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## Criminals in the fumes of prison imagination – the daily life of the “wise guy”

“C.K. is everywhere and will get everything!”<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The article is focused on showing the sub-cultural world of the imprisoned, including the convicted “wise guys”. Entering the path of crime and then being incarnated were presented in the optics of upbringing and socialization as important processes of human development. Prison is an institution in which thousands of people deprived of their liberty create a “second life”, giving it a variety of faces and dimensions. The subcultural dependencies in a penitentiary institution should be seen as an immanent feature of this environment, which are not uniform in their content, and their modification is in fact a natural consequence of the dynamics of social development.

**Key words:** upbringing, socialization, penitentiary space, the “second life” of the prison, convicted “wise guys”.

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<sup>1</sup> A poem by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

## ..the educational and socializing trend of views

“So what if I’m in the slammer and some other schmuck is out in the wild. I was once in the wild too, and I got a sentence!”<sup>2</sup>

The world can be different and varied, and its coloration is unusual and ambiguous. The shades of being and daily existence contribute to the multidimensionality of thinking about the days, months and years of yore. The social world is based on many pillars constructed in the long term. Not without significance, and perhaps even priority in building future moments of being, is the process to which we are all subject in one dimension or another, with uneven intensity and certainly with different effects. We are talking about the upbringing process. A process that is not and cannot be insignificant in shaping both macro and micro-social constructs. This will mark the momentum for development, as well as the denial, or a kind of counterweight of technocratic and mechanistic peeking at the surrounding reality. Undoubtedly, a disturbed, distorted educational process may have its consequences in the future. Such delayed results usually sound here and there, not without consequences. “Today, the most difficult upbringing problems occur in natural upbringing environments, not limited to a narrow margin of individuals with congenital biomenal defects and extreme environmental impairment, but are found in increasingly wider circles of young people who could reach social maturity in the future in a conflict-free manner” (Urban 2000, p. 27). Bronisław Urban continues as follows: “The period of childhood and adolescence lost its characteristics of cheerfulness and carefreeness a long time ago, and the Greek term *hebes* has no use today. It can be said that indeed difficult problems are becoming, to varying degrees, an experience for all individuals from the early stages of development, and contemporary living conditions are becoming more and more complex and diverse sets of threats to the modern generation” (Urban 2000, pp. 27–28). Thus, it seems that each of us, having a separate and individual vision of the future and setting ourselves heterogeneous life goals, creates a specific style of being and image of incomparable everyday life. Some people are brought up in the so-called copybook style, while others are characterized by outbursts not accepted both by the family and the community. Well, one could say that part of the society feels, or may feel a kind of discomfort, correlated with the endogenous surety of failure. Some reach their life’s goals in a socially acceptable way, others break both legal and community conventions, using an illegal and punishable strategy. Lesław Pytka

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states that: “An individual’s social maladjustment is associated with a characteristic set of social attitudes expressing readiness to react in a manner inconsistent or unsatisfactory with the recommendations of social axiology defining the content of social roles assigned or chosen by them. The subject of these attitudes are primarily norms and values that define the behavior of an individual in their contacts with other people, i.e. their social interactions” (Pytko 2001, p. 94). Otto Lipkowski, on the other hand, takes the view that social maladjustment is “an expression of the contradiction between an individual’s attitude of negating social norms and the social requirements. The inadequacy is therefore a bilateral phenomenon, a function of the individual’s attitude towards society” (Lipkowski 1987, pp. 23–24). The author also talks about the notion of social adjustment as an effect, or as a result of positive upbringing (Lipkowski 1987, pp. 22–23). One would wish that the articulated “social adjustment” accompanied us always and everywhere. But unfortunately, this is not the case. Marek Konopczyński, on the other hand, presents such an opinion that social maladjustment suggests “an individual’s inability or unwillingness to adapt their behavior and reactions to the expectations of their environment, measured by their degree of compliance with applicable legal and moral norms” (Konopczyński 2014, pp. 15–16).

