

**Remembering the Socialist Past:
Narratives of East German and Soviet Childhood in German
and Russian Fiction and Autobiography since 1990/1**

Submitted by Rebecca Louise Knight to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
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Abstract

This study compares German memory of life in the German Democratic Republic with Russian memory of life in the Soviet Union, as represented and created within fictional and autobiographical narratives of childhood, published since the collapse of each regime. The chosen texts are, to varying degrees, fictionalized and/or autobiographical. A comparison between German and Russian narratives is particularly interesting because the socialist past is remembered very differently in each country's public discourse and culture. An examination of narratives about childhood allows for a complex relationship between the post-socialist present and the socialist past to emerge. I study the texts and their reception, in conjunction with an analysis of the dominant ways of remembering the socialist past circulating within German and Russian society and culture. This allows the analysis to go beyond a straightforward comparison between the representations of the socialist past in the two groups of texts, to also explore how those representations are interpreted and received. It also demonstrates how the surrounding memory cultures appear to be producing quite different approaches to representing memories of broadly similar socialist childhood experiences.

Chapter 1 explores the role of literary texts in revealing and shaping both individual and collective memory with a review of relevant research in the field of memory studies. Chapter 2 draws on existing scholarship on post-socialist memory in German and Russian society and culture in order to identify dominant trends in the way the socialist past has been remembered and represented in the two countries since 1990/1. The analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 reveals a more detailed picture of the complexities and ambiguities inherent in looking back at childhood under socialist rule through the example of the chosen texts, and in the ways they are received by critics and by readers (in reviews posted online). I demonstrate that, in line with the surrounding memory cultures, questions of how the socialist past should be remembered are a more central concern in the German texts and their reception than in the Russian texts and reception. I show, however, that the nature of the Soviet past is often portrayed indirectly in the Russian texts and I explore how critics and readers respond to these portrayals.

Note on Transliteration and Translation:

The Library of Congress system without diacritics is used for the transliteration of Cyrillic. Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own and references are made to the original source. Quotations from the primary texts in the original language can be found in the Appendix. Quotations from secondary material are given in translation only.

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Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	9
Aims and Approach of the Thesis	10
Why Childhood?	12
The Primary Texts	14
Existing Scholarship and the Contribution Made by this Thesis	23
Chapter 1: Memory, Literature and Childhood: Theoretical Considerations	31
Theories of Collective and Cultural Memory	32
Literature and Memory	39
Childhood, Memory and Literature	46
Conclusion	56
Chapter 2: German and Russian Memory Cultures	59
Remembering the Socialist Past	60
Remembering the East German Past	71
Transitional Justice	74
State-sponsored Memory, History and Public Debate	78
Eastern German Identity after the Fall of the Wall	82
<i>Ostalgie</i>	89
The German Literary Context after the Fall of the Wall	95
Post-Unification Literary Representation of the GDR and East German Experience	99
Conclusion	109
Remembering the Soviet Past	110
Glasnost	111
Transitional Justice and the Political Use of Memory	114
Nostalgia and Selective Forgetting	120
The Post-Soviet Russian Literary Context	134
Representations of the Soviet Past in Post-Soviet Russian Literature	137
Memoirs and Fictional Narratives of Everyday Soviet Experience	141
Conclusion	149

Chapter 3: Memory of Life under Socialism in German, Russian and Russian Émigré Narratives of Childhood	151
Analysis of German Texts by Mourad Kusserow, Kathrin Aehnlich, Claudia Rusch and Daniel Wiechmann	159
<i>Rüber machen: Eine Kindheit und Jugend in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone/DDR</i>	159
<i>Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen</i>	165
<i>Meine freie deutsche Jugend</i>	174
<i>Immer Bereit! Von einem jungen Pionier der auszog, das Glück zu suchen</i>	181
Analysis of Russian Texts by Larisa Miller, Boris Minaev, Oleg Zaionchkovskii, Pavel Sanaev and Oleg Pavlov	190
'Bol'shaia Polianka'	190
<i>Detstvo Levy</i>	198
<i>Petrovich</i>	208
<i>Pokhoronite menia za plintusom</i>	216
'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' and 'Shkol'niki'	221
Analysis of Russian Émigré Texts by Ruben David Gonsales Gal'ego and Elena Gorokhova	229
<i>Beloe na chernom</i>	229
<i>A Mountain of Crumbs</i>	236
Conclusion	244
Chapter 4: Reception by Critics and Readers	248
German Reception	252
Critics' Reception of the German Texts	253
<i>Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen</i>	253
<i>Zonenkinder</i>	258
<i>Meine freie deutsche Jugend</i>	264
<i>Halbschwimmer</i>	271
Waning Interest in Narratives of East German Childhood	274
<i>Immer Bereit</i>	277
<i>Rüber machen...</i>	279
Readers' Reception of the German Texts	280
Identification, Memory and Authenticity	281
Readers' Assessments of the Representation of the GDR	287
Conclusion	296

Russian Reception	297
Critics' Reception of the Russian Texts	300
'Bol'shaia Polianka' in <i>Zolotaia Simfoniia</i>	300
<i>Petrovich</i>	306
<i>Pokhoronite menia za plintusom</i>	315
<i>Beloe na chernom</i>	324
Readers' Reception of the Russian Texts	337
<i>Detstvo Levy</i>	337
<i>Pokhoronite menia za plintusom</i>	339
<i>Beloe na chernom</i>	349
Conclusion	353
Conclusion	355
Appendix: Quotations from the Primary Texts in the Original Language	362
Bibliography	382

Introduction

The collapse of the socialist states, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR), brought about massive change in the lives of their former citizens. Life under socialism became the realm of memory. In general terms there were many similarities between the GDR and the USSR: the lack of freedom of expression and movement, the pressure to conform to the ideological values promoted by the state (or at least to appear to do so in public) and the threat of arrest for those who did not. In particular, there were many parallels between East German and Soviet childhood. In both the GDR and USSR children were the target of moral and ideological education which aimed to create ideal socialist citizens.¹ The celebration of socialist heroes was promoted among schoolchildren, and the capitalist West was portrayed as a corrupt and dangerous influence, particularly on the young. The children's organization the Young Pioneers existed in both states, with a very similar structure and promoting many of the same aims and activities. Many textbooks, stories and songs were translated directly from the Russian for use in the GDR. Socialist childhood experiences have, however, been remembered and re-imagined in different ways in the German and Russian narratives analysed in this thesis. A comparative study highlights these differences and allows some hypotheses to be made as to what has shaped these differing approaches. There is a marked contrast in the way the GDR has been remembered and represented in the public sphere in unified Germany compared to the way in which the Soviet past has been remembered and represented in Russia. A comparison between German and Russian texts is, therefore, of particular interest because it allows for an investigation into the significance of these

¹ On upbringing and education in the GDR see John Rodden, *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and Eastern German Identity* (University Park, PA.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); on upbringing and education, as well as childhood more broadly, in Soviet Russia see Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

contrasting post-socialist contexts for how the socialist past is remembered in literature.

This introduction sets out the aims of my research and explains the structure of the thesis. I will then explain the reasons for choosing to analyse depictions of childhood in particular. This will be followed by an introduction to the primary texts which will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Finally, I will give a brief overview of existing literature to show the contribution made by this thesis; a more detailed exploration of research relevant to my thesis is provided in Chapters 1 and 2.

Aims and Approach of the Thesis

Following the work of scholars working on literature within the context of memory studies, especially Astrid Erll, as well as Ansgar Nünning, Birgit Neumann and Ann Rigney, my approach is based on the premise that literary texts can both represent, and, potentially, play an active role in shaping individual and collective remembrance. This thesis will show how German and Russian portrayals of childhood in the GDR and Soviet Union 'remember' the socialist past in different ways. This is not simply an analysis of how life under socialism is represented in the texts. I also explore the extent to which the texts reflect, challenge or go beyond the dominant ways of remembering the socialist past circulating in German and Russian society and culture. Analysis of critics' and readers' reviews of the texts further demonstrates the relationship between the surrounding memory cultures and how the texts are interpreted. Analysis of the texts' reception also provides some indication of whether the texts are likely to shape the individual memories of readers and, in a few cases, whether a text may contribute to collective memory of the socialist past.²

² See Chapter 1 for my discussion of collective and cultural memory and an explanation of how I understand and apply these terms in my own research.

The overarching aim of the analysis throughout the thesis is to identify how the German and Russian texts differ in how they 'remember' the socialist past. That is, it examines how the socialist past is represented in the texts and how that representation is interpreted by critics and readers. More specifically, I explore the following questions:

- How do the texts create differing modes of remembering the socialist past?
- To what extent do the texts' portrayals of East German or Soviet childhood reflect, reinforce, challenge or complicate existing positions within memory debates about the socialist past?
- In what ways do critics' and readers' reviews engage with or appear to be shaped by dominant ways of remembering within German or Russian society?
- To what extent does the reception of the texts indicate the memory-making effects of these narratives?

In the first two chapters I set out the theoretical and contextual background for my argument. Chapter 1 provides a review of scholarship concerned with how literary texts can be analysed within the framework of memory studies. The chapter explains the methodology used in this thesis. Chapter 2 reviews existing research on how the socialist past is remembered in Germany and Russia, both in society and culture more generally, and in literature. This allows for the identification of dominant trends which may have influenced the primary texts and their reception. It also highlights the significant differences in how the Soviet past is remembered in Russia, compared to German approaches to remembering the GDR. Chapter 3 analyses the portrayal of the socialist past in a selection of German and Russian texts. I also include two Russian émigré texts to show how Soviet childhood has been remembered by authors living outside Russia and writing with non-Russian readers in mind. The analysis of all the texts includes consideration of the kinds of

specifically East German or Soviet experience portrayed and the narrative strategies employed in each text. Investigation of these two aspects demonstrates how certain aspects of, and concerns about the socialist past tend to be foregrounded in the German and Russian émigré texts, and underplayed in the Russian texts. Finally, Chapter 4 considers the reception of the texts. I analyse reviews by both critics and readers in order to show the extent to which issues of memory and identity are explored in, or are conspicuously absent from responses to the texts. The analysis of reception also demonstrates how some texts may be actively shaping memory of the socialist past.

Why Childhood?

Childhood is a particularly appropriate subject for narratives which seek to position a personal past within a wider context which considers issues of memory and identity. On a personal level childhood is usually seen as the most crucial part of our past for defining who we are. This derives from increased knowledge of developmental theories of childhood during the late nineteenth century, followed by the early twentieth-century interest in psychoanalysis, which made the child an indicator of and even the key to understanding the adult. This created a situation in which 'new information about childhood was abstracted, or conceptualised into the figure of "the child", or the idea of the child' and as a result 'the child figure becomes a central vehicle for expressing ideas about the self and its history'.³

Marianne Gullestad suggests that the widespread and popular acceptance of psychoanalytical theories which see early childhood experience as central to adult development is often a reason for the inclusion of childhood in autobiography:

'Childhood is seen as the "natural" foundation of the adult self.'⁴ Gullestad also

³ Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 5.

⁴ Marianne Gullestad, 'Modernity, Self, and Childhood in the Analysis of Life Stories', in *Imagined Childhoods: Self and Society in Autobiographical Accounts*, ed. by Gullestad (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996), pp. 1–39 (p. 2).

notes the strong associations between childhood and a collective sense of identity and origins:

Looking back on one's childhood means to a large extent returning to the memories of the intimate sphere of everyday life in the family, where group identities were transmitted as stories, myths, habits, food practices, religious practices, and so on. [...] The place of childhood, as the *Heimat*, or the place one is from, is for many people a microcosmos of the nation or the ethnic group.⁵

Thus cultural representations of childhood may have significance beyond the exploration of an individual's memory and identity. The portrayal of children's lives can also be ideal for giving an insight into society's values and beliefs because childhood is a period of socialisation; the portrayal of children's upbringing and education is likely to reveal how the child's worldview is shaped by his or her experiences in the family and at school.

There is potential for a particular resonance between memories of childhood and memories of life in a collapsed state; just as childhood is an irretrievable past to which one can return only in memory, similarly the socialist past can be perceived as a 'lost world'. Of course any adult looking back on his/her childhood is looking back on a different time period, with different attitudes and fashions. However, for former East Germans and Russians looking back to their childhoods in the GDR and USSR there is an added significance, because their society and way of living, and therefore, inevitably their sense of who they are as a member of that society, has changed in far more dramatic ways. This may be one reason why childhood can be identified as a prominent feature in both German and Russian (often nostalgic) remembering of the socialist past in their respective countries.

⁵ Gullestad, pp. 9–10.

Anna Saunders has noted the prevalence of the symbols and characters of childhood within *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for East Germany), for example, the character of the *Sandmann* as portrayed on East German children's television.⁶ Another example is the commercial success of a series of books dedicated to childhood memories of the GDR, *Aufgewachsen in der DDR – Wir vom Jahrgang...* (Growing up in the GDR – Born in the Year ...).⁷ For Russians there are websites and online communities dedicated to Soviet childhood, in which participants share stories, photos, and multimedia recordings of, for example, Young Pioneer songs, or popular cartoons.⁸ Other examples of Russian popular culture drawing on Soviet childhood include a popular St Petersburg band, Kim & Buran, whose music derives from the sound effects of Soviet children's TV shows, and a TV series broadcast in 2008, *Sinie nochi* (*Blue Nights*), set in a Young Pioneer summer camp.⁹

The Primary Texts

The texts chosen for analysis include narratives which are clearly defined as either autobiographical or fictional, as well as several texts which are not easily categorised but which seem to have some autobiographical basis. The notion of autobiographical truth and where the boundary between fictional and autobiographical narratives lies has been widely discussed and theorized.¹⁰ This is

⁶ Anna Saunders, "'Normalizing' the Past: East German Culture and Ostalgie", in *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-first Century: Beyond Normalization*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), pp. 89–119 (p. 101). The complex nature of *Ostalgie* will be discussed in Chapter 2.

⁷ The GDR series has been published by Wartberg since 2007. See <http://www.wartberg-verlag.de/wir_ueber_uns/der_verlag.html> [accessed 3 August 2012].

⁸ See, for example, the livejournal community, 'Rozhdennye v SSSR' ('Born in the USSR') <<http://nashe-detstvo.livejournal.com/>> [accessed 3 August 2012]; and the website, '76–82: Entsiklopedia nashego detstvo' ('76–82: Encyclopedia of our Childhood') <<http://7682.ru/>> [accessed 3 August 2012].

⁹ On Kim & Buran see Alexei Yurchak, 'Post-Post-Soviet Sincerity: Young Pioneers, Cosmonauts and other Soviet Heroes Born Today', in *What is Soviet Now?*, ed. by Thomas Lahusen and Peter Solomon (Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 257–276 (pp. 260–62); The title, *Sinie nochi*, comes from the first line of a well-known Young Pioneer song. The series is referred to in Dmitrii Tikhomirov, 'Zolotoi sovok', *Kommersant*, 8 December 2008, section *Den'gi* <<http://kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=1090139>> [accessed 28 January 2009].

¹⁰ For discussion of autobiographical truth (including generic conventions, meanings of autobiography after poststructuralism, and famous cases of 'fake' autobiographies) see Linda R. Anderson, *Autobiography*, (London: Routledge, 2001); Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis, MN: University

not, however, an important distinction for the present study. As will be further explained in Chapter 1, what matters is whether a text's representation of the past is received as authentic and relevant to readers' own memories.¹¹ Because my approach considers the possibility that the texts may influence collective memory, my selection of the primary texts mainly includes those which appear to have been widely read. This can be demonstrated by numbers of readers' reviews posted online, the extent of critical reception in the media, the number of editions published, whether the text has won literary prizes or has been adapted into a film. I have included a few texts which cannot be easily identified as commercially successful or critically acclaimed where these demonstrate interesting strategies or approaches to portrayal of the socialist past.

The German Texts

Portrayal of childhood experience in the GDR has been a popular theme in recent German autobiography and fiction. The German texts chosen for analysis include examples of both fiction and autobiography, narratives which describe families who conform to or dissent from state ideology to differing extents, and narratives set in different decades of the GDR's existence.

Rüber machen... Eine Kindheit und Jugend in der Sowjetischen

Besatzungszone/DDR (2008) by Mourad Kusserow (b. 1939) is set much earlier than the other German texts under discussion.¹² It is an autobiographical account of the author and his family's experience in the Soviet-occupied zone, and the early years of the GDR. His narrative culminates in his escape to West Germany as a fifteen-year-old in 1954. Kusserow is prompted by the events of the *Wende* to look

of Minnesota Press, 2001); Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

¹¹ The analysis in Chapter 4 will demonstrate that this is true of those texts for which readers' reviews were available.

¹² Mourad Kusserow, *Rüber machen ... Eine Kindheit und Jugend in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone/DDR, 1945 - 1954* (Mainz: Donata Kinzelbach, 2008).

back on his childhood in East Germany. (*Wende* literally means 'turn' or 'change'; the term refers to the collapse of the GDR and the subsequent process of German unification.) He describes the experience of growing up in a rural area in West Saxony under quite deprived conditions. His narrative is not confined to personal memories, however, but also includes historical background about various political developments and events, for example the general strike in 1953, of which he had only limited knowledge or awareness of at the time. Kusserow's family opposed many of the values and ideas promoted by the state; in the narrative the GDR is clearly perceived as a totalitarian state. Because Kusserow escaped from the GDR aged fifteen, his account takes a slightly different perspective from the other texts, in that he is not telling his story as a former East German in reunified Germany.

Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen (1998) by Kathrin Aehnlich (b. 1957) is a novel set in Leipzig in the 1960s.¹³ The text is narrated in the first person, mostly conveying the child's perspective, but occasionally also an adult retrospective perspective. The story describes a relatively normal East German childhood and youth. The protagonist's family is outwardly conformist, although not always so in private. In this novel, intertextual references to children's and popular culture (some, but not all, specific to the GDR) as well as inclusion of many different forms of discourse, for example, official slogans of the Young Pioneers or German proverbs and songs, create a vivid portrayal of the many influences on a child in the GDR and provide many opportunities for the former East German reader to recognise and identify with common experiences.

Meine freie deutsche Jugend (2003) by Claudia Rusch (b. 1971) gives an autobiographical account of the author's childhood, living initially on the island of Rügen, and then in Berlin.¹⁴ The focus of the narrative is her childhood and teenage years, although throughout the text she also includes description of experiences

¹³ Kathrin Aehnlich, *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen* (Munich: Piper, 2009).

¹⁴ Claudia Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005).

during and after the *Wende* in which her upbringing and identity as a child of the GDR play a significant role. Rusch has been brought up to question and be critical of the regime. She and her mother live for a while with Robert Havemann at the time of his house arrest and intense surveillance by the Stasi. This experience means that, even as a young child, Rusch is aware of the state as a potentially controlling and threatening force. Rusch suggests that had the GDR continued to exist in the same form, she would have tried to leave.

Immer Bereit! Von einem jungen Pionier der auszog, das Glück zu suchen (2004) is the childhood memoir of Daniel Wiechmann (b. 1974).¹⁵ It portrays his childhood ambitions to be a good socialist citizen and his growing confusion and eventual disillusionment with the GDR. The text describes his experience of growing up in an apparently conformist family. As a child he does not consciously feel deprived or limited as an East German citizen. The text also explores the author-narrator's experience of the *Wende* and the changed perspective this brings to his own past and identity.

In addition to the four German texts above which I examine in Chapter 3, I consider the reception of two further texts in Chapter 4: Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* and Katja Oskamp's *Halbschwimmer*.¹⁶ Jana Hensel (b. 1976) draws on her own experiences and memories, but in a different way to the previously mentioned memoirs. *Zonenkinder* (2002) is structured into chapters on different themes, such as 'our childhood', 'our education', 'our future'. It seeks to convey the experience of a generation who were adolescents when the GDR collapsed. The text was a huge commercial success and provoked considerable debate and controversy in the media. Katja Oskamp's (b. 1970) *Halbschwimmer* (2003) describes episodes from the life of the protagonist, Tanja. Each chapter could be read alone as a short story.

¹⁵ Daniel Wiechmann, *Immer bereit! Von einem Jungen Pionier, der auszog, das Glück zu suchen* (Munich: Droemer, 2004).

¹⁶ Jana Hensel, *Zonenkinder* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004); Katja Oskamp, *Halbschwimmer* (Zürich: Ammann Verlag, 2003).

The first five chapters are centred around events within her family or at school, while later chapters focus on her personal relationships as a young adult. The protagonist's experience of the *Wende* is not portrayed and although there are a few incidents narrated in which the East German context is relevant, it is not central to the story. The text is instead focussed on the protagonist's feelings and development from a child to a young woman.

Growing up in the GDR was a particularly popular topic among young former East German authors from the mid-1990s up to the late 2000s.¹⁷ In addition to the texts discussed in detail in this thesis, other representations of GDR childhood include semi-autobiographical texts by Falko Hennig, Jakob Hein and Michael Tetzlaff, all of whom describe growing up in the GDR in the 1970s-1980s.¹⁸ Falko Hennig's *Alles nur geklaut* (1999) is the story of the narrator's criminal career, from his first theft of a toy car at kindergarten, to insurance and welfare scams after 1989. Both Tetzlaff's *Ostblöckchen* (2004) and Hein's *Mein Erstes T-Shirt* (2001) provide humorous accounts of childhood and adolescence in the GDR.

The Russian Texts

The Russian texts I will analyse have been selected to demonstrate a range of Soviet childhood experiences and a variety of ways in which these have been presented.¹⁹ In order to make a fair comparison with the German texts, I only considered for inclusion narratives of Soviet childhood set after the end of Second World War.

¹⁷ Texts focussed more on East German adolescence include Sascha Lange, *DJ Westradio: Meine glückliche DDR-Jugend* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2007), Andre Kubiczek, *Junge Talente* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2002); Thomas Brussig, *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1999); and Jochen Schmidt, *Müller haut uns raus* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002).

¹⁸ Falko Hennig, *Alles nur geklaut* (Augsburg: Maro, 1999); Michael Tetzlaff, *Ostblöckchen: Eine Kindheit in der Zone* (Frankfurt am Main: Schöffling, 2004); Jakob Hein, *Mein erstes T-Shirt* (Munich: Piper, 2001).

¹⁹ Other Russian literary portrayals of Soviet childhood not examined in this thesis include: Denis Iatsutko, *Bozhestvo* (Moscow: OGI, 2005); Evgenii Grishkovets, *Reki* (Moscow: Makhaon, 2005); Eduard Kochergin, *Kreshchennye krestami* (Saint Petersburg: Vita Nova, 2010) and Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Devochki* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2002).

Larisa Miller (b. 1940), best known for her poetry, has also written a number of autobiographical prose pieces. These have been published in differing versions in both journals and in collections of Miller's prose. I will analyse 'Bol'shaia Polianka' as published in *Zolotaia Simfoniia* (2008).²⁰ In writing about her childhood, Miller draws attention to the role of memory and the relationship between the present and the past. Miller's text is the most reflective of all the texts, often using the adult voice of the author-narrator to express her feelings on remembering people and places from her past. There are also many passages which recreate the experience of her younger self. The narrative is fragmented, moving freely between past and present. Miller's narration consists of short episodes, often seeming to portray the process of remembering itself by linking events from different times in her childhood, and her life more generally, by association, rather than any temporal progression. In terms of content, Miller describes experiences at home with her family and at school. She has many happy memories, but she is not nostalgic. Cruelty and suffering as part of Soviet life are not ignored. In particular, throughout the text there is a recurring theme of anti-Semitic persecution, which she and her family faced.

Boris Minaev's (b. 1959) *Detstvo Levy* (2001) narrates episodes from the predominantly happy childhood of the protagonist Leva.²¹ The stories are semi-autobiographical; when Minaev began to doubt the accuracy of his memories he invented the fictional character, Leva, to give himself more creative freedom.²² The texts mainly portray childhood from Leva's perspective (written in the first person), but the retrospective voice of the adult narrator occasionally intrudes to explain some details. These texts are published for young readers, and so there are occasions where explanations are necessary for those who did not experience life in the Soviet Union in the 1960s for themselves. Both reviewers and the author

²⁰ Larisa Miller, 'Bol'shaia Polianka', in *Zolotaia simfoniia* (Moscow: Vremia, 2008), pp. 8–71.

²¹ Boris Minaev, *Detstvo Levy* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2001).

²² See the author's note at the end of *Detstvo Levy*, pp. 250–51.

himself suggest that the texts will also appeal to adults who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s. Minaev depicts Leva's childhood with affection and sometimes explicit nostalgia. The text conveys a mostly happy childhood, with the narrative focussed on family life and exploits with friends. Leva is fiercely patriotic and comes from a family who are clearly succeeding within Soviet society; his father is a senior engineer and drives a Volga, and his mother is highly educated.²³ Leva's best friend, Kolupaev, meanwhile offers a more cynical view on Soviet society and expresses a wish to leave for America.

Pokhoronite menia za plintusom (1996) is a hugely successful semi-autobiographical novel by Pavel Sanaev (b. 1969).²⁴ He describes the life of his protagonist (named Sasha Savel'ev) living with his grandparents. Sasha's grandmother is controlling and often cruel. She allows Sasha very little contact with his mother, and the few occasions he spends with her are a source of great happiness. Sasha is a sickly child, although it is not clear whether the seriousness of his condition is exaggerated by the grandmother; she has told him that he will probably die by the age of 16. The text is mostly confined to the child's perspective, with occasional passages which follow other adult characters overhearing their conversations in places where the child could not be. This has the effect of suggesting reasons for their behaviour, and allows a fuller picture of events than would be possible if the child's perspective was strictly maintained. There is, however, never a clear intrusion by any external author or narrator commenting on the action. Despite the psychological cruelty experienced by the narrator, he usually describes events in a matter of fact and sometimes humorous way. Sanaev is the step-son of the famous Soviet actor, Rolan Bykov, and his mother and grandfather were also known as actors, so there is unsurprisingly some interest in whether Sanaev's account is a true story of his own family life. The book, defined on publication as a novel (*roman*), appears to be widely received by readers and

²³ Minaev, pp. 194, 204, and 241.

²⁴ Pavel Sanaev, *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom* (Moscow: Astrel', 2008).

critics as autobiographical, although Sanaev himself has claimed that the text is only partially based on his own experience.²⁵

Oleg Pavlov's (b. 1970) 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' (2001) and 'Shkol'niki' (1999) are defined respectively as a *roman* (novel) and a *povest'* (novella) in their publication, though many critics have assumed that these are based on the author's own childhood experiences.²⁶ The narrative of 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' is told entirely from the perspective of an unnamed protagonist, a young boy living in Moscow. Pavlov's narrator experiences his parents' divorce, and also describes time spent with grandparents. The protagonist is mostly isolated from other children, and the text conveys a sense of sadness and even desperation. The limited perspective of the narrator means that the reader is often presented with an incomplete and confused perception of events. Pavlov's 'Shkol'niki' is included in my analysis for its particularly interesting portrayal of a child joining the Young Pioneers. As in 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh', the narrator of 'Shkol'niki' is unnamed. He lives with his mother (the protagonist's father is absent) and the story mainly describes the narrator's activities at school and with friends. Again, this text conveys a fairly bleak image of Soviet life.

Petrovich (2005) by Oleg Zaionchkovskii (b. 1959) is a fictional account of growing up in Soviet Russia in the 1970s.²⁷ The text is narrated in the third person allowing an external, authorial voice to provide some details and comment, but mostly it is focalized through the child protagonist's perspective. In the early chapters, the primary subject is the young protagonist's experiences of life and the constraints imposed by adults around him. The story tells various episodes from the life of 'Petrovich' (he is, unusually, addressed by his patronymic from a very young

²⁵ 'Chasto zadavaemye voprosy', <<http://plintusbook.ru/faq/>> [accessed 16 November 2010].

²⁶ Oleg Pavlov, 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh', in *V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh* (Moscow: Vremia, 2007), pp. 6–104; and 'Shkol'niki', in *V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh*, pp. 107–218.

²⁷ Oleg Zaionchkovskii, *Petrovich: Roman o zhivoi russkoi dushe* (Moscow: OGI, 2005).

age), including experience of kindergarten, school, family life, games with other children, and a final chapter tells about his adult life (still during the Soviet period).

The Russian Émigré Texts

My inclusion of two texts by authors who have emigrated from Russia helps to show that exposure to an external perspective on the Soviet past and the anticipation of readers who do not share that past can provoke a different kind of portrayal of Soviet childhood.

Beloe na chernom (2002) by Ruben David Gonsales Gal'ego (b. 1968) is an autobiographical novel (*avtobiograficheskii roman v rasskazakh*).²⁸ Gal'ego was the grandson of the Secretary-General of the Spanish Communist Party. Born with cerebral palsy, and without hands or feet, Gal'ego was brought up in Soviet children's homes. The text describes both frequent cruelty and rare moments of kindness in these homes, and tells not only his own story, but also about others he encountered during his life in care institutions. The narrative mixes passages which recreate the child's perspective, often told in the present tense in very simple language, with the author's voice reflecting on life more generally or on changes in his life since then. The text won the Russian Booker Prize in 2003. Gal'ego was living in Madrid at the time of the text's first publication.²⁹

Finally, Elena Gorokhova's (b. 1955) *A Mountain of Crumbs* (2010) is an account of Soviet childhood and youth written in English for a Western audience.³⁰ At the age of twenty four Gorokhova emigrated to the USA by marrying an American. In the initial chapters, Gorokhova writes in detail about her family history, especially her mother's life. She then narrates the story of her own childhood and youth, describing experiences at home and at school. She appears to

²⁸ Ruben David Gonsales Gal'ego, *Beloe na chernom* (Moscow: Limbus Press, 2005).

²⁹ For further justification for including *Beloe na chernom* as an émigré text, see Chapter 3, pp. 230–31.

³⁰ Elena Gorokhova, *A Mountain of Crumbs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

convey her feelings as they were at the time, that is, there is little explicit reflection or retrospection from a present-day viewpoint (except in the epilogue). The inconsistencies and limitations of the Soviet system, which cause her confusion as a child and increasingly frustrate her as she grows up, are a recurring theme of the text.

Existing Scholarship and the Contribution Made by this Thesis

The research presented in this thesis draws on scholarship in a number of areas. The scholarship on cultural and collective memory and, in particular, the study of literature and childhood in literature in relation to memory, which has provided the foundations for the methodological approach taken in my research, will be reviewed in Chapter 1. A detailed exploration of the relevant observations and arguments presented in existing research concerned with post-socialist memory and/or literary representations of the socialist past in Russia or Germany will be provided in Chapter 2. Here, I wish only to give a brief overview of existing scholarship in order to demonstrate how this thesis makes an original contribution to the study of post-socialist memory and, more specifically, to the study of literary representation of the Soviet past in post-Soviet Russia.

Scholarship on memory of the socialist past across Eastern Europe and Russia has been brought together in a number of edited collections of articles. While these tend not to offer detailed comparative research they do provide an insight into the commonalities and differences in how post-socialist memory has developed in different states. For example, the recent publication *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation* edited by Maria Todorova contains analyses of post-socialist memory across a wide range of countries in a variety of media including oral history, film, school textbooks and memoir.³¹ Some collections have

³¹ *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, ed. by Maria Todorova (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010); An earlier example which includes consideration of post-socialist memory through oral history focussed on 'totalitarian' pasts in various contexts

focussed on specific aspects of post-socialist memory, for example, the differing approaches to transitional justice, or the differing manifestations of post-socialist nostalgia.³² The 'Memory at War' project (2010-2013) led by Alexander Etkind provides further evidence of current interest in the comparative study of post-socialist memory; the project 'seeks to explore how public memory of twentieth-century traumas mediates the variety of ways in which East European nations develop in post-socialist space' with a particular focus on Russia, Ukraine and Poland.³³ There have, however, been very few studies which directly compare Russian and German memory.³⁴ Collaborative research by geographers Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson, and Karen Till compares German and Russian memory of the socialist past through the differing use of monuments and significant buildings and spaces.³⁵ Alexander Etkind also considers the importance of monuments in his comparison of German memory of the National Socialist past with Russian memory of the Soviet past.³⁶ I have not found any research which compares literary treatment of the socialist past in Germany and Russia.³⁷

Theories and concepts of memory have often been applied in research within German studies. Questions of how the GDR should be remembered and represented have been the subject of considerable discussion and debate in German society and

is *Memory and Totalitarianism*, ed. by Luisa Passerini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

³² *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past*, ed. by Lavinia Stan (London: Routledge, 2009); *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, ed. by Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010).

³³ *Memory at War: Cultural Dynamics in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, <<http://www.memoryatwar.org/about-us>> [accessed 7 August 2012].

³⁴ For further discussion of the relevant scholarship, see Chapter 2, pp. 65–69.

³⁵ Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson, and Karen Till, 'Post-totalitarian National Identity: Public Memory in Germany and Russia', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 5 (2004), 357–380.

³⁶ Alexander Etkind, 'Hard and Soft in Cultural Memory: Political Mourning in Russia and Germany', *Grey Room*, 16 (2004), 36–59. There has also been a study of Russian and German memory of the Second World War: *Recalling the Past – (Re)constructing the Past: Collective and Individual Memory of World War II in Russia and Germany*, ed. by Withold Bonner and Arja Rosenholm (Helsinki: Aleksanteri Institute, 2008).

³⁷ The only comparative research I have found which considers literature in relation to the post-socialist context is Andrew Wachtel's study of the changing role of the writer across Eastern Europe and Russia since 1989, but his research is not directly concerned with memory and he excludes consideration of the GDR/German context because of the very different circumstances of its transition. See Andrew Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant After Communism: The Role of the Writer in the Eastern Europe* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

culture, and have accordingly attracted considerable attention in academic research.³⁸ Early work by, for example, Daphne Berdahl, Elizabeth Ten Dyke, and Patricia Hogwood demonstrated the complexities of negotiating East German memory and identity in unified Germany.³⁹ In 2006 the plurality of German 'memory contests' was highlighted by Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove.⁴⁰ Much of the recently published research, which can now reflect on the developments in memory of the GDR over twenty years since its collapse, demonstrates that there is sustained interest in exploring the significance of memory of the GDR in contemporary Germany; these interdisciplinary collections continue to emphasize the multiplicity of memories circulating in German culture.⁴¹

In terms of German literary studies there is now a considerable body of work available on how German literature engages with the East German past and issues faced by former East Germans since unification.⁴² Several surveys of post-unification 'East German' literature have proved useful in providing contextual material for this thesis, especially those by Paul Cooke and Stuart Taberner.⁴³ Jill

³⁸ For further discussion of the relevant scholarship, see Chapter 2, pp. 71–95.

³⁹ Daphne Berdahl, '(N)ostalgia for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things', *Ethnos*, 64 (1999), 192–211; Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, 'Memory, History, and Remembrance Work in Dresden', in *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. by Daphne Berdahl, Matti Bunzl, and Martha Lampland (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 139–157; Patricia Hogwood, 'Identity in the Former GDR: Expressions of 'Ostalgia' and 'Ossi pride' in United Germany', in *Globalization and National Identities: Crisis or Opportunity?*, ed. by P. Kennedy and C. J. Danks (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 64–79.

⁴⁰ Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, 'Introduction: Germany's Memory Contests and the Management of the Past', in *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. by Fuchs, Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), pp. 1–21.

⁴¹ *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State Since 1989*, ed. by Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011); *Twenty Years on: Competing Memories of the GDR in Postunification German Culture*, ed. by Renate Rechten and Dennis Tate (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011); *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany*, ed. by David Clark and Ute Wölfel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and the forthcoming, *After the Wall: Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities*, ed. by Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinfold (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁴² For further discussion of the relevant scholarship, see Chapter 2, pp. 95–109.

⁴³ Paul Cooke, "'GDR literature' in the Berlin Republic", in *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 56–71; Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Stuart Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond: Normalization and the Berlin Republic* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), especially Chapter 2.

Twark's study of humour in representations of East German experience both before and during the *Wende* has particular relevance to three of the German primary texts analysed in this thesis.⁴⁴ There have also been a large number of articles published which consider literary portrayal of East German childhood and adolescence. In many cases these are concerned with how such texts fit into, or represent something more complex than, the trend for *Ostalgie*.⁴⁵ Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* is frequently selected for analysis, often as part of discussions of the particularity of her generation who were adolescent or young adults at the time of the *Wende*.⁴⁶ Less work has been done which explores the reception of these texts. Jennifer Bierich-Shahbazi has examined the critical reception of Hensel's *Zonenkinder* and Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*.⁴⁷ I have not found any scholarship which gives extended consideration to readers' responses to literary portrayal of East German childhood. This aspect of my research therefore brings a new element to the study of these texts.

Compared to research within German studies, memory has less frequently been a guiding concept in studies of Russian society and culture, in part because there has been relatively little discussion of the Soviet past in the public sphere in

⁴⁴ Jill E. Twark, *Humor, Satire, and Identity: Eastern German Literature in the 1990s* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

⁴⁵ Particularly useful for the present study were: Anna Saunders, "'Normalizing' the Past: East German Culture and Ostalgie", in *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-first Century: Beyond Normalization*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), pp. 89–119; Oliver Igel, *Gab es die DDR wirklich? Die Darstellung des SED-Staates in komischer Prosa zur "Wende"* (Tönning: Der Andere Verlag, 2005); Owen Evans, "'Denn wir sind anders": "Zonenkinder" in the Federal Republic', *German as a Foreign Language*, 2 (2005), 20–33 <<http://www.gfl-journal.de/2-2005/evans.html>> [accessed 11 November 2008]; and Nicole Thesz, 'Adolescence in the 'Ostalgie' Generation: Reading Jakob Hein's *Mein Erstes T-Shirt Against Sonnenallee*, *Zonenkinder*, and *Good Bye, Lenin!*', *Oxford German Studies*, 37 (2008), 107–123.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Susanne Ledanff, 'Neue Formen der "Ostalgie" – Abschied von der "Ostalgie"? Erinnerungen an Kindheit und Jugend in der DDR und an die Geschichtsjahre 1989/90', *Seminar*, 43.2 (2007), 176–193. Katja Warchold also considers representations of GDR childhood with a particular focus on generational differences between those born in the mid-1970s compared to those born even just a few years earlier who reached adulthood before the collapse of the GDR, see Katja Warchold, "'Ich wollte eine Distel im sozialistischen Rosengarten sein" – autobiographische Texte von zwei DDR-Jugendgenerationen', *German Life and Letters*, 63 (2010), 354–368.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 4, pp. 264–65.

post-Soviet Russia.⁴⁸ Research within Russian studies has tended to focus on public and individual remembering (and forgetting) of traumatic events of the Soviet period, for example, Catherine Merridale's research on Russian approaches to commemorating the vast numbers of victims of war and terror during the Soviet period.⁴⁹ In studies of post-Soviet memory of the Soviet period, political instrumentalization of the past and the widespread reluctance to confront questions of guilt and collective responsibility have been contrasted with efforts made by the organisation *Memorial* to commemorate victims of Soviet terror.⁵⁰

Few academic studies of post-Soviet Russian literature have focussed on the specific relationship between literary texts and memory of the Soviet past. For example, N. Norman Shneidman's survey of Russian literature from 1995 to 2000 is arranged around particular authors and groups of authors (e.g. according to generation or gender) rather than themes or literary approaches, while Birgit Menzel and Stephen Lovell's edited volume, *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia* is primarily focussed on the turn to mass fiction in post-Soviet Russian literature.⁵¹ Two studies which have specifically explored post-Soviet representations of the Soviet past and have therefore been particularly valuable for this thesis are Rosalind Marsh's *Literature, History and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia, 1991–2006* and Irina Paperno's *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs,*

⁴⁸ For further discussion of those studies which do explore post-Soviet memory in Russia, see Chapter 2, pp. 110–134.

⁴⁹ Merridale's major study is *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (London: Granta, 2000).

⁵⁰ See Ewa Thompson, 'Discourse, Empire and Memory in Postcommunist Russia', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 37 (2003), 155–164; Nanci Adler, 'The Future of the Soviet Past Remains Unpredictable: The Resurrection of Stalinist Symbols Amidst the Exhumation of Mass Graves', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57 (2005), 1093–1119. Kathleen Smith has also studied post-Soviet memory with a particular focus on political memory, see Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory during the Yeltsin Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); and with a focus on Memorial: Kathleen E. Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁵¹ N. Norman Shneidman, *Russian Literature, 1995–2002: On the Threshold of the New Millennium* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia: Post-Soviet Popular Literature in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Stephen Lovell and Birgit Menzel (Munich: Otto Sagner, 2005), pp. 39–56.

Diaries, Dreams.⁵² The primary focus of Marsh's study is historical themes and the representation of particular historical figures or events in post-Soviet literature (including both pre- and post-Soviet Russian history as well as the Soviet period).⁵³ The majority of the texts discussed by Marsh are not, therefore, concerned with representing everyday family life in the Soviet Union which is the main focus of my own study. Paperno's research on memoirs of Soviet life is more concerned with representations of the private sphere and how these convey, often indirectly, the nature of 'Soviet experience'.⁵⁴ Many of the autobiographical texts she discusses portray experiences of war and terror, often with a particular focus on the Stalin period.⁵⁵ The primary texts chosen for this thesis, however, describe childhood in the Soviet Union since the Second World War and experiences of war and terror do not feature prominently in the narratives (with the exception of Miller's depiction of experiences of anti-Semitism towards the end of Stalin's rule). I have found no research which specifically explores representations of the post-Stalin Soviet past through portrayal of everyday life, or which considers post-Soviet literary representation of Soviet childhood.

There are a few examples of scholarship on the critical reception of post-Soviet literary texts in Russia. A recent volume edited by Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov provides a broad overview of significant trends in Soviet and post-Soviet literary criticism.⁵⁶ Also noteworthy is Henrietta Mondry's discussion of the

⁵² Rosalind Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia, 1991–2006* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007); Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2009).

⁵³ Chapter 10 of *Literature, History and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia, 1991–2006*, for example, offers a detailed exploration of representations of Stalin and Stalinism.

⁵⁴ Another study of Soviet and post-Soviet Russian memoir which has been particularly useful and will be discussed further in Chapter 2 is Marina Balina, 'The Tale of Bygone Years: Reconstructing the Past in the Contemporary Russian Memoir', in *The Russian Memoir: History and Literature*, ed. by Beth Holmgren (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003), pp. 186–209.

⁵⁵ Paperno, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov, eds, *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

changing role of Russian literary criticism during the 1990s.⁵⁷ Again it is Marsh's study (noted above) which provides some discussion of literary reception in relation to debates over the representation of the Soviet past; analysis of critical reception is included in her discussion of certain texts, for example, the debates over Georgii Vladimov's representation of the Great Patriotic War in his novel *General i ego armia* (1994).⁵⁸ There is no research currently available on readers' reviews of post-Soviet Russian literary representations of the Soviet past.

This thesis, then, makes an original contribution to the study of post-socialist memory with a literary case study comparing German and Russian literary portrayal of childhood in the GDR and USSR. The comparative approach shows how similar experiences of growing up under socialism can be remembered with differing emphases and concerns coming to the fore. The comparison also draws attention to the absence or downplaying of certain features or themes in one context which are prominent in the other. Broadly speaking the analysis of the primary texts and their reception suggests that there is a strong relationship between the surrounding memory culture and both how literary texts engage with the socialist past, as well as how they are received by critics and readers. The German texts place a far greater emphasis on the specifically East German aspects of the childhoods portrayed. Additionally, the ethical considerations of how the East German past should be represented are a central theme in both critics' and readers' reviews. This reflects the multiple ways of remembering the GDR which have been openly discussed and explored in German society and culture. By contrast, in the Russian texts the nature of life in the Soviet state is not a dominant theme, but constitutes the background to stories which mainly focus on the personal sphere. This again reflects the surrounding memory culture; in contrast to the German

⁵⁷ Henrietta Mondry, 'The Russian Literary Press, 1993–98: Critics Reach Reconciliation with their Audience', in *Russian Literature in Transition*, ed. by Ian K. Lilly and Henrietta Mondry (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1999), pp. 105–26.

⁵⁸ See Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, pp. 205–24. 'Great Patriotic War' is how the Second World War was referred to in the Soviet Union and still is in Russia today.

context, in Russia there has been limited public acknowledgement of the crimes of the Soviet state and less self-conscious reflection on what the Soviet past means for post-Soviet identity. There are interesting complexities to the portrayal in the Russian texts, however, which do hint at or give some limited attention to experiences which reveal the effects of living under Soviet rule. This aspect of my research supports Marsh's observation of a continued interest in representation of the past in Russian literature in the late 1990s and early 2000s alongside a focus on individual lives.⁵⁹ My analysis also provides further evidence to support Paperno's observation that accounts of the Soviet past tend to convey something of the damaging effects of the Soviet system even if a critical stance is not explicit in the text.⁶⁰ The reception of the Russian texts, however, shows that although some aspects of life under Soviet rule are specifically portrayed in the texts (albeit in a more subtle and ambiguous way than the German texts), only a minority of critics and readers choose to openly discuss this subject in their reviews. My analysis of reception of the German texts, on the other hand, demonstrates the significant extent of public engagement with memory debates; this is particularly striking among readers' reviews.

To sum up: this thesis draws on existing research on the memory cultures and literatures of two post-socialist societies in order to study how the chosen narratives of childhood both reflect and contribute to shaping the way the socialist past is remembered. The comparative approach of my research highlights telling differences in how the texts portray the socialist past, and in how critics and readers have received those portrayals.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 2, p. 141 on Marsh's assessment of historical themes in literature, and Chapter 3 for my own analysis.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 2, pp. 146–48 on Paperno's research, and Chapter 3 for my own analysis.

Chapter 1

Memory, Literature and Childhood: Theoretical Considerations

Introduction

In this chapter I will consider how cultural and, more specifically, textual representations of memories – mediated memory – can be usefully studied. I will explore cultural and collective memory primarily as it is conceived of by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, Birgit Neumann and Ann Rigney, all of whom focus attention on remembrance as an ongoing process. They consider literature not only as a medium for representing ways of remembering, but also as an integral part in the process of creating and transforming memories at both an individual and collective level. In this strand of memory studies, literary texts are not studied in isolation, but in relation to existing memory cultures. The theoretical approaches discussed in this chapter have informed my own research on how fictional and autobiographical narratives of childhood reflect and contribute to memory of the socialist past. The discussion will justify the chosen methodology for this thesis: to combine analysis of the portrayal of the socialist past in representations of East German and Soviet childhood (Chapter 3) with discussion of significant trends in post-socialist memory in Germany and Russia (Chapter 2) and analysis of reception of the texts by critics and readers (Chapter 4).

In order to discuss how literary texts both represent and influence ways of remembering in a given cultural context, it is helpful to understand some of the broader issues in memory studies. I will, therefore, first outline some significant issues relevant to the study of cultural and collective remembering and major developments within this field of academic research, in particular concepts theorized by Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora and Jan and Aleida Assmann.¹ This

¹ For discussion of significant ideas and debates within memory studies not included in this chapter see, for example, *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); *Memory:*

overview will form the basis for the main focus of interest: the relationship between literature and memory. The discussion will include consideration of those concepts most relevant to the methodology I have used in this thesis: how memory is conveyed in literary texts, how texts can not only represent but also produce memories and how literature can play an active role in the process of collective remembrance. The final part of this chapter will briefly consider some critical studies on the representation of children and childhood memories in literature in order to explore the significance and potential effects of representing a past era through narratives of childhood experience.

Theories of Collective and Cultural Memory

There is no single definition of 'cultural memory', in part because the field of memory studies is highly interdisciplinary and still relatively new, but also because the complex nature of remembrance does not lend itself to precise categorization. In her introduction to *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, a wide-ranging collection of articles which sets out to provide the theoretical frameworks and ideas for memory work across a range of disciplines, Astrid Erll draws attention to the indistinct nature of the concept of cultural memory:

'Cultural' (or, if you will, 'collective', 'social') memory is certainly a multifarious notion, a term often used in an ambiguous and vague way. Media, practices, and structures as diverse as myth, monuments, historiography, ritual, conversational remembering, configurations of cultural knowledge, and neuronal networks are nowadays subsumed under this wide umbrella term.²

Histories, Theories, Debates, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

² Astrid Erll, 'Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara B. Young (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 1–15 (p. 1).

ErlI suggests a broad definition of cultural memory as 'the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts'.³ This understanding of cultural memory embraces two different levels of remembering: the remembering of personal experience which is significantly shaped by past and present socio-cultural contexts, i.e. remembering as a cognitive process by individuals, and representations of the past circulating within a socio-cultural context, i.e. mediated memory.⁴ Cultural remembering relies on interaction between the two levels.⁵ This is particularly relevant to my own research as the GDR and Soviet Russia are still within living memory and remembering of these periods is therefore shaped by first-hand memories as well as cultural representations. Although the discussion below considers some more narrowly defined concepts of collective and cultural memory, the overall approach taken by this thesis is based on ErlI's broader definition.

Recent work in memory studies emphasizes that memory, whether individual, collective, or cultural, should be conceived of as a process; memories are never a finished product. Mieke Bal states that 'cultural recall is not merely something of which you happen to be a bearer, but something that you actually perform, even if, in many instances, such acts are not consciously and wilfully contrived'.⁶ Ann Rigney describes collective memory as being 'constantly "in the works"'.⁷ We should not, therefore, think of cultural memory as constituting unchanged stories about the past which are preserved and transmitted across generations.⁸ Rather, in memory studies the focus is on the processes of remembering on a cultural or collective level; Rigney describes these processes as 'the multiple ways in which images of the past are communicated and shared

³ ErlI, 'Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction', p. 2.

⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mieke Bal, 'Introduction', in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. vii–xvii (p. vii).

⁷ Ann Rigney, 'The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, pp. 345–353 (p. 345).

⁸ Ann Rigney, 'Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans', *Poetics Today*, 25 (2004), 361–396 (pp. 365–366).

among members of a community through public acts of remembrance and through publicly accessible media which are sometimes commercially driven'.⁹ Memories cannot, of course, be considered as factually accurate or complete accounts of the past; they are in fact highly selective representations: 'memories are always "scarce" in relation to everything that theoretically might have been remembered, but is now forgotten.'¹⁰ The selection of what is remembered, rather than forgotten, is one way in which memories express a 'relationship to a meaningful past' in which the present conditions can influence how a past event or era is remembered.¹¹ This relationship between the present and the past, expressed through acts of remembering at a given time and place, is, therefore, subject to change.¹² The notion of memory as dependent on the present context has been criticized, in particular by the sociologist Barry Schwartz, who argues that this ignores the degree of continuity that has existed in representations of the past over time.¹³ Jeffrey Olick cautions against any approach which goes to the extreme of seeing collective memory as either the product of the present situation, or as an unquestionable foundation for unchanging collective identities and traditions. Instead he argues for recognition that remembrance is 'always a fluid negotiation between the desires of the present and the legacies of the past'.¹⁴

The importance of the context and the conditions of the present for any act of remembering were first explored by Maurice Halbwachs, whose sociological theory of memory has provided the foundations for much of the subsequent

⁹ Rigney, 'Portable Monuments', p. 366.

¹⁰ Ann Rigney, 'Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory', *Journal of European Studies*, 35 (2005), 11–28 (p. 17).

¹¹ Eric Caldicott and Anne Fuchs, 'Introduction', in *Cultural Memory: Essays on European Literature and History*, ed. by Eric Caldicott and Anne Fuchs (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 11–32 (p. 12).

¹² See Rigney, 'Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory', p. 17.

¹³ See Lewis Coser, 'Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1877–1945', in Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 1–34 (p. 26).

¹⁴ Jeffrey K. Olick, 'From Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practices and Products', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, pp. 151–61 (p. 159).

theorizing of memory as a collective, social and cultural concept.¹⁵ In Halbwachs's theory memory is understood as a social construction; what is remembered, rather than forgotten, and how it is remembered, are shaped by the social context: 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories.'¹⁶ Therefore, although remembering is in some sense an individual act, it is achieved within certain frameworks, defined by and common to a particular social group: 'One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories.'¹⁷ This will be discussed further below, in relation to the role of literature in cultural memory processes. Halbwachs proposed that frameworks of collective memory/forgetting can develop and change according to the present circumstances or needs of a particular group or society, thus also shaping individuals' memories:

We can remember only on condition of retrieving the position of past events that interest us from the frameworks of collective memory [...] Forgetting is explained by the disappearance of these frameworks or of a part of them, either because our attention is no longer able to focus on them or because it is focussed somewhere else. [...] But forgetting, or the deformation of certain recollections, is also explained by the fact that these frameworks change from one period to another. Depending on its circumstances and point in time, society represents the past to itself in different ways: it modifies its conventions. As every one of its members accepts these conventions, they inflect their recollections in the same direction in which collective memory evolves.¹⁸

¹⁵ Halbwachs's *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* was first published in 1925 and an edited translation of this work appears in Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Coser. On the significance of Halbwachs's work see, for example, Caldicott and Fuchs, pp. 11–12.

¹⁶ Halbwachs, p. 38.

¹⁷ Halbwachs, p. 40.

¹⁸ Halbwachs, pp. 172–73.

Halbwachs's theory of collective memory was conceived primarily in relation to memory shaped by everyday and intergenerational interaction and did not give detailed consideration to how memory might be transmitted through cultural texts, artefacts and practices.¹⁹ As will be shown further below, however, his concept of social frameworks of memory is relevant to consideration of how cultural objects and practices can reflect existing models of remembrance as well as, in some cases, shaping new ways of remembering the past.

The study of collective and cultural memory as it is mediated through, for example, texts, images or ritual has been advanced particularly by the work of Pierre Nora and of Jan and Aleida Assmann. Nora, in fact, perceived material and symbolic forms of remembrance to be in opposition to 'true' memory. These symbolic forms are the *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) which Nora considered to be replacing *milieux de mémoire* ('settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experiences').²⁰ Nora argues that we 'create archives, mark anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and authenticate documents' due to the disappearance of 'spontaneous memory'.²¹ He defines a *lieu de mémoire* as 'any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community'.²² Some aspects of Nora's theories have been criticized, including his understanding of *milieux de mémoire* which betrays a sense of nostalgia for the perceived loss of a more 'natural' and unmediated expression of memory in society.²³ Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* or 'sites of memory' has, however, been very influential and has been drawn upon in more recent theories of cultural memory which study collective remembrance through locations and

¹⁹ The role of tradition and cultural artefacts was, however, considered in his later work, *La Topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte* (1941). See Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. by Sara B. Young (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 18.

²⁰ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. by Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), I, p. 1.

²¹ Nora, I, p. 7.

²² Nora, I, p. xvii.

²³ See Stephen Legg, 'Contesting and Surviving Memory: Space, Nation, and Nostalgia in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 23 (2005), 481–504.

artefacts, including texts, which have become symbolic of certain memories and ways of remembering. For example, in Rigney's work 'sites of memory' are studied because 'by encapsulating multifarious experience in a limited repertoire of figures, they [sites of memory] provide a placeholder for the exchange and transfer of memories among contemporaries and across generations'.²⁴ In the work of Rigney, Erll and others the focus is now on the processes by which 'sites of memory' are created and transformed.

Jan and Aleida Assmann, two of the most influential theorists of collective memory, have proposed that there are two modes of remembering collectively: 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory'.²⁵ This allows for differentiation between remembering within a social context (as theorised by Halbwachs), and the study of memory manifested in 'medial externalization', such as texts and ritual.²⁶ Communicative memory is living memory based on personal recollection and shared through everyday communication; it is not 'formalized or stabilized by any forms of material symbolization'.²⁷ By contrast, cultural memory, in Jan Assmann's definition, is 'exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that [...] may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another'.²⁸ Both these forms of collective memory are always concerned with the identity of a particular group; Jan Assmann observes that it is the association with identity or a sense of belonging which distinguishes memory from simply 'knowledge about the past'.²⁹ He describes cultural memory in particular as: 'that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each

²⁴ Rigney, 'The Dynamics of Remembrance', p. 345.

²⁵ See Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, pp. 109–118 (p. 110). Major works include: Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: Beck, 1999); Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992).

²⁶ Astrid Erll, 'Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, pp. 389–398 (p. 389); and Aleida Assmann, 'Canon and Archive', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, pp. 97–107.

²⁷ J. Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory', p. 111.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image.³⁰ Aleida Assmann has studied the specific nature of texts which play a role in cultural remembrance, categorising them as 'kulturelle Texte' (cultural texts).³¹ In terms of literature (the term can also apply to visual and oral media), these are canonical texts which have a special status within a given culture. This status is indicated by the 'reverence, repeated study, [and] solemnity' which characterizes the way such texts are read and received.³² These 'cultural texts' are considered objects of remembrance in themselves as well as being the means by which common values and identity are shared and passed on within a cultural, religious or national community; the Bible and Shakespeare's plays are typical examples.³³ Jan and Aleida Assmann's approach to cultural memory, based primarily on the study of ancient societies (in Jan Assmann's work) and on canonical literature (in Aleida Assmann's work), cannot be directly and comprehensively applied to my own research. Their concept of cultural memory, which, as Rigney explains, 'is arguably always vicarious in the sense that it involves memories of other people's lives that have been mediated by texts and images' may raise doubts about applying such theories to cultural representations of an era which is still very much in living memory, as many readers will have first-hand memories of the period.³⁴ Moreover, the texts studied for this thesis could not be considered 'cultural texts' as Aleida Assmann defines them. Erll has, however, proposed a broader approach to the study of cultural/collective memory and literature advocating the consideration of textual mediation of memories still within the realm of communicative memory as well as the study of popular, non-canonical texts. Her methodology (along with concepts explored by Nünning, Neumann and

³⁰ Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', trans. by John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125–33 (p. 132).

³¹ Aleida Assmann, 'Was sind kulturelle Texte', in *Literatur Kanon – Medienereignis – kultureller Text. Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung*, ed. by Andreas Poltermann (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1995), pp. 232–244.

³² A. Assmann, 'Was sind kulturelle Texte', p. 242, cited in English translation in Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 162.

³³ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, pp. 162–63 (with reference to A. Assmann, 'Was sind kulturelle Texte').

³⁴ Rigney, 'Portable Monuments', p. 367.

Rigney) is particularly relevant to my own approach and will be explored in the next section.

Literature and Memory

In an article of 2005 Erll and Nünning set out a framework for categorizing how literature can be analysed productively within the area of cultural memory studies.³⁵ They choose to focus on three main areas, firstly, 'memory of literature', where texts or literary forms are both the object and medium of remembrance; this deals with concepts such as canon formation, memory of generic forms, and intertextuality. Secondly, 'memory in literature', that is the representation of memory as perceived in the extra-textual world. This considers, among other things, the narratological techniques used to portray the process of remembrance. Finally, 'literature as a medium of collective memory', which considers the role of literary texts in creating or influencing collective memory. This emphasizes the importance of the cultural and socio-historical context in which a text appears and how it is received, and how it affects other representations of the same events. The question of what role literature can play in creating memory derives from the concept of memory as performative (i.e. that memories are not recalled but rather (re)created in each act of remembering) and that memory studies therefore requires a method which recognises remembering as an ongoing process of selection and contestation.³⁶ This is a relatively new direction for literary studies where previously 'literary scholars have tended to view individual texts as the terminus or outcome of remembrance rather than as active ingredients in an ongoing cultural process'.³⁷ For the purposes of my research, which is concerned with literature which represents the 'real world' and the place of such texts in existing memory cultures, further exploration of 'memory in literature' and

³⁵ Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, 'Where Literature and Memory Meet: Towards a Systematic Approach to the Concepts of Memory Used in Literary Studies', *REAL: The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*, 21 (2005), 261–94.

³⁶ See, for example, Olick, 'From Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practices and Products', p. 159.

³⁷ Rigney, 'Portable Monuments', p. 369.

'literature as a medium of collective memory' are most relevant. The following discussion will therefore consider approaches to studying both the representation and creation of memory within literary texts. I will include consideration of how texts can influence both the memories of individuals and the collective memories of a group. In the final part of this section I will outline Erll's criteria for considering whether a text is likely to have an effect on collective memory.

Literary texts are particularly suited to representing how individuals remember.³⁸ Many forms of both memory and literature rely on constructing a narrative of past events in a way which is meaningful in the present moment of remembering/narration:

[T]he narrative distinction between an experiencing and a narrating "I" already rests on a (largely implicit) concept of memory: namely, on the concept of a difference between pre-narrative experience on the one hand, and on the other hand a memory which forms the past through narrative and retrospectively creates meaning. The occupation with first-person narrators is thus always an occupation with the literary representation of memory.³⁹

In addition to the individual memory processes of a narrator, literary texts may also depict cultural practices of remembrance within a particular society or group. The term 'fictions of memory' has been proposed by Nünning and Birgit Neumann as a generic category for texts which represent processes of remembering.⁴⁰ This term can apply not only to fictional texts which foreground issues of individual remembering, but also to texts concerned with identity and the past, that is: 'the

³⁸ Erll and Nünning, 'Where Literature and Memory Meet', p. 282.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Birgit Neumann, 'The Literary Representation of Memory' in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, pp. 333–343 (p. 334). She refers to *Fictions of Memory*, ed. by Ansgar Nünning, special issue of *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 10.1 (2003).

stories that individuals or cultures tell about their past to answer the question “who am I?”, or collectively “who are we?”⁴¹ These stories often reveal ‘predispositions, biases, and values, which provide agreed upon codes for understanding the past and present and which find their most succinct expression in literary plot-lines and myths’.⁴² Thus literary texts may indicate features of, in Halbwachs’s terms, the frameworks of remembering which shape collective memory within a particular context. This, as Neumann observes, is valuable for providing ‘insight into culturally prevalent concepts of memory, into stereotypical ideas of self and other, and into both sanctioned and unsanctioned memories’.⁴³ For example, a first-person narrative which moves between different time-frames might demonstrate how memories change according to the present context as well as highlighting the relationship between memory and identity.⁴⁴ The use of multiple perspectives within a text can reveal widely shared memories as well as divergence where aspects of the past are contested.⁴⁵

Erll provides an approach for identifying and categorising some of the many different ways in which a narrative can ‘remember’ the past by considering how ‘modes of remembering’ are created within texts. For example, in her analysis of novels representing the First World War, Erll identifies four ‘modes of remembering’: ‘the experiential, the mythical, the antagonistic, and the reflexive mode’.⁴⁶ The ‘experiential mode’ represents the past as it was experienced by a particular individual; the emphasis is on the experience rather than on the act of remembering. The ‘mythical mode’ constructs the past events as ‘foundational events which are situated in a faraway, mythical past’.⁴⁷ The ‘antagonistic mode’

⁴¹ Neumann, p. 334.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 335.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 336–37.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 338–39.

⁴⁶ Erll, ‘Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory’, pp. 390–391. Novels in the reflexive mode have been termed *Gedächtnisromane*. See also *Memory in Culture*, p. 157–60.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 391. In Erll’s *Memory in Culture* this category is termed ‘monumental’ rather than ‘mythical’ (p. 158).

presents one particular version of past events as more authentic than others, and challenges alternative perspectives. The 'reflexive mode' draws attention to the processes of remembering, thereby, for example, highlighting the potential unreliability of memory or the multiple ways in which one event can be remembered by different people or in different contexts.

The concept of 'mimesis of memory' has been used by both Erll and Neumann to describe how literary texts both represent and actively create memories: 'Novels do not imitate existing versions of memory, but produce, in the act of discourse, that very past which they purport to describe.'⁴⁸ Mimesis of memory works on the basis that literary texts create narrative representations which refer to the world outside the text; these representations are then 'refigured' by the reader.⁴⁹ Erll explains the effects of this refiguration:

The meanings ascribed by readers [...] affect not only their understanding of the text. Literary works can also change perceptions of reality and in the end – through the readers' actions, which can be influenced by literary models – also cultural practice and thereby reality itself.⁵⁰

The literary production of memory can also be understood in terms of 'frameworks of remembering', as Erll argues: 'Literary stories and their patterns are represented in our semantic and episodic memory systems. They shape knowledge, life experience, and autobiographical remembering.'⁵¹ This means that the text is offering another story which makes sense of the past (according to the needs of present context) and this story has the potential to affirm, challenge or modify readers' existing perceptions of the past, whether that is a past understood only

⁴⁸ This is based upon on Paul Ricoeur's 'circle of mimesis' as described in his *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984–88). See Erll, *Memory in Culture*, pp. 152–57 and see Neumann, pp. 334–35. The citation here is Neumann, p. 334.

⁴⁹ See Erll, *Memory in Culture*, pp. 152–57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

through cultural representations, through communicative memory (i.e. what people say in everyday interactions, grandparents' stories etc.) or even one's own personal memories. Rigney explains how first-hand memories can be modified by literary representations through the process of convergence:

Through repeated acts of communication, individual memories of particular events tend to converge with those of other people as these circulate and spread in the public sphere. This means, among other things, that the memories which individuals have of events in which they themselves participated become mediated by *other* people's memories of the same event as these are expressed, and thus stabilized, in different fora.⁵²

A literary text, therefore, has the potential to shape individual readers' perceptions of the past, including their own first-hand memories.

For my own research it is also relevant to consider how a text might contribute to collective or cultural memory, and how the role of literature in collective remembrance can be studied. Erll and Nünning identify three necessary steps for studying literature as a medium of collective memory: firstly to 'consider the connection of inner-literary memory to culture [...] through the incorporation of historical contexts'; secondly to extend consideration to non-canonical texts; thirdly, 'to conceive of literature not only as a medium of cultural memory, but also to ask what functions literary texts can fulfil in everyday communicative memory.'⁵³ Following these steps, and building upon Aleida Assmann's concept of 'cultural texts', Erll proposes an extension of literature-based cultural memory studies to consider what she terms 'collective texts'. 'Cultural texts', in their function as a 'storage medium', transmit cultural memory 'across centuries and even themselves

⁵² Rigney, 'Portable Monuments', p. 366.

⁵³ Erll and Nünning, 'Where Literature and Memory Meet', p. 285.

become objects of remembrance'.⁵⁴ 'Collective texts', by contrast, can be understood as a 'circulation medium that disseminates and shapes cultural memory'.⁵⁵ Popular fiction, for example, which is widely read but may not continue to be preserved across multiple generations, can nonetheless create representations of the past which contribute to collective memory.⁵⁶ Studying literary texts as 'collective texts' also involves assessing how such portrayals respond and contribute to 'current memory-debates'.⁵⁷ The memory cultures surrounding the production and reception of a text are, therefore, a significant consideration.

It should be emphasized that a narrative, wherever it might lie on the scale between high literature and mass, popular entertainment, need not be autobiographical or factually accurate in order to affect memory cultures; what matters is whether readers 'ascribe [...] some kind of referentiality' to the text.⁵⁸ Erll observes that the 'ontological gap between fiction and reality postulated in theory is smoothly overcome in practice, and that literary works clearly shape our ideas about past realities'.⁵⁹ In my own research, analysis of readers' reviews demonstrates that several of the texts studied, including those which are fictional or contain elements of fictionalization, are received as authentic depictions of the past with direct relevance to readers' own memories.⁶⁰ It is not the case, however, that readers believe that the events related in fictional texts happened in reality, rather that they interpret a fictional text as an authentic (but not necessarily factually accurate) version of the past if it 'resonates' with existing ideas about that past circulating within cultural memory.⁶¹ Texts which use fictionalizing narrative

⁵⁴ Erll, 'Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory', p. 390.

⁵⁵ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 164.

⁵⁶ Erll, 'Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory', p. 389–90.

⁵⁷ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 168.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁶⁰ See, for example, readers' responses to *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen* and *Detstvo Levy* in Chapter 4.

⁶¹ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 165. See also Erll, 'Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory', p. 389.

strategies may, in fact, have a greater potential to contribute to cultural memory because they can convey the essence of a past event or era in a story which grips and entertains the reader. Rigney observes:

[Authors of fiction] not only enjoy poetic license when narrativizing their materials, but also often have creative, specifically literary skills that help give an added aesthetic value to their work. This aesthetic dimension means that they can attract and hold the attention of groups without a prior interest in the topic, but with a readiness to enjoy a good story and suspend their disbelief.⁶²

While acknowledging that it is an area for further research, Rigney argues that there are significant examples of fictional texts which appear to have more 'cultural staying power' compared to less engaging narratives which are more faithful to the 'truth'.⁶³

As the discussion of how fictional texts are received demonstrates, it is necessary to look beyond the texts themselves in order to study how they might affect memory cultures. Erll highlights the importance of context and reception for studying the 'memory-making' effect of texts.⁶⁴ Certain criteria can indicate that a text is likely to affect *collective* memory rather than just the memories of a few individual readers. Firstly, it is important that they are 'read in a broad swathe across society'.⁶⁵ If only a few people read a particular text then, whatever the impression made upon those individuals, it cannot have any significant effect on collective memory.⁶⁶ In addition to having a broad readership, texts 'must be

⁶² Rigney, 'The Dynamics of Remembrance', p. 347.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 347-48. Rigney cites Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Steven Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List* (1993) as examples.

⁶⁴ Erll, 'Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory'.

⁶⁵ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 155.

⁶⁶ Erll, 'Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory', p. 395.

received as media of memory' if they are to shape collective remembrance.⁶⁷ This particular kind of reception might be indicated by, for example, memory debates surrounding the work, use of the text in school education about the past, or the appropriation of a quotation from the work into everyday speech.⁶⁸ Erll also draws attention to the role of promotion and reviews and comment about a work in the media. Erll refers to this discourse surrounding the work as 'pluri-medial networks'; in the context of a study on German film she has asserted that these networks 'constitute the collective contexts which channel a movie's reception and potentially turn it into a medium of cultural memory'.⁶⁹

Childhood, Memory and Literature

Representations of childhood were chosen as the focus for this thesis primarily because portrayal of childhood particularly lends itself to the exploration of issues of memory and identity, as well as revealing the values and ideology promoted within a given society.⁷⁰ Literary depiction of childhood, especially in autobiographical texts and first-person retrospective narratives, is directly concerned with remembering. Childhood memories, perhaps more so than memories from any other stage of life, are subject to substantial revision and creative reimagining; they are told again and again in family stories, they provide explanations for adult behaviours and identity, and their significance and meanings can be dramatically altered with the hindsight of knowledge gained as an adult. Some of the recent research on autobiographical writing about childhood explores the intersections between memory, childhood and literature. Particularly useful for this thesis are a study of American, British and Australian childhood memoirs by

⁶⁷ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 155. Erll's emphasis.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁶⁹ Erll, 'Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory', p. 396. See Astrid Erll and Stephanie Wodianka, eds, *Plurimediale Konstellationen. Film und kulturelle Erinnerung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

⁷⁰ For further discussion of the reasons for selecting texts with a childhood theme, see the Introduction, pp. 12–14.

Kate Douglas and a collection of essays edited by Marianne Gullestad.⁷¹ Douglas studies a wide range of contemporary childhood memoirs and examines how these texts both reflect and shape our understandings of what constitutes childhood and why childhood is significant.⁷² Gullestad's interdisciplinary volume focuses on the relationships between life-writing about childhood and real lives, and explores how these can be productively studied. Analyses of fictional representations of childhood which demonstrate the particularities of representing children's experiences and the functions of child narrators are also useful. The following discussion will explore those aspects of representing childhood in literature which are most relevant to my own study of how the socialist past is remembered in narratives of childhood.⁷³ Firstly I will consider Gullestad's proposal that although autobiographical accounts of childhood are likely to be highly unreliable, this unreliability can, in fact, be studied as 'reflexivity'; that is, it may reveal significant aspects of the relationship between the narrating adult, his or her remembered childhood-self and the context in which that childhood is being remembered.⁷⁴ Secondly I will consider various ways in which narration from a child's perspective can promote particular modes of remembering.⁷⁵ Finally, I will discuss Douglas's analysis of readers' reviews of childhood memoirs which has informed my own analysis of readers' reception.

Reflexivity

The difficulty of conveying verbally the inner world of a child whose own verbal and conceptual skills are limited is a major concern of much critical literature on the

⁷¹ Kate Douglas, *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Childhood, Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Marianne Gullestad, ed., *Imagined Childhoods: Self and Society in Autobiographical Accounts* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996).

⁷² Douglas, pp. 6–7.

⁷³ In addition to works cited in this chapter, additional studies of the child in literature with a wider scope and/or different focus to that which I discuss here include: John Hodgson, *The Search for the Self: Childhood in Autobiography and Fiction since 1940* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Virginia L. Blum, *Hide and Seek: The Child between Psychoanalysis and Fiction* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Roni Natov, *The Poetics of Childhood* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Richard Coe, *When the Grass was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984).

⁷⁴ Gullestad, p. 12.

⁷⁵ Using Erll's concept of modes of remembering as a starting point, but not confining myself to her categories. See above pp. 41–42.

representation of childhood. Naomi Sokoloff writes: 'children in imaginative writing by their elders are by definition Others whose words must be translated into a world of mature discourse they do not yet inhabit.'⁷⁶ The need to 'translate' children's experiences into 'mature discourse' means childhood is always represented from a distance, never from within as the child him/herself really sees it. Sokoloff explains the consequences of this:

Otherness always impinges in some way on treatments of childhood in adult writing. No grown writer can speak authentically in the name of childhood or in the voice of a child, for inevitably there exist disparities between grown-up narration and the experience of youthful characters.⁷⁷

Gullestad also addresses this concern and draws a distinction between 'textual childhoods' and 'lived childhoods', thus highlighting the fact that literary depictions of children and childhood are represented as they are remembered, imagined and observed by adults.⁷⁸ Depictions of children may also exploit or subvert our associations with childhood in order to communicate a variety of ideas about society in general. Even in autobiographies of childhood where the author really did experience the events narrated, the inaccessibility of childhood is masked by an acceptance or belief that because we remember our own childhoods we know what being a child feels like. Writing about childhood, even more than other forms of autobiography, requires an imaginative leap by the reader. Childhood memories are likely to be fragmented and lacking in detail, yet many childhood memoirs offer coherent narratives including, for example, substantial portions of dialogue which it would be virtually impossible to remember accurately. Paul John Eakin refers to popular autobiographical stories of childhood by Frank McCourt and Mary Karr as examples where readers accept a certain amount of 'imaginative reconstruction' as

⁷⁶ Naomi B. Sokoloff, *Imagining the Child in Modern Jewish Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Gullestad, p. 2.

part of an autobiography. He refers to this re-imagining of childhood as 'a special kind of fiction [...] in which memory and imagination conspire to reconstruct the truth of the past.'⁷⁹ Douglas observes that narration from the child's perspective in autobiographical texts 'has come to signify a perceptible synthesis between the author's child and adult selves. The apparently self-actualized, successful adult is qualified to speak on behalf of both selves.'⁸⁰

The unreliability of autobiographical portrayal of childhood is not problematic for this thesis, since I am not seeking to explore how children actually experienced life in the Soviet Union and GDR, but how socialist childhood is remembered. This unreliability is an intrinsic feature of remembering because memories are continually edited and reshaped as a result of repetition, external influences and narrative conventions. Gullestad therefore proposes that 'the apparent impurity of autobiographical material can be reformulated as *reflexivity* [...] a central quality that needs to be theorized'.⁸¹ Childhood autobiography can, therefore, be studied as revealing the relationship between past and present, through both personal and collective remembering. A literary narrative might explicitly engage with the unreliable nature of memory, but all childhood memoirs will on some level negotiate the relationship between the adult author and his or her childhood self. It is this intersection of present and remembered past, adult identity and childhood memories, which is explored. This might involve considering whether a text conforms to or challenges existing constructions of childhood, or identifying what kinds of childhood experiences are narrated, and why. Charlotte Heinritz argues, for example, for the importance of considering the selective nature of memory in life writing:

⁷⁹ Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 63.

⁸⁰ Douglas, p. 68.

⁸¹ Gullestad, p. 12.

[T]he author's choice of childhood memories and their composition is never accidental. For the autobiographer, the memories recollected mark important elements within their life story and their self-description. Autobiographical childhood memories may reveal the self-identification of their authors, the way they see the process of their growing up.⁸²

Childhood memories are also constantly (re)created with reference to the multitude of cultural representations of children to which we are exposed, as Douglas explains:

Memory is mediated by the various cultural texts and discourse that invite us to remember our childhoods on a daily basis [...] There is a range of culturally available templates for remembering and/or documenting our own childhoods or the childhoods of our children. We are intrinsically aware of what we are supposed to remember and document, of which stories and events are culturally valuable, of what is speakable and unspeakable (at any given time) about our childhoods.⁸³

In the context of remembering the experience of growing up under socialism in Germany and Russia, childhood memories are necessarily going to be bound up with the way the GDR and USSR are remembered.

Remembering through the Child's Perspective

Representations of a past era which are narrated fully or even partially from the child's perspective can function in a number of different ways within a narrative. Usually the child's view of the world is limited by a lack of understanding, knowledge and experience. This limitation can be used, for example, to narrate the

⁸² Charlotte Heinritz, 'The Child in Childhood-Autobiography: Secret or Mystery?', in *Imagined Childhoods: Self and Society in Autobiographical Accounts*, ed. by Marianne Gullestad (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996), pp. 179–99 (p. 194).

⁸³ Douglas, p. 23. See also Heinritz, p. 194.

past in a way which invites questions and criticism, to avoid judgement or bias in descriptions of the past, or to avoid incorporating retrospective knowledge about past into a narrative.

