

Translating Communism for Children: Fables and Posters of the Revolution

Serguei Alex. Oushakine

The bourgeoisie knew all too well the importance of children's literature as a useful tool for strengthening its own dominance. . . . The bourgeoisie did all it could to make sure that our children began as early as possible to absorb the ideas that later would turn them into slaves. We should not forget that the same tools, the same weapons, can be used for the opposite goal.

—L. Kormchii, *Zabytoe oruzhie: O detskoi knige* (*Forgotten Weapon: On Children's Books* [1918])

I am grateful to Nergis Ertürk and Özge Serin for the invitation to join this project, and for their insightful comments and suggestions. I also want to thank Marina Balina, David Bellos, Alexei Golubev, Bradley Gorski, Yuri Leving, Maria Litovskaia, Katherine M. H. Reischl, and Kim Lane Scheppelle, who read and commented on earlier drafts of this article. My special thanks to Helena Gosciolo, without whom this text would look quite different. I am indebted to Thomas F. Keenan, Ilona Kiss, Mikhail Karasik, and Anna Loginova for their help with obtaining visual materials, and I am thankful to the following institutions for their permission to use images: the Russian Digital Children's Library (<http://arch.rgdb.ru>); the Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; and Ne Boltai: A Collection of Twentieth-Century Propaganda (<http://www.neboltai.org>). All translations of Russian sources are mine, unless otherwise noted.

We will create a fascinating world of “cultural adventures,” inventions, struggles, and victories. These poems will be our children’s first books. . . . It is essential that this cultural project saturate and suffuse the whole country, all of its homes, all children’s dreams, all the games that boys and girls play, and all the holidays. Children should realize that instead of decorating Christmas trees with candles they should illuminate with electric lamps the unbounded forests and fields, animating them with the roar of furnaces, wheels, and all-conquering labor.

—Alekssei Gastev, *Lunost’, idi!* (*Youth, Go!* [1930])

Pechat’ i revoliutsiia (*Press and Revolution*), a monthly journal of literature and media criticism started by the Bolshevik government, launched in 1925 a series of publications on the state of children’s literature in the Soviet Union. In one of the articles, Anna Grinberg, a book editor and a writer herself, traced a sharp division within “the juvenile book market” of the time. Books of the past—the “former books,” as Grinberg labeled them—were almost entirely preoccupied with “inevitable kittens,” talking crocodiles, and tales about “the little hare.” Books of the future offered a very different perception of the world, familiarizing the reader with such things as the production of porcelain dishes, or newspaper editing, or the types of transportation that took Charlie Chaplin around the world (Figures 1–3). This bipolar book market, Grinberg insisted, was more than just a matter of writers’ preferences. The polarization reflected a constitutive split within the readership, too. The “former” (bourgeois) reader—“extremely bored and often naughty”—was always already eager to be entertained by fairy tales about “things that never happened.” The “new reader” was of a different kind:

When he is very young, he strokes a book with his little hand and says tenderly, “This little book’s about the U-S-S-R. I don’t know what the U-S-S-R is; I only know that it’s good. You think it’s good, too? Well, but what is it, anyway?”

Sometimes he takes a pencil and says, “Now I’m going to draw something pretty, such as a hammer and sickle.”

And when he’s older, he celebrates March 8, Women Workers’ Day, in preschool, and when he gets home from school, he reports cunningly, “Today we made an interesting little story out of letters. Here’s what it said, ‘Preschool emancipates women.’” And if one of the grownups (brought up on the hare, the crocodile, and the

95
3-81

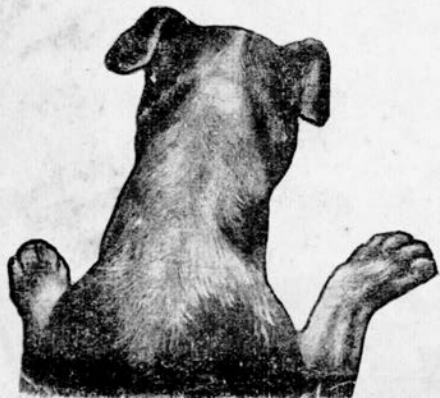
Ученым Комитетом Министерства Народнаго Просвѣщенія допущенъ къ выпискѣ въ ученическія библиотекы городскихъ училищъ.

Годъ изданія десятый.
АПРѢЛЬ.
№ 12.
1917.



ЗОЛОТОЕ ДѢТСТВО

ЖУРНАЛЪ ДЛЯ ДѢТЕЙ.



СОДЕРЖАНІЕ:

ВЕСНА ИДЕТЬ!
ВЫЗДОРОВѢЛА! (повѣсть).
УЖЕ ВЕЧЕРЪ ТИХІЙ (стих.).
ВЕСЕННЯЯ ПѢСНЯ (стих.).
ГОЛОВОЛОМКИ.
РЕБУСЪ и проч.

ПРИЛОЖЕНІЯ:

Русское сельцо—для склѣванія
«Прыгай дальше» (игра).

Figure 1. A book of the past: A cover of a children’s magazine, *Zolotoe detstvo* (*Golden Childhood*), published in April 1917 (before the October Revolution of 1917). Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children’s Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.



Figure 2. A book of the future: A cover of Nikolai Smirnov's *Puteshestvie—Charli (Charlie's Travel)* (Moscow: GIZ, 1925). Artists: Olga and Galina Chichagovy. Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children's Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.



Figure 3. Another book of the future: A page from Nikolai Agnivitsev's *Vintik-shpuntik* (*Little Rabbit-Screw*) (Moscow: Raduga, 1925). Artist: V. Tvardovskii. Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children's Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.

quacking queen) uncertainly asks him to repeat what he said, this new Soviet six-year-old will reveal the essence of this slogan as follows: “That means that if children go to preschool, mothers can earn money.”¹

Grinberg’s attempt to expand the normative class-based view of Soviet society into the area of book production and consumption was more aspirational than factual. In 1925, only eight years after the Bolshevik revolution, the world left behind by the former regime was not yet quite that “former.” Nor was the “new” — politically savvy — reader already fully shaped. When a group of sociologists conducted a comprehensive poll in 1927 to determine what children actually thought about the Bolshevik revolution ten years after it happened, the picture was rather amorphous: about 50 percent of those who associated the revolution with “liberation” could not specify what exactly this liberation was from.² It would take the cultural revolution of the 1920s and 1930s for this “reader of the future” to emerge as a distinctive social type.³

These details notwithstanding, Grinberg’s observations were an important indicator of the moment when Marxist ideas and images began trickling down into the field of *mass* culture and education in the new Soviet state. The fact that a major Bolshevik journal would initiate a discussion about children’s literature was a sign of double importance: children were increasingly emerging as an important object of educational, political, and cultural influence.⁴ At the same time, the abandonment of the economic and political restrictions of the “war communism” of 1918–21 turned children’s literature into a fast-growing section of the publishing industry. In February 1918, less than four months after the Bolshevik revolution, L. Kormchii, in a *Pravda* article, compared children’s books with a “forgotten weapon,” com-

1. Anna Grinberg, “Knigi byvshie i knigi budushchie (dlia malen’kikh detei),” *Pechat’ i revoliutsiia* 5–6 (1925): 245; for an English translation, see Anna Grinberg, “Books of the Past and Books of the Future (for Little Children),” *Soviet Studies in Literature* 24, no. 4 (1987–88): 29.

2. Children cited anything from some abstract “evil,” or “autocracy” (abolished before the revolution), to “serfdom” (abolished in 1861). Viktor Shul’gin, ed., *Deti i Oktiabr’skaia revoliutsiia: Ideologiia sovetskogo shkol’nika* (Moscow: Rabotnik prosvescheniia, 1928), 57.

3. Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*, trans. Jesse M. Savage (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

4. For a comprehensive review of this process, see Catriona Kelly, *Children’s World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

plaining that the Bolsheviks did nothing to wrestle children's literature from their enemies, who continued to use this "poisonous weapon" to produce slavish Russian "subjects" (*poddanye*).⁵ In 1921, at the end of the civil war, the book industry hit its lowest level ever, delivering to the market only 33 book titles for children. Yet, the following year, the number of published titles reached 200. A crucial breakthrough took place in 1924: with its 558 titles, the industry finally superseded the prerevolutionary numbers (about 400), entering a period of massive production of cheap books with a standard circulation of between 5,000 and 10,000 copies. In 1926, there were already 936 titles; in 1929—more than 1,500.⁶ By 1936, Detgiz, a specially created publisher of children's literature, annually produced 40,000 copies of books and magazines for children.⁷

Not all of these books were about politics; some were about printing newspapers, making dishes, or getting friendly with "the comrade tractor."⁸ Fairy tales and stories about "birdies-kitties-doggies" and other "silly surrogates of the fauna" made up 40 percent of the book market in 1926.⁹ However, "the books of the future" clearly constituted the most dynamic sector of the market, attracting innovative artists and writers who contributed to what became known as the "golden age" of Soviet children's books.¹⁰

The infusion of the mass book market with communist ideas was

5. L. Kormchii, "Zabytoe oruzhie: O detskoj knige," *Pravda*, February 17, 1918. For a detailed discussion of this article and approach, see Ben Hellman, "Detskaia literatura kak oruzhie: Tvorcheskii put' L. Kormchego," in *"Ubit' Charskuiu . . .": Paradoksy sovetskoi literatury dlia detei, 1920–1930–e gg.*, ed. Marina Balina and Valerii V'iugin (Saint Petersburg: Aleteia, 2013), 20–45.

6. Lidia Kon, *Sovetskaia detskaia literatura, 1917–1929* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1960), 63–65; P. A. Rybtsova, "Produktsia detskoj knigi," *Novye detskie knigi*, Vypusk 4 (1926): 69–70.

7. "Za bol'shuiu detskuiu literaturu," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 26, 1936.

8. See, for instance, M. Lengnik, *Tovarishch traktor (Comrade Tractor)* (Moscow: Molo-daia Gvardiia, 1930).

9. The statistical data are from Rybtsova, "Produktsia detskoj knigi," 76. Thematic descriptions are from "Detskaia literatura—orudie klassovogo vospitaniia: Mestkom pisatelei o detskoj knige," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 6, 1931; and D. Kal'm, "Be da Me ili naschet buzy: Zametki na poliakh detskikh knig," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 14, 1931.

10. Valerii Blinov, *Russkaia detskaia knizhka-kartinka, 1900–1941* (Moscow: Iskusstvo XXI vek, 2005), 89–184. For useful surveys, see Mikhail Karasik, *Udarnaia kniga sovetskoi detvory: Fotoillustratsii i fotomontazh v knige dlia detei i iunoshestva 1920–1930–kh godov* (Moscow: Kontakt-Kul'tura, 2010); Evgeny Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades: Revolutionary Artists and the Making of Early Soviet Children Books*, trans. Jane Anna Miller (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); and Susan Compton, *Russian Avant-garde Books, 1917–1934* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

far from simple, straightforward, or quick. There was no available legacy to build on, or even a clear narrative to express. In 1929, Grinberg observed, “Soviet children’s literature appeared out of nowhere [*poiavilas’ na pustom meste*].”¹¹ Viktor Shklovsky, a Russian formalist, would echo the same idea retrospectively, “The revolution took place. A lot of writers went abroad. Children’s literature almost ceased to exist. People started making it anew.”¹² Key Marxist ideas had to be identified and reduced to a few formulas, which, in turn, could be simplified even more in various—catchy or corny—slogans and stories by the Soviet machinery of agitation and propaganda. In order to be adopted, the theory of communism first had to be adapted symbolically.

This adaptation, however, was not perceived as mechanical reductionism. The Bolshevik Party’s decisions routinely warned writers against “abuse of tendentious propaganda” (*zloupotreblenie tendentsioznoi agitkoi*),¹³ while media outlets of the time were engaged in a persistent, vitriolic campaign against oversimplification and “red hackwork” (*krasnaia khaltura*).¹⁴ Adaptation, in other words, had to be creative. In fact, Grinberg’s own essay was a perfect example of such adaptation. By privileging revolutionary use-value as the main tool for differentiating children’s literature, Grinberg operationalized the ideas that Vladimir Lenin originally outlined in his 1905 programmatic essay, “Party Organization and Party Literature.” Back then, Lenin plainly formulated the bottom line—“for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot . . . be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat”—and declared, “Down with non-partisan writers!” The alternative, the new party literature, was to become a literature free “from capital, from careerism, and, moreover, free from bourgeois-anarchist individualism.” The new party literature was seen as a genuinely *mass* literature, and the sheer size of the readership was supposed to produce a qualitative (liberating) difference. As Lenin clarified it,

11. Anna Grinberg, “Litso sovetskoi detskoi knigi (pervoe desiatiletie),” *Pechat’ i revoliutsiia* 7 (1929): 114.

12. Viktor Shklovsky, *Staroe i novoe: Kniga statei o detskoj literature* (Moscow: Detskaia literatura, 1966), 12.

13. See the decision of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party on “the measures for improving publications for young adults and children,” from July 23, 1928 (“O mero-priiatiiakh po ulutsheniiu iunosheskoj i detskoj pechati: Postanovlenie TsK VKP(b) ot 23 iulia 1928 g.”), in *O partiinoj i sovetskoi pechati: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Pravda, 1954): 317.

14. Emden, “Tsitadel’ khatlury: Trebuem vmeshatel’stva komsomola i pionerorganizatsii,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 14, 1931.