Some teenagers often show a tendency to not see risky situations as such, thus showing an attitude that the world is open to them and nothing bad can happen. Nothing could be further from the truth. Often the unjustified belief in a better tomorrow forces people, especially the young, still without the baggage of life experience, into the wilderness and meanderings of functioning. The human being in a certain period of existence, often in their adolescence, peeks at the world through the prism of their own self, thus distorting the surrounding reality. The views of the polygonal perception of the environment are alien to them, assuming that only they and their subjective views count. However, the epiphanies of everyday life aim at making the optics of maximizing the use of life real, which should not be denied, provided that we follow the legal and social rules, not forgetting the moral and ethical principles. Thus, the resounding egoism, as the maxim of everyday life, without taking into account the context of the people around us and the diversity of their views, narrows the life down to respecting only personal beliefs and visions, i.e. creating an individual construct of data processing and inference according to a system of personal evaluation. In a cognitively interesting way J. Reykowski makes reflections on the “non-personal goal”. He gives it a kind of sense. At the beginning of his reflections, he says that “From a certain point of view, it would seem that each goal pursued by the subject is a personal one because of the subject’s personal involvement” (Reykowski 1980, p. 167). The author, however, sees the meaning, or personal and non-personal involvement differently. “When we speak of the pursuit of a personal goal, we mean the orientation to achieve a state of affairs that satisfies needs, protects interests, promotes the development of the subject itself – possible

benefits to others are a side effect of such an action; we speak of a non-personal goal when the subject's activities are organized in such a way as to satisfy others' interests in order to contribute to others' development; in this case, benefits to the subject itself may be a side effect of the action taken" (Reykowski 1980, p. 167). Therefore, it is important to show a valuable world based on the pillars of love, respect, understanding, kindness, trust and others creating a friendly and warm climate of coexistence during more or less tangible moments, so-called components of the educational process. "The educational process understood as growing up to the tasks – above all the tasks resulting from the perspective of the development of a given society – is one of the basic elements of this development. In this process, social development is intertwined with the development of the personality of the representatives of the socializing and educated generation" (Kowalski 1976, pp. 15–16) – as Stanisław Kowalski notes. Thus, socialization is the entry of the individual, as they get older, into more and more numerous social groups (convergent or conflicting), varied in terms of educational influences, as well as the adoption of certain social roles in these groups (Kowalski 1976, p. 17). The young generation often sees the world and its relations in a mercantile and entitled way. It promotes a free style of functioning, breaking the bans, not noticing legal boundaries. The world is mine and my vision of the world is mine – this is the trend of everyday beliefs and values of some representatives of the young generation. This can undoubtedly lead, in extreme cases, to a conflict with generally applicable law, with the implication that various sanctions and penalties may be applied. A specific behavior and functioning in society, as well as being and growing into the structures of particular social groups, is connected with understanding and respecting social norms and the norms of social coexistence. It also involves the construction of human relations and interactions, which visualizes the optics of individual socialization, drawing a socializing field for considerations. Marek Konopczyński (2013, p. 106) states that the quality of interpersonal relations is largely shaped by the socialization climate. The author, developing the thought, distinguishes such climate that creates personal development, but also the one that negatively affects the life of an individual. He identifies certain traumatizing types of socializing climate: "a socializing climate of tension, characterized by mutual distrust, insinuations, a sense of danger; a noisy socializing climate, where quarrels and brawls constantly occur; a depressive socializing climate, where depression, sadness and resignation dominate; a socializing climate of indifference, characterized by a lack of an affectionate relationship between the guardians and the child; a socializing climate of excessive emotion and problems, where the child is surrounded by excessive sensitivity or too much absorbed by various things" (Konopczyński 2013, pp. 106–107).

## ...the penitentiary color of being

“Mercy is a crime, my friend. Never have mercy when you want  
to reach your destination.  
Because if you soften up and have mercy, you will waste your life in the chokey!”<sup>3</sup>

Socialization – as O. Lipkowski says – “is a component of general upbringing” (Lipkowski 1987, p. 20). It is a process of growing into a social environment, which, depending on the trend, its extension and perspective of progress and course, undoubtedly draws a significant image of the individual’s future. Thus, certain disturbing bumps on the educational and socializing path of everyday life’s journey may imply various outbursts, modifying human existence in an expected or unexpected way. In extreme but not individual cases, as reality shows, this can lead to a situation of forced social isolation. In such a case, a person becomes, for a certain period of time, shorter or longer, a resident of facilities isolating them from the wider human community for their widely unacceptable behavior. Deprivation of liberty is a response to human behavior and is the most severe response to a failure to comply with legal regulations. Being placed and staying in a penitentiary creates a completely different state of daily life. A typical and conventional day, no matter what photographs of that day took the shade of that typicalness and conventionality, is completely different and rather incomparable to anything else.

