



## Detki v kletke: The Childlike Aesthetic in Soviet Children's Literature and Unofficial Poetry

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**Abstract:** Since its inception in 1918, Soviet children's literature was acclaimed as innovative and exciting, often in contrast to other official Soviet literary production. Indeed, avant-garde artists worked in this genre for the entire Soviet period, although they had fallen out of official favor by the 1930s. This dissertation explores the relationship between the childlike aesthetic as expressed in Soviet children's literature, the early Russian avant-garde and later post-war unofficial poetry. Even as 'childlike' devices were exploited in different ways in different contexts, in the post-war period the characteristic features of this aesthetic had come to be a marker for unofficial art.

The introduction presents the notion of the childlike aesthetic, tracing its recent history from Russian modernism and the avant-garde. Chapter One, "Detki v kletke: The Underground Goes into Children's Literature," traces the early development of Soviet children's literature and introduces the work of the OBERIU poets, the "first underground" to be driven by circumstance to write for children. Chapter Two, "Playing with Words': Experimental Unofficial Poetry and Children's Literature in the Post-war Period," fast-forwards to the late 1950s-70s, describing the emergence of a more substantial unofficial literary scene alongside still-rigid boundaries within official literature, including children's. The final two chapters present detailed comparative studies of the work of two post-war unofficial poets from each of the Soviet 'capitals,' Moscow and Leningrad: Igor Kholin and Vsevolod Nekrasov, and Leonid Aronzon and Oleg Grigoriev. All of these poets worked in children's literature and experimented with the childlike aesthetic in their unofficial work.

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With its roots in folklore, nonsense poetry and nursery rhymes, the childlike aesthetic challenges established notions of logic, propriety and order. Through childlike form and content, unofficial poetry could distinguish itself starkly from its official counterpart. Furthermore, unofficial writers who worked in children's literature could demonstratively ignore the strict generic boundaries of official literature by blurring them through their own, openly childlike poetry. This dissertation attests to the expressive power, resilience and ongoing relevance of the childlike aesthetic in art, while showing the curious intermingling of literary experiment and children's literature in Soviet literary history.

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