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LOVE, SERVICE AND SACRIFICE:
NARRATIVES OF DOGS AND CHILDREN IN THE SOVIET 1930S

‘Do not beat the dog – it was human once.’

Russian proverb.¹

In the 1930s, the Soviet state’s expansion of agricultural and industrial exploitation to new territories resulted in a rapid increase in the number of professional kennels for service dogs in the Russian Far East as well as in central Russia. This went hand in hand with the unprecedented growth in specialist literature devoted to the training of these highly developed animals.² Indeed, it was assumed that the preparation of dogs for various branches of Soviet life, from pulling sledges to defending the country’s borders, had to be underpinned by a correct theory if they were to be turned into fully contributing members of the new society.³ These developments paralleled the contemporaneous expansion of Soviet fiction for children with related ambitions to turn new Soviet generations into loyal citizens of their country and fierce defenders of its values.

¹ Dal’, V., ‘Sobaka’, in *Tolkovyi slovar’ zhivogo velikoruskogo iazyka*, vol. 4, Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1980, p. 251.

² Andreev, L. A. et al., *Rukovodstvo po podgotovke spetsialistov sluzhebno sobakovodstva*, Moscow: Gos. Izdatel’stvo sel’skokhoziaistvennoi literatury, 1936. G. P. Medvedev et al. *Nastavlenie voennomu sobakovodstvu*, Moscow: RKKKA, 1937.

³ Nelson, A., ‘A Hearth for a Dog: The Paradoxes of Soviet Pet Keeping’, in *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres in Soviet Russia*, ed. L. H. Siegelbaum, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 123-144.

Semiotics scholar Boris Uspensky has noted that the correlation between dogs and humans was a strong feature of Russian culture.⁴ One of Uspensky's examples concerns the words 'tsitsik' and 'tsutsia', which, as he shows, were applied in rural Russia equally to puppies and children. The parallelism between children and dogs denotes their similar status vis-à-vis adult society: both were at root considered part of nature and in need of conditioning in order to be admitted to society with its norms and hierarchies; without proper training and strict control both would be destined to remain part of nature and outside of organised society. At the same time, both were, in contrast to wild animals, supremely malleable and therefore ideal training subjects.

Both the need for training and the trainability of dogs and children acquired very specific connotations in the political culture of the Soviet 1930s, when various professions and disciplines made bold claims about their capacity to transform human and animal nature for the betterment of society. Both children and animals were viewed as material for the advancement of the Soviet project. Pedagogy, psychology and zoopsychology formulated theories and conducted experiments that were directed at improving nature, both human and animal, often in conjunction with each other.

Ivan Pavlov's (1849-1936) experiments on dogs implied underlying physiological correlations between human and dog organisms. As he himself put it in his memoirs, '[t]hat which I see in dogs, I immediately transfer to myself, since, you know, the basics are identical'.⁵ Pavlov's turn to neuropsychiatry in the 1930s 'involved an intensification and systematisation of his long-standing practice of inter-

⁴ Uspenskii, B. A., 'Religiozno-mifologicheskii aspekt russkoi ekspressivnoi frazeologii', in *Semiotics and the History of Culture*, eds. M. Halle et al., Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1988.

⁵ Pavlov, I. P., 'Moi vospominaniia', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, Moscow: Nauka, 1954, pp. 445-449, p. 447.

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preting dogs as people and people as dogs'.⁶ Indeed, Pavlov's work on dogs' conditional reflexes was expected to have potential applications for humans, ultimately resulting in the forging of a new humanity ridden of old habits. This was contingent, however, on Pavlov's understanding of dogs as fundamentally moral creatures, capable of moral actions as part of their intimate, if subordinate, relationship to humans. This refers specifically to Pavlovian representations of dogs as creatures able and willing to sacrifice themselves in order to help humans.⁷

A very different parallelism between children and domesticated animals, such as dogs, as subjects of training, is to be found in the zoopsychology of the famous circus entrepreneur Vladimir Durov (1863-1934). Durov argued that animal training achieved the best results when the subjects were treated humanely, without the infliction of pain or punishment. Durov claimed to have developed methods of animal training based on telepathic suggestion, which apparently worked best of all on dogs. As the Soviet state expanded its economy to the Far North and Far East, Durov expected his methods to be of use not only in the circus, but also in the wider socialist enterprise, as the title of his 1938 book *Zoopsychology in the Service of Socialism* would suggest.⁸ Somewhat intriguingly, this book was published by the Soviet Children's Publishing House (Detizdat). For, indeed, Durov was not just a celebrated animal trainer, but even more so a highly successful child entertainer. His animal performances were always expected to have an educative value and he assumed that the principles of kindness, reward and suggestion underpinning his animal training theories also applied to children's upbringing.

⁶ Todes, D. P., *Ivan Pavlov: A Russian Life in Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 631.

⁷ For a more general take on these problems see Haraway, D. J., *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, pp. 69-93.

⁸ Durov, V., *Zoopsikhologiia na sluzhbu sotsializmu*, Moscow: Detizdat, 1938.

This article will explore the complex relationship between dogs and children that one finds at the meeting point of animal training, child upbringing, the taming of wild nature, and the defence of the beloved country in Soviet culture of the 1930s. By analysing a selection of children's stories and films from this period, we will examine correlations between, on the one hand, ideas about service dog training and, on the other, the preparation of Soviet children for adulthood under socialism. For our analysis we have chosen three Soviet children's classics from 1939: Ruvim Fraerman's (1891-1972) 'Dikaia sobaka Dingo, ili povest' o pervoi liubvi' (Wild Dog Dingo, or a Tale about First Love), Arkadii Gaidar's (1904-1941) 'Dym v lesu' (Smoke in the Forest), and the film 'Vysokaia nagrada' (High Reward), directed by Evgenii Shneider (1897-1947) and produced by Soiuzdetfil'm.⁹

We see these works as examples of cultural artefacts which thematically correlate the politically motivated drive to bring up a new generation of both physically and morally strong and healthy young people with the need to create new methods for training service dogs. We will explore this correlation through the lens of the above two contrasting training traditions from the Soviet 1930s, the 'Pavlovian' and the 'Durovian'. The parallelism between children and dogs in the above three works of fiction creates narratives with dramatic adventure and danger plot lines, whose aim is to teach its young readers how to overcome weaknesses, such as emotions, or develop strengths, such as vigilance, all in the service of the motherland. The concept of service, which dominates the rhetoric of the period, binds together the roles assigned not only to dogs and children, but also to writers and cinematographers entrusted with the very construction of these instructive narratives.

