OLGA GRADINARU
"Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

DEATH REPRESENTATION IN THE SOVIET NOVEL OF WORLD WAR 2

Abstract: Abstract. The main focus of the paper is to present briefly the issue of representation in literature and its specificity in the context of the social, political and ideological mutations of the newly established Soviet State and of World War 2. While the principles and the main stages of the Socialist Realism are highlighted, they are also wrapped in and intermingled with various aspects of war ideology regarding the Soviet war prose. The analyzed Soviet novel is A. Fadeyev's The Young Guard as a representative of the romantic perspective on war and on heroism, supporting the idea of daily heroic deed and heroic death in the established tradition of Soviet reality depiction.

Keywords: Death Representation, Soviet Novel, World War 2, War Ideology, Socialist Realism.

1. Brief Introduction

The analysis of the Soviet literature belonging to Socialist Realism must start with the fact that culture was considered submissive to the political ideology of the Soviet State, having to mirror the new social ideals, realities and desires of the propaganda. On the other hand, this ideological intrusion is far from being a one way street phenomenon, as most ideological, political ideas come from Russian *intelligentsia*[1]. Art and literature were subject to censorship with the duty to guard the proper reflection of the Soviet reality or, in other words, to dictate the desirable politicized ideological reality in order to serve to the main aim – educating the masses for becoming great devoted citizens in a context of large social, political and national changes. The same changes contributed to the generative process of this Soviet type of literature, with a different function than in the West, starting with the generation of the middle of the 19th century, when there was a tendency of transforming literature into the umbrella under which the debate on Russia's way forward could continue. We may say that the Socialist Realism offers a twisted representation, *mimesis* in the traditional sense or in some subversive ways of writing a double-twisted representation – the necessary means of Soviet representation in order to seem part of the Socialist Realism and the veiled depiction of some forbidden Soviet realities, the result being the so-called double "effect of reality" of which A. Compagnon[2] spoke, consisting in the difficulty of judging the authors' membership to Social Realism.

The influence of Socialist Realism, whether we define it as a genre, style, school or method[3], is to be noticed in the Soviet prose of the World War 2 regarding the style of writing, the character construction and their type, as well as the heroic tone with ideological underlying notes. The theme of the World War 2 proves to be a prolific one for the Soviet literature, surpassing the literary obsession of the revolution motif or of the 1st World War, gaining amplitude due to the hallmark of the communist ideology, with the objective to gather

[1] Cf. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Inidana University Press, Bloomington and Indianopolis, 2000, pp. 6-9.
[22] Antoine Compagnon, *Demonul teoriei*. Editura Echinox, Cluj, 2007.
[3] Geoffrey Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism. Soviet fiction since "Ivan Denisovich"*. Holmes&Meier Publishers Inc., New York, 1980, p. 3

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

and keep together many nations and ethnic groups under the so-called Soviet identity[4] and under the common fight against the evil of almost mythical proportions called "fascism". World War 2 gets the title of "The Great Fatherland War", reaching and adjusting the level of patriotism of every Soviet citizen through propagation of some literary motives of moral origins and aligning them somehow to ideals and ethical norms previously approached not only by the writers of the Russian classical literature, but also by those from the dawns of the Soviet Union.

Apart from the already existing subsidiary ideology of the Soviet literature, whose main aim was to educate the masses, the war period triggers some patterns and ideological models of war, with the role to mediate and construct the identities of the Self and the Enemy, as Nico Carpentier[5] assumes from Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory[6]. The violence itself is subject to other rules and principles, suspending the moral laws and principles of the peacetime, structured by a set of discourses based on a series of oppositions – good/evil, just/unjust, rational/irrational, guilty/innocent, civilized/uncivilized and specific to the Soviet case - attackers/defenders, old world/new world, old man/new man, communist/fascist, bourgeoisie/proletariat. In the case of the general signifiers, named "floating signifiers" by Laclau and Mouffe[7], these oppositions have no fixed meaning, being filled with the necessary meaning before, during and after the conflict by the parties involved. The construction or the reconstruction of the Self during the war is accompanied by the (re)construction of the Enemy, creating thus a new temporary dichotomy. The specific Soviet case presents new oppositions for the context of the World War 2 based on the stability and rigidity of the ideological model of war. The transformation of the enemy supposes the exclusion from the political community and the goal of his destruction on a basis of discourses that articulate the identities of the involved parties. There is a third discursive position – the Victim – that may be an abstract notion or it may become a concrete one – a people, a minority, a state. In the case of the Soviet Union the self becomes conflated with the victim, which is intrinsically linked to the identity of the self and the enemy[8].

