New Forms of Writing about Jews in Polish Fiction after 1986

Katarzyna Zechenter

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the consequences of the unexpected popularity of Jewish themes and characters in fiction written by non-Jewish Polish writers after 1986. I argue that this popularity resulted from a transformation of the monological presentation of Jewish characters into dialogical one, unprecedented in the history of Polish literature. These novels written by gentile writers employed Jewish characters within a context of dialogue, plurality and a new reading of the Holocaust, thereby suggesting a growing understanding of the voices of Polish Jews despite the 'unresolved conflict of clashing memories'.[1] They also ended the unspoken division in Polish fiction between texts written by Jewish and non-Jewish writers, with Jewish topics being usually the domain of Jewish writers. This article also seeks to explain why earlier attempts to import dialogism into narratives about Polish Jews, such as Henryk Grynberg's *Jewish War* (1965) failed and why the monologism that prevailed in Polish fiction could be overcome only through texts that presented Jewish characters within the traditional Polish milieu and cultural hierarchy, depicting them through references to 'Polish martyrdom', 'traditional Polish values' and in general, through presentation within the broader context of Polish martyrology, traditionally conducted in a single, dominant, Polish, voice.[2]

I argue that the emergence of multiple discourses in place of a single dominant discourse, the master narrative of 'Polish aid extended to helpless Jewish victims during the German occupation of Poland in 1939-1945', should be read not only as a direct response to the improved understanding of the Jewish role in Poland's past, but also, and more importantly, as the gradual recognition by the Poles of the ethical impact of the Holocaust on Poland and on the Other with whom dialogue was now seen as possible, even desirable. In other words, Polish fiction found itself in a situation of cultural dialogism which affected how Polish Jews were portrayed, Jewish characters having finally been recognized as partners in the 'hidden dialogue' between the Polish characters and an 'invisible speaker', the Other.[3] Poland was often presented as an anti-Semitic 'country without Jews', but the critical years 1986-1988 saw the rejection of the view that Polish culture was a culture (and country) without Jews; this constituted an indirect rejection of the previous monologism of Polish fiction. It is also important to stress here

I would like to thank Professor Bogdana Carpenter for her comments.

[1] Rachel Feldhay Brenner, 'Ideology and Its Ethics: Maria Dabrowska's Jewish (and Polish) Problem', *Slavic Review*, 2 (2011), 399; see also Robert Cherry and Annamaria Orla-Bukowska (eds), *Rethinking Poles and Jews: Troubled Past, Brighter Future* (Lanham, 2007); Joshua D. Zimmerman (ed.), *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Brunswick, 2003).

[2] The Polish martyrological narrative became dominant after 1945 although writers recorded various responses even before 1945 as seen in certain personal diaries written during the war, but not published until much later. Alina Brodzka-Wald, Dorota Krawczyńska, Jacek Leociak (eds), *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady* (Warsaw, 2000).

[3] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Theory and History of Literature 8, Caryl Emerson ed. (Minneapolis, 1984); 197.

that although Jewish suffering during the Holocaust was present in Polish literature,[4] it was only novels written after 1986 that began to incorporate Jewish suffering into the mainstream of Polish discourse, supporting the cultural situation since 1982, when 'Poland's public agenda accorded a prominent position to the Jew; Jewish culture, Jewish history, Judaism itself.'[5]

In its analysis of the situation where the monological representation of Jewish characters was being challenged to the point of its eventual rejection, this article is informed by Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. Bakhtin assigned various meanings to the term 'dialogue', but here the term will be used primarily in the context of the interaction of the ideas and multiple languages of social heteroglossia that novels published in 1986 and 1987 acknowledged for the first time since 1945, or since Jewish characters became at all distinguishable in Polish literature. Today it is clear that these changes reflected not only a maturing of the debate on the Polish-Jewish relationship and the Holocaust, but also the emergence of dialogism within Polish post-Communist culture in general. As one of the most influential Polish critics, Maria Janion, writes in her *Jewish Lectures*: 'Although we do not always realize it, the Holocaust informs the entire system of contemporary culture, all the questions and dilemmas of post-modernity.'[6] Henryk Grynberg goes so far as to claim that the Holocaust is *the* most important event in Polish and European history, if not the history of the world: 'there has been no more important event on Polish soil, or even in the history of humanity. The sooner Polish literature appreciates the fact, the better it will be for that literature and for Polish culture as well, because there has never been a more important event in the history of Europe and most probably in the history of civilization.'[7] Przemysław Czapliński stresses that this invites a postmodernist approach because 'it is on the side of difference not similarity, on the side of otherness not sameness, on the side of lack of purpose or multiplicity of purpose and against functionality.'[8] Thus I argue that the gradual realization of the meaning of the Holocaust within Polish culture, combined with the postmodernist rejection of hierarchy and cultural monologism in general, allowed the introduction of dialogism into Polish fiction, given the new appreciation of the Jewish space in Polish culture, because 'the life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from generation to another generation.'[9]

Furthermore, the rift between Polish literature written inside Communist Poland and that produced by émigrés had been slowly but surely eroded since 1976 as publishing houses appeared on the scene unaffected by the censorship well before its demise in 1989, when the voices of Polish émigré writers became readily accessible in their entirety and could thus become an intrinsic part of modern Polish dialogism. Although some of those voices were known earlier thanks to the efforts of underground publishing houses, in many cases awareness of them was only partial; the censorship did not allow certain

[4] Jewish suffering as documented by non-Jewish writers was mostly internalized in poetry. Irena Maciejewska, *Męczeństwo i zagłada Żydów w zapisach literatury polskiej* (Warsaw, 1988); Bożena Shallcross, *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture,* Bloomington, 2011)
[5] Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, 'Challenge to Respond: New Polish Novels about the Holocaust,' in *Bearing Witness to the Holocaust 1939-1989*, Alan L. Berger (ed.), (Lampeter, 1991); 274.
[6] Maria Janion, *Bohater, spisek, śmierć. Wykłady żydowskie* (Warsaw, 2009); 63.
[7] Henryk Grynberg, 'Holocaust w literaturze polskiej', *Prawda nieartystyczna* (West Berlin, 1984); 91.
[8] Przemysław Czapliński, 'Zagłada jako wyzwanie dla refleksji o literaturze', *Teksty* 5 (2004); 11.
[9] Bakhtin, *Problems,* 202.

works to be published, thus only limited circulation was possible and, with it, only limited appreciation, despite the fact that after 1983 'the sheer amount of clandestine publishing houses was astonishing.'[10] For instance, works by Stanisław Vincenz, who devoted many pages to the multiculturalism of eastern parts of pre-war Poland, were virtually non-existent in Communist Poland and his collection of essays *Jewish Themes* (London, 1977) became available in Poland only in 1993. Czesław Miłosz was also unknown in Communist Poland until he received Nobel Prize in 1980. Like many of his generation, and coming from eastern pre-war Poland, Miłosz believes that 'for the poet of the "other Europe" the events embraced by the name of the Holocaust are a reality, so close in time that he cannot hope to liberate himself from their remembrance',[11] yet a full understanding of Miłosz's reading of the role of the Holocaust and the sense of guilt best exemplified in his poem 'Campo di Fiori' (1943) was not a part of the master narrative until the late 1980s.

