

MARINA BALINA ORCID: 0000-0002-1305-8346

Illinois Wesleyan University

## Depicting Communism for Children: Soviet Era Picture Books, 1920s–1930s<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** At the core of my investigation is the process of amalgamation of text and image within the boundaries of the illustrated book for young Soviet readers. As a part of the general desire to translate Communism into idioms and images accessible to children, books visualized ideological norms and goals in a way that guaranteed easy legibility and direct appeal, without sacrificing the political appeal of the message. Illustrated books presented the propagandistic content as a simple narrative or verse, while also casting it in images. A vehicle of ideology, an object of affection, and a product of labor, the illustrated book for the young Soviet reader became an important cultural phenomenon, despite its perceived simplicity and often a minimal set of technical devices.

**Keywords:** collectivism, picture books, *interknizhki*, class solidarity, illustrator, ethnographic information, adventure

In one of his most celebrated stories for children, *The Military Secret*, 1934, Arkady Gaidar depicts the life of a Soviet pioneer camp populated by a true international unity of children of all walks of life: Bashkir girl Emine is best friends with half-Jewish, half-Russian boy Al'ka; young trouble-maker Polish boy Vladik Dashevsky befriends the Chechen Ingulov whose troubles with Russian language do not bother his new friends, since he finds a personal translator and defender in another boy from Kuban', Lybat'ko, who knows how to speak Chechen and is ready to help his new friend. In fact, young pioneers do not need a translator since they understand each other even without words: they live and play together, spending their summer vacation in the Crimea at the Black Sea, resulting in the proverbial image of the happy soviet childhood depicted as all-inclusive and non-discriminatory of color and race (Fig. 1). Even when the annoying Jewish pioneer Yos'ka Rozentseig, with his constant social activity,

---

<sup>1</sup> I am thankful to the following institutions for their permission to use images: the Russian Digital Children's Library (<http://arch.rgdb.ru>) and the Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University. All translations of Russian sources are mine, unless otherwise noted. I am grateful to Boryana Borisova and Taylor Plantan for their help in preparing this article for publication.



Fig. 1: Arkadii Gaidar. *Military Secret/Voennaia taina*. Moscow: Detskaia literatura, 1964. Courtesy of the Russian Digital Children's Library

becomes the victim of anti-Semitic slander, it is Dashevsky who violently confronts Rosenzweig's accuser and defends Yos'ka; despite the fact that Dashevsky had himself previously gone through a confrontation with Yos'ka, he cannot stand silently when his fellow pioneer is insulted.<sup>2</sup>

Gaidar's children embody the future of the Soviet land: Natka

Shcheglova, the Young Pioneer leader states: "How many wonderful Soviet people are growing up together now!" (Gaidar 1964: 207). Although the story has its tragic element (little Al'ka becomes the victim of his father's dispute with the saboteurs on the Soviet construction site), the experience of losing a friend unites children even more. This children's paradise of friendship and equality remains important for Gaidar: in another story, *The Blue Cup*, 1936, the author returns to the topic of anti-Semitism once more: Berta, a Jewish girl from Germany who escaped with her father from the horrors of fascism, is insulted by one of her playmates. The other children immediately come to her rescue, calling the offender a traitor and a fascist and refusing to include him into their circle. Gaidar's children characters have a strong sense of justice and they resist any manifestation of national inequality: they are model citizens of the future land that Gaidar created in his imagination. Such a super strong insistence on international paradise in his stories for children made his adult readers truly suspicious of reality, and rightfully so. By analyzing the early works of Soviet children's literature that depict such a topic of Communist upbringing as *internationalism and friendship among nations* (italics are mine – MB), one can find wide an array of texts that offer a very different approach to the portrayal of young representatives of different parts of the world.

