

Revisiting Great Soviet Symbols of World War II. The Young Guard Now and Then

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Abstract: The anti-fascist organization The Young Guard (*Molodaya gvardia*) in a Ukrainian town is the main focus of the present analysis, offering a glimpse into the Soviet myth-making and hero-making cycle. The article unveils the ideological and cultural patterns during the Soviet period, with a focus on A. Fadeyev's novel and on the Soviet and post-Soviet film adaptations. The case of The Young Guard organization generated a frenzy of artistic representations throughout the Soviet Union, with various degrees of demystification during the post-Soviet period. The paper highlights the differences in describing and perceiving the heroic/heroicized death in various historical periods. Soviet propaganda traits and Socialist Realism patterns are revealed as part of the Soviet cult of World War II, as well as demystifying steps in approaching the myth of The Young Guard in post-Soviet filmic productions.

Keywords: The Young Guard, heroicized death, ideological fictionalization, demystification, cult of Great Patriotic War, Soviet material culture

Introductory Notes

The Soviet myth-making capacity needs no introduction. Homo Sovieticus was raised on the rich mythical soil of the Civil War cult replaced gradually by the Second World War cult.² We are to unveil the path of a symbol of the latter, called "Great Patriotic War" (*Velikaya Otechestvoennaya Voyna*) in Soviet and

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2. Elizabeth Jones Hemenway, "Telling Stories: Russian Political Culture and Tales of Revolution, 1917-1921" (PhD Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999).

post-Soviet period. This is the case of The Young Guard anti-fascist organization, revisited recently by two filmic representations. Our analysis takes into account the existing Soviet mythologized version of events - Alexander Fadeyev's novel and Sergey Gerasimov's film adaptation. The very fact that both these canonical heroicizing productions underwent censorship and editing is telling of the importance of the Soviet myth making process.

The historical events took place in Krasnodon, a town known for its coal mines in the Soviet Ukraine, in 1942, when a group of teenagers decided under dreadful circumstances of fascist occupation to fight back. The group grew bigger under the guidance of Ivan Turkenich (a former soldier of the Red Army who escaped Nazi imprisonment), Viktor Tretyakevich, and Oleg Koshevoy. What started as a chaotic childish game for some teenagers became a resistance force of up to one hundred members (mostly teenagers, aged 14-22). Among the activities of the resistance movement we mention: writing (then publishing) anti-fascist leaflets and real news from the front; constant diversions in occupants' attempts to restart industrial works, and hanging Soviet flags on important buildings of the town to commemorate the October Revolution. Whether or not ampler (and thus heroic) activities were initiated and completed by The Young Guard or they are only A. Fadeyev's fictional products in his novel is not clear. An armed riot was planned in order to restore the Soviet order in the town and to join forces with the nearby troops of the Red Army but the organization was uncovered.

The ambiguity and contradictions between the Soviet official version and recent information from archives presented in both Russian and Ukrainian documentaries may have one rather blunt explanation – that the Soviet version served the propaganda and myth-making machine. Once the film adaptation is released and the second version of Fadeyev's novel is published, they become the official canonical version of Krasnodon events. And this is eagerly pursued to the point that party members pressed the relatives from the small mining town of Krasnodon to support that particular version, imbued with Stalinist myths and motives.

Nevertheless, all sources agree that January 1943 is the period when the activity of The Young Guard stopped due to a wave of arrests. As a result, the official Soviet sources state that 71 Krasnodon prisoners were tortured and thrown alive into the pit of a coal mine on January 15, 16, 31, while others

were caught, tortured and shot in Rovenki, not far from Krasnodon on February 9. According to different sources, about eleven to sixteen members managed to escape. Krasnodon was liberated by the Red Army on February 14, and the bodies of the young fighters were retrieved from the pit and buried on the 1st of March 1943 in the central park of Krasnodon, where a temporary wooden obelisk was placed and then a monument. A museum dedicated to the memory of young guardians was opened in Moscow in 1958, and a memorial complex was built in Krasnodon in 1970, while the basement of the hospital where they were tortured was opened to the public as a museum.

