https://doi.org/10.18778/2299-7458.13.16

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Czytanie Literatury
Łódzkie Studia Literaturoznawcze
13/2024
ISSN 2299–7458
e-ISSN 2449–8386

"As Though It Were A Sacred Relic": The Troubled Holocaust Poetry of Julian Tuwim

SUMMARY

The Polish-Jewish poet Julian Tuwim (1894–1953) was among the most widely read – and denounced! – writers of interwar Poland. Described as 'a virtuoso of language' in his beloved Polish mother tongue, Tuwim's literary range was remarkable and varied. Most introspectively, his poetry expressed a simultaneous embrace and ambivalence, towards the dual identities he fiercely proclaimed: both Polish and Jewish. His poetry combined, stretched and challenged identities in unprecedented ways. This writing earned Tuwim a wide audience, along with many critics. Living in exile during the Second World War, Tuwim was among the first major European literary figures to write Holocaust poetry as genocide was being perpetrated. His searing Holocaust poems convey a longing for Poland, for a better Poland, and a solidarity of suffering with his brethren Jews. To the end, Julian Tuwim was a powerful, troubled Polish-Jewish literary voice. He was ever hunting for the words that could change his world and ours.

Keywords
Julian Tuwim, Polish-Jewish poetry, Holocaust poetry, poetry, identity, hybridity

Received: 3.06.2024; verified: 24.07.2024. Accepted: 30.08.2024

"Today," teenager Mary Berg recorded in her Warsaw Ghetto diary on February 22nd 1942, "we had an impassioned debate on poetry at our school." The source of controversy was the arrival, through clandestine channels, of poetry by the Polish-Jewish writer Julian Tuwim, all the way from his escaped haven in New York. "As though it were a sacred relic," Mary Berg described how excitedly classmates pressed close together to read the work "by the poet whom we had always worshiped…"[1] As we will see, Berg's diary entry would go on to convey the combination of delight, dismay and discord unleashed by the poem. Not for the first or last time, Tuwim's poetry provoked intense, conflicting response from readers. He could not help himself.

Julian Tuwim (1894–1953) was the first major Jewish European literary figure to write Holocaust poetry as genocide was being perpetrated, to be read by Jewry's impending victims and remnants. Poland's leading poet of the interwar period, Tuwim escaped the country days after the German invasion, making his way across Western Europe, to Rio de Janeiro and then to New York. From a safe distance, Tuwim wrote two searing wartime works: *Polish Flowers*, a nine-thousand-line epic poem written in the early years of war, and then *We, Polish Jews*, a lengthy prose-poem outcry written on the first anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in 1944. Both works were quickly spirited throughout the Jewish world, to imperilled ghettoes, to diasporas of escape and earlier emigration. After the war, would come his most poignant poem "Mother,"[2] conveying the inseparable Polish and Jewish identities of his mother, murdered in the Holocaust.

Tuwim's Holocaust poems, written in Polish (as all his works), were anguished laments for his homeland and people plunged into the abyss. Importantly, for Tuwim, homeland and ancestry pointed in different directions. Poland was the birthplace he would never forsake, while Jews were the people whose kinship he forever proclaimed. In a time of murderous monolithic identity attachment, Julian Tuwim asserted a postmodern-style hybridity embracing two often-conflicting identities: Polish and Jewish.[3] To further complicate matters, Tuwim could also be scathing in his criticism of both Poles and Jews. He combined, stretched and challenged identities in unprecedented ways. His life and writing tested both the possibilities and impossibilities of Polish-Jewish relations at the time.

In turn, Tuwim's life and writing were defined by the cataclysmic forces of his time and place: pogroms, World War I, the post-war restoration of Polish independence, modernism, antisemitism, fascism, World War II

[1] Mary Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg: Growing Up in the Warsaw Ghetto* (London: Oneworld, 2007), 127.

[2] Stylistically, short poems are identified in quotations, while long extended poems are cited in italics.

[3] In Poland's unique historical context, one could equally describe Tuwim's attachment to multiple identities as pre-modern. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 16th and 17th centuries was a sprawling multi-ethnic federation uniting peoples of diverse ancestries including Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, German, Jewish and more. Hybrid identities arose naturally in such a setting, most famously personified by Adam Mickiewicz's embrace of multiple identifies including Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian, alongside his philosemitic outlook, perhaps derived from his speculated own Jewish Frankist ancestry. Modernist nationalism everywhere would demand a singular identity attachment.

and Holocaust, followed by Communism in Poland and the creation of the State of Israel. Tuwim strove to express the meaning of it all through his poetry. In his 1926 poem "The Word and the Flesh", the poet conveyed his life's aspiration and mission:

> O Lord, grant me today My daily word!
>
> I have no occupation:
> I'm only a hunter of words,
> Watchful and attentive,
> I've gone to hunt into the world.[4]

"Only a hunter of words," Julian Tuwim devoted his life to naming the forces and feelings roiling his troubled homeland and people. As we will see, Polish Jewry's catastrophic twentieth century rendered Julian Tuwim both hunter and prey.

