

A Mongoose in Moscow: Adapting *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* to Soviet Animation



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Dedication

This project is dedicated to all of the weird kids who draw cartoon animals in their notebooks and try to teach themselves foreign languages from the internet. Don't let others dull your shine; someday you'll have a board of scholars as your captive audience.

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There have been many people I've met on my long, winding path to get to this point; thanking each and every one of them properly would take an essay of equal length to this paper. That being said, I could not have gotten to where I am today without the support of my family. I owe my education to my grandparents, Howard and Serafina Schorer, and for that I am eternally grateful. I would also like to thank my father and sister, Scott and Phoebe Schorer, for quite literally helping me return to Bard College.

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A Note on the Transliteration and Translations

Transliteration

The Library of Congress system without diacritics is followed for the transliteration from Cyrillic of Russian words and names. When a Russian name has an accepted English spelling, this form was used - for example, Gorky instead of Gorkii.

Translations

Unless otherwise cited, translations are my own and references are made to the original source. All back-translations from Russian to English of citations from primary sources are my own, as are all transcriptions of film dialogue.

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Introduction

The indispensable role of children's media in shaping national identity was well understood by the Soviet state. After all, someday Soviet children would grow up, and the survival of the Soviet Union depended on these future adults' loyalty to the state. It was imperative to instill within each new generation the strive to become superior—physically, intellectually, and morally—to the previous one; they would become “models for adults” worthy of inheriting the communist future those who came before them would not live to see.¹ Every aspect of Soviet children's life was influenced by the state, whether that be education or family legislation, and just as with media made for adults, children's cultural production was entirely generated by a government-controlled system with ideology-instilling motives.² Enormous amounts of state funds were allocated to create elaborately complex domestic institutions of authors, artists, filmmakers, psychologists, critics, pedagogues, and other professionals, to both create and monitor Soviet children's culture. Each and every book and film released to the public had to be approved by the state, and therefore had to align with Soviet values: aesthetically, ethically, socially, and politically.

However, not all Soviet children's media originated within the Soviet Union. In the days of the Russian Empire translated children's books had a strong presence in the landscape of Russian children's literature. After the October Revolution this legacy was inherited by Soviet Russia, albeit with a new purpose: just as it was compulsory for domestically-produced children's books to align with the dogma of the Soviet state, so was the case with translated foreign literature. Stories could not be imported and translated just by merit of being simply

¹ Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 110.

² Elena Goodwin, *Translating England into Russian: The Politics of Children's Literature in the Soviet Union and Modern Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 31.

entertaining or beautiful, their ideological content had to be deemed useful in the state's mission of conditioning the next generation of Soviets. This complicated the matters of translation, particularly in regards to literature originating from the capitalist West, the sworn ideological enemy of the USSR. However, this did not stop it all together. In the case of American author Jack London, who gained massive popularity in the Soviet Union to the point of becoming required reading, this importation was understandable. London was a self-proclaimed socialist who read Marx and actively wrote about the class struggle; even though there were critiqueable contradictions between his ideologies and his practices in writing for a bourgeois capitalist market, they were tolerable enough for the Soviet state.³ Lenin himself was a fan of London's writing, and his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, reported reading *Love of Life* to him upon his deathbed.⁴

Such convenient political agreements between Western authors and the Soviet state were uncommon, and flummoxing enough, works by authors who were explicitly anti-Communist nonetheless found their way into the USSR. Such is the case with the English author and poet, Rudyard Kipling, who publicly mourned the collapse of the Russian Empire and opposed the establishment of the Soviet Union. Even in pre-revolutionary Russia he was criticized for his staunch imperialist beliefs by democratic writers such as Maksim Gorky and Aleksandr Kuprin, the latter of which wrote in a review of Kipling's stories, "Kipling is the most outstanding representative of an England that has encircled the globe with its iron grip and is squeezing it in the name of its glory, wealth and might."⁵ Such critiques only became sharper over time, and after the second world war almost all of Kipling's works were "rejected unconditionally by

³ Deming Brown, "Jack London and O. Henry," in *Soviet Attitudes Toward American Writing* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 223.

⁴ Nadezhda K. Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin*, trans. Eric Verney (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1930), 209.

⁵ Natalia Ishchenko, "The Bard of Imperialism: Kipling's Reception in Russia and the Soviet Union," *The Kipling Journal* 86 (December 2012), 23.

official ideology purely for political reasons and [were] withdrawn from all Soviet libraries.”⁶

However, one body of his work was spared from these purges: his children’s stories. As a result, Kipling underwent an unofficial rebranding as an author of children’s literature.

Kipling’s heritage in Russia is one that puzzles many outsiders. In the West, most are only acquainted with his work through Disney’s 1967 animated adaptation of *The Jungle Book*. Among those who are familiar with him as an author, particularly in Britain, Kipling has the reputation of being an embarrassing artifact of an age of racism and imperialism.⁷ How could it be, then, that Kipling could rise in the ranks to become one of the most popular foreign authors in the Soviet Union? After all, it has been said that ‘Russian’ Kipling is more popular with Russian readers than ‘English’ Kipling with English-speaking ones.⁸ This unusual honor can be attributed to the fact that Kipling’s children’s literature is by far the most popular and developed of his legacies in the Russian language. *Just So Stories*, *The Jungle Book* (better known by its translated title *Mowgli*), and other short stories have sold millions of Russian copies, and have been reproduced in numerous forms such as films, stage plays, and even educational materials.⁹ By far the most enduring of these reproductions are the adaptations produced by the premier Soviet animation studio, Soyuzmultfilm, particularly in the case of *Mowgli*. However, *Mowgli* was not the first of Kipling’s stories to be adapted to animation in the USSR. That distinction belongs to *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, a short-story about a mongoose protecting his home from cobras, which in 1965 was adapted by Soyuzmultfilm into a twenty-one minute animated short.

Although Soyuzmultfilm’s *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* is faithful to its source material in many ways, there are two alterations based upon the Soviet Russian-language translation that set it

⁶ Ishchenko, “The Bard of Imperialism”, 26.

⁷ Katharine Hodgson, “The Poetry of Rudyard Kipling in Soviet Russia,” *The Modern Language Review* 93, no. 4 (1998), 1058.

⁸ Yan Shapiro, “Russian Translations of Kipling 1893-2015,” *The Kipling Journal* 89 (December 2015), 36.

⁹ Shapiro, “Russian Translations”, 39.

apart from Kipling's original text. The first is the age of Rikki-Tikki-Tavi being clarified from an ambiguously young mongoose to explicitly a child. The second is that the family Rikki lives with is altered from white English settlers living in colonized India, to indigenous Indian people. These two changes based upon the Russian translated text are emphasized in both the script and artistic direction of Soyuzmultfilm's adaptation, transforming Kipling's story about how a mongoose's natural instincts aid him in loyally defending his rescuers into an anti-imperialist narrative about a pioneer-hero saving his community from the cobras' tyrannical tsardom.

Through following the journey of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* in its literary translation from English to Russian and from the page to the screen, this project will attempt to take an interdisciplinary approach in examining the process of adapting stories from beyond the socialist sphere into animated fairy-tales for the Soviet Union's most impressionable audience; a process that is further complicated when the original author held beliefs completely antithetical to those promoted by the state. Historical contexts, as well as the limitations imposed by state censorship, will be taken into consideration alongside close readings of the original English texts, its Russian language iterations on the page and the screen, and the artistic direction of the film's visuals.

Chapter 1

Contextualizing Kipling in Russia

Before delving into the nuances of translating Rudyard Kipling from his original English-language text into Russian for a Soviet audience, it is important to understand the conditions under which his work originally entered Russian literary circles before the Soviet era. Had it not been for this pre-existing Russian audience it is unlikely that Kipling's children's stories would have accrued the amount of popularity they enjoyed in the Soviet Union, let alone penetrate into its cultural consciousness. This chapter will provide an abridged history of the introduction and distribution of English literature, and consequently, the works of Rudyard Kipling, in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union up to the 1960s.

English Literature in Russia

Foreign literature has been a cornerstone in Russian literary culture dating back to the late seventeenth-century, during the reign of Peter the Great (1682 to 1725). Peter's regime was defined by numerous reforms aiming to Westernize the Russian Empire. Among them included policies that led to a rise in printing, galvanized literacy among nobility, and established French as the language of the aristocracy.¹ More than half of the tsar's own personal library were in Western European languages, though most of them were concerned with sciences and mathematics rather than prose.² The majority of foreign literature brought into Russia, and by

¹ Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 207.

² Frank T. Brechka, "Peter the Great: The Books He Owned," *The Journal of Library History (1974-1987)* 17, no. 1 (1982): 8.

extension translated into Russian, was overwhelmingly French and German; English was among the minority.³

As domestic Russian literary culture continued to develop into the eighteenth-century so did the presence of foreign literature. The political and cultural reforms of Empress Catherine II (1762-1796) nurtured the growth of the Russian intelligentsia, and with it, literary criticism.⁴ The growing demand for literature stimulated the importation of foreign works into the empire, which was further facilitated by Catherine II's establishment of a translation department at the Academy of Science and further encouragement of printing enterprises.⁵ Journals became the primary distributors of literature in the empire, and the vast backlog of material that could be translated and published rendered foreign works often more accessible to readers than those by Russian writers.⁶ While French and German prose remained as dominating presences, English literature began to penetrate Russian consciousness, albeit predominately through translating French translations; it was through these means that the works Shakespeare was first introduced to Russia.⁷ This common practice of translating translations makes it difficult to determine exactly how many English works were translated into Russian, as they were often miscredited as being of the origin of their translation: for example, an English story translated into French and then into Russian, being classified by Russian publishers as being originally French.⁸ By the late eighteenth-century, a trend of anglophilia bled through from France to the court of Catherine II, which generated more interest in English prose and led to a rise of direct English to Russian

³ Yuri Levin, "English Literature in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *The Modern Language Review* 89, no. 4 (1994): xxvii.

⁴ Ernest J. Simmons, *English Literature and Culture in Russia (1553-1840)*, vol. XII, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature (New York: Octagon Books, 1964), 103.

⁵ Simmons, *English Literature*, 135.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁸ Levin, *English Literature*, xvii.

translations.⁹ The uptick of English popularity in the Russian Empire is evident in the reflections of Russian writers such as Nikolai Karamzin, who recalling his childhood schooling, wrote, “At one time, having seen almost no Englishmen, I was delighted with them and imagined England to be the most agreeable land to my heart.”¹⁰

Continuing into the nineteenth-century, English literature in Russia only continued to expand in translation and popularity within Russia’s blooming domestic literary intelligentsia. The evolution of printing and publishing perpetuated the cycle of supply and demand, and Victorian novelists were not only translated in literary journals, but in books that went through various editions, as well as dedicated anthologies.¹¹ This rise in accessibility to Russia’s slowly growing literate population also granted English literature a mainstream appeal outside of intelligentsia circles. There was a craving for stories about exotic lands, and English fiction was stuffed to the brim with adventure novels about the ‘New World’ that found an eager audience in Russian readers.¹² The rise in Russian realist fiction and the growing domestic discussion of social issues also led to the warm reception of English authors with similar sentiments: Charles Dickens has been claimed to have been as widely read in Moscow and Saint Petersburg as in London.¹³

After the 1917 October Revolution, the new Soviet state demanded retranslations of major works of classic world literature. This led to the establishment of the *Vsermirnaia Literatura* (World Literature) publishing house under the initiative of Soviet writer Maxim Gorky, which ran from 1918 to 1924 and asserted the position of foreign works in the new Soviet

⁹ Levin, *English Literature*, xxix.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Kenneth E. Harper and Bradford A. Booth, "Russian Translations of Nineteenth-Century English Fiction," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 8, no. 3 (1953): 189.

¹² Harper and Booth, "Russian Translations," 196.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 188.

literary system.¹⁴ Restrictions were also being placed on the types of foreign literature that could be brought into the Soviet Union. In 1923, the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs at the People's Commissariat for Education of the RSFSR, or better known by its abbreviation Glavlit¹⁵, declared the following types of literature banned for importation into the Soviet Union: all works containing ideology hostile or alien to the proletariat, books of an idealistic nature, children's literature containing elements of bourgeois values and praising pre-1917 ways of life, and works written by authors who were against the October Revolution.¹⁶ The matter of which such regulations were enforced fluctuated alongside the political climate of the country, and at times were loosened or tightened accordingly, but nonetheless these basic restrictive principles remained in place throughout the duration of the Soviet Union.¹⁷ While such restrictions did not stop previously untranslated English works from being published in the USSR, it did limit which authors could be imported and how "faithful" their translations could be.

Kipling in Russia

Rudyard Kipling's presence in Russia can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, where he was received with mixed reactions. While he was near universally condemned for his imperialist views, Kipling's prose was praised for its creativity and innovative integration of colloquial language; some interpreted it as counter to the cultural trend of the intelligentsia.¹⁸ In 1890 one Russian critic, credited as N.V., wrote:

¹⁴ Elena Goodwin, *Translating England into Russian: The Politics of Children's Literature in the Soviet Union and Modern Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 29.

¹⁵ The abbreviation for *Glavnoe Upravlenie po Delam Literaturny i Izdatelstv*.

¹⁶ Goodwin, *Translating England*, 30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁸ Katharine Hodgson, "The Poetry of Rudyard Kipling in Soviet Russia," *The Modern Language Review* 93, no. 4 (1998), 1060.

After a lengthy period of art which was purely intellectual, idealistic and refined to the point of losing all color, a reaction was inevitable, and to succeed it has emerged art which is more straightforward, perhaps, but which is, at the same time, more forceful, healthy and energetic. Kipling is its main representative, and this is how he has answered the unconscious needs of the majority. On the other hand, he has also turned out to be the spokesman of the English people's imperialist ambitions, which have become particularly intense in recent times.¹⁹

Others were not so impressed by Kipling's works, such as Leo Tolstoy, who in 1892 described him as an untalented imperialist that wrote with forced eccentricity.²⁰ His poetry received less attention, as in Russia at the time, French poets of the *fin de siècle*²¹ were considered to be much more fashionable than their English counterparts.²² In the Russian Empire, the majority of Russian Kipling translations were published in magazines, collectable pamphlets, or paperbound books containing single short stories, though a multi-volume issue of Kipling's *Collected Works* was released by the St. Petersburgian publisher Soykin 1915.²³

After the October Revolution of 1917, Kipling's popularity in Russia only rose, despite his vehement opposition to the new Soviet regime. Kipling wrote his own eulogy to the Russian Empire in his 1918 poem 'Russia to the Pacifists', where he bemoans how for "Three hundred years it flourished--in three hundred days it died", with nothing remaining "Except the sound of weeping and the sight of burning fire, / And the shadow of a people that is trampled into mire."²⁴ This did not stop the mobilization of translating his poetry. In 1922, Ada Onoshkovitch-Yatsyna published her translations of twenty-two Kipling poems.²⁵ 'Russia to the Pacifists' was not included. Ironically, these poems would prove to be highly influential to the young Soviet poets

¹⁹ Hodgson, "The Poetry of Rudyard Kipling," 1060.

