

# **Chapaev and His Comrades**

**War and the Russian Literary Hero  
across the Twentieth Century**

**Angela Brintlinger**

**BOSTON  
2012**

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## **Cultural Revolutions: Russia in the Twentieth Century**

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*Chapaev and his Comrades* has been in progress for a number of years, and so I have accumulated numerous debts in its writing. Many students and colleagues have been a part of this book project — in courses like *War and Russian Literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* and at seminars and talks — and I thank them for their aid and indulgence. I tried out versions of some of these chapters in Madison, WI and Bryn Mawr, PA, in London and Stockholm, and in Los Angeles, Providence, RI, Urbana, IL, Columbus, OH and New Brunswick, NJ. I also drew on my 2004 *Slavic Review* article “The Hero in the Madhouse: the Post-Soviet Novel Confronts the Soviet Past” in writing chapters 6 and 8 of the book.

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My interest in war and how it affects literature, readers, and the culture around them stems from visits to Soviet museums and war memorials in the 1980s, but grew more urgent after the arrival of my children and the onset of the Iraq War. I did not want my children to grow up in a war-torn world, and although many of the conflicts remain distant from us geographically, the effects of war in the twenty-first century have spread across the oceans and into the lives of us all. I hope that some of the examples in this book of how war plays out in a culture will prove inspirational, while I am certain that other examples will remind readers of how violence, especially state-sponsored violence, manipulates our psyches and damages our souls.

## Introduction

# **War and the Hero in the Russian Twentieth Century**

For every generation—its own war and its own victims, which also means its own myths . . .

В каждом поколении—своя война и свои жертвы, а значит, и свои мифы . . .

-Mikhail Epstein

Not long after the collapse of the Soviet state in 1991, Moscow poet Olga Sedakova commented, “Something has happened to the hero in our century.”

Sedakova was concerned primarily with the hero in lyrical poetry, but she inadvertently put her finger on an issue of central importance for Russian fiction as well. Something had indeed happened to the hero in twentieth-century Russian fiction, and that something was war.

The history of Russia in the twentieth century was, more than anything else, a history of war and the variety of its consequences: the effects that war inevitably brings to the structure of the economy; the toll that it takes on daily life and on social and familial bonds; the physical destruction of cities, towns, and farms; the dislocations both physical and emotional of populations; and finally, the ongoing struggles over the memory and meaning of these cataclysmic events. With the possible exception of China, in the twentieth century no other country has experienced these consequences more than Russia and the Soviet Union did. It is worth reviewing the litany of Russia’s militarized twentieth century.

Before the fall of the tsarist regime, Russians fought a war in the Far East with the Japanese. Soon afterward, a decade of almost constant war ensued, with the First World War interrupted by the Revolutions, and the Revolutions devolving into a long and bloody Civil War. The 1920s saw the beginning of the ongoing Soviet terror against the country’s own citizens. That terror, orchestrated and justified as “class war”—which, among other things, devastated the peasantry and countryside and decimated the officer corps of the Red Army—eased somewhat as the 1930s drew to a close, but only because Russians were consumed with and by World War II. The terror quickly resumed when World War II ended in victory.

The second half of the twentieth century was dominated by the Cold War against the West. This took many forms—proxy wars in the third world; a dizzyingly dangerous arms race with the United States; great military parades through Red Square, featuring tanks, phalanxes of marching soldiers, and intercontinental ballistic missiles; and briefly, from the mid-1950s through the late 1960s, the concomitant space race. It all ended with the chaotic collapse of the Soviet state, a consequence, some have argued, both of an arms race the Soviet Union could not afford and the disastrous decade-long Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979–1989). Even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, war has remained a central fact of Russian life. Russian leaders have picked up where their Soviet predecessors left off, fighting wars in Chechnya in 1994–1996 and 1999–2009, conducting border skirmishes with Georgia in 2008, and dealing with their own ongoing “war on terror.”

Virtually an entire century of war and everything that goes with it—ideological propaganda campaigns, drafts and recruitment into the armed forces, economic mobilization, and the repression of urban and rural populations across the country—created a thoroughly militarized society. The century saw actual fighting in the streets and across the geographic spaces of the Russian empire; incursions into other political spaces, including the annexation of the Baltic Republics and Ukraine; the march of Soviet soldiers all the way to Berlin; failed and costly struggles in the mountains of Afghanistan; civil sacrifices, evacuations, and suffering; self-policing, interrogations, and house arrests; and prison camp sentences, exile, and forced emigration.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the experience of war shaped every twentieth-century Russian generation and left no family untouched. Husbands killed in war left widows and orphans; lost children left grieving parents and grandparents; and all this on a scale that is still hard to even fathom. While it is a commonplace to talk about the “lost generation” of European men who did not return from the First World War, in a very real sense every Russian generation in the twentieth century was lost. And through it all, the state attempted—through education, propaganda, and ideologically manipulative art, and through the obverse, military conscription, prison camps, and psychiatric incarceration—to mold loyal citizens who would support the government and perpetuate a new Soviet way of life.

Wars both generate and require heroes. Thus what constituted the “heroic” in Soviet Russia remained more central than it might have in a less war-torn and less thoroughly militarized country. War was the experience



of the Russian people, and it became a dominant trope to represent the Soviet experience in literature as well as other areas of cultural life. This book will trace those war experiences, memories, tropes, and metaphors in the literature of the Soviet and post-Soviet period. Across the “short” twentieth century, we look closely at the work of just over a dozen writers: Dmitry Furmanov, Fyodor Gladkov, Alexander Tvardovsky, Emmanuil Kazakevich, Vera Panova, Viktor Nekrasov, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Vladimir Voinovich, Sergei Dovlatov, Vladimir Makanin, Viktor Astafiev, Viktor Pelevin, and Vasily Aksyonov. We will glance briefly at half a dozen more.

These authors represented official Soviet literature, underground or dissident literature, and even émigré literature; they fell into or out of favor, were exiled or returned to Russia, died at home or abroad. Most importantly, they were all touched by war, and they reacted to the state of war in their literary works.