Children are not yet initiated into adult society, nor bound by society's conventions. Literary children are therefore often constructed as outsiders or as newcomers, and as such they provide a defamiliarizing perspective. Sokoloff describes the appeal of this point of view: 'The status of the child as an outsider on the margins of adult activity proves congenial for the purposes of the artist whose aim is critique or reinterpretation of a status quo.'⁸⁴ Such children do not accept things because 'that's how it's done', rather their naivety means they tend to ask questions or draw conclusions which reveal adult hypocrisies and prejudices.⁸⁵ The novelty of the child's viewpoint is not its only advantage. Children's questions and observations are expressed innocently, without any prior agenda: 'Questioning from a position of unknowing protects the discursive child from accountability and forces empowered speakers to lay bare their own reasoning to the point of exposing the centering of that context's discursive power.'⁸⁶ Children's lack of knowledge and understanding, therefore, provides an ideal way to interrogate an idea without explicitly privileging or denigrating any one interpretation. Debbie Pinfold, in her study of the child's perspective in narratives of childhood under National Socialism, reminds us that a child who questions the values of the society he or she is being brought up in, may not be a realistic portrayal.⁸⁷ She observes that portrayal of children's blind acceptance of their experiences and upbringing as 'normal' can also have a defamiliarizing effect on the reader, who is required to take an active role in

⁸⁴ Sokoloff, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A Heberle, and Naomi B Sokoloff, 'Introduction', in *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi B Sokoloff (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), pp. 1-15 (p. 4).

⁸⁶ Honeyman, p. 136.

⁸⁷ See Debbie Pinfold, *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature: The Eye among the Blind* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), pp. 6-7. This is particularly relevant in the context she is discussing, because children were inculcated with Nazi values from an early age.

formulating his or her own opinion of the circumstances in which the child is living.⁸⁸

Whether questioning or accepting of the rules, values, and ideals which they are taught, child narrators tend to provide a limited, naive perspective. This can be shocking if the context is something that the adult reader perceives to be morally corrupt. In other contexts, however, the naive child narrator may be seen as offering an *apparently* artless, and therefore perhaps more truthful, account of events. The child expresses what he or she sees without a sophisticated interpretation of events. Frank McCourt, author of the well-known childhood memoir *Angela's Ashes*, explained this as a motivation for using the child's perspective, comparing the child's gaze to film: 'A small child has no hindsight, no foresight. He's just completely in the moment. I wanted to write without judging, to tell a story the way a camera would.'⁸⁹ The naivety of the child is crucial here, as is a perception of the child as naturally truthful; the young child is conceived of as being incapable of deliberate artifice, and so the narration by a child's voice is 'a gesture of authentication in which the appeal of the innocent child is vital'.⁹⁰ The child's limited perspective may also be used to convey a sense of confusion or fear, because the child may simply not understand the significance or causes of the events he or she is narrating. Sokoloff describes one possible effect of this in Holocaust narratives in which a child's limited comprehension might help to 'alleviate the adult narrator's struggle with language and artistic expression' in addition to conveying 'the incomprehensibility of the catastrophe'.⁹¹ By contrast, in some contexts the child's confused perspective may result in dramatic irony that could be a source of humour.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 26–27.

⁸⁹ Douglas, p. 73, citing an interview with Frank McCourt: Bill Kirtz, 'Out of the Mouths of ...', *Quill*, April 1998, 8–10 (p. 9).

⁹⁰ Douglas, p. 90.

⁹¹ Sokoloff, p. 15.

Confining a narration, or parts of a narration, to childhood experience can also be nostalgic by avoiding a retrospective appraisal of the past and focussing instead on positive memories. The roots of the word 'nostalgia' are 'nostos' (home) and 'algia' (longing).⁹² The irretrievable and often idealized time of childhood, likely to be associated with the family home, is particularly appropriate as an object of longing. The writing of childhood memoirs is often, as Douglas explains, 'a cultural mechanism for reconstructing, and to some extent mourning, the distant past'.⁹³ A nostalgic attitude to childhood is one way in which an adult may attempt to negotiate his or her memories and current situation, perhaps reflecting anxiety or dissatisfaction as an adult in the present. Accounts which mythologize the past through idealized childhood memories may also be a response to loss or change in the present. Douglas notes that a nostalgic attitude within autobiography may avoid problematic aspects of a personal or collective history, instead offering 'a means for nonconfrontational commemoration of historical periods and regions'.⁹⁴ Texts which represent the child's perspective may similarly present the past in positive terms if that was how the author remembers the experience, even if subsequent knowledge may have altered that view:

The nostalgic child voice provides a form of admirable ignorance, a simple and defensibly self-centered interpretation of history. [...] The nostalgic, child-voiced autobiography creates space for certain disclosures and not others. What might have been a traumatic narrative is taken up in a different register.⁹⁵

Douglas is referring here to a particular text, Brian Nicholls's *A Saucepan in the Sky* (2001), but the observations could also apply to some narratives of socialist childhood analysed in this thesis where happy childhood memories conflict with

⁹² Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xiii.

⁹³ Douglas, p. 86.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 91.

subsequent discovery of state repression.⁹⁶ The specific nature of post-socialist nostalgia and its manifestations in Germany and Russia will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Reading Childhood Memoir

Nancy K. Miller has observed the particular experience of reading autobiography, which tends to provoke the reader to reflect on, and even recreate, his or her own life story:

As a reader of autobiography, I perform an awkward dance of embrace and rejection: He's just like me, she's not like me at all. As I write myself into and out of other stories, in counterpoint to dramas lived on other stages, scenes from my personal history take on a new significance. Can my story – or yours – ever be more than that: a dialogue enacted with other selves?⁹⁷

This idea is explored by Douglas in her study of autobiographies of childhood. She considers not just the texts themselves, but also their reception, looking at both professional reviews and customer comments on the website of the online bookseller, Amazon. My research takes a similar approach in order to demonstrate how narratives of socialist childhood both reflect and actively shape individual and collective remembering of the socialist period. In Douglas's analysis readers typically take on one of two roles: they can identify with the childhood experiences, reinforcing both personal and collective memories of a particular era or type of childhood experience, or readers can take on the role of witness with the text fulfilling the function of a memorial to difficult and sometimes traumatic childhood experiences:

⁹⁶ Minaev and Miller make use of a nostalgic child voice in parts of their texts, see Chapter 3.

⁹⁷ Nancy K. Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. ix–x. See also, Nancy K. Miller, 'But Enough about Me, What Do You Think of my Memoir?', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13 (2000), 421–436.

The appeal of autobiographies of childhood is dependent on particular reader positionings and investments. These texts solicit an active reader who will participate dynamically in the politics of the autobiography either by being represented by the autobiography or by being confronted into witnessing what occurs within it.⁹⁸

Douglas has found that reader reviews on the Amazon website show a tendency for the reader to relate the text to their own lives, as in Miller's observation above. In these reviews readers 'offer critical responses framed within their own biographies. Through this interaction the truth of the text is created as much by the reader and by the author'.⁹⁹ Douglas acknowledges the 'limited perspective' of this analysis, noting that no comprehensive study has been made to ascertain whether fictional texts provoke similar responses. She also notes that the nature of the 'forum' may play a role; this may be something that readers do because they are writing a review that can be read by the public online, rather than a response that comes out of reading only.¹⁰⁰ Any conclusions drawn from such research can nonetheless be applied to those readers who do engage in such forums, and the valuable insight which reviews posted online can provide into the reception of literary texts among 'ordinary' (i.e. non-professional) readers should not be disregarded.

⁹⁸ Douglas, p. 154, with reference to Susanna Egan, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 163–64.

Conclusion

Two broad concepts emerging from the above discussion have shaped the approach taken in this thesis: firstly, that memory is a process, drawing on the present context as well as past events, and, secondly, that literary texts can play an active role in that process as well as giving some insight into existing memory cultures.

In terms of studying how ways of remembering are conveyed in literature I draw on the concept underlying Erll's 'modes of remembering': that narrative strategies used in literary texts can 'remember' the past in many different ways. In order to demonstrate the kind of memories of the socialist past created within the texts, my analysis of representations of socialist childhood considers what experiences, events and attitudes the texts portray, how these are framed within the narrative, and what kind of tone and perspective is used. Use of the child's perspective is crucial, because the differing ways in which childhood experiences are narrated in the German and Russian texts significantly shape their contrasting ways of remembering the socialist past. In the majority of the texts the child's limited point of view provides, either throughout or in selected passages, one or more of the following: a questioning, ironic (and sometimes humorous) portrayal, a naive depiction of the past 'as it was', or a nostalgic focus on the child's experience untainted by the wider historical context.

In considering both the context and reception of the texts, this thesis also considers how the texts studied both portray, and in some cases actively contribute to, collective memory of the socialist past. Using a broadly similar approach to Erll's concept of 'collective texts', I consider whether and how the texts affirm, challenge or offer alternatives to the surrounding memory culture, that is the existing frames of remembrance shaping collective memory of the socialist past in Germany and Russia. Neumann's assertion that literary texts which address questions of memory and identity can reveal 'culturally prevalent concepts of memory' is also explored in

my assessment of the extent to which the texts to be analysed are aligned with the surrounding memory culture. In this comparative study, consideration of the dominant trends in memory of the GDR and Soviet Russia helps to identify possible reasons for the differing approaches of the texts as well as the differing points of interest and attitudes of critics and readers. Analysis of critics' and journalists' reviews in newspapers, journals and online shows how the texts are interpreted in light of current memory debates within the relevant country. It also demonstrates that some texts have prompted media discussion which might promote the reception of the text as 'memory-making'. Erll's assertion that readers must 'ascribe referentiality' to the text is an important consideration for my analysis of readers' reviews. As Douglas found in her analysis of reception of childhood memoirs, several of the texts considered in this thesis have prompted readers to identify with the narrators and claim the authenticity of the depiction in online reviews. Readers' reviews also demonstrate how, on an individual level at least, a text can prompt reflection on or new interpretations of the socialist past. Some of the texts studied fit several of Erll's criteria for texts which are likely to affect collective memory. Some texts from both groups have been widely read; those by Rusch, Hensel, Sanaev, Gal'ego were all best-sellers and prompted widespread discussion in the media, although the nature of that discussion was quite different in the German and Russian contexts as will be shown in Chapter 4.

The specific nature of the post-socialist context particularly highlights some of the features of collective remembering outlined above. The sweeping change which occurred when the socialist regime collapsed in each country has intensified feelings of loss. It has also meant a change in 'frameworks of remembrance'; what is socially, culturally and politically acceptable to remember about the past has changed and developed in different ways in the German and Russian context. The question of identity ('who are we?') is particularly pertinent in the post-socialist context where approaches to memory of the socialist past are inextricably linked to

the future direction of society. Accordingly, there is, in both countries, some degree of contestation over how that past should be made meaningful. The next chapter will explore in detail the specific features of post-socialist memory in Germany and Russia.

Chapter 2

German and Russian Memory Cultures

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of significant trends in how the socialist past has been represented and remembered in society and literature in Germany since the fall of the Berlin Wall and in Russia since glasnost and perestroika. Because memory is subject to constant editing and recreation according to the present circumstances, the study of cultural memory of the socialist past (through literary representation and its reception) provides an insight into values, priorities and identity construction in post-socialist society. This thesis identifies significant differences in how socialist childhood is portrayed by authors and interpreted by readers in post-unification German literature compared to post-Soviet Russian literature. These differences are far less an indication of a disparity between the 'actual' experiences of Soviet Russian children and East German children, than they are evidence of the significantly different factors shaping society, culture and identity in the two countries since the collapse of communism. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the memory cultures in which the primary texts are written, published and read. The exploration of dominant trends in how the socialist past is remembered in Germany and Russia will help to explain some of the contrasting approaches observed in the two groups of texts and their reception.

The study of memory is necessarily interdisciplinary. Although the primary focus of this thesis is literary representation of the socialist past, this chapter draws on academic research across a range of disciplines, including cultural and literary studies, anthropological and sociological research, as well as studies of oral history. I will explore how the GDR and Soviet Union are remembered through a survey of research on a wide range of artefacts and practices, including popular culture, monuments and museums, official and legal responses to crimes of the past

regime, representation in the mass media, consumer products, and the results of surveys and polls. The chapter will be divided into two sections, on German memory of the GDR and Russian memory of the Soviet Union respectively. Each section will initially explore significant factors and trends in post-socialist memory more generally, such as the areas listed above; secondly, each section will provide an overview of the literary context and show how literature in each of the countries has been engaged in representing and reassessing the socialist past and its legacy in the present. Before considering each memory culture in detail, the remainder of this introduction will consider post-socialist memory in broader terms. I will outline major commonalities and fundamental differences between the German and Russian experiences of socialism and its collapse. Other comparative studies of the role of memory in the two countries, of which there are very few, will also be explored.

Remembering the Socialist Past

Both the GDR and USSR were ruled by political systems which sought to repress alternative ideologies and their means of doing so were both invasive and sometimes violent. For those remembering this period, there can be a need to reconcile experiences, or at least knowledge, of this repression with memories which recall many 'normal' and happy aspects of life under socialism. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan emphasize the complexity and contentious nature of remembering and representing personal life in such a context:

Under Fascism or other repressive regimes, the invasion of everyday private life by political agents contaminated memories of mundane events; how to write about family life under such circumstances was a profound challenge.

Where 'normality' ended and the monstrous began is a question which may never be answered fully.¹

This observation demonstrates how memory of life in a repressive state can be characterized by a tension between the need to address questions of guilt and collaboration often with the invocation of memory as a means of preventing repetition, and the wish of many who do not think of themselves as guilty of collusion or as victims of a totalitarian regime to remember normal everyday life. Memory of the socialist past can, therefore, appear polarized, with a focus either on commemoration of victims and reckoning with past crimes or on nostalgia for aspects of everyday life and attempts to show that the past had many positive aspects. Such contrasting views are often expressed in reaction to each other, as my discussion below of memory of the GDR will show. Many acts of remembering are, however, much more complex than these simplified, polarised positions would suggest. Memories of the socialist past are often characterized by ambivalence; affectionate remembering of certain aspects can be combined with acknowledgement of suffering caused by the state. This ambivalence is likely to be revealed in more complex forms of remembering such as literary representation which can encompass a wide range of experiences within the past.

Memory after the collapse of the socialist regime is inevitably affected by practices of collective remembering under socialism. Rubie Watson provides a useful summary of common features of socialist states: 'They were dominated by a single-party state that claimed the exclusive right to exercise political power, to organise the production and distribution of goods and services, and to authorize the

¹ Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 6–39 (p. 7).

production of cultural texts, including historical ones.² It has already been observed that memory is significantly influenced by present circumstances and future needs. Under state socialism this dynamic was taken to extremes; in both the GDR and USSR history and memory were often distorted or suppressed to suit the aims and ideology of the state: 'the past was read from the present, but because the present changed (leaders, plans, and lines of thinking came and went), the past also had to change.'³ However, this is not to say that ways of remembering that were not sanctioned by the state were not also expressed and preserved. This is what Svetlana Boym refers to as countermemory:

Countermemory was for the most part an oral memory transmitted between close friends and family members and spread to the wider society through unofficial networks. The alternative vision of the past, present and future was rarely discussed explicitly; rather it was communicated through half words, jokes and doublespeak.⁴

Watson suggests that the emergence and recovery of these secret pasts in the late 1980s and early 1990s resulted in a 'feast of remembrance' across Eastern Europe.⁵ Public expression of what had been hidden for so long may have been a tentative move for many, however. Studies of both German and Russian memory have included the observation that, at least initially, many people may not have been

² Rubie S. Watson, 'Introduction', in *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism*, ed. by Rubie Watson (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1994), pp. 1–20 (p. 4).

³ Watson, p. 1. In the Soviet Union, for example, this included the doctoring of photographs to 'erase' certain people from history. See David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997)

⁴ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 61. Although the distinction between memory and countermemory can be useful, it should be noted that this is a simplification, and that inevitably what was sanctioned by the state may have been influenced by the opinions and initiatives of individuals and vice-versa. On the problems with binary simplifications with reference to late Soviet period, see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁵ Watson, p. 6.

convinced that the era of repression was over and that it was now safe to express critical memories of the past. For example, Elizabeth Ten Dyke comments:

[T]o understand the choices of actors in the fall of 1989 it is important to remember that at that time it was entirely conceivable that the state would resort to the so-called Chinese solution (slaughter the protestors) and that no reforms would take place.⁶

Memory of the socialist past since 1990/1 is, in part, a recovery of the 'unofficial' interpretations of countermemory combined with new reflections influenced by present conditions.

There are some major differences between the Russian and German experiences of socialism and its collapse. The GDR existed for just 40 years, and although the National Socialist and Weimar Republic periods are both, in very different ways, problematic for Germans, the socialist period was brief enough that there were always those who remembered a Germany before the GDR. The existence of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) moreover, meant that there was always an alternative model of Germany in existence. There was, by contrast, no 'Russia' outside the Soviet Union except for émigré communities with which contact was extremely limited for most of the Soviet period. By the time of its collapse Soviet Russia had existed for 74 years and there were few people with first-hand experience of pre-Soviet Russia. The effect of this, along with various manipulations by the Soviet authorities, was to discourage any specific Russian national identity as separate from a Soviet identity.⁷ A further disparity was the differing levels of knowledge about the West in the GDR and USSR. The GDR was

⁶ Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, 'Memory, History, and Remembrance Work in Dresden', in *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. by Daphne Berdahl, Matti Bunzl, and Martha Lampland (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 139–157 (p. 149). See also Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 652.

⁷ This will be explored further below in the section on Russia, see below, pp. 126–27.

less cut off from the West than Russia; for example, West German TV was viewed across most of the GDR. This was almost impossible to control, and therefore tolerated by the authorities.⁸ Many East Germans also received packages of gifts from friends or family in the West (*Westpakete*). In Soviet Russia there were fewer alternative sources of information to counter the official view of western capitalism as a corrupt, unfair and unsuccessful system.

The collapse of the GDR led to German unification, which meant that the legacy of the East German past was considered with input from Germans who had not themselves lived in the GDR. In being absorbed into a 'ready-made state', East Germany had greater financial support, alternative models for state institutions to draw on, and skilled people to help.⁹ These factors meant that the changes which occurred in East Germany were particularly fast. The speed of unification and the sudden transformation of East German life into history and the stuff of museum exhibits has inevitably affected former East Germans' attitudes to the past. As well as the disorientating speed of change there were also disadvantages of a transition with western financial support and direction. The feeling emerged that the East had been colonised by the West, and there had been no opportunity for the more positive aspects of the East German state to be incorporated in the new unified Germany. This, as will be shown below, has been crucial in shaping memory of the GDR, which often reacts against West German perspectives and their perceived superiority. In Russia, on the other hand, the development of a post-socialist state and responses to the socialist past have been more autonomous; 'unlike Germany, Russia was not joining a "West" whose political discourse demanded a reckoning with the past.'¹⁰ The economic crisis which occurred in Russia shortly after the

⁸ There were attempts to guide the interpretation of Western media: for example, 'Der Schwarze Kanal' with Karl Eduard von Schnitzler was a programme on GDR television which heavily criticized extracts from western TV coverage.

⁹ See, for example, Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp. 4–6 and 27.

¹⁰ Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson, and Karen Till, 'Post-Totalitarian National Identity: Public Memory in Germany and Russia', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 5 (2004), 357–380 (p. 368).

collapse of the USSR also provides a stark contrast with the western investment received by the former GDR. The impact of these differing experiences of transition will be explored further below.

There are few studies which compare German and Russian responses to the socialist past directly, and those that do tend to use the German approach as a point of comparison for exploring the 'failings' of Russian memory. The perceived benefits of the German process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or 'mastering the past' (first considered in relation to the National Socialist past) tend to be emphasized along with Germany's efforts to achieve official, legal redress of past crimes.¹¹ Widespread discussion in German society about the ethics of remembering and representing the past is also noted. In studies of Russian attitudes to the past the emphasis tends to be on the absence of those features which characterise German memory culture. In Russia there has been, on the official level at least, little attempt to acknowledge and judge the crimes of the Soviet state, or to commemorate the victims, while in society a tendency to forget and avoid talking about the detrimental effects of the Soviet system has been observed.

Alexander Etkind, in analysing Russian cultural memory and, more specifically, commemoration of repression, has compared it with German practices in relation to the Nazi period. He proposes that cultural memory is made up of two forms: 'hard' and 'soft'. 'Hard' forms of memory are, for example, monuments and legal judgements on the past, whereas 'soft' forms are usually texts, including literary and historical narratives. Some acts of remembering constitute a mixture of

¹¹ The 'obsession' with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the correspondingly 'prescriptive' nature of much research on post-socialist memory is noted by Maria Todorova, 'Introduction: From Utopia to Propaganda and Back', in *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, ed. by Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), pp. 1–13 (pp. 3–4).

these forms: he cites, among others, the example of museums.¹² He argues that both forms of memory are necessary, because 'monuments without inscriptions are mute, whereas texts without monuments are ephemeral'.¹³ He suggests that memory of National Socialism in Germany has undergone a 'hardening' process, which has not occurred in the Russian context of remembering the Soviet past, though he acknowledges that this is partly due to foreign influence on Germany's engagement with that past, especially in the western zones following the end of the Second World War.¹⁴ It is not the case that the Soviet past is completely absent from contemporary Russian debates, but rather that there is no consensus on how it should be assessed and interpreted: 'the present is oversaturated with the past, and this solution refuses to produce any sediment.'¹⁵ That is, references are made to the past, and symbols and concepts of the Soviet period are used, but with little self-conscious examination of what these things actually mean, and what is associated with them, or any conclusion as to how this past should inform the future direction of Russia. Etkind's theory of a lack of consensus in Russian memory is supported by Boym's observation that expressions of 'countermemory', which had appeared united against the regime, seemed to diverge after 1991, leaving only contention and no widely accepted approach to the past: 'Countermemory could no longer be mobilized under a single banner; it was now divisive and divided and ranged politically from socialism with a human face to extreme right-wing nationalism and monarchism.'¹⁶ It should be noted that there is also limited consensus in Germany with regard to how the East German past should be remembered; in Germany, however, it seems that the lack of consensus has continued to be accompanied by significant levels of debate in the public and cultural sphere, whereas in the Russian context, as the second part of this chapter will show, this is not the case. The lack of consensus regarding the Soviet past in

¹² Alexander Etkind, 'Hard and Soft in Cultural Memory: Political Mourning in Russia and Germany', *Grey Room*, 16 (2004), 36–59 (p. 39).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 47 and 56.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁶ Boym, p. 63.

Russia appears to be a symptom of the post-Soviet state's reluctance to confront the crimes of the former regime. Etkind suggests that in Russia, instead of the state facilitating 'hard' forms of memory, most acts of remembering are initiated by individuals or citizens' groups. 'Hard memory is usually the responsibility of the state, while soft memory is the domain of society.'¹⁷ He argues that the primary role in Russia is played by literature: 'the most important monument to the many millions of victims of the Soviet regime is Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*.'¹⁸ Despite the presence of such texts, Etkind warns that the lack of 'hard' memory of the Soviet period holds potential dangers for post-Soviet Russia:

The hardening of memory is a cultural process with specific functions, conditions and thresholds. It promises that the events themselves will not return, that the demons of the past are exorcised, that the present exists and prevails. In a democratic society, it requires relative consensus in the public sphere. Such consensus follows after, and because, the intensity of the 'soft' debates reaches a certain threshold. If this does not happen, memory without monuments is vulnerable to a cyclical, recurrent process of refutations and denials. Guilt feelings can be consoled with new voices, and even the most influential texts can be challenged by new texts.¹⁹

Etkind's emphasis on the value of 'hard' forms of memory could be questioned in a society which has seen monuments replaced and streets renamed after regime change, and where the long-term significance of such physical sites of memory may be doubted. Nonetheless, as Maria Tumarkin argues, there is a desire for tangible objects of commemoration: 'When it comes to remembering Soviet totalitarianism, the need to counter the persistent immateriality of its memory emerges as one of

¹⁷ Etkind, p. 56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

the most important historical battles of the present day.²⁰ Physical markers to identify sites where victims of purges and repressions have been imprisoned or buried can be helpful to those mourning the past as well as demonstrating acknowledgement by the state of the crimes committed and a will that such acts should not happen again.

Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson and Karen Till, in an article which considers public memory in Germany and Russia, primarily through the examination of monuments, make many of the same points as Etkind. They assert that, although the process of remembering and responding to the past has not always been unproblematic or uncontroversial, 'Germany has had relatively open and vigorous public debates about its totalitarian periods, including the German Democratic Republic (GDR) past'.²¹ They compare this with the Russian situation, where 'elite groups have typically circumvented or manipulated public participation in the memorialisation process since 1991, reflecting both a reluctance to deal with Russia's totalitarian past and an emerging national identity less civic and democratic than in Germany'.²² Whilst the categorization in this argument of both the GDR and the Soviet past as totalitarian without any acknowledgement of the potentially contentious nature of this terminology is problematic, the observation of the contrasting approaches to the past is useful and will be reinforced by later, more detailed discussion.²³ Forest, Johnson and Till's observations suggest that the reluctance of the post-Soviet authorities to make a clear break with the Soviet past and to explicitly acknowledge its crimes restricts public understanding of the USSR,

²⁰ Maria M. Tumarkin, 'The Long Life of Stalinism: Reflections on the Aftermath of Totalitarianism and Social Memory', *Journal of Social History*, 44 (2011), 1047–61 (p. 1050). She supports her arguments with comments from prominent members of the organisation, Memorial. (See this chapter, pp. 113–14, for more information on this group's activities.)

²¹ Forest, Johnson, and Till, p. 359.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ The only explanation of their understanding of 'totalitarian' is as follows: 'Totalitarian regimes [...] demand mass popular mobilization in support of the state, mobilization that ranges from coerced, to indifferently feigned, to genuinely enthusiastic. Even though the extent of actual mobilization may be limited, totalitarian regimes base their legitimacy on symbolic mobilization', *Ibid.*, p. 360.

and consequently also limits the ways in which that past could be made meaningful for Russia's present and future identity.²⁴

One aspect of post-socialist memory which has recently attracted considerable academic interest is the phenomenon of post-socialist nostalgia.²⁵ The specific nature of this in the German and Russian contexts will be discussed in the relevant sections below, but a few more general observations are useful by way of introduction to the concept. Expressions of nostalgia in the post-socialist context are often criticized, or dismissed as misguided.²⁶ Such criticisms tend to ignore the fact that nostalgia can have different functions and emphases and does not necessarily constitute an uncritical yearning to return to the past. Boym helpfully identifies two different 'tendencies' in nostalgic remembering: 'restorative nostalgia' and 'reflective nostalgia'. Restorative nostalgia focusses on what has been lost and seeks to recreate it; in this case the nostalgic narrative is not perceived as nostalgia, but rather as 'truth and tradition'.²⁷ Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, focusses on the feeling of loss itself and the 'irrevocability of the past', it can be 'ironic and humorous' and it recognises memory's ambivalence in the idea that 'longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement or critical reflection'.²⁸ In the post-socialist context there are many reasons why expressions of nostalgia can be a logical response to the experience of the collapse of the former state and adjustment to a liberal capitalist democracy. A 'longing for security and stability' is unsurprising amid major social upheaval.²⁹ Nostalgia may also act as a kind of counter-memory attempting to reclaim positive memories in the face of representations of the past which simplify or overemphasize the negative aspects of the socialist past, as Maria Todorova observes:

²⁴ Ibid., p. 375.

²⁵ Todorova, p. 1.

²⁶ See for example, Todorova, p. 2 and my discussion of German reception in Chapter 4.

²⁷ Boym, p. xviii and p. 41.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 49–50.

²⁹ Todorova, p. 7.

[T]here is a desire among those who have lived through communism, even when they have opposed it or were indifferent to its ideology, to invest their lives with meaning and dignity, not to be thought of, remembered, or bemoaned as losers or 'slaves'.³⁰

Mitja Velikonja also emphasizes this point, noting that nostalgia 'can have strong emancipatory potential and can become an agent of liberation from oppression of contemporary hegemonic discourses and practices.'³¹ Nostalgia for certain aspects of the socialist past can also be seen as a constructive way of acknowledging faults in the present, post-socialist system.³² Frances Pine's exploration of post-socialist memory in Poland makes this point, which would also be applicable to many expressions of nostalgia for the socialist past in both Germany and Russia:

[W]hen people evoked the "good" socialist past, they were not denying the corruption, the shortages, the queues and the endless intrusions and infringements of the state; rather, they were choosing to emphasize other aspects: economic security, full employment, universal healthcare and education.³³

In some cases it may not be the reality of any aspect of socialist life, but the loss of the 'utopian future' of communism which is the object of nostalgia.³⁴ Velikonja argues that this kind of utopian nostalgia has little to do with the past, but instead represents a desire for a better society in the present: 'Nostalgia is in fact a retrospective utopia, a wish and a hope for the safe world, fair society, true

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Mitja Velikonja, 'Lost in Transition: Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-socialist Countries', *East European Politics and Societies*, 23 (2009), 535–551 (p. 547).

³² Todorova, pp. 5 and 7.

³³ Frances Pine, 'Retreat to the Household? Gendered Domains in Post-Socialist Poland', in *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia*, ed. by C. M. Hann (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 95–113 (p. 111). Cited in Todorova, p. 5.

³⁴ Boym, p xvi.

friendships, mutual solidarity, and well-being in general.³⁵ Finally, Velikonja asserts that most of those who express nostalgia for the socialist past have no desire to return to the old system. In fact, he argues that, for the majority, being 'absolutely sure that it [the socialist past/system] cannot return' is an important condition for nostalgically remembering it.³⁶

Remembering the East German Past

In Germany since unification the past has been widely and openly discussed in terms of memory, history and identity. Writing in 2006, Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove describe the extent of this discussion:

[T]he frenzied memory work of unified Germany [...] had to deal with multiple pasts, ranging from the old theme of National Socialism to the role of 1968 and the assessment of the legacy of the GDR. All these interconnected topics ignited ferocious debates in the media that, as the letter sections in the newspapers and radio talk-shows demonstrate, enjoyed a huge public response throughout the 1990s and into the beginning of this decade.³⁷

That there has been significant and sustained public engagement in debates over how Germany should relate and respond to its own past does not mean that the legacy and memory of the GDR has been unproblematic. It has, in fact, been the subject of contention and controversy, as Katherine Pence and Paul Betts note: 'The popular uproar over the crude rendering of GDR history in the mass media has

³⁵ Velikonja, pp. 547–48.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 546.

³⁷ Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, 'Introduction', *German Life and Letters*, 59 (2006), 163–68 (p. 163).

indicated just how sensitive and vital this past was – and is – for ex-GDR citizens.³⁸

David Clarke and Ute Wölfel observe that, aside from the 'minimal consensus' among most Germans that the collapse of the GDR and the subsequent unification of Germany are to be celebrated, the nature of the GDR and how it should be remembered remains 'highly contested'.³⁹ The limited consensus and intensity of public debate surrounding many aspects of German memory and identity is reflected in Fuchs and Cosgrove's proposal that recent engagement with the past should be understood in terms of 'memory contests', thereby emphasizing the 'pluralistic' nature of German memory.⁴⁰ These 'memory contests' are only partly about the past; they are also significantly shaped by concerns about how particular ways of remembering the GDR may be affecting German national identity in the present and what the consequences might be for the future of Germany.⁴¹ Differing concerns about the present and future have contributed to the development of two major opposing strands in memory of the GDR, as Silke Arnold-de Simine observes: 'The existing polarization in GDR remembrance culture between the focus on the everyday and the focus on political repression is a symptom of very different political and ideological interest in the present.'⁴² Arnold-de Simine acknowledges that this polarization represents a highly simplified approach to the GDR past, and one which disregards the relevance of everyday experience to reassessing the political and historical nature of the GDR.⁴³ Nonetheless, the general tendency for the GDR to be remembered and represented with an emphasis either on repression

³⁸ Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, 'Introduction', in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. by Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008), pp. 1–34 (p. 2).

³⁹ David Clarke with Ute Wölfel, 'Remembering the German Democratic Republic in a United Germany', in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany*, ed. by David Clark and Ute Wölfel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 3–22 (p. 22).

⁴⁰ Fuchs and Cosgrove, p. 164. For further discussion see also *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. by Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006).

⁴¹ Clarke with Wölfel, p. 11.

⁴² Silke Arnold-de Simine, "'The Spirit of an Epoch Is Not Just Reflected in Pictures and Books, but Also in Pots and Frying Pans": GDR Museums and Memories of Everyday Life', in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, ed. by Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 95–111 (p. 100).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

or on the everyday can be observed, and will be a recurring theme throughout the following discussion of German post-socialist memory. It is of particular relevance to this thesis, because it helps to explain why many reviews of autobiographical and fictional accounts of GDR childhood (see Chapter 4) demonstrate the same polarization by focussing on criticising or celebrating portrayals either of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* (a state not based on the rule of law) or of the relative normality of East German everyday life, while in the case of some positive reviews there is particular praise for works which are perceived to successfully combine these two aspects of GDR experience.⁴⁴

The following discussion will outline some of the most prominent and relevant strands among the multiple and competing perspectives on the GDR past: it will aim to enable a productive comparison with Russian memory of the Soviet past and to help explain how the German texts analysed for this thesis fit within the wider context of Germany memory culture. Firstly, I will consider some different ways in which the GDR has been 'remembered' in Germany since unification. This will include discussion of measures taken to pursue transitional justice and the role of state-sponsored initiatives and historical research in shaping collective memory and public debate about the East German past. I will give an overview of some of the issues which provided the background and context for the emergence of a distinct eastern German identity in unified Germany, and I will explore the multiple meanings of *Ostalgie*, a particular kind of nostalgia for certain aspects of the GDR. The second part of my discussion of memory of the GDR will consider relevant aspects of the literary context in Germany since unification, providing an outline of the range of approaches in contemporary German literature to portrayal of the East German past.

⁴⁴ The term, *Unrechtstaat*, 'refers to a state that not only perpetrates systematic injustice through its laws, but also breaks its own laws' and is often used to suggest parity between the GDR and National Socialism. Jan-Werner Müller, 'East Germany: Incorporation, Tainted Truth and the Double Division', in *The Politics of Memory*, ed. by Barahona de Brito et al., pp. 248–74 (p. 249, n. 2).

Transitional Justice

Broadly speaking, transitional justice denotes ways in which the legacy of past repressions is dealt with by new governments in democratizing societies. One definition of the term describes it as 'the choices made and quality of justice rendered when new leaders replace authoritarian predecessors presumed responsible for criminal acts'.⁴⁵ This can be approached through measures such as 'amnesties, trials or purges, through the establishment of truth commissions, by financial compensation, and with symbolic gestures such as the building of monuments or the proclamation of commemorative days of "remembering"'.⁴⁶ The approach taken in Germany towards transitional justice in the aftermath of the collapse of the GDR has been relatively rigorous, especially in comparison with the limited measures undertaken in Russia in relation to the Soviet past, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The previous experience of the Federal Republic in its efforts to 'master' the National Socialist past has undoubtedly influenced attempts to deal with the legacy of the GDR. Norbert Frei notes that although 'self-critical examination of the Nazi past' became part of the Federal Republic's 'political culture', this developed only after a period in the early 1950s during which 'repression and the tendency to turn a blind eye were on the agenda'.⁴⁷ In responding to the East German past, then, there was a desire to avoid the failings and delays which had hindered the development of a critical and productive approach to the Nazi past:

[T]he fact that an intensive public debate about the history of the GDR took place at all, and then very quickly spilled out of the sphere of the political

⁴⁵ Richard Lewis Siegel, 'Transitional Justice: A Decade of Debate and Experience', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 20 (1998), 431–454 (p. 433). For a comprehensive introduction to the concept and applications of transitional justice, see Paola Cesarini, 'Transitional Justice', in *The SAGE Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed by Todd Landman and Neil Robinson (London: Sage, 2009), pp. 497–521.

⁴⁶ Alexandra Barahona de Brito, Carmen Gonzalez-Enriquez and Paloma Aguilar, 'Introduction', *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies*, ed. by Barahona de Brito, Gonzalez-Enriquez, and Aguilar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1–39 (p. 1).

⁴⁷ Norbert Frei, '1945–1949–1989: Dealing with Two German Pasts', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 56 (2010), 410–422 (p. 412).

dissidents, can in the end only be understood as a critical reflex to the history of the *Bewältigung* or rather *Nicht-Bewältigung* of the Nazi past in the early Federal Republic.⁴⁸

The following discussion will consider three significant areas of transitional justice in Germany: the use and availability of the files of the State Security Service (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit or MfS, commonly referred to as the Stasi), the prosecution of individuals for the crimes of the GDR, and the work of two parliamentary commissions (*Enquete-Kommissionen*), which examined the nature of the GDR.

Gary Bruce argues that the protests and demonstrations which led to the GDR's collapse were instrumental in decisions about transitional justice. In 1989 Stasi offices were a 'focal point of unrest' and the Stasi headquarters in Normannenstrasse in Berlin were taken over by a citizens' group, protesting at the destruction of archival evidence.⁴⁹ Transitional justice, therefore, had to be particularly thorough with regard to the Stasi, because the archives had been seized by, and therefore belonged to, the people.⁵⁰ This may be one reason why security service archives relating to former East Germany have been made much more accessible than their equivalent in Russia. Individuals have the right to see their personal files, with some information removed where this conflicts with the privacy rights of others. Access to these files has not been without controversy as the balance between the individual's right to privacy and public rights to information has often been contested.⁵¹ The role of Federal Commissioner for Documents of the State Security Service of the former GDR (Bundesbeauftragte für

⁴⁸ Frei, p. 418. See also, Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: Unified Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 6.

⁴⁹ Gary Bruce, 'East Germany', in *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past*, ed. by Lavinia Stan (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 15–36 (p. 16).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

⁵¹ See Bruce, pp. 19–25.

die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes des ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik or BStU) was created in 1990, and was originally held by Joachim Gauck, subsequently by Marianne Birthler (2000-2011) and now Roland Jahn (since March 2011). The BStU agency is mainly responsible for preserving and enabling access to the archives. As of December 2011 the agency had received 'a total of 6,680,934 requests and applications' since its foundation in 1991, of these 2.83 million applications were by private citizens seeking information, and access to files.⁵² The archives also enabled the checking of an individual's involvement with the Stasi before being appointed to positions of public trust, a practice which continued until 2011 for some positions.⁵³ In addition to its function of enabling access to the Stasi archive, the agency's main aims are (according to its website) 'to teach the public about the structure, methods and effects of the MfS', including the cultivation of 'critical public discourse about totalitarian ideas and structures by contributing publicly to the questions of coming to terms with the past'.⁵⁴

The attempt to prosecute selected individuals who had been responsible for perpetrating violence and coercion in the name of the state was a complicated and largely unsuccessful process which has been identified as 'the greatest failure' of Germany's attempts to achieve transitional justice.⁵⁵ Some trials took place in the early 1990s of border guards, and subsequently also of those who held high positions in the party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands or SED) and the Stasi. The most significant problem lay in the decision to try the defendants based on the law of the GDR, a decision which was arguably unavoidable given the legal principle that an act cannot be retrospectively defined as criminal if it was not

⁵² 'BStU in Zahlen: Stand 31. Dezember 2011', <http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/BundesbeauftragteUndBehoerde/BStUZahlen/_node.html> [accessed 9 January 2012]

⁵³ Bruce, p. 29.

⁵⁴ 'History, Tasks and Structure of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi-files', <<http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/BundesbeauftragteUndBehoerde/Aktuelles/Englisch-Text-Introduction.html?nn=1703834>> [accessed 1 December 2011]

⁵⁵ Müller, p. 257.

illegal at the time it was committed.⁵⁶ The alternative would have been to define the GDR as an entirely illegitimate state and to try defendants according to a 'higher moral justice' (as had been done in the Nuremberg trials of Nazi officials), but this would have been complicated by the fact that the FRG and GDR had enjoyed moderately good relations since the 1970s.⁵⁷ Throughout the legal process it was difficult to locate ultimate responsibility. The trials of border guards were particularly controversial with many believing that those responsible for giving the orders were more to blame.⁵⁸ The suggestion that actions were the result of 'following orders' went right to the top, however, with members of the GDR's *Politbüro* blaming pressure from Moscow.⁵⁹ A further obstacle was that some of the defendants, especially those who had been in significant positions of power, were suffering the effects of illness and old age; consequently not all trials reached a full conclusion and in some cases sentences were not served.⁶⁰

Another initiative which formed part of Germany's efforts to achieve transitional justice was the establishment of a parliamentary commission (*Enquete-Kommission*) to examine the GDR past; the investigatory commission on the 'Working-Through of the History and Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in Germany' ('Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland') began in 1992 and completed its work in 1994.⁶¹ Jennifer Yoder argues that the commission failed to encourage public participation among ordinary former East Germans, many of whom 'interpreted the commission as an elite - and a mainly western elite - endeavour and therefore trusted neither its intentions nor

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Bruce, p. 25; Müller, p. 257–58; Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, pp. 30.

⁵⁸ Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship* (London: Arnold, 2002), p. 195.

⁶⁰ See Müller, p. 259. Most famously, Erich Honecker's trial was abandoned due to his ill health.

⁶¹ For more on the range of issues considered by the commission, see Hermann Weber, 'Rewriting the History of the German Democratic Republic: The Work of the Commission of Inquiry', trans by Reinhard Alter, in *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany*, ed. by Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997), pp. 197–207 (pp. 203–207); and Andrew H. Beattie, *Playing Politics with History: The Bundestag Inquiries Into East Germany* (New York: Berghahn, 2008).

its outcomes'.⁶² The commission's final report paid little attention to everyday experiences of living in the GDR, experiences which for many were not confined to repression and deprivation; instead, 'GDR life [was viewed] almost exclusively in terms of the logic of totalitarian domination'.⁶³ Writing in 2002, Corey Ross argued that the approach taken by the commission had had a significant impact on former East Germans' attitudes to their situation in a unified nation and their perceptions of west Germany as dominant: 'Against the backdrop of the *Enquete-Kommission's* work, the feeling of being somewhat robbed of one's identity, the sense that the west Germans have even "colonized our memory", are regrettably understandable.⁶⁴ A second commission, 'Overcoming the consequences of the SED dictatorship in the process of German unity' ('Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit', 1995–1998), was intended to consider some aspects which had been underrepresented in the first, including the experience of everyday life in the GDR, but still failed to engage ordinary former East Germans in the process.⁶⁵

State-sponsored Memory, History and Public Debate

The Federal German state has continued, beyond the measures taken in pursuit of transitional justice, to be heavily involved in efforts to influence collective memory of the East German past. Clarke and Wölfel note that the state has 'assumed an unprecedentedly active role in seeking to shape how the GDR will be remembered' and that this is made possible with 'significant expenditure of state resources'.⁶⁶ Examples of state initiatives include the establishment of the Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur (Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship) in 1998 and, more recently, events such as the 'Deutschland-Tour',

⁶² Jennifer A. Yoder, 'Truth without Reconciliation: An Appraisal of the Enquete Commission on the SED Dictatorship in Germany', *German Politics*, 3(8) (1999), 59–80 (p. 75). See also Ross, p. 198.

⁶³ Pence and Betts, p. 4. See also, Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, pp. 35–41.

⁶⁴ Ross, p. 199.

⁶⁵ Ross, p. 198.

⁶⁶ Clarke with Wölfel, pp. 21–22.

organised as part of celebrations to mark twenty years of unified Germany.⁶⁷ Official approaches, especially in the early years after unification, tended to emphasize an understanding of the GDR based on 'power structures and ideology, [...] [p]olitical domination and repression' as well as highlighting the memory of 'opposition and resistance'.⁶⁸ This is unsurprising, given the concerns which have often emerged in public debates about German identity and politics since unification. One major issue which was especially prominent in the early 1990s and which has continued to fuel discussion in the public sphere, is the worry that for some former East Germans, particular ways of remembering the GDR might 'present a barrier to their integration into the national community and its perceived core values'.⁶⁹ Since the mid-2000s an additional concern has emerged about how young Germans with no first-hand knowledge of the GDR might be 'misled into preferring the societal model represented by the former GDR over the contemporary realities of the Federal Republic'.⁷⁰ These concerns indicate how memories of the GDR, especially positive memories of state socialism, are perceived as a potential threat to German unity and stability and the nation's values as a liberal capitalist democracy. The imperative to minimise the risk of a return to authoritarian or totalitarian power is, of course, particularly strong in the German context, and therefore fears related to the lack of education among the younger generations are understandable. Nonetheless, such discussions demonstrate how the GDR can be posited as 'the negative other against which the Federal Republic should continue to define itself'.⁷¹ Thomas Ahbe, for example, argues that there is a master narrative in unified Germany which presents the GDR as a totalitarian state, a position which 'curtails ideas about political alternatives

⁶⁷ The official website of *Die Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur*: <<http://www.stiftung-aufarbeitung.de/>> [accessed 16 Jan 2012]; on the Deutschland-Tour see Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce, 'Introduction', in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 1–16 (p. 3).

⁶⁸ Thomas Lindenberger, 'Everyday History: New Approaches to the History of the Post-War Germanies', in *The Divided Past: Rewriting Post-War German History*, ed. by Christoph Klessmann (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 43–67 (p. 45).

⁶⁹ Clarke with Wölfel, p. 11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, see also pp. 14–15.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

and reform, and [...] validates the current federal German system'.⁷² Some more recent state-sponsored activity relating to memory of the GDR has, on the other hand, tried to embrace a variety of perspectives on the past. An expert commission led by the historian Martin Sabrow in the mid-2000s made recommendations for the state's approach to the past, including both the National Socialist period and the GDR. The Sabrow Commission's report advocated a more balanced approach to the GDR, proposing, for example, that there should be a greater emphasis on both resistance within the GDR and also on everyday experience (*Alltag*).⁷³ Public debate surrounding the commission and the media attention it received showed the ongoing conflict between the perceived necessity of remembering the GDR as an oppressive state and the personal, everyday memories of many former GDR citizens which often contradict this view.⁷⁴

Historical approaches to the GDR have developed, in a similar way to state-sponsored memory, from an initial focus on repression to more balanced assessments of the nature of the GDR. Early historical assessments often reduced the GDR to a totalitarian dictatorship with some assessing it as equivalent to the National Socialist dictatorship. Many of these interpretations 'were tied to Western narratives about "winning" the Cold War, of "good" triumphing over "evil"'.⁷⁵ Ross notes that in public debate in the early 1990s an understanding of the GDR in terms of 'heroes, victims and villains' was particularly prominent, as was interest in 'sensationalist revelations about *Stasi* activity'.⁷⁶ Such analyses of the GDR, which rely on a top-down perspective, have been challenged by some historians and by

⁷² Thomas Ahbe, 'Competing Master Narratives: *Geschichtspolitik* and Identity Discourse in Three German Societies', in *The GDR Remembered*, ed. by Hodgin and Pearce, pp. 221–249 (p. 244).

⁷³ Arnold-de Simone, 'The Spirit of an Epoch', p. 101. Martin Sabrow, 'Die Empfehlungen der Expertenkommission zur Schaffung eines Geschichtsverbundes "Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur"', in *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte*, ed. by Martin Sabrow et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), pp. 17–45.

⁷⁴ See Sabrow et al., eds., *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung?*

⁷⁵ Forest, Johnson and Till, p. 363.

⁷⁶ Ross, p. 15. On heroes, victims and villains, see Mary Fulbrook, 'Reckoning with the Past: Heroes, Victims and Villains in the History of the German Democratic Republic', in *Rewriting the German Past*, ed. by Alter and Monteath, pp. 175–96; on revelations about *Stasi* activity see Cooke, *Representing East Germany Since Unification*, pp. 62–68.

the mid-1990s historical research was starting to include consideration of 'social and cultural themes', in addition to the focus on the state's methods of coercion.⁷⁷ By the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Wall significant progress had been made towards 'a more pluralistic understanding of the GDR and its culture' as the view that 'there was more to the GDR than the Stasi' was increasingly acknowledged in academic and public debate.⁷⁸ Although alternative accounts did emerge, the characterization of the GDR as a 'Stasi-state', thereby focussing on state repression and control, made a big impact on debate in the mass media and public sphere. Such accounts have undoubtedly affected former East Germans' perceptions of the past, whether they agree with or, as appears to be more commonly the case, reject such theories:

Faced with accounts of repression, complicity and collusion, former citizens of the GDR claimed that their own memories and experiences told them otherwise. Their own biographies did not seem to fit easily within the bleak picture of oppression and fear.⁷⁹

Ross suggests a reason why historical interpretations of the GDR were so divergent from what those with first-hand experience perceived, noting an excessive emphasis on archival sources, as if East German history can be defined by policies and records alone:

We have been seduced and overwhelmed by the governmental sources which historians do not normally have this early on, and have tended to write history 'from the inside outwards', without focussing on the

⁷⁷ Ross, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Dennis Tate, 'Introduction: The Importance and Diversity of Cultural Memory in the GDR Context', in *Twenty Years on: Competing Memories of the GDR in Postunification German Culture*, ed. by Renate Rehtien and Dennis Tate (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 1–19 (p. 7).

⁷⁹ Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 1.

experiences of contemporaries, and in the process painting a picture of the past that the East Germans themselves do not recognize.⁸⁰

Daphne Berdahl notes a similar response to the 'Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig', a museum of contemporary German history which focuses predominantly on repression and resistance in the GDR with no reference to East German experience that does not fit within this binary perspective. She observes that many of the former East German visitors are critical of what they perceive to be a western bias and of the lack of representations which reflect their own experiences.⁸¹

Eastern German Identity after the Fall of the Wall

As the previous section has shown, German memory of the GDR as promoted by the state has tended to underplay everyday experience of the GDR in favour of emphasizing power structures and methods of state control. This has undoubtedly been one factor influencing the emergence of a distinct eastern identity in the mid-1990s; but to understand the dynamics of eastern German identity within unified Germany it is helpful to consider how East Germans experienced the *Wende* and the process of unification. As will be shown throughout this section, East Germans' perspectives on the Federal Republic, and on their own identities and histories as East Germans, have changed as they see the consequences of unification and as the GDR becomes part of a more distant past.

Throughout the process of unification East Germany was seen as needing to adapt to the western model and there was little opportunity for East Germans to contribute to the building of a new society. Patricia Hogwood observes that unification was 'neither pursued nor perceived as a merger of equals; rather the west was tacitly acknowledged to have "won" the struggle between the rival

⁸⁰ Ross, p. 201.

⁸¹ Daphne Berdahl, 'Re-presenting the Socialist Modern: Museums and Memory in the Former GDR', in *Socialist Modern*, ed. by Pence and Betts, pp. 345–366 (pp. 353–54).

German cultures and ideologies'.⁸² That the area of the former GDR has, since unification, been referred to as the 'new federal states' (neue Bundesländer) underlines the sense of East Germany having been absorbed into an existing state rather than constituting part of a new one.⁸³ This is not to deny that most East Germans welcomed most of the changes, especially in terms of freedom of expression and movement; nonetheless, the disorientating effect of the transition should not be underestimated.⁸⁴ In an article published in 1994, Mary Fulbrook offered an early description of the effects, both positive and negative, of the *Wende* on the former GDR:

Roads are being resurfaced, buildings renovated, streets and squares renamed; statues and memorials pulled down, tourist attractions spruced up, new telephone boxes sprout on street corners. Gone are the old banners ('*Alles zum Wohl des Volkes!*'); in their place are advertisements for cigarettes and savings banks. But not everything is undergoing renovation and renewal; [...] recurrent features of the East German landscape are deserted factories, rusting industrial dinosaurs lying idle and empty as they await their fate in the privatization lottery.⁸⁵

Normal frames of reference disappeared within a matter of months or years, for example with the changing of names of institutions and new building work. Most of the developments were achieved with West German money and direction.⁸⁶ The speed with which the society and landscape changed intensified for some the feeling that they had lost their identities: 'The cataclysmic *Wende* had irrevocably

⁸² Patricia Hogwood, 'Identity in the Former GDR: Expressions of "Ostalgia" and "Ossi pride" in United Germany', in *Globalization and National Identities: Crisis or Opportunity?*, ed. by P. Kennedy and C. J. Danks (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 64–79 (p. 69).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁸⁴ See Mary Fulbrook, 'Aspects of Society and Identity in the New Germany', *Daedalus*, 123.1 (1994), 211–234 (p. 213–214).

⁸⁵ Fulbrook, 'Aspects of Society and Identity in the New Germany', p. 213.

⁸⁶ Jonathan Grix, 'Introduction to East German Political and Cultural Distinctiveness', in *East German Distinctiveness in a Unified Germany*, ed. by Jonathan Grix and Paul Cooke (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2002), pp. 1–14 (p. 2).

transformed a social and cultural universe, and what was once “everyday” suddenly was thrust to the fore as “historic”.⁸⁷ Former East Germans could now see in museums the everyday objects which probably still furnished a large proportion of their homes in the 1990s.⁸⁸ The rate of change influenced the way former East Germans related to the past in the initial period after the *Wende*. Some made an active choice to preserve what they anticipated would soon become distant memories. Elizabeth Ten Dyke, for example, describes a private museum project begun in 1990 which was ‘motivated by the awareness that there had been an *Alltag* (daily life) in the GDR that was fading so fast that soon no one would remember it’.⁸⁹ Not all East Germans wanted to preserve the past. Rather, some, in their wish to assimilate West German culture and fashions as quickly as possible, rapidly forgot much of their East German background. Berdahl observed, in Kella (the border-area village where her fieldwork was conducted from 1990-1992), this wish to ‘blend in’ and to be ‘unidentifiable’ as East Germans: ‘villagers have discarded their East German clothes, changed their hairstyles, and undertaken extensive home improvement as well as community renovation projects.’⁹⁰ As later discussion in this chapter will show, however, many former East Germans subsequently chose to emphasize and celebrate their East German origins.

During and after unification the West German way of life was widely perceived as normal and desirable, whereas the GDR was often characterized as ‘backward’. This may be, in part, a legacy of the Cold War; retrospective evaluations of the GDR have been influenced by ‘older Western cold war logic, which often characterized state socialism as essentially a culture of surveillance, privation, economic mismanagement, and colorless lifestyles’.⁹¹ Berdahl observes

⁸⁷ Ten Dyke, p. 150.

⁸⁸ Daphne Berdahl, ‘(N)Ostalgie for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things’, *Ethnos*, 64 (1999), 192–211 (p. 206).

⁸⁹ Ten Dyke, p. 146.

⁹⁰ Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 173.

⁹¹ Pence and Betts, p. 7.

comments made by visitors from the West shortly after the border opening which demonstrate the perception of the GDR as backward: “It reminds me of my childhood”; “I haven’t seen anything like this for thirty years”; or “Look! Remember these?” were frequent remarks of Westerners.⁹² The initial experiences of East Germans in the FRG encouraged this sense of the East as backward and in need of help. On their first visits after the opening of the German-German border, East Germans were given 100DM of *Begrüßungsgeld* (welcome money). In addition, hand-outs of money from West Germans to East Germans, even those who were complete strangers, were not uncommon. Berdahl observes that this contributed to a sense of inequality between East and West ‘and placed westerners in the dominant position of gift-givers’.⁹³ The sense of inequality was further emphasized by suggestions that it was specifically former East Germans (and not those from the West) who needed to adapt in order to make unification work:

Western mainstream magazines such as *Der Spiegel*, newspapers like the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and commentaries by former Chancellor Kohl sent the message that East Germans needed to work through their pasts in order to become part of (West) German civil society.⁹⁴

The term *Nachholungsbedarf* (‘need to catch up’) expressed the view that former East Germans should endeavour to “catch up” materially, politically, socially, culturally, and economically to the western Germans’.⁹⁵ Former East Germans had not only experienced rapid change and a lack of autonomy regarding that change, but also saw their own identities marginalized through the dominance of the West.

As initial enthusiasm for the West and for reunification waned, distinct identities emerged on both sides of the now imaginary border: ‘the claim to be “*ein*

⁹² Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, p. 156.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁹⁴ Forest, Johnson and Till, p. 364.

⁹⁵ Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, p. 237.

Volk” was rapidly replaced by denigratory jokes about the newly perceived differences between *Wessis* and *Ossis*.⁹⁶ ‘Ossi’ and ‘Wessi’ emerged as derogatory terms for former East and former West Germans respectively. According to stereotype, the Ossi is characterized (usually by former West Germans) as ‘lazy, passive, lacking in initiative and desire, sly, secretive, and having a scrounging “welfare” mentality’; the Wessi, on the other hand, is often perceived as ‘arrogant, pushy (a product of the elbow society), humourless, selfish and greedy’.⁹⁷ As time passed former East Germans reclaimed their ‘eastern’ identity as a positive quality, as Berdahl noted in her fieldwork: ‘[V]illagers began proudly referring to themselves as “Ossis” or “Zonis”. [...] The period of socialist rule came to be called “in our times”.’⁹⁸ Hogwood describes this as ‘Ossi pride’, in which stereotypical ‘Ossi’ characteristics are adapted and reclaimed to emphasize positive traits and values, often in contrast to the ‘perceived negative attributes of the cultural stereotype of the Wessi’.⁹⁹ The negative view of Ossis as lazy and passive is, for example, transformed into the positive characterization of former East Germans as easy-going and is contrasted with the stereotypical ‘pushy’ Wessi.¹⁰⁰ This demonstrates the significant influence of West German norms against which former East Germans have often been judged and against which they sometimes actively defined themselves. The absence of any such influence in the Russian context makes this a significant factor in the differing construction of memory and identity with reference to the socialist past in the two countries. Although former East Germans have often expressed negative attitudes to many perceived western characteristics, Hogwood observed (writing in 2002) that ‘easterners [nevertheless] admire and aspire to many aspects of the western model’.¹⁰¹ It should be noted that the strengthening of eastern identity is not solely a consequence of the inequality of unification and attitudes of the west, but is also likely to be influenced

⁹⁶ Fulbrook, ‘Aspects of Society and Identity in the New Germany’, p. 214

⁹⁷ Hogwood, ‘Identity in the former GDR’, p. 74.

⁹⁸ Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, p. 174.

⁹⁹ Hogwood, ‘Identity in the former GDR’, p. 75.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* See also, Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, p. 180.

by the differing socialization in the GDR and FRG.¹⁰² Jonathan Grix also reminds us that the development of a distinct eastern identity indicates a general trend and has not been experienced by all former East Germans.¹⁰³

Some former East Germans reacted to the excessively negative portrayal of the past and frequent marginalization of eastern identity in the present by idealizing aspects of the GDR and defending their positive perceptions of life in that past. Berdahl reports hearing sentiments such as: 'We used to live like one big family here [...] now no one has time for any one else.'¹⁰⁴ The sense that the past was better because people were less materialistic, and had 'more time for each other' is reflected also in Milena Veenis's fieldwork.¹⁰⁵ These positive assessments and portrayals of the GDR past became more common and prominent as time has passed. Many former East Germans felt disillusioned with the experience of unification and this seems to have changed their views on the past retrospectively: 'Whilst only 19% of the east German population claimed that conditions in the GDR were "erträglich" [bearable] in 1990 [...] this had almost doubled to 36% by 1996.'¹⁰⁶ The increasing evidence of distinct eastern and western identities fuelled concerns about the so-called 'Mauer im Kopf' ('Wall in people's minds') which was, and to a lesser extent still is, seen to be detrimental to the prospects of Germany achieving 'inner unity' due to the ongoing social division between former East and former West Germans.¹⁰⁷ Accordingly, the eastern German identity which emerged during the 1990s was labelled by some as a *Trotzidentität*, an 'identity of defiance'

¹⁰² See Grix, pp. 3–4; and Ahbe, 'Competing Master Narratives'.

¹⁰³ Grix, pp. 1 and 3.

¹⁰⁴ Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, pp. 219–220.

¹⁰⁵ Conducted in Rudolstadt, Sept 1993 – Dec 1994. Milena Veenis, 'Consumption in East Germany: The Seduction and Betrayal of Things', *Journal of Material Culture*, 4 (1999), 79–112 (p. 81).

¹⁰⁶ Anna Saunders, "'Schrecklich leere Gemüseläden", "nicht wirklich Sozialismus" and "Gemeinschaftsgefühl": Young East Germans' Perceptions of the GDR', *German as a Foreign Language*, 3 (2004), 25–42 (p. 27). Her source for these surveys is Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Renate Köcher, eds., *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1993–1997* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1997), p. 583.

¹⁰⁷ This division was still perceptible twenty years after unification. See Hodgkin and Pearce, p. 3. The term, 'Mauer im Kopf', originates from Peter Schneider's novella, *Der Mauerspringer* (1982).

reacting against the privileging of western perspectives in unified Germany. The characterization of eastern identity as 'defiant' (trotzig) often goes hand in hand with a critical approach to nostalgic remembering of the GDR; both are viewed as barriers to successful unification and integration of eastern and western Germans.¹⁰⁸ These critical views of eastern distinctiveness promote and reproduce western cultural hegemony (which has provoked the so-called *Trotzidentität*) by constructing East German 'otherness' as a problem for German society.¹⁰⁹ Anna Saunders warns against the danger of perceiving the East German past as something to be 'overcome' in responses to 'Ossi pride' and *Ostalgie* (to be explored further in the next section):

While eastern distinctiveness will endanger the project of inner unity if this is to be understood as homogeneity, a confident and normalized nation that respects the validity of individual experience should be able to integrate *Ostalgie* as one of a variety of perspectives on the east German past.¹¹⁰

The responses of former East Germans to representations of the GDR as a repressive regime have not always taken the form of defiant or proud expressions of eastern identity. Berdahl notes examples of some former East Germans who retrospectively expressed feelings of victimization in response to narratives about state repression in the GDR, while others (from the same family or village) have disputed this, claiming that most people they knew did not feel they were suffering at the time.¹¹¹ It is impossible to know whether some were simply too scared to admit feeling like victims at the time, or whether the remembered feeling of victimization may, in fact, be a re-evaluation of the past drawing on new knowledge

¹⁰⁸ Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, p. 8. On *Trotzidentität* see also Dan Hough, *The Fall and Rise of the PDS in Eastern Germany* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2002), especially Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁹ Berdahl, '(N)Ostalgie for the Present', p. 205.

¹¹⁰ Anna Saunders, "'Normalizing" the Past: East German Culture and *Ostalgie*', in *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-first Century: Beyond Normalization*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), pp. 89–119 (p. 91).

¹¹¹ Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, pp. 213–215.

and the altered perspective which comes with it. There are also examples of former East Germans who have avoided any engagement with processes that might interpret their lives in terms of state repression, thereby choosing to 'forget' rather than remember more negative aspects of the past. Berdahl notes the widespread reluctance of the residents of Kella to access their Stasi files. She proposes that this may be a response to 'the discrediting of the GDR past, a critical resistance to partaking in the construction of new histories and memories'.¹¹² The process of 'forgetting', or at least the avoidance of direct engagement with the past, will be shown to be a more widespread and significant practice in the Russian context.

In the process and consequences of unification former East Germans were seeing their recent past cast as history, in museums, the media and historical writing, often with little input from themselves, or little consideration of aspects of their lives that fell outside the attention of politics and ideology. They were, in a sense, losing ownership of their own histories and experiences, in narratives which frequently portrayed them as victims, or as guilty of collusion in the system, as naive and backward in economic and social terms, and as being in need of help from the west. It is in this context that the trend for more positive representations of life in the GDR emerges.

Ostalgie

Although *Ostalgie* is a conflation of the terms *Ost* (East) and *Nostalgie* (nostalgia) it cannot be simply understood as nostalgia for the East, especially not in the sense of 'restorative' nostalgia (as previously discussed, see p. 69), because *Ostalgie* rarely represents a wish to return to the GDR or to recreate it. *Ostalgie* describes a focus on remembering positive aspects of East German everyday experience often expressed through cultural representations and consumer products. It tends to emphasize shared experiences and values which distinguish former East Germans

¹¹² Ibid., p. 219.

from their western counterparts. As has already been acknowledged, the phenomenon of post-socialist nostalgia has been observed across Eastern Europe and in Russia (to be discussed in further detail later), and certainly *Ostalgie* shares some of the qualities recognised in post-socialist nostalgia more generally, for example nostalgia for the loss of a utopian vision of the future and for some socialist values often in combination with expressions of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of capitalism.¹¹³ As a response to rapid and major social change its emergence is also not surprising. Here I will consider the significant features of *Ostalgie* and, more importantly for this thesis, the debates *Ostalgie* provokes, which are shaped by the specific conditions of the German context.

Ostalgie is most easily expressed and observed through practices of consumption. Hogwood has noted that although during the initial period after unification former East Germans chose western brands, the effects of rapid social change and rising unemployment soon led to disillusionment with the Federal government; this resulted in a 'dramatic U-turn in Eastern consumer behaviour as East Germans began to assert a distinct consumer identity through consciously buying Eastern goods'.¹¹⁴ Another example might be the return of 'Intershops', where, in the GDR, western products were available to those with the right connections and access to hard currency. Now, instead of the coveted western products they once sold before 1989, they sell products and memorabilia of the GDR.¹¹⁵ Berdahl argues that these products have, at least for former East German consumers, 'become mnemonics, signifiers of a period of time that differentiates Osis'.¹¹⁶ The ideology of work and production in the GDR, which encouraged great pride in the worker's role in manufacturing East German goods, means that these

¹¹³ On the loss of a utopian future as an important factor in *Ostalgie*, see Peter Thompson, "'Worin noch niemand war": The GDR as Retrospectively Imagined Community', in *The GDR Remembered*, ed. by Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 250–265.

¹¹⁴ Patricia Hogwood, "'Red is for Love ...": Citizens as Consumers in East Germany', in *East German Distinctiveness in a Unified Germany*, ed. by Grix and Cooke, pp. 45–60 (p. 54).

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Bach, "'The Taste Remains": Consumption, (N)ostalgia, and the Production of East Germany', *Public Culture*, 14 (2002), 545–556 (pp. 545–546).

¹¹⁶ Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, p. 176.

are not just reminders of the past but are also symbolic of East Germans' productivity: 'Consuming products of *Ostalgie* is not merely an assertion of identity as eastern Germans, then, it also recalls an identity as producers that has been lost in this transition.'¹¹⁷ East German products have also been a focus of many exhibitions which portray the daily life of the GDR. Ten Dyke describes a 'home-made museum', a flat in which three friends have collected and presented a huge number of GDR products. However, this exhibition is not necessarily a superficial nostalgia trip into GDR consumer culture, for example: 'Some of the objects recall stories about the so-called *Versorgungsloch* (gap in supplies) or *Mangelgesellschaft* (shortage society) as well as the social relations East Germans manipulated to obtain coveted goods.'¹¹⁸ Ten Dyke argues, therefore, that *Ostalgie* cannot be seen simply in opposition to the dominant discourse of the GDR as a repressive state, because these objects can also act as mnemonics for that repression. She describes the example of products often received as gifts for the *Jugendweihe* (the state secular coming-of-age ceremony). For one of the museum's founders these objects are a reminder of her difficult decision, in conflict with her religious belief, to take part in the ceremony.¹¹⁹ The products and practices of *Ostalgie* are ambiguous and their meaning often emerges only in interpretation and associations, such that even seemingly trivial items from the GDR can actually be bound up in a much more complex relationship to that past.

Particularly relevant for this thesis are the responses provoked by *Ostalgie*; the trend has 'fomented debates concerning the politics of memory and contemporary German identity'.¹²⁰ This again highlights the contested nature of memory of the GDR, and reveals an important contrast with the Russian context, where expressions of nostalgia for the Soviet past do not tend to provoke strong reactions or self-conscious reflection on memory and identity. *Ostalgie*, on the

¹¹⁷ Berdahl, '(N)Ostalgie for the Present', p. 199.

¹¹⁸ Ten Dyke, p. 147.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹²⁰ Hodgkin and Pearce, p. 10.

other hand, has often been heavily criticised and marginalized, especially in the mainstream German media.¹²¹ Saunders notes that criticisms can derive from concerns about the possibility that the East German past will be trivialised, leading to a perception of it as 'a "Kuschel-DDR" [cuddly GDR], which neither recognises the dictatorial nature of the regime, nor allows for its accurate historical appraisal'.¹²² For example, the 'DDR Museum' in Berlin, which opened in 2006 and is focussed on representing everyday life, was criticized for not addressing the GDR past seriously enough and for 'ignoring the political dimensions of the GDR'; it was 'perceived to be riding the crest of the *Ostalgie* wave'.¹²³ It should be noted that criticisms of *Ostalgie* are expressed by those from both the former East and the former West. The analysis in Chapter 4 of this thesis will show how the term '*Ostalgie*' is mainly used in a pejorative sense in reviews of the primary texts. In addition to concerns about the effect of *Ostalgie* on collective memory of the repressive nature of the GDR, there are also many who trivialize it and 'dismiss such practices as "mere" nostalgia, "pseudo" nostalgia, or "just" another instance of German regionalism'.¹²⁴ Berdahl argues that in these trivializing commentaries the privileging of western perspectives obscures both the complex nature of *Ostalgie* and the 'asymmetrical power-relations in which these practices are embedded'.¹²⁵ Jonathan Bach's observation that engagement with *Ostalgie* is judged very differently depending on who is doing the remembering demonstrates the inequality to which Berdahl refers:

When referring to the habits of easterners, Ostalgia confirms a widespread western image of East Germans as deluded ingrates longing pathetically (if understandably) for the socialist past. Yet when the subject is the knowingly

¹²¹ Ross, p. 200.

¹²² Saunders, "'Normalizing" the Past', p. 91. She cites Andreas Krause, "'Wir sind kein Volk!" Seit es Ostalgie gibt, hat der Westen eine Mauer: ein Beitrag zur aktuellen Debatte,' *Berliner Zeitung*, Feuilleton, 11 March 2004. For another example of a highly critical examination of *Ostalgie*, see Jens Bisky, 'Zonensucht. Kritik der neuen Ostalgie', *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 658 (2004), 117–127.

¹²³ Arnold-de Simone, 'The Spirit of an Epoch', p. 96.

¹²⁴ Berdahl, '(N)Ostalgie for the Present', p. 204.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

ironic westerner (or the 'sophisticated' easterner) enjoying the retro aura of GDR era design, *Ostalgie* appears as a (p)ostmodern artifact valued precisely for its lack of emotional attachment to a specific past.¹²⁶

Academic analyses of *Ostalgie* tend to emphasize its complexity and the importance of the context in which it has emerged, thereby offering an alternative perspective to the harsh criticism of *Ostalgie* often expressed in the German media. Central to such arguments is the recognition that *Ostalgie* does not necessarily refer to idealization of the GDR past or wilful ignorance of state repression; the difficulties of GDR life are not necessarily forgotten:

Ostalgie [...] does not entail an identification with the former GDR state, but rather an identification with different forms of oppositional solidarity and collective memory. It can evoke feelings of longing, mourning, resentment, anger, relief, redemption, and satisfaction – often within the same individuals.¹²⁷

The experiences of former East Germans during the *Wende* are also crucial; *Ostalgie* 'must be seen in the context of feelings of profound displacement and disillusionment following reunification, reflected in the popular saying that we have "emigrated without leaving home"'.¹²⁸ The enthusiasm of many former East Germans for *Ostalgie* can be seen a logical response to the marginalization of East German identity and experience, especially the widespread emphasis during the 1990s on the GDR as a 'Stasi-state'. Berdahl, therefore, describes *Ostalgie* as a kind of 'counter-memory', responding to the dominant, western interpretation of the East German past.¹²⁹ Arnold-de Simone similarly sees 'ostalgic' practices and products as a response to the lack of autonomy felt by former East Germans in

¹²⁶ Bach, p. 546–47.

¹²⁷ Berdahl, '(N)Ostalgie for the Present', p. 203.

¹²⁸ Berdahl, 'Re-presenting the Socialist Modern', p. 360.

¹²⁹ On *Ostalgie* as counter-memory see Berdahl, '(N)Ostalgie for the Present', p. 202.

relation to their own past: 'an attempt to regain agency in the decision of what should be left behind and what should be preserved.'¹³⁰

Most important for my own thesis is the consideration of *Ostalgie* as part of a relationship with the past which acknowledges both the complexity of memory and the fact that multiple perspectives on the East German past are possible and even desirable. Saunders interprets *Ostalgie* as a kind of 'reflective' nostalgia which explores memory of the GDR in order to acknowledge the validity of personal memories within the history of the period:

Ostalgie is clearly more nuanced than a simple and uncritical longing for a rose-tinted world. In the same way that *Alltagsgeschichte* [history of everyday life] promotes a more differentiated view of life in the GDR, *Ostalgie* involves developing a more complex understanding of memory rather than simply sweeping away the negative ones; it is not a naive longing to restore the past, but rather the desire to find a place for it within memory.¹³¹

Andreas Ludwig, director of the *Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* (a museum which preserves everyday objects of the GDR), makes a similar point to Saunders in advocating recognition of the multiple ways of remembering and representing the GDR, among which a focus on apolitical memories of the everyday has a valid place; he contends that 'museums of GDR everyday life have to be seen as part of a diversified landscape of remembrance in which most memorials and documentation centers do indeed deal with the border regime, the Stasi, and political imprisonment'.¹³² This is an important difference between approaches to

¹³⁰ Arnold-de Simine, 'The Spirit of an Epoch', p. 108.

¹³¹ Saunders, "'Normalizing" the Past', p. 101.

¹³² Arnold-de Simine, 'The Spirit of an Epoch', p. 100. She cites Andreas Ludwig, 'Views on the Recent Past: Interpretations and Contradictions in Museum Representations about the GDR' (unpublished manuscript, 2007).

post-socialist memory in Russia and Germany; as later discussion will show, expressions of nostalgic or affectionate memory of the Soviet past in Russia are not balanced by widespread acknowledgement of the crimes of the regime, nor have they prompted public debate or controversy similar to that seen in Germany in response to *Ostalgie*.

The German Literary Context after the Fall of the Wall

The functions of literature and the role of authors in Germany have been the topic of considerable debate among intellectuals and the media since the collapse of the GDR. Following unification, and with the end of the Cold War, German literature in general became less focussed on particular political and ideological causes. There has instead been greater emphasis on literature which deals with individual lives: 'In contrast with previous decades, much of German-language writing in the Berlin Republic is less concerned with the "state of the nation" than with personal, subjective, local, physical, in a word, intractably specific experience.'¹³³ For many engaged in literary activity during and after the *Wende*, including writers, critics and publishers, the aesthetic and/or entertainment value of literary texts was asserted as a more important factor than the political or ethical messages they conveyed. Although the political and didactic role of literature has diminished since unification, the specific nature of German experience, memory and identity are still major themes of contemporary German texts. In the case of representations of the GDR it appears that even portrayals of individual experience are likely to be interpreted with regard to wider concerns such as coming to terms with the 'totalitarian' past or the progress of integration between East and West in unified Germany.¹³⁴ For this thesis the most crucial observation is that in Germany, in comparison with the Russian approach to the Soviet past in literature, there has been more open discussion of the relationship between literature, history and

¹³³ Stuart Taberner, 'Introduction: Literary Fiction in the Berlin Republic', in *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1–20 (p. 11).

¹³⁴ See Chapter 4, and also Niven's comments cited below, pp. 97–98.

politics and the role played by literature in contributing to post-socialist memories and identities.

The following discussion will be mainly focussed on how post-1990 German literature has represented the GDR and East Germans' experiences of the *Wende*. I will first provide a more general outline of relevant aspects of the significant debates and discussions surrounding the changing role of literature in German society. I will then look specifically at the representation of the GDR and East German experience in post-unification literature, giving an overview of the range of approaches used. Texts which provide a critical reassessment of the GDR, including representation of the Stasi, are of interest as they demonstrate, in general terms, a different approach to the one found in Russian representations of the Soviet past. I will then focus in particular on two aspects which are directly relevant to the narratives of East German childhood analysed in this thesis: the use of humour in narratives concerning East German experience, and the depiction of 'normality' and everyday life in the GDR in texts which are often associated with *Ostalgie*.

In the early 1990s the role of literature and the author was the subject of significant debate in German literature. I will not provide a comprehensive account of the so-called *Literaturstreit*, but will highlight those aspects which are relevant for understanding the influences on and expectations of literature which specifically represents the GDR and East German experience.¹³⁵ The *Literaturstreit*, in which several critics and those prominent in the literary world expressed a need for change in German literature, began with controversy surrounding the publication of Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* (1990). The text fictionalizes the author's experiences of being under surveillance by the Stasi in the late 1970s. That Wolf, a celebrated

¹³⁵ The original articles of the *Literaturstreit* are collected in: Thomas Anz, ed., *Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf: Der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland* (Munich: Spangenberg, 1991). For a more detailed account of the debates, see Frank Finlay, 'Literary Debates and the Literary Market since Unification', in *Contemporary German Fiction*, ed. by Taberner, pp. 21–38 (p. 22); Bernd Wittek, *Der Literaturstreit im sich vereinigenden Deutschland* (Marburg: Tectum, 1997).

writer in the GDR, chose not to publish this work until 1990 provoked condemnation from critics, in particular Ulrich Greiner and Frank Schirrmacher, who saw the publication as opportunistic.¹³⁶ The attacks on Wolf at this time are reflective of the attitudes faced by other former East German intellectuals after the collapse of the GDR; those who had been established authors in the GDR were seen to be morally compromised by their alleged complicity with the state. In the early 1990s, revelations from the archives that some writers had worked as informants for the Stasi, to a greater or lesser extent, further undermined the position of such authors in society.¹³⁷ The *Literaturstreit*, however, moved beyond responses to the specific position of former East German authors in society and developed into a debate about the role of German literature in more general terms. Both Greiner and Schirrmacher argued that there should be a renewed emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of literature and that politics, social conscience and ethics should cease to be important factors. Greiner attacked the dominance of 'Gesinnungsästhetik', a term which 'can imply everything from party-political writing to a literature overburdened with a sense of didactic purpose in choice of theme, style and approach'.¹³⁸ These discussions had implications for how German literature represented the past, for, as Stephen Brockmann describes, the *Literaturstreit* led to calls for a 'normalization of the literary and aesthetic standards and an escape from the burden of coming to terms with the difficult German past in literature'.¹³⁹ Bill Niven suggests, however, that this was not necessarily the case for former East German authors:

¹³⁶ Finlay, p. 22.

¹³⁷ See Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, p. 64.

