Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Benjamin Thomas April 10, 2023

Carnival Ever After: How the Uneasy Marriage of Folklore and Early Soviet Children's Prose Built a New Ideological World

by

Ben Thomas

Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan
Adviser

Comparative Literature

Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan

Adviser

Dr. Mikhail Epstein

Committee Member

Dr. Vera Proskurina

Committee Member

2023

Carnival Ever After: How the Uneasy Marriage of Folklore and Early Soviet Children's Prose Built a New Ideological World

By

Ben Thomas

Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan

Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Comparative Literature

2023

Abstract

Carnival Ever After: How the Uneasy Marriage of Folklore and Early Soviet Children's Prose Built a New Ideological World

By Ben Thomas

In the early Soviet Union, educating the future "Builders of Communism" in line with Marxist-Leninist ideology was considered to be of paramount importance. Why and to what effect on their readers' moral psychology, then, were children's writers permitted such latitude to experiment with pre-revolutionary fairy tales? How did their works become some of the most influential Soviet children's texts ever written? Resolving this puzzle should not only improve our understanding of Soviet children's culture, but also shed light on the roots of the post-Soviet Russian subjectivity and engender a more holistic understanding of the general relationship between the interactive young reader and the text.

From the early 1920s through the beginning of Stalin's Terror in 1936, a tenuous, largely implicit compromise existed in the early Soviet children's literary scene that I term the socialist fantasia. Fairy-tale content coexisted with and buttressed socialist humanist form with great import for our understanding of how ideology attempted to shape the early Soviet subjectivity through art. To understand each of these three elements and the connections between them, the present work draws on Vladimir Propp's literary formalism to read four popular Russian Soviet novels written between 1924 and 1936, for children aged seven to fifteen, and with fairy tale influences.

In the first chapter, I analyze Yurii Olesha's novel *Tri tolstiaka* (1928) to develop a clear account of fantastic content as what I term the idiom of the fantastic, comprising a set of rhetorical strategies and motifs echoing fairy tales. The second explains the morality advanced by ideological form by explicating the roles and virtues of the socialist humanist hero in the context of Arkadii Gaidar's stories "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" (1933) and *Voennaia taina* (1935). In the third, I draw on Aleksei Tolstoi's novel *Buratino* to detail the co-optation inherent in the socialist fantasia and the ideological interactions between its form and content. Finally, the last chapter draws on all four texts, the critic Wolfgang Iser's *Rezeptionsästhetik*, and the phenomenologies of Gilles Deleuze and Edmund Husserl to theorize how the socialist fantasia situates the reader in relation to state morality and ideology.

Carnival Ever After: How the Uneasy Marriage of Folklore and Early Soviet Children's Prose Built a New Ideological World

By

Ben Thomas

Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Comparative Literature

2023

Acknowledgements

This project has required a great deal of me, and none of it would have been possible without the support of Dr. Elena Glazov-Corrigan, my professor, mentor, and thesis advisor. From my first course with her in the fall of 2020 to my last this semester, her love of literature and language has never ceased to inspire me, even as her thoughtful comments on my work have pushed me to improve my thinking, writing, and teaching. I am beyond grateful to her, Dr. Mikhail Epstein, and Dr. Vera Proskurina for their energizing questions and feedback as members of my committee now and as my instructors these last four years.

I also owe a great debt to my other professors — particularly Dr. John Stuhr, Dr. Shoshana Felman, Dr. Emily Gade, Dr. Jessica Sun, Dr. Deborah White, Dr. Elizabeth Goodstein, and Dr. Pam Hall — for supporting me in making connections between disparate fields that I had in many cases just discovered. Their encouragement and inspiration have immensely enriched my thinking in this work and in general, and I could not thank them enough. So, too, have my communities in the IDEAS Fellowship, the Emory Wheel, the Emory Undergraduate Research Journal, and the Student Government Association helped me to develop the writing, research, and editing skills that have proven so invaluable to me this year.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, Becky and John Thomas; my sibling, Maddie Thomas; my friends, Demetrios Mammas, Ash Shankar, Nandish Vora, Diego Hurtado, Sahana Mathiarasan, Isaac Gazmararian, and many more; and, especially, my partner, Rhea Gupta, from the bottom of my heart for their support and their love. Their continual belief in me has meant the world to me, and I could not have done this without them.

Table of Contents

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

—Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit*

Introduction: Brave New Fairy Tales

The author has been dead for 55 years,[1] but today's children are still often asked to identify the author's "main point" or, more insidiously, "what they mean."[2] Even in Advanced Placement literature courses, students are taught to read with an eye to correctly answering reductive multiple-choice questions. The fetishization of the author is slowly giving way to the fetishization of the meaning. Concurrently, political discourse on literary education has centered in much of the world on how texts corrupt or uplift the children who read them. U.S. school districts, mine included, have banned nearly 2,000 separate books since 2021 alone.[3] Most of these decisions have been on the grounds that they send messages on sexuality, gender, and race "inappropriate" for or harmful toward children. We certainly begin to develop in- and out-group orientations,[4] moral attitudes,[5] and notions of heroism[6] early in childhood, and the texts that we read, hear, and see do influence that process. However, as Darcia Narvaez et al. demonstrate empirically, readers do not necessarily do so as the author intends, and the precise relationship of the young reader to their texts, let alone to the moral reasoning therein, remains unclear.[7] This suggests that from academic research to primary education, we must de-emphasize reading for

---

[1] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 148.
[2] Sarah Garland, "The ELA Standards: Content and Controversy," *The Hechinger Report* (October 15, 2013). https://hechingerreport.org/the-ela-standards-content-and-controversy/.
[3] Daniel Trotta, "U.S. School Book Bans on the Rise Due to Advocacy Groups, Report Says," *Reuters*, September 19, 2022, sec. United States, https://www.reuters.com/world/us/organized-groups-fuel-rapid-rise-us-book-banning-report-says-2022-09-19/.
[4] Frances E. Aboud, "The Formation of In-Group Favoritism and out-Group Prejudice in Young Children: Are They Distinct Attitudes?", *Developmental Psychology* 39 (2003): 55-56. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.39.1.48.
[5] Elisabeth K. Heiner, "Fostering Heroism in Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Students," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 59, no. 4 (2019): 596. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167817753997
[6] Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Development of Children's Orientations toward a Moral Order I. Sequence in the Development of Moral Thought," *Vita Humana* 6, no. 1/2 (1963): 31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26762149.
[7] Darcia Narvaez et al., "Moral Theme Comprehension in Third Graders, Fifth Graders, and College Students," *Reading Psychology* 19, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 232-235. https://doi.org/10.1080/0270271980190203.

"the meaning" and begin asking more nuanced questions about how individual and collective readers form relationships with texts.

That said, this search for "meaning" may already be meeting a slow demise. Large language models like GPT-3 can already write passable critical essays, and better systems are on the horizon.[8] More importantly, the ease with which ChatGPT can answer questions about the "main point" of a text highlights the shallowness of the concept itself. Rather than give up the critical enterprise, the academy should instead allow the advent of artificial intelligence to motivate a return to the humanities' *raison d'être*: to create more sympathetic, flourishing, and open-minded people. The philosopher John Dewey put it best over a century ago, lamenting in his study of democracy in education that "achievement comes to denote the sort of thing that a well-planned machine can do better than a human being can, and the main effect of education, the achieving of a life of rich significance, drops by the wayside."[9] Martha Nussbaum goes further, specifying in her work on the same subject that humanities education enhances "the ability to imagine the experience of another" and to "think well about a wide range of cultures, groups, and nations."[10] Humanities education and research alike must reorient themselves toward what texts can do, not what they mean, in the coming years or risk obsolescence.

Popular and scholarly dismissal of the texts best suited to inform that variety of education may help to explain its continued scarcity. In children's literature studies, the notion of the "literary-didactic split" refers to the ongoing debate as to whether children's texts are a form of

---

[8] Stephen Marche, "The College Essay Is Dead," *The Atlantic* (December 6, 2022), https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/12/chatgpt-ai-writing-college-student-essays/672371/.
[9] John Dewey, *Democracy in Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 277.
[10] Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 10.

art, an educational vehicle, or both.[11] To this, I would add the popular perception that they are simple entertainment, a way to keep inquisitive minds occupied after school. But none of these perspectives fully captures how children themselves engage with the texts written for them. As Maria Nikolajeva notes in her survey of aesthetic approaches to children's texts, they often disregard the author's name, and they rarely critically engage or take away granular lessons from characters' motivations.[12] Children instead see these characters as their friends, focus on pivotal events, and make associations that shape their lives for years afterward.[13] Many people who came of age with Harry Potter books and movies, for instance, still identify with a Hogwarts House or a main character whom they feel represents them. Children's literature often occasions a much more interactive experience than we are willing to admit.[14] To be sure, there is no one experience of a child reading a book, and any adult's explication of this process lacks the benefit of direct, recent experience, but the little critical attention paid to the problem justifies an attempt.[15]

Formalism and Fairy Tales in the Early Soviet Children's Literary Scene

The other major "kind of literature in which the aesthetic function is not the dominant," as Gary Saul Morson argues in his seminal article on the subject, is that of socialist realism, the Soviet Union's official aesthetics from 1932 through 1988.[16] With some exceptions, Sovietists have long discounted the children's literature of that school as unserious and propagandistic. The

---

[11] Maria Nikolajeva, *Aesthetic Approaches to Children's Literature: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), xi.

[12] Nikolajeva, *Aesthetic Approaches*, 2.

[13] Van den Broek, Paul, Elizabeth Pugzles Lorch, and Richard Thurlow. "Children's and Adults' Memory for Television Stories: The Role of Causal Factors, Story-Grammar Categories, and Hierarchical Level," *Child Development* 67, no. 6 (1996): 3014, 3023.

[14] Charles A. Perfetti, *Reading Ability* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 21, 30.

[15] For more on this problem, see especially Nikolajeva, *Aesthetic Approaches*.

[16] Gary Saul Morson, "Socialist Realism and Literary Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38, no. 2 (1979): 126. https://doi.org/10.2307/430715.

question of its formative capacities remains even more understudied, as only one monograph, Felicity O'Dell's *Socialisation through Children's Literature: The Soviet Example*, has addressed it directly. Even then, her methodology shares more with anthropology than literary criticism, and it also almost entirely excludes the early Soviet period.

Few points in literary history have seen more acute bureaucratic and public concern with literature's role in creating the children who read it. As the Russian Civil War ended, the new Soviet government's interest in education became immediately apparent. At the Third Komsomol (The Union of Communist Youth) Congress, Vladimir Lenin argued that curricula should include only the knowledge necessary to build communism.[17] This was a "high ideological" but "low budgetary priority," as Lisa Kirschenbaum puts it in her study of the ideology of Soviet education,[18] meaning that much of the burden fell to literature.[19]A firestorm of controversy ensued throughout the early Soviet literary world. As Marina Balina explains, intense debates on acceptable forms and purposes of children's literature raged as the publishing industry's fortunes fluctuated throughout the early 1920s.[20] The patronage of Maksim Gorkii, the father of socialist realism, revived the industry amid the Russian Civil War, but it underwent

[17] Vladimir Lenin, *Zadachi soiuza molodezhi: Rech na III vserosiiskom s'ezde komsomola* [The tasks of the Union of Communist Youth: Speech at the Third All-Russian Komsomol Congress] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1982), 223.
[18] Lisa Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 37.
[19] Serguei Alex. Oushakine and Marina Balina, "Introduction: Primers in Soviet Modernity: Depicting Communism for Children in Early Soviet Russia," in *The Pedagogy of Images: Depicting Communism for Children*, eds. Marina Balina and Serguei Alex. Oushakine, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 4. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctv1pzk2jm.5.
[20] Marina Balina, "Creativity through Restraint: The Beginnings of Soviet Children's Literature," in *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9.

another sharp contraction when he left the country in 1921,[21] and the vast majority of pre-revolutionary works were taken out of circulation within the next few years.[22]

Gorkii's departure in protest was one part of a broader cultural tableau. Despite Lenin's position, the questions of whether children's literature should deal with the general human condition, retain connections with Russian literary heritage, or prepare children to build communism were debated openly at a children's literature congress held the same year.[23] The government's own Institute for the Study of Children's Reading criticized Gorkii's journal for children, *Severnoe siianie* (Northern Lights), as dull and overly ideological.[24] Minimally ideological children's texts by authors like Andrei Belii, Zinaida Gippius, Samuil Marshak, Evgenii Shvarts, and others were published to broad acclaim, as in the 1921 volume *Palochka-vyruchalochka*,[25] the Moscow publishing house *Raduga*, the Petrograd Children's Literature Studio circle, and Daniil Kharms and Aleksandr Vvedenskii's experimental OBERIU group.[26] In 1924, however, that freedom contracted sharply.[27] Delegates at that year's 13th Party Congress passed a resolution declaring, "We must… create a children's literature under the strict control and advisement of the Party, intended to foster a greater sense of class-consciousness, international solidarity and love for work."[28]

---

[21] Lidiia Kon, *Sovetskaia detskaia literatura vosstanovitel'naia perioda (1921-1955)* [Soviet Children's Literature of the Restoration Period] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo detskoi literaturi, 1955), 63.
[22] Ben Hellman, *Fairy Tales and True Stories: the History of Russian Literature for Children and Young People (1574-2010)* (Brill, 2013), 297.
[23] Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 297
[24] Kon, *Sovetskaia*, 22.
[25] Balina, "Creativity," 6.
[26] Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 299-300.
[27] Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 304.
[28] Except for where otherwise noted, all translations in this work from the Russian and the German are my own. "Rezoliutsiia XIII s''ezda partii" [Resolution of the 13th Party Congress] in *O Partiinoi i Sovetskoi Pechati, Radioveshchanii i Televedenii: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* [On the Party and Soviet Press, Broadcasting, and Television: Collection of Documents and Materials] (Moscow: Mysl′, 1972), 113.

Censorship appeared to have won, yet public debates on how such texts should accomplish the Party's formative goals continued. As O'Dell notes, the "most important expression [thereof was] in connection with fairy-tales and fantasy."[29] Just before the Party's directive on children's literature was released in 1924, *Palochka-vyruchalochka* had been condemned in the leading state-run newspaper *Pravda* because its fairy-tale-inspired stories were insufficiently ideological. Other critics, Lenin's widow Nadezhda Krupskaia among them, went further in arguing that fairy tales like those of the children's writer Kornei Chukovskii destroyed children's collective consciousness.[30] As Felix Oinas explains in his study of these debates, they held that folklore-inspired writing "glorified tsars and tsareviches, corrupted and instigated sickly fantasies in children, developed the kulak attitude, and strengthened bourgeois ideals."[31] At her behest, Aleksandr Afanas'ev's collections of Russian folk tales and many others were removed from libraries across the country.[32] Maksim Gorkii, still in self-imposed exile,[33] was aghast, bitterly criticizing Krupskaia's efforts to limit the scope of children's access to literature in his private correspondence:

> The fact is that Lenin's wife... compiled an index of counterrevolutionary books and ordered them removed from the libraries. The old woman considers the works of Plato, Descartes, Kant, Schopenhauer, Spencer, Mach, the Gospel, the Talmud, the Koran, books by Hippolyte Taine, W. James, Gelfding, Carlyle, Maeterlinck, Nietzsche, O. Mirbeau, L. Tolstoy, and several dozen other such "counterrevolutionary" works. For me personally, a man who owes his best to books and who loves them almost more than he

---

[29] Felicity O'Dell, *Socialisation through Children's Literature: The Soviet Example* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.
[30] Marina Balina, introduction to *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, ed. Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and Mark Lipovetsky, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 106, 119.
[31] Felix J. Oinas, "The Political Uses and Themes of Folklore in the Soviet Union," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 12, no. 2/3 (1975): 157.
[32] Evgenii Dobrenko, *Formovka sovetskovo chitatelia* [The Formation of the Soviet Reader] (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1997), 173; Oushakine and Balina, "Introduction: Primers in Soviet Modernity," 13.
[33] Gorkii left Russia in 1921 amid a widening rift with Lenin and distaste for the regime's increasingly severe censorship and repression. He then lived in Helsinki, Germany, Prague, and Sorrento. Tovah Yedlin, *Maxim Gorky: A Political Biography* (London: Praeger, 1999), xiii, 147, 161, 163-164.

> loves people, for me this is the worst I have ever experienced in my life and the most shameful thing Russia has ever experienced.[34]

Chukovskii, folklorists like Vladimir Propp,[35] and others defended the form stridently and publicly. As late as 1929, the former narrated in *Two to Five* his attempts to argue that folklore in fact heightened children's sense of reality, but his efforts were in vain.[36] Not until Gorkii's permanent return to the Soviet Union in 1933 at the personal invitation of Stalin did official attitudes on the question grow more sympathetic to the fairy tale.[37]

Young readers themselves, however, had long exhibited a clear preference for Chukovskii's side of the debate. The most popular texts among children comprised poetry collections like *Palochka-vyruchalochka*, pre-revolutionary stories, and the whimsical avant-garde works published in journals like *Vorobei* (Sparrow, 1923-1924) and *Novii Robinzon* (New Robinson, 1924-1925). This was in contrast to drab, uninspiring stories like the unsigned *Severnoe siianie* story "Polchasa v sutki" ("A half hour a day"), which exhorts children to safeguard their health by chewing their food long enough to digest it properly.[38] The functional Sovietization of children's reading, therefore, did not proceed linearly. As Balina notes, the two major bureaucratic inflection points in that process were the declaration of 1924 and the 1932 establishment of an official children's publishing house and critical journal, both named *Detskaia literatura* (Children's Literature).[39] But even after the Communist Party's 1924

---

[34] Maksim Gorkii to Roman Rollan, January 15, 1924, in *M. Gorkii i R. Rollan: Perepiska (1916-1936)* [M. Gorkii and R. Rollan: Correspondence (1916-1936)], 86-87 (Moscow: Naslediie, 1995).
[35] Oinas, "Political Uses," 158.
[36] Kornei Chukovskii, *From Two to Five*, ed. and trans. Miriam Morton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 115.
[37] Yedlin, *Maxim Gorky*, 178.
[38] "Polchasa v sutki" [A Half-Hour a Day], *Severnoe siianie* no. 10-12 (1919): 49.
[39] Balina, "Creativity," 12

directive, Chukovskii was writing wildly popular fairy tales, such as his 1927 *Krokodil* (Crocodile), with very little reference to Soviet ideology.

In its 1921 report, the Institute for the Study of Children's Reading concluded that stories like "Polchasa v sutki" did not win young readers' hearts and minds because they were simply too dull.[40] The Institute was disbanded within a year, however, and it was not until 1933, after Krupskaia's influence had begun to wane, that Marshak and the newly returned Gorkii began to argue publicly that fairy tales deserved a place in writing for children.[41] At the First Soviet Writer's Congress in August 1934, both writers gave speeches to just that effect. Gorkii's successful arguments contended that folklore was an inheritance of the working class.[42] In fact, his position stemmed from his efforts to learn what Soviet youth actually wanted to read. When he had asked them to send him letters answering that question in the previous year, he received well over 7,000 responses, the vast majority of which declared interests in dragons, princes, princesses, and magic.[43] His speech was enthusiastically received, and the Congress's concluding resolution formalized a compromise that had existed in tenuous form since the early 1920s. Particularly within children's literature, writers had considerable latitude to use fairy-tale-inspired characters, settings, and motifs as long as they did so in the service of advancing Soviet ideology through their texts.[44]

Chukovskii suggests in *Two to Five* that official antipathy toward folklore persisted into the late 1950s, but the fact remains that children's literature remained one of the freest spaces in

---

[40] Kon, *Sovetskaia* [Soviet], 22-23.
[41] Balina, "Creativity,"
[42] Oinas, "Political Uses," 158. This argument was effective but nevertheless incorrect, as contemporaneous and subsequent folklore scholarship demonstrated that most Russian heroic epic poetry in fact originated in medieval court circles.
[43] Maxim Gorky, *O detskoi literature* [On Children's Literature], 3rd ed. (Moscow: Detskaia Literatura, 1968), 269-270.
[44] See, for example, Oinas, "Political Uses," 160.

all of Soviet art during the preceding two decades because debates about the purpose and methods of education continued to rage.[45] [46]Writers may not have written fairy tales themselves, but many freely drew on them in their work. In fact, the government employed and trained folklore singers to compose and perform new songs glorifying the Soviet system from the 1920s through the early 1930s and Stalinism from the latter decade onward.[47] By the mid-1930s, it became unacceptable even to criticize the heroes of Russian folklore, as when the regime-friendly writer Dem'ian Bednii was harshly censored for doing so in his 1936 comic opera *Bogatyri* (The Bogatyrs).[48] What would have been encouraged just two years prior was now taboo. As Balina,[49] O'Dell,[50] Katerina Clark,[51] Mark Lipovetsky,[52] Serguei Oushakine,[53] and others all separately note, children's fiction was the one area of Soviet literature in which the fantastic was allowed to persist most freely because the government expected it to make Soviet ideology more palatable to children.

In this way, the virulently anti-formalist Soviet literary establishment enshrined a key tenet of formalist literary theory in its dogma.[54] Viktor Shklovskii remains the most famous advocate of the method in the West, but the Russian-Soviet critic Vladimir Propp broke ground in applying it to the study of Russian folklore. In his classic *Morfologiia volshebnoi skazki*

---

[45] Chukovskii, *From Two to Five*, 138.
[46] Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*, 87.
[47] Oinas, "Political Uses," 163.
[48] Frank J. Miller, "The Image of Stalin in Soviet Russian Folklore," *The Russian Review* 39, no. 1 (1980): 52-53. https://doi.org/10.2307/128551.
[49] Balina, "Creativity," 8.
[50] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 17.
[51] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 147.
[52] Mark Lipovetsky, introduction to *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, ed. Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and Mark Lipovetsky, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 233.
[53] Oushakine and Balina, "Introduction: Primers in Soviet Modernity," 7.
[54] Anatoly Liberman, ed., introduction to *Theory and History of Folklore* by Vladimir Propp, trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1984), xx.

(Morphology of the Wondertale, 1928), Propp gives examples of events occurring in four of Aleksandr Afanas'ev's fairy stories, concluding that

> Both constants and variables are present… the names of the dramatis personae change (as well as the attributes of each), but neither their actions nor functions change. From this we can draw the inference that a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages. This makes possible the study of the tale according to the functions of its dramatis personae.[55]

He developed this method using wondertales because, he argues, they are reducible to an arguably universalizable sequence of such functions.[56] For Propp, Shklovskii, Roman Jakobson, Boris Eikhenbaum, Yurii Tynianov, and many other Russian and Soviet critics of the 1920s and 1930s, separating content from form could reveal the priorities, origins, and basic character of a text and clarify its place in literary history. Form comprises all of a narrative's "functions," or each "action of the character from the point of view of its significance for the broader narrative."[57] Content refers to the details of the setting, characters, and the story that do not affect its plot.

If children indeed read for events, causality, and characters rather than abstract motivations, for the form and the content, formalism appears uniquely well-suited to describe literature as young people read it. Accordingly, we can understand much of the most popular early Soviet children's fiction as remaining within the ideologically circumscribed forms while experimenting with content that might render that form more appealing — a literary phenomenon that I term the socialist fantasia. This thesis will draw heavily on Propp's theory to understand why and how such writers experimented with content, what forms they used, and

---

[55] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968), 20.
[56] Propp, *Morphology*, 22.
[57] Vladimir Propp, "Structural and Historical Study of the Folktale," trans. Serge Shishkoff, in *Theory and History of Folklore*, by Vladimir Propp (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 74.

how the synthesis of the two involved the reader. In particular, it will follow Larissa Rudova, Evgenii Dobrenko,[58] Catriona Kelly,[59] and many other major scholars of Soviet childhood in understanding these ideological forms in terms of the "images of heroes whose development followed the ideological line from 'spontaneity' to 'consciousness,'" which were meant to inspire readers to become self-aware, class-conscious heroes themselves.[60]

To be sure, the formalist method fails to account for instances in which content and form are inextricable. Were Propp to have read a story in which a girl from Calcutta is bullied for bringing Indian food to lunch in a U.S. elementary school, for instance, Propp would have neglected the ways in which her ethnicity might load that bullying with additional meaning and significance relative to the rest of the narrative. Moreover, early Soviet permissiveness toward experimentation with content was predicated on its ability to render the form more appetizing, which this work's later chapters discuss in terms of the synergy between the two. But as we have seen, early formalism nevertheless appears especially well-suited to understanding children's literature, fairy tales, their intersections, and the reader's experience thereof. Its inability to provide a complete account should not preclude its use to illuminate the features of the text most important for this inquiry. It may also be suggested that the Soviet bureaucracy's long-running antagonism toward formalism should preclude its use in this inquiry, but the government's public campaigns against it in fact misused the term as a catch-all for art, especially music, that was overly complex, apolitical, or individualistic.[61]

---

[58] Evgenii Dobrenko, "Sotsrealizm i mir detstva" [Socialist Realism and the World of Childhood] in *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon* [The Socialist Realist Canon], eds. Hans Günther and Evgenii Dobrenko (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000), 32–3.
[59] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007), 114-116.
[60] Larissa Rudova, introduction to *Historical and Cultural Transformations of Russian Childhood: Myths and Realities*, ed. Marina Balina, Larissa Rudova, and Anastasia Kostetskaya (New York, NY: Routledge, 2023), 6.
[61] Leonid Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muzyki: stalinskaia kul'turnaia revoliutsiia 1936-1938* [Clutter in Place of Music: The Stalinist Cultural Revolution 1936-1938] (Moscow: Iuridicheskaia kniga, 1997), 8, 196.

