

## Semen Babaevskii and the Struggle to Revivify the Rural Theme

ANDY HICKS  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Of the Soviet writers who rose to prominence in the late Stalinist period, perhaps none suffered so dramatic a reversal in official critical reception as Semen Babaevskii (1909 - 2000). Recipient of Stalin Prizes for his novel *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy* [Bearer of the Golden Star] (1946-47) and its sequel, *Svet nad zemlei* [Light over the Earth] (Part I: 1948-49; Part II: 1949-50), Babaevskii had attained all the tokens of professional literary success in the Stalinist system: positions of responsibility in the Soviet Writers' Union, huge print runs of his novels, and a 1951 film adaptation of *Kavaler* that reportedly found favor with Stalin (Gromov 447). In some ways, this eminence continued in the years after Stalin's death. From 1955 to 1959 Babaevskii served as a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet, and he was also sent on a lengthy writing trip to the People's Republic of China, a visit which produced a volume of sketches and two collections of diary material. He continued to have a productive literary career, publishing regularly into the Gorbachev era.

Yet Thaw critics would transform Babaevskii from a lauded Soviet writer to an icon of the *lakirovka deistvit'nosti* (lacquering of reality) that had been identified as one of the primary defects sapping the vitality from Soviet literature. For Babaevskii, the shift in reception was permanent: as Polly Jones notes in her summary of Thaw-period debates over the Stalin cult in literature, Babaevskii was the only author who did not find his critical reputation somewhat rehabilitated in the Party's early 1960s reaction against Thaw "excesses." Even Petr Pavlenko, who was the target of as much vitriol in the mid-1950s as was Babaevskii, and who, moreover, was infinitely more essential to the Stalin cult, saw his critical reputation rise again within a few years (Jones 161-63).

At first reading, it is hard to identify the features of Babaevskii's works that merit such abuse. To be sure, he did produce grindingly optimistic novels of agricultural reconstruction and modernization just as a more unflinching view of the difficulties afflicting the countryside

was starting to take hold. His later attempts to adjust to that new paradigm were widely condemned as inadequate (especially *Synovii bunt* [Mutiny of the Sons] (1961) or, much later, *Privol'e* [Wide Open Spaces] (1980)). But since the rural theme dominated postwar Stalinist literature—and Thaw-era critics found similar faults in many other such works—that focus by itself would not have been enough to make Babaevskii the conventional symbol of *lakerovka*.

In this article I argue that Babaevskii may fall victim to his own attempts to breathe new life into a static genre, primarily in *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy*. One of his new techniques, the incorporation of the pastoral, runs afoul of a general shift toward a less optimistic depiction of rural settings and his other innovation, thematizing the positive hero (a key element of Socialist Realist doctrine), was not appreciated by most of his contemporaries and may even have contributed to the contempt that some harbored for him.

### Criticism of Babaevskii during the Thaw

Three mid-1950s statements frame the reaction against Babaevskii. Mikhail Sholokhov's typically pugnacious statement to the 1956 Twentieth Party Congress underlines a common source of discontent:

Писатель Бабаевский правильно решил, что *Кавалер Золотой Звезды* уже не принесет ему четвертой медали лауреата Сталинской премии, и поехал в Китай, по слухам, на три года. Что ж, привезет оттуда хороший роман о наших друзьях — китайских крестьянах, это будет большой радостью для нас всех. (16)<sup>1</sup>

Having devoted most of his speech to suggesting that Soviet writers spend insufficient time in the field, living with farmers and workers, Sholokhov takes a different tack with his fellow chronicler of Cossacks and *kolkhozy*. The redundant phrasing “ne prineset emu chetvertoi medali laureata Stalinskoi premii” (16) links the medal of the novel's title to the fascination with the awards that Babaevskii himself had received. His three Stalin prizes for the three parts of his saga<sup>2</sup> are often mentioned in discussions of the period, often in parallel with the “Golden Star”—the Hero of the Soviet Union medal, the nation's highest honor—worn by the novel's protagonist. In fact, throughout the late Stalinist and Thaw periods, the title of *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy* is used as a metonymy for Babaevskii much more frequently than most

authors are identified by their most famous work, foregrounding the issue of awards and recognition.<sup>3</sup>

