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THE IMAGE OF THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC (PRL)  
IN JANUSZ KRASIŃSKI'S PENTALOGY

1.

The Polish People's Republic is still an important subject in Polish literature. New works about the Poland of 1945–1989 are being published, written by authors of ever younger generations. The growing volume of literary works about the PRL, and their ever higher standards, can intimidate potential researchers who want to study this issue, especially if they want to formulate some general conclusions based on it. Certainly, this does not mean that attempts have not been made. For example Przemysław Czapliński, in his article about *The ends of history* in Polish modern literature,<sup>1</sup> did so. Writing about the troubles that our authors had with the PRL he proposed the thesis that their source is, among others, the fact that writing about communist Poland after 1989 meant entering the space between two groups of stereotypes: “conflicting” (“rightist,” “opposition”) and “conciliatory” (“leftist”). The “nostalgic” visions of the PRL departed from these and the consequence was a peculiar “privatization” of that period or an effort to “make it nice.” Taken together, the tendencies discussed by Czapliński were supposed to lead to many differentiated images of the PRL, which the author defined by the use of the phrase “all sorts of things happened.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Przemysław CZAPLIŃSKI, “Końce historii” (The ends of history), in *Teraźniejszość i pamięć przeszłości: rozumienie historii w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* (*The Present and the Memory of the Past: the Understanding of History in Polish Literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries*), ed. Hanna Gosk, Andrzej Zieniewicz. Introduction by H. Gosk (Warsaw: Elipsa, 2006), 177–187.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

Many years ago I also tried to draw up a balance of literary images of the PRL in Polish literature after 1989<sup>3</sup>. Among other things I advanced the thesis about the attractiveness of the pictures of the PRL formed before 1989 that presented it as a grotesque cabaret, a madhouse, but also as a jail or pulp, and I considered the appearance of comedy-nostalgic elements showing the PRL as a “grey area” between the poles of resistance and collaboration as relatively new. In the conclusion of the cited article I wrote:

[...] a brief review of the literary works published after 1989 in which the PRL appeared convinces the reader—firstly—about the considerable popularity of this subject, and one may risk formulating the thesis that the more time passes after 1989, the more frequently it is tackled by writers. And secondly, in Polish literature at least, a few outstanding and important works have appeared, among which I would count first of all the novels by Krasiński, Holewiński, Odojewski, Libera and the short stories by Nowakowski and Orłoś. However, we should not feel too good, because I will add that the texts mentioned were on the margins of interest of a large section of Polish critics after 1989.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.

Of the group of authors mentioned above, in the present article I would like to discuss more broadly the image of the PRL in Janusz Krasiński’s works, and specifically in his pentalogy formed by the autobiographical novels published between 1992–2016 *Na stracenie (To the Execution)*, *Twarzą do ściany (Face to the Wall)*, *Niemoc (Impotence)*, *Przed agonią (Before the Agony)* and—published after the author’s death—*Przełom (The Breakthrough)*.

Janusz Krasiński’s series of novels surely belongs to the most significant achievements of Polish fiction after 1989. It soon gained recognition from critics, and particular works of the series were awarded, among others, the Andrzej Kijowski Award and Józef Mackiewicz Literary Award. The subject matter and the original literary form were among the decisive factors making the novels special, pointed out by, among others, Tomasz Burek and Dorota

<sup>3</sup> Maciej URBANOWSKI, “Obrazy PRL w literaturze polskiej po 1989. Uwagi wstępne” (Images of the Polish People’s Republic in Polish literature after 1989. Introductory remarks), *Wyspa* nr 4 (2007): 22–27. For a view different from the one given by academic research see e.g. *Obrazy PRL. O konceptualizacji realnego socjalizmu w Polsce (Images of the PRL. About the Conceptualization of Real Socialism in Poland)*, ed. Krzysztof Brzechczyn (Poznań: Oddział Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

Heck.<sup>5</sup> After the first three volumes of the series had been published Burek defined them as “[...] an exceptional undertaking against the background of the literature of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>6</sup>

In Krasiński's pentalogy of over 2,300 pages (!) the reader watches Szymon Bolesta's vicissitudes; the protagonist as an eighteen-year-old is arrested by the Office of Public Security (the UB) in 1946 on a fabricated and absurd charge of spying for the West, and is then sentenced to fifteen years in prison. In this way, the recent prisoner of Auschwitz and Dachau is put in Mokotów prison and then in Wronki. The first two volumes of the series are about this period. In the next ones we can see Bolesta already a free person looking for his place in a Poland ruled by the Communist party. He becomes a writer, publishes several books, works on the editorial staff of a literary magazine and, like it or not, becomes part of the system. He internally resists it all the time, trying to save “a scrap of his soul” and becoming mature enough to write a work about his “inappropriate life history,”<sup>7</sup> that is, about his tragic experiences in Communist prisons and about the victims of the system.

