

From The Devil to Stalin: Change and Continuity in Children's Literature in America

Breaking Stalin's Nose: A children's novel in context

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Cover illustration by Eugene Yelchin, taken from *Breaking Stalin's Nose* (2011).

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“I don’t think I’m essentially interested in children’s books. I’m interested in writing, and in pictures. I’m interested in people and in children because they are people”.

Margaret Wise Brown

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INTRODUCTION

1. Background

Over the last fifty years or so, the field of children's literature has expanded rapidly. Not only is it taught on University curricula, there are also several journals dedicated to it, and children's books regularly feature on the bestseller lists. Despite all this, there is no single or widely used definition of children's literature. The term does not fit easily into any academic category, or cultural category for that matter. Different readers define the *subject matter* of the field differently (Hunt, 2001, p. 1). According to British scholar Peter Hunt, the diversity of texts and the variety of responses to them is one of the great challenges of children's literature (2001, p. 2). Nevertheless, if we use the basic definition "books for child readers", children's literature has existed in some form for a long time. It has a large cultural influence, existing in different languages and cultures, and varying in genre. Perhaps surprisingly, it is therefore more complex to discuss than other types of literature. It is this diversity that makes it hard to find a suitable wide spread term. Hunt states that if using the most accurate term, "texts for children", all of the three words have to be highly flexible (2001, p. 3). This is because *texts* can mean any form of communication, which, as mentioned, means that there is a lack of generic clarity. That a text is *for* children may be acknowledged by the author, and correctly or incorrectly assumed by the publisher, the parents, or the children themselves. Hunt claims that in this context, none of these groups are reliable. He also finds it problematic that the word *children* is used to construct a homogeneous group. The circumstances of a child's life can vary greatly, even within a single society. Grenby also agrees with this, as he states: "the child of children's literature has been subject of much debate" (2012, p. 10).

It is generally accepted that written works for children have existed for several centuries. Chronologies and overviews of the earliest children's literature tend to start in the seventeenth century, but some traces are found as far back as the fifteenth century, or even earlier. In the years that followed, literature aimed at children steadily grew in number, before it took off in the nineteenth century. "The Golden Age" is a term which is sometimes applied to the period beginning with the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 and lasting until the early 1920s (Grenby, 2014, p. 237). In this period, a great deal of innovative, successful and enduring children's literature was published in Britain.

This thesis will begin by establishing a broad working definition of the purpose and function of children's literature. Children's literature is popularly thought of as escapist and entertaining. It is even meant to be fun. However, in the past it was just as often didactic, and frequently used to teach both literacy (style, vocabulary, grammar and spelling) and codes of behavior and belief. Even though this thesis will argue that children's literature has always had a social function, it will also contend that the nature of this function in English-speaking countries has changed in tandem with the evolution of society. Issues relating to religion, class, ideology and thus naturally also history, will be touched upon. My intention is to provide a brief overview of American children's literature and then to trace a development from a time when children's literature was used to teach religious and moral lessons, to a present-day focus on class and family, but also ideology.

This historical background is important as a preamble to my analysis of a contemporary children's novel, Eugene Yelchin's (1956-) *Breaking Stalin's Nose* (2011). The novel has won several awards, among others the Newberry Honor Award in 2012¹. Yelchin was born in the Soviet Union in 1956 and moved to the United States in 1983, towards the end of the Cold War. He has now lived in the United States for over 30 years, and *Breaking Stalin's Nose* was his first novel for children. Yelchin is also an artist, and illustrated the novel himself. The book, which is overtly anti-communist, follows the story of a 10-year-old boy in Moscow during the Stalinist regime. It was written in English and translated into several languages. When it was proposed that it be translated into Russian, Yelchin decided to rewrite it himself, to avoid his message being "lost in translation" (Lushchevska, 2013). The novel caused controversy in Russia, where it was among the first to address the issue of Stalinism for young readers. Class affiliation and ideology are thus significant aspects of this book for children.

When speaking of ideology in this thesis I will use the same definition Peter Hollindale follows in his article *Ideology and the Children's Book* (1988), which is taken from the Oxford English Dictionary:

A systematic scheme of ideas, usu. relating to politics or society, or to the conduct of a class or group, and regarded as justifying actions, esp. one that is held implicitly or adopted as a whole and maintained regardless of the course of events
(Hollindale, 1988, p. 19).

¹ The Newbery Medal is awarded annually by the *Association for Library Service to Children* to the most distinguished American children's book published the previous year. Founded in 1922, the Newbery Award became the first children's book award in the world. Each year, a few selections of books are chosen as "runner-ups" and referred to as Newbery Honor books.

2. Thesis statement

This thesis will establish that books for children in the seventeenth and eighteenth century were clearly religious and moral. Besides teaching literacy, they taught lessons about the importance of Christianity and obedience to one's elders and betters. Gradually over the course of the nineteenth century, however, fictional texts for children became more sophisticated and nuanced. Some books trained young girls in particular how to prepare for a fuller part in society, and how to deal with secular problems as well as advancing religious ideals. In the twentieth century, Christianity could still influence children's books, but the messages were less obvious.

In attempting to tease out the purpose of Yelchin's book, I will begin with an overview of American children's literature in Chapter 1, before analyzing *Breaking Stalin's Nose* in Chapter 2. How does ideology manifest itself in more recent children's literature, and what does Yelchin do that is similar or different from historical children's literature? I would also like to find out what is presented in opposition to communism, and what the purposes of children's literature are in the past, and today? How do children's books deal with such "adult" themes as history and class?

In addition to looking at some of the contexts of *Breaking Stalin's Nose*, I will also look at the generic aspects of the book, to explore how the style and illustrations, however personal and unique, conform to or differ from the formal tradition of children's literature. Finally, the book's reception in the US will be analyzed. What did critics and reviewers say about the book, and can this be related to America's sense of its own role as the flagship of democracy? The book might be seen as liberal, but can also be taken as conservative, since to be anti-communist is often a starting point for conservative groups in the United States. Can a book's meaning depend a great deal on when and where it is read?

CHAPTER 1: The development of children's literature in America

1.1 The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

Seth Lerer once stated distinctly in his *Reader's History* that “ever since there were children, there has been children's literature” (Grenby, 2012, p. 2), while others have convincingly shown that literature for children existed in ancient Egypt, Hellenic Greece, classical Rome and medieval Europe. Grenby states, “these findings are fascinating and important, but to say that children have consumed literature for just as long as any other section of the population is surely something of a truism” (2012, p. 3). Young people in Shakespeare's time undoubtedly heard and read stories, but there is no evidence that either producers or consumers understood this as a distinct genre for the use of the young. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century Britain, books started to be printed specifically for children, and the United States followed only a few steps behind.

Children's literature in English on the continent of America can be said to begin shortly after the establishment of the first printing press around 1649 (Lause, 1991, p. 5). A key event in this early history of children's reading was the arrival of Puritan settlers in New England. Anne Scott MacLeod argues that

Although they were hardly the only settlers in a vast new land, the circumstances of their coming, the nature of their settlements, and the attitudes brought with them had influence beyond their numbers on early American cultural history and on the development of an American literature for children (1995, p. 102).

As Protestants, they relied on the Bible for guidance and emphasized an individual relationship between themselves and their God. However, they also looked to their children to embrace their convictions and carry them forward into the next generation. Their children read and learned, both from books and parents, the central tenets of Puritan theology. Much of their society thus depended on children's learning, e.g. the survival of their purified church, and the errand into the wilderness. MacLeod quotes how Cotton Mather instructed parents to “Help their Understandings, by breaking every Answer of the Catechism into little Parcels by Questions, whereto YES, or NO, or one word or two, shall be all the Answers” (1995, p. 103). Hence, the Puritans wrote for children.

The pieces written for children in the seventeenth century were not for entertainment at all: they were meant entirely for instruction (MacLeod, 1995, p. 103). Thus, the goal of education played a big part in what was written. Most famous of all seventeenth century

books for American children was *The New England Primer*². It was first published in the 1680s, and continued to appear in other versions and editions in the following century. It first presents all the letters in the alphabet, and then a list of words with different amounts of syllables. The primer also presents the alphabet with a rhyme and a picture for every letter, and this is perhaps the feature that most people associate with this work. Even though it was one of the earliest texts printed for children, Puritans acknowledged that a book for children could not be the same as one for adults. The illustrations helped the learning process by giving the children something visual to connect the rhymes to. In 1647, the Massachusetts Bay Colony lawmakers passed an ordinance that declared that one of Satan's chief strategies was to "keep men from the knowledge of the scriptures", and they ordered each town with more than fifty households to provide a teacher to instruct the children (Baym, Doria & Reidhead, 2012, p. 361). The main point was to get children away from the Devil and closer to God³. In one of the earliest version, the letter A is explained in the following way: "In Adams fall, We sin-ned all" (Harris, 1702), while J is represented: "Sweet Jesus he, Dyd on a tree" (Harris, 1702). These rhymes, then, promote biblical teachings.

One might think that the earliest versions of *The New England Primer* showed the greatest degree of influence by Christianity. However, this was not always the case. As mentioned, the decades following its first publication brought many new editions of *The New England Primer*. As a result, some changes were introduced. In an early version from 1725, the letter C is explained like this: "The Cat doth play, and after slay" (Harris, 1725). It does not have the same Christian emphasis as the previous examples. It is more difficult to easily understand the moral; the suggestion may be that nature is not easy to explain or understand. In the version from 1777, the rhyme with the cat is replaced with "Christ crucify'd, For sinners dy'd" (Harris, 1777). The integration of more religion into the rhyme about 50 years later is also found among other letters. In a 1725 edition, the letters M and N are explained as: "Moon gives light, in time of night" (Harris, 1725) and "Nightingales sing, in time of spring" (Harris, 1725). The moon and nightingales are replaced by Moses and Noah in the 1777 version: "Moses was he, Who Israel's Hoft Led thro' the Sea" (Harris, 1777) and "Noah did view, the old world & new" (Harris, 1777). These more recent rhymes clearly have

² Generally credited to Benjamin Harris.

³ The following excerpts from *The New England Primer* are taken from scanned images of the original works, available at these sites:

<https://archive.org/details/newenglandprimer00west> (1777) and

<https://archive.org/stream/newenglandprimer00fordiala#page/n103/mode/2up> (1702 and 1725). Page numbers are not available. The analysis is my own.

biblical motifs, dealing with two of the most well known biblical figures. Between 1725 and 1777 the character B also goes through a change from “This book attend, thy life to mend” (Harris, 1725) to “Heaven to find, The Bible Mind” (Harris, 1777). Both obviously deal with the same book, but later in the eighteenth century, publishers choose to emphasize that it was the Bible.

In the seventeenth century, the English clergyman John Cotton, who later moved to the American colonies, wrote a prominent text for children. The earliest extant American edition of Cotton’s work for children was printed in 1656 and has only survived in one badly defective copy⁴. It is called *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes in Either England: Drawn Out of the Breasts of Both Testaments for their Soul’s Nourishment*, and is further proof of the religious purpose books for children had in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The text is structured as a catechism, a long list of questions and answer. This format, as mentioned earlier, was intended to help children memorize doctrine. The text rehearses, for instance, the role of the church, sin and law, the Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and so on. During its 13 pages, 64 questions and answers are listed. The 1646 version starts with the question and answer:⁵ “Q. What hath God done for you? A. God hath made me, (a) He keepeth me, and He can save me” (Cotton, 1646, p. 1). The second and third phrases continue as following: “Q. Who is God? A. God is a Spirit of (b) himself and for himself”; “Q. How many gods be there? A. There is but one God in three Persons, (c) the Father, the Sonne, and the Holy Ghost” (Cotton, 1646, p. 1). The letters of the alphabet are also inserted into each question and answer. When the entire alphabet has been gone through, it starts over again and the letter A is again used after the Z: “Quest. What is the seventh Commandement? Answ. Thou shalt not commit (z) Adultery. Quest. What is the sinne here forbidden? Answ. To defile ourselves or others (a) with unclean lusts” (Cotton, 1646, p. 5). The *Milk for Babes* is thus thoroughly indoctrinating, using biblical passages to teach the children about social codes of behavior. Its shorter passages are clearly designed with young people in mind. The Bible is a very long and complicated text, and is naturally taught in a more simple way when reduced into questions and answers. Around 203 biblical passages are referred to during the 64 questions and answers, but there are no illustrations in this early version from 1646.

⁴ The text was originally printed in London in 1646.

⁵ The following excerpts from *Milk for Babes* are taken from scanned images of the original work, available at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=etas>. The analysis is my own.

Since the Puritans mostly came from England, they brought many English books of children's literature with them. One example is *A Token for Children* (1672) by James Janeway, which I will discuss shortly. However, it is important to remember that the term children's literature was not yet in use (Grenby, 2012, p. 3). According to most historians, a recognizably modern children's literature was not invented until the middle of the eighteenth century. Even though children read texts like *A Token for Children*, they were also exposed to other books that were intended for all ages. The works of John Bunyan and Isaac Watts were read, sometimes out loud in family settings by both young and old, and continued to attract new audiences, "for old titles continued in print, often going through multiple editions, and new ones were commissioned" (Grenby, 2012, p. 93). Inscriptions also show that the books were owned and used by different generations. However, these early books for children were seldom mentioned in memoirs, diaries etc. (Grenby, 2012, p. 93).

