

# A. ADAMOV'S *THE CASE OF THE MOTLEY CREW*: THE SOVIET POLICE PROCEDURAL – PARALLEL PATTERNS AND DIVERGENT IDEOLOGIES

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This paper analyses Arkadij Adamov's *The Case of the Motley Crew* (*Delo "pěstryh"*, 1956) as a distinct Soviet variant of the police procedural. Adopting a comparative genre approach and close structural reading, it examines how the novel incorporates core features such as a collective protagonist, methodical investigation, multiple criminal threads, procedural realism, and bureaucratic language. However, it departs significantly from Western models by framing investigation as an ideological mission. The *miliciâ* is portrayed not only as an institution responsible for maintaining order but also as a pedagogical force dedicated to re-education and the reinforcement of socialist values. Adamov structures policing across three concentric spheres: the professional investigative team, civic collaborators who emulate *miliciâ* methods, and a broader ideological collective whose vigilance legitimises law enforcement and blurs the boundary between civic duty and policing. Criminality is presented as a systemic threat linked to historical forces such as bourgeois opportunism and foreign subversion. By merging procedural conventions with socialist pedagogy, the novel transforms criminal investigation into a struggle over moral and political allegiance and demonstrates the genre's potential to shape visions of collective identity and social order.

KEYWORDS:

*Arkadij Adamov, Soviet crime fiction, police procedural, miliciâ, Delo "pěstryh"*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*The Case of the Motley Crew*<sup>1</sup> (*Delo "pěstryh"*), written by the Russian author Arkadij Adamov, is frequently regarded as one of the most significant detective works of its time. Its initial publication in the literary magazine *Ūnost'* in 1956 was met with great acclaim and quickly became the most popular reading material of the year (Zamost'ânov 2015). Many readers recall this short novel (*povest'*)<sup>2</sup> with a sense of deep nostalgia. As A. Korolëv (2010) describes, "This was the most famous book of my school years. I can still see it bathed in the light of memory: worn to tatters, with torn out pages, hand-patched, and even bearing a scorch mark from an iron on the cover" (Korolëv 2010). Critics such as A. Vulis described Adamov as the most prolific and vivid author of crime prose, arguing that his works were serious production novels<sup>3</sup> about *miliciâ* life rather than conventional detective stories (Vulis 1978: 258).

Although it was seen as a masterpiece, *The Case of the Motley Crew* has only occasionally attracted scholarly attention. O. V. Fedunina wrote an article entitled "Sovetskaâ 'Milicejskaâ' povest': motiv ispytaniâ i problema žanra ('Delo 'pěstryh' A. Adamova)" in which she examines the "trial" motif as a key element in the moral and professional formation of the protagonist Koršunov (Fedunina 2009). Her analysis highlights how the novel frames his development as an ideological journey. Other scholarly publications merely mention the novel as part of broader discussions of Soviet crime fiction (Kirilenko and Fedunina 2010: 7–8; Vulis 1978: 258). In addition, there are online articles commemorating Adamov's anniversaries (see Vesnina 2010; Zamost'ânov 2020), which, however, do not engage with literary analysis of his works.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Russian sources into English are my own.

<sup>2</sup> *The Case of the Motley Crew* bears the subtitle *povest'*, which in Russian literary studies denotes a prose genre occupying an intermediate position between *rasskaz* (short story) and *roman* (novel). Internationally, this designation is often equated with the "short novel" or *novella*. However, Adamov's work features a large cast of characters, a multilayered investigation, and an overall scope exceeding 300 pages, so it can reasonably be classified as a novel in both thematic and structural terms. The author's decision to label it *povest'* may reflect a Soviet preference for designations associated with more accessible and ostensibly less "bourgeois" forms of prose. In this study, I will use the term *novel* from this point on.

<sup>3</sup> The production novel (*proizvodstvennyi roman*) emerged in the Stalinist era as one of the central genres of Socialist Realism. It typically staged industrial construction or factory life as a testing ground where collective effort, technological innovation, and socialist consciousness were forged. Rather than focusing on the psychological growth of a single protagonist, these narratives emphasised the destiny of the group, often structured around the completion of a major industrial task. The genre combined ideological didacticism with the celebration of labour and progress. Notable examples include M. Shaginian's *Hydrocentral* (1930), I. Erenburg's *The Second Day* (1933), and V. Kataev's *Time, Forward!* (1932) (Khan, Lipovetsky et al. 2018: 676–77).

My aim is to examine how this narrative both aligns with and diverges from the conventions of the Western police procedural, particularly in terms of structure, function, and ideological orientation. Adopting a comparative and structural perspective, the article first demonstrates how *The Case of the Motley Crew* satisfies key characteristics of the procedural genre such as the emphasis on methodical investigation, the detailed depiction of professional practices, and the narrative focus on institutional coordination, features that are central to Western procedurals like H. Waugh's *Last Seen Wearing* (1952) or E. McBain's *Cop Hater* (1956). At the same time, it argues that Adamov expands this model in several distinctive ways: by embedding the logic of re-education and prevention into the investigative process, constructing an extended network of civic collaborators, and framing criminal investigation as an explicit site of ideological struggle. Through this dual lens of comparative typology and close textual analysis, the article shows that Adamov's work represents a specific Soviet variant of the procedural form, integrating collective ethics and ideological pedagogy into the very structure of crime fiction.

For the benefit of the reader, it is useful to provide a summary of the novel's plot, since it involves a large number of characters and interwoven storylines. Without such an overview, the complexity of the narrative and the roles of individual figures who reappear in the subsequent analysis may remain unclear. The novel begins with Sergej Koršunov, a young demobilised officer, returning from postwar service in Germany and joining the Moscow Criminal Investigation Department (*Moskovskij ugotovnyj rozysk*, MUR) despite his fiancée Lena's disapproval. He works alongside operatives Garanin, Lobanov, Voroncov, and Zabelin, under the mentorship of Major Zotov, Colonel Silant'ev, and Deputy Sandler. The first case is a murder and robbery in the Amosov apartment, which leads to the arrest of Slavka Gorelov, partly thanks to the testimonies of Vera and her mother, Klavdiâ Ivanovna, and the assistance of Pëtr Gvozdev. However, during the investigation another figure surfaces—the so-called "Papaša", whose identity remains obscure. The plot takes a new turn with the burglary of Šubinskij's apartment, which leads the investigators to the taxi driver Čurkin. Following interrogation, Čurkin eventually agrees to cooperate and guides them to a criminal hideout. There they make two arrests, one of which is Sofron Ložkin, and learn that another figure, Tit, is still at large. Questioning the landlady Rovinskaâ reveals another visitor, the student Igor Peresvetov, who was overheard speaking with Papaša. The *miliciâ* begins surveillance of the *Lastočka* café, where Ložkin's sister Zoâ works, and detains black-market profiteers Mercalov and Zubkov. Acting recklessly on his own, Koršunov persuades Zubkov to lead him to Tit, whom he manages to overpower, though at the risk of his own life. Later he locates

Igor Peresvetov at a Moscow school, who, under questioning, eventually agrees to cooperate. As a result of the new information, the investigation shifts to a communal apartment where Kupcevič Âkov resides. Koršunov goes undercover, posing as the brother of the tenant Katâ Svetlova, and discovers crucial evidence in his room. At the same time, Koršunov's fiancée Lena attends a gathering of *stilâgi* youths (Arnol'd, Kamov, and Rastâgaev), rejects their decadent lifestyle, and informs on them. Ložkin meanwhile escapes custody and joins the spy Pit, whose mission is to steal the papers of engineer Šubinskij and to build a new espionage network with Papaša's help. Back at Kupcevič's apartment, the investigators clash with Ložkin and his associates. Simultaneously, Papaša accepts the *stilâgi*'s request to murder Lena in order to bind them to his gang, while also instructing a young worker Mitâ Neverov to rob the factory's cash office. Neverov, however, thanks to the intervention of Pëtr Gvozdev and to skilful interrogations, agrees to cooperate with the *miliciâ*, so the detectives ultimately succeed in capturing Pit and Fed'ka, another of Papaša's accomplices. The narrative culminates in the pursuit and eventual arrest of Papaša. Among his possessions, investigators uncover a written order for Lena's murder, signed by Arnol'd and his associates, which ultimately seals the fate of the *stilâgi*.

