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BETWEEN A RELIC OF THE PAST AND A SOCIALIST DUTY: CHILD AND ADOLESCENT LABOUR IN 'COMMUNIST POLAND' IN THE LIGHT OF LITERARY FICTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (1948–1980)

Abstract: This paper examines the cultural image of child and adolescent labour performed in the People's Republic of Poland in the years 1948–1989 as was presented in the literary fiction addressed to the young people. During the Stalinist period, literature officially condemned child labour on individual farms, but affirmed the labour of adolescent workers in state industry and construction. After the 1956 Thaw, the subject matter of labour was receding into the background, for several reasons. Nevertheless, the post-1956 youth literature also featured labour-related themes: community works, school cooperatives, work in family crafts, tutoring, and shady trade.

Keywords: Poland, community work, child labour, adolescent labour, youth fiction

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INTRODUCTION

Among the many achievements of the People's Republic of Poland, the creation of conditions for children and young people to be educated and freed from the need for employment was officially cited. It was part of creating the image of the "happy generation of People's Poland" (Idzikowska-Czubaj, 2016: 21). Indeed, the upper age-limit of compulsory schooling was gradually raised, and adolescent work was severely restricted by law. Until 1956, compulsory education in elementary school covered children aged 7–14, still under the 1919 decree. This decree, however, provided the possibility of exemption from compulsory schooling for children living more

than 3 km away from a school (Dz.Pr.P.P. 1919, No. 14, item 147: art. 33). In fact, before 1956, half of urban youth and two-thirds of rural youth had not even finished elementary school (Idzikowska-Czubaj, 2016: 24; Kosiński, 2006: 8). A 1956 decree introduced absolute compulsory schooling in primary schools lasting 7 years from the age of 7, but no longer than until the age of 16 (Dz.U. 1956, No. 9, item 52: art. 1–3). Finally, the law in 1961 introduced a compulsory eight-grade primary school and compulsory schooling until the age of 17 (Dz.U. 1961, No 32, item 160: art. 7, 9).

Until 1974, the pre-war law of 1924 on the subject of juvenile and female labour was in effect. It forbade the employment of children under the age of 15. Juveniles between the ages of 15 and 18 could only be employed with parental/guardian consent and a medical certificate (Dz.U. 1924, No. 65, item 636: art. 5–6). The Labour Code of 1974 stipulated that persons under the age of 15 could not be employed, and persons between 15 and 18 (juveniles) could only be employed after completing primary school and were subject to further supplementary learning (Dz.U. 1974, No. 24, item 141: art. 190, 197).

In fact, however, there were numerous forms of child and adolescent labour in the People's Poland, in and out of the state sector. This was most exploitative during the Stalinist period. In 1948, the Universal Organization "Service for Poland" (SP) was established. Its purpose was to "organize the participation of youth in the implementation of the plans for the reconstruction and expansion of a democratic People's Poland" and to "train qualified squads of builders for all areas of national life" (Dz.U. 1948, No. 12, item 90: art. 1). It was a paramilitary and uniformed organization, and all citizens of both sexes between the ages of 16 and 21 were subject to compulsory service in it, with the exception of vocational school students, soldiers, and, significantly, members of the authorities of official youth organizations (Dz.U. 1948, No. 12, item 90: art. 32–34). Compulsory labour in the SP had two forms: barracks mode for 6 months or casual mode 3 days a month, in both cases the work was to last up to 6 hours a day. In practice, the SP was a reservoir of "the cheapest labour force", as its initiators themselves stated (Lesiakowski, 2002: 128). Daily working hours often exceeded 6 hours (Szuba, 2006: 37).

SP was dissolved in 1955, but numerous other forms of underage labour remained. It included the Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP) – established in 1958, it was primarily formally a social organization (M.P. 1958, No. 56, item 322), and later a state agency since 1982 (it still exists today, by the way). It provided work and further education for young people

with lower social and cultural capital, not attending school – one could be a member of OHP between the ages of 16 and 24. At the same time, the OHP allowed occasional seasonal earning of money by “normal” (attending school) youth during summer vacations.