²⁰ Natalia Ishchenko, "The Bard of Imperialism: Kipling's Reception in Russia and the Soviet Union," *The Kipling Journal* 86 (December 2012): 23.

²¹ A French term translating to "the end of the century", this phrase refers to the literary and artistic cultures of the end of the 19th century characterized by sentiments of pessimism, cynicism, and decadence.

²² Ishchenko, "The Bard of Imperialism," 24.

²³ Yan Shapiro, "Russian Translations of Kipling 1893-2015," *The Kipling Journal* 89 (December 2015), 37.

²⁴ Rudyard Kipling, "Russia to the Pacifists," in *The Years Between and Poems from History*, vol. XXVII, *The Works of Rudyard Kipling* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 38.

²⁵ Ishchenko, "The Bard of Imperialism," 24.

of the 1920s and 1930s seeking to immortalize the same figures Kipling accused of “dig[ging] a nation’s grave as great as England was.”²⁶

Rudyard Kipling’s popularity among Soviet poets may seem bizarrely out of place, but despite occupying polar opposite positions on the political spectrum, there is overlap between the messages both parties sought to convey. Kipling often utilized ordinary people as the heroes of his stories, praised technology and progress, and promoted ‘universal human values’ such as ‘duty and selfless dedication to a noble cause.’²⁷ His prose also offered militaristic tones and themes that appealed to many young Soviets. In the late 1930s, poet Konstantin Simonov wrote, “I liked Kipling because of his manly style, his soldiers' severity, sharpness, and clearly expressed masculine origin.”²⁸ However, the traumatic aftermath of World War II led to a sharp decline in Kipling’s popularity among Soviet writers, which is embodied in another reflection from Simonov: “On the first day at the front in 1941, I stopped liking some of Kipling's poems once and for all. Kipling's romantic war appeal and all that attracted me in my youth suddenly ceased to be related to the war I saw and to everything I experienced.”²⁹ Many of Kipling’s works were removed from state institutions, such as libraries, for their conflict in ideological content, and only a handful of new translations were published towards the end of the USSR.³⁰ In an interview published in a 1991 edition of *The Kipling Journal*, Aleksandr Shagniyana, a Soviet playwright, recounted an instance of a classmate being caught possessing Kipling’s banned works:

When I was a student at Moscow University, Kipling's poems in manuscript were secretly passed from hand to hand. One student, who had typed some verses, was caught. He was expelled from the Komsomol and then thrown out of the university on the charge of having

²⁶ Kipling, “Russia to the Pacifists,” 37.

²⁷ Hodgson, “The Poetry of Rudyard Kipling,” 1061.

²⁸ Ishchenko, “The Bard of Imperialism,” 26.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Goodwin, *Translating England*, 96.

distributed illegal literature. And this happened during the "liberal" times of Krushchev! Under Stalin, I do not believe he would have got off so lightly.³¹

Rather than fall into complete obscurity, though, Kipling's mainstream reputation in the Soviet Union enjoyed a curious transformation. He was no longer a "talented bard of British imperialism", but instead, a beloved children's author.³²

Kipling's literature for children such as *The Jungle Book* and *Just So Stories*, which had been present in Russia since 1902, were never the targets of ideological censorship: their content was considered to be politically neutral.³³ This "neutrality" is due in large part to these stories' narratives predominately centering on animals. Although these animal characters are anthropomorphized in that they express themselves with human words and feelings, they live as wild animals; they do not dress up in clothing or live in "human" societies. This quality gives Kipling's animal stories enough political ambiguity to be republished in copious amounts of Soviet books and magazines for children, but not enough to be completely devoid of censorship in their Soviet translations.

However, it is important to note that anthropomorphism was not always a politically neutral device in Soviet literature. In the early 1920s the *skazki* (сказки), or fairy tales, came under attack by the Communist Party. Affinity for folklore and fairytales was seen as being symptomatic of a bourgeois mindset, and would thus pollute the minds of young Soviet readers.³⁴ One of *skazki*'s harshest critics was Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife and a key Narkompros³⁵

³¹ Aleksandr Shaginyan, "Kipling in the Soviet Union," translated by Thomas Beattie, *The Kipling Journal* 65 (June 1991): 33.

³² Hodgson, "The Poetry of Rudyard Kipling," 1058.

³³ Goodwin, *Translating England*, 58.

³⁴ Laura Wheeler Mjolsness, "Under the Hypnosis of Disney: Ivan Ivanov-Vano and Soviet Animation for Children," in *A Companion to Soviet Children's Literature and Film*, by Olga Voronina (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 394.

³⁵ The abbreviation for *Narodniy komissariat prosveshcheniya*, or the People's Commissariat for Education. This Soviet agency oversaw public education as well as other issues pertaining to pedagogy and culture.

administrator.³⁶ At her behest, *skazki* were removed from library shelves due to her belief that developing children's imaginations through fantasy directly opposed the principles of a utilitarian upbringing, therefore sabotaging the future building of communism.³⁷

Anthropomorphism was included under the genre of the *skazki* and thus received the same condemnation. This is exemplified in one of Narkompros' 'letters on method' directed to Soviet nursery school teachers:

There is nothing to justify cats dressed up in hats or dogs baking pies; these fairground images add nothing positive to a child's emotions, nor do they inculcate clear ideas about animal behavior; in any case, one can show much more interesting things about animals than in representations of this kind.³⁸

This position was not met without pushback, though. As early as 1922, Soviet pedagogist N. Evergetov wrote that it was absurd to condemn anthropomorphism because for children, everything is alive; animism is central to how children understand the world.³⁹ Still, it was not until September 9, 1933 that the Decree of the Party's Central Committee acknowledged *skazki* as a necessity for Soviet children.⁴⁰ At the First Congress of Soviet Writers held in 1934, the *skazka* was fully rehabilitated into Soviet literature when Maksim Gorky praised the genre's aptitude for positive social change.⁴¹ Following his opening speech, Korney Chukovsky and Samuil Marshak, two Russian authors previously condemned for utilizing anthropomorphism, gave their own addresses regarding how Soviet children's literature ought to develop.⁴² That very same year, they would release their collaborative translation of Rudyard Kipling's short story, *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*.

³⁶ Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 73.

³⁷ Mjolsness, "Under the Hypnosis," 394.

³⁸ Kelly, *Children's World*, 74.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁰ Mjolsness, "Under the Hypnosis," 394.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Kelly, *Children's World*, 99.

Chapter 2

Translating *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* for Soviet Children

The Soviet Union held a unique relationship with the translation of foreign literature. Through its efforts to consciously cultivate an educated and cosmopolitan identity, the regime maintained an unparalleled commitment to translating and distributing foreign works.¹ However, this material and rhetorical support existed precariously alongside rampant xenophobia, which manifested itself in stringent restrictions on traveling outside of the country and interactions with foreign visitors, and most pertinent to the topic at hand, strict censorship of translated literature.² This meant not only that foreign literature imported into the Soviet Union had to align with state dogma, but that their translations needed to be as well. Unfamiliar imagery, historical pasts, and imperial aims were manipulated into a new ideological context within Soviet translations. Children's literature held a particularly interesting position within this translation ecosystem. It was still held to the scrutiny of state censorship; during the time of Perestroika³, Aleksei Slobozhan, a Soviet translator of Kipling, wrote a letter to the British publication *The Kipling Journal* reflecting upon his career, "While translating stories, I had to make a kind of adaptation, because the publishers had their own ideas about children's literature, and I was forced to yield to compromises."⁴ However, the creative nature of children's literature allowed for translators to find inventive ways to comply with state censorship, while preserving the essence of the original text.

¹ Brian James Baer, "From International to Foreign: Packaging Translated Literature in Soviet Russia," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 49.

² Baer, "From International", 49.

³ Perestroika refers to a period of political reform within the USSR's Communist Party during the 1980s, and is widely considered to be the defining trait of Mikhail Gorbachev and his glasnost policy reform.

⁴ Aleksei Slobozhan, "'Puck' Stories in Russian," *The Kipling Journal* 63 (March 1989): 36.

The first Russian-language Soviet edition of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* was translated by Semyon Grigoryevich Zaimovsky and published in 1923 in Kiev by the State Publishing House of Ukraine. However, this edition was never reprinted. Instead it is the 1934 translation done by Korney Chukovsky in partnership with Samuil Marshak⁵ that is considered to be the “canonical” Russian translation within Soviet literary history, and it was the only one to be reproduced until 1990.⁶ Korney Chukovsky was a prominent Soviet writer, literary critic, and translator. Before the Russian Revolution, Chukovsky lived and studied in England for a year, which laid the foundation of a life-long interest in British and American literature.⁷ He translated authors such as Mark Twain, Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and of course Rudyard Kipling, but he is most remembered for his contributions to Soviet children’s literature.⁸ He created his own original works in Russian, and he also popularized translated English literature for Soviet children; it’s been said that he was Russia’s Dr. Seuss and Lewis Carroll wrapped up all in one.⁹ Samuil Marshak was another Soviet translator as well as a prolific poet and literary critic. He wrote a substantial amount of Russian children’s literature, and also translated works by A.A. Milne, Lewis Carroll, and Gianni Rodari; he also translated the poetry of William Blake, Byron, Keats, Robert Burns, and Shakespeare, the latter of which has been incorporated into the Russian literary canon.¹⁰ Consequently, it was Chukovsky’s 1934 translation that Soyuzmultfilm’s 1965 animated adaptation of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* was based upon.

⁵ Samuil Marshak translated the poem “Darzee’s Chant” included at the end of the story, which was then turned into music in Soyuzmultfilm’s animated short. Although this poem will not be closely analyzed in this essay, it would be remiss to not mention Marshak’s involvement as well as his contributions to Soviet literature.

⁶ Yan Shapiro, “Russian Translations of Kipling 1893—2015,” *The Kipling Journal* 89 (December 2015): 40.

⁷ Brian James Baer and Natalia Olshanskaya, *Russian Writers on Translation: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 78.

⁸ Lauren G. Leighton, “Translator’s Introduction: Kornei Chukovsky and ‘A High Art,’” in *The Art of Translation: Kornei Chukovsky’s A High Art*, by Kornei Chukovsky (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), xiv.

⁹ Leighton, “Translator’s Introduction,” xiv.

¹⁰ Baer and Olshanskaya, *Russian Writers*, 90.

Adapting any work of literature to film is a translation process in and of itself, and it is subjected to the same discourse regarding fidelity, deviation, and transformation. This most commonly manifests in expectation of a film to be a reproduction of its source text, both in its plot points and spirit; readers are in no doubt familiar with the phrase, “The book was better than the movie.” In his essay “Adaptation”, film theorist Dudley Andrew argues that the adaptation of literature to film has a distinctly sociological component. He claims that the choice of literary source material, the adaptations made to the script, and the stylistic strategies utilized are all symptomatic of where and when the adaptation was created.¹¹ Therefore an adaptation is dependent on the cultural needs, pressures, and aesthetics of its point of origin, and can be utilized to validate or critique that context accordingly.¹²

This chapter will dissect and cross-analyze Chukovsky’s translation with Kipling’s original English text, which will then be compared to the plot of Soyuzmultfilm’s 1965 animated adaptation of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*. By doing so, I will demonstrate how Soyuzmultfilm’s *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965) created a new story emblematic of Soviet values which subverts Kipling’s original work. First I will present an overview of the aspects of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* which would have been problematized within the Soviet sphere, then a brief explanation of Soviet literary translation in the 1930s will be offered as historical context. Finally, I will compare and contrast these three versions of the story within two frameworks that I have defined as “Redirecting Imperialism” and “Creating a Pioneer.” These respectively refer to the ways in which Kipling’s imperialism was repurposed in order to create an anti-imperialist message, as well as how the character of Rikki is repurposed into a child-hero for Soviet children to admire.

¹¹ Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 4th ed., by Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 423-27.

¹² Andrew, "Adaptation," 428.

Soyuzmultfilm's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* completes the thirty year transformation first set into motion by Chukovsky, and thus exemplifies the latent power of Soviet adaptation in children's media.

The Imperialism of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*

Rudyard Kipling was born in the Bombay Presidency of British India, and described himself as "Anglo-Indian", a 19th century term referring to British people living in India.¹³ As a young child he grew up being told Indian songs and folk stories, and after living his adolescence in the British Isles, he returned to India when he was sixteen, where he would stay for another seven years before moving abroad.¹⁴ This multi-cultural upbringing instilled within him complex issues of identity and national allegiance, which would become prominent themes in his works.¹⁵ Despite his first language being Hindustani, whose earliest companions were Indian, and working as a journalist in India for seven years, Kipling was a staunch believer of racial typology, and one of the most vocal defenders of British imperialism in the literary sphere of his time.¹⁶ He believed that it was the "divine mission" of white, Western empires to conquer, rule, and civilize the nonwhite races, which he deemed as inferior.¹⁷ This sentiment was immortalized in his infamous poem "The White Man's Burden"¹⁸:

Take up the White Man's burden -
Send forth the best ye breed -
Go bind your sons to exile

¹³ John Mcbratney, "Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space in Kipling's 'Jungle Book,'" *Victorian Studies* 35, no. 3 (1992): 279.

¹⁴ David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 6-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ Mcbratney, "Imperial Subjects," 279-281.

¹⁷ Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 203.

¹⁸ "The White Man's Burden" was originally written in 1898 and sent by Kipling to then governor of New York, Theodore Roosevelt with the aim of encouraging the United States to colonize the Philippines, a territory the US had won following the Spanish-American War. It was later published in 1899 and has since been a focal point for both critics and supporters of imperialism, racism, and white supremacy; *the white man's burden* has become a phrase used within decolonization discourse to illustrate the mythos of Western colonization being a benevolent force to the Global South.

To serve your captives' need;
 To wait in heavy harness
 On fluttered folk and wild -
 Your new-caught sullen peoples,
 Half devil and half child.¹⁹

The opening stanza of the poem perfectly summarizes the imperialism, racism, and white supremacy that informed Kipling's worldview, and consequently, his works. Kipling's racial absolutism allowed him to admire aspects of Indian culture while simultaneously believing its people to be inferior, which he did not recognize as an impediment to faithfully portraying India.²⁰ This is exemplified in works such as his 1901 novel *Kim*, as well as his poetry and short stories— *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* is one such example.

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi originally appeared as a short story in Kipling's 1894 anthology *The Jungle Book*. For those unfamiliar with the plot, I shall provide a brief synopsis of Kipling's original text. A summer flood sweeps Rikki-tikki-tavi, a young mongoose, away from his family, and he is then rescued by an English family living in British colonial India. Rikki decides to live with the family and explores their garden the next day. While doing so he meets the tailorbirds Darzee and his wife, who are mourning their child who was eaten by the king cobra, Nag. Rikki is then ambushed by Nag and his wife, Nagaina, but he manages to fend them off. Immediately afterwards he saves the family's son, Teddy, from a venomous krait snake. Later that night Nag sneaks into the family's bungalow with the hopes of killing them all and driving off Rikki so that he and Nagaina can rule over the garden. Chuchundra the muskrat warns Rikki of Nag's presence, and Rikki then finds and kills Nag. The next day Rikki hatches a plan to eradicate the cobras from the garden once and for all; he has Darzee's wife to lure Nagaina away

¹⁹ Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Inclusive Edition 1885-1932* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1934), 373.