In her article "The End of Empire? Colonial and Postcolonial Journeys in Children's Books," Australian scholar Clare Bradford asserts the following: "To read children's books of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is to read texts produced within a pattern of imperial culture" (Bradford 2001: 196). Using texts written about "the far reaches of the British Empire," Bradford comments on

<sup>2</sup> Gaidar, Arkadii. *Voennaia taina*, p. 36.

how the land and indigenous peoples “out there” are *othered* in order to produce and sustain an idea fundamental to colonial discourse: that “Europe... is the norm by which other countries and peoples are judged” (Bradford 2001: 197). Soviet children’s literature of the 1920s–1930s provides convincing evidence for the existence of similar practices, with the role of Europe (or British Empire in Bradford’s case) assumed by Soviet Russia. I would also like to suggest that in the early 1920s Soviet children’s literature became the precursor to the new ideological discourse of *otherness* that was later successfully adapted for literature for adults.

As a political institution, children’s literature became an important part of the literary debate in the early Soviet years since in the new Soviet state it was supposed to provide the blueprint for becoming productive citizens of this newly formed society. It is interesting to note that this new discourse of depicting *the other* in children’s literature first focused on the depiction of the life and tribulations of foreign children, thus providing a convincing comparison with the lives of their Soviet counterparts.

Children’s literature very early on became captive to the notion of “red patriotism” (as defined by the Russian historian Ol’ga Malinova). Malinova states that “the outlook on world history adapted by Bol’sheviks, at least in the first years after the Revolution, did not allow “red patriotism” to become part of an official discourse. At the same time, its sentiments were very strong in the conscience of the masses”<sup>3</sup> “Red patriotism” influences one of the key educational goals of this new literature: the construction in young readers of the important quality of *internationalism*, which was defined in Marxist terms as “a brotherhood of all the working people of the world.” It is important to note that *internationalism* as an educational goal was not yet even formulated; the word itself, however, was catapulted into the children’s domain from Lenin’s speech at the Third Congress of Komsomol (Union of Communist Youth, established in 1918). Stressing the necessity of a thorough review of the old school programs, Lenin stated that “it is mandatory that we exclude from our education the abundance of dead knowledge that the old school provided, and we should retain only the knowledge that is needed for building communism” (Lenin 1982: 223–224). In this speech Lenin also formulated the guiding principles of the new education: collectivism, internationalism, and class solidarity. Guided by the latter two principles, children’s literature started to respond to the newly formed task of creating a new model Soviet citizen.

Given that it was essential that children’s literature retain its entertainment value, the adventure element remained a strong entertaining component of the literature for the young. As just one example of a hybridized genre of sorts, these new literary works merged an intriguing combination of exotic travel

<sup>3</sup> See more on this phenomenon <http://www.perspectivesy.into.ru>, last consulted September 1, 2018).

story with the depiction of the troubled childhood of poor and underprivileged children abroad. Thus, empowered with the “right knowledge” of the revolutionary cause, Soviet pioneers might land in China, in order to save Chinese compatriots from the evil rule (*Vanya in China*, Г. Шапошников, 1927); they might as easily fly around the world, in order to celebrate May Day with children in Japan, while advising them about the path to freedom and liberation (“the only thing that will cut through the door/to freedom is a sword”) in *Mai and Oktyabrina* by Lev Zilov, 1928). Although these books provided a modicum of ethnographic information as well as a definite political message, they were of questionable literary merit.

As it was crafted for this new audience, internationalism was supposed to nurture and shape a feeling of unity in struggle as well as compassion toward the fates of their less fortunate counterparts abroad. Soviet Russia, especially in the so called *interknizhki/children's books on international topics* of the 1920s that were richly illustrated, was depicted as *Promised Land*, and Soviet children traditionally fulfill the role of savior-missionaries of their simpleton counterparts. Narrating the story of a troubled foreign child's fate (“troubled childhood” experience) became the leading device in the formation of new discourse. This theme was best addressed in poetry of the 1920s (Nikolai Tikhonov, *Sami*, 1922, and Agniia Barto, *Little Chinese Boy Van Li*, 1925) and signified “a peculiar combination of the new demands for proletarian internationalism with the disgracing caricatured verbal and visual images of foreign children (predominantly Chinese and African) in the texts of the 1920s” (Steiner 2002: 131).