This article has several purposes. It presents and analyses the remarkable Holocaust poetry of Julian Tuwim, described by the eminent Yiddish scholar Chone Shmeruk as "a unique document of Holocaust survivors."[5] Tuwim's Holocaust poetry is situated in the broader context of both Polish Jewish culture, and the poet's own provocative identity stance.

Additionally, this article suggests that Tuwim is a writer for our times as well. This major 20th century Jewish poet is now largely erased from Jewish cultural consciousness, his attachment to Polishness perhaps being a disconnect. As East European Jewry's foremost historian Antony Polonsky notes: "Tuwim's poetry is almost unknown in the Jewish world… He deserves to be better known."[6] Meanwhile, in his beloved Poland, Tuwim has been de-fanged: largely remembered not for challenging narrow ethnic nationalism, but for his charming children's and cabaret verse. There is still much to learn from the fierce words of Julian Tuwim.

The making of a Polish-Jewish poet

Little could withstand the Holocaust's onslaught on Polish Jewry. On the shortlist was Julian Tuwim's unyielding attachment to both Poland and his Jewish ancestry. Throughout his life he fiercely proclaimed both, often in the face of scathing condemnation and repudiation from both camps. Perhaps Julian Tuwim's most distinctive quality was defiance: the ability – even desire, or bondage – to hold onto irreconcilable opposites. The intensity and danger of Tuwim's dual attachments was captured in an extraordinary 1924 confessional interview which the poet provided to the Polish-language

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[4] Julian Tuwim, "Words in the Blood," trans. Antony Polonsky, Antony Polonsky "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," (American Assocation for Polish-Jewish Studies online n.d.), http://www.aapjstudies.org/index.php?id=115, 4.

[5] Julian Tuwim, *We, Polish Jews*, ed. Chone Shmeruk, trans. R. Langer (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, 1984), 7.

[6] Antony Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 50.

Jewish daily newspaper *Nasz Przegląd* (Our Review). Aged 30 at the time, Tuwim was already a literary star, a leading member of the country's foremost 'new wave' poets of post-World War I, independent Poland.

Nasz Przegląd wanted to provide its readers greater insight into the young poet's worldview, requesting he complete a questionnaire on his sense of self. Few writers could have been so revealing. Tuwim declared himself fiercely bi-cultural: "a Polonized Jew, a 'Jew Pole' and I do not care what either side may say about it,"[7] he asserted. He situated his dual identities as follows:

> In my case, however, the Jewish question is in my blood, it is a component of my psyche. It creates, as it were, a powerful wedge cutting into my world outlook, into my deepest personal experiences…
> Brought up within Polish culture, instinctively guided by the spirit alone, I would say that subconsciously I have become attached to Polishness with all my heart… The language which most precisely and also most subtly expresses what I feel is the Polish language.[8]

Tuwim certainly recognised the perils of his dual attachments: "To anti-Semites (sic) I am a Jew, and my poetry is Jewish. To nationalist Jews I am a renegade, a traitor. That's too bad!"[9] At the same time, Tuwim expressed concerns over both Polish antisemitism and Polish Jewry's self-separation from Polish culture. Chillingly, he concluded on a note of foreboding:

> For me the Jewish problem is a tragedy in which I myself am one of the anonymous actors. What the denouement of this tragedy will be and when it will occur I cannot for the time being foresee. That is all I have to say.[10]

Julian Tuwim navigated his charged times on a tightrope of dual identities, fully aware of the risks involved. Where did such a highwire act come from? Julian Tuwim was a product of his home, his hometown, his homeland, and perhaps even his face from birth.

Julian was born in 1894 to Jewish parents Izydor and Adela Tuwim in the industrial city of Łódź. Five years later his adored sister Irena – also a poet and translator – was born. In a city starkly polarised between plutocratic industrialists and an impoverished proletariat, the Tuwims occupied middle ground from Izydor's bank clerk position. The Tuwims were non-observant Jews, strongly attached to Polish culture. Polish was the household language, and the children were raised on their mother's love of Polish stories, rhyme and song. Writing decades later in the Holocaust lament *We, Polish Jews* Tuwim reached back to childhood to explain the source of his identity as a Pole: "because since infancy I have been nurtured

[7] Piotr Matywiecki, "Julian Tuwim's Jewish Theatre," trans. Antonia Lloyd Jones, in *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry,* vol. 28, 2016, 398.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

in the Polish language; because my mother taught me Polish songs and Polish rhymes; because when poetry first seized me, it was in Polish words that it burst forth; because what in my life became paramount – poetical creation – would be unthinkable in any other tongue no matter how fluent I might become in it."[11]