Structure of the Thesis

Ben Hellman has written a delightful history of early Soviet children's literature, and Marina Balina has edited three volumes of criticism on individual authors and stories with other scholars, but very little Western scholarship has explored the ideological and formative ramifications of its roots in and resonances with folklore.[62] In fact, O'Dell's is the only study attempting to ascertain whether Soviet children's literature shaped its readers' character, but her focus lies squarely in the 1970s. She tentatively concludes that children's literature of that period succeeded in increasing their altruism, love of work, collectivism, and patriotism, four of the six virtues that she proposes as integral to Soviet children's texts.[63] Nevertheless, O'Dell herself admits that she cannot link apparent changes in children's moral attitudes to changes in what they have read.[64] As the second chapter of the present work explains, it is also very difficult to apply her set of virtues to the early Soviet context. That said, her focus on "socialist humanism," defined in a 1973 Komsomol handbook as consisting in "the creation of the real, material and cultural conditions for the realization of the slogan 'Everything for the sake of man, everything in the nature of man,'" proves illustrative throughout this thesis.[65]

Detailed data regarding literature's influence on young people from the first three decades of the Soviet Union simply do not exist, but two well-known cases do indicate a strong

---

[62] Marina Balina, Larissa Rudova, and Anastasia Kostetskaya's 2023 edited volume, titled *Historical and Cultural Transformations of Russian Childhood: Myths and Realities*, features many fascinating explorations of the relationship between children's texts and ideology, but it neither draws systematic conclusions about this relationship nor elaborates the role of folklore in it. See Rudova, introduction to *Historical and Cultural Transformations*, 1. Serguei Alex. Oushakine and Marina Balina's 2021 edited volume, *The Pedagogy of Images: Depicting Communism for Children*, also explores ideology in early Soviet children's literature, but it is more interested in the role of illustration in how the terms of the genre were solidified during the 1920s and 1930s.

[63] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 32.

[64] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 207; 222.

[65] *Osnovy kommunisticheskoi morali* [Foundations of Communist Morality] (Moscow, 1973), 142, quoted in O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 30.

relationship.[66] In Arkadii Gaidar's 1940 novella *Timur i ego komanda* (Timur and His Team), a young boy and his friends do good deeds for families of men who have left to fight in World War II, and soon after its publication, real groups of "Timurovtsi" sprung up in cities across the Soviet Union.[67] Life enthusiastically emulated fiction. Though Veniamin Kaverin's 1944 novel *Dva kapitana* (Two Captains) is written for an adolescent audience, it, too, inspired many Soviet children to model themselves after its heroic protagonists, Sanya Grigoriev and Captain Tatarinov.[68] As O'Dell's example indicates, however, empirical approaches to the problem suffer too many methodological and logistical issues to be of use. Consequently, this thesis is more interested in the individual experience of the text than in how texts may have formed communities in the past. To do so, it examines texts written for children in two of the Soviet Union's official literary age divisions, ages seven to eleven and eleven to fifteen,[69] that were published between the beginnings of the fairy tale controversy and Stalin's Terror.

That a tenuous, largely implicit compromise between children's authors and the Soviet government existed from the late 1920s until the mid-1930s existed is incontestable. Fairy-tale content coexisted with socialist humanist form with great import for our understanding of how ideology attempted to shape the early Soviet subjectivity through art. To answer this question, the present work draws on four Russian Soviet texts written for children between ages seven and fifteen, inspired in some way by fairy tales, featuring young heroes inspired by Stalinist ideology, and composed between the beginnings of the fairy tale controversy and World War II.

---

[66] Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades.*
[67] Aleksei Nikolaevich Balakirev, "Timurovtsi: Malen'kie volonteri velikoi voini" [Timurovtsy: Little Volunteers of the Great War], *Vestnik Buryatskovo Gosudarstvennovo Universiteta, Filosofiia*, no. 7 (2015): 20.
[68] Rosemarie Kieffer and William Riggan, "A Long Fidelity: The Career of Veniamin Kaverin," *World Literature Today* 52, no. 4 (1978): 578. https://doi.org/10.2307/40131315; Hongor Oulanoff, *The Prose Fiction of Veniamin A. Kaverin* (Cambridge, MA: Slavica, 1976), 77-78.
[69] Balina, "Creativity," 11.

Their influence was tremendous on readers young and old, but they were also accepted and used by the ideological machine, giving rise to films, operas, sequels, board games, propaganda, and even a rocket launcher. These include Gaidar's "Skazka o Voiennoi taine, o Mal'chishe-Kibal'chishe i ego tviordom slovie" (A Tale about a Military Secret, about Mal'chish-Kibal'chish and His Word of Honor, 1933),[70] and *Voennaia taina* (The Military Secret, 1935), Yurii Olesha's *Tri tolstiaka* (Three Fat Men, 1928), and Aleksei Tolstoi's *Zolotoi kliuchik, ili prikliucheniia Buratino* (1936).

The first chapter reads *Tri tolstiaka* through the lenses of Propp's formalism to more fully characterize the notion of fantastic content and its consequences for the reader's positionality relative to the text. Next, the second draws on "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" and *Voennaia taina* to explicate the figure of the hero and the morality advanced by the socialist humanist form. The third chapter then draws on *Buratino* to detail the co-optation inherent in the socialist fantasia, the intersections between its form and content, and its roots in Stalinism. Finally, the last chapter draws all four texts together in the context of Wolfgang Iser's *Rezeptionsästhetik* and the phenomenologies of Gilles Deleuze and Edmund Husserl to theorize how the socialist fantasia situates the reader in relation to state morality and ideology. Having enumerated its findings, the thesis explores the end of the socialist fantasia in the context of the history of Stalinism and asks guiding questions about the changing relationship between young reader and the text during the Era of Stagnation. It then ends by offering further suggestions for future research.

[70] For the sake of convenience, this text is hereafter referred to as "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish."

Chapter 1: No Day without a Metaphor — Yurii Olesha's Fantastic Content

On its publication in 1928, most reviews of Yurii Olesha's novel for older children *Tri tolstiaka* were glowing. The poet Osip Mandel'shtam, who knew Olesha well, praised the work's "crystal-clear prose, permeated through and through with the fire of revolution."[71] Nevertheless, many of its later critics were as unforgiving as they were illuminating. According to Lidiia Chukovskaia, the daughter of Kornei Chukovskii, Olesha wrote the story "intentionally to compare all things, all animals, all people with animals and with things," and its focus on materiality caused the reader to feel a "strange cold emanating from the text."[72] Her resistance to the work notwithstanding, why did its popularity endure for decades afterward, inspiring a theatrical adaptation in the Moscow Art Theatre in 1930, a ballet in 1935, an opera in 1956, a film in 1965, and several radio plays? The simple answer is that the text valorizes revolution while presenting, despite Chukovskaia's belief to the contrary, a fantastic world to the reader. As we will see, the text's tendency to "compare" humans and animals "with things" is in fact key to understanding how and why its younger readers found such magic and warmth in it. Accordingly, this chapter explores *Tri tolstiaka* as an example of the fantastic-socialist humanist compromise to clarify the notion and explanatory power of fantastic content. It concurrently explores why fairy tales proved so suitable as a substrate for early Soviet children's fiction.

Tri tolstiaka *and the Setting of the Socialist Fantasia*

Tri tolstiaka is set in a nameless country ruled by three oligarchs with monopolies on its natural resources, the titular Three Fat Men. After defecting guards destroy their designated heir Tutti's lifelike, animate doll, the oligarchs summon the doctor Gaspar Arneri to fix it. When he

---

[71] Osip Mandel'shtam, "Veer gertsogini" [The Duchess's Fan], in *Sobraniie sochinenii v chetyriokh tomakh* [Collected Works in 4 Volumes], ed. The Mandel'shtam Society (Moscow: Art-Biznes-Tsentr, 1993-1999), 2:501.
[72] Lidiia Chukovskaia, "Y. Olesha 'Tri tolstiaka,'" *Detskaia Literatura*, no. 8 (1940): 113; 111.

cannot, he finds a young girl named Suok, later revealed to be Tutti's sister, who looks exactly like the doll. She sneaks into the Fat Men's castle and releases the gunsmith and rebel leader Prospero, who then escapes, reunites with the other rebel leader Tibul, and then leads a successful uprising against the oligarchs. Particularly in its illustrated editions, the text presents the violence of revolution in graphic terms. Rebels are described as lying in pools of blood, and the 1978 Detskaia Literatura edition depicts Prospero being dragged along the ground in a noose by mounted police.[73] Prospero is captured and tortured, the scholar who created Tutti's doll dies in prison, and the rebels suffer many casualties in their successive attempts to overthrow the three oligarchs. Contrary to some early critics who accused Olesha of sugarcoating revolution, the novel in fact presents it as a series of bloody failures culminating in one final success.[74]

Broadly speaking, the form of the narrative conforms to the Marxist-Leninist view of class conflict. The titular Three Fat Men preserve their power by controlling the materials and means of production, and they exploit wealth rather than generate it.[75] During his interrogation before the oligarchs, Prospero declares that "all those who once worked for [them] and earned a pittance while [they] were getting fat, all of the unfortunate, the hungry, the emaciated, the orphaned, the crippled, the destitute — they are all going to war… against the fat, the rich, the stone-hearted."[76] Capitalism, economic exploitation, and decadence are linked in the figure of the gluttonous oligarch, as Cezar Barbosa Santolin and others have noted occurs often in socialist realism.[77] Nonetheless, Santolin's comparative study of the novel and its film adaptations

---

[73] Yurii Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka: roman dlia detei* [Three Fat Man: A Novel for Children] (Leningrad: Detskaia literatura, 1978), 13-14.
[74] Mandel'shtam, "The Duchess's Fan," 2:501.
[75] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka,* 40.
[76] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka,* 40.
[77] Cezar Barbosa Santolin, "História Da Obesidade No Cinema: 'Os Três Homens Gordos' (1963; 1966)" [History of Obesity in Cinema: 'The Three Fat Men' (1963; 1966)], *Revista Brasileira de Obesidade, Nutrição e*

certainly errs in arguing that the oligarchs are thereby cast as "brave" or worthy of emulation. Their first and longest appearance in the text, Prospero's interrogation, centers on their fear of the rebel leader. Insofar as they attempt to make their figurative "stone hearts" literal by replacing Tutti's heart with iron, they are in fact portrayed as extractive and cruel.[78]

In contrast, Prospero, Tibul, and their sympathizers embody at least four of O'Dell's virtues of socialist humanism,[79] in that they employ collectivist rhetoric, never waver in their patriotism, exhibit love for their revolutionary work, and remain disciplined despite hardship. Even Suok, a young girl, exhibits class consciousness in that she knows "that [the country's elite] was all one company: the Three Fat Men, the noble old ladies, the dandies, the shopkeepers, the guardsmen."[80] The novel's conclusion, moreover, sees the rebels ransack the Three Fat Men's palace and squeeze them into an impossibly tiny cage.[81] Just as O'Dell expects of socialist humanist heroes, the text's protagonists feel and act on "a positive love for [their] fellow men" even as they are "also… implacable towards those who, in the Soviet view, exploit them."[82] In very rough terms, then, the form of *Tri tolstiaka* conforms to the dictates of socialist humanism.

At first glance, the novel seems to flout our expectations with respect to fantastic content. Its first two sentences state that "the time of wizards is over" and that "in all likelihood, they never existed at all."[83] The text features no wizards, no kings, no knights, and no dragons or mythical beasts. Instead, both characters whom Propp might understand as "magical helpers"

Emagrecimento 15, no. 95 (July 2021): 483. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=158129321&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[78] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 156.

[79] Altruism, love of work, collectivism, and patriotism.

[80] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 98.

[81] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 152.

[82] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 31.

[83] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 7.

perform their astounding feats under the veneer of science.[84] Gaspar, a doctor, helps Tibul escape by transforming him into a Black man with a mysterious liquid in a flask — a potion by another name.[85] The scholar Tub, as the epilogue reveals, created Tutti's animate doll in the exact image of Suok, and he is shown to be capable of creating fully functional iron hearts as well.[86] As Santolin notes, the Three Fat Men resemble kings or "feudal lords," resplendent with a palace and an army, more than the bourgeoisie that one might expect in socialist realism.[87] Tutti therefore finds himself in the role of a prince and Suok that of a princess. All of the story's characters either belong to the nameless mass of the "people" or find themselves set apart in some extraordinary way. Prospero and Tibul, for instance, are a heroic gunsmith and a superhuman gymnast, respectively. Even the walled city in and around which the story occurs, featuring an underclass, a rich bourgeoisie, and a local nobility who congregate in a nearby manor nearby, strongly evokes Germanic fairy tales like those of Hans Christian Andersen. It is no accident that the guards, nobles, and citizens in many illustrated editions of the text resemble nineteenth-century Prussian soldiers, *Junkers*, and burghers.[88] In other words, *Tri tolstiaka* epitomizes the socialist fantasia. Just as the novel's form reflects the virtues of socialist humanism, it conveys them via content strongly evoking fairy tales' magic, royalty, singular characters, and European petty bourgeois settings.

The Idiom of the Fantastic

We must note at the outset that the presence of fantasy in the text fails to account for the difference in Chukovskaia's and Mandel'shtam's readings. Why did one see warmth and fire

---

[84] Propp, *Morphology*, 82.
[85] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 71.
[86] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 156.
[87] Santolin, "História," 482.
[88] Olesha, Tri tolstiaka, 42-43.

where the other found cold materialism? Might the prevalence of comparison in the text suggest an answer? Chukovskaia is certainly correct to diagnose the latter pattern in pointing to "cold materialism." Much later scholarship on Olesha has done the same, the most notable among which remains Richard Borden's 1998 study of childlike perception and metaphor in his prose. At the same time, these critics often lack a consistent definition of "comparison" or "metaphor." To address their position, I follow the prominent psychologist and scholar of metaphor Stella Vosniadou in defining these figurative comparisons as "meaningful statements that communicate something about a concept by comparing it or juxtaposing it to a similar concept from a different conventional category."[89] One clear example of this in *Tri tolstiaka* comes during the opening scene, in which the latest attempt at revolution is met with bloody reprisal. A crowd of people scatters amid exploding bombs and flying bullets. Instead of representing bombs, bullets, and bodies directly, the text compares the chaos to a "magic lantern," the fires to "sun bunnies," the explosions to "pieces of absorbent cotton" and the far-off protestors to "multicolored flags."[90] The text as a whole contains 157 similes and many metaphors, the vast majority of which describe complex processes, concepts, or ideas in terms of familiar physical objects. Children read that "thunder bounc[es] like a ball and roll[s] in the wind," not simply that artillery booms across the town, perhaps because most could not identify cannon fire or explain how its sound travels.[91]

Some, such as Chukovskii, conclude on this basis that comparisons are so prevalent in *Tri tolstiaka* and other texts like it for cognitive reasons.[92] They claim that children are too

---

[89] Stella Vosniadou, "Children and Metaphors," *Child Development* 58, no. 3 (1987): 871. https://doi.org/10.2307/1130223.
[90] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 10.
[91] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 9.
[92] Chukovskii, *From Two to Five*, 146; 150-151.

unfamiliar with rich descriptions and complex processes to visualize them correctly when they read, so they require metaphorical assistance to do so. Yet Olesha's text flies in the face of these assumptions. Early in the text, street lanterns are described as "balloons filled with dazzling boiling milk," but just eleven pages later, several balloons are described as a "magical bunch of flying grapes."[93] If a child did not know the image of a flying balloon, they would certainly be unfamiliar with balloons filled with hot, glowing milk. Borden goes somewhat further. For adults, he writes, Olesha's comparisons return the adult reader to a "lost or latent 'metaphoric mode of perception,'" simulating the "child's primordial attempts to understand and describe experience."[94] Borden derives this argument[95] from a conception of Olesha's mode of comparison as what Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour calls in her article on Olesha the "nonfunctional metaphor," a form of "mistaken" experience in which a child's apparent metaphor is in reality an error deriving from a misrecognition of an object or phenomenon.[96]

Children may use nonfunctional metaphors to acquaint themselves with or describe the unfamiliar, but there is no reason to assume that they need them for the same reason to read. Indeed, both Beaujour and Borden are curiously keen to avoid the question of how the child reading the text might experience these comparisons. They merely intimate that, as Barbara Leondar puts it in her psychological study of infant cognition, "metaphor… can invite, direct, and control exploration of a context in which new knowledge is implicit."[97] If Olesha's

---

[93] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 21; 32

[94] Richard C. Borden, "Iurii Olesha: The Child behind the Metaphor," *The Modern Language Review* 93, no. 2 (1998): 447; 446. https://www.jstor.org/stable/373535.

[95] Readers of the formalist critic Viktor Shklovskii will recognize in this argument his notion of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization.

[96] Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, *The Invisible Land: A Study of the Artistic Imagination of Iurii Olesha* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 36; Borden, "Iurii Olesha," 446.

[97] Barbara Leondar, "Metaphor and Infant Cognition," *Poetics* 4, no. 2 (January 1, 1975): 279. https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(75)90085-6.

comparisons simulate the child's metaphorical mode of perception, what must it mean for such a child to engage with it on the page? As Vosniadou has shown, both the comprehension and production of metaphorical language depend on the child's existing conceptual knowledge even as they expand it further in contexts of play.[98] Indeed, Vosniadou, Yusi Song, and many other psychologists have demonstrated that children understand similes far more consistently than metaphors. That the majority of Olesha's comparisons are the former is no accident.[99]

Returning to the example of the milk-filled balloons, the twelve-year-old reader would be familiar with milk, balloons, lamps, and boiling liquids but would almost certainly never have put each of these elements together in a comparison. In another instructive moment, several children see Tibul's shoe falling from the sky and shout, "Look! A Chinese walnut! A Chinese walnut!", after which the narrator confirms that, "indeed, the falling shoe evoked a Chinese walnut."[100] This passage makes explicit what is implicit elsewhere in the novel: children spontaneously make a new association even as the text confirms it. The reader not only gains new knowledge, but also links that unfamiliar item to an unfamiliar association with an ordinary item like a falling shoe. My contention is that for the young reader, comparative discourse in *Tri tolstiaka* acts to familiarize the unfamiliar rather than to defamiliarize the familiar. This occurs in terms both of conferring particulate knowledge, like that of Chinese walnuts, and of linking fantastical associations with mundane objects and processes, as with the milk-filled balloons.

Though Borden does not speak about metaphors rendering the unfamiliar familiar, both he and the earlier scholar Nils Nilsson argue in the context of Olesha's texts for adult readers,

---

[98] Vosniadou, "Children and Metaphors," 870; 873.
[99] Yusi Song, "Simile and Metaphor Interpretation in Children," *English Language Teaching* 13, no. 4 (2020): 91. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n4p91.
[100] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 32.

especially *Zavist'* (Envy, 1927), that the latter writes metaphors as "realized."[101] As Nilsson rather breathlessly observes, "as sometimes happens with the imaginations of children, the metaphor itself comes true, is materialized."[102] These scholars err in seeing this as a reflection of an "invariable condition of child cognition at a certain stage of development,"[103] since psychological research demonstrates that even toddlers reliably distinguish appearance from reality.[104] Even so, *Tri tolstiaka* contains several striking examples of such realized comparisons, as when the Three Fat Men's lackey Razdvatris (One-Two-Three) orchestrates a large dance figured as a huge, swirling, "unpalatable soup." Razdvatris himself "acts as a ladle in that soup." The dance ends and the "soup stop[s]" when the Three Fat Men with "three huge fists in rough leather gloves knock[...] on the door," looking "little different from clay wooden jugs."[105] The soup no longer swirls because it is being poured into the jugs, as if illustrating the capitalist Three Fat Men's rapacious appetite for others' labor and creativity. In this way, the soup metaphor realizes or materializes a social relation and the injustice contained therein.

Both scholars also suggest that only a subset of metaphors in Olesha's work are realized, but Olesha himself saw them all as his working laboratory, writing in his autobiography *Ne dnia bez strochki* (No Day without a Line, 1965) of himself as operating a "metaphor shop" and selling physical comparisons.[106] Indeed, not all metaphors in *Tri tolstiaka* operate as directly as

---

[101] Borden, "Iurii Olesha," 452.

[102] Nils Åke Nilsson, "Through the Wrong End of Binoculars," in *From Symbolism to Socialist Realism*, ed. Irene Masing-Delic, 256-279 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 265.

[103] Borden, "Iurii Olesha," 451.

[104] Borden's source on this point, the literary scholar Danuta Mendelson, draws on outdated research, and she herself argues that this only occurs for toddlers: Danuta Mendelson, *The Function of Metaphor in Babel's Short Stories* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982), 22-23. For psychological research on this point supported by subsequent work, see John H. Flavell, Eleanor R. Flavell, and Frances L. Green. "Development of the Appearance–Reality Distinction," *Cognitive Psychology* 15 (1983): 102. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(83)90005-1.

[105] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 128.

[106] Yuri Olesha, *No Day without a Line*, trans. Judson Rosengrant (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1979), 261.

the soup, but they are ubiquitous and, with few exceptions, stated matter-of-factly. As Chukovskii expects, adjectives are scarce in large part because Olesha relies instead on metaphors and similes for rich descriptions. Consequently, if the text and the reader both perceive in associational terms, comparisons do not merely familiarize the unfamiliar. Insofar as they structure the reader's mental reconstruction of the narrative, the vast majority of the text's comparisons go beyond the familiarization of the unfamiliar. They function to realize absurdity, magic, and fantasy.

But Gorkii's respondents clamored for fantasy elements, for wondrous characters and magic, not for metaphors. These, too, are present in spades, though not quite in the manner one would expect. Just as Propp writes of wondertale heroes, Prospero and Tibul's attributes are largely "expressed in deeds," both exhibit superhuman abilities, and they are only threatened by treachery.[107] Tibul's gymnastic and rhetorical skills allow him to escape over the city square, fool an audience while performing at a carnival, and escape its angry strongman. Prospero in particular becomes a Heraclean figure, as when he ambushes the Three Fat Men with Suok:

> And from there, from the menagerie, from behind the iron fence, calmly, firmly, with wide steps, came a huge man. In this radiance, red-headed, with glittering eyes, wearing a tattered jacket, he walked like a terrible vision. With one hand he held by the collar, twisted from an iron scrap of chain, a panther. The yellow and slender beast, struggling to break free from the terrible collar, was jumping, squealing, twisting, and, like a lion on a knight's flag, flicking its long crimson tongue. And those who dared to look around saw that on the other arm this man was carrying a girl in a shining pink dress. The girl was frightened looking at the rampaging panther, propped her feet up in her shoes with golden roses and clung to her friend's shoulder.[108]

Strong enough to hold back a slavering panther in one arm and carry a young girl in the other, Prospero appears supernatural. He is at once figured in the archetypal roles of saving a damsel in distress — as the sister of the Three Fat Men's heir, Suok is effectively a princess — and of

---

[107] Propp, *Morphology*, 85.
[108] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 119-120.

saving the kingdom. As Propp expects, his rise is inexorable and unimpeded throughout the text save for his initial capture, which comes about only because his army is not large enough.[109]

That said, neither hero's skills are explained. Much like that of Rakhmetov, the superman of Nikolai Chernishevskii's political novel *Chto delat'?* (What Is to Be Done?, 1836), their exemplarity appears supernatural but is in fact the product of destiny, virtue, dedication, and science. The most instructive examples of this technologized magic, so to speak, are Tutti's doll and the scientist Tub. Before Suok can free Prospero from the Three Fat Men's palace, she finds a furry creature in a cage who is later revealed to be Tub, the scientist who created Tutti's doll. Here we find another magical detail: the Three Fat Men had punished his insubordination by transforming him into a gorilla-like beast. Suok initially cowers in terror, but before Tub dies, she makes observations to reason away her fear, musing, "Why is he so scary? He's as furry as a bear. There are red sparks in his eyes. He has long, bent claws. He has no clothes. It's not a man, but a gorilla…"[110] In this way, the magical element discovers its foundation in reality. What could be construed as a magical creature is immediately established as a product of science.