## 2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE PROCEDURAL: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

To situate Adamov's novel within the broader field of crime fiction, it is useful to outline its key subgenres. Western scholarship traditionally distinguishes three dominant formulas: the classical detective story, the hard-boiled tradition, and the police procedural, each reflecting specific social concerns and narrative conventions, as discussed by authors such as J. Symons (1972), J. Cawelti (1976), and S. Knight (1980), while later accounts expand this scheme by adding a fourth category, the crime thriller<sup>4</sup> (Scaggs 2005; Knight 2004; Rzepka and Horsley 2010). The classical

<sup>4</sup> Some scholars (Scaggs 2005) consider spy fiction a variant of the thriller, since it likewise relies on suspense and on the individual's struggle against powerful conspiracies or institutions. Others, however, devote a distinct chapter to it in companions and handbooks (Priestman 2003; Rzepka and Horsley 2010). Spy fiction, while sharing investigative structures with detective fiction, is distinguished by its focus on clandestine political conflict, international rivalries, and covert operations, with the agent-protagonist often directly implicated in the very processes under investigation. In this way, it blends detection with political intrigue and offers readers access to the "secret histories" of nations, where covert action rather than crime becomes the central motor of the plot (Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987; Seed 2003; Seed 2010; Furst 2004).

detective story, exemplified by characters like E. A. Poe's Dupin, A. C. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, and A. Christie's Miss Marple, centres on a brilliant, often eccentric individual who solves crimes through logical deduction. This formula, dominant from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, positions the detective as an outsider detached from institutional power, an amateur or "consulting detective" whose authority derives solely from intellectual superiority. The hard-boiled detective fiction that emerged in the interwar period presents a more cynical and streetwise private investigator, such as D. Hammett's Sam Spade or R. Chandler's Philip Marlowe, navigating morally corrupt urban landscapes. Unlike their classical predecessors, these detectives are pragmatic, emotionally scarred, and often disillusioned by systemic failure. The hard-boiled private investigator typically works independently, often as a former police officer, and maintains an ambivalent relationship with official law enforcement. The crime thriller, which developed partly out of hard-boiled fiction, replaces retrospective investigation with forward-driving suspense, often heightened through "cliffhangers" that escalate tension towards a climactic resolution (Simpson 2010: 187–88). Its protagonist is typically a solitary figure whose struggle against overwhelming odds sustains the narrative's immediacy and sense of danger. The police procedural, which rose to prominence in the United States after the Second World War (Bailey 2010: 276), redirected the genre from the solitary hero to the collective mechanisms of modern law enforcement.

R. Winston and N. Mellerski argue that the rise of the procedural reflected a cultural response to a new social and institutional environment; to "the technological penetration and increased bureaucratic complexity of postindustrial society," proposing a squad of specialised detectives as a narrative solution to the challenges of modernity (Winston and Mellerski 1992: 6). Transformations in American society, particularly the growing public concern about crime, civil rights, and urban violence further shaped this literary shift (Panek 2003: 155). According to J. Scaggs, one of the principal reasons for the development of the procedural was the search for realism, as this type of fiction made the actual methods and procedures of police work central not only to the investigation itself but also to the themes, characters, and settings (Scaggs 2005: 31, 91). P. Messent similarly argues that the police procedural "seems to be supplanting the private-eye novel as 'realistic' crime fiction" (Messent 1997: 12). The emphasis on authentic techniques, professional terminology, and teamwork created a sense of documentary precision that distinguished the procedural from other forms of crime fiction.

Most scholars identify L. Treat's *V as in Victim* (1945) as the first novel to introduce elements later associated with the police procedural (Davis 2012: 10). This was

soon followed by H. Waugh's *Last Seen Wearing* (1952), often considered the first work to fully establish the genre's conventions, especially its focus on methodical investigation and procedural detail (Scaggs 2005: 87–88; Knight 2004: 154). In the United States, the procedural is also closely linked to Ed McBain's *87th Precinct* series, beginning with *Cop Hater* (1956), which shaped the genre's tone for decades (Scaggs 2005: 30). In Britain, J. Creasy, writing as J. J. Marric, established a local variant with *Gideon's Day* (1955) (Davis 2012: 10). Television played a decisive role in popularising the procedural. J. Webb's *Dragnet*, which began on radio in 1949 and moved to television in 1952, shaped a new image of the police officer and showed how popular culture could reinforce the authority of police institutions (Panek 2003: 155). Notable for its authenticity, *Dragnet* adapted real cases from the Los Angeles Police Department, and Webb often joined patrols to observe professional language and procedures firsthand (Davis 2012: 10).

It is intriguing that Adamov's *The Case of the Motley Crew*, which could be viewed as the first fully realised example of the procedural genre in the Soviet Union, appeared at almost the same historical moment when the form was crystallising in the United States and Britain. Indeed, the so-called Thaw period (*ottepel'*) of the 1950s and 1960s provided a similarly turbulent, though distinct, context for the rise of a Soviet variant of the genre. The postwar decades witnessed a dramatic rise in crime, and the issue of gangs was particularly acute, so these narratives placed a strong emphasis on restoring social order and protecting ordinary citizens (Šilina 2025: 38). The 1953 amnesty declared after Stalin's death further complicated the situation, as thousands were released from prison and quickly reoffended. At the same time, the *miliciâ* faced acute staffing shortages due to heavy losses sustained during the war. Against this backdrop, building a positive image of law enforcement in public consciousness became especially urgent (Popova 2018: 179).

This campaign included community meetings, official publications, and initiatives encouraging creative professionals to produce works about the *miliciâ* (Popova 2018: 181, 192). The literary competitions themselves were remarkably prolific. In 1954, the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced the first large-scale contest dedicated to the theme, attracting over 400 submissions. A second competition organised in 1957 by the journal *Sovetskaâ miliciâ* drew similarly high participation, and by 1964 the number of entries had grown to nearly 700, demonstrating both the creative potential and the institutional support for literary representations of law enforcement (Popova 2018: 185, 189). Significantly, Adamov himself served as chair of the jury in 1964, a role that suggests he was already widely recognised as an accomplished and authoritative writer within this emerging genre (Adamov

1964: 73). Furthermore, other Soviet cultural institutions, much like their American counterparts, recognised the power of popular media to shape public perceptions of law enforcement. While television shows such as *Dragnet* in the United States created a new image of the police officer for mass audiences, the Soviet Union adapted *miliciâ* narratives submitted to official literary competitions for the screen. This process led to the production of celebrated films such as *The Rumâncev Case* (1955), *Case No. 306* (1956), *Night Patrol* (1957), and *The Case of the Motley Crew* (1958) (Popova 2018: 186).

