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Political Taking Over of Tradition and Modernity Reflected in Books for Children and Youth in Post-War Poland (1945–1960)

*Polityczne zawłaszczanie tradycji i nowoczesności aktualizujące się
w książkach dla dzieci i młodzieży w powojennej Polsce (1945–1960)*

Abstract: This article is aimed at an analysis of a review of discourses of tradition and modernity in literature for children and youth in the situation of political entanglement in the communist system in post-war Poland (1945–1960). The analysis is based on a review of widely represented research described in texts focusing on history and literary criticism, in particular by scholars, who are concentrated on socialist realism – the period that was most painful to the Polish children's literature and education. Three unique and clearly distinct sub-periods identified during this time are used to describe the political tackling of tradition and modernity in books for children and youth in the period and sub-periods in question. These are: “hard beginnings” (1944–1949), “centrally-controlled books” (1950–1955), and “following the Thaw” (1956–1960). Simultaneously with this issue, a self-telling example of the convoluted fate of one of the best-known protagonists of Polish classical book for the youngest children, an icon – *Matolek the Billy-Goat* – is depicted.

Keywords: children's and youth's literature; socialist realism; ideologisation; *Matolek the Billy-Goat*

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest analiza zestawionych dyskursów tradycji i konstrukcji nowoczesności w obszarze literatury dziecięcej i młodzieżowej oraz jej uwikłań politycznych w ustroju komunistycznym powojennej Polski (1945–1960). Analizę oparto na przeglądzie szeroko reprezentowanych badań opisanych w tekstach historycznych i krytyce literackiej, w szczególności przez badaczy zajmujących się socrealizmem – jednym z najbardziej bolesnych okresów dla polskiej literatury i edukacji dzieci. We wskazanym okresie rysują się wyraźnie trzy odrębne podokresy, które trafnie opisują polityczność aktualizującą się w tradycji i nowoczesności w książkach dla dzieci i młodzieży. Są to: „trudne początki” (1944–1949), „książka centralnie sterowana” (1950–1955) i „na fali odwilży” (1956–1960). Równoległe z omawianym zagadnieniem przedstawiono wymowny przykład zawilego losu jednego z najbardziej znanych bohaterów klasycznej polskiej książki dla najmłodszych dzieci i zarazem ikony – *Koziołek Matolek*.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura dla dzieci i młodzieży; realizm socjalistyczny; ideologizacja; *Koziołek Matolek*

INTRODUCTION

The Second World War interrupted just a twenty-year period during which Poland was creating the foundations of a free state after one hundred and twenty-three years of Prussian, Russian, and Austrian partitions. Once again, the entire country fell into the snare of dependence, this time on the USSR, for several dozen years: until 1989. Researchers such as Krystyna Heska-Kwaśniewicz and Katarzyna Tałuż stress that what happened during the war and in the times of the Polish People's Republic hardly allowed an evolution or continuation of literature for the youngest readers. Emaciation of the entire nation by the occupation, followed by the change of the political system and the new political governance in Europe after 1945, almost closed all possibilities for creators and the use of topics previously clearly manifesting their presence (Heska-Kwaśniewicz, Tałuż 2014, pp. 8–9). One of the essential indicators of the totalitarian reality of the Polish People's Republic was control over all media of social communication, including books for children and young people. They were perceived as an important tool in the ideological struggle to be used primarily to educate new generations of citizens in the spirit of the socialist ideology (Rogoż 2012, p. 55, 80).

The period between 1945 and 1960 was not uniform in Poland. Three unique and clearly distinct sub-periods can be identified during this time. To describe them, the authors of an analysis of the Polish post-war book market used very apt categories: “hard beginnings” (1944–1949), “centrally-controlled books” (1950–1955), and “following the Thaw” (1956–1960) (Kitrasiewicz, Gołębiowski 2005). In this article I shall follow them.