¹³⁸ Bill Niven, 'Literary Portrayals of National Socialism in Post-Unification German Literature', in *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past: Representations of National Socialism in Contemporary Germanic Literature*, ed. by Helmut Schmitz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 11–28 (p. 12).

¹³⁹ Stephen Brockmann, *Literature and German Reunification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 78. On 'normalization' and German literature, see Stuart Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond: Normalization and the Berlin Republic* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005).

Problematic agendas were [...] visible in the blatant inconsistency that, while former East German writers were expected critically to deconstruct the GDR in a kind of savage autopsy, West German writers were not invited to be critical towards the FRG. The new aestheticism was to be the realm of the West, while GDR writers were simply to switch the political code of their writing to harangue what they had previously upheld.¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, in spite of the insistence on the aesthetic, literature was nevertheless called on to reflect experience of historical events, as demonstrated by critics' assertions that literature should respond to the experiences of the collapse of the GDR and unification in the creation of the *Wenderoman*: 'Literature was confronted with demands that it participate in establishing a cultural memory and enable people to come to terms with recent history on an emotive as well as cognitive level.'¹⁴¹ The idea that a novel might, and indeed should, be able to encompass the German experience of unification indicates the perceived value of German literature as a cultural form which could productively depict and interpret the nation's recent history.¹⁴² By the end of the 1990s, however, no single text had been widely accepted as the definitive *Wenderoman* and interest in identifying such a text had significantly diminished. Gerstenberger and Herminghouse offer a positive interpretation of this development, suggesting that it could be 'an indication that the German reading public is willing to consider a multiplicity of novels and a plurality of voices on events of national importance'.¹⁴³ The debates outlined here demonstrate significant expectations of literature in Germany since the early 1990s

¹⁴⁰ Niven, 'Literary Portrayals of National Socialism in Post-Unification German Literature', pp. 13–14.

¹⁴¹ Silke Arnold-de Simine, 'Theme Park GDR? The Aestheticization of Memory on Post-Wende Museums, Literature and Film', in *Cultural Memory and Historical Consciousness in the German-speaking World since 1500: Papers from the Conference 'The Fragile Tradition', Cambridge 2002*, ed. by Christian Emden and David R. Midgley, vol. 1 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 253–280 (p. 269).

¹⁴² Katharina Gerstenberger and Patricia Herminghouse, 'Introduction', in *German Literature in a New Century: Trends, Traditions, Transitions, Transformations*, ed. by Gerstenberger and Herminghouse (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 1–11 (p. 4).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

and show that the role of literary texts in relation to history and politics has been a subject of open discussion.

Post-Unification Literary Representation of the GDR and East German Experience

Despite the calls for a lesser role for politics and ideology by those who were vocal during the *Literaturstreit*, some former East German authors continued to 'reassert the legitimacy of both socialist values and of the writer's role as social critic.'¹⁴⁴

Their texts engaged in critically reassessing the East German past, exploring issues of guilt and complicity in the system. Paul Cooke notes, however, that for many former East German authors during the 1990s the primary concern was not to examine the GDR in political or historical terms; instead, the exploration of identity and shared memories became more significant as many writers expressed 'more visceral notion[s] of East Germanness [...], bound by the private examination of a collective past experience and a sense of dislocation within the unified German state'.¹⁴⁵ A sense of melancholy and loss could be identified in some texts written during the 1990s which sought to respond to the vast and rapid changes experienced by East Germans.¹⁴⁶ Disappointment and disillusionment with both the past system in the GDR and the present way of life in capitalist unified Germany were not uncommon themes.¹⁴⁷ In contrast with texts which cast East German experience as characterized by loss and disillusionment, Cooke has observed the development of a more positive expression of East German identity: 'a more self-confident image of an East German community which demands that its sense of

¹⁴⁴ Paul Cooke, "'GDR literature" in the Berlin Republic', in *Contemporary German Fiction*, ed. by Taberner, pp. 56–71 (p. 57).

¹⁴⁵ Paul Cooke, 'Literature and the Question of East German Cultural Identity since the *Wende*', in *East German Distinctiveness in a Unified Germany*, ed. by Grix and Cooke, pp. 151–167 (pp. 154–55).

¹⁴⁶ Cooke, "'GDR literature" in the Berlin Republic', pp. 62–3. Cooke refers to the observation made by the critic, Iris Radisch, that 'The East is tragic'. See Iris Radisch, 'Der Herbst des Quatschocento: Immer noch, jetzt erst recht, gibt es zwei deutsche Literaturen: selbstverliebter Realismus im Westen, tragischer Expressionismus im Osten' in *Maulhelden und Königskinder: Zur Debatte über die deutschsprachige Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Andrea Köhler and Rainer Moritz (Leipzig: Reclam, 1998), pp. 180–88.

¹⁴⁷ Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond*, pp. 36–37. He lists works by Volker Braun, Angela Krauß and Christoph Hein as examples of those which are critical of capitalism.

difference be accepted as one of the many social and regional markers which make up the multifaceted notion of German national identity.¹⁴⁸

The prevalence of texts which reassess the GDR in critical terms, considering both the role of individuals and of the state, especially surveillance by the Stasi, provides a contrast with the Russian context, where there have been fewer representations which are highly critical of the Soviet state and its methods of coercion and surveillance.¹⁴⁹ Cooke notes that, following unification, 'many of the GDR's most important writers continued to examine the GDR's failings as well as their own complicity with these failings'.¹⁵⁰ Christa Wolf's *Leibhaftig* (2002) is a prominent example of this approach.¹⁵¹ Another author who has explored significant historical and ideological debates is Monika Maron. Stuart Taberner describes her autobiographical work, *Pawels Briefe* (1999), as seeking to answer the question: 'Did the GDR truly offer a utopian alternative to what had gone before [...] or was it criminal in its very intentions and even, to a certain degree, at least, perhaps comparable with Nazi Germany?'¹⁵² Central to many texts which critically examine the GDR is portrayal of the Stasi. The 'post-unification wave of Stasi novels' included texts based upon Stasi files as well as fictional depictions of Stasi collaborators and victims.¹⁵³ During the 1990s, as mentioned above, there was a particular focus on the Stasi in the media and in popular representations of the East German past. Brockmann suggests that this emphasis could be interpreted as

¹⁴⁸ Cooke, 'Literature and the Question of East German Cultural Identity since the *Wende*', p. 155.

¹⁴⁹ The lack of widespread condemnation of the Soviet security services and the Soviet state in general, as well as the tendency for the most critical texts to be allegorical, non-realistic representations of power, will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

¹⁵⁰ Cooke, "'GDR literature' in the Berlin Republic", p. 57.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond*, p. 44. See also Taberner, "'ob es sich bei diesem Experiment um eine gescheiterte Utopie oder um eine Verbrechen gehandelt hat'": Enlightenment, Utopia, the GDR and National Socialism in Monika Maron's Work from *Flugasche* to *Pawels Briefe*', in *Textual Response to German Unification*, ed. by Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, Rachel J. Halverson, and Kristie A. Foell (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 35–57.

¹⁵³ Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond*, p. 37. Brockmann lists a large number of texts with Stasi themes, see p. 85. On literature and the Stasi, see *German Writers and the Politics of Culture: Dealing with the Stasi*, ed. by Paul Cooke and Andrew Plowman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

avoiding, rather than facing, questions of responsibility for the past: 'The Stasi allowed one simple, straightforward assignation of blame for the past. Questions of individual and collective guilt vanished before the overwhelming and evil divinity of the Stasi.'¹⁵⁴ Many literary explorations of the Stasi's activities and the effects of living in a 'surveillance society', however, were interested precisely in these complex issues of guilt, responsibility and complicity. So while popular understanding of the GDR often reduced it to a 'Stasi-state', literary depictions of the Stasi's activities in many cases challenged the simplistic categorization of victims and perpetrators as well as the assumption often made by former West Germans that the majority of GDR citizens had been one or the other.¹⁵⁵ Brigitte Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma*, for example, depicts an East German woman who, in conversation with a West German, falsely presents herself as having been an informer to the Stasi, thereby inhabiting and subverting a dominant West German perception of the former GDR.¹⁵⁶

Two authors whose texts, in very different ways, provide a critical perspective on the East German past as well as how it has been perceived since reunification are Wolfgang Hilbig and Thomas Brussig. Hilbig's *"Ich"* (1993) and Brussig's *Helden wie wir* (1995) both point to the complexities of looking back at the GDR as well as drawing attention to questions of responsibility and complicity. *"Ich"* is a complex, modernist novel which, among other themes, explores the psychology of a struggling author who becomes a Stasi collaborator.¹⁵⁷ In Cooke's interpretation the novel provokes a reassessment of personal responsibility in relation to the East German past:

¹⁵⁴ Brockmann, p. 84.

¹⁵⁵ Cooke argues that this is part of a wider strategy which can be seen in post-colonial terms as 'writing back', see *Representing East Germany after Unification*, especially Chapter 3.

¹⁵⁶ For discussion of this text see Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, pp. 83–84 and Alison Lewis, 'The Stasi, the Confession and Performing Difference: Brigitte Burmeister's *Unter dem Namen Norma*', in *German Writers and the Politics of Culture*, ed. by Cooke and Plowman, pp. 155–72.

¹⁵⁷ On *"Ich"* see Cooke, 'The Stasi as Panopticon: Wolfgang Hilbig's *Ich*', in *German Writers and the Politics of Culture*, ed. by Cooke and Plowman, pp. 139–154.

Hilbig's text calls for the silent masses, who acquiesced to the authority of the state by withdrawing into the private sphere while publicly accepting the SED's authority, to accept the fact that they are implicated in the system's forty year survival.¹⁵⁸

Brussig's *Helden wie wir*, on the other hand, is a satirical text narrated by Klaus Uhltscht, a former Stasi officer.¹⁵⁹ The narrative tone and perspective prompts critical reflection on both the role of the state and of individuals in creating a mostly conformist and compliant society, as well as challenging dominant perceptions of the GDR since the *Wende*.¹⁶⁰ This is demonstrated by Taberner's argument that the obviously unreliable version of events presented by the narrator prompts the reader to 'consider the extent to which those born into the GDR may have colluded in their own impotence and seek to rewrite history in the present'.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, the fact that the narrative takes the form of Klaus telling his story to an American journalist draws attention to the possibly dubious nature of reports of GDR life for Western consumption which might be 'exploit[ing] western audiences' sudden interest in the "exoticism" of everyday life in the East'.¹⁶²

Several of the German texts analysed for this thesis contain humorous elements which help express the ambivalence which is inherent in looking back on (often happy) memories of childhood in an oppressive state. In this section I will show that the use of humour in texts which explore East German memory and identity is not confined to narratives of childhood, but is part of a wider trend in German culture. In the 1990s and early 2000s large numbers of texts have been published which make significant use of humour and satire in depictions of the GDR

¹⁵⁸ Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁹ For another discussion of *Helden wie wir* see Brad Prager, 'The Erection of the Berlin Wall: Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir* and the End of East Germany', *Modern Language Review*, 99 (2004), 983–98.

¹⁶⁰ See Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification*, pp. 75–79.

¹⁶¹ Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond*, p. 48.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

and of East German experience during and after the *Wende*.¹⁶³ These comic texts often explore and challenge assumptions about the massive changes experienced by former East Germans as well as the position of former East Germans within German society since unification. Cooke identifies humour as central to the emergence of a more self-confident negotiation of the East German past and eastern identity within literature.¹⁶⁴ A humorous approach to representing East German experiences and former East Germans' lives in reunified Germany can, therefore, offer much more than simply a commercial form of entertainment, although many comic texts are indeed very popular.¹⁶⁵ Jill Twark argues that satire and humour have also helped authors and readers 'to deal with the problematic effects of the *Wende* and subsequent unification' and to come to terms with the past.¹⁶⁶

Many humorous texts by former East German authors are particularly concerned with the issues of memory and identity affecting East Germans during the *Wende* and subsequently in unified Germany. The commercial exploitation of *Ostalgie* and stereotypes of 'Ossis' and 'Wessis' have, for example, been satirized in two novels by Jens Sparschuh, *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* (1995) and *Eins zu Eins* (2003).¹⁶⁷ Representations of the GDR which focus exclusively on sensational stories of spies and surveillance have been challenged by, for example, the depiction of the Stasi in Brussig's *Helden wie wir*, in which 'the threatening nature of the organization is comically deflated instead of hyperbolically inflated'.¹⁶⁸ Humorous depiction of East German lives also plays an important role in strengthening East German collective memory and identity within western-dominated Germany society, as Twark argues:

¹⁶³ Jill E. Twark, *Humor, Satire, and Identity: Eastern German Literature in the 1990s* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), p. 288.

¹⁶⁴ Cooke, 'Literature and the Question of East German Cultural Identity since the *Wende*', p. 158.

¹⁶⁵ For example, Twark reports that, as of 2007, *Helden wie wir* was in its thirteenth paperback edition and had sold more than 170,000 copies. pp. 4–5.

¹⁶⁶ Twark, pp. 5 and 288.

¹⁶⁷ Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond*, pp. 51–53; Twark, pp. 58–69.

¹⁶⁸ Twark, pp. 297–98.

Using laughter, Eastern Germans call the Western German order into question and thereby assert their existence in this dominant culture, acting out their membership in it and raising their status since they do not passively accept their position as Other.¹⁶⁹

Humour is also used to provoke a critical and distanced perspective on the East German past. Twark observes that the GDR was well suited to the satirical portrayal it received from authors such as Thomas Brussig, Matthias Biskupek and Reinhard Ulbrich; the wide gap between the ideals and values promoted by state ideology and the reality of East German life meant that 'contradictions and absurdities in "real existing socialism" were blatant'.¹⁷⁰ In many cases it is not socialist ideology itself which is the target of satire, but how it 'was interpreted and instrumentalized by the GDR government and media to manipulate socialist citizens'.¹⁷¹ Friederike Eigler argues that texts which represent the GDR (and East German experience after the *Wende*) realistically, but with elements of humour, irony and the fantastic can prompt the reader to remember life in the GDR whilst also making it strange (*verfremden*).¹⁷² This creates a more reflective and distanced perspective, thus avoiding a purely nostalgic perspective on the past: 'narrative realism enables the reconstruction of individual lives [...] and of everyday life. With the addition of fantastical and grotesque elements 'ostalgic' idealization [ostalgische Verklärung] of the GDR past is avoided.'¹⁷³ Twark argues that texts which highlight the 'absurdities and contradictions of the socialist system [...] can preserve a collective identity while not ignoring the system's flaws'.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, those texts which satirise the memory culture surrounding the GDR, including cultural and media representations and stereotyped perceptions of former East Germans, 'can force readers to take a

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 307.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 73

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 302.

¹⁷² Friederike Eigler, 'Jenseits von Ostalgie. Phantastische Züge in "DDR-Romanen" der neunziger Jahre', *Seminar*, 40.3 (September 2004), 191–206 (p. 204).

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁷⁴ Twark, p. 305.

step back and laugh at them, creating critical distance to work through the past and the attendant feelings of loss'.¹⁷⁵ This is the most significant use of humour for an understanding of the German primary texts to be discussed in Chapter 3; in creating distance from the GDR, humorous texts can allow an ambivalent approach which recognises personal investment in that past and in some aspects of East German values and identity while also recognising the oppressive nature of the regime.

Many texts representing everyday life in the GDR, especially family life, childhood and adolescence, have been written by relatively young authors reflecting on common memories and identity relating to their upbringing in East Germany. Taberner observes that 'younger eastern writers [are] concerned less with grand ideological debates than with everyday experience of life in the socialist state into which they were born'.¹⁷⁶ In many cases, however, such texts do respond to, and sometimes provoke, debates surrounding the memory of the GDR. All the German texts discussed in detail for this thesis include portrayal of everyday life in the GDR and in most cases the East German context is highly significant within the narrative. In this section I will consider how these and similar texts have been explored in academic literature, in particular how post-unification representations of 'normality' in the GDR have been interpreted.

Portrayals of East German everyday 'normality' are often associated with *Ostalgie* and thus often attacked or dismissed by critics in the German media (as will be shown in Chapter 4). They can, however, prompt consideration of an alternative to the dominant Western interpretation of the GDR as a miserable, totalitarian state. Such depictions thereby reclaim the possibility of subjective and positive memories which do not necessarily acknowledge the context of state

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 305.

¹⁷⁶ Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond*, p. 45.

repression.¹⁷⁷ Cooke observes, for example, that the exploration of 'contemporary manifestations of *Ostalgie* as a response to western misrepresentations of the GDR as a "Stasi-state" that allowed no space for "normal" human experience' is a major concern of Brussig's *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* (1999), a humorous, fictional portrayal of the experiences of East German adolescents living close to the Berlin Wall.¹⁷⁸ While representations of normality may actively challenge perceptions of East Germans as perpetrators or victims and as 'Other', such depictions also often emphasize specific aspects of East German identity and experience that set them apart from West Germans. For example, Saunders identifies the 'attempt to create a positive basis for a distinctive and self-aware eastern identity' as one motivation for representing daily life in the GDR.¹⁷⁹ An important element in the creation of this distinct identity is the preservation of collective memory of normal everyday experiences within the GDR. This takes on a particular significance given that repression and resistance dominate popular understanding of the East German past, as well as much of the state-sponsored memory culture. Thus, Helmut Schmitz argues, the 'defence of East German childhood' in texts by Jana Hensel, Claudia Rusch and Jakob Hein, is 'directed against the western parallelization of SED state and GDR life and against the threatened loss of one's history that cannot be integrated meaningfully across the rupture of 1989/90 into hegemonic western cultural history'.¹⁸⁰ The representation of everyday memories that former East Germans can recognise and relate to is a major reason for the popularity of these texts: 'The success of ostalgie works such as *Sonnenallee*, *Zonenkinder*, *Good Bye, Lenin!* lies in the ability to recreate cultural memories on the one hand, and to provide a sense of identification with the East on the other.'¹⁸¹ That such texts and films depict subjective and personal

¹⁷⁷ See Saunders, "'Normalizing" the Past', p. 90.

¹⁷⁸ Cooke, "'GDR literature" in the Berlin Republic', p. 65.

¹⁷⁹ Saunders, "'Normalizing" the Past', p. 90.

¹⁸⁰ Helmut Schmitz, 'Introduction', *Seminar*, 43 (2007), 95–99 (p. 96).

¹⁸¹ Nicole Thesz, 'Adolescence in the "Ostalgie" Generation: Reading Jakob Hein's *Mein Erstes T-Shirt* Against *Sonnenallee*, *Zonenkinder*, and *Good Bye, Lenin!*', *Oxford German Studies*, 37 (2008), 107–123 (p. 108). Thesz refers here to the film, *Sonnenallee* (1999) directed by Leander Haußmann; the screenplay was written by Brussig, but is not to be confused with

accounts of the past is also appealing because they have the potential to provide alternative perspectives on the GDR and to challenge 'Ossi' stereotypes: 'The insistence on the personal and biographical in the face of a totalizing western media hegemony and its image of "Der Osten" may be, ironically, what contributes to the *gesamtdeutsche* success of "Ostalgie."¹⁸² When taken together as a group, representations of East German normality through the fictional or autobiographical portrayal of individual lives demonstrate that former East Germans remember the GDR in many different ways.

The significance of portraying East German 'normality' can be open to interpretation and need not always be seen as a response to western perceptions of the GDR. For instance, Cooke suggests that the ways in which Brussig and Jakob Hein present the normality of the GDR function differently to one another:

[W]hereas Brussig defiantly insists on an 'east German normality' as a form of resistance to what he sees as western marginalisation, for Hein such normality is a given; this makes possible a far more matter-of-fact portrayal of life in the GDR.¹⁸³

This indicates that a focus on the personal sphere in an East German setting need not constitute an assertion that 'East Germans are normal too'. Sometimes there is no clear agenda on the part of the author/narrator to present a particular perspective on the East German past. Depending on the tone and the prominence of specifically East German issues, some texts can also be interpreted as simply representing typical experience of a particular era or of experience at a particular age, that is, the GDR can be considered the setting, rather than a major theme of the text. Thesz, for example, argues that Hein's *Mein erstes T-Shirt* is

Brussig's novel written around the same characters: *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* (1999). The film, *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003), was directed by Wolfgang Becker.

¹⁸² Schmitz, p. 96.

¹⁸³ Cooke, "'GDR literature" in the Berlin Republic', p. 67.

predominantly about the (sometimes nostalgic) remembering of 'universal' childhood and adolescent experiences, but cannot be classified as *Ostalgie*.¹⁸⁴ Cooke makes a similar observation in the case of texts by both Jakob Hein and Falko Hennig: 'The east German state is simply a location for their stories.'¹⁸⁵ Cooke observes that this is a growing trend among some authors who are becoming 'ever less concerned with specifically "east German" issues or with the "distinctiveness" of an east German experience'.¹⁸⁶ It should be noted, however, that in comparison with the Russian texts considered for this thesis in which the Soviet setting is rarely prominent or directly commented upon, the texts by Hein and Hennig both include considerable portrayal of specifically East German experience and implicit criticism of at least some aspects of the system.

In his study of comic prose which looks back to the GDR, Oliver Igel reveals why there might be anxiety about representing the GDR as too 'normal', suggesting that the darker aspects of the East German past should not be entirely absent even in a subjective account of East German everyday life. He argues that those texts which remember without reassessment (*Aufarbeitung*) should be criticised because they do not encourage mutual understanding between former East and West Germans in the present, instead reinforcing stereotypical views of the GDR and East Germans.¹⁸⁷ Although he acknowledges that literature should not be required to make a critical assessment of the past, he cites a warning made by Volker Ebersbach: 'Literature which avoids the reappraisal of history is in danger of playing a part in obscuring and distorting it.'¹⁸⁸ He is particularly critical of Brussig's *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* which he considers to be an example of a text in which the GDR is 'simply just nice, just funny and laughable'.¹⁸⁹ Texts by Jakob

¹⁸⁴ Thesz, p. 111.

¹⁸⁵ Cooke, "'GDR literature" in the Berlin Republic', p. 68.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁸⁷ Igel, Oliver, *Gab es die DDR wirklich? Die Darstellung des SED-Staates in komischer Prosa zur "Wende"* (Tönning: Der Andere Verlag, 2005), p. 107.

¹⁸⁸ Volker Ebersbach, 'Aufarbeitung der Geschichte - eine Aufgabe der Literatur?', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 43.4 (1995), 210-216 (p. 216), cited in Igel, p. 12.

¹⁸⁹ Igel, p. 109.

Hein, Michael Tetzlaff and Daniel Wiechmann are, on the other hand, given as examples of *Ostalgie* which includes the second, and more 'positive' aspect: reassessment (*Aufarbeitung*), because the memories they depict prompt the reader to reflect on the past.¹⁹⁰

Conclusion

There has been significant debate and open discussion about the East German past in German society, although this is often polarized with a focus either on repression or everyday life and *Ostalgie*. Issues of identity play a significant role. The way the socialist past is remembered in Germany has implications for post-unification German society and identity and it therefore concerns those both from the former GDR and the former FRG. Interactions between these two groups appear to have accelerated the process of explicit self-reflection in representations of the GDR and in how it is remembered in society. As the second part of this chapter will show, many aspects of German memory culture are in stark contrast with Russian approaches to memory of the Soviet past.

In post-unification German literature it is clear that a significant number of texts engage with issues of memory and identity by highlighting or challenging different aspects of the surrounding memory culture. The use of humour in literary narratives and the popular focus on portrayal of East German daily life can be seen in many cases as responding to the surrounding memory culture by highlighting East German perspectives and experiences in a culture often still dominated by West German values and beliefs. Among literary responses to the East German past there are also texts concerned with critical reassessment of the past and issues of individual and collective responsibility.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Remembering the Soviet Past

During glasnost, introduced in 1986, there was an intense period of remembering and reassessing Soviet history. From the mid-1990s, however, nostalgia and forgetting have often been identified as significant trends in Russian post-Soviet memory, usually in discussions of official commemoration (or lack thereof), the political use of memory, or in analysis of popular culture. Studies of post-Soviet literature suggest that a range of approaches to the Soviet past exist, from patriotic and nationalistic portrayals of Soviet history to memoirs of Soviet repression. In identifying significant trends in post-Soviet memory, the context in which the texts to be analysed for this thesis were written, published and received can be better understood. This will help to identify possible reasons for the differing approaches to the Soviet past found in the Russian texts, compared to the German texts' treatment of the East German past. The Russian texts tend not to promote a particularly nostalgic, nor a particularly critical attitude to Soviet experience, rather they recreate Soviet childhood experiences with little or no retrospective reflection or judgement. Therefore, as well as giving a broad overview of the range of approaches to the Soviet past in Russian society, culture and literature, I will pay particular attention to trends in post-Soviet memory which might offer some explanation as to why discussion of the Soviet past in both the texts and their reception is often only implied, and why the attitude of the author, narrator and/or central characters towards the state is often ambiguous.

The first part of this section will consider post-Soviet Russian memory of the Soviet past in society, politics and culture, and how this has been assessed by academics in a number of disciplines. I will then give an overview of how post-Soviet literature has engaged with the Soviet past, followed by a more detailed discussion of fiction and memoir which, like the Russian texts analysed for this

thesis, focus on individual lives, portraying the Soviet past primarily as part of the background to characters' lives.

Glasnost

How the Soviet past was remembered and represented in the last years before the regime's collapse is crucial to an understanding of post-Soviet memory. The policy of glasnost, introduced by Gorbachev in the second half of the 1980s, allowed history and memory to be publicly discussed in a way which had previously not been possible. Censorship by the state ceased in the summer of 1986, although publication of some texts was still difficult or delayed until the Law on Press Freedoms became official legislation in June 1990.¹⁹¹ These changes allowed the publication of many works that had previously been censored or written 'for the drawer', including works by many dissidents and émigrés. The Russian public showed great interest in re-discovering history and the truth which had been hidden for so long: 'History became front-page news. [...] In Russia, anyone who could read was talking about the past by the late 1980s.'¹⁹² The way Russian history was understood underwent radical and rapid change; that there was no widely accepted version of the Russian past is demonstrated by the fact that in 1988 history examinations had to be cancelled.¹⁹³ The surge in public interest in newly available historical information and literary works is indicated by the huge increase in journal subscriptions; for example, the average monthly circulation of the 'thick' literary journals *Novyi mir*, *Druzhba narodov* and *Znamia* more than tripled between 1987 and 1989, and *Novyi mir's* circulation peaked at 2.7 million in 1990.¹⁹⁴ Glasnost was not intended to cause the collapse of the Soviet Union, nor

¹⁹¹ Rosalind Marsh, *History and Literature in Contemporary Russia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 14, 18, 21.

¹⁹² Catherine Merridale, 'Redesigning History in Contemporary Russia', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38 (2003), 13–28 (p. 16).

¹⁹³ Ian K Lilly and Henrietta Mondry, 'Introduction' in *Russian Literature in Transition*, ed. by Lilly and Mondry (Nottingham: Astra, 1999), pp. 1–9 (p. 4).

¹⁹⁴ Birgit Menzel, 'Writing, Reading and Selling Literature in Russia 1986–2004', in *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia: Post-Soviet Popular Literature in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Stephen Lovell and Birgit Menzel (Munich: Otto Sagner, 2005), pp. 39–56 (p. 41).

was the intention to start a state-led examination of the past, but rather to allow such discussion in society with the hope of reform.¹⁹⁵ Nonetheless, the literature which could be published after the policy was adopted played a crucial role in the Soviet Union's collapse: 'The historical fiction published in the Gorbachev period contributed to the transformation of public opinion, and hence to the gradual disintegration of Soviet ideology and the dismantling of the old political and social system.'¹⁹⁶

Political divisions between liberals and conservatives in Russian society and culture intensified during glasnost: 'Greater openness engendered not only liberal, democratic writings, but also reactionary writings by conservatives, nationalists and anti-Semites.'¹⁹⁷ The open expression of these opposing political opinions was evident in literary texts and in the tendencies of many journals and newspapers to support either a liberal, democratic line, or a patriotic, nationalist one. This division continues to exist in post-Soviet Russian society and culture.¹⁹⁸ The contrasting ideological approaches of liberals and nationalists can also be exemplified by two organizations which were active during glasnost in promoting opposing interpretations of Russia's history and identity: 'Memorial' and '*Pamiat*' (Memory).

The organization Memorial was set up in 1987. Its members work to commemorate the victims of repression in the Soviet Union and also to protect human rights in Russia today. Memorial collected material for archives and compiled Books of Memory, containing the names and brief biographical details of known victims.¹⁹⁹ In 1990 they erected a monument 'to victims of the totalitarian regime': a stone from the Solovetsky Islands, the location of an early camp for political prisoners in the USSR, was sited opposite the Lubianka (the headquarters

¹⁹⁵ Stan, 'The Former Soviet Union', p. 223.

¹⁹⁶ Rosalind Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia, 1991–2006* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 16.

¹⁹⁷ Marsh, *History and Literature in Contemporary Russia*, p. 16.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 20–1.

¹⁹⁹ Stan, 'The former Soviet Union', p. 222.

of the KGB) in Moscow.²⁰⁰ Memorial's work is significant because, as will be discussed in the next section, there have been no official state attempts to commemorate the victims of the Soviet regime.

Almost all projects of memorialisation in Russia [...] have been initiated by private persons. Without private initiative no book and no monument in Russia would describe the Great Terror, and our knowledge of Soviet history would remain at the level of Khrushchev's speeches.²⁰¹

Ewa Thompson puts particular emphasis on the unprecedented nature of Memorial's approach in the Russian context: 'Instead of calling the past "a period of mistakes and wrong solutions" as the government under Gorbachev was saying, they urged their fellow citizens to take historical responsibility for the crimes committed by the state against its own citizens.'²⁰² Memorial's activities have not been actively supported by the state and at times have been actively hindered.²⁰³ Their work was recently disrupted by a police raid on their St Petersburg archive in December 2008.²⁰⁴ Memorial has received a mixed response from the Russian public; although some support its work, 'a vocal section of the population has consistently maintained that the opening of old wounds can only cause pain and divert attention away from present tasks.'²⁰⁵ Possible reasons for the fairly common reluctance to examine the Soviet past, since the early 1990s, will be explored further below.

²⁰⁰ Nanci Adler 'In Search of Identity: The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the Recreation of Russia', in *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies*, ed. by Alexandra Barahona de Brito, Carmen Gonzalez-Enriquez, and Paloma Aguilar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 275–302 (p. 285).

²⁰¹ Etkind, p. 56.

²⁰² Ewa Thompson, 'Discourse, Empire and Memory in Postcommunist Russia', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 37 (2003), 155–164 (pp. 157–58).

²⁰³ On obstacles encountered during glasnost, see Adler, 'In Search of Identity', p. 285.

²⁰⁴ For more information see Orlando Figes, 'Memory under Siege', *Index on Censorship*, 5 December 2008 <<http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2008/12/memory-under-siege>> [accessed 21 October 2011]; and Figes, 'A Victory for Russian History', *Index on Censorship*, 14 May 2009 <<http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2009/05/orlando-figes-a-victory-for-history>> [accessed 21 October 2011].

²⁰⁵ Catherine Merridale, 'War, Death and Remembrance in Soviet Russia', in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 61–83 (p. 80).

Evidence of the flourishing of nationalist sentiment during glasnost was the emergence of the organisation, *Pamiat'*.²⁰⁶ *Pamiat'* was an extreme representative of a widely accepted myth of Russia's history and identity, in which Russia is glorified or represented as a victim of the 'Other', i.e. the blame is placed on those who are not ethnically Russian, especially Jews and Chechens.²⁰⁷ In contrast to Memorial's promotion of the need to acknowledge historical responsibility, the interpretation of the past promoted by *Pamiat'* 'consign[s] Russia's disasters to external enemies or to the demonic forces that ruled Russia under communism. These disasters thus become part of the conventional plot of Russian history that alternates between victimisation and glorious victory.'²⁰⁸

The section will consider official approaches to the Soviet past, firstly the almost complete lack of measures taken by the state to respond to the Soviet past on a legal basis through transitional justice, and secondly, how memory of the Soviet past has been used politically. These discussions will show that the explosion of remembering during glasnost, primarily focussed on revealing the extent of repression in the Soviet era, did not lead to a understanding of the Soviet regime as something to be held to account, or to take responsibility for.

Transitional Justice and the Political Use of Memory

In post-Soviet Russia the pursuit of transitional justice has been extremely limited, and provides a stark contrast to how Germany has dealt with the East German past. Lavinia Stan asserts that Germany has 'adopted strong approaches to transitional justice, pursued lustration, access to secret archives and court proceedings vigorously and quickly'.²⁰⁹ Russia, on the other hand, is one of a group

²⁰⁶ *Pamiat'* no longer exists in its original form, but nationalist-patriotic rhetoric has continued to be significant in post-Soviet Russia. See, for example, *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia*, ed. by Marlène Laruelle (London: Routledge, 2009).

²⁰⁷ Thompson, p. 155.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁰⁹ Stan, 'Conclusion', p. 262.

of countries that 'resisted attempts to re-evaluate the past and seemingly followed a "forgive and forget" approach'.²¹⁰

Decades before the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was an opportunity to commemorate and compensate victims of the Great Terror under Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinization. This was however, extremely limited: 'there was no official recognition of the millions who had died or been repressed, no public monument, no government apology, no proper reparation for the victims, whose rehabilitation was granted only grudgingly.'²¹¹ Then, under Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika, the focus was on reinterpreting the past in order to create a better future, but the explosion of information and extending of freedoms that occurred did not include any official judgements on the crimes of the past. This reluctance of the state to pursue justice or, in fact, to play a role in any form of commemoration of victims of repression during the Soviet period has continued. This is partly due to the large degree of continuity between those in positions of power (including in the security services) in the Soviet period through to the present: 'Many Russian political elites had held high positions in the Soviet party and state apparatus, and often this translated into a desire to downplay or simply "move past" the past.'²¹² It is therefore not surprising that no trials have occurred of those responsible for human rights violations under Soviet rule.²¹³ Political reform has not been seen as being in any way dependent on 'the need to reassess the past, to make a clear break with it, and to reign in the intelligence services.'²¹⁴ If anything, especially since 2000, the aim of the state seems to be to encourage a positive perception of certain aspects of Soviet history, and to maintain some aspects of that past as integral to Russian identity.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 262.

²¹¹ Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 605.

²¹² Forest, Johnson and Till, p. 368.

²¹³ Stan, 'The Former Soviet Union', p. 230.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 223.

In terms of addressing the role played by the KGB, not only were those involved in enforcing the Communist system not identified, brought to justice or limited in their involvement in public life in post-Soviet Russia, but, conversely, a law was passed in April 1992 making it 'a criminal offense to publicly identify KGB collaborators'.²¹⁵ Moreover, since 1995 Russia has observed the 20th December as the 'Day of Secret Service Workers', marking the anniversary of the foundation of the first Soviet secret police organisation, the *Cheka*, by Felix Dzerzhinsky in 1917.²¹⁶ There is a stark contrast between the attitudes of Russians to the Soviet KGB (and its predecessors) and Germany's outright rejection of the Stasi, perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the political success enjoyed by Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer. There has been little attempt to assess the role of the secret police in the Soviet Union, or to seek any justice for human rights violations they may have perpetrated. In fact, according to surveys conducted in 2002 'Russians viewed KGB officers as highly intelligent, professional and trustworthy'.²¹⁷ Stan suggests that the KGB have even been glorified: 'Scores of books present the heroism of dedicated spies, who selflessly defend their country and their people against domestic and foreign enemies.'²¹⁸ As in the GDR, some protests around the collapse of the Soviet Union focussed on the KGB. A statue of Dzerzhinsky in Lubyanka Square (the location of the former Soviet and current Russian security services building) was brought down by anti-communist protestors in August 1991.²¹⁹ In a move which would be unthinkable in post-unification Germany, the Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov proposed its restoration in 2002. Thomas Sherlock highlights the significance of this move: 'Luzhkov's proposal to return the statue to its pedestal threatened to desanctify a central symbolic act that had legitimated the

²¹⁵ Stan, 'The Former Soviet Union', p. 228.

²¹⁶ Adler, 'In Search of Identity', p. 293. See also Adler, 'The Future of the Soviet Past Remains Unpredictable', pp. 1111-12, on Putin's active involvement in this celebration in 2003.

²¹⁷ Stan, 'The Former Soviet Union', p. 227.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 228, drawing on V. Yasmann, "'Spymania returns to Russia', *RFE/RL Reports*, 15 April 2004.

²¹⁹ Thomas Sherlock, 'History and Myth in the Soviet Empire and the Russian Republic', in *Teaching the Violent Past*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Cole (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), pp. 205-248 (p. 206).

destruction of the Soviet regime and the creation of a democratic Russian republic.²²⁰ Unlike the German model, KGB files have never been made widely accessible, and there is no access to personal files for those who were under surveillance during the Soviet period.²²¹

Official responses to the Soviet past have avoided formally passing judgement on the Soviet system, the Party or any individuals who held positions of power within it. Despite the absence of identifiable perpetrators, however, they do acknowledge the existence of victims. Victims of political repression are able to apply for rehabilitation and this can result in the award of financial compensation and privileges, but as Arsenii Roginsky, the chairman of Memorial, has observed, rehabilitation is of limited use when the criminality of the Soviet regime has not been properly acknowledged.²²²

In addition to avoiding official recognition of, and apology for, the suffering caused by the Soviet regime, the post-Soviet Russian authorities have often encouraged a more positive view of Soviet history. Both Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin have used selective remembrance of the Soviet period in order to foster a sense of Russian pride, and to promote their own political causes. As the time for Yeltsin's re-election campaign approached in the mid-1990s, for example, there was an increased emphasis on Russian nationalism, particularly in the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of Soviet victory in World War Two.²²³ Also under Yeltsin, the idea that the Soviet Union had aimed to create a 'future of equality and brotherhood' was promoted as a praiseworthy feature of Russia's Soviet past.²²⁴

²²⁰ Sherlock, 'History and Myth', p. 206.

²²¹ Stan, 'The Former Soviet Union', p. 228.

²²² Adler, 'The Future of the Soviet Past', pp. 1102–03, citing '10 let zakony "O reabilitatsii zhertv politicheskikh repressii"', *Russkaya mysl'* (October 2001).

²²³ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 10, with reference to R. W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 73–75.

²²⁴ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 106.

Putin has gone much further in promoting pride in the Soviet past, to the extent that Stalin has been partially rehabilitated:

For the celebrations surrounding Victory Day 2000, Putin not only began his presidential address to veterans with the precise words Stalin had spoken in 1945, but installed a commemorative plaque at the Kremlin honouring Stalin (among others) as a war hero and authorized the Central bank of Russia to print commemorative coins with Stalin's portrait.²²⁵

Other examples of the selective positive portrayal of the Soviet Union under Putin include his restoration of the Soviet national anthem (with new words), and the removal of state endorsement for school textbooks which are considered to be too negative about Soviet history.²²⁶ For Victory Day celebrations in 2008, shortly after Dmitrii Medvedev became President, tanks and missiles were reintroduced as part of the military parade for the first time since 1990.²²⁷ '[O]pinion polls reported enthusiasm for this revival [...] among no fewer than 70 percent of the population', thus indicating the importance of memory of the war and the associated perception of Russian strength and power for national pride.²²⁸ Galina Mikhaleva asserts that the largely positive perspective on the Soviet past promoted by the Russian government is due to Russia's problematic national identity:

The conscious or unconscious reason behind the active and constant appeal to the past is the agonizing search for the foundations of a new national identity or national idea. The renewed imperial ambitions of an 'energy

²²⁵ Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, 'Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 92 (2002), 524–547 (p. 540).

²²⁶ See Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 111; Olena Nikolayenko, 'Contextual Effects on Historical Memory: Soviet Nostalgia among Post-Soviet Adolescents', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 41 (2008), 243–259 (p. 256).

²²⁷ Valerie Sperling, 'Making the Public Patriotic: Militarism and Anti-militarism in Russia', in *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia*, ed. by Marlène Laruelle (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 218–217 (p. 245).

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

superpower' require legitimation, justifying claims to dominance in the post-Soviet space and offering society release from its post-Soviet inferiority complex.²²⁹

Sherlock observes, however, that since 2009 there has been a change in direction in the Russian government's approach to the Soviet past: 'For now, Medvedev and Putin are bringing the Kremlin more in line with dominant Western assessments of Stalinism.'²³⁰ Sherlock suggests that this shift in attitude arises out of a desire for more co-operation with other nations, in particular in order to further Russia's economic growth.²³¹ Evidence of this new approach can be seen in the decision in April 2010 to officially commemorate the killing of Polish soldiers by Soviet secret police in Katyn in 1940.²³² Sherlock also notes the increasing use of the word 'totalitarian' by Putin and Medvedev to describe the Soviet regime, and the fact that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* was added to the secondary school curriculum in 2009.²³³ Even so, some aspects of post-Soviet Russian memory remain contentious issues which are not open to interpretation as far as the government is concerned. For example, the 'Presidential Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests' was set up by Medvedev in August 2009 to 'protect the dominant Russian memory of the war'.²³⁴ The establishment of this commission responded to concerns that Soviet forces should not be perceived as having occupied former Soviet republics during and after the Second World War, but instead as having liberated them. A survey of 2010 suggested that this was the widely held view in Russia with only 9% of

²²⁹ Galina Mikhaleva, 'Overcoming the Totalitarian Past: Foreign Experience and Russian Problems', trans. by Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian Social Science Review*, 51.6 (2010), 74–84 (p. 75).

²³⁰ Thomas Sherlock, 'Confronting the Stalinist Past: The Politics of Memory in Russia', *The Washington Quarterly*, 34.2 (2011), 93–109 (p.93).

²³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 93 and 98.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

respondents believing that the 'Soviet victory led to Stalinist occupation of Eastern Europe'.²³⁵

Nostalgia and Selective Forgetting

Official approaches to the Soviet system, which minimise recognition of the abuses of the regime, while emphasizing Soviet achievements, both contribute to and reflect popular attitudes to the past. After the 'high point of truth telling' during glasnost, public interest in a sustained examination of the Soviet system rapidly diminished during the 1990s.²³⁶ Boym describes the change in attitudes:

The campaign for recovery of memory gave way to a new longing for the imaginary ahistorical past, the age of stability and normalcy. This mass nostalgia is a kind of nationwide midlife crisis; many are longing for the time of their childhood and youth, projecting personal affective memories onto the larger historical picture and partaking collectively in a selective forgetting.²³⁷

It should be noted that such attitudes to the Soviet past are not universal. The work of Memorial is an obvious exception. Similarly, liberal sections of the press and literary world challenge patriotic and nationalistic attitudes towards Russian history and identity. Maria Tumarkin observes two major contrasting tendencies within post-Soviet Russian memory: in the public sphere, on the one hand, memory of the Soviet past focuses on positive aspects and avoids meaningful commemoration of suffering under Soviet rule, while, on the other hand, among literary, autobiographical and historical texts there is a 'surplus' of 'memories of

²³⁵ VCIOM, 'Press Release No 1273: World War II', 27 April 2010 <<http://wciom.com/index.php?id=61&uid=235>> [accessed 21 October 2011], cited in Sherlock, 'Confronting the Stalinist Past', p. 104.

²³⁶ Stan, 'The Former Soviet Union', p. 227.

²³⁷ Boym, p. 58.

totalitarianism and Stalinism'.²³⁸ The range of post-Soviet literary and autobiographical representations of the Soviet past, which includes popular nostalgic and patriotic works, as well as texts which offer a critical representation of the Soviet system, will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this chapter. For now, it is important to recognise that despite the fact that there is no shortage of 'testimonial literature' about the Soviet past in post-Soviet Russia and despite the efforts of groups such as Memorial, most commentators perceive selective forgetting and nostalgia as dominant modes of remembering. For example, Tumarkin asserts that 'attempts to mobilise [the] massive and constantly growing repository of private memories, public documents and historical work to act as an effective antidote to the falsification of historical accounts have failed to a significant extent'.²³⁹ The following discussion will outline *what* is being forgotten or, indeed, remembered as the object of nostalgia, and will identify the main reasons *why* these modes of remembering are prevalent in post-Soviet Russian society.

Following the generally negative view of the Soviet system held during glasnost and the early 1990s, nostalgia for the Soviet period emerged, accelerated by the difficult conditions of the economic crisis in the late 1990s. Sheila Fitzpatrick gives a comprehensive description of the sources of Russian nostalgia for the Soviet Union:

In this Soviet world remembered, a job was guaranteed, as well as a living wage and a roof over one's head, and one did not have to work hard for it. There was camaraderie at the workplace and guaranteed support and loyalty from friends (uncomplicated by the cash nexus) and family; children

²³⁸ Maria M. Tumarkin, 'The Long Life of Stalinism: Reflections on the Aftermath of Totalitarianism and Social Memory', *Journal of Social History*, 44 (2011), 1047–61 (p. 1047).

²³⁹ Tumarkin, p. 1051. Marsh expresses similar doubts about 'the permanence of the transformation wrought by historical writings, both fictional and non-fictional, published since perestroika by liberal writers and objective historians.' *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 544.

honoured their parents; the streets were safe; science and culture were respected and generously funded; education was a core value; and the state protected its citizens from pornography and other forms of moral corruption. The Soviet Union was a proud multinational state with a civilizing mission, organized at home on the principle of 'friendship between peoples' and extending a 'big brotherly' hand abroad to the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Third World. It was a superpower respected by the whole world, whose successes in space exploration were envied even by America.²⁴⁰

This could be summarized as a longing for the perceived safety, stability, idealism and international standing of the USSR. For some, post-Soviet nostalgia appears to represent a genuine longing to return, as continued support for the Communist Party indicates. Catherine Merridale has observed that an idealised version of the communist past is also attractive to those who are too young to actually remember the Soviet Union:

The staunchest among them [Communist Party supporters] are often war veterans, old soldiers or men and women who remember childhoods of hardship, exile and collective effort. It is this group that has kept a mythic version of the Soviet past alive, to be reclaimed by disaffected members of the younger generation.²⁴¹

In many cases, this nostalgic wish to 'return' appears to be a reaction to difficult conditions in the present, thus Merridale notes that there is particular interest in

²⁴⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'The Soviet Union in the Twenty-First Century', *Journal of European Studies*, 37 (2007), 51–71 (p. 62).

²⁴¹ Merridale, 'Redesigning History', p. 19.

joining the Communist Party among young people living in areas with high rates of unemployment.²⁴²

As in Germany, nostalgia for some aspects of Soviet life has led to an industry offering products and experiences to satisfy this demand. Fitzpatrick notes that there was a shift in consumer preferences in Russia, similar to that observed in the German context, where initial enthusiasm for western goods was later overtaken by a preference for more local products, although the growing Russian enthusiasm for Soviet(-style) products has not quite matched the intensity of *Ostalgie*:

[T]he Moskvich did not retrospectively acquire the same cachet as the Trabant. Still, throughout the 1990s the immensely popular television series *Staraia kvartira (The Old Apartment)* revisited the Soviet past and the things associated with it (from sausage to carpets to popular songs) year by year, with enthusiastic participation from its studio audience. Old Soviet films were shown and watched by millions; songs from the Second World War were reissued on CD.²⁴³

In a 2008 issue of the *Kommersant* supplement, *Den'gi (Money)*, an article was devoted to the commercialization of and fashion for Soviet nostalgia. It describes the success of Soviet-themed canteens, television shows, and memorabilia, noting that earlier that year the Soviet-style canteen, 'Gastronom N1', had opened in Moscow's GUM (*Glavnyi universal'nyi magazin*; main department store) 'in the same location it had occupied in Soviet times'.²⁴⁴ Television shows which look back to the lighter aspects of Soviet Russia have especially exploited the trend, for

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Fitzpatrick, 'The Soviet Union in the Twenty-First Century', p. 62.

²⁴⁴ Dmitrii Tikhomirov, 'Zolotoi sovok', *Den'gi*, 'Zolotoi sovok', *Kommersant*, 8 December 2008, section *Den'gi* <<http://kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=1090139>> [accessed 28 January 2009].

example, the program, *Old Songs about What's Most Important (Starye pesni o glavnom)*.²⁴⁵ Anna Novikova argues that one of main ideas behind this programme, broadcast from 1995–2000, was that 'Soviet songs, unlike contemporary ones, spoke about *what's important*, which was not love [...] but the *belief in a bright future*'.²⁴⁶ Post-Soviet nostalgia is not necessarily only a yearning for the past, for the 'fallen empire', but often rather for the optimistic expectations of the Soviet future: 'the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that became obsolete.'²⁴⁷

Although some similarities between German *Ostalgie* and Russian nostalgia for the Soviet past have been noted, the context and significance of nostalgic remembering in each country is very different. In the German context of looking back at the GDR, *Ostalgie* and the reappropriation of the positive aspects of GDR life are balanced by examinations of the power structures and the Stasi. Therefore, although nostalgic remembering is an alternative perspective on the past, it is unlikely to significantly obscure memory of the oppressive nature of the system. The media debate about *Ostalgie* may fear this consequence, but the fact that a debate is generated in the first place about nostalgic representations shows the strength of feeling attached to *not* forgetting the repressive nature of the East German state. Analyses of Russian memory of the Soviet past, on the other hand, often observe a tendency towards selective forgetting. Karen Dawisha suggests that after the 'initial euphoria' of glasnost, Russians experienced a 'whole host of reactions associated with trauma and loss, such as confusion, anger, mourning, nostalgia, and amnesia,' and that by the mid-1990s a 'frenzy of forgetting' was underway.²⁴⁸ Merridale notes the increasing popularity of escapist narratives at this

²⁴⁵ Tikhomirov lists several shows which have achieved high ratings.

²⁴⁶ Anna Novikova, 'Myths about Soviet Values and Contemporary Russian Television', *Russian Journal of Communication*, 3 (2010), 281–95 (p. 286). Italics in the original.

²⁴⁷ Boym, p. xvi.

²⁴⁸ Karen Dawisha, 'Communism as a Lived System of Ideas in Contemporary Russia', *East European Politics and Societies*, 19 (2005), 463–493 (p. 483, p. 464).

time, whether detective pulp fiction or foreign soap operas.²⁴⁹ Among the Russian population generally there appeared to be little interest in examining the Soviet past, especially issues of responsibility or what it meant to have colluded in the system. Forest, Till and Johnson observe, with the exception of Memorial's activities, 'a broadly shared opinion that such "reckoning with" or "atoning for" the Soviet past is unnecessary for contemporary Russians and would devalue the more positive aspects of Soviet history'.²⁵⁰ Etkind also observes a lack of interest in addressing the darker aspects of the Soviet past, or what this means for Russian identity today: 'In contrast to Germany or France there has been no serious philosophical debate, secular or religious, in Russia over problems of collective guilt, memory and identity.'²⁵¹ In Russian memory of the Soviet past the emphasis is more often on heroism (especially with regard to the war) and endurance, rather than atoning for collusion or celebrating resistance which are more frequently highlighted in German responses to the East German past.²⁵² As far as memory of the Stalinist period is concerned, 'minimising Stalin's crimes and maximising his military and security achievements enjoys both governmental and popular support'.²⁵³ In a survey of 2003 over half of those polled viewed Stalin's role in Soviet history as probably or definitely positive, suggesting that 'much of the population did not see the past, on balance, as something to be ashamed of'.²⁵⁴ More recently, Stalin was placed third in the television show *Imia Rossiia (Name of Russia)* (broadcast in 2008), which involved nominations of Russian historical figures and a public vote to determine which 'best represented Russia of today'.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁹ Merridale, 'Redesigning History', pp. 14, 17.

²⁵⁰ Forest, Johnson, and Till, p. 374.

²⁵¹ Etkind, p. 44.

²⁵² On the importance of heroism and endurance in Russian memory, see, for example, Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 416.

²⁵³ Adler, 'The Future of the Soviet Past', p. 1094.

²⁵⁴ Forest, Johnson, and Till, p. 368.

²⁵⁵ Tumarkin, p. 1047. See also the official website, <www.nameofrussia.ru> [accessed 29 October 2011].

The reluctance to engage in direct and in-depth consideration of the Soviet past and the tendency toward nostalgic portrayal for entertainment seem to derive from many of the same factors. Reasons for the prevalence of these modes of remembering are complex, but three main areas can be identified as significant factors: issues of identity and the need for a 'usable past' on both a national and an individual level, the difficult experience of transition and the 1990s, and the persistence of Soviet ways of thinking, for example, keeping silent about the past as a survival strategy.

The official responses to the Soviet system already discussed, which have encouraged national pride in Soviet achievements and avoided condemnation and commemoration of Soviet abuses can be seen as both symptom and cause of the fact that there is no sense of post-Soviet Russian national identity based on a common rejection of the Soviet system. On the contrary, for many there seems to be a sense of loss with regard to some aspects of the Soviet past. A major cause of this identity crisis is identified by Rosalind Marsh as 'the sudden humiliating loss of an empire and Great Power status, with their concomitant ideology and values'.²⁵⁶ The Russian post-socialist experience is in this respect quite different from other former Soviet states, whose 'recovered histories can rely on the familiar themes of imperial domination, cultural repression and national resistance'.²⁵⁷ A further complication for post-Soviet Russia is that there had not been a clear distinction between Russian and Soviet identity:

Russians were brought up with a national identity that mixed 'Russian' and 'Soviet' aspects. [...] They were treated as the dominant people of the USSR and regarded the USSR, a larger entity than the RSFSR, as being mainly their own creation.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 494.

²⁵⁷ Merridale, 'Redesigning History', p.13. See also Forest and Johnson, 'Unraveling', p. 540.

²⁵⁸ Robert Service, *Russia: Experiment with a People* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2003), p. 55.

The Soviet Union is not, therefore, perceived as an external or imposed system, but rather as something built by Russians and this makes the rejection of that past and the formation of a new post-Soviet Russian identity much harder.

On an individual level too it has been difficult in many cases for people to conceive of their own identity as separate from belief in the Soviet system both during the Soviet period and after its collapse. In the 1950s, for example, it was not unusual for those who survived the Gulag to rejoin the Party after their release. Irina Sherbakova explains that this was not just for the benefits of party membership or because it made it easier to fit back into society after their release, but also 'because they continued to believe in the excellence of communist ideas, explaining their own misfortunes in terms of mistakes and distortions'.²⁵⁹ For many Russians, making sense of one's memories and of one's own identity in the post-Soviet period after the revelations of glasnost and the collapse of the Soviet system could never be straightforward: 'so much of the meaning of their lives was intertwined with the goals and aspirations of the Party that recognising how badly things turned out would be especially unsettling.'²⁶⁰ This may be one explanation for observations of a Russian tendency to conceive of history as something that happens to them, rather than as something for which they could be responsible and in which they could pay an active role: 'The collective trauma of the past was hardly acknowledged; or if it was, everyone was seen as an innocent victim or a cog in the system only following orders.'²⁶¹ Ray Pahl and Paul Thompson comment on the effect of this on oral history interviews. They found that the views of Russian members of the interview team diverged from the accepted western research perspective that 'informants are "actors", who themselves make "choices" which

²⁵⁹ Irina Sherbakova, 'The Gulag in Memory', in *Memory and Totalitarianism*, ed. by Luisa Passerini (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2005), pp. 103–15 (pp. 108–109). On this phenomenon, see also Adler, 'The Future of the Soviet Past', p. 1100.

²⁶⁰ Adler, 'The Future of the Soviet Past', p. 1101.

²⁶¹ Boym, p. 58.

shape their subsequent life paths'.²⁶² The Russians saw these 'actors' rather as 'victims' with no control over or responsibility for their own lives. This may indicate a practice of avoiding difficult issues relating to the Soviet past and/or the persistent effects of a deeply ingrained sense of disempowerment.

A further complication for Russian post-Soviet memory is that there are Soviet achievements of which many are genuinely proud, in particular the Soviet defeat of Nazi Germany; Nanci Adler notes that 'Memorial has clashed regularly with those who excused the regime's "harsh methods" because of its "justifiable aims", and who claim that collectivisation and industrialisation at a forced pace contributed to the defeat of Hitler'.²⁶³ The memory of Soviet victory in the Second World War is a focal point of national pride in post-Soviet Russia and this has inevitably complicated the issue of how Russians remember the Soviet state: 'The emphasis on the victory in the war works to legitimate "the Soviet totalitarian regime as a whole as well as the principle of 'uncontrollable power' that defined it."²⁶⁴ In particular, it means that many Russians are unlikely to accept wholesale condemnation of Stalin's rule. In a 2005 poll, 'one third of respondents attributed Russia's victory in the war to Stalin'.²⁶⁵ Sherlock suggests that this is a reason for the apparent 'anomaly of Russians expressing respect for Stalin while recognising the brutality of his regime'.²⁶⁶ Merridale also notes the significance of the war in how the Soviet system is remembered. She has interviewed survivors of the Gulag who prefer to emphasize both their 'contribution to the war effort,' in the work they

²⁶² Ray Pahl and Paul Thompson, 'Meanings, Myths and Mystifications: The Social Construction of Life Stories in Russia', in *When History Accelerates: Essays on Rapid Social Change, Complexity, and Creativity*, ed. by C. M. Hann (London: Athlone Press, 1994), pp. 130–160 (p. 135).

²⁶³ Adler, 'The Future of the Soviet Past', p. 1100.

²⁶⁴ Tumarkin, p. 1049, citing Lev Gudkov, "'Pamiat'" o voine I massovaia identichnost' Rossiian', ['The Memory of the War and Russian Mass Identity'], *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 2–3 (2005). Tumarkin's translation.

²⁶⁵ Adler, 'The Future of the Soviet Past', p. 1100.

²⁶⁶ Sherlock, 'Confronting the Stalinist Past', p. 104.

were forced to do in the camps, and their 'enduring patriotism' rather than focus on the suffering they endured at the hands of the state.²⁶⁷

The way the Soviet Union is remembered in Russia has been significantly affected by the chaos of transition. The economic crisis of the early 1990s allowed the Soviet period to seem a haven of stability in retrospect and distracted attention away from discussion of the past. Nancy Condee describes the effects of the economic crisis:

The collapse of the Russian currency was swift: 80 rubles to the dollar in December 1991; 125 in June 1992; 425 by October 1992; 1000 by May 1993. [...] The collapse resulted in astronomical increases in the cost of both goods (to consumers) and raw materials (to producers). The rapid escalation of prices effectively wiped out the accumulated life savings of most of the Russian population.²⁶⁸

It is easy to comprehend how such economic chaos encouraged a re-evaluation of the Soviet past as a 'golden age of stability, strength and "normalcy"'.²⁶⁹ This is a significant reason why the memory boom subsided, and why the past was viewed more positively or simply forgotten; as Merridale suggests, during the difficulties of the 1990s: 'most ordinary people had become so preoccupied with mere survival that they had lost the energy for historical enquiry.'²⁷⁰ The difficult living conditions of the 1990s, following shortly after the intense historical debates of glasnost, do seem to have exhausted public interest in the past. In 1992, Arsenii Roginsky, co-founder of Memorial stated, '[s]ociety is sick of history. It is too much with us', to

²⁶⁷ Merridale, 'Soviet Memories: Patriotism and Trauma', in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 376–389 (pp. 385–86).

²⁶⁸ Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov, 'The ABC of Russian Consumer Culture: Readings, Ratings, and Real Estate', in *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-Century Russia*, ed. by Nancy Condee (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 130–172 (pp. 137–138).

²⁶⁹ Boym, p. xvi.

²⁷⁰ Merridale, 'Redesigning History', p. 17.

explain the public's lack of interest in a trial to determine the constitutionality of banning the Communist Party, a trial which had the potential to, but did not in fact, contribute significantly to transitional justice.²⁷¹ A reaction against the 'unremittingly negative picture of the USSR presented during perestroika' is also identified by Natal'ia Ivanova as a reason for the popular success of television programmes which appeal to nostalgic remembering of the Soviet past.²⁷² This is a point of similarity with the German case, where *Ostalgie* is often interpreted as reaction against representations of the GDR as a 'Stasi-state'.²⁷³

The experience of the Soviet Union's collapse, and of certain aspects of Soviet life itself, have often been identified as traumatic, but relatively few studies of post-Soviet Russian memory have developed this to consider the application of theories of trauma to cultural memory of the Soviet past.²⁷⁴ Broadly speaking, traumatic experiences cannot be remembered and expressed as a coherent narrative. Marsh suggests that trauma, not just associated with memories of the Soviet period itself, but also the Soviet collapse and the disorienting experience of rapid social change, is one of the reasons why there is a tendency towards the 'normalization' of Soviet history and the 'forgetting' of Stalinism.²⁷⁵ The application of theories of trauma to Russian memory of the Soviet past has been challenged by Merridale.²⁷⁶ Merridale's research supports the idea that 'while suffering is universal, the reactions to it, especially at the social level, are culturally specific'.²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, p. 526, cited in Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 556.

²⁷² Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 301, with reference to Natal'ia Ivanova, 'Nostal'iashchee: retro na (post)sovetskom teleekrane', *Znamia*, 9 (1997) 204–211.

²⁷³ See above, pp. 93–94.

²⁷⁴ Those who describe memory of the Soviet past or the experience of the Soviet collapse as 'traumatic' include: Boym, p. 58; Dawisha, p. 483; Adler, 'The Future of the Soviet Past', p. 1114. The impact of trauma on post-Soviet memory is given more attention in Serguei Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009) and Ewa Thompson, 'Discourse, Empire and Memory'. A more general consideration of the applicability of trauma to Russian studies can be found in *Travma: Punkty*, ed. by Serguei Oushakine and Elena Trubina (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2009).

²⁷⁵ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 159.

²⁷⁶ See especially Chapter 12 of *Night of Stone*.

²⁷⁷ Merridale, 'Soviet Memories', p. 380.

She does not deny that the memories of many who lived through the Soviet era are traumatic, but disputes that, in the Russian case, this has resulted in widespread incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), observing that few if any of the interviewees she spoke to displayed symptoms. In the Soviet case, Merridale suggests that optimistic ideology and propaganda may have fulfilled the function of 'cognitive psychotherapy', thereby helping some to cope with their traumatic memories:

Morale really was improved by propaganda. Listening to the stories people told, many of them speaking after decades of arbitrary suffering, I was struck by the fact that so many of the victims of one of the cruelest regimes of the twentieth century were actually homesick for it. The traces were there in the way people talked, in their enduring love for communist slogans and festivals.²⁷⁸

Merridale also argues that the tendency to keep silent about the past is not attributable to post-traumatic stress, but to the fact that not talking about the past had been a survival strategy in the Soviet Union: 'In almost every case [...] their lifetime's habit of silence could as easily have been attributed to state violence – the threat of arrest or demotion – as it could to psychological denial.'²⁷⁹ A detailed consideration of whether theories of trauma can explain a cultural tendency towards selective forgetting in perceptions of the Soviet past is difficult to assess and beyond the scope of this study. Merridale argues persuasively against the medicalization of trauma across different cultures. Nonetheless, it seems feasible that traumatic experiences of life under socialism and its collapse may contribute to the avoidance of confronting difficult and painful memories of the Soviet past

²⁷⁸ See *Night of Stone*, p. 418; and 'Soviet Memories', pp. 381–82. The citation is 'Soviet Memories', p. 382.

²⁷⁹ Merridale, *Night of Stone*, p. 22.

commonly observed in Russian society and culture, even if a widespread diagnosis of PTSD among the Russian population may not be appropriate.

Aside from discussions on the role of trauma, Merridale's suggestion that Soviet memory practices have persisted in post-Soviet Russia provides another useful way of explaining the culture of 'forgetting'. The Soviet state manipulated public memory with selective commemoration; public, official displays of memory were reserved for ideologically 'appropriate' memorials, for example, the Soviet victory in World War Two:

Depending on circumstances and its own perception of *raison d'état*, the Soviet state was as skilled at destroying the material basis of collective memory as it was eager to commemorate the selected fallen of Mother Russia in concrete and stone.²⁸⁰

Even after de-Stalinization there was no public commemoration of the victims of the Great Terror and the period of stagnation under Brezhnev made personal acts of commemoration dangerous:

Millions of people whose memory of the Stalinist regime might have made them think or speak more critically about the Soviet system pulled back, afraid of giving the impression that they sympathized with the dissidents, [...]. People again suppressed their memories – they refused to talk about the past – and conformed outwardly to the loyal and silent Soviet majority.²⁸¹

Levels of secrecy within families varied, however. Pahl and Thompson note some interviewees who said their families never talked about the past, or members of the

²⁸⁰ Merridale, 'War, Death and Remembrance', p. 63.

²⁸¹ Figes, *Whisperers*, p. 605.

family who had 'disappeared'; while others told stories but only in private.²⁸² The reason was simply that it was safer not to talk: 'Here was a society in which, for seventy years, remembering had been dangerous. The less that people knew about you and your family story the better, because any information was a hostage to fortune.'²⁸³ An unwillingness to talk openly about the past has persisted for many in post-Soviet Russia. The effects of this 'silent' nature of Russian memory have been felt in oral history projects, where informants are reluctant to reveal too much, or present narratives which conform to official versions of the past.²⁸⁴ Pahl and Thompson observed particular avoidance of talking about family members who were victims of repression: 'Many Russians are particularly reluctant to say much about grandparents who may have been shot, exiled to Siberia, or both. There were many abrupt losses of memory in response to questions about grandfathers in particular.'²⁸⁵ Orlando Figes has made similar observations that many people still feel that it is dangerous and are simply too scared to talk openly, even within their own families:

Even [...] in the liberal climate of glasnost, the vast majority of ordinary Soviet families did not talk about their histories, or pass down stories of repression to their children. [...] Fifteen years after the collapse of the regime, there are still people in the provinces who are too afraid to talk about their past, even to their own children.²⁸⁶

²⁸² Pahl and Thompson, pp. 139–140.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²⁸⁴ See, for example, Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson, and Anna Rotkirch, eds, *On Living through Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 8–9; Daria Khubova, Andrei Ivankiev and Tonia Sharova, 'After Glasnost: Oral History in the Soviet Union', in *Memory and Totalitarianism*, ed. by Passerini, pp. 89–101 (especially pp. 89 and 100); and Adler, 'In Search of Identity', p. 283.

²⁸⁵ Pahl and Thompson, p. 131.

²⁸⁶ Figes, *Whisperers*, p. 652.

The Post-Soviet Russian Literary Context

The collapse of the Soviet Union necessarily resulted in significant changes in the role of literature in society. During glasnost, literature had played a major role in providing new information about, and interpretations of, the Soviet past. By the early 1990s, however, public interest in reading about the past (and in reading 'serious' literature in general) subsided considerably, resulting in a sharp drop in the circulation of the thick journals between 1990 and 1993.²⁸⁷ Moreover, the newly established commercial book market allowed for a boom in mass literature as publishers began to respond to consumer demand.²⁸⁸ Literary debates in the early 1990s were, therefore, more concerned about whether Russian literature would survive this crisis, than in how it portrayed the past.²⁸⁹ The roles of both writers and critics had changed considerably as literature no longer had to serve (or in the case of dissident literature, oppose) the interests of a particular ideology, as had been its primary role in the Soviet period. This change had been anticipated by Viktor Erofeev in an article published in 1990 titled 'Pominki po sovetskoi literature' (A Wake for Soviet literature).²⁹⁰ There was also no longer a continued urgent need for the exploration of historical themes, as had been the case during glasnost. Birgit Menzel notes that, '[t]he traditional image of the writer as a teacher and prophet, as the moral or social conscience of the nation, reached the end of its natural life in the late perestroika era'.²⁹¹ Some commentators were, however, still concerned about how literature should negotiate the Soviet past. The literary critic Marietta Chudakova asserted that literature has a role to play in judgement of the Soviet past and as testimony to its effects:

²⁸⁷ For figures, see Menzel, p. 41.

²⁸⁸ On the effects of the move to publishing based on the commercial market, see Stephen Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 81–88.

²⁸⁹ See Marsh, 2007, pp. 36–38.

²⁹⁰ Viktor Erofeev, 'Pominki po sovetskoi literature', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 27 (4 July 1990), 8.

²⁹¹ Menzel, p. 46.

The trial of the Communist Party can occur not during court session, but on printed pages in the form of personal accounts and self-analysis of all those who lived and acted during Soviet times. [...] Yes, I am sure: each person who nowadays makes a statement in print, each person who feels a social responsibility must try to write an honest autobiography, his own account of the time he lived through.²⁹²

A large number of memoirs and autobiographical works have indeed been published, as will be discussed further below.

Political divisions between patriots and liberals in the post-Soviet literary scene were, and to some extent still are, influential in how the Soviet past was represented; each group advocates a different approach to the past according to its own particular vision of post-Soviet Russian identity and the Russian future. While some texts have continued to promote certain ideological approaches to the past, there has also been a broader move towards the consumption of literature as entertainment and/or art for its own sake. Henrietta Mondry notes that although political divisions continued to have some influence, especially in literary criticism, '[f]rom 1996 a new trend emerges, whereby literary periodicals place less emphasis on ideological debates in order to meet readers' desires for a focus on literature and literary criticism for its own sake'.²⁹³ Beth Holmgren's description of Russian memoir-writing in the early 2000s also indicates that art and entertainment have become more important for the genre than the promotion of a particular view of ideology, politics or history:

²⁹² Marietta Chudakova, 'Pod skrip ukliuchin', *Novyi Mir*, 4 (1993), 136. Cited in English translation in Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2009), p. 42.

²⁹³ Henrietta Mondry, 'The Russian Literary Press, 1993–98: Critics Reach Reconciliation with their Audience', in *Russian Literature in Transition*, ed. by Ian K. Lilly and Henrietta Mondry (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1999), pp. 105–26 (p. 105).

The current kaleidoscope of memoir types, ascending from 'authorized' gossip to sophisticated 'nonmemoirs,' promises to leaven a still tradition-bound Russian culture, subverting the longstanding Russian verities of the serving self and eyewitness truth and reveling in narratives that no longer serve, but exploit, Russian and Soviet history in pursuit of art, entertainment, and self-knowledge.²⁹⁴

Many post-Soviet Russian readers have sought entertainment and escapism in mass literature which saw a rapid rise in popularity during the 1990s. Marsh observes that this reflects a 'widespread desire to forget the past, to be entertained in the present and look positively towards the future'.²⁹⁵ Natal'ia Ivanova's interpretation of why the detective fiction writer Aleksandra Marinina has achieved such success suggests that mass literature was an escape from disillusionment with the new post-Soviet Russia:

It was gradually being realized that the long-desired glasnost, the chance at last to read *Doctor Zhivago* out in the open, not under the covers, had not actually resulted in qualitative improvements in life in general. This ushered in a period of disenchantment in those values upon which the 'liberal' literary publications had based themselves. It was a period of disenchantment – and of indifference.²⁹⁶

The tendency towards nostalgia and selective forgetting identified in the earlier part of this chapter then, can also be seen to a certain extent in post-Soviet reading habits, as Lovell describes: 'What post-Soviet citizens appear to want is reading matter that does not remind of them of the malaise of their own society and at the

²⁹⁴ Beth Holmgren, 'Introduction', in *The Russian Memoir: History and Literature*, ed. by Beth Holmgren (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003), pp. ix–xxxix (p. xxxii).

²⁹⁵ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 407.

²⁹⁶ Natal'ia Ivanova, 'Why Russia Chose Putin: Alexandra Marinina in Contexts Literary and Otherwise', trans. by Liv Bliss, *Russian Studies in Literature*, 39.4 (2003), 7–22 (pp. 9–10).

same time, projects a fundamentally stable moral universe.²⁹⁷ Marsh identifies as a reason for the increased popularity of historical fiction about the pre-revolutionary period, 'the weariness of the Russian population with ideas of national and individual "repentance" and the "moral cost" of the Soviet period, endlessly reiterated during perestroika by many writers'.²⁹⁸ This could also explain the more general decline in appeal of texts which deal directly with the Soviet past and its legacy in post-Soviet Russia. Although it appeared during the 1990s that Russian literature and its readers were, for the most part, no longer interested in discussing the Soviet past, Marsh argues that by the mid-2000s a continuing theme of 'confrontation with its past' can be identified in Russian literature and culture.²⁹⁹ There was a change of focus: literature contained fewer shocking revelations, there were fewer 'blank spots' of history to be filled and historical study itself was also catching up and taking over this role, but, as Marsh observes, 'a more oblique investigation of many aspects of Russian and Soviet history and an interest in the philosophy of history have continued to be significant preoccupations of post-Soviet culture'.³⁰⁰ There was also an increased emphasis on 'artistic quality' rather than the function of truth-telling and denunciation.³⁰¹

Representations of the Soviet Past in Post-Soviet Russian Literature

Research from the mid-1990s suggests there were two main, contrasting tendencies in readers' attitudes to historical literature at that time. Some Russian readers showed particular interest in texts which rewrite history and reveal previously untold perspectives on the Soviet past. Others prefer more nostalgic representations of Russian history as a means of escape from the present and from the difficulty of coming to terms with Russia's loss of status since the collapse of

²⁹⁷ Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution*, p. 135.

²⁹⁸ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 134, referring to: Aleksandr Arkhangel'skii, "Gei, slaviane!", *Novyi mir*, 7 (1995), p. 215.

²⁹⁹ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 13.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14. See also, p. 283.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

the Soviet Union.³⁰² Literature representing both these approaches continues to be available today suggesting there may still be a significant divide in Russian attitudes to the past. This is supported by Boris Dubin's observation that there is little crossover between those who read mass patriotic historical fiction and those who read literature which challenges historical authority.³⁰³ These contrasting approaches will be exemplified below in a brief overview of the range of post-Soviet literary portrayals of the Soviet past: firstly considering those texts which present the Soviet past in a more positive light; secondly, those which offer critical engagement with the past, and finally a more in-depth exploration of memoir and fiction which represent everyday life and stories of family lives in the context of the Soviet Union.

Literature promoting a nationalist agenda has become a prominent feature of the post-Soviet literary scene, represented by authors such as Aleksandr Prokhanov and Eduard Limonov.³⁰⁴ Such texts tend to portray the Soviet past in a positive light, including favourable depiction of Stalin and Stalinism.³⁰⁵ One text which allows for a 'positive' interpretation of the Stalinist terror is *Opravdanie (Justification)* (2001) by Dmitrii Bykov. The text appeals to 'imperial nostalgia' through representing an 'alternative' view of Soviet history in which Stalin's terror is viewed as a justifiable strategy for the 'formation of the Stalinist elite'.³⁰⁶ Although at the end of the novel it is revealed that the protagonist's understanding of the Stalinist terror is rooted in madness, Marsh argues that 'this sudden transformation is far less convincing than the praise of force – and even of violence and torture – in the main body of the novel'.³⁰⁷ The text provoked 'heated

³⁰² Ibid., p. 132, referring to N.V. Rudali and Z.A. Rudaia, 'Vremia uvlecheniia istoriei', *Zvezda*, 5 (1996), pp. 220–24.

³⁰³ Boris Dubin, 'Russian Historical Fiction', trans. by Stephen Lovell, in *Reading for Entertainment in Contemporary Russia*, ed. by Lovell and Menzel, pp. 173–96 (p. 194, n. 2).

³⁰⁴ Marsh, 'The "New Political Novel" by Right-Wing Writers in Post-Soviet Russia', *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte*, 14.1 (2011), 159–187.

³⁰⁵ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 456. For the development and range of literary representations of Stalinism in post-Soviet Russian literature, see Marsh, chapter 10.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 461.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

discussions in Russian intellectual circles' but also received praise from some critics and won or was shortlisted for several prizes.³⁰⁸ Mass historical fiction also promotes a patriotic version of the past. Boris Dubin's analysis of recent patriotic historical novels identifies recurring themes on the ideas of fate, Russia's special path, national pride, and division between one's own and the Other.³⁰⁹ Post-Soviet literary representations of the Soviet past sometimes include heroic representation of KGB agents, who are seen as primarily defending Russia against enemies, rather than as having maintained and defended a totalitarian state, as the Stasi are most often perceived in German literature: 'the second half of the 1990s witnessed a reaction against the former condemnation of Stalin's security services and a growing nostalgia for Soviet-style "positive heroes", including former representatives of the secret services.'³¹⁰ Popular Soviet novels by Lev Ovalov, whose protagonist, Major Pronin, was a representative of the Soviet security services, have been reissued in the 1990s and 2000s.³¹¹

Postmodern and experimental post-Soviet literature has offered some critical reflections on the Soviet past, sometimes indirectly through fictional representation of Russia under authoritarian rule and totalitarian ideologies. Discussions as to how the genre of recent non-realist Russian literature should be categorised and how Russian postmodernism should be defined (or whether the term is legitimate at all in the Russian context) are not relevant to the present study.³¹² Here I only wish to indicate the range of texts available, and to show that not all literature lost interest in examining the effects of the Soviet system after the end of perestroika. Works of postmodernist historical fiction can be particularly suited to reflecting on alternative

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 460.

³⁰⁹ Dubin, pp. 173–196.

³¹⁰ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 438

³¹¹ For more on the content and approach of these texts, see Marina Koreneva, 'Russian Detective Fiction', in *Reading for Entertainment*, ed. by Lovell and Menzel, pp. 57–100 (pp. 73–77).