Little Negro Sammi  
 (This you know yourselves)  
 Lives far, far away.  
 He is a good little boy  
 But his belly is black  
 As your galoshes.  
 He doesn't go to school  
 He runs around naked  
 With little Joe's a dandy  
 He's dressed up in high fashion  
 Looking very nice.  
 With feathers on his head  
 And bangles in his ears  
 A bracet in his nose.  
 The wild little boys  
 The parrots and the monkeys  
 Go running through the jungle.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Tarkhovskaia, Elizaveta. O tom, kak chokolad priekhal v Mossel'prom, Riazan': Druz'ia detei, 1925. Translated by Jane Ann Miller. See reference in Steiner, Evgeny. P. 103–104.

A traditional set of visual characteristics in the depiction of the savage is taken from colonial discourse – e.g., references to skin color, nakedness, attraction to cheap and flashy décor – but, nevertheless, an image of the *noble savage* (after all, Sammy is a good boy!) is resurrected. Young readers feel compassion toward their African counterpart and want to dress and feed him immediately. Steiner writes that “for the positive character in the Soviet children’s books of the 1920s the adventures in Africa, China and other exotic lands provided an opportunity to confirm his/her own dominance and magic ability to fight evil in almost realistic but, what was most important, class-oriented way” (Steiner 2002: 131). The process of *othering* in the Soviet model was doubtlessly based on the traditional colonial opposition of *civilized* and *savage*: like his adult counterpart, the Soviet child acted as an agent of cultural and physical dominance (Mikhailovsky, “The Negro Boy Tommi” 1926; Agnivitsev, “The Little Negro Tua” 1926; Shaposhnikov, “Vanya in China” 1927; Poltavsky, “Children of Different Colors” 1927). The reason for this dominance was not, however, the race of the Soviet child: rather, it was the unquestionable knowledge of the rightness of the cause – the revolutionary victory of the new social order.<sup>5</sup>

While the child character remained foreign, he/she never became alien to the Soviet world; the alien image was as a rule reserved for the adult counterpart who needed to be “re-educated.” In this fashion, the children’s audience was taught to accept outer differences (those who do not look like us) but was exhorted to actively fight and punish differences in ideology (those who do not think like us). From the 1930s onward the colonial discourse in children’s literature was treated as a relic of Western culture, and its carriers – usually rich and narrow-minded adults – were widely criticized in the works of children’s authors (Kalma, N, “Black Sally,” 1939; “The Children of Brown Paradise,” 1950; Zarechnaia S. “Black Tom and White Mary,” 1938; Galsovsky S., “The House Across the Pharmacy,” 1951; Liubimova, N, “Snowball,” 1950). The pattern of positive depiction of proletarian internationalism moved after 1931 from “foreign shores” onto domestic soil and, while retaining the idea of Soviet moral superiority (commonly expressed through the Russian characters in the narratives,) this theme was transformed into children’s stories about life and adventures in the former Soviet republics. Thus, the answer to Gayatri Spivak’s question, “Can the subaltern speak?” was in this new context quite easy to answer: “Yes, if he/she could only master the Soviet tongue” (Spivak 1988: 313).

<sup>5</sup> ...the thing isn’t really/To burn down one hateful mansion!/No! You’ve got to wage all-out war/and to the trill of machine guns/See that every last one of those cursed mansions/ Burns to the ground.» Tale of a Negro Boy, Z. Valentin, Moscow, 1925.