To start with, Fadeyev's novel *The Young Guard* (1946) stirs a lot of public discussions on the accuracy of depicted events from Krasnodon area and on the issue history-fiction. Then harsh critical notes in November-December 1947 invoke the necessity of re-writing the book closer to reality, that is, in a dutiful and laudatory tone when depicting (or, it would be safe to say inventing) the importance of Bolshevik resistance movement in the region. It appears that the young guardians' activity was insufficiently watched, raised and surveyed by the older and wiser generation of the forefathers, previously involved in the Civil War and Russian Revolution.

As a result, Fadeyev adds ten chapters to depict the basic Stalinist motives of picking up the baton and the relationship between "fathers" and "sons"³. The author views the re-writing of the novel as a necessity, a great deed of civil responsibility and not as a coercive act (Blagoveschensky 1957). While the aspects of Soviet literary theory are not the concern of this paper, it is clear how the literary works were written – under the pressure of the censorship, under the strict magnifier of ideology. It would be therefore only just to consider the second edition of the novel (1951) an ideological fictionalization⁴, a mythological historicization of real facts and events to serve better the needs and interests of the Soviet Homeland and Communist Party, the didactic purposes in raising exemplary submissive and self-denying citizens.

3. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 114–25, 226–33.

4. The context and genesis of the two versions of Fadeyev's novel, as well as the concept of ideological fictionalization are explained in Olga Grădinaru, *Războiul sovietic între idealizare și demitizare* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2018), 62–67.

A similar fate awaits Gerasimov's film adaptation⁵ (1948) – the initial film (1947) is severely criticized by Stalin himself and undergoes serious transformation under Andrey Zhdanov's thoughtful supervision (on Stalin's active role as censor of Soviet cinema see Maryamov 1992). The film is edited again in 1964 as a result of meaningful historical changes (several stages of the Thaw⁶ after Stalin's death), removing sequences that were part of Stalin's cult and correcting the name of the traitor⁷.

The '60s and the famous trial against the traitors of The Young Guard is the basis for a documentary story – *Eto bylo v Krasnodone* (*This Happened in Krasnodon*, 1961) - signed by Kim Kostenko. The main merit of this documentary is pointing out that the first commissar of the underground organization was Viktor Tretyakevich and not Oleg Koshevoy (according to Fadeyev's fiction and assumed version in later films and documentaries).

The three Soviet documentaries about The Young Guard resistance are based on Fadeyev's already canonical version of events: *Pamiat* (*Memory*, 1970) and *Po sledam fil'ma Molodaya Gvardia* (*Following the Steps of the Film The Young Guard*, 1988) are reflections of the same official ideologically correct perspective. A series of short documentary biographies of members of the organization is entitled *Zhivite za nas* (*Live for Us*, 1970) – presentations of members through fragments of their diaries or school essays, productions of a didactic nature, meant to influence the younger generations and to raise them in the same patriotic spirit.

Among cultural and material consequences of the Soviet myth making phenomenon, there are over one hundred streets, villages, towns, parks, schools named after the organization and its members (Molodogvardeysk, Molodogvardeyskaya Street, Krasnodonskaya Street etc.). Various monuments were erected throughout the Soviet Union, among which the most prominent: *Klyatva* (*Oath*, 1954) in Krasnodon; the memorial complex *Slava* (*Glory*, 1982) in Rovenki, Lugansk; the alley of young guardians (1952) in Kharkov/Kharkhiv,

5. Script by Sergey Gerasimov, composer Dmitry Shostakovich.

6. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 210–33.