### War and the Health of the Russian State

Across the twentieth century, Russia was virtually always at war—with Germany, the US, Afghanistan; with the aristocracy, the kulak, the class enemy. Philosopher Mikhail Epstein articulates the problem thus:

What generation have we had that was not military? We have fought against blue uniforms, white epaulettes, brown shirts and black berets, against the leather coats of commissars and the narrow pants of hipsters, against sandals, hats, bowlers and moccasins . . . Against autocracy and serfdom, the serfs and the intelligentsia, the bourgeois and the aristocracy, literature and religion, society and ourselves. In every generation—its own war and its own victims . . .<sup>1</sup>

This paradigm, the militarization of everyday life in wartime and in peacetime, has characterized Russian and Soviet perceptions of themselves and their place in the world across the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> “Какое поколение у нас было не военным? Сражались с голубыми мундирами, с белыми погонами, с коричневыми рубашками и с черными беретами, с комиссарскими кожаными куртками и стилижскими узкими брюками, с лаптями, шляпами, котелками и мокасинами . . . С самодержавием и с крепостным правом, с крестьянством и интеллигенцией, с мещанством и аристократией, с литературой и религией, с обществом и с самими собой. В каждом поколении—своя война и свои жертвы . . .” Mikhail Epstein, “Posle karnavala, ili vechnyi Venichka,” in Venedikt Erofeev, *Ostav'te moi u dushu v pokoe* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo XGS, 1995), 3–30, 26.

In this 1995 summary of his nation's contacts with war, Epstein inadvertently echoed some of the ideas first articulated by the American critic and philosopher Randolph Bourne (1886–1918) in his now classic unfinished essay “War Is the Health of the State.” Bourne wrote the essay exactly at the moment that gave birth to the Soviet Union, and while his own concerns were with the American involvement in World War I, his astute analysis of the relationship between war and the state is a logical place for us to begin. Indeed, reading that essay today, it feels almost prophetic, just as applicable to the First World War as to the Second World War and even the war in Iraq in the 2000s. In Bourne's reckoning, war brings “a sense of sanctity to the State.” In wartime, the individual is suddenly obligated to support the state—with his life and livelihood if necessary—and any dissent or opposition becomes unlawful or is targeted as dangerous. Bourne's words can easily be ascribed to the then-nascent Soviet state:

War is essentially the health of the State. The ideal of the State is that within its territory its power and influence should be universal. As the Church is the medium for the spiritual salvation of man, the State is thought of as the medium for his political salvation. . . . [In war] we are at last on the way to full realization of that collective community in which each individual somehow contains the virtue of the whole.<sup>2</sup>

Replacing the church, the Soviet state reached for universal influence, for becoming the medium for both man's spiritual and his political salvation. By maintaining this sense of urgency, this sense of war—whether against external enemies or internal—Soviet society and ideology developed as if according to Bourne's blueprint: “Old national ideals are taken out, re-adapted to the purpose, and used as universal touchstones, or molds into which thought is poured.” War was indeed the health of the state, and maintaining a state of war enabled the state to keep the nation continually mobilized to defend itself and eliminated any challenge or opposition.

The construction of Socialist society itself was presented through the lens of military metaphors: fighting class wars, throwing all forces onto the industrial front, identifying enemies of the people, and so on. The concept of

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<sup>2</sup> Randolph Bourne, “War Is the Health of the State” (1918), Bourne Mss., Columbia University Libraries, [www.bigeye.com/warstate.htm](http://www.bigeye.com/warstate.htm). All quotes below from Bourne from this edition of the essay.

“hero”—valorized in a militarization of daily life—kept the urgency of war alive even in times of relative external peace. During the first half of the Soviet century, actual warfare was central to the Soviet experience, and literary texts mirrored that experience. However, even though the second half of the Soviet century did not produce the same kinds of war heroes, or indeed the same kinds of war, writers were still confronted with those original war heroes and the state’s emphasis on presenting heroic models in literature. Thus an official equivalence between protagonist and hero continued during the period of Cold War. But as writers recognized the falseness of that equivalence, they instead began to create antiheroes, individuals struggling with the state and with the society that surrounded them. If in the first part of the century, writers created characters who could stride alongside Chapaev, in the second part they increasingly wrote against Chapaev, that is to say, in reaction to the notion of the war hero as it had emerged.

The trajectory of *Chapaev and his Comrades* will follow the trajectory of the century. From a moment when the central figure of war and literature was Civil War hero Vasily Chapaev, we will trace that figure as he becomes a vital part of Soviet cultural memory, reflected in literary texts and broader social contexts. By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, Chapaev reemerges, reclaimed from Soviet cant for the purposes of post-Soviet camp.

This book does not aim to be a comprehensive history of war fiction in the Soviet Union nor a complete history of the Chapaev story. Indeed, we will not follow the trajectory, explored by many other scholars over the years, of how Soviet literature was created, transformed, and then deformed into dissident movements.<sup>3</sup> Instead I am looking to distill the constants across the short twentieth century, reifying the value of shared cultural experience and memory as it remains and becomes fodder for the post-Soviet era. In so doing, it is important to include programmatic socialist realist “positive heroes,” especially as they fit into war and postwar contexts, and the simple soldiers from well-written, beloved narratives about the war experience; satirical treatments of the theme, particularly portraits of civilians struggling against the state, and soldiers caught in the gears of the military complex; and the post-Soviet reintegration of all three strands of literature from the period—“official” literature, underground literature, and émigré literature. In

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Rufus Mathewson, Jr., *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) and Geoffrey Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism: Soviet Fiction since Ivan Denisovich* (London, New York: Granada, 1980).

the chapters that follow, I have deliberately chosen to analyze all three types of writers and texts, as well as their protagonists—heroes and antiheroes both.

### War and the Hero

Epstein reminds us that though ruptures were created between the old Russia and the new Soviet Russia by major events—World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution—there were continuities as well. The hero in Soviet life had ancestors in the nineteenth century, and as in the nineteenth century, many of the hero's struggles unfolded in the context of literary creations.