Doubtless the first two volumes of the series are the best. This is determined by the very subject, one not presented in Polish literature, but also by the perspective from which it is described: the perspective of a very young, innocent, sensitive, somehow naïve, man who shares something with the “simpletons” of the Enlightenment, and at the same time hurt by Hitlerism, which allows him to notice similarities between the two systems ever more clearly. Bolesta is a perfect observer: he is a realist who desires the truth in the description of the world. He superbly, penetratingly, portrays his companions in misery and, without any unnecessary pathos, describes their martyrdom.

Krasiński's pentalogy is an autobiographical novel, since the similarities between the biographies of Bolesta and the author are clear; the plot is based

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<sup>5</sup> Tomasz BUREK, “Ciernie i wawrzyny” (Thorns and laurels), in *Dziennik kwarantanny (A Journal of the Quarantine)* (Kraków: Arcana, 2001); Dorota HECK, “Między racjami teoretyka a intencją autorską. Nad tetralogią Janusza Krasińskiego” (Between the critic's arguments and the author's intention), in *Wyobraźnia i pedanteria. Prace ofiarowane prof. Wojciechowi Głowali w 65. rocznicę urodzin (Imagination and Pedantry. Works in Honor of Prof. Wojciech Głowala on his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday)*, ed. Maciej Adamski, Małgorzata Gorczyńska, Wojciech Małecki (Wrocław: Uniwersytet Wrocławski–Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut, 2008); Tomasz BUREK, “Wyjście na wolność (Janusz Krasiński)” (Released from jail [Janusz Krasiński]), in *Niewybaczalne sentymenty (Unforgivable Sentiments)* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> BUREK, “Ciernie i wawrzyny” (*Thorns and laurels*), 247.

<sup>7</sup> Janusz KRASIŃSKI, *Przełom (The Breakthrough)* (Kraków: Arcana, 2015), 440 (further: abbreviation P with page number).

on the events from Krasiński's life, and the main protagonist seems to be a literary transformation of the person of the author, albeit—as usually happens in this kind of novel—he has a fictitious name.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the author does not make an autobiographical pact with the reader, but the knowledge we have about Krasiński's real biography makes us soon identify the author with Bolesta.<sup>9</sup> This is why we can also hear “[...] a personal tone that can be grasped owing to the reader's knowledge of the author's non-fiction, epistolary or journalistic statements.”<sup>10</sup> The personal tone gives the series features of authenticity, and in this way of credibility. In turn, fictionalization—indicated e.g. by the name of the main protagonist—builds a distance, and also tells the reader to see in Bolesta's vicissitudes the fate not only of one individual. A further point is that Krasiński's pentalogy differs from the classical autobiographical novel (e.g. *Childhood*, *Boyhood* and *Youth* by Leo Tolstoy, Zbigniew Żakewicz's borderland novels) with its plot being—especially in the later volumes—ever more digressive; motifs previously used return, episodes are developed that concern people and events loosely connected with the author's own biography.

Thanks to all this, however, this particular saga-novel more and more clearly offers a panoramic view of the whole era of the PRL. The first volume of the series begins in 1946, and the last one closes in 1989, at the moment when the final fall of the Communist state starts. This means that in the pentalogy we can see the PRL in all of its long existence, and so in its specific dynamics. This is also the PRL seen mainly from its victims' perspective, however—but not only, for we also encounter the creators and beneficiaries of the new state: the officers of the Security Office, prison “screws”, party dignitaries, clerks, writers, journalists, and at a certain moment, even Władysław Gomułka... On the pages of Krasiński's novels, apart from the fictitious characters, many historical figures appear who sometimes play a crucial role, e.g. Waław Lipiński, Hieronim Dekutowski “Zapora” (“Barrier”), Zbigniew Kulesza “Młot” (“Hammer”), Kazimierz Pużak, Romek Strzałkowski and Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko.

