

Lessons from the Kremlin:  
Folklore and Children's Literature in the Socialization of Soviet Children, 1932-1945

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts  
In the Department of History  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

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## Abstract

Officially in 1934, socialist realism emerged in Soviet society as the new cultural aesthetic, providing an artistic framework for all forms of cultural production—art, music, architecture and literature. In the realm of children’s writing, socialist realism had particularly interesting effects on the themes and formulas that were utilized by authors. Though once thought to represent the tsarist and peasant past, the Party encouraged the use of traditional folk elements to popularize the new overtly Soviet tales, despite the apparent unorthodoxy. Similarly, authors were encouraged to reintroduce the hero, also seemingly unorthodox in what was a theoretically collective society. Nonetheless, heroic themes and characters emerged to recognize achievements in industry and the drive for modernization, encourage vigilance against internal and external spies and saboteurs, propagandize the Soviet war effort against Germany, and honour Soviet soldiers for their sacrifices. Soviet children’s books demonstrated to youth the communist qualities of selflessness and devotion to the collective, and about the dangers of idleness. Children learned that the Soviet Union was to be the new Soviet family, replacing the bond of blood kinship. The leader cult filtered down to children’s books and Stalin made a significant appearance as the father of all heroes. This thesis argues that the Party recognized the value of children’s literature for shaping the character development of young readers. Popular in their own right, children’s books were not able to avoid the manipulation and control of the Party, which employed them as tools of propaganda. However, it is difficult to separate the extent of their genuine popularity from their appeal as propaganda.

## Acknowledgments

I would first like to sincerely thank my supervisor, John McCannon, for his invaluable contribution to the development of my thesis, from its early conceptualization to its completion. I am greatly indebted for his guidance and patience; his constructive criticism and extensive editing improved the final product exponentially. His passion and dedication to scholarship has been an inspiration, first as a curious undergraduate student and then throughout the often trying stages of thesis research and development in graduate school.

I would also like to recognize the members of my committee, whose criticism have also shaped this thesis, as well as the Department of History for their support, financially and otherwise. Various scholarships and bursaries were generously awarded to me from the Department of History and the College of Graduate Studies and Research, all of which provided me with the means to perform primary research in the United States, attend conferences for personal academic development, and to have the time away from alternative employment to dedicate to the completion of this project.

I would like to extend my thanks to my friends and colleagues in (and outside) the history department who have not only offered endless motivation, guidance and support, but have also eased the pressures and anxieties of graduate school in other ways. Whether it was in the office marking papers or finding creative ways to procrastinate through friendly competition at the bowling alley or curling rink, with a BBC movie, or in debates over a pint (increasingly less intellectual as the night wore on), you have made my experience in graduate school unforgettable and one that I will cherish long after I find myself in the “real world.”

And of course, I am inexplicably grateful for the support of my parents, Lorraine and Randy, who have offered endless emotional and financial assistance even though my confidence waned and my likelihood of employment seemed uncertain. And my brothers, Devon and Jared, both of whom share my love for learning and inspire me to find and follow my passion, always remembering the values we learned from Dad’s “mad minutes.”

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## Introduction

A new artistic aesthetic emerged in the Soviet 1930s whereby children's authors were assigned a new task. With the emergence of socialist realism around 1932, authors were encouraged, with little choice, to heroize and folklorize new Soviet society. Authors highlighted the country's achievements—politically, militarily, and technologically—and, often using traditional folk language and characteristics, depicted the Soviet Union as the best and most advanced country in the world. In a similar manner, they took the experiences of famous Soviet pilots, explorers, and military figures and heroized their exploits in songs and tales for children. Like their traditional folk models, Soviet stories from these years were formulaic and replicable; their messages were easy to control. They featured magical elements to make the story more interesting, or to transform a hero's unlikely circumstances into more plausible ones. Most importantly, the hero usually experienced some form of character development or enlightenment in the end: stories were to demonstrate Stalinist behavioural correctness to readers, as well as to teach the political and ideological values of the Party. These stories served to depict life as an idyllic utopia, no matter how far such a depiction was from reality. But even when tales transported children “beyond three oceans, beyond three mountains” or “west of the sun, east of the moon” and to “once upon a time,” they were never completely detached from real life.<sup>1</sup> Though there were enchanted objects and fantastic plots, and sometimes far-off, magical kingdoms, the setting, whether literal or metaphoric, was meant to be real life in the Soviet

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic* (New York: Garland, 1996), 122-123. Russian fairy tales often begin “beyond three oceans, beyond three mountains”; in Sweden they begin “west of the sun, east of the moon” and, in English, “once upon a time.” Nikolajeva distinguishes fairy tales from fantasy stories as follows: fairy tales take readers and characters to an imaginary place where magic is taken for granted, while fantasy stories involve a magical object or element but maintain a link with reality. According to this definition, Soviet authors wrote fantasy stories, not fairy tales. Admittedly, this distinction is not universally agreed upon.

Union—or rather, life as it was supposed to be. Soviet children’s stories were one medium that clearly demonstrated the gap existing between cultural representations of reality and the actuality of Soviet life. The false representation of life that appeared in Soviet culture and mass media serves as a microcosm of the nature of Soviet society in this period. This was the reality of literature in the USSR from 1932-1945, when children’s literature was intended to serve a purpose other than simply to entertain its readers.

This formula led to problems of inconsistency. A child looking out his window would see a reality that did not correspond with what he was told in school or what he read about in books. One Soviet writer cautioned that the Party’s “positive” claims might lead to situations in which “the child gets an idealized impression of life and is unprepared to react correctly to its negative sides, especially at the time when he is entering upon an independent life.”<sup>2</sup> But the utopian achievements that children learned about were not always glaringly false; they were often exaggerated, but many were based on actual achievements. Arctic explorers, pilot heroes, and athletes broke records and thrilled audiences. Collective farmers were utilizing modern agricultural technology, while their counterparts in the factory, the Stakhanovite hero-workers, labored on behalf of socialism, and military heroes protected the safety and security of the nation. Evidence suggests that, to a large degree, children and even adults wanted to believe in these things, and socialist realism, the cultural aesthetic of Stalin’s USSR after 1932 encouraged, even required, them to do so. The heroes and wonders of the fantastic reality encountered in children’s literature were intended to provide readers with hope, and it was the regime’s desire that this hope would overshadow the inadequacy of the current reality.

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<sup>2</sup> Felicity Ann O’Dell, *Socialisation through Children’s Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 263.

Children were targeted by propaganda from all angles. Take, for example, a Soviet child born into the revolution and raised during the Stalinist 1930s. This child falls asleep listening to fantastic tales recounting the adventures of collective workers, military men and women, and pilot explorers. The child dreams about these heroes nobly struggling against nature, honorably fighting the enemy, and heroically discovering uncharted territory. This same child spends the day at school learning about the near-mythic figures of Russia's past along with the Party's (near-mythic) achievements in the Soviet present. And after school, this Soviet child attends a Youth League meeting where he is educated to become a future member of the Communist Party. This innocent and unassuming child was a prime vessel for indoctrination, which, if successful, would cause him to brim with nationalist pride and patriotism, and to believe that his Soviet Union was the most advanced country in the world, one worth making sacrifices for. The Soviet child's life was consumed by the Party's values and beliefs. All of this is not to imply that similar socialization and educational techniques were entirely absent in the western democracies, and certainly other major dictatorships (Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, to name two) employed equally coercive policies and high levels of state interference. In the Soviet Union, there is no doubt that literature played a significant role for the Party in providing models of behavioural norms and societal expectations.

While children's literature is just one link in the chain of indoctrination employed by the Party, it is, as a printed text, the one medium that offers itself most easily to scholarly analysis. As it is difficult to determine the success of the Party's efforts to socialize children through literature—in other words, how the children received the literature—the focus of this thesis will be to uncover the Party's goals. According to the Party, what did it mean to be a good Soviet child? What values and characteristics were considered the Soviet ideal? Around 1932,



children's authors began to utilize traditional folk elements despite their seeming, and previously acknowledged, inconsistency with pure Marxist ideology. This thesis will examine the interesting synthesis of folklore and children's literature that was encouraged by the Party—one that has received little attention by scholars. Through an analysis of folklorized and heroized children's stories, many of the Party's preferred values and behavioural norms for children come to light.

Chapter one briefly considers some of the dominant questions and problems surrounding the historiography of Soviet children's literature, and discusses the research questions central to this thesis. Chapter two provides a glimpse into the Soviet literary world, outlining the various policy shifts and literary trends that emerged between the early 1920s and the late 1930s, highlighting their inconsistency and ideological contradictions. This chapter will also introduce the doctrine of socialist realism, as well as key figures and prominent authors. Chapters three and four will engage with these authors, as well as the stories themselves, providing the primary material for analysis. Chapter three will focus on the themes of collectivity versus heroism, as well as selflessness and obedience, as they were modeled by children's storybook characters. The greatest tension faced by Soviet children's authors was the difficulty of reconciling the collective consciousness that was theoretically central to Soviet ideology with the individualism that seemed inherent in the exploits of heroes, and this problem will likewise be dealt with in chapter three. Chapter four concentrates on the various forms of heroism that were portrayed in children's stories for purposes of developing character and promoting patriotism and nationalism. The most obvious examples were soldiers, pilots, polar explorers, and others with explicitly adventurous careers. This would have included Party leaders, particularly Stalin, who, through the emerging "leader cult," were extolled for their roles in building Communism. But

defined more broadly, heroes could include vigilant citizens on the lookout for spies and saboteurs, sports heroes demonstrating excellence, or workers on collective farms and in factories, benefiting from the USSR's advancements in technology. Heroes and their adventures comprised a significant part of children's stories, demonstrating to children the socialist-realist conviction that every individual had both the opportunity and the duty to become, for the sake of the Soviet Union, heroic.

## Chapter 1

### Historiography and Research Questions

Never before in the entire history of Russian literature have so many truly masterful children's verses been created. But behind the real masters and innovators of children's poetry there are plenty of literary swindlers of all kinds who speculate on the market's demand and shovel piles of abominable unlitrary books on the heads of unhappy children.<sup>1</sup>

(Kornei Chukovsky, 1924)

In later years, with an even more contrived and “harmful” (to turn the Party’s adjective of choice against it) literature dominating the scene, Chukovsky had cause to reflect that things can always get worse. Chukovsky, perhaps Russia’s greatest writer for children, spent most of the Stalinist 1930s—the time under consideration by this thesis—silenced and in fear. This thesis is particularly interested in examining the impact of Stalin-era children’s literature on Soviet youth, who were inherently more vulnerable than adults to literary propaganda and, at the same time, more heavily subjected to it by the Soviet state. From the Bolshevik revolution onward, literature became and remained one of the Party’s most preferred and effective means by which to indoctrinate Soviet children. Recognizing, however, the difficulties of quantifying the impact of literature on children, this thesis will focus instead on the apparent goals of the Soviet regime in regard to their literary-educational initiatives, remaining aware of the inherent difficulty of gauging the intent of authors. The various political and ideological uses of folk culture and children’s stories will be decoded and categorized in an attempt to uncover what kind of citizens the Soviet state intended to create, and what political and ideological values the state considered to be the ideal. This thesis examines the synthesis of two complementary media—folklore and children’s literature—that were utilized by authors at the Party’s urging throughout the 1930s, yet has received little attention by scholars. The resulting product—politically and ideologically

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Jacqueline Olich, “Competing Ideologies and Children’s Books: The Making of a Soviet Children’s Literature, 1918-1935” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999), 123.

motivated, Sovietized folktales—featured prominently in the reading repertoire for children after the introduction of socialist realism. The remainder of this chapter will discuss sources, research questions, limitations, and the scholarship that has influenced the development of this thesis.

Containing numerous threads of inquiry and presenting various challenges, the historiography of Soviet children’s literature is a complicated one. While this thesis will be approached predominantly from an historical perspective, it will also consider various interdisciplinary approaches. For simplicity, the relevant scholarship will be divided into three separate branches and discussed in turn. First, children’s literature obviously falls within the larger framework of general Soviet literature, the first historiographical category. It can be deduced that, in many ways, children’s literature in the USSR followed the same trends as literature overall as it adapted to the implementation of socialist realism. Second, this chapter will examine scholarship on children’s literature, both within and outside the Soviet Union. In democratic states, children’s literature continued to be written according to the will of the authors rather than the demands of a political party. Western scholars have debated many questions and problems concerning children’s literature but have largely neglected the Soviet case. To the extent it is possible, this thesis will attempt to apply western thinking about children’s literature to the Soviet context, something done only rarely to this date. Finally, Soviet children’s literature bears an obvious imprint from traditional Russian folklore (as well as Soviet appropriation of folk culture); therefore, the third historiographical branch will have to do with folklore and fairy tales.<sup>2</sup> The purpose here is to examine how scholars have contended with

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars take great care in clearly defining the terms “folklore,” “folktales” and “fairy tales.” In *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), Jack Zipes primarily distinguished “folktales” from “fairy tales” on account of their mode of transmission: “folktales” are primarily oral while “fairy tales” describe the literary appropriations of the tradition. In the Soviet context, scholars often exclude “fairy tales” from usage altogether (see note 1 in the Introduction). However, Marina Balina, Helena Gosciolo, and Mark Lipovetsky, *Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), use the term “fairy tales” when describing all forms of folklore-inspired

a Soviet version of folklore that obviously bears the mark of political motivation and manipulation for the purpose of inculcating youth. Scholarship on western folklore, as well as on Soviet appropriations of the genre, will be examined below.

In the interests of organization, this thesis has taken the liberty of extracting themes from selected stories and packaging them to reflect similar social characteristics or value-laden messages. This method of categorization is intended to present more effectively the research results and conclusions but is in no way a flawless or comprehensive methodology.

Furthermore, while it may be inaccurate to assume that the state's utilizations of children's literature (or, a more complex issue, the authors' efforts in creating it) were motivated exclusively by ideology or politics, it would be far more inaccurate to overlook the ideological and political content. It will be demonstrated through an analysis of folk content that while folklore may have been appropriated for various non-political purposes (entertainment, aesthetic appeal, personal preference on the part of the artist), the state undeniably recognized the value of the genre and applied it as a vehicle for the mass distribution of Soviet ideology.

Regarding sources, there are numerous collections of Russian and Soviet folktales and fairy tales in translation, as well as children's stories in general, that have been referenced in this study directly or used for the purpose of uncovering comparisons between traditional and Soviet-era culture.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, scholars of Soviet literature have done translations for the purposes of their own studies, many of which will also appear in this thesis. Both Stanford University

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Soviet stories. In this thesis, the use of "fairy tales" will be limited to discussions of western literature, while "folklore," "folktales," "skazka," and "tales" will be used interchangeably to describe Soviet literary material that demonstrates the influence of traditional folk genres.

<sup>3</sup> Examples include Alexander Afanasev, *Russian Fairy Tales* (New York: Random House, 1973); Marina Balina, *Politicizing Magic*; James von Geldern and Richard Stites, eds., *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays and Folklore, 1917-1953* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Miriam Morton, ed., *A Harvest of Russian Children's Literature: A Treasury for all Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Charles Philips and Michael Kerrigan, *Forests of the Vampire: Slavic Myth* (Amsterdam: Time Life Books, 1999); Y.M. Sokolov, *Russian Folklore* (New York: Macmillan, 1950); Elizabeth Warner, *Heroes, Monsters and Other Worlds from Russian Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).

Library and the University of California (Berkeley) Library hold substantial collections of Soviet children's stories and folktales published in Russia within the relevant time period; these provide the bulk of the primary material used below. Unless otherwise indicated, translations cited in this thesis are my own work. Along with the difficulty of obtaining a larger source base, time and space constraints prevented analysis of a broader sample of children's stories. Unavoidably, the conclusions drawn in this thesis reflect those limitations. The stories examined in this thesis in no way exhaust the plethora available to children during the Soviet period, and therefore the conclusions that have been drawn open up only a small window into the larger domain. Limited availability compelled this thesis to make extensive use of titles, covers and illustrations of children's stories, which were far more accessible online and in secondary sources than full texts. Although this limitation presents its own problems (i.e., content, language, structure, and potential influence on youth remain unclear), information interpolated from such materials has been of use in complementing the full-text sources analyzed by this thesis.

Another result of time and space constraints is the absence of any adequate discussion on the questions of gender and nationality. It should be noted, however, that there was a noticeable deficiency of female heroines featured in Soviet children's literature from this period. As well, as a union of republics, the USSR encompassed a variety of nationality groups, many of which were dealt with by the Party in very different ways than their Slavic counterparts. Questions of gender and nationality have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention in Soviet studies over the last decade and a half, but the source base on which this thesis draws is not large enough to permit a detailed treatment of either topic. A look at how either question played itself out in Soviet children's literature would provide an important avenue for future research.

## Soviet Literature and Socialist Realism

There has been much scholarship examining Russian literature from the Soviet period and, more specifically, socialist realism, which, around 1932, aspired to the status of official cultural doctrine.<sup>4</sup> The rise of socialist realism was accompanied by increasingly strict, Party-formulated regulations on style, content, and structure. Scholars have raised questions about the legitimacy of socialist-realist culture, the degree to which it allowed for artistic creativity, and the extent to which it influenced its audience. Did the Party ever obtain complete control over cultural production or the ability to dictate consumption totally? If so, could the authorities be sure that socialist-realist culture was having the intended effect on its audience? Did the Party's severity in shaping content produce effective propaganda? Until recently, attempts to answer these questions were shaped by the totalitarian/revisionist dichotomy that characterized Soviet studies for so long. Scholars following the totalitarian model identified Soviet society as under the thumb of an omnipotent government in which all functions of government occurred in a top-down fashion over a fundamentally defenseless society.<sup>5</sup> This school focused on political questions, placing less emphasis on social and cultural issues, and highlighting the Party's absolute control over the Soviet population. In the later 1970s and 1980s, revisionist scholars entered the scene to counteract the heavily political scholarship of the totalitarian school.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> Early works analyzing the socialist-realist aesthetic include: H. Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917-1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Rufus W. Mathewson, *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); J. C. Vaughn, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973); Walter N. Vickery, *The Cult of Optimism: Political and Ideological Problems of Recent Soviet Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963).

<sup>5</sup> This line of thinking proceeded from the assumptions outlined in classic works like Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York: Praeger, 1956); and Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966). Prominent "totalitarian" works include: Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1980); Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953); and Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: Norton, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Revisionism does not carry the same connotation in Soviet studies that it does in German historiography and Holocaust studies. In the Soviet case, revisionism refers to the scholarly response to the prevailing totalitarian

revisionists challenged the top-down power model put forth by totalitarians and began to examine history “from below.” Their focus was on social and cultural issues that had not been prioritized by scholars in previous decades. Later, from the 1990s onward, many scholars have begun to integrate the best insights from both schools. This thesis attempts to follow the later trend by examining the social and cultural significance of socialist-realist children’s literature, while not underestimating, as some revisionists did, the state’s desire and ability to impose its will.