Z. Bugajski (1928, p. 141) says that in the old days, prison was used as a last resort. Being placed in prison was too lenient a punishment and was not really a threat, not much of an act of revenge. Therefore, the death penalty and corporal punishment were rather used. “If, however, the sentence of imprisonment was resorted to, it was attempted to make the stay in prison as painful as possible, so that the prisoner could feel it in full” (Bugajski 1928, p. 141). In 1933, L. Rabinowicz wrote: “For the nations of ancient and medieval times, prison itself was a sanction too weak, an inadequate instrument of revenge” (Rabinowicz 1933, p. 2). M. Czerwicz, on the other hand, states that “The punishment was then a brutal act of reprisal for the crime committed or allegedly committed, and was also intended to intimidate entire social classes during the period of their resistance or rebellion, as well as individual rebellious individuals” (1958, p. 10). The authors refer to distant time spaces. Today, the perception of imprisonment is very different. Retaliation and revenge, which for centuries was the motto of imprisonment, has developed into an approach to repairing and transforming

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<sup>3</sup> A poem by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

the imprisoned person. This does not mean, however, that the socially expected metamorphosis of the offender always takes place, and that those who leave the prison walls are prepared, through a previously conducted process of social rehabilitation, to blend back into the local society and even to exist properly in it. This does not happen and cannot happen because, despite the difficult and multidimensional rehabilitation work, some of the convicts are unwilling or, due to various dysfunctions, cannot be influenced by psycho-correction. Furthermore, “the processes of rehabilitation, directed towards derailed individuals or groups, must take place in society in order to guarantee re-acculturation and connection to accepted forms of social participation. The above mentioned process cannot be carried out in conditions of social isolation, in these educational ghettos of sorts. For it is not possible to create social situations in closed social spaces with an accumulation of individuals with similar socialization disorders, which would favor the emergence of such systems of roles and relationships and the underlying values, norms and social patterns that characterize the natural living environments of the socialized generations” (Ambrozik 2016, p. 204). So, one could ask a somewhat rhetorical question, how to prepare for life in a society, without that society? How to teach to function in an open society and natural environment, being in a closed society and an unnatural environment? Continuing this theme, it is important to mention an important factor, as it seems to be a factor resulting from the very nature of the prison. One of the bright dimensions of imprisonment is the deprivation of needs. G.M. Sykes (quoted from: Kosewski 1977, pp. 228–231) indicates the five main ailments of the prison, indicating: imprisonment, deprivation of material and service facilities, deprivation of heterosexual contacts, deprivation of autonomy, deprivation of a sense of security. “It must be understood that the nuisance of isolation is so great that it causes abnormal behavior which only in a certain percentage reflects the individual’s actual attitude to society and is in fact their reaction to isolation. This image must be read correctly. This is one of the main requirements for successful social rehabilitation work” (Hołyst 1984, p. 41). According to Bogusław Waligóra (1984, pp. 62–63), i.a. the need for emotional contact, participation, partnership, personal dignity, independence and intimacy is subject to deprivation in prison conditions. The state of deprivation, according to the author’s thought, may be a factor of subjectively unpleasant sensations, but also of tensions in relations with others. Therefore, not only the imperfection of methods of influencing the convicts has its place in the significant percentage of lack of educational results in the environment of prison isolation, but also to a large degree in the deprivation of needs. Henryk Machel says: “One must agree, in the light of various experiments and studies, that prison was not, is not, and certainly will not be a universal institution to correct the many significant social errors that result in the production of criminals. It is a utopia to take the view that prison in any form will be a universal psycho-correctional tool, in the light of various studies and findings” (Machel 2003, p. 40). W. Ambrozik (2016,

