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FAMILY BONDS, HUMOUR AND THE REDEFINITION OF ADULTHOOD IN *THE ADVENTURES OF DZHERIK* BY NATAL'IA NUSINOVA

This article investigates how Natal'ia Nusinova's autobiographical tale about the Soviet period, *The Adventures of Dzherik*, establishes the reliability of the narrative voice by providing a source of moral guidance for its child readers, the author being an adult and an intellectual raised in intellectual family. The importance of this should be viewed within the context of post-Soviet culture, wherein came the crisis of intellectual world and that of adults as suitable care-providers. In Nusinova's book family love functions as the centre of the production of meaning and is joined with late Soviet humour. All these fill in the voids of sense in Natasha's (the author's child self) experience of Soviet times, and make her invulnerable to the most traumatic aspects of Soviet society, of which she is nonetheless part. The narrative voice establishes her position as an adult able to guide a post-Soviet child at the end of a ritualistic plot of rebirth that unites the introduction, the single chapters and the final glossary together into a macrotext[1].

Keywords: Memoirs, Soviet childhood, post-Soviet culture, adulthood, humour, family bonds, narrative voice, macrotext.

The Adventures of Dzherik, one of the first memoirs of Soviet childhood, addressing the audience of both children and adults in Russia,[2] was released in 2006. Natal'ia Nusinova, its author, is an internationally acclaimed cinema critic and historian, and she is the daughter of famous scriptwriter Il'ia Nusinov, whose films played an important role for Nusinova's generation [Artvinska 2015, 56][3]. Description on the book cover states that this is the autobiographical tale. Indeed, as Nusinova states in her introduction, fantasy and actual memories merge together

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DOI: 10.31860/2304-5817-2021-1-19-301-322

in the recollection of the author's childhood, which took place in 1960s Moscow. This present article aims to investigate the process of defining an adulthood that takes place in this book, and which goes hand in hand with the shaping of a specific relationship that's linking the authorial voice to the adult and child readers respectively. At stake is the ideal of acceptance and mutual understanding between generations, in which adults with a Soviet background overcome the wounds of history.

"Why did you allow all this to happen?"

In the introduction, the author turns to adults and poses the question of how to explain to today's schoolchildren what *Timurovtsy* or old Bolsheviks were. Above all, she shares with her adult readers her concerns about an issue that may be seen as crucial throughout the book: what to answer when children ask: "Why did you allow all this to happen?" [Nusinova 2006, 6][4]. Thus, writing about Soviet society for an audience of children necessarily implies addressing the issue of adults' responsibilities in this society. However, this is not the starting point for self-incrimination on the part of the adult world, as happened in books such as V. Zheleznikov's *The Scarecrow* [Zheleznikov 1981]; movies such as the one based on *The Scarecrow* itself [Bykov 1984], and those that are part of the cultural phenomenon called *chernukha*; or a number of articles written in the early 1990s [see, for example, Akimov 1991; Bystritskii 1990; Doletskii 1991; Gordeeva 1990; Ravtovich 1990]. As Eliot Borenstein observes, the *chernukha* aesthetics, in its urge to expose Soviet reality and in its pedagogical impetus, ultimately expressed the perception of a cultural and pedagogical blind alley, in which the whole Soviet society was seen as hopelessly violent and brutal [Borenstein 2008, 17]. The same can be said about *Chuchelo* or the above-mentioned articles. In these works, Soviet youngsters appeared as doomed because the surrounding them adults had been raised in a violent world with no freedom of thought, and were said to be pedagogically inadequate if not harmful[5]. In the same years, the literature and the intellectual world as a whole were losing their prestige and their traditional roles as sources of moral guidance for late Soviet, and then post-Soviet, society[6].

The impact of this cultural atmosphere on post-Soviet children's literature should not go underestimated. For example, Gregorii Oster's *Bad Advice 3* [Oster 2001] concludes with a piece of advice where the adult narrative voice warns child readers against the adults, because all of them hide in a secret corner 'the father's belt, rolled up as cripple' [pages are not numbered]. The narrative voice merges with the author himself,

and Oster includes himself among the adults mentioned in the advice since the illustration of the man in tears who looks at his own child self being beaten by his father, has Oster's facial features. Likewise, in many humorous books by Artur Givargizov, starting with *On a Bike with a Wardrobe* [Givargizov 2006], adults are corrupted, avid and violent, and children are no different.

