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THE YOUNG GENERATION IN THE LITERATURE OF THEIR PEERS

ABSTRACT

Literature is a social fact and as such it can be one of the ways to interpret social reality. Therefore, the literature published after the year 2000, with reference to sociological studies on young generation, is found to be an interesting source of knowledge on behavior, attitudes and values presented by young Poles.

The article as a contribution to the discussion on the role of literature as “the mirror” of social life is limited to young people as observers (the youngest generation of Polish writers) and as the observed (experiences and problems of young Poles at the beginning of the 21st century). Its introductory part deals with the problem of perception of social life from the angle of literature, and refers to the concept of the considered generation in sociological literature. Its main part presents the sketch for the portrait of fictional young Poles, their lifestyle and values based on the literary fiction. At the same time, this artistic image is compared to the existing sociological data. The use of the latter is subject to the problem key applied in the analysis of the selected novels.

Key words:

sociology in literature, generation, identity, values, rebellion

1. Literature as a testimony to the truth of social life – never answered question

A fundamental theoretical question facing the author is whether literary fiction on generational experiences used here contains information acceptable in sociological discourse. The question is closely connected with an immemorial and still insoluble discussion on mimetic and visionary functions of art in general. In ancient Greece, mimesis as understood by Plato, Aristotle, and Horace, was an idea that governed the creation of works of art which were to represent nature, and the more similarity between the model and its artistic image, the better the work of art was. Plato, a poet himself, saw poetry (the word literature was not used then) as the art of divine madness, which was not and did not convey the truth, because describing reality – the reflection of ideas itself – the poets were mere imitators twice removed from the truth¹. In his poetry, Aristotle is not as rigorous as his master. On the contrary, he believes that humans have a specific mimetic instinct and their artistic expression of reality has a high cognitive value². The follower of mimesis in art, Horace categorizes his fellow poets into *doctus* and *furiosus*, but warns them against misusing their freedom of creation “to such a degree that the tame should associate with the savage; nor that serpents should be coupled with birds, lambs with tigers”³.

As the history of literature shows, the mimetic function of literature in literature is a dominant one. Both positivist and Marxist sociology of literature assumed that art is a social fact and the world represented in it is a more or less “true” image of its real model. Moreover, great realistic writers of the 19th century felt obliged to depict the dark side of the capitalist society, such as poverty of the lowest class vegetating in the early industrialized London (Charles Dickens), the power of money in the world of growing bourgeoisie in French society (Honoré Balzac), or the area of social pathologies and appalling working conditions of mining laborers (Victor Hugo, Emile Zola). One of the best-known modern studies of mimesis, understood as a form of realism in the arts, is Erich Auerbach’s work in which the author showed how the literary image of social life is influenced by social, intellectual, and artistic conventions of the time⁴.

¹ Plato, *Państwo* [*The Republic*], Kęty 2003, pp. 596–599.

² Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1988.

³ *Trzy poetyki klasyczne: Arystoteles, Horacy, Pseudo-Longinos* [Three Classical Poetics: Aristotle, Horace, Pseudo-Longin], T. Sinko (ed.), Wrocław, pp. 13–15.

⁴ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Princeton 1946.

Approaching literature as an indicator of social life has been accusingly viewed as reductionism for a long time (i.e. finding simple homologies between the real and imagined worlds⁵ with the neglect to an individual artistic personality of a given author and his/her creative potential)⁶. In spite of this, some social thinkers assume that literature enriches our sociological knowledge. And, the fictional world, as a metaphor of the real one, can be “a significant... tool of discovery, creation, and cognition as a broadly understood development of understanding”⁷. Moreover, unreal events, processes, and characters can illustrate the sociological theory that, in turn, can confirm the “cognitive discourse or situation depicted in the course of the plot”⁸.

All these perspectives are applied within one of the two main paradigms of sociological literary studies: a paradigm of literature in society and a paradigm of society in literature⁹. The latter paradigm does not imply the separation between literary and social facts and therefore allows for the analysis of the literary discourse “which speaks of the world (social or psychological) as if it did not mean this”¹⁰.

To sum up, it is worth mentioning the dispute as to whether it is sociology or literature that offers a more adequate image of social reality. Finding this dispute pointless, Wolf Lepenies argues that they are just two different discourses and literature has the advantage of not having to prove the reliability of its description. Such an artistic vision cannot be refuted as completely false, but it is hazardous to find in it as the only true version of the presented phenomena and processes¹¹. The difference between a sociological and literary account, John Hall claims, “is close to that between a photograph and a picture; whilst the former includes everything, the latter has the power to heighten appreciation by missing some things out... The characteristic of the literary mode is that it is, as it were, self-authenticating”¹².

⁵ L. Goldmann, *Przesłanki socjologii powieści* [Premises of Sociology of the Novel] [in:] *W kręgu socjologii literatury* [The Outline of Sociology of Literature], A. Mencwel (ed.), Warszawa 1980; G. Lukaćs, *Teoria powieści* [Theory of the Novel], Warszawa 1968.

⁶ K. Łęcki, *Literatura* [Literature] [in:] *Encyklopedia Socjologii* [Encyclopedia of Sociology], Warszawa 1999, p. 132.

⁷ N. Goodman, *Ways of World Making*, Indianapolis 1997, p. 121.

⁸ M.P. Markowski, *Teoretyk jako pisarz* [Theorist as a Writer], “Literatura na Świecie” 1997, No. 12, p. 231.

⁹ J.S. Bystroń, *Publiczność literacka* [The Literary Public], Warszawa 2006.

¹⁰ P. Bourdieu, *Reguły sztuki* [Rules of Art], Kraków 2007, p. 17.

¹¹ W. Lepenies, *Trzy kultury* [Three Cultures. Sociology between Literature and Science], Poznań 1997.

¹² J. Hall, *The Sociology of Literature*, London–New York 1979, p. 35.

Given the above discussion, the author's opinion is that although the literary image of social life is painted as the writer sees it and this does not shatter its reliability as a source of sociological knowledge.

