

## **MYTH OF THE BERLIN WALL IN THE GERMAN WENDEROMAN (T. BRUSSIG, "HEROES LIKE US")**

**Pomohaibo J. O.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

German literature of the early 1990s saw the emergence of young writers from the former GDR who attempted to cast a new light on the events in the newest German history. Free from the burden of the past, they felt entitled to critically reflect on "the Peaceful Revolution", to present GDR's history and the fall of the Wall as a farce or a comedy<sup>1</sup>. It used to be considered that the post-modernistic novel "Heroes like us" by T. Brussig was the most "revolutionary" among numerous writings generally referred to as Wenderoman (E. Loest "Nikolaikirche", B. Burmeister "Unter dem Namen Norma", W. Hilbig "Ich", G. Grass "Weites Feld", A. Krauss "Die Überfliegerin", "weggeküsst", "wie weiter", I. Schulze "Simple stories", "Neue Leben", "Adam und Evelin"). Its young author resorted to "techniques of social and sexual grotesque as well as ruthless allegoric travesty"<sup>2</sup> to annihilate the myth of "a people-that-made-the Berlin Wall-fall" and to create a new scandalously shocking version of the demolition of the Berlin wall: "Die Geschichte des Mauerfalls ist die Geschichte meines Pinsels"<sup>3</sup>. T. Brussig's removed position and post-modernistic targeting to destroy the myth as a certain "meta-history" claiming to be authoritarian and universal<sup>4</sup> was fully put in practice and is now of particular interest for researchers.

The emphasis on this theme is also prompted by an approaching anniversary – 30 years since the Berlin Wall was destroyed, and the number of festivities and cultural events proves how important this date is for the Germans of today. Earlier the Wall as a symbol of the division of Germany was perceived to be a part in the context of the Germans'

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<sup>1</sup> Emmerich W. Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR. Berlin, 2005. S. 500.

<sup>2</sup> Baßler M. Der deutsche Pop-Roman. Die neuen Archivisten. München, 2005. S. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir : Roman. Frankfurt am Main, 2011. S. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Мережинская А. Ю. Русская постмодернистская литература. Киев, 2007. С. 236.

national identity problem, whereas today the Wall's symbolism goes far beyond the narrow national issue to be viewed as a global problem of a territorial break-up. By way of illustration, we'll refer to the exhibition "Unbuilding Walls" provided by the architects Craft and the politician Marianne Birthler at the 2018 Architecture Biennale in Venice. While mainly accentuating the consequences of separation and hard process of uniting, the exposition curators told a sad story of the walls now existing in different parts of the Earth – such as the walls in Cypress, Northern Ireland, between Israel and Palestine, the USA and Mexico, between North and South Korea, the Ceuta-Morocco fence.

It is obvious that the Berlin Wall, which has been surrounded with myths and legends both during the 28 years of its existence and after its fall, has remained an important memorial place for the Germans, consolidating their national identity. Thirty years since its destruction the recollections of the 1989–1990 events have still been in the stage of memorizing and transition into the society's cultural treasury. As the cultural memory values the myth, recreating and preserving the echo of the event rather than the history, the study of the novel, whose major task as seen by the author, was the myth deconstruction, appears to be necessary and timely.

Thus *the purpose of this paper* is investigating the techniques of the post-modernistic myth deconstruction in Th. Brussig's novel "Heroes like us". *The object of the research* is the GDR's ideological myths and stereotypes about East Germans, formed after the "turning point" (the *Wende*).

### **1. Berlin Wall as a Myth**

Destruction of the Berlin Wall, started on 9 November 1989, symbolized the collapse of once whole and well-ordered World structure as well as the socialist idea and the beginning of a long-awaited unification of Germany. A concrete monster soon turned into a heap of building garbage, only some wall fragments covered with graffiti were taken to museums. The attitudes to the Berlin wall, since its building started in 1961, had not been simple. According to Marion Detjen, the Wall had evoked an extremely negative public response – indignation, anger and, even, despair. Though there had been initial attempts of resistance (as, for instance, students' organizations aiding refugees), over the time the active struggle had given way to despair and pessimism. The

people were ready to put up with the very existence of the Wall and, more than that, to justify it.

It was natural that in the Cold War situation both West Germany and East Germany were creating and supporting diverse official myths about the Berlin Wall. Thus the FRG was suggesting a parallel between the Third Reich and the GDR *as a new socialist dictatorship*. The Wall as a symbol of this dictatorship was “an ideal background for projections” and performed an important *compensatory function*, states M. Detjen<sup>5</sup>. Condemning the erection of the Berlin Wall, West Germans seemed to be implicitly condemning Auschwitz and Holocaust. In the context of postwar evading the talks about the Germans’ shameful past (the position most Germans had kept until 1968), such interpretation of the myth turned out to be quite appropriate.

The Germans had been expressing their criticisms of the GDR (and, indirectly, of their own national-socialist past) through “scandalizing, commercialization and aesthetization”. The Wall was used as a surface for graffiti and inscriptions of all kinds. Escapes as performances were staged at the Wall and tourists were offered a look at the other side of “the monster” from watch towers<sup>6</sup>.