"It will be a free literature, . . . because it will serve not some satiated heroine, not the bored 'upper ten thousand' suffering from fatty degeneration, but millions and tens of millions of working people."¹⁵

Reading and writing were perceived as socially embedded practices; so was the process of acquiring literacy. In 1924, *Play and Work*, a collection of reading materials for preschool and elementary schoolchildren, pointedly emphasized the enduring importance of reading: two pictures presented the living conditions of the worker's family before and after the revolution. A dark, crammed basement was contrasted with a brightly lit room, the family seated around the dinner table. Instead of a candle-lamp, there was an electric bulb; instead of a sad peasant mother with a child, there was a modern woman, listening to the radio on her headphones. In the midst of radical changes, only one thing stayed constant: as before, the father continued to read his newspaper, which, presumably, was the main source of all the changes (Figure 4).

This broad understanding of literacy as an institution and practice of sociopolitical orientation was not limited to the children's culture. Adults were similarly taught to read through the introduction to revolutionary history and the revolutionary struggle. The process of shaping new—Soviet—adults might have been less subtle in its rhetoric, but it was motivated by a set of didactic and ideological concerns that shared many of the goals set by practitioners of children's literature. For instance, *Revolutionary ABC for Adults* (published in 1920) accompanied the Russian letter *Ts* with a picture of fetters attached to a prison wall, and a number of words that contained the letter: *price, chain, nation, agitation, censorship, center, and centralization*. The letter *E* featured a picture of Friedrich Engels, along with the words *echo, epoch, economy, poet, and poetry*. *Iu* was accompanied by a portrait of the German communist Rosa Luxemburg and the words *union, south, shelter, Jupiter, skirt, snowstorm, and bureau* (Figure 5).¹⁶ Symptomatically, the names of the revolutionaries were not listed in the vocabulary entries, yet their visual presence provided an organizing thematic frame for the whole section. As a result, a somewhat haphazard collection of words emerged as a compilation of building blocks, which brought together *nation* and *centralization, poetics* and *politics, snowstorm* and *shelter*. Ideological constellations and clichés of argumentation were not simply imposed

15. V. I. Lenin, "Party Organization and Party Literature," in *Collected Works*, vol. 10, trans. and ed. Andrew Rothstein (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1962), 48–49.

16. *Revolutsionnyi raboche-krest'ianskii bukvar' dlia vzroslykh* (Moscow: Iz-vo Moskovskogo gubispolkoma, 1920).

Жилище рабочего прежде и теперь.



Так жили раньше рабочие.



Так живут рабочие теперь.

Figure 4. "Workers' living conditions before and after." The caption under the top picture explains, "This is how workers lived before." The one below says, "This is how they live now." K. Sokolov, ed., *Igra i trud. Kniga pervaja*, 10th ed. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930), 18. Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children's Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.



Ф. Энгельс

Конституция Российской Республики есть наш основной закон.

Карл Маркс и Фридрих Энгельс положили основание научному социализму или марксизму.

Коммунистическая партия следует учению Маркса.

Юю Юю союз союз

юг уют юпитер
юбка выюга бюро



Союз рабочих и крестьян коммунистической молодежи.

Роза Люксембург убита немецкими белогвардейцами.

Роза Люксембург.

Ъ ъ отъезд отъездо

въезд Мы идем тернистым
объявление путем к светлому будущему.

Международное объединение рабочих называется интернационалом.

Figure 5. The ABC's of the revolution: sections on E and Lu were personalized with the images of Friedrich Engels and Rosa Luxemburg. *Revoliutsionnyi raboche-krest'ianskii bukvar' dlia vzroslykh* (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo gubispolkoma, 1920). Courtesy of the Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

on the Soviet reader-to-be; they were *transformed* into elementary models, epistemological nuclei, that she or he could understand and appropriate.

It is easy to read this process of adapting Marxism for a new adult or juvenile audience as only a massive propaganda project (and many scholars have done so).¹⁷ Yet to see in these iterations of communist ideas just an example of strategically exercised brainwashing is to endow the early Soviet culture's practitioners with organizational capability and political foresight that they neither had nor could have had at the time. Available public documents of the period convincingly demonstrate that until the mid-1930s the only thing certain about Soviet culture was the profound lack of certainty about what it was and what it should be. The early Soviet debates about a proper "proletarian culture" exhibited the same level of agitation and the same failure to find acceptable solutions as the debates about literature for children a few years later.¹⁸ Izrail Razin, the chair of the children's literature section in the OGIZ, the main state publishing house, complained in 1931 that when it comes to books for children, "we grope along, feeling our way [*rabotaem naoshchup'*]. . . . We still have no Marxist theory of children's literature."¹⁹ Practically any significant cultural issue was a subject of heated public discussions.²⁰ The propaganda machine, the propaganda content, and the propagandists themselves had to be created from scratch.

While not neglecting the administrative force and the militant zeal with which communist ideas were solidified by the mid-1930s, I find it more productive to pursue this process of adapting Marxism for the (semiliterate and illiterate) masses as a historically specific example of intracultural translation. This transposition of the revolution's *langue* into a *parole* of

17. For instance, Jacqueline Olich, in her highly informative *Competing Ideologies and Children's Literature in Russia, 1918–1935* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009), is mostly concerned with the way the "Red line" was drawn and maintained by the Soviet political and artistic establishment in the 1920s and 1930s.

18. On "fantasies of proletarian culture," see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 19–23; and Mark Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 56–61.

19. Izrail Razin, "Kuda napravit' ogon': Zametki o detskoi literature," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 14, 1931.

20. Kon, *Sovetskaia detskaia literatura*, 63–88. For an example of these prolonged "culture wars," see my essay on the attempts to define the key features of the genuinely Soviet humor and satire: Serguei Oushakine, "Red Laughter: On Refined Weapons of Soviet Jesters," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2012): 189–216.

daily life involved crucial syntactic, semantic, and ideological transformations, with often unintended consequences. This translation project forced its audience “to construct readings from a debris of historical and future possibilities.”²¹ And the term *debris* is significant here: in the absence of the ultimate “source text,” the intracultural translation that I analyze below had to be decidedly and “visibly interventionist” in its striving to generate meaningful vernacular versions of communism.²² Indeed, it was far from being “an act of faithful reproduction but [was], rather, a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication—and even, in some cases, of falsification, refusal of information, counterweighting, and the creation of secret codes.”²³

At least one feature radically distinguishes the process of translating communism in early Soviet Russia from the dynamic of translating theorized currently by translation studies scholars. Pointing out some time ago that “translating” should not be thought of in terms of linguistic transposition only, André Lefevere, a key figure in critical translation studies, suggested paying special attention to what he called “conceptual and textual grids,” within which linguistic transpositions actually take place.²⁴ As established patterns of epistemic and rhetorical expectations respectively, these grids are embedded (though not always transparently) in the techniques of translating.²⁵ The project of translating communism not only lacked the ultimate (or original) source texts to transpose, but it also—and this is a crucial distinction—had to create the very grids that could (eventually) generate conceptual and textual expectations of the audience. For instance, a group of Soviet literary scholars concluded in 1931, “The development of absolutely new themes, new material, which has no imprint of the halo of literary traditions, can be done successfully only when a new style, a new method

21. James Clifford, “A Politics of Neologism: Aimé Césaire,” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 175.

22. Christina Schäffner and Susan Bassnett, “Politics, Media, and Translation: Exploring Synergies,” in *Political Discourse, Media and Translation*, ed. Christina Schäffner and Susan Bassnett (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 11.

23. Edwin Gentzler and Maria Tymozsko, introduction to *Translation and Power*, ed. Maria Tymozsko and Edwib Gentzler (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), xxi.

24. André Lefevere, “Composing the Other,” in *Post-colonial Translation Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (New York: Routledge, 1999), 75–78.

25. André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett, “Where We Are in Translation Studies,” in *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, ed. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 1998), 5.

is created. Especially if we keep in mind that these themes and materials have to be viewed from the point of socialist reconstruction, from the point of view of the proletariat. And no new creative method could be invented without mastering a scientific worldview—that is, dialectical materialism.”²⁶ What the passage clearly demonstrates is a poignant understanding that the available literary conventions and epistemic regimes (“grids”) could not incorporate the new social “material.” A new social experience required new forms for its representation. Yet how exactly does one start “mastering” dialectical materialism for this purpose? How does one learn to write and read literature through the prism of this “scientific worldview”? What kind of narrative possibilities did this method offer? What kind of operations of poetic selection and combination does it allow for?

Children’s literature of the 1920s and 1930s was an organic part of these early Soviet attempts to do things “scientifically,” that is, in a Marxist way. It was a very distinctive part, though. Certainly, children were more malleable and less resisting than adults, but their young age also set clear limits on how the Marxist worldview could be presented. The production of the new—mass, communist, and *young*—reader required different and politically relevant literary themes and stories. In 1929, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the main newspaper of Soviet writers, stressed the importance of the sociological dimension of the new literature for children. As the newspaper indicated, the new reading audience was much more diverse in its origins, especially when compared to “the children of the cultural minority who used to make up most of the audience for juvenile literature in the past.” Whereas “previously, kids of hunters and nomads . . . merely populated the pages of children’s books, now they demand books for themselves.”²⁷

The radical expansion of the demographic borders of the “reading environment” brought with it an important pedagogical consideration. The modes of perception, levels of abstraction, or frames of metaphorical references on which books of the past had relied could no longer be taken for granted. Confronted by the actual comprehension skills of the socially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse “mass reader,” on the one hand, and the ideological demands of the time, on the other, the practitioners of the new Soviet literature focused on two main aspects. In content, children’s literature was to be concrete, useful, informative, and realistic, aiming at a reader

26. V. Ketlinskaia, P. Chagin, T. Trifonov, K. Vysokosvkii, and M. Dybianskaia, “Detskaia literatura v rekonstruktivnyi period,” in *Detskaia literatura: Kriticheskii sbornik*, ed. Anatoly Lunacharskii (Moscow: Khud. lit. 1931), 11.

27. A. Pokrovskaia, “Novye puti detskoj knigi,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, July 8, 1929.

who was active and independent (*samodeiatel'nyi*). In form, the new literature was expected to bring the textual components of the book as close as possible to the pictorial by turning the “graphic language” (*graficheskii iazyk*) of the new book into a default communication interface with “a multilingual” reader.²⁸ El Lissitzky, an artist who significantly shaped the visual language of early Soviet culture, neatly formulated the trend common in early Soviet literature in general. As he put it in 1926, the new audience brought about by the revolution—“the great masses, semiliterate masses”—demanded a very different informational medium: “The Revolution in our country accomplished an enormous educational and propagandistic task. The traditional book was torn into separate pages, enlarged a hundredfold, colored for greater intensity, and brought into the street as a poster.”²⁹

It is precisely this process of *posterizing* the revolution for an audience with limited or no literary skills—or, to put it slightly differently, it is the double translation of the revolution’s logic, content, and promise into a new book form and into a new language—that makes early Soviet adaptations of Marxist ideas so interesting.³⁰ On several fronts simultaneously, the new medium and new language developed side by side with their producers and consumers.

Lissitzky’s essay about the book of the future was mostly concerned with literature for adults. I find it symptomatic, however, that he finished the essay with a brief discussion of a new generation of Soviet children who were “already acquiring a new plastic language” by reading “a stream of children’s picture books.” It was precisely this language, Lissitzky maintained, that would provide a basis for “a different relationship to the world and to space, to shape and to color.”³¹ In what follows, I explore how a new plastic language of the graphic book for young (mostly preschool) Soviet children channeled, transformed, and/or distorted Marxist rhetoric and ideas. Visually enhanced, discursive slogans were turned in these books into striking hybrid constructions. Ideographs of sorts, they made communism iconic, suggesting pictorial and behavioral representations of a “col-

28. Pokrovskaiia, “Novye puti detskoii knigi.”

29. El Lissitzky, “Our Book,” in *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, by Sophie Lissitzky-Kuppers (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 362.

30. In her study of the Soviet people, Natal’ia Kozlova, a Russian anthropologist, extended the metaphor of the poster further, speaking about the people’s “life within the language of poster” (*zhizn’ v iazyke plakata*). Kozlova, *Sovetskie liudi: Stseny iz istorii* (Moscow: Europa, 2005), 197–203, 255–88.

31. Lissitzky, “Our Book,” 363.

lective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal.”³²

Recent studies of modernism (and the Russian avant-garde in particular) have similarly highlighted the influence of infantile aesthetics on the formation of modernist visual and literary conventions.³³ In part, following Walter Benjamin’s perceptive insight about the child’s ability to “recognize the new once again,” scholars of modernism have drawn attention to children’s culture as a vehicle for discovering and incorporating “new images . . . into the image stock of humanity.”³⁴ Early Soviet children’s literature, I suggest, could be seen as yet another important area that contributed to the emergence and development of the adult world’s expressive skills. Its topsy-turvy infantile aesthetic, spare plots, disjointed pictorial and discursive elements, graphic language, and whimsical poetry provided essential tools for perfecting the symbolic techniques and narrative technologies of Soviet Marxism-Leninism.

