

Title: The Diseased Generation of the Polish Political Transition
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Poland's last communist generation includes individuals born in the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s whose childhood and adolescence coincided with the last two decades of socialism. The formative historical event for this generation was the prolonged Democratic Revolution that began in 1981 with the imposition of martial law by Wojciech Jaruzelski (1923-) and concluded in June 1989 with the peaceful collapse of the communist regime during the first free elections. Uniquely shaped by a protracted and non-violent historical cataclysm, this age group represents a deviation from the traditional Polish martyro-heroic model of generations. Feeling distinguished by their formative experience but plagued by insecurities about its legitimacy, they face the choice of either succumbing to the established stereotype and denying themselves a generational status, or embracing a new definition of the generation as a propeller of evolutionary changes.

My paper is based on a selection of contemporary Polish novels by Wojciech Kuczok, Krzysztof Varga, Joanna Bator, Ewa Madeyska, Jarosław Maślank and Małgorzata Saramonowicz. These works show young protagonists in their 30s and 40s in the midst of an existential crisis. The authors employ the disease trope as a signifier of the characters' social dysfunction. The featured diseases – cancer, alcoholism, narcolepsy, comatose, and hysterical lethargy – are forms of a subconscious self-aggression whose purpose is the emancipation from a toxic environment. The main sources of toxicity are the past, the parents and the conservative values they represent. The rites of passage characters in these novels undergo do not take place on the "big stage" of history but in a domestic setting; their final goal is not self-abnegation for the nation's good but rehabilitation of the individual and his agency.