

CATERINA BALISTRERI BONSAVER ORCID: 0000-0003-2046-5166  
Independent Researcher, UK

## Pedagogical Commitment in Time of Self-doubting: G. Oster's *Bad Advice* and Children's Literature as Adults' Carnival

**Abstract:** *Bad Advice* by Grigorii Oster is a hugely popular children's series offering playful, topsy-turvy advice, and was first published in Russia in 1990 – a time of enormous social and cultural change. At the core of my investigation is the way in which this series expresses a specific understanding of adults as bearers of pedagogical and intellectual agency in post-perestroika Russia. Between the early 1980s and the early 1990s, through debates on journals and newspapers, novels and films, Russian culture exposed false values, violence and authoritarianism as features that were profoundly rooted in Soviet society. This, however, ended up in a blind alley for those who claimed a moral and intellectual leading role, because adults were described as representatives of that violent society and able to affect younger generations. *Bad Advice* managed to overcome that blind alley by staging a carnival in which the narrative voice is both a member of the intelligentsia endowed with moral authority, and the legitimate provider of a new, non-conformist pedagogy. It eventually reaffirmed the old theme of the ubiquitousness of violence, delegitimizing the narrative voice's pedagogical claims and closing its carnival, before opening a new one, in a long series of collections of advice.

**Keywords:** Adults' self-representation, playfulness in children's literature, post-perestroika Russia, underground humor, carnival theory, holy fool

### INTRODUCTION

Between the late 1980s and the 1990s, in that crucial time that saw the collapse of the Soviet Union, playfulness became a prominent feature in Russian children's literature and magazines. Many children's texts presented a mixture of humor, parody, fantasy and absurdist elements. Grigorii Oster's *Bad Advice*, a collection of verses containing humorous advice for children, is the most popular outcome of that wave, having sold millions of copies in Russia. Maria Poriadina has stated that Grigorii Oster occupies one third of the Russian "children's literature-oriented reading consciousness", and that this is especially due to *Bad Advice* (Poriadina, 2004). Scholars of Russian children's literature

and culture have underlined the pedagogical value of playfulness in the Russian post-perestroika and later post-Soviet context: humorous inversions, often bordering on nonsense and absurd, were a way of setting children and children's literature free from the imposition of false values and from the dominance of the collective over the individual in Soviet culture (Korf, 2006; Mäeots, 1997; Rudova, 2008; Arzamastseva and Nikolaeva, 2009: 469; 471–473). Ol'ga Korf underlines the fact that these children's texts directed their educative function at adults as well. She points out that, in the 1990s, children's writers used humor to invite "parents to go back to their children, helping them manage the troubles and adversities which were destroying human personalities" (Korf, 2006). The "troubles and adversities" in which these authors wrote their playful children's texts deserve a broader investigation, as this may cast new light on their texts – and *Bad Advice* in particular – as the site for adults' self-representation as bearers of pedagogical agency in post-perestroika Russia.

#### THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The tone of Poriadina's statement is echoed by multiple documents expressing anxiety, and in some cases sheer desperation, regarding both the failure of the country as a social and political system, and a catastrophic economic crisis (Waters, 1992: 129–130; Alexievich, 2016). During this time of rapid and challenging socio-historical transformations, individuals were officially being given new pedagogical responsibilities as parents and educators thanks to Gorbachev's reforms. In Catriona Kelly's words, throughout the Soviet epoch, "so far as the authorities were concerned, [parents'] principal role continued to be as recipients of advice about how to bring their children up" in line with common standards and guidelines (Kelly, 2007: 413). In the private sphere parents' approaches could differ from what was recommended in a number of ways (Kelly, 2007: 376–386). Furthermore, there were shifts in the understanding of the role of parents as providers of care and upbringing and of family as the ideal environment for the development of small children (Kelly, 2007: 415). Messages from official sources could vary, and sometimes contrast with each other (Kelly, 2007: 381–382)<sup>1</sup>. However contradictory, these messages and practices had at their heart an emphasis on social responsibility and collective values (Kelly, 2007: 411; 416). "Parents", Susan E. Reid maintains, writing on the 1960s, "could not be entirely entrusted with their children's upbringing [...] for some continued to inculcate patriarchal values. Moreover, no child should remain outside a well-organized collective: only within the collective could the individual fully develop" (Reid, 2002: 144). According to Amy C. Butler and Ludmilla G. Kuraeva, the new, individual respon-

<sup>1</sup> Kelly observes: "The prevalence of 'spoiling', or the persistence of alternative gender values, was attributable less to a conscious desire to subvert, or to deviate from, official dictates, than to contradictory messages in these dictates themselves, and to the pressure of Soviet everyday life" (Kelly, 2007: 382).