The Adventures of Dzherik and its exploration of the Soviet world can be perceived as an attempt to redefine adulthood in terms of pedagogical and intellectual reliability. This attempt takes place at a time when generational gap between those who came of age during the Soviet Union and the Russian children is considered especially wide. This is demonstrated by Aleksandra Ju. Veselova's study of schoolchildren's historical essays [Veselova 2003]. In her introduction, and also answering to the aforementioned question "Why did you allow all this to happen?", Nusinova, in turn, emphasizes a gap that separates her from the generation that took part in the revolution, by shifting to plural third person subject: "Not all of the people who 'did the revolution' and 'built communism' were bad" [6]. Nusinova quotes the 1939 French movie *The Rules of the Game* by Jean Renoir, saying that "each has his own truth". This passage allows the return to the first person plural: "These people had their truth", then the introduction goes on to say, "which was their fallacy, their *Grand Illusion*. Are we always right, on the other hand?" [6]. These words set adults free from the burden of history and the issue of personal responsibilities; the fear of suffering permanent damage having grown up in the Soviet Union and being raised by Soviet parents and grandparents; and the fear of damaging the next generation in a chain reaction. The author, being aware of addressing an educated audience, trusts in the adult readers, and establishes a relationship of solidarity with it. The book, indeed, is dedicated to "adults who understand everything". These adults, the introduction states, may not know the specific meaning of some of the Soviet terms which are mentioned in the memoir [6]. Nonetheless, the dedication suggests that they will, all the same, know how to dispel child readers' doubts when they hear of that weird bygone time. The introduction offers us another clue to understanding the process of redefining the adult world that awaits us chapter after chapter: the present book is said to be "a love story", in which two little girls — Nusinova's autobiographical self and her sister Tania — are raised by loving parents and grandparents, whose protective actions lasted "even after many people and facts of their childhood turned into a memory" [7]. The centrality of the theme of family in the narrative plays a key role in strengthening the reliability of the adult narrative

voice as a source of moral and intellectual guidance. The analysis of the family theme in *The Adventures of Dzherik* requires a discussion of the importance of it in the broader Russian political and social discourse in the 2000s.

Family values and adult agency in Russia of the 2000s

Russia in the 2000s is a society that declares its strong commitment to family values. Slogans such as "Liubov' k rodine nachinaetsia s sem'i" (Love for the country starts with the family), or "Sem'ia – odin iz shedevrov prirody" (The family is one of nature's masterpieces), were visible at almost every metro stop in Moscow until the mid-2010s, and other outdoor advertising spaces displayed similar messages. These official discourses identify adults as care-providers and the family as the mirror of the nation's cohesion and wellbeing in post-Soviet Russia. Serguei Oushakine, writing in 2004, draws attention to the fact that this rhetoric is ubiquitous in contemporary Russian society. In his view, it stems from the lack of alternative social frameworks capable of generating sets of meanings and values. "Metaphors of social and biological kinship", Oushakine writes, "have become the dominant ways of conceptualizing political, economic and cultural development" since the mid-1990s in Russia [Oushakine 2004, 10]. Other cultural analyses of post-Soviet popular culture confirm and enrich Oushakine's analysis. Scholars have demonstrated that the Soviet past is being re-conceived in personal terms, such as family history [Beumers 2004], and that themes such as the joys of family life or domestic happiness have become part of an "ideology based on comfort, warmth, and security" [Borenstein 2008, 228].

In this social context where so much emphasis is put on family values, the notions of adulthood and citizenship are associated with both the assumption of a pedagogical role within a patriarchal model, and with the transmission of traditional values [Oushakine 2004, 16]. As Oushakine observes, this notion of tradition, and the role assigned to adults as promoters of it, implicitly takes for granted the stability of culture. The idealization of kinship is therefore intertwined with discourses on the transmission of culture from one generation to another [Oushakine 2004, 47].

The adoption of a model that relies on the idea of stability of culture is problematic in Russia, where adults are confronted with a national history in which the link between two subsequent generations and the transmission of values from fathers (in the broadest sense of the word)

to children had been extremely fragmented throughout the Soviet period [Chudakova 1998]. This fragmentation also characterizes contemporary Russia. For example, the above-mentioned study conducted by Veselova in 2001 on schoolchildren's essays suggests that "the history of the recent Soviet past, the witnesses of which represent the majority of the country's inhabitants still today, appears as far from today's schoolchildren as events that occurred during the 19th or the 18th century" [Veselova 2003, 126].

Post-Soviet Russian children's authors are at the centre of these transformations involving the pedagogical role of adults and the possibility of conveying culture from one generation to another. Their involvement in these transformations is twofold — as adults themselves and, more specifically, as intellectuals. When at the time of perestroika adults had been entrusted with new pedagogical responsibilities as individuals [Butler, Kuraeva 2001], some children's authors felt entitled to assume a leading pedagogical role[7]. As discussed above, however, these changes occurred as the adult and intellectual world was going through a profound crisis. Thus it was especially difficult for the children's authors to search for new ways of establishing themselves as sources of moral guidance for child readers and their families. This search is inevitably intertwined with a broader issue regarding the role played by literature in both conveying new values and strengthening generational bonds.