In my analysis of literary debates and literary production in early Soviet Russia, I hope to demonstrate another important aspect of translation: its close connection with colonization.³⁵ I am less concerned here with the power relation, or the lack of reciprocity, between translating and translated cultures. Instead, I attempt to demonstrate how, in the process of cultural rewriting, the dynamism unleashed by the October Revolution became normalized: discursive and visual posterizing evolved into a form of political pasteurization, which did not quite sterilize the revolution but certainly made it harmless. To put it differently, I am interested in tracking links between the perceptual and interpretative grids that emerged in the process of posterizing the revolution, on the one hand, and the formation of a hegemonic language that would define the subsequent development of Soviet Russia, on the other. I argue that the translation tools

32. Michael Calvin McGee, “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66, no. 1 (1980): 15.

33. See, for instance, Margaret R. Higonnet, “Modernism and Childhood: Violence and Renovation,” *Comparatist* 33 (2009): 86–108; and Sara Pankenier Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard: The Infantile Aesthetic of the Russian Avant-garde* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

34. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999), 390. See also “Children’s Literature and Modernism,” ed. Karin E. Westman, special issue, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2007).

35. See Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-colonial Translation Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

and techniques used by early Soviet writers and artists to render Marxism legible resulted in the gradual homogenization of heterogeneous visual and narrative representations of the Bolshevik revolution. As the history of early Soviet children's literature demonstrates, not only did this thematic and expressive consolidation of the revolutionary narrative happen *before* socialist realism appeared as the dominant political aesthetics of the Soviet state, but it also was mostly driven by structural (rather than ideological) reasons. Influenced by Ernesto Laclau's ideas about the politics of rhetoric, I trace this constitution of hegemony through tropological passages "from a 'contiguous' starting point to its consolidation in 'analogy.'"³⁶ In the process of this "metaphorical totalization," contingent elements were frozen and integrated into repeatable models, systems, and paradigms, making displacement (or development) next to impossible.³⁷ The initial formalist insistence on explicit narrative structures and graphic pictorial language condensed the diversity of the revolutionary experience into a limited number of widely recognizable visual templates and discursive schemes. This is not, however, to suggest that there was an inevitable continuity between the theorists and artists of the Russian avant-garde and the supporters of socialist realism. Certainly, both "camps" took the political dimension of their artistic production seriously, offering different visions of communism. Yet to merge them within the same formation would mean to treat genealogy teleologically and mistake repetitive reproductions of ready-to-use configurations for artistic inventions of dynamic grids of perception.

Schemes and Gazes

The appropriation of the children's book for revolutionary needs was conducted from several discrete locations. Some literary critics and politicians saw the genre as "a weapon" and insisted on "directing its fire accordingly" in their "fight for the proletarian children's book."³⁸ However, most people involved in book production were preoccupied with more pacific questions: Should the Soviet children's book be mindless or even nonsensical? Was the fairy tale an appropriate form of narration after the revolution? What were the acceptable limits of anthropomorphism and animism in books for Soviet children? Should the book entertain or educate?

36. Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (London: Verso, 2014), 77.

37. Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations*, 90–91.

38. See "V boi za proletarskuiu detskuiu knigu," and Razin, "Kuda napravit' ogon'," both published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 14, 1931.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the consolidating cultural industry spent a lot of time, ink, and energy finding answers to these questions (Figure 6).³⁹ The government issued a series of special decisions and regulations aimed at directing the development of the field.⁴⁰ As early as 1921, the Soviet Commissariat of Enlightenment created a special Institute of Children's Reading and charged it with cataloging all children's books written in Russian in the past and with monitoring and reviewing those published in the present.⁴¹ In addition, multiple pedagogical, artistic, and literary conferences addressed the state of children's books in the USSR.

Among critics and authors of children's books, the role and meaning of the "Soviet" in "Soviet literature for children" were the most contested issues. Partly, the debates were driven by the basic discrepancy between experience and expression perceptively formulated by Anatoly Lunacharskii, an unorthodox Marxist in charge of the Soviet Commissariat of Enlightenment. As the commissar saw it, the proletariat included the most people able to comprehend adequately "the gigantic spread of vital forces" in the Soviet Union. However, the same proletariat visibly lacked "proletarian writers with the skills that could have enabled them to speak about themselves in their own words."⁴² In 1925, a party resolution expressed this idea of the proletariat's representational deficiency in terms of political domination: "The proletarian writers have not established their hegemony yet [*gegemonii proletarskikh pisatelei esche net*], and the [Bolshevik] Party should help them to earn their historical right to this hegemony."⁴³ Mean-

39. For a review of these debates, see Evgenia Putilova, *Ocherki po istorii kritiki sovet-skoi detskoj literatury (1917–1941)* (Moscow: Detskaia literatura, 1982); Marina Balina, "Creativity through Restraint: The Beginnings of Soviet Children's Literature," in *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–18; Elena Sokol, "Introduction," *Soviet Studies in Literature* 24, no. 1 (1987–88): 5–26; and Ben Hellman, *Fairy Tales and True Stories: The History of Russian Literature for Children and Young People (1574–2010)* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 354–427.

40. Irina Lupanova, *Polveka: Sovetskaia detskaia literatura, 1917–1967: Ocherki* (Moscow: Detskaia Literatura, 1969), 23–42; Marina Balina, "U istokov detskoj sovet-skoi literatury: Illuzii i fakty," in *V izmerenii detstva*, ed. Marina Abasheva (Perm': Perm gos. ped. universitet, 2008), 15–17.

41. Putilova, *Ocherki po istorii*, 38–40.

42. Anatoly Lunacharskii, "Puti detskoj knigi" (1929), in *Anatolii Lunacharskii: O detskoj literatury, detskom i iunosheskom chtenii*, ed. N. Medvedeva (Moscow: Detskaia literatura, 1985), 163.

43. "O politike partii v oblasti khudozhestvennoi literatury (Rezoliuistsia TsK RKP(b) ot 18 iunia 1925 g.)," in *O partiinoi i sovetskoj pechati*, 345.

На „детском фронте“

Рис. К. ЕЛИСЕЕВА.



— «В некотором — значит — царстве, в некотором государстве...»
— Брось, дяденька, сюсюкать, — старо. Да и некогда мне — я на полит-час спешу!

Figure 6. This caricature accompanied a report from a public conference on children's books in 1930. The report had the title "Safeguard Our Children from the Alien Class Influence: A Pseudo-Debate about Children's Books." In the image, the above caption says, "On the children's front." The bottom caption is a dialogue:

Writer: Once upon a time, so to speak, in a kingdom far, far aw . . .

Pioneer: Oh man, stop this baby talk; it's so passé. And I don't have time for this anyway — I'm running off to a political news-hour.

Literaturnaia gazeta, January 13, 1930.

while, children's literature was created mostly by "cadres of writers . . . with a petit bourgeois background," as one newspaper put it.⁴⁴

In the absence of "hegemony," how could one possibly distinguish, between "actually Soviet" children's literature and children's books that were "pseudo-Soviet"?⁴⁵ Moreover, was "Soviet" meant to describe a particular *set* of issues, things, or events? Or was it to indicate the *way* through which any such issue, thing, or event could be perceived and narrated? By the mid-1930s, the general position on the new book for Soviet children was taking visible shape. In 1931, a book of essays titled *Children's Literature: A Critical Collection*, edited and prefaced by Lunacharskii, usefully crystallized the core issues.⁴⁶ The contributors were a diverse group that included Maksim Gorky, the leading Soviet writer of the time, several young(er) scholars who would be described later as the "second wave of Russian formalists,"⁴⁷ and a few seasoned writers and artists. Apart from Gorky, none of the contributors was politically active, and a strong academic tone underlay almost all the contributions. In the rest of this section, I will comment on the main conclusions of the collection.

One of the contributors, Boris Bukhshtab, a younger member of the Russian formalist group, proposed the binary "theme versus method" to characterize the major approaches to children's literature at the time. As Bukhshtab argued, the simple expansion of themes and topics was not enough to create truly revolutionary literature: taken by itself, no theme could be seen as inherently "revolutionary or nonrevolutionary." For instance, any major revolutionary holiday could be presented easily in the most "boring, gray, and bureaucratic" manner.⁴⁸ "The *specificum*" of Soviet literature for children must be sought in the precise methods of artistic expression: "If the chosen method makes a particular theme incomprehensible for the child . . . , if this method makes the theme uninteresting, if the book . . . evokes boredom or even repulsion, then the book is socially dangerous, regardless of its theme."⁴⁹

44. D. Kal'm, "Protiv khaltury v detskoj literature," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, December 16, 1929.

45. "Za deistvitel'no sovetskuiu detskuiu knigu," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, December 30, 1929; on "pseudo-Soviet" books, see Kal'm, "Protiv khaltury."

46. Anatoly Lunacharskii, ed., *Detskaia literatura: Kriticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Khud.lit. 1931); hereafter referred to as *DLKS*.

47. On the second wave of Russian formalists, see Ian Levchenko, "Shkola, kotoroi ne bylo," in *Mladoformalisty: Russkaia proza* (Saint Petersburg: Petropolis, 2007), 245–54.

48. Boris Bukhshtab, "Stikhi dlia detei," in *DLKS*, 105.

49. Bukhshtab, "Stikhi dlia detei," 105.

Bukhshtab's own program was rather nebulous; yet in his analysis of the latest poetry for children, he singled out two important features that, in his view, clearly distinguished successful examples of the new Soviet literature from "opportunistic literary hackwork" (*khalturno-prisposoblencheskaia literatura*).⁵⁰ One was the palpable presence of "a dynamic *fabula*," that is, of an overarching framework (a story) within which the literary composition (the plot) unfolded.⁵¹ In the *fabula*, usually disjointed "lyrical" fragments and isolated vignettes found an organizing instrument, a structuring structure, that was neither mechanical nor static. Bukhshtab's second "specificum" was a close-up and highly realistic depiction of ordinary things: in the new literature, fantastic or distorted representations gave way to the almost documentary—"factographic"—portrayal of real-life objects.⁵² Bukhshtab's somewhat obvious attempt to link the genre of the children's book with clearly defined macro- and microlevels of narration was developed further by other contributors, who channeled Bukhshtab's protostructuralist fascination with the systemic and the elementary into two basic "methodological" principles: *schematism* and *gaze-appeal*.

In her survey of historical novels for children, Lidiia Ginzburg, likewise a member of the formalist group, warned Soviet writers against uncritical fascination with the factographic method of narration.⁵³ As Ginzburg emphasized, although the unconditional privileging of the historical document—*documentalism*, as she called it—certainly could be useful at the research stage, as the guiding principle, it was incapacitating during the construction of the actual story.⁵⁴ The narrative poverty of *documentalism*, she maintained, was especially obvious in historical novels for chil-

50. Bukhshtab, "Stikhi dlia detei," 127.

51. N. Glagoleva's pedagogical guide *Kak i chto rasskazyvat' pioneram* (*What and How to Narrate for the Pioneers*) (Moscow: GlZ, 1927), written for leaders of children's teams at schools and camps, defined *fabula* as "the main thread of a story" that "brings all the collected materials together" (25). In turn, *sujet* is a particular "account" that composes events, following the author's plan. For Tzvetan Todorov, *fabula* (the story) is the chronological sequence of events, while *sujet* (the plot) "personalizes" this sequence as a distinctive arrangement. Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 26.

52. Bukhshtab, "Stikhi dlia detei," 111, 118. On factography, see Devin Fore, "Introduction to Soviet Factography," *October* 118 (2006): 3–11.

53. On the early Soviet documentary approach to art and literature, see Elizabeth Astrid Papazian, *Manufacturing Truth: The Documentary Moment in Early Soviet Culture* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

54. Lidiia Ginzburg, "Puti istoricheskoi detskoi povesti," in *DLKS*, 162.

dren, where the excess of “archeological” facts could hardly make up for the “insufficient eventfulness of the fabula” (*nedostatocnaia fabul'naia nasyshchennost'*).⁵⁵ The historical novel certainly ought to be factually “adequate,” Ginzburg concluded, but it was just as important that it be ideologically and socially “grounded” and emotionally “sound.”⁵⁶ To retain a successful balance between “the number of words and the quantity of action,” she suggested, children’s literature “must be based on *obvious schemes*” of perception and interpretation.⁵⁷

Ginzburg’s appeal to lay bare the motivational structure, the narrative message, and the affective valence of the material, her enthusiastic endorsement of literary schematism (for the sake of narrative accessibility), went beyond the borders of the historical novel. A few years earlier, a group of scholars in education working with preschool children had come to a similar conclusion: after reading various stories to children, the educators asked them to recall the content or to restore it, using the illustrations in the relevant book. As the scholars observed, the children had a hard time reconstructing texts that lacked obvious story structures. All they could produce was a random list of disconnected details. They noticeably preferred books that had “a distinctive, accelerating fabula with a clear narrative turning point that leads to the resolution,” and they ignored books that tried to compensate a weak fabula with an easy language of narration or multiple illustrations.⁵⁸ A study conducted in 1928 detailed further the hierarchy of children’s reading motivations: among the interviewed or observed children, 47.9 percent chose books for their instructive qualities (“it explains how to”); 31.9 percent for the exciting plot (e.g., “about war”); 16.8 percent for the mood (“a funny book”); and 3.6 percent for the covers and pictures.⁵⁹ Parents expressed the same desire for easily accessible guiding lines to help children copy illustrations. A father who was an auto-worker wrote in his letter to a newspaper in 1931: “[Books and journals for

55. Ginzburg, “Puti istoricheskoi,” 166.

56. Ginzburg, “Puti istoricheskoi,” 177.

57. Ginzburg, “Puti istoricheskoi,” 161; emphasis added.

58. P. A. Rubtsova, “Eksperimental'naia retsenziia detskoi knigi,” *Novye detskie knigi*, Vypusk 4 (1926): 12–13. A survey of children’s literature since the October Revolution compiled in 1929 by Zlata Lilina, a major Soviet educator of the time, contained similar conclusions regarding the lack of developed fabula in books for children. Zlata Lilina, *Det-skaia khudozhestvennaia literatura posle Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii* (Kiev: Kul'tura, 1929), 72–73.

