Voluntary Social Marginalization as a Surviving Strategy in the Post-Communist Polish Initiation Novels

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It will not come as a surprise to anybody if I claim that one of the most significant consequences of the fall of communism for Polish literary life was the lifting of censorship. Polish writers were released from the mandatory ideological clichés, political engagement, but most importantly from obligatory patriotic duties. The word “patriotism” has a sacred meaning for the Polish nation as a whole and for its writing community in particular; the latter historically tends to “assume power” when the state is poorly governed or non-existent. So: did the break-up with communist ideology also mean a break-up with the Romantic tradition? Probably not, because Polish mentalité is infused with romantic patriotism, messianism, and martyrdom. This mindset is reinforced by the school curriculum from generation to generation. More relevant here seems to be the question of whether or not Polish writers have managed to change their focus from traditionally ethnocentric subjects to more universal, anthropocentric matters. And the answer is yes.

The emergence of the new, quasi-autobiographical trend in post-1989 Polish literature is convincing evidence that something important has changed. This new trend is represented by a relatively large group of initiation novels, such as R. Sadaj’s Telefon do Stalina [Telephone to Stalin] and Ławka pod kasztanem [The bench under the chestnut tree]; A. Stasiuk’s Jak zostalem pisarzem. Próba autobiografii intelektualnej [How I became a writer. An attempt at an intellectual autobiography]; I. Filipiak’s

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1 This investigation was supported by the University of Kansas General Research Fund allocation # 2302097.
2 I will use the terms “initiation novel” and “Bildungsroman” interchangeably further in the text.
Absolutna amnezja [Absolute amnesia]; M Stokowski’s Samo-loty [Airplanes]; M. Szczepanski’s Dzieci sierżanta Pieprza [Sergeant Pepper’s children], J. Stefko’s Możliwe sny [Possible dreams], L. Majewski’s Pielgrzymka do grobu Bridget Bardot Cudownej [A pilgrimage to the tomb of Bridget Bardot Miraculous], J. Kornhauser’s Dom, sen i gry dziecięce [Home, dreams, and children’s games; a sentimental tale] and many others.

These works typically feature young narrators trying to structure their new post-communist identities by recollecting their childhood and/or adolescence, which they experienced during the communist regime. This trend is symptomatic of the paradigm shift that has occurred since 1989: Polish literature has taken as its central theme not the sufferings of Poland caught in the Soviet totalitarian net, but the universal process of initiation into adulthood and social maturity. As the Polish literary critic, Dariusz Nowacki, accurately points out: “these novels do not join the barren and unwise political dispute about the People’s Republic of Poland because they answer the question “How was it?” by asking the question “How was I?” and not telling another truth than the personal truth3.

Communism in these recent novels serves as an historical background, allowing the authors to reflect on their youth in a totalitarian state where one is not entirely free to create one’s own identity. These Polish writers have embraced the postmodern historical perspective and abandoned, in Lyotardian terms, “the grand narrative.” They have chosen to focus on the uniqueness of personal experience, hoping to reveal in the layers of private memory some interesting anecdotes, images, and emotions associated with the

communist regime that would give some nuance to the stark black and white contrast of contemporary public opinion.

Within this larger context, the present paper focuses on one specific aspect of the Polish post-communist accounts of communist childhood, namely, the various strategies that the young protagonists employ to survive totalitarian reality. These rebellious children-protagonists clearly recognize the mechanisms of moral relativism that communist officials use to remove the weight of moral responsibility from the shoulders of citizens, thereby making them accomplices in the common crime and eventually supporters of the regime. The young protagonists refuse to “buy in” to the status quo, refuse to let communist rule corrupt their consciousness, and this refusal drives them to the margins of society.