Adamov's authority in this genre was further reinforced by his close involvement with the work of law enforcement. Like J. Webb in the United States, who rode along with police officers to prepare *Dragnet*, Adamov frequently accompanied officers on operations, participated in stakeouts and searches, and spent nights at the Moscow Criminal Investigation Department. This direct experience provided the foundation for the realistic detail and institutional knowledge that gave *The Case of the Motley Crew* a level of authenticity setting it apart from many contemporaneous works (Za-most'ânov 2015).

### 3. CONFORMITY TO THE PROCEDURAL GENRE

One of the defining features of the police procedural is its collective protagonist, and in this respect Adamov's novel fully aligns with the genre. It depicts a coordinated investigative team engaged in what Horsley describes as a "collaborative process of investigation requiring hierarchical relationships, well-established systems of communication, and shared expertise" (Horsley 2010: 35). At the heart of the investigation is Sergej Koršunov, a new officer at Moscow's Criminal Investigation Department. He operates within a clear institutional hierarchy, working closely with Saša Lobanov, Kostâ Garanin, Viktor Voroncov, and Semën Zabelin under the leadership of Ivan Vasil'evič Zotov and the supervision of senior figures Colonel Silant'ev and his deputy–Sandler. The commitment to collective labour is voiced early on in Colonel Silant'ev's address to Koršunov:

Our work is fundamentally collective. I can say with certainty that not a single crime—especially a complex one—has ever been solved by one person alone, no matter how capable. In that sense, the adventures of, say, Sherlock Holmes are a fairy tale—entertaining, talented, with elements of truth, but still a fairy tale (Adamov 1958: 24).

By rejecting Holmes as myth and the glorification of the solitary genius, the novel dismisses individualism and reaffirms the procedural's grounding in realism, institutional logic, and cooperation. This principle is not merely stated but enacted through the team's operations. The investigators meet almost every morning to exchange opinions, formulate theories, and plan the next steps. Tasks are assigned collectively by the commanding officer. For example, in the early phase of the investigation, Garanin is directed to pursue leads involving the suspect's car, Koršunov is tasked with questioning witnesses, while Lobanov "was studying the circle of Amosova's acquaintances" (Adamov 1958: 24). Surveillance operations follow the same collective logic and are structured as coordinated efforts involving multiple agents working in shifts:

One of our agents will sit at a table by the window. He'll maintain visual contact with a uniformed *miliciâ* officer outside. When a suspicious individual exits the café, our agent will give a visual signal from inside. The officer on the street, in turn, will be watched by a group of our operatives. They will take over the surveillance from there. At an appropriate moment, far from the café, they will find a pretext to check the person's documents (Adamov 1958: 99).

This kind of intricate choreography exemplifies the procedural's systematic methodology, which relies on teamwork rather than individual action (Malmgren 2001: 172).

The narrative openly criticises Koršunov's impulse towards independent action. When he pursues a suspect alone, bypassing procedure and team coordination, he is not portrayed as bold or heroic. Instead, he is reprimanded for compromising the investigation. As Zotov sharply states: "You have flagrantly violated the fundamental rule of our work. You exposed yourself without authorisation and in so doing could have jeopardised an important operation. That is official misconduct" (Adamov 1958: 120). What follows is not a private disciplinary warning but a public reckoning as both Koršunov and Lobanov must account for their decisions before their entire collective. As Panek notes, one of the defining features of the procedural genre is precisely its insistence on teamwork and shared responsibility, in contrast to the individualistic exploits of the classical detective (Panek 2003: 170). Yet Adamov's novel goes further. Unlike in Western procedurals, where breaches of protocol are typically framed as professional misconduct within a hierarchical institution, here they are staged as breaches of collective trust. The criticism directed at Koršunov is public and pedagogical, transforming individual error into a moral lesson for the entire investiga-

tive team. Through this symbolic act, the narrative amplifies procedural realism with a specifically Soviet inflection.

Structurally, the novel follows a tightly composed procedural arc that interweaves several parallel criminal threads, another feature considered characteristic of the genre (Knight 2004: 155; Scaggs 2005: 94; Kirilenko and Fedunina 2010: 14). It opens with the murder and robbery in the Amosov apartment, and after that case is addressed, the narrative introduces a second: the mysterious burglary of Šubinskij's home. Both crimes appear linked and orchestrated by the same elusive mastermind – Papaša. In parallel, a spy named Pit, operating under a false identity, seeks to obtain classified documents from Šubinskij by employing Papaša's contacts, while a group of nihilistic youths (*stilâgi*), denounced by Lena for their anti-Soviet attitudes, plot her murder and engage Papaša's network to carry it out. The novel concludes with the exposure of Pit's espionage, Papaša's arrest, and the dismantling of his organisation. The interweaving of these plot lines illustrates what Scaggs describes as a typical procedural strategy: using converging storylines to achieve narrative closure (Scaggs 2005: 94). The investigation unfolds in systematic phases, culminating in the exposure, arrest, and moral discrediting of all major perpetrators.

The coherence of the plot is reinforced by its grounding in realistic investigative procedure, a hallmark of the genre. M. Priestman observes that such narratives shift attention away from any "magic" of the gifted detective towards the day-to-day processes of policing (Priestman 2003: 179). As the multiple threads of the investigation unfold, every stage is marked by methodical record-keeping, cross-referencing, and forensic analysis. The team tracks suspects through license plate records, follows leads with procedural discipline, and documents their findings in detailed reports. One illustrative moment occurs when Zotov instructs Koršunov to file the crime scene report, highlighting the bureaucratic rigour that shapes the investigation: "Draw up an inspection report for the dining room. I'll check it later. Remember: we are starting blind. Every little detail could prove decisive. Try to connect the details to each other. Draw conclusions" (Adamov 1958: 27). The narrative then shows the cognitive dimension of this work:

And so Sergej sat in front of a blank form, thinking hard about how to describe all this chaos in a way that was sequential, detailed, and precise—yet at the same time concise. He had to write it so that anyone reading his report could easily and accurately reconstruct the scene of the incident. It seemed to Sergej that in this unfamiliar, enigmatic room he had just examined so carefully, every object still bore some unsolved trace of the crime (Adamov 1958: 27).

This moment exemplifies how documentation becomes not merely record-keeping, but a form of reconstruction. The investigator is expected to observe, analyse, and then translate experience into a structured institutional artefact that can serve as a reliable basis for further action.