2. Generation and its identity

Karl Mannheim insists that a cohort of individuals can be understood sociologically as a generation when they are born within the same historical and cultural context and share similar experiences in their formative years. Additionally, he distinguishes a "generation as actuality" within which individuals are linked through a "concrete" bond that develops when members of such a generation are exposed to and participate in the "social and intellectual symptoms of a dynamic destabilization process"¹³.

The variety of definitions that followed referred to either biological, historical, or cultural factors, which made a cohort of people "the generation" whose attitudes and shared system of values are the outcome of historical or any other experiences, particularly during their adolescence. Importantly, the young generation of Poles, as compared to the older generation, do not share any traumatic historical experiences and the most vital value for them is independence, understood as the freedom of choice. In her studies of youth subcultures, Barbara Fatyga defines generation with reference to social movements and implies the impracticality of those concepts that perceive a generation as a homogenous unit. Therefore, she offers two conceptions of a generation. Firstly, similar to Mannheim, she defines a generation in actuality; that is a group of people united through friendship, similarity of the status and lifestyle, shared experiences and values. Secondly, a generational community, that is cohorts of individuals who identify themselves with some elements of generational experience and accept selected opinions and behaviour patterns (lexis, fashion, music, ludic contexts)¹⁴.

The above-mentioned unsteadiness of generation concepts is illustrated by numerous labels used to describe the young, which show the decay of traditional values ("the young without patterns"), lack of rebellion ("not angry young people"), influence of the media and popular culture ("slaves of the media"), dominance of consumerism and dependence on IT ("hedonistic generation", "mobile generation",

¹³ K. Mannheim, *Issues of Generations*, "Colloquia Communia" 1952, No. 1–2, pp. 303–304.

¹⁴ B. Fatyga, *Dzicy z naszej ulicy* [The Savage in Our Street. Anthropology of Youth Culture], Warszawa 1999, pp. 126–127.

“@ generation”), and economically conditioned passage from adolescence to adulthood (“generation of gross PLN 1200” or “free market generation”). These mostly medial labels usually lose their popularity when a given event is forgotten and experience dies down. However, their number and frequently parallel occurrence seem to confirm the lack of a clearly defined generational identity. Erik Erikson, like many other psychologists and sociologists, perceives identity as a process located both in the core of the individual and in his/her culture environment. Whichever concept of identity is taken into account¹⁵, their authors assume that it is “socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed”¹⁶.

In spite of this heterogeneity, sociologists try to classify youth according to the values they follow, attitudes they present, social background, and the status they enjoy. The category most often used is “the normal”, who find education useful to find a well-paid job, are not pointedly religious, and appreciate predictability and life planning. The other category are “the middle class ethos followers” for whom money, education, competencies and successful career are the most important. They are unique for a high level of the inherited culture capital and religious indifference or rituality. Money is also a top value for “losers” who share the belief in physical fitness, traditional female roles, ethnocentrism, and patriotism closely connected with ostentatious religiousness. They are usually poorly educated or unemployed. On the one hand, they take too much for granted or simply retreat. On the other hand, they become involved in aggressive subcultures¹⁷. The typology offered by Krystyna Szafraniec is based on the comparison of young people and their parents’ participation in social change. She defines the groups of youth somehow coincident with the categories described by Fatyga. The first type includes “pragmatists”, that is ambitious and intelligent individuals standing out for their initiative and egalitarianism. Next “ethos followers” come. They are devoted to moral values but avoid of aggressiveness of the former type. The third group are “the unremarkable”, i.e. those who do not have any particular features. And, finally, “the stylish”, who are distinguishable for their individual, usually very eccentric lifestyle and appearance. All of them share a consumerist orientation with their parents, but consumption for them means “pleasure, novelty and fashion”¹⁸.

¹⁵ E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Every Day Life*, New York 1959; G. Marshall, *Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford 1998.

¹⁶ P.L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, New York 1963, p. 99.

¹⁷ B. Fatyga, op.cit., pp. 68–76.

¹⁸ K. Szafraniec, *Zmiana społeczna przez brak konfliktu pokoleń* [Social Change and the Lack of Generation Gap], “Przegląd Socjologiczny” 2001, No. 1, p. 15.

The concepts of identity and generation constitute a necessary reference frame for the analysis of the selected novels in which the listed typologies, as well as the most typical behavior of young people in peer groups, their relations with parents, religiousness, or the process of education, were important fictional components of the literature under study.

3. Empirical study

The article was based on a qualitative content analysis of the existing documents¹⁹ in the form of six novels published by young Polish writers (Piotr Czerski, Marta Dzido, Dorota Masłowska, Mirosław Nahacz, Sławomir Shuty, Jakub Żulczyk) after the year 2000. The considered literature is unique for the rich diversity of observation on the life of the young generation and its verisimilitude somehow call for confrontation with reality. The reconstruction of artistic image of the fictional generation was done according to the following key categories listed with consideration of the above mentioned sociological studies:

- parents-children relations: lack of intergenerational dialogue and conflict;
- the school: a necessary evil;
- role of religion in shaping young Poles' identity;
- drugs and alcohol in everyday and ludic contexts;
- love, sex and marriage as not correlated values;
- botched rebellion against the “systems”.

In the novels, the listed categories are different in scope (see Table 1). The accepted scale (0–6) illustrates their importance for the characters and the proportion of the text devoted to them.

Table 1. Categories of the problems in the novels under study*

Category	Novel & importance						Total
	Clam	Snow White and Russian Red	Armageddon Radio	Father Is Leaving	Eight Four	Mound	
family	2	2	3	1	2	2	12
school	0	1	4	0	2	0	7
religion	1	0	0	6	0	0	7
drugs & alcohol	2	6	6	4	5	4	27

¹⁹ E. Babbie, *Badania społeczne w praktyce* [The Practice of Social Research], Warszawa 2003.

