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Disabled Protagonists of Polish Children's and Youth Literature of the 20th and 21st Century

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Summary

The aim of this dissertation is to present, analyze and interpret Polish children's and youth literature in the perspective of disability studies. The author presents short historical context of disability in Poland from the Middle Ages to the 21st century. She notices different patterns of exclusion of disabled people in Poland than in the Western Europe. Then the author makes an attempt to answer the question about the aim of raising the topic of disability in the context of children's upbringing. She values the role of children's and youth literature in that process.

In the next paragraph author presents history and using of disability studies as the method of text reading and research area. At first she is focused on English-language scholars and the birth of the whole research perspective in the USA. Then the author presents disability studies in different areas of world, including French, Italian, German and Scandinavian researches of children's literature. She presents also works of scholars from South-Eastern Europe, Ukraine, Middle East and Africa. Then the author is focused on disability studies in Poland.

The next part of this dissertation is analysis of Polish children's literature of the 20th and 21st century. The author presents examples from the 19th century literature to show roots of later representation of disability in Polish children's novels and poetry. She notices the role of Roman Catholic theology and ideology of Romanticism in creation of stereotypical representations of children's disability in Polish culture. Then she present examples from the children's literature of the modernism to the 1918, noticing significant changes in these representations just after beginning of the 20th century and during the First World War.

The third chapter is the presentation of Polish children's and youth literature between 1918 and 1945. The author notices role of cultural and political changes after rebirth of Polish

country and gaining the independence in 1918. She explains the role of new pedagogical movements in the 1920s and 1930s. She presents examples of new patterns of writing about disability in children's literature, especially these created by left-wing writers in the 1930s (Helena Boguszewska, Halina Górska). She is focused also on books published during the Second World War.

In the next chapter author is focused on Polish children's literature from the Communist period in this country (1945-1989). She proposes the alternative view on the history of that époque in the perspective of disability studies and children's literature. Her proposal includes division of that period on several stages: the first one is between the end of the Second World War and year 1949, when writers tended to present disability in children's literature in similar ways as they used to write before the war. The next period was connected with the Stalinism in Poland (1949-1956) where the topic of disability was almost absent in children's literature and if it appeared, it was used as the tool of official propaganda. The third period after the year 1956 is marked by the rise of new Catholic visions of disability, as it was present in the poetry of Jan Twardowski, or disability in medical perspective, as in writings of Irena Krzywicka or Anna Kamińska. The last stage of the Communist period began in the second half of the 1970s and it was connected with new researches among Polish scholars. Besides those scientific shifts there was also beginning of changes in cultural attitude towards people with disabilities due to the pontificate of Pope John Paul II.

In the fifth chapter author describes changes in Polish culture and law after political transformation due to the collapse of the Communism in 1989. Then she presents literary visions of disability in children's literature of the 1990s which were in fact continuations of previous types of representations. Author notices also significant rise of number of published books for children and youth in Poland after 2001. She explains the role of technological development in this country and diversity in contemporary Polish society. The author notices that contemporary Polish children's literature is example of blending new ways of thinking about disability as the cultural phenomenon and stereotypes about it from previous decades.

In the last part of this dissertation the author includes the attempt to answer the questions about the image of disability in Polish children's and youth literature. She notices the existence of significant stereotypes in Polish society (like for example equating the whole phenomenon of disability with people using wheelchairs). She explains different strategies of

dealing with disability in these narrations, like aestheticization or writing about people with disabilities like about animals. Then she comes back to the problem of educational role of children's literature in the context of existing stereotypes and prejudices in Polish society. Author notices also the unique experience of disability in Polish culture which is depicted in texts dedicated to the youngest readers.