To synthetically describe the political management of tradition and modernity reflected in books for children and youth in the period and sub-periods in question, I reviewed some well-represented research described in texts focusing on history and literary criticism, in particular by scholars concentrating on socialist realism – the period that was most painful to the Polish culture and children's education (Boguszewska, Frycie, Heska-Kwaśniewicz, Jarosiński, Możejko, Nadolna-Tłuczykont, Ostasz, Rogoż, Zawodniak). I am aware that what I am presenting here is a review of research rather than a systematic study of such a broad topic, but this paper is aimed at a compilation analysis of discourses of traditions and the construction of the modernity in the area of literature for children and youth in the situation of political entanglement in the communist system in post-war Poland.

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Parallel to the discussion about which tradition was silenced and what and how was announced as a vision of the modern future, I shall depict, as a self-telling illustration, the story of one of the best-known protagonists of Polish classical books for

the youngest children – an icon *Koziołek Matołek* or *Matołek the Billy-Goat*, created long before the Second World War – highlighting what happened to him during the three sub-periods. This most famous hero of the Polish comic book,¹ written by Kornel Makuszyński and illustrated by Marian Walentynowicz, was created in 1932–1933. The four volumes are full of situational and linguistic humour and present the adventures of *Matołek the Billy-Goat*, who, searching for his hometown in *Pacanów*, visits far-away places in the world (e.g. America, Asia, or the African jungle), reaches as far as the Moon, to finally arrive in *Pacanów*, although his adventurous nature keeps him away from his destination. The worlds of fantasy and reality intermingle here in a wonderful but also logical way. The work is a praise of courage and persistence in following one's goals, but also shows the absurdity of the world ordered by people, in a funny way, in good taste, and without moralizing. *Heska-Kwaśniewicz* stresses that *Matołek the Billy-Goat* is one of the most popular children's story characters, a synonym of goodness, laughter, and adventure, as well as a set phrase for a likeable but also not very bright individual. The town he wants to reach – *Pacanów* – is semantically related to goats² and is an object of ridicule (possibly in every country one can find such a town) (*Heska-Kwaśniewicz* 1998).

Before the Second World War, the adventures of *Matołek the Billy-Goat* had eight editions, and the total number of copies printed amounted to about 300,000 (normally, at that time, good books were issued in 3,000–5,000 copies).

DIFFICULT BEGINNINGS: 1945–1949

Many researchers (*Frycie* 1978; *Rogoż* 2012, *Heska-Kwaśniewicz*, *Tałuć* 2013, 2014; *Boguszewska* 2013) strongly accentuate that just after the end of the war, literature that was well known to the previous generations re-gained its popularity. There were numerous re-editions of pre-war literature – a variety of traditional areas of children's literature: fairy tales (folk fables), poetry, or religious, adventure, psychological literature, as well as books about nature, with the exception of items clearly inconsistent with the communist ideology, in particular those with the patriotic content marked by the period of the Second Polish Republic (1918–1939).

There were still many private publishing houses, even confessional ones, which were guided by their own experience and their understanding of the traditional book market. There were also private libraries. However, this period was short – as

¹ The work has the form of a comic book, but one without the typical speech bubbles: here, under each picture resembling a film frame, there is a rhythmical unit of four lines of verse. In the images that are in harmony with the text, the illustrator in a brief, symbolical manner provides information on the places in which the protagonist finds himself.

² Blacksmiths named "Goat" live in *Pacanów*, and the goat is commonly disregarded as *pacan* (in Polish, a person who is not very bright).

editorship tightened, “ideological alertness” increased, and the Stalinist period was approaching, the number of publishers declined, some of them disappeared from the market (Heska-Kwaśniewicz, Tałuc 2014, p. 9). The structure of the publishing market was soon transformed, and the market was socialised and centralised (see: Jamróz-Stolarska 2014, p. 7). Guidelines provided by educational establishments postulated compensation for the damages caused by the German occupation and the alleviation of the consequences of the unjust pre-war system (see: Pęcherski, Świątek 1978). One of the assumptions of the cultural policy of the state was the massification of book production (Jamróz-Stolarska 2014, p. 7). After 1949, the nationalised Nasza Księgarnia publisher house (established in 1921) became the top publisher of literature for children and youth, and the state policy aimed at compensating for the small number of titles published by increasing their number of copies. Information about it was accentuated, becoming an element of propaganda (see: *ibid.*, p. 34).

