

Negotiating the Scope of Postwar Stalinist Novels

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## ABSTRACT

### Negotiating the Scope of Postwar Stalinist Novels

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This dissertation challenges dominant perceptions of literary socialist realism by demonstrating how works of official Soviet literature enjoy more scope for individuality and innovation than is commonly acknowledged by structuralist or dissident readings. It examines how three Stalin Prize-winning novels use the material of recent history, their predecessor works, the tropes and genres of the Soviet literary system, and allegorical reading to comment on Stalinist society, including such concerns as love, the legitimacy of the state, generational conflict, and Bolshevik management techniques. It traces the textual history of Aleksandr Fadeev's wartime conspiracy novel *Young Guard*, showing that revision demanded by the state can boost a work's legitimacy, and suggesting that the novel may not always be the most important version of a narrative when alternative versions exist, especially film. It argues that the first version of a Stalinist novel generally demonstrates more authorial individuality and engagement with Soviet Reality than the later versions that give the impression of homogeneity to Soviet literature. Semen Babaevskii's agricultural production novel *Bearer of the Golden Star*, one of the chief targets of Thaw critics, engages the Stalinist literary convention of the positive hero by thematizing the concept of the hero and showing how society's reaction to that status may impeach its ability to enable the rest of its citizenry to carry out post-war reconstruction. Vera Panova's *Radiant Shore* circumvents the constraints of the doctrine of conflictlessness by delving into the world of a child, but also by creating an allegory that links animal husbandry, Soviet literary history, and Communist management techniques.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I read a sampling of postwar High Stalinist novels as individual works of art. To explain the set of literary pressures and thematic possibilities with which each novel works, I also touch on the use of tradition and historical legacies in Stalinist fiction, generational conflicts, reconstruction, conflictlessness, love, the uses of the hero, management literature, prizes and awards, and originality. Through these readings, I hope to indicate some of the range for authorial style, innovation, disagreement, and evolution in a literary system that can often seem hermetic, homogenous, and static.

There are several practical problems in studying Stalinist novels. They tend to be long. They are set in a society that is increasingly remote, both chronologically and in terms of vocabulary and preoccupations. Likely most problematic for occasional readers and dedicated scholars alike, however, is that most socialist realist novels resemble each other quite closely. This uniformity leads to a certain tendency to read Stalinist culture in aggregate. One of the groundbreaking works in the field, Katerina Clark's *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, distills a master plot from a canon similar to the one with which I work, and then ingeniously mines that plot for anxieties about, among other things, revolution and ideology. Other studies analyze multiple streams of Stalinist discourse, whether traditional high art forms like sculpture, music, and dance or more rhetorical forms like journalism, speeches, and advertisements. This critical strategy can also tend to create a homogenous aggregate picture of Stalinist culture of which each particular work is an instantiation.

In this dissertation I react to Clark's account more than any other for two main reasons. First, her account was immensely influential in the study of Stalinist literature, and remains so

today. Second, she takes Fadeev's *Young Guard* as one of her main examples; I do as well, but study a different version, use it for different ends, and reach different conclusions. Examining Clark's approach thus throws my own into clearer relief.

A fundamental challenge in studying individual Stalinist novels is the fact that they were often revised, sometimes more than once, as the political and literary demands of the times changed. One of the first decisions to make in studying many works is which version to read. A simple way to distinguish my approach from Clark's is that she tends to read the final version of a work, whereas I tend to read the first. I do this because the novels grow more uniform as they are revised, and because the fact of revision encourages a teleological reading that I believe misses much of the creative ferment and anxiety in postwar Soviet literature. By the time Soviet writers, editors, and critics turned their attention to defining what they wanted their literature to be after the war, that literature had been evolving for over two decades; while it is hard to proclaim a given literary movement mature with any confidence, it must be noted that postwar Soviet literature had already established a substantial heritage: a set of common themes, acknowledged great writers, precursor works from the pre-Soviet era, and a new genre in the production novel. By the end of the war, official Soviet literature had stayed in place long enough that it began to develop internally, playing off predecessor works while changing emphases and tactics. The post-Stalinist Thaw is a widely cited example of a system undergoing self-renewal, vociferously rejecting elements of its past while desperately clinging to others, but late Stalinism already experiences its own anxieties of influence, often raising questions about the very definitions of continuity and rupture. It brings both literary heritage and social context into question, thematizing some concerns while subtly playing with others.



This use and questioning of what came before is one way that Stalinist literature determines what it is. The open secret about the critical prescriptions of socialist realism is that they meant very little in practice: although 1934 saw the proclamation of socialist realism as the USSR's official style, the famous definition adopted at the First Congress of the Soviet Writers Union – “a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development” – could be but of little help to someone trying to write a novel that – if a huge success – could vault the writer to fame and wealth and – if a dismal failure – could relegate the author to provincial drudgery if not even harsher manifestations of official displeasure. The stakes were high, and not just in the sense of material success or jeopardy. I assume that most members of the official literary establishment accepted the task of creating a new literature, the leading role of the Party, and the essential correctness of its prescriptions. The fact that these prescriptions were issued with minimal concrete examples meant that authors, editors, and critics had to grope toward the proper responses together. It is thus not surprising that this drive to create a new literature can seem very conservative: most Stalinist authors resorted to reworking models that had already proven successful. In turn, this conservatism would lead to periodic demands that writers produce more innovative works, or complaints that Soviet literature no longer fit the new era, however it might be defined at the time.

The flip side of the indeterminacy of these prescriptions is that they left scope for authorial individuality. Even though Stalinist novels often resemble themselves in plot structure and the roster of major characters, Stalinist authors do find space to put their own authorial stamp on their works. Throughout this study, I touch on the various and nebulous critical definitions of socialist realism and show how the authors I study may be trying to respond to them. I also point out some of the common concerns and questions of Stalinist novels that have

little to do with these prescriptions; showing how an author handles these issues can help to define that author's individual contribution.

I have selected my texts to illuminate some of the indeterminacy of postwar Stalinist literature, and some of the scope for authorial individualism. To remove any question of whether a given author or work was working within the bounds of Stalinism, I have limited myself to novels that won the Stalin Prize. Established in 1941, the Prize was awarded until Stalin's death in 1953, when it was renamed. Notwithstanding a few earlier works that were awarded retrospective prizes in the early years, the Prize-winning novels thus constitute a corpus of novels that were considered to be the best by the Stalinist literary establishment. While a few prizes were awarded for lifetime achievement, and -- as with many literary prizes -- there was a certain amount of logrolling, most materials suggest that the committee really was trying to distinguish the best writing of the past year.<sup>1</sup>

The Stalin Prize carried with it not only prestige but substantial monetary awards. A Stalin Prize in the First Degree brought 100,000 rubles, a Prize in the Second Degree 50,000, and Third Degree 25,000. In the case of joint authorship the award was divided among the authors, although this practice was much more of an issue for films and theater productions than for novels. Unlike the Hero of the Soviet Union decoration that underpins much of Chapter II, the Stalin Prize did not carry additional benefits relating to housing, transportation, or leisure. It should be noted, however, that Stalin Prize novels were virtually guaranteed to be reprinted in bulk, bringing the authors substantial income on top of the prize itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The best single account of deliberations for the Stalin Prize for literature is Konstantin Simonov's memoirs. Much of the relevant material is also printed in Svin'in and Oseev.

Out of these official laureates, I have picked authors and/or works that were controversial either in this period or immediately thereafter in the Thaw. I believe that moments of contestation and rupture can reveal much about the system, and about the writers who elicit those contradictory responses. This method allows me to gather a bounty of material from the necessarily limited number of works I can include in a dissertation based on close engagements with individual texts.

A few notes on genre will help. Of the three works that center each chapter, one is a novel of wartime partisanship. The conflicts both in and around this work illuminate many of the tensions inherent in postwar Stalinist prose. The other two novels are variants of the production novel, which is the Soviet sphere's contribution to the global index of literary genre. Much has been written on this form, which has also been called the industrial or factory novel. Those terms, however, include the hammer but exclude the sickle: many production novels take place in rural settings and depict challenges of agricultural production. This is the "boy meets tractor" period. In the postwar setting, the agricultural version predominates, and like many other postwar novels, the two main production novels I examine have primarily rural settings.

One of the most important facets of the production novel is the parallel building of the productive resource and the self. By leading the effort to construct a factory or increase the harvest, the hero not only grows into a better Soviet man, but also helps the community that supports that resource in becoming a better community, where each person plays his or her proper part in society. The production novel is thus allegorical at its core: the progress of the individual corresponds to the progress of the community. This allegory can expand in various ways depending on the author and the work; a phenomenon I examine most thoroughly in Chapter III. In some cases, the progress of love and the family maps to the journey of the

individual and collective. In addition, the author can sometimes comment on the well-being of the state itself by depicting one of its components.

Not enough attention has been paid to the fact that the production novel is generally not a novel of construction, but of reconstruction. From its beginning with Fedor Gladkov's *Cement*, the vast majority of Soviet production novels depict the reconstruction of a ruined resource, a factory, farm, or community that used to work at a certain level of productive equilibrium and now does not. The major exception to this rule is the literature of the first five-year plan, which gave more weight to new construction, imposing order on empty wastes, and growing from callow inexperience. I believe that the literature of the first five-year plan is an anomaly; subtract that from the history of Stalinist literature, and the novels overwhelmingly deal with battle and reconstruction. In the postwar period as in the postrevolutionary phase, Soviet society had to struggle with the fact that much of the country lay in ruins, and that many of its surviving men were injured and maimed. The production novels of the postwar period thus return to the concerns of the early examples of the genre, which took place after World War I and the Soviet Civil War had wrought comparable destruction. Only toward the end of Stalin's life did the emphasis shift back toward new projects; some of the novels that my authors wrote after the ones I examine here portray such efforts, but most of these efforts are indeterminate and attempts at innovation within Stalinist literature do not get very far before the Thaw brings its own sort of restorative project.

To underline the negotiations and disjunctures of official literature in this period, I devote each of my three chapters to works and authors that met with controversy while Stalin was still alive or immediately thereafter and, importantly, while they were still lionized. While all three

chapters discuss the author's other novels -- or revisions of the same novel -- the chapters are arranged in chronological order by the first publication of the primary work in question.

Chapter I establishes my methodology of reading by examining the case of Aleksandr Fadeev's *The Young Guard* (*Molodaia gvardiia*), a hugely popular work by a lionized writer and senior literary official that was abruptly attacked and pulled from the presses in 1947, a year after it had received a Stalin Prize. I examine the motivations behind the attack and sketch out the major differences between the offending version and the comprehensively revised but less popular redaction that Fadeev produced three years after the attack. I then use the fact that the attack and subsequent revision only served to strengthen the novel's reputation to posit that Stalinist literary practice was the subject of ongoing, collective negotiation and to argue for reading the first version of major Soviet works rather than the last. I then essay a reading of the first version that exposes the novel's profound ambivalence about the USSR's postwar future and the ability of the generation in power to lead it.

Chapter II turns to Semen Babaevskii's *Cavalier of the Golden Star* (*Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy*) and *Light over the Earth* (*Svet nad zemlei*), for which he won three Stalin Prizes as well as uniquely severe and long-lasting contempt from a large swath of Soviet writers, who lost no time in making him the symbol of "lacquering of reality" after Stalin's death. I explain this animosity by examining agriculture and the farm settlement as a setting that was contentious even before the Thaw, and posit that Babaevskii felt the same need to revive the agricultural theme as his critics, but was too mannerist in his approach, injecting heavy doses of the pastoral. Critics also charged Babaevskii with adolescent favor seeking, a reaction prompted in part, I argue, by their failure to appreciate the metaliterary game he plays with the socialist realist doctrine of the Positive Hero and the signification of orders and decorations. Instead, they read

hero and author as insubstantial creations with noses far too brown. I close the chapter with a brief discussion of Babaevskii's novels as expressions of anxiety over the coming of Communism.

Turning to Vera Panova's *Radiant Shore* in Chapter III, I examine the Stalinist novel's function as management education, as a source of behavioral and supervisory models for young Party members and those who were interested in their exploits. In addition to her famed skill at depicting character psychology and the world of children, Panova draws explicit parallels between Marxist management techniques and animal husbandry, an understandably materialist correspondence that takes an ominous turn when Stakhanovite attempts to set milking records must be halted when they threaten the farm's best cow. This distrust of overexertion informs Panova's treatment of a classic Soviet theme: the tension between organizing a society as a homogenous brigade or as a differentiated organic society. A major background for this novel is the Soviet doctrine of conflictlessness (*beskonfliktnost'*), which, though it was falling out of favor even before the death of Stalin, may have provided the ideal conditions for Panova to realize her gifts for detail and psychological portraiture: her most beloved and enduring creation, the little boy Serezha, embodies a new narrative technique. A novel that critics of every stripe regard as disappointing nevertheless is the foundation of her successful career in prose and screenwriting. I posit that this is no contradiction.

In my conclusion, I sum up the areas I have identified that allow for authorial individuality, characterize the contributions of the three authors I focus on, and briefly suggest some areas for additional research. I then make some observations on the continuities between late Stalinism and the Thaw. By that point, I will have established that Stalinist literature is much less monolithic than currently thought, and is the product of continuous iterative

negotiation among authors, popular readership, editors, critics, and political figures. This contentious, overdetermined environment nevertheless allows, recognizes, and rewards individual authorial contributions.

## CHAPTER I

***The Young Guard, the Teleology of Revision, and the Extent of Allegory***

## Fadeev Undergoes a Legitimizing Attack

In my introduction, I explained my belief that the study of Stalinist literature currently needs to undertake more close readings of individual texts in order to determine the bounds of the period's diversity and individual authorial choices within those bounds. Exploring how authors and works stand out against a straitened and homogenous milieu in turn can lead to discoveries of features unremarked by contemporaneous socialist Realist theory or non-Soviet work on the period. As with other periods, our understanding of a particular author's contribution must be formed in light of the literary system in which he worked.

In this chapter, I begin to explore how readings of such texts might be affected by the structural features of Stalinist literary production, and how a reading of a major Stalinist text can vary depending on how the interpretive strategies of Socialist Realism are applied. These factors manifested themselves especially strongly in and around Aleksandr Fadeev's *Young Guard* (*Molodaia gvardiia*), one of the most prominent novels of the Stalin era and a cornerstone of the elaborate Soviet mythos surrounding the Second World War with which all late Stalinist works must contend at some level.

The basic plot of *The Young Guard* is widely familiar in Russia and Ukraine: In 1942, as the Soviet Army hastily retreats into the interior of the country, it leaves the coal-producing Donbass region to the Nazis. In the area around the city of Krasnodon, the speed of the Wehrmacht's advance along with the swift unmasking of Soviet partisans leave little in the way of an effective underground. Moreover, Soviet authorities have destroyed the mines before withdrawing, signaling to the locals that they do not expect to return soon. As streams of German and Romanian troops pass through the region on their way



east, representatives of the Third Reich assume civil control, forming a collaborationist militia, pillaging the locals' homes, and dispatching residents to labor camps in Germany.

In Krasnodon, some members of the Komsomol (*KOmmunisticheskii SOiuz MOLOdezhi*, the Communist Youth League) attempt to join the resistance, and finding there is none, fill the vacuum by forming their own underground group, the Young Guard (a longstanding nickname for the Komsomol itself). The group quickly raises the standard for Soviet ideology and organization behind the lines. Over the five-month history of the organization, they execute a collaborator, liberate a work detail of Russian prisoners, conduct a selective arson campaign, distribute Soviet propaganda, steal supplies and munitions, disrupt a cattle drive to the same destination, foil plans to ship prison labor to Germany, and decorate the town on the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. Eventually, they are betrayed from within and are martyred by the Germans just before Soviet troops regain control of the territory in early 1943.

The novel is “based on a true story,” with all the uncertain historical veracity connoted by that phrase. No responsible account disputes the existence of the Young Guard, but almost every other detail of the episode has been challenged at one point or another. Over the decades, claims surfaced that the Young Guard was less effective than the official account represented, or that it was in fact a Ukrainian nationalist organization, or that it employed any number of alternative, less ideologically exemplary, leadership structures. Moreover, the official account gradually changed as well: in 1961, Viktor Tret'iakovich, who for 18 years had been vilified as the group's main betrayer (in deference to his family, Fadeev had changed his name to Evgenii Stakhovich in the novel), was officially rehabilitated and named a hero on par with the rest of the Young Guard martyrs. Many subsequent studies name him as the true leader of the group. Other early suspects were similarly ruled out, and despite the hunger to find a turncoat to vilify, the group's downfall may in fact have owed to the effectiveness of the German intelligence service.

As with the Kennedy assassination or the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Young Guard episode refracts an overwhelming national trauma through an authoritative narrative that makes sense of that trauma, and thus tends to attract both attempts to preserve the integrity of the official narrative as well as any number of more or less fevered alternative narratives. In Russia and Ukraine, at least, the story of the Young Guard still draws regular attention in the popular press, usually in articles commemorating the end of the Great Patriotic War, or when a researcher has a new theory or piece of information to publicize. It also enjoys a robust web presence.<sup>2</sup> But as often occurs with key episodes of national myths, contradictory interpretations and clashing facts have accreted to the original narrative, a narrative, moreover, that itself was constructed on partial evidence under strong ideological pressures.

In this case, the ideological stakes were high: The “Great Patriotic War” was and is essential to the national mythos of the Soviet Union and many of its successor states. It was a great unifying force, an attack on the entire country that required the entire country to defeat it. Internal enemies were, for a time, replaced by external foes, and the Party relaxed its social and cultural strictures to bolster national unity. Sixty years on, the War remains a much more immediate presence in the culture of the former Soviet Union than in any of the other Allied countries. Acknowledgement of the staggering material and personal costs borne by the USSR combine with justifiable pride in the country’s great industrial and military recovery to sanctify the period to this day.

The actual circumstances of the Young Guard continue to draw the attention of historians, journalists, and hobbyists, but since I am writing a literary study, I do not address the truth or falsity of any historical claims regarding the group.<sup>3</sup> My project is a cultural one: whatever its historical inexactitude, Fadeev’s version of the story was one of the dominant tales of the postwar Soviet Union,

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<sup>2</sup> The best starting points for an online exploration of the Young Guard phenomenon are <http://www.molodguard.ru> and <http://www.fire-of-war.ru/mg/index.htm>. The name has also been appropriated by a current pro-Putin youth group with apparent paramilitary ambitions: <http://www.molgvardia.ru/>.

<sup>3</sup> For two relatively recent orientation points, see the 2003 collection edited by Ioffe and Petrova as well as the 1993 report of the Intraregional Commission for the Study of the Young Guard (ed. Kovalenko et al).

and remains a touchstone today. It is both a broader national allegory than is commonly acknowledged and an excellent object lesson in the collective negotiation of a narrative during the Stalin era.

### The Struggle over the Young Guard in Art

As with the historical events themselves, there exists a well codified version of *the Young Guard*'s textual history: In the summer of 1943, once the Soviet Union had reestablished control over the Donbas and pieces of the Young Guard's story began to come to light, Aleksandr Fadeev was approached by representatives of the Komsomol in his capacity as a senior official of the Soviet Writers' Union to recommend someone to transform their exploits into a novel. After briefly considering other candidates, Fadeev himself fell under the spell of the material and made the project his primary focus, spending a month in Krasnodon to examine documents, tour the area, and interview survivors. After some months of composition, the novel appeared in serial form throughout 1945 to wide critical and popular acclaim. An array of honors quickly followed: In 1946, Fadeev received the Stalin Prize, first class, and work began on stage, film, and operatic adaptations of his work. The novel was supplied in bulk to every library and workers' club in the USSR, although demand still outstripped supply.<sup>4</sup> Also in 1946, Fadeev rose to become the sole head of the Soviet Writers' Union.

While the first full-bore multimedia assault of the postwar era was building around the novel, however, a backlash took shape. Fadeev had always had his detractors. *The Rout* (*Razgrom*, 1927), his breakthrough work, was criticized as excessively Tolstoyan, which in the context of the Proletarian Literature movement of the 1920s meant that Fadeev had spent too much time on individualizing his characters, depicting their internal psychological states, and exploring their doubts and conflicts instead of

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<sup>4</sup> According to Juliane Fürst, "each oblast' library was required to have at least 30 copies of the book, each town and raion library 5-10 and each village reading room 1-3." Despite this wide distribution, waiting lists were long, and many copies circulated from reader to reader without being returned. (Fürst, "Youth") Dobrenko 1997 shows that the Soviet Union used its school, club, and Komsomol structures to drive mass readership (260-261).

showing a disciplined, ideologically correct Bolshevik force. Though by 1945 radical animus against psychological portraiture had long since ceased to be an issue, even laudatory reviews of *The Young Guard* contained some caveats that Fadeev had once again shortchanged Party organization and discipline, this time in his portrayal of the underground struggle against Germany. Rumbblings in this vein had been heard since the novel's initial serialization, but on December 3, 1947, in an unmistakable sign that the top levels of government – most likely extending to Stalin himself – had decided to resolve the debate, *Pravda* published the article “The Young Guard in the Novel and on the Stage” (“Molodaia gvardiia v romane i na stsene”). The article attacked Fadeev's work – and the stage and film adaptations in preparation – for a failure to acknowledge that the Young Guard's daring exploits and rapid maturation were due in large part to the Party's wise stewardship. Noting that theater and film affected the masses more strongly than prose, the anonymous author criticized Fadeev not for falsifying incidents, but for picking atypical details. Though the rapid evacuation may have seemed chaotic to many, the author's responsibility is to reflect “the most important, the typical, the fundamental in full concordance with reality” (2). This overarching truth was of course that the Bolsheviks were in complete control, and that the Young Guard could not have achieved its successes without Party oversight.<sup>5</sup> Fadeev, “counter to his intentions,” had depicted a specific truth but a general falsehood, thus becoming the latest to run afoul of typicality, an issue that had bedeviled Russian realism since Belinskii.

The cultural establishment executed the practicalities attendant on such an attack. All new print runs of *The Young Guard* were cancelled, and film production was suspended while Fadeev and Gerasimov made the necessary changes to the script. In 1948, the revised film, now ideologically correct, premiered to packed theaters and garnered its own set of Stalin Prizes.<sup>6</sup> In 1951 Fadeev addressed *Pravda's* criticisms in a revised and expanded version of the novel that quickly regained its position as an official classic.

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<sup>5</sup> Recent research confirms that the underground youth groups in the Krasnodon region in fact operated largely without party direction. (Kovalenko)

<sup>6</sup> The actors playing Oleg, Serezha, Liuba, Ul'ia, Valia, and Protsenko all received Prizes in the first degree, as did cameraman Vladimir Rapoport and director Sergei Gerasimov.

