The Older Brother Speaks: Ideas of Polish National Identity in the Writings of Julian Tuwim and Marek Edelman

By
Marcin Marszalek
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Submitted by

Marcin Marszalek

Approved by

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Sarah Leonard            Kate Hollander

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# Table of contents

Acknowledgments..............................................................................................................2
Introduction.......................................................................................................................3
Historiography..................................................................................................................17
Marek Edelman - The Fighter..........................................................................................24
Julian Tuwim - The Writer...............................................................................................39
Conclusion.......................................................................................................................59
Bibliography....................................................................................................................63
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Introduction

In the mid-1930s, Moshe Prywes attempted to enroll in the prestigious medical school at the Warsaw University. He failed twice only to be admitted on the third try, after spending two years studying medicine in France. His 1996 memoir, *Prisoner of Hope*,¹ originally published in Hebrew and quickly translated to English, recounts stories of endless antisemitism leveled against him and his classmates. Yet coming from a very successful line who called Poland home for hundreds of years, Prywes and his family found connection to the land despite the antisemitism. His great-grandfather gave arms to the insurgents during the November Uprising against the Russian Empire in 1831, and his grandfather donated money to the medical school Prywes attended in Warsaw. His father would not hear of emigration to Palestine and having visited it, he ironized: “[s]ince except for camels there’s hardly any reliable transport, what wouldn’t take more than two days in Warsaw could keep me occupied there for two or three weeks. Only a madman would consider staying here in Warsaw.”²

During World War II, Prywes was in exile in the Soviet Union and between all those experiences, he did not feel much connection to the land of his birth because of all the pain it caused him. As a Zionist, he spent his youth in interwar Warsaw dreaming of the eventual move to Palestine. The war years only strengthened his resolve to leave Poland, and the 1946 pogrom in the Polish city of Kielce, so soon after the war, left him feeling little other than hatred for the country and its people. In the late 1940s, his dream of moving to what was by-then Israel was realized and he had no intention of returning to his birthplace.³

Nevertheless, in 1978, after not visiting Poland for nearly forty years, upon the news of the election of Karol Wojtyła, the archbishop of Kraków to the bishopric of Rome, Prywes felt

³ Prywes, *Prisoner of Hope*, 25-26, 64.
that “[d]espite everything that had happened to the Jews in Poland, despite my ingrained suspicion of Poles, I could not repress the strange elation I felt surging within. In a strange way, the elevation… was the election of my Pope.”

What could persuade a fervent Zionist who experienced many turmoils in Warsaw, and who felt a constant distrust and disliking towards Gentile Poles, to feel that the election of a Polish Cardinal to the papacy, the leader of the Catholic church, which itself had a checkered history of interfaith relations, was somehow also a part of his own history?

The search for this identity, the search for how Polish-Jews expressed their identity, showcased by some intellectual Jews living in Poland prior to World War II is at the heart of this thesis. To accomplish the task, I examine the life and works of Julian Tuwim and Marek Edelman, as well as their intellectual connection to the ideas of Adam Mickiewicz, the Romantic poet who lived a century earlier. Tuwim, one of the most successful writers of interwar Poland, spent the war years in emigration, first in Brazil, and later in New York. After World War II, he returned to Poland where he died in 1953. He was most strongly attacked by the interwar nationalist right-wing press which, as part of a wider European trend of rising antisemitism, denied him his Polish identity and civil rights. Edelman was one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising who became a neurosurgeon in postwar Poland. As a member of Jewish Workers Bund of Russia, Lithuania and Poland, a socialist party that started in the late nineteenth century, he felt that the Jewish future lay in Poland and that the Polish Jews should not be separated from their Polish past. This was no small feat since by the early twentieth century, the

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4 Prywes, Prisoner of Hope, 361-362 [emphasis in original].
adjective “Polish” was firmly a near-monopoly of the National Democratic party (ND, known as Endecja) who denied Jews the right to call themselves Poles.5

I contend that the national identity of Tuwim and Edelman stems not from the assimilationist narratives that dominated the late nineteenth and early twentieth century discourse, but from an older tradition represented by Adam Mickiewicz, the Romantic poet, who saw the Polish nationality as a new entity to which both Piasts (a Slav who lived in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth who may or may not have been Catholic and spoken Polish)6 and Jews had equal claim. It is a pluralist vision that does not equate the adjective “Polish” with a certain ethnicity (Slavic) and religion (Catholic), but rather celebrates the contributions of many groups that share a vision of a country that is made by all of them and is for all of them.

The differences between these Tuwim and Edelman are great and my decision to situate them at the center of this thesis should be raised. The explanation is as follows: Jewish history in general, and in Poland in particular, was shaken to the core by the experience of the Holocaust. This caused a change in the way Jewish history has been viewed. I will argue that looking through the lens of the Holocaust has skewed historians’ views of the pre-war events, either pointing to Polish antisemitism or to Polish tolerance vis-a-vis other European states. The identity of Poles, Jews and Polish Jews growing up in the aftermath of the Holocaust has been greatly affected by the experience. That is not to say that the Holocaust should not be used to frame the history, not least because it is also a very important part of this thesis. However, I want to look at individuals who lived long enough in the interwar period to have developed an identity

6 The Piasts were a dynasty that established the Polish state in the late 10th century. The name later came to refer to “Polish” to refer to the ethnic division of the Western Slavs living in Poland. It was especially used in the 16th and 17th centuries to refer to candidates for the Polish throne who had ancient roots in Poland to differentiate them from foreign born candidates.
with that world, people who felt an affinity for pre-World War II Poland. They are people whose personalities and presences were so strong that they were able to challenge and question the status quo as well as other groups’ assertions and attacks on their own identities. Finally, they are people that challenge the stereotypical assertion that only “ethnic Poles,” that is Slavs, and Catholics could be considered “Poles.”

The writings and life stories of two men cannot be used to generalize the experience of Polish Jews in the interwar period and the Holocaust. Whereas it is probable that similar attitudes were shared by many more individuals, this thesis does not pursue the question of wide-spread applicability of proposed ideas. These two individuals help us answer some key questions, however; were there multiple ways in which Polish-Jewish identity manifested itself, and could they still be considered part of the same identity? Also, were these views on Polish Jewish identity different than the arguments of assimilationists?

Jews in Poland were not a homogenized group and formed many different entities of differing political and cultural views. They contributed many different ideas to the culture of the region. The remainder of the introduction will serve to honor the diverse strategies Polish Jews used to interact with their societies but also to frame the foundations of one of those strategies as represented by Edelman and Tuwim, and how they relate to the ideas of Mickiewicz. Before moving on, however, it is important to define terms I will be using throughout this thesis.

The question of language will be important because the terms Poles and Jews have multiple meanings. During the interwar period, Jews born in lands reclaimed from the partitioning powers held Polish citizenship, and even Jews who only identified as Jewish were considered Polish citizens. However, the matter of national identity which is the focus of this paper, is a separate issue. The National Democrats, the right-wing political party, viewed Jews as
people of the Judaic faith and Semitic ethnicity. In extreme cases they also viewed Jews as internal and external enemies. Poles were people of Catholic faith and Slavic ethnicity. Thus, a “Pole” is an ethno(Slavic)-religious(Catholic) term. The dichotomy is often used by historians as well as contemporary writers to easily differentiate between Gentile Poles and Jewish Poles, that is, they will simply refer to “Poles” and “Jews” as though these categories are mutually exclusive. Tuwim, Edelman and even Prywes, identified as Polish Jews where Polish might refer to the language as well as culture and Jewish as religion, ethnicity and culture. Yet they also occasionally fall on the dichotomy to make their writing simpler, if confusing. Prywes often speaks in terms of “Poles and Jews” as separate categories, yet when recalling his time in France, he wrote: “We Poles did manage to enjoy ourselves.”

Mickiewicz, on whose ideas I rest my argument, used the term Polish not in the ethnic or religious sense but rather as something that comes of the fusion of Jew and Piast.

Initially, I was also interested in the exploration of the writings and drawings of Bruno Schulz, a somewhat reclusive writer living in the provincial town of Drohobycz, today’s Ukraine, who developed a multinational identity in step with the multicultural area in which he lived. However, my focus is on the exploration of how World War II and especially the Holocaust forced the questions of identity and how Tuwim and Edelman reacted to them vis-a-vis their prewar worldview. Schulz, who was shot in the Drohobycz ghetto in 1942, did not have the same chance for reflection, at least not in writings that survived. Also, because the realities of western Ukraine differed greatly from those of Warsaw or Łódź, it would be difficult to address these issues without much further research and delineation. In the end, because of the different realities of his day, that is, interaction not just between Poles and Jews but also Ukrainians, Belarusians and even Muslim Tatars, Schulz would require a study of his own that cannot be

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7 Prywes, Prisoner of Hope, 39.
given to him here. Only after exploring those questions would we be able to start looking at how
his approach to questions of identity interacted with those developed and explored here.

In an effort to find Edelman’s and Tuwim’s identities, I will first introduce Mickiewicz and his vision of Polish messianism and how it incorporated the Jews. I will then look at the Jewish Workers Bund, the socialist organization to which Edelman belonged. I will introduce the National Democrats, the party which attacked Tuwim in the interwar years and which he blamed for a lot of the antisemitism found in Poland. Then, I will look at Roman Dmowski, the founder of the National Democrats and Józef Piłsudski, the de facto Polish dictator between 1926-1935. The two represented the two currents of Polish identity, the first a monolingual, mono-religious monolith and the second a pluralist, multiethnic and multinational society. Finally, I will look at the writings of Marek Edelman and Julian Tuwim to explore their ideas of nationality and what it meant to them to declare themselves Polish Jews.

The Romantic period in Poland stretched from about 1820 to 1863. The end of the period is specifically tied to the failed January Uprising against the Russian Empire in 1863, in the aftermath of which voices that advocated peaceful cooperation with the partitioning powers and improvement through organic work, rather than armed uprising, became the most influential. The beginning of the period, however, is not as specific; it more or less coincides with the publication of the first poems of Mickiewicz. Eventually, he became known as the national poet of Poland, earning him the title of the primary of the three (or four, depending on who counts) wieszcz, a sort of mystical poet-prophets who embodied the national spirit. Juliusz Słowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński and Cyprian Kamil Norwid were the other wieszce, the first two were Mickiewicz’s contemporaries and composed purely in the Romantic vein, the last, more difficult to classify, composed a little later and was relatively unknown until the early twentieth century.
Mickiewicz’s philosophy and strong pro-Jewish feelings led some historians to believe he was of Jewish descent, yet there are no extant documents to substantiate the claim. His origins aside, the topic of Messianism is of importance to this thesis. Mickiewicz, forced into emigration along with thousands of his compatriots by the failed November Uprising, saw the suffering and pilgrimage of the Poles as similar to the fate of the Jews who had been wandering pilgrims for ages and began to formulate his ideas of national identity based on these similarities.

Mickiewicz composed his most influential works in the 1820s and the 1830s and came to be the most recognized name of Polish Romanticism. Yet the man himself was a product of the multinational, multireligious and multilingual Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Because he composed in Polish, he is claimed by Poles, yet he hailed from Lithuania, so he is claimed by Lithuanians. However, because his writings are in Polish (he did not speak Lithuanian), and about the Polish nation, his contemporaries and later generations saw Mickiewicz as the voice of the “Polish soul.” Yet writing before the national identity as it is known today was created and codified, his ideas about what it meant to be “Polish” and how the Jews fit into that idea shine light on how Tuwim as well as Edelman and his fellow insurgents saw their connection to the Romantic past.

The Polish national epic, Pan Tadeusz, written by Mickiewicz and published in Paris in 1834, concerns itself with the question of the Polish nation after it lost independence at the end of the eighteenth century. The poem tells the story of the imminent approach of Napoleon, who is seen as a hero and savior who can help Poland regain her independence. The course of history turned out badly for Napoleon and the Poles, many having to emigrate to avoid exile in Siberia.

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8 Czesław Miłosz, The History of Polish Literature. (University of California Press, 1983), 266.
9 A great illustration of the creation of the national memory along ethno-religious lines in the last third of the nineteenth century, which included the peasantry, can be seen in Patrice Dabrowski, Commemorations and the Shaping of Modern Poland. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2004).
Mickiewicz, himself a political émigré, he wrote the epic poem from the perspective of Poles living in France recalling the idyllic days that preceded their sore departure.\(^{10}\)

What makes *Pan Tadeusz* a national epic is its boundless love for the land and its inhabitants. Every tree, bush and stream are unique, extraordinary and infused with human-like qualities:

> “Meanwhile, bear my soul heavy with yearning’s dull pain, / To those soft woodland hillocks, those meadows, green, gleaming, / Spread wide along each side of the blue-flowing Niemen, / To those fields, which by various grain painted, there lie / Shimmering, with wheat gilded, and silvered with rye.”\(^{11}\)

Mickiewicz also recalls the people (especially the nobility) with dignity and respect despite their many faults. He underscores the patriotism, bravery, and sacrifices of the characters. The portrayal of the Jews in the story is particularly of interest to us.