A different myth was being formed in the GDR at that time – the Wall construction was justified by the objectives of the State acting for self-defense and for protecting its citizens. “*The Anti-Fascist Defensive Wall*” (“*Antifaschistischer Schutzwall*”) had to defeat an attack of “the class enemy – imperialism”. It meant that it had to safeguard its citizens from spies, enemy agents and potential military aggression of the West as well as “from threats and temptations of the capitalist world, from Japanese cars and Chinese cotton shirts”<sup>7</sup>. This myth continued the major ideological myth that the GDR had been created to counteract fascism and, “in contrast to keeping silence about national-socialism, as was practiced in the West, it gave [East Germans] an advantage of feeling that they were victims and winners rather than criminals and the defeated”<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Detjen M. Die Mauer. *Erinnerungsorte der DDR* / Hrsg. v. M. Sabrow M. München, 2009. S. 392.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. S. 391.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. S. 393.

<sup>8</sup> Münkler H. Der Antifaschismus als Gründungsmythos der DDR. *Mythos und Mythologie*. Berlin, 2004. S. 227.

Apart from official myths, there arose social myths, for instance, the sufferings were mythologized of those East Germans who felt bitter about their isolation, who perceived the Wall as prison. A concept of “*Berlin Wall illness*” (*Berliner Mauerkrankheit*), became popular in everyday life and was understood as a term for psychic disorder resulting from non-acceptance of violence. In this case the Wall became associated with inhuman and cruel imprisonment, the loss of freedom.

In the years 1989/1990 the old myth of GDR as an anti-fascist state lost its “integrating and orientating power”. “It could not motivate the people to mobilize their forces and agree to the limitations required for preserving GDR’s political independence”<sup>9</sup>, explains G. Münkler.

However, the Wall’s fall gave birth to new myths, one of which was *a myth of the heroic German people who had swept away the Berlin Wall*. This myth interpreted the event of November 9, 1989 as a democratic project initiated and realized by the German citizens, as a culmination of the peaceful revolution.

Over the time there appeared one more interpretation – the collapse of the wall initiated by G. Schabowski’s slip of the tongue emerged as an *unexpected event*, result of a political error, an absurdity which was at the same time a lucky incident opening to the Germans a world of new opportunities. Such “double semantics” did, in the opinion of S. Klinge, separate the Berlin Wall myth from the myth of Peaceful Revolution that, in its turn, had been understood to be a well thought-out project of the GDR’s progressively-minded citizens<sup>10</sup>.

Some of these myths became a target of irony and jeer on the part of T. Brussig, the author of the novel “Heroes like us”. Inventing his caricature-grotesque and perversive version of the Wall breakdown (it is not the people but his novel’s main character Klaus Uhltzsch who ruined the Wall with his male genitals!), Brussig attacks and deconstructs a number of myths at once: a) the myth of heroic German people who demolished the Wall; b) the official myth about GDR as an anti-fascist state; c) the myth of the GDR’s national heroes and the heroes of the Peaceful Revolution in the person of Christa Wolf. Consider these myths one by one.

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<sup>9</sup> Münkler H. Der Antifaschismus als Gründungsmythos der DDR. *Mythos und Mythologie*. Berlin, 2004. S. 228.

<sup>10</sup> Klinge S. 1989 und wir: Geschichtspolitik und Erinnerungskultur nach dem Mauerfall. Berlin, Bielefeld, 2015. S. 315.

## 2. The German Wenderoman as the Myth

The novel “Heroes Like Us “ is already looked upon as a classical example of the *Wenderoman* – a new genre of united Germany which reflected the chaotic reorientation stage, hard and complicated for Germany. The first novels in this trend came into the limelight in early 1990s in response to critical appeals to create a kind of novel which would engrave upon memory the history-making turning point in Germany`s destiny. The first appearances of the *Wenderoman* were perceived to be a journalists` utopian project capable of paralyzing writers` creative initiative, however, it eventually attained the status of a quite popular literary brand. The book market became flooded with numerous writings claiming that they deserved the prestigious title of the famous Novel of the Turn in question, though the only genre feature which could allow them to rank as such was that they topically correlated with the events of 1989/1990.

As time progressed, the list of novels given the *Wenderoman* title expanded, and for this reason the concept of “Literature of the Turn” became preferable very soon. According to T. Grub, all works topically correlated with the Turn period as well as those produced due to abolition of censorship and self-censorship may be related to the Literature of the Turn (*Wendeliteratur*). The researcher also puts into this category the products of those authors who actively studied historical documents and Stasi materials<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, *Wendeliteratur* may be treated as being “outside of any genre” or “above aesthetics” as it combines belles-lettres and documentary literature (diaries, biographies, letters, memoirs). Besides, here also belong the texts written still in the GDR which, to some extent, had paved the way for the peaceful revolution<sup>12</sup>.

The first literary researcher who suggested understanding the *Wenderoman* as a new independent genre was F. Wedeking in 1990s. In his book “Die deutsche Einheit und die Schriftsteller. Literarische Verarbeitung der Wende seit 1989” (1995) he singles out “four mainstream novels” of early 1990s which skillfully reflected “the epoch-making demolition of the mentality”. They are “Die Verteidigung der Kindheit” by M. Walser (1991), “Stille Zeile Sechs” by M. Maron

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<sup>11</sup> Grub F. Th. „Wende“ und „Einheit“ im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literatur. Ein Handbuch. In zwei Bänden. Berlin, New York, 2003. Band 1 : Untersuchungen. S. 69.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. S. 72–81.