In contemporary scholarship on the Stalin period, *The Young Guard's* dramatic textual travails usually serve to emblemize political control of literature in the USSR; in the most influential account, Katerina Clark extrapolates this politicization to argue that Soviet authors as a group have little control over their work, since in her approach each individual Socialist Realist story must be an instantiation of the Soviet master narrative:

A corollary of the Soviet novelist's status as mere teller of tales is his lack of autonomy over his own texts. It is the prerogative of his editors, critics, and patrons to see to it that the purity of the tale is preserved in the novelist's work. This prerogative has been demonstrated again and again by evidence that writers have been pressured into rewriting and/or that their works have been altered by editors without their permission. The author's creativity is not completely frustrated, however; for working within the well-known parameters of the Socialist Realist tradition, he can yet bring his ingenuity and imagination to bear in translating History into symbolic form. Thus one can find a range of literary quality even among works that have preserved the purity of the tale. (159-60)

While Clark does leave room for ingenuity and imagination to ease the almost stenographical burden she sees weighing upon the Soviet novelist, she makes it clear that the author's first responsibility is to History (in the sense of the inexorable dialectical progression toward the triumph of Communism) and situates the characteristic multiple revision of Stalinist works within that imperative. Authorial differentiation – whether a matter of style, creativity, or what have you – is a matter of embellishment, of individual instantiations of a single master tale.

Certainly, the late forties witnessed substantial state interventions into art and culture in all media and at all stages of a work's development. In August 1946, Central Committee Secretary for Ideology Andrei Zhdanov launched his notorious crackdown on the arts, beginning with the writers Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko as well as the journals that published their works, and later launching major assaults on the fields of philosophy and music. Even after Zhdanov's death in 1948, close attention to cultural and scientific matters persisted at the highest levels of the leadership, extending to Stalin's famous 1950 resolution of a major controversy in Marxist linguistics between those who

believed that languages evolved based on economic class and those who did not (Stalin supported the latter position). But while works of all sorts met with public criticism, assaults on works that had already won the state's highest honor were rare: in literature, perhaps only Viktor Nekrasov's *In the Trenches of Stalingrad* (*V okopakh Stalingrada*) and Vera Panova's *Travelling Companions* (*Sputniki*), both recipients of Stalin Prizes in 1947, suffered the same level of criticism as Fadeev's work. All represent cases of mixed signals in that Stalin likely signed off on both the awarding of his eponymous Prize and the attacks against some of its laureates. These abrupt and public reversals carried with them at least the possibility of diminished public confidence in the Stalin Prizes and the political and cultural establishment standing behind them.

A full accounting of the forces and machinations behind this dramatic official reversal could occupy a chapter of its own. A few suggestions, however, may provide some context for the reading I undertake in this chapter. First, conventional wisdom holds that the Party, having loosened its cultural and ideological reins to motivate the populace during the war, quickly felt the need to reestablish its primacy in such questions once hostilities had ceased. Second, on a purely practical level, Juliane Fürst's innovative work on postwar youth movements demonstrates that the Young Guard media phenomenon provided a behavior model for postwar adolescents, persuading some to form their own secret societies, most benevolent but some armed and bent on violence. (Fürst 2002) Even a few occurrences of this phenomenon may have been enough to spur officialdom to ensure that official culture stressed adult supervision. Given the *Pravda* article's emphasis on theater and film's ability to concentrate prose's ideological messages, the specter of an expensive but unsuitable movie likely precipitated whatever quiet misgivings existed in official circles.

Third, and perhaps more controversially, I suspect that *The Young Guard* fell prey to officialdom's desire to see itself in literature. Just as a successful novel about a steel factory, say, would often generate letters to the author from other steel factories asking for their own novels, various strata of Soviet society considered their depiction in Soviet culture as something for which to fight, almost as a

right to be jealously monitored. As Amir Weiner has demonstrated, the War was a point of rupture in Soviet legitimating myths, and thus the postwar period can be viewed as a competition among various myths of the War that effectively privileged or deprivileged various groups. Following Lyotard, he argues that “public discourse in Soviet political culture was the chosen setting for exercising ultimate control over the individual” (640) and goes on to trace how the self-image of regional officials who had entered the war as peasants and returned as officers was reflected in their struggles over similar characters in literature. Just as a demobilized peasant soldier could see himself in the brash young hero who battles bureaucracy to get things done with military directness, a Party functionary could take offense at the self-sufficiency of the young generation in Fadeev’s first account and demand that the author revise his magnum opus to emphasize the necessity of his own caste.

In this early postwar competition for cultural representation, the Young Guard was the project of two main power structures: the Ukrainian Party organization and the Komsomol. In September 1943, Khrushchev sent Stalin a telegram strongly advocating that the group’s key figures be elevated to Hero of the Soviet Union status (Petrova 34-35). The Party’s youth wing had also been quite active in publicizing the wartime exploits of its constituency: before its promotion of the Young Guard story, the 1941 partisan activities and subsequent martyrdom of eighteen-year-old Zoia Kosmodemianskaia also received heavy media attention, including a 1944 film. Another young partisan martyr, Liza Chaikina, received a similar treatment in a 1942 novel by N.A. Mikhailov, Secretary of the Komsomol’s Central Committee. In this context, *The Young Guard* can be seen as the media sensation that the Komsomol had been trying to create since the War began. Certainly the artists associated with the project were of a higher caliber than those associated with previous efforts – in addition to Fadeev and Gerasimov, Dmitrii Shostakovich was also pressed into service as the composer of the film score – but every such episode emphasizes the martyrdom of Soviet youth as well as its capacity for action.<sup>7</sup> It was in part the independence of that

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<sup>7</sup> The major works on the Zoia theme are Margarita Aliger’s 1942 poem “Zoia,” which received a Stalin Prize in 1943, and the 1944 film of the same title by Lev Arnshtam. The chronology of this media push thus runs slightly

youthful action that led to the crackdown in 1947, but the prominence that Fadeev's work achieved no doubt also contributed, especially when various adaptations promised to increase that prominence even more.<sup>8</sup>

While the social forces bearing on the novel were diverse and intense, their outcome was typical of the Stalin era. While few revisions achieved the *cause celebre* status of *The Young Guard*, countless novels were revised after publication. Revision of texts is in fact a fundamental Stalinist cultural behavior.

#### Revision's Place in the Stalinist System

Since the standard compressed version of *The Young Guard's* textual history can give the impression that Fadeev lived under a cloud of disfavor after the 1947 *Pravda* article, it is important to point out that if anything his official stature increased. He had been the sole leader of the Writers' Union since 1946, and beginning in 1948 he became the figurehead for the USSR's new peace offensive, undertaking something of a world tour to spread the gospel of peaceful coexistence. In August 1948, he headed the Soviet delegation at the World Congress of Cultural Activists in Defense of Peace in Wrocław, a role he also played at the first and second World Congresses of the Partisans of Peace (Paris, April 1949; Warsaw, November 1950). In the meantime, he had been devoting his writing time to his labor of love, the never-to-be-completed epic of a rural tribe's progress toward Socialism *Last of the*

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ahead of the corresponding dates for the Young Guard, which carried out its activities in 1942 and early 1943, first received public attention in the summer of 1943, and saw publication of Fadeev's version in 1945.

<sup>8</sup> The drive to produce a popular work on the theme of young martyrdom can also be seen in an earlier treatment of the Young Guard theme, Kotov and Liaskovskii's 1944 *Serdtsa smelykh*, published by the Komsomol press. Rarely discussed, this curious work reads like a series of preliminary sketches. The drive to make Oleg Koshevoi the main hero is already apparent here, and in fact seems more pronounced than in Fadeev's 1945 redaction. I have been unable to find any information on the impetus behind this work – did someone worry that Fadeev would not finish his version? Was the need to memorialize the Young Guard so strong that the Komsomol published a placeholder treatment until the master began to publish his work less than a year later? Is this an outline for the projected treatments of the theme in other media? Although Fadeev handles some scenes similarly – the books obviously share some sources – his work is far richer.



*Udege (Poslednii iz Udege)*, as well as his administrative duties and occasional visits to sanatoria to cure his alcohol-exacerbated liver ailments.

This is not a profile of official disgrace. To be sure, Fadeev did deliver a revised *Young Guard* more than three years after the *Pravda* attack, but in the meantime he seemed to feel no overriding urgency to return the novel to publication.<sup>9</sup> At least two factors likely influenced this attitude: in the Stalinist system, a demand for changes in itself carried little shame, if any; and second, the Soviet authorities may already have had what they needed from the *Young Guard* narrative.

Revision, in fact, was generally a sign of success in the Stalinist literary world. While not every successful work required reworking, as a rule of thumb any narrative that underwent substantial revisions after its first appearance in official print was that much more likely to be treated as significant, earning critical accolades, inclusion in school and study group curricula, and/or winning adaptation into a film or (less often) an opera. Certainly authors had been known to revise their major works before the Stalin era (Bely's *Petersburg* (1913, 1916, 1922) is a prominent early twentieth-century example), but some of the first Soviet classics went through multiple versions. Gorkii was noted for his frequent returns to published works. Between 1923 and his untimely death of meningitis in 1926, Dmitri Furmanov revised his seminal *Chapaev* twice. Fedor Gladkov, who lived until 1958, busied himself not only with new projects but with serial revisions of his novel *Cement* – one of the key texts of Soviet Literature – producing five significantly different versions between 1924 and 1958. The pattern continued throughout the Stalinist era. Typically, a work on its way to appearance in full book form would go through multiple cycles of writing, editing, and approval. As the examples above indicate, even publication in book form was less a finalizing act than we might expect.

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<sup>9</sup> The one pressure that Fadeev did seem to feel was financial, since the embargo on his most popular work deprived him of royalties from theatrical adaptations as well as the multiple printings that came with Soviet classic status (Soviet royalties were calculated on print runs, not sales). Always generous to his early acquaintances from eastern Russia, he was bothered, among other things, by his inability to help an old friend build a house. (Fadeev 1967, 247-248) On at least one occasion he also expressed the desire to finish revisions by his fiftieth birthday, December 24, 1951. (Fadeev 1967, 365)

Throughout his study devoted to the background of Vasilii Azhaev's *Far from Moscow (Daleko ot Moskvy)*, for example, Thomas Lahusen traces the evolution of the novel from a writer's school exercise to its serialization, then on to its first publication in book form, and then to a final round of revisions. At each stage, editors made suggestions and requested changes, and as the novel progressed through the system to reach wider and wider potential audiences, it garnered greater attention from a literary establishment that was charged with encouraging the development of a new Soviet literature. Azhaev carried out the 1948 rewriting that transformed his work from a sensation in a provincial journal to a Stalin Prize-winning tome under the close tutelage of Konstantin Simonov, already a Stalin Prize laureate himself for *Dni i nochi (Days and Nights, 1944)*, and well on his way to becoming a grand old man of Soviet letters. In Lahusen's words:

During the months of May and June 1948, *Far from Moscow* went into production again, but this time the collective of the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, with Simonov at its head, helped the author turn the novel into a Stalin Prizewinner. As Dolmatovskii recalls, the "iron Simonov put the concrete [made of cement] Azhaev to work" (*Zheleznyi Simonov zasadil betonno Azhaeva za rabotu*). The editorial reports document in great detail the rewriting of *Far from Moscow*: about 300 pages had to be cut, and more than 200 had to be rewritten. Many remarks pertain to the "bureaucratic" style of the Far East version, the many clichés and linguistic inaccuracies. Simonov strongly disliked one of the subplots, "related to crime, spying, and sabotage," and he suggested that Azhaev "weaken" this line considerably. Obviously any allusions to the real experiences on which the novel was based [the pipeline project made heavy use of prison labor] had to be suppressed. But the most objectionable happened to be the various love stories involving the hero of the novel and other characters... (142)

Lahusen goes on to treat reader reception of the novel's canonical version as effectively an unfinished editorial round in and of itself. That is, readers suggested areas for improvement, but there is no evidence that these suggestions resulted in any revisions to Azhaev's work. In fact, I have yet to come across a case of a Stalinist author revising a work to meet criticism from his mass readership rather than the official readership of editors, Writers' Union officials, and representatives of the government.

The layer of literary officialdom that guided such revisions and the senior members of government who functioned as the ultimate arbiters of thematic acceptability come together with the writers of Stalinist novels to form a sort of collective authorship. In many ways it was the job of the Stalinist literary apparatus to spot the promise in an author or his work and bring it to fruition. An ideologically committed Soviet author – however he might bridle privately at this layer of oversight and however vociferously he might argue the merits or demerits of specific changes – had to accept the fact that this collaborative production of literature was an inalienable part of the system in which he operated.

As a rough rule, those who were wedded to the idea of a writer's primary authority over his own texts were more likely to be unofficial writers, published sporadically if at all. Those writers sometimes used *Molodaia gvardiia* as an example of authorial capitulation. The titan of gulag literature Varlam Shalamov wrote Pasternak in the 1950s that "Fadeev proved that he was not a writer by adjusting an already published novel according to critical prescriptions"<sup>10</sup> (Savateev 60). Even authors operating within the Stalinist system battled against Party-mandated changes in their works. Weiner adduces the examples of two military novels that had been published to some acclaim: Dmitrii Medvedev's *On the Banks of the Southern Bug River* (*Na beregakh iuzhnogo Buga* [1952]) and Olga Dzhigurda's *The Liner "Kakhetia"* (*Teplokhod "Kakhetia"* [1948]). In both cases the authors argued strongly against revising out portrayals of wartime panic and confusion on the basis that they depicted the War in all its messy reality. Like Shalamov, Medvedev explicitly contrasted his behavior with Fadeev's when refusing to change his novel (650-652). Although both authors enjoyed strong support among the ex-soldiers whose wartime experiences they depicted, and although neither subjected his work to revision, they may be the exceptions that prove the rule; certainly neither achieved anywhere near the prominence accorded to Fadeev, Kataev, Viktor Nekrasov, Panova, or other authors who revised their novels to meet Party requirements.

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<sup>10</sup> Фадеев доказал, что он не писатель, исправив по указанию критики напечатанный роман...

There is some evidence that Fadeev himself resisted another round of editorial interventions in his novel in June 1953. V.O. Osipov reports that he has a letter from Fadeev in which the ailing author cuts off his relations with the Komsomol's publishing house over a proposed set of new revisions to the novel. The only surviving editor's mark from these proposals is one on the first page, the reverse of which Fadeev had used to write his letter: the phrase "*A u Uli svisali kosy*" ("But Ulia's braids were dangling") was underlined, perhaps due to the difficult string of back vowels that begin the phrase. But already in *The Young Guard*'s famous opening scene – an idyll of Ulia and other village girls by the river communing with nature before war intrudes – "*au*" has been repeated several times as the girls call to one another, and it is possible that the marked sentence was part of a conscious sound repetition. Whatever other revisions may have been suggested in 1953, this particular one did not take, indicating that Fadeev successfully staved off at least some of the suggestions.

Had Fadeev not made his first round of changes in 1951, however, he most likely would not have been approached to make more in 1953, for the simple reason that his novel would still be out of print. Changing that novel was the price that Fadeev paid to see it restored to print, but it was also in the Soviet authorities' interest to see it returned to circulation. The system had allocated one of its key writers to a topic that was promoted by both the Ukrainian Party organization and the Komsomol, and that writer produced a work that had garnered both a Stalin Prize and greater popular success than any other Komsomol-themed narrative. To allow *The Young Guard* to languish in memory would do injustice not only to the actual historical heroes of Krasnodon but to the Prize and the literary achievement it was supposed to recognize.

The dip in this work's trajectory, then, carried with it the imperative that *The Young Guard* would reappear and be proclaimed a vastly improved masterwork. In general, a work singled out for rewriting effectively bore a gold star rather than a stigma. It had shown such high achievement that the system incurred the opportunity cost of a potential new novel and devoted additional authorial and editorial resources to polishing it.

### The Teleology of Rewriting

For this reason, practically every Soviet summary of Fadeev's novel mentions the *Pravda* attack and the subsequent rewriting. It is a sign of the work's quality. But the implicit teleology of such an approach requires some examination, since it permeates not only the Stalinist approach but much non-Soviet criticism. Just as a work's rewritten status valorizes it in the Soviet context, so does it often lead non-Soviet scholars to take it as a representative work. Katerina Clark adduces *The Young Guard's* textual history as justification for making it the centerpiece of her teasing out of the Soviet "master plot," even though, as she notes, a production novel – the one uniquely Soviet contribution to literary genre – might have been a more appropriate example. For Clark, as for the Soviet establishment, the very fact of revision made the novel, if not perfect, at least representative, since multiple attempts at rewriting under the guiding eye of the literary establishment represented efforts to bring the work closer to ideal form, even though the definition of "ideal" changed over time.

Revision is inextricably tied to one of the most vexing features of Socialist Realism: homogeneity. Rewriting ensures not only official approval, but similarity to other novels that have been through the same process. The culture of revision, of Stalinist polish, encourages sameness. The final versions of Stalinist novels are the most similar to each other, while at the same time they tend to conform most closely to Clark's ingenious structural schemata. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this result was predetermined, that the final version of a novel is the best version, or the version most worthy of study. To study the final redaction exclusively is to prioritize the final results of the Stalinist cultural negotiation over individual responses to Soviet life and cultural tradition. Both are valid objects of study, but I believe that when a Stalinist novel exists in multiple versions, earlier editions more uniquely express the author's style and concerns, whether seen in imagery, themes, language, or any other tool available to that author. The first version of a work is generally fresher, more likely to engage its

material in a new way. The picture of Stalinist literature that results from reading earlier versions is richer and more variegated than the canon comprising the Soviet defaults.

The urge toward uniformity is understandable. Soviet writers labored under crushing pressure to create works that could compete with not only the finest works of the Capitalist world, but with all the literary monuments of the past, especially the titanic achievements of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century prose tradition. The textbook definitions of the new style – ideological commitment (*ideinost'*), Party consciousness (*partiinost*), national character (*narodnost'*); a concrete depiction of reality in its historical development – were little help to an author faced with a limited set of subjects, a narrow stylistic range, and a blank page. It is not surprising that they relied so heavily on Soviet classics, works that had already been identified as meeting most of the requirements rather than essay an entirely new solution.

The teleology of revision notwithstanding, any examination of *The Young Guard's* textual history must explain the novel's absence in new editions between the end of 1947 and 1951. Why allow such a prominent work to remain unrevised for three years after having invested so much in it and then having made such a point of its deficiencies? I believe that two factors account for the novel's delayed reappearance. First, the Zhdanovist point had been made: in criticizing a hugely popular work by the head of the Writers' Union the Party signaled its authority over Soviet literature and very publicly set the boundaries of acceptability for the myriad other Soviet narratives of the War, both those already published and those in process. Visible Party supervision was required not only for the heroes of the Young Guard, but for Fadeev himself, especially given his position.

Second, the multimedia push built around the Young Guard had ensured that the narrative was still available to the public: the film version quickly became the dominant carrier of the Young Guard narrative from its release in 1948.<sup>11</sup> The film's production schedule likely also forced a decision on the timing of the *Pravda* attack: if theater and film had a greater effect on the public than novels, to release a

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<sup>11</sup> Per Fürst, the movie was the most popular picture of 1948, with 42.4 million viewers immediately after its release. As she notes, the revised novel did not exert the same level of cultish fascination.

film of the Young Guard narrative in its 1945 form would likely cement that version forever in the minds of the populace. Films are also harder to revise than books. The end of 1947 was about the last point that would allow Fadeev and Gerasimov to adjust the screenplay to include a greater Party role. Once that narrative was widely available, the need to rework the novel was less urgent.

### *The Young Guard Revised*

Fadeev's 1951 revisions hewed to the classic Stalinist pattern in changing both style and incident. As with many other rewritten novels, including Fadeev's 1951 changes to his 1927 triumph *The Rout* (*Razgrom*), nonstandard language – regionalisms, colloquialisms, uneducated speech – tended to be smoothed over, surviving mainly in cases where it functioned as shorthand characterization. Since many of the characters were in fact Ukrainian, some of these changes amount to a partial Russification of Krasnodon. V.Ia. Savateev notes the “rigid demands of normativism” (“жесткие требования нормативности”) that affected the literary language of the postwar era, and that likely account for some of Fadeev's disgust with the suggested revisions of 1953 (63). As a general rule, this low-level revision of language also tends to result in some proactive self-censorship, producing many small omissions or changes for safety's sake: In some war novels, early versions reflect the realities of the Lend-Lease Act by having the characters drive American-made Willys jeeps; in later drafts, Soviet Gaziks are ubiquitous. Expressions of ethnic prejudice or distrust of the powers that be, even when uttered by unsophisticated minor characters, all but disappear.

Though eliminating problematic language and incidents has a subtractive bias, I have yet to encounter a Stalinist novel that became shorter in its second redaction. Perhaps responding to the universal desire for fictional representation that I posit above, authors invariably respond to demands for change by expanding their works, often multiplying both characters and scenes. As is well documented, Fadeev added not only new text to existing sections but entire new chapters, mostly focusing on Filipp

Petrovich Liutikov, a peripheral presence in the 1945 version who is arrested roughly halfway through the novel. In the 1951 redaction, Liutikov becomes the key link to the Soviet underground as well as the primary Bolshevik instructor, managing the Young Guard primarily through Oleg Koshevoi, the movement's commissar (Ivan Turkenich, who is three years older than Oleg and has spent time in the army, is the military commander). Liutikov is assisted in his greatly expanded role by one Barakov, who handles the day-to-day administration of the mine, and the maid/messenger Polina Georgievna. Cuts in the 1951 version tend to be limited to passages that frankly acknowledge organizational incompetence (much of Chapter 7 in the first version) or other suggestions that the leadership could be ignored or limited, as when the army doctor Fedr Fedorovich says that he would not abandon his patients even if Stalin suggested it, and that Stalin himself is "the only other person on Earth who does not have the right to flee in any circumstance" (ch. 13).<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most emblematic change from 1945 to 1951 occurs when Vania Zemnukhov meets Ekaterina Pavlovna Protsenko, the wife of the region's underground chief and a leader in her own right. Ekaterina Pavlovna wonders whether there are any soldiers left in Krasnodon who could form a resistance. Vania remembers that many townspeople took in wounded Red Army soldiers when the Germans shut down the military hospital:

"Establish contact with them and bring them into the fold...It doesn't matter that you're young, and they're older than you," said Ekaterina Pavlovna with a smile. "You make up for it by being organized, while they aren't as yet..." (1945, ch. 39).<sup>13</sup>

"Tell the ones who sent you to establish contact with them and bring them into the fold... Soon, very soon, even you youngsters will need them. You'll need them to command you. You're good folks, but they're older than you," said Ekaterina Pavlovna (1951, pt. 2, ch. 44).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Он единственный человек на свете, который тоже при всех условиях не имеет права уйти...

<sup>13</sup> -- Вы установите связи с ними и привлекайте их... Это ничего, что вы молодые, а они старше вас, -- с улыбкой сказала Екатерина Павловна, -- зато у вас есть организация, а у них пока нет...

