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The State in the Book: How to convince a Nation's Youth of Dictatorship

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ABSTRACT

Political decision makers in the former GDR¹ soon realised the need to get the youth's mind under state control. As children with their free spirit usually are somehow immune to political indoctrination measures, deeply reaching their minds definitely needed a tailored approach. So, there must have been hidden or rather indirect propaganda. Here, it could be proved that East German children's literature literally opened the door to their minds by integrating the youth's mass pioneer organisation "Ernst Thälmann" and also its young representatives directly into the plots. This made it possible to subliminally influence these children towards becoming a loyal member of the socialist society in the GDR. To support this hypothesis this research reveals some of the hidden and indirect ways of politically influencing and indoctrinating these children through literary works, that dealt with the pioneer organisation and used different linguistic strategies to hide or somehow cover the propaganda connected to it. With reference to the original literature, there is a thorough analysis of which symbols, motifs, single keywords and longer catchphrases as well as syntactic patterns have been implemented to pursue this strategy. This study aims to show that and how the state propaganda had been hidden in the children's literature of the GDR.

1. The political demands placed on children's literature and its authors

Political unrest and demonstrations against harsh economic quotas in the early 1950s mainly led by young people made it more than clear that in particular the youth in the GDR was

¹ GDR: German Democratic Republic (1949 – 1990)

dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions. So, the socialist power apparatus was faced with the question of how the nation's youth could be convinced of the "advantages" of a socialist dictatorship. Of course, this persuasion work had to begin as early and consistently as possible. These and other measures resulted in the idea of creating a „neuen sozialistischen Menschen“² (new socialist person). Later, the state's educational goal was expanded to include an „allseitig gebildete sozialistische Persönlichkeit“³ (universally educated socialist personality). This was to be achieved in very different ways, with literature for children and young people becoming the focus of efforts as an important pillar of this endeavour. This literature can be divided into socialist edification literature⁴ and fictional literature, while the focus of this study is on the latter.

Particularly the fictional children's and youth literature was highly valued in society for its educational and formative role, especially in the education of the socialist youth. In terms of quality, children's literature was in no way inferior to that for adults, as many renowned authors wrote for adults as well as children and young people, for example Ludwig Renn, Stefan Heym, Erwin Strittmatter, Bertolt Brecht, or Franz Fühmann (cf. NDR 2025). As early as 1950 Johannes R. Becher, who later became Minister of Culture of the GDR and was a loyal member and representative of the SED⁵, even demanded by law that every author also has to contribute to children's literature that promotes the educational goals of the SED dictatorship:

„(1) Es ist eine hohe Verpflichtung aller Schriftsteller und Dichter, an der Schaffung einer neuen Jugend- und Kinderliteratur mitzuwirken, die die demokratische Erziehung der heranwachsenden Generation fördert.“ [Johannes R. Becher, zitiert nach Lüdecke 2006: 127]⁶

However, the authors were not only obliged to create children's and youth literature but were also required to adopt a literary style determined by the state. The literary works had to be

² This phrase was first used by Walther Ulbricht, the Chairman of the State Council of the GDR in connection with the announcement of the "Ten Commandments of Socialist Morality and Ethics" on July 16, 1958, which were also called the "10 Commandments for the New Socialist Person" (cf. <https://www.ddr-im-unterricht.de/ideologie>).

³ Further information can be found in: Kwiatkowski-Celofiga (2008): Erziehung zur "allseitig gebildeten sozialistischen Persönlichkeit" und deren Folgen für den Schulalltag.

⁴ For the term *socialist edification literature* see section 4.1.

⁵ SED: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)

⁶ "(1) It is a great obligation of all writers and poets to contribute to the creation of new literature for young people and children that promotes the democratic education of the rising generation." [Johannes R. Becher, quoted from Lüdecke 2006: 127]. From here on, all German quotations will be provided with an English translation in the footnotes.

written in the style of Socialist Realism. Thus, the literary scholar Erich Sielaff confirmed the state doctrine that “also for youth literature, only the literary style of Realism can be the only useful method” [Sielaff 1952: 556, quoted from Lüdecke 2006: 129]. And Alfred Antkowiak (writer and editor) places particular emphasis on the author's responsibility when he states:

„In der Art, wie der Verfasser eines bestimmten literarischen Werkes den von ihm dargelegten Konflikt auflöst, manifestiert sich die Parteilichkeit des Autors. Man kann so weit gehen und sagen, dass die Art der Lösung des Konflikts die Klassenhaltung der Literatur bestimmt. [...] in der Literatur des sozialistischen Realismus [...] verliert sich die Lösung des Konflikts nicht in der Verneinung, sondern zeigt eine neue Stufe der Entwicklung des Lebens.“ [Antkowiak 1953: 137/138, zitiert nach Lüdecke 2006: 130]⁷

In Socialist Realism partisanship in the sense of Marxist-Leninist ideology is the most important aspect. Here, children's literature is meant to support this ideology and is subject to the authority of the SED, which exercises all political and ideological leadership (cf. Gomez 1978: 77). Children's literature written in the style of Socialist Realism is also supposed to be optimistic, have a positive hero, a literary plot that serves as a role model, and it is intended to demonstrate how children can contribute to the development of socialism (cf. MDR 2021).

In addition to the style, even the content of the fictional literature was often determined by the state, usually represented by the state censorship authority. With regard to the children's literature theme plan the censorship authority in 1958 demanded:

„Zum Beispiel sollte man den Kindern im Erstlesealter die Demonstrationen am 1. Mai nahe bringen und auf Ereignisse aus dem Leben der Pionierorganisation eingehen.“ [zitiert nach: Lokatis 2006: 106]⁸

Moreover, authors should prefer the “literary portrayal of the life path of Marxist fighters, and stories in a child-friendly form on the history of the German labour movement” [ibid.] to

⁷ “The way in which the author of a particular literary work resolves the conflict he presents, manifests the author's partisanship. One can go so far as to say that the way the conflict is resolved determines the class stance of the literature. [...] In the literature of Socialist Realism [...] the resolution of the conflict is not lost in negation, but rather reveals a new stage in the development of life.” [Antkowiak 1953: 137/138, quoted from Lüdecke 2006: 130].

⁸ “For example, children who are just learning to read should be taught about the demonstrations on May 1 and events from the life of the pioneer organisation should be discussed.” [quoted from: Lokatis 2006: 106]

legends or fairy tales. Furthermore, a “picture book about the pioneer organisation” [ibid.] was proposed, as well as works “that depict the relationship of the GDR children to the People’s Army” [ibid.].

In summary, it can be stated that the authors of children’s and youth literature in the GDR had very limited freedom in the process of creating such literary works. The state often determined not only that they had to write this type of literature, but also dictated the style of Socialist Realism with all its ideological implications, and ultimately even the themes of the stories. So, the role of the authors is limited to the education of the readers:

„Eigentlich sind die Künstler in der DDR in erster Linie Erzieher: auf die Kunstwerke, die sie schaffen, wird nur insofern Wert gelegt, als diese einen Beitrag zum Aufbau des Sozialismus leisten.“ [Gomez 1978: 79]⁹

The authors had to largely subordinate themselves, their personal views and ideologies as well as their literary works to the state doctrine.

Thousands of children’s books were published in the GDR, including non-political works. It goes without saying that in a socialist dictatorship all published books were also subject to strict state censorship, which prevented completely independent youth literature, especially since almost all publishing houses were state-owned, and the authors had to comply with the above-mentioned rules in order to have their books published. Such a strict state censorship must inevitably have led to a certain degree of self-censorship. This could be one reason why, surprisingly, censorship of children’s literature was significantly relaxed in the later years of the GDR (cf. Lokatis 2006: Die Zensur der Kinderbuchverlage).

2. Children’s literature as a means of political education and indoctrination

By deliberately adapting the GDR children’s and youth literature to state requirements (Socialist Realism, state censorship) and through the direct and indirect implication of political propaganda in the style of many literary works, it can be assumed that the socialist state

⁹ “In fact, artists in the GDR are primarily educators: the works of art they create are only valued insofar as they contribute to the development of socialism.” [Gomez 1978: 79]

leadership succeeded in extending its influence into the private life and leisure activities of its young hopefuls.