Babaevskii, Sholokhov implies, has gone to the well too many times, squeezing not two but three consecutive Stalin Prizes from the same characters and setting. Given the years he spent on both *Tikhii Don* [The Quiet Don] (Parts I-II: 1928-31; Part III: 1933; Part IV: 1940) and *Podniataia tselina* [Virgin Soil Uplturned] (Part I: 1932; Part II: 1960), it would be hard for Sholokhov to complain about devotion to a limited number of fictional worlds—and indeed he defends slow composition elsewhere in his speech—but in 1956 it had been fifteen years since his own Stalin Prize for *Tikhii Don*, and it would not be until 1960 that he would win a Lenin Prize (the renamed Stalin Prize), or 1965 the Nobel.<sup>4</sup> At the time of this speech, however, Sholokhov's production/recognition ratio would appear to rank substantially below Babaevskii's.

Indeed, contemporary criticism of Babaevskii often resembles resentment of the easy bestseller: contempt directed at a writer who seemingly casts aside scruples concerning originality, truth, and independent thinking to do exactly what is required to succeed. The most colorful statement in this vein is undoubtedly Vladimir Pomerantsev's famous 1953 characterization of Sergei Tutarinov, *Kavaler's* hero. His eyes opened by Valentin Ovechkin's proto-Village Prose *Raionnye budni* [District Routine] (1952-56) sketches, he attacks Tutarinov and his creator for vanquishing paper tigers rather than facing the true magnitude of rural problems. The attack takes on infantilizing overtones common to Babaevskii criticism:

И тут-то я понял, что до Овечкина во многих книгах по колхозной тематике все было затерто-притерто, острия все отпилены, углы пообломаны. Я понял, что Тутаринов преодолевал препятствия легкие, подлинно сложными проблемами жизни села не занимался и даже не видел их. Он выглядит сегодня не столько героем, сколько ангелочком на куличе. Славой он, как цветным маком, обсыпан, а лизнешь его – и растает. (middle third of web page)<sup>5</sup>

Pomerantsev surrounds this passage on Tutarinov with comments on Babaevskii's own inadequacy, and in conjunction with Sholokhov's criticism cited above, his complaints about Tutarinov's cheap victories

over simple obstacles could also be read to refer to the laurels Babaevskii himself garnered by hewing to the same shopworn narrative formula rather than grappling with the real problems of the countryside. Pomerantsev's confectionery imagery also becomes a commonplace of Thaw attacks on the late Stalin period, with *sladkost'* and *susal'nost'* reaching almost the ubiquity of *lakirovka* as standard epithets.

The third critical statement, Fedor Abramov's 1954 "*Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoennoi proze*" [People of the Collective Farm Village in Postwar Prose], shifts the emphasis from easy victories to willful ignorance. As he notes, *Kavaler's* central act of collective labor removes all young people from the fields during the height of harvest season, a move unthinkable in real life since it would threaten the collective farm's very reason for existence. Echoing Pomerantsev, Abramov notes that this failure to engage agricultural life as it was lived also led Babaevskii and many other Soviet authors to provide their heroes easy tasks that led to hollow victories.

Abramov's article is likely the single best indictment of postwar Stalinist literature from a mimetic realist perspective, and the sense of long-simmering exasperation is even more palpable here than in Pomerantsev. But, as any adherent of Socialist Realism would know, the official method aimed to show reality not as it was, but "in its revolutionary development," and indeed both articles were central exhibits in the August 1954 Writer's Union resolution that, among other steps, temporarily deposed Aleksandr Tvardovskii as editor of *Novyi mir*, where both articles first saw print. The resolution charged both critics with attempting to divert Soviet literary discourse from spiritual guidance and inspiration to the regurgitation of direct observations uninformed by any acknowledgement of Soviet agriculture's progressive achievements. Much of the early post-Stalin period can be seen as a collective attempt to speed the literary renewal that began after the War while negotiating the limits to that renewal, and in this case the polemics were quickly judged too vigorous. But the pendulum swung rapidly: in 1958 Tvardovskii regained his editor's chair and the charges leveled against Babaevskii by Pomerantsev and Abramov stuck for decades, albeit couched in more polite language.