Soviet visions have frequently evoked the Romantic period with its rhetoric of a lone and lonely hero struggling with a society and a regime that neither understands nor accepts him. This essentially Romantic view of the role of the hero in society shares much with the ideas of English Romantic historian Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle knew little about Russian society and letters when he permitted himself grand generalizations on the state of the nation of Russia in the early 1840s. In his by-now famous judgment of Russia, published in his book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), Carlyle wrote:

The Czar of all the Russias, he is strong with so many bayonets, Cossacks and cannons; and does a great feat in keeping such a tract of Earth politically together; but he cannot yet speak. [There is] Something great in him, but it is a dumb greatness. He has had no voice of genius, to be heard of all men and times. He must learn to speak. He is a great dumb monster hitherto. His cannons and Cossacks will all have rusted into nonentity while that Dante's voice is still audible. The nation that has a Dante is bound together as no dumb Russia can be.<sup>4</sup>

Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic* describes a society striving toward national consciousness and argues that a nation needs a number of things: military strength (bayonets, Cossacks, and cannons), centralized government (the czar of all the Russias), individual heroes, and a voice (a Dante) to create the nation's touchstones from those heroes. "Society," Carlyle believed, "is founded on Hero-Worship" (13), and it needs heroes around which to coalesce. According to this argument, through the ages heroes of

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1841), 132.

different kinds have arisen to fit the needs of societies, and Carlyle in his lectures focused on six of those types: the hero as divinity, prophet, poet, priest, man of letters, and king. Each of these heroes can draw society together, chronicling the myths and histories that bind a nation. Carlyle's project of nation building posits an era of peaceful coalition, a Romantic sensibility that fulfills its mission and perpetuates itself through fixing that national consciousness in words. But the early Soviet state found itself building a nation in an era of war, and it found much in the Romantic idea of nation building, which it could adopt.

Nineteenth-century Russians of Carlyle's generation saw their own Dante in Nikolai Karamzin, author of the great *History of the Russian State*, and in Alexander Pushkin, virtuoso of verse, drama, and prose, both voices that perhaps remained unheard or resonated too softly in England at the time for Carlyle to have heard them. Karamzin, Pushkin, and other poets and historians of the imperial era had embarked upon their own project of nation building and identified specific historical and cultural heroes—from Boris Godunov to the holy fool Nikolka-Kolpak, from Catherine the Great to Novgorod mayor's wife Marfa-Posadnitsa—and the texts in which these heroes featured strove to identify what it meant to be Russian, to belong in one way or another to the Russian imperial enterprise. In the Romantic era, literature both reflected and strove to influence society, and its literary heroes represented that connection.

Judith Kornblatt has also reminded us of another, more specifically Russian, nineteenth-century source for the twentieth-century literary hero. In her study of the Cossack hero in Russian literature, she demonstrates that the "historical narrative" of the socialist realist novel was not particularly revolutionary but instead relied heavily on nineteenth-century models. The novel, she writes, "turns toward traditional *Bildungsroman*. Over the course of the novel, the hero matures from rebellious adolescent to sophisticated ideologue. Such emphasis on psychological development [. . .] belies mythical associations; maturation equals acceptance of the authoritative values of the state."<sup>5</sup> Rooted in nineteenth-century traditions, whether of Romantics or Cossacks, the twentieth-century literary hero would be further shaped by the experience of war.

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Kornblatt, *The Cossack Hero in Russian Literature: A Study in Cultural Mythology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 170.

Carlyle notably excludes one kind of hero from his lectures in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*: the warrior hero. In Russian we find the term *geroi* (герой) in many studies of literature, used to refer to the protagonist of a work. But mythical and literary heroes have always been born in the crucible of war, as far back as Homer, and real-life heroes are proclaimed as such on the basis of their wartime service. In many cases, the protagonist and the hero are one and the same.

In Russian literature, the protagonist frequently participates in war as a soldier, observes it as a bystander or a journalist, or defines him- or herself in terms of military rank even if s/he is not actually in uniform. This has been true since Peter the Great created parallel civil and military ranks, a habit that Nikolai Gogol pokes fun at in his 1836 story “The Nose” with his hapless civilian hero, “Major” Kovalev. In Mikhail Lermontov’s 1841 Romantic novel *A Hero of Our Time*, Pechorin lives a life parallel to that of military officers and engagements, and his ennui and reckless bravado stem in part from the fact that he falls outside of a clear military chain of command. Equally Romantic were Nadezhda Durova’s memoirs in the 1830s, which she titled *The Cavalry Maiden* to identify her dual role as a woman with her own place in the service. Other nineteenth-century novelists followed suit, focusing on the relations between civilian heroes and their military counterparts, the most obvious example perhaps being Leo Tolstoy, with his *Sevastopol Sketches* (1855), journalistic writings from a military observer, *The Cossacks* (1863), fiction about a young man who longs to belong to a warlike people, and *War and Peace* (1865–1869), the epic novel of war and society that looms large for any novelist writing about military engagements, social transformations, and the philosophy of history and war, in Russia and indeed across much of the world.

No condition functions as well as war as the crucible for producing heroes—and for creating conformity. It seems that warrior heroes are made in the reaction to enemy attack, the patience of waiting and preparing, the heat of the battle. But heroic behavior in battle—the bayonet attack, the well-thrown grenade, the definitive flight over enemy lines—is only part of the equation. The status of hero must be conferred from the outside, by authors and journalists and of course primarily the state, who raise up the hero, mark him or her, and present him or her to contemporaries and to history as an example of worthy behavior: the patriot defending the nation, the individual protecting the collective. Thus two components are necessary in the making of a warrior hero—the actual heroic behavior and the ceremonial marking of

that behavior. Indeed, the actual heroics, the “truth” of battle, can be invented; the myths and ceremonies have cultural power even when they are based on fictionalized heroism.

Seeking the predecessor of the Soviet hero in his ancestor, the Russian revolutionary, Rufus Mathewson in his 1958 *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* also looked back to the nineteenth century. In Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Goncharov, and Turgenyev, Mathewson found a “gallery of faltering heroes,” who “all demonstrate an intensive effort to center the novelists’ moral quest in the figure of the protagonist.”<sup>6</sup> Other scholars who have investigated the hero in the realist era found him to be struggling with the conformist society around him and with his own superfluity. Ellen Chances has argued that some twentieth-century fiction follows the nineteenth-century model of conformism: “A character is doomed if he/she swims against the tides; good if with them.” In this kind of novel, Chances concludes, “The outsider becomes an insider. By this transformation to an active member of the community, he too erases the split between disparate elements and eliminates the problem of superfluity. Such a hero is then, of course, a ‘positive hero.’”<sup>7</sup> Here Chances is describing Fyodor Gladkov’s novel *Cement*, to which we will turn in the next chapter, but her argument works just as well for many other texts of the twentieth century. This important moment works two ways: either the outsider turns insider, or the outsider refuses to become “positive,” to bow to the collective. Both paradigms will interest us in our study.