The idea of education through work was one of the key tenets of official pedagogy in the socialist system. Hence, from the beginning of the Stalinist period until the end of the People’s Republic of Poland, the youth was mobilized in schools for various kinds of unpaid work, called community service (Kosiński, 2006: 176–180). The same function was performed by various youth organizations. The peculiar concept of the one-off event community work (Polish: *czyn społeczny*) as was legally introduced in 1955 (Nikoniuk, 2021: 172). The most characteristic form was collective work in the construction of public facilities, cleaning and arranging green areas or infrastructure elements. Over time, community work began to be perceived by the general public as actually coercive and of little real value.

The child and adolescent labour was reflected to some extent, albeit selectively, in literature for young people dealing with contemporary social and moral issues. Literature occupied a very important place in the culture of the communist period and in the cultural policy of the authorities. During this period in the People’s Republic of Poland, there was a massive increase in readership and a state publishing sector was created. Despite the development and spread of television (Pleskot, 2015), and the mass popularity of radio, the book remained one of the main carriers of cultural content throughout the communist period, including discourse on socio-economic reality, although its role gradually diminished (Parnowski, 1961: 40–42; Socha, 2013; Chrobak, 2019: 92–107).

The intention of the authorities was to create a “socialist model of literature” (Frycie, 1978: 17). In practice, this policy began to be implemented in 1949 in literature in general, and from 1951 in literature for children and young people – at that time socialist realism was decreed as the only valid style and direction. The prose of socialist realism for children and young people was to create personal role models for young people in accordance with the prevailing ideology so that young people become the generation that builds the so-called socialist society according to the program of the ruling Communist Party (on the goals of Party’s policy toward the youth see: Kosiński, 2006: 21–36). It was very schematic: the positive protagonist had to be involved in the “building socialism” and the “fight against opponents of people’s power” (Frycie, 1978: 20–28; Bereta, 2013; see also Czernow and Michułka, 2016: 85–86).

However, the development of this type of literature was short-lived, and after the “Thaw” it was officially stated that it was not very successful. Most of the novels for children and young people written at that time after 1956 went out of circulation and were not reissued. After 1956, there was a so-called “democratization” in culture. Ideologically committed works were still promoted in accordance with socialist ideology, but thematic and formal diversity was allowed. At that time, several currents of prose addressed to young people emerged, including mainstream fiction, but contemporary social and moral topics were also present in novels and short stories whose plot was primarily adventure or sensational-detective.

In academic and critical-literary discourse, there are various definitions and classifications of prose for young people. In general, it refers to literature addressed to readers between the ages of 11 and 16 (Chrobak, 2019: 118–125). Older adolescents of secondary school age were more likely to have reached for adult literature (Socha, 2013: 312–313, 320–321).

The key issue here is the realism of this literature and its relationship to the official propaganda discourse. As with any literary work, it is situated in a triangle of relationships: between the author, the publisher and the reader. Thus, the content was influenced by the author’s intentions, the publishers’ requirements as well as the readers’ expectations. Publishing houses were part of the state cultural sector and carried out its policies, and, in practice, were also an instrument of censorship. The authorities still expected youth literature to be involved in the so-called socialist upbringing of young people. Part of the short stories and novels was written on commission for youth magazines, or was written under the auspices of official organizations. Literature was not subject to market rules, or was only partially subject to them, and the authorities aspired to shape readers’ expectations, rather than adjust the bookstore offer to them. Nevertheless, adventure, love, sensational and comic plots, almost completely absent before, were increasingly developed after 1956. Official criticism, however, continued to accuse youth literature of an excess of criminal and thrilling plots and affirmation of informal structures (“backyard gangs”), i.e. insufficient didacticism. It was also criticized that the world depicted in youth novels is mainly that of the urban intelligentsia and only marginally portrays youth from the working class (Frycie, 1978: 61–62; cf. Kosiński, 2006: 314–315; Chrobak, 2019: 144–145).

The dominance of intelligentsia themes, however, continued. This is because, first, the novelists themselves belonged to the intelligentsia stratum and drew inspiration from their surroundings. Second, after 1970

(during the leadership of Edward Gierek) there was a revision of the egalitarian model of society, and the officially affirmed social group became the white collars: managers, engineers, and other highly skilled professionals (Sutowski, 2016). The final consequence was the conservative turn in literature for young people in the 1980s, the main manifestation of which is the work of Małgorzata Musierowicz – the novelist who wrote affirmatively about a conservative intelligentsia (Szybowski, 2016: 206).

