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KRZYSZTOF BACZYŃSKI'S POETRY**

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DARK LOVE: POLISH IDENTITY AND THE HOLOCAUST IN KRZYSZTOF  
BACZYŃSKI'S POETRY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

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Date Approved:

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Dolores Augustine

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## ABSTRACT

### DARK LOVE: POLISH IDENTITY AND THE HOLOCAUST IN KRZYSZTOF BACZYŃSKI'S POETRY

Anna Michalik

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, nom de plume “Jan Bugaj” (22 January 1921, Warsaw – 4 August 1944, Warsaw) was a Polish poet. In his short life Baczyński, who was killed at the age of 23 during the first days of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, had proven to be an individual of great talent and poetic maturity. After the war, the legend of Baczyński steadily grew. Today, he is recognized in Poland to be the greatest poet of the war generation. In the case of Baczyński, however, it needs to be acknowledged that many elements of his life have been manipulated by Poland's post-war Communist regime as well as by nationalist circles, and a falsified image of Baczyński remains in Poland today.

Through a careful examination of archival documents, including Baczyński's poems, letters, and illustrations as well as personal recollections of the poet's family and friends, this dissertation aims to provide a more authentic portrait of Baczyński than is now available, free of Communist and nationalistic framing of his life and work. In particular, this dissertation focuses on elements of the poet's life and work that have previously escaped attention and proves many of the prevailing views on Baczyński to be based on superficial or even false criteria.

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## INTRODUCTION

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, nom de plume “Jan Bugaj” (22 January 1921, Warsaw – 4 August 1944, Warsaw), was a Polish poet, considered by many a hero in his fight against Nazi occupier. This image and his own self-image will be examined in his thesis. Baczyński, whose family was of the intelligentsia, wrote his first poems as a student of the elite Stefan Batory Gymnasium in Warsaw, which he graduated from in May of 1939. During the Nazi occupation, he was connected with the left-wing literary journal *Droga* (The Way). In 1943 he joined the “Zośka” battalion of the famed Gray Ranks of the Polish Home Army, and in the spring of 1944 graduated from the underground reserve cadet school *Agrykola*. He participated in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and was killed in the first days of fighting.

Baczyński matured fully during the war, which became the theme of most of his poems. In the autumn of 1942, Baczyński’s first volume of poetry *Wiersze Wybrane* (Selected Poems) was published in a mimeographed edition of 100 copies by the underground press. The second volume *Akrusz Poetycki* (The Poetic Sheet) was published one year later. A collection of his previously unprinted poems was published in 1962 as *Utwory Zebrane* (Collected Works). In the course of time, Baczyński was recognized as the most renowned poet of the so-called *Generacja Kolumbów* (Generation of Columbuses), the generation of Poles whose adolescence was influenced by the experiences of World War II and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. His great talent, reminiscent of Słowacki’s, and death in the uprising prompted the historian of literature Stanisław Pigoń (1885-1968) to state: “Poles belong to a nation, whose fate is to shoot at

the enemy with diamonds.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, Polish self-understanding is as a nation rooted in ideas in literature, even when the political and military bases for nationhood are not present.

### **Aims and Arguments**

As a result of Communist Poland’s repressive social, historical and cultural politics, two conflicting, but equally distorted, images of Baczyński emerged in the Communist period. On the one hand, in the official – that is to say, state mandated – publications, Baczyński exists as a Home Army soldier, but a leftist one, sympathetic to Communism, and even as a likely supporter of Stalinism. On the other hand, in the former Home Army circles and anti-Communist opposition groups, Baczyński was granted the role of Poland’s leading national – that is, ethnically Polish and inherently Catholic – poet-soldier, whose patriotic poems and soldier’s death fulfilled the Mickiewiczian legend of the poet-soldier uniting word and deed. The latter image carried over to post-Communist Poland and to this day remains unchallenged. The aim of this dissertation therefore is to provide a more balanced portrait of Baczyński than is now available, free of Communist and nationalistic framing of his life and work. In particular, this dissertation will focus on elements of the poet’s life and work that have previously escaped attention and will prove many of the prevailing views on Baczyński to be based on superficial or even false criteria.

Most notable is the treatment of Baczyński exclusively as *Polak-Katolik* (Pole-Catholic) and the (more or less) conscious omission of his Jewish roots. Certainly, Baczyński was a Pole, considered himself a Pole, and expressed this with his poetry and participating in the resistance. However, as this dissertation will show, he was not a Pole

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Wiesław Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć Krzysztofa Kamila* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Kraków, 2014), 205.

in the narrow *Polak-Katolik* sense of the word. “How in the world did he become a symbol of the ethno-nationalist *Polak-Katolik* (Pole-Catholic)? I am angered by this appropriation of him by the nationalist circles. He was not a Catholic at all! And he hated the Endeks,” attested Konstanty Jeleński (1922-1987), a good school friend of the poet.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Baczyński despised narrow definitions of Polishness; his was based on the civic, republican ideas of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1791).

Moreover, according to the racial policy of Nazi Germany, Baczyński was not a member of Polish, but rather of the Jewish nation, inheriting his Jewishness from his mother born to a Polonized Jewish family. As such, from the beginning of the German occupation of Poland (1939-1945), he was marked for death by the Nazis. Thus, even if he did not want to, Baczyński was forced by history to acknowledge his Jewish roots. Yet, remarkably, Polish history teachers, as well as Baczyński’s biographers, commentators, and literary critics, including the renowned Kazimierz Wyka, the author of an important monograph on Baczyński (*Krzysztof Baczyński, 1921-1944*, 1961), either entirely omit or barely mention this vital element of the poet’s identity, simply because it does not fit into Poland’s nationalistic framework.

Furthermore, a reader of existing literature on Baczyński will, almost certainly, deduce that the poet remained unaffected by the events of the Holocaust, as if the destruction of Polish Jewry was not taking place in front of his very eyes. This, of course, is nonsense. Unbeknownst to those unaware of his Jewish ancestry, though Baczyński managed to survive the Nazi slaughter on the “Aryan side” of Warsaw, many of those closest to him were locked inside the walls of the Warsaw Ghetto. The family of

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<sup>2</sup> Konstanty Jeleński cited in Wiesław Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć Krzysztofa Kamila* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Kraków, 2014), 42.

professor Adam Zieleńczyk (1880-1943), Baczyński's maternal uncle, also decided to stay on the "Aryan side" with "Aryan papers." In July 1943, Zieleńczyk, along with his wife, two daughters, and ninety other individuals, was executed as a Jew in the ruins of the ghetto. In September 1943, Jerzy Kamil Weintraub (1916-1943), a Polish poet of Jewish descent, translator of Rilke and Baczyński's close friend, died from sepsis while in hiding in Warsaw's Old Town. And in May 1944, Ryś Bychowski (1922-1944), a Polish-Jewish refugee to the United States and then to Great Britain and Baczyński's best school friend, was killed while serving with the Royal Air Force.

This dissertation will show that Baczyński was not only well aware of his link with the condemned, but also wrote from deepest despair poems depicting the fate of Polish Jews. Certainly, Baczyński could not write openly about the fate of Polish Jewry without endangering himself and his loved ones. It is, then, not surprising that the Jewish problem in an explicitly named form appears only once in Baczyński's works, in the poem *Do Pana Józefa w dniu imienin 1942 roku* (To Mr. Józef on his name day, 1942). Nevertheless, almost from the outset of the occupation, Baczyński wrote poems – imbued with a sea of metaphors, allusions, symbols, and with scrupulously recorded dates suggesting a specific historical context – which speak of the events of the Holocaust. Most remarkable are his "laments" written in the spring and summer of 1942 as a direct response to the deportation of some three hundred thousand Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to the killing center at Treblinka. *O Wolność* (For Freedom, IV 1943), *Wiatr* (The Wind, IV 1943), *Dzieło Dla Rąk* (Creation For The Hands, V 1943), and *Zwycięzcy* (The Victors, V 1943) all allude to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. "*Byłeś jak wielkie stare drzewo...* (Like a grand old tree you were) written in the first days of the uprising speaks

directly of the Jewish nation, its destruction, and future rebirth. And in *Ciemna Miłość* (Dark Love, V 1943), Baczyński evokes the image of “pathetic people,” Poles who spent their time riding the infamous carousel at the Krasieński Park while across a wall Jews were burning. Relatively unknown in Poland and abroad, the poems included in this dissertation – the only poems (within wartime Polish poetry) directly reacting to the annihilation of Polish Jews – are missing from the canon of Holocaust literature. This dissertation, then, will attempt to also fill this gap.

### **Historiography**

This dissertation engages in two historiographies that run through the dissertation as a whole. The first is a scholarly discussion of Polish national discourse and memory culture in Communist and post-Communist Poland. The term nationalism is very difficult to define clearly and unequivocally. However, it generally encompasses two phenomena: 1) the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their identity as members of that nation, and 2) the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve (or sustain) self-determination. The first phenomenon raises questions about the concept of a nation (or national identity), and precisely whether an individual’s membership in a nation should be regarded as voluntary or non-voluntary.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the great task of nationalists has always been to define what they mean by a given “nation.” For thinkers of the united western proto-nations of France, England, and Spain, the “nation” was relatively unproblematic. The centuries long history as united proto-nations led to the development of civic nationhood built around a shared citizenship within the state. For German and Eastern European thinkers, however, the situation was

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<sup>3</sup> *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, summer 2018 ed., s.v. “Nationalism.”

much less clear. The existence of multi-ethnic empires made ethnicity appear to many to be the best basis for inclusion in nation-states. This, however, generated hostility towards ethnic minorities in the new nation-states.<sup>4</sup> Ethnic nationalism such as that of Roman Dmowski was in fact rooted in the ideas of the 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, who in his *Materials for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784) first laid the intellectual foundations for the claims that the nation was all.<sup>5</sup>

Building on research by Brian Porter, Geneviève Zubrzycki, Timothy Snyder, Keely Stauter-Halsted and Andrzej Walicki, to name but a few, I will discuss Baczyński's life and work in light of modern Polish nationalism, formulated by Roman Dmowski's *Endecja* (Endek) or National Democratic movement at the turn of the twentieth century. According to this version of nationalism, membership in the Polish nation is defined by ethnicity and religion rather than by ties of history or citizenship. Although the Endek intellectuals gained a reputation for chauvinism, anti-Semitism, and intolerance, they quickly came to dominate Polish nationalist discourse. Particularly useful in the study of modern Polish nationalism are Stauter-Halsted's *The Nation in the Village*, which explains Polish nationalists use of anti-Semitism to forge a sense of shared national feeling between Polish speaking-gentry and peasants, and Joanna Michlic's

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<sup>4</sup> Istvan Deak, "Uncovering Eastern Europe's Dark History," *Orbis* Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter 1989): 51-65; Peter Sugar, *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, Md.: American University Press, 1995); John Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1983); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1983); Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1971); Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

*Poland's Threatening Other*, which analyzes the role of the concept of the Jew as the threatening other in the development of modern Polish national identity, based on exclusivist ethnic nationalism.

Furthermore, when discussing the question of Polish nationalism, one has to acknowledge the pivotal role of Polish Romanticism in the development of Polish national sentiments. Stanisław Eile's *Literature and Nationalism in Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918* explains how the Romantic notions of martyrdom, heroism and moral superiority over others became core elements of Polish national discourse. These notions, Eile argues, have given the Poles self-assurance and a feeling of greatness, particularly active during the Second World War and the Soviet domination afterwards. In her study *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics: Russia, Poland, and the West*, Clare Cavanagh emphasizes the fact that since Romanticism, poetry had been intrinsically linked to the political life of the Polish nation. "The poet", states Miłosz in his *History of Polish Literature* "was hailed as a charismatic leader, the incarnation of the collective strivings of the peoples; thus, his biography, not only his work, entered the legend."<sup>6</sup> The poetry and drama of Polish Romanticism created a powerful image of Poland that died (i.e., lost its sovereignty), but would be reborn thanks to the suffering of Poles and would then redeem the entire world. The three Polish Romantic poets, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, and Zygmunt Krasiński were acclaimed national bards, and the notion of national messianism present in their works became a core element of Polish national discourse.

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<sup>6</sup> Czesław, Miłosz, *Historia literatury Polskiej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2016), 203.

Romanticism carried over to twentieth-century Polish poetry. In his essay “Polish Twentieth-Century Poetry,” included in the monumental volume *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture Since 1918*, Piotr Śliwinski notes that Romanticism “speaks more forcefully whenever historicism – that is, the understanding and experience of history as a living force, one that determines both individual and collective fates and that necessitates the effort of defining both individual and collective identities – intensifies.”<sup>7</sup> While Romanticism receded into the background during the interwar years, it returned during the German and Soviet occupation of Poland. The poets who debuted around the time of Nazi occupation, such as Tadeusz Gajcy, Zdzisław Stroiński, and Andrzej Trzebiński stressed the redeeming value of selflessly sacrificing one’s life for the Polish nation. Although Baczyński, too, turned to Polish Romanticism, his poetry was free of the most important, some would say pernicious of the myths (that of redemptive martyrdom) found in the poetry of his colleagues. The individual human being is the source of all values in Baczyński’s poetry, and no myth, ideal, or collective has the right to strip the individual of its conscience and the right to doubt. As this dissertation will show, not a belief in the sacrificial fight for the nation, but solidarity with those suffering (Jews and Poles) motivated Baczyński to join the Polish resistance.

Since the 1989 collapse of Communism, Poland has been struggling to come to terms with its twentieth-century past. Zubrzycki’s “History and the National Sensorium: Making Sense of Polish Mythology,” argues that the post-Communist period was viewed as the latest phase of Poland’s struggle for freedom: It was characterized not merely by

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<sup>7</sup> Piotr Śliwiński, “Polish Twentieth-Century Poetry,” in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture Since 1918*, ed. Tamara Trojanowska (Toronto: London University of Toronto Press, 2019), 444.



political and economic transitions, but primarily by the construction of a national state, a state *of and for* Poles. In *Post-Communist Poland: Contested Pasts and Future Identities*, Ewa Ochman explores the reinterpretations of Poland's past which have been undertaken by Poland's elites since the fall of Communism. Ochman argues that Poland's dominant vision of national Polish identity, historically centered on martyrdom, heroism and independence, will become less relevant to Poland's aspirations for the future. Ochman's argument (stated in 2013), however, does not seem probable as the dominant vision of national history plays a key role in Polish domestic and foreign politics. In "Jews in Museum: Narratives of Nation and 'Jewishness' in Post-Communist Polish and Hungarian Public Memory," Anna Manchin asserts that the narrative of heroic Polish resistance to Nazi and Soviet invasions has come to dominate post-Communist Polish public memory, and has been incorporated into the martyrological myth. The history of the Polish underground, the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, and the number of Christian Poles murdered by the Nazis and the Soviets all helped support such an interpretation.

Jan Błoński's essay "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto" published in 1989 is one of the most significant texts concerning Polish-Jewish relations during WWII. Inspired by Czesław Miłosz's poems "Campo di Fiori," and "Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto," Błoński's essay argues that Poland must work on its national memory to admit its failures and wrongdoing (without discounting its good deeds) in order to achieve the peace of conscience. Central to this was the 2001 publication of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors*, which describes how ethnic Poles murdered their Jewish neighbors in a small town of Jedwabne in the summer of 1941. Although the book shook Polish national identity at its core and generated the much-needed public debates about Polish involvement in the Holocaust, a

general consensus was not reached, and this discussion was followed by a counter-wave of renewed heroization of the Polish nation (in particular after *PiS* ascended to power in 2005). Sławomir Kaprański's "Jews and the Holocaust in Poland's Memoryscapes: An Inquiry into Transcultural Amnesia," argues that in post-Communist Poland Jews were commemorated by the authorities, but not remembered by the populace. Such lack of remembrance, Kaprański argues, can be understood as a mechanism protecting Polish collective identity. Remembrance of Poles' shameful behaviors during the Holocaust (in addition to the many righteous ones) would subvert some of the most important features of Polish collective identity. Jan Wróbel's "Double Memory: Poles and Jews after the Holocaust," and Michael Steinlauf's *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* are also important additions to the literature.

The second body of literature relevant to this dissertation as a whole consists of studies, mostly in Polish, on Baczyński's life and work. The strength of this, quite limited literature lies in the literary analysis of Baczyński's poetry, although it fails to put his work into a bio-historical context. These include Stanisław Stabro's *Chwila bez imienia: o poezji Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego* (A Moment Without Name: The Poetry of Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński), Zbigniew Lisowski's *Tragizm wojny i okupacji w poezji Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego, Tadeusza Różewicza i Zbigniewa Herberta* (The Tragedy of War and Occupation in the Poetry of Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, Tadeusz Różewicz and Zbigniew Herbert), and Janusz Dętka's *Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: twórczość, legenda, recepcja* (Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: oeuvre, legend, reception). Katarzyna Beliniak's *Poeta Tragiczny* (The Tragic Poet), Andrzej Waśkiewicz's *Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński i poezja pokolenia wojennego* (Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and

the poetry of the war generation), and Jan Marx's *Dwudziestoletni Poeci Warszawy: Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, Tadeusz Gajcy, Juliusz Krzyżewski, Zdzisław Stroiński, Andrzej Trzebiński i Wacław Bojarski* (Twenty-year-old Poets of Warsaw: Baczyński, Gajcy, Krzyżewski, Trzebiński and Bojarski) all present Baczyński within Poland's nationalistic framework.

There is no thorough biography of Baczyński, which is a major gap. Budzyński's *Miłość I Śmierć Krzysztofa Kamila* (*Love and Death of Krzysztof Kamil*), the only biography of Baczyński, written for the wider Polish audience, offers an insight into the life of the poet, but does not offer a complex analysis of the poet's life. Written in the traditionally accepted way, the biographies incline the readers to view Baczyński within the trope of martyrdom and associate his poetry with the literary tradition of Polish Romanticism. Baczyński's Jewish identity is mentioned only sporadically. Nevertheless, *Love and Death* as well as Budzyński's other studies on Baczyński – *Testament Krzysztofa Kamila* (*The Testament of Krzysztof Kamil*), *Dom Baczyńskiego* (*The Home of Baczyński*), *Taniec z Baczyńskim* (*A Dance with Baczyński*), *Warszawa Baczyńskiego* (*Baczyński's Warsaw*), and *Śladami Baczyńskiego* (*In Baczyński's Footsteps*) – are important secondary sources. Wyka's outdated monograph (*Krzysztof Baczyński: 1921-1944*) and Wasilewski's collection of memories (*Żołnierz, poeta, czasu kurz*) remain the canonical works on Baczyński. Written during Communism, both works present Baczyński as a leftist, even Communist, Home Army Soldier, and do not mention the poet's origins or his reaction to the Jewish Holocaust.

Significant is the historian Józef Lewandowski's (1923-2007) essay *Wokół Biografii Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego* (*Around the Biography of Krzysztof Kamil*

Baczyński) published in Sweden in 1991. Lewandowski broke the silence about Baczyński's Jewish roots, reminded readers that Stefania Baczyńska, the poet's mother, came from a Jewish family, and pointed to Baczyński's poems – *Pokolenie* (Generation), *Byłeś jak wielkie stare drzewo* (Like A Grand Old Tree You Were), and *Do Pana Józefa w Dniu Imienin* (To Mr. Józef On His Name Day) – in which echoes of the Holocaust resound. Natan Gorss's *Poeci i Szoa* (Poets and the Shoah), and Irena Maciejewska's *Męczeństwo i zagłada Żydów w zapisach literatury polskiej* (Martyrdom and the extermination of Jews in Polish literature) all demand a look at Baczyński's poetry from the perspective of the Holocaust, but they do not themselves undertake the analysis. Finally, Joanna Rostropowicz's "Wódz powstańców: poeta-bohater" (Leader of insurgents: the poet-hero), examines Baczyński's several poems in the context of the Holocaust and Tomasz Żukowski's article "Kręgiem ostrym rozdarty na pół" offers a compelling analysis of Baczyński's poem *Wybór* (The Choice) also in the context of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, a deep analysis of Baczyński's countless other poems as well as his biography is still lacking.

### **Overview of Chapters**

Baczyński has been strongly associated with Polish and Roman Catholic identity, ignoring his identification with his Jewish heritage. Chapter one presents the historical background of this misunderstanding of Baczyński, outlining the origin and evolution of Polish national consciousness and the transformation of the civic patriotism of 19<sup>th</sup> century Poland into the ethnonationalism of the interwar years. Chapter two continues to present the historical background of the misunderstanding of Baczyński, discussing nationalist politics in interwar Poland and the gradual placement of Polish Jews outside

of the realm of the Polish nation, defined in ethno-religious terms. A large portion of this chapter is dedicated to the discussion of German-occupied Poland, Nazi crimes against the Polish nation, the Jewish Holocaust, and Polish-Jewish wartime relations. Chapter three clarifies the nature of Baczyński's Polishness, demonstrates his awareness of his link with Polish Jews, and presents his Holocaust poetry of the early occupation period. In addition, this chapter introduces Baczyński's pre-war poems on love and nature, love poetry dedicated to his wife Barbara, and offers a glimpse of the hundreds of sketches, paintings, and illustrations created by the poet during his short life. Chapter four focuses on Baczyński's Holocaust poetry of the late occupation period. These are his most searing poems and reflect Baczyński's despair over the fate of Polish Jews. Chapter four also explains Baczyński's motives for joining the Polish underground and concludes with a description of his death on the fourth day of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Finally, chapter five focuses on history, memory, and the falsification of the image of Baczyński in Communist and post-Communist Poland.

## CHAPTER ONE

In public memory, Baczyński has been strongly associated with Polish and Roman Catholic identity, ignoring his identification with his Jewish heritage. This chapter presents the historical background of this misunderstanding of Baczyński, outlining the origin and evolution of Polish national consciousness and the transformation of the civic patriotism of 19<sup>th</sup> century Poland into the ethnonationalism of the interwar years. In particular, this chapter focuses on partitioned Poland - *the* defining moment for Polish national identity. It was during that time that Polishness began to be identified with ethnicity, increasingly excluding groups such as the Polish Jews from the Polish nation. An important element of Polish nationalism has been its identification with Roman Catholicism and with the messianic suffering of the Crucifixion. The poetry of Polish Romanticism – Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, and others – was vital in creating the concept of Poland as the “Christ of Nations.” In the poetic visions of the Romantics, the suffering of Poles was to bring salvation to Poland and to other nations, just as the death of Christ – crucified for the sins of the world – brought redemption to mankind. In other words, suffering, sacrifice, martyrdom and the struggle to protect ethnic and Roman Catholic type of identity became the most formative elements in the construction of modern Polish national identity, and the leading poets of Polish Romanticism became the nation’s seers who in their works expressed the soul of the martyred people. Their writing inspired many generations of Poles and became (and still is!) the most central element of the national heritage.

## **Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth At Its Peak (1569-1795)**

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a semi-federal, semi-confederal, and multiethnic aristocratic republic was formed by the 1569 Lublin Union, which united the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.<sup>8</sup> The Commonwealth was, until the beginning of the eighteenth century, one of the largest and one of the most ethnoreligiously diverse, tolerant and powerful entities in Europe, occupying a vast territory stretching from the Oder in the west to Muscovy in the east, and from Livonia in the north to the edges of the Ottoman Empire in the south. Legendary kings and great landowning families played a key role in shaping the cultural life as well as the political and economic systems of the country, and bringing it unprecedented international prestige.<sup>9</sup>

The Commonwealth possessed many features that were unique among contemporary states, including a system of royal elections – the elections by the nobility of individual kings, rather than dynasties, to the Polish throne –, and a principle of *Liberum Veto*, where every member of the *Sejm* (the parliament composed of nobility) had the right to a veto.<sup>10</sup> Thus, by shouting “*Nie pozwalam!*” (I forbid!), a lone voice of opposition could nullify any piece of legislation. Furthermore, the Commonwealth was a “land of many peoples but ultimately of a Polish destiny,” where Polish nationality was not defined by ethnicity, language, or religion, but by noble lineage, civic participation, and loyalty to the state.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History of the Second Republic* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004), 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 29.

The Commonwealth was then, a Polish “noble nation,” and the nobility, as the only section of the society, enjoyed full political and civil rights. Thus, in this context, a considerable portion of the Polish-speaking peasantry and the middle class did not regard itself as Polish; and there were many Poles (in the sense of subjects of the Commonwealth) who were Lithuanian, German, Belarusian, or Ruthenian in ethnicity and language.<sup>12</sup> For instance, a seventeenth century clerk described himself as “a member of the Polish nation, of the Ruthenian people, of Jewish origin.”<sup>13</sup> Some, thus, view the Polish “noble nation” as an embryonic form of “civic” nationalism.<sup>14</sup> This political ideology was grounded in a powerful cultural myth, the so-called *Sarmatian* myth, which claimed that the nobility, as an independent community distinct from the peasantry in origin as well as authority, formed the core of the Commonwealth.<sup>15</sup>

The Sarmatian myth began with one of the earliest Polish chroniclers, Jan Długosz (1415-1480).<sup>16</sup> His *Annals seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae (Annals of the Famous Kingdom of Poland)* regard the Polish noblemen as the descendants of the ancient, powerful, and famous Sarmatians who invaded Poland in ancient times and, due to their superiority over the local population, were able to establish a state where none had existed before. The peasants, contrarily, are identified as the progeny of the

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<sup>12</sup> Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, Vol. 2, 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 37.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Brian A. Porter, “Social Darwinism without empiricism, romanticism without ethics: Polish national democracy and the concept of “the nation,” 1863-1905” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994), 42, ProQuest (AAT 9423853).

<sup>16</sup> Tomasz W. Gromelski, “Queen Liberty: The Concept of Freedom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): 682.



Germanic tribe of Gepidi.<sup>17</sup> Grateful to the protection, guidance, and leadership of the Sarmatians, the Gepidi willingly subjected themselves to enslavement, according to this narrative.

Although present in all medieval historical texts, only in the seventeenth century did the Sarmatian myth develop any real ideological force and become the ideological foundation of the noble republic. Furthermore, the Sarmatian ideal did not only symbolize the essence of the Polish nobleman, but also provided the basis for the unity of the Commonwealth in that it contributed to the political integration of the multiethnic gentry by transforming it into a unified ruling elite. Sarmatian ideology, however, weakened the ethnic unity of the Polish “nation.” In order to become a “nation” in the modern meaning of the term, Poles had to cast aside their loyalty to their multiethnic motherland and undergo a psychological transformation from class identity to national identity. This only occurred in the decades after the Insurrection of 1864.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Fall and National Revival**

Once the Commonwealth was wiped off the map following a series of partitions (1772-1775) orchestrated by Prussia, Russia, and Austria, the old foundations of Polish nationality slowly lost validity.<sup>19</sup> It was the trauma of Poland’s first partition (1772) that unleashed an intense wave of political awakening and reconceptualization of the “nation.” The reformers’ camp, representing the lay intelligentsia of varied origins and liberal clergy, criticized the “Sarmatian” ideology, and relentlessly reminded the dominant class of the gentry that they “are not the whole Polish nation, only one estate”

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<sup>17</sup> Konstantin Symmons-Symonolewicz, *National Consciousness in Poland: Origin and Evolution* (New Jersey: Maplewood Press, 1983), 44.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-38.

<sup>19</sup> Gromelski, “Queen Liberty: The Concept of Freedom”, 682.

and that they would be responsible for the downfall of the Commonwealth if they did not change their outlook.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, the reformers' ideas were embodied in the Constitution of the Third of May, written in 1791, eleven months before the Second Partition. While this first constitution in Europe failed to extend full equality to all (serfdom, for instance, was upheld), it was a distinctively liberal document by contemporary standards. Civil rights were extended to the peasantry and to the city dwellers, religious toleration was upheld, royal elections and the *Liberum Veto* were abolished, and a hereditary monarchy was established.<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, however, the nascent constitution called for a broadening of the concept "nation": all commoners, whether urban or rural, were now members of the Polish nation.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the Polish "nation" was no longer equivalent to the Polish state, but instead consisted of all those who considered themselves Polish. Thus, although its statehood had been destroyed by the partitioning powers, Poland would continue to exist as an *idea* stored in the collective memory of the Polish people.<sup>23</sup> The first sentence of *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego*, a military march written in 1797 by Józef Wybicki and later adopted as Poland's national anthem, articulates this concept clearly:

Poland has not died  
As long as we [patriotic Poles] still live.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Symmons-Symonolewicz, *National Consciousness in Poland*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945*, 9-10.

<sup>22</sup> Symmons-Symonolewicz, *National Consciousness in Poland*, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Brian A. Porter, "Social Darwinism without empiricism, romanticism without ethics: Polish national democracy and the concept of "the nation," 1863-1905" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994), 42, ProQuest (AAT 9423853), 67-68.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

Thus, Poland as an idea – especially when articulated within the framework of Polish Romanticism – dominated discussions of the nation throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up until 1918. The Romantics viewed the partitions as an undeserved injustice, lamented over being deserted by Europe, and glorified the Commonwealth as a land of freedom and prosperity. For example, in his historical epic *Jagielloniada* (1817) Dyzma Bończa Tomaszewski (1749-1825) states, “when other nations suffered slavery, the Poles, proud of their freedom and rights, served as mediators between monarchs and as victors over barbarians.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in his very popular *Śpiewy Historyczne* (1816, Historical Songs), Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1758-1841) presents Poland as a land of liberty and the bastion of European, Christian civilization. Thus, Poland became identified with universal values of freedom and justice. True Poles, according to the romantics, should not only struggle for their own independence, but also for universal freedom. This helps us understand why the Polish legions serving alongside the French Army during the Napoleonic wars claimed to be fighting for Poland as well as for France, and for the Polish “nation” as well as for “the rights of man,” or why the Poles who fought in the November Uprising (1830-1831) against Russia carried banners with the inscription *Za wolność waszą i naszą* (For your freedom and ours) and why they believed they were liberating Poland as well as Tsar’s Russian subjects from his tyranny.<sup>26</sup>

During the November Uprising of 1830-1831, this appeal to the universal cause of freedom was placed within a framework of religious metaphors, generally known as

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<sup>25</sup> Eile, Stanisław. *Literature and Nationalism in Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 2002, 34.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Brykczynski, “Political murder and the victory of ethnic nationalism in interwar Poland” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013), 31.

“romantic messianism.”<sup>27</sup> In a speech delivered on May 3, 1831, Kazimierz Brodziński (1791-1835), a Polish Romantic poet, reaffirmed that the Polish national struggle was a part of a wider universal cause. If it succeeded it would bring freedom to all nations, but if it failed, “our [Polish] ashes will be sacred, and the cross raised above them will be the object of pilgrimages by all peoples to the tomb of the nation which was the disciple of Christ.”<sup>28</sup> Although Brodziński first equated the suffering of the Polish nation with Christ’s sacrifice on behalf of humanity, it was propagated and elaborated by three Romantic poets, the “holy trinity” of the national cause, namely Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859). Poland, Mickiewicz argues in his *Księgi Narodu Polskiego i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* (1834, Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrimage), is a God chosen nation or a “Christ of Nations.” Crucified by the partitioning powers for the sins of a corrupt Europe, it would be brought back to life to save Europe. An excerpt from the Books states:

And finally Poland said: ‘Whosoever will come to me shall be free and equal, for I am FREEDOM.’ But the kings when they heard of this, they were frightened in their hearts, and said... ‘Come, let us slay this nation’. And they conspired together...And they crucified the Polish Nation, and laid it in the grave, and cried out: ‘We have slain and buried Freedom.’ But they cried out foolishly...For the Polish Nation did not die. Its body lieth in the grave; but its spirit has descended into the abyss, that is into the private life of people who suffer slavery in their country...But on the third day the soul shall return again to the body, and the Nation shall arise, and free all the peoples of Europe from slavery.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Eile, *Literature and Nationalism*, 75-79.

<sup>28</sup> Ignacy Chrzanowski, “Mowa Brodzinskiego o narodowości Polaków na tle współczesnej ideologii patriotycznej,” in *Optymizm*, 153-159.

<sup>29</sup> Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland, Volume II 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

It was, however, the publication of *Konrad Wallenrod* in 1828 that marked the beginning of a powerful stream of literary national romanticism in Poland.<sup>30</sup> Seen as one of the most powerful books written by Mickiewicz, *Konrad Wallenrod* is a story of a Lithuanian<sup>31</sup> pagan, taken prisoner as a young boy by his people's long-standing enemies, the Teutonic Knights of the Order of the Holy Cross, and raised by them in the Christian faith as Gustaw at the court of the Grand Master in Malborg. Never forgetting his hidden national identity, the hero ultimately undergoes a metamorphosis, and the weak Gustaw is transformed into the strong Konrad of *Konrad Wallenrod*.<sup>32</sup> The change is sealed in an ominous, Faust-like setting with an inscription: *Gustavus obiit. Hic natus est Conradus* (Gustav died. Here Conrad was born). Konrad becomes the chosen leader, the Polish Prometheus, with a sole purpose – to save his nation:

This innate power I have  
 I want to expand over human spirits...  
 Now my country and I are one  
 I swallowed her soul with my body  
 My name is "Million": for I love and suffer torments for millions.<sup>33</sup>

One must understand Konrad's agony: the spiritual drama takes place in a Teutonic prison cell, where Konrad awaits execution. The reader is made aware, however, that the suffering of Konrad – synonymous with Poland's suffering – is not senseless. It is a necessary martyrdom that will eventually lead to Konrad's - that is to

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<sup>30</sup> Elie, *Literature and Nationalism*, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Although a Lithuanian, the hero of *Konrad Wallenrod* is native to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – used interchangeably with Poland by Mickiewicz – and considers his national identity to be Polish.

<sup>32</sup> Konstanty Żantuan, "Mickiewicz' Konrad Wallenrod: An Attempt at Reappraisal," *Comparative Literature Studies* 6, no. 2 (1969): 149.

<sup>33</sup> Helen N. Fagin, "Adam Mickiewicz: Poland's National Romantic Poet," *South Atlantic Bulletin* 42, no. 4 (1977), 110.

say, Poland's – redemption.<sup>34</sup> The majority of the readers, as was the author's intent, found in *Wallenrod* the poetry of rebellion and patriotic sacrifice. Similarly, in one of his most popular poems, *Testament Mój*, written in 1840, Słowacki appealed to his countrymen not to lose hope in the rebirth of the nation, but, if required, to die one after another for its independence “like stones cast by God on the rampart.”<sup>35</sup>

The pivotal role of Romanticism in the development of the Polish national sentiment and memory culture seems beyond question. The poets of the period were given a unique role and burdened with a unique mission: to instill in the Polish psyche the notion of total subordination to the fatherland. Their oeuvre formed the core of Poland's literary canon, and knowledge of their key works is the foundation of Polish cultural literacy to this day.<sup>36</sup> In fact, it is widely believed that the poetry of both Mickiewicz and Słowacki actually provoked the national uprisings of 1830 and 1863.<sup>37</sup> These were uprisings of patriots, condemned to defeat from the beginning. Yet people fought with a romantic faith that their death would bring independence to Poland.<sup>38</sup>

The Polish Romantic tradition profoundly influenced Poland's World War II generation of poets, especially those associated with the right-wing literary journal *Sztuka i Naród, SiN* (Art and Nation), who translated the reality of the occupation into the language of the great tragedies of the past. Much like the greatest works of Mickiewicz or Słowacki, their poetry was visionary, full of patriotic passion, and very popular among

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>35</sup> Elie, *Literature and Nationalism in Partitioned Poland*, 68.

<sup>36</sup> Dariusz Skórczewski, “Polish Romanticism: From Cannon to Agon,” in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture Since 1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 68.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>38</sup> Leon Dyczewski, *Values in the Polish Cultural Tradition* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2002), 195.

Poland's youth, who were ready to die for Poland, "like stones cast by God on the rampart."<sup>39</sup> Although Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński did not associate with the *SiN* poets and his poetry did not express the necessity of martyrdom in the service of Poland, in the collective imagination of Poles Baczyński exists as the last Romantic, chosen by the gods to "lead" the Polish nation. His death on the barricade – exalted and full of pathos – is also seen fitting into the tradition of Polish Romanticism.

Following the failed anti-Russian insurrection of 1830-1831, the nation looked to the holy trinity to make sense of defeat. The Romantics, thus, grew into the role of spiritual leaders who strove to provide answers. Not wanting to accept the reality of yet another defeat, the nation escaped into a world of fiction (the so-called "literarization" of life) where the word of the poet held precedence over fact.<sup>40</sup> Having been conferred highest authority, the Romantics strove to unite all Poles, dispersed across three empires and in exile, into an imagined community that would share the same cultural values and political goals, and provided a logical explanation of Poland's fate. In essence, then, the struggle to make sense of the trauma of the Partitions produced Polish identity, which revolves around victimhood and suffering or, rather, the obligation to suffer and sacrifice. It is important to realize that this type of narrative of Polish suffering omits dark spots in Polish history and excludes the suffering of other groups on Polish lands.

Yet another military defeat of 1863-1864 brought about a period of disillusionment with Romanticism and ushered a period of Positivism. Polish Positivists turned from armed struggle for independence to *praca organiczna* (organic work) as

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<sup>39</sup> Elie, *Literature and Nationalism in Partitioned Poland*, 68.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

realistic alternative for national survival.<sup>41</sup> The two basic principles of the organic work included the increase of economic potential of the Poles and the construction of national self-consciousness in the Polish countryside. The most well-known advocates of positivism included Aleksander Świętochowski (1849-1938), Franciszek Krupiński (1836-1898), Bolesław Prus (1847-1912), and Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841-1910). Although positivism would become the leading ideology for most of the second half of the nineteenth century, romanticism was not dead. As already mentioned, it returned with a bang in the twentieth century.

### **Peasants into Ethno-National Roman Catholic Poles**

Although under the novel Constitution of 1791 all of the Polish-speaking masses were now considered to constitute the nation, *chłopi*, the largely illiterate Polish-speaking peasants (the nation's largest social class) certainly did not possess a strong national identity.<sup>42</sup> While Polish art and literature often exploited and mythologized the patriotism of Kościuszko's famous peasant battalion *kosynierzy* (scythemmen), the participation of peasants in the Kościuszko insurrection (1794), a failed attempt to liberate Poland from Russia after the Second Partition of Poland (1793), was relatively hesitant and negligible. In fact, one of the most prominent peasant leaders, Wincenty Witos (1874-1945), testified in his memoirs that many years after the failed Kościuszko's Insurrection, Kościuszko had still been regarded in local villages as "a criminal, who rebelled against the authority

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<sup>41</sup> Stanislaus A. Blejwas, "Polish Positivism and the Jews," *Jewish Social Studies* 46 (1984): 21-22.

<sup>42</sup> Agnieszka Nance, *Literary and Cultural Images of a Nation without a State: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Poland* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2008), 147.



[of the partitioning powers] established by God, and therefore was eventually punished.”<sup>43</sup>

More so, the Galician peasants’ behavior during the 1846 Kraków revolt was actively hostile.<sup>44</sup> Directed against the partitioning powers, it was an attempt to incite a fight for the restoration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>45</sup> Faced with small bands of armed Polish noblemen, the Austrian officials sought the help of local Polish-speaking peasants, who were promised emancipation if they would turn on their masters. Before long, over two thousand Polish noblemen were slaughtered in cold blood by marauding bands of Polish-speaking peasants. The severed heads of the noble victims were then sold to Austrian officers by the peasant bands as proof of their loyalty.<sup>46</sup>

For the Polish elite, it was a rude awakening that Polish-speaking peasants could not be depended on to support Polish noblemen in projects of national liberation.<sup>47</sup> A growing number of intellectuals were convinced that conventional tactics were inadequate for the needs of the national cause and began to claim that a truly popular uprising might succeed where the other projects have failed. Prus wrote, “Nowadays a nation is not constituted by one class, even if educated and prosperous, but by the all members of each society, by all the common people. Those masses provide new blood

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<sup>43</sup> Stanislaw Eile, *Literature and Nationalism in Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 2002), 6.

<sup>44</sup> Keely Stauter-Halsted, K, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Davies, *God’s Playground*, 108.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

without which the rest will wither and vanish.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Prus argued, the peasants were living real life, while the upper classes engaged in useless activities such as the arts and poetry. The upper classes were also made responsible for the extreme role of poetry in politics. “In our country,” wrote Prus, “the poets replace the politicians, philosophers, teachers, even economists...Whoever promotes unreal, fantastic politics, can easily back it up by references to a poet admired by the nation.”<sup>49</sup> According to Prus and many others only the mutual cooperation of all social classes could guarantee national survival. As a result a belief in the awakening of the peasants as essential for the nation’s future emerged. This was a daunting task, however, as it required more than the mere assertion that the motherland now encompassed all the social classes: The challenge was to imagine an *ethnic* Polish nationalism that did not yet exist.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, the construction of national self-consciousness in the countryside was a difficult task. It not only required the obliteration of centuries-old division between the nobility and their former enserfed peasants but it also required the establishment of a conceptual space for peasants within the future reconstituted nation. Yet by the turn of the nineteenth century, a strain of ethnic nationalism had developed in the Polish countryside. “Long live Poland,” cheered the no longer nationally indifferent Polish-speaking peasants in 1894 at a gathering to celebrate the centennial of Tadeusz

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<sup>48</sup> Bolesław Prus, “Od czego zależy powodzenie w życiu?” *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 13 (1912), 459-60.

<sup>49</sup> Prus, unpublished notes of 1903, quoted after Fita, “Na drodze do Lalki: Historia i tradycja w twórczości Bolesława Prusa,” in Józef Bachórz and Michał Głowiński *Lalka i inne* (Warsaw, 1992).

<sup>50</sup> Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth Century Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2000), 30-31.