59. P. A. Rubtsova, “Chto vliiaet na detskie knizhnye zaprosy,” *Kniga detiam* 2 (1928): 25.

children] should provide clear and distinct pictures, so that the child can learn to draw by copying them.”⁶⁰

The obvious demand for narrative grids that could be discerned (and reproduced) easily by a reader with limited literary skills and social knowledge stimulated the production of what *Literaturnaia gazeta* called the genre of “recipe books,” which offered technological instructions, moral manuals, and social maps for navigating the emerging Soviet society.⁶¹ Most of these books portrayed social “types” and behavioral “scenarios”; their titles didactically spelled out the vector of the interpretative trajectory. Vladimir Mayakovsky’s *October 1917–18: The Heroes and Victims of the Revolution* was one of the earliest examples of this trend. Published in 1918, this black-and-white picture book suggested no coherent narrative of the revolution. No recognizable political leaders figured in it. Nor was the word *Bolshevik* (or *communism*) ever used. Instead, the book was constructed as a gallery of social and professional classes—from workers and Red Army soldiers to factory owners and priests; from seamstresses and laundresses to generals and bureaucrats. Each social group was represented by an individual portrait (Figures 7–9). Creatively metered rhyming captions summarized the life changes brought about by the revolution. For example, a spare but well-defined vertical image of the Worker advised the reader: “Slaves turned into eagles / How? / Ask a worker.” A similarly graphic (and vertically composed) picture of the Telegraphist explained that it was he who kept sending crucial dispatches to “comrades in rebellion” about the location of the enemy during the revolution. The Banker was presented very differently. A round, overstuffed figure (with top hat, glasses, and a cigar) was shown disintegrating visually into blotchy surroundings. The rhyme expanded the disorienting effect of the image to society in general, channeling the banker’s story: “Every bourgeois panics / Now, he has no banks, / There is no fate / Worse than that of the banker, / I am selling herrings now / On a street corner.”⁶²

Using the standard before-and-after comparison as the main organizing device, the book presented the Bolshevik revolution as a multiplicity of radical changes in people’s fates. Social transformations were personal

60. Cherniaev, “Perestroit’ detskie zhurnaly,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 14, 1931.

61. “Protiv apolitichnoi ‘bessmyslinski,’ protiv prisposoblencheskoi krasnoi khaltury! Za deistvennuiu kommunisticheskuiu knizhku,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, February 9, 1931.

62. Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Oktiabr’ 1917–1918: Geroi i zhertvy revoliutsii* (Petrograd: Izdanie Komissariata narodnogo prosveshcheniia, 1918).

Рабочий.



Стали орлы из рабов.
Отчего?
Спроси рабочего.

Телеграфист.



Это я о врагах: где конный, где пеший
Восставшим товарищам спал дельеши.

Figures 7–8. Heroes of the Revolution: The Worker (7) and The Telegraphist (8). Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Oktiabr' 1917–1918: Geroi i zhertvy revoliutsii* (Petrograd: Izdanie Komissariata narodnogo prosveshcheniia, 1918). Artists: Boguslavskaia, Kozlinskii, Makletsov, and Puni. Courtesy of Ne Boltai: A Collection of 20th-Century Propaganda, <http://www.neboltai.org>.

yet simultaneously typical enough. Class division was shown but never named. Strikingly, there was no narrative “voice-over” to homogenize the story about heroes and victims, and no narrative culmination, just as the sequencing of images resulted in no plot development. Indeed, *Heroes and Victims* was an assemblage of graphic posters torn out of a book about the revolution that had yet to be written. What *Heroes and Victims* did offer was a polyphony of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary voices: in some cases, characters presented themselves “directly” in the first person; in others, an unidentified narrator introduced them. The effect of this narrative instability was further strengthened by the captions’ different rhythmic structures. When traced throughout the book, the multiplicity of differently

Банкир.

Все буржуи в панике
Отобрали банки.
Долю не найдешь другую
Тяжелей банкирочной,
Стал, сеledнками торгуя,
На углу у Кирочной.



Figure 9. A victim of the revolution: The Banker. Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Oktiabr' 1917–1918: Geroi i zhertry revoliutsii* (Petrograd: Izdanie Komissariata narodnogo prosveshcheniia, 1918). Artists: Boguslavskaiia, Kozlinskii, Makletsov, and Puni. Courtesy of Ne Boltai: A Collection of 20th-Century Propaganda, <http://www.neboltai.org>.

speaking subjects results in the creation of a very dynamic positionality for the reader, who constantly has to modify his or her location vis-à-vis the image *and* the text. The segmented visual narrative, the constantly changing rhythmic structure, and the shifting identity of the narrator left no space for a stable, predictable mode of interaction between the audience and the book, forcing readers to contribute actively to the generation of meaning.

This dynamism of the reading trajectory, however, has clearly defined limits: the first page of the book divides all the characters into two lists (heroes and victims), providing an explicit pattern of expectation.⁶³ To a large degree, it is precisely the “exposure [*obnazhennost*]” of the agitation device,⁶⁴ this schematic (black-and-white) framing of the world with clearly specified moral poles (attraction/negation) or temporal frames (before/after), that helped sustain the high dynamism of the reading engagement. The method of social schematization would become one of the major constructive devices of children’s literature. With such titles as *What Is Good and What Is Bad* or *Yesterday and Today*,⁶⁵ these books would organize diverse social material and complicated political ideas into lucid tales and unambiguous schemes (Figure 10). For instance, the picture book *Our Enemies and Friends* (1930), in the rhyme titled “Who Is Really in Charge of China?,” portrays the struggle between the communists and nationalists in China at the end of the 1920s: “Rebellious slaves / Are suppressed by Chiang Kai-shek / But / Do pay attention: / Who controls his actions, / Who orders him around?”⁶⁶ The book activated two strategies simultaneously, offering a model of the world and a model for inscribing oneself in this world. Having presented the symbolic universe of “enemies,” it spelled out the proper (collective) subject-position with which one should identify: “To fight / We are always ready / Our forces are getting stronger / Day after day . . . / All we are waiting for / Is a call to fight / Against the class enemy” (Figures 11 and 12).

The boilerplate origin of such books did cause some anxiety among practitioners of children’s literature. Yet story templates—*shablon* in Rus-

63. The list of the heroes included Worker, Red Army Soldier, Farm Laborer (*batrak*), Sailor, Seamstress, Laundress, Automobilist, Telegraphist, and Railroadman. Victims included Factory Owner, Banker, Landlord, Kulak, Lady of the Manor, Priest, Bureaucrat, General, and Merchant.

64. D. Khanin, “Sozhzhenie Maiakovskogo,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, July 10, 1930.

65. Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Chto takoe khorosho i chto takoe plokho* (Moscow: Priboi, 1925); and Samuil Marshak and Vladimir Lebedev, *Vchera i segodnia* (Moscow: Raduga, 1925).

66. N. Studenetskii and A. Konevskii, *Nashi vragi i druz'ia* (Moscow: Krest'ianskaia gazeta, 1930).



Figure 10. Yesterday vs. today: A book cover created by the artist Vladimir Lebedev for Samuil Marshak's children's poem, in which the gloomy and black-and-white yesterday (at the top) is juxtaposed to the colorful and perky today (at the bottom). S. Marshak and V. Lebedev, *Vchera i segodnia* (Moscow: Raduga, 1925).



Figures 11–12. Representation as prescription. Chiang Kai-shek is directed by a shadow figure from the capitalist West (11). The young guard getting ready to fight (12). N. Studenetskii and A. Konevskii, *Nashi vragi i druz'ia* (Moscow: Krest'ianskaia gazeta, 1930). Courtesy of the Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

sian (from the German *Schablone*), as they were often called by the critics⁶⁷—were seen as problematic, not because of their schematism⁶⁸ but because of the inferior, incorrect, or even improbable material that the authors used to animate the schemes.⁶⁹ I will discuss different modes of schematization in the next section; here I highlight only one aspect of this process.

That Soviet literature in general and Soviet literature for children in particular would rely on repetitive schemes and formulas is not surprising. Katerina Clark, in her seminal study of the Soviet novel, pointed out some years ago that socialist realist fiction was based on what she calls “the prototypical plot.” Deeply rooted in “the Soviet ‘divine plan of salvation,’ or Marxist-Leninist account of history,” the Soviet novel as a genre was a collection of variations of the same tale about “a questing hero who sets out in search of ‘consciousness.’”⁷⁰ The presence of the master plot significantly limited the author’s creativity and autonomy by “the well-known parameters of the Socialist Realist tradition.”⁷¹ Under this condition, cultural production was doomed to be a form of enforced cultural recycling. As Clark puts it, “the one invariant feature of all Soviet novels is that they are ritualized, that is, they repeat the master plot, which is itself a codification of major cultural categories.”⁷²

Clark’s model directly links the process of literature’s ritualization to political control over the reproduction of the master plot. Presumably, the removal of the state’s pressure would necessarily result in a greater variety of narrative structures and plot configurations. Yet the existing scholarship on English-language children’s books adds a dimension that significantly complicates the view of ritualized literature offered by Clark. In a 1985 article on the apparent sameness of children’s novels, Perry Nodelman convincingly suggested that children’s literature poses a crucial challenge to the

67. Anna Pokrovskaiia defined such literature as having *shablonnaia fabula*, the “template narrative,” in her *Osnovnye techeniia v sovremennoi detskoii literature* (Moscow: Rabotnik prosveshcheniia, 1925), 25.

68. Lunacharskii in his 1929 address to educators and authors of children’s literature put it plainly: “Taken by itself scheme is not a disaster [*beda*]. Scheme is something that could be filled up with animating content.” Lunacharskii, “Puti detskoi knigi,” 175.

69. Lunacharskii, “Puti detskoi knigi,” 176; Pokrovskaiia, *Osnovnye techeniia*, 26; and S. Margolina, “Proizvodstvennaia detskaia literature,” *Pechat’ i revoliutsiia* 5 (1926): 109.

70. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 162.

71. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 160.

72. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 9.

“most basic conviction about both style and interpretation—that distinctive details are worth interpreting because they do point to a distinct personal vision.”⁷³ The remarkable fact about children’s literature, Nodelman argued, is that “unique surface details that create tone and atmosphere” of individual books point to “the same basic set of opposite ideas, and a propensity for bringing them into balance.”⁷⁴ Distinctive surfaces in this case are nothing but examples of ornamentation. However, these unique details do not simply mask the sameness beneath; their purpose is to individualize access to the ideas and affects that are constitutive of the genre.

Maria Nikolajeva, in her study of the aesthetics of children’s books, extended Nodelman’s point by drawing attention to the developmental task of this literature. Confronting the core story again and again, the young reader compares and contrasts it with what she or he has read earlier. By reading similar books in a row, the reader perfects the sequencing of analogical equations, thereby constructing from below a “memory of the genre,”⁷⁵ as well as a set of expectations associated with this genre. When seen from this perspective, the goal of ritualized literature, then, is to reveal to the reader the principles of its own organization: “structure is the very essence of information” in this case.⁷⁶ Constant recitations of the Soviet “prototypical plot,” perpetual attempts to posterize/pasteurize the revolution were a historically specific practice of uncovering the generic law of the plot, its internal code.⁷⁷

Massive research on early Soviet reading practices among children conducted in the 1920s by P. Rubtsova provides interesting support for this conclusion. When asked what kind of book they would like to read, 23 percent of children described the book they were then reading or planned to read as “something similar” to the one they had just finished (*vrode etoi*). In some cases, the sameness was understood literally: one of the children, a ten-year-old son of a low-ranking state officer, explained his request to the librarian this way, “How many *Robinson Crusoes* do you have? A lot? Give

73. Perry Nodelman, “Interpretation and the Apparent Sameness of Children’s Literature,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 18, no. 2 (1985): 19.

74. Nodelman, “Interpretation and the Apparent Sameness,” 20.

75. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 121.

76. Maria Nikolajeva, *Children’s Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic* (New York: Garland, 1996) 55.

77. Jacques Derrida, “Living on/Border Lines,” trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979), 86.

me all of them, all you have.” In others, the repetition was seen as repetition with difference: a thirteen-year-old boy, having read a book about American Indians, asked “for something similar,” clarifying that in the book “there should be one leader, and he should be in charge of the Indians.”⁷⁸ A clear scheme helped young readers to recognize the key elements of “the story of stories”⁷⁹ but also to organize the already accumulated knowledge by turning individual characters into types, distinctive situations into generic scenarios, and narratives into fabula.