In the present paper I argue that the traditional framework of the classical Western European Bildungsroman (Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, Dickens’s Great Expectations, Bronte’s Jane Eyre, etc.) undergoes radical permutations in the Polish post-communist version of the genre. The main protagonists in the Polish post-1989 quasi-autobiographical novels refuse to enter the adult world and become full-fledged members of society because the totalitarian state deprives them of their traditional right to negotiate the basic oppositions between modernity and tradition, individual and collective. In the classical examples of the Bildungsroman, whatever happens to the protagonists serves their ultimate good and social advancement; in the Polish post-communist initiation novels, the refusal to comply with communist ideology serves to guarantee the preservation of the protagonists’ integrity. Does the failure to be recognized as loyal members of society mean that they do not experience initiation and enter adulthood? Perhaps…
In the first part of the paper, I will present some of the reasons that have conditioned the desire to escape or withdraw from social life. In the second part, I will describe and analyze the various forms of alternative existence the juvenile protagonists adopt in order to avoid their socialization. Finally, I will discuss the effect of failure to be initiated on the genre structure.

Before I present the various forms of escape or withdrawal, it is necessary to consider briefly the circumstances that have led the main characters to this state of mind. Some protagonists clearly declare their indifference to politics. They usually come from anti-communist families, which have been hurt by the regime physically or spiritually. A good example in this regard is Tadzio, the hero from Zielonka’s novel of the same name, who, while recollecting his first intimate relationship with politically active Iwona, thinks to himself: “It is true that in the summer, I helped her once or twice to disperse some leaflets, but honestly, politics have never interested me.” Tadzio’s indifference is actually a well-masked fear, which he has inherited from his father. The taboo-topic in their house is mandatory military service. Tadzio’s father was emotionally molested and physically injured when he was serving his time at the army because of the way he spoke. Now, when Tadzio himself is approaching the age when he has to perform his duties, his parents are fearful because they suspect his guttural “r” might bring him the same bad luck it brought to his father. The father’s traumatic military experience functions as a synecdoche of the totalitarian regime in the novel as it discloses the essence of the communist absurdity.

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4 Jurek Zielonka, Tadzio, Znak: Kraków, 2000, p. 22.
5 The injury was caused by the cruel sergeant, Fonfary, who was constantly picking on Tadzio’s father because of his guttural, French “r.” Fonfary associated this articulation problem with bourgeois degeneracy and effeminacy and was merciless towards people having it. The irony and misfortune was that the sergeant himself suffered from the same speech impairment and was very ashamed of it. He never doubted that Tadzio’s father was making fun of him.
Bolek (Possible dreams) and Adam (A pilgrimage to the tomb of Brigitte Bardot Miraculous) are sensitive, but emotionally disturbed children, who suffer enormously from the lack of a father figure in their life. While it is never stated directly in the novel, the reader infers that Bolek’s father decided not to return to communist Poland after the end of the WWII. Forced by the manager of the factory to reveal his political preferences, the juvenile protagonist confesses: “I am for nobody, just for myself (...) Besides, I do not like to talk about politics, I do not like politics, I do not like politicians, because they usurp the right to decide how other people have to live, why they have to live, and if they should live at all.”

Adam’s father, on the other hand, was a hero; one of the few Polish aviators who participated in the battle for Great Britain in the WWII. After the war, he was sentenced to prison by the communist court and most probably killed. Adam’s mother does not have the courage to tell her son the truth and creates a story that his father is alive and lives in England. To maintain the myth, she regularly writes and sends postcards to their address as if they came from the father. Terrified by the regime and afraid to lose her adolescent son, Adam’s mother constantly reminds him: “Adam, honey, do not engage in politics,” I am sick and tired of hearing this warning over and over again. Like I am engaged in any political actions.”

