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From Socialist Realism to Mash-up Fiction: The Evolution of Arkadii Gaidar's *Timur and His Team*[1]

Abstract: When Arkadii Gaidar's novella *Timur and His Team* was published in 1940, it gained instant critical acclaim, readers' recognition, and was included in school reading lists for future generations. While the story cleverly combines an entertaining narrative of children's adventures with political ideology, its main focus is on the character of Timur who embodies an ideal Soviet child and a talented young leader. In post-Soviet children's culture Gaidar's story undergoes numerous textual and cinematic transformations that reinforce some general cultural assumptions about Soviet Russia while simultaneously revising and transforming them. The article traces the evolution of Gaidar's story over time and analyzes its cultural significance. Ultimately, the new versions of *Timur and His Team* reveal a need for addressing the past either as a traumatic experience or a nostalgic tribute to happy Soviet childhood where children were raised in the spirit of collectivism, national pride, and moral principles.

Keywords: adaptation, Socialist Realism, mash-up fiction, post-Soviet children's literature, militarized masculinity, gender hierarchy, disability, vampires, post-Soviet nostalgia

In her seminal work, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art" and points out that adaptations do not necessarily involve a "shift of medium or mode of engagement" (Hutcheon, 2013: 170). Following John Bryant's study, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen*, she rejects the sacrosanct status of the primary text and argues that "no text is a fixed thing" (Hutcheon, 2013: 179) for texts constantly undergo rewriting, revisions, different editions, transformations, translations, and other

[1] Some materials used in this article have been previously published in the journal *Detskie chteniia* (Children's Readings: Studies in Children's Literature). See: Rudova, L. (2014). Maskulinnost' v sovetskoi i postsovetskoi detskoi literature: transformatsiia Timura (i ego komandy). *Detskie chteniia*, 6 (2), 85–101. See also: Rudova, L. (2014). Deti-outsaidery i parallel'nye miry: real'noe i fantasticheskoe v povesti E. Murashovoi *Klass korrektsyi*. *Detskie chteniia*, 5 (1), 198–214.

changes while maintaining a continuous intertextual relationship with the original. New textual interpretations engage in a dialogue with the past and add layers of meaning, sometimes "destabilize[ing] both formal and cultural identity and thereby shift[ing] power relations" (Hutcheon, 2013: 174). Hutcheon further explains that adaptation is not a copy but a work in its own right capable of "bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty" (Hutcheon, 2013: 173). As authors transform the original text, they do so with the cultural demands and conditions of the present in mind. Once the original text is transformed, it inevitably produces a new vision and perspective on culture that "embed(s) difference in similarity" (Hutcheon, 2013: 174). The ubiquity of adaptations is persistent and overwhelming. Among their most prominent literary examples is the New York Times bestseller, a parodic and whimsical mash-up novel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), by Seth Graham-Smith, who blends roughly 85 percent of Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), with contemporary zombie fiction and lists Austen as his co-author. Likewise, James Joyce based his elusive and illusive experimental novel, *Ulysses* (1922), set in the early twentieth-century Dublin, on *The Odyssey*, the Greek epic written in eighth-century BC and attributed to Homer. But perhaps the most irresistible and productive source of literary adaptations belongs to fairy tales. Having captured the imagination of authors throughout the world, fairy tales became subject to diverse and abundant transformations that enriched the literary tradition with new plot lines, characters, and meanings, occasionally changing the original altogether.

The Russian attachment to literary and folk-tale adaptations has a long tradition, and curiously, the most beloved children's books in the Soviet Union were often adaptations of Western originals. For one, Aleksandr Volkov's immensely popular book, *The Wizard of the Emerald City* (1939), based on L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), appeared in the midst of the Great Terror; it was subsequently serialized by the author at the request of the readers, and continues to be in demand even now[2]. Similarly, Alexei Tolstoy's successful *The Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino* (1936), adapted from Carlo Collodi's 1883 fantasy and adventure story, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, has undergone numerous editions and screen adaptations[3]. It is also hard not to mention the stories about Gavroche and Cosette from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), adapted from the French by various Russian translators at different times. Known for their stark depiction of social injustice under capitalism, these adaptations became required reading for Soviet children[4].