Probably it is not random that the World War 2 subject became the most prolific of all other literary motives in the Soviet Union if we take into account the fact that not only the enemy is structured during the conflict, but also the identity of the self involved in the war is crystallized. The threat to the so-called "our own" identity contributes to the emphasis and solid formation of the Soviet self, pointing out the importance of the Fatherland and serving as a unifying factor of all ethnic groups and nationalities into one body that responds to the exterior threatening factor – the enemy.

All these mutations of the self came into the context of the revolutionary ideas best expressed in N. Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* and then developed by V. I. Lenin and I. V. Stalin in building and maintaining a system dedicated to socialist ideology and progress toward communism[9]. As the Soviet prose of the Great Fatherland War appeared

[4] G. Hosking admits the difficulty of writing about the Russians and the Soviet Union, as even until 1932 Russian identity was not acknowledged in official documents. The stakes were placed on the fluidization of the concept of nationality and the shift from each national identity to one and only Soviet identity. See G. Hosking, *Rulers and Victims. The Russians in the Soviet Union*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2006.

[5] N. Carpentier, "The Ideological Model of War: Discursive Mediations of the Self and the Enemy". In: *Creating destruction: constructing images of violence and genocide*. 1. vyd. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011.

[6] E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*, London: Verso, 1985.

[7] E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *op. cit*., p. 112-113.

[8] Nico Carpentier presents a model that includes Supporters and Passive Allies, as well as Bystanders with no direct involvement in the war (p. 26).

[9] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley, 1995.

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

and developed in the Stalinist era, some aspects have to be highlighted in order to place A. Fadeyev's novel in the historical, political and socio-cultural context.

The Stalinist era represents a shift in the mid-1930s that has generated various and in some cases opposite perspectives. To remind some of them we use the synthesis offered by David L. Hoffman[10] – Trotsky's and Timasheff's opinion that Stalinism was the betrayal of socialism and a return to bourgeois patterns and bureaucratic despotism, Robert Tuckler and his regard on the archaization elements of the Stalinist era, Moshe Levin's ideas on Stalin's patriarchal authoritarianism. Even if these perspectives offer an enriched understanding of Soviet context, there are enough solid arguments that the fundamental elements of Soviet socialism remained the same, being maintained during Stalin's ruling and even strengthened. The creation of the New Soviet Person, ideally portrayed by N. Chernyshevsky in his famous novel, was still the main focus of Stalinist leadership and values aiming to transform human nature itself, providing the world the new human status in the human evolution - "Homo Sovieticus".

Death doesn't occupy a prominent place in the Soviet literature of the first post-war years, the accent being on the heroic deed[11] but in most of the cases it had been presented with a heroic halo and mainly representing the authors' personal accounts of their impending death. The representation of death gained substance and credibility only with the prose of the second wave of prose writers during the '50s - writers who were actually involved in the battle (*frontoviki*). The heroic death during the first years of the Soviet prose of World War 2 seems to be a romantic form with idealized content, a propagated literary device under the control of socialist propaganda. After the "Thaw" (*Ottepel`*) in 1954 marked by Hruschiov's period and named after Ilja Ehrenburg's novel, the Soviet writers became preoccupied by plausible principles of the war representation and character construction, and began writing about battlefield harsh scenes and death as a daily reality (the phenomenon is known as the "truth of the battle| – *okopnaja pravda*). The war atrocities and the irrational death represent the focus of the Soviet writers even after the fall of the Soviet Union, uncovering the heroic ideological clothes of the Soviet soldiers' death. One relevant example of the post-Soviet prose of World War 2 is Viktor Astafyev's novel *Jolly Soldier* (*Veselyj soldat*, 1998), portraying the horrors of the Soviet Army met with adverse reactions by both writers and critics, fact that may have brought about his heart failure. On the other hand, the Soviet writers were preoccupied with stating the exceptional nature of the Soviet soldier in an attempt to offer an alternative to the French existentialism and its death absurdity or other European literary trends with different perspectives on death.

