

The Stalinist Soviet Union in the Disney Animated Cartoon *Tale Spin*

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ABSTRACT

The Disney animated cartoon television series *TaleSpin* was released in 1990, at the end of a decade that started with an escalation of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and ended in the abolition of nuclear weapons, which foreshadowed the eventual downfall of the USSR in 1991. This “adventure-plus comedy” American series successfully combines sources not only from within the studio (the 1967 Disney animated version of *The Jungle Book*), but also from adventure films outside the studio (*Casablanca*, Indiana Jones movies), and most interestingly, it weaves in a harsh parody of Stalinist Soviet Union. *TaleSpin* effectively captures the complex political climate of the 1980s–1990s by presenting the conditions of high Stalinism (mass repressions, executions, and show trials) in the military state Thembria with her Thembrian inhabitants, the anthropomorphic warthogs. The essay explores the characteristic topoi of Stalin’s Soviet Union in the series with an overview of US–Soviet relationship and the general perception of the USSR in the United States in the 1980s. The essay argues that the American image of the USSR established in the 1930s–1950s was extrapolated to post-Stalinist periods of Soviet history and was still prevalent in the 1980s, thus shaping the conception of Thembria and the Thembrians. (ÁLK)

KEYWORDS: animated cartoon, Soviet Union, images, Stalinism, Cold War



Political propaganda in animated cartoons first appeared in the Soviet Union as early as in the 1920s. The aim of these cartoons produced for domestic distribution was to shape the public thinking of citizens in accordance with the official narrative of the communist state. The imperialist West was represented as a system of oppression and exploitation of the people.¹ Following the outbreak of World War II and with the entrance of the US in the war conflict, propaganda animated cartoons were produced by major American film studios as well. Like their Soviet counterparts, the American animated cartoons were also ideologically driven since—tailored to the immediate needs of the country—they aimed at educating people on the necessity of armament, the avoidance of stock piling, and the moral victory of American democracy over the Axis powers’ dictatorial regimes, thereby supporting the war efforts of the country.² MGM’s *Blitz Wolf* (1942), directed

by Tex Avery, places the characters of the classical tale of *The Three Little Pigs* into a war situation. The Big Bad Wolf, wearing a Hitleresque toothbrush mustache and dressed in uniform, attacks the peaceful land of Pigmania and only the last little pig can defeat the aggressor with all the weapons he equips his bunker-like house with. The Academy Award winner Disney cartoon *Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943), directed by Jack Kinney, features Donald Duck as a factory worker living in Nazi Germany. The country is depicted as a stern place where Donald has practically to work himself to death while he is bombarded with propaganda slogans all the time. At the end, he awakes realizing that what he has experienced so far has just been a dream, or rather a nightmare.³

Propaganda cartoons promote ideology directly, whereas other types of films and cartoons expose audiences to a wide range of beliefs and value systems in a more delicate yet clearly identifiable way. Though not American, an excellent example of the implicit representation of political commentary is the Dutch-Japanese cartoon *Alfred J. Kwak* (1989–1990) created by Herman van Veen. The main antagonist and archenemy of the title character is Dolf, a mixed breed of a crow and a blackbird, who has to paint his yellow beak black to hide his origin. As alluded to by his name—Dolf is a shortened version of Adolf—he is a cartoon parody of Hitler. He even establishes his own political organization named *National Crows Party* and takes power in a coup d'état, proclaiming himself emperor. Obeying the ever-necessary demands of a happy ending in cartoons, Dolf loses his power and he is justly punished.

Similarly, a mainly latent representation of political and historical issues is traceable in the 65-episode long animated cartoon series *TaleSpin* created by Jymn Magon and Mark Zaslove. It was broadcast as part of the “Disney Afternoon” program, a two-hour televised programming block of animated cartoon series that ran from 1990 to 1997.

In *The Encyclopedia of American Animated Television Shows*, David Perlmutter categorizes *TaleSpin* as an “adventure-plus comedy series,” a genre that evolved in the “renaissance age of American animation” in the late 1980s. Lei Ye points out that “[i]n this period, many major American mass media and entertainment companies reinvigorated their animation branches, significantly improved the technical quality, developed more forms and genres of animation” (11). Perlmutter describes the genesis of *TaleSpin* as follows:

this was another of the company's syndicated adventure-plus comedy series, combining the standard borrowing from the studio's film heritage [Baloo, King Louie, and Shere Khan had all previously appeared in the 1967 animated version of *The Jungle Book*] with new (by the studio's standards) settings and characters. The borrowing extended to outside sources as well, from the adventure-oriented B films of the 1940s starring such aging has-been actors as Richard Arlen and Chester Morris to the comedic exploits of the Bowery Boys to the Indiana Jones movies. (624)

Unlike in *The Jungle Book*, the original motion picture, the characters in *TaleSpin* are all anthropomorphic. Baloo, the bear is a pilot of an amphibious aircraft named *Sea Duck*; King Louie, the orangutan becomes simply Louie, who owns a pilot's bar named *Louie's* located on a small island, while Shere Khan, the tiger turns into the most powerful business tycoon of the city Cape Suzette (a pun on Crêpes Suzette) where Baloo is based.⁴ Apart from these three, some other important characters are introduced: Rebecca Cunningham, also a bear and a young single mother with her daughter, Molly, who takes over Baloo's one-man business in the first episode, renaming it from "Baloo's Air Service" to "Higher for Hire"; Kit Cloudkicker, a bear cub of twelve (human) years of age, who becomes Baloo's navigator, whereby a father-son bond is established between them evoking the relationship between Baloo and Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*; and Wildcat, a lion, who works as an airplane mechanic. Besides the principal ones, two groups of supporting characters also appear: the air pirates led by Don Karnage, a wolf, and the Thembrians living in the fictitious state of Thembria.

