

**Title:** The Initiation Novels of Poland's Last Communist Generation

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This paper examines a selection of post-1989 Polish initiation novels, whose narrators recollect their coming of age in late communist Poland. The authors of these novels belong to the last communist generation, which encompasses the members of the demographic cohort born in the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, and whose childhood and adolescence coincided with the last two decades of the communist regime and whose young adulthood corresponded with the establishment of a new sociopolitical and economic order in Poland. In contrast to earlier Polish generations, whose myth of self was embedded in the collective struggle for national independence, this uniquely positioned generation creates an unusual martyrological narrative which focuses on the personal struggle for emancipation from the collectivist ethos of the communist ideology, national mythology, and traditional Polish religiosity whose triple grip completely deprived young Poles of a sense of agency.

Unlike the classical Bildungsroman, which is an affirmative genre, confident in the validity of the society it depicts and anxious to lead both hero and reader toward a productive place within the world (Kontje), the fictionalized coming of age accounts of Poland's last communist generation depict rites of passage that become suspended in the middle stage. The suspension results either from the protagonists' conscious desire to remain forever in the blissful state of social invisibility (to avoid the intolerable adult reality) or from their inability to complete the transition into adulthood under the present circumstances. I argue that these works represent a generation-defining project that aims to cultivate generational self-awareness, to activate the generation's potential to initiate a sociocultural change and, ultimately, to locate the last communist generation in the historical process.

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