

Style and Principles of *The Young Guard* Novel¹

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Abstract

The article aims at presenting “The Young Guard”’s place within Alexander Fadeyev’s work and Socialist Realism canon. While his previous novels had a realistic tone and were influenced by psychologism, the analyzed novel is representative for the heroic-romantic perspective on World War II. Moreover, its lyrical overtones set it apart from other novels and determined the writer to re-evaluate his writing conceptions. In addition, we highlight the way in which author’s style and writing principles changed after (re)writing “The Young Guard.” His sober realistic writing manner and lyrical tones were considered as multi-stylistic in a larger discussion of the Socialist Realist principles.

Keywords: *The Young Guard, Fadeyev’s style and principles, Socialist Realism, ideological fictionalization, heroic-romantic perspective*

Alexander Fadeyev occupies a prominent place within the Socialist Realism canon due to his realistic novels and revolutionary themes. But *The Young Guard* gained a special status due to its complicated destiny. First of all, it was a political command and, as a result of research and interviews, Fadeyev was impressed by the young inhabitants’ tenacity and patriotism in the Nazi occupied Ukraine during World War II. Secondly, the author had to rewrite the novel, following harsh criticism concerning the party’s lack of involvement in the underground fight against the Germans. These aspects shaped the specificity of the novel that became one significant example of ideological fictionalization in Soviet literature.

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The Young Guard in Fadeyev's work

Alexander Fadeyev had a heroic-romantic approach on World War II events (see more details on literary perspectives on war in Grădinaru, 2018), continuing thus the heroic style embedded in his previous literary works. In addition, he introduced lyrical-romantic ingredients when depicting the prewar atmosphere in Krasnodon area and portraying the young fighters against the German rule established in Soviet Ukraine.

Fadeyev considered that “Socialist Realism was not a dogma of creativity” (Rybak, 1977, p. 650), but a “profound conception of life, the result of Soviet artists’ work with various individualities and distinctive creativity.” (Rybak, 1977, p. 651) This “profound conception of life” implied the rewriting of the novel *The Young Guard* in order to convey more accurately the party involvement in the underground activities. It is significant that A. Zhdanov oversaw this process, along with the (re)making of some scenes of S. Gerasimov’s film adaptation (1948, edited in 1964).

The first edition of *The Young Guard* was published in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* and *Znamya* in 1945, and a year later the book followed. After the huge success, however, critical reactions appeared in an article in *Pravda* – “the main flaw of the novel is the incomplete and even representation of the party ruling involved in the heroic fight of komsomolists in Krasnodon.” (*Pravda*, December 3, 1947) That, in turn, resulted in the “wrong presentation of the role of the party in represented events and the real leaders of this fight.” (*Ibidem*) Another flaw of the novel resided in the fact that “Fadeyev didn’t create typical characters of communist-educators.” (Bushmin, 1983, p. 183) Fadeyev spent the next three years rewriting the novel, incorporating in the novel new documents on the party activity in the Voroshilovgrad/ Lugansk region. The additional eleven chapters of the second edition were focused on depicting the bravery and thorough involvement of party leaders in anti-fascist activities.

The motif of the “party man’s capacity to act under life-threatening circumstances” is introduced masterfully in the novel *The Young Guard*. Nevertheless, the lyrical-patriotic notes prevail more than in the novel *The Rout* (1927). Depicting the Bolshevik partisans’ fighting spirit in the novel *The Rout* helped Fadeyev in describing the courageous young inhabitants of Krasnodon. The same manner of representation is specific to both novels. Nevertheless, while *The Rout* depicts the changes of the era through the revolutionaries’ interior universe, *The Young Guard* renders the interior changes of the Soviet youth from a lyrical-romantic perspective.