Kościuszko's insurrection in defense of Polish independence.<sup>51</sup> This development was possible because of many factors, the most significant being the utilization by the intellectuals of anti-Semitism as a foundation of inter-class cooperation and expansion of Polish-language primary education in the countryside.<sup>52</sup>

### **Anti-Semitism as a Foundation of Inter-Class Cooperation**

In early decades of the nineteenth century, Polish nationalists welcomed into the Polish nationalist movements all those who shared their political goals including Polonized Jews – those who spoke the Polish language and assimilated to Polish culture. After the failure of the January Insurrection (1863-1864), however, Polish nationalists adopted a more cultural, religious, and ethnic conception of the nation.<sup>53</sup> They did so to generate the perception among the nobles and the peasantry that they could cooperate on the basis of shared national – anti-Semitic – interests and to imbue Polish-speaking peasants with a sense of national belonging.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, branding the Jews as the quintessential “other” aided the process, especially since anti-Jewish sentiment was already prevalent in Galician villages due to the economic structure of country life.<sup>55</sup> Because of their economic position within the village as merchants, innkeepers, or managers of general stores, Jews were viewed by Galician peasants as responsible for much of their economic misery. This image of the

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<sup>51</sup> Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 1-17.

<sup>52</sup> Because of the constraints of this paper, I will limit my analysis of the process of the acquisition of a Polish national identity by the peasantry to the Galician countryside, a region located in the northeastern part of contemporary Habsburg Austria. It is essential to keep in mind that this process differed more or less significantly in the other two – Russian and Prussian – regions of Poland.

<sup>53</sup> Judith Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 194-195.

<sup>54</sup> Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Baskin and Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide*, 195.

rapacious Jew, taking advantage of the honest peasant, is, of course, a great exaggeration. In reality, an economic interdependency of Jews and Catholics existed in the villages.<sup>56</sup> The Jewish market, for instance, provided the peasantry with the opportunity – often their sole opportunity – to sell farm produce and to acquire household necessities:

On Mondays the peasantry of Dobromil used to come [to a Jewish market] to buy for themselves their various household necessities for the week. At the same time, they would bring into town their geese, their quacking ducks, hens, calves, hogs, horses, cows, wagon loads of wood, and so on. And so the *shtetl* used to provide a livelihood, one day rousing up from its week-long sleep. And for the “Yehudim” there was a lively turmoil, a hollering, a screaming, and a bleating, every Monday until time for the “Mincha” evening prayers. Then once again everything became hushed quiet.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, in order to foster an alliance between the nobles and the peasantry in categorical opposition to Jewish economic interests, the Polish nationalists of the late nineteenth century began to describe the economic situation in the Galician countryside in terms of competition between ethnic groups (Poles vs. the “other”) and religious groups (Catholics vs. Jews) instead of economic interdependence among the population.<sup>58</sup> Franciszek Drózd, a Galician peasant calculated on the pages of the *Wieniec* newspaper that his village was losing 5,986 złotych per year by conducting business with the local Jews. “If one village loses so much on the Jews, how much must a district pay, and how much does the entire crownland pay? Why are we losing this money to the Jews?” he wondered.<sup>59</sup> Drózd held the peasants themselves responsible for the financial losses because they “would rather give themselves up to the advantage of the Jews than learn

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<sup>56</sup> Rosa Lehmann, “Conflict or Harmony? Poles and Jews in a Small Galician Town.” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 4(1996): 325.

<sup>57</sup> Saul Miller, *Dobromil: Life in a Galician Shtetl, 1890-1907* (New York, 1980), 4.

<sup>58</sup> Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 133.

<sup>59</sup> Franciszek Drózd, Rajcza, to *Wieniec*, February 9, 1882, 31-32.

and improve.”<sup>60</sup> In addition, many peasants came to view Jewish businessmen as dishonest in their dealings with their Christian neighbors. Polish peasants, maintained Maciej Szarek, a leading peasant activist, had nothing against the Jews themselves. “It is just the swindling they have troubles with.”<sup>61</sup> The establishment of Catholic-run general stores, he argued, would “reduce the amount of goods sold by Jews according to false weights and measures.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, with the aid of upper-class activists, a network of Catholic-run general stores was established to compete with the Jewish-run stores. The result was that many of these stores were not only able to sell goods at a lower price than the Jewish-run stores, but they also promoted social and national solidarity among Polish-Catholic speakers.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, the rural intelligentsia encouraged a view of the Jews as foreigners. In the 1878 issue of his rural newspaper, *Pszczółka*, (The Bee), Father Stanisław Stojalowski claims that “one must allow neither the sale of land into foreign hands, nor the loss of Polish lands into the hands of the enemies of our nation, the Jews.”<sup>64</sup> As a result, as Jews became increasingly resented for both economic reasons and because of their perceived “otherness” / “foreignness”, the peasants began to imagine themselves as part of the Polish nation in opposition to the anti-Polish “other” and to forge ties with their centuries-old antagonist – the Polish nobility. It is important to note that surrounding the aforementioned issues began to emerge a question of how the unified Polish nation would treat its minority groups.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>61</sup> Maciej Szarek, Brzegi, to *Pszczółka*, July 25, 1878, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 134.

## Expansion of Polish-language Education

In the early 1770s, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was on the brink of ruin, its sovereignty threatened by its powerful neighbors – Russia, Prussia, and Habsburg Austria. In an attempt to retain independence, Polish nobility approached Rousseau for advice. In his *Considerations on the Government of Poland and on its Proposed Reformation* (1772), Rousseau indicated that in all likelihood Poland would not be able to retain its political sovereignty. Civic education, Rousseau however believed, would be enough to keep the spirit of the nation alive should Poland be partitioned.

Rousseau writes:

It is education that must give souls to national formation, and direct their opinions and tastes in such a way that they will be patriotic by inclination, by passions, by necessity. When first he opens his eyes, an infant ought to see the fatherland, and up to the day of his death he ought never to see anything else....At twenty, a Pole ought not to be a man of any other sort; he ought to be a Pole. I wish that, when he learns to read, he should read about his own land; that at the age of ten he should be familiar with all its products, at twelve with all its provinces, highways, and towns; that at fifteen he should know its whole history, at sixteen all its laws; that in all Poland there should be no great action or famous man of which his heart and memory are not full, and of which he cannot give an account at a moment's notice...<sup>65</sup>

Although at the time of his writing Rousseau solely had the children of the nobility in mind, the Polish intellectuals of the late nineteenth century sought to construct the nationally conscious peasant Pole and thus to galvanize the support of the peasantry for the national cause through educational processes. Thus, intellectual volunteers flocked the countryside to promote education, expand formal as well as non-formal education opportunities for the children of the peasants, and to train hundreds of rural

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<sup>65</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland and on its Proposed Reformation*, 1772. Retrieved from: <http://www.constitution.org/jjr/poland.htm>

primary school teachers, who would join the clergy in becoming the rural elite. In fact, hundreds of new primary schools were built in the Galician countryside after 1868. Nonetheless it is important to keep in mind that schools remained informal – in the organist’s home for instance – or nonexistent in a large number of villages.<sup>66</sup> In 1911, a report submitted to the Russian authorities of Sosnowiec revealed the extent of illegal schools in the area:

I have the honour to report the existence of the following illegal schools in the district entrusted to me:

In the settlement of Modrzejów:

1. In the house of Pergricht, the son-in-law of the foreman, Najer, a dangerous person by the name of Rusek is teaching.
2. Two secret Jewish schools are to be found in the house of Szczekacz, but it is hard to say who the teacher is.
3. Maria Góralska, the daughter of an official of the “Jerzy” Mine, holds lessons in a house belonging to the Company on the other side of the street from the clinic.
4. Janina Drozdowska and her sister hold lessons in another house of the same company on Wesoła Street.
5. The aunt, or possibly mother of the manageress of the ‘Jutrzenka’ store, name unknown, teaches in the flat adjoining the store.
6. The mother of Stanisław Chrzanowski, an official of the ‘Jerzy’ Mine, teaches in her house on Wesoła Street.
7. A certain Woźniacze, the son of a workman at the Sosnowiec Company’s Machine Factory, teaches in a house belonging to the company.
8. The daughters of an official of the same company called Wieruszowski are holding lessons.
9. The daughter of a guard on the Warsaw-Vienna Railway called Filak teaches in Duda’s house.

There are other schools, which I have been unable to discover. In some of the schools, e.g. in Rusek’s, Goralska’s, or in that of the Drozdowska sisters, a considerable number of children, up to fifty at a time, are taught in two shifts.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 141-142.

<sup>67</sup> Davies, *God’s Playground*, 173-4.

Although funding remained a great obstacle to the expansion of the rural school system, many peasant parents simply opposed the education of their children because of a belief that as future laborers they required little schooling.<sup>68</sup>

Children who were lucky enough to attend village schools were subjected to instruction in the Polish language and to lessons on the history, geography, and literature of Poland. The more pragmatic subjects such as arithmetic and orthography were, of course, taught as well. It was through the “patriotic” lessons however that the teachers sought to make the nation more accessible to their pupils.<sup>69</sup> It is necessary to remember, however, that Poland of that era was partitioned. The region of Galicia, for instance, was under the control of Habsburg Austria and Polish teachers had to struggle with the official curriculum as well as with official regulations. According to the official crownland primary school curriculum, for instance, neither the 1830 November Insurrection nor the 1863 January Insurrection appeared in primary school history textbooks, and no map of Poland, as opposed to the illustrations of the Habsburg monarchs, were permitted in the classroom.<sup>70</sup>

Yet in distinct violation of the crownland law and under the threat of removal from their posts, Polish primary school teachers sought to use their own materials – nationalist poetry and literature – to teach national topics. Adam Mickiewicz’s *Księgi Narodu Polskiego i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* (Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 154-155.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 153; 165.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 167; 169.



Pilgrimage), illegal until the *Ausgleich*<sup>71</sup> reform of 1867, for instance, served the Polish teachers well in imbuing village youth with Polish identity.

Furthermore, Bolesław Prus, Władysław Reymont and Eliza Orzeszkowa – all leading figures in the history of Polish literature – played an important role in the creation of a peasant Polish identity. For instance, in her Positivist novel *Nad Niemnem* (On the Banks of the Niemen), Orzeszkowa focuses on the failed 1863 January Insurrection and depicts peasants as active participants.<sup>72</sup> In addition, teachers sought to promote patriotism among the rural populations through the display of Polish history from the peasant perspective. In his memoirs, Jan Madejczyk, a rural activist who was educated in a primary school in his native village of Wróblowa recalls that the teachers “spoke about the Kościuszko Rising, about Bartosz Głowacki [a Polish peasant and a scythman – mortally wounded, he became one of the symbols of the peasant sacrifices for the Polish nation], and about the scythemen at Raclawice.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, many memoirists recall that their exposure to Polish history and Polish literature in their village school was crucial to their discovery of Polish identity.

However, the teachers often ventured beyond their classroom walls in order to engender patriotic sentiment. In a recollection of his father, who was a rural primary school teacher, Benedykt Wygoda states:

[The teachers] traveled about the countryside giving courses and conducting lectures...[They] emphasized the concept of nationality and the feeling of civil rights...[They] never worked “over” peasants or “for” the

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<sup>71</sup> Ausgleich of 1867 established the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Article 19 of the 1867 Fundamental Law guaranteed the nations of the empire the right to free development.

<sup>72</sup> Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 111-112.

<sup>73</sup> Jan Madejczyk, *Wspomnienia* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1965), 452.

peasants, but always “with” them. [They] taught the peasants about such important historical figures as Mickiewicz and Kościuszko...[and] about the goal of Polish independence and always used the term “we” with the peasants. Eventually [they] created a second Polish army, this one consisting of the peasants.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, through commemorative activities, often organized by teachers, the villagers were able not only to celebrate the – real or imagined – great past of Poland, but also to create a space for themselves in the future of the nation. Thus, both through the lessons they taught rural children and through their active participation in the rural community, village elementary school teachers helped convince the Polish-speaking peasants that they too are a part of the Polish nation. In an 1878 letter to *Wieniec Polski* (The Polish Wreath), a rural newspaper, an unidentified author writes:

Each of us already knows that we are of Polish nationality. Several years ago, we peasants did not know what sort of nationality we were. We spoke among ourselves, that we were “imperial”, as if we were cattle and not a nationality...Now...although we are not very well-educated, we know well that we are the Polish nation and what our country...used to be and what it is today.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, the term nation shed its former political connotation and gradually acquired ethnic overtones. Many began to view Polishness as the exclusive quality of Polish speakers or even only of Roman Catholic Polish speakers. Nevertheless, those who longed for the restoration of the Commonwealth continued to think of Polish identity in non-national terms. By the turn of the century, two visions of Polish nationalism dominated the Polish political scene: Józef Piłsudski’s “civic” vision versus the “ethnic” vision of Roman Dmowski.

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<sup>74</sup> Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 171.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

## **Józef Piłsudski, Romanticism, and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS)**

Józef Klemens Piłsudski (1867-1935), the centrally important Polish commander and statesman, was the First Marshal of Poland since 1920, Chief of State of the Second Republic of Poland from 1918 to 1922, and its virtual dictator from 1926 until his death in 1935.<sup>76</sup> Born to a renowned Polish noble family at their Zułów estate (near Vilnius), Piłsudski was brought up in a family that cultivated the traditions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and that preserved the memory of Polish Insurrections.<sup>77</sup> In 1903, he described his childhood in the socialist review *Promień*:

I was born in the country, in a family of the gentry whose members, both by the long line of their ancestors and by the extent of their property belonged to the rank that was formerly called ‘bene nati et possessionati’ [the well born and landed]. As a possessionatus I knew no material care for a long time, and was surrounded as a child by a certain amount of comfort. Since my family was numerous and our parents were very considerate and affectionate with us, I could call my childhood a country of idyll – were it not for one cause of bitterness, which saddened my father’s face, drew tears from my mother’s eyes, and deeply impressed our childish minds. This bitterness was due to the national disaster of 1863, the memory of which was still fresh.

Our mother, an irreconcilable patriot, did not even try to hide from us the pain and disappointment that the failure of the rising caused her, and indeed educated us with particular emphasis of the necessity of a further struggle with our country’s enemies. From our earliest childhood she made us acquainted with the works of our greatest poets, especially those that were forbidden, taught us Polish history, and bought none but Polish books. Of our greatest poets my mother preferred Krasiński, while from my childhood I was always enchanted by Słowacki.”<sup>78</sup>

Of the failed January Insurrection (1863-1864), in which his mother was imprisoned and his father fought as a Polish officer, Piłsudski wrote:

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<sup>76</sup> M.K. Dziwanowski, *Joseph Piłsudski A European Federalist, 1918-1922* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1969), vii.

<sup>77</sup> Antony Polonsky, *Politics in independent Poland 1921-1939: the crisis of constitutional government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 61.

<sup>78</sup> Józef Piłsudski, *The Memories of a Polish Revolutionary and Soldier* (New York: AMS Press, 1971), 11.

It was a sublime effort, an effort in which everyone in the land, old and young, woman and child, shared. A unity of purpose so beautiful and so great that the vast military force of Russia with all the weight of its government machinery behind it could not destroy it. The strength and power of that resistance lay not in the guns that were carried through the woods and marshes, but in the sublime self-sacrifices of the whole civilian community which sent forth that army and protected it, in the spiritual height to which the nation was able to attain. It was defeated, but that defeat is one of the most beautiful leaves in the Polish crown of laurels.<sup>79</sup>

Shaped by his home environment, his family's history, as well as by his reading of Słowacki and other romantics, Piłsudski's patriotism was the natural continuation to the romantic insurrectionary tradition of Polish nationalism. Moreover, nineteenth century Polish-speaking Lithuanians living in the Vilnius area maintained a distinct Polish-Lithuanian borderland (*Kresy*) identity. Thus, Polish-speaking Lithuanians often found it offensive to be called Poles or Lithuanians. As one Polish-speaking Lithuanian, Michał Juckiewicz, told Lithuanian nationalists, "Jagiello, Chodkiewicz, Mickiewicz, Piłsudski, and I – these are Lithuanians [using the word *Litwini*, the Polish word for Lithuanians] – and you; you are Lietuvisy [using a Polonized form of the Lithuanian word for Lithuanians.]<sup>80</sup> To be a Polish-speaking Lithuanian, then, meant to preserve the legacy of the multiethnic Grand Duchy of Lithuania, one of the two constituent parts of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Piłsudski is most often portrayed as a traditional and even anachronistic patriot who represents what was best in the multicultural tradition of the Commonwealth. Although highly patriotic, Piłsudski was not a narrow nationalist. His concept of Polishness, just like Baczyński's, was historic

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Hetherington, *Unvanquished: Joseph Piłsudski, resurrected Poland, and the struggle for Eastern Europe* (Houston: Pingora Press, 2012), 81.

<sup>80</sup> Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer, *Power and the nation in European history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 225.

<sup>81</sup> Brykczyński, "Political murder and the victory of ethnic nationalism in interwar Poland", 37.

and inclusive rather than ethnic.<sup>82</sup> As Brykczyński writes, “Piłsudski’s aspiration as a Polish patriot or nationalist, was neither the bringing together of all ethnic Poles into a single national states, nor the exclusion of non-Poles, but the recreation of the old Commonwealth. For him, Poles, Belarusians, Lithuanians, and Jews were all “sons of the soil” and future citizens.”<sup>83</sup> In Piłsudski’s own words, “The People’s Republic, which we will build after casting off the Muscovite yoke will be a republic of brotherhood and community, where the door to happiness and freedom will be fully open for all and where the welfare of its citizens will take precedence.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, while it is common to characterize Polish national movements by being preoccupied by excluding the Jews and other non-ethnic Poles from the Polish nation, Piłsudski and his followers not only accepted non-Polish minorities into an inclusive and civically defined Polish nation, but moreover went out of their way to reach out to them.

In the beginning of 1887, Piłsudski was arrested in connection with an assassination attempt on the life of Alexander III of Russia and condemned to five years of exile in Siberia. “And it was only there, where I could peacefully think over everything I had gone through, that I became what I am,” wrote Piłsudski in his memoir.<sup>85</sup> It was there that Piłsudski made the acquaintance of other Polish patriots, among them Bronisław Szwarce, one of the leaders of the 1863 insurrection, and read quite a lot of Spencer and Marx. Following his return to Vilnius in the autumn of 1892, Piłsudski joined *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, or PPS* (the Polish Socialist Party) and by

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<sup>82</sup> Dziewanowski, *Joseph Piłsudski A European Federalist*, 34.

<sup>83</sup> Brykczyński, “Political murder and the victory of ethnic nationalism in interwar Poland”, 37-38.

<sup>84</sup> Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945*, 16.

<sup>85</sup> Piłsudski, *The Memories of a Polish Revolutionary and Soldier*, 16.

1894 had become one of its leaders. According to Stanisław Mendelson, one of its early leaders, the goal of the PPS was to, “complete under the banner of socialism the task [Polish independence] which the romantic democrats were not able to finish.”<sup>86</sup>

Although the PPS placed Polish independence at the forefront of its program, it identified the liberty of Poland with the freedom of the proletariat. Obviously, the PPS’s program was highly criticized by orthodox Marxists. “The program amounts to nothing more than the offering up of the proletariat’s most vital interests on the altar of the bourgeois-democratic national independence,” wrote Lenin in 1904.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, for Piłsudski, his sense of patriotism transcended his socialism. When, upon his arrival in Warsaw in November of 1918, he met his former PPS colleagues who addressed him as “comrade,” he said, “Comrades, I took the red tram of socialism to the stop called Independence, and that’s where I got off. You may keep up to the final stop if you wish, but from now on let’s address each other as “Mister” [rather than continue using the socialist term of address “Comrade.”]<sup>88</sup>

As early as 1895, Piłsudski advocated for the reorganization of Eastern Europe into a Polish-led federation of former Russian client states – Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, the Ukraine, and Finland.<sup>89</sup> The concept of an Eastern European federation under Poland’s aegis was, of course, not new, going all the way back to Bolesław the Brave in the eleventh century. And as aforementioned, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was for nearly two hundred years a highly successful, Poland-led quasi-federalized

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<sup>86</sup> Cited in Waldemar Potkański, *Odrodzenie czynu niepodległościowego przez PPS w okresie rewolucji 1905 roku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2008), 22.

<sup>87</sup> Feliks Tych, *Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878-1918*, (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1975), 222.

<sup>88</sup> Cited in Stachura, *Poland*, 69.

<sup>89</sup> Hetherington, *Unvanquished: Joseph Pilsudski*, 347.

association of Eastern European states.<sup>90</sup> In his 1905 memorandum to the Japanese [In 1904 Piłsudski was in Japan seeking support against the Russians, who were at war with Japan], declared:

We regard this [Poland-led federation] not only as the fulfillment of our country's cultural strivings for independent existence, but also as a guarantee of that existence, since Russia divested of her conquests will be sufficiently weakened that she will cease to be a formidable and dangerous neighbor.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, although the federation was meant to emulate the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Piłsudski, above all, believed that individually none of the newly independent states could resist Russia, and, later, the burgeoning Soviet Union. Only if they formed a durable alliance in the form of a federation could they hope to survive.<sup>92</sup> In essence, then, Piłsudski wanted to take the old traditions of the Commonwealth and to create a democratic association of nations, linked together by the necessities deriving from the geopolitical situation. Moreover, federalism seemed to him as the only sensible solution to the ethnic problems of East-Central Europe where drawing of clear and fair national borders was not possible due to the complex intertwining of races and languages.<sup>93</sup> It was with these ideas about the future of Poland and the region that Piłsudski entered World War One as the founder and leader of *Legiony Polskie* [The Polish Legions], who fought against Russia.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 348.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 348-349.

<sup>92</sup> Hetherington, *Unvanquished: Joseph Piłsudski*, 347.

<sup>93</sup> Marian K. Dziewanowski, "The Making of a Federalist," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 11 (1963): 559.

## Roman Dmowski and the National Democrats

The development of right-wing, mass-based, ethno-nationalist movement in Poland is often seen as an inevitable result of modernization. However, although the ideology of *Narodowa Demokracja* (National Democrats), commonly known as *Endecja* (ND) evolved in response to modernization, for the first twenty years of its existence the movement was mainly confined to a narrow elite of intellectuals and had little impact on the masses. It was only the 1905 revolution that transformed the National Democrats and the PPS into mass political movements. And, according to Paul Brykczyński, “there was nothing inevitable about its development and eventual triumph – rather it reflected the active ideological choices formulated by particular political actors in response to specific intellectual influences and contingent political events.”<sup>94</sup>

Roman Dmowski (1864-1939), the leader and main ideologue of *Endecja*, in the words of Antony Polonsky, was “almost the diametrical opposite” of Piłsudski.<sup>95</sup> He was born in Kamionek, a suburb of Warsaw, considered part of *de jure* territory of the Kingdom of Poland but *de facto* ruled by Russia, to a petty bourgeoisie family with little ties to the traditions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>96</sup> Not only Dmowski’s personal characteristics but also the bases of his ideology were formed by the circumstances of the home into which he was born. Andrzej Micewski (1926-2004), a Polish historian, states:

The family home and middle-class circumstances formed not only his [Dmowski’s] character and lifestyle but also his views. Everything which

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<sup>94</sup> Brykczyński, “Political murder and the victory of ethnic nationalism in interwar Poland”, 37-40.

<sup>95</sup> Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland*, 60.

<sup>96</sup> Davies, *God’s Playground*, 39.



he did in modern Polish history was an expression of middle-class and petty bourgeoisie interests and contemporary concepts.<sup>97</sup>

As a graduate of biological sciences Dmowski was heavily influenced by theories of social Darwinism. He believed that “struggle is the basis of life,” and that “nations that cease to struggle degenerate morally and disintegrate.”<sup>98</sup> Casting aside all forms of Polish romantic nationalism, which continued to animate Piłsudski and the PPS, Dmowski advocated for a hardheaded national egotism.<sup>99</sup> In *Mysli Nowoczesnego Polaka*, (The Thoughts of a Modern Pole, 1902), Dmowski’s main work expressing his political and ideological views, he states:

The fall of the Commonwealth and the series of struggles for independence which followed upon it stood as the source of post-Partition patriotism, a patriotism marked more by the taking of a position in regard to foreign governments than to one’s own society, more by the negation of foreign domination than by a positive form of binding oneself to one’s own country or people.<sup>100</sup>

Dmowski also believed that Polish political thought had gone astray becoming enamored with individual freedom and multiethnic federation at the very time when such concepts were being discarded in other parts of the world.<sup>101</sup> And, of course, he viewed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a failure. The hegemony of the “noble nation”, Dmowski argued, oppressed and exploited the peasantry, ruined city-dwellers, and favored those of Jewish faith. By expanding the Commonwealth eastward into the

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<sup>97</sup> Alvin Marcus Fountain II, *Roman Dmowski: Party, Tactics, Ideology 1895-1907* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 9.

<sup>98</sup> Stanisław Kozicki, “Roman Dmowski, 1864-1939,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 52(1939), 120.

<sup>99</sup> Piotr Wandycz, “Poland’s Place in Europe in the Concepts of Piłsudski and Dmowski,” *East European Politics and Societies*, 4(1990), 155.

<sup>100</sup> Fountain II, *Roman Dmowski: Party, Tactics, Ideology*, 99.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

multiethnic and multireligious *Kresy* (borderlands), Dmowski continued, the nobles “diluted” Polish blood.<sup>102</sup>

It was important, Dmowski felt, to clarify his (and the ND’s) definition of Polish nationality, and what was the physical extent of Poland. The main ideology of the ND movement was thus defined in Dmowski’s copious writings and publications. In the 1892 issue of *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, (“The All-Polish Journal”), a journal published by the National Democrats, Dmowski stated:

We are a nation, a single, indivisible nation, because we have a feeling of our unity, we have a common, collective consciousness, a common national spirit. That national spirit has been nurtured through centuries of common state existence, and is a feeling of unity in the fight for a common existence, in success and collective failure, in the aspiration to collective aims, a feeling of distinctiveness from the alien traditions of neighbors...Yes, we are one nation, because we are united by a common feeling, a common national thought, and finally a common will directed towards one national aim that every Pole, even if only poorly educated, is aware of.<sup>103</sup>

And further:

For us, Poland is above all the Polish nation, with its culture and tradition, with a separate soul and separate civilizing needs; it is a living, organic union of people having common needs and interests in a certain area, a union demanding specific duties, including personal sacrifice, and work for collective needs and struggle in defense of common interest. The nation is a loose collection of individuals, groups, or strata, having nothing more in common than the fact that they live on one land, that they speak one language.<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, Dmowski was not only fanatically jingoistic, but also extremely anti-Semitic. Indeed, he did not shrink from inflaming the antipathies of the society towards Polish Jewry. His ideas set out in *Myśli* expressed his anti-Semitism:

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<sup>102</sup> Wandycz, “Poland’s Place in Europe”, 156.

<sup>103</sup> Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945*, 16.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

In the character of this race [Jewish race] so many different values, strange to our moral constitution and harmful to our life, have accumulated that assimilation with a larger number of [them] would destroy us, replacing with decadent elements those young creative foundations upon which we are building the future...Instinctively, the Jew seeks to destroy in his European environment respect for tradition, attachment to religion, recognition of hierarchy; he besmirches and ridicules all that which for every honest conservative is sacred...The incursion of a large wave of Jews into our life has resulted, in those social circles which have become connected with them, in such destruction of all preservative characteristics, such as rebellion against one's own national tradition, such decay in religious feelings and even basic respect for religion...that it has in a sense threatened us with barbarisation. If all of society were to succumb to this influence, we would actually lose our capacity for societal life.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, Poles, in Dmowski's view, were intrinsically Catholic. In a book titled, *Kościół, Naród i Państwo* ("Church, Nation, and State"), published in 1927, Dmowski argued:

Catholicism is not an appendage to Polishness, coloring it in some way; it is, rather, inherent to its being, in large measure it constitutes its very essence. To attempt to dissociate Catholicism from Polishness, and to separate the nation from its religion and the Church, is to destroy the very essence of the nation.<sup>106</sup>

And further, he codified Polishness and Roman Catholicism into a single category:

The Polish state is a Catholic state. It is Catholic not only because the great majority of its population is Catholic, and it is not Catholic in some or other percentile. From our [ND] perspective, it is Catholic in the full sense of that term because our state is a national state, and our nation is a Catholic nation.<sup>107</sup>

In essence, the nation, stressed Dmowski, was an "organic" entity, based upon distinctive spiritual and emotional bonds, and on the perception of a common tradition and future destiny. For Dmowski, then, the Polish nation consisted of not the inhabitants of pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but of those whose language was

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>106</sup> Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, 57.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 57.

Polish and whose religion was Roman Catholic.<sup>108</sup> Thus, Dmowski dismissed Piłsudski's federal idea, and argued for an incorporationist approach – the annexation by the Second Republic of ethnic Polish or “polonizable” territories.<sup>109</sup>

Consequently, Dmowski advocated for a policy of Polonization towards Ukrainians and Belarusians – the absorption of presumably “lower” cultures into a “higher” Polish one. The Germans and the Jews were, according to Dmowski, too “different” and thus could never be assimilated into the Polish nation. In fact, a large-scale admixture of Germans, and especially Jews would, Dmowski argued, “debase” the Polish national character.<sup>110</sup> Conversely, ethnic, Roman-Catholic Poles could be excluded from the Polish nation if their behavior threatened the interests of the national community.<sup>111</sup> It was, of course, the National Democrats that defined those interests.

### **The Reemergence of Poland as the Second Republic (1918-1939)**

Poland re-emerged on the map of Europe from the ashes of the First World War, as the Second Republic of Poland in November of 1918. Although opinions varied among Polish politicians, most notably those of Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski, as to how much of the territory the nascent Polish state should consist of, the Polish borders were defined by a series of regional conflicts (six wars fought concurrently between 1918 and 1921!) and consolidated by 1923 by a series of international treaties.<sup>112</sup> With twenty seven million people inhabiting a territory of 150,000 square miles, the Second Republic

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<sup>108</sup> Alexander J. Groth, “Dmowski, Piłsudski and Ethnic Conflict in Pre-1939 Poland,” *Canadian Slavic Studies*, 3(1969), 70.

<sup>109</sup> Wandycz, “Poland's Place in Europe”, 156.

<sup>110</sup> Groth, “Dmowski, Piłsudski and Ethnic Conflict”, 70-73.

<sup>111</sup> Brykczyński, “Political murder”, 45.

<sup>112</sup> Davies, *God's Playground*, 297-298.

became the sixth largest state in Europe.<sup>113</sup> Although Piłsudski's concept of a federation never materialized, the territory of the nascent Republic, to the dismay of Dmowski, included large portions of Lithuania and Ukraine, becoming a multiethnic and a multicultural state.<sup>114</sup> It is important to keep in mind that in the early years of the Second Republic, no one quite knew what kind of a state Poland would become. It was a country with massive social problems, ravaged by war and plagued by violence. There were many open questions (Who would be considered a Pole? What would be the relationship between nationality, ethnicity, and religion?), which were actively contested by different political forces. Yet ultimately, the Second Republic of Poland became primarily a state *of* and a state *for* the ethno-linguistic Polish nation defined by Dmowski. Interestingly, although Baczyński did not fit within this strictly defined Polish nation nor identify with it, he was hailed by the ethno-nationalists as its spiritual leader.

Although Piłsudski, the conqueror of Soviet Bolsheviks in the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1921), became a national icon and hero of Polish struggle for independence, it was Dmowski who dominated the political scene of interwar Poland. Thus, the political scene of the Second Republic was flagrantly nationalistic, where “‘Polishness’ became the touchstone of respectability”.<sup>115</sup> In practice, this left little scope for minority interests and for political groups, such as Piłsudski's PPS, which were not so virulently nationalistic. When, in 1922, Gabriel Narutowicz, a left-wing politician and Piłsudski's friend, was elected, thanks to the support of minorities, as the first president of the Polish Republic,

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<sup>113</sup> Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, 57.

<sup>114</sup> Davies, *God's Playground*, 297-298.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

he was assassinated only forty-eight hours after taking up the duties of office.<sup>116</sup> The assassin was Eligiusz Niewiadomski, a well-known modernist painter and a supporter of the National Democrats. During his trial, he stated that the assassination of Narutowicz was “a step in the fight for Polishness and for the nation.”<sup>117</sup> Niewiadomski reflected the belief of many Poles, that the only people who should have a say in governing Poland were Poles, and a government, president, or authority that depended on the support of minorities was illegitimate. When the victory of Narutowicz was announced, right-wing nationalists raged through the streets, breaking windows, beating up passers-by with Semitic features, and shouting, “we don’t want this kind of president! Down with the Jews.”<sup>118</sup> Following his execution, Niewiadomski was hailed as a hero, his grave became a right-wing shrine, and hundreds of newborns baptized in Warsaw were given the name Eligiusz.<sup>119</sup>

Right-wing nationalism was, to an extent, fueled by the fact that ethnic minorities, with their own equally uncompromising nationalisms, were so large. Ethnic Poles formed only 68.9 percent of total population. The Germans (2.3 percent), Belarusians (3.1 percent), Jews (8.7 percent), and the Ukrainians (13.9 percent), constituted nearly one third of the total.<sup>120</sup> So, right off the bat, there was a deep conflict between Poland’s self-

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<sup>116</sup> Joseph Rothschild, “The Ideological, Political, and Economic Background, of Piłsudski’s Coup D’état of 1926,” *Political Science Quarterly* 78 (1963): 229.

<sup>117</sup> Irena Grudzinska, *In Search of Lost Meaning: The New Eastern Europe* (California: University of California Press, 2011), 248.

<sup>118</sup> Paul Brykczyński, “Political murder and the victory of ethnic nationalism in interwar Poland” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013), 2.

<sup>119</sup> Richard Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and its Fate, 1918 to 1939* (New York: Hippocrene, 1998): 511.

<sup>120</sup> Davies, *God’s Playground*, 300.

identity as a nation-state of Poles and the reality that only about sixty percent of the citizens of the new state were actually Polish.

Understandably, in most cases, minority groups wanted to maintain their own national identity. However, adherence to non-Polish national identity often manifested itself as a lack of loyalty to the Second Republic, anti-Polish propaganda, and even calling into question the existence of the Polish state. This applied, in particular, to Poland's relations with its German and Ukrainian minorities. Following the so-called "Diktat" of Versailles in 1919, Germany considered Poland's existence as intolerable and incompatible with the needs of Germany. Successive Weimar governments encouraged Germans living in Poland to preserve their distinct identity and to remain allegiant to the Reich. For example, *Jungdeutsche Partei* (Young German Party), a right-wing political party founded in 1931 by members of the German minority in Poland urged everyone who wanted to bear the name of a "true" German to:

Keep company only with Germans, for in this way you will strengthen the feeling of community and support the weak and vacillating. Give economic support to Germans in the first instance...avoid Poles. Employ only Germans in your businesses...avoid Poles. Remember to leave every single penny in German hands, deposit your capital only in German banks and co-operatives...if required, always be prepared to sacrifice your work, capital and yourself, for only when every German is imbued with a sacrificial spirit will we achieve victory...<sup>121</sup>

As a result, only a relatively small number of Germans living in Poland ever declared their loyalty to the Polish state. The majority adopted a hostile attitude toward the Second Republic, regarding it as an artificial entity that would soon fall apart. To illustrate, on the eve of the Polish-Soviet War the head of the German Army Command General Hans Seeckt stated, "To save Poland from Bolshevism - Poland, this mortal

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<sup>121</sup> From the periodical *Jungdeutsches Wollen* No. 1, 1939, pg. 14.

enemy of Germany, this creature and ally of France, this thief of German soil, this destroyer of German culture – for that, not a single German arm should move. And should Poland go to the devil, we should help her go. Our future lies in alliance with Russia...no other way is open to us...We must count on the probability that Russia will sooner or later, probably this summer [1920] attack Poland. To this attack Poland will succumb...If we cannot bring it about ourselves at this moment in time, we must in any case regard with gratitude the destruction of Poland.”<sup>122</sup> Alas, the overwhelming majority of Germans living in Poland hoped for Poland’s defeat, believing that the defeat of Poland would result in Germany recovering its lost eastern provinces. Despite their negative attitudes towards the Polish state, the German minority was tolerated (to a greater or lesser extent) and its interests were protected by state policies and overseen by the League of Nations – though not very effectively.

Among the minorities in Poland, the Ukrainians were the most numerous. Similar to the Germans, they viewed the Polish state with suspicion and often with outright hostility. Of all the issues dividing Poles and Ukrainians, the most bitter was Polish-Ukrainian struggle over Lwów and Eastern Galicia in 1918-1919. In the disputed city of Lwów, an individual of unknown nationality pointed out the war damage to a western visitor, “ You see those little holes? We call them here ‘Wilson’s Points.’ They have been made with machine guns; the big gaps have been made with hand grenades. We are now engaged in self-determination, and God knows what and when the end will be.”<sup>123</sup> Ultimately, Lwów became a Polish city and Eastern Galicia was incorporated into

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<sup>122</sup> Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945*, 36.

<sup>123</sup> Mark Mazower, “Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe,” *Daedalus* 126 (1997): 50.



Poland. Nonetheless, the conflict had left both sides with many painful memories and awakened Ukrainian national pride.<sup>124</sup> In addition to the clash of nationalities, there was an issue of class warfare. The Ukrainians, characterized by large, impoverished peasantry, were deeply resentful of the Polish landlords, who, along with the Polish peasantry, were in the minority in Eastern Galicia.<sup>125</sup> Although Piłsudski and his allies tried to gain Ukrainian loyalty through a policy of toleration, this approach was gradually abandoned and dropped permanently after his death in 1935. Beginning in 1937, the government, controlled by the National Democrats, initiated a ruthless campaign of Polonization of Eastern Galicia. Orthodox churches were destroyed or converted to Roman Catholic ones, many Ukrainian schools were closed, and thousands of Polish colonists settled in the region. The Ukrainian response was a bout of terrorism and a demand, in 1938, for territorial autonomy. Tensions persisted into the Second World War culminating in a series of anti-Polish ethnic cleansings conducted by Ukrainian nationalists between 1942 and 1945.<sup>126</sup> However problematic Polish-German and Polish-Ukrainian relations were, the Second Republic's relation with its Jewish inhabitants was of an entirely different order.

## **Conclusion**

The period of the partitions of Poland must be regarded as crucial in the history of the development of Polish national identity. It was the period during which the "Sarmatian" ideology of the Commonwealth's nobility was transformed into a fully developed national consciousness of the modern Polish nation. In order to become a

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<sup>124</sup> Bohdan Budurowycz, "Poland and the Ukrainian Problem, 1921-1939," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 25 (1983): 476-477.

<sup>125</sup> Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945*, 82.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

nation in the modern meaning of the term, Poles had to cast aside their loyalty to their multiethnic motherland and undergo a psychological transformation from class identity to national identity. By the time Poland regained independence in 1918, many Poles believed that a Pole was by definition a Roman Catholic and asserted the historical inseparability of Catholicism and the Polish national identity. When the term *Polak-Katolik* (Pole-Catholic) came into common usage during the interwar years it constituted for many Poles the true essence of Polishness. Of course, there was no place for non-Polish minorities in a unitary state dominated by ethnic Poles. Some minorities, such as the Ukrainians, Lithuanians or Belarusians were to be assimilated and turned into Poles. However, the Jews, even the assimilated ones such as the Baczyński and the Zieleńczyk families, were to be excluded unconditionally.

## CHAPTER TWO

As was already stated in the previous chapter, Baczyński has been strongly associated with Polish and Roman Catholic identity, ignoring his identification with his Jewish heritage. This chapter continues to present the historical background of this misunderstanding of Baczyński, discussing nationalist politics in interwar Poland and the gradual placement of Polish Jews outside the realm of the Polish nation, defined in ethno-religious terms. It shows that by 1939, in the common Polish perception, the *Żyd* – the Jew – was the chief, internal enemy of the Polish nation. This deep-seated hatred of the Jew portrayed in rightist press as a “monster,” “devil’s servant,” and the like, repulsive in his physicality and mentality, and dangerous to the Polish nation, unquestionably had a direct impact on the moral value system of many Poles, placing Jews outside of that system, and ultimately resulting in an attitude of indifference among a large portion of the Polish population to Nazi genocide of Polish Jewry. The indifference of Poles was unimaginably painful for Baczyński. It was so difficult for the poet to bear, so inhumane, that he perceived it as a “challenge thrown to the blackened heavens.”<sup>127</sup>

Underlying all of Baczyński’s mature poetry is the experience of the occupation. Over and over again, in poems, but also in prose pieces and drawings, he portrayed scenes of horror, which reflect the carnage he witnessed. Even in his love poetry dedicated to his wife Barbara, war is always the background theme. In order to fully appreciate Baczyński’s life and realize the importance of his poetry, one must therefore understand the nature of German occupation of Poland. Consequently, a large portion of this chapter is dedicated to the discussion of German occupied Poland, Nazi crimes

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<sup>127</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Ciemna Miłość,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 194.

against the Polish nation, the Jewish Holocaust, and, of course, Polish-Jewish wartime relations.

### **Polish Jews in Interwar Poland**

Polish Jews, numbering in 1931 nearly 3.2 million, represented some 10 percent of the population. Among them, only a small minority considered themselves Poles or “Poles of the Mosaic Persuasion.” The majority regarded themselves, in national terms, as Jewish and were, for the most part, native speakers of Yiddish, not of Polish. Many were Orthodox / Hasidic Jews whose relationship to the state was mediated by observed religious law. They kept themselves apart from Polish society, lacked emotional connection with Poland, and lived in small towns known as shtetls, or in larger urban centers such as Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, Wilno and Lwów. Many were destitute. “I have never seen such poverty, squalor, and filth,” stated Neville Laski, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, about Warsaw’s Jewish residential quarter, “It made me despair of civilization. I have read much of Poland. I have heard much of Poland. But nothing that I have seen or heard in any degree pictures what I saw with my own eyes.” Warsaw’s Jewish residential quarter was, he concluded, a “teeming city of wretchedness.”<sup>128</sup> Many also were Zionists, who, while they fulfilled the obligations of Polish citizenship, linked Jewish destiny with Palestine.