Although the more or less political fictional literature, which is the focus of this research, strikes a quieter tone compared to socialist edification literature in order not to be immediately exposed as propagandistic, it pursues the same goal of influencing and educating the youth in line with the state's agenda:

„Die Verwendung brauchbarer Jugendbücher als literarische Erziehungshilfe setzt dem Buch einen bestimmten Zweck. Damit wird das Jugendbuch aus dem ›nur ästhetischen‹ Bereich gelöst und in den pädagogischen versetzt – es wird ihm damit sein richtiger Verwendungszweck angewiesen.“ [Sielaff 1952: 555f., zitiert nach Lüdecke 2006: 129]¹⁰

Some of these books, including all of the books analysed in this research, have even been classified as official school literature and were integrated into the curriculum. So, the students had to read them at home and to discuss them in class. In other words, there was no escape and the propaganda the books contained certainly reached the intended audience. In this context Johannes R. Becher, then Minister of Culture of the GDR, emphasised in 1956:

„Vom Deutschunterricht und von den Büchern, welche die Kinder zum Lesen erhalten, hängt es wesentlich ab, in welcher Richtung ihr literarischer Geschmack sich entwickelt, ihr politisches Urteil, ihr Menschsein, ihr Menschlichsein.“ [Johannes R. Becher 1956, zitiert nach Lüdecke 2006: 128]¹¹

As relying solely on direct agitation and propaganda in literature was unlikely to be successful with free spirited children, the propagandists often turned to much more subtle means of influence. In addition to socialist heroes and identification figures, such as in Korn's "Mit Bärbel fing es an" (It started with Bärbel, 1952) or Holz-Baumert's "Der kleine Trompeter und sein Freund" (The little trumpeter and his friend, 1959), the depiction of the pioneer

¹⁰ "The use of suitable books for young people as a literary educational aid gives the book a specific purpose. This removes the book from the 'merely aesthetic' realm and places it in the educational one – it is thus assigned its proper purpose." [Sielaff 1952: pp. 555 - 556, quoted from Lüdecke 2006: 129]

¹¹ "The direction in which children develop their literary taste, their political judgement, their humanity, and their human nature depends significantly on their German lessons and the books they are given to read." [Johannes R. Becher 1956, quoted from Lüdecke 2006: 128]

organisation “Ernst Thälmann” and its more or less obvious integration into the storylines of the various literary genres can be considered an extremely effective instrument for the subliminal political indoctrination of the East German children.

The pioneer organisation was a political mass organisation under state control to which almost every child and young person in the GDR belonged. This pioneer organisation and the activities associated with it were therefore part of the daily lives of the young readers. If these topics were also integrated into the respective target-group-specific literature, then this is clearly an example of indirect political propaganda and its political goals and furthermore a prototypical example of writing in the style of Socialist Realism. And although, as mentioned above, state censorship significantly eased in the later years of the GDR, the pioneer organisation was a constant theme in political fictional children’s literature.

To support this hypothesis, some characteristic representatives of the GDR’s more or less political fictional children’s literature were analysed to show that the portrayal of the pioneer organisation as a whole, but also of its personal representatives in the storyline, was intended to contribute specifically to the political shaping of the young readership. So, a main focus and the research question of this paper was to examine the linguistic characteristics of these persuasive representations in order to illustrate, which linguistic persuasion strategies were used in addition to the content-based argumentation and how they were implemented. The works analysed for this research were selected from different periods of the GDR and date from 1952 to 1986 to prove that hidden and indirect as well as direct propaganda relating to the pioneer organisation can be found over the years of the GDR and its socialist dictatorship (1949 – 1990).¹²

The mere publication dates of these books are not fully covering the time of the GDR, but considering that it takes some time for a book to be written and published, and that after their publication, it also takes some time for these books to be distributed to every schoolchild, the publication dates of the selected books can be seen as representative of the GDR period and thus

¹² “Camilo” (1986) by Ludwig Renn (who also wrote books for adults) and “Ich bin die Nele” (I’m Nele) (1975) by Peter Brock are aimed at a younger audience (Young Pioneers). While “Igel, Rainer und die anderen” (Igel, Rainer and the others) (1958) by Alfred Wellm, “Frank” (1958) by Karl Neumann as well as “Mit Bärbel fing es an” (1952) by Ilse Korn seem to be aimed at a slightly older audience (Young Pioneers/Thälmann Pioneers). “Camilo” is more likely to be classified in the transitional area between socialist edification literature and fictional literature, as the book combines elements of both areas, while Heilbock’s “Wir tragen die Fahne” (1963) clearly is an example of edification literature. Since this study focusses on the depiction of the pioneer organisation and its loyal representatives as well as on the linguistic persuasion strategies in the books, it does not provide a detailed description of the content or an individual examination of the history of each individual work’s creation. Also, all of these books were subject to the same stringent requirements and state censorship measures of the socialist dictatorship.

of the whole time of its socialist dictatorship. This is all the more true given that all of the analysed books were reprinted over time. For example, "Frank" by Karl Neumann (1958) was reprinted more than 20 times.

This comprehensive analysis of the text-immanent representation of the pioneer organisation and the associated linguistic persuasion strategies breaks new ground in research on GDR children's and youth literature. In previous research the rather general consideration of this literature as a means of political influence and its frequent contrast to the Nazi literature as well as the comparison of the pioneer organisation with the Hitler Youth has provided at least some valuable insights into the political intention (cf. Steinlein/ Strobel/ Kramer 2006). But it can be assumed that a mere comparison of the literature of the two German dictatorships might lead to an overly limited perspective and heighten the risk of dealing with the topic in a narrow-minded way. Such a contrasting approach alone would therefore not do justice to the matter. And the pioneer organisation as an identity-forming component of the reality of life for young readers in the GDR as well as the specific use of language in connection with the organisation's literary representation have unfortunately only been considered marginally, if at all. It is just the few pages by Blumenthal-Barby (2006: 34 – 50) about the pioneer organisation in the compendium on the children's literature in the GDR of almost 800 pages by Steinlein/ Strobel/ Kramer 2006 (as mentioned above) that can be considered the quintessence of the research about the pioneer organisation in GDR children's literature until today.

So, this interdisciplinary analysis is the first to focus on the pioneer organisation as well as on specific linguistic strategies and literary motifs used as propaganda tools in the GDR children's literature to depict the pioneer organisation as worth of becoming a member. And it shows that by reading the books and joining the organisation, the children to a certain extent fell victim to the socialist state and its political ideas.

3. The "Ernst Thälmann Pioneer Organisation"

The "Pionierorganisation Ernst Thälmann" was considered a political mass organisation of the children of the GDR and emerged from the "Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ)" (Free German Youth). The "Freie Deutsche Jugend" was founded on March 7, 1946 (cf. Heilbock 1963: 153). Erich Honecker was elected as chairman by the FDJ's first parliament during its session from

June 8 – 10, 1946. On December 13, 1948, the Central Council of the FDJ decided to establish the Young Pioneer organisation (cf. Heilbock 1963: 154). From that day on December 13 was celebrated as the pioneers' birthday. The right to bear the name "Ernst Thälmann" was granted to the pioneer organisation in August 1952 at the 1st Pioneer Meeting in Dresden (cf. Heilbock 1963: 155). This was to honour the former chairman of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), who was shot in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944.

The model for the pioneer organisation of the GDR was the "Pioneer Organisation Vladimir Ilyich Lenin" in the Soviet Union. Almost all children of the GDR belonged to the pioneer organisation. There were only a few exceptions, and the rejection of the officially "voluntary" membership sometimes had life-changing consequences, e.g. an outsider position in the class or later even being refused a place at university.