²⁰ Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals*, 205-12.

from her lair, and while she is distracted, he destroys all but one of the cobra's eggs. Nagaina finds the family and is about to kill them to avenge Nag, but Rikki confronts her and uses the last egg as a bargaining chip. The two fight, Nagaina flees to her den, and Rikki follows her inside. Just when all hope seems lost Rikki emerges, announcing that the cobras are gone and will never return. Everyone, animal and human alike, celebrates his heroism, and Rikki keeps the garden safe for the rest of his life.

The story is reflective of Kipling's nostalgia for his childhood home and his affection towards Indian folktales, as well as the animals of the subcontinent. While it may have been written with the intention of being an entertaining story for children, *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* is still steeped in the imperialist views of its author. This is made explicit in the way Rikki, the mongoose titular character, views the human family he lives with. They are a white British family living in a military base in colonial India, and to the mongooses of the story, living with such a family is something to aspire to. It is explained that Rikki's mother once lived in the house of a British military officer, and that she had explained to Rikki how he should act if he should ever meet white people so that he could have such a lifestyle.²¹ Rikki then dedicates himself to the protection of the family, who the cobras, characters that directly identify themselves with Hinduism, wish to kill the family in order to reclaim the garden in which they live. While mongooses and snakes are natural enemies, and this conflict has basis in animal behavior, Kipling gives his animal characters knowledge of human structures such as race, status, and religion. By defending the bungalow, Rikki acts as an agent of British imperialism.

²¹ Rudyard Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," in *The Jungle Book* (Middlesex: Viking Kestrel, 1987), 111-12.

Translating English-language Literature in the Early Soviet Union

After the October Revolution the new Soviet state performed a complete overhaul of its literary and publishing infrastructure. With this also came the demand from the state to retranslate classic works of literature, as well as to import and translate even more works into Russian.²² Under the initiative of Maxim Gorky, a leading Soviet writer and cultural figure, the publishing house *Vsermirnaia literatura* (World literature) was established in September 1918.²³ Gorky viewed the project as a means for Russia to “step resolutely on the path of spiritual unification with the peoples of Europe and Asia.”²⁴ In writing on *Vsermirnaia literatura*, Gorky stated:

Literature, the living and graphic history of the deeds and misdeeds, contributions, and errors of our ancestors, wielding a mighty ability to influence the organization of thought, softening the crudeness of instinct, nurturing the will, must, in the end, fulfill its planetary role – a role of power, strongly and profoundly uniting nations from within through a consciousness of a communion with their sufferings and desires, a consciousness of the unity of their strivings towards the improvement of a free and beautiful life.²⁵

Although the project would be shut down just six years later, it is credited with cementing the presence of foreign works in Soviet literature, as well as creating a high standard of literary translation; it laid down the foundation of the Soviet school of translation and its subsequent theoretical discourse.²⁶ These ideas were further developed by the First All-Union Conference of Translators held in 1936. It was at this conference that the term *tvorcheskiy perevod* (creative translation) was coined by Soviet literary critic Iogann Al'tman.²⁷ The creative translation did not

²² Vilen N. Komissarov, "Russian Tradition," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation*, by Mona Baker (London: Routledge, 1998), 545.

²³ Elena Goodwin, *Translating England into Russian: The Politics of Children's Literature in the Soviet Union and Modern Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 27.

²⁴ Maksim Gorkii, "World Literature (1919)," trans. James McGavern, in *Russian Writers on Translation: An Anthology*, by Brian James Baer and Natalia Olshanskaya (New York: Routledge, 2014), 66.

²⁵ Gorkii, "World Literature," 66.

²⁶ Sergey Tyulenev, "'Vsermirnaia Literatura': Intersections between Translating and Original Literary Writing," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 60, no. 1 (2016): 8-9.

²⁷ Goodwin, *Translating England*, 27.

invent individual interpretations of the work, but rather re-created the original by accommodating it within the receiving culture.²⁸ This idea evolved into the Soviet school of socialist realist translation. According to Soviet translation theorist V.M. Rossells, this school is based on four postulates: the acceptance of translatability in principle, the treatment of translation as a literary process, the idea that translators are authors who are concerned with reality as well as text, and most importantly of all, understanding the process of translation as not a copy or imitation of an original, but its own artistic process.²⁹ Translation was seen as a high art; translators were not merely transcribers, but co-authors in their own right.

At the Third Symposium of the International Research Society for Children's Literature held in 1976, Soviet literary critic and translator Igor Motyashov asserted that “the supreme concern of the [Soviet] state as publisher is not to make a profit, but to educate properly and rear the younger generation,” and so “everything that Soviet publishing houses undertake in the way of translation proceeds from Lenin’s concept that the full wealth of mankind’s cultural treasures be made accessible to each and everyone.”³⁰ Motyashov also stated that Soviet publishers held a philosophy of quality over quantity; that “it is better to bring out one good translation in a big impression than several average books in smaller impressions.”³¹ As a result of these two principles, the foreign literature that was imported into the USSR was curated and had to meet state guidelines. According to Motyashov, these books had to meet four basic criteria: aesthetic, educational, moral, and political. The aesthetic criterion meant that a foreign book not only had to be well written and “in good taste”, but also had to have equal appeal to both children and

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lauren G. Leighton, "Translation as a Derived Art," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 134, no. 4 (1990): 448-49.

³⁰ Igor Motyashov, "The Social and Aesthetic Criteria Applied in Choosing Children's Books for Translation," in *Children's Books in Translation: The Situation and the Problems : Proceedings of the Third Symposium of the International Research Society for Children's Literature, Held at Södertälje, August 26-29, 1976*, by Göte Klingberg, Stuart Amor, and Mary Orvig (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1978), 97.

³¹ Motyashov, “The Social,” 98.

adults.³² Similarly, Motyashov defined the educational criterion as meaning that foreign books not only had to be edifying and informative, but they also needed to provide authentic information on its culture of origin.³³ Foreign literature met the moral criterion by promoting industry, integrity, respect for elders, inculcating self-discipline, and cultivating a sense of civic-responsibility; simultaneously it must also condemn egoism, cruelty, violence, parasitism, and greed.³⁴ Finally, foreign works met the political criterion by falling in line with the ideology of the Soviet state and rejecting all racist, militarist, chauvinist, royalist, clericalist, neo-fascist, neo-colonialist, anti-communist, anti-democratic, and anti-socialist viewpoints and ideas.³⁵ These criteria were based on both the historical and then contemporary policies of Soviet publishing as well as on what Motyashov defined as the state's philosophy towards children's literature: Children are part and parcel of all of humanity, and that is how they are seen in Soviet children's literature, which has no wish to detach or isolate them from the reality in which they are to live."³⁶ In her book *Translating England into Russian*, academic and translator Elena Goodwin argues that while all of these criteria imposed ideological constraints onto Soviet literary translation, the moral and political criteria were the most influential on censorship infrastructure; they provided the most explicit suggestions as to what needed to be omitted, amended, or substituted in order for translated children's literature to be published.³⁷

From 1917 to 1931, a massive system of literary censorship was established in the Soviet Union. Though these regulations would fluctuate alongside the political climate of the nation, they would remain largely unchanged until the dissolution of the USSR sixty years later. This censorship hierarchy consisted of four primary levels: Communist Party control, the department

³² Motyashov, "The Social," 99.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 99-100

³⁵ Ibid., 100.

³⁶ Ibid., 102.

³⁷ Goodwin, *Translating England*, 29.

of political control within the KGB³⁸, the predominant government censorship authority Glavlit, and the self-governing censorship of editors, authors, and translators.³⁹ Children's literature was of especially great concern to Soviet censorship. In July of 1923, Glavlit circulated a letter to its enforcing authorities detailing the types of foreign literature banned from being imported into the Soviet Union, which included:

1. All works bearing a hostile character to Soviet power and communism.
2. All works containing ideology that is hostile and alien to the proletariat.
3. Literature hostile to Marxism.
4. Books of an idealistic nature.
5. Children's literature containing elements of bourgeois values and praising pre-1917 ways and conditions of life.
6. Works written by authors who were against the October Revolution.
7. Works by authors who fought against the Red Army during the Civil War.
8. Russian literature published by religious societies regardless of their content.⁴⁰

What *exactly* these restrictions meant was often ambiguous, and the severity to which they were enforced varied widely. Publishing house editors were appointed by state authorities and as such were held to scrutinizing standards; if the censor had to return a manuscript for further adjustments, infractions were typically blamed solely on the editors, and the consequences were severe.⁴¹ Despite these heavy stakes, communication between censors and publishing houses could be remarkably poor. An editor for the Lenizdat publishing house, Inna Slobozhan, recalled that there was an official list of banned literary themes, but in her forty year long career, it was never seen by her nor any of her colleagues.⁴² Consequently, editors had to use their intuition to guess what their superiors at Glavlit would disapprove of, and had to remain hypervigilant of obscure citations, subtexts, and nuances that could be in potential conflict with official state

³⁸ The abbreviation for *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*, or the Committee for State Security.

³⁹ Goodwin, *Translating England*, 30.

⁴⁰ Arlen V. Blium, *Za kulisami Ministerstva pravdy: Taynaya istoriya sovetskoy tsenzury 1917-1922* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1994), 194.

⁴¹ Goodwin, *Translating England*, 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*

ideology.⁴³ This self-censorship was also extended to translators, who had to anticipate both the reactions of their editors and Glavlit. While translating the works of foreign authors, translators had to be vigilant in avoiding translating any explicit or potentially implicit “bourgeois values.” Soviet translators were simultaneously authors, interpreters, and diplomats. They were expected to be faithful to the essence of the original authors, but they were also tasked with creating ideological substitutions. Soviet translations replaced the original works for the working class with what the text *should* say, rather than what it does say.⁴⁴ As a result, Soviet translations, particularly those of works from the capitalist West, were a curated literary genre that offered manicured images of foreign cultures that further contributed to the USSR’s cultural isolation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Kipling already had a firmly established audience amongst Russian literary critics prior to the October Revolution, and thus was not subjected to the same amount of scrutiny as the Western authors imported after him. However, this did not mean that his works were translated without censorship, nor that their availability would be later restricted.

Rewriting Imperialism

One of the most notable adaptations that is consistent between Chukovsky’s translation and Soyuzmultfilm’s film is the absence of any mention or allusion to the British Raj⁴⁵ as present in Kipling’s original text. This is made immediately apparent in the opening line. Kipling begins his story with, “This is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought single-handed, through the bath-rooms of the big bungalow in Segowlee⁴⁶ cantonment.”⁴⁷ A cantonment is a

⁴³ Goodwin, *Translating England*, 31.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁵ The British Raj, or Crown rule, refers to the time period of England’s colonization and direct rule over the Indian subcontinent that lasted from 1858 to 1947.

⁴⁶ Segowlee is an outdated spelling of the Indian city Sugauli.

⁴⁷ Kipling, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” 109.

permanent military station, and in the context of South Asia and British literature, refers specifically to British occupation in India. By contrast, Chukovsky's translation opens as follows:

Это рассказ о великой войне, которую вел в одиночку Рикки-Тикки-Тави в ванной большого дома в посёлке Сигаули.

This is the story about the great war, which Rikki-Tikki-Tavi waged alone in the bathroom of the big house in the village of Sugauli.⁴⁸

The militaristic, colonial presence Kipling establishes as being the setting of his story is replaced with Chukovsky's neutral *poselok* (посёлок), which simply refers to a village or settlement. Without an adjectival modifier the nature of this village is left ambiguous, therefore designating the Indian town of Sugauli as the setting; it is presented as autonomous rather than as a British colony.

The most explicit means by which Kipling's imperialism manifests in *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* is through the human characters. When the family is first introduced to Rikki, Kipling describes the father as such: "'Now,' said the big man (he was an Englishman who had just moved into the bungalow); 'don't frighten him, and we'll see what he'll do.'"⁴⁹ This parenthetical is omitted in Chukovsky's translation and the father is simply referred to as *Bol'shoy Chelovek* (Большой Человек), Big Man, without any further detail.⁵⁰ Just a page later Kipling goes on to clarify the family's race:

Early in the morning Rikki-tikki came to early breakfast in the veranda riding on Teddy's shoulder, and they gave him banana and some boiled egg; and he sat on all their laps one after the other, because every well-brought-up mongoose always hopes to be a house-mongoose some day and have rooms to run about in, and Rikki-tikki's mother (she

⁴⁸ Rudyard Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," trans. Korney Chukovsky and Samuil Marshak, in *Skazki*, Shkol'naya biblioteka (Moscow, USSR: State Publishing House of Children's Literature of the Ministry of Education of the RSFSR, 1956), 133.

⁴⁹ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," 110.

⁵⁰ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," trans. Chukovsky, 135.

used to live in the General's house at Segowlee) had carefully told Rikki what to do if ever he came across white men.⁵¹

While not stated explicitly, this passage in conjunction with the previous quotes insinuates that the father is either employed with the British military or government, which would make him a direct agent of the colonial empire. This status is something that is recognized by Kipling's animal characters; appeasing "white men" is not only valued knowledge that is passed to their young, but being in their service is something that "every well-brought-up mongoose always hopes to be." These mentions of race and military occupation are completely absent in Chukovsky's text. He translates the same passage as follows:

К утреннему завтраку Рикки въехал на веранду верхом на Теддином плече. Ему дали банан и кусочек яйца. Он перебивал на коленях у всех, потому что хороший мангуст никогда не теряет надежды сделаться домашним мангустом. Каждый из них с детства мечтает о том, что он будет жить в человеческом доме и бегать из комнаты в комнату.

By morning breakfast, Rikki rode into the veranda on Teddy's shoulder. He was given a banana and a piece of egg. He had been on everyone's lap, because a good mongoose never loses hope of becoming a pet mongoose. Each of them dreams from childhood that he will live in a human house and run from room to room.⁵²

By omitting the backstory of Rikki's mother from his translation, Chukovsky portrays the mongooses' aspiration to be taken in by a human family not as a manipulative means to an end, but rather as a product of their inquisitive and friendly natures. Companionship with people of any race, not just Kipling's "white men", is something to strive for.

These quotes are the only allusions to the British empire made in Kipling's original text, making for a total of three separate instances of omission made by Chukovsky's translation.

There is little doubt that these lines were cut in order for the translation to meet the standards of state publishing, particularly in regards to the political criterion as outlined by Motyashov.

⁵¹ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," 111-12.

⁵² Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," trans. Chukovsky, 136.