Similarly, Tutti's wondrously intricate doll, capable of dancing, smiling, and walking, and outwardly indistinguishable from a real girl, is exposed as a mechanical creation on its first appearance in the text. It is introduced as a "mere stuffed animal, a rag. Somewhere in its throat and in its chest beneath the pink silk, a broken spring was wheezing, like an old clock."[111] The brutality of the world of the Three Fat Men reveals not only this magical inhuman's fragility and its mundanity, but also its exploitation. It is a puppet, a tool of the oligarchs, and the reader is made to confront this fact at the outset. The mechanical doll indistinguishable from a real girl is

---

[109] Propp, *Morphology*, 85-86.
[110] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 112.
[111] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 46.

the archetypal instance of what Sigmund Freud calls *das Unheimliche*: the uncanny, a sensation of creepy, strange familiarity often evoked by the semi-human. But whereas the story on which Freud partly based the concept, E.T.A. Hoffman's "The Sandman," reveals its doll's mechanical nature near the end of its plot, *Tri tolstiaka* foregrounds its non-humanity at the outset of the story.[112]

As the major folklorist Jack Zipes demonstrates, the "very act of reading a fairy tale is an uncanny experience in that" it renders "the unfamiliar familiar once again."[113] If, as Freud argues, the *Unheimliche* produces unease by provoking "the feeling that automatic, mechanical processes are at work, concealed beneath the ordinary appearance of animation," by blurring the human with the non-human, Olesha's text seeks to familiarize the *Unheimliche* by linking magical appearance with material reality.[114] Though the narrator assures the reader that "all will be explained in due time. I assure you that no miracles occurred and that everything was done, as scientists say, by the iron laws of logic," Tub's transformation is never explained.[115] The magical elements are ubiquitous, but they are never authenticated. Instead, the story's lack of overt magic and miracles goes hand-in-hand with the early Soviet literary bureaucracy's condemnation of magic and animism as counter-revolutionary idealism.[116]

At the same time, magic is never entirely eradicated in Olesha's fictional world. Critics of *Tri tolstiaka* almost universally note this fantastic undercurrent, as when Hellman points to but does not explore a vague "fairy-tale mood" in the novel.[117] Nilsson's formulation is perhaps the

---

[112] Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche," in *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften* (Leipzig: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1919), 5:297-298.
[113] Jack Zipes, "The Potential of Liberating Fairy Tales for Children," *New Literary History* 13, no. 2 (1982): 309. https://doi.org/10.2307/468914.
[114] Freud, "Unheimliche," 5:303.
[115] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 125.
[116] Balina, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 107.
[117] Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 346.

most generative, though he, too, makes this valuable observation only in passing. To children in Olesha's texts, he writes, all things are "wonderfully connected with each other. This makes it so easy for their imaginations to work along metaphorical lines… an object loses its firm contours… we witness a fantastic metamorphosis."[118] In other words, metaphor and fantastic permutations of the ordinary in Olesha derive from a sort of interconnectedness between his stories' objects, characters, and environments.

One may suggest, therefore, that this spirit of the interconnectedness that pervades *Tri tolstiaka* is to be understood most clearly through the device of what Mikhail Bakhtin terms the carnivalesque. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin posits the "carnival sense of the world" as one in which an "atmosphere of joyful relativity" suspends the structure and order of ordinary life.[119] Hierarchies are destroyed and recombined, eccentricity becomes commonplace, and the sacred is profaned, in the process of which a farcical carnival king is crowned and subsequently dethroned.[120] Indeed, Victor Peppard[121] and Neil Cornwell[122] each ably locate this carnival sense of the world in *Tri tolstiaka*. As the former writes, the Square of the Star is introduced as a "colossal circus."[123] During the first, unsuccessful rebellion, an enormous, variegated crowd in this square watches Tibul, a circus performer, escape. Just before he does so, a street play features three fat monkeys dancing in the roles of the Three Fat Men while a clown dethrones them in verse, crowing, "Hey, look out, fatsos! // Here come the last days!"[124] Insofar

---

[118] Nilsson, "Wrong End," 265.
[119] Mikhail Bakthin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 107; 124.
[120] Bakhtin, *Problems*, 123; 124
[121] Victor Peppard, *The Poetics of Yury Olesha* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1989), 58-62.
[122] Neil Cornwell, "At the Circus with Olesha and Siniavskii," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 71, no. 1 (1993): 3-4. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4211149.
[123] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 23.
[124] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 22.

as the plot revolves around the circus-like Square of the Star, pitting the manifold, diverse, equalized people of the town against the farcical "kings" who live in the palace, *Tri tolstiaka* enacts a carnivalesque dethroning.[125]

Though Peppard is correct to argue that "the order of ascendancy between the thin and the fat… corresponds with that of the carnival," he erroneously concludes on this basis that the novel ends with "Carnival… about to yield to Lent."[126] The Three Fat Men may exemplify the gluttony of the carnivalesque, but the people continue to ridicule them in the epilogue, which takes place a year after the revolution.[127] Indeed, the final page of the 1978 Detskaia Literatura edition features an image of the people jeering and waving torches at the former oligarchs, now dressed as clowns as they dance in a gilded cage.[128] *Tri tolstiaka* does not memorialize the transition from Carnival to Lent so much as it eternalizes the transition brought about by the courageous rebellion. The text preserves the moment of carnival after the farcical king is dethroned but before the arrival of Lent's compensatory austerity. The people remain a powerful and variegated yet undifferentiated mass, and they continue to jeer at their dethroned kings. Tellingly, the story's final line reveals that Suok's name means "all life."[129] Her actions as an individual and as a circus performer may have been key to the carnival kings' dethroning, but she fulfilled this role as one connected to all life.

On the surface, this eternalized carnival echoes, even sanitizes, the utopianism of socialist realism. The dethroning is followed by an extended period of joy and prosperity in common among all. As folklorists from Stith Thompson to Bronwyn Reddan have argued, however, the

---

[125] Peppard, *Poetics*, 60.
[126] Peppard, *Poetics*, 60.
[127] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 155-156.
[128] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 157.
[129] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 156.

instability and interconnectedness of the animate-inanimate dichotomy are key to fairy tales' distinctive character.[130] Similarly, although children generally make accurate animate-inanimate distinctions by the age of four,[131] they continue to work between the two long afterward in states of play.[132] All told, the centrality to *Tri tolstiaka* of the journey toward the utopian, teleological carnivalesque normalizes socialist realist utopian thinking, even as it sneaks fairy-tale interconnectedness into the narrative and harmonizes this underlayer of the text with the child's mode of perception.

Finally, *Tri tolstiaka* is notable among Olesha's works for its completely de-identified setting. Though the town evokes one of Hans Christian Andersen's small German cities, it and its people lack demonyms and toponyms, just as do the characters and settings of most fairy tales.[133] As Maria Nikolajeva puts it in her article on the fairy tale and fantasy genres, "the spatiotemporal condition, or chronotope, of fairy tales… take[s] place in one magical world, detached from our own both in space and time."[134] On one level, this aspect of the setting corresponds well to what O'Dell calls the socialist humanist virtue of internationalism. The text's model revolution, led by and against people without nationality, could occur anywhere in the world given the correct conditions of industrialization and class divisions, just as Marx would expect. Even as it carries internationalist connotations, though, so does it open the door to non-

---

[130] Thompson, *The Folktale,* 76; Bronwyn Reddan, "Thinking Through Things: Magical Objects, Power, and Agency in French Fairy Tales," *Marvels & Tales* 30, no. 2 (2016): 191. https://doi.org/10.13110/marvelstales.30.2.0191.

[131] Merry Bullock, "Animism in Childhood Thinking: A New Look at an Old Question," *Developmental Psychology* 21 (1985): 217. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.21.2.217.

[132] Tanya N. Beran, Alejandro Ramirez-Serrano, Roman Kuzyk, Meghann Fior, and Sarah Nugent, "Understanding How Children Understand Robots: Perceived Animism in Child–Robot Interaction," *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 69, no. 7 (July 1, 2011): 539. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2011.04.003.

[133] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 54-55.

[134] Maria Nikolajeva, "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern," *Marvels & Tales* 17, no. 1 (2003): 141. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41389904.

ideological reading, the very critique that Krupskaia and her supporters often made of fairy tale writing.[135] The truth of this is borne out by the results of Gorkii's survey and the findings of the Institute for the Study of Children's Reading. Children asked not for specific characters or plotlines, but for highly generalizable characters, genres, and plot elements found in fairy tales, such as adventures and magical creatures.[136] Deidentification in *Tri tolstiaka* renders its revolution radically generalizable even as it facilitates its readers' acquisition and subsequent reapplication of fairy tale elements.

All told, the fantastic content of *Tri tolstiaka* comprises four components. Fantastic, ubiquitous comparisons familiarize, even realize, the unfamiliar, and articulation of magical processes in material terms demystifies the *Unheimliche*. The centrality of the carnivalesque journey toward an eternal dethroning normalizes socialist realist utopian thinking even as it sneaks fairy-tale interconnectedness into the narrative, and de-identification renders the revolution radically generalizable while facilitating its readers' acquisition and subsequent reapplication of fairy tale elements. In more concrete terms, the story is an exemplar of a fantastic "avant-garde poetics" in virtue of its wondrous, realized comparisons, its interconnected world, its deidentification, and its magical subversion of the *Unheimliche*.[137] Though all of these elements are intimately related to the story's form, particularly via the carnivalesque, they are ultimately far more grounded in its content. Rather than being merely plot elements, they collectively constitute a way of telling a story. My contention is that this idiom of the fantastic, as I will call it, comprises the fundamental ways in which the content of *Tri tolstiaka* derives

[135] Balina, "Creativity," 7.
[136] Balina, "Creativity," 8.
[137] Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 346.

from fairy tales and is relatively consistent across early Soviet children's texts exhibiting the compromise of the socialist fantasia.

By the idiom of the fantastic, I mean a loosely interrelated set of rhetorical strategies that are inherited from fairy tales and that appeal to children by mimicking their metaphoric, carnivalistic, interconnected, animistic mode of perception. As Svetlana Maslinskaia shows in her study of Russian avant-garde children's prose, one of the most important shifts in 1920s Soviet children's literature was toward a more accurate simulation of the viewpoint of the child.[138] As we have seen, metaphor and fantastic permutations of the ordinary in *Tri tolstiaka* are linked to the interconnectedness and deidentification of the text's world through the institution of the carnival and through technologized magic. Olesha himself writes in his 1937 story "Zrelishcha" (Spectacles) that "the circus speaks the language of magic about science" and that "its spectators feel the scent of fairy-tale-ness."[139] The idiom of the fantastic's conceptual utility is threefold. First, its methodology of isolating and linking specific rhetorical commonalities is well-suited to clarifying intertextual relationships with fairy tales in formalist terms, whether in the specific context of the Soviet 1930s or in the world's many other fairy tale adaptations and cooptations. Consequently, reading in terms of the idiom of the fantastic should assist in clarifying what Zipes, Freud, Bruno Bettelheim, and many other psychoanalytic folklorists have argued is fairy tales' distinctive effectiveness in forming children who read

[138] Svetlana Maslinskaia, "From the Child's Point of View: The Observer in Children's Literature of the 1920s and 1930s," in *Historical and Cultural Transformations of Russian Childhood: Myths and Realities*, ed. Marina Balina, Larissa Rudova, and Anastasia Kostetskaya (New York, NY: Routledge, 2023), 43.
[139] Yurii Olesha, "Zrelishcha" [Spectacles], in *Izbrannoe* [Selections] (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1974), 276.

them.[140] Relatedly, it should also help to clarify how the relationship between the young reader and the folklore-influenced text might extend beyond the immediate act of reading.

As we have seen, children make fantastic metaphors, engage in verbal play, and exhibit an interconnected outlook quite often, but they also perceive fairy tales, their magical elements, and these modes of thinking as timeless and independent of social context.[141] Kristin Wardetzky's 1990 study on children's own composition of fairy tales is especially instructive as to how children might be understood as acquiring and reapplying the fairy tale elements in new contexts. Of several thousand West German children between eight and ten asked to write their own fairy tales, 73% wrote stories that occurred outside time and place and that incorporated magic elements.[142] Though most were short and featured simple plots, the details of their stories' characters, their language, and their instances of magic varied significantly according to their individual experiences.[143] "In this manner," Wardetzky writes, "the child plays with reality free of the risks inherent in the everyday world."[144]

We can therefore conclude that the notion of an idiom of the fantastic is also inherently relational and formative. Not only may it help children adopt its four constituent modes of perception, reading, and rhetoric, but children may also actively recombine and reuse these elements in their daily lives and in crafting stories of their own. Qualitative and quantitative education scholarship bears out this expectation. Although her subjects were somewhat younger than those of Wardetzky, Joanna Smogorzewska finds that reading and listening to fairy tales

---

[140] Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 6; Sigmund Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," in *Three Case Histories*, ed. and trans. Philip Rieff (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 188-191; Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 5.
[141] Kristin Wardetzky, "The Structure and Interpretation of Fairy Tales Composed by Children," trans. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *The Journal of American Folklore* 103, no. 408 (1990): 158. https://doi.org/10.2307/541853.
[142] Wardetzky, "Structure," 160-161.
[143] Wardetzky, "Structure," 161-162;
[144] Wardetzky, "Structure," 172.

indeed increases children's linguistic creativity and figurative language use.[145] Similarly, Chieh-Lan Li has found older children capable both of internalizing and recombining fairy tale elements and of critically engaging the ways in which they themselves do so.[146] The exact role of the idiom of the fantastic in generating this response and the relationship between the text and the reader giving rise to it, however, remain unclear. Both are explored in more detail in the fourth chapter of this work.

Conclusions

In sum, *Tri tolstiaka* epitomizes the socialist fantasia, reflecting the virtues of socialist humanism through its form even as its content evokes fairy tales' magic, singular characters, and feudal settings. More specifically, the story's fantastic content is best understood as an idiom of the fantastic, comprising its fantastic, realized comparisons, its interconnected world, its deidentification, and its magical subversion of the *Unheimliche*. It is a set of rhetorical strategies that are inherited from fairy tales, that appeal to children by mimicking their metaphoric, carnivalistic, interconnected, animistic mode of perception, and that are loosely linked through the carnivalesque and technologized magic. Given this understanding of fantastic content, the next chapter turns to the notion of socialist heroic form, reading Arkadii Gaidar's "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" and *Voennaia taina* to clarify the roles and virtues of the young hero therein.

---

[145] Joanna Smogorzewska, "Developing Children's Language Creativity through Telling Stories – An Experimental Study," *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 13 (September 1, 2014): 29. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2014.02.005.

[146] Chieh-Lan Li, "Promoting Critical Literacy of Children through a Juxtaposed Reading of Classic Fairy Tales and Their Contemporary Disruptive Variants," Ph.D. diss., (Pennsylvania State University, 2010), 105-113; 124-127. https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/10903.

Chapter 2: Arkadii Gaidar — Holding Out for a Socialist Hero

Critics Soviet and Western have long seen Arkadii Gaidar as the founder of Soviet children's prose.[147] Gorkii, given his influence in the publishing industry and his founding of *Severnoe siianie*, and Krupskaia, on account of her early efforts to recreate the sphere of children's literature in the Soviet image, perhaps warrant the title of "founder" more than Gaidar, but his influence cannot be denied. His early novels *R.V.S.* (1925) and *Shkola* (1930) established him as a children's author, after which followed the stories "Golubaia chashka" (The Blue Cup, 1936), "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" (1933), and *Voennaia taina* (The Military Secret, 1935), a novel that includes the full text of the "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" tale. His most famous novel, *Timur i ego komanda* (1940), touched off the mass Timurite movement shortly before his death in 1945.[148] In particular, *Timur* and "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" became enduring exemplars of what O'Dell terms the socialist humanist children's hero in the form of their respective eponymous protagonists. Though Gaidar's tale does not feature magic or mystical beasts, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" is also taught, studied, and categorized as a fairy tale.[149] Indeed, the tritagonist Natka of *Voennaia taina* recounts it to a group of Young Pioneers in just this context.[150] This chapter consequently draws on both that tale and the larger novel featuring it to explicate the virtues and structure of the young hero in the socialist fantasia.

---

[147] Evgenii Dobrenko, "The School Tale in Children's Literature of Socialist Realism," in *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (New York: Routledge, 2008), 43.
[148] Kul'tura.RF [Culture.RF], "Gaidar Arkadii Petrovich — Biografiia Stsenarista, Lichnaia Zhizn', Foto, Fil'mi" [Gaidar, Arkadii Petrovich - Biography of the Writer, Personal Life, Photos, Films], https://www.culture.ru/persons/10148/arkadii-gaidar.
[149] Balina, Introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 110.
[150] Arkadii Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," in *Sobranie sochinenii: v chetiryokh tomakh* [Collected Works: In Four Volumes], ed. T. A. Gaidar, L. A. Kassil', V. I. Kompaniets, and F. E. Ebin (Moscow: Detskaia Literatura, 1964-1965), 2:190.

The circumstances giving rise to both texts immediately complicate the first of these questions. Though Gaidar's texts inspired joy among millions of readers throughout the Soviet period and afterward, the author's own military experience in his early youth was far darker. He is known for writing in his diary, without context, "I dreamed of people I had killed as a child."[151] Gaidar served as a commander in the Red Army during the Russian Civil War at just fifteen years old, but he was discharged in 1924 on account of so-called extreme excesses on the battlefield. Eyewitness reports indicate that, when stationed near the Mongolian border, he summarily executed between 86 and 134 civilians against orders while searching for a fugitive.[152] The experience left Gaidar traumatized. As his longtime friend and the eventual executive secretary of the literary magazine *Novii Mir* (New World) Boris Zaks wrote years later, he drank heavily and cut himself so often as to leave his entire torso covered in scars.[153] Save for the Russian-British scholar Evgenii Dobrenko, the few scholars who have written on Gaidar ignore his trauma, and even Dobrenko glosses over his wartime atrocities.[154] Future work on his writing must accordingly read him in terms of both that past and his love for children.[155] In the present inquiry, Gaidar's traumatic military experience should immediately call into question the prospect of reading his heroes as worthy of admiration.

"Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" and the Hero as Martyr

The story, written for readers between seven and ten, features a lean plot. After the men of his village die fighting an invading bourgeois army, a boy named Mal'chish-Kibal'chish leads

---

[151] Boris Kamov, "Iskuplenie," *Literaturnaia gazeta* no. 5 (1990): 12.

[152] Dar'ia Pashchenko, "Snilis' liudi, ubitiie mnoiu v detstve," *Diletant* (Jan. 22, 2018). https://diletant.media/articles/38917592/. See also Boris Zaks, "Zametki Ochevidtsa" [Notes of an Eyewitness] *Minuvshee: Istoricheskii al'manakh* [The Past: A Historical Almanac], no. 5 (1988): 389.

[153] Zaks, "Zametki Ochevidtsa," 385; 388-389.

[154] Dobrenko, "School Tale," 43-44.

[155] Zaks, "Zametki Ochevidtsa," 388.

his friends against them, but the children are soon betrayed by Mal'chish-Plokhish (Bad Boy).[156] Mal'chish-Kibal'chish dies under torture while protecting his country's "military secret," buying the Red Army time to arrive and defeat the bourgeois. The young hero and his treacherous opponent pull and push the reader, respectively, to embody self-sacrificial duty to the motherland. While Mal'chish-Plokhish harms his country and betrays his friends, Mal'chish-Kibal'chish evinces — at first glance — five of Felicity O'Dell's six virtues of the "Builder of Communism," the idealized cultural, economic, and military contributor to the Soviet Union.[157] He fights for his community's collective well-being, takes joy in that work, exhibits no distraction, patriotically endures torture for the Red Army, and inspires international revolution with his sacrifice. For his readers, Mal'chish-Kibal'chish becomes an exemplar of socialist humanism.

Unlike most exemplaristic children's heroes, though, Mal'chish-Kibal'chish dies. In fact, the reader is told only that "Malchish-Kibalchish perished."[158] The security that his sacrifice grants his community exceeds the tragedy of that sacrifice in importance. The boy himself lives happily ever after only through his legacy, as after his comrades "place[...] a big red flag above his grave," "steamships… pilots… [and] locomotives racing by hail Malchish[,] and Pioneers passing by salute him!"[159] Here, heroism means martyrdom. Mal'chish-Kibal'chish is also an unusual hero in that he is an extremely uncritical, even "utopian," thinker.[160] Trusting his

---

[156] The etymology of "kibal'chish" is unclear. It may refer to Nikolai Ivanovich Kibalchich, who tried to assassinate Tsar Alexander II in 1866; Viktor Serge, a Trotskyist writer and Gaidar's contemporary; or even the Jewish kippah. See Aleksei Koval'skii, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," 24SMI. https://24smi.org/person/4620-malchish-kibalchish.html.
[157] The full list comprises "collectivism, discipline, love of work, patriotism, proletarian internationalism and atheism." O'Dell, *Socialisation,* 32.
[158] Arkadii Gaidar, "Tale of the Military Secret, Malchish-Kibalchish and His Solemn Word," in *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales,* ed. Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and Mark Lipovetsky (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 129.
[159] Gaidar, "Malchish-Kibalchish," 130.
[160]Balina, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 108.

comrades implicitly, he fails to anticipate Mal'chish-Plokhish's treason and accepts everything that his father, his brother, and the military's messenger tell him without comment. Indeed, one impassioned call to arms from the latter, whom he does not know at all, is enough to rouse him to action.[161] His incorruptible moral impulse leads him to sacrifice himself for the good of the collective, establishing the image of the hero here as that of a naïve, saintly martyr.

The significance of that representation becomes clearer in opposition to the story's villain. On the surface, Mal'chish-Plokhish is coded as "plokhish" because he commits treason, and he is as consistent in his will to do so as Mal'chish-Kibal'chish is unwavering in his will to resist. In other words, he is the uncritical villain to Mal'chish-Kibal'chish's uncritical hero. Where the latter is loudly naïve, winning support with inspirational speeches to the village,[162] the former is "so cunning…that he didn't say anything."[163] Mal'chish-Plokhish deceives through personal silence while his counterpart loudly imparts collective truth. Later, he proudly announces to the bourgeois, "I, Plokhish, did it all myself," and sits "stuffing himself and rejoicing" on his reward of "a whole barrel of jam and a whole basket of cookies."[164] Mal'chish-Plokhish's treason becomes all the more outrageous in light of its materialism and its roots in individualism.

In sum, the saintly, naïve hero becomes a martyr when one of his followers betrays him to an amoral occupying force for short-term, material gain. A Judas figure betrays a Christ figure. Indeed, Mal'chish-Kibal'chish's final resting place is marked by a red flag on a hill, a kind of Soviet rewriting of Christ's crucifixion. As Yulia Bol'shakova notes in her article on the

---

[161] Gaidar, "Malchish-Kibalchish," 126.
[162] Gaidar, "Malchish-Kibalchish," 126-127.
[163] Gaidar, "Malchish-Kibalchish," 126.
[164] Gaidar, "Malchish-Kibalchish," 127.

story, a horseman's four increasingly apocalyptic visits to his town herald Mal'chish-Kibal'chish's ascendance to leadership.[165] Gaidar's own religious beliefs are unclear, but his diaries express a great interest in allegorical writing, and some of his readers would have made the connection whether he intended it or not.[166] Despite the Soviet Union's official atheism, Orthodox Christianity remained very popular underground well past World War II.[167] Even if the Soviet children, brought up as unquestioning atheists, do not know the biblical imagery, Gaidar's story establishes the pattern for the new Soviet saints, instructing the young on the need to sacrifice their lives to protect their country against its bourgeois enemies. "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" was also published at the cusp of Stalin's purges, so readers young and old may have also seen in Mal'chish-Plokhish's betrayal "the message of suspicion and mistrust dominating Stalinist culture of the 1930s," as Balina observes in a critical introduction.[168] Even children must remain vigilant against treason. In this way, the opposition of Mal'chish-Kibal'chish to Mal'chish-Plokhish brings together pre-Revolutionary Orthodox belief, Young Pioneer ideology, and the Stalinist culture of suspicion. The religious, cultural, and ethical milieu in which the story's readers were raised becomes a bridge to its ideological content.