The pioneers were divided into the "Young Pioneers" and the "Thälmann Pioneers". Pupils were a "Young Pioneer" from the 1st to the 3rd grade, and a "Thälmann Pioneer" from the 4th to the 7th/8th grade, before they could become a member of the FDJ. The insignia of pioneer status were a pioneer blouse or a pioneer shirt with the JP emblem and the blue neckerchief for the Young Pioneers or the red neckerchief for the Thälmann Pioneers. Of course, this neckerchief had to be tied with the pioneer knot. In addition, a kepi with the pioneer emblem or various rank insignia in the corresponding neckerchief colours could be worn. However, this varied greatly from region to region. The pioneer blouse or shirt and neckerchief were preferably combined with dark blue trousers and skirts. In addition, each pioneer received an identity card containing a photograph of the holder, personal information, the pioneer commandments/rules, the pioneer pledge and, if applicable, the stamps for the membership fee. At first glance, the rules for the Young Pioneers appeared to be rather non-political but then took on a clearly politicised touch for the Thälmann Pioneers.

The pioneer salute, however, was the same for everyone: While the group or friendship council chairman shouted the slogan "Für Frieden und Sozialismus – Seid bereit!"¹³, the group addressed responded with "Immer bereit!"¹⁴ While saluting, the right hand was raised above the head so that the thumb was pointing towards the parting of the hair, but the little finger was pointing towards the sky. In addition, every pioneer could use the "Pionierehrenwort" (pioneer's

¹³ "For peace and socialism – Be ready!"

¹⁴ "Always ready!"

word of honour) to prove how serious he or she was about a matter and to emphasise that he or she was telling the truth.

The pioneers of a class were organised not only by the class teacher, but also by the chairperson(s) of the group council and its members (today's class representatives). All classes also sent at least one member of the group council (usually the chairperson) to the friendship council (today's student council), whose chairperson was usually the pioneer leader. The pioneer groups' activities on the pioneer afternoons ranged from general leisure activities (sports and games), collecting of old and recyclable materials, organising of cake bazaars or tutoring for less able classmates, fundraising campaigns for children of friendly nations, the design of political wall newspapers, the maintenance of relations with the mentoring brigade, participating in political demonstrations (e.g. on May 1 (Labour Day)) through to planning and carrying out of pioneer project tasks, to name just the most important ones.¹⁵

4. Children's literature in the GDR – Political propaganda and the pioneer organisation

4.1 Socialist edification literature

In the following, the term "socialist edification literature" will be used to summarise those works that served not only to promote the development of the GDR's pioneer organisation, but also its leadership cadre, and to swear the pioneers as a whole to the line of the socialist state.

After the founding of the pioneer organisation on December 13, 1948, it had to be structurally and ideologically built up, managed and of course constantly expanded. In the early days, this was based heavily on the Soviet Union's pioneer organisation. This was not only evident in the pioneer salute "Будь готов! – Всегда готов!" (Be ready – Always ready!). Also, the first manuals on organising leisure and political activities, holding elections, the pioneer assembly, organising pioneer and summer camps and much more were translated from Russian into German in order to compensate for the initial lack of native-language specialist literature. The most important example is the "Handbuch des Pionierleiters"¹⁶ (HDPL 1952) ("книга вожатого" (Book of the Counselor, 1950)). This states, among other things, the following about the tasks of the pioneer leader:

¹⁵ Further information on the pioneer organisation can be found in: Kaiser, Beate (2014): Die Pionierorganisation «Ernst Thälmann», Pädagogik, Ideologie und Politik – Eine Regionalstudie zu Dresden 1945 - 1957 und 1980 - 1990.

¹⁶ Handbook of the Pioneer Leader

„Du sollst gemeinsam mit den Lehrern nach dem Vorbild unserer sowjetischen Freunde die junge Generation zu aufrechten Patrioten unserer Heimat erziehen, die bereit sind, jegliche Hindernisse auf dem Wege zu einem einheitlichen, demokratischen und friedliebenden Deutschland zu überwinden.“ (HDPL 1952: innere Umschlagseite).¹⁷

Later, the GDR itself published books to guide the future leadership of the pioneer organisation. The most notable of these is “Wir tragen die Fahne” (We carry the flag) by Klaus Heilbock (1963), which was explicitly compiled as “Material für Vorsitzende der Gruppen- und Freundschaftsräte und Pionierleiter”¹⁸ (Heilbock 1963: 4). It should always be kept in mind that this book was intended “for readers from the age of 11” (Heilbock 1963: 160). Nevertheless, it is full of calls to fight and to the commitment to be a “Kampfgefährte(n) der Arbeiterklasse”¹⁹, e.g.:

„[...] Das erste [sic!], was ihr aus dem Leben Ernst Thälmanns lernen müßt [sic!], ist, stets ein treuer Helfer und Kampfgefährte der Arbeiterklasse und des arbeitenden Volkes zu sein.“ [„Aus der Ansprache Hermann Materns zum 1. Pioniertreffen in Dresden 1952“, In: Heilbock 1963: 5]²⁰

In addition to work and the working class, the symbolism of the ship and its connected vocabulary is also repeatedly used to swear the youth into the state line:

„Achtet jede Arbeit! Liebt jede Arbeit! Haltet Ordnung und Disziplin in der Schule, und eignet euch hohe Kenntnisse und Fähigkeiten im polytechnischen Unterricht an! Seid kühne Kapitäne eurer Gruppen und Freundschaften! Vor euch liegt eine herrliche lichte Zukunft, die Sozialismus heißt. Liebt eure Heimat, die Deutsche Demokratische Republik! Seid kühn im Denken, fleißig im Lernen, zielstrebig bei der Arbeit und fröhlich beim Spiel! Seid immer bereit für Frieden und Sozialismus!“ [Walter Ulbricht, zitiert nach Heilbock 1963: 140]²¹

¹⁷ “Together with the teachers, following the example of our Soviet friends, you should educate the young generation to become upright patriots of our homeland, ready to overcome any obstacles on the way to a united, democratic and peace-loving Germany.” (HDPL 1952: inside cover)

¹⁸ “material for chairmen of the group and friendship councils and pioneer leaders” (Heilbock 1963: 4)

¹⁹ “comrade in arms of the working class”

²⁰ “[...] The first thing you must learn from the life of Ernst Thälmann is to always be a loyal helper and comrade in arms of the working class and the working people.” [“From Hermann Matern’s speech at the 1st Pioneer Meeting in Dresden in 1952”, In: Heilbock 1963: 5]

²¹ “Respect any work! Love any work! Maintain order and discipline at school and acquire high-level knowledge and skills in polytechnic classes! Be courageous captains of your groups and friendships! Ahead of you lies a wonderful, bright future

And of course, socialism is declared to be “progress” and everyone who helps it win is called “progressive”. In addition to these obvious propaganda texts, there were also those that were disguised as everyday or functional literature, but were nevertheless permeated with propaganda, such as propagandistic poems, stories and supposedly factual texts. However, because the propaganda was skilfully mixed with everyday topics and occasions, it did not attract any attention. The most telling examples of this are the pioneer calendars, which, disguised as notebooks and calendars, at exactly the same place provided suggestions for political as well as non-political activities at school and in leisure time:

„Ist dein Fahrrad verkehrssicher?“ [PK 1978: 67]

„Bist du schon in einer Bibliothek eingetragen?“ [PK 1978: 102]

„Lies Bücher, die vom Leben und Kampf Ernst Thälmanns erzählen.“ [PK 1978: 86]

„Berichtet den Genossen eurer Patenbrigade, wie ihr das Pionierversprechen einhaltet“ [PK 1978: 40]²²

Especially the example of the pioneer calendar already shows the tendency to hide political propaganda within everyday literature. This approach can also be found in fictional literature.

4.2 Political fictional literature

The path through everyday life in the GDR was paved with socialist propaganda, political slogans and agitational measures, as well as omnipresent socialist symbolism. It was almost impossible to escape this political indoctrination. Despite this, or perhaps precisely because of this, there seems to be a noticeably softer tone particularly in more or less political fictional children's literature. In these books, the agitprop measures were placed and carried out in a way that, through their indirectness, they sought to counteract a possible oversaturation of the young readership and to prevent a “mental switch-off”.