The topics of child and adolescent labour appeared in this fiction in several aspects. The first aspect is labour, which is a relic of the past and would be eliminated thanks to the “socialist transformations”. The second aspect is unpaid labour within the framework of various community works and the activities of social and educational organizations. The third: labour in accordance with legislation. The fourth: school cooperatives. The fifth: work in the shadow economy.

The initial point of this study – 1948 – was chosen as the beginning of Stalinism, marked by the creation of the Polish United Workers Party, the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP) and – crucial to the topic – the SP. However, on the grounds of cultural history, it could even be shifted to 1949, when socialist realism was decreed as the prevailing direction in literature. Earlier, in the period 1944/45–1948, many elements of the pre-war reality were still in place. First of all, the publishing market, including the market for books for both children and young people, was still pluralistic. There were private publishing houses publishing reissues of pre-war books, translations from Western literature, and books that were new, but written without major ideological burdens yet. The end point also posed a certain problem, because there was a period of transition in children and adolescent literature after 1980. The old generation of authors active since 1956 was ending its activity, and many writers avoided contemporary themes due to the political situation after the introduction of martial law in 1981. Thus, however, 1989 marked the end of communist system, the last analyzed being a novel that was published in 1979.

The works of the main authors of literature for children and young people dealing with contemporary social and moral issues were examined – with reference to the period after 1956: Adam Bahdaj, Janusz Domagalik, Edmund Niziurski, Natalia Rolleczek, Aleksander Minkowski, Elżbieta Jackiewiczowa, Małgorzata Musierowicz. Their novels were the most popular, published in the largest circulations and often reissued. Of course, most of their work does not relate to the subject of labour at all, hence the bibliography includes only a dozen selected novels. Also in-

cluded were a few lesser-known authors: the authors of representative socialist realism novels, Franciszek Klon as a regional author, inspired by the realities of the Silesian Industrial District, and Wiktor Zawada's and Maria Kowalewska's novels because of their unique themes.

A VANISHING RELIC OF EXPLOITATION AND POVERTY

In the novels of the era of socialist realism depicting social changes in the countryside, the main theme was the previous overburdening of children with farm work. On the eve of the "socialist transformation", children, especially of poorer peasant families, cannot learn and have no time to play (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1954: 42). Sometimes they also have to be subcontractors for the work of adults, hiring themselves out for work. In the novel *Hela będzie traktorzystką* [Hela Will Be a Tractor Driver] the child protagonist's father works for a rich miller for the proverbial "measure of flour". When the father can't come, the child must replace him and is brutally pressured:

And you ginger whelp, bustle about! If not – then away! I'll chase you out like a dog and dock your father's pay that there will be nothing left! (Michalska, 1950: 30).

Being an agent of change, the young mechanic-communist explains that with the collectivization of agriculture, child labour on the land will essentially disappear:

Well, enjoy it, because you will not graze! – And what will we do? – What all children in the world should do: learn, play, and sometimes help their parents with the work, and this work is not always so boring as grazing (Michalska, 1950: 73).

The same problem is also the subject of Edmund Niziurski's *Księga Urwisów* [Book of Urchins] (Niziurski, 1962b, later reissued many times). This is a significant book, as it was the first announcement of a turn away from socialist realism in youth fiction. On the one hand, it still has a schematic propaganda distribution of political and moral values. On the other hand, it deviates from didactic schemes and presents the world of schoolboys as autonomous, guided by its own rules. In the hidden layer one can see allusions critical on Stalinism, including, as discussed below, those referring to the exploitation of youth labour in the "Service for Poland".

The novel contains a fairly broad and realistic, though biased, picture of life in the countryside of Kielce voivodship in 1952. One of the main topics of the novel is the collectivization of agriculture. Most of the children are portrayed to be overburdened with farm work. They have to graze cows after classes, and at some times of the year, they do not go to school at all because they work at digging potatoes. The establishment of a cooperative is supposed to rationalize farm work and reduce child labour. The novel contains numerous phrases critical of child labour on the land, both from the children and positive adult protagonists:

Would you go to such a cooperative? There is, brother, freedom... The old ones only work for days' pay, and you are free. [...] Cows will be bred that will give three thousand liters of milk each. And the children will finally stop grazing them and from now on they will be able to learn and play at leisure [...] Because we all want there to be a cooperative. – So that there would be tractors. – And let us not have to graze cows. (Niziurski, 1962b: 182–196).