(1991), “Ich” by W. Hilbig (1993), “Unter dem Namen Norma” by B. Burmeister (1994)<sup>13</sup>. The 2000s saw the *Wenderoman* being still timely and to the point. New works emerge which seek understanding the GDR and the phenomenon of the Turn, among which, primarily, “Zonenkinder” by J. Hensel (2002), “Landnahme“ by Chr. Hein (2004), “Neue Leben” by I. Schulz (2010), “Der Turm” by U. Tempelkamp (2008), “Kaltenburg” by M. Beier (2008). Such vitality of the genre makes still more acute the researchers` fascination with the matter of defining the *Wenderoman* genre borderlines.

Some generalization of what has been observed and concluded by today`s researchers in respect of this genre should be made as follows.

Broadly speaking, the *Wenderoman* does not seem to be a uniform genre outlined with distinct genre features. It incorporates diverse texts which *individually cope with understanding and evaluating* the historic significance and problems of the Turn. This point of view is upheld by an American researcher W. C. Donahue<sup>14</sup> who considers the *Wenderoman* to belong to a “non-existing genre” and substantiates his position with the fact that the list of relative products tends to continuously grow, often because films are also included. A similar reasoning is shared by A. Miyazaki<sup>15</sup> who views the *Wenderoman* as an aggregate number of “post-GDR” heterogeneous literary works or, in other words, a large rhizomatic structure having numerous plateaus and an incorporating topos of silence.

In a more narrow sense, the works “published after the fall of Berlin Wall which describe this historic event and its effect on the people” are identified as the *Wenderoman*<sup>16</sup>. A. Hector, a researcher of literature, has distinguished three variations of the novel of the Turn:

- the novels which offer direct comprehensive evaluation of the Turn events and whose plot is placed in 1989;
- the novels centering on the life in the GDR whose plot partially touches 1989;

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<sup>13</sup> Wehdeking V. Die deutsche Einheit und die Schriftsteller. Literarische Verarbeitung der Wende seit 1989. Stuttgart ; Berlin ; Köln, 1995. S. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Donahue W. C. The Impossibility of the Wenderoman: History, Retrospective, and Conciliation. *Konturen IV*. 2013. P. 167–206.

<sup>15</sup> Miyazaki A. Brüche in der Geschichtserzählung. Erinnerung an die DDR in der Post-DDR-Literatur. Würzburg, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Hector A. Der Wenderoman: Definition eines Genres : diss. for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Michigan, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2009. P. 23.

– the novels narrating the East Germans` life in new Western lands after the Turn<sup>17</sup>. However, the researcher has noted that, more often than not, the events in the plot have originated immediately after 1989.

The major function of the novel of the Turn appears to be finding comprehension of Germany`s recent past in the context of its present and future. When it is about coming to reckoning with the past, a chorus of voices is heard and there is a wealth of individual authors` positions. The writers of the Turn are shaping a new approach to the German history, and very often it turns out to be radically ironic and sarcastic (T. Brussig). The young writers are notable for their free attitude to historic facts, their daring re-evaluation of the events in question.

*Receptive function of the Wenderoman.* In I. Gabler`s opinion, the novel helps to stabilize the sense of identity and articulates the identity diffusion situation”. It enables a reader to overcome his own biographical horizon, to feel involved in crucial points of history as a participant of an important historical process<sup>18</sup>.

*Cumulative function of the Wenderoman.* The novel is a means of preserving the nation` cultural memory, a tool of cultural reconciliation and harmony, says W. C. Donahue. It preserves and conveys the values and aspirations of the former East Germans after the GDR itself stopped to exist. In view of its genre heterogeneous nature, the novel of the Turn may be said to be utilizing the genre schemes of trivial literature, for instance, masking itself as a feminine novel (“Unter dem Namen Norma” by B. Burmeister), a love novel (“Weites Feld” by G. Grass, “Adam and Eveline” by I. Schulze), a horror novel (“NOX” by T. Hettche), or representing an interesting combination of picaresque and pornographic novels (“Heroes Like Us” by T. Brussig).

The plot of Th. Brussig`s *Wenderoman* is based on Klaus Uhltscht`s “heroic biography” he told an American journalist and which was recorded on tape (seven tape recordings make up the novel`s text). The grotesque-carnival-type culmination has been advanced to the very beginning of the novel and then the storyteller chronologically and consistently describes the most dramatic episodes of his perverted socialist biography: Klaus is an exemplary son of his parents (a hygiene-

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<sup>17</sup> Hector A. Der Wenderoman: Definition eines Genres : diss. for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Michigan, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2009. P. 32.

<sup>18</sup> Gabler W. Der Wenderoman als neues literarisches Genre. *Zeiten-Wende – Wendeliteratur* / Hrsg. W. Gabler, N. Werz. Weimar & Rostock, 2000. S. 91.

crazy mum and a dad, Stasi secret agent); he is boastfully smart and the last school outsider; he is a teenager having complexes and suppressing his sexual desires. In the end, he becomes a State Security trainee (a Stasi rat), Honecker's rescuer and, ultimately, "a great German people's Liberator".

It is noteworthy that Uhltzsch's story is presented as a truthful "oral history", that is, as evidence of a witness and participant of a historical event. It is tape-recorded so as to preserve historic information. Such a magnetic recording, on the one hand, opens up a new dimension of viewing a historical event, and on the other hand, offers the reader a personal, subjective interpretation of history without claiming to be accurate and objective. This perspective is strengthened by introduction into the text of the novel of "an unreliable" narrator who suffers from a superiority complex and dreams to get on the front page of the newspaper New York Times. In the meantime Mr. Kitzelstein, Klaus's interviewer, remains an invisible participant of "the dialogue". He does not ask questions, does not comment on what has been said and this silence is fully compensated by Klaus's redundant verbal confessions. Klaus presents them as "voice checks" (*Sprechproben*) and thus disclaims the storyteller's responsibility and gets certain freedom: "Ich darf alles sagen, was mir in den Sinn kommt, ohne dass ich dafür festgenagelt werden kann – ist ja nur eine Sprechprobe"<sup>19</sup>.