7. Fadeyev admitted that Evgeny Stakhovich was a fictional character, not a real member of The Young Guard; meanwhile the real name of the traitor became known – Genady Pocheptsov – after considering Viktor Tretyakevich the traitor.

and the memorial complex *Nepokorennye* (*Unconquered*, 1982) in Krasnodon. Moreover, Fadeyev's novel is the basis for many theatrical representations, as well as for Andrey Malyshko's Libretto (1947) and Yuliy Meytus' Opera (1947).

The Last Confession (4 episodes, 2006) and *The Young Guard* (12 episodes, 2015) are two Russian post-Soviet TV series, which are relevant examples for the necessity of re-writing the famous Soviet narratives about Krasnodon historical events during the fascist occupation in 1942-1943. Another post-Soviet approach of the thorny Soviet heritage is the Ukrainian animated feature film *Nashi* (*Ours*, 2012)⁸, which may be considered a fine example of history reconstruction in search of relevance for nowadays young generations. The list of post-Soviet documentaries dedicated to this resistance movement is impressive: twelve documentaries on the heroic theme of the Soviet times in a relatively short period (only three Russian films and Ukrainian ones from the Lugansk/Luhansk region, the disputed territory in the hybrid ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict⁹).

Soviet Times: The Path from Popular Hero to National Symbol

In order to explain the nowadays interest and/or fascination of Russians with the young members of a resistance movement during World War II, we are to uncover the mechanisms that made them national heroes and symbols of patriotic duty and sacrifice. The Socialist Realism canon (1934) required the depiction of positive heroes and the merge of two opposite principles: the

8. The Ukrainian animated feature film is directed by A. Sych commemorates 70 years from the Krasnodon events and it is the work of "Fantazery" studio, within the State Academy of Art and Culture, Lugansk. The frame of the cartoon is a discussion between an old man and his grandson about war medals, heroism, and homeland, while the last sequence presents the two of them bringing carnations to the monument of the young guardians in Krasnodon. If the aim of *Ours* is an educational one as a continuation of the Soviet film-making tradition, then it may be considered successful due to its usage of nowadays adjusted language and avoidance of Soviet linguistic clichés and stereotypes.

9. See the analysis of post-Soviet documentaries in Olga Grădinaru, "The Discourse of Russo-Ukrainian Identity in the Luhansk/Lugansk Region," in *Ways of Being in Literary and Cultural Spaces*, ed. Leo Loveday and Emilia Parpalá (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 66–79.

romantic and the realistic, or, as Katerina Clark puts it, combining verisimilitude and mythicization¹⁰. This resulted in a “modal schizophrenia” that reduced the novel to the dichotomy of depicting “what is” (realistic mode) and “what ought to be” (idealistic, utopian, mythic mode)¹¹. The sudden leaps from realistic to mythic mode and the idealized tone are characteristics of Fadeyev’s novel, especially the second edition, where entire chapters of elder generations involved in the resistance were added¹².

The creation of the New Man required a new type of literature, dedicated to the education of the masses, based on Lenin’s vision regarding the close relationship between the party and literature¹³. In order to produce the new literary hero, the positive hero¹⁴, examples are to be found among simple people of the newly established socialist state and embellished, idealized, mythologized and brought back to the people. The Soviet propaganda machine is prolific during the Second World War, using real-life heroes, writing articles, short stories and novels about them in order to raise the morale of those on the front and beyond.

Thus, the propagandistic cycle is complete: from heroes in the popular mentality to positive heroes in literature and back to people’s conscience with the status of symbols, national heroes set as reachable examples. The mass-copying phenomenon has the task of creating a canonized symbol that is to be instilled in the social conscience¹⁵. This mechanism specific to Russian wars of the 20th century is a method of re-affirming the heroic examples in people’s conscience, transforming real traumatic events into heroicized and idealized ones.

10. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 35.

11. Clark, 37.

12. One particular fragment must be mentioned – a lyrical-pathetic dialogue between two Bolshevik leaders just hours before their death penalty (buried alive near the town singing Internationale).