sibilities concerning children's upbringing and education were not introduced in response to popular demand, and rather represented the fruit of international pressure (Butler and Kuraeva, 2001: 219). Crucially for a debate around Russian children's literature of the time, adults were questioning their own capacity to act as adequate providers of care and upbringing. In 1990, the journal *Detskaia Literatura* (*Children's Literature*) opened a debate significantly titled *Children: Anxieties and hopes*. Here an intellectual of the time, Andrei Bystritskii, defined the whole of perestroika as a matter of *vospitanie*, of upbringing. In his words, "all the debates, conflicts and discussions around [perestroika's] underlying reasons contain this question" (Bystritskii, 1990: 3). Bystritskii points out: "the trouble lies [...] in the fact that we have very unclear ideas about who we are and what our lives will be like in the future" (Bystritskii, 1990: 4). In 1991, a highly respected children's surgeon, Stanislav Ia. Doletskii, joined in the debate on abused and abandoned Soviet children by stating on *Pravda* that children were victims of abuse because their parents, in turn, had been raised in an authoritarian system, characterized by propaganda and oppression (Doletskii, 1991). Adults were here expressing the perception of being victims themselves and, at the same time, the instruments of a system that had corrupted the whole society (Akimov, 1991; Radvovich, 1990). Upbringing could therefore be perceived as something potentially dangerous, even an act of violence *per se* (Gordeeva, 1990).

Russia was not new to anxieties towards the younger generations, and towards adults as providers of care and upbringing. The 1981 children's novel by Vladimir Zheleznikov, *Scarecrow*, and the 1983 film by Roland Bykov based on it, can be seen as an expression of an existential labyrinth involving both adults and children, and a desperate cry of "what has to be done?" addressed to the whole Soviet society. In the same period in which *Scarecrow* was released, mainstream culture saw the rise of the phenomenon known as *chernukha*: a form of "pessimistic neo-naturalism and muckraking" (Borenstein, 2003: 243) resulting in plays, novels, and investigative reporting. In literature and film, it referred to "the naturalistic depiction of and obsession with bodily functions, sexuality, and often sadistic violence, usually at the expense of more traditional Russian themes, such as emotion and compassion" (Borenstein, 2004: 242). Typically, these films had young protagonists with no values. Eliot Borenstein highlights that *chernukha* was motivated by social, and especially pedagogical, concerns, and that it was rooted in the idea of the social function of art. However, *chernukha* was overly negative, and eventually ended up in a blind alley for the adult's pedagogical agency. The ultimate truth that these authors tried to convey with their moral crusade consisted of the ubiquitousness of violence, and the idea that adults had infected young generations (Borenstein, 2008: 17)<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> See also Zorin, 1992: 202, in which it is stated that these writers and filmmakers wanted to heal the country through their works. In his discussion of *chernukha*, Borenstein draws on Zorin's essay. Birgit Beumers and Mark Lipovetsky support this analysis of *chernukha* (Beumers and Lipovetsky, 2009: 37).

When the reforms regarding family rights in the upbringing of children took place, some Soviet, and then Russian, children's writers and intellectuals showed a high level of commitment towards childhood and adults' pedagogical role. For example, the reintroduction of the foster care system was campaigned for by children's author Albert Likhanov through the *Sovetskii Detskii Fond Imeni V. I. Lenina* (V. I. Lenin Soviet Children's Foundation) in 1987. This was part of a larger stance in which, with perestroika, intellectuals felt that the time had arrived for them to take a more active role as moral guides of society. As Steven Lovell remarks, they did not want to be any longer "the passive, if respected, transmitters of cultural values", but finally part and parcel of the reforming process, "as the authorities' equal partners" (Lovell, 2000: 75). Nonetheless, they soon lost the charisma they formerly enjoyed, as did literature itself. In 1990 Aleksandr Genis published an article titled "A view from a blind alley". In it, the author addressed the question of the Russian literary intelligentsia's dismay after perestroika, maintaining that the loss of a common, general truth to support made intellectuals paradoxically incapable of dealing with the freedom of speech they had finally obtained (Genis, 1990. See also Gudkov and Dubin, 1993; Gudkov and Dubin, 1993b; Dubin, 1993: 304–311; Clark, 1993).

It is in this climate, in which the general structures of trust which sustained Soviet society were collapsing (Hosking, 2009, 2005, 2004), including the traditional prestige and ethical authority of intellectuals and of the written word, that some children's texts fostered a pedagogical practice based on humor and funny inversions. Writing for children inspired by a pedagogical vocation therefore implied embarking on a defense of literature and of intellectuals as valid sources of moral guidance, which acquired the features of a quest for truth and for the possibility of advocating it.

#### MOCKING DIDACTICISM AND SOVIET DISCOURSE

The pedagogical, albeit non-conformist, inspiration behind *Bad Advice* was clear since the appearance of these verses in the first issue of the children's magazine *Tramvai* in 1990<sup>3</sup>. These were accompanied by a short introductory text:

Scholars have recently discovered, with some surprise, that there exist disobedient children who do everything upside-down. They are given useful advice, such as 'Wash yourselves in the mornings', and they stop washing themselves. They are told: 'Greet one another', and they start not to greet anyone. Scholars established that these children should not be given useful advice, but, rather, bad advice. They will do the opposite of what they are told, which will turn up to be the right thing! Here are some pieces of advice for disobedient children. Obedient children must not read them (Oster, 1990: 10).

<sup>3</sup> The first poem later published in one of the collections of *Bad Advice* appeared in the journal *Kolobok* as early as in 1983, and was titled *The Brave Cook*. Grigorij Oster tells about this himself in Oster, 2007.