Open discussion of the Polish-Jewish past was impossible also because of a lack of knowledge of and research into it.[12] Only as late as 1983 did the Catholic monthly *Znak* publish an issue devoted to Judaism in Poland and abroad entitled *Jews in Poland and in the World,* the first thing of the kind in post-war Poland.[13] When, however, Emmanuel Ringelblum's *Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto* was published in the same year, the censors altered parts of the introduction and even the *Chronicle* itself.[14] And when in 1986 the émigré journal *Aneks* published a series of articles under the title 'Jews as a Polish Problem', they were not discussed in Poland. In short, at the time the Poles were still having to read between the lines, but because the Jewish past in Poland was still not seen as an important part of the country's cultural heritage there was not much to read on the subject anyway, although work on collective memory, what Iwona Irwin-Zarecka calls the 'Jewish memory project', had already begun.[15]

The period 1986-1989 brought a change in this situation within the larger trans-formation going on in Poland not least because of Jan Błoński's influential article 'The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto,' which was a sober analysis of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War. Błoński argued that Poles needed to consider their own 'faults and weaknesses. This is the moral revolution which is imperative when considering the Polish-Jewish past'.[16] His article is to be credited with launching the wider debate on the role of antisemitism in Poland although some scholars accord primacy to the later publication by Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbours*, in 2000.[17] Błoński's article also coincided with the start of the process whereby older narratives were rejected and new ones sought. Within that process, the discovery of a Jewish heritage that was not perhaps 'as exotic as the history of Babylon', as one critic claims, but unknown none the

[10] Irwin-Zarecka, 'Challenge to Respond', 15.
[11] Czesław Miłosz, Nobel Lecture, 8 Dec. 1980, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1980/milosz-lecture.html, [accessed Feb. 23, 2012].
[12] Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick, 1990); 2-4.
[13] *Katolicyzm - Judaizm. Żydzi w Polsce i świecie. Znak 339-340 (1983).*
[14] Jerzy Tomaszewski, 'Historiografia polska o Zagładzie', In: *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, 2 (2000); 163. Ringelblum's *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej* was published, though only in minute numbers, for the same reason.
[15] Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing,* 5.
[16] Jan Błoński, 'Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto,' *Tygodnik Powszechny,* 11 January 1987, 4.
[17] Pietrych, Krystyna, '(Post)pamięć Holocaustu – (meta)tekst a etyka. *Fabryka muchołapek* Andrzeja Barta a *Byłam sekretarką Rumkowskiego* Elżbiety Cherezińskiej', in *Inna literatura? Dwudziestolecie 1989-2009*, Z. Andres et al, vol. 1 (Rzeszów); 204.

less, became important.[18] The process began with the publication of four spectacularly popular works, the first being Andrzej Szczypiorski's *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman* (Paris 1986).[19] A year later, Pawel Huelle published his debut novel *Who Was David Weiser?*, which became an international bestseller, hailed by Błoński as the 'best novel of the decade' and awarded the prestigious Kościelski Prize.[20] In the same year, Tadeusz Konwicki, considered one of the greatest modern Polish fiction writers, published a love-story entitled *Bohin Manor*, recognized as 'Novel of the Month' by *The Economist* in July 1992 – the only Polish novel awarded such a distinction. I would argue that this process of preparing Polish fiction for dialogism appears, to some degree, completed with the publication of Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz's *Umschlagplatz* in 1988, in which parts of the text are presented within the context of a dialogue between a Pole and a Jew, the narrator himself intending to find out 'what does Umschlagplatz signify in Polish life and Polish spirituality'.[21] [22]

These novels constitute, then, the opening of a dialogue where, while it is still Poles speaking on behalf of the Other, they none the less reflect some of the voices and views of the Other without completely projecting their own voices over the Other's voice; thus a 'dialogic position' is created in which the independence of the other voice and its internal freedom is affirmed, providing a semblance of the situation in which 'for the author the hero is not "he" and not "I" but a fully valid "thou", that is, another and other autonomous "I"'.[23] This does not mean that these works written by gentile writers were able to present Jewish views in their entirety; rather it suggests that for the first time in the history of Polish literature Jewish voices and at least some of their grievances and points of view were being presented as valid, thus allowing for a situation where an informed discussion could take place. Now, fifteen years later, the term 'dialogue' is taken for granted as far as the Polish-Jewish context is concerned, despite the fact that the situation is still far from ideal.[24]

One could argue that the process of the diversification of Polish culture began in the late 1970s, notably during the times of the political opposition to the system that later created Solidarity in 1980, but was brutally interrupted by the imposition of martial law in December 1981, although the picture of just how the Jewish past was remembered, told or forgotten is truly a complex one.[25] In the 1970s, some historians, such as Marek Arczyński or Wiesław Bielak, were already working on Polish-Jewish history, but the emphasis was still on the aid given by the Poles to the Jews, since this was the essence of

---

[18] Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, 'A New Generation of Voices in Polish Holocaust Literature', *Prooftest*, 3 (1989); 273.

[19] Szczypiorski's novel has become one of the most popular texts in modern Polish literature. It was translated into 15 languages, including French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Norwegian, Finnish, Hungarian, Japanese, English and Hebrew.

[20] Jan Błoński, 'Czarna dziura lat 80-tych', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1 April 1990, 4-5.

[21] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, *Umschlagplatz* (New York, 1994); 8,129.

[22] Piotr Szewc published a novella *Annihilation* in 1987 that was set in a small town populated mostly by Jews. Although popular and later translated into several languages, the novella was not as influential as the texts discussed here and was thus omitted from this article's analysis.

[23] Bakhtin, *Problems,* 63.

[24] The proliferation of texts that make reference to the 'Polish-Jewish dialogue' or 'Polish-Jewish debates' confirm that the dialogue is essential to Polish-Jewish coexistence in the future. See Antony Polonsky, '*My Brother's Keeper?' Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust* (London, 1990)

[25] See: Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory.*

the master narrative.[26] It was also in the late 1970s that Polish Jews began to have a visible presence in Polish visual culture for the first time since 1968. The exceptionally popular 1979 exhibition entitled *A Self Portrait of the Poles*[27] included paintings of Polish Jews, such as the portraits of Abraham Stern or Leopold Kronenberg. A few other paintings also depicted Polish Jews, though neither the exhibition nor the catalogue did justice to the presence and influence of Polish Jewry in Polish history. Many of the paintings were re-shown ten years later in a larger exhibition by the same museum entitled *Jews–Poles*, with some critics already questioning the monological representation of Polish-Jewish history.[28]

More importantly, the late 1970s brought two important documentary texts that discussed the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising within the Polish master narrative of opposition, heroic struggle and heroic death; since Romanticism this had been the traditional domain of Polish mythology but now Poles and Jews were being placed together. These texts confronted for the first time the unspoken belief that Jewish death was not 'honourable' because it was not death in battle and so they afforded an indirect challenge to the stereotype of Jews as cowards who do not fight or who went 'like sheep to the slaughter'.[29] In 1977, Hanna Krall published an interview with Marek Edelman, the only surviving leader of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, entitled *Shielding the Flame.*[30] Not counting a short account of the struggle published by Edelman himself in 1945[31] and two scholarly, specialist works on the subject,[32] Krall's short book about the ghetto uprising was the first popular account of the events by an eyewitness and talked about the ghetto fighters in the most open, honest even ironic manner. The book presented Edelman's view on the fighters and their desire to die fighting and for a 'beautiful dying'.[33] It aroused widespread interest and praise, but also some anger among critics outside Poland because Edelman allegedly 'deheroized' the fighters while drawing attention to the way Poles perceived Jewish death during the Second World War as less respectable simply because it did not form a part of the national discourse of heroic struggle.[34]

Similarly, Kazimierz Moczarski's 1977 account of his ten months spent in the same death cell as Nazi criminal Jürgen Stroop, who was responsible for the annihilation

---

[26] Marek Arczyński, Wiesław Balcerak, *Kryptonim 'Żegota'. Z dziejów pomocy Żydom w Polsce 1939-1945* (Warsaw, 1979); Teresa Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942-1945* (Warsaw, 1982); this author had to contend with the official censorship. See Tomaszewski, 'Historiografia polska o Zagładzie', 161-62.

[27] *Polaków portret własny. Praca zbiorowa* (Kraków, 1979)

[28] Justyna Guze, '"Żydzi-Polacy"; na marginesie wystawy krakowskiej.' *Twórczość* 12 (1989); 115-19.

[29] Michael Barenbaum, 'Frequently Asked Questions on the Holocaust', *The Anti-Defamation League*, http://www.adl.org/uprising/faq.asp, [accessed 15 May 2012].