13. Anatoly Lunacharsky, *Stat' i o Literature* (Moskva: Goslitizdat, 1957), 76–90.

14. The positive hero is one of the mandatory traits of Socialist Realism, with its literary tradition going back to the middle of the 19th century, especially Nikolay Chernyshevsky’s novel *What Is to Be Done?* (1863).

15. Elena Senyavskaya, *Psikhologija Voiny v XX Veke: Istoricheskij Opyt Rossii* (Moskva: Rosspen, 1999).

The propagandistic aim of literary works inspired by World War II events goes further than to educate submissive citizens through these transformed, mythologized heroes; the shaping of Soviet national unity and identity was at stake, where heroism and heroic deed play prominent roles (Grădinaru 2013:114-122). As for our specific case, Fadeyev's novel manages not only to build positive heroes as symbols of the Soviet era, but also to depict their death as a symbol – a trait that become part of what Katerina Clark called the “master plot” of the Socialist Realist novel¹⁶. A. Fadeyev's *Molodaya Gvardia* reiterates the defining features of the Soviet novel: the path of initiation from spontaneity (*stikhijnost*) to consciousness (*soznatel'nost*)¹⁷; the relationship “mentor-disciple” as variant of the relationship “father-son”, and the social integration of the hero and his/hers collective identity.

Moreover, death under its various forms brings forth the issue of legitimization. By undergoing the initiation process, the hero dies as an individual and is reborn as a collective figure, as part of the newly found community. This “death-and-transfiguration” pattern may be seen in the way death of the Krasnodon people during the war triggered the beginning of the initiation process for most of the young guardians¹⁸. While most of them die after being brutally beaten and tortured, others survive and serve as living examples. The official funerals and the patriotic speeches at the grave of heroes are memorable scenes from the Soviet film adaptation of Fadeyev's novel. The gross plans of the survivors of The Young Guard organization, the party leader, the relatives, especially Oleg Koshevoy's mother are emotional filmic portraits with didactic role for imprinting the desirable patriotic citizen in the minds of the viewers.

The impact of Gerasimov's film in popular culture was huge, and the success was great partly due to the restrictions of film-making of those times and the fact that there were only five films released in 1948. The film *The Young Guard* perpetuates the same romantic-heroic narrative tone of the novel, with idealistic accents (the usage of light on the beaten up and tortured teenagers

16. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*.

17. Clark, 15–24.

18. Olga Grădinaru, “Death Representation in the Soviet Novel of World War 2,” *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies*, no. 4 (2014): 455–57.

is relevant, and the usage of some lyrical-heroic lines from the novel). It is known that the Stalinist cinematography played the role of an institution in producing history, creating the illusion of historical reflection and reflecting the specificity of the rhetoric of that era¹⁹. The Stalinist war films rebuilt historical events using historicization and museification of war experience, facilitating alienation toward past and traumas of memory²⁰. The main task of the Soviet cinema was to create an alternative, mythologized reality and to educate in the spirit of socialism²¹ so that it was rather a “factory of illusions” than a reflection of social-historical aspects²². Moreover, the Stalinist aesthetics aimed at overcoming the difference between art and life²³.

The great Stalinist myths and motives are present in the film as ideological testimonies: different variants of oaths by the graves of relatives and fellow citizens (as a reiteration of the revolutionary motif); the relationship mentor-disciple; the path from spontaneity and individualism to consciousness and collective effort (especially in the case of Sergey Tyulenin, as well as Oleg Koshevoy). The myth of the “great family” (*bol'shaya sem'ya*) is another relevant example, with its two variances: the “Great Family” as the unity of different peoples within the Soviet Union (and the organization is a great example at a small scale, including Russians, Ukrainians, Moldavians, and Armenians) and the “great family” - the collective as the new community of people with the same ideas, aims and ideals. The category of the traitor deserves a special place in Stalinist culture, as it is closely linked to concepts of “moral failure” and “political distrust”²⁴.

19. Evgeni Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 4.

20. Dobrenko, 7–14.

21. Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 223.