Mal'chish-Kibal'chish's heroism is the text's clear favorite between the two characters, and his enduring popularity in film, merchandise, and official celebrations testifies to his continued appeal.[169] Even so, the consequences of that affinity are less obvious, as betrayal and resistance alike occur against the backdrop of the nameless and formless invading bourgeois

---

[165] Gaidar, "Malchish-Kibalchish," 130; Y. B. Bol'shakova, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," in *Literaturnie geroi [Literary Heroes]*, (Akademik, 2009). https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/litheroes/312.
[166] Bol'shakova, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish."
[167] Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 43; 50. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zgb089.
[168] Balina, Introduction to *Magic*, 110.
[169] Katya Kudryavtseva, curator, *Malchish-Kibalchish: The Soviet Superhero* (Stetson University, 2020). https://www.handartcenter.org/malchisch-kibalchisch

forces. Neither Mal'chish-Kibal'chish nor the reader knows anything of them except that they threaten the former's family, his friends, and his home. He does not witness the war until he fights in it himself, while the reader sees no violence whatsoever.[170] The "bourgeois" label would have associated the enemy with the White Army, the Bolsheviks' opponents in the Russian Civil War, but their identity and aims nevertheless remain unstated because their details are irrelevant. Their only germane characteristic is their status as the enemy, and the reader's focus accordingly remains on Mal'chish-Kibal'chish and his sacrifice. The bourgeois leader, perplexed at Mal'chish's success, assumes that a "military secret" accounts for the Red Army's military superiority. Under torture, the hero proclaims that "the strong Red Army does have a powerful secret," but he never relinquishes it because he had "given his solemn word" not to do so.[171] Mal'chish's "solemn word" and "secret" are introduced to the story by the bourgeois forces, however, not the boy himself. To assume that the secret does not exist would be to misread its ambiguity; Gaidar himself believed that, although there was a secret, the bourgeois commander could never have understood it.[172] The obvious corollary to that position is that the good Young Pioneer will know it without being told, meaning that it is up to the reader to discover it for themselves. Indeed, awed by Mal'chish's heroism, many did just that. Gaidar received reams of letters from children who wanted to know if they had guessed it correctly.[173]

Individually, these aspects of the story seem innocent, but together, they paint a much more insidious picture. Mal'chish-Kibal'chish uses deadly weapons without question in a war about which he knows almost nothing, and he sacrifices his life to protect a secret that may not

---

[170] Gaidar, "Malchish-Kibalchish," 124.
[171] Gaidar, "Malchish-Kibalchish," 128-129.
[172] Arkadii Gaidar to the Young Pioneers of Rostov, March 5, 1935, in Sobraniie sochinenii: v chetiriokh tomakh [Collected Works: In Four Volumes], ed. T. A. Gaidar, L. A. Kassil, V. I. Kompaniets, and F. E. Ebin (Moscow: Detskaia Literatura [Children's Literature], 1964-1965), 2:435.
[173] Kudryavtseva, *Malchish-Kibalchish.*

be secret at all in order to honor an oath that he may never have given. After all, if his "secret" is simply a widely held intuition, to whom could he have sworn to protect it? The secret's ambiguity pushes readers to explore and imagine for themselves, but it also encourages them to justify military action as they see fit. When the enemy's names, identities, and ideas are irrelevant and justification for the conflict is fluid, anything is permitted.[174] Tellingly, Gaidar wrote the story after being expelled from the military for murdering innocent peasants, and he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder for the rest of his life.[175] The mentality the story propagates has certainly has not single-handedly caused Russian atrocities in Ukraine, for instance, but "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" does prepare its readers to become soldiers who uncritically fight and die for an exceptionalism that they do not understand.

Evoking Gaidar's own traumatic military service, the text contains some notable hints of ambivalence in describing Mal'chish-Kibal'chish's heroism. For example, the head bourgeois exclaims, "what kind of incomprehensible country is this, in which even such kids know the Military Secret and keep their firm word so tightly?"[176] How terrible, indeed, that Gaidar and his generation learned the oldest secret of war, that it is hell, in childhood, and how terrible that many of those children lost their lives along with their innocence. Gaidar upholds the necessity of their sacrifice on the altar of the country's new ideology even as the text quietly calls this obligation into question. Throughout the text, Mal'chish-Kibal'chish sees the horseman's grievous wounds and watches as an old man succumbs to despair. Even as the text lionizes him,

---

[174] This is also a key aspect of Stalinism. See George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe, 1945-1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 97.
[175] Kul'tura.RF [Culture.RF], "Gaidar Arkadii Petrovich — Biografiia Stsenarista, Lichnaia Zhizn', Foto, Fil'mi" [Gaidar, Arkadii Petrovich — Biography of the Writer, Personal Life, Photos, Films], https://www.culture.ru/persons/10148/arkadii-gaidar.
[176] Gaidar, "Malchish-Kibalchish," 129.

it cannot but signal subtle discomfort with the personal tragedies, moral loss, and single-minded naïvete that make the young child a martyr.

Voennaia taina *and the Socialist Humanist Hero*

In contrasting its Christ-like, socialist humanist hero with its materialistic, self-serving villain, Gaidar's story prepares its young readers to die unquestioningly for ideas that they do not understand even as the text admits the human costs of participating in such an all-embracing cataclysm. This image of the child-hero is alternately accentuated and complicated in the 1935 novel *Voennaia taina*, which acts as a frame story for the original "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" tale. Set in the early Soviet Union, its two protagonists are the reluctant Komsomol' group leader Natka and the six-year-old Young Pioneer Al'ka. After the camp's water supply is contaminated, the engineer Ganin arrives to fix it, and Al'ka is temporarily placed in Natka's room. While there, he tells her the story of Mal'chish-Kibal'chish, which she promptly recounts to her group of seven-to-nine-year-old students. Thanks to information from the mischievous student Vladik, two of Ganin's foremen are arrested for stealing supplies from the work site and for hiding guns in an abandoned tower nearby. When the drunken brother of one of the villainous foremen subsequently ambushes Ganin and Al'ka in the forest, he accidentally strikes and kills Al'ka with a stone. When Al'ka is buried on a rock above the sea, Natka realizes that educating the younger generation is her calling.

The parallels between Al'ka and Mal'chish-Kibal'chish are clear. Each is a young boy who becomes a martyr by perishing for the greater good, is buried on a promontory under a "big red flag," and is honored by his compatriots after his death.[177] Similarly, just as Mal'chish-Kibal'chish ensures the defeat of the bourgeois by keeping his word under torture, Al'ka ensures

[177] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 261.

the capture of Ganin's treacherous foremen through his honesty. He saves Vladik from expulsion by telling Natka that the latter had been washing a bloody shirt, not breaking the rules to swim,[178] which allows Vladik to point out the traitors to Ganin.[179] Both young heroes draw on their honesty to ensure the collective's victory over treacherous individualism. The two boys are also equally drawn to expose unknown threats to that collective. Despite his father's assurances, Mal'chish-Kibal'chish worries about the cause of unexplained explosions over the mountains, and Al'ka wonders why he hears explosions over the hill near his camp. Their fears are each proven justified, in that Mal'chish discovers a military enemy and Al'ka helps to expose the treacherous workmen's misdeeds. Finally, they both inspire love and admiration in their compatriots. Mal'chish becomes a leader, a fighter, and a martyr in the eyes of a large band of child soldiers, while the campers treasure Al'ka as "our Al'ka," protect him against bullies, and admire his joyous nature.[180]

The status of "military secrets," protected and never disclosed, is paramount in both tales. Al'ka never explains his secret, and even the "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" story is introduced with the epithet "about the unsolved Military Secret."[181] This reality is intensified further when Ganin implies that Al'ka's fixation on the story and the secret derives from his mother, a Komsomol member whom Al'ka briefly saw after she had escaped from a Romanian prison.[182] As she was a fugitive, his parents had told him to keep quiet about the encounter. Finally, Natka's revelation at the end of the text clarifies the true military secret as much broader and more idealistic:

> And Natka again remembered Al'ka's Military Secret. "Why did forty kings and forty queens fight with the Red Army? Why did they fight and fight only to crash and burn?"

---

[178] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 241, 244.
[179] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 253.
[180] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 256.
[181] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 189.
[182] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 266.

> "They fought for a long time," Natka thought. "Let them try now. Or let them wait a little longer, while Vladik, Tol'ka, Ios'ka, Barankin and thousands and millions of the same guys grow up… We have to work, thought Natka. We must protect them. So that they study even better, so that they love their country even more. And this will be our most faithful, strongest Military Secret, which can be unraveled by whoever wants to."[183]

In other words, Al'ka and Natka's secret roughly corresponds to Gaidar's interpretation of Mal'chish-Kibal'chish's secret. While the secrets are never disclosed, the Red Army "knows what it is fighting for," "deeply convinced of the rightness of [its] struggle" and buttressed by the love of millions of proletarians in the Soviet Union and beyond.[184]

That said, readers' responses to the two heroes differ radically. Many children told Gaidar that they felt "very sorry" for Al'ka, whereas the most common responses to Mal'chish-Kibal'chish himself have been emulation and celebration.[185] Where the fairy-tale hero is simultaneously a leader, a warrior, and a martyr, Al'ka is only a martyr. In this way, he resembles Iliusha Snegiriov of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Brat'ia Karamazovi*.[186] Both are physically weak boys who are buried on rocky outcrops after they die senseless deaths — one from a stray rock, the other from tuberculosis — but both also become martyrs in that their deaths inspire their comrades to unite around a common ideal. At Iliusha's funeral, for instance, Alyosha Karamazov exclaims, "who has united us in this good, kind feeling… if not Ilyushechka, that good boy, that kind boy… may his memory be eternal and good in our hearts."[187] Similarly, Al'ka's posthumous destiny has sacred undertones. He unifies the listeners, deepening their dedication to the construction of a new Soviet state.

---

[183] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 269.
[184] Arkadii Gaidar na Pioneri Rostova, 5 Marta 1935, 435.
[185] Arkadii Gaidar to the Pioneers of Rostov, March 5, 1935, 435.
[186] It is unclear whether Gaidar was aware of this text, particularly as it was considered too religious by the authorities.
[187] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Picador, 2021), 822.

Thus, Mal'chish-Kibal'chish's three roles are split among three characters in *Voennaia taina*. Al'ka is the martyr, the vulnerable, compassionate Christ-like figure whose death inspires his comrades to value and take strength in one another. Vladik is the courageous fighter and adventurer, discovering the abandoned tower and its weapons, exploring the area, challenging a bully, and sealing the camp's victory against the treacherous workmen. Natka is the leader, providing the campers with a strong foundation throughout the text and resolving to dedicate her life to educating the Soviet youth. Together, all three aspects of heroism prepare Natka by the end of the text to help her future students understand the "military secret."

In this way, *Voennaia taina* performs an idealized model of children's heroes as character-forming. Having been told the Mal'chish-Kibal'chish story by his father, Al'ka derives his personal exemplar of courage, a downed pilot who refuses to break under torture, directly from "when Mal'chish was put in chains, stood pale, and nothing was extorted from him, either."[188] In turn, Natka's pedagogical epiphany arrives as a result of "remember[ing] Al'ka's Military Secret."[189] The story of an exemplaristic, all-encompassing hero inspires Al'ka, Vladik, and Natka to adopt select qualities of that hero as they work to build a stronger Soviet society, uniting and educating youth just like those reading the novel. In effect, *Voennaia taina* models the process of exemplaristic character-building in response to literary heroes for its young readers, showing them how to improve themselves based on what they read.

With this in mind, we can derive the archetypal qualities of the socialist humanist children's hero from the fantastic hero Mal'chish-Kibal'chish and the three realistic heroes Al'ka, Natka, and Vladik. O'Dell tells us to expect these to be "collectivism, discipline, love of

[188] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 257.
[189] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 269.

work, patriotism, proletarian internationalism and atheism," but although all but the last virtue have appeared at various points thus far, it is worth asking if they are indeed fundamental to the texts at hand.[190] This is especially true because O'Dell derives them from a 1973 Komsomol handbook and from the 1963 Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, rather than children's fiction itself. For example, she tells us not to expect atheism, "an affirmation of Marxist faith in science in progress" over spiritual ways of interpreting the world, in Soviet children's literature.[191] She is correct to note that questions of religion rarely appear in direct terms in children's texts of the period, but *Voennaia taina* indicates that the picture is far more complex: religious undertones mix with atheism.

On the one hand, as we have seen, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" has many resonances with the Bible, and both Mal'chish and Al'ka become martyrs. On the other, the final scene of *Voennaia taina* sees Natka hear and investigate an explosion out of sight, as do both Al'ka and Mal'chish, only to find "a whole mountain of fragments of a decrepit chapel that had just been destroyed."[192] In its place, she finds a school, the symbolism of which is clear. Secular education supplants outdated religious institutions and beliefs even as these ideas become its foundation. In *Voennaia taina*, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," *Tri tolstiaka*, and many other Soviet children's texts, moreover, the absence of arguments for atheism does not mean that their heroes do not advance it or embody it as a virtue. Such heroes' success in terms of clear, secular value systems and with no reference whatsoever to religion or the lack thereof itself supports the idea that the new Soviet individual does not need religion to build communism. As O'Dell herself puts it, Komsomol materials generally "start from the Soviet interpretations of society and history… [they] start

---

[190] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 32.
[191] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 43; 158.
[192] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 272.

from an affirmation, not a negation" of religious doctrine.[193] At the same time, as with the Biblical subtext in "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," the old doctrine is subtly evoked to render the new more palatable.

Next, O'Dell defines the virtue of internationalism as love for the working classes of other nations but rarely finds it in her survey of children's texts. When it does appear, it is essentially a reflection of the government's short-term foreign policy.[194] Sympathy between nations does appear in *Voennaia taina*, but its functions are rather more complex. The conversation between Al'ka and Natka following their discussion of "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" is particularly instructive:

> "Wonderful, right, Natka?"
> "What is wonderful, Al'ka?"
> "And on that side... and on the other side..." Al'ka said slowly. "Everywhere. Do you remember how it was in our fairy tale, Natka?" he continued briskly. "My father is Russian, my mother is Romanian, and what am I? Well, guess.
> "And you? You are Soviet. Sleep, Al'ka, sleep," Natka said quickly.[195]

Al'ka's parents belong to different, distinct ethnicities, whereas Al'ka himself is only described in terms of the ethnic characteristics he lacks, such as his "non-Russian eyes,"[196] and in terms of his nationality. The camp itself features workers and students who speak many different languages, but they are all present as future builders of Soviet communism.[197] To be sure, a strong Russocentric current still runs through the text, as nearly all of the primary characters are ethnic Russians, and minority students, such as the Bashkir girl Emine, only appear in conjunction with their ethnicity.[198] Even so, each of the primary characters embodies the virtue

---

[193] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 43.
[194] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 40-41; 140-147.
[195] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 249.
[196] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 239.
[197] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 150.
[198] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 150.

of transnational solidarity, an active love for the Soviet nation as (nominally) inclusive of people, particularly class allies, beyond the Russian nation and the Soviet borders. Al'ka's heroic mother Maritza hailed from Romania,[199] and Vladik bitterly regrets hiding with his family in Poland during the World War I Battle of Brest-Litovsk rather than fighting alongside the Red Army.[200] "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" itself ends with revolution spreading to many different countries.[201] As with atheism, however, transnational solidarity is both directly evident in Gaidar's stories and, more generally, fundamental to the genre of fairy tale-inspired Soviet children's fiction. "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," given its deidentified setting, appeals to all members of the camp because it could occur in any of their homelands.

O'Dell's framework demarcates collectivism, patriotism, and internationalism as separate virtues, but curiously, she herself argues that the latter two are in theory and practice permutations of the first. Internationalism is "to support patriotism by re-approaching it from the angle that proper patriotism is not Russian or Ukrainian… but Soviet" or proletarian, while patriotism is "treated as the ultimate form of collectivism."[202] The latter is defined as "a valuing of the interests of the collective over those of the self — or of individuals generally."[203] Her own argument, then, indicates that these three are in reality aspects of the same virtue, and they appear together so consistently and with such consistent linkages as to obviate the need for separate categories. To exhibit the virtue of transnational solidarity, to know and use the "military secret," is to be one who fights for the collective well-being of the working classes out of love that does not know national or ethnic boundaries. In short, it is a collectivist messianism,

---

[199] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 222-223.
[200] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 155-156.
[201] Gaidar, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," 129.
[202] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 36; 40-41.
[203] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 33.

and it suffuses each of the texts explored so far. Mal'chish-Kibal'chish protects, embodies, and promulgates a military secret that, the Head Bourgeouin rages, applies "in my High Bourgeouinland, and in the Plains Kingdom, and in the Snow Realm, and in the Sultry State… they sing the same songs, though in different languages, carry the same banners, though in different hands."[204] Natka's epiphany derives from the effects of that story in an ethnically and linguistically diverse camp, and she feels called to educate "whether it's home, whether it's Tajikistan… it doesn't matter. Everywhere is work, necessary and important."[205] Al'ka and Vladik ground their love for and actions on behalf of the Soviet Union and its people in their respective hyphenated identities. Similarly, the heroes of *Tri tolstiaka* justify their fight in terms of their love and sympathy for "the people," not any one nationality or ethnicity. Suok's name means "all life," and Tutti's name means "everyone" or "all" in Italian. The name Tibul is a reference to the ancient Roman poet and Republican Albius Tibullus, and Prospero is named after the protagonist of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Transnational solidarity is a key characteristic of the heroes of socialist fantasia children's prose not as a collection of three shifting ideals, but as a consistent virtue in its own right.

O'Dell's two other virtues, discipline and love of work, are less independent virtues than they are indicators that whatever virtues a hero might exhibit actually qualify as such. Here, I understand the notion of a "virtue," as the major virtue ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, to mean an "acquired human quality the possession and the exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevent us from achieving any such goods."[206] From this perspective, discipline and love of work merely

---

[204] Gaidar, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," 128.
[205] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 268.
[206] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 191.

become the capacity to acquire, possess, and exercise a quality essential to a practice. Indeed, discipline has for O'Dell nearly the same definition as does collectivism. It is the "much-praised virtue which helps the individual subordinate any selfish desires to the common good."[207] In other words, Natka, Al'ka, Vladik, and Mal'chish may generally be disciplined and enjoy their work, but this fact indicates little more than that their heroic characteristics qualify as virtues.

That said, two further traits that do qualify as virtues consistently appear across each text. Foremost among these is integrity, the quality of durable trustworthiness, honesty, and fortitude. Mal'chish-Kibal'chish and Al'ka exhibit this most directly, as each keeps his military secret under extreme torture and emotional duress, respectively.[208] The subtitle of the former's story, after all, is "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish and His Solemn Word."[209] More fundamentally, the military secret binding them, Vladik, Natka, and all of her future students is figured as a secret despite its status as a widely held intuition because, as a virtue, it must "be unraveled" and acquired "by whoever wants to" do so.[210] Integrity in this sense accounts both for Mal'chish's fortitude under torture and for Natka's newfound approach to character-building education. Importantly, it is not necessarily an application of the collectivist aspect of transnational solidarity. Al'ka, for example, exhibits it in telling his father and Natka that Vladik has not intentionally violated the camp rules, and Vladik himself demonstrates integrity in telling Ganin of the weapons, violence, and treachery he has witnessed near the camp.

Courage, perhaps the most commonly proposed virtue across all aretaic accounts of morality, then completes the picture. If, as MacIntyre argues, it is "the capacity to risk harm or

---

[207] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 33.
[208] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 250.
[209] Gaidar, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," 123.
[210] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 269.

danger to oneself" in connection with "care and concern for individuals, communities and causes," we can understand it as necessary to fulfill the socialist humanist obligation of loving implacability toward those who exploit others.[211] Al'ka, Vladik, Natka, and Mal'chish all perceive threats to their communities' well-being beyond their immediate surroundings, including explosions beyond the mountains, hidden guns, and falling buildings, and charge ahead to investigate anyway. As they all learn, the conflicts that follow from such pursuits carry great risk. Al'ka and Mal'chish die, Vladik endures physical injury, and Natka loses her friend. Each exhibits great courage in the aretaic sense. In sum, *Voennaia taina* uses the "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" story and its heroes' responses to it to model the process of exemplaristic character-building in response to literary heroes for its young readers. It evinces a model of the socialist humanist hero in terms of three roles — the martyr, the leader, and the fighter — and four virtues — atheism, integrity, courage, and transnational solidarity.

Conclusions

In sum, through its Christ-like, socialist humanist hero and its materialistic, individualistic villain, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" prepares its readers to die unquestioningly for ideas that they do not understand even as it admits the human costs of participating in building this new society. *Voennaia taina* uses the "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" story and its heroes' responses to it to model the process of exemplaristic character-building in response to literary heroes for its young readers and evinces a model of the socialist humanist hero in terms of three roles — the martyr, the leader, and the fighter — and four virtues — atheism, integrity, courage, and transnational solidarity. However, several critical questions remain unanswered. The foremost among these relate to the formation of the socialist fantasia and the interplay between

[211] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 192.

its form and content. Can we understand it as a co-optation, as intentionally constructed at the textual level, and what narrative qualities bind its two components together? *Buratino* will help us to answer these questions.

Chapter 3: *Buratino* and His Merry Marionettes — The Co-optation of the Fantastic

It is fitting that *Buratino,* perhaps the clearest example of a fairy tale co-opted into a socialist fantasia text, was authored by a writer who allowed himself to be co-opted by the Soviet authorities. After fleeing the Revolution, Aleksei Tolstoi became the head of the literary supplement to a major émigré newspaper in Berlin. His nationalistic response to allegations of pro-Soviet bias provoked widespread criticism, and he found himself blacklisted across Berlin when the paper's funding from and subordination to Soviet officials became public.[212] By 1923, he had returned to the Soviet Union, where he led a highly privileged life until his 1945 death. It is for this reason that many other writers, from Osip Mandel'shtam[213] to Vladimir Nabokov,[214] saw him as having sold his soul to the regime. Never again did Tolstoi produce any anti-Soviet or apolitical works. By the late 1920s, he had rewritten his major émigré novel, *Khozhdenie po mukam* (The Cavalry), to demonstrate stronger support for the government, and he followed it with an equally groveling sequel.[215] As Lipovetsky puts it in his chapter on *Buratino* and the literary trickster, Tolstoi "underwent the total and irreversible transformation from… a suspect 'fellow-traveler' into a cornerstone and classic of Soviet literature."[216] That said, he retained a deep interest in folklore throughout his life.[217]

Tolstoi's most influential children's work,[218] the 1936 novel *Buratino,* is a partial rewriting of the Italian author Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1881), and it is a key point in his

---

[212] Elena D. Tolstaia. "Glory Pallid and Glory Justified: Nabokov's Two Portraits of Aleksei Tolstoy." *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, no. 66 (Fall 2018): 38.
[213] Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, *Hope against Hope, a Memoir*, trans. Max Hayward (London: Collins & Harvill, 1971), 3.
[214] Tolstaia, "Glory Pallid," 40, 53.
[215] Tolstaia, "Glory Pallid," 39.
[216] Lipovetsky, *Charms*, 128.
[217] Miron Petrovskii, "Chto otpiraet 'Zolotoi kliuchik'?" [What does the Golden Key Open?], in Knigi nashego detstva [Books of Our Childhood], (Moscow: Kniga, 1986), 170.
[218] Petrovskii, "Chto otpiraet 'Zolotoi kliuchik'?", 147.

transition toward the Communist Party line.[219] In it, the woodcarver Papa Carlo fashions a talking piece of wood into the marionette Buratino, who runs away from Papa Carlo only to find himself exploited alongside several other puppets by the theater owner Karabas Barabas. Realizing that Papa Carlo is Buratino's father, Karabas lets him go for an as yet unknown reason with five gold coins. After Basilio the Cat and Alisa the Fox try to rob Buratino and then hoodwink him out of his money, he is imprisoned in the dystopian, bourgeois Land of the Fools. He then receives a golden key from the tortoise Tortilla, meets two marionettes who have run away from Karabas, and together, they defeat their former master. Buratino then tricks Karabas into telling him about the secret of Papa Carlo: the golden key unlocks a room in his house.[220] Papa Carlo and the marionettes reach the room before Karabas, and they find a beautiful marionette theatre inside. Karabas is arrested, and the marionettes start a worker-owned theatre together with Papa Carlo that drives their former owner out of business.

Like "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" and *Tri tolstiaka*, *Buratino* enjoyed great popularity on its release,[221] eventually inspiring an opera adaptation, a board game, and several films.[222] More importantly, given its clear basis in Collodi's existing text, the narrative also presents a unique opportunity to understand the genesis of the socialist fantasia and the interplay between its form and content, as each has so far been analyzed in isolation. While taking into account Tolstoi's

[219] It is perhaps for this reason that few scholars have studied Tolstoi's work beyond his science fiction and that the little scholarship on *Buratino* is primarily interested in divining hidden references to or resonances with Tolstoi's friends, his enemies, and himself in the text. See, for example, Lipovetsky, *Charms*, 143; Valery Shubinsky, "'A Wooden One, with the Big Nose...' Further Comments on the Question of a Secret Code in A.N. Tolstoy's Fairytale 'The Golden Key or The Adventures of Buratino,'" *Slavic Almanac: The South African Journal for Slavic, Central and Eastern European Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 2014): 64. https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC154942.
[220] In fact, Tolstoi's family crest features a golden key at its center.
[221] Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government, a Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 526.
[222] Balina, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 111.

own cooperation with the Soviet regime, this chapter reads Buratino in the context of Collodi's original.