Socialist-realist children’s stories, as a product of Stalin-era literary culture, have been dealt with very differently by both schools of thought. Totalitarian scholars characterized socialist-realist literature as little more than propaganda, viewing Soviet society as a blank canvas, comprised of innocent people susceptible to the state’s overt, top-down brainwashing efforts. The most extreme totalitarians believed that propaganda reached the masses in a straightforward Orwellian fashion, described by Jacques Ellul as “a matter of reaching and encircling the whole man... This myth becomes so powerful that it invades every area of consciousness, leaving no faculty or motivation intact.”<sup>7</sup> Totalitarians also tended to discuss socialist-realist culture as superfluous and artistically meritless, if not morally bankrupt. Nevertheless, totalitarian scholarship has insights to contribute to this study. Influential works from this school, though they rarely use the term, include Gleb Struve’s *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953*, which provides an extensive overview of Soviet literary policies and trends from the spark of revolution to the thaw at Stalin’s death, as well as Peter Kenez’s

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school. Prominent “revisionist” scholarship includes: Stephen F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Sheila Fitzpatrick, “New Perspectives on Stalinism,” *Russian Review* 45, no. 4 (October 1986): 357-373; Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); and J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (New York: Knopf, 1972), cited in John McCannon, *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union, 1932-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 143-144.



definitive work on top-down Soviet methods of propaganda.<sup>8</sup> As is characteristic of the totalitarian model, these works highlighted the Party's efforts to exert its power and establish control over literature.

On the other hand, revisionist scholars proved more sceptical about the state's ability to indoctrinate through literary and cultural propaganda; they were also more inclined to see Soviet propaganda efforts as motivated at least in part by genuine idealism, not just political expediency. Reflecting the revisionist view, William Sewell explained how complete cultural conformity is a myth even in a totalitarian state.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Ellul, with his depressing opinion regarding the power of propaganda, revisionist scholars have contended that the state did not have the power to totalize the human mind, although the more insightful acknowledge that near-total control over mass media and the symbolic environment is nothing to sneeze at. Revisionist scholars also believed that despite state interference and control, socialist-realist culture still possessed meaning and had an impact on its consumers. In addition, they addressed the possibility that some works of socialist-realist art and literature might possess artistic merit. Finally, scholars working outside the totalitarian framework came to see the study of socialist-realist culture as an excellent way to understand the norms and values of Stalinist society. Leading the way here was Vera Dunham, whose *In Stalin's Time* showed how postwar Stalinist literature reflected the regime's willingness to allow middle-class, materialist values to emerge, as long as society remained obedient.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gleb Struve, *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> William Sewell, "The Concept of Culture," in Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 56. See also Olich, "Competing Ideologies," 1.

<sup>10</sup> Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

Even more significant has been Katerina Clark's 1981 monograph, *The Soviet Novel*.<sup>11</sup> Clark placed socialist-realist literature in a Soviet cultural and temporal context, arguing that despite the obvious imprint of the regime, socialist realism must be considered to have contributed to the Russian literary tradition, particularly when compared to the dry, didactic works of the Five-Year Plan period (1928-1932). She also inserted that, just as literature should not be considered "merely an elephant's graveyard for reigning political doctrines," socialist realism's role in developing Soviet culture must not be overlooked.<sup>12</sup> She further explained that:

The particular literary possibilities canonized in Socialist Realism were those that had power to interact with the new ideologies that had become dominant. What was kept was kept because it served a function under the new conditions; yet, as a part of the new tradition, these surviving elements of the old tradition would have an effect on literature's further evolution.<sup>13</sup>

Clark's seminal work remains influential, but inquiry has continued, as have debates regarding the extent and effects of state control and the question of authenticity versus artificiality. The scholarship that has emerged in the 1990s and 2000s has attempted to weave a textured understanding of Stalinist literature both as a vehicle of propaganda and a significant factor in the development of a uniquely Soviet culture.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>14</sup> Representative works include: Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, eds., *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Irina Gutkin, *The Cultural Origins of the Socialist Realist Aesthetic, 1890-1934* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Hans Günther, ed., *The Culture of the Stalin Period* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites, eds., *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); A. Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia, 1928-1939* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites, eds., *Bolshevik Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Victor Terras, *A History of Russian Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Peter Kenez and David Shepherd,

## Western Children's Literature versus the Soviet Case

The historiography of children's literature proves to be a difficult one even without the added complication of an interfering totalitarian system. For decades, scholars of children's literature have debated various issues surrounding the genre; everything from definitions of the intended audience to the genre's value as a pedagogical tool has fueled the fire.<sup>15</sup> Who are "children"? How do children respond to literature? Is it primarily a source of entertainment for them, or do they take something more from it? In the Soviet case, children's literature in the 1930s became recognized for its potential as a source of political and ideological socialization, and was employed as such. But how much less pedagogical or ideological has western children's literature been? Have western societies been any less concerned about values and behavioural models? These questions and the scholars who have engaged with them will be the subject of discussion in this section.

One issue of particular importance is that of audience. Any examination of the children's literature genre must begin by defining who the readers are. This may seem like a simple question, but is actually much more complicated.<sup>16</sup> Without going into the theoretical core of this issue, this thesis will define children's literature as reading material written by adults for children (varying from the pre-literate to young adults, or approximately the age of 15), primarily consisting of fiction (although sometimes non-fiction intersects with it), and of the published variety, generally in the form of books or magazines. In the case of folktales, which are

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"'Revolutionary' Models for High Literature: Resisting Poetics," in Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, eds., *Russian Cultural Studies*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Perry Nodelman, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (New York: Longman, 1992); J. R. Townsend, "Standards of Criticism for Children's Literature," in Nancy Chambers, ed., *The Signal Approach to Children's Books*, (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1980); Torben Weinreich, *Children's Literature—Art or Pedagogy?* (Frederiksberg, Denmark: Roskilde University Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> See Weinreich, op. cit., as well as Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 2-7, 13-14.

generally understood to be primarily an oral tradition, the examples utilized in this thesis will also be of the published variety, although sometimes the published versions are recorded from an oral source. This decision was made more on the basis of accessibility and simplicity rather than one of preference.

Scholars have set out to determine what exactly constitutes children's literature. This leads to the paradox surrounding a genre that is written by adults but intended for children.<sup>17</sup> If a children's story contains mature subject matter, should it still be classified as children's literature? For example, literary classics are often considered suitable for children even though they were not originally written with a young audience in mind.<sup>18</sup> Classic adventure fantasies like *Gulliver's Travels* and the "Lord of the Rings" series, or stories starring monsters like vampires and werewolves, while not intended primarily for children, are often included in the repertoire.<sup>19</sup> As with folklore, literary classics were often misinterpreted as child's reading because of their fantastic content.<sup>20</sup> Complicating the issue further are fantasy stories containing

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<sup>17</sup> Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature*, 57. For further information regarding the scholarship that examines children's books as didactic and pedagogical tools rather than only as forms of entertainment, and scholarship that questions children's books that do not consider the child's views of the world but rather interpretations and perspectives that have been filtered through adults, see Philip Nel, "Never Overlook the Art of the Seemingly Simple": Crockett Johnson and the Politics of the Purple Crayon," in *Children's Literature, 29: Annual of The Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and the Children's Literature Association* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (London: Longman, 1992); Weinreich, *Children's Literature*; various authors and articles in Peter Hunt, ed., *Understanding Children's Literature: Key Essays from the International Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature*.

<sup>18</sup> Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, explains that "most of Swift's satirical elements, his allusions to contemporary persons and events, and his deep philosophical reflections have been removed from the children's editions." This demonstrates how classic novels have been adapted for a modern child audience. The same can be said of the Grimm Brothers' tales, which were once very dark but, in later adaptations, became more colorful and fun, still containing similar value messages, but obviously adapted for children.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. Nikolajeva explains how folklore was often unsuitable for children, contradicting proper upbringing and containing dark, scary and violent content.

mature themes that blur their categorization. J. K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series, with its wide adult appeal and escalating complexity (and length), is a case in point.<sup>21</sup>

Scholarship is also concerned with pressures brought to bear on the writing of children's literature. In the west, attention is devoted primarily to corporate influence and the demands of the market.<sup>22</sup> Whether because of personal creative or ideological preferences, or because of commercial or institutional imperatives, children's literature in the west has never been free of moral, didactic, and even political messages. Still, by and large, children's literature in the west has tended to encourage children to stretch their imaginations, think creatively, and develop inquiring minds.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, in dictatorial regimes like the USSR, the state's regulation of and control over all aspects of creation, production, and distribution is far more direct and intrusive. In the Soviet Union, the Party rewrote the rules and demanded that literature teach children to conform to "correct" Stalinist values and not to question the state of things. Most scholars who have probed into the Soviet case of children's literature observe that it cannot be examined using only the same methods of inquiry applied to the western variety.<sup>24</sup> At the least, such scholars argue that Soviet children's books must be examined within their own temporal and cultural

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Blake, *The Irresistible Rise of Harry Potter* (London: Verso, 2002); Philip Nel, "'Is There a Text in this Advertising Campaign?': Literature, Marketing and Harry Potter," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 29, no. 2 (April 2005): 236-267; John Pennington, "From Elfland to Hogwarts, or the Aesthetic Trouble with Harry Potter," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 26, no. 1 (January 2002): 78-97.

<sup>22</sup> See Jack Zipes, *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Hunt, *Children's Literature*, 10-12.

<sup>23</sup> One scholar pointing recently to the inclusion of political messages in U.S. children's literature is Julia L. Mickenburg, whose *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), examines literature published from 1920 through the Cold War period that was designed to challenge the status quo. She argues that many works of children's literature had a leftist slant and encouraged liberal thinking and openness among readers.

<sup>24</sup> Maria Nikolajeva, "Fairy Tales in Society's Service," *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy Tale Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 171-187; O'Dell, *Socialisation*; Olich, "Competing Ideologies"; John McCannon, "Technological and Scientific Utopias in Soviet Children's Literature, 1921-1932," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no. 4 (Spring 2001): 153-169; Xenia Mitrokhina, "The Land of Oz in the Land of Soviets," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1996-97): 183-188; Katerina Clark, "Little Heroes and Big Deeds: Literature Responds to the First Five-Year Plan," in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 189-206*; Evgeny Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades: Revolutionary Artists and the Making of Early Soviet Children's Books* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Miriam Morton, *The Arts and the Soviet Child: The Esthetic Education of Children in the USSR* (New York: The Free Press, 1972).

context. Soviet regimentation and control of the cultural world ensured that children's literature was deliberately designed by the Party, and not shaped just, or even primarily, by the artistic creativity of the authors. This reality, along with an extensive overview of policy and literary trends, is perhaps best discussed in Jacqueline Olich's 1999 dissertation, "Competing Ideologies and Children's Books: The Making of Soviet Children's Literature, 1918-1935," which examines how children's literature evolved within the totalitarian state and in response to ideological shifts. Olich further analyzes the Soviet authorities' attempt to establish cultural uniformity in literature, arguing that, ultimately, the regime failed in its quest for absolute conformity.

The standard assumption of most critics and authors in the west is that the best children's books are those that make the readers question the nature of reality, empowering them "to interact with that reality, to change it, to shape it."<sup>25</sup> But this statement speaks specifically to literature in a western, democratic context. In dictatorships like Nazi Germany, Communist China, and, of course, the USSR, governments sought to keep books that sparked such questions well outside their borders. Instead of leading one to question one's place in the world, Soviet children's literature advocated pride for the Soviet Union and total conformity to its values. Not surprisingly in the ultra-nationalistic and Russocentric USSR, themes that might cause children to challenge the system or provoke scepticism were not encouraged.<sup>26</sup> Instead, political and ideological themes furthered the Soviet goal of socialism and state-building. And the contrived and overly-didactic literature produced during the Stalin period reflects the distinction between

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<sup>25</sup> Nel, "Never Overlook," 167. This is an original quote by children's writer Chris Van Allsburg, noted children's author of *Jumanji* and *The Polar Express*.

<sup>26</sup> On Stalin's gradual downgrading of Marxist and Leninist internationalism in favour of a more Russocentric nationalism, see Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1946); and, more recently, David Brandenburger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

the purported goals of most works of western children's literature and those of their totalitarian counterparts.

While many scholars criticize children's literature for "its apparent secondariness [to adult literature] as manifested in similarity of patterns, limited plot variations, and so on," this quality was precisely the appeal for the creators of Soviet socialist-realist children's literature.<sup>27</sup> The Soviets embraced this formulaic quality, because when children are familiar with the structure and patterns of a text, their reception of the ideas can be anticipated. Maria Nikolajeva states that "the chief accusation leveled at children's literature by its detractors is that children's books are so similar that 'children do not learn anything new' from them."<sup>28</sup> But by turning this logic on its head and recognizing the potential for a genre that did not encourage individuals to question and criticize, the Soviets were able to capitalize on the familiarity of traditional structures, even more effectively when they added folklore to the mix.

And what was the impact of children's literature on readers? Was children's literature an effective method of propagating the Party's values? Did it help to create the right kind of Soviet children? It is always difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the effect that a cultural or mass-media message has on a population, let alone a population under the control of a totalitarian leadership. Some scholars have used library borrowing records, children's letters to *Detizdat* (the government's publishing house for children's works), and personal interviews in attempts to uncover the impact of literature on the Soviet people.<sup>29</sup> However, this remains one of the most

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<sup>27</sup> Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature*, 48. She refers specifically to questions of artistic merit raised by Peter Hunt in *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*; and Perry Nodelman, "Interpretation and the Apparent Sameness of Children's Literature," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 5-20.

<sup>28</sup> Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Jan Plamper in "Cultural Production, Cultural Consumption," *Kritika* 6, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 755-762, examines the new scholarly trend that uses contextual evidence to reconstruct patterns of consumption. See also Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*; Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin*; Susan Reid, "In the Name of the People: The Manège Affair Revisited," *Kritika* 6, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 673-716; Catriona Kelly, "'Thank You for the Wonderful Book': Soviet Child Readers and the Management of Children's Reading, 1950-1975," *Kritika* 6, no. 4

challenging questions in the study of Soviet culture, and so this thesis will concentrate instead on Party policy and intent, remaining content to assume that children's literature had an impact on its readers to some degree—if not as much as the Party hoped, or of the nature the Party had intended.

### **Folklore and Soviet Appropriation of Folk Culture**

Scholars have examined the status of folklore in many countries during the 1930s, a time when folklore was making a resurgence in the Soviet Union. In Depression-era and wartime Germany, folklore was utilized to popularize and legitimize the Nazi regime, much as it was in Soviet Russia. In the United States, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) under Franklin Roosevelt established “Federal One” in the 1930s to further cultural development and employ artists and musicians during the Depression. These projects included comprehensive guidebooks for each state that included everything from town descriptions, historic sites and photographs to oral history and folklore. Furthermore, at this time, writers in the United States were continuing to adapt traditional folktales for a modern audience, including the tall tales of Paul Bunyan and the Blue Ox, Pecos Bill, Johnny Appleseed and others.

Since the Romantic era, folklore has been put to use for various political and nation-building initiatives by intellectuals and governments.<sup>30</sup> In Prussia in the late eighteenth century,

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(Fall 2005): 717-753; and Thomas Lahusen's *How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin's Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). Olich, “Competing Ideologies,” 230, draws on a study performed by the Department of Children's Reading in the Institute of Extracurricular Methods from 1928 which surveyed the reading habits of children by examining their library requests. O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 213, compared revolution-era survey data regarding children's worldviews with surveys taken in the USSR years later. She concluded from the differences that primary-school texts and the children's magazine *Murzilka* had significantly affected the character development of Soviet youth, although this presumes that children answered these surveys honestly and accurately.

<sup>30</sup> For a further discussion of the ideological content and socialization utility of folklore and fairy tales see: Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, eds., *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning*



Johann Gottfried Herder expressed ideas about language and cultural traditions (including folklore, music, and art) creating a sense of “nation” among people. A faith in the unifying quality of language later inspired the Grimm Brothers’ folklore-collecting expeditions in Germany. Hans Christian Andersen expressed great interest in Danish nationalism and language, even though he is better remembered for his literary editions of fairy tales; the same is true of Charles Perrault of France. The publication in the nineteenth century of a standard version of Finland’s national epic, the *Kalevala*, has been credited with helping to ignite the nationalist spark that led to Finland’s break from Russia in 1917. Furthermore, numerous works of national folklore were compiled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, effectively strengthening various countries’ sense of nationality.<sup>31</sup> Correctly or erroneously, folk culture is often seen as a pure expression of “the people.” Therefore, it can be used (sincerely or insincerely) to legitimate many types of assertions about what “the people” believe, desire and dream.

The use and abuse of folk culture is not only a European phenomenon, however, and folklore continues to play a significant role in modern mass-media culture in the west.<sup>32</sup> Many scholars have examined, some quite critically, the commercial use of folktales and fairy tales,

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*and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976); Ruth B. Bottigheimer, ed., *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986); Simon Bronner, *Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998); Henry A. Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); Christa Kamenetsky, “Folklore as a Political Tool in Nazi Germany,” *Journal of American Folklore* 85, no. 338 (October-December 1972): 221-35; idem, “Folklore and Ideology in the Third Reich,” *Journal of American Folklore* 90, no. 356, (April-June 1977): 168-178; John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children’s Fiction* (London: Longman, 1992); Eugene Weber, “Fairies and Hard Facts: The Realities of Folktales,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (January-March 1981): 93-113; Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Wildman Press, 1983); idem, *Breaking the Magic Spell*.

<sup>31</sup> From the twelfth or thirteenth century, the heroic myth *Nibelungenleid* emerged as a German national epic, was widely used for nation-building, including by Richard Wagner and, later, the Nazis. Romania’s Dracula-figure, Vlad the Impaler, is celebrated in folklore for driving off the Turks in the fifteenth century. Numerous compilations of Celtic, Scottish and Welsh myths and legends, as well as the collections of Norse mythology, also demonstrate this trend.