[30] Some parts of the interview were first published in Wrocław-based monthly *Odra* in 1976 'after the difficult battle with censorship conducted by Zbigniew Kubikowski, the editor-in-chief of *Odra*'; see Monika Adamczyk Garbowska, 'Hanna Krall', in S. Lilian Kremer (ed.): *Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work* (New York, 2003); vol.1, 708.

[31] Marek Edelman, *Getto walczy* (Warsaw,1945).

[32] Bernard Ber Mark, *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim* (1953) and *Walka i zagłada warszawskiego getta* (1959).

[33] Hanna Krall, *Zdą żyć przed Panem Bogiem (*Kraków, 1977*);* 78 and 22.

[34] According to Avraham Burg some of the criticism of Krall's book was political: 'the book was not translated into Hebrew; the Zionist censorship kept the book outside the national consciousness. He [Edelman – KZ] was not a Zionist! Poland was his motherland and he fulfilled his role as second-in-command on behalf of the non-Zionist Bund.'; 'Edelman's book was not translated into Hebrew until 2001, and Krall's book didn't find an Israeli publisher, even though it was published in many languages throughout the world. Zionist Israel did not tolerate divergence from its canon. In the last part of the twentieth century Edelman and his memoirs became a litmus test for the Zionist and post-Zionist attitude toward the Shoah.' In Avraham Burg, *The Holocaust Is Over; We Must Rise From Its Ashes* (New York, 2008); 102, 104.

of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, also rejected the narrative of the Jewish lack of military participation in the fight with the Nazis.[35] Moczarski had been an officer in the Home Army,[36] was imprisoned by the Communists, and spent eleven years in prison, four of them on death-row, eight months in the same cell as Stroop.[37] Moczarski wrote not only about the struggle, but also about Stroop's admiration for Jewish fighters, thus giving Polish Jews a firm place in the narrative of military heroism: 'The Jews surprised me and my officers, […] with their determination in battle. And believe me, as veterans of World War I and SS members, we knew what determination in battle was all about. The tenacity of your Warsaw Jews took us completely by surprise.'[38] Even more, Moczarski's account brought the Jewish and Polish struggle together within the narrative of heroism as in Stroop's opinion: 'Were I to tell the truth about the Ghetto fighting, I'd have to admit that the Jews and their Polish allies were heroes.'[39]

In general, however, late 1970s Poland went through a process of unification of opinions and social accord as opposition to Communism gradually consolidated and became more interested in political opposition than in challenging the traditional Polish discourse about Jews and Jewish suffering. After the political change of 1989, the growing interest in the Polish-Jewish past became more palatable, but the basis of this interest was still not challenged. The big shock came with the Jedwabne debate of 2000-04 followed by works of such as Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, who analysed antisemitism through its connections to the Catholic Church in Poland.[40] This had a major impact on the general awareness of the complexity of Polish-Jewish relations and shattered the master narrative whereby Poles only ever helped Jews; acknowledgement of the massacre of Jews by Poles in the village of Jedwabne was the nail in the coffin of the monological vision of the Polish-Jewish past.

The years immediately following 1945 saw the emergence of many works on the Holocaust, such as, to mention but a couple of examples, some short stories by gentile writers such as Zofia Nałkowska or Tadeusz Borowski. Various Polish Jewish writers published works based on first-hand experience, for example Leopold Buczkowski, Marek Edelman, Adolf Rudnicki and Julian Stryjkowski, not to mention some of the less well-known works by Stanisław Wygodzki, who was also a translator of Yiddish literature, or verse works by Erna Rosenstein, who was mainly a painter.[41] There were also multiple 'semi-belletristic personal narratives by the survivors of the concentration camps where the Holocaust was omnipresent', including Seweryna Szmaglewska's *Smoke over Birkenau* (1945) or Krystyna Żywulska's (Sonia Landau) *I Came Back* (1946).[42] In the early years, differences in how Polish and Jewish writers presented the

[35] Kazimierz Moczarski, *Rozmowy z katem* (Warsaw, 1977); the first part of the *Conversations* was published by the journal *Odra* in 1974.
[36] The Home Army (Armia Krajowa) was the largest resistance movement in Nazi-occupied Poland and most probably in all of occupied Europe loyal to the Polish Government in Exile. It was formed in February 1942 and its membership is estimated at around 400,000 members, although some have claimed it to be around 600,000. The most widely known AK operation was the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, although the Home Army also sabotaged German activities such as transports and fought various battles against the Germans. Norman Davies, *God's Playground: 1795 to the Present* (New York, 2005); 344.
[37] Stroop was already sentenced to death by U.S. Military Tribunal at Dachau but was still awaiting his trail in Poland.
[38] Kazimierz Moczarski, *Conversations with An Executioner,* ed. by M. Fitzpatrick (Englewood, 1981); 148.
[39] Moczarski, *Conversations with An Executioner*, 169.
[40] Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Legendy o krwi: antropologia przesadu* (Warsaw, 2008)
[41] Wygodzki was also the translator of works by Szalom Asz (1880-1957), for example *Opowiadania* (Warsaw, 1964).
[42] Henryk Grynberg, 'The Holocaust in Polish Literature', *Notre Dame English Journal*, 2 (1979); 125.

war were not easily visible; Polish writers such as Nałkowska and Borowski stressed the universality of suffering, as in Nałkowska's now familiar motto: 'People dealt this fate to people' although her short stories do bring the voices of the Jewish survivors, thus asserting some dialogism in this particular work. It is at this time that we also find the first acknowledgement of 'witness guilt', which has largely been overlooked by critics; it is to be found in, for instance, Borowski's story 'People Who Walked On', in which the narrator, himself a prisoner at Auschwitz, becomes a witness to Jews being walked towards the crematoria where they would meet their death within minutes. He simply says: 'I was calm, yet my body was rebelling,'[43] clearly suggesting that even a witness who is unable to do anything, bears the guilt of being a witness and remaining alive in such circumstances.[44] In the words of Maria Czapska in 1957, this created a bond between Poles and Jews because occupied Poland under the Nazis became the place of their premature death: 'The most terrible genocide in human history, the massacre of several million Jews in Poland, which was chosen by Hitler as the place of execution, the blood and ashes of those victims which have soaked Polish soil, constitute a bond which has fused Poland and the Jewish people, and from which it is not in our power to free ourselves.'[45] Witness-guilt is also present in other works, especially in verse, for instance in Miłosz's 'Campo di Fiori' of 1943[46] or in Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński's poems[47] from the same period. Still, some writers, were able to deal with even more difficult issues than witnessing such as of collaboration with Germans, for instance in Stanisław Rembek's novel, *The Condemnation of Franciszek Kłos* (*Wyrok na Franciszka Kłosa*) where the protagonist, a policemen working for the Germans, denounces Poles working for the underground and Jews in hiding but unable to live with fear and guilt, starts drinking heavily.[48]

The events of the time known synecdochically as 'March 1968' aggravated the situation. Although they were triggered earlier, in June 1967, when party officials from the Warsaw Pact countries decided to break off diplomatic relations with the state of Israel, the events of March 1968 itself, when huge student demonstrations were brutally suppressed by the Gomułka government, resulted in a 'wave of mass meetings in factories and "hate sessions" in administrative offices', but also in a new visibility of ordinary antisemitism.[49] Together with its anti-intellectual tenor, the Party's campaign was strongly antisemitic but then called 'anti-Zionist'.[50] The viciousness of the 'anti-

[43] Tadeusz Borowski, 'Ludzie, którzy szli,' In *Pożeganie z Maria i inne opowiadania* (Warsaw,1961); 125.
[44] The issue of witness-guilt in Polish fiction still calls for a deeper analysis, although some analyses of the concept of survivor-guilt in Polish literature written in Israel: Karolina Famulska-Ciesielska, *Polacy, Żydzi, Izraelczycy. Tożsamość w literaturze polskiej w Izraelu* (Toruń, 2008); 103-116.
[45] Maria Czapska, *Kultura* 6 (1957); 53.