There is also a statement of the negative protagonist: the rich conservative farmer, a typical “kulak” from the Stalinist schemes, with a clerical worldview. As the head of the farm, he exploits the underage brother of his daughter-in-law living under his roof, constantly ordering him to do some work on the farm. He regards child labour on the family farm as something natural and right, sanctioned by religion and tradition:

Children from the beginning of the world grazed for their parents and the crown did not fall off their heads. It was while grazing sheep, that St. John Bosco, who founded the Salesian order, had his first revelations. And Bernardette the Maid became a saint while serving. And you, Mr. Teacher, after all, you are also wise and educated, and once you told us here yourself that you used to graze cattle at your daddy's place in your youth. I mean, there is nothing wrong with that, and it does not interfere with education. (Niziurski, 1962b: 193).

A similar motif – child labour as a relic of the past that should be eliminated – occurs in Franciszek Klon's novel *Chłopcy z Czarnej Hałdy* [The Boys from the Black Heap]. Set in a mining town in Upper Silesia, the time of action is most likely the early Stalinist years, after 1950. The protagonists are boys, who collect coal in heaps to then sell it under the counter (Klon, 1961: 3). They are mainly from single-parent families, living in poverty. Their gangs compete for crumbs of coal, and entering other gangs' territory can end in a beating. Such work is contrasted with useful and desirable work: schoolboys and schoolgirls should collect recyclables and use the proceeds to build a common room. In Klon's novel, there are also ref-

erences to the phenomenon of adolescent labour in the mines, which has disappeared thanks to socialism. The protagonist's guardian turns to the schoolmaster:

Couldn't he be exempted from schooling? Mr. Schoolmaster, give him a pickaxe in his hand. He could already earn boldly [...] – The mine would not accept your Wiktor. Times have changed (Klon, 1961: 24-25).

The child labour on the land, of course, did not disappear with the 1950s, although its scale gradually diminished thanks to the progressive modernization of the countryside, and the topic also disappeared from youth fiction.

In the late 1970s, on the other hand, a somewhat shocking plot twist appears against the background of communist egalitarianism: with a teenage servant girl. The novel in question is Małgorzata Musierowicz's novel *Kłamczucha* [The Liar] – the main character, a 16-year-old girl from a small town (a fisherman's daughter), is employed in disguise under a false name in the house of a high-level manager in Poznań as a servant (Musierowicz, 1979: 98-100). On the one hand, this is a conventional literary comic disguise, and this intrigue serves the novel's plot. On the other hand, the narrative indicates that the practice of hiring teenage servants is accepted and considered normal, however, the employers are portrayed somewhat comically as a pair of typical careerists of the Edward Gierek era. Interestingly, the motif of employing servants (housekeepers) in intelligentsia houses occurred sporadically in youth fiction, but these were adults and often even elderly (Rolleczek, 1961: 196; Bahdaj, 1967: 33). Here we have for the first time a situation where a 16-year-old maid and a secondary school students at the same age appear together in the same apartment.

THE SERVICE FOR POLAND AND COMMUNITY WORKS

The "Service for Poland" has found some reflection in literature. In the novel *Krzak jaśminu* [The Bush of Jasmine], this organization is shown as an opportunity for social advancement and broadening of horizons, but one of the main characters (a village teenager) fails to take advantage of this chance. He first resists applying, and eventually ends up at an SP camp, where he works on road construction. However, he does not receive a referral to a vocational course, as he was involved in drunkenness and brawling. Only work (but no longer at SP) on the construction of Nowa Huta – a giant metallurgical plant and new city close to Cracow –

will make him a good “member of the workers’ collective” (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1954: 91, 116, 165).