Marian (Airplanes) matches the stereotype described above only partially. Like Bolek and Adam, he also comes from an anti-communist family and has lost his father due to the totalitarian regime. Marian’s father is a political immigrant who lives in the United States and anchors a talk-show at the Voice of America, telling amusing and yet revealing stories about his life in communist Poland. As one could expect, the Polish

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7 Lech Majewski, Pielgrzymka do grobu Brigitte Bardot Cudownej, TAiWPN UNIVERSITAS: Kraków, 1996, p. 64.
authorities are very concerned about the consequences of his anti-communist propaganda. His radio show not only compromises the regime outside Poland, but it also sabotages it from within, as many Polish citizens secretly listen to the banned radio station. Unable to reach the renegade, the security officers attack his family: Marian is asked to condemn his father’s behavior and disavow him in front of the whole school. His mother, in turn, is compelled by the security agents to take part in a radio program and tell the entire country what a dishonest and unfaithful husband Marian’s father was. The intrusive presence of the secret police in his home turns politics into an everyday reality for the young protagonist. He starts asking his relatives about Communism and goes even further in his dreams: he asks the French president and the Pentagon to throw a bomb at his school and the State Security Office, the two institutions that have caused his family the most pain and humiliation.

Ryszard (A bench under the chestnut tree) and J. (Home, dreams, and children’s games; a sentimental tale) have not suffered any major losses, except for being everyday witnesses of their parents’ quiet and self-destructive struggle with the regime because of their (respectively) noble descent or Jewish origin. The family of Ryszard’s mother has always belonged to the Polish gentry, but in the new circumstances she is forced to earn her own family’s living by bootlegging. His father, a gifted engineer, swings back and forth between periods of creative euphoria and alcoholic torpor, because his unwillingness to become a Party member has blighted his professional career. Adolescent Ryszard is absolutely indifferent towards politics and his attitude remains unchanged even after the democratic revolution, when most Polish citizens developed an immediate and consistent interest in domestic politics:

At the beginning I had very little interest in this news, it seemed to me that they were talking about the same things over and over again, constantly repeating the same
names: Jaruzelski, Wałęsa, Mazowiecki, Balcerowicz. Politics didn’t appeal to me; however, I evidently knew that the general Jaruzelski was from the Communist Party and Wałęsa from Solidarity, which, as my father liked to say, brought communism to its knees.⁸

J. comes from an educated Jewish family with deep Silesian roots. His broken spirited father lives the life of an outsider, because he does not have the strength either to resist the regime or to emigrate to Israel like most of his relatives. J.’s confession about his lack of interest in politics and clear understanding of the political realm display no traces of remorse: “Seriously, he (J.) had a very little interest in it. Besides, he did not understand politics very well. (…) If he thought about these matters it was almost exclusively in philosophical categories, not in everyday terms. (…) He was interested in man with no political armor.”⁹

All of the protagonists from the aforementioned novels are sensitive young individuals who unmistakably decode their parents’ unspoken message that silence and passivity speak volumes about one’s perception of reality and, most importantly can save a lot of trouble. By making a conscious choice to stay away from politics, they prove that they have learned their parents’ lesson about self-preservation. For other juvenile protagonists, however, politics is an everyday reality because their fathers are intimately involved with the Communist Party. Roman (Telephone to Stalin) and Marianna (Absolute amnesia) are children of Party authorities. This gives them a close perspective on the manipulative and anti-human nature of the administrative machine and an equally strong reason to despise it. It is interesting to note here that the true rebels are actually the ones closest to power.

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⁸ Ryszard Sadaj, Ławka pod kasztanem, Znak: Kraków, 2000, p. 78
Roman’s father is a vice-secretary of a regional Party Committee. The little boy sincerely likes his father and is proud of his important position in the town, until he discovers his conflict with his grandparents. It is not only the generation gap that sets apart the son and parents-in-law, but the tragic rivalry between the two different social and moral systems they represent. The depiction of the ideological conflict on a family level is not exclusively defined by the fact that the narrator in the novel is a child; the personalization of the official discourse (communist order vs. capitalist order) also highlights the profound effect of politics on the private lives of ordinary people. Roman chooses his grandparents’ side and begins demonstratively to ignore his father’s will. His son’s rebellious actions lose the vice-secretary his job at the Committee, an event that represents a turning point in the father’s life: his eyes gradually open to the truth he has been neglecting for a long time.