Apparently, the series is set in the late 1930s, early 1940s, as suggested by the distinctive features of Art Deco style buildings (including the one where Rebecca lives), as well as by the level of technical development: no television sets are shown, cars in the streets evoke pre-war vehicles, and the main mass medium is the radio. Nevertheless, anachronistic elements that do not fit into the period defined above—like humanoid robots in the episode "From Here to Machinery"—also feature in the series. A pre-World War II environment is indicated by the state of Thembria inhabited by warthogs, many of whom wear army uniforms, thus reinforcing the image of a military state. The country is invariably shown as snowbound and ruled by the dictatorial High Marshall, so a parallel with the Cold War—the political and ideological rivalry between the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union after World War II—and the Stalinist Soviet Union is implied. Arguably, the creators intentionally alluded to this historical era as they

affirmed it in a forum launched by the fan site animationsource.org in 2009.⁵ In response to the question of “[W]as Thembria a stereotype of Russia?” Jymn Magon not only confirmed the analogy, but also explained the etymology of the country’s name: “Well, definitely the Cold War Soviet Union. For those of you who lived through the Cold War (and I doubt that’s very many), you’ll know that there was a real ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’ attitude in the world at that time. Thus the country names ‘Usland’ and ‘Thembria’” (“Ask the creators! Questions to Jymn Magon”). The explanation also elucidates that the writers did not intend to distinguish between the time of Stalinism (1924–1953) and the post-Stalinist period of the Cold War. Even though the series is set in a period that coincides with the era of high Stalinism, the perception of the Soviet Union in America of the 1980s was not substantially different from the one established decades earlier. For this reason, the country as depicted in the series reflects contemporary assumptions and beliefs rather than earlier historical views.

Practices and conditions in Stalin’s Soviet Union are unveiled through ample satirical images verging on the absurd about the state of Thembria and its inhabitants. Though Magon unambiguously refers to the Cold War era of four decades,⁶ particular features and practices of Stalin’s dictatorship and Leonid Brezhnev’s rule are conflated. In addition to the likeness between Thembria in *TaleSpin* and the Soviet Union under Stalin’s rule, the environment, the climate, and the social conditions can hardly be told apart from those in the Brezhnev era. Even the physical appearance of the leader of the state is reminiscent of Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who was in office from 1964 until his death in 1982. Characters in power in Thembria often threaten to shoot their subordinates (and sometimes the citizens), which was a pervasive practice in the Stalinist Soviet Union during the “Great Purge” of 1936–1938, an era of political repression.⁷ The autocratic head of the state of Thembria, the High Marshall shows a striking resemblance to Brezhnev, being corpulent and having Brezhnev’s trademark bushy eyebrows, while the High Marshall’s wife, a plump, ever-eating sullen female warthog evokes the figure of the Soviet “first lady,” Viktoria Brezhneva. Brezhnev proved to be a dictator who built a personality cult like Stalin, though the persecution of people during his rule was not comparable to that of the Stalinist era. Still, the overall representation of Thembria and the Thembrians is more closely related to Stalin’s USSR despite certain anachronisms like the physical appearance of the character of the Brezhnevian High Marshall.

Parallels between Nazism and (Stalin's) Communism, both being totalitarian and oppressive regimes, emerged as early as in the 1930s in the American thinking and persisted in later decades of the twentieth century, despite the alliance between the US and the USSR in the last four years of World War II. As stated by Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson:

Americans both before and after the Second World War casually and deliberately articulated distorted similarities between Nazi and Communist ideologies, German and Soviet foreign policies, authoritarian controls, and trade practices, and Hitler and Stalin. This popular analogy was a potent and pervasive notion that significantly shaped American perception of world events in the cold war. Once Russia was designated the "enemy" by American leaders, Americans transferred their hatred for Hitler's Germany to Stalin's Russia with considerable ease and persuasion. (1046)

In the bipolar world of the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the antithesis of American democracy and not only under Stalin's rule, but well after the dictator's death in 1953. Despite certain differences between Hitler's Nazism and Stalin's Communism—for instance, in the USSR, the individual was discriminated against on the basis of social class, primarily, while in the Third Reich the basis of discrimination was race—the two regimes had much in common⁸; therefore, they proved to be interchangeable in the American mind, sustaining the opposition of "us" and "them." The tension between Usland and Thembria depicted in *TaleSpin* reflects this hostility. In the series, it is Thembria that assumes the role of the aggressor—threatening repeatedly with an act of war—while Usland never acts on the offensive as she does not let herself be antagonized.

US–Soviet relationship in the 1980s

A brief overview of the political climate and some historical events in the 1980s is necessary to elucidate—at least partially—the deeply-rooted antagonism between "us" and "them," as incorporated in *TaleSpin*. The 1980s were a controversial decade in the history of Soviet–American relations, starting with the escalation of the arms race and ending in détente. When the episodes of *TaleSpin* were aired in 1990, the revived Cold War hysteria of the early and mid-1980s was a recent experience for most of the Americans. During the Ronald Reagan Administration in the early 1980s, Soviet–American relations became more strained than before. John Lewis Gaddis states:

President Reagan in March 1983 made his most memorable pronouncement on the Soviet Union: condemning the tendency of his critics to hold both sides responsible for the nuclear arms race, he denounced the U.S.S.R. as an “evil empire,” and as “the focus of evil in the modern world.” (122)

This presidential statement—just as striking as Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech in Fulton in March 1946—was made in a politically unstable period of the Soviet Union. Brezhnev had been dead for four months, the General Secretary was the seriously ill Yuri Andropov, who died the next year, and Mikhail Gorbachev, with his reform initiatives *glasnost* (“openness”) and *perestroika* (“restructuring”), came to power only after the death of Andropov’s successor, Konstantin Chernenko in March 1985. Though the Cold War tensions escalated until the mid-1980s, with the arrival of Gorbachev, a thaw seemed to start. The Reykjavik Summit on 11–12 October 1986 between Reagan and Gorbachev ended with an agreement on the abolition of nuclear weapons and brought the end of the Cold War within reach. According to Gaddis, the summit indicated

the possibility that the Cold War itself—the occasion for deploying such vast quantities of nuclear armaments in the first place—might one day end, and that some of us might actually live to see the emergence of a new international system capable of moving beyond the condition of perpetual confrontation that has overshadowed our lives for the past four decades. (134)

Despite Gorbachev’s reform efforts and the reconciliation with the US, the Soviet Union began to fall apart. The satellite states gained their independence in late 1989 and after an agony of two years, the USSR finally dissolved in December 1991.