Magic Naturalized in the Service of Socialist Humanism

Its derivation from Collodi's fairy tale notwithstanding, the content of *Buratino* clearly exemplifies the socialist fantasia, and here Tolstoi's invention is not without some notable originality. First, its characters are singularly memorable, and they are conceived to reflect class struggle. Karabas is a cunning and perfectly evil villain and exploiter, Papa Carlo demonstrates superhuman woodworking skills, and Buratino himself exhibits great courage and heroic leadership instincts despite being less than a month old. At the same time, its talking animals, such as Basilio, Alisa, and Tortilla, and its anthropomorphic, sentient puppets evoke fairy tales' magic, and its setting's evocation of petit bourgeois life in the Mediterranean of the Renaissance heightens the superficial level of its fairy tale content to match even the notably transnational setting of *Tri tolstiaka*. Its world is deidentified; the hellish bourgeois state in which Buratino is fooled and imprisoned is called only the Land of the Fools,[223] and the rest of the story occurs in an unnamed city on the Mediterranean.[224] This is one aspect of what Miron Petrovskii calls Tolstoi's attempt to obscure the story's creation in the 1930s.[225]

More fundamentally, the idiom of the fantastic suffuses the text, as in its many outlandish, often realized comparisons. Karabas Barabas, for example, is first described in terms befitting a monster: "his bulging eyes swiveled, his huge mouth clattered with teeth as if he were not a man but a crocodile."[226] Similarly, Barabas and the two bandits' manipulation of Buratino

---

[223] Aleksei Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik, ili prikliucheniia Buratino* [The Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino] (Leningrad: Izdatel′stvo detskoi literaturi, 1936), 34.
[224] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 9.
[225] Petrovskii, "Chto otpiraet 'Zolotoi kliuchik'?", 152.
[226] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 27.

and the other marionettes is often described in terms referencing their status as puppets. Basilio and Alisa promise Buratino, "we are not pulling your string."[227] At the same time, the story's uncanny elements are tied to its ideology, as the marionettes are indeed puppets figuratively as well as literally, suffering exploitation at all three villains' hands. All of the world's countries and characters are linked in the struggle for liberation, and the magical explanations for Pinocchio and the other three puppets' consciousness and anthropomorphism subvert the *Unheimliche*.

That said, *Buratino* at first glance appears to flout a central tenet of the idiom of the fantastic: it does not technologize its magic. Unlike the treatment of Gaspar Arneri in *Tri tolstiaka*, the text never explicitly disavows wizardry, and it introduces a menagerie of fantastical creatures and talking puppets without comment. Even so, the reader never witnesses real magic being worked, and the best candidate for this, Buratino, is born through the skill and luck of a human craftsman. His consciousness derives not from Papa Carlo's abilities, moreover, but from the wood from which he is made, as becomes evident when he speaks before Papa Carlo carves him a mouth.[228] Like Gaspar's transformation of Tibul and Tub's metamorphosis, that phenomenon is never explained. Even when magic is not given a direct, empirical explanation, it functions to bring recognizable aspects of the observable world into the story, as with the text's many talking animals. Their anthropomorphism is similarly never accounted for. It simply is.

The utility of this view is borne out by comparison with the elements of Collodi's tale that Tolstoi excludes. These comprise *Pinocchio*'s most violent episodes, such as the mutilation of Pinocchio's feet,[229] and all of its most explicitly magical elements, such as Pinocchio's

---

[227] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 34.
[228] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 9; 12.
[229] Carlo Collodi, *Pinocchio: The Tale of a Puppet* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publishing Group, 2015), 32. Numbering in this edition begins with the cover as page 1.

transformation into a donkey and the wonders worked by his blue-haired fairy godmother. The latter does not appear in Buratino at all.[230] Indeed, Collodi's story ends with the fairy turning Pinocchio into a human boy,[231] but Buratino simply becomes a happier puppet.[232] Even if magic is not always explained in material terms in Tolstoi's story, then, it is always naturalized, rendered explicable as an immanent part of the human or non-human environment.[233] Propp expects this in all folktales, writing that "in folklore, reasons, or… motivations, are not required for actions."[234]

As Balina argues, the role of magical aid in *Pinocchio* is expropriated by the collective in *Buratino*.[235] The titular character only defeats Karabas in the forest with the help of Malvina, Pierrot, and the dog Artemon, and his final victory over Karabas comes when his new marionette company drives the theater director out of business.[236] That said, Buratino's leadership is also critical in this victory. While his comrades panic, "only Buratino was not confused," and after giving orders to each of his friends, "he himself stood in front: 'None of this panic! Let's run!'"[237] Not only does he embody the virtue of courage, but he also does so in solidarity with his peers. He frequently demonstrates explicit concern for the other marionettes during battle and elsewhere. Indeed, the marionettes are such staunch allies that they know each other's names

---

[230] She is replaced by the blue-haired marionette and sometime teacher Malvina.
[231] Collodi, *Pinocchio*, 184.
[232] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 121.
[233] By "naturalized," I am not referring to the post-structuralist theorist Jonathan Culler's somewhat similar notion of naturalization, whereby the reader "brings [what they read] within the modes of order which culture [has made] available." See Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1981), 137.
[234] Vladimir Propp, "Folklore and Reality," trans. Richard Martin and Ariadna Martin, in *Theory and History of Folklore*, by Vladimir Propp (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 25.
[235] Balina, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 113.
[236] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 80-85; 121.
[237] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 79.

before having met.[238] As should be expected, Buratino's solidarity is specifically transnational in several respects. His allies' names evoke very different sociolinguistic backgrounds, none of which are Russian. Pierrot is French, Malvina is Scottish, Artemon is Greek, and both Buratino and Papa Carlo are Italian. Further, as he leaves the Land of the Fools, Buratino obtains the golden key and learns of Karabas's secret from the turtle Tortilla, and he makes the crucial connection between the two because Tortilla had also been abused by the theater owner.[239] Unlike Pinocchio, whose story is a series of failures followed by edifying punishments, Buratino is a hero embodying the virtues of transnational solidarity and courage.

The most instructive of Buratino's virtues, however, is integrity. He sometimes lies, keeping his key secret from Karabas while tricking him and his accomplice into revealing the secret location of the door that it opens, but nowhere does Tolstoi mention his nose extending.[240] Tellingly, every illustration in the 1936 Leningrad edition depicts the nose as the same length. Excepting his initial betrayals of Papa Carlo, for which he suffers severely at the hands of Karabas, Buratino exhibits great integrity among his comrades. He only uses dishonesty against his group's enemies, thereby exhibiting, in keeping with socialist humanism, "a positive love for [his] fellow men" even as he is "also… implacable towards those who, in the Soviet view, exploit them."[241] He even guards a secret integral to his and his comrades' victory, as do Mal'chish-Kibal'chish and the heroes of *Voennaia taina*. Relatedly, atheism again appears as a sort of virtue in absentia, in that Buratino and his comrades succeed with integrity without even confronting the question of religion, while Karabas's forces run "to the City of Fools to lie to the

[238] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 25.
[239] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 64.
[240] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 95.
[241] O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 31.

police department that the governor [of the city] had been taken to heaven alive."[242] Indeed, the 1936 Leningrad text depicts the city as full of steeples.[243] The silent atheism of socialist humanism is tacitly set against the dishonest religiosity of the City of Fools.

Collodi's *Pinocchio*, of course, lacks a hero in the strict sense. Rather than a villainous enemy and cruel environment that highlight his virtues, Pinocchio's own failures teach him the consequences of the corresponding vices.[244] Pinocchio learns, for example, that "all boys who are lazy, and who take a dislike to books, to schools, and to masters… must end… transformed into so many little donkeys."[245] One must study hard and respect authority to avoid menial labor. Pinocchio also learns altruism[246] and the obligatory nature of work.[247] Having acquired these lessons, he becomes a fully realized, autonomous human boy. If *Pinocchio* is the story of a child forced to accept bourgeois morality, Tolstoi's novel replaces the latter with the virtues of socialist humanism, affirming them both through Buratino himself and against the story's villains.[248] It is telling that many of the events demonstrating Buratino's socialist humanist virtues occur in the Land of the Fools, so named because it is populated by beggars whose wealth has been stolen by a few oligarchs — quite literally, "fat cats in golden spectacles."[249] In a clear critique of capitalist meritocracy, unfortunate victims are lured to the city with the promise of economic opportunity in the Field of Miracles, only to be robbed by thieves like Basilio and

---

[242] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 103.
[243] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 56,
[244] Maria Nikolajeva uses similar criteria to distinguish between heroes and protagonists in fairy tales. See Nikolajeva, "Fairy Tale," 140.
[245] Collodi, *Pinocchio*, 151.
[246] Collodi, *Pinocchio*, 131.
[247] Collodi, *Pinocchio*, 109.
[248] Petrovskii makes a similar point, contending that "with Collodi, everyone moralizes; with Tolstoi, no one," but in doing so, he misses the extent to which *Buratino* as a whole advances the virtues of socialist humanism. Petrovskii, "Chto otpiraet 'Zolotoi kliuchik'?", 161.
[249] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 57.

Alisa.[250] In this way, *Buratino* is a paradigmatic case of the socialist fantasia's formation. The content — the idiom of the fantastic, the setting in Renaissance Europe, and the magic — is intentionally[251] taken from *Pinocchio*, an existing fairy tale, and molded around a socialist humanist hero and his journey. The resultant synthesis uses fantastic content to advance the necessity of Marxist-Leninist ideology as the only possible sanctuary for the confused workers.

Further, as we have seen, principles or values become virtues when they are internalized as natural aspects of one's character. As Nikolajeva writes in her study of fantasy genres, "the hero (and the reader/listener) of a fairy tale does not experience wonder when confronted with magical events or beings; they are taken for granted."[252] For the major folklorist Stith Thompson, the "existence [of magical objects] is merely taken for granted" in fairy tales.[253] Tzvetan Todorov makes a similar argument in his study of the fantastic, defining "the marvelous" as a genre in which events inexplicable "by the laws of this same familiar world" are rendered "an integral part of reality — but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us."[254] Nikolajeva perhaps goes too far in claiming that taking the supernatural for granted in fairy tales precludes wonder, and Todorov's conception of the marvelous as a conscious perceptual choice on the reader's part is difficult to apply to a child's experience of reading. Still, all three note in passing a key aspect of fairy tales that survives clearly in *Buratino*. Not only all supernatural phenomena and characters, but all social relations are depicted as given, as taken for granted by

---

[250] Tolstoi, *Zolotoi kliuchik*, 57-58.
[251] Petrovskii, "Chto otpiraet 'Zolotoi kliuchik'?", 150; 182. It is perhaps unsurprising that, as Petrovskii notes, Olesha so loved the story and that many commentators have tried to link it to other fairy tales from around the world, such as Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland." Petrovskii, "Chto otpiraet 'Zolotoi kliuchik'?", 152; 185.
[252] Nikolajeva, "Fairy Tale," 153-154.
[253] Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (United Kingdom: University of California Press, 1977), 78.
[254] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cleveland, OH: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 25.

characters, narrators, and readers alike. Hereafter, I refer to this phenomenon both as grantedness and, for the sake of syntax, naturalization.

This notion of the grantedness of the fantastic is crucial to the socialist fantasia's formative project. In *Buratino*, for instance, talking animals appear without comment or explanation, and the protagonist's consciousness emerges as immanent in the material world, the wood from which he is carved. The same scene in *Pinocchio* makes the supernatural even more explicit, as the narrator simply declares, "I do not know how this really happened, yet the fact remains that one fine day this piece of wood found itself in the shop of an old carpenter."[255] No such emphasis upon the unusual nature of the events can be found in *Buratino*, because no similar explanation is ever necessary. Magic is co-opted as given in the service of the socialist vision. The inequality and suffering in the Land of the Fools and Karabas's marionette theatre, as well as the utopian ease with which Buratino's revolution succeeds and flourishes, are portrayed in a similar manner. This grantedness unites the fantastic content and the socialist humanist form, naturalizing the Marxist-Leninist view of social relations for the reader.

How, though, might grantedness advance a particular social perspective? The answer lies in its relation to the story's narrative temporality. In her monograph on time in children's literature, Nikolajeva proposes two extremes of narrative temporality, one in which time is non-linear and cyclical[256] and another in which the plot proceeds linearly.[257] The former evokes Collodi's *Pinocchio*, which frequently skips ahead in time by ambiguous intervals. It is unclear, for instance, how long he spends in school after reuniting with Geppetto, and when he enters the

[255] Collodi, *Pinocchio*, 12.
[256] Maria Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 6.
[257] Nikolajeva, *Mythic*, 8.

Land of Toys, "the hours, the days, and the weeks passed like lightning."[258] It also features many cycles of death and rebirth, as when Pinocchio becomes a donkey but returns to his marionette form, when he is swallowed by and then escapes a whale, and when he is transformed into a human boy. Propp argues that this temporality is common to most fairy tales, writing that "time as a form of thought does not seem to exist."[259] By contrast, linear time is much more common in modern realist fiction[260] and socialist realist children's texts after Stalin's purges, such as Gaidar's *Timur i ego komanda*. *Buratino* strikes a midpoint between the two. Its temporality is nonlinear, as in the discontinuity between the discovery of Papa Carlo's marionette theatre and its first performance,[261] but it is much less so than *Pinocchio*,[262] and it lacks the latter's cycles of death and rebirth completely.

Buratino's denouement also becomes a liminal, eternalized carnivalesque, featuring Karabas dethroned and the marionette collective ascendant. Buratino becomes not a human boy ready to begin the rest of his life, but a fully actualized, newly class-conscious puppet who has already founded a small utopia. As Nikolajeva argues, mythic temporality is often integrated into linear narratives through carnivalesque rituals and festivals.[263] In this way, the narrative's temporality itself evinces grantedness. The narrative's temporal irregularities are mythologized as given, yet its largely linear temporality establishes its eternalized, utopian destination as somehow inevitable. Where time typically begins and ends within the bounds of a fairy tale, here it is sealed at the beginning of the story but spills over at the end into infinity.

---

[258] Collodi, *Pinocchio*, 148.
[259] Vladimir Propp, "Folklore and Reality," 25.
[260] Nikolajeva, *Mythic*, 228-230.
[261] Tolstoi, *Buratino*, 104-105.
[262] Petrovskii makes a similar, albeit overstated, case. See Petrovskii, "Chto otpiraet 'Zolotoi kliuchik'?", 206.
[263] Nikolajeva, *Mythic*, 5.

In this way, the socialist fantasia forces together two very different epistemological modes. Not unlike the paradigm of dialectical materialism, time in *Buratino* proceeds in semi-linear terms from the perspective of the reader, but history itself is portrayed as utopian and teleological. As Katherine Verdery and many other scholars of socialist politics have argued, the rhetoric of Stalinism and its successors indeed emphasize social dynamism in nonlinear, teleological terms.[264] The marionette theatre beneath Papa Carlo's house literally waits to be unlocked, and the marionettes in Karabas's theatre are waiting to be freed. In "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," the Red Army's ability to vanquish the bourgeois forces is never in doubt, and neither is the heroes and the people's capacity to dethrone the Three Fat Men in *Tri tolstiaka*. It is only a matter of waiting for the right factors to align until victory occurs and is eternalized. Particularly through semi-mythical, semi-linear temporality, narrative grantedness naturalizes for the reader not only the pseudo-magical elements of the texts' fantastic content, but also the dialectical materialist perspective on history and social relations.

That being said, who is the implied reader reflected in the text? The first part of the answer lies in one of Tolstoi's inheritances from Collodi. Both texts often directly address their readers, as in the first three lines of *Pinocchio*:

> Centuries ago there lived —
> "A king!" my little readers will say immediately.
> No, children, you are mistaken. Once upon a time there was a piece of wood.[265]

Similarly, Tolstoi interrupts the forest battle in Buratino to remark that "it all happened so fast that you, dear readers, would not have had time to count all the fingers on your hand."[266] Both texts construct their implied readers as excited by the story, invested in the characters, and

---

[264] Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 35.
[265] Collodi, *Pinocchio*, 12.
[266] Tolstoi, *Buratino*, 89.

interacting with the narrator. The extent to which each story is centered on the growth and discoveries of one protagonist, an exemplaristic hero in the case of *Buratino,* then suggests that the implied reader is figured as adulatory of those heroes. Tolstoi's narrative often makes this explicit, as when "Buratino wanted with all his might, on this first evening in his life, to live without pampering, as the Talking Cricket had taught him."[267]

Importantly, Buratino also seeks truth and growth because both will reward him and his comrades in the future. He declares after the battle with Karabas, "I still want by all means to find out from Karabas Barabas where the door that the golden key opens is. Behind the door is something wonderful, amazing… and it should bring us happiness."[268] He is frequently rewarded for taking the initiative to rebel even if this involves dishonesty, as when he overhears Karabas's secret by hiding in a jar during the latter's meal.[269] Indeed, the only major exception to Buratino's integrity, his sale of the reader that Papa Carlo had bought him for school, proves the rule. He suffers greatly as a result of this betrayal, nearly becoming kindling for Karabas's fire, because he has sacrificed an opportunity to better himself alongside a group for the transitory pleasure of individualistic consumption. The implied reader, then, engages with the text to emulate the hero's growth.

Thus far, *Buratino* has proven not only a clear instance of the socialist fantasia, but also as a paradigmatic case of its intentional transference of fairy tales' content and plot into socialist humanist form.[270] The novel has also demonstrated the extent to which narrative grantedness

---

[267] Tolstoi, *Buratino,* 21.

[268] Tolstoi, *Buratino,* 82.

[269] Tolstoi, *Buratino,* 87. For a similar argument, see Mark Lipovetsky, *Charms of the Cynical Reason: Tricksters in Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture* (Boston, USA: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 137. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781618118509.

[270] Lipovetsky makes a similar argument in passing that in *Buratino*, Tolstoy "unites the two models" of fairy tale and myth, "creating something that evokes syncretic fairy-tale myths." Lipovetsky, *Charms,* 139.

naturalizes for the reader not only the pseudo-magical elements of the texts' fantastic content, but also the dialectical materialist perspective on history and social relations. Finally, the implied reader who experiences the latter process has emerged as interactive, emulatory, growth-oriented, and therefore ideal as a target for said naturalization. It remains unclear, however, how the socialist fantasia, whether in the context of *Buratino* or in general, positions the reader of the mid- to late 1930s relative to state morality and ideology.

Influences of Stalinist Culture

During and long after the period of the socialist fantasia, Stalinism dominated the social, political, and cultural spheres of Soviet life. Not only do its emphases account for many of the linkages between the socialist fantasia's form and content, but they also point toward the ways in which both of these situate the reader in relation to ideology and the state. For the present purpose, I broadly follow the political scholar George Schöpflin in defining Stalinism as a period characterized by several rhetorical foci and policies, beginning with Stalin's 1928 consolidation of power in the Soviet Union[271] and ending with his death in 1953.[272] In economic terms, it emphasized the pursuit of rapid modernization, the acquisition of military might through heavy industrialization, and the absence of self-limiting mechanisms. Culturally, it was marked by strong cults of personality around Eastern Europe's so-called "little Stalins" and around Stalin himself, forced participation in political life, total control of public discourse, a permanent search for enemies, mass surveillance and terror, and purges. As Schöpflin argues, underpinning all of these facets was a drive toward perfection, toward a perfect society led by a perfect leader under

[271] Stalinism did not reach Eastern Europe until 1948, when communist regimes had successfully taken power across the region.
[272] George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe, 1945-1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 81-83.

a perfect ideology.[273] To achieve this, the state sought to exclude all dissent and to control all aspects of life within its borders.[274]

It is therefore no accident that each of the texts examined thus far end in some sort of carnivalesque utopia key not only to the idiom of the fantastic, but also to the vindication of the hero's virtue. The most obvious example is the eternalized carnival seen in the epilogue of *Tri tolstiaka*, but the final scene of *Buratino* also juxtaposes the paradisical marionette theatre collective with the despondent Karabas Barabas, a kind of dethroned carnival king. Just as the former text's final image is the mocked, caged Three Fat Men, the marionette collective confronts their former owner with their joyful success, and the final image of the story — literally, in the case of the 1936 Leningrad edition — is of Karabas lying humiliated on the ground.[275] Similarly, both *Voennaia taina* and "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" find hope for a utopian future in the figure of the Builder of Communism.[276] Though Buratino certainly exhibits flaws, as when he frivolously sells the book that Papa Carlo buys for him and allows himself to be duped in the Land of the Fools, he otherwise proves to be a near-ideal moral exemplar much like the collective heroes of *Tri tolstiaka* and *Voennaia taina*.[277]

Indeed, both Buratino and Mal'chish-Kibal'chish exhibit only one major fault in an exception that proves the rule: they are too trusting. The latter enlists the boys of his town without regard for their potential treachery, a mistake for which Mal'chish-Plokhish's betrayal makes him suffer. Buratino, as we have seen, allows himself to be fooled repeatedly by Basilio the Cat and Alisa the Fox, failures for which the text makes his responsibility explicit. On their

---

[273] Schöpflin, *Politics*, 76.
[274] Schöpflin, *Politics*, 98.
[275] Tolstoi, *Buratino*, 125.
[276] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 269.
[277] Tolstoi, *Buratino*, 24.

first meeting, the two show clear signs of greed on seeing Buratino's money, "but Buratino didn't notice any of this."[278] Later, after they try to rob him in disguise, he "found it suspicious that the cat's right paw was tied up with a rag, and the fox's tail was stained with marsh mud," but he nevertheless follows them into the Land of the Fools.[279] Though both heroes exhibit the virtue of integrity within the socialist humanist framework, they lack both the vigilance necessary to detect treachery and the sense of urgency needed to act on their suspicions. Constant vigilance against and suspicion of any enemies of the state or its ideology, of course, are key aspects of Stalinism, manifesting in mass surveillance, the culture of suspicion, and show trials. Each, as Schöpflin explains, was "a way of demonstrating the party's omniscience and ever-vigilance" against "enemies [who] were all identical" insofar as they were enemies of Stalinism.[280] It is telling that everyone against whom Buratino must be vigilant, successfully or not, is tied in some way to the deidentified, vaguely bourgeois and capitalist Land of the Fools.

Conclusions

In sum, *Buratino* is a paradigmatic case of not only the socialist fantasia's derivation from fairy tales' content and socialist humanist form, but also the way in which narrative grantedness naturalizes both pseudo-magic and dialectical materialist perspectives on social relations for the reader. Moreover, the prominence of the utopian carnivalesque ending and vigilance in the text echo Stalinism's doctrine of perfection and culture of suspicion. We have characterized the virtues and social perspective that the text seeks to advance and elaborated the ways in which the form and content allow it to do so, but we have not yet understood the formative relationship between the text and the implied reader or the ideological landscape that

---

[278] Tolstoi, *Buratino*, 32.
[279] Tolstoi, *Buratino*, 55.
[280] Schöpflin, *Politics*, 97.

this process seeks to create. The next section will answer each of these questions through the lenses of Stalinist ideology, Wolfgang Iser's *Rezeptionsästhetik*, and the phenomenologies of Edmund Husserl and Gilles Deleuze.

Chapter 4: Building the Builders of Communism — A Theoretical Framework

Having explained the influence of ideology on the virtues and roles of the young hero and fantastic content in the works of Olesha, Gaidar, and Tolstoi, we are now equipped to explicate their texts' "fantastic forms," as Katerina Clark calls them in her study of the Soviet novel.[281] With a focus on these narratives' roots in fairy tales in fairy tales and *bylini*, or Russian heroic epic poetry, the resulting theoretical framework will permit a fuller understanding of how the socialist fantasia situates the young reader in relation to the state and its ideology. To this end, Chapter 4 begins with a brief account of what I term the socialist humanist hero's journey. This form is relatively consistent among the four texts examined here, and it is centered on the socialist humanist hero described in Chapter 2. Next, I trace how this form, in tandem with the idiom of the fantastic, engages and even directs the moral psychology of the reader. The discussion then concludes by theorizing how this reader-text relationship constructs the ideal reader in relation to the Stalinist state and Marxist-Leninist ideology.