“Serial repetition involves paradigm-effects,” Jacques Derrida reminds us. Yet such repetition also reveals the irony of this phenomenon: the organizing power of paradigm-effects requires constant continuation of the series.⁸⁰ To put it somewhat differently, prototypical plots and story templates, which provided the organizing backbone for children’s literature, seemed to act as the flip side of the technique of estrangement (*ostranenie*) elaborated by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky. If for Shklovsky to “estrangle” objects (primarily through striking metaphors) was to release them from the sensorial dullness of routinized perception, then for the practitioners of early Soviet literature for children, the purpose of literary schematism was to routinize the narrative organization of unknown cultural experience (e.g., “Indians”) as well as the (“proletarian”) experience that the available literary conventions and stylistic regimes used to completely ignore. What was at stake in this process of analogical reading of schematic literature was the construction of the very “sphere of automatized perception”⁸¹—of the “systems of generative schemes”—that would ensure the continuous reproduction of narrative choices and stylistic preferences.⁸²

The growing narrative schematism of early Soviet children’s literature was a major method, but not the only one, of translating revolutionary theory for children. The second main methodological requirement was the so-called principle of gaze-appeal (*nagliadnost’*), which emphasized the semantic and affective potential of the image. By the mid-1920s, Soviet children’s books had altered significantly the visual conventions of book

78. Rubtsova, “Chto vliiaet,” 28.

79. Derrida, “Living on/Border Lines,” 100.

80. Derrida, “Living on/Border Lines,” 130.

81. Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Device” (1917), in *Theory of Prose* (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 6. See also the forum “Estrangement Revisited,” in *Poetics Today* 26, no. 4 (2005), and 27, no. 1 (2006), for a detailed discussion of the concept.

82. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 166.

publishing: picture books had become the main literary medium for illiterate or semiliterate children.⁸³ Ready-made illustrations, which populated books published before the revolution, were replaced with highly individualized pictorial narratives designed specifically for each book. The book artist increasingly was understood as “an author in his or her own right, not just a mere illustrator.”⁸⁴ Covers of many books listed both the writer and the artist as equal contributors.

It was not immediately clear, though, what kind of outcome this growing prominence of the artist should produce. Two contributors to *Children’s Literature: A Critical Collection* tried to develop the idea of coauthorship by suggesting that in addition to the more traditional function of “supporting” and/or “clarifying” the textual material, book pictures could be approached as autonomous or even self-sufficient visual configurations with their own, independent, semantic value.⁸⁵ Nikolai Kovarskii, yet another formalist, stressed that “the drawing must be just as efficient (semantically speaking) as the text,” and he proposed that Soviet children’s literature ensure “the systemic equivalence between the graphic and the textual elements of the book” by strictly implementing “the principle of the gaze-appeal” in books for children.⁸⁶ Elena Dan’ko, an artist and an author, underlined the educational function of the image by analyzing the artistic design of children’s books: “To develop, the eye must work; it must overcome some difficulty.”⁸⁷ Hence, every new book should present “an independent solution for new artistic puzzles”; every book should present “a new task for the reader’s eye.” The book should avoid simply perfecting the reader’s visual recognition skills. Instead, the main task of the book illustration is “to educate the eye—an eye that is unbiased and devoid of viewing clichés, an eye that is capable of working through a piece of art independently and actively.”⁸⁸

At least partially, this ongoing recognition of the semantic and struc-

83. Pokrovskaia, *Osnovnye techeniia*, 43; V. Petrov, “Iz istorii detskoi illiustrirovannoi knigi 1920–kh godov,” in *Iskusstvo knigi 1958–1960*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1962), 349–64.

84. Pokrovskaia, “Novye puti detskoi knigi.”

85. Nikolai Kovarskii, “Delovaia knizhka,” in *DLKS*, 155.

86. Kovarskii, “Delovaia knizhka,” 157.

87. Elena Dan’ko, “Zadachi khudozhestvennogo oformleniia knigi,” in *DLKS*, 227.

88. Dan’ko, “Zadachi khudozhestvennogo,” 229. Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott usefully operationalized these debates, suggesting a typology of relations between the image and the text created in children’s books: from symmetry, enhancement, and extension to alternation, deviation, and counterpoint. Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* (New York: Garland, 2001), 6–27.

tural independence of the pictorial component of the children's book was precipitated by an influx of professional artists into the publishing business after the revolution. The radically shrinking demand for art forced artists to change their medium.⁸⁹ There were other, aesthetic and ideological, reasons, too. From the early 1920s, Russian theoreticians of revolutionary art had been elaborating the concept of productivist art.⁹⁰ The "old visual art," with its mimetic painting, was declared dead. Instead of "pictorial illusionism," practiced by the artists of the past, new artists were to construct self-sufficient, "genuinely real things" that would not "copy the objects of the actual world," as Nikolai Tarabukin, a leading theorist of productivism, explained in his book *From the Easel to the Machine*.⁹¹ Productivist art was supposed to be fully integrated with life, providing practical guidance to the world of knowledge and objects, not an escape from it. A catalyst and organizer of its audience's activity, productivist art was to be a scientific alternative to the illusionist art of the past—as chemistry was to alchemy, or astronomy to astrology.⁹²

The illustrated book was a primary instance of this active, organizing, productive understanding of artistic "things" that were to challenge and educate their audience. El Lissitzky, a professional printmaker, graphic artist, and designer (he created the first red communist banner with hammer and sickle),⁹³ was one of the most vocal proponents and practitioners of the book understood as a site of "creative sign-formation."⁹⁴ Foregrounding the scopic aspect of reading, Lissitzky insisted that words on the page

89. Marina Balina, "Sovetskaia detskaia literatura: Neskol'ko slov o predmete issledovaniia," in Balina and V'ugin, *Ubit' Charskuiu . . .*, 11–12. For a detailed historical review, see Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades*, 13–70.

90. For more detail, see Christina Lodder, "Constructivism and Productivism in the 1920s," in *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery; New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 118–68.

91. Nikolai Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta—k mashine* (Moscow: Rabotnik prosveshcheniia, 1923), 8. For an abridged English translation of this work, see *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Francina and Charles Harrison (London: Harper and Row, 1986), 135–42.

92. Tarabukin, *Ot mol'berta—k mashine*, 42. For a detailed discussion, see Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

93. Nikolai Khardzhiev, "El Lisitskii—konstruktor knigi," in *Iskusstvo knigi 1958–1960*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1962), 147.

94. El Lisitskii, "Primechaniia ne k etoi knige" (1920), in E. Lisitskii, *Fil'm zhizni, 1890–1941*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Novyi ermitazh, 2004), 24.

are learned “by sight, not by hearing”; therefore, “the book space” should embody a new economy of expressive means, privileging “optics instead of phonetics.”⁹⁵ Already in 1919, Lissitzky wrote in his letter to Kazimir Malevich, the founder of suprematist art: “I think we need to pour the thoughts that we are to drink from the book with our eyes in all the forms that could be perceived by the eyes. The letters and punctuation marks that bring order to thoughts must be included in our calculations; also, lines in the book meet each other, [creating points of] condensation of thoughts: such condensation should be made perceptible for the eye, too.”⁹⁶

What Lissitzky pointed to was a process of visual syntaxing of the flow of thoughts: the scopic organization of meaning dislodged the sonic as the main semantic interface. Lissitzky’s own *About Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale of Two Squares in Six Constructions*, designed during his cooperation with Malevich in Vitebsk in 1920 (but published only in 1922 in Berlin), was one the most striking examples of the approach in which “a particular condensation of thoughts” was successfully accomplished through a creative combination of the narrative schematism and arresting optical effects.⁹⁷ In the *Tale*, the reader’s education was inextricably linked with that of the viewer: the epistemic and the optic were purposefully merged. As a result of this “education through optics,” the reading process went far beyond the simple operation of following the lines of the text.⁹⁸ Instead, the page bombarded readers with different visual stimuli; it pulled them in different directions, forcing them to create an idiosyncratic trajectory of the page-perception.

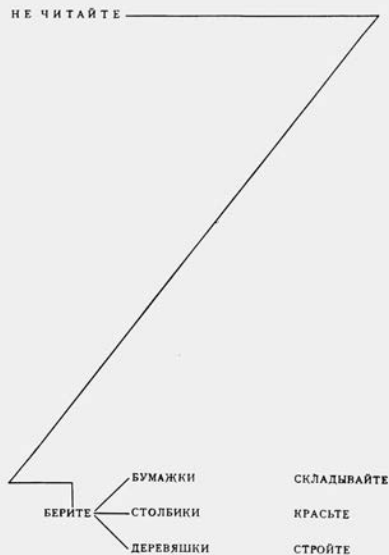
Relying on the visual vocabulary developed in Malevich’s suprematist art, Lissitzky constructed in his *Tale* a minimalist yet intricate assemblage of text, lines, and colored geometric objects. The visual language was not mimetic, and the text’s syntax was deliberately nonlinear. The hybrid language of Lissitzky’s tale began on the book’s cover. Far from being traditional, it combined word, number, and a colored image: “*About 2* [red] □.” Indicating from the very beginning that the book would not limit the visual

95. El Lissitzky, “Topography of Typography” [1923], in *El Lissitzky*, 359.

96. Khardzhiev, “El Lisitskii—konstruktor knigi,” 154.

97. El Lissitskii, *Pro dva kvadrata (About Two Squares)* (Berlin: Skify, 1922 [1920]). An English version of the book recently became available: El Lissitzky, *About Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale of Two Squares in Six Constructions*, trans. Christina Lodder (London: Tate, 2014).

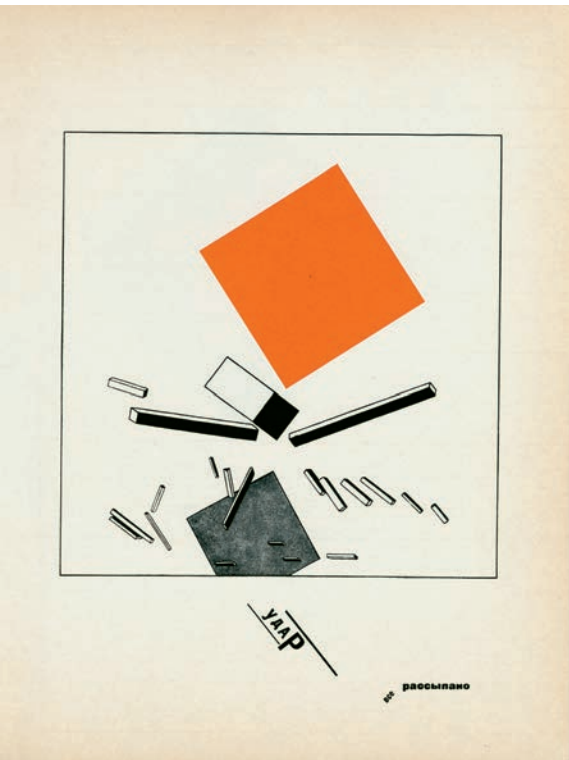
98. In his study *Vospitanie optikoi* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010), Yuri Levig traces the history of education through optics in Soviet Russia.



Figures 13–14. Exploring “the book space.” The hybrid language of Lisitzky’s tale: *About 2* □ (13). Educating through optics: “Do not read” (14). El Lissitskii, *Pro dva kvadrata* (*About Two Squares*) (Berlin: Skify, 1922 [1920]).

experience to the normalizing logic of the text’s horizontal sequencing, the name and surname of the author dynamically intersected (sharing the same letter *L*) at the bottom of the cover, resulting in a graphic *V* (or *L*, depending on the view) (Figure 13). As an introduction to the story, a special page presented instructions for the reader. The command “Don’t read” at the top of the page was followed by a zigzag line that crossed the entire page, leading to the next instruction, at the bottom of the page: *Take* [it]. The instruction then pointed to the three equally plausible choices of objects and forms of activity: *paper* (fold), *columns* (color), *woodblocks* (build) (Figure 14).

The rest of the book was a sequence of diagrams that outlined a story frame (fabula) for unpacking basic actions (take–fold–color–build) into a meaningful narrative. Six minimally colored plates told a tale about a journey of two squares, one red, the other black. The squares flew from afar to the red circle of the earth, where they witnessed an alarming disar-



Figures 15–16. Condensing thoughts. “One strike—everything is scattered” (15). “Here it is all over. . . . And then” (16). El Lisitskii, *Pro dva kvadrata* (*About Two Squares*) (Berlin: Skify, 1922 [1920]).

ray. The black-and-white picture of disorder on the globe was followed by a plate depicting a strike and further disintegration (Figure 15). Yet the last two plates established some balance. One showed the black square as the basis that supported an orderly arrangement of several three-dimensional red structures. The other plate ended the *Tale* with a view from above, in which a flat black circle (the earth?) with vertical three-dimensional red structures (columns? towers?) was semicovered (protected?) by the red square, while a diminished black square was located in (expelled to) the top right corner of the page. The text at the bottom commented, “Here it is all over.” Yet this closure was immediately disavowed by the final, diagonally placed “And then” (Figure 16).