In the following, the carefully selected and above-mentioned representatives of GDR children's literature from 1952 to 1986 are used to show that these are specifically permeated

called socialism. Love your homeland, the German Democratic Republic! Be bold in your thinking, diligent in your learning, determined in your work and cheerful in your play! Always be ready for peace and socialism!” [Walter Ulbricht, quoted from Heilbock 1963: 140]

²² “Is your bicycle roadworthy?” [PK 1978: 67]

“Are you already registered in a library?” [PK 1978: 102]

“Read books that tell of Ernst Thälmann's life and fight.” [PK 1978: 86]

“Report to the comrades in your mentoring brigade how you keep your pioneer promise” [PK 1978: 40]

with propaganda, although this fact is not too obvious at first glance.

4.2.1 Personality change: From a lone wolf to the herd

The main characters in these books, most of whom are male, except for Nele and Bärbel, and also some supporting characters perform a 180-degree like turnaround, from an outsider to an active and recognised member of the pioneer group.

Felix, one of the main characters in “Mit Bärbel fing es an” has a hard time leaving a more and more criminal gang, called “Rasselbande”. Starting from a seemingly harmless Native American cosplay game a new member managed to turn around the whole group into a destructive force. After the only two female members left the group early, Felix increasingly realises the wrong path he has chosen but also feels unable to leave out of fear of the gang leader. These feelings intensify as he learns about the interesting activities offered by the pioneer organisation and the impossibility of him becoming a member and taking part in these activities due to his criminal career. But the appeal of the pioneer organisation and the support from his friend Hannelore, a former gang member but later Young Pioneer, is so strong, that he finally turns his back to the gang to seek forgiveness from the pioneers and students in his class:

„Ahnungslos fragte Felix: Muß [sic!] man eigentlich Pionier sein oder kann jeder mit euch singen?“ [Korn 1952: 155]²³

„Sogar Felix hatte eine Fahrt in den Spreewald mitgemacht. Dabei war er kein Pionier, aber er wurde als der Tüchtigste seiner Arbeitsgemeinschaft vorgeschlagen.“ [Korn 1952: 255]²⁴

„Ja, ob er noch einmal von vorn anfangen kann, das müssen wir jetzt entscheiden. Er hat ehrlich und tapfer eingestanden – und scheinbar nichts verschwiegen.“ [Korn 1952: 261]²⁵

Igel, the main character in “Igel, Rainer und die anderen” feels misunderstood, is beaten up for misbehaviour and then gradually withdraws from his classmates. While they are building a poultry farm as a pioneer project task for the LPG²⁶ so that it can soon meet its egg quota, he is

²³ “Felix asked unaware: Do you have to be a pioneer or can anyone sing with you?” [Korn 1952: 155]

²⁴ “Even Felix had joined a trip to the Spreewald. He wasn’t a pioneer, but he was recommended as the most able member of his project group.” [Korn 1952: 255]

²⁵ “Yes, whether he can start over again is something we have to decide now. He admitted it honestly and bravely—and apparently didn’t hide anything.” [Korn 1952: 261]

²⁶ Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft (agricultural cooperative)

raising three small piglets to help the LPG meet its livestock quota. When this becomes public, he is reintegrated into the class and the pioneer group:

„Jeder wusste, dass Igel ein Außenseiter war, der nichts mitmachte.“ [Wellm 1958: 96]
„Er gehörte ja nun wieder dazu. Er war sogar zur letzten Pioniersammlung gewesen.“
[Wellm 1958: 107]²⁷

In the subplots, the eternal complainers and critics of the LPG also change, and, in the end, they are convinced that LPG is the best solution for everyone and that it works for them too. At the same time, “Spatz” also transforms from a know-all nag into a valuable socialist personality. And Roswitha, the eternally critical one, undergoes one of the biggest changes when she no longer wants to become a hairdresser but a poultry farmer.

Frank, nicknamed “Speckfrank” because of his shabby clothes, also changes from a constant outsider to a recognised, full member of the class. And even within the class, “Wanze” and Hanne change into better versions of themselves as well. “Purzel” also discovers completely new sides to herself by purposefully pursuing her plans and not letting herself be dissuaded from them.

Nele also undergoes a real personality change and strives, like no other protagonist before, to be a real pioneer and to put all the rules of the Thälmann Pioneers into practice, but especially the one regarding the truth: “Wir Thälmannpioniere lieben die Wahrheit...”²⁸, because she has not always taken the truth so seriously. Sometimes she could not and sometimes she did not want to tell the truth:

„Ein Pionier sagt immer die Wahrheit.“ [Brock 1975: 52]
„Eben nicht! Auch wenn man Pionier ist, kann man nicht immer die Wahrheit sagen.“
[Brock 1975: 73]²⁹

Nevertheless, she changes and astonishes her friends when she tells the truth about how an artist's vase actually broke:

²⁷ “Everyone knew that Igel was an outsider who didn't participate in anything.” [Wellm 1958: 96]

“He was part of the group again. He had even been to the last pioneer assembly.” [Wellm 1958: 107]

²⁸ “We Thälmann Pioneers love the truth...”

²⁹ “A pioneer always tells the truth.” [Brock 1975: 52]

“Not at all! Even if you're a pioneer, you can't always tell the truth.” [Brock 1975: 73]

„Am meisten aber zeigte sich Niki überrascht. Ihm war, als lernte er heute tatsächlich eine andere Nele kennen.“ [Brock 1975: 187]³⁰

It is very clear that the literary characters are intended to serve as role models for the readership. The personality changes reflect the youth's path to becoming a “universally educated socialist personality”, who of course functioned as a valuable member of the pioneer organisation, without this term of “socialist personality” ever being mentioned directly in any of the works. Still, it can be assumed that this change must have been on the list of state requirements to be fulfilled, as it was sometimes forced into the literature at all costs and was not always convincing. A particularly meaningful example is the introduction of Roswitha's personality change:

„Dann saß Roswitha wieder vor der Kommode. Sie wußte [sic!] nun, wie sie als Dame aussehen würde, und drehte verträumt am Lippenstift. [...] Und komisch, bei diesem Spiel träumte sie gar nicht von dem spiegelblanken Frisiersalon und davon, wie sie mit abgespreiztem kleinem Finger die Schere bediente. Sie träume von kleinen Küken. Jawohl, sie sah viele, viele Küken vor sich. Die waren weich und possierlich und hatten noch die gelben Höcker auf den Schnäbeln.“ [Wellm 1958: 54]³¹

4.2.2 Propaganda using special keywords

Although most works attempt to noticeably reduce the use of well-known political slogans and, if possible, to avoid them altogether, this is not always successful. Sometimes it can even be assumed that certain keywords are deliberately placed, which, like a stimulus-response chain, are intended to trigger certain associations in the readership.

4.2.2.1 “progressive” vs. “backward” as keywords

One of the most frequently used keywords in relation to socialism is “fortschrittlich” (progressive). The so-called real existing socialism of the GDR and its representatives are propagated as a progressive socio-political and economic innovation, whereby everything else is characterised as backward without directly formulating it that way. So, in Heilbock 1963: “Wir

³⁰ “But Niki was the most surprised. He felt as if he was actually getting to know a different Nele today.” [Brock 1975: 187]

³¹ “Then Roswitha sat in front of the dresser again. She now knew what she'd look like as a lady and dreamily twirled her lipstick. [...] And strangely, during this game she didn't dream at all about the shiny hairdressing salon and how she used the scissors with her little finger spread out. She dreamed of little chicks. Yes, she saw many, many chicks in front of her. They were soft and cute and still had the yellow humps on their beaks.” [Wellm 1958: 54]

tragen die Fahne" (We carry the flag) you can read:

„Hier erzogen einige Lehrer die Kinder im fortschrittlichen Sinne.“ [Heilbock 1963: 20]
„...fortschrittlichen Zeitungen...“ [a. a. O.: 33]
„...Massenbewegungen, an denen sich alle fortschrittlichen Menschen beteiligten.“ [a. a. O.: 34]
„...fortschrittliche Kinderorganisationen...“ [a. a. O.: 37]
„...fortschrittliche Kräfte...“ [a. a. O.: 44]
„...fortschrittliche Organisationen... fortschrittliche Lehrer... fortschrittliche Bewegungen...“ [a. a. O.: 50]³²

And for example, the pioneers in “Igel, Rainer und die anderen” discuss whether to join the LPG or not:

„Einige ja“, mußte [sic] Hein zugeben. „Aber die meisten sind man faul. Wir gehen nicht in die LPG.“ Spatz schluckte. Das tat er immer, wenn er erregt war. „Weil – weil ihr nicht **Fortschrittliche** seid, darum...“ [Wellm 1958: 28]³³

This obviously implies that anything that is not socialist or not following the socialist way cannot be progressive either.