Images of the USSR in the United States

Although there is no reliable information available on the sources the creators of *TaleSpin* used, the Sovietophobe tone of the American press and media may have added to the conception of Thembria. It is highly unlikely that scholarly articles based on facts rather than on impressionistic and stereotypical views were read by the general public.⁹ The perception of the USSR in the American public thinking is investigated in Stephen F. Cohen’s 1985 monographic work, *Sovieticus: American Perceptions and Soviet Realities*. In search of the root causes of the

newly emerged Sovietophobia, the author claims that a primal responsibility rests with the American media, the press in particular:

Efforts to show both Soviet achievements and failures are exceedingly rare, whereas wholesale vilifications of the Soviet Union appear frequently. A 1982 article in the *Wall Street Journal* by the influential academic Irving Kristol, for example, informed that the Soviet system is simply a “regime of mafioso types” with “pathological” beliefs and “no popular roots.” The problem is not that the opposite is true but that, as a *Washington Post* correspondent returning from Moscow concluded several years ago, “If Americans know anything about the Soviet Union, we probably know what is bad about it.” (26–27)

The official narrative was not exempt from exaggerations as Cohen points out, referring to a 1982 CIA report that mentions the existence of four million forced laborers, in fact mostly penal inmates who had to work just like the majority of convicted prisoners in the US. (27). The common misconception of the contemporary Soviet Union had a long history in American public thinking as pointed out by William Zimmerman: “[s]cholars’ conceptions of the Soviet system too often led them to extrapolate from the periods of high Stalinism to other periods of Soviet history” (120). This tendency characterized not only scholars specializing in Soviet studies, but the average American as well. The image of the Soviet Union in the United States based on the conditions of Stalin’s era survived well beyond its actual existence. Zimmerman accurately summarizes these sentiments:

The general picture they painted in the 1950s was of a static, self-perpetuating, totally politicized Soviet Union in which “politics” did not exist (except during a succession crisis set off by a dictator’s death). The aversion to terms like totalitarianism and terror had been more than overcome. It was widely asserted that terror was the linchpin of the Soviet system; that mass purges were a permanent feature of the Soviet system; that the Soviet leader, like the Tsar, dies in office; that the outcome of a succession crisis would inevitably result in an omnipotent dictator; that (given the party-state’s monopoly over the means of communication and violence) major overt dissent was inconceivable; that in foreign policy there had to be a main enemy, the United States. (120)

Additionally, the topoi represented in the series—shortage economy, bureaucracy, lack of freedom of speech—indicate that the creators had access

to sources other than the press. However, in the absence of confirmation from them (see note 5), this point remains unsubstantiated.

In accordance with the narrative outlined, the representation of the Soviet Union in American popular culture in the 1980s was somewhat stern, still farcical, and obsolete. The 1982 parody film *Airplane II: The Sequel* directed by Ken Finkelman (a sequel to the 1980 film *Airplane!* directed by Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, and Jerry Zucker) serves as a case in point. A space shuttle named *Mayflower One* carrying passengers to the recently colonized Moon becomes uncontrollable and is heading towards the Sun. In the movie, short newsreels from the US, Japan, and the Soviet Union are inserted, each starting with news on a city fire then on the shuttle in peril. While the American and the Japanese television announcers state only facts, their Soviet counterpart with a Russian accent is reading the news from his paper while a hand on the left is holding a gun to his head: “A four-alarm fire in downtown Moscow clears way for a glorious new tractor factory, and, on the lighter side of the news, hundreds of capitalists are soon to perish in shuttle disaster” (54:35–54:49). At the end of the scene, when the announcer is not visible anymore, a gunshot is heard. I deem this a false representation of the 1980s since the oppression of people—at least as it is shown in the film—ceased to exist as a practice in the Soviet Union then. Similarly, even though forced industrialization characterized earlier phases in the history of the Soviet Union, this tendency was not as dominant in the 1980s as it used to be. Such an incident may have a basis in reality, though, which can be substantiated by stand-up comedian and actor Yakov Smirnoff’s jokes as well. He emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States in 1977 and gained popularity among American audiences, mostly, with his jokes that compared the US to the Soviet Union. The three jokes below by Smirnoff echo with what is suggested by the movie scene in *Airplane II*.

- 1) In Russia we only had two TV channels. Channel One was propaganda. Channel Two consisted of a KGB officer telling you: Turn back at once to Channel One.
- 2) Many people are surprised to hear that we have comedians in Russia, but they are there. They are dead, but they are there.
- 3) In the U.S. the police shoot in the air—in Russia they shoot straight ahead, that’s warning for the next guy. (“Yakov Smirnoff Jokes”)

In view of these examples, it is no coincidence that the extrapolation of the conditions of earlier periods of Soviet history characterizes—though in a

humorous and inevitably exaggerated form—the animated cartoon *TaleSpin* produced in 1990. However, by the early 1990s—when *TaleSpin* was aired—the perception of the USSR as an enemy of the US had undergone a remarkable transformation due to the Gorbachev thaw from the mid-1980s. The general opinion of the Soviet Union became more favorable as the analysis of poll trends reveals. Alvin Richman asserts:

Perceptions of a lessened Soviet threat and improved relations with the USSR are reflected in an improvement in the overall image of the Soviet Union. Gallup and ABC/*Washington Post* polls in early 1990 found about three-fifths of Americans expressed a favorable opinion of the USSR—up from about one-fifth in the early 1980s. (138)

Thembria and the Thembrians

The representation of Thembria and the Thembrians evokes common images of the Soviet Union. The state of Thembria first appears—though still unnamed—in the last twenty-three seconds of episode five. Introducing the country, this scene shows two recurring topoi closely related to Thembria: first, the eternal, savage cold and snow, second, the technical underdevelopment. A failed inventor, Professor Torque, with his malfunctioning and thus unsellable robots stands shivering at a small snowbound Thembrian railway station when a haycart equipped with massive train wheels and pulled by a hairy buffalo arrives at the station on the rails. The passengers, a group of Thembrians, descend from the cart, not paying any attention to the professor or his robots (“From Here to Machinery” 21:49–22:12). Cold and snow are typically associated with Russia in general, therefore this feature cannot be regarded as specifically linked to Stalin’s era.¹⁰ Also, partial technical underdevelopment, the coexistence of high technology, and primitive ways of agricultural cultivation characterized both the Stalinist and the post-Stalinist era. As Isaac Deutscher claims quoting from his own obituary written on Stalin’s death, “[i]t is a fact that ‘Stalin found Russia working with a wooden plough and left her equipped with atomic piles,’ even though the epoch of the wooden plough still persisted in lingering on all too many levels of her national existence” (624).