The “assimilationists,” with some exceptions, lived in the big cities. Like the such as the Baczyński and the Zieleńczyk families, they came from the upper middle class, were fluent in Polish and predominantly felt connected to Polish culture and nation.

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<sup>128</sup> William W. Hagen, “Before the “Final Solution”: Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Interwar Germany and Poland,” *The Journal of Modern History* 68 (1996): 354.

Some were born at the fin de siècle into assimilated Jewish families. For others assimilation was a personal choice, not influenced by their family background. And many became assimilated through the process of modernization, which was a slow, gradual process that often went unnoticed.<sup>129</sup> Some of the “assimilationists” held a critical view of their Jewish origins and brethren, some, like Stefania Baczyńska converted to Roman Catholicism, some, like Adam Zieleńczyk (Baczyńska’s brother), continued to cultivate certain aspects of their Jewish identity. What they all had in common is their predominant identification with Polish culture, language, and nation. This group included those who served in the Polish army and reached senior positions in Polish government, academe, and cultural and scientific institutions.

Many spheres of Jewish life flourished during the twenty years of the Second Republic. Jewish schools competed with the Polish ones, Jewish filmmakers produced numerous Yiddish films, and Jewish scholars gained worldwide acclaim. For example, the Jewish Scientific Institute (YIVO) was founded in Wilno in 1925 and became the leading Jewish cultural center in the world.<sup>130</sup> Likewise, the Jewish press thrived. For example, the assimilationist writers produced *Wiadomości Literackie* (The Literary News), a modern, liberal, Polish-patriotic weekly journal – Poland’s highest literary periodical of the interwar years.<sup>131</sup> *Nowy Dziennik* (New Daily), *Chwila* (The Moment), and *Nasz Przegląd* (Our Review) also enjoyed wide readership.

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<sup>129</sup> Katarzyna Person, *Assimilated Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1940-1943* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>130</sup> Davies, *God’s Playground*, 302.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 302-303.

In theory, the Minorities Treaty of 1919, for which the Poles blamed the Jews, the Treaty of Riga of 1921 and the Polish constitutions of 1921 and 1935 protected the rights of minority groups living in Poland. From the Minorities Treaty:

Article 2: Poland undertakes to assure full and complete protection of life and liberty to all inhabitants of Poland without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion. All inhabitants of Poland should be entitled to the free exercise, whether public or private, of any creed, religion or belief, whose practices are not inconsistent with public order or public morals.

Article 3: Poland admits and declares to be Polish nationals *ipso facto* and without the requirement of any formality German, Austrian, Hungarian, or Russian nationals habitually resident at the date of the coming into force of the present treaty in territory which is or may be recognized as forming part of Poland.

Article 7: All Polish nationals shall be equal before the law and shall enjoy the same civil and political rights without distinction as to race, language or religion. Differences in religion, creed or confession shall not prejudice any Polish national in matters relating to the enjoyment of civil or political rights, as for instance admission to public employment, functions and honours, or exercise of professions and industries. No restriction shall be imposed on the free use by any Polish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, in religion, in the press or in publications of any kind, or at public meetings. Notwithstanding any establishment by the Polish Government of an official language, adequate facilities shall be given to Polish nationals of non-Polish speech for the use of their language, either orally or in writing before the courts.

Article 8: Polish national who belong to racial, religious or linguistic minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as the other Polish nationals. In particular they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense charitable, religious and social institutions, schools and other educational establishments, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their religion freely therein.

Article 9: Poland will provide in the public educational system in towns and districts in which a considerable proportion of Polish nationals of other than Polish speech are residents adequate facilities for ensuring that in the primary schools the instruction shall be given to the children of such Polish nationals through the medium of their own language. This provision shall not prevent the Polish Government from making the

teaching of the Polish language obligatory in the said schools. In towns and districts where there is a considerable proportion of Polish nationals belonging to racial, religious, or linguistic minorities, these minorities shall be assured an equitable share in the enjoyment and application of the sums which may be provided out of public funds under the state, municipal or other budget, for educational, religious or charitable purposes....

Article 11: Jews shall not be compelled to perform any act, which constitutes a violation of their Sabbath, nor shall they be placed under any disability by reason of their refusal to attend courts of law or to perform any legal business on their Sabbath. This provision however shall not exempt Jews from such obligations as shall be imposed upon all other Polish citizens for the necessary purposes of military service, national defence or the preservation of public order.<sup>132</sup>

In practice, however, the Minorities Treaty, the Treaty of Riga, and the Polish constitutions of 1921 and 1935 did very little to protect the minorities. Ethno-nationalists viewed the Minorities Treaty as a humiliating, imposed treaty. In particular, they regarded the Jewish minority rights as an insult against the Polish people and as an attempt to create a Polish-Jewish state in Poland. The Polish government considered the concept of equal rights a Jewish attempt to gain special privileges. In the words of Prime Minister and General Władysław Sikorski (1881-1943), “The Jewish minority undoubtedly believes that the rights which the Poland has voluntarily granted it will be safeguarded by the government. But a note of warning is necessary, because too often the defense of its justified interests has been turned by the Jewish side into a struggle for privilege.”<sup>133</sup> Sikorski implies that equal rights for Jews, referred to as a “struggle for privilege,” by the Polish government might be suspended in the future. *Polskie*

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<sup>132</sup> Cited in Stachura, *Poland*, 89-91

<sup>133</sup> Władysław Sikorski, speech, 19 Jan. 1923, cited in Joanna B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew From 1880 to the Present* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 79.

*Stronnictwo Katolicko-Ludowe (PSKL)*, a Christian Democratic Party, expressed a similar approach to equal rights for the Jewish minority:

Regarding the Jewish masses of several millions, PSKL upholds the ground of traditional Polish religious toleration, which is guaranteed by the Constitution on the grounds of social and civic justice. However, the party is not going to tolerate the privileged position of Jews in any aspect of life. Our point of view is that there are definitely too many Jews in Poland and that their influence on our life is generally negative and harmful, and that the saturation of Polish cities with Jews also causes poverty among Jews themselves. PSKL wholeheartedly supports the emigration of Jews from Poland to other countries and will defend the Polish state from the new Jewish invasion from the East, although we grant Jews equal rights with other citizens and condemn anti-Jewish excesses on the part of irresponsible elements. However, we will not allow the Jews to create a state within a state and will concentrate all our efforts against Jewish parties acting against the Polish state and its sovereignty.<sup>134</sup>

Moshe Sneh, a Polish-Jewish publicist, noted a clear discrepancy between official endorsement of the notion of equal rights for Jews and its practice, “From a formal point of view the Jews are citizens enjoying equal rights; in reality they are treated as a ‘foreign and harmful element.’”<sup>135</sup> Indeed, now that the Polish nation was a social “organism” defined in ethno-religious terms, the Polish government adopted a firm and uncompromising stance towards Poland’s ethnic minorities, especially towards Polish Jewry. Jews became second-class citizens. Moreover, they were being deliberately targeted by an increasingly anti-Semitic government that enjoyed the support of key political parties such as the National Democrats, Christian Democrats, and the various Peasant Parties. In 1919, the Polish *Sejm* (Parliament) passed the mandatory Sunday Rest Law. In theory, the Law was intended to protect all workers, Jewish and non-Jewish,

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<sup>134</sup> PSKL program cited in in Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 80.

<sup>135</sup> Moshe Sneh, “Hoser omez ba-zad ha-yehudi”, cited in Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 78.



from exploitation. In practice, however, it strengthened the Catholic nature of Polish society and forced the Jews, who observed the Sabbath, to suffer economic consequences.<sup>136</sup> Jews were barred from employment in state-owned industry, civil service, and the teaching profession, to name but a few. In 1923, the Polish state established a quota on the number of students “of the Mosaic faith” that could be admitted to Polish universities. As a result, the percentage of Jewish students in Polish universities decreased from twenty-five percent in 1921-1922 to eight percent in 1938-1939. And, *Żydokomuna* (Judeo-Communism, related to Judeo-Bolshevism), the idea that the Jews and the Communists, especially Soviet Bolsheviks, are one movement aimed at destroying Poland, became a staple of Polish anti-Semitism. For instance, during the Polish-Soviet War, three thousand Jewish soldiers and officers were removed from the Polish Army and detained, as potential Bolshevik spies, at *Jabłonna*, a closed camp near Łódź. Although the camp was liquidated in September of 1920, Jewish soldiers were permanently removed from the Polish Army, and an atmosphere of suspicion toward every Jew continued to infiltrate Polish society for years to come.<sup>137</sup> In an article titled *Żydokomuna grozi nam bezlitosną zagładą* [Judeo-Communism threatens us with merciless annihilation] appearing in a magazine *Polska dla Polaków – Poland for Poles –* we read, “While eight million Polish peasants are starving to death, a million and a half affluent Jewish merchants, lawyers, doctors, politicians, writers swell from fat taken from the Poles. The impoverished Polish nation must defend itself with all its might so that it does not fall prey to the Jews and their greed. The Jewish parasite nestled

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<sup>136</sup> Mitchell Hart and Tony Michels, *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Volume 8, The Modern World, 1815-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>137</sup> Adam Ciolkosz, “Dzielnica Żydowska obozu w Jabłonnice,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* 20 (1971): 178-99.

in Polish soil seeks to create a Judeo-Poland via a Communist revolution in cooperation with the Soviets. We need to defeat them!”<sup>138</sup> *Polska dla Polaków* was only one of the many magazines, journals, and newspapers whose affiliation with anti-Semitic ideology was unquestionable and which gained wide readership during the interwar period.

In May of 1926, Piłsudski staged a successful *coup d'état* against the parliamentary system dominated by Dmowski's National Democrats, and inaugurated the era of the *Sanacja*, the “purification” regime.<sup>139</sup> Many, including ethnic minority groups, expected that Piłsudski's *coup* would stifle the National Democrats, and viewed it as the beginning of a better era modeled on the traditions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They were greatly mistaken, however. Although the Prime Minister Kazimierz Bartel (1882-1941) proposed the abolition of several cultural, religious, and economic restrictions on the life of Jews, these proposals came to nothing. Furthermore, as a result of Piłsudski's death in May of 1935, the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, and Great Depression, the *Sanacja* regime not only failed to reconcile ethnic minorities to the state, but also was becoming increasingly susceptible to the ideas of its chief adversary. Indeed, as fervid nationalism metastasized to all ranks of the society in the late 1930s, National Democrat ideology became more and more central in key sectors of Polish society.<sup>140</sup>

In 1933, on the fifteenth anniversary of Polish independence, the magazine *Pod Pręgierz*, (Under the Pillory), published an illustration depicting Poland as a soaring

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<sup>138</sup> “Żydokomuna grozi nam bezlitosną zagładą,” *Polska dla Polaków* nr. 1 (1937): 4.

<sup>139</sup> Rothschild, “The Ideological, Political, and Economic Background, of Piłsudski's Coup D'état of 1926,” 224.

<sup>140</sup> Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945*, 68.

woman, rays of light streaming from her head in all directions. The Polish eagle, Poland's national symbol appears on her chest, the *Maciejówka* cap, a type of headgear popular with Piłsudski's legionaries appears on her head, and in her hands are broken shackles, signifying the end of oppression and rebirth of Polish statehood. Poland stands upon three stones that represent the now fallen partitioning powers. She is surrounded by key figures of the Second Republic: Józef Piłsudski, Roman Dmowski and Ignacy Paderewski. The illustration seems to suggest that Poland – just like resurrected Christ – was restored to glory. But at her feet sits a caricature of the rapacious Jew. The text under the illustration states in Polish, “Gdy Chrystus Pan zmartwychwstał, został odwalony jeden kamień, na którym siedział Anioł Gabryel – Gdy Polska zmartwychwstała – odwalono trzy Kamienie: - Rosja, Niemcy i Austria – pozostał zaś żyd. Kiedy Polacy obchodzić będą rocznicę oswobodzenia swego kraju z czwartego zaborcy?”<sup>141</sup> (When Christ the Lord rose from the dead, one stone was cast on which Angel Gabriel sat. When Poland rose from the dead three stones were cast: Russia, Germany, and Austria. But the Jew remained. When will the Poles celebrate the anniversary of the liberation of their nation from the fourth partitioning power?) This illustration exemplifies major trends in nationalist discourse in interwar Poland. Ethno-nationalists claimed that Poland was not just partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary, but that Poland's most dangerous occupier was the fourth partitioning power – the Jews. As the fourth partitioning power, the Jews intended to take over Poland – politically, economically, and culturally – from the inside. To illustrate, Dmowski believed that Poles would never build a modern country until they have their own middle

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<sup>141</sup> “15 lat temu,” *Pod Pręgierz* 33 (1933): 1.

class, and they will never have their own middle class unless they eliminate the Jews.

The mere presence of Jews in Poland was thus viewed as a deliberate threat to the creation of a modern Polish state.

Cena 10 gr.

NR. 33 (Rok 5)  
POZNAŃ, 1933

# POD PRĘGIERZ

Tygodnik poświęcony  
obronie handlu i przemysłu  
chrześcijańskiego w Polsce



Redaktor naczelny  
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## 15 LAT TEMU



Gdy Chrystus Pan zmartwychwstał, został odwalony jeden kamień, na którym siedział Anioł Gabryel. — Gdy Polska zmartwychwstała — odwalono trzy kamienie: — Rosja, Niemcy i Austria — pozostał zaś żyd. — Kiedyż więc Polacy obchodzić będą rocznicę oswobodzenia swego kraju z czwartego zaborcy?

Figure 1. "15 lat temu (15 years ago)," Pod Pręgierz 33 (1933): 1.

There is no doubt that the large number of Polish Jews with their ambivalent attitude toward the Second Republic and a peculiar role in the Polish economy could be seen as problematic by the young state and contribute to the rise of anti-Semitism among the Poles. However, in the case of ethno-nationalists, it was not the size, qualities and actions of the Jews that caused anti-Semitism. Rather, anti-Semitism stemmed from the ethno-nationalists' view of the Jews as the chief harmful alien.<sup>142</sup> According to the ethno-nationalist rhetoric, minorities at a lower level of civilization than the Polish nation such as Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Belarusians, even Germans, after many generations in Poland could become true Poles, but the Jews could never join the Polish nation:

We must and we are entitled, thanks to our cultural superiority, to influence our nonethnic Polish citizens. We must integrate them into the Polish nation by means of assimilating them into the cultural ethos of our civilization. However, we have to take a totally different approach toward the "Jewish power." Because of their ethics and their imperialistic goals the Jews have forced us to take a different approach toward them. Our duty is to fight against the Jewish goal of destroying the material, spiritual, and national achievement of Poland. Our duty is to organize positive action toward the enrichment of our Christian heritage, to nationalize our industry and commerce, and to spread among Poles the awareness of their separate identity and their unity and of exclusive rights to the Second Polish Republic.<sup>143</sup>

This concept of the Jew as the major other defining Polish identity, already in use in the pre-independence period, goes a long way towards explaining why in the modern period Poland failed to develop an equivalent of a stable liberal democratic movement, and the idea of civic Polish identity.

*PPS* was the only major political party to reject the representation of the Jew as the major other in the interwar period. However, following Piłsudski's death in 1935,

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<sup>142</sup> Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 76.

<sup>143</sup> "Deklaracja Ideowa Stowarzyszenia Młodzieży Akademickiej Odrodzenie," cited in Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 82-83.

there were some members prone to the ethno-nationalist perspective. For instance, in essay *Sprawa żydowska a socjalizm* (The Jewish issue and socialism) published in 1937 in a socialist paper *Robotnik* (The Worker) Jan Borski, an assimilated Polish Jew characterized Jews as the antithesis of Poles and urged for the emigration of Jews from Poland.<sup>144</sup> In the post-1935 period, the *Sanacja* regime embarked on restricting the equal rights of Jews. In February 1936, the Polish Sejm passed a bill banning kosher slaughter (shehitah). It was modeled on anti-shehitah law passed in Nazi Germany. In March 1938, the Polish Sejm, expecting a mass return of Polish Jews living in Nazi Germany to Poland, passed the deprivation on citizenship law, which took away Polish citizenship from Polish citizens living abroad. Although the law did not mention Jews at all, it was clearly directed at them.<sup>145</sup>

This assault on the Jewish status in Poland was punctuated by a wave of pogroms and anti-Jewish riots. The Polish press in 1935-36 deliberately underestimated the number of Jews killed in pogroms that erupted at the time. Although the pauperization of Jews had begun long before 1935, the government itself supported the economic boycott of Jews in the post-Piłsudski era. To be sure, the *Sanacja* regime opposed anti-Jewish violence, but, as Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składowski (1885-1962) explained in 1936, “at the same time, it is understandable that the country should possess the instinct compelling it to defend its culture, and it is natural that Polish society should seek economic self-sufficiency.”<sup>146</sup> Economic anti-Semitism also gained the approval of the Polish Catholic Church. The Polish Church, with its own press, is also guilty of

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<sup>144</sup> Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 81.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>146</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 71.

disseminating among the Roman Catholic population, especially its largest segment, the peasantry, the representation of the Jew as the enemy of the Polish nation and Christianity. As an illustration, the most popular Catholic magazine of interwar Poland, *Mały Dziennik* (the Small Daily) published simple articles with titles such as, “How the Jew Was Stealing Money from the Treasury and at the Same Time Was Poisoning the Goys,” or “Jewish Educators Poison Our Children with the Venom of Hatred and Atheism.” These articles usually examined the individual life of Catholic Poles, where the Jew was always made responsible for the hardships they faced.<sup>147</sup> Poems, also representing the Jew as the major other, were often presented next to the articles. For example, another popular Catholic magazine, *Przegląd Powszechny* (The General Review) published the following poem, titled “Yet we...are blind”:

Jewry is contaminating Poland thoroughly.  
It scandalizes the young, destroys the unity of the common people.  
It poisons the spirit, incites to evil, provokes, and divides.  
A terrible gangrene had infiltrated our body.  
Yet we...are blind.  
The Jews have gained control of Polish business,  
As though we are imbeciles,  
And they cheat, extort, steal.<sup>148</sup>

It is beyond doubt that a significant section of Roman Catholic Poles internalized the representation of the Jew as the enemy of both the Polish nation and Christianity. Moreover, National Democrats used the concept of the *Polak-Katolik* or the fusion of Polish ethno-nationalism and Roman Catholicism to dissociate their views on the Polish Jews from that of the German Nazis. A good example of this approach can be found in articles published in the ND’s weekly periodical, *Myśl Narodowa* (Weekly Thought).

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>148</sup> “A myśmy...ślepi!” *Przegląd Powszechny*, 7 Dec. 1922, cited in Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 84.



For instance, an article entitled, “*Katolicyzm, rasizm i sprawa żydowska,*” (Catholicism, Racism and the Jewish Question), published in 1935, explains, “ Our ideology is older than Hitler’s ideology. In our [National Democratic] treatment of the Jews we never found ourselves in conflict with the Church. We are not racists. Our main goal is to serve the nation. There is no conflict between our nationalism and Catholicism. We define the Jews as the enemy of our nation and as a foreign element, which has caused the degeneration of European culture and civilization...The battle of the Polish nation with the Jews does not stand in conflict with the Roman Catholic Church but in fact serves its interest.”<sup>149</sup> Polish interwar ethno-nationalists, then, believed that the anti-Semitism they adapted emerged out of their concern over the fate of the Polish nation and Christianity. It was thus not only morally justified, but also totally different from the racial anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany. Although the majority of the Polish Church supported the ethno-nationalist views, spread anti-Jewish stereotypes, and encouraged economic anti-Semitism, it condemned anti-Jewish violence and Nazi racism (In the eyes of the Polish Church, a Jew who converted to Catholicism, was a Catholic and not a Jew.)

In his pastoral letter of 1936 Cardinal Józef Hlond wrote:

It is a fact that Jews strongly oppose the Catholic Church, that they are freethinkers and that they are in the vanguard of atheism, Bolshevism and revolutionary activity. It is a fact that they exert a pernicious influence on public morality and that their publishing houses spread pornography. It is true that the Jews are swindlers and usurers, and that they deal in prostitution. It is true that, from a religious and ethical standpoint, Jewish youth is having a negative effect on Catholic youth in our schools.

Then he took a step back:

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<sup>149</sup> “*Katolicyzm, rasizm i sprawa żydowska,*” *Myśl Narodowa*, no. 51 (1935), cited in Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 86.

But let us be fair: not all Jews are like this. There are very many Jews who are believers, who are honest, just, merciful and philanthropic. There is a healthy, edifying sense of family in many Jewish households. We know Jews who are ethically outstanding, noble and honorable.

I warn against the moral stance, imported from abroad [Nazi Germany] that is fundamentally and ruthlessly anti-Semitic. It is contrary to the Catholic ethics. One may love one's nation more, but one may not hate anyone. Not even Jews. It is proper to prefer your own kind when shopping and to avoid Jewish shops and Jewish stalls in the market place. But it is forbidden to demolish a Jewish shop, damaging its goods, break windows, or even throw things at Jewish homes. One should avoid the harmful moral influence of Jews, avoid their anti-Christian culture, and especially boycott the Jewish press and immoral Jewish publications. But it is forbidden to assault, beat up, maim or slander Jews. One should honor and love Jews as human beings and neighbors...When divine mercy enlightens a Jew to sincerely accept his and our Messiah, let us welcome him with joy into our Christian fold. Guard against those who incite anti-Jewish violence. They serve a reprehensible cause.<sup>150</sup>

Christian ethics was in little evidence in the far-right press, however. Anti-Semitic propaganda did not boil down to words, but also drawings, images, and cartoons. Although anti-Semitic cartoons were published in the Polish rightist press throughout all of the interwar years, the most shocking were published after Piłsudski's death. These regularly portrayed Polish Jews as the enemy, who had to be removed from Poland with all possible means. The Jew was always presented as an outsider, a monster, or a devil's servant, repulsive in its physicality and mentality and dangerous to the Polish nation. The Jew – the creature was then outside the “human” realm of the world. To illustrate, Edmund Heydak's 1937 cartoon entitled “A recipe for crisis,” shows cattle freight cars filled with Jews. The caption reads, “This export will definitely strengthen out our trade balance.”<sup>151</sup> Another cartoon by Kazimierz Grus shows a young Pole shooting *Chrobry*

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<sup>150</sup> August Cardinal Hlond, *Na Straży Sumienia Narodu* (1936), cited in Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945*, 97-98.

<sup>151</sup> *Edmund Heydak, A recipe for crisis (1937)*

swords, the symbol of the far right in the 1930s, at a gathering of Jews. The caption reads, "Effective missiles."<sup>152</sup>

## **Recepta na kryzys.**



Ten eksport wzmocniłby na pewno nasz bilans handlowy!

Figure 2. Edmund Heydak, A Recipe for Crisis (1937). The caption reads: "This export will definitely strengthen our trade balance."

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<sup>152</sup> Kazimierz Grus, *Effective missiles* (1935)

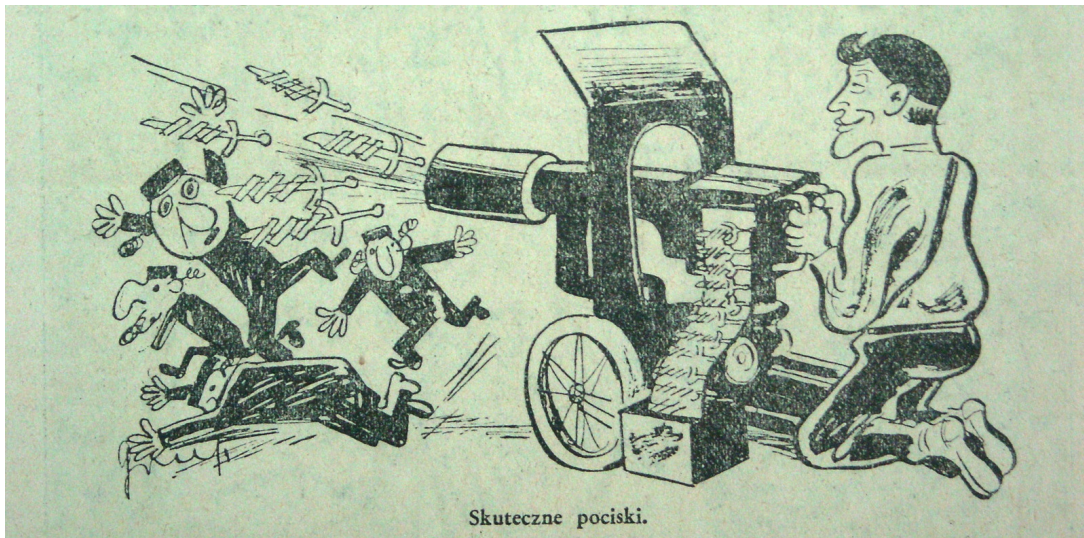


Figure 3. Kazimierz Grus, (1935). The caption reads: “Effective missiles.”

*Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego (OZN)* (Camp of National Unity), an ethno-nationalist political party established in 1937 by the *Sanacja* regime, caused further deterioration in the authorities’ attitude towards the Jews. The 1938 conference of OZN’s Supreme Council created Thirteen Clauses on the Jewish Question. Modeled after the Nuremberg laws, the clauses presented Jews as the polluter of the Polish national soul. According to ethno-nationalists, physical removal of Jews from Poland was a necessary step toward the “purification” of the Polish nation. Thus, the OZN Supreme Council argued that Polish Jews should be deprived of all civil rights and encouraged to immigrate to Eretz Israel, the French island colony of Madagascar, or elsewhere.<sup>153</sup> It is important to note that The Thirteen Clauses on the Jewish Question remained theoretical and were never implemented in interwar Poland. Nevertheless, it resulted in mass emigration of Polish Jews to Palestine and the West.

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<sup>153</sup> Freilich, *Assimilation and polonization among Jews in inter-war Poland (1918-1939)*, viii.

As Ezra Mendelsohn points out, Jewish life in interwar Poland was neither all “good for the Jews” nor all “bad for the Jews.” What is indisputable is that by the end of the Second Republic, a significant section of the Polish society regarded Polish Jews as the chief internal enemy of the Polish nation. It is also clear that the abundant anti-Jewish propaganda of the interwar years had a direct impact on the moral value system of many Poles, placing Jews outside of that system, and ultimately resulting in (many, but certainly not all) Poles’ attitude of indifference to the fate of the Jews during the Nazi genocide of Polish Jewry.

### **Poland under Nazi and Soviet Occupation (1939-1945)**

Optimism ran high among the Poles in the summer of 1939. Poland, after all – as the official propaganda had been asserting for twenty years – was a great power that could, if necessary, hold off the Germans without external aid. Les Kaluza, a Polish teenager in the summer of 1939, recalls the general atmosphere of confidence:

I had been in summer camp when the news came that war was imminent. The word was on everyone’s lips. My friends and I had no doubt that we [Poland] could beat the Germans easily. We were the stronger ones. “We will cover them with our hats,” was a popular saying back then. The posters, which were visible everywhere, showed planes, ships, tanks, artillery, and marching troops; they assured us that we were *Silni, Zwarci, Gotowi* (Strong, United, Ready). We knew that we could have complete faith in our forces and the fact that we also had two world powers (Great Britain and France) on our side convinced us that disaster would await the Germans if they dared to attack us.<sup>154</sup>

Of course, it goes without saying that the German blitzkrieg that struck Poland during the first few days of September left Poles stunned and shattered. Their last note of hope vanished on September 17 when the Red Army unexpectedly invaded Poland from

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<sup>154</sup> Les Kaluza, *Once Upon A Time There Was a War* (New York: Merriam Press, 2020), 15-16.

the east. On September 18, the Polish government and military leaders fled across the frontier to Romania, then France and finally on to Britain. On September 27 Warsaw capitulated. A Varsovian remembers, “In his last radio announcement, Mayor Starzyński assured us that Poland’s capitulation and transition would be orderly. There was more Chopin. The radio announcers’ and the Mayor’s voices broke; we, the listeners, bravely tried not to weep. The Mayor’s last words: “Thank you for your bravery and – ” A long silence. “God save us!”<sup>155</sup>

When Germany invaded Poland in September of 1939, Hitler’s objective was to create *Lebensraum* or, new “living space” for the German master race. To the Nazis, Poles were *Untermenschen*, or subhumans occupying a territory, which ought to be colonized by the German master race.<sup>156</sup> This meant the end of Poland as a state and as a nation. Thus, when the time came to transform the *Lebensraum* theory into practice, Christian Poles were targeted in greatest numbers, that is, until the fate of Polish Jewry had been decided.<sup>157</sup>

Shortly before the German invasion of Poland, Hitler is reported to have said, “The destruction of Poland is our primary task. The aim is not the arrival at a certain line but the annihilation of all living forces. [...] Be merciless! Be brutal. [...] It is necessary to proceed with maximum severity. [...] The war is to be a war of annihilation.”<sup>158</sup> In a speech to the commanders of the German army in August of 1939 he was even blunter, “I

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<sup>155</sup> Sophie Stallman, *My War My Life* (Minneapolis: Mill City Press, 2013), 54.

<sup>156</sup> Richard C. Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation 1939-1944* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 4.

<sup>157</sup> Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 20.

<sup>158</sup> William D. Rubinstein, *Genocide: a history* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 182.

have put my death-head formations in place with the command relentlessly and without compassion to send into death many women and children of Polish origin and language. Only thus can we gain the living space that we need.”<sup>159</sup> Other German politicians, like Hans Frank, the Führer’s Governor-General of occupied regions, *Gauleiter* Arthur Greiser and *Gauleiter* Albert Forster have made similar declarations.<sup>160</sup> German President of Łódź, on his part, Friedrich Uebelhoer, portrayed the attitude of the German occupation authorities in Poland as of November 12, 1939: “We are the masters. We must therefore behave like masters. The Pole is a *knecht* (servant), so he must serve. We must have steel in our backbone and must never allow Poland to be reborn. Be tough...”<sup>161</sup> Reich Minister Dr. Robert Lay, on the other hand, declared on January 31, 1940 that a race inferior to the Germans requires less food; therefore it is sufficient if the Poles have subsistence, in order to be just fit to serve the German Reich. In short, the Polish elite was to be liquidated and the non-elite, or “primitive” Poles were to become a migrant workforce living on starvation diets.<sup>162</sup>

By the end of October 1939, Poland already had been partitioned: Soviet Union seized 50 percent, Germany 48.4 percent, and Lithuania 1.6 percent. Stalin incorporated his part of the spoils into the USSR as the Ukrainian, Belarusian and, from June 1940, Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics. Hitler divided his 48.4 percent of Poland into two sections – *Reichsgau Wartheland* composed of a large expanse of western Poland incorporated directly into the Reich, and *Generalgouvernement*, or General Government

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<sup>159</sup> Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 21.

<sup>160</sup> Arthur Greiser served as *Gauleiter* of *Wartheland* – a region of western Poland illegally annexed to Nazi Germany, beginning in September of 1939. Albert Forster served as the *Gauleiter* of the Free City of Danzig.

<sup>161</sup> *Lodzer Zeitung*, November 12, 1939.

<sup>162</sup> Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust*, 21.

(GG) composed of those parts of Poland that had not been incorporated into the Third Reich. After his attack on the Soviet Union in June of 1941, Hitler conquered eastern Poland incorporating a small part of its territory – the district of Galicia – into the General Government.<sup>163</sup>

Although all of the former Polish territory under German control was subjected to repressive measures, there were significant differences in the Nazi arrangements in the *Wartheland* and the GG. In the *Wartheland* the Nazis completely destroyed the infrastructure of the Polish state and its socio-political organizations and religious institutions.<sup>164</sup> The *Wartheland* was also the first eastern territory to be subjected to a program of ruthless Germanization. This meant, of course, de-Polonization and was to be implemented by the colonization of the area by Germans. Thus, roughly one million Poles and Jews were forcibly evacuated (this was accompanied by mass killings) from the annexed provinces of the *Wartheland* to a newly created dumping ground, the GG. For instance, on the morning of October 12, 1939, a notice relating to the evacuation of Orłowo, a Polish village near Gdynia, was posted by the Germans in the streets:

In the interest of public order the evacuation of the Polish population of *Orłowo* is hereby decreed. Each person may take as many personal objects as he is able to carry. The vacated residences must be left open, with the keys in the locks. The inhabitants must be in readiness by 9 a.m. Any person opposing the measures taken by the German authorities will be shot on the spot. Any act designed to spoil a residence or its furniture will be treated as sabotage.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Marek Jan Chodakiewicz. *Between Nazis and Soviets: occupation politics in Poland, 1939-1947* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 14.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>165</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. *The German Occupation of Poland: extract of note addressed to the governments of the allies and neutral powers on May 3, 1941*. London: 1942, 183.



The majority of the people to be expelled, however, had neither the time, nor the chance to learn the contents of such German orders, so that expulsion took them unawares and when the German gendarmes ordered them to leave their houses, threatening them with firearms, they did not even know what it was all about. About 75 percent of the expelled were unable to take anything with them, not even food. It was, however, easier to expel Poles from their homes than to find *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans) to replace them. With the exception of approximately 650,000 repatriated Germans from Eastern Europe – for example, Estonia, Latvia, Soviet-occupied Poland, Bessarabia, Bukovina, and the GG – there was no sizeable migration from Central and Western Europe beyond the frontiers of the annexed Polish territories.<sup>166</sup> An eyewitness observed, “The Germans who come here [to Gdynia] from the Baltic States even when subsided, live a wretched life. The only comfort they have is represented by the apartments and fine furniture left behind by the Poles who have been driven out.”<sup>167</sup> Despite the efforts to establish a thriving agricultural community of ethnic Germans in the annexed lands, which Hitler planned would produce ‘grain, grain and again grain’, the Nazi program failed.<sup>168</sup> German resettlement in the area drastically fell in 1941 due to the demands of the German war with the Soviet Union.<sup>169</sup>

The General Government with its seat at Kraków was not juridically an integral part of the Reich, but constituted an “accessory” territory (*Nebenland, Ostraum,*

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<sup>166</sup> Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust*, 18.

<sup>167</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. *The German Occupation of Poland: extract of note addressed to the governments of the allies and neutral powers on May 3, 1941*. London: 1942, 184.

<sup>168</sup> Elizabeth M. Collingham, *The taste of war: World War II and the battle for food* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 43.

<sup>169</sup> Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust*, 19.

*Restgebiet, Heimstätte der Polen*, etc.) of the Reich, with a character and administration similar to that of a colony of exploitation.<sup>170</sup> With the exception of entities of social utility, such as welfare groups, most Polish socio-political organizations were banned, and the administration of the GG was composed entirely of German officials. Polish secondary schools and universities were closed, their property destroyed or confiscated. This reflected the aims of the occupying powers, whose governor, Hans Frank, said, “The Poles do not need universities or secondary schools; the Polish lands are to be changed into an intellectual desert.”<sup>171</sup> To be sure, the ultimate aim of the German policy in GG was the same as in *Wartheland* – the area was to be colonized by German settlers who would subjugate the Poles to slavery before their eventual decimation and removal. Warsaw, for instance, was to be completely destroyed, and a “New German City” was to be built on one-twentieth of the area of the city, in place of 1,310,000 Varsovians it was to have not more than 130,000 German inhabitants plus 80,000 Polish slaves confined to camp in Warsaw’s Prague district.<sup>172</sup>

The Nazis organized all ethnic groups of the GG according to a racially discriminatory system: the *Reichsdeutsche*, or Germans from the Reich were at the top of the system, followed by *Volksdeutsche*, or Poland’s ethnic Germans, then by the Poles and other Slavs, and lastly by Jews. The Jewish community was gradually isolated in the ghettos, (400 ghettos were established on Polish territory!), exploited, and, later,

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<sup>170</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. *The German Occupation of Poland: extract of note addressed to the governments of the allies and neutral powers on May 3, 1941*. London: 1942, 3.

<sup>171</sup> Ulrich Menten, *Forgotten Voices: The Expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe after World War II* (Routledge, 2017), 85.

<sup>172</sup> Adolf Ciborowski, *Warsaw: A City Destroyed and Rebuilt* (Warsaw: Polonia Publishing House, 1964), 46.

exterminated after the Final Solution commenced in 1941.<sup>173</sup> The American Vice-Consul to Poland T.H. Chylinski, based in Warsaw, reported in 1941:

From the moment Poland was occupied, the Jews were persecuted and much more severely than the Poles. The military authorities seemed to make a special point of treating them brutally, always emphasizing the difference between Jews and Poles. With the creation of the General Government and the taking over of the administration by German civilians and the police functions by the Gestapo, the situation of the Jews remained relatively stable for some time. The treatment of the Jews, however, continued to be much worse than that of the Poles, and a series of regulations were made public introducing restrictions for Jews along the lines of the Nuremberg laws. Expulsion of Jews from apartments, requisitioning of their factories and businesses, the prohibition against dealing in drugs and medicines, the requirement to register all Jewish property, the prohibition of Jews using the trains (explained officially as a sanitary ruling against the spreading of disease), the taking of Jews off the streets for work in the city and vicinity (cleaning the streets of snow, dismantling bombed buildings, carrying and transporting confiscated furniture and supplies and so forth) and finally, the requirement to wear a white arm band with the blue star of Zion on their sleeves – all served to place the Jews in a position beneath the Poles.<sup>174</sup>

In spring 1941, before the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Germans issued a decree relating to the liquidation of Jews during the advance into conquered territory. By the end of 1941 about half a million individuals had been murdered, usually in woods near their homes.<sup>175</sup> In 1942, the Germans launched Operation Reinhardt, designed to exterminate the entire Jewish population of the GG (The Germans first used Zyklon B as the killing agent in the Chełmno camp in December 1941, and decided on gassing as the “final solution” at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942). The ghettos were liquidated and their inhabitants transferred to the major killing centers – Chełmno,

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<sup>173</sup> Chodakiewicz, *Between Nazis and Soviets*, 15-16.

<sup>174</sup> T.H. Chylinski, *Poland Under Nazi Rule*, a report by American Vice Consul to Poland, 1941, 22-24.

<sup>175</sup> Jozef Garlinski, “The Polish Underground State (1939-1945),” *Journal of Contemporary History* 10 (1975): 237.

Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka. In just three months about 1.3 million Polish Jews had perished, and only a small number still lived in the remaining ghettos. The Germans continued to liquidate these ghettos throughout 1942 and 1943. In all, around 2.9 million Polish Jews perished in the Holocaust: about 90 percent of Poland's pre-war Jewish population.<sup>176</sup>

Initially, however, as in the *Wartheland*, a high-pressure terror campaign was launched almost immediately after the invasion with the object of liquidating the Polish political, religious, and intellectual elite. The GG definition of the "elite" was so broad, however, that it embraced essentially anyone who attended secondary school. Furthermore, Poles were killed not only for resisting the Germans but also for being out after curfew or for not making way on a sidewalk for a German approaching from the opposite direction.<sup>177</sup> Several hundred thousand blond, blue-eyed children were taken from their Polish parents and sent to German couples for adoption. In short, the GG became the scene of executions, pacifications, and an archipelago of death factories and camps. In the words of the American Vice-Consul to Poland T.H. Chylinski, 1941:

The bloody reign started about the middle of October 1939. By that time the Army had thinned out considerably by the number of the Gestapo increased daily. [...] A high-pressure terror campaign was launched almost immediately with the object of putting away the leaders of the people and to beating the remainder into submission. [...] Round-ups, executions (without even the semblance of a trial), confiscation of property and homes as well as humiliations in various forms kept the population in a state of fear and mental torture. Later on, in 1940, the execution squad was replaced by the concentration camp, which is almost equivalent to a death sentence. [...] The rounding up of thousands of men on streets, in trolley cars and restaurants occurred whenever the concentration camps were ready or when the Reich needed labor for farms

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<sup>176</sup> Joanna Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew From 1880 to the Present* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 141-142.

<sup>177</sup> Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust*, 8.

and factories. [...] Women and girls are subject to arrests equally with men for political and criminal offences. [...] As reprisals for the murdering of Germans, the Gestapo stages mass executions. On December 26, 1939, in the small town of Wawer near Warsaw approximately 150 Poles were mowed down with machine guns in reprisal for the murder of two German soldiers. [...] Several German soldiers have been killed in and around Warsaw, chiefly in drunken brawls or in brothels. In such cases the Gestapo immediately arrive on the scene, rope off the block in which the killing occurred and proceed to rake all the buildings and streets with machine gun fire. In the country districts they have also been known to set fire to villages for the same reason and shoot the inhabitants when they flee from buildings. I have personally seen streets in the districts of Praga and Wola where the bodies of Poles killed during punitive expeditions were left lying for several hours where they dropped as an object lesson to others.<sup>178</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the difference between the fate of Polish Jews and the Poles remained stark. While Polish Jews were explicitly designated for extermination down to the last child, Poles were “only” to be brutally reduced to a nation of slaves.

The economy of the GG was organized to assist the occupants in the war effort. The economic aims of the German authorities could not have been better expressed than they were in a covert memorandum issued by the General Governor Hans Frank on January 25, 1940. It opens with the following statement of the principle by which the exploitation is to be conducted:

“In view of the present requirements of the Reich’s war economy, no fundamentally long-term policy can be pursued in the GG. On the contrary, the economy of the GG must be so directed that it should at the earliest possible moment produce the maximum

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<sup>178</sup> A report titled *Poland Under Nazi Rule* written in 1941 by American Vice Consul T.H. Chylinski, 3-7.

of what is possible to extract from the local resources within the GG for the immediate reinforcement of the Reich military strength.”<sup>179</sup>

The main value of the GG to the Germans was as an area of exploitation, in the least sophisticated sense. From this point of view, however, the GG was not a particularly profitable acquisition. About 80 percent of Polish industry was located in the *Wartheland*. What industry remained in the GG was cut off from its resources of raw materials and energy. even before the war the area that the Germans turned into GG did not produce enough food to feed Warsaw and other cities. It relied on imported food from other areas of Poland, areas that were now in Nazi and Soviet hands and thereby no longer available to supply food.<sup>180</sup> Even so, the inhabitants of the GG were not only required to feed themselves but also to supply first and foremost German soldiers. If this was not bad enough, nearly 30 percent of agricultural production in the GG was shipped to the Reich for civilian consumption.