It was the epitome of the topsy-turvy children's literature of the post-perestroika period, moving away from didactic tones and encouraging a creative, individual response in the young reader. The key to understanding these short verses was clear: they worked as upside down advice, in which the sense is supposed to be the opposite of what is stated, such as in the following example:

When you become an elderly person,  
You'd better walk.  
Don't take the tram – all the same  
You will have to stand there.  
Today there are still a couple of idiots  
Who will give you their seats,  
But in those distant times  
There will be no one like that left (Oster, 1990: 10).

In the same year, *Bad Advice* was published as a book: *Bad Advice: A Book for Disobedient Children and for their Parents*, with illustrations by Aleksandr Martynov, Vladimir Burkin and V. Dun'ko. As we learn from the back cover, the book was financially supported by Grigorii Oster, and part of the income was devolved to the V. I. Children's Fund campaigned for by Albert Likhanov. Through the new subtitle, *Bad Advice* explicitly included adults as its audience and introduced itself as a new pedagogical model that replaced an old and unfruitful understanding of the educative process.

In 1991, a new edition of *Bad Advice* was published with illustrations by A. Semenev. However, the series is especially associated with the name of Andrei Martynov. He is particularly known for the illustrations of *Bad Advice*, *Bad Advice 2* and *3*, which were published between 1994 and 2001 and then gathered in *All Bad Advice* in 2004. My analysis of *Bad Advice* will especially focus on these three books because, as I will argue, they form a coherent whole, and give us the possibility of discussing *Bad Advice* as a work with its own internal structure in which a specific discourse on adulthood can be detected.

*Bad Advice* (which from now on I will refer to as *Bad Advice 1*, so as to make it clear that I refer to the edition illustrated by Martynov in 1994), opened with an introductory note which was almost identical to the one that appeared in the previous versions. However, *Bad Advice 1* presented a novelty, and this was a final section entitled *The Book of the Tasty and Healthy Food of the Ogre*. It offered a collection of recipes for ogres, who, as is well known, eat children. The recipes varied from "Stupid Child with Dumplings"; "Sour Children Soup", or "Curious Little Girls with Soft Rolls". It was a parody of *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*, first published in 1939 and reprinted several times, especially in the 1950s. This book promoted the most common recipes and food habits of the Soviet people. As Gian Piero Piretto explains, each edition linked the theme of food to Soviet happiness, and soon became the object of unofficial hilarity (Piretto, 2009: 79–96). In 1958 *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* was

included in *The Book of Useful Advice*. This was an extremely popular household manual, which brought together books with advice about the most disparate fields of everyday life, from the care of an orchard to the application of makeup (Kelly, 2001: 312–93). This too, like all advice literature, became the object of unofficial mockery among young people and the creative intelligentsia until the early 1990s, as expressed, for example, by *anekdoty*, the Soviet jokes (Kelly, 2001: 360–61; Arzamastseva and Nikolaeva, 2009: 471)<sup>4</sup>. These intertextual aspects were stressed in the subsequent development of the series *Bad Advice*, and became one of its hallmarks. Indeed, mocking didacticism in *Bad Advice* went hand in hand with mocking the Soviet discourse, and the title of the series itself made fun of Soviet manuals<sup>5</sup>. Martynov's illustrations made the reference to Soviet culture even more explicit.

In the following example it is the anthem of International Socialism which is being ridiculed:

If you are going to destroy  
The whole world of violence  
And besides dream of becoming  
Everything while you are nothing  
Then follow us bravely  
Along the paved way.  
We may even move over for you (Oster, 1994).

In the spirit of internationalism, the illustration shows representatives of different nations walking towards the top of a hill where a red flag is. However, they are not aware that a ravine awaits them beyond it. On the next page, a statue of Lenin, covered in cobwebs, points towards the flag. It is important to note that in this text the narrative voice uses the pronoun 'we', adults, as opposed to 'you', the child. However, by mocking the Soviet symbols and categories the narrative voice of *Bad Advice* is not only stating his adulthood, but also his belonging to a specific group: that of the producers and consumers of Soviet underground humor, usually referred to as *steb* or *prikol*. *Steb* ridiculed Soviet discourse and its mythologies through a variety of forms. By the early 1990s, underground humor was abandoning the reference to Soviet discourse as its main object of humor (Yurchak, 2006: 275–276). In other words, by the time *Bad Advice* started being published, the Soviet discourse had already been deconstructed<sup>6</sup>. What is significant here is that, with perestroika,

<sup>4</sup> Unofficial Soviet literature in the 1960s and 1970s such as Erofeev and Dovlatov's prose often made reference to advice literature in a parodic fashion (Kelly, 2001: 362–64).

<sup>5</sup> See Maslinskii, 2010 for a structural breakdown of Oster's children's work as a parody of Soviet school textbooks and pedagogical literature.

<sup>6</sup> In his analysis of Sots-Art, Evgenyi Dobrenko underlines the fact that by 1990 Sots-Art artists were already addressing Socialist Realism both as the code of power and as an already delegitimized, already deconstructed, discourse (Dobrenko, 1990: 170).