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[2] On A. Volkov's adaptation of L. Frank Baum's book, see: Haber, E. (2017). *Behind the Iron Curtain. Aleksandr Volkov and His Magic Land Series.* Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi.

[3] On Buratino, see: Lipovetskii, M. (2008). *Buratino: Utopiia svobodnoi marionetki. Veselye chelovechki: Kul'turnye geroi sovetskogo detstva.* Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 125–152.

[4] On Gavroche and Cosette, see: Triuel, M. "Gavrosh" i "Kozetta" – sovetskie rasskazy?

While the desire to retell the story in a new way across different media and literary genres has been persistent throughout history, often these adaptations focus on the character, "the one to whom the story is happening" (Nikolajeva, 2005: 110). As Murray Smith observes, "characters are crucial to the rhetorical and aesthetic effects of both narrative and performance texts because they engage receivers' imaginations through… recognition, alignment and allegiance" (quoted in Hutcheon, O'Flynn, 2013: 11). While the chronotope (time-space) and fabula, the "raw material" of the story, can drastically change in the process of adaptation, the character frequently remains central, and his or her values are faithful to the primary source. According to Maria Nikolajeva, the appeal of the fictional character in children's literature remains strong because despite "the postmodern and poststructural denigration of characters, they are still central in fiction", and above all, the reader is interested "in human nature and human relationships" as they manifest themselves in the character (Nikolajeva, 2005: 145).

My study focuses on the transformation of one of the most famous characters of Russian/Soviet children's literature, Timur Garaev, or simply Timur, from Arkadii Gaidar's novella *Timur and His Team* (1940), who has been captivating the minds of both young and adult Russian readers for over eighty years, and whose presence in the children's literary canon remains uncontested. When the book was released in 1940, it received instant critical acclaim and readers' recognition and was included in school reading lists for generations to come. In particular, the two main characters, Timur and the girl Zhenia, became so popular that for years parents named their newborns after them (Maiofis, 2017). By the time of Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika in the mid-1980s, the book had been translated into 75 languages and its 212 editions in Russian had sold 14,281.000 copies (Nemirovsky, Platova, 1987: 300–320). The story's triumphant journey produced numerous textual and cinematic adaptations, reinforcing some general cultural assumptions about Soviet Russia while simultaneously revising and transforming them. Moreover, a short time after the book's publication and its simultaneous screen adaptation by the director Aleksandr Razumnyi, *Timur and His Team* gave birth to the so-called Timurite movement, a form of social volunteering rooted in Soviet ideology. The appeal of Timur is deeply engrained in Russian cultural consciousness, and in this article I want to explain how and why – after a series of various textual transformations – this character and his values continue to attract Russian readers and authors, and how Timur's literary evolution has become such a carrier of the nation's historical Zeitgeist.

The construction of heroes in Soviet children's literature was almost always ideological and defined by the historical context[5]. Gaidar created his famous

(K probleme osvoeniia frantsuzskogo romana na russkoi pochve (2014). *Detskie chteniia*, 6 (2), 366–380.

[5] Catriona Kelly writes that as a role model for Soviet children, Timur surpassed the real-life young hero, Pavlik Morozov. In 1947 *Timur and His Team* was added to the list

hero in 1939, in Stalin's time, a period whose values and practices had a strong impact on the formation of Soviet identity. According to Tatiana Kruglova, Soviet culture of the 1920s–1930s was subject to the "revolution of feelings" that replaced human relationships based on intimacy and human attachment by pragmatic collectivist values (Kruglova, 2010: 38–39). Collective socialization came to supersede private "bourgeois" emotions and made their expression shameful. In the 1930s in particular the collectivist ideology served as the Party's "strategy of eradication… of negative existential states" of being (Kruglova, 2010: 45). As the result of it, a whole generation of Soviet people lost their personal autonomy and learned how to subordinate their interests to the interests of the state.

Discipline, subordination, and collectivism were Gaidar's building blocks for constructing his fictional characters. Although critics recognized that his characters retained their inner freedom, *Timur and His Team* was above all a product of Stalinist "social command" and reflected the ideological and discursive practices of the time[6]. Thus, Timur unmistakably embodied a model of the Soviet masculinity code that required allegiance to the state rather than to one's biological family. Timur's model of selfless "heroic masculinity" informs all of Gaidar's works.