Examples of keywords that indirectly describe the “backward” can be found in almost all of the works examined, except for “Ich bin die Nele”. What is noticeable is that the backwardness is also illustrated by the “old” and negative vocabulary used. In addition to the still “unbelievers” in the GDR in general, the nobility, the rich, the Americans in Cuba and the West Germans as a whole did not come off well:

„Das Dorf nannte ihn einen Geizkragen. Bei der Altstoffsammlung hatte er nicht eine

³² “Here, some teachers educated the children in a progressive spirit.” [Heilbock 1963: 20]

“...progressive newspapers...” [ibid.: 33]

“...mass movements in which all progressive people participated.” [ibid.: 34]

“...progressive children's organisations...” [ibid.: 37]

“...progressive forces...” [ibid.: 44]

“...progressive organisations...progressive teachers...progressive movements...” [ibid.: 50]

³³ “Some of them,” Hein had to admit. “But most of them are just lazy. We don't go to the LPG.” Spatz gulped. He always did that when he was excited. “Because – because you aren't **progressive**, that's why...” [Wellm 1958: 28]

Flasche rausgerückt. ... Hundert Mark wollte der ihnen abknöpfen. So ein Gauner!“ [Wellm 1958: 92-93]³⁴

„... „Solche Verdrehten gibt's auch noch“, sagte er.“ [Wellm 1958: 94]³⁵

„Im Schloß [sic!] wohnte der Herr von Ölleritz. (...) Seine Kutschpferde hatten einen ausgekachelten Stall. (...) Aber bei Schütts und Gleisners fehlte der Fußboden in der Küche; das störte den **Junker** nicht. Ölleritz **kümmerte es einen Dreck**, ob die Schulkinder Zeit zum Lernen hatten.“ [Wellm 1958: 100]³⁶

„Wie die das Volk ins Unglück gestürzt haben, der **hochnäsige Kaiser und seine Geldmänner!** Wie hieß doch der **Kanonenfritze?** [...] Krupp, **Kanonenkönig**, verdient am Kriege, und die Arbeiter müssen sterben, und die SPD macht den ganzen **Schwindel** mit. In Rußland [sic!] sind sie schlauer. Dort werden die **Lumpen** abgesetzt und verjagt. 1917. Große Revolution. (Oktober)!“ [Neumann 1958: 209]³⁷

„Bei uns in der Schule“, sagte Camilo, „gibt es Kinder, die gegen **Yankis** sind. Die heißen Pioniere.“ [Renn 1986: 84]³⁸

Alfred, the new pioneer leader in “Frank”, who migrated from West Germany, says:

„[...] Die **Richter und ihre Knechte** haben mich **angekläfft wie bissige Hunde**. ... Der Besitzer des Werkes, ein **feiner Hund**, versteht ihr, ein **geschniegelter Laffe**, der hat **unsere Rechte mit Füßen getreten**. ...“ [Neumann 1958: 140]³⁹

What is astonishing here is that the terms commonly used in non-fictional texts such as “amerikanische(n) und westdeutsche(n) Imperialisten” (American and West German imperialists), “westdeutsche(n) Kapitalisten” (West German capitalists) [Heilbock 1963: 72, 73] etc. are

³⁴ “The village called him a cheapskate. He hadn't come across with a single bottle to the recycling collection. ... He wanted to rip them off for a hundred marks. Such a crook!” [Wellm 1958: 92-93]

³⁵ “... ‘There are still such twisted people,’ he said.” [Wellm 1958: 94]

³⁶ “The Lord of Ölleritz lived in the castle. (...) His carriage horses had a tiled stable. (...) But the Schütts and Gleisners had no floor in the kitchen; that didn't bother the **Junker**. Ölleritz **didn't give a fig about**, whether the schoolchildren had time to study.” [Wellm 1958: 100]

³⁷ “How they're plunged the people into misery, the **arrogant emperor and his money men!** What was the name of the **cannon freak?** [...] Krupp, **cannon king**, is making money from the war, and the workers have to die, and the SPD is going along with the whole **scam**. In Russia [sic!] they're smarter. There, the **rascals** are degraded and chased away. 1917. Great revolution. (October)!” [Neumann 1958: 209]

³⁸ “At our school,” said Camilo, “there are children who are against **Yankees**. They're called pioneers.” [Renn 1986: 84]

³⁹ “[...] The **judges and their stooges barked at me like vicious dogs**. ...The owner of the factory, a **fine dog**, you understand, a **slicked-up coxcomb, trampled on our rights**. ...” [Neumann 1958: 140]

evidently deliberately avoided here, and instead of the usual propaganda, the focus is put more on defaming the opponent. Especially in the last example, the compassion and sympathy for the oppressed Alfred are clearly intended to strengthen the antipathy against the West German system. This propagandistic act is crowned by the ultimate proof of trust, when the West German defector Alfred is entrusted with the political education of the GDR youth:

„Du und ich und unsere Väter, wir sind eine Kette. Die hält! Unzählige solcher Ketten spannen sich und reißen **die alte Welt** aus ihrem Trott. [...] Ich möchte mich auf dich verlassen können. Das möchten auch die Jungen Pioniere unserer Schule und meine Kollegen.“ [Neumann 1958: 147]⁴⁰

4.2.2.2 Equal rights and obligations? – “Equality” as a key idea

Another keyword or key idea of immense importance is the “equality” of the pioneers, which leads to situations where children and young people are often treated like adults: with almost the same rights and obligations:

„Es galt, den jungen Staat stark zu machen. Dabei mußten [sic!] alle Menschen der Republik mithelfen. In diesem Ringen um die Festigung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik stand in den nächsten Jahren die Pionierorganisation stets mit an vorderster Stelle.“ [Heilbock 1963: 74]⁴¹

Thus, the narrator in “Camilo” (Renn 1986: 65) remarks about his mother: “Sie sprach mit ihm wie mit einem Erwachsenen, und er liebte sie sehr”.⁴² And in “Igel...” the representative of the state power also talks to him “as an equal.”:

„Und man konnte sich mit ihm so – so gleichberechtigt unterhalten. Rainer wußte nicht, daß [sic!] der Dicke der Stellvertreter des Landrates war.“ [Wellm 1958: 63]⁴³

⁴⁰ “You and I and our fathers, we’re a chain. That holds! Countless such chains are tightening and pulling **the old world** out of its rut. [...] I want to be able to rely on you. The Young Pioneers of our school and my colleagues want that too.” [Neumann 1958: 147]

⁴¹ “The aim was to make the young state strong. All the people of the republic had to help with this. In this strive for the consolidation of the German Democratic Republic, the pioneer organisation was in the years to come always one of those at the forefront.” [Heilbock 1963: 74]

⁴² “She spoke to him as if he were an adult, and he loved her very much.”