Klaus's "voice checks" are associated with, and refer us to, other well-known utterances made by public figures of the Wende. This is primarily Ronald Reagan's 1987 speech with a "tear down-this-wall" proposal addressed to Gorbachev, Christa Wolf's speech at the demonstration in Berlin on November 4, 1989, urging to stay in the GDR and the interview of G. Schabowski which caused the immediate destruction of the Wall. In the chorus of the renowned speakers the voice of the German Simplicissimus Klaus Uhltzsch should occupy a proper place. Klaus reasons that his narration will become the most remembered voice check in humanity's history: "Es wird die berühmteste Sprechprobe der Menschheitsgeschichte!"<sup>20</sup>

I. B. Orlov, discussing advantages of written evidence compared to verbal ones, states: "Oral remembrances are "more independent" than the

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<sup>19</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir : Roman. Frankfurt am Main, 2011. S. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. S. 18.



written ones because when a man sits down to writing, his mind starts functioning intuitively both as an editor and a censor. They are valuable for their random choice of facts and density of details”<sup>21</sup>. This makes clear why all Klaus’s attempts to write his life story in the “a la European eye witness” style have failed (“Kein Wunder, dass ich nach zwei Jahren Nachdenken gerade einen Ansatz Lebensbeschreibung fertigbrachte”)<sup>22</sup>. Thus the oral story form turned out to be quite a convenient compromise: “Wenn ich über meinen Schwanz schon nicht schreiben kann, werde ich eben darüber reden. Und das sind keine Pennälerprotzereien, sondern Mosaiksteine der historischen Wahrheit, und wenn sie nicht wollen, dass noch Fragen offenbleiben, müssen Sie schon akzeptieren, dass meine Schilderungen ziemlich schwanzlätzig geraten”<sup>23</sup>.

### **3. Myth of the German People`s Heroism Breaking Down the Berlin Wall**

Klaus begins his life story as he is driven with a specific idea – to refute the legend of the people who demolished the Wall (“*Das-Volk-sprengt-die-Mauer-Legende*”) and thereby alter “the dominant historical image of peaceful revolution”<sup>24</sup>. In his version the events were developing in this way. While the people who in their own eyes were revolutionaries were crowding at the Brandenburg Gate and did not have the courage for any action, he, Klaus Uhltscht, put down his pants and showed the gaping frontier guards his gigantic privy part, which act caused confusion and resulted in opening the frontier crossing. But later that episode sank into oblivion: “Als die Mauer plötzlich nicht mehr stand, rieb sich das Volk die Augen und musste schließlich glauben, es hätte selbst die Mauer abgerissen”<sup>25</sup>. Now the offended Klaus is going to reveal to the American journalist and the whole humanity “the truth” about the Fall of the Wall: It was he (outsider, nancy and pervert) who fulfilled his historic mission on November 9, 1989: “Ja, es ist wahr. Ich war’s. Ich habe die Berliner Mauer umgeschmissen. Aber wenn es nur

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<sup>21</sup> Орлов И. Б. Устная история. *Теория и методология истории : учебник* / под. ред. В. В. Алексеева, Н. Н. Крадина, А. В. Коротаева, Л. Е. Гринина. Волгоград, 2014. С. 354.

<sup>22</sup> Brussig T. *Helden wie wir*. S. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Brussig T. *Helden wie wir : Roman*. Frankfurt am Main, 2011. S. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Geier A. Brussig, Thomas. *Metzler Lexikon DDR-Literatur: Autoren – Institutionen – Debatten*. Stuttgart; Weimar, 2009. S. 59.

<sup>25</sup> Brussig T. *Helden wie wir*. S. 6.

das wäre – die Rezensionen des Historiker und Publizisten jedenfalls lesen sich so: „Ende der deutschen Teilung“, „Ende der europäischen Nachkriegsordnung“, „Ende des kurzen 20. Jahrhunderts“, „Ende der Moderne“, „Ende des Kalten Krieges“, „Ende der Ideologien“ und „Das Ende der Geschichte“. Wie das tapfere Schneiderlein: Sieben auf einen Strich. Ich werde Ihnen erzählen, wie es dazu kam. Die Welt hat ein Recht auf meine Geschichte, zumal sie einen Sinn ergibt“<sup>26</sup>.

The narrator hiding behind the guise of rogue and pervert can openly condemn the Eastern Germans. Shattering the official myth of the GDR citizens' courage and consciousness, he denounces their infantilism and passiveness. Th. Brussig underlines “helplessness” of the GDR's generation which had not revealed itself before the fall of the Wall and after that took place was not interested in interpretation of what was going on<sup>27</sup>. This definition will appear in the novel's final pages: “Sehen Sie sich die Ostdeutschen an, vor und nach dem Fall der Mauer. Vorher passiv, nachher passiv – wie sollen die je die Mauer umgeschmissen haben?“<sup>28</sup> His conclusion is mono-semantic: there was not any wall-breaking people (“Die illusionsloseren Betrachter kommen nun zu dem Schluss, dass es kein mauersprengendes Volk gegeben hat“)<sup>29</sup>.