The Socialist Humanist Hero's Journey

To my knowledge, no study has yet proposed a model form for early Soviet children's prose fiction, but the clear centrality of the hero and their virtues to such texts' ideological roles indicates that at least two theoretical perspectives may provide a persuasive heuristic foundation. The first of these is found in the study of *bylini*. Most such epic poetry originated between the tenth and fourteenth centuries during the existence of Kyivan Rus' and was primarily sung throughout the villages of the region. Having lingered for several hundred years, the tradition

[281] "In order to describe homo extraordinarius, one needed more fabulous forms such as fairy tales." Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 147.

only began to die out during the nineteenth century.[282] Most *bylini* consist of a single episode,[283] and, as the formalist folklorist Aleksandr Skaftymov argues in his essay collection on the subject, they center on the journey and feats of a hero.[284] The hero's deeds are set against what Skaftymov calls the "resonating background," a generalized foil that is often a social setting like a court or a city but may sometimes be an individual authority figure, such as Prince Vladimir (Volodymyr) of Kyiv. It is this social space or powerful individual who first casts doubt on the hero's abilities but whose own incompetence and passivity later emphasize the hero's virtues throughout their quest.[285]

The parallels between this view of *bylini* and the heroic form of *Tri tolstiaka*, *Voennaia taina*, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," and *Buratino* should be self-evident.[286] All four texts focus on the journey of one or more heroes and emphasize their virtues in contrast to the vices of their surroundings, a monarchical figure, or both. Though the scope of Olesha's, Gaidar's, and Tolstoi's engagement with *bylini* cannot be established with certainty, their narratives' plots share much with the tradition of heroic epic poetry. More broadly, debates in the discipline of folkloristics often directly influenced the contemporaneous literary scene during the 1930s and long afterward, as in Krupskaia's campaign against the fairy tale and the later controversy over Dem'ian Bednii's *Bogatyri*.[287] Consequently, the contemporary scholar should overlook neither

---

[282] James Bailey and Tatyana Ivanovna, introduction to *An Anthology of Russian Folk Epics* (Armonk, N.Y.: Routledge, 1998), xvii; xxxiii-xxxiv.
[283] Bailey and Ivanovna, introduction to *Anthology*, xxviii.
[284] Aleksandr Skaftymov, *Poetika i genezis bylin: Ocherki* [The Poetics and Genesis of the Bylini: Essays] (Moscow-Saratov: The Publishing House of V. Z. Iaksonov, 1924), 88.
[285] Skaftymov, *Poetika*, 88.
[286] As Oinas demonstrates, folklore singers in the government's employ during the 1930s composed new songs, *novini*, featuring Soviet leaders with the same qualities as the folk heroes of older *bylini*. Felix J. Oinas, "Folklore and Politics in the Soviet Union," *Slavic Review* 32, no. 1 (1973): 50. https://doi.org/10.2307/2494072.
[287] Dana Prescott Howell, *The Development of Soviet Folkloristics* (Abingdon and Oxon, U.K.: Routledge, 1992), 365-366. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315731384.

Skaftymov's and Propp's *bylini* scholarship nor the more recent "hero's journey" paradigms of Joseph Campbell and Christopher Vogler to describe the formal aspect of the socialist fantasia. This study will accordingly apply the folklorists' findings to explicate the formal aspect of the socialist fantasia in terms of a socialist humanist hero's journey.

What is heroic epic poetry for Propp, and what formal characteristics do the texts at hand share with it? While most of Propp's work on *bylini* is based on the premise that "epic poetry necessarily reflects the economic and social structure of a people," he also provides useful and relatively accurate criteria by which to classify a text as a *bylina*.[288] The first of these, their heroic content, corresponds to Skaftymov's argument on the centrality of the hero.[289] Their origins notwithstanding, *bylini* tell the story of an individual who performs various impressive feats in historical terms.[290] The Russian word *bylini* derives from the past tense of the verb *byt'* (to be), implying that their stories actually occurred at some point in the distant past.[291] They thereby historicize their heroes, or establish them as historical and real for the listener or reader. In other words, socialist fantasia children's texts seek to realize their heroes not only by practicing character formation on their readers, but also by establishing them as the necessary and inevitable outcome of history according to Leninist-Marxist dialectical materialism. Many of the largest group of songs, the Kyivan cycle, are indeed based very loosely on historical events. Their heroes, known as *bogatyri,* are larger-than-life but typically accomplish their feats without magic, just as do the heroes of "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," *Tri tolstiaka,* and *Buratino*.[292] As with

---

[288] Vladimir Propp, Russkii geroicheskii epos [Russian Heroic Epic Poetry] (Leningrad: Leningradskii gosudarstvennii universitet, 1958), 33, qtd. In Liberman, introduction to *Theory and History*, lxxi.
[289] Vladimir Propp, "*Russian Heroic Epic Poetry*: Introduction," trans. Ariadna Martin and Richard Martin, in *Theory and History of Folklore*, ed. Anatoly Liberman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 149.
[290] For a comprehensive discussion of this debate in folkloristics, see Bailey and Ivanovna, introduction to *Anthology*, xxxvii-xlv.
[291] Folk singers themselves often called their works *starini* — roughly, "songs of old."
[292] Bailey and Ivanovna, introduction to *Anthology*, xxiii.

the three heroes of *Voennaia taina* and the four of *Tri tolstiaka*, the individual strengths of *bogatyri* often vary widely, but their centrality to bylini is consistent. Ilia Muromets is a strong leader and warrior, Dobrynia Nikitich is a knowledgeable and courteous diplomat, and Alyosha Popovich is a cunning trickster.[293] Accordingly, we may understand Gaidar's, Olesha's, and Tolstoi's texts as, like *bylini*, narratives structured around the journeys of historicized heroes.

Further, Propp writes that "musical, vocal performance is so essential to [epic poetry] that works not meant to be sung do not qualify as epic."[294] As Liberman notes in his critical introduction to Propp, this claim is perhaps too strong, as a *bylina* remains a *bylina* whether it is read or heard, and not all peasant singers set them to music.[295] Even so, Propp is correct to note that *bylini* retain significant markers of orality and poetry, many of which have also appeared in each children's text examined thus far.[296] All four works feature a great deal of alliteration, rhyme, and vivid imagery in what one might understand as a form of *skaz*, a form of writing that imitates a spontaneous spoken narrative.[297] Indeed, *Voennaia taina* introduces "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" as an oral text. Al'ka learns it from his father and tells it to Natka, who then memorizes it and recounts it to her students the next day.[298] *Buratino* occasionally addresses its young reader directly, as if it was written to be read aloud. It is no accident that children's poetry enjoyed great popularity alongside socialist fantasia prose in the early Soviet period and long afterward.

---

[293] Bailey and Ivanovna, introduction to *Anthology*, xxiii.
[294] Propp, "Introduction," 150.
[295] Liberman, introduction to *Theory and History*, lxxi.
[296] Liberman, introduction to *Theory and History*, lxxi.
[297] "Skaz," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (September 1, 1999). https://www.britannica.com/art/skaz.
[298] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 189-192.

Propp never explains his third condition — that *bylini* employ a distinctive poetics — in depth, but his fourth criterion is particularly instructive.[299] He and many others argue that most heroes of *bylini* struggle for a collective ideal, such as the defense of Kyiv[300] or Russian identity, that reflects some combination of the text's setting, the context in which it is being told, and the context in which it was composed.[301] Every hero seen thus far in Olesha, Gaidar, and Tolstoi, of course, is at base inspired by such collective ideals, which are a key aspect of their virtue of transnational solidarity. Prospero, Mal'chish-Kibal'chish, Buratino, and Natka are particularly strong examples. That said, the hero's enactment of a struggle based on such collective ideals shifts somewhat between *bylini* and socialist fantasia texts, and Propp's ideological analysis of the heroic epic tradition indicates how we should understand the same elements in early Soviet literature. In one *bylina* of the Kyivan cycle, for instance, Dobrynia Nikitich leaves Kyiv to fight a dragon after it abducts Prince Vladimir's niece. Nikitich's courage, patriotism, and diplomatic courtesy are set in sharp contrast to Vladimir's passivity and harshness, but his enemy is still the dragon.[302]

It is worth noting that Propp sees Vladimir as an antagonist in virtue of his cruelty and authority. He writes that "in the later bylina [Vladimir] is described not only as a statesman: the people depict his depravity, show him as a vicious despot, an abject human being who despises all morals…social injustice is represented as a vice, as a moral evil."[303] Propp conflates the story's "resonating background" with its villain, but this fusion actually occurs in *Tri tolstiaka*,

---

[299] Propp, "Introduction," 161.
[300] Alex Alexander, *Bylina and Fairy Tale: The Origins of Russian Heroic Poetry* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973), 110.
[301] Propp, "Introduction," 162; 149.
[302] "Dobrynya and the Dragon," trans. James Bailey and Tatyana Ivanovna, in *An Anthology of Russian Folk Epics*, ed. James Bailey and Tatyana Ivanovna, 84-97 (Armonk, N.Y.: Routledge, 1998).
[303] Propp, *Russkii geroicheskii epos*, 388, qtd. in Liberman, introduction to *Theory and History*, lxxiii-lxxiv.

"Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," Buratino, and *Voennaia taina*. Prospero, Tibul, Gaspar, and Suok's virtues become most apparent in their journeys to fight the Three Fat Men, whose ideology and vices stand in direct opposition to their own. Indeed, the passage of the text in which their collectivist ideals are most clearly articulated is Prospero's threatening speech before the oligarchs.[304] Similarly, Mal'chish-Kibal'chish's transnational solidarity becomes apparent during his conflict with the bourgeois army, while his courage and integrity are emphasized through his opposition to Mal'chish-Plokhish. Vladik and Al'ka could not have demonstrated their own heroic virtues without the treacherous workmen as foils. Buratino's marionette revolution takes place against the backdrop of Karabas Barabas's exploitation, which receives explicit support from the bourgeois ruler of the City of Fools. To conclude, then — with respect to their vestigial orality, their heroic structure, their historicization of heroes, and the roots of their heroes' motivations in collective ideals, socialist fantasia children's texts share many formal characteristics with *bylini.* At the same time, their fusion of the resonating background with the villain begins to establish their version of the hero's journey as distinctively Soviet.

The picture becomes clearer still on comparing the form of these texts with the canonical conceptions of the hero's journey, also known as the monomyth, of Joseph Campbell, David Adams Leeming, and Christopher Vogler. They and many other theorists of the monomyth divide the concept into three acts. The first of these is the departure, during which the hero is called to leave home on a quest and prepares to do so. Next follows the initiation, the hero's transformation through a set of trials before they achieve their goal. Finally, the return sees the hero overcome doubt and further trials to return home with their triumph.[305] Scholars differ on

---

[304] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka,* 40.

[305] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), ix-x.

the stages within each act — Campbell names seventeen, Vogler twelve,[306] and Leeming[307] eight — but generally agree that they are not always present in the same order or at all.[308] Further, all scholars understand the monomyth as centered on one central hero. On the surface, this reflects the hero-centric *bylini* forms reappearing in socialist fantasia texts, particularly "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish." Its general, flexible stages also lend themselves well to adaptation and rearrangement, just as has been the case with fairy tales. The correspondence breaks down, however, in the contexts of *Tri tolstiaka* and *Voennaia taina*, as both texts replace one hero with three or four who can only succeed in their shared quest as a group.

Though their terminology differs, Campbell, Vogler, and Leeming conceive of the departure as beginning in an ordinary world, continuing with an initially-refused call to adventure and preparation by a mentor or magic to heed it, and culminating in the transversal of a threshold.[309] "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" and *Voennaia taina* each exemplify this progression, albeit with certain caveats. Mal'chish and his family initially enjoy an explicitly ordinary life: "there was peace in the wide fields, in the green meadows… no one to bow down to. All you had to do was live and work—a good life!"[310] He initially does not heed the call to adventure on the horseman's first and second visits, but he immediately takes up arms upon seeing an old man, a mentor figure, try but fail to lift his rifle.[311] Similarly, Natka begins *Voennaia taina* as an ordinary high school graduate in a train. Her uncle's exhortations to educate the Young Pioneers quickly overcome her reluctance to help, and she exits her train to do just that. Still, neither

---

[306] Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, 3rd ed. (Michael Wiese Productions, 2007), vi.
[307] David Adams Leeming, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero,* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7-8.
[308] See, for example, Campbell, *Hero,* 59.
[309] Campbell, *Hero,* 51, 59, 69, 77, 90.
[310] Gaidar, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," 123.
[311] Gaidar, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," 124-126.

Natka nor Mal'chish refuse their respective calls to adventure in the strict sense. Natka has already committed to work at the camp, and Mal'chish tries to join the battle on the horseman's first two visits but is prevented by his family. None of the four heroes of *Tri tolstiaka* express reluctance to resist the Three Fat Men, and neither does Buratino in his quest. Though they occasionally exhibit fear, there is a sense of the inexorable to the departure in each text. As Prospero makes clear in his warning to the oligarchs, vowing that their exploitative economy will necessarily doom them, the fulfillment of the hero's journey writ large is figured as inevitable on the basis of social conditions.[312] The departure becomes teleological, reflecting Karl Marx's dialectical materialist vision of history as inescapably driven toward communism by successive socioeconomic conflicts.[313]

Campbell, Vogler, and Leeming's most radical differences occur in their conceptions of the initiation, but broadly speaking, they each see it as progressing through a "road of trials" introducing enemies, allies, temptations, and helpful items to the hero.[314] The hero then reaches a seat of power, undergoes a climactic ordeal, and wins a reward.[315] Again, Mal'chish's story exemplifies this act quite clearly. After leaving home, he embarks on a dangerous campaign against the bourgeouins, winning allies, overcoming challenges in battle, and suffering the betrayal of Mal'chish-Plokhish. The bourgeouins then take the captured Mal'chish to their castle, where he undergoes a dramatic interrogation before the Head Bourgeouin and wins the day for the Red Army. Natka, too, endures trials and travails with the students, the thieving workmen, and the inefficient camp administrators before helping Al'ka and Vladik through the frenetic

---

[312] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 40.
[313] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ernest Untermann (United States: Modern Library, 1906), 25-26.
[314] Campbell, *Hero*, 97.
[315] Campbell, *Hero*, 109, 130-131, 176.

period of the former's disappearance and the latter's apparent rule-breaking. Each initiation roughly corresponds to Campbell's expectations. That said, each hero's quest, struggle, and subsequent growth occur in terms of their struggle to develop and deploy the virtues of socialist humanism against class enemies. Natka's example is particularly instructive on this count. Each text also, as we have seen, fuses its resonating backgrounds with its villains. Most importantly, the ordeal tends to end in victory through martyrdom, sacrifice, or loss, whereby self-sacrifice displaces success in combat as the ultimate heroic act. Mal'chish, Al'ka, and Tub, for instance, grant their compatriots and their communities the rewards of liberation by dying. The heroes' sacrifices, no matter their agency therein, become an inspiration to develop virtue.

The final act, the return, is the most consistent of the three among Campbell's, Vogler's, and Leeming's paradigms, but its incarnation in the socialist fantasia diverges more sharply from the monomyth than do the other stages. In the monomyth, the hero returns home from the ordeal with the spoils of victory, although they often do so reluctantly and amid further trials.[316] The hero then undergoes a sort of resurrection and rebirth as they return home, completing their growth and attaining new power before finding personal freedom and peace.[317] Here we should note several major departures from the structure of the hero's journey. Whereas the return in the latter often comprises an act in its own right or more, making up nearly all of Homer's *Odyssey*, it is sharply abbreviated in all four stories analyzed here. Each one ends abruptly after its bourgeois villain is defeated. There are neither any further trials nor any reluctance to return home, because the successful revolution is figured as final and unquestionably desirable. The hero themself may have even died in the course of the ordeal, meaning that their victory often

[316] Campbell, *Hero*, 193, 197, 207, 217.
[317] Campbell, *Hero*, 229, 243.

leads to a reward for and the resurrection of a broader collective for which they had fought, such as through military victory, revolution, or the construction of communism. Mal'chish-Kibal'chish, Al'ka, and Tub are martyred for this purpose. Consequently, the socialist hero returns not to their previously ordinary world, but to a more just, peaceful way of ordinary life. *Tri tolstiaka*, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," and *Buratino* end in revolutions of varying size, and *Voennaia taina* sees the dawn of the generation of the builders of communism.

As Alex Alexander argues in his study of the origins of Russian epic poetry, the finality of death distinguishes return acts in *bylini* from those of fairy tales: "the *bylina* does not use the fairy-tale motif of death and revival; when death occurs, it is an end to human existence."[318] The difference, he contends, stems from the text's need "to strengthen the quality of believability."[319] Even as the hero's martyrdom for the collective heightens the virtue of transnational solidarity in their character, then, their death in the process helps to realize and historicize that virtue for the reader. Death is final and furthers a sense of reality in the *bylina* return but engenders magical rebirth in the fairy-tale. Consequently, we can understand the individual martyrdom-collective resurrection phenomenon as a compromise between the two genres.

All told, we can understand the formal aspect of the socialist fantasia as a socialist humanist hero's journey. The form features one or multiple heroes who embark on a quest. In the departure, the hero begins in an ordinary yet imperfect world, overcomes ignorance or limited reluctance to heed an inexorable call to adventure, receives help from a mentor, and crosses a threshold. The initiation then sees the hero progress through a "road of trials," reach a seat of power, undergo a climactic ordeal in combat with a villain who is also an ideological resonating

[318] Alexander, *Bylina*, 107.
[319] Alexander, *Bylina*, 106.

background, and win a reward for the collective, often through martyrdom, sacrifice, or loss. In the abbreviated return, the hero's sacrifice confers a reward on the collective for which they had fought as the text returns, without further trials or reluctance, to a more just, even utopian "ordinary" state. As we have seen, *Tri tolstiaka,* "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," *Voennaia taina,* and *Buratino* all evince this form with minimal variations. To be sure, this version of the monomyth is derived from a very limited set of texts, and even these do not consistently feature every element of it in the same way, if at all. Even so, it remains an instructive framework with which to understand the socialist fantasia, its formal manifestation in specific literary texts, and the character of the hero.

Utopian Hope, the Eternalized Carnival, and Narrative Gaps

As a consequence, we may understand each text as the story of heroes who preserve and then realize hope for the collective. In contrast to Zipes's view that critical engagement with fairy tales and their reincarnations "might enable people to distribute and share their experiences to undermine conformity," these texts are imbued with hope for a utopian conformity.[320] *Tri tolstiaka* is a particularly instructive example of this process, as when a crowd flocks to Gaspar Arneri for protection as the first rebellion fails.[321] When Gaspar later finds Suok, she has maintained her anger at the present injustice and her hope for a better future despite being sold to a circus years earlier, singing "a song about a pie that would rather burn in the oven than go into the stomach of a fat nobleman."[322] Neither imprisonment nor defeat ever faze Tibul and Prospero. As we have seen, the four revolutionaries' hopes are realized and eternalized in the form of the liminal twilight of the carnival by the end of the story. Hope in *Tri tolstiaka* thereby

[320] Zipes, *Happily Ever After,* 140.
[321] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka,* 10.
[322] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka,* 86.

reinforces conformity to the utopianism of Marxism-Leninism for its characters and its readers alike, and the details of that realized hope are explicated in very little detail. The plot ends with the revolution's victory, and the epilogue largely serves to confirm its success. The eternalized twilight of the carnival reigns, but its everyday character is a mystery. Even the merits and character of that hope are absent from the text. Indeed, the only appearance of the word *nadezhda* (hope) in the novel describes Gaspar's annoyance at missing his dinner.[323]

Zipes's notion of fantastic hope accordingly does not apply in the Soviet context, but his articulation of it in terms of "gaps" warrants further exploration. Hope in *Tri tolstiaka* becomes a locus of indefinition, an ill-defined future that, in erasing its past save for the still-ridiculed Three Fat Men, remains radically uncertain through the end of the story. The details are left up to the reader's imagination, and the same is true in all of the other texts analyzed here. The worker-owned marionette theater in *Buratino*, the dawn of the builders of communism in *Voennaia taina*, and world revolution in "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" form liminal, eternalized carnivals for young readers to specify and concretize for themselves. The unexplained yet open "secrets" key to the realization of this utopia in each case foreground this invitation, as they are left to the reader to define. Similarly, the story's articulation in the idiom of the fantastic confers on young readers an opportunity and an inspiration to recombine and reuse its components as they sees fit. More broadly still, phenomenological gaps also inhere in each aspect of the idiom of the fantastic. One might imagine a balloon filled with boiling milk, for instance, in many different ways. The stories' deidentified worlds lack distinguishing characteristics; more strikingly still, their instances of technologized magic and their initial social relations lack explanations. At the narrative and rhetorical levels, each text at hand features significant phenomenological gaps that,

[323] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 82.

as is the case in fairy tales, offer the mesmerized reader opportunities to fill in the blanks as they imagine their way through the story and its world.

To better understand these gaps and the ensuing relationship between the reader and the text, we now turn to the realm of reader-response theories and their ongoing debates. As Elizabeth Freund observes in her introduction to the approach, the basic project of reader-response criticism is to "narrativize, characterize and personify or otherwise objectify the reading experience and its conditions."[324] This often means guessing at the real reader's reactions or constructing an ideal reader from the text.[325] The critic must also contend with the project's inherent instability, which Freund perceives as fatal. Either the reader dominates over the text or the text determines the reader, which destabilizes "the distinction between the objective and subjective, between the literary fact… and the interpretive act" to which reader-response criticisms aspire.[326] In this, she and other skeptics of the orientation err on two counts. First, the objective-subjective dichotomy they often emphasize is flawed. The perceptions and values that we label subjective are empirically demonstrable, and they merge with reality outside of the mind through the actions they inspire. This is always the case in reading, as the objectively present text furnishes its subjective ideas and values to the reader, from which the latter generates subjective perceptions that, in turn, affect objective reality. Second, reader-response criticism emphasizes freedom, however conditional, in the reading process. It exists, therefore, to honor that destabilization's crucial role in reading and explain the reader-text relationship that it reflects. These qualities in turn establish it as uniquely suited to understand how children might

[324] Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 6.
[325] Freund, *Return*, 7.
[326] Freund, *Return*, 152.

engage with and reuse the transferable elements of the idiom of the fantastic, given the latter's emphases on interconnectedness, unexpected comparisons, and animism.

An exhaustive discussion of reader-response criticisms and of narrative ethics is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, the work of the curiously little-read and oft-maligned[327] reader-response critic Wolfgang Iser, given his extensive work on what he calls narrative gaps, is particularly well-suited to elucidate the indeterminacies of Olesha's, Gaidar's, and Tolstoi's works and the moral consequences thereof. Iser and the school of *Rezeptionsästhetik* to which he belonged propose the "implied reader" as "a network of response-inviting structures…the real reader is always offered a particular role to play, and it is this role that constitutes…the implied reader."[328] For example, the reader of Vladimir Nabokov's metafictional novel *Pale Fire* is offered many competing clues as to the identity of the text's narrator,[329] and the fictional poet whose work the latter edits invites the reader to find joy in the hunt for the correct piece of the puzzle.[330] Iser names these engaging uncertainties narrative gaps. In *The Act of Reading*, he writes that "the lack of any connecting reference" in a text "produces a gap between… different [narrative] elements, and this can only be filled by the reader's imagination."[331] In this sense, Iser's theory best accounts for the tension between the interactive, affective aspect of children's reading and its dependence on social, familial, and cultural context. As he writes, "the situation and conventions regulate the manner in which gaps are filled, but the gaps in turn arise out of

---

[327] Freund, *Return*, 147.

[328] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 34-35. See also: Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

[329] See, for example, Nabokov's short story "Signs and Symbols" and Alexander Dolinin, "The Signs and Symbols in Nabokov's "Signs and Symbols," in *Anatomy of a Short Story: Nabokov's Puzzles, Codes, "Signs and Symbols,"* ed. Yuri Leving (New York: Continuum, 2012).

[330] Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 62-63.

[331] Iser, *Act*, 84.

contingency and inexperienceability and, consequently, function as a basic inducement" to imagine.[332] In conversation with the components of the idiom of the fantastic, which leave so many gaps unfilled, young readers heed exactly this "inducement" to imagine.

In his early essay "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," Iser points toward but does not follow to the end the philosophical insights that will complete the picture. "The convergence of the text and the reader," he writes, creates "the virtual dimension of the text…the coming together of text and imagination."[333] Following his thought, we may suggest that in picturing aspects of the text in this virtual space, the reader creates a definite, virtual interaction with a text while preserving a rich multiplicity of imaginative possibilities.[334] What, exactly, is this virtual space? In terms of the present study, I will suggest that it facilitates readers' exploration, further expanding the role of the idiom of the fantastic.