The socialist realist hero, officially codified in 1934, was formulaic. Adults and schoolchildren alike complained about, resisted, and lampooned him, and sometimes her, for decades. The many dull and lifeless novels featuring politically conscious heroes should by all rights have eliminated writers’ and readers’ interest in the central protagonist in fiction. But despite the tired formula and the turgid plotlines, the heroes in twentieth-century Russian novels still offered novelists and readers opportunities to explore psychological, cultural, and historical issues.

In the end, the literary hero survived the trial of socialist realism. Paradoxically, both war and the institution of Soviet censorship facilitated that survival. On the one hand, war, especially the Second World War, pumped life into the socialist realist hero, providing a context for officially sanctioned

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<sup>6</sup> Rufus Mathewson, *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Chances, *Conformity’s Children: An Approach to the Superfluous Man in Russian Literature* (Columbus: Slavica, 1978), 166–167.

heroic deeds that were exciting to read about. On the other hand, the confines of censorship created an underground literature and a space to create different kinds of heroism. Beyond socialist realism, issues of heroism remained important within the literary discourse. The Russian literary hero—forged in the fire of warfare—has even outlived the Soviet Union itself.

*Chapaev and His Comrades* begins by examining the roots of the Russian hero in the early years of the twentieth century. One model of Russian heroism was created by Maxim Gorky, whose 1906–1907 novel *Mother* connected the hero to both the peasantry and the proletariat in a context of political action. Thus the Soviet hero descended from the nineteenth-century, hero-driven realist novel, with its ties to the intelligentsia, but his class politics were reoriented to match Soviet ideology. In another, more viable, model, the soldier-hero was forged in the crucible of the Revolution and Civil War and drew strength from the fabled Vasily Chapaev, “ataman of the steppes.”<sup>8</sup> From that soldier was codified the socialist realist “positive” hero, who acted on the labor as well as the military fronts and returned to fight in the trenches and on the battlefields of the Second World War.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the peasant-warrior figure and the socialist realist hero continued to thrive, in war-related fiction and in satires of that genre. As mentioned above, we will deliberately examine both. The doctrinally required positive hero did not damage the Russian literary hero in any way, but I will argue even strengthened the paradigm in continual creative efforts by nonconformist writers who formed various “oppositions” to state-mandated literary models.

This study ranges across the century, taking its beginning in the pre-Soviet period and ending in post-Soviet postmodernism. We will stop along the way at the particularly crucial cultural and historical junctions, especially moments of war—Civil War, World War II, Cold War—and their immediate aftermath, when soldiers return from war and try to reintegrate into a changed society, often bringing their own military culture back with them. Throughout the book I will situate close readings of novels and novelists in these shifting cultural contexts, thus illuminating the evolution of the

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<sup>8</sup> In his *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917–1929* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), Eliot Borenstein identified a “masculinist myth,” which remains quite relevant to many of the heroes we discuss. See also Justus Grant Hartzok, “Children of Chapaev: The Russian Civil War Cult and the Creation of Soviet Identity, 1918–1941” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2009).



protagonist's function within the official literary canon as well as in the "opposition," alternative or underground traditions, always keeping in focus the protagonists' relationship to war, war rhetoric, and concepts of heroism.

As this book demonstrates, the protagonists of twentieth-century Russian novels remained a vital part of the evolution of Russian prose into the postmodern period, and their relationship to war and the state, to society and the collective, forms a fascinating parallel to historical and cultural events beyond literature. Writers' and critics' attitudes toward literary heroes and their social position vis-à-vis war and the state have ranged from the serious to the ironic. But the literary hero offered the perfect mechanism, within the socialist realist tradition or in the subversion of it, to explore central cultural and literary problems of the Soviet period.

Whether the fictional hero-protagonist or the hero marked as such in history, the Hero, by definition, must stand out from his fellow man. In wartime only some soldiers are decorated, and always for specific actions and brave deeds, while others remain unnoticed, regardless of their behavior under fire; some are marked as heroes, and their actions define heroism for the rest. The opposite of a soldier-hero, of course, is the traitor, the coward, the soldier who is singled out and punished for insufficient bravery in the heat of battle. The penal battalions of the Second World War were devised precisely to punish those identified as unworthy soldiers, without losing their manpower at the front—and those punishments were used both for actual cowards and traitors and for any individualist or nonconformist who got in the way of the military high command.

Thus the relationship between military discipline and the collective effort and necessarily individual acts of war (whether manifested in sniper fire, reconnaissance work, setting minefields, or any number of other wartime activities) contributes to the tension of the individual and the collective inherent in the definition of heroism, especially under the Socialist/Communist regime of post-revolutionary Russia. However, as Irina Gutkin, among others, has shown, the religious and ideological "mass enthusiasm" whipped up by the Bolsheviks made the Soviet case very particular, transforming the Soviet understanding of how an individual ought to act and harnessing those individuals to the cart of large-scale economic, cultural, and political construction.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press: 1999), 21.

The individual hero worked for the collective in war and peaceful construction and was marked as heroic to serve as an exemplar for his comrades to emulate. Official literature followed this prescribed model: the war-hero protagonist was to inspire at the war and on the home front and to trigger a cloning process whereby his comrades too strove for heroism and became heroic.

Which is exactly what Bourne was talking about. War—on economic, cultural, and political fronts—helped maintain the health of the state. And literature during the Soviet era explored questions of war as it upheld—or undermined—that state.

### **War and Narrative: Paradoxes, Contradictions, Tensions**

Astounding.

That was the word Abraham Lincoln used to describe war and all its consequences, and that remains the best single-word description of it. War can be effective at destroying things, but it does little positive work. War does not build nations, it does not make the world safe for democracy or for communism, it does not avenge the wrongs of the past, nor does it fulfill any of the other sanctimonious justifications offered by old men as they send young men off to kill and die. Plutarch knew as much when he wrote, “The poor folk go to war, to fight and to die for the delights, riches and superfluities of others.”