A very ambiguous allusion to the SP organization, on the other hand, appears mentioned in *The Book of Urchins*. Two heroes (13-year-olds) run away from school to explore a copper mine on their own, but a rumor spreads in the village that they have been kidnapped by the authorities and forced to work there. The peasants execrate and angrily protest:

To see the mine they were supposed to – continued Skórka – and then to work, to help in the obligations. And if he stopped, he was beaten. – No, he did not stop, but ran away, they chased him. The din rose. Everyone added some details. [...] – It was Malinowski [the foreman] who beat you with a cable! A monster! (Niziurski, 1962b: 143–144).

They spread the nonsense around the village that children were being taken from school for mining work. Sądej wanted to speak – Stachurczyna stands up, “Sir, first of all, tell us about this child labour in the mine. Is it such SP or something else?” (Niziurski, 1962b: 147).

Anonymous letters are also sent to the authorities:

Children are being dragged to the mines to work. On September 17, the schoolboy Stopa was detained after a movie at the mine. And when he wanted to leave, they beat him up and since then he has been ill with kidney disease (Niziurski, 1962b: 258).

Thus, in the open layer of the narrative, Niziurski presented the criticism of the SP as gossip spread by a “reactionary element”, but in essence, perhaps, he gave voice to society here. The peasants’ complaints in the novel reflect the actual negative attitude of society towards the SP (Lesiakowski, 2002: 138). The date “September 17” – the day of the Soviet Union’s invasion of Poland in 1939 – is perhaps not accidental, and is a deliberate allusion, if so, overlooked by the censors.

On the pages of the novels, the unpaid work of children and adolescents within the framework of so-called community service, community work and the activities of various socio-educational organizations occurred quite extensively.

During the Stalinist period, “just” unpaid labour was contrasted with “unjust” paid labour. The novel *The Bush of Jasmine* smacks of a certain hypocrisy – it criticizes paid child labour on individual farms, while praising unpaid, but actually hard and dangerous work of 14-year-olds – a school class one day “volunteers” to clean a construction site in Nowa Huta. The only deviation from the propaganda is the citation of the children’s opinion that the work was hard:

It was terribly boring. It was awful work. [...] Hands and backs began to ache from the constant bending over, carrying whole heaps of bricks, digging out of the sand and out of the ground shells, splinters, and bits of building material. And the sun was shining so hard that faces, backs, and hands were sweating from the heat (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1954: 197–198).

In *The Book of Urchins*, gainful labour for the common good (here: harvesting the hazelnuts and blueberries to donate the profit to a youth organization) is shown as a positive demand (Niziurski, 1962b: 172). It is probably a reflection of the nationwide campaign of collecting herbs, conducted in 1953 (Kosiński, 2006: 177). In *Awantura w Nieklaju* [Disturbances in Nieklaj], one of the rival groups of boys performs community service to build a sports field (Niziurski, 1962b: 95, 250). However, the leaders of community work in both of these novels are shown somewhat comically – they are teenage equivalents of party secretaries, who speak artificial propaganda language, and prefer to manage the work rather than to work themselves (see Chrobak, 2019: 184–185).

In contrast, a moderately affirmative attitude toward community work is found in Joanna Chmielewska's novel *Zwyczajne życie* [Ordinary Life]. This novel – which combines elements of romance, detective fiction, and humour – is quite emblematic of the middle period of communist Poland. Two 16-year-old secondary friends follow the middle path – they are in no way ideologically or organizationally committed to the political system, but they do not contest it either. A community work is announced at school – arranging an orchard by the orphanage – and the heroines mistakenly take on more tasks than they were assigned. The propaganda is treated by them with distance – they ironically repeat the newspeak phrase “Long-term social work with long-term benefit” (Chmielewska, 1974: 54). However, the goal itself – helping “starved and abandoned children” seems justified to them (Chmielewska, 1974: 61). In contrast, the heroine's younger brother (portrayed as a cynic) has a sneering attitude:

At their school, they go crazy. They tell them to scrounge up millions of fruit trees and plant an orchard somewhere there. And they fly around all sorts of people, rip these trees from them, and drive them to school, like fools, on foot through the whole city (Chmielewska, 1974: 106).

