

## THE MOTIF OF IMPROVEMENT OF HUMAN WORK IN THE POLISH LITERATURE IN THE 20TH CENTURY. EDUCATION VERSUS LITERATURE

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**ABSTRACT:** *The article considers the thread of work in the Polish literature in the 1930s and 1950s. These two periods were divided by World War II. In Poland, this war lasted from 1939 to 1945. Also in the history of Polish literature, two different periods can be distinguished - before and after World War II.*

*The motive of improvement of work was evident in the pre-war Polish literature, intended for readers from the countryside and for the intelligentsia involved in improving rural life. An impulse for the appearance of a work thread in literature was the study of sociologists regarding life in the countryside. Books describing the life of peasant families were published. The division of work between wife and husband was described. The analysis of the wife's working day and the schedule of works with hours were evidence of the hard life of a rural woman. The authors of the books not only described reality. They postulated greater concern for the health of rural women and demanded a different organization of work in rural households. Support for ideas contained in the literature was sought in education and in extramural vocational schools for girls and boys. However, curricula in vocational schools were not as sensitive to social issues as literature and the dreams of sociologists.*

*The motif of improving work was different after 1945. Post-war literature was dependent on great politics, it was part of the propaganda of communism. Nowadays, literature has been created for workers working in factories and on construction sites. The most vocal thread of improving work was the idea of heroes of work, i.e. shock workers, which was created in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Soviet Communists called on all workers in other communist countries to work more efficiently.*

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*One of the books describes an experiment based on the analysis of work of two Soviet workers. It was calculated that one of the women worked a few seconds faster than the other. Soviet books were translated into Polish. Polish writers were also inspired by Soviet books. In Poland, as in other countries in the East of Europe, the work race was disseminated in many books written to order of communists. Information about shock workers reached the public through radio, press and propaganda books. The heroes described in the literature were artificial, they had little in common with real people. They were happy because of hard work, they had no problems and no existential doubts. The Communists wanted vocational schools to help in promoting the work race. However, the school programme was more resistant to propaganda than literature.*

**KEY WORDS:** *literature, work day, village, sociology, politics, woman, production, shock worker.*

## BEFORE WORLD WAR II

### SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF LITERATURE

After World War II, the Polish state was larger than now. In Poland, over 65% of the population lived in the countryside. Looking from the west to the centre of the country, we can see Poland A, better developed economically from Poland B, located in the east. Villages in the west were part of the European civilization. Agricultural economy was based there on the principles of modern capitalism. There was a wide gap between Poland A and B. The villages in the eastern part of the country were particularly poor. The peasants owned small farms. Overpopulation, poverty and hidden unemployment were a common phenomenon in the countryside.

Intelligentsia wanted to help the peasants fight with poverty and backwardness. Sociologists (Curzytek, 1935) conducted research that showed reality. Published books confirmed the thesis that the family was a working base for a peasant farm. In peasant families, there was a division of work between the head of the family - the husband and his wife. The men's physical work, mainly in the open air, required more strength, but it was more beneficial to the body than the physical work of women. During work, women usually stood in the shrunken position. They had many responsibilities at the same time. Even the villagers themselves noticed the difference. Many men honestly said that they could not cope with various and meticulous works that only women were fit for.

The authors compared the work of men and women in the books, then made further conclusions. The work tools used mainly by men, i.e. ploughs, scythes, flails were relatively well looked after, people tried to acquire improved models. However, little attention was paid to the tools and equipment that women used in the kitchen. The organization of the woman's workplace caused petrification and pity. The country woman was walking from one dish to another, she was bending over and picking up heavy dishes. She was running all day long between the well, the pigsty and the cowshed. The woman, battered by the cumbersome work, was helpless. She did not have time for mental effort that would help her improve her own work technique. In the evening, when other family members went to sleep, the woman sewed, ironed and darned in the low light of the oil lamp. Work from dawn to night reflected the health of the woman

and the health of her offspring. Literature contains postulates regarding changes in the work organization:

- A man should be well prepared to take over some of the work done by a woman and convinced that some activities, such as milking cows, do not discredit him.
- It should be made clear to the rural community that a woman is not a slave.
- It is necessary to spread awareness about a rural woman who is to give birth and raise healthy children.
- Take care of the health of a woman who is resting when she is ill or in the postnatal period. A woman rests so short after childbirth that it's hard to believe.
- You should teach a woman another organization of work in the kitchen.