*steb* culture had a specific meaning in people's perception, and this was especially associated with a provocative stance directed at the Soviet discourse and which was endowed with an ethical value. Underground Soviet humor was being perceived as an anti-Soviet intellectual code, the language of truth-telling (Yurchak, 2006: 4–8, 227). By referring to this form of underground humor and replicating its capacity to turn Soviet discourse upside down and expose its absurdity, the narrative voice of *Bad Advice* introduced himself as the representative of a group of intellectuals who had been able to state the truth in a time of oppression and censorship, and therefore deserved the reader's trust.

#### THE POST-PERESTROIKA POETICAL-PEDAGOGICAL FOOL

*Bad Advice 2* in 1997 opened with a new, brief introduction. To the earlier slogan: "obedient children are not allowed to read", it now added that in the case of too obedient children these pieces of bad advice would be useful anyway: "as a vaccination against stupidity" (Oster, 1997). Challenging the reader to guess the real meaning of the advice, each page of this book worked as a riddle to be solved. Johan Huizinga connects both some sort of playful advice and the riddle to the ancient tradition of the sacred riddle, in which an ultimate, sacred truth had to be guessed and understood (Huizinga, 1955: 105–118). *Bad Advice* hides truths, and encourages children to develop and trust their own intellectual skills. The upside down logic and the use of laughter in this series reveal a carnivalesque vein associated with a pedagogical attitude, which makes this collection of verses part of what Maria Lypp calls "poetical-pedagogical fools' discourse". By this expression, Lypp refers to a trend in Western European children's literature, very popular in the sixteenth century, which can be referred to as Grobian literature. Grobian constantly breaks society's rules. Laughter was, in these texts, an instrument for educational purpose, because it was easy to guess the correct behavior for one's everyday life: the opposite of what Grobian suggested. As Lypp explains, in contrast to Grobian, the eighteenth century character of Struwelpeter is punished for infringing social conventions and violating taboos, and punishments are as comical as they are extreme (Lypp, 1995: 183–189). Oster's series sites itself halfway between Grobian and Struwelpeter literature. If readers were to follow the narrative voice's initial instructions while reading the book, they would draw conclusions such as "give up your seat in the tram". In fact, a more proper interpretation seems to be the following: be aware of social norms when these stem from good sense and logic and are useful for your wellbeing, but keep alive the subversive attitude that is intrinsic to childhood. "Remain a Grobian!" suggested the sixteenth century texts, according to Lypp (Lypp, 1995: 185); "Be like this child!" *Bad Advice* appears to be saying. In Larissa Rudova's words, every single piece of advice is an "invitation to subversion" (Rudova, 2008). Nevertheless, the book shows

some features of the Struwelpeter texts. The child of *Bad Advice* is often punished for his subversive ventures. It is usually the father that performs the punishment, and this is always corporal. In other cases, the body of the child is involved in accidents that are again caused by his rebellious or simply non-conventional behavior, thus appearing as punishments. The violent consequences of the child's norm-breaking attitude are often comic. However, the reiteration of violent scenes throughout the books is such that those who read *All Bad Advice*, one poem after the other, will soon feel puzzled. Perplexity arises because, on the one hand, an adult narrative voice is inciting children to subversion; while on the other he is describing a rebellious child who is the object of punishment. We see the child tied up to a chair when he refuses to eat what he does not like, threatened with mom's rolling pin, with plasters on his backside, chased by an armed crowd, pierced by knives and scissors, or beaten and humiliated with his trousers pulled down. The list of what the child is subjected to both in the texts and the illustrations could carry on, but there is one image in the book that seems to summarize all the other representations of violence: the father's belt. It occurs obsessively throughout the three books, especially in the illustrations, where it always appears firmly held in the father's hands. Corporeal punishment was a widespread reality in Soviet Russia, especially among working class and peasant families, and it was the father who traditionally carried it out (Kelly, 2007: 388; 390). In this regard, the display of violence in the book seems to hold a message for children (*claim your rights, defend yourselves*) and their parents (*no violence against children*). However, a literary work such as *Bad Advice*, with its playful reworking of symbolic categories, suggests we can interpret its violent component as something more than just a realistic element. *Bad Advice 1, 2 and 3*, and *All Bad Advice*, appear particularly indebted to a specific form of *steb* culture called *sadistskie stishki* (sadistic verses), with their staging of violence and their almost splatter effect. They consisted of short anonymous lines full of black humor, equally popular among both adults and children, and in which the latter were either objects or agents of violence. These micro-stories were likely to produce amusement or disgust, or a mixture of the two, in the listener, as is the case in the following example:

A little girl found a grenade in the field.  
 "What is this, uncle?" with trust she appealed.  
 "Pull on the ring," he said, "you will find out."  
 For a while her bow will be flying about (Yurchak, 2006: 254–256).

The following piece of *Bad Advice* is reminiscent of the sadistic verses:

Those who have never hopped off a balcony  
 With mum's umbrella  
 Cannot for now call themselves

Shock paratroops.  
 They won't fly like birds  
 While the crowd screams alarmed,  
 They won't lie in hospital  
 With a broken arm (Oster, 1994).