<sup>14</sup> - Вы скажите тем, кто вас послал, чтобы установили связи с ними и привлекли их... Они скоро, очень скоро понадобятся и вам. Понадобятся, чтобы командовать вами, молодыми. Народ вы хороший, но они старше вас, - сказала Екатерина Павловна.



In 1945, organization trumps all. In 1951 it is no less important, but Fadeev has made it inextricable from adulthood, a necessary attribute of the maturity that can only be gained from close work with an older mentor. Even in the chaotic conditions behind German lines, adult supervision must be found – or supplied by the author – to justify the triumphs of the young.

Not every revision follows so neat a progression, however. In what must be a sign of Fadeev's ambivalence about the project, the rhetorical climax of the novel is vitiated in almost all editions of the later redaction. In 1945, Oleg's final interrogation scene is naturally the opportunity for a rousing rhetorical performance, since the last words before execution are an exhortatory commonplace in the literature of ideological warfare, and stoicism in the face of torture is a commonplace of the Komsomol martyr genre. Fadeev delivers on this generic obligation:

Before [Feldkommandant] Klehr, a man mired in murder because he could do nothing else in life, stood not a sixteen-year-old boy, but a young leader of the people who had seen clearly not only his own path in life, but the path of his people among others as well as the path of all humanity. And he said:

"It is not you who are terrifying – you are already destroyed and doomed – terrifying is that which spawned and continues to spawn you even after all the time people have existed on this Earth and reached such heights of thought and labor... The cancer of cannibalism eats away at the soul not only of individual people, but of whole populations, it threatens human existence... this cancer of cannibalism, more terrible than the plague, will eat away at the world as long as the world's riches are used by those who did not produce them, as long as the degenerate part of humanity continues to exercise unlimited power over people, concentrating all the world's riches in their hands... In vain do those gentlemen in snow-white linens hope to evade the judgment of History... Spattered with blood, they already stand before her fierce eyes... I regret only that I can no longer fight in the ranks of my people and all of humanity for a just, honorable way of life. I send my last greetings to all who fight for that goal" (Chapter 53)!<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Перед Клером, закосневшим в убийствах, потому что он ничего другого не умел делать в жизни, сотаял не шестнадцатилетний мальчик, а молодой народный вожак, который не только ясно видел свой путь в жизни, а видел путь своего народа среди других и путь всего человечества. И он говорил:-- Страшны не вы, -- вы уже разбиты и обречены, -- страшно то, что вас породило и порождает после того, как люди так давно существует на земле и достигли таких ясных вершин в области мысли и труда... Язва людоедства разъедает души уже не только отдельных людей, а целых народов, она угрожает существованию человечества... Эта язва людоедства, более страшная, чем чума, будет разъедать мир до тех пор, пока благами мира будут пользоваться не те люди, которые их создают, пока неограниченной властью над людьми будут пользоваться вырожденки человечества, сосредоточившие в своих руках все богатства мира... Напрасно эти

Oleg's oration shoots for the moon. Thematically, he ties his partisan struggles to the broader historical struggle between Capitalism and Communism, an opposition that plays only a small role in the rest of the book.<sup>16</sup> Stylistically, the statement shades well into floridity. While I do not find this rhetorical excess necessarily unrealistic for a bookish sixteen year old who has had plenty of time in solitary confinement to compose his statement – even given the echo of Nathan Hale – Fadeev lowers his rhetorical level throughout the 1951 version. While the structure and meaning of Oleg's statements remain largely identical, Fadeev's changes make him sound slightly more like a normal teenager, underlining his relative immaturity next to Liutikov.

The corresponding scene in the 1951 version is critical to Clark's discussion of *The Young Guard* as a key example of the Soviet novel's rite-of-passage structure:

In the initiation scene of *The Young Guard* we find both instruction and the symbolic physical link. The scene takes place when Lyutikov and Oleg have already been captured by the Germans and are led out, *bound together*, to be interrogated. Lyutikov makes a last statement to his captors, in the tradition of the revolutionary's trial speech. His speech is not intended to move his captors, who are essentially *outside* the bounds of the family. When Lyutikov begins, "The words I speak are not for you," Oleg stands by listening, and "his big eyes...have a clear expression, clearer now than ever before." He has made the passage into "consciousness" (173).

Those who wish to read Lyutikov's statement in full will have a difficult time, however, since Fadeev removed it almost immediately after the 1951 version's first publication (SS 356). Whether Fadeev's immediate and critical deletion is a sign of protest or self-disgust must remain a matter of speculation.

What is clear, however, is that in the USSR's canonical version of the novel, Oleg's 1945 speech

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господа в белоснежном белье надеются уйти от суда истории. Забрызганные кровью, они уже стоят перед его грозными очами... Я жалею только о том, что не смогу больше бороться в рядах своего народа и всего человечества за справедливый, честный строй жизни. Я шлю мой последний привет всем, кто борется за него!..

<sup>16</sup> For the strongest identification of the Nazis with Capitalist perversion, see the treatment of SS Commander Fenbong's corpse robbing as an accumulation of capital. Fenbong keeps extracted gold teeth and other ill-gotten gains wrapped around his body and therefore is afraid to bathe. He dreams of owning a shop one day (ch. XX).

disappears without replacement, producing an oddly truncated scene – the two are bound together, led in, and led out again -- leaving the final act of the novel without a rhetorical climax.

Regardless of the fate of Liutikov's statement, the removal of Oleg's final speech likely hinges on the issues inherent in the last sentence, where Oleg sends his greetings to fellow fighters for Communism. Bearing in mind Clark's emphasis on ideological transmission, and since Fadeev makes it clear that there are no other Soviet citizens in the room, Oleg is effectively passing the baton to his readers, an unusual transferal and one that implies that he has already reached the requisite level of consciousness despite the lack of experienced Communists to guide him. Here again, the clear implication to be drawn is that close work with older generations is not essential to attain this level of ideological maturity.

#### Who is the Hero of the Young Guard?

Ideological maturity, in fact, only really becomes a primary issue in the second redaction, where, as we have seen, it tracks chronological maturity. This emphasis on maturation carries with it the progression from spontaneity to consciousness that Clark identifies as central to the Soviet novel. In Fadeev's case, as the role of Party representatives expands dramatically, so too must there be someone to receive their instruction, and something to impart. Thus the most prominent characters in the 1951 version are Liutikov and Oleg Koshevoi. With heightened emphasis on one aspect, though, comes decreased emphasis in other areas; changing the focus on major figures changes the character of the novel. In *The Young Guard* the altered ideological message corresponds roughly with the shifting prominence of the group's members.

In broad terms, the second version of the novel introduces in Liutikov a true adult hero – I discuss the two other major Bolshevik figures in the next section – and a focus on Oleg Koshevoi as the youth group's *primus inter pares*. It is only in 1951 – or perhaps 1948 when the film is taken into account – that

Oleg Koshevoi assumes his now-canonical role as the main hero of the Young Guard. To be sure, he is the organization's commissar in both versions, and is marked more than others with the standard traits of the positive hero, but his progression to consciousness is not a major plot line in 1945; if anything, he has a high level of consciousness from the beginning. In the early series of sketches by Kotov and Liaskovskii that I mention above, Oleg is obviously the designated main hero. There is some evidence that Koshevoi's mother immediately started to promote her son's role after the War, and that her activities distorted the historical record for quite some time. Certainly the authorities took Oleg as the ringleader and hero. In this context, Fadeev's choice to elevate other characters to his level is at the very least a conscious decision, and perhaps even an attempt to change the prevailing emphasis.

With the elevation of other heroes, orthodox Soviet "positive" heroism proves to be but one of multiple possible models: in the 1945 version there are at least two other major heroes, each with a defined cluster of themes and concerns. Each enjoys roughly equal space in the narrative, and like Oleg, each follows a separate narrative path after the Young Guard is betrayed and attempts to escape Krasnodon. These two characters are Liuba Shevtsova and Serezhka Tiulenin.

While other characters play prominent roles in the world of *The Young Guard* – notably Vania Turkenich, the former soldier who became the group's military commander, and Ulia Gromova, the high-spirited focus of Fadeev's opening scene who becomes one of two female members of the group's directorate -- the text tends to focus on Serezhka and Liuba. In a novel of underground exploits, they are the two most active characters in the book: Serezhka is involved in the bulk of the group's paramilitary operations, while Liuba combines a flirtatious exterior with a dangerous vocation in espionage. Reading the 1945 version against the more familiar 1951 version as an exercise in retrospective alteration can produce a pleasant surprise, since among many other differences the roughly coequal troika of heroes incarnates a broader and more encompassing array of characteristics and even genres.

Specifically, Liuba and Serezhka are inclined toward action in contrast with Oleg's more deliberative style. In the 1945 edition, spontaneity (*stikhiinost'*) need not necessarily progress toward consciousness, nor is it in any way a subordinate quality. More than anyone, Serezhka embodies this trait: His signature act is arson, and fire's elemental unpredictability is combined with his habitual barefootedness to make him an unconstrained agent, a naturally appealing boy of action. While many other characters are still on the steppe attempting to flee the German advance, Serezhka is already collecting cast-off weapons, and he begins to strike at the Germans almost immediately, setting fire to the town school which has become the temporary Nazi headquarters. His ideal is to fight with the Red Army despite his age – perhaps an attraction to a type of maturity, albeit unideological – and in fact he does attach himself to a regiment on two different occasions. He is also involved in the Young Guard's most extreme operations, including the execution of Ignat Fomin, the hidden class enemy and occupation militia chief who had unmasked the adult underground. In either version, Serezhka is motivated less by historical or class consciousness than by hatred of the Germans, but in 1945 this motivation appears in no way inferior to Oleg's. By virtue of his freedom of movement, his dramatic exploits, and Fadeev's palpable fondness for the character, Serezhka Tiulenin has long been one of the most popular members of the Young Guard.

Liuba Shevtsova, who in Inna Makarova's film portrayal became one of the teen idols of the postwar Soviet Union, is another of Fadeev's obvious favorites. Famously described in the novel as "Sergei Tiulenin in a skirt," she too is an active figure, albeit an inveterate narcissist and performer. Ironically, though, she combines her predilection for self-display with a hidden role. Since before Krasnodon was overrun, Liuba has in fact been attached to the underground movement as a radio operator and spy; during parts of the novel she is the only contact between anyone in the Young Guard and the Soviet side, although none of the other members realize her other affiliation until late in the novel. The outspoken blonde employs her physical gifts and dramatic talent to extract both information and supplies from German officers, all the while risking her reputation among Krasnodon's general populace for her

seeming fraternization with the enemy and her refusal to remove a postcard of Hitler that hangs above her bed. As one of two girls in the Young Guard steering committee and the one who goes on missions along with the boys, she is the most prominent and physically alluring female in the novel. Liuba is the final Young Guarder to die, and her last acts before death combine her performative nature with an end reminiscent of earlier Komsomol girl martyrs: she sings one of her favorite songs as she is led to her execution, where she refuses to kneel and takes a bullet in the face.

Though many of Seriozha and Liuba's exploits remain in the 1951 version – Seriozha's independence is treated more negatively, while Liuba, after all, has more adult supervision than her friends expect – the dramatic increase in partisan bureaucracy that centers on Oleg overshadows their plot lines and throws the original generic balance out of alignment. While *The Young Guard* in all of its incarnations is probably a juvenile adventure novel above all, its dominant mode has always been that of conspiracy, as I discuss in greater detail below. In 1951, the improvisational thrill of that mode is somewhat lessened by the formality of the inserted mentorship and organizational material. In 1945, however, it finds a balance with Serezhka's combat and Liuba's espionage, related modes that together produce a fuller fictional treatment of wartime experience.

The interaction of genres in the 1945 version extends farther than questions of thematic balance. Combined with the allegorical turn that lay at the heart of the Soviet novel, Fadeev's use of genre signals deep unease about the direction Soviet society is taking, the ability of the generations in power to rule effectively, and the course of Soviet literature. The Party was in fact right to be concerned about the implications of *The Young Guard*, but the self-sufficiency of the young Krasnodon partisans was only the most superficial possible cause.

#### Genre, Generations, and the Bounds of Allegory

Soviet explanations of *The Young Guard*'s textual history always portrayed Fadeev's errors as those of omission rather than commission. As the December 1947 *Pravda* article put it, Fadeev had "successfully reconstructed the appearance of the Krasnodon heroes. But the most important thing fell out of the novel (*No iz romana vypalo samoe glavnoe*), the thing that characterizes the life, growth, and work of the Komsomol. That thing is the leading, educational role of the Party, of Party organization."<sup>17</sup> The description of the Party's role as having been dropped from the novel, rather than just never having been part of the work, speaks to Clark's perception that the system pushed official novels toward a certain homogenous master narrative, however arbitrary and historically determined that narrative may have been. It may also indicate that Fadeev had strayed from the narrative it was assumed he would follow.

To explain the 1945 version's deficiencies without making them seem a conscious act of opposition, Fadeev and the literary establishment offered two types of argument. The first keyed into the tension between the real and the typical that had occupied Russian literature from the time of Belinskii: When the novel was first published, Fadeev emphasized to his young readers that the Young Guard comprised real people, presumably to inspire emulation by making them more accessible. After the 1947 attack, he increasingly described the characters of the novel as types, composite characters deployed to reveal a higher truth. The shift in argumentation may reveal some ambivalence about his fealty to the historical record, and seems to run counter to the second, more prevalent argument that he and his supporters used: the first version had shortchanged the Party's role simply because the historical record available to Fadeev in 1943 and 1944 was incomplete, and as more proof of the Party's involvement surfaced, it was only appropriate to rewrite the novel to do justice to the revised historical understanding. As I discuss above, the revised historical record was faulty, and some of its defects were at least suspected at the time.

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<sup>17</sup> Автору удалось воссоздать облик героев Краснодарона. Но из романа выпало самое главное, что характеризует жизнь, рост, работу комсомола, это – руководящая, воспитательная роль партии, партийной организации.

Whatever private and/or public justifications were found after the fact, the Fadeev of 1943-1945 did indeed believe that the Party was absent from Krasnodon, precisely the standpoint for which his novel was withdrawn. As the Soviet critic and close Fadeev confidante Evgeniia Knipovich points out, Fadeev's first published response to the Young Guard phenomenon – a 1943 article – stated the premise directly: “People of the older generations, having remained in Krasnodon to organize the struggle against the German occupiers, were quickly discovered by the enemy and either died at his hands or were forced to hide. The full burden of organizing the struggle against the enemy fell on the shoulders of the young” (108).<sup>18</sup> Knipovich, who was writing in 1964 and seems to be trying to burnish Fadeev's reputation against both Stalin- and Thaw-era attacks, writes that the second version corrected the theme of generational conflict and restored the proper “unity of generations” (“*edinstvo pokolenii*”). This last phrase perhaps points to a greater anxiety over generational relations in the first version than is usually acknowledged, an anxiety that I believe is justified.

As the matched pair of Katerina Pavlovna's injunctions I quote above indicate, Fadeev approves of independent action in the first version of *The Young Guard*, as long as the group organizes itself along Party principles, which it obviously does. The young people form themselves into independent cells commanded by a central directorate, which in turn has both a military commander (Turkenich) and an ideological commissar (Koshevoi). They execute a series of impressive attacks despite their inexperience, saving the lives of many adult Krasnodoners, and are uncovered only due to a combination of betrayal from within and their own irrepressibly correct Soviet behavior, which functions as a red flag to the Nazis. All of this could easily be read as flattering to the older generations: the Komsomol organization especially seems to have done its job with flying colors, imparting both ideological consciousness and practical techniques of conspiracy. Pride in offspring who can execute urgent national imperatives independently, however, seems to have been trumped by fear of their independence itself.

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<sup>18</sup> Люди старших поколений, оставшиеся в городе Краснодоне для того, чтобы организовать борьбу против немецких оккупантов, были скоро выявлены врагом и погибли от его руки или вынуждены были скрыться. Вся тяжесть организации борьбы с врагом выпала на плечи молодежи.



This fear was likely heightened by the novel's dominant genre: necessarily, it is a novel of conspiracy, a work in which a group of people work in secret to overthrow the powers that be. Because the heroes are underage and their parents worry about them, they must keep their work secret from most adults as well, lying to or defying remaining Russian authority figures even as they enlist other adults in their schemes. Fadeev is an astute enough psychologist to balance these burdens with adolescent pleasures: the Young Guard are at an age when they are likely to want to keep things from their parents in any case, including the romantic and sexual attraction experienced by many of the group's members (though there is no clear evidence of consummation, Serezhka Tiulenin and Valia Borts seem to have acted on these feelings more than the others). Many of the group's conspiratorial dilemmas are also those of adolescence: Whom can we trust? Who are our allies, and who our enemies? What roles shall we assume? Which adult activities are we capable of performing? What is holding us back? What is the extent of our volition, and how should we employ it?

As I note at the beginning of this chapter, Juliane Fürst has established that postwar youth were drawn to these pleasures of conspiracy, a few even emulating the Young Guard to the point of violence ("Youth"). Even less extreme reports of the fascination that Fadeev's novel exerted could raise concerns among the ruling elite, despite the fact that the conspiratorial novel has a proud if somewhat circumscribed place in Soviet literature. Its very nature requires secrecy and acts against the ruling order, and while Stalinist culture was obsessed with enemies plotting to destroy it from within, the theme of secret saboteurs and shadowy enemies working against the Communist regime – perhaps due to almost inescapable affinity with the detective novel – largely remained confined to lower genres and produced few Soviet classics.<sup>19</sup> The reverse perspective, Communists working in the underground, had a prouder tradition in the Soviet Union, but only in two specific contexts. Communist conspirators could be

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<sup>19</sup> One exception is Anatolii Rybakov's debut novel *Kortik* (The Dirk), a novel for adolescents that tells the story of a band of Komsomol hopefuls that foil an anti-Soviet plot during the Civil War. Published soon after the attack on Fadeev, the novel shows children trying to solve conspiratorial plots on their own, but with frequent adult consultations and guided by adult principles.

depicted in two historical periods: the Tsarist era and the Civil War. One of the most noted of all Socialist Realist precursors, Gorky's 1905 *Mother (Mat')*, is a conspiratorial novel in an industrial setting. Naturally, the renewed need for a partisan movement occasioned by the German occupation brought back memories of the Civil War, but the unmistakable implication in the 1945 version is that the Civil War partisan experience – or at least the generation that carried it out – is inadequate to modern needs. The issue lies not just in absence, in omission: Fadeev expends great energy on showing how adult generations in fact assure that absence through disorganization and failure to apply bedrock Bolshevik principles. His adult partisans have clearly brought their ruin on themselves.

The 1945 version's preeminent case in point is the man charged with organizing the Krasnodon underground, Matvei Shul'ga, a miner and veteran of the Civil War underground in 1918-1919. As the Germans approach, his superior Ivan Protsenko leaves him without an organizational structure or recently vetted contacts, a situation that Fadeev clearly attributes to carelessness (*vinoiu vsemu byla bespechnost'*, a statement that naturally disappears in 1951) and the partisan organization's failure to make organization a priority as the Red Army experienced early success in repelling the German attack (ch. 7). Shul'ga compounds that heedlessness by misjudging nearly everyone he meets, effectively precluding any hope of building an underground organization and in the process demonstrating himself to be one of the saddest characters in Stalinist literature.<sup>20</sup>

Admittedly his task is not easy, since his designated contact harbors a son who deals in stolen goods. A former flame complains of the war's poor organization, and he rejects her as well. His final recourse turns out to be a class enemy just waiting for the opportunity to make himself useful to the Germans, and he winds up in prison almost immediately. He has failed to evince one of the elementary abilities of conscious Bolsheviks: A commonplace in Stalinist literature holds that Party elders can easily distinguish the individual essences of those they meet and can discern anyone's unique abilities even

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<sup>20</sup> It might be possible to read Shul'ga's failings allegorically as those of Stalin, who purged his military leadership in the late 1940s and was caught off guard by the German invasion.

secondhand. Protsenko displays precisely this trait when he meets with Liuba and correctly identifies the boy who will bring down the group (ch. 33). Shul'ga, though, explicitly runs afoul of one of the most basic Marxist/Leninist oppositions in taking form for content. The unreliable son blinds him to the fundamental reliability of the father, and harsh words spoken under extreme duress turn him against an old flame and comrade; conversely, he casts his lot with the traitor Fomin due to his neat dress and reserved politesse, both superficial attributes of *kul'turnost'*, the Soviet version of bourgeois propriety.

Shul'ga is quickly joined in jail by Andrei Val'ko, the former director of the region's main mine, who has returned to Krasnodon to try to put together a partisan movement on his own. Unlike Shul'ga, he can identify trustworthy collaborators, but is undone by his own impulsiveness, violating conspiratorial discipline when he rushes from his hiding place to warn other members of his improvised underground of impending arrests.

Fadeev devotes considerable space to Val'ko and Shul'ga's experience in prison, which they do not leave until their execution. It is a strangely static section of the novel, notable for one rousing brawl in which the two deal out substantial punishment to their captors but fail to escape or achieve any other benefit. The two adult characters spend the rest of their time in prison reflecting on the Revolution's ossification and delivering the novel's longest soliloquies. First Shul'ga reflects on his errors, which Val'ko correlates to a surprising general case:

“Paper!” exclaimed Va'lko. “You had more trust in paper than in a man,” he said with manly sorrow in his voice. “Yes, it happens with us fairly often...”

After another statement of the theme by Val'ko, Shul'ga repeats the lesson:

“You and I are just the ones in the trenches; it's not for us to tally up all the great work for the people that we've borne on our shoulders in this life. But our life has also seen more than enough fuss, paper, formalism, superficiality, window-dressing, compromise, and boondoggling,” said

Shul'ga mockingly. "And the most valuable thing in the world, the thing it's worth living for, toiling for, dying for – it's our people, it's man! (ch. 30)<sup>21</sup>

Decrying formalism and bureaucracy is always acceptable in Socialist Realism – and indeed Val'ko's statements survive reasonably intact in 1951 – but Shul'ga's complaint is completely rewritten in the later version. His criticism here cuts deeper than the standard attack against bureaucratic obstacles to approach a systemic indictment of life before the War. Here is one of the places where Fadeev's offenses shade from the aforementioned sins of omission – a *failure* to depict the truth – to sins of commission, depicting perhaps a different truth than the Party was comfortable hearing.

It is hard not to hear in these passages a *cri de coeur* from Fadeev himself. His bitter complaints about his own bureaucratic burdens were frequent – they constitute one of the dominant grievances in his suicide note – feeling that they prevented him from fulfilling his true promise as an author. That he associated the heroes of the Young Guard with his own experience as a teenage partisan in the Civil War is clear from his reminiscences in Chapter 52, but the 1945 version contains hints of dissatisfaction with the succeeding decades.