The conception of Thembrian characters is explained by Magon on animationsource.org. To the question “What is the significance (if any) of the blue (my guess is because of the cold), Warthog design of the USSR-like Thembrians?” the following answer is provided: “Blue for cold. Warthogs because they are lumpy, ugly critters. We needed an animal that matched the

dumpling-like thinking of the Thembrians” (“Ask the creators! Questions to Jymn Magon.”). Indeed, all Thembrians are of the same species, be they soldiers wearing uniforms or ordinary citizens, while other locations of the fictitious universe of the series; for example, Cape Suzette or Louie’s bar are populated by various species of anthropomorphic animals. The homogeneity of Thembria’s inhabitants conjures up the notion of the classless society envisioned by Communism.

Besides the High Marshall and his wife, recurring Thembrian characters include the head of the Thembrian air force, Colonel Ivanod Spigot and his adjutant, Sergeant Dunder. Col. Spigot is a short stature warthog who has a lisp and shows signs of a Napoleon complex, defined as “a theorized condition of aggressive misbehavior occurring in people of short stature” (Hermanussen and Scheffler 271). To compensate for his shortness, he is despotic to his subordinates, primarily to Sgt. Dunder, but he is subservient to his supreme superior, the High Marshall, a behavior demanded in authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, Col. Spigot’s epithets indicate the practice of dictators endowing themselves with illustrious titles and names. Col. Spigot’s monikers include “Tyrant of the New Territories,” “Beast of the Battle of Baldoon,” “Death-dealing Demon of Dimswipe” (in the episode “A Spy in the Ointment”), “The Terror of Tiny Tundra” (in the episode “Flying Dupes”), “The Scourge of Sultan’s Creek” (in “Flight School Confidential”). Correspondingly, Stalin’s nicknames such as the “Father of Nations,” “Builder of Socialism,” and the “Architect of Communism” compare to those of Col. Spigot’s in grandeur and eminence. In the series, the origins of Col. Spigot’s monikers are never explained, it is he who refers to himself by them so they are supposedly self-invented, while Stalin’s epithets were introduced by the official Soviet propaganda.¹¹

As opposed to his tyrannical and narcissistic superior, the simpleton Sgt. Dunder is not only willing to take the responsibility for Col. Spigot’s wrong decisions, but also shows sympathy for non-Thembrians, including Kit and Baloo, even though it is considered as a sin in Col. Spigot’s eyes. He exclaims:

BALOO. “Say, Spiggy, the Sarge was with me. He’ll turn up. He was just being friendly.”

SPIGOT. “He’s not a friendly. He’s a Thembrian!” (“The Golden Sprocket of Friendship” 09:47–09:56)

In light of the numerous allusions to Stalin's regime and the Cold War period in *TaleSpin* discussed here, Magon's commentary concerning the audience targeted with the series appears to be striking:

A common phrase in TV animation is "It's for 5–12." Well, I defy you to find something a 5 yr old and a 12 yr old would agree on, but be that as it may, that's what *TaleSpin* was aimed at. . . an after school audience. Technically, it would be more 6–10, I would think but then I keep running into older folk (who were teens or adults back then) who enjoyed the show, as well. . . . Anyway, the show was intended for kid after school audiences, but I don't think we actively tried to target any one group. If the little 'uns enjoy the slapstick and the action, then they don't have to get the older concepts. . . 'til they get older.

("Ask the creators! Questions to Jymn Magon")

Besides children, the series was aimed at older audiences as well, primarily with some hints at the particularities of life in the USSR, which were not necessarily understandable for many. It is doubtful whether the average American was familiar with the living conditions in the Soviet Union at the time of the release of the series or in the pre-World War II period. It is assumed that they were not, since scarce information was available in the press or on television, whereas immigration to the US from the Eastern Bloc occurred only in exceptional cases before the mid-1970s. The breakthrough in this respect was the Jackson–Vanik amendment adopted in 1975. As Geoffrey P. Levin states,

[a]pproved by Congress in 1974 and signed by President Gerald Ford in January 1975, the Jackson–Vanik amendment to the 1974 Trade Act denied "normal trade relations, programs of credits, credit guarantees, or investment guarantees," commercial agreements, and Most Favored Nation status (MFN) to all nonmarket economy countries that prohibited emigration, taxed emigrants, or punished those applying to emigrate. Though the amendment was written in general terms, it was specifically crafted with Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union in mind. (65)

The US thus placed an economic pressure on "all nonmarket economy countries" and on the Soviet Union in particular, to make emigration possible for the masses. Taking the opportunity, hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens, chiefly of Jewish origin emigrated, and many of them chose the US to settle. These former citizens provided their first-hand experiences of the

Soviet system and some, among them Yakov Smirnoff, enjoyed wide publicity. Whilst these accounts may sometimes be distorted or rather tinted with personal bitterness, they served as an additional source of information besides the persistent images of the Stalinist Soviet Union established decades earlier.

Topoi of the Soviet Union

Here I intend to explore the distinct topoi of the notion of Sovietness to offer a more nuanced understanding of Stalin's Soviet Union as shown in *TaleSpin*. The sense of persecution complex—which originated from Stalin, the head of the state—infiltrated all layers of society. He was diagnosed with a possible paranoia as early as in 1927. A. Mark Clarfield recalls that “[i]n his memoirs Dmitri Shostakovich tells the tale of Vladimir Bekhterev, a world renowned psychiatrist who at 70 was summoned to assess Stalin's mental condition. The good doctor described him as ill, perhaps even paranoid. And how right he was. Bekhterev died immediately afterward—poisoned by Stalin” (1488). Suspecting enemies everywhere penetrates everyday life in Thembria: upon the arrival of the Thembrian delegation at the Friendship Festival of Cape Suzette, Col. Spigot orders Sgt. Dunder to “Stay and guard it as if your life depends on it! Because it does. Remember, this is a Friendship Festival. You can't trust anyone” (“The Golden Sprocket of Friendship” 03:26–03:36).

In Stalin's era, citizens declared as “enemy of the people” on the basis of fabricated and often absurd charges were either executed instantly or transported to Gulag camps. As an example in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973) illustrates:

If a husband killed his wife's lover, it was very fortunate for him if the victim turned out not to be a Party member; he would be sentenced under Article 136 as a common criminal, who was a “social ally” and didn't require an armed escort. But if the lover turned out to have been a Party member, the husband became an enemy of the people. (65)

Despite some decrease in the intensity of despotism, political repression persisted until Stalin's death. The citizens who were sentenced to death were often shot without a trial.¹² In *TaleSpin*, threatening by shooting is a recurring detail in almost each and every episode featuring Thembrian characters. Col. Spigot regularly envisages Sgt. Dunder's execution by shooting. In the episode “The Golden Sprocket of Friendship,” the reason for the planned

execution is the robbery of the Golden Sprocket, the official present of the State of Thembria to Cape Suzette.