The Jewish tavern owner, Jankiel, is presented as hardworking and honest. Despite renting the tavern for many years, no nobleman ever made a complaint about his business. His Polish was fluent and he was known for his musical talent. He returned from every trip he made with a fresh supply of folk dances like the mazurkas and kolomeykas, the national dances of Poland and Ukraine respectively. According to the story, it was rumored that he was the first to introduce the Dąbrowski’s Mazurka (which became, to this day, the Polish national anthem) to the area. His musical talent made other musicians wary of playing in front of him. During the winter of 1806, he disappeared and it was not known where he was, yet when Napoleon’s army appeared, he was at their helm; Mickiewicz implies that Jankiel led them to the area. During the marriage of the main characters in the story, he was asked to play his hammered dulcimer and,

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\(^{10}\) Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*. (Kraków: Greg, 2007).

\(^{11}\) Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, 5.
his love for the country evident, he played the *Third of May Polonaise* (to commemorate the signing of the 1791 constitution) as well as the *Dąbrowski’s Mazurka* making others exclaim that he is a true patriot and lover of the country. Dąbrowski himself, present with the French army, shook his hand and thanked the old Jew for his patriotism and services to the country.\(^{12}\)

So those traits make Jankiel Polish, whatever that may mean, yet he never gives up his Jewish identity, that is, he never “assimilated.” In the poem, he keeps his religion and traditions, “honest Jew, loved the fatherland like a Pole.” As Błoński notes, this passage does not mean he loved similarly to a Pole, but rather by being a Pole.\(^{13}\) As the sociologist Alexander Hertz contended, Mickiewicz placed the “difference” of Polish Jews, with their language, traditions and religion, within the realm of “homeliness” rather than “separation,” or “alienness.”\(^{14}\) What is even more important, Mickiewicz did not see the need for Jews to assimilate into the Polish culture; since Israel was the “older brother” of Piast, “spiritually and corporally tied to Poland and her fate.”\(^{15}\) For Mickiewicz, there was a plurality in oneness which, during World War II, would include the Jewish Combat Organization (ŻOB) as much as the “Polish” Home Army. Later, in the post January Uprising Positivist Poland, the *Izraelita* (Israelite), became a leading weekly which helped to bring up an assimilated generation of Jews. As the founders of the paper contended, an Israelite, was not a Jew with a capital letter, but rather a Pole with a certain, specific history and religion. It was an assimilatory paper similar to the *Alliance Israelite* or *Israelitische Gemeinde*.\(^{16}\) Yet unlike Mickiewicz’s Israel, these emphasized assimilation.

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15 Błoński, *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* 58-59
16 Hertz, *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej* 48
It is important to define what I mean by Messianism because Mickiewicz’s approach serves as the foundation on which I situate the identity of Tuwim and Edelman. The term itself has been applied to vastly differing ideologies, and in the Polish case it has been applied broadly enough to include anyone who believed it was Poland’s mission to defend Europe against the barbaric Russians, Ottomans, and spreading the Latin civilization to the East. However, the sense of importance of one’s state does not necessarily translate to Messianism. Rather, to define Mickiewicz’s Messianism, and, more broadly, Polish Messianism during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, I refer to Andrzej Walicki, the Polish historian who specialized in philosophy of sociopolitics. Walicki defined Polish Messianism as a type of religiously inspired social utopianism. It was specifically a product of the failed November Uprising, forced emigration, feelings of rootlessness and isolation as well as the failure of the traditional religious authority symbolized by Pope Gregory XVI’s condemnation of the uprising.  

Mickiewicz saw parallels between the Poles and the Jews in their stateless wanderings which fostered a link between the two peoples. In his visions of Messianism, there were three nations called upon to preserve and save mankind, the French, the Jews and the Slavs and the process was many tiered, the first of which was Judaism. Thus, the Jews became the foundation upon which the new society was to be built. What was most important was that they were not to be converted but merely illuminated with the light coming from the upper tiers of this Messianic temple. Because it was little more than a philosophical idea, it did not affect the situation of the Polish Jews at the time. However, as we have seen, Mickiewicz saw the Jews, or Israel as he preferred, as the older brother to Piast, the Slavs that were to become “Poles,” along with Israel.

18 Walicki, “Adam Mickiewicz and Polish Romantic Messianism.”
This approach to Polish-Jewish identity can be seen in Tuwim and Edelman, and it separates the three from the proponents of assimilation.

The January Uprising in 1863 began somewhat spontaneously as a protest against forced conscription of Poles into the Russian army. \(^{19}\) There were important differences between the January Uprising and the November Uprising which took place some thirty years earlier, yet it shared the same Romantic beliefs that armed struggle could result in Poland’s reemergence as a sovereign state. Thus, the failure of the January Uprising was seen as a general failure of the Romantic ideals and ushered an era of Positivism which put pressure on reason before emotion and “organic work,” that is, the belief that the powers of the nation should be spent on labor, education and economic improvement rather than national uprisings. In terms of its approach to Polish-Jews, it saw a rise of assimilationist tendencies. The assimilationists were more inclined towards rapprochement while losing parts of the Jewish culture. Yet unlike Staszic, Krasiński or Butrymowicz, there were non-Jewish Poles who were friendly towards the Jewish cause. The Positivist period stressed social and economic improvement through work, education and industrial development. It cut off from Romantic ideals of armed uprisings and saw the future of the Polish state in organic work. Positivism was, in many ways, an intellectual heir of the Enlightenment. Positivist writers who were friendly towards the Jewish cause included Eliza Orzeszkowa, author of *Meir Ezofowicz*, a work about a Jewish youth who, annoyed by religious fanaticism and cultural backwardness, attempted to reform the shtetl by introducing social reforms. Jewish assimilationists included Leon Holleanderski and Ludwik Lubliner. \(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) The forced conscription, which also applied to Jews, was aimed at individuals which were suspected of belonging to patriotic movements. For more info, see Mikołaj Pawliszczew, *Tygodnie polskiego buntu, T. 1 i 2* [The Weeks of Polish Revolt, Volumes 1 and 2]. (Warszawa: Bellona, 2003), 21.

\(^{20}\) Hertz, *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej*, 30, 45-46.
The assimilationists saw Poles and Jews as different and sought to provide ways for Jews to fuse into the majority (non-Jewish) population. The approach was different from Mickiewicz’s vision which saw the two peoples as forming one, coherent identity. It is this difference that serves as the basis of my argument that Tuwim and Edelman saw their origins not in the assimilationist narrative of the latter nineteenth century, but in the fusion of the two that was espoused in the early nineteenth century. Whereas it did not serve as an intellectual base, it was the same idea that encouraged the Bund to seek cultural autonomy as a minority population, rather than seeking an independent state.

To understand the full range of possibilities for imagining what it meant to be both Polish and Jewish, that is, to be a Polish Jew, it is important to understand the nature of the Bund. First organized in Vilnius in the 1890s, the Jewish Workers Bund of Russia, Lithuania and Poland eventually inspired the Polish Bund. The party sought and hoped to see a socialist Poland which guaranteed rights to all nationalities which would enjoy their own cultural autonomy. It did not rely on the hope for the coming of the Messiah and did not advocate a large-scale emigration to Palestine.\(^{21}\) It was a party only active in the Russian partition, had to compete with the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), and eventually both had to succumb to the primacy of the younger Social Democratic Party of the Polish Kingdom and Lithuania (SDKPiL). Since the Bund did not oppose Russian primacy, the PPS opposed it because, while it was opposed antisemitism, its program included a call for Polish independence. Thus, the main socialist parties in the Russian partition did not see eye to eye, but it was the Bund that drew most heavily from the Jewish proletariat. In the interwar years, the Bund and the PPS collaborated, since Polish independence

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\(^{21}\) Rudi Assuntino, Wlodek Goldkorn; *Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada [The Guardian, Marek Edelman relates]* (Kraków: Znak 2000)
was achieved and the Bund did not oppose it. It was against this background that Marek Edelman joined the Bund organizations in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{22}

In the interwar period, the Bund organized Yiddish language schools, theaters, and also organized antifascist strikes. In March of 1936, one such strike was attended by tens of thousands of people in the streets of Warsaw.\textsuperscript{23} Politically, Henryk Erlich and Viktor Alter, disillusioned with the Soviet Union, sought to distance the party from the Eastern neighbor and wanted to create a wider international appeal and recognition in the West. Alter believed that the Bund should emulate the attempts of the socialists parties in Scandinavia which, while they did not fully rid their countries of the evils of capitalism were nevertheless making great strides at improving workers conditions and the approach was preferable to losing one’s political independence to Moscow.\textsuperscript{24}

The Bund, while strongest with the Jewish workers, was not the only Jewish party in the interwar years. Actually, the amount of parties representing vastly different points of view illustrates the great divisions of views and opinions of the Jews living in interwar Poland. Joseph Marcus asserts, that, proportionally speaking, Jews had even more political parties than Gentiles.\textsuperscript{25} Parties were founded, merged, split, dissolved, some lasting only a few days. Thus, as Marcus claims, in the interwar period, parties represented class or economic interests and “were sub-divided among nationalist and cultural lines. Thus a Jewish socialist might be Zionist, non-Zionist, or anti-Zionist, with a preference for Hebrew, Yiddish, or Polish culture.”\textsuperscript{26} A Zionist

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22]Wandycz, The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918 300-302,304.
\item[23]Assuntino and Goldkorn, Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada, 18.
\item[26]Marcus, Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland 1919-1939, 262.
\end{footnotes}
might be militant, ultra-nationalist, orthodox, non-orthodox, socialist, non-socialist, etc. This was a product as much of the differing opinions as the lack of strong history of democratic elections where major parties would have established themselves through time. It was also what Ezra Mendelsohn termed the “golden age of modern, autonomous Diaspora Jewish politics.” He went as far as to predict, “with a fair degree of confidence,” that “there will never be anything like it again in the Jewish Diaspora.”

The non-Jewish view

Having explored the multitude of political and cultural approaches to the Polish-Jewish identity, and how they were approached, we can now turn to the two figures who represented the two most influential non-Jewish Polish approach to the question of national identity: Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski. Piłsudski, born in Lithuania in 1867 to a family with patriotic traditions, would eventually become Poland’s chief of state and de facto leader of the country following his May Coup in 1926. Since the 1890s, he was a member of the PPS eventually becoming its leader. He concluded that independence can only be won through force of arms and created the Polish Legions to prepare for the eventual fight. When World War I broke out, he predicted that the Center Powers would defeat Russia before being defeated in turn by the western states. He fought under Austrian control but withdrew his support in 1917 and was eventually jailed by the Germans. He was released in November 1918 and took charge of the nascent Polish state. He believed in a pluralist Poland which would be an heir of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the eighteenth century and hoped to

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create a confederation of Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian states. Roman Dmowski believed in an ethno-religious definition of Poles and Jews and separated the two, advocating for emigration of Jews from Poland. His views were espoused by the National Democrats. They sought to create a Poland that would be ethnically Polish and Catholic, without minorities whom they saw as an internal enemy. At times staunchly antisemitic, they frequently attacked Julian Tuwim and other Jewish and non-Jewish writers of the Skamander group he co-founded in the early post World War I period.29

Summary

The perhaps rather lengthy introduction is necessary for two main reasons. One, to introduce the many Jewish experiences in Poland, establishing the plurality of opinions and identity trajectories, and, two, to introduce a link between the interwar Polish Jewish intelligentsia, or at least as embodied by Tuwim, Edelma, and to an extent Prywes, to an idea that was part of Mickiewicz’s Messianist philosophy; that Slavs and particularly Piasts, are younger brothers of Israel, and the two living in Poland become Polish, without losing their history or religion but united by the struggles of the earthly pilgrims and ushering an era of universal salvation of mankind. That is not to say that Edelma, Prywes or Tuwim were Messianists, not at all. However, the trajectory of the origins of their nationality differed from the ethno-centrist idea of Polish nationality that was based on racial ideas of the second half of the nineteenth century that was espoused by the Endecja.

Historiography

Historians treated the question of Jewish identity in Poland in the interwar period from the macro, as well as the micro perspective. Literary critics dealt with Tuwim’s identity,

however, Edelman, despite the role he played in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, did not receive the same treatment. I will first look at the scholars that dealt specifically with these figures. Then, I will look at macro history and how historians have or have not drawn clear lines of demarcation between Polish Jews and Gentiles. Finally, I will look at how microhistory deals with the questions of Polish-Jewish identity differently.

