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## New Book Continues Balina's Work on Soviet Children's Literature

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Gaining insight into the development of Soviet children's literature in Russia is the focus of a new book co-edited by Illinois Wesleyan University's Marina Balina.

"Two opinions govern the discussion of Soviet children's literature from the 1920s and '30s," said Balina, the **Isaac Funk Professor and Professor of Russian Studies** at Illinois Wesleyan. "One opinion sees in it a product of Soviet propaganda directed at the country's young citizens. Children's literature is viewed as a Soviet institution totally subordinated to the demands of the Communist Party. The other opinion believes children's literature was the only free space available to writers who worked during the Soviet period and had to comply with the universally required Socialist Realism, the only official artistic method of Soviet literature.

"The development of children's literature was much more complex than either of those opinions," Balina adds.



Her book, *To Kill Charskaia: Paradoxes of Soviet Literature for Children, 1920s-1930s* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2012), is co-edited with Dr. Valery Viugin of the Pushkin House/Institute of Russian Literature, Russian Academy of Science, the oldest research center in St. Petersburg, Russia (established 1905). The book is an outgrowth of a 2009 international conference on children's literature held at the Institute. *To Kill Charskaia's* chapters were contributed by leading scholars in children's literature from Finland, Austria, Germany, Great Britain, the United States and Russia. Balina also wrote the introductory chapter entitled "Soviet Children's Literature as State Institution: Beyond Politics and Ideology."

The book's title references popular pre-revolutionary children's writer Lidiia Charskaia (1875-1937), who, despite her high popularity, was labeled as a "master of middlebrow literature for children" by her opponents among children's authors. In the post-revolutionary years, 'to kill Charskaia' and literary production associated with her name became one of the leading tasks of new Soviet children's literature, Balina said. "The period between the 1920s and 1930s marked the most decisive years in establishing children's literature in the context of new political and ideological assignments," Balina said. "Samuil Marshak, one of the founding fathers of new children's literature, said that to create this new literature – 'to kill Charskaia's way of writing' – was not easy, and it required significant efforts on the part of new writers. We believed that his statement best illustrated the struggle for the development of new literature for children so we chose to take part of his statement and use that for our title."

The editors' philosophy was to "show the progression from free-spirited discussion (in children's literature) to a creation of petrified institution that became structured according to the demands of the government but didn't subvert completely," explained Balina, who describes herself in this project more as a literary historian rather than a literary critic. "Children's literature remained a free-er space among Soviet literary discourse, but it was a dangerous place as well," she said, citing children's authors who perished under the Stalin Purges of the late 1930s.

Balina also noted there was a division between the children's literature published under the Soviet regime and what children were actually reading. Russians have enjoyed a long tradition of home libraries and personal book collections, Balina said, which meant some children's books published before the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 were still widely read and exchanged privately between families.

A native of Russia who earned her doctorate at Leningrad State University (now St. Petersburg), Balina joined Illinois Wesleyan's faculty in 1989. A member of the University's Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures, Balina was first named to the Isaac Funk Professorship in 2007. A prolific author, Balina has published more than 40 articles and nine editorial volumes in three languages – Russian, German and English. A highly requested speaker, Balina is regarded as one of the leading specialists in Russian children's literature of the Soviet period and has traveled the world to present her research to other scholars.

She has also received grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the U.S. Department of Education, the Austrian Ministry of Culture and the American Association of Learned Societies.

Balina said she is indebted to the Paul A. Funk Foundation, who made a major gift to Illinois Wesleyan in 2004 to reestablish the Funk Professorship. "The Funk Foundation has provided opportunities not just for me, but for other scholars at IWU, to do so many things on such an important topic," she said. "In 2010 we hosted an international colloquium on Childhood and Globalization at Illinois Wesleyan, and in 2011 a group of IWU professors from various disciplines traveled to Russia to take part in another international conference dedicated to such an important topic as studies of childhood. Our students and faculty have benefitted intellectually from funds provided by the Funk Foundation."

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