Depicting English colonists living in a cantonment as sympathetic characters, in addition to having the story's hero align himself with them and save their lives, would not have fallen in line with the Soviet state's anti-imperialist ideals. While these may appear to be minor changes, the implications of Chukovsky's choices should not be underestimated; his subtractions create ambiguity. Readers of Chukovsky's translation only know that the story takes place in India, and without any provided evidence to suggest otherwise, they would have likely assumed that the family is Indian. This is further compounded by the lack of any accompanying illustrations of human characters in any reprinting of Chukovsky's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* before 1965—the year Soyuzmultfilm's adaptation was released. Chukovsky's omissions of empire are kept intact in the script of the film as well as within its visual storytelling. This is manifested most strikingly, and most importantly, in the film's depiction of the family: they are represented as Indian. The significance of this choice will be further discussed in the next chapter, but it highlights an aspect of Soviet literary translation that can be too often taken for granted. Redactions from the original text should not be thought of as solely the casualties of state censorship; the space that is left behind can offer a place of potentiality for the imagination of the reader.

Removing mentions of the British Raj does not mean that imperialism is completely struck from the narrative. Instead, Chukovsky cleverly displaces it from the protagonists of the story to its antagonists: the cobras. This is accomplished not through the addition of contrived new passages or changes to the plot, but rather, in the subtlety of vocabulary. When the cobras are plotting to kill the family, Nag expresses his doubts to his wife, Nagaina. The exchange goes as follows in Kipling's text:

‘But are you sure that there is anything to be gained by killing the people?’ said Nag.

‘Everything. When there were no people in the bungalow, did we have any mongoose in the garden? So long as the bungalow is empty, we are king and queen of the garden; and

remember that as soon as our eggs in the melon-bed hatch (as they may to-morrow), our children will need room and quiet.⁵³

Chukovsky translates the same passage as:

– Но будет ли нам хоть малейшая польза, если мы убьем их?

– Еще бы! Огромная. Когда дом стоял пустой, разве тут водились мангусты? Пока в доме никто не живет, мы с тобою цари всего сада: ты царь, я царица. Не забудь: когда на дынной гряде вылупятся из яиц наши дети (а это может случиться и завтра), им будет нужен покой и уют.

–But will it be of the slightest use to us if we kill them?

– Of course! Huge. When the house was empty, were there mongooses here? While no one lives in the house, you and I are tsars of the entire garden: you are the tsar, I am the tsarina. Don't forget: when our children hatch from eggs on the melon ridge (and this may happen tomorrow), they will need peace and comfort.⁵⁴

In Russian the words for king and queen are *korol'* (король) and *koroleva* (королева), respectively; when translating foreign stories into Russian these words are used to describe royalty. They are completely separate words from *tsar* (царь) and *tsarina* (царица), which are used only in specifically Russian contexts, such as folktales or when speaking about the tsardom of Imperial Russia. Using them outside of these situations is done when the speaker wants to draw a direct comparison from whomever they are speaking of to Russia's tsardom.

This passage is not the only instance where the cobras are referred to as tsars. At the climax of the story when Rikki is using one of Nagaina's eggs as leverage, he also likens them to Russia's past monarchy:

Рикки-Тикки положил яйцо между передними лапами, и глаза у него стали красные, как кровь.

– А какой выкуп за змеиное яйцо? За маленькую кобру? За кобру-царевну? За самую, самую последнюю вроде? Остальных уже пожирают на дынной гряде муравьи.

Rikki-Tikki placed the egg between his front paws, and his eyes became red as blood.

⁵³ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," 117-18.

⁵⁴ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" trans. Chukovsky, 148.

– And what is the ransom for a snake egg? For a little cobra? For the cobra tsarevna? For the very, very last of its kind? The rest are already being devoured by ants on the melon ridge.⁵⁵

Just as is the case with using *korol'* versus *tsar*, the Russian words for prince and princess, *prints* (принц) and *printsessa* (принцесса), are typically used over *tsarevich* (царевич) and *tsarevna* (царевна) in translations. However, Rikki does not describe the snakeling as a princess in Kipling's original passage:

Rikki-tikki put his paws one on each side of the egg, and his eyes were blood-red. 'What price for a snake's egg? For a young cobra? For a young king-cobra? For the last – the very last of the brood? The ants are eating all the others down by the melon-bed.'⁵⁶

Instead, he refers to the snake's specific species, the king cobra. The Russian name for this species is a literal translation of the English, *korolevskaya kobra* (королевская кобра).

Chukovsky choosing the word *tsarevna* was another intentional evocation of Russia's imperial past.

There is another element present in Kipling's original text that may have contributed to Chukovsky's decision to designate the cobras as tsars. When Rikki and Nag first encounter one another, it goes as follows:

'Who is Nag?' said he. 'I am Nag. The great god Brahm put his mark upon all our people when the first cobra spread his hood to keep the sun off Brahm as he slept. Look, and be afraid!'

He spread out his hood more than ever, and Rikki-tikki saw the spectacle-mark on the back of it that looks exactly like the eye part of a hook-and-eye fastening...

'Well,' said Rikki-tikki, and his tail began to fluff up again, 'marks or no marks, do you think it is right for you to eat fledglings out of a nest?'⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" trans. Chukovsky, 158-59.

⁵⁶ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," 124.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 112-13.

Nag introduces himself with Kipling's version of one of Hinduism's creation stories, using his divine origins to justify why Rikki should fear him.⁵⁸ This symbol that the cobras hold as sacred is then derided in Kipling's description where it is compared to spectacles and fastenings. Rikki then questions the authority that Nag claims to have given to him by Brahm, insinuating that eating chicks is reprehensible regardless of one's "marks." This interaction goes differently in Chukovsky's translation due to one omission:

– Ты спрашиваешь, кто такой Наг? Смотри на меня и дрожи! Потому что Наг – это я...

И он раздул свой капюшон, и Рикки-Тикки увидел на капюшоне очковую метку, точь-в-точь как стальная петля от стального крючка...

– Ну так что! – сказал Рикки-Тикки, и хвост у него стал раздуваться опять. – Ты думаешь, если у тебя узор на спине, так ты имеешь право глотать птенчиков, которые выпадут из гнезда?

–You ask who is Nag? Look at me and tremble! Because I am Nag...

And he puffed up his hood, and Rikki-Tikki saw a spectacled mark on his hood, just like a steel loop from a steel hook...

– So what! – said Rikki-Tikki, and his tail began to swell again. – Do you think if you have a pattern on your back, you have the right to swallow chicks that fall out of the nest?⁵⁹

Nag's creation story is conspicuously absent from Chukovsky's text. This is due to the atheism enforced by the Soviet state; references to Hinduism in a children's story would have most likely gone against publisher guidelines given to them by the communist party.⁶⁰ Instead, an editor's footnote at the bottom of the page gives the zoological explanation for what a cobra is, explaining that when cobras are threatened they puff out their hoods to intimidate enemies.

⁵⁸ Kipling is most likely referring to the creation story found in the sacred Hindu text the Vishnu Purana, but his details are mistaken. In this story the god Vishnu is floating in the sea on top of the primordial cobra Sesha, who is protecting him.

⁵⁹ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" trans. Chukovsky, 138.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 439.

While this explains to readers unfamiliar with the species what a cobra is, therefore falling in line with Motyashov's educational criterion, it does not explain to them why Rikki reacts the way he does, or why Nag would think his mark gives him the right to do anything. Chukovsky, however, would have obviously read Nag's myth. It is possible that he drew a connection between Nag's relationship with Hindu gods and the divine right to rule proclaimed by the former tsardom, which then further inspired him to describe the cobras as tsars.

The portrayal of political enemies as snakes was also not without precedent in Russia. Between 1905-6, during a brief period of freedom of speech, Russia's independent press published hundreds of satirical journals rife with political caricatures.⁶¹ Though the producers of these journals differed in specificities of their politics, they were united by their desire to criticize and discredit the Romanov regime.⁶² Articles were accompanied by striking illustrations depicting ghouls, monsters, and snakes as representations of governmental figures (fig. 1). After 1917 the Soviet regime utilized similar visual rhetoric in its own propaganda. Imperialism was commonly represented as allegorical, serpentine creatures greedily snaring anything they could into their coils (fig. 2).

⁶¹ Oleg Minin, "The Value of the Liberated Word: The Russian Satirical Press of 1905 and the Theory of Cultural Production," *The Russian Review* 70, no. 2 (April 2011): 215.

⁶² Minin, "The Value," 219.



Figure 1. The cover of *Satiricheskoe Obozrenie*, no. 1, depicting an allegorical figure of Freedom being molested by serpentine caricatures. Pavel Kostylev. 1906.



Figure 2. *Death to world imperialism!* Soviet poster. Dmitrii Moor. 1920.

It is important to bear in mind that Chukovsky's translation of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* was published in 1934, just seventeen years after the Russian Revolution. Soviet media was working fervently to re-educate those who had lived during the Romanovs' reign, and most importantly, to inoculate children with Soviet values so that they could continue down the path of building communism. A key part of this effort was the constant condemnation and vilification of those the state declared to be the enemies of socialism: Western capitalists, the bourgeois, kulaks, and of course communism's vanquished foe, the tsar. As exemplified in Glavlit's letter, the idealization of Russia's imperial past was vehemently forbidden by all bodies of the Soviet state, especially in children's media. By using *tsar*, *tsarina*, and *tsarevna* in these passages, rather than opting for a direct translation of Kipling's prose, Chukovsky intentionally casts Nag and Nagaina as royal villains and further attaches negative associations to tsardom in the imaginations of Soviet children.

This imperial characterization of the cobras is also carried over to Soyuzmultfilm's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965). While Nagaina does not declare herself and her husband to be the tsar and tsarina of the garden, when Rikki bargains with the final egg, he echoes Chukovsky: “Это последняя кобра – кобра царевна! (This is the last cobra— the cobra tsarevna!) (fig. 3)”⁶³ While Chukovsky directly influenced this direction, as it is his translated text from which the film is adapted, the animated film takes a different approach. The cobras' tsardom is not represented through their own declarations or the exaggeration of their actions, but by the film elaborating upon the story's hero— Rikki-tikki.

⁶³ Alexandra Snezhko-Blotskaya, dir., *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, Soyuzmultfilm, 1965.



Figure 3. “*This is the last cobra—the cobra tsarevna!*” Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

Creating a Pioneer

At the beginning of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, Kipling insinuates that Rikki is not a full-grown mongoose, but rather a juvenile: “One day, a high summer flood washed [Rikki] out of the burrow where he lived with his father and mother, and carried him, kicking and clucking, down a road-side ditch.”⁶⁴ This detail is kept intact in Chukosky’s translation: “Он жил с отцом и матерью в узкой ложбине ([Rikki] lived with his father and mother in a narrow hollow).”⁶⁵ Kipling mentions Rikki’s age only in one other instance, after his first encounter with the cobras: “Rikki-tikki knew that he was a young mongoose, and it made him all the more pleased to think

⁶⁴ Kipling, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” 109.

⁶⁵ Kipling, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” trans. Chukovsky, 134.

that he had managed to escape a blow from behind.”⁶⁶ Chukovsky keeps this in his translation as well: Рикки-Тикки хорошо понимал, что он еще молодой и неопытный (Rikki-tikki was well aware that he was still young and inexperienced).⁶⁷ Rikki’s youth is one of his defined characteristics, but is mentioned so briefly in passing, that it could easily be missed by readers.

This is not the case in Soyuzmultfilm’s *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*. Instead, Rikki’s age is brought to the forefront of the narrative by the invention of a prologue for the story. The film opens with Rikki’s father, a character only mentioned once in the original story, instructing Rikki on the proper ways to jump. He is massive compared to his son, which immediately indicates to the audience that Rikki is a very young mongoose far from maturity (fig. 4). When the monsoon begins and they run to take cover, Rikki’s father imparts him with words of wisdom:

Говорят что, ужаленный змеей мангуст тотчас же убегает прочь и съедает какую-то травку, которая будто бы лечит его. Это неверно. Победа мангуста над коброй – в быстроте его глаз и лап. У кобры – укус, у мангуста – прыжок. Вот этот прыжок чудеснее всякой волшебной травы.

They say that a mongoose stung by a snake immediately runs away and eats some kind of herb, which supposedly heals him. This is not true. The triumph of a mongoose over a cobra lies in the quickness of his eyes and paws. A cobra has a bite, and a mongoose, a jump. This jump is more wonderful than any magic herb.⁶⁸

This text originally appeared as part of the story’s narration, rather than as dialogue, in both Chukovsky and Kipling’s versions. After this repurposed speech, the scene ends when Rikki wanders away from his father before being swept away by the storm, and then the familiar story begins.

⁶⁶ Kipling, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” 115.

⁶⁷ Kipling, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” trans. Chukovsky, 142.

⁶⁸ Snezhko-Blotskaya, *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*.



Figure 4. *Rikki listening to his father's lesson.* Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

The addition of this scene is significant for two reasons. First, it reinstates an element of Kipling's text that Chukovsky omitted: listening to the advice of his parents. As discussed earlier in the chapter, in the original English story Rikki recalls his mother's advice regarding "what to do if ever he came across white men" and follows it accordingly.⁶⁹ In Chukovsky's translation this line was removed without a substitute. By creating this prologue, Soyuzmultfilm provides a replacement that falls in line with Motyashov's moral requirement— particularly in regards to respecting one's elders— while still complying with the political criterion Chukovsky was also subjected to. After meeting Nag and Nagaina, Rikki turns his head to the audience and states, "Настало время, вспомнить все чему учил меня отец (It's time to remember everything my

⁶⁹ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," 111-12.

father taught me),” a line invented for the film.⁷⁰ When Rikki masterfully outmaneuvers the cobras, the audience is able to attribute it to him listening to his father and holding that advice close to his heart. Secondly, this scene makes Rikki’s age explicitly clear. From this point onward the audience is aware that Rikki is a child who is just beginning to learn how to fight snakes, unlike in the original story, where the extent of his youth holds some ambiguity. Thus, Soyuzmultfilm transforms *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* from an animal adventure and turns it into a story of revolutionary child heroism.

In her essay “‘Be Always Ready!’: Hero Narratives in Soviet Children’s Literature”, Svetlana Maslinskaya defines a child hero as an adolescent who performs a socially meaningful act which risks one’s life for the sake of the people or the Soviet regime; such feats could include saving a citizen from peril, preventing an industrial accident, or a combative encounter with an enemy of the state.⁷¹ They are vigilant, dutiful, quick-thinking, and oftentimes resemble literary tricksters in their cleverness and cunning.⁷² The popularity of these stories was galvanized in the 1930s when the Soviet state realized their political indispensability.⁷³

Rikki’s heroism is emphasized throughout the narrative of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* in both Kipling’s narration as well as the dialogue of the other characters. The family praises and credits Rikki for saving their lives each time he kills a snake, but no other character goes to the same lengths to lionize Rikki as Darzee the tailorbird. Darzee serves as the bard of the garden; after Rikki kills Nag, Darzee sings his praises and addresses him with lines such as: ‘For the great, the beautiful Rikki-tikki’s sake I will stop,’ said Darzee. ‘What is it, O Killer of the terrible Nag?’⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Snezhko-Blotskaya, *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*.

⁷¹ Svetlana Maslinskaya, “‘Be Always Ready!’: Hero Narratives in Soviet Children’s Literature,” in *A Companion to Soviet Children’s Literature and Film*, by Olga Voronina (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 251.

⁷² Maslinskaya, “Be Always,” 256-62.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁷⁴ Kipling, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” 120.