### **The Postwar Struggle for *Kolkhoz* Literature**

Ultimately, it is the incipient rise of Village Prose that likely contributed most to Babaevskii's permanently damaged reputation in

the literary establishment. Beginning in the early 50s, agricultural and village life became the most consistently contested subject matter in Soviet literature, easily outpacing the disputes over depictions of wartime heroism and the Party's leadership (exemplified by, say, Aleksandr Fadeev's *Molodaiia gvardiia* [The Young Guard] (1945) and Viktor Nekrasov's *V okopakh Stalingrada* [In the Trenches of Stalingrad] (1946)), or the explorations of industrial production reminiscent of literature produced during the first Five-Year Plan.

As we have seen, both Pomerantsev and Abramov saw the future of the rural theme in early Village Prose experiments and chose the most highly decorated representative of the reigning approach as a natural polemical target. Even as Abramov became a leading Village Prose author himself and navigated his own episodes of condemnation, Semen Babaevskii's name remained a byword for simplistic and juvenile depiction of agricultural life. Babaevskii, however, had also departed from the conventional Soviet depiction of rural life, albeit in a direction so opposed to the new approach that he was seen as the apotheosis of contemporary weaknesses rather than as an innovator.

In hindsight, the late 1940s was exactly the wrong time to bring the pastoral to Socialist Realism. *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy* is full of pastoral reverie and ripeness, the latter quality personified most notably by Irina, Tutarinov's object of erotic fascination and eventual fiancée.<sup>6</sup> Katerina Clark seizes on this aspect of Babaevskii's writing, noting no fewer than three times the description of Irina as a "swarthy shepherdess" (106, 193, 197).<sup>7</sup> Even this epithet may not fully capture the pastoral overdetermination of Irina, who, after all, first appears at the reins of an oxcart hauling large jugs of milk (7-8).<sup>8</sup> The pastoral elements of the novel—including Tutarinov's sexual (re)awakening after taking shelter in Irina's remote barn during a thunderstorm, a pastoral commonplace most familiar to modern audiences in its incarnation as the fourth movement of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony—dominate the work's tone until the final act of group labor. In fact, the novel's incorporation of orthodox pastoral elements can be read to clash with the equally orthodox Socialist Realist "man versus nature" theme: the extended timber float that culminates the first book presents nature as a fearsome force, perhaps tamable with expertise and supreme effort, but one that can injure and kill the settlement's denizens, potentially threatening their ability to sustain food production even at its currently attenuated levels.

As I have noted, Abramov criticized this task for its removal

of the farm's strongest laborers at precisely the most important part of the agricultural year. More generally, Abramov indicts *Kavaler's* pastoral strategy for its inherent substitution of the simple for the complex:

Автор последователен. Он противопоставляет обычным практическим делам прекраснодушные вымыслы, как бы стараясь при этом доказать превосходство условно-романтической выдумки над действительностью.

[...]

Основа “пасторального романтизма” – сглаженное, благодушное представление о развитии колхозной деревни, о нашем движении к коммунизму, который-де легко, без осуществления предварительных условий, чуть ли не сам собой войдет в жизнь. (19)<sup>9</sup>

The pastoral elements of the tale, in Abramov's conception, are inextricable from the easy problems/easy solutions dynamic rejected by the school of Ovechkin and his successors. Dramatic as a raging river choked with logs might be, the entrenched social relations of the village and their clashes with central authority and encroaching modernism seemed much less susceptible to a concentrated application of youthful spirits. This seeming simplicity of the pastoral model likely also served to intensify the perception of Tutarinov as Pomerantsev's insubstantial ornamental angel. In this light, Tutarinov's marked weakness for cream can be seen as another infantilizing trait, an eagerness for a concentrated form of the mother's milk that Irina so copiously represents.

