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The Topos of Utopianism in Posters Dedicated to the Countryside in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1950s.

Topos utopijności w plakatach poświęconych wsi w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach pięćdziesiątych XX w.

ABSTRACT

The concept of utopia is explored by scholars from various disciplines, including literary theorists, political scientists, cultural analysts, educators, historians, and art historians who often refer to it as the Arcadian myth. In Central and Eastern Europe, posters depicting rural life and published during the 1950s were created exclusively in the style of Socialist Realism. This artistic method was employed to portray an idealized, fictional image of the countryside, whose characteristics bear striking resemblance to those of a utopia. The depicted vision consists of key elements typical of utopian literature, including: the absence of specific temporal and spatial coordinates, the dissolution of state structures, the prevalence of collectivism, professed equality (albeit illusory in practice), the eradication of social classes and conflicts, the paramount importance of labor, the omnipresent factor of happiness, the idealization of human figures and their behavior, as well as an Arcadian landscape. The utopian essence of these 1950s posters was further reinforced by the intrinsic attributes of the posters themselves which were

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reduced to serving merely as advertising tools, by the strategic deployment of ideology, and by the distinctive features inherent to Socialist Realism.

Keywords: utopia, poster, Socialist Realism, art of the 1950s in Central and Eastern Europe, propaganda, image of the countryside

STRESZCZENIE

Pojęcie utopii jest przedmiotem badań naukowców z różnych dziedzin, w tym teoretyków literatury, politologów, analityków kultury, pedagogów, historyków i historyków sztuki, którzy często odnoszą się do niego jako do mitu arkadyjskiego. W Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej plakaty przedstawiające życie na wsi, publikowane w latach pięćdziesiątych XX w., były tworzone wyłącznie w stylu socrealizmu. Ta metoda artystyczna została wykorzystana do przedstawienia idealizowanego, fikcyjnego obrazu wsi, którego cechy charakterystyczne są uderzająco podobne do cech utopii. Przedstawiona wizja składa się z kluczowych elementów typowych dla literatury utopijnej, w tym: braku konkretnych współrzędnych czasowych i przestrzennych, rozpadu struktur państwowych, dominacji kolektywizmu, deklarowanej równości (choć w praktyce iluzorycznej), likwidacji klas społecznych i konfliktów, nadrzędnego znaczenia pracy, wszechobecnego czynnika szczęścia, idealizacji postaci ludzkich i ich zachowań, a także arkadyjskiego krajobrazu. Utopijny charakter plakatów z lat pięćdziesiątych został dodatkowo wzmocniony przez ich wewnętrzne cechy, które sprowadzały się do pełnienia funkcji narzędzi reklamowych, strategiczne wykorzystanie ideologii oraz charakterystyczne cechy realizmu socjalistycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: utopia, plakat, realizm socjalistyczny, sztuka lat pięćdziesiątych w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej, propaganda, obraz wsi

INTRODUCTION

The concept of ‘utopia’ first appeared in Thomas More’s book of the same title in 1516. The etymology of this word is derived from two Greek meanings: ‘eutopos’, meaning ‘good place’, and ‘outopos’ – ‘no place’ or ‘place that does not exist’. The author’s conscious use of this duality seems evident, as the ‘Utopia’ that he described was a non-existent/fictional and, at the same time, a ‘good’ place[1]. Utopias stemmed from a critique of the reality of a specific historical period, hence their critical and negative orientation. However, they also offered a positive-prospective component. These are visions of a better, future world with a different society, a new social structure, altered interpersonal relationships, a fundamentally changed human being with the inherent customs and behavior, as well as a reconfiguration of values. States

[1] J. Szacki, *Spotkania z utopią*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 11–12.

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and their institutions, cultural sphere, economic systems, legal matters, etc., were also subject to critique and futuristic design.

Utopianism is a theme engaging scholars from various disciplines: literary studies, where utopias in literary fiction are analyzed (and it seems this perspective is dominant)[2], political thought, philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, history, pedagogy, and even architecture and urban planning[3]. To some extent, related phenomena include Arcadianism in literary studies and art history, as well as research on paradise in both aforementioned disciplines together with history[4].

Considering utopias literally, as Karl R. Popper did with Plato's concept[5], they become prophecies of totalitarian systems and societies. However, if one follows Ernst Cassirer's path and his understanding of the idea of utopia in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and Johann W. Goethe, it can be assumed that utopians did not perceive their concepts in a literal way. Kant pointed to the separation in the human mind, and only in it, of what is real and what is possible, thus: 'We cannot think without images, and we cannot intuit without concepts'[6]. This means that by creating ideas that have no counterpart in present reality, humans possess the ability to create progress, to change their place in the cosmos, or, more broadly speaking – to advance civilization. As Cassirer argued: 'The great political and social reformers are indeed constantly under the necessity of treating the impossible as though it were possible'[7]. According to the German philosopher, utopia, despite its non-existence and symbolic conventionality, strongly influenced the modern world, awakening humans from natural passivity and acquiescence to remaining in an abhorrent *status quo*[8]. Zygmunt Bauman similarly viewed it, stating: 'Utopias relativize the present', they prove the incompleteness of current reality, provoke a critical attitude, and allow us to perceive alternative solutions. They are therefore essential for historically significant changes[9].

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[2] Cf. W. Tomasik, *Inżynieria dusz. Literatura realizmu socjalistycznego w planie „propagandy monumentalnej"*, Wrocław 1999.

[3] Cf. T. Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities 1460 to 1900. Reconstructing their Architecture and Political Philosophy*, Abingdon–Oxon–New York 2015.

[4] Cf. J. Delumeau, *History of Paradise. The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, Urbana IL 2000.

[5] K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Princeton–Oxford 2013.

[6] E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, New York 1953, pp. 79–80. Cf. M. Brzóstowicz-Klajn, *Tomasz Morus w mundurku pioniera, czyli utopia i utopijność w polskim socrealizmie*, Poznań 2012, p. 38.

[7] E. Cassirer, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 86.

[9] Z. Bauman, *Socialism. The Active Utopia*, London 1976, p. 13.

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Furthermore, Bauman pointed to their limitations. Although utopias are driven by the 'principle of hope' rather than reason and logic, they are merely an extrapolation of reality: 1) they encompass only as much as a person at a given historical stage is able to imagine, which implies that 2) they adapt to these imaginations and human needs, meaning that they propose only (!) what is imaginable[10].

Utopian literature is highly didactic[11], however, importantly, it contains no instructions regarding the paths to implementing the described systems, only their final version. Its didactic nature lies in revealing, through antithesis, the defects of the social system contemporary to the time when these literary works were created, yet they had the power to effect change. According to Bronisław Baczko, a few years after More's *Utopia* appeared, Thomas Müntzer's peasant rebellion erupted, invoking slogans of communality, equality, justice, the absence of private property, prosperity, and the idea of salvation; the reward promised to the poor and oppressed for violently overthrowing the existing social order was the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God[12]. For the first time, ideas were primarily directed at the peasant population, predestined to achieve a splendid future, echoing the archetype of the chosen people. While Baczko indicates significant differences between the peasant uprising of 1524–1525 and the ideal society in *Utopia*, he concedes that the more humanity approached the 20th century, the more frequently millenarian imaginations intersected with utopian visions through the influence of political myths and ideologies[13]. It should be recalled that millenarianism (from Greek: chiliasm) is a belief (especially in certain branches of Christianity) in the imminent advent of the thousand-year kingdom of God. This so-called historicism (in the Popperian sense) stems from the conviction that history unfolds according to some plan. It was Christianity that introduced to European culture the concept of the teleology of human history, i.e., the assumption that history has meaning and purpose, and thus will eventually come to an end (from the Greek 'telos' – end, boundary, purpose), with its ultimate aim being the religious salvation of humanity, or in the case of ideologies – secular salvation[14]. The zenith of popular-

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[10] *Ibidem*, pp. 13–14.

[11] J. Szacki, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[12] Cf. the views of the socialist Karl Kautsky on the topic (*Poprzednicy współczesnego socjalizmu*, Warszawa 1949, pp. 223–286).

[13] B. Baczko, *Wyobrażenia społeczne. Szkice o nadziei i pamięci zbiorowej*, transl. M. Kowalska, Warszawa 1994, pp. 121–123.