22. Anna Lawton, ed., *The Red Screen. Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

23. Boris Groys, *Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (London, Brooklyn NY: Princeton University Press, 1992), 48–49.

24. David L Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values. The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity (1917-1941)* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 11.

Post-Soviet Films: Oscillation between Perpetuation and Demystification Lyalin's Post-Ideological Fictionalization

The Russian TV series *The Last Confession*²⁵ (*Posledniaia ispoved`*, 2006), directed by Sergey Lyalin, seem to have the task of liberating the war events of Krasnodon from Fadeyev's canonical perspective or grand narrative of collective memory already instilled in the mind of readers and spectators. However, most of the motives and narrative elements, as well as dialogues are recognizable from the novel and the first film adaptation. The beginning of the film with wide views of the Ukrainian steppe with the idyllic and dramatic role and death of wounded Red Army soldiers and of a Soviet commander as the decisive factor for young men to fight back are similar elements.

We have to acknowledge though the fresh vision and the addition of a religious component²⁶ as a defining aspect of the Russian national identity under reconstruction. The fact that the young inhabitants of Krasnodon meet in the ruins of a church outside the town has a symbolical value, along with the soundtrack of old Orthodox songs. Moreover, the young anti-fascist fighters are welcomed, supported in their activity and conducted on their last road by an inhabitant of those church ruins - the tongue tied son of a deceased priest. These significant details are in line with the post-Soviet Russian national revival with its focus on Orthodoxism seen by N. Berdyaev as the basic component of the Russian Idea, the Russian national ideology.²⁷

Among the plot elements, the scene of the arson of the German Labour Exchange lacks the dramatic touch of Gerasimov's film, but its planning by the young guardians is realistic. Moreover, there are no elder leaders, partisans to guide the teenagers, fact that seems impossible for German authorities in their constant search for Bolshevik underground leaders. The matter is discussed by German authorities: one of them prefers the presence of some elder guidance for teenagers and even new military troops than a spontaneous popular resistance.

Furthermore, the Soviet heroism is suggested by German authorities, along with some aspects of Russian and German mentality, which proves to

25. Script by Yury Avetikov and Evgeny Kotov; composer Vladimir Dashkevich. The film was shot in Russia, near Tula and in Ukraine, in a small mining town.

26. See the concept "religious turn" in recent Russian cinema in Berezhnaya 2013.

27. Nikolas Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948).

be an ingenious directorial strategy. In fact, the entire film has only several references to heroism, escaping the trap of situating the discourse in a similar Soviet propagandistic language.

Lyalin's film does not dwell on the notable Stalinist motif of the traitor. The Young Guard's traitor's identity is not revealed, and the act of treason itself is a minor encounter with Gromov, former officer of the White Army, who gives Renatus (head of the German police) a list of young guardians from a teenager. Like in Gerasimov's film, *The Last Confession* has no scenes of torture of the young guardians, just metonymic images (gross-plan of the torture instruments and the disastrous effects on teenagers when sending them on their last journey to the mine pit).

Stalinist specific themes and motives are not present in this cinematographic depiction of The Young Guard activity: spontaneity is Tyulenin's trait throughout the entire film as much as consciousness is Koshevoy's. Besides, the myth of the Soviet unity of nations is not fructified. The tone of the TV series is realistic; there is no pompous funeral scene and no urge for an eternal remembrance. In this way, the core of Stalinist regime and culture – legitimization – is avoided. There is no emphasis on the symbolical value of death and no heroicizing and mythologizing agenda for the younger generation.

Despite some similarities, Gerasimov's and Lyalin's films bear a difference in tone: the theatrical and heroicized Soviet version of events versus the moderate post-Soviet demystified perspective, with mild idealizing accents. However, in the Soviet tradition of rewarding works of patriotic importance, *The Last Confession* is awarded the 1st place at the contest of televised films at the International Festival *Vernoie Serdtse* ("Loyal Heart") in Moscow, 2007 for the "Impressive representation of the military-patriotic subject".