The Family as the Centre for the Production of Meaning

In Nusinova's book, family bonds and love — as well as humour, as I will discuss later on — are called upon to fill many gaps in the child's Soviet experience that's been created by non-existance of sense or by painful circumstances. The memoir's narrative voice has overcome the conflicts stemming from introspection and now acts as a mediator between two polar dimensions: then and now, adulthood and childhood, Soviet and non-Soviet eras. This mediation attains its form of harmonious dialogue between the Soviet child, Natasha, and Natal'ia, the adult who has reached another level of awareness of social and political issues. It is significant that the reverse of the frontispiece explains that the book "builds a bridge between our times and that epoch, from which we all, inhabitants of today's Russia, come to a greater or lesser extent".

In many respects Natasha is a Soviet child, and this is the key factor that makes the aforementioned mediation possible. G. A. Shipova in her analysis of this memoir observes that the child protagonist, Natasha, enjoys a family environment whose values are different from those im-

posed by the Soviet environment [Shipova 2011, 80]. While this is certainly true, it should be noted that Natasha herself is part and parcel of that society: she longs to join ranks of the Pioneers or to sing Soviet songs in a choir, and appears to be well acquainted with the Soviet lexicon. Although the final "List of difficult and Soviet terms" reveals that the child actually misunderstands some specific words, she is more often puzzled by idiomatic expressions such as "Time flies", or entire situations that have little to do with Soviet reality. In fact, Natasha demonstrates that she understands, and often approves of, key aspects of Soviet society. For example, when her grandparents have to get married again with a civil rite, Natasha asks her grandmother why she does not explain to authorities that they married each other in a church before the revolution. On the old woman's reply, "What are you saying? I'm a member of the party", Natasha comments: "Well, yes, right" [51]. Family — the "silkworm's cocoon", "the tortoise's shell", as Natal'ia defines it in the introduction [7] — protected Natasha, allowing her to be a part of Soviet society: to live through school propaganda, antisemitism, the censorship of her father's scripts, and to find out that her paternal grandparents had been killed during times of Stalinist repression. These aspects of Soviet society had not damaged the girl in any way. Within the narrative, tragic experiences, Lev Tolstoi's school — attended by Natasha's grandmother as a child — Pushkin's poetry, Soviet humour and Aleksandr Galich's songs form a coherent whole that has the family as its centre and its producer of meaning. If Natasha's childhood took place in isolation from Soviet society, then Natal'ia as an adult would not had been able to convey the sense of the Soviet experience to new generations, nor could she become, in the initial introduction, the addressee of the question: "Why did you allow all this to happen?". This childhood memoir can be a bridge between the Soviet and the post-Soviet societies by virtue of Natasha's invulnerability. She has personally experienced events that could have damaged her, but they had not. The book, indeed, attributes to family bonds an almost prophylactic function. Thanks to these bonds, Natal'ia/Natasha is the best possible witness: she is able to narrate 'the Soviet epoch', having spent her childhood deeply in — and yet outside of — that society at the same time. In her narrative intersections between private and public life occur continuously, because Natasha also uses the Soviet lexicon in her private daily life. Her parents refuse to "align themselves" when they don't buy some pets for her and her sister like other parents do for their children [13], and she is so happy to be part of a choir and sing a "serious patriotic repertoire"[34].

The private and the public spheres are interwoven in the visual aspects of the book as well. The family pictures that constitute most of the illustrative apparatus strengthen the private character of Natal'ia's narrative and its value as a personal testimony. These pictures, however, are accompanied by few others with a documentary value (such as parades, flags, or a map of the Soviet Union) and by some pictures of objects (a tape recorder, a Singer sewing machine, a postcard and so on). Photographs merge with professionally made illustrations and drawings, which imitate children's scribbles. The personal level (personal pictures and children's drawings), the purely narrative level (professional illustrations), and the historical one (documents) merge with each other harmoniously[8]. In this memoir, the private sphere is not a refuge from the hostile world. Rather, it helps Natasha to overcome the voids of sense that she comes across every day and enables her to have a social life. When she finds out that her paternal grandfather died in prison, her maternal grandmother limits her explanation to the fact that he was Jewish and a professor. Natasha is bewildered at these words, and even more so when her Bolshevik grandfather "CLARIFIES THE SITUATION" (the capital letters are in the original): Isaak Nusinov, as the author of Pushkin and Worldwide Literature, was accused of internationalism, imprisoned and never released. His wife Hana died of sorrow. And yet, this fracture in the child's consciousness is healed by the following dialogue:

> — Granny... do you think that grandpa Isaak and grandma Hana would have loved us if they hadn't died?
>
> — Why, of course! — Granny was surprised — Of course they would have loved you! They would have loved you so much! They would have taken care of you, they would have been worried about you, they would have taught you many things, they would have been proud of you, they would have read books for you!
>
> — Then I love them too. — I said — And I will defend them! [Nusinova 2007, 61–2]

In this dialogue, private stories and private feelings reveal themselves to be more powerful than history. The latter remains painful and incomprehensible, but can still find place in one's biography thanks to the strength of family love.

No 'Alternative I': Conflict-free Truth-Telling in Nusinova's Novel

In The Adventures of Dzherik, truth-telling on the part of adults leaves behind the bleakness of the chernukha. As Anna Artvinska observes, this memoir moves away from what Marina Balina defined as the canon of anti-childhood: the depiction of childhood as marked by deprivation and injustice that in the Soviet time was placed in pre-revolutionary Russia, but that a set of Jewish childhood recollections written in the 1990s placed in the Soviet reality [Artvinska 2015, 58; Balina 2008].

Balina explains that some early 1990s autobiographical narratives put the idea of the happy and perfectly harmonious Soviet childhood to doubt by displaying a fragmented reality "that seek[s] no legitimizing correlation with official history" [Balina 2008, 201][9]. Personal details or excerpts from private documents sometimes intertwine with historical events and disrupt their linearity. In Balina's words: "concrete episodes are presented as parts of a puzzle that the author tries to gather together in order to achieve wholeness as a person" [Balina 2008, 21]. Furthermore, the author of the late 1980s but especially 1990s memoir holds a dialogue with 'the alternative I': the self who could have existed if not for Soviet history. 'The "alternative I" ', Balina writes, 'is the author who wouldn't be self-fulfilled and could not be self-fulfilled, because he himself, the author of the text, wouldn't have given this "I" the chance to develop' [Balina 1992, 18–19].

Thanks to the series of narrative features in The Adventures of Dzherik 'the actual I', Natal'ia, reciprocates a serene and harmonious dialogue with 'the child I', Natasha. There is no 'alternative I' who had never had the possibility to exist and who now claims attention. On the contrary, Natal'ia is what Natasha promised to become in spite of the weight of history in her own life. This progression can be inferred already from the introduction. This informs the reader that, by virtue of family bonds, Natasha's values are the same as Natal'ia's. Thanks to this intense emotional experience, Natal'ia and Natasha can embark upon speaking of the Soviet era to the child audience — an audience, which finds this society alien. It is the framework of family values and family bonds that makes truth-telling, which had triggered a tormented self-incrimination between the 1980s and the 1990s, conflict-free. The episode mentioned above could have been the ideal moment for the emergence of the alternative 'I': Natasha could have had a relationship with her paternal grandparents if Stalin had not killed them. However, Natasha's words, "Then I love them too. And I will defend them", have

the power to re-absorb that alternative ‘I’ into her actual life. Natasha is saying that from now on she will have relationships with Isaac and Hana: ‘alternative I’ has been turned into ‘potential I’, to which Natasha gives a chance for fulfilment.

Smoothing over Incongruities and Disruptions Thanks to Humour

The absence of an alternative ‘I’ is also made possible by humour. *The Adventures of Dzherik* is a rich narrative that encompasses many forms of Socialist humour, which ridiculed the Soviet discourse. These are usually defined with the term steb and include anekdoty, jokes. The beginning of the book, mocking a political leaflet, is an example of steb adapted for child audience, and because of its position it seems to establish a hallmark of the whole narrative:

> All children have the right to love dogs.
>
> All children have the right to dream of a dog.
>
> And all children have the right to whine, moan, ask and implore their parents to buy a dog.
>
> They will be told: “Now stop it!”, but they won’t — they will sigh and lament their hard destiny and their grave fate until a dog appears in their homes, because their cause is right, and sooner or later they will certainly win their just and honest fight for a dog [12].

I detect three main functions of humour in Nusinova’s narrative. First, steb and other forms of Soviet humour are a part of cultural code shared by a generation of intellectuals that the book addresses. Second, humour smoothes down the tensions that are provoked by recalling difficult personal and collective experiences. Third, humour contributes to mediating between two different and opposite elements or dimensions: then and now, the Soviet generation and the post-Soviet generation, the protagonist’s happy childhood and the tragic nature of some events that took place at that time. Thanks to this mediation, humour preserves the continuity between the child ‘I’, Natasha, and the adult ‘I’, Natal’ia. These three functions are linked to one another and they should be seen as an important part of the book’s approach to the adult and the child readers.