Marianna’s father (Absolute amnesia), in contrast, seems incapable of any change. Controlling and tyrannical in both his public and private life, he is an embodiment of the Communist Party itself. It is symptomatic that Marianna never uses her father’s name when referring to him. She calls him “the Secretary,” just as everybody else in the neighborhood does. By observing her father’s behavior both inside and outside of their home, the adolescent protagonist discovers the “true purpose” of institutions like family and school, which is to systematically destroy the soul and will of the younger generation. This observation confirms Goffman’s comment, in Characteristics of Total Institutions, that by depersonalizing or de-individualizing their subordinates, totalitarian
institutions deprive them of the will to make independent decisions, thus leading them to collective identification with the regime\textsuperscript{10}.

One would expect that children’s perceptions of reality would be a function of their parents’ beliefs and experiences, but it is not always the case in our novels. This overview suggests instead that, despite their parents’ compliance or non-compliance with the regime, the young protagonists unerringly recognize its immoral and oppressive nature. They consciously choose to stay away from politics. Open resistance is not an option for them, because (as Leszek has realized) “even if you are protesting against the system, you become a subject to external influences and turn your life into a constant reaction”\textsuperscript{11}. In a totalitarian state, indifference to politics actually means abstention from official forms of social/public life. Most of the protagonists follow a similar pattern: they not only withdraw from political sphere, but they also withdraw from reality in order to create their own fictional worlds that satisfy their longing for freedom and give them some sense of control over their lives, confirming Bauman’s notion that “the desire for freedom comes from the experience of oppression”\textsuperscript{12}.

Most of our juvenile protagonists are avid readers. Tadzio, Adam, Bolek, Marianna, and J. live in the realm of literature. Literature allows them to dream and thus escape the unacceptable external world; literature allows them to experience different lifestyles and human relationships; it subconsciously shapes their value systems. Tadzio sees reality as “a remote imperfect reflection of the world of his solitary readings and contemplations”.\textsuperscript{13} For Mariana the outside world becomes more acceptable when seen

\textsuperscript{11} Jan Sobczak, Dryf, Czarna lampa: Czarne, 1999, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{13} Jurek Zielonka, Tadzio, Znak: Krakow, 2000, p. 7-8.
through the softening filters of recently read novels. For J. reading is a special ritual which brings temporary oblivion. Bolek is doubtful whether books make him a better person, but he is certain about their calming effect on him. Often times he finds himself craving reading as a hungry man craves food. Leszek (Drift) defines his attitude towards reading in the 1980s statistically: “I read at least five hundred books, which I did not remember, but they are still there, in my sub-consciousness, fermenting. (...) I had about three hundred sexual encounters. I am not sure if I want to switch those numbers.”¹⁴ The abundance of titles, quotations, and references to literary, philosophical, and scientific works is a feature that almost all post-1989 initiation novels share. It might seem somewhat pretentious at first sight, but the repetitiveness of the pattern rather suggests that reading indeed had a great impact on the younger generation in communist times. It will take a separate study to examine the books these teenage protagonists read, but even a quick glance indicates the prevalence of Western European authors. Antony Libera -- literary critic, writer, and author of the critically acclaimed initiation novel Madame (1999) -- attaches an even greater meaning to the role of Western culture in the spiritual survival of Polish citizens by pointing out that, thanks to the Pole’s love of Western literature and culture, the process of the sovietization of Polish society (or at least of its elites) failed.

Most of the young characters are not only passionate readers, but they are also engaged in some form of creative production. Tadzio, Marianna, Mikolaj, Adam, and J. use the medium of the Logos not to create new and better universes (as one might expect), but to give deeper meaning to the one they live in. The setting in Adam’s novel (A Pilgrimage), for example, is a fictional hotel, where his protagonist lives with his

¹⁴ Jan Sobczak, Dryf, p. 10.
favorite Western writers, movie stars, singers, and painters, who belong to different
generations and even different epochs. He claims he is staying at the hotel to seek his lost
father, however, Rabindranath Tagor leads him to the realization that he is actually trying
to determine his own identity. Each one of the celebrities represents a different hypostasis
of the father and they all serve as mediators in Adam’s attempt at self-discovery.