When discussing Edelman, scholars focused on his role in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and his efforts to keep memory of the victims alive. Thus, and perhaps following his lead, there has not been a large body of work produced about his identity. Zbigniew Kloch, literary theorist and critic, in his 2013 article *Edelman, Short Story, Consciousness Discourse and Conflict* contends that Edelman’s “I” does not function as a strictly autobiographical discourse. Rather, it is meant to give voice to the unknown lives of those that perished in the Holocaust. Thus, they are to be preserved in the realm of symbolical existence.\(^30\) In the end, Edelman separated himself from his own autobiography in an effort to focus on those that did not survive.

Following the suggestion of Elie Wiesel and some Jewish theologians like Richard Rubenstein and Emil Fackenheim, Zygmunt Bauman, the great contemporary sociologist deals with the question of Tuwim’s identity, as that of other Jews, through the eyes of the Holocaust. With this premise, the new nationalities of East Central Europe of the early twentieth century seem predisposed to national and cultural conflict. Yet the view is not without grounds; for the Jews, living among Germans, Poles, Russians and Ukrainians, moving towards one group meant risking animosity from the other three, a position which led many to choose not to assimilate.\(^31\)


In Bauman’s narrative, Tuwim, as a writer in a young nation (the sovereign Polish state only regained independence in 1918) which needed as much culture as it could muster to justify statehood, was allowed to participate in the national life. In this, the nation was open to anyone who professed the cause, without asking for birth certificate. However, as the amount of homegrown culture reached respectable levels, Tuwim’s writing was later hailed as Jewish tactlessness, arrogance and pushiness.\(^{32}\)

Bauman argues that for Tuwim and other writers like him, the Polish language offered a shelter from the political life. It offered writers a feeling of home and the language benefitted even as the writers did not because of antisemitism.\(^{33}\) What this narrative does however, is deny Tuwim his own voice, he is only seen as an object of a larger power play, not as an agent in his own right.

Stanisław Barańczak, poet and literary critic, in his 1984 article *Taking Revenge on Language: Julian Tuwim’s Ball at the Opera* analyzes *Ball at the Opera* as part of a literary tradition that stretches back to Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers Eve* (1822) and Wyspiański’s *Wedding* (1901). The two works form an integral part of the canon of Polish literature, and Barańczak’s inclusion of *Ball at the Opera* in their ranks, places Tuwim’s literary achievement among the greatest examples of Polish literature. Like the two great predecessors, it is a cross-section of the political and cultural life of the country, and it did not paint a rosy picture. Similarly to Bauman, Barańczak sees Tuwim’s use of language as a basis for his nationality. It is interesting to note that Tuwim decided to “punish language for… reality’s crimes.”\(^{34}\)

\(^{32}\) Bauman, “Assimilation into Exile,” 586-587

\(^{33}\) Bauman, “Assimilation into Exile,” 589

\(^{34}\) Stanisław Barańczak, “Taking Revenge on Language: Julian Tuwim’s Ball at the Opera,” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Summer 1984) 244.
The way Tuwim accomplishes this is through morphological fragmentation ("ideolo"), nonsense words ("udibidibinda, udibidibinda"), phonetic violence ("malo" instead of "mało"), rhythmic violence ("na tajniaka tajniak mruga, No jadź, jadź! bedziesz tu stać"), grammatical violence ("grubasobie" instead of "grubasy"). Metaphorically speaking, the word became flesh the poet mutilated. Barańczak argues that the mutilation of language meant to distance Tuwim from the culture he described, even though he saw himself as an inseparable part of it.\(^{35}\)

To look more broadly at the question of identity of Polish Jews, we will move away from study of Edelman and Tuwim, and look at Polish Jews as a larger community. One way to study the history is to look at Poles and Jews as separate national categories. Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, historian of nineteenth and twentieth century East Central Europe, argues in his 2000 book, Żydzi i polacy 1918-1955: współistnienie - zagłada - komunizm [Jews and Poles 1918-1955: Coexistence - Holocaust - Communism], that the Poles and Jews lived largely a divided existence. Their different culture, religion, tradition, and language led to mutual incomprehension and even conflict. Peter Stachura, a British historian of twentieth century Poland and Polish-British diaspora, argues in Poland Between the Wars, 1919-1939 (1998), that the Jews constituted a separate nation and points to the Zionist movement as an example of Jewish desire to undermine Polish nationhood: “a large majority made their loyalties all too clear: they were pro-Soviet or Zionist, and anti-Polish.”\(^{36}\)

Harry M. Rabinowicz, best known for his study of Hasidism, viewed Poles as little more than “menacing neighbors” and the country’s approach to the Jews as “deliberate policy of persecution.” He discusses Roman Dmowski’s 1903 book Thoughts of a Modern Pole, yet did


not address such thinkers as Orzeszkowa, Czacki, or Vicenz, who hoped for a peaceful and successful assimilation of the Jews to the Polish society. Despite mentioning Zionists, Bundists, assimilated and orthodox Jews, he does not delve into their differences. He specifically mentions Tuwim, whom he calls one of Poland’s major poets, and describes *Kwiaty Polskie*, which I discuss in detail, as a “powerful indictment of the Germans.”37

Alina Cała, a Polish historian, sociologist and a former member of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, specializes in the nineteenth and twentieth century Jewish assimilation in Central and Eastern Europe. In her 1989 book *Asymilacja Żydów w Królestwie Polskim (1864-1897)* [Assimilation of Jews in Congress Kingdom (1864-1897)], as well as the *Wizerunek Żyda w polskiej kulturze ludowej* [Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture] (1992), Cała argues that despite differences in language and religion, Gentiles and Jews, living in near proximity for centuries, make it difficult to draw clear lines of demarcation between them, especially since proclaimed values are do not clearly translate to everyday life.38

Aleksander Hertz, a Polish Jewish sociologist, ventures beyond exploration of differences and separation of Poles and Jews and looks at the interaction between the idea of a caste and visions of identity in his 1965 book *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej* [Jews in the Polish Culture]. He argues that because Jews formed one of the castes of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, along with the peasants, the szlachta (nobility), and the burghers, they were no more “outside” of the nation than any of the other castes. Each group had its own *raison d’être* and when the order was upset, a statewide soul-searching ensued. This perspective is useful because it highlights the

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point in time when the Jews were neither of the nation, nor outside of it; it was a time when the notions were first being introduced and there was no demarcation between Jews and Gentiles along national lines.\textsuperscript{39}

Furthermore, Hertz emphasizes the “\textit{swojskość}” of the Jews. \textit{Swojskość} is difficult to translate, but it implies belonging and homeliness; in other words, the Jews were part of one’s own nation. These are the Jews of Mickiewicz, especially in his portrayal of Jankiel in \textit{Pan Tadeusz}. Jankiel loved Poland despite keeping his completely separate religious identity. For Mickiewicz, this did not imply assimilation which did not exist at the time, since he was writing so early, he was creating national identity and for him the two religions were part of one nationality. As Hertz asserts, there were many Polish Jews, builders of Israel in the postwar period, with whom Mickiewicz’s ideas about identity resonated.\textsuperscript{40}

It is possible to draw clear lines of national demarcation along ethnic lines as some historians we discussed have done, and whereas the differentiation helps to address difficult issues, it does not discuss the places in which the different identities blend. This is where microhistory can help to narrow the focus of the study. Focusing on the Jewish youth in interwar Kraków, Sean Martin, the historian of Jewish history, explores how Jewish cultural institutions encouraged the growth of Jewish consciousness through publications, in and out of school activities, and sports club in his 2001 paper \textit{Jewish Youth Between Tradition and Assimilation: Exploring Polish Jewish Identity in Interwar Kraków}. He argues that Jews developed a separate ethnic identity from their non-Jewish neighbors yet did not reject an affiliation with the majority community. This was partly a result of Jewish children attending public schools. Despite efforts of some organizations, it was impossible for vast numbers of Jewish children to attend Jewish

\textsuperscript{39} Aleksander Hertz \textit{Żydzi w kulturze polskiej}, 51-56
\textsuperscript{40} Hertz, \textit{Żydzi w kulturze polskiej}, 56, 205.
schools, and many Jews opposed the *khadorim*, the traditional Jewish religious schools, and sought modern ways of education.\(^{41}\) Thus, afterschool activities aimed at fostering Jewish culture had to supplement studies in public institutions. Language presented another obstacle: Kraków, being one of the more assimilated centers of Jewish culture, struggled to organize theater plays in Yiddish because Polish was seen as the language of the middle class Zionist youth. Furthermore, the writings of Mickiewicz and Słowacki served as an inspiration for many young Zionists. That is not to say that Yiddish and Hebrew were unknown among the Jewish youth, however, Polish made large inroads into the Jewish community. Martin argues that the Jewish youth in Kraków were able to create a separate identity from their Gentile neighbors, yet not through complete rejection, but in tandem with it.\(^{42}\)

Gertrud Pickhan, the historian of Eastern Europe, focuses on plurality in her 2009 study of the Bund’s minority concept and argues that the Bund presented a predecessor to a modern multiculturalist state in the interwar Second Polish Republic. The Bund’s *Yiddishkayt*, “Jewishness,” as Pickhan argues, gave the Jewish working class a sense of cultural pride and did not require material success. The realization that Jews are “a people like any other,” allowed the Bund to demand cultural autonomy.\(^{43}\)

The interwar Jewish community was multifaceted and there were proponents of different ideas of national identity. Some historians focused on the differences between Jews and Gentiles while others focused on the interconnections between the two. The scholars that looked

\(^{41}\) The Zionist Tarbut schools had over 100,000 students in 1937, and the Central Yiddish School Organization (TSYSHO) had about 16,000 in the same year. Yet the TSYSHO was interesting because it was a supraparty organization with strong Bund influence that attempted to organize secular Yiddish language schools that would be supported by the national government. See Yuu Nishimura, “On the Cultural Front: the Bund and the Yiddish Secular School Movement in the Interwar Poland,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 43, no. 3 (2013), 265-281.


\(^{43}\) Gertrud Pickhan, “*Yiddishkayt* and class consciousness: the Bund and its minority concept,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 39, no. 2 (August 2009), 249-251.
specifically at Tuwim pointed to how his identity manifested through language. The study of Edelman was focused on his role in preserving memory of the Holocaust and not much work has been done that treated his identity as a Polish Jew. With that in mind, I will now discuss precisely this issue.

Marek Edelman - The Fighter

Marek Edelman’s birth date and place are variously given as 1919 or 1922 Warsaw or Homel (today Belarus). He was one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1943. He was also the one who lived the longest, passing away in 2009. He did not leave Poland during the war and, aside from some travel in the early days of the war, he stayed in Warsaw Ghetto. He survived the war, became a very respected cardiologist, and despite never becoming a member of the Communist party, he was left, for the most part, in peace. Yet he was not so quiet; he wrote The Ghetto Fights (1945), gave an interview to Hanna Krall which became a book; Shielding the Flame (1977), and he also gave an interview to Rudi Assuntino and Wlodek Gordkorn to create Il Guardiano (The Guardian, 1998).

Each of the three books had a different focus and purpose. Edelman wrote the Ghetto Fights soon after World War II ended, while the events were still fresh in his mind. The first English language translation appeared in May 1946. He wanted to give account of the activities of the Bund in the Ghetto and its conspiratorial activities. Hanna Krall’s book length interview with Edelman, Shielding the Flame, alternates between recollections of the Ghetto and of the

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44 Various sources differ. In Il Guardiano he writes “I was born in 1921. My family lived in Homel.” Assuntino and Goldkorn, 16
45 Marek Edelman, The Ghetto Fights: Warsaw 1941-1943 (London: Bookmarks; 1990). Hanna Krall, Shielding the Flame: an Intimate Conversation with Dr. Marek Edelman, the Last Surviving Leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (New York: Henry Holt and Company; 1986). For the purposes of this thesis, I am using the Polish language versions of all the works. The Ghetto Fights and Shielding the Flame were originally written in Polish and translated into English. To simplify the process, where appropriate, I quote the English version unless otherwise noted. Il Guardiano was written in Italian and I had to rely on to the Polish translation. To my knowledge, only Polish and German translations exist; an English language translation was never published. All the quotes from Il Guardiano are my own translation.
Edelman seems almost irreverent in some parts of the book due to his dislike of grand narratives. The book deals with memory and exploration of life. *The Guardian* focuses almost exclusively on the war with the exception of reflections at the end of the book which deal with the conflict in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. However, just like *Shielding the Flame*, it also deals with questions of memory and their importance.