It is tempting to interpret this condensed story about chaos, violent strike, and eventual stabilization as an “iconotext” that abstracted the alarming havoc of World War I, the turmoil of the Bolshevik revolution and

ensuing civil war, and the gradual reconstruction that followed the state of disorder in Russia.⁹⁹ Lissitzky's own political activism certainly points in this direction.¹⁰⁰

What is perhaps most interesting about this tale is not its actual meaning but rather Lissitzky's general desire "to formulate an elementary idea using elementary means."¹⁰¹ As his *Tale* compellingly shows, vivid narrative or condensed visual schemes do not have to be one-dimensional or limiting. In fact, elementary means, elementary building blocks, could create a highly dynamic environment that activates readers' creative potential.¹⁰² Like Mayakovsky's *Heroes and Victims of the Revolution*, Lissitzky's *Tale* polarized the word—*before/after*, *black/red*—demonstrating the transformative power of violent encounters. Through his imaginative typography and topography of the book space, Lissitzky encouraged the reader to oscillate constantly between the image and the word, between an abstract idea and a concrete form, between a picture and a real object. Reading here is not the passive consumption of a text or an image; nor is the book's iconotext a reproduction of reality. Instead, it is a self-sufficient construction that offers both a model of the world and a scenario for an active and playful engagement with it.

Taking Revolt Out of Revolution

While El Lissitzky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Vladimir Tatlin, and a few other avant-garde artists did contribute to the formation of the genre of the revolutionary children's book, the field was shaped predominantly by authors who viewed the solution to the "harmonic combination of children's interests with the tasks of the class struggle"¹⁰³ in a much less radical way. The visual dynamism, narrative fragmentation, and hybridity of expressive means that was so typical of avant-gardist attempts to push the limits

99. For perceptive historical and pictorial interpretations of the *Tale*, see Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917–1946* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 37–42; and Higonnet, "Modernism and Childhood," 96–98. The concept of iconotext as "an inseparable entity of word and image" is discussed at length in Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work*, 6–7.

100. See Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades*, 22–32.

101. El Lissitzky, "Typographical Facts," as quoted in *El Lissitzky*, 80.

102. Leo Lionni's popular book *Little Blue and Little Yellow* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959) similarly translates the social content into abstract elementary shapes. For a discussion, see Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work*, 88–89.

103. Razin, "Kuda napravit'ogon'."

of “the book space” in the process of translating communism was overshadowed by the striving to impose some visual predictability and narrative coherence. The translator as “the visible interventionist” was pushed aside by the translator as “an invisible transporter of meanings.”¹⁰⁴ Creative transposition mutated into an act of mechanical reproduction.

In this section, I look at several picture books produced for the mass (mostly preschool) children’s market. Specifically, I am interested in four thematic clusters that prominently defined the content of children’s books in the 1920s and 1930s: *revolution* as the foundational event, *labor* as the dominant organizing practice, *internationalism* as the global context, and Lenin as the normative model of individual identification. These books followed the same principles of narrative schematization and gaze-appeal that I discussed earlier, but they understood them more literally: books’ fabulas became ready-made formulas, while their scopic organization returned to the figurative and illusionistic language. Hardly a location of “creative sign-formation” anymore, these books nonetheless were effective manuals for translating communism into easily recognizable idioms of everyday life.

In 1933, Maksim Gorky published in *Pravda* an important article, “On Themes.” Outlining various topics that writers for children should pursue, Gorky formulated a slogan that several generations of Soviet pedagogues and critics would cite: “In our country, to educate means to revolutionize.”¹⁰⁵ Surprisingly, though, Gorky’s themes did not mention the Bolshevik revolution at all; most of them were about labor, nature, or science. The absence of the revolution in the project of revolutionizing was not entirely accidental: by 1933, the seizure of power in October 1917 was presenting a certain narrative difficulty. As the foundational event for the new Soviet state, it had to be celebrated and popularized; at the same time, the logic of political stabilization and economic reconstruction required a certain containment of the revolution’s radicalism. The revolution had to be rewritten into symbolic fields, which could reframe and redirect its force while retaining its grandeur.

It is indicative that two artistic productions that significantly defined the canonic revolutionary iconography—the extravagant “mass dramatization” *Storming the Winter Palace*, directed by Nikolai Evreinov in situ on November 6, 1920, and Sergei Eisenstein’s film *October* (1928)—focused

104. Schäffner and Bassnett, “Politics, Media, and Translation,” 11.

105. Maksim Gorky, “O temakh,” *Pravda*, October 17, 1933.

on the takeover of the Winter Palace in Petrograd. Taking power in October was equated with taking over the location of the powerful. This metonymic move added an important performative dimension to the revolutionary narrative: disagreements and fights within the Bolshevik Party were dramatically overshadowed by the impressive spectacle of the collective action in the square. Explaining his staging approach to the reenactment (which involved 2,500 actors and about 100,000 spectators), Evreinov pointed out a few weeks before the event, “Our method of work will be artistic simplification.”¹⁰⁶ As I noted earlier, postrevolutionary literature for children relied on a similar method. The portrayal of the revolutionary event in these books was no exception: most stories for children left institutions of power out of the picture and described instead various effects of power. Here I point out only two trends—the domestication of the notion of rebellion and the narrative ossification of the revolution, its “metaphorical totalization,” in a set of iconic objects and gestures.

In the mid-1920s, several picture books introduced Soviet children to various riots (*bunt*) that reversed existing social hierarchies and created new social alliances. In 1925, Sergei Gorodetskii, a Russian symbolist poet, published a poetic fairy tale titled *The Riot of Dolls*, accompanied by his own folksy illustrations. In the poem, the usually quiet world of dolls goes through a major upheaval when a certain Dame becomes a target of her own servants who are “short on brains” (*s golovoi kutsoiu*), as the narrator describes them. Nutcracker, the Tin Soldier, and others learn from the street-smart and sharp-eyed Stepka that the ongoing revolution has given all the power to the Soviets and has proclaimed that “those who do not work shall not eat.” Inspired by that idea, the dolls first refuse to follow the Dame’s orders, then expropriate and divide among themselves her excessive possessions, and finally abandon the Dame altogether, joining a communist cell en masse. The fairy tale ends with a direct appeal to the reader to help other “stupid dolls around the world” who still suffer from injustice (“the black Arab” and “the Chinese” are especially singled out): “There are still lots of dolls / Who are short on brains / Help them / To stage a revolution.”¹⁰⁷ Instead of “The End,” the fairy tale concludes with an image of a Chinese doll in a traditional dress with a slogan above the head that reads *Revolution* (in Cyrillic stylized as Chinese characters). The end of the

106. *Zhizn' iskusstva*, September 30, 1920. A short video of Evreinov's 1920 production recently became available: http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/film_screenings/19269.

107. Sergei Gorodetskii, *Bunt kukol* (Moscow: Novaia Moskva, 1925), 14.

tale, the book seems to suggest, is the time to start acting: the revolution has to continue (Figure 17).

A. Gurin's *Toys' Riot* (1927) followed the same fabula, presenting revolt as a suspension and inversion of the social order, but his tale provides the reader with a clearer model of identification. Little Zoya is in trouble: her animal toys do not obey her anymore. Her little monkey does not want to wear pants, her hippopotamus will not stop screaming, and her sheep keep fighting with everyone. The only help comes from the rhinoceros, who advises Zoya to go to Africa, where she can beg Lion, the tsar of all animals, to rein in the rebellious toys. On her way to Africa, however, Zoya's "red tram" is stopped by real animals, who ridicule her belief in monarchic omnipotence, explaining that it has been more than five years since "all the knights and tsars," Lion included, were deposed and expelled from the country. To help, the committee of animals (chaired by Crocodile) issues a decree demanding that the toys behave properly.¹⁰⁸

These tales about carnivalesque riots turning the world upside down demonstrated that existing social hierarchies did not last forever. It is important, though, that, unlike carnivals described by Mikhail Bakhtin, the doll riots sought a solution to social disorder by replacing disorganized (and "short on brains") individuals with a "rational" collective—be it a communist cell of toys or a committee of animals. Although class struggle did not appear in these tales as a struggle of classes, the "doll riots" provided a way for experiencing the power of group solidarity. Aleksandr Bardovskii, a writer and educator, went furthest in this direction in his "theatrical game" *The Riot of Toys (In Ten Acts)*, in which revolutionized dolls and puppets leave the toy store in order to join children at an orphanage. Encouraged by Evreinov's choreography of masses, Bardovskii, in 1924–25, even staged several performances of his "mass action" with orphans and homeless children, and then popularized the script in book form as "a new kind of dynamic art" that could turn passive spectators into energetic actors.¹⁰⁹

At the time, most critics agreed that the allegoric treatment of the October event in these and other fairy tales was artistically flawed.¹¹⁰ It was politically ineffective, too: the idea of the revolution-as-reversal might have captured well the essence of the event, but it was hardly helpful for organizing *postrevolutionary* everyday life. The writer Aleksandr Neverov also

108. A. Gurin, *Bunt igrushek* (Rostov-na-Donu: Sev-Kavkaz ODN, 1927).

109. Aleksandr Bardovskii, *Bunt igrushek* (Leningrad: Nachatki znanii, 1925), 1, 2.

110. Kon, *Sovetskaia detskaia literatura*, 128–29.



Figure 17. The Revolution must go on. Sergei Gorodetskii (text and pictures), *Bunt kukol* (Moscow: Novaia Moskva, 1925). Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children's Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.

contributed to the genre of the dolls' revolt: his 1924 fairy tale *How Dolls Lived and What the Tin Soldier Did* tells a predictable story about a coup in a world of dolls staged by the tin soldier and a kitchen maid against a noble but "lazy doll with glassy eyes."¹¹¹ Neverov's later stories suggest a plausible way out of the doll dead end by abstracting the revolution into a few symbolic and behavioral gestures. In these books, Neverov does not dress up his fabula with fancy allegories or the rhetoric of mass spectacles, but he does retain the core idea of the book as a producer of "energetic actions." The portrayal of the revolution in his stories mainly uses the perspective of (imaginary) children, and this "naive" point of view allows the narrator to replace questions about power and its applications with the depiction of performative acts through which the presence of the revolution can be recognized (and marked).

Neverov's illustrated story *Bolsheviks* translates revolutionary activity into the language of a "theatrical game." In the story, two boys, three girls, and a doll meet every day to play in their courtyard. Sometimes these little "Bolsheviks" play the game of commander and (Red Army) soldiers. Alternatively, they could decide to stage a Bolshevik meeting, with "an orator" and Q&A, in genuine Bolshevik style. One day, one of the boys, Zhen'ka, asks the rest of the group, "Do you want to hear my speech?" The following discussion ensues:

"Wait a minute, Zhen'ka. Who are you today? Trotsky?"

"No, today I'm Lunacharskii."

"Then who am I?" [asks the other boy]

"Do you want to be Trotsky?"

"Sure. . . . Well, you know what? I'd rather be Lenin."

"Ok, then. Lenin is as good as any other Bolshevik. . . ."

"And what about us?" asks [one of the girls].

"You'll be delegates from other cities, visiting our congress."¹¹²

(Figure 18)

But the distribution of roles runs into problems; the little Bolsheviks quickly lose their interest in the meeting and opt for a more dynamic scenario. The group decides to march around the village, reenacting the May 1 parade (in

111. Aleksandr Neverov, *Kak zhili kukly i chto sdelał oloviannyi soldatik* (Moscow: Izdanie G. F. Mirimanova, 1924).

112. Aleksandr Neverov, *Bol'sheviki*, art by B. Ioganson (Moscow: Izdanie G. F. Mirimanova, 1924), 8.



Женька делает наказы уверенно.

Figure 18. Learning revolutionary gestures: Zhen'ka, the orator. Aleksandr Neverov, *Bol'sheviki* (Moscow: Izdanie G. F. Mirimanova, 1924). Artist: B. Ioganson. Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children's Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.

July, as the story emphasizes)—with a boy’s shirt as a flag, a tin can as a drum, and a Red Army song as musical accompaniment.

While being citational to the core, such “meetings” and “marches” had no agenda of their own, so to speak. Nor did they need one: their entire value was in their performative self-sufficiency. Neverov’s *Revolution* (reprinted multiple times and included in various collections) operationalized the foundational event even more, showing how the revolution’s signifiers could be taken for the revolution’s signifieds. In the story, Misha, a village boy, travels with his father to a big city, where their horse cart is blocked by a group of people walking with flags down the street. Misha’s father explains that workers are celebrating the revolution and orders his son to take off his hat as a sign of respect. Amused by the new experience, Misha begins to count flags but gets distracted by the sound of trumpets. Back in the village, he proudly explains to his friends that he saw a revolution in the city. “What’s it like?” they ask. “Twelve flags with different tassels, and music from big trumpets,” he replies.¹¹³

This descriptive perception very quickly acquired the status of a prescriptive formula. “Flags with tassels” made the revolution perceptible; “trumpets’ music” provided a distinct sonic experience, and “marches” offered a form of organized kinetic activity. Taken together, these elements constituted a referential evocation of the event, creating an illusion of involvement and belonging. At the same time, they functioned as an independent behavioral scenario, “forming a pocket inside the corpus” of the revolutionary texts.¹¹⁴ The potential destabilizing effect of this part that replaced the whole, however, was neutralized; an event of accounting turned into an account of the event. Or, as Laclau puts it, a certain particularity became “the name of an utterly incommensurable universality.”¹¹⁵ The initial act of displacement resulted in a fundamental substitution: the image of young pioneers marching with flags, trumpets, and drums would be replicated countless times—by children’s books, but also by such early Soviet documentary films as Dziga Vertov’s *Kinopravda* or *Three Songs about Lenin*. What is crucial for my discussion, however, is that in the process of these representational attempts to keep the revolution going, the original

113. Aleksandr Neverov, *Rasskazy* (Moscow: GIZ, 1925), 3. See also Neverov, *Revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Gosiz, 1929).