In his study of masculinity, Eliot Borenstein demonstrates how in the 1920s the Soviet state privileged conventional "male values" over "female domesticity" (Borenstein, 2001) and despite the Bolsheviks' formal declaration of gender equality, women continued to be objectified and denied equal opportunities with men. Similarly, family units – although never undermined – lost their former social significance in favor of units based on camaraderie, brotherhood, and allegiance to the common cause. Ultimately, it was masculinity based on heroism and associated with military motifs that became one of the defining features of Stalinist Russia (Borenstein, 2001). Throughout the 1930s the model of dominant masculinity continued to thrive and cement the hierarchical gender conventions in which "fathers", "sons", and "brothers" played leading roles in the modernization and militarization of Soviet society, despite the fact that women joined the labor force *en masse*.

Given that Gaidar's novel focuses on the "big" metaphorical "family" represented by the state, it is not surprising that the image of Timur is modeled on the prewar masculine code of behavior and the idea of male brotherhood, in which he takes center stage as an exemplary "son" of the Soviet "family" and

of classical children's literature that included such books as Ivan Krylov's fables (published between 1806–1834, Alexander Pushkin's *Captain's Daughter* (1836), Leo Tolstoy's *Childhood* (1852), and other critically acclaimed works of world literature (Arzamastseva, Nikolaeva, 2005: 344). In post-Soviet time, Gaidar's novella was adapted by the director Igor' Maslennikov in his film, *Timur and His Commandos* (2004), in which the protagonist is an offspring of a super wealthy Russian businessman.

[6] See: Kruglova, 2010; Chudakova, 1990.

successor to the older generation of his metaphorical "fathers"[7]. Furthermore, his ideological significance is amplified by the Party's changing goals in the late 1930s. Whereas during the first Five-Year Plan of industrial development the party launched the slogan, "Technology is the key to everything", by the late 1930s this slogan was replaced by a different one, "Cadres are the key to everything". In children's literature, Timur comes to embody the image of these new cadres by becoming a model chairman-administrator who builds a strong team of boys who help the elderly, the young, and the families of servicemen in their daily chores while simultaneously fighting the local hooligans. At twelve years of age, Timur is no longer a "little man" but a "big leader" who protects the peace of his local dacha community. Gaidar's message to the reader is unambiguous: with a leader like Timur, the state can feel secure in the face of adversity.

As Maria Litovskaia noticed, the image of a "militarized state" is present in many of Gaidar's works (Litovskaia, 2012: 87–104). It is hardly surprising that in the atmosphere of impending war with Germany, Timur and his team function like a military organization based on discipline, conspiration, strict subordination, and readiness to act. The team invented its own alarm system and used a secret phone and code signs for urgent round-the-clock communication. The boys were expected to report to Timur's headquarters promptly, especially when they had to accomplish a serious mission, such as to prevent the local hooligan Kvakin and his gang from raiding people's gardens. To ensure the mission's success, Gaidar unfailingly places Timur in control of the team's operations.

While innocent at first sight, most of Timur's summer adventures are ideologically motivated. His uncle notices the seriousness of Timur's games and compares them to and ponders the difference from his own childhood games: "In my generation, we used to run, jump, crawl the roofs, and fight with each other. Our games were simple and understood by everyone" (Gaidar, 1965: 91)[8]. By contrast, Timur's games are presented as a training ground for adulthood, and in the story even the negative adolescent characters feel this and respect Timur's team's austere discipline and militarized code of behavior, associated with the older generation (Gaidar, 1965: 60, 68). In fact, Timur's judgements and actions are so impressively mature that they prompted the critic Dmitrii Bykov to note that Gaidar always tries to "adapt the child to the world of adults" (Bykov, 2012). With every accomplished task, Timur makes a step for-

[7] As Katerina Clark writes, in the public rituals of the 1930s, there existed numerous male teams and groups (e.g., "border guards, long-distanced skiers, violinists, mountain climbers, parachutists", etc.) who were celebrated as the "sons". In official 1930s biographies, they were referred to as "close fellows" or "brothers", and considered Stalin as "father" (Clark, 1987: 125).