Some of the humourous content of this dual narrative can be understood only by an adult educated audience[10]. When, in particular, Soviet humour is involved, it should be noted that already at the time

of perestroika steb culture and anekdoty had a specific meaning in people's perception, and they were specifically associated with provocative stance directed at Soviet discourse and were endowed with an ethical value. Late Socialist underground humour, in other words, had started to be seen as a form of truth-telling and political resistance [Yurchak, 2006 4–8][11]. Collections of anekdoty, which had always been an oral and unofficial genre, started to be published[12]. It is now that that Soviet underground humour enters Russian children's literature as a distinctive narrative feature, as shown by works such as Bad Advice by Grigorii Oster. Its function in post-Soviet children's literature should not only be seen as part of pedagogical stance of the narrative voice toward its child audience, but as a way of strengthening the narrative voice's reliability as truth-teller and cementing a bond of solidarity with its adult readers that belong to a specific cultural circle[13].

Vadim Runev maintains that the function of anekdot in everyday speech is to overcome 'a moment of discomfort, when no logical argument is able to solve the situation'. On these occasions the joke acts as a 'breakwater' [Rudnev 1990, 100]. The position of some anekdoty and other pieces of humour in the narrative of The Adventures of Dzherik supports Rudnev's argument. In one initial episode of the book, Natasha's parents would like to go to Yugoslavia for a short holiday, although their financial conditions are not ideal because of the censorship of her father's scripts. Natasha's grandfather, an old Bolshevik, vehemently protests: how can they talk about this meshchanstvo when they want to go to a capitalist, or rather — even worse — a semi-capitalist country, with strong "bourgeois propaganda!" At this point Natal'ia's father:

> Grasped his head and cried out: 'Petr Ivanovich! Even Lenin went to Zurich!'
>
> To which grandpa lit up and said, full of pride for Lenin: 'Yes, only think, to Zurich! And don't forget Poland! He also lived in Paris, in Marie Rose Street!' [26].

The themes of censorship, absence of freedom and lack of money are addressed, but their capacity to represent a disruption in Natasha's wholeness as a person and in the harmonious atmosphere of her family is neutralised by the *anekdot*, the breakwater.

The cooperation between humour and sentimental bonds in this regard is best demonstrated by one of the most disturbing episodes in the book. In the courtyard, two women offend Natasha because she is Jewish. She goes back home, where she is told about her paternal

grandparents and their tragic destiny. However, before this conversation with her maternal grandparents takes place, she notices the presence of some guests. These are Communists from Tashkent, visiting Natasha's grandfather. The old Bolshevik is worried. He explains, using what he considers commonly known terms, that he has heard that in Uzbekistan one can still find 'single cases of *peregiby na mestakh*'. Eventually he asks his guests how things are going in their *partiacheika*, and whether there still are *perezhitki* out there[14]. In reply, one of the two guests smiles and merrily exclaims:

> 'Of course there are, how couldn't there be! <...> In Uzbekistan we've got everything!'
>
> 'What are you saying?' Grandpa was alarmed, and with an arm behind his back started walking back and forth across the room. 'And of what kind in particular?' 'Ripe, juicy...' the communist listed [58].

The joke is an evident reworking of the cycle of *anekdoty* on the Chukchi, an ethnic group that lives in the Arctic northeast of Siberia and has become the major representative of Soviet Asians in underground humour, where they had usually been described as "naïve, childlike simpletons" [Graham 2003, 200][15]. When Natasha overhears this comic dialogue, she is still deeply hurt because two women have just accused her of belonging to another "nation". She was not even aware of being Jewish and cannot find an explanation for what has happened to her. The *anekdot* alleviates the tension provoked by that episode, and then, as discussed above, her grandmother intervenes, who has the power of affection to heal the wounds provoked by history.

Anekdoty, other pieces of Soviet humour and common quips, constitute a web that traverses and sustains the whole narrative, filling all the possible gaps, which in memoirs of the 1980s and 1990s conveyed the sense of a "quilted identity" [Balina 2003, 21]. Humour has the power to make explicit the incongruities and the artificial nature of what is commonly believed to be natural, while at the same time smoothing or neutralizing altogether incongruities and disruptions, such as the fact that one of Natasha's grandfathers is an old Bolshevik and an enthusiastic supporter of the Soviet state, while the other is a Jewish intellectual victim of Stalin's repressions. The frequent teasing of her nonetheless beloved maternal grandfather — the member of Natasha's family who appears most often in the family pictures that accompany the narrative — seems to be a part of a structure aimed at joining oppositions together.