[46] Miłosz calls himself 'a Jew of the New Testament' in the poem 'A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto' (1943) that was the starting point of Błoński's article in the *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 1987. *http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1980/milosz-poems-4-e.html* [accessed 10 July 2012]

[47] Baczyński's mother, Stefania, who was a zealous Catholic, came from an assimilated Jewish family: Józef Lewandowski, 'Wokół biografii Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego', In; *Szkło bolesne, obraz dni... Eseje nieprzedawnione*, (Upssala, 1991), http://www.jozeflewandowski.se/texter/Wokol_biografii_Baczynskiego.htm [accessed 10 July 2012]
[48] In 2000, Andrzej Wajda, made film based on Rembek's novel under the same title.
[49] Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours, Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park, 2005); 329.
[50] Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead. Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, 1997); 70-88.

Zionist' campaign eventually led to the emigration of more than 10,000 Polish Jews[51] and destroyed the joint participation of the Polish-Jewish intelligentsia in Polish cultural life that had been in some small measure resurrected after the war.[52] In short, 1968 had disastrous consequences for Poland, which 'lost a huge company of distinguished intellectuals and specialists [...]. And she lost a great deal of her good name, since it is difficult for people in the West to distinguish between state and nation.'[53] Ironically, it also set the stage for a new era because of the necessity to 'integrate into the national memory the image of the murdered Jew', as Michael Stainlauf has argued.[54]

What is important here, however, is the gradual establishment of a clear division between fiction written by ethnic Polish and that written by Polish-Jewish writers. Numerous writers of Jewish origin, both in Poland and abroad, began to write almost exclusively about the Jewish past and the Holocaust; they include Janina Bauman, Leopold Buczkowski, Wilhelm Dichter, Ida Fink, Anna Frajlich, Henryk Grynberg, Hanna Krall (after 1977), Leo Lipski, Kalman Segal, Julian Stryjkowski, Adolf Rudnicki, Bogdan Wojdowski, Stanisaw Wygodzki and Artur Sandauer (as writer, not critic) although some such as Krystyna Żywulska wrote some of the their works without mentioning their Jewishness.[55] With few exceptions, ethnic Polish prose writers (though not poets) adopted a position where Jewish issues were 'next to Polish issues' as in the case of Miron Białoszewski, whose *Memoirs of the Warsaw Uprising* includes the view prevailing among Poles during the 1944 uprising (but not only then) that, after the Jews, the Poles were next in line to be killed off.[56] The theme was older than that, though, and is to be found in works written immediately after the war: one thinks of, for example, the Jewish character in Borowski's *Farewell to Maria* who says: 'But I think that on the Aryan side there will be a ghetto as well. […] But there will be no way out of it.'[57]

The first and still the most notable attempt to break the monological approach to Polish-Jewish history was made by Henryk Grynberg in 1965, when he published his first novel *The Jewish War.* The novel is actually about the author's parents: the first part carries the subtitle *Father* and the second, *Mother*. The former ends with the death of his father, who was murdered not by Germans, which would have been typical in the context of the war, but a Polish peasant.[58] The second part deals with the author's mother's attempts to save herself and her son up to the moment of their liberation by Soviet

[51] Eisler Jerzy, *Marzec 1968. Geneza – przebieg – konsekwencje* (Warsaw, 1991); Grzegorz Berendt (ed.), *Społeczność żydowska w PRL przed kampanią antysemicką i po niej* (Warsaw, 2009); 120.
[52] Aleksander Gella, 'The Life and Death of the Old Polish Intelligentsia', *Slavic Review*, 1 (1971); 21-22. The 1968 anti-Semitic campaign was clearly visible in the press, though not in fiction, with the exception of two writers, Roman Bratny and Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, who were also Party *apparatchiks*. Bratny published a short-story 'David, son of Henry', where young Israelis were compared to Nazi soldiers: 'They became identical to their own oppressors': Roman Bratny, *Przesłuchanie Pana Boga. Opowiadania*, (Warsaw, 1969), 31; Dobrowolski published his equally antisemitic novel, *A Silly Situation*, which was ignored by the Polish press but fiercely attacked by the émigré press: see Józef Wróbel, *Tematy żydowskie w prozie polskiej 1939-1987* (Kraków, 1991); 147.
[53] Jan Jershina, 'Church, State and people', In S. Gomulka, A. Polonsky (eds), *Polish Paradoxes* (London, 1990); 89.
[54] Steinlauf, *Bondage,* 88.
[55] 'In her book Żywulska does not mention that she was Jewish' http://www.tchu.com.pl/wydawnictwo/zywulska/tchu_zywulska_esej.htm, [accessed 1 July 2012]
[56] Miron Białoszewski, *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* (Warszawa: PIW 1988); 76.
[57] Tadeusz Borowski, 'Pożegnanie z Marią', *in Pożegnanie z Maria i inne opowiadania* (Warsaw, 1961); 12. Tadeusz Borowski spent more than two years as a prisoner at Auschwitz and Dachau and later wrote short stories which delivered 'a disturbingly honest message'; see Bożena Shallcross, *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture* (Bloomington, 2011); 113.
[58] Henryk Grynberg, *The Jewish War and the Victory*, Trans. Celina Wieniewska (Evanston, 2001), 28.

soldiers.

Grynberg's open challenge to the Polish monological presentation of Polish-Jewish relations was immediately countered by the censors. In Grynberg's own words, 'the novel became a subject of controversy because it differed from the official prescriptions for depictions of the Nazi occupation and the fate of the Jews'[59] – it presented the Other's story of the Holocaust and rejected the official version of Poles only ever helping the Jews. The novel could not be reviewed. Eventually, one of the most influential writers of the times, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, did review it in *Życie Warszawy* on 1 May 1966. The review was distinctly positive in the sense that Iwaszkiewicz praised the book's wisdom and maturity while focusing exclusively on the positive aspects of Grynberg's story – the assistance afforded to Grynberg's mother by a Mr. Orliński, who later dies with his children during the Warsaw Uprising, or on the Poles who provided the so-called Aryan papers for Grynberg's family. There is, however, no mention of the fact that the narrator's father was killed by a Pole. In all fairness it has to be said that Iwaszkiewicz did write about 'thousands of concealments and vague hints', yet this in itself was only a hint of what the novel actually says. Although both state censorship and, most probably, self-censorship contributed to Iwaszkiewicz's failure to acknowledge the book's main thesis, I would argue that his review in fact only supported the monological presentation of Poland's past through its emphasis on Poles aiding the Jews during the Second World War and not allowing for any acknowledgement of the Other's story.[60]

Grynberg's actual challenge to the monological presentation of Poles as only helpful to the Jews during the war was in having introduced not just a different, but an opposite narrative. Grynberg's autobiographical novel contains a string of people to help his mother and him, many of them mentioned only in passing since Grynberg in not focused on those who helped.[61] His main point is that Jews like his father were victims of certain Poles too, not just of the Germans. In fact, Grynberg's novel barely even notices the Germans: they are hardly ever mentioned in the text as it shifts its focus onto the Polish peasant classs, which is uniformly presented as stupid, crude and anti-Semitic, even including those who help.

In 1965 it was impossible, within Poland, to present the voice of the Other because, as one Communist critic put it, 'the book is a lie and offends Polish society'.[62] It was easier for the Polish émigré press, which was under no such political pressure, thus in 1966 Grynberg received the prestigious Kościelski Prize and later, in 1976 in London, the *Wiadomości* Prize. After emigrating, Grynberg continued to write and publish, but it was only during the Solidarity period that his novels again began to appear inside Poland, if only in the underground press.