It is difficult to reconcile the articles in the German controlled press praising the great concern of the German authorities for the welfare of the “backward nation” with the impoverishment of the Polish population. City dwellers were hit particularly hard, as were members of the intelligentsia and laborers, who were forced to work for pay that did not cover basic sustenance. By mid-1941, for instance, 25 percent of Varsovians were being helped in some way by welfare agencies.<sup>181</sup> By contrast, the first few months of the occupation brought improvement in the peasants’ material conditions of life relative to

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<sup>179</sup> Polish Fort-Nightly Review, “How the Germans are starving Poland”, Tuesday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1942, London.

<sup>180</sup> Jan Gross, *Polish society under German occupation: the Generalgouvernement, 1939-1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 92-97.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

other social strata. The earnings of peasants around Warsaw, for instance, were very high because the starved city paid the high prices they demanded for food. That is, until the Germans forbade the distribution of food from the countryside to the cities. The peasants' condition worsened when the Germans unloaded close to two and one-half million refugees – both Jewish and Christian Poles – from areas incorporated into the Reich. The feeding of these people rested upon the peasant. Zygmunt Klukowski, a doctor in charge of a hospital in the town of Szczepieszyn, was horrified by the way in which local people who had been relatively prosperous farmers had become 'beggars in one hour.'<sup>182</sup> With the systemization of German exploitation of the countryside the peasants' condition further deteriorated. The Jewish section of the population was subjected to conditions of life that were much worse than those of the Poles. In regard to food, they were brought under a separate system aimed at depriving them of the basic necessities of life.

A racialized rationing system for the working non-farming population was introduced in the fall of 1939. This rationing system, however, was not an effort to feed but rather to annihilate the non-German populations of the GG. "In Poland," the *New York Times* reported in 1943, "a sharp distinction is made in rationing between Germans, on the one hand, and Poles and Jews (of whatever nationality) on the other...actually, many Poles and Jews are being starved as part of a deliberate and consistent German policy."<sup>183</sup> Rations in the GG at the beginning of 1940 for the Germans were 2,600 calories per day. Other groups received less than was needed to sustain life: Poles 609

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<sup>182</sup> Collingham, *The taste of war*, 43-44.

<sup>183</sup> Alice Autumn Weinreb, *Modern Hungers: Food and Power in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 80.

calories (26 percent of the caloric intake needed), and Jews, forced into ghettos, were granted 503 calories. At the time of Barbarossa, this number was further reduced, to 184 calories (7.5 percent of what was needed).<sup>184</sup> Goods, such as sugar, flour, and potatoes, theoretically available under the rationing system, were practically non-existent. The supply of other items, such as bread and meat was ridiculously low not only in quantity but also in quality. Moreover, the German authorities forbade articles of food not incorporated into the rationing system, which, among others, include vegetables and fruits, to be sold to or purchased by Poles and Jews. Severe penalties were provided for Poles and Jews contravening this order, as well as for Germans guilty of supplying these products to the Poles or Jews, either for payment or as a gift.<sup>185</sup> The eventual death of the non-German populations of the GG was therefore guaranteed.

A detailed exploration of the Soviet crimes in eastern Poland from 1939 until their withdrawal in 1941 is beyond the scope of this paper. It must be said, however, that, for the Poles, the work of the NKVD in the Soviet Zone proved as destructive as that of the Gestapo in the German Zone.<sup>186</sup> The Polish “bourgeois” class – including 22,000 Polish military officers and intelligentsia at Katyn – was executed, some 780,000 Poles were deported into the depths of the USSR, and Soviet law, bureaucracy, and schooling were firmly established.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Charles D. Roland, *Courage under siege: starvation, disease, and death in the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>185</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. *The German Occupation of Poland: extract of note addressed to the governments of the allies and neutral powers on May 3, 1941*. London: 1942, 134.

<sup>186</sup> Davies, *God's Playground*, 331.

<sup>187</sup> Stachura, *An Interpretive and Documentary History*, 132-33.



In Poland, resistance began early and grew to such a degree that it was called *Polskie Państwo Podziemne* (Polish Underground State). At its peak in 1943-1944, *Armia Krajowa, AK* (The Home Army), commanded by the Polish government-in-exile came to number about 350,000 individuals, making it the largest military resistance organization not only in Poland, but also in Nazi occupied Europe.<sup>188</sup> “Beneath its mask of indifference and civility, Warsaw burns with a fierce hatred of the invader and longs intensely for the day when it will be able to strike back. That day, I believe, will be a bloody one in Warsaw,” wrote T.H. Chylinski of the Warsaw Underground.<sup>189</sup> However, the secret state operated not only military activities, but also, had its own administration and judiciary, established *sub rosa* secondary schools and universities, published clandestine periodicals and books, formed underground theaters, held illicit concerts, and preserved and protected works of art.<sup>190</sup><sup>191</sup>

Including Polish Jews, Poland lost roughly 6 million citizens in the war; of these only 600,000 were killed in military operations. The defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, however, did not bring about Polish freedom. Instead, the so-called “liberation” of Poland by the Soviet Union resulted in almost fifty years of repressive Soviet-controlled rule.

### **Poles and the Jewish Holocaust**

Polish-Jews relations improved at the beginning of war. In the face of a common enemy, previous conflicts seemed not to matter. However, mutual solidarity

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<sup>188</sup> Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 142.

<sup>189</sup> T.H. Chylinski, *Poland Under Nazi Rule*, 57.

<sup>190</sup> Garlinski, “The Polish Underground State,” 220.

<sup>191</sup> Gordon Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 156-157.

proved short-lived and illusive. Aleksander Donat, survivor of the Holocaust in Poland, recalled, “ Just prior to the war at the opening of hostilities, anti-Semitism had slackened. The threat of a common enemy and the wartime sharing of experience had brought Poles and Jews together. But the idyll was short-lived. Poisonous Nazi propaganda reawakened native antisemitism.”<sup>192</sup> A contemporary observer, T.H. Chylinski, wrote in 1941:

It seems that the Germans are already inciting Poles and Jews against each other. [...] Relations between Jews and Poles in Warsaw were very good. There was a genuine sympathy among the Poles for the suffering Jews. The common suffering of Jew and Gentile alike during the siege of Warsaw brought them closer together than ever before. Suddenly, the Jews changed, and there were frequent incidents; Poles approaching too close to ghetto walls or riding in tramcars passing through the ghetto to a suburb beyond were stoned. I tried in vain to find the cause of this sudden hatred. The Poles suspect the Germans because they remember how they tried the same trick before only in reverse order. When the Jews were still at large in the city, rumors would spread about the killings of Poles by Jews. Almost immediately gangs of rowdies would attack Jewish labor detachments. The same gangs were also used to demolish Jewish stores on some of the main streets in Warsaw. Gestapo officers were invariably on hand to photograph these scenes. They were later published in Germany and elsewhere as evidence of “pogroms” in Poland.<sup>193</sup>

Nazi propaganda, however, was not the main cause of Polish anti-Jewish perceptions and actions; rather, they were rooted in pre-1939 Polish exclusivist ethno-nationalism. Explanations of Polish anti-Semitism during World War Two must also take into account the nature of the Nazi and Soviet occupations of Poland.<sup>194</sup> It must be stressed that the realities of Nazi occupation in Poland were much harsher than those in Western Europe. In 1941, draconian laws were introduced, which forbade aiding Jews on

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<sup>192</sup> Aleksander Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom: A Memoir* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978), 13.

<sup>193</sup> T.H. Chylinski, *Poland Under Nazi Rule*, 25.

<sup>194</sup> Michlic, *Threatening Other*, 133.

pain of death. But there were Poles – private individuals, clandestine organizations, and Church institutions – who did help. As a result, approximately 100,000 Polish Jews were saved.<sup>195</sup> It should be noted, however, that while the extent of Polish national solidarity directed against the German oppressor was impressive, Polish Jews were not included in it. To illustrate, while it was socially acceptable and praised for Poles to belong to the underground, it was socially unacceptable and stigmatizing to be seen as someone helping Jews. It is not surprising that many Poles of good will feared their neighbors or even relatives. Worse still, some Poles extorted property from Jews, denounced Jews in hiding to the Nazis, participated in German organized *Judenjagd* (Hunt for Jews) in the countryside, and committed wartime pogroms, such as the 1941 Jedwabne pogrom.<sup>196</sup>

A major factor in Polish perception of the Jews was the belief that Polish Jews in the Eastern Provinces had betrayed Poland during the Soviet invasion and occupation of 1939-1941. Gershon Adiv, an eyewitness to the Soviet entry into Wilno in September 1939, recorded in his diary, “It is difficult to describe the feeling that agitated me when in the street I saw, opposite our gate, a Russian tank...A crowd gathered around where the tanks were standing, someone shouted: ‘Long live the government of the Soviets,’ and everyone cheered in their honor...It was difficult to make out the non-Jews in the crowd. Mostly it was the Jews who showed enthusiasm. This aroused the anger of the Poles somewhat...The Jews’ happiness was complete: the Russians are better than the

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<sup>195</sup> Garlinski, “The Polish Underground State,” 220.

<sup>196</sup> Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagd: polowanie na Żydów 1942-1945: studium dziejów pewnego powiatu* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011).

Germans.”<sup>197</sup> The manifestation of pro-Soviet sympathy was not, however, the crucial issue for Polish-Jewish relations under the Soviet occupation. After all, for the Jews, the Red Army appeared a savior from Nazi barbarism, and they had the right to feel genuine relief and gratitude. This was well understood by Poles. The key factor was the Polish perception of massive Jewish collaboration with Soviet authorities against Poles. When a young Jew who returned to Warsaw from Eastern Provinces at the end of 1941 was asked about the Jewish attitudes to the Soviets, the following response was recorded in the Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto:

When the Bolsheviks entered Polish territory, they were very mistrustful of the Polish population, and fully trusted the Jews. They deported to Russia the more influential Poles and those who before the war held important jobs, and all offices were given mostly to Jews, who everywhere were trusted with positions of power. For these reasons, the Polish population at once assumed a very hostile general attitude. Hatred became even stronger than before the war...The coming of Bolsheviks was greeted with joy. Now they felt proud and secure. They almost considered themselves in charge of the situation; towards the Poles they were condescending and arrogant, and they often let them feel their powerlessness, and they scorned them because of it...There were many Jews who at any opportunity took special pleasure in mentioning to Poles that their time was over, that now nothing depended on them, and they had to obey the Soviet authority.<sup>198</sup>

Most Poles viewed such behavior as treachery and Polish attitudes towards the Jews hardened, reviving the prewar stereotype of *Żydokomuna* (Judeo-Communism). It is true that some Jews collaborated with the Soviets against the Poles in 1939-1941, but, as Marek Chodakiewicz, a Polish historian, points out – and this was unknown to Polish opinion in German occupied Poland – the majority of Jewish collaborators were active left-wingers and constituted a small minority of the whole Jewish population in the

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<sup>197</sup> Cited in Joshua Zimmerman, *Contested memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its aftermath* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 56.

<sup>198</sup> A IH (Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw), Fond: Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawskiego (Ringelblum Archive), I/1042.

Eastern Provinces. In short, the total condemnation of the Jewish population of eastern Poland as traitors was wholly unjustified.<sup>199</sup>

There is no doubt that the destruction of Polish Jews was orchestrated by the occupying German power. There is also no doubt that while some Poles actively participated in the Holocaust (especially in the Eastern Provinces), others risked their lives to save Jews. Neither group, however, was typical of the majority of Poles during World War II. The majority was cruelly indifferent to the horrors of the Holocaust. It is not that they did not know. It is that they did not consider Nazi extermination of Polish Jews as part of the Polish national tragedy. Certainly, this behavior was the result of interwar exclusivist ethno-nationalist teachings of the National Democratic Party. Already tremendously popular before the war, its popularity continued to grow during the course of the war. Such growth can be attributed to the National Democrats' strong ethno-national, Catholic, and anti-German stance, values with which many Poles (including those who previously did not support the Endeks) identified under conditions of war and occupation.<sup>200</sup> It is, then, not surprising that Polish Jews continued to be excluded from the realm of the Polish nation during Nazi occupation and that the majority of Poles expressed indifference and even joy at the murder of Jews.

The Polish Government-in-Exile, based in London since June 1940, sought to demonstrate to the Allies that it represented a clean break from the *Sanacja* regime and that anti-Semitism would not be tolerated in a post-war Polish state, and that Poland will

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<sup>199</sup> Anna Cienciala, "Poles and Jews under German and Soviet Occupation, September 1 1939 – June 22 1941," *The Polish Review* 46 (2001): 400.

<sup>200</sup> Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 175.

guarantee all her citizens, including Jews, full legal equality.<sup>201</sup> The Polish nation viewed the London based government as its representative; for many the “we” it represented did not include Jews. Thus, many Poles on the ground as well as in exile were highly critical of the government’s pro-Jewish statements. On September 25, 1941, the commander in chief of the Home Army, Stefan “Grot” Rowecki, wrote to the Government, “ I report that all favorable declarations of and moves by the Government and by the National Council [Poland’s parliament in exile] concerning Jews in Poland create inside the Country the worst impression possible and eminently facilitate propaganda unfavorable or hostile to the Government...Please accept as a completely real fact that the overwhelming majority of the country is antisemitically inclined. Even socialists are no exception...[and they] accept the postulate of emigration as the solution to the Jewish problem.”<sup>202</sup> “The Jewish problem in considered in Poland to be a very important one. The Poles acknowledge that Hitler unwittingly has done them a great service by eliminating the Jews and many of them aspire to make this a permanent feature in the restored Poland of the future,” wrote T.H. Chylinski in 1941.<sup>203</sup> This position is also apparent in press articles. To illustrate, in 1942, when over 300,000 Polish Jews had been deported from the Warsaw Ghetto to their death in Treblinka, a right-wing Polish underground paper, *Do Broni* (To Arms), wrote, “The Germans and the Jews have set the world afire. Therefore they must burn together.” Another right-wing paper, *Barykada*

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<sup>201</sup> Peter Stachura, *Poland, 1918-1945: An Interpretive and Documentary History of the Second Republic* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004), 154-155

<sup>202</sup> Cited in Konstanty Gebert, “Warsaw: The guilt of indifference,” in *Civil Society and the Holocaust: International Perspectives on Resistance and Rescue*, ed. Anders Jerichow and Cecile Felicia Stokholm Banke (New York: Humanity in Action Press, 2013), 47.

<sup>203</sup> Chylinski, *Poland Under Nazi Rule*, 25.

(The Barricade) in 1943, “ The liquidation of the Jews on Polish soil is of great significance for our future development, since it will free us from several million parasites. The Germans have greatly aided us in this matter.”<sup>204</sup> A report on Polish reactions toward the plight of Polish Jewry, composed in February 1940 by Jan Karski (1914-2000), a secret courier of the Polish Underground State, reveals that majority of Poles felt no real empathy for the suffering of Jews, still considered to be the enemy:

Usually one gets the sense that it would be advisable were there to prevail in the attitude of the Poles toward them the understanding that in the end both peoples are being unjustly persecuted by the same enemy. Such an understanding does not exist among the broad masses of the Polish populace. Their attitude toward the Jews is overwhelmingly severe, often without pity. A large percentage of them are benefitting from the rights that the new situation gives them. They frequently exploit those rights and often even abuse them...The solution of the “Jewish Question” by the Germans – I must state this with a full sense of responsibility for what I am saying – is a serious and quite dangerous tool in the hands of the Germans, leading toward the “moral pacification” of broad sections of Polish society. It would certainly be erroneous to suppose that this issue alone will be effective in in gaining for them the acceptance of the populace. However, although the nation loathes them mortally, this question is creating something akin to a narrow bridge which the Germans and a large portion of Polish society are finding agreement.<sup>205</sup>

A striking example of indifference toward the plight of Warsaw Jews was the participation of a segment of Warsaw’s Polish population in Easter festivities on the Krasiński Square in 1943, while across the wall the Ghetto was burning. Memoirs of both Polish Jews and ethnic Poles speak of the “ill-conceived joy” at the Nazi destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. One Holocaust survivor, in hiding on the so-called Aryan side in spring 1943, recalls, “For me this was the most painful experience on the Aryan side.

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<sup>204</sup> Cited in Hava Ben-Zvi, *Portraits in Literature: The Jews of Poland* (London: European Jewish

Publication Society, 2013), xxx.

<sup>205</sup> Cited in Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 186.

This was simply shocking. Crowds of people were on the way to visit their families and friends during the Easter Festival. And I myself with friends was also walking towards Żoliborz [one of the suburbs of Warsaw]. Among the passing pedestrians I heard ‘the Jews are burning and are spoiling our festival.’...I felt as if I was on Golgotha. People were dying and yet they were saying that the Festival was being spoiled. Not one person remarked how terrible it was.’<sup>206</sup>

However, other voices, though a minority, were also to be heard. Six days after the outbreak of the Uprising, on Easter Sunday, Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004), a Polish poet and future Nobel Prize winner, went to visit a friend, the novelist Jerzy Andrzejewski (1909-1983), living on Nowiniarska street in a small apartment that offered a view of the ghetto. At one of the stops at Krasiński Square Miłosz observed a carefree carousel, swirling happily in front of the burning walls of the ghetto.<sup>207</sup> From across the wall, Marek Edelman (1919-2009), one of the leaders of the Jewish underground, also saw the carousel ‘spinning, girls’ skirts, red and blue with white dots, swirling.’<sup>208</sup> Many years later, Edelman recalled the carousel as ‘our curse,’ the ‘Jewish road’ to death alongside Polish merriment.<sup>209</sup>

In the poem *Campo dei Fiori*, composed immediately, under the pressure of emotion, Miłosz captured this cruel spectacle. The poem begins with the description of Campo De’ Fiori, a public square in Rome full of colorful flowers, fruits, and people. ‘On this same square,’ says Miłosz, ‘they burned Giordano Bruno,’ the sixteenth century

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<sup>206</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 189.

<sup>207</sup> Jerzy Krzyżanowski, ‘The Captive Mind Revisited,’ *World Literature Today* 73 (1991): 660.

<sup>208</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Iron Wind: Europe Under Hitler* (S.I.: Basic Books, 2016), 296.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.



friar and philosopher.<sup>210</sup> Yet, this fact did not disturb the joyful atmosphere of the square. “Before the flames had died,” he writes, “the taverns were full again, baskets of olives and lemons again on the vendors’ shoulders.”<sup>211</sup> Something similar, Miłosz then suggests, happened to the Jews of Warsaw in 1943:

I thought of Campo dei Fiori  
in Warsaw by the sky-carousel  
one clear spring evening  
to the strains of carnival tune.  
This bright melody drowned  
the salvos from the ghetto wall,  
and couples were flying  
high in the cloudless sky.

At times wind from the burning  
would drift dark kites along  
and riders on the carousel  
caught petals in midair.  
That same hot wind blew open the skirts of the girls  
and the crowds were laughing  
on that beautiful Warsaw Sunday.<sup>212</sup>

In both scenarios, people passed by, gazed, perhaps felt empathy, but simultaneously remained detached. They did not only fail to protest the clearly visible atrocities but also failed to connect with the victims on the *human qua human* level. Unlike “the people of Rome and Warsaw [who] haggle, laugh, make love as they pass by martyrs’ pyres,” Miłosz made the choice to, at least, emotionally connect with those who are victims. “That day I thought only of the loneliness of the dying,” he says, and, discovers that no words exist “in any human tongue” which could adequately express

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<sup>210</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems 1931-2001* (New York: Ecco Press, 2001), 33.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

what he sees: “those dying here, the lonely forgotten by the world.”<sup>213</sup> *Campo dei Fiori*, then, suggests that the Poles bear guilt for the Holocaust, not in most cases because of direct complicity, but because of cruel indifference.

This sense of guilt – his own as much as others’ – is a constant throughout Miłosz’s work, and never more powerfully deployed than in *Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto*, written in late 1943. The poem not only suggests that Poles, as passive eyewitnesses to the Holocaust are deprived of innocence, but, more importantly, shows that the genocide of European Jewry testifies to a glaring failure of Christian love. Arguably, no theological term is more fundamental to the Christian faith than the notion of *Imago Dei* – the image of God –, which denotes a symbolic relationship between God and humanity.<sup>214</sup> Each person, then, is created in the image of God, and, as such, all people are bound together by a sense of shared humanity. It can, therefore, be argued that proper Christian behavior during the Holocaust would have been characterized by a love of neighbor, despite seeming differences.

To illustrate, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka (1889-1968), a virulent anti-Semite, motivated by her Catholic faith, which called for mercy and compassion even for Jews, co-founded *Żegota* (Polish Council to Aid Jews) in September of 1942. In an article published in *Prawda* (The Truth) in 1943, she explained, “Today the Jews face extermination. They are the victims of unjust murderous persecutions. I must save them. ‘Do unto others what you want others to do unto you.’ This commandment demands that

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<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>214</sup> Book of Genesis 1:26-27

I use all the means I have to save others, the very same means that I would use for my own salvation.”<sup>215</sup> She pleaded with Poles to come to the aid of the Jews:

All will perish. Poor and rich, old and young, women, men, youngsters, infants...Their only guilt is that they were born into the Jewish nation condemned to extermination by Hitler.

England is silent, so is America, even the influential international Jewry, so sensitive in its reaction to any transgression against its people, is silent. Poland is silent. Dying Jews are surrounded by a host of Pilates washing their hands in innocence.

Whoever remains silent in the face of murder becomes an accomplice of the murder. He who does not condemn, condones.

We are required by God to protest. God who forbids us to kill. We are required by our Christian consciousness. Every human being has the right to be loved by his fellow men. The blood of the defenseless cried to heaven for revenge. Those who oppose our protest are not Catholic.<sup>216</sup>

The majority of Christian Poles, however, remained passive. In their eyes, the Jews “strange and hostile” – were outside their sphere of moral responsibility.<sup>217</sup> The Polish prose writer Zofia Nałkowska (1884-1954), too, was a passive bystander. Devoured by feelings of guilt, she decided to bear witness to what was going on around her. In a short reportage *Przy torze kolejowym* (By the railway track), Nałkowska demonstrates the behavior of the majority of Poles in the face of the Holocaust. In the reportage, a young Jewish woman took the risk of jumping from a death transport. Shot and wounded, she collapsed by the railway track. At dawn, first passersby appeared. The action at the railroad lasted several hours. People came and went, then came again,

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<sup>215</sup> Cited in Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 166.

<sup>216</sup> Cited in Jack Mayer, *Life in a Jar: the Irena Sendler Project* (Vermont: Long Trail Press, 2011).

<sup>217</sup> David Aberbach, *The European Jews, Patriotism and Liberal State, 1789-1939: A Study of Literature and Social Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 93.

not knowing what to do. An old woman brought her milk, a “small-town guy” bought her cigarettes and vodka, but “no one would intercede by removing her before nightfall, or by calling a doctor, or by taking her to the station so she could get to a hospital.”<sup>218</sup> Why did the Poles not help? Those who offered assistance or shelter, Nałkowska explains, were marked for death. Clearly, people were afraid, but the reportage confronts a deeper level of degradation. At dusk, the woman asked two Polish “blue” policemen to shoot her. When the policemen could not bring themselves to do it, the “small-town guy” said, “let me do it, then,” and he shot her to the disapproval of most of bystanders.<sup>219</sup> Later, at night, two unidentified people emerged from the forest to save the woman, but they left once they realized that she was dead.

“By the Railway Track,” speaks volumes about the behavior of ordinary Poles during the German occupation, but it also raises many questions: Was it anti-Semitism that prompted the “small-town guy” to pull the trigger? Would a member of a Polish resistance wounded during action have been shot if he had asked for it? Who were the people who emerged from the forest to save the woman? Were they, perhaps, members of the Polish resistance? Or, were they, maybe, other Jewish escapees hiding in the forest? What is clear, however, is that the murder of the Jewish woman, encouraged by Nazi laws, was an act of collaboration. Moreover, from a moral perspective, everybody, including the bystanders who turned in disgust when the “small-town guy,” pulled the trigger, are guilty of murder, not because they participated in the act of killing, but because they allowed it.

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<sup>218</sup> Zofia Nałkowska, *Medallions* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>219</sup> Henryk Grynberg, “The Holocaust in Polish Literature,” *Notre Dame English Journal* 11 (1979): 120.

## **Polish Government-in-Exile, the Polish Underground, and the Jewish Holocaust**

The attitude of Polish Government-in-Exile and the underground in occupied Poland to the Jewish Holocaust is among the most controversial, and under-studied, topics of wartime Polish-Jewish relations. From 1939-1941, the so-called period of ghettoization, the question of the future postwar status of Polish Jews dominated discussions in London as well as on the ground in occupied Poland.<sup>220</sup> Polish leaders in exile, eager to gain support of Western democracies for the Polish cause, had gone to considerable lengths to demonstrate that anti-Semitism formed no part of their political agenda or plans for postwar Poland. A declaration to the status of the Jews in a postwar Poland issued in 1941 on behalf of the Polish Government-in-Exile by Jan Stańczyk (1886-1953), Minister of Labour and Social Welfare assured that, “Future relations between Gentiles and Jews in liberated Poland will be built on entirely new foundations. Poland will guarantee all her citizens, including the Jews, full legal equality. Poland will be a true democracy, and every one of her citizens will enjoy equal rights, irrespective of race, creed, or origin.”<sup>221</sup> Poles on the ground, including Cyryl Ratajski (1875-1943), the government delegate from Poland, were highly critical of the government’s favorable decisions in Jewish matters. In a report to London, the delegate stated that, “the government exaggerates with its love towards the Jews...The government goes too far in its philosemitism, especially as the Jews are not liked in the country.”<sup>222</sup> Fearing the opinion of the country, the Polish leaders in London decided not to give specific

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<sup>220</sup> Cited in Dariusz Stola, “The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Final Solution,” in *Contested memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its aftermath*, ed. Joshua Zimmerman ((New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 85.

<sup>221</sup> Document 114 in Stachura, *Poland*, 154-155.

<sup>222</sup> Cited in Stola, “The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Final Solution,” 89.

directives on how to behave toward the Jews to either the underground or the Polish population in general. However, in 1940 it did instruct the underground to “refrain from any cooperation, or even appearance of cooperation, in the anti-Jewish actions organized by the Germans,” and repeated this instruction in 1941 after the German invasion of the Soviet Union.<sup>223</sup>

Upon receiving reports from the underground of the mass murder of Jews in Poland by the Nazis, the government sought to convey the information to its allies, repeatedly approached the British and U.S. governments with the demand for retaliation (with no results), tried to organize support for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising from the Home Army, and to aid Polish Jews through clandestine organizations such as *Żegota*.<sup>224</sup> After receiving support from the underground, the Government-in-Exile, in 1943 and 1944, repeatedly appealed to the Polish population via radio broadcasts to aid the Jews. The Polish underground press printed and distributed the government’s appeals.<sup>225</sup> However, with the scarce resources and limited influence, the efforts of the Polish Government-in-Exile were bound to lack meaningful impact. In a letter to the government before his suicide in May 1943, Szmul Zygielbojm (1895-1943), a member of the National Council of the Polish Government-in-Exile, wrote, “ Although the Polish government has in great measure contributed to stirring world opinion, it has not done so

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<sup>223</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 89.

<sup>224</sup> Stachura, *Poland*, 152.

<sup>225</sup> Stola, “The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Final Solution,” 90.

sufficiently, nor has it risen to anything extraordinary to match the extent of the drama taking place in occupied Poland.”<sup>226</sup>

In order to understand the attitude of the Polish underground toward the Jewish Holocaust, we must consider its multifaceted structure. The main underground political movements were those subordinated to the Polish Government-in-Exile and the *Delegatura* (Government Delegation in Poland). The *Delegatura* comprised twelve branches (Internal Affairs, Information and Press, Labour and Social Affairs, Education and Culture, Industry and Trade, Agriculture, Justice, Liquidation of the Effects of the War, Public Works and Reconstruction, Treasury, Post Offices and Telegraphs, and Communications) and was composed of pre-war political parties (Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the right-wing National Party, the Labor Party, and the Peasant Party). The *Delegatura*'s armed organization was the Home Army. In opposition to the *Delegatura* were the Communist Polish Worker's Party connected to the *Armia Ludowa* (People's Army) and the extreme right wing organizations connected to the right-wing military organization of the National Democrats the *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne, NSZ* (National Armed Forces). The attitude of the parties and the military movements to Polish Jews reflected their prewar ideologies and rarely changed under the impact of events.<sup>227</sup>

When analyzing the response of the Polish underground to the Jewish Question, one must take into account the extreme diversity of attitudes and actions. There were

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<sup>226</sup> Szmul Zygielbojm's letter of 11 May 1943, cited in Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, *Kto ratuje jedno życie...Polacy i Żydzi 1939-1945* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2009), 216.

<sup>227</sup> Shmuel Krakowski, "The Attitude of the Polish Underground to the Jewish Question during the Second World War," in *Contested memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its aftermath*, ed. Joshua Zimmerman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 97.

individuals, such as Aleksander Kamiński (1903-1978), the editor of the *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (Information Bulletin), the main propaganda organ of the Home Army, and Henryk Woliński (1901-1986), the head of the Jewish Department in Home Army's Bureau of Information and Propaganda, that truly cared about Polish Jews. There were also those who confronted with the brutal murder of Polish Jews – people they had known – expressed absolute indifference. As a whole, however, there is no doubt that the Polish underground was more interested in Polish than in Jewish affairs.

In general, the period of 1939-41 was characterized by an ambivalent attitude of Polish underground to German treatment of Polish Jews. Certainly, this attitude was influenced by the perceived betrayal of Poland by the Jews in Eastern Provinces during Soviet aggression on Poland in September 1939 and throughout subsequent occupation. The underground, obviously, was not able to prevent the establishment of the ghettos, stop the deportations to death camps or obstruct the functioning of concentration camps. Yet, once it realized the full extent of Nazi plans toward Polish Jews, the Polish underground kept the Allies informed about the Nazi Final Solution, funded *Żegota*, and supported the *Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, *ŻOB* (Jewish Combat Organization).<sup>228</sup> It is unclear whether it could or was willing to do more.

A subject that is grossly understudied is the Polish Underground's stance toward the approximate 3000,000 Jewish escapees from ghettos and camps. Their survival depended upon the attitude of Christian Poles and, to a large degree, the Polish underground. Holocaust survivor testimonies as well as wartime archival documents of the Home Army reveal that the Home Army response to Jewish fugitives varied, ranging

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 98.



from murder to extraordinary acts of aid. The case of Halina Zawadzka is representative. After a successful escape in November 1942 from the Końskie Ghetto in the Kielce district, Zawadzka hid in the home of a member of the local Home Army who supported her until the end of the war. However, after she joined the local Home Army herself (posing as a Catholic), the commander of her unit revealed that he had recently ordered his insurgents to shoot dead a Jewish escapee whom they had discovered in the forest.<sup>229</sup>

The excerpt from a poignant essay written by Emanuel Ringelblum (1900-1944) in September 1943 expressed horror over Polish reactions to the Nazi treatment of Jews:

The Polish people and the Government of the Republic of Poland were not in a position to deflect the Nazi steamroller from its anti-Jewish course. But it is reasonable to ask whether the attitude of the Polish people measured up to the scale of the catastrophe that befell their country's citizens. Was it inevitable that the last impression of the Jews, as they rode in the death trains speeding from different parts of the country to Treblinka or to other places of slaughter, should have been the indifference or even joy on the faces of their neighbors? Last summer, when carts packed with captive Jewish men, women and children moved through the streets of the capital, was it really necessary for laughter from wild mobs to resound from the other side of the ghetto walls, was it really necessary for such blank indifference to prevail in the face of the greatest tragedy of all time? A further question is whether some sympathy should not have been expressed during the slaughter of a whole people... We ask further, why was it possible to considerably reduce the evil of denunciations, spying and collaboration with the Germans within one's own [Polish] community, while nothing was done to check the giant wave of blackmail and denunciation of the handful Polish Jews that had survived the slaughter of a whole people? These and similar questions are being asked every day by the remaining quarter-of-a-million Jews.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Joshua Zimmerman, "The Polish Underground Home Army (AK) and the Jews: What Postwar Jewish Testimonies and Wartime Documents Reveal," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 34 (2020): 213-214.

<sup>230</sup> Cited in Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 8.

## **Conclusion**

During the interwar period, Poland hosted a large Jewish minority, but the relations between Poles and Jews were poor. The nationalist rhetoric during this period focused on excluding Jews from the Polish nation, so much so that by 1939 the majority of Poles viewed Polish Jewry as the chief, internal enemy of Poland. This certainly led to indifference on the part of a large portion of the Polish population towards the Nazi murder of Jews during the Holocaust. As later chapters will show, Baczyński, too, was affected by the nationalist rhetoric. As a Pole of Jewish descent, he worried about his place in the Polish nation. Moreover, the indifference of Poles to the Holocaust was unimaginably painful for Baczyński, who not only identified with the Polish but also with the Jewish nation.

### CHAPTER THREE

Biographers, literary critics, and ordinary Poles regard Baczyński exclusively as *Polak-Katolik* (Pole-Catholic) and more or less consciously omit his Jewish roots. Certainly, Baczyński was a Pole and considered himself a Pole, but, as this chapter will show, he was not a Pole in the narrow *Polak-Katolik* sense of the word. Baczyński not only did not support the exclusive nationalism of the National Democrats, but also, just like his father and Piłsudski, embraced Polishness based on the inclusive, republican ideas of the old Commonwealth. Even in poems addressed exclusively to *ojczyzna* (fatherland), Baczyński seems to have in mind a place to be found within the soul itself rather than an actual land. Moreover, Baczyński was not only a Pole, but also a Jew, inheriting his Jewishness from his mother. As such, from the beginning of the German occupation of Poland he was marked for death by the Nazis. Thus, history forced Baczyński to either commit to his Jewish identity or give it up entirely. It forced him to choose. Jewish roots, of course, do not preclude a Polish identity. Nor does the necessity of concealing his lineage exclude the feeling of belonging to those suffering in the ghetto. It also must be recognized that calling Poles the poet's nation does not exclude the possibility that the poet's people are also Jews (unless one is an ethno-nationalist).

This chapter will show that Baczyński's was not only well aware of his link with Polish Jews, but also wrote poignant poems depicting their fate. In particular, this chapter focuses on Baczyński's Holocaust poetry of the early occupation period: *Banita* (The Outlaw), a poem written in the spring of 1940 as a reaction to a wave of anti-Jewish riots that swept through Warsaw; a series of poems written in the spring of 1941 during the

poet's stay at the Polish Red Cross hospital on Smolna Street, which are remarkable testimonies of the hunt for Jews hiding on the so-called "Aryan" side of Warsaw; and the first cycle of laments written in autumn and winter 1941, expressing the horrors that befell the Jews. (In summer 1941 the overt extermination of Jews had begun.) Other poems, such as *Ci Ludzie* (These People, 1941), *Do Pana Józefa w dniu imienin 1942 roku* (To Mr. Józef on his name day, 1942), and *Pokolenie* (Generation, 1943), also reflect the tragedy of Polish Jews.

In addition, this chapter introduces Baczyński's pre-war poems on love and nature of which *Piosenka* (The Song) – lighthearted in tone, vivid in imagery – written in the summer of 1938 during his summer holidays on the coast of the Adriatic in Yugoslavia, and *Ars Poetica* (Latin for the Art of Poetry), also written in 1938. These are the most popular in Poland. But it is his love poetry dedicated to his wife Barbara that is most beautiful. Stunningly original in their imagery, they describe the universal human experience of all-consuming love. Baczyński, however, was not only a poet, but also a very talented illustrator. This chapter offers a glimpse of the hundreds of sketches, watercolor paintings, and illustrations, which very often correspond to the specific text of a poem or convey actual events that made up the poet's life.

Finally, it must be said that the translation of Baczyński is an extremely difficult task. In fact, many people consider his poems to be untranslatable. Bill Johnston's translation (*White Magic and Other Poems*, 2004), the only English language translation currently available, conveys (despite failings of individual phrases and lines) the spirit of the original poem as well as its meaning. However, it fails to capture the profundity of thought and brilliance of expression that mark Baczyński's writing in Polish.

Nevertheless, Johnston's translation is much better than my own, and, whenever possible, poems translated by him appear in this dissertation. Several poems translated by Joanna Rostropowicz also appear in this dissertation. Finally, I indicate my own translation of poems, letters, and passages in the footnotes.

### **Family, Upbringing and Identity**

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński was born on January 22, 1921 in Warsaw into an intellectual milieu. Krzysztof Baczyński's father, Stanisław Augustyn Baczyński (1890-1939), named after Stanisław August Poniatowski, the last king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was the son of an insurgent of the Insurrection of 1863, a member of radical pro-Polish youth organizations in Galicia, a soldier of Piłsudski's Legions that won Poland's independence in 1918, and an officer in charge of a highly specialized unit, which would come to be known as the *Wawelberg Group* during the Silesian Uprisings (1919-1921).<sup>231</sup> As a commander of the *Wawelberg Group* Stanisław Baczyński was considered particularly dangerous to the Third Reich. In the first months of occupation – when he was already dead! – the Gestapo came to arrest him. In July of 1942, on the third anniversary of his father's death, Krzysztof wrote a poem *Wigilia* (Christmas Eve) describing the Gestapo's search of his mother's apartment: "The three, dark, bent, searched the wardrobe for a long time."<sup>232</sup> During the early years of the Second Polish Republic, he was also an active member of *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, *PPS*, and a close friend of Piłsudski.

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<sup>231</sup> Stefan Zabierowski, *Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: biografia i legenda* (Warszawa:

Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1990), 6.

<sup>232</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnston, "Wigilia," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 119.

A descendent of former Polish-Lithuanian aristocracy with origins in Saxony, Transylvania, Hungary and Ruthenia, Stanisław Baczyński firmly believed in the values of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He cherished the multi-ethnic aspect of the Commonwealth and enjoyed friendships with non-ethnic Poles. In addition to his native Polish, he spoke fluent German, Russian, French, English, Ukrainian, Spanish, and Yiddish. Stanisław believed that Poland, as any other country, needed responsible, self-critical patriotism rather than ethnic nationalism and exaggerated pridefulness. Accordingly, he sought to cultivate a patriotic spirit of the civic kind in his son, and to oppose the exclusionary nationalism of Dmowski and the Social Democrats.

However, more than anything else, Stanisław wanted to instill in his son the belief that individual human beings are morally obligated to actively oppose evil, no matter what public or private goal the evil in question is supposed to serve.<sup>233</sup> Living what he preached, Stanisław left the *PPS* after it took a sharp turn to the right after Piłsudski's death in 1935 and publically criticized the anti-Semitism of the leading parliamentarians of the *Sanacja* regime. During the interwar period, he quickly established himself as a leading writer, essayist and literary critic of his day whose political leanings were towards a loosely defined Marxism. His major works include *Sztuka Walcząca* (Fighting Art, 1923), *Syty Paraklet i głodny Prometeusz* (The sate Paraclete and the hungry Prometheus, 1924), *Literatura piękna Polski porozbiorowej 1794-1863* (The belles-lettres of post-partition Poland 1794-1863, 1924), *Losy romansu* (The fate of romance, 1927), *Powieść kryminalna* (The criminal novel, 1932), *Literatura w ZSRR* (Literature in the Soviet Union, 1932), and *Rzeczywistość i fikcja* (Reality and fiction, 1939). He also

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<sup>233</sup> Wiesław Budzyński, *Śladami Baczyńskiego* (Warszawa: Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Warszawy, 2009), 80-81.

published numerous articles in left-wing newspapers, even in the Jewish press, and lectured at the Institute for East European Studies at Vilnius University.<sup>234</sup>

Krzysztof Baczyński's mother, Stefania Baczyńska (1889-1953), née Zieleńczyk, was a pedagogue and an author of children's books, most well-known being *Żoko za granicą* (*Żoko abroad*, 1927) and *Wacek i sześć jego siostrzyczek* (*Wacek and his six sisters*, 1927). Together with Anna Oderfeldówna (1895-1958), a notable interwar educator, she authored a very popular Polish language textbook for primary school children entitled, "*Patrzę i opisuję*" (*I observe and describe*, 1930). Stefania Baczyńska had Jewish roots. However, growing up with no real grounding in Judaism, in a family that chose assimilation, Baczyńska felt alienated from the Jewish community. As an adult, she converted to Roman Catholicism and became a devout member of the Church. Her brother Adam Zieleńczyk (1880-1943), with whom she maintained a very close relationship until his death in 1943, remained loyal to Judaism and, unlike Stefania, did not identify himself solely as a Pole.<sup>235</sup> Interestingly, Baczyński's Jewish heritage, handed down from his mother, is treated as an inconvenient fact by Baczyński's biographers and nearly always omitted in works discussing his life and poetry. Baczyński considered himself a Pole and, during the interwar years, did not attach any

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<sup>234</sup> Józef Lewandowski (1923-2007), a Polish historian, suggested in 1991 that Stanisław Baczyński had Jewish origins: "In October 1961, I talked with professor Henryk Jabłoński [a Polish socialist with close ties to Stanisław Baczyński]. At some point we went down on the subject of the Baczyński family. To my surprise, I found out that Stanisław Baczyński was a Jew by origin and his name was originally Bittner. Jabłoński vowed that he talked with him [Baczyński] about it, and even saw the relevant documents." Due to the WWII disappearance of the "relevant" documents, it is, unfortunately, impossible to determine the credibility of Lewandowski's suggestion. It is worth noting, however, that Stanisław Baczyński was fluent in spoken and written Yiddish, which was not common in Poles not of Jewish descent.

