

**Pedagogical University of Cracow**  
**Faculty of Philology**

**DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABSTRACT**

mgr Piotr Szostak

*Stereotype of a Russian in Young Adult Novels of 1945-1989*

Supervisor: dr hab. Maria Ostasz

The years 1945 - 1989 in Poland are connected characterized **by** the strong influence of communist ideology in the public sphere and the control of cultural life by the socialist party. The nationalization of print combined with censorship activities allowed literature to be used as a propaganda tool for the indoctrination of Poles. This was also the time when the Soviet Union played an important role in the shaping of, and then in the functioning of the Polish state. Obedience to this new ally and stimulation of fraternal feelings to what had formerly been an enemy became one of the priorities of People's Poland. The most vulnerable group was the youth, whose national consciousness could be shaped anew at school, in youth organizations and through literature. The way they were educated was paramount to whether they would become good citizens of the communist state in the future.

The main aim of the dissertation is to examine how Russian stereotypes functioned in Polish young adult literature. The dissertation covers novels written in the years 1945-1989. The choice made by the author is primarily of a qualitative nature. It includes works in which the Russian theme is crucial for the subject matter discussed, plot development or perception-shaping function. Accordingly, there will be novels in which: all or part of the action takes place in Russia or in the Soviet Union; the main character or a supporting character (one or more characters) is a Russian or a citizen of the USSR; and finally, the Russian language, culture, science, history of this country or any other topic related to Russia plays an important role in the story built in the literary work. The texts chosen in this way constitute the basic canon for the multifaceted examination of the manifestation of Russian stereotype in the Polish young adult novel of the selected period.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the concept of a stereotype, referring to its

interdisciplinarity and its role in shaping social consciousness. It takes into account both sociological and linguistic positions and also justifies the use of this theory in literary science. With the tools developed this way it is then possible to discuss the manifestations of a particular stereotype in cultural texts, to examine attempts at changing it, and to take into account the literary author's creative strategies.

The second chapter concentrates on presenting the Polish-Russian history and the so "difficult neighborhood" related to the fact that the border between the two countries was also the border between the Western and Eastern cultural spheres of influence. Historical references make it possible to identify and explain the existence of a specific repertoire of ethnic stereotypes involving Russians in Polish culture and national consciousness. To carry out an in-depth analysis of literary texts from the 1945-1989 period, it is necessary to provide a background of the political and social situation in Poland of that time. The third chapter is devoted to presenting the characteristics of the time in question, taking into account historical facts of particular impact on the perception of Russians. The characteristics of young adult literature and its situation in postwar Poland are presented in chapter four. The author attempts to define this notion by determining, among other things, the age of the intended audience, the way the audience is addressed in the young adult literature, and the special features of that literary form.

The three consecutive chapters form the analytical part of the dissertation. Each of them discusses one of the stages into which the 1945-1989 period was divided. They begin with a brief overview of the young adult literature that emerged at that time. This is followed by a multi-faceted analysis of individual literary works in the spirit of the cultural theory of literature. In addition to describing the images of the Russians present in these works, it also takes into account the space in which they are displayed, the historical moment in which the work was created, the author, and his or her views and creative strategies.

Summary comments arising from the analytical part can be found in the final section of the dissertation, which is a recapitulation of all the issues discussed. Based on them one may conclude that the shape of Polish young adult literature in the years 1945-1989 varied in both genealogical and ideological terms. These differences, as well as the time when particular works were created, greatly affected the way Russians were presented in novels addressed to young readers. The analysis of selected works confirms that the intensification of pro-Russian stereotypes reached its apogee in the first post-war decade characterized by the subjugation of creative works to ideological objectives, to be phased out in successive decades.

What was characteristic in shaping the image of Russians after World War II was the fuelling of hatred for tsarist Russia, which fitted well with the stereotypes already embedded in the Poles' national consciousness during the Partitions. This attitude, in line with the communist ideology, dictated how the tsar and everything connected with his authority: soldiers, officials and teachers of the russified school, were all depicted. In contrast to this, a positive image of a simple and oppressed Russian people was presented, deprived however of the traditional belief in "Muscovite boorishness" and civilizational backwardness of the eastern neighbors propagated before World War II. In later works, there is also a sentimental image of Russians taken from classical Russian literature, embedded in the nineteenth-century philosophical thought dwelling on the phenomenon of the Russian soul.

The new stereotypes that the literature tried to smuggle into the minds of young Poles included crystal clear figures of heroic revolutionaries and figures of the leaders of the new regime made in the hagiographic image of medieval saints. Attempts were made to replace the negative image of the Bolshevik with the positive image of a Soviet soldier: a missionary of the new order, a defender of the peace and happiness of the working people. The discussed works also show a flattering image of the Soviet Union and of the Soviet man and the positive merits of Russian language teaching at school. Of interest is the change in thinking about Siberia, which, even though still tainted by the martyrdom of the Polish nation, becomes a land of great opportunity, a place where the progressive influence of the economic policies of the Soviet Union is most visible.

The synthesis of the above issues allows the dissertation author to discuss the process of profiling Russian stereotypes and to explore the phenomenon of specific literary strategies (an ignoramus, a player, and a contender) being adopted by the authors of young adult literature of that time. The whole paper is a fitting part of the still vivid discussion on the image of Russians in Polish literature and constitutes an introduction to further studies.