Bolek (Possible dreams) enjoys drawing as much as he enjoys reading. His dream
is to become an architect and build a beautiful and people-friendly capital city in a place
where nothing has existed before. In a Freudian moment, he points out that the option of
building his dream city on the ruins of an old one is absolutely unacceptable.

Marian (Airplanes) and J. (Home, dreams, and children’s games) adore airplanes
and often ride their bicycles to the airport to enjoy the view of the big metal birds and the
roar of the motors: “This is not true – says Marian – that this place was something
ordinary for me. Every time I went there I had the feeling that I was stepping into
something completely surreal. Airplanes are a transparent symbol of freedom which
becomes literal in Stokowski’s novel. Marian’s passion for flying does not end with
airport visits. He diligently studies his collection of Russian aviation magazines and
spends long days sketching and constructing his own aircrafts. Marian and his friends
even take two imaginary trips: to France and the United States. Interestingly, the first
thing he notices after landing at the foreign airports is the immediate disappearance of his
inseparable companion - fear. The act of creation is a constructive outlet for the
adolescent artistic impulses and need for self-expression. It is also a way to escape “the
absorbing grayness and mediocrity” for a while. “Because – as Leszek (Drift) concludes -
what else could we do in those dark years and at this puppy age, except create.”

15 Marek Stokowski, Samo-loty, Jacek Santorsky & Co: Warszawa, 2005, p. 44.
16 Jan Sobczak, Dryf, p. 43.
Sports have a similar effect on the young protagonists – they are time spent away from “total madness,” and they offer an opportunity for self-reinvention. Swimming and skating makes Roman (*Telephone to Stalin*) and Bolek (*Possible dreams*) realize that they possess the talent, perseverance, and endurance to become superior athletes. It brings them an immense sense of fulfillment and, in Roman’s case, even social affirmation.

Some protagonists have discovered that constant movement and changing location make them feel free and prevent them from surrendering to the social pressure: “We cared about our freedom. That is why we walked so much. Days and nights. And we traveled. Months. Until it got really cold. Even then we tried. Sometimes hitchhiking, sometimes riding trains without tickets.”\(^{17}\) When Bolek (*Possible dreams*) and Leszek (*Drift*) play hooky, they spend the entire day riding random buses or trains to the last stop and enjoying the feeling of being anonymous in the outskirts or in other cities. Bolek usually takes a bag full of books with him, thus combining the physical and the mental escapes. Leszek is simply killing time before the first show at the theatre “Atlantic.”

Some protagonists take a larger step and cross state borders: Penguin (*Sergeant Pepper’s children*) emigrates to America following his dream to become rich and famous; his friend, Brzanka, joins him for a while out of starvation and desperation. The original purpose of Tadzio’s trip to West Germany is to bring his cousin back to Poland. He does not succeed in the rescue mission, but he succeeds in discovering himself as he experiences his initiation into adulthood at the immigration camp like his favorite literary character, Hans Castorp, in the Berghof sanatorium (*T. Mann, The Magic Mountain*).

After taking two imaginary trips to France and the US to rescue his country from the communists, little Marian (*Airplanes*) decides that it is time to start thinking about his

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own safety. He prepares a meticulous plan to board a real plane secretly and flee to America to reunite with his father. The inhabitants of Adam’s hotel (*A Pilgrimage*) collectively reach the decision that their only way out from the collapsing building is to build a rocket and escape to the US. Like in the classical Bildungsroman, the journey in post-1989 Polish initiation novels symbolizes the process of self-discovery.