2. Fadeyev's *The Young Guard*

Considered by Gorky the loyal exponent of Socialist Realism, Fadeyev stressed the aspect that "Socialist Realism is not a dogma of creativity"[12] or a "measure of determining the assets and flaws of a literary work and it is neither a recipe of creating artistic works"[13]. In A. Fadeyev's opinion, Socialist Realism was a "profound conception of life, the result of the Soviet artists' work of various individualities and distinct creativity"[14], adding that "it is unacceptable to bring to light and to exalt works only for the 'good idea' or 'revolutionary

[10] David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values. The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London, 2003.
[11] See more on the Soviet heroic deed in my article "The Soviet Hero-Making Process. Aspects of the Soviet Heroism" in *Brukenthalia 3*, Sibiu, January 2014.

[12] *Pisatel`-boets* [*The Writer-Fighter*] by S. Rîbak in A. Fadeev, *Molodaia gvardia*, Literatura artistică, Chişinău, 1977, p. 650.
[13] Ibidem, p. 651.
[14] Ibidem, p. 651.

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

theme'"[15]. The novel *The Young Guard* (1946) continues the lyrical and heroic tone and cadence impregnated by the Bolshevik convictions of the author and party member A. Fadeev. Previous Fadeyev's novels – *The Flood* (1924), *The Rout* (1927), *The Last of the Udege* (1930-1941) – were of less literary value (although *The Rout* is considered a masterpiece by the Soviet literary critics) than *The Young Guard* that had a special destiny, as the author had to rewrite it due to the harsh critique received immediately after the first edition of the book (1946). The reason for such critique was the fact that the subject itself meant to be the representation of the young Soviet citizens' life and fight in Krasnodon during the German occupation in 1943. Stalin himself criticized the novel, as it hadn't revealed much of the ruling and orienting role of the Communist party. Even if Fadeyev pointed out that he was not writing the real history, but a novel that permits and even supposes an artistic creativity[16], he rewrote the novel and the second revised and so-called improved edition of the book appeared in 1951. The book was included in the Soviet educational program and every pupil knew well the subject and the characters. The film adaptation appeared in 1948 (and some episodes were edited in 1964) after the first edition of the book, directed by Sergei Gerasimov[17].

The Socialist Realism, as the proper example of political intrusion in the literary realm, encouraged the inspiration from some real cases, adjusting and depicting the hero according to ideological standards, taking over a popular symbol, an existing hero and transforming him into a symbol for propaganda goal. Elena Seneavskaia is the one to point out the fact that there was a true phenomenon of "mass copying" of literary characters inspired from real life, reminding of the "mass edition of the example of heroic deed"[18]. In this way the function of generating myths of ideological and communist type was supplied by respecting the ideological and educational role of literature, choosing and popularizing heroes and heroic cases already "canonized" by the social conscience. The transformation of real events into symbols was a known process in other Russian wars, but the Communist regime brought this to another level, contributing in a controlled manner to reaffirmation of the social examples of heroism in the people's conscience and to the crystallization of the identity and mentality of the newly formed Soviet Union State. From this point of view, rewriting the novel *The Young Guard* with new chapters, new characters and new ideas was of global importance for resuscitating and maintaining the interest for the party role and communist mentors in the underground battle against the fascist attackers. Rewriting the novel was considered a deed of great civic responsibility, which demonstrated the author's noble-mindedness and his dedication toward life beyond the fictionalization of events and separate conceiving through political or socialist and patriotic view of literature toward reality. From this perspective the second edition is regarded as a necessity, not as an arbitrary and coercive event[19], being the result of the collaboration between the author and the readers and the result of author's receptivity toward the requests of historicity and Soviet social interests, the party conscience and loyalty toward the desirable truth.

---

[15] Ibidem, p. 653.
[16] Ibidem, p. 665.
[17] There was an attempt to film another version of the events in Krasnodon, but the Communist Party didn't approve it. Among the arguments was the fact that the spectators were used to the existing actors for the beloved characters, and another version would bring confusion and discontent of the masses. A post-Soviet TV series was filmed in 2006 named *The Last Confession* directed by S. Lialin, pretending not to be entirely inspired by the novel and adding some aspects that would have been rejected by the Soviet censorship.
[18] E. S. Seneavskaia, *Psikhologija voiny v XX veke: istoricheskij opyt Rossii*. Rosspen, Moskva, 1999.
[19] On more details about the differences between the 1st and 2nd editions of the novel see F. M. Blagovescenski, *Tvorceskaja istoria romana „Molodaja gvardija"* [*The Creative History of the Novel „The Young Guard"*]. Ufa, 1957.