Plyaskin's Demystifying Historicization

The recent TV series *The Young Guard*²⁸ (*Molodaya Gvardia*, 2015), directed by Leonid Plyaskin, may be regarded as a notable attempt in offering an alternative perspective on historical events of the Second World War. The

28. Script by Anna Suvorova; composer Maksim Koshevarov. The TV series was filmed in the village Krasnodonetskaya, Rostov region, not far from the area where the historical events happened.

director mentions that his film is neither Fadeyev's film adaptation nor Gerasimov's remake²⁹, while the script writer Anna Suvorova points out that the "*The Young Guard* is a modern perspective on the Krasnodon events during World War II"³⁰. Moreover Plyaskin emphasizes "Fadeyev's politicized version of the events" and his directorial attempt to present "simple average students during the war"³¹. It is truly a new perspective on the old (manipulated and ideologically fictionalized) history. The beginning and the ending of the TV series contains some sequences from old documentaries and an extradiegetic narrative voice stating several historical facts about the Krasnodon anti-fascist organization.

Firstly, there is a huge difference from the previous post-Soviet film on *The Young Guard*, not to mention Gerasimov's version and this refers to the historical accuracy. As a result, Oleg Koshevoy is almost a marginal member (who appears only in the 5th episode); Viktor Tretyakevich is the leader of the resistance, sharing his role later with the artists Lyuba Shevtsova and Ivan, with links to the Lugansk resistance. Moreover, the previously idyllic relationship between Elena Koshevaya and her son Oleg in the first films, following Fadeyev's fictional representation is presented in a twisted manner. Mainly, mother tries to protect her son from troubles and death until the end, being ready to lie and pay, while Oleg decides to do what is right for his conscience, dying with the others.

Secondly, the successful Soviet category of the traitor receives a different nuanced approach. The reason for Solikovskiy (the main Cossack traitor from the town) entering the German police is revealed – the Reds killed his entire family. The motif of revenge is used for characters that were marginal characters in previous films, going beyond the classical Soviet description of the traitor as a liar, a criminal and an enemy of the state. Another traitor of the partisans is presented with his own emotional battles – torn between remorse and the

29. Susanna Alperina, "Pervyi Kanal Pokazhet Dolgozhdannyy Serial Molodaaya Gvardia [The First Channel Broadcasts the Long-Awaited TV Series *The Young Guard*]," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/04/30/teleprogramma-site.html>.

30. Alperina.

31. Aleksey Zotov, "Segodnya Na Pervom Kanale Prem'iera – Mnogoseriynyi Fil'm Molodaya Gvardia" [Today on the First Channel the Premiere of the TV Series *The Young Guard*]," *Первый канал*, n.d., 2015, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-05-05/16674-segodnya_na_pervom_kanale_premiera_mnogoseriynny_film_molodaya_gvardiya.

sense of duty for Fatherland, oscillating between covering the young men's activity and betraying them. The traitor of The Young Guard Genady Pocheptsov is corrupted by this treacherous elder miner and escapes the town with his family as a reward for his act. In this way, the Stalinist motif of mentor-disciple gains an ironic meaning – a traitor initiates a younger traitor on this path.

The sordid status of being undercover is yet again nuanced in the case of the artist Lyuba Shevtsova. It is only at the end that Lyuba's mother finds out the truth about her daughter's secret activities linked to her close ties with the German officers. Besides, the idealized image of the Soviet woman at war fiercely supported by Soviet censors³² is compromised in this TV series – Lyuba is far from being an innocent modest Soviet girl, following strictly the Soviet moral code. Even if her behaviour is a cover, this shatters the deeply seated Soviet imagery in the minds of spectators.