One key reason why Grynberg could not have been successful in 1965 was precisely because he was writing from the position of a Jew whose father was murdered by a Pole, not from that of a Jew whose mother was saved by a Pole. The reviews of his book written to the Party template clearly suggest why no such view could possibly be

[59] Grynberg, 'Author's Note', In *The Jewish War and The Victory*, vii.
[60] Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, 'Wojna żydowska', *Życie Warszawy*, 1-2 May 1966, 4.
[61] Grynberg, *The Jewish War*, 15. In general, help given by Poles to Jews during the German occupation needs more 'detailed research' including help described in autobiographical works such as Grynberg's: Marcin Urynowicz, 'Organised and Individual Help Provided by Poles to Jews Exterminated by the German Occupiers during World War II', in: *Inferno of Choices. Poles and the Holocaust*. S. Rejak, E. Frister (eds), (Warsaw, 2011); 308.
[62] Kazimierz Wojciechowski, 'Książka zła i kłamliwa,' *Głos nauczycielski* (18) 1968, 18, 4

accepted: he had simply 'defamed' the Polish nation by contradicting the monological discourse of Polish succour to the Jews. In Communist Polish fiction of the 1960s there was no dialogic relationship among voices as there could be only one dominant, official voice controlled by the state – other voices were not yet being developed or they were still too weak, as in Dostoevsky's observation: 'Reality in its entirety is not be exhausted by what is immediately at hand, for an overwhelming part of this reality is contained in the form of a still latent, unuttered future Word.'[63]

A change came with works written by non-Jewish writers who attempted to speak through the Polish narratives of suffering, sacrifice, heroism and struggle. For the first time, authors presented Jews as their protagonists reorienting the Polish world around them as they moved towards dialogism and an acknowledgement of Jewish narratives and opinions. In so doing they began to present views of the Other as being transformed, albeit slowly, into the Familiar. The process began with Szczypiorski's *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman* published it in 1986 in Paris; six weeks later the novel was published by an underground publishing house, *Przedświt*, in Poland.[64] The novel appears 'typical' in upholding the master narrative of Polish assistance to Jewish victims since it focuses on Polish efforts to save a Jewish woman who is hiding on Aryan papers. Irena Seidenman, comes from an assimilated Jewish family, feels Polish and in no way connected to her Jewishness. She is betrayed to the Germans by a Jewish blackmailer (*szmalcownik*), but is eventually rescued by a group of Poles and an old German who had lived in pre-war Poland, a socialist, who 'felt himself to be only a little bit German, and a little bit still a Pole', which the reader readily understood to be his redeeming feature.[65] Although the novel was much praised (with some notable exceptions)[66] and received the prestigious Kościelski Prize, I would maintain that its true importance lies not so much in Szczypiorski's traditional, even stereotypical depiction of the war that underpins the main narrative, as in his open acknowledgement of a Polish sense of guilt for 1968 – the first such admission in Polish fiction to give space to the opinion of the Other who had been effectively forced out of Poland.

When the novel was translated into German, its title was, as cited above, *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*,[67] which clearly exhibited the Jewishness of the main character. The original Polish title, however, *The Beginning*, implies a reading that suggests that the Poles should re-examine their own role in 1968 and that for a real beginning Polish-Jewish relations needed to be brought to the fore. To quote one critic: 'The approach of the Poles to the Jews constitutes the main theme of the novel and becomes the essence of humanity'.[68] Szczypiorski returned to this argument several times, since he believed that 'we became orphaned because a part of our body was thrown out, our Polish organism. Throughout the centuries, Polishness manifested itself as for the Jews or against the Jews, but always alongside them. And then suddenly, they

[63] See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoesvsky's Poetics*, 90.
[64] Helena Zaworska, 'Psychoterapia dla wszystkich. Rozmowa z Andrzejem Szczypiorskim', In: Ewa Jażdżewska-Golsteinowa: *'Początek' Andrzeja Szczypiorskiego*. Biblioteka Analiz Literackich 81 (Warsaw, 1995), 97.
[65] Andrzej Szczypiorski, *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*, Trans. K. Glowaczewska, (London, 1990), 111.
[66] Stanisław Barańczak, '*The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*' a review, *Harvard Book Review*, 15/16 (1990), 27-28; Madeline G. Levine, 'Nostalgia for Apocalypse: Andrzej Szczypiorski's *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*', In: Raymond A. Prier, Gerald Gillespie (eds), *Narrative Ironies*, (Amsterdam, 1997); 91-106.
[67] Jażdżewska-Golsteinowa, 71.
[68] Jażdżewska-Golsteinowa, 73.

disappeared, they suddenly were no more. Then the post-war years came and 1968'.[69]

Szczypiorski had been a soldier in the Polish underground army, he had fought in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 and survived Sachsenhausen concentration camp, so he was a competent witness to both the atrocities of war and the later events of 1968, and his fiction is a search for an answer to the question as to whether he and others had really done all they could to help the Jews despite being a 'silent and helpless victim'.[70] He argues that although the Germans almost succeeded in wiping out Polish Jewry, they had failed to humiliate them the way 'Poland' did when it forced them out of the country in 1968. Pawełek, who was instrumental in saving Mrs. Seidenman during the German occupation, meets her many years later in Paris where she now lives. He understands, just like Mrs. Seidenman, that 'it is after all not they [the Germans – KZ] who chased you out, but Poland'; as a Pole, Paweł feels guilty because of what Poland had done in 1968 despite the fact he himself bears no personal responsibility for what happened.[71]

In this respect, Szczypiorski's novel should be read as the first work in Polish fiction openly to admit collective Polish guilt of antisemitismin 1986, when the state-sponsored anti-Zionist campaign became an excuse for ordinary Poles to vent ordinary, individual antisemitismand prejudice. Szczypiorski argues that by having denied Jews who felt Polish their Polishness, the Poles succeeded in their ultimate humiliation and rejection:

> She would have understood then the banal truth that Stuckler had not humiliated her in the least […] because Stuckler had wanted only to kill her, whereas those others, who years later came to her office and would not let her take her briefcase with the documents, they took from her something more than life because they took away her right to be herself, the right to self-determination.[72]

Szczypiorski employed an omniscient narrator and his novel became dominated by commentary: 'rhetorical questions, conditional clauses, evaluative adjectives, expressions that valorize the reality presented'.[73] In this manner the narrator allows the characters no independence and could not be further from the concept of polyphony, understood as 'a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices'.[74] Yet precisely by adopting the position of the all-knowing narrator who is a Pole and not allowing his Jewish characters to speak outside their Polish-given framework of 'heroic Polish help in the face of death', he is able to convey an admission of Polish guilt for 1968 even after suggesting that it was the Communist government that orchestrated the anti-Semitic campaign. More importantly, Szczypiorski does not allow for any guilt on the part of Poles in the context of the war: his Polish characters are presented as in many ways exemplary.[75] They help Mrs Seidenman precisely because

---

[69] Andrzej Szczypiorski, *Początek raz jeszcze. Z Andrzejem Szczypiorskim rozmawia Tadeusz Kraśko* (Warsaw, 1992), 181.
[70] Szczypiorski, *Początek,* 181.
[71] Szczypiorski, *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*, 191.
[72] Szczypiorski, *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*, 192.
[73] Grażyna Moroszczuk, *Dyskurs i historie. O powieściach Andrzeja Szczypiorskiego* (Katowice, 2004); 82.
[74] Bakhtin, *Problems*, 6
[75] In her article Madelaine Levine reads this as a sign of their antidemitism: Madeline G. Levine, 'Nostalgia for Apocalypse: Andrzej Szczypiorski's *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*', In: Raymond A. Prier, Gerald Gillespie (eds), *Narrative Ironies*, (Amsterdam, 1997); 91-106.

some of them do not believe that she is Jewish, while others, like Pawełek, do so because they are in love with her. The few antisemitic Poles in the novel such as 'Beautiful Lolo', the *szmalcownik* or the unnamed man who walks towards a merry-go-round built by the Germans near the wall of the ghetto, laughing at the dying Jews,[76] carry no weight among the heroic Poles who are the focus of the novel. The negative Polish characters include Beautiful Lolo, who is a Polish extortionist but is badly beaten by another Polish criminal who turns out to be essentially an honest man despite his criminal record, thus affirming the idea of Polish help towards Jews in a manner typical of 'a monologic artistic world' with a single consciousness, in this case 'the spirit of the nation', the Polish nation.[77]

By not challenging what happened during the war, Szczypiorski can argue that Poland *is* responsible for antisemitism in 1968, but not for antisemitism during the war or even earlier.[78] And precisely because Szczypiorski's novel focuses on the heroism of those who saved Jews during the war, he can not only gloss over any antisemitism at that time, but also simply point up the universality of evil: 'It is God Himself who made people warriors. It has always been that way.'[79] And although the narrator allows Irena to speak about 1968 in her own voice, restricting his own narratorial role at that moment, and even allows Irena to defend 1968 as something done by Communists, not Poles, deep down she feels rejected by Poland and her feelings are shared by Pawełek (and the reader), who understands that 1968 was not just a Communist aberration, but a failure of Poland itself to act as home to Polish Jews, which comports with Błoński's thesis.