[14] J. Grey, *Czarna msza. Apokaliptyczna religia i śmierć utopii*, transl. A. Puchejda, K. Szymaniak, Kraków 2009, p. 15.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

ity for this view occurred during the unstable times of the Middle Ages, but communism exhibited numerous characteristics of millenarianism, albeit in a secular form. The existing world was destined for destruction, and in its place, the emergence of an exclusivist paradise on earth was promised, that is, a state/society founded on the proletariat.

Particularly, times of crisis gave rise to myths of the new man, the new society, myths of revolution and progress. Faith in various kinds of Arcadias and returns to the 'beginning', as well as in the myth of the Golden Age has accompanied humanity since antiquity, with writers such as Plato and Virgil addressing them in various forms; they were depicted in paintings during the modern era, while the myth of the English countryside and the 19th-century romantic Arcadian myth intertwined with socialist narratives about social justice in the same period, eventually evolving into concepts, such as the garden city or the constructivist movement in art from the first decades of the 20th century. Following Mircea Eliade, Baczko categorizes utopias within the realm of all millenarian visions, myths of happiness, eschatologies, and messianisms, namely, in nostalgia for lost paradise symbolizing predictability and security[15]. However, the same author demonstrates numerous differences, even of an oppositional character, between utopias and paradise. He indicates that utopias are invented, while paradise is ascribed real existence. Paradise was *given* to humans, whereas utopia is *produced* by them; utopias are characterized by an overtly fictional discourse, paradises are characterized by truth; in utopias, many details are offered, yet they are projected, i.e., invented (likely to lend credibility to their existence and serve as guidance for the future); images of paradise lack particulars as they need none; in utopias, albeit marginally, evil exists, while in paradise it has never existed[16].

Utopia is not synonymous with ideality; there are two important reservations to consider. This is an ideal on a macro scale, involving a broadly outlined structure that encompasses all spheres of human life, starting from the social hierarchy, expected institutions and the rules governing them, and extending to types of nutrition, forms of leisure, educational matters, sexual issues, and the appearance of cities. We have here, therefore, a precisely detailed and comprehensively planned as well as anticipated reality. 'Utopia is a dream that becomes a system; an ideal

[15] B. Baczko, *Wyobrażenia*, p. 99. Cf. M. Eliade, *Patterns in comparative religion*, transl. R. Sheed, London–New York 1958, pp. 382–385.

[16] B. Baczko, *Hiob, mój przyjaciel. Obietnice szczęścia i nieuchronność zła*, transl. J. Niecikowski, Warszawa 2001, pp. 81, 143–144.

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expanded into a doctrine', as Szacki[17] writes, adding quite rightly, that utopians, or more broadly – 'those who wish to make humanity happy', were unconcerned with whether many people shared their ideals and goals[18]. Moving within an imagined world, they rationalized it in every possible way.

Depending on the definition, Marxism may or may not be considered a utopia[19]. Even if we accept the second option and adopt a stance in opposition to the title of the famous book by Michał Heller and Aleksander Niekricz, *Utopia in Power*[20], it is difficult to deny that communism as a socio-political system was indeed an attempt to build a utopia. It possessed all the attributes allowing it to be defined as such. It is sufficient to mention the overview of social experiments described in Richard Stites's monograph, *Revolutionary Dreams*[21]. From the perspective of visuality it is secondary, yet what is more important are the visual indicators that are appropriate to the phenomenon. Here, it is worth utilizing the compilation of features of 19th-century socialist utopias created by Leszek Kołakowski, which can also be found in Karl Marx. The future socialist society was to be based on ideas, such as:

> 'abolition of private ownership of the means of production; planned economy [...]; right to work [...]; elimination of classes and sources of social antagonisms; voluntary, solidarity-based cooperation of associated producers; public and free upbringing of children combining learning with training for productive work; abolishment of the division of labor and the degrading effects of specialization in favor of the creativity of individuals developed comprehensively in multiple skills [...]; eradication of differences between town and country [...]; abolition of political power in favor of economic administration, end of the exploitation of man by man [...]; gradual liquidation of national divisions; complete equality of women and men [...]; flourishing of science and art

[17] J. Szacki, *op. cit.*, p. 27. Others limit utopias to mere intellectual speculations, whose authors disregard mass movements and the search for ways to attain power. In this case, Marxism would not be a utopia, but rather a myth preceding real action. *Ibidem*, pp. 27–28.

[18] *Ibidem*, p. 26.

[19] The topic has been addressed numerous times, so there is no need to repeat it. For example: E. Hobsbawm, *Jak zmienić świat. Marks i marksizm 1840–2011*, transl. S. Szymański, Warszawa 2013, pp. 22, 33–40.

[20] N. Heller, A.M. Nekrich, *Utopia in Power. The history of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the present*, New York 1986.

[21] R. Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams. Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, Oxford 1989.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

[...]; socialism [here understood as socialization – M.M.] as a universal human value [...]'[22].

RESEARCH AND RESULTS

This type of modest outline allows for the construction of a set of research questions. The fundamental questions concern whether posters from that era contain indicators of utopia, and if so, what those indicators are. What will be the effect of confronting utopianism, a political doctrine such as Marxism, with knowledge about posters and with Socialist Realism? Furthermore, does the poster differ in this respect from other carriers of political messages, and if so, for what reasons? Is it possible to tell the utopian myth using a poster from the 1950s? In addition to the search for existing utopian markers, one should also analyze what is absent in the discussed posters. The topic is not the visual aspects of the poster itself or the effectiveness of this type of propaganda; therefore, to a large extent, the research threads that did not pertain to utopianism have been omitted. All the aforementioned aspects are examined in the context of the poster as a historical source, excerpted from among other types of sources[23].

Over 80 years ago, the German art historian Erwin Panofsky, a cofounder of iconology, distinguished three layers of an image[24]: 1) a primary, natural meaning, i.e., the simple identification of depicted objects or events; 2) a secondary, conventional meaning, in other words, a symbolic significance upon which society collectively agrees (e.g., a group seated at a table in a specific configuration is recognized as the Last Supper); 3) an intrinsic meaning, i.e., 'those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion'[25].

The analytical material consists of the posters concerning the countryside from the 1950s[26] originating from Poland (60 titles), the USSR

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[22] L. Kołakowski, *Główne nurty marksizmu. Powstanie – rozwój – rozkład*, Londyn 1988, pp. 185–186. Cf. M. Brzóstowicz-Klajn, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[23] Cf. P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London 2001.

[24] Throughout the entire text, the word 'image' is used exclusively in the sense of 'representation', and not in the sense of easel painting.

[25] Quoted after: P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, p. 36. In recent years, the most interesting monograph on the theory of the image has been written by Gillian Rose. G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, London 2016.

[26] A few interesting posters from 1949 have been included.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

(including 49 in Russian, 40 in Estonian, 2 in Belarusian)[27], Czechoslovakia (in Czech and Slovak) (70), Hungary (40), East Germany (10), Bulgaria (10), Romania (5), totaling 286 items[28]. The final caesura for Polish posters is the year 1956, a significant turning point both in politics and in socialist realist art. In other countries, we deal with a phenomenon which in the case of Czechoslovakia was termed a 'painstaking thaw'[29], meaning a period to some extent more extended into subsequent years. Two important characteristics regarding publishing of posters must be mentioned. Soviet posters were significantly more numerous than in other countries of the Eastern Bloc, both in terms of the number of titles and print volumes; secondly, the majority of posters concerned the city and workers. Rural posters enjoyed less interest from decision-makers[30]. A rural poster is defined here in the broadest possible way, i.e., as one in which

[27] There are numerous publications on Soviet posters; yet most interest has been focused on descriptions of their content, as well as on posters from the period of the Revolution, the 1920s and 1930s, and WWII, cf. V.E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power. Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, Berkeley 1999.

[28] The most useful publication in terms of poster reproductions proved to be the work: *"Zboże państwu!". Rolnictwo i wieś w plakacie propagandowym Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej z lat 1950. Wystawa czasowa 24 kwietnia – 10 października 2010. "Crops for the State!". Agriculture and the Countryside in the 1950s Propaganda Poster of Central and Eastern Europe. Temporary Exhibition 24th April – 10th October 2010*, catalog compiled H. Ignatowicz, U. Siekacz, Szreniawa 2010. There are about 165 items. Several other posters come from various albums and exhibition catalog, e.g., *Katalog polskich plakatów politycznych z lat 1949–1956 w zbiorach Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Rewolucyjnego*, Warszawa 1978. Some come from collections of posters published during the period under discussion, e.g., *Plan 6-letni*, graphic design M. Orłowska et al., Warszawa [1952] or from contemporary magazines, such as "Przegląd Artystyczny". The remaining posters come from websites, including both museum websites https://permartmuseum.com/collection/posters [access: 15.02.2025], from online archives such as https://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/en/graphics?id=2031&page=1 [access: 20.01.2025], as well as collectors' and sales portals (which comprised several dozen web pages in total). At this point, it is also worth noting that many posters from the late 1940s (especially 1947–1949) are very similar to those from the following decade discussed here, in their message, narrative, symbolism, and techniques. In the context of Soviet posters, this boundary could even be moved back to 1934. The greatest challenge during the research was determining the actual dates of creation for some of the posters and identifying their authors.