The process of *othering* in the domestic Soviet model came into being later, mainly after 1931, and was associated with *The First Russian Conference on Children's Books* and the establishment of the special commission on national children's literatures. The peoples of the remote regions of the Far North – Chukchi and Nagai, for example – became the focus of this *othering*, the same blueprint of colonial opposition of *civilized/savage* was preserved, however, in texts depicting the relationship between nations: the Soviet child fulfilled the role of cultural as well as physical dominator (for example, “Little Laplander Olesa” by Aleksei Kozhevnikov, 1931; “Little Ket” by Nikolai Sher, 1932; “Little Tungus Mikhailo” by Valentina Kharusina, 1933). The titles reflected the very idea of “*malye narody*” since even the names of the main characters were accompanied by the attribute “small or little/*malen'kii*.” While preserving the adventure element in the stories of domestic *othering*, the “troubled childhood” element was incorporated only in its reference to the depiction of the pre-revolutionary past. Since in these stories the new way of life for indigenous people was promoted, the representation of this change was closely related to the industrial development of those previously untouched territories.

Thus, the adventure story that became the backbone of this new literature created new symbioses with the very popular *production* narrative (производственная книга) that emerged in Soviet children's literature under direct involvement and supervision by the premier Russian writers such as Maxim Gorkii and Samuil Marshak. Little Ket' from Sher's story is excited about the new power plant built in her native Kamchatka, and her new Russian friend, the son of an engineer, helps her to understand the power of radio waves that drove away the local village *shaman*. Chukchi boy Nepunge is inspired by Russian pilots to become politically active in his own village, and he flies as the first delegate to a Young Pioneer Congress in Moscow. In his desire to get educated, little Ololo, another character from Kamchatka (Stebnitsky, *Ololo*, 1928,) breaks away from his Koryak tradition and, with the help of his Russian friends, embraces his new family of children of a big boarding school, of course with the Soviet state as the adaptive parent. One remarkable example that stands apart from the rest of this literature is *The Life of Imteurgin the Oldest* by Teku Ogdulok (the pen name of Nikolai Spiridonov, who was arrested and executed in 1938 after being accused of acting as a Japanese spy). This story about a Yukagir hunter and shepherd from the Far North was published by Detizdat in 1935 and overseen by Samuil Marshak himself as well as his crew of experienced editors, including Lidiia Chukovskaia. The poetic story that mirrored Ogdulok's own childhood remained one of the few examples of the real voice of a subaltern without the patronizing and superior Russian character-helper who would traditionally guarantee the success of conversion to the new way of life.

## DEPICTING PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM: CASE STUDIES

The illustrator... is bound to a specific idea or narrative, with some intent, at least, to convey a specific meaning to an audience.

Barbara Kiefer, *Evaluating Children's Books*, 1992

I would like to propose that the major issue of the structure of *interknizhki* resides in the dichotomy between two opposite discourses – one of the class conscience liberation struggle and the other of an explicit colonial discourse of imperial diversity<sup>6</sup> (as defined by Marina Mogilner in her “Homo Imperii”). Interestingly enough, both visual and verbal narrative modes served as carriers of both discourses and, quite often, passed this role between each other within the boundaries of a single text.

In 1925, the 20 years old Agniia Barto (1906–1981), the future premier Soviet children's poet, had published in GIZ her first poem “Little Chinese Boy Van Li”. The book was illustrated by Petr Aliakrinskii (1892–1961) as black and white pen drawing that had strong resemblance to simplified caricature<sup>7</sup>. The choice of the medium closely reflected the binary ideological nature of the nar-



Fig. 2–3: Agniia Barto. *Little Chinese Boy Van Li/Kitaichenok Van Li*, Moscow: GIZ, 1925, cover. Courtesy of Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University

ative. However, the traditional juxtaposition of “happy” and “unhappy” childhood that in the post-revolutionary culture acquired standard “geographies”

<sup>6</sup> Mogilner, Marina. *Homo Imperii: History of Physical Anthropology in Russia*, Moscow: NLO, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> In the late 1930–1950s, Aliakrinskii became a famous illustrator for adventure and history novels for children and young adults.