The genre of sadistic verses started in adult circles in the 1970s and became popular among children in the 1980s (Lur'e, 2007: 288). In the 1990s, sadistic verses represented a meaningful part of the cultural background of those who had been students in the early 1980s and were now parents, eager to share with their children their old forms of amusement (Novitskaia, 1992: 105). According to Mikhail Lur'e, children found these verses funny because they ridiculed adult culture, or Soviet official children's poetry, characterized by a sugary tone. Adults, on the other hand, invested these verses with a broader satirical function, because they mocked and discredited the Soviet discourse, including the myth of the happy childhood, the emphasis on seriousness and sentimentalism, and an overall "pedagogical idiotism". Nonetheless, Lur'e argues that the main feature of these verses was not the attack on the Soviet, official, discourse, but their sadistic inspiration, their play with the categories of health and illness, life and death, wholeness and fragmentation of the body, which may or may not be combined with political, anti-Soviet, motives (Lur'e, 2007: 290–301).

Notably, sadistic verses stimulated in Russian people a sense of coherent identity (by bringing generations together, making them feel part of one specific circle) and, simultaneously, a split in the self, a sense of estrangement<sup>7</sup>. *Bad Advice* appears to have inherited from this form of underground culture dynamics between cultural self-identification and alienation. *Bad Advice 3* presents the reader with a last piece of advice which offers us an interesting reworking of this specific feature, and an interpretative key to the fact that violence occurs not simply because the child character fails to behave sensibly, but because he acts upon the subversive influence of the narrative voice. The text reads as follows:

Childhood is the most beautiful thing  
 Man has ever received.  
 Its light gleams through the years  
 As souls grow up.  
 Know that in every adult's heart  
 There's a special corner,  
 Where dad's old belt  
 Lies, rolled up like a cripple (Oster, 2001).

The illustration shows a trembling man in tears, looking at the white and black picture of a man with similar features, which we understand to be his father, caught in the act of beating a little boy with a belt. The boy is crying

<sup>7</sup> See also Yurchak, 2006: 255.

and his trousers have been pulled down. Next to the horrified man, an open trunk with a belt in it is visible, underlining the continuity between the picture – with the act of violence portrayed in it – and the current life of this adult. It should be noted that the belt in the trunk appears to be alive: one of its ends stands straight as if it were a snake which has just been woken up by music. The adult in tears has the facial features of Grigorii Oster. The narrative voice adopts the name of the authorial persona, and tells his readers that he is the man who has been subjected to violence and is potentially able to use violence, in turn, because of the belt he brings within himself. The belt becomes the symbol of a patronizing, oppressing power of which the adult feels a victim but also, at least potentially, a perpetrator. The uncanny effect of this last piece of advice is amplified by the fact that the book opens with a new introductory note that for the first time specifies that these vaccinations against stupidity are intended for teachers as well. Thus the circle of the interlocutors of *Bad Advice* enlarges, and involves children (both “obedient” and “disobedient”), and the main stakeholders in the educative process: parents and teachers. It is to all of them that the narrative voice makes his confession. This last poem of the book abruptly interrupts the comic flow of upside down advice, of infractions and punishments at the expense of a helplessly rebellious child. The adult narrative voice of *Bad Advice* had repeatedly encouraged the child to be a Russian Pippi Longstocking, Astrid Lindgren’s child character who lived alone, slept with her feet on the pillow, and had at her disposal plenty of gold to face her life independently. But this post-perestroika Russian child can only be a Pippi whose cheeks are all red from slaps.

#### BAD ADVICE AS THE ADULT’S CARNIVAL

My interpretation of the contradictions of *Bad Advice*, including violence, and this last poem in particular, draws on Maria Nikolajeva’s application of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of carnival to children’s literature. Nikolajeva draws attention to Bakhtin’s view of literature itself as carnival. In her words, this is “a symbolic representation of a socially liberating process, a subversive, that is, disguised, interrogation of authorities” (Nikolajeva, 2010: 10). The adult voice in a children’s book, Nikolajeva maintains, functions as the ruler of the carnival: the one who has the power to allow children to deviate from the existing order in total freedom from social restrictions – because this is the condition for the *status quo*, that is aetonnormativity, or adults’ rule as the only possible norm, to be maintained once the carnival is over (Nikolajeva, 2010: 1–11). The condition of the post-Soviet adult, who had been officially deprived of independence as a care-provider by the State for decades and was now being confronted with new individual pedagogical responsibilities during extremely challenging times, suggests we can turn upside down the Bakhtinian approach proposed by Nikolajeva. In other words, *Bad Advice* is a carnival in which the

adult's, and not the child's, aspirations and desires are temporarily fulfilled before the *status quo* is established again. The aspiration that here finds a realization lies in the pedagogical value of the series. The adult narrative voice opens the book by introducing himself as the independent promoter of a new form of upbringing, in which children of the post-perestroika period are set free from authoritarian approaches that require uncritical obedience. The adult narrative voice's claim to pedagogical agency appears to be partly grounded on his willingness to question adults' power, their presumed omniscience and infallibility. Indeed, adults' discourse and adult figures are often ridiculed throughout *Bad Advice* 1, 2 and 3. For the narrative voice of *Bad Advice* to fulfil his aspiration to being a reliable educator he has to set himself apart from the general category of adults. Adopting what Lypp termed the poetic-pedagogical fool's discourse enables him to point his finger towards adults' shortcomings without himself being included in this category, and therefore claiming the readers' trust and accomplish his carnival.