[8] All translations of the original passages from Russian are mine – unless indicated otherwise.

ward in mastering the "code of a real man", and his heroic stature is illustrated by his own words, "I stand… I look. Everybody is happy. Everybody is at peace. It means I'm also at peace" (Gaidar, 1965: 110).

Vera Dunham's study, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*, helps us understand other reasons of Timur's popularity as a role model. She argues that Stalinist culture reintroduces decorum as a prominent feature of the new middle class (Dunham, 1976: 19–22). To describe it, she uses the word "kul'turnost'" ("culturedness") which stands for more than good manners and includes all-round education, social skills, love of reading, personal hygiene, neatness in dress and other normative cultural practices approved in Soviet upbringing. Overall, "kul'turnost'" standards were necessary for the regime to control the personal and social lives of Soviet citizens by cultivating in them a sense of moral stability, rationality, self-control, and attention to decorum. Since the 1930s "kul'turnost'" became an indispensable aspect of Soviet middle-class masculinity, and Gaidar generously endowed Timur with its features.

It is not hard to notice the expression of Timur's kul'turnost' in his "chivalrous" attitude toward Zhenia, who hopes to be accepted in his team (Kruglova, 2010: 45). Yet it is obvious that Timur's chivalry conceals a share of sexism as he does not believe that Zhenia is capable of accomplishing anything on her own and patronizes her as the "weak sex". The gender hierarchy is also staunchly supported by Zhenia's older sister Olga who constantly reminds Zhenia that she should act like a girl – not a boy – and by Timur's teammates who are initially biased against having a girl among them. To grasp Gaidar's own attitude toward Zhenia, we should pay attention to his portrayal of her character. For a good part of the story, she is impulsive, excessively curious and immature. Gaidar emphasizes the contrast between Zhenia's rampant "feminine" weaknesses and Timur's superior masculine strengths and thereby compels the reader to accept Timur's patronage of her as normal and natural. Timur seems to infantilize Zhenia by running her chores and promoting her to the team despite the apprehension of his teammates; he also proves himself indispensable in a critical situation when Zhenia wants to see her father before his departure to the front but cannot get to Moscow on time. Timur comes to the rescue and rushes her there on his uncle's motorcycle that he takes without permission. In a different instance, Timur consoles the girl in a condescending "fatherly" manner: "Zhenia, are you crying? … Please don't cry. … Don't! I'll be back soon" (Gaidar, 1965: 97). Here, too, the traditional gender stereotype highlights the contrast between Zhenia's emotionality and Timur's restrained demeanor. Despite his infatuation with Zhenia, Timur, as a strong man of action, never reveals his romantic feelings to her.

In her *Poetics of Children's Literature*, Zohar Shavit draws attention to the binary model of positive and negative heroes in children's literature as a means to reinforce middle-class values for the young (Shavit, 1986: 100). In *Timur and*

His Team, the positive model of masculinity contrasts with the negative one, represented by the character Kvakin and his gang. The gang members fail to meet the standards of Soviet masculinity: they smoke, curse, beat up younger kids, destroy private property, and are in general socially unfit. The master plot of Stalinist literature requires that negative heroes should be "reforged" and developed from "spontaneity" to "consciousness" with the help of an expert ideological guide. Unsurprisingly, Timur makes it his mission to reeducate the gang. In one of his confrontations with them, he mocks Kvakin's leadership qualities, "You are ridiculous. Nobody is afraid of you and nobody needs you … Neither they [gang members – L.R.] can accomplish anything with you, nor you with them" (Gaidar, 1965: 80). By the end of the story, Timur predictably wins the trust of Kvakin's gang and successfully reeducates them in normative Soviet masculinity. Loyal to the principle of brotherhood and capable of transforming himself and others, Timur did not have equals among canonical heroes in Soviet children's literature.