Janeway's *A Token for Children* consists of 13 "examples", working as chapters, telling personal stories about different children and youths. Religion plays an important role in each of them. The subtitle is "being an exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary Lives and joyful Deaths, of several young children". The text is thus a collection of short sketches of historical children. James Janeway was open about how he chose to use strong characters, explaining how he wanted his readers to react. He asked the children how they were affected by reading his book. He also asked whether they had shed a tear, and if they had been on their knees and begged that God would make them like those blessed children in the text (Grenby, 2012, p. 263). Thus, the purpose of the text is clear, as is the feelings Janeway hoped the children would be left with after reading his work.

Cotton Mather liked Janeway's text so much, that he wrote his own version for American children and called it *A Token for the Children of New England*. Here, he added his own texts to the work already written by Janeway⁶. In a version from 1795, the front page states that the edition has: "... added A Token for the Children of New England, or, some examples of Children, in whom the fear of God was remarkably budding before they died; in several parts of New-England" (Janeway & Mather, 1795, p. 1). The first page of Mather's part of this version goes as follows:

If the children of Newengland with an early piety, set themselves to know and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of their fathers, they will be condemned, not only by the examples of pious children in other parts of the world, the published and printed

⁶ The following excerpts from *A Token for Children of New England* are taken from scanned images of the original work, available at: <https://archive.org/details/tokenforchi00janeiala>. The analysis is my own.

accounts whereof have been brought over hither; but there have been exemplary children in the midst of New England itself, that will rise up against them for their condemnation (Janeway & Mather, 1795, pp. 142-143).

Mather specifically addresses himself to the children of New England, enabling them to more closely relate to the text at a personal and local level than they would to an imported text just describing British children. This version for New Englanders presents the readers with the stories of several children, their ages varying from 5 to 20 years old. Generally, their relationship to God is described, and also the children's own thoughts about God. What unites them is that all the children have died: some of the passages speak thoroughly of the child's illness. As noted, what also makes these stories similar to each other is that they all describe children from America, which makes it closer to the child reader's home. An example of this is seen in Mather's first passage: "Little more than thirteen was John Clap of Scituate, when he died; but it might very truly be said of him, that while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of his father" (Janeway & Mather, 1795, p. 145). Scituate is a coast town in the state of Massachusetts. The following describes a 19 year old boy from Salem: "He was one, who used an extraordinary diligence to obtain skill in the several arts that make an accomplished scholar; but he was more diligent in his endeavors to become an experienced Christian" (Janeway & Mather, 1795, p. 156). The purpose of these passages is clearly to honor the children that have died at a young age. All of the stories provide positive descriptions of how dedicated they were to their Christian faith, or how Christianity helped them. Even though it uses a different format than John Cotton's *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes*, the message is just as clear: this world is temporary, life is short, and it is important to think about God early in order to save your soul. In a way, these are early self-help books: children are encouraged to get to know God directly. Puritans did not let children die without knowing about salvation, it would have been cruelty to not let them know about this consolation.

In 1783, Noah Webster first published *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*. Its successor, which will be discussed in section 1.2, turned out to play a changing role in the nature of children's literature. Nonetheless, as seen above, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had a focus on religious didacticism in children's books. Throughout the eighteenth century, the most obvious example of a book shared by children and adults is the Bible. However, most people agreed that children should not read the Bible *en bloc* (all together in one piece). John Locke (1632-1704) instead suggested *Aesop's Fables* as an alternative; though he was not against children reading Scripture, he did not think they should

do so chapter by chapter (Grenby, 2012, p. 99). By the end of the eighteenth century, objections to the Bible were more likely to be based on religious concerns. Ellenor Fenn (1743-1813) considered the Bible “too sacred” for children “to tumble about”. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), moreover, worried that too early an exposure to the Bible would make religion seem a task, not a “source of the most exalted satisfaction” (Grenby, 2012, p. 99).

In the seventeenth century and for much of the eighteenth, literacy was a two-step process. This meant that reading was learned at home, and writing at school. Boys were more likely to be sent to school, so girls who could read could not necessarily write. In the late eighteenth century, girls gained greater access to schooling, and literacy levels among women rose. This created a new class of readers, which later had a major influence on nineteenth century publishing in America, including the market for children (MacLeod, 1995, p. 104). The eighteenth century saw a gradual shift away from the spiritual intensity of Puritan children’s writings, toward a more generalized moralism (MacLeod, 1995, p.106). Maria Edgeworth is seen as an important transitional writer, because she composed stories about children (including *The Parent’s Assistant*, 1796), which featured moralizing, but also credible characters who were more than stock figures. Americans still primarily wanted books for instruction, but were prepared to accept a moderate flavoring of fictional entertainment for the sake of more successful instruction. After the American War of Independence (1775-1783), in addition to the War of 1812, a wave of nationalism in the United States made publishers encourage American authors to write for American children. Devoted to heroism and patriotism, citizens of the newborn country saw its culture progress on both the individual and social level. Bolt and Lee states, when discussing the 1830s: “Where the Puritan sermon had been the chief entertainment, now the public lecture and the political speech became prime attractions for godly audiences...” (1989, p. 87). There was a change in the landscape of literary content.

Thus, as the nineteenth century progressed, all was ready for gradual changes in American children’s literature. People started asking questions about use of the Bible as literature for children, a new class of readers arose, and nationalism ascended, which arranged for more American authors. Moreover, everyday life in America changed. The difference was impossible not to notice, especially after the Civil War. The United States saw its industrial development grow throughout the nineteenth century. In addition to this, society changed on nearly every level, such as in regards to education, class and household arrangements. Finally, at least for some classes, a universal education system was developed.

1.2 The nineteenth and twentieth centuries

Throughout the eighteenth century there was significant import of literature, which continued into the nineteenth century. As there was no International Copyright Act, a great deal of literature was still imported from England. Emory Elliott states that the works of authors like Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding and Jonathan Swift “circulated in cheap editions in the colonies since there were not yet copyright laws and American printers did not pay English writers royalties” (2002, p. 167). In the decades following American independence, however, a growing population, coupled with improved literacy, transport and technology, led to a rising demand for American materials - including children’s books. In the early nineteenth century Noah Webster released the *Blue-Backed Speller*, as the 1829 edition was called (the original version was the first part of *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language* published in 1783). Webster believed that “his instructional textbook would serve to galvanize and unify Americans, to implant, in the minds of American youth, the principles of virtue and liberty” (Grenby & Immel, 2009, 137). The title was often changed over the many editions, sometimes going under *The American Spelling Book* and *The Elementary Spelling Book*. Colloquially, however, it was referred to as the *Blue-Back Speller* because of its color.

Webster wanted words like *humour* and *honour* to be spelled *humor* and *honor* and to teach students to read through the sounds of letters. Three skills in particular were in focus: to divide words into syllables, to pronounce words properly and to spell correctly. *The Blue-Backed Speller* also contained fables. An 1809 version of *The American Spelling Book* presents the following fable about “The country Maid and her Milk pail”⁷:

A country Maid was walking very deliberately with a pail of milk upon her head, when she fell into the following train of reflections: The money for which I shall sell this milk, will enable me to increase my stock of eggs to three hundred. These eggs, allowing for what may prove addle, and may be destroyed by vermin, will produce at least two hundred and fifty chickens (Webster, 1809, p. 85).

Anyone familiar with Aesop’s fables will know that the girl ends up spilling all of her milk, and the moral is not to count your chickens before they are hatched. Webster thus drew on fables to help teach spelling and reading. The religious motif is not as present in this speller as in earlier texts. This does not mean that there is no mention of God; typical of 19th century Christian beliefs, education was seen as a project of self-improvement. However, the focus

⁷ The following excerpt from *The American Spelling Book* is taken from a scanned image of the original work, available at: <https://archive.org/details/americanspelling00webs>. The analysis is my own.

was on vocabulary and spelling. A great deal of the pages are filled with letters and syllables. Webster is generally credited with causing a shift from religious to political purposes in educational texts, as he emphasized what was unique about the English language in America.

As mentioned, imports were still big business. Another book popular in America was John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a Christian allegory first published in England in 1678. By 1830, fifty different editions of the book had been published in America (MacLeod, 1995, p. 104). It was widely read by American children, especially in the nineteenth century, because it was so obviously allegorical that even young readers could follow its meaning (MacLeod, 1995, p. 23). Considered one of the most significant works in English literature, it was embraced for its strong, but simple story and memorable allegorical characters (MacLeod, 1995, p. 104). Even though it was first written and published in the seventeenth century, it continued to be popular in nineteenth century America. Although the importance of Christianity began to diminish in children's fiction, it did not disappear completely. The book is divided into two parts, the first containing ten "stages", and the second eight "stages". Here is an excerpt from a conversation between Christian and Pliable⁸:

Christian: Nay, but do thou come with thy neighbor Pliable; there are such things to be had which I spoke of, and many more glories besides. If you believe not me, read here in this book, and for the truth of what is expressed therein, behold, all is confirmed by the blood of him that made it. Heb. 9: 17-21.

Pliable: Well, neighbor Obstinate, said Pliable, I begin to come to a point, I intend to go along with this good man, and to cast in my love with him: but, my good companion, do you know the way to this desired place?

Christian: I am directed by a man whose name is Evangelist, to speed me to a little gate that is before us, where we shall receive instructions about the way.

Pliable: Come then, good neighbor, let us be going. Then they went both together. (Bunyan, 1678, p. 10)

This was a new way of providing people with information. The religious motif was put into a context and presented as part of a narrative to a greater extent than in previous examples. A phrase about blood from *Epistle to the Hebrews* is paraphrased rather than quoted, and spoken by a character invented for the book. Furthermore, sentences like "then they went both together" help create a narrative story. Perhaps this format is why children also liked to read it. *The Pilgrim's Progress* was, as mentioned, imported, but this was a period where also American writers started to shine.

⁸ The following excerpt from *The Pilgrim's Progress* is taken from a scanned image of the original work, available at: <http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/pilgrim%20progress.pdf>. The analysis is my own.

From the mid-nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, other educational works became popular. Whilst *The New England Primer* was clearly religious, and the *Blue-Back Speller* more political, *McGuffey's Readers* had a cultural sense to them. A series of primers taught spelling and reading, as well as history, table manners and proper behavior. McGuffey marked “the change from ‘speller’ to ‘reader’ as the term used to identify an introductory textbook of literacy instruction” (Grenby & Immel, 2009, p. 137). He promoted American culture, for example by featuring the then-developing genre of American poetry (Grenby, 2009, p.138). This resulted in generations of school children across America recited poems written by American authors. This lasted until the mid-twentieth century, when other readers came to dominate literacy instruction. As in many other works for children, McGuffey used illustrations of both animals and children to make his works suitable for children to read.

Early in the 1820s, stories of willful children learning the value of obedience started to flourish in American presses (McLeod, 1995, p.107). As did chronicles of careless children learning to be careful, or selfish children learning to live for others. Some aspects differentiated them from British texts, according to MacLeod: “Few servants lived in them, and if class distinctions had by no means disappeared, there was much democratic insistence on the worthiness of every level of birth and work” (1995, p. 107)⁹. In addition, the children in the stories were identifiably American in characterization: serious, conscientious, self-reflective and independent. Jacob Abbott (1803-1879) achieved popularity, as he wedded the Edgeworthian tradition¹⁰, which Americans enjoyed, to the old Puritan traditions. He published his first story about the character Rollo in 1835, which grew into a series of 14 works including *The Little Scholar Learning to Talk* (1835, later titled *Rollo Learning to Talk*), *Rollo Learning to Read* (1835), *Rollo at Play* (1837), *Rollo at Work* (1838) and *Rollo's Travels* (1839). They follow the character Rollo as he grows. In an 1850 edition of *Rollo Learning to Talk* the following is written in the “Notice to parents” section in front¹¹:

These little talks about pictures are mainly intended to be read by a mother, or by one of the older children, to a little one who is learning to talk.... To the reader, I have three directions to give. 1. Act out all the motions described.... 2. Read distinctly and with all the natural tones, and in the manner of conversation.... 3. Do not confine yourself to what is written (Abbott, 1850, pp. 5-6).

⁹ There were servants in America as well. Some of the first settlers had with them indentured servants. Children in America had therefore acquaintance with the concept.

¹⁰ Maria Edgeworth, see page 9.

¹¹ The two following excerpts are taken from scanned images of the original work, available at: <https://archive.org/details/rollolearningtot00abbo>. The analysis is my own.

This means that even though it was nominally written for children, Abbott's intended audience for this book was in fact toddlers learning to talk. The following excerpt is placed next to an illustration of a rabbit and the headline "The Rabbit":

This is the picture of a rabbit; children sometimes call him bunny. Which do you think is the best name, rabbit or bunny? It is winter. This little rabbit lives in a hole in the ground. He dug the hole with his sharp claws. Do you see his sharp claws? Touch them with your finger (Abbott, 1850, p. 34).