[29] P. Kolář, *Poststalinizm. Ideologia i utopia epoki*, transl. J. Górny, Warszawa 2022, p. 30.

[30] Similarly, as far as researchers are concerned. The topic of rural posters, mainly their content, has been addressed by: H. Ignatowicz, U. Siekacz, *Międzynarodowa wystawa plakatu „Zboże państwu! Rolnictwo i wieś w plakacie propagandowym Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej z lat 1950."*, "Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego Rolnictwa i Przemysłu Rolno-Spożywczego w Szreniawie" 2010, 27, pp. 74–98; eadem, *'Crops for the State!' Agriculture and the Countryside*

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at least some elements of the image show the countryside or its residents and whose content was specifically addressed to them[31].

In Poland until the mid-1950s, and slightly longer in other countries, the method of Socialist Realism, or 'Arcadian realism'[32], or as Peter Burke called it 'Socialist Idealism'[33], was in force. This direction, or rather method in art, was legally decreed in the USSR in 1934, and by the end of the 1940s in other communist countries, it gained a monopolistic position. Socialist Realism became solely a propaganda instrument, largely excluding aesthetics in favor of persuasion and an educational function. Officially, a realistic form and socialist content were assumed; *de facto*, the basic principles became *partisanship* (party-mindedness), meaning subservience to the interests of the party, relevance to current affairs (topicality), and the so-called typicality. The latter was defined not as a fixed, repeatable pattern, but as an idealized representation of reality. Artists were obligated to actively create, not to reproduce realities. Marxist-Leninist epistemology was based on cognitive objectivism, meaning that reality was supposed to 'reflect' itself within human consciousness. This conviction lay at the foundation of the entire aesthetics and approach to art, but the targets envisaged for them were to reach much further, the role of art was to transform the world. Jadwiga Siekierska wrote at the time:

> 'The image of a man, »exaggerated« in his negative traits or »perfected«, that is, enriched, deepened by the dreams, by fantasy of the artist (if this dream and fantasy keep their feet on the ground), helps to perceive what does not lie on the surface of events, may contain an element of prediction, in a sense anticipate and shape reality. [...] One might venture to say that without »exaggeration« it is impossible to show the essence of a phenomenon through artistic means, in other words, typicality, and thus one cannot discover the truth in art. To achieve this goal, creative invention and artistic exaggeration are used, as Gorky states. Poetic exaggeration, hyperbole convinces and functions like the naked truth of life, evoking emotion, insofar as it deals with facts and phenomena that truly exist (even if sometimes only in an embryonic form), which art discovers and brings into the daylight [...]; the sharpening of the artistic image in order to reveal spiritual beauty, moral fortitude, and the creative passion

in 1950s Propaganda Posters of Central and Eastern Europe, "Folk Life. Journal of Ethnological Studies" 2014, 52, 1, pp. 62–81.

[31] The titles of the posters mentioned in the text are only representative of entire groups of posters with similar themes.

[32] After: W. Tomasik, *Okolice socrealizmu. Prawie tuzin szkiców*, Bydgoszcz 2009, p. 26.

[33] P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, p. 120.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

> of the builders of socialism – this makes the art of Socialist Realism, in Gorky's words, the gravedigger of the old world and the midwife of the new, emerging world'[34].

As stated in the Soviet journal "Kommunist" in 1952: 'To typify what is characteristic, to exaggerate, does not mean to fabricate. It means to have the capacity for foresight'[35].

The poster is a specific kind of art; in its political form, it must be concise, even schematic, but expressive and legible; it must be topical, that is, convey what the commissioner expects at a given moment, and for this reason it is more agitation than propaganda. Its task is attracting attention hence it appeals to unambiguous emotions. Only the most banal aims can be set for a poster, as its form does not allow for overly complicated acrobatics; it shows what is important in a simple way. As the poster artist Józef Mroszczak wrote at the time: 'The poster is an ideological projectile, striking the psyche in motion'[36]. As a visual medium, it is more credible than a written text, playing a particularly important role in societies with low levels of education. The sender of the poster's content is not the artist, i.e., its creator, but the commissioner who places a specific order and finances the poster. In the case under discussion, it would be representatives of political power associated with propaganda, positioned at various institutional levels. The recipients were ordinary people, the so-called 'everyone', not only aesthetically sophisticated elites. This, undoubtedly, imposed its appearance, content, execution techniques, a limited level of metaphorical expression and complexity. Therefore, as in all types of propaganda, the posters predominantly appeal to emotions rather than to knowledge. It is also noteworthy that rural posters feature very few symbolic or typographic representations, and instead, mainly figurative

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[34] J. Siekierska, *Sztuka jako odbicie rzeczywistości. Zagadnienie specyficznych cech sztuki*, "Materiały do studiów i dyskusji z zakresu teorii i historii sztuki, krytyki artystycznej oraz badań nad sztuką" 1954, 2, pp. 166, 170–171.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 171. For a broader discussion of typicality, cf. M. Mazur, *O człowieku tendencyjnym... Obraz nowego człowieka w propagandzie komunistycznej w okresie Polski Ludowej i PRL 1944–1956*, Lublin 2009, pp. 269–271.

[36] J. Mroszczak, *O dalszy wzrost poziomu ideowo-artystycznego*, "Przegląd Artystyczny" 1953, 3 (paper of ZD ZPAP [the Artistic Board of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers] presented by J. Mroszczak at the national conference on posters, 26 June 1953). For the full text of the paper, see: Archiwum Akt Nowych, Komitet Centralny Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej, ref. no. 237/VIII-61, fols 75–105; *O dalszy wzrost ideowo-artystyczny plakatu polskiego*, in: *O plakacie. Zbiór materiałów z narad i dyskusji oraz artykułów poświęconych aktualnym problemom plakatu politycznego*, [Warszawa 1954], pp. 7–23.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

images with a high degree of realism appear. All these characteristics of the poster served very effectively in constructing illusion.

When we speak of utopianism in the socialist realist visual arts, the poster holds an entirely exceptional position, incomparable to painting or sculpture, or even film, not to mention music[37]. In none of these art forms did utopianism play such a pivotal role. This results from the functions assigned to the poster, among which the basic ones are: informational, persuasive, and aesthetic[38]. In the posters of this period, the first function disappeared, the third one was completely subordinated to pragmatism, i.e., serving the interests of the party and the socialist system, and Socialist Realism was excellently suited for this. For this reason, the content found on the posters in the discussed decade can unambiguously be interpreted as utopian. This applies to individual elements on the posters, relationships between particular components, the full content of the posters, and, what should be emphasized, the overall narrative in the large set comprising all posters. Admittedly, the banality and simplicity of propaganda messages on this type of medium allow for decoding the intentions of the artist-creators, especially the commissioners, but the depiction of the utopian world does not stem from their conscious assumptions, but is rather the outcome of: 1) the ideological assumptions, 2) the aims assigned to Socialist Realism, 3) the role ascribed to poster art, 4) a certain artistic freedom and the skills of individual creators, 5) the commissioners' ability to express their expectations, and 6) coincidence. Beyond the general instructions from the authorities about the themes and fundamental principles, the content and form are to some extent an unintended consequence of the artistic-intellectual assumptions of individual artists.

Rural posters were displayed almost exclusively in rural areas because their content was primarily directed at its residents. In the city, posters that made comparisons between the countryside and the city could appear, proclaiming worker-peasant unity, or alternatively, they could be displayed in municipal buildings, where their potential recipients, namely – farmers, were likely to be present. In such cases, figures of workers and peasants were placed on them. In the countryside, posters were displayed in village shops, agricultural cooperatives, the few existing village clubs, and near market squares. In these locations, their lifespan was longer than on fences, where they would be exposed to tearing or unfavorable weather conditions.

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[37] An exception here is architecture, where, just like in poster art, utopianism can be fully realized.