Edelman gave numerous interviews to newspapers throughout his life and wrote books on the life in the Warsaw Ghetto. Yet despite that outpouring of creative work, he is still somewhat a mystery; he preferred to talk about others, and even in his autobiographical works he places himself as an almost insignificant witness to events, rather than a protagonist. In the postwar years, he is hailed a hero by both Poland and Israel due to his part in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. As an individual, his story has helped to capture the fighting spirit of the Jews in general, and Polish Jews in particular. Yet he also represents a lost tradition; his prewar upbringing strongly influenced his actions during the war and his postwar beliefs. Despite his great respect for memory of the people he knew and the times in which he lived, he had an irreverent approach to grand narratives and an innate talent to say what some considered “improper,” whether about memory, commemoration of that memory, or even those that were commemorated. Yet he was vocal about the organizations he supported and reflected on questions of identity, history, and Polish-Jewish relations.

Edelman self-appointed himself a role as a vessel for Polish Jewish Holocaust memory. It is evident in the titles of his books, especially *The Guardian* in which he recalls the leaders of the Bund, Henryk Erlich and Wiktor Alter, his friends in the Bund, Szmul “Artur” Zygielbojm who organized worker battalions in the defense of Warsaw in which some six thousand Jewish Bund
members fought, the Bund’s contact on the Aryan side Leon Feiner, as well as many of his friends during the uprising including Adam Sznajdmil, Maurycy Orzech, Abrasza Blum (to whom he dedicated *The Ghetto Fights*), and his wife Luba Bielicka.\(^\text{46}\)

Edelman also saw himself as a gate-keeper between life and death who picked out people who were to live. In the Ghetto, as a member of the hospital staff which was located next to the Umschlagplatz, along with other staff members, Edelman picked out people and dragged them through the windows into the hospital to save their lives.\(^\text{47}\) Some were saved multiple times. He felt that his work as a cardiologist was similar. In a clinic he worked later in his life, under a palm tree, he looked over the rooms of his patients “and I realized, that day, that day under the palm, that actually it was the same assignment as I’d had there, at the Umschlagplatz. There, too, I would stand at the gate and pull out individuals from the throngs of those condemned to die.”\(^\text{48}\)

Edelman was a guardian of life as much during the war as after. He attempted to save people’s lives by tricking the Germans in the Ghetto during the war, and by surgery and treatment in the Łódź hospital after the war.

With the understanding of his self-appointed role as a guardian, we begin to see his need to stay in Poland after the war: “I decided to stay. Someone had to stay with all of those that died.”\(^\text{49}\) His friends, some of them past members of the Bund, like “Antek” and “Celina,” attempted to persuade him to leave the country. The two became some of the most vocal

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\(^\text{46}\) Actually, aside from a two page introduction, the first forty five or so pages of *Il Guardiano* introduce these characters. Edelman also spends much of his narratives relating stories of different people, whether he was involved in them or not.

\(^\text{47}\) Umschlagplatz was the collection point from which Germans loaded Jews onto the trains to the Treblinka extermination camp during Grossaktion Warsaw between July and September 1942 and until the end of the Ghetto Uprising in April 1943. As many as 10,000 Jews were deported on some days and a total of 300,000 were deported. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, *Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* in Holocaust Encyclopedia, 2016. https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005188 (accessed 3/11/2016).

\(^\text{48}\) For Edelman’s recollections saving lives at the Umschlagplatz, see Assuntino and Goldkorn, 51. For his reflections on the war while working at the Łódź hospital, see Krall, *Shielding the Flame*, 85.

supporters of emigration to Palestine in the immediate postwar years. Edelman asserts that “I did not know what to talk to them about, such was the fervor of transporting people to Palestine that swept them.”

In 1957, Edelman visited the two in Israel where “Antek” decided to show him the land. After a visit to the Dead Sea, Antek asked Edelman how he liked the country. Commenting on the geography, Edelman agreed that Israel was indeed beautiful, yet Antek pressed him about factories which led to an argument:

“‘And the factories? Did you see the factories?! All built by Jewish hands.’ I answered: ‘That’s no miracle, building factories...’ He counters: ‘But these were built by Jews.’ I continue: ‘Give it up, Antek; anyone can put down bricks, Jews, Americans, or Poles, there’s no difference’. ‘Have you no national pride’ - screamed Antek. - ‘Your duty is to live here, in Israel!’ I got up and left, slamming the door.”

Edelman’s national identity is not easy to assert. He certainly did not like to subject himself to ready-made stereotypes and preferred to walk his own path. He saw national identity and memory as an individual manner. In a speech he gave in Kraków in 1995 during a colloquium entitled *Jewish memory - Polish memory*, he differentiated between different types of memories of the Holocaust. A memory of a Jewish policeman who saved his family’s life is different from a policeman who led his family to the Umschlagplatz. A memory of Bartoszewski, Karski, and those who hid and saved Jews is different from the memory of a mother who lost her son at the Ghetto walls, which in turn is different from those who read left-wing papers and those who read right-wing papers. He adds: “Let us not talk about schemas. And let us not talk about what is the national memory. Let’s not talk about national memory at all... These are things...”

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51 Władysław Bartoszewski, Catholic intellectual who spent some time in Auschwitz, he was a founding member of the Żegota, the Council to Aid Jews, an arm of the Polish Home Army. The purpose of Żegota was to save lives of Jews. Jan Karski is best known for having reported to the Western Allies the political situation in Poland, the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Holocaust.
which lead to evil and not good. Especially in totalitarian systems.”

And yet some kind of national memory was important to Edelman as can be seen in his martial career as a leader of the Bund-organized Jewish Combat Organization (ŻOB) in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. We will return to this deliberation later but first we need to look more closely at the Bund and Edelman’s activities in the organization from his youngest days.

The relationship to the Bund, the Jewish Socialist Party of Poland, dominated Edelman’s early life in interwar Warsaw. Edelman strongly believed in the ideals of the Bund which in the interwar period created a vast organization with a highly developed cultural infrastructure. He was a member of its youth organizations, *Skif* and *Cukunft*. 

A sanatorium for children, organized by Włodzimierz Medem, which Edelman visited as a child due to an early onset of tuberculosis, sought to promote understanding among all its patients and included a children’s self-government which was “a little island of freedom and democracy.” The sanatorium did not differentiate based on national or religious basis and Jewish, Polish, and German children played, sang and held discussions together. It created a sense of equality between the children not always found in the outside world.

Edelman recalled that the *Skif* and *Cukunft* both organized children’s camps, choirs, after school activities in the interwar period and that activity continued in the Ghetto. In 1941, the *Cukunft* became the pillar which organized the Jewish youth by creating youth circles, choir, and school lessons. The *Skif* attempted financial help for its prewar members and organized several

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53 *Skif - Socjalistiszer Kinder Farband* and *Cukunft* are both the Polish transliteration of the Yiddish for *Socialist Children’s Union* and *Future* respectively.
hundred school children and preschoolers. Within a few months, some 12,000 children attended two plays by the Dramatic Club which were performed some eighty times.\textsuperscript{55}

In \textit{the Ghetto Fights}, Edelman asserts that it was the Bund that organized the resistance in the Ghetto with the knowledge of Polish Socialists. Initially without weapons, the organization limited itself to theoretical exercises and intelligence gathering. By about October 1942, the Coordinating Committee was formed with representatives from all the existing political parties. It was also at this time that the Jewish Combat Organization (ŻOB) was formed with Edelman as one of its leaders, however, it did not start acquiring weapons and carrying out first assaults until November.\textsuperscript{56}

On April 19, 1943 the day the Ghetto Uprising began, Edelman recounts that after a day of shooting the Germans sent three guards with their guns held down and holding white sashes. In an offhanded manner he comments: “We shot at them… By the way, we missed, but it doesn’t matter. ‘How come it doesn’t matter?’ — ‘The important thing was just that we were shooting. We had to show it. Not to the Germans. They knew better than us how to shoot. We had to show it to this other, non-German world. People have always thought that shooting is the highest form of heroism. So we were shooting.”\textsuperscript{57} In a seemingly light-hearted manner, he talks about the death of those the world would consider heroes. Edelman never considered the option of not fighting. In every Bund meeting in the Ghetto, the command staff was in agreement about fighting, but not for heroic deaths but for life. In a sense this idea of fighting against impossible odds harkens to the Romantic uprisings of the first half of the nineteenth century symbolized in Mickiewicz’s dictum “measure your abilities according to your aims, not your aims according to your abilities.”[\textit{Mierz siłę na zamiary, / Nie zamiar podług sił}] found in his poem \textit{Pieśń}

\textsuperscript{55} Marek Edelman, \textit{The Ghetto Fights}, 46.  
\textsuperscript{56} Edelman, \textit{The Ghetto Fights}, 45,68-69.  
\textsuperscript{57} Krall, \textit{Shielding the Flame}, 3.

Assuntino and Goldkorn, Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada, 88.

In the interview with Krall, Edelman recalls that after the war, every year on April 19, he received flowers. He did not know who they were from or whether it should even be recorded since, as Krall commented, it smacks of:

“kitschy stories [which] somehow seem to stick to you. Those prostitutes, for instance, who would give you bagels everyday. By the way, do you think it would be proper to write that there were prostitutes in the Ghetto? — I don’t know. Probably it wouldn’t be. In the Ghetto there should only have been martyrs and Joans of Arc, right? But if you want to know, in the bunker on Mila Street, together with Anielewicz’s group, there were some prostitutes... These girls gave us some food, and Guta and Juno cigarettes. That was one of the best days in the Ghetto.”

Edelman refused to whitewash the history of the Ghetto and those that were present in the uprising; he included all Polish Jews. Later, we will see Tuwim also refuse to discard any part of history because all its parts make up the nationality, whether heroes or prostitutes.

Edelman also appears irreverant when discussing death. On May 8th, at the end of the uprising, at Mila 18, the headquarters of the ŻOB, Anielewicz shot his girlfriend first and then committed suicide. Jurek Wilner, another leader of the ŻOB “apparently declared ‘‘let’s all die together.’’” In all, some eighty people committed suicide and Edelman was later told: “This is how it should have been… The nation has died, its soldiers have died. A symbolic death’”

Edelman adds to his interviewer: “You, too, probably like such symbols? There was a young woman with them, Ruth. She shot herself seven times before she finally made it… but she wasted six bullets.” Edelman does not mock the deaths, he holds all of those that died in great esteem. What this passage however shows the contempt he held for grand narratives; Edelman

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61 Krall, Shielding the Flame, 40.
62 Krall, Shielding the Flame, 5-6.
painfully juxtaposes the ideal of fighting with the reality of death of the fighters by pointing out that the symbolism is more concerned with the fight and not with life and those who gave up their lives for ideals.

In 1963, Edelman was invited to a meeting of union leaders in the United States, the same gentlemen that during the war had organized and sent money to arm the uprising. They discussed human memory and whether it was proper to build monuments or buildings. He kept reminding himself not to hurt them by asking questions like: “what does it matter today?” Being Edelman, he unintentionally managed to harm them anyway asking: “do you really think that it can be called an uprising?” The question hurt the people because they saw in it the heroism of Jewish fighters against all odds. Edelman did not care for that narrative, he questioned the uprising because it involved some 200 people who had no chance of winning. It was only a matter of choosing the manner in which they would die. For him that human dignity was infinitely more important than the narrative of heroism.

The passages do not show Edelman’s contempt for human life or an attempt to undermine the people that lived and lost their lives. It does however show his contempt for grand, heroic narratives. In reference to Anielewicz and his people committing suicide, Krall asked Edelman whether he ever considered the same action: “Never. They should never have done it. Even though it was a very good symbol. You don’t sacrifice a life for a symbol.” Edelman shows that for him, life precedes ideology and even fight for a national idea should not take precedence over human life.

The most important value to Edelman was life and human dignity. In “Some Reflections” he wrote: “[y]ou ask, what is most important in life? The most important is life itself. And when

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63 Krall, Shielding the Flame, 9-10.
64 Krall, Shielding the Flame, 6.
you have life, the most important is freedom. Then we give up life for freedom. And then I don’t
know anymore, what is most important. Certainly it’s not patriotism.”65 The Ghetto was not
filled with martyrs, and there were some prostitutes. Yet to Edelman, that is only part of human
life, the prostitutes are not seen as “improper women” who deserve contempt and condemnation.
No, indeed they were “good, clever, resourceful girls.” They were human, and he saw them as
human, not with the label of prostitutes that many would associate with them during and after the
war.

The Holocaust gave rise to people worth remembering and Edelman spent his life
keeping their memory alive. He lit candles and brought flowers to the graves of the fighters of
the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, yet he did not accept most official invitations to those events,
especially from the communist government that ruled Poland from 1947 to 1989. When he was
invited to a commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising in 1983, during
Martial Law in which the communist government severely limited people’s freedoms, Edelman
replied with an open letter in which he stated:

“[f]orty years ago we fought not only for life - we fought for life with dignity and
freedom. The commemoration of our anniversary here, where humiliation and bondage
still hangs over social life, where words and gestures are completely falsified, is a
perversion of our fight, is a part of something completely different. I will not be a part of
it.”