It should be noted that in *Bad Advice* the fool's discourse merges with other forms of foolishness (*durachestvo*) which are specific to Russian culture, and in particular the *iurodivyi*, or holy fool. The association of narrative strategies such as riddles, playful inversions and parody with *iurodstvo* was customary in Russia in the 1990s and earlier. As scholars such as Sergey A. Ivanov and Oliver Ready point out, these associations are often inaccurate, because they neglect the specificity of the language and the motivations of the *iurodivyi* (Ivanov, 2006: 412; Ready, 2012: 33). However, the fascination of Russian culture with the *iurodivyi* is significant *per se*, and while referring to the narrative voice of *Bad Advice* in terms of *iurodstvo* emphasis should be put on the cultural filter through which the *iurodivyi* has been transformed into a model of the Russian intellectual, which answered to a specific set of needs and values (Ready, 2012: 33–34). In Russian culture, the *iurodivyi* is associated with theatricality, implying elements of ambiguity; with truth-telling; or with suffering and Christ's passion (Ready, 2012: 36–37). Above all, the *iurodivyi* is "a model of otherworldliness" (Ready, 2012: 38). Let us see how the narrative voice of *Bad Advice* embodies *iurodstvo* but eventually finds in its very code an obstacle, which puts an end to his carnival, or, in other words, puts an end to his self-representation as a capable educator.

Both the common fool, the *shut*, and the holy fool, the *iurodivyi*, often rely on the power of laughter to communicate. Nonetheless, in Russian Orthodox culture it is only the *iurodivyi* who turns to laughter in order to transform the crowd ethically, and in this highest sense, to teach (Panchenko, 1984: 85). The last illustrated text of *Bad Advice* 3 suggests that the cultural model of reference in Oster's series is *iurodstvo*, including the *podvig* as a means of expression. The *podvig* is an ethical act whereby the would-be *iurodivyi* has the courage to acknowledge sin within himself. In this rested the meaning of the *iurodivyi*'s nudity: by confessing his sin and setting himself free from decep-

tions, he figuratively undresses. Only after undressing can the *iurodivyi* leave the space of sin and undertake the road to holiness (Kauchtschischwili, 2001: 259). In the piece of advice that concludes *Bad Advice* 3, the narrative voice appears to be performing a real *podvig*. By acknowledging the belt, he takes the sin onto his shoulders; he humiliates himself before the eyes of the crowd, and has the courage to acknowledge sin, having got rid of self-deception. In accordance with the *iurodivyi*'s code, *Bad Advice* employs the disruption of commonly shared values and overturns what has been established. Crucially, though, the narrative voice cannot make any reference to a higher order, be it a religious or political faith. The significance of this difference between the narrative voice of *Bad Advice* and the *iurodivyi* can be clarified if we take into account the fact that the *iurodivyi* enjoys a very specific kind of liminality. He is perceived as "a man from another world at the very heart of this world" (Clément, 2001: 182): he takes the sin onto his shoulders, and includes himself among the crowd that has been so far the object of his mockery, but his extraneousness is guaranteed by his representing the transcendental on earth, and the promise of the realization of this transcendental order (Clément, 2001: 181). Without this eschatological dimension, the *iurodivyi*'s actions are only *monstrous*, an abortion, as a possible etymology of his name suggests. Thus, the final piece of bad advice marks the end of the carnival: the narrative voice can no longer carry on teaching; his narrative has to stop here, and, indeed, the book ends here.

This final piece of bad advice expresses the impossibility of an ethical renewal, or at least the impossibility for the narrative voice to take part in it. There is a paradoxical element here: by including himself among those who potentially contribute to violence and oppression, the narrative voice accomplishes the *podvig* of the *iurodivyi*, and he does this through the *iurodivyi*'s shocking language. And yet, this figurative undressing turns into a declaration of pedagogical inadequacy. The *podvig*, which entails the *iurodivyi* to a didactic function, here nullifies itself. The shadow of violence and tyranny which supposedly kept on living within adults, and which had been the object of heated debates in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, reappears.

#### BAD ADVICE AND A MACROTEXT AND THE REPRODUCIBILITY OF THE CARNIVAL

In *All Bad Advice*, published in 2004, the three books illustrated by Martynov were brought together. The collection is organized coherently so as to represent a narrative in its own right, developing the theme of the adults' carnival. It opens with the three introductory notes, now entitled "Author's reflections on who can read this book". "The book of tasty and healthy food of the ogre", which concluded *Bad Advice* 1, has not been included in this new version, as if it were superfluous in the plot which *All Bad Advice* develops. Other substan-

tial changes concern the fact that the second book ended with a “Proshchal’nyi sovet” (“Farewell advice”), while now this appears at the end of the collection, after many texts drawn from *Bad Advice* 3, but immediately before the text on the belt that lies in the heart of every adult. In other words, the three books together form a coherent discourse on adulthood, a coherent carnival, with a neat macrotextual structure. Italian semiotician and literary critic Cesare Segre explains that we have a macrotext when “texts, totally or partially autonomous, [...] have been grouped together to form a more ample text [in which] the overall structure of their forces of cohesion is reinforced” (Segre, 1988: 31–32). A crucial aspect of macrotexts is their coherence, and this “must be considered in terms of progression whose later phase assimilates the earlier” (Segre, 1988: 32). The structure of *All Bad Advice*, described above, respects this progression.