[38] A. Biała, *Literatura i plakat. Korespondencja sztuki*, Kielce 2021, p. 25.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

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In literary utopias, time was never a straightforward matter[39]. In Plato, the utopian *polis* is situated in an ideal past (in the Spartan tradition), in the future (as a project), and in a completely timeless (supra-temporal) world of ideas. In the works of Thomas More and Tommaso Campanella, it is the present and the future; in those of Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, it is the future; whereas in the context of experimentally established factories and settlements, it is the present. Likewise, in Arcadian painting, time is suspended in timelessness between the past and the future, precluding its unambiguous definition. The understanding of time in the posters from the 1950s is equally complex. According to socialist realist principles, it simultaneously represents both the present and the future, resulting in a temporal diffusion. The present and future become unified to invalidate the real problems of the contemporary world, replaced by the desired ideal state[40]. Time has been fulfilled and ultimate harmony has been achieved.

Although the creators of Marxist doctrine relied on the myth of revolution as a breakthrough[41], the poster did not present the moment of the ongoing reorientation; the world shown in it is already 'after' the conversion, not in the process of construction, but in its ultimate ideal state. As Irena Pańków writes based on utopian literature: 'Utopia is a world of realized values'. It marks the end of further transformations because the achieved perfection requires no further corrections, time has ceased to flow, has stood still, because reality has reached its end[42]. According to the narratives promoted in rural posters, the anticipated progress is supposed to rely solely on the ever-improving use of nature and technology, and ever-greater production efficiency. It is more an adjustment to a model than a change. There follows an 'annihilation' of the future as a state different from the present. History as a process has ended and now finds itself in a state of *constans*. Quite coincidentally, this aligns with the canon of peasant culture, in which time also does not exist, there is no past or future, only the eternal annual cycle which is the changing, repetitive seasons.

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[39] Cf. A. Juszczyk, *Stary wspaniały świat. O utopiach pozytywnych i negatywnych*, Kraków 2014, p. 62.

[40] In the analyzed set, only two cases employed the technique of bisecting the poster surface to juxtapose a grim past with a splendid today, (e.g., *Nem nehéz a választás. Mi a szabadságra, jólétre, békére = a Népfrontra szavazunk*, 1950).

[41] B. Baczko, *Wyobrażenia*, p. 135.

[42] I. Pańków, *Filozofia utopii*, Warszawa 1990, p. 184.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

There is no clear answer to the question about the setting in the posters. It is only known that it concerns the countryside; one could say the visualized story takes place everywhere, or nowhere, it is the characteristic 'outopos'. There are no recognizable, specific locations because the posters could appear in any region of the country, they did not describe real space, their symbolic content needed to be universally relevant.

At the level of individual posters, the origin of this ideal world cannot be explained. Its provenance can be understood only by considering a larger set of posters, deriving it indirectly from to whom the peasants should be grateful and towards whom they have obligations. Subjects such as the state, socialism, society, and workers appear here. A certain socio-political order functions. From this, one can conclude that the achieved status of the countryside and the situation of its residents depicted in the posters are the merit of the system, the state, and the working class, but nothing indicates any merit of the peasants themselves. Similarly to utopian literature, they received this ideal world as a gift, they did not fight for it nor build it themselves. This is explicitly confirmed by the titles of some posters, e.g., *W darze wsi polskiej ku nowemu socjalistycznemu jutru* (Antoni Szymaniuk, 1952)[43]. Obligations towards the state and workers are portrayed in the poster as entirely natural, stemming from historical necessity and the necessity of reciprocating for the gifts received. Characteristically, the 'obligations' of the peasants towards the state and workers clash with the 'gifts' from the workers to the countryside. A significant imbalance is evident here.

In the vast majority of posters, political authority does not appear[44], which, quite incidentally, aligns with the principles of Marxism (though not Leninism-Stalinism). If one were to extract solely the message from the rural posters from the entire communicative layer of the 1950s, the emerging image of the power structure would be unclear. Political decision-makers appeared in rural posters rather infrequently, one could say marginally, mainly through names of the institutions mentioned in the titles and occasional figures. Most often, it is a symbolic reflection, in the titles, as in the Czechoslovak poster *S Presidentem Gottwaldem vpřed k vybudování Socialismu v naší Vlasti*, (Jan Čumpelík, 1949), or as 'pictures within pictures', i.e., painted portraits of leaders, like Klement Gottwald in another poster: *Rychle dodáme obilí republice*, (Bohumil Němec, 1949),

[43] Another version of the same theme is titled: *Elektryfikacja wsi zdobyczą Polski Ludowej, darem robotnika – chłopu*, (A. Szymaniuk, 1952).

[44] The rural residents who were the target of propagandistic messages were not isolated from other forms of persuasive instruments and were under constant pressure from the political authorities; however, their perception is not the subject of analysis here.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

where the peasants transporting produce to a collection point also hold a portrait of the Czechoslovak president. In the analyzed set, there are only two exceptions. The first is Soviet posters where Stalin appears surrounded by collective farm workers, sometimes against the backdrop of fields; others feature quotes from his speeches, his surname also appears in titles (*По плану Сталина – преобразуем природу!*, Viktor Ivanov, 1949). In the cases of Stalin and Gottwald, the cult of the leader transferred to the countryside via rural posters is most visible[45]. Another exception is the only poster featuring Polish communist leaders, by Lucjan Jagodziński, *Plon niesiemy, plon w nasz ojczysty dom*, (1952), where a woman in a folk costume hands a sheaf of rye to Bolesław Bierut and Konstanty Rokossowski standing above her. A clear subordination of the peasant woman to the political-military power, i.e., men, is evident here (more on this below). Except that in this case, we deal with a direct borrowing from pre-war images presenting President Ignacy Mościcki receiving harvest wreaths from peasants.

A comparatively uniform structure organizing the political sphere emerges. The titles on the posters feature terms, such as: state, nation, homeland, people. All these concepts form a unity similar to the ancient Platonic *polis*; they are not distinguished or separated. Institutional power functions almost exclusively as a collegial democratic form, e.g., national councils or National Fronts mentioned only during elections (*Volíme kandidáty Národní fronty*, Josef Lada, 1954). They are representations of the people and simultaneously institutions acting as intermediaries between the state/nation/people/community and the individual. However, their activity ends with the elections.

In the analyzed set, there is only one poster showing the security apparatus (*Naší vesnicí americký agent neprojde*, Bedřich Votruba, 1952), where a Czechoslovak peasant shakes hands and embraces a border guard soldier standing with a rifle. This is the only example indicating the necessity of peasants cooperating with the apparatus of coercion, but as can be seen, it was meant to illustrate total equality and voluntary cooperation. This occurred at the same time when forced collectivization was taking place in all communist states in Europe, and the relations between state-party structures and the countryside were unequivocally negative[46].

The mentioned communality is, however, a much broader phenomenon, inherent to utopianism from its beginnings, in Fourier it constituted

[45] This does not mean that, for example, figures like Walter Ulbricht or Todor Zhivkov were not featured on labor-themed posters.

[46] D. Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948–1956 a chłopi*, Warszawa 1998.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

the very foundation of society. Cooperation, collectivity, and in Marx, even thinking in terms of humans as social beings understood as a species[47], unity throughout the propaganda of the 1950s, including the posters, was meant to open completely new possibilities, to end the irrational, disjointed effort of individuals in favor of maximizing effects[48]. The most important form of peasant organization was intended to be agricultural cooperatives; in the Soviet Union this process had already been completed, while in other countries it was still in its initial phase. A limited form of communality was not alien to peasant culture, either.

Declared communality implied equality as an innate trait. In the shallow layer of image perception, equality and community are also transferred to the next sphere, i.e., class relations, when workers appear alongside peasants in the poster. At the basic level, it might seem that total equality and mutual solidarity, a kind of classlessness, prevail between these two socio-professional groups. This is suggested, for instance, by the slogan 'worker-peasant unity' appearing in titles. However, a deeper analysis indicates the existence of a hierarchy of importance. It is the workers who are the leading figures. This is visible at the level of behavior and gestures. It is the worker who places a hand on the peasant's shoulder and indicates the direction in which he should look. His figure is usually in the center or in the foreground, leaving the peasant slightly behind; the sequence of the alliance in the phrasing was never altered to 'peasant-worker', either. The hierarchy is even more visible, and there are significantly more examples like these, when allegory is employed, in which the working class is represented by a man and the peasants by a woman (as discussed further in the text).