In the Russian text, Chukovsky directly translates these lines as dialogue, but he also makes one notable addition. He incorporates a stanza of Marshak's translation of "Darzee's Chaunt", which originally appears at the very end of Kipling's text as a standalone poem:

Нагайна пришла к водосточной трубе,
 И кликнула Нага Нагайна к себе,
 Но сторож взял Нага на палку
 И выбросил Нага на свалку.
 Славься же, славься, великий
 Красноглазый герой Рикки-Тикки!..

Nagaina came to the drainpipe,
 And called for Nag to come to Nagaina,
 But the watchman took Nag upon a stick,
 And threw Nag into the rubbish heap.
 Glory be, glory to the great one
 The red-eyed hero Rikki-Tikki!..⁷⁵

This integration of verse into the narrative echoes the utilization of the ballad genre by Soviet authors in child hero narratives, thereby further emphasizing Rikki as a heroic character.⁷⁶

Maslinskaya's definition of the child hero may appear to be irrelevant to *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* at first glance; Rikki is a mongoose in India, not a Pavlik Morozov martyred in a ditch.⁷⁷ However, the

⁷⁵ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" trans. Marshak, 153.

⁷⁶ Maslinskaya, "Be Always," 284.

⁷⁷ Pavlik Morozov was a young boy and member of the Pioneers who was murdered. The publication *Pionerskaia Pravda* (Pioneer Truth) ran an article about the crime and reported that Pavlik was martyred after denouncing his father to the state for assisting kulaks. Although this story was almost completely fabricated, the legend grew and grew until Pavlik became a national hero. These fictionalized biographies of Pavlik are considered to be the

archetype of the Soviet child hero and the characterization of Rikki-Tikki have much in common. After all, the genre has its roots in the child “homo militaris” narratives of British literature, a tradition Kipling was a part of, which became immensely popular in Russia during the Great War.⁷⁸

In 1922 the Soviet state created the ‘Young Pioneer’ organization, a branch of the Komsomol⁷⁹ for children aged ten to fifteen made to be the politically engaged replacement for the newly banned Scout movement.⁸⁰ It placed a strong emphasis on character-building, community engagement, and outdoor activities, blurring the line between work and play to further inoculate Party values.⁸¹ The Pioneer oaths and laws changed over time in accordance with the political and cultural climate of the Soviet Union, but they always evidenced the state’s conviction in childhood as a vital site for building a communist future. This is made abundantly clear in the first iteration of the organization’s pillars, which clearly position the child as an agent of the Revolution:

I, a Young Pioneer of the USSR, do solemnly swear, in the presence of my comrades, that I will staunchly support the working class in its battle for the liberation of laboring people all over the world, and for the construction of socialist society, that I will honorable and unwaveringly follow the commands of Il’ich and the laws of the Young Pioneers.

1. The Pioneer is faithful to the cause of the working class.
2. The Pioneer is the youngest brother and helper of the *Kosmoltsy* and communists.
3. The Pioneer is a comrade of Pioneers and workers’ children worldwide.
4. The Pioneer loves labor.
5. The Pioneer is honest and truthful (his words are like granite).
6. The Pioneer is healthy, robust, and never falls in spirit.

prototype for pioneer-hero stories. For more on this, see Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero*.

⁷⁸ Maslinskaya, “Be Always,” 258.

⁷⁹ Abbreviation of *Vsesoyuzny leninsky kommunistichesky soyuz molodyozhi*, or All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth.

⁸⁰ Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 62.

⁸¹ Elizabeth White, *A Modern History of Russian Childhood: From the Late Imperial Period to the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 68-69.

7. The Pioneer strives for knowledge. Knowledge and ability are strengths in the struggle for the workers' cause.
8. The Pioneer carries out his duties quickly and accurately.⁸²

Child-heroes in Soviet literature were also often called pioneer-heroes, which Maslinskaya argues reflects the philosophy of the Soviet regime: if all Soviet children were to become pioneers, all of them could and should be heroes ready for self-sacrifice.⁸³ Accordingly, characters in foreign literature who exemplified values found in the Pioneer laws would fall in line with Motyashov's political and moral criteria for translation.

As previously discussed, in the narrative of Chukovsky and Soyuzmultfilm's respective versions of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, the cobras' reign over the garden is represented as a tyrannical tsardom: the ultimate political other in the imagination of the Soviet child. In the canon of Soviet storytelling the only one who is capable of defeating such a force is the revolutionary. Following this logic, the only character appropriate for this role would be one sharing traits with the revolutionary archetype or its offshoots, such as the pioneer-hero. Just as the mongoose is the mortal enemy of cobras, the revolutionary is the vanquisher of tsars. Chukovsky's coding of the cobras as imperial figures in combination with Rikki's valiance implies this revolutionary characterization. It is Soyuzmultfilm's portrayal of Rikki-tikki that makes this characterization blatant.

Rikki's loyalty and honor cannot be denied in Kipling's text; he risks his life on four separate occasions for the sake of defending others. When he enters a fight to the death with Nag, he holds his ground despite the risk to his own life not only to protect his family, but to uphold his honor: "As [Rikki] held he closed his jaws tighter and tighter, for he was sure he

⁸² White, *A Modern History*, 69.

⁸³ Maslinskaya, "Be Always," 251.

would be banged to death, and, for the honor of his family, he preferred to be found with his teeth locked.”⁸⁴ Chukovsky translates the same passage as follows:

Он сжимал челюсти все крепче и крепче, потому что хоть и думал, что пришла его смерть, но решил встретить ее, не разжимая зубов. Этого требовала честь его рода.

[Rikki] clenched his jaws tighter and tighter, because even though he thought that his death had come, he decided to meet it without unclenching his teeth. The honor of his kind demanded it.⁸⁵

Rod (род) is used to indicate lineage, or race; it is also the root word for *narod* (народ), meaning a people. Rikki’s willingness to face his death with courage and dignity for the sake of his *rod* is akin to that of pioneer-heroes of Soviet children’s media; such characters are often martyred for the sake of the communist cause or defending the Soviet Union. Maslinskaya argues that this trope is the result of “the Soviet idea of self-sacrifice as the only type of attitude possible in the conditions of the nation’s perpetual struggle against its enemies.”⁸⁶ However, in both the English and Russian versions of the story it is not solely Rikki’s bravery that leads him to oppose the cobras; he is also driven by instinct. Whenever Rikki encounters a snake, or even thinks of fighting one, his eyes turn blood red, his tail puffs out, and he enters a berserker-like state. This is exemplified when Rikki slays Karait, a small venomous snake:

Rikki-tikki's eyes grew red again, and he danced up to Karait with the peculiar rocking, swaying motion that he had inherited from his family. It looks very funny, but it is so perfectly balanced a gait that you can fly off from it at any angle you please; and in dealing with snakes this is an advantage. If Rikki-tikki had only known, he was doing a much more dangerous thing than fighting Nag, for Karait is so small, and can turn so quickly, that unless Rikki bit him close to the back of the head, he would get the return-stroke in his eye or lip. But Rikki did not know: his eyes were all red, and he rocked back and forth, looking for a good place to hold.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Kipling, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” 119.

⁸⁵ Kipling, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” trans. Chukovsky, 151.

⁸⁶ Maslinskaya, “Be Always,” 278.

⁸⁷ Kipling, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” 115.

This scene, despite it being the first time Rikki kills a snake in the story, is completely cut from Soyuzmultfilm's adaptation. His red-eyed trances are also removed from the film. By omitting this aspect of Kipling's original characterization, Soyuzmultfilm changes the conflict between mongoose and cobra from being based in animal behavior to being one of clashing morals and class struggle.

This alteration is verbally demonstrated when Rikki and Nag first meet in the film. A brief scene is added showing Nag knocking one of Darzee's babies out of their nest while the family is sleeping, and then devouring it. Upon learning of this, Rikki puffs up his fur and demands, "Ты думаешь если у тебя узоры на шлеме, а что имеешь права глотать птенцов? (Do you think that just because you have patterns on your helmet, you have the right to swallow chicks?)" (fig. 5).⁸⁸ Nag then replies, "Давай малыш поговорим. Ведь ты обедаешь по своему вкусу, так почему бы мне не закусить птенцов? (Come on kid, let's talk. After all, you dine according to your own taste, so why shouldn't I snack on chicks?)" before laughing cruelly.⁸⁹ This differs from Chukovsky's direct translation of Kipling, where Darzee's chick had fallen out of the nest and was then eaten. When Rikki criticizes Nag for doing this, Nag calmly replies: "Давай поговорим. Ведь птичьи яйца ты ешь, не правда ли? Почему бы мне не лакомиться птичками? (Let's talk. You eat bird eggs, don't you? Why shouldn't I feast on birds?)."⁹⁰ Nag's original dialogue points out that he and Rikki are both predators who must kill in order to survive; it is hypocritical for Rikki to condemn Nag for eating chicks, when eggs are part of a mongoose's natural diet. By altering this line of dialogue, changing the delivery of Nag's words, and adding the new scene, Soyuzmultfilm portrays the cobras as being morally reprehensible and

⁸⁸ Snezhko-Blotskaya, *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" trans. Chukovsky, 140.

bloodthirsty instead of animals acting in accordance to their instincts. The similarities between Nag and Rikki are completely erased. Thus, Rikki is a hero standing up to a cruel tyrant, rather than a mongoose simply doing what mongooses do.



Figure 5. *Rikki challenges Nag*. Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

While Soyuzmultfilm’s addition of a moral conflict raises the stakes of the clash between mongoose and cobra, it is only in combination with the emphasis on Rikki’s youth that it transforms the narrative into a truly Soviet story: the triumph of the pioneer-hero over tyranny. Since the 1920s, state-produced children’s media worked to portray Soviet young people as being uniquely apt at being responsible, decisive, and quick-witted in the face of danger.⁹¹ Literature, songs, magazines, and movies all worked in tandem to construct the notion that every

⁹¹ Maslinskaya, “Be Always,” 256.

Soviet child was capable of heroic acts; not only that, but valor was so inherent in Soviet reality that it became ordinary and expected.⁹² Such traits are captured in Soyuzmultfilm's characterization of Rikki-tikki. Despite his age and inexperience, Rikki unquestionably challenges Nag's authority as the cobra tsar looms over him, not because he is some sort of chosen one, but simply because it is the right thing to do (fig. 6). Throughout the story he remains unwaveringly dedicated to his mission: eradicating the snakes from the garden for the good of all who inhabit it. There is perhaps no other scene that exemplifies this as dramatically as when Rikki discovers Nagaina's eggs. After unburying them, he lifts one up and glares at the snakeling visible through the shell, stating, "Еще один день и было бы поздно (One more day and it would have been too late)."⁹³ It then fades to a scene from Rikki's imagination; all the eggs hatch and rapidly grow from babies to a mass of writhing, vicious, fully-grown snakes. The shot is brought back to the unhatched eggs, Rikki cries out "Смерть кобрам! (Death to the cobras!)", a line completely original to the film, and he mercilessly crushes all but the last egg.⁹⁴ Immediately afterwards Rikki confronts tsarina Nagaina and taunts her with her only surviving child. She bargains with Rikki, vowing, "Я уйду отсюда и не вернусь никогда. (I will leave here and never return)."⁹⁵ In turn he shouts, "Ты не вернешься потому что скоро будешь лежать на мусорной куче! (You're not coming back because you'll soon be lying on the garbage heap!)"⁹⁶ He attacks, they fight, and he kills her and the cobra tsarevna. Rikki eradicating Nag and Nagaina's bloodline bears an uncanny resemblance to the ultimate fate of the Romanov dynasty and falls in line with Soviet child-hero literary tradition. In these stories, Soviet children vigilantly seek out and confront the enemy: the politically defined other.⁹⁷ While the child hero's

⁹² Maslinskaya, "Be Always," 256-7.

⁹³ Snezhko-Blotskaya, *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Maslinskaya, "Be Always," 266.

confrontations were not always grandiose, the ideological stakes involved were small-scale re-enactments of the Revolution.⁹⁸ Thus, they served as not only individual heroes, but as a representation of their nation won through bloodshed and class struggle.⁹⁹



Figure 6. *Nag attempts to intimidate Rikki.* Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

Conclusion

When examining the adaptation process of a literary work into animation, one must take into account if the studio producing the film is a part of the same culture, and perhaps even more importantly, if they are basing their screenplay from the original language text. If not, it is imperative to compare and contrast the original text to the corresponding translation. Even subtle

⁹⁸ Maslinskaya, "Be Always," 258.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

changes in vocabulary or a few missing lines can create new subtexts that were not originally part of the author's vision. In the case of animations based upon translated works, they are adaptations of adaptations. Thus, they may emphasize these themes created by the translator and result in a new story that can be held separately from the original language text. This necessitates a cross-examination of these three versions of the same story in order to acquire a holistic understanding of what has changed. In the case of both Chukovsky's translation and Soyuzmultfilm's adaptation of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, this resulted in the complete erasure of the British empire. The imperialism that was central to Kipling's idea of a just world order was instead condemned and transformed into a characteristic of treacherous, venomous snakes. In the same vein, instinctive animal behavior was reframed as the irreconcilable morals in class conflicts. When combined with Soyuzmultfilm's decision to make Rikki's youth at the forefront of the narrative, the adjustment made within both Chukovsky's text and the film's script synthesized into a new story of a uniquely Soviet genre: the pioneer-hero.

Chapter 3

Visualizing *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* for the Soviet Screen

Adapting written works to the screen is a unique translation process in of itself. Directors are placed into the role of interpreter; they are tasked with recreating the image an author is trying to impart into a new visual language for a new audience. This practice had already been well established in the USSR through the films of Ivan Petrovich Ivanov-Vano, who is often referred to as the father of Soviet animation.¹ Early into his career Ivanov-Vano recognized the potential of animation in shaping the values of young viewers, and utilized the medium to adapt Russian literature, folklore, and art history into the language of Soviet ideology and culture.² The result was a series of dazzling animated Russian fairy tales such as *The Little Humpbacked Horse* (1947) and *The Snowmaiden* (1952), which earned him the moniker of the Russian Walt Disney.³ However, it was not until the late 1960s that foreign children's stories began to be adapted into Soviet animated films.⁴ In the case of these films, the adaptation process is further complicated not only by the changes made by the translators of their source material as well as the parameters mandated by the Soviet state, but by the storytelling compromises necessitated by the medium of animation itself. The result is an adaptation of an adaptation that not only reinforces the ideology of the translated text, but makes its own distinct adjustments that set it apart for the sake of being suitable for the Soviet screen. Such is the case with Soyuzmultfilm's 1965 production of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* directed by Alexandra Snezhko-Blotskaya.

¹ Michele Leigh and Lora Mjolsness, *She Animates: Soviet Female Subjectivity in Russian Animation* (Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 14.

² Laura Wheeler Mjolsness, "Under the Hypnosis of Disney: Ivan Ivanov-Vano and Soviet Animation for Children," in *A Companion to Soviet Children's Literature and Film*, ed. Olga Voronina (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 389.

³ Mjolsness, "Under the Hypnosis," 389.

⁴ Brigit Beumers, "Comforting Creatures" in *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, by Marina Balina and Larissa Rudova (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 165.