⁹ Gaidar, A., 'Dym v lesu', Moscow: Det. Lit, 1962. Fraerman, R., 'Dikaia sobaka Dingo, ili povest' o pervoi liubvi', Minsk: Iunatsva, 1986. *Vysokaia nagrada*, dir. E. Shneider, Soiuzdetfil'm, 1939.

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All three texts share the plot typical of high Stalinism: that of the protagonist coming into contact with an enemy from within or abroad, a villain whose aim is to violate the country's borders by making them penetrable to a further destabilising threat from the outside. The didactics in Gaidar's story and Shneider's film suggest that only properly prepared children and professionally trained dogs can be trusted with the protection of the motherland. Dogs here become divided into useful and dependable, on the one hand, and useless and dangerous, on the other, depending on whether they have received the right kind of training. Fraerman's narrative, however, contains a more nuanced take on the parallelism between children and dogs, and, we suggest, challenges the utilitarian and emotional exploitation of dogs for the greater good of society, in opposition to the dominant rhetoric of this era. As the subtitle of Fraerman's novella suggests, it is a story about love, and it is the notion of cross-species, human-dog love that we will highlight here, something that has not as yet been explored in readings of this work.¹⁰

Of Love and Self-Sacrifice: Human-Dog Relations after Pavlov and Durov

When Pavlov commissioned his Monument to the Dog ('Pamiatnik sobake') in 1934, he personally authored four inscriptions engraved on the cast-iron round base of the sculpture. The sculpture, technically produced by KNAP ('Kombinat nagliadnoi agitatsii i propagandy'), the Leningrad factory that made public display artefacts for the purposes of 'agitation and propaganda', was installed in Leningrad in 1935. Pavlov's inscriptions present dogs as willing co-operators during experiments and emphasise their desire to please their human (tor)mentors. The central inscription justifies the dog's sacrifice for the sake of human science: 'Let the dog, man's best helper

¹⁰ Balina, M., 'Narrating Love in Soviet Adolescent Literature of the 1930s: Ruvim Fraerman's "The Wild Dog Dingo or, a Tale about First Love"', *The Russian Review*, 73/2014, pp. 354-370, reads this story through the theme of adolescent love.

and friend from prehistoric times be sacrificed for science, though our dignity obliges us to make sure that it always happens without unnecessary torment.’ Another inscription, on the back of the monument, vividly promotes the notion of the dog’s *willingness* to serve the experimenter: ‘The dog, thanks to its long-established friendly disposition towards man, its cleverness, patience and obedience, serves the experimenter, with considerable pleasure in fact, for many years, and sometimes even for the whole of its life.’

Pavlov’s text contains a number of assumptions about canine ethics, including that it is natural for dogs to accept suffering for the sake of humans and that dogs have the ability and the willingness to express their friendship, love and loyalty to people through self-sacrifice and the acceptance of physical suffering. These inscriptions lay bare what is arguably the most exploitative side of Pavlov’s experiments on dogs: the use and misuse of these animals’ ability to love. They also articulate the expectations that humans have of dogs – namely that they be ready to sacrifice their lives for a greater goal.

The latter reflects broader discourses of physical suffering and self-sacrifice expected of Soviet citizens as a natural part of their heroic and patriotic deeds for the benefit of the motherland. There is, however, an important difference. In the case of humans, heroic self-sacrifice is assumed to be the result of self-control and the exercise of strong will – essentially the power of spirit over matter and character over emotions. It is this spirit, power and domination over the self that is to be nurtured in children as part of their upbringing. In the case of ‘useful’ dogs, however, the tension between nature and nurture is more complex: it involves not only the dichotomy between the wild and the domesticated, or the question of the degree to which the domestication and training of dogs achieves their separation from nature and incorporation into human society and relationships; the dog’s ‘readiness’ for submission and

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sacrifice is meant to be already there *in potentio* in its 'nature' as a species, one to be harnessed by the animal trainer and/or experimental scientist. This does not, however, prevent dogs from being presented as heroic and, in effect, moral creatures that in the process of training need, similarly to humans, to exercise control and suppress instincts and emotions.

When the first Central Moscow School-Kennel for Military and Sports Dogs was established in 1926, members of Pavlov's group were invited to give lectures on theoretical aspects of animal training. Pavlov's younger collaborator Iu. P. Frolov became involved in a number of experiments in service-dog breeding and training, including a trip to the Far North in 1932. He was also the co-author of service-dog training manuals.¹¹ Pavlov's 'disciples' advocated adherence to Pavlov's theory of reflexes as the foundation for training based on a combination of rewards and what they euphemistically called the application of pressure on the external points on the surface of the dog's body, thereby alternating 'positive' and 'negative' stimuli. The term 'pain' to express the dog's experience of electric shocks or burning by the apparatus that tested the dog's response to heat was considered too 'subjective' to have scientific value.¹²

The 1936 *Manual for Preparing Specialists in Service-Dog Training* was marketed as the first textbook in the field based comprehensively on Pavlov's theory of reflexes.¹³ The Introduction written by Professor L. A. Andreev was critical of other manuals of the 1930s, stating that these books merely recycled dated information from foreign works. Instead, it was Pavlov's teaching that was to underpin a theory of training based around the problem of disciplining and remoulding nature, while firmly re-

¹¹ Medvedev et al.