⁴³ “And you could talk to him on such an equal footing. Rainer didn’t know that the chubby man was the deputy district administrator.” [Wellm 1958: 63]

Frank's father treated him like an adult, too, when, as an 8th grade student, he entrusted him with the care of his little siblings for at least two months:

„Ich denke, so kannst du hier auch wirtschaften, bis ich mit meinen Werkhallen fertig bin. Oder? [...] Gut, Junge! Wenn du ein Kerl bist, dann hältst du Wort. [...] Du wirst tüchtig ranmüssen, Frank. ...“ [Neumann 1958: 193-194]⁴⁴

And even in “Nele” a relationship on an equal footing develops between the workers of the mentoring brigade and the pioneers, despite the immense age difference:

„Konrad Würdinger war sehr nachdenklich geworden. Er spürte, daß [sic] sich hier eine ungezwungene Freundschaft unter Gleichgestellten anzubahnen begann. Und dazu hatte ausgerechnet Nele, die für ihn immer noch so was wie ein verkappter Eulenspiegel geblieben war, den Anstoß gegeben.“ [Brock 1975: 149]⁴⁵

And there are several situations in “Bärbel”, too, where it is emphasised that teachers and students are actually friends and where the children are seen as the adults:

„Für mich gilt als oberstes Gesetz, daß [sic] der Lehrer der Freund der Schüler ist...“ [Korn 1952: 83]⁴⁶

„... und besprach mit dem Pionier Bärbel, mit der man wie mit einem Freunde reden konnte, seine Niederlage in der Klasse, die ihm keine Ruhe ließ.“ [Korn 1952: 97]⁴⁷

„Und das ist mein Fehler, daß [sic] ich euch vergessen habe, die Jungen Pioniere und die Schüler. Wollen wir ein Bündnis schließen?“ [Korn 1952: 99]⁴⁸

Being treated this way places a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of the pioneers, if not too great a responsibility for such young people in general.

⁴⁴ “I think you can manage things here like this until I'm finished with my factory halls. Right? [...] Alright, boy! If you're a real man, you'll keep your word. [...] You'll have to work hard, Frank. ...” [Neumann 1958: 193-194]

⁴⁵ “Konrad Würdinger had become very thoughtful. He sensed that an informal friendship between equals was beginning to develop. And of all people, Nele, who was still something of a disguised Eulenspiegel for him, had given the impetus for this.” [Brock 1975: 149]

⁴⁶ “For me, the most important law is that the teacher is the friend of the students...” [Korn 1952: 83]

⁴⁷ “...and discussed with the pioneer Bärbel, with whom one could talk like a friend, his defeat in the class, which gave him no peace.” [Korn 1952: 97]

⁴⁸ “And that's my fault that I've forgotten you, the Young Pioneers and the students. Shall we form an alliance?” [Korn 1952: 99]

4.2.2.3 The importance of ships and water as keywords and key motifs

The ship and water symbolism is important in many ways. As traveling abroad was severely restricted in the GDR, being able to board a ship like the “Völkerfreundschaft”⁴⁹ and go to other countries via the open sea was truly special. Furthermore, many goods had been transported by ship to and from the GDR, so that the ships also have an economic aspect, as not only connecting the GDR to the world, but also to enhance trade. Moreover, ships have always been used as a symbol of the whole nation or another institutional group to reinforce the idea that everyone is in the same boat and that a lack of cooperation and disregard for the captain's instructions can lead to the ultimate catastrophe. Therefore, the ship is often seen as a symbol for the socialist state, whose “voyage” can only be successful, if everyone follows the rules. Here, it again connects to the symbolism of water, as often it is only in a dangerous situation, like in a storm on a ship surrounded by the turbulent sea, that you will know who is truly loyal. Thus, the water can be seen as a means to reveal one's true character.

The “Völkerfreundschaft”, as the friendship among nations, is mentioned in the fourth pioneer rule and also thematised in the literary works, without the keyword always having to be used directly. This often overlaps with the ship and water symbolism, since the relief supplies donated by the pioneers are usually transported by ship to friendly nations and one of these ships bore that very same name – by no means a coincidence:

„Wir haben übrigens erfahren, dass die Deutsche Demokratische Republik ein Schiff schickt. Es trägt den Namen ‚Völkerfreundschaft.‘ Dieses Schiff ist voller Geschenke für das befreite Kuba, und darunter befinden sich auch Schulhefte, Bleistifte und Radiergummis, die deutsche Schulkinder für ihre kubanischen Freunde gesammelt haben.“ [Renn 1986: 62]⁵⁰

Of course, it goes without saying that the schoolchildren mentioned in the quote are pioneers.

But the pioneer groups themselves and their members are also compared to ship crews, according to the motto: “We are all in the same boat.” And so, the official statement says:

⁴⁹ friendship among nations, a key word in socialist policy

⁵⁰ “By the way, we've learned that the German Democratic Republic is sending a ship. It's called 'Völkerfreundschaft.' This ship is full of gifts for liberated Cuba, and among them are school notebooks, pencils and erasers that German schoolchildren have collected for their Cuban friends.” [Renn 1986: 62]

„Seid kühne Kapitäne eurer Gruppen und Freundschaften!“ [Walter Ulbricht zitiert nach Heilbock 1963: 140]⁵¹

„Vergeßt [sic!] auch die nicht, die sich noch nicht in eure Schiffsbesatzung einordnen können! Laßt [sic!] keinen abseits stehen und keinen über Bord fallen!“ [Walter Ulbricht zitiert nach Heilbock 1963: 141]⁵²

This ship symbolism is most evident in “Frank”. He, initially an outsider in his group, develops through shipbuilding into the captain, not only of the canoe, but also of the group. In addition, the ships of the GDR merchant fleet, financed by collecting recyclable materials, are also thematised, especially the merchant ship “Thälmann-Pionier”. This is mentioned not only in Heilbock’s “Wir tragen die Fahne” (1963: 97), but also in Neumann’s “Frank” (1958: 87, 101):

„Das Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands schlägt euch vor, den Arbeitern beim Bau eines 3000-Tonnen-Handelsschiffs zu helfen. Jedes einzelne Schiffsteil soll erzählen können, von welcher Gruppe Junger Pioniere der Schrott gesammelt, von welcher Freundschaft das Geld aufgebracht, von welchem Kreisverband das Material zusammengetragen wurde. Das Schiff soll den Namen ‚Thälmann-Pionier‘ tragen, und eure Besten werden seine erste Fahrt miterleben.“ [Heilbock 1963: 97]⁵³

„Wir müssen sammeln“, rief Purzel, „Altmaterial und so.“

„Quatsch!“ Wanze, der Schlauberger stand auf. „Ist alles abgegrast. Elf Tonnen hat damals die Schule für das Thälmann-Schiff gesammelt. Unsere Gruppe allein über zwei Tonnen. Seitdem ist der Schrott alle. Du findest kein Hufeisen mehr.“ [Neumann 1958: 87]⁵⁴

⁵¹ Be courageous captains of your groups and friendships! [Walter Ulbricht quoted from Heilbock 1963: 140]⁵¹

⁵² “Do not forget those who cannot yet fit into your ship’s crew! Do not let anyone stand aside and do not let anyone fall overboard!” [Walter Ulbricht quoted from Heilbock 1963: 141]

⁵³ “The Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany proposes that you help the workers build a 3,000-ton merchant ship. Every single part of the ship should be able to tell the story of which group of Young Pioneers collected the discarded metal, which friendship raised the money, which district association gathered the material. The ship should be called the ‘Thälmann Pioneer’, and your best will experience its first voyage.” [Heilbock 1963: 97]

⁵⁴ “We have to collect,” shouted Purzel, “old material and so.”

“Nonsense!” Wanze, the know-all, stood up. “Everything has been detected. The school collected eleven tons for the Thälmann ship. Our group alone collected over two tons. Since then, the discarded metal has been used up. You won’t find a single horseshoe anymore.” [Neumann 1958: 87]

The collection of old and recyclable materials, which were mostly carried out on pioneer afternoons, not only served as a source of income for shipbuilding, but also for financing various pioneer tasks, such as the construction of the LPG's poultry farm in "Igel..." (Wellm 1958: 57) or the collection of donations for friendly nations (Heilbock 1963), which closes the circle to the friendship among nations (Völkerfreundschaft) mentioned at the beginning.