³¹² See, for example, Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, trans. by Anesa Miller-Pogacar (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos*, ed. by Eliot Borenstein (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

ways of looking at the past as they undermine the concept of historical truth.³¹³ Postmodernist fiction has also often included shocking portrayal of taboo subjects and has tended not to be popular with the wider reading public.³¹⁴ Marsh observes that in some cases this kind of portrayal has a moral purpose including the function of 'reject[ing] the whole of Soviet culture and values and to reflect the moral and spiritual disintegration of Russian society'.³¹⁵ Anti-utopian works were significant during perestroika: 'anti-utopian and "meta-utopian" prose played a crucial role in articulating a new anti-ideological mentality on the eve of the fall of the Soviet regime.'³¹⁶ The genre regained prominence again in 1999-2000 in works by authors such as Vladimir Makanin, Tat'iana Tolstaia, and Vladimir Sorokin.³¹⁷ Another aspect of postmodernist theory that has found expression in literary treatment of the Soviet past is the idea of postmodern reality as simulation; Viktor Pelevin's *Omon Ra* (1992) exposed the emptiness behind Soviet ideology and propaganda.³¹⁸

The use of humorous portrayal to critically engage with the Soviet past is less common in the Russian literary scene than the use of humour in German representations of the GDR and does not feature prominently in the texts analysed for this thesis. One example of an author who has written satirical novels both during the Soviet period (mainly published abroad) and since the collapse of the Soviet Union is Vladimir Voinovich. His novel, *Monumental'naia propaganda* (2002) provides a satirical portrayal of the Soviet Union and its collapse.³¹⁹

³¹³ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 250.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 89–93.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90. (Here referring specifically to the work of Vladimir Sorokin.)

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 185. See also Edith W. Clowes, *Russian Experimental Fiction: Resisting Ideology after Utopia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 186–89.

³¹⁸ For further discussion, see Marsh, pp. 252–55.

³¹⁹ See Karen Ryan, 'Vladimir Voinovich and Soviet/Émigré/Post-Soviet Satire: A Case Study', in *Uncensored? Reinventing Humor and Satire in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. by Olga Mesropova and Seth Graham (Bloomington: Slavica, 2008), pp. 11–26.

Memoirs and Fictional Narratives of Everyday Soviet Experience

Most relevant for this thesis is how everyday experience of the Soviet past has been portrayed in fictional and autobiographical texts. Marsh observes that much of the post-Soviet literature which continues, following the boom during glasnost and perestroika, to confront the past, does so with 'an intensified focus on the private concerns of the individual human being'.³²⁰ Oliver Ready makes a similar observation; he comments on Oleg Zaionchkovskii's novel, *Petrovich*, (analysed in this study) as 'representative of the recent turn towards realism and sentiment and towards an exploration of the past in a private key'.³²¹ Although this trend is a significant feature of recent Russian fiction, it is most clearly demonstrated by the huge popularity of memoirs in the post-Soviet period.³²² The following discussion will consider studies of both autobiographical and fictional prose in order, firstly, to explore some major factors causing the recent fascination among Russian authors and readers for subjective, personal accounts of the past, and secondly, to demonstrate how such texts can usefully represent the Soviet past. This is crucial to an understanding of how the Russian texts analysed in Chapter 3 are representative of an approach to the Soviet past which has the potential to complicate more pessimistic assessments of Russian memory of the Soviet past as being largely characterized by forgetting and/or nostalgia. This may seem surprising as such texts tend not to comment explicitly on the nature of Soviet power and ideology, nor to reflect on the legacy of the Soviet past in the Russian present, and do not appear to pass judgement on the past. Oliver Ready comments on the texts selected for a recent anthology of contemporary Russian prose as representative of 'a desire among writers of the last ten years not so much to "come to terms" with the past as to render it real and tangible'.³²³ Nonetheless, in recreating personal memories of the past, narratives of subjective experience can

³²⁰ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 284, see also pp. 304–06.

³²¹ Oliver Ready, "'Like a Tree Growing Backwards": Contemporary Prose between Past and Present', *Ties of Blood: Russian Literature from the 21st Century*, [Rossica, Vol 18] (London: Academia Rossica, [2008]), pp. 8–15 (p. 11).

³²² Holmgren, p. xxv.

³²³ Ready, p. 13.

offer an insight into the effects of living under Soviet rule whilst also placing individuals' lives centre-stage. They describe experiences which allow for the interpretation of both critical and affectionate perspectives on different aspects of Soviet life, thus creating an ambivalent and complex perspective on the Soviet past.

It is useful to consider *why* there has been a particular emphasis on narratives of individual experiences of the past. The boom in memoir writing and publication has been noted, and in one sense the popularity of this genre is not a phenomenon specific to Russia; there is a fascination among readers across the western world for books which reveal details of the lives of the rich and famous, and a demand for stories of personal success and survival against the odds. These tendencies have also been observed in Russia since the mid-1990s.³²⁴ There are, however, also significant factors associated with the particular post-Soviet context, not least because the vast majority of recent Russian memoirs include depiction of lives in the Soviet Union narrated for a post-Soviet Russian readership. The crucial factor in the popularity of texts based on personal memory is their (perceived) authenticity. Marsh argues that the popularity of both autobiographical and fictional texts representing personal experience is, in part, a reaction to the way that history and memory were instrumentalized under Soviet rule: 'the increasing emphasis on memory in contemporary Russia can primarily be attributed to the former suppression of both individual and collective memory by the state, and the constant distortion and rewriting of history in Russia.'³²⁵ It is understandable, therefore, that there is now little demand for literature which subordinates literature to ideology and politics, and that individual stories of personal experience may be perceived as more authentic than historical accounts.³²⁶

³²⁴ See Holmgren, p. xxv.

³²⁵ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 156.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 156–57.

Marina Balina's survey of the changing nature of Soviet and post-Soviet memoirs provides some further useful indications as to why post-Soviet memoirs often shy away from making a political or ideological statement or from passing judgement on historical developments. Balina shows that post-Soviet memoirs reject certain functions of both official Soviet and dissident memoir-writing, while reclaiming the significance of individual experience. She observes that, '[r]elying on subjective reality as the only true one available to them for their inspiration, this new [post-Soviet] generation of writers recollected rather than wrote against their Soviet past.'³²⁷ This shows a move away from the didacticism which had heavily influenced most examples of officially sanctioned Soviet memoir as well as autobiographical texts with an anti-Soviet agenda. Balina also comments on the reluctance of some contemporary writers to be labelled as memoirists, with particular reference to a survey of writers in a 1999 issue of *Voprosy Literaturny*.³²⁸ She suggests that they may be choosing not to be associated with a genre which had until recently been so politically and ideologically charged.³²⁹ This further supports the idea that a more conventional memoir might be perceived as inauthentic or unreliable because Russian readers and writers have been so used to life stories shaped by Soviet ideology, or indeed reacting against it in the case of dissident writing.

A selective chronological summary of significant developments in Soviet memoir helps to explain the nature of post-Soviet memoir. In the 1930s published memoirs had to portray the past according to 'official history': 'The important quality of the memoir to depict events in retrospect was completely paralyzed: the memoirist could pay with his or her own life for what he or she chose to

³²⁷ Marina Balina, 'The Tale of Bygone Years: Reconstructing the Past in the Contemporary Russian Memoir' in *The Russian Memoir: History and Literature*, ed. by Beth Holmgren (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003), pp. 186–209 (p. 196).

³²⁸ 'Memuary na slome epokh', *Voprosy Literaturny*, 1 (1999), cited in Balina.

³²⁹ Balina, p. 187.

remember.³³⁰ Most memoirs continued to perform 'propagandistic and didactic functions' through the post-Stalin era, so that the experiences of the individual were narrated only in order to communicate a particular version of history or ideology.³³¹ A new kind of memoir also emerged in the Soviet Union during the mid-1950s and this new approach to the genre seems to share many qualities with post-Soviet life-writing. The new memoir focussed more on subjective experience rather than adhering to official models of Soviet autobiography.³³² It should be noted that in the Soviet Union these texts were on the 'periphery of the literary world'.³³³ Balina describes the approach to representing history taken by these 'alternative' memoirs published during the Thaw:

In this new memoir official history ceases dominating subjective narrative and historical facts serve as stage backdrop or decor. The subjective memoir 'highlights' moments from officially accepted history randomly when those events and facts are relevant to the depiction of individual experience.³³⁴

Balina comments that '[b]y focussing on the events of a particular life disconnected from the narrative of official history, the writer stresses that life's uniqueness and upsets the dominance of official history over personal story'.³³⁵ These descriptions could easily apply to many texts which are examples of the post-Soviet tendency towards depiction of personal stories, and to the Russian texts examined in this thesis.

While a focus on subjective experience may be, in part, a rejection of a singular approach to history and ideology (be that the official party line, or the

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 189.

³³¹ Ibid., p. 190.

³³² Balina cites as examples Ol'ga Berggolts's *Dnevnye zvezdy* and Paustovskii's *Povest' o zhizni*.

³³³ Balina, p. 191.

³³⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

dissident resistance to it), in the post-Soviet period it may also involve a reaction against the many, and often-changing, accounts of the past published during perestroika. Balina describes the effects of perestroika:

The reminiscences of the 1980s 'throw' the entire body of historical facts together so that the confused reader cannot discern where official history is being validated or objective reality is being reconstructed. The abundance of memoirs that focussed on the same factual material undermined the very authenticity of the objectivity of both facts and official history.³³⁶

In this context, stories which sought only to convey the subjective experience of an individual could easily be perceived as the most believable accounts of the past.³³⁷ By the early 1990s it no longer seemed imperative for texts to 'uncover the blank spots' of the Soviet past. Thus Balina argues that '[t]he memoirs of the 1990s finally free the genre from its Soviet past by returning to the eyewitness the right to select and comment on the events that surround one's life'.³³⁸ In the post-Soviet context, such texts reclaim the significance of the individual and his/her experience in representing the Soviet past. It would be valid to express concerns that such texts also avoid extended reflection on the wider historical context. There has certainly been far less evidence of a self-conscious attempt to come to terms with the Soviet past in Russian society and literature, than there has been in the German context with regard to the East German past. As the next section will show, however, the vast majority of post-Soviet memoirs do convey the difficulties of life in the Soviet Union.

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 196.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 197. Examples cited by Balina include: Anatolii Rybakov's *Roman-vospominanie*, Nina Gorlanova's *Vremia kak parodiia na vechnost'* (*neserieznye memuary*), and Sergei Gandlevskii's *Trepnatsiia cherepa*.

Irina Paperno's study of glasnost-era and post-Soviet memoir is less concerned with the reasons for the recent popularity of memoir in Russia. Instead her study is primarily interested in how post-Soviet Russian memoirs convey the experience of living in the Soviet Union. Paperno perceives 'personal accounts of the Soviet experience' (autobiographical texts published from the period of glasnost up to the early 2000s) as a 'single extended corpus', that is she studies them as a group with a particular focus on their common themes, concerns and reference points.³³⁹ Paperno argues that 'diaries and memoirs create a community where those who lived through the Soviet era can gain access to the intimate, inner recesses of one another's lives'.³⁴⁰ These texts constitute a shared space describing many shared experiences. Paperno suggests that readers do not read such texts only to read about another's life, but to recognise and understand aspects of one's own experience of Soviet Russian life through reading another's life story.³⁴¹ The shared experience which creates this community, or the shared memories which create a kind of common identification among authors and readers, is the experience of living in the Soviet Union.

Paperno's observations about what constitutes this 'Soviet experience' according to the corpus indicate that, among memoirs at least, there is little danger of nostalgia or selective forgetting with regard to the abuses of the Soviet state. First of all it is important to note that Paperno 'did not find many documents that are written to celebrate Soviet power'.³⁴² Moreover, those texts which are not explicitly critical of the Soviet state do, nonetheless, convey the horrors and suffering experienced by many Soviet citizens: 'these accounts describe human lives [...] shaped by violent historical forces, focussing on Stalin's terror and the Second World War (which some experienced vicariously) as defining moments in

³³⁹ Paperno, p. 159.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. xii.

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁴² Ibid., p. xi.

the Soviet experience.³⁴³ She presents a kind of repertoire of typical Soviet experiences according to the memoirs studied. This includes the effects of terror, war and political repression, but also the debilitating effects of Soviet everyday life such as 'crowded communal apartments' and 'state-produced deformation of the body and mind', including 'restricted hygienic and sexual practices' and 'the loaded idiom of Soviet-speak'.³⁴⁴ Paperno observes, however, that despite the terrible experiences described, authors tend not to offer an explicit examination of the nature and effects of the Soviet system:

Self-conscious texts written by intellectuals may go so far as to imply that the Soviet regime created an emotional economy of duplicity, deception, and ambiguity (prompted by the need to hide one's thoughts and feelings and to conceal one's parentage, ethnicity, and partnerships, or to form new loyalties, identities, and partnerships without forsaking old ones.) Produced from within this economy, most texts (even naive ones) demonstrate how this was achieved.³⁴⁵

These observations suggest that although autobiographical depictions of Soviet life rarely criticise the Soviet regime directly, this is nonetheless a likely interpretation of texts which testify to the experience of Soviet life.

One possible reason for the lack of direct and open discussion about the Soviet past may be that Russian authors are less concerned with presenting themselves as pro- or anti-Soviet, and are instead focussing on the common experience of suffering and endurance: 'What comes through in these documents is a sense of self derived from the experience of danger, fear, deprivation, and

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 209.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 209.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 209.

pressure (even for those who do not blame the Soviet state).³⁴⁶ It is this self-identification as someone who has suffered and survived (given that these writers are now able to tell their own stories) which seems to be the prime motivation behind many of the texts: 'Life stories from the Soviet Union tend to derive their claim to significance from the catastrophic quality of personal experience, even when their authors do not place themselves in opposition to the Soviet regime.'³⁴⁷

Examples can also be found of fictional narratives which depict lives defined or characterized by suffering and by survival, and in which the regime is only represented when it is relevant to the characters' lives. Benjamin Sutcliffe observes that in works by Liudmila Ulitskaia and Svetlana Vasilenko Soviet history is portrayed indirectly while the focus remains on the experience of the characters: 'Human relationships subsume political events as the undercurrent of history.'³⁴⁸ Sutcliffe suggests that one of the reasons for Ulitskaia's popularity is that 'her narratives subtly and unobtrusively engaged the past'.³⁴⁹ He cites the example of Ulitskaia's *Kazus Kukotskogo* (2001) in which the protagonist is a gynaecologist who opposes the Stalinist state through his support of illegal abortion: 'The result was accessible themes, which accompanied stylistic sophistication as part of the realist mode of representation with which Russian readers were most comfortable.'³⁵⁰ Marsh also identifies Ulitskaia as an example of an author who portrays Soviet history in the background, and the characters' lives as the primary focus.³⁵¹ Marsh's explanation for Ulitskaia's success suggests, like Paperno's

³⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 210.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p. xi.

³⁴⁸ Benjamin M. Sutcliffe, *The Prose of Life: Russian Women Writers from Khrushchev to Putin* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), p. 102.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 133. He refers to this as 'history by indirection' – 'where [...] a narrative conveys historical information through "the everyday affairs of the fictional characters".' Sutcliffe, p. 104, citing Jerome Beaty, 'History by Indirection: The Era of Reform in *Middlemarch*', in *Middlemarch: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Reviews and Criticism*, ed. Bert Hornbach (1977).

³⁵⁰ Sutcliffe, p. 133–34; see also pp. 104–05.

³⁵¹ Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity*, p. 307. Another example given is Irina Polianskaia, *Prokhozhenie teni* (1997).

observations, that stories of endurance and survival alongside Soviet history hold significant appeal for Russian readers:

Ulitskaia's novel, along with other family chronicles – both of the 'mass' and 'elite' varieties – have become particularly popular in post-Soviet Russia because they provide a sense of the permanence of the family and its ability to withstand historical cataclysm, reflecting Russian readers' longing for a non-catastrophic, everyday world of greater stability and predictability.³⁵²

These observations are relevant for the present study because, although the protagonists and narrators of the Russian texts are, in most cases, not directly exposed to the 'catastrophic' experiences of Soviet history, there are significant references made to these darker experiences of the Soviet past in their interactions with adults, but at the same time the main focus of most of the texts is on everyday childhood experience, that is, the continuation of family life.

Conclusion

In Russia there has been little open discussion and limited official acknowledgement of the Soviet regime's crimes in comparison with the German approach to the GDR past. In Russian society there appears to have been no widespread desire for continued detailed examination and reassessment of the Soviet period after the memory boom of glasnost. This may be influenced by several factors including the more urgent need during the 1990s to concentrate on survival in the present; the focus on positive aspects of Soviet history promoted by the post-Soviet administrations; the persistence of Soviet practices of not talking about the past and the possibility that some may be affected by traumatic memories.

³⁵² Ibid., p. 311.

In terms of literature, some contemporary Russian texts do engage with the Soviet past, but often in a more ambiguous or indirect way than German literary works representing the GDR. The Russian texts to be analysed in Chapter 3 can be considered as part of the wider trend in post-Soviet Russian literature in which narratives of individuals' and families' lives portray subjective experience of the past, rather than openly promoting a particular version of history or ideology. The Russian texts do not pass judgement on the Soviet past; nonetheless, they do reveal some darker aspects of the Soviet experience (as Paperno observed in her analysis of memoirs) and cannot, therefore, be considered as encouraging nostalgia and forgetting.

The extent to which the chosen narratives of socialist childhood conform to, or in some cases offer alternative or more complex perspectives on the socialist past than the existing memory cultures in Germany and Russia will be considered in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Memory of Life under Socialism in German, Russian and Russian Émigré Narratives of Childhood

Introduction

The most striking difference between Russian and German accounts of Soviet and East German childhood is the differing emphasis on ideology and the state as important factors in narrating the experience of childhood. In the Russian texts, the Soviet context tends to provide a background, and at times is commented on, though often indirectly. By contrast, many of the German narratives foreground the East German context. Some German authors appear to portray childhood primarily in order to explore life in the GDR and questions of memory and identity arising during the *Wende*. On the other hand, the Russian authors seem to be more interested in childhood, in and of itself, and the Soviet Union is the setting, simply because that was where the author grew up. I do not wish to overstate the case, however, as the representation of the Soviet context in the Russian texts is more complex and nuanced than this. Moreover, those specifically Soviet experiences which are portrayed in the Russian texts often reveal the damaging effects of the Soviet system, even if this is only implied and a minor element within the narrative.

This chapter will analyse how a group of German, Russian, and Russian émigré texts convey the specific experience of growing up in the GDR or USSR. (Unless otherwise stated, any reference to the Russian texts as a group excludes the émigré texts by Ruben Gal'ego and Elena Gorokhova.) By considering the prominence of the socialist setting, the kinds of childhood experiences portrayed and the narrative perspective and tone used, I will show that the narrative strategies employed in the German texts provide a more distanced and/or critical perspective on the GDR past. In the Russian texts, the tendency is rather for Soviet childhood experiences to be 'recreated' or remembered with few prominent

references to the Soviet state; they tend not to guide the reader towards a particular interpretation of the Soviet past.

All the texts define, to differing degrees, the time and place in which the story plays out. Some are explicit about locations and dates, giving considerable detail to description of a neighbourhood, or events in a particular year. Some make reference to consumer products, popular culture, sports events and so on, which build up a picture of life in a particular context. Although the Soviet or East German setting is explicit in every text, a comparison between the Russian and German texts shows different levels of engagement with the past. There is no suggestion of the Soviet past being ignored in the Russian texts. All the texts are clearly set in the Soviet Union and all make references to specific people, objects, practices and ideas of that time. Yet the Soviet context is less prominent than the East German setting in many of the German texts. Even a comparison of the titles indicates the difference. Among the German texts are *Meine freie deutsche Jugend (My Free German Youth)*, a reference to the name of the East German political youth organisation; *Immer bereit! Von einem Jungen Pionier, der auszog, das Glück zu suchen (Always Prepared!: By a Young Pioneer who Set Off in Search of Happiness)*, a reference to the motto of the Young Pioneers; *Rüber machen ...: Eine Kindheit und Jugend in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone/DDR, 1945 - 1954 (Getting from East to West...: A Childhood and Youth in the Soviet-Occupied Zone/GDR, 1945-1954)*, refers to the author's escape from the GDR and very clearly states the historical context of the narrative; and finally, two further texts not analysed in detail in this chapter also demonstrate the trend: *Ostblöckchen: Eine Kindheit in der Zone (Little Ones from the Eastern Block: A Childhood in the Zone)* and *Zonenkinder (Children of the Zone)* both indicate the GDR's significance as the setting of the narrative and as central to the identity of the narrator/protagonist. By contrast, not one of the Russian titles indicates the Soviet setting of their narratives. Some of the German texts also organise the narrative

around significant elements of GDR life, so that a chapter may be centred on the depiction of parades or the Young Pioneers. While many of the Russian texts mention the Young Pioneers, Brezhnev's appearances on television, Yuri Gagarin and many more people and things associated with Soviet life, they tend not to focus on the system, but on individuals' lives within or alongside that system, i.e. the Soviet past is a backdrop, in some cases very significant in the characters' lives, but not a primary theme of the text. Because the analysis in this chapter picks out specific examples where narratives convey the experience or memory of specifically Soviet or East German experience, it may appear that the Russian texts are just as concerned with the Soviet past as the German texts are with the GDR. It is important to note, therefore, that among the German texts the examples are selected from many possible illustrations, whereas the discussion of the Russian texts draws on a far smaller number of possible examples. Moreover, as the analysis in this chapter will show, the proportion of the text devoted to the specific context is less important than how this content functions within the narrative.

As narratives of primarily childhood experience, the texts tend not to engage in direct discussion of politics and ideology. The child protagonists mainly come into contact with the system and state ideology in two ways: through school and official leisure provision, and through the attitudes and experiences of adults around them, usually parents and grandparents. Those texts which are narrated at least in part by a retrospective adult voice or an omniscient narrator may also reflect on the nature of the Soviet or East German state more directly. A striking difference between the two groups of texts is that the German texts usually portray experiences of school and, in particular, ideological education. These are often presented in a way which undermines or even ridicules the attempt to teach a narrow ideology. Sometimes the depiction of school provides the context for showing the child protagonist's need to 'pretend to conform' or a growing awareness of a difference between what is acceptable in official and in private

contexts. That real life in the GDR does not measure up to the ideals of socialism is also commonly portrayed through the child's naive belief in the ideal version of the GDR promoted through their education.

The Russian texts, on the other hand, tend to focus on the portrayal of home, family and friends far more than the child's contact with institutions. Where this is portrayed, the ideological content is minimal, and several of the characters are portrayed as outsiders with respect to this kind of collective activity.¹ Although most of the Russian authors choose not to portray ideological education, the texts do sometimes reveal the effects of it, such as an emphasis on heroes, militarism and the prominence of the memory of the Second World War. These are revealed sometimes only with passing references, which demonstrate a character's values or way of looking at the world. This is more subtle than in the German texts, and is usually ambiguous as to whether it constitutes a critical portrayal, that is, the inclusion of such elements could be interpreted as making an indirect comment on the Soviet regime, or they could simply be considered by the majority of Russian readers as 'normal' childhood memories without any significant connection to the Soviet system.² The émigré texts by Gal'ego and Gorokhova give more attention to experiences of education and both texts clearly depict teaching which is heavily biased and even distorted by ideology.

In terms of representing the attitudes of adults around the child protagonist or narrator, the German texts are again more explicit in portraying the opinions of adult characters towards the state. The Russian texts do portray parents and grandparents whose experiences have been shaped by, for example, the state use of terror, but the narratives rarely convey the children overhearing, reporting, or

¹ See, for example, the chapter 'Dom kul'tury Pavlika Morozova' in Boris Minaev's *Detstvo Levy* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2001), pp. 86-97.

² For example, as a modern, Western reader it is easy to assume that portrayal of a young child involving torture and interrogation in his play is presenting a negative effect of the Soviet system, but this depends on culturally-specific, not universal, ideas about how childhood should be.

puzzling at the opinions of family members and teachers, in the way that the German texts do more frequently.

The kinds of Soviet or East German experiences which are portrayed in the texts are important, but just as significant are the narrative perspective and tone used. Most of the texts, both German and Russian, use a combination of adult and child voices, but often in different ways. I will argue that the German texts are characterized by a narrative distance whereas the Russian texts tend to immerse the narrative in the past, at least in certain passages, giving the illusion of direct access to that past. The narrative distance towards the GDR past demonstrated in many of the German texts is usually achieved through the use of humorous, satirical and ironic elements which convey criticism of the East German state, even if the narrator him/herself (as a child) does not share this critical perspective. The use of humorous and/or naive narration in fact allows a dual perspective which shows both affection for and a distancing from different aspects of the GDR.³ In the texts discussed in this chapter, humour is often derived from the use of the child's innocent view of East German life. Another way in which the German narratives distance themselves from the East German experience is through retrospective reflection, taking into account new knowledge and attitudes acquired and developed since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Some narratives, such as that by Kusserow in particular, also include historical information. Many of the German texts include narration of the events of the *Wende* and the process of establishing an identity and position with regard to the East German past. The inclusion of narration from the author's present-day perspective in texts by Kusserow, Rusch and Wiechmann enables exploration of and direct comment on how the GDR past is remembered in post-unification Germany.

³ See my earlier discussion of humour in representations of the GDR: Chapter 2, pp. 103–05.

The Russian texts tend to recreate rather than reflect on the past, appearing to give the illusion of direct access to the past through memory or through limiting the narrative to the Soviet present of the action. There are far fewer instances of narration with an explicitly post-socialist perspective, nor is there significant use of humour to reflect on, judge or question the Soviet system. The Russian texts do not communicate a version of the Soviet past that is easily characterized, instead they tend to be obscured by ambiguity, complexity or ambivalence. In some cases, this is because the narrative is primarily about something else (i.e. the Soviet context is the background to the story), and in others it is because the narrative focus on childhood and, in particular the use of the child's perspective, results in description without judgement. Unlike the German texts, in which incongruities between the child's view and reality or adult perceptions of that reality create irony and critical distance, the child's perspective in the Russian texts rarely functions as a vehicle for questioning the system.⁴ Although the Russian texts do not pass judgement on the Soviet past and do not appear to be primarily concerned with confronting the socialist past in the way that the German texts are, they nevertheless include some experiences and observations which demonstrate the detrimental effects of Soviet rule. The Russian texts, therefore, cannot be accused of 'forgetting' the Soviet past, but do appear to be aligned with, and may be influenced by, the tendency observed within Russian society and culture to avoid open and direct criticism of the Soviet system (as discussed in Chapter 2).

I would argue that a major factor causing the difference between German and Russian texts in both the focus of the content and the narrative approach is the anticipated readership. German texts are likely to be read by both former West and former East German readers. As such they tend to fulfil a dual function: to inform former West German readers about the GDR, often emphasizing aspects of everyday life which might not be addressed in historical approaches; secondly to

⁴ I am aware of one short story which is an exception to this: Nina Gabrielian, 'Lilovyi khalat', *Preobrazhenie: Russki feministskii zhurnal*, 4 (1996), 93-104.

contribute to a shared memory of the past for former East Germans, particularly important for a sense of identity in reunified Germany where western German identity and values have been dominant over eastern 'otherness'.⁵ In Germany, then, narratives of East German childhood tend to have the primary effect of saying, 'this is what the GDR was like'. Some narratives have been identified by critics and readers as valuable in helping towards integration of east and west in reunified Germany. This is something I will return to in discussion of the reception of the texts.

In contrast to the German situation, Russian accounts of the Soviet past tend not to anticipate readers with an 'outsider' perspective. Older Russian readers will have experienced Soviet life first-hand, whilst younger readers will still identify with it as their own history. I have included analysis of a text in English, written by Elena Gorokhova, a Soviet Russian, who emigrated to the US in the 1980s. This text is significantly different from those texts written for a Russian readership. The Soviet context, historical references, the restrictive nature of state ideology all play a major role in this text which is presenting the Soviet past for a western audience. It seems to be partly explaining things that would not need explaining to Russian readers, as well as perhaps fulfilling the expectations of American and British readers who are likely to be reading this for an insight into life under communism.

This chapter will focus on both the differing kinds of content and themes addressed in each text, as well as looking at the different ways in which these are narrated. This discussion centres on the following questions: Is the text giving the illusion of direct access to the past through memory or is there a critical distance incorporated, either explicitly, e.g. through retrospective reflection, or implicitly, e.g. through humour or irony? How does the selection of content, comments from characters and the narrator, or narrative tone reflect or challenge present (i.e.

⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 84-88.

post-socialist) discourses about the past? I will consider the prominence of the socialist context and how it is shown to affect the lives of the protagonists. Examples will focus on particular types of comment and experience, most significantly: education and ideological upbringing; support for or criticism of 'the system'; portrayal of the effects of political repression; and, where relevant, issues of memory and identity arising after the collapse of the socialist state. In terms of narrative strategies, I will show how narrative perspective, tone and construction contribute to creating different approaches to the socialist past.

I will analyse German texts by Mourad Kusserow, Kathrin Aehnlich, Claudia Rusch and Daniel Wiechmann. This selection offers both fiction and autobiography, a variety of approaches, narratives of childhoods lived both in opposition to and support of the regime, and a range of time periods. The analysis of the Russian texts will consider works by Larisa Miller, Boris Minaev, Oleg Zaionchkovskii, Pavel Sanaev and Oleg Pavlov. This is a diverse range of texts portraying very different Soviet childhood experiences and using different narrative approaches. Finally, I will consider two émigré texts by Ruben David Gonsales Gal'ego and Elena Gorokhova. These texts show similarities with the German texts and support the argument that an external perspective and/or the anticipation of an external perspective among readers is an important influence on the representation of the socialist past. Each group of texts is discussed in chronological order of the narrative setting.

**Analysis of German Texts by Mourad Kusserow, Kathrin Aehnlich,
Claudia Rusch and Daniel Wiechmann**

***Rüber machen: Eine Kindheit und Jugend in der Sowjetischen
Besatzungszone/DDR (2008)***

Mourad Kusserow's autobiographical text is focussed on representing life in the Soviet-occupied zone, later the GDR.⁶ Although Kusserow combines portrayal of political repression with what could be considered nostalgic depictions of childhood experience, all aspects relating to the specific East German context are critical of the system or celebrating those who were resistant or oppositional in their thoughts and actions. In the foreword he explains his intentions and reasons for writing:

With this account of my life [...] I intend to create a memorial not only to the companions of my childhood and youth, but also to my parents and above all to my mother, who until her death on the 1st May 1954 lived constantly with the fear that her husband, our father, could be taken away by the East German state security. (p. 8)

Kusserow's text is an act of witnessing and of commemoration. As such, his judgement of the past is sometimes dogmatic. At times this text is presented more as a historical document than a personal experience. Sections which set out the broader historical context to his story are included in order to inform the reader about wider political events. He states his intention that the text should offer an objective account of the past, as well as conveying his own subjective experience of it: 'The life story told here, a combination of autobiography and post-war history, is the chronicle of a contemporary witness who set out on the adventure of a balancing act between subjective and historical truth' (p. 7). In regards to his

⁶ Mourad Kusserow, *Rüber machen... Eine Kindheit und Jugend in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone/DDR, 1945 - 1954* (Mainz: Donata Kinzelbach, 2008). For quotations from this text in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 362-63.

representation of the introduction of Soviet-style socialism, and the first years of the GDR, the narrative affirms the popular perception of the GDR as a struggle between party state and resistance, perpetrators and victims.⁷

While most of the other German authors are critical of certain aspects of the East German past, their sense of loss for or affectionate identification with other aspects is also evident. Kusserow has a different perspective because he escaped from the GDR to West Germany in 1954, aged 15 (this event is narrated in the text). At the time of the *Wende*, therefore, he is neither experiencing a profound change in his everyday life, nor is he having to suddenly come to terms with a lot of new knowledge about the crimes committed by the East German state and many of its citizens.⁸

The following analysis will show how Kusserow characterizes the Soviet-occupied zone and early years of the GDR. The first examples illustrate his view of childhood and education. Secondly the inclusion of a particular instance of political repression targeted at young people is discussed. The final example considers Kusserow's direct assertions about how the GDR should be remembered. Throughout, the tone and perspective of the narration is significant in directing the reader towards one particular interpretation of the GDR past: that the East German state was criminal in nature and that its crimes and the suffering of its victims should not be forgotten.

Kusserow's text often describes his childhood experiences through retrospective narration which allows him to make overarching judgements about the nature of his childhood, as well as narrating particular events. He describes the

⁷ As discussed in Chapter 2, p. 80.

⁸ Rusch, Wiechmann and Jana Hensel all portray the disorientating effects of the *Wende*. Wiechmann in particular describes the experience of seeing a new side to the GDR, see below, p. 188. Rusch describes the effects of revelations in Stasi files.

politicized nature of socialist childhood explicitly, suggesting that the experience was in some sense at odds with how childhood should be:

We spent our childhood in circumstances which were not suitable for children. [...] The SED made every effort to connect our personal experience with socialist requirements, the collective 'we' was everything, 'I' meant nothing. That our childhood could not remain untouched by all this was knowingly accepted because the SED party strategists were well aware that children are malleable, easy to enthuse, and, what was most insidious, easily seduced. (p. 93)

Most of the other German texts show that children received ideological education and that many, especially younger children, enthusiastically engaged in what they were taught, Kusserow is the only author to explicitly claim the political appropriation of childhood. As a child from a family which did not support the new government, Kusserow's East German childhood is characterized as a kind of double life. He states that, at the age of twelve, he understood that he could not express the same opinions in public as at home and that he should actively perform a role in order to protect himself and his parents:

I learned how to handle deceit. My parents anxiously warned me to be careful, not knowing that at twelve years old I was no longer a child. [...] I joined the Young Pioneers in order to show that my parents were not in league with the imperialist and revanchist class enemies, those from West Germany who, according to the Communist propaganda, were constantly carrying out subversive and hostile acts against the GDR. (p. 86)

Kusserow suggests here that learning to lie in order to fit in with society made him less of a child, thereby illustrating his claim that the GDR did not provide an

appropriate environment for children. The requirement to display allegiance to the state in one's actions both in and out of school meant that children could not just choose to do things simply for fun, although many children were eager and excited about joining the Pioneers, as will be demonstrated in other German texts below.

Kusserow explains that he realised only later how important the ability to lie was in order to survive 'in the world of the homo absurdus' (p. 85). He suggests that everyone knew that the 'truths' of the SED were in fact 'lies': 'The lie was elevated to truth and everyone knew that this truth was in reality nothing more than a gigantic illusion, a dirty trick' (p. 85). It is inappropriate to draw a direct comparison with the other German texts as the time-frame of this narrative is earlier; it should be noted, however, that the other German texts discussed here tend not to make general statements about the extent to which GDR citizens believed, supported, disengaged from or opposed the system, rather they show individual incidents which sometimes reveal a particular frustration or cynical attitude towards the state.

While Kusserow may make many more direct judgements about the past than the other authors discussed in this chapter, his text also shows a greater concern to depict political repression and its effects. He describes the events of October 1951 when nineteen young people from Werdauer Oberschule were given custodial sentences 'for expressing oppositional views and repeated protests' (p. 96).⁹ He refers to this as a turning point for many in realising what the system really stood for: 'Anyone whose eyes had still not been opened to the illegal and unjust nature of the system [Unrechtssystem] under the SED was beyond help' (pp. 95–96). He asserts that this trial provides evidence that the East German system must be considered wrong, and he is explicit in his condemnation of the state. The

⁹ For more information on this particular case see: 'Werdauer Oberschülerinnen und Oberschüler', *Jugend Opposition in der DDR* (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung & Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft) <www.jugendopposition.de/index.php?id=2858> [accessed 3 December 2009].

narration of this event also shows that the 'historical' approach allows the author to broaden the scope of the narrative to depict aspects of the GDR which he did not experience first-hand and about which he may not have been fully informed at the time. For example, he states that the trial was not open to the public yet he displays precise knowledge of the proceedings:

The inhumanity of the judge's actions on behalf of the SED Central Committee was shown by the fact that although seven of the convicted youths were less than eighteen years old, the parents were nevertheless forbidden to say goodbye to their children before they were led away. (p. 96)

The narrative also addresses the subjective experience of this event by showing the painful realisation of the narrator and his friends that young people could be treated so harshly. He describes the sense of distrust which emerged between pupils and teachers in his own school: 'This verdict of terror affected me like a shock. Between classes in the school yard we stood together, devastated. No one dared speak about it with the teachers' (p. 96). There is a sense that they are also under threat, but the distanced position of his narrative diminishes the potential emotional impact of this. Narrating one's past in a primarily informed and reflective manner, rather than offering a (re)creation of the child's experience (even where this is contrived to communicate certain ideas), means the reader is less immediately engaged in that experience. It does, however, allow this text to include details which might otherwise be lost.

It has already been shown that Kusserow's text is not open to interpretation with regard to its treatment of the system and GDR ideology. At several points in the narrative he asserts his own feelings and beliefs as to how the period should be remembered. Kusserow's narrative mentions, on several occasions, teachers who

encouraged students to think for themselves. He intends his text to be, in part, a memorial to those who resisted the state:

As teacher Hans Köhler is still among the living, these lines shall be a homage to his bravery and moral courage in maintaining secret resistance against the communist German dictatorship, which could only remain in power thanks to Soviet occupying forces. A monument should be erected for teachers like him, who brought us up to be true individualists. (p. 80)

This statement also shows that he defines the GDR as a dictatorship and a state without legitimate origins, propped up only by Soviet military strength.

In the epilogue, Kusserow makes some concluding remarks on the nature of GDR socialism and how it should be remembered. He again questions the legitimacy of the GDR, claiming that it never stopped being a Soviet-occupied zone. He claims there can be no forgiveness for 'the numerous crimes of the SED and those who implemented them like Ulbricht, Honecker, MfS-Mielke & Co' (p. 170). His particular concern is that so many of the crimes can never be brought to justice: 'What makes their crimes so perfidious is that they often occurred in the dark and were so insidious that the majority remain impossible to prove in court' (p. 170). In the absence of a satisfactory legal response to the GDR past (as Kusserow perceives it), he sees his own text as an attempt to pass moral judgement: 'If it is not possible to prosecute these incorrigible apologists for the GDR in court, then they should at least be morally pilloried' (p. 170). He describes this task of judgement as the purpose of his text although he explicitly states that it is for the reader to decide whether he has succeeded (p.170).

Rüber machen attempts to offer a combination of personal memory and historical knowledge. My analysis above has focussed on Kusserow's depiction of

the GDR. It should be noted, however, that the narrative also gives an account of his childhood on a personal level, portraying people, places and events, sometimes with a sense of nostalgia. The more prominent aspect of the text is, however, his depiction of the specific nature of the Soviet-occupied zone and GDR. Particularly when portraying the early years of his childhood he often states that what he is narrating is something that he did not know or only had vague awareness of at the time. It is only in later years as a young adolescent that his actual memories of childhood experience seem to coincide with the image of the GDR presented in the text. Kusserow's text provides a contrast to the trend for German texts which approach the subject in a humorous tone, as the next three texts discussed will demonstrate.

Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen (1998)

Portrayal of life in the GDR is one of the major themes of Kathrin Aehnlich's novel, *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen*.¹⁰ The text, set in Leipzig during the 1960s, includes most of the 'typical' elements of East German childhood, for example, the Young Pioneers (the official children's organisation in the GDR), the *Jugendweihe* (a secular coming of age ceremony centred on socialist ideology), references to East German children's culture, and the Intershop (where Western goods could be purchased for hard currency). Childhood in the GDR is not, however, the sole focus of the text, which also explores more universal aspects of growing up and family life; there are several chapters in which the East German context has no significance.¹¹

Aehnlich's text provides an interesting contrast to the other texts discussed in detail here, because it is fictional rather than autobiographical and Aehnlich has chosen to reveal almost nothing about the protagonist's adult life and attitudes.

¹⁰ Kathrin Aehnlich, *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen* (Munich: Piper, 2009). For quotations from this text in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 363–365.

¹¹ In four of the total ten chapters of Aehnlich's text, the East German context has little or no significance: Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 8.

There are occasional digressions which mention later developments in the life of the family, and these suggest that the narrative is a retrospective remembering of childhood. Nevertheless, through most of the text the narration is confined to the child's perspective. There is no direct discussion of the system or reflection on how the East German past should be remembered. Aehnlich's child protagonist is often enthusiastic and eager to conform to the ideals of socialism she is taught, even though she has some contact with oppositional ideas through her father's cynical attitude to the government and her parents' decision to send her to Bible classes. The naive perspective of the protagonist does not prevent this text from offering a critical portrayal of the GDR, and the child's questioning perspective on the behaviour of adults around her is often the most incisive form of criticism, while her naivety allows for ironic portrayal in which the reader will perceive the failings of the system, even where the child narrator does not.

The following analysis of Aehnlich's novel will show how the text offers a critical perspective on the GDR through the limited perspective of naive narration. I will firstly consider the representation of school and the Young Pioneers. Secondly I will show how the child's innocent observations can comment indirectly on the nature of party ideology. Finally, I will consider how the narrative makes reference to political surveillance and repression without making these central themes in the text.

The fictional nature of Aehnlich's text gives greater scope for the depicted events to be constructed so as to highlight ideas beyond the narrator's childhood understanding. One particularly clear example of this emerges in the description of history lessons in school. The narrator's friend has an old edition of the history textbook published before the de-Stalinization of the previous decade. When the two girls are asked to give a presentation they are keen to use examples about

Stalin from the book. The narrator expects the teacher, who had so enthusiastically told stories about Lenin, to be pleased with the work:

The longer I spoke about him, the more thunderous the look on my teacher's face became. She should have been grateful that we had found these nice stories which were directly related to her beloved Lenin. I didn't understand why she was annoyed. Vladimir Ilyich's companion in life and comrade in the struggle, Nadezha Krupskaja, who must have known about it, wrote at the end of her memoirs: *After Lenin's death his work was continued by his best friend and helper, Comrade Stalin.* (p. 109)¹²

The inclusion of this incident implies that GDR socialism could not be entirely disentangled from the legacy of Stalinism, and clearly shows that children in the GDR had not long ago been taught how wonderful Stalin was. Moreover, the narrator's description of the teacher's response suggests that no real explanation was given for Stalin's changed status:

Things had happened which had no connection to *the cause*, which had damaged it, indeed even betrayed it. Instead of the expected praise we received a stern warning. *In future we should pay more attention to the task we have been given and keep our schoolbooks in good order.* (p. 109)

It is the child's naivety which allows the narrator to approach this subject from 'a position of unknowing'.¹³ Thus the concept of the manipulation of history under socialism is introduced to the narrative in a way that might be considered more

¹² The use of italics in quotations from *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen* is the author's, mainly to express reported speech, common sayings or song lyrics.

¹³ See Chapter 1, p. 51.

engaging and entertaining than, for example, Kusserow's inclusion of historical information and explicit value judgements on the past.¹⁴

The narration of the history lesson discussed above shows the protagonist's eagerness to please her teachers. She is also keen to be a good Pioneer.¹⁵ The protagonist is inspired by figures such as Ernst Thälmann, the heavily glorified Communist hero who had been imprisoned and executed by the Nazis, and in whose name the children's organization, *Die Thälmann Pioniere* (The Thälmann Pioneers), was founded: 'We were proud that our Pioneer organization was able to bear his name. We wanted to be like him: *happy, honest, brave and intrepid*' (p. 110).¹⁶ The hero of Nikolai Ostrovskii's semi-autobiographical Soviet novel, *Kak zakalialas' stal* (*How the Steel was Tempered*), also makes a significant impression on her: 'My personal role model was Pavel Korchagin. [...] I was moved by the fate of courageous Pavel' (p. 110). The effectiveness of mobilising ideological support through heroic narratives and role models is demonstrated when the protagonist decides she wants to emulate her heroes: 'I wanted to fight for the cause, but for that I had to first of all be elected to the class Pioneer council [*Gruppenrat*]' (p. 111).¹⁷ The narrator's naive idealism is soon shown to contrast with reality by the suggestion that the current *Gruppenratvorsitzender* (chair of the class Pioneer council), Gerlinde, had an unfair advantage in her nomination for the role:

Mrs Hartmann, who had *no wish to influence the decision of the class*, proposed, quite incidentally, Gerlinde Träger, which in my opinion had less

¹⁴ Thus illustrating Ann Rigney's argument that fictional texts can better engage the reader and therefore may have a greater impact on cultural memory. See Chapter 1, p. 45.

¹⁵ The GDR's children's organizations were the Young Pioneers (*Junge Pioniere*) for those aged 6-10 years and the Thälmann Pioneers (*Thälmann Pioniere*) for those aged 10-14. Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 127.

¹⁶ On Thälmann and the Thälmann Pioneers see John Rodden, *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and Eastern German Identity* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 33-38.

¹⁷ The *Gruppenrat* was a Pioneer committee; there was one for each school class.

to do with Gerlinde's abilities than with the fact that her mother worked in the grocers and often put something by for my teacher. (p. 104)

The narration here draws attention to favouritism in the nominations for the *Gruppenrat* elections and also refers to the informal networks which existed due to the shortage economy in the GDR. Her suspicions are later confirmed when, helping her teacher to carry some shopping home, a bag breaks revealing the content to be types of fruit the narrator has only seen in parcels from the West (p. 113).

The narration of events surrounding the election of Pioneer official positions is combined with portrayal of elections for the GDR government and this juxtaposition implies that the same unjust practices extend throughout the system. Unlike Wiechmann's text, which, as will be shown further below, directly questions the 'democratic process', Aehnlich's narrator offers a simple description and is not portrayed as noticing anything untoward: 'The names of those who attended were checked off on a list. Anyone asking to use the booth, which stood in the corner next to the grand piano, also got a cross by their name' (p. 116). The narrator also explains that her father liked to vote after lunch to show his dislike for 'the Reds' (pp. 116-17). Her childhood response to her father's attitude shows no understanding of this as a political statement: 'I didn't understand why my father didn't take the election seriously. I couldn't sleep for excitement the night before the class Pioneer council vote' (p. 117). In this way, Aehnlich's text contrasts with Kusserow's and Rusch's accounts, which portray childhood awareness of the dangers of non-conformity and the threat of political repression, even from quite a young age. The significance for comparison with the Russian texts is that, even without the child's understanding or awareness, this text addresses the lack of political freedom in the GDR.

In Aehnlich's text, humorous elements and the child's naive perspective are sometimes used to make indirect suggestions about the nature of the GDR. In one narrated scene, the protagonist's aunt has been drinking and begins to sing the National Socialist anthem: 'Die Fahnen hoch, die Reihen fest geschlossen' ('Raise the flags, the ranks tightly closed'). The child narrator does not understand why her father is so concerned to stop the singing. She explains: 'I didn't understand why Aunt Elvira was not to sing anymore. *We must sing*, said our homeland studies teacher, Mrs Hartmann and sang the first bar: *The homeland has made itself beautiful*' (p. 15). The song quoted by the narrator is a Pioneer song, 'Lied der jungen Naturforscher' ('Song of the young naturalists'). In connecting Aunt Elvira's singing to her own experience of singing with the Pioneers the narrator seems to be inviting comparison between the two systems. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the comparison is implied again later in the text, when the protagonist's mother joins the Democratic Women's League of Germany (Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands or DFD): 'This development promptly reawakened Aunt Elvira's memory of old BDM-songs and only the threat of a ban on red wine made her be silent' (p. 104). The humour derived from the inappropriateness of Elvira's actions and the family's solution to this masks the potential controversy that a comparison between the DFD and the National Socialist organisation for girls aged 14 to 18, The League of German Girls (Bund Deutscher Mädel or BDM), might provoke. While the implied similarities with National Socialism do not make any reference to ideological content, they do invite comparison between methods of mass mobilization of support as well as serving as a reminder that Nazi Germany was still the very recent past for this generation.

Another example which shows the effective use of the child narrator in order to prompt reflection on the nature of the GDR is the protagonist's comparison of her Bible studies teacher with her school teacher:

For Mrs Hartmann, Lenin was by far the best and cleverest person she knew of. When she told us about his life her cheeks grew red and her voice began to quiver slightly. It didn't surprise me as I'd already got to know this kind of euphoria in Mrs Goldhuhn. Mrs Hartmann's greatest wish was to travel to Moscow one day so that she could say goodbye to the deceased Lenin. In this respect it was harder for Mrs Goldhuhn because not even Mary Magdalene knew exactly where Jesus had ended up. (p. 108)

The child has been exposed to the teachings of both Christianity and socialism and her observations of the similarities in the attitude of the two teachers invites comparison between the two ideologies. That the child makes this observation from a position of innocence makes this a humorous, rather than inflammatory statement.

One of the more explicit criticisms of the ruling party expressed in the novel is through the opinions of the narrator's father. His objections to the system, as reported by the narrator, are directed towards inefficiencies and poor running of the country's economy and infrastructure, rather than ideology or lack of freedoms:

My father didn't like the Reds. They were unreliable, didn't make the trains run on time and they had no tiles to repair the roof of our house, [...] And, above all, they were incapable of maintaining order in the shops. (p. 114)

The text also includes, however, some hints to the more threatening nature of the state ideology and its control. The next section will consider the two clearest examples.

The protagonist arrives home later than expected one evening to find her homeland studies teacher (*Heimatkundelehrerin*) has come to visit. Her mother

believes that she has been at a Bible studies class (*Christenlehre*), but the narrator had disobeyed her parents and attended the Pioneer House instead, in order to take part in a 'cosmonaut test'. When the teacher asks where the narrator has been, the mother's nervousness is made clear, although the narrator herself does not understand the reason for it:

My mother seemed to start. Did she know something about my test?
Yet before I could answer, my mother jumped up and pushed me to the door: 'Go wash your hands! Have you already packed your schoolbag? I think you ought to say good evening to Aunt Elvira first!' (p. 33)

The narrator decides it is safer to admit her misdemeanour in the presence of her teacher and explains that she was in the Pioneer House:

I closed my eyes and waited for the clip round the ear. [...] I was sure that my secret visit to the Pioneer House was a particularly serious crime.
Nothing happened. My confession was followed by the shrill laugh of my mother: *Children grow up so fast.* (p. 33)

This incident has no serious repercussions for the protagonist and her family and the scene is portrayed in a humorous manner. Nonetheless, the underlying sense of fear felt by the mother points to the lack of freedom and pressure to conform in GDR society.

Another depiction which makes reference to state ideological control describes the effects when a neighbour, Herr Schluntz, receives an unexpected promotion and is driven to work in a big, black car. The Schluntz family become the subject of whispered discussions between the residents of the building where the narrator lives:

And all of that just because overnight, without the knowledge or involvement of the tenants, Mr Schluntz had become a *bigwig*, one of *them up there*, whose fault it was that there were no onions, that churches were being pulled down and that the price of schnapps was rising. (p. 50)

Schluntz is now working for the state and the implication is that he may be an informer, although the Stasi are never referred to directly. The characterization of Herr Schluntz does not present him as a threatening character and even ridicules him; the narrator nonetheless indicates that this development required caution and changed the behaviour of her family and neighbours. For example, the narrator's father turns the radio volume down: 'In his position as a civil servant and government employee *Deutschlandfunk* instead of *Deutschlandsender* could be considered an unforgiveable crime' (p. 50).¹⁸ A neighbour fears that her TV aerial may be discovered pointing in the wrong direction (p. 50). As with the previous example, there are no serious consequences of the turn of events, and Herr Schluntz's promotion turns out to be short-lived (p. 62). It could be argued that this depiction trivialises the culture of surveillance that existed in the GDR. I would contend that in depicting an atmosphere of fear, even in a humorous tone, this narrative does not avoid the subject altogether, but rather gives it an appropriate place in a narrative which describes everyday experiences of East German childhood within a family which is not actively dissident.

Aehnlich's text is concerned with the portrayal of everyday life in the GDR, primarily from the child's perspective. She shows the child's inculcation with socialist ideology, but she also provides a critical portrayal of many aspects of life in the GDR. The use of humour and the child's naivety allows the text to broach difficult subjects without passing judgement.

¹⁸ *Deutschlandfunk* was a West German radio station, while *Deutschlandsender* was East German.

Meine freie deutsche Jugend (2003)

In *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* Claudia Rusch combines autobiographical portrayal of the effects of political repression and surveillance with elements of personal and everyday experience.¹⁹ The main subjects of the text are Rusch's memories of her childhood and adolescent experiences in the 1970s and 80s, always related in some way to the specific GDR context, her experience of the *Wende*, and her retrospective view of the GDR after its collapse. All chapters contribute to representation of the GDR or the narrator's negotiation of its legacy and its meaning for her later life. The narration combines humorous portrayal of the GDR past with more serious expressions of fear or anger. She also reflects on her changing perception of her own identity. Although Rusch's narrative describes a childhood aware of political repression in many ways similar to Kusserow, her approach is not didactic in the way that *Rüber machen* is. Rusch focuses far more on her own personal experience and opinions, often using humour to highlight absurdities in the system, rather than promoting wholesale condemnation of the East German state.

The following analysis will firstly discuss the use of humour in Rusch's portrayal of the threat of surveillance and political repression, an element which is often underplayed in German accounts of GDR childhood. Secondly I will consider how she represents her experience of the conflict between private opinions and public conformity to the system. Finally I will demonstrate how Rusch reflects on issues of identity and memory during and after the *Wende*.

Meine freie deutsche Jugend portrays the effects of living in a repressive state. This is partly a result of the fact that, through her mother's friends, Rusch had close contact with dissidents. She, therefore, experienced this aspect of the GDR earlier than many. Rusch's choice to include retrospective consideration of her

¹⁹ Claudia Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005). For quotations from this text in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 365–67.

childhood experiences, as well as passages which convey her childhood point of view, is also significant in allowing a broader view of this aspect of her childhood experience. Rusch describes an incident in which, as a young child, she ends up sitting on the lap of a policeman on a crowded train. She starts to tell him some jokes: 'First a few rude ones and then, much to the amusement of our fellow passengers but to my mother's regret, Honecker jokes' (p. 26). She is presumably repeating political jokes which she has heard at home, but she has little concept of how serious an offence this could be. Her mother rescues the situation by telling her off, asking where she had heard these, and warning that the policeman will have to report them if she says such things. The narrator understands this 'code': 'The threat hit home' (p. 27). Rusch says she had always been prepared for the fact her mother and friends could suddenly disappear: 'With her warning, my mother brought me back down to reality. The vague sense of being under threat, that accompanied my whole childhood, instantly stirred in me. Big Brother is watching you. I knew that wasn't good' (p. 27). Here the combining of present and past perspectives allows Rusch to characterize an aspect of her childhood experience in general: that she felt a sense of being under threat. Her use of the term 'Big Brother' (Rusch uses the English phrase) indicates a perception of the GDR as a totalitarian state, and describes the surveillance culture in way that western readers will connote with totalitarianism. Although the narrative seeks to convey an atmosphere of fear, Rusch also acknowledges her limited understanding as a child of the dangers:

And so from the beginning I was brought up to be suspicious of strangers and any kind of GDR authority, especially the police. But I was seven years old and distinguishing between friends and enemies was most real to me in a game of ludo. (p. 27)

Comments such as this one reinforce the idea that whatever the context, Rusch was in many ways a 'normal' child.

A clearer example of the use of humour in representing surveillance in the GDR is Rusch's description of an incident when she, aged seven, decides she wants to meet her grandmother at the bus stop. It is dark, but she is determined to go alone. Her mother pretends to allow this, but in fact follows at a safe distance so that the narrator does not notice her. The narrator explains, however, that the Stasi officers in a car outside the house do notice: 'Our personal security immediately sensed subversive activity and started the car' (p. 22). Rusch describes her childhood self singing a song learnt in the Pioneer choir as distraction from her fear of the dark, a song her mother does not approve of, 'because it glorified the military' (p. 23). In exaggerated and official language she conveys the Stasi response to the situation, thereby mocking their act of surveillance: 'With a trained eye the operational outdoor task group immediately grasped what was going on here. A diversionary tactic. Or a code' (pp. 23–24). Her description and judgement of the Stasi decision to follow her mother, who is following her childhood self, ridicules their activities further: 'It was *the fools'* carnival procession [*Narrenumzug*] of the season. The daughter singing a National People's Army song out in front, her subversive mother behind with the Stasi's jolting Lada in tow. All at a suitably safe distance' (p. 24). She later implies that, when she safely reached the bus stop to meet her grandmother, and her mother had hurried home, the conclusion of the Stasi officers was that they had been tricked, suggesting that they were incapable of seeing the actions of those being watched as anything other than suspicious (p. 24). In this chapter, humorous portrayal of the Stasi is significant because it allows Rusch to portray them negatively, emphasizing their incompetence, but without portraying herself and her family as frightened victims. Jill Twark notes this particularly useful aspect of humorous narratives describing East German experience, especially given the stereotype of the *Jammerossi*

(moaning 'Ossi') resulting from a perception that East Germans complained excessively about the changes occurring during the *Wende*.²⁰

Rusch narrates a number of situations in which she has to appear to conform to ideological norms and rituals. Having participated more willingly as a young child, Rusch learns the importance of appearances for the sake of continuing her education as she gets older:

Although I had gone willingly to the Pioneers, I became a member of the FDJ [Free German Youth] only for the sake of a place at college. I joined the Society for German-Soviet Friendship and, before the intense recruitment phase began, I pulled myself together and took over the post of FDJ secretary for my class. If you're going to sell out to the system, then do it right. It makes no difference now anyway. (p. 61)

Rusch makes light of this 'selling out' to the regime; many of the repressive aspects of life in GDR are described by her with a touch of humour. This humour could be masking just how difficult some of the compromises she had to make were, but it could also be a way of dealing with the awkwardness of looking back on her past actions, implying questions of complicity or guilt. Rusch touches again on the ethical difficulties of pretending loyalty when she reflects on her feelings about participating in the *Jugendweihe*. She is not particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of lying at this ceremony, but she knows that the only alternative is to be confirmed in church:

Theoretically I could also have been confirmed, though it would have seemed more false to me than swearing an oath to the state. I had been

²⁰ Jill E. Twark, *Humor, Satire, and Identity: Eastern German Literature in the 1990s* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), p. 7. For my earlier discussion of Ossi and Wessi stereotypes see Chapter 2, p. 86.

brought up to be profoundly atheist, although, to be honest, I preferred to lie to Honecker than to God. To be on the safe side. One never knows. (p. 48)

She then explains that it was perhaps unusual to be so concerned about lying to Honecker:

Though I was probably the only one in the hall who took the political aspect of the *Jugendweihe* so seriously. The oath of allegiance with its outdated pathos fitted right in with the everyday schizophrenia of the East. The vow was insignificant – it was the party and presents that mattered. (p. 50)

This perspective on the culture of pretence suggests that it was taken for granted by many; lying was part of daily life, even better when state conformity could coincide with having a good time. Although she is making a generalizing statement about what people believed and valued in the GDR, and the description of the East German experience as 'everyday schizophrenia' is a heavy criticism, the narration does not attempt to be singularly authoritative; the use of the word 'probably' ('vermutlich') softens her statement. Moreover, the fact that her text draws almost entirely on her own, personal experience means that she tends not to convey a sense of speaking for all former East Germans.

Despite the humorous tone through much of the narrative, Rusch makes clear her own personal judgement of the past, based on her own and her family's experiences. In narrating her retrospective view of the GDR, Rusch explicitly condemns the East German state's methods of coercion. For example, Rusch explains her feelings about the fact that she would have tried to leave the GDR as an adult:

There are things for which I cannot forgive the GDR. The destruction of families is one. That's on a different level to the shortage of fruit or torchlight processions. This system caused parents to give their children away forever. Nothing can heal such wounds. (p. 134)

In another chapter she explains the effects of having access to Stasi files. Rusch's mother discovers that someone was informing on her and eventually, after fearing that it could have been her own mother (i.e. Rusch's grandmother), finds out that it was a long-standing friend. Rusch explains why her mother could never see this friend again: 'It wasn't about the fake friendship or the spying. It was the fact that she had consciously supported a system which made any betrayal possible. Any. There was nothing else to say' (pp. 116–17).

Rusch's narrative, although addressing the effects of the Stasi, challenges the idea that political repression should define the East German experience. She describes her realization, on her first visit to West Germany, that despite her oppositional background, she was as unprepared as anyone else brought up in the GDR for the culture shock of the West:

Here, at this bar, it became clear to me that I, too, was a quite normal GDR-child. My childhood was shaped not only by the Stasi, but also by the shortage economy. [...] I, too, had a deficit to make up for. And I did it. In all innocence I ordered a banana juice. (p. 78)

The lack of exotic fruit and the particular enthusiasm of East Germans for bananas, suddenly widely available to them, became the target of many jokes during the *Wende*.²¹ Here she explains the impulse for an action which has become an object

²¹ For an example see Patricia Hogwood, "'Red is for Love ...': Citizens as Consumers in East Germany", in *East German Distinctiveness in a Unified Germany*, ed. by Jonathan Grix and Paul Cooke (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2002), pp. 45–60 (p. 58, n. 20).

of humour, but this time she, 'a child of the GDR', makes the joke, taking ownership of a stereotype which originated in western German perceptions of the East. Rusch also shows how her feelings about her East German identity changed in the months after fall of the Berlin Wall. In June 1990 she and a friend, Robert, prepare a speech to mark their finishing school. In writing about their experiences, they begin to realise that they too, i.e. those who questioned the system, were also part of the GDR:

Three months before it all finally fell apart, we took on the identity that we had so firmly rejected. We were the GDR too. Not only spies and careerists, but also our families and friends lived here. Not only those who wanted to mould us according to their own model, but also those who had made us independent thinkers were a part of this country. At the eleventh hour Robert and I became citizens of the GDR. (p. 100)

Again she emphasizes that the GDR cannot be defined by the Stasi and the party alone. Although Rusch expresses a sense of reclaiming her East German origins and upbringing as part of her identity, this does not extend, in her case, to enthusiasm for the products of *Ostalgie*, as demonstrated by her comments on the revival of certain former East German products:

A lot of East German sweets are now on sale again. I find most of them simply disgusting. I refused them then, and I don't eat them now either. It's not a matter of principle, I just boycott assaults on my taste buds. [...] Nudossi, for example. It's nothing but a Nutella-substitute for easterners. Sentimentality included. After all, not everything was bad. (p. 88)

The comment 'After all, not everything was bad' ('War ja nicht alles schlecht') is significant in showing that she recognises that many have fond memories of the GDR and that such products have sentimental appeal for many East Germans.

Through a mixture of humorous, reflective and retrospective portrayal, Rusch offers her own personal experience of a GDR upbringing. Her narrative challenges perception of the GDR as a Stasi-state, yet her text cannot be accused of avoiding or trivialising this aspect. She also shows the complexity of the experience of the Wende, conveying the variety of ways in which she had to come to terms with her past and her identity.

***Immer Bereit! Von einem jungen Pionier der auszog, das Glück zu suchen*
(2004)**

The East German context and especially children's exposure to state ideology is central to Wiechmann's autobiographical *Immer Bereit*.²² It could not be argued in this case, that the GDR merely provides a setting for a narrative of childhood, rather it is a narrative of childhood which allows exploration of life in the GDR, both the experience and the memory of it. The narrator is a conscientious East German child, keen to be a good pupil and a responsible Young Pioneer. He has no contact with dissident ideas and has very little exposure to the West. (He has no relatives in West Germany and is not allowed to watch West German TV until later than many of his peers.) This text is therefore significant as a largely autobiographical account of a childhood where there is no real awareness of threat and ideological conflict, and for showing how this affects retrospective feelings about the GDR past after the *Wende*.

²² Daniel Wiechmann, *Immer bereit! Von einem Jungen Pionier, der auszog, das Glück zu suchen* (Munich: Droemer, 2004). For quotations from this text in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 367–369.

The text's foreword anticipates the assumptions the reader might have that this is simply another product of *Ostalgie*. The author explicitly distances his work from this trend, telling the reader to forget ostalgie memories of the East German food products 'Knusperflocken, Spreewaldgurken und Schlagersüßtafel' (p. 9). He asserts that the text is not a portrayal of East Germans as 'other': 'Forget the human zoo in which instead of animals cute Osis with little brightly patterned nylon pouches tramp through the enclosure. "Look, there's another one. Ah, how sweet!"' (p. 9). He instead creates a picture of himself as simply a normal human being, and an individual, who grew up in East Germany and has lived his adult life so far in the West. He presents himself as having dual perspective and identity:

Such a person has spent half his life in the Zone, the other half in the West. And now, fifteen years after the *Wende* he has mutated into a creature that is at home in the West, but the East is still deep in his bones. (p. 9)²³

Wiechmann portrays GDR life in a humorous and often indirectly critical way. Later in the text he also offers more direct interpretations and evaluations of his upbringing and identity. The text relies on the combining of narrative voices, using aspects of both the child's limited perspective within the GDR, and the narrator's adult, retrospective and reflective voice, writing post-*Wende*.

The following analysis of *Immer Bereit* will consider three main thematic areas: firstly, the representation of ideological upbringing and the failure of the GDR to live up to the image and ideals it projects; secondly, the implicit representation of state control through portrayal of children's limited autonomy; finally, the discussion of the *Wende* and the author/narrator's changing perspective on the GDR.

²³ Both Rusch and Jana Hensel express similar sentiments though with differing emphases, see Chapter 4, p. 259.

The representation of ideological upbringing and the increasing gap between the child's perceived ideals of GDR ideology and his experience of its reality is the main theme of this text. As a young child, the narrator is portrayed as enthusiastic in his wish to live up to the socialist ideal: 'at a young age I was already eager to develop myself into a broadly educated socialist personality' (p. 11). The Young Pioneer organisation plays a significant role in this text, as indicated by the use of the organization's motto as the title. Like Aehnlich's narrator, Wiechmann's protagonist is keen to be voted to the position of *Gruppenratvorsitzender*: 'It was the first important political office that one could hold as a Young Pioneer. From then on, one's political career lead almost inevitably to the next position up: Member of the Friendship Council' (p. 55). The incongruity of a child considering the development of his political career is a potential source of humour, and the language used implies the present perspective of the narrator as critical of this aspect of GDR childhood. (This also echoes Kusserow's assertion that childhood in the GDR was a 'politicized childhood'.) The narrator further ridicules the organization when he explains the role of the 'Freundschaftsrat' (Friendship Council):

The Friendship Council looked after the interests of all the Pioneers in the school. It organised, for example, events for the Day of Teachers, for the Day of the National People's Army, for the Day of Metalworkers, the Day of Chemists, the Day of Water-supply Workers [... he lists sixteen more examples]. In addition, the Friendship Council organized the cleaning of the school. (p. 55-56)

In listing so many celebratory days the narrator undermines the significance of any one of them. The list also emphasizes the narrator's slightly mocking attitude towards such events, especially the inclusion of cleaning the school as the final item. In this chapter, and throughout the text, the sometimes humorous tone of

the narration allows the narrator to distance himself from his childhood attitudes and to criticise aspects of the system, but also to retain a sympathetic and sometimes affectionate stance towards his past.

In depicting the Pioneer elections Wiechmann's narrator also questions the broader idea of democracy in the GDR: 'The word "election campaign" was as unfamiliar to me as it was to seventeen million other Ossis, I certainly had no idea what could be meant by it' (p. 57). His anachronistic choice of language here, describing East Germans as 'Ossis', emphasizes his post-Wende perspective. His language conveys both distance from the GDR, in using the language of the West, and identification with it, in reclaiming that label and asserting his belonging to the group with self-deprecating humour. This interpretation of a dual perspective is supported by his description of himself in the foreword as having lived half his life in the East and half in the West.

Again like Aehnlich's protagonist, Wiechmann's narrator perceives injustice in the *Gruppenrat* election. The girl who wins the class vote had been giving out sweets from the West:

Melanie simply couldn't now become the chair of the class Pioneer Council just because she'd given out West German sweets to everyone in the class. That would surely mean that it was possible to buy the position?! [...] I was beside myself. Here, today, democracy had been taken to its grave, and in a Republic which bore the word 'democratic' in its name. No one seemed bothered by it. (p. 60)

Daniel's disappointment at how easily the democratic process is corrupted foreshadows the later depiction of his disillusionment on learning more about elections for the GDR government. This occurs during a school visit to the

Volkskammer. The narrator is 14 years old. The tour guide, a member of the Liberal Party whose cynical tone is noted with surprise by the narrator, explains that the SED always make all the decisions. He asks how this is possible if they don't hold more than half the seats (i.e. at least 251). She explains that the seats held by representatives of other interest groups (*Interessenverbände*), such as the 'Bauernverband' or the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* were also members of the SED:

Therefore the SED always have at least two hundred and fifty one votes. In confusion, I interjected, 'but then it's not at all democratic'. The woman from the liberals looked at me full of pity and said nothing. The world no longer made sense to me. (p. 146)

The narrator is portrayed as being severely shaken by this discovery:

This woman had pulled the rug from under my feet. In a moment the firmly established foundation of the better society had vanished into thin air. I simultaneously felt ill and dizzy, and for a long time I no longer knew what to think. (pp. 146-47)

The moment of disillusionment is not complete at this stage, however. When he tries to ask his parents and teachers about it they say he must not have understood correctly. His feelings about it are vague: 'More and more I had the feeling that something wasn't right with our society of the better man. Only I didn't know what' (p. 147). The narrator does not resolve his worries and as will be shown further below, he only really understands the situation after the collapse of the GDR.

The above examples show how the child's perspective is constructed so as to expose the flaws and inconsistencies between ideology and reality. Despite the emphasis on the failings in the GDR system, Wiechmann's child narrator, like

Aehnlich's, also conveys just how unaware he was at the time of the extent of these failings. The following example suggests that it is possible to experience a comfortable and happy childhood, even in a repressive political system. The narrator depicts a visit to the school by an 'Arbeiterveteran', Heinz Mattuschke. Mattuschke describes overhearing his father plotting strikes and demonstrations in support of socialism when he was a child in the 1920s–30s, and says that his father worried that he would blurt something out at school (p. 87). The experience of having to conform to a different 'truth' at school to what is believed at home is represented by several of the German texts.²⁴ This is therefore a situation which could easily be transposed to the GDR period, but Wiechmann's narrator does not relate to the experience described. He comments that when he listens at the living room door, it's just to find out what his parents are watching on the TV (p. 89). He, in fact, expresses gratitude to people like Mattuschke for fighting to create a better society: 'It was thanks to the commitment of people like Heinz Mattuschke that my life was so pleasant and comfortable' (p. 89). As a child, Daniel is shown to be quite happy with his life. The narrator's perception of his own comfortable childhood while reflecting on Mattuschke's story is ironic given the extent of political repression in the GDR.

Wiechmann includes a few episodes in his narrative which allegorically represent state control, in particular through portraying the power struggles between children and adults. In one chapter, the narrator describes participating in a strike to demand to be allowed outside during after-school care (*Schulhort*). Oliver Igel argues that the 'strike' of the children to be allowed to play outside is an analogy for the GDR as a whole, evidenced by use of language and references to being walled in.²⁵ Wiechmann describes it thus:

²⁴ Examples from *Rüber machen...* and *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* have been discussed above, see pp. 161–62 and 177–78.

²⁵ Oliver Igel, *Gab es die DDR wirklich? Die Darstellung des SED-Staates in komischer Prosa zur "Wende"* (Tönning: Der Andere Verlag, 2005), p. 98.

We fought for freedom and self-determination, we fought for football. On one of our placards it said: 'We want out!' We shook the foundations of a system which surrounded us with walls [Mauern]. Even if it was only the walls [Wände] of our after-school club. (p. 68)

In this case, the narrative suggests that this kind of opposition is not effective.²⁶ The day-care assistant successfully diffuses the situation: 'The day-care assistant recognised the danger immediately and dealt with it. Action was urgently required. Our professional strike culture could certainly only have been learned by watching West German television' (p. 68). The exaggerated language throughout and the incongruous image of children, who simply want to play outside, developing a 'professional strike culture' allows this depiction of state control to be told in a humorous tone. In another chapter he expresses doubts as to the value of demonstrations intended to further the socialist cause internationally, and supports his argument with an example of how, as a child, he is unsuccessful in his attempt to 'demonstrate' for more pudding against parental authority:

As long as my parents were in power they would determine how much pudding was healthy for me. So much for the effect of demonstrations. It didn't work with my parents, who loved me, so why should it work with, of all people, the imperialists on the other side of the border, who couldn't stand us one bit? (pp. 114–15)

The suggestion is that the child is well placed to understand power hierarchies and the futility of opposing authority.

In the later chapters dealing with the *Wende* period, the narrator is far more reflective about his experiences and changing perceptions and beliefs. The feelings

²⁶ Igel, p. 98.

expressed by the narrator exemplify many of the common reactions and trends identified in academic studies of the *Wende* and discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The narration shows how his perspective on his own life changed with the *Wende* and a new way of looking at his life and experiences emerged: 'My life, and what I had striven for, was called into question by every person who turned his or her back on the GDR at that time. What had previously been right was now wrong' (p. 167). This sudden change in perspective also encompassed aspects of his daily life; his first experience of western consumer culture makes him see the conditions of his childhood and youth in a new light: 'Here in Stieglitz there was a vast amount of clothes, of fruit and vegetables, of toys, and of sparkle and shine. When I saw all these things my past suddenly looked different. We had been poor' (p. 165). The disillusionment which has been building through the text is now complete as he gains new knowledge about the system:

The truths about the GDR and the view behind the façade of this Potemkin village robbed me of my illusions. It was not Marxism-Leninism that settled all my doubts, but the newspapers and television news, which every day now were revealing why the GDR had to fail: because it was bad. (p. 167)

The truths he now learns about the GDR through the media do not portray a way of life that he recognises. Although it seems clear that he does not doubt that his childhood belief in the system was an illusion, there appears a vast difference between the portrayal of the GDR during the *Wende* and his own memories.

Wiechmann shows the complexity of looking back at the GDR, that it was difficult to accept the simplistic explanation that the GDR failed simply because it was bad. He reflects that he might easily have become part of the system as an adult. Wiechmann problematizes any simplistic categorization of perpetrator and victim. He presents the imagined scenario of a young border guard (brought up,

like the narrator, to support the system and defend his country), faced for the first time with having to shoot someone attempting to escape, and realising that he does not want to kill. The escapee also has a gun and shoots the guard for fear of his own life, not realising that the guard has decided not to shoot. The narrator comments: 'The truth is that in this story there are only two victims. Two victims of a system that placed people in a situation where they had to decide whether to kill one another' (p. 170). Wiechmann also poses the more optimistic possibility that he could have contributed to changing the GDR for the better:

Perhaps in the GDR I might also have become someone who would have put a stop to the easy lying, someone who would have contributed to turning many people's dream into reality and to finally creating a genuinely better society which lived up to its ideals instead of perverting them. Peace, joy and pancakes. Every day. (p. 172)

Wiechmann's expression of this perspective supports the interpretation that the humour in this text is directed towards criticism of the system in practice, but sympathetic towards socialist ideology in theory.

Wiechmann's text reflects the complexities and difficulties of recalling one's childhood in a repressive political system. It constructs a child's perspective which is confused by a conflict between ideals and practice, although the child does not himself perceive any serious injustice or deprivation in his everyday experience.²⁷ The sometimes humorous portrayal through juxtaposition or ironic commentary is a recurring reminder of the narrator's present, more critical, perspective on the GDR state. It also allows a critical perspective to be combined with a more sympathetic portrayal which does not make harsh judgements on the past actions of the

²⁷ Igel's analysis of the text also identifies a recurring theme of conflict between ideology as one learned it and as one experienced it, and the resulting exposure of the 'contradictions' [*Widerspruche*] of the GDR system. See Igel, in particular, p. 101–103.

protagonist. The more reflective passages towards the end of the text allow further discussion of the altered perspective already indicated by the narrative construction of the preceding chapters. These reflections offer insight into the effects of reunification for many former East Germans.

Analysis of Russian Texts by Larisa Miller, Boris Minaev, Oleg Zaionchkovskii, Pavel Sanaev and Oleg Pavlov

'Bol'shaia Polianka' (2008)

Larisa Miller's 'Bol'shaia Polianka' evokes memories of the author's childhood experience in the 1940s and 1950s.²⁸ In many passages she shows childhood experiences by apparently recreating them in narrative form, rather than by relating them with a retrospective viewpoint. She portrays events and experiences which create an impression of Soviet life, although many sections of the text do not deal directly with the topic of life in the Soviet Union. The narration reflects on the nature of childhood, the process of remembering and the passage of time, but tends not to discuss the political or ideological conditions of the time described. In terms of content, however, Miller has chosen to narrate particular events. She includes portrayal of, for example, instances of repression and the consequences of arrest; Miller's family and friends are often the target of anti-Semitic persecution. The text also conveys details of Soviet life which extend beyond her own personal experience to portray the conditions of post-war Moscow, for example, indicating food shortages (p. 16), poor living conditions (p. 53), and the scarcity of men (p. 51). Miller's text is, therefore, rich in contextual detail and likely to appeal to

²⁸ Larisa Miller, 'Bol'shaia Polianka', *Zolotaia simfoniia* (Moscow: Vremia, 2008), pp. 8–71. This selection of Miller's prose writing about her childhood comprises sections of prose which were previously published during the 1990s in literary journals and in Miller's earlier collections of prose. Unless otherwise stated, quotations are from the published English translation: Larissa Miller, 'Childhood in Post-War Moscow', in *Dim and Distant Days*, trans. by Kathleen Cook and Natalie Roy (Moscow: Glas, 2000), pp. 16–86. For quotations from this text in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 370–372.

collective memory. The text does not read as a testament to suffering, as there is no extended introspection on the effects of her experiences; unlike Kusserow, Miller does not state any intention to commemorate the past. The act of remembering itself is particularly foregrounded in this narrative. As Miller recreates past experiences in detailed descriptions appealing to all the senses, the emphasis is placed on conveying the experience (both the past experience and the experience of recollecting it), rather than analysing or judging past events. Miller's portrayal of her childhood can be characterized by an ambivalent and complex relationship to the Soviet past. The text does not present a clearly defined view of the Soviet system, but narrates a variety of experiences in which specifically Soviet features are associated with both good and bad memories. My analysis will focus on the portrayal of the effects of terror and on Miller's depiction of happy childhood memories associated with official provision of children's leisure in order to show the ambivalence of Miller's portrayal of Soviet childhood.