The class structure within the peasant class itself, or rather social stratum, is more frequently evident. If in a 'worker'/'urban' poster there is no differentiation within the working class, as according to ideology it constitutes a unified, integral whole (proletariat), then the peasants were divided into three categories based on their property ownership status: collectivized peasants, individual peasants, and kulaks. The first ones have already achieved the ideal, the second ones are striving towards it (and there are far fewer of them), and the posters use rational arguments and observations of differences always favoring collectivization to encourage them to join the ideal community (*Neváhej, vstup do JZD!*[49],

[47] H. Walentowicz, *Przyszłość w prognozach Marksa i Engelsa*, Warszawa 1993, p. 70.

[48] A. Sikora, *Prorocy szczęśliwych światów*, Warszawa 1982, p. 56.

[49] Jednotné zemědělské družstvo – United Agricultural Cooperative

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

1955). The third group tries to destroy everything and is ascribed exclusively negative traits[50] (which is discussed further in the text).

If in Plato the foundation is the rule of philosophers, in More it is property, and in Campanella it is community, then in the discussed posters the most crucial element is work[51]. It becomes the purpose and meaning of life, decisively dominating over all other themes in the content of the posters. In his vision, More envisioned the maximal reduction of working hours, yet he did not place labor in the sphere of joy. For Henri de Saint-Simon, work truly aggregates happiness, serves as its inherent component, it humanizes individuals and enables the expression of human activity[52]. Fourier operated with similar categories, for whom, as Adam Sikora wrote about him: work is 'an internal human need, a free form of human expression and self-affirmation, a desire for creativity which realizes itself in the act of choosing an action, dependent solely on the inclinations or aspirations of every human being. Such liberation of work, endowing it with a self-purposeful character, will become the fundamental condition for its true attractiveness'[53]. For Marx, on the other hand, work is the realm of enslavement and coercion[54], yet he understood its necessity. Emil Cioran asserted in the context of work in utopias that:

> 'they are the expression of a humanity engulfed in toil, proud of conniving with the consequences of the Fall, of which the gravest remains the obsession with profit. The stigmata of a race that cherishes »the sweat of the brow« and makes it a sign of nobility, that labors exultantly – these we bear with pride and ostentation [...]'[55].

Conversely, for Friedrich Engels, work lost its marks of compulsion through the abolition of the division of labor. The posters of the 1950s clearly evoke the Fourierist-Arcadian vision of work. According to the guidelines, Socialist Realism must be optimistic, hence it is associated with joy[56]. The image of agricultural labor negates previous toil, full of hardship

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[50] This is reminiscent of the Nazi racial hierarchy, which postulated that the Aryans were 'culture-creators',' other peoples were 'culture-bearers' who could learn but not create, and the Jews were 'culture-destroyers'.

[51] Cf. I. Pańków, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[52] A. Sikora, *op. cit.*, pp. 45–46.

[53] *Ibidem*, p. 115.

[54] Z. Bauman, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–89.

[55] E. Cioran, *History and Utopia*, transl. R. Howard, Chicago 1987, p. 90.

[56] Regarding the theme of work in Socialist Realist painting, cf. K. Czarnocka, *Tematyka pracy*, "Przegląd Artystyczny" 1952, 1, pp. 30–35.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

and torment. The figures almost always have radiant faces. Laughter accompanies them while working in the field or the cowshed, as in the poster *Хороший уход – колхозу доход!*, (V. Sachkov, 1955), where a kolkhoz woman tenderly strokes a supernaturally large sow with several piglets[57]. Work provides joy and satisfaction, linking it to an improved life for society, the nation, and the state, and ultimately, though last in line, for an individual's personal life too. An ethos of work is cultivated, fostering an enthusiastic attitude towards labor among the peasants. Here we encounter a pure reflection of Marxism, whose founder at one point even wrote about the 'abolition of work' in favor of 'self-realization', in other words, the most essential life need, understood in a completely different way than in capitalism that it would cease to be something burdensome and instead become a joyful expression[58]. Yet such declarations do not negate the pragmatic attitude towards work.

There is something else that indicates the Arcadian quality of work in the poster. This may seem astonishing, but very often, in fact – in the majority of cases, the people on the posters are indeed in the field or in farm buildings, surrounded by symbols of work, but precisely at the moment captured by the artist, they are not working. Instead, they are merely gazing into the distance, looking around, admiring something, holding tools or agricultural produce, or even – relatively frequently, looking at the viewer, clearly 'posing' for the artist and engaging with the observer. An example is the Soviet poster *Доярки, добьёмся высоких удоев от каждой фуражной коровы!*, (Boris Zelensky, 1950), where a woman is looking at the viewer while holding a large milk bucket occupying almost 25% of the poster's surface. This reinforces the conviction about the theatricality of the depicted world. This phenomenon is an unexpected

[57] The problem was recognized by the poster artists themselves. For instance, this is what Józef Mroszczak said about the 1951 poster by Lucjan Jagodziński and Witold Chmielewski, *Plon niesiemy plon w nasz ojczysty dom*: 'The depiction of a sugar-coated, smiling girl with a wreath, obscuring the reality of the countryside with pseudo-folklorism, creates a false and unrealistic sign of optimism. Jagodziński and Chmielewski often feature people in their posters, which should be viewed positively, but in many cases, their protagonists embody a state of blissful smiles and lightheartedness. These posters lack the conflicts so crucial to the contemporary countryside. They lack a reflection of reality, of the harsh class struggle being waged on the front of the socialist transformation of the village'.

[58] A. Walicki, *Marksizm i skok do królestwa wolności. Dzieje komunistycznej utopii*, Warszawa 1996, p. 90; H. Walentowicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 50–51, 71. In his subsequent works, Marx returns to a more realistic conception of labor as both effort and necessity. For more on the concept of labor in Marxism, cf. M. Mazur, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–96.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

difference compared to easel painting and can probably be explained only by the propagandistic function of the message in the poster.

Work is associated with a high degree of mechanization; posters are full of agricultural equipment like tractors, mowers, etc. which make work much easier and more pleasant, and as one might expect, also more efficient and shorter, in accordance with the assumptions of all utopias. Work entails effort both in the field and on the farmyard, but also the peasants' quasi-scientific activities, such as observing the growth of grain sprouts under a magnifying glass, implementing the methods of Ivan Michurin. Here we see the elimination of work specialization and its division, which was foretold by Campanella and later by Marx and Engels[59]. The peasant also became a scientist, as in the Slovak poster *Čo sa v zime naučíš, v lete ako by si našiel* (V. Polívka, 1950s)[60]. In this way, science and rationality were introduced into the narrative as values that were important since the Enlightenment.

Work, in the socialist realist narrative, has another very important aspect. The titles of the posters feature concepts, such as: quickly, more, best, above the norm, competition, fight, win, fulfill obligations, frugality, efficiency. They all are related to work and signify purely pragmatic, not metaphysical, activity and mobilization. Work is accompanied by a specific aim – deliveries for the state/city (*Больше овощей и фруктов советским городам и промышленным центрам!*, G. Shubina, 1953, poster printed in 300,000 copies). World peace was supposed to depend on fulfilling these delivery commitments. It is worth mentioning that in the analyzed set, only one poster featuring a message that scared people with the threat of war could be found, and it represented a significant propagandistic narrative, particularly during the years 1948–1953, but also later. Deliveries were also considered a patriotic act. The adoption of Soviet models became another patriotic value (*Von den Sowjetmenschen lernen heißt siegen lernen. Bauern! Steigert die Hektarerträge durch Anwendung der sowjetischen Agrarwissenschaft*). Such indication of patterns entirely goes beyond any utopian literature, in which there are no ideals of lower and higher rank.

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[59] '[In] communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, to do what I want, when I want, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic'. K. Marks, F. Engels, *Ideologia niemiecka*, in: eidem, *Dzieła*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1961, p. 35.

[60] This poster also exists in a Czech version.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

An additional, more down-to-earth aspect of time in the poster is leisure time, which workers of agricultural cooperatives were supposed to have. In More's work, there is no free time, while for Marx at some point, it turns into an aspect of freedom. Posters depict ways of spending spare time, limited however to: practicing sports, intellectual development, but mainly parading with flags and admiring the development of socialism (*Kizsákmányolók, kulákok ellen, boldogabb jövőnjért fogunk össze a DÉFOSZ-ban!*[61], 1950). Admittedly, though, there were relatively few posters like these.