**LITERATURE**

In the literature, descriptions of peasant farms can be found that showed the interdependence between the work of the host and hostess. Men performed jobs that required strength and perseverance. Women performed jobs that required dexterity and care. Women's work was varied. Here, for the purposes of this article, descriptions from the 1930s were reduced to one woman's work model and included in tables.

**Table 1. Work of a rural woman. A typical day schedule during spring.**

<b>Hours and minutes</b>	<b>Activity name</b>
5.00 - 5.10	Wake up and prayer
5.10 - 5.50	Milking cows and straining milk
5.50 - 6.00	Feeding poultry
6.00 - 6.25	Preparing breakfast, making beds
6.25 - 6.45	Feeding pigs, piglets and calves
6.45 - 7.30	Breakfast, washing dishes
7.30 - 8.00	Washing and necessary clothing repairs
8.00 - 9.00	Works in the garden and in the field
9.00 - 9.30	Preparing and eating the second breakfast
9.30 - 11.40	Cooking dinner

11.40 - 12.00	Feeding pigs, piglets and calves
12.00 - 12.30	Dinner
12.30 - 13.10	Milking cows and straining milk
13.10 - 14.00	Free time
14.00 - 16.00	Works in the garden and in the field
16.00 - 16.30	Preparation and consumption of afternoon tea
16.30 - 18.00	Works in the garden and in the field
18.00 - 18.30	Feeding pigs, piglets and calves
18.30 - 19.15	Milking, straining and ordering milk from the whole day
19.15 - 20.45	Supper, washing dishes
20.45 - 21.00	Making beds, prayer, rest

Cechnowiczówna, 1938, p. 9-14.

**Table 2. Work of a rural woman. A typical day schedule during winter.**

<b>Hours and minutes</b>	<b>Activity name</b>
6:00 - 6:10	Wake up and prayer
6:10 - 6:20	Preparing breakfast and pig feed
06:20 - 06:45	Milking cows and straining milk
06:45 - 07:15	Feeding pigs, piglets and poultry
07:15 - 08:30	Breakfast, washing dishes, cleaning the house
08:30 - 10:00	Spinning, weaving, sewing
10:00 - 12:45	Cooking dinner, dinner consumption
12:45 - 13:00	Feeding pigs, piglets and poultry
13:00 - 13:20	Washing, sweeping the yard
13:20 - 14:00	Free time
14:00 - 15:00	Spinning
15:00 - 15:30	Preparation and consumption of afternoon tea
15:30 - 16:00	Feeding poultry and other animals
16:00 - 16:30	Milking cows and straining milk
16:30 - 18:00	Spinning
18:00 - 19:15	Cooking supper and supper consumption
19:15 - 19:30	Washing dishes and making beds

19:30 - 21:30	Spinning
21:30 - 21:50	Feeding animals
21:50 - 22:00	Prayer and rest

Cechnowiczówna, 1938, p. 9-14.

## EDUCATION

Education in vocational schools was the only chance to change thinking about work. After graduating from elementary school, young farmers could learn in agricultural schools. However, the most important in the curricula were traditional family values and the traditional division of work between a woman and a man. Many teachers did not understand new sociological ideas. They were not able to change the traditional way of teaching. The agricultural schools were male or female. Co-educational schools were rarely organized. In male schools, the curriculum included issues typical of activities performed by men. Of course, in female schools it was analogous, there were classes typical for rural housewives. In this way, education duplicated the stereotype.