The purpose here was to teach the children new words, and to learn about an animal in what we would now term an interactive way. Christianity was not the main focus, and the little stories in this book are mostly about people and animals. This means that the educational motive was still present, but that Abbott moved away from a purely or overtly religious intention. The emphasis on good morals and behavior were still present as well. An adult instructor follows Rollo at every stage. What differs from Rousseau's *Émile* (1762) for instance, is that in this American version the adult is not a hired tutor, but a parent, relative or at times a schoolteacher (MacLeod, 1995, p. 107). However, the message was the same: all actions had moral connotations or dimensions.

A wider literacy in the nineteenth century quickly created a reading public that was neither as solemn nor as homogeneous as it had been in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (MacLeod, 1995, p. 109). Publishing became many-layered and one aimed to reach a variety of tastes, in addition to different interests and understanding. Periodicals for children came and went, but *The Youth's Companion*, established in 1827, continued up until 1929. During the 1830 and 40s, some periodicals were tied to the American social issues of the time. *The Slave's Friend*, for instance, was an antislavery periodical that lasted for two years.

A great deal of writers characterized their work as entertaining, but never without emphasizing that it was also morally decent. Two books worth mentioning are Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850, considered America's first bestseller) and Samuel Goodrich's *The Runaway* (1836). Warner's text set "a transatlantic pattern for the 'girls' book'" (Hanlon, Keyser and Stahl, 2007, p. 514). Goodrich is considered one of the most successful publishers of children's books before the Civil War. Under the pseudonym Peter Parley he wrote and published several books under the general series title *Peter Parley's Juvenile Tales*. *The Runaway* teaches children moral lessons. The main character, Jane, is told by her mother to stay at home while she is out, and to not leave the house under any

circumstances. Jane does leave the house, and gets lost, but finally returns at dark during the night. Her house is then lost in flames, because a coal had fallen on the floor while she was absent: “Then Jane and her mother were without a home! What a dreadful consequence to follow from a little girl’s obedience!” (Goodrich, 1838, p. 13).¹² Goodrich creates an exciting story, as the girl is lost in the woods and feels scared. But he also teaches children about the dangers of disobedience. A stimulating plot is thus connected with a moral lesson.

Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* was a domestic novel, like all best sellers of the mid-nineteenth century (MacLeod, 1995, p. 125). No novel, however, had ever sold in such numbers prior to this one. It was written and marketed as a novel for adults, but has been read by older children in later years. For instance, it is read by Jo March, a character in Louisa May Alcott’s classic *Little Women* (1868). It had a strong appeal well into the twentieth century.

Changes in the contents of books for children came about slowly. The conventions that dictated the attitudes and purposes remained stable. The standard children’s book before 1850 was “domestic and undramatic, focused on the development of moral characters, rather than on overtly public issues” (MacLeod, 1995, p. 114). Fantasy and imagination were clearly not promoted to the same degree as today.

The aforementioned *Little Women* is another work that had an impact on American children’s literature. It is about four sisters’ lives from childhood into adulthood. It was written for girls, but it differed from previous writings for children. Fetterley states that it became so popular because of its “embodiment of a cultural fantasy of the happy family – the domestic and feminine counterpart to the nostalgia in male American literature....” (2009, p. 23). In an excerpt from *Little Women* in *Crosscurrents of Children’s Literature* (2007) one of the girls is worried about her anger, to which her mother replies that she used to be just like that herself:

I’ve been trying to cure it for forty years, and have only succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo; but I have learned not to show it; and I still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another forty years to do so (Hanlon, Keyser & Stahl, p. 86).

This is very different from the religious materials children read a century earlier. By dealing with issues such as anger, the book appears more open than previous texts (though there is a clear message to control and suppress anger as well, so the book does not entirely abandon moralizing). Montgomery and Watson state that it was “realistic in mode” (2009, p. 14).

¹² Digitalized by Google as e-book. See Goodrich in reference list.

Thacker and Webb argue that the focus is on the women in the family “who live out their Transcendental ideals through their everyday lives and achieve a sense of success and happiness, despite the temporary absence of their father, who has left them to join the forces in the Civil War as a chaplain” (2002, p. 33). By writing a book about a regular American family, Alcott contributed to the patriotic writings that were typical of the period. Peter Hunt points out that Alcott “took some of the key features of contemporary romance (middle class benevolence, the virtuous death, the safely iconoclastic female hero) and blends them with quite complex characterizations and some mild (to the modern eye) feminist thinking” (2001, p. 28). It was the book that the mainstream children’s market had been waiting for (MacLeod, 1995, p. 127). It brought tradition and change together.

The years just after the Civil War produced more, and more distinguished, magazines for children. *Our Young Folks* (1865) and *Riverside Magazine for Young People* (1867) were two of them. The latter is seen as the forerunner of “The Golden Age”. With it came a recognition that young readers should be allowed the freedom to enjoy childhood. It had, unlike most of its predecessors, no didactic purpose, no religious or moral message (Hunt, 1995, p. 230). The young editor Horace Scudder believed in the value of the imagination, and his priority was literary excellence. The *Riverside* lasted for only four years, which tells us that there may not have been enough demand for a quality journal for children. In 1873 the culmination of the creative burst came with the publication of one of the most famous of the magazines, *St. Nicholas*. It differed from the others in its informality. The editor’s warm approach is also considered to be some of the reason for its success (Hunt, 1995, p. 230). It lasted until 1940.

Between the end of the American Civil War, in 1865, and the start of the First World War in 1914, American literature as a whole changed radically, and this was also the case with children’s literature (Hunt, 1995, p. 225). A commercially important literary culture was established. As mentioned, Britain had a Golden Age of children’s literature. In many ways, America had one as well in the aforementioned inter-war period, but with different characteristics. The threads of the past were drawn together on both sides of the Atlantic, but in America the “domestic” tale and the boys’ books had a far more independent tone (Hunt, 1995, p. 225). In addition, the division between children’s books and adult literature was much finer. Series books (as mentioned with the *Rollo* series and *Peter Parley’s Juvenile Tales*) flourished. The USA started to become urbanized. In 1920 the population living in cities passed 50 per cent for the first time (Hunt, 1995, p. 226). Even the fact that more people had access to electric lighting had an impact on the reading habits. Although the USA

was becoming a multi-cultural, international power, “it was not until 1894 that the number of American-produced children’s books outnumbered European imports” (Hunt, 1995, p. 226). According to Peter Hunt (1995) fantasy, in the late nineteenth century, did not make such a strong appeal to American readers as British: “When the *Nation* reviewed *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in December 1866 it was the humor, the puns and word-play that were praised (qualities that had not been much noticed by English reviewers)” (p. 227).

Lyman Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), however, had a huge appeal for the children of America. A new form of fantasy emerged with this book. The drawings were also thought to be an essential part of the book’s success, as was its setting in the magical kingdom of Oz. Only a few decades earlier, this type of narrative was not to be found in American children’s literature. Not only are the land and setting fictitious: characters melt, a scarecrow wants a brain, munchkins are a distinct people, and one of the witches has a telescopic eye. There are few resemblances to the texts children read a century earlier. It encourages children to look within themselves for strength and to follow their dreams. Though critics did not praise it at the time, the story has sustained interest and as late as 2013 it was adapted by Disney into the movie *Oz the Great and Powerful*.

Since the Second World War, the traditions of American and British children’s literature have tended to gradually converge, even though cultural colonization by the USA has been more evident (Hollindale & Sutherland, 1995, p. 252). If fantasy in Britain on a general basis involved “secondary worlds”, in the USA it was often rooted in the pragmatic form of science fiction. Additionally, in the USA the tradition of historical realism was continued by revisionist history and a new growth of social realism (Hollindale & Sutherland, 1995, p. 252). This period also saw children’s books concerning various ethnic groups: Margeurite de Angeli’s *Bright April* (1956), for instance, was one of the earliest books to focus on the problems an African American child might have to deal with.

E. B. White’s post-war book *Stuart Little* also evoked mixed response at the time of its publication in 1945. It is about a talking mouse, and some adults were disturbed by the idea of a mouse being born to human parents (Hollindale and Sutherland, 1995, p. 288). *Charlotte’s Web* (1952) however, is considered White’s classic.¹³ It is an ambiguous text that moves from realism to fantasy to morality tale. Animals such as a pig and a spider talk to each other. Personification, which gives a thing or an animal human attributes, is normal in fantasy. This literary device helps us relate actions of inanimate objects to our own emotions.

¹³ Newberry Honor book, 1953.

“My name,” said the spider, “is Charlotte.”
“Charlotte what?” asked Wilbur, eagerly.
“Charlotte A. Cavatica. But just call me Charlotte.”
“I think you’re beautiful,” said Wilbur.
“Well, I *am* pretty,” replied Charlotte. “There’s no denying that. Almost all spiders are rather nice-looking. I am not as flashy as some, but I’ll do.” (White, 1993, p. 36)

Crucial to the book’s success is that the characters have distinctive personalities: Charlotte is vain for instance, while Wilbur is sincere and enthusiastic. There is humor too, because few people find spiders attractive. The very idea of a talking spider is imaginative as well.

Hollindale and Sutherland state that the period after the Second World War in USA was colored by one type of children’s literature in particular:

A glance at the list of Newbery prize-winners between 1945 and 1970 shows how strong the tradition of historical writing was in the USA. No less than ten were historical novels (and it might be useful to observe at this point that of the others, eleven had broadly “realistic” settings and themes); nearly half the winners were concerned with multi-cultural issues (1995, p. 264).

After the Second World War in particular, authors of children’s literature used history as a theme. In the period of 25 years mentioned above, only four Newbery winners were neither historical nor realistic. For instance, *The Door in the Wall* (the 1950 winner) is set in England during the Middle Ages, while *Rifles for Watie* (the 1958 winner) is about the American Civil War. In 1988, *Lincoln: A Photobiography* won, the first non-fiction book to do so in 30 years. Several of the winning books from this post-war period have African American or Hispanic American characters, and are often set in Africa, South-America and Spain. The civil rights movement in the 1950 and 60s America had an impact on the world of children’s books as well. “Black pride” brought awareness about the lack of books for and about African American children (Watkins & Sutherland, 1995, p. 293). According to Robert Leeson, writers of historical fiction may look back at the past for different motives: “one is to seek consciously or unconsciously the stability that is not ours today. The other is to seek the movement and development then which is the essence of our *now*” (Watkins & Sutherland, 1995, p. 295). Writing about the past opens up lines of communication with the present – and books about spiders teach children about other ways of seeing the world.

In the last 25 years, American children’s literature has seen more realism and more attention to social and political issues. However, some writers have combined elements of realism and fantasy and there has also been a continuing thread of fantasy itself, some of it serious, some comic (Watkins, 1995, p. 304). In the early 1990s, 6000 juvenile titles were published each year (Watkins & Sutherland, 1995, p. 319). Today, there is a wider audience

for children's books than ever before. There are all sorts of opinions and messages in literature directed at children. Looking at the Newbery winners over the last five years, diversity and variety is evident. The 2015 winner is told entirely in verse and deals with two African American twin brothers who are drifting apart from each other (*The Crossover*); the 2014 winner is about a superhero squirrel (*Flora & Ulysses*); the winner of 2013 tells of a gorilla who lives in a cage at a mall (*The One and Only Ivan*); and the 2012 winner is historical, political and autobiographical (*Dead End in Norvelt*).

All things considered, times have clearly changed in children literature. As shown above the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries taught the necessities of religious faith and salvation. The purpose was first to teach about Christianity, and then to teach moral lessons. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, children's literature changed. Improvements in printing and transport meant that more books could be produced, and more cheaply. Journals and magazines appeared for children and families. Two significant wars made the American people more patriotic, which opened up for more books by American authors on American subjects. Religion no longer played the main part in children's literature, but the books were still educational. This development can be seen in the educational readers: *The New England Primer* was religious, Webster's *Blue-Backed Speller* was more political, while *McGuffey's Readers* had a more obvious cultural aspect. In the late nineteenth century, the element of fantasy became more important, while in the period after the Second World War, historical novels with more political messages were popular. Today, children's literature in the USA is a mixture of all sorts of genres. Children still read literature, but the lessons they learn are much more secular and varied. Section 1.3 and 1.4 will introduce topics that are significant for the analysis in Chapter 2.

1.3 The Family and the School

Both families and schools have had a constant presence in children's literature, and for many of the same reasons. It is natural that the two places children tend to spend most time in their first years are given a lot of space in children's literature¹⁴.

¹⁴ Families have at times been political, exhibited as the best foundation of empire, or as a defense against attack from the growing power of the state. Sometimes, families have been represented as constrictive. However, the majority of children's literature has endorsed the relationship between siblings, parents and children, as well as ancestors and descendants, as more liberating than limiting (Grenby, 2014, pp. 139-140).

As society has changed, its expectations for both families and children have changed as well. Along with this change, the depiction of families in literature has also changed. There has been a movement toward more intimate family groups, which gathered speed in the eighteenth century (Reynolds, 2009, p. 193). About the same time, commercial publication for children started to grow. Some early books focused on child characters' relations within families that consisted only of parents and siblings. However, attitudes to such families vary a great deal, and there are conflicting views on how children should behave and act to make them effective adults (Reynolds, 2009, p. 193). This pattern is typical for what would later be seen in children's books: a resolute loyalty to the idea of the nuclear family, but also a series of challenges and adjustments to it. Early children's books, on the other hand, included

both tales that point to the importance of cultivating independence and entrepreneurial skills in the young by depriving them of their families (so families are viewed as dispensable and potentially enfeebling), and those that stress the importance not only of having a family, but also of high levels of parental intervention intended to create self-controlled individuals dedicated to the principles of ratiocination and self-improvement (Reynolds, 2009, p. 194).

