

Valentyna Kharkhun

Depictions of WWII in Ukrainian Socialist Realist Literature (1941-43)



Three tendencies in the wartime socialist realist literary canon

An ideological change in the role of literature and it's aesthetic categories (modification)

- **The main aim:** literature as a tool for the militarization of Soviet consciousness and as a weapon against enemies
- **The main idea:** future victory
- **Type of protagonist:** a creator of victory
- **Genre:** poetry
- **Artistic expression:** journalistic writings, chronicles, factual data and poster imagery

Three tendencies in the wartime socialist realist literary canon

Expanding the canon

- the lifting of restrictions on previously taboo themes and images (the glorious historical past of Ukraine, Ukraine as the spiritual homeland, life of immortal soul etc.)
- rehabilitation of the “imprisoned” word (it’s aesthetic and ontological potential)

Three tendencies in the wartime socialist realist literary canon

Process of revision

- a significant blow to the stability of Soviet cultural myths, such as the invincibility of the Soviet army
- prevention of cultural homogeneity and control of mental practices
- busting of the “naked” truth into literature, causing revisionist narratives with literary heterogeneity

Three narratives of the war, created during 1941-43

- the official version (Oleksander Korniychuk's plays)
- the rehabilitation version (Pavlo Tychyna's *Funeral of a Friend*)
- the revisionist version (Oleksander Dovzhenko's *Ukraine in Flames*)

Main goals of the research

- the exploration of similarities, differences and contradictions in artistic interpretations of the war experience
- the study of official codes in military narratives as well as revisionist dominance in the creation of the war image
- the analyses of 1941-1943 literature which can be codified as Soviet propaganda and at the same time as “true” artistic work depicting the real tragedy of the war period

The official version of war

Oleksander
Korniychuk's
plays



Korniychuk's wartime plays

- *"Partisans in the Ukrainian Steppes" (1941)*
- *"The Front" (1942)*
- *"Mister Perkins's Mission in the Country of the Bolsheviks" (1943)*

“Partisans in the Ukrainian Steppes”

The play fulfills two functions:

- 1) rehabilitation
- 1) ideologically “appropriate” information



“*Partisans in the Ukrainian Steppes*”

The function of rehabilitation
(the rescue of Soviet consciousness from inflicted injury):

- Korniychuk used the party's explanation of the army's defeat: *It [the army] retreats because German fascists unexpectedly hit it like thugs*
- the playwright created an image of partisans as defenders who did not exist in reality at that time
- the playwright depicted the tragedy of the situation in comic terms
- Korniychuk employed a therapeutic technique of recognition: he used the plot and imaginative “framework” of his very popular pre-war comedy, *In the Ukrainian Steppes*

“Partisans in the Ukrainian Steppes”

**The function of ideologically “appropriate” information
(the predominance of didactic semantics):**

- who is who (Korniychuk created an image of a hero and an enemy)
- what to do (Korniychuk formulated a recommendation for the organization of a partisan’s movement)
- “it is not so bad” (the tragedy of war “muted” by humorous scenes)

“Partisans in the Ukrainian Steppes”

Korniychuk’s perception of the war

- ideological
- mythologized
- based on the codification of the hero and the enemy

“Partisans in Ukrainian Steppes”

The image of a hero

- is defined by the statement: *Soviet people will never become the slaves of German fascists*
- generalization as the main way for depicting a hero
- exaggerated glorification as the crucial principle in creating the image of a hero

“Partisans in Ukrainian Steppes”

The image of an enemy

- the principle of individualization
- “internal” enemies of the people (nationalists and followers of Petlura), “external” enemies (German fascist)
- debunking of heroism as the main way of the depicting an enemy
- ignominious death as the culmination of the negative depiction of enemies

“*The Front*”

- **The main aim:** the finding of a fake culprit, who was supposed to embody all failures of the Soviet leadership
- **The peculiarities of publishing:** *Pravda* (*The Truth*) on August 24, 1942 (a crucial moment in the Battle of Stalingrad)



“*The Front*”



- **The main conflict:** the drama is focused on two military leaders representing two different approaches to war tactics
- **The version of the war:** “internally” ideological
- **The resonance:** an article *About Oleksander Korniychuk’s Drama “The Front”*, resulting in the concept “gorlovshchyna”

“Mister Perkins’s Mission in the Country of the Bolsheviks”

- comedy as a response to the turning point in the war when the Soviet army stopped the Nazi offensive and the second front began
- predominance of the semantics of victory
- Korniychuk’s vision of the Soviet regime’s uniqueness
- *The weakness of the Soviet people lies in the fact that they have not comprehended what they have done and what they can still do*



Korniychuk's three official versions of the war

- **First:** based on the images of the hero (heroic) and the enemy (debunking of heroism)
- **Second:** “internally” ideological conflict of two Soviet military leaders
- **Third:** glorification of the Soviet country and Soviet authority

The rehabilitation version of war

Pavlo Tychyna's
Funeral of a Friend



“Funeral of a Friend”

Three areas of a lyric protagonist's spiritual experience:

- the first one is created by the senses: sight, hearing, taste etc. (the world experienced as a tragedy is depicted by acoustic and visual images)
- the second stage predicts perception of reality in categories (the hero of the poem expresses the tragedy of a situation in which an unknown soldier's funeral generates the memory of a dead friend)
- the third stage is connected with an affirmation (a lyrical judgment is delivered in a tragic requiem, turning it into an affirmation of life)

“Funeral of a Friend”

Three areas of a lyric protagonist's spiritual experience are constructed in coexistence:

- the tragic: wartime, unknown soldier's funeral, an approaching storm
- the optimistic: type of protagonist, narration consisting of declarative and propagandistic discourse and the plot's elements of a futuristic dream

“Funeral of a Friend”

The rehabilitative vision of the war:

- artistic expression of the poet (synchronization manifested in a multi-level construction of a poetic world)
- creation of an image of human soul

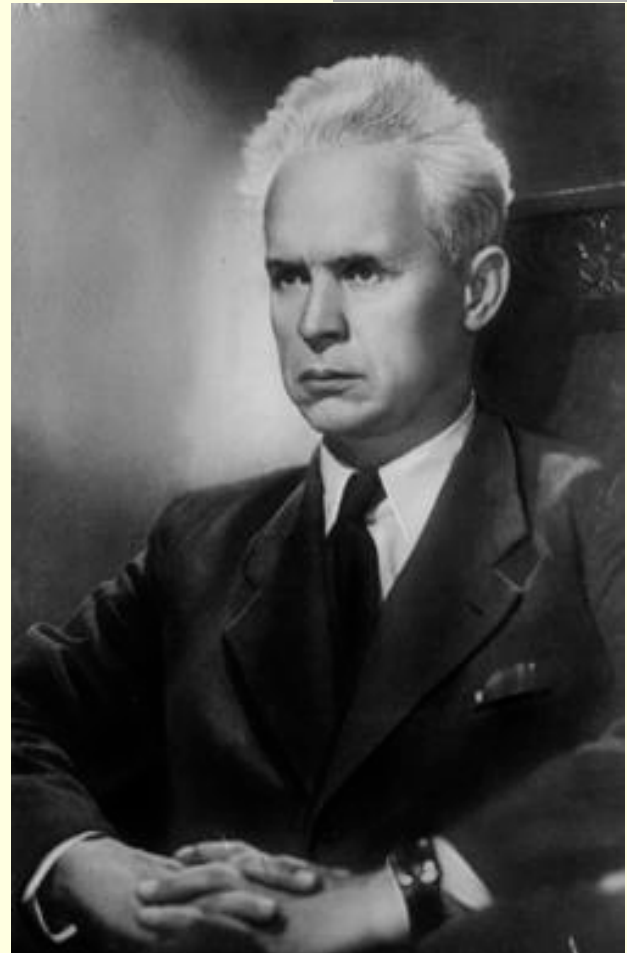
BUT

this version of the war is close to the official Soviet version with its predominance of ideology and propagandistic type of poetic thinking

The revisionist version of war

Oleksander
Dovzhenko's

Ukraine in Flames



“Ukraine in Flames”

- Dovzhenko regarded the war as “fair”, “sacred” and a “liberation”
- Dovzhenko’s vision of war based on the polarization: “hero – enemy”
- The idea of heroism is embodied in generalized images of the Soviet army, the partisan’s detachment and is unfolded in individualized protagonists.



“Ukraine in Flames”



Scene of love

Yuliya Solntceva, *Ukraine in Flame*, 1967

“Ukraine in Flames”

- *I understand Olesya – there is only one path leading back to you. The hero's path. I must be a hero and hate the enemy*
- *Having spilled your blood, did you not understand who it is that we are? We are not mere inhabitants, nor witnesses of history but the heroes of a great menacing time? We won't earn capital, conquer foreign land and subjugate people, we will come back home to ashes and ruins where for some there will be no place to rest one's head. Without a father, a mother, or a brother. And we will say: we triumphed. And this will be our great proud truth for centuries to come*

“Ukraine in Flames”

Image of a hero

- Soviet soldiers: heroic martyrs – winners of the war
- Partisans: folk heroes, the semantics of Cossacks
- Dovzhenko’s vision of the heroic: an attempt to link the official myth of the war to Ukrainian historical and philosophical ideas



“Ukraine in Flames”

Image of an enemy

- Germans, their Italian allies, kurkuls and the nationalists. Europe as the enemy
- myth of a “worthless” enemy based on a distortion of reality, grotesque imagery and exaggeration



“Ukraine in Flames”

The official text of Dovzhenko’s war myth

- a cheering pathos for the heroes
- a pejorative pathos for the enemy

“Ukraine in Flames”

Revisionist version of war:

- terrifying reality of war
(devastated land, human sacrifices and broken lives)
- the fragmentation of society into wartime categories: refugees, the occupied, deserters, Nazi policemen and prisoners.



“Ukraine in Flames”

These people have absolutely no ability to forgive each other even for the sake of common, high interests. They do not have an instinct for statehood [...], they do not study history. It's unbelievable. They have already lived twenty five years among negative slogans condemning God, property, family and friendship. From the word “nation” only an adjective remains for them. They do not embrace high truths. That is why they have so many traitors...

“Ukraine in Flames”

- the myth of the war unfolds in a revision of the entire Soviet society
- the construction of a program of rehabilitation for society

“Everyone of us has to have two victories. Victory over the fascist-occupier, a national, common, great victory. And the second, small victory over numerous personal shortcomings, rudeness and stupidity”

The program:

- 1) the stabilization of social consciousness and consolidation of society
- 2) the intensification of archetypal categories of Ukrainian mentality: family, nation and homeland

“Ukraine in Flames”

Dovzhenko’s myth of war is based on two texts

- The first is official; it postulates the “probable”, “desired” and ideologically motivated perception
- The second is revisionist, appearing as a result of Dovzhenko’s deep analyses of the war circumstances

Валентина Хархун

Соцреалістичний
канон в українській
літературі: генеза,
розвиток,
модифікації



Valentyna Kharkhun

- kharkhun2004@mail.ru
- vk2282@columbia.edu