To interpret these passages and others in the first version, a reader must decide how allegorically to read. Allegory is one of the fundamental tools of Socialist Realism, which, as Clark points out, frequently tends to reenact a progression to Bolshevik consciousness on both the personal and national level. In essence, there is one official allegory that can take a limited range of forms. But if we read the adults in this novel as representatives of their eras, a different, less optimistic allegory emerges.

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<sup>21</sup> -- Бумага! -- воскликнул Валько. – Поверил бумаге больше, чем человеку, -- сказал он с мужественной печалью в голосе. Да, так бывает у нас частенько...

[...]

Мы же с тобой низовые люди, не нам с тобой считаться, який великий труд на благо народа пал в жизни на наши плечи. А немало было в нашей жизни и суеты, бумаги, формы, внешнего, казового, согласовательского да представительского, -- с издевкой сказал Шульга. – А самое дорогое на свете, ряди чего стоит жить, трудиться, умирать, -- то наши люди, человек!

Before their execution, Shul'ga and Val'ko recall the entire flow of Soviet history from the Revolution through NEP and the Five Year Plans to the prewar period. It is the only retelling of Soviet history in the novel, which otherwise limits itself to the happenings in 1943 Krasnodon. It has a valedictory feeling, a summing up before the two are buried alive while singing the *Internationale*, which itself would be replaced as the Soviet national anthem in March 1944, after the Young Guard had been executed but before Fadeev published his work.<sup>22</sup> Both Val'ko and Shul'ga are identified with the generation that gave birth to and subsequently led the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, in the 1945 *Young Guard*, they fail in every way. They fail to maintain the elementary discipline they learned 25 years earlier and they fall afoul of one of the most elementary philosophical distinctions of their party. Moreover, structurally it appears they must die for the Young Guard to coalesce into its own organization: in both versions, the first words that appear after the death of the old guard are the Young Guard membership oath, which mark the formalization and organization of what to this point has been fairly slapdash activity carried out mostly by Serezhka Tiulenin. The younger generation picks up where the older generation fails.

Extending the allegory somewhat, perhaps we can read the Young Guard generation as a proxy for the country as a whole. Certainly its wartime success can be read as a symbol for the Soviet victory: despite disorganized or absent leadership, a multinational populace manages to organize and carry out counterattacks and eventually push the Nazis back to Berlin. Though the Young Guard was executed before the German retreat, they were similarly multinational and had already exacted significant losses from the occupiers. The very liminality of the Young Guard, however, could have contributed to the power structure's anxiety at this allegory. Adolescence is a classically liminal period, when children traverse a variety of states on their way to more or less settled adult roles. The Young Guard makes more transitions than most: lying to parents, murder, first love, trespass, collaboration, ascension to leadership, descent to captivity, and myriad criminal acts. More literally, they frequently try to cross boundaries –

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<sup>22</sup> The tune of the new anthem debuted as the Bolshevik anthem in 1939, but with a different set of lyrics.

witness the attempts to return to Soviet territory that begin and end the novel – or sometimes boundaries shift across them, as when the Red Army pulls out and the Nazis move in, instantly changing the life of all those who remained behind. Like the youth of Krasnodon, the country was in a fluid state, and could potentially settle into a number of different arrangements, including one in which a new generation assumed control based on superior organization and the effective abdication of the old guard.

The range of available adults, however, contains another generational option between the ineffectual Old Bolsheviks and the surprisingly successful children who were born under Stalin: the men and women in their thirties, represented in this novel by Ivan and Katerina Pavlovna Protsenko. Ivan Protsenko is 35 during the novel, too young to have fought in the Civil War, but old enough to have attended Soviet schools and participated in the industrial achievements of the five-year plans. Protsenko's record is mixed in *The Young Guard*: first, he is absent from Krasnodon throughout the occupation, instead leading a partisan detachment farther north. As a commander of the underground, he offers only wry acknowledgement of the partisan movement's organizational failures before leaving Shul'ga to his ill-fated mission. He actually has Evgenii Stakhovich in his detachment for a time, but fails either to change his ways or to eliminate the threat before Stakhovich returns to Krasnodon and eventually betrays the Young Guard. Although Protsenko does identify Stakhovich to Liuba as a boy who bears watching, this is his only contribution on the matter. Of course, Stakhovich's real-life counterpart was believed to have betrayed the Young Guard at the time, but Fadeev's brief linkage of the partisan commander and the suspicious youth does raise interpretive questions that could easily have been avoided.

When Protsenko does return to Krasnodon – the novel's final event before the raising of the monument to the fallen heroes – he does so in his trusty Gazik, a car which has received unusual attention, attention which I believe leads to another reading of genre in the novel. The car merits a loving description in the early pages of the novel when Protsenko is meeting with Shul'ga before the Germans arrive:

Yes, it was a “Gazik,” one of those that traveled thousands, tens of thousands of kilometers across the steppes of the Don and Kazakhstan and across the northern tundra, that climbed the mountains of the Caucasus and the Pamir almost on goat’s feet, that penetrated the wilds of the taiga in the Altai and Sikhote-Alin’, that served the construction of Dnepr dams, the Stalingrad tractor factory, and Magnitogorsk, that brought Chukhnovskii and his comrades to the northern aerodrome to save Nobile’s expedition and crawled through blizzards and ice hummocks along the Amur ice road to assist the first builders of Komsomolsk. In a word, it was one of the Gaziks that through extreme effort, dragged out the entire first five-year plan on its back, dragged it out, grew old, and ceded its place to more modern machines, the offspring of the same factories it had dragged forth. (ch. 6)

We learn later that the Gazik has been kept safe in a cave while Protsenko fights in the underground, only to return triumphantly at the end. The car, I believe, functions as a framing device: along with the destruction of the region’s most productive mine – an event that traumatizes the girls of the novel’s opening scene – and the marked refusal of the Soviet workers to produce anything under the Germans, it symbolizes not only the fact that the war set the Soviet Union back industrially, but also the peacetime heroism of the thirties, the spirit that Soviet society needed to renew in order to begin reconstruction. It was also, I believe, an acknowledgement by Fadeev that the production novel, the genre most appropriate to the five year plans, had not been appropriate to the War, but now could begin to serve, even though, like the Gazik, it might appear slightly outmoded. I turn to a more elaborate combination of metaliterary comment and examination of postwar reconstruction in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II

**Semen Babaevskii and the Logic of the Postwar Agricultural Novel***Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy and the Struggle to Revivify the Agricultural Theme*

Of the Soviet writers who rose to prominence in the late Stalinist period, perhaps none suffered so dramatic a reversal in official critical reception as Semen Babaevskii (1909 – 2000). Recipient of Stalin Prizes for his novel *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy* [*Bearer of the Golden Star*] and its sequel, *Svet nad zemlei* [*Light over the Earth*], Babaevskii had attained all the tokens of professional literary success in the Stalinist system: positions of responsibility in the Soviet Writers' Union, huge print runs of his novels, and a 1951 film adaptation of *Kavaler* that reportedly found favor with Stalin (Gromov 447). In some ways, this eminence continued in the years after Stalin's death. From 1955 to 1959, Babaevskii served as a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet, and was also sent on a lengthy writing trip to the People's Republic of China, a visit that produced a volume of sketches and two collections of diary material. He continued to have a productive literary career, publishing regularly into the Gorbachev era.<sup>23</sup>

Yet Thaw critics would transform Babaevskii from a lauded Soviet writer into an icon of the *lakirovka deisvitel'nosti* (lacquering of reality) that had been identified in the late 1940s as one of the primary defects sapping the vitality from Soviet literature. For Babaevskii, the shift in reception was permanent: as Polly Jones notes in her summary of Thaw-period debates over the Stalin cult in literature, Babaevskii was the only author who did not find his critical reputation somewhat rehabilitated in the Party's early 1960s reaction against Thaw "excesses." Even Petr Pavlenko, who was the target of as much vitriol in the mid-1950s as was Babaevskii, and who, moreover, was essential to the Stalin cult in prose and film, saw his critical reputation rise again within a few years (161-63).

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<sup>23</sup> Portions of this chapter appeared in an earlier form in Hicks 2007.



At first reading, it is hard to identify the features of Babaevskii's novels that merit such abuse. To be sure, he does produce grindingly optimistic novels of agricultural reconstruction and modernization just as a more unflinching view of the difficulties afflicting the countryside was starting to take hold. His later attempts to adjust to that new paradigm were widely condemned as inadequate (especially *Synovnii bunt* [*Mutiny of the Sons*] (1961) or, much later, *Privol'e* [*Wide Open Spaces*] (1980)). But since the rural theme dominated postwar Stalinist literature – and Thaw-era critics found similar faults in many other such works – that focus by itself would not have been enough to make Babaevskii the conventional symbol of *lakirovka*.

Babaevskii may in fact have fallen victim to his own attempts to breathe new life into a static genre, most notably in *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy*, his breakthrough work. One of his signature techniques (incorporation of the pastoral) runs afoul of a general shift toward less optimistic depiction of rural settings, while an innovation (thematizing the doctrine of the positive hero, a key element of Socialist Realist theory) was not appreciated by most of his contemporaries and may even have contributed to the contempt that some harbored for him. The backlash against Babaevskii is an interesting case of two clashing attempts to inject some new life into a shopworn set of themes and textual strategies. Both the Stalinist laureate and his Thaw critics are players in the negotiation over the rural theme.

#### Criticism of Babaevskii during the Thaw

Three mid-1950s attacks frame the case against Babaevskii. Mikhail Sholokhov's jab during a typically pugnacious statement to the 1956 Twentieth Party Congress, though brief, underlines a common source of discontent:

The writer Babaevskii correctly decided that *The Bearer of the Golden Star* would not bring him yet a fourth medal of a Stalin Prize laureate, and has gone to China, rumor has

it for three years. Well, he'll bring back a good novel on our friends the Chinese peasants, that will be a great joy for us all (16).<sup>24</sup>

Having devoted most of his speech to criticism of Soviet writers for spending insufficient time in the field with farmers and workers, Sholokhov takes a different tack with his fellow chronicler of Cossacks and *kolkhozes*. The redundant phrasing “would not bring him yet a fourth medal of a Stalin Prize laureate” emphasizes the physical artifact of the medal, linking the gold star of the novel’s title to the fascination with the awards that Babaevskii himself had received. His three Stalin prizes for the three parts of his saga<sup>25</sup> are often mentioned in parallel with the Hero of the Soviet Union medal -- the nation’s highest honor -- worn by the novel’s protagonist. In fact, throughout the late Stalinist and Thaw periods, the title of *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy* is used as a metonym for Babaevskii and other writers who share his supposed faults much more frequently than most authors are identified by their most famous work, continuing to foreground the issue of awards and recognition.<sup>26</sup>

Babaevskii, Sholokhov implies, has gone to the well too many times, squeezing not two but three consecutive Stalin Prizes from the same characters and setting. Given the years he spent on his two major works, *Tikhii Don* [*The Quiet Don*] and *Podniataia tselina* [*Virgin Soil Upturned*], it would be hard for Sholokhov to complain about devotion to a limited number of fictional worlds – and indeed he defends slow composition elsewhere in his speech – but in 1956 it had been 15 years since his own Stalin Prize

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<sup>24</sup> Писатель Бабаевский правильно решил, что «Кавалер Золотой Звезды» уже не принесет ему четвертой медали лауреата Сталинской премии, и поехал в Китай, по слухам, на три года. Что ж, привезет оттуда хороший роман о наших друзьях – китайских крестьянах, это будет большой радостью для нас всех.

<sup>25</sup> *Svet nad zemlei* was published in two parts and received a Stalin Prize for each. Babaevskii’s three Prizes were awarded in 1949 (First Degree), 1950 (First Degree), and 1951 (Second Degree), each for the work published in the preceding year.

<sup>26</sup> For an example of Babaevskii and *Kavaler* standing in for a school of overly entitled authors opposed to the Sholokhov school, see Konstantin Vorob’ev’s February 28, 1956 letter to the editors of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, (Sholokhov 241). The letter traverses the major points of Babaevskii resentment – the supposed juvenility and unreality of his works as well as the disproportionate rewards garnered by the author – in the space of a paragraph. The aggressive polemical tone of the letter delayed its publication until 1988; it is doubtful that more than a handful of people saw it at the time.

for *Tikhii Don*, and it would not be until 1960 that he would win a Lenin Prize (the renamed Stalin Prize), and 1965 the Nobel.<sup>27</sup> At the time of this speech, then, Sholokhov's production/recognition ratio would appear to rank substantially below Babaevskii's.

Indeed, contemporary criticism of Babaevskii often resembles resentment of the blockbuster potboiler, contempt directed at a writer who seemingly casts aside scruples concerning originality, truth, and independent thought to write an easy crowd pleaser. The most colorful statement in this vein is undoubtedly Vladimir Pomerantsev's famous 1953 characterization of Sergei Tutarinov, *Kavaler's* hero. His eyes opened by Valentin Ovechkin's proto-Village Prose *Raionnye budni* [District Routine] sketches, Pomerantsev attacks Tutarinov and his creator for vanquishing paper tigers rather than facing the true magnitude of rural problems. Note here especially the infantilizing overtones common to Babaevskii criticism:

And here I understood that before Ovechkin many books on the theme of the kolkhoz sanded everything down, sawing off the points and breaking the corners. I understood that Tutarinov overcame simple obstacles, not dealing with or even seeing the genuinely complex problems of village life. Today he seems not so much a hero as a little angel on an Easter cake. Glory dusts him like colored poppy seeds; but lick him, and he melts.<sup>28</sup>

Pomerantsev surrounds this passage on Tutarinov with comments on Babaevskii's own inadequacy, and in conjunction with Sholokhov's criticism cited above, his complaints about Tutarinov's cheap victories over simple obstacles could also be read to refer to the laurels Babaevskii himself garnered by hewing to the same shopworn narrative formula rather than grappling with the real problems of the countryside.

Pomerantsev's confectionery imagery also becomes a commonplace of Thaw era attacks on late Stalinist

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<sup>27</sup> Although the honorary 1955 Order of Lenin he received on the occasion of his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday may have lessened the sting somewhat.

<sup>28</sup> И тут-то я понял, что до Овечкина во многих книгах по колхозной тематике все было затерто-притерто, острия все отпилены, углы пообломаны. Я понял, что Тутаринов преодолевал препятствия легкие, подлинно сложными проблемами жизни села не занимался и даже не видел их. Он выглядит сегодня не столько героем, сколько ангелочком на куличе. Славой он, как цветным маком, обсыпан, а лизнешь его – и растает.

culture, with sweetness (*sladkost'*) and cheap glitter (*susal'nost'*) reaching almost the ubiquity of *lakirovka* as standard epithets.

The third critical statement, Fedor Abramov's 1954 "Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoennoi proze" ("People of the Collective Farm Village in Postwar Prose"), shifts the emphasis from easy victories to willful ignorance. He notes that the centerpiece collective labor of *Bearer of the Golden Star* -- a mass mobilization to float timber down a river to the village -- removes all young people from the fields during the height of harvest season, a move unthinkable in real life since it would threaten the collective farm's very reason for existence. Echoing Pomerantsev, Abramov notes that this failure to engage agricultural life as it was lived also led Babaevskii and many other Soviet authors to provide their heroes with easy tasks that led to hollow victories. These easy literary victories, in turn, implied that the problems facing the USSR were also susceptible to easy solutions.

Abramov's article is likely the single best indictment of postwar Stalinist literature from a mimetic realist perspective, and the sense of long-simmering exasperation is even more palpable here than in Pomerantsev. But as any adherent of Socialist Realism would know, the official method aimed to show reality not as it was, but "in its revolutionary development," and indeed both articles were central exhibits in the August 1954 Writer's Union resolution that, among other steps, temporarily deposed Aleksandr Tvardovskii as editor of *Novyi mir* [*New World*], where both articles first saw print. The resolution hit back at both Abramov and Pomerantsev with charges that they attempted to divert the role of Soviet literature from spiritual guidance and inspiration to the regurgitation of quotidian detail uninformed by any acknowledgement of Soviet agriculture's progressive achievements. Much of the early post-Stalin period can be seen as a collective attempt to speed the literary renewal that began after the War while negotiating the limits to that renewal, and in this case the polemics were quickly judged too vigorous. But the pendulum swung rapidly: in 1958 Tvardovskii regained his editor's chair, and the charges leveled against Babaevskii by Pomerantsev and Abramov stuck for decades, albeit couched in more polite language.

### The Postwar Struggle for *Kolkhoz* Literature

Ultimately, it was the incipient rise of Village Prose that likely contributed most to Babaevskii's permanently damaged reputation in the literary establishment. Beginning in the early 50s, agricultural and village life becomes the most consistently contested subject matter in Soviet literature, easily outpacing the disputes over depictions of wartime heroism and the Party's leadership (exemplified by, say, Fadeev's *Molodaiia gvardiia* [*The Young Guard*] and Nekrasov's *V okopakh Stalingrada* [*In the Trenches of Stalingrad*]) or the explorations of industrial production reminiscent of literature produced during the first Five Year Plan.

As we have seen, both Pomerantsev and Abramov had seen the future of the rural theme in early Village Prose experiments, and chose the most highly decorated representative of the reigning approach as a natural polemical target. Even as Abramov became a leading Village Prose author himself and navigated his own episodes of condemnation, Semen Babaevskii's name remained a byword for simplistic and juvenile portrayal of agricultural life. Babaevskii, however, had also departed from the conventional Soviet representation of rural life, albeit in a direction so opposed to the new approach that he was seen as the apotheosis of contemporary conservatism and weaknesses rather than as an innovator.

In hindsight, the late 1940s were exactly the wrong time to bring the pastoral to Socialist Realism. Before I discuss Babaevskii's use of it, however, I should say a few words about the term itself. Many commentators expand the concept to describe all of Socialist Realism. As early as 1935, William Empson devoted the first chapter of his *Some Versions of the Pastoral* to proletarian literature, one of the precursors of Socialist Realism. Empson – if I parse his typically idiosyncratic reading correctly – identifies the pastoral with literature that may be “about” the people, but not “by” or “for” them (6). That is, it uses the lower classes (peasants or workers, in his conception), to signify whatever values the intelligentsia desires them to have, generally those associated with simple virtue and/or wry humor that

make their inferior social position more bearable and thus more stable. Although he writes before the period that I examine in this dissertation, Empson's approach might possibly be extended to the relations between the Party and its literature, although I am unaware of any attempts to do so.

Empson's pithiest quotation on the subject – "...I think good proletarian art is usually Covert Pastoral" – was picked up by Katerina Clark in her *The Soviet Novel* and extended to most postwar official Soviet literature. In her fourth chapter, she states that the tension between the garden and machine – respite in nature versus industrial efficiency – that characterized the early Soviet period rapidly succumbed to widespread resentment of the cult of the machine, leading to an emphasis in Stalinist culture on nature itself, either as a force to be struggled with, or as half of a new nature/culture distinction that eventually leads to the elementality/consciousness (*stikhiinost'/soznatel'nost'*) dichotomy that she sees as a fundamental structuring tension.

While approaches such as Empson's and Clark's have increased our understanding of Soviet literature, they are much broader conceptions of the pastoral than the sense in which Abramov and his contemporaries used the term. After all, they existed inside the system and were describing a particular phenomenon rather than the system as a whole. For these critics, Clark's citation of Marinelli seems most apposite: "...literature is called 'pastoral' if, as P. Marinelli puts it, it 'deals with the complexities of human life against a background of simplicity. All that is necessary is that memory and imagination should conspire to render a not too distant past of comparative innocence as more pleasurable than the harsh present'" (107). In the Soviet context, at least in the eyes of the Thaw critics, the central tension is probably the one between fantasy and reality rather than between past and present. Classic pastoral elements like shepherdesses, agricultural bounty, and the escape from various urban pressures did not evoke an idealized past the way they might have farther to the West, so the general resentment may also be tinged with suspicions that Babaevskii is insufficiently Russian in his approach.

*Bearer of the Golden Star* is full of pastoral reverie and ripeness, the latter quality personified most notably by Irina, Tutarinov's object of erotic fascination and eventual fiancée. Katerina Clark seizes on this aspect of Babaevskii's writing, noting no fewer than three times the description of Irina as a "swarthy shepherdess" (106, 193, 197). Even this epithet may not fully capture the pastoral overdetermination of Irina, who, after all, first appears at the reins of an oxcart hauling large jugs of milk (7-8).<sup>29</sup> The pastoral elements of the novel – including Tutarinov's sexual (re)awakening after taking shelter in Irina's remote barn during a thunderstorm, a pastoral commonplace perhaps most familiar to modern audiences in its incarnation as the fourth movement of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony – dominate the work's tone until the final group labor. In fact, the novel's incorporation of orthodox pastoral elements can be read to clash with the equally orthodox Socialist Realist "man versus nature" theme: the extended river float of timber in which the first volume culminates presents nature as a fearsome force, perhaps tamable with expertise, dedication, and supreme effort, but one that can injure and kill the settlement's denizens, potentially threatening their ability to sustain food production even at its currently attenuated levels.

As I have noted, Abramov criticized this literary task for its removal of the farm's strongest laborers at precisely the most important part of the agricultural year. More generally, Abramov indicts *Kavaler's* pastoral strategy for its inherent substitution of the simple for the complex:

The author is consistent. He counterpoises ordinary practical matters to starry-eyed fantasies, as if trying thereby to demonstrate the superiority of ideal romantic fabrications over reality.

[..]

The foundation of "pastoral romanticism" is a smoothed-over, placid conception of the development of the collective farm village, of our movement toward Communism, which easily – apparently – without any prior conditions, will come to life almost of its own accord (19).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, Irina supplants her pastoral functions with a position at the new hydroelectric power station.

<sup>30</sup> Автор последователен. Он противопоставляет обычным практическим делам прекраснотушные вымыслы, как бы стараясь при этом доказать превосходство условно-романтической выдумки над действительностью. [...] Основа «пасторального романтизма» -- сглаженное, благодушное

The pastoral elements of the tale, in Abramov's conception, are inextricable from the easy problems/easy solutions dynamic rejected by the school of Ovechkin and his successors. Dramatic as a raging river choked with logs might be, the entrenched social relations of the village and their clashes with central authority and encroaching modernization seemed much less tractable. Rather than nature, the enemy was modernity itself. The seeming simplicity of the pastoral model likely also served to intensify the perception of Tutarinov as Pomerantsev's insubstantial decorative angel. In this light, Tutarinov's marked weakness for cream can be seen as another infantilizing trait, an eagerness for a concentrated form of the mother's milk that Irina so copiously represents.