The earliest texts therefore had mixed messages concerning family life. Today, it is clear from children's literature, such as the *Harry Potter* books, that children can thrive without a conventional family. But this was also suggested as early as in 1765: *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*, by John Newbery, tells the story of an orphan who ends up happy. Even though stories like these were many in number, loving and caring families dominated. According to Reynolds, "more common by far are stories in which the family makes up the child's world" (2009, p. 195). Parents were also given parental instructions in literature. Maria Edgeworth, who greatly influenced American authors, wrote *The Parent's Assistant*. It focuses on the children learning, but that they *do* learn is shown to be a result of good parenting. According to Reynolds, the role of the child in the family started to shift in the nineteenth century. The need to pay attention to children's emotional needs and social potential became important (2009, p. 196). She also states that exemplary families tended to be middle class even if they lived in reduced financial circumstances. Problem parents belonged either to the upper class, who failed to value their children, or to the dissolute poor, who failed to provide for them (2009, p. 196). An example of a middle class family is the March Family in Alcott's *Little Women*. And in *A Token for Children* "the pious child protagonists typically expire surrounded by a close and supportive unit of siblings, parents and relatives" (Grenby, 2014, p. 117).

The paradox of the family story genre is, according to Grenby, that it “probably includes more accounts of family disordering than family coherence” (2014, p. 119). Parents and children are separated from one another by death, divorce, evacuation, flight, abandonment or some other mechanism. In *Little Women*, this is the case with the father: he leaves because of military service. In *The Runaway*, the girl is separated from her mother because, as the name suggests, she runs away, though they are eventually reunited. Grenby states that “the absence of one or more parents serves to endorse the importance of family” (2014, p. 119). Dorothy, the protagonist of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, is an orphan living with her aunt and uncle. In *The Wide, Wide World*, an aunt half-heartedly brings up an orphaned girl. The mother is ill and has to leave her child with an almost unknown relative. Many see *Little Women* as the first example of the family story. In the *Rollo* series, an adult always follows the character Rollo around, and this emphasizes the importance of support by parents or other adults in a child’s life.

The classic tradition of telling “the school story” to children seems deeply rooted in British culture (Grenby, 2014, p. 87), at least the tradition of narratives in which the school features almost as a character itself, and in which children fit happily into their school. During the last century, however, many of the most celebrated school stories have appeared in the USA. Examples range from *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941) to the *Sweet Valley High* series (1983-2003).

In the classic school narratives the story revolves around issues of authority and obedience, which often lie at the heart of the school life. “Superficially, the teachers wield the power and the pupils are required to obey, generally coerced by the threat of severe punishment. But in fact, children challenge this authority at every turn” (Grenby, 2014, p. 95). Gillian Avery points out that in nineteenth century novels, this is often because of the class divide, the children coming from upper orders recognizing that teachers are their social inferiors (Grenby, 2014, p. 95). Beyond this, a more enduring complicity often exists. Hunt adds that “school remains an apparently natural and frequent setting for children’s books, some of which deliberately deconstruct the genre. (2001, p. 302).

After the Second World War, some changes took place, according to Hollindale and Sutherland: “Like the historical novel, the school story changed and evolved in the period. It also contracted, occupying a smaller share of the popular market” (1995, p. 277). Among many writers there was a growing impatience with the gulf between fictional schools and the actual lives of home and day school lived by the vast majority of children (Hollindale & Sutherland, 1995, p. 278). Grenby states that the great longevity of the school story is due to

its adaptability: “it has successfully combined with other genres ... and has absorbed and responded to changing social conditions (2014, p. 113).

1.4 Illustrations

As with most aspects of children’s literature, illustrations have an extreme variety. They can range from books where the occasional illustrations are purely ornamented, to fully illustrated book, picture books, pop-up books, and so forth. Grenby states that some critics refuse to differentiate between words and images, and analyze both as one unit. However, “it is surely clear that there are substantial differences between the ways pictures and words work. Words are generally invisible, so to speak” (Grenby, 2014, p 200). Pictures, however, are designed to be both arresting and memorable. They leave lasting impressions. “Pictures also affect the way in which readers (and writers) relate to their books. They often seem to draw attention to the book’s materiality: its size and shape, the way it is manufactured perhaps, and the way its content has been formatted” (Grenby, 2014, p. 200).

Lewis Carroll’s famous character Alice from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* clearly expressed to the readers what she thought about illustrations: “‘And what is the use of a book’, though Alice, ‘without pictures or conversations?’” (Carroll, 1971, p. 7). Her question, proposed as early as 1865, shows what children at the time expected of literature meant for them. Grenby (2014) argues that “from the end of the eighteenth century children’s books illustrations began to be taken more seriously” (p. 202). Before this, they were mostly woodcuts. Copperplate engravings started to expand in late eighteenth century, before wood engraving played a significant role for the development of children’s literature illustrations. In the eighteenth century these illustrations were often there to fill up space. Increasingly, however, complementarity and interpretation were in focus. John Vernon Lord argues that:

The main function of the children’s book illustrator is usually to represent, interpret and heighten the meaning of a text (in a complimentary way) by means of pictures, with the aim of bringing a story to life as a complete entity and experience for the child.... Illustrations and words in a book must work together. (2007, p. 73)

Even though *The New England Primer* was illustrated, this was relatively rare for its time. However, even at this early point, children were understood to like and learn from pictures. While children’s books had been decorated with engravings and woodcuts for several centuries, it was not, according to Hanlon et al., until the 1880s in England that illustrations started to assume the importance they have today (2007, p. 707). L. F. Baum and W. W. Denslow (the illustrator of *The Wizard of Oz*) were innovative because Baum’s fantasy

adventure was mixed with Denslow's original style of illustration. Garth Williams, who illustrated *Charlotte's Web*, was in turn inspired by E. B. White's views on animal fantasy.

Perry Nodelman states that "words cannot communicate descriptive information as easily as pictures can" (Hanlon et al., 2007, p. 719). It can be argued that the pleasure of reading fiction is to be able to use your own imagination to create visual images. However, there is no doubt that illustrations can convey information that words cannot. Nodelman also suggests that there are two sorts of information that are better conveyed by pictures: "what *type* of object is implied by words and which particular *one* of that type is being referred to" (Hanlon et al. 2007, 719). In the different editions of *The New England Primer*, the illustrations show what *type* of cat the text refers to. Also, by giving an illustration of a rabbit, children reading *Rollo learning to talk* will know exactly what a rabbit looks like. The character of Oz from Baum's classic is an example of a character who has been illustrated numerous ways throughout the years. People's image of him is clearly affected by the illustrated version they saw as children. But it is not only entertainment and the appeal of the visual that has led to an increase in illustrated materials of children reading today. Again, technological and industrial innovations, such as in color separation, have also driven the market, leading to great improvements in in the quality of illustrations in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Watkins & Sutherland, 1995, p. 310). Today, most illustrations in children's books are colored.

CHAPTER 2: *Breaking Stalin's Nose*

Breaking Stalin's Nose is a children's novel published in 2011. According to the ALSC's (Association for Library Service to Children) Notable Children's Books Committee manual, the following three categories describe the readers of children's literature: younger readers are classified as belonging to preschool-grade 2 (up to age 7); middle readers belong to grades 3-5 (ages 8-10), and older readers are in grades 6-8 (ages 11-14) (ALSC, 2015). When using this scale, I believe that the category of older readers is most suitable for *Breaking Stalin's Nose*, but middle readers could also enjoy the book. While aimed at children, it is also an interesting read for adults. The story follows a 10-year-old boy named Sasha Zaichik. He is devoted to Comrade Stalin, the Communist Party, and communism. As the book begins, it is finally time for him to join the Communist Youth Organization "Young Pioneers". The night before the big day his father is arrested and taken away, in front of Sasha. Could the inspiring people behind communism have something to do with his father being put to jail? The next day at school, Sasha accidentally crashes into a statue and knocks Stalin's plaster nose clean off his face. This is of course considered vandalism and a reason for arrest. Sasha's world is turned upside down.

2. 1 Narration and language

Like all novelists, Yelchin had many options when deciding which narrative technique to use. Narrative technique includes such matters as the choice of narrator and narrative situation, the creation of a plot with its implied underlying story, the selection and variation of perspective and voice (point of view), implied narrative medium, linguistic register¹⁵, and different techniques (Hawthorn, 2010, p. 109). In *Breaking Stalin's Nose*, the narrator, the individual or voice who tells us the story, is both a personified narrator, and a character narrator. He is recognizable as a distinct person with well-defined individual human characteristics. Thus, the narrator is personified, and has both a name and a full human identity. The book is narrated in the first person by the protagonist, Sasha Zaichik. He has no access to other characters' thoughts, he does not know what will happen, and is therefore not omniscient. The first person narrator is auto-diegetic, since he is located in the main story as a narrator (just as a homo-diegetic narrator would be), but in addition to this also participating in it as its protagonist.

¹⁵ Variety in language used for a particular purpose or setting.

One of the acknowledged benefits of having a first person narrator is the feeling of intimacy. The narrator gives the reader direct access to thoughts, feelings, experiences and observations. We get the sense that the narrator is speaking directly to us, and a relation is created between narrator and reader. We are taken into his confidence. What is important to note, is that the narrator in *Breaking Stalin's Nose* is a child. He can therefore be considered slightly naïve or innocent because of his young age. Much of the book makes it clear that communism is totalitarian, and that it brings out the worst in people, but for most of the book Sasha is unaware of this. The gap between what Sasha believes and what we know is evident in a number of places in the text: "Stalin says that sharing our living space teaches us to think as Communist 'WE' instead of capitalist 'I'. We agree. In the morning we often sing patriotic songs together when we line up for the toilet" (Yelchin, 2011, p. 8)¹⁶. There is a certain amount of humor in the way that Sasha repeats Stalin's emphasis on the communal *we* rather than the subjective *I*. He is so indoctrinated that he does not say "I agree" as most people would, but "we agree". This is both humorous and disturbing, and what makes it disturbing is that the child's mind can be molded so easily. There is also a very touching disconnect between Sasha's account of happy communal activity, singing patriotic songs together, and the occasion or setting – people lining up to use the toilet in the morning. Another example of Sasha's innocence is after his father has been arrested and the room that they share has been ransacked. When he returns this is what he sees:

Soon the courtyard turns blurry, warped at the edges. I rub at my eyes and my knuckles come away wet. Then I hear a broom sweeping the floor somewhere. I turn and listen. It's coming from our room. When I get there, the door is open. Stukachov's wife is in our room, sweeping. What a good woman, rising from her sleep, helping to clean up. "Move it, Vasya," she says. "They've changed their minds before" (Yelchin, p. 29).

This is an ideal example of the effectiveness of using a child narrator. To begin with Sasha is unaware that he is crying. He thinks it is the courtyard and not his vision that is blurry, and that makes him even more sympathetic. However, it is also an example of how human life continues even after terrible things happen. Sasha hears someone cleaning, but what strikes us is that he misunderstands what is happening. He believes that Stukachov's wife is helping him and his father by cleaning up the mess that is left by the secret police. In other words, the child in him continues to believe that people are essentially good. But when the woman speaks, her voice is cynical and experienced. She has been in this situation before, suggesting

¹⁶ From here, the publishing year will be excluded in the in-text reference of Yelchin's book. (Yelchin) always refers to *Breaking Stalin's Nose*.

that the Stukachov couple have regularly informed on and betrayed other people, but she also knows that not even the secret police can be trusted. They can change their minds. Even though the room may not be permanently theirs, the couple is prepared to take advantage of it for as long as they can. This shows us that the system makes people selfish and greedy, and this in contrast to Sasha's innocent belief in their benevolence.

Another instance of the boy's innocence is nicely shown in the quotation below:

When hunger gnaws inside my belly, I tell myself that a future Pioneer has to repress cravings for such unimportant matters as food. Communism is just over the horizon; soon there will be plenty of food for everyone. But still, it's good to have something tasty to eat now and then. I wonder what it's like in the capitalist countries. I wouldn't be surprised if children there had never even tasted a carrot (Yelchin, p. 10).

Here, we see a clash between what communism promises and what it fails to deliver. Hunger is a feeling we all can relate to. At the time the book is set, in the 1950s, children in capitalist countries had access to not only carrots and other vegetables, but various types of food dishes, and luxury goods such as chocolate and milkshake. There is something touching about the fact that a carrot is magical and exciting for Sasha. This is one of several places where we sympathize with his innocence. What we also see here is an author exploiting the gap between what his audience knows and what the character knows about the communist society. We are also alerted to a potential contradiction when reading "communism is just over the horizon". This is written from within a communist country, and yet we are told that communism has not yet happened. The implication is that the faults and weaknesses of communism are blamed on the fact that the rest of the world has not yet adopted the system. Interestingly, Sasha can be seen as a secular equivalent of Cotton Mather's young child who thinks seriously about his responsibilities to a higher power, to God in Mather's text and Stalin in Yelchin's. In other words, Yelchin is drawing on a familiar image in children's literature of the exemplary child, or the child as an example of good morals and behavior. What we have to ask, then, is what is Sasha a good example of? What is he being used to teach? The answer is that at one level he is a perfect communist who sets aside his own needs for the greater good, at another level he is used to exemplify the failures of communism.