A reader well-versed in the Soviet version of the nineteenth century canon, however, would recognize avid consumption of cream as a nod to Nikolai Chernyshevskii's *Что делать?* [What is to be Done?] (1862), a work that laid some of the foundations for the Socialist Realist positive hero. Babaevskii, having graduated from the Gor'kii Institute in 1939, was grounded in that tradition's canon and, as in Chernyshevskii, Tutarinov's fondness for cream shows that the pleasure principle does not conflict with heroic aspiration, although it may have to be deferred during the most intense moments of achievement. The cream seems less infantile when read along with the other overt heroic traits with which Babaevskii bestows Sergei Tutarinov. As I argue in the next section, by foregrounding these elements, Babaevskii

executes the classic Formalist trick of defamiliarizing the positive hero by placing the device itself front and center.

### **Thematizing Heroism**

At first, heroism seems overripe in *Kavaler*, as if Babaevskii's diligent literary study and penchant for pastoral abundance had caused him to load his central character with too many heroic traits. Like many postwar protagonists, Sergei Tutarinov is a demobilized soldier, a veteran who must reintegrate himself into civilian life at the same time as he helps his village to restore its productive capacity and its spirit. The adolescent qualities identified by so many critics also reflect the fact that Babaevskii's prose operates more in the vein of Nikolai Ostrovskii's *Kak zhalialas' stal'* [How the Steel Was Tempered] (1932-34) rather than Fedor Gladkov's *Tsement* [Cement] (1924-25): more *Bildung* than restoration, more progressive attainment of maturity than coping with lost youth. The simple problems noted by both Pomerantsev and Abramov do indeed find too simple solutions: Tutarinov's obstacles are mostly managerial and rely on the all too common device of the "hidden stores."<sup>10</sup> As in many novels of reconstruction, the protagonist's ambitious plans require more raw material than the traumatized state can provide, and progress seems imperiled until a stockpile of the necessary material is found to have survived the war. Specifically, in *Kavaler*, the resource turns out to be a huge amount of timber stored on a distant mountainside—enough timber to realize the settlement's ambitious five-year plan, which calls for new lines of livestock, a cinema, and a hydroelectric plant. The betterment of life in all its aspects thus comes to center around this timber: the five-year plan that Tutarinov pushes the villagers to create will ensure social cohesion, material progress, and cultural advancement, but to fulfill the plan Tutarinov himself must undertake a bureaucratic labor—acquiring rights to the timber—and lead the town in floating the stockpile down the river to the settlement.

So far, nothing in this summary seems out of the ordinary for an agricultural reconstruction novel. While *Kavaler* tracks a typical Socialist Realist plot, however, it does distinguish itself via its thematizing subplot: Tutarinov is an actual Hero of the Soviet Union, the novel's eponymous Bearer of the Golden Star. In other words, the novel's protagonist is not only the requisite positive hero, but he has also been designated a Hero inside the world of the novel. This device could be read as either an overdetermination of heroism, or, as

Pomerantsev and Abramov saw it, as a convenient stratagem to smooth the travels and petitions of the protagonist. In a gambit unusual for the period, however, Babaevskii uses the device to add a self-sufficient meta-literary layer to the narrative. Tutarinov's heroic status is discernable not only to the reader—who knows generally



**Figure 1:** Hero of the Soviet Union (“Zvanie”)

what to expect from reading many similar novels—but is signaled to other characters in the work. The hero's relation to the reader is altered as well: in Socialist Realism, the positive hero should not occupy too rarified a stratum, so that his struggles and accomplishments can seem both accessible and emulatable to the average reader. Here, though, Tutarinov has reached the top of one scale and readers can see how Soviet society treats a man who has reached a position that few will ever attain. At the same time, the novel depicts Sergei's doubt in his own ability to live up to his Heroic status.

A brief description of the award itself will inform the discussion, since among Soviet orders it seems uniquely designed to provoke questions of signification, questions that I believe inform Babaevskii's work. Established in 1934, the Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded for heroic deeds both on and off the battlefield, although in practice it was mostly limited to military, aviation and space exploration, and senior Communist leaders. Since recipients also received the Order of Lenin, which was considered the highest of the general state orders, the Hero medal marked the pinnacle of achievement in the USSR. The practical benefits were also sizable, especially in the straitened postwar environment: first priority on

the housing list, a fifty-percent rent reduction, additional living space, reduced taxes, a generous pension, a free first-class ticket every year, free bus tickets, and additional perks such as sanitarium visits, premium medical care, and special entertainment (“Gold Star”). In addition to the presumed valor to which each medal referred, the Gold Star also functioned as a marker of substantial privilege and prestige.