When comparing the three actresses, one might highlight the fact that the first actress is a closer depiction to a Soviet teenager of the 1940s. While the actress from Lyalin's filmic version is frail, unconvincing and lacking the sparkling personality, Plyaskin's Lyuba is a modern version of what spectators call *damochka* (which in a loose translation would mean a young lady probably way too conscious of her charm and familiar with the men's world) and not a Soviet *artistka* (energetic yet pure). From this point of view, we might use Stephen M. Norris's concept of "packaging the past for the present"³³ and suggest that Plyaskin's version for the Krasnodon events is a case of "packaging the present for the past". Even though demystification of World War II heroicized reality is necessary, the process of post-Soviet revisionism has to be conducted carefully, conveying the atmosphere of the era.

32. See a similar reaction of censors even in the last Soviet decade to Svetlana Alexievich's de-heroicizing perspective on the Soviet woman in war: Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War* (London: Penguin Books, 2017). Other films that question the holy status of the Soviet woman during World War II are *Gu-ga* (1989) and *Shtrafbat* TV series (Penal Battalion, 2004).

33. Stephen M. Norris, "Packaging the Past: Cinema and Nationhood in the Putin Era," *KinoKultura*, 2008, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2008/21-norris.shtml>.

Thirdly, the “classic” Young Guard activities are depicted: writing and spreading the leaflets; placing the Soviet flags on buildings and even reading a statement on the local radio on the 7th of November; procrastinating the works on the mines and even killing the German engineer; attempting to free a local family of Jews from a camp; attack on the German warehouse with weapons; destroying the wheat prepared for the German army, and arson of the German Labor Exchange. The scenes of the arson and the concert organized by the members of resistance, as well as those presenting their arrest and Renuk-Tretyakevich relation are beautifully staged and montaged, ensuring great climaxes.

As for the atmosphere of those years, we might notice that the historical distance added some colourful exaggerations regarding the generous space of Krasnodon homes³⁴, the Western-like cabaret, as well as Lyuba’s exotic stage costumes and truly elegant dresses, not to mention her master of German language (along with Oleg Koshevoy, his mother, Ivan Zemnukhov and others). This supposed knowledge of German is improbable, especially in a mining area where the population was half-literate, as some sequences of the series rightfully point out.

The presence of Stalinist motives is relevant in this last cinematographic approach not as an assumed ideological repertoire (as part of the post-Soviet cult of the Great Patriotic War), but as means of presenting the atmosphere of the Stalinist era: the graveside oaths (Tretyakevich’s Jewish girlfriend shot by a German officer; boys witnessing the Jews’ liquidation; hasty partisans’ burial by young guardians), and the Great Family (the unity between the members regardless of their ethnicity).

Moreover, there is an ironic approach on the consecrated Stalinist myth of “father-son”/“mentor-disciple” relationship: there are no elders to teach and coordinate the younger generation how to fight; the only link with the exterior and higher authority is the usage of Morse code by the pianist. Besides, the bond between Oleg Koshevoy and the German engineer Hopf may be considered a subtle irony for the lack of real Bolshevik fathers in the

34. The same detail regarding the space characterizes the three film adaptations of M. Gorky’s *Mother*, directed by V. Pudovkin (1926), M. Donskoy (1955) and G. Panfilov (1989).

life of Soviet children and teenagers – a void caused by the Civil War and Stalinist purges, especially in the Ukrainian space. Furthermore, when tortured, Sergey Tyulenin decides to confess the name of organization's true leader, naming Stalin, which is considered a great joke by Solikovsky the torturer.

The spirit of collectivity and the status of individual is another greatly explored motif in the film, when the two notions – collectivity and individual – are invoked in a dire situation: is it worth sacrificing innocent people to maintain the members' cover and life; is it worth to sacrifice a comrade for the sake of the entire team? The entire organization is almost split with contrasting opinions, but the rational order is installed by Lyuba and Ivan, casting doubt on Tretyakevich's authority and integrity.