The joke-teller as a trickster

If the joke is a breakwater, than the joke-teller enables the joke to fulfill its function, and is therefore the actual agent of mediation. Vadim Rudnev was among the first scholars to define the joke-teller as a trickster [Rudnev 1990, 101]. He was the ancient mediator between gods and men; he sometimes acted as the gods' messenger, sometimes as a thief, stealing from the gods what men needed, like Hermes and Titan Prometheus. In Lewis Hyde's words, the "trickster is a boundary-crosser" [Hyde 199, 7]. He argues that the trickster is found at the edge of society and of culture, and also at the boundaries between what is right and wrong, sacred and profane, male and female, and, most importantly in our case, young and old: "in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction" [Hyde 1999, 7]. The grey-haired child, like the creative idiot or the wise fool, is an ambiguous figure whose crucial function is to overcome a moment of stasis and escape an ethical trap: "where someone's sense of honorable behaviour has left him unable to act, trickster will appear to suggest an amoral action, something right/wrong that will get life going again" [Hyde 1999, 7]. Nonetheless, it should be emphasised that the trickster can also be a cultural hero, the provider of a specific cultural definition, and thus, ultimately, an agent of construction. In particular the myth of Prometheus embodies what Hyde notes about the trickster: sometimes rather than crossing a boundary he creates it, "or brings to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight" [Hyde 1999, 7]. In the very act of crossing the boundary between heaven and earth, between gods and men, Prometheus establishes a new boundary, bearing out that "boundary creation and boundary crossing are related to one another" [Hyde 1999, 7].

Natasha does not transgress any rules; she is a good girl, respectful and good-hearted. Some of the features of the narrative voice, however, allow to define the narrative voice of the book as that of a trickster. Once past the introduction, the point of view of the narrative of *The Adventures of Dzherik* is mostly Natasha's, and yet intrusions of the adult 'I' can be observed (for example, a comment such as 'At that time I didn't know that...' [88]). G. A. Shipova too points out that some parts of the narrative should be interpreted as expressing the perspective of the adult 'I', for example the episode where Natasha finally achives her dream to sing patriotic songs in a choir. She is tone-deaf, ss the reader understands from other characters' reactions, although the child does not seem to be aware of it. During rehearsals the teacher wonders 'who is spoiling the whole choir', and passes by the rows of children to find out:

> I thought she shouldn't have talked in this way, that was just unpleasant and inconvenient, well, yes, it had nothing to do with me, because I was singing LOUD, but any rate, when she passed by, I kept silent. 'Natasha is shy', the teacher said tenderly, and I humbly lowered my eyes.
>
> In this way I managed to hold on for a while [36].

The last words appear as the comments of the adult 'I' that reveal a different awareness of the scene ('*proderzhat'sia*', 'to hold on'). Shipova interprets this and other intrusions of an adult perspective as introducing a 'present tense' point of view, telling the story in retrospect. These shifts from Natasha's past focalization to the present awareness of Natal'ia are often responsible for some of the comic effects in the narrative; also to this effect work frequent paralipses, in which the narrative voice limits itself to the information held by Natasha [Shipova 2011, 79]. The child's transferred point of view is often rendered through the reproduction of the child's speech[16]. In the following example Natasha has had a fight with a little boy in the courtyard. The repetition of the word 'babushka' ('granny') belongs to a child register: "And he even told his granny I hit him. And his granny complained with my granny, and my granny was very pleased and told that granny: 'Are you joking? This can't be true!'" [15]. The following example, in which the music teacher has finally realised that it is Natasha who "spoils the whole choir", shows an adult level of syntax: "She said, opening wide the door of the AUDITORIUM in front of me, so that I could comfortably leave it forever" [6].

The changes in focalisation are very common device in literature [see Genette 1980, 194–198]. However, I suggest that in Nusinova's book they acquire a specific value: Natasha and Natal'ia, the child 'I' and the adult 'I', continuously interchange with each other. If readers were to imagine the narrator who verbalises these shifts in the point of view and stylisation, they would have to imagine a face in constant transformation, sometimes having the features of a child and sometimes those of an adult. In other words, I suggest that the narrative voice of *The Adventures of Dzherik* is a hybrid figure, a trickster constantly crossing the boundaries between then and now, childhood and adulthood, and telling jokes that bring together and separate these two dimensions.