Animation is inherently a synthetic artform. Even in its simplest state, such as a flipbook, it is a combination of visual art and acting. An animated production is a highly complex synthesis of visual and performing arts. An expert analyst of animation needs to not only have sound knowledge of drawing and painting, but also of photography, acting, dance, stage-production, cinematography, and even sculpture.⁵ While all of these components are of equal importance in acquiring a holistic understanding of an animated film, this chapter will be focusing on the *visuality* of the cartoon and the larger implications of the artistic choices made by the makers of the film. *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965) is a traditionally animated film, which means that every second consists of multiple handmade illustrations called frames. Each one of these illustrations is a collaborative effort, and typically each step is done by a separate individual. There is an initial sketch, which is then sent to be inked and colored, and the resulting cell is overlaid onto a background. Throughout the chapter, these frames, also known as “stills”, will be provided to exemplify the scenes and details as discussed in the text.

In his 1978 essay “On the Language of Animated Films”, the Soviet semiotician Yuri Lotman proposed that animation has a “specific language”, that “animation is a completely independent artform with its own artistic language, in many ways opposed to the language of fiction and documentary cinema.”⁶ He argues, “The original property of the animation language is that it operates with signs of signs: what floats in front of the viewer on the screen is an image of an image.”⁷ While moving drawings may be uncanny compared to stationary drawings and paintings,⁸ animation offers two separate spaces for interpretation of language. First is the drawn

⁵ Maureen Furniss, *Art in Motion, Revised Edition: Animation Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 61.

⁶ Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman, "O yazyke mul'tiplikatsionnykh fil'mov," in *Ob Iskusstve: Struktura Chudozhestvennogo Teksta ; Semiotika Kino I Problemy Kinoestetiki ; Stat'i, Zametki, Vystuplenija* (1962-1993), (Saint Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2005), 671-72.

⁷ Lotman, “O yazyke,” 673.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 672.

image itself, or frame, the interpretation of the tangible world into the clearly expressed rhetoric of the artificial image. Second is the discontinuity derived from the act of animation; multiple images are rapidly flashed in front of the viewer to create the illusion of motion, which doubles the illusion of the image while emphasizing its specificity.⁹ In other words, by imitating the motion of life, both animation's natural and unnatural qualities are brought to the forefront. He states that these qualities make animation "exceptionally adapted to conveying different shades of irony."¹⁰ Animation knows, but will not say, that it's not real; it takes the common world, reconsiders it through animation, and instigates a process of transformation that elicits emotional cognisance in its audience.¹¹ Soviet film director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein also recognized this quality of the medium:

Here [in animation] magic is not just an empty phrase of speech. For art (true art) artificially returns the viewer to the stage of sensuous thought — which is also the stage of a magical relationship with nature. When you achieve, for example, a magical blending of sound and image — you have subjected the viewer's perception to the conditions of sensuous thought, where synthetic perception is the only kind possible — there is not any differentiation of perceptions. Our viewer is *rebuilt* in accord with norms *not of the present*, but those of *primordially* sensuous perception — he is "returned" to the conditions of the magical stage of experiencing the world.¹²

Audiences watching an animated film do not truly believe that they are watching, in the case of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965), a real mongoose on the screen. However, there is enough suspension of disbelief to play into the illusion. Soyuzmultfilm director Garri Bardi described this same phenomenon as a "magical fantasy world of perception"; the moment that viewers believe the pictures on the screen are moving of their own accord, the animators have succeeded in throwing an invisibility cloak over reality.¹³ Sergei Ginsburg, the first serious Soviet animation theorist,

⁹ Lotman, "O yazyke," 673.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ David MacFadyen, *Yellow Crocodiles and Blue Oranges: Russian Animated Film since World War Two* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 42-43.

¹² MacFadyen, *Yellow Crocodiles*, 46-47.

¹³ Maya Balakirsky Katz, *Drawing the Iron Curtain: Jews and the Golden Age of Soviet Animation*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 8.

challenged these perspectives. He argued that on the contrary, animation has the “inability to conceal the reality of the artist or of the times.”¹⁴ Ginzburg staunchly believed that the content of animated films held up a mirror to the consciousness of their animators, which is inextricably bound to their historical and geographical context.¹⁵ In her book *Drawing the Iron Curtain*, art historian and clinical psychoanalyst Maya Balakirsky Katz postulates that whether one applies the framework of Lotman, Eisenstein, or Ginzburg in examining animation, it is ultimately the medium’s unique “unstable in-betweenness” of occupying both the real world and the fantastic that allows for “seemingly irreconcilable contradictions” in ethnicity, gender, class, and even politics to co-exist.¹⁶ This quality of “in-betweenness” is what allows Soviet animation to adapt stories from sources that may conflict with state ideology, such as Kipling, and turn them into something new.

This chapter will first provide an overview of the history of animation in the Soviet Union in order to present the wider artistic and political context in which Soyuzmultfilm’s *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* was produced. It will then examine the additions and omissions that are unique to the visuality of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*; these are the adaptations that can only be seen, rather than those made to the plotline and dialogue as discussed in the previous chapter. The first is the decision to make Rikki a red furred mongoose, and the second is the representation of the colonized through centering India, which was colonized by England at the time Kipling wrote *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, as the setting of the story. It will be argued that through these adjustments, Soyuzmultfilm transformed *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* from an Englishman’s imperialist fable to a fairytale of revolutionary anti-colonialism for Soviet children.

¹⁴ Katz, *Drawing the Iron*, 5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

Animation in Soviet Russia

Animation held an ephemeral existence in Russia prior to the 1917 revolution. Aleksandr Shiriaev, a ballet master with the Imperial Russian ballet, could be credited as the first Russian animator. From 1906 to 1909, Shiriaev used a combination of paper and ink animation and intricate stop-motion¹⁷ films to recreate folk dances with the hope of preserving them for posterity.¹⁸ These films were never publicly screened, and after 1909 Shiriaev abandoned animation to focus on dance.¹⁹ Vladislav Starevich, also known by his Polish given name Władysław Starewicz, discovered stop-motion animation independently of Shiriaev. As a trained biologist, Starevich's first animations were originally meant to be educational; when the stag beetles Starevich was filming for a documentary refused to move beneath the bright lights, he created puppets using embalmed beetles and wires to recreate their battle over mating rights.²⁰ The resulting film, *Lucanus Cervus* (1910), is widely credited as the first narrative-driven stop-motion film. Starevich then went on to create a series of commercially successfully stop-motion films using his insect puppets, such as *Beautiful Lucanidae* (1910), a fairytale love story, and most famously *The Cameraman's Revenge* (1912), a playful drama about marital infidelity (fig. 7).²¹ One such film, *The Grasshopper and the Ant* (1911), based on a fable by Ivan Krylov, won the admiration of Tsar Nicholas II, who awarded it a prize.²² After the Russian

¹⁷ Stop-motion refers to an animation technique where objects, commonly puppets or plasticine figures, are physically manipulated in small increments and then photographed to create individual frames, which when played back sequentially, create the illusion of movement. Famous examples of stop-motion animated films include Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Aardman's *Wallace & Gromit*, and Soyuzmultfilm's *Cheburashka* series.

¹⁸ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 29-30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²¹ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 30-31.

²² Laura Pontieri, *Soviet Animation and the Thaw of the 1960s: Not Only for Children* (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2012), 5-6.

Revolution Starevich moved to France, and his Soviet contemporaries derided him as a “children’s entertainer without any value.”²³



Figure 7. Still from *The Cameraman's Revenge* (1912).

It was not until the 1920s that animation, particularly drawn animation²⁴, began to develop in the newly established Soviet Union. Cinema was viewed as a powerful tool for spreading Communist ideology to Russia’s still predominantly illiterate population and was prioritized accordingly, as reflected in Vladimir Lenin’s famous statement, “that of all the arts the most important for us is the cinema.”²⁵ As a result, the earliest Soviet animated films were highly propagandistic, and though there were some educational works produced, the majority of them were political satires and caricatures intended for an adult audience²⁶ with aesthetics derived

²³ Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 6.

²⁴ At this time, drawn animation was limited to the use of pen and ink to create black and white animations, oftentimes without sound. Western examples of this include the earliest *Felix the Cat* cartoons, as well as the animated shorts of Fleischer Studios.

²⁵ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 32.

²⁶ Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 10-11.

from the Russian avant-garde.²⁷ It was not until the end of the decade that animated films created for Soviet children began to be produced, and were similarly tasked with ideologically indoctrinating youth rather than simply entertaining them. Some of these earliest children's films including *Sen'ka the African* (1927), a screen adaptation of Korney Chukovsky's famous story *Krokodil*, and *The Samoyed Boy* (1928), which tells the story of an indigenous Nenets child who leaves his village to study in the city after exposing a deceptive shaman (fig. 8).²⁸ While both of these films are highly didactic, with *Sen'ka the African* serving as a moral tale about proper behavior and *The Samoyed Boy* acting as a modern folktale about leaving traditions in order to embrace the new Soviet future, they mark a shift in the direction of Soviet animation as a genre from propaganda for adults to ideologically-rife children's films, which would come to be fully realized in the following decade.



Figure 8. Animation still from *The Samoyed Boy* (1928)

²⁷ Mjolsness, "Under the Hypnosis," 391.

²⁸ Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 16-17.

The early 1930s witnessed the solidification of Stalin's reign over the Soviet Union, and under his totalitarian regime, every aspect of Soviet life was under state control. This led to two major changes that would affect the development of animation in the USSR for decades to come. The first was the declaration of socialist realism²⁹ as the mandatory canonical style of all artistic production after the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934.³⁰ This aesthetic dogma resulted in a massive loss of creative control for Soviet animators, who were put under ever-changing, loosely defined restrictions to the types of stories they could tell and the ways that they could be portrayed. The second was the Soviet state's bureaucratic centralization of all artistic institutions, which led to a complete overhaul in the organization of film studios.³¹ By 1936, all independent animation studios were dissolved and merged into a new centralized studio, "Soyuzdetmultfilm", later renamed to "Soyuzmultfilm".³² The Moscow-based Soyuzmultfilm would go on to become the Soviet Union's premiere animation studio, and encouraged its animators to utilize new technologies such as cel animation³³, color processing, and sound, as well as new aesthetics, such as those used by the rising success, Disney studio.³⁴ In the mid-thirties, Disney films were screened at various Soviet festivals and garnered massive popularity amongst both critics and the general public, despite their accompanying disclaimers about the dangers of American ideology.³⁵ Program notes for a screening of Disney's *Silly Symphonies* at the 1935 American Color Film Festival in Leningrad warned:

²⁹ Socialist realism refers to a set of aesthetics that calls for the didactic use of literature, art, and music to develop social consciousness in a socialist state. In the visual arts, it is characterized by the use of idealized realism in portraying socialist history and daily life in a positive light.

³⁰ MacFadyen, *Yellow Crocodiles*, 38.

³¹ Mjolsness, "Under the Hypnosis," 400.

³² Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 41.

³³ Cel animation is an animation technique where characters and objects are drawn onto clear celluloid sheets which are then layered over a background to create a single image, also referred to as a "cel." These cels are then individually photographed and sequenced together in order to create a moving image. This technique is also commonly referred to as "traditional animation."

³⁴ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 60.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

The drawing, movement and music are main components of Disney's films, and they subordinate not only characters but also the inanimate objects, trees, flowers, leaves and clouds, which all take part in the whole rhythm. Disney films do not shine because of their narrative content. They are light, happy but frivolous, and their main task is to distract viewers from evident reality and from the essential causes and social problems of the bourgeois world.³⁶

Despite these proclaimed ideological conflicts the fluid, naturalistic movements of Disney's animations aligned with the aesthetic sensibilities of socialist realism. It also quickly became apparent to Soviet animators that in order to compete with the West in a world market, emulating Disney's style was a necessity.³⁷ This imitation extended beyond just the technical, it also included subject matter; the formerly contentious fairy-tale genre was embraced by the Soviet animation industry. The renewed interest in the genre can also be attributed to Maxim Gorky's return from exile and his speech in 1934 at the First Congress of Soviet Writers.³⁸ He proclaimed the value of fairy-tales in promoting socialist change, and called for the gathering and dissemination of folklore. Such views were also echoed by Ivanov-Vano, who asserted that exposure to fairy-tales was necessary for a child's future wellbeing.³⁹

World War II, also known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War, brought Soviet animation production to a halt. The few animations that were produced were overwhelmingly patriotic war propaganda and political satire intended for an adult audience.⁴⁰ It wasn't until the postwar years that Soyuzmultfilm returned to producing animated children's films, and were subsequently faced with new challenges. The 1930s' call for nationalism was only intensified in the traumatic aftermath of the war, and the state demanded for a unification between art and ideological content.⁴¹ The 1940s also saw the tightening of state control over all Soviet film production,

³⁶ Mjolsness, "Under the Hypnosis," 405-406.

³⁷ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 61.

³⁸ Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 46.

³⁹ Mjolsness, "Under the Hypnosis," 393.

⁴⁰ Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 43.

⁴¹ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 78.

including animation. The Ministry of Cinematography increased its regulation over scripts and film production, and the establishment of The Art Council in 1946, which was tasked by the ministry with censorship oversight, placed its chairman as the appointed director of Soyuzmultfilm.⁴² In light of these new demands, the appeal of the fairy-tale to Soviet animators only grew; the genre seemed to perfectly suit the imposed propagandistic purposes. This is due to the fairy-tale's drawing upon national heritage, its inherent didactic qualities that make it suitable for instilling ideology, and its accessibility to children.⁴³ The animated fairy-tale created a visual world steeped in Russian heritage that celebrated virtues such as bravery, selflessness, comradery, veneration of elders, and respect for nature that were simultaneously promoted by the Soviet state, that children could fully immerse themselves in. Despite their compliance to the imposed ideology, fairy-tales also offered a level of creative freedom to Soviet animators. Magic, anthropomorphism, and rich folk aesthetics provided a relatively safe cover to avoid explicit themes of socialist realism.⁴⁴ They also provided a level of ideological subversion by offering an alternative to the Communist party's dogma; children were taught a sense of right and wrong through a folk tradition of storytelling, rather than empty ideological phrases.⁴⁵ The genre became fully established in Soviet cinematic canon with the release of the USSR's first full-length animated film, Ivanov-Vano's classic *The Little Humpbacked Horses* (1947), an adaptation of Pyotr Ershov's 1834 story of the same name (fig. 9).⁴⁶ From the 1940s to the 1950s, adaptations of fairy tales were the dominant subject matter of Soviet animation, as well as the most successful among audiences.⁴⁷

⁴² Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 79-80.

⁴³ Beumers, "Comforting Creatures," 160.

⁴⁴ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 64.

⁴⁵ Beumers, "Comforting Creatures," 160-161.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁷ Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 47.



Figure 9. Still from *The Little Humpbacked Horse* (1947).