p. 205), already quoted, points out that in an atmosphere of compelling coercion, it is not possible for the process of social rehabilitation, or repeated socialization, to take place simultaneously. M. Konopczyński gives four main reasons for the lack of success in social rehabilitation, indicating that “it is a mistake to apply an archaic form of institutional coercion in social rehabilitation centers, based on the bankrupt vision of behavioral rehabilitation involving the use of regulatory penalties and rewards (...); Secondly, the rehabilitation change is not caused by therapy, because both the criminal behavior and the causes are generally not based on disease. Their causes are shaped parameters of deviant identity, which cannot be “cured” in prison. (...). Thirdly, the very fact of sentencing to prison has no social rehabilitative values, so it does not produce positive changes. Rather the other way around. It causes a sense of frustration and rejection, rebellion and desperation, as well as a desire to retaliate once free again. (...). Fourthly and finally, the condemned leaving prison walls, even if he really wants to function positively among other people, has slim chances of it, as he often lacks postpenitentiary care and assistance (...)” (Konopczyński 2014, pp. 178–179).

### **... the wise guy in the wilderness of the prison sub-cultural community**

“Fear not, oh Brother, of the grey prison, because you’ll be coming out of it  
as a wise guy!”<sup>4</sup>

Human beings have an undoubted tendency and, in a way, a peculiar need to join together in specific groups or individual assemblies. This fact results from the social need for human functioning. As Aleksander Kamiński says, “man is a bio-socio-cultural being and that these three spheres of human personality are a mutually permeable unity, but are characterized by a distinct educational situation” (Kamiński 1975, p. 34). The author further claims that human social development means growing into social groups, as well as assuming or learning proper social roles within them (Kamiński 1975, p. 34). “In addition to a certain material resource, which forms the organic basis of social life and collective property, each group’s common interests include a more or less rich complex of spiritual values that constitute its spiritual culture” (Znaniecki 1973, p. 303). According to the authors, such an image is recorded in the natural environment, so what does happen in the prison reality? Currently, there are 74154 (as of 31.03.2020) temporarily arrested, convicted and punished persons

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<sup>4</sup> A poem by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

in Polish penitentiary units.<sup>5</sup> Prison and detention facility residents experience situations, moments and events different from natural conditions every day. The circumstances of staying in an incarceration space, i.e. a total institution (Goffman 1975, pp. 151–177), do not correlate with the freedom of living in a non-institutional environment, as mentioned above. Despite the significant differences between the two environments (prison and liberty), resounding and showing up in the mosaic of everyday life, inmates of prisons and detention centers do not give up and do not shy away from merging into specific groups, including those with a subcultural inclination. There are thematic groups and the so called statutory groups resulting from the penitentiary units' measures or therapies, but there are also informal groups, creating an environment with disapproval of the resocialization discourse, observed for many years in the incarnated space.

The history of subcultural prison life (see, among others, Braun 1975, pp. 40–44) is interesting and multifaceted. Informal stratification of prisoners took on heterogeneous colors, but also occurred and is still recorded and observed with different territorial and temporal intensity. The world is changing, so that after some time the prison adapts to the external conditions within certain limits, translating the libertarian trends and tendencies into its barred possibilities of mapping and sometimes reconstruction. In spite of the changes in the field of the “second life” in prison, it is impossible to exclude and deny the functioning of the convicts in a subcutaneous and under-the-table circulation. Such is the institution and such are the circumstances. Thus, it can be concluded that the subcultural groups filling in and outlining the irregular reality of the “choky” are a group of prisoners under the names of “canters”, “non-canters” and “fairies” (see, among others, Szaszkiewicz 1997; Przybyliński 2005). The traditional figure of the canter will not come back, because there is no need and no basis for the development of subcultural thought colored by the values of these convicts. Since today's prison offers far more than it used to offer when “valeting”<sup>6</sup> occurred, and the fight against what is missing and absent makes no sense, then “canting” takes on a different dimension. Prisoners look at each other and their possible relationships through the lens of financial potential and from behind the curtain of interest, as well as the connections from which they can gain something. In this context, it should be stressed that subcultural travesty is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. A subcultural atomization is taking place, showing a heterogeneous photograph, especially of the prisoners who “cant”, who have been shaping this nefarious incarcerated space in recent years. This does not change the fact that the contemporary arrangement of the prison climate does not overlook the small number of convicts under the name of “wise guys”. Small in the sense that it is