¹² Todes, *Ivan Pavlov*, p. 340.

¹³ Andreev et al.

enforcing the hierarchy between human trainers and dog trainees. The *Manual* recommended the lashing of dogs undergoing training as one of the methods included in the effective development of reflexes, even if this approach was expected to be used only rarely.

At the same time that Pavlov was relying on the heroic self-sacrifice of ‘man’s best friend’ for the advance of science and his followers were reworking this principle in the context of animal training through the conditioning of reflexes, Vladimir Durov was actively publicising his own very different method of training based on kindness and rewards, which he described in his 1929 book *Moi zveri (My Animals)*. When the first Central Moscow School-Kennel for Military and Sports Dogs was established in 1926, Durov and his nephew Anatolii (1887-1928), were invited to provide their expertise. Durov’s method of rewards, of encouraging animals to do his bidding with the help of treats such as sugar and sweets, went counter to common practice among circus and menagerie trainers at the beginning of his career in the 1890s, but he firmly maintained that the infliction of pain on animals only created resistance and led to a refusal of cooperation. Durov also believed that it was possible to communicate telepathically with animals. His telepathic exercises, modelled on fashionable hypnotism séances on humans, claimed that dogs were capable of perceiving human commands inter-mentally, thereby positing a correlation between the human and non-human mind. Durov had scientific ambitions, in fact, and his zoopsychology attracted the attention of Russia’s foremost hypnosis specialist at the time, the renowned neuropsychiatrist V. M. Bekhterev, Pavlov’s arch rival and critic. Durov also sought to contribute to the exploration of the Soviet Union’s uncharted lands in his *Zoopsikhologiiia na sluzhbu sotsializmu* (1938) where he contended that untamed animals, those that had not been exposed to hunting and other forms of human violence, displayed no fear of humans.

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As we shall argue, both Gaidar's story and the film 'High Reward' contain what one might term 'anti-Durovian' motifs vis-à-vis his trademark method of training by rewarding animals with treats. The film features, in fact, a dangerous international espionage ring-leader disguised as a circus trainer who has a small circus-trained dog as his loyal helper. Durov's method of kindness with its emphasis on cross-species love thereby appears to be politically obsolete in the context of the late-1930s' efforts of children's writers to make both dogs and children ready to serve the country loyally in the build-up to war. As we shall see, the dynamics around the separation of children from nature, as a mark of their reaching the right kind of consciousness and vigilance, are figured by children overcoming emotional attachments to dogs, which in some scenarios involve not only acts of disciplinarian dog-training, but also acts of punishment and betrayal of the dogs' love of and loyalty to their young masters in ways that evoke 'Pavlovian' discourse and practice as discussed above. The exploitation of the dog's ability to love becomes not only the act of mastering one's will and the child's symbolic separation from nature; it also gives rise to the ethics of betraying 'friendship' for the sake of the country.

In Shneider's 'High Reward' and Gaidar's 'Smoke in the Forest' love is treated with suspicion, given that it weakens the will and impairs vigilance. Fraerman's work, however, places the question of a dog's love for a girl and his ability to sacrifice himself for her sake within the broader theme of love as an emotion among adolescents. Indeed, while the other narratives under examination display a simplistic following of the 'Pavlovian' framing, Fraerman's novella takes a more nuanced approach to matters of ethical and emotional interaction between humans and animals. While the parallelism between children and dogs is at the core of all three narratives examined here, some, like Gaidar, adopt it in an unproblematic way, others, like Shneider, enforce hierarchy, with children placed firmly in charge of dogs, while oth-

ers still, namely Fraerman, question the very notion of the trainability and malleability of both species.

‘High Reward’: On Dangerous Animal Trainers and Vigilant Border Guards

The film ‘High Reward’ presents a caricature of Durov in the character of the circus animal trainer Sobachkin (from *sobaka*, meaning ‘dog’) who is portrayed as an agent of an international plot to steal state military secrets. The secrets, typically for the 1930s’ cultural script, relate to an airplane design which a capitalist industrial espionage ring is keen to appropriate in order to endanger the defence capability of the Soviet Union and lower its potential to conquer new territories in the Far North and Far East. Sobachkin impresses an unsuspecting boy to get to his famous father, a professor of aircraft engineering. The scene takes place after a circus act with small dogs. Durov as a historical prototype is easily recognisable in the clown-trainer who performs Durov’s trademark act: Sobachkin uses his own bodily postures to suggest to animals what he wants them to do in imitation of his own actions.

Having established contact with the boy, the trainer visits the family at their summer house, which is where the classified drawings of the new airplanes are kept. The boy’s father is critical of Sobachkin’s little circus dog whom he dismisses as a ‘toy-dog’ (*fintifliushka*) – a ‘useless’, purely decorative animal, a remnant of the bourgeois past (thereby making it synonymous with the class enemy). The story also contains a counter-motif to that of the toy-dog trained by a spy: it features useful, service-dog characters, who are being trained by the boy-protagonist. Indeed, the boy is engaged in the training of two German shepherds, generically called *ovcharki* to avoid politically incorrect connotations of the breed’s name.¹⁴ The training is part of the

¹⁴ The official recognition of the politically correct ‘East European shepherds’ as opposed to ‘German shepherds’ took place only in 1964.

boy's school's scheme of fostering young dogs for a career in the border guards. The fostering takes place during the school summer holidays, and the two puppies live at the professor's country dacha. The boy's father teaches the boy that service dogs have to be brought up as 'vicious' (*zlye*), because they will have to defend the country from the enemy. The father here displays awareness of training methods recommended in the manuals of this era, specifically those that claimed to be based on Pavlov's reflexology.