<sup>235</sup> Wiesław Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć Krzysztofa Kamila* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Kraków, 2014), 20-30.

significance to his Jewishness. It is obvious, however, that his Jewish background acquired immense significance in the context of the Second World War and the fate of Polish Jewry. According to the Nazi racial policy, he was a member not of Polish, but, rather, of the Jewish nation, and was, therefore, marked for death.

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński was a curious but highly withdrawn child. As a frail asthmatic, he spent much of his childhood alone in his bedroom reading, drawing, and scribbling. Stefania, who revered Polish literature, deserves credit for kindling her son's interest in the works of Polish Romantics. Słowacki, in particular, had profound influence on Baczyński's later poetry. Stefania deeply believed that her son's destiny was to create, to be an artist or a poet, and devotedly nurtured the promise of genius in her only child.<sup>236</sup> Conversely, Stanisław wanted a son in his own image – strapping, athletic, manly. He often expressed annoyance and dissatisfaction at his son's high sensitivity. Baczyński later attributed the split in his own soul to his parents' differing expectations of how their son would carry on the fight for freedom: through the use of language, as encouraged by his mother, or through the use of the sword, stressed by his father.

The re-establishment of the Polish state in 1918 brought rapid development to Warsaw: the capital – “Paris of the East” – became an important industrial city as well as the center of lively intellectual, artistic, and cultural movements. The city developed a character of its own, unmistakably Varsovian, and so had its inhabitants. The literature

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<sup>236</sup> Madeline Levine, “History's Victims: The Poetry of Tadeusz Gajcy and Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński,” *The Polish Review* 23(1978), 31.



of that time evokes the iconic images and sounds of pre-war Warsaw's streets.<sup>237</sup> However, the political situation of the 1930s, the threat brought on by the European economic crisis and rapidly rising totalitarianisms, Hitler's Germany to Poland's west and Stalin's Soviet Union to Poland's east, all cast shadows of uncertainty and apprehension, which also had an impact on the type of literature produced.<sup>238</sup> Polish writers and poets of the time were filled with a strong sense of impending doom. Appalled by the sterility of European culture, Stanisław Witkiewicz (1885-1939) resolutely prophesized its end.<sup>239</sup> The poetry of Józef Czechowicz (1903-1939), too, revealed a sense of imminent catastrophe. It was Jerzy Zagórski (1907-1984), however, who was most authentic in the catastrophist trend. The captivating chaos of fragments in prose, surrealist ballads, and biblical verses of his *Przyjście Wroga* (The Coming of the Enemy, 1934) were used to convey the anticipated enormity of the disaster awaiting the world.<sup>240</sup>

Raised in an atmosphere of naïve optimism, the young Baczyński did not share the pessimistic visions of the literati. His first literary efforts consist of a collection of satirical essays meant to debunk the reputation of the elite Stefan Batory Gymnasium and Lyceum, colloquially referred to as Batory, where Baczyński, an indifferent student, went to school. In one of the satires, the fifteen-year-old states, "In order to accurately assess

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<sup>237</sup> Jerzy Stanisław Majewski, *Warszawa nieodbudowana: metropolia belle époque* (Warszawa: Veda, 2003), 6.

<sup>238</sup> Alina Kowalczykova, *Programy i spory literackie w dwudziestoleciu 1918-1939* (Warszawa : Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1978).

<sup>239</sup> Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 316.

Interestingly, after the German invasion of Poland, Witkiewicz fled to the east of Poland, and, after learning of the Soviet invasion of Poland, he committed suicide.

<sup>240</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature, Updated Edition*, 2nd ed. edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 412.

the significance of the great Boobalak I Gymnasium [Batory], one needed to suffer in it many years as the nominal persecutor or as the nominally persecuted. I say, nominal / nominally, because in essence everyone suffered and despite our stubborn Gymnasium patriotism, everyone, I say, experienced many tragedies...”<sup>241</sup> Indeed, Baczyński was not happy at Batory. Established in 1918, the all-boys high school was equipped with exceptionally modern facilities and distinguished faculty, including Stanisław Młodożeniec (1895-1959), the father of Polish futurism, Stanisław Arnold (1895-1973), historian and a professor at the University of Warsaw, and Gustaw Wuttke (1887-1976) professor of geography, famed for his genuine passion for teaching and engaging with students. However, the so-called Jędrzejewicz reform of 1933 introduced a considerable degree of state interference and curtailment of academic freedom, in line with the overall politics of Józef Piłsudski and, after his death in 1935, the *Sanacja* regime.<sup>242</sup> Batory, as all public secondary schools, was required to not only deliver high quality education to its students but to also educate them in the spirit of ethno-nationalism. The students, then, were taught according to government strictures and pedagogy often served political purposes. One of the more explicit examples of the incorporation of ethno-nationalist perspectives was the incorporation of prayer and patriotic songs into the daily curriculum. All pupils, regardless of faith and ethnicity, were required to join the recital of the Lord’s Prayer and in the singing of *Bogurodzica* (The Mother of God), a prayer hymn sang by Polish knights before the famed Battle of Grunwald of 1410.

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<sup>241</sup> Cited in Stefan Zabierowski, *Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: biografia i legenda* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1990), 9. Translation is my own.

<sup>242</sup> Jarosław Jastrzębski, “Reforma Jędrzejewicza W Państwowym Szkolnictwie Akademickim II Rzeczypospolitej. Wzmocnienie Prerogatyw Władz Państwowych,” *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* 138 (2011): 159-162.

Andrzej Józef Kamiński, Krzysztof's former classmate, recalls: "Krzysztof had every reason not to like, as he termed it, 'Boobalak I Gymnasium.' The whole atmosphere of this school, where significant part of the students were sons of senior military and *Sanacja* dignitaries who expressed ethno-nationalist sentiment and pride, was stifling for Krzysztof who, like his father, was disgusted by exclusionary nationalism of Dmowski and the Social Democrats. This does not mean, of course, that all students supported National Democracy. Exceptions include the redheaded Jan Bytnar (1921-1943), the skinny Aleksy Dawidowski (1920-1943), and the quiet Tadeusz Zawadzki (1921-1943). And, of course, Krzysztof's beloved friend, Ryszard Bychowski (1921-1944)."<sup>243</sup>

Bytnar, Dawidowski, and Zawadzki will later become the main characters of *Kamienie na Szaniec* (Stones for the Rampart, 1943), a non-fiction novel written by Aleksander Kamiński (1903-1978), the editor of *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (Information Bulletin), the main propaganda organ of the Home Army, and one of the ideological leaders of the legendary *Szare Szeregi* (Gray Ranks) of the Home Army. Published in 1943 by the Polish underground press, the book tells of acts of sabotage and armed resistance carried out by the Gray Ranks, and describes the deaths of Bytnar, who died in 1943 from injuries obtained during an extremely brutal interrogation carried out by the Gestapo, Dawidowski, who died from wounds obtained during *Akcja Pod Arsenalem* (Operation Arsenal, 1943), and Zawadzki, who died, also in 1943, in an attack on the

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<sup>243</sup> Andrzej Kamiński, "W Sąsiedztwie Kubusia Puchatka," in *Żołnierz, poeta, czasu kurz... Wspomnienia o Krzysztofie Kamili Baczyńskim*, ed. Zbigniew Wasilewski (Kraków, 1967), 105. Translation is my own.

watchtower of German border patrol station in Sieczychy.<sup>244</sup> Already iconic during World War Two, after the war it entered the Polish literary canon and remains a mandatory text for Polish secondary school students. Notably, it is at Batory that Baczyński, Bytnar, Dawidowski, Zawadzki, and Bychowski joined *Pomarańczarnia*, a sub-branch of the Polish Scouting Organization, which, during World War Two morphed into the Gray Ranks of the Home Army.

Although Krzysztof was not very much liked, he was treated well by his classmates, who were unaware of his Jewish roots. It was Krzysztof's beloved friend, Ryszard Bychowski, who most often was the target of unpleasant anti-Semitic incidents that plagued Batory in the 1930s. Konstanty Jeleński (1922-1987), a former classmate of Baczyński and Bychowski recounts one such incident:

The lively, likeable, freckled, pug-nosed, blond Ryszard Bychowski was the son of Gustaw, a well-known psychoanalyst, author of a once famous book *Psychoanalyzing Hitler*. [...] Bychowski was a Jew – he himself told me about it. [...] Towards the end of our second year (1934-5), the proverbial thunderbolt struck us from the sky, already dark although we did not truly realize it. It was during mathematics class, taught by Professor Jumborski...He summoned Ryś Bychowski to the board and asked him to solve a math problem (out of the entire class, he and I were the worst at math) and he solved it incorrectly. That's when the booing began. And then, a quiet "Zyt" [a mocking alternate for the word "Żyd," the Jew] emerged from the back of the class, not "Żyd," but "Zyt," I remember this clearly, and soon almost the whole class was hissing "Zyyt," Zyyyt," [Jew-ew-ew]. It was one of the first incidents of this kind. Professor Jumborski got up, his face red with rage (we found out later that he himself was a Jew), and started to shout something like, "Barbarians! Wicked barbarians!" Then he left the classroom, slamming the door, in

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<sup>244</sup> Aleksander Kamiński, *Kamienie Na Szaniec* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Nasza Księgarnia, 2019).

Operation Arsenal was carried out by the Gray Ranks of the Home Army on March 26, 1943. Its aim was to free Jan Bytnar and other prisoners from a van that transported them daily from Pawiak Prison to Gestapo Headquarters at Szucha Avenue, where they were interrogated. Although successful, Bytnar died on March 30, 1943 from injuries obtained while in captivity.

order to fetch the principal. I threw myself on my nearest classmate, who had belonged to the “choir.” Bychowski jumped in to help me, and a bloody fight ensued, in which, out of the thirty something students only four fought on our side: Baczyński, Wojtek Karaś, Jurek Karcz (the son of one of Piłsudski’s colonels), and Jurek Dziewulski. I found out later (right after the fight or the next day) that Karaś was a Jew, and that Baczyński and Dziewulski had Jewish mothers...<sup>245</sup>

Although Professor Jumborski was appalled by the anti-Semitic attack on Bychowski, many teachers showed a high level of support for the ethno-nationalization of the Polish state and played a role in propagating anti-Semitic myths within their classrooms. According to one student’s account: “Once in a history class, professor Marian Trojan stated that Jews were the cause of all of Poland’s woes and economic hardships. ‘And idiots,’ said one of the students quietly. But Trojan heard it, and with a finger pointed at the student, yelled, ‘what’s your name?’ ‘Bergman.’ ‘Get out of my classroom!’ When Bergman left, Trojan asked the class in horror, ‘Is he a Jew?’ And then, ‘Are there any more Jews amongst you?’ Terrified, we sat in silence.”<sup>246</sup> Following a few such incidents, Baczyński, a loner by nature, approached his Jewish classmates with an offer of friendship. He chose to stick with them not because they were Jewish, but because similarly to him they were anti-Endek (opposed to the National Democrats). According to Jeleński, “Baczyński, similarly to me was an absolute anti-nationalist. How in the world did he become a symbol of the ethno-nationalist *Polak-katolik* (Pole-catholic)? I am angered by this appropriation of him by the nationalist circles. He was not a Catholic at all! And he hated the Endeks. Besides he considered himself a

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<sup>245</sup> Konstanty A. Jeleński, cited in Wiesław Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć Krzysztofa Kamila* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Kraków, 2014), 41-42. Translation is my own.

<sup>246</sup> Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć*, 40.

Trotskyist back then.”<sup>247</sup> The claim that Baczyński was a Trotskyist is an exaggeration. However, his first political activity, membership in *Spartakus*, a socialist-Communist youth group, dates from his high school years. It was on the pages of *Strzala* (The Arrow) that Baczyński published his first poem *Hej, Z Drogi Precz* (Hey, Out Of The Way). Written in 1938, most likely after the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany, it tells the story of Hans, a German SA-man, who imbued with nationalistic fervor and Nazi propaganda, dies a sad and senseless death moments after he himself kills unspecified victims by stomping on their “lips, hearts, brains, heads” with his boots.<sup>248</sup> Baczyński’s activism in *Spartakus* should nonetheless be viewed in the context of his father’s leftist leanings and was rather brief; he left the group at the outbreak of the war.<sup>249</sup>

### **Pre-War Poetry and Illustrations: On Love and Nature**

Baczyński’s pre-war poems, freed from constraints of the historical moment, most often describe changes in seasons and mythical creatures of land and sea. For instance, in the relatively early poem, *Madrygał* (Madrigal, 1937), written on the Adriatic island of Šolta in the summer of 1937, Baczyński calls out to the “caravans of camels...crocodiles with a gaze of birds...harsh wolves, wild dogs, crayfish bristling with colored lacquer...” to come and meet him in front of the entrance of the “burned paradise with Eve lost”.<sup>250</sup> At Šolta, Baczyński finally felt free of his protective mother, demanding father, and the constraints of school. In a letter to his parents, he wrote, “I read a lot. I already read

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<sup>247</sup> Konstanty Jeleński, cited in Wiesław Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć Krzysztofa Kamila* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Kraków, 2014), 42. Translation is my own.

<sup>248</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Hej, Z Drogi Precz,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 10. Translation is my own.

<sup>249</sup> Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć*, 87-92.

<sup>250</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, “Madrygał,” in *Liryki Najpiękniejsze* (Toruń: ALGO, 2004), 7. Translation is my own.

Maupassant [French writer of short stories], almost all of Krasiński [Polish Romantic poet] and Hugo's *Les Misérables*. What else do I do? Well, I swim and catch bugs. I caught one similar to a big fly with a dead wasp in its mouth..."<sup>251</sup> The letter is decorated with two drawings of the bugs, one of which looks like a cricket, the other resembles a stick insect or a mantis.

There, also on the island of Šolta, Baczyński fell in love with Anna Żelazny.

Hanna Grotowska, née Zalewska, a friend of Baczyński who accompanied him to Šolta in 1937, recalls:

I was twice on the island in Yugoslavia, in 1935 and in 1937. A two and a half month vacation on the island cost about five hundred pre-war Polish złotych. Until my parents could afford it, they sent me with the hope [that] a stay in a warmer climate would cure my lungs [asthma?]. In 1937 there were about twenty of us. I remember Hala Miller, the Razowscy siblings, Nela Grossman, Jurek Dobrodzicki, and, of course, Ania [Anna] Żelazny and Krzyś [Krzysztof] Baczyński. We were still children then. Krzyś and I were sixteen. Ania was two years younger. She had beautiful eyes, dark eyebrows, bangs – both of us had bangs. She wrote poems. They liked each other right away. [Krzysztof and Anna] went on long walks, had their own secrets, notebooks in which they scribbled something.<sup>252</sup>

After a summer spent at Šolta, Krzysztof returned to Warsaw, and Anna to Jasło, a small county town in southeastern Poland where her father ran a hospital. They began exchanging ardent letters. To her he dedicated his first love poems. In December of 1939, he wrote, "The woman I loved transformed into letters, I see her in the window of

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<sup>251</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, *List do Rodziców* (Letter to Parents), 12 August 1937. Accessed through POLONA. Translation is my own.

<sup>252</sup> Hanna Grotowska cited in, Wiesław Budzyński, *Śladami Baczyńskiego* (Warszawa: Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Warszawy, 2009), 46-49. Translation is my own.

every street car...”<sup>253</sup> Finally, in the summer of 1940, the now nineteen-year-old Anna invited Krzysztof for a visit: “Come to me. I want to finally see you after three years. I was a little ill...Your arrival would be a great refreshment for me. And we don’t really know each other at all because what does writing letters without seeing each other even mean?”<sup>254</sup> By that time the poet was consumed by depression caused by a pyramid of disasters: death of his father, outbreak of war, and fall of France. He wrote of his desire to leave this world: “I am the shadow that has lost its body in distant habitations of events; raised to the power of night I move within a fourth dimension. [...] It’s time to pass above the earth to the order of the universe.”<sup>255</sup> In an untitled and unfinished story, dated August 1940, he describes the events surrounding his trip to Jasło:

So he goes, certain of her love for him, although he doesn’t know what she looks like now. Along the way he wonders what he will tell her, what the meeting will be like years later. [...] The train stopped suddenly. It’s six in the morning. He feels a piercing wind. [...] They are finally together. The evenings, dawns, and mornings gallop at immense speed. After two days, he suggested that they go to Warsaw together and asked her to marry him. Anna blinked her eyes quickly, her face narrowed with pain, and she began to speak quickly, her voice filled with tears, “What do you mean, Krzysztof? I can’t now.”<sup>256</sup>

To Baczyński, marriage with Anna seemed as the one and only thing in the world that would restore and cleanse him. Anna’s mother, however, did not consider this relationship appropriate. She was concerned about the age of the couple, and perhaps, above all, she feared the uncertainty of her daughter’s fate in Warsaw. In short, she would not let Anna visit Krzysztof, let alone marry. Baczyński returned to Warsaw

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<sup>253</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, “Kobieta którą kochałeś...” December 1939. Accessed from: <http://www.baczynski.art.pl/wiersze/159-W.html> Translation is my own.

<sup>254</sup> Budzyński, *Śladami Baczyńskiego*, 54. Translation is my own.

<sup>255</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnston, "Piosenka," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 35.

<sup>256</sup> Budzyński, *Śladami Baczyńskiego*, 54-56. Translation is my own.



plagued, in his own words by “vile, suicidal thoughts.”<sup>257</sup> On the night of September 10-11, 1940, he writes *Zła Kołysanka* (Evil Lullaby), a poem with a morbid ending:

The scent of autumn leaves and your [Anna’s] hair,  
fear’s broken timepiece ticking. Summer’s candles  
blown out; the stars breathe down cold air  
while my grief  
like some dark beast runs nightly to your hand.

[...]

Do you know how to sleep? The crazy poet  
has hanged himself amid the pines’ dark baying,  
while rain drags by the hair a dead wax puppet  
through endless streets, to windblown music playing.<sup>258</sup>

This poem, like many of Baczyński’s, appears to reflect his state of mind and the experiences and specific events of those days. It is probable that all of Baczyński’s poem’s from that time – verses abounding in macabre visions, poems built of schizophrenic deformations of the world and gruesome fairy tales – are at least partially rooted in the deep disappointment of the young poet in his first unfortunate love affair.<sup>259</sup> In a 1940 poem he summons Anna: “Come, pierce this shell of eerie sleep, come. Hang your eyes far above me as a lamp over the sleep of a fearful child,” only to in another titled *Improwizacja dla Anny* (An Improvisation for Anna), bid her a final farewell:

A funeral,  
The snow is drizzling. On the coffin are falling, like an echo  
the steps of earth.  
Quietly dies the memory hanged on the cross  
and beats far away.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>257</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>258</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnston, "Zła Kołysanka," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 39-41.

<sup>259</sup> Agnieszka Zagrzywa, “Cierpienie, groza, baśń – czas Anny w poezji Baczyńskiego,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 101 (2010): 23.

<sup>260</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, “Improwizacja dla Anny.” October 1940. Translation is my own. Retrieved from:

But it is *Ars Poetica* (Latin for the Art of Poetry) that is Baczyński's most popular early poem. Written in autumn of 1938, it offers a wonderfully acerbic description of the poetic process:

The poem is in me, evil, alien, evil  
and hateful; with scorching fire it burns my night,  
it passes through me crowdlike, hoarse with shouting  
like a torch lit procession in the streets.

The poem is evil, hateful, trying to burst  
its form (how hard to shackle one who's free),  
and though I drag it from my fiery innards,  
its master I will never wholly be,

It twits, shouting and troubled, till it cries out;  
becomes then alien, a friend who never was,  
stands on the frozen, flaming threshold, created,  
and joins the others in the evening frosts.<sup>261</sup>

Another early poem *Piosenka* (The Song) – lighthearted in tone, vivid in imagery – written in the summer of 1938 during his second stay at Šolta, acts as a hallmark of Baczyński's attachment to nature perceived as a kind of arcadia:

At the violet-gray meadow  
The sky unbuttons liquidity of arcades  
Landscape softly sinks in the eyelids  
Congealed salt on bare lips

And in the evenings in the currents of bays  
Night licks the sea with its sweet mane  
Summer's maturing like soft pears  
As wind blanched with nettle<sup>262</sup>

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[https://poezja.org/wz/Baczy%C5%84ski\\_Krzysztof\\_Kamil/25120/Improwizacja\\_dla\\_Anny](https://poezja.org/wz/Baczy%C5%84ski_Krzysztof_Kamil/25120/Improwizacja_dla_Anny)

<sup>261</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Ars Poetica," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 29.

<sup>262</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, "Piosenka," in *Liryki Najpiękniejsze* (Toruń: ALGO, 2004), 33. Translation is my own.

It was during this second trip to Yugoslavia that Baczyński befriended Zuzanna Chuwień, a fifteen-year-old girl from Lwów, to whom he devotes a handful of poems. Chuwień's recollection of the summer paints a vivid picture of the Baczyński on the eve of World War II:

I spent with Krzyś Baczyński two summer months, July and August 1938, in Yugoslavia. [...] I was fifteen-years-old and I attracted Krzysztof's attention with my good swimming. We swam out together deep into the sea and he would ask, "You are not afraid of sharks, are you?" Our friendship, formed in the waters of the Adriatic, transferred onto land. Krzysztof took care of me, pulled me into various games and activities, we spent entire days together. We took long walks along the coast of the island and that is when I noticed that Krzysztof always carried a notebook and a pencil. Sometimes he would suddenly disconnect from an activity or even from a conversation, step aside and note something. After some time, intrigued, I asked him about his notes, he said that he was trying to write poems, that he already had a few ready pieces. He was a very interesting boy. He talked a lot about school, about Warsaw. He told me his secrets, which I was not allowed to tell anyone. From him I first learned about Communism – he was an absolute supporter. He talked a lot about his mother, he wrote long letters to her. During my illness, caused by a mosquito bite, he spent all his time looking after me. He brought fruits, read books aloud, and when I got up for the first time in a few days, he gifted me a poem *Gdy przyjdiesz* (When You Come) – and a beautiful, fine-woven silver bracelet. After our return to Poland, we wrote to each other very often. He sent me a beautiful collection of poems *Wyspa Szczęścia* (Island of Happiness). There was a poem in almost every letter, often drawings made in ink. I saw Krzysztof again in February 1939 in Zakopane [resort town in southern Poland, at the base of the Tatra mountains.] I came with my parents, he was alone. We were very happy. He showed me Zakopane, we went for long walks again, we went sledding on Cyrhla, among the starry sky he spoke of his dreams: finish high school, visit Italy, Egypt. That was the last time I saw Krzysztof. On the first of September everything ended...Separated by events and wartime borders, we knew nothing about each other. In May 1945 I came to Warsaw. I didn't try to find him – I already knew everything.<sup>263</sup>

Baczyński, however, did not set out to be a writer or a poet, but an illustrator.

The hundreds of sketches, watercolor paintings, and diagrams accompanying his poems,

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<sup>263</sup>Zuzanna Chuwień cited in Wiesław Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć Krzysztofa Kamila* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Kraków, 2014), 140-143. Translation is my own.

stories and letters are beautiful works of art in themselves. The illustrations respond to the compositions in a variety of ways, but always with respect for the specifics in the text. While some are visualizations of abstract textual illustrations, others convey actual events that made up the poet's life: Dan (Baczyński's dog) playing ball, idyllic prewar summers in Yugoslavia and the Tatra Mountains, and, later, occupation of Warsaw and carnage of war.

Although most are undated, one can easily distinguish Baczyński's pre-1939 and post-1939 works. A common feature of Baczyński's prewar paintings is his bold use of vibrant colors. For example, in a painting of a sunset over the Tatra Mountains, the constant change of sky color from bright yellow, to orange, to red, and the light and shade expressed by color on the landscape at dusk, evokes feelings of warmth, serenity, and joy. In contrast, all of Baczyński's wartime illustrations are devoid of color and evoke feelings of angst, anguish and despair. For example, a black and white sketch complementing a 1940 poem *Labirynt Miasta* (City Maze) depicts a dark and desolate city and two shadowy figures, with a pistol clutched firmly in one's hands, walking its streets in search for something or someone. Huddled in terror behind a wall is a man desperate to escape into darkness. "I am alone in a city surrounded by evil," writes Baczyński in the poem.<sup>264</sup> Of course, the poem and the accompanying illustration describe the dark reality of life in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, where literally everyone, regardless of race, creed and ethnicity, could become a victim of German terror. However the moral lesson Baczyński wants to convey is that each individual is alone in his own despair. The city seems deserted, forgotten even, but surely, behind the lit windows

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<sup>264</sup> Cited in Budzyński, *Miłość i Śmierć*, 26. Translation is my own.

of buildings are people, standing and peeking out into the street, witness the protagonist's crisis, but choose to do nothing. They also experience despair. But that is precisely what prevents individuals from developing concern, compassion, and empathy towards others.

Baczyński graduated from Batory in May of 1939 and intended to continue his education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He spent his last summer of peace in the idyllic village of Bukowina Tatrzańska nestled in southern Poland. Ewa Winnicka, a friend of the Baczyński family, who in the 1930s resided in Bukowina Tatrzańska, recalls, "He [Krzysztof Baczyński] visited us with his friend Ryszard Bychowski. They were very happy that they graduated from high school and that now they would be able to learn only what they are most interested in. Both were well rested, tanned, and, with enthusiasm, spoke about their plans for the future. Krzysztof mentioned studying at the Academy of Fine Arts."<sup>265</sup> "I swim away on the deck of the meadow," Baczyński wrote in a poem from Bukowina.<sup>266</sup>

And then, on 27 July 1939, Krzysztof's father died. Shocked by his father's death, Baczyński rushed back to Warsaw. Zbigniew Baczyński, Krzysztof's cousin, recalls the funeral, "Krzysztof was depressed by the great loss and by his powerlessness against fate. We stood together over the open grave, and when the tomb of Stanisław in the legionaries headquarters slowly covered with a brick wall, we stood petrified, struck by a blow that fell on our family, and above all on Krzysztof. We had no idea that even larger clouds were gathering above us, defeat and a night of occupation."<sup>267</sup> In his last pre-war poem

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<sup>265</sup> Ewa Winnicka cited in Budzyński, *Śladami Baczyńskiego*, 69. Translation is my own.

<sup>266</sup> Cited in *ibid*, 74.

<sup>267</sup> Wiesław Budzyński, *Testament Krzysztofa Kamila* (Warszawa: Twój Styl, 1998), 58. Translation is my own.

*Sierpniowa Elegia* (August Eulogy) dedicated to his father, the grief-stricken Baczyński writes: “It is empty, empty without you [...] In the trains empty from sorrow I seek you, yet you do not come [...]”<sup>268</sup> In September, war came instead.

### **Outbreak of War and Life in the Shadows**

The German Campaign in Poland (September 1 to October 5, 1939) brought enormous destruction to the country, and especially to Warsaw. Jan Nowak-Jeziorański (1944-1999), a courier of the Polish underground recalled later the siege of Warsaw “The city resembled an overturned ant heap. The streets were full of rubble, already with pathways trodden through and over it by people hurrying in all directions. Everybody seemed to be engrossed in his own affairs, and all carried something: a rucksack, a basket with provisions, a suitcase.”<sup>269</sup> Air raids, electricity blackouts, evacuation of civilians caused disorganization of the city. The panic was exacerbated when on the night of 6/7 September Colonel Roman Umiastowski (1893-1982), head of the propaganda of the Supreme Command of the Polish Army, issued a hysterical appeal via the Warsaw Radio calling on all men capable of bearing arms to leave the city before the bridges were blown in order to make their way east and join in the new lines of defense.<sup>270</sup>

A group of Batory graduates with Zawadzki, Bytnar, and Dawidowski, left the city in search of the army to be established in the borderlands. On 17 September they reached Włodawa, a town in eastern Poland on the Bug River, and after the Soviet army

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<sup>268</sup> Cited in Budzyński, *Miłość i Śmierć*, 52. Translation is my own.

<sup>269</sup> Cited in Richard C. Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation 1939-1944* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 2.

<sup>270</sup> Magdalena Matysek-Imelińska, *Warsaw Housing Cooperative: City in Action* (Switzerland: Cham Springer International Publishing, 2020) 248.

Umiastowski’s appeal lost all meaning after Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east on 17 September 1939.

entered Poland – when the march to the east lost its sense and became dangerous – they returned to Warsaw. Baczyński left Warsaw with a group of Communist youth. It is not clear how far he traveled, what he experienced, or how an asthmatic boy endured the hardships of a grueling journey. In *Drogi Nocne* (Night Roads), a poem written during the journey, Baczyński talks of every kilometer being a “boulder on the heart,” mentions “eyes tired from the road,” and speaks of determination to move forward despite the fatigue: “when our feet hurt with a thousand trees, we will go on.” “Anyway,” he ends the poem, “tonight is tired and it flows like the moon.”<sup>271</sup> What is clear, however, is that after four weeks he returned to Warsaw, shocked by what he had seen during the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland and with an attitude of reserve toward Communism. He immediately moved away from *Spartakus*, a Communist organization that he joined as a student in 1935. Baczyński’s former teacher, Mieczysław Czyżzkowski (1907-1996), who, returning to Warsaw, ran into the poet, claims that as a result of the journey, Baczyński was, “lost, full of tormenting thoughts, and, like everyone else, he couldn’t find the answer to what to do next.”<sup>272</sup>

One needs to imagine the severity of the Baczyński family’s situation in autumn of 1939: an elderly mother without savings and an adult son without a job caught in the midst of a brutal war. “We did not know how to find our place in the new reality. All our plans went to hell, although at first it seemed not for long, and certainly not forever...” admitted Baczyński’s former classmate.<sup>273</sup> Searching for ways to survive, Baczyński

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<sup>271</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Drogi Nocne.” 13 October 1939. Translation is my own. Accessed from:

[https://poezja.org/wz/Baczy%C5%84ski\\_Krzysztof\\_Kamil/25104/Drogi\\_nocne](https://poezja.org/wz/Baczy%C5%84ski_Krzysztof_Kamil/25104/Drogi_nocne)

<sup>272</sup> Budzyński, *Testament*, 62. Translation is my own.

<sup>273</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 72. Translation is my own.

glazed windows damaged in September bombings, painted signs, and even worked for a coalminer in the Czerniaków district of Warsaw. Interestingly, he almost stopped writing poems. Instead, he sketched. The series of sketches from this period (over 50!) depict what appears to be the same man, terrified, and utterly helpless, in the face of a great event, tragedy, and death. The sketches reflect the state of Baczyński's own soul from the time.

Baczyński returned to writing at the instigation of a close friend Jerzy Kamil Weintraub (1916-1943), an outstanding Polish poet of Jewish descent, and a translator of Rilke and Pasternak. Sadly, he is a poet almost completely forgotten in Poland, and, astonishingly, passed over by historians of literature. Apart from two volumes of poetry *Próba powrotu* (An attempt to return, 1937) and *Wrogi czas* (Hostile time, 1939), which testify to his extraordinary poetic talent, his works are virtually unknown. This is harmful not only to him, but also missing from research on literature of war and occupation. The years of occupation are a "hostile time," when he must hide, live in a locked room, hunted and blackmailed by shmaltsowniks.<sup>274</sup> He is choked by loneliness and detached from life, trapped in a cage of four walls, always surrounded by the same objects, experiencing only his own interior emotional life.<sup>275</sup> An extremely touching drawing by Baczyński, glued into Weintraub's wartime journal, depicts a man seen from behind who looks out a window and sees a tree, but it is deformed, its branches broken and burned. The drawing illustrates Weintraub's longing for nature, for trees. In his

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<sup>274</sup> Shmaltsownik refers to a person who blackmailed Jews who were in hiding, or who blackmailed Poles who protected Jews during the German occupation.

<sup>275</sup> Małgorzata Wichowska, introduction to *Cudowne Przygody Pana Pinzla Rudego* by Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński (Warszawa: Muzeum Literatary im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2017), 11.



journal entry, on 27 January 1943, he writes, “ I vegetate [...] I count days and constantly ask myself: When will it all end?”<sup>276</sup> It all ended when he died on 10 September 1943 from a blood infection caused by a shaving accident.

Baczyński first met Weintraub sometime in the late autumn of 1939. Joanna Weintraub-Krzyżanowska, Weintraub’s wife, recalls: “[Baczyński] came to us to meet Jerzy. [...] It must have been at the beginning of the war. Jerzy was captivated by his poems. He saw that he [Baczyński] was very talented and because he was a few years older, he decided to look after him. He [Weintraub] encouraged him [Baczyński] to write. I remember Jerzy seating Krzysztof at the table because Krzysztof had some idea for a poem... [...] Krzysztof used to visit us often, then he disappeared, or we erased our traces, changing our place of residence, and we found each other again after a while. Krzysztof and Jerzy liked each other very much and became close friends. They had long talks on literary topics and matters that preoccupied us all. They wrote poems together, experimented with verses...they also wrote short essays. I also have several of Krzysztof’s drawings illustrating my husband’s poems.”<sup>277</sup> One evening, sometime in October 1941, the two poets enjoyed an evening walk. After returning, Baczyński wrote *Jesienny Spacer Poetów* (The Poets’ Autumn Walk) and dedicated it to Weintraub:

The trees like barbarians’ ruddy heads  
were absorbed in the veins of yellow rivers.  
Immersed in water, the city’s edge  
lay whitely down in the ash of plaster.

Across a rumbling bridge they strode

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<sup>276</sup> Jerzy Kamil Weintraub, “Pamiętnik,” *Narracje o Zagładzie 5* (2019): 328. Translation is my own.

<sup>277</sup> Cited in Małgorzata Wichowska, introduction to *Cudowne Przygody Pana Pinzla Rudego* by Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński (Warszawa: Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2017), 19. Translation is my own.

as if on a rim of fragile glass;  
beneath a pensive tomb of cloud  
through leaves like bloody tears they passed.

And one was saying: "This is the song  
that strikes against the eyelids' vault."  
While the other was saying: "You're wrong,  
this is death which my green word forethought."<sup>278</sup>

The friendship of the two poets, endowed with great sensitivity and imagination, was born out of mutual fascination, similar poetic passions, and shared experiences. What might those be? It is well known in Poland that Weintraub was forced into hiding soon after the outbreak of war. Trapped in a hideout for months at a time, he would be tracked down by *shmaltsowniks*, forced to hastily find new shelter, only to be yet again tracked down: Otwock, the Old Town, Kierszek near Klarysewo, Saska Kępa, Mokotów, and the Old Town again - these are the stages of his tortured journey. What is less well known, or rather, overlooked, is that Baczyński, too, felt hunted. A strong testimony of such shared feeling are the words of Baczyński himself, with which the poet commented in *O muzie* (About a muse): "*O muzie* was written in a period when certain visual experiences, nightmare experiences of people locked in houses and closed in this hopeless period of constant fear are shared with the poet J.K.W. [Jerzy Kamil Weintraub]."<sup>279</sup> A rhetorical question, which puzzles many: what period is the poet talking about? Let us return to the poem. *O Muzie* was written on 19 December 1940, a month after the Germans sealed the Warsaw Ghetto to the outside world. On 9 November 1940 Emmanuel Ringelblum noted in his diary: "There's been the growth of a strong

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<sup>278</sup>Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Jesienny Spacer Poetów," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 51.

<sup>279</sup>Cited in Wichowska, introduction to *Cudowne Przygody Pana Pinzla Rudego*, 34. Translation is my own.

sense of historical consciousness recently. We connect, our daily experiences, one after another, with the events of history. We are returning to the Middle Ages,” and on 19 November, “The Saturday the Ghetto was closed off (16<sup>th</sup> of November) was terrible. People in the street didn’t know it was to be a closed Ghetto, so it came like a thunderbolt.”<sup>280</sup> According to German policy, the Baczyński family should have moved to the ghetto, as many families did in their situation (a group of Christians was even established in the ghetto around the All Saints’ Parish and Father Marcei Godlewski). Czesław Miłosz, who personally knew the poet, wrote after the war: “He [Baczyński] was well aware that his place was in the ghetto. Moreover, he felt that his people, with whom he is not only bound by blood, but also by the history of several millennia, were the Jewish people in the ghetto.”<sup>281</sup> Evasion of the ghetto was an offence punishable by death, by shooting on the spot. Yet, the Baczyński family decided to stay on the “Aryan” side. They lived under constant fear of denunciation, closed in a family circle and in a narrow circle of friends. The fear was heightened by loneliness and guilt: a large portion of Baczyński’s family, friends and acquaintances stayed behind the Ghetto wall.

And yet, Henryk Hiż (1917-2006), who had personally known the poet, attributes Baczyński’s feelings to his involvement in the Polish underground: “Was Baczyński in hiding? He was in the underground. We were all in hiding, moving, changing addresses, helping each other.”<sup>282</sup> It is indeed true that every Pole in the underground was hunted game, but people like Baczyński, burdened with the extra weight of origin, were forced

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<sup>280</sup> Emmanuel Ringelblum and Jacob Sloan, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: ibooks distributed by Publishers Group West, 2006), 82-86.

<sup>281</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *Abecadło Miłosza* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literacki, 1997), 55.

<sup>282</sup> Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, “Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero,” *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 167.

into double hiding. Certainly, Baczyński could not, and, perhaps, did not, want to share this burden with friends, with the exception of those closest to him like Weintraub. Moreover, Baczyński explicitly speaks of a life in the shadows in poems written before he joined the underground in late 1943. One of the examples is the poem *Pokolenie* (Generation, VII 1943). The first stanza begins with a rather suggestive description of a state of nature. There are clouds, ears of corn, earth. There is also a wind, which, with its might “foams” the trees:

The wind whips the trees to foam. The earth  
has matured. Corn-spikes raise heavy bellies  
and only the clouds, rapaciously –  
like fingers or hairs – cross into the darkness.<sup>283</sup>

And down below the earth is ripe, full of satiety. Such images are usually associated with autumn, which is harvest time. Baczyński’s *Pokolenie*, however, talks about the harvest of war. Successive verses seem to point to this cruel truth. An image of apocalyptic dimension appears to us: a head hanging on a tree and bodies crammed underground, which is already swollen with excess:

The earth is brimming with fruits, and boils  
like a giant bowl in plentitude.  
Yet from the spruces standing outside  
hangs a severed head that haunts like a cry.

The flowers are drops of honey that burst  
compressed by the swollen earth; underground,  
bodies twisted like roots are crammed  
alive beneath an unlit vault.

Huge skies drone overhead. People  
call out in oppressive dreams like cages.  
We have pursed lips and wolflike faces,  
Watching by day and listening by night.

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<sup>283</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, “Pokolenie,” in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 145.

Underground, streams are heard carving their way,  
while blood gathers in the veins of silence;  
the roots draw up blood, and from the leaves  
a red dew falls. And the distances sigh.<sup>284</sup>

In the next part of the poem, Baczyński ends the impersonal monologue and begins to speak on behalf of a “we.” The poet becomes a representative of a certain group, community, and, as the title suggests, a generation. The “we” learned their lesson: there is no more mercy, conscience, or love (war annihilated all individual and collective values). A world of underground people has emerged. They are the dead, victims of war, but also those who still live. They live their lives in underground, in secret, and in constant escape. They are like troglodytes, cavemen from millions of years ago. In this perspective, pre-civilization behaviors appear: animal-like self-preservation instincts, but also bestiality, bloodlust and meanness in attitude towards others. Eye piercing, bone breaking, and hunting down the victim become the new normal. To endure all this, “one must forget”:

We learned our lesson. There is no mercy.  
By night come dreams of the brother who died,  
his eyes put out while he still was living,  
beaten until his bones were all broken,  
deep and painful the chisel’s carving,  
his eyes bulging like bubbles with blood.

We learned our lesson. There is no conscience.  
Buried by fear, we live in pits;  
in terror we carve out our dark loves,  
statues of ourselves – evil troglodytes.

We learned our lesson. There is no love.  
How could we then escape into darkness  
from the sail of the nostrils sniffing us out,  
from the staves and hands in their spreading net,

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.,45-147.

when the mothers and children would never come back  
to the hollowed out pod of an empty heart.