A reader well-versed in the Soviet version of the nineteenth-century canon, however, would likely recognize avid consumption of cream as a nod to Chernyshevskii's *Chto delat'*, a work that laid some of the foundations for the Socialist Realist positive hero. Babaevskii, having graduated in 1939 from the literary training provided by the Gorky Institute, was grounded in that tradition's canon, and as in Chernyshevskii, Tutarinov's fondness for cream shows that earthly pleasures do not conflict with heroic aspiration, although they may have to be deferred during the most intense moments of heroic achievement. The cream seems less infantile when read along with the overtly heroic traits with which Babaevskii lards Sergei Tutarinov. As I argue in the next section, by foregrounding these elements, Babaevskii executes the classic Formalist trick of defamiliarizing the positive hero by placing the device itself front and center.

### Thematizing Heroism

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представление о развитии колхозной деревни, о нашем движении к коммунизму, который-де легко, без осуществления предварительных условий, чуть ли не сам собой войдет в жизнь.



At first, heroism can seem overripe in *Bearer of the Golden Star*, as if Babaevskii's diligent literary study and penchant for pastoral abundance had caused him to load his central character with too many heroic traits. Like many postwar protagonists, Sergei Tutarinov is a demobilized soldier, a veteran who must reintegrate himself into civilian life at the same time as he helps his village to restore its productive capacity and its spirit. The adolescent qualities identified by so many critics also reflect the fact that Babaevskii's prose operates more in the vein of Ostrovsky's *Kak zakalialas' stal'* [*How the Steel Was Tempered*] than in that of Gladkov's *Tsement* [*Cement*]: more *Bildung* than restoration, more progressive attainment of maturity than coping with lost youth. The simple problems noted by both Pomerantsev and Abramov do indeed find too simple solutions: Tutarinov's obstacles are mostly managerial, and rely on the all too common device of the hidden stockpile. As in many novels of reconstruction, the protagonist's ambitious plans require more raw material than the traumatized state can provide, and progress seems imperiled until a store of the necessary material is found to have survived the war. Specifically, in *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy*, the resource turns out to be a huge amount of timber stored on a distant mountainside, enough timber to realize the settlement's ambitious five-year plan, which calls for new lines of livestock, a cinema, and a hydroelectric plant. The betterment of life in all its aspects thus comes to center around this timber: the five-year plan that Tutarinov pushes the villagers to meet will ensure social cohesion, material progress, and cultural advancement, but to fulfill the plan Tutarinov himself must undertake a bureaucratic labor – acquiring rights to the timber – and lead the town in the physical labor of floating the stockpile down the river to the settlement.<sup>31</sup>

So far, nothing in this summary seems out of the ordinary for an agricultural reconstruction novel. While *Kavaler* tracks a typical Socialist Realist plot, however, it does distinguish itself via its thematizing subplot: Tutarinov is an actual Hero of the Soviet Union, the novel's eponymous Bearer of the Golden

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<sup>31</sup> Hidden stockpiles feature in many Stalinist novels, not just those of Babaevskii. They are a surprising structural weakness: if socialist realist novels are meant to inspire readers to emulate the feats depicted therein, conditioning achievement on convenient stockpiles would seem to defeat the whole purpose of the novel. I have not seen anyone attempt an explanation of this strange feature.

Star. In other words, the novel's protagonist is not only the requisite positive hero, but he has also been designated a Hero inside the world of the novel. This device could be read as either an overdetermination of heroism, or, as Pomerantsev and Abramov saw it, as a convenient stratagem to smooth the travels and petitions of the protagonist. In a gambit unusual for the period, however, Babaevskii uses the device to add a self-sufficient metaliterary layer to the narrative. Tutarinov's heroic status is discernible not only to the reader – who knows generally what to expect from reading many similar novels – but is signaled to other characters in the work. The hero's relation to the reader is altered as well: in most Stalinist novels, the positive hero should not occupy too rarified a social stratum, so that his struggles and accomplishments can seem both accessible and emulatable to the average reader. Here, though, Tutarinov has reached the top of one scale, thus readers can see how Soviet society treats a man who has reached a position that few of them will ever attain. At the same time, the novel depicts Sergei's doubt in his own ability to live up to his heroic status.

A brief description of the award itself will provide context for the discussion, since among Soviet orders it seems uniquely designed to provoke questions of signification, questions that I believe inform Babaevskii's work. Established in 1934, the Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded for heroic deeds both on the battlefield and off, although in practice it was mostly limited to the military, aviation and space exploration, and senior Communist leaders. Since recipients also received the Order of Lenin, which was considered the highest of the general state orders, the Hero medal marked the pinnacle of achievement in the USSR. The practical benefits were also sizable, especially in the straitened postwar environment: first priority on the housing list, a 50 percent rent reduction, additional living space, reduced taxes, a generous pension, a free first-class ticket every year, free bus tickets, and additional perks such as sanitarium visits, premium medical care, and special entertainment (“Gold Star”). In addition to the presumed valor to which each medal referred, then, the Gold Star also functions as a marker of substantial privilege and prestige. While the privilege is only tangentially mentioned in the novel, Sergei's prestige is recognized by all as a key tool in breaking down bureaucratic barriers.

Visually, the Hero medal is arresting for what it is not. An almost unique application of the “less is more” philosophy in Soviet orders, it is a plain five-pointed gold star with a minimal red ribbon suspension (Figure 1). Only on the reverse does the medal contain the text “Hero of the USSR.”



Figure 1: Hero of the Soviet Union Medal (“Gold Star”)

Compare this restraint with its companion medal, the Order of Lenin (Figure 2). Here, as with most Soviet decorations, more is more. Every aspect of the Order of Lenin, from the materials (gold, platinum, and enamel) and the number of design elements to the length of the suspension, embodies the pageantry and abundance characteristic of High Stalinist art. The Hero medal, conversely, pares such signs to the

minimum, relying on its rarity and the presumption of underlying heroic deeds for its force. It is the equivalent of a whisper instead of a shout.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 2: Order of Lenin Medal (“Order of Lenin”)

Babaevskii establishes Tutarinov as the Star bearer on the second page of the novel, and almost everyone in his home village knows about the honor before he arrives there. Significantly, one person who does not know is Irina, his future fiancée and anchor of the pastoral element. She must first grow to love him without knowing of his distinction and the decidedly unpastoral perquisites that accompany it. The local leadership, however, harbors no scruples about using the local Hero to further its ends, and in the first half

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<sup>32</sup> *Svet nad zemlei* tends to focus more on the Hero of Socialist Labor medal, an honor far more attainable in peacetime, and one based in design on the Hero of the Soviet Union (a hammer and sickle was added in relief to the superior Hero design). In contrast to the relative unattainability of the Hero medal, many characters in the later work either have or actively hope to receive the Hero of Socialist Labor. In general, however, *Svet* – though a more intricate and polished work – does not pursue the themes it inherits from *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy* with the prior novel’s energy.

of the novel, many of the party leaders and bureaucrats try to incorporate Tutarinov into their organizations to lend weight to their struggles for resources and recognition. Most egregious in his tactics is the local functionary Rubtsov-Emnitskii, who allegorizes the petty bureaucrat's tendency to use collective resources to further his own position. In this case, Rubtsov-Emnitskii's expensive furnishing of an office to lure the returned Hero to his own stronghold (92) is a danger sign, a harbinger of his attempt at the end of the novel to requisition the lumber that Tutarinov has led the village in floating downstream. Most of the villagers, in contrast, implicitly regard Sergei as a kind of collective property, and indeed this attitude helps Tutarinov overcome his early embarrassment at his distinction. The village drafts him to be on the planning commission for the local five-year plan, and the young Hero takes the next step in his evolution, presiding over a meeting that produces an extremely ambitious set of goals.

As I have noted above, the plan's ambition requires resources *ex machina*, the prewar timber stockpile that the town must move from the mountain to the village. Met with skepticism by the local party leadership, Tutarinov must undertake one of his two trips to the center, this one to Piatigorsk and Stavropol' to get his plan for the wood approved. As the episode that most removes the character from familiar circumstances, it throws the issues surrounding his hero status into sharpest relief. It is the first time in the novel that Tutarinov is essentially anonymous, a fact underscored by his disappointing experience in Piatigorsk's local "Heroes' Alley," a row of commemorative portraits in a local park:

Interesting," thought Sergei. "A Heroes' Alley!" And his pleasant feeling stemmed solely from the realization that here he was in a strange city, walking down not just any old alley, but "his own." What are you going to do? Apparently that's how people are made: they love glory—it sweetly intoxicates the head, and makes the heart unusually warm.

[...]

And he wasn't thinking about construction, but about himself: "Maybe I'll see my own portrait in this alley? And why shouldn't I see it? Of course I will...I always look gloomy in portraits, with knitted brows, just like an owl (163).<sup>33</sup>

After several mental colloquies with various portraits, Tutarinov reaches the lieutenants' section, and is distressed not to find his own representation. Informed by an old man that only Piatigorsk heroes are included, and chagrined by his own need for recognition, Sergei leaves to focus on his bureaucratic labors.

Piatigorsk presents many opportunities to think about distinction, however, and for Tutarinov to resolve his ambivalence over displaying his status. When Sergei and his driver arrive at the dormitory set aside for collective farm workers, the desk attendant informs him with some satisfaction that all the rooms are reserved a year in advance, until, that is, she sees his gold star:

You're a Hero?" the young woman asked.

"I've reached even their ranks! What of it?"

[...]

"A Hero," she prattled, "And I said those things to you! But don't you worry. We have some reserves!" She smiled. "I'll just call and arrange it..."

"Who do you want to call?"

"Margarita Fedorovna"... "She just adores Heroes." (156)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Интересно – подумал Сергей. – Аллея Героев!» И ему сделалось приятно от одного лишь сознания, что вот он и в чужом городе идет не по какой-нибудь обычной аллее, а по «своей.» Что поделаешь? Видно, так уж устроен человек: любит он славу, сладко опьяняет она голову, и на сердце от нее становится необыкновенно тепло.

...И он думал не о чем-либо постороннем, а о себе: «Может, я увижу в этой аллее и свой портрет? А почему бы и не увидеть? Конечно, увижу... На портретах я всегда получаюсь мрачным, с насупленными бровьями, все одно, как сын.

<sup>34</sup> – Вы – Герой? – спросила девушка.

– Гожусь и в герои! А что ж?

As if the point had not been made, Sergei neglects to transfer his medal when he washes and puts on a new shirt, and then she returns:

“Dear Comrade!” she said pleasantly. “Dear Comrade, Margarita Fedorovna and I ask you... ask you...”

Here her voice dropped off, and her gentle blue eyes widened and grew darker.

“Fr...fraud...,” she said, and left, hanging her head.

Sergei’s gaze followed her.

“Amusing!” he said. “Yes, very amusing! So there is a room for a Hero, but nothing for the rest. Amusing!” (158)<sup>35</sup>

...

– Герой, -- пролепетала она. – А я вам такое наговорила! Но вы не беспокойтесь. У нас есть бронь!  
– Она улыбнулась. – Я позвоню и согласую...

– Кому ж вы хотите звонить?

– Маргарите Федоровне ... Она обожает Героев!

<sup>35</sup> – Дорогой товарищ! – сказала она приятным голосом. – Дорогой товарищ, Маргарита Федоровна и я просим вас... просим вас...

– Тут ее голосок оборвался, нежно-голубые глаза расширились и помрачнели.

– Об-бманщик... – проговорила она и ушла, нонутив голову.

Сергей посмотрел ей вслед.

– Забавно! – проговорил он. – Да, очень забавно! Значит для Героя есть номер, а для других нету...Забавно!

By this point, he has already established his heroic status to the attendant, so the fact that she still reacts to the presence or absence of the medal underlines its status as a totem. Similarly, when Sergei wears his medal on a return visit to an office, the secretary moves him to the head of the line.

All of these passages seem to support a fairly straightforward message, namely that everyone should be treated with equal respect. Sergei's sporadic desires to hide his medal or play down his status owe at least partially to this impulse, and the gentle mocking of low-level functionaries works well with the time-honored Socialist Realist criticism of obstructionist bureaucrats. But what to make of an earlier incident in the Heroes' Alley, when Sergei, in one of his mental conversations, is told by a general's portrait to put his medals back on, which he promptly does, or the fact that he takes honest pleasure in his luxurious guest room? Nowhere does he renounce the substantial Hero's benefits listed above, although he does delay building his house until construction of the power station is under way. The trip to the center maps his gradual acceptance of his heroic status, and when he must travel from Piatigorsk to the more important regional center of Stavropol', he does not hesitate to show his Hero booklet to cut in line for the air taxi. What is more, exercising this privilege gains him a seatmate who proves to be just the person who can help him reach his goal. By identifying himself in his state-assigned (and author-assigned) role, he achieves results that help his entire community.

So despite the regrettable foibles of secretaries and attendants, Tutarinov does deserve the perks of a Hero, and learning to embrace the privileges and responsibilities thereto appertaining is part of his development. In fact, his status as Hero of the Soviet Union is critical to his bureaucratic quest, which carries him all the way to the office of a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet as he works to have his five-year plan approved and the timber stockpile signed over to the village. After this success and his return from Stavropol', the medal will essentially cease to be a plot issue. As in many works of Socialist Realism, the space for authorial innovation and individual thematics contracts once the culminating labor is about to get under way.



This innovation, again, is to thematize the concept of the (positive) hero, preserving the convention while at the same time displacing it into the realm of the plot. For an ideally enlightened reader, as for the senior Party officials in the novel, Tutarinov's dual heroic status presents no problem, for it stands to reason that a Hero of the Soviet Union would also display the admirable talents and potentials expected of an ideal Soviet Man. This perspective essentially embodies the "concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development," and Tutarinov's spiritual development is a necessary precondition of his home's material progression. But recognizing that this section is also one of the novel's most "realistic"—in the sense of verisimilitude to actual lived experience—we must concede that many people will react more strongly to a heroic medal rather than a heroic idea. What is more, this fact also strikes to the heart of the inspiration the positive hero is supposed to exercise on the reader: if the hero of the novel must repeatedly invoke his heroic status to achieve his goals, what hope is there for the reader with no extraordinary weapons against bureaucratic obstruction, material shortages, and widespread passive resistance?

*Kavaler zolotoi zvezdy* offers no solution to this problem, and there is no sign that Babaevskii realized that predicating rapid bureaucratic success on a barely attainable status might conflict with Socialist Realism's charge to inspire emulation. This absence of resolution is less a trait specific to Babaevskii than a common feature of Stalinist novels. In part this is because such novels tend to open more spaces for authorial individuality earlier in the novel, before the wide array of required elements must be developed to their inevitable conclusion. This can mean that there is more space to establish problems than to resolve them.

The genre's resistance to innovation, however, should not obscure Babaevskii's unusual step in thematizing a prescribed element of Soviet literature. This defamiliarization of the positive hero may account for some of the criticism directed against Babaevskii as well, for if the play with the signification and reception of Heroism is missed, the literalization of hero status could seem an adolescently overliteral tactic rather than an examination of the reception of the positive hero by the everyday world. Tutarinov's

taste for cream, if not read as a conscious evocation of Chernyshevskii, only reinforces Pomerantsev's sugary and insubstantial imagery. At the same time, Tutarinov's liminal status as a hero who is still maturing into his status may account for *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy*'s popular appeal, which in some measure seemed to survive the critical hit on its author's reputation. Although JK Rowling is in many ways a more talented writer than Semen Babaevskii, Harry Potter is the most prominent recent example in a line that also contains Sergei Tutarinov: both characters must cope with the almost crippling anxiety over the great role that has been assigned to them. Along with *Kavaler*'s extended courtship plot, this facet of Tutarinov may account for much of the reader identification that Jones and others document.

In the end, *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy* may align with the interests of Pomerantsev and Abramov more than they realized. Babaevskii's defamiliarization of the positive hero may be a sign that the conventions of the Stalinist novel were played out, that composing a novel in that tradition required an infusion of new energy which Babaevskii attempted to find in experimentation, no matter how limited. This need to revivify the genre may also account for the heavy injection of pastoral themes that characterizes both *Bearer of the Golden Star* and *The Light over the Earth*. But even if he did wish to breathe new life into the *kolkhoz* novel, Babaevskii's simple problems and pastoral features likely blinded his critics to his exploration of the Hero theme, even though its suggestion that the positive hero might face problems in real Soviet society is one they might have found congenial. Ultimately, Babaevskii's own struggles with some of the same problems that vexed village-oriented critics informed his works in ways that may have helped to keep his reputation depressed with those same critics.

#### *The Light over the Earth* and a new gradualism

Following on the success of *Bearer of the Golden Star*, Babaevskii rapidly returned to the same setting in the two volumes of *Light over the Earth* (*Svet nad zemlei*), which appeared in book form in

1949 and 1950. Each garnered a Stalin Prize: as with *Kavaler*, Volume I was awarded a Prize in the First Degree, while Volume II was honored with a Second Degree Prize.

From a post-Soviet standpoint, it is difficult to understand how the sequel could attain recognition equal to the original, or how the weak first volume could be judged superior to the second. At the very least, *Kavaler* and *Svet* differ substantially in scope, content, and ambition, even after Babaevskii expanded and revised the earlier novel in 1950 and 1951. As I have shown above, *Svet* concerns itself with postwar reconstruction and focuses on two labors (the acquisition of raw material as well as the construction of the hydroelectric station), enriching those standard elements with narratives of young love, the Pastoral, and an unusual thematization of the heroic element of Socialist Realism. While *Svet* moves forward from the privations of the immediate postwar years, it preserves *Kavaler*'s preoccupations without developing them: rather than the pervasive tension over Sergei's unusual Hero of the Soviet Union status, we see several holders of the Hero of Socialist Labor medal acting as one would expect: discussing methodology, increasing production, and so on. While the shift to a more accessible decoration matches the shift to a more peaceable period of history, probes into the nature of heroism are now absent save for a few faint echoes of the first novel.

While subordinating his metaliterary impulses, however, Babaevskii does display his sensitivity to the ideological currents of the era. In fact, *Svet nad zemlei* could be read as a catalogue of postwar Soviet concerns, from gender relations to (self-) criticism, to the impending arrival of full communism, to Lysenkoist agriculture. Over 100 different characters embody various social attitudes and historical fates – some for a mere chapter or two – while the landscape of the Kuban exerts its eternal pull on Babaevskii's increasingly officebound Cossack protagonists, producing perhaps the highest incidence of wistful window gazing in any Russian novel.

For all its sweep, however, *Svet* ultimately is most notable for its hanging narrative threads, unfinished labors, and general lack of resolution. Almost all of the major tasks set by or for the central

characters remain unconsummated, and personal dramas flicker out as well. The central collective labor around which this book is organized, the planting of a multi-kilometer greenbelt to prevent forest erosion, starts too late in autumn and is arrested by winter snows, and late in the novel two brigade leaders discover that they were not employing the latest Lysenkoist methods in any case (498). Sergei's mother suddenly falls ill and nears death, but evidently recovers offstage. Sergei's childhood friend Viktor Grachev, although obviously on the path to Party membership, agonizes over but does not resolve his relationship with Sonia, Sergei's own prewar love. The disgraced former collective farm director Khokhlakov sends a class enemy to gather signatures on a letter denouncing Sergei, but the class enemy is rejected by right-thinking Soviet citizens, and Khokhlakov himself, though he sees the error of his ways, falls dead before he can confess them to the Party leadership. As sometimes happens with sequels to lionized Stalinist novels, the urge to incorporate more and more settings and character types threatens to turn the work into a loose, baggy, unmanageable omnibus.

The character who functions as the greatest nexus of narrative frustration is the agronomist Tatiana Netsvetova (a surname which could be read as "does not flower"). A young war widow, Tatiana is plucked from her primarily agricultural and educational duties for Party work, specifically the reeducation of another intransigent collective farm director. She also suffers from a surfeit of romantic attention, most notably from the editor of the regional newspaper and from her own first choice, the leader of a tractor brigade. From these circumstances spring a series of tensions that largely crowd out Sergei's own story in Volume I: women's struggle for equal respect and input (largely won by the end of the novel), countering the centralizing tendencies prevalent in Soviet bureaucracy (succeeded), the need to balance scientific and Party duties given the shortage of specialists in rural areas (unclear), finding love and reconstituting a family unit (aborted due to a single instance of public drunkenness on the tractor boss's part), and rehabilitating a key Party figure (failed).

Tatiana's chief labor is to bring Ignat Savel'evich Khvorostiankin back into the fold of right-thinking Party members. Khvorostiankin, the director of the Red Cavalryman farm, is in turn the central

figure in Babaevskii's exploration of Party criticism, especially its *samokritika* variant. Though an effective administrator during the War, Khvorostiankin has succumbed to classically bureaucratic temptations, surrounding himself with symbols of rank. Even his chief achievement during the War was to build an impressive new headquarters, an administrative labor that must at least equal Sergei's in *Kavaler*, but one that emphasizes his centripetal impulses. The use to which he puts the electricity provided by the region's new hydroelectric station further symbolizes his isolation from his workers: he has rigged headquarters with an elaborate signaling system that can bring any functionary to his desk within minutes.

In conjunction with Nikolai Petrovich Kondrat'ev, the novel's requisite Bolshevik mentor, Tatiana battles these tendencies with centrifugal gambits: upon her appointment as the farm's Party Secretary, she immediately walks among the people, leading discussions on domestic gender relations and placing female shock workers in positions of greater responsibility. Soon she is recommending that mobile cinema units and stores tour the steppe, and that nurseries be built nearer the mothers working in the fields. Upset that he has lost the initiative, and that services and culture are flowing away from his administrative seat, Khvorostiankin goes so far as to convince the least scrupulous of his lieutenants to hide the materials that would be needed for such an endeavor (193).

Yet despite his obstructionism, and further despite his failure to complete Tatiana's assigned reading (*Fathers and Sons* and *A Hero of Our Time*, signaling two of Babaevskii's major preoccupations, or Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Uplifted*, a foundational work on Cossacks and collective agriculture) or to study for Grachev's classes in practical electrification, Khvorostiankin remains in office at the end of the novel, long after Tatiana has been promoted to district Party headquarters.

This failure to reform finds its counterpart in Babaevskii's own failure to deliver key scenes in his novel. Despite the centrality of Khvorostiankin's reformation plot, and despite the narrative buildup given to the two meetings devoted to discussions of his failings – the first held among the Party, the

second open to the entire collective farm – neither is actually portrayed. In both cases, the narrative resumes the morning after the major turning point; in the second case, the omission is especially jarring since the main pretext for the meeting is an open discussion of – and quiz on – Stalin’s recently issued official biography. Khvorostiankin’s behavior, therefore, is to be measured against the Great Leader and ultimate Soviet man. Though it is obvious that he will suffer greatly when measured against this standard, the specifics of that failure are not so obvious as to justify Babaevskii’s failure to provide any description of the actual meeting. This curious missed opportunity for edification is only the most notable void in a novel full of such frustrated expectations.<sup>36</sup>

Given this frustration and indeterminacy, why then did each volume garner a Stalin Prize? Were Sholokhov and other ‘50s critics justified in their resentment of Babaevskii’s trifecta? While a full examination of Prize criteria and aesthetics is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the official success of *Svet nad zemlei* may point to some changing currents as the USSR acclimated to peacetime and moved on from the pressing needs of immediate postwar reconstruction. While *Svet* does not – at least to my eyes – engage Soviet literary conventions directly as does *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy*, it still may evince some sensitivity to contemporary cultural logic. That is to say, perhaps late Stalinism was in some ways inherently indeterminate.