<sup>32</sup> For prominent literature on folk studies and folk culture in the west see: Bottigheimer, ed., *Fairy Tales and Society*; Richard Dorson, *Folklore and Fakelore: Essays Toward a Discipline of Folk Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Alan Dundes, *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965); Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*; idem, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*.

often targeting Walt Disney.<sup>33</sup> Most prominently, Jack Zipes' work on German folktales and fairy tales, as well as folk culture in general, deals extensively with the issue of commercialization. In a similar vein is Richard Dorson's concept of "fakelore," introduced in 1950. "Fakelore," as defined by Dorson, is "a synthetic product claiming to be authentic oral tradition but actually tailored for mass edification."<sup>34</sup> The theory of "fakelore" can be traced across the globe throughout the twentieth century, and although Dorson was not speaking directly to the Soviet case, his work is relevant for a number of reasons. First, Dorson criticized folklorists for financially exploiting the genre to cater to market demands, and attacked the "growing popularization, commercialization, and resulting distortion of folk materials."<sup>35</sup> (While folklore was intended primarily for improving the effectiveness of the Party's propaganda in the USSR, the authorities certainly did not refuse any of the commercial rewards.) Second, in line with the "mass edification" condemned by Dorson, the Soviet tales were intended for enlightening Soviet people (particularly children) with the "correct" ideology. Therefore, while the Soviets were collecting examples, and creating their own versions, of the tradition, they enforced strict specifications to ensure that proper ideological content was emphasized. Finally, Dorson contrasts academic folklorists, who properly collect oral folklore from tellers and singers in the field, to the "parlour folklorists" who do no field work and adapt potentially suspect printed folklore and invent "jolly, cute, and quaint" contrivances.<sup>36</sup> Although Soviet scholars did organize folklore-collection expeditions, the state pressured them to use the collected works as structural models and guides in the creation of new folktales. When one compares the idyllic

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<sup>33</sup> Shane Gunster, "Revisiting the Culture Industry Thesis: Mass Culture and the Commodity Form," *Cultural Critique* no. 45 (Spring 2000): 40-70; Michael Jacobson and Laurie Masur, *Marketing Madness* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995); Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney* (New York: Avon, 1969); Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales and the Culture Industry* (New York, Routledge, 1997); Linda Dégh, *American Folklore and the Mass Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> Dorson, *Folklore and Fakelore*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

image of happy peasants on the Soviet collective farm with the true reality of Soviet life—shortages and outright starvation in the USSR’s countryside, for example—the application of Dorson’s theory to Soviet folktales seems painfully clear.

So what happens to folklore when there is the added complication of a dictatorial regime that regulates and controls all aspects of creation, production and often consumption? A number of scholars have examined the use and impact of folk culture on Soviet society.<sup>37</sup> The benefits to the Soviet state of appropriating folklore are obvious. Recognized as a supposedly pure expression of the masses, folklore provides a vehicle through which the regime can legitimize its power. The temptation to justify the regime by means of folklore/fakelore is high in past-oriented ideologies like Nazism or the Japanese militarism and State Shintoism of the 1930s and 1940s. The same was eventually true of folklore in the USSR, but not in the beginning. In the immediate post-revolutionary years, folklore was frowned on as a backward-looking, reactionary relic of the past. In the late 1920s, Soviet children’s literature was almost exclusively devoted to furthering communist values and ideals. At this time, folklore and magical tales were seen as connected to peasant culture and the tsarist past (for example, in the way they featured characters like tsars, tsarinas, princes, and princesses). There was a fear among devoted communist educators that the traditional stories contained subversive elements which might have a counterproductive effect on the socialization of children.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, considering the

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<sup>37</sup> Frank J. Miller, *Folklore for Stalin: Russian Folklore and Pseudofolklore of the Stalin Era* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1990); O’Dell, *Socialisation*; Felix J. Oinas, *Essays on Russian Folklore and Mythology* (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1985); Oinas, ed., *Folklore, Nationalism and Politics* (Columbus: Slavica Publishers, 1978); Oinas and Stephen Soudakoff, eds., *The Study of Russian Folklore* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*. For discussions of Russian and Soviet folkloristics see: Jack Haney, *An Introduction to the Russian Folktale* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1999); Dana Prescott Howell, *The Development of Soviet Folkloristics* (New York: Garland, 1992); Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of a Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968); Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and Y. M. Sokolov, *Russian Folklore*.

<sup>38</sup> James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) considers the varying degrees of subversion that exist within a society, particularly its literary and

internationalist focus of Marxism-Leninism during the revolutionary period and the 1920s, the connection between folklore and tsarist national identity would have been ideologically problematic.

Nevertheless, around 1932, Stalin initiated a great turn in cultural policy. The Party and its ideologues became more comfortable with ideas of national identity and less concerned about the apparent unorthodoxy of folk culture—although they were very careful to reintroduce folklore in a manner that served to benefit the collective consciousness and solidify the group with a particular set of values. Moreover, the inherent appeal of folk motifs, as opposed to the bland imagery of the Five-Year Plan period, was noticed by the regime as well, not to mention folklore’s potential powers of legitimization. The end result was grossly unauthentic, as even many Soviets admitted after Stalin’s death. During the Khrushchev era, for instance, key folklorists confessed “tragic guilt” for “yielding to the influence of the propaganda of the personality cult” and for trying to “present the matter in such a way as if the whole nation glorified Stalin from all its heart and created these idyllic, conflictless, gala works about the ‘happy life’ ...”<sup>39</sup>

More than simply teaching behavioural norms, however, folklore served as a means of applying social pressure and exercising control, and many scholars have investigated the relationship between the discourse of folktales and fairy tales and their impact on the character-development of youth. Jack Zipes argued that folklore and fairy tales, far from being innocent, were used by the European bourgeoisie to shape their children with societal values and norms.<sup>40</sup> According to another definition, “folklore operates within a society to insure conformity to the

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artistic culture, and serve as a method of resistance against the powers above. The “hidden transcript” is the subversive aspect or element of a text (or other medium).

<sup>39</sup> Oinas, “Essays on Russian Folklore,” 153. Originally from V. Gusev’s 1962 essay “Dve diskussii,” in the prominent journal *Russkaia literatura*.

<sup>40</sup> Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 9-11.

accepted cultural norms, and continuity from generation to generation through its role in education and the extent to which it mirrors culture.” Furthermore:

In many societies folklore is employed to control, influence, or direct the activities of others...[and] may also become an internalized check on behaviour. ...folklore is an important mechanism for the stability of culture. It is used to inculcate the customs and ethical standards in the young.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, the Party realized that folklore could be used not only for propaganda purposes or to heighten the regime’s popular appeal, but as a valuable tool for achieving social conformity.

And as a result, cultural propaganda in the form of “folklore for Stalin,” to borrow Frank J. Miller’s phrase, was produced under the auspices of the socialist-realist aesthetic. This aspect of folk culture reinforces the seeming ideological inconsistencies and internal contradictions that resulted from the imposition of socialist realism on Soviet culture, a theme that will appear regularly through the course of this thesis.

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<sup>41</sup> William R. Bascom, “Four Functions of Folklore,” in Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*, 293-298. The third function Bascom describes is “that which it plays in education, particularly, but not exclusively, in nonliterate societies.” Primarily using examples from African folklore, Bascom explains how stories about the bogey-man are used to discipline children, just as lullabies and jokes are used to calm or entertain, and proverbs as a lighthearted and effective way to reproof misbehaviour. Also relevant to this study is Bascom’s fourth function, that “of maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour” (294). Interestingly, Bascom also identifies the use of folklore as a means of subverting culture norms. Therefore he highlights the basic paradox of folklore: “while it plays a vital role in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for repressions which these same institutions impose upon him.”(298)

## Chapter 2

### The Myth of Socialist Realism: Zigzag Policies and Contradictory Ideologies, 1921-1934

We must never forget what a mighty influence the artistic word has on the human soul and especially on the youthful soul. And on this depends the further growth of our literature, the further heightening of its role in the formation of the moral outlook of the man of the Stalin age...<sup>1</sup>

(“The Mighty Educative Force,” August 25, 1945)

As was the case in many spheres of Soviet policy during the 1920s and 1930s, the literary world underwent dramatic shifts, wavering between soft and hard policy lines that significantly affected the artistic freedom of both the writers and the products that resulted from their efforts. Immediately after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, the new regime saw literature as one of the most important media for socializing and educating youth. The Party recognized the value of literature, and conversely, perceived it to be dangerous to leave literature uncontrolled and entirely in the hands of the authors. However, the degree of control varied between 1917 and the mid-1930s, and the events leading up to the emergence of socialist realism as the new cultural aesthetic in the Soviet Union reveal that there were comparatively fewer limits imposed on the cultural world by the Party throughout most of the 1920s. And even after the Party strengthened its hold over the literary world, its efforts and directives did not have the desired result of entirely suppressing “harmful” literature, or creating an ideologically sound alternative that was entertaining and well-received. This chapter will examine shifts in Soviet cultural policy and their effect on the literary world—and discuss the major players of Soviet children’s literature—from the early 1920s through to the mid-1930s.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in George Reavey, *Soviet Literature To-Day* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1946), 28.

One further thread of inquiry introduced in this chapter involves the varying roles that folklore and the concept of individual heroism played in children's literature despite their inherent contradiction of communist ideology, at least in its purest form. Early on, Soviet authorities considered folklore to be anti-Soviet and retrograde because it was reminiscent of old Russia and primarily a peasant tradition. It was therefore condemned as harmful to young readers, who should instead be reading pro-Soviet, industrial-themed stories. But corresponding with the appearance of socialist realism in the early 1930s, the Party revisited the folk tradition and began to appropriate elements of the genre for socialist propaganda. Having already stood the test of time, folklore was popular and accessible, making it an ideal genre for attracting the attentions of young readers. Similarly, heroes were exceptional individuals in a place and time that was supposed to be devoted to collective identity. Purist attempts to expunge the hero failed, however, and so, despite apparent philosophical contradictions, the zigzag shift toward socialist realism involved a renewed emphasis on the hero, although he or she still operated within a collectivist framework. Despite ideological tensions, heroes and folk elements both made their way back into the spotlight in children's literature and were incredibly successful in terms of audience appeal—but not necessarily as successful in conveying to that audience the values and messages favoured by the state.

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In 1921 Lenin introduced to the Soviet Union the New Economic Policy (NEP), a more gradualist approach to the development of socialism than the utopian storm and stress that had followed the revolutions of 1917. This shift coincided with a more moderate line in literature and the arts, providing relative freedom and flexibility to artists

and authors. Within limits, the period from 1921-1928 was characterized by a soft line on literature and culture. At this time, Anatoli Lunacharskii served as the Commissar of Enlightenment (*Narkompros*), and would remain in this office until 1929. This body, roughly equivalent to a minister of education and the arts, assumed responsibility for educational policy and cultural affairs, including the processes of cultural production. In contrast to his successors, Lunacharskii was comparatively more lenient on cultural issues; consequently, Soviet artists and authors worked under conditions of greater—although never complete—tolerance. They were freer than before (or later) to experiment with western styles and traditional forms, and were not as compelled as during 1917-1921 or after 1928 to incorporate explicitly political or class-based themes and values into their work.<sup>2</sup>

Of particular significance in the field of children's writing was Kornei Chukovskii, one of Russia's most renowned and enduring children's poets. Throughout the 1920s, relative cultural freedom enabled authors like Chukovskii to produce apolitical works that focused on entertainment or the teaching of language rather than socialization or politicization as would later become the norm. In 1917, Chukovskii published the blockbuster *Crocodile*, a series of nonsense verses about a crocodile's adventures on the streets of Moscow, and thus secured himself a high place in the genre of children's literature. His output of whimsical and fanciful stories continued throughout the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> Near the end of the decade, however, Chukovskii temporarily fell from prominence,

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<sup>2</sup> See Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, 1917-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Including such popular titles as: *The Little Cockroach* (1923), *Wash 'em Clean* (1923), *Barmalei* (1925), *Telephone* (1926), and *Fedora's Grief* (1926).



largely due to the stylistic and content requirements demanded by the Party. Chukovskii would maintain in later years “that ideologically inspired children’s books were worthless unless they were also endowed with artistic merit,” and he refused to believe that “children’s literature should be stamped by the bitterness of the times, by party consciousness, and by the demand for unconditional ideological involvement.”<sup>4</sup>

Harassed and censored during the First Five-Year Plan period (1928-1932) and much of the 1930s, Chukovskii survived, and was eventually restored to prominence as one of Russia’s most beloved children’s poets.

Samuil Marshak earned a stature almost equal to Chukovskii; he also weathered the Stalinist storm more easily. In the 1900s, he moved to St. Petersburg, where he was introduced to Maxim Gorky, and began to move in literary circles there. Marshak traveled as a newspaper correspondent to England, where he remained for two years, studying and translating English classics: as he recalled, “I discovered marvellous English folklore, full of whimsical humor. My familiarity with Russian children’s folklore helped me recreate in Russian those classical children’s verses that are so difficult to translate.”<sup>5</sup> With his new-found passion for children’s verse, he returned to the Soviet Union in the early 1920s and began his career as a children’s writer, finding quick success with the private publishers.<sup>6</sup> Early in his career, Marshak, like Chukovskii, focused on creating apolitical works intended for entertainment rather than political education or indoctrination. Both men, who became lifelong friends, sought to create a

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Orvig, “A Russian View of Childhood: The Contribution of Kornei I. Chukovsky (1882-1969),” *The Horn Book Magazine* 50, no. 5 (October 1974): 69-71. For more on Chukovskii’s political outlook, see Jeffrey Brooks, “Young Kornei Chukovskii (1905-1914): A Liberal Critic in Search of Cultural Unity,” *Russian Review* 33, no. 1 (January 1974): 50-62.

<sup>5</sup> Olich, “Competing Ideologies,” 104. The original citation from Samuil Marshak, “O Sebe,” *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. I (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1968-1972), 5.

<sup>6</sup> His early works include: *Circus* (1925), *Ice Cream* (1925), *Fire* (1925) and *Yesterday and Today* (1925).

broadly-informed readership by exposing children to Russian classics, folktales, and the best of western children's literature.<sup>7</sup> This continued until the late 1920s, when the Party strengthened its hold over publishing, and the entertaining and whimsical stories were officially no longer considered acceptable reading material. Nevertheless, the works of both Chukovskii and Marshak were fixtures in Soviet culture and remained popular even after censorship and writing restrictions were more firmly established by the Party.

During the NEP period, the relative freedom characteristic of the period's soft line enabled children's authors to make use of popularized forms of folklore, as well as to continue experimenting with fun, fanciful, and less ideological themes. *Raduga* (The Rainbow) was a NEP-era private publishing house and the first prominent publishing company to concentrate primarily on children's literature. Authors like Marshak and Chukovskii enjoyed the creative freedom of working with publishers like *Raduga*, and in the early 1920s reintroduced and popularized *skazki*—traditional folktales in verse. In its early years, “*Raduga* became synonymous with innovation,” and the company was drawn to humour, fantasy, clever verse and eye-catching illustrations.<sup>8</sup> From its inception around 1922, *Raduga* and other presses introduced many of the up-and-coming “greats” to Soviet readers. Diversity prevailed, as shown by the fact that there were over 200 publishers producing children's literature during the first half of the 1920s.<sup>9</sup> Then, in the early 1930s, the Party placed its own publishing houses (primarily *Detizdat*) in control and formally shut enterprises like *Raduga* down.

Private publishers found a place for Soviet authors as they experimented with modernist trends popular in the west. Early in his career, Marshak teamed up with

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<sup>7</sup> Olich, “Competing Ideologies,” 97.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 145.

Vladimir Lebedev, one of the Soviet Union’s most notable avant-garde artists for children’s books. (When Lebedev’s career was threatened in the late 1930s, he was able to adapt his style accordingly and remained on the scene until the 1950s). An excellent example of Lebedev’s avant-gardism is his art for the 1921 adaptation of Rudyard Kipling’s *The Elephant’s Child* (*Slonyonok*), depicted below. Lebedev’s style



Figure 1. Cover image from a Soviet translation of Rudyard Kipling’s *The Elephant’s Child* (Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1921), and second illustration from a later adaptation (Petrograd, 1922).

was not always well received by its intended consumers. Unable to piece together the “dismembered, foreshortened, displaced” animals, some children were distracted by their fragmented parts, and responded to surveys with comments like: “The ostrich’s neck came off. The snake’s cut up into little pieces. Hey, look, the giraffe’s all cut up! Its tail came off... Why is everything all apart?”<sup>10</sup> To many young readers, such pictures were

<sup>10</sup> All quotations from Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades*, 46-47. Children’s reactions to this artistic style were collected through surveys and published in *The Bulletin of the Children’s Reading Institute Review Commission*. Steiner cites *Novye detskie knigi* 3 (1926): 120-22, for specific comments. Considering the era, and that the survey was published by an organization Steiner describes as a “comical-sounding ‘pundit’ institution,” the data collected must be treated with caution as they may have been manipulated for political purposes.

not comprehensible, and in light of the Party's desire that children's literature serve as a vehicle of propaganda, this incomprehensibility posed a significant problem. Despite the prominence and popularity of avant-gardists and Constructivists throughout the 1920s, their efforts in the field of children's literature have been interpreted by some scholars—though not all—as a “failed social and artistic experiment.”<sup>11</sup>

Early in the 1920s the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (*Agitprop*) attempted, without much success, to establish a “red line” in the arts—a clear ideological position that reflected more “Soviet-ness” in literature.<sup>12</sup> It was determined that future children's literature should showcase realism, proper class attitudes, proletarian morals and ideals, internationalism, and collectivization and cooperation. Furthermore, Soviet children's literature should highlight atheism, avoiding themes of mythology, magic and superstition. Folkloric elements and stories that featured references to the bourgeois and autocratic past were considered “anti-Soviet and immoral.”<sup>13</sup> But for the moment, the Party ideologues who established this “red line,” as well as those authors and educators who favoured it, were unable to bring about a systematic change in the realm of children's literature, or to gain exclusive control over its production. While some writers and publishers edged closer to the “red line” on literature, whether out of conviction or political opportunism, it was clear in the mid-1920s that little demand existed for the “dry, explicitly didactic and ideological children's fiction” that characterized the “red line.”<sup>14</sup> However, as many authors and publishers began to follow the new direction, the new literature was largely being ignored by the book-buying public. These new stories

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<sup>11</sup> Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades*, 176. This

<sup>12</sup> Olich, “Competing Ideologies,” 74.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. These examples were drawn from a larger list provided by Olich of the tropes, themes and representations that were to be cultivated and those that were to be avoided under the “red line.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

were often printed in comparatively small initial press runs, usually sold for very little, and often went without being reprinted, suggesting they did not meet the demands of the market or appeal to young readers.<sup>15</sup> A useful case in point is I. Mukoseev's *How Senka the Hedgehog made a Knife*, released in 1928 by Gosizdat, the state publishing house, and using verse and colourful images to explain the factory production of knives. The book did not sell well, and Mukoseev apparently vanished from the field.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, some of this "red-line" literature was no less "fantastic" than the "harmful" stories condemned by the ideologues.<sup>17</sup> For instance, Nikolai Agnivitsev's *Vintik-Shpuntik* (1925) introduced mechanical objects that were just as anthropomorphized as any animal in the tales of Marshak and Chukovskii—but not nearly as appealing or as popular.<sup>18</sup> As the end of the NEP era approached, it was evident that the "red line" was not satisfying the market's demands for children's literature: children were not interested in overly preachy "stories about tractors, the triumph of October, military themes such as revolt, rebellion, war, Bolsheviks, Pioneers, or internationalism," but instead preferred tales "featuring lively, talking animals, stories based on English nursery rhymes, and modern-day redesigns of traditional Russian folktales."<sup>19</sup> Very soon, though, between 1928 and 1932, "red-line" literature would receive a tremendous boost from the Stalinist state, allowing it to prevail by force where it had lost on the grounds of literary merit.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 158. Additionally, the Ruthenia website database provides a wealth of publication information for Soviet authors and poets from 1917-1991: [http://www.ruthenia.ru/sovlit/p\\_tit001.html](http://www.ruthenia.ru/sovlit/p_tit001.html). This database provides evidence that many authors who published stories idealizing the regime and on industrial and technological themes did not experience great success during the early-to-mid-1920s. With regard to the number of copies published, most new authors in the mid-1920s had average first runs (5,000–10,000 copies was common), while more established authors like Marshak, Chukovskii, and Barto usually had much larger first runs (50,000–100,000 copies) and sold for higher prices.