Visually, the Hero medal is arresting for what it is not. An almost unique application of the “less is more” philosophy in Soviet orders, it is a plain five-pointed gold star with a minimal red ribbon suspension (fig. 1). Only on the reverse does the medal contain the text “Hero of the USSR.”

Compare this restraint with its companion medal, the Order of Lenin (fig. 2). Here, as with most Soviet decorations, more is more. Every aspect of the Order of Lenin, from the materials (gold, platinum, and enamel) and the number of design elements to the length of the suspension, embodies the pageantry and abundance characteristic of High Stalinist art. The Hero medal, conversely, pares such signs to the minimum, relying on its rarity and the presumption of underlying heroic deeds for its force. It is the equivalent of a whisper instead of a shout.<sup>11</sup>

Babaevskii establishes Tutarinov as the Star bearer on the second page of the novel and almost everyone in his home village knows about the honor before he arrives there. Significantly, one person who does not know is Irina, his future fiancée and anchor of the pastoral element. She must first grow to love him without knowing of his distinction and the decidedly unpastoral perquisites that

accompany it. The local leadership, however, harbors no scruples about using the Hero to further its ends, and in the first half of the novel, many of the party leaders and bureaucrats try to incorporate Tutarinov into their organizations to lend weight to their struggles for



**Figure 2:** Order of Lenin

resources and recognition. Most egregious in his tactics is the local functionary Rubtsov-Emnitskii, who allegorizes the petty bureaucrat's tendency to use collective resources to further his own position. In this case, Rubtsov-Emnitskii's expensive furnishing of an office to lure the returned Hero to his own stronghold (92) is a danger sign, a harbinger of his attempt at the end of the novel to requisition the lumber that Tutarinov has led the village in floating downstream. Most of the villagers, in contrast, implicitly regard Sergei as a kind of collective property, and indeed this attitude helps Tutarinov overcome his early embarrassment at his distinction. The village drafts him to be on the planning commission for the local five-year plan, and the young Hero takes the next step in his evolution, presiding over a meeting that produces an extremely ambitious set of goals.

As I have noted above, the plan's ambition requires resources *ex machina*: the prewar timber stockpile that the town must move from the mountain to the village. Met with skepticism by the local party leadership, Tutarinov must undertake one of his two trips to the center, this one to Piatigorsk and Stavropol', to get his plan for the wood approved. As the episode that most removes the character from familiar circumstances, this journey throws the issues surrounding his hero status into sharpest relief. It is the first time in the novel that Tutarinov is essentially anonymous, a fact underscored by his disappointing experience in Piatigorsk's "Heroes' Alley," a row of commemorative portraits in a local park:

Интересно – подумал Сергей. – “Аллея Героев!”  
И ему сделалось приятно от одного лишь сознания, что вот он и в чужом городе идет не по какой-нибудь обычной аллее, а по “своей.” Что поделаешь? Видно, так уж устроен человек: любит он славу, сладко опьяняет она голову, и на сердце от нее становится необыкновенно тепло.  
... И он думал не о чем-либо постороннем, а о себе: “Может, я увижу в этой аллее и свой портрет? А почему бы и не увидеть? Конечно, увижу ... На портретах я всегда получаюсь мрачным, с нахмуренными бровями, все одно, как сыч.” (163)<sup>12</sup>

After several mental colloquies with various portraits, Tutarinov reaches the lieutenants' section and is distressed not to find his own representation. Informed by an old man that only Piatigorsk heroes

are included, and chagrined by his own need for recognition, Sergei leaves to focus on his bureaucratic labors.