Another novel that allowed some space for future dialogism was Tadeusz Konwicki's *Bohin Manor*. This work discusses a largely forgotten issue of patriotism among some parts of Polish Jewry during the January uprising in 1863. The narrator presents himself as Tadeusz Konwicki, the contemporary Polish writer – a device used by Konwicki in many of his novels. This narrator dominates the narration as is the case with almost all of Konwicki's novels, and he constitutes a Jewish character with characteristics typical of the majority of Konwicki's protagonists: he is bold, even arrogant, always restless and obsessed with the freedom of his country, Poland, he falls in love quickly and consummates the relationship equally quickly, even against the will of the woman, and although not a religious man, he believes that it was pre-ordained, since he and the woman are 'fated for each other' because it's 'God's will'.[80]

Although *Bohin Manor* was the first Polish post-war novel to suggest blood ties between the two peoples, it was not Konwicki's first novel to bring a Jewish character to the forefront, otherwise a rare event in post-1945 Polish fiction written by gentile writers. In *The Polish Complex* (1976), which focuses on the continual Sovietisation of the Polish people, there are two interpolated short stories about the Uprising. One of them includes 'a Pole of the Jewish faith', Chaim Karnowski, who becomes Colonel Borowy's adjutant despite suffering from tuberculosis. In Konwicki's other novels, such as *Hole in the Sky*

---

[76] The image of the merry-go-around built by the Germans near the wall of the ghetto just before the uprising functions in Polish literature as the most potent symbol of Polish indifference towards Jewish suffering since Miłosz's 1943 poem 'Campo di Fiori', where the 'poet included in his fifth strophe two possible ways of reading the parallel that encompassed the future reader's indifference toward death and suffering of the Other, oblivion as well as transience'. See Bożena Shallcross, *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture* (Bloomington, 2011), 73.

[77] Bakhtin, *Problems*, 79-80 and 82.

[78] Levine, 'Nostalgia', 104-105.

[79] Szczypiorski, *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*, 174. See also: Helena Zaworska, *Wczoraj i dzisiaj* (Warsaw, 1992); 151-66.

[80] Tadeusz Konwicki, *The Bohin Manor*, trans. R. Lourie (New York, 1990); 167.

(1959), *A Dreambook for Our Time* (1963) or *Pulp* (1992), the Jewishness of some of the characters becomes important at least in part because the protagonist, in an act of solidarity with the Jews and their lot, actually identifies himself as a 'Jew'.[81]

Bohin Manor's real importance lies, however, in how it expands the concept of the 'inheritance of common blood' [*dziedzictwo krwi*], used by Poles at the turn of the nineteenth century in support of Poland's union with Lithuania.[82] In Konwicki's novels this concept is extended to embrace Jewishness as well: in another of Konwicki's novels, *The Polish Complex* (1976), Wanda is considered beautiful because in her veins 'flowed the blood of the Lechites and Lithuanians, Karaites and Tartars'.[83] In short, the absence of Jews in post-war Poland makes for a gaping hole, an amputation of a part of the Polish essence:[84]

> I gazed astounded at these pages […] and I thought about that world, great and splendid, majestic and romantic, funny and laughable, moving and tragic, the unforgettable and already forgotten world and universe of Polish Jews. A planet died. A globe incinerated by a cosmic disaster. A black hole. Antimatter. Oh, God, how did it happen? Anti-Semitism, philo-Semitism, Zionism, nationalism, converts and Hasids, hatred and rivalries, moments of solidarity and community, good days, bad days, humanity, inhumanity, all of it mixed and whirled together in one land, divided and united, two civilizations and two cultures. Then, suddenly, during the brief night of the occupation, something was amputated. […] Yes, a world great as human thought, deep as love, beautiful as longing has turned to ashes. That torments me. That will always torment me.[85]

In *Bohin Manor*, the complicated love affair between a Polish noblewoman and a Jew during Poland's struggle for independence represents Konwicki's attempt to bring Polish Jews into the mainstream of Polish fiction without focusing on the Holocaust, and so highlighting the Jewish presence in pre-Holocaust Poland within the context of the struggle for Polish independence, a parmount issue for Poles. Konwicki's novel is, then, a political parable played out within the framework of a 'manor house romance', a genre that usually favoures Polish characters although not always.[86] Konwicki's story concerns a certain Helena Konwicka, and a young Jew, Elisz Szyra, an insurgent of the 1863 uprising. The romance ends tragically when Helena's father, an ardent if rather strange patriot, murders Szyra for dishonouring his daughter – Helena Konwicka is pregnant by him. The real importance of the novel lies in the employment of two strategies that bring a new dimension to presenting the Other: firstly by presenting the love-hate relationship between Poles and Jews, and secondly by the author, Konwicki, openly admitting his

[81] Tadeusz Konwicki, *Dziura w niebie* (Warsaw, 1959); 175.
[82] Bogdan Czyżyk, 'Mit wspólnoty biologicznej w sporach polsko-litewskich na przełomie XIX i XX wieku', In A. Staniszewski and B. Tarnowska (eds): *Folkor i pogranicza* (Olsztyn, 1998); 173-87.
[83] Tadeusz Konwicki, *The Polish Complex*, trans. R. Lourie (Normal, 1998); 39.
[84] This view places Konwicki among other Polish writes of non-Jewish origin such as M. Białowszeski, M. Czapska, Z. Herbert, Cz. Miłosz, A. Szczypiorski, S. Vincenz, , J. Zagórski and others.
[85] Tadeusz Konwicki, *Moonrise, Moonset*, trans. R. Lourie (New York, 1987), 73.
[86] This style is perhaps best exemplified by the exceptionally popular novels of Maria Rodziewicz. It seems that Konwicki's novel did indeed revitalize the 'romans dworkowy' – the manor house romance. In 1997 Hanna Kowalewska published a romance, *This Year in Zawrocin*, and in 2005 Polish television began showing a highly popular soap opera, *Wilkowyje Ranch*, in which an American woman of Polish descent moves to a small village in Poland after her grandmother leaves her a manor house.