Various methods were employed to organize the market of children’s books – also owing to literary critics who, aware of their purposes and tasks, felt the need to develop a precise criteria of evaluation of children’s books (see: Ostasz 1999, p. 47).

The establishment of the monopoly of power by the Polish Workers’ Party (PWP) in 1948, as a result of rigging the results of elections by the police apparatus (Ministry of Public Safety subordinate to the PWP), put an end to the relative freedom in the area of creativity and publishing.

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Soon after the war, in 1947, only the first book – *120 przygód Koziołka Matołka* [*120 Adventures of Matołek the Billy-Goat*] – was reissued in a very small number of copies. Due to the doctrine of socialist realism enforced in Poland, the character of Matołek was completely eliminated from the public consciousness and children’s imagination for 10 years.

CENTRALLY-CONTROLLED BOOKS: 1950–1955. THE OFFENSIVE OF SOCIALIST REALISM

Zbigniew Jarosiński points out that after the political overthrow of 1948, school curricula were changed in no time. The ruling party inculcated in the youth love of the socialist fatherland and admiration for the Soviet Union, the literature of which, even by second-rate writers, flooded the Polish market (Jarosiński 1998, p. 69). This period of intense activity of Stalinism was marked by the strictest implementation of principles of the new order and radicalism in keeping quiet about every kind of culture that belonged to tradition.

Due to the specific interpretation of historical events, certain historical periods became widely discussed, while other events were omitted in literary works (Rogoż 2012, p. 78). The Warsaw Uprising and the Home Army were referred to in a biased way. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its consequences were veiled in silence. The extensive issue of the Golgotha of the East with the Katyń massacre could not even be mentioned. The picture of only one enemy – the Germans – was created, and descriptions of a beautiful, sincere friendship with the other one – the Soviet Union – prevailed (Heska-Kwaśniewicz, Tałuż 2013, p. 11).

Historical works, especially ones intended for young people, were to mainly criticise the former “bourgeois” relations and show “progressive” attempts that were made to introduce social changes. What was typical of those times, but understandably rather odd from today’s point of view, was the obsessive search for “class consciousness” at all stages of civilizational development (Rogoż 2012, p. 77).

From 1949, school and public book collections in Poland were subject to ideological purgation. A lot of them were banned by the government, being considered as “bad, hostile to the people’s political system, and socially harmful” (Heska-Kwaśniewicz, Tałuż 2013, p. 9). In 1950, libraries received instructions (a special list called “purification list”) concerning “ideologically dangerous” books from the Ministry of Education. Pre-war and immediate post-war (1945–1948) editions of books by selected Polish writers for young people, including Ferdynand Goetel, Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, Czesław Miłosz, Ferdynand Ossendowski, and Melchior Wańkowicz, whose works dedicated to different aspects of Russification, scouting, the Polish Legions, Marshal Piłsudski, and religion, were banned (Heska-Kwaśniewicz, Tałuż 2013, p. 10).

The withdrawal of certain types of literature involved such genres as adventures, romance, anti-Bolshevik books, and works about nobility, as well as the traditional classics of Western literature, including works by Karl May, George Owen Baxter, or Thomas M. Reid – due to their excessive promotion of “the cult of power and adventure”. Hugh John Lofting’s *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* was pronounced to “contain layers on layers of impossibilities, with (...) animals that are unnatural and do not manifest the appropriate features”, while Lucy Maud Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* was “too idealistic” (Grodzieńska, Pollak 1951, after: Nadolna-Tłuczykont 2016, pp. 129–132).