Unfortunately, not all of the juvenile protagonists engage in constructive escapism. Some of them find comfort in alcohol, drugs, and promiscuous sex. This means of self-exclusion is characteristic of the hippie culture, artistically captured in *Drift*, *Sergeant Pepper’s Children* and *How I became a writer*. Sobczak’s novel contains, perhaps, the most graphic portrayal of the communist absurdity and existential pain of the “lost generation.” The choice of the main character’s family name, Wałęsik, is not random. The verb *wałęsać się* means “to idle away” in English and that is exactly what Leszek and his friends do: they waste their time and energy in seeking alcohol, drugs, and women to escape reality: “My friends and I discovered marijuana rather early, long before the reggae wave, and we left beer, red wine and school for it. (…) I was abusing other substances as well, but none of them helped me to find the sense of life.”

Several protagonists from different novels suggest that in the 1980s, especially during martial law, drug abuse among the youth surpassed alcohol abuse, which has been traditionally high in Poland. Mikolaj (*Sergeant Pepper’s children*) grows marijuana himself and takes pride in his thickset green bushes, but his friend Brzanka is rather upset about the fact that the “whole city has went crazy and people smoke pot like they drink vodka.” Leszek (*Drift*) offers a similar observation: “They took them [the girls] from

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one party to another, but instead of alcohol, there were green leaves everywhere: dried in a hurry in the oven and smoked in pipes.\textsuperscript{20}

Another means of escape popular among the juvenile protagonists is feigned schizophrenia. Leszek (\textit{Drift}) openly confesses: “I want to be a schizophrenic on paper.” In order to obtain this desirable diagnosis, he has to demonstrate his insanity in front of a psychiatrist every two weeks for an entire year. The doctor immediately recognizes the fake, but lets him do his show anyway and finally prescribes him diazepam. This episode suggests that Leszek was not the only person who had come up with the brilliant idea of buying freedom and safety in exchange for a diagnosis of “schizophrenia,” which in any normal circumstances would be a stigma. The narrator in \textit{How I became a writer} tells the reader about his fake suicide attempt (during which he almost dies) in order to escape military obligations. Stasiuk’s character does not, however, succeed in obtaining the desirable diagnosis; he is instead pronounced a “deserter” and sent to prison. Marianna’s (\textit{Absolute amnesia}) high school teacher feigns a mental disorder and finds peace of mind in a psychiatric facility. The juvenile protagonist’s comment on the event is that “I would do the same; however, madness requires certain firmness and stubbornness and perhaps even premeditation. And I am constantly carried away.”\textsuperscript{21}

Jaś (\textit{Sergeant Pepper’s children}) represents the opposite case. He is a genuine schizophrenic, but he believes he is feigning it and generously invites his friends to refer to him in case something bad happens. Little Marian (\textit{Airplanes}) falls so deeply into the habit of daydreaming as a coping strategy that as time goes by it becomes more and more difficult for him to distinguish between dream and reality. Adam from \textit{A Pilgrimage to}

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\textsuperscript{20} Jan Sobczak, \textit{Dryf}, p. 14. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Izabela Filipiak, \textit{Absolutna amnezja}, Tchu: Warszawa, 2006, p. 188. This issue of sanity/insanity and incarceration in psychiatric facilities in communist countries is an enormous topic with many ramifications: personal, political, cultural, scientific, and literary.
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the grave of Brigitte Bardot Miraculous experiences the same ontological confusion. The fictional hotel, where the action of his book takes place, displays certain ambiguities. First, it is a retreat, where he (or his protagonist) socializes with his favorite celebrities, thus escaping the hostile environment; next it appears as a symbol of the disintegration of communist Poland. Adam’s attempt at resurrecting his fragmented self in fiction fails as he actually re-creates the prison he cannot escape in his real life.