Arrests and the effects of terror are represented several times in the text. In Miller's early childhood memories these occur as overheard snippets of conversation whispered between adults. Here she describes her first encounter with the concept of suicide: 'The surgeon's wife had committed suicide. [...] Those were strange, incomprehensible, hermetic words, like the heavy drapes on the windows of the apartment where the ruined family lived' (pp. 27-28). The woman's suicide had been motivated by her husband's arrest, and the idea that this friendly neighbour could be a criminal is equally strange and incomprehensible to the child:

Her husband, a short fat Jew, was always in a hurry, but whenever he passed me he would crack a joke and invite me to their place. They said he was an army surgeon. [...] One day he disappeared. I heard mother whisper to someone that he had been 'put away'. I had thought that only bandits

and thieves were jailed, and hard as I tried I couldn't associate that word with him. (p. 27)

This is part of a passage in which she recollects her first experiences of people dying. The other deaths she describes hearing about are not related to the regime. State repression is, therefore, just one element in this section of the narrative which is primarily concerned with her childhood struggle to comprehend death.

In another part of the text Miller's narration conveys the impression that the above incident was not an unusual event, and that adult discussion of terror was part of the background to her early childhood, even though they tried to hide it from her: 'Grandfather didn't have much luck with his friends: many of them died young and some were discussed at home in whispers and only when they thought I was sleeping. I naturally didn't ask questions about anything I happened to overhear' (p. 35).²⁹ Miller shows that she knew as a child that such things could not be openly discussed. The following narration gives an example of what she overheard and is supplemented with information which the present-day narrator provides:

One day I caught, 'when they arrested her husband she strangled herself with her own plait.' I listened. They were talking about the wife of grandfather's friend, an old Bolshevik who, as we found out later, had been executed just before the war. (p. 35)

The narration does not elaborate on her feelings at the time. She talks about visiting the daughter of the husband and wife mentioned at their dacha. The daughter, Enichka, has long plaits, which reminds her of the whispered words she had heard. As in the first example, however, this passage is not primarily about the

²⁹ This passage does not appear in the Glas translation. Translation of this and the next two quotations are my own with page references given to the Russian edition.

effects of terror perpetrated by the regime. The focus is on her memory of the event. She explains that in her memory, the location of the dacha will always be associated with things she felt and saw that day, of which the 'frightening plaits' associated with whispers of suicide are just one element: 'When I hear Perkhushkovo-Polushkino, I always remember that incredible spring freshness, Enichka's frightening long plaits, the almost ghostly house, the melted snow, and the thin lace of ice on which it was so nice to step slowly and carefully' (p. 36). These two examples show how the text's focus is on the workings of memory, rather than presenting an evaluative view of the Soviet past.

Later in the text Miller narrates her growing awareness of anti-Semitic attacks in 1953, the year of the Doctors' Plot, when a number of Jewish doctors were accused of conspiracy to murder Stalin.³⁰ At this point state-sanctioned persecution is no longer something she just hears about but something she begins to experience first-hand. She describes how she particularly feared for her grandfather at this time, making specific reference to the Doctors' plot (Delo vrachei). She witnesses her grandfather receiving anti-Semitic, verbal abuse, and describes her memory of it: 'I remember how terrified I was because, not having seen a single pogrom or even heard of one at my age, I clearly imagined the universal hatred of the people around us and their readiness to attack' (p. 63). The narrative focusses on her emotions at the time and conveys the fear and real danger faced by her family. Miller demonstrates that she is treated differently in school at this time.³¹ She is the only Jewish member of her class, and knows that the others have agreed to beat her up:

³⁰ For more on the Doctors' Plot see, for example, Jonathan Brent and Vladimir Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot against the Jewish Doctors, 1948-1953* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

³¹ A similar portrayal of the effect of the Doctors' plot on a young Jewish girl can be found in: Liudmila Ulitskaia, 'Vtorogo marta togo zhe goda', *Devochki* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2004), pp. 116-46.

The girls formed a circle around me and started throwing me from one to another like a ball, giving me no chance to catch my breath. I didn't feel much pain or fear, only a numb resignation – and amazement that this was happening to me. (p. 59)

The narrative is explicit in stating that this particular phase of persecution finished with Stalin's death, thus connecting the frightening childhood experiences directly to the regime:

When Stalin died the persecution stopped. One early morning we heard a wild knocking on the door, my stepfather went to open up, his eyes wide with fright. Our big, fat neighbour, half-dressed, burst in and embraced him. 'The doctors've been acquitted! Not guilty!' he repeated again and again, squeezing my step-father. 'We're saved, my dear! Can you believe it!' (p. 59)

This chapter contains one of the few examples in the Russian texts where any aspect of the state, in this case Stalin, is clearly identified as a cause of difficulties in people's lives. Yet Miller shows that the attitude of her grandfather towards the leader is not so straightforward. At the time of Stalin's death, Miller's grandfather is confined to bed after a heart attack, but he is determined to stand when he hears about Stalin's death: 'he wrenched himself up and stood at attention, groaning as he held onto the back of a chair. No one dared argue with him' (pp. 59–60). Miller explains her confusion at her grandfather's reaction which is inconsistent with his previous criticisms of the leader:

'Why?' I asked myself. Why was Grandfather so shaken? A veteran member of the Bund (the Jewish Workers Union), he had been very critical of Stalin. He had even called him the source of all the Jews' sufferings. So why was

Stalin's death such a misfortune? There he stood, slightly swaying, tears rolling down his cheeks. (p. 60)

Her grandfather's actions could be interpreted as an indication of the effects of propaganda, and of Stalin's significance having been leader for more than 25 years through times of profound change, and most importantly the war. There is, however, no suggestion from the adult narrative voice which might explain her grandfather's actions and nothing in the text to guide the reader's interpretation. A similarly ambivalent attitude among the older generation towards Stalin and his rule is conveyed in Gorokhova's memoir and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Despite the frequent references to and portrayal of terror, Miller also portrays many happy childhood memories. In one particular chapter Miller describes some of the New Year entertainments she used to attend each year. These are remembered with great affection and her childhood excitement about these events is made clear. This chapter offers a very different view of the Soviet past by associating happy memories with events which contributed to children's ideological upbringing. For example, the description of a ticket to a festive celebration at the Central Club of Artists includes reference to Stalin's image:

One day I went out with my finest ticket of all, to a concert at the Central Club of Artists. It was a trick ticket. When you opened it, out popped a big bushy fir tree decorated with streamers, tiny animals and Grandfather Frost in a sledge with the Snow Maiden. Presiding over all this in the star-spangled heavens was Stalin's face. (p. 68)

When Miller remembers the poems she could recite at such occasions, reference is made to the idea of the Soviet Union as a country of happiness and Stalin's role as 'father' of the nation. As a child she seems eager to show her knowledge and this

scene is described without any retrospective comment on the content of these poems:

[A]t last Grandfather Frost asked: 'Who's going to recite us a poem?' Me, of course. I knew so many poems I could go on reciting till the cows came home. So out I went and began: 'Little Moscow girls have two pigtails, little Uzbek girls have twenty-two...' or 'We children live in a happy land and a happier land there cannot be...' or 'At this late hour Stalin is thinking of us all...' (p. 70)

Given the approach of Miller's text it seems that this apparently contradictory association of Stalin with positive memories is reflecting the way she remembers her childhood, rather than letting subsequent knowledge or beliefs change her representation of 'how it was'.

Miller, like several of the German authors discussed, conveys the excitement and pride she felt on joining the Young Pioneers:

The next day we had a Young Pioneer assembly in class. I had joined the Young Pioneers only recently and was made a team leader. I was in seventh heaven and every now and then stroked the new stripe on my uniform sleeve. (p. 66)

Her portrayal does not give any attention to the ideological content of the organisation. Nor does she highlight hypocritical or unfair practices as Aehnlich and Wiechmann do. In Miller's portrayal this episode serves only as a background for narrating a friend's betrayal. In contrast to this portrayal of her childhood perception of the Pioneers, she describes Pioneer activity in another part of the text in a less personal way. This time it is part of the description of a spring day scene:

In the middle of the yard stood a group of Young Pioneers their scratch-pads poised. They promptly and cheerfully took down the names of the children whom they caught going to church, so as to denounce them to their teacher. That was their Young Pioneer assignment for Easter. (pp. 29–30)

This description demonstrates how children were encouraged to be complicit in ideological control, but Miller describes the scene simply, without indicating any judgement.

There is some explicit criticism of the system in Miller's portrayal of the fate of the craftspeople of Moscow. In this particular passage, Miller remembers the cobbler, dressmaker, clockmaker and others, whose expertise was essential in the 1950s: "Tsar, tsarevich, king, prince, cobbler, tailor, who are you?" we used to chant in my childhood that was spent in post-war Moscow, a chaotic but surprisingly cosy city, because of ordinary people living their everyday lives' (p. 25). She acknowledges that she was too young to appreciate their work at the time, but describes her encounters with them in vivid terms which capture her childhood fascination with them. One of the few occasions where Miller directly describes state ideology in negative terms, is in describing the attitude to these people: 'Each of them was a holdover of the "accursed past", a relic who had miraculously preserved his or her noble qualities despite countless actions by the state designed to obliterate the individual' (pp. 25–26). She goes on to comment that such trades do not exist at all in the present, but she emphasizes that her intention is not to be critical of the present, but simply to enjoy remembering something which is now lost:

No, I don't want to pull the present to pieces – a tedious and pointless occupation. It's just that living in a desert and feeling a natural thirst, I try

to quench it the only way I can, by kneeling down at the old, long-exhausted springs. (p. 26)

Thus the focus is on her pleasure in remembering the craftspeople, rather than on the state ideology which considered them enemies. The narrative construction and tone throughout 'Bol'shaia Polianka' affirms this approach and the intention to recreate memories largely for their own sake, rather than for critical or analytical purposes.

Miller appears to recreate her childhood impressions and experiences as she remembers them with only occasional reflection or comment explicitly from an adult perspective. These reflections are more often on the nature of childhood or remembering than on the Soviet past itself. Whereas the German texts often seem to distil the experience of East German childhood into identifiable themes or aspects, Miller is not representing a coherent narrative of the past which promotes a particular perspective on the Soviet past. Instead she depicts many moments within that past, representing a wide range of Soviet experiences. The texts on childhood collected in *Zolotaia simfoniia* were not all originally published together and this may be a significant factor, but the effect in this publication is to convey multiple and complex ways of remembering the past.

Detstvo Levy (2001)

Boris Minaev's *Detstvo Levy* provides an affectionate and sometimes nostalgic portrayal of childhood in Soviet Russia in the 1960s.³² It is a personal account, tending to focus on the child's adventures at home with his family and in leisure time with his friends, which means that there is little portrayal of Soviet education. The Soviet context is significant in some chapters which deal with specific aspects and attitudes of the past, but much of the text explores more general childhood

³² Boris Minaev, *Detstvo Levy* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2001). For quotations from this text in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 372–74.

experiences of increasing independence and family relations. The text mainly keeps to the child's perspective, but there are sometimes comments, reflections and explanations from the adult voice of the narrator. As this text is intended partly for young readers, these explanations sometimes seem to be designed for them. What seems significant is that these explanations never seem to clarify the author's current position on the Soviet past and its ideology or to give the young readers information about failings in the system which are only hinted at or dealt with in ambiguous terms in the text.³³

In *Detstvo Levy* there is no depiction of school and very little portrayal of organised leisure. The Pioneers are referred to a few times, but Leva is never represented as engaging in Young Pioneer activities. Although the narrative avoids representing the dissemination of Soviet values and political ideology, some effects of ideological influences do emerge in Leva's activities, thoughts, and in his conversations with friends. My analysis of the text will show how, despite avoiding any portrayal of children's ideological education, Leva is shown to be heavily influenced by patriotic, military and heroic ideals. I will then consider the ways in which the text broaches the topic of the Soviet period, showing Leva's positive view and the alternative perspective of his friends. Finally I will consider the portrayal of the family and the narrator's ambiguous retrospective view of his uncle having been arrested and sentenced to a camp for 'work on the side'.

Leva is represented as very patriotic and has great enthusiasm for life in the Soviet Union as he experiences it: 'In general I loved our homeland, our army, our people, the capital city of our homeland, the Krasnopresnenskii district in the capital city of our homeland, our Bol'shevitskaia Street [...] For some reason I was just built that way' (p. 158). He does not question the source of his patriotic

³³ An example of a children's book which is a more explicit attempt to tell Russian children about the Soviet past is Natal'ia Nusinova, *Priklucheniia Dzherika* (Moscow: Samokat, 2009).

feelings and sees it simply as part of who he is. At several points in the text it is shown or commented upon that he gets particularly offended if people are critical of anything that could be considered 'ours'. One example which is particularly striking in contrast to many of the other texts, both Russian and German, is that Leva is loyal to Soviet products and favours them over Western goods. The following quotation shows his defence of Soviet production when he hears the adults admiring foreign goods:

[I]f the grown-ups were talking about some foreign tat, which someone had by a miracle managed to get hold of, buy, deliver and so on:

- Is it French?

- No, German.

- Look how well made it is? They really have the skills, don't they? - I would immediately lean out of my room and say in a disapproving voice:

- We have the skills too. We don't need it, mama.

And everyone would start to laugh. (p. 189)

The narrative does imply that his opinion is naive, however, by the fact that the adults find this amusing. In another example earlier in the text he is allowed to choose a toy and decides against the western product, preferring the Soviet-made cuddly toys, even though he is aware his mother would like to show off the more exotic and luxurious choice. (p. 22)

Another effect of Soviet upbringing is portrayed in Leva's fascination with war games, demonstrating the militarization of young people in the Soviet Union and the prominence of the cult of the Great Patriotic War (the term used in the Soviet Union, and today in Russia, to describe Soviet involvement in the Second

World War).³⁴ The narration of these events often hints at a feeling of unease with this combination of childhood and violence. Leva is depicted at a very young age playing war games with his cuddly toys:

Elephant and Hare hid behind the chair, lying in ambush. They were laying mines on the railways and taking prisoners. In short, it was a real cuddly toy war.

Everyone was shooting. And they charged.

I remember the brutal counter-intelligence agents, Cat and Dog, torturing the old commander, Teddy. They beat him up with their rigid, unbending paws, and I watched with delight, as, with a wooden thud, he banged his sawdust-filled head against the polished arm of the sofa, and mournfully gave a short moan:

– O-o-o-oh! (p. 23)

Leva is only six or seven years old at this point in the narrative, but he is shown to be aware of the concepts of torture and counter-espionage. The adult perspective of the narrator emerges at the end of this chapter as he questions why he chose to treat his toys so badly, why he did not instead enact hospital or school scenes, but no indication is made of the possible reasons why (p. 24). The purposeful militarization of children in the GDR is indicated in some of the German texts by references to military subjects of songs and activities in nursery or early years of school, but the effects on children's behaviour and psychology are not explored.³⁵

Related to the theme of militarism is the prevalence of young heroes presented to Soviet children as role models to look up to. Leva's favourite Pioneer hero is Marat Kazei, who was only fourteen years old when he died whilst fighting

³⁴ In addition to the example given here, there is also depiction of Leva and friends play-acting scenes of torture and killing in the roles of German soldiers vs. Soviet partisans, see Minaev, p. 144.

³⁵ See, for example, Wiechmann, p. 13, and Rusch, p. 23.

for the Belorussian partisan movement during the Second World War.³⁶ The narrator describes his imaginings of Kazei's heroic act:

Then I saw Marat Kazei, my favourite pioneer hero with his PPSH sub-machine gun against his bare chest. I saw the Gestapo officers take Marat Kazei prisoner and begin to torture him – painfully pinching, twisting his ears, wrenching his fingers... Then they started doing things to him that I could no longer stand and I tightly closed my eyes to my imagined vision.
(p. 205)

Here, as in the above example of the influence of militarism, the narrator seems to express mixed feelings about the brutality involved. The narration of Leva's games and imaginings of torture only refer to the torture of Soviet citizens at the hands of German forces during the Second World War, yet a Russian reader may also be prompted to think of the torture of Soviet citizens at the hands of the Soviet state itself, something which Leva, as a child, would have had little if any awareness of.

Another young hero mentioned in the text is Pavlik Morozov, a Young Pioneer who denounced his father to the authorities and was later murdered in 1932.³⁷ The adult narrating voice explains that as a child he only had a vague understanding of Morozov's story because the adults appeared unwilling to explain it:

I knew almost nothing about Pavlik Morozov at that time. Both at home and at school they somehow seemed ashamed to tell the details of his heroic act,

³⁶ Jeanne Vronskaya with Vladimir Chuguev, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Soviet Union, 1917–1988* (London: K.G. Saur, 1989), p. 127. Vronskaya reports a slightly different version of events to Leva's imaginings, stating that Kazei killed himself with a grenade to avoid capture by the Nazis.

³⁷ For a detailed account of the variations on Pavlik's heroic narrative promoted throughout the Soviet period, see Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero* (London: Granta, 2005).

although what is there to be ashamed of – there are such fathers who, whether you want to or not, you will run off to report. (p. 95)

He goes on to add: 'For that reason Pavlik was for me simply a Pioneer hero who was killed by enemies' (p. 95). The implication that Morozov's denunciation of his father may have been justified is striking, as is the author's decision to deviate from the child's perspective in order to add more information about Morozov's story and yet not raise any question or make any comment about a system in which a child might be encouraged to betray a family member for the 'greater good'.

Leva's patriotism and optimistic outlook is the cause of disagreements between him and his best friend, Kolupaev. The portrayal of their discussions develops to allow representation of critical attitudes to the system. Leva justifies his ideas about why the time and place in which he is living is so good, and getting better, by referring to Soviet achievements described in newspapers, events in his family and local life, and most importantly how he feels:

What was our time made up of? Concerts, Olympiads, World and European Championships in football, film festivals, international summits, space flights... But that's how it is according to the newspapers.

Aside from the newspapers' version, it's also not bad – they opened a new fabric shop nearby, practically on our street, Mama was sent on a business trip to the GDR, Papa was offered a holiday in Crimea, but he, incidentally, even turned it down!...

Overall, however, facts had nothing to do with it. If a person himself doesn't feel, doesn't understand, doesn't value the kind of time in which he is living – facts will not prove anything at all to him. And indeed for me it wasn't the facts that were important but the feelings. (p. 206)

Leva believes that the world around him is great and getting better: 'The world around was developing dynamically and joyfully buzzing' (p. 206). Kolupaev, on the other hand is not impressed. When Leva suggests developments and achievements, such as space travel, television and families having their own flats, which his friend must surely approve of, Kolupaev is still unenthusiastic. According to Kolupaev, space travel is no good because he cannot smoke there, his mother says it was better living in a *kommunalka*, and television is no good because Brezhnev and the news is the only thing to watch. Kolupaev wants something good for himself: 'It's not about television, space travel or flats! I don't need your time! I am my own time! I want something for myself, not for the time I'm living in!' (p. 207). Kolupaev rejects the collective sense of Soviet achievement as it is irrelevant to his own life.

The disagreement deepens into a discussion and exploration which one might imagine leading to a moment of disillusionment or at least a sense of doubt. Contrary to expectation, as will be shown by the following analysis, the effect on Leva is far from clear, and Minaev does not bring in a retrospective, narrative voice to clarify or reflect on Leva's experience. Leva, Kolupaev and two other friends, Zhenia and Suren, go for a walk. Kolupaev shows them a building which scares them. It is a huge, eight-storey building with the date 1936 on it. They go inside:

He threw open the nearby door and suddenly we saw something that I will never forget. [...]

Out into the distance stretched an unbelievable, gigantic corridor, doors stood open, one after the other, all along each side.

– A corridor system, Leva! – said Kolupaev, turning specifically to me. – There's your time, Leva! Look! Do you see what kind of time it is? (pp. 208–209)

Leva is shocked by this extreme version of communal living which is reminiscent of a prison. He calls the corridor a 'street with no name', and he is most disturbed by the fact that no-one there asked him who he was. Kolupaev explains that it is referred to as a 'tuberculosis house', but he has lived in such a place and there weren't any people with tuberculosis there (p. 209).

They move on to talk about various conspiracies, including the building of a secret metro system, and rumours that Beria had been planning to sell the Soviet Union to the Americans. Leva objects to these stories, but it is clear that he is the only one among these four children who does:

– But when they arrested Beria, they found a whole storehouse of gold, – Zhen'ka said, again in a deathly-quiet voice. [...]

Now it was my turn, but I didn't know what to say.

– That's enough, isn't it? – I asked plaintively. – Who needs these stories of yours?

– What do you mean, stories? – Zhen'ka quietly retorted. – It isn't a story. That's what you told us: about our time, about space, about flats. But we're telling you the truth, how it is. (p. 210)

Minaev does not make it clear how exactly the dispute was resolved, although he has introduced this part of the story by saying: 'In short, we never managed to settle our argument, until one day we found ourselves in a certain strange place' (p. 207). It could be interpreted that Leva finally understands that there is more than one way of experiencing life at that time. The chapter ends with them looking over Moscow:

– There it is, our capital, – said Kolupaev, with a sweet sigh. From above it's beautiful. But inside?

The gloomy building behind us suddenly fell quiet and the muffled clattering of saucepans and the distant babbling of women's voices ceased. It was completely silent.

And I understood everything about our time. (p. 211)

Considering Leva's strong patriotic feelings, this change in perspective would be expected to have a profound effect, as, for example, expressed in Wiechmann's *Immer Bereit!*. The narration does not explain what it was that Leva now understood and no further reference is made to this episode at any other point in the text; the reader is left to his or her own interpretation.

Finally, I want to consider the portrayal of Leva's attitude to his uncle having served time in a prison camp. For a long time, the child's knowledge about this is vague, but he finally persuades his mother to explain. Her response indicates her belief that the punishment was excessive for the crime (participation in unofficial work producing goods for private sale):

– Well of course he was guilty... A grown man should have understood how it would all end. But, you know, to be imprisoned for five years – for being good with his hands... That... That could only happen here. A fine, ok. Or at most a suspended sentence of a year. But five years... What a nightmare!
(p. 79)

Her comment that this 'could only happen here' suggests criticism of the Soviet system. The text also indicates that the facts had long been hidden from Leva, suggesting, as in Miller's portrayal, that arrests and repression were not willingly discussed with children. The narrator offers some further explanation:

As far as I understand, Uncle Iura simply loved money in his youth. In the grand scheme of things, that's not really a shortcoming. But... Uncle Iura was born a little too early. With such hands and with such an innate love of life he needed to be born much later. However, at the time we are talking about, I was not yet able to comprehend Uncle Iura's life with the benefit of hindsight.

At the time we are talking about, I sternly told myself that I would do everything possible to stop the police from entering our house, our yard, our street or from finding any trace of Uncle Iura. (p. 79)

The narrator's opinion of Uncle Iura's imprisonment is ambiguous. As a child, the narrator wishes to protect his uncle from the police, and also states that his uncle is not a criminal as far as his family is concerned (p. 79). By saying that his uncle should have been born later, the adult narrator's voice suggests that his uncle was not suited to living under Soviet rule. Positing the timing of the uncle's birth as incorrect, rather than the system itself, seems to suggest a view of the Soviet system as inevitable, as something which, even in retrospect, could not be opposed. The inclusion of the retrospective point of view of the adult narrator is not used in this scene to make any comment about state ideology and control. This provides a stark contrast to Rusch's anger at the East German system for its effect on individuals' lives, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Although the Soviet context is not a prominent theme throughout the text, the narration of Leva's actions and thoughts portrays a boy who in many respects appears to be a product of the influences and ideals of his time. The construction of the narrative does not provide any in-depth exploration or questioning of the Soviet system and its effects on children's everyday lives, yet the author has not avoided the inclusion of difficult subjects altogether and shows through the opinions of Leva's friend, Kolupaev, that Leva's impression of the society in which he lives is

not necessarily complete or correct. The text offers an ambiguous, and arguably sometimes nostalgic, portrayal of Soviet childhood experience.

***Petrovich* (2005)**

Oleg Zaionchkovskii's novel, *Petrovich*, portrays a variety of experiences from the protagonist's childhood and youth in the 1970s.³⁸ Some of the experiences portrayed suggest a critical perspective on the Soviet past. This is expressed in a variety of ways, sometimes through the voice of the omniscient narrator, and at other times it is the thoughts, words or actions of the characters which express dissatisfaction or disengagement with aspects of the Soviet system. This is just one theme within the text however, and much of the narrative does not explicitly depict or comment on the specific nature of the Soviet Union. Throughout the following analysis I will show how the Soviet system and its effects on individual lives are part of the background of the text, rather than providing the main focus for the narrative and its development (as the East German setting arguably does in Wiechmann, for example.) I will first show how the narrator's voice, external to the world of the text, comments on the Soviet past. I will then show two other areas in which the text explores aspects of the Soviet context: firstly, the depiction of the protagonist's experience of Soviet education, and secondly, the prominence of Soviet history and the story of the protagonist's grandfather, Genrikh.

In using an extra-diegetic narrator (i.e. a narrator who is not a character in the world of the story) to comment on or describe a scene in a particular way Zaionchkovskii's text is able to express a critical perspective with an apparently authoritative voice, rather than opinions expressed by a character or autobiographical narrator whose subjective position might be more obviously questioned. The novel both begins and ends with descriptions of the early morning

³⁸ Oleg Zaionchkovskii, *Petrovich: Roman o zhivoi russkoi dushe* (Moscow: OGI, 2005). For quotations from this text in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 374–76.

and comments on the daily broadcast of the Soviet anthem. The narrator's tone indicates that this text will not offer a favourable depiction of the Soviet past:

Oh, how many enemies the foolish old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics earned for itself with that daily morning broadcast of the national anthem. How many warm, naked bodies, entwined in their own, supremely tender unions, shuddered in their beds at those initial peals of thunder proclaiming that greater 'inviolable union' and all the rest of it...³⁹

The narrator's choice of words is clearly critical of this intrusion by the state into the private space of individuals. The novel's final chapter concerns the adult life of the protagonist and it will, therefore, not be discussed in detail here. The repetition of the criticism in the final paragraph of the text is worth noting, however, as it reinforces the theme, which will recur throughout the following analysis, of conflict between the personal or individual and the official realm of the state:

Oh, how many enemies the foolish old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics earned for itself with that daily morning broadcast of the national anthem. How many warm, naked bodies, entwined in their own, supremely tender unions, shuddered in their beds at those initial peals of thunder ... And only Petrovich and Veronika slept so soundly this morning that they didn't hear anything. (p. 284)⁴⁰

That the (now adult) protagonist and his childhood sweetheart, Veronika, sleep through the broadcast seems to suggest a small victory over the system.

³⁹ Oleg Zaionchkovsky, 'Pushed Too Far: Extract from the Novel *Petrovich*', trans. by Andrew Bromfield, in *Ties of Blood: Russian Literature from the 21st Century*, [*Rossica*, Vol 18] (London: Academia Rossica, [2008]), pp. 22–26 (p. 22). Where specified below, translations are Andrew Bromfield's. Otherwise translations are my own with references to the Russian edition.

⁴⁰ As the first part of this quotation from the end of the novel uses the same words as in the opening of the first chapter, I have used Andrew Bromfield's translation for the first two sentences. The page reference given is to the Russian edition.

There are two other notable examples of the narrator expressing a critical or subversive comment about the Soviet Union. In one chapter, the protagonist and his father are walking in a park. The narrator's description of a defiled statue representing a Young Pioneer suggests a resemblance to the park drunks: 'This pioneer, which had been defiled many times by jackdaws, stood with the stump of a horn in his mouth in the pose of a drunk sucking on the neck of a bottle' (p. 41). This is just one element of the scene, which is otherwise not dependent on the Soviet setting. Moreover, no other opinions on the Pioneers or the state of this statue are expressed by the narrator or characters portrayed, but even just the inclusion of this image, without any discussion, subverts the heroic and celebratory image which such statues were designed to convey.

A final example of the use of the narrator's voice to convey criticism of the Soviet past is in a description of celebrations for the anniversary of the Revolution. Here the external narrator's voice is able to express a different perspective to the characters portrayed:

The Soviet authorities were celebrating another of their anniversaries – emanating endless self-satisfaction as usual, and with no regard for the circumstances of those under their care. True, this time, the first time in many years, Genrikh didn't go to the demonstration, for the passage of time had broken up the small column of the Union of Industrial Mechanization which he usually headed. But he watched the military parade on television and even discussed with Petia some of the new models of missiles passing across Red Square. (p. 175)

Although the narrator comments that such events are usually self-congratulatory, irrespective of the real situation of Soviet citizens' lives, this description mainly functions in order to highlight a consequence of Genrikh's recent, forced retirement.

Unlike in some of the German texts, this passage does not introduce the topic of parades and patriotic celebrations in order to explore Soviet life and culture in its own right.

The child protagonist's reluctance to participate in institutional life is one way in which this text indirectly questions the values of the Soviet system. Here the external narrator's descriptions and the reported thoughts and actions of Petrovich combine to present an oppressive image of both nursery and school. This is never explicitly critical of the Soviet state, but these institutions are portrayed as threatening and overbearing against personal freedoms and individualism. Petrovich is portrayed as unhappy at nursery school; the narrator describes his arrival there like being swallowed by a whale: 'The nursery school enveloped him in its incessant, nauseating eddy and swirl. It breathed on Petrovich with its damp stale breath, like some greasy whale preparing to gulp him down without even bothering to chew.'⁴¹ Petrovich is shown to dislike group activity; he avoids the other children, preferring to sit alone and draw, but this chance to be alone is soon interrupted: 'But even this highly relative solitude was no less fragile than the lead in a pencil.'⁴² When the protagonist feels tormented by one of the other children and hits her, the narrator reports the thoughts of the teacher, who has judged Petrovich's unwillingness to participate in collective activity as a sign of his poor character:

She was an experienced nursery teacher, and this was not the first day she had been expecting Petrovich to finally show his true face. She didn't trust his scowling civility; intuition told her that nobody who rejected round-dances and group ball games could possibly be pure in heart ... And now look, it had happened! With a feeling of pedagogical gratification, Tatyana Ivanovna clasped Petrovich's ear between her cold finger and thumb and

⁴¹ 'Pushed Too Far: Extract from the Novel *Petrovich*', p. 23.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

dragged him off, like a she-wolf dragging a ground-squirrel, into her sour-smelling nursery school lair.⁴³

The language used to describe Petrovich revealing his true self ('pokhazhet istinnoe svoe litso') is reminiscent of the language of state terror which exhorted Soviet citizen to 'unmask' enemies of the people. The unsympathetic portrayal of the teacher and the emphasis throughout the chapter on Petrovich's unhappiness at nursery school presents the protagonist as a victim of the narrow ideology of state education. As a critical portrayal of ideological upbringing, however, Zaionchkovskii's portrayal is more subtle than examples in both the German and Russian émigré texts.

Later in the text, the description of the effect school has on children supports the argument that the narrator sees these institutions as a threat to individuality:

Every morning boys and girls came here with their own supply of familial and class particularities in their manners, clothing and hairstyles, but already after midday break there was hardly anything to distinguish Eitingen from Gotalimov, or Epifanova from Emel'ianova (however, the last two had different bows in their hair). Like ingredients cooked in a single broth acquire a common flavour and are then referred to as soup, so the school pupils towards the end of the day's lessons had, it seemed, a single taste and smell and looked at times to be so overcooked that they had practically dissolved. (p. 192)

This criticism may not be particular to Soviet schooling, but a reference to a bust of Lenin, on a pedestal draped in red calico, in the school corridor serves as a

⁴³ Ibid., p. 25.

reminder of the Soviet context and the ideological content of school education (p. 191). Petrovich is shown to resist this effect when he states his unwillingness to take part in the annual school parade:

The class teacher [...] announced that instead of her lesson, practice for the annual parade of marching and singing had been arranged. This event was hated deeply by Petrovich, – to march whilst all singing some cheerful nonsense, – what could be more stupid... and humiliating. A year had passed since the last parade; Petrovich was a year older. He firmly decided that this time he would refuse to take part in the collective clowning whatever the consequences. (p. 215)

Petrovich's opposition to the parade is not explained by any ideological beliefs, but his refusal to take part in the 'collective clowning' can be interpreted as a preference to not take part in a mass activity which has no meaning for him. In the context of a narrative set in the Soviet Union this choice cannot be considered neutral with respect to the state ideology. Despite the significance of Petrovich's actions for the representation of Soviet life, the function of this scene in terms of the plot is not to portray the absurdities of mass displays of support for the Soviet Union. The alternative offered by the teacher to Petrovich, that he can instead be on cleaning duty, is what makes possible his next meeting with Veronika, the girl he is in love with. This illustrates that Petrovich's disengagement from state ideology provides part of the background to the story and contributes to the portrayal of his character, rather than being a central subject of the narrative.

In the chapter, 'Genrikh', the primary focus is the life of Petrovich's grandfather. This is mostly through the depiction of Genrikh showing old photographs and telling stories to Petrovich, although the external narrator provides some more detailed information to the reader, aside from the interaction

between grandfather and grandson. The inclusion of this historical context and family background means the scope of the narrative is widened, so that the narrator is able to depict not only Petrovich's childhood in the late Soviet period, but also to give some impression of how older family members had been affected by historical events. The experiences of previous generations, particularly in relation to the Second World War and instances of terror, are significant elements in several of the Russian texts.⁴⁴ In Zaionchkovskii's text, the emphasis is on the Genrikh's remarkable achievement of having survived:

But how was it possible: to not die of cholera in the Civil War, to not be shot in the cellars of the NKVD, to survive the Battle of Stalingrad, to head the Union of Industrial Mechanization and to not succumb to senility in his later years? (p. 160)

Although there is no extended discussion of terror, it is stated, in a matter of fact way, that Genrikh admitted the fear it provoked:

By his own admission Genrikh feared only two real dangers in life: being shot by the NKVD and, strangely enough... becoming senile in his old age. Of these threats (by the way, mutually exclusive) he had happily escaped the first: his services to the military in the Second World War allowed him to become a member of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and the post-Stalin liberalization and the relaxation of the class struggle made his White Guard background irrelevant. (p. 159)

Later in the chapter Genrikh's friends Tereshchenko and Valia arrive, and a discussion ensues in which Genrikh reflects on the course his life has taken. Valia toasts the newly retired Genrikh, and comments on his life:

⁴⁴ Relevant examples from the texts by Sanaev and Gorokhova will be discussed further below. It is also a recurring theme in Miller's writing.

- You must be proud, Genrikh! – said Uncle Valia. – Such a biography... – He turned to Petrovich: – And you be proud of him... You know that his father was a member of the White Guard?
- I know, – Petrovich nodded.
- Well then... And he is a communist. He made himself into a communist by his own efforts. (p. 184)

Genrikh does not agree with Valia's description, stating: 'I didn't make myself into anything. I'm simply a product of my time' (p. 185). He appears to define himself not by his ideology, but by his adaptation to the context in which he found himself. He emphasizes his own lack of agency in his own fate: 'Biography is a matter of chance' (p. 185). Genrikh illustrates his point with a story, which he asks Petrovich, in particular to pay attention to. He reveals that his father had wanted to take him away to the West when he was a child, but his grandmother had prevented it. He points out that if his father had succeeded, he would now be a very different person: 'I wouldn't have sat with you in the same trench and wouldn't be drinking vodka here now – that's what I'm saying. Perhaps I'd have become a police officer, dispersing workers' demonstrations' (p. 187). This scene has a similar function to Wiechmann's reflection on what kind of East German citizen he would have become if the *Wende* had not occurred. The suggestion is that who you are and what you stand for is dependent on the context, on the circumstances and type of society in which you live; in the narrative Petrovich is encouraged to understand this. Genrikh's perspective on his own past and identity suggests a reason for the ambivalence with which many look back on the socialist past, as whatever their judgements on the ideology or crimes of the state, it is not easy to separate that from the events of one's personal life and the person one has become.

Through the narrator's comments, the protagonist's experience of education and his grandfather's reflections on the past, Zaionchkovskii's novel questions the

Soviet system and its effects on individuals' lives more prominently than the other Russian texts discussed here. In Chapter 4 on the reception of the texts, I will show, however, that this aspect is not explored in detail by the critics and is, in fact, heavily criticised in one review. It should be noted that the novel is also concerned with many other experiences of childhood which are not related to the Soviet system.

Pokhoronite menia za plintusom (1996)

Pavel Sanaev's loosely autobiographical novel, *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom*, set in Moscow in the 1970s, is primarily concerned with portraying the relationship between the child narrator/protagonist, Sasha Savel'ev, and his grandparents and mother.⁴⁵ The Soviet context is not foregrounded but provides a real and identifiable setting for the story, and as such the novel can indirectly convey something of the nature of Soviet childhood. The specifically Soviet context is directly important for the plot and character development in just one aspect: the biggest impact on Sasha's childhood experience is the state of mind of his grandmother, and it emerges during the narrative that her sometimes extreme and paranoid behaviour may be the result of traumatic experience during the war and her fear of being arrested or interrogated by state security as a young mother. The narrative perspective is mostly confined to that of the child, Sasha, with occasional digressions portraying the grandmother's or grandfather's conversations with friends. There is no indication of a post-Soviet perspective within the narrative. The following analysis will first demonstrate the text's portrayal of Soviet Russia as part of the backdrop to the main story. Secondly, I will show how the legacy of war and political repression in the past of the older generation is an important aspect of this text's representation of childhood in the late Soviet period.

⁴⁵ Pavel Sanaev, *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom* (Moscow: Astrel', 2008). For quotations from this text in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 376–77.

In contrast to the German texts which evoke life in the GDR in order to explore the East German past and identity, I would argue that Sanaev's narrative uses the Soviet context primarily as a setting or backdrop for his story, rather than as part of its subject. The experiences of the narrator and the development of the plot depend very little on the Soviet context, except for the experiences which have shaped his grandmother's behaviour. Here I will provide some examples to show how the setting of the text is identifiably Soviet. There are some references which indicate the lack of consumer products available and the 'second economy' which relied on informal networks to obtain goods and services. For example, Sasha's tights (*kolgotki*) are described as: 'expensive and impossible to get hold of' (p. 9). The narrator also describes the contents of the kitchen, explaining that there is a fridge just for products to give to the various medical professionals who treat him:

Grandmother gave the good sweets and caviar to the homeopaths and professors; the not so good sweets and canned food like salmon – to the consultants at the polyclinic; chocolates and sprats – to the on-duty doctors and lab assistants who took my blood for testing. (p. 51)

The text also demonstrates the superior status of western brands through Sasha's response to his grandfather bringing a cassette player home from a trip abroad:

I will listen to the 'Beatles', [...] I'll listen to the hoarse voice of Vysotsky, I'll put the cassette player by the wide-open window, like Bor'ka did, but I'll be much better than all of them, because they have 'Elektronika' and I have a 'Philips'. (p. 213)

The text makes a few references to popular culture. One example is the narrator's reference to Cheburashka, a character from children's cartoons of the 1970s and 1980s. Sasha is visiting a homeopath and when the homeopath comments on how

thin Sasha is, he is offended and replies by commenting on the size of the homeopath's ears. The child narrator explains his comment to the reader: '– And why do you have such big ears? – I asked, feeling offended and pointing at the homeopath's ears which really did make him look like an elderly Cheburashka' (p. 63).

There is no depiction of school in the text. Sasha is portrayed as a sickly child who rarely attends school. There is some portrayal of the protagonist catching up on school work at home. His grandmother gets the exercises by phoning a friend whose daughter is in Sasha's class. The scene shows her dictating sentences which Sasha has to write out. The content of the dictation includes references to Communism and the Young Pioneers. "Uncle Vania is a communist". [...] "The Pioneers walked in orderly lines..." Then... "Uncle Iasha loaded the rifle..." (p. 38). The only other reference to Pioneers in the text is when Grandmother is scolding him for bad behaviour.⁴⁶ She seems to refer to joining the Pioneers as a threat and a consequence of his need for discipline, rather than something he might want to do, as it is portrayed in several of the other texts, both German and Russian. 'Well, I'll send you to join the Pioneers then!' (p. 33). The Pioneers, therefore, are not presented as a particularly prominent or positive part of Sasha's childhood. It should be noted that the photograph which appears on the front cover of the novel is of a boy wearing a Soviet badge.⁴⁷ The badge is a star shape, possibly the badge worn by 'Octobrists', the party organization for young children before they entered the Pioneers. Among the German texts the presence of anything which identifies the context as East German tends to indicate that the narrative is particularly focussed on the GDR. In this case it seems to be a marker of time period and setting, and does not signal that the text is particularly concerned with the past ideology or political system.

⁴⁶ There are additional references to the Pioneers in previously unpublished chapters included in a special edition of the text which was published in 2010; Sasha himself is still not portrayed as involved in Pioneer activities.

⁴⁷ The photo has been used on most editions of the novel published to date.

Although there is little depiction of Sasha's contact with ideology, his narrative perspective occasionally implies the influence of Soviet ideals on his thoughts. For example, it is shown that his perception of the world is shaped by Soviet heroes, although none are mentioned by name as in many of the other texts. Here he describes how his friend helped him escape from wet cement: 'He dragged me, the way partisans in films drag each other out of a marsh' (p. 29). This demonstrates, as in *Detstvo Levy*, that partisans were often role models for Soviet children. The narrator's description of himself and his friend after the rescue, now covered in wet cement, also reveals the prominence of space travel in the Soviet consciousness at this time: 'The cement which stuck to me weighed about ten kilograms, and so I walked like a cosmonaut on some kind of large planet, Jupiter for example. Bor'ka had less cement on him, he was a cosmonaut on Saturn' (p. 30).

The relationship between the protagonist and his grandmother is central to the text. Her treatment of Sasha is almost always verbally abusive, and she sometimes appears convinced that those around her are betraying and working against her. The character of the grandmother is complex and the text provides some background to her character in a number of ways. The reader is informed about her present state of mind by the narration of Sasha's experience with her, but also about her past by the reported speech of Sasha's mother, grandfather and grandmother herself. These reports are often conflicting. Grandfather's explanation of the situation to a friend reveals that his wife had developed a persecution complex thirty years previously after the arrest of one of her neighbours:

She was in the kitchen and told some joke about the tsar, and a few days later the surveillance officers [*toptuny*] arrived, they took Fed'ka Zil'berman, a doctor, from the neighbouring flat and asked about her: 'Who is that, why is someone so young not working anywhere?' They explained,

said she was at home with a child. But she panicked: 'They'll arrest me, they'll take me away...' (p. 59)

He describes how this panic caused her to destroy gifts he had brought her from foreign trips, a fur coat and a bottle of Chanel perfume: 'She says they'll come and search the house, they'll find it and say we have connections abroad' (p. 59).

Grandfather's version of events emphasizes the fear and panic that he perceived in her behaviour: 'Someone looks at her on the trolleybus – she runs away, catches a taxi. Hides our daughter under a blanket, and whispers: "Little daughter, they're going to arrest me, be good, obey your father"' (p. 59). He states that he was advised to have her admitted to a clinic. This conversation between grandfather and a friend is one of only two occasions in the text that the narrative leaves Sasha's perspective. He is not present during this conversation.

Later in the text, grandmother's own version of events is presented as she talks on the telephone to a friend. This time Sasha is present, but the narrative does not give any indication of his understanding or opinion of what he has heard. Grandmother describes her experiences during the war, saying that she was persuaded by her husband, an actor, to join the evacuation of the Moscow Art Theatre (MKhAT) to Alma-Ata. She goes alone, as he is elsewhere shooting a film. The poor conditions there are the cause of her first child's death, and once she no longer has a child to care for, her accommodation is taken away completely (p. 179). She also describes the same encounter with the KGB that is related by her husband, describing how one of her neighbours had denounced another: 'Well one time she came [...] and said: "Fedor was taken yesterday by the KGB, I was a witness". And she was the one who had denounced him!' (p. 182). She does not convey the same sense of fear as in her husband's account, and she argues that she did not have a persecution complex but simply had deep depression which had begun because she spent so much time alone with a sick child (Sasha's mother)

(pp. 182–83). She states her belief that her husband betrayed her when she was tricked into going into a psychiatric hospital:

They put me in hospital under false pretences – they said I would be placed in the sanatorium, but put me in with the raving lunatics. [...] I will never be able to forgive him for his betrayal, the hospital, for the fact that I was changed from an intelligent woman with a strong character into a damaged nonentity. (p. 183)

The significance of the Soviet context, in particular the culture of surveillance and denunciation, can be variously interpreted here, depending on whether Sasha's difficult relationship with his grandmother is perceived to be the result of external factors, or as she argues, more a result of her husband's actions.

Pokhoronite menia za plintusom is not primarily concerned with social, political and ideological factors in the Soviet setting. However, the war and fear of state security are shown to be significant factors contributing to Sasha's grandmother's behaviours and perceptions. Readers' differing interpretations of the significance of this will be discussed in Chapter 4. The child narrator does not offer any opinion on his grandmother's experiences and there is no external narration to give an authoritative account. This strand of the plot could be seen as conveying some of the difficult and traumatic effects of the Soviet experience in the mid-twentieth century, or it could be read as a story of personal encounters, where the Soviet context is only the setting.

'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' (2001) and 'Shkol'niki' (1999)

Oleg Pavlov's 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' and 'Shkol'niki' are both set in the 1970s and the narrative of each is primarily limited to the young protagonist's point of

view.⁴⁸ Both texts are narrated in the past tense and the fragmented nature of the narrative does suggest that these are remembered experiences. Nonetheless, there is no retrospection or reflection. There is also little dialogue which means that the narrative portrays the world only through the child's perception, unlike, for example, Sanaev, who makes use of extended passages of direct speech of adults in order to give information beyond the child's perception and understanding. In 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' where the narration describes the experiences of a young child (probably between the ages of five and eight), this approach often causes the narrative to be confused or unclear, as there is much that the narrator says he does not understand, or does not know.

The Soviet setting is explicit in both texts, through references to Brezhnev, to places, for example, Red Square and The Exhibition of Achievements of the People's Economy (VDNKh) and to the Pioneers. Despite this, the texts are more focussed on personal and private experience than on representing Soviet life. Both texts present a bleak experience of childhood. In 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh', in particular, there is a recurring theme of suicide. The narrator's father has threatened to kill himself, and the child himself considers suicide as a way out of a hopeless situation (pp. 79–83). Even in less dramatic turning points in the narrative, the narrator of 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' is presented as lonely. In contrast to the portrayal in several of the other texts (Minaev and Zaionchkovskii in particular), the child is never shown playing with other children. He considers the yard (*dvor*) to be a place of punishment because he is always alone there (p. 26). The scope of 'Shkol'niki' is broader, narrating adolescent as well as childhood experience. I am including it in my discussion because it portrays the narrator's initiation into the Pioneers. Most of the Russian texts mention the Pioneers only in passing, while many of the German authors portray the enthusiasm of their young

⁴⁸ Oleg Pavlov, 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh', in *V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh* (Moscow: Vremia, 2007), pp. 6–104; and 'Shkol'niki', in *V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh*, pp. 107–218. For quotations from these texts in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 377–79.

protagonists/selves for the Pioneer organisation. Pavlov's depiction offers a striking contrast by conveying the sense of oppression and violence which the narrator associates with Pioneer rituals. The following discussion will look at one particular aspect of each text. In 'V bezbozhnykh pereulках' the portrayal of the child's perception of power and authority will be considered. I will then consider the portrayal of the Pioneers in 'Shkol'niki'.

'V bezbozhnykh pereulках' conveys ideas about power and authority in the Soviet Union through the narrator's perception of Brezhnev, his grandfather, and 'Babai', a mythical figure used to frighten the narrator into good behaviour. The text opens with the narrator's explanation of his childhood love for Brezhnev:

As a child I loved 'brezhnev' – from about five years old I was able to recognise his image on the television screen, sensing that that this was a person everyone thought was important. I didn't understand where he came from or even who he was, but if I was let into the room where the colour television towered in the corner, when at bedtime grandfather would be watching the programme 'Vremia', then I would be waiting for him to make his appearance: I knew that he was there and would surely soon arrive. (p. 7)

Pavlov indicates the pervasive nature of the state into everyday life by the young child's recognition of Brezhnev's importance. The child narrator sees the Soviet leader, although it is not clear that at this stage he knows his position, as a source of power and influence. He likes to pretend that his grandfather is friends with him:

If I was boasting or defending myself in the yard, then I'd say: 'my grandfather is a Chief police officer'. Or I'd say, knowing that it wasn't true

but wishing with all my strength that it was: 'my grandfather is a friend of Brezhnev'. (p. 9)

Even more significantly the narrator realises that mentioning Brezhnev is the only thing that gives him some power over his grandfather, although he doesn't understand why:

I did know one all-powerful word – 'brezhnev', which even had an effect on grandfather. I didn't understand why, but it always worked; one only had to utter the words: 'And I'll tell brezhnev about you...' Grandfather would freeze for a moment, then, almost with disdain, stare at me as if I were a stranger; the whole day he'd go round like a dangerous, snappy dog. (p. 11)

Although the child does not comprehend why this statement has such an effect on his grandfather, it can be assumed that his grandfather has lived through periods of intense terror when denunciation by family members was not uncommon. This is hinted at in the portrayal of his reaction, but requires interpretation by the reader.

Grandfather has his own way of exerting authority over the narrator. He frightens the child, telling him about 'Babai', who knows everything that the narrator does, and will punish him if he misbehaves:

Grandfather said that no-one was ever able to find and rescue those children who didn't do as they were told and found themselves with Babai, and Babai himself never forgave anyone: as long as you worked hard for him and always obeyed him, he would allow you to live, but if you misbehaved again or if you carried out his orders badly, he would eat you alive. (pp. 10–11)

This description of the threat of Babai, who will allow you to live if you work well and submit to his authority, could be interpreted as an allegory for living in a totalitarian society where dissent could cause you to be sentenced to a labour camp, or death. The parallels between this cautionary tale and the Soviet state are hinted at further, when the narrator reveals that he sometimes sees Babai and his grandfather as the same person:

Then when he turned out to be my saviour, all these thoughts flew away and I loved grandfather more than anyone else on earth. But when I thought of Babai, what appeared in my imagination was none other than my own grandfather: stony-faced, with bushy eyebrows, laughing loudly, and all-powerful – so all-powerful that all the police officers in Kiev would smile and bow before him. (p. 11)

The image of his grandfather as all-powerful, with both the capacity to terrify and to act as his saviour, for which he loves his grandfather above all others, has parallels with the cult of leadership in the Soviet Union. Moreover, his grandfather's connection to 'real' state power having been a Chief police officer also supports this association.

In 'Shkol'niki' Pavlov depicts another unnamed narrator. My analysis will focus on just one chapter which deals with the narrator's introduction to the Pioneers. Pavlov offers a far more detailed and sinister portrayal of the Pioneers than the other Russian texts which tend to mention the organisation only in passing.⁴⁹ The narrator's initial description of the room where the Pioneers meet conveys a sense of solemn ritual:

⁴⁹ Among the German texts, the Pioneer organization tends to be presented as appealing to children, although Wiechmann does describe the responsibility he felt on joining, see Wiechmann, pp. 38–40 and 78.

In a disorderly fashion we entered the room, forbidden until that day, where only children with red neckerchiefs were allowed to go... The atmosphere in there aroused trepidation in one's soul, it seemed mysterious and solemn, – and the scarlet banner with Lenin's image, heavy with its golden embroidery and velvet, which breathed as if alive and sparkled with light even though it was not swaying. (p. 125)

He describes the militaristic impulses inspired in him when he learns the anthem: 'As soon as the first few loud notes sounded – I was seized with trembling. One after another surged waves of fury, fear, happiness, and without knowing why, I began to sense within myself something that was both exalted and warlike' (p. 126). It is not clear how the narrator feels about the effect of Pioneer activity on his state of mind, but as the chapter continues the ceremonial and militaristic atmosphere causes him to develop a preoccupation with death. This is first shown by the depiction of the celebration of Young Pioneer heroes as part of their enrolment. They have to make an album about one of these young heroes. Everyone asks for Pavlik Morozov, but the narrator gets Lenia Golikov, a teenage partisan scout who died in action in the Second World War.⁵⁰ He is disappointed by this:

I saw him in the picture and became deeply annoyed: there was nothing heroic, except that he was clasping a sub-machine gun in his hands, he was wearing a rural sheepskin coat and a trapper hat, not a hero at all! (p. 127)

The narrator does not consider Golikov to be a great hero because he was never tortured: 'They didn't even torture this boy, like the other pioneer heroes, and I felt that the absence of torture made his heroic act somehow not genuine. I decorated my album as if it were a grave' (pp. 127–28). The narrator perceives joining the

⁵⁰ Vronskaya with Chuguev, p. 122.

Pioneers as a preparation for death and Pavlov shows that the promoted ideal of heroic death disturbs the narrator deeply:

And when they tied the pioneer neckerchief and I swore to be ready to give my life, I felt that I was lying. For many days a sad, martyred boy appeared to me, and with the light extinguished from his eyes the only thing he did was to complain: I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead... (p. 129)

He explains that previously he had often been frightened by the thought that if his mother had died during the war he would never have been born, but joining the Pioneers has introduced to him the idea that he himself could die: 'But having become a Pioneer, one thing frightened me more than all this: death' (p. 128). The narrator's feelings are not wildly disproportionate, given that the rules which Pioneers promised to follow included:

A Pioneer is devoted to the country, the Party and Communism

[...]

A Pioneer emulates heroes of struggle and labour

A Pioneer reveres the memory of fallen fighters and prepares to defend the country.⁵¹

The association between the Pioneers and death continues as the narrator describes the process of lining up (*lineika*): 'Pioneer line-ups seemed like a preparation for death... In January, when Lenin had died, and then in April on the day of his birth, all classes paraded in line in the sports hall' (p. 128). His description of the hall in which these line-ups took place suggests a militaristic and oppressive atmosphere created in part by his comparison of the gym equipment to instruments of torture:

⁵¹ Jim Riordan, 'The Role of Youth Organisations in Communist Upbringing in the Soviet School' in *The Making of the Soviet Citizen: Character Formation and Civic Training in Soviet Education*, ed. by George Avis (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 136–160 (p. 155).

[W]ith its painted floorboards, like in a barracks [...] and its tightly barred windows [...] From the ceiling and walls protruded the hooks for gym apparatus, like a rack. Behind us, level with our backs ropes hung down. And all these surroundings kept one in suspense and agony waiting for something, feeling one's soul stifled by submissiveness. (pp. 128–29)

It is not necessarily a foregone conclusion that this is meant as a negative portrayal of the Pioneers, as the narrator has stated that you have to be tortured to be a real hero, and the whole experience could therefore be perceived as an important rite of passage. However, the reference, in a quotation above, to his vision of a 'sad, martyred boy', apparently provoked by stories of heroic Pioneer martyrs as well as the narrator's fears of his own death places particular emphasis on the child's psychological suffering brought on by his response to state ideology.

Thoughts of death are prominent in the minds of both Pavlov's child-narrators. (Death is also a recurring theme in 'V bezbozhnykh pereulках'; the child narrator considers suicide at one point in the narrative.⁵²) The journalist, Svetlana Aleksievich, has argued that a culture of death was promoted in the Soviet Union. In 1994, she published a collection of documents telling the stories of those Soviet citizens who attempted and committed suicide in response to the downfall of the Soviet Union. She argues:

Although it is frightening to do away with the convictions of several generations, it needs to be acknowledged, that for a long time, too long, we have been ruled by an idea which cannot be called anything other than thanatology, the study of death. We were taught to die. We learnt dying

⁵² Pavlov, pp. 79–81. Not discussed in detail here as the circumstances are not presented in the narrative as being related to the Soviet context.

well, much better than living. And we forgot how to distinguish war from peace, daily life from existence, life from death.⁵³

Although neither of Pavlov's protagonists commits suicide, Aleksievich's study nonetheless suggests that the often frightening experiences of childhood portrayed by Pavlov may have wider relevance to the collective memory of the Soviet past.

Pavlov's writing casts a very bleak image of the Soviet past, but criticism of the state is not explicit. In both texts the late Soviet context is defined, but only foregrounded in a few parts of each narrative. The texts do not represent the system, but describe the experience of living within it. The portrayal of a child's perceptions of power in 'V bezbozhnykh pereulках', and in 'Shkol'niki' of the Young Pioneers, imply a critical perspective on the effects of the Soviet system, even though both narratives are not primarily concerned with describing or judging that setting.

Analysis of Russian Émigré Texts by Ruben David Gonsales Gal'ego and Elena Gorokhova

***Beloe na chernom* (2002)**

Beloe na chernom does not describe Soviet everyday life as the majority experienced it, but portrays the particular experience of growing up in Soviet institutional care in the 1970s as a non-Russian, disabled child.⁵⁴ The situation described in the text is specific and unusual, offering an insight into an institutional

⁵³ Svetlana Aleksievich, *Zacharovannye smert'iu* (Moscow: Slovo, 1994), pp. 221–364 (p. 227). One case described by Aleksievich concerns a fourteen-year-old boy whose grandmother had observed that he liked to always be the one who was killed when playing war. He later killed himself. See pp. 239–50.

⁵⁴ Ruben David Gonsales Gal'ego, *Beloe na chernom* (Moscow: Limbus Press, 2005). All quotations from this text are given from the published English translation: Ruben Gallego, *White on Black*, trans. by Marian Schwartz (London: John Murray, 2006). For quotations from this text in the original language, see the Appendix, pp. 379–81.

world that many Soviet Russians may not have been fully aware of. Nonetheless, Gal'ego's text can still contribute to collective memory of the Soviet past. A childhood lived in institutions cannot avoid portrayal of the Soviet state. Moreover, some of the themes are more broadly relevant to the Soviet past, for example, the gap between ideology and reality. Another reason that Gal'ego's text is likely to have an effect on collective memory of the Soviet past is that it has been a bestseller and widely discussed, partly due to the text winning the 2003 Russian Booker Prize. (The reception of the text will be discussed further in Chapter 4.)

The text often recreates the child's perspective, sometimes narrating in simple language and in the present tense to convey the child's experience within the past. At other times the retrospective view of the adult is used, and there is also narration of adult experiences which relate to his childhood experience. There is no in-depth analysis or explicit political agenda, but the choice of episodes portrayed and the way they are narrated conveys cruelty, hypocrisy, and lies as part of the system, as well as moments of kindness from individuals.

Gal'ego's text is also significant in offering what might be considered an external perspective to a Russian readership. The author was living abroad by the time of the text's publication. Although there are a few instances where he narrates the very process of writing, no other details about the author's present location and situation at the time of writing are revealed. The text was written in Russian, but its first publication before being released as a book was in the journal *Inostrannaia literatura* (*Foreign Literature*). The author himself is of Spanish nationality. The identification of the text as giving a view of the Soviet past external to the current Russian perspective could also be supported by the occasional explanations in the text, which seem to position the narrator as 'outside' Russia. These show that the text is addressed, at least in part, to non-Russian readers and those who might be unfamiliar with Soviet life. In one instance, he explains the meaning of a shortage

economy as part of an introduction to a story: 'The Soviet Union was a country of universal shortages. Shortages are when something isn't for sale and can't be bought for any price' (p. 47). Another example of the narrator explaining aspects of Soviet life is the narrator's explanation of the attitude to religion: 'Believing in God was forbidden. They told us there was no God. Atheism was the norm. Nowadays hardly anyone would credit this, but that's how it was' (p. 26). These explanations about the nature of the Soviet past are similar to the sometimes explicit narration found in Gorokhova's autobiography (discussed below) and in some of the German texts which clarify certain contextual references presumably for the benefit of former West German readers.⁵⁵ He also explains the Russian custom of sharing food with those in need forty days after the death of a loved one. The explanation begins 'In Russia, there's a custom of honouring the dead by sharing food' (p. 18). This demonstrates most clearly that the author has non-Russian readers in mind. The text has now been translated into several languages.

Gal'ego's narration shows that he was familiar with the idea that the Soviet Union provided 'a happy childhood' and that he was lucky to be born there. In one chapter he imagines how things might have been different if his grandfather, who was Secretary General of the Spanish Communist Party, had been involved in his life. Gal'ego makes clear that there are certain privileges for those with status in the party. He imagines his grandfather to be a little like Brezhnev, who is considered to be concerned for the happiness of Soviet children: 'We all knew that Leonid Ilich Brezhnev loved children very much and made sure every day that every Soviet pupil had a happy childhood' (p. 95). Gal'ego's childhood is, by contrast, made happy neither by his grandfather (who is reported to have made the decision to have Gal'ego put in a children's home), nor by Brezhnev and the system over which he presides. Another reference to 'our happy childhood' is made in a speech Gal'ego hears: 'about the Party and the government, about the ultimate

⁵⁵ See, for example, Rusch's explanation of the significance of Ernst Thälmann for East German children (*Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, p. 38).

victory of communism, about our happy childhood' (p. 108). It is New Year, and directly after this speech, given by the man who has been acting as Father Frost, the presents are given out. The narrator describes it as: 'the best New Year's of my life' (p. 108). The reference to happy childhood then seems almost appropriate in the context of the particular memory he is describing, but in context of the text as a whole a stark contrast is revealed between the ideal of a happy Soviet childhood and Gal'ego's own experiences.

The meaningless nature of Soviet claims to provide a happy childhood is revealed when Gal'ego describes the future he expects. The narrator explains that it was usual for disabled young people, once they were too old for the children's home, to be moved to institutions for the elderly. In these institutions those who were too ill or disabled to care for themselves were often neglected to the point of death. The narrator describes asking one of the helpers about this, at which point he realises that this would be his future:

I asked her what was going to happen to me when I grew up. Would they take me away to an old folks' home, too, and would I die?

'Naturally.'

'But I'll be fifteen; I don't want to die so soon. Does that mean it's all for nothing? Why should I study, then?'

'Nothing is for nothing. You have to study because you're being fed for free.'

(p. 35)

A few pages later, Gal'ego reports the words of his teacher:

Now do you understand, children, how lucky we were to be born in our country? In the Soviet Union, we don't kill our handicapped children. We

teach you, treat you, and feed you for free. You have to study well so you can acquire a useful profession. (p. 37)

It has already been made clear to the reader that to continue to study or get a job is not possible for those, like Gal'ego, who are unable to walk. The right of Soviet children to a school education is shown to be of little benefit for those with severe disabilities, who were frequently denied the opportunity to live as adults.

The West, as it was represented in Soviet teaching and propaganda, and the reality as Gal'ego later experiences it as an adult, is a recurring theme through the text, with a particular emphasis on America. The narrator shows the fascination for western culture among his peers, and the attempts to prevent this by the school. The narrator makes clear the official attitude to the West and to capitalism: 'They took the music away, the transgressors' behaviour was discussed by the school's pedagogical council, and a struggle against the capitalist influence went into full swing. A pointless struggle' (p. 65). The narrator also describes how some of the boys started to grow their hair long. The official response described by the narrator demonstrates the exaggerated threat perceived in anything related to the West: 'Instructions were sent from Moscow on how to fight this "contagion"' (p. 65). Here the narrative goes beyond the more usual experience of Soviet ideological policing; the narrator states that he was unaffected, because all children who were not able to walk had their heads shaved anyway. This chapter, therefore, demonstrates both the ideological control attempted over young people in care, and the more extreme limitations placed on those with more severe disabilities.

The narrator is explicit about what the children were taught about the capitalist world, and the USA in particular. His only comment on this is to say that they believed what they were told:

We were supposed to hate all the capitalist countries, but especially America. Our enemies – the bourgeoisie, who drank the blood of the working class – lived in America. American imperialism was making an atom bomb with our name on it. The workers in America were constantly starving and dying, and an endless stream of people hoping to change their citizenship kept pouring into the Soviet embassy in the United States. That's what they taught us, and we believed it. (p. 37)

Soviet claims about the standard of life in America are addressed again in another portrayal of school. The narrator sets the scene: a political studies class in which they are used to being told about the horrors of life in the West. He describes his understanding of this as a child: 'I'm absolutely convinced that most people in America are living on the streets in cardboard boxes, that each and every American is building a bomb shelter, and that the country is experiencing crisis after crisis' (p. 55). In the following scene, the child's naive questioning reveals the illogical nature of official representation of the West. The picture of American life which the child imagines is so extreme that he believes there must be bodies all over New York. Having been told that there are many unemployed starving to death and that there are always workers losing their jobs, this is a logical conclusion. The child narrator decides to ask another teacher about this, and why there has not yet been a revolution in the USA: 'I don't understand these Americans. Walking down the streets surrounded by people who are starving or starved to death. Why haven't they thrown out their landowners and capitalists yet?' (p. 56). The teacher initially responds in a friendly way, suggesting that the ten-year-old narrator is too young to be thinking about such things and that it is too complicated for him. Then, with a sterner manner, the teacher says: 'Not a soul, you hear? Don't bring this topic up with a soul. You're a big boy now, you should understand' (p. 57). It appears that the teacher is trying to protect the narrator, and that what he must understand above all is that such things should not be questioned or discussed. This shows a

similarity with Gorokhova's portrayal (to be discussed below) and some of the German texts, including Rusch and Kusserow, in the suggestion that some things should not be openly discussed. As Gal'ego's childhood is entirely lived in institutions, he does not show the distinction between the family home and school as is usual in other texts.

The theme of America continues with depiction of scenes from his adult life which are primarily focussed on the different provision for and attitudes to disability in the USA and (post-Soviet) Russia:

I could go on and on about America. I could go on and on about the wheelchairs, the 'talking' elevators, the smooth roads, the ramps, the vans with lifts. About the blind programmers and the paralyzed scholars. About how I cried when they told me I had to go back to Russia and leave the wheelchair behind. (p. 158)

His comparison is not entirely straightforward, as he explains that in Russia he will get compassion and in America everything has to be paid for. However, he places freedom and independence as his highest priority:

There, in faraway Russia, they'll put me nicely on a couch and sentence me to life imprisonment within four walls. Good Russian people will give me food and drink vodka with me. I'll have plenty to eat and I'll probably be warm. I'll have everything there but freedom. (p. 161)

This suggests that the text is as much about communicating a need for change in the present as it is about bearing witness to the past, and indicates that the difficulties of his childhood were not solely the product of the Soviet system.

Beloe na chernom offers a representation of a very specific kind of Soviet childhood experience, yet some of the themes which emerge, such as perceptions of the West, the ideal of a happy childhood, and learning what subjects cannot be questioned or talked about, are more widely applicable to Soviet childhood in general.

A Mountain of Crumbs (2010)

Elena Gorokhova's memoir is written for an English-speaking readership. Having emigrated from the Soviet Union and having lived in the United States for nearly thirty years before her memoir was published, Gorokhova offers a view of the Soviet past and memories of her own childhood in 1960s Leningrad (now St Petersburg), which are accessible to non-Russian and non-former Soviet readers. The narrative perspective through most of the text does not allow for her émigré point of view to be conveyed explicitly. The narrative mainly expresses the child's perspective in the child's present. This is demonstrated through the use of the present tense as well as the child-centred concerns of the narration. Nonetheless, the narrative does not avoid critical depiction of Soviet life and ideology. The narrative includes representation of ideological education, as well as family conversations about the past and present. Her story is, for the most part, told in a linear narrative and does not cast doubt on the accuracy of how these events and feelings have been remembered or recorded. The epilogue, however, includes some retrospective reflection, and suggests that others in her family are reluctant to analyse or even discuss the past.

Gorokhova's memoir emphasizes the Soviet context through references to historical figures and events. The narrative begins with two chapters of family history, mostly detailing her mother's experiences through the first few decades of Soviet power. Gorokhova's relationship with her mother is central to the text.

Gorokhova's mother at times appears to be representative of or associated with the controlling and narrowly defined ideology of the Soviet Union:

Born three years before Russia turned into the Soviet Union, my mother became a mirror image of my motherland: overbearing, protective, difficult to leave. Our house was the seat of the *politburo*, my mother its permanent chairman. She presided in our kitchen over a pot of borsch, a ladle in her hand, ordering us to eat in the same voice that made her anatomy students quiver. A survivor of the famine, Stalin's terror, and the Great Patriotic War, she controlled and protected, ferociously. (p. 2)

In the third chapter the narration of the author's own childhood begins, describing her experiences at nursery school, aged five. The narrative does not just define the year and her age, but also places this in the context of history and an internationally recognised event: Gagarin's first space flight. 'It is 1961, and Yuri Gagarin, our Soviet hero, has just stepped out of his rocket that flew around Earth' (p. 26). She does not narrate memories or perceptions of Gagarin and Soviet space travel; the inclusion of this information is as a marker of the Soviet setting, recognizable to Western readers.

The representation of school in Gorokhova's text is similar to the approach found in some of the German texts. Through depiction of the child's thoughts, aspects of ideological education are criticised. For example, in a lesson about the 'Great October Socialist Revolution' the narrator indicates her confusion:

The part about the Provisional Government remains murky since she never explains how this government came to replace the Tsar, and why it too, needed to be overthrown if it was the already de-throned Tsar who had

plunged the country into the pitiful abyss requiring revolutionary intervention. (p. 52)

The child's innocent questioning (even if only to herself) reveals that this narrative of the origin of the Soviet state is taught in vague and unconvincing terms. In the portrayal of another class the subject is Pavlik Morozov. The version of events described by the teacher is that Pavlik reported his father for keeping sacks of wheat for himself while others were starving. A pupil asks what happened to the father, and the teacher explains that he 'served ten years in the camps'. The narrator's own thoughts on this reveal not only that she is not convinced by the official interpretation, but also that she knows not to question it:

I am not sure that ratting on your father and having him shipped to Siberia is a heroic thing to do, even if it saved someone from starvation. But I don't say anything, and no one else does either, to contradict Vera Pavlovna in praising Pavlik Morozov's vigilance and valor. We all know that some things are so obvious you just don't debate them. You don't debate what's written in history textbooks. (pp. 54–55)

Gorokhova's assertion that 'we all know' not to ask such questions suggests that general disbelief and pretence of conformity was widespread, yet the Russian texts discussed above do not include portrayal of this practice.

The need to appear to conform is one of the most prominent themes in Gorokhova's account of her childhood. She indicates that public displays of party loyalty and private convictions spoken of at home were sometimes very different. For example: "'Listen well to what Vera Pavlovna says,'" instructs my mother as we go down in the elevator, letting me know that, although what my father said may be true, it does not apply in school' (p. 56). This is similar to the portrayal in

German texts by Rusch and Kusserow which convey that children needed to understand not to repeat in school what was said at home. Another similarity to German portrayal is that Gorokhova shows that she joined the Komsomol only to improve her chances of further education: 'I am in the eighth grade, and I am cynical. I no longer believe in the cause of the Young Pioneers' (p. 166). She doesn't want to join the Komsomol once she is too old for the Young Pioneers, but is then asked by her Mother asks if she wants to continue her education: 'Now Tanya and I both wear our Komsomol pins on a black uniform cinched at the waist around a brown dress. Despite our cynicism and our doubts, we both want to go to college' (p. 167). The narrator does not just show or refer to one-off situations in which she has to pretend loyalty to the party, she also explicitly refers to the practice of 'pretence':

The game is called *vranyo*. My parents play it at work, and my older sister plays it at school. We all pretend to do something, and those who watch us pretend that they are seriously watching us and don't know that we are only pretending. (p. 30)

This aspect of Soviet life is referred to again later in the text, and the widespread nature of this activity throughout Soviet society and the suggestion that everyone is complicit in it, is particularly emphasized:

We all know we have to pretend [...] In school, Andrei and I pretend to be obedient Pioneers worthy of a young Lenin, whose profile is pinned to our uniformed chests. My mother pretends that her uncle Volya was arrested in 1937 because he was *vrag naroda*, an enemy of the people, and not because he was simply out of luck when he told a joke in a crowded restaurant. My friend and classmate Katya, whose father, a colonel, has access to an exclusive library full of rare books on literary criticism, pretends

her father's rank has nothing to do with her exemplary essays that score perfect fives. (p. 153)

This aspect of Soviet life is a recurring theme in Gorokhova's text, yet does not feature explicitly in any of the other Russian portrayals. This may be because it would be 'stating the obvious' for the majority of the intended readership, nonetheless its omission may also reflect the general reluctance to examine the Soviet past too closely.

Unlike the Russian texts, and similar to some of the German texts, Gorokhova includes some representation of her family's attitudes to the state. The generation of Gorokhova's parents seem to be cynical about the present, i.e. the 1960s, and nostalgic in some respects for the previous decades and Stalin's rule. Gorokhova reports her Father's assertion: "We used to believe in something. You went through the war, you know," he motions towards my mother. "For motherland, for Stalin. Remember?" (p. 55). The narrator does not convey her childhood opinion on this, but a later discussion (the narrator is now twelve years old) provokes her to think further on the subject. The narrator is with her mother, aunt and uncle, and her aunt has been discussing the case of a surgical aide, who, working whilst drunk, had left a 'surgical napkin' inside a patient:

'A firing squad. It would have been quick under Stalin – no investigation and it's over,' proclaims my uncle [...] 'They used to shoot people for lesser crimes than that.'

'For being two minutes late to work they used to throw you in jail,' says my mother. 'You overslept and missed the bell and the next thing you know they're banging on your door in the middle of the night. I saw people disappear for missing the bell. There was order then.'

'Order!' erupts Uncle Fedya and spits on the ground. 'Look around. Gangs of hooligans on every corner, nurses drunk in operating rooms. Where has the order gone?' His arms fly up in the air. 'A hand of steel – that's what the people need. They understand strength and that's the only thing they listen to. Put someone strong in charge and even the worst bum will shape up overnight.'

'That's absolutely right,' says my mother. (p. 137)

This might implicitly demonstrate the ineffectiveness of de-Stalinization and the lack of real information about the past, but it also shows that even the narrator's mother, whose brother was arrested and later shot for telling a joke, believes that there were positive aspects to Stalinist terror or as it has been termed in this discussion: 'order' and rule by 'a hand of steel'. The child narrator cannot comprehend this attitude:

I am glad I wasn't born when Stalin was in charge. It's unclear to me why my mother, my uncle, or anyone else would lament the era of throwing people in jail for being late to work. Did they also throw students in jail for being late for school? (p. 137)

The narration, conveying the child's perspective, does not provide a serious in-depth discussion of the issues, but, as in some of the German texts, the child's perspective on adult attitudes and actions does allow questioning without wholesale condemnation, in this case of her mother and uncle's perspective on the past.

Gorokhova, whilst having herself written a narrative which does explore the past and the Soviet system, indicates the tendency towards silence, and a possible reason for it in her mother's case. She describes frustration at her mother's attitude

to the party, especially given how her mother has not been well served by the Soviet system:

So why is it that she [mother] still grows silent now, when Marina curses the Culture Ministry, which has closed another controversial play, or when I mock the absurd topics in our textbook called *English Conversation*? Why does she defend the party that has betrayed her? (p. 214)

Gorokhova has just previously explained the 'betrayal': her father was refused admittance to hospital when he was very ill, and Gorokhova's mother went to 'every party boss in Leningrad', eventually obtaining permission for him to be admitted for just a week. Gorokhova's imagining of how her mother must have felt then, and how she coped with it, make her mother's defence of the party seem inexplicable and yet understandable: 'How resentful my mother must have felt on that summer day ten years ago, how powerless and humiliated. Yet she demanded and pressed and fought, in her usual way – the only way she'd learned to achieve anything in our country' (p. 214). The implication of this passage is that the narrator's mother's thoughts and energy were always directed at surviving as best she could within the system, rather than opposing it or considering what was wrong with it. Later it is suggested that a western or dissident perspective is required to be able to openly discuss the crimes of Soviet socialism. The narrator is considering what her own fate will be if she applies to leave the country:

I'll be *vrag naroda*, enemy of the people, just like Uncle Volya, my mother's uncle who was arrested in 1937 and then shot – the time we don't talk about, the time that makes sense only in the West, where they publish Solzhenitsyn. (p. 275)

The epilogue brings the reader up to date, explaining that Gorokhova's mother and sister now also live in the United States. In the final words of the epilogue Gorokhova demonstrates that the practice of not discussing things has outlived the Soviet Union, and even now when her mother now lives with her in the USA, the past is not discussed:

'Whatever happens, happens for the best, as Mamochka used to say,' murmurs my creased, once again white-haired mother. Her *mamochka*, my grandma, as soft and wrinkled, smiles at us from a photograph on the wall, which hangs next to my young mother's portrait, painted by her brother Sima. We don't talk about such things as forgiveness, understanding, acceptance. We simply sip blackcurrant tea, my mother's favorite, and I don't say anything to question Grandma's wisdom. (p. 305)

Although Gorokhova does not appear to judge this tendency, in writing her autobiography in a way which does speak more plainly about Soviet life, she demonstrates that her own attitude is different. In the 'Acknowledgements' to the text she also suggests that her account might not agree with the way others would tell it: 'I am indebted to my remaining family in Russia, although they would have probably told a different story of our past' (p. 308). It is not clear whether it is because they have stayed in Russia that their account would be different, but the analysis throughout this chapter supports the argument that awareness of an external perspective does produce different ways of remembering and representing life under socialism.

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter shows that the German representations of childhood in the GDR place a greater emphasis on the socialist context than the Russian representations of Soviet childhood. The German texts appear concerned to provide a portrayal which is critical of at least some aspects of the system, but in some cases there is also a sense of reclaiming aspects of daily life and sometimes also socialist ideals as positive. The Russian texts are a more disparate group with different approaches and emphases, but all seem to offer ambiguous or ambivalent representations of the Soviet past. They convey the experience of living under Soviet rule as part of the background to individuals' lives, but representing the nature of Soviet life does not appear to be the primary concern of these texts. The Russian émigré texts, on the other hand, have more in common with the approach of the German texts, including narration of experiences and attitudes which promote a critical perspective on the Soviet state.