We learned our lesson. One must forget,  
so as not to die imagining it all.  
We rise in the dark and slippery night.  
We look for the heart, take hold of it, strain  
our ears: the pain will be extinguished,  
but stone – yes, a rock – will still remain.<sup>285</sup>

There should be no doubt as to who lived in pits, buried by fear, and from whose sniffling nostrils it was necessary to escape into darkness. However, those who doubt should pay attention to the date of the creation of the poem. Baczyński wrote it on 21 July 1943, a day after his maternal uncle Adam Zieleńczyk along with his wife and two daughters were executed as Jews in the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto. Baczyński, then, wrote the poem in the name of the entire community of Polish Jews – those annihilated and those still in hiding - and not, as is widely accepted in Poland, on behalf of *Generacja Kolumbów* (Generation of Columbuses), the generation of young Poles who willingly fought and died for the country (again, the poem was written before Baczyński joined the underground). What is more, the poem is written in the name of “us,” and not on behalf of “them,” which clearly shows that Baczyński consciously linked himself with the Jewish nation and with the fate of Polish Jewry. In the concluding stanza, Baczyński is reflective. Will they – “human strata turning to ashes” – be remembered by posterity? Will the Christian Poles of the future, if only from pity, place a cross over the graves of slaughtered Jews? :

And so we stand on tanks and trucks,  
on aeroplanes and in the rubble,  
where the serpent of silence will crawl over us.  
where the ice-cold torrent will cleanse us, not

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 147-149.

knowing  
if time is standing still or flowing.  
Like foreign cities dug from the depths,  
human strata turning to ashes  
lying on their backs or standing straight,  
not knowing whether we are the pages  
of a fire-sculpted Iliad in shimmering gold,  
whether, if only from pity, they'll build  
a cross over our grave.<sup>286</sup>

Baczyński owed his occupation-era literary debut to Weintraub. In July 1940 he published, under the clandestine name of Jan Bugaj, his first collection of poems *Zamknięty Echem* (Closed by the Echo), followed by *Dwie Miłości* (Two Loves) with the underground publishing house *Sublokatorzy Przyszłości* (Sub-tenants of the Future) founded by Weintraub at the beginning of war.<sup>287</sup> The name of the publishing house is quite telling. As sub-tenants of the future, Weintraub and Baczyński were uncertain if they, as Poles of Jewish descent, would have a rightful place in future, post-war, Poland. In a testimony given in 1959, Ludomir Lissowski (1888-1972), a priest and an acquaintance of the Baczyński family, confirmed that, indeed, Baczyński was anxious about his place in the Polish nation: “Krzyś belonged to the Home Army. He finished a cadet school. He took part in night expeditions to derail German military trains. He proved his Polishness in participating in the military actions of the underground and, later, in the uprising. Still, he was afraid that someone might question his Polishness because his mother was Jewish. She was a very intelligent person who deeply loved her

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<sup>286</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>287</sup> Cited in Małgorzata Wichowska, introduction to *Cudowne Przygody Pana Pinzla Rudego* by Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński (Warszawa: Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2017), 15.

son, and he repaid her with equal love. Nevertheless, he was aware of his mixed heritage.”<sup>288</sup>

### **Baczyński as the “New” Słowacki and a Clash with Peer Poets**

Baczyński’s poems from this first period are diverse in character and demonstrate the poet’s search for the right form and content. One should note that from the outset, Baczyński referred to the world of fairy tales, myths, and startling images in his poetry. One should not forget, however, about the historical context of Baczyński’s poetry. With all its fairy tale and idyllic charm, it is deeply immersed in history, in the tragedy of the occupation of Poland. Naturally, Baczyński protected himself against the nightmare of reality by escaping into fantasy. The realm of fairy tales, myths, and magic and the realm of historical truth are thus inseparable in the poet’s works.<sup>289</sup> To illustrate, in *Madrygal* (Madrigal), written in 1940, the poet, on the one hand, writes of, “gentle animals and majolica islands,” and on the other of, “white elephants of sorrow,” and, “snakes of fear wrapped around my throat.”<sup>290</sup>

In the autumn of 1942, Baczyński’s first volume of poetry *Wiersze Wybrane* (Selected Poems) was published in a mimeographed edition of 100 copies by the underground press. The second volume *Akrusz Poetycki* (The Poetic Sheet) was published one year later. These volumes sold out immediately, the poems were copied and recited in the literary underground. The older writers (among them the novelist Jerzy

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<sup>288</sup> Cited in Anna Synoradzka-Demadre, “O początkach przyjaźni Jerzego Andrzejewskiego i Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego,” *Kwartalnik Artystyczny* 4 (2014): 260. Translation is my own.

<sup>289</sup> Paweł Spyra, “Optymizm I Wojenna Zawierucha. O Wybranych Lirykach Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego,” *Nowy Wymiar Filologii* 1 (2016): 175.

<sup>290</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Mardygał,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 37. Translation is my own.



Andrzejewski (1909-1983) and the poet Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (1894-1980)) were particularly enthusiastic about Baczyński's work. Already in 1941, Andrzejewski praised Baczyński in a letter to the literary critic Kazimierz Wyka (1910-1975): "The boy is more mature than his age, ill with asthma, he looks and behaves like the young Słowacki in his Vilnius years. He is self-confident without a hint of arrogance, aware of his own value, and yet, highly critical of his work. If this boy survives the war, his name will mean a lot."<sup>291</sup> After reading Jan Bugaj's (the literary pseudonym of Baczyński) *Selected Poems* published in Warsaw in 1942, Wyka sat, together with Iwaszkiewicz, at the beginning of 1943 in the jury of an underground literary competition, which awarded Baczyński one of the four prizes. In June 1943 Wyka published the famous *List do Jana Bugaja* (A Letter to Jan Bugaj) in Kraków's clandestine *Miesięcznik Literacki* (The Literary Monthly). It was the first, deep and enthusiastic, review of Baczyński's poetry placing him in the row of outstanding predecessors: Słowacki, Norwid, Czechowicz and Miłosz, which gave the young poet an unquestioned place in contemporary Parnassus.<sup>292</sup>

The legend of Baczyński as the "new" Słowacki survived the war and is still heard today. "I was enchanted with him [Baczyński] as a phenomenon," recalls Miłosz years later, "Imagine the sudden birth of talent among the horrors of that Warsaw. He was like Ariel [an angel found primarily in Jewish and Christian mysticism], the juvenile, ethereal Słowacki, or rather because of asthma, Proust. Baczyński, when I met him and visited him at home was always sick with asthma, he spent his days in bed and wrote in

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<sup>291</sup> Cited in Spyra, "Optymizm I Wojenna Zawierucha," 264. Translation is my own.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

bed. His later metamorphosis into a soldier is all the more amazing as the triumph of the will.”<sup>293</sup> The Polish poet Anna Świrszczyńska (1909-1984), wrote about him this way:

I wouldn't like to be influenced by his later tragedy, his premature death, and great talent because all of these things monumentalize people and falsify their true image [...] but he really drew attention to himself. He was a man of intense, internal dialogue. Even during ordinary social conversations, he did not cease to conduct an internal monologue or dialogue with himself [...] which seemed to be much more important than all literary discussions and conversations with colleagues. [...] The dominant feature of his face was sadness. Premature death was not a surprise in his poetic biography, it was somehow predicted, built into this biography. It was written in his face. And now, as I recall from the dark times of occupation a fleetingly seen figure of this beautiful, silent boy, I feel violent, senseless regret for him. He did great harm to his homeland by dying for her.<sup>294</sup>

While highly praised by the older writers, Baczyński's peer poets associated with the right-wing literary periodical *Sztuka i Naród, SiN* (Art and Nation) did not consider his works noteworthy. “Their writing,” wrote Miłosz of these poets, “was a revival of Polish Romanticism, with its messianic overtones which stressed the redeeming value of selflessly sacrificing one's life for one's country.”<sup>295</sup> Indeed, the brutal nature of German occupation brought the Romantic heritage to pre-eminence once again. Just as the greatest works of Mickiewicz or Słowacki, the poetry of *SiN* poets was visionary, full of patriotic passion, and very popular amongst Warsaw's young, who nourished the cult of patriotic bravery and expressed readiness for martyrdom in the service of Poland. It was also, quite literally, written in blood: all of the five editors-in-chief of *Sztuka i Naród* were active members of clandestine military organizations, be it the Home Army, or the

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<sup>293</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *Ogród nauk* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2014), 148.

<sup>294</sup> Cited in Waldemar Smaszcz, *Krzysztof i Barbara...podobni jak dwie krople łez* (Białystok: Studio Wydawnicze Unikat, 2011), 58-59. Translation is my own.

<sup>295</sup> Cited in Clare Cavanagh, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics, Russia, Poland, and the West* (Yale University Press, 2009), 250.

far-right *Konfederacja Narodu* (Confederation of the Nation), and all died fighting for Poland, fulfilling the Mickiewiczian legend of the poet-soldier uniting word and deed.<sup>296</sup>

An excerpt from one of Miłosz's masterworks *Traktat Poetycki* (Treatise on Poetry, 1956) describes their (and Baczyński's) deaths:

Trzebiński, the new Polish Nietzsche,  
Had his mouth plastered shut before he died.  
He took with him the view of a wall, low clouds  
His black eyes had just a moment to absorb.  
Baczyński's head fell against his rifle.  
The uprising scared the flocks of pigeons.  
Gajcy, Stroiński were raised to the sky,  
A red sky, on the shield of an explosion.<sup>297</sup>

Although Baczyński, too, turned to Polish Romanticism (it was only natural that poets who found themselves under German occupation should look back for inspiration to the Romantic era) in works like *Modlitwa I* (Prayer I), *Historia* (History), *Z głową na karabinie* (With their heads resting on their rifles), and *Elegia* (Elegy), to name but a few, he resented the most pernicious of the myths – that of redemptive martyrdom – found in the poetry of the *SiN* poets. For example, the dominance of moral criteria in Baczyński's poetry, made killing questionable even in defense of one's own nation, and thus suggests a shift opposite to the Romantic concept of self-immolation. In addition, the poet did not intend to renounce the leftist ideals of his youth: Baczyński co-edited, from 1942 to 1944,

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<sup>296</sup> Bronisław Kopczyński (1921-1943) was arrested in January 1943 and died later that year; Waclaw Bojarski (1921-1943) was shot in May 1943 for placing flowers on Copernicus's monument on the four-hundredth anniversary of his death, and died a month later; Andrzej Trzebiński (1922-1943) was arrested and executed in October 1943; Tadeusz Gajcy (1922-1944) and Zdzisław Stroiński were killed in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.

<sup>297</sup> Czesław Miłosz and Robert Hass, *A treatise on poetry* (New York: Ecco Press, 2001).

another literary periodical, the left-wing *Droga* (The Way) and was highly critical of the right-wing nationalist *SiN*.<sup>298</sup>

Thus, motivated by political differences and a personal dislike of Baczyński, in 1942 review of *Wiersze Wybrane*, Tadeusz Gajcy, the editor-in-chief of *SiN*, wrote, “*Wiersze Wybrane* contains poems of very uneven quality... There are about 4-5 poems of high-quality [out of 20], the rest are average, or of low-quality.”<sup>299</sup> A few months later, Stanisław Marczak-Oborski (1921-1987), a writer publishing in *SiN*, made it clear that in the eyes of Baczyński’s peers associated with *SiN*, Baczyński is a Jew and his poetry is Jewish, not Polish: “Alien coachman [Jew] with a whip of decadent moods you drive the horse. And the cart is rolling further and further from us [...] Aharbal [demon], leave!”<sup>300</sup> Of course, Oborski’s claim that Baczyński’s poetry, a decadent attribute of his Jewish soul, was poisoning pure Polish souls fit nicely into the language of Polish nationalism from the 1930s and the war period. An example of this is the text by Gajcy about Polish poets of Jewish origin, published in October 1943 in *Sztuka i Naród*: “Finally it must be made clear that poetry of the interwar period was in 75 percent a mentally foreign work of this land and soul [soul of this land]. I mean the work of poets such as Tuwim, Słonimski, Leśmian...”<sup>301</sup>

### **Baczyński’s Holocaust Poetry of the Early Occupation Period**

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<sup>298</sup> Afterword to *Wybór Poezji*, by Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 267-269.

<sup>299</sup> Stefan Zabierowski, Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: biografia i legenda, 18. Translation is my own.

<sup>300</sup> Cited in afterword to *Wybór Poezji*, by Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 268. Translation is my own.

<sup>301</sup> Cited in Tomasz Żukowski, “Kręgiem ostrym rozdarty na pół. O niektórych wierszach K. K. Baczyńskiego z lat 1942-1943,” *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2004): 160. Translation is my own.

Let us return to the question of whether, and if so, to what extent, the murder of Polish Jews was reflected in Baczyński's work. Of course, the question about the attitude to the Jewish tragedy applies to every writer who was creating in Poland at the time and provides insight into the writer's ethical and ideological values. The ethno-nationalist writers, Tadeusz Gajcy being the most notable, chose not to write about "what everyone has seen." On the other hand, the "elders," who were the first to recognize Baczyński's talent, chose to respond to the Holocaust: In 1943, Miłosz described himself as "a Jew from the New Testament," Andrzejewski wrote the novella "Holy Week," at the time of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and Jerzy Zagórski was recognized as the Righteous Among the Nations for saving Jews. And Baczyński? According to Kazimierz Wyka's well-known monograph on Baczyński (*Krzysztof Baczyński, 1921-1944*), Baczyński remained indifferent to the fate of Polish Jewry. This, of course, is nonsense. How could Baczyński, who did not hide his revulsion to anti-Semitism, who always stood up for his Jewish classmates, and who was fully aware of his Jewishness, remain indifferent to the destruction of Polish Jewry, literally taking place in front of his eyes?

Certainly, Baczyński could not write openly about the fate of Polish Jewry without endangering himself and his loved ones. One could be killed in those days because of poetry. It is, then, not surprising that the Jewish problem in an explicitly named form appears only once in Baczyński's works, in the poem *Do Pana Józefa w dniu imienin 1942 roku* (To Mr. Józef on his name day, 1942). In this poem, full of irony, Baczyński presents post-war Poland as a continuation of pre-war times:

Yes it will be. And Sikorski will be,  
PPS, Endeks, poets, and everywhere  
the Jews will again spread and the Poles will again conclude  
that everything is the Jews' fault and that the Jews live in dirt

and sow miasma, and that they have to smash their windows  
and shops and knock out their teeth.<sup>302</sup>

In the first months of 1940, a wave of anti-Jewish riots swept through Warsaw. Although initiated by the Germans, it was the Polish hooligans who raided Jewish shops and attacked people wearing the Star of David Band, shouting: “It’s a shame to be a Jew! Be ashamed! Be ashamed!” As a reaction to the appalling reality, Baczyński wrote the poem *Banita* (The Outlaw; early spring 1940), which echoes the pogrom. Just the title itself is quite telling: *Banita*, deprived of honor and banished from his native land, was allowed be killed with impunity if he ever again appeared in the land. In *Banita*, Baczyński writes:

A distant return in a slant of rusty roads,  
Adam.  
[...]  
On the broken yards and return masts  
a nightingale sat:  
he calls paradise lost with his fist between your eyes  
like a human.  
[...]  
Oh, stranger, back to the side of the rusty road,  
Adam.<sup>303</sup>

Is the exiled, stigmatized, struck with a fist between his eyes Adam, not an attacked Jew of Warsaw? Is not his return journey to a paradise of peace, tolerance, and equal rights, uncertain and rusty in the spring of 1940?

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<sup>302</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, “Do Pana Józefa w dniu imienin 1942 roku.” 19 March 1942. Translation is my own. Accessed from: <https://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/baczynski-poematy-do-pana-jozefa-w-dniu-imienin-1942-roku.html>

<sup>303</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, “Banita.” Early spring 1940. Translation is my own. Accessed from: [https://poezja.org/wz/Baczy%C5%84ski\\_Krzysztof\\_Kamil/437/Banita](https://poezja.org/wz/Baczy%C5%84ski_Krzysztof_Kamil/437/Banita)

In spring of 1941, Baczyński spent several weeks in the Polish Red Cross hospital on Smolna Street. There are two testimonies about Baczyński's stay in the hospital, both quite intriguing. A friend of the poet, Tadeusz Sołtan (1921-1996), hospitalized at the same time as Baczyński, noted:

The reason for my stay in the hospital was not so much illness as my desire to disappear from my family home for some time [Sołtan already was involved in the underground]. For Krzysztof, the basis for obtaining hospital asylum was his asthma. But, above all, he wanted to find himself in a slightly different environment for a few weeks, to escape from the everyday horror.<sup>304</sup>

Joanna Weintraub, remembered Baczyński's hospitalization this way:

I received a letter from Krzysztof's mother, whom I did not know personally at the time, asking me to visit Krzysztof in the hospital and bring him food. [...] He lay in a large common room. His neighbor was a large man, about whom Baczyński whispered to me that he had come out of prison and that he was hiding there. I can't remember if he said, "he is hiding here," or rather, "he is also hiding here." It is difficult after so many years to have control over what was true and what was my assumption drawn from certain situations. Rather, it was true that Krzysztof was already involved in the underground work and the situation required hiding in the hospital. Perhaps that is why Krzysztof's mother didn't want to go see him, so as not to draw attention to him. These were times when no one asked questions.<sup>305</sup>

As is known today, Baczyński did not enter the Gray Ranks of the Home Army for another two years. Thus, if he was in hiding in 1941, it certainly was not because of his work in the underground. By mid-1941, nearly all Jews in occupied Poland had been forced into ghettos. In Warsaw, the ghetto was sealed with a brick wall, four meters high, including one meter of barbed wire on top. "Head by head – is this a wall? Their faces are like nuts of firm skulls. Their fists are swollen like the mountains' humps [...] On the

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<sup>304</sup> Cited in Spyra, "Optymizm I Wojenna Zawierucha," 259. Translation is my own.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 259-260. Translation is my own.

roads' ropes torn to pieces, a motif like barbed wire breaks [...] It reminds me of something...I know; Violins' broken hearts," writes Baczyński of the wall in *Ci Ludzie* (These People, 1941).<sup>306</sup> In March 1941, the city experienced the influx of Jewish deportees from the surrounding countryside. In the ghetto, mass round-ups of men for deportations to work camps began. On 17 April, 1941 Emmanuel Ringelblum noted: "What the streets looked like on the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> of April, during the work seizures: There were only women in the streets. Crying women surrounded the men who had been seized; they were sent off to camp the first day empty-handed."<sup>307</sup> The hunt for those few who had fled to the "Aryan" side escalated. It seems, then, that the poet wanted to wait out this particularly difficult period in the hospital. Moreover, *Legenda* (Legend), *Świat Sen* (Dream World), *Elegia O Genezie* (Elegy About Genesis), *Śpiew Na Wiosnę* (Singing In The Spring), *Starość* (Old Age), and *Groteska* (Grotesque), all written during the poet's stay at the hospital, are remarkable testimonies of the tragic events of spring 1941.

Autumn of 1941 brought the first cycle of unrestrained laments triggered by a public street execution that Baczyński personally witnessed. In his bibliographic notes, the poet describes it this way: "I saw this moment too. A heavy truck carrying "something", blood dripping down from its rear. Here is a moment without name and

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<sup>306</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, "Ci Ludzie." Cited in Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, "Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero," *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 171.

<sup>307</sup> Emmanuel Ringelblum and Jacob Sloan, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: ibooks distributed by Publishers Group West, 2006), 163-164.



living in all times, despite the fact that I saw it in a specific segment of time,”<sup>308</sup> and documents it in the poem *Bez Imienia* (Without Name, XI 1941):

Now is the moment without a name:  
the door swelled out and was extinguished.  
In the tumult, loud as a burning flame,  
and in the shadows, faces you cannot distinguish.

Then a short cry from next door;  
then a thud like a rock falling down  
and as from a wound the darkness flows  
and in the clattering cart a body is thrown.

Now is the moment without a name  
branded in time as in an anthem. It spells out,  
with a filament of blood like a string,  
its name on the flagstones behind the cart.<sup>309</sup>

Wyka is puzzled as to why the shock of German occupation occurred to Baczyński earlier than to his peer poets, already in 1941:

“Without Name” is the first of Baczyński’s works testifying to an occupational shock. We have the poet’s confirmation that this extraordinary poem is an authentic notation of a sudden execution. Meanwhile, in the autumn of 1941, the Germans had not resorted to public executions of Poles on city streets as a means of mass terror. They started a year later. It is therefore difficult to know exactly what fact this shocking text corresponds to.<sup>310</sup>

Wyka is not quite correct. Terror against Poles eased, but probably because the Germans had their hands full: in summer and autumn 1941 the overt extermination of Jews had begun. With the invasion of the Soviet Union, the German authorities dispatched mobile killing squads, known as Einsatzgruppen to follow the regular military

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<sup>308</sup> Cited in Kazimierz Wyka, *Krzysztof Baczyński (1921-1944)* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1961), 37. Translation is my own.

<sup>309</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, “Bez Imienia,” in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 67.

<sup>310</sup> Kazimierz Wyka, *Krzysztof Baczyński (1921-1944)* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1961), 37. Translation is my own.

into Soviet territory. Their primary task was the slaughter of all Jews, including women, children, and the elderly. Probably the biggest slaughter carried out by the Einsatzgruppen was the massacre at Babi Yar (a ravine on the outskirts of Kiev), where in just two days in September 1941, more than thirty thousand Jews were shot. The exact number of people killed by Einsatzgruppen will never be known, but an estimate approaches 2 million total victims (1.3 million Jews and 250,000 Gypsies).<sup>311</sup> In Warsaw, too, the mass execution of Jews on the “Aryan” side was a daily occurrence, and there was little attempt to conceal the killings from onlookers. On 18 September 1941, Emmanuel Ringelblum noted in his diary:

Beginning the second half of July, repeated rumors that Jews are to be expelled from Warsaw. [...] Heard something at the end of August that the Germans are readying a project that will call for the resettlement of all Jews now in the Government General etc., in the East, somewhere in Polesia.<sup>312</sup>

On 20 November 1941:

A decree was published threatening Jews with the death penalty if they left the Ghetto without a pass. [...] On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November (it is said) two Jews were shot in the street, without a hearing – because they left the Ghetto without a pass. One of them is the well-known movie-house owner, Lehmann (shot at Theater Place); the other Jew was shot at the train station.<sup>313</sup>

On 22 November 1941:

The execution of eight Jews, including six women, has let all Warsaw trembling. We’ve gone through all kinds of experiences here in Warsaw, and in other cities, as well, particularly in Lithuania, where mass executions are common. But all past experience pales in the face of the

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<sup>311</sup> Doris Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 153-157.

<sup>312</sup> Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, 212.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

fact that eight people were shot to death for crossing the threshold of the Ghetto.<sup>314</sup>

And on 21 December 1941:

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1941, a death sentence was carried out on fifteen Jews who left the Ghetto without a permit.<sup>315</sup>

And so forth. Yet, Wyka chose to disregard these historical facts and argued that Baczyński's poetry of this period was not a reaction to real events, but rather, a foreseeing of later events (public executions of Poles).<sup>316</sup> In the autumn and winter of 1941, in addition to *Bez Imienia*, Baczyński wrote other poems, expressing the horrors that befell the Jews. In *Jesień 41 R.* (Autumn 1941), he wrote:

When the body's all burned, the eyes will remain –  
in a lid made of ebony clouds they are nails.  
The ringer will emerge, frown like earth in the autumn,  
and tug at the long legs of hanged men like bells.

[...]

Since we slept in embraces of corpses, already  
you know death's profile, knife-sharp, without motion.  
Since we walked on steps of our brothers'  
black brothers,  
take the rag of the body and cast it in the ruins.

And gouge out my eyes and roll them away  
like lead balls, and with them set fire to the wind,  
so it whistles through bare skulls, and let it burn so  
till our hearts turn to ash, gone the world  
they contained.<sup>317</sup>

In *Krzyż* (The Cross, XI 1941):

For those who were cut down like leaves

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>316</sup> Wyka, *Krzysztof Baczyński (1921-1944)*, 38.

<sup>317</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Jesień 41 R.," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 54-57.

by the lash, those like birds of wax,  
and those whose blood spills with fatigue,  
and those whose shadows have been etched  
on walls, for dying animals  
whose eyes are slowly drained of color,  
you'd like to cast life back to God  
and die a second time, like the Savior;

but the blood you've lost has gathered  
and your hands are tied together,  
for creative disquiet you are not –  
it's just that you're afraid to watch.<sup>318</sup>

In *Z Szopką* (With The Crib, XII 1941):

White horses wreathed the steaming way  
in clouds as they passed overhead;  
afame with stars, the Christmas hay  
quietly creaked.  
From over the hills, or from the heavens  
came the white angel? the frost that bit?  
the old men to the sky a-bending?  
A white angel bore the crib.<sup>319</sup>

In this was irony – within  
a small star-whitened roof confined  
and inside four pasteboard walls  
the flame of ages and of mankind;  
confined within two figures – one  
black, one white, from afar it seemed,  
the bones of epochs trampled on,  
and the flesh burned up with greed.  
Into storms' taut crossbows did  
the white angel bear the crib.

And the figures, in agonies  
dying, weakened, faded fast  
into the brilliant starlit skies  
and to pasteboard ashes passed.

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<sup>318</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Krzyż," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 69.

<sup>319</sup> In this case the crib is a box-sized representation of the nativity scene, which carol singers carry with them as they go from house to house during the Advent period before Christmas.

At their resistance, not their sin,  
the angel smiled, seeing them alone  
though great in numbers was their tribe.

The white angel bore the crib.

Till his light foot like rock and mist  
touched upon the frozen ground  
and he saw a crooked body, transfixed  
in earth, that hunger had cut down,  
the ribs' black arches, the clasped and twisted  
spades of hands, the belly swollen  
like the drum of life, a belly  
livid, a belly like a piston,  
and he turned back. Into the drip-  
-ping sky he bore the blackened crib.<sup>320</sup>

In *Psalm 4* (Psalm 4, XII 1941 – I 1942):

God of mine, I stand before you  
my body's altar torn asunder.  
Born as a single conscience, with  
the smoke of a thousand dead I smolder.

Don't explain the birds and flowers;  
I know them all – I was conceived  
of them. It's hurt I cannot learn,  
people that I cannot read.

Now I'm clam again. Send  
torrents of severed heads, and bring  
down the flattened hand of sky,  
You who are holy in all things.

Instead explain actions to me,  
earth's great gasping hurricane,  
for it means nothing that I trample  
on its defeat as if upon  
flint blades of people with changeless ways,  
sharpening their swords on walls of caves.

Instead explain to me those who,  
unknowing, at dark watersides

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<sup>320</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Z Szopką," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 70-75.

are the small and charred black crosses  
of notes that never will be played.<sup>321</sup>

In *Szklany Ptak: poemat – basń* (Glass Bird: a poem – a fairy tale), a long, twelve-part pseudo-mythical fantasy, written in autumn 1941, Baczyński tells the story of Miłun, a young hero, who leaves his wife and young son and sets off to unknown worlds in order to seek peace for his native land overrun by violence.<sup>322</sup> Miłun eventually enters the land of crystal people, who moved by his words about his land where “everyone free – died a slave, where bloody nightingales are born...”<sup>323</sup> gift him a glass bird (a symbol of peace) but warn: only Miłun’s sacrificial death can bring real peace to his land. So already then, in autumn 1941, Baczyński was confronted by the choice he knew he would eventually have to make: that between a life of personal fulfillment as a poet, husband, and father, and that of a hero, who loses everything dear to him including his own life, but dies knowing that he stood up – for those who could not – against evil.

### **A Respite from War: Baczyński’s Marriage**

After that autumn, came the winter with Baczyński’s fulfilled love for Barbara (Basia)

Drapczyńska. In a post-war testimony, Basia’s mother, Mrs. Drapczyńska recalls:

Basia came back from an evening poetry reading and said that she met a charming boy, whom she would like to invite to her Name Day celebration on December 4<sup>th</sup> [1941]. I agreed and a young man came, very handsome, very serious and very shy. He stood out with his seriousness, and Basia was under his spell, and happy with the gift, because he brought her a poem for her name day. It was love at first sight and a marriage out of

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<sup>321</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, “Psalm 4,” in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 79-80.

<sup>322</sup> Madeline Levine, “History’s Victims: The Poetry of Tadeusz Gajcy and Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński,” *The Polish Review* 23(1978), 40-41.

<sup>323</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, “Szklany ptak: poemat – basń.” Translation is my own. Accessed from: <https://wiersze.annet.pl/w,,3864>

great love. Basia was enthralled with him, and always radiant and joyful...they fit together intellectually. They understood each other...<sup>324</sup>

The wedding ceremony of Krzysztof and Barbara took place six months later, on 3 June 1942. Several accounts of this celebration exist; Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's is the best known:

I attended the Baczyński wedding at the church in Powiśle [neighborhood in Warsaw's borough of Śródmieście] on a wonderful June day in 1942. Lilacs bloomed profusely that year and I appeared at this rite with a huge bundle of these flowers. After the wedding, I told someone that it did not look like a wedding, but rather a first communion. Both Baczyńskis, very young, looked even younger because they were of small height. It actually seemed that two children were kneeling before the altar.<sup>325</sup>

Their love resulted in a set of beautiful love poems dedicated to Barbara. In these poems, Baczyński surrounds Barbara with pure imagery: powdery snow, white dust of the moon, silver seas, mirrors. She is the night's rose flower, the pure white air, and the milk of daylight, whose purity is redemptive for the poet, the man who loves her. Baczyński himself, in an annotation to one of his erotic poems, explains that, "writing these became an escape, they brought little moments of tranquility."<sup>326</sup> In *Biała Magia* (White Magic, II 1942), for instance, Baczyński writes, in a very subtle way, about intimate moments, combined with happiness and peace. The time spent with his wife is an escape from war and extermination, a respite from misfortunes, suffering, chaos, and moral degradation. The "whiteness" mentioned many times in the text, refers to values that were most important to them both: innocence, purity, beauty, and goodness. The

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<sup>324</sup> Cited in Waldemar Smaszcz, *Krzysztof i Barbara...podobni jak dwie krople łez* (Białystok: Studio Wydawnicze Unikat, 2011), 71. Translation is my own.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 125. Translation is my own.

<sup>326</sup> Zbigniew Lisowski, *Tragizm wojny i okupacji w poezji Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego, Tadeusza Różewicza i Zbigniewa Herberta* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Semper", 2008), 11. Translation is my own.

light, which surrounds Barbara brings peace and perhaps hope for the future. The intimacy of the love act is emphasized by the very high metaphorization of the text. In this beautiful love poem nothing is expressed explicitly and everything encloses itself in a metaphor:

Barbara stands at the mirror  
of silence, and her hands reach  
to her hair; in her body of glass  
she pours silver droplets of speech.

And then like a water pitcher  
she fills with light, and soon  
she has taken the stars within her  
and the pale white dust of the moon

Through her body's trembling prism  
white sparks of music will leap  
while ermine will creep through her  
like the downy leaves of sleep.

Bears are rimed in its hoarfrost  
with polar starlight imbued  
and a stream of mice pours through it  
in a clamorous multitude.

Till slowly she drifts into sleep,  
filled all with milky white,  
while time melodiously settles  
deep down, in a tumble of light.

So Barbara's body is silver.  
The ermine of silence within  
arches its white back softly  
at the touch of a hand unseen.<sup>327</sup>

Barbara was not only Baczyński's muse, but also his protector. Fully aware of his Jewish roots, she was concerned about her husband's wellbeing and, as much as she could, shielded him from the outside world. Throughout the entire occupation, she

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<sup>327</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Biała Magia," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 82-85.



secured food and other supplies for their household, attended clandestine lectures of Polish language and literature on his behalf, and visited his friends while he stayed home, so as to not unnecessarily expose him to danger.

### **Conclusion**

Although aware of his mixed heritage, Baczyński was not attached to his Jewishness in the interwar years. His Jewish background, however, acquired immense significance in the context of the Second World War. From the beginning of the German occupation he was marked for death by the Nazis. While he managed to evade the ghetto and stay on the Aryan side of Warsaw, he lived under constant fear of denunciation and stayed in a narrow circle of family and friends. Moreover, Baczyński was not only well aware of the danger he faced as a Jew in Nazi occupied Warsaw, but, what is more significant, in the course of the war, he increasingly identified with his Jewish heritage (without losing his Polish identity) and from the outset of the occupation wrote from deepest despair poems depicting the fate of Polish Jews.

## CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter focuses on Baczyński's Holocaust poetry of the late occupation period, which reflects the poet's despair over the fate of Polish Jews. In March 1942 rumors of deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to the killing center at Treblinka pushed Baczyński into overwhelming depression and triggered the second cycle of laments. During the so-called *Grossaktion Warsaw* lasting from 23 July 1942 to 21 September 1942 some three hundred thousand Jews were deported to Treblinka. For Baczyński, it was a time of numb, bottomless despair. In September 1942, day after day, he wrote, creating a unique cycle of poems, Job-like laments for the dead. He was suffering from an indelible sense of guilt. In *Modlitwa I* (Prayer I, 1942), he wrote: "Oh, do not say I am a man, for bloody shame will blind my sight, for my forehead bears the mark of crime, earth smells of death instead of fruit and I've an ax in place of my arm."<sup>328</sup> And in *Poemat o Chrystusie Dziecięcym* (Poem About the Christ Child), written already in 1940, he explicitly suggests that Polish Catholics bear the guilt of failing to show Christian love and compassion toward the victims of the Holocaust. The events of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising are also reflected in Baczyński's work. For instance, in *Ciemna Miłość* (Dark Love) written in May 1943 Baczyński argues that the Ghetto Uprising was not only a remarkable act of Jewish resistance but also a great act of love toward all murdered Polish Jews, and *Byłeś jak wielkie stare drzewo* (Like a grand old tree you were) written in April of 1943 speaks directly of the Jewish nation, its destruction, and future rebirth.

In July 1944, Baczyński entered the Scouting Assault Groups of the Gray Ranks of the Home Army. This chapter attempts to explain his motivation for joining the Polish

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<sup>328</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Modlitwa I," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 112.

underground and argues that for Baczyński, the decision to join the Home Army was not born out of a belief in the sacrificial fight for the future Polish nation, but out of solidarity with those suffering (Polish Jews and Christian Poles). Baczyński did not want to be a soldier, did not have anything in him of a soldier, and killing during military actions did not come easy to him; even in Nazi soldiers he saw human beings. Moreover, he not only questioned the ultimate triumph of Poland, but also believed that the struggle for freedom carried a heavy penalty: the soldiers would come out of the war morally deadened by the killing, which they had undertaken. For him, then, the decision to join the underground was born out of “dark love,” towards the murdered Jewish nation as well as the still-fighting Polish nation. The few poems written by Baczyński, the Home Army soldier, are in fact imbued with a sense of impending death, bitterness, and a loss of faith in a better world that can wait for Poles after the war. On 13 July 1944, Baczyński wrote his last poem. The poet’s last words sound ominous: “they conceived a child all red with blood.”<sup>329</sup> On 4 August 1944 he was killed in action. A few days later Barbara was also killed, pregnant with their first child.

As in the previous one, whenever possible, poems translated by Bill Johnston or Joanna Rostropowicz appear in this chapter. My own translations are indicated in the footnotes.

### **Deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto and Baczyński’s poetry**

In March-April 1942, Baczyński spent a few weeks at Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz’s beloved manor house “Stawisko”, located in the serene Podkowa Leśna, a village not far from Warsaw. However, his stay at “Stawisko” was anything but serene. In March, the

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<sup>329</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Gdy za powietrza dłoń pocznie kształty fałdować,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 241. Translation is my own.

terrifying rumors of deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka pushed Baczyński into overwhelming despair and triggered the second cycle of unrestrained laments. In

*Historia* (History, III 1942), the poet writes:

Weep, mother, lover, and pardon, for no angel  
it is, no angel walking in the lead.  
You are the same ones, in the sky atremble,  
you are the same ones coming to plant roses  
like voices on the graves, and with your hands  
wipe leaves and memories like graying tresses  
from the flat tombstones. All the never ending  
processions, where is it that they're headed for,  
like mercy's outcasts, led by land ascending  
and soaring through the sky. Or it may be  
the sky that blows over the land, sand like,  
and covers up their figures this way.  
Like knives plunged into bread they disappear,  
then slowly reemerge. The sand engulfs them.<sup>330</sup>

In *Młodość* (Youth, III 1942):

And the crime, like an embedded  
red beetle on a pin,  
which cools in pain and granite,  
remains in a dream like a voice.<sup>331</sup>

In *Pieśń O Ciemności* (Song About Darkness, III 1942):

...Again, the smoke envelops,  
I'm dying nailed by a dream. The century is passing.

Oh, stop it! A silence. I still see the peoples,  
and the nation under the dome where crazy wagons  
tear from the clouds the rains of bloody scissors.  
And the murrain falls down, and the frightened people  
are banging at the gates, the gates of stone.  
So they lay on the trembling ground  
that opens its mouth, kisses, and swallows them  
the sky is shaking and no voice is calling.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Historia," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 100-103.

<sup>331</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, "Młodość," in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 111-112. Translation is my own.

In *Martwa Pieśń* (Dead Song, IV 1942):

The eternal dream carries away the murdered people's ghosts  
whom – even the cross won't pledge out their fiery crosses  
and the lament too late won't restore the whites,  
and won't bleach the stigma from their death sheets.<sup>333</sup>

In *Samotność* (Solitude, IV 42):

There are no people. That's just the tragedy freezing  
into fantastic monuments growing by themselves  
and beyond me. Their sight like a veil  
and the original sin took their arms away.<sup>334</sup>

On July 22 1942, the Jewish Council of the Warsaw Ghetto published a German notice that all, but a necessary few, inhabitants of the ghetto were to be deported “to the East.” During the so-called *Grossaktion Warsaw* lasting from 23 July 1942 to 21 September 1942 (between two important Jewish holidays *Tisha B'Av* and *Yom Kippur*), some three hundred thousand Jews from the ghetto were deported to the killing center at Treblinka.<sup>335</sup> The weak, the crippled, and the aged were the first to go. On 6 August the orphanages were deported, including Janusz Korczak's.<sup>336</sup> Marek Rudnicki, a Holocaust survivor, recalls this dreadful, unforgettable sight:

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<sup>332</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Pieśń O Ciemności.” Cited in Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, “Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero,” *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 172.

<sup>333</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Martwa Pieśń.” Cited in Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, “Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero,” *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 172.

<sup>334</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Samotność.” Cited in Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, “Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero,” *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 172.

<sup>335</sup> Doris Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 187.

<sup>336</sup> Janusz Korczak (1878-1942), also known as Henryk Goldszmit, was an internationally renowned Polish-Jewish educator and pediatrician. When the Germans created the Warsaw Ghetto in 1940, the Jewish orphanage of which he was a director was

When, on 6 August, around 10 o'clock in the morning, I got to the house on Sienna Street 16, the children were already assembled, in fours, on the sidewalk. They were neatly dressed and did not look starved; seemingly, Korczak always had managed to scrape enough to give them sufficient nourishment. [...] The atmosphere was pervaded by some paralyzing fatigue, numbness, apathy. There was no sign of agitation, no saluting (as some describe it) [...] There were no gestures, no singing, no proud spring in the step; I don't remember whether the children carried the Children's Home flag – some people say they did. There was an overwhelming, weary silence. Korczak dragged his feet with an effort, appeared smaller than usual, as if shrunk, mumbling something to himself. [...] They walked as if in a trance. I followed them to the gate of the 'Umschlag' [Umschlagplatz] as we called it. I cannot describe the scene in front of our eyes, I lack adequate words, perhaps such words do not exist. [...]...tens of thousands of people were driven daily to this square, at the corner of Dzika and Stawki. A heaving multitude in unspeakable confusion, wailing, groaning, howling. Some walked round as if demented shouting names in search of their families. Many took poison, whole families in common embrace. [...] The children went up the sloping ramp [of the train] and disappeared in the darkness. Korczak went after them, the last. I can see his hunched figure disappearing from view. [...] I am almost certain that many of those children suffocated in the train before reaching Treblinka. I am also convinced that Korczak did not survive the journey to Treblinka.<sup>337</sup>

All of "Aryan" Warsaw became abuzz with news of deportations. For Baczyński, it was a time of numb, bottomless despair. He was suffering from an indelible sense of guilt; in *Modlitwa I* (Prayer I, VII 1942), he writes:

Clumsy hands, lifeless labors!  
And what can I do beneath this sky,  
where conflagrations are, deaf crowds  
and hungry peoples howling in terror?  
Unfed on bread or dreams, what can I,  
like a corpse reconciled with God,  
do for you all beneath this sky?

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forced to move from its building at Krochmalna 92 Street first to Chłodna 33 and later to Sienna 16 Street, within the Ghetto. Korczak had been offered protection on the "Aryan" side by Żegota, but refused, saying that he will not abandon his children. On August 6 1942, he and his staff led their charges to the *Umschlagplatz*. They were all sent to the Treblinka death camp.

<sup>337</sup> Marek Rudnicki, "My Recollections of the Deportation of Janusz Korczak," in *Jewish Life in Nazi-occupied Warsaw*, ed. Antony Polonsky (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 219.

Oh, do not say I am a man,  
for bloody shame will blind my sight,  
for my forehead bears the mark of crime,  
earth smells of death instead of fruit  
and I've an ax in place of my arm.<sup>338</sup>

But, no one is free from guilt. In *Modlitwa II* (Prayer II, IX 1942):

None of us is without guilt. When the night descends  
your faces and my face are all dripping with blood  
and my own body feels as if it has betrayed its soul,  
and hateful are the hobnails of my hands.<sup>339</sup>

In *Modlitwa III* (Prayer III, IX 1942):

If little children's wings  
can be cut off and turned into stone,  
then take away the ground from our accursed feet,  
turn us into clay.<sup>340</sup>

And, *Poemat o Chrystusie Dziecięcym* (Poem About the Christ Child), written already in 1940, explicitly suggests that Polish Catholics bear the guilt of failing to show Christian love and compassion toward the victims of the Holocaust:

Here you are, hypocrites, here you are, hypocrites,  
you have forgotten all the myths, your hands are in blood,  
Oh, you Christians, with empty songs  
in crowded churches...<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Modlitwa I," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 112.

<sup>339</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, "Modlitwa II." Cited in Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, "Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero," *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 174.

<sup>340</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, "Modlitwa III." Cited in Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, "Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero," *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 174.

<sup>341</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, "Poemat o Chrystusie Dziecięcym." 1940. Translation is my own. Accessed from: <https://polona.pl/item/poemat-o-chrystusie-dziecięcym,MjYzNTg1Njc/2/#info:metadata>

Baczyński, then, was a poet of pain. His poetry expresses pain for millions whose end of existence was marked by a cloud of smoke over the crematories of Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka. However, it was the reaction of the Polish nation that was most painful to the poet. Baczyński could not comprehend why “no one even cried for the grace of forgiveness of sins.”<sup>342</sup>

In September 1942, day after day, he wrote, creating a unique cycle of poems, Job-like laments for the dead. In *Ten Czas* (This Time, IX 1942), he writes:

Darkness floats in. The silence. The cracking of broken skulls;  
And the wind sometimes storms, the century crushes it with a rock.<sup>343</sup>

In *Znowu Jesień* (Autumn Again, IX 1942):

Autumn is here already. Trees are again  
the sails for dead houses, the wings for dead dreams,  
as if they didn't appear above the hacked head  
as if there were no columns of hands trampled into the ground.<sup>344</sup>

In *Tren I* (Lament I, IX 1942):

Oh, People, my people,  
alone in your pain,  
are you still in body,  
or only in spirit,  
not like any other,  
distinct in death,  
distinct in birth.<sup>345</sup>

In *Tren II* (Lament II, X 1942):

There's no escape, none. On the earth rent open

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<sup>342</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Modlitwa II,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 150. Translation is my own.