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

Concerning the thanatological perspective on Fadeyev's novel, we should point out the fact that the genesis of the novel is the true story of Krasnodon's young inhabitants fighting the fascist occupation and their death (only few had escaped) just a few days before the Soviet liberation. The true inspiring stories of teenagers' heroic death and their underground activities couldn't have been avoided by the Soviet propagandistic writing machine. Fadeyev had full access to documents and spent time in Krasnodon and its surrounding, interviewing the survivors and teenagers' relatives for getting the entire picture. Pragmatically speaking, heroes' death and their relatives' pain couldn't pass unnoticed and fructified for the great cause of popularization and contribution to the formation of the Soviet patriotic conscience. After the filling in the second edition of the ruling socialist void (reproached in the first edition of the novel) and bringing all age categories involved in the anti-fascist battle, the author could rest. This case of desirable historical novel inspired by real events and transformed by the requests of the Stalinist censorship organs may be considered typical for the pattern of Soviet war representation until the cultural shift after Stalin's death (the Thaw) – between reality and representation the ideological hand-glass disguised in pedagogical clothes interposes, generating standardized characters and neglecting the writer's artistic liberty of expression.

The first pages of the novel situate the entire plot development under the symbolic sign of presenting the two involved parties in the war – Soviet and fascist – at mythical dimensions. The life of the Soviet constructors of "golden future" is described in light and peaceful terms, while the invasion and the imminence of death combines images and articles from the dark register. The first volume of the novel depicts the characters' various reactions towards danger and imminence of death, be it the case of Valia Borts who continues peacefully her reading of Stevenson in the garden, or of Ulyana and Lyuba who search for their role in the new adverse and challenging war context. The second volume represents the teenagers' activity and involvement in the struggle of resistance against the German occupants, describing the methods and events of this struggle, as well as the cooperation between generations. While the first part of the narration lingers upon the interior conditions and crystallization of the patriotic conscience and responsibility toward Fatherland, depicting stages in relationships, the second part of the novel is replete with events, actions and an alert rhythm, as well as a lyrical and heroic tone with patriotic accents.

The Soviet critics of those days spoke of the heroic characters of the book as being the typical representatives of the Soviet youth, especially after undergoing an ideological "make-up" specific to the character construction of the Socialist Realism. The positive hero traces its origins to Chernyshevsky's novel and the creation of a new type of character in new social, cultural and political circumstances, receiving new traits and characteristics during the revolutionary years and their political, as well as literary writings. As Katerina Clark explains, the literary hero was created according to an "alphabet"[20] in the construction of the positive character offered by Maxim Gorky in his novel *Mama*. Pavel Vlasov, the main character of Gorky's novel represents the standard version of the positive character of the '30s, as well as the inspiration for later characters of the Socialist Realism.

The novelty of Fadeyev's work consists in the representation of a group's life and death, although the group is formed mainly by indistinctive and pale individualities that reaching the deadly final become acting in unity as an entire body. Another specific trait of this novel is bringing the characters to the level of symbols.

The first scene where the main characters face death is in the 5th chapter while attempting to escape from the town. The 11th chapter presents the death of a refugee truck

[20] Katerina Clark, *Socialist Realism in Soviet Literature* in *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*. Edited by Neil Cornwell. Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Chicago, Illinois, 1998, p. 58

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

with orphan children and the driver, Shevtsov, Lyuba's father (of whose death she finds out in the chapter 26). The refugees are attacked by dive bombers and the memorable scene is of a little boy crying after being hurt and running in circles with his eyes getting out of the orbits and then dying. Ulya is one of the main characters and one of the witnesses of the children's death and their attendants, trying to hold the dying boy and then crying in despair. The scenes of falling bombs and the mentioned deaths don't occupy much of the narration and the writing at the 3rd person of an omniscient narrator may be a serious obstacle in representing the characters' inner conflicts or condition. As for the descriptions, they are short, with few metaphors or no metaphors at all, as if being a brief newspaper article stating the latest events. The scene of the death of innocent children and Ulya's reaction, as well as her comfort offered by Oleg Koshevoi seems to be the key scene in becoming fully aware of the German occupation and probably the necessity of acting somehow, but the narrator refers only to Ulya's awareness among many Oleg's sayings to one word – "Germans" – the cause of their misery and children's innocent death, the key word of the entire situation and the plot for the appearance of the Young Guard – the organization of young Komsomolists fighting against the German occupiers. The fight for life began in that moment of the first encounter of the enemy on the Donetsk's steppe[21].