The differing modes of remembering the socialist past observed in the texts are created primarily through the differing use of narrative strategies and differing emphases in terms of the kinds of experiences and attitudes portrayed. The German texts tend to approach the GDR past with a critical distance provided either by humorous, ironic portrayal, naive narration, retrospective reflection and, in the case of Kusserow, added historical information. In their use of humorous portrayal and the combining of child and adult perspectives, Rusch and Wiechmann are able to emphasize both the failings of the GDR in addition to asserting a sense of belonging towards East Germany. It is striking that all the German texts discussed in this chapter demonstrate a critical attitude to the East German state; Kusserow's text is explicit in taking this approach, Aehnlich conveys it implicitly through humorous representation of absurdities in the system, and in Rusch and Wiechmann's texts it is demonstrated through a mixture of both explicit comment and implicit humorous portrayal. The approaches taken by Gorokhova and Gal'ego

to representing Soviet upbringing are similar. Both include some explicit condemnation of the system, while Gal'ego's narration also makes considerable use of the child's naïve perspective to emphasize the cruelty of the state.

The narrative strategies used in the Russian texts tend to recreate past experiences, without obviously constructing events and perspectives which would lead to a clear interpretation of a critical judgement on the Soviet system. For the most part they narrate events with no indication of a post-Soviet perspective which might modify or inform the way that the past is remembered. Selected sections in Miller and most of Minaev's text make use of a nostalgic child voice when focussing on happy childhood memories without the intrusion of retrospective knowledge.⁵⁶ All of the Russian texts give some indication of, in some cases only hinting at, the detrimental effects of Soviet rule, but rarely convey a particular stance, nor do they tend to portray characters' attitudes to the state. The texts by Miller and Sanaev, in particular, include portrayal of the effects of the earlier Soviet period and the potentially traumatic effects of terror and war, although this is not the dominant theme in either text.

The differing modes of remembering identified in the German and Russian texts appear to reflect the dominant memory culture in which they were produced and published, thus supporting Neumann's argument that literary texts offer an 'insight into culturally prevalent concepts of memory'.⁵⁷ The German texts in particular function as 'collective texts' (as defined by Erll) by offering responses to current memory debates. The concern of the German texts to address the specific nature of the GDR in their portrayals of East German childhood reflects the widespread open discussion which has taken place since unification about how the East German past should be remembered in German society and culture. The texts by Kusserow, Rusch and Wiechmann respond directly to the surrounding memory

⁵⁶ For earlier discussion of the nostalgic child voice, see Chapter 1, pp. 53–54.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 1, p. 41.

culture. Kusserow reinforces the need to condemn repression perpetrated by the East German state and to commemorate both acts of resistance and victims of repression. Rusch and Wiechmann illustrate how the GDR can be remembered in a way which acknowledges both the repressive nature of the state and the relative normality of many aspects of East German life as well as a sense of willingly identifying with selected aspects of the East German past. Aehnlich's text, because it is fictional and does not include narration from a post-*Wende* perspective, does not address memory of the GDR and eastern identity directly; nonetheless, the text portrays an image of the GDR which is relatively 'normal', but which also demonstrates the child's experience of ideological upbringing and the hypocrisy and pretence inherent in the system.

The texts by the émigré Russian authors Gal'ego, a non-Russian with a Soviet upbringing, and Gorokhova, writing for an English-speaking audience, support the argument that an 'external' perspective and the anticipation of readers who do not have first-hand experience of life under Soviet rule can have a significant effect on the way childhood under socialism is presented and remembered.⁵⁸

The avoidance in the Russian texts of explicitly condemning the Soviet state or of portraying Soviet childhood in such a way as to particularly highlight the effects of the system reflects the dominant memory culture in Russia, which has paid little attention to the crimes of the Soviet regime. The lack of 'hard memory' identified by Etkind may be affecting the choices of authors and publishers.⁵⁹ Certainly it seems that a common rejection and condemnation of the Soviet state's political repression and methods of coercion is not a significant feature of post-

⁵⁸ That neither author was immersed in Russian memory culture at the time of writing does not mean, of course, that these texts are not shaped by cultural memory of the Soviet past. Gorokhova's text, for example, is likely to be influenced in some way by American perceptions of the Soviet Union. Investigation of these influences is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 2, p. 65–67.

Soviet Russian memory and identity. Instead of confronting this aspect of the past there appears to instead be a withdrawal or separation from political and ideological issues, thus the texts analysed here mainly focus on the subjective experience of Soviet life, both good and bad experiences within it, without passing judgement. All the texts do, however, contain selected passages which indicate or hint at darker sides of the Soviet experience.

The next chapter concerning the reception of the texts will indicate what kinds of discussion are provoked by both the Russian and German texts, and whether engagement with questions of responsibility, interaction with the state, and ideological beliefs are issues that critics and readers consider important. Of particular interest will be whether the potential for the Russian texts to provoke a critical interpretation of the Soviet past (in their sometimes understated or ambiguous portrayal of the damaging effects of the system) will be taken up by readers and critics.

Chapter 4

Reception by Critics and Readers

Introduction

The approach taken in this thesis considers the selected German and Russian narratives of childhood as contributing to the ongoing process of creating and negotiating memory (both individual and collective) of the socialist past. Significant tendencies in public discourse around the remembering of the GDR and Soviet Union have been discussed in Chapter 2, and the depiction, in the texts themselves, of the specific nature of life in the socialist states has been demonstrated in Chapter 3. The analysis in Chapter 3 identified *potential* ways of remembering the socialist past created within the texts; this chapter will consider *actual* interpretations and assessments made by readers and critics with regard to representation of the socialist past.¹ My primary aim is not to dispute how the critics and readers judge the texts, but to show how reviews reveal the dominance of certain ways of remembering, or forgetting, the socialist past in their discussion of the texts. Analysis of these reviews highlights the significance of the surrounding memory culture in each country and shows how/whether the texts prompt discussion related to current memory debates.² In addition, the consideration of readers' reviews also gives some indication of how the texts might influence, and be judged in light of, the personal memories and identities of readers. The analysis has two main aims: firstly, to demonstrate how the different approaches to the socialist past in Germany and Russia are reflected in, and sometimes challenged by, the reception of the texts by critics and readers; secondly to show the ways in which the narratives are identified as authentic, and as significant or valuable representations of the socialist past. This will show whether readers 'ascribe

¹ Erll observes that analysis of, for example, modes of remembering in literary texts is concerned with the '*potential* memorial power, or effects, of literary forms'. *Memory in Culture*, p. 158.

² An important consideration in Erll's 'collective texts' approach to studying memory and literature, see Chapter 1, p. 44.

referentiality' to the various portrayals of socialist childhood.³ While it is probable that not all the primary texts discussed in this study will still be readily available and considered important works of literature in the long term, the consideration of their reception gives some insight into their effects as a 'circulation medium' that contributes to and influences memory cultures in the present.⁴

The analysis of reviews by professional critics will demonstrate the influence of existing trends in memory of the socialist past on how the texts are interpreted and judged. In the German context, for example, the reception of several of the texts is dominated by the perception of *Ostalgie* as an undesirable characteristic of texts lacking in artistic merit.⁵ In comparing German and Russian reception, this chapter will show that the representation of the East German past is more prominently discussed in reception of the German texts, than the Soviet past in reviews of the Russian texts. Moreover, many reviews of the German texts are contributing to debates surrounding how the GDR should be remembered and represented, whereas the issue of how the Soviet past should be represented is rarely raised in the Russian reviews.

In the German context, reception is often shaped by the tension between condemnation of repressive practices and commemoration of victims on the one hand and the representation of East German everyday life as 'normal' and as a focus for fond memories and identification on the other. Moreover, concepts and terminology emerging from memory discourse about the GDR, and about the nation's past in general, are frequently used in reviews of the German texts. For example, the term *Verharmlosung* ('belittling' or 'playing down') is used to criticise portrayals which underplay the repressive nature of the East German state and the phenomenon of *Ostalgie* is frequently referred to. Although the concept of

³ A criterion Erll identifies as necessary for a text to affect memory cultures, see Chapter 1, p. 44.

⁴ See Chapter 1, p. 44.

⁵ For earlier discussion of *Ostalgie*, see Chapter 2, pp. 89–95.

Vergangenheitsbewältigung is not explicitly referred to in any of the reviews to be discussed, this principle of 'reckoning with the past' appears to underlie the widespread attention paid to ethical considerations of how the East German past should or should not be portrayed.

Critics' responses to the Russian texts, by contrast, place a far greater focus on questions of literary merit, than on questions of memory and dealing with the Soviet past. Many Russian critics pay little or no attention to the potential significance of the Soviet context in the texts while others explicitly deny its relevance. Some reviews hint at issues of memory and identity relating to the Soviet past, but without extended reflection or offering an explicit point of view. Many of the Russian critics' reviews reflect the dominant trend identified in Russian memory culture: avoidance of open discussion about the Soviet past and what it means for post-Soviet Russian identity.⁶ In a few reviews, the portrayal of the Soviet system is considered, and in these cases the interpretations often tend towards one of two approaches: 'liberal' (i.e. those who are critical of the Soviet system, and usually the post-Soviet Russian administration too) or 'patriotic' (those who are concerned to defend a positive perception of Russia, including the Soviet Russian past).⁷

The analysis in this chapter will also show some differences in readers' responses (mostly in online forums) compared to professional critical responses. As might be expected, critics' reviews often reveal concerns about the literary value of the texts, while readers' reviews tend to show a greater interest in the possibilities of identifying with the narratives. Both German and Russian readers appear keen to comment on how the texts compare with or prompt their own childhood memories.

⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 120–33.

⁷ These contrasting ideological tendencies have been observed in the post-Soviet Russian literary scene by both Rosalind Marsh and N. Norman Shneidman. See Marsh, *Literature, History and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia, 1991–2006*, pp. 40–41; N. Norman Shneidman, *Russian Literature, 1995–2002: On the Threshold of the New Millennium* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 5–7.

These responses, which show identification with and recognition of the childhood experiences portrayed, are of particular interest, because they demonstrate that the texts are received (by some) as authentic depictions. Moreover, they reveal that the texts are read not simply as entertaining or interesting stories but that readers, in the act of reading and reviewing the texts, can be prompted to affirm or renegotiate their own memories of the socialist past. The texts are thereby shown to have the potential to shape individual, and in some cases collective, memory of the GDR or USSR. As with the critics' reviews, German readers' reviews place more emphasis on the portrayal of the GDR. Although most Russian readers do not ascribe significance to the Russian texts for looking back on the Soviet period, a minority of readers do reveal some interesting perspectives on this very issue. Analysis of readers' reviews is subject to certain constraints. Firstly, some of the texts have only received a small number of online comments from readers, and these comments cannot therefore be taken as representative. They do, however, offer anecdotal evidence of how some readers respond. Additionally, this analysis, by its very nature, can only consider the views of readers who choose to publish their views online.⁸ These reviews are written with an audience in mind (i.e. other readers) and may sometimes be used simply as a platform for other ideas, i.e. expressing a political viewpoint or personal experience which is only tenuously related to discussion of the text. Despite these limitations, the discussion of readers' comments does offer some valuable insights into how Russian and German readers express ideas about identity and memory in conjunction with their readings of the texts.

This chapter will be divided into two main sections: German Reception and Russian Reception. In each section I will first consider the reception of selected texts by professional critics and journalists. The second part of each section will consider readers' reviews (mainly posted online). This is not an exhaustive account

⁸ See Chapter 1, pp. 54–55 for discussion of Kate Douglas's analysis of readers' online reviews of childhood memoirs.

of the reception of all the texts referred to in this thesis. The selection of texts whose reception is to be discussed, and the selection of reviews to be analysed, has been defined based on the availability of review articles and readers' comments and the extent to which available reviews reveal concerns about the portrayal of the socialist past, or where these are conspicuously absent.

German Reception

The analysis of German critical reception will include reviews of the German texts analysed in Chapter 3, but will also consider the reception of a few other texts which demonstrate significant concerns of critics in recent years. The analysis will consider the texts in chronological order of their publication, starting with Kathrin Aehnlich's *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen* (1998). I will then summarise the controversy caused by Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* (2002), a text which both opened up discussion about East German memory and identity, but which also provoked harsh criticism of 'ostalgic' tendencies. Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (2003) received far more praise than *Zonenkinder*, appearing to satisfy the critics' expectations of a text which reflected on the more repressive aspects of East German life. Some reviews of Katja Oskamp's *Halbschwimmer* (2003) are included to show how critics praised this text for offering a more literary account of growing up in the GDR with little trace of *Ostalgie*. The analysis will show that by the mid-2000s fictional and autobiographical accounts of East German childhood were attracting less and less critical attention, and that there was a perception among critics that some publications were simply 'jumping on the bandwagon'. This seems to be one factor in the very small number of reviews of Daniel Wiechmann's *Immer Bereit* (2004) and Mourad Kusserow's *Rüber machen...* (2008), the reception of which I will also discuss.

The second part of my analysis of reception of the German texts will consider readers' reviews posted on German website of the bookseller Amazon (www.amazon.de). I include reviews of the texts by Aehnlich, Hensel, Rusch, and Wiechmann. This analysis will show how readers' concerns and expectations diverge from and, in some cases, coincide with those of the critics. It will also show how the texts can be perceived as authentic, representative accounts of childhood in the GDR. Hensel's *Zonenkinder* is not a primary focus of this thesis, but the reception by readers of this text is included because this has not been extensively surveyed in other academic studies, and because it provides an important context for analysis of the reception of the other texts, not least because it has received so many readers' comments (as of June 2011 there were 130 reviews posted about the text on the German Amazon website).⁹

Critics' Reception of the German Texts

Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen

Reviews of Aehnlich's novel, *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen* (first published in 1998) show what reviewers expected and valued in narratives about childhood in the GDR before the publication of Hensel's *Zonenkinder*. Jörg Magenau reviews Aehnlich's novel alongside two other texts: Caritas Führer's *Montagsangst*, which describes the experience of growing up as a vicar's daughter in the GDR; and an account of West German childhood by Hans Ulrich-Treichel, *Der Verlorene*. He compares their approaches, stating that Aehnlich does not portray East German childhood in the way one might assume:

Certainly it may be difficult to treat the experience of a hostile GDR society with the same subtle irony which Hans-Ulrich Treichel summons up in relation to his East-Westphalian childhood. And one could consider it to be

⁹ <http://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/349802972X/ref=cm_cr_pr_top_helpful?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=0> [accessed 03 July 2011].

typical that the westerner would choose suffering in the family as a central theme, while the easterner would choose suffering in society. Typical also that irony would be the established mode in the West and tragedy in the East. However, another eastern first-time novelist, Kathrin Aehnlich, proves this impression to be wrong.¹⁰

Magenau's expectations, that East German accounts would provide some criticism of the state by depicting society's problems and tragic experiences, are indicative of the fact that *Ostalgie* is not yet (in 1998) a dominant mode of remembering in representations of the GDR.

Magenau has observed that criticism of the East German state is not central to Aehnlich's text, but the ways in which the text presents the political and ideological nature of the GDR are a significant concern of the critics. Magenau considers that Aehnlich's narrative successfully uses the child's perspective to portray indirectly elements of East German politics and society which are beyond the child's understanding. Magenau begins his article by stating this as a potential advantage of narratives of childhood: 'When the shift back in time is successful, the societal constraints become clear in the reconstructed microcosm of the child's experience, unclouded by comprehension.'¹¹ He emphasizes that the child-centred narration of Aehnlich's novel is able to reveal political aspects of East German life: 'Without superimposing a political dimension on the child's experience, much of the GDR is nevertheless recognizable – for instance, when the parents speak in whispers about the world on the other side of the border.'¹² One way in which the political dimension is introduced is the intertextual references made throughout the text:

¹⁰ Jörg Magenau, 'Schamjahre', *Die Tageszeitung*, 20 March 1998
<<http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/archiv/?dig=1998/03/20/a0217>> [accessed 7 April 2011]
Translations of all reviews cited in this chapter are my own.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Throughout Kathrin Aehnlich uses a stylistic device of italicised set phrases – parental maxims and warnings, sentences from textbooks, common aphorisms. She thereby demonstrates how the language and thought of the child is formed imperceptibly and relentlessly through ideologemes, how identity is produced first of all in society.¹³

This demonstrates an interest in discussing how this fictional text portrays the political and ideological context through a child's experience. Another critic, Anke Westpfahl, also praises Aehnlich's use of the child's perspective for indirectly portraying the broader context of the GDR.¹⁴ Although this may not seem surprising or unexpected, it is a noticeably different approach to many of the Russian critics' reviews of the Russian primary texts. It is also noteworthy that Westpfahl chooses to define the extent of the family's complicity and/or resistance in Aehnlich's portrayal: 'The pseudo-child's-eye view used by Kathrin Aehnlich sees a representative picture of a moderately conformist family who get away with minor transgressions.'¹⁵ This again contrasts with reception of the Russian texts as the Russian critics rarely discuss the attitudes or actions of characters or narrators in relation to the state.

Although the German critics take an interest in how Aehnlich's narrative depicts the East German system, they also express recognition that Aehnlich's portrayal of the petty bourgeois attitudes of the protagonist's parents has relevance to former West German readers. Magenau, for example, describes the subject of Aehnlich's novel as 'a petty bourgeois world full of shame and inhibitions [...] Ulbricht-stuffiness is not much different to Adenauer-stuffiness'.¹⁶ Moreover, it is

¹³ Magenau, 'Schamjahre'.

¹⁴ Anke Westphal, 'Staßfurt Patriot und Schüler mit Funktion', *Berliner Zeitung*, 24 March 1998 <<http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/1998/0324/magazin/0005/index.html>> [accessed 11 April 2011].

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Magenau, 'Schamjahre'.

acknowledged, and not criticised, that everyday family life is at the centre of the text, rather than resistance, victims or informers: 'Aehnlich gives an account of a quite normal everyday life: of the carousel in the city park, of the summer idyll, and of being forced to wear a little sailor dress by one's mother.'¹⁷ Aehnlich's narrative does not focus on the effects of living in a dictatorship, nor does she offer any serious portrayal of repression, but this is not a cause for concern in the reviews considered here. Westpfahl compares Aehnlich's text to Führer's *Montagsangst* (which does emphasize state repression), but Westpfahl asserts that Aehnlich's narrative of a 'normal' childhood in the GDR is just as valuable as Führer's for its portrayal of East German upbringing:

As an archaeology of socialization in the GDR it is no less important that Führer's story, although it portrays a lesser emotional burden because Aehnlich's childhood played out under less extreme circumstances; the heroine (also based on the author's own life) was integrated in school.¹⁸

Later in the same review, Westpfahl builds on the idea of the text as 'archaeology', asserting the value of *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen* as preserving memory of everyday life in the GDR:

In its interweaving of supranational and GDR-specific socio-cultural references, however, 'Wenn ich groß bin' functions as an archive. It was once the wild East; it has been survived by a textual model made up of secret codes, stock phrases and pedagogical warnings.¹⁹

This archival function of the text, which includes making references to consumer products and popular culture, is a feature which many reviewers were criticising as

¹⁷ Magenau, 'Schamjahre'.

¹⁸ Westphal.

¹⁹ Ibid.

'ostalgic' a few years later, as will be discussed further below. Knoll similarly perceives value in the text as a record of East German life. She describes it as a 'memory book' which preserves authentic elements of the East German past within a fictional story:

Kathrin Aehnlich's book is a book of memories, not a coming-of-age novel. It is a combination of documentary and story and it is in the authenticity of this form that its appeal lies. Other people have different memories, that is certain and something we want to insist on, so that the monolithic view of life in the GDR which people who have never lived in the GDR are so fond of maintaining will one day be convincingly revised.²⁰

Knoll's insistence that there should be a plurality of memories about the East German past shows a recognition that there cannot be one archetypal representation of growing up in the GDR, and that a range of texts must be considered. Aehnlich's narrative is perceived as representing just one of many possible ways in which the GDR was experienced and in which it might be remembered. Reflection on how literature can offer a varied and nuanced representation of the socialist past is not something which emerges in the Russian reviews. Even among the German reviews, however, this measured attitude towards the representation of East German childhood experience is less commonly found in reviews of later texts; the concept of *Ostalgie* and the approach taken by Hensel's *Zonenkinder*, which explicitly seeks to represent collective rather than individual experience, significantly changed the criteria against which such texts are assessed.

²⁰ Irene Knoll, 'Heitere Erinnerungen an eine Kindheit', *Berliner LeseZeichen* 7 (July/August 1998) <http://www.luise-berlin.de/lesezei/blz98_07/text27.htm> [accessed 12 April 2011].

Zonenkinder

It is impossible to discuss the reception of texts concerning childhood in the GDR without summarising the debate provoked by Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder*, first published in 2002. The text seeks to preserve the memory of typical childhood experiences in the GDR in the 1980s and to describe the experiences of the East German generation who were still adolescents at the time of the *Wende*.

Zonenkinder was a bestseller, selling over 160,000 copies in the first year after publication.²¹ Hensel's text has not only proved the commercial viability of the subject matter, but has also received a lot of media attention, sometimes provoking heated discussion. *Zonenkinder* is often used as a point of comparison in reviews of other texts which look back to the GDR and/or convey the experience of reunification for young East Germans. The text received some harsh criticisms, and, as will be shown below, some authors have been praised for offering a different kind of portrayal of East German childhood to that in *Zonenkinder*. Here I will summarise some of the main criticisms of Hensel's text, as well as some of the praise it received, before going on to look at the effects of this controversy and how subsequently published texts describing childhood in the last generation of the GDR have been received in light of the debates.²²

Firstly, it is important to explain the meaning of the term 'Zonenkinder', created by Hensel for the title of her book, which refers to the particular generation who were still adolescents at the time of the GDR's collapse. Hensel writes:

²¹ Tom Kraushaar, ed., *Die Zonenkinder und Wir: Die Geschichte eines Phänomens* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004), p. 7.

²² For more detail on the reception of Hensel's text see the volume edited by Kraushaar (cited above) and for an analysis in English see Jennifer Bierich-Shahbazi, 'The *Zonenkinder* Debate: An Analysis of Media Reaction to Two Popular Memoirs Written by East Germany's Youngest Generation of Authors', in *Ossi Wessi*, ed. by Donald Backman and Aida Sakalauskaite (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), pp. 57–74.

We grew up neither in the GDR nor in the Federal Republic. We are children of the zone in which everything must be built from scratch, where not a stone was left standing and hardly any goal has already been achieved.²³

Elsewhere, she describes her generation as 'hybrid East-West children [zwitterige Ost-westkinder]'.²⁴ The particular nature of this generation has also been noted by other authors. Rusch expresses a similar idea to Hensel's description of a generation that does not fit neatly into East or West. Whereas Hensel sees her generation as belonging neither to East nor West, Rusch seems to see it as the best of both worlds. She says of her year group at school: 'We were the last real Ossis. And the first new Wessis.'²⁵ As will be discussed below, Rusch's more positive approach to the *Wende* and lack of nostalgia for the East German past is one reason why her text has received more widespread praise than Hensel's. It has already been mentioned that Daniel Wiechmann makes a similar statement in the Foreword of *Immer Bereit*, suggesting that his identity encompasses both Eastern and Western perspectives.²⁶ The term 'Zonenkinder' is often used in the media, not only with reference to representation of the GDR in literature, but sometimes simply to describe those who were teenagers or young adults at the time of the GDR's collapse.²⁷ That the term has caught on in more general usage, as well as being echoed in the work of Rusch and Wiechmann, suggests that there is widespread recognition of the specificity of this particular generation's experience, even if not all agree on what that experience was. Finally, the term is also used by some literary critics, often in conjunction with accusations of *Ostalgie*, as an example of how the GDR should not be represented.

²³ Jana Hensel, *Zonenkinder* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004) pp. 159–160.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁵ Claudia Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005), p. 101.

²⁶ See Chapter 3, p. 182.

²⁷ See, for example, this article on differing attitudes between young former East Germans and the older generation: Mia Raben, 'Aufbruch der Zonenkinder', *Spiegel*, 14 July 2004 <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,308701,00.html>> [accessed 23 May 2011].

Criticisms of *Zonenkinder* have two main targets: Hensel's attempt to present her personal memories and reflections as representative of a generation and the lack of depth in her representation of the GDR, which avoids any discussion of the repressive nature of the state. Tom Kraushaar, in his edited collection of materials surrounding the reception of Hensel's text, sums up these main criticisms as 'excessive generalizations' and 'naïve trivialization of the GDR'.²⁸ Ingo Arend, for example, criticises the lack of analysis in Hensel's account; he observes: 'Indeed, she doesn't give a second thought to the reasons behind the failure of this state, which has retrospectively been romanticized as a homeland with a "nice warm sense of community [Wir-Gefühl]".²⁹ Hensel has challenged this view; in an interview she defended her approach to the text by emphasizing that she sought to represent the GDR as personal memories, separate from politics and ideology: 'For me it was about purging memory of ideology. I didn't want to write about the GDR as a political system. I wanted to describe it as a place of origin.'³⁰ She argues that having only childhood memories of the GDR is significant in this respect:

When I speak of childhood I mean the time of innocence in which it is simply not yet clear to you what kind of system you live in, or to what extent you share responsibility or could be to blame.³¹

In another article she is quoted as saying: 'What does a 13-year-old know about an illegal state [Unrechtsstaat]?'³² Because Hensel was thirteen years old when the Berlin Wall came down and did not live in close contact with dissidents, as, for example, Claudia Rusch did, it is not surprising that her own memories (and those of many of her generation) did not include perceptions of the GDR as repressive.

²⁸ Kraushaar, p. 25.

²⁹ Ingo Arend, 'Der Setzkasten der Erinnerung', in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, ed. by Kraushaar, pp. 36–41 (p. 38).

³⁰ Kraushaar, 'Die Normalität des Ausnahmezustands: Ein Gespräch mit Jana Hensel', in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, pp. 94–110 (p. 95).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³² Doja Hacker, 'Ich bin aber nicht traurig', in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, ed. by Kraushaar, pp. 55–60 (p. 57).

She provides a representation of how many in this generation experienced the collapse of the GDR. Hensel's defence could be seen as problematic, however, because the text is not written primarily from the perspective of her childhood self. The narration is explicitly retrospective and yet Hensel does not address how her generation negotiated the combining of personal memories with knowledge later gained of how the East German state operated (as the final chapters of Wiechmann's *Immer Bereit* do, for example). This is one reason why her highly selective narration of memories and perceptions of the GDR is not considered valid or useful by some sections of the German press.

Another significant influence on the media reaction to *Zonenkinder* could be a privileging of West German discourse about the GDR. Jennifer Bierich-Shahbazi argues that criticisms of Hensel's text for avoiding political issues and not portraying the GDR as a repressive state 'say more about the critics' expectations of how East Germany should be reconstructed, a reinforcement of the negative images of the GDR, rather than their opinions about the novel'.³³ Bierich-Shahbazi notes that Claudia Rusch's memoir has received widespread praise and that reviews of *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* tend to focus on 'stereotypical elements that have been portrayed repetitively in the media,' such as encounters with the Stasi.³⁴ This comparison supports the argument that Rusch's book is favoured because she conforms to the expectation that narratives about the GDR should portray repression and demonstrate opposition to the East German State, while Hensel is criticised for not doing so. (Reception of Rusch's memoir will be discussed in more detail further below.)

Hensel's decision to write based on her childhood knowledge of the GDR, without further reflection on the nature of state which in many ways influenced the childhood environment she yearns to recreate, might have been accepted as a valid

³³ Bierich-Shahbazi, p. 58.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

representation of her personal perspective. Hensel's text is, however, written in the first person plural: the 'Wir' form. She does not write only about her own individual experience but seeks to speak for others. Bierich-Shahbazi has noted that this attempt to write about the collective experience of a generation was received far more negatively by former East German critics than in reviews by former West Germans. A suggested reason for this differentiated response is that former East Germans perceive negative connotations in the idea of being identified collectively, whereas for former West Germans the idea of having something 'in common' is a far more appealing idea.³⁵ As Bierich-Shahbazi notes, the idea of the 'collective' was 'one of the many negative stereotypes which former citizens of the East Germany tried desperately to shed in the 1990s'.³⁶ Hensel has stated that she wanted to provide an opportunity for identification (*Identifikationsangebot*) and while many critics rejected this universalizing of a generation's experience, I will show further below that some readers enthusiastically identified themselves as part of Hensel's 'Wir'.³⁷

Zonenkinder was not universally criticised. Reinhard Mohr recognises Hensel's 'Identifikationsangebot' when he emphasizes the book's function in representing the common experiences of a generation and thereby creating a sense of shared identity: 'Jana Hensel has now created a small memorial to the children of the zone, the first generation of unified Germany.'³⁸ While it is potentially controversial to see *Zonenkinder* as a monument or memorial given that Hensel does not make any mention of the effects of surveillance, political control and limited freedoms in the GDR, this comment demonstrates recognition that the abuses of the state are not the only aspect of the GDR which should be

³⁵ Ibid., p. 64. She makes reference to an interview with Hensel and Alexander Fest (Director of the publishing house, Rowohlt): Doja Hacker, 'Der umstrittener Bestseller-Erfolg den jungen Leipzigerin Jana Hensel', *Der Spiegel*, 6 January 2003, p. 138.

³⁶ Bierich-Shahbazi, p. 65.

³⁷ Kraushaar, 'Die Normalität des Ausnahmezustands', p. 95. For discussion of readers' reactions, see below, pp. 280–296.

³⁸ Reinhard Mohr, 'Jenseits von Schkopau', in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, ed. by Kraushaar, pp. 17–24 (p. 24).

remembered. Mohr's comments are quoted on the back cover of later editions of the texts. Two other quotations are also used in the book's paratext to assert the text's significance for negotiating memory of the GDR and for integration in reunified Germany. A comment from the magazine, *Emma*, praises the text for preserving the collective memory of a generation, thereby, like Mohr, recognising the value of remembering aspects of everyday life: 'Saving a childhood from disappearing and thus archiving the collective memory of the children of the *Wende*, that is the great achievement of this book.'³⁹ Secondly, a comment by Angela Merkel is quoted, asserting that the text has the potential to increase understanding between former East and West Germans: 'The book accomplishes something which could contribute to overcoming a major misunderstanding of German unity.'⁴⁰ These more positive assessments of *Zonenkinder* demonstrate the perceived importance of the collective memory of everyday life and the value attached to opportunities to identify with others on the basis of shared experience. Merkel's comment indicates that presenting those memories in a form which is accessible to former West Germans (who do not share that experience) is also considered productive.

Hensel's book might have been differently received if she had used the first person singular and had spoken only about her own personal perspective, but this is likely to have generated far less debate, and therefore almost certainly fewer book sales. Owen Evans points out that, however representative it may or may not be, the fact that the text has stimulated discussion is significant:

One should not view Hensel's text as the definitive record of this generation by any means – although one must note that her term 'Zonenkinder' has now stuck – and if it provokes responses from others, then it is fulfilling an

³⁹ In the 2004 printing. I have not been able to access the original article.

⁴⁰ In the 2004 printing. Angela Merkel, 'Unser Selbstbewusstsein', in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, ed. by Kraushaar, pp. 75–76.

important role in the debate about this generation's position in the new Germany and the validity of their experience.⁴¹

Moritz Baßler also addresses this function of the text. He observes that *Zonenkinder* lacks analysis because Hensel does not have the required distance from what she describes; she is part of it herself, but she is also doing more than simply telling her own story.⁴² This does not mean that her text does not have value. Baßler suggests that Hensel's use of 'Wir' was essential for provoking debate and discussions, and because she has opened up this discursive space, other authors, such as Rusch, can write their own more personal stories.⁴³ In terms of the publishing market, the commercial success of her text also seems very likely to have encouraged the writing and publication of other texts relating to GDR childhood, thus increasing the range of available narratives contributing to cultural representation of the East German past, and East German childhood in particular.

Meine freie deutsche Jugend

Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* represents a very different experience of the GDR and the *Wende* to that in Hensel's text, in part because Rusch portrays her family's experiences of state repression. Critics often demonstrate particular interest in this aspect of the text, giving details of the author's background. Bierich-Shahbazi's analysis has found that reviews which particularly praised *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* placed a significant focus on Rusch's family connections to dissidents.⁴⁴ Certainly, all of the reviews discussed here mention that Rusch grew up among dissidents and refer to the Havemanns by name, even though Robert Havemann has little significance in the text (other than being the reason why Rusch was aware of the Stasi at a young age). In describing the content of the text, most

⁴¹ Owen Evans, "'Denn wir sind anders': 'Zonenkinder' in the Federal Republic", *German as a Foreign Language*, 2, (2005), 20–33 (p. 24).

⁴² Moritz Baßler, 'Die "Zonenkinder" und das "Wir"', in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, ed. by Kraushaar, pp. 111–119 (p. 118).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁴ Bierich-Shahbazi, pp. 71–72.

critics focus on chapters which relate to the Stasi. For the critic Birgit Walter it appears that Rusch's background means her story is more important to tell: 'Claudia Rusch is not a grateful child of the GDR, she grew up in dissident circles – she has something to tell.'⁴⁵ This is a symptom of what Bierich-Shahbazi has noted in comparing the reception of Hensel and Rusch: a privileging of narratives which conform to (former) West German expectations of how the GDR should be represented.⁴⁶ Walter also perceives Rusch's 'serious' portrayal of the failings of the East German state within an entertaining narrative to be the text's strength: 'Despite the entertaining form, her reflections on childhood and the past display a great seriousness which captures much of the nature of the collapsed state, including its malice, duplicity, pettiness and narrowness.'⁴⁷ Walter's characterization of East Germany implies that she considers a highly negative portrayal of the GDR to be more legitimate than that presented in texts such as *Zonenkinder*.

Almost all reviews of *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* compare the text to *Zonenkinder* and to other cultural products of *Ostalgie*. Ingo Arend emphasizes that Rusch's text is not just another text in the style of *Zonenkinder*:

In any case I have no reason to remember my deprived childhood,' says Rusch at one point, dismissing the new euphoric wave of remembering, which has swept up every moderately talented author who wishes to wrest his GDR teddy-bear from historical oblivion. That sounds like a snub to Hensel&Co. And Rusch has indeed written 25 episodes that are very worth reading.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Birgit Walter, 'Kein FDGB-Urlaub in Kühlungsborn', *Berliner Zeitung*, 22 July 2003 <<http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2003/0722/feuilleton/0138/index.html>> [accessed 11 April 2011].

⁴⁶ See especially, Bierich-Shahbazi, p. 72.

⁴⁷ Walter.

⁴⁸ Ingo Arend, 'Hassliebe: Claudia Ruschs "Meine Freie Deutsche Jugend"', *Freitag*, 5 September 2003 <<http://www.freitag.de/kultur/0337-schizophren>> [accessed 11 April 2011].

Jens Bisky emphasizes that, unlike Hensel, Rusch is not trying to speak for a generation:

Anyone who, like Claudia Rusch, grew up in the small, exclusive world of civil rights campaigners has little opportunity to sell his or her own life as representative of a generation. [...] Rusch makes no attempt to take the sting out of her particular life or to tempt the reader with cosiness. She has nothing to offer to those who wish to be *Zonenkinder*.⁴⁹

The language used by both these reviewers suggests a perception of *Zonenkinder* as a commercial rather than literary product ('Hensel&Co'; 'to sell [...] as representative of a generation', in the original: 'als Generationendurchschnitt zu verkaufen').⁵⁰ Walter also compares Rusch's memoir favourably to *Zonenkinder*, appreciating the lack of nostalgia in Rusch's text as well the lack of a narrating 'Wir':

[T]he stories are well constructed and written in the singular. She doesn't bother us with chatter about generations or with pushy, form-prefect attitude. She spares the reader the warm sense of community [Wir-Gefühl], the embarrassing eastern parents and the nostalgic search for old routes to school (*Zonenkinder*).⁵¹

In many reviews, as in the last example, condemnation of *Zonenkinder* and *Ostalgie* is not explained or justified, but simply assumed as the 'correct' response for both critic and reader. Susanne Leinemann, on the other hand, explores the

⁴⁹ Jens Bisky, 'Peggy, Petzke, Polizisten', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 July 2003 <http://www.buecher.de/shop/buecher/meine-freie-deutsche-jugend/rusch-claudia/products_products/detail/prod_id/11788732/> [accessed 13 April 2011].

⁵⁰ Both Bisky and Arend wrote highly critical reviews of Hensel (both reproduced in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, ed. by Kraushaar). Bisky has also been a vocal critic of *Ostalgie*, see Chapter 2, p. 92, n. 122, and has published his own memoir which includes a section on his childhood in the GDR: *Geboren am 13. August: Der Sozialismus und ich* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2004).

⁵¹ Walter.

issue in a little more depth by indicating the potential effect of increasing nostalgia for the GDR:

Many in East and West are secretly asking themselves: Was my instinctive repulsion against the GDR so misplaced? Was my assessment so wide of the mark? Were the majority of the country's inhabitants not depressed, did its uniformed officers, for instance, not behave in a frightening and authoritarian manner?⁵²

Leinemann suggests that the prevalence of nostalgic representations of the GDR may obscure memory of the repressive nature of the state. She advocates Rusch's memoir as a contribution which might counteract this effect of widespread *Ostalgie*, stating that the text helps to redress the balance.⁵³

Hensel's text was criticised in part for a lack of depth and analysis. It cannot be denied that, in spite of all the favourable comparisons to *Zonenkinder*, Rusch's memoir is also a highly subjective and selective account which does not engage in detailed reflection on the failures of the East German state. Some reviewers have commented on the lack of depth in Rusch's text. Erika Deiss praises Rusch's book and only briefly comments that the text does not offer any critical analysis of the GDR: 'Claudia Rusch has a lot to tell even though reflecting on her experiences and critically assessing them is not what concerns her.'⁵⁴ Bierich-Shahbazi observes that the 'brushing aside' of this aspect of the text by Deiss is 'the exact opposite way

⁵² Susanne Leinemann, 'Die DDR war mies', *Die Welt*, 26 July 2003 <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article248854/Die_DDR_war_mies.html> [accessed 6 April 2011].

⁵³ Leinemann, a former West German, has written her own account of the *Wende* period: *Aufgewacht: Mauer weg* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002).

⁵⁴ Erika Deiss, 'DDädderäh? Non merci!', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 30 July 2003 <http://www.fr-online.de/in_und_ausland/kultur_und_medien/literatur/?em_cnt=260238&em_loc=92> [accessed 12 November 2008].

that Hensel's book was received'.⁵⁵ Leinemann also suggests that the one aspect of the book which leaves the reader unsatisfied is the lack of detail:

Claudia Rusch describes very private moments and yet noticeably holds a lot back. She gives glimpses through the keyhole, yet has hung a fine gauze over the opening. The people who determine the shape of her life, therefore, remain shadowy in the narration.⁵⁶

Leinemann suggests some examples of what more the reader wants to know:

He wants a visual conception of the mother that has so strongly influenced the daughter. How does she look? How does she speak? What are her silences like? What does she wear? One would like to find out how things were at the Havemanns. Shelves full of books? Empty white walls? After reading, you are left wanting more – more description, more emotion, more context, more details.⁵⁷

Although what Leinemann appears to be advocating is more in-depth characterization and description of the setting, the examples given indicate that there is an appetite for greater insight into dissident life in the GDR, again emphasizing the crucial role that this plays in responses to Rusch's memoir.

Meine freie deutsche Jugend receives particular praise for revealing the contradictions inherent in remembering the GDR. Leinemann perceives the strength of Rusch's narrative in her depiction of the failings of the state whilst still being true to her happy childhood memories:

⁵⁵ Bierich-Shahbazi, p. 71.

⁵⁶ Leinemann.

⁵⁷ Leinemann.

The clear language which boldly dares to express what the author thinks is one of the strengths of this book. 'I hated the small-mindedness of the GDR, the bigoted madness instituted between Wandlitz and the viewing of West German television.' At the same time, the tone in which she recollects the collapsed state is warm and full of affection. She never sympathizes with the East German state, but she also does not betray her childhood. And that is quite something when you consider the nostalgic literature currently on offer.⁵⁸

While Leinemann sees the ambivalence on a personal level, Arend sees a reflection of the East German attitude to the past in general:

Indeed, if Rusch has been successful in something, then it is in revealing this love-hate emotion, the inner dialectic of repulsion and identification which still binds to the GDR the harshest critics of the regime – the origin of East German hostility, which remains misunderstood in the West.⁵⁹

Rusch's memoir is therefore perceived as valuable in promoting understanding between East and West in reunified Germany.

An article by Rusch herself, published in *Die Welt* more than a year after the publication of her memoir, discusses questions of how the GDR should be remembered. The article is presented as a response to a question Rusch has frequently been asked: how was she able to write about her childhood in the GDR 'so freely and lightly'?⁶⁰ Rusch acknowledges that personal memory cannot always align itself with official representations of the past: 'Are the right feelings in the

⁵⁸ Ibid. Wandlitz was where many high-ranking members of the SED lived.

⁵⁹ Arend, 'Hassliebe'.

⁶⁰ Claudia Rusch, 'Richtige Gefühle im falschen Staat: Erinnerungen an die DDR', *Die Welt*, 2 October 2004 <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article343959/Richtige_Gefuehle_im_falschen_Staat_Erinnerungen_an_die_DDR.html> [accessed 6 April 2011].

wrong state not permitted? That would be presumptuous. Everyone has the right to remember his or her own history. Osis included.⁶¹ She emphasizes, however, that it is 'how' one remembers that is important: 'Because directing one's gaze on the private sphere is one thing, the trivialization of a system which despised human beings is something quite different.'⁶² Rusch's exploration of the tension between personal memory and the need to avoid a misleading representation of the East German 'dictatorship' prioritises the latter:

No, we, those of us who know the truth better, should counteract this denial in the best possible way by telling stories from our lives and by continuing to show that the GDR, even when looking back 15 years later, was no cuddly-state [Kuschelstaat] with a possibility of a future, but a cynical, hypocritical system, [...]. If one keeps referring to it, it isn't about condemning the life that took place there [...], it is just about a precise and subtle reappraisal. Life comes in many colours of course, even in a dictatorship. But nonetheless it remains a dictatorship. That is not a question of memory, but, as it was back then, it is a question of perspective.⁶³

For Rusch it is important to present personal memories of the GDR within a broader context of knowledge about the state. Most significant for this thesis, however, is the fact that Rusch wrote and published this article at all, as it indicates significant levels of interest in debates about the representation of the East German past. The reception of Rusch's memoir and the ensuing discussion involving critics, readers (as will be shown further below) and further comment by the author herself provides a stark contrast to the Russian context where issues of how the Soviet past is portrayed are discussed rarely, with limited scope, and often only by implication rather than the in-depth discussion seen in the German context.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Halbschwimmer

A consideration of how literary, fictional accounts of childhood and youth in the GDR are compared to *Zonenkinder* is useful in further demonstrating the expectations and preferences of critics with regard to narratives of East German childhood. One text which has been praised for offering something different is Katja Oskamp's *Halbschwimmer* (2003): a novel, structured as a series of interconnected short stories, portraying scenes and events during the childhood and youth of the protagonist, Tanja. Critics are quick to assert that this text is not just another *Zonenkinder* despite it being set in the late GDR and *Wende* period. Sibylle Birrer anticipates and challenges the expectations of the reader: 'Another piece of memory prose then? Getting to grips with the past with a shot of *Ostalgie*? By no means. Because there is a subtlety to Katja Oskamp's work.'⁶⁴ A review in *Die Welt* also places Oskamp outside the trend: 'The episodes about the protagonist Tanja have nothing in common with other generation-compendia and the sighs of recognition they prompt.'⁶⁵ Oskamp's work is clearly perceived as offering something different and more valuable than texts which appeal mainly to consumer demand for *Ostalgie*; *Halbschwimmer* is, in comparison, praised as a more 'literary' text. One of the few criticisms made about *Halbschwimmer* in several reviews is that Oskamp does include a few references to specific East German brands in her narrative. An emphasis on the surface reality of everyday life, especially popular culture and consumer items, is a common feature of texts categorised by some as 'ostalgic'.⁶⁶ Verena Auffermann suggests that Oskamp had no need to tap into the demand for *Ostalgie*:

Actually Katja Oskamp has no need of Roger Whittaker records, Duett cigarettes and Undine fragrance, but that's really all that has crept into this

⁶⁴ Sibylle Birrer, 'Leichtes aus dem Zwischenland: Das bemerkenswerte Erzähldebüt von Katja Oskamp', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 14 January 2004, Feuilleton, p. 45.

⁶⁵ Oliver Jahn, 'Kurz und knapp: Belletristik', *Die Welt*, 17 January 2004 <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article286767/Kurz_und_knapp_Belletristik.html> [accessed 06 April 2011].

⁶⁶ See Saunders, "'Normalizing" the Past', pp. 91–92.

book of the current trend for *Ostalgie*. We are not talking here about a catalogue of products and consumerist excess, but about literature.⁶⁷

The clear implication in Auffermann's comments is that 'ostalgic' representations cannot have any literary worth.

The East German context is not such a major theme in Oskamp's stories as in the other German texts discussed here. Oskamp does not, for example, portray her protagonist's experience of the Young Pioneers, her *Jugendweihe* or the fall of the Berlin Wall and first experiences of the West. The prominence of the socialist setting in *Halbschwimmer* is, in fact, similar to the prominence of the Soviet past in several of the Russian texts. Oskamp's portrayal of the East German state nonetheless provokes a significant amount of comment among several critics. This demonstrates an increased sensitivity to portrayal of the specifically East German setting among German critics when compared with the reception of texts about Soviet childhood in the Russian press. Hans Joachim Neubauer, for example, claims that although Oskamp's narrative does not directly reflect on the GDR as an ideological or political entity, the text is nonetheless political in showing the experience of growing up at that time:

Everything we see is from the perspective of Tanja's experience. This lively subjective book about the 80s in the GDR and the 90s in unified Germany is, therefore, also a political one. Katja Oskamp's great skill is in showing rather than telling.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Verena Auffermann, 'Am runden Tisch der Kleinfamilie', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 November 2003 <http://www.buecher.de/shop/rauriser-literaturpreis/halbschwimmer/oskamp-katja/products_products/detail/prod_id/11764237/> [accessed 17 July 2011]. See also Jan Wagner, 'Blut im Schuh. Nachrichten aus der Kindheit: Katja Oskamps vielversprechendes Debut "Halbschwimmer"', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 21 January 2004 <<http://www.fr-online.de/kultur/literatur/blut-im-schuh/-/1472266/3227470/-/index.html>> [accessed 17 July 2011].

⁶⁸ Hans-Joachim Neubauer, 'Katja Oskamp erzählt von den seltsamen Wegen des Älterwerdens', *Rheinischer Merkur*, 9 October 2003 <<http://www.lyrikwelt.de/rezensionen/halbschwimmerin-r.htm>> [accessed 18 July 2011].

Similarly, Auffermann notes that the text portrays the political nature of the period indirectly: 'Life under Honecker's rule is seen here from the world of a girl who knows little of politics but feels the effects of it everywhere.'⁶⁹ Auffermann's further characterization of the text reveals an unfavourable attitude to the GDR which has little basis in the actual content of the text: 'A light-hearted, lucid book about growing up in a repressive state [...] it conveys the atmosphere of life in a surveillance-state [Spitzelstaat].'⁷⁰ The use of the term 'Spitzelstaat' is particularly striking given that *Halbschwimmer* does not include any reference to surveillance or the Stasi.

The critic, Silja Ukena, also comments on Oskamp's portrayal of the GDR: 'the political reality creeps in to the lives of the characters rather quietly, almost casually.'⁷¹ Despite this acknowledgement that the East German state is portrayed indirectly as part of the backdrop to the characters' lives, the greater proportion of Ukena's review is, nonetheless, focussed on the author's family background in the GDR. The review begins by describing how the author had not intended to write about the GDR: 'Katja Oskamp, 33, did not want to call this defunct state to account, nor to mourn for it. "I wanted to explore experiences which influenced my life. I consider it to be a very personal matter."⁷² Ukena suggests that a political dimension was inevitable, citing details of the author's biography:

It couldn't have been any other way, because Oskamp, born in Leipzig, grew up the daughter of a high-ranking National People's Army officer and a headmistress of a school in East Berlin. Her parents believed in the SED and

⁶⁹ Auffermann.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Silja Ukena, 'Leise Fragen', *Kultur Spiegel* 1 (2004), p. 42

<<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/kulturspiegel/d-29585896.html>> [accessed 26 May 2011].

⁷² Ibid.

in the GDR and wanted to create for their daughter the nicest and smoothest possible path towards real existing socialism.⁷³

The critic's decision to report the political views of the author's parents in a review of a fictional text seems to show a disproportionate interest in categorising the author in terms of her East German background.

It seems that, although several critics praise Oskamp's more subtle approach to representing East German childhood and youth, there is still a significant level of interest in specific details of the text and the author's life relating to politics and ideology. In contrast to much of the Russian reception, to be discussed in the second part of this chapter, these reviews present Oskamp's stories as worthy of the reader's interest, in part *because* they represent the specific conditions of growing up in the GDR.

Waning interest in narratives of East German childhood

By 2004 reviews of texts depicting East German childhood reveal an increasing sense of frustration at the perceived lack of originality in content and approach of the majority of texts. The critic Magenau, who, as discussed above, favourably reviewed Kathrin Aehnlich's novel in 1998, suggests in an article published in 2004 that the number of texts about East German childhood and youth has reached saturation point:

Are there any stories of childhood and youth in the later years of the GDR that have not yet been told? No? Then perhaps now would be a good time to stop. It started in the mid-nineties with Thomas Brussig's 'Helden wie wir'. Since then no school day, no Baltic coast holiday, no debate with middle-class parents and no first love in a blue shirt has been missed. Everything

⁷³ Ibid.

possible has been transformed into literature with the GDR as backdrop, because this genre promises interest and success.⁷⁴

The suggestion is that the subject is represented for the purposes of commercial success rather than literary achievement. Magenau was not the only critic who expressed a wish for a more original take on the GDR. The critic Gisa Funck praises a collection of short stories by Roswitha Haring, *Das halbe Leben* (2007), in which the East German setting is not prominent but rather provides a backdrop for exploration of more universal themes such as relationships and self-understanding. In her review Funck describes the use of brands and icons which made the texts of the 'Zonenkinder' so popular with readers, and which she is pleased *not* to find in Haring's stories:

Five years ago, perhaps, stories of youth in the GDR were considered a successful genre in the German literary industry. That was the time of the 'Zonenkinder' and 'Generation Trabant' – a controversial label, that was, however, borrowed not entirely by chance from the consumerist, West German 'Generation Golf'. Many young authors from the East also listed brand names and logos in their recollections of the GDR: from Pioneer caps to Sandmännchen, from the SERO collection point to the socialist young people's magazine 'FRÖSI'. And the conjuring up of a common childhood by listing the signifiers of everyday life was by no means insignificant in making authors such as Jana Hensel, Jakob Hein, Jochen Schmidt and Falko Hennig popular with their readers.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Jörg Magenau, 'Plattenbau als Kulisse: Institutionalisiertes Erzählen: Katja Oskamps Debütband' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 January 2004 <<http://www.faz.net/artikel/C30347/plattenbau-als-kulisse-30239353.html>> [accessed 17 July 2011]. A decline in interest in the GDR in general as a subject for German literature is noted by Paul Cooke in "'GDR literature" in the Berlin Republic', p. 56. Blue shirts were part of the uniform for the Free German Youth (Freie deutsche Jugend).

⁷⁵ Gisa Funck, 'Dies ist kein Liebeslied: Roswitha Haring besingt den traurigen Vogel Jugend', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 July 2007 <<http://www.faz.net/artikel/C30347/dies-ist-kein-liebeslied-30149311.html>> [accessed 27 July 2011]. Texts about childhood and youth in the GDR by Hein, Schmidt and Hennig were noted above, see Introduction, p. 18. The

However popular this approach may have been, it seems that there was subsequently a decline in interest. Several reviews convey a sense that there have now been too many books, without significant literary merit, about everyday life in the GDR. An article by Susanne Messmer published in May 2004 praises young writers from the GDR who avoid the clichés of representing the East German past, authors who are 'emancipated from the GDR: from its sweetness as well as from its horrors'.⁷⁶ This comment indicates that it is not only 'ostalgic' portrayals of everyday life that have diminished appeal, but also texts which focus on revealing horrors of growing up in the GDR. Messmer is critical of Michael Tetzlaff's *Ostblöckchen* (2004), a humorous and often cynical account of childhood in the GDR, first published as a newspaper column in *Frankfurter Rundschau*. Messmer dismisses Tetzlaff as a straggler ('Nachzügler'):

It's a shame that funny moments like this get lost in Michael Tetzlaff's book – they get lost between the ridiculous title and the twee humour, between school trips to the fraternal socialist countries, between holiday camps and *Jugendweihe* ceremonies. We've had all this a hundred times already from the 'Zonenkinder'⁷⁷

According to the critics there was little left to say by the mid-2000s on the subject of growing up in the GDR.

term 'Generation Golf' comes from a novel of the same name by Florian Illies, published in 2000. *Zonenkinder* has frequently been compared to *Generation Golf* as it is also narrated primarily from the 'Wir' perspective and describes the experiences in the 1980s of a generation of young West Germans. 'Sandmännchen' was a popular East German children's animated TV programme. In the GDR, school children were encouraged to collect raw materials for recycling, which would be taken to the SERO collection point.

⁷⁶ Susanne Messmer, 'Die neuen Zonenkinder', *Die Tageszeitung*, 28 May 2004 <<http://www.taz.de/?id=archivseite&dig=2004/05/28/a0222>> [accessed 31 March 2010].

⁷⁷ Messmer. For another example of a review which suggests Tetzlaff has little new to offer, see: Olaf Selg, 'Nicht viel Neues aus der Zone', *Titel*, 28 May 2004 <<http://www.titel-magazin.de/artikel/1335.html>> [accessed 12 April 2011].

Immer Bereit

Daniel Wiechmann's text has received little critical attention, probably partly due to the waning interest in East German childhood demonstrated above. *Immer Bereit* was reviewed in the online publication, *Titel-Kulturmagazin*. The reviewer, Birgit Kuhn, categorises Wiechmann as a follower of the 'Zonenkinder' trend: 'Jana Hensel and Claudia Rusch led the way with *Zonenkinder* (2002) and *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (2003) and Daniel Wiechmann followed – that is the impression which strikes you after reading.'⁷⁸ She does acknowledge the differing ideological perspectives of the three texts, but nonetheless does not consider that Wiechmann offers anything substantially different to previous texts:

Immer bereit! offers little that's new in terms of content, it is similarly wide-ranging as its predecessors and is told in the familiar short-stories-structure – three good reasons to classify this book as 'nice, but a little inconsequential'. Nevertheless, it is certainly a pleasing, easy-to-read book of reminiscences for those feeling 'ostalgic' and for the Zonenkinder generation!⁷⁹

The book is presented as likely to appeal only to those whose own memories overlap with those of the narrator. This seems to be an underestimation of Wiechmann's text which addresses the difficulty of negotiating the East German past as a young adult who had been brought up not to question the dominant ideology, something which neither Rusch nor Hensel conveys. Although Wiechmann does not portray repression in the GDR in terms of the Stasi, he does show how children were socialised and inculcated with ideology, and he offers reflections on his own identity during and after the *Wende* as he began to see the GDR from an alternative perspective. It is perhaps the humorous and light-hearted style of

⁷⁸ Birgit Kuhn, "Über allen strahlt die Sonne...", *Titel*, 6 May 2004 <<http://www.titel-magazin.de/artikel/1248.html>> [accessed 6 April 2011].

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Wiechmann's text which disguises the seriousness of its content, but it may also be the case that the extended debate surrounding Hensel's *Zonenkinder*, despite having opened up discussion about the way the GDR is remembered, has also led to a dismissive attitude towards texts which are assumed to be 'cashing in' on the trend.

I found only one other critical response to Wiechmann's text: a very short review in the *Berliner Zeitung*. The critic, Torsten Harmsen, begins by defining the generation to which Wiechmann belongs:

The last generation of East German school pupils were already too old to be able to ignore the GDR, and are still too young to fully understand it. They have a strong need to understand themselves and want to contribute to the discussion: We were there!⁸⁰

Harmsen's comments indicate that the content of Wiechmann's work is similar to other narratives about childhood in the last years of the GDR: 'Daniel Wiechmann, born in 1974, also tells us a lot about nursery, life as a Pioneer, flag ceremonies and holiday camps.'⁸¹ This is not, however, the main cause of criticism for the text, rather it is the lack of literary subtlety which disappoints: 'Some memories are amusing, to some extent also touching. But Wiechmann spoils it all by retrospectively cramming cliché-ridden meaning into them.'⁸² The claim is justified with the example of Wiechmann's description of school children campaigning to be allowed outside to play, with obvious references to acts of protest against the state. (Discussed in the previous chapter, see p. 187).

⁸⁰ Torsten Harmsen, 'Mit Bedeutung vollgestopft', *Berliner Zeitung*, 19 August 2004 <<http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2004/0819/literatur/0096/index.html>> [accessed 31 May 2011].

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

These two reviews of *Immer Bereit* do not express interest in Wiechmann's portrayal of the GDR, but rather concern at what they perceive as a lack of originality and literary merit.

Rüber machen...

Finally, Mourad Kusserow's autobiography was published in 2008 and has been reviewed by only one critic, Sabine Brandt. It seems likely that this text appeared too late to provoke much media interest. Brandt acknowledges that Kusserow is using autobiographical narration of childhood and youth as a vehicle for a broader engagement with the past and the GDR state:

Indeed the autobiographical aspect is not the author's primary concern, rather it provides him with a medium for exploring the way of life which was imposed on seventeen million Germans for more than four decades and which is also gradually 'going over' ['rüber macht'] to the land of forgetting or, worse still, being reinterpreted and manipulated.⁸³

The last part of this comment assigns value to Kusserow's text as a challenge to more superficial or misleading representations of the GDR. Brandt judges Kusserow's approach to be successful in combining historical information with an engaging narrative: 'What the author Kusserow recounts could for many, therefore, be a kind of history lesson, and one which never makes excessive demands of the pupils' interest and patience.'⁸⁴ Kusserow's narrative is already highly critical of the East German state, but Brandt further emphasizes the abuses of the state, beyond what is portrayed in the text, when she discusses the timing of Kusserow's escape to the West:

⁸³ Sabine Brandt, 'S-Bahn in die Freiheit', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 13 August 2008 <<http://www.faz.net/-00r175>> [accessed 13 April 2011].

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Kusserow took the opportunity to free himself from the shackles of the GDR. [...] Indeed, what would have happened if he had waited? Seven years later the wall was built. Perhaps he would have bled to death trying to cross it, like Peter Fechter and many others, or he would have ended up in a prison cell in Bautzen. At just the right time he freed himself from a regime whose subjects could choose only between either slavish obedience or ruin.⁸⁵

This demonstrates a similar approach to the prominence of state repression and dissident biographical details observed by Bierich-Shahbazi in her discussion of the reception of Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*.

Readers' Reception of the German Texts

The following analysis considers readers' reviews, posted on the German website of the bookseller Amazon (www.amazon.de), responding to texts by Kathrin Aehnlich, Jana Hensel, Claudia Rusch, and Daniel Wiechmann. Mourad Kusserow's autobiography has not been included because no reviews by readers have been posted about the text. In the case of Hensel's *Zonenkinder* I have also included some observations of readers' letters which were sent to the author and which are reproduced in Kraushaar's collection: *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*. The purpose of this analysis is not to present an exhaustive survey of readers' reviews, but to provide examples of responses to the texts which are particularly striking and relevant to the consideration of the texts and their reception as part of the process of cultural remembering. Moreover, the numbers of comments posted for the texts by Aehnlich, Rusch and Wiechmann are not large enough to be able to draw definitive conclusions.⁸⁶ Reviews which indicate the 'memory-making' effects of the texts are particularly relevant; such reviews demonstrate identification with the narrator/protagonist and prompting of the reader's own personal memories. Equally

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Five reviews posted on Aehnlich; one hundred and thirty on Hensel; twenty six on Rusch; six on Wiechmann (as of July 2011).

significant are those reviews which engage with debates about how the East German past should be remembered and portrayed. The following analysis will, therefore, be broadly divided into two sections. Firstly, I will consider how readers' reviews demonstrate the perceived 'referentiality' and 'memory-making effects' of the texts. Secondly I will consider how readers assess the representation of the East German past. In each section I will consider the texts in order of publication.

Identification, Memory and Authenticity

It is particularly striking that, across readers' responses to all the texts, many readers express recognition of and identification with the memories narrated. Readers' comments suggest that this is a major factor in motivating them to read these texts and to recommend them to others. These readers often comment on how the narrative compares to their own childhood experience, asserting that the narrative reflects their own experience or the experiences of friends and family. In so doing, readers (usually former East Germans) seek to vouch for the authenticity of the texts. Reviews which express recognition and identification often reveal something of the reader's own biography, for example, some readers state the year and place of their birth. Such reviews are usually, but not always, favourable towards the text.

Aehnlich's *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich auf den Sternen* is a fictional text and might not, therefore, be expected to provoke readers to access their own memories and identify with the narrator to the same extent as an autobiographical work. Nonetheless, the few available reviews of Aehnlich's text do suggest that readers are reflecting on their own memories and identity in the act of reading and responding to the novel. Aehnlich's novel is recognised as representing a collective past with which the reader can identify: 'Kathrin Aehnlich's narration is masterful, exciting and full of joy in describing her memories of a lived and lively history. Our

history.⁸⁷ In referring to the text as representing 'our history', the reader implies the importance of representations of everyday life for a collective understanding of the past. In another review, whose title, 'Mitten aus unserer Kindheit' ('From the middle of our childhood'), again suggests identification with collective memories of East German childhood, the reader emphasizes the representativeness of Aehnlich's portrayal of East German daily life:

With her amusing and lightly ironic style the author tells about a childhood similar to that of many of the sixties generation. [...] This book also made me thoughtful. You forget a lot about everyday life in the former GDR, especially your own childhood.⁸⁸

It can also be inferred from this review that the archival function of Aehnlich's text (as identified by the critic, Anke Westpfahl) is successful in provoking consideration of what has been forgotten.⁸⁹ A review by a former West German reader suggests that without the 'recognition effect' (*Wiedererkennungseffekt*) enjoyed by former East German readers the text loses some of its appeal: 'Some concepts meant little to me as a Wessi, for example the Pioneer organisation, the Women's league, but I can imagine that many an Ossi would wallow in childhood memories with this book.'⁹⁰ The use of the word 'wallow' (*schwelgen*) in this review indicates that the reader is dismissive of this function of the text. As will be shown in several examples through the following analysis many readers explicitly state or indirectly indicate their identity as either East or West German. This appears to be a significant factor in how the text is received by a particular reader.

⁸⁷ Der Buch-Vorleser "André Hanke", 'So war die Kindheit und Jugend in der DDR', 3 August 2003, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R1DYCGDD25TCLS>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

⁸⁸ Ein Kunde, 'Mitten aus unserer Kindheit', 19 November 2000, <<http://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/3378006080>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

⁸⁹ See above, pp. 256–57.

⁹⁰ Daggi, 'Ich trage eine Fahne, und diese Fahne ist rot!', 10 December 2009, <<http://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/3492254608>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

In *Zonenkinder*, Hensel states her intentions to reclaim the lost memories of her generation's childhood: 'I want to remember where we come from, and so I will set off in search of lost memories and unacknowledged experiences.'⁹¹ The potential for former East German readers to recognise and rediscover their own childhood memories is shown to be a major reason for the appeal of Hensel's text in many readers' reviews, for example: 'I find it simply brilliant, I can completely identify [with it]. For me it is like a biography, things came back to me that I thought I'd long forgotten!'⁹² Another reader describes the text as 'a hot-water bottle for my memories, because suddenly I can remember so much'.⁹³ These memories may be perceived as being in particular need of rediscovery due to the rapid changes which occurred during the Wende, as the GDR quickly became the subject of history and museum exhibitions.⁹⁴ Moreover, the desire to 'catch up' with the West also meant that many former East Germans were initially keen to forget their past lives, as suggested in the following review:

I am a 'Zonenkind' myself, born in 1974. I have just started reading 'Zonenkinder' and I am deeply grateful for this novel! Until recently I too had buried all the memories of my youth somewhere in my head, as who really wants to know what it was like in the GDR. But, to be honest, I'm tired of disowning my past and this novel really struck a chord with me.⁹⁵

This reader is just one example of many who identify themselves as a 'Zonenkind'. In many readers' reviews identification with the narrative is a significant part of their response to the text, but not all readers who identify themselves as 'Zonenkinder' agree with Hensel's portrayal. This reader, also from Leipzig,

⁹¹ Hensel, p. 14.

⁹² "tomundsandy", 'super- gut', 3 April 2005
<<http://www.amazon.de/review/R10Z7M3J8O9GXY>> [accessed 16 July 2011].

⁹³ Sandra Yemesin, 'Eine Wärmflasche für meine Erinnerungen', in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, ed. by Kraushaar, pp. 77–80 (p. 77).

⁹⁴ See Chapter 2, p. 84.

⁹⁵ Ein Kunde, 'Danke für dieses Buch!', 24 September 2002
<<http://www.amazon.de/review/R2XM0YSG48GUHE>> [accessed 16 July 2011].

challenges the authenticity of the text by comparing the narrative to her own memories:

I had high hopes of this book as I am also a 'Zonenkind' and spent my childhood at least partly in Leipzig. I was simply horrified. Are such gross exaggerations in the search for more readers really necessary? Many descriptions bore absolutely no relation to reality. The description of the tram, many locations and routes did not correspond in the slightest with what was there at the time.⁹⁶

This is one example of several instances of readers describing themselves as a 'Zonenkind', but otherwise responding to the text unfavourably. In some cases, identifying oneself as part of the particular generation gives more credibility to any attempt to challenge the authenticity of the narrative. It also suggests that whether or not readers agree with the way Hensel portrays her experiences of childhood and youth, there is general acceptance that the experiences of this generation are specific and particular to them.

The 'Wir' perspective in which the text is written is also a point of contention. For some readers it strengthens the possibility of identification, while for others it is an unnecessary and inaccurate generalization. Kraushaar states that readers' responses to *Zonenkinder* reveal a very different attitude to the critics regarding the author's decision to write her narrative in the 'Wir' form: 'Jana Hensel's "we" had a completely different effect on the majority of readers as it did on the review sections of the press. They enthusiastically took up the opportunity to identify [with the text].'⁹⁷ One reader's letter exemplifies this enthusiasm, ending with these words: 'In any case, thank you for the book. And thank you for finding

⁹⁶ Schrummi "schrummi0", 'Völlig an der Realität vorbei', 3 January 2005 <<http://www.amazon.de/review/RR2YLG0RSTXGI>> [accessed 16 July 2011].

⁹⁷ Kraushaar, p. 8.

the right words. And that there was a “we” in which I could also rediscover myself.⁹⁸ Although Kraushaar’s comments suggest that the majority of readers were enthusiastic, the number of stars awarded to the book by readers on Amazon are fairly evenly spread, it would therefore be misleading to suggest that most readers received the text positively.⁹⁹ Moreover, the majority of reviews which are harshly critical of the text express particular disapproval with Hensel’s attempt to speak for a whole generation, for example: ‘Definitely not worthy of recommendation. Everyone has memories of their own. I was troubled most of all by the constant “we”.’¹⁰⁰ Such complaints will be further considered below in my discussion of how readers assess Hensel’s representation of the East German past.

Despite the quite different approach to portrayal of East German childhood found in Rusch’s *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* compared with Hensel’s *Zonenkinder*, many similar comments emerge in reviews of the two texts. Again, readers are drawing on their own memories in assessing Rusch’s text and readers frequently express the pleasure of rediscovering and remembering their own childhoods. This reader has been provoked to remember his/her own youth and perceives Rusch’s memoir to be an accurate portrayal: ‘It is wonderful to read and reminds you of your own childhood. It was just like that!’¹⁰¹ In the next two examples, the readers assert that Rusch’s account portrays much of their own experience. These two readers also state the years in which they were born, thereby identifying themselves as part of a generation with similar experiences to the author. Firstly, this reader expresses surprise at recognising so much of what Rusch describes:

⁹⁸ Christin Nitsche, ‘Solide DDR-Ausbildung’, in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, ed. by Kraushaar, pp. 85–87 (p. 87).

⁹⁹ Of the 130 reviews posted 43 gave the text the minimum score of one star (out of five) and a further 20 readers gave it just two stars. See <<http://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/3499235323>> [accessed 28 July 2011].

¹⁰⁰ Mozartkugel, ‘Brrrr.....das Schlechteste Buch seit langem.....’, 12 October 2003 <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R1VT6FKZRN1QGI>> [accessed 16 July 2011].

¹⁰¹ Ein Kunde, ‘Ein rundum gelungenes Buch!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!’, 7 October 2003, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/RA6QNF038NW1E>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

As a former citizen, interested of course in literature about the former GDR, I naturally got hold of the book immediately in order to see where its tendencies lay. I was surprised, I recognised myself. The short episodes from Claudia Rusch's life reflect – from my perspective, born in 1972 – much that was exactly the same as what I lived through and experienced.¹⁰²

In the second example, the reader implies that aspects of her childhood had been forgotten before reading the book: 'Born in '76 and a little younger than the author, I rediscovered many old companions of my childhood and youth, analysed in a sensible way! A must for all who would also like to reminisce.'¹⁰³ As in reviews of *Zonenkinder*, the idea that Rusch's text allows readers to 'rediscover' aspects of their childhood is mentioned by several readers, for example: 'In many stories I rediscovered myself.'¹⁰⁴

Finally, in a review of Wiechmann's *Immer Bereit*, a reader suggests that the prompts to his own memories were the only redeeming feature of the narrative which he/she considered to be otherwise contrived and unbelievable:

I was also once a Young- and Thälmann-Pioneer and so I recognise certain situations – to think about it again now is quite interesting. Similarly the memory of particular smells (for example, the West German ink-eraser), as a child these things make a distinct impression – and one has long since forgotten them.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² madmayer, 'So war's gewesen*****Das Buch mit Wiedererkennungseffekt*****', 19 July 2003, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R1KGN4T2XH9A0>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

¹⁰³ "bettibecker2", 'Erinnerungslektüre für einen Abend', 19 August 2003, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R27X5W45BA3VYO>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

¹⁰⁴ Leserin aus NRW, 'Auch ein Generationsbuch', 11 June 2009, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/RUZTD8J9U3GLK>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

¹⁰⁵ Ein Kunde, 'bis auf einige Erinnerungshappen langweilig und konstruiert', 8 July 2005, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R19HDR5OT2UQES>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

The comments made in the reviews discussed above indicate how these texts are contributing to a process of cultural remembering. In some cases the text is simply giving voice to memories recognised by readers, in others provoking reflection and active identification of readers to belonging to a particular group. The next section will consider further how readers respond specifically to the portrayal of the GDR in the texts.

Readers' Assessments of the Representation of the GDR

In many of the reviews, in particular of *Zonenkinder* and *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, readers express concerns about how the GDR and (former) East Germans are portrayed. Some also seem to be as disenchanted as the critics with what is often described as the 'Ostalgiewelle' (literally 'Ostalgie-wave', referring to the widespread popularity of *Ostalgie* and products associated with it). These readers are not just expressing a personal reaction to the text, but also considering more widely how the narrative might affect the way others perceive the GDR and former East Germans. Such reviews often use concepts and terminology from the memory debates in the German media, echoing the opinions of professional critics and journalists.

Several reviews of *Zonenkinder* demonstrate that readers are considering the text in the context of contemporary relations between former East and West Germans. This reader expresses concerns about the text encouraging prejudice towards former East Germans: 'And what, then, is the well-disposed reader (West German) to make of what he reads there? At most, books like this one confirm for him the widespread image of the maudlin, disoriented Ossi who lives in the past.'¹⁰⁶ Another reader, who identifies himself as a young 'Wessi', makes a similar point: 'With her often very whiny and smug tone she makes herself rather unsympathetic

¹⁰⁶ Sascha Mönch, 'Hensel 6 - setzen!', 24 January 2005
<<http://www.amazon.de/review/R1I3Z8FEOKHGW4>> [accessed 16 July 2011].

and encourages those people who, even today, still moan about "Ossis".¹⁰⁷ This is made more problematic by the attempt to speak for a whole generation: 'If the author experienced it like that herself, it is of course 100% ok, except that in the book she always says "we". It is understandable that many other Zonenkinder are angry about it.¹⁰⁸ Less common are reviews which suggest the text should be recommended to former West German readers. Those that do tend to emphasize that Hensel's narrative should be taken as a personal account, again resisting a view of the text as representative of a generation. This reader takes a particularly favourable stance on the text, suggesting that it encourages former West Germans to reflect on their attitudes to the GDR and to want to know more about it:

For a Wessi [...] an outstanding book for getting to know about the different life in the GDR. [...] One wonders why we in the FRG were, and are, so little prepared to take a closer look at life in the GDR in order to at least learn to understand and accept the 'others'. The book motivates you to read more about it.¹⁰⁹

These kinds of responses demonstrate the prominence of identity politics in reception of *Zonenkinder*.

Another criticism made of *Zonenkinder* is that the GDR is presented too superficially and idealistically, something which the next reader identifies as a recent trend. This reader states that she belongs to the generation portrayed in *Zonenkinder*, but she does not share the author's experiences:

¹⁰⁷ deathdelaer92618, 'Ich hatte mehr erwartet', 1 April 2005
<<http://www.amazon.de/review/R1SD380AW8XZGZ>> [accessed 16 July 2011].

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Hans-Jürgen Hörmann, 'Das Fremde kennenlernen', 10 December 2009
<<http://www.amazon.de/review/R2JMQM3SC4V3B0>> [accessed 16 July 2011].

I do not recognize myself and my GDR childhood in the narrative, which is crammed full of clichés and – like so much recently – simply idealizes the GDR. [...] All in all too superficial – I am disappointed by it and cannot recommend the book.¹¹⁰

Surprisingly, very few readers identified *Ostalgie* as a problematic aspect of Hensel's text.¹¹¹ While a few acknowledged the book's merits in spite of (n)ostalgic tendencies, and a few claimed the text successfully avoided *Ostalgie*, I have found only one example which explicitly condemns the text as an example of *Ostalgie*: 'All in all a really terrible Ostalgie-book.'¹¹² The following two examples demonstrate how some readers perceive the text to contribute to a more complex understanding of the experiences of this East German generation. Firstly, this reader suggests that a text which recreates past memories does not necessarily foster an 'ostalgic' attitude:

Readers with past experience of the GDR will replay many experiences in their minds. Whether these memories are connected to good or mixed feelings depends on the reader's own biography. I encountered many now almost forgotten habits and customs of that time and I was prompted to engage with my childhood and youth in the GDR once more without the idealized perspective of the Ostalgie-wave.¹¹³

The reader's assertion that East German readers may interpret and be prompted to remember quite different aspects of the past on reading *Zonenkinder* acknowledges the nuanced and complex nature of memory. S/he does not, however, comment on

¹¹⁰ princess-moonlight "princess-moonlight", 'Enttäuschend !', 23 August 2003
<<http://www.amazon.de/review/R1MFYGR8DEIYJV>> [accessed 16 July 2011].

¹¹¹ Only eleven reviews of one hundred and thirty in total refer directly to nostalgia (*Nostalgie*) or *Ostalgie*.

¹¹² Rene Ressler, 'Der rote Faden fehlt.', 29 December 2003
<<http://www.amazon.de/review/R13PG2Y7VJ1B9K>> [accessed 27 July 2011].

¹¹³ "labradorrose", 'Ein Muß nur für Ostalgiker...?', 3 February 2004
<<http://www.amazon.de/review/R28PIELB24KRC5>> [accessed 27 July 2011].

how the text might be received by former West Germans. The second example is a more detailed review which reflects on the value of Hensel's text for understanding East German memory among the 'Zonenkinder' generation. The reader, who states that, like Hensel, s/he was born in 1976, recognises that the generation described in *Zonenkinder* faces difficulties with identity ('Identitätsproblematik'):

Of course the GDR was a dictatorship with human rights violations, but we knew nothing of the Stasi, barbed wire and deaths at the Berlin Wall. By the 'grace of late birth' we were protected from that entering our consciousness or from taking any active part in it. [...] Nevertheless a part of our identity can be found in this collapsed state and my generation, born in the mid-seventies, also has a specific problem: We are caught between two stools.¹¹⁴

This reader thereby supports Hensel's approach in choosing not to represent the GDR as a dictatorship, because this is not an aspect of the GDR which many of her generation have any experience of. The review is partly written in the first person plural (for example, in the quotation above) and explicitly supports Hensel's decision to write from the perspective of 'Wir': 'I think Jana Hensel was right to use "we", because I believe that many of the mid-seventies generation are able, but naturally not obliged, to find themselves again in it.'¹¹⁵ The reader argues that Hensel's book has allowed him/her some insight into the nature of remembering for this generation. S/he argues that East German remembering is just as valid as West German remembering of everyday childhood experience, culture and products:

And just as the same generation in the old FRG has childhood memories of

¹¹⁴ Ein Kunde, 'Das Problem genau erfasst', 29 June 2003
<<http://www.amazon.de/review/R2BDLAOD35Z4KM>> [accessed 16 July 2011]. (Partially reproduced in *Die Zonenkinder und Wir*, ed. by Kraushaar, p. 92.)

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Commodores, 'The Neverending Story' and posters of wanted terrorists at post offices, we also have a right to our childhood memories, because our fate is a German fate and the history of the GDR is a part of German history. In my opinion, Jana Hensel's book convincingly worked through this problem without excessive Ostalgie.¹¹⁶

It could be inferred from this review that criticism of *Zonenkinder* based on Hensel's lack of engagement with East German politics and ideology is denying East Germans their right to personal memories. This review and the previous example demonstrate how a text which has been condemned by critics as lacking in reflection and analysis can, in fact, prompt reflection and analysis on the part of the reader.