In Uli Knoepflmacher's and Mitzi Myers's terms, Nusinova's narrative is a form of cross-writing, in which "a dialogic mix of older and younger voices occurs" [Knoepflmacher, Myers 1997, vii]. Interestingly enough, the two scholars point out that, "whether addressing adult or child readers, or both, such fluid texts often rely on settings that dissolve the binaries" [viii]. In my analysis of *The Adventures of Dzherik* it is

mostly the use of humour that transforms the Soviet experience into a liminal environment, where the narrator-trickster can reactivate her child self and abolish the distinction between child and adult.

The 'List of Soviet and Difficult Words': The Return of the Adult

The semi-serious list of 'Soviet and difficult words', allegedly written by Natasha and enriched by Natal'ia's comments, brings to an end the ongoing shifts in focalisation that occur throughout the book. In this humorous appendix, the child 'I' and the adult 'I' have undergone a distinct separation, because the comments of the adult are graphically marked by italics. The child and the adult, in other words, have split into two separate voices:

> Racial discrimination — It's when people or dogs are getting offended just because they are of another nation or another race, or because they are mongrel, or half-caste. *This is a very bad thing, those who use these terms should be ashamed, and not those who are called in this way* [emphasis by Nusinova — C. B. B.] [123].

Many of these explanations resemble *anekdoty*, and it is the child voice which pronounces them:

> State farm — It means that the goods and duties in a country village are communal, and nobody does anything because each one thinks that somebody else will do it [109].

The main components of Natasha's Soviet experience are here tidily categorized and clearly explained by an adult speaker, regularly signaled by italics: Stalin's repression, including the Doctors' plot, the invasion of Prague in 1968 and Natasha's father signing a petition against it — after which he went through a long time of unemployment. Also here are playfully described the objects of her childhood, such as the primus, and her grandmother's folk expressions, and the great festivities such as the First of May, but the separation of roles is rather neat: the child is the joke-teller or the one who makes the reader laugh — for example by showing that she does not know the actual meaning of a word, while the adult explains. The latter does not address her child reader authoritatively, but appears confident and serene.

I propose reading of *The Adventures of Dzherik* as a macrotext. 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 introduction, the stories gathered together, and the final semi-serious list of Soviet terms form a coherent structure; an internal plot in its own right. At the beginning of Nusinova's book an adult 'I' addresses other adults, the other members of her community, and raises the question that has appeared as tormenting in many childhood and mainstream narratives for more than twenty years: "Why did you allow all this to happen?" As in *chernukha* films, it seems to be the child self who is crying out this question. The authorial persona then immerses herself in childhood, allowing her child self to speak again and merge with her adult self, producing a narrative with continuous shifts in the focalization. At the end of this process, the adult is reborn, is able to provide explanations and to guide the child reader.

This macrotext, where there is no real diachronic relation between events, and where the main hero is perfectly at ease in her Soviet world and shows no traces of inner turmoil, ultimately describes a coming-of-age path, as the protagonist manages to grow into an adult that is equally at place in the new, post-Soviet world, having gained another awareness of the historical past. The subjective growth and socialisation of the hero do take place, as does the reconciliation of opposite tensions, which are typical of the *bildungsroman*. However, the family of origin and the narrative voice that belong to a specific cultural circle — inherited from her father — are here constitutive of individual identity, and not social mobility[17].

Nusinova's memoir hides a ritualised narrative which ultimately establishes a defined relationship between the adult and the child in the book. Both child and adult readers are invited to laugh while addressing complex issues, but the adult narrative voice is able to provide child readers with guidance, and in the same time addresses adult readers ("the adults who understand everything", mentioned in the introduction) who are equally able to undertake an effective pedagogical role. The jokes that can be understood only by adults are a way of cementing a feeling of social and cultural belonging as a precondition for the integration of adults with a Soviet background into society. In other words, Nusinova encourages adult readers to approach contemporary children by giving value to the adults' Soviet background and the experience of Soviet life.

Notes

[1] The present article is based on a chapter of my PhD dissertation [Balistreri 2013]. I am thankful to the AHRC for funding my research through both its BGP award and the Research Training Support Grant, and to the Children's Literature Association for its Hannah Beiter Graduate Research Grant.

[2] It was preceded by [Minaev 2001] and [Levitina 2005].

[3] In this respect, Artvinska underlines the importance of the fact that the book shows Il'ia Nusinov's pictures.

[4] For this source, page numbers will be set off in the main text inside square brackets after the quotation.

[5] For an analysis of *The Scarecrow* and its impact on late Soviet society, both as a book and a film, see [Condee and Padunov 1986, 28]. For an analysis of the *chernukha* aesthetics, see [Russell 1994; Zorin, 1992]. Zorin states that these writers and filmmakers wanted to heal the country through their works. As well as Borenstein, B. Beumers and M. Lipovetsky support Zorin's analysis of *chernukha* as being driven by moral intentions during Perestroika [Beumers, Lipovetsky 2009, 37].