The motif of ownership of the means of production is clearly inscribed in the utopian narrative. The conviction that the absence of private property results in abundance and equality, satisfying all needs, has appeared since Plato's time. Likewise, in the poster, labor originates from ownership, which is consistent with the economic philosophy of Marxism. Not only the statements used explicitly in titles, but also the vast fields depicted on posters, cultivated by a multitude of people and numerous pieces of equipment, farm buildings housing dozens of cattle and hundreds of other farm animals, indicate large social or state agricultural ownership (*Bauern, sichert die Ernte! Denkt an die Herbstbestellung*, J. Wernitz, ca. 1950). Everything operates according to plans, meaning it is predictable, efficient, and logical (*На денонощна вършитба по часов график!*, ca. 1950).

In Polish, Romanian, and Hungarian posters, individual farms appear in a neutral context (*Ţărani Muncitori, Creşteţi Cât Mai Multe Păsări şi Valorificaţi-le Prin Cooperativă!*), whereas in Soviet posters, only cooperative or state farms appear, resulting from the degree of agricultural collectivization (even in the territories of the Baltic states incorporated into the USSR). Even where private property still existed, it was supposed to be in the minority (which did not reflect reality), and propaganda also convinced of its lower efficiency compared to collective enterprises (*Čo roľník to družstevnik*), which was also not true.

Happiness understood as life satisfaction is mentioned in all philosophical-political doctrines. For utopians, it is usually about grasping the notion of necessity (in the Christian-Hegelian sense – freedom understood as recognized necessity), though its origin and attributes were interpreted in various ways. Thus, for Plato, the happiness for producers, regardless of the effort invested, was to belong to the class to which they were destined and to work within it. For him, the happiness of the *polis*

[61] DÉFOSZ – Dolgozó Parasztok és Földmunkások Országos Szövetsége [in Hungarian: National Union of Working Peasants and Agricultural Laborers].

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

and the prosperity of an individual meant the same thing[62]. Saint-Simon also appealed for 'the happiness of all', that is, the fulfillment of the widest range of physical and spiritual needs[63]. Russian Narodniks anticipated 'inviting' as many people as possible to the metaphorical feast table. According to Marxists, people will gladly accept the happiness offered to them, but they must be led there and it must be offered/guaranteed to them, sometimes doing this against their will and current beliefs, as they do not understand the laws of history.

The reasons for happiness can be quite effortlessly deduced from the posters: it is communality, closeness to other people, solidarity, and consequently security. Thus, there was an unconscious reference to the beliefs existing since antiquity, from Plato and Aristotle, concerning institutionally mediated collective happiness as a form superior to private satisfaction of an individual. Medieval philosophers, e.g., Marsilius of Padua, argued that a well-functioning state should ensure happiness of its society, and that the happiness of the state and an individual are strongly interdependent[64]. In this context, the rural community is the happy beneficiary, Marx would say – humanity as a species, and not an individual thinking in terms of private interest. Happiness came from the enthusiasm generated by ongoing development, the transformation of nature performed in the name of and for the benefit of all people (*Młodzieży – naprzód do walki o szczęśliwą socjalistyczną wieś polską*, Witold Chmielewski, 1950). Happiness also has a moral dimension – it consists of 'honestly fulfilling obligations' towards the state (*Obilí je bohatstvím Vlasti Čestně Splníme Výkup*, ca. 1950). As one can infer from Marxist teachings, prosperity only subsequently led to satisfaction (*Navštivte podzimní okresní zemědělskou výstavu*, 1952), as did private or family happiness, which was only rarely depicted on posters, e.g., *Когда в колхозе хорошие ясли, спокойная мать и ребенок счастлив* (G. Shubina, 1950s), where two plump children are playing under the care of nursery teachers in a well-equipped and well-maintained environment.

If labor is the hallmark of 1950s posters, then its effect, i.e., specifically understood prosperity, can be considered the second one. It thus replicates the archetypal historical myth of a place free from worries, especially the most serious ones, providing economic security. Large sacks

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[62] N. White, *Filozofia szczęścia. Od Platona do Skinnera*, transl. M. Chojnacki, Kraków 2008, p. 22.

[63] A. Sikora, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

[64] E. Baum, S. Antczak, *Szczęście – fenomen niejednowymiarowy. Konteksty filozoficzne, społeczne i polityczne rozważań nad odczuwaniem szczęścia*, in: *Szczęście w wymiarze pedagogiczno-socjologicznym*, eds. E. Kowalska, P. Prüfer, M. Kowalski, Kraków 2014, pp. 18–19.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

of grain, baskets full of exceptionally large apples or vegetables placed in the foreground, large sheaves of rye reaching above the heads of the people holding them, plenty of livestock, trailers full of sacks, and in a Hungarian poster – massive corn cobs. Prosperity is mainly associated with collectivity and cooperativism. Private material prosperity appears much less frequently. In this last case, radios and shoes are visible in the hands of the farmers depicted on the posters, less frequently bicycles (*Légy az elsők között a terménybeadási versenyben!*, György Pál, ca. 1950) or food. However, the theme of 'community' reappears then, and in many cases it is virtually impossible to distinguish cooperative farmers from individual ones (*Kiváló minőség – bő választék a földművesszövetkezeti boltban*, ca. 1950).

The ideal countryside celebrates, yet once again in a specific way. This mainly concerns harvest festivals, agricultural exhibitions and fairs, as well as festivals of friendship between individual nations and the peoples of the Soviet Union. An additional form of celebration accompanies deliveries of agricultural products to state procurement points, i.e., again 'deliveries for the state'. The festive mood prevailing then is conveyed by showing cavalcades of vehicles, most often tractors or cars (to illustrate the high level of technology), whose trailers are filled with products being delivered to collection points. Joyful, festively dressed people, often in folk costumes, are accompanied by flags, floral garlands, and banners with ideological slogans (*Szybko odstawimy zboże państwu*, Tadeusz Gronowski, 1952). The posters do not contain any elements of sacrum or religious symbols.

At this point, we should address several aspects related to the representation of humans themselves. Human age is not a variable designed in posters with the intention of presenting an ideal message. Naturally, in advertising, youth carries greater mobilizing and persuasive power than old age. Although the dominant age of figures in the posters is indeed youth and middle age, old age is not negatively connoted, as was the case, for instance, in Nazi propaganda. We find no artificial intergenerational conflict here. Elderly people fulfill three functions: they become symbols of experience, they are meant to show that even they join agricultural cooperatives and develop culturally and intellectually (*Vegyünk részt a 3 éves mesterképző tanfolyamon!*, György Pál, 1956). Interestingly, Soviet posters exhibit a similar trend.

Jerzy Szacki notes that utopians disliked fashion and diversity in clothing[65]. The visuality of posters necessitated the presentation of certain themes that were only marginally mentioned in utopian literature.

[65] J. Szacki, *op. cit.*, p. 194. Cf. For example: T. Campanella, *Państwo słońca*, Warszawa 1954, pp. 71–72.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

In the 1950s, the attire of people in the countryside was different from that of city dwellers. Here, clothes are always neat and clean to avoid disrupting the perception of ideality, but such treatment is hardly surprising in socialist realist art that rejects naturalism. Clothing is close to reality apart from two exceptions: one is the frequent whiteness of women's blouses even during fieldwork. The second exception is related to poster symbolism. Women, even while working, often wear regional, even festive attire, which clearly indicates their social origin[66], although it is not consistent with the photographs from the era. Women in work overalls unambiguously belong to agricultural cooperatives. They almost always wear headscarves, most commonly red, somewhat less frequently white ones, and only in third place in other colors, including floral patterns. Like fashion models, they always have impeccably styled hair, as befits advertising, a large proportion of them can be considered pretty. In Hungary, men wear traditional hats, while in all other countries they typically wear flat caps, meaning that in this aspect the posters accurately reflected reality. Men are also sturdy and handsome.

A certain surprise is the distinctiveness of the propaganda aimed at the urban-worker audience versus the rural addressee. In 'urban' persuasion, the posters exhibit tendencies to masculinize female workers, or rather portray women as 'workers' in the male sense. In these cases, their appearance, including clothing, facial features, body build, and muscular arms, defeminizes them. This phenomenon does not extend to the countryside where rural women are unambiguously ascribed feminine traits. Only in Soviet posters, and even then, rarely do we find women dressed in men's jackets or traditional quilted padded jackets worn by workers (the Russian term 'telogreika' – translator's note). In the context of the fictitious nature of poster visuals, it is unlikely to find evidence of deliberate intent here to enable audiences to relate to the characters. Thus, we should probably seek the reasons for this in class division, according to which, despite everything, the countryside was still not part of the socialist world.