Rusch's representation of the GDR provokes significant comment in several reviews. Some readers of *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* choose to emphasize that the childhood she portrays is not representative. For some readers this constitutes a failing of the text, while for others the value of the narrative is not diminished. This reader challenges the idea that Rusch's memoir should be judged by the representativeness of her childhood experience. S/he also asserts that the account is an authentic portrayal:

Even if the majority of former GDR citizens do not possess such a past – can this really be a criterion for whether the book is good or bad? Whether the masses lived like that at the time? It is indeed especially interesting to get hold of a book in which childhood in the GDR is not idealistically portrayed. And I know from my own experience that there were children in the GDR who did live through that kind of childhood.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ libri1902 "libri1902", 'Ohne Ostalgie-Romantik....', 14 April 2008, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R2DVFDFSF69SZXH>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

The reader suggests that it is more common to find idealised narratives of East German childhood and implies that Rusch's text is superior in comparison. The following review is a further example of a reader asserting the value of Rusch's portrayal even though she does not describe a typical GDR childhood:

Of course not everyone (former GDR citizens) can identify with it, there will always be people who say that it can't have been like that...

And yet, what Claudia Rusch writes provokes smiles as well as memories and it reveals a retrospective feeling of dismay. She gives a realistic description of how children with everyday experience of non-conformity could sense the absurdity of the system.¹¹⁸

The reader emphasizes the significance of a portrayal which shows that children can be affected by a repressive State. The next example, on the other hand, reveals a reader who perceives *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* to be misleading to former West German readers who may not realise how unusual the circumstances of Rusch's upbringing were:

Surely not even 5% of GDR citizens experienced their youth like the one described in this book. Certainly there were such cases, but if a former FRG citizen (one can also say Wessi) were to read this book, he would get a false impression of the conditions at that time.¹¹⁹

As with some reviews of *Zonenkinder*, the problem here seems to be one of identity politics and difficulties of understanding between East and West. It is not clear in what way this reader perceives Rusch's portrayal to be 'exaggerated' (the title of the review is 'Völlig übertrieben!'), but his/her comments may reflect the common

¹¹⁸ "mamberg8", *Abseits der "Ostalgie"*, 21 January 2004, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R3TSPWJ04Z00SD>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

¹¹⁹ Sylvia Hartung, 'Völlig übertrieben!', 13. Mai 2004, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R3TSPWJ04Z00SD>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

concern that East Germans were and are often constructed as victims in (former) West German discourse.¹²⁰ In this next example, by contrast, a reader is concerned that Rusch's text is presented as an account which portrays the abuses of the regime, yet the narrator suffers few serious effects of this:

However, what I felt to be most problematic was that she perceived herself as a victim and opponent of the GDR regime and at the same time, from what one reads, had no real problems whatsoever. For people who actually suffered at the hands of the Stasi, this book must have been a slap in the face.¹²¹

This and many of the reviews discussed above are contributing to questions of *who* should describe life in the GDR, and *how* East German experience can be legitimately and authentically portrayed for both former East and former West German readers.

In several reviews readers express opinions about Rusch's portrayal of the GDR through references to *Ostalgie* and ostalgie works. It is clear throughout the reader responses to all the texts that *Ostalgie* is seen by most as a pejorative term. Among reviews of Rusch's book assertions that her text is worth reading because it is *not* 'ostalgie' are common, for example: 'A book that I can recommend to anybody who would like to remember the other GDR aside from Ostalgie, Spreewald gherkins, and the blissful feeling of togetherness [Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl].'¹²² The reference here to 'Spreewaldgurken' is likely to be a reference to the film, *Good Bye Lenin!*, and also indicates the revival of some East German consumer products. The concept of

¹²⁰ See Chapter 2, p. 80.

¹²¹ Ein Kunde, 'langatmige Selbstbeweihräucherung', 17. Januar 2004, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/RNRLTFIJREFVM>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

¹²² "mamberg8", Abseits der "Ostalgie", 21. Januar 2004, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R3TSPWJ04Z00SD>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

'Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl' is prominent in *Zonenkinder*. The next two examples compare *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* directly to *Zonenkinder*. In the first example, the reader particularly values the fact that Rusch portrays the negative aspects of growing up under SED ideology, which Hensel does not:

Claudia Rusch's book is a successful counterpart to Jana Hensel's 'Zonenkinder'. [...] Also, because Claudia Rusch shows a side which Jana Hensel probably never noticed in the GDR: the lack of freedom which even children sensed, the everyday insanity of the education system. The boredom of the GDR which, above all, struck those who allowed themselves individualism.¹²³

By contrast, another reader suggests that for those who wish to read about the GDR both Hensel's and Rusch's texts are recommended: 'A really entertaining and in no way melancholic novel about youth in a land that now exists only in stories. [...] Along with "Zonenkinder" by Jana Hensel, a definite must-read for all who are interested.'¹²⁴ Another former East German reader praises the text for avoiding not only *Ostalgie*, but also an overly negative portrayal full of 'Jammerei' (complaining, self-pity): 'A look back at the GDR of the 80s without Ostalgie or endless whining [Jammertiraden].'¹²⁵ This again shows that readers approve of portrayals which do not subscribe to stereotypical characterization of former East Germans as *Jammerosis*.¹²⁶ The final example is a reader who compares Rusch's memoir with other products of *Ostalgie*, especially TV shows.¹²⁷ The reader perceives particular value in narrative representations of the GDR:

¹²³ H. Kunze "hagenkunze", 'Claudia Rusch hält, was Jana Hensel verspricht', 20. August 2003, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R15H8PVMSTZR85>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

¹²⁴ Leserin aus NRW, 'Auch ein Generationsbuch', 11 June 2009 <<http://www.amazon.de/review/RUZTD8J9U3GLK>> [accessed 28 July 2011].

¹²⁵ hanna, 'Empfehlenswert', 17. Februar 2008, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R2LT2BUV24LXQT>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

¹²⁶ See Chapter 3, pp. 176–77.

¹²⁷ For more on the wave of German television entertainment shows in the early 2000s which looked back on the GDR see Cooke, *Representing the GDR*, pp. 141–75.

The point here is that this is a wonderful counterpart to the general tendency of the so-called Ostalgie-wave. Public examination of the GDR past doesn't need explanatory or idealising TV shows, but exactly this form of narrative remembering and snapshots.¹²⁸

This kind of reflection on how the past can be most usefully or appropriately remembered is rarely expressed with respect to the Soviet past among the Russian reviews.

Many of the responses to Rusch's text seem to illustrate that any assessment of how a text portrays the socialist past is relative to the reader's expectations and beliefs of what is representative or appropriate. Rusch's text neither portrays the 'average' GDR childhood, nor does it offer serious, in-depth portrayal of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*. It seems that for most readers she successfully offers insights into both everyday life and the effects of the system, but for a few she fails to portray either authentically.

Finally, it is interesting to note that, despite the lack of critical interest in Wiechmann, some readers seem to value his text for its positive outlook, conveying idealism as well as criticism of how the system worked in practice:

A wonderful, romantic book. The story of a small boy who looks at the world of the former German Democratic Republic with big, wide eyes. At some point his belief that he is living in a better society clashes with his attempt to be a better person and to lead a happy life.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ "mswaton", 'Nicht nur lesen - sondern genießen!', 3. August 2003, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R250LKPOMW7X03>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

¹²⁹ Ein Kunde, 'Die Suche nach dem Glück', 19. Februar 2004, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R38B0E3IZPOYCY>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

Another review expressing similar praise considers Wiechmann's narrative to be a valuable alternative to 'ostalgic' representations:

'Immer bereit!' is not settling any scores: shot through with gentle humour, it is a more subtle and complex obituary of a dream that never allowed itself to come true. A clever book that is beneficial after the crude Ostalgie-wave.¹³⁰

Conclusion

Analysis of the reception of German narratives of East German childhood shows that responses to these texts are inextricably linked to the existing memory culture. Most critics and many readers show an awareness of existing tendencies in how the GDR is remembered. Whether discussing the dangers of *Ostalgie* and an idealised (*verklärt*) depiction, or praising portrayals which demonstrate the repressive nature of the state or which might improve understanding between East and West, the question underlying German reception of the texts is: how should the East German past be represented and remembered? Most of the critics demonstrate particular interest in how texts reveal a critical perspective on the state, while readers often raise concerns about how a text might influence former West German readers' perceptions of the GDR and those who grew up there.

The consideration of readers' responses also demonstrates that, in addition to the ethical considerations of representing the GDR, there are personal reasons for reading and responding to these texts; reviews demonstrate a real appetite among former East German readers for books which tap into their own memories, reminding them of things they have forgotten and allowing them to identify with the narrator. The extended discussion in the media and among readers about the

¹³⁰ Ein Kunde, 'OST-(DES)ILLUSIONEN', 30. März 2004, <<http://www.amazon.de/review/R3DOHPH7CIVREU>> [accessed 4 April 2011].

texts by Hensel and, to a lesser extent, Rusch suggests that these texts are likely to have some influence on collective memory of the GDR, at least in the short term.

Russian Reception

While the reception of the German texts shows a preoccupation with discussing how the GDR is represented, reviews of the Russian texts often emphasize other concerns and in many cases the depiction of the Soviet context provokes only minor comment and implicit judgements. The reception of the Russian texts tends not to be concerned with questions of how the Soviet past should or should not be portrayed. The idea that a text could or should commemorate the experiences of a particular group or generation is rarely evoked. Issues of memory and identity are sometimes hinted at but are rarely discussed explicitly or at length. In contrast to the reception of the German texts, the reviews of Russian texts discussed below reveal stronger objections to excessively bleak portrayals of Soviet childhood than to nostalgic reflections. Moreover, the absence of an analytical or judgemental viewpoint is seen by some Russian critics to be a positive quality for a memoir. A few reviews, especially critics' responses to Gal'ego's *Beloe na chernom* and readers' reviews of Sanaev's *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom* demonstrate that the Russian texts do have the potential to provoke discussion about the nature of the Soviet past. This makes the widespread avoidance of reflection on issues of memory in the majority of reviews more striking.

In the following analysis I will first identify the main concerns of professional critics expressed in reviews of Larisa Miller's *Zolotaia simfoniia*, Oleg Zaionchkovskii's *Petrovich*, Pavel Sanaev's *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom*, and Ruben Gal'ego's *Beloe na chernom*. I will then consider reader reviews of Minaev's *Detstvo Levy* and again, the texts by Sanaev and Gal'ego. Sanaev's *Pokhoronite*

menia za plintusom has provoked more discussion than any of the other Russian texts. The adaptation of the book into a film in 2009 provoked further media exposure, bringing many more readers to the text. The number of reader reviews available on *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom* makes analysis of these a more productive exercise when trying to identify trends, and Sanaev's text will, therefore, be the main focus of my analysis of Russian readers' reviews. Elena Gorokhova's *A Mountain of Crumbs* has not been included in this chapter at all because the text has not been published in Russia.

This chapter does not provide a detailed account of critics' reviews of the texts by Minaev and Oleg Pavlov, but a brief indication of the response to each is worth noting. Minaev's *Detstvo Levy* is usually perceived as a text that will appeal both to young readers and to adults wanting to be reminded of their own childhoods, as Igor Zotov states: "Detstvo Levy" will most likely be read by those of a similar age to the author, whose childhood fell at that peaceful time at the end of the 60s and beginning of the 70s.¹³¹ Liza Birger, introducing a review of a later novel by Minaev, explains that although his earlier works, *Detstvo Levy* and the sequel, *Genii Dziudo*, were considered children's literature, the primary readership consisted of adults of a particular generation: 'His books are, in fact, not addressed to children but to those currently in their thirties and forties, who are always glad to reflect on their Soviet childhood.'¹³² Although in these two cases there is no direct reference to nostalgia, it is clear that the text is presented as appealing to those wanting to remember their own childhood experiences. This provides an interesting contrast with the German reception of (n)ostalgic representations of the East German past, because in the Russian context there appears to be no assessment of what should be remembered or what should not be forgotten when looking back on

¹³¹ Igor' Zotov, 'Novyi sentimentalizm: Pervoe "Detstvo" tret'ego tysiachletia', *Nezavisimaia gazeta: Ex Libris*, 17 May 2001 <http://exlibris.ng.ru/bios/2001-05-17/2_childhood.html> [accessed 28 October 2010].

¹³² Liza Birger, 'Otsy i teti', *Kommersant Weekend*, No. 18 (64), 16 May 2008 <www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=890857> [accessed 12 March 2009].

Soviet childhood. As will be shown below, even where a nostalgic attitude towards the past is more explicitly expressed, there is still no reflective discussion about either the value or the potential dangers of nostalgia.

This chapter also omits detailed discussion of the critics' response to Pavlov's texts. The majority of reviews of 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' and 'Shkol'niki' focus primarily on the portrayal of childhood experience and do not discuss in any detail how Pavlov portrays the specifically Soviet context.¹³³ Indeed, Valeriia Pustovaia argues that the Soviet context is not particularly significant in 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh':

Despite the fact that the first sentence of the story 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' apparently deposits us in the broad context of the Soviet period ('As a child I loved "Brezhnev"'), throughout the text we inhabit the narrow sphere of the protagonist's childhood experience. And this isn't the experience of coming into contact with wider society, but of the profoundly inward dawning of the protagonist's realisation that he can be welcomed and accepted in the world of grown-ups, into which he was pushed by virtue of being born one day.¹³⁴

The following analysis will show that many other critics also choose not to explore portrayal of the Soviet past in the Russian texts, focussing instead on other themes or on literary technique.

¹³³ See, for example Viktor Nikitin, 'Prostoe schast'e zhizni', *Oktiabr'*, 3 (2008), 174–77; and Natal'ia Rubanova, 'Moimi druž'iami byli derev'ia', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 30, 27 July 2007 <<http://www.litrossia.ru/2007/30/07148.html>> [accessed 28 October 2010].

¹³⁴ Valeriia Pustovaia, 'Rozhdennye evoliutsiei: Opyty po vospitaniiu geroia: Iatsutko, Cherednichenko, Kabakov, Pavlov, Sanaev, Zaionchkovskii', *Kontinent*, 129 (2006) <<http://magazines.russ.ru/continent/2006/129/pu17.html>> [accessed 21 November 2008].

Critics' Reception of the Russian Texts

Zolotaia Simfoniia ('Bol'shaia Polianka', pp. 8–71)

The following analysis will consider four reviews of Larisa Miller's *Zolotaia simfoniia*. Although Miller's book is a collection of autobiographical prose, all four critics give considerable attention to the sections on her childhood and youth, especially 'Bol'shaia Polianka'. I will first discuss two reviews by Ol'ga Rychkova and Ol'ga Dunaevskaia. These mainly summarise the content of the text, but make a few comments on the style and content of Miller's portrayal.

Rychkova emphasizes that Miller's narrative describes everyday life: 'Ordinary life in post-war Moscow: playground friendships, neighbours, mother coming home late from work, festive new year's trees, music lessons... But all this is described in a wonderfully genuine and vivid way.'¹³⁵ The critic's description indicates that many of the experiences Miller describes are typical; she implies that while the content of this typical childhood may be unremarkable, the narrative style of the author provides an authentic and vivid portrayal. The idea that Miller provides 'direct access' to the past through her descriptions emerges, to some extent, in all the reviews. Rychkova notes that Miller does not offer an idealised, nostalgic collection of happy memories: 'the author is looking at the past not at all through rose-tinted glasses.'¹³⁶ She cites as an example the portrayal of Miller's early experiences of anti-Semitism. Rychkova does not discuss Miller's portrayal of the Soviet period. The Soviet setting of the text is only indicated by referring to the period as 'post-war' and a reference to the Doctors' Plot (*delo vrachei*).

Dunaevskaia, like Rychkova, gives limited consideration to Miller's portrayal of the Soviet past. In referring to Miller's portrayal of anti-Semitism, Dunaevskaia does, however, place a greater emphasis on the family's experiences at the time of

¹³⁵ Ol'ga Rychkova, 'Proshedshee prodolzhennoe', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 21, 23 May 2008 <<http://www.litrossia.ru/2008/21/02926.html>> [accessed 18 March 2009].

¹³⁶ Ibid.

the Doctors' Plot, thereby focussing on a particular wave of anti-Semitism sanctioned by the state. As discussed above, Miller portrays the surprising reaction of her grandfather to the death of Stalin (which brought the Doctors' Plot to an end).¹³⁷ This scene is commented upon by Dunaevskaia, and the critic is, like Miller in her narration, at a loss to explain this behaviour:

The death of the leader brought deliverance. Beloved grandfather, a veteran member of the Bund [Jewish Labour Union], who hated Stalin – but who, after a heart attack, stood to attention with tears in his eyes on the 5th March of that year, 1953. How could this be explained, then or now?¹³⁸

There is no attempt to suggest an explanation, only a feeling of incomprehension shared by the author, critic and, by implication, the reader. Neither of these reviews asserts that Miller's portrayal is valuable specifically as a portrayal of the Soviet past and although the portrayal of anti-Semitism is discussed, there is no sense that Miller's narrative is written in order to *commemorate* or *bear witness* to the experiences of Jews in Soviet Russia. The fact that Dunaevskaia gives more attention to the theme of anti-Semitism in the text may be explained by the fact that her review appears in *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, a relatively liberal publication, while Rychkova's review was published in the more conservative and patriotic *Literaturnaia Rossiia*.

The critics Andrei Miroshkin and Dmitrii Shevarov discuss Miller's narrative approach in greater detail, but her portrayal of the Soviet past still provokes little comment or interpretation. Moreover, both Miroshkin and Shevarov reveal an appreciation of the fact that the author herself does not include explanations, justifications, or judgements in her depiction of childhood memories.

¹³⁷ See Chapter 3, pp. 194–95.

¹³⁸ Ol'ga Dunaevskaia, 'O vremeni i o sebe', *Nezavisimaia gazeta: Ex Libris*, 18 December 2008 <http://exlibris.ng.ru/lit/2008-12-18/7_petit.html> [accessed 4 May 2011].

Miroshkin notes that the period about which Miller writes has been represented many times: 'Moscow of the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s... An era described a thousand times in literary memoirs and reconstructed in dozens of films.'¹³⁹ The reviewer implies, however, that Miller's portrayal is particularly valuable: 'Larisa Miller's prose contains many shades and nuances of that time. Its lyricism and cruelty. Its broken humanity, the fascination of simple objects and incidents now forgotten.'¹⁴⁰ Miroshkin's characterization of 'that time' indicates that Miller has successfully captured the contradictions inherent in remembering the post-war and late-Soviet period. This can be compared to comments made by the German critics Leinemann and Arend about *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (see this chapter, p. ?). Both these German critics praised Rusch's synthesis of happy childhood experiences with portrayal of a repressive state, seeing this as a significant achievement on the level of personal memory and for understanding East German memory in general. In Miroshkin's review of Miller's text such concepts are only implied and there is no open discussion of why a nuanced portrayal revealing contrasting aspects of Soviet life might be of particular value. In the Russian context, where all readers (of a certain age) have first-hand experience of living in the Soviet Union, it may be assumed that no further discussion is necessary, as opposed to the German context where the limited knowledge of former West Germans is taken into account.

Miroshkin, like Rychkova and Dunaevskaia discussed above, draws attention to the fact that Miller portrays incidents of anti-Semitism and the experiences of Jews as victims of state terror, e.g. 'A neighbour, a Jewish doctor, mysteriously disappears, and his wife commits suicide soon after.'¹⁴¹ A quotation from the text representing Miller's experience at school at the time of the Doctors' Plot is included in the review. The critic does not comment on the way these events are portrayed,

¹³⁹ Andrei Miroshkin, 'Devochka s bol'shoi Polianki', *booknik.ru: evreiskie teksty i temy*, 16 April 2008 <<http://booknik.ru/reviews/fiction/?id=26712>> [accessed 12 March 2009]. 'Booknik' is a Russian-language website 'dedicated to Jewish texts and themes in literature and culture'. See <<http://booknik.ru/about/?page=conception>> [accessed 8 May 2011].

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

but demonstrates that these 'other events of those years' are a significant aspect of Miller's story.¹⁴² Again, there is an implication that the Soviet past was multi-faceted, and that Miller is also portraying this 'other side'.

Although Miroshkin's review indicates a view of the past which does not ignore the darker sides of Soviet life, his comments suggest that he is not looking for a critical portrayal of the Soviet past. He praises Miller's text throughout the review and seems pleased by her non-judgemental and non-political approach: 'The tone of her memoirs is calm, in places almost epic but without excessive emotion and political diagnoses.'¹⁴³ Miroshkin's preference for an observational rather than analytical narrative is further indicated by comments which suggest that the memoirist's role is primarily to represent the past 'as it was':

Time itself decides the arrangement of all objects and names. The memoirist is powerless to alter this hierarchy – he only adds brushstrokes to the depiction of events, mixing unique colours into the existing picture of the past, into the scenery of bygone Moscow life.¹⁴⁴

The idea that 'time' is responsible for what happens suggests a fatalistic concept of the past, in which the writer's only role is to add artistic detail to reconstruct the experience, rather than to probe or reflect on how human actions may have influenced or caused events.¹⁴⁵ The language used here, which indicates the irretrievability of the past ('nepovtorimyi', translated as 'unique', but literally meaning unrepeatable; 'ushedshii' or 'bygone'), might also suggest a feeling of loss or even nostalgia on the part of the reviewer for some aspects of the past. This feeling of nostalgia is also hinted at in the critic's description of Miller's narration of

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ This echoes the lack of agency observed in Ray Pahl and Paul Thompson's oral history study, see Chapter 2, p. 128.

remembered tram journeys: 'The tram routes (from Polianka to Lefortovo and back again), long since disappeared, on which one can, in one's mind, travel together with the author.'¹⁴⁶ This is another contrast to the German critics who are, for the most part, highly critical of a nostalgic perspective on the GDR. Moreover, in the German reviews surveyed, there were no examples of critics themselves expressing nostalgic sentiments.

A review by Shevarov is notable because, unlike the other critics discussed here, it does not include any reference to Miller's portrayal of anti-Semitism. Shevarov does not comment on the Soviet setting of Miller's text, except to say that the book portrays the period from the 1940s to the 1990s. His description of how Miller portrays this period indicates that he perceives a benevolent attitude towards the Soviet period in the text:

Larisa Miller has published a book of memoirs which encompasses the epoch from the beginning of the forties to the end of the nineties. However, 'encompassing the epoch' – that is somehow not at all appropriate for Miller. Shyly embracing, carefully touching on, privately recollecting... – that seems to describe her.¹⁴⁷

Shevarov focuses on Miller's ability to recreate the experience of being a child and of being in the past. He describes the experience of reading the text: 'everything is resurrected before our very eyes.'¹⁴⁸ He emphasizes this 'resurrection' of the past as one of the poetic qualities of Miller's prose (Miller is best known as a poet). Like Miroshkin, Shevarov also demonstrates resistance to any critical assessment of the

¹⁴⁶ Miroshkin.

¹⁴⁷ Dmitrii Shevarov, 'Zhizn' v mimoletnykh podrobnostiakh: dve novye knigi dlia letnego chtenia', *Pervoe sentiabria*, 12 (2008) <<http://ps.1september.ru/article.php?ID=200801228>> [accessed 9 May 2011]. *Pervoe sentiabria* is a twice monthly newspaper mainly dealing with issues of education and pedagogy. The literature pages often deal with children's literature or literature about childhood and growing up.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

past, for example, when he describes the reader's immersion in the experience of the young narrator:

And having immersed oneself in the book, you really feel overcome by a sense of calm and childish reverie. Your view on the past, and in the present, becomes a little less exacting and severe. And you no longer want to maintain that much-prized quality of objectivity, but only want to stay a little longer in this lilac cloud of love.¹⁴⁹

This response to the text hints at nostalgia, suggesting that returning (in one's imagination) to the past is more attractive than any attempts towards 'objectivity'. His preference for a narrative which recreates rather than reflects is further emphasized later in the review, when Shevarov implies that Miller, as a poet, is to be praised for providing a view of the past unlike the one offered by other memoirists:

Even in prose, the poet remains a poet. Unlike fashionable memoirists, she does not wade through masses of events and dates, bombarding the reader with an accumulation of scandalous revelations, – no, she hovers above the past. But with no arrogance or sense of superiority, rather like a bumblebee.¹⁵⁰

This description of the poetic narrative view suggests that Shevarov would not wish Miller's memoir to pass judgement on what she describes.

The reception of Miller's *Zolotaia simfoniia* in these four reviews suggests that a literary memoir may be valued for excluding political or ideological reassessment of the past. These critics focus on Miller's ability to recreate past

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

experiences. In the reviews by Miroshkin and Shevarov the enthusiasm for the text's vivid and detailed portrayal may suggest an element of nostalgia, possibly for the Soviet past, but possibly also for youth more generally. Moreover, these critics are celebrating the literary achievement of conveying the author/narrator's experience in a way which makes that experience 'real' for the reader. This indicates that their concerns are primarily literary rather than assessing the text for social or historical value. There is no sense that the text may be significant or useful for understanding what the Soviet past means in the Russian present and there no self-conscious reflection on what Miller's narrative might contribute to existing discourses surrounding memory of the Soviet period.

Petrovich

The reception of *Petrovich* is primarily focussed on the text's portrayal of ordinary, everyday childhood experiences and family life. The reviews discussed below demonstrate the broad range of interpretations that have been drawn from the text. Some critics give little attention to, and even appear to evade discussion of, the Soviet setting of the novel, while others suggest an interpretation based on a separation of the private sphere and the state. By contrast, one further critic has explicitly identified and criticised an anti-Soviet theme perceived in the text. The following analysis will consider relevant observations and arguments presented by six critics across a range of journals, newspaper supplements and one online publication.

A review by Maiia Kucherskaia emphasizes Zaionchkovskii's achievement in observing and describing the details of everyday life: 'Zaionchkovskii is a writer with a talent for epic, without question he could write a real epic – not about war, but about peace, an epic about the everyday.'¹⁵¹ Kucherskaia also stresses the

¹⁵¹ Maiia Kucherskaia, 'Knizhnaia polka Maii Kucherskoi', *Novyi mir*, 1 (2006), 197–202 (p. 198).

ordinariness of the protagonist's childhood in *Petrovich*, suggesting a perception of the narrative as representative of Soviet childhood in the 1960s:

What happens to him, however, is no more than what happens to the most ordinary child. Going to a Soviet kindergarten in the sixties – with vile yellow pudding and a kindergarten teacher who hates children, delightful walks with grandmother, the smells of autumn and of the railway, the one-act dramas 'home alone' or 'mama left me behind in a shop', the fervent anticipation of one's birthday and presents, and being in love for the first and only time with a girl from the neighbouring yard.¹⁵²

In this list of experiences which the critic presents as evoking a typical childhood of that time, her comments on Soviet kindergartens suggest that this was commonly a bad experience. This is the only reference to the Soviet setting of the text in this review and it occurs in the first paragraph, thus it seems to be primarily a way of informing the reader about the basic facts of the novel's setting. Nonetheless, this juxtaposition of the 'kindergarten teacher who hates children' and 'delightful walks with grandmother' hints at a contrast between the nature of the state and of the family home; this is a theme which is explored by two other critics, Vladimir Itkin and Andrei Nemzer, but which is not discussed further by Kucherskaia.

Itkin identifies a concern with patriotism in Zaionchkovskii's novel, a particular kind of patriotism focused not on the state but on the everyday experiences of Russian-Soviet life. He explains that apparently clichéd memories of ordinary experiences, common to author and reader, are what constitute this kind of patriotism in the text:

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 198.

No no, the text is not at all clichéd – it is in reality incredibly beautiful – it is, rather, our and the author’s memories which are clichéd. Mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, the album with yellowed photographs, friendships with the children we met in the yard, the ‘headquarters’ in the basement, the uncovered lights from windows in a five-storey building at night – this is where Zaionchkovskii’s patriotism comes from, in defiance of all the national anthems in the world.¹⁵³

By referring to Zaionchkovskii’s comments on the daily broadcast of the Soviet anthem (for my discussion of this see Chapter 3, pp. 208–09), Itkin suggests an opposition between the patriotic feeling promoted by Zaionchkovskii and Soviet state patriotism. This opposition is further underlined by Itkin’s description of how Zaionchkovskii represents the Soviet setting of the text:

Zaionchkovskii transfers the surrounding reality to the text without any snobbery. He really relates with warmth to it all: the ‘kids’, the ‘we’re going to have a fight in the yard’; he loves the boundless, free expanse of the Volga region. The author sets the whole novel – from start to finish – in the epoch of unmitigated stagnation, but social institutions, the government, and Brezhnev are not mentioned on principle.¹⁵⁴

The critic implies that the absence of the Soviet state in the text, and the ‘warmth’ with which the past is described, means that Zaionchkovskii is interested in portraying the Soviet period on the level of the personal sphere, while rejecting the Soviet past as a political or ideological category. Itkin suggests that patriotism is in need of rehabilitation and that the novel constitutes an attempt to do this:

¹⁵³ Vladimir Itkin, ‘S chego nachinaetsia Rodina...’, *Knizhnaia vitrina*, 15 November 2005 <<http://www.top-kniga.ru/kv/review/detail.php?ID=18847>> [accessed 28 October 2010].

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

“Petrovich” is a shy attempt to rehabilitate the word “patriotism”.¹⁵⁵ It is probable that Itkin perceives this theme in Zaionchkovskii’s work as an alternative to the kind of patriotism promoted by the Putin administration which at that time was focussed on Soviet achievements including some celebration of Stalin’s legacy.¹⁵⁶ The description of this rehabilitation of patriotism as a ‘shy attempt’, however, indicates that Itkin does not consider it to have been entirely successful. This seems to be due to a perceived lack of authenticity; his main criticism of the text is the claim that Petrovich’s ‘voice’ is unconvincing. Itkin perceives the novel as being too obviously the adult author’s exploration of the Soviet past, rather than an authentic account of a child’s experience:

The author plays the role of the child, yet does not merge with him. The point here is not only that the boy Petrovich speaks in the language of a grown-up author. His text is a caterpillar mechanism, a slow and virtuous excavator picking out of the maternal Soviet black earth the ghosts of his childhood which are dear to his heart.¹⁵⁷

Although Itkin does not explicitly refer to ‘memory’ or ‘dealing with the past’, and does not consider Zaionchkovskii to have fully achieved the ‘rehabilitation of patriotism’, Itkin is nonetheless asserting the possibility of a text contributing to the reclaiming of personal memory of the Soviet past. Moreover, the idea that Russian patriotism might be in need of rehabilitation also suggests that the critic perceives a need to renegotiate memory and identity with respect to the Soviet period. This review is unusual among the Russian reviews for demonstrating recognition that portrayal of the Soviet everyday can be significant for Russian identity in the present.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ See Chapter 2, p. 118.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

Andrei Nemzer draws on similar ideas to Itkin in terms of seeing *Petrovich* as revealing a distinct division between everyday family life and the state. Nemzer's interpretation of the final scene of the text suggests that it is critical of the Soviet state. He describes the home and family in Zaionchkovskii's text as a 'fortress' ('krepost'): 'The fortress cannot be separated from the world (if you're not in (the hell of) kindergarten [detskii (s)ad], then you have to go to school, college or the office), the fortress is not protected from enemy raids – real or symbolic.'¹⁵⁸ That the state is being set up in opposition to the 'fortress' of home and family is made clear by the references to state institutions. Nemzer follows this statement with a reference to the narrator's comments, at the end of the text, about the daily broadcast of the Soviet anthem. It is implied that this broadcast represents what he describes as an 'enemy raid' ('vrazheskii nabeg'). Nemzer draws significance from the fact that in the final scene of the text the purpose of the anthem's broadcast has been subverted: 'One day the anthem proves to be powerless and unwittingly truthful – in Moscow it announces to Aunt Tania the "inviolable union" of her dissolute nephew and a girl unknown to her.'¹⁵⁹ 'Soiuz nerushimyi' (inviolable union) are the opening words of the anthem and are here also referring to sexual union between the protagonist and Veronika. Nemzer's conclusion takes his interpretation beyond what is described in the text, to imagine a new life created in defiance of both Petrovich's aunt (who forbids them to spend the night together) and the state (by sleeping through the morning transmission of the anthem):

They deceived the honourable aunt and the dishonourable Union. [...]
Whether in exactly nine months' time or a little later our world gained a
Georgievich or Georgievna is not at all important. What's important is that it

¹⁵⁸ Andrei Nemzer, 'Otkuda poshli Georgievichi', *Vremya novosti*, 121 (8 July 2005) <<http://www.vremya.ru/2005/121/10/129255.html>> [accessed 12 June 2011].

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

happened. In all probability. Although in 'Petrovich' nothing is said about it.¹⁶⁰

Although Nemzer's interpretation indicates some anti-Soviet sentiment, and seems to assume a similar position on the part of the reader, there is, as in the majority of reviews of the Russian texts, no self-conscious discussion of why a portrayal which reclaims the memory of everyday life from the memory of the state might be significant. Nemzer may be leaving this unsaid, because the reader is assumed to understand the significance, or it may be that further introspective, self-conscious discussion of the subject appeals neither to the critic nor the majority of readers.

Valeriia Pustovaia also comments on the text's ending, but in her interpretation there is no mention of the Soviet anthem. Pustovaia interprets Zaionchkovskii's text as a representation of the norms of family life: 'The author's attention is centred on the norms of life's structure and the norms of childhood inscribed in this structure.'¹⁶¹ She presents the text as a study of banality and the continuous cycle of life: 'The banality of Petrovich is the blissful banality of life itself, its eternal regeneration and recurrence, the irrevocability of its cycles, its laws – its structure.'¹⁶² The review does not draw any significance from the Soviet setting. When Pustovaia makes reference to the fact that the opening of the novel is mirrored in the final paragraph (the narrator's comments about the Soviet anthem), she gives no indication of the content of this passage, and the potential relevance of the narrator's attitude for understanding the portrayal of the state within the text. Pustovaia mentions it only as a sign of repeating cycles of life:

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. (Zaionchkovskii, pp. 278 and 284.) Georgievich or Georgievna would be the patronymic of the protagonist's child. The protagonist is usually known by his patronymic, Petrovich, but referred to occasionally as Gosha, a diminutive form of the first name, Georgii.

¹⁶¹ Valeriia Pustovaia, 'Blagaia banal'nost'', *Novyi mir*, 3 (2006), 156–62 (p. 160).

¹⁶² Ibid.

The childhood of Grandfather Genrikh, placed within the novel about the childhood of Petrovich (chapter 'Genrikh'), Genrikh's comments addressed to Petrovich after finding out that he was being pensioned off: 'Well, friend... some day you too will come to this', and finally, the repetition of the novel's opening in its finale – all this is evidence of the immutability of the structure of life.¹⁶³

That Pustovaia comments on the form, but not the content, of the opening and closing paragraphs suggests that the comments made by Zaionchkovskii's narrator about the Soviet state are perceived as insignificant or that their significance is deliberately avoided in this reading of the text.¹⁶⁴

Sergei Beliakov, in contrast to the other critics discussed, is far more explicit in judging Zaionchkovskii's representation of the Soviet past. He identifies, and is harshly critical of, a recurring anti-Soviet theme in the text.¹⁶⁵ Beliakov reacts strongly against this feature of the text, claiming that it 'spoils the whole novel'.¹⁶⁶ His explanation for this rests on a perceived incompatibility of childhood and political matters:

Just as air which has got into a tin can renders it unusable, so politics forces its way into the pure, cherished subject of childhood and vulgarizes it. It desecrates something sacred. In a novel about childhood it is simply not appropriate!¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Pustovaia also resists an interpretation which reflects on the Soviet past in discussions of Pavlov's *V bezbozhnykh pereulках* (see above, p. 299) and Sanaev's *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom* (see below, pp. 319–20).

¹⁶⁵ Sergei Beliakov, 'Detskii portret v antisovetskom inter'ere', *Ural*, 3 (2004) <<http://magazines.russ.ru/ural/2004/3/bel.html>> [accessed 29 October 2010]. It should be noted that this review refers to the journal publication of the text, rather than the edition cited in this thesis. The journal publication did not include the fourth section of the text, which I refer to only briefly in this thesis as it represents the protagonist in early adulthood rather than childhood.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

This could be a reaction against the political instrumentalization of childhood in the Soviet era, but there are other indications in the review which suggest that Beliakov is resistant to condemnation of the Soviet state.¹⁶⁸ Beliakov, for example, questions the truthfulness of the narrator's presentation of the Soviet anthem. Whereas Nemzer presents the broadcast as a symbolic intrusion of the state into the 'fortress' of family life, Beliakov is more concerned with the truth of the narrator's statement in a literal sense:

But in fact the ordinary common citizen didn't listen to the anthem in the morning. It would only be heard by someone who forgot to turn the radio off overnight, or someone who really loved the anthem and couldn't miss the morning broadcast. No-one forced Soviet citizens to listen to the anthem as a compulsory requirement.¹⁶⁹

Beliakov assesses this part of the narrative with regard only to factual accuracy and without any consideration that the enforced listening might be representative of many other limited freedoms. This suggests that Beliakov is avoiding any interpretation which might accept a critical portrayal of the Soviet state. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the theme of childhood is the only reason that the critic objects to this political strand of the text.

Finally, a review by the critic, Lev Pirogov, is noteworthy because it compares Zaionchkovskii's work to that of other contemporary Russian authors who have portrayed childhood (Oleg Pavlov, Denis Iatsutko and Boris Minaev). Pirogov's comparison of these texts is striking because he judges the representation of childhood without any reference to the context in which these childhoods were spent. All the texts are set in the Soviet period and portray a range of Soviet

¹⁶⁸ On the politicization of childhood in the Soviet era see Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven: Yale, 2007). Kelly discusses both the political indoctrination of children and the representation of Soviet childhood in propaganda.

¹⁶⁹ Beliakov.

childhood experiences, yet Pirogov appears to expect literary representations of childhood to conform to a particular relationship between the present and the past: 'life needs neither embellishment ["lakirovka"], nor blackening ["ochernitel'stvo"] – it needs love and forgiveness.'¹⁷⁰ Pirogov is rejecting both the Soviet practice of embellishing reality (*lakirovka*) and the late and post-Soviet trend towards *chernukha*, the portrayal of dark, sometimes violent and/or sexual subject matter in post-Soviet literature and film.¹⁷¹ In a similar vein to Beliakov, Pirogov's comments imply that representations of childhood should be free from politics or social criticism.

Pirogov contrasts *Petrovich* to Pavlov's 'V bezbozhnykh pereulkakh' and Iatsutko's 'Bozhestvo', both of which present childhood in a miserable light: 'Both are complaining about life, neither loved his childhood, both torment the reader.'¹⁷² Pirogov appears to offer these texts as examples of *ochernitel'stvo* and demonstrates little consideration that the bleak portrayal in either text might be an authentic portrayal of how the author (and possibly many others) experienced childhood. Boris Minaev's work, on the other hand, is considered to bear similarities to *Petrovich*:

With reference to the novel 'Petrovich', one is reminded of Boris Minaev's 'Detstvo Levy' and its sequel 'Genii dziudo' – the same steady pace, the same bright, unclouded view. But Minaev writes rarely (although accurately), his stories are, rather, a personal nostalgic project.

Zaionchkovskii seems to be more ambitious: his first two books [...] look to

¹⁷⁰ Lev Pirogov, "'Pozovi menia v dal' svetliuu'": Restavratsionnyi proekt Olega Zaionchkovskogo', *Nezavisimaia gazeta: Ex Libris*, 22 December 2005 <http://exlibris.ng.ru/lit/2005-12-22/4_dal.html> [accessed 28 October 2010].

¹⁷¹ Seth Graham notes that the term 'ochernitel'stvo' was also used during the Soviet period to 'denounce overly pessimistic representations of socialist reality'. Similarly the term 'chernukha' has almost always been used pejoratively by Russian critics describing post-Soviet film and literature. See Seth Graham, '*Chernukha* and Russian Film', *Studies in Slavic Cultures*, 1 (2000), 9–27, p. 10.

¹⁷² Pirogov, "'Pozovi menia v dal' svetliuu'".

me like they could be steps on the way towards some kind of achievement on a grander scale.¹⁷³

Although Pirogov judges Minaev's work to be less 'literary' than Zaionchkovskii's, it is an interesting contrast with the reception of the German texts that Minaev's nostalgic approach is not more harshly criticised. While Pirogov has mentioned disapproval of *lakirovka* he appears to assume that nostalgia is an appropriate mode of representing the past. Unfortunately these ideas are not explored further in this short review which is not concerned with how the specific nature of the Soviet past is represented.

Pokhoronite menia za plintusom

Sanaev's *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom* has attracted a lot of discussion in the Russian press. Many reviews of the text emphasize the widespread attention received by the book, for example in this review written in 2009: 'since 2003 when it came out as a book in its own right, it has continuously been reprinted and has maintained a high position in the sales rankings.'¹⁷⁴ One reviewer, discussing the book after the film adaptation had provoked a new wave of interest in the book, acknowledges that the story is widely known: 'It is not worth speaking even briefly about the plot of the work. The internet abounds with retellings of the story, it has been, and still is, considered compulsory reading for the intelligentsia.'¹⁷⁵ The text has prompted debate and divided opinion: 'Pavel Sanaev's story "Pokhoronite menia za plintusom" made a lot of noise. The bold confessional style was valued by supporters and caused outrage among opponents.'¹⁷⁶ The 'confessional' aspect of the work is particularly significant because Sanaev's grandfather, step-father and

¹⁷³ Pirogov, "Pozovi menia v dal' svetliuu".

¹⁷⁴ Grigorii Dashevskii, 'Liubov' i volia', *Kommersant Weekend*, No. 46 (142), 27 November 2009 <<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1277390>> [accessed 4 May 2011].

¹⁷⁵ Natal'ia Fedchenko, 'Bluzhdaniia v korzine griaznogo bel'ia', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 23 (2010) <<http://www.litrossia.ru/2010/23/05308.html>> [accessed 28 October 2010].

¹⁷⁶ Ekaterina Barabash, 'Serial'naia infektsiia: "Pokhoronite menia za plintusom" Sergeia Snezhkina vykhodit v prokat', *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 3 December 2009 <http://www.ng.ru/culture/2009-12-03/8_plintus.html> [accessed 28 October 2010].

mother were all well-known actors. Some reviews make explicit the connection between Sanaev's ('fictionalized') characters and his family members.¹⁷⁷ Sanaev himself only hints at such connections by dedicating the text to his step-father, Rolan Bykov. It is clear then that whether or not this text has any effect on memory discourse surrounding Soviet childhood will certainly not be a question of whether it has been read and discussed enough.

Particularly relevant for this thesis is the fact that several critics make connections between Sanaev's portrayal of unhappy family life and the Russian condition in general. Across several reviews a theme emerges, suggesting that dysfunctional relationships and psychology are commonly experienced in Russian families, and that a therapeutic effect of the text may be part of its appeal. These reviews will be the initial focus of my analysis. I will also consider three reviews which, in different ways, appear to avoid direct discussion of how the text portrays the specific nature of Soviet childhood. Finally I will look at a review which perceives the success of the text as a symptom of moral degradation.

Grigorii Dashevskii comments on the fact that the book's popularity grew primarily through word of mouth, and that this method of publicity is associated with the Soviet period:

Moreover, people did not find out about this book from critics or adverts, but from one another. The horizontal method of recommendation from reader to reader, which governed reading in the USSR and practically disappeared after 1991, has suddenly been revived for this book in particular.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, Viktoriia Shokhina, 'Povest' o babushke', *Nezavisimaia gazeta: Ex Libris*, 22 March 2007 <http://exlibris.ng.ru/tendenc/2007-03-22/7_sanaev.html> [accessed 28 October 2010].

¹⁷⁸ Dashevskii.

He argues that the extent of personal recommendations suggests the text has some collective importance:

And in order to give such advice it is surely necessary not only that you yourself like the book – you also need to know that you’re not going to put your foot in it with your advice. And so, the impression created by Sanaev’s story was not just powerful, but such that it inspired confidence that others would share it, that this book is about something which secretly unites us.¹⁷⁹

Dashevskii acknowledges that while some readers can relate to the protagonist directly, not all of them can have had grandmothers like Sasha’s. Dashevskii’s explanation, instead, relies on a perception of a widespread tendency towards feelings of inferiority among Russian people:

[W]e read grandmother’s cursing and swearing with the same pleasure with which we hear a truth that is usually painstakingly concealed and suddenly said aloud. That is, judging by our own reaction, deep in our soul we believe it is true – we believe that we are insignificant, weak and helpless and that this mad love does not hold us captive, but in fact saves us from instant death caused by more freedom than we can cope with.¹⁸⁰

There is no discussion of why these feelings should be so common among readers, again suggesting an assumption that readers will understand. Dashevskii’s comments may be reflecting a sense of crisis in Russian national identity related to the loss of international status and sweeping changes that occurred following the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ See Chapter 2, p. 126.

The idea that the situation and characters represented in Sanaev's text are in some way representative of a collective or shared experience also emerges in a review by Ekaterina Barabash. Her review considers both Sanaev's text and its film adaptation and emphasizes the cathartic nature of the work: 'despite its calculated commercial success, the story "Pokhoronite menia za plintusom" is like a lanced abscess. The pus drains away and the patient feels better.'¹⁸² It is further suggested that the therapeutic effects were not confined to the author but instead had broader relevance to the Russian population: 'It was decided to grant the abscess the status of being a mass, Russia-wide phenomenon.'¹⁸³ The suggestion of a need for some kind of therapeutic effect across Russia, which echoes Dashevskii's comments, seems likely to be connected with the upheavals experienced during the late 1980s and 1990s, and may even represent a step towards coming to terms with the Soviet past. However, again like Dashevskii, Barabash does not explain why there might be a mass need for this catharsis; the reader is assumed to be able to draw this conclusion independently.

Comments made by the critic Viktoriia Shokhina suggest that Sanaev depicts a characteristically Russian family situation. No particular significance is explicitly drawn from the Soviet setting, although Shokhina's description of the grandmother might seem to invite comparison with an authoritarian leader: 'The important thing about this monster is the obsessive lust for power. Grandmother needs everyone to fear her and everyone to submit to her.'¹⁸⁴ Shokhina offers no further development of this association between power relations in the Soviet Union and within Sanaev's fictionalized family. Whether or not an allegorical interpretation was intended, this review is not likely to provoke reflection on memory of the Soviet past, unless the reader had already made a similar connection him/herself.

¹⁸² Barabash.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Shokhina.

Shokhina does, however, perceive the grandmother as representing an archetypal Russian character in both literature and life:

It's a Russian character-type that you often come across (in literature from Kabanikha to female characters in Shukshin's stories, and to the heroine of Petrushevskaja's novella, "The Time: Night" [*Vremia noch'*]). Such women completely embody the horror of the Russian family. A horror which explains a lot about the Russian character in general.¹⁸⁵

These thoughts are echoed in some of the readers' reviews which suggest that the experiences portrayed by Sanaev are representative of many Russian families.

Although the reviews discussed so far suggest that Sanaev's work has a wider relevance to Russian society and the Russian character there is little indication that the text has any significance for understanding the specific nature of the Soviet past. None of the reviews place much emphasis on the Soviet setting. Those which summarise the background to the character of the grandmother sometimes mention the war and the death of her first child as factors affecting her later behaviour, but her fear of being arrested by the KGB is rarely mentioned.

Two critics directly pre-empt any interpretation that the text offers a significant portrayal of the Soviet past in particular. An early edition of the book included in the publisher's description the suggestion of a parallel between the character of the grandmother and the Soviet state: 'In it [the book] Sanaev reads the funeral service and buries together with the grandmother of his protagonist that insufferable country which we all lost around that time.'¹⁸⁶ Valeriia Pustovaia challenges the interpretation encouraged by the publisher, asserting that the

¹⁸⁵ Shokhina. Kabanikha is a terrifying mother-in-law in Aleksandr Ostrovskii's nineteenth-century play, *Groza*. Vasilii Shukshin was a writer associated with 'village prose'; his female characters were often nagging wives.

¹⁸⁶ Cited in Pustovaia, 'Rozhdennye evoliutsiei'.

description is misleading ('obmanyvaet'). Her objections do not engage with the question of how the text relates to the broader experience of Russia dealing with the Soviet past, instead she argues that such an approach is unimaginative: '[The description] reinforces in us the lazy thinking which habitually inscribes the story of childhood into the larger story of society.'¹⁸⁷ Her dismissal of this line of interpretation may be influenced by the fact that literary portrayal of growing up as a model for conveying political and ideological development was a common feature of socialist realist texts, for example Nikolai Ostrovskii's *Kak zakalialas' stal'*. As discussed above, Pustovaia has also demonstrated reluctance to relate texts by Pavlov and Zaionchkovskii to the Soviet context.¹⁸⁸ Her approach may be due to a prioritisation of literary, rather than social, issues, or there may be some underlying ideological basis. Whatever the reason, her purposeful avoidance of discussing the Soviet context is clearly revealed when she gives a detailed list of the factors affecting the behaviour of Sasha's grandmother including the development of a persecution complex but does not mention the grandmother's fear of being taken away by the KGB.

The critic Ol'ga Rychkova also cites the same publisher's description as Pustovaia and challenges it by asking whether the book is specifically relevant to the Soviet period. She suggests that children today suffer in similar situations: 'But are children today really no longer hostages and victims of adult conflict?'¹⁸⁹ This comment does not necessarily deny a critical perspective on the Soviet past, rather it suggests that in some respects Russian lives have not significantly improved. It is not clear whether the critic perceives such unhappy childhoods to always be a possibility in family life, or whether there is an element of social criticism here, of both the past and the present in Russia. Even if we interpret that there is an

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ This chapter, pp. 299 and 311–12 respectively.

¹⁸⁹ Ol'ga Rychkova, 'Detskii mir i vzroslaia voina', *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 2-3 (2006) <http://www.lgz.ru/archives/html_arch/022006/Polosy/15_1.htm> [accessed 15 November 2010].

element of social criticism, it is still the case that Rychkova has chosen to focus away from Sanaev's portrayal of the Soviet past, even though the publisher's description could be seen to invite such a discussion.

A review by Viktor Bochenikov comments on the publisher description of later editions, which describes the text as a parody of happy childhood: 'A book in which the very idea of a happy childhood is parodied with Homeric hilarity and refined fury.'¹⁹⁰ Bochenikov perceives this as being about the specifically Soviet idea of happy childhood.¹⁹¹ He claims that this approach might have been useful in the Soviet period, but that it has little purpose now:

This idea [of happy childhood] would perhaps have been in need of parody, if the book had been written in the Soviet period, if it had been contemporary with, for example, Erofeev's 'Moskva-Petushki'. But now it is too late to claim to have discovered a new word and new style, which reveals other artistic worlds.¹⁹²

Bochenikov indicates that Sanaev's 'parody' lacks originality and literary value by finishing with the statement: 'We have plenty of people who produce parodies, but what about writers?'¹⁹³ Bochenikov's criticism is problematic as Sanaev's text could not have been published in the Soviet period due to censorship. The comparison with Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* undermines the argument as, despite being written in 1970, a full version of Erofeev's text was not published in Russia until 1995, only one year before the journal publication of Sanaev's text.¹⁹⁴ An edited version of *Moskva-Petushki* was published in the Soviet Union in 1989 and

¹⁹⁰ This publisher description is used in the edition of the text cited in this thesis.

¹⁹¹ On 'happy Soviet childhood' see Catriona Kelly, 'A Joyful Soviet Childhood: Licensed Happiness for Little Ones', in *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*, ed. by Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko (London: Anthem Press, 2009), pp. 3–18.

¹⁹² Viktor Bochenikov, 'Opozdavshii idiot', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 2–3 (2010) <<http://www.litrossia.ru/2010/02-03/04863.html>> [accessed 28 October 2010].

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Karen L. Ryan-Hayes, *Venedikt Erofeev's Moscow-Petushki: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 6–7.

Bochenikov may be suggesting that Sanaev's text would have had more relevance during glasnost or in the early post-Soviet period, but it seems premature to dismiss a text which challenges Soviet ideals of childhood at a time when there are still many Russians who grew up under Soviet rule. It is more likely, therefore, that these comments reflect an ideological bias against any negative portrayal of the Soviet past. This is supported by the fact that the review is published in *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, a literary publication known for promoting patriotic and nationalistic values.

A criticism of the text raised by Natal'ia Fedchenko emphasizes the inappropriateness of Sanaev's decision to represent details of his own family members' lives. This is a concern which, as will be discussed below, also emerges in some readers' reviews. Fedchenko expresses distaste for the text's voyeurism:

The author summons us to peer at people who were once living, in a cluttered kitchen, in an untidy bedroom, to stroll unhurriedly around the souls of these people, to stir up with unhealthy curiosity everything that is usually hidden from the indiscreet glances of strangers.¹⁹⁵

That members of the family are, in Fedchenko's words, 'revered heroes of the screen' makes it even worse.¹⁹⁶ In this respect, however, Fedchenko is less concerned about the portrayal of Rolan Bykov (Sanaev's step-father): 'It is not worth talking about R. Bykov, whose character is reconstructed more timidly than ruthlessly.'¹⁹⁷ Fedchenko justifies her attitude to Bykov by claims that both Bykov's films and Sanaev's text contain elements of *chernukha*: 'What's more, the spiritual "chernukha" of his work in film pervades "Pokhoronite menia za plintusom".'¹⁹⁸ It is

¹⁹⁵ Fedchenko.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. Some critics are vocal in defending Sanaev against accusations of 'chernukha'; see, for example, Rychkova, 'Detskii mir i vzrosliia voina'.

the portrayal of Vsevolod Sanaev (Pavel Sanaev's grandfather and a celebrated Soviet actor) that concerns Fedchenko the most:

But Vsevolod Sanaev remains in my memory for his wonderfully joyful roles. I'm not an expert on film and don't know all of his filmography well. What remains in my memory (as it probably does for many who love 'soviet' cinema) is the film 'White Dew [Belye rosy]'¹⁹⁹

In this film Vsevolod Sanaev plays a father with three sons; Fedchenko chooses to compare Pavel Sanaev's actions in writing about his family with the behaviour of the three sons in the film, even though this was a fictional representation: 'But they [the three sons] do not overstep the bounds of decency, they do not profane the idea of family, love, respect, or memory.'²⁰⁰ Fedchenko's review is clear in presenting Sanaev's narrative as lacking in moral value and she ridicules the fact that the text has nonetheless been celebrated: 'Let's just, simply, as suggested to us by the author of "Plintus..."', laugh at him, show off in a fool's cap, since today people are recognised writers and given prizes for that. Today that is popular...'²⁰¹ Fedchenko does not, therefore, draw any conclusions about the Soviet past from Sanaev's text, instead focussing on what she perceives to be symptoms of moral collapse in post-Soviet Russia.

None of the reviews cited above explicitly connect dysfunctional family relationships to the Soviet experiences of war and terror which would have affected the older generations (i.e. grandparents) of almost all families in the late Soviet, early post-Soviet period. In spite of this approach taken by the critics, some readers have interpreted Sanaev's text as revealing specific difficulties of Soviet life. This will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Beloe na chernom

Ruben Gal'ego's *Beloe na chernom* attracted some interest from the critics in its first publication in the journal *Inostrannaia literatura (Foreign Literature)*. The subsequent book publication and the book's nomination for and eventual winning of the Russian Booker Prize 2003 further increased media interest in the text. There was some controversy surrounding the eligibility of *Beloe na chernom* for the Booker competition as this is defined as a prize for the best Russian novel. Consequently, many critics have debated the genre of the text, its literary qualities, and whether the choice was in fact a 'politically correct' decision based on the book's subject matter, rather than on Gal'ego's literary achievement. In comparison with the other Russian texts discussed above, *Beloe na chernom* has provoked more discussion about the Soviet past and its continuing legacy in the present. This is unsurprising as Gal'ego portrays childhood in Soviet children's homes. In the other Russian texts the portrayal of Soviet institutions, most often school and the Young Pioneers, plays only a minor role, if at all. In Gal'ego's case the state had a more direct effect on the childhood experiences portrayed, and there is, therefore, more potential for comment on the Soviet system.

In the following analysis I will first consider the reaction of critics to the genre and literary quality of *Beloe na chernom*. I will then discuss how some reviewers variously interpret the significance of Gal'ego's portrayal of Soviet children's homes. Despite the prominent role of the state in the narrator's upbringing, some critics place little or no emphasis on the depiction of the Soviet Union, instead expressing a greater interest in the individual circumstances of the author's biography. Of those critics who do address Gal'ego's representation of the Soviet past, some perceive significant social criticism in the text and while others resist a critical perspective on the state by denying that the Soviet context is relevant.

The journal *Voprosy literatury* provides an account of conference discussions the day after the announcement of the Russian Booker Prize 2003, including discussion of the 'political correctness' of the jury's decision. Natal'ia Ivanova, although in favour of political correctness in general, has doubts about the selection of Gal'ego's text with respect to the aims of the Prize: 'your decision is in human terms completely understandable, but given the format of the prize it raises questions.'²⁰² Ivanova claims that texts like Gal'ego's (she also cites the example of Andrei Sergeev's *Al'bom dlia marok*, the winner in 1996) are in some way incomparable, suggesting that their content can sometimes be more important than literary aesthetics. Irina Rodnianskaia (a member of the 2003 jury) explains that avoiding 'political correctness' was an important consideration for the jury; those who supported the text advocated its literary qualities: 'we did not want it to sound like a politically correct decision. Those who defended the selection of Gonsales Gal'ego argued for the unique literary and artistic qualities of this book.'²⁰³ The discussions serve to highlight the complexities of the issue, rather than to come to any conclusions. The above comments demonstrate that there are concerns that the documentary subject matter of a text can detract from questions of literary aesthetics. There seems, however, to be little interest in discussing the text's importance as a social and human document even though the potential of this to outweigh aesthetic value has been acknowledged; the few instances I have found will be discussed further below.

Alla Latynina, in the introduction to a review of Gal'ego's second book, *Ia sizhu na beregu* (2005), returns to the debates about whether his first publication, *Beloe na chernom*, constitutes 'real' literature. She argues that *Beloe na chernom* can be distinguished from a simple witness testimony, citing the effect produced by the text among the reading public as evidence of this. Latynina asserts that there is widespread knowledge of far worse experiences in children's homes than those

²⁰² 'Literatura v epokhu SMI', *Voprosy literatury*, 4–20 (p. 11).

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

described in Gal'ego's text and that the overwhelming response to the book was not because the conditions of children's homes and the experiences of the disabled were previously unknown. She argues that it is the literary quality of the text, rather than its subject matter, which has caused the greatest impact: 'Why, then, was this book read as a revelation? It was because the author found the appropriate literary language to convey the subject-matter.'²⁰⁴ Latynina supports her argument with reference to literary prose about the Gulag, suggesting that the effect on readers is what sets these narratives apart from standard witness testimonies:

Solzhenitsyn's 'Gulag Archipelago' and Shalamov's 'Kolyma Tales' could not have been created without the corresponding camp experiences of the authors. But many had that experience, and their accounts did not become literature, but ended up in the gigantic file of witness testimonies. The effect of Gonsales Gal'ego's testimony derives precisely from the fact that it is literature.²⁰⁵

The comparison of *Beloe na chernom* to celebrated literary works which revealed some of the worst aspects of the Soviet system suggests that Latynina perceives Gal'ego's text to also function in this way.

The following discussion will consider three examples of reviews in which critics are unambiguous in their interpretations of *Beloe na chernom* as a highly critical portrayal of the Soviet past and, to some extent, the Russian present. Evgenii Ermolin compares *Beloe na chernom* to two well-known Soviet texts in which the heroic protagonists face illness and injury: *Kak zakalialas' stal'* by Nikolai Ostrovskii and *Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke* by Boris Polevoi. Ermolin argues that while the development of the heroes represented by Ostrovskii and Polevoi

²⁰⁴ Alla Latynina, 'Volia k zhizni i volia k smerti', *Novyi mir*, 12 (2005), 152–59 (p. 153).

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

involved a realization of their commitment to the Soviet project, Gal'ego's text describes development in the opposite direction:

He spends his childhood in the furnace of Soviet man, he feels for the unhappy, ordinary Americans, believes in the red star, but in the end his efforts towards self-realization are in no way connected to the ideology which at that time was already on its last legs.²⁰⁶

Ermolin interprets the portrayal of the author-narrator's development as being in opposition to his Soviet upbringing: 'he equips himself with *stoical* opposition to his surroundings and fate.'²⁰⁷ He suggests, however, that a lack of detail in the portrayal of this character development is a weakness of the text: 'Perhaps the main weakness of the book is the fact that the reasoning behind this spiritual formation is not established.'²⁰⁸ I would argue that there is a lack of detail because the text does not, in fact, set up such an opposition. Gal'ego survives in spite of the system and reveals some of its serious failings, but there is no sense of a self-conscious turning away from Soviet ideology and no sense of a growing disillusionment or a changed perspective on, for example, Pavel Korchagin (the hero of *Kak zakaliyas' stal'*) who Gal'ego considers a hero for fighting for a cause.²⁰⁹ Ermolin's interpretation supports his view that *Beloe na chernom*, as a whole, represents a judgement on the Soviet system and those who were complicit with that system:

His book can be taken as a judgement. A judgement on both the inhumane system and the people who accepted it, felt at home within it, and agreed with its evils. The depictions of everyday spiritual decline are that much

²⁰⁶ Evgenii Ermolin, 'Zhivaia nit': Russkii buker kak zerkalo sovremennoi rossiiskoi literatury', *Novyi zhurnal*, 235 (2004), 170–84 (p. 182).

²⁰⁷ Ibid. Italics in the original.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Gal'ego, p. 16.

more striking for the fact that they are the essence of the author's personal impressions over many years. The religious nurses are the only exception to this sombre spectacle of the savage and increasingly superficial nature of the common people.²¹⁰

In comparison to reviews of the other Russian texts discussed in this chapter Ermolin's attitude to the Soviet past is clearly expressed. He seems, however, to be pessimistic in his expectations of the effects of Gal'ego's text: 'Perhaps Gal'ego's memoirs could become a real literary event with national significance. But not today. Or not in a country where the nation's soul has been damaged.'²¹¹ He implies that the Russian people are not in a position to recognise the significance of Gal'ego's text. Ermolin's characterization of the Soviet state as an 'inhumane system' is implied as the cause of the 'damaged soul' of the Russian people.

The critic, Elena Men'shikova, raises similar points to Ermolin in her interpretation of the text, and in her concerns about the legacy of the Soviet past. In a review of the text in its journal publication (which was entitled 'Chernym po belomu'; it was changed to *Beloe na chernom* for the book publication) she clearly expresses her view that the text reveals the horror of Russian society to readers:

You read it and are convinced of the horror in which we live – the horror of alienation runs right through our society. And the text, like a sphinx, looks at you and asks: and what are you like? Could you keep yourself safe in this hell created by God?²¹²

²¹⁰ Ermolin, p. 183.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Elena Men'shikova, 'Zalozhnik', *Novyi mir*, 7 (2002), 184–86 (p. 185).

Although these comments, written in 2002, exhort readers to reflect on their present lives, her discussion of the text indicates that she perceives the Soviet past as a continuing source of 'evil' in society:

Behind the specific histories of the invalids (children and elderly people) in the context of the camp-like children's home retrospective stands the sinister monolith of the epoch which we will never lose, as it's eaten too far into our rough brains. Its structure, like a fateful curse, hangs above us as a thick fog and hasn't begun to think about dispersing.²¹³

Like Ermolin's image of the 'damaged soul' of the Russian people, Men'shikova also indicates the lasting effects of the Soviet system which has been internalised and continues to affect society in the present. In the next quotation she further underlines the condemnation of the Soviet system which she interprets in Gal'ego's text:

'Chernym po belomu' – it is evidence of the tragic ascent of the Spirit: the author of the memoir achieves heroism just by being alive. It is a heroic act of survival and at the same time it is a 'pointed finger' – pointing towards that Soviet savagery from which we have all emerged and from which we will never break free.²¹⁴

Like Ermolin and Men'shikova, Tat'iana Sotnikova also identifies criticism of the Soviet state in *Beloe na chernom*. Sotnikova is, however, more optimistic about the text's potential effects in society. She expresses the hope that readers will grasp the social criticism in Gal'ego's work:

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 186.

I want to believe that those people who are buying 'Beloe na chernom' today in happy Moscow's many bookshops are not doing so in order to be titillated by such stories, but in order to understand something about the country in which they live.²¹⁵

She explains that, for her, the desired effect of Gal'ego's text would be for readers to recognise that the Russian spirit is not the answer to society's problems:

I also want to believe that on reading the book they will understand this so well that they will vow to forever give up debating the subject of our spirituality and warm-heartedness [dushevnost'] and instead be concerned about a social structure in which a person's right to life would not depend on the personal qualities of the citizens he or she happens to encounter.²¹⁶

These comments represent an anti-nationalist stance by rejecting reliance on the idea of the Russian soul as a source of comfort and salvation and instead stating the need for a system which protects individuals. Sotnikova also uses her review to criticise those in contemporary Russian society who do not perceive a need to provide equal opportunities for disabled people:

A few of them [...] are very indignant at the fuss created in the United States about people with disabilities. They say, look at how crazy American political correctness is: 'these people' are allowed to prepack products in the supermarket, and, you know, they do it much worse than healthy people!²¹⁷

She suggests that those who disapprove of 'political correctness' are the same critics who write unfavourable reviews which focus on what they perceive as the

²¹⁵ Tat'iana Sotnikova, 'Bol'she, chem iskusstvo', *Kontinent*, 120 (2004)
<<http://magazines.russ.ru/continent/2004/120/sot27.html>> [accessed 29 October 2010].

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

poor literary quality of Gal'ego's text, thereby suggesting that the attacks on his literary style may be hiding an ideological bias: 'It is exactly these people who tell readers that Gal'ego's book does not possess certain mythical literary-stylistic qualities which make it worthy of the attention of snobs.'²¹⁸ Sotnikova's perception of how Gal'ego's text has been received by the general public is more optimistic:

Fortunately, normal people understand what Tsvetaeva once said: 'There are things which are greater than art. More terrifying than art.'

These are the very things that art consists of.²¹⁹

She asserts that both those who would not credit Gal'ego's text with both literary and social significance, and those who would rather rely on Russian spirituality than a system which recognises the basic rights of all, are in a minority.

Sotnikova's review indicates that Gal'ego's text is provoking discussion not just about the Soviet past, but also the Russian present.

Two critics, Valentin Luk'ianin and Vladimir Bondarenko, argue against any interpretation of *Beloe na chernom* as revealing and passing judgement on the failings of the Soviet state. Luk'ianin asserts that this anti-Soviet interpretation is a habitual practice of some Russian critics: 'Incidentally, certain reviewers have, according to deeply rooted habit, interpreted the new Booker prize-winner's narrative as yet another human document which exposes the inhumanity of the Soviet system.'²²⁰ Luk'ianin refers to a passage in the text in which Gal'ego expresses thanks to the Soviet state for bringing him up. His attempt to argue that the text is not anti-Soviet relies on there being no irony perceived in the narrator's expression of thanks:

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Valentin Luk'ianin, 'Literaturnoe segodnia skvoz' prizmu "russkogo Bukera"', *Ural*, 3 (2004) <<http://magazines.russ.ru/ural/2004/3/luk10.html>> [accessed 16 May 2011].

If desired, it is possible to find this motif too, of course for that it's necessary to take the declaration at the end of the chapter 'Nurses [Nianeckki]' as ironic: 'Thank you to my teachers, who taught me how to read. Thank you to the Soviet state, which raised me.' Ok, maybe that's ironic, but then, it's immediately followed by: 'Thank you to the smart Americans, who created the computer and gave me the chance to type this text with my left index finger.' All in all it's not irony. Nor is it Christian forgiveness. That's simply not what the book is about.²²¹

Luk'ianin's interpretation of this passage does not consider that Gal'ego may be highlighting a contrast in his juxtaposition of thanks for his Soviet upbringing (which allowed him to survive, but only just) and for the invention of the computer (which allowed him to write about his experiences and gain some independence). Luk'anin also fails to interpret the comments in the context of the entire work, which recounts several terrible experiences of cruelty and neglect in Soviet institutions. Luk'ianin instead interprets *Beloe na chernom* as a story of human spirit in the face of adversity: 'Its meaning is in its spirit. [...] through suffering the hero of this story, shaped by life itself, reaches another level of understanding – unfortunately inaccessible to most of us – an understanding of the natural order of things.'²²² He praises the optimistic attitude of the narrator and, like the critic, Pirogov (see above, p. 314), indicates his resistance to the tendency in Russian literature for particularly bleak, dark narratives: 'It would seem that, in stark contrast to the dramatic fate of his narrator-hero, this "non-novel" is unreservedly optimistic and this striking quality makes it stand out from the general current of Russian literature today.'²²³

²²¹ Luk'ianin. For the internal quotations from Gal'ego's text, I have used the published English translation: *White on Black*, trans. by Marian Schwartz, p. 28.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

Bondarenko's review of *Beloe na chernom*, published in the nationalist newspaper *Zavtra* is particularly scathing of 'liberal' praise of the text. His patriotic-nationalist views are made clear from the outset by his description of his expectations of *Beloe na chernom*:

When, at the presentation of the Booker prize [...] liberal critics talked about this book, I was indignant and, hearing their version, I was seized by fury: yet another Russophobic concoction!... Yet another book about the 'abominations of the Soviet regime' and the blessings of today's liberalism.²²⁴

Bondarenko reports, however, that he is very impressed by Gal'ego's text: 'I bought the book, read it and was astounded. I'm still under its spell.'²²⁵ He challenges the idea put forward by other critics that the text is an indictment of the Soviet state, suggesting that this is to miss the point:

I understood once again that a good half of the critics, even distinguished ones, are not in a position to comprehend the heart of the text, the heart of the book's meaning. They have read a few facts about stern nurses and cruel teachers, and transposed all of this onto the country, the nation. What excites them is the extent to which the book exposes 'communist morality'...²²⁶

He instead identifies the text as being about illness, and the struggle to survive:

The book is not about the system, it is about sick children, about the good and evil which lies in each of us. It is not a political manifesto or lampoon,

²²⁴ Vladimir Bondarenko, 'Zametki zoila', *Zavtra*, 5 (532), 27 January 2004 <http://www.zavtra.ru/cgi//veil//data/zavtra/04/532/84.html> [accessed 16 May 2011].

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

but a book about a sick child's struggle for his life, a triumphant book by a man who was fated to die and who overcame that death.²²⁷

He defends his argument not with references to the text in question, but with examples of responses to illness and disability in the West against which he can favourably compare the Russian situation. He refers to the treatment of disabled children in National Socialist Germany and claims some modern-day continuation of this approach in recent debates over euthanasia: 'Hitler destroyed such children immediately in maternity hospitals. Among today's democrats there are also supporters of similar measures, supporters of euthanasia, the voluntary death of the disabled.'²²⁸ He refers also to the novel (1962) and film (1975), *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, stating that it 'did not take place in our country', while conveniently ignoring the fact that the narrative was highly critical of psychiatric institutions and contributed to a change in attitudes towards mental health.²²⁹ Bondarenko's description of Russian provision for ill and disabled children does not claim that the system always works, but denies that this is a reflection of Russia itself:

Here in Russia they were treated and educated, but, as happens in all children's homes and schools, there has never been a shortage of injustice in the way sick children are treated. And that has nothing to do with the system or the regime.²³⁰

Bondarenko uses his review of *Beloe na chernom* as an opportunity to pass judgement on the West and to promote the kind of patriotism which does not allow any recognition of failures by the Soviet state and the post-Soviet Russian

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

administration. The review pays very little attention to the text itself, and gives no examples of the cruel treatment which Gal'ego depicts.

In some reviews the representation of the Soviet past does not attract any significant comment. The focus is instead on Gal'ego's biography, the personal qualities promoted by the text, and questions of genre and literary worth. Lev Pirogov's short review of the text does not pass comment on the portrayal of the Soviet system, or in fact on the treatment of disabled children in contemporary Russia.²³¹ Another critic, Anna Kovaleva, implies in her initial description of the author that the text may have a significant role in negotiating the Soviet past, but does not expand on this point: '[Gal'ego] was able to deal with fear of death, with the Soviet system with and life.'²³² This is the only mention of the Soviet context in her review which otherwise concentrates on biographical details of the author and literary qualities of the text. A review by Elena Ivanitskaia is mainly focussed on the controversial decision to award Gal'ego the Russian Booker Prize. Although her comments include some indication of the significance of the portrayal of Soviet children's homes, the genre of the text remains the most emphasized point of the article:

These are extremely tough, serious, confessional memoirs leading the reader into the terrifying reality of homes for sick children, which have not got any better since Soviet times.

It is a very powerful book which one must read. But, I repeat, it is not a novel.²³³

²³¹ Lev Pirogov, 'Zhizn' bez liubvi?..', *Nezavisimaia gazeta: Ex Libris*, 4 December 2003 <http://exlibris.ng.ru/lit/2003-12-04/5_life.html> [accessed 8 June 2011].

²³² Anna Kovaleva, 'Ne slomat'sia', *Izvestiia*, 30 November 2003 <<http://www.izvestia.ru/news/284430>> [accessed 9 May 2011].

²³³ Elena Ivanitskaia, 'Russkaia grust' ispanskogo pisatel'ia', *Pervoe sentiabria*, 89 (2003) <<http://ps.1september.ru/articlef.php?ID=200308922>> [accessed 16 May 2011].

Finally, Elena Vengerskaia presents the text as a therapeutic act of witnessing for the author:

Even before he found his mother again at the age of 33 he had graduated from two colleges, married twice, and had children... But he is only now slowly beginning to distance himself from what he has lived through, experiences which he doesn't have the right to forget. He wrote this book 'at the behest of memory'.²³⁴

Although Vengerskaia's comments show awareness of the importance of this act of remembering for the author personally, there is no discussion of how this testimony may be a valuable contribution to collective memory of the Soviet period.

The critical reception of *Beloe na chernom* shows a remarkable variety of responses. It is a text which reveals terrible experiences in Soviet children's homes, and therefore one might expect reviews to focus on the role that the text could play in contributing to collective memory of the Soviet past. Although a few reviewers do perceive important themes of social criticism of both the Soviet system and present-day Russian society in the text, the Soviet context is little commented on by some critics and is denied as an object of criticism by others. These differing approaches can be explained in part by the contrasting liberal and patriotic tendencies identified in the post-Soviet literary scene. That some reviews make little or no comment on the Soviet setting of the text repeats the tendency observed in reception of the other primary texts that many critics are reluctant to engage in discussion about how the Soviet Union is portrayed in these texts.

²³⁴ Elena Vengerskaia, 'Zapiski iz detskogo doma', *Knizhnaia Vitrina*, 17 January 2003 <http://www.top-kniga.ru/kv/review/detail.php?ID=15394> [accessed 28 October 2010].

Readers' Reception of the Russian Texts

Analysis of readers' responses to the Russian texts will refer to reviews posted on three different websites: Ozon (www.ozon.ru), Labirint (www.labirint.ru) and Bookmix (<http://bookmix.ru>). Ozon and Labirint are bookseller sites, and the reviews posted are usually fairly short with no facility for discussing or commenting on another's review. On the Bookmix site readers tend to post more lengthy reviews and comment on and discuss each other's posts. I will focus on the reception of three texts: *Detstvo Levy*, *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom* and *Beloe na chernom*. Readers' responses to Minaev's *Detstvo Levy* show the appeal of a text which chimes with readers' own childhood memories. Like some of the readers' reviews of the German texts, reviews of Minaev's stories demonstrate how readers seek to identify with others of the same generation and enjoy revisiting memories which might have been forgotten. Sanaev's text has provoked a far greater number and range of responses. As with Minaev's text, some reviews demonstrate that readers identify with the portrayal and recognise elements of the story and setting from personal memories. Most significantly, a small number of readers' reviews of *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom* make specific reference to the Soviet setting and how the text might contribute to or change perceptions of the past. Finally, reviews of Gal'ego's *Beloe na chernom* usually demonstrate the reader's role as witness to his story, rather than identifying with the experiences portrayed. Surprisingly, given that Gal'ego narrates experience of cruelty and suffering in Soviet institutions, only a very small proportion of readers make any comment at all on the Soviet setting.

Detstvo Levy

Reviews of Minaev's stories often show the reader's identification with the experiences portrayed. In this first example a reader affirms the authenticity of the narrative, by suggesting that the text could be about her own childhood and that it provoked her to remember aspects of her own childhood:

Leva's Childhood – it's about my childhood too. A remarkable book!
Astonishingly accurate. It even reminds me of the smells of that time. I wonder how people older and younger than me would respond to it? I was born a couple of years earlier than Leva, in Moscow, on the street, 'Ostozhenka', which was then called 'Metrostrovskaja'.²³⁵

As observed with readers' reviews of Claudia Rusch's memoir, this reviewer reveals something of her own biography, identifying herself as part of the same generation as the author, and, in this case, as being from the same area. Another review considers that depiction of Soviet childhood means the book will appeal to both adults and younger readers:

It's a good book. I thought about it for a long time and came to the conclusion that it should be interesting not only for adults but also for children. [...]; for nostalgic adults it is a detailed description of Soviet childhood, with the same smells and objects.²³⁶

Compared with the reception of the German texts this comment which suggests that *Detstvo Levy* might appeal to nostalgic adults is striking, especially as there is no hint of dismissiveness or criticism conveyed. This supports the observation made earlier in this chapter (pp. 298–99) that nostalgia for the Soviet past does not have the negative connotations often attached to *Ostalgie*.