The 12th chapter contains a scene where Sergei Tyulenin returns home after several days of fighting the Germans and witnessing the death of fifteen Soviet soldiers. The colonel Somov before dying asked the brave teenager to reach for his relatives and transmit the fact that he had died of an honorable death. Sergei tells his sister the events and the fact that he killed two Germans, maybe more with a sense of hatred, declaring that he would kill them everywhere. His sister's frightened response that he would perish has no effect on the young boy: "It's better to perish then to lick their boots or to live with no aim"[22]. He is the one to attack the German's house at night, alone and to get involved in the Young Guard organization for other underground activities against the occupiers. Sergei refuses to embrace the status of the victim and speaks about the necessity of fighting.

The construction of the self in relationship with the enemy in case of Ulya Gromova, Oleg Koshevoi, and Sergei Tyulenin has its core in the bombing scene of the peaceful refugees or in the case of a fighting scene with several details that the reader finds out in an indirect manner – from Sergei's story to his sister. The objectification of the enemy and the investment with floating meanings is obvious from these scenes – the enemy attacks the peaceful refugees and even the innocent orphans (being thus cruel, coward, heartless), and then especially in the scenes of occupying Krasnodon in the chapters 17-18 the enemy is depicted in disgusting ways: getting drunk, urinating in public, washing themselves naked in public, shooting brutally all the wounded soldiers in the hospital and even the doctor who protested to this inhuman behavior (being brutal, inhuman, beastly, which is a specific manner of depicting the enemy[23], while the young Soviet characters are idealized and described in a romantic manner[24]). Death is the trigger of investing the floating meanings to the enemy and contributing to the definition and consolidation of the self as the opposite.

---

[21] *Istoria russkoi sovetskoi literatury 40-80 gody* [*History of the Russian Soviet Literature of the 40s-80s*], eds. Prof. A. I. Metchenko and prof. S. M. Petrov. 2nd corrected edition. Moskva, Prosvescenie, 1983, p. 177.

[22] A. Fadeyev, *Tânăra gardă*. Chişinău, Cartea moldovenească, 1973, p. 126

[23] *Istoria...*, p. 176-177.

[24] On the idealization matter see V. Ozerov, *Problema polozhitel`nogo geroja* [*The Problem of the Positive Hero*] în *Problemy sotsialisticheskogo realizma*. *Sbornik statei* [*Problems of the Socialist Realism. Volume of Articles*]. Moskva, Sovetskii pisatel`, 1961, pag. 507; Cf. A. Buşmin, *Aleksandr Fadeyev. Cherty tvorcheskoj individual`nosti*. Izdanie vtoroe, dopolnennoe [*Aleksandr Fadeev. The Traits of the Creative Individuality*. 2nd edition]. Leningrad, Khudozhestvennaja literatura, Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1983, p. 200-204 and on the style of the novel see A. I. Barsuk, *Iz nabljudenij nad stilem «Molodoj gvardii» A. Fadeeva* în *Vorposy sovetskoj literatury*. ed. 3, Moskva-Leningrad, 1956, p. 490-497.

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

Returning to the 26th chapter, we must describe the scene when Valko tells the news of Shevtsov's death to his wife and daughter Lyuba. Valko's coming at night, hiding and trying to establish a connection with young fighters against the fascists contributes to the increasing dramatic atmosphere when announcing Shevtsov's death. Lyuba, even afflicted by her father's death, starts her underground activity, being the link between the young men of Krasnodon and the elder leaders from Voroshilovgrad, aspects that fill the floating meaning of the self with other new concepts – stoic, brave, bold despite the grieve in the heart and the imminence of death in the context of arrests in the town.

Besides the mentioned victim category by Nico Carpentier (together with the self and the enemy) in the war ideology scheme, we would like to add another secondary category – the traitor, which is well represented in the Soviet war prose. This novel is not an exception and one traitor is Ignat Fomin who betrayed Matvei Shulga, but his betraying history goes to the revolutionary years when he betrayed his brothers to get their land. When collectivization came, he was sentenced to exile, but he managed to get forge documents after killing the chairman of the village and the secretary of the village party committee. These biographical details of the 28th chapter are meant to differentiate the Soviet men with patriotic views and the traitors before the beginning of the war. Although the traitor may be invested with the same floating meanings as the enemy, he is the disguised enemy of the Soviet state and the negative terms characterize the traitor no matter what are the events. The war is just the trigger and the suitable context for a traitor to come to surface and to show his real face.