Because of that, wars require narratives. As historian Drew Faust has written, war itself is a “narrative invention.” As she explained, “Only a story of purpose and legitimation can transform random violence into what human convention has designated as war.”<sup>10</sup> Recently she has argued further that “we seek the order that narrative promises to impose on the incoherence of conflict.”<sup>11</sup> Narrative is the only thing that can give meaning to war.

Tim O’Brien, a Vietnam veteran turned author, explained the complexities of translating violence into narrative in his chapter “How to Tell a True War Story”:

How do you generalize?

War is hell, but that’s not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and

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<sup>10</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, “Race, Gender, and Confederate Nationalism: William D. Washington’s *Burial of Latane*,” *Southern Review* 25 (1989): 301.

<sup>11</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, 2011 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, “Telling War Stories: Reflections of a Civil War Historian,” [www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2011-05/TellingWarStoriesWeb.pdf](http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2011-05/TellingWarStoriesWeb.pdf), 7.

pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead.

The truths are contradictory. It can be argued, for instance, that war is grotesque. But in truth war is also beauty. For all its horror, you can't help but gape at the awful majesty of combat. . . . Like a killer forest fire, like cancer under a microscope, any battle or bombing raid or artillery barrage has the aesthetic purity of absolute moral indifference—a powerful, implacable beauty—and a true war story will tell the truth about this, though the truth is ugly.<sup>12</sup>

This book examines the work of twentieth-century Russian writers as they tried to turn violence into narrative, confronting the challenge of making meaning out of what would otherwise have remained meaningless.

That paradox, the need to make meaning out of violence, sits at the heart of the war experience. But it is only one of several that any writer who would take on the challenge of writing about war has to face. Running through this book will be a number of paradoxes, some intrinsic to the experience of war itself, others more specific to the twentieth-century Russian experience of it. Let me describe them briefly here.

The old cliché says that truth is the first casualty of war. It isn't that simple. Truth about war became a central criterion to judge the merits of the literature we will examine, but as we will see, the definition of what constituted the "truth of war" was debated and changed over time. Given the state-driven model of the production of art and the relationship between war journalism and propaganda, who decided how truth was defined depended on the way the political winds happened to be blowing.

Connected to this is the question of who was best positioned to tell the truth about war. We will examine writers who were eyewitnesses and participants, journalists and political officers, victims and the children of victims of the militarized society. Each staked his or her own claim to a particular authenticity and thus to a particular truth. Therefore, part of what interests me in this study is the tension—sometimes the contradiction—between what we might call "testimony," the firsthand accounts of events, and the myths that are created from those accounts later. This is central to the creation of war heroes in the first place.

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<sup>12</sup> Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 80.

Many of the authors who write about war were at the front in wartime themselves and experienced what Kali Tal has called the “drive to testify,” a common if not universal reaction to the trauma of life in wartime, which we can trace through many wars, from the Russian Civil War through the American war in Vietnam through today’s wars across the globe.<sup>13</sup> Their act of witnessing, of testifying, made the details of war real. As World War II poet Ilya Selvinsky wrote, the eyewitness can offer the most significant and convincing voice:

I saw it!  
 You don’t have to listen to folk tales,  
 Or believe newspaper columns,  
 But I saw it. With my own eyes.  
 Understand? I saw it. Myself.<sup>14</sup>

Selvinsky’s powerful staccato language harnesses to poetry a documentary feature, which exemplifies the need of poets and writers to “witness” from the front or the rear, to contribute to the war effort, and to chronicle the war, both inspiring and explaining the war for their own and future generations.<sup>15</sup>

Heroism is premised on acts of sacrifice—for country or for comrades—even though the experience of war is often and for most participants a struggle for self-preservation. These paradoxes have confronted all nations when they go to war. My sense is that Soviet writers highlighted the differences between bravery—mere acts of impulse—and heroism. We can define hero-

<sup>13</sup> See Kali Tal, “Speaking the Language of Pain: Vietnam War Literature in the Context of a Literature of Trauma,” in *Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature*, ed. Philip K. Jason (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 215–250, 229. Blogging and other electronic communication formats (including WikiLeaks) have made today’s wars immediately accessible, although sometimes less “narrativized” than in the past.

<sup>14</sup> I. Sel’vinskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971), 352.

<sup>15</sup> Anatoly Abramov, in his book *The Lyric and Epic of the Great Patriotic War*, notes that the “poetic aesthetic at the time was documentary in nature.” He points out that cycles of poems published tended to sound like chronicles or news dispatches: Sel’vinsky published the cycles “Crimea, 1941–1942,” “Caucasus, 1942–1943,” “Kuban’, 1943”; A. Yashin published “Baltics, 1941–1942,” “Volga, 1942–1943,” “Black Sea, 1943–1944”; Konstantin Simonov published “Poems of 1943,” “Poems of 1942,” “Poems of 1941.” See A. M. Abramov, *Lirika i epos Velikoi otechestvennoi voyny: problematika, stil’, poetika* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1972), 45.

ism in the Soviet context as bravery plus consciousness. Many people might rescue a comrade in danger or put their own lives at risk, but the true Soviet hero did so in order to advance the Soviet cause. Both kinds of actions have merit; both are described in fiction. But only one is heroic.

Thus in Soviet fiction we will meet what we'll call the "rhetoric of *podvig*." *Podvig* is Russian for "feat," an act of bravery that accomplishes something necessary and dangerous and that often ends in sacrifice or death. Framing an act in war as a *podvig* gives it the stamp of consciousness, the label that makes it medal-worthy, worthy of retelling, worthy of becoming "truth" rather than a mere fact of life in battle.

Those facts, those details of the experience of war, came to be called the "truth of the trenches." *Byt*—mundane daily life—included the boredom of war, the waiting, as well as the frenzy of sudden activity. Neither of these things is particularly heroic. Instead, they are described in literature using the details of *byt*. The tension between these two ways of describing war is a tension over which better portrayed the truth of war. In some eras *byt* was lauded and rewarded; in others, Soviet officials noticed that it lacked the higher truth necessary for the health of the state.