Tuwim's attachment to Polishness was not ethnic, religious, nationalist or even patriotic. It was essentially linguistic and cultural. In his 1936 poem "Green" he wrote of: "The Polish language, my beautiful homeland."[12] In childhood, he kept lists of words with similar sound, but different meaning. In adolescence, his prized possessions were three notebooks in which his maternal grandmother, mother and sister each recorded their favourite Polish poems.[13] As a poet, Tuwim was especially lauded for his lyrical, evocative use of the Polish language. Fellow poet Leopold Staff declared: "Tuwim's talent had a hundred colors, a hundred strings; it was always a surprise."[14] Roman Zrębowicz noted that Tuwim's linguistic mastery gave his work an entirely different sensual quality: "all of Tuwim's poetry smells as ecstatically as a forest. Each verse has its own particular aroma."[15] And Adam Gillon simply described Julian Tuwim as a "virtuoso of language."[16]

And yet Tuwim's right to the Polish language was vehemently attacked by Polish ethno-nationalist critics who denounced Jewish infiltration into Polish culture. Antisemitism rose sharply in interwar Poland, unleashing what fellow Jewish poet Maurycy Szymel called "a pogrom against Tuwim's right to Polish literature."[17] As early as 1921, the newspaper *Kurier Warszawski* charged: "Tuwim does not write Polish poetry; he only uses the Polish language. His poetry does not represent the spirit of Juliusz Slowacki, [revered 19th century Polish Romantic patriotic poet], but that of Heinrich Heine… the soul of a merchant and Jewish poet."[18] Tuwim was variously denounced as: 'foreign,' 'Judeo-communist,' 'the Jewish pornographer,' 'culturally alien to Poland' and 'littering the Polish language' [with] 'Talmudic spirit.'[19] Tuwim would stand his ground returning volley with broadsides and polemics of his own, until suffering a mental breakdown in the later 1930s.

[11] Tuwim, *We, Polish Jews*, 18.

[12] Cited in Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, "Julian Tuwim," *YIVO Encyclopedia,* trans. Christina Manetti (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/printarticle.aspx?id=613).

[13] Julian Tuwim, *Tam zostałem. Wspomnienia młodości.* (Warsaw, Czytelnik, 2003).

[14] Julian Tuwim, *The Dancing Socrates and Other Poems*, ed. and trans. Adam Gillon (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), 9.

[15] Cited in Mikolaj Glinski, "Tuwim's Tensome Faces," (http://archive.is/MDIxa)

[16] Tuwim, *The Dancing Socrates and Other Poems*, 12.

[17] Cited in Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, *Polish-Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years,* trans. Abe Shenitzer (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 88.

[18] Cited in Joanna Beata Michilic, *Poland's Threatening Other* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 100.

[19] Cited in Magnus J. Kryński, "Politics and Poetry: The Case of Julian Tuwim," *Polish Review,* vol. XVIII, no. 4(1973): 5, 7; Elvira Gröezinger, "Tuwim, Julian," trans. Karen Goulding, ed. Sorrel Kerbel, *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1098.

Julian Tuwim was very much 'Made in Łódź,' Poland's leading manufacturing centre. Specialising in textile production, the city experienced explosive growth from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War. It was distinctively Poland's most cosmopolitan city, with sizable Polish, Jewish, German and Russian populations, a place where one could develop an appreciation of diversity and pluralism. Above all, industrial Łódź was a place sharply divided along class lines. Tuwim early developed a lifelong solidarity with labour, promoted by his mother and his own youthful observation that for every 100 wealthy residents of Łódź, there were 500 immiserated poor.[20] Still, the Polish literary critic Ryszard Matuszewski thought it most incongruous that so exceptional a creative luminary of Polish poetry could hail from such a place: "He came from a town which had no cultural traditions, the ugliest town in Poland and one of the ugliest in the world," Matuszewski wrote.[21] And yet, true to Tuwim's uncanny capacity to hold opposites together, he rhapsodised the beauty in its grime. In the 1934 poem "Łódź" Tuwim declared:

> Let other poets sing the praises
> Of Ganges, Sorrento, Crimea.
> Give me Łódź. Her dirt and smoke are
> Happiness and joy to me.[22]

Tuwim did not deny the grime of Łódź, but somehow could take pleasure and inspiration from its underbelly. Where did such powers of alchemy come from? The ability to create synthesis without letting go of contradictory thesis and antithesis?

The answer may lie, in part, in the face of Tuwim. Julian was born with severe disfigurement to the left side of his face, namely a large black furry blotch he carried through life. His mother regarded this as an omen of a marked, accursed life. Neither doctors nor fortune tellers could provide relief. From childhood, Tuwim was bullied, mocked and tormented for his appearance. Virtually every photo of the adult Tuwim shows the profile of his 'normal' right side. Julian Tuwim entered the world, and lived, with binaries, not singularities. Two faces. Two national attachments, Polish *and* Jewish, each of which he embraced but also critiqued. And two understandings of his hometown Łódź. As his mother feared, Julian's dualism did make him a marked man, and a distinctive voice of Polish poetry.