<sup>8</sup> See M. GŁOWIŃSKI, “Powieść autobiograficzna” (Autobiographical novel), in *Słownik terminów literackich (A Dictionary of Literary Terms)*, ed. Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1988), 382–383. Dorota Heck treated this aspect of Krasiński's series more broadly in the article mentioned above.

<sup>9</sup> Not only do biographical entries in encyclopedias or the writer's interviews convince us about this, but also his memoirs; see e.g. Janusz KRASIŃSKI, *Tabliczka z chleba (A Bread Tablet)* (Toronto: Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Małgorzata CZERMIŃSKA, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie, wyzwanie (The Autobiographical Triangle. Testimony, Confession, Challenge)* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 120.

Krasiński sees the PRL through the eyes of many characters and in many places. In the first two volumes the perspective of the Communist prison dominates, then a flat, a café, a queue for newspapers or for meat, a sanatorium, a street, a convention of writers, a newspaper editorial office, a train carrying cattle to the slaughterhouse... Together with Bolesta we are in Rawicz, Warsaw, Wrocław, in a little village on the Bug, and even in Moscow, Prague or Paris. We can see the PRL in the phase of its heyday, and in the last volumes of the pentalogy in its agony and fall. Bolesta looks at the fall incredulously, for “[...] the best of all systems has fallen, but somehow without much noise, despicably, not raising any dust” [P, 358].

All of this taken together determines the exceptional quality of Janusz Krasiński's literary undertaking.

### 3.

What does the PRL shown in the pentalogy look like? Are we dealing here with one picture of the Polish People's Republic, or rather with various pictures?

Jerzy Jarzębski saw in Krasiński's novels a characteristic example of the “image of the PRL in a martyrological version,” that is, one in which “the PRL is above all a place of martyrdom of true patriots,”<sup>11</sup> which—apart from the perhaps unintentional irony of the critic's remarks—is accurate with respect to the first two volumes of the series connected with his prison years. The problem then becomes more and more complicated: martyrdom again and again gives way to the everyday, banal life in Communist Poland. This was indicated by Tomasz Burek who remarked that from Krasiński's series “[...] an epic image of Poland appears as a fragment of the prison civilization created by the Soviet system,<sup>12</sup>” and an element of this image shows “the latent metaphysics of the PRL,” that is “a slave's attachment to even the shabbiest kind of life” and “the virus of impotence in the organism of a great historical nation.”<sup>13</sup>

So it seems that the main protagonist's, that is Bolesta's, experience is the deciding element that bonds together the images of the PRL in Krasiński's series. And for him the state that was established after 1945 will be,

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<sup>11</sup> Jerzy JARZĘBSKI, “PRL w narracjach” (*The Polish People's Republic in various narrations*), in *Proza: wykroje i wzory (Prose: Patterns and Designs)* (Kraków: Universitas, 2016), 126.

<sup>12</sup> BUREK, “Ciernie i wawrzyny” (Thorns and laurels), 249.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 250–251.

in fact, a prison; in the first two volumes *sensu stricte*, and in the following three ones perhaps a more invisible, but still real, one and one he is painfully aware of. This is why the protagonist of the pentalogy constantly has to cope with acute anxiety, with a sense of enslavement, with a desire to escape from his country, with a fear of compromises with the Communists that is all the greater because Bolesta, from the very beginning, in fact, feels a stranger in the alien world of the PRL. At first he does not understand the rules in the new state, and when he comprehends them he sees the PRL as something that is thoroughly alien, or even hostile to him. Certainly, Bolesta's biography will be essential and tragically helpful here; he will soon notice the secret bonds between Nazi and Stalinist violence. Furthermore, the protagonist's companions in his prison misery will play their own roles.