(happy-soviet and unhappy- foreign childhood) had very little visual support other than the choice of colors.<sup>8</sup> The focus of the story is on successful transformation of the Chinese boy from the oppressive world of poverty and abuse in the southern province in China to the happy streets of Moscow where he marches together with Young Pioneers in hope that one day they all will arrive and liberate China. This book was Barto’s first attempt to turn to the depiction of an international theme in her poetry for children, and, although somewhat naïve and immature, her work is significant for our understanding of foundations of structural and verbal depiction of internationalism (Fig. 2).

The structure of the story has three traditional elements of the “unhappy childhood” narrative adapted from the pre-revolutionary children’s literature: hardship of childhood in China – it occupies major part of the poem; a transformative dream – of a magician who – in this concrete case, Lenin – “raised the flag of the revolution”, and sudden but final entrance into the world of universal happiness – the streets of Moscow. The four illustrations that accompany this story are divided according to the importance of the ideological message: three drawings depict the world of abuse (Fig. 3) and one final drawing is focused on the happily marching group of children, with Van Li in their midst, a part of the united whole. (Fig. 4).

Here we see the first disparity between the visual and the verbal. While the visual effect of sameness in the last picture supports the ideological message of liberation and solidarity in the poem, the verbal text creates a very certain distance between Van Li and his soviet counterparts. It brings the reader back to the first pages of the story that are marked by the depiction of the boy as the *other*. Barto starts her story with the portrait of the young boy that is completely based on difference typical for colonial portrait: «his eyes are small and crossed; he looks angry and with suspicion, his hair is prickly.” Thus, the colonial focus of race, color, and difference remains prevalent and undermines visual equality. Even the happy life among soviet pioneers does not change this image. At the end of the poem, Van Li is still “stooped, his hair is bristly, his cheeks yellow...” He is trying to catch up with his pioneer friends but he cannot! Visual and verbal discourses remain disconnected, and the image of class solidarity is overpowered by exo-



Fig. 4: Agniia Barto. *Little Chinese Boy Van Li/Kitaichenok Van Li*, Moscow: GIZ, 1925

<sup>8</sup> See on this subject Marina Balina, “It’s Grand to be an Orphan!”: Crafting Happy Citizens in Soviet Children’s Literature of the 1920s in *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*, Marina Balina, Evgeny Dobrenko, eds. Anthem Press, 2009, p. 97–115.

tic (and colonial by nature) inventory of outer features.

Barto's second attempt to work with an international theme is much more elaborate but still retains the same well-recognizable elements. This is her highly popular poem «Little Brothers/Bratishki», 1928, which is written in a form of a lullaby. It was illustrated by Georgii Echeistov (1897–1946); an artist who studied and worked under Vladimir Favorskii (1886–1964) and who religiously followed his teacher's philosophy of book illustration<sup>9</sup>. Favorskii's artistic credo was based on his belief that he was a co-creator of the book that he illustrated: "I am not *illustrating* a work of literature, I am *creating* a book." So, for Echeistov, the unity of word and image, the overall amalgamating stylistic of the book was of great importance. Nevertheless, the same discord but, in this case, of colonial visual discourse and proletarian internationalist text, is present in this *interknizhka* as well.

The overall composition of "Bratishki" (Fig. 5) is more complicated than the previous poem. Its narrative is based on repetition: first, four babies of different races are introduced.

The image of a baby occupies major part of the page leaving space for a small picture of their native surroundings (Fig. 6, 7, & 8). While the structure of all four pages remains the same, the visual message creates obvious positive focus on the white child (Fig. 9). The reader journeys from page to page in this non-linear reading of the picture book straight into a climax of



Fig. 5: Agniia Barto, *Little Brothers/Bratishki*, Moscow: 1928. Courtesy of Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University



Fig. 6–8: Agniia Barto, *Little Brothers/Bratishki*, Moscow: 1928

<sup>9</sup> Favorsky viewed the book as a holistic esthetic organism, an 'instrument of reading'. Its decorative component was inseparably blended with its function.