Valya Filatova may be considered a version of the traitor who prefers to go working in Germany than to think about her duty as a Soviet citizen. She is considered weak by Ulya, and even if Ulya tries to settle a place for Valya to hide, the latter is afraid for her mother and for her uncertain situation. Lena, Oleg's girlfriend is also a female traitor, preferring to entertain the German soldiers for food than to engage in an underground fight or even consider other options. These examples are clearly situated as antitheses to the self, although being a peripheral category between the self and the enemy. We may name this category the "internal enemy", even if the people from this category consider themselves victims sometimes, or the "disrupted self", having the apparent floating meanings of the self, but actually being characterized profoundly by the enemy's opposite traits. Facing death triggers the consolidation of identity or its disruption, causing the displacement of the involved identity in either of the mentioned categories.

Lilya Ivanikhina is a strong representative of the self category and her return from a Natzi prison camp in the 30th chapter represents a pretext for investing more opposing terms to the superlatives of the self. Lilya told her story, mentioning: the soldiers' death in the battle, her beloved's death (shot in the prison camp, because he was exhausted and was of no use). The description is brief, with no details, the accent being of Lilya's strong character and will, as well as her and others prisoners' determination to murder the matron and to escape, returning home by foot all across Poland and Ukraine. The death of the enemy is reported briefly, while the context of Lilya's comrades in the battlefield and in the prison camp is filled with mercy, compassion and lyrical tones.

The end of part one (the 35th chapter) is the execution of Soviet prisoners with the underground leaders Valko, Shulga and even a mother with an infant. The previous chapters depict Valko and Shulga's brave character while being beaten and refusing to offer information about the underground organization. After realizing that death is their only outcome, both leaders evoke with patriotism the challenges the brave Soviet people had to overcome since 1917. The condemned prisoners were forced to jump in a pit and they were buried alive while singing *Internationale*. Shulga, just before being buried shouted: "My magnificent comrades! Eternal remembrance and glory be yours! Long live the Communist Party, which has shown the people the road to justice!", while Valko shouted "Death to

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

enemies!" This type of cruel death and the presence of a mother with a sleeping infant in her arms among the victims are some other reasons for solidifying the identity of the enemy. As for the victim category, the dying prisoners act with dignity as if being victorious. The leaders were singing a revolutionary song while dying, which may be considered a defining aspect to deconstruct the victim category while referring to Soviet self - a popular narrative and discursive strategy of the Socialist Realism.

Probably in the same intermediate category as the traitor may be placed the category of the spy - the case of Lyuba Shevtsova. She is the link between the organization Young Guard and the leaders from Voroshilovgrad, posing in a popular artist and flirting with the German soldiers in order to obtain useful information. The scene from the first chapter of the second part of the novel when Lyuba bursts into a random apartment in Voroshilovgrad accompanied by a German officer is a key one in the inhabitants' perception of the apparent traitor. The definition and the crystallization of the spy category is twisted and complicated, as it is situated as a subgroup of the self with its defining floating meanings, but it has the appearance of the traitor, of the enemy. A strong psyche is the defining trait of the spy, being torn between the consistent self content and the apparent characteristics of the traitor, playing this role and being partially identified with the enemy. Protsenko is from the same category as Lyuba – he played the role of a collaborator for a while and then had to run away, reestablishing his underground mission and relations.

As for the traitor category, Evgeny Stakhovich is the best representative in this novel, even if playing an important role in the organization. Protsenko is the one to warn Lyuba and the members of the Young Guard concerning Stakhovich's suspicious disappearance as a member of a partisan detachment. However, being tortured for information, Stakhovich was the first and the last to be broken, betraying almost all the members of the organization. Other two girls, being afraid of torture and death provided the missing information so that almost all the members were arrested and tortured.