The novel continues to build procedural realism by illustrating, step by step, how the investigation unfolds. The search for the perpetrators includes the analysis of trace materials such as red clay and lime, the collection of fingerprints, and the preservation of evidence with forensic precision. For example, Garanin notes: “Clear fingerprints were found here, but through gloves. The criminal’s hand was very sweaty, and the sweat seeped through what appears to have been a thin glove. We lifted those prints onto film” (Adamov 1958: 69). Attention to detail is accompanied by analytical deduction. A glove found at the criminal’s hideout is linked to a thread from the crime scene, illustrating a methodical process that combines observation and systematic reasoning within disciplined institutional routines. Maps, statistics, and spatial planning are also integral to the investigation. The search for Igor Peresvetov involves analysing the city’s geography, transportation networks, and the distribution of schools. The team uses diagrams and concentric circles to “narrow the field of search” from hundreds of institutions to a manageable group (Adamov 1958: 131). This segment not only presents the investigators as systematic planners but also underscores the principle of “large-scale policing that serves society as a whole” rather than “personal, small-scale, and often self-serving investigation” (Scaggs 2005: 89).

Many police procedurals hinge not on discovering who committed the crime, since the culprit is often revealed early in the story, but on preparing enough evidence to secure arrest and conviction (Davis 2012: 10). This approach is clearly illustrated in *The Case of the Motley Crew*, where the elusive figure of Papaša is identified as the mastermind earlier in the narrative, yet much of the plot is devoted to developing the procedural means to apprehend him. The same principle shapes Koršunov’s covert operation. Under a false identity, he infiltrates the apartment of the suspect Kupcevič and discovers several key pieces of evidence: a letter hidden in a book, a gift vase inscribed to the murder victim, and a concealed passage beneath the floorboards. These findings enable the team to “expose Kupcevič and get him to reveal everything” (Adamov 1958: 198).

Furthermore, the novel gestures towards the scale of MUR’s institutional apparatus when Koršunov walks through a “wide, long corridor” lined with laboratory doors for different forensic sectors: “‘chemical’, ‘biological’, ‘physical’, ‘ballistic’, ‘fingerprinting... The signs stretched off into the distance down the corridor” (Adamov 1958: 261). Although these departments are not explored in detail, their enumeration conveys a comprehensive investigative infrastructure. A brief example of procedural

precision occurs when investigators attempt to link the alias “Pan” to Papaša. Rather than relying on guesswork, Zotov instructs the team to “get in touch with the central archive right away. Have them immediately search the alias card index for all information on Pan” (Adamov 1958: 261). Once a photograph is retrieved, it is sent for expert comparison to confirm the match. This sequence highlights the novel’s insistence on interdepartmental coordination and evidentiary discipline.

Moreover, the novel’s language and tone reflect the institutional discourse of Soviet law enforcement. Dialogue is pragmatic, functional, and stripped of stylistic ornamentation or psychological introspection. Terms such as “official misconduct” (*služebnoe prestuplenie*), “task force” (*operativnaâ gruppy*), “interrogation report” (*protokol doprosa*), “inspection report” (*protokol osmotra*), and “criminal hideout” (*prestupnoe gnezdo*) anchor the narrative in the procedural register and capture the bureaucratic grain of police work. In contrast to, for example, the hard-boiled tradition, where language often reveals the detective’s inner world or personal style, Adamov’s diction privileges clarity, impersonality, and institutional exactitude.

In sum, *The Case of the Motley Crew* exemplifies the core features of the police procedural: collective investigation, several parallel criminal threads, narrative closure, forensic realism, and bureaucratic language. However, as the following section will explore, these elements are embedded within a distinctly Soviet ideological framework, in which investigation is not only a technical or juridical process but also a moral project involving re-education, collective engagement, and the reinforcement of socialist ethics through narrative form.

#### 4. RE-EDUCATION, REHABILITATION, AND *PROFILAKTIKA*: TOOLS OF THE SOVIET PROCEDURAL

*The Case of the Motley Crew* portrays the *miliciâ* not simply as an instrument of state policing but as a moral and pedagogical institution tasked with ideological rehabilitation. This becomes clear from the opening chapter, where the reader encounters Colonel Silant’ev, the head of MUR, for the first and only time. Silant’ev does not participate in investigations himself but functions primarily as a didactic figure—a moral authority and ideological voice of the state. In his address to Koršunov, he delivers a reflective monologue on the roots of criminal behaviour. Unlike in the West where, as he states, “[P]overty and unemployment drive people to commit crimes, then there’s the thirst for profit, the cult of power and cruelty” in the Soviet Union, each citizen can earn a living through honest labour and “the very fabric of our society is designed

to raise honest people” (Adamov 1958: 21). And yet, Silant’ev acknowledges, crime persists because of moral failings within the family unit:

(...) [w]hen children are raised poorly or incorrectly. That’s when the first seeds of contempt for labour, dishonesty, selfishness, and greed begin to appear. (...) A young man may grow up without ever intending to cross the boundaries of the law. But then, by chance, he encounters someone who has already become a criminal. (...) Of course, a morally sound, truly Soviet young person will inevitably reject such an influence and overcome it. But someone who is, in some way, morally deficient may give in—may fall under that influence (Adamov 1958: 21).

Accordingly, the role of the *miliciâ* extends beyond the enforcement of law. It is charged with identifying and guiding those who can still be reintegrated into the socialist collective. “We know that most criminals can be reformed,” Silant’ev declares. “One just has to find the place in their soul where some good feeling still flickers, identify that feeling, and kindle that little spark” (Adamov 1958: 22). Investigators are therefore expected to combine procedural precision with ethical sensitivity, assessing each suspect’s potential for reform. Just as fingerprints and witness statements are gathered, so too are signs of conscience, hesitation, or inner turmoil. These are not seen as weaknesses to exploit, but as moral openings to cultivate. In Adamov’s vision of Soviet justice, re-education and rehabilitation become equally essential tools of the profession as observation or deduction. This model of investigation is embodied in the treatment of suspects such as Slavka Gorelov, Vasilij Čurkin, Igor Peresvetov, and Mitâ Neverov, each representing a different degree of moral pliability and potential for return to the collective.

The young suspect Slavka Gorelov, at first arrogant and resistant, is gradually worn down through a careful process of psychological and moral confrontation. Zotov does not shout or threaten; instead, he reconstructs Gorelov’s life, evoking his estranged family, his father’s sacrifice, and the ideals he has long since abandoned. In a pivotal moment, he reads aloud a letter written by Slavka’s father from the front: “Remember, my son, we are now fighting a terrible, deadly battle (...) for the Motherland, for a bright future, for happiness and freedom. And my future is you; there is no one closer or dearer to me now. I want to see you healthy and happy. Study, my son, study well, be brave, honest, and strong” (Adamov 1958: 59). Faced with this emotional appeal to his better self, Gorelov breaks down and answers truthfully. This transformation illustrates how interrogation, in the Soviet procedural, transcends its punitive function

and becomes a therapeutic encounter and an instrument of moral restoration rather than mere extraction of confession.

A similar approach is taken with Vasilij Čurkin, a taxi driver who initially attempts to conceal his involvement. When questioned, Čurkin is visibly anxious and reluctant to cooperate. Zotov quickly diffuses the tension and addresses him not as an investigator, but as a Communist speaking to a fellow Komsomol member: “Let’s be honest. You’re a Komsomol member, and I’m a Communist; I joined during Lenin’s call” (Adamov 1958: 81). He shows his party card and appeals to Čurkin’s sense of duty, bravery, and wartime legacy. The turning point is not incidental: Zotov deliberately chooses an approach suited to his conscience and biography. He tells him how he would address a coward but says he cannot speak that way to a “battle-hardened tankman, awarded the Order of the Patriotic War for his heroism—a man who looked death in the eye many times” (Adamov 1958: 83). Zotov’s faith in him triggers Čurkin’s transformation. Fortified by this renewed self-worth, the driver quietly replies: “Let’s go. No need for disguises” (Adamov 1958: 83). Later, when the *miliciâ* thanks him for his cooperation, Čurkin insists on staying to assist further. Near the end of the novel, he even returns voluntarily to report a suspicious encounter, the same type of entanglement he was previously drawn into. This act of initiative marks a successful re-education. Čurkin’s trajectory exemplifies the pedagogical arc of the Soviet procedural: his temporary moral lapse is not portrayed as a definitive fall, and his redemption is framed not as legal obedience but as ideological awakening.