It is impossible to characterize here, even generally, the curricula in agricultural schools. For example, (Łukaszewicz, 1937) let's choose here vocational schools for girls and only one type of these schools. They will be extramural schools, i.e. those where part of the education took place at school and part at home. In autumn and winter, girls listened to lectures at school and learned theoretical aspects of agriculture, cooking, etc. They learned the rules of hygiene and care for children. School didactics contained many issues that were new. Teachers talked about the necessity of growing and eating vegetables. They promoted the cultivation of new plants, among others soy, tomatoes. Until now, the most popular vegetables in the countryside were potatoes and cabbage. Girls learned how to grow chickens, pigs and cows in a modern way. Information in the field of fruit growing was something new, because the care of fruit trees was at a low level. Girls were given exact instructions on what to do on their own farms. At school, they also received orders and tasks to be carried out on their farms. They returned home and performed recommended tasks. Then, they returned to school and boasted about their achievements. Learning in extramural school lasted two years. The main goal of school didactics was to show that many works can be done better and more

effectively than before. Girls were supposed to work better than their mothers. According to school programmes, the improvement of work was to rely on the modernization of work performed by a woman. Another new division of work between a woman and a man was not taught in vocational schools for young people from the countryside.

## **AFTER WORLD WAR II**

### **SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF LITERATURE**

After the end of World War II, Poland was a different country, it lost some of its former territory and political independence. There were also social changes, people migrated from the villages to cities where they found employment in construction and industry. As a result of rapid industrialization, there has been an increase in the number of workers.

At the end of World War II, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics subordinated many countries in Eastern Europe, including Poland, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria and Romania. Communists ruled in these countries, listening to orders from Moscow. The orders concerned all spheres of life, including culture and literature. The impulse for the emergence of Polish literature propagating hard physical work was the labour competition movement in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. However, the basic goals were determined by the communist ideology, which was the basis for a totalitarian regime. At the outset, an aggressive communist ideology proclaimed that competition is expressed in a conscientious and zealous attitude to work. Communism wanted to break old habits and replace them with new methods of work. In communism, a single person did not matter, because the collectivity was more important. Also the work of one man was treated as a nameless element of work of the whole crew in the factory or on the construction site. After the end of World War II, Soviet workers were forced by communist activists to make commitments to early implementation of their annual production plans. The appeals of Soviet workers directed at workers in other communist countries were political and propagandist. These appeals concerned the race of work, i.e. more efficient work during each

day. People also called for higher quality of products and saving of materials needed for their production.

Soviet engineers also had to join the job race. Their task was to develop guidelines for a different organization of production processes. An example is a metal tool factory in the USSR. The task of engineers was a diagnosis showing the workers how to eliminate unnecessary movements. Conclusions from the research said that they should limit short movements with one hand and perform more movements with both hands. Two workers were the subject matter to the experiment. The work of two women was compared. It turned out that both women used different methods. The first of the women worked more efficiently because she removed the waste with her left hand while removing the manufactured thing from the machine tool with her right hand. The other woman, however, worked worse because she first took off the work and then removed the waste with the same hand. The results of the experiment were placed in the table.

**Table 3. Working time of two workers dedicated to making one item on the machine**

Operation number	Activities listed	Time in seconds	
		First worker	Second worker
1	Picking the material from the box	0.2	1.1
2	Laying the material on the machine	1.9	1.9
3	Turning on the machine pedal	1.8	1.8
4	Taking off the thing from the machine and the removal of waste	2.3	2.8
5	Removal of cuttings from the machine	1.4	1.4
The whole operation time		7.6	9.0

Rozpowszechnianie, 1952, p. 69.

Finally, in the conclusions of the experiment, the method of work of the first worker was recommended. It was supposed to increase work efficiency by several percent. In the conclusions of the experiment, there was no word about fatigue and exertion overwhelming the possibilities of women.

A loud trend of competition developed in Moscow, and its sources could be traced back to World War II in one of the footwear factories. In one of the books (Wańkowicz, 1950), the story of a young worker was published, who together with her crew produced over 9,500 pairs of shoes, thus increasing work efficiency by 27%. Soon, her crew proposed saving the materials so that they would not have to open warehouses for one day a month. For one day a month the factory worked using the raw material saved earlier. Other crews also joined this action. On 1 May 1946, to celebrate the post-war labour holiday, over 25,000 pair of shoes were produced, including 16,500 thousand of pairs produced of materials saved. Later, other reserves and savings were sought for. Someone said to keep the solvent in small vessels, smaller than before, in order to limit its volatilization. After 28 days, supplies of materials were enough for more than one day of production. Another peak of achievements occurred on 29 April 1950, when the entire factory used only raw material saved. On 1 May 1950, workers issued an appeal to young people in communist countries in Eastern Europe. They called for the start of a comprehensive saving action.