On a concrete level, foregrounding Bolshevik criticism (and its *samokritika* variant) can lead to a lack of narrative closure, since the only way to fully explore the theme is to maintain disorder and inadequacy in sections of the fictional world: failure is the necessary foil for criticism as a social-

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<sup>36</sup> Having not examined the archival record, I must acknowledge the possibility that Babaevskii was dissuaded from writing or publishing these episodes at some point in the editorial process. However, I view that possibility as unlikely since the ideological content of these omitted episodes would not intrinsically overstep any of the contemporary norms, whether implicit or explicit; these are just ideologically charged examples of a general pattern of frustrated narrative expectations; and Babaevskii occasionally acknowledges explicitly that his genre has become conventionalized. For the most explicit statement of this last point, see 341-342, where he fears a reader’s decision that his description of a Party meeting may break no new ground (“«Эге, да тут же придется пахать по вспаханному и сеять по засеянному»” (“Aha, well here we’ll have to plow what’s plowed and sow what’s sown”). Once again, the gap between the Stalinist laureate and his Thaw-era critics seems narrower than they seemed to assume.

managerial technique. On the one hand, Babaevskii knows that to show criticism functioning too efficaciously would deprive it of its drama: the Party leadership would have nothing against which to apply its skills and energy, and the resulting changes would have no meaning. The author is probably responding to similar concerns when, in the final quarter of the work, he introduces Pavel Pavlovich Aleshkin, the Party and Komsomol Director of the "Dawn" Collective Farm. Aleshkin embodies the easy out aspect of *samokritika*, employing it as a type of verbal jiu-jitsu in his conversation with senior Bolshevik Kondrat'ev on the fact that his farm has not started planting its section of the greenbelt:

"Have you started to plant the forest?"

"Nikolai Petrovich, I acknowledge my guilt wholly and in full," began Aleshkin without thinking, and here cheerfulness again began to play in his light eyes. "Here, Nikolai Petrovich, I need to say up front, we didn't examine it thoroughly, and above all I did not examine it fully."

"Well what difference does it make whether you didn't examine it or somebody else? What's the status?"

"I am guilty, and as Secretary of the Party Organization, I admit..."

"Pavel Pavlovich, what good is this? A week ago you were also acknowledging, and confessing, and repenting. And what's really changed? You admit some mistakes, and a week later you allow the same mistakes! It's a merry-go-round, is all it is (429-430)!<sup>37</sup>

By himself, this character – who arises to illustrate a specific deviation from the Party line and disappears, never to be heard from again – is an unremarkable device of ideological fiction. But is Khvorostiankin's journey to consciousness also a merry-go-round? At points he does seem to realize his mistakes, and the

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<sup>37</sup> -- Лес сажать начали?

-- Николай Петрович, вину свою я признаюсь целиком и полностью, -- не задумываясь, сказал Аleshкин, и теперь светлые его глаза снова заиграли веселостью. -- Тут мы, Николай Петрович, надо прямо сказать, недосмотрели, и в первую очередь я недосмотрел.

-- Да какой в этом толк, ты недосмотрел, или кто другой! Дело-то стоит?

-- Я виноват и, как секретарь парторганазации, сознаю...

-- Павел Павлович, ну куда это годится! Да ты же неделю тому назад тоже и сознавал, и признавал, и каялся... А что изменилось на деле? Ошибки признаешь, и снова те же ошибки допускаешь? Карусель – вот что это такое?

Party decides to leave him in his position. At one point in the novel, he even removes the signaling system that has functioned as his main attribute to that point. But at the end of the novel, he still insists on his personal preeminence and believes that his position exempts him from the basic responsibilities of every Party member, despite Tatiana Netsvetova's public vituperation and private tears.

If Khvorostiankin is making a sort of two-steps-forward-one-step-back progress – a debatable proposition – then why does he not complete that process by the end of the novel? First, criticism of Khvorostiankin necessitates self-criticism by his Party superiors, even the authoritative Kondrat'ev. This stands to reason: if a Bolshevik embraces unflinching examination of his own faults and unsparing exposure of inadequacies in his comrades, then the author must provide examples of both. Kondrat'ev in fact criticizes himself and his organization not only for allowing the situation at the Red Cavalryman farm to deteriorate so drastically, but for not ensuring that the hydroelectric plant's power goes to more than hot plates and office bells.

Second, mature Socialist Realism's own version of dramatic irony ensures that conflicts need not be resolved before the last page. Stalinist dramatic irony inhered in both the literature's ideological rigidity and in its limited store of plots and devices. As an Athenian audience knew that Oedipus would discover the truth of his parentage and blind himself, so a Soviet audience would know that Sergei's proposal for the transformation of nature via the greenbelt must eventually be accepted despite the many arguments and machinations surrounding the idea.<sup>38</sup> The difference lies in the target of the irony: classical tragic irony watches the main character inexorably approach a fate the audience expects, while Stalinist irony watches the correct ideological line inexorably approach its fruition. That ideological line would be apparent to any contemporary reader from reading the newspaper, and Soviet literature's 25 years of standardized plot points lead to confidence that these elements will eventually reach fruition even if they do not all achieve resolution by the end of the novel. In this sense, an author's skill may partially

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<sup>38</sup> There is apparently some debate among Classicists as to whether Sophocles's Athenian audience was in fact familiar with the element of the blinding; the other elements of the tale, however, were known.



lie in how he shows different characters – most of whom represent one literary type or another – reacting to these central ideological points. Thus Sergei's father Timofei Il'ich, who consistently argues for completing one major task properly before moving on to the next labor, would seem by the end of the novel to have been proven more perspicacious than his son, who believes that the urgency of the USSR's needs compels simultaneous efforts on several interrelated fronts. After all, seedlings planted in an insufficiently scientific manner are threatened by winter snow and summer drought, electric farm machinery requires connection to the grid during sowing season, and some farms are headed by Party officials who are less than fully competent, if not obstructionist. But since the correctness of Sergei's ideological line would be obvious from external sources, the ideal reader would have to assume that intervening troubles would only increase the glory of the inevitable triumph of this approach, and of the fruits it would bear. Thus Khvorostiankin may in fact be reformed, or if not, then the delay in removing him will not have wreaked irreparable damage.

The highest case of Stalinist dramatic irony, of course, is the arrival of Communism itself. Much more so than in *Kavaler*, the collective farmers of *Svet* are subject to classically eschatological anxieties about this inevitable event: When will it arrive, and what will it look like? The generation of the "fathers" in particular – including Timofei Il'ich – worry that they will not live to see the day, and although Soviet ideology excluded the possibilities of heaven and hell, Khokhlakov's death in an open field before he could reach Party headquarters unmistakably carries resonances of the unfortunate penitent who dies before he can confess his sins, and thus is doomed never to reach the promised land.

This anxiety over the coming of Communism finds its reflection in the anxiety over electrification, the Light of the title. Although Babaevskii develops the theme only sporadically, and not entirely successfully, debates in the novel over the production and use of electricity can also be read as discussions of impending Communism. Most explicitly, Babaevskii ends the first volume of *Svet nad zemlei* with Sergei's musings in a Moscow hotel:

Before him lay Moscow in its bright nocturnal finery: wherever he looked, lights and more lights ran across the square along wide streets already growing quiet. Sergei sighed deeply and loosened his shoulders. "At this hour back home, there is also light over the settlements...But we need to turn our "settlement light" to the earth, to the harvest, and harness it for industry," thought Sergei, and in his heart he felt untroubled and joyful(239).<sup>39</sup>

Little is new in this theme. All discussions of electrification in the USSR are founded on Lenin's famous 1920 dictum that "Communism equals Soviet power plus electrification of the entire country." In fact, the electrification theme is usually associated more with 1930s literature than with late Stalinism.

Babaevskii's use of the hydroelectric station as the culminating labor of *Kavaler* escapes the taint of anachronism only due to the destruction wrought by the War and the isolation of the Kuban. Lenin's emphasis on the "entire" Soviet Union carries with it the implication that regions like Sergei's, in addition to their own intrinsic problems, may be holding the rest of the country back.

One of the differences between *Kavaler* and *Svet* inheres in the way the hydroelectric station is viewed: in the first novel, its very construction is viewed as a defining labor, one that brings the region – and by extension the country – closer to the Promised Land of Communism. In keeping with its less immediate expectations, however, *Svet* is at pains to point out that the power plant by itself has changed life little and that the metaphorical light it brings has done little to change the circumstances of the region. In fact, the station suffers from a surplus of power, a situation that irritates many. The emphasis has shifted from construction to utilization, an inherently less dramatic topic, but one that can cut both ways. On the one hand, since Timofei Il'ich and others clearly associate full electrification of agriculture with the advent of Communism and wish to see that event in their lifetimes, they advocate a focus on the acquisition and installation of electrical farm machinery to the exclusion of other Stalinist projects such as the greenbelt. On the other hand, increasing utilization has no natural endpoint, a fact emphasized when the power station acquires a second turbine to accommodate all the machinery planned for the district.

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<sup>39</sup> Перед ним лежала Москва в своем ярком ночном убранстве: куда ни посмотри – огни и огни убегают через площадь по широким и уже приутихшим улицам. Сергей глубоко вздохнул и сильно расправил плечи. «Вот у нас в этот час тоже разливается свет над станицами... Только надо нам свой «станичный свет» приблизить к земле, к урожаю, да направить его в производство», -- думал Сергей, и на сердце у него было легко и радостно.

That turbine will once more produce a surplus, which will in turn require utilization, and so on. Yet again, the bias in *Svet nad zemlei* shifts away from clearly defined, dramatic accomplishments and toward continuous gradual progress. The new internal logic of the novel, in turn, necessitates a new structure. Instead of work organized around a heroic collective achievement, *Svet* has become a chronicle, an open-ended and potentially infinite depiction of a community's life.

Kondrat'ev characteristically has the last word on the subject. After he has been promoted out of the district and replaced by Sergei, he bequeaths Tolstoyan wisdom to his successor, who, overwhelmed by his new responsibilities, is searching for a model to follow:

Yes, as Lev Tolstoy said, how important it is for a creative laborer that from day to day scaffolding rises to help him rise up higher and higher. Party laborers like us -- for we are also people on a creative path -- really need such scaffolding as well, and here it should grow beneath the legs not only of directors big and small, but of the entire people. A person comes up on this new scaffolding, and his eyes see farther, and his gaze is clearer, and his mood is beautiful... (528-9)<sup>40</sup>

Three pages later, the novel ends with Kondrat'ev's departure, the beginning of another cycle mirrored by the eternal cycle of Bolshevik advancement, with both Sergei and Tatiana occupying new positions of prominence. Among other things, I will discuss this type of Communist career advancement in the following chapter.

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<sup>40</sup> Да, как Лев Толстой говорил, как важно для творческого работника, если у него изо дня в день вырастают подмости, помогающие ему подниматься все выше и выше. Вот и нам, партийным работникам, людям тоже творческого труда, очень нужны такие подмости, и у нас они должны вырастать под ногами, и не только у руководителей малых и больших, а у всего народа. Взойдет человек на такие новые подмости, -- и глаза его дальше видят, и взор его светлее, и настроение у него прекрасное...

## CHAPTER III

**Vera Panova, the Virtuoso of Conflictlessness***Children, Careers, the Milkmaid Allegory of the State, and the Soviet Marriage Plot*

From doomed partisan conspiracy and hazardous struggles with nature, I turn in this chapter to a different set of Stalin Prize-worthy incidents: A state farm director sells a promising calf to a collective farm recovering from wartime devastation, even though the plan for his farm has already allocated all livestock. A young milkmaid fails to break the single-day, single-cow milk production record, but achieves a solid second place. The dugout canoe belonging to the farm's bookkeeper nearly overturns, ejecting the four children he has taken on an excursion and briefly endangering their lives. Galvanized by this near catastrophe, the farm's director proclaims his love for the mother of one of the children.

Such are the events of Vera Panova's *Bright Shore* (*Iasnyi bereg*), published in 1949 and awarded a Stalin Prize Third Class in 1950, the same year that Babaevskii took his First-Class prize for the first volume of *Light over the Earth*. The Prize was her third, and indicates the range of official style in this period: Far from the cataclysms and great labors portrayed by many of her Stalinist contemporaries, Panova is at her best when dealing in minutely observed psychology and small, often personal incidents. Her skill with detail and distaste for unambiguous heroics led to a thriving post-Stalinist career depicting the world through children's eyes. *Bright Shore* is her first experiment with that device, but it also contains a sly allegory for the development of both Soviet literature and the Soviet state in the experiences of Niusha, the aforementioned second-place milkmaid. I explain many of her strategies in the light of conflictlessness, a prominent if nebulous critical prescription that came to prominence after the War.

In this chapter I discuss Panova's major works of the 1940s and 1950s, but focus on *Bright Shore* despite the fact that critics of all periods and persuasions have considered it disappointing, a work that does not live up to its author's talent. Although it did win a Stalin Prize, readers in the literary

establishment tended to consider it ideologically unimpeachable but schematic and insufficiently related to countrywide trends:

Panova is the most talented of the women [writers]...I always support her as the most talented. She writes well. But this new work of hers is weaker than the previous ones. Five years ago it would have been possible to give a work like this a bigger prize than now, but now it's impossible. Panova has a somewhat strange way of preparing to write a work. Here she's taken one collective farm and studied it in detail. But that's incorrect. You have to study differently. You have to study several collective farms, many collective farms, and then generalize. Take them all together and generalize. And then you can depict them. But what she does is incorrect in its very method.<sup>41</sup> (428)

The critic here is Stalin, speaking during the deliberations for the 1950 Stalin Prizes, as recorded by Konstantin Simonov. Perhaps not surprisingly, he states here one of the critical preoccupations of the period: the need to generalize (*obobshchat'*) from specific cases in order to find the purest, truest case, the typical. Any student of Russian realism will recognize the typical as a major critical category for well over 100 years before Stalin's pronouncement, but in the development of Soviet literature the imperative to generalize did become more urgent and more contentious in the late 1940s. The precept expressed itself in two general ways. In literary criticism, the failure to show the general case was often invoked whenever an author depicted a negative or undesirable incident: unfortunate events may indeed have happened in a specific time and at a specific place, the assumption went, but were certainly isolated deviations from the general trend of life in the modern Soviet Union. In literary practice, the urge toward the general case also tended to discourage small personal incidents and individual details, since psychological specificity could be read as hampering general applicability. That this was a narrow gauntlet to run can be seen by the fact that Panova was criticized for focusing too closely on one set of

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<sup>41</sup> -- Из женщин Панова самая способная... Я всегда поддреживаю ее как самую способную. Она хорошо пишет. Но если оценивать эту новую вещь, то она слабее предыдущих. Пять лет назад за такую вещь, как эта, можно было дать и большую премию, чем сейчас, а сейчас нельзя. У Пановой немного странная манера подготовки к тому, чтобы написать произведение. Вот она взяла один колхоз и тщательно его изучила. А это неверно. Надо иначе изучать. Надо изучать несколько колхозов, много колхозов, потом обобщить. Взять вместе и обобщить. И потом уже изобразить. А то, как она поступает, это неверно по манере изучения.

circumstances and also for insufficiently individualizing secondary characters in the same novel. Stalin's comment that a higher degree would have been justified five years earlier -- that is, roughly at the close of the War -- may also speak to the greater leeway to express uncertainty and criticism that ended with the public criticism of Fadeev and, as I will describe, Panova herself.

Despite the Stalinist consensus that *Bright Shore* could have been better, non-Stalinist critics from the 1950s to the present have tended to discount the novel as Panova's ideological olive branch to the establishment. This verdict has led to a paucity of modern criticism on the work. In some ways, however, *Bright Shore* is an important novel in Panova's output. While I am far from arguing that the novel is her undiscovered masterpiece, I am intrigued by its relations to her more beloved and respected works, and believe that it is a prime example of what a talented author can do within the confines of the conflictless novel. As I argue below, Panova's specific talents and themes were well adapted to the doctrine of conflictlessness, which may in turn have encouraged her to create her most beloved character. On the thematic level, her use of the marriage plot works well within conflictlessness and maps interestingly to questions of career development and the country's overall political maturity. While in many ways a retreat from her earlier, more controversial novels, *Bright Shore* is in some ways the keystone of Panova's career, and contains some unrecognized riches.

Some background on Panova's early literary career, *Bright Shore* and the works it intertwines with, and the theory of conflictlessness will help situate my argument.

#### Vera Panova's Career in Stalinist Letters

Although other Stalin Prize laureates would continue to enjoy critical and popular success during the Thaw and into the Brezhnev years, Vera Panova is perhaps unique in her ability to appeal to both the

official Stalinist literary establishment and to those who criticized that system. Her post-Stalinist – and post-Soviet – reputation remains respectable, and new editions of her works still appear today. While most of these new editions are devoted to a handful of beloved works written during the Thaw and thereafter, the two novels she published immediately before *Bright Shore* are routinely mentioned as impressive achievements within the bounds of the Stalinist literary system. While both novels debuted to acclaim, the second ignited a critical controversy comparable to the controversy that arose around *The Young Guard*.

Although Panova had always wanted to be a writer, she did not come to broad attention until she published *The Hospital Train (Sputniki)* in 1945. Based on her experiences traveling with a medical evacuation train in 1944, the novel depicts both staff and patients as the train evacuated the wounded and itself came under attack. These fellow travelers – the term is ideologically weighted in Bolshevik discourse – grapple with some of the epic themes associated with the Great Patriotic War: life and death, of course, but also the psychological difficulties associated with working in the rear while so many fought and died on the front lines. The members of the train's staff come to realize that their work is as important as that of the cavalry or the partisans, an orthodox message applauded by orthodox critics. Such themes are to be expected in war literature, but Panova's interests lie more in the psychological development of the train's staff than in more traditionally epic wartime themes of battle and sacrifice. Each character must come to terms with both colleagues and personal anxieties. Most often these anxieties revolve around love, one of Panova's perennial concerns. Female characters especially must confront their need for love despite male inattention or even abandonment. As a narrative strategy, Panova moves her characters along by relying less on grand gestures than on aggregated small details of daily life.

*The Hospital Train* met with broad acclaim for its skill in psychological portraiture and provided Panova with new material stability and professional prominence. Her next novel, however, almost lost her those benefits, since it sparked one of the more intense critical debates of the postwar period. 1947's

*Kruzhilikha* (the name of the factory depicted in the novel) attracted bitter and public criticism as well as equally heartfelt public defense. *Kruzhilikha* is a production novel, with the standard array of characters developing ideologically as they struggle to exceed production targets. The main character, however, is a much more ambiguous protagonist than Soviet readers were used to seeing. Although he occupies the structural position most commonly given to a positive hero or his mentor, the factory director Listopad (literally “falling leaves,” the autumnal sobriquet is also the word for October or November in several Slavic languages) is an autocratic leader who cares little for those serving under him. Moreover, the men who oppose his high-handedness – Uzdechkin, the trade union leader, and Riabukhin, the Party official – are equally autocratic in their own spheres. Although each may be read as a variant of the positive hero, none of the three is truly sympathetic or particularly deserving of emulation, yet none receives a comeuppance in the novel.

Panova’s portrayal of the postwar industrial sphere was ambiguous enough that her novel was debated openly and subjected to sometimes bitter attacks in the press. Caught up in the same wave of criticism that engulfed *The Young Guard*, *Kruzhilikha* found ardent defenders as well as detractors. To some younger writers, the novel was an act of truth-telling: In his 1979 *History of Post-War Soviet Writing: The Literature of Moral Opposition* (English translation 1981), Grigori Svirski retrospectively ranks Panova among the bravest writers of the Stalin period, calling *Kruzhilikha* “a landmark in the history of courageous and honest social thought” for its identification of the corrupting effects of Soviet bureaucratic power, seeing in it a precursor to Milovan Djilas’s seminal Thaw-era *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*:

Vera Panova, it appears, was taking a searching look at the positive hero of the Stalinist era, the darling of the Party, the hero of whom the Party regional committee and Moscow were so proud. And what did she choose to accentuate, what did she consider the dominant strain in this type, his very core? What did she choose to describe in rich detail, with abundant talent and merciless precision? *The hero’s callousness and inhumanity and what we might call his moral deafness* [emphasis in the original]. Those who are most drawn to Listopad and happiest with him are the swindlers... (41-43)



Indeed, in its clear-eyed directness *Kruzhilika* reads more like a work published during the Thaw than one published in 1947. Svirski charts the work's stormy reception: Articles both pro and contra appeared in the press, but the contra articles seemed to carry the weight of official disapproval in their viciousness. Nevertheless, Panova responded by defending the author's right to complex characterization and by appealing to Stalin directly.<sup>42</sup> Whatever the cause, the effect was that Panova did not have to withdraw or revise the novel, retained her freedom and professional status, and was awarded her second Stalin Prize for the work. Simonov reports that Stalin ended discussions of Panova's work at that year's Prize deliberations by saying "She portrays people truthfully" (403). Many critics continued to see the work as subversive, however, and the shadow of official displeasure continued to loom over the author. Even Stalin's apparent approval was no guarantee of continued freedom, since he had frequently shown that he could change his position as circumstances dictated. Panova had already lost a husband to the camps in 1935, and there is some indication that she would continue to be unnerved by any hint of official criticism for the rest of her life. Her next work, *Bright Shore*, would push no obvious ideological boundaries.

As the last work that Panova published under Stalin, *Bright Shore* can seem a stylistic and thematic capitulation. Late 1953, however, would see the publication of a more contentious novel with which Panova had been struggling for several years, *Seasons (Vremena goda)*, an exploration of the seedy underbelly of Soviet life instead of yet another novel about production and allocation. That novel became one of the first "Thaw" works, although the period would only receive a name when Ehrenburg published his eponymous work the following year. Like *Kruzhilika*, *Seasons* created a sensation, and although most critics feel that the novel is not one of her best — perhaps because its sweeping canvas may not be the best match for Panova's talents for intimate detail — it is her second attempt to grapple with the less-

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<sup>42</sup> Svirski reports this detail as hearsay. Whether or not Panova appealed to Stalin personally, we do know from Simonov that the Leader was favorably disposed toward her. Belov also reports that Stalin disapproved of the poet Aleksandr Raskin's attack on the novel in *Krokodil*, and that Raskin would write under a cloud until Stalin's death (346).

than-ideal aspects of Soviet life and thus her second bout with strong public criticism. Her second retreat would end up in the same fictional world as the first: as with *Kruzhilikha*, Panova followed the *Seasons* controversy with another work set at the Bright Shore collective farm.