<sup>16</sup> According to the Ruthenia website database, Mukoseev had no publications after 1928.

<sup>17</sup> Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>19</sup> Olich, "Competing Ideologies," 159.

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In 1928, with Stalin firmly cemented in power, the NEP moderate line was replaced by a hard line, in the form of the First Five-Year Plan, which centered on super-industrialization to catch up with and overtake the west. This hard line was paralleled by a corresponding shift in literature and culture; although the Five-Year Plan did not specifically target culture, it coincided with something of a “cultural revolution” that significantly affected, among the other things, the creation of children’s books in the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> The creation in 1928 of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), a radical, leftist organization, signalled the state’s aim of establishing and enplacing a more explicitly defined proletarian literature meant to “capture public enthusiasm” and “implant loyalty.”<sup>21</sup> Concerning the sphere of children’s literature, writers who joined this organization, along with its supporters, were extremely concerned with the *skazki* and other folkloric influences that were, and continued to be, highly successful in the market. RAPP argued that these elements glorified the former ruling classes, promoted bourgeois ideals, and corrupted children by overly romanticizing life. Furthermore, RAPP criticized folktales for their regressive influence on children, on the grounds that they usually originated among the backward peasantry and “functioned as carriers of all that was archaic and repressive.”<sup>22</sup> As the publishing house most associated with the *skazka* form, *Raduga* was shut down in 1930, along with other private publishing houses. Nevertheless, many authors were able to make the transition from the

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<sup>20</sup> The term “cultural revolution” was introduced by Sheila Fitzpatrick in the edited volume *Cultural Revolution in Russia*.

<sup>21</sup> Olich, “Competing Ideologies,” 224.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

private publishing houses to the state publishing house, and stories that incorporated fantastic and folkloric elements and “bourgeois” themes remained in production.<sup>23</sup>

During the Five-Year Plan years, RAPP came down hard on writers who had enjoyed more freedom in the 1920s. RAPP outlined stringent literary models for writers, including themes that glamorized industry, technology, and the modernization of agriculture, all within the context of an idealized Soviet state and in accordance with purist ideology. This was essentially a more forceful extension of the “red line” from the mid-1920s. The new literature:

...had to become a part of the general mobilization for industrialization. It had to be integrated into the broad-based cultural revolution... This meant rejecting as “bourgeois” the old concept of literature as aesthetic, literature as the product of individual genius... It also meant rejecting as light-minded the notion that literary works should entertain their readers.<sup>24</sup>

In this period, children’s stories featuring productive themes, national holidays, pride for the working class, the Revolutionary struggle, and achievements of the Five-Year Plan were abundant.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, because RAPP technically remained outside the Party organization and did not have official authority to regulate literary output, it was unable to effect lasting change. It was instead a pressure group, effective only as long as the regime backed it.

Lenin’s wife Nadezhda Krupskaja, a member of Lunacharskii’s People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment, as well as the head of the Chief Committee on Political Education and the Party’s leading pedagogical writer, took great interest in the direction

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>24</sup> Clark, “Little Heroes and Big Deeds,” 194. Originally cited in *Literaturnaia gazeta* (20 January 1930) and (3 March 3 1930).

<sup>25</sup> Titles like Mikhail Troitskii’s *Poem about a Machinest* (1932); A. Vvdenskii’s *The Worker’s Holiday* (1930) and *October* (1930); Osip Kolichev’s *The Children of Soviets* (1931); G. Krugov’s *The Scythe* (1929) and *The Axe* (1929) were published by state publishers.

of children's literature throughout the 1920s. Her line was purist. According to Krupskaja, children's literature was a powerful weapon for socialist character education. In regard to old literature, Krupskaja argued that: "We cannot just give any entertaining little book. I think that old literature must be reexamined and we must take what we can from it but other parts can be discarded. And old books must be remade, must be 'Sovietized'."<sup>26</sup> She strongly criticized the lack of realism in Chukovskii's stories, which, because they were not explicitly didactic or state-serving, were questionable in their purpose and merit. She further argued that "to teach children such nonsense, to read him or her such trash ...ha[s] nothing in common with the upbringing that Soviet parents want to provide children...The only worthwhile Soviet children's books [are] those explicitly extol[ing] the virtues of collectivism, discipline, work and other socialist principles."<sup>27</sup> Krupskaja would remain an influential voice in Soviet literary and educational policy until the mid-1930s when she deviated from Stalin's line in favour of preserving Lenin's legacy.

But as before, stories following stringent models were not popular among Soviet readers who saw through the overly didactic, ideological messages inherent in the characters and themes of Five-Year Plan literature. Furthermore, these ideological tales did not appeal to young readers, who found them tedious and contrived. According to a study performed by the department of Children's Reading in the Institute of Extracurricular Methods in 1928, Marshak and Chukovskii remained the most requested authors at libraries.<sup>28</sup> Even by the end of the Five-Year Plan period, it had become clear

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<sup>26</sup> Olich, "Competing Ideologies," 248.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 235. Marshak and Chukovskii accounted for 41% of library requests, followed by Agnia Barto further down the list.



that “tactics of dictatorial regimentation of art were not bearing fruit and that other methods had to be tried to ensure that literature should follow the party line, without at the same time impairing its quality.”<sup>29</sup> By 1932, as before, authors who chose to concentrate on the pro-Soviet themes of production, industry, pride for the working class and the Revolutionary struggle were not meeting the demands of Soviet readers.

The authorities understood the value of children’s literature as a tool for propagating Soviet ideology and became far more involved in all stages of the creation and publication of children’s books throughout this period. The Party’s Central Committee issued a decree “On Measures for Improving Youth and Children’s Publishing” in 1928, which deemed it necessary to:

...create a wealth of books promoting the Party upbringing of youths according to the tenets of Marxist theory as well as an artistic literature responsive to everyday social questions facing young people.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the decree called for books that helped raise children “in a suitably collective and internationalist” spirit and focused on “socialist themes.” In 1930, the Central Committee organized all publishing houses into the Association of State Publishing Houses, which fell under the responsibility of the People’s Commissariat for Enlightenment. Under the careful organization of the Party, it was hoped that children’s literature could become a better vehicle for propagating the tenets of the Five-Year Plan.<sup>31</sup> A few years later, the Party established *Detgiz* (also *Detizdat*), a distinct publishing house for children’s literature that stood apart from the state publishing houses. It was heavily monitored and controlled, and put excessive pressure on its

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<sup>29</sup> Struve, *Russian Literature*, 254.

<sup>30</sup> Olich, “*Competing Ideologies*,” 263. Originally cited in “O meropriiatiiakh po uluchsheniuiunosheskoii detskoi pechati,” *KPSS o sredstvakh massovoi informatsii i propagandy* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1987), 423.

<sup>31</sup> Olich, “*Competing Ideologies*,” 264.

authors. These Party initiatives helped to secure the Central Committee a more involved role in the field of children's literature.

One significant consequence of this policy shift was the replacement of Anatoli Lunacharskii as the Commissar of Enlightenment. As mentioned above, throughout the 1920s Lunacharskii advocated a soft line on culture that corresponded with NEP's more moderate line. He recognized the value of children's literature as a vehicle for socializing children with Soviet ideals, but rationalized that this could be done without limiting authors to industrial and production-themed stories. In 1929, Lunacharskii was forced to resign his post. Although he effectively lost his influence in the realm of children's literature, he continued to advocate that the children's literature of the future must "take socio-political truth and put it in a form that children will understand and read."<sup>32</sup>

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Soviet society by the mid-1930s was drastically different from the previous decade, and the shift that occurred in literature was only a microcosm of the larger changes taking place in the USSR. Not surprisingly, Stalin declared the Five-Year Plan a great success, having supposedly surpassed the goals of the Plan in four years instead of five. In one famous statement, Stalin declared that "life has become happier comrades, life has become more joyous," but this utopia remained only a dream for most of Soviet society. In reality, there was a general lack of resources and consumer goods; horrific food shortages and mass starvation as a result of the famine, the dekulakization program (liquidation of "rich" peasants), and the collectivization campaign in the early 1930s; and exploitation and chaos in factories and the industrial sector. Furthermore, there was a

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 239.

general increase in the level of control over the everyday lives of Soviet people. Social mobility was drastically reduced and severely regulated; work place conditions remained harsh and primitive; and the mass terror of Stalin's purges (1936-1938) brought imprisonment and death to millions.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of cultural and social policy, and to a lesser extent political orientation, the period of change following the Five-Year Plan has been termed the "Great Retreat" by scholars to describe the Bolsheviks' apparent abandonment of the classless internationalist objective and purist socialist values for more traditional values like Russophile patriotism, workplace and educational hierarchy, and patriarchal, almost bourgeois, family structure.<sup>34</sup> It was not, however, a formal Party policy, but rather a pragmatic approach to dealing with the problems that had emerged following the Five-Year Plan years. Although reminiscent of the ideological reversions of the NEP period, the "Great Retreat" was nowhere near as comprehensive and never explicitly acknowledged by Stalin or the Party. As well, the "Great Retreat" in no way involved a loosening of cultural controls. Quite the opposite: the literary and cultural world fell under an even tighter grip. In this period, the Party established further control by creating and administering the Union of Soviet Writers in 1932 to replace RAPP. (In all spheres of culture—music painting, architecture, and so on—the same thing happened with proletarian associations being phased out in favour of the new unions.) Any writer or illustrator who wished to work was forced to conform to the restrictions established by the Writer's Union. Although the high level of Party influence and control that had

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<sup>33</sup> Historians continue to debate the death toll for the Stalinist period but many estimates range around 20 million, excluding war deaths.

<sup>34</sup> This thesis was put forth by Nicholas S. Timasheff in *The Great Retreat*, 1946.

characterized the Five-Year Plan years remained, certain allowances were made regarding the technical and ideological content of art and literature.

It was at the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, the first gathering of the newly formed Union of Soviet Writers, that Maxim Gorky introduced the new aesthetic of socialist realism as the future doctrine of Soviet culture. In 1934, socialist realism officially emerged as the dominant, state-sanctioned cultural aesthetic and exemplified the Party's proposed new direction for literature and the arts. Socialist realism sought an emphasis on culture that was more readily accessible than the avant-garde, modernist trends that had been permitted throughout the NEP years, and ascendant during the Five-Year Plan and Stalin's "cultural revolution." While socialist-realist literature and culture would continue to glorify the proletarian struggle, it was to be more realistic, heroic, and optimistic; it was also encouraged to make use of traditional folk elements and adapt them to reflect and relate to the new Soviet reality. According to Gorky at the Congress:

...folklore, i.e. the unwritten compositions of toiling man, has created the most profound, vivid and artistically perfect types of heroes...images in the creation of which reason and intuition, thought and feeling have been harmoniously blended. Such a blending is possible only when the creator directly participates in the creative activities of labour, in the struggle for the renovation of life.<sup>35</sup>

Following the motto "national in form, socialist in content," socialist realism was to promote Marxist ideals, but also patriotism. Later, most scholars would criticize socialist realism for being simplistic, formulaic and idealized—but it was these qualities that made it ideal for propaganda purposes. Gorky's intentions for folklore were to find a

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<sup>35</sup> "Maxim Gorky—Soviet Literature," in H. G. Scott, ed., *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979), 35-36.

compromise that allowed the continued politicization of literature without sacrificing popular appeal.<sup>36</sup>

Socialist-realist literature was supposed to portray an idyllic reality while satisfying the Party's demands for ideological content. However, the reality being portrayed was not necessarily represented accurately. The utopian dream that had been the primary goal of the early revolutionary years was abandoned during the 1930s and replaced with an artificial utopia declared by the Party to be reality. Leningrad Party leader Andrei Zhdanov, who emerged as Stalin's watchdog over cultural affairs, put this utopian notion forward in his inaugural address at the Writer's Congress in 1934:

Comrades, your congress is convening at a time when the main difficulties confronting us in the work of socialist construction have already been overcome...when under the leadership of the Communist Party, under the guiding genius of our great leader and teacher, Comrade Stalin, the socialist system has finally and irrevocably triumphed in our country.<sup>37</sup>

Heroes were revived under socialist realism to serve the important role of making the case that Soviet life was indeed as ideal as the authorities claimed it to be. Zhdanov further explained that:

To be an engineer of human souls means standing with both feet firmly planted on the basis of real life. And this in its turn denotes a rupture with romanticism of the old type, which depicted a non-existent life and non-existent heroes, leading the reader away from the antagonisms and oppression of real life into a world of the impossible, into a world of utopian dreams.<sup>38</sup>

Zhdanov insisted that socialist realism would do away with artificial representations of life, ignoring (or not realizing) how it would go on to create new artificialities of its own.

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<sup>36</sup> Olich, "Competing Ideologies," 315.

<sup>37</sup> A. A. Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature—the Richest in Ideas. The Most Advanced Literature," in *Problems of Soviet Literature*, 15. Zhdanov was a major player in the cultural sphere during the 1930s and 1940s, attaining virtually complete control by 1946, at which time the Party's control over literature was tightened and another purge on the cultural world occurred. Zhdanov targeted the beloved poet Anna Akhmatova, as well as the famed composers Dmitrii Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

However unintentional or surprising, socialist realism contains numerous inconsistencies that have been the subject of much discussion among Soviet scholars in the past few decades.<sup>39</sup> Some emphasize the basic point that belief systems in general (socialist realism specifically) are never perfectly observed in practice, even by the most sincere and dedicated adherents. Further arguments range from theories about how Stalin may have felt his own understanding of Marxism-Leninism to be more valid than anyone else's (an idea he likely inherited from Lenin, who revised Marxist orthodoxy, all while remaining convinced that he was the only Bolshevik who truly grasped Marxist principles) to the classic Orwellian belief (favoured by many totalitarian scholars but not entirely borne out by recent research) that Stalin did not care about ideology at all but was concerned only with power. Scholars have dealt extensively with socialist-realist literature, art and culture in this light, and there are numerous positions that fall between these two extremes.

This thesis is concerned with two of socialist realism's inconsistencies: the revival of folklore and the renewed emphasis on individual heroes. As described above, for the sake of ideological purism and promoting Party initiatives, during the Five-Year Plan years, literary heroes had been minimized and replaced with technology, industry and machines. But this had proven to be widely unpopular among the readership; therefore, socialist realism returned the hero to the limelight. Soviet literature and journalism, which worked hand-in-hand, profiled not only military heroes, but other "heroic"

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<sup>39</sup> For further discussion see the works discussed in chapter one, as well as Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Rosalinde Sartorti, "On the Making of Heroes, Heroines and Saints," in Richard Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and McCannon, *Red Arctic*.

achievers, including many drawn from everyday life, depicting their accomplishments as honourable demonstrations of patriotism and nationalism. Achievements in agricultural production and factories, as well as exploration and aviation, were recognized as heroic and widely popularized. Youth were also told that heroism included excellence in athletics, chess and music, and even good behaviour and obedience. Sports were so highly valued as demonstrations of excellence that in 1934 the Soviet Union established specialized sports schools that usually focused on a particular sport (gymnastics, figure skating, ballet and hockey), while also demanding high levels of scholastic achievement.<sup>40</sup> Despite the inherent mark against individualism in Soviet ideology, heroism became a prominent theme in socialist-realist literature, and literary heroes were designed to provide moral and ideological guidance to their readers.

As for folklore—a genre also seemingly incongruous with purist ideology—the Russian cultural tradition came to represent and exemplify the Soviet era. As described above, throughout the early revolutionary years, elements of folklore were discouraged as anti-proletarian, because of their connection to the peasant past and the tsarist regime. Folktales, often featuring magical and fantastical (and aristocratic) elements such as honourable tsars and beautiful tsarinas, brave heroes, wicked witches and evil villains, conflicted with ideological puritans’ call for realism in literature and contradicted Bolshevik pedagogical and child-rearing principles. However, despite these concerns, because folklore was a “popular,” “accessible” and “comprehensible” genre, it became the ideal vehicle for propagating Soviet ideologies. Furthermore, socialist-realist

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<sup>40</sup> “Sports in Soviet Schools,” *The Elementary School Journal* 74, no. 1 (October 1973): 28-33. In 1973 there were more than 4000 of these sports schools. The Soviet Union also created secondary schools (in Russia this includes elementary schools) that specialized in specific subjects like music, languages, math or physics.

literature utilized the binary opposites of good and evil—pitting the hero against the villain (class enemy)—and thereby, “the worlds of Soviet realism subsumes the fairy tale plot, making [the fairy tale] a vessel for its ideology.”<sup>41</sup>

The revival of folklore is of particular interest because of the Soviet regime’s resolve during the early revolutionary years, and again in 1928-1932, to establish an entirely new culture, separate from that of the bourgeois and tsarist past. The Russian word *narodnost*’ is a crucial term in this case because it establishes the cultural context for the production of Soviet folklore in the 1930s. *Narodnost*’ is a “most elusive” concept; it has been translated variously as “nationalism, nationality, nationhood, national identity... folksiness, folklorism... to populism, popularity, accessibility and comprehensibility.”<sup>42</sup> No later than the eighteenth century, a national Russian consciousness appeared, and rural Russia came to be seen by intellectuals as the embodiment of national virtues—the “possession of a generous heart and simple soul...the preservation of a certain roughness of manner...and a proper regard for integrity, sincerity, friendship, and honest service.”<sup>43</sup> Foreign influence was perceived as undesirable, and rural Russia was considered “more truly national” than the urban centers, which were more affected by foreign influence.<sup>44</sup> Folklore was recognized primarily as the artistic expression of the rural Russian peasantry; therefore, as the virtues of rural Russians came to represent the virtues of the entire population, many saw in

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<sup>41</sup> Balina, *Politicizing Magic*, 109.

<sup>42</sup> Kelly and Shepherd, eds., *Constructing Russian Culture*, 28.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



folklore the “true expression of national feeling...[and] “national culture.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, folklore was widely regarded as the voice of the people.

Whether or not Soviet authorities truly believed this, their plan during the socialist-realist era was to take advantage of folk culture’s supposed authenticity. However, they would do so by creating and disseminating a new folklore that captured the perspectives of the folk while adhering to the ideological models outlined by the Party. This trend falls within the context of Richard Dorson’s theory on “fakelore.”<sup>46</sup> Like others condemned by Dorson, Soviet scholars and officials encouraged the collection and creation of versions of folklore that broke from tradition. They enforced strict specifications on the content of the new tales in order to emphasize proper ideological content, and did not remain entirely faithful to the tradition of oral dissemination, but encouraged the manufacture of new, more modern and politically relevant tales and distributed them in print. The Soviet versions adopted themes, schemes and characteristics similar to those of the earlier Russian folktales, but according to Dorson, “for the Communist Party ideology, folklore is made to order.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Frank J. Miller coined the term “pseudofolklore” in 1980 to describe the tales that were devised to propagate the official Party line to Soviet people.<sup>48</sup> According to Miller, the “hoax” perpetrated during the Stalin era, whereby the Party encouraged the manipulation of folklore, resulted in Sovietized versions that did not do justice to the genuine tradition.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Dorson, *Folklore and Fakelore*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>48</sup> Frank J. Miller, “The Image of Stalin in Soviet Russian Folklore,” *Russian Review* 39, no. 1 (January 1980): 53.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 66.