As Russia abruptly moved from socialism to capitalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there emerged a need for new themes and new heroes. However, it took years before such characters were developed. Among them, we find a group of previously absent or silenced types: the disabled, the nerd, the zombie, the vampire, and other characters unfit for the standards of normative masculinity. It could be argued that these new heroes came to symbolize liberal values that were marginalized under the Soviet regime. Viktoria Sukovataia singles out three factors in the emergence of non-standard heroes in contemporary Russian culture: 1) a disintegration of collectivist identity; 2) pluralization of public opinion; 3) interest in and accessibility of Western culture and the desire to adapt Western cultural models to the contemporary Russian context (Sukovataia, 2012: 95).

The cultural power of Timur made him a popular candidate for literary and cinematic adaptation in post-Soviet time almost instantly. In Genrikh Sapgir's tale, "Timur and Her Team" (1991), Timur is transformed into a misanthropic disabled girl with a sadistic imagination. In a manner consistent with sots-art, an artistic trend that emerged in the late 1960s and parodied socialist realism, Sapgir mocks Gaidar's portrayal of the ideal boy character. Sapgir's diabolical Timur is a lonely girl who spends her days in a wheelchair, suffering from debilitating pain and planning torture and death to the healthy and happy. Timur turns her team into an obedient and murderous instrument of destruction, who at the end liberate themselves from her control and decorate her porch with feces in a protest against her evil domination. This last gesture appears as Sapgir's mockery of Gaidar's vision of model Soviet childhood and the ideal child hero.

The contemporary children's author Ekaterina Murashova (b. 1962) explores this issue by revisiting Gaidar's novel. She rejects the traditional concepts of the "norm" and "normalcy" and reinterprets the construction of hero-

ism and heroic character in children's literature. Her focus is on "abnormal" children, and she invites the audience to think about tolerance toward them.

Murashova's characters emerge during the transition from old cultural codes to the new ones, when the connection with the Soviet legacy is being questioned. The sociologist Boris Dubin emphasizes that the process of cultural transition in Russia unmistakably reflects nostalgia for the past life (Dubin, 2009). Therefore, it is only natural that the Soviet past becomes an inspiration and organic part of Murashova's works that unambiguously sends us back to *Timur and His Team*. In her three major works, *Correction Class* (2005), *Alarm Guard* (2007) and *One Miracle for the Whole Life* (2010), the author nostalgically revives Gaidar's collectivist model of childhood, and her *Alarm Guard* becomes the most explicit adaptation of Gaidar's canonical text.

Gaidar's plot, ideology, and proximity to the character's identity inform the entirety of Murashova's novel, which combines reality and fantasy. The story begins with the arrival of three new students to a strange class in one of St. Petersburg's schools. What strikes the newcomers is that their classmates look disturbingly alike: tall, slim, with similar facial expressions, quiet and mysterious; they move as if marching "in line", and each of them wears a pin with the strange Latin letters, "AG" (Alarm Guard). In the eyes of the newcomers, their classmates are "aliens from a parallel world" (Murashova, 2008: 180). As the story unfolds, the reader discovers that the mysterious classmates belong to a secret organization of "alarm-guards" that in the vein of Timur's team helps people in need. Like their literary predecessors, alarm guards act efficiently, have their own system of communication and conspiration, and never discuss their good deeds outside of their organization.

Like Gaidar, Murashova creates her heroes in the period of transition to a new social, economic, and spiritual culture. Gaidar wrote at the turning point of two periods, revolutionary and Stalinist, when revolutionary romanticism and utopian mentality yielded to post-utopian pragmatism and private life gave way to the ideological priorities of the collectivist state (Kruglova, 2010: 46). Similarly, Murashova's novel shows how in Putin's Russia, materialism and individualism replace the idea of collectivism and care for others. A number of sociologists conclude that the Russian society of the beginning of the twenty-first century is characterized by "alienation, detachment, realization that nothing can be done to influence any issues or solve problems" (Gudkov, Dubin, Zorkaia, 2008: 64). As a result of the fragmentation of social life, weak social institutions, and little incentive for organizing, post-Soviet people cannot rely on any support outside of their immediate family (Gudkov et al., 2008: 66). Low levels of solidarity and interest in organizing (2% of adult population), politics, and the reluctance to help others contrast with the expectation of help from the paternalistic state (Gudkov et al., 2008: 71–76). In this atmosphere where the role of social movements, organizations, and any form of resistance to social injustice or the abuse of power is non-existent,

Murashova's *Alarm Guard* shows a way toward the development of new civil values, her characters stand out as honorable role models for the contemporary Russian youth.