*All Bad Advice* is a macrotext which states the temporary nature of the adult’s carnival, making the final text about adults as agents of tyranny its last word. And yet, other collections of *Bad Advice* followed. The playful nature of *Bad Advice* is indeed a safety net, allowing the game to start again, and thus to re-open the carnival. Today, there are so many collections of *Bad Advice* that Oster has been accused of repetitiveness (Iakovlev, 2000).

## CONCLUSIONS

The series *Bad Advice* ultimately exposes the difficulty entailed in both being on the frontline of social and cultural transformation, and therefore inside time, and yet offering oneself as someone who is extraneous to that which requires transformation, and therefore not affected by time. This was the dilemma which many Russian children’s authors of the post-perestroika period were confronted with as adults and intellectuals. *Bad Advice* tries to solve it through traditional forms of playfulness and laughter which assigned its narrative voice a liminal, albeit temporary, position: from another world at the very heart of this world.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

- Bykov, R. (Director.) (1983). *Chuchelo* [Scarecrow] [Motion picture]. Russia.
- Iakovlev, L. (ed.). (1990). *Ku-ka-re-ku: Skazki i komiksy dlia detei i vzroslykh*. Moscow: Slovo.
- Oster, G. (1990). *Vrednye sovety. Tramvai*, 1, 10–11.
- Oster, G. (1990). *Vrednye sovety: Kniga dlia neposlushnykh detei i ikh roditelei*. Moscow: Moskovskii knizhnyi dvor.
- Oster, G. (1990). *Vrednye sovety*. Moscow: Detskaia literatura.

- Oster, G. (1994). *Vrednye sovety: Kniga dlia neposlushnykh detei i ikh roditelei*. Moscow: Rosmen.
- Oster, G. (1997). *Vrednye sovety– 2: Kniga dlia neposlushnykh detei i ikh roditelei*. Moscow: Rosmen.
- Oster, G. (2001). *Vrednye sovety– 3: Kniga dlia neposlushnykh detei i ikh roditelei*. Moscow: Astrel'.
- Oster, G. (2004). *Vse vrednye sovety*. Moscow: Planeta detstva.
- Zheleznikov, V. (1981). *Chuchelo*. Moscow: Detskaia literatura.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

- Akimov, V. (1991). Nado nachinat' s sebia. *Detskaia literatura*, 2, 16–19.
- Alexeevich, S. (2016). *Second-hand Time*. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions.
- Arzamastseva, I.N., and Nikoleva, S. (2009). *Detskaia literatura*. Moscow: Akademiia.
- Beumers, B., Lipovetsky, M. (2009). *Performing Violence: Literary and Theatrical Experiments of new Russian Drama*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Borenstein, E. (2008). *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Borenstein, E. (2004). Chernukha. In: J. R. Millar (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (342–343). New York: Thomson Gale.
- Butler, A.C., Kuraeva, L.G. (2001). Russian Family Policy in Transition: Implications for Family and Professionals. *Social Service Review*, 75 (2), 195–224.
- Bystritskii, A. (1990). Zametki o vospitanii v epokhu demokratizatsii i glasnosti. *Detskaia literatura*, 9, 3–6.
- Clark, K. (1993). Not for Sale. The Russian/Soviet Intelligentsia, Prostitution, and the Paradox of Internal Colonization. *Stanford Slavic Studies*, 7, 189–205.
- Clément, O. (2001). Follia e santità. In: A. Mainardi (ed.), *Forme della santità russa: Atti dell'VIII convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa: Sezione russa* (179–93). Magnano (BI): Edizioni Qiqajon.
- Dobrenko, E. (1990). Preodoleniie ideologii: Zametki o sots-arte. *Volga*, 11, 164–84.
- Doletskii, S. Ia. (1991). Po isku detstva. *Pravda* (1 March), 3.
- Dubin, B. (1993). Zhurnal'naia kul'tura postsovetskoii epokhi. *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 4, 304–311.
- Genis, A. (1990). Vzgliad iz tupika. *Ogonek*, 52 (December), 17–19.
- Gordeeva, G. (1990). Slishkom sil'nee?...*Detskaia literatura*, 4, 8–11.
- Grigorii, O. (2007). Ia predatel' v strane vzroslykh. *Tikva*, 599 (52). Download from: <http://viknaodessa.od.ua/newspaper/news/?8200>.
- Gudkov, L., Dubin, B. (1993). Bez napriazheniia...: Zametki o kul'ture perekhodnogo perioda. *Novyi Mir*, 2, 242–255.
- Gudkov, L., Dubin, B. (1993b). Konets kharizmaticheskoi epokhi: pechat' i izmeneniia v sistemakh tsennostei obshchestva. *Svobodnaia Mysl'*, 5, 32–44.
- Hosking, G. (2004). Forms of Social Solidarity in Russia and the Soviet Union. In: I. Marková (ed.), *Trust and Democratic Transition in Post-Communist Europe* (47–62). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hosking, G. (2005). The Intelligentsia and Russia's Twentieth -century Crisis of Trust. In: F. Björling and A. Pereswetoff-Morath (ed.), *Words, Deeds and Values: The Intelligentsia in Russia and Poland during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (229–52). Lund: Lund University, Department of East and Central European Studies.
- Hosking, G. (2009). Is Russia Really Different? Reflections on Structures of Trust. *The East-West Review* (Spring Edition). Download from: <http://www.bearr.org/en/node/1512>.