This final example of a review on Minaev's work was posted about *Genii Dziudo* (a second collection of stories about the protagonist, Leva, with very similar kinds of content as *Detstvo Levy*). It is included here because the reader particularly comments on the text as preserving the memory of Soviet childhood:

²³⁵ Ekaterina Golovina, [no title], 21 January 2006

<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/152564/>> [accessed 9 May 2011].

²³⁶ Deplan'i Arina, 'Khorosho', 4 April 2007 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/152564/>> [accessed 9 May 2011].

The author helps you to remember your happy Soviet childhood. Everything that surrounded us as children in the 60s and 70s. Certain little things, words and games are already starting to be forgotten. It's so much nicer to know that someone else cares about this.²³⁷

For this reader, Minaev's stories about Leva reinforce the memory of a 'happy Soviet childhood'. Minaev's descriptions also remind him of things which have almost been forgotten about that time, thus the text has a function in preserving details of informal children's culture in the Soviet period. The reader's appreciation that others have similar fond memories shows a wish to share these memories and to be able to identify with others on the basis of common childhood experience. None of the readers' reviews of Minaev's work expresses any concern that his portrayal might encourage an idealised view of the Soviet past.

Pokhoronite menia za plintusom

For the analysis of reader responses to Sanaev's text I have considered readers' reviews and comments, posted between the book's first publication in 2003 and April 2011 on two websites: Ozon (www.ozon.ru) and Bookmix (<http://bookmix.ru>). These reviews, posted for several different editions of *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom*, number 258 in total. The large numbers of reviews posted on this text, in comparison to the other texts discussed here, reflects the popular and sometimes controversial response the book has provoked. This is also illustrated by the reasons given by some readers for deciding to read the book in the first place: for example: 'Why did I start to read this book? The masses, society... it's the one thing everyone is talking about!'²³⁸

²³⁷ D Mikhail, 'Khoroshaia knizhka', 13 March 2009
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/2400736/>> [accessed 9 May 2011].

²³⁸ Konfeti, 'O ned ... bol'she nikogda!', 20 May 2010,
<<http://bookmix.ru/review.phtml?rid=28670#review>> [accessed 20 May 2011].

I will begin by providing a brief summary of recurring themes in reader reviews, both those which praise the text, and those which are highly critical. This will be followed by more in-depth analysis of those reviews which comment on the text in relation to memory and the Soviet past. For this thesis readers' reviews which show that the text may be influential in preserving or challenging readers' memories, and the memory of Soviet childhood in particular, are of primary relevance. Readers who express recognition of the experiences and way of life portrayed by Sanaev are of particular interest, as they demonstrate that the text prompts or reinforces the reader's own memories. Less than ten percent of readers offer interpretations of Sanaev's text as representing wider issues in Russian/Soviet society, or even the national character.²³⁹ Of these even fewer expand on their comments to describe how the text offers a critical perspective on the Soviet past, although it is clear that this is the main interpretation of a few readers.

Among positive and ambivalent reviews the vast majority of readers are concerned to discuss their opinion of the characters. Reviews often centre on the question of which character is most to blame or the most deserving of sympathy in the unhappy family situation portrayed. For example, this reader tries to explain the motivations of the grandmother, but does not draw any direct connection with the grandmother's experiences of war and terror:

Why did grandma hold herself and those around her captive, shackled with iron chains? Only one answer suggests itself. She was moved by fear. But fear of what and what gave rise to it remain unclear.²⁴⁰

Another reader, on the other hand, presents the narrator, mother and grandfather as victims, and the grandmother as the source of the family's misery:

²³⁹ Twenty two of 258 reviews.

²⁴⁰ Berta S., 'Iz pod plintusa ...', 10 April 2009, <<http://bookmix.ru/review.phtml?rid=2962#review>> [accessed 20 May 2011].

I feel very sorry for the boy and his mother, who became the victims of an overbearing woman dissatisfied with her own life and blaming her husband for all her woes, a husband who loved her and throughout his life did everything for her so that she would want for nothing.²⁴¹

Many readers discuss their emotional response to the text, often in conjunction with disputing the publisher's description of the text as humorous. Readers frequently state that they found the text sad and/or frightening, some claiming to have been moved to tears. This comment is representative of these kinds of reviews: 'A terribly emotional book, it's a long time since I encountered anything like it. It appears to be a simple account of one man's not so simple childhood, but it moves you to the depths of your soul.'²⁴²

Those readers who disliked the book often justified their opinions with one or both of two common reasons: poor literary quality and a discomfort with autobiographical writing revealing unhappy private lives. This reader demonstrates particularly strong feelings on the text's lack of cultural value and suggests that the text ought to be censored:

Where are the censors? Why are such shameless lampoons published and made into 'cinematic masterpieces'? Why has everyone forgotten Russian literature? Surely Turgenev would not have represented his cruel mother in such a manner. After reading P. Sanaev's 'masterpiece' I am left with an unpleasant aftertaste. Both V. Sanaev and R. Bykov will always be the great

²⁴¹ Evgeniia, 'Rekomendovat' by ne stalo... no knizhke postavliu tverduiu 5!', 28 December 2009 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/3724533/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

²⁴² Reshetnikova Elena, 'Emotsional'no', 27 August 2008 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/3724533/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

masters of their art for people of my generation and older, and to reveal the open sore of their family relationships shows an utmost lack of culture.²⁴³

The above review displays a similar attitude to that expressed by the critic Fedchenko in perceiving the text as a symptom of moral and cultural degradation, especially in its revealing portrayal of respected and well-loved actors.²⁴⁴

Among negative reviews there are frequent references to feeling dirty after reading it, for example: 'what pleasure is there to be had in rummaging through this questionable dirty laundry? [...] After reading it I wanted to wash myself.'²⁴⁵ This, like the previous reader's wish for censorship, could be a reaction to the use of language in the text; the narrator's grandmother uses obscene language frequently throughout. It may also be a response to the subject matter, which some readers perceive as inappropriate, for example: 'Here is cold-blooded profiteering from the growing interest among a certain category of readers in *chernukha* and *bytovukha*, in digging about in the dirt, especially if there is a faint resemblance to the lives of famous people.'²⁴⁶ Several negative reviews make references to *chernukha* (see above, p. 314) and to *bytovukha* (a term which usually relates to violence or crime in the home or within a family).²⁴⁷ In a final example of a critical review, a reader acknowledges that the text is a reminder of

²⁴³ Laptev Vadim, 'P. Sanaev', 23 June 2009
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/1417762/?type=4&page=1#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

²⁴⁴ See above, p. 322–23.

²⁴⁵ Evgeniia Belova, 'otvratitel'naia kniga', 3 February 2010
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/4895145/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

²⁴⁶ H. Gonchar, 'Bolezn' zapushchena', 13 February 2011
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/4872841/#comments>> [accessed 27 April 2011].

²⁴⁷ Volha Isakava defines 'bytovukha' as 'crimes that are not premeditated but spontaneous and most commonly develop from domestic conflicts' in 'The Body in the Dark: Body, Sexuality and Trauma in Perestroika Cinema', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3 (2009), pp. 201–214 (p. 201); Eliot Borenstein refers to it as a 'police term [... describing] everyday violence ranging from drunken fights to sexual assault to murder' in *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 218.

the Soviet past, but considers that this alone does not make the text valuable as literature:

I didn't find anything of interest, let alone anything funny about it. Yes. It is reminiscent of one's own life (especially for the Soviet generation), but it is far from being a masterpiece, and there is simply nothing at all psychological in it. It is the usual *bytovukha*, if one can put it like that. And is it necessary to wash one's dirty linen in public and 'get a kick out of it'?²⁴⁸

Discomfort with Sanaev's uncompromising portrayal of the private sphere, even in semi-fictionalized form, seems to be the common element in almost all the reader reviews which are overtly negative towards the text.

A significant proportion of readers' responses to Sanaev's text expressed some kind of identification with the narrative, or recognition of elements within it, for example: 'It's interesting to read about one's childhood! Mine was similar, and so I was hooked.'²⁴⁹ Reviews like these ascribe authenticity to Sanaev's text and encourage other readers who may not be able to judge based on personal experience, to believe in the truthfulness of the depiction: 'With horror I fell into my own childhood... everything was more or less the same. [...] The book is terrifying and truthful.'²⁵⁰ As well as connecting their interpretations of the text to personal memories, a few readers interpret Sanaev's narrative as relevant to an understanding of Russian society or the Russian character more generally: 'The most horrifying thing is that for our country and our people such a childhood is the

²⁴⁸ Zaiko Maksim, 'Ne fontan', 24 February 2010
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/3724533/?type=4#comments> [accessed 8 November 2010]

²⁴⁹ Olesia, 'Chitaite obiazatel'no...', 22 January 2010
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/4895145/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

²⁵⁰ Roman Isaev, [no title], 21 November 2005,
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/1417762/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

norm!²⁵¹ Presenting a similar view as the critic, Shokhina, (cited above, p. 318), this next reader perceives the text to portray a peculiarly Russian approach to love:

A genuine book from the series 'Love Russian-style'. Most likely it is only in our country that people know how to love like this: giving all of oneself, forgetting about everything in the world, literally giving the shirt off one's back and at the same time not giving any thought at all to whether the object of one's affection needs this massive amount of love.²⁵²

Some reviews suggest that the text depicts typical childhood experiences of that time, but without explicitly connecting this to the concept of the Soviet past: 'Many of the sixties generation had such a childhood, I only hope it's not the same for today's children.'²⁵³ That the narrative might also be representative of modern Russian childhood is also a recurring concern: 'A similar childhood was experienced by many people in those times (and also today if you believe the TV news).'²⁵⁴

The readers' comments discussed so far do not place any emphasis on the Soviet setting of the text. This has, however, been a prominent element in a small proportion of the reviews, and it is the responses of these readers which I will now discuss. A few reviews reveal particular identification with or recognition of the Soviet setting of the text. For example, this reader recognises what is portrayed, even though she does not consider herself to have had a similarly traumatic childhood:

²⁵¹ Tat'iana Ivanovna Pakhmovna, 'Komu kakoe detstvo dostalos'...', 25 February 2010 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/3724530/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

²⁵² Plius, 'Liubit' po-russki', 8 November 2008 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/3724530/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

²⁵³ Marina Vladi, 'Vot ono kakoe byvaet – detstvo!', 15 March 2007 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/1417762/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

²⁵⁴ Elena, 'Na liubitelia!', 2 February 2010 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/3724533/?type=4&page=1#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

An excellent book! Dedicated to the children of the USSR! Although I didn't have that kind of horror in my family, for some reason everything was still very familiar! Most probably because that kind of thing was going on all around me!²⁵⁵

The comment that the text is dedicated to children of the USSR reveals the reader's association of the text with the specific experience of Soviet childhood, rather than perceiving it as about childhood and family life in more universal terms. Another reader suggests that first-hand experience of the Soviet period may be necessary to truly comprehend the book: 'For today's young people, who didn't live at that time, it might be very difficult to understand the book. The book reminded me of what childhood was like then.'²⁵⁶ Both these readers recognise elements of the narrative from their own personal memories and are relating these memories to an idea of Soviet childhood in particular. This particular association is also revealed by readers who pick up on the publisher's description (of later editions) which describes Sanaev's text as parodying the idea of happy childhood. The description does not include the word 'Soviet', but for most Russians old enough to remember life in the Soviet Union, this would be understood as the ideal of a happy Soviet childhood was used widely in propaganda. In a further example of a reader who gives details of his/her own autobiography, this review suggests that the text allows a humorous perspective on memories which are far from happy: 'With horror and Homeric laughter I recognised my 'happy childhood' (it wasn't all so tragic, but very similar), my district [...], the entrenched Soviet way of life [*makhrovyyi sovok*] and its recognisable features which now even seem amusing.'²⁵⁷ In a review entitled 'All adults who believe that they had a "happy childhood" must read this'

²⁵⁵ Elena Nevazhno, 'Stoit prochitat!', 30 November 2009
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/3724530/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

²⁵⁶ Zhanna Stakhovskaia, 'Super!!!!!!!!!!!!', 3 February 2011
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/4895145/?type=4&sort=date#comments>> [accessed 27 April 2011].

²⁵⁷ Elena Orlova, 'Ne genial'no, no ochen' zdorovo!', 5 August 2009
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/3724530/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

another reader indicates her belief that the collective memory of Soviet childhood needs to be reassessed and that Sanaev's text contributes to this: 'Let's remember together what it was like, this childhood ...'²⁵⁸ These responses (posted in 2009 and 2007 respectively) contradict the view expressed by the critic, Bochenikov, that it is too late to be writing a parody of happy Soviet childhood, by showing that almost twenty years after the Soviet Union's collapse there is still interest in the subject.

A further three reviews reveal readers who perceive a critical portrayal of the Soviet past in the text, recognising that the Soviet system and/or traumatic experiences during the war and under repressive rule have contributed to psychological problems and difficult relationships within families. For one reader, the text offered an insight into effects of the Soviet system on her own family:

I read the book... no, to be more precise – I swallowed it whole – in one night... At first I laughed, remembering my own childhood, then it got scary, and then I howled into my pillow ...

Now I understand that my grandma didn't hate me... It's a peculiar expression of love by a person deformed by THE SYSTEM. Only as a child, when I wanted kindness, I didn't understand that... It's a pity ...²⁵⁹

This reader now perceives her own grandmother to have been affected by similar experiences to Sasha's grandmother in the text. The review shows that for a reader who could personally identify with the situation portrayed, the narrative led to greater understanding and to a changed perspective on her own childhood memories. A review from the 'Bookmix' website provides a more detailed

²⁵⁸ Zhanna, 'Neobkhodimo prochest' vsem vzroslym, kotorye schitaiut, chto u nikh bylo "schastlivoe detstvo"...', 6 November 2007
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/1417762/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

²⁵⁹ Ksina Markesh, 'Strashno...', 3 April 2009
<<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/1417762/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 8 November 2010].

discussion of the failings of the Soviet system and how Sanaev's text portrays them: 'It seems to me that much of what the novel describes can be attributed to the monstrosity of our system, which has changed only in name and hasn't improved.'²⁶⁰ She expands on this by explaining her sympathy towards the character of the grandmother and the experiences which Sanaev shows to have shaped her:

This is someone moulded by Soviet life, a product of it in all its glory. I write this without irony. If you show her life off-stage, as it were, then a picture emerges before us of thousands like her! She wanted to be an actress – she wasn't allowed to! [...] Her hopeless Moscow life in the same old communal flat, playing the supporting role to her husband, the atmosphere of denunciation, which Sanaev delicately refers to although we see it unfold in all its magnitude. The war, the death of her child, the psychiatric hospital with its ward of lunatics...²⁶¹

This reader specifically identifies that the portrayal of the grandmother demonstrates the consequences of the 'atmosphere of denunciation', an aspect of the text which is rarely mentioned either by critics or by other readers. The reviewer acknowledges that many lived through similar and worse circumstances, but implies, nonetheless, that the effects of Soviet life cannot be disregarded:

One can immediately retort that she was not the only one like that, that many, many people went through even worse ordeals. I agree with this and always admired and still admire those who can come through all that and be

²⁶⁰ olgera, 'Schast'e stalo zhizn'iu ili Eshche raz o plintuse', 14 December 2009
<<http://bookmix.ru/book.phtml?id=279123&rid=19983#review>> [accessed 12 May 2011].

²⁶¹ Ibid.

lucid. But each person is an individual and not everyone is capable of holding it together.²⁶²

Another reader responds to the text along similar lines. In her explanation of why she did not find the text funny, she suggests that Sanaev's text shows how the traumatic experiences of one generation can continue to affect subsequent generations, thus interpreting the text as potentially relevant for Russian families in the present.

There proved to be too much common ground between the protagonist's childhood and the childhoods of many of my friends of the same generation. So a trend emerges. With grandmothers who grew up before the Great Patriotic War, who were starving and put through the ordeal of evacuation, who were 'under the Germans' and under Stalin's rule – all this with a small child on your hands. Their generational conflict with those same children but now grown-up, in the fifties, sixties and seventies. And how that conflict takes its toll on the grandchildren – that is on people of my generation, and on the great-grandchildren, in other words, our children.²⁶³

In this review the reference to Stalin is the only indication that the reader is also considering the effects of state repression. A reader has commented on this particular review, supporting the interpretation that Sanaev's text offers an insight into the psychological effects of the war: 'I was very pleased that the review mentioned the difficult life of the generation who lived through the war, hunger, evacuation. This provides an opportunity to understand these old people and even to sympathize with them.'²⁶⁴ Analysis of these reader reviews shows that some

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Vera Ageeva, 'Dobralis' do plintusa', 17 November 2009
<<http://bookmix.ru/book.phtml?id=279123&rid=18913#review>> [accessed 12 May 2011].

²⁶⁴ Selena, [no title], 17 November 2009
<<http://bookmix.ru/book.phtml?id=279123&rid=18913#review>> [accessed 12 May 2011].

readers consider Sanaev's text to offer insight and a valuable exploration of the possible effects of both the Soviet system and the legacy of the Second World War on family life. While this is shown to be a valid interpretation, the small proportion of reviews which explicitly discuss this, and the limited discussion of this subject in reviews by professional critics, suggests that this interpretation is either not perceived by many readers, or that it is a topic which they do not wish to discuss openly.

Beloe na chernom

Readers' responses to *Beloe na chernom* reveal a particular emphasis on the personal, human story behind the text, rather than concerns about the text's genre or whether it constitutes a judgement on the Soviet past, as raised by a number of critics. None of the readers' reviews passes comment on *Beloe na chernom* winning the Russian Booker Prize and I have not found any readers' comments which express concern about the extent of fictionalization or autobiographical truth in the text. Many readers praise the style of writing, however, which implies that the text is seen to have literary worth. Moreover, the use of words such as 'honest' (*chestnyi*), 'truthfulness' (*pravdivost'*) and 'sincerely' (*iskrenno*) in many of the reviews indicates that these readers perceive Gal'ego's narrative to be an authentic representation. The following discussion will first demonstrate the emphasis placed by many readers on the text as life-affirming and optimistic. Secondly I will consider the few reviews which do make reference to the Soviet setting of the text.

Many readers' reviews of *Beloe na chernom* express a feeling of changed perspective after reading it, for example: 'After reading this book you start to appreciate what you have.'²⁶⁵ Gal'ego's text is presented as life-affirming and as a positive experience for the reader:

²⁶⁵ Lesik, [no title], 12 May 2009 <<http://www.labirint.ru/reviews/goods/142999/>> [accessed 5 November 2010].

The book very clearly allows you to understand what's really important in life and what's simply trivial. Read it – and you will understand that you've never had any real problems. And happiness is right there, within reach, and nothing special is required for it.²⁶⁶

Many reviews identify the narrator's emphasis on kindness and strength as the main reason for the book's success: 'An astonishing book! Nothing can rival it! One of my favourites. Painfully real, honest, and not one superfluous letter. It's about a very difficult situation, but at the same time 100% optimistic.'²⁶⁷ That Gal'ego has avoided creating a work of *chernukha* despite writing about extreme cruelty is also commented on:

Having barely survived the system of Soviet homes for the disabled, the author has succeeded in doing something unimaginable: turning terrifying personal experience into genuine art. In his memoir, with all its merciless veracity, there isn't a drop of *chernukha*. [...]

The book proves to be life-affirming, even joyful, however paradoxical that sounds.²⁶⁸

Reviews which focus exclusively on the text as a life-affirming document of personal struggle, without reflection on the context in which the struggle took place, appear to be interpreting the text along similar lines as the critics Luk'ianin and Bondarenko.

²⁶⁶ Irina, 'Ochen' sovetuiu!!', 26 October 2009 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/4713786/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 5 November 2010].

²⁶⁷ Jevgenija, 'Vystradannaia i nezabyvaemaia', 14 April 2010 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/4713786/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 5 November 2010].

²⁶⁸ Nikita, [no title], 16 October 2008 <<http://www.labirint.ru/reviews/goods/142999/>> [accessed 5 November 2010].

The wish expressed by the critic Sotnikova that readers would take from the text a greater understanding about the country in which they live, is not shown to be fulfilled in the majority of reviews. Only three of the sixty-one reviews posted express any opinion of the Soviet system in responding to the text. In the first example, the reader is particularly struck by the realisation that the narrative represents real experiences:

The most important thing is that at first you don't take in the really candid and simple stories. But the moment comes when you 'get it', that all this is the TRUTH, that a person really happened to live through this concentration-camp-Soviet-hospital-children's-home HORROR!²⁶⁹

The reader's perception of the horror of Soviet children's homes as in some way similar to a concentration camp is a comparison which Gal'ego's text invites by juxtaposing narration of his own suffering with narration of a history lesson about fascist concentration camps.²⁷⁰ Another review which perceives criticism of the Soviet state in the text is written by a reader who identifies himself as a psychotherapist and psychiatrist; he considers the text to have therapeutic value:

It is existential psychotherapy. Two hours of rapture and sobbing. A powerful book. [The author has] a crystal-clear intellect, a gift for writing and a mighty spirit. An abominable government in a great country. Damn communism. Any idea which comes to power turns into a lie.²⁷¹

It is clear from this reader's comments about the government and about communism, that he perceives Soviet state ideology to be the primary cause of the

²⁶⁹ Zhanna, [no title], 18 October 2009 <<http://www.labirint.ru/reviews/goods/211554/>> [accessed 5 November 2010].

²⁷⁰ Gal'ego, pp. 9–10.

²⁷¹ Ruben Mogilevskii, 'Otzyv', 10 November 2004 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/2459662/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 5 November 2010].

cruelty and neglect depicted in the text. The third and final example is a review in which the reader explicitly blames the 'system' (*sistema*). She asserts, however, that the text is just as relevant to the present as to the past:

A documentary narrative about the survival of children in the children's homes of our vast HOMELAND. The terrible SYSTEM became a part of our lives and there was nowhere to hide from it. This SYSTEM is still strong today. Don't say that in the 21st century these are empty words. Nothing has changed in our country since those days. Rather it has got even worse. Children are still suffering the same way in our terrible children's homes.²⁷²

It is not entirely clear what aspect of the state, society or government she is referring to, although her assertion that 'nothing has changed in our country since those days' indicates that she perceives continuity between Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, and the reference to 'our vast homeland' suggests that she is talking about the country in general, rather than specifically about the system of 'care' for disabled children. This reader also identifies the text as useful for Russian society, thereby implying a belief that the text has value in revealing criticism of the 'system': 'The book is very sad (I had tears pouring down my cheeks), but very necessary for our society.'²⁷³ Moreover, she makes the direct assertion that the 'system is to blame' for Gal'ego's suffering.²⁷⁴ These last two readers are unusually direct in passing judgement on the Soviet state as part of their responses to *Beloe na chernom*.

²⁷² Dmitrieva Tat'iana Iurevna, 'Chitala i plakala!', 23 April 2009 <<http://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/2459662/?type=4#comments>> [accessed 5 November 2010].

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that in the majority of Russian reviews the Soviet setting of the primary texts receives limited comment. There is little sense of the value of narratives in commemorating the experience of suffering, either in reviews of Miller's *Zolotaia simfoniia* with reference to her portrayal of anti-Semitism or in reviews of Gal'ego's *Beloe na chernom*. There are some indications, particularly in critics' responses to *Petrovich* and readers' responses to *Detstvo Levy* and *Genii Dziudo*, that there is value in preserving memory of everyday life, but even in the reviews of *Petrovich* by Itkin and Nemzer, which seem to posit an opposition between Russian family life and the Soviet state, the question of how to reconcile that opposition when remembering the Soviet past is not addressed. Critics' reviews of Sanaev's novel touch on interesting ideas about the therapeutic effect of the text and what it says about the Russian psyche, but the critics do not probe these issues to explain their observations. The reluctance to engage in any extended discussion about how Soviet life is remembered in the texts reflects the lack of open discussion of the Soviet past in the surrounding memory culture. It also indicates that, perhaps in part due to the rejection of Soviet-style didacticism, there is little desire for literature and literary criticism to engage in social criticism.

Among the reviews there are, however, a few interesting exceptions to the tendency towards avoiding discussion of the representation of the Soviet past. In the case of the critics reviewing *Beloe na chernom*, there are a few critics who particularly emphasize that the text constitutes a damning portrayal of the Soviet system. There are also a few critics who are critical of anti-Soviet sentiments which they perceive within the texts (*Petrovich* and *Beloe na chernom*) or within liberal interpretations of the texts. A minority of readers' reviews reveal an interest in the portrayal of Soviet life through their discussion of what Sanaev's text reveals about the Soviet system and its effects on childhood and families.

In contrast with the German reception, where, for example, reviews of Oskamp's novel demonstrate an almost excessive interest in the East German setting of the story, it is clear that the majority of Russian responses to the primary texts are not focussed on how the texts represent the experience of life in the Soviet Union. Except by implication in a few reviews of Gal'ego's text, none of the Russian reviews raises the more general issue of how the Soviet past should be portrayed and remembered. In the German reviews surveyed in this chapter there is also no German equivalent of the stance adopted by 'patriotic' Russian critics; while a small minority of German reviews defend the right of East Germans to remember their childhoods on a personal level without reference to the political and ideological context, not one German review condemns criticism of the East German state in either the texts or in others' responses to the texts.

It is harder to identify how the Russian texts may be influencing collective memory of the Soviet past because the question of how the Soviet past should be remembered does not appear to be a concern of the majority of critics and readers or indeed of society at large. While reception of the German texts clearly shows that the texts are contributing to memory debates in German society, there is little existing debate in Russia for the Russian texts to engage with. The suggestion made by Ermolin and Men'shikova that Russia was (when *Beloe na chernom* was published in the early 2000s) not ready or able to confront certain aspects of the past seems, therefore, to be a not unrealistic one.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that there are significant differences in how the socialist past is remembered through literary representations of childhood in the GDR and Soviet Russia. The German texts show a greater tendency towards self-conscious reflection on the socialist past and exploration of contemporary issues of memory and identity relating to it. They seem to say 'this is what growing up in the GDR was like'. All the German texts convey a negative attitude towards at least some aspects of the system. This is sometimes expressed directly through the narrator's voice, through the opinions of characters who are opposed to the state, or by describing difficult or absurd situations which characterize the nature of the GDR. While Mourad Kusserow clearly expresses his wish to condemn those who perpetrated repression and commemorate those who suffered, Claudia Rusch and Daniel Wiechmann approach it from a more personal perspective, describing their sometimes complicated feelings as (former) East Germans during the *Wende* and in unified Germany. Kathrin Aehnlich's fictional narrative conveys many of the absurdities of life in the GDR primarily through the child's naïve perspective. The child's point of view is often a source of humour in the texts by Rusch, Wiechmann and Aehnlich, thus allowing these authors to provide a portrayal of life in the GDR which combines a critical distanced perspective with affectionate and entertaining memories of some aspects of East German childhood.

Central to the Russian texts is not the nature of *Soviet* childhood in particular, but the child's experience and/or the remembering of childhood experiences. Unlike the German texts, the Russian texts do not exploit the child's limited understanding to promote a humorous or critical perspective on the society in which he/she is being brought up. In most cases, whether a narrator or character identifies with or against the regime is ambiguous and does not appear to be an important element in the narrative. Furthermore, these narratives of childhood

experience are not combined with any retrospective reflection on how the experience of growing up in the Soviet Union might be significant for one's sense of identity in post-Soviet Russia. In the Russian texts, therefore, the portrayal of the Soviet past provides the background to the characters' or narrators' lives, and the texts do not actively promote a particular interpretation of that past.

If we consider this basic comparison of the texts' engagement with the specific nature of the socialist past and how it is remembered, the differences between the two groups of texts appear to be closely aligned with the surrounding memory culture. Although it is not possible to clearly identify cause and effect, a major factor shaping the differing modes of remembering identified in the texts may be the different official approaches to dealing with the past in each country. In Germany the accessibility of Stasi files, and trials of some former authority figures provided a clear response to the crimes of the state. Although this contributed to the idea of the GDR as a Stasi-state, and provoked alternative ways of remembering the past, especially everyday life, the fact that state repression had been acknowledged and officially condemned provided a clear and safe position from which to debate more nuanced aspects of East German memory and identity. In the Russian context, the official response to the Soviet past has not been consistent, often evasive and selectively positive. Open, critical discussion of the Soviet past has been made difficult by both the lack of 'hard memory', identified by Alexander Etkind, with respect to the abuses perpetrated by the state, and the importance of Soviet achievements for post-Soviet Russian national identity. Another factor which may play a role is the explosion of remembering which occurred in Russia during glasnost with the publication of memoirs and previously banned texts. This subsided in the early 1990s during the economic crisis as people concentrated on the present rather than the past. It seems that subsequently there has been no widespread, collective desire to again focus on the past, pursue a detailed examination of the system or discuss issues of responsibility.

The initial observation that the Russian texts engage far less in discussion of the Soviet past might encourage a pessimistic view that these authors are avoiding significant questions and seeking to recreate aspects of the past without reflection. While a close relationship between the surrounding memory culture and the often understated representation of the Soviet past in the Russian texts is clear, the texts cannot simply be categorised as part of the wider trend towards forgetting and nostalgia. Although the Russian texts do not focus on conveying the specific nature of Soviet life, the fact that personal experiences take centre stage in these texts is significant. Marina Balina shows that a focus on personal lives without reference to the state or to politics and ideology can actually constitute a rejection of Soviet-style literature, even though this avoidance of ideological and political issues makes an explicit, critical judgement on the Soviet past more difficult. Moreover, the recent popularity of memoir and fictional portrayal of everyday lives in the Soviet period demonstrates that there is sustained interest in personal memories of that time and, as Irina Paperno has shown, such narratives often include portrayals of the damaging effects of the system. This is also true of the Russian texts analysed in this thesis. Even though they focus on representing everyday childhood and family experience, predominantly in the post-Stalin years of the Soviet Union, all the Russian texts convey some detrimental effects of Soviet rule by making reference to repression or the intrusion of the state on family's lives. These aspects of the Soviet past are mainly portrayed indirectly or at least without self-conscious reflection; for example, in Pavel Sanaev's narrative they are revealed in the experiences and behaviour of older family members, while Oleg Zaionchkovskii's narrator makes occasional passing comments which indicate a hostile attitude to the Soviet state. Even Boris Minaev's *Detstvo Levy*, which in many ways is a nostalgic portrayal of Soviet childhood, hints at the darker side of Soviet life in describing circumstances which are not fully understood by the child and left unexplained by the adult narrator. The extent and explicitness of the German and Russian texts' engagement with representing the socialist past appears, then, to

reflect existing tendencies in collective memory, but a closer look at the Russian texts reveals the potential for a more complex and critical look back at the Soviet past. My analysis of reception, however, shows that this interpretation is rarely expressed by Russian critics and readers.

The surrounding memory cultures in both Germany and Russia appear to have a considerable influence on how critics and readers respond to the texts' portrayal of the socialist past. The German texts are discussed by both critics and readers with reference to current memory debates in Germany. The possible impact of a text on levels of understanding between East and West are considered to be important in the German context, especially in reviews of texts which are criticised for contributing to *Ostalgie*. How the GDR should be represented is the primary concern in many responses to the texts, whether they are advocating the need for space for personal memories of the GDR or warning against trivialization of the system. Rusch's memoir receives particular praise from a few critics and readers who consider that she has successfully combined these opposing attitudes to show the complexity and multi-faceted nature of remembering the GDR. Reception of Katja Oskamp's novel shows that some critics have chosen to focus their comments on the portrayal of the GDR, even when reviewing a text where the East German state is not central to the plot and mainly provides the backdrop to the story.

In contrast to the reflection and discussion provoked by the German texts, the reception of the Russian texts shows the limited attention paid to, or in some cases ambiguous and implicit engagement with, ideas about how the Soviet past should be remembered. Without the analysis of reception it would be easy to assume that the indirect portrayal of the Soviet system in the Russian texts would prompt readers to think critically about the Soviet past; in many cases, however, it appears that critics and readers are either not interested in this aspect of the Russian texts or do not wish to discuss it openly. Some of the critics' reviews

appear deliberately evasive on the subject of the Soviet setting of the narratives, while several others imply that a text may have relevance to Russian identity and memory but do not extend this to discuss the ethics of representing the Soviet past. The sentiments of readers (and the critic Fedchenko) who expressed disapproval of Sanaev's semi-autobiographical portrayal of dysfunctional family life may provide some insight into why many avoid discussing the failings of the Soviet system; for some, a closer examination of the Soviet past would perhaps be analogous to 'washing one's dirty linen in public'. Of the texts considered here, only Gal'ego's *Beloe na chernom* has prompted detailed discussion among the critics of the text's portrayal of the Soviet past. In contrast to the reception of the German texts it is particularly striking that a few Russian critics are explicitly critical of anti-Soviet sentiment. Among the readers' reviews only a minority of responses to the texts by Gal'ego and Sanaev include comment on what the texts reveal about the nature of the Soviet system.

The Russian texts and their reception reveal (in the majority of cases) a widespread reluctance to pass judgement on the Soviet system or to explicitly discuss how the Soviet past should be remembered. It has been noted that this may be, in part, a reaction against the instrumentalization of literature, especially memoir, during the Soviet period, reflecting a wish to concentrate on literary features of texts and to view literature separately from social concerns. A similar approach was also advocated by some critics in Germany as part of the *Literaturstreit*. This raises the question: why have the German texts and reviews analysed in this thesis not also demonstrated a reluctance to critically engage with the socialist past? The culture of 'memory contests' in Germany is of course highly significant, but one of the factors shaping those memory contests appears to be particularly important: the fact that former East Germans are not having a private conversation amongst themselves. Many former East Germans, having been constructed as 'other' in the process of unification, demonstrate a wish to explain,

defend, justify, or assert a distinct identity in relation to West Germany. The fact that there is no Russian equivalent of a West German readership, for whom the socialist past might need more explanation and against whom a post-socialist identity might be more strongly defined, is likely to be significant in the differing approaches taken by the two groups of texts. The inclusion in this thesis of two Russian émigré texts shows that Soviet childhood can be remembered with a greater focus on the specific nature of Soviet life and the damaging effects of the system by authors who are looking back on the Soviet past both from a position outside of post-Soviet Russia and with non-Russian readers in mind.

One aspect which was common across readers' reviews of both the Russian and German texts was the enthusiasm for narratives which preserved or restored forgotten memories of childhood and everyday life in the GDR/Soviet Russia. On the level of individual readers there is evidence that those texts which prompted such responses from readers are contributing to personal memories of the socialist past, sometimes simply by strengthening memories of everyday life which might otherwise have been forgotten, and in some cases by prompting readers to think about their own pasts from a different perspective. In terms of the influence the texts may have on collective memory of the socialist past, it appears that those German texts which have been widely read and discussed in the media are likely to have made some contribution to shaping collective memory of the GDR. It is more difficult to identify whether the Russian texts are having an influence on collective memory because most critics and readers are not talking about the texts in those terms, although it is clear that for one reader, at least, Sanaev's text provoked a new perspective on childhood memories along with a new understanding of her grandmother's experiences. The German texts and their reviews, as well as the Russian émigré texts, demonstrate a critical distance towards the socialist past which appears to be created by having to negotiate that memory at least partly for an 'external' audience who did not experience it first-hand. Russian memory of the

Soviet past may achieve this critical distance with the passage of time. The Russian texts discussed in this thesis certainly have the potential to prompt reassessment of the Soviet past and, if they continue to be read in the longer term, new interpretations may emerge from a younger generation of readers.

Appendix

Quotations from the Primary Texts in the Original Language

Quotations from each text are provided in the order in which they appear in the thesis.

Mourad Kusserow, *Rüber machen... Eine Kindheit und Jugend in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone/DDR, 1945 - 1954* (Mainz: Donata Kinzelbach, 2008)

Mit meinem Lebensbericht [...] beabsichtige ich, nicht nur den Weggefährten aus meiner Kindheit und Jugend ein Denkmal zu setzen, sondern auch meinen Eltern, vor allem meiner Mutter, die bis zu ihrem Tode am 1. Mai 1954 ständig in der Angst lebte, dass ihr Mann, unser Vater, von der ostdeutschen Staatssicherheit abgeholt werden könnte. (p. 8)

Die Lebensgeschichte, die hier erzählt wird, eine Mischung aus Autobiografie und Nachkriegsgeschichte, ist die Chronik eines Zeitzeugen, der sich auf das Abenteuer einer Gratwanderung zwischen subjektiver und historischer Wahrheit eingelassen hat. (p. 7)

Wir erlebten unsere Kindheit unter nicht kindgemäßen Bedingungen. [...] Die SED setzte alles daran, unser persönliches Erleben mit den sozialistischen Ansprüchen zu verknüpfen, das Wir stand an erster Stelle, das Ich bedeutete nichts. Dass unsere Kindheit davon nicht unberührt bleiben konnte, wurde dabei bewusst in Kauf genommen, denn die SED-Parteistrategen wussten genau, dass Kinder formbar, begeisterungsfähig und, was besonders heimtückisch ist, verführbar sind. (p. 93)

Ich lernte den Umgang mit der Lüge und händeringend ermahnten mich die Eltern zur Vorsicht, ohne zu wissen, dass ich mit meinen zwölf Jahren kein Kind mehr war. [...] Ich trat den 'Jungen Pionieren' bei, um zu zeigen, dass die Eltern nicht mit den imperialistischen und revanchistischen Klassenfeinden paktieren, die von Westdeutschland aus, so die kommunistische Propaganda, ständig ihre kriegslüsterne Wühlarbeit gegen die DDR vortrugen. (p. 86)

in der Welt des homo absurdus (p. 85)

Die Lüge wurde zur Wahrheit erhoben, und alle wussten, dass diese Wahrheit in Wirklichkeit nichts als eine gigantische Täuschung war, ein gemeiner Betrug. (p. 85)

wegen oppositioneller Meinungsäußerung und wiederholter Kundgebungen. (p. 96)

Wem jetzt die Augen über das Unrechtssystem der SED noch immer nicht aufgegangen waren, dem war nicht zu helfen. (pp. 95–96)

Wie unmenschlich die Richter im Auftrag des SED-Zentralkomitees handelten, zeigt sich daran, dass sieben der verurteilten Jugendlichen unter 18 Jahre alt waren und man den Eltern trotzdem verbot, sich von ihren Kindern zu verabschieden, bevor sie abgeführt wurden. (p. 96)

Auf mich wirkten diese Terrorurteile wie ein Schock. Zwischen den Unterrichtsstunden standen wir niedergeschmettert auf dem Pausehof zusammen. Niemand wagte es, mit den Lehrern darüber zu sprechen. (p. 96)

Da Lehrer Hans Köhler noch unter den Lebenden weilt, sollen diese Zeilen auch eine Hommage an seinen Mut und seine Zivilcourage sein, der heimlich Widerstand leistete gegen die kommunistische deutsche Diktatur, die sich nur dank der sowjetischen Besatzungstruppen an der Macht halten konnte. Lehrern wie ihm, die uns zu wahren Individualisten erzogen, sollte ein Denkmal errichtet werden. (p. 80)

die zahlreichen Verbrechen der SED und ihre Vollstrecker wie Ulbricht, Honecker, MfS-Mielke & Co. (p. 170)

Das Perfide an ihren Verbrechen ist, dass sie oft im Dunkeln geschahen und so heimtückisch waren, dass die meisten juristisch unbeweisbar bleiben. (p. 170)

Wenn man diese unverbesserlichen DDR-Apologeten auch nicht juristisch belangen kann, so sollte man sie wenigsten moralisch an den Pranger stellen. (p. 170)

Kathrin Aehnlich, *Wenn ich groß bin, flieg ich zu den Sternen* (Munich: Piper, 2009)

Je länger ich von ihm sprach, um so mehr verfinsterte sich der Blick meiner Lehrerin. Dabei hätte sie dankbar sein müssen, daß wir diese schönen Geschichten gefunden hatten, die im unmittelbaren Zusammenhang mit ihrem geliebten Lenin standen. Ich verstand ihre Verärgerung nicht, denn Wladimir Iljitschs Kampf- und

Lebensgefährtin Nadeshda Krupskaja, die es genau wissen mußte, schrieb am Ende ihrer Erinnerungen: Nach dem Tode Lenins wurde seine Arbeit von seinem besten Freund und Helfer, dem Genossen Stalin, weitergeführt. (p. 109)

Es hätte Vorkommnisse gegeben, die nicht im Zusammenhang mit der Sache standen, ihr geschadet, ja sie sogar verraten hatten. Statt des erwarteten Lobes erhielten wir eine strenge Ermahnung. Wir sollten in Zukunft besser auf die Aufgabenstellung achten und unser Lernmaterial im Ordnung halten. (p. 109)

Wir waren stolz, daß unsere Pionierorganisation seinen Namen tragen durfte, wir wollten werden wie er: froh, aufrichtig, mutig und unerschrocken. (p. 110)

Mein direktes Vorbild war Pawel Kortschagin. [...] Ich nahm Anteil am Schicksal des tapferen Pawel. (p. 110)

‘Ich wollte für die Sache kämpfen, aber dazu mußte ich zuallererst in den Gruppenrat gewählt werden.’ (p. 111)

Frau Hartmann, die uns bei unserer Entscheidung nicht beeinflussen wollte, empfahl ganz nebebei Gerlinde Träger, was meiner Meinung nach weniger an Gerlindes Fähigkeiten als an der Tatsache lag, daß ihre Mutter im Gemüsekonsum arbeitet und meiner Leherin öfter etwas zurücklegte. (p. 104)

Die Namen der Anwesenden wurden auf einer Liste abgehakt, und wer nach der Kabine fragt, die in der Ecke neben dem Flügel stand, bekam zusätzlich ein Kreuz hinter den Namen. (p. 116)

Ich verstand nicht, wieso mein Vater die Wahl nicht ernst nahm, ich hatte vor Aufregung in der Nacht vor der Gruppenratswahl nicht schlafen können. (p. 117)

Ich verstand nicht, weshalb Tante Elvira nicht mehr singen sollte. Uns ist singen ein Bedürfnis, sagte unsere Heimatkundelehrerin Frau Hartmann und gab den ersten Takt vor: Die Heimat hat sich schön gemacht. (p. 15)

Bei Tante Elvira rief dieser Schritt sofort die Erinnerung an alte BDM-Lieder wach, und erst die Androhung eines Rotwein Verbots brachte sie zum schweigen. (p. 104)

Für Frau Hartmann war Lenin mit Abstand der beste und klügste Mensch, den sie kannte. Wenn sie uns aus seinem Leben erzählte, röteten sich ihre Wangen, und

ihre Stimme begann leicht zu beben. Es verwunderte mich nicht, denn ich hatte diese Art Euphorie bereits bei Frau Goldhuhn kennengelernt. Frau Hartmanns größter Wunsch war, einmal nach Moskau zu fahren, um Abschied von dem toten Lenin nehmen zu können. In diesem Fall hatte es Frau Goldhuhn schwerer, denn nicht einmal Maria Magdalena wußte genau, wo Jesus abgeblieben war. (p. 108)

Mein Vater mochte die Roten nicht. Sie waren unzuverlässig, ließen die Züge unpünktlich fahren und hatte keine Ziegel, um das Dach unseres Hauses zu reparieren, [...] Und vor allem waren sie nicht in der Lage, für Ordnung in den Läden zu sorgen. (p. 114)

Mir war, als ob meine Mutter zusammenzuckte. Ahnte sie etwas von meinem Test? Noch bevor ich antworten konnte, sprang meine Mutter auf, schob mich zur Tür: 'Geh Händewaschen! Hast du deinen Ranzen schon gepackt? Ich glaube, du solltest erst Tante Elvira guten Abend sagen!' (p. 33)

Ich schloß die Augen und wartete auf eine Ohrfeige. [...] ich war sicher, daß mein heimlicher Pionierhausbesuch ein besonders schweres Vergehen war. Nichts geschah. Meinem Geständnis folgte das schrille Lachen meiner Mutter: Die Kinder werden immer selbstständiger. (p. 33)

Und das alles nur, weil Herr Schluntz, ohne Wissen und Zutun der Mieter, über Nacht zu einem Bonzen geworden war, zu einem von denen da oben, die schuld waren, daß es keine Zwiebeln gab, die Kirchen abgerissen wurden und die Schnapspreise stiegen. (p. 50)

Deutschlandfunk statt Deutschlandsender konnte in seiner Position als Beamter und damit Staatsangestellter als unentschuldbares Vergehen gelten. (p. 50)

Claudia Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005)

Erst ein paar unanständige und dann, sehr zum Amüsement der Mitreisenden, aber dem Leidwesen meiner Mutter, Honecker-Witze. (p. 26)

Die Drohung saß. (p. 27)

Mit ihrer Mahnung holte mich meine Mutter auf den Boden meiner Wirklichkeit zurück. Sofort erwachte das diffuse Gefühl von Bedrohung, das mich meine ganze

Kindheit begleitet hat. Big Brother is watching you. Ich wusste, das hieß nichts Gutes. (p. 27)

Also hatte man mir von Anfang an Skepsis gegenüber Fremden und jeder Art DDR-Behörde, insbesondere der Polizei, beigebracht. Aber ich war sieben Jahre alt und unterschied Feind und Freund am realistischsten beim Mensch-ärgere-dich-nicht. (p. 27)

Unser Personenschutz witterte umgehend staatsfeindliche Aktivitäten und ließ den Wagen an. (p. 22)

weil es das Militär verherrlichte. (p. 23)

Mit trainiertem Auge erfasste die operative Außenarbeitsgruppe sofort, was hier gespielt wurde. Ein Ablenkungsmanöver. Oder ein Code. (pp. 23–24)

Es war der Narrenumzug der Saison. Zu NVA-Lied marschierende Tochter vorn, subversive Mutter dahinter, der durchgeschüttelte Stasi-Lada im Schlepptau. Alle in gebührendem Sicherheitsabstand. (p. 24)

War ich zu den Pionieren noch freiwillig gegangen, wurde ich FDJ-Mitglied nur wegen des Platzes an der EOS, der Erweiterten Oberschule. Ich trat in die Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft ein, und bevor die heiße Bewerbungsphase begann, gab ich mir einen Ruck und übernahm den Posten der FDJ-Sekretärin meiner Klasse. Wenn schon ans System verkauft dann richtig. Das machte jetzt auch keinen Unterschied mehr. (p. 61)

Theoretisch hätte ich mich auch confirmieren lassen können, doch es wäre mir noch falscher vorgekommen, als auf den Staat zu schwören. Denn ich war zutiefst atheistisch erzogen worden, aber, ehrlich gesagt, belog ich doch lieber Honecker als Gott. Sicher ist sicher. Man weiß ja nie. (p. 48)

Aber vermutlich war ich sowieso die Einzige im Saal, die den politischen Aspekt der Jugendweihe so schwer nahm. Denn der Treueschwur mit seinem überholten Pathos reihte sich ein in die alltägliche Schizophrenie im Osten. Das Gelöbnis spielte keine Rolle – entscheidend waren das Fest und die Geschenke. (p. 50)

Es gibt Dinge, die kann ich der DDR nicht verzeihen. Das Zerstören von Familien gehört dazu. Das hat eine andere Dimension als Obstknappheit oder Fackelumzüge.

Dieses System brachte Eltern dazu, ihre Kinder für immer wegzugeben. Solche Wunden sind durch nichts zu heilen. (p. 134)

Es ging nicht um die gelogene Freundschaft oder das Bespitzeln. Es ging darum, dass sie bewusst ein System unterstützt hatte, das jeden Verrat möglich machte. Jeden. Es gab nichts mehr zu erklären. (pp. 116–17)

Hier an diesem Tresen offenbarte sich, dass auch ich ein ganz normales DDR-Kind war. Nicht die Stasi allein, auch die Mangelwirtschaft hatte meine Kindheit geprägt. [...] Auch ich hatte ein Defizit aufzuholen. – Und ich tat es. In aller Unschuld bestellte ich einen Bananensaft. (p. 78)

Drei Monate bevor sich alles für immer auflöste, nahmen wir doch noch die Identität an, die wir so sehr von uns gewiesen hatten. Wir waren auch DDR. Nicht nur Spitzel und Karrieristen, auch unsere Familien und Freunde lebten hier. Nicht nur diejenigen, die uns in ihr Schema pressen wollten, waren auch ein Teil dieses Landes, sondern auch die, die aus uns wache Köpfe gemacht hatten. Kurz vor Toresschluss wurden Robert und ich Staatsbürger der DDR. (p. 100)

Manche Ostsüßigkeiten gibt es jetzt wieder. Ich finde das meiste schlicht eklig. Ich habe sie damals verweigert, und ich esse sie auch heute nicht. Es ist nichts Prinzipielles, aber ich boykottiere Angriffe auf meine Geschmacksnerven. [...] Nudossi zum Beispiel. Das ist nichts als Nutella-ersatz für Ostler. Sentimentalität inklusive. War ja nicht alles schlecht. (p. 88)

Daniel Wiechmann, *Immer bereit! Von einem Jungen Pionier, der auszog, das Glück zu suchen* (Munich: Droemer, 2004)

Vergessen Sie den Menschenzoo, in dem statt Tieren putzige Osis mit buntgemusterten Nylonbeutelchen durchs Gehege stapfen. 'Guck mal, da ist noch einer. Ach, wie süß!' (p. 9)

Ein solcher Mensch hat die Hälfte seines Lebens in der Zone verbracht, die andere Hälfte im Westen. Und jetzt, fünfzehn Jahre nach der 'Wende' ist er zu einem Geschöpf mutiert, das im Westen zu Hause ist, dem aber der Osten noch immer tief in den Knochen steckt. (p. 9)

ich [...] war schon in jungen Jahren mit Eifer dabei, mich zu einer allseits gebildeten sozialistischen Persönlichkeit zu entwickeln. (p. 11)

Es war der erste wichtige politische Amt, das man als Junger Pionier bekleiden konnte. Von dort aus führte die politische Karriere beinahe zwangsläufig in die nächsthöhere Position: Mitglied des Freundschaftsrats. (p. 55)

Der Freundschaftsrat kümmerte sich um die Belange der Pioniere der gesamten Schule. Er organisierte zum Beispiel Veranstaltungen zum Tag des Lehrers, zum Tag der Nationalen Volksarmee, zum Tag des Metallarbeiters, zum Tag des Chemiearbeiters, zum Tag der Werktätigen der Wasserwirtschaft, [...]. Außerdem organisierte der Freundschaftsrat den Putzdienst an der Schule. (pp. 55–56)

Das Wort 'Wahlkampf' kannte ich sowenig wie siebzehn Millionen anderer Osis, geschweige denn, dass ich eine Ahnung gehabt hätte, was damit gemeint sein könnte. (p. 57)

Und nur weil Melanie an alle in der Klasse diese Westbonbons verteilt hatte, konnte sie doch jetzt nicht einfach Gruppenratsvorsitzende werden. Das hieße ja, dass man sich die Position erkaufen kann?! [...] Ich war außer mir. Hier und heute war die Demokratie zu Grabe getragen worden. Und das in einer Republik, die das Wort 'demokratisch' sogar im Namen trug. Niemand schien sich daran zu stören. (p. 60)

Darum habe die SED immer mindestens zweihunderteinundfünfzig Stimmen. 'Aber das ist dann doch gar nicht demokratisch', warf ich verwirrt ein. Die Frau von den Liberalen schaute mich voller Mitleid an und erwiderte nichts. Ich verstand die Welt nicht mehr. (p. 146)

Diese Frau hatte mir den Boden unter den Füßen weggezogen. Das festgefügte Fundament der besseren Gesellschaft war mit einem Mal in Nirgendwo verschwunden. Mir wurde schlecht und schwindlig zugleich, und lange Zeit wusste ich nicht mehr, was ich denken sollte. (pp. 146–47)

Mehr und mehr hatte ich das Gefühl, dass mit unserer Gesellschaft der besseren Menschen etwas nicht stimmte. Ich wusste nur nicht, was. (p. 147)

Das mein Leben so angenehm und bequem war, hatte ich dem Einsatz von Menschen wie Heinz Mattuschke zu verdanken. (p. 89)

Wir kämpften für Freiheit und Selbstbestimmung, wir kämpften für den Fußball. Auf einem unserer Plakate stand: 'Wir wollen raus!' Wir rüttelten an den Grundfesten

eines Systems, das uns mit Mauern umgab. Auch wenn es nur die Wände unserer Horträume waren. (p. 68)

Die Hortnerin erkannte die Gefahr sofort und handelte. Eile war geboten, unsere professionelle Streikkultur konnte ja nur aus dem Westfernsehen abgeschaut sein. (p. 68)

Solange meine Eltern an der Macht waren, würden sie darüber bestimmen, wieviel Pudding sie für mich gesund hielten. Soviel zur Wirkung von Demonstrationen. Und warum sollte etwas, das schon bei meinen Eltern, die mich liebten, nicht funktionierete, ausgerechnet bei den Imperialisten jenseits der Grenze klappen, die uns überhaupt nicht leiden mochten? (pp. 114–15)

Mit jedem Menschen, der der DDR damals den Rücken kehrte, wurde mein Leben und das, wonach ich gestrebt hatte, in Frage gestellt. Was vorher richtig gewesen war, galt jetzt als falsch. (p. 167)

Hier in Stieglitz gab es Unmengen an Kleidung, an Obst und Gemüse, an Spielsachen, an Glitzer und Glanz. Als ich all diese Sachen sah, war meine Vergangenheit plötzlich nicht mehr dieselbe, die ich kannte. Wir waren arm gewesen. (p. 165)

Die Wahrheiten über die DDR, der Blick hinter die Fassade dieses Potemkinischen Dorfes, raubten mir meine Illusionen. Nicht der Marxismus-Leninismus klärte alle meine Zweifel, sondern die Nachrichten, die jetzt jeden Tag in der Zeitung und im Fernsehen enthüllten, warum das System der DDR scheitern musste: weil es schlecht war. (p. 167)

Die Wahrheit ist, dass in dieser Geschichte nur zwei Opfer gibt. Zwei Opfer eines Systems, das Menschen in eine Situation bringt, in der sie vor der Entscheidung stehen, ob sie einander töten. (p. 170)

Vielleicht wäre ich in der DDR aber auch jemand geworden, der Schluss gemacht hätte mit den bequemen Lügen, jemand der mitgeholfen hätte, den Traum vieler wahrzumachen und endlich eine echte bessere Gesellschaft zu verwirklichen, die ihre Ideale lebte, anstatt sie zu pervertieren. Friede, Freude, Eierkuchen. An jedem Tag. (p. 172)

Larisa Miller, 'Bol'shaia Polianka', in *Zolotaia simfoniia* (Moscow: Vremia, 2008), pp. 8–71

Жена хирурга покончила с собой. [...] Слова странные, непостижимые, наглухо закрытые от меня, как шторы на окнах той квартиры, где жила разоренная семья. (р. 14)

Муж ее, низенький полный еврей, всегда спешил, но, проходя мимо меня, непременно шутил и звал в гости. Говорили, что он военный хирург. [...] И вдруг он исчез. Однажды я слышала, как мама шепотом говорила, что его посадили. Я представляла, что сажают только бандитов и воров. И никак не могла связать с ним это слово. (pp. 13–14)

Дедушке не везло с друзьями: многие из них рано умерли, а про некоторых у нас дома говорили шепотом и лишь тогда, когда думали, что я сплю. Вопросов про случайно подслушанное я, естественно, не задавала. (р. 35)

'Когда посадили мужа, она задушила себя собственной косой', — донеслось до меня однажды. Я прислушалась. Речь шла о жене дедушкиного друга, старого большевика, о котором спустя годы мы узнали, что его расстреляли перед самой войной. (р. 35)

Когда я слышу Перхушково-Полушкино, я всегда вспоминаю эту небывалую весеннюю свежесть, пугающе длинные косы Енички, полупризрачный дом, талый снег, тонкое кружево льда, на которое так приятно наступать медленно и осторожно. (р. 36)

Помню свой тогдашний ужас, потому что я, маленькая, не пережившая ни одного погрома и вряд ли знавшая о них тогда, без труда вообразила всеобщую ненависть и готовность к рукопашной. (р. 60)

Девочки образовали круг и швыряли меня друг другу, как мяч, не давая опомниться. Особой боли я не чувствовала и страха тоже, а только тупую покорность и удивление, что это происходит со мной. (р. 56)

Все кончилось само собой: умер Сталин.

Однажды рано утром в нашу дверь забарабанили, и отчим с вытаращенными от страха глазами, бросился отпирать. Едва он отпер, его сгреб в объятия грузный полуодетый сосед по квартире. 'Оправдали врачей. Оправдали. - приговаривал он, тиская отчима, - Мы спасены, милый мой, дорогой'. (р. 56)

он поднялся и стоял навтыжку, держась за спинку стула и постанывая. И никто не посмел ему перечить. (р. 57)

'Почему?' - спрашивала я себя. Неужели и дедушка так потрясен? Ведь я слышала, как он, старый бундовец, нехорошо говорил о Сталине. Даже назвал его однажды главным виновником всех еврейских несчастий. Почему и для него это такое горе? Вот он стоит, слегка пошатываясь, и слезы катятся по впалым щекам. (р. 57)

Однажды я вынесла во двор свой самый нарядный билет на елку в ЦДРИ. Он был с секретом. Стоило его раскрыть, как выростала пушистая елка в гирляндах, выбегали звери из чащи, выезжал Дед Мороз на санях, в которых сидела Снегурочка. И надо всем этим в звездном небе парил лик Сталина. (р. 38)

[Н]аконец вопрос Деда Мороза: 'Кто почитает стихи?' Ну конечно же, я. Я знаю столько стихов, что могу читать бесконечно. Выхожу и читаю: 'У москвички две косички, у узбечки - двадцать пять', или 'Счастливая родина есть у ребят и лучше той родины нет'. Или 'Потому что в поздний час Сталин думает о нас'. (р. 40)

На следующий день в нашем классе - пионерский сбор. Я только недавно вступила в пионеры и меня недавно выбрали звеньевой. Я была счастлива и, то и дело, гладила новенькую нашивку на рукаве формы. (р. 61)

[П]осреди двора стояла группа пионеров с тетрадочками наготове. Они проворно и радостно заносили в тетради фамилии знакомых ребятшек, идущих в церковь, чтобы потом передать списки в школу. Это была их внеклассная пионерская работа в пасхальный день. (р. 16)

'Царь, царевич, король, королевич, сапожник, портной - кто ты такой?' - считалочка моего детства, которое прошло в послевоенной, неустроенной и все же удивительно домашней Москве. И обжитой ее делали люди, среди которых протекала бытовая, повседневная жизнь. (р. 32)

Каждый из них - наследник "проклятого прошлого", реликт, чудом сохранивший свои свойства после многократных государственных акций по ликвидации личности. (р. 32)

Нет, я не собираюсь перебивать косточки нашему времени - занятие скучное и неблагодарное. Просто, живя в пустыне и испытывая естественную жажду, пытаюсь утолить ее единственно доступным мне способом, припадая к старым, давно пересохшим источникам. (р. 33)

Boris Minaev, *Detstvo Levy* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2001)

Вообще я любил нашу родину, нашу армию, наш народ, столицу нашей родины, Краснопресненский район столицы нашей родины, нашу Большевикскую улицу [...] Так уж я был почему-то устроен. (р. 158)

[Е]сли взрослые говорили о какой-нибудь заграничной тряпке, которую кто-то чудом достал, купил, привез и так далее:

– Это Франция?

– Нет, Германия.

– Ну как делают, а? Ведь умеют, а? – я тут же высовывался из своей комнаты и говорил нехорошим голосом:

– Наши тоже умеют. Не надо, мама.

И все начинали смеяться. (р. 189)

За спинкой кресла в засаде прятались слон и заяц. Они минировали железные дороги, брали пленных. Короче, это была настоящая плюшевая война. Все стреляли. И шли в атаку.

Помню, как жёсткие контрразведчики Кот и Пёс пытали старого командира Мишу. Они избивали его своими жёсткими негнущимися лапами, и я с восторгом следил, как с деревянным стуком бьётся он своей опилочной головой в полированную ручку дивана, как жалобно и коротко стонет:

– У-у-у-у! (р. 23)

То я видел Марата Казея, своего любимого пионера-героя с автоматом ППШ на распахнутой груди. Я видел, как Марата Казея берут в плен гестаповцы и начинают его пытать – больно щипать, откручивать уши, выворачивать пальцы... Дальше они начинали с ним делать что-то такое, чего я уже не мог выдержать и закрывал наглухо свой внутренний взор. (р. 205)

О Павлике Морозове я не знал в ту пору почти ничего. И дома, и в школе как-то стеснялись рассказывать о деталях его подвига, хотя чего тут стесняться – бывают такие отцы, на которых хочешь не хочешь, а побежишь докладывать. (р. 95)

Поэтому Павлик был для меня просто пионером-героем, которого убили враги.
(р. 95)

Что составляло содержание нашего времени? Концерты, Олимпиады, чемпионаты мира и Европы по футболу, кинофестивали, встречи на высшем уровне, полеты в космос... Но это так, если по газетам.

Если не по газетам, тоже неплохо — то открывали рядом практически на нашей улице новый магазин тканей, то маму посылали в командировку в ГДР, то папе давали путевку в Крым, а он, между прочим, даже отказывался!..

Однако факты были в общем-то ни при чем. Если сам человек не чувствует, не понимает, не ценит, в какое время он живет — факты ему равным счетом ничего не докажут. Ведь и для меня главными были не факты, а чувства. (р. 206)

Мир вокруг динамично развивался и радостно гудел. (р. 206)

Не в том дело, что телевизор, космос, квартира! Мне не надо твое время! Я сам время! Я хочу, что у меня что-то было, а не у времени! (р. 207)

Он распахнул ближнюю дверь и вдруг мы увидели то, чего я никогда не забуду. [...] Вдаль уходил гигантский, невероятный коридор, по бокам которого сплошняком, одна за другой, торчали двери.

— Коридорная система, Лева! — сказал Колупаев, обращаясь именно ко мне. — Вот тебе время, Лева! Смотри! Вот видишь, какое время? (рр. 208–209)

— А у Берии, когда его арестовали, целый склад золота нашли, — опять загробно-тихим голосом сказал Женька. [...]

Теперь была моя очередь, но я не знал, что сказать.

— Хватит, а? — жалобно попросил я. — Кому нужны эти ваши сказки?

— Какие же эти сказки? — спокойно возразил Женька. — Это не сказки. Это ты нам рассказываешь: про наше время, про космос, про квартиры. А мы тебе правду говорим, как оно есть. (р. 210)

Разрешить наш спор, короче говоря, никак не удавалось, пока однажды мы не оказались в одном странном месте. (р. 207)

— Вот она, столица, — сказал Колупаев, сладко вздохнув. — Сверху-то красивая. А внутри?

Угрюмый дом за нашими спинами вдруг замолчал и перестал глухо греметь кастрюлями и отдаленно переливаться женскими голосами. Было совершенно тихо.

И я все понял про времени. (р. 211)

– Ну конечно виноват... Взрослый мужик, должен был понимать, чем это все кончится. Но знаешь, сажать на пять лет – за золотые руки... Это... Это только у нас может быть. Ну штраф. Ну самое большее год условно. Но пять лет... Какой кошмар! (р. 79)

Насколько я понимаю, дядя Юра в молодости просто любил деньги. По большому счету, это вообще не недостаток. Но... дядя Юра немного поспешил родиться. С такими руками и с такой прирожденной любовью к хорошей жизни ему надо было родиться гораздо позже. Однако в то время, о котором идет речь, я еще не мог осознать дяди Юрину жизнь в грядущей перспективе. В то время, о котором идет речь, я твердо сказал себе, что сделаю все для того, чтобы милиция не проникла в наш дом, в наш двор, на нашу улицу и не напала на след дяди Юры. (р. 79)

Oleg Zaionchkovskii, Petrovich: Roman o zhivoi russkoi dushe (Moscow: OGI, 2005)

О, сколько врагов себе нажил старый глупый СССР этой ежеутренней трансляцией гимна. Сколько теплых голых тел, сплетенных в собственных нежнейших союзах, содрогались в постелях при первых его раскатах, возглашавших 'союз нерушимый' и все остальное... (р. 9)

О, сколько врагов себе нажил старый глупый СССР этой ежеутренней трансляцией гимна. Сколько теплых голых тел, сплетенных в собственных нежнейших союзах, содрогались в постелях при первых его раскатах... И только Петрович с Вероникой спали сегодня так крепко, что ничего не слышали. (р. 284)

Этот пионер, многократно оскверненный галками, стоял с обрубком горна у рта в позе пьяницы, сосущего из горлышка. (р. 41)

Советская власть праздновала очередную собственную годовщину – испуская, как обычно, бездну самодовольства и невзирая на положение дел своих подопечных. Правда, на этот раз, впервые за многие годы, Генрих не пошел на демонстрацию, ибо время расформировало маленькую колонну

‘Союзпроммеханизации’, которую он привык возглавлять. Но он смотрел по телевизору военный парад и даже обсудил с Петей некоторые новые образцы проехавших по Красной площади ракет. (р. 175)

Сад окутал его всегдашней своей тошнотворной спиралью. Словно жирный кит, перед тем как не жуя проглотить Петровича, дохнул на него влажно и несвеже. (р. 13)

Но, как карандашный грифель, было хрупким даже такое, весьма относительное уединение. (р. 15)

Воспитательница она была опытная и не первый день дожидалась, когда наконец Петрович покажет истинное свое лицо. Она не доверяла его насупленной благовоспитанности; интуиция подсказывала ей: не может быть чист душой человек, отвергающий хороводы и общие игры с мячиком... Вот и случилось! С чувством педагогического удовлетворения Татьяна Ивановна зацепила Петровича за ухо двумя холодными пальцами и, словно волчица суслика, утащила в кислое садовское логово. (рр. 18–19)

Каждое утро мальчики и девочки поступали сюда с собственным своим зарядом семейных и сословных особенностей в манерах, одежде и прическах, но уже после большой перемены едва ли чем отличались Эйтинген от Гуталимова, а Епифанова от Емельяновой (впрочем, две последние были в разных бантах). Как продукты, сваренные в едином бульоне, приобретают общий вкус и получают название супа, так и школьные ученики к концу дневных занятий имели, казалось, один вкус и запах и выглядели подчас полностью разварившимися. (р. 192)

[К]лассная руководительница [...] объявила, что вместо ее урока назначается репетиция к ежегодному смотру ‘стройка и песни’. Мероприятие это было Петровичу глубоко ненавистно, – маршировать, распевая хором какую-то бодрюю ахинею, – что может быть глупее... и унижительнее. Со времени прошлого смотра прошел год; Петрович стал на год старше. Он твердо решил, что на сей раз откажется от участия в коллективной клоунаде, чего бы ему это ни стоило. (р. 215)

Но как это можно: не умереть в Гражданскую войну от холеры, не быть расстрелянным в подвалах НКВД, уцелеть в Сталинградской битве, возглавить ‘Союзпроммеханизацию’ и не впасть на склоне лет в маразм? (р. 160)

Генрих, по собственному его признанию, страшился в жизни только двух существенных опасностей: быть расстрелянным в НКВД и, как ни странно... впасть в старческий маразм. Из этих угроз (между прочим, взаимоисключающих) первой он счастливо избежал: его боевые заслуги во Второй мировой войне позволили ему вступить в члены ВКП(б), а послесталинская либерализация и ослабление классовой борьбы сделали уже неактуальным его белогвардейское происхождение. (р. 159)

– Ты, Генрих, гордись! – сказал дядя Валя. – Такая биография... – Он повернулся к Петровичу: – И ты им гордись... Ты знаешь, что у него отец белогвардеец?

– Знаю, – кивнул Петрович.

– Ну вот... А он – коммунист. Сам себя выковал. (р. 184)

Ничего я себя не выковал. Просто я продукт своего времени. (р. 185)

Биография – это дело случая. (р. 185)

Не сидели бы мы с тобой в одном окопе и не пили бы сейчас водку – вот о чем я толкую. Может быть, я стал бы полицейским и разгонял рабочие демонстрации. (р. 187)

Pavel Sanaev, *Pokhoronite menia za plintusom* (Moscow: Astrel', 2008)

дорого стоят и нигде не достать (р. 9)

Хорошие конфеты и икру бабушка дарила гомеопатам и профессорам; конфеты похуже и консервы вроде лосося — лечащим врачам поликлиник; шоколадки и шпроты — дежурным врачам и лаборанткам, бравшим у меня кровь на анализ. (р. 51)

Я буду слушать 'Битлз', [...] буду слушать хриплого Высоцкого, распахнув окно и поставив магнитофон на подоконник, как делал Борька, но буду лучше них всех, потому что у них 'Электроника', а у меня 'Филипс'. (р. 213)

— А чего у вас такие большие уши? — с обидой спросил я, указывая пальцем на уши гомеопата, которые действительно делали его похожим на пожилого Чебурашку. (р. 63)

‘Дядя Ваня — коммунист’. [...] ‘Пионеры шли стройными рядами...’ Так... ‘Дядя Яша зарядил винтовку...’ (р. 38)

Ну, ты у меня вступишь в пионеры! (р. 33)

Он тащил меня, как в кино партизаны тащат друг друга из болота. (р. 29)

Цемент, который облепил меня, весил килограммов десять, поэтому походка у меня была, как у космонавта на какой-нибудь большой планете, например на Юпитере. На Борьке цемента было поменьше, он был космонавтом на Сатурне. (р. 30)

Рассказала на кухне какой-то анекдот про царя, а через несколько дней пришли топтуны, забрали из соседней квартиры Федьку Зильбермана, врача, и о ней спросили: ‘Кто такая, почему такая молодая, нигде не работает?’ Объяснили: мол, с ребенком сидит. А с ней паника: ‘Меня посадят, меня заберут ...’ (р. 59)

Говорит, придут с обыском, найдут, скажут – связь с границей. (р. 59)

В троллейбусе кто-то взглянет — она выбегает, ловит такси. Дочь под одеяло прятала, шептала: ‘Доченька, меня посадят, будь умницей, слушайся папу’. (р. 59)

Вот как-то она пришла [...] и говорит: ‘Федора вчера забрали в КГБ, я была понятой’. А она сама же на него и стукнула! (р. 182)

Положили меня обманом в больницу - сказали, что положат в санаторное отделение, а положили к буйным. [...] Вот этого предательства, больницы, того, что, при моем уме и характере, ничтожеством искалеченным стала, - этого я ему забыть не могу. (р. 183)

Oleg Pavlov, ‘V bezbozhnykh pereulках’, in *V bezbozhnykh pereulках* (Moscow: Vremia, 2007), pp. 6–104

В детстве я любил ‘брежнева’ – лет с пяти умел узнавать его изображение на экране телевизора, чувствуя, что это важный для всех человек. Откуда он являлся и даже кем был, толком я не понимал, но если впускали в комнату, где в углу возвышался цветной телевизор, когда дедушка смотрел на сон грядущий

программу 'Время', то ожидал всегда лишь его возникновения: знал, что он есть и скоро обязательно придет. (р. 7)

Если я хвалился или защищался во дворе, то говорил: 'Мой дедушка генерал милиционеров'. Или говорил, понимая, что сказал неправду, но изо всех сил желая, чтобы это так было: 'Мой дедушка дружит с Брежневым'. (р. 9)

Я же знал одно всесильное слово – 'брежнев', которое даже на дедушку имело действие, непонятное мне, но самое надежное, стоило только произнести: 'А я про тебя брежневу скажу...' Дедушка на миг замирал, потом пристально, чуть презрительно глядел на меня как на чужого, обходя, бывало, целый день как вредную, кусачую собачонку. (р. 11)

Дедушка рассказывал, что детей, которые никого не слушались и попадали к Бабаю, никто уж не мог потом отыскать и спасти, а сам Бабай никого никогда не прощал: пока ты хорошо работал для него, во всем ему подчинялся, он оставлял тебя жить, а если снова не слушался или плохо делал, что он приказывал, то заживо съедал. (pp. 10–11)

Потом, когда он же оказывался моим спасителем, все эти мысли улетучивались и я любил дедушку больше всех людей на свете. Но при мысли о Бабае в моем воображении рисовался не иначе как родной дед: каменнолицый, бровастый, громко хохочущий да всесильный – такой всесильный, что все милиционеры Киева улыбались и кланялись ему. (р. 11)

Oleg Pavlov, 'Shkol'niki', in *V bezbozhnykh pereulках* (Moscow: Vremia, 2007), pp. 107–218

Мы нестройно вошли в комнату, до этого дня запретную, куда разрешали входить только ребятам с красными галстуками... Вся ее обстановка вызывала в душе трепет, казалась таинственно-торжественной, — и это алое знамя с ликом Ленина, тяжелое своим золотым шитьем и бархатом, что дышало как живое и переливалось светом, хоть даже не колыхалось. (р. 125)

И стоило грянуть первым же громким звукам — окутала дрожь. Волны ярости, страха, счастья хлынули одна за другой, и я, сам не понимая отчего, стал ощущать в себе это возвышенно-воинственное. (р. 126)

Я увидел его на картинке, и стало до слез обидно: ничего геройского, разве что автомат сжимает в руках, сам в тулупе деревенском и ушанке, какой же это герой! (р. 127)

Этого мальчика даже не мучили, как других пионеров-героев, и отсутствие мучений делало его подвиг в моем сознании каким-то ненастоящим. Свой альбом я украшал, будто могилку. (pp. 127–28)

А когда повязывали пионерский галстук и я клялся не пожалеть жизни, чувствовал, что вру. Ко мне являлся много дней грустный убиенный мальчик и светом потухших глаз только о том и жаловался: я убит, я убит, я убит... (р. 129)

А став пионером, больше всего этого боялся: умереть. (р. 128)

Приготовлением к смерти казались пионерские линейки... В январе, когда умер Ленин, и уже в апреле, в день его рождения, все классы строились шеренгами в спортивном зале. (р. 128)

[С] дощатыми, как в казарме, крашеными полами [...] и зарешеченными наглухо окнами [...] Из потолка и стен торчали крючья гимнастических снарядов, похожие на дыбу. Ровнехонько за спинами нашими свисали канаты. И вся эта обстановка заставляла чего-то напряженно, мучительно ждать, чувствуя раздавливающую душу покорность. (pp. 128–29)

Ruben David Gonsales Gal'ego, *Beloe na chernom* (Moscow: Limbus Press, 2005)

Советский Союз - страна всеобщего дефицита. Дефицит - это когда чего-либо нет в продаже и это нельзя купить ни за какие деньги. (р. 69)

Верить было запрещено. Нам говорили, что Бога нет. Атеизм был нормой. Сейчас в это мало кто поверит, но так было. (р. 41)

'В России существует обычай поминать умерших угощением.' (р. 30)

Мы все знали, что Леонид Ильич Брежнев очень любит детей и каждый день заботится о том, чтобы у каждого советского школьника было счастливое детство. (р. 132)

про партию и правительство, окончательную победу коммунизма и наше счастливое детство. (р. 147)

‘лучший Новый год в моей жизни’ (р. 148)

Я спросил ее, что будет со мной, когда я вырасту. Меня тоже отвезут в дом престарелых, и я умру?

- Конечно.

- Но мне тогда будет пятнадцать, я не хочу умирать так рано. Выходит, все зря? Зачем же тогда учиться?

- Ничего не зря. Учиться вы должны потому, что вас кормят бесплатно. (рр. 52–53)

Вы понимаете, дети, как вам повезло родиться в нашей стране? В Советском Союзе детей-инвалидов не убивают. Вас учат, лечат и кормят бесплатно. Вы должны хорошо учиться, получить нужную профессию. (р. 55)

‘[...] Нарожали негры, теперь таскай его всю жизнь. Нам-то что, мы русские бабы-дуры, добрые, вот и терпим от них, заботимся. А родители их умные, уехали в свою Африку’. И так изо дня в день, бесконечно я слушал про их доброту и жалость и про моих чернокожих родителей. Немного смешно, но текст этот мне приходилось слышать во всех учреждениях Советского Союза - в детдомах, больницах, доме престарелых. Словно читали его по неведомой таинственной шпаргалке, как школьный урок, как заклинание. (р. 84)

Пластинки отбирали, поведение нарушителей обсуждалось на педагогическом совете школы, борьба с капиталистическим влиянием шла вовсю.

Бессмысленная борьба. (р. 93)

Из Москвы прислали инструкции по борьбе с ‘заразой’. (р. 93)

Ненавидеть следовало все капиталистические страны, но Америку особенно. В Америке жили враги, буржуи, пьющие кровь рабочего класса. Американский империализм готовил для нас атомную бомбу. Рабочие в Америке постоянно голодали и умирали, перед посольством Советского Союза в США нескончаемым потоком лилась очередь желающих сменить гражданство. Так нас учили, мы верили. (р. 55)

Я абсолютно уверен, что большинство людей в Америке живут на улицах в картонных коробках, все американцы поголовно строят бомбоубежища, в стране очередной кризис. (р. 79)

Я не понимаю этих американцев. Ходить по улицам среди умерших и умирающих от голода. Почему они до сих пор не свергли своих помещиков и капиталстов? (р. 81)

Ни с кем, слышишь? ни с кем не говори на эту тему. Ты уже большой мальчик, должен понимать. (р. 82)

Я могу долго говорить про Америку. Могу бесконечно рассказывать про инвалидные коляски, `говорящие` лифты, ровные дороги, пандусы, микроавтобусы с подъемниками. Про слепых программистов, парализованных ученых. Про то, как я плакал, когда мне сказали, что надо возвращаться в Россию и коляску придется оставить. (р. 210)

Там, в далекой России, меня аккуратно положат на диван и приговорят к пожизненному заключению в четырех стенах. Добрые русские люди будут давать мне еду, пить со мной водку. Там будет сытно и, может быть, тепло. Там будет все, кроме свободы. (р. 214)

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