No matter how well the protagonists cope with their reality, almost all of them have moments of self-questioning depression, during which they blame themselves for not fitting into the mainstream. Mikolaj, the narrator and a main character in Sergeant Pepper’s children, reveals his struggle with depression: “He would start delicately with a cursory balance. Who was he? What did he represent, what could he do, what capacities did he posses? Zero, ladies and gentlemen, a round zero with a hole in the middle. What then was he supposed do with himself? One has to do something in life, find a place for oneself. However, Mikolaj was incompatible with the world or it could be as well that the world was not compatible with Mikolaj.” Adam (A Pilgrimage) experiences the feeling of chaos and fragmentary existence as well as an inability to distinguish between dream and reality: “Because I cannot find unconditional values, I do not have measures, proportions, parameters, and I do not believe in relative ones. (…) The module of my existence is non-existence.”

Some of the younger characters declare their desire to disappear unnoticed or to never grow up. A child’s imagination is governed by different rules than that of an adolescent or adult. Little Bolek, for example, believes that closing his eyes will make him and the whole world disappear. Tadzio realizes later in life that his “desire to run
away, slip out on tip-toe without being noticed”22 was fueled by his fear of the real world. Marianna (*Absolute amnesia*) senses what awaits her and makes the decision that, “until she finds more convincing arguments to join the adult world, it would be better if she stays little forever. (…) Sometimes adults make her laugh, other times she is ashamed of them, and even in moments of weakness when she would start dreaming about the privileges promised as she grows up, she would come quickly to her senses”23. It links her intertextually with another child-protagonist – Oskar Matzerath from Gunter Grass’s novel *Tin Drum* (1959). Both Marianna and Oscar are citizens of Gdansk and share the same desire not to grow up and enter the hypocritical adult world. Adam (*A Pilgrimage*) is rather worried about the fact he is not maturing: “I delay my development, I withhold time (which does not exist), I am still a son. Not a husband, not a father. Eternal childhood”24. Adam’s worries convey the psychological stress of living without the ability to create a coherent self.

The most extreme cases of self-denial are expressed by the characters, who have suicidal thoughts, make suicide attempts, or succeed in taking their own lives. The black statistic in the novels is that four of the adolescent protagonists try to commit suicide and one dies during his attempt to flee to America.

“In the 1980s- confesses Leszek (*Drift*) - I made three attempts at suicide (…) and “thought three hundred and thirty three thousand times that I did not want to live”25. Bolek (*Possible dreams*) is even more extreme in his rejection of the life he is destined to live:

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23 Izabela Filipiak, *Absolutna amnezja*, p. 15
If it was up to me, I would have been still-born. Because life is not worth of living at all. (…) I will imagine for myself piece of mind, because that is what I like the most. One needs not to take part in life, get engaged in people’s businesses, participate in anything external. I will imagine somebody else who would live for me my restless, wounded, meaningless, chaotic, and accidental life.26

All of the described examples of internal struggle point to the impossibility of the process of socialization. When the aggressive, depersonalizing social pressure “bumps” into the stubborn non-conformity of the teenage protagonists, the only possible compromise seems to be voluntary exile (internal or external). However, total liberation from social ties is untenable, even in theory. The growing uncertainty and need for protection leads the young protagonists to peer groups with similar alternative thinking. These groups provide temporary relief, but in the long term prove to be an insufficient form of social interaction and a limited source of social affirmation. Sometimes they even become a source of anxiety as the young protagonists observe the reflection of their own social drama in their peers’ conduct. I suspect that, as minority structures, such groups are visible in the larger culture, and they experience constant pressure from mainstream society to blend in. Furthermore, their ideological platform is based entirely on the rejection and eventually demolition of the existing order, and that is not what most of the protagonists are looking for, consciously or subconsciously. They seek freedom to establish their own identities, they long for positive values to identify with, and they expect acknowledgment of their social utility. Only two of the characters, Tadzio and Bolek, realize these aspirations by discovering love and assuming husband and father’s responsibilities; nevertheless, they continue to refuse to participate in social structures that might compromise their integrity.