Edelman refused to support and legitimize commemorations organized by a communist
government. For him, memory of the “martyrs and heroes” will survive “far from the
manipulated commemorations, in the silent graves and hearts” of the people that commemorate

65 Assuntino and Goldkorn, Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada, 134.
By the 1980s, Edelman, who survived the war and commemorated the uprising quietly every year, knew about the survival of that memory. Yet during the war it was not always apparent and he despaired about the future.

The fear of being forgotten was on Edelman’s mind during his time in the Ghetto. In an answer to a question about whether you could see the “other,” that is, the Aryan side from the Ghetto, he answered:

“Oh yes. The wall only reached the second floor. And already from the third floor, one could see the other street. We could see a merry-go-round, people, we could hear music, and we were terribly afraid that this music would drown us out and that those people would never notice a thing, that nobody in the world would notice a thing: us, the struggle, the dead…. That this wall was so huge, that nothing, no message about us, would ever make it out.”

Perhaps in some metaphysical sense, the Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz heard that cry as he noticed the same merry-go-round and people’s passivity about what was happening to the dying fighters in the Ghetto. In Miłosz’s poem Campo di Fiori, he recalls the burning of Giordano Bruno, the 16th century Dominican friar and the return to “normal” life following his death. The poet feared that the same oblivion might await the Ghetto: “I thought of the Campo di Fiori / In Warsaw by the sky-carousel, / One clear spring evening / to the strains of a carnival tune. / The bright melody drowned / The salvos from the ghetto wall, / and couples were flying / high in the cloudless sky.”

Literary critics have indicated that the poem discusses death from the position of an observer. Indeed, Miłosz accuses Poles of complicity by inaction and includes

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66 Both quotes found in Assuntino and Goldkorn, Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada, 258.
67 Krall, Shielding the Flame, 7.
himself in that accusation: “that is the way this poem is written… Some die, others play, he
[Miłosz refers to himself in third person] ‘stirs up a revolt’ with his word and walks away happy,
because he wrote a pretty poem.”

Yet the poem is also about memory, despite its self-accusatory nature, it does
memorialize the struggle of the fighters and warns against forgetting. Miłosz thought of
forgetting as abandonment: “But that day I thought only / of the loneliness of the dying…/ Those
dying here, the lonely, / Forgotten by the world, / our tongue becomes for them / the language of
an ancient planet…” Despite Edelman’s worries, the carousel’s symbol of passivity became
the rallying point of memory of the struggle and the Jewish sacrifice on the other side of the
Ghetto walls.

Edelman considered himself a guardian of those that perished in Poland during World
War II. At least one poet preserved the memory symbolized ironically by the forgetfulness
brought about by the carousel. Edelman recounted the stories of those that perished and he kept
their memories alive, yet he never intended to martyrize the dead; that was not his purpose. He
saw in their memory a story of humanity, not national memory per se, but certainly people who
were a part of the national story; a story that was a part of the Polish consciousness. With all its
faults and embarrassments. While discussing Polish antisemitism, Edelman wrote: “There were
always antisemitic Poles, just as there are Frenchmen who hate Arabs. It is a political matter: the
Jew is not the enemy, but the enemy is the Jew. On the other hand, up until the beginning of the
Uprising in August 1944 in Warsaw, there were over twelve thousand Jews living on the Aryan
side. Over one hundred thousand people had to be involved in their survival… Well, all of it

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69 Jan Błoński, Biedni Polacy Patrzą na Getto, 12.
70 Miłosz, Campo di Fiori
makes up history of Poland.” Edelman equated all those that lived in Poland without reference to their religion; to him they were all part of the same story that was made up of pluralistic memories. Thus, they were the same in their difference.

During the 50th anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising in 1993, as Edelman recounts, there were those who wanted to invite the state of Israel to co-organizing the commemorations. He did not agree with the idea: “You can invite people from Israel. Even Al Gore, the vice president of the United States, was invited. But you should not, being a guest, dress yourself up in the feathers of the host. Of course, some feel that the uprising in the Ghetto was not a Polish uprising. That it does not belong to Polish history. And it fills me with bitterness and sorrow.” Edelman saw the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as part of the Polish national history, not as a separate, Jewish uprising.

This bitterness and sorrow was not in the least unjustified. As he recalls: “[i]n April of 1943, our uprising was incited by Polish citizens, and in Warsaw, for the first time since capitulation in 1939, the Polish flag was raised.” Edelman places the uprising in the same line as its nineteenth century predecessors; that of a Polish nation uprising against a foreign oppressor in which the Jews participated as part of the nation. Thus, it is part of a Polish national identity, and it is linked to a more expansive vision of how Polish Jews and Polish Gentiles are linked. The connection to the Romantic past can also be seen in the Ghetto before the uprising when one of the six periodicals published by the Bund was called “For Our Freedom and Yours,” in

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71 Assuntino and Goldkorn, Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada, 135.
72 Assuntino and Goldkorn, Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada, 136.
73 Assuntino and Goldkorn, Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada, 136.
74 The slogan was first used in 1831 to commemorate the Decembrists, the Russian army officers who led an uprising against Tsar Nicholas I. It was later used by revolutionaries in the November and January Uprisings as well as both World Wars but also wherever Poles fought in the nineteenth century, whether it was Hungary, Spain, Belgium or Italy. Jerzy Axer, “Reshaping the “Classical Tradition” to Question the European Political Order, Polish Case Studies,” in Multiple Antiquities - Multiple Modernities: Ancient Histories in Nineteenth Century European Cultures Gabor Klaniczay, Michael Werner, and Otto Gescer
reference to the Romantic era slogan the meaning of which is deeply ingrained in the Polish psyche; to fight for freedom from oppression for all peoples, in all corners of the world. It was, in a sense, the most “Polish” trait of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ national consciousness.

Jewish fighters took part in all national uprisings of the Long-Nineteenth-Century. Tadeusz Kościuszko, a hero of the American revolution, led an unsuccessful uprising in Poland in 1794 during which Berek Joselewicz, a Jewish-Polish merchant raised a cavalry unit of 500 men: the first Jewish military unit organized and in modern Europe.75 During the November Uprising, about 300 Jews joined the National Guard, some 1100 soldiers joined the Warsaw Jewish City Guard. Overall, about 25% of the Jewish citizens of Warsaw participated in defense of the city against the Russians.76

Despite a general opposition of the Orthodox Jews to the January Uprising (1863), many young Jews, perhaps for fear of conscription to the Russian army, joined the nascent revolutionary units. Also, the National Government, the revolutionary, underground government, cajoled massive Jewish support with promise of full civil rights. A number of the leaders of the National Government were Jewish, e.g. Władysław Epstein, the son of the director of the Warsaw-Vienna railroad line and Henryk Wohl the financial adviser, whose staff included Izaak Goldman, author of the Hebrew-language announcements.77

Aside from connecting the activities of the Bund to the nineteenth century Polish fighters through the Ghetto Uprising, Edelman tied the Bund to postwar history and the activities of the

77 Dubicki and Łukomski, “Jewish Soldiers in Polish Armies, 1794-1945.”
Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR)\textsuperscript{78} formed in September 1976: “[a]fter all, KOR was the same as the Bund in the times of my youth. For me it was a continuation, the same values; brotherhood, social justice, hatred of dictatorship. KOR took up the Bund’s ideals and passed them on to Solidarity.”\textsuperscript{79} Just as the slogan is one of the most recognizable and most durable expressions of national ideals, the Solidarity movement of the 1980s is seen in the same light. It was this organization that shook-off the chokehold communism held over East-Central Europe and led to the eventual collapse of the totalitarian regime. The Bund is thus a natural, integrated link in the long chain of fighting “for your freedom and ours.” Uprisings, which all included Jewish fighters.

In a continuation of a speech on \textit{Jewish Memory - Polish Memory} mentioned earlier, Edelman discusses the importance of human life: “[w]hat does it mean: five thousand poisoned in the Tokyo subway?\textsuperscript{80} It is contempt for human life and that is the change introduced into our consciousness by the Holocaust.” For Edelman, in the most extreme circumstances, which the Holocaust certainly was, passivity turns into a crime, an opinion Miłosz agreed with through his poetry. As Edelman recalls: “A Jew left the Ghetto, there was a crowd of people including two szmalcownik\textsuperscript{s} [blackmailer].\textsuperscript{81} There were only two of them and yet they did what they did, the

\textsuperscript{78} KOR - \textit{Komitet Obrony Robotników} was an organization established by intellectuals to provide material assistance to the repressed workers and their families. It was seen as a turn in Polish postwar history because the intellectuals did not vocally support previous workers’ strikes in 1956 and 1970, and the workers did not voice support for intellectuals in the events of March 68. The KOR turned towards defending human and citizen rights, and became a focus for the opposition. Lukowski and Zawadzki, \textit{A Concise History of Poland}, 307.

\textsuperscript{79} Assuntino and Goldkorn, \textit{Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada}, 126.

\textsuperscript{80} Edelman presumably refers to the 1995 Tokyo Sarin Subway Attack perpetrated by the members of the doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyo. However, out of some 5,500 people reporting to the Tokyo hospitals, about 1,100 were considered ill with the remainder seen as worried well. Amy Smithson and Leslie-Anne Levy \textit{Ataxia: The Chemical and Biological Terrorism Threat and the US Response}, (The Henry L. Stimson Center; 2000) 95 http://www.stimson.org/sites/default/files/file-attachments/atxchapter3_1.pdf (accessed 3/13/2016).

\textsuperscript{81} Szmalcownik is a pejorative slang word for Poles who blackmailed Jews in hiding or Poles that hid them. The term szmalec means “lard” or “dough” meaning money was the motivation for their actions.
rest turned their heads not wanting to see it… a passive witness becomes guilty of complicity. And in extreme cases, passivity becomes a crime.”

Edelman placed high value on memory of those individuals who were a part of the struggle and who died during World War II. His upbringing in the Bund instilled in him the hope of creating an autonomous Jewish cultural identity within the Polish state. He firmly placed the Ghetto Uprising in the canon of Polish national uprisings because it followed the same traditions as the nineteenth century Romantic uprisings. Polish flag waving over the Warsaw Ghetto, in an uprising organized by Bundist fighters is a testament to the memory of the “Polish” national uprisings of the nineteenth century which were not defined by the ethno-religious terms (Slavic, Catholic). Rather, “Polish” was an agreed symbiosis of different groups living in a certain geographic place and a metaphysical understanding of unity between the Catholics and the Jews who were equally “Polish” in their fatherland. His approach to the questions of identity places Edelman closer to Mickiewicz’s mythical Jankiel, that is a Pole of Jewish faith, who is separate in oneness. This “cultural nationality” separates Edelman from the “racial nationality” which emphasized an ethno-religious background. Yet despite this complicated identity, Edelman placed more value on the humanity in each individual and hoped for a state that would protect and promote simpler if infinitely more difficult “good” in its fight against “evil” which always had an easier time winning.