A similar logic of re-education shapes the interrogation of Igor Peresvetov, a sixteen-year-old whose outward arrogance hides confusion and vulnerability. On arriving at MUR, he projects theatrical superiority, presenting himself as a future actor, dismissive of his father’s ideals and proud of his self-styled realism. Yet Garanin quickly detects the cracks beneath this pose: insecurity, tension, and a longing for guidance. He counters Igor’s cynicism with calm irony, appeals to his sense of vocation, and gradually dismantles the façade. At the height of their exchange, Garanin delivers a strikingly ideological and paternal statement: “We will by no means let you fall. You must—we will simply make you—live and work honestly” (Adamov 1958: 159). This line captures the novel’s ethos: the state rescues misguided youth rather than punishing them. The interrogation then becomes a moral dialogue as Garanin strips away Peresvetov’s pretensions to reveal a lonely adolescent, alienated from his father, drawn into petty crime as a form of rebellion. His involvement with the criminal milieu, embodied by Papaša, is presented as a deviation still open to correction. Severing this bond becomes the goal while Garanin offers himself as an alternative role model. In a pivotal moment, Peresvetov asks for time to reflect and then returns

to give a full confession. The encounter illustrated thus becomes a rite of passage. Garanin's final words are both parental and encouraging: "Become an actor. A real one. I mean it—you can do it" (Adamov 1958: 164).

A further example is that of Mitâ Neverov, a young worker whom Papaša instructs to rob the factory's cash office. Rather than interrogate him directly, Zotov begins a seemingly casual conversation that shifts towards personal and disarming themes, particularly Mitâ's bond with his younger brother, Valerka. Zotov tells him: "You're all he has left. He's really proud of you. And he clearly loves you. I asked him, 'Do you have a father?' and he answered, 'No, I have Mitâ.'—'And a mother?' I asked. 'Yes,' he said, 'but Mitâ is also there instead of her'" (Adamov 1958: 288). This calculated appeal to responsibility strikes a nerve. Noticing that the boy's "eyes suddenly grew warmer", Zotov frames Mitâ's dilemma as a question of leadership: "What matters now is that you answer this for yourself: where are you turning your life to? And remember—this I tell you with certainty—Valerka will follow you. He'll follow you anywhere: to honest, noble work or into crime, wherever you lead him" (Adamov 1958: 290). Mitâ lowering his head to hide his trembling lips marks the turning point in the conversation. Upon learning that Zotov already knows about the planned robbery, Mitâ is stunned and glimpses in Zotov a rare kind of moral authority he has lacked in his life. Though still torn by fear of Papaša's retribution, he breaks down after being accused of cowardice and confesses everything. Zotov's strategy culminates in an act of trust: he instructs Mitâ to proceed with the plan but in cooperation with the *miliciâ*. That night, Mitâ returns home and tells Valerka, half-jokingly and half in earnest: "You're going to become a real man" (Adamov 1958: 293), which completes his moral alignment. What began as defiance is transformed into cooperation through the reconstruction of a meaningful sense of self in relation to others.

These episodes inevitably raise the question of procedural realism, a defining element of the subgenre. As Scaggs notes, one of the principal reasons for the development of the procedural was precisely the pursuit of realism, achieved by foregrounding the actual methods of police work (Scaggs 2005: 31, 91). Yet in Adamov's novel the speed and ease with which figures like Čurkin, Peresvetov, or Neverov are "turned back onto the right path" may appear overly convenient from a critical standpoint, since rehabilitation is typically imagined as a slower and more uncertain process. Adamov, however, situates these transformations within the ideological climate of the Thaw. On the one hand, the "conversions" of offenders align with the official image of the militia as a "people's force" entrusted not only with suppressing crime but also with prevention and educational work. Popova notes that in the mid-1950s, Soviet authorities sought actively to cultivate this image, deploying officers into labour col-

lectives to deliver lectures, engage with citizens, and implement preventive measures (Popova 2018: 180–181). At the same time, Adamov's representation resonates with criminological debates of the Thaw, when Soviet discourse on punishment and rehabilitation combined long-standing ideas with renewed emphasis. Already in the 1920s and 1930s, official terminology distinguished *ispravlenie* (correction), *vospitanie* (moral and cultural education), and *perevospitanie* (re-education) (Hardy 2016: 10). Crime was interpreted not as an innate defect but as the lingering product of capitalist "remnants" and the subversive influence of hostile elements. The goal of re-education was therefore to eradicate these remnants and instil socialist habits and a Soviet worldview (Hardy 2016: 70). Under Stalin, however, these ideals receded into the background; in the Gulag, in particular, they were subordinated to economic imperatives, and in practice the camps functioned primarily to meet industrial quotas rather than to transform individuals (Hardy 2016: 10, 70). After 1953, a marked shift occurred, as the penal system was explicitly reoriented around the ideals of re-education (*perevospitanie*) and correction (*ispravlenie*) rather than production. Beginning in 1954, for example, the Gulag's political departments, previously responsible for production, discipline, and the political education of staff, were tasked primarily with the correction and re-education of prisoners. N. Hruščev introduced structural reforms to ensure that this reorientation would not remain rhetorical but would become an institutional priority (Hardy 2016: 72–73). Adamov's narrative adapts this broader re-educational project to the conventions of the procedural form, privileging didactic clarity over psychological plausibility. In this sense, realism is redefined not as mimetic accuracy but as an idealised vision of how Soviet justice was meant to function. It reflects these ambitions in compressed form: what in reality was conceived as a long and uncertain process of rehabilitation is staged as a sequence of emblematic encounters.

In these scenes, the Soviet police procedural moves beyond its punitive function and becomes a site of moral intervention and transformation. Through calibrated emotional appeals, empathy, and psychological insight, investigators aim not merely to extract confessions but to open a space for dialogue, emotional reattachment and, ultimately, redirection. This re-educational imperative, woven into the very fabric of the investigation, marks a key point of divergence from Western models of the genre. The effort to influence people, especially youth, becomes an ideological contest, a struggle between the *miliciâ*, which embodies the values of socialist order, and Papaša, who represents everything anti-worker and corrosive to collective solidarity. This conflict is framed not merely as the dismantling of a criminal group but as a battle over the future of society, since the younger offenders are portrayed as a generation still open to guidance. The *miliciâ* fights to reclaim each individual, offering offenders a chance to

realign with socialist values and assume their place in the envisioned future collective.