Category	Novel & importance						Total
	Clam	Snow White and Russian Red	Armageddon Radio	Father Is Leaving	Eight Four	Mound	
love, sex, marriage	4	4	5	1	3	2	19
rebellion	0	0	6	0	0	0	6

* In the table shortened titles of the categories were used

Source: Author's research.

Most of the involved narrations are devoted to the problems of drugs and alcohol (27); love, sex, and marriage (19); and the family (12). Such a ranking may indicate the scale of the problem or its importance for the young characters. In common belief, such values as the family and religion are crucial ones, therefore their relatively low "status" in the novels comes as a surprise. However, as a detailed analysis of particular categories reveals, it is justified and results not only from the heroes' age but also from the change in traditional patterns of social life.

The "study sample" are young people, aged from seventeen to mid-twenties, who constitute the two biological and cultural age categories: teenagers and adolescents. The action takes place in a social space typical for young people: schools, clubs, rented flats, streets where they buy drugs and participate in acts of violence, an abandoned bunker changed into a rehearsal room by Cyprian and his band after its former homeless "owner" had been expelled, a deserted place under the train viaduct that is used as a meeting place for those in love or those who seek privacy, and homes when parents are away.

The fictional characters can be classified into some clear categories. Gerart, Nuka, Andrew, and other secondary school students in the novel *Eight Four* can be defined as "the normal" or "the unremarkable":

...none of us starved, and it was not that we missed something... Or that father was an alcoholic, or that someone was abused at home²⁰.

Young people in the private secondary school presented in Żulczyk's book belong to the group of "pragmatists" and "the stylish", children of well-off intelligentsia and businessmen:

²⁰ M. Nahacz, *Osiem cztery* [Eight Four], Wołowiec 2003, p. 15.

We are children of... Shoestring Kings, Carrot Tsars, Fruit Juice Carton Oligarchs... You returned home on Sunday without a bag and jacket? No problem at all: spare sets of bags and jackets wait for you at home in custom built wardrobes... Have I mentioned that my house is a sterile fortress built with dough from liposuction and botox²¹.

The heroes of *Snow White and Red* are “losers”. They are young and unemployed graduates from vocational schools (Silny, Lewy) or still students (Magda, Andżela). Their family background is unknown, except that Silny’s mother does some vague business with Russians. Some of them represent the category of “the stylish”, stupefying the adults with their eccentric clothing and lifestyles. The young in the novel *Clamare* “pragmatists” (Mateusz and Magda, before she lost her job). They are well-educated young people coming from intelligentsia families. The values that matter for them are successful careers, carefully planned futures, and eternal bourgeois lifestyles and conventions:

A facile face, manicured nails, premium perfume, a mobile with a camera... An electric toothbrush, a pass to body-building gym, polished booties, a muffler, a cap, undershorts, a car and a mortgage for a charming little house in the suburb²².

The characters in Shuty’s novel, employees of the Hamburger Bank, are young people focusing (except for Mirek) on consumption. And finally, the action in the book *Father Is Leaving* takes place in a community of artists. The main hero is Piotr, a novice poet. Altogether, fictional characters fit the categories defined in the sociological studies referred to above. In the background, there also appear members of various youth subcultures: heavy metal, nationalist-religious subculture, radical ecologists, football hooligans, etc.

4. The young in the novels

4.1. Parents-children relations: lack of intergenerational dialogue and conflict

Although treated rather sketchily, the parental-child relations in the novels are expressive enough to find homologies between the artistic vision and sociological

²¹ J. Żulczyk, *Radio Armageddon* [Armageddon Radio], Warszawa 2008, pp. 15–16.

²² M. Dzido, *Małż* [Clam], Kraków 2005, p. 42.

account of the problem. Taking into consideration these relations, Fatyga classifies families into “normal”, “retreating”, and those in which “the bonds have never been correct”. In normal families, parents treat children as equals (partnership version), use the system of imperatives and bans (repressive version), or are overprotective (fighting version). In a retreating family, they are unable to develop emotional contacts with children because of poor educational competencies or shortage of time²³. In Fatyga’s studies, the respondents are just tolerant toward parents, but Szafraniec’s findings seem to indicate that their mutual evaluations are mostly positive and no “meaningful tensions or generation gap (except for lifestyle) occur”. Nevertheless, children are annoyed at their elders’ lack of understanding, distrust, and “excessive grouchiness”²⁴.

The analyzed novels present parent-child relationships at various life stages and contexts (e.g. starting with the preschool period through the teenage years to adolescence). The fundamental feature of these contexts is the absence of parental characters. They simply organize their offspring’s life according to their own rules and ideas, preferably through money and institutions, which means that they meet their consumption needs and since early childhood invest in their future everything, but time and dialogue:

Oh, I will enroll Justysia in an English course – she says, and we are sensing a deep satisfaction in her voice... – I will enroll my Wanda, too... but not unless she is three. – You must be joking?! – Basia cries indignantly. Why so late? You don’t want to blight her opportunities on a difficult and demanding labor market, do you?²⁵

The account of an English lesson at a private kindergarten shows the values which are important and those that are missing in the family:

Today we are drawing my family... Madam, I don’t know what to draw – Doro-ta says silently – because my dad does not live with us... Madam, and my father has a million dollars – Jacek says – ...and he can send me to America, to learn English there. – It’s not true – Kasia cries – he’s lying, Madam, and his brother went to young offender’s home because he had smoked grass... private school, classes from six a.m.

²³ B. Fatyga, *op.cit.*, pp. 76–78.

²⁴ K. Szafraniec, *op.cit.*, pp. 18–19.

²⁵ S. Shuty, *Zwał* [Mound], Warszawa 2004, p. 15.

till after midnight... Kajtuś's computer should be extended so that he started learning Arabic, English and Arabic, the two basic languages²⁶ .

Silny's family illustrates distorted family relationships. His father is not even mentioned and his mother (constantly on business trips) socializes with her son only by phone, warning him against his girlfriend:

...she thinks that a lass' treasure is her modesty, and you miss this quality, to say nothing of culture. That there are gossips about you in the estate, that you take amphetamine, LSD... That generally, you are finished, that you exhaust me morally and mentally²⁷ .