**Julian Tuwim - The Writer**

Julian Tuwim was born in 1894. He grew up in Łódź, an industrial city to the south-west of Warsaw, sometimes called Polish Manchester due to its textile industry, which at the time was under Russian rule. In the interwar years, he was one of the country’s most successful poets and a co-founder of an influential literary group named *Skamander*, which also included poets Antoni Assuntino and Goldkorn, *Strażnik, Marek Edelman opowiada*, 240-241.
Słońimski, Jan Lechoń, and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, among others. However, due to his Jewish heritage, he was a target of antisemitic attacks from the country’s right wing in the 1920s and 1930s.\(^{83}\)

The group’s favored outlet was the *Wiadomości Literackie* [Literary News], a weekly paper which commented on social and cultural issues; it was started by Mieczysław Grydzewski, a Polish Jewish historian in 1924. At its peak, the paper reached a circulation of about fifteen thousand copies, and about half of its readership was made up of Polish Jews. Compared to other papers, its circulation was not very high, yet it shows there was a need for high culture among a certain segment of the intelligentsia in the interwar period. Even though it did not represent a specific political current, it tended to represent liberal views and was disliked by the National Democrats and Zionists alike, the former seeing it as satanic tool brandished by the socialist (even Communist) Jews and, the latter seeing it as assimilationist, and thus as a threat to an independent Jewish nationality.\(^{84}\)

The existence of the paper, its readership, and opponents, highlight the existence of a certain strand of Polish and Polish Jewish identity espoused by Tuwim and others; that of a nationality which while Polish, did not see itself as losing its Jewish identity. Through its apolitical outlook, it saw the question of identity as a social, even civilizational issue and attempted to deal with the problem widely; it printed opposing opinions, some of which were seen as antisemitic and which would not be acceptable after the Holocaust, yet which were


printable in the interwar period. It was mostly through this paper that Tuwim produced his works, often polemicizing with the Endecja which denied him his identity.\textsuperscript{85}

The Endecja and their supporters were not the first to proclaim the dangers Jews pose to what they perceived as native culture. It was a European-wide issue yet they were the ones that most strongly represented the views in interwar Poland. Roman Dmowski, the politician, co-founder, and chief ideologue of Endecja perceived Jewish influence as anathema to Polish culture, which he saw in ethno-religious terms. His most influential work was the \textit{Thoughts of a Modern Pole}, a nationalist manifesto written and published in Florence in 1903 at a time when there was no independent Polish state. Antony Polonsky, a historian of the Holocaust, writes about the tendency to see Jewish assimilation as superficial and only used by the Jews to promote their own national interests. Dmowski saw the Jews as even more dangerous since because they adopted the language and knew the customs of their host country, and thus are able to disguise their true intent.\textsuperscript{86}

In the interwar years, the right wing press attacked the Polish Jewish for their “semitic tendencies” and denied them any Polish identity. Tuwim, as a leading poet, bore the brunt of the attack: Józef Mackiewicz, a Vilna-based journalist maintained that Tuwim was a “Jewish poet writing in Polish” and the right-wing literary weekly \textit{Prosto z Mostu} (No Nonsense) ran the headline “Jewish Poetry in the Polish Language.”\textsuperscript{87} This accusation even extended to the non-Jewish writers of \textit{Skamander} like Iwaszkiewicz and Lechoń, who were painted with the same semitic brush. For this, the right-wing press invented the concept of an “artificial Jew,” to distinguish a writer from “born Jew,” not to mention “a Pole.”\textsuperscript{88} A number of writers of the

\textsuperscript{85} Błoński, \textit{Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto}, 68.
\textsuperscript{86} Polonsky, "Why did they hate Jews Tuwim and Boy so much?,” 190-192.
\textsuperscript{87} Polonsky, "Why did they hate Jews Tuwim and Boy so much?,” 192.
\textsuperscript{88} Polonsky, "Why did they hate Jews Tuwim and Boy so much?,” 196-7.
Skamander group responded to different accusations with articles of their own including Antoni Słonimski, the unofficial ideologue of the group, and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński.\textsuperscript{89}

The group also had to defend itself from attacks of the Orthodox Jews who accused them of betraying their Jewishness. The writers of Skamander, as a contemporary Jewish writer Roman Brandstaetter put it, “express[ed] our own Jewish longings in the Polish language, we set the pain of a Jewish heart to the sound of [Jan] Kochanowski’s words for the first time on Polish land, we associate the words of Mickiewicz with the holy words of the Bible…”\textsuperscript{90} A certain tie to the ideas of the Bund exists in the passage: closeness to the Polish soil, seeing the Jewish past in the land and associating its future with it. That is not to say the Bund held mystical beliefs, but as a socialist group it attempted to solve Jewish issues wherever they were. Of course, the use of Polish as opposed to Yiddish or Hebrew put the group at odds with parts of the Bund ideology, yet a certain anationality, or at least exhaustion with the national question rings in the words.

The power of right wing politics had enough influence to convince one man at least, Eligiusz Niewiadomski, who had connections to Endecja, to assassinate the newly elected president Gabriel Narutowicz five days after taking office on 16 December 1922. According to the Polish Constitution which went into effect in March 1922, the president was chosen by the National Assembly, that is the two houses of the Parliament. Narutowicz, a hydroelectric engineer who lived in Switzerland since 1887, and who became a Swiss citizen in 1895, only returned to Poland in 1920. He was a candidate of the Polish Peasant Party, and elected with the eventual support of the left wing, the center and the National Minorities Bloc. Because he was elected with the votes of the minority deputies, and because he was an atheist, he was an unacceptable choice for the staunchly conservative and Catholic National Democrats, whose

\textsuperscript{89} Tomasz Stępień \textit{Kabaret Juliana Tuwima} [Julian Tuwim’s Cabaret] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo “Śląsk,” 1989) 102.
\textsuperscript{90} Polonsky, “Why did they hate Jews Tuwim and Boy so much?,” 194.
candidate was defeated. His atheism, along with his socialist tendencies, also caused the conservative clergy to vocally oppose his election. Narutowicz’s opponents were driven to fury, organized mass protests and had their supporters fling mud at the presidential automobile. On his fifth day in office, while attending an art exhibit in Warsaw’s Zachęta Gallery, he was shot and killed by Niewiadomski who immediately surrendered himself to the police, was eventually executed, and became a martyr of the nationalist circles.91

Tuwim was despised by the right for his Jewish heritage and writings, but the feelings were mutual: he was disgusted by their nationalistic politics which led to the president’s death. In his poem, Pogrzeb prezydenta Narutowicza [Funeral of President Narutowicz], written and published immediately after the assassination, Tuwim scathingly accuses the right of hypocrisy and violence which led to the assassination:92 “You had a cross on your chest, and a Browning in your pocket, / [You] were allied with God, and in a pact with a murderer, / You, in frozen giggle, pale, scared, / Come, fools, to the window - and look! And look!”93 Specifically referring to the National Democrats’ strong religious rhetoric, Tuwim accuses the party of being responsible for the president’s death and wants them to face the crime. Using the symbolical power of the funeral procession advancing through the streets of Warsaw, Tuwim calls the National Democrats to the windows, forcing them to face the consequences of their politics and to be displayed to the capital’s citizens. Within four years of regaining independence following World War I, the rhetoric of the National Democrats, filled with hatred towards non-Catholics and

91 Lukowski and Zawadzki, A Concise History of Poland, 236.
92 My translations are literal and do not keep the rhyme or rhythm of the poems. They are faithful translations but are not meant to be artistic renditions as I would not be able to do justice to Tuwim’s ability to play with language.
“non-Poles,” led to the tragedy, and Tuwim wanted to force the right-wing to realize the same truths.

Tuwim expanded the image of the streets of Warsaw, that is, the real Warsaw, as equally repulsed by their politics in the following stanza: “Pierced by the funeral through its heart, like His breast with bullets, let the capital see / Your faces, criminals - and let it greet you / with a terrible cry of silence, a mourning street.”94 Using strong imagery, Tuwim portrayed the whole of the right as criminals and wanted the death, symbolized by the silence, to speak clearly of the repulsion he felt.

The president’s death led the National Democrats to concede the election of the next president, Stanisław Wojciechowski. For a time, they also toned down their rhetoric. This self-imposed constraint did not last long however, and by 1926 Tuwim was accused of bolshevism, the spread of obscenities, having defeatist tendencies and no respect for traditional sanctities, private property, the family, the army, maidenly virtue; he was even named “the Jewish Pornographer.”95 Doubtless, the critics could not come to terms with the fact that his ability with the pen was far superior to theirs. He resorted to satire to mock their accusations.

In Mój Dzionek (My Day) published in 1926, Tuwim recounts his day, at least as seen by Endecja: “As soon as the sun strikes / the window with golden rays, / I wake up charming and refreshed / with an anti-state shout. I immerse myself up to my ears / in a nice moral rot / And most cordially insult / God, humanity, fatherland.”96 Tuwim’s pseudo-biographical poem answers the critics that accuse him of spread of obscenities by giving them the absurd description of him that they espoused.

94 Julian Tuwim, “Pogrzeb prezydenta Narutowicza,” 19.
The creation of his portrait continues: “I communize for an hour, / Poison the soul, and later / either slander a bit, / or, if it is a holiday, I blaspheme.” The senselessness of these actions, especially ensuring he blasphemes on Sundays and holidays, underlies the real if absurd vision of the right-wing, steeped in traditions of superstitious Catholicism, who saw enemies undermining the state’s moral health. This will be discussed in more detail when discussing the poem *Demon*, below. Yet the stress with which some clergy and right-wing proponents placed on this rhetoric display the gulf between Tuwim’s and the right wing’s views of “Polishness.”

To establish the connection to his Jewish roots and Russian connections, Tuwim continues: “Sometimes my uncle visits, / Pleasant, messy old man, / We read together, / The Talmud, the Shulchan Aruch. / With the uncle, the bearded Jew, Soviets emissary, / We sing the *First Brigade*97 / We go to cabarets. / From officer friends / I coax out during dinner / Some little staff secret / Or mobilization plan.”98 Tuwim’s crimes at this point become grave. He is no longer just a moral threat to the nation, but a threat to national security; collaborating with the Soviets and wheedling state secrets out of army staff makes Tuwim a traitor, the punishment for which was death. The critic Jerzy Pierkiewicz did indeed call for Tuwim to be tried for treason.99

However, Tuwim was not yet done with all of his treacheries: “Often I have special missions / In Druskieniki or Kielce, / and I recruit rebels / To Strzelce, on orders from Moscow…. / I make copies / of beautiful green dollars, / Communist papers / Pornographic brochures.”100

He closes the poem with a “confession” that his heart is heavy and hopes one of his fellow countrymen will help him: “Let this burden be shared / By one of my countrymen / My

97 *Pierwsza Brygada* (*The First Brigade*) was a song sung by Piłsudski’s Legionnaires during World War I which emphasized the sacrifice and daring of the soldiers. It became one of the best known songs about Polish fight for independence. Presumably Tuwim and his uncle would have been supposed to be singing it with contempt.


99 Polonsky, *Why did they Hate Tuwim and Boy so Much?*, 199.

100 Stradnicki, *Jarmark Rymów*, 85.
God, how many there are / Stupid Endek scribblers!”

Tuwim created this political autoportrait out of articles from right-wing papers and it highlighted the absurdities of their accusations. The satire also shows *ad hominem* nature of attacks; they were focused on his Jewish background and the perception of Judeobolshevism - an antisemitic conspiracy theory which alleged that the Jews were leaders of communism, were responsible for Russian Revolution and held power over the Soviet Union. Tuwim attempted to humiliate the beliefs of the right wing in these poems, but also demarcated his own position from theirs; he did not cut ties with his “Polishness,” but distinguished it from the ideas the right wing espoused.

Tuwim’s satire of the political platform of Endecja does not limit itself to his person and he attacks their paranoia of Judeobolshevism. Once again, the accusation has national undercurrents as it is meant to cut any ties some Jews might have to their Polish selves. In the poem *Demon*, he recounts and “admits” it is the Jews (the demons), that pull the strings of the national politics: “When Warsaw slumbers quietly / Under the deaf night’s shroud, / When darkness falls on the earth / and ghosts walk around town/ Wrapped in black darkness / Walking out of his hole / With a silent cackle, secret step / is Aszkemason Szymonazy.”

Tuwim resorted to the tropes of Jewish appearance and attitude used by the Endecja; working under cover of darkness, walking with a silent, secretive step. He used the stereotypes to deconstruct and delegitimize the absurdity of the image. The “demon’s” name itself could hardly be more Jewish yet it was not picked by accident, Tuwim wrote this poem about Szymon Aszkkenazy, a

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Polish historian of Jewish origin. The name also refers to another important stereotype; the supposed masonic connection of the Jews.

The connection between the nationalist Catholic Church in Poland in the interwar years and the fear of Freemasonry and Judaism went hand in hand. Following the Polish-Soviet War, with an expected, if excessive, fervor, Cardinal Kakowski, in an interview with an Italian newspaper stressed that despite the strength of the country’s Catholicism: “You must not, however, suppose that we have not also our difficulties. Infidelity and Freemasonry have spread their contagion amongst us, as elsewhere. Judaism constitutes with us a danger more serious than elsewhere.” Years of suppression and foreign rule created conditions in which the Catholic Church in Poland felt defensive, yet the ease with which the clergy connected the abstract with the concrete to point to enemies — all the more easy to spot if all three are represented by the same person — was made possible by the deep internal resentment, fear and paranoia already found in wide swaths of the population.

Thus,Demon presents the nightmare of the right: a masonic Jew. The image is not yet complete however. Aszkemason still lacks a Communist connection and an anti-Polish political agenda. His motives are quickly revealed when he approaches the Belvedere, the presidential palace, and greets Józef Piłsudski, the Marshal of Poland: “Well Piłsudski, how are you?”