An even more charged tension for Soviet war literature was between the individual nature of the hero and the insistence on the collective identity of the new Soviet man. No less than any other country, the Soviet Union wanted to produce war heroes to hold up as exemplars to the nation. How to square that with an ideology that devalued individualism as such, indeed posited it as retrograde, became a particularly Soviet paradox that these writers had to sort out. The relationship between an individual, an "I," and his comrades, the "we," is both an ideological and a practical problem. For some writers, highlighting the experience of one person added to the sensation of authentic truth, but that had to be balanced with the value of the individual act for the collective good, for the nation and the state. In the official literature, the "we" would always have to triumph. For those writing against the grain, the situation was more complicated. They might foreground the integrity of the individual, but that meant a rejection of the idea of *podvig* as such, and it also doomed their work to remaining unpublished, at least in the Soviet Union.

War is hell. That quip is usually attributed to American general William Tecumseh Sherman. But as the philosopher Michael Walzer notes, the quip is not a description so much as "a moral argument, an attempt at self-

justification.”<sup>16</sup> In the end, to write about war, to turn violence into narrative, is necessarily to confront our most difficult moral and ethical questions. No contemporary thinker has wrestled more deeply with the morality of war than Walzer. Borrowing from medieval theologians, Walzer asks us to confront and distinguish between the justice of a war (*jus ad bellum*) and the justice of what goes on in that war (*jus in bello*). We want it both ways, Walzer notes: victory in war and moral decency on the battlefield (47). That’s the paradox.

Judgments about what constitutes *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* can be made by states and by individuals. But in the Soviet context, writers were not allowed to question either. The Soviet Union was not alone in insisting that all the wars it fought were just, nor was it unusual in its refusal to acknowledge that even just wars can be fought immorally. As we will see in the latter chapters of this book, the fight over the meaning and memory of war—the Revolution, the Civil War, Stalin’s Terror and other Soviet repressions of citizens, and the Second World War in particular—revolves precisely around how writers forced readers to confront the distinction between the two.

The history of twentieth-century Russia and its militarized society made war an inescapable topic for Soviet writers. In trying to confront the tensions and paradoxes I have just outlined—truth versus fact, testimony versus myth, the rhetoric of *podvig* versus the simple rendering of *byt*, the “I” versus the “we,” and the justice of war versus justice in war—they struggled to reinvent literary heroes for their time.

### ***Chapaev and His Comrades***

These themes seem to me the central dilemmas faced by writers who have tackled the narration of war over the Russian twentieth century, and they have informed the choices I have made about the writers and texts I have gathered here. Putting the experience of war—and its social, cultural, and moral implications—at the center of my considerations means foregrounding some writers and works that would not necessarily be considered part of the canon of twentieth-century Russian writing. Interestingly, in twenty-first-century Russia, with its new political emphasis on nationalism and patriotism and its renewed state-sponsored veneration of the veterans and narratives of the Second World War in particular, some of these forgotten texts have been

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 32.

reissued. War sells, and such authors as Vera Panova, Boris Vasiliev, and Viktor Nekrasov now fill the shelves of Moscow bookstores along with the New Russian cookbooks and the dozens of detective novels.

The works we look at in this study, some of which have more literary merit than others, are among the most important ones through which to look at how war formed the central experience of Russians across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Furthermore, a number of these works were and remain immensely popular, although due to Soviet censorship not all were published at home in a timely fashion. Such works as the officially approved Alexander Tvardovsky's *Vasily Tyorkin* and—on the parodic side, published initially abroad—Vladimir Voinovich's *Life and Adventures of the Soldier Ivan Chonkin* (*Zhizn' i neobychnyye prikliucheniia soldata Ivana Chonkina*) resonated with people, and their enduring popularity stems from the fact that they spoke with pathos and with humor about war and militarization to a nation made up of individuals who had experienced those phenomena firsthand.

It is also the case, necessarily, that I have had to leave out many worthy books and authors whose study would surely enhance my argument. Not only was the twentieth century a century of war for Russia, it was also a century of writing about war. The hundreds of fascinating and telling poems, narratives, and memoirs—along with the hundreds of less interesting texts—mean that this book project might have continued forever. I've had to make some hard choices, but I hope they will prove good ones for my readers. In the chapters below, I look at poets and prose writers, soldier-writers and civilians. I consider some “mainstream” writers—including a number whose books became exemplars of socialist realist fiction and several whose stars set after Stalin's death, only to rise again in the post-Soviet period—and some more marginal figures. Included in the latter are underground and émigré writers as well as those who published some work in official venues and left other works unpublished or resorted to *tamizdat*, publication abroad. I have also included several authors whose popularity soared in post-Soviet times. I hope through this selection to provide a sample from each of what I have called the three strands of Russian literature during the Soviet period: official literature, underground or dissident literature, and émigré literature.

The book proceeds chronologically, but it is sometimes not a straightforward chronology. The history of publication and suppression in the Soviet Union meant that books written in one era might not see the light of day until

another; conversely, books published at one moment might find themselves banned in the next. And as we will see, while war defined the Russian twentieth century, the Second World War looms so large in the Russian imagination that it returns over and over again as Soviet and now post-Soviet Russians continue to struggle with what that war ultimately meant.

I explored one reaction to the “man of the future” in my first book, *Writing a Usable Past*, where I argued that authors of the 1920s and 1930s sought to portray a “real life” biographical hero in such a way that these heroes from the past would be useful to readers of the day. Instead of a “man of the future,” some writers in the 1920s and 30s placed a “man of the past” at the center of their narratives. At the same time, of course, there were plenty of future socialist realist heroes being developed, many based on the biographies of actual individuals.<sup>17</sup> These biographical sources meant that literary (and filmic) heroes in the 1930s were designed to be emulated; heroic behavior became the expectation. However, the code of heroism by which the individual hero must always represent a collective enterprise created tension within the model itself and affected Soviet society in myriad ways.