The characters of *The Rout* – Levinson and Morozka – retained aspects of the positive hero: self-education and overcoming personal weaknesses. The same aspects were employed in the construction of *The Young Guard* anti-fascist fighters: Ulyana Gromova, Oleg Koshevoy, Sergey Tyulenin, Lyuba Shevtsova. Soviet critics pointed out that “Fadeyev’s style of creation, the profoundness of psychological characterization of literary heroes, the attention to the interior universe are the proof of creative inheritance of L. Tolstoy’s realistic writing.” (Fadeyev, 1977, p. 668)

Unlike *The Rout*, Fadeyev’s *The Last of the Udege* (1930-1941) is focused on one representative of the Soviet intelligentsia; it presents the dynamics of the process of reeducation in the socialist-communist spirit in all its stages. This unfinished novel reveals the social changes in remote spaces of the Soviet Union in the period of the Civil War, handling an impressive gallery of characters. That novel represents an important step toward writing *The Young Guard* with a lot of literary heroes. On the other hand, *The Last of the Udege* marks a relevant period in Fadeyev’s creation, as it overcomes the sphere of artistic psychologism and attracts him closer to precepts of Socialist Realism. In A. Bushmin’s opinion, with that novel “Fadeyev proved his realistic principles in a more complicated context.” (Bushmin, 1983, p. 176)

The Young Guard continues thus Alexander Fadeyev’s preoccupations to unveil the triumph of socialist convictions and communist morals in various circumstances. Starting the work on the novel in 1943, the author was writing under the impulse of the first impressions. He was inspired by the new possibility of describing the exceptional character of Soviet fighters facing the enemy. Fadeyev acknowledged the fact that he owed writing the novel to the Central Bureau of the Leninist-Communist Union of Youth of USSR (Preobrazhensky, 1981, pp. 6-7). Both the fact that the writer visited Krasnodon to conduct interviews and his experience as a war correspondent shaped the specificity of the novel’s style.

Lyricism is intrinsic to the first edition of the novel, remaining pervasive enough in the second one. That was due to writer’s enthusiastic impression to the heroic deeds of Krasnodon youth under the Nazi occupation. These lyrical-romantic tones were poured into the documentary-journalistic style, retaining realistic features and contributing thus to the multi-stylistic nature of the novel.

According to the ideological necessities of the Stalinist era, Fadeyev’s novel was considered a “heroic poem about the heroic greatness of the people” and a “heroic epic about the people’s struggle for freedom” (Bushmin, 1983, pp. 188-189), as well as a “poem of the great deed of the Soviet young generation.”

(Şoptereanu, 1987, p. 141) The mass heroism of the new generation during World War II is the result of their education according to the socialist principles, inspired by the example of their parents who fought for the revolutionary victory. Consequently, the novel was included in the Soviet curriculum and it was the second most published literary work in the category of literature for children and teenagers in the Soviet Union during the period 1917-1987.

Style, Principles, Tendencies and Theories

The fact that *The Young Guard* belongs to Socialist Realism is beyond any doubt, given the fact that Soviet critics considered that directions of development of the Soviet literature were represented in this novel. Nevertheless, there are some other matters that are worth discussing – the style and the nature of the novel's realism. The difficulty in writing the novel-document resided in maintaining the balance between the historical truth and the creative freedom, the synthesis between the historic content and the adequate artistic form.

At the end of the '40s there was a hypothesis that the style of *The Young Guard* imposed the revision of principles and auctorial tendencies. More specifically, the introduction of “exalted-pathetic romantic” (Metchenko & Petrov, 1983, p. 86) was requisite, taking into account that the most important principle of Fadeyev's realism resided in representing characters under dramatic circumstances, inspired by real events. Thus, the genesis of his heroes and heroines may be considered the most powerful aspect of the novel's historicism, while the artistic historicism highlighted the problem of the historic essay and historically documented story. According to Stalinist standards, the prerequisites of the Soviet heroic prose consisted in the representation of events with the accuracy of a historian. Thus, the author revealed in a sensitive manner the “great deed of the masses, of the united collective from the moral and ideational perspective.” (Metchenko & Petrov, 1983, p. 173) A. Fadeyev's primary artistic aim was presenting the Soviet man at war while using the most appropriate means in order to express accurately the truth of life and to present the features of that generation. The aesthetic principles of the novel could be resumed as giving up the naturalistic elements, getting closer to the romantic construction of characters, and idealizing the main heroes and heroines.