Finally, as a formative influence on Tuwim, it should be noted that the decades preceding the Holocaust were an unprecedented period of 'Polonisation' for the country's Jews. As Katarzyna Person wrote, the beginning of the 20th century saw an emergence of "a new generation of Jews who were educated in Polish schools, were fluent in Polish, and were increasingly familiar with the environment outside traditional Jewish quarters, were

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[20] Julian Tuwim, *Tam zostałem. Wspomnienia młodości,* 1.

[21] Ryszard Matuszewski, *Contemporary Polish Writers* (Warsaw: Polonia Publishing House, 1959), 72.

[22] Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 20.

becoming ever more visible in Polish social, political and cultural life."[23] Driving this process was dramatic change in the schooling of Jewish children. At the start of the 20th century, the great majority of Jewish children were learning in traditional *heders*, Jewish schools; by the late 1930s, 87% were enrolled in Polish public schools which taught in the Polish language, but also accommodated Jewish holidays and Jewish religious instruction.[24] The creation of a quality, inclusive public school system ranks as perhaps the signal achievement of the Polish Second Republic, from 1918-1939. Economic and urban growth, together with modernist cultural forces, also expedited greater integration of Jews into the Polish mainstream.

Linguistically, Polish was now a widespread language of Polish Jewry. By the late 1930s, Katarzyna Person noted, most Polish Jews across all cultural and ideological leanings were bilingual. Jewish daily newspapers, including Zionist, were published in Polish. And Jewish libraries in Poland's largest cities experienced a greater demand for books in Polish than in Yiddish.[25] This was the environment that nurtured a brief golden age of Polish literature by Jewish writers. Julian Tuwim was part of the first generation of prominent Jewish authors to write in Polish, not Yiddish or Hebrew. Their ranks, in addition to Tuwim, included Bruno Schulz, Janusz Korczak, Alexander Wat, Antoni Słonimski, and Józef Wittlin. These and other Jewish writers were luminaries of Polish letters. They were read – and denounced – by both Jewish and Catholic Poles. Antisemitic, ethno-nationalist Poles lashed out as self-appointed gate-keepers of Polish cultural purity, now deemed threatened by Jews. Meanwhile, some Jewish cultural critics regarded Yiddish or Hebrew as the only authentic language options for Jewish writers. What Tuwim wrote about Jews before the Holocaust only further inflamed some Jewish readers.

Tuwim's poetry before the Holocaust

Julian Tuwim's writing was remarkably fresh, prolific and wide-ranging before 1939. His oeuvre included poems both light and dark, cabaret lyrics, translations and a trove of children's rhymes for which he remains beloved and best remembered in Poland to this day. Tuwim was *tout court, a tour de force.* As Ryszard Matuszewski observed, "He was a storm – a spring storm which passed across the sky of Polish poetry, breaking out most unexpectedly."[26] His impact on Polish poetry would be transformative. In eulogizing Tuwim, poet Jan Lechoń declared: "Everyone who came after him and many of his contemporaries should say now: 'We are all from him.'"[27]

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[23] Katarzyna Person, *Assimilated Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto: 1940–1943* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 3.

[24] Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: A Short History,* 109; Person, *Assimilated Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto,* 157.

[25] See Nathan Cohen, "Reading Polish among Young Jewish People," in *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry,* vol. 28, 2016; Person, *Assimilated Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto.*

[26] Matuszewski, *Contemporary Polish Writers*, 72.

[27] Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 50.

Tuwim published his first poem in 1913, at age 19. To that point, Polish poetry had been dominated, virtually defined by Romanticism. Revered classic poets such as Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Norwid and Krasiński all projected a shared pastoral, Catholic and above all emotive patriotic voice. Poland's partitions since the late 18th century by Prussia, the Hapsburg and Russian Empires loomed especially large over Polish letters. Its poets saw their mission as rallying a nation to restore its independence, embodying the soul of a devout, rural, proud, persecuted people. As Stanley Bill observes, Romanticism in Poland "developed in the context of Poland's struggle for independence, as a cultural expression of the insurrectionary tradition against foreign domination."[28] In Poland, poetry and politics have long been intertwined. And then rather miraculously, with the defeat and collapse of all three partition powers in World War I, Poland's independence was re-established in 1918 after almost 150 years of servitude.

New lines on the map were not the only markers of change. Poland's post-war cultural landscape was radically different from the 19th century. Industrialisation, urbanisation, mass society, and the horrors of war now reshaped Polish life and sensibilities. Julian Tuwim was a major force in turning Polish poetry from Romanticism to Modernism. A member of the avant-garde poetry group Skamander, he garnered a wide audience. Peter Dembowski identified Tuwim as "the most read poet of his generation."[29] His poetry of the 1920s and 1930s probed the pleasures and perils of everyday life. His canvass was huge, writing on love, desire, beauty, depravity, urban life, mass society, injustice, authoritarianism, militarism and catastrophist alarm over his country and continent hurtling towards an abyss. And through it all, there was another trope: Tuwim's intense ambivalence about Jewishness.