Children’s literature of the time – both prose and poetry – was taken over by socialist realism focusing on problems related to the formation of new, proletarian people full of ideological passion (Jarosiński 1998, p. 70). During the Fourth Convention of the Polish Writers’ Union in Szczecin in January 1949, which became famous for its significance for the fate of literature, Stefan Żółkiewski (a writer) expressed in his keynote address a belief that “socialist realism is our criterion of evaluation, our aesthetic standard” (after: Możeko 2001, p. 175), while the key feature determining whether or not a given literary text is valuable was its contribution to the development of socialism, which, in consequence,

was equal to a proclamation of socialist realism as a dogmatic and universally applicable creative method for the entire culture (Ostasz 1999, p. 55). Freedom of literary expression was limited and censorship was tightened to eliminate all contents inconsistent with the Marxist doctrine. During the Plenum of the Board of the Polish Writers' Union in 1951, Grzegorz Lasota – a prominent literary critic – announced that books for youth, just like works addressed to adults, “should present the entire complex dialectics of life and the tender mechanism of class struggle”, and, in consequence, they must not avoid a presentation of images of the “enemy of the people”, who should be easily identifiable to the generation entering the adulthood (Lasota 1951, after: Nadolna-Tłuczykont 2016, p. 123). It was assumed that literature has some special pedagogical tasks to carry out and should display role models that young people could follow (Zawodniak 2012, p. 37). However, it was reduced to a propaganda tool and the legitimisation of the political system: its aim was to focus solely on certain topics related to the new reality, such as large construction sites, work emulation, agricultural collectivisation and modernization, etc. as displayed in such works as Marta Michalska's *Hela będzie traktorzystką* [*Hela Will Be a Tractor Driver*], and Jadwiga Stępniowa's *Pietrek będzie budowniczym* [*Pietrek Will Be a Builder*] (after: Nadolna-Tłuczykont 2016, p. 129). It was also to popularize the achievements of science and technology (mainly the Soviet ones), and describe events from the history of the revolutionary movement (for example, critics praised Lucyna Krzemieniecka's versed biography of Joseph Stalin called *O wielkim Stalinie* [*About the Great Stalin*], which was called a “pioneering initiative” (Grodzińska, Pollak 1951, p. 139, after: Nadolna-Tłuczykont 2016, p. 129).

The postulate of socialist realism to create a new reality (and – as it was planned – a new future) also referred to fables for children, and, therefore, traditional fairy tale plots, which were much criticized for excessively diverting children's attention from the daily events (Zawodniak 1994, p. 88). To make tales for children more realistic, it was necessary, for example, that the plot took place in a town with trams, that shoe makers in their workshops called themselves using the word “comrade”, that dwarfs appeared in state agricultural enterprises, while princesses (if there were any at all) dreamt of workers (*ibid.*, p. 89). Lands of wonder were to be replaced with the landscapes of the developing socialism. A valued literary critic and author of children's books expressed an opinion that “escalators resemble »sesames«, while buildings erected in the record-short time (...) and scaffoldings taken from one place to another will excellently replace wonderland. The collective effort of workers will provide children with as many emotions as adventures of fairy tale heroes easily ripping out oaks” (Grodzińska 1949, after: Zawodniak 2012, p. 47). The Grimm Brothers' tales were considered to be highly immoral and dangerous due to such motifs (also present in all other folk tales) as revenge, cruelty, and deceit (Osterloff 1946, after: Zawodniak 1994, p. 88).