Fig. 9: Agniia Barto, *Little Brothers/Bratishki*, Moscow: 1928

the white child, who is distinguished from his naked counterparts by a. wearing a shirt, and b. holding a paper plane in his hands. This image only strengthens the idea of imperial diversity that is supported by stock ethnographic images of a little hut behind the African baby; a rickshaw next to the Chinese baby; oxen and a wagon in the fields for an Indian baby. Barto makes her little subalterns speak their baby talk (“по-своему лопочет”) that supposed to imitate their native tongues: *Gilli-Milli-Ga* for an African boy; *Chinge-Linge Chen* for a Chinese boy; *Kiwa-Kiwa Shwa* for an Indian boy, and,

of course, *Mama*, for the Russian one. It is easy to recognize “Kruchenykh-like”<sup>10</sup> attempt to recreate the exotic flavor of futuristic linguistic exercises. This initial stage of the poem is all but exotic ethnography both in image and in text (Fig. 10 & 11). The significant shift happens in the second part of the narrative when the frames of the story get expended to include the figure of a singing mother (Fig. 12).

The concluding refrain of each lullaby delivers identical message with some small variations: “Grow up, my son. You are not alone/You have young brothers all over the world/ You all will struggle together for the better future/You will fight through fire and smoke of the revolution/And you will win together.» This is a very clear message of proletarian solidarity that comes to the child straight from their mother. It is an obvious play by Barto on the popular notion of class solidarity that comes “with mother’s milk”, so class-so-



Fig. 10–11: Agniia Barto, *Little Brothers/Bratishki*, Moscow: 1928

<sup>10</sup> Aleksei Kruchenykh was a very well-known of the Silver Age in Russia (early 20th century) famous for his experiments with language.



Fig. 12: Agniia Barto, *Little Brothers/Bratizhki*, Moscow: 1928

did the aim of it include overtly political didacticism. Nevertheless, it was published by GIZ as part of the series *Lenin's library/Leninskaia biblioteka* and designated for the middle school age. After all, 1924 was the year of Lenin's death, and children's literature was desperately looking for any literary works, old and new, where the name of the leader was celebrated and recognized. Tikhonov's poem presented the perfect case of an early *hagiographical* discourse that is directly applied to the image of Lenin in this poem (Fig. 13). The poem was written while Lenin was still alive; however, the obligatory vocabulary describing Lenin's *spiritual* (italics are mine – MB) presence, typically found in later examples of children's poetry and prose, is already displayed in this poem. It includes features typical for Lenin's *posthumous* glorification in children's literature: he is caring and understanding, a friend to all children whose major goal in life is to work at bettering their lives.

While disengagement with politics was among the artistic credos of *Serapion Bro-*

liarity of all working people becomes not only an integral experience of all oppressed but also their biological precondition. The visual image, however, is not in tune with this strong ideological statement. Echeistov still continues to exploit same ornamentation and flatness of images expanding the role of illustration as an ethnographic tool rather than an ideological one. Details of foreign surroundings – a Chinese shop, an Indian field – support a non-linear reading of intriguing pictures, and the final message, that stresses the obvious Soviet leadership in this struggle for justice for all, gets drowned in the strangeness of an exciting “world of foreignness.”

Nikolai Tikhonov's poem “Sami” (1896–1979) was completed in 1922, and later reprinted in 1924 with the illustrations by Efim Khiger (1899–1956). In 1922 Tikhonov joined the literary group *Serapion Brothers*, so the original audience for this poem most likely did not include children, nor



Fig. 13: Nikolai Tikhonov. *Sami*, Moscow: GIZ, 1924. Courtesy of Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University

thers<sup>11</sup>, one can hardly claim such lack of politically changed narrative when evaluating this text. The exotic *other*, a poor Indian boy Sami, has to work for a rich Englishman (Fig. 14). The juxtaposition of “good” and “bad” in the poem has a very strong class orientation: the rich “imperialist” master exploits and abuses poor “native” boy. Thus, Sami’s image helps to shape the distinct binary division between the happy world of Soviet children and that of their foreign counterparts. Sami dreams about the country

of happy childhood; he longs for the strong friend of all children, the great Lenni (Lenin) who, according to what Sami has heard from adults, wants to make Sami’s own life better. The journey to find Lenni is not a successful one – he lives too far away – but this fact of daring to resist evil is placed at the center of the story<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 15). In a nut shell, the reader is presented with a familiar plot of Bildungsroman/novel of education, in which the change for better life comes from within. Returning from his escape to the same master, Sami is a new “man” – free of fear, knowing that the injustice done against him will be punished one day.