The call was also published in the Polish press. Next, the Polish thread was developing almost independently, of course it was controlled by Polish communists. Workers from many factories were forced to take action to save materials. The workers in the factory sewing clothes promised to save the thread. The workers at the railway car factory promised to save drill and technical oils. The workers in the electric machine factory promised to save copper. Declarations came from different towns and cities and contained round numbers and many names of raw materials, technological inventories (parts remaining for cutting products) and products obtained as a result of collective saving. It was difficult to verify suspicious information, even the most untrue.

## LITERATURE

Information about shock workers reached the public through radio and the press, which were part of communist propaganda. The system of propaganda also included literature, which was subject to strict censorship. A special, previously unknown phenomenon were small books devoted to workers. Several series of small books were published. The longest in the series was called "Biblioteka przodowników pracy" ("The library of shock workers"), until 1953 there were 85 items in it. There were also books published without belonging to any series. All books were published in over 10,000 copies. They were very large expenditures. This was a crazy publishing effort, especially considering the shortages of paper and printing difficulties in a poor country, damaged by warfare.

The most Polish version of the hero of work is Wincenty Pstrowski, a miner, who was the hero of several books. One of them is a story about his life, it was published twice, the first time in his lifetime. The story was entitled *Życiorys wykuty kilofem* (Piórkowski, 1947). The story of a career began with the scene when Pstrowski published a letter - an appeal in the newspapers. In this letter, in the first eight sentences he summarized his life. He wrote that he came to Poland in 1946, after a ten-year wandering in Belgium. He came back, because he believed that the new communist Poland is just for the worker and the peasant. After a year in the hard coal mine, he made 240 percent of the monthly standard, the next month 273 percent, and the following month 270 percent. In the last sentences of the letter, Pstrowski called for competition among other miners who were members of the communist party. This famous appeal had its provenance (Roszko, 1975), and its originator was not Wincenty. Simply, one day an instructor from the Communist Party came to the chopper's house. This instructor persuaded Wincenty to cooperate and guided his career. Pstrowski became famous, like other shock workers he made a lot of money. When he went to his son on a military oath, he was greeted with honours in two work places along the way. After the military oath, when the parade took place, Pstrowski was invited as a guest of honour to the grandstand. Then, in the following months, the situation was developing dynamically. The publicized competition movement found imitators among other miners. In October 1947, Pstrowski's record was beaten. Another miner made 307 percent of the norm. The press gave yet

unimaginable data. In December, the whole Poland heard the number 552, as many percent of the standard was made by another miner. The fundamental tragedy of Wincenty Pstrowski consisted not only in his extensive ambition fuelled by the communist press, not only in competing with other competitors to lead in the race of work. From the historical point of view, the drama relied on the ephemerality of the character for whom fate was inexorable. Pstrowski had a complex because of lack of teeth, he had to extract a few teeth to order a prosthesis at the dentist. He forced the doctor to extract five teeth at once, because he didn't have time to come for another visit. Just one day after the surgery he went to work in the mine, he smoked a lot of cigarettes all the time. He worked only one day, then he fell seriously ill. In the hospital, the doctors fought for the health of the famous patient, they brought in a foreign consultant, and soldiers gave blood to make a complete transfusion. In April 1948, the patient died.

The ideological guidelines for describing the action of the work race were in force for politicians. Politicians used many slogan claims to create propaganda compositions. The creators of propaganda did not know moderation in praising the USSR and the communist regime. The writers who wrote propaganda books followed them. There were three basic types of books:

- The first type was a story about a hero or heroes. Each of the stories had a happy ending, because it showed a happy worker who worked above the current norm. The worker was happy that he could work for the state, for a better communist system. The worker was happy that he was living in a new communist system.
- The second type was the hero's memories. The authors of the books wrote texts pretending to be workers' memoirs on the behalf of workers. As a result, the hero of the memoirs was artificial, and his fate was only the starting point for literary fiction. In addition, the book containing memories was provided with an introduction glorifying the hero.
- The third type was mixed. It was a story about a worker with fragments of his memories.