Prior to the Holocaust, Tuwim wrote a number of poems reflecting his troubled ancestral ties. He was alternately despondent and disparaging of Jewishness, all-the-while cherishing its nobility, and denouncing antisemitism. Above all, he never discounted nor disconnected his Jewish ties. Instead, Tuwim wrestled with his Jewishness. True to form, he would cling to opposite impulses. These were stunningly revealed in a poem Tuwim wrote in 1914, at the age of 20, titled "The Tragedy":[30]

> My greatest tragedy – is that I am a Jew,
> And have come to love the Aryans' Christian soul!
> That at times by some inner gesture something bursts
> And recalls the ancient heritage of the Race.
> That at times with a sudden, primal reflex something

[28] Stanley Bill, "The Splintering of a Myth: Polish Romantic Ideology," in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918* eds. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Niżyńska, Przemysław Czapliński with the assistance of Agnieszka Polakowska (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 48.

[29] Peter Dembowski, "Julian Tuwim, 1894-1953," *Canadian Slavonic Papers,* vol. 1 (1956): 65.

[30] Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 20-21.

Rebels in my blood, wildly, unconsciously
And semitic blood battles with another Spirit,
In the gales of future ages and in the enormity of thought!
And then I am proud – I, an aristocrat,
Son of the oldest people – of the embryo of messianism!
And I am shamed, that I am the blood brother
of a vile, enslaved nation of cowards with no home!

This youthful poem captures the intense inner turmoil of Tuwim's struggle with his Jewish identity -- his "greatest tragedy." Tuwim grew up in a household with little exposure to Jewish religion or culture. He spoke neither Yiddish nor Hebrew, but would wed in a synagogue. In adolescence, he developed a fascination with Christian iconography and narrative. He was enthralled by the Polish language and poetry. And yet something primal, reflexive kept reasserting in him a Jewish identity. His was a conflicted Jewish identity of both pride and shame, of Jews as both the aristocrats and the reviled of humanity. For Tuwim, the root of the Jewish problem was exile and diaspora. Jews were a lost, forlorn people scattered across the globe without a homeland. They cowered to the Divine, or to the majority nation within whose borders – and at whose pleasure – they resided.

Tuwim was more explicit and poignant on the toll of Jewish exile in his 1918 poem, "Jews"[31]:

Dark, cunning, bearded
With demented eyes
In which there is an eternal fear,
In which is the inheritance of centuries.
People
Who do not know what a fatherland is
Because they have lived everywhere…
The centuries have engraved on their faces
The painful lines of suffering
They bear in their souls the memory
Of the walls of Jerusalem
Of some dark funeral
Of cries in the cemetery

For Tuwim, Jews had become deformed by diaspora, both physically and metaphysically. He himself was desperate for homeland, for belonging. Polish became his language and lifeline of belonging.

In 1925, Tuwim penned the poem "Jewboy,"[32] which surely ranks among the most pained meditations on the Jewish condition. It concerns the encounter between a young disoriented Jewish boy in an apartment courtyard (embodying the Jewish people) and a first-floor resident who "fancies

[31] Ibid., 22.
[32] Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 23–24.

himself a poet" (representing Tuwim himself). In the poem, Tuwim portrays a people as forsaken, distressed and unsalvageable:

He sings in the courtyard, clad in rags
A small, poor chap, a crazed Jew.

People drive him away, God has muddled his wits
Ages and exile have confused his tongue

He wails and he dances, weeps and laments
That he is lost, is dependent on alms.

The gent on the first floor looks down on the madman.
Look my poor brother at your sad brother.

How did we come to this? How did we lose ourselves
In this vast world, strange and hostile to us?

You on the first floor, your unhinged brother
With his burning head dances through the world

The first floor gent fancies himself a poet
He wraps up his heart, like a coin, in paper

And throws it from the window, so that it will break
And be trampled and cease to be

And we will both go on our way
A path sad and crazed

And we will never find peace or rest
Singing Jews, lost Jews.

For Tuwim, before the Holocaust Jewishness was a burden he would not relinquish. These were the trade winds Tuwim navigated. He regarded Yiddish as a lesser language, and traditional Jewish religious practice as an outdated relic. He wrote poems depicting Jewish acquisitiveness worthy of antisemitic tracts. In others, he ridiculed prevailing antisemitic conspiracy theories of Jewish cabals and blood rituals. Being Tuwim had its contradictions and challenges. His unrequited attachment to Polishness only magnified the difficulties.