Alongside re-education, Adamov's procedural emphasises *profilaktika*—the effort to detect and prevent moral deviation before it manifests as crime. Within this broader framework, the detective's role expands beyond investigation into that of a moral vanguard. However, in Adamov's narrative, *profilaktika* emerges as a shared obligation rather than solely a duty of the *miliciâ*. For example, an ordinary citizen, Sof'â Grigorevna Rovinskaâ, is the first to express concern about young Igor Peresvetov. She even admits to eavesdropping on his conversations with the unknown older man (Papaša), growing so worried that she considered alerting his parents or teachers, and now urges the *miliciâ* to find him. This ethic of collective vigilance reframes investigation as a shared moral project extending beyond formal institutions. In contrast to Western procedurals, where detection remains largely the domain of professional teams, Adamov portrays policing as a broad social undertaking—a multilayered endeavour supported by three concentric spheres of engagement: the internal collective, the extended collective, and the ideological collective.

## 5. THE ARCHITECTURE OF COLLECTIVE POLICING

The first sphere is the internal collective—the investigative team composed of Sergej Koršunov, Kostâ Garanin, Saša Lobanov, Viktor Voroncov, Semën Zabelin, the operative group leader Zotov, and Deputy Colonel Sandler. This group functions as a disciplined unit, maintaining moral consistency, strict procedures, close cooperation, and ongoing internal communication as shown above.

The second sphere involves an extended collective, which consists of civilians who adopt and apply *miliciâ* methods in unofficial contexts, thereby projecting investigative procedures beyond the institutional setting. These characters are not mere observers or occasional informants; rather, they actively reproduce the logic of investigation by engaging in surveillance, deduction, and tactical support. One such figure is Pëtr Gvozdev, who appears at several key moments throughout the narrative, gradually transitioning from a helpful bystander into a procedural imitator. Initially, he provides testimony with striking precision and transforms his own apartment into a base of operations:

where, on his own suggestion, other eyewitnesses and witnesses were summoned. Gvozdev himself called them in, very skilfully and without attracting attention. He always began the conversation with the same, seemingly innocent

question: 'Do you remember that Friday when I was planning to go for a ride in Kolá's car?' (Adamov 1958: 51)

Later, when Koršunov finds himself in a precarious position while pursuing a suspect alone, Gvozdev helps him by discreetly alerting the *miliciâ*. By the final chapters, he is no longer merely responding to events but actively investigating Mitâ Neverov: observing him, speaking with his family, and questioning a neighbour who reveals Mitâ's ties to Zoâ Ložkina. He also learns about tensions in Mitâ's family and his protective attachment to his younger brother Valerka. In gathering this information Gvozdev consciously imitates *miliciâ* officers "Koršunov and Garanin in everything, recalling how they conducted themselves during their visit to his home and their conversations with the tenants" (Adamov 1958: 281). Moreover, he emphasises his conviction that collective action is essential, stating:

I happen to have acquaintances in the criminal investigation department. I had to help them out with a few things, so I know the nature of their work. What's needed here is prevention (...) We have to connect the personal with the collective (...) If we don't all work together to turn someone like Neverov around, he might end up causing someone personal grief as well (Adamov 1958: 281).

Additionally, this episode exemplifies how *profilaktika* and re-education function as core elements embedded in the structure of investigative work.

A similarly illustrative case is that of Koršunov's fiancée, Lena (Elena Anatolevna). At first, she appears ideologically uncertain, shaped by her proximity to the *stilâga* Arnol'd. However, as the narrative progresses, she undergoes a process of moral and ideological realignment. When attending one of Arnol'd's gatherings, Lena is appalled by the books his friends read, which proclaim that "labour is a disgrace, the fate of slaves, that the struggle for power is the essence of all living things, and that only a caste of superiors has the right to possess and rule the world" (Adamov 1958: 175). She begins to question her position, and the narrator echoes her state of mind: "Lena felt afraid; disgust was choking her. Why had she come here? What should she do now? She'll leave right away. Leave? And that's it? But what else can she do? And what would Serëža do now?" (Adamov 1958: 176) By invoking the figure of Serëža Koršunov, she symbolically adopts the rational, duty-bound mindset of the *miliciâ*, which leads her to report Arnol'd's group to the Komsomol, resulting in their expulsion from the university. Moreover, towards the end of the novel, Lena plays a critical role in unmasking the spy Pit, who has assumed the identity of a fallen soldier, Ivan Utkin. As caretaker of

Utkin's elderly mother, Praskov'â Osipovna, she grows suspicious when a man named Rubcov—ostensibly a writer researching Utkin's military unit—comes to visit. Recalling the letters Utkin has sent to his mother, she realises the name was never mentioned and detects inconsistencies in Rubcov's story. Her suspicions are confirmed when Igor Peresvetov tells her he saw Papaša waiting for someone matching Rubcov's description. Lena cross-checks Rubcov's claim of staying at the hotel "Moskva" and finds no record of him. She immediately alerts Koršunov, and shortly thereafter reports her findings directly to Zotov together with Peresvetov. In short, Lena's role is not framed as passive assistance but as autonomous investigative labour. She systematically gathers evidence, formulates hypotheses, verifies information, and communicates her conclusions to the authorities, effectively mirroring the procedural logic of *miliciâ* work. Her conduct echoes Koršunov's not only in method but also in ethical orientation.

Through the actions of citizens such as Gvozdev and Lena the *miliciâ*'s investigative logic extends into the private and social spheres. These citizens do not simply assist *miliciâ* but emulate its core procedures. The extended collective thus becomes a vital arm of the procedural system in Adamov's narrative. Like the members of the internal investigative collective, both Gvozdev and Lena are woven into the narrative from beginning to end, reappearing at decisive moments and reinforcing the continuity of the procedural effort.

The third and most encompassing sphere involves the ideological collective, a symbolic community that upholds Soviet society's moral order without directly engaging in investigative procedures. Unlike the extended collective, whose members actively adopt *miliciâ* methods, the ideological collective operates through trust, cooperation, and passive vigilance. Their conduct, rooted in loyalty, civic duty, and a clear sense of right and wrong, forms the social foundation on which the *miliciâ* depends. They ensure that crime does not go unnoticed, while their readiness to report or support gives moral legitimacy to official actions. As Silant'ev teaches Koršunov: "We always have the support of the people. And those are not just empty words. A criminal does not live or act in a vacuum, there are always dozens of honest eyes watching him, whether deliberately or unintentionally" (Adamov 1958: 22).

An exemplary instance of the ideological collective is found in the behaviour of Vera and her mother, Klavdiâ Ivanovna. Vera is introduced as an ideologically conscious citizen. When investigator Garanin visits her apartment, she provides a detailed testimony about a suspicious vehicle she observed near the crime scene. Her recollection is precise and structured, showing a clear awareness of its potential significance for the investigation. What distinguishes Vera is not only her readiness to help but also the emotional warmth and ethical commitment that shape her cooperation. Ga-

ranin is moved by the sincerity radiating from her: “so sincere was her gaze, so full of friendly concern and trust” (Adamov 1958: 44). Equally important is her mother, Klavdia Ivanovna, whose emotional vulnerability does not prevent her from offering a clear and valuable account. She recounts an incident involving a chauffeur’s aggressive behaviour and a luxury car never seen in the neighbourhood before. Her testimony provides crucial support for Vera’s account, including the partial recollection of a license plate. She speaks with humility and doubt about the importance of her memories, but the investigator warmly assures her of their value. Together, mother and daughter embody the moral backbone of Soviet society: emotionally invested, ideologically aligned, and willing to support the *miliciâ* not out of obligation but out of genuine belief in the justice and necessity of their work.