COL. SPIGOT. “You’ll all be shot! Especially you, Sergeant Dunder. You’ll have to be shot twice.” (14:42–14:46)

Col. Spigot’s trademark threat of shooting occurs even in his address to the Thembrian people on the change of Friday to Saturday:

COL. SPIGOT. “Attention, all Thembrians. This is Colonel Spigot. Perhaps you’ve heard of me. Today is officially Saturday. Anyone who disagrees will be sent to prison. Anyone who complains will do hard labor. Anyone who sneers will be shot. Have a nice day.” (“The Time Bandit” 09:00–09:21)

However, he is also a target of such threats by the High Marshall for disturbing him:

HIGH MARSHAL. “Spigot! I told you not to disturb me. Now I have to go to the trouble of having you shot.” (“Flying Dupes” 20:17–20:22)

In Stalin’s USSR, the abuse and cruelty as represented in the series in a humorous and quasi-innocent form was an everyday experience for millions of people. After the death of the Generalissimus—Stalin adopted this title right after the end of World War II—marked the end of mass imprisonments and executions, even though the dictatorial political system remained the same in its essence.

The term “show trial” refers to trials held in public that have a pre-designed concept, largely on political grounds, in which the court judgment is predetermined. Show trials were held not only in the Soviet Union, but also in Nazi Germany, as well as in the socialist satellite countries after the war. The most memorable ones that received international press attention took place under Stalin’s rule. As Robert Argenbright remarks:

[t]he cases of well-known former Communist leaders in the late 1930s have long dominated our view of Soviet show trials. They constituted the most dramatic intentional representation of Stalinism, imparting both a sense of history-in-the-making on a grand scale and, as in the case of Bukharin, a glimpse of agonizing personal tragedy. It is no wonder that absorbing trials of the “Great Terror” period have inspired not only historical accounts but

also works of fiction. The “classic” show trials left an indelible impression of Stalinism but they were not entirely creations of Stalin’s era. (250)

The travesties of show trials occur in two episodes of *TaleSpin*: “Flight of the Snow Duck” and “The Time Bandit.” There is an implicit and deducible pun on the term “show trial” that is manifest in the inclusion of the radio presenter’s character commenting on the events taking place in the courtroom right before the planned execution (“The Time Bandit”). The “show trial” becomes a “trial show.”

The outcome of the trial is decided and established already at the moment of the arrest of the accused, as confirmed by Col. Spigot: “[T]rials are the one thing in Thembria that are swift and expedient. You’ll have a fair trial, then be shot” (“The Time Bandit” 11:09–11:16). The reasons for arrest—Baloo, Rebecca, and Kit traveling with expired passports in “The Time Bandit”; Molly and Wildcat playing in the snow in “Flight of the Snow Duck”—may sound preposterous exaggerations of the writers’ imagination. However, similar cases are depicted in a great number in *The Gulag Archipelago*.¹³ The charges outlined in the courtroom in the series are no less absurd. In “Flight of the Snow Duck,” Wildcat and Molly, who fly to Thembria so that Molly can finally see snow, “are charged with wanton snowball rolling, frolicking without a license, and failing to compliment the judge on his new hairdo” (07:56–08:04), as well as with stealing Thembrian snow since they wanted to take the snowman they had built back to Cape Suzette. The most serious offence, however, is free thinking, which results in a long jail sentence :

JUDGE. “Snowman, eh? Doesn’t look much like man.” (referring to the melting pile of snow in a small trolley in the courtroom)

MOLLY. “Sure he does. Here’s his eyes, and that’s his nose. Use your imagination.”

COL. SPIGOT and JUDGE. “Huhh!”

JUDGE. “Imagination? That is capital offense in Thembria. I hereby sentence you each to one thousand years in prison!” (09:16–09:39)

The wave of rehabilitations of the show trials’ victims during Khrushchev’s Thaw era from the mid-1950s testifies to the immensity of unlawful and unjust legal procedures in Stalin’s era. In “The Time Bandit,” it is acutely ironic that the unimportance of truth and the state’s ultimate power are uttered by the Judge in the trial:

JUDGE. “I am not caring about truth. The state says it’s Saturday. You are guilty as charged.” (12:18–12:24)

In this episode two of the accused, Baloo and Kit are released; however, Rebecca is pronounced guilty as charged. This illogical functioning of the system is illustrated in the memoirs of Soviet poet Olga Ivinskaya, who was the friend and lover of Nobel Prize laureate Russian poet and novelist, Boris Pasternak. According to the anecdote cited by Ivinskaya, Pasternak’s name was on a list of planned executions presented to Stalin, who crossed Pasternak’s name off and said: “Leave that fool alone” (133). The fate of an individual often depended on the momentary whim of the person in charge.

The animated cartoon *TaleSpin* never presents the full prosecution process; viewers do not see the actual execution as it is never carried out, though Baloo (in “Gruel and Unusual Punishment”) and Rebecca (in “The Time Bandit”) are both led to the firing squad. By contrast, Thembrian prisons feature in both these episodes. “Gruel and Unusual Punishment” is set on a tropical island where Baloo arrives, thinking that he has come to the Elizabeth Tapir fitness center—a pun on Elizabeth Taylor’s name—but actually, it is a Thembrian forced labor camp named Bedevilled Island Prison. He realizes his mistake well after his arrival; up to that point he assumes that the aim of the Spartan circumstances is to help him lose weight. The tropical setting contradicts the general image of Thembria as shown in the series, yet, a fitness center in a snowbound environment would not have fitted into the story of misbelief. The episode presents the common images of a forced labor camp, from a tyrannical camp commander (Warden Slammer) through different torture mechanisms—Baloo is put in a wooden box exposed to direct sunlight—to poor diet: the prisoners get steam as food. However, as Baloo’s fellow prisoner, Professor Krackpotkin remarks: “You are lucky. Yesterday it was cold steam” (08:52–08:56). Serving steam as food is both ironic and scathing, yet the representation of the labor camp evokes the accounts of former inmates quoted in *The Gulag Archipelago*. The camp-like prison in “Flight of the Snow Duck” where Molly, Wildcat, and Baloo are incarcerated looks like an arctic-subarctic Siberian labor camp surrounded by a fence. The focus is on Baloo’s attempts to escape. The Thembrian power is represented only by a single guard who leads the newly arrived prisoners to their barracks, welcoming them as follows:

GUARD. “Welcome to prison camp Sunnyvale. Your barracks is equipped with the latest conveniences: cold and colder running water, good reading

light, and air conditioning. If you have any complaints at all, just tell us and you will be shot repeatedly. Have a nice day.” (09:48–10:08)

A quintessential element of the USSR in pre- and post-Stalinist times was the bloated bureaucracy that characterized the new system right after power was seized by the Bolsheviks in 1917. As George G. Heltai remarks,

[e]ven before seizing full power, however, the communists had constituted a totalitarian state in miniature within the party; and immediately after seizing power, those institutions were imposed upon the society. Communists renounced social revolution and became isolated from the masses. Placed by events above the real society, the party rulers had to construct their own social base by creating an immense bureaucratic machine. (170)

After the Stalinist era was over, state bureaucracy was among the few topics still possible to joke about, yet only under strict control. In his 1957 article on Soviet anecdotes, William Henry Chamberlin claims that “[h]umour in official Soviet publications is rationed, controlled, and directed. Therefore, there is not much of it. Occasionally *Krokodil*, the Soviet *Punch*, publishes a story or cartoon hitting off neatly one of the innumerable aspects of Soviet bureaucracy” (27).¹⁴ Excessive red tape and routine are lampooned in the scene where a Thembrian airplane with Col. Spigot and Sgt. Dunder on board arrives in Cape Suzette on the occasion of the Friendship Festival. After landing, Col. Spigot is about to proceed with the administrative tasks following the Thembrian practice:

COL. SPIGOT. “First, where do we go to get processed? I’m always ready for the proper forms and paperwork.”

SGT. DUNDER. “I don’t think they do any of those things here, Colonel, sir.”

COL. SPIGOT. “No triplicate E1-18s? No day-long line?” (very sadly)

SGT. DUNDER. “Sorry.”

COL. SPIGOT. “What way is this to run a country?” (“The Golden Sprocket of Friendship” 02:54–03:12)

The bureaucratic operation of the state is not applicable outside Thembria. Its inefficiency is proved when it prevents an action of self-defense. Col. Spigot is pointing his gun at Trader Moe, a crocodile who, with his two

henchmen, is trying to rob the award, the golden sprocket that Spigot should hand to the mayor of Cape Suzette.

TRADER MOE. "Watch where you're pointing that thing. It may be loaded."

COL. SPIGOT. "It's all right. My bullets are back in Thembria. They can't leave the country without an 11-14 form and we were all out of those."
(11:32-11:43)

Col. Spigot cannot defend himself with an unloaded gun, so the golden sprocket is stolen.

In Stalin's USSR, laudatory epithets were used not only to praise the leader, but to emphasize the greatness of the country both literally and figuratively. The same applies to institutions and heroes of labor and war. In the common speech of the era, attributes like "glorious" ("Glorious Red Army") or "great" ("Great Patriotic War") were abundantly used to characterize the usually overstated achievements of the young country, which was commonly named "the paradise of workers and peasants." The phraseology outlined above has identifiable examples in *TaleSpin* since "glorious" and the substantive "glory" recur as adjuncts and identifiers throughout the episodes where Thembria and/or the Thembrians appear: "the glory of my Mommyland, Thembria" ("The Idol Rich"), "the glorious Thembria" ("The Idol Rich"), "Thembrians' glorious Slush Festival" ("A Spy in the Ointment"), "our glorious leader, the High Marshall" ("A Spy in the Ointment"), "the glorious, colossal Thembrian People's Court" ("Flight of the Snow Duck"), "the Glorious People's Air Force" ("The Time Bandit"), "the glorious Thembrian gruel reserve" ("Gruel and Unusual Punishment").

In the episode "Flight School Confidential," the plot comprises the preparation for the "Great Patriotic Flounder Day"—an allusion to the "Great Patriotic War"—where Col. Spigot is responsible for the air parade. The story that serves as a basis for the festival—a myth actually—is explained by Sgt. Dunder while he is instructing flight school trainees how to salute: "This is the Great Patriotic Flounder who jumped from a stream into an enemy cannon, clogging it and saving all of Thembria" (07:23-07:30). These examples demonstrate that certain components of the typical Soviet phraseology are discernible in the Thembrians' enunciations. Even though the word "communist" is not uttered in the series, its antipode is articulated when Col. Spigot explodes with rage thinking that Cape Suzette is a day ahead of Thembria: "No! This is a plot by those capitalist swine in Cape Suzette!"

(“The Time Bandit” 07:03–07:06). So, Col. Spigot indirectly reinforces that Thembria is a communist state.

Allusions to oversize goods—with a satirical tinge—made in the Soviet Union abound in *TaleSpin*. Soviet industrial products were typically bigger in size and heavier in weight than their western counterparts, principally because of the technical underdevelopment and the feeble precision of manufacturing capabilities. The artifacts related to Thembria in *TaleSpin* are more massive than those in Cape Suzette. Baloo’s Sea Duck seems tiny compared to Thembrian airplanes (“The Golden Sprocket of Friendship,” “The Idol Rich”), the firing squad is made up of tanks (“The Time Bandit”) or of cannons (“Gruel and Unusual Punishment”), the extra-size, tracked anti-aircraft gun is called “really big Bertha” (“Gruel and Unusual Punishment”), which is a reference to the German World War I cannon Big Bertha. This quality is further reinforced in the dialogue in “A Spy in the Ointment,” when the Sea Duck is bombarded by the Thembrian air force:

REBECCA. “What’s making that noise?”

BALOO. “If I’m not mistaken, a piano. Thembrians like to get your attention with large objects.” (03:38–03:45)

Scenes of bombarding reappear throughout the series, though they are never done with actual bombs but, besides the piano referred to above, with bathtubs (“Flight of the Snow Duck”), washbasins, refrigerators, and even lunchmeat and cheese (“Flying Dupes”).