After the revolution, writers—and readers—were in search of heroes, historical figures to whom they might turn for models and exemplars of a proper way of viewing the world and their own place in it.<sup>18</sup> Finding literary paradigms in the historical record was one way that early Soviet writers lent the sensation of truth to their fiction. Authors also exploited symbolic patterns for the socialist realist novel: the mentor/disciple pattern, the pattern of martyrdom, and paradigms of family and family metaphors.<sup>19</sup> These patterns, like those based in biography, are predicated on the arc of a human life and draw upon archetypal understandings of the relationship of the individual to history, the present, and the world around him. For Soviet literature, that relationship and those mythmaking narratives are foundational. The “state of war” during which the new Soviet culture was founded meant that writers reached out for their universal touchstones in creating literary heroes and rolling out their narratives during times of actual or metaphorical war. As we

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<sup>17</sup> On Soviet war films and their heroes, see Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914–2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> See my *Writing a Usable Past: Russian Literary Culture, 1917–1937* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> See Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).



will see throughout this study, those cultural touchstones have remained in place well into the twenty-first century.

The central characters of Gorky's *Mother*, a proletarian mother and son, were one variant of the heroics in the first part of the century. But by the 1920s, another model had captured the imagination of Russian readers and children alike—the Chapaev model. In chapter 1 of the book, I examine Furmanov's 1923 novel *Chapaev* and Gladkov's 1925 novel *Cement*, contrasting the Civil War hero with his civilian counterpart on the factory front. Chapaev won out, and he became the ideal of boys all over the country. One example of this is seen in Yury Libedinsky's 1930 *Birth of a Hero (Rozhdenie geroia)*, a book that tracks the relationship between the individual and the collective and features an adolescent who dreams of Chapaev-like stature in his imaginative play at the game of "world revolution." We see in Libedinsky that the new Soviet hero would be modeled on the peasant-warrior Chapaev, not on Gorky's mother or her son. The release of the early talkie film *Chapaev* in 1934, as well as its thirtieth anniversary re-release in 1964, meant that for children and adults all over the Soviet Union, the Chapaev model grew and remained ever more prominent.<sup>20</sup>

For the new Soviet state as well, Chapaev's class identification confirmed his centrality. In the second chapter of the book, we explore the quintessential Soviet peasant-intellectual, Alexander Tvardovsky, who left his peasant family behind for a long and successful career as a journalist and poet.<sup>21</sup> As members of the peasant class began to move into more visible roles in society, in some cases this was facilitated through political sponsorship of specific individuals; in others it was the persistence and raw talent of the former peasant that enabled him (or her) to rise to prominence. Tvardovsky was one of those talented new Soviet peasants.

Tvardovsky's most famous work was an epic poem with the genre designation "A Book about a Soldier" ("Kniga pro boitsa"). His Vasily Tyorkin, a soldier-hero of the Second World War, is not particularly well-known outside Russia, but Tyorkin serves as an iconic figure for Russians, representing both continuity and change: a folkloric peasant thriving in the Soviet era, an enduring and inventive image of Russia herself. Couplets from the poem entered Russian cultural memory on a par with quotes from the Civil War's Chapaev. Through Tvardovsky and his creative process, we explore this new

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<sup>20</sup> For more, see Hartzok, "Children of Chapaev."

<sup>21</sup> Tvardovsky had to turn his back on his family entirely when they were declared to be kulaks and sent into administrative exile.

rank-and-file Chapaev of what Russians called the Great Fatherland War, a “grown-up” Chapaev who no longer needed a political commissar baby-sitter.

In exploring the relationship between myth and testimony, Russian literature about World War II offers an unusually rich body of work. Some of the greatest, and certainly most influential, fiction of the era was written at the front itself. Ilya Ehrenburg, Vasily Grossman, Viktor Nekrasov, Vera Panova, Boris Polevoi, Konstantin Simonov, even Alexander Tvardovsky—all worked for newspapers, and many wrote their works as dispatches from the front lines.<sup>22</sup> In part this is what makes the works so vivid; this is also the reason that detail, a vital component of *byt*—of the “every day”—in literature, took center stage in this fiction.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore the power of the eyewitness and the documentary detail through the works of several of these authors, including Stalin-prizewinning authors Kazakevich, Panova, and Nekrasov. The perception of truth in their depictions of war made their fiction extremely popular in Soviet Russia. Soldiers and their counterparts in the rear, both during and immediately after the war, needed inspiration, but not the false inspiration that sometimes rang from tribunals; they wanted to read about little men and women like themselves, individuals who took heroic steps, and occasionally made errors, in fighting for the common good and the Soviet motherland. Cognizant of the censorship their work would undergo, these writers strove to find the most expressive ways of chronicling the war while still getting their narratives published.

Like Kazakevich and Panova, Nekrasov won a Stalin Prize in 1947 for his World War II novel *In the Trenches of Stalingrad* (*V okopakh Stalingrada*), and like theirs, his award-winning novel was made into a powerful film. Panova and Kazakevich remained orthodox Soviet writers, however, while Nekrasov was forced to emigrate in the 1970s. In his fiction and in his later memoirs,

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<sup>22</sup> Vasily Grossman, in particular, has been studied by a number of excellent scholars in recent years, and I will not be addressing his works in this book. See Anatolii Bocharov, *Vasily Grossman: Zhizn', tvorchestvo, sud'ba* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990); Frank Ellis, *Vasily Grossman: The Genesis and Evolution of a Russian Heretic* (Providence: Berg, 1994); John and Carol Garrard, *The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman* (New York: Free Press, 1996); see also Antony Beevor and Lara Vinogradova, eds. and trans., *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army, 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 2005). Grossman should be particularly familiar to an English-language audience since essays about him regularly appear in the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*. See, for example, Keith Gessen, “Under Siege: A Beloved Soviet Writer’s Path to Dissent,” 6 March 2006, a review of *A Writer at War*.

Nekrasov explored the role of heroism in wartime and in peacetime. Using specific and arresting details—from a well-worn copy of Jack London's novel *Martin Eden* handed about in the trenches, to the legacy of Stalingrad, the mine- and skeleton-strewn earth of Mamaev Kurgan—Nekrasov investigated the meaning of truth, patriotism, and service to country in the Soviet context. The émigré writer never ceased revisiting the trenches of Stalingrad though he was unable to set foot in his homeland again after his forced retreat abroad.