Nadzieja, Cyprian, and Szymon's parents are either too permissive or repressive. Cyprian's father is known only for being an architect and the mother shows some interest in her missing son's fate when she is given an opportunity to help the police with her allegedly paranormal qualities. Left on their own, missing parental emotional support, and having realized that permissiveness and lack of the adult control do not work, the children try to communicate with them, but it is impossible since mothers and fathers are too busy doing business:

They have always done, what you told them. And now you will ask them, to tell you what to do, what they want, and not, what you want, and you know that they, undoubtedly, will meet this demand. You are about to open your mouth, when your father says: – Nadzieja, a friend of yours is waiting in your room, and returns to scanning some company's documents²⁸ .

Szymon's mother justifies the restrictions in her son's life with hers and husband's sacrifices to his future:

You have to learn, learn, and not roam around the street with some bums, you have to be over this all, Szymon, because you know very well that we did all this for you to be over, over all this shit²⁹ .

²⁶ M. Dzido, op.cit., pp. 45, 137–140.

²⁷ D. Masłowska, *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* [Snow White and Russian Red], Warszawa 2003, p. 41.

²⁸ J. Żulczyk, op.cit., p. 264–265.

²⁹ J. Żulczyk, op.cit., p. 119.

When he gets arrested during the rebellion, his father comes to the police station with the lawyer, gives him the money and orders to leave the house. In apparently normal families, child-parent relations are often infected with lies:

I once spent the night at Muka's, we arrived fucking drunk sometime after midnight... And, in the morning, good lord, a family cinema straight from America... And now: yes mummy, yes daddy, stop joking, don't say this, but it was fun, although we got pretty tired helping Adam clean the cellar³⁰.

The relationships between the characters in their twenties and their parents are still more inadequate. The mother of Mirek in *Mound*, plays the role of a goods and services provider. Mirek is a late adolescent. He has a job, but he cannot afford his own flat or a family. Living with parents, the two uneducated and television-addicted persons, who have no authority over their son, do not contribute to the development of any deeper bond between them:

...you are in the place to which a label "home" clung. This is Dad, this is Mom, and this is a television set³¹.

Well off enough to financially support their "adult" children, parents feel entitled to make important life decisions for their offspring, and the children let them do it. Following his parents' advice, Magda's ex-boyfriend gets married to another woman for her resourcefulness and a flat in the center of Warsaw. Magda's fiancé, Mateusz, leaves the decision about the wedding rings, party, and its participants to his parents (money-givers):

Mateusz's father took a wad of banknotes out of his wallet and inserted it in his hand. – Dad, stop it, – Matti stammered out not very convincingly³².

Even these few quotations prove that parent-child relations in the novels do not provide favorable conditions for a deep emotional bond to develop. The following table illustrates the problem as a whole.

³⁰ M. Nahacz, op.cit., p. 25.

³¹ S. Shuty, op.cit., p. 57.

³² M. Dzido, op.cit., p. 20.

Table 2. Types of parents-children relations

Title	Clam	Snow White and Red	Armageddon Radio	Father Is leaving	Eight Four	Mound
Relations						
1. Financial						
– total dependence	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no
– partial dependence	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
2. Emotional						
– relations reification	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
– mutual tolerance	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
– intimate communication	no	no	no	no	no	no
– conflict	no	no	no	no	no	no
– control of behaviour	no	no	no	no	no	no
– permissiveness	-	Yes	yes	yes	yes	-
– contacts based on lies	no	-	-	yes	yes	no
– parents as patterns to follow and authority	no	-	-	no	-	no

Source: Author's own research.

Generally, the relationships between parents and children in the literature under study lack strong negative emotions or open conflicts. However, they also lack strong positive emotions and closeness. They are mostly of financial nature. Therefore, it can be assumed that these relations are subject to reification (see Table 2). This reification results both from a generally consumerist approach of the two generations (see: Szafranec) and the fact that characters in the novels are either totally (teenagers) or partially (school graduates) dependent on their parents. And, whereas, the financial support of teenage students is obvious, the necessity to participate in expenses of university graduates is caused by their unemployment (*Clam*) or earning too little to become independent (*Mound*). Such financial dependence is either accepted or triggers frustration and socially unacceptable behavior: children who are not given enough money earn it by dealing drugs (Cyprian) or prostituting themselves (Andżela).

Reification of familial relations makes the reader believe that meeting their children's material needs and investing in their future, the fictional parents find their fundamental obligations met. Busy at work, they do not have time to socialize their children and they shift this responsibility to some auxiliary institutions: a good school, interests or sports clubs, and the internet. There is no hostility and conflicts between children and parents, but there is no trust and honesty in these

relationships either. Excessive permissiveness “deprives” parents of the status of an authority. Moreover, they are not role models to follow. It is perhaps why the adults’ roles in the lives of the teenagers are scarce and communication between them very limited. The authors do not report quarrels, discussions, or arguments about values. Such forms of interaction simply do not occur. Parents are just “factors” that support the youth and the youth take this for granted. If problems occur, they are solved through the agency of others (teachers, lawyers), which does not create a suitable environment for close bonds to develop. Children mostly love their elders, but they evaluate their mentality and way of thinking and see some unacceptable hypocrisy and superficiality typical of all the systems in which they are involved:

... a car, a coat, taxes, extras, a flat, a job in a foreign company... a wife who is not beaten by him, and if she is, he does it in such a way that nobody can see it – why are people to comment... go to the cinema, to church, to show yourself among people. Look like a normal person³³.

The characters’ social interaction takes place within their peer groups mainly. Contacts with other adults usually end up in conflicts, as in the case of the police, television managers, or criminal groups involved in the narcotics business. Thus, we can say that the young live on the borderline between the family and other social institutions and their communication with these spheres is infected either with artificiality or violence.