For the French phenomenologist Gilles Deleuze, virtuality denotes a multiplicity of possibilities that prefigure not what is real, but what is actual.[335] In more concrete terms, the child's experience of reading is virtual in that they imagine the characters and events of the story as fuzzy, indeterminate, shifting images. All of the infinite images that they could latch on to are already objectively-subjectively real, but because the child is not watching the images on a screen or a stage, they are not yet actual. Though the reader then develops an actual mental image, such "incompossibles" are simultaneously present to them. These Deleuze defines in an earlier work as the real "series that diverge…monads of which each expresses a world different

---

[332] Iser, *Act*, 166.
[333] Iser, "Reading Process," 279; 284.
[334] Iser, "Reading Process," 288.
[335] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 100.

from the other (Caesar the emperor and Adam the nonsinner)."[336] Deleuze's virtual is less a heuristic methodology for thinking about how one thinks when reading, as Iser would have it, than a register of experience that the child is particularly apt to employ while reading.[337]

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze explains the process of engaging this experiential register. We resolve the fuzzy visualizations that we see in reading by resolving or integrating the virtual field of "multiplicities" with which the text presents us, thereby changing those multiplicities themselves via "counter-effectuation."[338] Though literary interpretation is far from his concern, Deleuze hints at this application of his work when he writes that "perhaps the highest object of art is to bring into play simultaneously all these… divergences and decentrings; to embed them in one another and to envelop one or the other in illusions the 'effect' of which varies in each case."[339] To be sure, the typical child reading *Tri tolstiaka* would not be led to confront the presence of incompossibles and dissonances in their own experience of reading, as might an adult reading Fyodor Dostoevsky's prose fiction.[340] In any case, my contention is that in reading a text, the child engages in a reciprocally effective "play of difference" in the Deleuzian virtual register.[341] In the context of *Tri tolstiaka* and the other works of the socialist fantasia, the tools that they use to do so constitute the idiom of the fantastic.

---

[336] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, ed. and trans. Tom Conley (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 60.

[337] Also particularly illustrative of this concept is the philosopher Susanne Langer's earlier notion of virtuality, which she understands as a materially bound space created by the artist in which a contemplative interaction between the viewer and the art occurs. See Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form* (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 114-115.

[338] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 1994), 281.

[339] Deleuze, *Difference*, 281.

[340] See especially Greta Matzner-Gore, Dostoevsky *and the Ethics of Narrative Form: Suspense, Closure, Minor Characters* (Northwestern University Press, 2020), 12-13.

[341] Deleuze, *Difference*, 300.

At the same time, these texts offer a very constrained morality to the reader. The characters around whom all four narratives are structured, as we have seen, are characterized by a consistent set of virtues developed in contrast to the vices of the hero's resonating background. There are no intermediates between Mal'chish-Kibal'chish and Mal'chish-Plokhish or between Buratino and Karabas Barabas. The choice is a binary one between good and evil, virtue and vice, an absolute faith in the dictates of socialist humanism or an absolute opposition to it that threatens the joyful, utopian ending. It is no accident that each of the texts analyzed thus far echoes religious devotion and martyrdom, whether directly in the Judas-Christ opposition of "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" or more indirectly in self-sacrifice for a truth that will engender collective salvation in *Buratino*. To fully enjoy the possibilities of the Deleuzian virtual register, the child must embrace this dichotomy in socialist ethics. Consequently, in view of the socialist humanist hero's journey and the young reader's engagement with the narrative gaps offered by these texts, the next section explores how the texts of the socialist fantasia situate the young reader within this moral-ideological dynamic.

The Once (and Future?) Ideological Lebenswelt

> "And therefore I raise my glass to you, writers, the engineers of the human soul." [342]
>
> — Joseph Stalin

The answer to this question derives from the relationship between Stalinism and the representation of integrity via the motif of sacred secrets. Al'ka, Mal'chish, and Gaspar all keep major secrets under duress, and Buratino safeguards his golden key and the location of the door that it opens. At base, a secret is a concentration of epistemological power in one individual,

[342] Joseph Stalin, "Speech at the home of Maxim Gorky" (26 October 1932), qtd. in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), 137.

knowledge that empowers its holder and their allies in virtue of its exclusivity. Buratino, for example, leads Karabas Barabas on a wild goose chase and secures the new marionette theatre for his friends by refusing to tell anyone about his key or the door's location. Dishonesty with everyone but his comrades is inherent to his persona; when Papa Carlo is carving him, "his nose began to stretch and grow… [it] remained a long, long, curious, sharp nose."[343] Similarly, the purpose of the cult of personality surrounding Stalin was, per Schöpflin, "to reinforce the message that all truth stemmed from the single leader, that he had heroic, superhuman qualities incorporating wisdom, knowledge and control of the future."[344] Stalin is figured as the sole possessor of secrets and their associated power, and through interrogations, show trials, and the like, all others must publicly confess their own secrets.[345] To the list of literary features heightening aspects of Stalinist ideology, then, we should add that secrets instantiate Stalinist epistemological totalitarianism in each text.[346] This explains, for example, how "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" prepares its readers to fight and suffer for their country so uncritically, for the sacred, undisclosed secret. This devotion derives from the binary opposition of virtue to vice in all four texts and the pseudo-religious dimension of the choice between the two.

It also points us once again toward the notion of grantedness, which concentrates epistemological power outside the reader. One must simply accept as true what the narrator says to be the case about the world of the story. The text naturalizes for the reader not only the pseudo-magical elements of the texts' fantastic content, but also the dialectical materialist perspective on history and the above aspects of Stalinist ideology. I contend that we may

---

[343] Tolstoi, *Buratino*, 13.
[344] Schöpflin, *Politics*, 95.
[345] Schöpflin, *Politics*, 95.
[346] It is worth noting that each of these themes also appears in the *novini* of the mid- and late 1930s, often in explicit connection to Stalin. See Miller, "Image," 56.

therefore understand the text as constructing for the reader what the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl terms a *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld). For Husserl, a *Lebenswelt* is a world of what is given that "is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this 'living together.'"[347] It "is a realm of original self-evidences," the set of ways in which all members of a cultural, political, or linguistic group structure the world into, for lack of a better term, self-evident objective objects.[348] *Lebenswelte* are reductive, in that they mythologize aspects of reality as eternal, and therefore also inherently ideological. In the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser's terms, they interpellate individuals living in exploitative labor and social relations as subjects and provide an "absolute guarantee that everything really is so."[349] They thereby promise that as long as "the subjects recognize what they are" — in Gaidar and Tolstoi's terms, as long as they understand the importance of protecting the "secret" — "everything will be all right."[350]

A complete account of the notion of a *Lebenswelt* is beyond the scope of this inquiry. Even so, the concept accounts well for the ways in which the semi-mythic chronotope, setting, and rhetorical strategies of the socialist fantasia structure an ideological world along with the reader. The fact that all of *Buratino*'s positive characters will never become more than happy marionettes is no accident. They are quite literally objects suffering exploitation that are then interpellated as speaking, thinking subjects, subverting the *Unheimliche*, but the fact that they nevertheless remain marionettes highlights ideology's ongoing control over their actions. As

---

[347] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, ed. and trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 108.
[348] Husserl, *Crisis*, 127; 138-141.
[349] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 180-181.
[350] Althusser, "Ideology," 181.

Lipovetsky puts it in his chapter on *Buratino*, this results in a "paradoxical if not oxymoronic utopia of the free marionette."[351]

Further, the Kingdom of Tarabar, which rules Carlo's city, the Land of the Fools, the swamp, and the forest, is home to many different species and social classes in *Buratino*, but all of its inhabitants have definite roles in the same exploitative, class-based social order. In turn, the text's semi-mythic temporality mythologizes this order's transformation into a collective, carnivalesque utopia as natural, predictable, desirable, and perfectly rational.[352] Lipovetsky hints at this when he notes in the context of *Buratino* that "the totality of myth is the source of totalitarian power."[353] As is the case with Stalinism's effort to preclude the retreat into private, non-political life, ideology penetrates every rhetorical, temporal, aretaic, and spatial aspect of the text, and the text naturalizes this as a Stalinist, Russian socialist *Lebenswelt*. In Zipes's words, it "insinuates itself into [readers'] lives as 'natural history.'"[354]

To recall, the implied reader of Buratino is interactive, emulatory, and growth-oriented, and the same is true in each of the other texts. For instance, *Tri tolstiaka* begins with a direct reminder to the reader that Gaspar should be admired for his morality and his scholarly prowess, not any illusions of wizardry.[355] *Voennaia taina* advocates this mode of interaction with the socialist fantasia by showing us readers, these being Al'ka, Natka, and the latter's students, who are transfixed by the story of Mal'chish-Kibal'chish,[356] draw inspiration from it,[357] and joyfully

[351] Lipovetsky, *Charms*, 141.
[352] Tolstoi, *Buratino*, 111.
[353] Lipovetsky, *Charms*, 147.
[354] Zipes, *Happily Ever After*, 73.
[355] Olesha, *Tri tolstiaka*, 7.
[356] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 200.
[357] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 257.

emulate its heroes.[358] In this way, just as it is for the implied reader in *Buratino*, the story's world is naturalized for them. Further, Balina correctly contrasts Buratino's active truth-seeking with Mal'chish-Kibal'chish's passive acceptance of what adults tell him, but, as we have seen, his story inspires Vladik and Natka in *Voennaia taina* to discover integrity and a vocation, respectively.[359] In *Tri tolstiaka*, Suok and Tutti both seek and discover painful truths about the Three Fat Men and their oligarchy.

Given that all four stories feature interactive, emulatory, and growth-oriented implied readers, their hero-centered structure suggests that the *Lebenswelt* concept can also explain the formative terms in which that implied reader, constructed by the text, interacts with their exemplaristic heroes. If we understand the text's *Lebenswelt* as a "realm of original self-evidences," structuring its social system as self-evident, we may understand the characters' interactions with each other and the implied reader as what Husserl terms an intersubjective encounter. In it, one "experience[s] the world" not as one's "private synthetic formation but as other than [one's] alone (*mir fremde*)... actually there for everyone, accessible in respect of its Objects to everyone."[360] A simpler, albeit reductive, way to describe the experience would be empathy, understanding how and why someone else feels or acts from that individual's perspective. When one meets with an Other resembling oneself in some way, Husserl argues, one will generally ascribe subjectivity to that Other immediately and without cognitive deliberation, or "appresentatively."[361] In other words, their subjectivity is taken as natural, as given, its premises shared and taken for granted.

---

[358] Gaidar, "Voennaia taina," 205.
[359] Balina, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 112.
[360] Italics mine. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960), 91.
[361] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 119.

The central, exemplaristic, often young heroes in each text examined thus far are ideal candidates for this Other. The reader fills the text's Iserian narrative gaps in terms of the heroes' given subjectivity and therefore in an intersubjective sense. This is heightened in each text examined thus far by the explicit and implicit interaction between the narrator and the implied subject, as well as the similarities between the idiom of the fantastic and the young reader's distinctively childlike cognition. In short, the text's ideological *Lebenswelt* becomes a substrate of grantedness that, via the intersubjective, exemplaristic encounter with the hero, the implied reader begins to replicate in their own life. As timeless and placeless, moreover, the idiom of the fantastic is especially well-suited for co-optation in this enterprise. If that idiom dominates the content of a text and the ideology that is taken for granted structures the form, the result is an appealing mythologization of a collectively inherent world in which Stalinist ideology is ubiquitous and self-evident in virtue of its perfection. The freedom to experiment during and after reading that it promises is ultimately illusory.

Did these four texts and others like them create genuine Builders of Communism and reliably establish their real, not implied, readers in a Stalinist *Lebenswelt*? This is primarily a historical and sociological question on which, as we have seen, data is scant. Indeed, as Schöpflin finds, the broader social project of Stalinism doomed itself to obedience rather than true belief by relying on fear to enforce its dictates.[362] That said, the longevity and popularity of *Buratino*, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," and *Tri tolstiaka* beyond their original texts and authors suggests that this project did not entirely fail. As Goering finds, the character of Buratino retains significant popularity in Russia, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe today through contemporary media and even commercial products like soft drinks, much of which derives from nostalgia for

[362] Schöpflin, *Politics*, 102.

the Soviet Union.[363] The popular Russian game show *Pole chudes* [Field of Miracles], for instance, takes its name from the field where Buratino loses his four gold pieces.[364] In the nine decades since its release, *Tri tolstiaka* has inspired cartoons, comics, films, an opera, and even a video game. Children still read "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" in Russian public schools. Even if the fantastic content of these stories has had a much more prolonged and significant social impact, it remains linked to the socialist realist form and the *Lebenswelt* generated at the intersection of the two.

Buratino in particular has been adapted for the stage, the screen, and other media many times, often far beyond the period of the socialist fantasia. As Lipovetsky notes, the text "remains an inexhaustible source of creative fantasy," generating a plethora of fan-fiction, a popular rock song, a museum, a new theatrical adaptation, and even the name of a rocket launcher used in Chechnya.[365] It is curious, however, that this leads Lipovetsky to conclude that Buratino "is the most *non-ideological* character in Soviet culture—utterly disconnected from all social and political models" despite his embodiment of the virtues of socialist humanism, his socialist humanist hero's journey, and his text's interest in constructing a Stalinist *Lebenswelt*.[366] By contrast, Balina notes that each successive adaptation of the text makes its ideological message more direct.[367] In the 1938 play staged by Natalia Satz and the Central Children's Theater, for example, Papa Carlo speaks about a faraway country where everyone lives in

---

[363] Laura Goering, "Marketing Soviet Nostalgia: The Many Faces of Buratino," *Gastronomica* 17, no. 4 (November 1, 2017): 88. https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2017.17.4.88. See also Petrovskii, "Chto otpiraet 'Zolotoi kliuchik'?", 220.
[364] Lipovetsky, *Charms*, 129.
[365] Lipovetsky, *Charms*, 130.
[366] Lipovetsky, *Charms*, 131.
[367] Balina, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 111.

comfort, after which Artemon looks into the audience and declares that said country is the Soviet Union.[368]

In this way, the cultural history of *Buratino* epitomizes what Zipes understands to be the two ways in which fairy tales are co-opted by ideology. On the one hand, the culture industry or a government can rewrite a text to socialize readers or viewers according to an ideology or a profit motive. It is perhaps telling that Zipes's example is the Disney version of *Pinocchio*.[369] On the other hand, future storytellers can "liberate [themselves] and others through a genuine exchange of freedom… the storyteller knows [they are] free to subvert."[370] To conclude that the first method has facilitated the second in the case of *Buratino* would not be far-fetched, as can be seen in the expression "strana durakov" [Land of the Fools], a Perestroika-era derogatory term for the Soviet sociocultural landscape.[371] Some rewritings of and references to the story project its *Lebenswelt* into the future or hearken back to it, such as the various adaptations during Stalin's rule, the soft-drink brand, and the eponymous rocket launcher, while others draw on the original to escape or criticize that *Lebenswelt*. Today, in Vladimir Putin's Russia, the political and corporate "shapers" of childhood "rely ever more heavily on [these] past ideological models," as Rudova puts it.[372] As we have seen, the other three texts have had similar histories of cooptation from video games and operas to films and school curricula, stretching from the early Soviet period into the present day. It is left to today's educators, consumers, scholars, and policymakers to interrogate and understand these histories.

---

[368] Balina, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 111.
[369] Zipes, *Happily Ever After*, 86-87.
[370] Zipes, *Happily Ever After*, 139.
[371] Lipovetsky, *Charms*, 128.
[372] Rudova, introduction to *Historical and Cultural Transformations*, 11.

Conclusions

Tri tolstiaka, "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," *Voennaia taina*, and *Buratino* have demonstrated that the socialist fantasia of 1924-1936 reflects the virtues of socialist humanism through its form, even as its content evokes fairy tales' magic, improbable characters, and feudal settings. I have understood this as an idiom of the fantastic, a set of rhetorical strategies inherited from fairy tales comprising fantastic, realized comparisons, the story's interconnected world, its deidentification, and its magical subversion of the *Unheimliche*. These features appeal to children by mimicking their metaphoric, carnivalistic, interconnected, animistic mode of perception, and they are loosely linked through the carnivalesque and naturalized magic. The socialist fantasia also features a consistent form evoking the *bylini* of the Kyivan Cycle. The hero in these texts, whether collective or individual, fills three roles — the martyr, the leader, and the fighter — and exhibits four virtues — atheism, integrity, courage, and transnational solidarity. Such heroes are then centered in a relatively consistent socialist humanist hero's journey. This begins with a departure to heed an inexorable call to adventure, proceeds to an initiation set against an ideological resonating background, and ends with a quick return to a more just, even utopian "ordinary" state thanks to the hero's sacrifice for the collective.

Further, both the idiom of the fantastic and the socialist humanist form create narrative gaps — through fantastic comparisons, the utopian carnivalesque return, ill-defined revolutionary hope, and the motif of the pseudo-secret — that invite the reader to imagine their way through the story and its world. The resulting implied reader becomes interactive, emulatory, growth-oriented, and, eventually, indoctrinated. Many of the same factors responsible for creating these narrative gaps echo Stalinism's doctrine of perfection with respect to the individual and the surrounding world, engendering a culture of suspicion and epistemological

totalitarianism. Narrative grantedness allows the text to naturalize this ideology in tandem with the idiom of the fantastic by facilitating the reader's appresentative intersubjective engagement with the text's hero. The result is an appealing mythologization of a collectively inherent world resembling Husserl's notion of the *Lebenswelt* or lifeworld. In this fictional construction, Stalinist ideology is ubiquitous, self-evident in virtue of its perfection, unrelenting in its call for personal sacrifice, and ripe for illusory experimentation before and after reading.

The End of the Socialist Fantasia and Directions for Future Research

The period of the socialist fantasia came to a rapid end shortly after the publication of *Buratino*. Socialist realism became official doctrine at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934, and its dictates gradually took root over the next two years.[373] Gorkii had "rehabilitated" the fairy tale in his address at the same event, but artistic freedoms were drastically curtailed on the advent of Stalin's Great Terror in 1936, just months after Tolstoi's novel was published.[374] From that year until Stalin's death, the study and practice of both children's literature and folklore were harshly scrutinized, beginning with the scandal surrounding Dem'ian Bednii's 1936 comic opera *Bogatyri*. The play satirizes the heroes of *bylini*, which contravened what Stalin called a new policy of respect[375] for Russia's ancient cultural heritage.[376] The backlash swept up not only the historicist folklorists whose belief in the aristocratic origins of epic poetry had informed the play's satire, but also many other writers who

[373] C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan U.K., 1973), 35.
[374] John Archibald Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered*, 1933-1938 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 25.
[375] In many ways, this proceeded from the violent, genocidal Russification policies that had killed millions in Ukraine's *Holodomor*, Kazakhstan's *Asharshylyk*, and other hunger crimes just a few years earlier and that would continue for decades afterward. See, for example, Alex de Waal, *Mass starvation: The history and future of famine*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2017).
[376] Miller, "Image," 52-53.

adapted and referenced folklore as well.[377] Rather than supporting socialist humanism, folklore itself became an aspect of Stalin's Russification campaign. Even outwardly non-ideological children's fairy stories published during Stalin's rule after this point in fact served this purpose. As Oinas notes, Gorkii's 1934 proclamation that folklore was primarily a creation of the working people became powerful fuel for this fire.[378]

Along with the backlash against folkloristics, two other factors contributed to the end of the socialist fantasia in the late 1930s. The harsh censorship of the Great Terror was foremost among these. Nevertheless, each of the stories studied thus far received at least one adaptation during this period, many of which foreground ideology far more directly than their original texts. In a time when the slightest verbal misstep could lead to years in a penal colony, sequelizing a text already established as acceptable was far safer than risking the authorities' wrath by experimenting further with magical content. The strictness of socialist realism concurrently reached its peak, and new writers' and artists' organizations came to oversee almost all public creative activity.[379] Journals like *Iozhik* (the Hedgehog), *Detskaia literatura*, *Vanka-vstanka* (The Tumbling Doll), and *Sverchok* (The Cricket), all flourishing centers of fantastic children's stories as late as 1936, contracted sharply or disappeared by the following year.[380] Tolstoi and Gaidar limited themselves to socialist realist fiction and to rewriting their old works, while Olesha would struggle to publish until his death in 1960. Many of the other poets and authors who mixed socialist humanist form with fantastic content, from Daniil Kharms and Samuil Marshak

[377] Howell, *Development*, 376-377.
[378] Oinas, "Folklore and Politics in the Soviet Union," 49.
[379] See Chapter Seven of Hellman's history of Russian children's literature. Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 354-426.
[380] Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 368.

to the other members of OBERIU and almost 100 of the delegates at the 1934 Writers' Congress were arrested, sidelined, or otherwise silenced.[381]

Many popular stories incorporated fantastic motifs and featured heroes during and after the Terror, as Lipovetsky,[382] Balina,[383] and Hellman[384] all note, but none of them feature both a socialist humanist hero's journey and the idiom of the fantastic in its full form. In Gaidar's "The Hot Stone" (1941), an old man refuses the young hero's magical help because the Revolution has already granted him a good life. Others, as Hellman explains, were "*skazy* (true, oral tales) and not *skazki* (fairy tales)" or "fairy tales… without any contemporary association."[385] Still others, most notably Evgenii Shvarts, wrote plays and stories using fairy tales to criticize Stalin or Soviet ideology but struggled to publish or perform them.[386] The situation remained tenuous for decades.

The story most instructive in the end of the socialist fantasia, however, is Gaidar's *Timur i ego komanda* (1940), the story of the boy Timur and his friends' efforts to help others in their village while the men are fighting in World War II. Timur exhibits all of the virtues and roles of the socialist humanist hero, but his novel features no pseudo-secrets or utopian carnivalesque ending. Its temporality is linear, and its setting is not deidentified. The rhetorical features of the idiom of the fantastic are largely absent, from naturalized magic to fantastic comparisons and the subverted *Unheimliche*. Under the external threat of Nazism, the dictates of socialist realism[387]

---

[381] Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 371.
[382] Lipovetsky, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 236.
[383] Balina, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 118.
[384] Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 421-426.
[385] Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, 425. See Pavel Bazhov's *Malakhitovaia shkatulka* (The Malachite Casket) and Valentin Kataev's "Tsvetik-semitsvetik" (The Flower of Seven Colors), respectively.
[386] Lipovetsky, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 236-237. Shvarts's screenplay for the 1947 film *Zolushka*, an adaptation of the fairy tale "Cinderella," was a notable exception.
[387] Morson, "Socialist Realism," 131.

and the mundane privations of the Second World War pulled the genre toward concrete, contemporary problems, acts of patriotism and altruism, and entertainment.

How form, content, and inheritances from folklore in children's literature changed from the Terror onward warrants further study. Future scholarship would do well to explore this question in both descriptive and reader-response terms, particularly given the intensity and longevity of the *Timurovtsi* movement following the publication of Gaidar's novella. How might we describe its form and content, who is its implied reader, and what might account for its effectiveness in shaping its readers' belief and ideology? Alternatively, what might we learn from its history about the relationship between the young reader and the text? Psychoanalysis offers particular promise for this question. For example, Lipovetsky has often argued that fear, foreboding, and disturbing memory in children's stories of the late 1930s and 1940s establish them as windows to or products of the Soviet collective unconscious.[388]

This approach may prove more fruitful still in exploring the roles of collective memory and trauma in shaping the fantastic content and form of children's texts of the so-called Era of Stagnation. For instance, Fyodor Khitruk's Vinni-Pukh (Winnie the Pooh, 1969-1972) cartoons and Yurii Norshtein's wildly popular films "Iozhik v tumane" (The Hedgehog in the Fog, 1975) and *Skazka skazok* (Tale of Tales, 1979) are highly symbolic forays into the multilayered imagination of a child. The latter unfolds like a journey through memory, leaping from one scene to another related only by association. The protagonist, *Seren'kii volchok* (the little gray wolf) warms himself before a dying fire in a decrepit mansion, looks on a woman and her alcoholic husband, and eventually saves an abandoned baby in a forest between scenes of bereaved wives

[388] Lipovetsky, introduction to *Politicizing Magic*, 234; Mark Lipovetsky, "Pavel Bazhov's *Skazy*: Discovering the Soviet Uncanny," in *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (New York: Routledge, 2008), 266.

dancing and soldiers marching off into the darkness.[389] The collective trauma of World War II persists in the psyche of the generations born long after the fighting ended, damaging relationships and poisoning memories, but compassion and exploration provides a poignant route to belonging and love. In "Iozhik v tumane," the titular hedgehog follows a beautiful white horse into a sea of fog but quickly finds himself lost and terrified by apparitions in the haze. All the while, a large, sinister owl surveils the hedgehog as he wanders. Just as he reaches the depths of despair, a mysterious "kto-to" (someone) guides him to his friend *Medvezhonka* (Bear Cub), "and yet… Hedgehog thought of the Horse. How was it there, in the fog…"[390] In this respect, the white horse evokes the mythological figure of Pegasus, who improbably flies amid the world of imagination and creativity. The child's fears are represented as ephemeral visions in the fog even as the real object of his curiosity, the horse, eludes but still inspires him through the end of the film.

Nowhere in either film does there appear a moral exemplar or a hero, and neither is structured according to the hero's journey. Nevertheless, both symbolically explore the imagination and memory of a child, drawing on fantastic imagery, creatures, comparisons, and more to do so. Each of these elements instantiates narrative gaps, as do the protagonists' curiosity and tenuous hope. Along with something resembling the idiom of the fantastic appears a symbolic journey through the unconscious. Future work in this area might therefore study Norshtein's films and other children's texts of the same era through the lens of the large secondary literature on psychoanalytic approaches to folklore, particularly the work of Zipes, Freud, and Bettelheim. Carl Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, along with the

---

[389] *Skazka skazok* [Tale of Tales], directed by Yurii Norshtein (Soiuzmul'tfil'm, 1979), video, 24:32-27:08. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAw6r9-BIt8.