The researcher K. Reimann assumes that the main character exposes Germans as “an incompetent submissive petty-bourgeois nation”, he being its typical representative<sup>30</sup>. Actually, the entire book is dedicated to proving this idea: Though they attribute to themselves the services of revolutionaries and wall crushers, East Germans are in fact none of these. The forty years of living in the GDR have made out of them the inert conformists: “Wie konnte diese Gesellschaft Jahrzehnte existieren, wenn alle unzufrieden gewesen sein wollen? ... Alle waren dagegen, und trotzdem waren sie integriert, haben mitgemacht, kleinmütig, verblendet oder einfach nur dumm. Ich will das genau wissen, denn ich glaube, dass sich *alle* modernen Gesellschaften in diesem Dilemma bewegen“<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir. S. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Dieckmann Chr. Klaus und wie er die Welt sah. Der junge Ostberliner Autor Thomas Brussig hat den heißersehten Wenderoman geschrieben. *Die Zeit*. 08.09.1995.

<sup>28</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir. S. 319–320.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. S. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Reimann K. E. Schreiben nach der Wende – Wende im Schreiben? Literarische Reflexionen nach 1989/90. Würzburg, 2008. S. 256.

<sup>31</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir. S. 312.

T. Brussig calls his novel: “a book about the unrealized confrontation of young East German generation with the GDR”. In contrast to West Germans, actively seeking a dialogue between generations since late 1960-s, a communication between older and younger generations in GDR was practically non-existent. In fact, a message was addressed them which was expected to mobilize the GDR’s public activity to evaluate the current events. The novel covering the loser Klaus Uhltscht’s life story was expected to make the readers admit their own failures and realize their causes. According to T. Brussig, that that generation was reluctant to examine their past was his great omission but he “is now convinced that this confrontation will never take place. The chance has been lost, first, because the GDR’s reality is being gradually forgotten. And, second, because ”the 1968 generation” putting questions to their fathers won’t be repeated in 1989”<sup>32</sup>.

#### 4. The Myth about Socialism

In his novel T. Brussig turns inside out the major ideological myth of the GDR that socialism was associated with the hopes for building a new and happy future contrary to Germany’s fascist past. The writer creates his own personal myth of a great pervert and “messiah with a penis” in order to expose all perversions of the socialism: “Mr. Kitzelstein, ich lege Wert auf die Feststellung, dass ich pervers wurde, um dem Sozialismus zum Sieg zu verhelfen. Mein Forschungsgebiet war heikel; das Verhältnis von Sozialismus und Perversion nirgends geklärt. Wie gefällt Ihnen die dialektische Einheit *Sozialismus braucht Perversion, Perversion braucht Sozialismus!*“<sup>33</sup>.

The novel “Heroes like us” can be essentially read as an inverted education novel (*Bildungsroman*), as “a distorting mirror of [KlausUhltscht’s] youth in the progressive GDR” where education turns out to be deformation of personality<sup>34</sup>. It is not accidental that the hero is born on 20 August 1968 when Soviet tanks moved to Czechoslovakia: “In Panik durchstieß ich die Fruchblase, trieb durch den Geburtskanal und landete auf einem Wohnzimmertisch”<sup>35</sup>. His date of birth marks the

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<sup>32</sup> Gunske V., Poser S. S. Nachdenken über Thomas B. *Tip-Magazin*. 1999. № 21.

<sup>33</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir. S. 247.

<sup>34</sup> Dieckmann Chr. Klaus und wie er die Welt sah. Der junge Ostberliner Autor Thomas Brussig hat den heißersehten Wenderoman geschrieben. *Die Zeit*. 08.09.1995.

<sup>35</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir. S. 5.

death of illusions and hopes that “the Soviet power is capable of realizing the socialist utopia”<sup>36</sup>.

Uhltzsch’s **personality myth** is built on the principle of grotesque inversion. On the one hand, the hero feels in his consciousness that he is a messiah (“a savior with a penis”), on the other hand, he is conscious of his inferiority and describes himself as “the most miserable of all losers”: “Ich hatte den widerwärtigsten Namen, ich war der schlechthinformativste Mensch, ich war Toilettenverstopfer, Sachenverlierer, Totensonntagsfick und letzter Flaschschwimmer”<sup>37</sup>. This involves rejection of the heroic in its entirety and “the socialist heroism” in particular.

Klaus Ulzsch is a new German picaresque, an adventurer who grew up under socialism. The Brussig’s novel as a whole can be interpreted as a post-modernistic parody of the picaresque novel genre (*Schelmenroman*). Just like other adventurers (Portnoy by Ph. Roth, Harp by G. Irving or Oscar Mazerat by G. Grass), Klaus Ulzsch behaves as a typical rogue-hero who does not accept society and whose naivety exposes its inhumanity<sup>38</sup>. As a rule, a picaresque character is a homeless vagabond, a rogue whose amorality was born by an equally amoral society. His image is always ambivalent having both positive and negative traits. As stressed by G. Grass, “a picaresque character urinates on the pillars of power, destabilizes them, but at the same time he knows that he has no ability either to destroy a sanctuary or overthrow a throne”<sup>39</sup>. Ulzsch’s image has been structured on the principle of grotesque inversion or “anti-imagery”. Klaus sees himself as a hero who accomplished a feat, a historically significant action, but at the same time he is incapable of heroism or an evil deed. On the one hand, a reader perceives Klaus’s behavior as immoral (he tracks down a dissident, kidnaps a child, is close to raping a woman), on the other hand, he may be called a conformist, “a one of us”<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Sabrow M. *Sozialismus. Erinnerungsorte der DDR*. München, 2009. S. 190.