The metaphor of "a child in an imbroglio"<sup>14</sup> that appears at almost the very beginning of the series will define Bolesta's situation in the PRL; an imbroglio, but also a labyrinth, a trap, a masquerade—this is what postwar Poland is for him. Krasiński's protagonist feels a "parcel" in it [NS, 48], a "hunted animal" [NS, 48], and after being released from prison he will, for example, compare himself to "a spy for an alien system [wreaking havoc in] the country, in the souls and minds" [NS, 442], to "a miraculously surviving relic" [NS, 147] or "a literary pariah benignly treated by the system."<sup>15</sup>

Bolesta possesses "tragic forbidden knowledge" [PA, 422] of the system, but he may not reveal it in the PRL. The experience of the impossibility to understand this world that is new for him, the experience accompanying him, especially at the beginning, sometimes causes laughter and surprises the people around him. This is so when, just after the war, an activist of the Polish People's Party tells his interlocutors that he was arrested for distributing leaflets. Szymon

could not understand this. The Polish People's Party was a legal party, had its own press, so why should posters be illegal? He shared his doubts. [...] Emilka assumed a surprised face—how can someone of his age be so naïve; and the host burst out laughing and said that is obvious that Szymon had just come from abroad [NS, 58].

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<sup>14</sup> Janusz KRASIŃSKI, *Na stracenie (To the Execution)* (Kraków: Arcana, 2006), 17 (further: abbreviation NS with page number).

<sup>15</sup> The same, *Przed agonią (Before the Agony)* (Kraków: Arcana, 2005), 113 (further: abbreviation PO with page number).

In any case, neither Bolesta nor the narrator of the pentalogy use the term “the PRL.” They rather speak about Communism or a regime. The same concerns Bolesta’s companions in misery, who tell him what the essence of the new state consists of. Doctor Andrzej informs him that “communists will not tolerate even the most miserable worm that would not have to eat out of their hands,”<sup>16</sup> and at the same time he warns:

You have to believe in people. Communists would like to destroy this belief in everybody. To transform humans into a society of reptiles so that nobody will lend you a hand in your misery when they torture you. So that you will see only an enemy in each person, and so that you will be an enemy to others. [...] you must not transfer hate for the system to hate for a man [TŚ, 119].

Andrzej also makes Bolesta realize the paradox that freedom in Communism may be “still found only in oneself and only here”, that is, in prison [TŚ, 159]. In turn, Kazimierz Pużak speaks about the PRL as a “puppet government imposed on Poland by the Soviets” [TŚ, 274], and one of the “cursed soldiers” sighs: “Damned Bolshevia! They will take everything from us, grind us down, debase us, unleash one against his brother!” [NS, 272].

The PRL seen from the prison perspective is, above all, omnipresent physical and mental violence. A prison “screw” in Wronki says the words to Bolesta that he will remember forever as an ominous memento: “You are destined to be ground down and not to be educated” [TŚ, 34]. This grinding down is certainly concerned with the body, but also, or perhaps primarily, with the soul, and more precisely with the conscience.

As a matter of fact, Bolesta’s most important struggle he fought in the PRL was that for his conscience, the alternative being losing it. Soon after being arrested he is told by a security officer that he may be saved “[...] only by setting himself free of his conscience” [NS, 70]. The PRL is “the heart of new ethic” [NS, 71], in which “first of all the community of the system’s and the individual’s goals is essential” [NS, 71]. Such an ethic is symbolized by an informer, a grass, in whom Krasieński’s protagonist will see “[...] the personification of the Soviet evil—the vile soul of this system” [TŚ, 261]. And this is why he will rebel against the temptation to accept that ethic. He promises himself that “he will not allow to be inoculated with the conscience of a rat” [NS, 105], he will be worried by the “tiredness of his conscience” [NS, 194]; in a word, he will struggle to save “a scrap of his soul” [NS,

<sup>16</sup> The same, *Twarzą do ściany* (*Face to the Wall*) (Kraków: Arcana, 2006), 159 (further: abbreviation TŚ with page number).

116]. The genius mathematician Zenek, murdered in prison, is someone “not crumbled, with a soul like a nut” and for this reason unacceptable for “this Soviet world” [TŚ, 356]. This resistance to the PRL sometimes has something instinctive, or even bodily, in it. Bolesta is warned against compromises by the “itching of the soul” [NS, 137], he feels that “the soul, like phlegm, keeps to the body and he cannot spit it out” [NS, 137]. After being released from prison his “scratched conscience” [P, 16] will often bother him.