[390] "Iozhik v tumane" [Hedgehog in the Fog], directed by Yurii Norshtein (Soiuzmul'tfil'm, 1975), video, 9:42-9:53. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThmaGMgWRlY.

scholarship of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann on collective memory, should prove especially illuminating. Similarly, the philosopher Susanne Langer's theory of art's influence on the mind with respect to the human need to create and interpret symbols should assist in illustrating how symbolism mediates the reader-text relationship in Norshtein's films.[391] Of particular interest is her notion of presentation symbolization, wherein an element in a work of art, such as a flower in a painting, has specific meaning only in relation to the rest of the work.[392] This theory leads Langer to contest the practice of abstracting form from content, suggesting that future work in this vein might move beyond that critical approach altogether.[393]

Further, the broad relaxation of censorship during the 1953-1964 Krushchev Thaw suggests that future studies would also do well to consider whether and how fantastic content and heroic form changed in children's literature during that period. Have similar compromises existed at other points in the cultural histories of Soviet or post-Soviet societies in Eastern Europe or Central Asia? Might we use the formalist heuristic to analyze children's film and animation similarly? A more rigorous phenomenological theory of reader response remains to be articulated as well, particularly as concerns non-print media and adolescent fiction.[394]

In any case, this work has demonstrated the ability of children's texts to clarify the anxieties, hopes, power relations, ideology, and mores of the artists who produce them and of the societies that they influence. Both the genre approach and the form-content distinction, reductive as they may be, preserve the clarity of that contextualization, permitting literary analysis, theory,

---

[391] Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (The New American Library, 1948), 16.
[392] Langer, *Philosophy*, 78-79.
[393] Susanne Langer, "The Principles of Creation in Art," *The Hudson Review* 2, no. 4 (1950): 521. https://doi.org/10.2307/3847705.
[394] Of particular interest in such a study would be Robyn McCallum's excellent study of ideological identity formation in adolescent fiction: *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999).

and cultural history to build on one another. Critical in that endeavor has been the approach to texts in terms of the causes, contexts, and results of their relationships with the reader. We are left with pressing questions not only regarding Russian and Soviet children's literature and culture, but about the echoes of ideology, fairy tales, *bylini*, the collective trauma of war, and more in the former Soviet Union. From rocket launchers named after *Buratino* used in the Chechen Wars to youth parades in honor of Mal'chish-Kibal'chish and Russian soldiers committing horrific atrocities in Ukraine, these texts still act with real consequences.[395] Young readers are once again exhorted to sacrifice themselves for an unclear, messianic future. As the children's literature sphere in Russia comes under hybrid government-oligarch control, begins to exhibit Soviet nostalgia, and flattens complex realities for children, answering that call is becoming increasingly urgent.[396] Within the classroom and without, we must heed it, lest future generations lose the ability to hear it at all.

---

[395] Press Service of the City Hall of Cherkessk. "V Cherkesske na ploshchadi Lenina proshiol konkurs-parad iunarmeitsev 'Mal'chish-Kibal'chish'" [In Cherkessk, on Lenin Square, there was held a "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" parade of Iunarmiia members]. *MANGAZEIA Information Agency*, May 5, 2014. https://www.mngz.ru/russia-world-sensation/482351-v-cherkesske-na-ploschadi-lenina-proshel-konkurs-parad-yunarmeycev-malchish-kibalchish.html.

[396] Larissa Rudova, "From Character-Building to Criminal Pursuits: Russian Children's Literature in Transition," in *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (New York: Routledge, 2008), 19-20.

Bibliography

Aboud, Frances E. “The Formation of In-Group Favoritism and out-Group Prejudice in Young Children: Are They Distinct Attitudes?” *Developmental Psychology* 39 (2003): 48–60. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.39.1.48.

Alexander, Alex. *Bylina and Fairy Tale: The Origins of Russian Heroic Poetry*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973.

Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation).” In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* translated by Ben Brewster, 127-186. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Bakthin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Bailey, James, and Tatyana Ivanovna. Introduction to *An Anthology of Russian Folk Epics*, xv-xlix. Armonk, N.Y.: Routledge, 1998. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=24557&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Balakirev, Aleksei Nikolaevich. “Timurovtsy: Malen’kie volontery velikoi voyni” [Timurovtsy: Little Volunteers of the Great War]. *Vestnik Buryatskovo Gosudarstvennovo Universiteta. Filosofiia*, no. 7 (2015): 19–23.

Balina, Marina. “Creativity through Restraint: The Beginnings of Soviet Children’s Literature.” In *Russian Children’s Literature and Culture*, 1-19. Edited by Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova. New York: Routledge, 2008.

———. Introduction to *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, edited by Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and Mark Lipovetsky, 105-122. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005.

Barbosa Santolin, Cezar. "História Da Obesidade No Cinema: 'Os Três Homens Gordos' (1963; 1966)" [History of Obesity in Cinema: 'The Three Fat Men' (1963; 1966)] *Revista Brasileira de Obesidade, Nutrição e Emagrecimento* 15, no. 95 (July 2021): 482–93. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=158129321&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." In *Image, Music, Text*, edited and translated by Stephen Heath, 142-148. New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.

Beaujour, Elizabeth Klosty. *The Invisible Land: A Study of the Artistic Imagination of Iurii Olesha.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

Beran, Tanya N., Alejandro Ramirez-Serrano, Roman Kuzyk, Meghann Fior, and Sarah Nugent. "Understanding How Children Understand Robots: Perceived Animism in Child–Robot Interaction." *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 69, no. 7 (July 1, 2011): 539–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2011.04.003.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Knopf, 1976.

Bezrogov, Vitaly. "Ideal Childhood on the Front Cover: Sovietness, Folkness, and Globality in Russian Reading Primer 1980s-2000s." *Zbirka Zgodovinskega časopisa* [Collection of Historical Papers] 45 (2012): 146-162. https://sistory.si/publikacije/prenos/?urn=SISTORY:ID:31016.

Bol'shakova, Y. B. "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish," in *Literaturnie geroi* [Literary Heroes]. Akademik, 2009. https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/litheroes/312.

Borden, Richard C. "Iurii Olesha: The Child behind the Metaphor." *The Modern Language Review* 93, no. 2 (1998): 441- 454. https://www.jstor.org/stable/373535.

Bullock, Merry. "Animism in Childhood Thinking: A New Look at an Old Question." *Developmental Psychology* 21 (1985): 217–25. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.21.2.217.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949.

Chukovskaia, Lidiia. "Y. Olesha 'Tri tolstiaka.'" *Detskaia Literatura,* no. 8 (1940): 111-113.

Chukovskii, Kornei. *From Two to Five.* Translated and edited by Miriam Morton. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963.

Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Collodi, Carlo. *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Cornwell, Neil. "At the Circus with Olesha and Siniavskii." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 71, no. 1 (1993): pp. 1-13. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4211149

de Waal, Alex. *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2017.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York: Zone Books, 1991.

———. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. London: Continuum, 1994.

———. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Edited and translated by Tom Conley. London: The Athlone Press, 1993.

Dewey, John. *Democracy in Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1917.

Dobrenko, Evgenii. *Formovka sovetskovo chitatelia* [The Formation of the Soviet Reader]. St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1997.

———. "Sotsrealizm i mir detstva" [Socialist Realism and the World of Childhood] in *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon* [The Socialist Realist Canon], edited by Hans Günther and Evgenii Dobrenko, 31-40. St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000.

———. "The School Tale in Children's Literature of Socialist Realism." In *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, 43-66. Edited by Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Dolinin, Alexander. "The Signs and Symbols in Nabokov's "Signs and Symbols." In *Anatomy of a Short Story: Nabokov's Puzzles, Codes, "Signs and Symbols,"* edited by Yuri Leving. New York: Continuum, 2012.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Picador, 2021.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Flavell, John H., Eleanor R. Flavell, and Frances L. Green. "Development of the Appearance–Reality Distinction." *Cognitive Psychology* 15 (1983): 95–120. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(83)90005-1.

Freud, Sigmund. “Das Unheimliche.” In *V. Band,* edited by Otto Rank and Hans Sachs. Vol. 5 of *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften*. Leipzig: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1919. 5:297-324.

———. “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis.” In *Three Case Histories,* edited and translated by Philip Rieff (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

Freund, Elizabeth. *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

Gaidar, Arkadii. Arkadii Gaidar to the Young Pioneers of Rostov, March 5, 1935. In *Tom vtoroi* [Volume Two], edited by T. A. Gaidar, L. A. Kassil’, V. I. Kompaniets, and F. E. Ebin, 435. Vol. 2 of *Sobranie sochinenii: v chetiryokh tomakh* [Collected Works: In Four Volumes]. Moscow: Detskaia Literatura, 1964-1965.

———. “Tale of the Military Secret, Malchish-Kibalchish and His Solemn Word.” Translated by Helena Goscilo. In *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales,* edited by Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and Mark Lipovetsky, 123-130. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005.

———. *Timur and His Team*. Translated by Leonard Stocklitsky. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973.

———. “Voennaia taina.” In *Tom vtoroi* [Volume Two], edited by T. A. Gaidar, L. A. Kassil’, V. I. Kompaniets, and F. E. Ebin, 136-272. Vol. 2 of *Sobranie sochinenii: v chetiryokh tomakh* [Collected Works: In Four Volumes]. Moscow: Detskaia Literatura, 1964-1965.

Garland, Sarah. “The ELA Standards: Content and Controversy.” The Hechinger Report, October 15, 2013. http://hechingerreport.org/the-ela-standards-content-and-controversy/.

Getty, John Archibald. *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Goering, Laura. "Marketing Soviet Nostalgia: The Many Faces of Buratino." *Gastronomica* 17, no. 4 (November 1, 2017): 88–101. https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2017.17.4.88.

Gorkii, Maksim. Maksim Gorkii to Roman Rollan, January 15, 1924. In *M. Gorkii i R. Rollan: Perepiska (1916-1936)* [M. Gorkii and R. Rollan: Correspondence (1916-1936)], 85-89. Moscow: Naslediie [Legacy], 1995.

———. *O detskoi literature* [On Children's Literature], 3rd ed. Moscow: Detskaia Literatura, 1968.

Husserl, Edmund. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960.

———. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Edited and translated by David Carr. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

Heiner, Elizabeth K. "Fostering Heroism in Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Students." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 59, no. 4 (2019): 596–616. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167817753997

Hellman, Ben. *Fairy Tales and True Stories: The History of Russian Literature for Children and Young People (1574-2010)*. Brill, 2013.

Howell, Dana Prescott. *The Development of Soviet Folkloristics*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.

———. “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach.” *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 279–99. https://doi.org/10.2307/468316.

James, C. Vaughan. *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*. London: Palgrave Macmillan U.K., 1973.

Kamov, Boris. “Iskuplenie,” *Literaturnaia gazeta* no. 5 (1990): 12.

Kelly, Catriona. *Children’s World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Kieffer, Rosemarie, and William Riggan. “A Long Fidelity: The Career of Veniamin Kaverin.” *World Literature Today* 52, no. 4 (1978): 577–80. https://doi.org/10.2307/40131315.

Kirschenbaum, Lisa. *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Koval’skii, Aleksei. “Mal’chish-Kibal’chish.” 24SMI. https://24smi.org/person/4620-Malchish-Kibal'chish.html.

Kohlberg, Lawrence. “The Development of Children’s Orientations toward a Moral Order I. Sequence in the Development of Moral Thought.” *Vita Humana* 6, no. 1/2 (1963): 11–33. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26762149.

Kon, Lidiia. *Sovetskaia detskaia literatura vosstanovitel’naia perioda* (1921-1955) [Soviet Children’s Literature of the Restoration Period]. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo detskoi literaturi, 1955.

Kudryavtseva, Katya. Curator. *Malchish-Kibalchish: The Soviet Superhero*. Stetson University, 2020. https://www.handartcenter.org/malchisch-kibalchisch

Kul'tura.RF [Culture.RF]. "Gaidar Arkadii Petrovich — Biografiia Stsenarista, Lichnaia Zhizn', Foto, Fil'mi" [Gaidar, Arkadii Petrovich - Biography of the Writer, Personal Life, Photos, Films]. https://www.culture.ru/persons/10148/arkadii-gaidar.

Langer, Susanne. *Feeling and Form*. London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.

———. *Philosophy in a New Key*. New York: The New American Library, 1948.

———. "The Principles of Creation in Art." *The Hudson Review* 2, no. 4 (1950): 515–34. https://doi.org/10.2307/3847705.

Leeming, David Adams. *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Lenin, Vladimir. *Zadachi soiuza molodezhi: Rech na III vserosiiskom s'ezde komsomola* [Tasks of the Union of Youth: Speech at the Third All-Russian Komsomol Congress]. Moscow: Politizdat, 1982.

Leondar, Barbara. "Metaphor and Infant Cognition." *Poetics* 4, no. 2 (January 1, 1975): 273–87. https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(75)90085-6.

Levin, Lev Davidovich. *Na znakomye temy* [On Familiar Themes]. Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1937.

Li, Chieh-Lan. "Promoting Critical Literacy of Children through a Juxtaposed Reading of Classic Fairy Tales and Their Contemporary Disruptive Variants." Ph.D. diss. Pennsylvania State University, 2010. https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/10903.

Liberman, Anatoly, ed. Introduction to *Theory and History of Folklore,* by Vladimir Propp. Translated by Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1984: ix-lxxxi.

Lipovetsky, Mark. *Charms of the Cynical Reason: Tricksters in Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture*. Boston, USA: Academic Studies Press, 2010. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781618118509

———. Introduction to *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales*, edited by Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and Mark Lipovetsky, 233-250. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005.

———. "Pavel Bazhov's *Skazy*: Discovering the Soviet Uncanny." In *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, edited by Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova, 263-285. New York: Routledge, 2008.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Third Edition*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Maksimenkov, Leonid. *Sumbur vmesto muzyki: stalinskaia kul'turnaia revoliutsiia 1936-1938* [Clutter in Place of Music: The Stalinist Cultural Revolution 1936-1938]. Moscow: Iuridicheskaia kniga, 1997.

Mandel'shtam, Osip. "Veer gertsogini" [The Duchess's Fan]. In *Stikhi i proza 1921-1929* [Poems and Prose 1921-1929], edited by the Mandel'shtam Society, 498-502. Vol. 2 of *Sobraniie sochinenii v chetyriokh tomakh* [Collected Works in 4 Volumes]. Moscow: Art-Biznes-Tsentr, 1993-1999.

Maslinskaia, Svetlana. "From the Child's Point of View: The Observer in Children's Literature of the 1920s and 1930s." In Historical and Cultural Transformations of Russian Childhood: Myths and Realities, edited by Marina Balina, Larissa Rudova, and Anastasia Kostetskaya, 40-54. New York, NY: Routledge, 2023.

Matzner-Gore, Greta. *Dostoevsky and the Ethics of Narrative Form: Suspense, Closure, Minor Characters*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11qdwxj.

McCallum, Robyn. *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999.

Mendelson, Danuta. *The Function of Metaphor in Babel's Short Stories*. Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis Publishers, 1982.

Morson, Gary Saul. "Socialist Realism and Literary Theory." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38, no. 2 (1979): 121–33. https://doi.org/10.2307/430715.

Marche, Stephen. "The College Essay Is Dead." The Atlantic, December 6, 2022. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/12/chatgpt-ai-writing-college-student-essays/672371/.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy.* Translated by Ernest Untermann. United States: Modern Library, 1906.

Miller, Frank J. "The Image of Stalin in Soviet Russian Folklore." *The Russian Review* 39, no. 1 (1980): 50–67. https://doi.org/10.2307/128551.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Pale Fire*. New York: Vintage International, 1989.

Narvaez, Darcia, Jennifer Bentley, Tracy Gleason, and Jay Samuels. "Moral Theme Comprehension in Third Graders, Fifth Graders, and College Students." *Reading Psychology* 19, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 217–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/0270271980190203.

Nikolajeva, Maria. *Aesthetic Approaches to Children's Literature: An Introduction*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005.

———. “Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern.” *Marvels & Tales* 17, no. 1 (2003): 138–56. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41389904.

———. *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children’s Literature*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Nilsson, Nils Åke. “Through the Wrong End of Binoculars.” In *From Symbolism to Socialist Realism*, edited by Irene Masing-Delic, 256-279. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012.

Norshtein, Yurii, director. “Iozhik v tumane” [Hedgehog in the Fog]. Soiuzmul’tfil’m, 1975. 9:56. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThmaGMgWRlY.

———. *Skazka skazok* [Tale of Tales]. Soiuzmul’tfil’m, 1979. 29:05. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAw6r9-BIt8.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

O'Dell, Felicity Ann. *Socialisation through Children's Literature: The Soviet Example*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Oinas, Felix J. “Folklore and Politics in the Soviet Union.” *Slavic Review* 32, no. 1 (1973): 45–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/2494072.

———. “The Political Uses and Themes of Folklore in the Soviet Union.” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 12, no. 2/3 (1975): 157–75. https://doi.org/10.2307/3813923.

Olesha, Yurii. *No Day without a Line*. Translated by Judson Rosengrant. Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1979.

———. *Tri tolstiaka: roman dlia detei* [Three Fat Man: A Novel for Children]. Leningrad: Detskaia literatura, 1978.

———. “Zrelishcha” [Spectacles]. In *Izbrannoe* [Selections], 274-276. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1974.

Osnovy kommunisticheskoi morali [Foundations of Communist Morality]. Moscow, 1973.

Oulanoff, Hongor. *The Prose Fiction of Veniamin A. Kaverin*. Cambridge, MA: Slavica, 1976.

Oushakine, Serguei Alex., and Marina Balina. "Introduction: Primers in Soviet Modernity: Depicting Communism for Children in Early Soviet Russia." In *The Pedagogy of Images: Depicting Communism for Children*, edited by Marina Balina and Serguei Alex. Oushakine, 3–49. University of Toronto Press, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctv1pzk2jm.5.

Pashchenko, Dar'ia. "Snilis' liudi, ubitiie mnoiu v detstve." *Diletant* (Jan. 22, 2018). https://diletant.media/articles/38917592/.

Perfetti, Charles A. *Reading Ability*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1985.

Petrovskii, Miron. "Chto otpiraet 'Zolotoi kliuchik'?" [What does the Golden Key Open?]. In Knigi nashego detstva [Books of Our Childhood], 147-220. Moscow: Kniga, 1986.

Peppard, Victor. *The Poetics of Yury Olesha*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1989.

"Polchasa v sutke" [A Half-Hour a Day]. *Severnoe siianie*, no. 10-12 (1919): 49-52.

Propp, Vladimir. "Folklore and Reality." Translated by Richard Martin and Ariadna Martin. In *Theory and History of Folklore*, edited by Anatoly Liberman, 16-38. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

———. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Translated by Laurence Scott and edited by Louis A. Wagner. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968.

———. *Russkii geroicheskii epos* [Russian Heroic Epic Poetry]. Leningrad: Leningradskii gosudarstvennii universitet, 1958.

———. “Russian Heroic Epic Poetry: Introduction.” Translated by Ariadna Martin and Richard Martin. In *Theory and History of Folklore*, edited by Anatoly Liberman, 149-163. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

———. “Structural and Historical Study of the Folktale.” Translated by Serge Shishkoff. In *Theory and History of Folklore*, edited by Anatoly Liberman, 67-81. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Reddan, Bronwyn. “Thinking Through Things: Magical Objects, Power, and Agency in French Fairy Tales.” *Marvels & Tales* 30, no. 2 (2016): 191–209. https://doi.org/10.13110/marvelstales.30.2.0191.

“Rezoliutsiia XIII s’’ezda partii” [Resolution of the 13th Party Congress]. In *O Partiinoii i Sovetskoi Pechati, Radioveshchanii i Televedenii: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* [On the Party and Soviet Press, Broadcasting, and Television: Collection of Documents and Materials]. Moscow: Mysl′, 1972.

Rudova, Larissa. “From Character-Building to Criminal Pursuits: Russian Children’s Literature in Transition.” In *Russian Children’s Literature and Culture*, edited by Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova, 19-42. New York: Routledge, 2008.

———. Introduction to *Historical and Cultural Transformations of Russian Childhood: Myths and Realities*, edited by Marina Balina, Larissa Rudova, and Anastasia Kostetskaya, 1-20. New York, NY: Routledge, 2023.

Schöpflin, George. *Politics in Eastern Europe, 1945-1992*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993.

Shubinsky, Valery. “‘A Wooden One, with the Big Nose...’ Further Comments on the Question of a Secret Code in A.N. Tolstoy’s Fairytale ‘The Golden Key or The Adventures of

Buratino.'" *Slavic Almanac: The South African Journal for Slavic, Central and Eastern European Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 2014): 64–72. https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC154942.

Skaftymov, Aleksandr. *Poetika i genezis bylin: Ocherki* [The Poetics and Genesis of the Bylini: Essays]. Moscow-Saratov: The Publishing House of V. Z. Iaksonov, 1924.

"Skaz." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 1, 1999. https://www.britannica.com/art/skaz.

Slone, Michelle, Ricardo Tarrasch, and Dana Hallis. "Ethnic Stereotypic Attitudes among Israeli Children: Two Intervention Programs." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2000): 370–89. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23093721.

Smogorzewska, Joanna. "Developing Children's Language Creativity through Telling Stories – An Experimental Study." *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 13 (September 1, 2014): 20–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2014.02.005.

Smolkin, Victoria. *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*. Princeton University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zgb089.

Song, Yusi. "Simile and Metaphor Interpretation in Children." *English Language Teaching* 13, no. 4 (2020): 91-103. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n4p91.

Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. United Kingdom: University of California Press, 1977.

Thurlow, Richard, and Paul van den Broek. "Automaticity and Inference Generation during Reading Comprehension." *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 13 (April 1, 1997): 165–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057356970130205.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Cleveland, OH: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973.

Tolstaia, Elena D. "Glory Pallid and Glory Justified: Nabokov's Two Portraits of Aleksei Tolstoy." *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, no. 66 (Fall 2018): 37-53.

Tolstoi, Aleksei. *Zolotoi kliuchik, ili prikliucheniia Buratino* [The Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino]. Leningrad: Izdatel′stvo detskoi literaturi, 1936.

Trotta, Daniel. "U.S. School Book Bans on the Rise Due to Advocacy Groups, Report Says." *Reuters*, September 19, 2022, sec. United States. https://www.reuters.com/world/us/organized-groups-fuel-rapid-rise-us-book-banning-report-says-2022-09-19/.

Press Service of the City Hall of Cherkessk. "V Cherkesske na ploshchadi Lenina proshiol konkurs-parad iunarmeitsev 'Mal'chish-Kibal'chish'" [In Cherkessk, on Lenin Square, there was held a "Mal'chish-Kibal'chish" parade of Iunarmiia members]. *MANGAZEIA Information Agency*, May 5, 2014. https://www.mngz.ru/russia-world-sensation/482351-v-cherkesske-na-ploschadi-lenina-proshel-konkurs-parad-yunarmeycev-malchish-kibalchish.html.

van den Broek, Paul, Elizabeth Pugzles Lorch, and Richard Thurlow. "Children's and Adults' Memory for Television Stories: The Role of Causal Factors, Story-Grammar Categories, and Hierarchical Level." *Child Development* 67, no. 6 (1996): 3010–28. https://doi.org/10.2307/1131764.

Vandenplas-Holper, Christiane. "Children's Books and Films as Media for Moral Education: Some Cognitive-Developmentally Orientated Considerations." *School Psychology International* 11, no. 1 (February 1, 1990): 31–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034390111005.

Verdery, Katherine. *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Vogler, Christopher. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. 3rd ed. Michael Wiese Productions, 2007.

Vosniadou, Stella. "Children and Metaphors." *Child Development* 58, no. 3 (1987): 870–85. https://doi.org/10.2307/1130223.

Wardetzky, Kristin. "The Structure and Interpretation of Fairy Tales Composed by Children." Translated by Ruth B. Bottigheimer. *The Journal of American Folklore* 103, no. 408 (1990): 157–76. https://doi.org/10.2307/541853.

Williams, Margery. *The Velveteen Rabbit; or, How Toys Become Real*. Project Gutenberg, 2004.

Yedlin, Tovah. *Maxim Gorky: A Political Biography*. London: Praeger, 1999.

Zaks, Boris. "Zametki Ochevidtsa." *Minuvshee: Istoricheskii al'manakh* no. 5 (1988): 378-390.

Zipes, Jack. *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry*. Psychology Press, 1997.

———. "The Potential of Liberating Fairy Tales for Children." *New Literary History* 13, no. 2 (1982): 309–25. https://doi.org/10.2307/468914.