And also, in "Nele", who is planning a student club on an old ship, the ship symbolism stands for the entire pioneer group:

„Da war auch eine frische Brise nötig, wenn ihr Kahn der fröhlichen Kinder eines Tages in See stechen sollte. Die Schiffsmannschaft vom Smutje bis hinauf zum Kapitän stand bereits fest. Da fehlte keiner aus ihrer Klasse. Sogar Anke segelte hoch oben im Topp als Beobachter oder, wenn Kikeriki unbedingt wollte, als Wetterhahn mit.“ [Brock 1975: 104]⁵⁵

Later, the ship is referred to with the keywords "dream ship" (p. 147) or "floating children's paradise" (p. 148).

But of course, a ship would be worth nothing without water. Therefore, it is not only the ship that works as a symbol or key motif, but the water, too. Many stories in all these books take place at the water, either at the seaside or at inland waters. It is the weir where Frank proves to be the bravest, and it is the lake where Hannelore and Felix, two of the main characters in "Bärbel", spend what will be their last time together as friends for several weeks.

With Benno Pludra ("Bootsmann auf der Scholle") it is not only the authors of the books analysed for this research, but also the most famous East German author for children's books, who uses the water, to transmit feelings of longing and the strong desire to travel, as well as the key ideas of friendship and comradeship (cf. Jahns 2025). In general, it can be said, that the water on the one hand works as a connecting element, where the young people in the stories gather and spend time together and on the other hand as a catalyst for the plot as well as a symbol of the truth that brings the real personalities of the protagonists to light. A very significant example can be found in "Bärbel", where Hannelore decides to try out sailing and nearly

⁵⁵ "A fresh breeze was also needed if her boat of happy children was to set sail one day. The ship's crew, from the cook right up to the captain, had already been chosen. No one from her class was missing. Even Anke sailed high up in the masthead as an observer or, if Cock-a-doodle-doo really wanted to, as a weathercock." [Brock 1975: 104]

damages the boat, while trying to somehow survive and master the strong winds at the same time. With the help of her friend Felix she finally reaches the shore unharmed. And Felix is deeply impressed by her courage:

„Und du? Du wirst bestimmt mal eine große Seglerin, Lore, denn etwas hast du, was man da zu allererst braucht: Mut.“ [Korn 1952: 47]⁵⁶

Like in “Frank”, the water here brings the courage of the protagonists to light and still highlights the comradeship and the spirit of the pioneer community.

4.2.2.4 Pioneer songs as keywords

The titles and choruses of various pioneer and FDJ songs are also sprinkled into the literary texts like keywords. The full lyrics of the songs are not necessary here, as the songs have been sung so often in everyday life that the titles or choruses alone automatically trigger the songs to play in the reader’s mind. This is absolutely comparable to an involuntary earworm, e.g.:

„Sind die Fahnen umkränzt von den Rosen...“ [Korn 1952: 229]

„Guten Morgen, du glücklicher, junger Kapitän, ...“ [Korn 1952: 242]⁵⁷

In addition to pioneer, FDJ and battle songs, explicit workers’ songs are also sung in the literary works, such as those in Wellm, Neumann and Korn. They illustrate once more what political and social expectations were already being placed on the pupils and would continue to be placed on them in the future:

„Wir sind die erste Reihe! Wir gehen kühn voran...“ [Wellm 1958: 28]

„Wann wir schreiten Seit an Seit...“ [Neumann 1958: 65]

„Bau auf, Bau auf, Maurer Simon Brinkmann, bau auf“ (eigentl. Freie Deutsche Jugend) [Neumann 1958: 208]

„Das neue Leben muss anders werden.“ [Korn 1952: 235]⁵⁸

⁵⁶ “And you? You’ll definitely be a great sailor one day, Lore, because you’ve something that’s needed above all else: courage.” [Korn 1952: 47]

⁵⁷ “Are the flags wreathed with roses...” [Korn 1952: 229], part of the text of the third verse in the song “Im August blühen die Rosen” (The roses bloom in August)

“Good morning, you lucky young captain” [Korn 1952: 242], original song title; another title was “Lied vom glücklichen jungen Kapitän” (“Song of the lucky young captain”)

⁵⁸ “We’re the first row! We go forward boldly...” [Wellm 1958: 28], the first sentence is the original song title

Sometimes the title was not mentioned, and the content was deliberately kept vague, so that several songs could be considered. For example, the following text excerpt could have come from songs like: "Fröhlich sein und singen" (Be happy and sing), the "Pioniermarsch" (Pioneer March) or "Vorwärts, Junger Pionier" (Forward, Young Pioneer):

„Ein Lied der jungen Pioniere, in dem von Jungsein und Freundschaft und guten Taten die Rede oder vielmehr das Singen war. Natürlich kannte auch Nele das Lied, hatte es oft gesungen.“ [Brock 1975: 19]⁵⁹

Wellm in "Igel, Rainer und die anderen" (1958) also refers in such a vague way to a song that is sung at the end of the lesson. This hint is so vague that it leaves the door wide open to personal imagination:

„Sie sangen das Schlußlied. [sic!] Dann nahm Igel seine Mappe und ging hinaus. Die sollten ihn nur anfassen!“ [Wellm 1958: 46]⁶⁰

„Hunderttausend Kinder wollen wissen...“ (A hundred thousand children want to know...) [Brock 1975: 72] is sung in "Nele", while in "Camilo" songs are more like battle songs:

„Die Geheimnistuerei machte ihr erneut solchen Spaß, daß [sic!] sie beim Reinigen in der Küche wieder sang, aber diesmal nicht die herzzzerreißende Llorona, sondern eins der neuen Kampflieder.“ [Renn 1986: 81]⁶¹

Juana also sings shortly before Camilo is accepted into the pioneer organisation in the presence of Fidel Castro:

"When we walk side by side..." [Neumann 1958: 65], original song title

"Build up, build up, bricklayer Simon Brinkmann, build up" (originally Free German Youth) [Neumann 1958: 208], the first two imperatives are the original song title; an alternative title was "Jugend erwach" ("Youth awaken")

"The new life must be different." [Korn 1952: 235], original song title; an alternative title was a slightly shortened version of the original "Das neue Leben" ("The new life")

⁵⁹ "A song of the Young Pioneers, which spoke of youth and friendship and good deeds, or was rather singing of them. Of course, Nele also knew the song and had often sung it." [Brock 1975: 19]

⁶⁰ "They sang the final song. Then Igel took his folder and went out. They shouldn't dare even touch him!" [Wellm 1958: 46]

⁶¹ "She once again enjoyed the secrecy so much that she sang again while cleaning in the kitchen, but this time not the heartbreaking Llorona, but one of the new battle songs." [Renn 1986: 81], "La Llorona" (The weeping woman) is a Mexican folk song with many variations all over Latin America.

„In der Küche sang Juana ‚Adelante, compañeros‘. Das heißt ‚Vorwärts Genossen!‘ Es war das Lied, das bei allen Kundgebungen gesungen wird. Auch in der Schule hatten sie es gelernt, und Camilo sang gern, aber heute hatte er keine Lust, es mitzusingen.“ [Renn 1986: 103]⁶²

And in Korn’s “Bärbel” the ability of singing and the joy to sing songs is named one of the most important qualifications a pioneer leader should have. And since Susanne, the pioneer leader in the book, can neither sing nor play any instrument, she is openly criticized for that lack of talent and it is indicated, that this fact makes it impossible for her to be a successful pioneer leader:

„Das ist es ja, Hannelore, wir haben niemanden, der mit uns singt, der Gesanglehrer hat keine Zeit für uns und unsere Susanne – stell dir vor: Susanne kann nicht singen!“ [Korn 1952: 96]⁶³

„... Susanne ist sicher eine gute Seele, aber das ist alles. ... Und das allerschlimmste, sie ist unmusikalisch, kann weder singen noch Klampfe spielen.“ [Korn 1952: 133]⁶⁴

„Und richtig gesungen haben wir mit Susanne nie.“ [Korn 1952: 148]⁶⁵

4.2.3 Short sentence schemes as part of the avoidance strategy

With regard to the explicitly propagandistic use of political catchphrases and keywords, interesting trends can be seen developing over the years. As has already been noted, the socialist edification literature is full of them. No chapter, no page, and hardly a single sentence in Heilbock’s book (1963) can do without it.