Through the first person narrative we have constant access to the protagonist's thoughts. Even though he may seem naïve, it is important to remember that he clearly means what he says and writes. He genuinely believes that children in the capitalist countries have not tasted a carrot and that Stalin is a great leader and teacher. As readers, we know differently and this creates dramatic irony: the reader's knowledge of events or individuals

surpasses that of the character. We know that Stalin is a not a kind man and a caring leader, but Sasha does not.

Child narrators are often used to bring out hypocrisy and unfairness whether it is in the society, the schoolyard, in the family etc. This is done by providing a gap between their innocence and the corruption in the world around them. A good example of this can be seen in Charlotte Brontë's famous *Jane Eyre* (1847)¹⁷. Though it is not a children's novel, the title character is a child in the first part of the book, and the reader is provided with the child's perspective. When Mr. Brocklehurst discovers a girl with curly hair at the Girls' School in which the action takes place, he demands that all the girl's hair should be cut off for the sake of modesty, even though the girl has naturally curly hair. At this point, Brocklehurst's family enters, with all the females having artificial curls in their hair. Brontë does not comment on this: she allows the discrepancy to speak for itself. Here, the child narrator is used to uncover oppression, cruelty and hypocrisy. Something similar can be seen in the classic *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)¹⁸ by Mark Twain, where the protagonist believes he is doing something illegal, and stealing someone's property, by befriending an African-American slave on the run. His flawed understanding comes from the fact that he has been taught that a black man belongs to someone else, which can be seen as a sort of social indoctrination. Eventually, he decides for himself that this is wrong. Traditionally, both adult and children's literature use the child as a lens with which to focus on social wrongs, because it is especially moving when a child witnesses something wrong without fully understanding it. It is dreadful to hear a child say positive things about Stalin. It is most likely worse than if it was an adult, again because of children's innocence.

In *Breaking Stalin's Nose*, an everyday and simple style is used due to the young age of the main character. In addition, most of what happens is spoken and thought, not written. There is no distinction between who speaks and who sees in this novel. The voice is Sasha's, as is the perspective the reader is encouraged to see the story from. The reader is never addressed directly. We as readers receive Sasha's voice, but we are also aware that he does not know everything¹⁹. Even though the narrator is a child and uses mostly colloquial language, the tone is at times very serious, not surprisingly, since his father is taken away. The carrot example shown above also shows how something as simple as eating is linked

¹⁷ Norton Critical Edition (2001).

¹⁸ Norton Critical Edition (1999).

¹⁹ Voice and perspective may be the same, but as readers we are aware of the limitations of both. We are conscious of a larger truth.

with politics, and it also shows the consequences of communism when it comes to food. In the following quotation we can again see the effect of using a child narrator: “‘don’t talk to him’, says my dad. ‘He’ll use it’. I nod in agreement, but I’m not sure what he means. Use what? Il I have to think about it later” (Yelchin, p. 14). The child is uncertain about what his father actually means, and this emphasizes his age. An adult reader will understand what is really going on, while a young reader will perhaps not understand, in a similar way as Sasha.

The perspective of a child is not only seen through the written words. This book also uses illustrations to reinforce the perspective. When Sasha’s father is taken away from him, he goes to Moscow’s Red Square to try to find answers, but is stopped by a Kremlin guard. The illustration at this point gives us the child’s perspective²⁰. The viewer is positioned even lower than the child. This makes us sympathize even more with the boy, as we get his view of the man’s size, bulk and attitude, which are imposing. The guard’s gloved hand is extremely big, even larger than his face. The steam coming out of the his mouth is represented in the text as white space. However, it also reminds us of a speech bubble, a convention from comics and graphic novels, but here left blank, as if what is said is without meaning or sense to the child. The reader cannot see the man’s eyes, which makes him even more terrifying and distant. Eye contact is normally an important part of communication. Seeing a person’s eyes enables us to interpret emotional intent, the presence or absence of good will. This is not done here, which makes the guard distant and forbidding. Thus, the illustrations contribute a great deal toward providing the reader with the child’s perspective. We are brought down to his level²¹.

The novel takes place over only two days. Sasha’s home and school are located in the Soviet Union. Place names such as Red Square make us aware that it is set in Moscow. It is reasonable to think that the story takes place in the early 1950s. Joseph Stalin led the Soviet Union from the mid 1920s, until his death in 1953. There are no references to the Second World War in the novel. On the other hand there is reason to believe that the conditions described in the novel are those of post-war Russia, with widespread poverty and class differences. Stephens (1992) states that “actual settings implicate attitude and ideology, because writers of fiction are rarely content to use the spatiotemporal dimension of setting merely as an authenticating element of narrative” (p. 209). It is thus not accidental that the action is set in Moscow during the early Cold War: the city, the school and the home are a part of the ideological narrative.

²⁰ See image 1, page 51.

²¹ More analysis on the illustrations will be given below, in Section 2.4.

Breaking Stalin's Nose provides the reader with certain images and symbols. "The three tips of the Pioneers scarf symbolize the union of three generations, mature Communists, the Communist Youth, and the Young Pioneers" (Yelchin, p. 16). This symbol is included in the book. The reader is also told that the red scarf the boys will get when becoming Pioneers represents blood spilled in the cause of communism. When Sasha tries it on, he says: "I see myself reflected in his glasses; scarlet burns at my throat" (Yelchin, p. 16). A parallel between the scarf and his father is perhaps drawn. Since Sasha is reflected in his father's glasses, this additionally suggests that the two are alike. Also, at the very end of the story, a friendly old lady ties a woolen scarf around Sasha's neck. This scarf is a contrast to the red Soviet scarf.

Both the statue that gets its nose broken off, and other statues of Stalin that are mentioned throughout the book, are symbolic in different ways. The one Sasha looks at from his window is gigantic, and is an image of power. At one level, the fact that Sasha accidentally breaks off the nose of a statue of Stalin suggests that what the statue celebrates – Stalin's absolute power – is not as absolute as one would think. At another level, it foreshadows the end of Stalin's rule. It is also comic; Stalin without a nose becomes a figure of fun, not fears.

There is a recurrence of words such as "dark", "ice", "icy", "freezing air" and "cold", all of which describe winter. It is often cold throughout the book, and often in places where Sasha is alone, such as on his way to school and in the queue of visitors to prison. This may indicate his isolation from other people, as well as loneliness. People in the Soviet Union were isolated from each other because they were afraid. Quotes like "Red Square is deserted..." (Yelchin, p. 35) and "the street car is like an ice cave" (Yelchin, p. 142) also strengthen the feeling of a society where people are in seclusion from one another.

An author's note is included in the paratext, the parts of the novel not part of the actual text itself. In the case on this note, it is found after the text. Here, Yelchin explains how he once himself was called in for an informal chat with an official from the committee of State Security. He pretended to be ignorant, and was not harmed. However, he states that "had that happened some years earlier, when the ruthless dictator Joseph Stalin ruled Russia, I would not have gotten out of that office alive" (Yelchin, p. 153). The author's attitude to communism is made even clearer by the paratext. Chapter 1 of this thesis outlined how literature for children in the past was used to teach children a system of belief. Children's literature is still used to tell the young what to believe in, but now the message is political.

2.2 Stalinism for children

Yelchin has used a well-known and controversial leader and historical figure, Joseph Stalin, as a central character in this book originally printed for American children. Among US school children Stalin is associated with communism and the Soviet Union. In the novel, American values are at one level challenged by what characters say, but they are also supported. One example of this is when Sahsa goes alone to Red Square. This shows courage and bravery, which are qualities that Americans believe are core values: the US is, after all, the “Home of the Brave”. But at the same time, there is an ideological agenda in the book. The 1950s in the United States brought with it a “Red Scare”, or fear of communism. During the Cold War, most Americans were anti-communists. The American government wanted to find, and control, those who were not. Many were falsely accused and convicted as communist sympathizers in an attempt at finding real traitors. “McCarthyism” is the term used for the accusations of treason without proper regard for evidence²², after the anti-communist furor US senator Joseph McCarthy personified. In *Breaking Stalin’s Nose*, a parent is taken away from his child. There are also real-life examples of this within America itself. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were an American couple sentenced for conspiracy to commit espionage to the Soviet Union²³. The Rosenberg couple had two sons, but the parents were executed by the American government in 1953, when their sons were six and ten years old. In *Breaking Stalin’s Nose*, American children are given a selective view of history. There was political oppression in the United States at the time the story is set, perhaps not to the same degree as in the Soviet Union, but present nevertheless.

Peter Hollandale’s article *Ideology and the Children’s Book* argues that there are three possible levels of ideology. The first is the “level of intended surface ideology” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 28). This is the author’s profound message in a text. It is made up of “the explicit social, political or moral beliefs of the individual writer, and his wish to recommend them to children through the story” (1988, p. 27). This is the easiest level to detect and the most conspicuous element in the ideology of children’s literature. The second level relates to the unexamined beliefs of the writer that appear almost unnoticed, or “the individual writer’s unexamined assumptions” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 30). Writers for children, like writers for adults, cannot hide what their values are, and the texture of language and story will reveal

²² See “McCarthy, Joseph R.” in Foner, E. & Garrathy J. A. (1991). *The Reader’s Companion to American History*, pp. 709-710.

²³ See “Rosenberg Case” in Foner, E. & Garrathy J. A. (1991). *The Reader’s Companion to American History*, pp. 959-960.

and communicate these (Hollindale, 1988, p. 30). The workings of ideology at this passive level are not incidental or unimportant. “The values at stake are usually those which are taken for granted by the writer.... In turn, this means that children, unless they are helped to notice what is there, will take them for granted too” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 30). The third category refers to the ideologies of the author’s world: “a large part of any book is written not by its author but by the world its author lives in” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 32). The third level sees ideology as a powerful force “hovering over us”, to which writers and readers subscribe to and reproduce. To place *Breaking Stalin’s Nose* into one of these categories may be complex. At the surface level, there are positive statements made about communism in the book: “The state security is our secret police, and their job is to unmask the disguised enemies infiltrating our borders. My dad is one of their best” (Yelchin, p. 10); “when I imagine Comrade Stalin reading my letter, I get so excited that I can’t sit still” (Yelchin, p. 4). The main character is indoctrinated to believe that 1950s Russia is the most ideal society in the world. Clearly, this does not mean the book supports communism, and the author has no wish to “recommend” this ideology to children, as the first level suggests. The author’s purpose is to expose Stalinist paranoia and oppression. A few times in the book, such as in the carrot-example above, capitalism is offered as an opposition to communism. Also, Sasha is sometimes picked on and called “Amerikanetz” because his mother was American. To have Russian communists denigrate America in an American book obviously works to make America, and the character associated with it, positive. As Yelchin has lived over 30 years in America, the American view on communism is one that he shares in the text. The main character has a huge devotion to and love for communism, but that is not the message the author wants to send. He wants the opposite; he wants to warn children about this ideology. An older child will understand, as the story develops, that communism is not promoted in this book at all, as one understands that it is the government who has taken away Sasha’s father. John Stephens argues that the audience for historical fiction begins during the years of upper primary school. He states that the readers are located there for three reasons.

First – readers need to have developed a less solipsistic view of the world to engage imaginatively with characters and events not identifiable in the present.... Second – readers need to be able both to imagine settings and technologies which are exotic in a particular way and to be able to take an interest in such details. Third – historical fiction tends to present some degree of linguistic difficulty, in so far as the strategies writers seek out for making the text strange often take a linguistic form. This latter point is important, because while historical fiction is essentially a realist genre it also has a pervasive need to make the discourse “strange”. (Stephens, p. 202)

Accordingly, young readers will understand the historical parts of *Breaking Stalin's Nose* better, and get more out of it if they are at an age that allows them to see these three perspectives.

The purpose of the book is clearly to convey a message. Yelchin uses a child to make children understand how life was like under the Stalinist regime. The book shows what kind of effect ideology can have on people, and especially young people. The readers get a first-hand perspective of the totalitarian regime. In the book, Sasha eventually starts to disagree with majority opinion. He no longer wants to become a Pioneer; he only wants to see his father again. Most American children are not used to seeing their parents arrested, and they are made aware of how the country they live in is a fairly democratic place. The fact that the novel is written by a man who has experienced life in the Soviet Union, but rejected it, makes it even more authentic for the children reading it. Yelchin said the following in an interview with Oksana Lushchevska:

The events in the book are fictional, but the feelings conveyed by means of those events are real... To describe the feelings I felt while living in the Soviet Union I had to feel them all over again, but those feelings still frightened me. Consequently, the book is shot through with fear, and that fear is completely authentic.... If you happened to live in a place where over sixty million people perished through starvation, terror, and war you are bound to feel the effects of those deaths (Lushchevska, 2013).

Yelchin clearly wants to teach about the importance of freedom of speech, democracy and civil liberties, and does so by focusing on a particularly repressive time in Soviet history. Thus, there is continuity with the previous children's literature: the purpose was to educate, as well as entertain. Just because *Breaking Stalin's Nose* does not teach about either religion or spelling does not mean that it does not teach: it has a different message, but it still wants to educate. American children learn about how it could have been, to realize how important democratic systems are.