Every creator of utopian projects paid attention to gender distinctness. According to the tradition of various epochs, the sexes were not

[66] A member of a Municipal National Council said this about the Jagodziński-Chmielewski harvest poster: 'This poster shows a country woman, and that's right, but you could never convince a real country woman [...] that she looks like that. I've seen women like that, dressed that way, in delegations for the May Day parade. Your work isn't adapted to our local area. You've come to us, and you must go to our community and see what our women are truly like'. *Fragmenty wypowiedzi uczestników narady plastyków pracowników POM i aktywu Spółdzielni Produkcyjnych w POM-ie Niegłosy, pow. Płock w dniu 6 czerwca 1953 r.*, in: *O plakacie*, pp. 76–77.

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equal. Fourier changed this approach. His declarations were continued by Marxism which declared the abandonment of inequality in favor of complete equalization of rights, yet not obligations. During the analysis of the poster content, again, at first glance it seems that equality of both sexes has been achieved. Although there are slightly fewer women than men on the posters, they are portrayed in a range of social roles, including that of tractor operators (the poster in Estonian, *Naiskolhoosnikud, omandage põllumajanduse mehhanisaatori austav eriala!*, Asta Vender, Olev Soans, 1953). However, upon closer examination of the relationships between figures and gestures, the pervasive secondary status of women becomes apparent again. The most important example is the symbolic division into male workers and women as allegories of the peasantry and countryside. Not a single example can be found where the opposite is true, i.e., a man representing the countryside and a woman representing the working class. This phenomenon can be understood in the context of cultural influences, as in culture, not only European, women are associated with farming, in contrast to the 'masculine' activity of hunting. Fertility was also supposed to link the earth and women; in some cultures, women were attributed magical abilities to influence abundance[67]. A feminist anti-discriminatory interpretation is also acceptable. It is the male worker who will usually be in the foreground as the figure dominating the peasant woman. The same thing happens when the poster features only villagers of both genders, without any workers included. Again, the man will most often play the more important role on the poster. The women are more likely to stand behind the men rather than vice versa. Additionally, the man will be the one operating the more specialized equipment. Female tractor drivers appear when there are no men on the poster; when men are present, the woman becomes merely a passive observer. Typically, newspapers, books, documents are in the hands of men, not women, while the woman is again portrayed in the role of a more passive figure, listening and learning. Women are equal only in the company of other representatives of their sex. Out of nearly 300 posters subjected to query, a dominant role for women was found in only two cases, e.g., on the Czechoslovak poster *Pozývame vás na roľnícko-družstevný trh*, (author unknown, 1956), where a man standing with his back to the viewer has slung newly purchased knee-high leather boots over his shoulder, while the central figure is a woman holding a modern vacuum cleaner. This, however, is a poster with very limited, regional distribution. There is another noteworthy thread related to gender: the *kulak* is always a man.

[67] M. Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 257–259, 332–334.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

The ideal world from the poster narrative eliminated any coercion and almost completely eradicated conflict. Antagonistic classes no longer exist, the dissonance between civilization and nature, city and countryside (visible, for instance, in Rousseau) has been finally overcome. In the communism portrayed on posters, both places are integrated in cooperation. They produce for each other, creating a harmonious coupled arrangement. The exploitation of man by man no longer exists, which was the dream of utopians at least since the Renaissance.

Posters showing the enemy constitute a small part of the whole set. Just as in literary utopias, where evil also exists, it is marginal and kept under control (e.g., in More, Campanella, and others). Hence, posters are closer to them and to communism as an already developed system, rather than to the socialist stage of ongoing transformations. Furthermore, this image is much more distant from other propagandistic narratives, e.g., in film or literary fiction.

The categories of the enemy are limited to the *kulak*, the Colorado potato beetle, imperialists, and various negative figures hindering development. The most frequently depicted figure is the *kulak*, embodying evil arising from class origin itself; he is characterized by greed, fury, and hatred, and he was portrayed in precisely such poses. He is always an individualist, the antithesis of communality. However, the enemy is powerless, which is evident even in his caricatured appearance. Very rarely do tiny imperialists appear, for example, who are being crushed or run over by tractors (*Rechtzeitige Frühjahrsbestellung sichert eine gute Ernte und hilft den Frieden erhalten*, Liedtke-Weber, 1951). Among the negative figures are also rural bureaucrats or lazy workers responsible for repairing agricultural machinery (*Wiejski biurokrata*, Stanisław Gratkowski, Jerzy Jankowski, 1953). The fight against the Colorado potato beetle, or 'American beetle' is a form of conflict with imperialism (*Do boje proti mandelince zločinné setbě amerických imperialistů*, early 1950s). The posters, unlike the literature of this period, lack dynamic situations of transformation from evil to good. A utopian *status quo* prevails.

And finally, the last visual aspect – the world surrounding humans. The majority of the posters feature outdoor scenes, with a few exceptions showing interiors, but exclusively of clubs or agricultural reading rooms, and only one poster, a very specific one, depicts the interior of a private house in a highly schematic way (*W każdej rodzinie wiejskiej stały czytelnik*, 1955)[68]. This means that private interiors do not

[68] This rather particular image shows three men dressed in folk costumes, sitting at a table, and a woman spinning. Additionally, it features several pieces of furniture: a painted chest, a clock, embroidered wall hangings, a window, a wall-mounted radio, a dog,

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

exist in the posters of the discussed period. This is an aspect of a broader phenomenon – the absence of scenes from private life in the poster narratives, or even the absence of privacy. Only the public sphere is articulated. The peasant world unfolds exclusively outside the home, at most in the cowshed, most often in harmony with nature, in natural surroundings.

The visual character of the landscapes in the background serves as another obvious sign of utopianism. It carries a large amount of information. Factories, always depicted with smoking chimneys, are an obligatory feature. The typical rural landscape can be compared to Arcadian painting and references to the myth of paradise can be seen. Usually sunny weather, yellow fields of ripe grain just before or during harvest, much like in Eliza Orzeszkowa's novel *Nad Niemnem* [*it is a significant work of Polish literature, written in 19th century* – translator's note]. Applying a quantitative approach might give the impression of unity between the countryside/peasants and nature. Nothing could be further from the truth. The nature presented here has a specific form; it does not exist as wilderness, but solely as an extremely utilitarian tool completely subordinated to production. In the landscapes, we find no fragment of undeveloped space. They are filled with power lines, combine harvesters, tractors, and buildings. The houses are most often white, namely, made of brick, almost always with red roofs, suggesting tiles, not the thatched roofs, which were ubiquitous in real life. Everything is rendered in an idyllic, pastoral style. The quality of the buildings is most clearly visible in the close-up views: smooth roads, well-maintained greenery, fences. The facilities of the agricultural industry cooperatives (kolkhozes) in the USSR are the most visually impressive. In the poster *Строим счастливую, строим культурную, нашу колхозную жизнь!*, (Viktor Koretsky, 1950), an entire urban layout is visible: squares, streets, well-maintained green belts, planned to look like Fourier's phalanstery or Owen's New Harmony. As Bauman noted, nature is chaotic, hence unfriendly to humans, and through geometric, ordered forms in architecture and even rectangular fields, regularity and coherence can be imposed upon it[69]. The geometry of urban layouts negated the real chaos of rural buildings, it ensured neatness, organization, and logic. In line with the hopes held for many generations, even before Saint-Simon[70], nature has been tamed and harnessed for the sake of human development.

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and a cat. It is made in the style of a traditional folk paper-cut. From the exhibition catalog: *Socjalizm twórz, wspólnotę twórz! Polski plakat socrealistyczny 1949–1955*, Bochnia 2011, p. 20.

[69] Z. Bauman, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[70] A. Sikora, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

The role of animals was generally absent in literary utopias. They usually appeared in the context of breeding as an example illustrating the necessity of eugenic policies (to the extent possible in each era)[71], which, once again, was first addressed by Plato. Modern Arcadian painting was different, as it often depicted animals, both farm and fictional ones. In the rural poster narrative, animals become primarily a product ensuring sustenance. Except for one specific example[72], they are exclusively farm animals. The hyperbolization of their size and number creates an illusion of abundance and success.