<sup>5</sup> Miesięczna Informacja Statystyczna za miesiąc marzec 2020 r. Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości, Centralny Zarząd Służby Więziennej, Warszawa 2020, p. 1, [www.sw.gov.pl/strona/statystyka--miesieczna](http://www.sw.gov.pl/strona/statystyka--miesieczna)

<sup>6</sup> To valet – “to be friends”. (Michalski, Morawski 1971, p. 37).



not fully recognized, so it is difficult to get accurate figures about it. It seems, however, that these are individuals rather than a wider group that resounds in the prison repertoire of subcultural events – “Our group is like a wave, sometimes approaching, sometimes distant”<sup>7</sup>

Prison is a place where thousands of people carrying the stigma of their former existence spend, as was already said earlier, every moment of their lives in unnatural spaces. It is a place where every day one should lead and initiate a weighty process that builds the perspective of tomorrow as something that can come true for the convicts. It is also a place where an incarcerated person creates their daily relations with their fellow prisoners, with whom they share their prison fate. One of them is the “wise guy”, belonging to a specific group of inmates, who are a penitentiary “curiosity” of sorts, and also included in the subcultural world of prison up until now. In spite of the relative reading and depiction of the “wise guy brothers” (see Przybyliński 2005, pp. 39–42; Przybyliński 2016, pp. 39–50), there is a constant lack of knowledge about them. The specific decoding and blurring of the “wise guy” environment was intensified by the correspondence that the Prison Service took over in one of Polish prisons. It says, among other things, that the name of the “wise guy” environment “came from when one of the canters called one of the wise guys (they were not called that at the time) a Wise Guy, so it has remained so until today that we have adopted the name Wise Guys, and people who fight with canters or whores like them are called Wise Guys” (Przybyliński 2005, p. 40). The message also contains information on where the cradle of the “wise guys” lies. Well, “The wise guy was born in Iława. It was created in such a way that a few thieves could no longer bear the actions of the canters who, by beating and humiliating and stealing, terrorized non-canting thieves, it was the canters who provoked the tough and ambitious thieves with a tough character and a healthy mind to form a team that started to rebel against the canters, and thus began to fight against them to this day” (Przybyliński 2005, p. 40). In the “Forum Penitencjarne” magazine, Grzegorz Brejtenbach reports on the conversation between a convicted “wise guy” and a convicted “canter”, writing as follows: “Where did you start? – That’s not important! Why did you start? – Because you have been terrorizing non-canting thieves through beating, humiliating and stealing. You canters provoked the fact that ambitious, hard-line, and healthy-minded thieves created a team that started to rebel against the canters and thus started to fight you” (Brejtenbach 2003, p. 23). The intercepted message also shows that “The wise guys fight for equality. In the slammer, we disallow any prison subcultures, especially canting, we disallow humiliation, or elevation of the weaker and less cunning” (Przybyliński 2005, p. 42). So, who is the “wise guy”? “The wise guy is an agile person with  
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<sup>7</sup> A poem by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

a rational way of thinking, who does not recognize any rules in prison, because they live the free life. They do not belong to any prison subculture, which means that they are people free from any situation that involves a prison subculture” (Przybyliński 2005, p. 40).

Functioning in an isolated area is not a customary situation, so every convicted person tries, in one moment of being or another, to somehow find a place for themselves in this unusual space. The “second life” is a product which, at the moment when the so-called first, official life is unacceptable and incompatible with the subjective system of valuing and perceiving the surrounding reality, is tempting, luring and arouses interest. The convicts get entangled in a diagonal, irregular dependence, hoping for a “better” future, satisfaction of their needs and the team strength of their mates behind them. “Wise guy” prisoners also make attempts to appear on the map of the subcultural image. Despite the above mentioned information that the “wise guy” is free from participation in the subcultural world, he actually creates the environment of the “second life”, describing where he comes from, with whom and why he fights, what his views are, and presenting a specific philosophy of life. They have an abbreviation that they use, that is, C.K. – “In every moment always and everywhere. May you be well in Z.K. May your group bestow upon you C.K. – the symbol you have been dreaming about”<sup>8</sup> – as well as the key symbol, which is the cobra, which often appear in the form of a tattoo. A cobra wearing a crown is a sign/symbol of the highest seriousness and rank. C.K. has, above all, a fairly extensive integrating space, characterized by its own commandments, sayings, sentences or poems. The example commandments are as follows: “Trust a wise guy man without selling him!; Seek friends among wise guy brothers!” (Przybyliński 2016, p. 46). The greatest enemy of the “wise guy” is a “canting” convict, with whom you have to fight and whom you have to dethrone. Some of the “wise guy” sentences, which they call poems, are as follows:

“When a canter runs your way don’t fucking say it’s bad luck hit him on the liver, make him die faster”.