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104 Born in 1865 and earning his doctorate in law from Warsaw University and doctorate in history from Göttingen, Aszkenazy’s historical writings focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth century Polish history. He was one of the first to cite the partitions as responsible for the creation of the idea of the modern Polish nation. As a professor at the University of Lwów, focusing on studying political and diplomatic history in its international contexts, he gathered many students and his tutelage led to a creation of the Aszkenazy school which competed with the Kraków school. After World War I, he was Poland’s representative in the League of Nations with Piłsudski’s backing and was probably closest to the Marshall in terms of political outlook, yet he never joined any political party. When the Lanckorona Pact was signed by the centrist Piast and right-wing parties which sought stronger emphasis on polonization, he stepped out of politics and focused on his academic career. Hanna Węgrzynek: “Askenazy Szymon” in Żydzi Polscy. Historie niezwykłe. (Warszawa: Demart, 2010), 16.

Rod staratsia106 answers the Marshal…. / Now take a paper / And write down nominations /
And write down changes in the military… / ‘Give all Jews a promotion / And degrade the
Goyss…’”107 There are a few things that stand out from this passage. First, published in
September of 1926, the poem comes only a few months after the May Coup when Piłsudski
(somewhat reluctantly) became the de facto leader of the country. As a vocal opponent of
Endecja, the party did not harbor much sympathy for the man. Piłsudski’s Russian greeting in the
passage shows his supposed connection to the Soviet government which pulls the strings of
Polish politics. Finally, Piłsudski as a Minister of Military Affairs, indeed had much power over
the matters of nominations.

The satirical portrait slowly starts to resemble the Endecja’s fears, Jews, Masons,
Communists control Piłsudski, who in fact has next to no power: “And the Marshal listens
trembling / Beads of sweat roll down his forehead, / He writes down, what the Master dictates /
And every so often cries ‘orrrder!’ / Joy in the Kremlin! Berlin roars! Triumph in the lodges!
Amphibians hiss!”108 With these final details in place, all the anti-Polish demons are unleashed
as the maelstrom picks up speed in this “Warsaw black mass.” Tuwim shows rabbis dancing with
devils, freemasons congratulating each other, and on top of all of this: “Lies, roaring with the
‘voice of truth,’ / The Freemason Aszkemason.” The imagery becomes fantastical, reminiscent
of the Ball at the Opera and Wyspiański’s Wedding. Yet it symbolizes the paranoia and the
absurdity of the beliefs of Jewish conspiracies and potential world domination which seemed
perpetually imminent yet never quite occurred.

106 Transliteration of the Russian greeting род стараться meaning glad to [see you].
107 Stradnicki, Jarmark Rymów, 88. Tuwim uses the diminutive żydek, meaning “little Jew,” a rather
pejorative term favored by those at whom the satire is directed.
108 Stradnicki, Jarmark Rymów, 89.
In the end, demons do not win; they are held back by one man: “And for this sin - the poor fatherland / Divine fire would burn / If it were not protected / by the Angel Zygmunt Wasilewski.” Wasilewski was a member of the Endecja and the chief editor of the right wing papers “Warsaw Gazette” and “National Thought.” Pointing to the “angel” was used as a _coup de grâce_ to fully and irrevocably, at least in Tuwim’s view, discredit the views of the right wing. As an editor of two influential papers, Wasilewski’s views were important in determining what was printed, thus becoming an angel of the right. In this, the satire is complete; the absurdity of Endecja’s vision of the Jews, the Freemasons, the Communists embodying one person, the “demon” that was Aszkemason, ordering Piłsudski and being responsible for the downfall of the country, were the Endecja not there to stop him.

The two satirical works quoted here show Tuwim’s dislike and polemics with Endecja, yet his political and social outlook was not quite so straight-forward and he polemicized with people of differing political ideologies. In 1937, Tuwim illegally published a poem I will refer to as _Wiersz_, in which he attacked certain persons and social groups with invectives. The vulgarity in the poem serves to emphasize the accusations and is used to great effect as Tuwim ends each stanza with “you can all kiss my ass.” In this way, Tuwim attacks “wooers of Big Bertha (abszyfikanci grubej Berty), Warsaw opportunists and braggarts (bubki, żygolaki, lit. dandies and gigolos), the _nouveau riche_ (“And you fortunate bastard, perfumed little shit, / That carries the splendor and spleen of London, / in your forbidden mug, / And you, who now lives in a palace, but used to shit in an outhouse, You, grazed on IKC [Kraków daily newspaper], / You

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109 Stradnicki, Jarmark Rymów, 89.
Tuwim did not align himself with those that attack the right wing if they also espoused beliefs with which he disagreed. He was therefore forging a separate identity not easily categorized by the more all-encompassing labels.

Fascists, Zionists, pan-Slavists, nationalists are also not spared in his verse:

“And you Aryan experts, / Offspring of German spirit / (When I check your blood and mine, / Believe me it’ll be the same liquid) / ... / You Palestinian Zionists, / candidates for the Kibbutz, who pour tenderly, / Your Orthodox moronic tears / ... / And you pan Slavic dreamers, / Collected in a colorful troupe, / Led by any mystical fool. / You can all kiss my ass.”

The condemnation of any and all political extremes, be they fascist or Zionists, show Tuwim’s overall dislike for political ideologues as opposed to pacifist tendency and desire for cohabitation. His pacifism can be seen in his attack on “wooers of Big Bertha,” war veterans, at least some of whom longed for the prewar monarchical system which eventually gave the rise fascist parties of the interwar years.

Tuwim did not leave the diatribes against him go unanswered. His superior talent with the pen allowed him to effectively answer his critics by both mockingly summing up their arguments in My Day and Demon, or as a scathing accusation of the consequence of their political ideologies in Pogrzeb prezydenta Narutowicza [Funeral of President Narutowicz]. Thus, he clearly demarcated the visions of the Endecja and separated himself from them. To construct his identity, as separate from the political world of Endecja, we turn to his Kwiaty Polskie (Polish Flowers) and My, Żydzi Polscy [We, the Polish Jews].

111 Tomasz Stępień. “’Paru Słowek igraszką unieśmiertelnić wroga’ - o pamfletach Juliana Tuwima” [“To immortalize the enemy with a few trifling words’ - about the pamphlets of Julian Tuwim”] Acta Universitatis Lodziensis Folia Litteraria Polonica 4, no. 26, (2014).
112 Tuwim, Wiersz, w którym autor grzecznie, ale stanowczo uprasza liczne zastępy bliżnich, aby go w dupę pocałowali.
Tuwim started writing *Kwiaty Polskie* in 1940 while in Brazil, continued the poem while living in New York and did not finish it until his return to Poland after the war where it was first published in 1949 although the author continued revising it until the time of his death in 1953. It is not clear which parts were written when, however, as we will see, there are references in the work to his time in Brazil. The work refers to his Poland and his relation to it. Yet a clipping from a *New York Times* article, found with the manuscript of the work reported the story of a Polish-Jewish socialist who committed suicide in the wake of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, thus showing that the suffering of the Jews deeply affected him. *Kwiaty Polskie* is not an idealized work which Tuwim used to escape reality. Rather, he used it precisely to deal with the question of his Polishness and Jewishness.\(^\text{113}\)

*Kwiaty Polskie* is a narrative poem about a gardener, Ignacy Dziewierski, whose daughter married a Tsarist officer who quells a workers’ strike during the events of 1905 but is also killed by a worker. The daughter dies soon after in labor, and Dziewierski adopts his granddaughter. He attempts but fails to raise her in the Polish patriotic tradition as she idealizes her Tsarist father. The work is frequently interspersed with reminiscences and commentary by Tuwim, relating to current events like his emigration and the Holocaust. The poem connects the past with all its characters to World War II and the suffering of the Jews (not only Polish Jews) and the author’s own family. It seeks an identity which condemns the nationalist right wing rhetoric, is proud of its Polish Jewish past, and prefers a “defeated” nation to a fascist one.

The many autobiographical digressions serve to create a sense of nostalgia and a wish to recapture a lost past. The memories are not necessarily happy ones, or at least not idealized; Tuwim remembered the squalor of his hometown and the hardships its residents face. Sudden

\(^{113}\) Madeline G. Levine, Julian Tuwim: “We, the Polish Jews…” *The Polish Review* 17, no. 4 (Autumn, 1972), 82.
temporal shifts also abound in the work. Recalling an orchard with its poor Jewish gardener, Tuwim remarks:

“I pass the orchard, the human dump, / And I walk on, sullen youth, / Thinking of the industrial Łódź, / About the kindled Łódź misery…. Porters bent most cruelly / Apoplectically violet, / Carry, dull and severe, / the humps of heavy crates. When they stop, / They rest, lean against the wall, / From their faces hot, corrosive drops / of sweat flow unto their breast… / And I, breathless, in streams of sweat, / On the morning of December 10 / In Brazil, in the stuffy hell in year / One thousand and forty, / I bend under the stones / of a terrified heart / When tons and tonnes of bombs / Fall on London when I write this / And the sirens of Jericho’s trumpets / Howl threateningly calling for heaven’s revenge - / And all the bursting bombs / Fall on my little Irena, / Who now walks on a Inowłódz’s path / Among grain and gathers cornflower / I run breathless around Otwock / Searching for my poor screaming Mother, / To soothe her, / That Irena is alive, gathers cornflower - - / And then under the bomb’s steel threshing / Falling on the Dorset-House in London, / The sirens of Łódź’s factories moan, / That my Irena, Irena is dying! / Oh how they wail! oh how they howl! / Oh, what heat in Rio this morning! / And what stuffiness in the black piston, / of the day 15 July, the year / One thousand and twelve, / When the devil tosses dust, / down the throats of East and Stone Streets.”\(^{114}\)

The action of the passage alternates between at least two different time periods and four different locations. It is not unusual for a narrative poem to be filled with digressions and the lyrical content can take precedence over the plot, so the quote deserves unpacking.

The passage begins with the author strolling down the streets of Łódź before the outbreak of the war. He sees the hard-working laborers with whom he establishes a link through his own exhaustion. Yet he, in turn, links his exhaustion and the weight on his chest to the fate of the civilians dying in the streets of London during the German bombings and the fate of his mother Adela, and his sister Irena who were still in Poland. The reference to the biblical passage in which the Jews conquer Jericho from the Canaanites establishes the German crimes which will be punished through divine revenge. Because he was in Brazil at the time he wrote this passage, guilt-ridden in his safety, he felt the weight of the Jewish suffering on his own chest. In this, he starts to embody the nation and takes on a mystical significance reminiscent of the Romantic heroes that did the same a century earlier.

Tuwim uses Kiwaty Polskie to establish his right to write about Poland: “My country is my home [English in original] My country / is my home. For my part / I received a Polish home. That is - my homeland, / All others are hotels.” Tuwim firmly identifies himself with Poland, yet there is no indication whether Poland is a “good” home or not. Rather, it simply is a home, free of mystical power and not better or worse than other homes. In itself, this “Polishness” is not inherently a source of pride. He goes on to discuss the question of the significance of speaking for one’s country which he compares to an old drawer; once something is put in a drawer, you do not throw it out, no matter how insignificant it might be because

“[W]ith each you spent a bit of life / And you exist, without knowing, with all that junk / As is the drawer, so is the country: / You don’t throw anything out… / Superstition,

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115 Incidentally, Tuwim’s mother was killed in Otwock in August 1942 but his sister survived the war. Tuwim wrote a poem about Adela’s death entitled “Mother” which in its own turn gives his ideas about national divisions of Poles and Jews: “There is in a Łódź cemetery, / In the Jewish cemetery, / A Polish grave of my mother, / My Jewish mother. / Grave of my Mother Poland, / My Mother Jewess.” Julian Tuwim. "Matka” [“Mother”], in Wiersze 1 [Poems 1] edited by Alina Kowalczykowa. (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1986), 327.

116 Tuwim, Kwiaty Polskie, 85.
you say? Yes, superstition… / Wise men call it - myth. / And from this daily mythology /

Of sudden, peripheral, occurrences, revelations, / From the tone, from line, or from melody / In a moment a country will grow… It’s her - your own, living.”

Thus Poland as a homeland requires that all those that have a part in its creation are represented and have a part to play. The mythology of a nation needs to include all of those parts, thus Polish Jews are not separate from non-Jewish Poles in their Polishness because they all create it.

Tuwim did not deny that your country, your identity, is a mythological construct. Yet he denied that anything could be discarded. In other words, Jews, who lived for centuries in Poland, were part of the Polish past, no matter what others might wish. Those others, he goes on to say, look for “glory” and “victory,” thus: “You will drag Poland still, / through ‘trails’ ‘missions’ ‘destinies?’ / … / You will with your pen lead the nation / Through historic trails, / And it is hungry, cold.”

Tuwim critiques the tendency to view idealized heroism which brought a sense of an inflated pride despite the reality of people starving and dying for that ideal of a nation. Tuwim saw it as leading to: “faith in greatness! If he found / Such unit - of course / Pole, Piast, dear sir - And threw off the unfaithful ballast, / Then, you’d see, what a tough, disciplined nation can do, / Ready, compact, and mighty!”