Authors of all books had to stick to one model of describing heroes. The stories of the leading workers were properly modified. The awareness of vigilant censoring and the fear of repression caused the authors to be cautious. The authors did not allow themselves literary experiments. The characters

described in the books were clichéd, devoid of individual characteristics. Heroes of books did not have existential problems or love failures, they did not have family problems. Workers from the village, peasant sons who came from the village to work in industry, did not miss their family and their village.

It was forbidden to write about housing problems and the torments of staying in worker hotels. It was forbidden to write about drinking vodka and about rows in workers' hotels. It was not allowed to write about Sunday masses in the church and about religious holidays. Mutual relations between workers were shown according to the rule that dictated to avoid sensitive problems in the factory and on the construction site. One of such problems was the dislike to shock workers. Workers hated the shock workers, who stood out from the whole crew. They overstated the set standards and as a result, standards were raised for the entire crew. Often the workers rebelled against overextending the shock worker, whom they had to help. This was especially true in construction. A bricklayer, who was the shock worker, had several helpers who prepared and gave him bricks.

The "shock worker" literary category was important in the present. In the literary narrative, the ethos of the shock worker functioned at a specific time and place, that is in the present. Literary narrative also included the past and future. The heroes of the time had a past and a future.

The past was:

- poor due to misery in the family home, where families often lacked food. For example, a young boy recalled (Glembin, 1951) a family farm, around a fisherman's hut. He described sandy soil fertilized with sea grass. It was impossible to feed the family on the sandy soil. When it was impossible to catch fish in the sea, it was the hungry year.
- fighting, the worker (Wigóra, 1951) from the paper factory near Warsaw described it. The worker recalled the pre-war capitalist reality. He recalled the red banners during the workers' strike. The author of the book described people who shouted against the pre-war capitalists, describing how the police scattered the crowd.

The future was:

- full of hopes for promotion related to work in the communist system. The worker could become the leader of the crew and manage the work of his colleagues.

- full of hopes for promotion after graduation. The worker could also be a factory director, but he had to study at school beforehand. It was education that gave hope for better pay and a better social position. School education was a superior value.

## **EDUCATION**

After work, in the evenings, young workers could learn in vocational schools, technical schools and then even try to study extramurally in engineering courses. Curricula of humanistic subjects, especially history and literature, were arranged in accordance with the guidelines of the Communist Party. The teaching assumptions expressed (Wyrzykowska, 1951) that young workers will receive ideological and professional education. The young workers during the study were to receive knowledge of Marxism. However, teaching practice differed from theoretical assumptions. Marxism was difficult to understand and accept for teachers and students. In the end, most of the time and attention was devoted to teaching the profession.

After World War II, vocational education in Poland flourished. It was connected with the development of industry, the reconstruction of the country after the war damage. Construction and industrial companies needed hands to work. Vocational schools were created to prepare qualified workers. They had over 30 fields, corresponding to the branches of the economy. Young people enrolled in vocational schools after graduating from primary schools. Also technical secondary schools were created, preparing technical staff.

In vocational and secondary technical schools, former teachers who taught before World War II worked. For them the most important was the reliable preparation for the profession. That is why communist politics and propaganda did not matter while learning the profession. The traditional didactics of the profession prevailed, in which there was no place for pushing a race of work contrary to human nature.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Before World War II, literature describing life in the countryside and education in vocational schools - these were two different worlds. Authors of books under the influence of sociological research called for a different division

of duties between a woman and a man. On the other hand, educators in agricultural schools were not able to introduce new ideas to didactics. The aim of teaching was to improve work on peasant farms. The idea of a different division of work in the family was not included in school curricula. Tradition was stronger than modernity. Life in the villages of Eastern Europe was modernized very slowly.

After World War II, when the communists ruled, a lot of propaganda books were published. The writers called men and women to work hard. Improving the work was to create more products and save materials. From 1953, after the death of Joseph Stalin, the communist ideology was less aggressive. In Poland, the bitterness of the workers was growing, caused by many factors, especially the enslavement of the entire society. In 1956, the Polish workers opposed the communist governments. Polish society ceased to pay attention to communist propaganda. The myth of a happy working class fell. The ethos of work went down in history. Literary works praising the benefits of physical work became useless for politicians.

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