Unlike Timur's team whose goals correspond to the ideology of the Soviet state, the philosophy of alarm guards is directed against the cynicism of Russia's contemporary leadership that endorses paternalism, social apathy, and consumer mentality. Good deeds of Murashova's characters inspire hope that civil society can emerge on the basis of collective action. Their moral philosophy and the infectious desire to improve life for many people is so powerful that at the end of the novel one of the skeptical characters not only changes his view of AG, but decides to sacrifice his future academic studies in the United States and stay in St. Petersburg in order to continue the work of Bert, their leader, whose character is modelled on Gaidar's Timur.

An enigmatic character, Bert differs not only from Timur but from most characters in Soviet and post-Soviet children's and young adult literature. He is an inventor of digital communication systems who seeks to uncover and destroy the world of evil, but in contrast to the previous generation of heroes, he is physically disabled by a fatal disease and loses his battle with it at the end of the novel. Since Bert cannot move around without his wheelchair and is bound to stay inside, his unheroic masculinity is a striking contrast to the hypermasculine ideal of Russia's ruling president. Rather, Bert's strength is in his symbolic capital and social consciousness. According to sociologists, post-industrial societies favor leaders who possess good education, intelligence, creativity, tolerance, and most importantly, the absence of old-fashioned macho masculinity[9]. Endowed with these qualities and despite his physical fragility and social marginalization, Bert becomes an exemplary leader for the alarm guards. The reader realizes that Bert's physical limitations are not a problem for his leadership because his strength rests on in his intelligence, and his virtual world is limitless. Combining computer capabilities and human consciousness, he invents a fantastical system of communication through which alarm guards stay in contact and coordinate their rescue operations.

Bert's organizational model for his alarm guards is strikingly similar to Timur's, and Murashova's language and imagery in describing their rituals and military discipline are clearly informed by Gaidar's novella. Although alarm guards are required to "resign" from their organization and go back to "normal" life on their twentieth birthday, they remain AG "reservists" for life. In the vein of Timur's team, Bert's alarm guards are committed to humanitarian work and fighting social vices. Whether they save a crow trapped in a thicket, or pull out a young junkie from a well, or make toys for a little Tadjik boy, or collect money for his hospital treatment, alarm guards' actions model social

[9] About masculine types in post-Soviet Russia, see: Gavriliuk, 2004: 100; Kosterina, 2012: 70.

betterment and hope for a brighter future. This is not missed by the observant members of the older generation who identify AG with Timurites, "They look most like the Timur team from the prewar years. In them, the collective dominates the individual. Now such young people just don't exist anymore…" (Murashova, 2008: 104). The teachers also sense their students' "vague collective activity and collective responsibility for something unknown… Something that's against the drift of our time" (Murashova, 2008: 137). In the meantime, the news about Bert's extraordinary organization goes viral on the Internet and the AG movement begins to spread all over Russia.

In Murashova's novel, Gaidar's conflict between Timur's team and Kvakin's gang is reenacted through a similar conflict between alarm guards and criminal elements that plan to steal Bert's invention. However, the specificity of Gaidar's formula for "reforging" a gang into a team and thus eliminating petty crime doesn't work in the context of contemporary Russian reality, and alarm guards remain in a state of permanent symbolic war against criminals. *Alarm Guard* juxtaposes behavioral models of the socially conscious population groups to those who undermine these values. The high cultural and educational values of alarm guards are persistently emphasized in Murashova's novel, and the reader understands that the new leader who comes to replace Bert has to be equal to him in his intellectual and moral standards.

In Soviet culture, disabled persons were incompatible with the concept of heroism and comparable to female-gender, or "second-class" citizens (Sukovataia, 2012: 91). Therefore, it is Murashova's great achievement that she features a non-traditional role model of masculinity. However, we may still wonder if Murashova's novel overcomes the gender asymmetry that characterizes Gaidar's novella. In fact, her adaptation of *Timur and His Team* does not overcome the binary model of gender relations, in which women are always second-class citizens. In *Alarm Guard*, a female heroine, Asia, is excessively emotional and cannot win a math competition without her male friend. Another female heroine quits the alarm guard to become a dancer. The third heroine, Ania, is portrayed in a secondary role as Bert's assistant. That is, despite Murashova's innovative adaptation of Gaidar's character of Timur, her portrayal of gender roles remains conservative and unchanged, in line with the gender hierarchy in contemporary Russian society.