Given Panova's individuality and her willingness to venture outside the safe zones of Soviet literature, it is puzzling that she is not regarded as more of a Thaw author, or at least a proto-dissident figure. Timing certainly played a role in this omission. Her cycles of overt criticism and apparent retreat seem to run counter to historical trends, almost as when two waves oscillating counter to each other cancel themselves out. Though her literary innovation began with *The Hospital Train*, her more overt social criticism came two or three years too early to be included in the standard narratives of post-Stalin dissent. When the Thaw was in full swing, conversely, her major innovation was to inhabit the world of a little boy, a boy who would become beloved to Soviet readers.

The second work to be set at Bright Shore was *Serezha* (1955). *Serezha* both embodies Panova's most distinctive device and is her most popular work, a full-length novel told entirely from the child's point of view, handled with such sympathy and good humor that the public demanded several other such child-centered works in the following years. It is also the continuation of the story of the farm director, the schoolteacher, and the boy who form a family at the end of *Bright Shore*. That earlier novel introduced the device of the child's perspective, although it interwove it with more traditional omniscient narration. Nevertheless, it was in *Bright Shore* that Panova began to extend her psychological portraiture to the world of children, and to show her ability to chronicle the worlds of both adults and children from a child's perspective. This innovation won her a loyal audience and launched the screenwriting career that would sustain her for the rest of her life: In the 1960s, *Serezha* was the first work of hers to be adapted to film.

*Bright Shore's Place in Panova's Oeuvre*

Little attention has been paid to the continuity of these two "retreat" works, or to the ties of both with *The Hospital Train*: Danilov, that train's commander, becomes the regional director in charge of *Bright Shore* and several other farms, and although he is not a central character, does continue to defend his characteristic position that service in the rear was every bit as valuable as service at the front. The overall effect of Danilov's reappearance is that of a reunion with an old acquaintance, a pleasurable confirmation that the character survived the war and is still finding occupation in the peacetime world, but it also signals the more circumscribed settings at which Panova excels. *Bright Shore* and *Serezha* are linked more closely than either is with *The Hospital Train*, but Panova's skill at characterization and her focus on the theme of love bind these three works together more closely than they do her intervening, more socially critical efforts. At a minimum, then, *Bright Shore* functions as a link between two of Panova's greatest successes.

Panova herself may not have believed the novel was much more than that. In a widely quoted statement of August 1950, she describes her characters in *Bright Shore* as "pale and anemic" (*Neskol'ko myslei*), although the statement comes in the context of the ongoing public negotiation of her literary reputation and may not fully represent her views of her own work. As I note at the beginning of this chapter, it is true that the plot of the novel could be judged as attenuated as Panova sees her characters, since it plays for small stakes and generates little in the way of suspense. Not all of her characters are anemic, however, though certainly many of the less important ones are: the core characters are well drawn enough for a Stalinist novel, and some of the minor characters are reasonably vivid if unsurprisingly two dimensional. The problem really arises in the depiction of Party officials, who, other than the farm director himself, are uniformly flat.

#### The Child's Perspective in the Two Serezha Novels

No reader, however, could accuse the five year-old Serezha of being a pale character, and it is in his scenes that the novel reaches its heights. Despite the fact that *Serezha* picks up the story of the new family that was formed in *Bright Shore*, few discuss the two novels together. Most commentators seem to find it difficult to square the tired socialist realist trappings of *Bright Shore* with the child's eye innovation of *Serezha*. One exception is Ruth Kreuzer, who in her article devoted to the two works views their differences as an index of what was possible in 1949 versus 1955, and as a sign of Panova's own progressive maturation as a writer. As Kreuzer acknowledges, the differences are matters of emphasis: Just as *Bright Shore* must be acknowledged as Panova's first use of the "Serezha" device, *Serezha* itself is still structured around a typical postwar plot (a promotion and transfer to the East). But anchoring the second novel in the child's consciousness, combined with the greater freedom from Stalinist cliché afforded by the Thaw, does allow the second book to breathe more freely than the first.

Serezha's appeal inheres not only in the world of children and in a child's perception of the adult world, but also in the natural world surrounding the farm, both its wonders (a baby jackdaw) and its dangers (near drowning). In the world of *Bright Shore*, only children seem to fully experience the joys of nature, while adults are immersed in wresting agricultural production and the settlement itself from nature's entropy, complaining about the muddy streets if they notice nature and its effects at all. Serezha differs from other child characters of this era, who – perhaps epitomized by the *Son of the Regiment* (*Syn polka*), Valentin Kataev's 1945 work – are there to shed light on adult dilemmas in their own struggles with maturation. The charm of young characters like those in Anatolii Rybakov's 1948 *Kortik* (*The Dagger*) or even *The Young Guard* is in their attraction to and mimicry of adult social structures, and in their effectiveness in adult endeavors despite their immaturity. No matter how young the children are supposed to be, they thus occupy positions of adolescence rather than actual childhood; as I posit in Chapter I, some of the narrative interest comes from their liminality and relations to the adult world. In *Bright Shore*, on the other hand, children are children, and occupy a largely separate world from that of the adults. They are judged according to different criteria: adults struggle to overcome their own

personal impulses and anxieties to merge with the common good, while Serezha epitomizes the charms of individual subjectivity, and of a limited world experienced intensely.

While acknowledging that Serezha's passages are the freshest and best part of *Bright Shore*, however, I believe both that the other elements of the novel hang together more than most people perceive and that the freshness of the child's perspective may even owe a debt to one of late Stalinisms' most derided features. Underpinning *Bright Shore*'s major themes – the marriage plot, career advancement, subordination to a larger picture – as well as the Serezha device is that late Stalinist phenomenon, conflictlessness. In fact, with her own quiet slyness and her talent for quotidian detail and psychology, Panova may have produced one of the best conflictless novels ever written.

#### *Bright Shore as a Conflictless Novel*

As we have seen, the setting of the Bright Shore state farm could be seen as a retreat for an author with a tendency to explore the bounds of official acceptability, since both of the works set there appeared after more controversial novels. *Bright Shore* itself followed the stormy debate over *Kruzhilikha*, and hews much more closely to a conventional Stalinist template. Within the Soviet establishment, a safer work like this was likely meant to indicate that Panova was willing to work within the system, and in making that point, would encourage official readers to resolve the doubts aroused by *Kruzhilikha* in a way favorable to its author.

*Bright Shore* thus eschews irremediably autocratic factory directors – in fact, a major plot thread features farm director Dmitrii Korostelev's struggle with his own incipient autocratic tendencies – and limits its purview to a single state farm and the largely personal relationships that play out there. The obstacles and achievements of this world are small and individual: postwar reconstruction supplies the genre, but restoration of the farm's output functions as a backdrop to Panova's characteristically mundane

personal progressions. Serezha, it should be noted, functions outside this scheme: He is young enough not to require maturation. In the 1949 novel his passages function as refreshing interludes in the otherwise relentlessly teleological plot. Each of the four major adult characters must partake of this teleology, each travelling an individual path requiring parallel professional and romantic maturation.

Although his deviations stem from praiseworthy impulses, state farm director Korostelev must learn to subordinate himself to the Party's overarching plan. In a different struggle with overreliance on the self, he must also acknowledge his need for family and his love for the widowed schoolteacher Mar'iana. Mar'iana herself must put her recently acquired teacher training into practice and acknowledge her own continued desire for true love despite loyalty to the memory of her fallen husband and a corresponding urge to settle for the unlovable but attentive accountant Ikonnikov. The carpenter Almazov struggles to find his place in peacetime society and his own family after wartime trauma and a postwar romance. Finally, the milkmaid Niusha undertakes a Stakhanovite labor in large part to win the heart of Korostelev. She is unsuccessful in absolute terms – that is, she both fails to break the record and fails to draw Korostelev's interest – but her labor provides her with invaluable knowledge, not only about bovine rations but about the mechanisms of Soviet fame and career advancement.

In each one of these progressions, a handful of themes cohere: love and marriage, career, and the relation of individual dilemmas to collective tasks. One of Panova's defining characteristics, however, is that she devotes little attention to those general tasks, overarching narratives, and set pieces: no sweeping mechanized harvest canvasses, no triumphant drives to Berlin. For the more or less obligatory trip to the center, she offers only a cursory description of Moscow and the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, and only an aborted meeting with Stalin, who otherwise functions as a distant and somewhat unreal point object of emotional projection. Instead, she defines her characters through acts that are local, personal, and above all small.

Smallness – of setting, of detail, of incident – is Panova’s calling card, the flip side of her aversion to grand but hackneyed gestures. In some ways it reaches its most concentrated form with Serezha’s passages in *Bright Shore*, for in the later, more popular *Serezha*, Panova narrates all of the action from his point of view and therefore is forced to expand his perception to convey a large amount of information on events in the adult world. In *Bright Shore*, Serezha generally inhabits a separate world, his style of perception shared only by other children and incorporating only those aspects of the world that he experiences directly.

All of Panova’s *Bright Shore* characters in the novel, however, are predominantly concerned with their own world; larger themes are either chronologically distant (the War), geographically distant (Stalin, the trip to Moscow undertaken by Korostelev’s mother and her prize cow), or treated cursorily (as in the brief celebration at the end of the book in which the main characters speculate on a future war with America). Panova’s strengths as an author tend toward subjective and circumscribed worlds. That she could achieve both three Stalin Prizes and popular acclaim shows that literature of the period did not require epic bombast. Stalinist writing had ample room for stories of the Soviet individual making his or her way through Soviet challenges writ small, and sometimes very small. I believe that it was this strain of Soviet literature that was most amenable to the murky but influential Stalinist theory of conflictlessness.

As I have pointed out throughout this dissertation, the major literary doctrines of Socialist Realism were prescriptive but fuzzy: usually formulated as principles that Soviet authors should strive toward rather than clearly visible aspects of existing works, such doctrines only gained clear examples after much negotiation and revision. Conflictlessness is no different. In essence, *beskonfliktnost’* was the idea that since the Soviet Union had achieved Socialism on its way to true Communism, class conflict no longer existed. Without that historical antagonism between the exploiters and the exploited, it thus followed that there was no more conflict between good and evil in Soviet literature, only between good and better, at least within the borders of the USSR. Although the concept arose as early as the mid-1930s,

it was obviated by the Second World War, which provided a surfeit of external threats and opportunities to portray evil unblushingly. It was really only after the war had ended and domestic recovery had become the overriding cultural theme that writers had to grapple with the implications and bounds of conflictlessness. In practical terms, what or whom could their heroes struggle against, and how might those choices reflect on the work and on the author? As Victor Peppard notes in his survey of the concept,

Soviet writers have had to face the pitfalls of portraying negative characters convincingly. First of all the mere existence of such a character may conceivably be interpreted as an implicit criticism of Soviet society. Second, an author runs the danger of being associated by literal-minded critics with a negative character who is too convincing or too sympathetic (233).

Panova had run this very gauntlet with *Listopad* and *Kruzhilika* two years previously, and so stayed far away from portraying any true villains in *Bright Shore*. As we shall see, Korostelev's main antagonist – though mendacious and irresponsible – is merely “good” to Korostelev's “better.” At the same time, Panova did include a romantic conflict (not proscribed) as well as a way to comment on the state of Soviet society and letters.

### Redefining Conflictlessness

As I note above, a central difficulty in discussing the concept of conflictlessness is that it was a tendency rather than a codified doctrine, an argument advanced by certain critics and embodied by certain writers to varying degrees. Essentially, conflictlessness was finally codified only via a campaign of rejection that began in 1952 and was elaborated most fully during the post-Stalinist Thaw.<sup>43</sup> The Thaw wave epitomized by the Second Soviet Writers' Conference in 1954 was not concerned with fine critical

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<sup>43</sup> A good historical treatment of the critical backlash against conflictlessness appears in Evgenii Dobrenko's chapter on Late Stalinist criticism in Dobrenko and Tihanov.



distinctions, yet it has bequeathed to us the clearest concept of the tendency, if not necessarily a fully descriptive one.

Because I believe that Panova wrote *Bright Shore* within the confines of conflictlessness, I must therefore discuss the concept and clear up what I see as a confusion in terms that arose in the 1950s and has persisted until the present day. Relying for definitions on statements by opponents during a period of wholesale doctrinal shift has led to some confusion over what exactly conflictlessness entails, and what differentiates it from other concepts that came under attack at the same time.

Misleadingly, conflictlessness is often conflated in the attacks of the 1950s with *lakirovka* (the “varnishing” over of any less than positive details that I discussed in Chapter II) and its related concept of *paradnost'*, a sort of triumphal Pollyannaism. This conflation had the additional consequence of associating conflictlessness with the wrong author, for as I showed in my discussion of the Second Writers' Conference, where *lakirovka* is attacked, so too must Babaevskii be. Babaevskii, therefore, has since become the primary embodiment of conflictlessness in the critical imagination. I believe this association is inappropriate.

The most elementary argument against calling Babaevskii's work conflictless is the presence therein of flat-out enemies and genuine ideological struggle: To return to *Light Over the Earth*, the disgruntled Khokhlakov, having already been deposed from his collective farm directorship in *Cavalier of the Golden Star*, authors a denunciatory petition against the hero Tutarin, and after finding that no one will lend their names to his cause, meets a death fitting for an ideological enemy, dying alone in a barren field. In an echo of Christian confessional anxiety, he expires having realized his errors but unable to inform the Party of his change of heart. In a farcical reiteration of Khokhlakov's tragedy, his lackey goes to town with the petition, endures a series of folk humiliations (progressive befoulment, losing his pants), and is driven from the town by the faith and unity of its inhabitants. Conflicts such as these hardly hint at a universe of “good” characters and “better” characters; in Babaevskii's world, real enemies still exist.

While the author does indeed take great pains in *Light* to show that the work of building Communism can incorporate all types of workers and personal situations, he does not depict unanimous support for the goal. In these novels, just as in *The Young Guard*, there are characters who oppose the work of the Party and who must be defeated.

It was really Babaevskii's image as an overeager pupil, his "sweetness," that exercised Thaw critics, and his status as the iconic target of the backlash against Stalinism has influenced later generations of critics to define certain Stalinist precepts in reference to his work, all the more so when an authoritative prior definition is lacking. During its height in the late 1940s, conflictlessness operated mainly as an anxiety, as one of the many ideas that had the potential to become doctrine. Since the victory of a critical concept often meant that it would be applied retrospectively, at least to the works that its adherents had attacked, Soviet authors could tend to be gun shy, trying not to range too far afield of approved predecessors lest their works be tarnished retroactively. Panova obviously felt the pull of conflictlessness after the debate surrounding *Kruzhilikha*, but she was too good a psychologist to sink her characters in inauthentic despair and syrupy raptures. The only sweetness in the novel is in the world of children, where it is charming instead of saccharine, an attempt to understand the young rather than to infantilize adults.

Using the critical lens of the Thaw, is Serezha a retreat from more direct engagement with the reality of life in the Soviet Union? Although Panova twice turned to the character after more controversial works, the available evidence indicates that she was fond of Serezha and her other child protagonists, so it was not merely a cynical move. Nevertheless, I find it suggestive that she strikes upon the device of a child's point of view – rendered as completely separate from adult concerns – in her most conflictless work. A talented artist may find that a strictly limited form – be that form sonata, sonnet, or Stalinist prose – can spur creativity, forcing innovation into new channels. *Bright Shore* may thus be an important foundation of Panova's mature style, and her adoption of conflictlessness after the critical storm occasioned by *Kruzhilikha* may have led her to her most beloved device. Although Soviet authors

found other ways to create drama – in addition to the pastoral resonances of thunderstorms and crevasses, one of the reasons that struggles against the elements were common in this period is that conflict with nature was still acceptable – Panova had found a way to create interest through characterization and voice. Even so, when she needed a crisis to move the plot along, she resorted to a domestic version of the natural cataclysm: the canoe containing Serezha and other children overturns, and the boy winds up in the hospital.<sup>44</sup>

Although the character of Serezha is the lasting legacy of *Bright Shore*, there is also a full array of adult characters, all operating well within standard Stalinist types. As I have noted, however, Panova's own instinctive disinclination toward epic conflicts and cataclysms as well as her talent for quiet psychological realism leads her to set small stakes for her adult characters. In this novel, she trades the thematic adventurousness of *Kruzhilikha* for devices that fit well within the conflictless novel, namely professional advancement and romantic rivalry. Panova may be up to something else as well. As characters struggle toward romantic love and career success, these progressions tend to correspond to each other in each individual's search for a rewarding place in society. As the four major adult characters undertake similar journeys, however, an allegory of the Soviet Union's own progression begins to emerge. Like the narrative in *The Young Guard*, it structures itself around generational differences, but takes the opposite tack: *Bright Shore* hints that the fevered heroic labors of the 1930s are obsolete. Like Tutarinov, the farm director learns to incorporate the strengths of every worker into his management, and acknowledges his love. The new schoolteacher accepts that love and looks to the future. The carpenter transcends his wartime trauma to once again become a husband and a valued member of the community. Infatuated with the director, the milkmaid pushes her cow and herself a little farther than she should, learns maturity, and leaves the collective.

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<sup>44</sup> Panova may also have meant the capsizing as just desserts for the farm accountant Luk'ianych, one of the merely "good" characters in the novel. While eminently competent, Luk'ianych does show some tendencies toward private enterprise in the novel: the log out of which he made his new canoe was a reward for helping another farm with its annual account reconciliation. Because the accountant is as underdeveloped as any adult in the novel other than the main four, it is hard to say for sure.

Transcending Egoism: The Director and the Schoolteacher

Since the boy Serezha constitutes the emotional heart of *Bright Shore*, it stands to reason that the novel's primary marriage plot will eventually constitute a new nuclear family around him, the continuing adventures of which will later form the plot of *Serezha* the novel. As I point out at the beginning of this chapter, that marriage (although no ceremony is shown in either book, the couple's intentions are clear) is catalyzed by the boy's near drowning. Indeed, the suitor seems to be motivated as much by a desire to play father to Serezha as by love for his mother. In the course of the novel, both man and wife must learn to open up to the possibility of love, and to transcend their own self-sufficiency. For Panova, this progression inheres not only in romance but in career. They are two sides of the same coin.

The couple in question is Dmitrii Korneevich Korostelev, Director of the Bright Shore state farm, and Mar'iana Lavrova, a fresh graduate of the regional teachers' college. Of the two, Mar'iana is the flatter character, at least in *Bright Shore*; in *Serezha* she is intriguingly, perhaps even frighteningly un sentimental about her son, leaving Korostelev to embrace fatherhood, entertaining the boy, and defending him from others. In the earlier work, her most vivid scenes come as she puts her recently acquired pedagogical theory to work in her class of seven-year-olds, providing more opportunities for Panova to depict children in all of their confused imperiousness, as in this scene from the beginning of the school year:

Two mothers went into the office. A pair of children, a boy and a girl, waited in the corridor.

"I turned seven a long time ago," said the girl. "My birthday was in March. When's yours?"

She had red braids, tied in knots on the ears, and lively black eyes. The boy gave her a perplexed look.

"I can draw a steamboat," he said.

“Ha, a steamboat!” said the girl. “Any idiot can draw a steamboat. Do you know how to draw a horse?”

Mar’iana walked by with a pile of books.

“Even if she wants to make me kneel,” said the boy, “I’m not going to.”

“She won’t make us kneel,” said the girl. “She’ll make us leave the room” (107-08).<sup>45</sup>

Mar’iana must learn to teach effectively, but also to acknowledge her need for love, even while honoring the memory of her husband who perished in the war. From the moment Mar’iana returns to the farm and grows annoyed with Korostelev for addressing her as he did when they were both children, it is obvious that the two will wind up together. While Panova’s handling of the intervening obstacles fails to reach the artistry of a Jane Austen or a Preston Sturges, she does introduce a rival for Mar’iana’s hand.

That rival, the veterinary technician Innokentii Ikonnikov, is a character that in a more conflicted – or less conflictless – work would be genuinely despicable, and indeed in his quest to avoid responsibility Ikonnikov is genuinely unsympathetic. As with any good romantic rival, Ikonnikov opposes the hero not only in the competition for the woman’s affections, but in the values he represents. Professionally, the deskbound bureaucrat refuses to take any potentially problematic action without written instructions, and writes to the central administration to report on any unorthodox action with the potential to arouse official disapproval. Korostelev despises his bureaucratism, especially when it limits his own headstrong management style. Romantically, Ikonnikov courts Mar’iana primarily out of a desire for married propriety, showing little real affection for the widow or her son. When Korostelev warns him

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<sup>45</sup> Две матери зашли в канцелярию. Двое детей, мальчик и девочка, ждут их в коридоре.

-- Мне уже давно семь лет, -- говорит девочка. -- Мое день-рождение было в марте. А твое когда?

-- У нее рыжие косички, завязанные крендельками на ушах, и черные живые глаза. Мальчик смотрит на нее озадаченно.

-- Я могу нарисовать пароход, -- говорит он.

-- Фу, пароход! -- говорит девочка. -- Пароход каждый дурак умеет. А ты умеешь нарисовать лошадь?

Проходит Марьяна со стопкой книг.

-- Если она захочет поставить меня на колени, -- говорит мальчик, -- я все равно не стану.

-- Она не будет ставить на колени. -- говорит девочка. -- Она нас будет выгонять из класса.

away from Mar'iana, Ikonnikov first considers denouncing him to the Party, having already reported him once for a bad decision, but ultimately decides that discretion is the better part of valor and obtains a job in the administrative center.<sup>46</sup>

By using Ikonnikov as a romantic rival to her hero, Panova creates narrative conflict even within the bounds of conflictlessness, which prohibits only class conflict and, transitively, tension between good and bad within Soviet society. Though distasteful, Ikonnikov is not in fact bad: even Korostelev must admit that his new job is the perfect solution: the bureaucrat will not have to engage the messy reality of farm life, but will still be able to employ his genuine administrative talents in the service of the country. He has been vanquished romantically but not destroyed.

While many Stalinist authors used the marriage plot, it is surprising that more Stalinist authors did not resort to romantic rivalry when conflictlessness closed off so many other options. Nevertheless, love and its complications were a major theme in postwar prose. With so many men having died in the war, it could hardly be otherwise. Everyone knew families that had lost husbands or sons, and massive internal migration meant that even families that remained alive might take years to be reunited. On the whole, postwar Soviet literature confronts these difficulties fairly straightforwardly: widows especially must mourn their fallen husbands, or, perhaps worse, wonder if they are in fact dead. Meanwhile the demands of postwar reconstruction face not only the country and the collective, but the household. Masculine labor was essential to rebuild housing, and feminine labor was necessary to create the domesticity that signaled that the war was truly over. To reconstitute the family and repopulate the country, the reproduction imperative was also strong. For material and spiritual reasons, therefore, the temptation to pair off based on concerns other than romantic love was strong, and generally not condemned in literature of the period. The primary hero of a given novel almost always finds true love after a series of false starts, and that true love is most often someone he knew before. Secondary

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<sup>46</sup> Although some tools of repression (for example, prison camps and interrogations by the secret police) are rarely if ever depicted in official Stalinist literature, denunciations are fair game. As with bureaucratic maneuvering, however, they are almost exclusively the province of negative characters.

characters, however, find a wider variety of living arrangements, and romance does not always triumph over practical concerns.