All of this shows that Bolesta describes the PRL in somatic, but also medical, terms. The ideology dominating in the new state is, for example “red fever” [TŚ, 386] or “the fever of hate” [NS, 194] that “destroys everything that is best between people” [NS, 194]. As an ex-prisoner of Auschwitz and Dachau, the protagonist also notices analogies between Nazism and Communism. For instance, when he compares a party activist to a “red Volksdeutscher” [NS, 96] or when he comes to the conclusion that there are similarities between anti-Semitism and “class hostility raised to the rank of an idea” [NS, 185], adding with sarcasm, however, that “differences should have been looked for in a change of the object, [...] and good sides in embracing an immeasurably greater part of humans with hate” [NS, 185].

It is not strange that even in prison Szymon speaks about the PRL from the position of a critic, or even an enemy, as a “Poland occupied by the Soviets” [TŚ, 226], “the Soviet-enslaved Polish state” [TŚ, 269], “homicidal Communism” [PA, 483], and finally “the red regime hateful to him” [P, 9].

In fact, these conclusions had been formulated in prison and after he is freed he only confirms them. These emotions were characteristic of those stirred up in Bolesta by the Warsaw Palace of Culture and Sciences when he saw it for the first time in 1956:

He turns his eyes and suddenly he freezes. In the distance, from above the roof of the crouching shed of the railway station, a colossal white tower shoots up into the sky. Where did it come from?! It climbs up like some ridiculous marzipan cake. [...] An eastern temple! It was crowned with something like a lantern pointed with a golden spear reaching the clouds with its head. Alien, unfriendly, impenetrable, like a Spanish corvette at the coast of the Incan Empire, it paralyzed the city, dominating it with the ruthlessness of a satrap. He looked, overcome with terror.<sup>17</sup>

With terror, because the Palace of Culture and Sciences will appear to Bolesta as a cake that “the tyrant serves to his vassals”: “for some there is poison in it, for others sweet punch, but depriving them of freedom” [N, 13].

<sup>17</sup> *Niemoc (Impotence)* (Kraków: Arcana, 2006), 12–13 (further: abbreviation N with page number).



The experience of this poisoning-incapacitating strangeness of Poland symbolized by the Palace of Culture and Sciences will, from that moment, constantly accompany Bolesta. For example, he will be struck by “the alien stone landscapes” [N, 21] in Warsaw, or the “identical, nearly barrack-type stone houses” [N, 21] built in the place of the merchants’ tenement houses.

Although Krasieński’s protagonist will set himself as the goal “to live against crime” [N, 57], he will ever more strongly penetrate PRL reality, agreeing to various compromises and living in constant fear of being put into prison again. The experience of “fear tingling in his temples, grabbing him by the throat, piercing the body with a cold shiver—the kind he remembered from the day he was arrested—incapacitating, uncontrollable” [N, 112] often recurs in the pentalogy. It is fear of the Communists, but also of his own conscience.

The regime’s crimes, like killing Romek Strzałkowski or murdering Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko convince him that the PRL will never change, that it is a state “created by Stalin, sneering at the lost independence” [N, 126]. In his pentalogy Krasieński devoted separate episodes to these people, as it were, additionally stressing the invariably pathological, indeed criminal, essence of the PRL.<sup>18</sup>

In 1964—during a convention of writers—Bolesta defined the PRL unambiguously negatively: “An omnipresent, omnipotent paralysis of good will. Slander, denunciation, calumny, fraud, destruction, sham, lawlessness and murder... Everything, everything was possible in this system—but not an ordinary worthy aim” [N, 446]. This is also the effect of the knowledge gained in the course of Bolesta’s reporter trips to the provinces during which he “[...] learned about the absurdities of the double authority, that of the party and of the government, the unlimited power of the provincial notables” [P, 89].

Krasieński’s protagonist will be filled with remorse, will feel helpless or impotent in this world so alien to him the more keenly when, for instance, in 1956 his fellow-prisoner, Fr. Kazimierz will tell him that the Communist system cannot be changed because “it is impossible to convert a guillotine into a cabbage shredder” [N, 213]. The priest will also remark that Szymon’s cooperation with the PRL press is *de facto* collaboration with the regime’s propaganda. He explains:

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<sup>18</sup> For the episodes concerning Romek Strzałkowski in Krasieński’s pentalogy see my article “*Śmierć Romka* (poznński Czerwiec w prozie Janusza Krasieńskiego)” (“Romek’s death” [the Poznań June in Janusz Krasieński’s novels]), *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* nr 29(49) (2016): 91–102.