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While many children's authors fell from prominence in this era of increased regimentation and control, some were able to alter their styles accordingly and succeeded at employing the socialist-realist aesthetic. Sergei Mikhalkov, an immensely prominent children's poet and writer, had published in the late 1920s but began to enjoy incredible success in the mid-1930s with works that honoured Soviet heroes and dealt with contemporary Soviet themes.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, his most popular creation was a series of apolitical poems recounting the adventures of Uncle Steeple (Uncle Styopa), a remarkably tall man who wandered the streets of Moscow. Still, it was his conformity to socialist-realist dictates and the Party's demands that caused him to prosper so well. the necessary adaptations to the Soviet line. A newer author, Agnia Barto, rose to fame in



the 1930s, also taking care to adhere to socialist-realist norms. During the First Five-Year Plan, Barto focused on pro-Soviet themes, with titles like *The First of May* and *Red Globes*, and she was published extensively by the state publishing houses in Moscow and Leningrad.<sup>51</sup> During World War II she published primarily on patriotic and

Figure 2. Cover image from Agnia Barto's *The First of May* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930).

<sup>50</sup> An ardent nationalist and loyal Communist, Mikhalkov was commissioned by Stalin to write lyrics for a new national anthem in 1944. After Stalin's death in 1953 the lyrics were discarded because of their direct references to Stalin. Mikhalkov penned new lyrics in 1970, which were officially added to the Constitution in 1977. In 2001, Mikhalkov, then 88 years old, was asked by President Vladimir Putin to write the lyrics used in Russia's national anthem today.

<sup>51</sup> Representative works by Barto include *Little Brothers* (1928), *Red Globes* (1926 and 1929), *The First of May* (1926 and 1928), *Pioneers* (1926), *About War* (1930), and *About a Tram* (1930).

nationalistic themes, and her success continued long after her death in 1981.

Not all children's authors were so lucky. Faced with the quandary "adapt or perish," many authors tried to lie low, hoping to regain popularity later, some shifted their energies to other domains, and still others were forced out of the field altogether. Chukovskii was among those unable to find a place for his stories under the new cultural banner. Known primarily for his entertaining and whimsical stories, Chukovskii was an obvious target for criticism from proponents of the "red line." He struggled with his outspoken enemies throughout the 1930s (silencing himself somewhat during the purge years). Failing to appease them, he fell from prominence until after Stalin's death in 1953. Nevertheless, he had made a lasting impression on Soviet children's literature, and his legacy has long since been restored in Russia children's literature.

Despite the deliberate direction and limitations of socialist realism, certain works—less political, even slightly nonconformist—remained on the scene during this period.<sup>52</sup> The appearance of works like Barto's *Toys*, Mikhalkov's *Uncle Steeple*, numerous works by Marshak, and even some previously-published works by Chukovskii, can be explained, despite their apparent departure from the acceptable norms of the 1930s. First, the popularity of these authors enabled them to ride the coattails of their fame and publish "undesirable" works long after such publications were officially discouraged. Second, most of these authors were noted for numerous pro-Soviet works, which may have earned them a degree of creative freedom to write on less political

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<sup>52</sup> Samuil Marshak's *Luggage*, which had previously been published by *Raduga*, was published in 1929, 1930 and 1931 by the state publishing houses in Leningrad and Moscow. *Yesterday and Today*, which had been published by *Raduga* in 1924 and 1925, was picked up by the state publishing houses in 1928, and published twice more in 1930 and 1931. And *Fire*, which had been published by *Raduga* in 1923, was picked up in 1928-1932. Similarly, Chukovskii's *Wash 'em Clean*, *Telephone*, and *The Cockroach* were published by *Raduga* until 1928 and then picked up by the state publishers in 1929.

themes. Third, although stories like Mikhalkov's *Uncle Steeple* and Barto's *Toys* were not overtly pro-Soviet or political, they were also in no way anti-Soviet. In light of the ideological flexibility associated with the resurgence of folklore and fanciful themes that characterized socialist realism, these points have even more currency. Finally, it is possible that certain works, especially minor ones, simply slipped through the cracks. Despite the Party's attempts to maximize the efficiency of its control over literary production, it did not always succeed completely. Regardless of the reason, it can be said without underestimating the power of the Stalinist state that many authors who had found fame in the 1920s were able to make the transition to the 1930s without entirely suppressing their creative energies or personal motivations.

### Chapter 3

## The Oxymoronic Hero?: Individualism vs. Collectivity as Competing Ideals

Communist morals flow out of the requirements of collective labor, collective life, and the struggle for a better future for all workers. An author who does not understand this is unable to write real children's books that interest children.<sup>1</sup>

(Nadezhda Krupskaya, 1933)

Throughout the early years of the revolution and into the 1920s, the collective was a prominent theme in Soviet children's literature and Soviet society in general; it had deep roots in pre-revolution Russian culture as well. By the mid-1930s, however, the individual hero made a definite, but perhaps not surprising, reappearance. Following the Party's policy zigzags in the 1920s and the emergence of socialist realism in the 1930s, authors and artists struggled with balancing the collective ideal, a fundamental part of communist ideology, with a renewed emphasis on individual heroism. The emergence of heroes was intended to improve the new aesthetic's value as propaganda by introducing exciting, adventurous stories of Soviet achievements. According to Soviet journalist and children's writer Nikolai Bogdanov in 1961:

Books to a child are not merely a pastime but an inspiration to action. In imitating heroes he finds an outlet for this energy. This is something that Soviet children's writers realize full well. And to write stories and create heroes influencing life has become a tradition with them. Writers of great and powerful appeal can do more than influence the child's mind. They can suggest to him a course of action.<sup>2</sup>

While the collective remained a prominent theme in literature, Soviet writers worked in, as much as possible, examples of individual heroes, as a way of providing youth with examples of "correct" Soviet values. The Party's simultaneous reintroduction of folklore demonstrates another aspect of socialist realism's apparent ideological

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Olich, "Competing Ideologies," 296.

<sup>2</sup> Nikolai Bogdanov, "Literary Characters Influence the Life of Soviet Children," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 35, no. 4 (December 1961): 164.

inconsistency. Folk themes and folk elements featured in socialist-realist tales, while the authors of these stories struggled to maintain an appropriately Soviet and ideologically sound foundation. By examining the ideas and works of prominent Soviet children's authors, this chapter will discuss the collective ideal in the context of Soviet children's stories, and analyze the use of the hero as an entertainment device and propaganda-pedagogical tool. Additionally, this chapter will devote attention to diametric themes found in children's stories—selflessness/greed, for example, or obedience/idleness—in order to reveal which characteristics were being propagated to youth as desirable through socialist-realist literary works.

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The concept of the collective is deeply engrained in Marxist theory and was fundamental to early Soviet culture and society. It was reinforced by a strong collectivist streak in pre-revolutionary Russian identity, most notably in the form of the peasant commune, or *mir*. Theoretically, a Communist society, organized around the proletariat, becomes increasingly collectivized and inclined to cooperation and solidarity. Ultimately, solidarity leads to the withering away of market economies and social classes, and then with the withering away of the state. In time, the system of governance becomes more collectively organized and administered. The end result is communist utopia. Among others, Maxim Gorky and Anatoli Lunacharskii were early proponents of collectivism; they assigned to it an almost religious component. Both published numerous articles in the early 1900s, outlining their plans to “reconstruct Marxism as a

new religion in order to fuse the proletariat into a this-worldly equivalent of the supreme being.”<sup>3</sup>

By the early revolutionary period, the conceptual collective from Marxist ideology was largely actualized in Soviet society. According to a survey of school children from the early revolutionary years, popular responses revealed “the actual ideals of modern Soviet youth are...largely the collectivist ones encouraged by those who run the educational system.”<sup>4</sup> Factory workers, miners, teachers, elementary school classes, youth organizations, and even delinquents were organized into collectives. Members of a collective were supposed to share similar motivations and goals, usually outlined by the Party. Two of the most prominent examples of collectives for youth were the Young Pioneers and the *Komsomol* (Soviet Youth League). First appearing in 1922, the Pioneer organizations targeted children as early as kindergarten, while the *Komsomol* targeted young adults and was recognized as the youth wing of the Communist Party. Both collectives were valuable organizations for maintaining control, while also providing the Party with a means for ideologically socializing younger generations. Furthermore, the *Komsomol* introduced youth to political activities and prepared them for future positions in the Communist Party. With all of society neatly parcelled into various collective groups, the Party was able to extend its reach and better establish and maintain control.

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<sup>3</sup> Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*, 79, calls collectivization a “very culturally specific phenomenon, existing almost exclusively in Soviet society.” Furthermore, *kollektivizm* carried with it a politically Soviet connotation, and was defined as “the principle of the comradely cooperation of laborers, according to which the private interests of an individual were ‘consciously’ subordinated to social ones.” (77)

<sup>4</sup> O’Dell, *Socialisation*, 206.

A comparison between the Soviet Union's Young Pioneers and the Boy Scouts from the west can demonstrate the uniquely Soviet characteristics of collectivism.<sup>5</sup> Both organizations targeted adolescent children, dressed them in similar uniforms and educated them with basic life skills. Both groups even boasted similar mottos: the Boy Scouts' famous two-finger salute and the motto "Be Prepared" were modified only slightly to "Always Prepared" (*vsegda gotov*) in the Soviet Union. Although on the surface they seem comparable, aside from the Young Pioneers' integration of genders, the two organizations fundamentally differed in their motivations. While members of the Boy Scouts were personally motivated by self-oriented intentions (collecting individual merit badges, for example), the Young Pioneers, at least in theory, were animated by a collectivist spirit that called for placing the betterment of the group above the individual.

Another significant figure in the story of Soviet collectives was renowned Soviet pedagogue Anton Makarenko. Aside from his involvement in the creation of production schools and the educational reforms of the 1920s, he was also responsible for establishing colonies in the later 1920s designed for the rehabilitation of Soviet delinquents and petty criminals. Makarenko, who spent years working with Soviet juvenile offenders, explained that "the way to reform a human being and produce a communist personality was to enclose the individual in a collective."<sup>6</sup> During the "remaking" of literature that took place during the First Five-Year Plan, "it was widely believed that the experience of production could transform not only the masses of society, but individual deviants—the "alien elements" inherited from capitalism, "wreckers," hooligans, and criminals."<sup>7</sup> And

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<sup>5</sup> This comparison appeared in Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*, 94, but was originally published in 1931 in an article titled "Detskie kollektivy" ("Children's Collectives").

<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Heller, *Cogs in the Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 124.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, "Little Heroes and Big Deeds," 192.



the collective—in factories, on collective farms, or in Makarenko’s colonies—served as the scheme for bringing about this change.

Although not primarily a children’s writer, Makarenko made a significant contribution to Soviet pedagogical literature. His theories on the rehabilitation potential of discipline and the collective and discipline were clearly illustrated in his famous semi-fictionalized book *The Road to Life*, which detailed the establishment and operations at the Gorky Colony just outside of Poltava in the Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> In one chapter of *The Road to Life*, Makarenko recounts the story of Burun, a young hooligan suspected of stealing the colony’s food supplies. Makarenko, who appears as a character in the story, initially responds to the thefts by hoping, rather idealistically, that “the common, collective nature of our [group’s] interests will assert itself, and arouse a greater zeal in the matter of clearing up the thefts.”<sup>9</sup> But the thefts continue with increasing severity, and still the criminal does not come forward. In a speech to the boys, Makarenko announces: “You’ve got to learn to realize that you yourselves are the owners [of the colony],” and that “a man should be able to respect himself, should be strong and proud.” Only after all the boys are threatened with expulsion from the colony does Burun finally confess. Burun, “scarcely able to suppress his sobs,” swears, “I... will... never... steal... again!” Asked why he wants to remain in the colony so desperately, Burun replies: “I like it here. There’s the lessons. I want to learn.” In the end, Burun “never stole anything again, either in the colony or anywhere.” This story was put forward to demonstrate the disciplinary and rehabilitative potential of collective organizations. It further conveys that those who respect and appreciate collectives will inevitably learn proper behavioural

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<sup>8</sup> Originally published as *Pedagogicheskaiia poema* (“Pedagogical Poem”) in the early 1930s. This served as the basis for the popular film *The Road to Life*.

<sup>9</sup> von Geldern and Stites, eds., *Mass Culture*, 229.

norms and values, and how to contribute effectively to Soviet society. The story's primary themes of discipline, collective cooperation, and social constraint became common themes in the children's literature of the period.

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Despite official culture's emphasis on the collective, the emergence of socialist realism in the mid-1930s signalled a significant shift in literature and culture. One result of this was a renewed emphasis on heroes in Soviet society. Stalinist henchman Andrei Zhdanov stated in his inaugural address at the Writer's Congress that "in our country the main heroes of works of literature are the active builders of a new life—working men and women, collective farmers, Party members...members of the Young Communist League, Pioneers. Our literature is impregnated with enthusiasm and the spirit of heroic deeds."<sup>10</sup> Another major proponent of these ideas was the world-renowned Maxim Gorky, who had recently returned to Russia after years of self-imposed exile, and who spoke at the Writer's Congress in 1934. A dedicated proletarian and Marxist, Gorky had also been greatly influenced by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche; according to many scholars, this fact explains his enthusiasm for individual heroism, and his efforts to restore heroic themes to Soviet literature despite their inconsistency with purist Marxism.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Gorky drew ideologically and artistically on literary figures from abroad, including Charles Dickens, Mark Twain and Jack London, all of whom were skilled storytellers with a penchant for exposing social injustice. As mentioned

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<sup>10</sup> Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature," 20.

<sup>11</sup> For further discussion on Gorky and Nietzscheanism, see: Clark, *A Soviet Novel*, 152-155; McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 100-102; Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); and chapter one in Hans Günther, *Der sozialistische Übermensch: Maksim Gor'kij und der sowjetische Heldenmythos* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1994).

above, one of the most challenging tensions for writers in this period was balancing the demand for the popular literary heroes with attempts to adhere closely to ideological tenets like the collective ideal. The transition in socialist-realist literature towards a renewed emphasis on individual achievement, as well as the emergence of folk elements, reflect an apparent relaxation in the Party's demand for all-round ideological compliance by the mid-1930s, but that should not be mistaken for a relaxation in control.

Socialist-realist doctrine, as outlined by Gorky, spoke of the positive hero. One early model for this positive hero was Gleb Chumalov, protagonist of Fyodor Gladkov's *Cement*, published in 1924.<sup>12</sup> Like a warrior on the battlefield, the bold Chumalov “strode into Soviet institutions in his seven-league boots and with one *bogatyr*'-like gesture sent flying all the red tape, restrictive orders, and constraining advice from the experts.”<sup>13</sup> Figures like Chumalov demonstrate how a fictional character could be depicted as taking on the responsibility of leadership while remaining within the ideological framework of collectivism. This formula, however, still needed refinement. A. A. Fadeev, Soviet writer and prominent member of the Union of Soviet Writers, pointed to *Cement* as an illustration of problems that still prevailed in the early 1930s. Chumalov, according to Fadeev, “embodies the enormous will of the working class in the building of socialism, but he has no personality of his own—this is his weakness.”<sup>14</sup> As scholar Vera S. Dunham notes, the early prototypes of the positive hero:

were totally absorbed in fulfilling their faith. It ordained a revulsion against private values as a matter of belief, nor celebration. Their attempt to understand

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<sup>12</sup> *Cement* tells the story of Gleb Chumalov, who returns from his Civil War service to find the cement factory in his town abandoned. Sacrificing love and happiness, Gleb musters his heroic strength to lead the masses and rebuild the factory.

<sup>13</sup> Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 139. *Bogatyri* were warrior heroes from Russia's epic *bylina* (folktales in verse) tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Cockrell, *Bolshevik Ideology and Literature, 1917-1927* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 65.

themselves was a search without any private intent, largely even without individual psychological awareness. They made their self-analysis—as they did everything else—under the aspect of service to the collective.<sup>15</sup>

Such two-dimensional characters had become “obsolete and ineffective” by the early 1930s.<sup>16</sup> They were tedious and lacked differentiation; they had totally been “stripped” of their identity by the culture of the First Five-Year plan, and did not effectively inspire readers to action.<sup>17</sup> Of course, the Party did not openly denounce this ideologically-correct literature. Instead, authorities emphasized the degree to which “literature and art in the Soviet Union had grown, both quantitatively and qualitatively speaking,” and attributed this growth to “the success of Socialist reconstruction.”<sup>18</sup> Still, they claimed the new Soviet society called for new types of literary heroes who could represent the changing Soviet reality.

Socialist-realist heroes were supposed to symbolize Bolshevik virtue and serve as guides on the path to communism. They were supposed to be inspiring, positive, and forward-looking, capable of representing the “new man” who would inhabit the new Soviet utopia, even though the utopian dream was still not reality. In addition, these heroes were supposed to be individuals and leaders, not entirely bound to the will of the collective, as had been the case with characters like Gleb Chumalov. An emblematic example of the socialist-realist mode of heroism can be found in Nikolai Ostrovsky’s *How the Steel was Tempered*, a 1934 novel about the establishment of Soviet power. The main character, Pavel Korchagin, was the quintessential positive hero—a “man of steel, an ideal communist”—whose selfless exploits and clear devotion to communism was

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<sup>15</sup> Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time*, 63.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>17</sup> McCannon, “Technological and Scientific Utopias,” 159.

<sup>18</sup> Struve, *Russian Literature*, 254.

intended to inspire in the hearts of readers a sense of duty and service on behalf of the socialist community.<sup>19</sup>

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At the Party's encouragement, Soviet authors drew on Russia's traditional folk genre as a tool for cultural construction and political education. Folklore, it was thought, could be used to help children identify with the values propagated by the Party by encouraging them to feel that they were part of a long tradition.<sup>20</sup> This campaign, beginning as early as 1934, involved mass folklore expeditions across the country whose goal was to collect both old and new folklore, and to determine which were suitable for appropriation and circulation.<sup>21</sup> According to folklorist Y. M. Sokolov:

Never, in all of the history of Russia, has the oral poetic tradition served the social aims so broadly and powerfully as in the Soviet period. Soviet folkloristics has helped to reveal the agitational and propagandist significance of folklore.<sup>22</sup>

Among the formats adapted to modern use were the *bylina* (epic folk poem), *chastushki* (rhyming peasant folksongs), *skazy* (biographical narratives, memoirs and anecdotes), and *stariny* (old songs). These last were renamed *noviny* (new songs) and comprised a combination of *byliny*, historical songs and laments.<sup>23</sup> These folk-inspired forms were used widely to praise heroic achievements, glorify leaders and advance national pride. They were blatantly and deliberately contrived, as their creators were under severe pressure by the Party. (After Stalin's death, this pseudofolklore, as well as the literature that drew on folk motifs, were the targets of angry debates about authenticity.)