War heroes—and the writers who chronicle them—dominate the Soviet cultural landscape, but in the background the Soviet state under Stalin had been at war with its own population. In chapter 5 we look at three writers who tried to confront Stalinism and the consequences of Soviet militarized life, which included mazes of bureaucracy and the horrors of prison camp. In the wake of the Twentieth Party Congress, Nikita Krushchev singled out Tvardovsky and the literary journal he edited, *Novy Mir* (*New World*), expressly endorsing Tvardovsky's post-war sequel "Tyorkin in the Other World" and personally approving the journal's publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (*Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha*), Alexander Solzhenitsyn's tale of another peasant-soldier hero who was incarcerated at the state's behest at war's end. Though World War II had ended and their enemies had been routed, soldier-heroes continued to make their mark in the 1950s and early 1960s, particularly in Tvardovsky's reprisal of Tyorkin and Solzhenitsyn's memorable character Ivan Denisovich. The chapter considers the woes exposed in these two works and their implicit indictment of a state that went to war against its own people, but it concludes with a look at Voinovich and his contribution to the literature of war—both his celebratory song about the new Soviet space program and his parodic novel of World War II, *The Life and Adventures of the Soldier Ivan Chonkin*, not published in the Soviet Union until *perestroika*.

The 1960s heralded a new kind of writing, perhaps signaled by the new journal *Yunost'*, or *Youth*, which began publishing in 1955. A "renewed realism . . . of the 60s and 70s" included such authors as Yuri Trifonov, whose novels of ambiguity portrayed young heroes caught in complicated social and political situations.<sup>23</sup> Youth prose writers such as Vasily Aksyonov wrote

<sup>23</sup> For more on Trifonov and other new realists, see Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism*, x. The "lieutenants' literature" of the 1960s and early 1970s fills in the gap in Second World War fiction.

against a background of the city prose of Trifonov and pushed the envelope on anti-Western propaganda, doing their best to embrace the music, movies, and literature that were flooding the underground.<sup>24</sup> While this era offered certain freedoms in choice of theme, style, and genre, the authors publishing still had to come to terms with official Soviet culture and socialist realism's positive hero. In the midst of the ongoing Cold War, not every author could get his work into print, but young prose writers continued to explore the relationship between the individual and the totalitarian state.

Sergei Dovlatov's pseudoautobiographical central protagonists seem to many to be antiheroes rather than heroes, characters who do not even take the socialist realist model into account and thus cannot qualify as positive heroes. In chapter 6, I chronicle the emergence of this new kind of hero in life—the dissident hero, the misfit, the “dropout,” the outsider. Looking at the prose of Vladimir Makanin and Sergei Dovlatov—one a writer who published throughout the period, and the other a man who never managed to publish any fiction before his emigration to the West—we examine the marginal hero and his place in society. About Dovlatov, Nobel-prizewinning poet Joseph Brodsky once said, “The decisive thing is his tone, which every member of a democratic society can recognize: the individual who won't let himself be cast in the role of a victim, who is not obsessed with what makes him different.” Makanin's heroes are victims, but in the post-Thaw retrenchments of official Soviet culture, a victim became a kind of hero too.

As the Soviet state imploded in the early 1990s, the veterans of the Second World War who had chronicled their eyewitness experiences as journalists or as soldiers were nearing the ends of their lives. A new surge of memoirs and novels, each more earnest than the last, burst onto the literary scene as these writers tried to rewrite Soviet history and their own earlier works, this time without Soviet censorship. The Second World War and its memorials had played an enormous role in the formation of Soviet self-identity across the second half of the twentieth century, and the negation of Soviet history caused a true crisis for veterans and many other Soviet citizens and heralded the decline of the country and its regime. In 1988, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev cancelled all history exams nationwide, stating, “There

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<sup>24</sup> For a study of this era, see Sergei Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

is no point in testing their knowledge of lies.”<sup>25</sup> Official acknowledgement of the lies was unexpected after the years of stagnation and status quo, and Gorbachev’s statement pointed toward the end of Soviet history as Russians had known it.

In the 1990s, author Viktor Astafiev revisited his own war experiences in his two-volume novel *The Accursed and the Dead* (*Prokliaty i ubity*) as well as in some of his shorter fiction, and his work featured a new and honest vision of the soldier’s war and postwar experiences. The struggles of veteran-writers such as Astafiev to find a place in a post-Soviet world for their memories of betrayal by their own state have run up against the new patriotism and nationalism championed by President (and Prime Minister) Vladimir Putin. Chapter 7 looks at post-Soviet visions of World War II, contrasting them with the more immediate eyewitness narratives we looked at in previous chapters. Astafiev (1924–2001), a member of the generation I am calling the “boys of ’24,”<sup>26</sup> tried to write the *War and Peace* for the twentieth century. His novel *The Accursed and the Dead* strove for detachment and impartiality, but his memories of his own war experience may have kept him from realizing those goals.

The final chapter of this study sums up the ways in which Chapaev brought Soviet society into a post-Soviet world. The icons of the Soviet past—including Chapaev, but in the context of the Cold War expanding to other important figures, his “comrades” in the larger Soviet context, such as the first Soviet cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin<sup>27</sup>—were ripe for revisiting. The children born in the 1960s, who dreamed of Soviet heroism and transformed their games from horse riding and swashbuckling in Russia’s steppes to manning their own crafts in the vast far reaches of space, did just that as they approached

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<sup>25</sup> Gorbachev’s quote from Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacobs, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994), 290. Vladimir Putin has returned to Victory Day and the need to honor Soviet World War II veterans even as those veterans are dying out. See for example <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1618531,00.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Another “boy of ’24” whom I’ll include only tangentially is Boris Vasiliev, author of the WWII novel *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, among other works. *Dawns* was published in *Iunost’* in 1969; Yuri Liubimov staged a version of it at his famous Taganka Theatre in 1971, and in 1972 Vasiliev’s fellow veteran, director Stanislav Rostotsky (1922–2001), released a film version. Vasiliev’s novels have been republished recently by Vagrius in Moscow, and *Dawns* even received a Chinese translation in 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Gagarin’s thirtieth birthday was celebrated with pomp and circumstance in 1964, the same year the film *Chapaev* was released in a thirtieth anniversary edition.