The favorite Stalinist theme of initiation - the path from spontaneity to consciousness - is not represented in the film, although a hint of such a trajectory may be supported in Seryozha Tyulenin's case. However, unlike the Soviet path based on the patriotic duty, Tyulenin changes under the spell of Lyuba's charming presence, who is preoccupied with order and discipline. We must also admit that despite the fact that both Viktor Tretyakevich and Tolya Kovalyov are clear minds, they burst into spontaneous decisions and acts, which make them more credible heroes than the theatrical monuments from Gerasimov's film adaptation. Even Lyuba acts against any reasonable arguments and risks everything to save Viktor from death, guided by her feelings for him.

Patriotism is another aspect that is represented in Plyaskin's film in a balanced manner, even with de-heroicizing accents. The scene of the oath of core members of the organization is nothing but solemn and pompous: the entire scene takes place in a deserted cave, outside the town. The other scene of the oath, when more members join the organization, is more solemn, in the community home, swearing to die for the country if necessary and not to betray fellow comrades.

Another specific trait for both analysed post-Soviet TV series is the gradual amplification of filmic violence, an aspect that has been also highlighted by Peter Kenez in his study concerning the specific traits of films of the Second World War. The filmic violence becomes gradually amplified

toward the end of the war, when the Soviet victory is certain and death of heroes has a symbolic meaning for the viewers³⁵. While Gerasimov's film adaptation eludes violence and is focused only on its effects (shredded clothes, wounds, bruises) and the most significant violent act is traitor's death penalty (represented by ellipsis), post-Soviet films have plenty violent brutal acts: shooting partisans, local people, beating up children and women with virtually no reason, throwing Jews into the mining pit in order to save bullets (and then chasing a pig in the yard with a gun), killing German officers as a retribution act, annihilating the German engineer and other German soldiers etc.

Naturalistic scenes of violence don't refer only to Germans; young guardians also resort to violence when necessary to protect themselves or only to avenge death of the loved ones. Besides, some German soldiers are killed by mistake, despite the initial plan. The purity of the Soviet heroic deed at war is questioned and de-heroicized, and the once clean martyrs are "tainted" with real love affairs with the enemy, with no such honourable propriety and more or less necessary murders. The temporal distance from the historical events influences not only the degree of represented violence, but also explores the moral and ethical nuances of deeds and choices at war.

Brief Conclusive Thoughts

The analysis is an attempt to unveil the complex Soviet myth-making process, focused on The Young Guard myth, part of the World War II cult. Once the cultural background set, we open a dialogue between the Soviet canonical versions represented by Fadeyev's novel, particularly the second edition, and Gerasimov's film, on one hand, and Lyalin's and Plyaskin's TV series, on the other. Their directorial perspectives are part of the post-Soviet revisionism, an attempt to deal with the thorny Soviet heritage.

35. Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society 1917-1953* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 158–62.

If we take into account the three types of discourses in post-communist art – “off-modern”, ironic and intermediate³⁶ – we may consider the post-Soviet films inspired by The Young Guard organization as ironic, taking into account the playful and conscious usage of Stalinist myths and motives. As we argue, the idealized Soviet heroism of The Young Guard organization underwent mutations when viewing the 2006 and 2015 films inspired by the same events. We support the idea of a gradual de-heroization and demystification process of what proved to be a Soviet carefully constructed heroic and propagandistic myth of The Young Guard. While Sergey Lyalin’s TV series is a post-ideological fictionalization approach, trying to balance the canonical versions with a fresh and relevant directorial vision, Leonid Plyaskin’s TV series offers a demystifying historicization. Although both directors use poetical license (real members of the organization are missing, new characters are introduced, events are altered), Plyaskin’s perspective addresses rather the younger generation of viewers than the older ones used to Soviet heroicized version.

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36. Cristian Nae, “Politici Ale Memoriei În Arta Est-Europeană de După 1989 [Memory Politics in East-European Art after 1989],” in *Istoria Recentă Altfel: Perspective Culturale [The Recent History Otherwise: Cultural Perspectives]*, ed. Andi Mihalache and Adrian Cioflâncă (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2013), 977.

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