If for no other reason than that so many families had been broken apart, Soviet authors could not portray nuclear families as the sole desirable configuration, nor could they privilege marriages founded on romantic love to the exclusion of "settling." At the same time, the disruption wrought by the war likely lent the marriage plot an urgency that readers in the 21st century do not feel. So while there was an understandable rooting interest in seeing main characters pair off, there might not have been a sense of inevitability. Moreover, the logic of postwar novels often dictated that main characters resolve their professional obstacles before they could be allowed to find love. As the positive hero of *Bright Shore*, Korostelev must learn to manage before he can unite with Mar'iana.

Korostelev's own personal difficulties are more varied than Mar'iana's, and more intertwined with the collective good. Like many protagonists of postwar novels, he is a demobilized soldier trying to adjust to peacetime tasks. A former veterinary medic, he returns to his native farm and is named director, but finds it hard to make the transition from officer to manager. In the early pages of the novel, his superior dresses him down for daydreaming during a Party meeting and failing to consider the welfare of any entity greater than his own farm. He receives an instruction that unsurprisingly functions as one of the novel's major themes: "Think about your place among us, and about our place in your life, and about our collective role in the life of the country (*gosudarstvo*)" (22). It will eventually take the threat of expulsion from the Party to force Korostelev to come to grips with his role in the Party's grand scheme.

The plot archetype that underlies this and so many other Stalinist novels is the narrative of professional advancement. Especially in postwar fiction, Communist heroes must learn how to succeed in management while really trying. In this they resemble many protagonists of Western business school case studies or "working girl" fiction, the most successful recent example of which is probably the heroine of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996). In each case, the hero is thrown into a new

milieu, with new responsibilities to perform, an unfamiliar hierarchy to learn, and undiscovered norms to navigate. Narrative interest comes as the hero rebels against certain strictures, is tripped up by others, but eventually comes to terms with the system's values and is promoted. In many cases both Stalinist and Western, poor romantic decisions correspond to career pitfalls.

In this general outline, the narrative of career advancement would seem to be a subspecies of the *Bildungsroman* which I and others see underpinning the structure of the Stalinist novel. Whatever its place in the genre system, I see the specific appeal of the professional advancement plot in its quotidian nature. Rather than the escapist elements of a more adventurous plot, this narrative works by identification, and perhaps also by aspiration. The postwar Soviet Union presented many opportunities for professional and social mobility as a generation of veterans returned and were slotted into civilian roles. As I discussed in Chapter II, many of these new and inexperienced mid-level functionaries seemed to look for similar characters in the novels they read. I believe that that demand stemmed not only from a desire for self-representation in official art, but from a desire for models of behavior to help navigate the requirements and dilemmas of the new positions returning veterans were filling.

A related but distinct possibility is that this new professional class did not demand instruction so much as the Party thought it advisable that it be provided to them. In this reading, writers were not so much engineers of human souls – in Stalin's famous formulation from the early 1930s – but equivalent to business school instructors. The Russian word *khoziaistvennyi*, often used to describe the work typical of Party administrators, is typically translated as *economic*, but I tend to read it in this period as equivalent to the contemporary discipline of *management*. Consider the following criticism in Boris Isaev's generally pro-Panova article of 1950:

We see now the inadequacies of Panova's novel. She has shown us people who are passionately devoted to their task, who love their creative labor, and this is typical. But at the same time Panova has shown a young director who for months does not receive help from his superiors (*khoziaistvennye rukovoditeli*), who contents himself with primitive methods of management (*khoziaistvennoe rukovodstvo*)... (177)



In this passage, the focus is clearly less on accounting and economics than it is on organization, planning, and the best use of “human resources.” Following this argument, I must acknowledge that the definition of Socialist Realism with which I took issue in the introduction – that it is the entire system by which the state inculcates desired behavior in its subjects – is not completely off base, although it still should not be used to sum up a whole universe of artistic practices. Rather, it is probably just one of the Stalinist elements that are less apparent to an outside reader, but which any author could mold and combine in unique ways.

For most of the novel, Korostelev tells himself that he does not propose to Mar’iana because his job keeps him too busy, and it would not be fair to have a family. Meanwhile, his Party membership is in danger because he fails to consider how the interests of the Bright Shore farm fit into any larger context. This makes him a bit of a loose cannon, and in order to both find his place in the Party and the resolve to create a family with Mar’iana and Serezha, he must learn to merge his own interests with those of others. The inciting incident for this theme, and one of the most fully realized passages in the novel, is Korostelev’s sale of a calf to another farm.

Throughout *Bright Shore*, it is important to keep an eye on the livestock as well as on the human characters, since the farm’s cattle are its productive capital, its reason for being. Here, Korostelev’s unauthorized disposal of livestock is simultaneously fraught with significance and strangely without consequence in practical terms. Although Panova makes it abundantly clear that every calf counts for the farm and for the country, another cow later has twins, restoring the headcount. Later, a cow will miscarry, but at another point Korostelev draws on his old veterinary training to save another, so the total number of cattle on the farm seems to remain where it would have been before Korostelev took his unauthorized action.

Even though the scales have been balanced in practical terms, Korostelev's generosity also carries political implications. Like *Kruzhilika's* Listopad, Korostelev suffers from autocratic tendencies, becoming incensed when someone dares question his decisions as farm director. Unlike Listopad, however, in this case he acts out of sympathetic motives. The purchaser of the calf is one Ivan Grechka, a heavily decorated former partisan and director of the Stalin collective farm in Belarus, a location that was much closer to the front lines than Korostelev's farm. Notwithstanding the Bright Shore farm's own dilapidation, Grechka moves Korostelev to pity with his narratives of deprivation and terror at the hands of the Germans. Appealing to Korostelev as a fellow veteran and as a fellow director, he plays on his sympathies to enlist his help in alleviating the terrible conditions on his farm more quickly than the central plan contemplates. We will later learn that Grechka has been travelling from farm to farm in the region playing on the same sympathies to get more and more materials.<sup>47</sup>

Every other person on the farm instinctively knows that Korostelev has committed a grievous error. As we have seen, Ikonnikov goes so far as to demand a written order, which he then forwards to the Party's regional organization. Even though the director sold the calf rather than giving it away, it was still a promising animal, and the farm had already met all of its obligations to other farms. Like Korostelev, Grechka will be reprimanded for this transaction, and one of the last passages of the novel is Korostelev's letter to his Belarusian counterpart suggesting they reestablish their relationship on "Bolshevik principles." The larger point is clear: no matter how effective partisan methods may have been under occupation, no matter how unequally distributed the current suffering, allocation of resources lies in the sole competence of the Party. Mid-level functionaries like Korostelev must do their best to fulfill or overfulfill the plan. Lesson learned.

To return to conflictlessness for a moment, the idea shows itself here in the fact that Grechka is not acquiring these resources for personal gain: he obviously believes that his actions are the best way to

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<sup>47</sup> Since there is a general critical tendency to overassociate Stalinist culture with glorification of the Leader himself, it is worth noting that Panova associates nothing positive with the Stalin farm save good intentions. Grechka epitomizes the manager's prioritization of his own sphere over the needs of the collective.

help his farm. Like Korostelev, he is a veteran who in his new role must learn to subordinate himself to the Plan. Lest we start to perceive him as too much of a disruptive influence, however, Panova allies him with the marriage plot, having Grechka urge Korostelev to find a wife (29). As Bright Shore's director comes to terms with the guiding role of the Party, he also realizes his need for others in his personal life. Once he acknowledges the need to be part of something bigger than himself, he gains not only a family, but entrée to the in-group of regional leaders. His professional stock is going up. The main plot complication of *Serezha* in fact is that Korostelev has done such a good job at the Bright Shore farm that he has been promoted to a new position in the Soviet East.

#### Restoring the Status Quo: the Carpenter

While each major character must work through related problems in career and romance, the outcome is never uniform. In part this disparity owes to each character's role: as farm director and Party member, Korostelev must embody the novel's management education function. As the primary hero, he must find love. As a widow, Mar'iana must move past her loss. As a single mother and love interest, she must restore the family unit and rediscover love herself. The third major character is neither a Party member nor a management case study, and thus can undergo a more realistic, nuanced, and adult progression.

Korostelev's first action in the novel – in fact, on its first page – is to find his driver and reprimand her for her absenteeism. But Tosia Almazova has been staying at home because her husband, the third major character, has finally returned from the war. We first see Almazov hung over and out of sorts, an understandable condition for someone spending his first morning at home in four years. Initially the opening scene seems to function more as a characterization of Korostelev, who fails to extend any courtesy or forbearance to his fellow returned veteran. This is the first of Almazov's many hangovers, however; alcoholism will mark the man for the first half of the novel. Afflicted both by postwar trauma

and love lost, he must resolve to make do with what life presents him rather than striving for and attaining some sort of ideal. In the world of the novel, this is a form of maturity.

Almazov drinks because he cannot find a place in Bright Shore. He does not take a job because he cannot find work that satisfies him (“*ne po dushe*,” essentially “not to my liking” but more literally something like “not in harmony with my soul,” becomes his leitmotiv in the first part of the novel). We eventually see that he is in this state because he loves someone other than his wife. After his release from a hospital in the rear, but still needing extensive recuperation, he had met and fallen in love with a war widow, moving in with her for at least several months and functioning as her husband in all respects, from fixing the fence to sharing the marital bed. As I note above, marriage and romantic love are not required to coincide in postwar fiction: Narratives of adultery, cohabitation without marriage, and ad hoc family relationships ballooned in postwar Soviet literature, as a reaction to life in a country where most of the able-bodied male population had been mobilized, and many of them had perished. In this particular example, Almazov has used his skills in carpentry to completely rebuild his new love's home, an act of restoration that contrasts with his early behavior once he returns to the Bright Shore farm. In fact, Almazov would never have returned to his wife and children had not his love discovered that her own husband was alive, wounded, and in desperate need of nursing.

With her prewar family restored, Almazov returns to his own. In *Bright Shore*, however, he must reacclimatize himself by reversing the vicious cycle he is trapped in when we first see him: first he must stop drinking, which he does out of both guilt toward his wife and annoyance at her. Then he finds work on the farm, putting his skills to work in reconstruction, training others, and gaining the respect of the collective. Lastly, this improved social position gives him the strength to accept his role in the family and restore that unit. He does this last primarily for the sake of the children, and, once again, out of pity for Tosia. As the final break, he must bid farewell to his postwar love, who is travelling to rejoin her husband at a new Eastern settlement with the infant son most likely fathered by Almazov. It is only when he kisses that child goodbye that he is fully reintegrated into his prewar life at Bright Shore.

Again, that a postwar novel should show parallel reconstruction of the community, family, and individual is no innovation. It is a natural feature of postwar fiction. Panova's strength is to acknowledge that not everyone will be a star, and that the most many can hope for is a life with dignity. True love is not a prerequisite to happy life, nor is it the ultimate goal: Unlike the director and the schoolteacher, Almazov must give up his true love to restore his family. It may be that romantic love is a force subordinate to love for children and responsibility to them: Almazov decides to rejoin the family unit for his children's sake, and Korostelev only acknowledges his love for Mar'iana when Serezha is in danger. Although marriage is apparently unnecessary, responsibility to the family is nevertheless a real force and essential to proper functioning within the system. Almazov embodies maturity in family life and career: while he will likely never move into middle management, and may never again love his wife, he has found a position in society. While he most likely has a son that he will never see again, he has in effect chosen to let that son be raised by a different father so he can provide for his own children. By the end of the novel, he comes off as noble in his skillful work and commitment to the well being of his family.

#### Maturation: The Milkmaid and the State

Panova's stress on the family unit and on love as a force that is trainable, sometimes resigned, and essential for proper functioning in the collective finds a counterexample in Niusha the milkmaid, who strikes many readers as the second most vivid character in the novel after Serezha. Part of her appeal is in her youth and high spirits, but also in her embodiment of a prewar model of Soviet behavior that Panova strongly hints has no place in the new world of the postwar USSR.

Anna Vlasova, universally referred to by her nickname Niusha, is an inexperienced milkmaid at the beginning of the novel, someone who the more experienced milkmaids tell to keep out from underfoot. Her journey is launched by a crush on Korostelev, who himself is both imperious and impetuous at this early point in the novel, and thus represents something of a kindred spirit. She could

function as a psychological case study in transference, with a desire for fame merging with an attraction to authority figures. To impress Korostelev, she undertakes a Stakhanovite labor, striving to break a milk production record. Korostelev's mother has already marked her with the theme of abundance, noting that the junior milkmaid possesses love without measure (136), but implicit in her observation is that this emotion exists independent of an object, that Niusha has not gotten close enough to anyone to truly love him or her.

As this extended quotation indicates, Niusha's approach to work and life is marked by ambition, struggle, and overflowing vitality:

I want to do outstanding work. I want to be respected, I want Iosif Vissarionovich himself to know about Niusha Vlasova, a little girl from a farm far away. You know, there's this Niusha, she's also building Communism, and no worse than anyone else...I'll do it! I lack neither reason nor strength, don't look at me as the last in line...

...

Her love [for Korostelev] was all-powerful, cruel, exactly as they described it in novels but a hundred times stronger.

...

Niusha would have everything, everything. Niusha would achieve vast feats of production. She would become a Senior Livestock Specialist. Director Dmitrii Korneevich would be her husband.

How this would happen, and when, she knew not, but it must come to pass.

Dmitrii Korneevich walks around unaware that he is Niusha's future husband. He has no idea that Niusha loves him. If he knew this kind of love, he wouldn't be able to think of anything else...

...and Niusha would learn to play the accordion. It would all happen (165-67).

This approach to life and work, like the language that Niusha uses to describe it, recalls an earlier era of the USSR, when boundless potential and overwhelming passion were the highest virtues, the prerequisite for the eventual global triumph of Soviet Communism. She is the only character in the novel who adopts

the language and behavior of the first five-year plans, who adopts an ideal of overflowing vitality that characterized the 1930s but that is plainly out of place in a nation exhausted by war.

In ending the passage with a resolution to learn the accordion, Panova's gentle ironizing of this earlier cultural model shows most clearly. Niusha does indeed achieve great feats of production, but they are means to ends more personal than Communism. She undertakes the labor to show her superiority to other milkmaids and to impress an authority figure. Hungering for fame, she understands that Stakhanovite feats are a way to achieve it. Having been through the high tide of Stakhanovism, the farm's leadership understands the mechanisms of this fame, including the fact that farms and factories could also benefit by developing Stakhanovite workers, and therefore undertake the necessary steps to bring her to the attention of the star-making machinery in Moscow.<sup>48</sup> Although from the beginning her roiling passions mark her as too immature for Korostelev, her celebrity does help her rise from the milk barns to advanced study, and thence presumably to membership in the intelligentsia. Structurally, it also removes her from the farm (she does not appear in *Serezha*). Such passions play only a vestigial and codified role in this postwar world.

Though heavily marked as immature, by herself Niusha would not seem to bear the allegorical weight I have assigned to her: that the 1930s-style behavior she embodies is inappropriate for the entire country. My reading, however, is supported by the fate of her prize cow, and the way that Niusha's animal husbandry mirrors the personnel management techniques that Korostelev must learn as part of his own development.

A general precept of Bolshevik personnel management, at least as expressed in postwar novels, is that every worker must be treated as an individual. Korostelev learns this quickly:

Korostelev had learned a lot in five months.

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<sup>48</sup> For a useful survey of the rural Stakhanovite movement, see Mary Buckley's *Mobilizing Soviet Peasants: Heroines and Heroes of Stalin's Fields*.

At first he treated everyone exactly as if he were a battalion commander, surrounded by soldiers and junior officers. Then he understood that different people need to be treated differently if you wanted everyone to work to the full extent of his abilities. It was enough to give one person an instruction to “do this and that,” and he would do it. Another person would have to be called into the office, sat down, praised for his work, asked about his kids, and he would do anything for you. A third liked it when you dropped by his apartment and partook of his hospitality. A fourth would have to be handed over to Bekishev [the farm’s Party secretary], who would read him a little lecture on current events. A fifth—there were still people like this—wouldn’t respond to civil speech. He absolutely needed language that wasn’t meant for children’s ears; give him five words, and he’d give you ten— afterwards he’d put his heart at ease, enjoyed his quotient of boldness, and worked so well he was a wonder to look at.

Mar’iana learns a very similar lesson when she begins to teach her first class: each child learns in his or her own way.

Where Panova departs from the usual handling of this idea is when she discusses milk cattle in the same terms:

...Niusha now had more experience and understood that every cow demanded her own approach. Take Gratsia for example: she gave Niusha twenty-two liters, but when Niusha’s replacement came in, Gratsia wouldn’t produce more than twelve for anything. Zvezdochka liked her neighbors to be milked before she was, so she would be last of all. Kroshka liked you to talk to her while you were milking her. How they got it into their heads, those cows, who knows; but you had to oblige if you wanted to get more out of them (152).

At first it might seem subversive to discuss animal husbandry and Bolshevik leadership in the same terms, but the widespread use of the concept for human management combined with a general materialist bias probably renders it innocuous. The next step, however, is more marked. Once Panova has drawn the parallels between human and animal management, and having established at the beginning that the cattle of this farm are vitally important resources, she has a Moscow professor cut Niusha’s record attempt short because it threatens the health of her cow.



It would have been easy to have Niusha actually set the record, to justify the fame that she receives. Depicting her orthodox Stakhanovite attempt as ultimately presenting a danger to the cow is a warning that all-out efforts to increase production could end up damaging productive resources. And since humans have been marked as a similar sort of productive resource, the whole 1930s ethos of pushing people to their limits must now also be outmoded. *The Bright Shore* can thus be read to embody a political position -- that Soviet citizens must rest, reestablish families and communities, and reembrace differentiated labor -- and a literary one. At least in Panova's uncommonly skilled hands, conflictlessness appears to be a maturation from the fevered prose of the 1930s and the understandable chaos of wartime writing.

## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have examined three postwar Stalinist novels in detail, and have touched on several others that provide context for or build on the works in question. I have demonstrated that the author of each of those novels was considered among the best in the Soviet Union by the official literary establishment, and yet that each was the target of major official attacks. In two out of the three cases, however, those authors found their reputations stable or even enhanced after these episodes.

By revisiting the critical debates over these works, I have also tried to shift the scholarly focus from the more homogenous final state of these works to the creative ferment that produced the first versions. As I demonstrated in Chapter I, highly respected writers could produce works that achieved immediate success among both official readers and the broader public, but that nevertheless had to be revised. To view this revision cycle as political interference with authorial independence would be too simplistic: politics and creation were not mutually exclusive realms. The writer was expected to help shape the reality of the Soviet Union, and thus was assigned a major role as a shaper of society. As I have noted, Stalin himself was an engaged reader and participant in the deliberations for his eponymous prizes, but he, like the rest of the literary establishment, determined what was better or worse by reacting to the works that writers produced. The development of Soviet literature was thus incremental and improvisatory rather than teleological. In this it resembles the development of most other literary traditions. Because many Stalinist novels exist in multiple versions, however, a reader's choice of version can influence his view of the overall era. By reading the first version of a novel and then examining the continued negotiation over that novel, I emphasize the dynamic and contentious elements of High Stalinism.

In a parallel exercise, I have tried to reconstruct some of the cultural frames of an official Stalinist reader in order to evaluate a Stalinist novel the way it might have been read at the time, when the revisions had yet to be made and the canon was not yet as fixed as it would become later. Some of these frames, like the management education function of the Socialist Realist novel or the various responses to and escapes from conflictlessness, have not been accorded much attention. Other elements, like the positive hero, have been studied extensively. By examining these elements as loci of authorial style, I have tried to outline some of the ways that we can study the contributions of individual authors. It might seem that I have merely identified previously unrecognized Stalinist requirements that authors were expected to meet, but that was not my goal; rather, I believe that I have identified some of the variables and axes that remained open for individual authorial treatment. In reading different treatments and orchestrations of these concerns, I have discovered anxieties about the state and course of the postwar USSR that otherwise might not have been apparent. This type of reading relies on allegorical impulses that would have been natural to skilled Soviet readers.

In essaying this type of reading, I should note two reservations: First, I have identified some -- but not nearly all -- loci of authorial differentiation and allegory. As Kaganovsky has shown, motifs like the maimed male body are vitally important to Stalinist literature, and are treated in myriad ways. Genres like the war novel (as opposed to *Young Guard*, which is a conspiratorial novel) or production novels set in factories rather than on farms present different possibilities. Middle-aged protagonists pose different allegorical issues than my mostly adolescent cohort. The use of pre-Soviet and foreign literary antecedents also enrich some authors' palettes in ways that I have not addressed here.

Second, by studying works and authors that came under attack, I do not mean to imply that Stalinist novels must somehow be self-defeating or covertly dissident to be interesting. If anything, by showing how different authors engage the difficulties of postwar Stalinism, I hope to complicate readings that counterpoise conformity and dissent. As I suggest in my reading of Fadeev, episodes of "discipline" were necessary and accepted as the literary establishment struggled to define what was acceptable in the postwar era. These episodes functioned as a template, in turn, for some of the polemics of the Thaw.

By showing the various and sometimes conflicting cultural currents at play in the period after the Great Patriotic War, I believe that I also lay some of the foundation for calling into question the common view of the post-Stalin Thaw as a dramatic break with the previous literary tradition. I believe that many of the preoccupations of the Thaw were already gathering force in the postwar period, most notably the generational tension between aging veterans of the Revolution and younger people who felt that those veterans were compromised and ineffective. Another contested issue since at least the 1920s was the proper approach to the village; as I have shown, Babaevskii fell afoul of an attitude that wanted a grittier, less optimistic depiction of rural problems even though his distancing treatment of other standard Socialist Realist elements demonstrates some affinity with the younger Thaw generation. The multimedia phenomenon of the Young Guard certainly remained popular throughout the Thaw, sometimes in ways that threatened the ruling elite. Vera Panova's critical reception -- as well as her responses to it -- seems to involve similar issues and strategies regardless of whether she was writing under Stalin or Khrushchev. In any eventual expansion of this study, I would like to read the postwar period and the Thaw as a single period of creative ferment, identifying common features, concerns, themes and strategies for influencing the boundaries and definitions of Soviet literature.

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