[...] wherever you would give your poem, everywhere they will soak it in the propaganda mud. They are in control of all the domains of life, the industry, sciences, culture... They have even poisoned the wells. And if someone reads your poem that was written out of the need of your soul, due to the other surrounding, mean works, he will be convinced that yours is equally mean. [...] To be a poet in a country where it is denunciation that is valued a hundred times higher than an inspired act of the soul is an awful thing. [N, 213].

In any case, confronting the realities of the PRL with his memories about the criminal origin of this state will not allow Bolesta to recognize it as his own even when he works in the state radio or he collaborates with the Russians on making a film about the Auschwitz camp. His prison experiences will let him see the ostensible character of the PRL's "little stability." This mechanism may be seen in the heartbreaking scene where Bolesta is having fun in the artistic Bohemia in one of Warsaw restaurants. It is the beginning of the 1960's:

The saxophone was wailing longingly. *Only you* was dripping softly under the heart, a few artist couples—or maybe artistically talented security officers—were swaying to the rhythm of the transoceanic melody. He looked under his feet, at the stone floor, then at the blackened dome of the cellar. The lamps painted red reminded him of the ones in the detention ward that were never turned off for the night, painfully glowing under the prisoner's eyelids, and unexpectedly he found himself in his thoughts in the crowded cell in Mokotów prison. There, among those one hundred prisoners, each of whom knew exactly why he was imprisoned, but was not sure if he was guilty of anything. He saw them all walking around on the treadmill, frantically debating... And he nearly cried: Christ, what a different world it is! How completely different! [N, 397].

The PRL is a different world, and at the same time somehow similar to the prison world. Both in one and the other the space is similar: a stone floor, a cellar, lamps painted red... Inconspicuous signals that make us realize the origin and also the essence of this reality. Hence, the moral discomfort felt by Bolesta when he tries to outwit the censor by transferring the plot of his stories from Stalinist Poland to a Spain ruled by General Franco. He thinks: "Camouflage... What is camouflage anyway?! A literary figure or a moral device?" [N, 409]. And here the experience of the PRL as a trap, as has already mentioned, returns: "A trap. Actually he set it himself. And he should have known that Communists cannot be outwitted. He understood it well in prison. After being released he grew stupid. Grew stupid and was caught" [N,]. So it is not strange that the radio employees he meets remind him of "the accused in the labyrinths of the law courts in Kafka's *The Trial*"

[P, 35]. The world of the PRL has Kafkaesque features in Krasiński's works and it is not by accident that Tomasz Burek wrote *à propos* the first two volumes of the series that they were about “‘a penal colony’ created by the same [Soviet] system on the territory of the PRL.”<sup>19</sup>

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A prison, a penal colony and a trap—these are probably the best terms to describe the way the PRL looks like in the series of novels by Janusz Krasiński. We can see here postwar Poland from the point of view of a victim of Communism, carrying the memory of the bloody origin of the state formed after 1945. It is not the grotesque but rather tragedy that dominates in the story. Not nostalgia, but accusation. Not laughter and scorn, but anger and disdain for a world built on the blood of the innocently murdered and imprisoned.

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<sup>19</sup> BUREK, “Wyjście na wolność” (Released from jail), 165–166.

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THE IMAGE OF THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC (PRL)  
IN JANUSZ KRASIŃSKI'S PENTALOGY

Summary

This article reconstructs the image of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) in the monumental pentalogy by Janusz Krasiński, one of the most important achievements of Polish literature after 1989. In his works Krasiński showed Poland in the years 1945–1989 from the perspective of Szymon Bolesta, who at the age of 18 was falsely accused by the Communists of espionage and sentenced to 15 years in prison. The prison experience and Bolesta's later literary career makes the reader perceive the PRL as a hostile, alien and dangerous entity, based on violence and lies, arousing fear, destroying human souls and trying to create a new non-human ethics.

**Key words:** Janusz Krasiński; Polish novel after 1989; PRL (Polish People's Republic); Communism.

*Translated by Tadeusz Karłowicz*



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