Fadeyev's writing was described as a “stylistic dependence on Leo Tolstoy's work and in his ideological subjugation to political forces” (Rzhevsky, 1969, p. 419), especially in *The Rout*. But grains of Tolstoy's realism may still be found in *The Young Guard*, although distilled in the lyrical-romantic pathos. Therefore, we

may state that *The Young Guard* is a step closer to the Socialist Realism's canon due to the realistic-romantic blend and the method of artistic expression (influenced by Tolstoy) serving the party ideology. While Tolstoy's work channeled efforts to unveil real principles of life, Fadeyev's writings attempted to reveal party principles of society, the individuals integrated in the collective. The psychological approach to characterization is another common trait of both Tolstoy and Fadeyev (Rzhevsky, 1969, p. 425) so much so that the tone of heroes' thoughts bears a striking resemblance (Pierre Bezukhov's, Metelitsa's and Oleg Koshevoy's thoughts on life and death). In terms of psychological dynamics, the same spontaneity is to be seen both in Tolstoy's and in Fadeyev's heroes (evident in Koshevoy's case, chapter 11). However, Fadeyev masters the art of transformation from spontaneity to consciousness, from abruptness to discipline (*stikhijnost` to soznatel`nost`*), specific to Socialist Realism (Clark, 2000, pp. 15-16, pp. 21-22).

The same device used by Tolstoy characterizing the heroes and heroines based on a specific element of character's physique is utilized successfully by Fadeyev. That is why any reader would be able to describe Ulyana Gromova as a beautiful girl with big dark eyes and long dark hair, Sergey Tyulenin as a barefoot negligent teenager and so on. Consequently, these details would stand for an interior trait: Ulyana's profundity and capacity to look deep into one's soul (see Stakhovich's incapacity to betray her at the simple thought of her big dark eyes), Tyulenin's simplicity and hooliganish nature. And this is in line with Fadeyev's earlier expressed considerations on the necessity of endowing characters with specific features (Fadeyev, 1929, p. 7). We could even extend N. Rzhevsky's comparison on the "proper" death concept, seen in L. Tolstoy's story *Three Deaths* and recognizable in A. Fadeyev's chapter in *The Rout* (Rzhevsky, 1969, p. 426), to the case of *The Young Guard*, when facing torture and death, Evgeny Stakhovich breaks and betrays the members of the organization. Moreover, his imminent death isn't described in martyrish terms like in Oleg Koshevoy's or Filip Lyutikov's cases (see Grădinaru, 2014, pp. 451-461).

As for the historical collision between the two worlds involved in the Second World War, it is represented through artistic forms used later by other writers: the general unveiled through singular, the people through personalities. The beginning of the novel placed the entire plot in a symbolic reading, while extrapolating the two camps – the Soviet and the German – to mythical-symbolical dimensions. Consequently, we have the idyllic peaceful and bright image of the builders of the golden future opposed to the dark cruel image of the attackers. The principle of the tragic contrast is visible in the composition of *The Young Guard* in the

organization of scenes, events, conflicts and in the construction of characters. The Soviet world is in antithesis with the fascist one: the genuineness of the idyllic life of the Krasnodon steppe is interrupted by the malefic intrusion of the German army. A subtle consolidation of this dichotomy comes from the symbolic load of a scene from the beginning of the novel: the girls contemplating the water-lily marked the symbolic passing from careless childhood to maturity, becoming responsible to defend the motherland.

The first part of the novel focuses on characters' reactions to war and Nazi occupation. While some characters display a superficial autonomy, others are actively searching how to get involved in the anti-fascist underground movement. For example, Ulyana Gromova and Lyuba Shevtsova have different approaches to their role within the Soviet resistance, but they are able to combine their skills and abilities fighting against the Nazi. The second part of the novel dwells on the fighting methods and the cooperation between the young and elder generations. Whereas the first part is preoccupied with the heroes' inner world and the so-called awakening of the patriotic conscience and responsibility, the second part is characterized by a faster rhythm and patriotic tones.