26 Jolanta Stefko, Możliwe sny, p. 5-6.
The Polish post-communist accounts of childhood subvert the conventions of the Bildungsroman (as viewed by Wilhelm Dilthey, who introduced the term into common usage\textsuperscript{27}) as they tell the story of failed initiation. In novel after novel the children-protagonists fail to mature and become useful and satisfied citizens; the expected integration into an affirmative society is replaced by alienation from unacceptable reality. This permutation of the genre should be interpreted as an indication of an axiological crisis, a society gone wrong. Initiation into mature adulthood is impossible in the post-communist novels because the adolescent protagonists seek their identities in a milieu that is threatening, alienating, and lacking in stability and consistency. What is left for them is fragmentation and incompleteness. The choice of self-estrangement exposes, at least to the reader, the illusion that even in the most unfavorable circumstances one might find a way of not compromising one’s personal moral values. It may sound pathetic, but most of the time the narratives successfully balance pathos with humor and irony.

This brings us back to the question of Romanticism and its presence and function in contemporary Polish culture. I join Maria Janion\textsuperscript{28} in her conclusion that Romanticism is still alive, however, that is a different kind of Romanticism and its contemporary heroes have different dilemmas – but this problem requires a separate investigation. I would rather devote my final thoughts to the future of the Polish post-communist initiation novels. Dariusz Nowacki suggests that the vitality and attraction of the theme will soon wear out as new generations of writers will step onto the Polish literary stage and for them the People’s Republic of Poland will be a phenomenon known exclusively

\textsuperscript{27} The hero of the classical Bildungsroman engages in the double task of self-integration and integration into society. Under ideal conditions, the first implies the second: the mature hero becomes a useful and satisfied citizen. Viewed in this way, the Bildungsroman is a fundamentally affirmative, conservative genre, confident in the validity of the society it depicts, and anxious to lead both hero and reader toward a productive place within the world. Quoted by Todd Kontje, \textit{Private Lives in the Public Sphere: The German Bildungsroman as Metafiction}, The Pennsylvania State University Press: Pennsylvania, 1992, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{28} Maria Janion, \textit{Do Europy - tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi, Sic!: Warszawa, 2000.}
from history textbooks. I am a bit more optimistic (or perhaps pessimistic!) than Nowacki and believe in the longevity of this topic. Polish society has by no means come to terms with its communist past. Not even one generation has passed since the collapse. The issues of the past exhibit great longevity in Polish culture, and the communist past will continue to absorb people’s minds, for it constitutes almost 45 years of Poland’s history.

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Solution: Marginalization is the social process of being confined to a lower social standing. Marginalization involves people being denied their fundamental rights which results in lowering their economic and social status. Question 2 List two reasons why Adivasis are becoming increasingly marginalised. Solution: The development of forests robbed the Adivasis of their natural territory and livelihood and turned them into marginal and powerless communities. Question 5 You are participating in a debate where you have to provide reasons to support the following statement: Muslims are a marginalised community. Using the data provided in this chapter, list two reasons that you would give. Solution: The literacy rate of the Muslim population in India is the lowest. It is only 59%. Voluntary social marginalization as a survival strategy in Polish postcommunist accounts of childhood. Svetlana Vassileva-Karagyozova. However, communism is not the central theme in the post-1989 Polish initiation novels; rather it serves as a historical backdrop that allows the narrators to reflect on the process of social maturation in a totalitarian state where one is not entirely free to create one’s own identity. In other words, these works do not represent the persecution-type novel characteristic of émigré literature; instead, their retrospective narrative serves a therapeutic purpose as the narrator attempts to come to terms with atraumatic past. The Meaning of Social Movements: In the society a large number of changes have been brought about by efforts exerted by people individually and collectively. Such efforts have been called social movements. Lundberg and others define social movement as, “a voluntary association of people engaged in concerted efforts to change attitudes, behaviour and social relationships in a larger society.” Thus, social movement is the effort by an association to bring about a change in the society. A social movement may also be directed to resist a change. The communist revolution in Soviet Russia overthrew the Czarist regime and replaced it with the communist system of production and distribution of goods.