<sup>37</sup> Brussig T. *Helden wie wir*. S. 92.

<sup>38</sup> Zachau R. K. «Das Volk jedenfalls war’s nicht!» Thomas Brussigs Abrechnung mit der DDR. *Colloquia Germanica. Internationale Zeitschrift für Germanistik*. 1997. Bd. 30. S. 388.

<sup>39</sup> Грасс Г. Продолжение следует...Нобелевская речь / пер. с нем. Н. Тишковой. *Иностранная литература*. 2000. № 5. URL: <http://magazines.russ.ru/inostran/2000/5/grass.html>

<sup>40</sup> Gebauer M. *Wendekrisen: Der Pikaro im deutschen Roman der 1990er Jahre*. Trier, 2006. S. 69.

When still a child, Klaus was unable to oppose adults' authority. His parents made him an object of educational drills and gradually turned him into mother's darling, a nancy. Only while telling his story, he finally, puts an end to his surrounding<sup>41</sup>. His parents are an embodiment of absurd "petty bourgeois virtues". "Authoritarian and respectable" father, ignoring his son, and mother – "a goddess of hygiene", smothering him with excessive care and thinking it was her duty to learn all his intimate secrets. The author hyperbolizes his hero's traditional qualities of a hero-rogue's character – stupidity and ignorance. Klaus is unaware of where his father works (it is not spoken about at home, therefore he is naïve to assume that his father is a staffer of the Ministry of Foreign Trade).

As a result, Klaus grows up ignorant in intimate affairs. He knows about them less than do boys his age, as human anatomy was explained to him by his mother on the pictures of antique statues. Klaus is stuffed with knowledge but this advantage does not make him socially competent. He picks his friends from those who know the plural forms of the nouns *Kompas*, *Atlas* and *Lexikon*<sup>42</sup>, but when the matters of sex are touched, Klaus "turns out to be a little fool again": "Nein, da war ich plötzlich das Dummchen – was ist das? Wovon reden die? Sicher ging es wieder um irgendwelche Schweinereien, in denen sich diese halbverwahrlosten Kinder besser auskannten als ich, das Einzelkind aus gutem Hause, das Titelbild, das Vorbild, der zukünftige Straßename"<sup>43</sup>. He is always literal in understanding words: thus he thinks that "philately" (by analogy with "sodomy" or "pedophilia" means "sex with post stamps" or "at least, sex with post stamp collectors"). He understands "Ministry of State Security" in a distorted way as "a great anonymous defender": "Wo kann man in einem Staat in Sicherheit leben, wenn nicht gegenüber dem Ministerium für Staatssicherheit? <...> Es hat Jahre gedauert, bis ich anders darüber dachte, aber zunächst war es wirklich so, dass ich die Stasi wie einen großen anonymen Beschützer vergötterte"<sup>44</sup>. His thinking perversity manifests itself in exaggerating the importance of common things: he admires his dad's driving skills ("Das Auto gehorchte seinem

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<sup>41</sup> Gebauer M. Wendekrisen: Der Pikaro im deutschen Roman der 1990er Jahre. Trier, 2006. S. 72.

<sup>42</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir. S. 61.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. S. 63.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. S. 36.

Willen!”<sup>45</sup>), his ability to sleep and snore at the same time and to blow his nose (without his mother`s assistance!) on his own, using a large handkerchief and so on.

Th. Brussig endows his hero with a grotesque anatomy (“*Da-kann-man-direkt-neidisch-werden-Anatomie*”) which comes into reciprocity with the outside world. This grotesque physical nature of the hero is shown most prominently in the novel`s final scene when he, showing his enormous phallus, distracts a frontier pass point guard on Borholmer Strasse from performing his duty, and crowds of people stream across the border into West Berlin<sup>46</sup>.

All the hero`s fate is shown through the prism of his sexual perversions (a similar collection of perversions can only be found in a pornographic novel). P. Zachau defines “Heroes like us” as “a soft-porno novel” written in the spirit of American alternative literature (books of such authors as J. D. Salinger, H. Miller, Ph. Roth, Ch. Bukowski, J. Irving)<sup>47</sup>. Attempts of Klaus`s phallic emancipation (from being an impotent to becoming a porno-star) strike the very heart of dictatorial bigotry which demonizes sexuality in human life but proclaims ideological and existential repression as its basic principle: “Zum einen trifft die Schilderung von Klaus' phallischen Emanzipationsanstrengungen exakt ins Herz diktatorischer Prüderie, die das Sexuelle verteufelt, ideologische und existentielle Vergewaltigungen aber zum Prinzip erhebt”<sup>48</sup>. An allegoric parallel is drawn between the hero`s impotence and that of the regime which follows its perverted principles. Actually, all his sexual perversions are read in the context of “unhealthy” relations between the GDR and the FRG (the first sexual experience, peeping at western girls familiar from fashion catalogues) are crowned with a symbolic East – West unification when Klaus becomes a porno star in the West after the Fall of the Wall<sup>49</sup>. R. Zachau has expressed an idea that the novel of Brussig should rather be

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<sup>45</sup> Brussig T. *Helden wie wir*. S. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Gebauer M. *Wendekrisen: Der Pikaro im deutschen Roman der 1990er Jahre*. Trier, 2006. S. 93.