Although *The Young Guard* is a war novel, we consider applicable Katerina Clark's structural perspective on novels of the Stalinist period, based on Vladimir Propp's narrative functions for Russian popular fairytales (Propp, 2001). The six large floating divisions are the following: prologue or separation (the heroes reach a new microcosm or the native land after an initiative journey); setting up the task (the anti-fascist fight, reaching out to Bolshevik leaders, choosing the young leaders); transition or trials (of heroic-dramatic or prosaic nature); climax (with possible obstacles); initiation (the mentor and the apprentice – Lyutikov and Oleg Koshevoy) and the finale, usually a complex one. The finale is represented by the martyrdom of the young Soviet fighters (see also Grădinaru, 2021, p. 233).

The finale of the novel is a tribute to all members of "The Young Guard" organization – a list of full names. Therewith, that memorial finale is less patriotic-pathetic and lyrical-dramatic for the Socialist Realism canon.

The realistic tone of the narration is sometimes interrupted by lyrical fragments and by subjective reflections of the narrative voice. The latter manifested especially in the case of expressing sympathy or antipathy towards characters or towards the documentary reflections on events (Metchenko & Petrov, 1983, p. 176). The characters are depicted in the hustle and bustle of the war events, involved in multiple tasks to undermine the authority of the Nazi occupation in the region. Secret meetings and difficult missions are carried out by

mere children and teenagers, enlivened by their love for motherland, in a seamless collective unity.

As a consequence of the mentioned aspects, the oath scene of the core members is the only one to give direction in interpreting the hectic activity of the resistance movement. In the same manner, raising the red flags on the important buildings of Krasnodon on the day of the 25th celebration of October Revolution and receiving in Komsomol the young Radik Yurkin are part of the patriotic-Soviet activity. Moreover, the description of the glorious Red Army that retakes the lost territories is also transmitted in romantic-lyrical colours.

The patriotic motivation of young fighters may be questioned, as it appears discontinuously in dialogues of the young inhabitants of Krasnodon, giving them strength and determination in various heroic activities. The limited pages that describe the torture of the arrested young guardians fail to point out the heroism so eagerly exalted by critics. In addition, the narration is interrupted by Ekaterina Protsenko's detailed adventures in her attempt to get through to the Red Army commanders with information from Lugansk area.

On the other hand, the concise report of burying the young fighters alive in the mine pit, along with the brief mention of the death of Oleg, Lyuba and Lyutikov may be interpreted as narrative mechanisms to confer the events a dramatic aura (as part of the realist strategy). In fact, Alexander Fadeyev admitted that he could have written a "pathetic or lyrical finale that would have made a more profound impression", but he chose to list all those who were allegedly part of the Krasnodon resistance movement "out of respect for their memory." (Fadeyev, 1960, pp. 397-398)

Some critics appreciated Fadeyev's option for subtle heroizations. For example, Bushmin considered that "Fadeyev proved the greatness of the Soviet people's morale and the beauty of its manifestation in heroic acts." (Bushmin, 1983, p. 179) This unveiling of the special character of the young Soviet citizens is accomplished in a new manner when compared to Fadeyev's other writings. The usage of realist and romantic elements determined him to revert on his previous considerations concerning romanticism (Cockrell, 1986, p. 345). The author researched and theorized the importance of romantic elements and the double lineage of the Socialist Realism: "The authentic realism must necessarily include the dream, desire, namely romanticism. The antithesis between the realist and romantic methods is annulled by the Socialist Realism." (Fadeyev, 1960 (4), p. 254)

If we are to explore the aspects of Soviet romanticism, then M. Gorky must be mentioned, as he understood by "natural romanticism" the romanticism of real

people, generated by life itself (Bushmin, 1983, p. 121). Therefore, for both Gorky and Fadeyev the romantic component was indispensable for the new literature of the Soviet Union and, according to these arguments. This position justifies the romantic ingredients of *The Young Guard* found both in the structure and in the narration: comparisons, metaphors, the tragic contrast between the wonderful picture of peace and the destructive explosions of the war. The same tension marks the characters' main decisions under exceptional circumstances of occupation, at the intersection of the personal and collective interest. The debut of the second part of the novel with the oath of "The Young Guard" members imprints a change of tone so that the unity becomes deeper and the ties between the partisans and Soviet leaders closer.