The “unfaithful ballast,” in this vision of nationalist glory, are the Jews, which prevent the Piasts, the real Poles, to reach the heights of glory they deserve, an eerie parallel to Nazi propaganda.

Tuwim continued to assert that he knew such “winning nations” and their leaders, by which he meant the Germans: “I prefer - defeat, / rather than such a master in Poland / Who would introduce Pagan order / That motorized antichrist / And a government of brooding

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117 Tuwim, Kwiaty Polskie, 86.
118 Tuwim, Kwiaty Polskie, 87.
119 Tuwim, Kwiaty Polskie, 89.
morons.” Tuwim accused those who harbored ideas of greatness of being similar to the Nazis. Thus, it is not only the Germans who are responsible for what happened during World War II, but also the nationalists who wanted to rid Poland of her Jews. At this point, Tuwim would perhaps be expected to cut his ties to Poland and say that he wants no connection to the country and its “Poles.” Yet he does not. He does not do it because he sees an alternative path for Polish nationality, one he considers right, a path which includes Polish Jews and is not drawn across ethno-religious lines.

Tuwim’s *My, Żydzi Polscy* (*We, the Polish Jews*), is a manifesto, a lament of one of the leading Polish Jews, an outcry of pain about the Jewish suffering in the Holocaust. Composed, most likely, around April 1944, the first anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising, at a time when Tuwim lived in New York City, it is a strong condemnation of home-grown and foreign fascism as well as an acclamation of his identity, both Polish and Jewish. It was immediately translated into English, Hebrew and Russian and circulated among émigré circles and the native populations in the United States, United Kingdom and Russia. Yet, for some time after the war it was not available to the wider public; it was published in Poland in 1947 in an anthology of Holocaust writings, yet it was not included in *Dzieła* [*Works*], a five-volume set of Tuwim’s prose, published in 1964.

However, during the time of its writing, the manifesto introduced the suffering of Polish Jews to a wide audience and resonated among Polish Jews, a fact perhaps best illustrated in an anecdote by Stanisław Wygodzki, a Polish Jewish poet who after surviving Dachau, was treated for tuberculosis in a Munich hospital in 1945:

“A small, sickly boy from Ozorków arrived in our hospital ... This fifteen year old boy, having traveled through numerous countries, other than a small bundle of clothes,”

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120 Tuwim, *Kwiaty Polskie*, 89.
only possessed a wrinkled piece of typewritten paper. It was a copy of the famous “letter” by Tuwim, sent from New York to Poland in 1944. The painful letter reopened old wounds, it attacked fascism, cruelty, thoughtlessness.”

The letter Wygodzki mentioned was We, the Polish Jews, and for the boy who suffered so much in the war, it was his: “certificate, his identity card. The boy took part in the same tragedy and had the same right to those same words which had never before been spoken in Polish.” Wygodzki’s testimony shows that the work resonated with Polish Jews at the end of the war and gave, at least some, a sense of identity and belonging cruelly attacked in the preceding years.

In the opening of We, the Polish Jews, Tuwim separates himself from ideas of right-wing nationalism and differentiates between an innate nationality, one a person is born with, and instead opts for an understanding of an acquired or chosen nationality one can grow into through upbringing, and by being steeped in its language and culture. He also strongly affirms a right to choice. He opens:

“.... And immediately I can hear the question: “What do you mean - WE?” The question, I grant you, is natural enough. Jews to whom I am wont to explain that I am a Pole have asked it. So will the Poles to the overwhelming majority of whom I am and shall remain a Jew. Here is my answer to both. I am a Pole because I want to be.”

The answer Tuwim gives to the question is a conundrum to translators. In this translation, it is “because I want to be,” whereas the Polish phrase, “bo mi się tak podoba,” implies a certain

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122 Julian Tuwim, My, Żydzi Polscy... We, The Polish Jews.... (Warszawa: Amerykańsko-Polsko-Izraelska Fundacja “Shalom,” 1993), 41.
123 The translation used in this volume was done by Mrs. R. Langer, first published in Free Press, New York, July, 1944. I use this translation because I think it is a faithful reconstruction of its Polish predecessor, there are only a couple of cases in which I make distinctions, which are noted.
disdain, as if the author did not think he should have to answer that question. The phrase could perhaps be translated as “because I feel like it.”

For Tuwim, a question of nationality is a private manner, something he makes clear in the very next sentence: “[I]t’s nobody’s business but my own. I certainly have not the slightest intention of rendering account, explaining, or justifying to anyone.”

Yet nationality, and blood, were questioned by the Poles as much as by the Germans, by the latter to the point of a wide scale extermination campaign. So what would a writer do, but write the answer.

Tuwim, in the manifesto, explains he is a Pole “for most simple, almost primitive reasons.” He is a Pole because he was born in Poland, lived there, and he wants to return there from exile, “no matter what paradise might be offered.” He was a Pole because his mother taught him Polish songs and rhymes, because it was in the Polish language that poetry first burst forth from him. Yet there are more abstract, even mystical reasons:

“A Pole - because the birch and the willow are closer to my heart than palms and citrus trees, and Mickiewicz and Chopin dearer than Shakespeare and Beethoven…

A Pole, because my hatred of Polish Fascists is greater than my hatred of Fascists of other nationalities…. A Pole - because I feel like it.”

Thus, “Polishness” is a matter of culture; steeped in Polish language and finding in it expression of creativity, as well as locating mysticism in poetry, music, and even trees (important in themselves to Polish poetry), Tuwim saw himself as a Pole. The identity thus predated the political entity which was the Polish state. Of course, this could not be the same “Pole” that the National Democrats defined, for them a Pole could not be Jewish. Yet at this point Tuwim did not deny his Jewish past.

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124 Tuwim, My Żydzi Polscy, 41.
125 Tuwim, My Żydzi Polscy, 41-42.
The second section of the manifesto describes the importance of blood, specifically blood of Jews, yet not in racial terms, quite the contrary:

“There are two bloods, that inside of veins, and that which spurts from them. The first is the sap of the body, and as such comes under the realm of physiologists. Whoever attributes to this blood any other than biological characteristics and powers will in consequence, as we have seen, turn towns into smoking ruins, will slaughter millions of people, and at last, as we shall yet see, bring carnage upon his own kin.”

For Tuwim, there is no overlap between “blood” as seen by the Nazi racial philosophy, and the “blood” spilled because of that philosophy. The latter takes on mystical powers outside of the veins, precisely because of the violence that had been done to it:

“[t]he other kind of blood is the same blood but spilled by this gang-leader of international Fascism to testify to the triumph of his gore over mine, the blood of millions of murdered innocents, a blood not hidden in arteries but revealed to the world... the blood of Jews (not Jewish blood, mind you).”

The translation once again poses a problem. Tuwim differentiates between the words: krew and jucha. They both mean blood and the instance in which jucha is used is translated as “gore.” In Polish, at least at the time the poem was written, jucha is generally used to refer to animal blood. Thus, when Tuwim writes that Hitler wants to prove his own blood is superior to the Jews, Tuwim mocks the statement by implying what he asserts previously, that blood is not a substance infused with mystical qualities, but merely a physiological phenomena no different in animals and humans.

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126 Tuwim, *My Żydzi Polscy*, 42.
127 Tuwim, *My Żydzi Polscy*, 42.
Blood, while flowing in the veins is unimportant; it pumps life but is not mystical. It is however infused with mystical power because of its spillage; the streams of blood flowing create a “NEW JORDAN [from which] I BEG TO RECEIVE THE BAPTISM OF BAPTISMS; THE BLOODY, BURNING, MARTYRED BROTHERHOOD OF JEWS.” ¹²⁸

Tuwim implied that Polishness, at least his own, was a matter of upbringing in Polish culture with the Polish language. Yet he did not deny his Jewish background. Furthermore, Tuwim believed that the martyrdom of the Jewish nation would lead to the creation of the the Order of the Yellow Star, in reference to the star of David worn by Jews in the territories occupied by the Nazis, and the Cross of the Ghetto, (a curious mixture of religious symbolism). The two orders would be “bestowed upon the bravest among Polish officers and soldiers.” ¹²⁹ The Jewish military inaptitude was part of the Polish folklore, referred to in this work by quoting a Polish rhyme: “‘Jonah, go to war!’ [Jojnie, idź na wojnę!] He did, Gentlemen, and laid down his life for Poland.” ¹³⁰ Since the Jews fought for Poland in every uprising since Kościuszko’s in 1794, the accusation of Jewish military inaptitude would most certainly have been a painful one. Thus, the creation of these two orders would denote the heroism and daring of the sacrifice Jews paid to the Polish soil from Kościuszko until the Warsaw Ghetto and the Holocaust.

Conclusion

Nationality is not just a shared experience in which a member has to go through a period of initiation before acceptance by the group and entry into the cohort. Standards are held high for outsiders or new members from groups which were, until then, considered “foreign” or “alien.” Members of the same group show incredible diversity, e.g., in the Polish case, Piłsudski and

¹²⁸ Capitals in original, Tuwim, My Żydzi Polscy, 42.
¹²⁹ Tuwim, My Żydzi Polscy, 43.
¹³⁰ Tuwim, My Żydzi Polscy, 44.
Dmowski. No one will deny either of them their Polishness (even if Piłsudski could be considered a Polonized-Lithuanian), yet how different their ideas were! Piłsudski put a lot of weight on his Lithuanian background and saw it as an inseparable part of his identity. What it meant to him is, of course, very different than what it means to Lithuanians today. Dmowski’s nationalism defined itself in exclusionary terms, Piłsudski’s in romantic ideals. The first is a political nationalist, the second cultural.

I link Mickiewicz’s idea of Polish nationality, and the lives of Tuwim and Edelman, who, at least in part embodied those ideas a century later. Edelman exemplifies a continuation of a military tradition that stretches back, on a large scale at least, to the Kościuszko Uprising, a time before the racial ideas of ethno-centric nationality were invented. Tuwim symbolizes poetry which is part of the same tradition as Mickiewicz.

Both Edelman and Tuwim experienced more than their fair share of antisemitism, not just before the war, and both had opportunities to emigrate. Both spent time abroad, Tuwim during the war and Edelman after, however, neither remained in emigration. The popular politics of the interwar period, as well as widespread sentiment of antisemitism created difficult conditions to live, both physically and psychologically. Thus, when Edelman and Tuwim refer to Polish nationality, they separate themselves from the notion of “political nationalism.” I call it political because it refers to the idea of a nation-state which is not pluralistic and has little place for Poles who are Jews.

Edelman and Tuwim found their identity in what I refer to as “cultural nationalism,” which harkens to cultural traditions of interconnected lives in a similar geographic space that predate the modern Polish state. These traditions were different for Tuwim and Edelman yet they fit in the idea of homeliness (swojskość) that Hertz and Mickiewicz advocated. Tuwim, speaking
and creating in Polish, represented the tradition of Mickiewicz who lived and wrote before the racial and ethnic ideas of nationality took root. Thus, by referring to this older tradition, Tuwim did not “assimilate” into the Polish nation any more than the peasants who only gained their national consciousness in the last third of the nineteenth century. Rather, he created the nationality in which he is an equal member, not a newly adopted neophyte.

Edelman, as a Bundist, hoped for a pluralist Poland in which the Jews, as well as other national minorities could pursue cultural autonomy. It is a different identity than that of Tuwim’s, yet in a pluralistic vision of Mickiewicz’s “homeliness,” it is not surprising that Edelman used the adjective “Polish” when referring to his identity.

What I argue for is a different trajectory of origins of national identity. When Edelman said fascism won, he meant that hatred, passivity and indifference about crimes against human dignity are still present in the world. Yet he might as well have meant that fascism won because the divisions they championed survived and are accepted as absolute. For Tuwim, to be Polish was not in any way an innate honor. There is no cosmological hierarchy which ranks nationalities; Poles, Jews, Germans, French, Russians, etc. It is something we feel, but without that fascistic vision of superiority (this can be seen in We the Polish Jews when Jewishness was in his blood which represented his past, but there were no metaphysical virtues associated with it). It was the same for Mickiewicz who did not see “Polishness” as an ethno-religious category, but rather a symbiotic union of the Piast and the Jew. Tuwim saw it in that way in writings, and so did Edelman in his Bund upbringing and activities. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was part of that same tradition. To call them assimilated uses the political nationalism's approach to history, whereas Mickiewicz’s “older brother, younger brother” dichotomy puts them on an equal footing where neither assimilates, rather, they are united in equality. For Moshe Prywes, this approach
explains why he did not want to be associated with Poles (because of political nationalism), but he felt Wojtyła’s papacy was also his success because they were “Polish” (in Mickiewicz’s terms) brothers.
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