4.2. The school: a necessary evil

The school is another, besides the family, socialization institution presented in the novels whose heroes are students (*Eight Four*, *Armageddon Radio*, and *Father Is Leaving*). In Nahacz’ story, it is the place young people have to go to obtain education with possibly little effort:

We go to school and somehow manage to make it to the second class, so fuck off us, you all. The fact that we are still here is the effect of our passiveness... The school is a taboo we never talk about³⁴.

³³ S. Shuty, op.cit., p. 205.

³⁴ M. Nahacz, op.cit, p. 25.

The school that Cyprian, Szymon, Nadzieja, and Gnat attend is a private grammar school chosen by their parents for two reasons. The first reason is the highly qualified teaching staff and well-equipped classrooms that prepare the students to take over their parents' businesses in future. Thus, they learn how to be assertive, aggressive, and how to negotiate:

The teachers give us different instructions using such phrases as *use your energy, listen, consider it*, they say: *I am worried about you*, they use such dicta as: *if you hate something, try to love it*, but for some reasons you do not trust them at all³⁵.

As important motivation is the belief that in such a school children are well protected against any threats:

I happened to arrive here because of my parents' fear of drugs given for nothing and alcohol poured into my throat, which allegedly would expect me in a normal secondary school³⁶.

Like the parents, the teachers' characters will also appear relatively rarely in the literature. In fact, the readers can meet a religion teacher in Czerski's book and three teachers at the private grammar school. Out of the teachers that do appear, only a teacher of literature is the person they discuss their problems with:

People start talking about their fear to have venereal disease tests made... they mention suicidal attempts of their friends, that people don't like them for something they should be liked for, that they are surrounded with hypocrisy and that nobody is able to say some things in your eyes...³⁷.

Later on in the story, it appears that the only trusted and liked teacher has sex with a student and the sociology teacher supplies the rebels with homemade explosives, which are used to destroy the school. The most important problem though is that (like the family) the school does not provide for "communicative rationality" ("inter-subjective relation"), that is interaction in which the subjects participate, when they want to "agree on something". According to Jurgen Habermas, such a type of communication is indispensable for the "experienced society" in which

³⁵ J. Żulczyk, op.cit, p. 22.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 16.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 23.

the individual participates consciously and actively through the process of communication³⁸. In the analyzed literature, such communication is missing both in the family and the school. Instead, according to fictional characters, the school shapes the mentality compelled with tradition, history, and jingoistic slogans that do not appeal to them:

You live in the country of a great history, a great testimony, and great betrayals – she was drawing her words as if repeating after an invisible prompter. – Poland is your motherland... You are her hope, you are the generation of our saint pope John Paul II, the generation of change, faith and purity. I didn't give a shit about it, neither did the rest of my class³⁹.

From the first class of primary school tormented with partitions, Germans, Oświęcim, Katyń, there is no fan, there can't be fan with us. A Polish class topic: martyrdom of the Polish nation in Różewicz's poems, ten-year olds with a hunchback of martyring, of God, honor and motherland⁴⁰.

It does not teach skills necessary to adapt to the requirements of modern democratic world, but breeds the feeling of historical detriment and groundless hostility to "historical enemies". In Masłowska's novel, the alleged poisoning of Silny's dog is found to be a political sabotage:

...the Russky who undermine our economy, the Russky killing dogs – ours and yours, our children crying out of them. Yes or not, Poland for the Russky, or Poland for Poles?! Decide now, because here we are chatting away, and these scum are arming themselves⁴¹.

4.3. Role of religion in shaping youth's identity

Among teenagers studied by Fatyga, only 9% declared themselves as being nonbelievers. Another 29% did not identify themselves explicitly with Catholicism, which she claims proves the growing diversification of their worldviews and the "possibil-

³⁸ J. Habermas, *Teoria działania komunikacyjnego* [The Theory of Communicative Action], Warszawa 1999, p. 39.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 175.

⁴⁰ M. Dzido, op.cit.

⁴¹ D. Masłowska, op.cit., p. 90.

ity of their increasing ‘lukewarm’ attitude to religion”⁴². Krzysztof Kiciński, whose study reveals that 67% of his respondents believe that moral behavior is possible without religion, shares this opinion⁴³. Rafał Boguszewski, in turn, concludes that although Catholicism still constitutes an important element of Poles’ self-identification, they tend to identify religiousness with the churchgoing and their acceptance of religious morality is very selective. Moreover, the churchgoing of the young is accompanied with a relatively critical approach to the church itself⁴⁴. Besides an aversion for the clergy’s excessive interference in their intimate sexual affairs (83% of the respondents use contraceptives), the studied teenagers postulate an absolute separation between the state and the church, as in any “normal country”⁴⁵.

When we compare these findings with the role of religion in the life of the fictional characters, we must admit except the two works, the literature does not present behavior, experiences, or reflection connected with this form of spirituality. The characters do not mention participating in religious practices or bothering themselves with religious doctrine or ethics. Young people labeled as “the JPII generation” have premarital and extramarital sex (Magda and her now married ex-boyfriend), use religion to start a political career (a competitive band at Cyprian’s school), mention the Bible only while picking up psychedelic mushrooms (students in Nahacz’ novel), and refuse to participate in Sunday mass (Mirek). Therefore, it is difficult to say whether religion has any influence upon their values and personalities. On the other hand, like young people in sociological studies, they are pretty critical about the church as an institution and the superficial religious behavior of the adults reflected in the commercialization and conventionality of religious rituals:

– And you will get nothing on the Holy Communion Day, and I am to be given a computer, a handy, one thousand in cash, an electronic notebook. – And I will get a thousand in cash and a mountain bike, and you’ll be given nothing. – You will get nothing. My dad promised a laptop to me⁴⁶.

⁴² B. Fatyga, J. Rogala-Obłęgowska, *Style życia młodzieży a narkotyki* [Lifestyles of the Young and Drugs], Warszawa 2002, p. 54.

⁴³ K. Kiciński, *Młodzież a problemy polskiej demokracji* [Youth and the Problems of Polish Democracy], Warszawa 2001, p. 221.