Fig. 15: Sami returns. Pg. 5.



Fig. 14: Sami and Sagib – his English master. Pg 2

The readers see the adventure of the boy through a dual optic: it introduces them to the issues on inequality and colonial hardship, but it also focuses on belief in an ideal. Even his master is afraid when he hears about mighty Lenni!

In a true stylistics of colonial narrative, the poem is full of exotic details that are interwoven into the fabric of the story: foreign words such as *sagib/ сагиб*, *Vishnu/Вишну*, unknown geographical locations – Binjharpur/ Бенжапур, Rohilkhand/Рохилькэнд. It is also densely populated: the re-

<sup>11</sup> The Serapion Brothers was a literary group that emerged in 1921. Their poetic name (after E.T.A Hoffmann’s hermit Serapion) indicated their dedication to the freedom of creative act and free fantasy.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to notice that Sami, while thinking about Lenni, sees himself in the same subaltern role: he promises to bring Lenni water for shaving, care for him, “and perform all same duties he does for his English master”.

ader is confronted simultaneously with the white *sagib*-master, merchants from the port cities, Sami's own father who used to be a footman and passed to his son his strong legs and ability to run fast, the grey pony bitten by a black cobra etc. In comparison to Barto's poems, Tikhonov's text does not include any colonial references to color or race, any derogatory diminutives such as little Chinese, little Negro boy etc. The poet whose early work was labeled as «revolutionary Romanticism/революционный романтизм» and who, during the 1920s, was frequently compared to both, Nikolai Gumilev and Rudyard Kipling, for his attraction to the world of foreign and exotic, treats his character with some level of respect. However, he creates a highly ideologically charged narrative that is supported by the images produced by the artist Efim Khiger.

Little is known about Khiger: all official sources identify him as a Russian Jewish graphic artist who began his work in children's literature with his illustrations for Tikhonov's poem for the private publishing house *Priboj* in Leningrad. Later he started to get actively involved into the work of the publishing house *Rainbow/Raduga*. His early association with children's literature could be attributed to his friendship with the children's author Elena Dan'ko. In 1925 Khiger has illustrated Dan'ko's history novel for children, *Vase of Bogdykhan/Vaza Bogдыхана*. Various sources also indicate of his own deep interest in the art of the Ancient Orient which is reflected in the overall arrangement of his illustrations. There are four prints in the book that are constructed as chapters full of the mini-plots of the poem. The prints are placed on a page below the text, not even next to it; this immediately creates an impression of textual superiority. The ornamental focus in the print's construction in all four cases supports the exotification and sense of "foreignness" of the images. However, the ornaments are held firm within the boundaries of the ridged frames: the images never violate the frame borders. The opulence of imagery that is described in the text is mirrored but not allowed to bloom within the space of the visual.

Within the frame everything happens at once: illustrations proved a concise story of the boy's troubles. Flattering of the pictorial space creates an almost iconographic effect while important figures of the narrative are lifted through interplay of light and shadow. There are three such figures: Sami, identified through his turban, his English master with a monocle and military hat (an important mark of British colonial power), and three different images of Lenin – as a monument, as a profile, and as a Buddha-like image. What is important for the overall structure is one small vignette on the books' cover that repeats, in a reduced version the final, more profound image of Sami praying to Lenin's image (Fig. 16). By lifting these three images of the page and making them central to the visual story, Khiger summarizes the important message of the class struggle. He creates all three necessary parts of the desired revolutionary change: an oppressed (Sami), an oppressor (English *sagib*), and the liberator, Lenin. Lenin's oversized head and Sami's kneeling in front of this head create a

powerful message of spiritual awakening of the oppressed people who are influenced by this new ideology. This message might have not been de-coded by a child reader but was definitely intentional device of an illustrator.