<sup>343</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Ten Czas,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 150. Translation is my own.

<sup>344</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Znowu Jesień.” Cited in Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, “Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero,” *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 174.

<sup>345</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Tren I,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 153. Translation is my own.



those million crippled hearts from by breast bleed.  
They lived, then left with simple words they'd  
spoken;  
these God with silence redeemed.<sup>346</sup>

In late autumn of 1942, Baczyński began studying Polish Philology at the clandestine University of Warsaw and worked all sorts of odd jobs. In the few poems written during the harsh winter of 1942-43, the poet argues with and cries out to God; in *Ziemia* (Land, I 1943):

O Lord of apocalypse! Lord of world's end!  
Find your voice, call the downcast over death's expanse,  
Put voice in our mouths, and punishment in our hands.<sup>347</sup>

### **Baczyński's Reaction to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising**

On 18 January 1943 the Germans began the deportation of the remaining 60,000 Jews of the Warsaw ghetto, which led to the first armed resistance within the ghetto, organized by the *Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa* (Jewish Combat Organization, ŻOB). Vladka Meed, a ŻOB resistance fighter recalls: "...as soon as we got hold of a few revolvers, the first German soldier fell in the Warsaw ghetto. The surprise act forced the Germans to hold the deportations."<sup>348</sup> Although it was brutally suppressed, and the Germans managed to seize some five to six thousand people, the January 18 revolt marked a turning point, for on that day, for the first time, the ghetto dared to strike back

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<sup>346</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Tren II," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 123.

<sup>347</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Ziemia," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 129-131.

<sup>348</sup> Vladka Meed, "Jewish Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto," in *Portraits in Literature: the Jews of Poland*, ed. Hava Ben-Zvi (UK: European Jewish Publication Society, 2011), 220.

in an organized fashion, preparing the way for future resistance.<sup>349</sup> In the words of Vladka Meed:

By setting fire to German factories, by carrying out death sentences against informers and collaborators, the Jewish Fighting Organization won the support of the remaining Warsaw ghetto Jews. Through bulletins placed on the walls of ghetto buildings, the ŻOB informed noncombatant Jews of the aims and work of the underground. [...] ‘Resist! Don’t let yourself be taken away’ – was the call. [...] Jews were secretly building bunkers and hiding places. Shots rang out; young people were learning to handle firearms. The whole ghetto was preparing to face a new deportation. [...] None of them expected to survive a Nazi attack. Nor did we expect to influence, in the smallest way, the outcome of the war. But we were fueled by the conviction that the enemy must be fought.<sup>350</sup>

The events of January 1943 are undoubtedly reflected in Baczyński’s work. In *Oddycha Miasto* (The City Breaths, II 1943), inspired by what has already happened, Baczyński writes of the need for further armed struggle:

Become the wrong and the vengeance, the people and the love  
Take in your hands the sword of history and strike! and strike again!<sup>351</sup>

And, in *Deszcze* (Rains, II 1943), he writes about Holocaust trains still transporting Jews to their death (without him!) and about merciful rains that will gradually wash away traces of people and their suffering:

Long trains are still going  
without you. Well? Without you. Well?  
[...]  
The rain is like pity – it will wipe away everything;  
blood from the battleground, and from the people,  
and the petrified air of fear.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Holy Week* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), xvii.

<sup>350</sup> Vladka Meed, “Jewish Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto,” in *Portraits in Literature: the Jews of Poland*, ed. Hava Ben-Zvi (UK: European Jewish Publication Society, 2011), 220-221.

<sup>351</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Oddycha Miasto.” Cited in Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, “Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero,” *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 176.

On 19 April 1943, at dawn, the last act of the extermination of the Warsaw ghetto began. In the words of Vladka Meed: "...the German soldiers marched, in full gear, into the Warsaw ghetto, to make it '*Judenrein*.' Suddenly, they came under fire. From buildings, from windows, from the rooftops of houses, Jews were shooting."<sup>353</sup> News of the Uprising did not immediately spread around the city. In the first hours it was only known that the Germans intended to liquidate the ghetto once and for all. But, hour after hour, as the fighting became increasingly fierce and as the ghetto began to burn, the Poles realized that the chaotic defense of the first few hours turned into organized resistance.<sup>354</sup>

On 23 April 1943, ŻOB issued an appeal to the Polish population of Warsaw:

Poles, Citizens, Soldiers of Freedom!

Among the roar of cannons, from which the German army shoots at our homes, to flats of our mothers, children, and wives, among the rattle of machine guns that we win in fights with the cowardly gendarmes and SS men, among the smoke of fires and dust of blood of the murdered Warsaw ghetto – we ghetto prisoners – we are sending you cordial greetings.

We know that you watch with compassion, admiration and fear, the fight that we have been waging for many days with the cruel occupier. [...] Maybe we will all die in this fight, but we won't give up. We are still alive and, like you, we demand revenge and punishment for all the crimes of our common enemy!

The fight for your freedom and ours is underway!

For your and ours – human, social, national – honor and dignity!

We will avenge the crimes of Oświęcim, Treblinka, Bełżec, Majdanek!

Long live the brotherhood of arms and blood of Fighting Poland!

Long live Freedom!

Death to executioners and torturers!

Long live the fight to the death with the occupier!<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, "Deszcze," in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 184. Translation is my own.

<sup>353</sup> Meed, "Jewish Resistance," 221.

<sup>354</sup> Andrzejewski, *Holy Week*, 7.

<sup>355</sup> Cited in Bernard Mark, *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim: Nowe uzupełnione wydanie i zbiór dokumentów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "Idisz Buch," 1963), 263-264.

Few Poles, however, felt compassion or pity for the Jews. Jerzy Andrzejewski noted in his remarkable text *Wielki Tydzień* (Holy Week, 1945) that “the populace was mainly glad that the despised Germans were now beset by a new worry,” and amused by the fact that “a handful of solitary Jews made the victorious occupiers look ridiculous.”<sup>356</sup> Some spoke with undisguised satisfaction about the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto and the killing of Jews. For Polish Jews, however, most painful was the fact that most Poles did not notice the Jewish tragedy at all, as if it did not touch them, change them. In a poignant December 1943 letter to his father, Ryszard Bychowski, Baczyński’s close friend, a Polish Jew and a pilot in one of the Polish squadrons in Britain’s Royal Air Force during World War Two, writes of his feeling of betrayal of Polish Jews by the Polish nation:

I know that it is difficult to wipe out twenty years of anti-Semitic propaganda in a short time. But it seemed to me that if not even a war against Hitler, if not even the common misfortune, then certainly the immense tragedy of the Jews in Poland in 1942 and 1943 would lead to a revolution in Polish views. Nothing of the sort. [...] In July 1942 the emptying of the Warsaw ghetto commenced. Today, after a year of systematic murder in the capital and in the provinces, the Jewish community in Poland has virtually ceased to exist. How did the Polish nation react to this unprecedented crime by the hand of the common enemy?

My colleagues in the air force and the army either were indifferent or openly rejoiced. For an entire week I saw fellows smiling scornfully on seeing the headlines of the *Dziennik Polski* [Polish Journal] about murders of Jews. They did not want to buy the *Dziennik* because it was “continually only about those Jews.” Surely you understand how painful it was. [...] I consoled myself with the thought that back home it is different. [...] Today I know that our homeland also did not pass the test. [...] Sometime, unfortunately, we will hear the whole truth from one of our relatives who nevertheless survived. But already at this moment I see that there was only indifference around the Jewish people going to their death: scorn, that they did not fight; satisfaction, that “it’s not us.” I sense that there was not the atmosphere [...] giving a Jew who had escaped from

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<sup>356</sup> Andrzejewski, *Holy Week*, 8-9.

the ghetto certainty of aid. Jews could not flee in masses because they did not have anywhere to go. Beyond the walls of the ghettos was an alien state, an alien populace, and that is, it seems, a terrible truth. [...] I hope that I will come out of the war whole. I have already decided that I will not return to Poland. I do not ever again want to be a second-class citizen [...] but above all I fear knowledge of the whole truth about the reaction of Polish society to the extermination of the Jews. I cannot live, consequently I am unable to work, with people who could have turned their backs on Jews in need of aid, people who managed to brush aside the Jews' liquidation, to occupy their homes, and to denounce or blackmail the saved remnants.<sup>357</sup>

Ryś Bychowski did not survive the war. On the night of 22 May 1944, the Avro Lancaster Bomber Squadron was returning to its RAF Blackpool station from a raid over Dortmund. Over Frisian Islands, Bychowski's bomber came under heavy fire from German anti-aircraft flak. Four of the crewmembers managed to jump out and survive. Three burned alive inside the bomber. Ryś was among them.<sup>358</sup>

At the beginning of May 1943, when the Ghetto Uprising was still underway, Baczyński wrote the poem *Ciemna Miłość* (Dark Love, V 1943). In the first lines, he writes of the fighting ghetto:

And again we see the city burning and smoke,  
which is slowly rising to the heavens,  
and trees turned into gallows scream and from afar  
the whip shoots and slices a man.<sup>359</sup>

Then, Baczyński evokes the image of "pathetic people," who, "in the carousel, float like a rag, singing cheerfully in the smoke," almost to the rhythm of the insurgent fight. The indifference of Poles who spent their time riding the infamous carousel at the

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<sup>357</sup> Ryszard Bychowski, "Letter to Father," in *Focusing on the Holocaust and its aftermath*, ed. Antony Polonsky (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 191-193.

<sup>358</sup> Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, *W ogrodzie pamięci* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2008), 331.

<sup>359</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, "Ciemna Miłość," in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 194. Translation is my own.

Kraśiński Park, presented so movingly by Miłosz in *Campo di Fiori*, was unimaginably painful for Baczyński. It was so difficult for the poet to bear, so inhumane, that he perceived it as a “challenge thrown to the blackened heavens.” The poem ends with Baczyński’s desperate call to every person to question his humanity and the content of his heart.<sup>360</sup> *Ciemna Miłość* is also a narration of the poet’s personal realization that there cannot be love without suffering. Those who love must, therefore, take the sword and lose themselves in spilled blood. The Ghetto Uprising, Baczyński argues, was not only a remarkable act of Jewish resistance, but also a great act of love towards all murdered Polish Jews.

In *O Wolność* (For Freedom, IV 1943), the poet writes of the Ghetto insurgents:

Animals woke up in us  
and milky spirits are waking up.  
We are cruel warriors by day,  
animals that burn in pain at night,  
[...]  
And a gentle battle in the sky of clouds,  
and on the ground the crunch of bones and steel.<sup>361</sup>

*Wiatr* (The Wind, IV 1943), *Dzielo Dla Rąk* (Creation For The Hands, V 1943), and *Zwycięzcy* (The Victors, V 1943) all allude to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. One poem, however, cannot be bypassed. “*Byłeś jak wielkie stare drzewo...* (Like a grand old tree you were) written in April 1943, speaks directly of the Jewish nation, its destruction, and future rebirth. In the first stanza, Baczyński compares the Jewish nation to an old oak tree, which has stood steadfast for centuries and has survived despite all adversities:

Like a grand old tree you were,

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<sup>360</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Ciemna Miłość,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 194. Translation is my own.

<sup>361</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “O Wolność,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 191. Translation is my own.

my people, bold as an oak,  
heavy with burning juices of old,  
like a tree of faith, of might, of rage.<sup>362</sup>

Next follows the description of its annihilation:

They have crushed your body to ashes  
to tear God out of a living soul.<sup>363</sup>

The poem concludes with a promise of resurrection:

The clock of heaven moves on,  
time bangs a sword against a shield,  
you'll shudder with the dawn's first glow,  
you'll hear your heart's voice: it's alive.

You'll rise like God from the dead  
with the breath of hurricane  
for you the earth's embrace  
will open. My people! To arms!<sup>364</sup>

Interestingly, *Byłeś jak wielkie stare drzewo...* was not published during the war, and did not spark the interest of *Wyka*, other literary critics and commentators.

Furthermore, in the collective consciousness of Poles today, the poem is about the Polish, and not the Jewish nation. Remarkably, the poet's call to arms is interpreted as an appeal to the Poles to fight in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 (that's how it's taught in schools)!

However, when one begins paying attention to the date of the creation of the poem and its inspiring stanzas saturated with Old Testament symbolism, it becomes obvious that *Byłeś jak wielkie stare drzewo...* was Baczyński's reaction to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

*Niebo złote ci otworzę* (I'll open for you the golden sky, VI 1943) is another commonly known poem (it was popularized by the poetry singer Ewa Demarczyk),

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<sup>362</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, "Byłeś jak wielkie stare drzewo..." Cited in Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, "Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: A Poet-Hero," *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (200): 176.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

which, every year, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, is invoked as a tribute to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and its fighters. Dedicated to Basia, the poem begins:

I'll open for you the golden sky  
where the white thread of silence is,  
like a great nut with sounds inside  
which breaks in two that it might live  
through small green leaves, the song of lakes,  
the music that the twilight makes,  
until its milky kernel's shown  
by the birdlike dawn.<sup>365</sup>

It concludes:

Only from my eyes take out  
this stabbing shard of glass – the days'  
image, by which white skulls are brought  
over meadows of blood ablaze.  
Only change the cripple's time, cover  
the gravestones with a cloak of river,  
the dust of battle wipe from my hair,  
those angry years'  
black dust.<sup>366</sup>

Again, one only needs to look at its date to find out that *Niebo złote ci otworzę* was written before 1 August 1944. Baczyński wrote of “meadows of blood ablaze,” exactly on July 15, 1943, two months after the Ghetto Uprising!

### **Baczyński, the Home Army Soldier**

After the final Nazi destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, Polish Jewry – the people Baczyński addressed in many of his poems – ceased to exist. But now, he has finally decided to undertake the fight. The decision matured slowly. The Ghetto Uprising accelerated it, perhaps settled it. In July 1944, the frail poet, Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński

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<sup>365</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, “*Niebo złote ci otworzę*,” in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 141.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.



entered the ranks of the *Zośka* battalion of *Harcerskie Grupy Szturmowe Szarych Szeregów* (Scouting Assault Groups of the Gray Ranks) of the Home Army.

Baczyński's July 1943 poem *Rodzicom* (To My Parents, VII 1943), dedicated to his parents, offers a glimpse into his soul at the time of his entrance into *Szare Szeregi*. In the first stanza, the poet talks about himself in the past tense, and suggests that his youth was fleeting, comparing it to the rustling of a linden tree in the wind. His time on earth was so brief that his existence could be described only by his name and by his body, received at birth:

And so this is all you have, then.  
I was like the linden's rustle.  
Krzysztof was the name I was given,  
and my body- so very little.<sup>367</sup>

In next stanza, Baczyński refers to St. Christopher, who, according to a legend carried an unknown child across a river. During the crossing, the river became swollen with animals, sand, and people, and the child grew extremely heavy, so much that Christopher felt as if he carried the entire world on his shoulders. The child then revealed himself as Christ. The allusion to St. Christopher means that Baczyński's parents expected their son to become someone great, like the saint whose name he was given:

And up to my knees in the dazzle,  
like the saint, I was to bear the Lord across swollen  
a river of animals, sand, people,  
wading in earth to my knees.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnston, "Rodzicom," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 151.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

In the rhetorical questions addressed to his parents, one can hear the poet's despair; he realizes that the unique literary talent he has received is a lost gift because he came to live during a period of war, blood and tears:

Why such a name for a child?<sup>369</sup>  
Why wings shaped in this way, mother?  
Why a struggle, father, for such a fault.  
The ground wet and bloody from my tears.<sup>370</sup>

He, then, quotes the words of his mother, who believed that thanks to his talent he would be able to convey all the pain experienced by the people of his time:

“He’ll bear it all,” you thought, mother:  
“he’ll name the pain, bring understanding,  
raise within me what’s fallen; o flower –  
you said – bloom with the fire of meanings.”<sup>371</sup>

His father's words were not fulfilled either. The poet's patriotism was not enough; the weight of the war was overwhelming:

Father, it's hard at the war.  
You said in your longing, in your suffering  
for Earth: “You’ll not know human scorn,  
but you’ll carry a cumbersome fame.”<sup>372</sup>

The next rhetorical questions are an expression of the poet's belief that he will not live an adult life, that death will come before he reaches adulthood:

Why should a child need such faith, and why  
a legacy like a house of flames?  
Before twenty years have gone by,  
life will die in his glittering hands.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Again, Baczyński refers to St. Christopher who, according to the Roman martyrology, was beheaded in Lycia under the Roman emperor Trajan Decius (201 AD - 251 AD).

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 153.

The poet also acknowledges that in his poetry, he is unable to convey what is happening around him because these are too overwhelming images:

And why a mind like a pine-tree, too high  
the crown as the cut trunk crashes?  
And how can the road run so straightly,  
when the clumsy heart is all ashes?<sup>374</sup>

Addressing his mother, the poet confesses that he is losing faith in love and that God is far away:

Mother, I cannot name, the pain is too great,  
death strikes too powerfully from every side.  
Love – mother, I no longer know if it is;  
From far away my flared nostrils smell God.<sup>375</sup>

Love changed its meaning, instead of giving joy, it brings sadness, because war takes everyone and everything: “Love – what will it give birth to – hatred, streams of tears.”<sup>376</sup>

Addressing his father, the poet conveys his feeling of senselessness at joining *Szare Szeregi*. Life in the underground, he argues, distances from values he believed in and, thus, is morally degrading. At this point, Baczyński’s soul is still split between undertaking an active fight for freedom (regardless of personal cost) or strictly focusing on his poetry:

Father, I carry my gun in my jacket;  
in the dark night I fight while the faiths all fade.  
Father – like you – apart from freedom  
maybe nothing else matters, or maybe my work.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 155.

In the last stanza, Baczyński declares to his parents that he will preserve on the battlefield his identity as a soldier and as a poet. He will fearlessly fight for freedom despite his awareness that all his personal plans and ambitions would not be realized:

Day and night, mother, father, I'll endure  
in the rifle-fire, I, soldier, poet, dust of time.  
I'll go on – this I have from you: I do not fear  
death, as I bear desires like burned roses in my arms.<sup>378</sup>

But, it is in *Wybór* (The Choice), written in May, July, August, and September 1943) that Baczyński asks himself the question whether at the time of occupation, when people of his generation are fighting, he can devote himself exclusively to art. He took a long time, several months, to write *Wybór*, as he himself indicates, and reworked it many times, not only for artistic reasons. The period in which the poem was written corresponds to the period in which Baczyński made his definitive decision to join the Home Army, “a choice [made] for all the world, forever.”<sup>379</sup> In fact, this long, eleven-part tale is often cited as Baczyński’s canonical work, precisely because it gives a fictionalized account of his own decision to join *Szare Szeregi*.

The poem begins with a description of Maria, a woman waiting for Jan, her husband to return home. Maria is also a woman awaiting a child, which confirms her and Jan’s fulfillment of love. The poet speaks very warmly about a “little plant” that is safe for the time being in its mother’s belly, which is like a “great raindrop,” but soon it will “rise as a person over the evil earth”:

Quietly Maria waited. And the vast world  
like chasms, it seemed, was flowing in the sky’s breath,  
blowing through the great windows onto a table set  
white and untouched. She waited. Without speech  
she placed her hands upon her breasts, at which

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 167.

her blood's hot potion foamed, and the milky fruit  
swelled in her hand and she could feel the beat  
of her heart's aching fist. And, tiny, alive,  
she felt a stalk within her, two small leaves  
embracing whole the love the two of them  
had locked inside themselves. And when  
her hand slid lower, she felt, rasping and blazing,  
the tongue of quiet lick her. Her belly was  
a great raindrop locked in her hips' broad basin.  
In the quiet she heard the downy growth inside  
climb up the hours' steps, harden to a nut –  
it was the child their bodies' warming murmur  
had rocked to life, like whispering seas a-pitch,  
into her fullness and her ripeness, which,  
equal to earth, embraced, grew tiny arms,  
the shape of a pink mouth, a little plant  
which she could feel beneath her reaching hand  
and which today would be fulfilled and rise  
as a person over the evil, half-closed eyes  
of earth, to become what? flower, husk, or tear?<sup>380</sup>

Jan is not with Maria, but also not alone. He is “with them.” “They,” are “soldiers, with no uniform, [...] wearing civilian hats.” They could be young conspirators, such as those among whom Baczyński found himself after making his choice. However, if one takes into account the fact that the immediate historical background of *Wybór* was the fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto (it was written in May, July, August, and September 1943) and Baczyński's telling description of the armed clash, which is not a subversive action, where soldiers strike by surprise, but a hopeless fight, a heroic act of self-destruction of people surrounded by the enemy, it seems that Baczyński wrote of the Warsaw Ghetto insurgents. By joining the armed resistance, then, Baczyński attempts to overcome the border separating him from the exterminated, and his decision is an expression of solidarity towards those who die in isolation:

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<sup>380</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, “Wybór,” in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 157-159.

And he was with them. [...]  
Standing still, they watched the enemy in the dark  
surround them slowly, helmets glistening bright  
like scales of some great fish hallowing the night.  
Jan stood among them, quiet as a great ensign  
who bears the dying flight of the huge heavens.  
His head rose high, topped by his flaming hair  
in which the stars burned with their final fire,  
into night's firmament silent and vast.  
Such were the soldiers, with no uniform,  
guns pulled from belts, wearing civilian caps,  
standing like storm-clouds at the heart of earth  
against a dead love and a powerless faith.

[...]

The enemy neared. And so each grasped his gun  
as a sculptor takes his chisel thoughtfully  
to carve a headstone in such agony,  
in such pain made, that all the deeds they'd done,  
all sufferings would be hammered, all crests of storms,  
into the statute's face, mouth, hair, and arms.

So came a chain of shots. Each link fell ringing  
at first to the ground; then denser outbursts opened. [...]  
The street was dark. A voice cried. From low windows  
a flake of frightened eyes. The road slick with blood.  
A dry rattle on the wall. The hiss. Heads bowed,  
they fell to earth as to the lowest depth. [...]

Jan saw dark bodies, once again reloaded,  
and slowly chocked his gun like a beast resisting.  
The broken chain of shots once more was twisting  
its laden wing. Then a grenade exploded  
and the smashed road, and the bodies still and black  
forever now fell silent in the dark.<sup>381</sup>

Jan, too, is killed:

He stood another moment somehow higher  
at the wall, made longer by his shadow, leaned  
like a staff that's propped against a fence to wait,  
stumbled and fell. And only a plash devoid of sound  
closed over him quietly [...]

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 159-163.

and petrified air hung still over the world.<sup>382</sup>

The motif of solidarity with people led to death seems even stronger in variants of the text (Baczyński wrote and re-wrote the poem many times), where Jan dies while rescuing prisoners from a train carrying them to a death camp. In one version of the poem, the description of the transport grows is as many as ten lines:

They stood next to the road. It was an iron trail,  
where the dark occupier led long processions  
to death camps. Above them, the stars  
were ringing softly like silver fur of sky  
and they saw in their memory these terrible processions  
of trains, inside of which heads as if loaves of bread  
were cut with a whip – living flesh of earth,  
went to the well of darkness like stone lions,  
and they thought of the hands twisted in agony  
and the decks of living entangled bodies.<sup>383</sup>

The attack on the train eliminates the physical barrier separating Jan from the exterminated, and symbolically eliminates the difference in fate. Jan's death is a double sacrificial gesture: he dies in exchange for transport victims and in exchange a resistance fighter, whom he covers with his own body. Thus Jan takes on two types of fate – the fate of the victims of extermination and the fate of patriotic fighters – and through this kind of combination he redeems the distance between them. As Jan's soul flows up above Earth, he catches a glimpse of Maria bent over their newborn child. Only now is Jan's internal dilemma revealed, the source of which is the choice between love for a woman and a child, and love for the homeland. Jan wonders if his choice, death in battle, was actually an escape from suffering:

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>383</sup> Cited in Tomasz Żukowski, "Kręgiem ostrym rozdarty na pół. O niektórych wierszach K. K. Baczyńskiego z lat 1942-1943," *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2004): 159. Translation is my own.

Did I not sin by walking away from suffering,  
walking away, when behind me painful flowers  
blew; a fearful butterfly beat her hands and eyes,  
while the heavy earth was chained to her small feet?  
I followed the flame that burns incautiously,  
oblivious to all.<sup>384</sup>

The message of the poem, and at the same time the resolution of Jan's dilemma can be found in the words of the angel accompanying him. He makes Jan realize the value of his choice, which was dictated by love not "for one body," but for many people, some sort of a collectivity. Jan followed the "flame that burns incautiously." The flame is a symbol of sacrifice, which is even more valuable because it is borne out of love. As the angel promises Jan that the purity of his choice "will keep from evil those he loves," Jan is lifted into the celestial sphere and turned into a star.<sup>385</sup>

For Baczyński, then, the decision to join the Home Army was not born out of a belief in the sacrificial fight for the future Polish nation, but out of solidarity with those suffering (Jews and Christian Poles). Baczyński did not want to be a soldier, did not have anything in him of a soldier, and killing during military actions did not come easy to him; even in Nazi soldiers he saw human beings. Moreover, unlike most underground soldiers, who truly believed that through their death Poland would eventually regain freedom, Baczyński rejected the redemptive value of suffering and death for the fatherland. He not only questioned the ultimate triumph of Poland, suspected that Poland would be subjected to Soviet domination after the war, and, in such political circumstances, he considered death for the nation to be meaningless, but also believed that the struggle for freedom carried a heavy penalty: the soldiers would come out of the

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<sup>384</sup> Baczyński and Johnson, "Wybór," in *White Magic*, 165.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-169.



war morally deadened by the killing which they had undertaken. For him, then, the decision to join the underground was born out of “dark love,” towards the murdered Jewish nation as well as the still-fighting Polish nation. Many of his friends, including Andrzejewski and Iwaszkiewicz tried to dissuade him from joining the Home Army. He, however, refused to use his calling as a poet, his love for Basia, and his personal opposition to violence, as an excuse to evade what he considered his moral responsibility to bear arms in opposition to evil (Nazi Germany).

After joining the elite “Zośka,” assault battalion, in October 1943 Baczyński began studies at the Reserve Cadet School, the famed “Agricola.” Studying at “Agricola” was very challenging: lectures were conducted by Polish army officers in hiding, started after curfew and continued until two in the morning, and lasted about seven months; apart from lectures Baczyński was required to participate in practical sessions in terrain, usually held in the woods near Warsaw. In the apartment on 3 Hołówki Street, where he had lived with Basia, “Agricola,” classes were held and guns were stored. In April 1944 Baczyński began participating in field actions, such as blowing up of a German military transport train near Kobyłka, a town located right outside of Warsaw. The action cost Germans 38 dead and 36 wounded, mostly officers. The Polish side did not suffer any losses. During the intense training as well as in field actions, Baczyński, despite his poor health, kept pace with stronger boys. In May 1944 he graduated from “Agricola,” although he had some problems with topography. When in July 1944 Andrzej Romocki (1923-1944), his superior assigned him to the press division of “Zośka”, Baczyński,

offended, transferred to “Parasol,” another assault battalion.<sup>386</sup> According to the poet’s friend, Zbigniew Wasilewski, Baczyński simply had to fight.

And yet, despite his deep involvement in the underground, Baczyński remained troubled, so much that in the depressing poem *Spojrzenie* (The Gaze) written in October 1943, he speaks of himself as a divided being. The poem begins with Baczyński’s realization, that nothing is lasting, and that darkness alone will replace his reflection in a mirror:

Nothing will remain. They are forgotten  
already, these times; in mirrors alone  
the darkness curdles into a reflection  
evil and empty, yet my own.<sup>387</sup>

As the rain rumbles against the walls of the house, the poet and his other forms sit around a table: the first, the I “who fell in love”; the second, the I “who gave birth to tremulous hatred” the third, the I reflected in his own tears; and the fourth, the I who teaches his “ailing” heart humility, so it prepares for the death that is hatching inside of him.”<sup>388</sup>

The few poems written by Baczyński, the Home Army soldier, are in fact imbued with a sense of impending death. For instance, *Elegia o chłopcu polskim* (Elegy on a Polish Boy, III 1944) sounds like a lyrical, ominous prophecy for the poet and his mother and the entire generation forced by history to grow up during a war. The poem’s addressee is a fallen son, to whom a desperate mother turns:

They kept you, little son, from dreams like trembling butterflies,

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<sup>386</sup> Ludmiła Bratkowska, “Żołnierz, poeta, czas kurz..., rocznica śmierci Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego,” *Myśl Polska* 33-34 (2005): 9.

<sup>387</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, “Spojrzenie,” in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 171.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-173.

they wove you, little son, in dark red blood two mournful eyes,  
they painted landscapes with the yellow stich of conflagrations,  
they decorated all with hangmen's trees the flowing oceans.

They taught you, little son, to know by heart your land of birth,  
as you were carving out with tears of iron its many paths.  
They reared you in the darkness and fed you on terror's bread;  
you traveled gropingly that shamefulest of human roads.

And then you left, my lovely son, with your black gun at midnight,  
and felt the evil prickling in the sound of each new minute.  
Before you fell, over the land you raised your hand in blessing.  
Was it a bullet killed you, son, or was it your heart bursting?<sup>389</sup>

In an untitled poem written in March 1944, Baczyński describes the “terrible years” in which the poet and his generation came to live. The poem is imbued with disappointment, bitterness, and loss of faith in a better world that can wait for Poles after the war. A dramatic turn to God is the last thing the poet can do:

Which no one can replace, and for whose worth  
we shall receive no recompense,  
you strait and terrible years, like the hands  
of death upon a day of birth.

You said more even than the massive  
ribbons of ruddy hurricanes,  
like human hands of evil demons  
sowing in the rubble a bitter fame.

You took what was most beautiful  
and left the thunderclap for us,  
to make our hearts the more sorrowful  
and wild – a cross in an empty house.

O, you terrible years of mine,  
you taught us to believe, and that  
was a staff to carry on our journey  
through all the storms that lie ahead.

Which no one can replace, and for whose worth

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<sup>389</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, “Elegia o chłopcu polskim,” in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 176-179.

we shall receive no recompense,  
you years – homeland of a bad youth,  
a hard old age's day of birth.

In the end we offer God our hands  
burned by the Antichrist's dark wing,  
and he'll understand that in the horror  
that youth was the only unspoiled thing.<sup>390</sup>

And in *Z lasu* (From the Woods, VI 1944), the poet asks the Home Army soldiers a poignant question: "My lads, how can we redeem whole worlds with a single lacerated soul?"<sup>391</sup>

On 1 August 1944, at a time when Allied troops were celebrating the success of Normandy and the Red Army was approaching Warsaw from the East, Varsovians struck back at the Nazis. Undertaken by the Home Army, the Warsaw Uprising was a sixty-three day struggle to liberate Warsaw from Nazi occupation. The Uprising's main political goal, however, was to liberate the city from the German occupiers prior to the entrance of the Red Army. The underground believed that in order to secure post-war Polish sovereignty, the London-based Polish government had to be established in Warsaw before the Soviet created Committee of National Liberation took charge.<sup>392</sup> Yet, to the Varsovians, the Uprising was an entity much greater than a mere military and political event. The entire population of Warsaw, including prominent political figures, intellectuals and literati, were either active participants of the Uprising or its passive

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<sup>390</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Których nam nic nie wynagrodzi," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 180-183.

<sup>391</sup> Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Bill Johnson, "Z lasu," in *White Magic and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 187.

<sup>392</sup> Jan Ciechanowski, *Powstanie Warszawskie* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987) 211-268.

observers. In fact, the Uprising was the defining event for the generation of Varsovians born in the 1920s, the so-called Polish “lost generation.”

On 13 July 1944, Baczyński wrote his last poem. The poet’s last words sound ominous: “they conceived a child all red with blood.”<sup>393</sup> (It is now known that Barbara was pregnant at the time). In a 25 July 1944 letter to his mother, who at the time lived in Anin, a village near Warsaw, the poet wrote: “ Be calm about me. I have to be in Warsaw on the spot. [...] It [the uprising] is all a matter of literally a week or a one and half [...] It is very hard for me that I cannot see you in such a moment, but please do not leave Anin during these few days. Think...these are all silly things in view of what is happening with the nation, the country, with the world. There are worse misfortunes, completely monstrous, and yet nothing changes between us, regardless of the situation.” From the same letter we find out about the situation in the city, the atmosphere heralding imminent liberation, and communication difficulties resulting from the withdrawal of German troops from behind the Vistula River: “Trams are hardly running, so I’m walking everywhere. Even if there is a tram, I can’t hook on. I tried to get a bicycle, but it’s impossible, because whoever has one, rides it as if possessed.”<sup>394</sup> 17 July 1944 was the fifth anniversary of the death of the poet’s father. That day Baczyński visited his father’s grave at the Powązki Cemetery. Edmund Semil, Baczyński’s former teacher, who talked to Krzysztof that day, regretfully confessed that he was not able to convince him that his participation in the uprising was superfluous.

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<sup>393</sup> Krzysztof Baczyński, “Gdy za powietrza dłoń pocznie kształty fałdować,” in *Wybór Poezji* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo IBIS, 2018), 241. Translation is my own.

<sup>394</sup> Cited in Wiesław Budzyński, *Śladami Baczyńskiego* (Warszawa: Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Warszawy, 2009), 125-126. Translation is my own.

On 1 August 1944, a few hours before the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, cadet “Krzyś,” for the last time left the apartment at Hołówki Street. When the “W” hour struck he was at Focha Street (today Molier Street), in the area of Teatralny Square. Baczyński and four other insurgents were cut off from the rest of their platoon that fought in Wola. Zbigniew Czajkowski (1926-1999), who was with Baczyński at Focha Street noted in his diary that the poet was very worried, because when leaving the house he did not say goodbye to his wife. Baczyński then decided to join a volunteer unit, located at Warsaw Town Hall, commanded by lieutenant Lesław Kossowski, “Leszek.” Witold Sławski, “Sławek,” remembers that, on the third day, he was with “Krzyś,” at a post in the corner room of the Town Hall from the side of the Kanoniczek Church. It was dusk when a German car drove by. They decided to shoot. The first shots hit the car’s tires. The next round of shots killed the German driving the car. And then, Baczyński began to feel terribly guilty that he had killed a man (although it is unsure whose bullet killed the German).<sup>395</sup> Perhaps this experience, so painful for the poet, weakened his vigilance and self-preservation instinct so much that just a day after the event he himself was killed.

On 4 August 1944, around 4 in the afternoon, officer cadet “Krzyś,” died a soldier’s death (a German bullet shattered his skull) defending the Blanka Palace in the Warsaw Old Town. Basia Baczyńska, mortally wounded on 26 August 1944, died pregnant on 1 September 1944. At the moment of her death, she was clutching the Kennkarte of her husband and a handful of his poems.

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<sup>395</sup> Budzyński, *Śladami Baczyńskieg*, 131.

## **Conclusion**

Baczyński's Holocaust poetry of the late occupation period undeniably reflects his despair over the fate of Polish Jews. Moreover, his decision to join the Polish Home Army was born out of "dark love," towards the murdered Jewish nation as well as the still-fighting Polish nation. Although many of his friends tried to dissuade him from joining the Home Army, he refused to use his calling as a poet, his love for Basia, and his personal opposition to violence, as an excuse to evade what he considered his moral responsibility to bear arms in opposition to evil (Nazi Germany).

## CHAPTER FIVE

Between 1944 and 1948 a new political system was imposed in Poland. The results of the 1946 national referendum and the 1947 parliamentary elections were falsified, and the Communist regime engaged in a policy of persecution, in particular of former soldiers of the Home Army. However, lacking popular support, and having nothing but terror at their disposal, the regime was eventually forced to “nationalize” Communism. Such a task entailed gaining control over the existing narratives of the past. Otherwise these narratives would become a resource for the anti-Communist underground (mostly led by former members of the Home Army). That is why from the 1960s onward, the regime used ethnicity, national traditions, and myths of the “dominant nation,” to legitimize its rule. On 4 June 1989 *Solidatrnosć* (Solidarity) won the (partially) free legislative election, leading to the fall of Communism in Poland. The post-Communist period was characterized not only by political and economic transitions but also by the construction of a democratic nation-state, a state *of* and *for* Poles.

Already highly praised during the war by the “elder” poets, the poetry of Baczyński gained immense popularity in the post-war years. However, Home Army circles and anti-Communist opposition groups reduced Baczyński to a figure lacking all ambiguity: a national (Polish Roman-Catholic) poet-soldier who chose to fight and die for the nation. The Communist regime also manipulated and adapted the image of Baczyński to fit its current needs. In contemporary Poland, although the general awareness of Baczyński is extensive, a falsified image still prevails.



## **The Warsaw Uprising of 1944, the Polish Home Army, and the Politics of Memory in the Polish People's Republic (1945-1989)**

The Polish Home Army was ferociously mistreated in the legitimizing myths of the Communist regime imposed on Poland after 1945. The Polish Home Army was not merely an anti-Nazi resistance movement, but the legitimate armed force of the Polish underground state based in London. Neither the German and Soviet occupying forces nor Poland's postwar Communist regime recognized this fact and treated the Home Army soldiers as criminals. The aim of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, the key operation of the Home Army, was to liberate Warsaw from Nazi Germany, and, what is more important, to do it in front of the Soviets in order to underscore Polish sovereignty. To the Poles, however, the uprising was something much greater than a mere military and political event: the disproportion in weaponry between the insurgents and the Germans, the heroism of the insurgents, the lack of Soviet aid, and the immense losses revived and re-legitimized the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic myths of martyrdom and messianism. The legend of the uprising was already born in the first days of August 1944. One of the adolescent insurgents admits that he tended to mix "our uprising [Warsaw Uprising of 1944] with that of 1830 [The November Uprising of 1830-1831 against the Russian Empire]."<sup>396</sup>

Having been granted limited power by the Soviets and lacking popular support (the majority of Poles supported the Polish government-in-exile in London), Poland's new rulers, at first, launched a policy of persecution rather than politics of memory. The avalanche of arrests began on 24 December 1948 with the imprisonment of Jan Rodowicz, "Anoda" (1923-1949), the 25 year-old student of architecture and a

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<sup>396</sup> Andrzej Waśkiewicz, "The Polish Home Army and the Politics of Memory," *East European Politics and Societies* 24 (2010): 48.

commander of platoon “Felek” of the “Zośka” battalion during the Uprising. Rodowicz died on 7 January 1949 during a brutal interrogation. Remarkably, in January of 1949, the Ministry of Public Security sought to arrest Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and was rather disappointed to learn that in fact, the poet-soldier was already dead.<sup>397</sup> The trials were accompanied by widespread propaganda. The most bizarre was the false accusation of Home Army’s collaboration with Nazi Germany. It was a narrative used to ostracize the Home Army, discredit the government-in-exile and undermine its legitimacy to represent the Polish nation.

Until the end of the Stalin era, the Polish underground was portrayed as the military force of a treacherous bourgeois government-in-exile in London collaborating with Nazi Germany in its military operations against the Communist People’s Army partisans, especially in Polish territories under Soviet occupation until 1941. To illustrate, a 1945 propaganda poster titled *AK – zapluty karzeł reakcji* (Home Army – the spittle-bespattered dwarfs of reactionary forces) presents a giant, running People’s Army soldier who is ready to shoot the enemy and who is spat at by a miniature dwarfish creature with an AK inscribed sign hanging around its neck.<sup>398</sup> Such a stance fit nicely into the leading principle of the Communist regime’s propaganda: that only the Red Army and the People’s Army liberated Poland from the Nazis. This principle provided

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<sup>397</sup> Jacek Sawicki, *Bitwa o prawdę: Historia zmagania o pamięć powstania warszawskiego 1944-1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo “DiG”, 2005), 82-92.

<sup>398</sup> Włodzimierz Zakrzewski, “*AK – zapluty karzeł reakcji.*” Published in February of 1945 by Wydział Propagandy Głównego Zarządu Polityczno – Wychowawczego WP. Accessed from <https://dobroni.pl/zdjecie/2441833>.

the post-war Communist puppet government with a founding myth and a mandate to legitimately reign over Poland.<sup>399</sup>



Figure 4. Włodzimierz Zakrzewski, “AK – zapluty karzeł reakcji.” Published in February of 1945 by Wydział Propagandy Głównego Zarządu Polityczno – Wychowawczego WP. Accessed from <https://dobroni.pl/zdjecie/2441833>.

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<sup>399</sup> Waśkiewicz, “The Polish Home Army,” 48-49.

It was highly difficult for the Communist regime, however, to reconcile such a thesis with factual evidence. For instance, it is estimated that around five hundred People's Army insurgents fought in Warsaw while the sum of the Home Army insurgents surpassed fifty thousand. The disproportionately high number of the Home Army insurgent deaths in respect to the losses suffered by the People's Army spoke for itself. To counterbalance this problematic fact, the Central Committee of Exhumation appointed in February of 1945 by the administration of the city, attempted to exhume the remains of insurgents from the streets of Warsaw and rebury them in mass graves without regard to the military organization of the deceased person.<sup>400</sup>

However, although strictly forbidden, the family and friends of the fallen Home Army insurgents organized exhumations on their own and buried their loved ones in special Home Army quarters on the Powązki Military Cemetery. Nonetheless, in order to achieve the illusion that facts fit their thesis, the Communist regime declared the "war of the graves", where the families of the deceased Home Army soldiers were coerced into burying their dead in the quarters of the People's Army.<sup>401</sup> In a 1996 publication, Krzysztof Głuchowski, a Polish London émigré publicist recalls, "(...) the authorities began a *battle for the dead*. Just like that, one night the bodies of the freshly exhumed Home Army soldiers were snatched from the cemetery chapel and buried in the People's Army quarters."<sup>402</sup>

The policy of brute terror terminated with the end of the Stalinist era, and in the mid 1950s, following the Gomułka thaw of 1956, the proper battle for memory began.