⁴⁴ R. Boguszewski, *Religia i religijność Polaków w zmieniającym się społeczeństwie* [Religion and Religiousness of Poles in Changing Society], www.kulturaswiecka.pl/node/18 [access: 02.12.2012], pp. 2–6.

⁴⁵ J. Baniak, *Pomiędzy buntem a potrzebą akceptacji i zrozumienia* [Between Rebellion and the Need of Acceptance and Understanding], Kraków 2009.

⁴⁶ M. Dzido, op.cit., p. 131.

When recalling his first communion day, the narrator in Czernski's book remembers only the setting of the celebration:

Stand like this – the nun Leonia said... *In a moment a photographer will come, and then* – here she made a longer pause than usual and said clearly, in Capital Letters – *the Bishop!*⁴⁷.

In his reminiscences of religion lessons are presented as another obligatory class, and the catechist as a disliked teacher who could not cope with bored teenage students.

Moreover, similar to their "real" counterparts, his schoolmates are reluctant to accept the church's aspirations to influence public life and notice a clear discrepancy between Poles' declared faith and their everyday life:

...to church in one's best clothes on Sunday, to Licheń, obligatory, every five years, and on weekdays giving a damn about somebody, backhanders, abortions, infants in barrels, let's party!⁴⁸.

For the narrator of the novel, the superficiality of Polish Catholicism was particularly noticeable in the mass media during the last days and after the death of John Paul II. The viewers were inundated with the image of the plunged in despair nation consisting exclusively of inheritors of the ceased pope's teachings and admirers of his literary production⁴⁹.

Instead, the young need are ready to discuss problems connected with faith:

Piotr, finished his beer and said: *Listen guys, he* [clerical student Maciek – LS] *is right, you must understand... any sexual intercourses which prevent procreation are forbidden, if you are Catholics, you have to accept it and there is no place for discussion.* But somebody interrupted him with arguments for reforms, that clergy celibate is a pure fiction, that equal rights for gays, female priests, time for change. We sat talking for three hours, in the sun, on the cracked pavement, drinking warm beer – he didn't drink...⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ P. Czernski, *Ojciec odchodzi* [Father Is Leaving], Kraków 2006, p. 43.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 53–54, 77.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 115, 132.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

The characters' attitudes to religion are somehow similar to their attitudes toward parents: critical, but tolerant. Religious values are not particularly respected or appreciated, but they are not contested either.

4.4. Drugs and alcohol in everyday and ludic context

It is estimated that some 100 thousand Poles are addicted to drugs and about 200 people die from overdosing each year⁵¹. Respective sociological studies report that, besides alcohol, it is drugs that are found indispensable for teenagers to "have fun" when they meet their peers to entertain. However, apart from ludic context "drugs are now becoming an everyday life element to an increasing extent"⁵².

In the literature under study, drugs and alcohol appear in both contexts. The teenagers take drugs at school, their hangout spots, and homes when their parents are away:

During the break half of the people harbor in the niches in the wall that surrounds the school, and smoke joints quickly enough for another half to replace them⁵³.

I had tried fungi before I began to smoke, and it was the first different world after which I had the biggest moral experience in my life. And with this moral experience, I started my first year in secondary school⁵⁴.

Andrzej and Olga arrive when we are almost over with our second, fifth (or perhaps sixth) beer...⁵⁵.

Out of festive contexts, the most frequent are meetings to celebrate someone's birthday, or successful concert of the Armageddon Radio:

...everybody is already in horizontal positions, they are swimming in the pool of vodka and pills, it's a banal and obvious climax of this evening⁵⁶.

⁵¹ A. Sieniawska, J. Charmast, A. Sieniawska, J. Charmast, *Raport Rzecznika Praw Osób Uzależnionych* [Report of the Addicted Persons Spokesman], 2011, Polityka Narkotykowa, http://politykanarkotykowa.pl/sites/default/files/biblioteka/raport_rzecznika.pdf [access: 21.01.2013].

⁵² B. Fatyga, J. Rogala-Oblękowska, op.cit., p. 95.

⁵³ J. Żulczyk, op.cit., p. 62.

⁵⁴ M. Nahacz, op.cit., p. 31.

⁵⁵ P. Czernski, op.cit., p. 10.

⁵⁶ J. Żulczyk, op.cit., p. 197.

Drugs are also taken to soothe the stress connected work (Mould), to overcome one's deficiencies, or sometimes to forget about a heartbreak and disappointment in life:

...he smokes marihuana, because it helps him talk, it unlocks him, and when he is sober, he has problems with speaking, ...and suddenly, what a fuck it is going on, the master of rhetoric, eristic and monologue⁵⁷.

...he shares dope with me, his punk hairstyle becomes prettier, once, twice, third time, I was lying motionless, and he was stroking me... when I was small it was mum to stroke me like this⁵⁸.

Patol is a follower of the theory that marihuana reveals new horizons and space of human thought, that it deepens reflection, and the more you smoke, the smarter you become⁵⁹.

Generally, however, drugs and alcohol help the young kill the time and escape boredom:

This pitting in a pub is a pure lethargy and time disintegration. Nothing is done. They tell the truth on TV again, we drink alcohol and smoke because we are bored...

Guys, shall we smoke or not? It is cold and you are saying fucking nothing, perhaps some encouragement for the mind? To wake up fucking subconscious... I don't know, but I shall fill, because it is fucking raining and foggy⁶⁰.

Drugs are something obvious in the teenagers' life. The heroes of Masłowska's novel are in fact constantly under their influence. In search for the white powder, Natasza wrecks the kitchen in Silny's house. And, in a post-amphetamine psychosis, Silny smashes his head against the wall of the police station, believing that it is made of cardboard. Although they are aware of the harm that drugs inflict, they take anti-drug campaigns with gallows humor:

I have heard recently that "the best way to get out is not to get in". The slogan is damn great, Patol said it was impossible for a sober pal to coin it, he must have been doped ...

⁵⁷ M. Nahacz, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ M. Dzido, *op.cit.*, p. 147.

⁵⁹ M. Nahacz, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 29–30, 9.