John Stephens argues that childhood is a crucial period in our lives, "the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it, how to relate to other people, what to believe, what and how to think – in general, the intention is to render the world intelligible" (p. 8). The cultural work of children's literature then is to educate, and in this case to warn about totalitarian regimes – and by implicating the importance of the American system. Montgomery and Watson argue that "children's literature has always been implicitly or explicitly ideological, presenting and promoting particular ideas about childhood and encouraging children to either uphold or challenge particular values" (2009, p. 7). It is not the

first time Stalin has been portrayed in literature for children: in *Animal Farm* (1945) by George Orwell, he is the basis for the character Napoleon.

The following quotation is taken from a letter Sasha writes to Stalin: “I have read how hard the lives of children are in the capitalist countries and I feel pity for all those who do not live in the USSR. They will never see their dreams come true” (Yelchin, p. 2). This is truly ironic, as the phrase “The American Dream” is a national ethos of the USA. Historically, lives in Soviet Russia were fairly uniform and materially poor for most of its citizens. Nevertheless, one of the implications of this excerpt is that dreams are best realized in exactly the country in which the book is published and read. “Where Dreams Come True” is also the slogan of the Walt Disney parks, which is uniquely American. These are two sayings which American children may be aware of, but which their parents, who buy the book, certainly are.

According to Ruth Mirtz, Gabriele Thomson-Wohlgemuth states that while East German texts for children before reunification had to “conform to the enterprise of creating children who fit in with the political doctrines of the socialist government, Western countries also have didactic and ideological goals for children literature which creates limits and censors certain books in predictable ways” (Mirtz, 2005, p. 447). In other words, both Soviet and American literature had political objectives. It would seem, then, that the ideological purpose of children’s literature remains at least in Yelchin's novel. Adult authors and publishers have an extreme power over children, and their control is every day, in cultures all over the world, deciding what children get to read. In descriptions of the Stalinist regime, Yelchin has little censorship and do not hide the fact that Stalin is evil. At the same time, he has the power of putting the USA in a good light, which he does. He is using his influence to promote the USA.

2.3 The Family and the School

As section 1.3 clarified, the traditions of the family story have varied throughout the years. Loving and caring families have often dominated, but children with no parents or only one parent, loving or not, have also been visible. From the earliest children’s literature, authors saw the importance of teaching youngsters independence and entrepreneurial skills by depriving children of their families in literature. In *Breaking Stalin’s Nose*, the family situation is an important part of the plot. At the beginning of the story, Sasha lives with one parent, his father. Their relationship is strong and loving. The reader can clearly see that Sasha’s dad is an important figure in his life. The first sentence of the first chapter is “my dad

is a hero and a communist and, more than anything, I want to be like him” (Yelchin, p. 1). The position of the father in the communal apartment is also visible: “everyone in the kitchen stops talking when my dad comes in. They look like they are afraid, but I know they are just respectful. Dad swoops me off the radiator and carries me through the kitchen, nodding at everybody” (Yelchin, p. 11). This scene is also illustrated²⁴. The illustration strengthens the impression that Sasha adores his father. He is clinging on to him with both hands around his back. The father has one hand around Sasha and one on his briefcase. When children lose their parents it is usually because of illness, death, divorce, evacuation, flight or abandonment. This story stands out because other people come into Sasha’s home and take his only parent away, against his will. Most children in the middle grade will understand the difference between someone choosing to leave and someone being forced to. A few hours before the arrest, Sasha describes their evening at home: “then he says quietly in my ear ‘anything ever happens to me, go to Aunt Larisa’” (Yelchin, p. 18). This proves that the father knows that he might be arrested. Sasha, on the other hand, has no idea. “I wake up in the middle of the night, worried. Why did he say ‘anything ever happens to me, go to Aunt Larisa’? I don’t understand. What could happen to him” (Yelchin, p. 19). As the guards are walking up the stairs, Sasha looks at his father: “He’s leaning out, listening to someone on the other side. When he finally turns, he has a face I’ve never seen before” (Yelchin, p. 25). Children enjoy routines and security: this unknown facial expression disrupts both. The guards order the father not to speak, so the only thing he says to his son before he is taken is the following: “‘It’s more important to join the Pioneers than to have a father’, he whispers hurriedly. ‘You hear me?’” (Yelchin, p. 27). The man selflessly encourages his son to remain orthodox and anonymous, because it is safer. But he is also asking him to continue to trust the people who are arresting him, which is confusing to Sasha: “Dad! Dad! Wait!” (Yelchin, p. 28) The repetition of the word “dad” tells us how desperate Sasha is to not lose him. The family story of the novel makes us sympathetic towards the boy, but the loss of the parent is clearly linked to the system and the ideology that surround him. As Grenby states, “the absence of one or more parents serves to endorse the importance of family” (2014, p. 119), and again, in America, the family unit is one that is especially important for conservative politicians. In other words, showing the disruption of the family is not only universal, making us feel sorry, it also promotes America as a place where the family is safe.

²⁴ See image 2, page 51.

“Your mother would be so proud” (Yelchin, p. 16) Sasha’s father tells him. This proves that father and son have an open relationship about his mother. However, there are conflicting views about what has happened to her. This is Sasha’s story:

I think of the last time I saw Aunt Larisa. It was before she married that jerk. Dad dropped me off and said he would be taking Mom to the hospital because she was ill. ... When Dad came back, he said Mom had died in the hospital. I started crying, and Aunt Larisa hugged me and said to my dad, “You look guilty, not sad”. He didn’t say anything, just took me home (Yelchin, pp. 43-44).

However, at school Sasha is teased by some boys and nicknamed *Amerikanetz*. “He calls me Amerikanetz on the account of my mother. Vovka used to be my best friend, but I shouldn’t have told him anyway. My dad warned me never to tell anyone” (Yelchin, p. 48). It is thus clear that his mother was American, which of course was less than ideal in the 1950s Soviet Russia. In a conversation with his classmate Finkelstein, Sasha tells that his mother was American. “He squints at me. ‘And she was arrested and shot?’ ‘What do you mean? Of course not. She came from America to help us build Communism’” (Yelchin, p. 63). Finkelstein argues that the authorities think all foreigners are spies, but Sasha assures him that she was not. All in all, the readers are given hints both by Aunt Larisa and Finkelstein that Sasha’s mother was arrested and killed for treason, and did not die of natural causes, as Sasha believes. It is possible his father colluded in this. Towards the end of the book Sasha has a conversation with a senior lieutenant who gives him a choice between going to prison or becoming a secret agent, denouncing his dad and reporting suspicious behavior in the school. Sasha denies that his father was ever a snitch. The lieutenant explains how Sasha’s father was a true communist who submitted a report on the anti-communist activity of his wife, but that his vigilance faltered and he became easy prey for Sasha’s mother’s spy contacts (Yelchin, pp. 136-7). Sasha refuses to believe this, and later in the book he still tells how his mother died in hospital. Clearly, the book is complicated enough to challenge the family story as a genre. But it is interesting that the mother, who is a threat to the system, is American: no matter how sincere her political motives, she cannot be trusted because she embodies freedom. Like *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, it is almost allegorical. America is the opposite of everything that Stalin and his regime stands for.

Sasha is let down by his relatives. His aunt’s new husband does not want to take Sasha into their home, as his father is an “enemy of the people”. The aunt gives him a bit of money, but Sasha sleeps in the basement of the building she lives in, on a stack of old papers. In this novel, the family is compromised and undermined. The couple cannot take in their own relative, because they are afraid they will be arrested themselves. The harshness of the

system affects all parts of society, and not least family life. Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), *Breaking Stalin's Nose* shows a fragmented family in order to criticize a repressive regime. In fact, the idea of family, kinship and loyalty is complicated from the beginning of the novel: "Forty-eight hardworking, honest Soviet citizens share the kitchen and single small toilet in our communal apartment we call *komunalka* for short. We live here as one large, happy family: We are all equal; we have no secrets" (Yelchin, p. 5). But later on the same page: "We even have a room clearly divided with shelves of books about Stalin that two families share" (Yelchin, p. 5). This draws attention to a contradiction: on one hand they are one happy family, but on the other hand we get the idea of specific family units. Within the large family, there are subfamilies. The question is whom you stay loyal to, as within the little community, people betray each other.

School, in resemblance with family, is an aspect that is a big part of *Breaking Stalin's Nose*. What marks this book as different from other school stories is how much politics dominates not only the ordinary classroom lessons, but even the playtime. In one episode where the children throw snowball at each other they pretend that they are targeting an enemy of the people. Children are also rewarded in class not just for their academic abilities, but for being model communists. Instead of practicing mathematics, science or translation, children are asked to recite the laws of the Young Pioneers.

The school in the novel very much mirrors the system of the country. There is a clear leader in the classroom, the teacher: "'Up Sobakin!' calls Nina Petrovna. 'How dare you repeat the sacred laws after Zaichik? Into the corner, criminal!'" (Yelchin, p. 56). She is brutal, showing no compassion for her students. Still, the teacher states that the Soviet classroom is the most democratic in the world and she addresses the whole class when deciding on a punishment for a pupil: "You will decide his fate. You will vote. Those in favor of sending Finkelstein to the principal, raise your hands" (Yelchin, p. 59). This is ironic, as sending the child to the principal is clearly what the teacher wants, and none of the children would want to contradict her. Also, in a real democracy it is optional to vote. Towards the end of the book, one of the pupils find the plaster nose that is broken off, and puts it in the teacher's desk to arrange for her to be caught. Eventually, guards find the nose and she is arrested. She screams and kicks, but is taken out of the classroom in front of the pupils. This tells us that the government shows no mercy for anyone, and it can be seen as frightening for a child reader that the role of the teacher, which is supposed to be safe, is so unstable. The teacher is innocent of the crime and is regardless arrested, which signifies the brutal system, but it can also make readers more uncertain and confused about the guilt of Sasha's parents.

Clearly, these sections of school life work as an exposure of just how early and thoroughly children were indoctrinated in Soviet Russia. Just as clearly, American children and their parents are likely to be horrified by the absence of academic exercises at school. The satire of Soviet Russia has the effect of reinforcing American ideas about the superiority of their own system – which is not unreasonable. One must wonder, however, if Yelchin has taken into consideration that American children usually start every school day by pledging allegiance to the American flag. In other words, Yelchin is exposing historical indoctrination in a communist country, but he is not necessarily encouraging ways in which they may be manipulated too.

2.4 Illustrations

The use of the visual is a prominent characteristic of writing for children, and, as seen in Section 1.4, has been so from its inception. The presence of illustrations in children’s literature is one aspect that differentiates it from other types of writing, since most books for adults don’t have them. Pictures are there to break the monotony of typeface, and to appeal to younger viewers. They also supplement the text. Furthermore, some pictures dominate the page so letterpress serves mainly to explain the image (Grenby 2014, p. 199). Thus, there is a lot of variety in illustrations.

In the 151 pages of *Breaking Stalin’s Nose*, about 40 illustrations are included. All but one are black and white; only the cover is in color. This increases the feeling that the story takes place in the past. When children see pictures from several decades ago, they are usually black and white. The absence of colors and light may give an additional effect of a more sad and serious setting. Stephens (1992) point out that “picture books can of course, exist for fun, but they can never be said to exist without either a socializing or educational intention, or else without a specific orientation towards the reality constructed by the society that produces them” (p. 158). I would argue that the same thing matters for illustrations. They are there for a reason: to give an extra angle, approach or perspective to the written words.

As mentioned above, illustrations give the author one more way of providing us the perspective. We actually meet the protagonist of *Breaking Stalin’s Nose* in three illustrations that precede the actual text: not in language, but in pictures. We first meet him on the front page, which shows an image of a child walking²⁵. He is wearing a jacket that is too big; the sleeves are longer than his arms. It is winter and he walks in an odd way: all in all he looks

²⁵ See image 3, page 52.

quite poor. We are made sympathetic to the boy as early as the front page. There is also a tension between the awkward boy in front and the inhuman buildings in the background, which look rich. The setting looks cold as white frost emerges from the boy's mouth. However, the red scarf he is wearing gives us a feeling of warmth, and positivity. The red star on the back of the cover, on the other hand, gives us associations of coldness and a negative feeling (perhaps in part because most stars are represented in the west as white, or sometimes gold). Red is well known as the color of communism, and children who know this may draw a line to the name Stalin and understand that the boy is a communist. The inside of the paperback is red, both before and after the text. The front page is also covered with the Newbery Honor medal, which indicates that it is a book of good quality. One of the hidden messages of the cover is perhaps that Sasha is trying to reproduce the gait of Soviet Young Pioneers.