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<sup>400</sup> Sawicki, *Bitwa o prawdę*, 34.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>402</sup> Kazimierz Głuchowski, "Blisko i Daleko," *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza*, 1996.

Władysław Gomułka (1905-1982), imprisoned on Stalin's orders from 1951 to 1954 as a "rightist nationalist deviationist," and rehabilitated during the period of de-Stalinization, came to power during the 1956 Poznań worker protests. As a part of the nationalization of the Communist system in Poland, Gomułka admitted party mistakes from the past, and introduced a number of significant reforms whose consequences proved to be stable: he abandoned collectivization, improved relations with the Church, pursued a pragmatic cultural policy, and eliminated lawlessness, especially in the countryside.<sup>403</sup>

Compared to the brute terror of the Stalinist era, the new policy toward the Home Army was much more sophisticated. The regime officials and the regime-controlled press began stressing the difference between rank-and-file insurgents and the leadership of the Home Army. Ordinary soldiers, one was told, were true patriots who wanted to fight for their city but were manipulated and abused by the vicious Home Army leadership and the old reactionary regime (*reactionary* being the key word describing the prewar *Sanacja* regime in Communist propaganda) whose leaders had their own interests at stake: the desire to keep their pre-war social class privileges untouched at the expense of the lower classes, the workers and the peasants, and thus their political fight against the liberators of Poland – the Soviet Union. Thus, although the Home Army was treated as a hostile organization, rank-file-insurgents were partially rehabilitated and were even allowed to take part in the commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising. Nevertheless, the Home Army insurgents stood behind the People's Army insurgents, who in official

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<sup>403</sup> Andrzej Werblan, "Władysław Gomułka and the Dilemma of Polish Communism," *International Political Science Review* 9 (1988): 146.

propaganda, were always portrayed as the true war heroes. This new policy toward the Home Army lasted until 1980.<sup>404</sup>

The Communist regime, however, had never succeeded in imposing its vision of the Home Army on the Polish people. Although the regime possessed all of the resources they needed (a widespread propaganda machine, monopoly on the press and the media and censorship of the educational system), they could not prevent the former Home Army insurgents from sharing, perhaps in a whisper in the comfort of their homes, their narrative of the Home Army and the uprising. In fact, many of the accounts of the uprising resembled hagiographies, in which the Home Army and its soldiers could do no wrong, while Stalin and Western Allies were to blame for the failed uprising.<sup>405</sup> In the democratic opposition circles the legend of the uprising grew, and by the mid-1980s it became a symbol of the Polish independence struggle in general.

### **Memory of the Jews and the Holocaust in Communist Poland (1945-1989)**

Almost all of the Polish Jews had been murdered during the Holocaust, and many of the survivors had emigrated to Israel or to the West. The few Holocaust survivors who remained in Poland were either unwilling to acknowledge their Jewish origins in the light of the post-war pogroms, or they were so traumatized by their wartime experiences that they suppressed the memory altogether.<sup>406</sup> The material traces of the centuries of Jewish life in Poland were eradicated during the war and the socio-economic space once occupied by Polish Jews was soon filled by non-Jewish Poles. As a result of the war and

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<sup>404</sup> Wańkiewicz, "The Polish Home Army," 49-50.

<sup>405</sup> Alexandra Richie, *Warsaw 1944: Hitler, Himmler, and the Warsaw Uprising* (London: William Collins, 2014), 17.

<sup>406</sup> Katrin Steffen, "Disputed Memory: Jewish Past, Polish Remembrance," *Osteuropa* 58 (2008): 205.

the ensuing territorial-political changes, Poland became an ethnically homogenous nation-state. Consequently, non-Jewish Poles have been left with their own, uncontested memories of the past. While the Communist regime attempted to shape Poland's memory to give it a new meaning in accordance with the Communist worldview, the majority of Poles, unsupportive of the new political system, sought to safeguard the memory of the country's past in the private sphere of family life. Significantly, what has united these otherwise opposing forms of memory is the complete erasure of the memory of Jews.<sup>407</sup>

As previously discussed, Polish ethno-nationalists in interwar Poland and during WWII (especially during the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland) promulgated the idea of Jews as both the creators of Communism and the executors of Soviet policies. In the early postwar period, as a result of the Communist takeover of power, this categorization of Jews intensified once again and had a major impact on the post-war political culture and popular memory. Jews occupying high state and party positions were perceived as double enemies: as Jews and as servants of the Soviet Union.<sup>408</sup> Illegal press articles and leaflets circulating around the country warned against the Jews. For instance, a message written in an illegal leaflet circulated in Kielce in 1945 warned: "Fellow Poles! Do you

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<sup>407</sup> Sławomir Kaprański, "Jews and the Holocaust in Poland's Memoryscapes: An Inquiry into Transcultural Amnesia," in *The Twentieth Century in European Memory: Transcultural Mediation and Reception*, ed. Barbara Tornquist-Plewa (Denmark: Brill Academic Pub, 2017), 170-171.

<sup>408</sup> Joanna Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew From 1880 to the Present* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 202.

know who is in charge of the trials against us? Jews! Do you know who is murdering us? Jews! Do you know who is ruling over us? Jews – and Bolsheviks!”<sup>409</sup>

The majority of post-war Polish society treated the “Jewish question” as if the world had gone back to the pre-war period and the Holocaust had never happened. The situation resulted in the preservation of anti-Semitic attitudes, which were then passed on to the next generation of Poles. Instances of hostility, ranging from verbal harassment to murder, were common. On 9 July 1945, for instance, the Jewish community of Jedlińsk, in Radom county, received a “friendly” warning: “It has been observed that many of you work in intelligence in the service of a government brutally imposed on us and that therefore you are acting against the well-being of Polish society. As a representative of the Polish people, I order all Jews to get out of Radom and Radom province by 15 August 1945. I warn you that if you do not leave by this date or if you attempt to ask the local government for help, you will be punished.”<sup>410</sup> By the end of 1947 there had been a great number of casualties among Jews. Polish historiography tends to solely focus on one particular pogrom – the Kielce pogrom of 1946. The Kielce pogrom, however, was not an isolated event, but a small part of a large wave of post-war anti-Jewish violence.<sup>411</sup>

In the first years after the war, the Communist regime officially commemorated Polish Jews and the Holocaust. However, the Communists manipulated the Jewish issue cynically. It was used to get political legitimization from the West, and to discredit the Polish anti-Communist groups. Any opposition to the Communist regime was interpreted

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<sup>409</sup> A message written in an illegal leaflet circulated in Kielce in 1945 published in Danuta Blus-Węgrowa, “Atmosfera programowa,” *Karta* 18 (1996): 101.

<sup>410</sup> Leaflet to the Jewish community in Jedlińsk cited in Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 215.

<sup>411</sup> Anita Prażmowska, “The Kielce Pogrom 1946 and the Emergence of Communist Power in Postwar Poland,” *Cold War History* 2 (2010): 106.



as nationalist, reactionary, and anti-Semitic. A good illustration of this attitude was the unveiling of the Ghetto Heroes Monument already in 1948 (while the construction of memorial of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising was allowed only in 1989). On the walls of the former ghetto, were posted – side-by-side – propaganda posters with the following texts: “Glory to the heroic defenders of the Ghetto” and “Shame on the fascists flunkies of the Home Army.”<sup>412</sup> As the American historian Michael Steinlauf pointed out:

Rapport’s monument stood alone in a vast field of rubble, easily read by the Poles as a symbol of the new government’s decision to honor the Jews, while consigning the Polish national struggle to the dustbin of history. Similarly, Polish secondary school textbooks of the early 1950s devote more attention to the history of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust than any subsequent versions, but the context for this information is a narrative in which the AK is described as hindering Polish resistance.<sup>413</sup>

In the period of 1949-1956, the Communist regime followed a Marxist-Leninist approach to history. All expressions of ethnicity and nationalism were reduced to an epiphenomenon of class struggle and interplay of economic forces. Jews (as well as Poles) were thus excluded from the official version of history. However, with the destalinization of the Communist regime after 1956, the regime attempted to legitimize its rule by placing it in the framework of Poland’s national history and tradition. Comrade Włodzimierz Sokorski (1908-1999) wrote in in 1965:

The moment we came face to face with the construction of socialism each Marxist party found itself faced with the responsibility for its own nation. On these grounds our internationalism has gone through a defined evaluation. Now we too are trying to unite two phenomena: the responsibility for one’s nation and our internationalist obligations. These matters are not as simple as they appeared in theory.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Piotr Wróbel, “Double Memory: Poles and Jews After the Holocaust,” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 11 (1997): 566.

<sup>413</sup> Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead. Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 111.

<sup>414</sup> Cited in Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other*, 230.

Thus, while in theory the regime preached the Marxist ideology of internationalism and working-class brotherhood, in practice it used ethnicity, national traditions, and myths of the “dominant nation,” to legitimize its rule. Although (true) memories of the Warsaw Uprising 1944, the Katyń massacre, the struggle of the Polish pilots in the Battle of Britain continued to be repressed, average Poles were presented, in accordance to the romantic paradigm, as the innocent victims of World War Two. Poles were also presented as the main victims of the war. For example, the Communist regime turned Auschwitz into a symbol of the martyrdom of the Polish nation, while the murder of Jews was to a large extent ignored. For ethnic Poles today, who for three generations were socialized to believe that they had constituted the majority of victims of Auschwitz – a “fact” that fit neatly into the myth of Polish martyrology – statistics which prove that Jews constituted 90% of the camp’s victims are not easily accepted.<sup>415</sup>

Thus, in post 1956 Poland, ethno-nationalism came to constitute an essential part of the Communist system, and reached its apogee in the 1960s when anti-Jewish policy, expressed in the slogan “Party free of Jews, Poland free of Jews,” was endorsed by the regime.<sup>416</sup> When on 8 March 1968 University of Warsaw students took to the streets marching for freedom of speech, a political crisis unleashed which quickly transformed into an openly anti-Semitic campaign led by the regime. The campaign officially denounced Zionism in response to the 1967 six-day war in Israel, but it was really a veil for anti-Semitism. Media propaganda called to get rid of the “fifth column” (Zionists and those considered anti-Polish) from the country. Polish Jews were purged from within

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<sup>415</sup> Genevieve Zubrzycki, “History and the National Sensorium: Making Sense of Polish Mythology,” *Qualitative Sociology* 34 (2011): 39.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

the party, expelled from places of work, and subjected to harassment. Prime Minister Gomułka urged “Polish citizens who are in their thoughts connected to the State of Israel,” to leave Poland. Over the course of a few years, between 13,000 and 20,000 Polish Jews emigrated from Poland. As a result, for the most part, from 1968 until 1980s Jews and the Holocaust completely ceased to be remembered and commemorated.<sup>417</sup>

### **History and Memory in Post-Communist Poland (1989 – present)**

The partially free elections in June 1989 led to the collapse of Communism and marked the beginning of the so-called Third Republic of Poland (a continuation of the Second Republic of Poland (1918-1939). Most Poles inject the period of Communism into the long narrative of conquest, occupation, and oppression. The post-Communist period was therefore viewed as the latest phase of Poland’s struggle for freedom: It was characterized not merely by political and economic transitions (democratization and marketization) but primarily by the construction of a democratic nation-state, a state *of and for* Poles.<sup>418</sup> Myths accumulated and frequently established a stronger hold on people’s *Weltanschauung* (philosophy of life) than the history *wie es eigentlich gewesen war* (as it truly was).<sup>419</sup> In contemporary Poland, emphasis is placed on a victimhood-based national identity, idealization of self-sacrifice for the nation, and a defense of the “good name,” of the (ethnic) Polish nation. Jews (and Muslims) continue to be excluded from the (ethnic) Polish nation. That is not to say that people are uncritical of that vision of national identity or that there are not significant attempts to redefine Polishness.

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<sup>417</sup> Kapralski, “Jews and the Holocaust in Poland’s Memoryscapes,” 174.

<sup>418</sup> Zubrzycki, “History and the National Sensorium,” 39.

<sup>419</sup> Georg Iggers, introduction to Leopold von Ranke *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg Iggers, trans. Wilma Iggers (London and New York: Routledge Publishers, 2011), xiv.

To a great extent, history became a substitute for politics and a subject of conversation for the general population, a fact that reflects the importance of history to Poles. In Poland, history has served as an affirmation of national values, and the Polish historian had traditionally been not only a scholar, but also a guide, for history as a discipline and history as national consciousness were often inseparable.<sup>420</sup> Poles viewed the end of Communism in Poland as a *return* to history, or rather a return to historical memory. All that was forbidden, denied and distorted about the past under Communism was brought back to light (especially Soviet crimes). City streets were renamed after their prewar patrons, monuments were built to recent heroes, and in many bookstores special shelves were assigned to for literature devoted to reclaimed historical memory.<sup>421</sup>

The Home Army and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 became Poland's national legends. In the new narrative, the political function (resistance to Soviet domination) of the Home Army was not less important than its military role (resistance to Nazi Germany). Accordingly, Polish historians have written extensively on the Home Army activities in the Volhynia and Vilnius regions intended to counter operations by the Soviet army, which contributed to the legend of resistance against foreign rule. The Warsaw Uprising of 1944, too, gained immense significance. A 2003 survey shows that it is ranked among the most important events of World War Two. Most notably, asked about the death of the young insurgents, most respondents marked the answer "for a just but hopeless cause, it was justified." Thus, in accordance with the Romantic tradition, the dead insurgents became a symbol of hopeless heroism in the struggle for freedom, that is,

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<sup>420</sup> Piotr Wandycz, "Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Poland," *American Historical Review*, 97 (1992): 1011.

<sup>421</sup> Wańkiewicz, "The Polish Home Army," 52.

for the ancient, *collective* freedom (*Za naszą wolność i waszą*), and not the modern individualistic one.<sup>422</sup> The pendulum swung so far that many of the accounts of the uprising, the Home Army and its insurgents read like hagiographies. Unsurprisingly, in all these accounts there is very little information about the suffering of Warsaw's civilians, 200,000 of which were killed, and 700,000 expelled.<sup>423</sup>

The Home Army and the Warsaw Uprising 1944 took on special significance in the politics of memory after the Kaczyński brothers' ascension to power in 2005, and they continue to occupy this place to this day. The right-leaning *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, *PiS* (Law and Justice party) challenged the legitimacy of the Third Republic as a post-Communist creation whose foundations must be changed to create a truly democratic state free of its past (and its dependence on the former secret services in particular). *PiS* intellectuals had tried (successfully) to build a post-Communist state's legitimacy on a narrative of freedom fighting, victimhood, and martyrdom. The Warsaw Uprising (as the ultimate sacrifice for freedom) is at the core of this narrative, and the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising, created in 2004, plays a key role in articulating this narrative. In accordance to the Romantic vision of Polish history, the museum elicits a sense of admiration for the young insurgents, stresses the willingness to sacrifice one's life for Poland, and celebrates military defeat of the uprising as moral victory.<sup>424</sup> Of course, the construction of the uprising as the quintessential example of Polish patriotism automatically excludes from the community of patriots those who question the rationality

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<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-56.

<sup>423</sup> Richie, *Warsaw*, 18.

<sup>424</sup> Wańkiewicz, "The Polish Home Army," 55.

of the Uprising (as Baczyński did).<sup>425</sup> In fact, many Poles feel that to criticize the (sacred) Warsaw Uprising is un-Polish.

The decade after 1989 was marked by a revival of Jewish memory, partly assisted by the state authorities. A significant number of developments (cultural and educational initiatives, publications, and conferences on Polish-Jewish relations) took place. In addition, commemorative ceremonies with the participation of state authorities have helped to focus public attention on the Holocaust and previously neglected Jewish aspects of Polish history. Furthermore, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum narrative has been changed to emphasize the role of the site as the symbol of the Holocaust. The revision opposed the Polish view of Auschwitz as the site of Polish martyrdom, challenged the Polish martyrological myth, and led to years of tension between Poles and Jews, culminating in the 1998 War of the Crosses.<sup>426</sup> But it was the 2001 publication of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors*, which describes how ethnic Poles murdered their Jewish neighbors in a small town of Jedwabne in the summer of 1941 that shook Polish national identity at its core, and generated the much-needed public debates about Polish involvement in the Holocaust. After the Jedwabne debate, in which a general consensus was not reached, there followed a counter-wave of renewed heroization of the Polish nation (in particular after *PiS* ascended to power in 2005).

Most important among the attempts to revive memory of the Holocaust and Polish Jews have been changes in the school curricula and special Holocaust programs addressed to teachers. In 1999 Poland joined the International Holocaust Research

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<sup>425</sup> Ewa Ochman, *Post-Communist Poland: Contested Pasts and Future Identities* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis 2013), 29-30.

<sup>426</sup> Kapralski, "Jews and the Holocaust in Poland's Memoryscapes," 181-82.

Alliance, and in 2000 signed the Stockholm Declaration, which emphasizes the importance of Holocaust education, remembrance, and research. Previously, history textbooks presented World War Two as a Polish struggle against Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, did not mention the Jewish population at all, and blatantly ignored the Holocaust. For example, a passage from 1998 history textbook for primary schools informs: “In order to annihilate the Poles, the Germans opened concentration camps, the so-called death factories.”<sup>427</sup> Since the early 2000s all Polish history textbooks name the Jews as victims and present the Holocaust as a unique, autonomous subject. Simultaneously, however, these sources do not discuss Christian Polish complicity in crimes against their Jewish co-citizens.

Moreover, the most recent core curriculum introduced in 2016 by the right-wing Polish government discusses Polish reactions to the Holocaust in terms of the roles played by the Polish Righteous Among Nations; discussion of shameful reactions is not encouraged.<sup>428</sup> History textbooks, thus, reflect the greater society’s defensive and “patriotic,” use of history. A victimhood-based national identity, where Poles could do no wrong, continues to be emphasized. For instance, in 2018 Article 55 of the 1998 Act of the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, which criminalized historical negation of crimes committed against Poles by Nazi or Communist polities was amended to also criminalize mentioning

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<sup>427</sup> Jerzy Centkowski, *Podręcznik dla klas czwartych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1998), 102.

<sup>428</sup> Lidia Zessin-Jurek: Hide and Seek with History – Holocaust Teaching at Polish Schools. In: *Cultures of History Forum* (03.09.2019), DOI: 10.25626/0103

the complicity of the Polish nation in the crimes of the Holocaust.<sup>429</sup> This, in combination with idealization of self-sacrifice in the name of the Polish Christian nation creates a very unfortunate situation where minority groups – Jews (and Muslims) – continue to be excluded from the nation.

### **The Image of Baczyński in Communist and Post-Communist Poland (1945-present)**

Baczyński only slowly evolved into the object of myth building after the end of the war. Some thought that until Baczyński's body was found, there was still hope that he survived the uprising. News was circulating that he was in a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany. The first issue of a Roman Catholic weekly magazine *Tygodnik Powszechny* established in March 1945 under the auspices of Cardinal Adam Sapieha (1867-1951) published Baczyński's poem *Z Waitrem* (With the Wind, IX 1942), and commented:

Perhaps the greatest revelation of literary life of the wartime period was the poetry of Krzysztof Baczyński. [...] Unknown and not publishing before the war (at its outbreak he was probably no more than 17-years-old) he suddenly appeared as an incredibly mature poetic individuality. [...] The outbreak of the uprising found Baczyński in Warsaw. The poet with a gun in his hand took part in an unequal fight with the occupier. Baczyński's further fate is completely unknown; the question of whether the poet is alive cannot be answered today.<sup>430</sup>

The period of prolonged uncertainty was hard for the poet's mother. Unlike the Drapczyńskis, who already in 1944 had come to terms with the news that both their daughter Barbara and her husband died in the uprising, Stefania Baczyńska did not want to accept the news as certain. On 5 April 1945 she wrote to Iwaszkiewicz:

I accidentally found out that you received a message from someone about my son, Krzysztof. Since I have not heard anything concrete about him

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<sup>429</sup> George Soroka, "Nationalism, Democracy and Memory Laws," *Journal of Democracy* 30 (2019): 159.

<sup>430</sup> *Tygodnik Powszechny*: katolickie pismo społeczno-kulturalne R.1, nr 1 (24 March 1945). Accessed from POLONA. Translation is my own.



since August, I am begging, write me a few words. [...] Please try to recall who brought you this message and on what grounds he based his confidence in this message. Should I speak to you about what is happening to me, what I'm going through? I would not wish such hell on the worst of people. I was told that you could not remember who told you about Krzych...but maybe you will recall it. It's very important to me. The versions that come to me are very diverse. I switch from extreme despair to hope. You are a father, I think you understand. I am also asking for the address of Mr. Jerzy Andrzejewski. Is he in Kraków? Maybe he will know something.<sup>431</sup>

Baczyńska's earliest correspondence to Andrzejewski, to which she received no reply, is lost. In the first of the letters that survived, dated November 3 1945, Baczyńska complained:

It is difficult for me to say how hard it is to knock on your memory again. Why don't you want to speak to me? I wrote to you, sent people...all to no avail. Are you afraid that I will disturb you with my despair? You don't have to be afraid of unhappy people. You will remain forever in my memory as someone very dear. You are a friend of Krzych. It is because I do want to lose hope yet, because I checked very carefully all the most nightmarish rumors and none were confirmed. At least I didn't get confirmation. [...] I want to delude myself, I want to hope, because I have nothing else left.<sup>432</sup>

Baczyńska's letter to Andrzejewski shows that she was somewhat "split": On the one hand, she was still waiting for her son's return, while on the other, she impatiently sought to publish the legacy of Krzysztof:

Krzyś left the completed collection of his poems for publication. [...] A young man brought it to me, to whom Krzyś himself gave the collection in July of last year and who somehow kept it. [...] I want to publish it. I have the paper. Mr. Drapczyński [Basia's father] wants to print it in his printing house, but I would like to ask you and Mr. Wyka whether to supplement this collection with other poems, or give a preface or a few words of introduction. [...] I suggest either you or Mr. Wyka, whichever

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<sup>431</sup> Cited in Wiesław Budzyński, *Testament Krzysztofa Kamila* (Warszawa: Twój Styl, 1998), 256. Translation is my own.

<sup>432</sup> Stefania Baczyńska's letters to Jerzy Andrzejewski found in the manuscript section of the Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature in Warsaw: signature 1587, cards 71-91. Translation is my own.

wants and can help me, to stay with me for a week, so that you would have everything needed for quiet work.<sup>433</sup>

Wyka finally answered the plea of Stefania Baczyńska. He came to Anin in March 1946 and helped her assemble a volume of Krzysztof's poems for publication. Already at the end of the month, the volume was ready to be submitted to the censorship bureau. Its publication, however, was never finalized: Beginning in the mid-1940s, Stalinist propaganda tried to eliminate any memories of the Home Army, and all literary texts by former Home Army soldiers were seized and unconditionally prohibited. Notwithstanding, Baczyński's volume was widely circulated in the Home Army and anti-Communist circles, few of which previously knew of Baczyński or read his poetry. Upon a deeply warm reception of his patriotic poems, Baczyński was placed, in particular by those connected with the wartime right-wing literary monthly *Sztuka i Naród, SiN* within a collective narrative of the wartime generation of Polish poets. Baczyński was presented, along with *SiN* poets, as an ethno-national and Roman Catholic poet-soldier, whose patriotic poems and a soldier's death fulfilled the Mickiewiczian legend of the poet-soldier uniting word and deed, and whose poetry kept Polish identity and the memory of the Home Army alive during Communism. Of course, Baczyński's Jewish roots, his alleged atheism, and his quite apparent distaste for the Polish Roman Catholic Church were not mentioned. After all, one cannot be a national bard if one does not belong to that nation.

Baczyńska's hopes for Krzysztof's survival were brought to an end by the exhumation of his body, which took place at the beginning of 1947 in the ruins of the Town Hall, in the yard of which he was provisionally buried during the uprising. In a 7

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 71-91.

January 1947 letter to Kazimierz Wyka, Stefania Baczyńska wrote: “So finally I gained certainty, my doubts are gone, and with them this fragile thread of hope which kept me alive...How am I to live now?”<sup>434</sup> On 14 January 1947 Baczyński’s funeral took place. The funeral service at the church of the Capuchin Fathers began at eight o’clock in the morning. During the service, agents of the Ministry of Public Security announced that the burial of the body at the Powązki Military Cemetery would be postponed to a later date. With such a large gathering – the church was filled with former insurgents of Home Army – the Communist authorities were afraid of demonstrations. After much delay, however, the poet’s body was laid in a tomb near the quarters of the “Zośka” battalion.<sup>435</sup> Already then, in January of 1947, a falsified image of Baczyński existed among Warsaw’s surviving insurgents. In the 7 January letter to Wyka, Baczyńska wrote: “ His [Home Army] colleagues call him “insane”, so eager was he to jump into battle, he died, as they say, in “combat ecstasy.”<sup>436</sup>

In April 1947 *Tygodnik Powszechny* published Jerzy Zagórski’s text about Baczyński titled *Śmierć Słowackiego* (The Death of Słowacki).<sup>437</sup> “I was struck,” wrote Zagórski, “by the amazing similarity of his face with some portraits of Słowacki! It was not a similarity in the strict sense, but rather a very clear, common anthropological feature.”<sup>438</sup> Comparisons of Baczyński to Słowacki made by Wyka and Zagórski, and

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<sup>434</sup> Cited in Marta Wyka, *Pod okupacją: listy* (Warszawa: Fundacja Zeszytów Literackich, 2014), 266.

<sup>435</sup> Wiesław Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć Krzysztofa Kamila* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Kraków, 2014), 212.

<sup>436</sup> Wyka, *Pod okupacją*, 266.

<sup>437</sup> Juliusz Słowacki was Poland’s great Romantic poet and is considered one of the “Three Bards” of Polish literature.

<sup>438</sup> *Tygodnik Powszechny: katolickie pismo społeczno-kulturalne* (April 1947). Accessed from POLONA. Translation is my own.

Anna Kamińska's suggestive phrase that Baczyński is the last incarnation of *Król-Duch* (The Spirit King) – the essential spirit of the nation – have done their part. In the collective imagination of contemporary Poles, Baczyński exists as the last Romantic poet, chosen by the gods to “lead” the Polish nation.

After the Communist regime embraced Polish nationalism in 1956, a series of extensive articles were published in *Życie Literackie* (Literary Life) by a Communist official Władysław Machejek (1920 – 1991), which discussed the issue of former Home Army soldiers. Machejek argued that the soldiers, persecuted for years, should be given a chance to publically speak out about their experiences (of course, under the supervision of the censorship bureau). Although the publication of articles which suggested the history of the Home Army had been falsified or discussing the organization were unconditionally prohibited, there began to appear poetic texts which discussed the Home Army experience more broadly. For instance, such texts did not include specific references to Home Army (or the uprising), did not mention the persecution of its soldiers by the regime, and the reader could interpret the poem as a glorification of the People's Army (The deeper meaning of the poems was essentially inaccessible for people outside the Home Army circles who did not experience the same events and did not possess the “memory apparatus,” necessary for interpreting certain content). In accordance with the anti-Semitism of the post-1956 Communist regime, the censor stated the need to intervene in cases of poems that raised the Jewish matters.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Agnieszka Kloc, “ ‘There aren't any Dwarfs; They Got out in Time.’ Censored Image of the Home Army in Polish Poetry in 1956-1958,” *Folia Litteraria Polonica* 37 (2016): 121-124.

In 1958, the authorities released a preliminary censorship report to a collection of poems by the poet Julian Przyboś (1901-1970) titled *Narzędzie Światła* (Tool of Light), but ultimately the poems were published. Specifically, the censorship bureau intervened in regards to one poem titled *Poległy* (The Fallen). The poem speaks directly of Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and of the need to restore society's collective memory of him and other Home Army soldiers. In the final stanza of *Poległy*, Przyboś writes:

Not from black ruins  
but from the underworld of conscience  
we dig up from a conspiracy of silence,  
as his [Baczyński's] white bones for sacrifice,  
mutilated glory of the vanquished,  
Nike with no arms.<sup>440</sup>

Soon thereafter, there were no reservations for the publication of Baczyński's poems. A collection of his poems was published in 1962 under the title *Utwory Zebrane* (Collected Works). Full of symbolic visions and reflections on the fate of the nation (it was automatically assumed that the poet spoke on behalf of the Polish Christian nation), *Utwory Zebrane* became a bestseller and Baczyński became the object of a cult of the generation coming to age in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>441</sup> Of course, in his introduction to *Utwory Zebrane*, Wyka omitted Baczyński's Jewish roots. Poems speaking directly of the Holocaust were not included in the volume. Similarly, his important monograph on Baczyński *Krzysztof Baczyński: 1921-1944* published that same year does not even allude to the poet's origin or to his reaction to the Jewish Holocaust. Baczyński's friends also failed to mention his roots in a volume of memoirs *Żołnierz, poeta, czasu kurz* (A soldier, a poet, dust of time) collected by Zbigniew Wasilewski and published in 1971.

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<sup>440</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 128. (Nike is a Greek goddess of victory).

<sup>441</sup> Wojciech Roszkowski, *Biographical Dictionary of Central and Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Armonk Taylor and Francis, 2016).

The manipulation of history and its adaptation to current needs by a Soviet-type state is well known and requires no explanation. However, it is worth considering why the biography of Baczyński and his work became the object of such endeavors. Why would the Communist regime permit the publication of Baczyński while publication of (most) other Home Army poets was suppressed? And why was the Jewish aspect of the poet's life continually omitted? It was the poet's popularity that was the root cause of the issue. Bans were ineffective; it was necessary for the state to reach for flexible means: the Communist state had to "adopt" the poet. Wyka, I think, started working on Baczyński out of genuine admiration for his poetry. However, the monograph, as it was written and published, was also in the interest of the Communist state: yes, it presented a Home Army soldier, but a leftist one that perhaps was even sympathetic to Communism. Wasilewski went even further in the manipulation of the poet's image. His Baczyński, presented in *Żołnierz, poeta, czasu kurz*, is a supporter of Stalinism and of Soviet reign over Poland. Notably, the volume of memories was created on the suggestion of Witold Stankiewicz, a former member of the *PPS* and a soldier of the Home Army, but then an officer of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (the reigning Communist party).

Baczyński was a socialist of the Piłsudski kind, but certainly not a Communist or a Stalinist. In the undated poem *Wybór* (The Choice), he writes:

Slowly the wise Bolsheviks  
delineated what counts as "Bolshevik", what doesn't.  
So this and that into the hive, this and that to Siberia,  
Kochanowski – to trash, Prus also did not make it.  
Those who died, escaped, I will not enumerate,  
Wasilewska together with Mickiewicz remained.

She didn't defend herself. He couldn't [emphasis by poet] defend himself.<sup>442</sup>

The poem is not dated, but it can be safely assumed that it comes from the first months of war. It contains echoes of the Soviet invasion of Poland and its further consequence: the totalitarian cultural policy conducted by Wanda Wasilewska. In fact, this poem can be read as a warning, a prophesy of what was to take place in post-war Communist Poland.

Moreover, the authorities of Polish People's Republic always sought to reduce the questioning of the Communist state's Polishness. They wanted Polish ancestors and traditions that could not be easily disregarded by the populace and which would legitimize their rule. In accordance with Poland's image of the Jew as the "enemy," "harmful alien," and "threatening other," the Communist authorities preferred not to mention the Jewish origins of the poet. The authorities feared that if Poles found out about Baczyński's Jewish roots they would reject him as someone who is not a part of the Polish nation. Consequently, the regime would have to find a new Home Army poet-soldier whose image they would not be able to manipulate as easily. Paradoxically, then, the Communist regime helped to place Baczyński on the high pedestal of the ethno-national and Roman Catholic Polish nation. To illustrate, the poster of the exhibition dedicated to Baczyński at the Museum of Literature in Warsaw in 1984-1985 shows the Virgin Mary, Queen of Poland, with baby Jesus in her arm, blessing a Home Army

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<sup>442</sup> Cited in Budzyński, *Miłość I Śmierć*, 296. Translation is my own. Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584) was a Polish Renaissance poet, commonly regarded as the greatest Polish poet before Mickiewicz; Bolesław Prus (1847-1912) was a Polish novelist, who fought in the 1905 insurrection against Russia; Wanda Wasilewska (1905-1964) was a Polish novelist, a devoted communist, a trusted consultant to Stalin, and one of the creators of the Soviet-backed Committee of National Liberation in July 1944.

insurgent (Baczyński) and supporting the Polish cause. Such image of Baczyński carried over to post-Communist Poland.



Figure 5. Poster of the exhibition dedicated to Baczyński at the Museum of Literature in Warsaw in 1984-1985. Found in Wiesław Budzyński, *Śladami Baczyńskiego* (Warszawa: Muzeum Historyczne Warszawy, 2009), 166.



Thirty years after the collapse of Communism in Poland, Baczyński's legend has survived. Perhaps it lost the dynamic of its sudden post-war birth and revival after 1956, but the image of the poet as the national poet-soldier-seer significantly grew. To illustrate, in 2018, Baczyński was posthumously awarded one of Poland's highest decorations, the Order of Polonia Restituta "for outstanding services in the fight for the liberty of the Republic of Poland and for achievements in the development of Polish culture."<sup>443</sup> And, every year on 1 August, among the ceremonies commemorating the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, hundreds of Poles bring red-and-white flowers, light candles, and pay homage to the national poet at his grave in the Powązki Military Cemetery. The press and the media present a biographical sketch of Baczyński focusing on his death on the barricade, and Polish children sing or recite his patriotic poetry. Unfortunately, the sketches (still) fail to mention the poet's Jewish origins, and most Poles simply do not realize that the poems they recite were written as a response to the 1943 Ghetto Uprising and not "their" Uprising of 1944.

Thus, although the general awareness of Baczyński is extensive, a falsified image still prevails. Astonishingly, over the past thirty years not much has been written about Baczyński. Of course, a few articles, essays, and analyses of poetry have been written, but they bring nothing new to the slim literature on Baczyński. Wyka's outdated monograph (*Krzysztof Baczyński: 1921-1944*) and Wasilewski's collection of memories (*Żołnierz, poeta, czasu kurz*) remain the canonical works on Baczyński. Wiesław Budzyński (1948 –), Baczyński's biographer, published six books on Baczyński: *Miłość i śmierć Krzysztofa Kamila* (Love and death of Krzysztof Kamil, 1992), *Dom*

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<sup>443</sup> Radio eM broadcast. Accessed from <https://www.radioem.pl/gal/pokaz/4897890.Prezydent-odznaczył-powstancow/14>

*Baczyńskiego* (Baczyński's Home, 2000) *Taniec z Baczyńskim* (A Dance with Baczyński, 2001), *Warszawa Baczyńskiego* (Baczyński's Warsaw, 2004), and *Śladami Baczyńskiego* (In the Footsteps of Baczyński, 2009). Although Budzyński's biographies acquaint the reader with Baczyński, they, unfortunately, do not offer a complex analysis of the poet's life. Written in the traditionally accepted way, the biographies incline the readers to view Baczyński according to the martyrdom-oriented narrative and associate his poetry with the literary tradition of Polish Romanticism. Unsurprisingly, Budzyński does not offer an in-depth discussion of Baczyński's Jewish roots nor does he mention the poet's reaction to the annihilation of Polish Jewry. Significant is the historian Józef Lewandowski's (1923-2007) essay *Wokół Biografii Krzysztofa Kamila Baczyńskiego* (Around the Biography of Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński) published in Sweden in 1991. It was the first attempt at the demythification of Baczyński. Sadly, it failed to generate any substantive discussion.

Two biographical films exist about Baczyński. *Baczyński*, directed by Kordian Piwowarski, caused controversy upon its release in 2013 due to its use of poetry as a documentary device. The film begins with a former Home Army soldier stating, "You are a young person, and therefore you are not able to understand that, despite all the tragedy, it [Warsaw Uprising of 1944] was a beautiful time. We had arms and we could stand up for ourselves." The film then focuses on three themes: Baczyński's marriage to Barbara Drapczyńska, Baczyński as a soldier of the Home Army, and Baczyński's death. Although the film makes subtle references to Baczyński's Jewishness, it does not explicitly state it. For example, one of the scenes depicts Baczyński's hospital stay in March-April of 1941. It does not, however, state the cause for Baczyński's

hospitalization, but rather lets the viewers decide whether the cause was the poet's severe asthma or his desire to "temporarily change the environment," in other words to go into hiding. In essence, because of the dramatization of scenes and the glorification of the poet's death, the film presents a mythologized version of Baczyński's life. *Dzień Czwarty (The Fourth Day)*, directed by Ludmiła Niedbalska in 1984, achieves a greater degree of reality, albeit references to the poet's Jewishness are absent.

Moreover, Baczyński ranks high among the well-known, but *unread* poets. The reading of Baczyński is often hasty, superficial, and occurs solely in the history classroom. Most Poles associate Baczyński with the few patriotic poems and with his beautiful lyrics dedicated to Basia. Few to none are aware of his poignant collection of laments, written as a direct reaction to the events of the Holocaust. Alas, these poems are also missing from the cannon of Holocaust literature. Like many of his poems, his numerous prose pieces are virtually unknown to the Polish (and foreign) reader.

It is worth considering if an open discussion of Baczyński's Jewish roots and an in-depth analysis of his poetry would depose him from the high pedestal of a national poet-soldier-seer. Certainly, those who are used to a narrow, exclusionary treatment of nationality and the nation will indeed remove Baczyński from the said pedestal. After all, in the words of the literary critic Jan Walc (1948-1993): "In Poland it is always better not be a Jew than to be a Jew, and therefore talking about the Jewish roots of the Polish poet Baczyński is not in the interest to anyone. Maybe it is in the interest of truth, but no one seems to care about truth."<sup>444</sup> Yes, in Poland it is always "better" not to be a Jew, but

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<sup>444</sup> Cited in Józef Lewandowski, *Szkło bolesne, obraz dni...Eseje nieprzedawnione* (Uppsala: Ex libris, 1991), 17. Translation is my own.

those Poles also exist who oppose the narrow definition of Polishness. They, certainly, will warmly welcome the “true” Baczyński into the Polish nation.

### **Conclusion**

For nearly eight decades Baczyński had been entangled in the politics of memory and exploited for political purposes. In publications endorsed by the Communist regime Baczyński was presented as a Home Army soldier, but one that embraced Communism and perhaps even supported Stalinism. Simultaneously, in the former Home Army circles and anti-Communist opposition groups Baczyński became the last Romantic poet-soldier, chosen to “lead” the ethno-national and Roman Catholic Polish nation. Of course, both narratives failed to mention Baczyński’s Jewishness, his increasing identification with it in the course of the war, and his poignant Holocaust poetry, which reflects the poet’s despair over the fate of Polish Jews.

The latter image carried over to post-Communist Poland and still prevails. Perhaps Baczyński can be reduced to a figure lacking all ambiguity and will continue to be treated as a national (Polish Roman-Catholic) poet-soldier who chose to fight and die for the nation. Fortunately, however, Baczyński’s poetry cannot be treated unambiguously. It lives and is the most candid testimony of his soul, thoughts, and experiences.

## CONCLUSION

Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, nom de plume “Jan Bugaj” (22 January 1921, Warsaw – 4 August 1944, Warsaw) was a Polish poet. In his short life Baczyński, who was killed at the age of 23 during the first days of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, had proven to be an individual of great talent and poetic maturity. After the war, the legend of Baczyński steadily grew. Today, he is recognized in Poland to be the greatest poet of the war generation. In the case of Baczyński, however, it needs to be acknowledged that many elements of his life have been manipulated by Poland’s post-war Communist regime as well as by nationalist circles, and a falsified image of Baczyński remains in Poland today. Specifically, Baczyński has been placed in a narrative of Romantic self-sacrifice for the sake of the Polish nation, a nation conceived in narrow ethnic and religious terms.

Through a careful examination of archival documents, including Baczyński’s poems, letters, and illustrations as well as personal recollections of the poet’s family and friends, this dissertation aimed to provide a more authentic portrait of Baczyński than is now available, free of Communist and nationalistic framing of his life and work. This dissertation showed that indeed Baczyński was a Pole and considered himself a Pole, but he was not a Pole in the narrow *Polak-Katolik* sense of the word. Baczyński not only did not support the exclusive nationalism of the National Democrats, but also, just like his father and Piłsudski, embraced Polish identity based on the inclusive, civic, republican ideas of the old Commonwealth. Baczyński was a humanist who believed that his compatriots should seek greatness within.

Moreover, Baczyński was not only a Pole, but also a Jew, his Jewish status being passed down through his mother. Although Baczyński was not attached to his Jewish identity in the interwar years, his Jewish background acquired immense significance in the context of the Second World War and the Holocaust. This dissertation showed that Baczyński not only felt strong empathy with Jews persecuted, deported, and killed by the Nazis, but, what is more significant, in the course of the war, he increasingly identified with his Jewish identity (without losing his Polish identity) and from the outset of the occupation wrote from deepest despair poems depicting the fate of Polish Jews. These poems are missing from the cannon of Holocaust literature and are virtually unknown to the Polish (and foreign) reader.

This dissertation also attempted to explain Baczyński's motivation for joining the Polish underground. Baczyński was essentially a pacifist, and his health was too frail for him to join in the fight against the Nazis. Nonetheless, he took up arms against them not out of a belief in the sacrificial fight for the future Polish nation, but out of "dark love," that is, killing out of love for one's people: Christian Poles but also Polish Jews. Indeed, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 was the turning point for Baczyński, when he experienced deep anguish, expressed in some of the most beautiful poetry to be found in the Holocaust literature. He joined the Polish Home Army and participated in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 primarily out of sense of duty to his fellow Jews – for by that time, he felt his Jewish identity more strongly than ever.

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