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<sup>19</sup> Dunham, *In Stalin's Time*, 62.

<sup>20</sup> O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 105.

<sup>21</sup> Oinas, *Essays on Russian Folklore*, 136.

<sup>22</sup> Sokolov, *Russian Folklore*, 141.

<sup>23</sup> Oinas, *Essays on Russian Folklore*, 141-143. The Russian term "skazy" should not be confused with "skazki," the word for folktales or fairy tales.

In children's literature, heroes provide behavioural examples to imitate or avoid. Two themes commonly stressed by Soviet children's stories were leadership and collective cooperation, presenting socialist-realist authors with the difficulty, already discussed, of finding a balance between depicting heroes as strong and independent individuals while maintaining their collective consciousness. Furthermore, authors had to counter the growing indifference of young readers to the literature of the First Five-Year Plan by creating stories that entertained as well as educated. Staunch communist and versatile author Alexei Tolstoy (a former aristocrat—the “Red Count”—related to the novelist Leo Tolstoy) wrote in many veins during the 1930s, including that of children's literature. His most famous children's story was a 1936 adaptation of the popular Italian fairy tale *Pinocchio*, which he titled “The Adventures of Buratino” (also known as “The Golden Key”). This tale provides a valuable example of how the collective and the hero were creatively fused to satisfy ideology while also educating and entertaining. Buratino starts off as a “horrid, mischievous” wooden puppet with a long wooden nose, carved by the old organ-grinder Carlo.<sup>24</sup> After associating with thieves and foolishly losing all of his money, Buratino finds the golden key said to unlock the door to a magical place that “will bring you happiness.” As in *Pinocchio*, Buratino's journey involves numerous encounters with cunning characters and many challenges. Along the way, Buratino is transformed from a “brainless, gullible child” with “no sense at all” to a heroic puppet who, with the help of his exploited puppet friends and the magical golden key, is able to overthrow the villain: the wealthy (bourgeois) puppet master, Karabas Barabas. Buratino embodies the rehabilitation and character development of delinquent children, as

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<sup>24</sup> Alexey Tolstoy, “The Golden Key, or The Adventures of Buratino,” in Balina, *Politicizing Magic*, 131-164.

described in Makarenko's *Road to Life*. As was the case with Burun in Makarenko's colony, Buratino "illustrate[d] how a simple piece of wood, with no appropriate heritage, and, moreover, affiliated with thieves, may be changed through proper collective endeavour and the support of his peers."<sup>25</sup> "The Golden Key" also shows that even a strong and independent hero cannot succeed without the cooperation and solidarity of the collective.

By 1936, when "The Golden Key" was first published, folklore had been successfully reinstated within the socialist-realist framework. In keeping with this trend, Tolstoy employed a magical object—a golden key discovered while exploring an underwater realm—to give Buratino the confidence and power to expel the villain and bring happiness to his town. While the magic key provided Buratino with one means to his end, he still could not have succeeded without the assistance of the collective. In essence, the magical power of the key is replaced by the power of the collective, which has the power to bring out the best in an individual.<sup>26</sup> Here is where the ideological differences between *Pinocchio* and *The Golden Key* are most evident: Buratino is clearly a Soviet hero, learning to act according to good socialist values. Although the story highlights his personal development, it also makes clear that his success depends on cooperation with the collective. Furthermore, Buratino does not use his magical object to satisfy his own selfish aims or improve his own social status, but to meet "the needs of the communal utopian fantasy."<sup>27</sup> Unlike *Pinocchio*, whose primary goal is to become human (a personal desire), Buratino's selfless aim is to purge the enemy from his village and find happiness for everyone. And in the end, Buratino does not really need to

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<sup>25</sup> Balina, *Politicizing Magic*, 113.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 112.

become human, because he has already learned to behave like a good and loyal Soviet citizen—by far the greater accomplishment.<sup>28</sup> “The Golden Key” clearly satisfied Soviet demands for emphasis on the collective, but also ensured popularity by incorporating fantastic elements. Other versions of the story, as well as further adventures for Buratino and his friends, were published and very well received. The 1936 version recounted above was later adapted as a screenplay.

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Some Soviet tales served to romanticize the Party’s various campaigns, inspiring young readers to respect and support the regime’s initiatives. Such stories also sought to convince youth that they, too, had the potential to contribute to Soviet progress. In “The Chuvash Peasant and the Eagle,” from 1937, the author idealizes one of the most notorious forms of Soviet communalism: the collective farm or *kolkhoz*. *Kolkhozy* came into being as a result of Stalin’s collectivization campaign, a state initiative that, starting in 1928, abolished private ownership of land and transplanted peasants to government-run farms, banishing, imprisoning or executing anyone who opposed the change. According to Party propaganda, the people on collective farms worked eagerly and joyfully, reminiscent of the slogan sung by Snow White’s dwarves, “whistle while you work”: the USSR was depicted as being full of “jubilant singing people whose life resembled a continuous holiday.”<sup>29</sup> In actuality, collectivization was imposed with immense brutality, and, in 1932-1933, caused one of the worst famines in modern history, killing millions in Ukraine, Southern Russia, and Kazakhstan.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Miller, “The Image of Stalin,” 55.



None of this reality appears in “The Chuvash Peasant.” Instead, the story tells of an old, poor peasant couple who sends their three sons in search of happiness (the number “three” being an obvious folkloric staple). Andry, the youngest son, sets out three times in search of happiness, each time assisted by a great eagle. The eagle prompts Andry to kill a bear, a wolf and fox; each time Andry finds a golden box, containing food, in the animal’s belly—a temporary source of happiness. On his third journey, Andry kills the fox; he then looks up and does “not recognize the village of his childhood. It was a new village, clean and wonderful. The buildings were smart. There were barns full of grain and seeds, big stables and cowsheds. And on the main building was written a great word: *kolkhoz*.”<sup>30</sup> “The Chuvash Peasant” concludes with the explicit message that true happiness for Soviet people could be found on Stalin’s collective farms.

The purpose of this story’s romanticization of a boy-hero’s exciting quest for happiness was to legitimize the campaign and ensure that young readers understood collectivization as an uplifting, honourably-intended policy. The use of folk elements in “The Chuvash Peasant” not only romanticized *kolkhoz* life—by detaching fantasy image from stark reality—but heightens the story’s appeal. Standard folk devices, such as cyclical repetition, magical objects, talking animals, and the embodiment of happiness in material form, provided a storytelling form that was familiar and entertaining. Ideological requirements were satisfied as well. Stalin himself is identified as the force guiding Andry on his path to improvement:

So the poor Chuvash Andry found happiness at last. He had killed the bear, the tsar; the wolf, the landlord; and the fox, the kulak. And the

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<sup>30</sup> “The Chuvash Peasant and the Eagle,” in von Geldern and Stites, eds., *Mass Culture*, 327.

eagle, who showed the poor Chuvash the way was—Stalin!<sup>31</sup>

As described in the next chapter, Stalin was frequently linked with the image of the eagle. As for the equation of Andry's foes with the enemies of Marxist-Leninist revolution, this further reinforces the story's obvious political messages. Working toward the collective good, "The Chuvash Peasant" told Soviet children, was the best ticket to happiness.

The type of collectivity represented by the *kolkhoz* was glorified even more explicitly in literary treatments of one of the Stalin era's most infamous episodes: the martyrization of Pavlik Morozov, a 13-year-old Young Pioneer from the Urals who denounced his father to the secret police in 1932 for hiding grain. Murdered soon after by his relatives, Pavlik was touted by the regime as the ultimate symbol of loyalty and self-sacrifice. As so often happened in the socialist-realist era, this real-life event was fictionalized and folklorized for propaganda purposes; Gorky himself called on writers to exalt this young hero, who had overcome blood kinship to discover a higher spiritual kinship.<sup>32</sup> In a poem by Mikhail Doroshin from 1933, Pavlik is portrayed as a devoted child, dedicated student, and prominent member of his Pioneer troop, who held the honour of the collective above that of his biological family—which was of far less significance than his *true* family, the Soviet nation itself. Aside from demonstrating model orthodox behaviour—conformity, selflessness, and unswerving devotion to the collective—the tale of Pavlik Morozov conveyed another key message: in the Soviet Union, the socialist-realist aesthetic proclaimed, even children were capable of becoming heroes.

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<sup>31</sup> von Geldern and Stites, eds., *Mass Culture*, 327. The appearance of Stalin in the form of an eagle becomes very prominent in children's stories and Soviet culture in general, and will be discussed in Chapter four.

<sup>32</sup> Heller, *Cogs in the Wheel*, 177-178.

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The cherished value of selflessness is addressed less intensely in other stories. For example, in “A Rainbow Flower” (also known as “The Flower of Seven Colours”), the heroine learns that, by overcoming selflessness, she is able to find happiness in the form of a friend. Less blatantly political than many Soviet stories, “A Rainbow Flower,” written by the popular author Valentin Katayev in 1940, nonetheless strives to impart lessons about collectivity. Zhenya, the story’s absent-minded and selfish protagonist, is subjected to a series of moral tests when she finds a magical flower, each of whose seven petals has the power to grant a wish. Zhenya uses her first wish to travel to the North Pole, to show off for a group of boys who will not let her join in their game of Arctic exploration. Improperly dressed, though, and freezing in the company of polar bears, she has to use another magic petal to return home. Before long, in typical fairy tale fashion, she has wasted the first six petals on frivolous wishes that are meant to satisfy her greed, but only lead to trouble. After using her sixth wish to return things to normal, Zhenya remains friendless and alone. She then meets a boy named Vitya who seems friendly, but is prevented by physical disability from playing. Taking the precious flower from her pocket, she “carefully [tears] off the last petal, open[s] her fingers and let[s] it fly off.” Thus, in a “high and happy voice,” Zhenya uses the last of her wishes to cure Vitya’s handicap: “no sooner were the words out of her mouth than Vitya jumped up from the bench and began playing tag with her.”<sup>33</sup> Zhenya learns that selfishness does not lead to happiness, and one pays a price for careless decisions, and that finding true friends is more important than displaying power.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, she finds that improper use of

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<sup>33</sup> Valentin Katayev, “A Rainbow Flower,” in Morton, ed., *Harvest*, 92-99.

<sup>34</sup> Nikolajeva, “Fairy Tales,” 176.

unusual gifts isolates her from others—precisely the message of conformity encouraged by the Party.

Once again, magic serves a different purpose than it typically does in western tales. Rather than bringing happiness simply by realizing material desires, it establishes plausible circumstances for the heroine’s moral development. When Zhenya wishes for all the toys in the world, they came crashing down on her, making her tangibly aware of the consequences of greed. When she foolishly breaks her mother’s favourite vase, the magic flower provides an easy way out of a difficult situation, but thereby puts her at risk of learning nothing. But by causing her to make mistakes, and by estranging her from other children, the temporary possession of magical powers teaches her the consequences of unwise and selfish actions, as well as the value of the communist collective.<sup>35</sup> Magic encourages Zhenya to put the needs of others above her own, just as a good Soviet child should place the collective ahead of himself or herself. This wish-granting motif is reminiscent of the carnivalesque plots in some western tales, in which “the normal order of things is temporarily reversed so that the weak and the oppressed become rich and mighty.”<sup>36</sup> However, while western heroes tend to develop personality and individuality as their tales progress, good heroes in Soviet stories demonstrate an ability to conform.

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Stories with a carnivalesque plot structure, like “A Rainbow Flower,” use a temporary upside-down turn of things to teach other various moral lessons. Those who failed to live up to the examples provided in the tales were at risk of becoming

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 181, 186-7. Differences between Soviet and western tales should not be overstated: many western stories, like that Greek myth of Midas and the Goethe/Dukas Disney tale of the sorcerer’s apprentice, warn of the moral and practical dangers of abusing wish-granting magic.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 177.

disobedient and idle. Because of the implied disdain for control and conformism, these two characteristics were particularly dreaded by Soviet authorities. Also, in a country attempting to modernize at breakneck speed, idleness was an especially hated vice. Therefore, many stories make examples of the children who falter on this front—although generally they realize the error of their ways and are able to reform their behaviour. In *The Soviet Novel*, Katerina Clark links this type of character development to the Marxist spontaneity/consciousness dialectic—the idea that consciousness is the essence of the mature Soviet identity, and can only be achieved by wielding and controlling spontaneous energy. (By the same token, without spontaneity to begin with there is no forward progress.) According to Lenin, undisciplined spontaneity on the part of the masses led only to misdirected and misguided attempts for change. Only later, guided by revolutionary intellectuals, did the masses attain political consciousness and begin moving toward their goal of socialist revolution.<sup>37</sup> In the context of socialist-realist literature, however, Clark refers to the hero's potential, determination and spontaneous energy (*stikhiinost'*), which he must learn to wield through self-control and discipline in the process of attaining consciousness (*soznatel'nost'*). As scholar Oleg Kharkhordin puts it, in nearly every socialist-realist novel, “a disciple, under the guidance of a wise teacher, overcomes enormous difficulties, learns to control his or her chaotic passions by doctrinal insight, and thus rises to Conscience.”<sup>38</sup> Only positive heroes who possess *stikhiinost'* and learn to channel it effectively by gaining *soznatel'nost'* can achieve true greatness.

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<sup>37</sup> For discussions of socialist consciousness in the context of Soviet society see V. I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement* (New York: International Publishers, 1943).

<sup>38</sup> Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*, 59.

Soviet children's stories also drew on this dialectic. Buratino, in "The Golden Key," shows confidence, bravery and presence of mind, indicating that he has achieved a sense of *soznatel'nost*, as does Zhenya in "A Rainbow Flower," when she selflessly offers up her last wish to help a friend. On the other hand, failure to control one's *stikhiinost'* could lead children down the path of disobedience and idleness. Sergei Mikhalkov's beloved "Disobedience Holiday: A Tale for Children and Parents" provides a vivid warning. The story opens with a young boy whose disobedience has earned him an afternoon alone in his room. But a magical kite flies him out of captivity to a town rumored to have no parents or punishments. All the adults in this town have decided to leave, in order to teach the "rude and lazy, naughty and stubborn children" a lesson: "Let them live as they like and do as they please! Then we shall see what happens."<sup>39</sup>

On the first day of this disobedience holiday, absolute chaos ensues. The children run wild and smoke cigars, "crossing the streets wherever they liked," eat ice cream until their stomachs hurt, and scribble graffiti on shop fronts and windows. By day two, however, the children are bored with their freedom and physically sick from eating too many sweets. At this point the misbehaving boy arrives on the magical kite and witnesses what life is like without order and control. The children beg the kite to take a message to their parents, asking them to come home. And when the parents finally return on the third day, they find the town returned to order and their children straightened up:

The children stood before them, lined up as if on parade, the boys combed and freshly washed, in well-pressed suits and polished shoes and the girls gaily dressed with bows in their well-brushed hair. Quiet and obedient, ready to fulfill any assignment or request. Exemplary, model children!<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sergei Mikhalkov, "Disobedience Holiday," in *A Choice for Children: Poems, Fables and Fairy Tales* (Moscow: Raduga, 1988): 113.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

In other words, ideal Soviet children. After witnessing the joyous reunion, the misbehaving boy grabs hold of the kite's tail and goes home. Safely in the air, he asks: "Listen, Kite, you didn't like it there either, did you?" And the kite replies: "To tell you the truth, that sort of freedom wouldn't suit me! There's got to be at least some kind of order!"<sup>41</sup> The boy has matured and learned the value of social order, thereby achieving a child-sized dose of *soznatel'nost'*. After their "disobedience holiday," the children have learned that absolute freedom and lack of control is dangerous, and that there is value in hierarchy and social structure.

Like "Disobedience Holiday," Samuil Marshak's "Petrushka the Foreigner," republished by *Detizdat* in 1935 (and several times more throughout the Soviet period), warns children about the dangers of idleness.<sup>42</sup> Petrushka, a young schoolboy, decides to become a "free bird," skipping a day of school to "sing and have fun."<sup>43</sup> Petrushka gets into various kinds of trouble: he buys and sells cigarettes, he is chased by a fireman and a street cleaner, he ruins all the ice-cream man's goods by hiding in the ice cream cooler, and he steals the clothes of a foreigner and impersonates him in the presence of a policeman. Eventually Petrushka's distraught parents discover him underneath the foreigner's clothes and phony accent. In the end, disobedient Petrushka is not punished but simply returned to school with a warning from the policeman, which provides the story with its moral. The policeman states that Petrushka: "is not a danger to society. But I will release him to his school only if they keep an eye on him, so he does not idle

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>42</sup> A 1968 version of "Petrushka and the Foreigner," instead of ending with a warning from the policeman against idleness and misbehaviour, concludes with Petrushka begging the foreigner for forgiveness. This raises questions about whether idleness remained a problem, or at least a valuable moral lesson, in later years.

<sup>43</sup> Samuil Marshak, *Petrushka Inostrannets* (Moscow: Detgiz, 1935), 1.

about.”<sup>44</sup> Albeit light-heartedly, Petrushka’s adventures illustrate the dangers of disobedience, idleness, and failure to conform to societal norms. It is interesting that Petrushka does not repent or apologize for his misbehaviour. In fact, apart from the policeman’s admonition, the story portrays a disobedient boy’s wonderfully exciting day, and it is questionable whether or not the story had the desired effects of enlightening children or encouraging obedience. It may even be that “Petrushka” is one of the few tales that managed to fall outside, or at least partly outside, the socialist-realist framework.

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Children’s writers undoubtedly played an important role in the moral development of Soviet readers. Their characters were admired by millions and exemplified the attitudes and behaviour that Soviet children were supposed to emulate. They demonstrated how to control and utilize their spontaneous energy in order to achieve truly socialist consciousness. Soviet educators and propagandists recognized the didactic potential of children’s stories and thereby ensured that pages were filled with messages, morals, and values that would mold child readers into model Soviet youth. Sometimes the messages were apolitical—selflessness, cooperation, and obedience. At other times the stories clearly highlighted Soviet ideology—collectiveness and heroic achievement within the bounds of a strict hierarchy. As is evident, overly strident children’s fiction had received official boosting during the First Five-Year Plan, but proved ineffective as propaganda. Therefore, they were phased out in favour of the new socialist-realist aesthetic. While the collective, as an inherent facet of Communist ideology, always remained a part of children’s stories, the focus shifted towards

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 9.



individual heroes and their roles as leaders in building socialism. In the socialist-realist period, authors continued to struggle with the line between ideology and entertainment; finding a way to merge or balance these two divergent imperatives presented socialist-realist authors with one of their most significant challenges. The approaching war and the threats to security that were emerging (or were said by the state to be emerging) in Soviet society and foreign policy in the 1930s provided authors with exciting new heroes for their stories, and the struggle to capture children's enthusiasm continued.