Indeed, the *Manual for Preparing Specialists in Service-Dog Training*, authored by leading personalities staffing the experimental service-animal training centres in 1930s' Moscow, including Pavlov's junior colleague, Professor A. P. Orlov (cf. his 'Theoretical Foundations of Training', pp. 179-277), and M. I. Vanichev, V. V. Rylov, N. A. Sakharov (cf. 'Training Service Dogs', pp. 273-418), explains that the training of dogs uses the animal's inborn features, which include 'viciousness' (*zlost'*) as one of its main characteristics, alongside the dog's good sense of smell and hearing, resilience and strength.¹⁵ However, dog training has to 'develop new qualities under the impact of a human on the dog's organism'.¹⁶ The manual conflates the Russian term for animal training (*dressirovka*) with a range of other terms typically used for humans, such as 'upbringing' (*vospitanie*), 'discipline' (*distsiplina*) and 'habits' (*privychki*), explaining that they are all equally applicable to humans and dogs.¹⁷ The manual advises that the trainer cannot work with the dogs only by influencing them with 'tenderness' (*laska*), but should also use other stimuli (*razdrazhiteli*, lit. 'irritants'), including, if necessary, lashing.¹⁸ This method was deemed acceptable for

¹⁵ Andreev et al.

¹⁶ Andreev et al., p. 234.

¹⁷ Andreev et al., p. 235.

¹⁸ Andreev et al., p. 237.

search, guide and guard dogs in order to develop ‘viciousness’ in ‘an active form’, although the manual recommends that strong lashes be used only exceptionally in order to avoid the inhibition (*tormozhenie*) of reflexes.¹⁹

Special attention in the manual is given to the use of food and treats in training because the trainer has to teach the dog not to accept food from strangers. ‘Subjectivity in training’, such as showing love, is termed ‘humanisation’ (*ochelovechivanie*) and is considered to be a common mistake.²⁰ The manual purports to use Pavlov’s views on the continuity and discontinuity between humans and dogs in reflex formation. It explains that humans are superior to dogs, because while the primary signal system works for both, the secondary system, linked to language, is uniquely human. Indeed, the manual considers the method of ‘showing’ the animal what to do – i.e. precisely the method that Durov promoted and that Sobachkin uses in the film – as misconceived and ineffective. In the story, however, the circus trainer Sobachkin interferes with the boy’s method of training his foster dogs by advocating a different approach – that of (apparent) kindness. He uses rewards to corrupt one of the *ovcharkas* in order to achieve his act of political sabotage: he feeds the boy’s dog with juicy bones, which leads the animal to accept the trainer-spy as a ‘friend’. When the crucial moment arrives, this incorrectly trained dog allows the villain to enter the house where the secret documents are kept.

On discovering that the dog accepts food from strangers, the professor declares that the dog will have to be *re-trained*. While the implication here is that animals can be ridden of bad habits, the method that it entails is harsh: in one episode the boy establishes his authority by lashing the young dog with *his father’s* leather belt. Lashing with the father’s belt was, in fact, a typical form of *child* punishment among

¹⁹ Andreev et al., p. 244.

²⁰ Andreev et al., p. 267.

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the lower classes of Russian society. The belt is synonymous with the power of the father as well as the authority of the state. Using leather for lashing was a common form of corporeal punishment in pre-Revolutionary times. The gentry were exempt from it, but it was commonly applied to serfs and other lower classes.

The boy's act thus implies the establishment of a hierarchy and it both breaks and reinstates the correlation between children and dogs. By disciplining the dog the boy separates himself from nature and assumes a place equal to that of his father in the hierarchy father-child-animal.²¹ By assuming the role of his father he also shows his ideological maturation. In the story's conclusion the well-trained dogs and the police manage to stop the perpetrator who eventually makes an attempt to steal the classified drawing. And it is the circus trainer's little dog who makes the blunder of attracting the attention of a security guard who is monitoring the house.

The story contains a parallel subplot which involves another spy attempting to steal the plans by pretending to be in love with the professor's daughter. Thanks to her vigilance and distrust of his false pretences, she helps to intercept him as a perpetrator. The love subplot here establishes the symmetry between human-to-human and human-to-animal love – in both cases love is portrayed as a dangerous emotion. In both subplots love is exploited by the enemy, and it is only thanks to the right kind of upbringing that the professor's children stop a serious act of sabotage and subversion. Fittingly, their father's vigilance also plays a major role because he had, in fact, preemptively substituted the newest aircraft drawings with old ones.

The film also introduces the opposition between 'useful' and 'useless' dogs, a distinction formulated in the 1933 service-dog training manual *The Shepherd Dog at*

²¹ On this hierarchy in European culture see Salisbury, J., *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, London: Routledge, 2010.

the Service of the Kolkhoz.²² According to this manual, in contrast to working dogs, there are also harmful, parasitical dogs, among which are included both strays and lapdogs. The manual argues that the Soviet Union, which is building a socialist society, needs only useful dogs, especially working breeds.²³ It is quite clear that circus dogs like poodles, in spite of their high intelligence and trainability, did not fit the category of being ‘useful’ – like Sobachkin’s little dog assistant, they were associated with the bourgeois classes emblematised by Durov and his circle.

‘Smoke in the Forest’: On the Perils of Treating Dogs with Sweets

Gaidar’s ‘Smoke in the Forest’ continues the script of dividing dogs into those that are useful as defenders of the country and its people and those that are harmful because they have not been subjected to utilitarian training. An untrained dog parallels an uneducated and naïve child, while the child reader is expected to identify with and emulate a trained service dog. Gaidar’s story is devoted to the dubious heroics of the teenage boy Volodia who tries to rescue a wounded Soviet airplane pilot by finding the way out of the forest in which the pilot had crashed when his aircraft was shot down by the enemy. It turns out, however, that Volodia had failed geography in school and was bad at reading maps. Fittingly, the boy is accompanied by a small dog called Brutik who is not only useless as a pathfinder and rescue dog, but ends up putting the boy in danger. Not being adequately trained, this pet dog relies on the help of humans for his own survival: instead of helping the boy cross the river, Brutik throws himself onto the boy when they are in the water and almost drowns his young master. The boy is saved in the end by a well-trained border-guard dog of the approved breed

²² Zavodchikov, P. A., *Ovcharka na sluzhbe v kolkhoze: Instruktornye ukazaniia*, Leningrad: Leningradskoe oblastnoe izdatel'stvo, 1933.