114. Jacques Derrida calls this modality “the form of an *invagination*,” in “The Law of Genre,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 70.

115. Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations*, 140.

idea of collective *action* was replaced by endless images of *actively moving* collectives (Figures 19 and 20).

The reduction of the revolution to a few iconic posters and behavioral schemes required analogical equations able to convert historical experience into genre conventions. Flags and marches were important, but they were *festive* signs of “the Red equivalent of Christmas,” as an *Izvestiia* article put it in 1922.¹¹⁶ In this respect, the poetics of constructive labor was an effective narrative solution that recast the revolutionary struggle as a daily process of heroic work. Aleksei Gastev, the head of the Central Institute of Labor in the 1920s (and a poet), wrote in his book-manifesto, *Youth, Go!*, in 1923:

Russia hibernates for a century, but then it wakes up, stretches itself, and erupts into a riot. . . . This riot was rightly called a revolution. . . . Thousands, millions of young, hungry barbarians want to turn everything upside down; their muscles yearn for work; the molecules of their brains are red hot, going berserk [*nakaleny i bezumstvuiut*]. . . . The sluices must be opened to contain this elemental force. . . . Youth wants to live, confronting in a naive yet daring manner everything that crosses its path. It must be given organization and slogans. The main idea is to storm Russia from the inside, to transform its mustiness and backwardness, and to get everything that fell asleep to toil.¹¹⁷

Children’s books toned down significantly the exuberance of Gastev’s poetic Marxism; but they kept intact the fundamental belief in the transformative and organizing force of collective labor. The revolutionary makeover of the world did not end, the books emphasized; what was different now were the targets under attack. The initial idea of the revolutionary reversal of the social order was appropriated for the portrayal of massive industrial projects during the first five-year plan of 1928–32. Nature was to be reformed, just as bourgeois foes were reforged earlier.¹¹⁸ As a result, the landscape of revolutionary change was drastically expanded, going way beyond the usual depictions of Moscow and Leningrad as the hotbeds of

116. Z. Richter, “Moskva,” *Izvestia*, November 5, 1922.

117. Aleksei Gastev, *Iunost’, idi!* (Moscow: Izdanie VTsSPS, 1923), 5, 10.

118. I discuss these fights against nature as a form of Soviet modernization in my essay “The Flexible and the Pliant: Disturbed Organisms of Soviet Modernity,” *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 3 (2004): 392–428.



Figure 19. Evgenii Shvarts's picture book *Camp* presents a day in a children's summer camp that consists of a sequence of routinized collective activities (gymnastics, a war game, repair of a local bridge) and ends with a formal report (*doklad*) by a bonfire: "This is an exemplary camp, / This is a remarkable team, / Tonight we have a report, / Tomorrow, with songs and drums / We'll visit peasants." E. Shvarts, *Lager'* (Leningrad: GIZ, 1925). Artist: A. Pakhomov. Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children's Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.

Смена смене идет.

Коммунистам идут на смену
комсомольцы.

Комсомольцам идут на смену
пионеры.

Пионерам смена — октябрята.

Смена смене идет.



Дети Советского Союза.

Готовим смену крепкую
мы дедам и отцам.

Страну свою советскую
не отдадим врагам.

Эй, собирайтесь под наши зна-
мена, дети рабочих всех стран!

Figure 20. A collection of reading materials titled *Igra i trud* (*Play and Work*) used the standard image of marching pioneers to illustrate a different—politico-generational—sequencing that was spelled out in the accompanying poem: Komsomol (young communists) members replace Communists / Pioneers replace Komsomol members / Pioneers are replaced by Octobrists / Change follows change. K. Sokolov, ed., *Igra i trud* (Moscow: GIZ, 1930), 21. Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children's Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.

the revolution. Undergoing dramatic transformation, the North, the Urals, the Caucasus, and Central Asia entered the picture. In Mikhail Ruderman's picture book *Estafeta (Relay Race)*, geography evolves into a distinctive topography of major sites of industrial construction in the USSR. For example, a story about building the Turksib, a new railroad that linked Siberia and the Turkestan region in the south (the main producer of cotton), does not depict the process of construction itself. Instead, it dramatizes the contrast between the old and the new introduced by the railroad's construction: "Wheels in place of hooves, / And rails—in place of sand, / And the Turksib's chimney smoke / Flies, / Like cotton, / To the sky" (Figure 21).¹¹⁹

Images and stories about collective labor altering the country's landscape required a certain adjustment, though. The presence of children in these stories was rather passive. Moreover, the audience was exposed to a massive flow of information that was rather tangential to the readers' own lives. The solution came in the form of an analogical operation that equated children's learning with adults' labor. *Piatiletka (The Five-Year Plan)*, a picture book by Boris Evgen'ev, frames a story about industrial tools and activities as the travelogue of a small boy named Grisha. Puzzled by the term *five-year plan* frequently used by his parents, Grisha asks a group of young pioneers to help him understand its meaning. The pioneers take Grisha to factories and fields where he can witness the work in progress. He observes later:

"I saw a factory—it's growing. I saw a railroad—it's being built. I saw a tractor—it plows the field. I saw electricity—it runs to the village."

"You saw the Five-Year Plan, then," the pioneers said.

"Now I know what the Five-Year Plan is. It means new factories, new roads, new cars, new fields, which will multiply in five years. But I don't know how we'll get all that."

The pioneers said, "Our fathers and mothers will make all of this."

"And what about us?" Grisha asked.

"We'll help them, and we'll study," the pioneers said. "We'll study a lot so that we can become good workers."¹²⁰

Like the revolution epitomized in tasseled flags and trumpets, the Five-Year Plan is substantiated through a series of "tropological substitu-

119. Mikhail Ruderman, *Estafeta*, art by A. Laptev (Moscow: GIZ, 1930), n.p.

120. Boris Evgen'ev, *Piatiletka*, art by Leonid Gamburger (Kiev: Kultura, 1930).

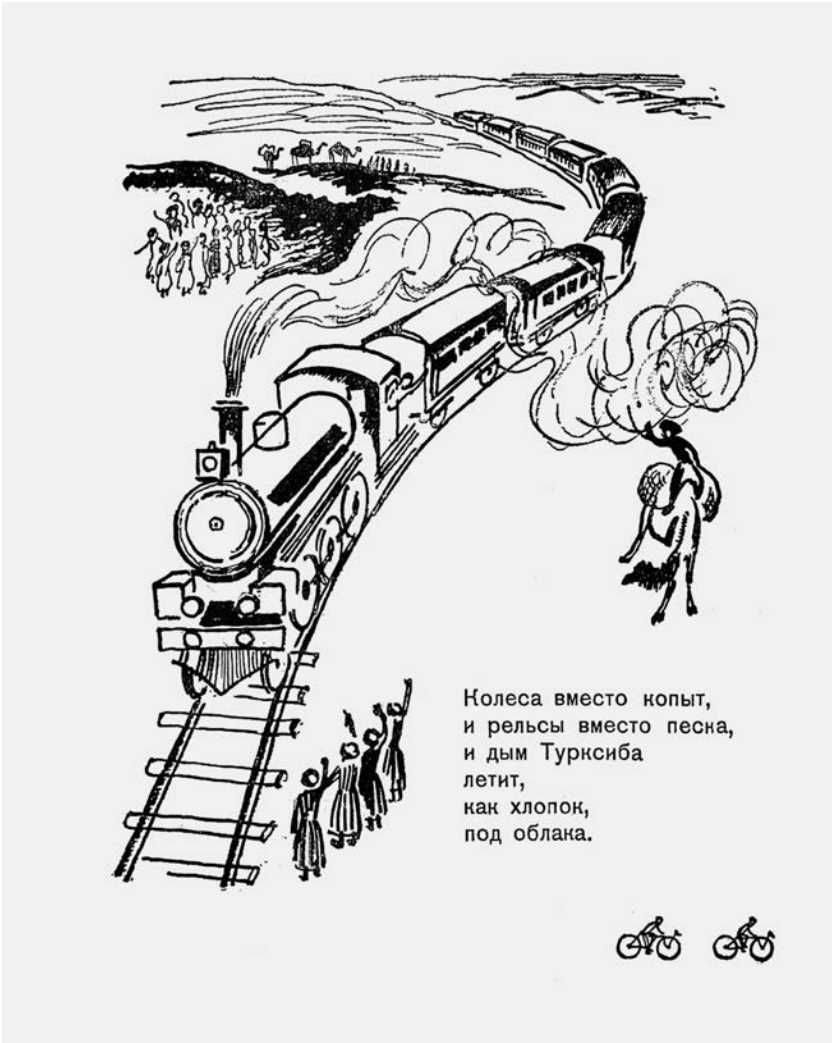


Figure 21. Contrasting temporal and spatial orders: “Wheels in place of hooves, rails—in place of sand.” Mikhail Ruderman, *Estafeta* (Moscow: GIZ, 1930). Artist: A. Laptev. Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children’s Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.

tions” of metonym by metaphor.¹²¹ Material elements (roads, tractors, or airplanes) delineate and structure the social space; but, more important, they act as (optic) analogues for the plan itself: “I saw a tractor. . . / You saw the Five-Year Plan, then.” Downplaying differences, this “metonymic game” foregrounds connectedness and continuity in the new country.¹²² Children become workers-in-waiting; history turns into a relay race. The popular slogan “Change follows change” (*Smena smene idet*) was used frequently in children’s books to affirm the permanent flow of workers of different ages, not to indicate the inevitability of generational breaks.¹²³ A short poem, written on behalf of (imaginary) Octobrists by the prominent children’s poet Agniia Barto, deftly captures this perception of generational difference as a form of sameness distributed diachronically and spatially: “Not just playing; / Not just marching / With flags / Down the street. / We help / We help / We help / The adults . . . / Our fathers work on the shop floor, / We work on the shop floor, too. / Our desks are our machines. / A book and a notepad / Are our tools” (Figures 22 and 23).¹²⁴

If the revolution presented the point of departure, and labor signified the intergenerational permanence of revolutionary dynamics, then the idea of internationalism brought back social difference. Picture books with such titles as *Raznye chelovechki* (*Different Little Humans*), *Raznotsvetnye rebiata* (*Colorful Kids*), and *Detki raznotsvetki* (*Kids of Many Colors*) flooded the market in the late 1920s. Most of them presented the literal discovery of racial, ethnic, or social difference: a little boy (sometimes together with a little girl) flies on an airplane around the world in order to “become fraternally familiar with local proletarians” (*poznakomit’sia kak s bratom s mestnym proletariatom*).¹²⁵ In these encounters, the initial surprise caused by human diversity usually is followed by friendly exchanges of gifts and a safe return home.

A smaller group of books presented a more politically advanced narrative. A highly debated picture book by Lev Zilov tells the story of a brother and sister, meaningfully named May and Oktiabrina, who (in their sleep)

121. Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations*, 93.

122. Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations*, 93.

123. *Smena* in Russian means “change” or “replacement” but also “a work shift” and “generation.”

124. Agniia Barto, *Oktiabriatskaia zvezdochka* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1932), 68.

125. Yuri Dantsiger, *Raznye chelovechki* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1927), n.p. See also Nikolai Agnivitsev, *Raznotsvetnye rebiata* (Moscow: Raduga, 1928); Agniia Barto, *Bratishki* (Moscow: GlZ, 1928); and S. Poltavskii, *Detki raznotsvetki*, art by S. Chekhonin (Moscow: Zemlia i fabrika, 1927).



Figures 22–23. “You saw the Five-Year Plan.” In this book, the idea of change as a guarantee against breaks is amplified through the repetition of the same or similar images. The uninterrupted flow of objects and people creates simultaneously a sense of dynamism and a feeling of stability.

The text in Figure 22 explains, “Tractors are to plow land” and “Sowing machines are to sow grain” (*khleb*, lit. bread).

Ironically, in Figure 23, women who produce nondescript white uniformed garments nonetheless promise “to sew various dresses, many more than now. For everybody—for boys and girls, for fathers and mothers.”

Boris Evgen’ev. *Piatiletka* (Kiev: Kul’tura, 1930). Artist: L. Gamburger. Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children’s Library, <http://arch.rgdb.ru>.

travel all over the globe to see “where life is good, and where life is ugly.”¹²⁶ Visiting various continents, they discover pretty much the same picture everywhere: different nations suffer under their colonizers and dictators. Appalled and indignant, May and Oktiabrina attempt to mobilize the subalterns to fight for their rights and freedoms, and even occasionally teach them to sing the “Internationale” (Figures 24 and 25).

The human diversity that emerges in this type of book is the diversity of misery and exploitation. Against the positively colored (yet unspecified) picture of the Soviet Union, this negatively charged view of social differentiation results in a radical reversal of the initial narrative trajectory. From serving as the point of departure and a source of revolutionary knowledge *spreading* around the world, the USSR mutates into a point of centripetal attraction, happy sociopolitical exception, which manages to build socialism within its own borders.

Yuri Gralitsa’s picture book *Children’s “Internationale”* provides a good illustration for this development. In the tale, children from an orphanage called *Murav’i* (Ants—a real institution) decide to form a labor commune. Mindful of the fact that their ethnic homogeneity could be unproductive, they invite children of different countries to join in: “Our circle will be too narrow / If the commune unites only Russians. / . . . There are children all over the world / Let’s get them over here / To talk . . . / About the way they work.”¹²⁷ Children of the world do join them, but their diversity only confirms the children’s universal sameness. Different clothing, skin color, or eye shape cannot hide that “we are all equipped / With the same pair of legs and pair of arms / . . . That enable us to work.”¹²⁸ Difference, in other words, is not rejected but seen as functionally irrelevant for the commune where people “work for one another.”