<sup>47</sup> Zachau R. K. «Das Volk jedenfalls war`s nicht!» Thomas Brussigs Abrechnung mit der DDR. *Colloquia Germanica. Internationale Zeitschrift für Germanistik*. 1997. Bd. 30. S. 388.

<sup>48</sup> Brandt S. Bleiche Mutter DDR. Thomas Brussig kuriert den Sozialismus aus einem Punkt. *FAZ*. 10.10.1995.

<sup>49</sup> Briel H. Humor im Angesicht der Absurdität. Gesellschaftskritik in Thomas Brussigs *Helden wie wir* und Ingo Schulzes *Simplex Storys*. *Schreiben nach der Wende: ein Jahrzehnt deutscher Literatur; 1989–1999*. Tübingen, 2001. S. 266.

taken as a political pamphlet written for the benefit of East Germans and representing a kind of look from inside the GDR. This proves continuously shifting narration perspective as Ulzsch's position is replaced with Brussig's own point of view. For all this, all literary allusions, all "perverse inserts" as well as the very structure of a post-modernistic picaresque product recede to the background and "the book produces the impression of purposefully designed pamphlet" exposing the thinking of a GDR's petty bourgeois, a conformist burdened with a host of complexes<sup>50</sup>.

### 5. "Deheroization" of the Mothers' Generation

It is natural that Brussig, destroying the myths and illusions about the GDR and the Wende by means of "liberating laughter", revolts against the officially recognized "deities", particularly – Christa Wolf, the major figure in the GDR's literary life. The novel's conflict symbolically reflects the mythological struggle of the heroes' younger generation ("heroes like us") who were born after the GDR's illusions had been put an end to) with "the socialism's titans", the mothers' generation of those who believed that it was possible to build socialism with the human face. In the person of Christa Wolf, T. Brussig attacks the whole of East German intellectuals' generation who for a long time were devoted to socialist ideas and believed in false ideals: "Wenn Christa Wolf, die Meisterin des Wortes oder welche Aura auch immer sie umflorte, am 4. November trotz befreiter Sprache darauf verzichtete, zur Maueröffnung anzustacheln, dann wird sie schon gewusst haben, warum. Und ich habe es trotzdem aufgemacht! Eigenmächtig! Ohne mich mit ihr abzustimmen!"<sup>51</sup>

It is that Brussig, essentially, discredits Christa Wolf's image. When she was speaking at the demonstration, he took her first for Jutta Müller, a figure skating trainer – one more "GDR's icon", "the Queen of his sexual fantasies" who had trained Katarina Witt, an Olympic champion. The collective Christa Wolf – Jutta Müller image is an author's projection on the "tender mothers'" generation. These mothers are "im-pecc-able" ("ta-del-los") in everything they do – they were winners at the Olympics,

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<sup>50</sup> Zachau R. K. «Das Volk jedenfalls war's nicht!» Thomas Brussigs Abrechnung mit der DDR. *Colloquia Germanica. Internationale Zeitschrift für Germanistik*. 1997. Bd. 30. S. 394.

<sup>51</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir. S. 305–306.

they wrote preambles for the Constitution projects, they raised the country from ruins. How can their offspring show its worth with these “Olympic mothers” in the background? “Wie soll man, umgeben von olympischen Müttern, darüber sprechen können, mit eigenen, unsicheren Worten! Wo sie doch die Exklusivrechte an befreiter Sprache gepachtet haben, auch wenn ihnen als erstes frei von den Lippen geht, dass aus Forderungen Rechte, also Pflichten werden“<sup>52</sup>.

The famous Christa Wolf’s speech she made at the demonstration of November 4, 1989 becomes an object of deconstruction in the novel’s 7<sup>th</sup> chapter. The chapter’s title “Der geheilte Pimmel” (“The cured prick”) is an ironic play on the title of Christa Wolf’s most popular novel “Der geteilte Himmel” (“Devided Heaven”). Her speech given in this part of the novel is followed with a full-scale criticizing of Christa Wolf’s work and the whole GDR’s literature (“can this be a liberated language?”). Ultzscht` criticism playing here the role of “the author’s mouthpiece” concerns the whole generation of “mothers and figure skating trainers” (the trainer’s name Jutta is rhymed with “Mutter”). “Mr. Kitzenstein, eigentlich wäre es zum Lachen, wenn es nicht so tragisch wäre – aber diese Mütter und Eislauftrainerinnen hängen wirklich am Sozialismus. Sie sind aus den Trümmern der tausend Jahre gekrochen. Die Angst vor den Luftangriffen saß ihnen so gründlich in den Knochen, dass sie noch heute bei jedem Feuerwerk an die Flaks denken. Sie hatten Hunger. Der moralische Teil unter ihnen litt daran, deutsch zu sein. Sie hatten weiss Gott keine vorzeigbare Vergangenheit und obendrein eine freudlose Gegenwart. Aber die Zukunft!”<sup>53</sup>. The narrator shows that the mothers’ generation dreams (“Stell dir vor, es ist Sozialismus und niemand geht weg!“) have not found response from the new generation (“Stell dir vor, es ist Sozialismus und keinen interessiert“) <sup>54</sup>.

In his critical attacks at Christa Wolf, Brussig resorts, as thinks K. Reimann, to the stereotyped accusations of this lady-writer which have already sounded before, he reproaches her for “the cowardly petty-bourgeois ways, adaptability and sentimentality”<sup>55</sup>. The hero wants to find a proof of the fact that Christa Wolf has really urged Germans to

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<sup>52</sup> Brussig T. Helden wie wir. S. 311.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. S. 287.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. S. 290.