## Chapter 4

### The Many Faces of the Positive Hero: Socialist-Realist Models for Character Development

...it is the heroes who provide models for behavior and prompt actions that enjoy the greatest popularity among young readers, live longest and are of greatest educational value. They help Soviet society to educate the children to grow up to be humane, kind, freedomloving, to actively build a better world and to wish well and do good to their fellow creatures. Therein lies the aim of our Soviet literature for children.<sup>1</sup>

(Nikolai Bogdanov, correspondent and children's writer, 1961)

Soviet authors, journalists, and artists of all types manufactured an extraordinarily heroic culture during the 1930s. The socialist-realist aesthetic included a children's literature that featured various subcategories of hero-types to serve as models for youth. Military heroes, as the most obvious type, inculcated nationalism and a sense of patriotism. But as children were rarely active participants in the military, stories that demonstrated more relevant ways for children to demonstrate heroism were more effective as propaganda. Themes like safety, security and vigilance, which afforded to child characters more plausible avenues for heroic behaviour, were regularly highlighted. Going a step further, the exploits of individual achievers served as even more realistically imitable examples of heroic accomplishment than vigilant citizens on the lookout for spies and saboteurs. Such achievers, "the best people in the USSR," as Stalinist rhetoric called them, were real people who attained heroic status as quota-busting Stakhanovites, record-setting athletes, brave pilots, and venturesome explorers.<sup>2</sup> For a child to aspire to these roles was not unfeasible. Closer to everyday experience, children could live out their own forms of heroism by behaving well, excelling at school work, honing sports skills, or participating in the Young Pioneers and Komsomol. Out of this culture of

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<sup>1</sup> Bogdanov, "Literary Characters," 164.

<sup>2</sup> On Stalinist celebration of the "best people's" exploits, see Günther, *Culture of the Stalin Period*; and Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous*.

heroes, a leader cult emerged that glorified Stalin as the father of all heroes. In literature, as well as in life, all of these hero-types were intended to promote popular pride, romanticize the socialist realities of the Stalinist 1930s, and enlighten readers with examples of appropriate values and forms of behaviour to emulate.

Unlike the culture of the First Five-Year Plan, socialist realism made allowances for heroization and folklore despite the inherent contradiction to Soviet ideology. However, this should not be mistaken for a relaxation in Party influence. Socialist-realist literature continued expounding Stalinist ideology and, considering the context of Soviet society during this period, it would be naïve to suppose that the literary world managed to circumvent the Party's regimentation and control in any sustained or systematic way. Following the Writer's Congress of 1934, "the post-1932 reorganization [of literature] was designed to provide an institutional framework for literature that would guarantee a high degree of ideological conformity."<sup>3</sup> The touch of magic provided by folklore served to popularize ideologically correct tales, and also as a fictional device that allowed child characters to be placed in heroic settings that would otherwise be unconvincing. Ironically, the unreal elements of folklore made it seem more realistic that children might carry weapons, catch spies, or stand up to a dangerous enemy. Such tales gave readers exciting and inspiring demonstrations of heroics that, unlikely in real life, were imaginable in the fantastic world of folklore.

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Thematic emphasis shifted according to the practical concerns and political climate at the time. During the 1930s, heightened Nazi aggression, as well as Japanese expansionism, steadily increased the likelihood of war, and, as the decade progressed,

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<sup>3</sup> Clark, "Little Heroes and Big Deeds," 205.

socialist culture responded to this growing concern. Soviet troops fought unofficially in Spain in 1936-1938, clashed with Japan in an undeclared conflict in 1938-1939, and, of course, faced German invasion after June 1941. Especially by the late 1930s, then, stories that popularized and romanticized the military and its heroes were being designed to entice young people to support the armed forces or to actually join and serve. Once again, folklore served to reinforce Soviet propaganda efforts, this time to boost patriotism. Efforts obviously escalated during World War II; the prominent journal *Literature and Art*, the official mouthpiece of the Union of Soviet Writers, put it in 1942, wartime literature:

... was called upon to serve one single aim—the cause of victory over the enemy. It was meant to become a weapon in the hands of the soldiers who rose to defend their country. It had to foster the fighting spirit of the people, to consolidate the force of patriotism, to fan the hatred for German-Fascist invaders, to call for revenge. It was to show the moral greatness of the Soviet people, their tenacity, their faith in the coming victory.<sup>4</sup>

Both before and during the war, children, particularly boys, had many stories and books to choose from that depicted the brave deeds of soldiers. Folkloric touches were sometimes added, not only for reasons discussed elsewhere, but also to blunt the harsh realities of war somewhat for children. An excellent prewar example of a folk-tinged soldiering story is “The Three Sons,” published by *Detizdat* in 1938.<sup>5</sup> Like old tales featuring three princes, this story is about three brothers, all servicemen: a sailor, a pilot and a border guard. (Border guards generally served in military units under the authority of the secret police (NKVD), not the armed forces, a fact well known to the public.) The two older sons return home to discover that their youngest brother, the border guard, has been captured and killed by the enemy—in this case the Japanese. After receiving

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<sup>4</sup> Struve, *Russian Literature*, 319.

<sup>5</sup> *Tri syna: russkaia skazka* (Moscow and Leningrad: Detizdat, 1938).

permission from Stalin, the two boys set out on a quest to find their younger brother. They travel by airplane (a nod to the USSR's technological achievements) to the Far East, where their brother had been stationed, and find him dead and covered in wounds. The boys search for a magical spring containing the water of life (a staple for many traditional Russian tales), collect some of the magical water, and return to their brother. They sprinkle the water over his wounds three times, healing the wounds and restoring him to life.

After returning home, the brothers then travel to Moscow and are granted an audience with Stalin. The leader is delighted by their heroic story and asks: "What is it you would like most from me?" The boys wish to remain together and serve in the Far East as heroic defenders of the borderland. Stalin gives his permission, pronouncing that "you do not deny heroes. I very much respect and love such heroes." These characters achieve heroic status by displaying honour and selflessness. Their patriotic actions were meant to demonstrate that serving one's country was a privilege rather than an obligation, even though, as of 1918, military service in the Red Army was compulsory for men between the ages of 18 to 40. On the border, the brothers would continue to have opportunities to protect and serve. Their heroism also demoralizes the enemy: when the brothers return to the Far East, the foe across the border sees that the youngest brother is still alive, conceding with dismay that: "It seems that we can't ever destroy them."

While "The Three Sons" fulfilled the Party's ideological demands regarding content with its themes of duty and service, the story also utilized the popularity and appeal of folktales in form. The structure of the quest-tale—two heroes set out on a journey, overcome difficulties and eventually succeed in their goals—is an obvious

throwback to folktales, particularly tales of Russian *bogatyri*. This same year, 1938, also saw the completion of Sergei Eisenstein's film *Alexander Nevsky*, which used a retelling of a medieval episode—Russia's heroic defeat of invading Teutonic Knights in the 1200s—to comment on present-day tensions with Hitler's Germany. The film's medieval setting added heroic glamour and tapped into patriotic roots that were deeply Russian. "The Three Sons" aimed to do the same, even if it did so by placing traditional folk elements in a contemporary setting.

As labourers, children supported the war effort on the home front. In a surprising number of cases, they participated directly in combat. The archetypal real-life example is Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, a 14-year-old partisan fighter captured by the Germans. Tortured and executed for refusing to betray her comrades, Zoya became not just a martyr, but an immediate Joan of Arc symbol—inspiring to all youths, but especially girls and young women.<sup>6</sup>

A fictional counterpart to Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya (although in this case a boy) can be found in the A. Busyrev story "The Boy and the Officer," published in the prominent magazine *Ogonëk* ("Little Fire" or "Campfire") in 1942.<sup>7</sup> In this story, German soldiers patrolling through a village, searching for a Soviet partisan detachment, find a young boy, Tolya Nilov, walking towards them with a book under his arm. Tolya is brought before an officer for questioning; the boy, being held by two soldiers, "gaz[ed] swiftly about him...rested his eyes on the officer's face, then on the soldiers, and last on his book that had dropped to the ground and was lying pressed into the snow by the soldier's boots. It was Jules Verne's *The Fifteen-Year-Old-Captain*." The boy

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<sup>6</sup> Sartorti, "On the Making of Heroes," in Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment*, 176-193.

<sup>7</sup> A. Busyrev, "The Boy and the Officer," in Morton, ed., *Harvest*, 446-447.

withstands torture, abuse, and cunning bribery, finally shouting in the officer's face, "I don't barter my country!" The next day, the Soviet partisan detachment finds Tolya's corpse and buries him. One of the partisans, the boy's former teacher (and a woman), faces the mourning crowd and says:

A fascist bullet pierced the loving heart of the little patriot, Tolya Nilov... These brutes learned nothing from him about the partisans. But they learned, once more, how strong is our people's love for their country. There will come a day when the children of Leningrad and the children of all over our land will sing songs about Tolya's love for his native land... We vow over your grave to avenge the executioners who are robbing our children of their happiness and life.

Tolya's knowing sacrifice is no less honourable or valuable than the deeds of soldiers who wear a uniform. The story shows clearly that even children can be as patriotic and heroic as adults. The teacher's monologue at the end also introduces a new theme common in Soviet wartime culture: the demonization (fully understandable, under the circumstances) of the Germans as brutes.<sup>8</sup> The lack of folkloric elements in "The Boy and the Officer" makes the harsh realities of war all the more apparent.

These examples illustrate the use of heroes as instruments for sparking pride among young readers in their Soviet homeland and its military efforts. The German invaders in particular made excellent foils: their brutality could easily be contrasted with the supposed virtues of the Stalinist order. Tales like that of Tolya Nilov illustrated the real dangers of the war while romanticizing the heroic sacrifices made by children. In these stories, of which there were many, "writers sing the praises of boys and girls ready for adventure who perform heroic deeds and sacrifice themselves for the Motherland; children have drummed into them the need to destroy the enemy and be ready to die."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Argyrios K. Pisiotis, "Images of Hate in the Art of War," in Stites, ed., *Culture and Entertainment*, 141-156.

<sup>9</sup> Heller, *Cogs in the Wheel*, 156.

Such stories imparted to youth the conviction that everyone, regardless of age, could play an honourable role in the war effort.

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There were other ways to safeguard the Soviet homeland, especially before the war. An exceptionally important theme during the Stalinist 1930s, both in public life and in popular culture, was vigilance—against external and internal enemies alike. Not only did the threat of war worsen throughout the decade, as described above, but whether the authorities cynically manufactured it or generally believed it, a general sense grew that Soviet society had been penetrated by all kinds of spies, saboteurs (“wreckers” in Soviet terminology), counter-revolutionaries, and oppositionists loyal to defeated opponents like Stalin’s arch-foes, Leon Trotsky. Supposed “wrecking” in factories and workplaces during the First and Second Five-Year Plans, the mysterious assassination of Party official Sergei Kirov in 1934, and the witchhunts and show trials of the 1936-1938 purges all fuelled the general paranoia. The threat could be external and internal: it was assumed that wreckers, Trotskyites and class enemies would also be willing to serve as enemy spies or fascist sympathizers.<sup>10</sup>

In such a climate, children, no less than adults, were called upon by schoolteachers, newsreels, radio and newspapers to be constantly on guard. As Sheila Fitzpatrick wrote, vigilance was portrayed during this time as “one of the cardinal virtues” of all Soviet citizens.<sup>11</sup> Children’s fiction added its voice to the chorus. This

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<sup>10</sup> For discussion of this sense of crisis, and to what degree Soviet citizens felt it was based on truth, see Davies, *Popular Opinion*; Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*; and Robert W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin’s Russia, 1934-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3. Fitzpatrick investigates how individuals dealt with issues of identity and how Soviet people adapted to drastically changing social conditions. In one context, “unmasking” referred to the hunt for “double-dealers” who were trying to hide their true identity.



sort of heroic action, of course, was more plausibly within the reach of young characters than straightforward military action. Children were encouraged to keep their eyes and ears open, watching and listening for suspicious activity, even within their own families. Here again the image of Pavlik Morozov, who had informed on his own father, was of great use.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the ultra-Soviet children's author Sergei Mikhalkov addressed the theme of vigilance eagerly and frequently. In 1938, he published *The Border*, a volume of poems, many of which dealt with national security.<sup>12</sup> The borderland separates and protects the communist utopia from everyone else (another example of how socialist-realist rhetoric contradicted Marxist ideology, with its sense of internationalism). Many children's texts hammered this point home, like the first-year school reader describing how: "The border guard on the frontier/ protects our land,/ so that the whole people peacefully/ may work and study."<sup>13</sup> Children were told that the ever-watchful secret police—whose role in the purges was proudly propagandized—were in charge of the border guards, a fact that would have been known to Mikhalkov's young readers (and those of the earlier-mentioned "The Three Sons"). Mikhalkov's little poem recounts the ominous infiltration of a spy across the border:

In the deaf night,  
In the cold gloom  
With an envoy of the white gang  
The enemy crossed the border—  
A spy and saboteur.

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<sup>12</sup> Sergei Mikhalkov, *Granitsa* (Moscow: Detizdat, 1938).

<sup>13</sup> O'Dell, *Socialisation*, 82. Originally cited in the first-year school reader *Zvedochka* ("Little Star"), 88.

But, in a more than slightly contrived turn of events, a fifth-grade class, somehow armed with guns, cunningly intercepts the spy and brings him to the authorities. At the station, the young chief declares:

In the border land there is  
An unwritten law:  
We know everything, we know it all,  
Who I am, who you are, who he is.<sup>14</sup>

Here again, socialist-realist rhetoric emphasizes heroic achievement while also portraying it as a team effort for the betterment of the whole. The lack of realism is outweighed by the power of fantasy and excitement “to teach young readers morals, disguising them behind exciting adventures.”<sup>15</sup>

Mikhalkov brings the action closer to home in “The Spy,” another selection from *The Border*.<sup>16</sup> Here, a fascist spy has infiltrated the Soviet community; his sabotage betrays and threatens the collective good. This seemingly innocent character:

[s]at where he wanted,  
He ate and drank with us  
Sang our songs.  
And gave to our girls  
Smiles and flowers,  
And he spoke with everyone,  
As an old friend...

But in the night, the saboteur lurks around like a thief:

And that same year  
Water suddenly rushed into our mine,  
A chemical plant burned,  
Wires burned.

Finally he is exposed as a spy. His treason revealed to all, he is admonished by righteous Soviet citizens:

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<sup>14</sup> Mikhalkhov, “Granitsa,” in *Granitsa*, 3-6.

<sup>15</sup> Nikolajeva, “Fairy Tales,” 173.

<sup>16</sup> Mikhalkhov, “Shpion,” *Granitsa*, 7-9.

You betrayed your native land.  
We see your hatred,  
Your fascist face...  
You will be wiped off the face of the earth,  
So we can live peacefully!<sup>17</sup>

Mikhalkov's poem sought to convince children that the Party's warnings were not idle. With lines such as "like a malicious viper...you crept into our fair family," Mikhalkov not only increases the sense of threat, but reminds readers that their loyalties lay not with their immediate family, but the larger collective state. In dramatic fashion, Mikhalkov harnesses all the suspicion and mistrust that prevailed within Soviet society during the 1930s.

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Another popular subset of Soviet heroes was the achiever, who appeared in a variety of forms including the Stakhanovite, the pilot, the champion farmer or breeder, the athlete, and the Arctic explorer. All fields of endeavour, the socialist-realist aesthetic told the public, were potentially heroic, and children were offered a wide array of these achieving heroes to emulate. Among the most heavily-promoted were the Stakhanovites: hero-workers who over-fulfilled their production targets.<sup>18</sup> Although Five-Year Plan culture had praised so-called "shock-worker" teams (*udarniki*), workplace achievements had mostly been portrayed by writers as a "grey swarming of mass activity;" in the 1930s, by contrast, socialist realism used the real-life example of miner Andrei Stakhanov to design propaganda to highlight outstanding individual workers.<sup>19</sup> To

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<sup>17</sup> Mikhalkov, "Shpion," in *Granitsa*, 7-9.

<sup>18</sup> On the Stakhanovite movement, see Marcia Mueller, "Ideology, Heroism and Industrialization: The Stakhanovite Movement, 1935-1939" (PhD diss., Eastern Washington University, 1984); and Lewis Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> Mueller, "Ideology, Heroism and Industrialization," 42.

accelerate technological advancement and productivity in the Soviet Union, Stalin called on all workers to “emulate the Stakhanovite and to move from the arena of ordinary labor into the realm of heroism.”<sup>20</sup> Promoting Stakhanovism presented socialist-realist journalists and authors with one of the earliest examples of the tensions they would face in trying to encourage achievement without contradicting the collective ideal. The answer was to portray the Stakhanovites as heroic individuals who devoted themselves to bettering the whole by surpassing the country’s industrial and technological objectives. Stakhanovism itself faded from prominence by 1940, the eve of the Soviet Union’s entry into World War II. But the same logic was applied to other forms of pride-stirring, patriotically-motivated, heroic-seeming accomplishment.

One of the most genuinely appealing forms of achievement-based heroism involved pilots and polar explorers. Fictional and real-life examples regularly appeared in socialist-realist literature and Soviet society. This focus on flying and Arctic adventure allowed the socialist-realist aesthetic to combine themes of heroism, patriotism, Stalin’s leader cult and technological prowess with two other symbols: the North Pole and aviation.<sup>21</sup> Children ploughed through the breathtaking tales of pilots and explorers—such as Veniamin Kaverin’s *The Two Captains*, one of socialist-realist fiction’s enduring classics—hoping to be lucky enough to one day see the Arctic or fly a plane. (Recall that, in Katayev’s “A Rainbow Flower,” Zhenya was excluded by boys who were pretending to be Arctic heroes, and it was to the real Arctic that she first wished herself.) In a fan letter to a team of scientists at the USSR’s SP-1 polar outposts, two boys exclaimed:

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>21</sup> McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 9.

We wish to go to the pole,  
Where the cold and frost reign,  
And we wish to see  
The axis of the Earth.  
But by the time that we have grown,  
All the poles will be discovered.  
By the time ten years have passed,  
Not a “white spot” will remain.  
We will agree to wait—but  
We insist on one condition:  
Please leave for me and Seryozha  
Just one “white spot” on the map!!<sup>22</sup>

The Arctic was an unexplored, dangerous and distant—but potentially economically useful—land that provided an incredible challenge to explore and develop. Soviet people of all ages were captivated by the adventures of these heroes who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the good of scientific and industrial progress in the USSR.