Antisemitism intensified in Poland, and across Europe, in the 1930s. Economic depression, competing nationalisms, and racial purity fixations of pseudo-scientific Social Darwinism all conspired to target Jews as the dangerous, unwanted other. Poland had for a thousand years been a place of both promise and peril for Jews, home to Europe's largest Jewish community of over 3 million by 1939. Since the 18th century Poland itself had

endured domination and suffering at the hands of foreign powers. By the 1930s, intensified ethno-nationalist sentiment in Poland identified Jews as their internal enemy.[33] Particularly dangerous, in their eyes, were those Jews who left their own ethno-religious identity to adopt or assimilate into Polishness. Interestingly, a most stark expression of this attack on Polonised Jews came from Łódź. In 1935, municipal City Councillor Kowalski declared:

> We consider those who are of mixed ethnic origin – of Polako-Żydzi, or Żydo-Polacy – as the most damaging element in our society. We consider them extremely harmful because they spread poison into Polish culture. We shall not change our view on this matter; we have to defend ourselves from them.[34]

There can be little doubt that Councillor Kowalski had Łódź native son Julian Tuwim in mind, as he spoke these words.

As the leading Jewish writer in Polish, Julian Tuwim was a prime target of ethno-nationalist denunciation. His first line of defence to mounting vilification was his most trusted weapon, namely words. He wrote poems ridiculing antisemitism and savaging his critics. The 1934 poem "On St. P."[35] opens with a recitation of the calumnies levelled against him by one antisemitic literary foe:

> Spitting poison and frothing at the mouth
> He spits, snorts and splutters
> And writes that I am a butcher
> A yid and bolshevik
> Jewboy, bacillus
> A baboon and a Skamanderite
> That I sell out the Fatherland
> That I deform the Polish language
> That I provoke and profane
> And the Devil knows what else.

Tuwim concludes with trademark polemic and vengeance of his own. He assures his critic that from his "whole journalistic mess" of a lifetime's writing, only one legacy would remain: Tuwim's own mocking retort, roused from his Jewish God:

> Indeed *this* very poem…O stern revenge
> Inspired by a Jewish God.
> Here is a phrase, a few words with which I toy
> To immortalize my enemy.

[33] See Michilic *Poland's Threatening Other.*
[34] Ibid., 98.
[35] Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 52.

Denunciations of Tuwim's Jewish invasion of Polish literature continued. His own ripostes grew more pointed and lewd. In the poem titled "Kiss My Ass," Tuwim informed a "barking" critic that he would not even advise dogs to have intimate relations with the critic lest it demean the canines' honour.[36]

These poems in response to antisemitism capture a fundamental quality of Tuwim's Jewishness. Detached as he was from Jewish culture and community, ambivalent as he was in his ancestral lineage, when confronted by antisemitism, Julian Tuwim always became resolutely more Jewish and incensed. A solidarity of suffering was central to Tuwim's Jewishness.

Yet for all his strength of conviction and bravado, the later 1930s took their toll on the poet. He wrote his last poem of the decade in 1936, the lengthy *Ball at the Opera,* described by David Aberbach as "a bitter allegorical attack on a corrupt, wicked, anti-semitic [sic] Poland…"[37] Polish poet and Nobel Prize recipient Czesław Miłosz[38] says of the poem: "It is an apocalyptic poem where Tuwim's horror of a corrupt society's filthy doings fuses with a foreboding of genocide."[39] Militaristic and misogynist surreal imagery abound in depicting a debauched, debased society.

And then Tuwim broke - overcome by family blows, financial pressures, relentless antisemitic criticism, depression and anxieties. In 1935, following her failed suicide attempt, Tuwim's mother entered a psychiatric hospital. She would never leave its care, nor see her beloved son again. Julian could not bear seeing her in diminished capacity.[40] At the same time, he was himself buckling under multiple strains. In the mid-1930s he lamented his despondent condition in Poland. "I am going down, it is very difficult, it is awful for me in this country," he confessed to his friends. More poignantly, he said of his rejection by the Poland he loved: "It is difficult to be a stepson with a stepmother."[41] At the same time he complained to a literary friend of his financial challenges: "Poles won't help me because I'm a Jew, and Jews, because I'm a Pole."[42] Additionally, he spent the last years of 1930s battling ulcers, agoraphobia and dread.

Julian Tuwim's Holocaust laments and manifestos

As noted earlier, Tuwim along with his wife Stefania fled Poland in the early days of the German invasion. Escape and exile were both haunting and liberating. Out of the country from 1939 to 1946, he missed Poland desperately.

[36] Mariusz Urbanek, *Tuwim: Wylękniony Bluźnierca* (Warsaw: ISKRY, 2013), 125, 155.

[37] David Aberbach, *The European Jews, Patriotism and the Liberal State, 1789–1939* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 97.

[38] Lithuanian-born, Polish-writing Miłosz also embodied multiple identities, proclaiming himself the "last citizen of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania", federated with the Kingdom of Poland in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

[39] Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 389.

[40] Urbanek, *Wylękniony Bluźnierca*, 135.

[41] Józef Ratajczyk, *Julian Tuwim* (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy REBIS, 1995), cited in Antony Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 28.