His [Muka's – LS] photo, when he is drunk and unshaven... could be hanged in psychological and educational advisory centers as a model example of some proportion of the youth who get drunk permanently on days off school⁶¹.

Retreating from the family relations to their peer groups, the young find the “experienced society” and dialogue. However, finding understanding of their peers, they have to accept the rules of the group and its lifestyle, and seeking refuge in drugs is its very important feature.

4.5. Love, sex and marriage as not correlated values

Love is very important in the lives of the fictional characters. At the stage of platonic feeling, it seems to be something exceptional:

They find that love of theirs unique... I heard all of them say: ...”this time it’s true”, “I don’t know what to say”, “I will take my life because of her”. At this age, two things are equally sure, love and writing poems...⁶².

At the same time, treating sex very liberally, the young do not find love with the partners necessary to make it. The idea of being unfaithful to Magda does not even cross Silny’s mind when he is having sex to Angela. On the other hand, Magda’s sexual intercoursures with others (Lewy, Lolo, casual men at the beach) does not bother him either:

Silny will lick the floor under your feet clean on spot, for you not to walk on dirt. Silny will fall for you in Polish-Russian war shielding you against the blow with a banner, a white-red flag... She is my woman. She is speeding, but it’s not your problem... And for you, lads – respect from Silny, it’s kind of you to have brought her here⁶³.

To prove his love, he gives Magda the last line of amphetamine when she is going through withdrawal:

⁶¹ Ibidem, pp. 10, 38.

⁶² Ibidem, p. 45.

⁶³ Ibidem, pp. 22–23.

I am telling her not to die, I am saying that our love when not being exasperated, not being destructed, it does exist between us⁶⁴.

Because of her rejected love to Cyprian, an “ossified hippie” Weronika commits suicide. In turn, Cyprian’s love to Nadzieja (in spite of meaningless sex with the teacher) encourages him to return to the city, pay his and the brother’s drug debts, and take his girl-friend “over there”, to some mythic place, where their love will survive as the only authentic value. However, generally, focusing on their physical appearance, teenage boys represent a very dispassionate and critical approach to their peer girls:

The more stupid ones aspire to the appearance of strip girls, those a bit smarter follow models advertising perfumes. And those most distinctive imitate the image of vocalists of alternative bands whose names start with “The”... Of course there are also the so-called good students who look as if they were dressed by a merciful leaser of the Red Cross second-hand clothing containers... All these girls are as sexually attractive as a not grounded switch⁶⁵.

The older the youth, the more frequently love becomes subordinated to other, mostly material values. Preoccupied with his career, Mateusz neglects his relationship with Magda, and her ex-boyfriend does not hesitate to sacrifice their love for peaceful life in a traditional patriarchal family⁶⁶. Neither the premarital parish course nor wedding vows held the newly married husband from meeting Magda in the hotel. And finally, in the novel *Mound* quite a new phenomenon in the sphere of sexual relations appears, the so-called cyber-sex⁶⁷.

4.6. Botched rebellion against the “systems”

In her article, Szafraniec writes that there is no intergenerational conflict as for the most important consumerist values. However, in all the literature under study there are elements of protest against, as Fatyga calls it, “the systems”. The protest results from the fact that some important socialization institutions do not perform their

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 32.

⁶⁵ J. Żulczyk, op.cit., p. 19.

⁶⁶ M. Dzido, op.cit., p. 67.

⁶⁷ S. Shuty, op.cit., pp. 143–144.

roles efficiently and from the fact that the contacts parents-children-society have become instrumental. In other words, young people in the novels protest against processes and institutions that create the society they live in without their influence through the process of communication. A protest against socialization institutions is a protest against the values they instill; against reification of human relations; against consumerism in the form promoted by the media; and against artificiality, helplessness, and the inability to cross the conventions. For most characters in the novels, this negation ends up in retreat. It is only in *Armageddon Radio* that the young make an effort to change the situation through rebellion against the systems. Consumers themselves, the fictional characters are the most critical of the thoughtless consumption promoted by the media:

...be beautiful this summer, the lady of the house advises, ...seduce him with the scent, be predatory in the bedroom, remember, men like wild women, so be wild... They have their own problems. How to remove stretch marks? Whether to buy eye cream, or perhaps cuticle cream... How to struggle with wrinkles. How to struggle with fat? How to struggle with one's own head? How to struggle effectively with herself? [...] And they are watching me, those bitches. Those impeccably white products of a Photoshop. They are watching me travelling without a ticket to another job interview⁶⁸.

Consumption becomes an addiction as everybody is constantly purchasing things, as if they were "starving Africans waiting for an American helicopter". Even the youth's disillusionment and stress can be a source of profit to a respective market sector:

The fact that we are eighteen, the fact that we hate this world totally, is used to sell us another pair of trousers, shoes, beer, condoms, game consoles and records. You have suicidal tendencies? ...you are alone with your suffering? Here, this eyeliner suits you perfectly. You don't want to take a job, squeeze in the corporation formula, rot with the wife and children, you prefer freedom, skateboarding, smell of skunks on your clothes, dandruff in your hair? Here you are, this energizer will do⁶⁹.

Being aware of their total immersion in consumerism and passiveness, Cyprian, the leader of *Armageddon Radio* finds violence to be the only way to break through

⁶⁸ M. Dzido, op.cit., pp. 39, 110.

⁶⁹ J. Żulczyk, op.cit., pp. 43–45.

the walls of the reified reality and to change the style of living, thinking, and experiencing:

Over there are tens of thousands of people [...] who will never slit, even for a while, this five-centimeter thick condom in which they were closed, if you do not do it. They will never feel fear, if you do not show them, how to feel. They will never think on their own, if you do not show them how to do it. They will never realize, that they have chosen themselves out of a limited pool of copies, out of some Lego set...⁷⁰.