Anna Boguszewska provides two representative examples of the extreme ideologisation of works for young children, in particular picture books and illustrated books, with socialist realism: the first example covers such works as *Kongres dzieci* [*The*

Children's Congress] (1950), containing collected poems for various occasions such as Mieczysław Jastrun's *My nie chcemy wojny* [*We Do Not Want War*], Mieczysława Buczówna's *Dzieci wysyłają gołąbka pokoju* [*Children Send a Dove of Peace*], and Lucyna Krzemieniecka's *Pokój* [*Peace*] with illustrations by Jan Marcin Szancer – an eminent painter and illustrator of fairy tales and old epochs, which, however, in this particular case did not present his outstanding talent or aesthetic values, but only “the truth of the times”. The second one is a book in the form of an album with canvas binding and a gold-pressed title, containing illustrations by children from all over Poland, published to mark the 10-year anniversary of the Polish People's Republic. The topics of the works by different authors (both texts and illustrations) stressed the changes that took place in Poland: from war and the withdrawal of the Germans, through the liberating actions of Red Army soldiers, to post-war efforts at reconstruction of the country both in towns and cities: *W stoczni* [*In the Shipyard*], *Budowa mostu* [*Building a Bridge*], *Odbudowa stacji* [*Rebuilding the Train Station*], *Wizja nowej Warszawy* [*A Vision of a New Warsaw*], *Pałac Kultury i Nauki w nocy* [*The Palace of Culture and Science at Night*], *Obniżka cen* [*Price Reduction*], and in rural areas: *Pierwsza orka* [*The First Ploughing*], *Sianokosy* [*Hay-Making*], *PGR w województwie olsztyńskim* [*State Agricultural Enterprise in the Olsztyn Province*] (Boguszewska 2013, pp. 52–53). Since it was the school class that was considered the best collective for children, the book had to contain such works as *Spacer z klasą* [*A Class Walk*], *Przedstawienie kukielkowe w naszej szkole* [*A Puppet Show at Our School*], *Druga klasa pali ognisko* [*The Second Class Makes a Bonfire*], *Zlot młodych przodowników* [*A Meeting of Young Work Leaders*], *Pierwszy maja* [*May the First*], etc. (cf. Boguszewska 2013, p. 53). The already mentioned Szancer also illustrated an example of a work indoctrinating children with the idea of an imperialistic enemy – the poem *Bronka i stonka* [*Bronka and the Potato Beetle*] written by Jan Brzechwa about the Colorado potato beetle thrown onto fields of Polish farmers from state agricultural enterprises and the children's self-sacrificing work during collecting beetles.

Works devoted to the depiction of life in towns and villages that praised the value of work typical for these environments, the development of state factories and industry, the importance of the army guarding the borders, the significance of shock workers (metallurgists, miners, port staff, as well as engineers working in factories), farmers from the modernised countryside (mostly tractor drivers), the collective, and the leaders of revolution, such as Lenin and Stalin, were published on a mass-scale (Boguszewska 2013; Friedrich 2019). First May manifestations, competition at work, or the collectivisation of the countryside were widely represented as motifs of propaganda.

Someone might think that at that time the imagination of children in Poland was stirred by the “radical texts” discussed by Kimberley Reynolds in *Left Out: The Forgotten Tradition of Radical Publishing for Children in Britain 1910–1949*: “Radical texts assumed an audience of intelligent, capable, socially aware young readers and set about providing them with the skills, information and inspiring social visions they

would need to find solutions to many problems confronting the world” (Reynolds 2016, p. 12). However, the Polish version of socialism, although filled with the ideology of communism, did not have an emancipatory nature as did the radical British aesthetics, but was an enslavement of the minds, demanded a single party rule and legitimised it. For the purposes of a comparison, the works created in Poland during the interwar period (i.e. between 1931 and 1938, e.g. *Pocztą* [*The Post Office*], *Jacusi w zaklętej wiosce* [*Little Jack in the Enchanted Town*], or *Pan Tom buduje dom* [*Mr Rouse Builds a House*]) by Stefan and Franciszka Themerson, which were based on ideas of emancipatory constructivism, were not issued after the Second World War and were withdrawn from libraries. At the time, these avant-garde artists wanted to rebuild the society (primarily lift it up from illiteracy) and show children the complexity of the world, technological development, and mechanisms of changes, so that they could start thinking independently, create and change the world, be empowered. Just like the authors of radical texts described by Reynolds, the couple “saw children’s books as vehicles through which taste could be changed in a way that would lead to the radically different kinds of buildings, furnishings, infrastructure, production practices, and social spaces, that would underpin a new kind of society” (Reynolds 2016, p. 13). We may say that the Themersons’ modernist, radical and avant-garde approach was ideologised, politicised and taken over by the new political system during the period of socialist realism. Their works returned to the book market only a couple of years ago owing to publishers who decided to reprint them and the state patronage of culture in the years 2012–2015.