These forms of achievement were made to seem even more heroic, thanks to the restoration and adaptation of traditional folk genres and forms. This can be seen in the works of Marfa Semyonovna Kryukova, one of the most prolific and celebrated folk singers of the Soviet period. Familiar with traditional folk singing since birth, she adapted folk styles and forms to satisfy the ideological demands of the period. She coined the term “noviny” (new songs) to reflect the Sovietized updating of the traditional *stariny*, or old songs. One of Kryukova’s most famous examples is “The Tale of the Pole,” from 1937, which extolled the virtues of polar exploration and honoured those heroes who successfully reached the North Pole.<sup>23</sup> Of course, along with recognizing the actual heroes of the expedition, the song acknowledges the Soviet Union’s great leader Stalin for his continuous guidance.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 138. Originally from E. T. Krenkel’, *Chetyre tovarishcha* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1940), 116.

<sup>23</sup> *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* (24 June 1937); Marfa Semyonovna Kryukova, “Tale of the Pole,” in von Geldern and Stites, eds., *Mass Culture*, 287-291.

The great chieftain Stalin summoned all his men unto a meeting...  
He called together his brave eagles, the arctic pilot heroes,  
And he spoke to them this speech:  
“Hail to ye, my champions brave and hero pilots,  
Fly ye off to yon country in the distance,  
To yonder country, yon cold country,  
The cold country, yon northern country,  
Whereto brave eagles heretofore have never flown,  
Whereto our champions brave have never fared,  
Where our good folk have never found abode.

Kryukova’s poem demonstrates an obvious return to traditional folk language. She describes the arctic explorers as “wondrous knights,” a reference to the *bogatyri* of the epic *byliny* tradition who won battles and conquered lands. She describes the pilots—“men of wisdom, men of valour”—as “brave eagles” who will conquer the arctic for the “good folk.” In Soviet tales, while Arctic explorers became the heroic warriors of the land, pilots became “eagles” and “falcons”—the heroes of the skies.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, heroes were granted almost mythical, god-like qualities in these folk songs:

Whenever the blustery wind starts blowing.  
They make walls of ice for protection,  
To stop the blustery winds from blowing our fertile lands,  
The trees from bending in our orchards,  
And to help our Soviet ships sail on calm seas.  
When storm clouds gather they hold them back,  
Hold them in their hands and get their feel,  
And then they let them go in the direction  
Where the land needs rain right away.

Like the figures from great myths, these heroes have the power to control the winds and the weather—an allusion to the technological advances the USSR claimed to be making under Stalin.

Another prominent Soviet folk singer and poet was A. V. Morozova. Although she was born to a peasant family in Kalinin (originally Tver) in 1872, according to the

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<sup>24</sup> For further discussion of the significance of the falcon in traditional folklore, see Miller, *Folklore for Stalin*; Sokolov, *Russian Folklore*; and McCannon, *Red Arctic*.

prologue of one book of her songs—an admittedly propagandized text—“real life for her began only after the October Socialist Revolution.”<sup>25</sup> She was a devoted Communist and a talented artist. In 1939, Morozova published “The Story of The Miracle-Birds, the Soviet Eagles,” in which she praised a heroic accomplishment by three famous Soviet female pilots.<sup>26</sup> This was the famous, long-distance flight from Moscow to the Far East that was undertaken by Valentina Grizodubova, Polina Osipenko and Marina Raskova in September 1938, which brought Soviet female pilots into the limelight.<sup>27</sup> Using traditional language, she demands “You, our affectionate, red sun [a folkloric reference to Stalin]/ And you, moon, our sun’s friend and comrade/ And you, stars, the lamps of the skies/ Light up the way.” But the “tempestuous winds did not listen,” and the “wonder-bird” was forced to land in undesirable conditions. Luckily, Soviet pilots were “raised by our great, wise Stalin” and blessed with “much fortitude, patience, composure and knowledge,” all of which were necessary for survival. After their successful mission the women were sent home “to red Moscow” to be recognized for their heroic contribution and inspiration, undoubtedly provoking pride and inspiration among Soviet girls.

Although the heroic achievements of explorers and pilots provide exciting examples of Soviet heroism, even everyday children’s activities were commonly heroized in stories to inspire youth to emulate the demonstrations of good Soviet values. One boy-hero, Timur, became a household name in the socialist-realist Soviet Union. Arkady Gaidar’s famous children’s story “Timur and his Gang” appeared in 1940 and recounts

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<sup>25</sup> A.V. Morozova, *Skazy tkachikhi Morozovoi* (Kalinin, 1939).

<sup>26</sup> Morozova, “Skaz o chudesnikh ptitsakh, o sovetskikh trëkhorlitsakh,” in Morozova, *Skazy*, 40-46.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Krylova, “Stalinist Identity from the Viewpoint of Gender: Rearing a Generation of Professional Violent Women-Fighters in 1930s Stalinist Russia,” *Gender and History* 16, no. 3 (November 2004): 626-653. Their flight, part of the USSR’s campaign for record-breaking long-distance flights, earned the three pilots the country’s highest award, the Hero of the Soviet Union. The military applications of long-distance flying are self evident. See also Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous*, 48, 59-61, 64; and McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 79, 94-100, 106.

the exploits of an admirable boy hero and his friends, whose deeds, although not particularly grand or impressive, demonstrated honourable characteristics of leadership and collective cooperation. Timur, “a strong and brave boy with a chivalrous nature,” gathers a team of friends to do good deeds for families whose fathers, sons and husbands were serving the Red Army.<sup>28</sup> Every such house was marked with a red star identifying its inhabitants as being under the protection of Timur’s team. Timur and his gang chopped firewood for the families, fetched water for the elderly, helped out on collective farms, volunteered in kindergartens and did numerous other good deeds in strict secrecy, “which made it all the more exciting.”<sup>29</sup> This story, with its inherent messages of leadership, generosity and selflessness, remained part of the Soviet school curriculum until 1990. Although “Timur and his Gang” featured the good deeds performed by a collective, Timur became one of the Soviet Union’s most influential heroes, inspiring groups of “Timurovites” to materialize around the country, doing good deeds and inspiring other children to join their ranks.<sup>30</sup> In 1941, the Soviet press acknowledged the impact of Gaidar’s hero:

He has thought up a new game for children, an entertaining and moving game based on our very best feelings—on love for our motherland and for Soviet man, on the firmest comradeship. It is a game which inculcates in its participants justice, bravery, inventiveness, physical skill and endurance, spiritual sensitivity and resoluteness—all qualities which we want so much to see in our children.<sup>31</sup>

The popularity of Timur, as well as the countrywide expansion of the Timurovite movement, reveals the impact that one motivational story had on the behaviour of children.

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<sup>28</sup> Bogdanov, “Literary Characters,” 163.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>31</sup> O’Dell, *Socialisation*, 194. Originally in *Literaturnaia gazeta* (19 January 1941).



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Stalin himself was rarely absent from the child's fictional world. A leader cult emerged in the 1930s that venerated Stalin as the Great Leader, Lenin's faithful follower and chosen successor, and the father of all Soviet heroes. By definition, a leader cult is a deliberately constructed system that raises a political leader to a level of near mythic qualities as an omniscient and omnipresent individual, thereby legitimizing his position of supreme power and authority. In one *novina*, "A Tale about Comrade Stalin and our Great Nation," Morozova described Stalin as a "*bogatyr*," depicting him not only as the father of heroes but as one of the great heroes himself.<sup>32</sup> She described the country's achievements in the air, technological advancement in the countryside, and increased productivity in factories. She glorified Stalin for giving himself over to the Revolution, claiming that the people, who live "happy and full lives," owe everything to the "wise" and "honourable" leader. In Kryukova's famous *novina*, "The Lay of Lenin," she tells the story of the Revolution, paying little attention to historical accuracy. She tells of how Lenin gave careful instruction to Stalin on how to bring about revolution in Russia; Lenin accepts the golden keys to the country from the peasants and gives them to Stalin; Lenin assigns Stalin the task of commanding the Red Army in the Civil War (a patent falsehood); on his deathbed, Lenin hands over the keys to the country to his trustworthy follower and friend.<sup>33</sup> According to Kryukova's *noviny*, Stalin was the hero of the Civil War and Lenin's legitimate heir.

Furthermore, the children's periodical *Molodaya Gvardiia* ("Young Guard") often began each issue with several full-page photographs of Soviet leaders. Lenin, Zhdanov,

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<sup>32</sup> Morozova, "Skaz o tovarishche Staline i o nashe velikoi rodine," in *Skazy*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Miller, "The Image of Stalin," 56-57. Originally from M. S. Kriukova, *Noviny*, (Moscow, 1939).

Voroshilov, Yagoda, and Molotov graced the pages of the magazine, while Mayakovskii, Chekhov, Marshak and Chukovskii, who would obviously have been more appropriate, appeared far less often. Where there should have been illustrations of storybook characters and other images more suitable for children, the periodical chose instead to honor and glorify “the bloody dwarf” and other notorious Soviet leaders.<sup>34</sup> In one *novina*, titled “Narkom Yezhov,” written by a Kazakh folk singer and published in *Pravda* in 1937, the author likened “eagle-eyed and keen” Yezhov to the great *batyrs*, (traditional Kazakh folk heroes), and describes in a folk-inspired lexicon how he “saddled his steed and rode off to the front...barring his cutlass...”<sup>35</sup> The song exclaims that “[w]hen the dawn of October first glimmered/ He stormed the Winter Palace with valor in his gaze.” More importantly, the song’s folk language extols Yezhov’s role against Soviet enemies:

The enemies of our way, the enemies of millions,—  
The Trotskyist bands of spies crept up on us,  
And the Bukharinites, those cunning swamp snakes.  
Yezhov destroyed their traitorous ring,  
The brood of the enemy snakes was exposed  
By the eyes of Yezhov—

The leader cult filtered down through various media and cultural forms, most of which were under the control of the Party or at least heavily influenced by it.

Most interesting is Stalin’s role as father of heroes—as a guide and teacher for his children in their transition to becoming new Soviet men and women. Children were not only advised to learn the morals and values of their literary heroes, but actually to

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<sup>34</sup> “The Bloody Dwarf” describes Nikolai Yezhov, who served as the People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs (NKVD, the Soviet secret police) from 1936 to 1938, during which time the purges reached their height. Yezhov earned this nickname for short stature (approximately 5’1”) and sadistic personality.

<sup>35</sup> Dzhambul Dzhabaev, “Narkom Yezhov,” in von Geldern and Stites, eds., *Mass Culture*, 298-300.

become heroes themselves.<sup>36</sup> And as children endeavored to secure heroic status in society, Stalin was their paternal guide. As “rightful leader,” “builder,” and “defender” of communism, Stalin emerged as the head of the new Soviet family. In the mid-1930s, the Party encouraged the return of family values despite the ideological attack on the family that had taken place during the revolutionary years.<sup>37</sup> During the First Five-Year Plan years, Soviet citizens related to each other as “brother to brother,” following the prophet Stalin. But the new Soviet family was united not by blood kinship but instead by a shared ideology and collective goals—a relationship the young Pavlik Morozov knew all too well—and “the hierarchy of man was structured on a hierarchy of fathers and sons with Stalin as the ultimate father.”<sup>38</sup> And, “as Soviet songs of the time testify, the appeal of the collective did not just disappear,” but was replaced by “a view of Soviet society as an enormous but close-knit and harmonious family composed of nonantagonistic classes and peoples.”<sup>39</sup> In literature, the term “family” became an alternative for “collective,” and the Party hoped by duplicating this bond of family in society, it could capitalize propagandistically on the inherent sense of duty and responsibility that members of a family share.<sup>40</sup> More importantly, Stalin’s role as the paternal guardian served to further legitimate his position as the head of state, and the metaphoric construction of the new Soviet family meant Stalin could be elevated to even greater heights as the symbolic father.

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<sup>36</sup> McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 109.

<sup>37</sup> Heller, *Cogs in the Wheel*, 179.

<sup>38</sup> Gutkin, *Cultural Origins*, 115. Gutkin cites Katerina Clark, “Utopian Anthropology as a Context for Stalinist Literature,” in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Norton, 1977).

<sup>39</sup> Gutkin, *Cultural Origins*, 115.

<sup>40</sup> In Mikhalkov’s story “The Spy,” one member of the worker’s collective exclaims: “Into our fair family you crept like a malicious viper...” (Mikhalkov, *Granitsa*, 8).

Military heroes were a substantial subset of the characters that appeared in socialist-realist children's literature, but they were not the only heroes. With the approaching threat of war, the exploits and achievements of military heroes were an obvious avenue for writers to pursue, but the potential influence of those characters was somewhat limited considering the target audience. Children's books were not aimed towards the generation of youth targeted for military service. However, the alternative was to present characters who depicted other forms of heroism or service to the country. Security, vigilance, and safety, while being honourable, valuable and potentially exciting storylines, were also more appropriate forms of heroism for readers of children's books. The idea that each child should strive to achieve his or her own potential regardless of the size or value of the contribution, was a prominent concept in children's literature. Like Timur and his helpers, or Tolya Nilov who stood up to the German enemy, each child was encouraged to serve the country in some capacity. If nothing else, literature inspired nationalism, and child readers were taught to love and respect their country, whether or not they found a truly heroic way to serve.

## Conclusion

The next few decades of Soviet literature belonged, to one degree or another, to the Party. Soviet literature during and following the war period (1941-1945) continued, and, in fact, escalated, in the trend of intense nationalism and patriotism. On one hand, children's literature romanticized the Soviet war experience in order to instill a sense of pride in young readers. Idealized images of the Soviet war effort portrayed the sacrifices of the Soviet people—and epic episodes like the siege of Leningrad and the epochal standoff at Stalingrad—in such a way as to legitimize the Soviet state, and Stalin himself, as leading the fight for a just and worthy cause: a “sacred” or “holy war,” as one of the USSR's most popular wartime songs put it.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, for a brief time, wartime conditions caused the socialist-realist aesthetic to become somewhat more emotionally honest than it had been during the 1930s—or would be after the victory over Germany.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately following the Second World War, Soviet cultural policy shifted back, and, thanks to Stalin and Zhdanov, the arts came under stricter control than ever before. Cultural icons such as Akhmatova, Shostakovich, and Prokofiev were savagely attacked; others, like the Jewish actor and director Solomon Mikhoels, disappeared. The period between the mid-1940s and Stalin's death has been characterized as the “most barren” time in Soviet literary history; socialist-realist conformity was more smothering than ever, and the Party lowered an “impenetrable iron curtain” to cut off harmful influences from the “decadent” West.”<sup>3</sup> Literary and artistic creativity suffered miserably during these years.

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<sup>1</sup> Von Geldern and Stites, eds., *Mass Culture*, 340.

<sup>2</sup> Stites, *Culture and Entertainment*, 4-6.

<sup>3</sup> Struve, *Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin*, 393.

Then, after Stalin's passing, came the thaw," as journalist Ilya Ehrenburg famously termed the cultural liberalization of the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>4</sup> In his "Secret Speech" from 1956, Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin for his abuses and transgressions, also mentioning the severe damage done to literature. Of the films, books and poems that had built up Stalin's cult of personality, Khrushchev said: "They make us feel sick." Furthermore, "in many literary works the figure of Lenin was incorrectly presented and inadmissibly depreciated...all events were explained as if Lenin played only a secondary role."<sup>5</sup> During Khrushchev's "thaw," there was a significant relaxation in demands for cultural conformity, and a new generation of writers and artists emerged. As for folklore, the tradition remained a strong influential force in children's literature, but was no longer used as blatantly as a vehicle of Party ideology and propaganda.

Socialist-realist children's literature was an ideologically contradictory genre. In an ideal communist society, the population should be neatly packaged into various collectives. Yet socialist-realist storybooks portrayed a society in which the characters stood out from their collective and earned individual heroic status. In a similar vein, while folklore had originally been considered an anti-Soviet and backward-looking tradition, elements of the genre reemerged to exert a great deal of influence on the socialist-realist aesthetic. Aside from utilizing the genre's existing popularity and appeal to heighten the success of the Sovietized stories, folklore also provided usefully unrealistic elements that more plausibly positioned young Soviet characters in otherwise impossibly heroic situations. Magic allowed children to save the Soviet Union from dangerous enemies or accomplish amazing deeds. Folktales contained the magical transformations, anthropomorphism, and adventurous opportunities that made their use as tools for socialization and propaganda more effective.

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<sup>4</sup> Ilya Ehrenburg, *The Thaw* (London: Harvill, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, "Secret Speech," <http://www.uwm.edu/Course/448-343/index12.html>

The amount of consideration and effort that went into the creation and publication of children's books, as well as policies regarding what children read, reveal just how much the Party valued the medium. But as has been discussed earlier, assessing and quantifying the effects of literary propaganda on a population is an extremely complicated question. Using various methods, scholars have contended that literature had a significant effect on children as a tool of character education and attitude formation. Therefore, uncovering the Party's apparent goals for literature by extracting prominent themes and values—like collectivism, heroism, and nationalism—continues to be a valuable exercise, as it provides insight into the types of children Soviet authorities hoped to create, and the aspects of official ideology that the Party considered most valuable for children. As well, this thesis has probed into the somewhat surprising synthesis of folklore and children's literature carried out by socialist-realist authors at the Party's insistence, despite yielding a product that was relatively ideologically inconsistent.

It must not be forgotten, however, that just because the Party had strict policies and deliberate intentions for children's literature does not mean it succeeded in achieving those goals. As the Party's literary policies wavered back and forth, affecting the content requirements and restrictions for authors, it was difficult for society to keep up with the changes. As could only be expected, literature that suddenly became "unacceptable" according to the Party did not magically disappear from homes, nor was it always or perfectly replaced by "acceptable" literature. Scholarly consensus in Soviet studies has recently tended to argue that, while the Stalinist state was overwhelmingly powerful, it was never *all*-powerful or all-knowing. Therefore, despite the extent of its efforts, the Party never obtained total control over what children were reading.

Although there was a significant increase in literary, musical and artistic freedom after Stalin's death, socialist realism remained the official cultural aesthetic until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. But the Party would never again hold as much sway over the creation and distribution of culture, nor interfere as much in its production, as it had under Stalin. While scholarly debates persist over various issues relating to children's literature—quality of socialist-realist literature, the effects of literature on young readers, intended audience, the importance of cultural context—perhaps the more important point to make is simply that children learn and develop a great deal from their reading material. For centuries, people from various cultures around the globe have recognized literature as an influential tool for the socialization of young people. Whether it is ideological, political, moral or behavioral, children's literature is almost always didactic and can be used to convey a particular worldview or lesson. With this knowledge, the Party manipulated children's literature for its own purposes, at times neglecting considerations of artistic quality or creative freedom. While this thesis did apply western approaches and scholarship to a certain degree, it became apparent that Soviet children's literature must be considered in its own temporal and cultural context. Nevertheless, one example of how western scholarship shed some light involves the surprising role that demand seems to have played in a dictatorial society—a communist and supposedly market-free society at that. At the end of the day, Soviet children's literature must to be examined under a specialized microscope—one that is suitable for analyzing an already complicated cultural product within the context of a totalitarian society. On that note, much remains to be done where the study of Soviet children's literature is concerned. An investigation into how gender and ethnicity were treated in children's books is noticeably absent in the historiography. Similarly,



an attempt to learn more about reader reception, whether nationwide or regional, would be invaluable.

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