However, Fadeyev's sometimes contradictory attitude toward romanticism, romantic elements and idealization may be seen in his earlier theoretical attempts to delineate the specificity of the proletarian writer's relation to reality (Cockrell, 1986, pp. 348-349). A. Fadeyev's suggestion before the Socialist Realism's establishment was for the Soviet writers to offer a synthesis of realism and romanticism, avoiding thus the status of "naïve realists" or "false romantics" and focused on the depiction of incipient golden future in the context of present reality. Despite all confusing theoretical searches, A. Fadeyev remained a reconciler between contrasting visions on reality, attempting to offer a multifaceted world-view (*tselostnoye mirovozzrenie*).

The reflections on the interrelation between romantic and realistic elements were noted in the period of rewriting the novel *The Young Guard*. Romantic elements were thus organic elements of the Socialist Realism and the romantic form was prone to expressing the truth of life. Starting with these considerations, the heroes' attitudes and actions of Fadeyev's previous novels – Levinson, Metelitsa, Baklanov, Kostenetsky, Surkov and Churkin – are inspired and fueled by the romanticism of the heroic revolutionary deed. Consequently, the young guardians have a romantic vision upon Revolution, war and life in general.

To sum up, the specificity of *The Young Guard* consists in realistic elements and romantic-idealizing accents, doubled by psychologizing elements typical to Fadeyev's prose. A. Bushmin identified the idealization in the analyzed novel, specifying that "idealization is strongly rooted in the realistic tendencies of representation and it is differentiated from typification more qualitatively than quantitatively." (Bushmin, 1983, p. 203)

All these reflections justify the conceptual disjunction applied to Fadeyev's writing: while the period of writing this novel was named by Bushmin "figurative realism" (*krylatyi realism*), the era of *The Last of Udege* was entitled "monumental

realism” (*monumental`nyi realizm*). *Figurative realism* is characterized by lyricism, pathetic expressions and romantic accents in tragic episodes and in complicated situations of moral nature. On the other hand, *monumental realism* is preoccupied with the amplitude of revolutionary events. Both the emotional tone of the report and the pathetic-lyrical notes are part of the mentioned stage and part of the Socialist Realism, characterized by stylistic and formal diversity, as Fadeyev noted (Fadeyev, 1960 (5), p. 236). In this way, the dogmatic attempts to standardize the method of Socialist Realism were qualified by the author as “mockery over socialism and realism altogether.” (*Ibidem*)

The attempt to establish the dominant style of the novel *The Young Guard* was among the Soviet critics’ preoccupations: it was considered mostly romantic or mostly realistic, or combining both elements so that the phrase “multi-stylistic” (*mnogostil`nyi*) (Barsuk, 1956, p. 471-498) emerged. We share Bushmin’s position concerning the realistic style of the novel with romantic elements (see also Şoptoreanu, 1987, p. 142, p. 144); we have to add, however, that these romantic elements are sometimes invasive, as a result of an incomplete creative synthesis (partly due to the ideological intrusion in the rewriting process). However, Bushmin’s considerations highlight that “romanticism of life is expressed in the novel in a realistic form; it is not added to the realism, but it became an inner, organic element, transforming it into an exalted realism of a higher tone, significant due to its emotional nuance.” (Bushmin, 1983, p. 203) We may notice the desire of Soviet criticism to minimize the weight of romantic elements in favor of the dogmatic realism as a mandatory component of the Socialist Realism. Whatever the case, we may adhere to the voice of some Soviet critics that supported the idea of a “romantic form of expressing the truth of life” (Metchenko & Petrov, 1983, p. 178), difficult to obtain in prose, but with forerunners in the Russian literature like A. Pushkin, N. Gogol, M. Lermontov and M. Gorky (Fadeyev, 1960(5), p. 525).

The synthetic and complex novel *The Young Guard* is part of author’s poetics and stylistics development and it became an important part of the Socialist Realism canon. The synthetic intermission of the stylistic plans differentiates *The Young Guard* from other novels, together with the coexistence of objectivity and subjectivity of the narrative voice, emotional and lyrical notes, and documentary reports. The interweaving of heroic-tragic aspects and idealizing ones in the character construction determined the author to revise his ideas regarding the Socialist Realism so that he became an ardent supporter of the stylistic diversity.

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