What did socialist realism do to our protagonist – Billy-Goat?

In the days of the socialistic modernity, Goya – a journalist of the relatively free weekly of Catholic intelligentsia “Tygodnik Powszechny” – wrote as follows: “Matolek the Billy-Goat was expelled from Poland. He could not joyfully roam the Polish roads, flash his white beard and red trousers, experience his incredible adventures, or talk to ducks in French, to the Chinese Emperor in Chinese, and to the Indians in Hindi, as, in so doing, he distracted our children from production processes and was a herald of escapism” (Goya 1957, after: Heska-Kwaśniewicz 1998, p. 29). In 1951, the aforementioned critic Grzegorz Lasota during the Plenum of the Main Board of the Polish Writers’ Union in Szczecin considered books about our Billy-Goat a manifestation of the negation of class struggle, and of literature that positively presented the world of nobility and intelligentsia (Lasota 1951, after: Heska-Kwaśniewicz 1998, p. 29). At the same convention, Wanda Grodzieńska (a poet, and critic of children’s literature) and Seweryn Pollak (a poet, essayist, and translator) also negated the “stupid little poems about some goats having a screw loose, full of ridiculous, impossible adven-

tures, actually being explanations of illustrations – something along the lines of the infamous American comics” (Grodzieńska, Pollak 1951, after: Nadolna-Źuczkont 2016, pp. 128–129).

Matolek the Billy-Goat was not included in the so-called “purgatory” list, despite being excessively filled with humour. However, the People’s Government did not like him for a number of reasons: he visited the USA but failed to see the Soviet Union, he laughed at schematic thinking, and his manners and language were high class. The totalitarian authorities did not accept any comicality or humour marked by MakuŹyński’s works – in particular the ones illustrated by Walentyłowicz.

FOLLOWING THE THAW: 1956–1960

The social and political life in Poland changed after Stalin’s death (1953). It brought the changes and the events related to the Khrushchev Thaw. In Poland, October 1956 constituted a symbolic and real caesura in the cultural life. After 1956, the publishing policy underwent significant modification, and the number of translations of the literature from the USSR and other socialist countries markedly diminished to the benefit of Western literature. The book market witnessed the return of fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault (*Fairy Tales*) as well as other texts translated from Western literature. This fact highly contributed to a noticeable modification of the writing of children’s authors (Ostasz 1999, p. 73). It was for the first time since 1945 that classics and children’s favourite books, such as Alan Alexander Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*, Carlo Collodi’s *Pinocchio* and Edmondo De Amicis’ short stories, were reissued (*ibid.*, pp. 73–74). Karl May was also rehabilitated owing to the *Winnetou* trilogy, which was related to the Thaw in the GDR. The fight for May’s novels was simultaneously a fight for the introduction to the reading circulation of books about adventures, travels, exotic topics, and American Indians, creating brave, courageous, physically fit protagonists fighting in the name of noble ideals. It was also a continuation of pre-war traditions and a form of re-acceptance of the category of nature as an essential component of every book addressed to young people. The publication of May’s novels (*Winnetou* proved to be a best-seller) was followed by the appearance on the market of other books in a similar convention by such authors as Robert Louis Stevenson, James Fenimore Cooper, Jack London, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Thomas Mayne Reid, Jules Verne, and Rudyard Kipling (*ibid.*, pp. 75–76). The ideologisation of other areas of social life, however, was less effective.