Unlike previous examples by Barto, where colonial plan was overpowered by class-conscience image of liberating struggle, or vice versa, the collaboration between Khiger and Tikhonov unveils a deeper psychological issue. It presents one of those rare occasions when the visual plane of the narrative unveils a desire to cooperate in spreading communist ideology, a desire that in the early 1920s the *Serapion Brother*, Nikolai Tikhonov, future soviet literary functionary and court poet, might not have been fully admitting to himself<sup>13</sup>.



Fig. 16: Final illustration of the book

## REFERENCES

- Barto, A. 1925. *Kitaichenok Van Li*. Moscow: GIZ.
- Barto, A. 1928. *Bratishki*. Moscow: GIZ.
- Bradford, C. 2001. The End of Empire? Colonial and Postcolonial Journeys in Children's Books. – *Children's Literature*, 29, 196–218.
- Chekhov, N. 1931. Detskaia literatura natzmen'shinstv: mesto detskoi literatury v rabote po prosveshcheniiu. – *Natsional'naia kniga*, 2, 27–31.
- Chudakova, M. 1990. Ckvoz' zvezdy k terniiam. – *Novy Mir*, 4.
- Gaidar, A. 1964. *Sobranie sochinenii v 4-x tomakh*. T. 2. Moscow: Detskaia literatura, 136–273.
- Lenin, V.I. 1982. *Zadachi soiuzna molodezhi. Rech na III vserossiiskom s'ezde komsomola*. Moscow: Politizdat.
- Lupanova, I. 1969. *Polveka: sovetskaia detskaia literature, 1917–1967*. Moscow: Detskaia literatura.
- Marshak, S.Ya. 1958. *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh*. T. 2. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 184–211.
- Mogilner, M. 2008. *Homo Imperii: History of Physical Anthropology in Russia*. Moscow: NLO.
- N.K.Krupskaia o detskoi literatury i detskom chtenii*. Moscow: Detskaia literatura, 1979.
- Nikolaeva, M. 1996. *Children's Literature Comes of Age. Toward a New Aesthetic*. New York–London: Garland Publishing.

<sup>13</sup> Nikolai Tikhonov (1896-1979) has abandoned his early avant garde ideals and became a highly decorated and celebrated Soviet poet. He served as a chair of the Peace Committee of the Soviet Union, a highly politicized organization, from 1949 through 1979.

- Ogdulok, T. 1934. *Zhizn' Imterurgina starshego*. Leningrad: Detgiz.
- Russkaia detskaia literatura*. Setin, F.I. ed. Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1972.
- Shaposhnikov, G. 1927. *Vanya v Kitae*. Rostov-na-Donu.
- Spivak, G. 1988. Can the Subaltern Speak? – C. Nelson, L. Grossberg (Eds.). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke: University of Illinois Press. 271–313.
- Steiner, E. 1999. *Stories for Little Comrades: Revolutionary Artists and the Making of early Soviet Children's Books*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Steiner, E. 2002. *Iskusstvo sovetskoi detskoj knigi 1920 godov. Avangard I postroenie novogo cheloveka*. Moscow: NLO.
- Tarkhovskaia, E. 1925. *O tom, kak chokolad priekhal v Mossel'prom*, Riazan': Druz'ia detei.
- Tikhonov, N. 1922. "Sami," first in *Braga*, Moscow: 1922, as a separate publication – *Sami*, Leningrad: 1924.
- Tikhonov, N. 1925. *Sami*. Moscow: GIZ.
- Thompson, E. 2000. *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Voices of the Other. Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context*. R. McGillis (ed.). New York–London: Garland Publishing.
- Zilov, L. 1924. *Mai i Oktiabrina*. Moscow: Mospoligraf.