“When you grow up, my son, make every canter suck your cock. And then burn the canter mama to make them whores cry”.

“The slammer is as malicious as a fly, and canter whores are as nasty as dogs. There’s my mattress, my blanket, my pillow, this is how my bed looks. There’s a table and a small cupboard, that’s the whole cell.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> A poem by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

<sup>9</sup> Poems by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

The “wise guys” and the “canters” are feuding, so some of the “wise guy” poems directly or indirectly refer to the “canters.” The background to the enmity may be that some of the “wise guys” are former representatives of the “canter” group, who were expelled from this environment.

The “wise guys” support each other, respect each other, and look at each other with respect. They are no stranger to honor and are hard and tough, as they declare.

“When you are in iron shackles and in a dark cell, chained to the wall. Don’t lower your head and beg, because you’re a wise guy, because a wise guy has honor, because a wise guy doesn’t cry”.

“Flowers are beautiful and smell good. But they are not permanent because they wither. And our group is tough and honest, may it go on until the end and not die.”<sup>10</sup>

They are committed to their environment and often declare their respect or a kind of love for their “wise guy” everyday life:

“I remember the moments when I started, the great change I experienced then, the huge mistakes I had made in my life, now I know I did well. I fell in love with C.K. – head over heels. C.K. – it overshadows everything, because it reciprocated my principles, and so far we are together”.

“What are the millions that you dream of, is a subculture that respects you not enough?”<sup>11</sup>

Although it is true that a person can adapt to almost any conditions, they are not a blank sheet of paper on which culture writes its text. Needs such as striving for happiness, harmony, love and freedom are in their nature. It is these needs that dynamize the historical process, and their unsatisfaction causes mental reactions that finally create conditions that fit the original desires” (Fromm 1996, p. 92), says Erich Fromm. The primitivized life in prison, in a sense and within certain limits, is manifested in some of the convicts as a longing for the world of freedom, that is, for illusions and life left behind the great wall. It sounds in the thoughts of the “wise guy” – “I’m like an animal locked in a cage, thinking about my daughter, freedom and mother!”<sup>12</sup> There is also an emotional element, not to say a love story, whose realization in a closed space is significantly distorted and makeshift. C.K.’s sayings (called poems by the “wise guys”) addressed to the beloved take on the vector of longing and nostalgia, i.e.:

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<sup>11</sup> Poems by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

<sup>12</sup> A poem by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

“I have only you and I love you sincerely, whoever takes you away from me will pay dearly!”

“You taught me the art of loving, you taught me how to live together. But don’t ever walk away from me, because I’m very scared of it!”

“I met so many girls who wanted my heart. But I kept it hidden for you, because I love you very much!”

“How much I would like to kiss you, and embrace you in my arms. And although day after day goes by, please, darling, wait!”

“When I hear your name, I want to cry. And I can’t forget, because without you I feel bad!”

“What a car is worth – when there is no petrol. What’s a Wise Guy worth – when he has no girlfriend!”

“How the fire burns, how the water pours – thus the wise guy heart is crazy about you!”<sup>13</sup>

The present is, however, different from that expected by many convicts, and thus perceiving the prose of an isolated life and a certain reflection on what is going on around them, the “wise guys” weave their prison-distorted thoughts. Thoughts with which every moment is filled and adorned. The present takes the form of what was yesterday, and tomorrow will most likely be what is today. The inducement in these conditions results in subsequent “wise guy” poems, i.e.:

“Here in Barczewo things are joyful, a crowd of wise guys moves in circles. Dudes are of the good sort, and everyone wears a tracksuit!”

“When a wise guy is in the slammer, he only sees walls, he will not see anything from here, apart from blue clouds!”

“Don’t worry, Wise Guy, and think positive, many stayed here and gone out. They survived this hell and lived in this toil. To see the outside not run away from it!”