The modified self-representations of Soviet communism—from its global expansion to its concentration, if not self-absorption—gave rise to a series of picture books that anchored an ostensibly international content around the figure of Lenin. As the usual fabula would have it, a boy in Calcutta or a coolie in China would learn about Lenin’s politics, and this knowledge would force him to change his life forever, and maybe even move to Moscow (Figure 26).¹²⁹ *Millionnyi Lenin (Millionfold Lenin)*, another illus-

126. Lev Zilov, *Mai i Oktiabrina*, art by Vladimir Orlov (Moscow: Poligraf, 1924), 3.

127. Yuri Gralitsa, *Detskii Internatsional* (Moscow: GIZ, 1926), 5.

128. Gralitsa, *Detskii Internatsional*, 29.

129. See A. Isbakh, *Ballada o Lenine i Li-Chane* (Moscow: GIZ, 1928); and Elena Safonova, *Lenin v Indii* (Leningrad: OGIZ, 1931).



Figures 24–25. Learning about native proletarians: May and Oktiabrina in Japan (24); May and Oktiabrina in Benares, singing *The International* (25). Lev Zilov, *Mai i Oktiabrina* (Moscow: Poligraf, 1924). Artist: Vladimir Orlov.



Figure 26. Li Chang, a coolie in Beijing, thinking of Lenin. A. Isbakh, *Ballada o Lenine i Li-Chane* (Moscow: GIZ, 1928). Artist: P. Aliakrinskii. Source: Mikhail Karasik, *Udarnaia kniga sovetskoi detvory: fotoillustratsiia i foto-montazh v knige dlia detei i iunoshestva* (Moscow: Kontakt-kultura, 2010). Courtesy of Mikhail Karasik.

trated poem by Zilov, was crucial for shaping this subgenre of Leniniana, despite the fact that Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaja, dismissed the book as "twaddle and jabber" (*boltovnia i treskotnia*).¹³⁰ The book equivalent of a road movie, *Millionfold Lenin* traces a journey of two boys from India to Moscow (Figure 27). When their adult friend, a loader in a Calcutta warehouse, is killed during a strike against his greedy employer, the boys learn from the loader's coworkers about a certain "Lenin from the North." He fights for freedom and equality among people, they are told: "For him, there are no yellow and white people, / But only those who have something to eat and those who don't." The boys travel to Russia, witnessing injustice, suffering, and exploitation in different countries along the way. Zilov packages key themes of the time—revolt, class struggle, labor, internationalism, and so on—as an adventure story, but he adds an important twist. Having reached Moscow, the boys find out that Lenin has just died. The adventure turns into a pilgrimage: "We want to see at least his corpse . . . / At least, the ashes of the sun / If the sun itself is gone." In the process of witnessing Moscow's rituals of collective mourning, the boys finally grasp (analogically) "the great mystery of the country of ice and night." Lenin is "not a corpse hidden in the pagoda" but "millions of people" who fought with him for their freedom, and who will continue to fight in solidarity.¹³¹ The reincarnation on a mass scale does not recuperate the traumatic loss, but it turns the loss into the constitutive exclusion that makes possible "the totalization of the system of differences."¹³²

The internationalization of the Lenin cult in children's literature was a continuation of a much deeper tradition that had started taking shape after Lenin's death on January 21, 1924. The publications that came out that year were very distinctive in their approach. Most were documental or quasi-factographic. Usually called *Children and Lenin* or *Children about Lenin*, these books compiled ethnographic, pictorial, and literary evidence of children's reaction to the death. Stories about trips to Moscow to see Lenin's body abounded, as did reports about different ways of memorializing Lenin's absence.¹³³ The nonfictional character of these texts was amplified by visual narratives in which photomontages and children's drawings

130. Nadezhda Krupskaja, "O detskoj biblioteke i detskoj knige" (1927), in *Pedagogičeskie sočineniia v desiati tomakh*, vol. 8 (Moscow: APN, 1959), 178.

131. Lev Zilov, *Millionnyi Lenin* (Moscow: GIZ, 1926).

132. Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations*, 145.

133. For examples, see Il'a Lin, *Deti i Lenin* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1924); and Zlata Lilina, ed., *Velikii učitel': Leninskaia khrestomatiia* (Leningrad: GIZ, 1924), 264–79.



Figure 27. A cover for Lev Zilov's *Millionnyi Lenin* (*Millionfold Lenin*) uses the visual cliché of marching pioneers to present Lenin's followers from abroad—in this case, from India. Lev Zilov, *Millionnyi Lenin* (Moscow: GIZ, 1928). Artist: B. Pokrovskii. Source: Mikhail Karasik, *Udarnaia kniga sovet-skoj detvory: fotoillustratsiia i fotomontazh v knige dlia detei i iunoshestva* (Moscow: Kontakt-kultura, 2010). Courtesy of Mikhail Karasik.



Figure 28. "Your image will be the guiding star." A photomontage by G. Klutsis. From Ilya Lin, *Deti i Lenin* (Moscow: Molodaya gvardia, 1924). Courtesy of Ne Boltai: A Collection of 20th-Century Propaganda, <http://www.neboltai.org>.

prevailed (Figure 28). R. Orlova, in her *Preschool Children about Lenin*, documented perhaps the most striking cases observed in Moscow's kindergartens and orphanages. Playing "dead Lenin" seemed to be quite widespread in 1924. One group of children was observed carrying a box around kindergarten rooms as a reenactment of the procession with Lenin's coffin. Eventually, the children set up the box on top of a piano and started approaching it one by one, bowing. In a different kindergarten, boys would lie down, one after another, on the dining table, their bodies representing the dead Lenin. Meanwhile, other children, symbolizing "workers and people," circled the table. "Our Lenin died; did yours die too?" asked one of them.¹³⁴

The loss of Lenin would be naturalized, too. *Play and Work*, a book of reading materials for preschool and elementary school children, inscribed the death into the cycle of seasons by placing the section on Lenin Memorial Days in January, next to instructions on how to create a weather calendar for the winter months. To commemorate the death, the book even suggested examples of posters "for school and home": "*Lenin died, but his cause lives on!*" was one among many.¹³⁵ Significantly, Lenin's birthday in April was completely ignored.

These games of identification eventually would be crystallized in a formulaic question: "What should I do to become Lenin?"¹³⁶ By bringing loss and identification together, these publications produced a melancholically charged symbolic space within which the figure of Lenin simultaneously promised a new life and signified the fragility of the promise and the life itself. As a group of students put it in their collective poem *To Lenin*:

We are by your dear grave, Lenin.
 You are dead, but your testament is alive.
 And it will live for a long time.
 All people, all children visit your grave
 The year around.
 There are guards of honor,
 They look at Lenin with pain in their hearts,
 Thinking: "If only our teacher were alive,
 Everything would be unlike now [*togda by bylo vse ne to*]."¹³⁷
 (Figure 29)

134. R. Orlova, ed., *Deti doshkol'niki o Lenine* (Moscow: GIZ, 1924), 14, 23, 20.

135. K. Sokolov, ed., *Igra i trud. Kniga pervaya*, 10th ed. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930), 12–16.

136. Orlova, *Deti doshkol'niki o Lenine*, 40, 57.

137. "Leninu," in *Deti o Lenine*, ed. Natalia Sats (Moscow: Novaya Moskva, 1925), 20.



Figure 29. Creating affective attachment: “I’d rather be Lenin.” A book cover for a story about a boy who went to see Lenin’s funeral. P. Dorokhov, *Kak Petun’ka ezdil k Il’ichu* (Moscow: GIZ, 1930). Artist: Piotr Aliakrinskii. Source: Mikhail Karasik, *Udarnaia kniga sovetskoi detvory: fotoillustratsiia i fotomontazh v knige dlia detei i iunoshestva* (Moscow: Kontakt-kultura, 2010). Courtesy of Mikhail Karasik.

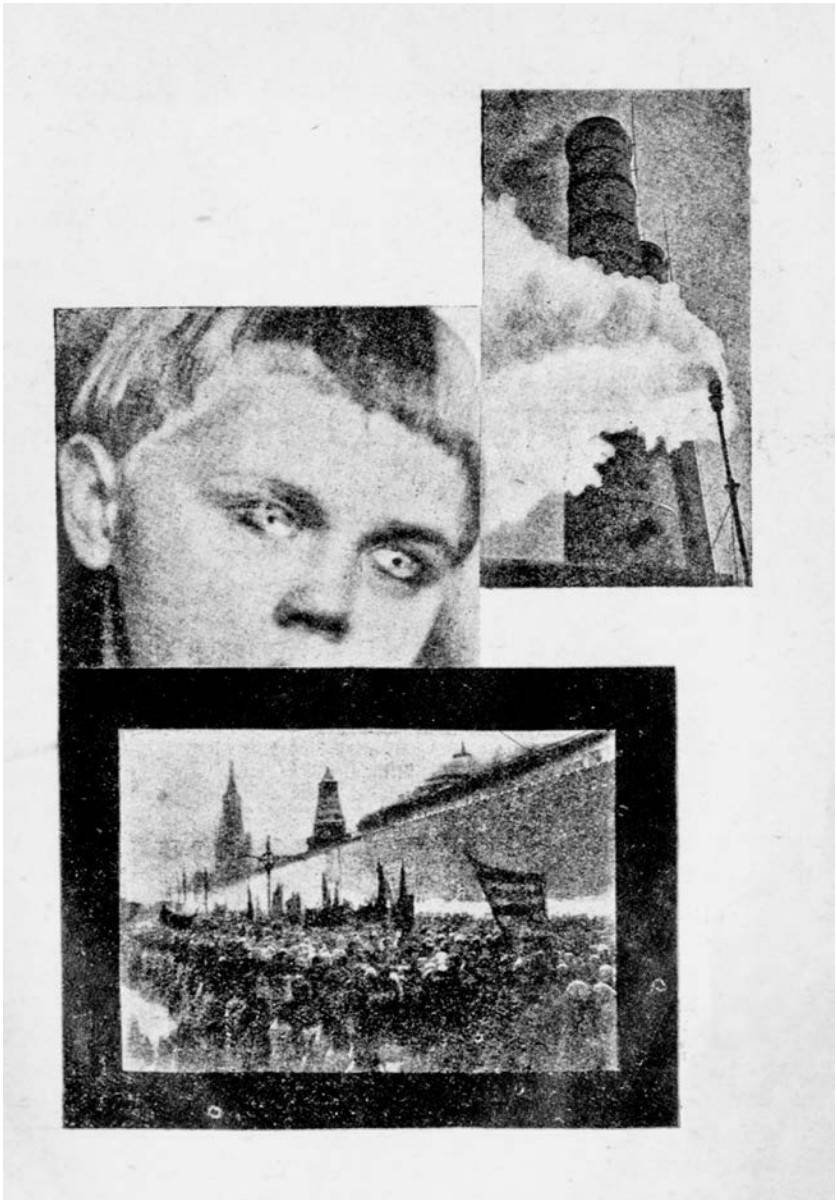


Figure 30. “Our Lenin died; did yours die too?” A photomontage by S. Sen’kin from Anna Grinberg, *Rasskazy o smerti Lenina* (Moscow: GIZ, 1930). Source: Mikhail Karasik, *Udarnaia kniga sovetskoi detvory: fotoillustratsiia i fotomontazh v knige dlia detei i iunoshestva* (Moscow: Kontakt-kultura, 2010). Courtesy of Mikhail Karasik.

Linking the revolution with loss, affect, and attachment, stories about Lenin's death helped readers imagine the event as a collective experience framed in personal terms. Distinctive details led to the same core idea: everything could have been "unlike now"; but it won't be. And it is hardly surprising, then, that one of the last publications by Anna Grinberg, the person who actively contributed to the debates about the "books of the future," was the 1930 collection *Rasskazy o smerti Lenina (Stories about Lenin's Death)*. Grinberg's own book of the future was a story about illness, loss, and subsequent mourning for the past (Figure 30).

As I argue in this section, each thematic cluster treated the narrative organization of revolutionary ideas differently. But in all these cases, the outcome was a similar homogenization of the narrative and pictorial language. The same generative schemes of theatrical games infused the whole country much faster than Gastev had envisioned.¹³⁸ In this process of saturation, the revolution was posterized/pasteurized: its dynamism and utopian impulse were rechanneled, diffused, or sedated. Difference, understood as a pathway to sameness, was of little use-value here, ontologically and even discursively.

This does not mean, of course, that children's literature had nothing to offer. Reclaimed and recharged, the previously "forgotten weapon" hit its targets quite successfully. Within a decade (or so), "books of the future" managed to translate crucial Marxist notions into straightforward fables and graphic posters, providing millions of people with behavioral scenarios and symbolic competence. New social values—such as generational continuity, collective labor, and international solidarity, to name just a few—were foregrounded and popularized. A new reading audience was formed. New grids of perception and interpretation were established. Yet in the process of this translation something fundamental was lost: abstracted in a handful of performative gestures, objects, plots, and icons, this edition of the revolution no longer had room for revolt. The revolution became a cliché: a formulaic fable told in a graphic language.

138. See the passage from Gastev's manifesto cited in the second epigraph.