Stalin's death in 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev's subsequent ascension to power heralded a new Soviet era known as The Thaw.⁴⁸ Although official policies would go back and forth between loosening and tightening their grip over media industries, the Thaw brought about an era of relative artistic freedom compared to previous decades. In Khrushchev's own words, "We wanted to guide the progress of the Thaw so that it would stimulate only those creative forces which would contribute to the strengthening of socialism."⁴⁹ Cinema was still not fully liberated from the ideology of the Communist Party, but it was allowed to explore outside the parameters of the Stalin years' strict socialist realism. The Soviet animation industry continued to

⁴⁸ Named after Ilya Ehrenburg's 1954 novel of the same name, The Thaw refers to the period of time between 1953 and 1964 when Khrushchev implemented de-Stalinization policies in the USSR which led to a relaxation in state censorship and repression. It also led to a temporary lessening of tensions between the Soviet Union and the West, leading to the introduction of more foreign media in the USSR and participation in international festivals.

⁴⁹ Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 52.

predominately create films for children, but stories about contemporary society began to supersede fairy-tales.⁵⁰ Animated films for adults also re-emerged, though this time as predominantly satires about modern life, instead of the militant propaganda of the early 20th century.⁵¹ The aesthetics of Soviet animation also shifted. Animators turned away from the realistic, Disney-inspired style in favor of more experimental, individualized artistic directions. These new stylistic tendencies were influenced by foreign films utilizing limited animation⁵², particular those by the studio United Productions of America⁵³, or UPA, a Disney competitor whose films were defined by a concern with formal design and minimalism.⁵⁴ Characters and environments were conveyed through essential colors and forms; movements lost fluidity in favor of basic functionality. The first of these films made in this new style was *Big Troubles* (1961), which utilized a flat pictorial language inspired by children's art (fig. 10).⁵⁵ Shape-based characters, contrasting colors, and poster-like visuals would continue to dominate the aesthetics of drawn Soviet animation throughout the 1960s. While these films would vary in the complexity of their respective art directions, they shared a distinct graphic quality that made them stand apart from their Disney-adjacent predecessors.

⁵⁰ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 101.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Limited animation refers to an animation style characterized by reusing frames for partial movement, as opposed to full animation, where each frame is an individual drawing. It also often utilizes simplistic drawings, empty backgrounds, and extensive camera movement.

⁵³ Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 79-80.

⁵⁴ Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 140.

⁵⁵ Pontieri, *Soviet Animation*, 82.



Figure 10. Still from *Big Troubles* (1961).

Production of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi was far from Alexandra Snezhko-Blotskaya's first project. After studying painting at the Moscow Architectural Institute, Snezhko-Blotskaya entered the world of Soviet animation in 1934, and in 1936 began to work closely with Ivanov-Vano.⁵⁶ For years she co-directed films with him and adapted Russian stories such as the aforementioned *Snowmaiden*, folktale *Geese-Swans* (1949), and Pushkin's *The Tale of the Dead Tsarevna and Seven Bogatyrs* (1951).⁵⁷ In the 1950s she began to direct her own films, many of which were adaptations of folktales from around the world. Some of these titles include the Lithuanian fairytale *The Amber Castle* (1959), Vietnamese story *The Dragon* (1961), and the Kazakh folktale *The Wonderful Garden* (1962) (fig. 11). Siuzanna Bogdanova, Snezhko-Blotskaya's daughter, attested that her mother developed a love for fairy tales while working at a library while attending school, which

⁵⁶ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 95-96.

⁵⁷ Sergei Kapkov, *Entsiklopediya otechestvennoy mul'tiplikatsii* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2006), 595.

may have influenced her choice in projects.⁵⁸ It may also be how she became familiar with the works of Rudyard Kipling and was inspired to adapt two of his stories: *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* and *The Cat that Walked by Himself* (1968).⁵⁹



Figure 11. Still from *The Wonderful Garden* (1962).

The art director of the film, Max Solomonovich Zherebchevsky, was relatively new to Soyuzmultfilm during the production of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*. He had worked as an art director on three other films at the studio: a drawn animated adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *Wild Swans* (1962), a stop motion short of Goergey Landau's fairytale *Ku-ka-re-ku!* (1963), and *Cotton Street* (1964), an animated educational story about textile production. The graphic, illustrative style of *Wild Swans* most closely resembles *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*. In a 2012 interview

⁵⁸ Leigh and Mjolsness, *She Animates*, 95.

⁵⁹ Kapkov, *Entsiklopediya otechestvennoy*, 595.

about his career at Soyuzmultfilm, Zherebchevsky stated that *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* was the first “good” film of his career.⁶⁰

A Red Mongoose

One notable adaptation taken by the animators of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* is the choice to make the titular character red. Prior to the 1965 animated film, there were no depictions of Rikki as red in any printed editions of the story (fig. 12). Korney Chukovsky’s 1934 translation of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* was the first Russian language edition to include accompanying illustrations. These were a series of black and white ink drawings by Valentin Ivanovich Kurdov, which would go on to be reproduced in each early Soviet re-publishing of the story as a standalone volume. It was only in a 1941 hardcover edition that Kurdov depicted Rikki in color, where he is shown as brown-furred. In 1956, an anthology of Kipling’s short stories titled *Skazki* was released which included new illustrations by Viktor Aronovich Duvidov. These were also black and white ink drawings and there were no new color illustrations of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*. It was not until 1970, five years after the release of the film, that there would be another Russian language Soviet edition of the book with color illustrations. Rikki being a red mongoose is a design choice unique to the 1965 animated production without precedent within the Soviet Union.

⁶⁰ Max Solomonovich Zherebchevsky, "Ya ot strakha delayu vsyakiye chudesa," interview by Maria Tereshchenko, *Peoples*, last modified September 29, 2012, accessed March 20, 2023, https://www.peoples.ru/art/painter/maks_jerebchevskiy/.



Figure 12. *Printed depictions of Rikki in Soviet editions*. From left to right: illustrations by Valentin Kurdov from the 1934 and 1941 editions of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, illustration by Viktor Duvidov from the Soviet 1956 Kipling anthology *Skazki*.

In reality, the Indian gray mongoose, the species Rikki is based off of, is a brindled grayish-brown with a slightly lighter underbelly and darker limbs. Rikki's father, the only other mongoose depicted in the film, follows this coloration, albeit in a heavily stylized way; his coat is soft brown with a cream underbelly and tail-tip (fig. 13). Contrastingly, Rikki is a bright vermillion with a golden underbelly, and darker vermillion down his legs and around his eyes. This discrepancy between the two characters and their respective resemblances to the real animal show that Rikki's design was intentionally unnatural. His red fur is a deliberate choice made to differentiate him as an individual, as opposed to red being used as simply the general color of the species within the stylization of the film.



Figure 13. *Rikki and his father*, animation still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

This is further compounded by Rikki not just being the only red mongoose, but the only red character in the entire film. All of the other characters that appear are predominantly blue or cool-toned gray in their color palettes. The only exception to this is the human mother, who is depicted wearing a traditional Indian green and orange sari. Not only does Rikki's color make him unique among his kind, but it makes him immediately stand out from the rest of the story's cast. Of course, this serves an obvious function in the film's visual storytelling by indicating his status as the main character. However, the significance of this color choice goes beyond a hierarchy of narrative importance. Rikki's red fur further highlights his role as the revolutionary leader tasked with overthrowing the tyrannical tsardom of the cobras, as well as further situating him as a young Pioneer for Soviet children to identify with.

Red has always existed as a color of great significance in Russian culture and history. The Russian word for red, *krasnyi* (красный), shares the same linguistic root as the word for beautiful, *krasivyi* (красивый). As a result, red has long been associated with beauty, goodness,

and honor; it is used prolifically in folk dress, art, and Orthodox iconography throughout Russia.⁶¹ The color's prevalence and significance became paramount during the Russian revolution. Inspired by the French Revolution of 1789-1799, revolutionary movements in Tsarist Russia adopted the red banner as the predominant symbol of their protests.⁶² Red ribbons, arm bands, flowers, and stripes affixed to clothing became the way revolutionaries and their supporters identified one another.⁶³ During the 1905 Revolution, oppositional journals would refuse to distribute issues that did not include red in their covers, because its public appeal was so great, the amount of red ink used positively correlated to the success of a journal's run.⁶⁴ The color red was central to organizing street demonstrations, and as a result, red objects became potent revolutionary symbols.⁶⁵ When the Soviet Union was established, red's importance was transformed into reverence: it was now the color of communism and Soviet state. The red banner of revolution became the national flag of the USSR, and later on for each of the fifteen individual Soviet Socialist Republics.⁶⁶ Throughout Soviet society red flags and banners were used as substitutes for the national flag, and red scarves, sashes, and stripes were worn to show allegiance to the communist party.⁶⁷ It became a symbol for the three types of Soviet unity:

- 1) The unity of all the Soviet peoples within the boundaries of the USSR.
- 2) The unity of the workers and the peasants who, under the revolutionary red banner, established the first socialist state in what had been the Russian Empire.
- 3) The brotherhood of the Soviet people with all the working people of the world under the red banner of socialism.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonickij, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 32.

⁶² Figes and Kolonickij, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁴ Oleg Minin, "The Value of the Liberated Word: The Russian Satirical Press of 1905 and the Theory of Cultural Production," *The Russian Review* 70, no. 2 (April 2011): 220.

⁶⁵ Figes and Kolonickij, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 41.

⁶⁶ Anne M. Platoff, "Soiuz and Symbolic Union: Representations of Unity in Soviet State Symbols," *Flagmaster*, no. 160 (Summer 2020): 38.

⁶⁷ Platoff, "Soiuz and Symbolic Union," 38.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

Even without an accompanying hammer and sickle, or five-pointed star, the color red would have signaled an instant, patriotic response.⁶⁹

Bearing these facts in mind, the choice to make Rikki's fur red within the context of the story's plot, as well as within the context of the Soviet Union, cannot be overlooked. Rikki's arrival in the garden upsets the status-quo; he is the first of the garden animals to not only question the cobras' rule but to challenge it openly. The red stripe down his back sets him apart from the melancholic blues and grays of his fellow animals, who are moved by his bravery and valor. With his long, lithe body and acrobatic movements, Rikki resembles a red banner as he races through the garden, his coat proudly standing out against the yellows, blues, and greens of his environment. He formulates a plan to eradicate the cobras from the garden once and for all then rallies the others to help him. They do so, despite knowing that they are risking their lives, because they believe in his cause. With their help, Rikki overthrows the cobras, destroys their bloodline, and everyone in the garden can now live peacefully in paradise. The red mongoose successfully leads a revolution to liberate the garden from its royal oppressors.

⁶⁹ Platoff, "Soiuz and Symbolic Union," 38.



Figure 14.1. *Rikki kills Nag*. Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).



Figure 14.2. *Rikki's final fight against Nagaina*. Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

Rikki's coloration also adds additional layers of visual and symbolic drama during his fights with the cobra tsar and tsarina, Nag and Nagaina. In both scenes where Rikki confronts each cobra for the last time, the surrounding environments are blue and gray (fig. 14.1-14.2). The black, blue, and gray cobras blend into the backgrounds, whereas the red Rikki immediately stands out. Their color contrast further highlights the dramatic struggle between the two forces: the Revolution and the monarchy. Contrasting a red figure representing the Revolution, communism, or the USSR against dull monochromatic figures representing the monarchy, capitalism, or other enemies of the Soviet state was commonplace in Soviet propaganda throughout the existence of the USSR (fig. 15). The color language of Rikki and the cobras invokes this visual rhetoric which Soviet citizens would have been well familiar with.



Figure 15. "October 1917 - October 1920. Long live the Worldwide Red October!" Soviet poster marking the anniversary of the October Revolution. Dmitrii Moor. 1920-1921.



Figure 16. “A Pioneer is friends with children from all countries of the world.” Soviet postcard depicting a multi-ethnic group of Pioneers. Illustrated by Natalia Valentinovna. 1964.

In addition to marking him as a revolutionary, Rikki’s red fur, in combination with his young age, further delineates him as a Pioneer. As discussed previously red scarves were used as symbols of loyalty to the communist party and to the Soviet Union, and it was for these reasons that a red kerchief was included as part of the required Pioneer uniform as an ultimate signifier of allegiance (fig. 16).⁷⁰ The red stripe down Rikki’s back is reminiscent of these scarves. As Rikki moves throughout the story doing good deeds and rallying his community, his own red ‘kerchief’ marks his dedication to following the Pioneer’s oath as detailed in the second chapter. At times Rikki’s body even becomes a kerchief in itself. As he plays with Teddy, the son of the human family that rescues him, Rikki’s body and tail repeatedly curl around the boy’s neck,

⁷⁰ Elizabeth White, *A Modern History of Russian Childhood: From the Late Imperial Period to the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 69.

evoking a popular Soviet trend of depicting foreign children with Pioneer kerchiefs (fig. 17).⁷¹ This friendship also creates an additional layer to Rikki's visual coding as a Pioneer character due to another important adaptation made by this animation; changing Teddy from being a white English boy in Kipling's original English text, to being Indian.



Figure 17. *Rikki befriends Teddy*. Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

The significance of race will be further elaborated on in the next section of this chapter, but in the context of Rikki's Pioneerhood, it highlights the second Pioneer Law⁷² at the time of the film's release: *A Pioneer is friends with children from all countries of the world*.⁷³ The political aspirations of Krushchev's Thaw led to a rise in internationalist sentiment throughout

⁷¹ Evgeny Steiner, *Stories for Little Comrades: Revolutionary Artists and the Making of Early Soviet Children's Books*, trans. Jane Ann Miller (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 105.

⁷² The Pioneer Laws, or Rules of the Young Pioneers, refers to the codes of conduct to which members were expected to follow; they also served as a mission statement for the organization. These laws were continuously revised over the years and reflected the various political climates of the USSR.

⁷³ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.* (New York: Pocket Books, 1973), 43.

the USSR towards both other socialist nations, as well as the capitalist West. This extended to the Pioneer movement, which started to become increasingly international in its participation in festivals, Pioneer representatives participating in events with child ambassadors from other countries, and engaging with officially politically approved topics such as the peace movement or international children's welfare.⁷⁴ By depicting Teddy as Indian, his character becomes visually identifiable as non-Soviet to those watching the cartoon. As an anthropomorphic animal Rikki is able to serve as a race-neutral character for Soviet children to identify with, which was important as the Soviet Union was a multicultural, multi-ethnic empire. It is the red color of Rikki's fur that gives him his Soviet identity, and therefore enables his friendship with Teddy to become representative of the Pioneers' comradery with the children of the world.

Representing the Colonized

In an essay dissecting the history of Kipling's popularity in Ukraine, Yulia Dzhugastryanka notes that in written works set against the background of imperialism, the USSR "maintained a policy of illustrating the books in close accord to the 'culture of colonized peoples'."⁷⁵ This policy is most explicitly demonstrated in Soyuzmultfilm's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* by choosing to change the family that adopts Rikki from white English settlers in India, as portrayed in the original English text, to a local Indian family (fig. 18). These changes are unique to this animation. Similarly to how Rikki's red fur had no precedent in USSR publications before the production of this film, neither did the portrayal of the family as Indian. In fact, they were not portrayed in any illustrations from Chukovsky's editions of the story released before 1965—Kurdiv and Duvidov only drew pictures of the animal characters. To the same degree that

⁷⁴ Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 556.