“Why fate has crossed our paths? Now I’m C.K. – and I know that I chose well”.

“They put me here by force, They took away my freedom with violence, But in my memory stayed those That had recruited me to C.K. back then”.<sup>14</sup>

The meanders of the prison fate and existence make the “wise guy” relatively realistically compose his time in isolation – “They took away my beautiful

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freedom, they took my youth. Before me are Wise Guy soldiers and filthy prison scum.”<sup>15</sup>

### **...greetings from the “wise guy brothers” – a few final words**

“From the grey province surrounded by walls, I send you a landscape with greetings.  
A lot of happiness and joy from a C.K. deprived of his freedom!”<sup>16</sup>

The daily life of a “wise guy” is not uniform in terms of situation, because the circumstances of staying in a penitentiary institution are also varied. Already some time ago, the so called traditional face of the “second life” of the convicts was fatigated, who for various reasons started to create a different color of their subcultural existence. “Today, the prison subculture is, to a large extent, a subculture of money, where financial resources have dominated many of the traditional rules of conduct of “canting” inmates. Only a small number of prisoners follow the customary subcultural rules, as most of them underwent civilizational changes that set a new direction for the functioning of the non-formal trend in isolation. Money or drugs are the immanent elements of today’s penitentiary institution that prevail against the rules or norms of “second life” from years ago” (Krause, Przybyliński 2012, pp. 124–125). For decades, it has been wondered whether the phenomenon of “second life” could be neutralized, reduced or removed from prison life. Nowadays, in the era of transposition in the field of image and multidimensional functioning of convicts creating informal structures within the penitentiary institution, this question is still relevant. Of course, other realities accompany prison life today, but despite its considerable transformation, prison is not free from the subcultural dependencies observed within the “second life” phenomenon. Over the last decades, this phenomenon has been largely recognized and described in the professional literature (see, among others: Negatywne 1975; Kosewski 1985; Moczydłowski 1991; Materiały 1994; Machel 1995; Ciosek 1996; Szaszkiewicz 1997; Miszewski 2005; Przybyliński 2005). It was not only an inducement to fight against it, but also to prevent and predict the activity of inmates empowered in this current of activities and considerations. In fact, the arsenal of subcultural behaviors is no longer as much of an active interest today as it was a few or more years ago. There has been success in directing the prisoners, for whom often the so-called traditional form of assimilation of the planes of “second life” is even alien, to other courses of action.

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<sup>15</sup> A poem by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

<sup>16</sup> A poem by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author’s archives).

They are constructing their own, partly known and partly not yet completed illustration of the unofficial life. The prison knows no vacuum in this respect, since a kind of immanent feature of this type of institution is the creation of a parallel reality in which one can/must i.a. satisfy one's own emerging needs and desires, which cannot be fulfilled in the existing reality, and in the case of prison – in the official reality. It is difficult to speak of subcultural futurism, because this phenomenon in the prison environment is currently unable to acquire such features, nor is it the assumption and essence of the self-division of the convicts and giving their faces a certain outline and clarity. Undoubtedly, the subcultural life rolls on every day, modeling new paths, demarking the “second life” of the convicts. Is it justified in this field to claim that the “wise guys” are an incidental and sporadic phenomenon? It seems that in many incarceration spaces nobody has seen or maybe even heard of “wise guy brothers” for months or years, so it is a certain imagination for them. It cannot and should not be denied that here and there they are standing by a prison cell and have a certain but insignificant impact on the subcultural realities. They are, as stated above, a penitentiary ‘curiosity’, which is an outburst on the subcultural map of the Polish prison. Undoubtedly, they have their own facilities, which define and visualize them, i.e., duties, commandments and rules, or poems, which are supposed to integrate them theoretically and give a signal to other inmates that there are such people as the “wise guys”. The “wise guy”, i.e., an inmate who professes the following words, which should be considered the best exemplification of the “wise guy” disposition and approach to life:

“If you write, write the truth. If you speak, speak frankly. If you despise, despise wickedly. If you suffer, suffer persistently. If you're a wise guy, stay wise.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> A poem by the “wise guy” prisoners; the original spelling of the convict has been preserved (material from the convicted “wise guy” in the author's archives).

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