But Piatigorsk presents many opportunities to think about distinction and for Tutarinov to resolve his ambivalence over displaying his status. When Sergei and his driver arrive at the dormitory set aside for collective farm workers, the desk attendant informs him with some satisfaction that all the rooms are reserved a year in advance, that is, until she sees his gold star:

- Вы – Герой? – спросила девушка.
  - Гожусь и в герои! А что ж?
  - [...]
  - Герой, – пролепетала она. – А я вам такое наговорила! Но вы не беспокойтесь. У нас есть бронь! – Она улыбнулась. – Я позвоню и согласую ...
  - Кому ж вы хотите звонить?
  - Маргарите Федоровне ... Она обожает Героев!
- (156)<sup>13</sup>

As if the point hadn't been made, Sergei neglects to transfer his medal when he washes and puts on a new shirt, and then she returns:

- Дорогой товарищ! – сказала она приятным голосом. – Дорогой товарищ, Маргарита Федоровна и я просим вас... просим вас...
- Тут ее голосок оборвался, нежно-голубые глаза расширились и помрачнели.
- Об-бманщик ... – проговорила она и ушла, нонутив голову.
- Сергей посмотрел ей вслед.
- Забавно! – проговорил он. – Да, очень забавно! Значит для Героя есть номер, а для других нету...Забавно! (158)<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, when Sergei wears his medal on a return visit to an office, the secretary moves him to the head of the line.

All of these passages seem to support a fairly straightforward message, namely, that everyone should be treated with equal respect. Sergei's sporadic desires to hide his medal or play down his status owe at least partially to this impulse, and the gentle mocking of low-level functionaries works well with the time-honored Socialist Realist criticism of obstructionist bureaucrats. But what to make of an earlier incident in the Heroes' Alley, when Sergei, in one of his mental con-

versations, is told by a general's portrait to put his medals back on, which he promptly does, or the fact that he takes honest pleasure in his luxurious guest room? Nowhere does he renounce the substantial Hero's benefits listed above, although he does delay building his house until construction of the power station is under way. The trip to the center maps his gradual acceptance of his Heroic status, and when he must travel from Piatigorsk to the more important regional center of Stavropol', he does not hesitate to show his Hero booklet to cut in line for the air taxi. What is more, exercising this privilege gains him a seatmate who proves to be just the person who can help him reach his goal. By identifying himself in his state-assigned (and author-assigned) role, he achieves results that help his entire community.

So, despite the regrettable foibles of secretaries and attendants, Tutarinov does deserve the perks of a Hero, and learning to embrace the privileges and responsibilities thereto appertaining is part of his development. In fact, his status as Hero of the Soviet Union is critical to his bureaucratic quest, which carries him all the way to the office of a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet as he works to have his five-year plan approved and the timber stockpile signed over to the village. After this success and his return from Stavropol', the medal will essentially cease to be a plot issue. As in many works of Socialist Realism, the space for authorial innovation and individual thematics contracts once the culminating labor is about to get under way.

This innovation, again, is to thematize the concept of the (positive) hero, preserving the convention while at the same time displacing it into the realm of the plot. For an ideally enlightened reader, as for the senior Party officials in the novel, Tutarinov's dual heroic status presents no problem, for it stands to reason that a Hero of the Soviet Union would also display the admirable talents and potentials expected of an ideal Soviet Man. This perspective essentially embodies the classic 1934 statement in the bylaws of the Writer's Union that Socialist Realism should be a "truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development," and Tutarinov's spiritual development is a necessary precondition of his home's material progression. But, recognizing that this section is also one of the novel's most "realistic," in the sense of verisimilitude to actual lived experience, we must concede that many people will react more strongly to a Heroic medal rather than to a heroic idea. What is more, this fact also strikes to the heart of the inspiration the positive hero is supposed to exercise on the reader: if the hero of the novel must repeatedly invoke

his Heroic status to achieve his goals, what hope is there for the reader with no extraordinary weapons against bureaucratic obstruction, material shortages, and widespread passive resistance?