²³ Zavodchikov, p. 7.

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– the *ovcharka*. The shepherd dog drags the boy to safety and hands him over to the border guards. The trained service dogs also help rescue the wounded pilot. The dog Brutik drowns in the river, however, his fate exemplary of what happens to dogs (and children) who have not received the necessary training.

But what exactly was wrong in Brutik's training? The answer lies in a cryptic episode at the beginning of the story. Brutik belongs to the little girl Fenia, the pilot's daughter, and both Volodia and Fenia feed Brutik a sweet. The way in which this is expressed – 'skormili sobake' – suggests that the act was the children's initiative, the dog himself being *made* to have the sweet. The two children then ask for another sweet for each of them, as well as a ginger cookie, which they give Brutik to eat. Moreover, as a prank they smother the dog's nose with honey. The symbolic meaning of these acts is a moral one, hinting at the link between the dog's spoilt upbringing and the consequences that this then has on his training and eventually on his sorry fate. Brutik is not only separated from nature, but also the product of the wrong kind of nurture.

The act of feeding sweets to the dog hints at the 'Durovian' method of training animals, which emphasises rewards by treats. Moreover, because the children are also spoilt by indulging in sweet treats, the episode establishes a parallelism between the children and their dogs, given that both end up helpless and useless in their efforts to find and save the pilot. The moral is that both children and dogs place themselves and others in danger if improperly brought up. Sweets represent not only the wrong kind of training, but also the wrong way of showing love as part of this training. At a time when heroic deeds at the service of the country are expected of adults, children and animals alike, love is yet again revealed as a potentially treacherous emotion.

It is noteworthy that the story also frames the dog Brutik's demise as the inevitable loss of life in war. The 'reformed' boy Volodia says about his dog's death: 'War

is war' ('Raz voina, tak voina'), accepting the culture of sacrifice that comes with defending one's country. Interestingly, though, in the 1955, post-Stalin-era, film adaptation of this story by directors E. Karelov and Iu. Chuliukin,²⁴ Brutik survives, returning to his young friend after the near-drowning episode, helping him recover, in fact. This exhibits a very different ethos of human-animal relations, stressing the positive, healing role that pets like Brutik can have on their child-companion. It also reflects the more humanistic attitude towards working dogs characteristic of the Thaw era, which culminated in the anti-Pavlovian novella 'Mukhtar' (1959-60) by Izrail' Metter.²⁵ Fittingly, as a marker of the Thaw and of a new attitude towards the role of animals in child upbringing, the Moscow animal circus for children known as The Corner of Grandpa Durov (Ugolok dedushki Durova) received high praise in Emilii Dvinskii's 1956 book *Ugolok imeni V. L. Durova*.²⁶ While this book still had to state that animal training at this circus was carried out in line with Pavlov's theories of conditional reflexes, its publication signalled the emergence of a new sensibility towards the role that animals were expected to play in child upbringing in the Soviet Union – one that represented a move towards the 'Durovian' heritage of love and kindness as the normative feature of human-animal interactions.

'The Wild Dog Dingo': On the Sacrifice of a Malformed Pet

In its exploration of the wider theme of love, Fraerman's 'The Wild Dog Dingo, or a Tale about First Love' imbricates the motif of love between a dog and a human with the motif of the emergence of feelings of romantic attraction between adolescents. The story's action is set in the Far North East of Russia – a setting typical for

²⁴ *Dym v lesu*, dir. E. Karelov and Iu. Chuliukin, Mosfil'm, 1955.

²⁵ Mondry, H., *Political Animals: Representing Dogs in Modern Russian Culture*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 219-30.

²⁶ Dvinskii, E., *Ugolok V. L. Durova*, Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1956.

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1930s narratives of heroic exploration, made additionally authentic thanks to Fraerman's personal experiences of living and working in these territories. A friend and colleague of Gaidar's, Fraerman shared with the latter not only aspects of biography, such as serving in the Red Army during the Civil War and as a war correspondent during the Second World War, but also a strong sense of romantic longing for new, formerly unexplored lands. Both Fraerman's and Gaidar's story are set in thick forests exemplifying untamed nature to be taken over by the Soviet socialist enterprise.

Part of Durov's *Zoopsychology in the Service of Socialism* is devoted to the elaboration of the idea that wild animals have an inborn friendly disposition towards humans. This friendliness applied to those animals that had not been previously exposed to human cunning and violence. Thus, in Durov's imagination, the uncharted lands of the Soviet Union acquire a quasi-Arcadian character. Durov also understood that animals perceived their first encounter with humans as an encounter with another species *in nature*. In Durov's book wild nature did not represent danger to be overcome or a world to be captured and tamed, as was common in Soviet discourse of the 1930s, but an ecosystem ready for cooperation with humans, provided they did not use force and violence.

The conceptualisation of wild nature of the Far North East in 'The Wild Dog Dingo' contains some of the above 'Durovian' features. It shares the setting with the exploration narratives of the 1930s, yet it presents a complicated picture of human interactions with nature, situating the latter both outside and inside humans and animals, while also showing that animals can be more 'humane' than humans. And while the goodness of animals is still measured by their ability to be useful to humans, Fraerman chooses the dog subplot of his story for the dramatic portrayal of the key emotions of love, loyalty and the capacity for self-sacrifice.