⁷⁵ Yulia Dzhugastryanska, "How Children's Books by Rudyard Kipling Became Ukrainian Best-sellers," *The Kipling Journal* 89 (December 2015): 32.

Chukovsky omitted the family's race from his "canonical" Russian translation, so did its illustrators. It is also important to note that these changes are completely visual, there are no alterations to the dialogue of the characters. Although this change may appear to be superficial upon first glance, it is crucial to understanding how the works of Kipling could survive under the Soviet regime. Soyuzmultfilm's artists took full advantage of what Chukovsky left unsaid in order to create a subversive representation. By changing the race of the human characters, British imperialism is removed from the story altogether, therefore imbuing the film with anti-colonist qualities.



Figure 18. *The family as they appear in the film.* Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

As discussed in the previous chapter, in Kipling's original English text the family that cares for Rikki is an English family living in a cantonment in Sugauli, India. In Soyuzmultfilm's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, these aspects are completely removed from the story in both its script, as

previously examined, but also in its visuality. The most immediate of these is removing England's occupation from the narrative by omitting it from the setting. As there is no narrator in the film, and the characters only discuss the garden and the house as locations, the setting is established entirely through its visuals. India is immediately established as the setting of the film in its opening shot, where a butterfly flits along a series of sculptures at a Hindu temple (fig. 19.1). Moments later a storm rolls in, lighting flashes across a statue of a deity, and Rikki and his father dash up the steps, revealing more of the temple. (fig. 19.2). By utilizing iconic Indian imagery and architecture in its opening shots, the film decolonizes Kipling's opening line: "This is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought single-handed through the bath-rooms of the big bungalow in Segowlee cantonment."⁷⁶ Soyuzmultfilm's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* takes place in *India*, not the British Empire's "Segowlee cantonment." In addition to indicating where the story is set, these sculptures also reintroduces Hinduism into the narrative, albeit only in visual references. The political conditions of the Thaw allowed for such allusions; they were simply not possible during the militantly atheist Stalinist era in which Chukovsky wrote his translation, and consequently had to remove Kipling's mentions of Hinduism.⁷⁷ It was also not uncommon for Thaw-era book illustrations to expand on themes that were otherwise censored in the text.⁷⁸ These backgrounds are another manifestation of that same principle.

⁷⁶ Rudyard Kipling, "Rikk-Tikki-Tavi," in *The Jungle Book* (Middlesex: Viking Kestrel, 1987), 109.

⁷⁷ Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" trans. Chukovsky, 112.

⁷⁸ Elena Goodwin, *Translating England into Russian: The Politics of Children's Literature in the Soviet Union and Modern Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 103.



Figure 19.1. *A relief depicting a Hindu deity. Still from Rikki-Tikki-Tavi (1965).*



Figure 19.2. *A storm brews over the temple. Still from Rikki-Tikki-Tavi (1965).*

This re-centering of India in the story's narrative is why the family's race is changed. As discussed in the previous chapter, in Kipling's original text they are explicitly described as being white, and while it is not stated directly, it is implied that the father works for the British military or government.⁷⁹ As white English occupants they are agents of the British imperialism which the Soviet Union so vehemently abhorred, and are therefore unsuited to be sympathetic figures in a Soviet children's film. However, as Indians, they represent the colonized which the Soviet Union declared to uplift. This sentiment is also extended to the family's home. Rather than an invasive English bungalow, it is portrayed as modest space furnished with Indian objects and decorative motifs (fig. 20.1-20.2). By choosing to represent them as being a civilian Indian family, the film wordlessly subverts the power dynamic that Kipling glorifies in his work.



Figure 20.1. *Rikki plays in the family home.* Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

⁷⁹ Kipling, "Rikk-Tikki-Tavi," 112.



Figure 20.2. *Rikki lays in wait behind a basket.* Still from *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965).

In centering India and Indian in the animated narrative, Soyuzmultfilm's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* is not only a film embodying Soviet anti-colonialism and anti-Western imperialism sentiment, but one that represents contemporary Soviet engagement with a post-colonial India. During the late 1950s the Soviet Union doubled-down on fostering relations with developing countries in the global south through sponsoring anti-imperialist, anti-colonial "national liberation movements" and "national democratic states", on the condition that they were a means to building socialism.⁸⁰ Despite India and the USSR not sharing the same values, they had a mutual interest in expanding their influences over a historically Western-dominated international stage, as well as amassing respect from abroad.⁸¹ This led to the establishment of a cordial relationship

⁸⁰ Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 520.

⁸¹ Vojtech Mastny, "The Soviet Union's Partnership with India," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 3 (2010): 53.

between the two nations in 1955, with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visiting the Soviet Union, and Khrushchev reciprocating later that year (fig. 21).⁸² From there the USSR began to finance the construction of important industrial infrastructure in India such as steel works and India purchased mass amounts of military weapons and equipment from the USSR.⁸³ When conflicts broke out on the Indian-Chinese border in 1959, and then the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the Soviet Union remained neutral, though it continued to offer India generous amounts of financial aid and weapons deals.⁸⁴ By the 1960s the two nations were brought even closer by their mutually poor relations with the PRC⁸⁵, and when war broke out between India and Pakistan in 1965, the Soviet Union successfully brokered a rapprochement.⁸⁶ By electing to depict Indians as an autonomous people, rather than representing a painful, recent imperial past as portrayed in Kipling's original story, the state-owned Soyuzmultfilm studio reflects the Soviet Union's attitudes regarding foreign policy towards its new ally, India.

⁸² Mastny, "The Soviet Union," 54.

⁸³ Hosking, *Russia and the Russians*, 520.

⁸⁴ Mastny, "The Soviet Union," 57.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 63,

⁸⁶ Robert H. Donaldson, "India: The Soviet Stake in Stability," *Asian Survey* 12, no. 6 (1972): 475-76



Fig. 21. "Indians and Russians are brothers!" Soviet poster illustrating Indian-Soviet partnership. 1956.

It also bears mentioning that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, there was a Russian fervor surrounding India, particularly Indian cinema. This can be credited to the 1954 Indian film festival held in Moscow, where Bollywood films such as *Awaara* (1951) were met with popular success.⁸⁷ The simplistic, melodramatic plots and individualistic characters of these Indian movies were enthusiastically received by a nation subjected to the cold, pompous films of the Stalinist era.⁸⁸ They also provided their Russian viewers with a means of escape from the realities of daily life. Part of this escapist appeal is in no doubt attributable to exoticism. Media was the only way most Soviet citizens were able to experience foreign lands; India's tropical landscapes and colorful folk dress particularly charmed Russian audiences.⁸⁹ Such sentiments are exemplified in this fan letter from an anonymous citizen to their local theater:

Essentially, beauty can be seen only in Indian films. Life is boring, gray and sordid, but in Indian films (which are incomparable with any other), there is so much beauty, music and love... You see it and your heart rejoices. Everything is beautiful; there is so much beauty that you do not want to leave the cinema, especially when you think of what awaits you outside.⁹⁰

This demand for Indian cinema was not only met by the continued importation of Bollywood films into the USSR, but by domestic film production. Soyuzmultfilm began to create their own adaptations of Indian fairy tales such as *The Golden Antelope* (1954), directed by Lev Atamanov (fig. 22.1-22.2). Soviet-based productions such as *The Golden Antelope* typically had to rely on media representations of India as their reference material, as animators were rarely granted the exit visas required to travel outside of the USSR.⁹¹ This limitation placed on filmmakers' abilities to authentically portray India did not go unacknowledged, but the goodness of their intentions superseded any concern regarding the fidelity of their representations. A Soviet critic

⁸⁷ Alexander Lipkov, "India's Bollywood in Russia." Translated by Thomas J. Mathew. *India International Centre Quarterly* 21, no. 2/3 (1994): 186.

⁸⁸ Lipkov, "India's Bollywood," 186.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Katz, *Drawing the Iron*, 14-16.

introducing *The Golden Antelope* promised that even if “[the] Indian viewer notices any mistakes,” within the film, they will nonetheless be able to understand “the feeling of love and respect the people of the Soviet Union feel for the people of India.”⁹² Despite being adapted from Kipling rather than an Indian story, Soyuzmultfilm’s *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* is a part of this same Soviet-Indian genre characterized by the transnational, postcolonial consciousness of Soviet politics combining with the exoticizing desire of the Russian public.



Figure 22.1. Still from *The Golden Antelope* (1954).

⁹² Katz, *Drawing the Iron*, 16.



Figure 22.2. Still from *The Golden Antelope* (1954).

Conclusion

The adaptations made in Chukovsky's translation made it possible for *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* to enter the USSR, and changes to the plot structure in writing the script subverted the text, but it was the visual adaptations based on what was present and what was omitted that finally drew out the latent power of the Soviet adaptation process. Through the medium of animation, Soyuzmultfilm's 1965 short *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* completed the story's thirty-year transformation from Kipling's fable of nostalgic imperialism to a truly Soviet tale of child heroism in an anti-colonialist world.

Conclusion

After all this dissection and cross-examination of Rudyard Kipling's work, it is easy to lose sight of the reasons why his work struck such a chord with Russian readers in the first place. Despite the jingoistic fervor that often seeped into Kipling's verse and prose, the heroes of his stories shared many traits with the heroes of Soviet literature. More often than not they are ordinary figures from ordinary circumstances; what makes them heroic is their honor and conviction to a higher cause. Perhaps some of the best ways to describe them can be borrowed from the Pioneer Laws: the Kipling hero is honest and truthful (his words are like granite); the Kipling hero is healthy, robust, and never falls in spirit; the Kipling hero strives for knowledge; the Kipling hero carries out his duties quickly and accurately.¹ Chukovsky and Soyuzmultfilm did not need to create a protagonist out of nothing, Kipling had already provided a hero suitable for Soviet audiences in *Rikki-tikki*.

That being said, a translated *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* could not exist in the Soviet Union without some compromise to the fidelity of Kipling's narrative. The story satisfied the aesthetic, educational, and moral criteria established by Glavlit for foreign children's literature to be imported into the Soviet Union, but, left unchanged it would have not met political standards. The allusions to the British occupation of India were simply too overt, and thus would go against the state's proclaimed anti-imperialist position. As a result, Kornei Chukovsky had to omit some lines of Kipling's text in his Russian language translation in order to erase the British empire from the narrative. In order to emphasize the USSR's opposition to Western empire, Chukovsky shifted the imperialist subtext that originally imbued the protagonists of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* onto the

¹ Elizabeth White, *A Modern History of Russian Childhood: From the Late Imperial Period to the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 69.

villains of the story, the cobras. This was accomplished not by making any dramatic changes to the narrative, but through the subtle nuance of word choice. In the end, Chukovsky's 1934 translation of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* was a faithful, albeit slightly censored, version of Kipling compliant with the Soviet state's requirements. Thirty years later, Soyuzmultfilm released its own adaptation of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* with a script based upon Chukovsky's version of the text. While the essential plot remained the same, there were two striking alterations: the decision to depict Rikki as a child character, and re-centering the colonized by portraying the family as Indian. This was accomplished through the film expanding upon Chukovsky's additions and subtractions by means of making their own in its narrative structure, character dialogue, and the artistic direction of its visuals. This culminated in the creation of a new, Soviet retelling of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* that sought to subvert Kipling's original story. It promoted the transnational, postcolonial politics characteristic of contemporary Soviet policies, while providing a Pioneer-coded protagonist Soviet children could relate to.

Whether or not they succeeded at imparting these messages onto Soviet children is something that is difficult to gauge. *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1965) was created at a specific moment in time for a specific audience. Although an educated guess can be made, I am limited simply by virtue of only being able to encounter both Chukovsky's translation and Soyuzmultfilm's adaptation as an American adult in the modern age. No matter how many books I read or academic discourse I consume, I can never experience *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* in same way a Soviet child did as Krushchev's Thaw gave way to Brezhnev's Stagnation. I do believe that it would be naive to claim that children did not internalize any state ideology, whether it be explicit or subliminal, present in the film; it is impossible for any art, especially media produced by a nation state, to be truly apolitical entertainment. However, this does not mean that it did not impart any

alternative messages. Just as Soyuzmultfilm deviated from Kipling's original intentions, their audience may have left *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* with sentiments other than those it aimed to instill.

Perhaps revisiting Aleksandr Shaginyan's reflections on Kipling's significance to him can shed some light on what these alternative meanings may have been:

The whole of Soviet literature, with which our poor heads were stuffed during our student years, tried to convince the reader that he was only a tiny cog in a vast machine. Outside the group, the collective, he was nothing. It cultivated the herd instinct.

Kipling's works, particularly his poetry, proclaimed exactly the opposite, and said that everyone was an individual: a person.²

As previously discussed, the aim of the pioneer-hero genre was to make valorous deeds ordinary within Soviet society; if everyone is a hero, then no one will be. However, there lies a discrepancy in the execution of these stories. The narrative relies on the pioneer-hero being exceptional from the rest of the characters. When nobody else is brave enough, clever enough, or dedicated enough to face the challenge at hand, the pioneer-hero rises to the occasion. While they may speak humbly of themselves, claiming that they only did what any good Soviet would do, it is their refusal to stay in line that makes them who they are. A child may have walked away from watching *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* thinking not of the evil of monarchies or postcolonial politics, but instead desiring to be their own red-furred mongoose that will stand up for others when no one else will.

There is much more left to say in this conversation. While I have examined the anti-imperialist intentions of Soyuzmultfilm's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, I have yet to fully interrogate if adaptations such as this one had any tangible, positive effects on developing truly anti-imperialist politics. After all, the Soviet Union was one of the largest empires in the world; it continued to ruthlessly annex other nations and expand past the territory inherited from the behemoth Russian

² Aleksandr Shaginyan, "Kipling in the Soviet Union," translated by Thomas Beattie, *The Kipling Journal* 65 (June 1991): 33.

Empire. There are many parallels to be drawn between the British Raj and the Soviet Union's communist colonization of Central Asia. Could any media produced by the Soviet state truly be described as anti-imperialist? It could be the case that such stories are actually enabling imperialism by deflecting criticism from the Soviet state onto its political enemies, much in the same spirit as the whataboutisms fueling the Russian propaganda machine in its ongoing war of conquest against Ukraine. If we aspire to continue the process of decolonization in the fields of both Russian & Eurasian Studies and Art History, it is crucial to move beyond the intentions of artists and examine works within their greater historical and geopolitical contexts.

Media is not anchored to the year it was created in. The influence of animated films endures for as long as children continue to grow up and pass them down to their own children. This is especially pertinent in the case of animations based upon written works; animation can extend the memory of a story, but the memory of the animation more often than not supersedes the original within the cultural consciousness. In concluding this project, I propose that no singular method can be applied in order to fully comprehend Soviet adaptive animation. It requires an interdisciplinary understanding of English literature, Russian literature, comparative translation, geopolitics, historical contexts, art history, and an understanding of animation's technicalities to even approach understanding the genre's origins, properties, and implications. Of course, there is even more to be said regarding the roles of music, sound design, photography, cinematography, and acting in the adaptation process. An art form as collaborative as animation deserves an equally collective approach in its scholarship.

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