Jewishness in a novel presented as autobiographical by referring to the 'autobiographical pact'.[87] Although rare, there had previously been romances that presented love between Jewish and Polish characters such as Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's (1812-1887) *A Novel Without a Title*, (1855) or Teodor Tomasz Jeż's (1824-1915) *Charming* (1868); similar romances written by Jewish-Polish writers would not be known by Gentile readers though.[88] Konwicki, however, presents his novel as an autobiographical work based on facts: the narrator assures the reader that he is telling the story of his actual grandmother, Helena, who had a child out of wedlock.[89] Thus Konwicki is metaphorically identifying himself as Jewish, given that in the novel his grandfather is a Jew: 'my imagination brought me an image of my grandfather, who was a handsome young Jew from Oszmiana, Mejszagoła or Święciany. A young Jew, a travelling salesman, a learned Talmud scholar or a poet writing nostalgic poems in that horrible Yiddish vernacular.'[90]

For Polish readers it did not matter that one's Jewishness or Jewish identity had as much to do with the religious as with cultural, genealogical or even personal dimensions. From this rather simplistic point of view, the Konwicki of the novel is, as noted, a Jew because his grandfather was Jewish.[91] Secondly, by making himself a Jew Konwicki is presenting Jewishness as part of Polishness by rejecting the strategy of discrimination, so typical of nationalist discourse,[92] or at least the strategy of isolation and separateness between Poles and Jews so familiar to contemporary Polish readers, who would have grown up in a country where Jewish issues were rarely present in fiction. These two strategies as employed by the most popular Polish fiction writer, whose anti-Communist novels such as *The Polish Complex* and *A Minor Apocalypse* made him popular abroad as well as in Poland, suggest that although in *Bohin Manor* Konwicki presents Jews as the Other, that Other actually constitutes an integral part of Polish identity. Following the logic of the novel, the reader has to agree that now the author, Tadeusz Konwicki, is both the grandson of a Jew and a very Polish writer; he *is* a Jew who *is* unquestionably Polish and is fully accepted by other Poles as a Pole. At the same time, however, Szyra is evaluated from the Polish point of view only and by sole reference to the highest Polish virtues, whereby his Jewishness is to some degree overlooked; as Aleksander Hertz has remarked about Polish fiction in general, Jewish characters are often 'entirely subordinated to the Polish community'.[93] Yet, despite that, Konwicki brings back the forgotten image of the Other who is not only a Polish patriot but has fathered a Pole, the accent being here on the shared, if fraught past of the 'Polish-Jewish fraternization that had surfaced during the patriotic demonstrations of 1861.'[94]

---

[87] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, Paul J. Eakin (ed.) (Minneapolis, 1989); 3-30.

[88] Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Antony Polonsky, 'Polish-Jewish Literature. An Outline', In *A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, Junctures and disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries,* Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (eds.), vol. 1, (Amsterdam, Philadelphia, 2004); 437-438.

[89] In fact, Konwicki's grandmother did have a child out of wedlock: Tadeusz Konwicki, *Kalendarz i klepsydra* (Warsaw, 1976); 12-15.

[90] Konwicki, *Kalendarz i klepsydra*, (Warsaw, 1976), 14. [translation KZ]

[91] The strategy of 'Konwicki's Jewishness' has not been adequately addressed by the critics with the exception of Katarzyna Zechenter's 'The Other – The Polish Jew in the Borderlands' In *The Fiction of Tadeusz Konwicki: Coming to Terms with Post-War Polish History and Politics*, (Lampeter, 2007); 153-169.

[92] See G. Smitherman-Donaldson and T. A. van Dijk (eds): *Discourse and Discrimination*, (Detroit, 1988). Also: Michał Głowiński, *Skrzydła i pieta. Nowe szkice na tematy niemtologiczne* (Kraków, 2004).

[93] Aleksander Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, trans. R. Lourie, (Evanston 1988), 218.

[94] Stanisław Blejwas, 'Polish Positivism and the Jews', *Jewish Social Studies*, 1 (1984), 24.

Even the conclusion of the novel: 'Still, it all ended well, because, despite everything, *I* do exist and am among the living. But how can I be the upbeat ending to any story?' could be read as alluding ironically to his Jewishness, notwithstanding that self-irony is typical of Konwicki's style in general. And yet the positioning of the Other in the novel is reinforced by the fact that *Bohin Manor* is written in Konwicki's typical manner, with the main character – the Jew – acting as all Konwicki's Polish protagonists act: he is arrogant and yet insecure, passionate and tormented by his past, with a sense of his own superiority and yet shy, always feverish and searching, even when the sexual act is presented 'in terms of wandering' and search for the truth.[95] This lack of differentiation can be thus read in two ways: by presenting a Jew as a typical Pole Konwicki can be seen as appropriating Jewishness; on the other hand, this can be also read as an acceptance of Jewishness without assimilation because Szyra (like other Jewish characters in Konwicki's fiction) remains and sees himself as a Jew, and he is seen as such by others.

In his representation, the first such in Polish fiction, Konwicki goes much further than Adam Mickiewicz's famous *Pan Tadeusz*, where the respected old Jew, Jankiel, is asked to narrate Polish history through his music, but, though seen and presented as a 'Jew-Pole', he is not related to any Poles and thus his love for Poland lacks any physical dimension. In Konwicki's novel, Szyra is portrayed as someone who divides his identity between Polishness and Jewishness, preoccupied, as he is, with the Polish national cause – independence. This does not, however, yet suggest any kind of equality: it is Szyra's Jewishness that constitutes his Otherness, while his Polishness is barely accepted. Szyra's Otherness is further enhanced by his humble social status, an essential issue in all nineteenth-century European societies, despite which he is portrayed as Helena's equal because of his exalted patriotism and devotion to Polish causes, which once again constitutes a return to the tradition of Jews fighting alongside Poles; this is a tradition that goes back to Berek Joselewicz's 1794 involvement in the Kościuszko Uprising or Mickiewicz's Jewish legion from 1855, despite the fact that 'Jewish participation in the January Insurrection that can be documented was limited.'[96] Thus Konwicki is placing his unknown, hypothetical grandfather within the worthy tradition of 'patriotic Poles of Jewish faith', which crystallized in the 1860s as an extension of a broader current in the tradition of Polish literary Romanticism with its stress on togetherness.[97] *Bohin Manor* does not, therefore, give the Other a distinct voice: on the contrary, the Other speaks the same as all Konwicki's Polish characters. Yet Konwicki presents the forgotten narrative of Jewish patriotism in such a way that it cannot be omitted from the narrative of Poland's struggle for independence, for 'Konwicki has fabricated his genealogy so that the ethos of the Polish Jew can be grafted onto the ethnic family tree we share. It is a tree of hope and subjugation, struggle and downfall, sacrifice and suffering, love and hate'.[98]

The third novel published in 1987 was Paweł Huelle's debut novel, *Who Was David Weiser?* It revolves around the disappearance of a schoolboy, David Weiser, in Gdańsk during the hot summer of 1957. Weiser was an orphan and the reader does not learn how he survived the war. That summer in 1957 Weiser disappears; an official investigation reveals nothing and eventually leads to the narrator's conducting his own

[95] Katarzyna Zechenter, *The Fiction of Tadeusz Konwicki*, (Lampeter, 2007), 149.
[96] Blejwas, 'Polish Positivism', 25.
[97] Magdalena Opalski, 'Polish-Jewish Relations and the January Uprising: the Polish Perspective, *Polin. A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*, 1 (1986), 79.
[98] Stanisław Bereś, '*Bohin Manor*: Romance with Nothingness', *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 3 (1994), 195.

private investigation years after the boy's disappearance. Yet even that search leads nowhere and the reader and the narrator never learns who David Weiser really was or why he disappeared. The mystery surrounding Weiser and the possibility that he did not die and might yet come back suggests various readings: from Weiser's being a magician who can levitate to his being a modern messiah, not understood by his followers, who are, however, completely mesmerised by him.