Fifteen-year-old Tania Sabaneeva²⁷ lives in a village in the Soviet Far North East with her mother, who brought her up without a husband. Her father arrives in the same village with his new wife, and they bring with them the boy Kolia, who, importantly, is not a blood relative of Tania's, but a nephew of her father's new wife. Before the boy's arrival Tania asks her mother whether Kolia is her father's son, but learns that he is not, making him fall into the category of permitted objects of love. Fraerman thus introduces the problematics of culture vs. nature into the theme of adolescent love. Were the boy Tania's half-brother, 'culture' would have forbidden the liaison. Fraerman, however, allows culture and nature to conflate in order to allow the consummation of 'natural' feelings.

Before Kolia's arrival, Tania was friendly with the Nanai boy Fil'ka, who is unmistakably attracted to her. She also has a non-human friend, the dog Tiger, a small ten-year-old malformed animal who is particularly devoted to the girl. The dog's name highlights the discrepancy between his physical characteristics and that of the most powerful predatory animal of the forests in the Russian Far East. The dog's appearance receives special attention, and Fraerman hints at the dog's awkward shape which is said to be the result of overbreeding. Tiger, an epitome of a domesticated pet, is thus featured as the product of nurture over nature.

Tania's behaviour to both Kolia and her own father manifests characteristics typical of adolescent awkwardness: she is jealous of both, but tries to conceal her jealousy; she is shy of receiving presents from her father or Kolia and she refuses to accept food from her father's wife even when hungry; she regrets her actions, yet remains entrenched in stubborn pride and self-pity. It is only the native boy Fil'ka and

²⁷ Fraerman ciphers a cryptic code in Tania's surname – Sabaneeva: aside from the fact that the first two syllables of the name are phonetically equivalent to the first two syllables of *sobaka* [sabáka], knowing dog lovers will recognise that this is also the surname of the influential pre-revolutionary zoologist, Leonid Sabaneev (1844-1898), the editor of the journal *Priroda i okhota* in the 1870s-80s and author of influential books in cynology.

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the dog Tiger that make her feel comfortable. Fil'ka's appeal lies in the fact that he blends harmoniously into the surrounding nature and culture alike. Russian children tease Fil'ka's native skills, such as his path-finding abilities, by calling him a dog – a symbol of his cultural and ethnic Otherness. One example of Fil'ka's interactions with nature makes a particularly potent statement: he treats Tania with what he calls 'ant juice' – a refreshing sour-tasting secretion left by ants on a wooden stick that he puts inside an anthill. This act speaks of the native population's harmonious relationship with nature: Fil'ka harvests the juice without harming the ants that produce it – a striking counter-example to the invasive surgical methods of harvesting dogs' gastric juices that typified Pavlov's experiments.²⁸

Building towards the story's dramatic denouement – Tania saving Kolia's life in the snow blizzard by sacrificing her loyal dog Tiger to a pack of vicious and disobedient sledge-pulling dogs – Fraerman punctuates his narrative with a number of episodes that relate to human-animal encounters, linked to the thematic cluster of trainability and exploitation, on the one hand, and love and loyalty, on the other. One episode combines the idea of the cooperation of wild animals with humans (as advanced in Durov's *Zoopsychology*) with the use of punishment in child upbringing. Fil'ka's father, a herdsman, hands him his long leather belt in an ambiguous, yet highly symbolic, gesture that at the same implies punishment for Fil'ka's disobedience and the granting of permission to Fil'ka to use the belt as he wishes. Fil'ka refuses to use the belt on the animal. And indeed, the deer does not even require pulling by the noose, but willingly follows Fil'ka to the camp. The leather belt as a weapon of punishment and discipline is thus revealed as obsolete in the conditioning of both animals and children.

²⁸ Todes, D. P., *Pavlov's Physiology Factory: Experiment, Interpretation, Laboratory Expertise*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

This episode is paralleled by another symbolic motif already encountered in the narratives discussed above – that of treating children and, by extension, dogs, with sweets. During the first meeting between Tania and her father, he hands her a box of sweets. The episode is depicted with considerable attention to detail: the father tries clumsily to pull the box out of his pocket, which takes him an embarrassingly long time as the box seems to be wedged in awkwardly; when he finally manages to pull it out he tells Tania apologetically that he should have brought her flowers instead, because she is now quite a grown-up girl. He lays the box on the first object available, the sledge, while the dog Tiger and the house cat sniff at it with great interest.

Tania's mother witnesses the gift-giving with disapproval and immediately puts the sweets away. It is quite clear that Tania has not been brought up on sweets. Yet why would Tania's mother treat this box with such suspicion? Is it because she considers sweets to be spoiling children, especially in a harsh environment such as the one they lived in, in terms both of the climate and the political realia of the late 1930s? We have seen that Gaidar's story made sweets emblematic of the wrong kind of training for dogs. Fraerman echoes this motif, while leaving it ambivalently unresolved: the box of sweets is not eaten by either the girl or the dog, as the connection between upbringing and emotions, growing up and love, fails to actualise. Tania's emotional turmoil is further manifested in another symbolic episode also involving animal life. When she receives a goldfish in a bowl as a present from Kolia, she threatens to fry it. This spiteful and aggressive behaviour could be seen as typical of adolescent expressions of attraction through its opposite. But the motif also relates to ideas about the 'usefulness' of animals in the new world which has no room for decorative animal life, but only forms that can be of practical use to humans – a fish exists to be eaten and not to be kept as a pet.

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These episodes serve as signalling markers and structural building blocks for the main and most controversial episode of the story, in which Tania heroically saves Kolia, but only by sacrificing the life of her loyal dog Tiger. The episode is a complex interaction of young people and dogs, and it sets the fully domesticated house dog Tiger against the semi-domesticated working dogs – the sledge-pulling *laikas* used by the Nanai people. Fil'ka receives a pack of these Siberian *laika* dogs from his father as a present, and both father and son warn Tania that these are freedom-loving and ferocious animals. Knowing of Tania's fantasies about the Dingo, Fil'ka jokes that the *laikas* are far more vicious than the Australian wild dog. This does not deter Tania, however, who asks Fil'ka's father to allow her to drive the sledge with the pack. Tellingly, the *laikas* give Tania a look described as 'wolf-like' (*po-volch'ï*).