After the front page, the reader's next meeting with the protagonist is on the page next to the title, still a part of the paratext. This illustration gives us a specific impression of the little child²⁶. He looks innocent, with big ears, a thin neck, and a slightly large head. The hair is very natural. His head is somewhat heart shaped, which gives us a good feeling about him. The perspective is from the child once again. He is in the foreground, which makes him closer to us than Stalin is. Stalin, on the other hand looks characteristically sombre and solid, as he always does in portraits. He is framed, as this is an example of many of the portraits of him that were placed on walls in homes and buildings all over the Soviet Union. He expresses authority, and he is looking to the left. This makes him even more authoritarian and more distant, as he is not looking directly at us. Again, the reader gets no eye contact. There is a contrast in the picture between what we know about Stalin and what we sense, but don't know for certain about the child who is frail, small and vulnerable. Stalin towers above him, cold and forbidding. We see his face, but he is less human somehow than the little boy, whose back is turned to us, but who is also nearer to us, physically and emotionally.

There is a third picture of Sasha before chapter one starts. These illustrations introduce us to both the artist author, as well as to the figure of the child. In this picture Sasha is sitting at a table, bent over a paper²⁷. There is a large window right in front of him, in the background of the picture. This symbolizes openness, transparency and seeing. On the other hand, the place looks poor. The window does not have curtains. It is simply furnished, with no lamp shade and no rugs. He still looks innocent. Only one of his feet is seen, and the

²⁶ See image 4, page 52.

²⁷ See image 5, page 53.

foot's underside touches the chair leg, which again is something children do. To the left one can see a radiator on the wall, and on the right, on the table, is a fan, which gives the reader a contradicting feeling. All of Yelchin's illustrations are characterized by a certain unbalance. The lines of the window are not straight. It is not drawn with a ruler, but interrupted. The same goes for the chair and the table.

There are several pictures showing the child's perspective. This, as mentioned, helps remind the reader that a child is narrating the story. When the door bell rings and Sasha's father is taken away from his home, the reader can see boots running up the stairs²⁸. All of the legs have similar boots, which mean they are a part of a uniform. They are obviously soldiers or policemen. The perspective is once again from below. When Sasha seeks help at his aunt and uncle's place the illustration makes him very sympathetic²⁹. The stairway looks long and wide and dark, just like his future. At the top is a little child, and two adults, who have not even opened the door completely for him and who will not let him in. Grenby argues that "one method is to capture a precise moment of the action of a text in an illustration. When done well, this does not immobilize the book, or even stabilize it, but opens it up, inviting the reader to explore the moment and enquire into where the book is leading". (Grenby, 2014, p. 206) We understand that the aunt and uncle will reject him, and the illustration makes it even more real. As Grenby suggests, this image shows where the narrative is leading.

Another precise moment that is captured through illustration is when Sasha's classmate "Four-Eyes Finkelstein" falsely admits to have broken off the nose on the statue of Stalin³⁰. The text connected to the illustration says the following: "the lieutenant frowns and nods to the guards. They cut through the crowd, lift Four-Eyes under the arms, and carry him to the exit" (Yelchin, p. 91). The guards look very similar – large, shapeless, more uniforms than individuals. They are taking Finkelstein away, but it also looks as if they are closing in on him. He seems resigned and helpless, but there is the hint of a smile as if he has achieved something by taking the blame. Again, the system is seen as bigger than the individual, but like Huckleberry Finn, the boy is more fully human. The guards are also drawn in a much darker shade than the boy, which makes him more innocent.

The illustrations in *Breaking Stalin's Nose* also have an effect of setting the mood. One illustration is of Sasha's "neighbor" Stukachov, one of the people they share the

²⁸ See image 6, page 53.

²⁹ See image 7, page 54.

³⁰ See image 8, page 54.

communal apartment with³¹. When the guards arrive at the apartment he makes himself known as the one who “made the report” (Yelchin, p. 27). The illustration is on the same page that the neighbor starts to move things into the room Sasha and his father have lived in. Sasha tries to enter the room: “I reach for the door handle, but his hand is clutching it. He leans in close. ‘Your daddy’s been arrested’, he says. ‘There’s no room for you here’”. (Yelchin, p. 30). The illustration shows an intimidating man and is more of a caricature than a portrait. The figure is almost Hitlerian. The drawing has to appeal to someone other than adults. The eyes of the man are not gentle and there is a sly smile. The drawing thus has an effect of making him more evil, and a man the child reader would want to avoid. The man shows no concern at being the one who separates father and son.

There is a class photo of Sasha’s class where one face is blotted out³². Stalin routinely ordered his enemies to be removed from official records and photos. “Enemies of the people” were not only killed, but also removed from visual history. The teacher in the novel blackens Finkelstein’s face with her ink pen. Children reading this today would be horrified by the thought that a teacher can remove someone from a class photo. A harsh reality is therefore illustrated.

When it comes to Stalin, there are mostly three images of him that are repeated throughout the book. He looks exactly the same in all of them, a portrait style. Apart from the paratext and counting only pictures inside the text (not his nose, but portraits or statues of him), Stalin is represented this way in eight of the pages. He is thus not over-exposed, but is mostly in the background on a banner or on a poster. The humor in the book is presented in some of the illustrations. Stalin’s Nose, which is knocked off a statue, is actually given human characteristics, and in one of the illustrations the nose is sitting on a chair, with a smoking pipe in its mouth, talking to Sasha³³. The nose is trying to get Sasha to understand that his father is guilty and that he, Sasha, should join the Pioneers. This illustration is necessary to heighten the meaning of the text, as John Lord Vernon stated. It adds meaning to the written words, but is also an example of the comic or slightly absurd edge many of the illustrations have.

³¹ See image 9, page 55.

³² See image 10, page 56.

³³ See image 11, page 56.

2.5 Reception in the United States

The Association for Library Services to Children, a division of the American Library Association, gave *Breaking Stalin's Nose* one of their two runner-up awards, and it is thus entitled a Newbery Honor book. Together with the Caldecott Medal, the Newbery is considered the most prestigious award for children's books in the United States. Receiving the honor is therefore considered high-status and a sign of quality. On their web pages the association state this as the reason for their choice: "Yelchin deftly crafts a stark and compelling story of a child's lost idealism" (ALSC, 2012). Clearly, Yelchin's book was well received in the United States, which is known for having a complicated historical relationship with the Soviet Union and now Russia, and the book indeed puts the Soviet Union to shame.

Writing in *The Wall Street Journal's* "Bookshelf" column, Megan Cox Gurdon gives *Breaking Stalin's Nose* a positive review, describing it as a "series of darkly comic events" (2011). She also states that it is "a novel for children ages 9 to 12 that lays bare the ghastliness of the era without going into inappropriate detail" (Gurdon, 2011). She thus reassures parents that the book is appropriate for children even though serious and gruesome topics are touched upon: "Mr. Yelchin has compressed into two days of events an entire epoch, giving young readers a glimpse of the precariousness of life in a capricious yet ever-watchful totalitarian state" (Gurdon, 2011). Her review emphasizes Stalin's depravity: "As the story opens, young Sasha is penning an ardent letter to the tyrant whose statue looms outside" (Gurdon, 2011). Gurdon then makes an interesting and even revealing point: "Yet even the most imaginative child may find it difficult to wrap his mind around the mad, improbable place that was the Soviet Union during the 30-year rule of Joseph Stalin" (2011). That Stalin might have been psychopathic seems beyond dispute (Porter & Woodworth, 2006, p. 483), but the assumption here seems to be that American children do not have a government which makes decisions that cost lives and bring about suffering and hardship. *The Wall Street journal* is considered conservative, and that the book is anti-communist may be one cause among many for the positive review. It is, however, slightly disturbing that a review about ideological excerpts seems blind to its own bias.

Kirkus Reviews is an American book review magazine and shares the positive attitudes seen above: "Yelchin's debut novel does a superb job of depicting the tyranny of the group, whether residents of a communal apartment, kids on the playground, students in the classroom or government officials" (2011). Once again, the tyranny in the book arouses strong feelings in the reviewers. They also comment on the perspective provided: "Yelchin's

graphite illustrations are an effective complement to his prose, which unfurls in Sasha's steady, first-person voice, and together they tell an important tale" (Kirkus Reviews, 2011). Both the writing style and artistic skills are thus praised. Kirkus also focuses on the fact that this is a historical novel that adds something new to the market of children's books, as "not many books for such a young audience address the Stalinist era, when, between 1923 and 1953, leaving a legacy of fear for future generations. Joseph Stalin's State Security was responsible for exiling, executing or imprisoning 20 million people" (Kirkus Reviews, 2011). Again, these facts are undeniable, but what seems missing is an awareness that America, too, imprisons and kills people unlawfully. The Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp, for instance, has received large amounts of international attention and complaints in regard to violation of human rights. The scale is of course different, but the principle is the same.

Two quotations are printed on the cover of the book, and these two are obviously positive, as they are there for marketing reasons. One is put on the front, while the other is found on the back. The one on the front states that this is "an important book for all people living in free society" and is written by "Peter Sís, author of *The Wall*". Sís is a Czech writer of children's literature, living in the USA. The book mentioned is *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*, and is a memoir of his life in Communist Czechoslovakia. It is also a children's book about a little boy, and the two books are therefore similar in that respect. The quotation on the back is by *The Horn Book Magazine* and adds "although the story takes place over just two days, it is well paced, peeling off the layers of Sasha's naiveté to show him – and young readers – the cynicism of the system he trusted". *The Horn Book Magazine* is an American bimonthly periodical about literature for children. This quotation has similarities with the two reviews above, so it is clear that the book is well received, but also that one of the reasons for that is that the publication of the book confirms America as the antithesis of everything described in and by it.

The United States often defines itself as a flagship of democracy. This is also visible in the reviews above. The focus is on the injustice and unfairness that the child experiences in his community, which is by implication very different from the American one. Soviet Russia is seen as negating the aspects that define USA as a country, or at least that Americans want to be associated with, such as democracy and the right to live free. *The San Francisco Chronicle* also states that: "This Newbery Honor book offers timeless lessons about dictatorship, disillusionment and personal choice" (Faust, 2012). The importance – or illusion – of personal choice is important for Americans, and this book challenges those rights.

In March 2013, *Russia Beyond The Headlines* published an article titled “How to talk to Children about Joseph Stalin”. It is a multilingual news and information resource, and is sponsored by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, which is an official newspaper owned by the Russian government. *Breaking Stalin’s Nose* was published in Russia on the day of the 60th anniversary of Stalin’s death. The article agrees that Russian children, just as much as their American counterparts, need to learn about Stalin, but deals with the issue of *when* they need to hear about him. Poet Lev Rubenstein wrote a review of the book (featured on the Russian cover) which is quoted in the article: “to create a book about the most agonizing and haunting episodes of our own history – and to make it attractive, in uncomplicated language that even kids can read – is a task which, to be honest, very few people could manage”, and he continues: “but the author of this book has achieved that task” (Guzeva, 2013). Alexandra Guzeva, the author of the article, finishes by stating that: “Perhaps not everyone will agree that the author of this book has fully managed it – but it is, at least, a good start” (2013). Yelchin himself states about the Russian reception that “consequently, those in favor of Stalinism vehemently attacked the book, the publishers, and me personally. Regardless ... *Breaking Stalin’s Nose* became a starting point for a public debate about Stalin, Stalinism, Democracy, and the future of Russia” (Lushchevska, 2013). Undoubtedly, there are mixed responses to the book in Russia. Many Russians have a nostalgic and affirmative view of Stalin, and are not in favor of Yelchin’s brutal truths.

A book’s meaning can depend on when and where it is written. *Breaking Stalin’s Nose* was written 20 years after the end of the Cold War. It is also a historical novel that is set sixty years back in time. It was also written in English, and originally meant for an American audience. That is significant. Americans have a very distant relationship to Stalin, but he represents the worst excesses of state, imposed communism. The book, perhaps, performs different functions. Perhaps it suggests that Russia is no longer run by Stalin, and communism has been defeated – in other words, it makes today’s Russia look more appealing by contrast. But its main job, I believe, is to make American children and their parents happier about their own privileges, personal and political. It reaffirms America’s sense of its superiority.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to offer a survey of how children's literature in America has developed, with the purpose of examining in what ways a contemporary children's novel relates or differs from that development. For Puritans in seventeenth century America, the main purpose of children's literature was clearly to bring up good Protestants who could carry the Christian mission further. Children were guided to be religious and righteous in order to receive salvation and avoid temptation. Gradually, however, as the American society changed, the purpose of children's literature changed with it. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there is more emphasis on patriotic literature – on texts that promote a separate American culture and language, as well as values like the importance of family, domestic industry, honesty and hard work. Teaching literacy contributed to the rise of an entire industry. In addition, novels began to feature elements of fantasy and the historical, often trying (like most books) to teach their readers a lesson (and though Puritan texts could often be very imaginative too, their images were more strictly aimed at regulating behavior). Throughout these centuries and decades, though, what seems to unite children's literature is that it shares both didactic and ideological goals.

At first reading, it might seem that *Breaking Stalin's Nose* breaks with that tradition. It is an entertaining and moving story, set in an exotic historical location, about a young boy who survives the loss of both his parents to an undeniably oppressive and undemocratic regime. It is often heartbreaking and sometimes horrifying, but what makes it a good read is the strong spirit and warm heart of its central character. Nevertheless, it is not just a book about Stalinist Russia. It is a book that promotes American values and aspirations. Sasha is as self-reliant as the young boys in Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay *Self-Reliance* (1841), an important cultural text that argues that children are closer to nature, free of indoctrination and therefore able instinctively, to know the difference between right and wrong. Sasha typifies that attitude. He is somewhat a Huckleberry Finn in Soviet Russia.