*Kavaler zolotoi zvezdy* offers no solution to this problem, and there is no sign that Babaevskii realized that predicating rapid bureaucratic success on a barely attainable status might conflict with Socialist Realism's charge to inspire emulation. This absence of resolution is less a trait specific to Babaevskii than a common feature of mature Socialist Realism, which tends to open more spaces for authorial individuality earlier in the novel, before the wide array of required elements must be developed to their inevitable conclusion. The genre's resistance to innovation, however, should not obscure Babaevskii's unusual step in thematizing a prescribed element of Soviet literature. This defamiliarization of the positive hero may account for some of the criticism directed against Babaevskii as well, for if the play with the signification and reception of heroism is missed, the literalization of hero status could seem an adolescently overliteral tactic rather than an examination of the reception of the positive hero by the everyday world. Tutarinov's taste for cream, if not read as a conscious evocation of Chernyshevskii, only reinforces Pomerantsev's sugary and insubstantial imagery. At the same time, Tutarinov's liminal status as a hero who is still maturing may account for *Kavaler's* popular appeal, which in some measure seemed to survive the critical hit on its author's reputation. Although J.K. Rowling is in many ways a more talented writer than Semen Babaevskii, Harry Potter is the most prominent recent example in a line that contains Sergei Tutarinov: both characters must cope with the almost crippling anxiety over the great role that has been assigned to them. Along with *Kavaler's* extended courtship plot, this facet of Tutarinov may account for much of the reader identification that Jones and others document.

In the end, *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy* may align with the interests of Pomerantsev and Abramov more than they expected. Babaevskii's defamiliarization of the positive hero may be a sign that the conventions of the Stalinist novel were played out—that composing a novel in that tradition required an infusion of new energy that Babaevskii attempted to find in formal experimentation, no matter how limited. This need to revivify the genre may also account for the heavy injection of pastoral themes that characterizes both *Kavaler* and *Svet nad zemlei*. But, if both schools wished to breathe new life into the *kolleboz* novel, Babaevskii's simple problems and pastoral features likely

blinded his critics to his exploration of the Hero theme, even though its suggestion that the positive hero might face problems in real Soviet society is one they might have found congenial. Ultimately, the fact that Babaevskii saw some of the same problems as the Village school only served to strengthen the enmity of the latter when its members essayed different solutions.

### Notes

1. [The writer Babaevskii correctly decided that *The Bearer of the Golden Star* would not bring him yet a fourth medal of a Stalin Prize laureate, and has gone to China, rumor has it for three years. Well, if he brings back a good novel on our friends the Chinese peasants, that would be a great joy for us all.]
2. *Svet nad zemlei* was published in two parts and received a Stalin Prize for each. Babaevskii's three Prizes were awarded in 1949 (First Degree), 1950 (First Degree), and 1951 (Second Degree).
3. For an example of Babaevskii and *Kavaler* standing in for a group of overly entitled authors opposed to the Sholokhov school, see Konstantin Vorob'ev's 28 February 1956 letter to the editors of *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Sholokhov 241). The letter traverses the major points of Babaevskii resentment—the supposed juvenility and unreality of his works as well as the disproportionate rewards garnered by the author—in the space of a paragraph. The aggressive polemical tone of the letter delayed its publication until 1988; it is doubtful that more than a handful of people saw it at the time.
4. However, his honorary 1955 Order of Lenin for his fiftieth birthday may have lessened the sting somewhat.
5. [And here I understood that before Ovechkin many books on the theme of the kolkhoz sanded everything down, sawing off the points and breaking the corners. I understood that Tutarinov overcame simple obstacles, not dealing with or even seeing the genuinely complex problems of village life. Today he seems not so much a hero as a little angel on an Easter cake. Glory dusts him like colored poppy seeds; but lick him, and he melts.]
6. All discussion of *Kavaler* in this article relates to the first redaction, before the novel's major revision and expansion in the early to mid-1950s.
7. Clark goes on to develop the theme of the pastoral in her "Machine and the Garden" chapter, but in *Kavaler* Babaevskii uses the pastoral in its most classic form.
8. In *Svet nad zemlei*, Irina supplants her pastoral functions with a position at the new hydroelectric power station.
9. [The author is consistent. He counterpoises ordinary practical matters to starry-eyed fantasies, as if trying thereby to demonstrate the superior-

ity of ideal romantic fabrications over reality. [...] The foundation of “pastoral romanticism” is a smoothed-over, placid conception of the development of the collective farm village, of our movement toward Communism, which easily – apparently – without any prior conditions, will come to life almost of its own accord.]