In Niziurski's novel *Awantury kosmiczne* [Cosmic Disturbances], which depicts, in dark and grotesque colors, the realities of the end of the Gierek era, the characters create a fictional organization to voluntarily support the renovation of a school. The episode is in fact a parodic description of

community work and careers in official youth organizations – the heroes, in accordance with the rules of community work, display a banner, but only simulate working:

The banner bore the words: “School cleanup work. Team No. 1.” [...] – We can clean up the area between the new pavilion and the old building [...]. In any case, we enter there with rakes and shovels. A banner will be placed and the work will begin. [...] We’ll be levelling and raking. – Raking really! – At a moderate pace, but a little movement will do. – Is it necessary? – I don’t think it’s necessary. Those who don’t want to move a shovel can only feign that they are doing something (Niziurski, 1978: 122–123).

The little kids will be driven to work. I am just completing the management staff for supervising (Niziurski, 1978: 204).

EMPLOYMENT IN COMPLIANCE WITH LEGISLATION

Legal juvenile labour in accordance with legislation occurred more widely only in the literature of the Stalinist era. This is because the literature of socialist realism served to promote labour, generally, physical labour (Bereta, 2013: 93). A certain group of novels for young people were variants of the flagship adult literary subgenre of the socialist realism period – the production novel (*powieść produkcyjna*), which spread the cult of labour and the cult of the worker. Thus, for example, the novel *Domy nad Wisłą* [Houses by the Vistula] describes the growing of a 17-year-old who, after graduating from elementary school, begins working as a bricklayer at the construction of a new housing development (Ostromęcki, 1950). In the novel *The Bush of Jasmine*, taking a job after graduating from elementary school is a natural life path for most of the characters – peasant children. At the same time, the girls also choose professions, perceived, until recently, as masculine:

Zosia Partyłanka is strong, skilful, and necessarily wants to go to a profession right away, to be a bricklayer... Her mother is ill and Zocha has to work, and she will further her education at the same time in a high school for working people (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1954: 185).

In the post-stalinist period, several novels portraying small towns feature the theme of youth working in family crafts. In Klon’s novel *Łowcy minionego czasu* [The Hunters of Bygone Time], which is hybrid in genre – combining features of science fiction, popular science, and mainstream fiction. One of the main characters (circa 17 years old) combines his second-

ary school education with work in the family craft of bakery. He gets up at dawn every day and is constantly exhausted as a result (Klon, 1972: 7). This hero is atypical: he is an outsider, rides a self-built motorcycle, and is strongly rooted, almost mystically, in the little homeland. Working in a bakery is perhaps an additional element in the creation of a character who is superior to his colleagues in life experience.

A similar theme occurs in Niziurski's novel *Disturbances in Niekłaj*, set in the late 1950s/early 1960s. One of the supporting characters also works in the family bakery (Niziurski, 1962a: 224). This creation is a minor, but quite important element of the setting – the fictional town of Niekłaj is a locality where “the old” collides with “the new”. “The new” is represented by industrial plants, immigrant population and official structures of youth organizations, while “the old” – treated by the author with a great deal of sympathy and nostalgia – is represented by traditional craftsmen, entrenched families and informal groups.

By contrast, Natalia Rolleczek's novel *Rufin z przeceny* [Rufin from Overprice], is a picture of a musty petit-bourgeois world in a small town in the 1960s, where money-based hierarchy reigns. The main character – a 16-year-old girl from an orphanage adopted by a conservative spinster – has to help her with the cottage industry sewing sweaters and curtains (Rolleczek, 1971b: 26). There is nothing here to be proud of or sentimental about.

Since the thematic predominance in the novel's depicted world has been gained by the intelligentsia, the youth's employment tends to become an episode presented as the result of temporary adventures. A case in point is the episode in Rolleczek's popular and repeatedly reissued novel *Kochana rodzinka i ja* [My Dear Family and Me], which portrays an intelligentsia family in Cracow, setting on “The Thaw” (circa 1957). The protagonist, a 16-year-old girl, under the influence of emotions and rebellion against moral hypocrisy, runs away from home and for three days casually works as a dishwasher in a milk bar (cafeteria) in the working-class district of Nowa Huta. She finds the experience quite transgressive (Rolleczek, 1961: 224–234).