What I have found by looking at the history of children's literature in America is that while the kinds of messages and content have changed, the main purpose is still the same: to educate children and to teach them to be good members of (Puritan, or American) society. *Breaking Stalin's Nose* might be set in Russia with fictional and historical Russian characters, but it is a very American book in the sense that it is about an individual who stands up against the system, and it promotes values that some Americans like to think of as uniquely theirs. "The Star-Spangled Banner" refers to the "land of the free and the home of the brave", and

Sasha embodies bravery and the desire for free thought and behavior. Clearly the only thing that is missing in his life is the location – the *land* of the free and the *home* of the brave. For American readers, there is an obvious contrast between the cover of Yelchin’s book, with the red star/state, and the title of their national anthem, with lots of different stars/states together. And even though *Breaking Stalin’s Nose* is fiction, it uses a real photograph of the author’s father in military uniform³⁴. Readers may make the connection between the young Yelchin in Russia and the older Yelchin in America, writing in English and publishing in America: he is a symbol of an American success story, not because he is American, but because America allows people to write as they wish. My point is to not to criticize this, but to show that in many ways the book typifies children’s literature in America in the sense that it teaches a lesson.

Seen against the backdrop of earlier children’s literature, then, *Breaking Stalin’s Nose* can be seen to perform a certain kind of cultural work: Stalinist Russia is the country where freedom of speech and thought is suppressed, and the United States is where freedom of speech and thought is encouraged. It is a message we can approve of because millions of people lost their lives during Stalin’s rule. The message is made even clearer by contrasting the innocence and trust of the child as opposed to the violence of the state. But by placing the book in the past and in a foreign country, it could be argued that American children are taught that state oppression is something that happens in other times and places – and not in the United States. They might even be taught that people who live in systems that are against America, or that do not have democracy like America, need help (which sometimes happens when we look at the history of American military intervention). Again, my point is not to criticize this, but to show that the lessons to be drawn from Yelchin’s book can be both positive and questionable at the same time. In other words, it is also fair to ask: is this a book that teaches children to think for themselves and to question society and political regimes of any kind, or is it a book that denounces a particular regime in a foreign country during a historical period, with the moral that children should be happy and grateful to live in America³⁵?

It is possible that both interpretations are possible, of course – we can only hope that that thinking for oneself is the strongest lesson. The bottom line is that children’s literature is written – and very often chosen – by adults, and that adults very often want children to inherit

³⁴ Next to the photo is a dedication: ”To my father, who survived the Great Terror”.

³⁵ There is another possibility of course: Stalinist Russia is what America will become if democracy is not protected. But even this warning may seem like propaganda.

their values and beliefs. The lessons may change, but the fact that there is a lesson doesn't. What kind of lesson is taught by Yelchin is difficult to say with certainty – a great deal of its meaning may depend on how it is presented by parents, teachers, libraries or communities. It would also be interesting to research, for instance, how the novel colors American children's views on Russia today. In recent years, after the publication of *Breaking Stalin's Nose*, tensions have increased between Russia and the USA, much because of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. As the disagreements between the two countries continue, a children's book, with good help from the media, may very well have influenced American children's sight on the Russian Federation, in both directions. Historical novels can also influence the perceptions of those who read them, especially young readers, leading them to interpret historical fiction as historical fact. One can in addition speculate whether the trend of pro-American children's literature will continue. Perhaps there is also Russian children's books set in America? The field of studying children's literature is still growing and there are many stones left to turn. I hope that this thesis makes a contribution to showing that though we think of it as fun and entertaining, children's literature is a serious business.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Relevance for the Teacher Profession

This thesis is relevant for my course of study as I am learning the ways in which literature is adapted for children. It is relevant to me as a future teacher, since I learn how children function as readers. What are the true meanings of the children's books, and what lessons can they teach the pupils? The main book of the thesis, *Breaking Stalin's Nose*, is a book written in English, which improves my reading and writing skills in the language. The book also features classroom scenes. It is a useful pedagogical exercise to read about how historical classrooms were organized. The book also deals with our role in society as teachers. Finally, the comprehensive analysis of both the text and its illustrations are useful, as they prepare teaching in these topics. Teachers in middle or junior high school can advantageously use this novel in their English lessons to teach culture, society, literature and language.

Appendix B: Illustrations

Image 1:

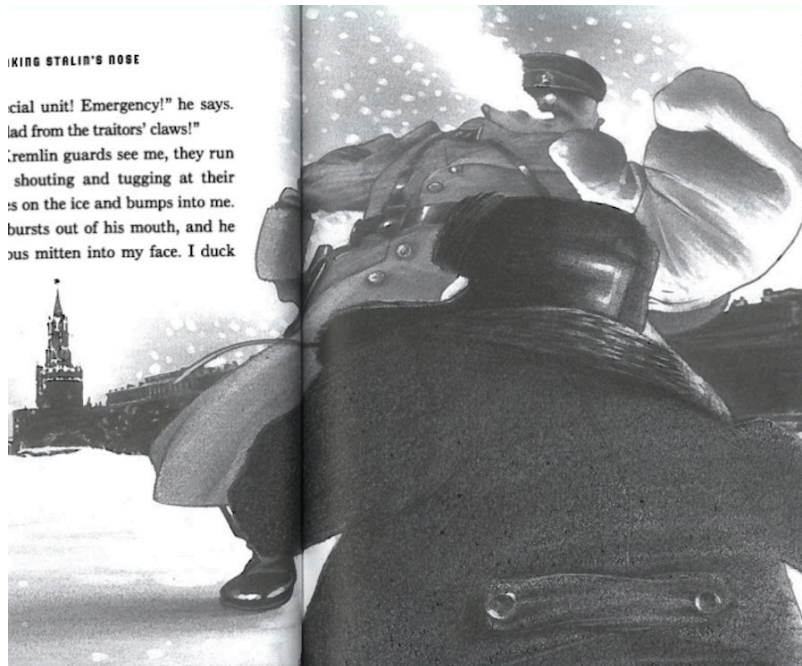


Image 2:



Image 3:

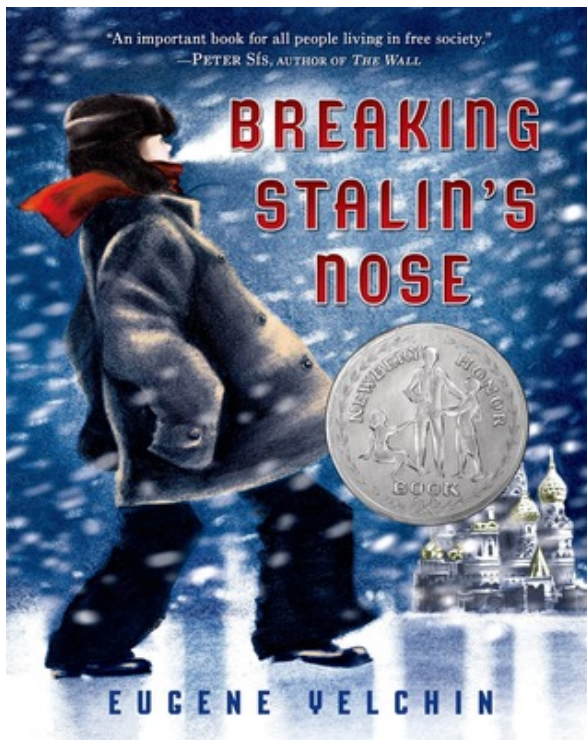


Image 4:

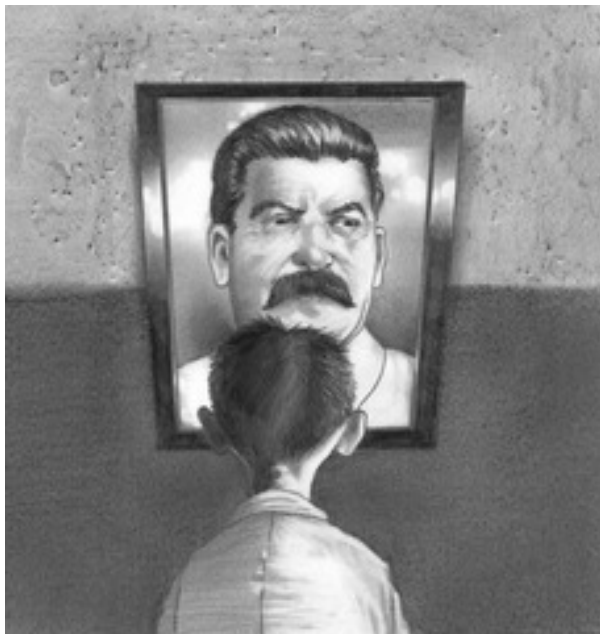


Image 5:



Image 6:

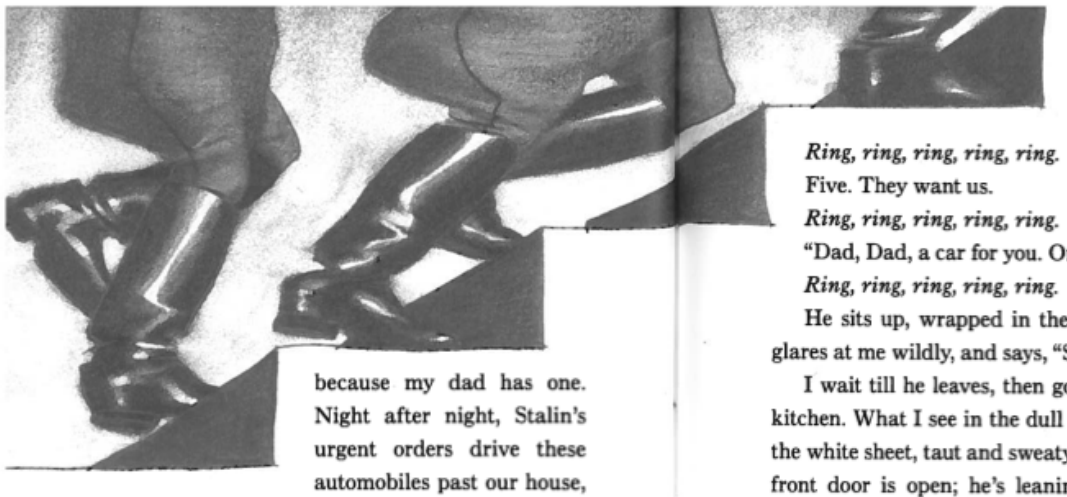


Image 7:



Image 8:

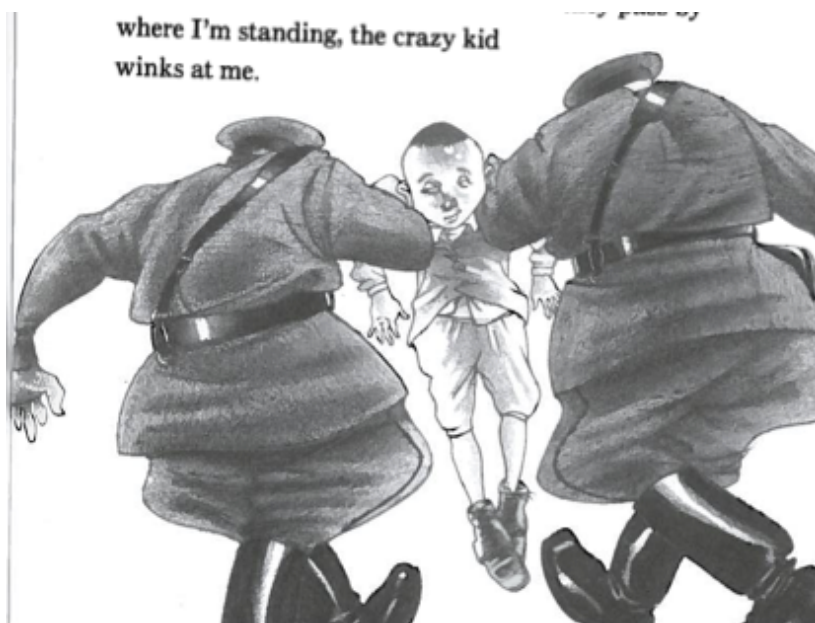


Image 9:



Image 10:



Image 11:



References appendix B:

Image 1: Yelchin, 2011, p. 37 (scanned image)

Image 2: Yelchin, 2011, p. 12 (retrieved from <http://orangemarmaladebooks.com/2013/05/01/fiction-favorites-breaking-stalins-nose/>)

Image 3: Yelchin, 2011, front page (retrieved from <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10693803-breaking-stalin-s-nose>)

Image 4: Yelchin, 2011 (retrieved from <http://aforapplesbforbooks.blogspot.no/2012/09/breaking-stalins-nose.html>)

Image 5: Yelchin, 2011 (retrieved from <http://www.writershouseart.com/eugene-yelchin/>)

Image 6: Yelchin, 2011, p. 24 (scanned image)

Image 7: Yelchin, 2011, p. 41 (scanned image)

Image 8: Yelchin, 2011, p. 91 (scanned image)

Image 9: Yelchin, 2011, p. 31 (scanned image)

Image 10: Yelchin, 2011, p. 97 (scanned image)

Image 11: Yelchin, 2011, p. 118 (scanned image)