<sup>55</sup> Reimann K. E. Schreiben nach der Wende – Wende im Schreiben? Literarische Reflexionen nach 1989/90. Würzburg, 2008. S. 264.



break the Wall down: “Ich wollte in ihren Büchern so lange suchen, bis ich meine mit ihren Worten entschuldigen kann. Irgendwo würde sich schon was finden! Dann kann ich wieder ruhig schlafen! ... Vielleicht war Christa Wolf sehr für die Mauereröffnung? Vielleicht hat sie sogar mit *Gefühlswörtern* hantiert? *Stell dir vor, die Mauer ist weg*, und so weiter. Dann könnte man mir nicht mehr allein das Ende der Geschichte anhängen! Dann könnte ich geltend machen, daß ich im Einklang mit den aufgeklärtesten Geistern der Gesellschaft gehandelt hätte!”<sup>56</sup>. However, having reread all her books, he realized that there was not a single hint in them of her participation in the event of the Berlin Wall Fall. The myth of the German intellectuals personified by Christa Wolf’s having prepared the ground for the Peaceful Revolution has not thus withstood the test.

Brussig reproaches Wolf for her knowing in 1968 that the GDR had no future and not writing about that. It was exactly then that his “hero was born, when, according to Wolf, everything had ended”<sup>57</sup>. In the novel his settling the scores with Wolf’s generation is merciless: thus, her most acclaimed love novel “Der geteilte Himmel” is recommended in a hospital as a reading suppressing desire. It should be noted that such sarcastic mockery of the older writers’ generation is characteristic of the younger generation of German writers.

The subjectiveness of this interpretation of the GDR’s literature should not be overlooked. In H. Briel’s view, Brussig does not take into account the dubious GDR’s writers’ position as well as that the GDR’s literature nevertheless produced space for freedom<sup>58</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions are as follows. Despite “the historic setting” and political references, the novel of Brussig cannot be identified as a historical novel in the commonly accepted sense. What it represents is an exclusively post-modernistic version of history – it is comical, satirical, ironic and morbidly perverse. The writer’s intention was not to convey the historical truth but to replace it with the “historical lies”, that is to decompose reality by means of creating a great grotesque myth. The

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<sup>56</sup> Brussig T. *Helden wie wir*. S. 306.

<sup>57</sup> Günske V., Poser S. S. Nachdenken über Thomas B. *Tip-Magazin*. 1999. № 21.

<sup>58</sup> Briel H. Humor im Angesicht der Absurdität. Gesellschaftskritik in Thomas Brussigs *Helden wie wir* und Ingo Schulzes *Simplex Storys*. *Schreiben nach der Wende: ein Jahrzehnt deutscher Literatur; 1989–1999*. Tübingen, 2001. S. 265.

hero's mask merges diverse narrative strategies which in their combination give the feeling that the historical truth is relative: a) seven chapters marked in the novel as "voice tests" emphasizing the speaker's subjective perception; b) numerous inter-textual allusions hinting at the story as being secondary; c) picaresque and carnival-like motives alluding to the replacement of long-established hierarchy of values (both in the political system and the system of literature).

An especial ironically removed attitude to the GDR's political situation is characteristic of T. Brussig as was typical of the young writers' generation of his time. Non-participation in GDR's past allows the author to make an arbitrary treatment of historic facts, to destroy and recreate the myths.

T. Brussig is active in destroying both GDR's old ideological myths and the new ones emerging on the Berlin Wall's and liquidated state's debris. Exposing inadequacy of the former conceptions, the author gives birth to his own myth of the socialist perversions. Klaus Uhltscht with his perverted personality suppressed by totalitarian structures (school, family, office work) is a typical product of this world. The new savior of the German nation is as helpless and a passive A Philistine as all East Germans.

Th. Brussig, a post-modernist, interprets the GDR's reality as a chaotic world, an inverted one, the one which turns all values inside out, depriving a man of landmarks indicating the past and the future. And yet there exists a way out of this crisis, the escape is possible, it consists in conscientious and responsible attitude of Germans to their history and its interpretation.

## **SUMMARY**

The article deals with the problem of the post-modernistic myth deconstruction in Th. Brussig's Wenderoman "Heroes like us". As a representative of the young generation of authors from the former GDR who were not personally involved in the postwar German history Brussig has a target to destroy the myth as a certain "meta-history". It is shown that Brussig deconstructs popular ideological myths and stereotypes about East Germans by creating his own scandalously shocking version of the demolition of the Berlin wall with techniques of grotesque and travesty. This text reviews different myths that has been ironically attacked in the novel: 1) the myth of heroic German

people who demolished the Wall; 2) the official myth about GDR as an anti-fascist state; 3) the myth of the GDR's national heroes and the heroes of the Peaceful Revolution in the person of Christa Wolf. Exposing inadequacy of the former conceptions, Brussig gives birth to his personal myth of the socialist perversions. Klaus Uhltscht with his perverted personality suppressed by totalitarian structures (school, family, office work) is a typical product of GDR. The function of the demythologization is to criticize the passiveness of the GDR citizens and to call them to be more conscientious and responsible to their history and its interpretation.

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**Information about the author:**

**Pomohaibo J. O.**

Candidate of Philological Sciences, Assistant Professor,  
Department of Foreign Literature,  
Odessa I. I. Mechnikov National University  
2, Dvoryanska str., Odessa, 65082, Ukraine