[42] Ryszard Low, *Hebrajska Obecnosc Juliana Tuwima,* [Julian Tuwim's Hebrew Presence], trans. Mirella Eberts (Łódź: Oficyna Bibliofilów, 1995), 35.

He was guilt-ridden over his privileged escape through the hurried exodus of Polish cultural luminaries, spirited out of harm's way. At the same time, distance restored his poetic powers. Writing from Rio Janeiro in 1940 to his sister Irena (also out of Poland), Tuwim marvelled at his renewed literary output after the barren years of the later 1930s. Trying to explain his creative resurgence, Tuwim poignantly reflected:

> How do I explain, dear Irena, that in Poland in the past five years I was able to write practically nothing whereas here I have been writing non-stop. I think that 1) the atmosphere in Poland was so unbearable that it seeped into my subconscious and blocked my 'poetic orifices', 2) that here I feel compelled to rebuild in some measure *that unbearable, but, above all, most beloved Poland* [author's emphasis].[43]

Tuwim was indeed himself again, fiercely and unabashedly clinging to opposites: portraying Poland as both unbearable and most beloved, reasserting both his Polish and Jewish attachments more painfully and powerfully than ever.

These conflicting sentiments found remarkable and troubled expression in three major wartime/Holocaust works. First was the sprawling nine-thousand-line epic *Polish Flowers*, written in Rio de Janeiro in 1940. Four years later in New York Tuwim would write the searing Holocaust lament *We, Polish Jews*. On his return to Poland in 1946, Tuwim would learn the fate of his mother during the Holocaust, and convey the circumstances and significance in the poem "Mother." In these works, Tuwim confronts the abyss with his trademark dualities fully intact, and his Jewish identity fortified.

Polish Flowers was written early in the war, before genocide was unleashed, when subjugation of Poland was the most evident consequence of Nazi invasion for Tuwim. As the title suggests, *Polish Flowers* reflects the author's need to re-assert positive, hopeful associations with his invaded and occupied native country. Ever binary however, Tuwim does not spare Poles denunciation either. Four themes stand out in this poem: revenge against the German invaders, love of Poland, condemnation of Polish antisemitism, and hope for a better future Poland. Citing a flavour of each theme highlights the raw intensity of the poet's disposition in exile at the onset of war.

Tuwim was a pacifist, with powerful earlier poems denouncing militarism and calls to arms. Yet in *Polish Flowers*[44] he cries out for the most vicious retribution against the invading Germans. He assigns the deed to Poland's most rabidly violent – its canines:

> And you, Warsaw dogs, on judgement day
> Fulfill your canine duty --
> Howl yourselves into a running pack
> To wreak fierce vengeance for your victims…

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[43] Ratajczyk, *Julian Tuwim*, 115, cited in Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 38.

[44] Julian Tuwim, *Kwiaty Polskie* (Warsaw: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza "Czytelnik", 1949). Citations from *Polish Flowers* are from Antony Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," trans. Antony Polonsky.

Let rabid foam rise in your muzzles,
Loose the breathless pack in hot pursuit
Of the German trail, when they scuttle
From Poland, with only their breeches!…
And when you get them – leap at their throats…
Tear them to bits so that even their
Mothers never shall know where to look
For their parts, scattered over the earth…
For ours could not find them either,
Their babies' heads, little legs and fists.

Mindful of the Jewish biblical injunction his call transgresses, Tuwim appeals to the Divine:

When the time of vengeance draws near,
Give us leave to break your commandment.

Not surprisingly, Tuwim wrote some of his most loving and longing words for Poland in this poem from exile. He wrote of being separated from Poland "by the Atlantic of yearning," and proclaimed:

My country is my home. Fatherland
Is my home. My lot was to receive
A Polish home. This – is fatherland,
And other countries are hotels.

At the same time, *Polish Flowers* also contains some of Tuwim's harshest denunciation of Polish antisemitism. In extraordinary condemnation and confession he harkens back to pre-war days when, he reminds readers, that many Poles:

Caught the fascist infection…

When the street was ruled by petty middle-class scoundrels
Excellent 'Catholics'
Except that they had not yet become Christian…
When the rampant braggarts so beat the Jews
That I felt more shame for my fatherland
Than pity for my beaten brethren…
When in the worm-like press
There was nothing but roars and flashes:
The Jews, Jews, Jews, Jews, Jews
Mangy and scabby Kikes
The Jew is our greatest enemy

Tuwim would not allow his love of Poland to erase recognition of its antisemitism; nor would he allow antisemites to eradicate his attachment to

Poland. An attachment that was cultural, rather than nationalistic, chauvinist or mythically patriotic. In a prayer-like fragment of *Polish Flowers,* Tuwim appeals to the Divine to fashion a new improved postwar Poland:

> Open our Poland as with a bolt
> You clear up the overcast heavens.
> Give the rule of wise and righteous men,
> Mighty in wisdom and in goodness
> Give the toilers ownership, the fruit
> of their labor in villages and cities.
> Chase away the bankers, Lord,
> Stop the growth of money from money.
> Teach us that under your sunny sky
> 'There is no more Greek and no more Jew'…
> Any size of Poland – let her have greatness:
> To the sons of her spirit or her
> Body give a greatness of hearts if
> she's great, and a greatness of hearts
> if she's small.