To control the dogs Tania wields a *kaiuk* – the traditional Nanai wooden driving stick with a metal ending. The driving stick suggests the harsh method of training that these dogs undergo, but it also stands for their ultimate un-trainability: had they been fully domesticated, no whip would be required; it is only through the application of force that these dogs continue to serve people. However, Fraerman never shows Tania whipping the pack; she either waves the *kaiuk*, or sticks it into the snow in a failed attempt to slow down the pack. In the same way that Fil'ka did not use the leather belt earlier in the story, she did not use the stick to lash the dogs, although she ends up being ineffective in controlling the wild pack.

In her treatment of Tiger, we again encounter the method of rewards with treats: in order to entice Tiger to follow her into the snow storm Tania throws him a sugar cube. It turns out, however, that Tiger, owing to his advanced age, cannot in fact see the sugar in the white snow nor can he sniff it out; yet he follows the girl voluntarily, the implication being that he does so not because of the reward, but out of love and loyalty. In the story's climactic scene, as Tania drives the pack to rescue Kolia out

of the snow storm, and as the ferocious pack is about to take the wrong turn by following a horse that has unexpectedly appeared in the forest, the girl ends up throwing Tiger from the sledge on to the ground in order to divert the pack's attention:

Она подняла Тигра высоко над своей головой и бросила его на дорогу. Он с визгом упал на снег. Потом, словно поняв, что ему нужно делать, мгновенно вскочил и с громким воем понесся рядом со стаей. Он опередил ее, будто сам обрекая себя на гибель. Собаки заметили его. Он бросился прочь с дороги. И стая кинулась вслед за ним. Лошадь проскакала мимо.

«Дорогой мой, бедный Тигр!» - подумала Таня.

Он прыгал по целине высоко, он тонул, он задыхался в снегу. Он, может быть, проклинал людей, которые изуродовали его тело, сделали короткими ноги, шею длинной и слабой. Но он любил эту девочку, с которой вместе играл щенком и вырос вместе, и только он один состарился. Справедливо ли это?

Он сел на снег и стал дожидаться смерти.

А Таня припала к нарте, услышав его долгий визг, и хрипенье, и стук собачьих клыков, заглушивший громкий шум ветра.²⁹

Having torn Tiger to pieces, the pack of *laikas* run away into the forest. Tania herself takes their place and pulls the sledge against Kolia's protestations. The contrast between the individual domesticated house-dog Tiger and the collective semi-wild sledge-dogs is essential to the symbolic meaning of this scene. The *laikas'* running away into the forest shows that they have not been tamed. Turning dogs into hard-working service animals through the exploitation of their strength and energy by

²⁹ Fraerman, p. 110.

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means of force is clearly not tantamount to fostering the animals' willing cooperation with humans. It is the 'useless', artificially-bred and awkward-looking, domesticated Tiger who displays the necessary loyalty and performs the ultimate sacrifice.

Yet the depiction of the Tiger-Tania relationship in the story questions the exploitative side of human emotional interactions with the socialised dog. While this relationship depends on the domesticated dog's ability to love the girl and go all the way in order to help her, it also shows that in the girl's hierarchy, the boy whom she is in love with comes first. The ethical question of both sacrifice and self-sacrifice in the context of love is made poignant by the ambiguities of the meaning of cross-species relationships, here between the girl and her dog. While Tania unquestionably loved the dog, she nevertheless made what to her appeared to be a rational choice, given the assumption that dogs ultimately have a service function in relation to humans.

The dog's act, on the other hand, is presented as an ethical one of self-sacrifice. Tiger's apparently willing acceptance of death at the hands of the wild pack for the sake of the girl is a complex metaphor. On the surface it fits the overall discourse of the heroics of self-sacrifice by Soviet people and the Pavlovian notion of dogs' self-sacrifice for a higher cause. Yet this sacrifice is also a form of suicide – and it is at this point that it becomes not heroic, but subversive – subversive of the very narrative of heroic sacrifice, here underpinned by the failures of human love, friendship and loyalty in relation to the animal. Tania, after all, with her longing for the wild Australian Dingo uses her loyal old malformed dog to her own ends. She shows the same perverse understanding of 'friendship' as did Pavlov who sacrificed the lives of the dogs even when naming them Druzhok – 'Little Friend'.³⁰

In the end Kolia and Tania are saved by border-guard dogs on skis. These appear out of nowhere, *deus-ex-machina*-like. Their presence as life-savers testifies to

³⁰ Todes, *Pavlov's Physiology Factory*, pp. 123-152.

their being on guard at all times and in all conditions. It is they who ultimately overcome the forces of nature. Their panoptic vigilance shows, moreover, how difficult it would be to cross the border not only from the outside, but also in the opposite direction, if one wanted to escape. Tania does leave this place, however, after the traumatic experience, in part because her mother makes the decision to move in order to avoid being in the same place as Tania's returned father – the man whom she still loves, but who evidently loves another woman. Thus, Tania leaves the village, yet for an unidentified destination, suggesting perhaps that she will follow her dreams, whatever meaning her youthful fantasies might acquire in her actual life trajectory.