Successful at destroying the school, some cars, and other city facilities, the rebels are pretty surprised that the local police remain inactive. Instead, the parents of one of the heroines start to produce jumpers with the logo of the Armageddon band. After Cyprian disappears, the band begins its television career. The process of ex-corporation in which the band creates its own alternative music, using for this purpose elements of the dominant culture resources, soon transforms into the process of incorporation. As a result, their music is absorbed by this very system and changed into another product of popular culture⁷¹. Finally, both the rebellious music and provoking attire of the musicians turn into a goldmine for clothing producers and television talent hunters:

...you're creating a new line of sale, a new target... I can see them calling, drinking subsequent coffees and whoring around my idea, and what we wanted to do. And you know what? ...It is them that I wanted to shoot, the directors of this pap, producers of this eatable polystyrene foam, bosses and managers, pricks in suits who measure you like insects and choose the soil, fertilizer, and stimulators to produce another layers of rubbish...⁷².

The façade, which isolates the young from the experienced world, proves to be indestructible. The rebellion is not suppressed, but tamed and commercialized, as if it were a computer game:

Nobody forbade you to clash with the police or to take heroin, neither were you prevented from fighting or breaking into the school. Everything was programmed,

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 44.

⁷¹ J. Fiske, p. 73.

⁷² J. Żulczyk, op.cit., p. 439.

and nothing happened which would shake this pot. The Armageddon Radio was merely another brand of a mobile... NOTHING IS TRUE, EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED⁷³.

The young were defeated by “the systems” again. The attempt to communicate through violence proved ineffective and confirmed the inviolability of the “substitute, the ersatz of life which only resembles reality”. The disillusioned rebels have returned to their normal course, and now again they can again:

...select out of the available sets not only their appearance but also their behaviour. In the packages there are also included substances, small offences, farewell mobile messages to girlfriends, boyfriends, and the hours of escaping home, ways to commit suicide and standardized blog information afterwards⁷⁴.

Still worse, the tamed and commercialized rebellion has lost its spell and become pointless:

...we are as stupid as anybody else, as our all pampered generation, and... we will win nothing, because there is nothing to struggle for. Actually, it's even better, because nobody feels like fighting any more⁷⁵.

* * *

If we wanted to compare the image of young people as presented in sociological studies and in the analyzed fiction, we would not notice some differences. Firstly, it is only the fictional characters that declare their freedom to choose. And, decision-making is limited within commonly accepted and ready-made culture patterns and they do not rebel against it, except in Żulczyk's novel. Generally, they criticize and retreat from the family and into the peer group. The latter is as a rule connected with drugs taken in everyday and ludic contexts. Like sociologists, the writers accept that the identity of their heroes is not shaped by the family, school, or religion, but by changeable social life (commercialized popular culture and consumerism, which influence the hierarchy of values appreciated by them and result

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 406.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 49.

⁷⁵ M. Nahacz, *op.cit.*, pp. 35–36.

in a diminishing role of such intergenerational criterion as the rebellion and father-child gap).

Secondly, in comparison to the artistic account, sociological studies seem to overlook the fact that children treat adults as sponsors and pushy people who coerce some trivial and impractical rules or traditions that do not play an important role in a modern social environment. However, the prospects of the youths' future lives is amazingly similar to that of parents' generation in spite of the current fears and frustrations:

God is playing joke on us, to prevent boredom, he is thinking "everything is OK with you, so I shall give you fucking existential fears, so that you don't think that you have paradise here". And it is sweet, it is going as planned. We will find wives, skinny, fat, we will play around with them, then lovely babies will be born, we will go to work and our life will take a proper course. Amen⁷⁶.

The hero and the author's alter ego in Shuty's book asks himself and answers the question, what the young generation is like? In the literary vision, the young of the first decade of the 21st century are the quintessence of the socio-cultural environment of the time; it is a generation of fast-food shops visited at lunch breaks ("generation of the kebab, in whose aromatic sauce several types of sperm were found"); the generation which witnesses the decay of traditional religious values ("generation of a prick glued to the cross"); the generation of sex without commitments and drugs ("generation of last-ditch knocking in dirty bogs... in heroin hallucination); and finally the generation without authentic experiences, which is replaced by the offer of pop-culture⁷⁷.

This article was not aimed at proving which discourse – sociological or literary – offers a more adequate image of social life. They are not dramatically different and most problems appear in both. But, even though an artistic expression is not grounds to make conclusions about the entire young generation, it should be emphasized that young writers, due to their age and common experiences, are able to note some phenomena which, for obvious reasons, are overlooked in sociological reports. Moreover, fictional characters can be perceived as participants of open, in-depth interviews, who express their opinions in their own style. The latter seems to be the advantage of literature. The literary discourse presented in the novels of Masłowska, Żulczyk, Nahacz, Shuty, Czerski, and Dzido is shaped by the literary

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 16.

⁷⁷ S. Shuty, *op.cit.*, pp. 61–62.

convention and cultural context the writers happen to live in. In spite of a prevailing verisimilitude nature of the stories, a literal decoding of the plots and characters may be risky, because it is the image of young people as perceived by the authors, who are young themselves.

Although the content analysis of the selected novels focuses primarily on the identity and behavior of fictional characters, the form of the books is also worth mentioning, particularly the language used in them, which performs two functions: cognitive (signification) and emotive (stimulation of emotions, transfer of supra-meanings). In this description, the authors use the two types of parole. The first one is the language of commercials, marketing, business, and didactic (jargon of the façade):

Who are you? A little Pole. Smile! Colgate toothpaste and winter fresh chewing gum. Smile. What is your badge? A white eagle. For breakfast: light fluffy almette cheese, with the stress on the last syllable, Nescaffe Classic, and forward. And smile!⁷⁸.

Another one is the spontaneous, full of vulgar language used by young people to express their emotions, opinions, and judgments. In other words, the authors apply enunciation that is the adjustment of the message to the needs of its sender and the context of its reception. The vulgarity and the syntax typical for jargon used by young characters (the latter is particularly masterful in Silny's monologues) adds to authenticity of the literary visions and does not seem to be a mere linguistic game.

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⁷⁸ M. Dzido, op.cit., p. 124.

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