- Huizinga, J. (1955). *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Development in Culture*. Boston: The Beacon Press.
- Iakovlev, L. (2000). Detskie pisateli ne khotiat byt' avtorami. *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (10 August). Download from: [https://www.ng.ru/izdat/2000-08-10/4\\_child.html](https://www.ng.ru/izdat/2000-08-10/4_child.html).
- Ivanov, S.A. (2006). *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kauchtschischwili, N. (2001). La santità laica nella letteratura russa. In: A. Mainardi (ed.), *Forme della santità russa: Attidell'VIII convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa: Sezione russa* (255–277). Magnano (BI): Edizioni Qiqajon.
- Kelly, C. (2001). *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kelly, C. (2007). *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia 1890–1991*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Korf, O. (2006). Iumor epokhi vseobshchei depressii. *Ostrovskrovishch*, 06, supplement to *Biblioteka v shkole*, 14 (170), 16–31. Download from: <http://lib.1september.ru/2006/14/3.htm>.
- Lovell, S. (2000). *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press LTD.
- Lur'e, M. (2007). Sadistskii stishok v kontekste gorodskoi fol'klornoj traditsii: Detskoe i vzrosloe. *Antropologicheskii forum*, 6, 287–309.
- Lypp, M. (1995). The Origin and Function of Laughter in Children's Literature. In: M. Nikolaeva (ed.), *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature* (183–189). Westport: Greenwood Publishing.
- Mäeots, O. (1997). Topsy-turvy World: New Trends in Modern Russian Children's Literature. In: S. L. Beckett (ed.), *Reflections of Change: Children's Literature since 1945* (171–177). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Maslinskii, K. A. (2010). Zadachniki Grigorii Ostera: Shkol'naia norma i literaturnoe otklonenie. *Detskaia literatura segodnia: Sbornik nauchnykh statei* (63–74). Ekaterinburg: UrGPU.
- Nikolajeva, M. (2010). *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Novitskaia, M. Iu. (1992). Formy ironicheskoi poezii v sovremennoi detskoj fol'klornoj traditsii. In: A.F. Belousov (ed.), *Shkol'nyi byt' i fol'klor: Uchebnyi material po russkomu fol'kloru* (100–23). Tallin: Tallinskii pedagogicheskii institut.
- Panchenko, A.M. (1984). Smekh kak zrelishche. In: A.S. Likhachev, A.M. Pachenko and N.V. Ponyrko (ed.), *Smekh v drevnei Rusi* (72–153). Leningrad: Nauka.
- Piretto, G.P. (2009). Tasty and Healthy: Soviet Happiness in One Book. In: M. Balina, E. Dobrenko (ed.), *Petrified utopia: Happiness Soviet Style* (79–96). London, New York, Delhi: Anthem Press.
- Poriadina, M. (2004). Grigorii Oster: Est' o chem razgovarivat', *Kriticheskaia massa*, 2. Download from: [http://artpragmatica.ru/km\\_content/?auid=285](http://artpragmatica.ru/km_content/?auid=285).
- Ravtovich, E. (1990). Vpered, malys, na karuseli perestroiki!. *Detskaia literatura*, 9, 7–11.
- Ready, O. (2012). The Myth of Vasilii Rozanov: The "Holy Fool" Through the Twentieth Century. *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 90 (1), (January), 33–64.
- Reid, S.E. (2002). Khrushchev's Children's Paradise: The Pioneer Palace, Moscow, 1958–1962. In: D. Crowley and S. E. Reid (ed.), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (141–179). Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Rudova, L. (2008). Invitation to a Subversion: The Playful Literature of Grigorii Oster. In: M. Balina, L. Rudova, (ed.), *Russian Children's Literature and Culture* (325–341). New York and Abingdon: Routledge.

- Segre, C. (1988). *Introduction to the Analysis of the Literary Text* (trans. J. Meddemmen). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Waters, E. (1992). "Cuckoo-Mothers" and "Apparatchiks": Glasnost' and Children's Homes. In: M. Buckley (ed.). *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (123–141). Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne and Sydney: Cambridge University Press.
- Yurchak, A. (2006). *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Zorin, A. (1992). Kruche, kruche, kruche... Istoriiia pobedy: Chernukha v kul'ture poslednykh let. *Znamia*, 10, 198–204.