Another figure belonging to the ideological collective is Tamara Abramovna Golikova, an older woman and acquaintance of the Amosovs, a family whose daughter was murdered and their apartment robbed. Though not involved in investigative work, Golikova steps forward with testimony motivated by a strong sense of civic duty. Upon discovering a bloodied handkerchief while helping clean the crime scene, she immediately recognises its evidentiary value and urges Valentina Amosova, the victim’s cousin, to hand it over to the authorities. When Valentina fails to do so, Golikova becomes suspicious and even eavesdrops on her phone call to Koršunov to confirm her doubts. Although she neither gathers further evidence nor reconstructs events as members of the extended collective might, she exemplifies the vigilant Soviet citizen whose determination to see the truth revealed sustains the broader framework of public solidarity and trust in the *miliciâ*.

Katâ Svetlova is another example of an individual belonging to the ideological collective. A spirited and respected Komsomol member known for her camaraderie, and civic engagement, she willingly takes part in an undercover operation by posing as Koršunov’s sister, a role requiring courage, discretion, and ideological trust. Her participation is not investigative but involves maintaining appearances as well as transmitting messages vital to the operation.

These interwoven spheres of collective engagement in policing—the internal, extended, and ideological—form a coherent architecture of social vigilance, where each level reinforces the next. The professional authority of the *miliciâ* legitimises civilian intervention, while civilian participation reaffirms the moral standing of the state. This system, however, is not confined to the fictional world of the novel. It extends outward, addressing the reader as a potential participant in the same moral project and producing a fourth, meta-level of ideological engagement. The narrative’s persistent emphasis on ordinary citizens noticing small details, voicing concerns, and taking ac-

tion functions as a subtle didactic prompt. The novel thus aims not only to instruct or entertain but also to enlist, extending the procedural logic into the realm of reception and transforming the genre itself into a tool of social engineering.

## 6. SYMMETRICAL STRUCTURES AND IDEOLOGICAL WARFARE

In his lecture at the outset of the novel, Colonel Silant'ev draws a clear moral boundary between those who can be rehabilitated and "those who have corrupted their souls to the bottom" (Adamov 1958: 22). The latter, he insists, must be eliminated as sworn enemies. These figures are easily recognisable in the narrative: in most cases, they are older men tied to the pre-revolutionary past and serve as symbols of entrenched opposition to the Soviet order. Adamov develops this idea through a symmetrical conflict between two collectives: the cohesive *miliciâ* and a strategically organised, though ideologically fragmented, criminal network led by the elusive Papaša.

Papaša (formerly known as Pan) represents the most dangerous kind of antagonist – the ideologically irredeemable enemy. Originally from Warsaw, he arrived in Moscow in 1917, seizing the opportunities created by revolutionary upheaval. Amidst the instability of the early Soviet years and the NEP, he rose to lead a criminal gang and "waged full-scale battles with MUR agents" (Adamov 1958: 260). Although eventually captured by Sandler, Pan manipulated the legal system, received only a short sentence, and disappeared, leaving his main crimes concealed. Considering that Sandler was then a young operative, it could be said that he and Papaša emerge as symmetrical figures of experience and authority but on opposing moral poles. Within this framework, despite holding the rank of Deputy Colonel, Sandler effectively functions as the true leader, especially since Colonel Silant'ev remains largely absent, serving mainly as an ideological voice. Papaša's return years later is symbolic, for he reappears as a spectre of the past Soviet society sought to eradicate. What makes him particularly insidious is not only his persistence but also his corrupting influence on the younger generation. As a manipulator and recruiter, he draws disoriented youth into his criminal orbit, becoming a systemic threat and a living remnant of pre-revolutionary violence and bourgeois amorality.

Pit occupies a uniquely destabilising role within the narrative. Although operating in a different sphere of espionage and foreign subversion, he belongs to the same top tier of the criminal hierarchy as Papaša. Both embody irredeemable forms of ideological hostility and personify systemic threats to the moral order the *miliciâ* defends. Originally a neglected child from Penza, Pit drifted in his youth from petty theft and desertion into espionage. In Germany, he was recruited by the foreign agent Kardan and trained in sabotage and psychologically conditioned to despise others, believe

in his own exceptional destiny, and hate his homeland. Unlike other criminals, Pit is driven not by material need but by cold ambition to dominate and humiliate. His excitement at the idea of harming strangers blends pathology with calculated malice, while his fantasy of publishing a biographical “confession” underscores a narcissistic belief that betrayal is the highest form of mastery. Defined by evasion, infiltration, and severed from any past or loyalty to his homeland, Pit personifies the shadow of foreign subversion. His rootlessness and conviction that he stands above the law make him a symbol of an amorphous enemy opposed to collective values. From this perspective, Pit can be seen as a dark counterpart of Colonel Silant’ev. Just as Silant’ev serves as the ideological conscience of the *miliciâ*, Pit functions as its absolute negation and an invisible principle of corruption. His arrest is not merely a procedural resolution but a symbolic act, restoring epistemological clarity, reaffirming that truth is knowable and ideology provides stable meaning.

Beneath Papaša, a hierarchical order unfolds. Figures such as Sofron Ložkin and Âkov Kupcevič occupy the middle tier, each representing a facet of ideological decay. Ložkin is identified as a former kulak, first arrested in 1931 for setting fire to a kolkhoz with his father. During interrogation, he tries to recast his early crimes as noble resistance to clerical influence, but Zotov dismantles his narrative, exposing him as a murderer and a man who destroyed the collective’s livestock in an act of ideological sabotage. Confronted not just with evidence but with an attempt to awaken a sense of remorse within him, Ložkin responds with raw hostility, shouting: “It’s too late to persuade me (...) I’ll rob!... And I’ll kill!... You reformers!... I hate you! I hate all of you!” (Adamov 1958: 97) This moment reveals visceral loathing for the entire Soviet project of re-education.

Kupcevič, by contrast, embodies a quieter but no less corrosive form of ideological decay. Born into a petty bureaucratic family, he grew up idolising NEP entrepreneurs and absorbing an ethic of greed. His father’s brief access to private wealth left a lasting mark, making money the supreme value. Early on, Kupcevič was “instinctively drawn to money” (Adamov 1958: 180), which soon led him to embezzlement, theft, and prison. Years in a labour camp taught him only to operate more cautiously. During the war, he posed as a decorated soldier to secure a pension and later rejoined Papaša. He is portrayed as cowardly and opportunistic, a degenerate *barin* (lord) clinging to the mentality of the exploitative classes under the guise of an ordinary Soviet citizen. In structural terms, this middle tier of the criminal collective corresponds to the experienced operatives of the *miliciâ*, especially Zotov. Where Zotov embodies the rational, collective ethos of Soviet justice, Ložkin and Kupcevič represent its negation: individual greed and class resentment.