One of the few novels where the plot is structured around the theme of a teenager's job is Wiktor Zawada's *Szukam pana Kalandra* [I'm Looking for Mr. Kalandar] A secondary school student, who does not get promoted from second grade to third grade, which causes his angry parents (his father is an accountant) to leave home for the whole summer and leave him alone with no money (this plot twist, by the way, seems unlikely, and is hardly convincing). So he starts looking for a job. He is not accepted for a construc-

tion job, because he is under 18 (formally, this would not be an obstacle). In turn, he himself does not want to take a job at the “Municipal Water Pouring and Sand Sprinkling Company” because he is afraid of embarrassment if his colleagues see him sweeping the streets. This confirms the colloquial low prestige of the profession of city cleaning and physical labour. Eventually, he is hired by the newspaper’s editorial office as a bicycle courier. The novel approximates the reality of the work of a daily newspaper and printing house, and this was most likely the author’s intention (Zawada, 1971).

The most typical communist model of underage work – the apprenticeship of a vocational school student – occurs very rarely in the literature. One of such few examples is Adam Bahdaj’s novel *Telemach w dżinsach* [Telemachus in Jeans] (1979) set in the reality of the late Edward Gierek era (Kłos, 2016: 343–345). The main character is a student of a vocational school at the Wood Industry Plant in a small town. The work of a vocational school student is tedious, monotonous and not conducive to the development of the individual: “Every day I rearrange piles of boards in the yard”, “the very smell of shavings and glue makes me nauseous” (Bahdaj, 1979: 7). The hero, on the one hand, is one of the few protagonists of novels for young people of this period belonging to the working class (Chrobak, 2019: 149). On the other hand, he has aspirations for self-development well beyond vocational school: dreams of long-distance sailing and mountaineering. These activities were supported and even promoted by the authorities during the Gierek period, but they were associated with the intelligentsia rather than the working class. The negative image of labour in the wood and furniture industry is reinforced by the drastic mention of a tragic accident at the workplace. Also, the protagonist’s aunt died in a fire – she “fried herself in the paint shop” (Bahdaj, 1979: 7).

SCHOOL COOPERATIVES – BETWEEN UTOPIA AND CARICATURE

School cooperative activity was an activity of the nature of economic education and had its beginnings in the grassroots educational and social movement of the early 20th century. In post-war Poland, the activity of school cooperatives was promoted by the state and reached a very wide scope (Brzozowska-Wabik, 2015: 5). The work of school cooperatives was to include: making teaching aids and toys, running a school savings bank, a garden, a breakfast buffet or collecting medicinal herbs

(Dz.Urz. Ministerstwa Oświaty 1946, No. 1, item 21). However, the novel *Zwariowane podwórko* [The Crazy Backyard], published in 1976 and intended to promote school cooperativism, is, in fact, an attempt to revive the spirit of Stalinist pedagogical utopia, which does not fit the Gierek era. It describes a boarding secondary school where all is subordinated to collective work in a school cooperative. In addition to studying, the students are engaged in raising fish and even cotton, which is somewhat reminiscent of the pseudoscientific ideas of Trofim Lysenko (growing cotton in Poland is essentially impossible for climatic reasons). The idealistic commune-cooperative-plantation is contrasted with a nearby town where hooliganism is rampant.

But here, besides studying, we still work – warned that one. – What do you mean, we work? – And yes: in the garden, in the greenhouse, in the school workshops, in our store, with fish, rabbits, bees. – Agricultural school, or what! – Jurek grumbled. – No, what agricultural! A general secondary school. An ordinary “high” (Kowalewska, 1976: 6).

There will be a lot of work, and hard work at that. We have a couple of fierce enemies: first, frost [...] second – hooligans (Kowalewska, 1976: 44).

The novel, in the context of the 1970s, is not only stiffly didactic, but is also out of date, as reminiscent of Stalinist collectivist totalitarianism with its most influential educational theorist Anton Makarenko. According to a contemporary critic:

The first edition was published in 1976, but while reading it I had the impression that Kowalewska was still stuck in the 1950s, and Makarenko’s “Pedagogical Poem” was still the basis of her work with young people. In the Dziwnów school, it is the collective that counts, and the individual is worth as much as his work for the collective (Chojnacki, 2020).