10. I treat this generic peculiarly in more depth in my dissertation, to be defended at Columbia University in 2007.
11. *Svet nad zemlei* tends to focus more on the Hero of Socialist Labor medal, an honor far more attainable in peacetime, and one based in design on the Hero of the Soviet Union (a hammer and sickle was added in relief to the higher Hero design). In contrast to the relative unattainability of the Hero medal, many characters in the later work either have or actively hope to receive the Hero of Socialist Labor. In general, however, *Svet*—though a more intricate and polished work—does not pursue the themes it inherits from *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy* with the prior novel’s energy.
12. [Interesting,” thought Sergei. “A Heroes’ Alley!” And his pleasant feeling stemmed solely from the realization that here he was in a strange city, walking down not just any old alley, but “his own.” What are you going to do? Apparently that’s how people are made: they love glory—it sweetly intoxicates the head, and makes the heart unusually warm. [...] And he wasn’t thinking about construction, but about himself: “Maybe I’ll see my own portrait in this alley? And why shouldn’t I see it? Of course I will ... I always look gloomy in portraits, with knitted brows, just like an owl.”]
13. [You’re a Hero?” the young woman asked.  
“I’ve reached even their ranks! What of it?”  
[...]  
“A Hero,” she prattled, “And I said those things to you! But don’t you worry. We have some reserves!” She smiled. “I’ll just call and arrange it...”  
“Who do you want to call?”  
“Margarita Fedorovna”... “She just adores Heroes.”]
14. [“Dear Comrade!” she said pleasantly. “Dear Comrade, Margarita Fedorovna and I ask you ... ask you ...”  
Here her voice dropped off, and her gentle blue eyes widened and grew darker.  
“Fr ... fraud ...,” she said, and left, hanging her head.  
Sergei’s gaze followed her.  
“Amusing!” he said. “Yes, very amusing! So there is a room for a Hero, but nothing for the rest. Amusing!]

*Works Cited*

- Abramov, Fedor. *Slovo v iadernyi vek*. Moskva: Sovremennik, 1987.
- Babaevskii, Semen. *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy*. Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1947.
- . *Privol'e*. Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1980.
- . *Svet nad zemlei*. Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1951.
- . *Synovii bunt*. Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1961
- Chernyshevskii, Nikolai. *Chto delat'?* Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1969.
- Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000.
- "Gold Star of a 'Hero of the Soviet Union?'" *Soviet Military Awards Page*. 20 January 2007. <<http://www.soviet-awards.com/titles1.htm#tit1>>.
- Gromov, Evgenii. *Stalin: Vlast' i iskusstvo*. Moskva: Izd. "Respublika," 1998.
- Fadeev, Aleksandr. *Molodaia gvardiia*. Moskva: Pravda, 1946.
- Gladkov, Fedor. *Tsement*. Moskva: Zemlia i fabrika, 1927.
- Jones, Polly. "A Symptom of the Times?: Assigning Responsibility for the Stalin Cult in the Soviet Literary Community, 1953-64." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 42.2 (2006): 151-67.
- Nekrasov, Viktor. *V okopakh Stalingrada*. Moskva: OGIZ, 1948.
- "Ob oshibkakh zhurnala *Novyi mir*. Rezoliutsiia prezidium pravleniia Soiuza sovetskikh pisatelei." *Literaturnaia gazeta* (17 Aug. 1954).
- "Order of Lenin." *Soviet Military Awards Page*. 20 January 2007. <<http://www.soviet-awards.com/orders2.htm#order2>>.
- Ostrovskii, Nikolai. *Kak zakalialas' stal'*. Moskva: Molodaia gvardia, 1936.
- Ovechkin, Valentin. *Izbrannoe*. Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1955.
- Pomerantsev, Vladimir. "Ob iskrennosti v literature." *Novyi mir* 12 (1953). 15 October 2006 <<http://vivovoco.rsl.ru/VV/PAPERS/LITRA/MEMO/POMER.HTM>>.
- Sholokhov, Mikhail. *Podniataia tselina*. Moskva: Moskovskii rabochii, 1952.
- . *Sobranie sochinenii v deviaty tomakh*. Vol. 9. Moskva: Terra-Knizhnyi klub, 2002.
- . *Tikhii Don*. Gosudarstvennaia literatura, 1959.
- "Zvanie Geroia Sovetskogo Soiuza i medal' 'Zolotaia Zvezda'." *Ordena i medalii SSSR*. 15 April 2007. <<http://www.mondvor.narod.ru/HUssr.html>>.