What Huelle accomplishes in his book is not just a well written detective story, but a rendering of a Jew who in post-1945 Poland acts as a natural leader, is misunderstood and mocked, even abused, but whose Otherness is his major asset and is accepted as such: Weiser's very Otherness and the inability of the Polish boys to understand him is what makes him unique, powerful, enigmatic and fascinating to them. More importantly, Huelle succeeds in reversing the traditional perspective: the Other is actually not Weiser but the Polish boys, whose humiliation stems from their very inability to understand him: 'As soon as it had been said we felt our old antipathy towards him, fast growing into hatred, because he wasn't one of us, because he never joined in with us, and because of the expression in his slightly bulging eyes, which clearly implied that it was we who were the odd one out, not he.'[99] More importantly, however, Huelle's construction of Weiser results in his consciousness being completely inaccessible to the narrator both in 1957, when the story takes place, and in the late 1980s during the narrator's search for the 'truth'. As such it affords space to the Other's voice, which is not taken over by the narrator as in the case of Szczypiorski or Konwicki. In a polyphonic novel, according to Bakhtin, it is not essential how the 'hero appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself'.[100] It is Weiser's self-awareness that is of importance, and by emphasising the narrator's inability to understand the protagonist's self-awareness Huelle's narrator shifts the dominant governing principle from having a Jewish protagonist as an understandable and familiar fixture of the Polish landscape to emphasising our complete inability to understand him and his understanding of the world around him: 'for a long time these questions wouldn't let me sleep, and they went on troubling me long after the inquiry was over, for many years, even when I had become a completely different person.'[101] By this token, Huelle is the first Polish fiction writer to leave room for a Jewish protagonist's thoughts and who thus keeps him as a fully autonomous character. Even those around him do not understand him either: his consciousness remains inaccessible, but, even more importantly, the inability of others to understand Weiser and the events connected to him become the governing principle of the novel, continuously emphasised by the narrator right from the novel's very first sentence: 'To this day I still don't know how it all come about.'[102] Eventually, 'Weiser seemed to have become even more unfamiliar than he'd been for all those years at school, stranger than throughout the course of the holidays, ever since we'd struck up our rather special acquaintance'[103] and nothing is known of 'his inner life, to which no one, it seems was party'.[104] Thanks to this strategy, Huelle leaves room for 'the hero's final word on himself and on his world' opening up a space for a

[99] Paweł Huelle, *Who is Weiser David?*, trans. A. Lloyd-Jones, (London, 1995), 7.
[100] Bakhtin, *Problems*, 47.
[101] Huelle, *Who is Weiser David?*, 8.
[102] Huelle, *Who is Weiser David?*, 1.
[103] Huelle, *Who is Weiser David?*, 109.
[104] Huelle, *Who is Weiser David?,* 42.

new polyphony in Polish fiction.[105]

In this context, Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz's *Umschlagplatz* seems to be the first novel to allow unmediated Jewish voices into the text. On one level, this, Rymkiewicz's most influential text amounts to an investigation that enables him create a detailed map of Umschlagplatz, the place in occupied Warsaw from where the Germans sent more than 300,000 Jews to their death in 1943. *Umschlagplatz*, 'a hybrid blend of novel, confessional journal, meditative essay and record of investigative research'[106] represents two valid and equal viewpoints: Polish and Jewish. Large parts of the text that take place in 1987 are presented in the form of a dialogue between a Pole, the narrator Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, who presents himself as the book's author, and Hania, his Jewish wife. The Polish narrator writes from the point of view of a 'Christian',[107] but more importantly as a witness to the Holocaust: 'I was a witness, and nothing will ever change my nature now, because it was the most decisive thing in my life: I witnessed it.'[108] Hania is his assimilated Jewish wife[109] who feels that her husband does not understand her (or the Jews) at all,[110] that he is callous in his attempt to write about the Umschlagplatz[111] and even that there is something unbecoming in his interest in Jewish death. Although often presented as arguing with each other, the narrator and Hania are both preoccupied with not only on the concept of collective responsibility, but also, indeed mostly, with the contrast between Rymkiewicz's somewhat normal childhood during the German occupation and that of the Jewish children who were being murdered at the same time. The dialogues of the narrator and his sister, but also those between the narrator and Hania, could be thus read as an 'inter-individual zone of intense struggle among several individual consciousnesses'[112] within Rymkiewicz's attempt to find answers to the question: 'what does Umschlagplatz signify in Polish life and Polish spirituality, and what does it portend for posterity'?[113]

Unlike Dostoevsky, Rymkiewicz might not have been endowed with 'an extraordinary gift for hearing the dialogue of his epoch', yet *Umschlagplatz* does convey the dialogic relationship between Polish and Jewish voices in the late 1980s, notably within a conception in which the core narrative is destroyed and Polish shame is allowed to show ('how could we ever have behaved like that'[114]), where Jewish voices represent a valid viewpoint and are not undermined or drowned out by either the narrator or the storyline.[115] However, Rymkiewicz's novel conveys above all a desire to share in the fate of the Jews as a form of compensation for Polish wrongs when he says to the boy in a

[105] Bakhtin, *Problems*, 48.
[106] Madeline Levine, *Wrestling with Ghosts: Poles and Jews Today*. East European Studies Occasional Papers 36 (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 1998), 11.
[107] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, *The Final Station: Umschlagplatz*, trans. Nina Taylor (New York, 1994), 44
[108] Rymkiewicz, *The Final Station*, 42.
[109] 'I'm assimilated […] so I'm not a Jew. Anyone who is assimilated is by definition a Pole.' In Rymkiewicz, *The Final Station*, 75.
[110] Rymkiewicz, *The Final Station,* 105.
[111] Rymkiewicz, *The Final Station*, 105.
[112] Bakhtin, *Problems*, 89.
[113] Rymkiewicz, *The Final Station*, 8.
[114] Rymkiewicz, *The Final Station*, 75
[115] Iwona Irwin-Zalecka, *Challenge to Respond: New Polish Novels about the Holocaust*, 273-275.

peaked cap from the famous ghetto photo:[116] 'I've got a better idea. We'll both stand with our arms up'[117] at the same time confronting 'his private life story with public history and cultural memory of the Holocaust'.[118]

Although many critics have noticed and discussed the rising popularity of Jewish themes in Polish fiction since the mid-1980s, when 'a number of Poland's most respected writers have sought to represent pre-war Jewish life and the Jewish experience of the Holocaust in their fiction',[119] next to no effort has been expended on any systematic appraisal of fiction dealing with Jewish characters; this article has sought to remedy that omission. I have discussed the rising incidence of Jewish themes and characters as an attempt to import dialogism into the depiction of Jewish characters in Polish fiction written by non-Jewish writers as part of a larger process in which Jewish viewpoints have become a valid and equal counterweight to the main national Polish narrative within social heteroglossia. This has been a genuine innovation in Polish fiction since never before have so many non-Jewish writers devoted novels to Polish Jews and chosen Jewish characters as their protagonists; there were some exceptions in the positivists, who were, however, more interested in altering the Jewish voice rather than just reflecting it.[120]

The gradual process of rejection of a single narrative that began in 1965 came to fruition only after 1986, when Polish writers began to acknowledge the wrongs done, though without rejecting the entire master narrative about Polish suffering. This admission allowed the Other's narratives to become part of a changing Polish narrative (and to some degree a revision of Polish identity) that was now moving away from a narrative of the exclusivity of Polish martyrology. As long as the Polish and Jewish dimensions existed separately in Polish fiction, there was little hope for dialogism. But with novels that afforded a new space for Jewish voices alongside Polish voices, or novels written as a form of dialogue between Poles and Jews, dialogism understood as 'freedom for others' points of view to reveal themselves without any finalizing evaluation from the author' finally become possible.[121]

---

[116] The photo of a boy in a cap being rounded-up at gunpoint during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is the most iconic image of the destruction of the ghetto and was included in Stroop's *Report* on the destruction of the ghetto. http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/nazioccupation/boy.html, [accessed 2 July 2012].
[117] Rymkiewicz, *The Final Station*, 326.
[118] Joanna K. Stimmel, 'Holocaust Memory between Cosmopolitanism and Nation-Specificity: Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe* and Jaroslaw Rymkiewicz's *Umschlagplatz* ,*The German Quarterly*, 2 (2005), 156.

[119] Madeline G. Levine, *Wrestling with Ghosts: Poles and Jews Today*. East European Studies Occasional Papers 36, (Washington 1998), 11.
[120] Harold B. Segel, 'The Jew in Polish and Russian Literatures', *The Sarmatian Review,* 1(2002), *http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/102/221sege.html, [accessed 5 June 2012]*
[121] Bakhtin, *Problems*, 67.