The spectrum of the ideal world is also shaped by what cannot be found on the posters, and what does not appear in the narratives. These images do not show peasant women sunbathing or casually drinking coffee, their husbands washing clothes by the river, chattering gossips, processions of horse-drawn carts heading for the church, alcohol consumption and card games, neighborhood conflicts, or family life. On the one hand, this stems from the cultural reality of 'here and now', meaning actual social roles and behavioral patterns, such as how leisure time was spent in the countryside; on the other hand, it results from the aims set for the posters, i.e., promoting specific, expected behavior. After all, posters, regardless of the era, show an artificial, idealized world; they are advertisements, not realistic photographs/depictions. This was the case at the end of the 19th century in the works of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, in the interwar period, and in the 1980s. The poster is thus predestined to show utopia.

Peter Burke, in the introduction to the Polish (and Spanish) version of his *Eyewitnessing*, recommends examining the functions that creators imposed on visual representation[73]. Following this suggestion, this raises the question of why utopia was portrayed in the context of rural poster imagery. Undoubtedly, we can point to: 1) a conviction stemming from the Marxist thesis about reality reflecting in art, which was to serve in creating reality, albeit only imagined, and 2) an advertising-propagandistic purpose. And what was the effect? It is worth referring to a symptomatic statement made during a joint meeting of artists and ordinary peasants specially brought in for this occasion, held at the Production Cooperative in State Machine Center (POM Niegłosy), Płock district, in June 1953. Among others, a lesser-known member of the National Council, Wasiński, spoke:

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[71] For example, T. Campanella, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–94.

[72] This refers to the above-mentioned poster: *W każdej rodzinie wiejskiej...* (*In every rural family...*)

[73] P. Burke, *Naoczność. Materiały wizualne jako świadectwa historyczne*, Kraków 2012, p. 22.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

> 'I would like to talk about Chmielewski's poster with the tractor. That tractor driver couldn't be driving like that, with hair like that, and that girl couldn't ride like that at the back, because she'd fall into that hole where it's standing. Besides, we know you can't drive like that, it's forbidden. [...] And another thing with that poster for the Production Cooperatives Congress – after all, there was snow and frost then. So how could they ride – the girl in a blouse, the boy in a shirt?'[74].

The peasants most often understood the posters in a literal way, which in this case meant the emergence of dissonance between reality and its image, so for villagers they were completely unrealistic and not very credible. They therefore did not fulfill a persuasive function, but rather constituted something foreign, and from history we also know that they were considered a hostile manifestation of influences from outside the rural world.

* * *

The rural poster from the 1950s, originating from European communist countries, is significantly weaker artistically than Soviet posters published in the first dozen or so years after the October Revolution[75], as well as the communist art from the interwar period[76]. Even at that time, this fact was recognized, both in the USSR and in other countries of the communist bloc. The socialist realist poster became solely a propagandistic instrument, losing its artistic aspect. The artist Jan Lenica, writing about the poster in 1952, quoted the Soviet "Pravda":

> 'The artistic value of the majority of the posters remains unsatisfactory; the solutions of many works are formulaic, the compositions monotonous, with primitive color and drawing. [...] The posters turn into poor copies of easel paintings, which reduces their impact on the viewer. [...] Formulaic character and excessive idealization have not yet been eradicated in political posters, which has often been condemned in party resolutions. For example, instead of kolkhoz workers on posters, one can often see 'sugarcoated' hicks instead of union

[74] This presumably refers to the poster by Witold Chmielewski, Do dobrobytu, do socjalizmu. I Krajowy Zjazd Spółdzielczości Produkcyjnej (1953). *Fragmenty wypowiedzi uczestników narady plastyków...*, in: *O plakacie*, p. 77.

[75] Cf. D. King, *Russian Revolution Posters. From Civil War to Socialist Realism, From Bolshevism to the End of Stalinism*, [London 2012].

[76] P. Rypson, *Czerwony monter. Mieczysław Berman: grafik, który zaprojektował polski komunizm*, Kraków 2017.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

activists or Komsomol members – posed puppets, taken from the worst clichés'.

Lenica, quoting these words, saw identical problems in Poland[77]. This can be compared with Cioran's statement, according to whom people in literary utopias are presented schematically: 'Their characters are automatons, fictions or symbols: none is real, none exceeds its puppet status, an idea lost in a universe without reference points'[78]. But after all, the identical nature of the illustrated figures is a simple implication of the unified needs postulated from Plato, through More, Campanella, Saint-Simon, to Mao Zedong as something natural, blocked only by historical conditions, civilization, or private property. Thus, quite accidentally, the artistic quality of socialist realist posters met the narrative sophistication of utopian literature of the last several hundred years.

All posters, regardless of the country in which they were published, are identical in terms of content and message. They may differ at most in execution technique or individual stylistic elements. The Estonian or Ukrainian posters do not differ in any way from the Soviet ones except for the language of the titles. There are slight variations in clothing details. All of them – Romanian, Hungarian, Czechoslovak, East German, Polish, and Soviet – present one universal story about the socialist countryside as an ideal place, essentially without a past, with a future already achieved in the present. This means far-reaching uniformity and systemic similarities between socialist countries.

The content and aesthetics are derived from only one goal – to promote specific attitudes and behavior as well as patterns of thinking among rural residents. Recipients are encouraged to reject the real world. The posters usually resemble advertising brochures promoting pleasant and joyful life in the countryside. The straightforwardness of the message in the utopian poster design was adapted to the recipient's needs. In a greater number of posters, realism was used rather than symbolism.

At the beginning of this text, the author quoted a comparison of the features of utopian works from the 19th century and their analogies to Marxism. Based on the analysis of the content of rural posters from the 1950s published in socialist countries, it can be stated that all the mentioned parameters can be found in them.

In the poster, similarly to Plato's works, the unchanging nature of the ideal *status quo* dominates. The world emerging from the posters is unambiguous and obvious, which is consistent with the role

[77] J. Lenica, *Plakat – sztuka dzisiejszych czasów*, "Przegląd Artystyczny" 1952, 5, p. 48.

[78] E. Cioran, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

of this medium. The fact that many elements in the poster are consistent with the principles of Marxism does not mean that those commissioning the posters or their creators had extensive knowledge of Marxist philosophy. This state of affairs is due, on the one hand, to realism, and on the other – to the establishment of the role of the poster as a simple propagandistic instrument. Realism dictated a straightforward depiction of the desired reality, while the very nature of the poster, by definition, is an approach that is simplified and schematic. The socialist realist understanding of tendentiousness determined the utopian-idyllic convention of the poster. Utopia, and with it the rural poster, rejected the contingency of human fate and history in favor of order, predictability, transparency, organization, harmony, and beauty. The diversity of the world, of people, of their behavior or needs was also eliminated, which constitutes another imperative of utopia.

Unlike socialist realist film and literature, which portray the rural past as tied to poverty, class disparities, the contempt of elites, the brutality of life, but also present-day passivity, and on the other hand, an idyllic socialist present, the poster (but also, to some extent, painting) focused almost exclusively on the latter image. Despite the imposed rules of Socialist Realism, other branches of art still retained a trace of artistry; the political poster, however, was seen purely as a utilitarian tool of propaganda, entirely stripped of aesthetics and any auxiliary functions. It was meant to be nothing more than an advertisement, expected to possess pragmatic appeal, but not to engage in aestheticization. This was because visual arts lack chronology, a kind of timeline on which one could depict the transformation from a bad past to a good future, from capitalist corruption to communist idyll. This model transformation illustrating progress was recognized as the fundamental principle of socialist realist art. The inability to fulfill this requirement placed commissioners in a position of having to choose between negative and positive imagery. Neutrality was branded a defect, deemed ideologically hostile for failing to serve the revolution and pragmatically unsound from the propagandistic perspective intrinsic to poster art. Thus, Arcadian idealism became the inevitable choice.

The rural poster was meant to create the conviction of the reality of utopian images. Visually, that means, 'more credibly', it shortened the distance between the not-yet-ideal reality and the idyllic world of joy, prosperity, economic security, cooperation, etc., that was within arm's reach. It is the ultimate example of anomie, where the harsh reality and the sugar-coated picture on propaganda posters belonged to completely different spheres, which were practically opposites, and yet these two diametrically opposed realities were forced to coexist for over a decade.

DOI:10.17951/rh.2025.60.871-902

Admittedly, the chaos that was once synonymous with danger and off-putting unpredictability is now a thing of the past, but in utopias order comes at the cost of freedom. Here, at first glance, it is not visible. Only upon a deeper analysis does it become clear that the established structure is not merely a proposal, but has been imposed as the only alternative, it is not a choice, but an inexorable necessity, it is definitiveness.

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