Although serious literature is still widely read in Russian schools, "boundary-defying fiction" acquires a "growing stature in the cultural mainstream" (Boog, 2017). As speculative fiction is actively adding new mashup genres by fusing elements of historical fiction, fantasy, science fiction, or other genres in innovative ways, young Russian readers eagerly embrace it and feel "crazy about characters (and scenarios) that have little in common with their own everyday lives" (Rabey, 2010). Commenting on the new literary trends the critic Sue Corbett observes, "These days repulsive and strange are in vogue" (Corbett, 2012). This phenomenon is illustrated by Tatiana Koroleva's *Timur and His*

Team and the Vampires (2012) that mixes the classical text with vampire tales. Her mashup adaptation turns Timur and his comrades into vampire slayers who fight Zhenia's enigmatic neighbor Arman and Kvakin and his gang, all of whom are eventually exposed as vampires by the police. Koroleva's book is a skillful hybrid of Gaidar's original tale and clichéd ghoul-slaying adventure. While the plot remains virtually unchanged, the upgraded characters of Kvakin and his gang add more fun and intensity to it. Besides reading about Timur and his time, contemporary readers can learn about the vampire lore and ways to rid the world of them. The plot is amazingly violent and includes multiple victims of vampire bites as well as several mysterious deaths of humans and animals in the dacha community. Although Koroleva does not modify Gaidar's story substantially, she cleverly adds elements of popular fiction and vampire films to attract different kinds of readers – those who know the story of Timur, those who like vampire books, and those who'd like to be entertained. *Timur and His Team and the Vampires* could also be read as a parodic text that "vampirizes" the original socialist realist text by completely destroying its ideological meaning in favor of pure entertainment. No social "reforging" takes place in Koroleva's mash-up as the valiant leader Timur must fight the supernatural.

Over time, canonical texts and popular heroes turn into "timeless cognitive models" inviting intermedia adaptations, "evolving and mutating to fit new times and different places" (Hutcheon, 2013: 175–176). Gaidar's *Timur and His Team* has proven to be a model text that allows contemporary authors to convey their perception of Soviet history while simultaneously expressing "their detachment from disempowering harsh present" (Debbora Battaglia quoted in Rethmann, 1997: 77). Sapgir's adaptation of Gaidar's story is the only one of the four reviewed here that – albeit in a grotesque form – highlights the crippling effect of the oppressive ideological norms imposed on the Soviet youth. If anything, "Timur and Her Team" satirizes the teammates' blind support of their evil leader who does not tolerate happiness outside of her own suffocating and warped world. Murashova's adaptation of Gaidar's work is, on the contrary, an expression of a post-traumatic, post-Soviet nostalgia for certain aspects of the socialist past obliterated by the new capitalist order. Besides its nostalgia for the "positive heroes" à la soviétique, *Alarm Guard* also longs for the kind of youth of the past that valued the spirit of solidarity and collectivism. Finally, Koroleva's approach to Gaidar's original illustrates Fredric Jameson's argument that in postmodern capitalist society, culture frees itself from the "sense of the unique and personal" and mass-produces a commodity cultural product whose goal is not to elicit emotional or ethical response from the reader but rather to provide a light entertainment, free from intensity and anxiety (Jameson, 1993: 319). While Koroleva's vampire story works as an antidote to Gaidar's ideology, it nevertheless provides a stimulating journey to the unknown Soviet past for the new post-Soviet generation, some of whom

may even be curious to look at the original *Timur and His Team*. The "Soviet" therefore continues to survive in the post-Soviet present and, as a category, continues to be redesigned. As a result of this process, the new image of the "Soviet" has become "a mirror that reflects who we are today. Two images reinforce each other: the past in the present and the present in the past. And this new design has also been replicated in culture" (Dubin, 2009: 3).

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