In contrast, the works of Wellm and Neumann (both 1958) in particular show a completely different picture. Here, almost everything seems to be tried, just not to use any of the usual catchphrases, keywords and political slogans. For example, the following blurb can be found on the back cover of Wellm’s work (1958):

⁶² “In the kitchen, Juana sang ‘Adelante, compañeros’. That means ‘Forward, comrades!’ It was the song that was sung at all rallies. They’d also learned it at school, and Camilo liked to sing, but today he didn’t feel like singing along with it” [Renn 1986: 103]

⁶³ “That’s it, Hannelore, we’ve no one to sing with us, the singing teacher doesn’t have time for us, and our Susanne — imagine: Susanne can’t sing!” [Korn 1952: 96]

⁶⁴ “Susanne is certainly a kind soul, but that’s all. ... And worst of all, she’s unmusical; she can neither sing nor play the guitar.” [Korn 1952: 133]

⁶⁵ “And we never really sang with Susanne.” [Korn 1952: 148]

„Wie der Einzelgänger dem **Kollektiv** zurückgewonnen wird und wie die Dorfkinder alle anderen Schwierigkeiten meistern, wird vom Autor bunt, interessant und mit viel Humor geschildert.“⁶⁶

But not even once does the word “collective” appear in the entire work. The author seems to have avoided it by all means. Similar strategies can be observed regarding the word for pioneer: “Pionier”. Applied in a spotlight manner, it seems to be used to repeatedly and briefly remind the reader that the text is about pioneers, but without resorting to the usual range of agitprop measures. This is also reflected in the syntax. The word “pioneer” mostly appears in rather short main clauses, before and after which only “Kinder” are spoken about again:

„Die Pioniere waren über Igels Verhalten empört.“ [Wellm 1958: 39]

„Gestern waren die Pioniere wieder zusammengekommen.“ [Wellm 1958: 54]

„Die Pioniere wunderten sich.“ [Wellm 1958: 92]

„Die Pioniere waren enttäuscht.“ [Wellm 1958: 93]

„Die Pioniere hatten schweigend dagestanden.“ [Wellm 1958: 94]⁶⁷

Some compound words also act as reminders for the reader, so that they at least keep the word “Pionier” in the back of their minds: “Pionierwort” (pioneer’s word of honour) (Wellm 1958: 39, 40), “Pionieraufgabe” (pioneer task) (ibid. 128), “Pionierversammlung” (pioneer assembly) (ibid. 109). Interestingly, agricultural vehicles were also used for this purpose: The tractor “Pionier”, also known as the RS01, was the first tractor to be mass-produced in the GDR and, miraculously, appears in Wellm and Neumann:

„Pikkolo, der Traktorist, hatte sie manchmal mit seinem „Pionier“ mitgenommen.“ [Wellm 1958: 10]

„Am Straßenrand stand ein Trecker. ‚Ifa, Pionier‘ stellte Frank fest.“ [Neumann 1958: 121]⁶⁸

⁶⁶ “How the loner is won back into the **collective** and how the village children overcome all other difficulties is described by the author in a colourful, interesting and humorous way.”

⁶⁷ “The pioneers were outraged by Igel’s behaviour.” [Wellm 1958: 39]

“Yesterday the pioneers came together again.” [Wellm 1958: 54]

“The pioneers were surprised.” [Wellm 1958: 92]

“The pioneers were disappointed.” [Wellm 1958: 93]

“The pioneers stood there in silence.” [Wellm 1958: 94]

⁶⁸ “Pikkolo, the tractor driver, sometimes took them with him on his ‘Pioneer’.” [Wellm 1958: 10]

Of course, the tractor must be identified by name here, since a “normal” tractor would not have satisfied the intended keyword function.

Sometimes the word “Pionier” is even in short sentences completely omitted and the propaganda is left entirely to the reader:

„Hurra, die Fahrt begann! Blaue Tücher winkten. Spatz stand und schwenkte den Wimpel.“ [Wellm 1958: 155]⁶⁹

So, here the reader automatically interprets the “blue cloths” as the blue neckerchiefs of the Young Pioneers as well as the pennant as the blue pennant of the pioneer organisation.

In “Nele” by Brock, however, a completely opposite picture emerges. Here, the text seems to be flooded with references to the pioneers, but limits these to the compound words already mentioned, expanded by a few political terms from the world of work. And through the targeted use of surprising plot twists, some self- or system-critical statements and humorous interludes, it manages to bring a certain lightness into the text, which counteracts an overly serious view and an overly intensive perception of the propaganda. Here, state propaganda de facto creeps into the consciousness of the readership.

5. Conclusion

As an essential part of the everyday life of children and young people in the GDR, the “Pioneer Organisation Ernst Thälmann” as well as the political-moral principles and ideals it represented were also a recurring component of the socialist children’s and youth literature.

While the focus of pre- and post-reunification literary research in this regard is primarily on the socialist ideology reflected in literary works and on more general comparisons of the GDR pioneer organisation with the Hitler Youth of the Nazi era (cf. Blumenthal-Barby 2006, p. 37 et. seqq.), this linguistically focused research work followed a different path. With reference to the hypothesis that there must have been indirect propaganda in the children’s literature to influence even the younger children as early as possible and to comply with the SED

“There was a tractor on the side of the road. ‘Ifa, pioneer,’ Frank stated.” [Neumann 1958: 121]

⁶⁹ “Hurrah, the journey began! Blue cloths waved. Spatz stood and waved the pennant.” [Wellm 1958: 155]

dictatorship's requirements of creating works written in the style of Socialist Realism with all its ideological implications, this research paper followed the question, how this propaganda was implemented, focusing explicitly on the linguistic representation of the pioneer organisation and its representatives in the GDR children's and youth literature as well as on the linguistic persuasion strategies used to politically indoctrinate the young readership.

Although there are significant differences between the real socialist edification literature and primarily fictional literature, it cannot be denied that propagandistic elements/motifs of the edification literature were also used in the fictional works analysed in this study: for example, the progressiveness, the equal rights/treatment of young people or the symbolism of ships and water as well as the captain's motif. These fictional works are therefore to be classified as more or less political fictional literature.

Through the focused analysis of the linguistic representation of the pioneer organisation and its representatives not only the obligatory personality change to a "allseitig gebildete sozialistische Persönlichkeit" (universally educated socialist personality) could be illustrated, but, it was also possible to reveal some of the linguistic persuasion strategies used in the texts for the subliminal political indoctrination of the young readership: for example, the keyword propaganda in all its different forms, e.g. "progressive" vs. "backward" or the "equality" of adults and children, or the syntactical short sentence schemes. It is also worth mentioning that at least some of the specific political keywords were used in both types of literature, edification and fictional works: for example, "Kampf für/gegen..." (fight for/against...), "Schulkampfwoche" (school fighting week), "Klassenkollektiv" (class collective) or "Pionier-" (pioneer-)..., although far less direct propaganda was used in the fictional literature and attempts were made to strike a quieter, seemingly innocuous tone. As the authors could not or did not want to completely do without the well-known, ideologically charged keywords, catchphrases and motifs, they tried, more or less skilfully, to disguise these (e.g. Roswitha). So indeed, on very different levels, the political propaganda was hidden in the GDR's children's and youth literature.

Finally, it should be mentioned that a recent development in Germany is paving the way to further research on the pioneer organisation in children's literature, as even in the plots of newly published children's books the pioneer organisation is playing a leading role (e.g. "Ein Halstuch voller Lügen" 2023). These books aim to explain the everyday life and challenges of the GDR youth to children today and therefore also focus on the importance and the influence of the

pioneer organisation on the youth back then.

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