The communist-socialist countries, with the USSR at the forefront, all endured the so-called shortage economy, “a system in which activities of firms and other organizations are strictly controlled, forced quantitative growth is a stable phenomenon, budget constraints of firms and organizations are soft, and budget constraints of consumers—hard” (Kersten 375). The shortage economy resulted in the unavailability of many goods and products, and often in their unaffordability by consumers. The Thembrian air force’s bombardments with various objects other than actual bombs hints at the consequences of the economic model outlined. In the episode “Gruel and Unusual Punishment,” Baloo’s planned execution has to be interrupted:

GUARD. “There’s no gunpowder in the shells, sir.”

WARDEN SLUMMER. “They must be leftover from the last gunpowder shortage.” (11:14–11:20)

In Thembria, there is a deficiency of everything, even of apartments, as Baloo must realize when he tries to retrieve his plane that, following its confiscation, has been converted into an apartment for people (“The Time Bandit”). Housing shortage was a permanent difficulty in the Soviet Union until the mid-1950s, which led to the widespread emergence of communal apartments, the so-called *kommunalkas*. As summarized by Amy Starecheski in her book review of Paola Messina’s *Soviet Communal Living: An Oral History of the Kommunalka*,

[f]amilies from different classes were forced to share housing, with one room to each family and the kitchen and bathroom shared by all. At times up to 80% of urban Soviets lived in *kommunalka*, which simultaneously addressed the housing crisis, mixed social classes, and created opportunities for State surveillance and informing at the most intimate scales. (174)

In the USSR, the individual’s political reliability often, but definitely not always, counterbalanced the potential lack of professional competencies. In *TaleSpin*, even the head of the Thembrian air force, the “Lord of the Flyboys” Col. Spigot turns out not to know how to fly (“Flight School Confidential”). Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, political engagement and devotion overwrote actual professionalism in many instances, like in the case of the infamous pseudoscientist, the enemy of Soviet genetics and three-time winner of the Stalin prize, Trofim Lysenko. As he was a favorite of Stalin, his ineffective and pseudoscientific methods were implemented and led to devastating famines.¹⁵

The several decade-long Cold War between the US and the USSR never involved any direct military action, but led to a tension between them in which the demonstration of power had a crucial role. Such a display of power was Stalin’s Berlin Blockade in 1948–49, when the Soviet forces isolated West Berlin hermetically, blocking all access to the city. The supplies to sustain the citizens were carried by aircraft of the Western powers several times a day for months.¹⁶ Ideological warfare played an important role in the conflict since both sides made attempts to emphasize their superiority over the adversary. In “Flight of the Snow Duck,” the pink flamingos imported from Cape Suzette are repainted in Thembria in this spirit:

BALOO. "What do you guys do with these flamingos anyway?"
CUSTOMS OFFICER. "We buy them for a dollar each, paint them blue, and then sell them back to Cape Suzette for half what we pay."
BALOO. "Don't you lose money?"
CUSTOMS OFFICER. "Yes, but this is a power struggle. They keep painting them pink again and selling them back to us." (05:09–05:28)

Regardless of the costs, the aim is to achieve ideological victory over the enemy. The financial loss of the Thembrians—the sale price of the repainted flamingos is half of the purchase price—is counterbalanced by the fact that the flamingos must be repainted pink in Cape Suzette so extra work is required from the enemy.

According to the "Zhdanov Doctrine" as articulated by Stalin's political ideologist Andrei Zhdanov in 1946, "the world was divided into two camps and . . . the Soviets must rally 'the peace-loving elements in the struggle against the new American expansionist plans for the enslavement of Europe'" (qtd. in Coates 219). On the surface, the USSR posed as the proponent of peace, being the leader of the "peace camp," but Stalin had ambitions to gain influence over new territories; for instance, he supported the North Korean attack against South Korea in 1950. The urge to declare or start a war persists in the series. In the episode "The Golden Sprocket of Friendship," as the sprocket of the title is robbed, Col. Spigot threatens war if it is not returned on time: "My speech is at six. If you're not back by then, it's going to be war. War! War!" (10:43–10:49). In "The Time Bandit," he intends to make war because the Cape Suzette radio—which they listen to in secret since in Thembria, like in the USSR, only state programs are permitted—affirms that it is Saturday instead of Friday to declare war.

The last episode of the series, "Flying Dupes," revolves around a conspiracy by two Thembrians, Wally, the manager of a Thembrian bomb factory and Mac, another leader there. Wally, in disguise, asks Baloo to deliver a package, officially a "present for peace" to the High Marshall's new summer residence. However, there is actually a bomb in it that must be found so that Thembria can declare war. Though the plot is a personal instigation, it illustrates how a *casus belli* is fabricated, like in the case of the "Shelling of Mainila," the provocation by the Soviets that provided the cause for launching the Winter War against Finland in November 1939.¹⁷ The bomb is not found on Baloo's plane and finally, it is delivered to the High Marshall by Col. Spigot himself. Even though the bomb explodes, the High Marshall escapes from death and, expressing his gratitude to Baloo and Col. Spigot, he

offers peace: “I want to thank you both for saving my life and for promoting peace between our countries” (21:28–21:34). The series thus ends in peace between Usland and Thembria, mirroring the real-life reconciliation between the US and the disintegrating Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s.

Conclusion

As described in the introductory part of the essay, the American perception of the Soviet Union in the 1980s continued to reflect several features of the Stalinist era. Some characteristics of Stalin’s USSR were extrapolated to the decades after the 1950s in Soviet history and created a distorted image of a country that was evidently far from being a democracy, but it was not the dictator’s inhumane and paranoid system either any more. The representation of the USSR in *TaleSpin* demonstrates how deeply the extrapolated view was embedded in the public thinking. By creating the military state Thembria and her inhabitants, the Thembrians in the series, the writers portray the Cold War Soviet Union with the means of irony and expect (at least part of) the adult audiences to understand the allusions and references to Soviet reality as envisaged by the American public. While the depiction of the Soviet Union in American films was fairly regular in the 1980s (for instance the 1984 comedy-drama *Moscow on the Hudson* directed by Paul Mazursky),¹⁸ animated films and cartoons did not focus on this topic with the exception of *TaleSpin*, which, therefore, has a unique place in the American popular culture of the late Cold War era.