[6] See [Lovell 2000; Genis 1990; Gudkov, Dubin 1993; Gudkov, Dubin 1993a; Dubin 1993; Clark 1993].

[7] For example, the group of children's authors and poets Black Hen made explicit their assumption of a pedagogical role towards the post-Soviet child reader on the page of the children's journals *Pioner* and *Tramvai* starting from 1990. See for example their manifesto in [Chernaia kuritsa group 1990].

[8] For a further analysis of the visual aspects of the book, see [Arvinska 2015, 59–60].

[9] In this essay Balina refers to memoirs written by Soviet Jewish authors as particularly representative examples of a general trend that includes autobiographies written by non-Jewish authors. In this respect, see also [Balina 2012].

[10] By dual narrative, I refer to Barbara Wall's distinction between single, double and dual addresses in children's literature. We have the first case when the narrative voice addresses child readers and wants to be understood by them regardless of adults' response. In the double address, the narrative voice only appears to address a child, but actually addresses an adult, looking over the child's shoulder. A dual address, instead, is achieved when the narrative voice addresses the child and the adult equally, without discriminating against the first as a consumer of literature, as the double voice model ultimately does. See [Wall 1991 9; 35–6].

[11] According to Yurchak, these associations stem from retrospective approaches to Soviet culture and Soviet reality. These retrospective approaches, he maintains, rely on binary categories, such as oppression and resistance, falsity and truth, which do not do justice to the complexity of life in the Soviet Union. *Anekdoty*, in particular, have often been associated with

a 'clandestine statement of "truth", of what one "really thinks" [Yurchak 2006, 277].

[12] As Seth Graham points out, the publication of *anekdoty* participated in the project of perestroika, as a "literary counterpart to the many posthumous political rehabilitations of the Gorbachev years" [Graham 1996, 206].

[13] Lur'e has discussed a number of Soviet children's texts written in the 1950s and addressing part of their humorous content to a restricted, highly educated, circle of adult readers [Lur'e 2003]. The nature of the form of humour employed by Nusinova in her narrative and here discussed, as well as the social context in which she writes, however, make her text different from those discussed by Lur'e.

[14] The three terms mean, respectively: "local excesses", "party cell" and "remnants of capitalism".

[15] On the cycle of *anekdoty* about the Chukchi see [Barskii 1992, 195; Draitser 1998, 94–97; Graham 2003, 191–202].

[16] Here I use the definition of transferred point of view provided by Maria Nikolajeva: the one reproducing 'the child's understanding of what she sees, the child's thoughts and opinions'. [Nikoljeva 2003, 11.] Seymour Chatman calls it 'figurative' or 'conceptual': the point of view that reproduces 'someone's world view'. See [Chatman 1978, 151–2].

[17] I am thankful to the anonymous peer-reviewer who has raised the question of the possible connection between the *Bildungsroman* and Nusinova's text as a fictional autobiography. This topic certainly requires further investigation. The brief answer I here provide is informed by my reading of [Moretti 2000] and [Bakhtin 1986, 10–59].

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СЕМЕЙНЫЕ УЗЫ, ЮМОР И ПЕРЕОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ ВЗРОСЛОСТИ В «ПРИКЛЮЧЕНИЯХ ДЖЕРИКА» НАТАЛЬИ НУСИНОВОЙ

Статья посвящена тому, как автобиографическая повесть «Приключения Джерика»Натальи Нусиновой устанавливает надежность повествовательного голоса, предоставляя источник моральных ориентиров для своих читателей-детей. Автор этих ориентиров — взрослый интеллектуал, воспитанный в интеллигентной семье. Это следует рассматривать в контексте постсоветской культуры, переживающей аксиологический кризис и пересматривающий взрослую претензию на трансляцию мировоззрения. В книге Нусиновой семейная любовь показана как средоточие смыслопорождения, тесно связанного с позднесоветским юмором. Все это заполняет пустоты смысла в опыте Наташи (авторского детского «я») советских времен и делает ее неуязвимой для эмоционального насилия советского общества, частью последнего она тем не менее является. Голос повествователя демонстрирует позицию взрослого, способного направлять постсоветского ребенка в конце ритуального сюжета возрождения, который объединяет введение, отдельные главы и заключительный глоссарий в макротекст.

Ключевые слова: Мемуары, советское детство, постсоветская культура, взрослость, юмор, семейные связи, повествовательный голос, макротекст