Conclusion: Where the Wild Things Are

Tania's out-of-place-ness in the world she inhabits is emblematised by her idiosyncratic dream of the Australian dog Dingo. This dream can be interpreted as a transposition of an adolescent romantic longing, but also as her outsider status within the system, cultural as well as political. If the story of the first love between a girl and a boy was written for both adult and adolescent audiences, the story of the love of a small dog for the girl and the fantasy of the girl for the wild dog Dingo was written for those in the know. In order to fully understand the symbolism of the Dingo dog it is useful to note this animal's typological definition in the 1936 *Service Dog Training Manual*: 'Contemporary scientists consider the Australian dog Dingo as a special case – that of a formerly domesticated dog that had become wild.'³¹

The wild dog Dingo is a polyvalent metaphor for the adolescent girl protagonist's inner world of feelings and fantasies. However, Fraerman also invests the wild Dingo motif with his own authorial code, resulting in a complex narrative abundant with Aesopian layers in need of deciphering. The central motif is that of the girl who

³¹ Andreev et al., p. 11.

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lives with her mother in the Soviet Far North, yet dreams of a dog that represents the North's opposite pole – Australian wilderness. The girl's dreams of the Dingo thus emerges as a subversive counter to the Soviet socialist project of the late 1920s-30s with its construction of the Far North and Far East as the cross-section of romantic longing for virgin lands upon which to stage socialist missionary heroics. The girl's own formulation: 'Why does everybody around here talk about bears, and not about the wild Dingoes?' can be read as a challenge to Russo-Soviet patriotic colonial expansionism. Her indifference to the local bears and her preference for the wild Dingo becomes a dream of escape from the dominant 'bear-centred' political script. Indeed, the girl's story is not one of overcoming of the wild Dingo fantasy, but of *becoming-Dingo*.

The notion of the reversal of domestication to wilderness is a powerful metaphor for liberation. The *laikas* that ran away into the forest have a chance to become wild again, to revert to their wolfish past. If badly or incorrectly trained dogs can be re-trained, following the thinking promoted in 'High Reward' and the Soviet dog-training manuals, then Fraerman suggests that the whole enterprise of training is a form of captivity from which some animals can still escape. He comes close to ideas found in contemporary animal studies that advocate the radical separation of animals from humans as the only true form of animal liberation. Dogs, however, occupy a unique place in this context, and 'overbred' pets, like Tiger, appear to have reached a place of no return to nature: their liberation can be found only in extinction.

The political code in Fraerman's text at times becomes almost dangerously overt: Tania simultaneously dreams of 'becoming a pilot, of other countries ('inye strany'), of another world ('inoi mir'), of, for instance, the Australian dog Dingo.'³² By putting together the dream of becoming a pilot, and that of 'another world', with

³² Fraerman, p. 35.

the dream of the wild dog Dingo, Fraerman introduces a conflicting script of wanting to serve the country, yet also wishing to escape into a different realm and a different form of being. The standard teenager's dream of the 1930s of becoming an airplane pilot is here combined with the subversive narrative of running away from 'the land of the bear'. As a writer who had risked his life when he served in the Red Army in 1919, Fraerman had good reason to consider himself an underdog in the menacing years of the Stalinist Great Terror of 1937-39, the years when many of his contemporaries perished in the Ezhov purges.³³

Fraerman's text also clearly questions the 'Pavlovian' model that champions the sacrifice of animals for human needs and desires. His story contrasts the mechanistic narratives of Gaidar and the Soiuzdetfilm production, which put the trainability of dogs and children on a par, expecting both to experience and express only one kind of love – love for the service of their country. The service dogs that exemplify this kind of love in the above-discussed narratives can, in fact, be seen as part of a literary canine genealogy – one that culminates in Faithful Ruslan, the labour camp guard-dog of Georgii Vladimov's eponymous dissident text, written in the 1960s, which places the conditioning of service dogs at the centre of his political satire of Soviet life during de-Stalinisation. Ruslan's training based on the infliction of pain alternated by reward was exemplary of the 'Pavlovian' paradigm discussed above. The paradox of the trained dog Ruslan is that he loves his trainer, despite the latter inflicting pain on him. The allegorical implication is that the Soviet people loved Stalin and were ready to sacrifice their lives for the love of their leader, whose name became synonymous with the mother/fatherland. For the human and canine Ruslans alike there is no return from domestication to wilderness: the *ovcharka* cannot become the Australian Dingo.

³³ The writer's identification with the (under)dog is a motif well-developed in Russian and Soviet literature. See Mondry, pp. 149-216.

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While faithful Ruslan is the emblematic product of high Stalinism, the Thaw marks a shift in the discourse that correlates dogs with children. This applies especially to the role that ‘love’ between species is expected to play in children’s upbringing, even if this still implies a utilitarian view of dogs as ‘helpers’ in it. As the 1963 book *My Friends*, authored by a professional dog trainer and published by the Soviet state publishing house of children’s literature states: ‘Treasure the dog. It is your helper and friend; a true, unselfish friend, who will never ever change. But in order for it to give so much to you, you must give a lot of feeling, care, love and affection to it. A dog is your friend, if you are its friend.’³⁴

Dogs as children’s friends and loyal companions in this new discourse are still expected to serve people, especially in the task of bringing up emotionally developed citizens. Dog love, however, is no longer viewed as an *unconditional* emotion to be used for experiments on *conditional* reflexes, but as a direct response to human love. This was part of the 1960s’-70s’ trend of promoting the ‘harmoniously developed personality’ as the desired outcome of upbringing, one which included the didactic inculcation of love of nature and a condemnation of cruelty to animals.³⁵ The concept of ‘friend’ here changed significantly from the ‘Pavlovian’ notion emblematised in the nickname of Pavlov’s experimental dog Druzhok, reflecting rather more the myths of ‘Durov’s Corner’ in Moscow, which remains to this day an iconic site used to instil in children a sense of closeness to the animal world as an essential part of their ethical and emotional development.

³⁴ Riabinin, B., *Moi druz’ia*, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo detskoi literatury, 1963, p. 189.

³⁵ Bibikov, A.T., *Grammatika poriadka: istoriia sotsiologicheskikh poniatii, kotorye meniaiut nashu real’nost’*, Moscow: Vysshaia shkola ekonomiki, 2014.