Numerous references to incidents of the Stalinist Soviet Union as represented in *TaleSpin* may seem to be both incredible and farcical, yet all of them are grounded in documented facts as illustrated by the examples provided. Stalin’s death did not draw a distinctive caesura in the history of the Soviet Union apart from it signaling the end of mass political repressions, so many occurrences and aspects of everyday life in the USSR as depicted in *TaleSpin* prevailed even in the post-Stalinist era. However, the topoi discussed in this essay were all present only in a single, clearly defined period of Soviet history: high Stalinism.

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Notes

1 An early example of Soviet propaganda cartoons is the 1924 animated short film entitled *Межпланетная революция* (Interplanetary Revolution) directed by Zenon Komissarenko, Yuri Merkulov, and Nikolai Khodataev. The bourgeois of the Earth are escaping to Mars to save their wealth. However, they cannot hide themselves even there from the world revolution of the proletariat that reclaims what has been stolen from them. *Блэк энд Уайт* (the Russian title, Black and White, is written in phonetic Cyrillic transcription in English) directed by Ivan Ivanov-Vano and Leonid Amalrik in 1932, is set in the American South, depicting the oppression of African-American workers in the American sugar industry.

2 As film critic and film historian Leonard Maltin states in his introduction to the collection of eleven Warner Bros. wartime cartoons released on VHS in 1989:

[D]uring the war, filmmakers pursued two special goals: to provide an escape from daily reality and to rally Americans together with a little patriotic flag waving. Back then, every time you went to the movies, you saw a cartoon along with the feature film and they were made to be enjoyed by adults as well as children. While most of the *Looney Tunes* and *Merry Melodies* were just out for fun, they also took up the war as subject matter now and then. They reflected the feelings of their audience. . . . [T]he early forties, a time of turmoil on the warfront as well as the home front . . . the rationing of gasoline and tyres and food, women going to work in factories, and the local draft board calling up all eligible males to serve their Uncle Sam. All of that and more was reflected in these timely cartoons. (*Bugs & Daffy: The Wartime Cartoons* 01:15–02:15).

3 See also: Kwok-Yin Ting, Elle. *Wartime ideology and the American animated cartoon*. 1998. The U of British Columbia, MA thesis.

4 Crêpes Suzette is a French dessert of pancakes in sweet sauce, flambéed when served. The series is overall characterized by puns on words and cultural references, even in the titles of certain episodes, for example “Citizen Khan” refers to Orson Welles’ 1941 classic motion picture entitled *Citizen Kane*.

5 At the time of writing this essay, the site *animationsource.org* had been unavailable for months due to a server failure. The online digital archive *Wayback Machine* (<https://archive.org/web/>) stores billions of cached webpages (actually, copies of websites made at a given date and time), including those of *animationsource.org*. The cached pages of *animationsource.org* were accessed via the *Wayback Machine* as shown in the URLs given in *Works Cited*.

6 I reached out to both creators of the series, Jymn Magon and Mark Zaslove in email, hoping that they would respond to some questions and clarify certain points and especially the sources they might have had access to. Until the date of completion of this essay, no answer had been received from them so all information on character creation and development is obtained from the website *animationsource.org*.

7 See also: Conquest, Robert. *The Great Terror: Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties*. New York: Vintage Publishing, 2018. It must be noted that the Great Purge was only one of the waves of repressions initiated by Stalin; however, it is considered to be the most notorious.

8 See also: Malia, Martin. “Judging Nazism and Communism.” *The National Interest* 18.69 (2002): 63–78.

9 For objective, rather than impressionistic, journal articles see: Dunn, Keith A. "Strategy, the Soviet Union and the 1980s." *Naval War College Review* 34.5 (1981): 15–31; and Lapidus, Gail W. "Gorbachev and the Reform of the Soviet System." *Daedalus* 116.2 (1987): 1–30.

10 It is worth noting that Russia and the Soviet Union proved to be commonly interchangeable country names despite the fact that Russia was only a part of the USSR. Even such a renowned scholar as the economist Marshall I. Goldman refers to the Soviet Union as Russia. See: Goldman, Marshall I. and Shigeto Tsuru. "Economics of environment and renewable resources in socialist systems: Part 1: Russia. Part 2: China." *Handbook of Natural Resource and Energy Economics Vol. 2*. Ed. Allen V. Kneese and James L. Sweeney. Amsterdam & New York: North-Holland, 1985. 725–49.

11 See also: Pisch, Anita. "Stalin Is Like a Fairytale Sycamore Tree—Stalin As a Symbol." *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929–1953*. Canberra: ANU Press, 2016: 191–289.

12 See also: Applebaum, Anne. *Gulag: A History*. New York: Doubleday, 2003; Conquest, Robert. *The Great Terror*. For a statistical analysis of Gulag inmates see: Ellmann, Michael. "Soviet Repression Statistics: Some Comments." *Europe-Asia Studies* 54.7 (2002): 1151–72.

13 One example of the many: "A half-literate stovemaker used to enjoy writing his name in his free time. This raised his self-esteem. There was no blank paper around, so he wrote on newspapers. His neighbors found his newspaper in the sack in the communal toilet, with pen-and-ink flourishes across the countenance of the Father and Teacher. Anti-Soviet Agitation—ten years" (Solzhenitsyn 75).

14 Chamberlin's article was published four years after Stalin's death in 1957. Even though the de-Stalinization initiated by Nikita Khrushchev had been in progress, the process of liberalization known as the "Khrushchev Thaw" was slow, gradual, and partial. Criticizing the state from any aspect would have been impossible some years earlier in Stalin's Soviet Union.

15 See also: DeJong-Lambert, William. "Biological Utopias East and West. Trofim D. Lysenko and His Critics." *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West*. Ed. Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith, and Joes Segal. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2012. 33–52.

16 See also: Tusa, Ann and John Tusa. *The Berlin Blockade*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988.

17 "(A)t the village of Mainila on the Soviet side of the frontier on the Karelian isthmus four Soviet soldiers were reported by the Soviet authorities to have been killed and more injured by Finnish artillery. This has been considered by Soviet historians to have been a provocation and the immediate cause of the train of events which led to the Soviet action on 30 November. The Finns, however, claimed that they had no artillery close enough to fire into the Soviet village concerned and that the Finnish frontier guards had noted at the time in their reports that the shots sounded as if they came from the south-east and thus from Soviet territory!" (Spring 219)

18 On the Cold War from a cinematic perspective see: Shaw, Tony and Denise Young. *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds*. Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 2010.

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