Contrariwise, Niziurski’s short story, *Afera w „Złotym Plastrze”* [The “Golden Honeycomb” Affair] is essentially a mockery of the school cooperativism, as well as the socialist bureaucracy:

Juliusz Łania appeared in the firmament of the school [...] He ruled that we were falling behind and that only cooperatives could save us. He repeated this again to the teaching staff, adding that he intended to activate us. [...] From then on, cooperatives grew like mushrooms. The girls established a supply cooperative, or “Dainty” school store named after Maria Konopnicka, while the boys, as could be predicted, liked Mr. Łania’s polytechnic ideas and in a short time established five technical-service cooperatives in various classes, the most famous of which was the “foremen-electricians” cooperative (full name: Cooperative of technical-service electricians foremen and radio

and teletechnicians "Skillfulness" named after Adam Mickiewicz) and the cooperative of "foremen-hydraulics", with a name even more magnificent and longer, which, for reasons of paper economy, is impossible to cite in full (Niziurski, 1970: 115-117).

SHADOW ECONOMY

Literature for young people in the People's Republic of Poland often dealt with the theme of "outcast youth". A typical element of such plots was gainful work in the gray zone: clandestine trade or casual, unregulated employment. The best-known example is Adam Bahdaj's very popular novel *Stawiam na Tolka Banana* [I Bet on Tolek Banan] where numerous ways of earning money in the gray zone were presented, which the young protagonists engage in: clandestine trade at the bazaar in goods probably derived from smuggling or theft, as well as playing music in the bars and restaurants (Bahdaj, 1967: 41-42, 52, 228-229). Scrap dealings, knife sharpening, and fortune telling are also engaged in by children from the Roma minority, who do not complete their compulsory schooling (Rolleczek, 1971a: 74, 96). The hero of the novel *Telemachus in Jeans*, while wandering around Poland, also undertakes work in the gray zone: washing car windows at gas stations (Bahdaj, 1979: 251-252).

The shadow economy - but not ethically questionable - also includes tutoring (giving private lessons). This phenomenon has had historical continuity since the 19th century as a traditional way for impoverished intelligentsia youth in Poland to earn money. In the case of the hero of Chmielewska's novel - belonging to a typical intelligentsia family with fairly high cultural capital, but low material capital - tutoring is not necessary for existence, but necessary to realize even modest consumer aspirations: vacations, clothes, electronic equipment, participation in social and cultural life:

There was no way to count on increased subsidies from her family, but this was what Tereska was used to. For two years she had already been meeting her private needs on her own, reluctantly and loathingly giving tutoring, which she hated, but which provided clear material benefits (Chmielewska, 1974: 48).

I don't have a radio, an adapter, a camera, classy dresses, fashionable shoes, and a winter coat. My father insists that he will not steal. [...] They'll buy me an overcoat, possibly shoes too, but I can get the rest out of my head right away. I'll be able to get my own money [...] Unless I earn it myself. I would have to give these lousy tutoring sessions twenty-four hours a day (Chmielewska, 1974: 139).

Earning money by tutoring is also difficult, sometimes even humiliating because parents of students who pay for tutoring try to cheat the teenage tutors when billing (Chmielewska, 1974: 223–228).

CONCLUSIONS

Child and youth labour in the literature of the communist era in Poland depicting contemporary reality was presented in an ambiguous and rather incomplete manner. In the Stalinist period (the period of socialist realism in literature), it was quite common to present children as “little exploited workers” if they worked in a farm, or “happy little socialist workers” if they worked for the social good. In the post-Stalin period, the subject of child labour was definitely relegated to the background. First, this is actually due to the introduction of compulsory schooling and a significant reduction in child labour. Secondly, it is due to the transformation of the literature. The largest group of labouring young people, after 1956, were vocational school students doing apprenticeships. As late as the 1970s, about 70% of young people, after completing primary school only continued their education in a three-year basic vocational school (Socha, 2013: 323). Books about this group of youth, however, were not written, for at least three reasons. First, this group was not the target, as they generally did not read books – they were rather interested in television, sports and ludic leisure (discotheques, etc.; Socha, 2013: 319–320). Second, the writers themselves belonged to the intelligentsia and drew inspiration from their own surroundings. Thirdly, a separate segment of literature addressed to and depicting young people aged 16–19 (equivalent of contemporary young adult fiction) did not emerge in the People’s Poland. Thus, underage labour in the People’s Republic of Poland was a largely literary, not presented, subject.

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