Jan Brzechwa – one of the most eminent children’s writers, who was subject to silencing attempts and subordination during the socialist realism period – could conclude in one of his column articles as early as in 1960: “Works from which children learn that they are to fight for peace, that imperialists are their enemies, and that

socialism is a system of social justice, are psychological nonsense. Nevertheless, this burden (...) was loaded onto children's minds" (J. Brzechwa, *Prawo do zabawy* [*The Right to Play*], "Kurier Polski" 1960, No. 10, p. 18, after: *ibid.*, p. 72).

And what did the Billy-Goat do?

The aforementioned journalist writing under the pseudonym of Goya stated in "Tygodnik Powszechny" that "the Billy-Goat won his fight with Stalinism" when Matołek's adventures were reissued in 1957 in almost 100,000 copies. It was considered the funniest of his adventures. It had a symbolical meaning, as it was tantamount to the return of "smiles, fairy tales and fun" to literature for children. The book appeared in bookshops at five o'clock in the morning just before Christmas, and by afternoon all the copies were sold out (Heska-Kwaśniewicz 1998, p. 30).

Walentyłowicz was forced to introduce absurd changes to the 1957 edition that were consistent with the spirit of the reality of the Polish People's Republic – for example, in the scene of the protagonist flying above Warsaw, a view of King Sigismund's Column had to be replaced with a view of the Palace of Culture and Science (the great symbol of communism – a gift from the USSR), *rogatywka* or peaked caps on soldiers' heads had to be replaced with round caps each with a red band, and the pre-war Polish airplane displaying a white-and-red chequerboard – with a Soviet MiG aircraft. What was most important, however, was that Matołek returned to stir children's imagination after so many years (Heska-Kwaśniewicz 1998, p. 38).

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE *HAPPY END*

In the period in question, socialist realism was basically the obligatory discourse eliminating literary traditions, important for the young, to the benefit of communist propaganda, which created perspectives for the new reality that continued to be extended in accordance with the rules and standards of Marxism, or, rather, Stalinism. In his book *The Total Art of Stalinism*, Boris Groys writes that the slogan of socialist realism promoted by Stalin was the realisation of "[t]he avant-garde's dream of placing all art under direct party control to implement its program of life-building (that is, 'socialism in one country' as the true and consummate work of collective art) (...). The author of this program, however, was not Rodchenko or Maiakovskii, but Stalin (...)" (Groys 1992, p. 34). Fortunately, in Poland, Stalin failed to fulfill the entire potential of his political power and did not live to see the future.

According to Maria Ostasz, socialist realism affected children's literature by considerably limiting its formal experiments, its use of structurally diverse genres, and

its creative exploration of the wealth of tradition of the Polish and West European children's books. Criticism of children's and youth literature was also subjected to indoctrination by imposing on it both non-literary (e.g. political, ideological, and "class") criteria, and normative assumptions of socialist realism (Ostasz 1999, p. 54). Socialist realism also made sure laughter and jokes were eliminated, as the realistic stories and actions of the protagonists building their country, fighting for peace, and combating the class enemy, were permeated with deadly seriousness (Friedrich 2019 p. 370). By simplifying the picture of the reality, socialist realism strove to eliminate fantasy, adventure, and, thus, root out children from the broader European culture, from children's culture and folklore. It robbed the youngest ones of the possibility to fantasize and create their own world, which was a kind of deprivation of the children's psyche and imagination (Zawodniak 1994, p. 93). Mariusz Zawodniak stressed that these "maddest black magic fables" luckily saw their end (p. 94).

Since the end of the 1950s, the traditional world literature was gradually returning to the awareness of the public and the readers, or they found their way to it, while Polish modern literature was winning back its creative unrestraint and symbolic freedom – a kind of relative stabilization for the next twenty years.

In the second half of the 20th century, over four million copies (or more) of all the series of *Adventures of Matolek the Billy-Goat* were published in total!

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