Below them is a third layer of petty criminals: smugglers and black market profiteers like Mercalov and Zubkov; Zoâ Ložkina, who facilitates communication by passing messages and arranging meetings; figures such as Tit, Len'ka Hohol, Ivan Fëkla, Fed'ka Dubina, and Mitâ Neverov, who operate as petty thieves and provide logistical support; and finally, the *stilâgi* Arnol'd, Kamov, and Rastâgaev, who, after being reported by Lena, plan to hire Papaša's gang to murder her. Significantly, Papaša intends to use this transaction to blackmail them into permanent collaboration, tightening his hold over the next generation. This tier functions as the criminal counterpart to the MUR operatives—Koršunov, Garanin, Voroncov, Lobanov, and Zabelin. This structural mirroring goes even further because, much like the *miliciâ*, the criminals also hold morning meetings and divide responsibilities in a kind of institutional routine, as shown towards the novel's conclusion.

The narrative symmetry between the *miliciâ* and the motley crew elevates the conflict beyond a conventional crime versus justice plot. It becomes an allegory of competing social models: one rational, disciplined, and committed to rehabilitation, the other anarchic, parasitic, and corrosive. By framing the confrontation in these terms, Adamov's narrative transforms the procedural genre into a symbolic contest over the moral future of Soviet society itself. Ultimately, however, the *miliciâ* prevails, largely thanks to the system of collective policing that extends beyond institutional boundaries into the wider social fabric.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Arkadij Adamov's *The Case of the Motley Crew* represents a distinct Soviet variant of the police procedural. While the novel shares core genre features with its Western counterparts such as a collective protagonist, methodical investigation, several parallel criminal threads, narrative closure, procedural realism, and bureaucratic language, it departs fundamentally in purpose and ideology. In Adamov's vision, the *miliciâ* emerges not merely as an investigative body, but as a pedagogical force. Investigation is never just about solving crimes. It is an instrument of social engineering, dedicated to the rehabilitation of individuals and the reinforcement of socialist values. This dual function is most apparent in the novel's architecture of collective policing. The story depicts three concentric spheres of engagement: the professional team of investigators, civic collaborators like Gvozdev and Lena who emulate *miliciâ* methods, and the broader ideological collective whose vigilance sustains social order. Each layer reinforces the other, blurring the line between law enforcement and civic duty.

This structure dramatises the belief that public security cannot be left to institutions alone but must be a shared ethical project in which every citizen participates. Even the reader is addressed as a potential participant in this moral undertaking, invited to emulate the vigilance and commitment of the characters. At the same time, the novel frames crime itself as a systemic and ideological threat. Figures such as Papaša and Pit are not merely criminals but embodiments of historical forces—bourgeois amorality, pre-revolutionary opportunism, and foreign subversion—arrayed against the Soviet collective. This ideological dimension transforms the procedural genre into a struggle for allegiance, in which criminal investigation becomes a contest over moral and political legitimacy. By merging procedural conventions with the imperatives of socialist pedagogy, Adamov created a cultural artefact that testifies to the power of crime genre not only to reflect reality but also to shape visions of society itself.

Beyond its specific narrative architecture, other elements of Adamov's novel resonate with a broader pattern of the Soviet police procedural. For instance, polemical allusions to Sherlock Holmes appear as a symbolic rejection of the individualist detective archetype across many novels, and sometimes even recur multiple times within a single work, as in J. Semënov's *Petrovka*, 38. The ironic references highlight how consistently Soviet texts opposed the Western cult of the solitary genius to the cooperative ethos of the *miliciâ*, transforming Holmes into a foil against which the legitimacy of the collective method was asserted. Another recurrent element is the figure of the newcomer in the police team, whose integration dramatises the didactic function of the genre. Just as Adamov introduces Sergej Koršunov as a novice who learns through collective mentorship, so too do P. Nilin's *Ispytatel'nyj srok* (1955) and the Vainer brothers' *Era miloserdiâ* (1976) exemplify the same narrative device. As Fedunina has shown, this type of hero became a recognisable invariant of the *milicejskaâ povest'* during the *ottepel'* period, appearing also in texts such as P. Šestakov's *Čerez labirint* (1966) and V. Lipatov's *Derevenskij detektiv* (1968) (Fedunina 2009). The repeated use of the novice figure underscores the pedagogical role of the police procedural, not only in training characters within the story but also in modelling desirable behaviour for the reader, who witnesses the novice's transformation into an ideologically sound member of the collective. Equally significant is the theme of prevention (*profilaktika*), whereby characters who have "stumbled", acted unwittingly as accomplices, or committed minor transgressions, are not simply condemned but re-educated and reintegrated into the social order. Such figures appear in Semënov's *Petrovka*, 38 and in later works such as *Iščite "Volka"!* (1980) by L. Sapožnikov and G. Stepanidin, demonstrating that the re-educational function is not incidental but central to the genre. Finally, this ideological and didactic element connects the Soviet

police novel with the Soviet variant of spy fiction, revealing the permeability of genre boundaries through exposure of enemies, the safeguarding of collective security, and the pedagogical rehabilitation of those who stray. As Fedunina and Kuznecova (2008) observe in O. Šmelëv and V. Vostokov's *Ošibka rezidenta* (1965) and L. Ovalov's *Sekretnoe oružie* (1963) the spy novel of the *ottepel'* period crystallised around the invariant opposition of "ours" and "theirs", yet it also foregrounded the prophylactic concern with ordinary citizens at risk of faltering, thus mirroring the didactic structure of the police procedural. In Adamov's novel this convergence takes shape in the figure of the antagonist Pit, a spy whose presence aligns the police procedural with espionage fiction and underscores the structural kinship of the two genres. In this way, Adamov's *The Case of the Motley Crew* not only illustrates the ideological mechanics of the Soviet police procedural but also exemplifies how Soviet popular genres reconfigured international models into instruments of social pedagogy and collective identity.

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SLUČAJ „ŠAROLIKIH“ A. ADAMOVA: SOVJETSKI POLICIJSKI PROCEDURAL –  
PARALELNI OBRASCI I DIVERGENTNE IDEOLOGIJE

MAJA PANDŽIĆ

SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad analizira roman Arkadija Adamova *Slučaj „šarolikih“* (*Delo „pěstryh“*, 1956) kao specifičnu sovjetsku varijantu policijskoga proceduralnog žanra. Primjenjujući komparativni žanrovski pristup i detaljno strukturalno čitanje, istražuje se kako roman uključuje temeljna obilježja poput kolektivnoga protagonista, metodične istrage, više paralelnih kriminalnih radnji, proceduralnoga realizma i birokratskoga diskursa. Ipak, roman se značajno udaljava od zapadnih modela jer istragu prikazuje kao ideološku misiju. Policija je prikazana ne samo kao institucija odgovorna za održavanje reda već i kao pedagoška sila posvećena predodgoju i jačanju socijalističkih vrijednosti. Adamov strukturira policijsko djelovanje unutar triju koncentričnih sfera: profesionalnoga istražiteljskog tima, građanskih suradnika koji oponašaju metode policije i širega ideološkog kolektiva čija budnost legitimira provođenje zakona i zamagljuje granicu između građanske dužnosti i policijskoga djelovanja. Kriminalitet se prikazuje kao sustavna prijetnja povezana s povijesnim silama poput buržoaskoga oportunizma i strane subverzije. Spajajući proceduralne konvencije sa socijalističkom pedagogijom, roman pretvara kriminalističku istragu u borbu za moralnu i političku lojalnost te pokazuje potencijal žanra u oblikovanju vizije kolektivnoga identiteta i društvenoga poretka.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

*Arkadij Adamov, sovjetska kriminalistička fikcija, policijska procedura, policija, Delo „pěstryh“*