The most important members of the Young Guard decided to hang publicly the traitor Ignat Fomin, the traitor *par excellence*. Sergei Tyulenin proposed this, saying that he would kill Fomin either way. The scene of the traitor's death is depicted in the 41st chapter. The preparation for Fomin's murder occupy more space than the hanging itself, as the young men considered necessary to let the traitor know that he is hang after being judged "in the name of the people". The members of the Young Guard thought of themselves as lawful representatives of the people, having the moral and national right to decide the traitors' destiny, assuming the right and authority to put to death or to let live. This so-called hasty trial of the traitor just moments before hanging him in a public place and leaving a note about this deed may be considered a moral vent, a justification in harsh times of war. The involvement in this execution of a small boy Radik Yurkin is a surprising fact, giving information about the capacity of the construction of the self even in the case of children at war. In this scene Sergei is represented metaphorically as the revenger for all Fomin's deeds, crimes and betrayals – a revenger in bare foot (as Sergei Tyulenin used to walk) with a face of an almost adult but still boy. The narrator explains Fomin's death before the execution as a spiritual death with an appearance of living and moving, an existence driven by wickedness and not only by craving for wealth, surviving, hatred. And this wickedness covered not only Fomin's life, but also all the people including the Germans and his own neighbours. Ignat Fomin is represented as a "walking dead, a living dead", whose masks had fallen during this war and this difficult context, whose actual death is represented in a windy and rainy autumn evening. It is significant that among the last things he saw was the gray unclear sky in the fog and the prepared string, realizing his imminent death and starting to move on the ground as a long worm and listening to the verdict. The description of Fomin's execution offers details on how he was grabbed, immobilized, bound, put on earth to wait, his thoughts while

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

recognizing the involved people in this action. Compared to the German woman's murder in the Natzi camp told by Lilya and to other deaths presented through characters' retelling, the traitor's execution occupies more space than in the case of Shulga and other prisoners' execution. No brief informative style, no information through the eyes of the witnesses – the full report of the narrator. Radik's peaceful reaction after the execution and his words about sleeping necessity are also shattering, especially after taking a life and playing the judge. As for Sergey, the narrator takes time to explain his feeling of satisfaction and the ardent desire of revenge that consummated his soul since he had found out about Fomin's betrayal.

The Young Guard activities are only mentioned – attacking officers' cars, killing tank drivers, straggling soldiers, robbing food, guns and petrol, putting red flags on buildings and removing the fascist flags, destroying the lists of the citizens that were to be sent to labor in Germany, opening a club of amateur variety show to distract Germans' attention from the underground activities. Killing the enemy are narrative events just like the others, showing the ignorance of the human nature when it comes to the enemy's life.

As for the torture scenes of the members of the organization, the narrator lingers upon them with details, pointing out the difference between Stakhovich and the other members. Beaten up, dismembered, eyes gouged out, breasts cut off, unable to walk, they are all transported to a mine pit while they were singing *Internationale*, encouraged by the fact that the Soviet army was close. The Germans didn't bother to kill them, covering them with coal wagons in the mine pit. Again, no details, no metaphors - only the brief notice that the groans from the mine had been heard for several days. The penultimate chapter is written as if the initial lyrical and patriotic thoughts were to compensate the lack of any comments, while mentioning the last events and the characters' death. The narrator addresses directly the reader in the beginning of the chapter, preparing the reader for the tragic end of the novel.

Oleg Koshevoi, the commissar of the organization was captured outside the town and was tortured like other members of the organization, revealing nothing and suffering together with other adult leaders of the Party underground organization. He was shot and buried in a common pit. What distinguishes the construction of character Oleg Koshevoi is the accent on his special relationship with his mother, fact that is consistently mentioned even in his last days before facing death.

Lyuba Shevtsova was tortured seven days longer, because she was also involved in a secret wire transmission of information. Being led to the place of death, she began to sing her favorite song and refused to kneel, receiving the shot in her face. The floating meanings of the self are to be filled with courageous, brave, resistant, and other terms from the same lexical category, as no epithets and metaphors are present in the novel; they are to be completed by the reader in order to learn about the great character of the so-called "Soviet people" fighting the enemy.

The novel closes with the mere remembrance of the most important characters involved in the underground activity and either their death or their involvement in bringing victory and liberation of the occupied territories. The bodies of the Young Guards (*molodogvardeitzy*) are retrieved from the mines and buried in two common graves in the park with temporary wooden obelisks and the inscription of the heroes' names. The last lines are the names of the real people involved in the represented events.

To conclude with, in the majority of the analyzed cases, death is a present absence, as it is told by the characters, briefly mentioned by the witnesses of hardships and cruel scenes of the war. The most impressive details are given in the case of the traitor Fomin's execution, leaving some space for a weak metaphysics of death in a Soviet socialist godless manner. In fact, the Party and the Socialist hymn gained the religious role, and the last confession is replaced by the remembrance of the Soviet hardships since 1917 (in Shulga and Valko's case), while the teenagers recite parts of Lermontov's *Demon* or live with the hope of Soviet

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

liberation. The members of the organization seem to have endless interior resources while facing the enemy in the torture room and they are not preoccupied with death thoughts. It seems that even if the ending is obvious and the death is near, the narrator is not focused on a poetics of death, but of heroism and stoicism, of offering a complete picture of educational purposes with patriotic tones. Compared to Ginzburg's work *The Abyss* of a similar nature (depicting real events and persons)[25], where the psychological triggers of fear facing imminent death are well represented, Fadeyev's narrative death is pale, as if the context is not of war, but of peaceful times.

Bibliography:

Barsuk, A. I., *Iz nabljudenij nad stilem «Molodoj gvardii» A. Fadeeva* in *Vorposy sovetskoj literatury*. ed. 3, Moskva-Leningrad, 1956.

Buşmin, A., *Aleksandr Fadeyev. Cherty tvorcheskoj individual`nosti*. Izdanie vtoroe, dopolnennoe [*Aleksandr Fadeev. The Traits of the Creative Individuality*. 2nd edition]. Leningrad, Khudozhestvennaja literatura, Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1983.

Blagovescenski, F. M., *Tvorceskaja istoria romana „Molodaja gvardija"* [*The Creative History of the Novel The Young Guard*]. Ufa, 1957.

Carpentier, Nico, "The Ideological Model of War: Discursive Mediations of the Self and the Enemy". In: *Creating destruction: constructing images of violence and genocide*. 1. vyd. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011.

Clark, Katerina, *Socialist Realism in Soviet Literature* in *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*. Edited by Neil Cornwell. Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Chicago, Illinois, 1998.

Clark, Katerina, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Inidana University Press, Bloomington and Indianopolis, 2000.

Compagnon, A., *Demonul teoriei*. Editura Echinox, Cluj, 2007.

Fadeyev, A., *Tânăra gardă*. Chişinău, Cartea moldovenească, 1973.

Gradinaru, Olga, "The Profile of the Traitor in L. V. Ginzburgs's *The Abyss*" in Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Brasov, Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies. Volume 4 (53) No. 1, 2011.

Gradinaru, Olga, "The Soviet Hero-Making Process. Aspects of the Soviet Heroism" in *Brukenthalia 3*, Sibiu, January 2014.

Hoffmann, David L., *Stalinist Values. The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London, 2003.

Hosking, Geoffrey, *Beyond Socialist Realism. Soviet fiction since "Ivan Denisovich"*. Holmes&Meier Publishers Inc., New York, 1980.

Hosking, Geoffrey, *Rulers and Victims. The Russians in the Soviet Union*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2006.

Istoria russkoi sovetskoi literatury 40-80 gody [*History of the Russian Soviet Literature of the 40s-80s*], ed. Prof. A. I. Metchenko and prof. S. M. Petrov. 2nd corrected edition. Moskva, Prosvescenie, 1983.

Kotkin, Stephen, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley, 1995.

Laclau, E. and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*, London: Verso, 1985.

Ozerov, V., *Problema polozhitel`nogo geroja* [*The Problem of the Positive Hero*] în *Problemy sotsialisticheskogo realizma. Sbornik statei* [*Problems of the Socialist Realism. Volume of Articles*]. Moskva, Sovetskii pisatel`, 1961.

[25] See my article "The Profile of the Traitor in L. V. Ginzburgs's *The Abyss*" in Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Brasov, Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies. Volume 4 (53) No. 1, 2011

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)

Rîbak, S., *Pisatel`-boets* [*The Writer-Fighter*], in A. Fadeev, *Molodaia gvardia,* Literatura artistică, Chişinău, 1977.

Seneavskaia, E. S., *Psikhologija voiny v XX veke: istoricheskij opyt Rossii* [*The Psychology of War in the 20th Century: the Historical Experience of Russia*]. Rosspen, Moskva, 1999.

BDD-A21785 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:38:50 UTC)