With these words, Tuwim envisages a socially just, ethnically and religiously inclusive country whose size on a map matters less than its peoples' generosity of spirit. Drawing from the New Testament, Galatians 3:28-29, he appealed to Christian Poles to regard Jews as brethren. In the darkest of days, Tuwim would not relinquish hope for Poland -- that would amount to giving up on life itself.

It was a fragment of *Polish Flowers* that Mary Berg and her classmates excitedly read in the Warsaw Ghetto in early 1942. We do not know which lines and stanzas were smuggled into the Ghetto. Yet Berg's diary makes it clear that many classmates were disappointed, finding in the poem none of the comfort they yearned for in their torment. Rather than words of encouragement for trapped fellow Jews, Berg described the poem as "full of love for Poland."[45] Debate ensued over whether the distant Tuwim fully recognised the horrific treatment reserved for Jews in Nazi Poland. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the Ghetto, 21-year-old Halina Swambaum wrote rhapsodically of this same clandestinely circulating poem. She described it as "a beautiful epic, of a completely novel and unexpected quality…his [Tuwim's] crowning achievement." As if to summon as much strength as possible from the renowned poet, Swambaum and her friends organised a "Tuwim evening," at which "we recited Tuwim's poems from his earliest to the most recent."[46]

[45] Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg,* 127. Mary Berg and her family would survive the Holocaust, as a result of her mother's American birth and citizenship. In 1943, the family was transferred from the Warsaw Ghetto to a German internment camp in France. A year later they were released for return to the United States.

[46] Halina Szwambaum, "Letters from the Warsaw Ghetto", CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) News, http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/letters-from-the-warsaw-ghetto-1.791933. Halina Szwambaum was killed fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Reading *Polish Flowers* in the Warsaw Ghetto was disappointing to some, inspiring to others. In turn, the Ghetto Uprising and its destruction prompted Tuwim in New York to write the wrenching prose-poem *We, Polish Jews*. By now fully cognizant of the virtual annihilation of Polish Jewry, in this torrent of emotions Tuwim gave voice to grief, martyrology and his undiminished dual identity. As the poem's title announced, Tuwim proclaimed his continued attachment to both Polish and Jewish identities, but now with a more desperate commitment to Jewishness described in late 1944 by Israeli Literary Prize winner Gershon Shofman as a combination of "shock verging on hysteria."[47] Tuwim wrote *We, Polish Jews*, in Polish, in New York, in the spring of 1944. First published in London in the Polish monthly *New Poland*, it was quickly translated and disseminated in many other languages including English and Hebrew. As Shmeruk noted, it "spread with great speed through the remnants of Polish Jewry wherever it was scattered and aroused deep emotion and shock."[48]

Tuwim wrote *We, Polish Jews*[49] in anger and despair. Anger at not being accepted as Polish, and despair over the Nazi mass murder of Jews. The title of the work was a provocation, Tuwim knew fully well. In the opening line, the poet declares he can hear readers questioning: "What do you mean – WE?" Many Poles and Jews, he knew, rejected his claim of kinship with them. Tuwim therefore begins by explaining why he is a 'Polish Jew', attached to both identities, and what he regards as Poland's duty to honour its murdered Jews.

In ten paragraphs, Tuwim enumerates why and how he identifies as a Pole. The enumeration may arrive at a random total number. But given the biblical influence on his writing, arriving at ten reasons may symbolically be a nod to ten other commandments of devotion. Tuwim's reasons for identifying as Polish align remarkably with contemporary post-modern, post-national notions of belonging.

Reason number one: "I am a Pole because I want to be." Tuwim begins by asserting individual agency – the right to choose one's own identity. Tuwim then rushes to strip his feelings of nationality of any 'mystical' associations. His nationality attachment has no flag-waving patriotism in search of mythic past glories: "To be a Pole is neither an honor nor a glory nor a privilege. It is like breathing. I have not yet met a man who is proud of breathing." Next, he reminds that he is a Pole because that is where he was 'born and bred…was happy and unhappy," and longs to return to from exile. It is also the country, for reasons he cannot explain, where he wishes to be buried, "to be absorbed and dissolved into Polish soil and none other."

Tuwim then powerfully invokes the spell the Polish language holds over him:

> because since infancy I have been nurtured in the Polish tongue; because my mother taught me Polish songs and Polish rhymes; because when

[47] Cited in Michal Sobelman, "Zionists and 'Polish Jews'. Palestinian Reception of *We, Polish Jews*," In *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis, Folio Litteraria Polonica* 6(36) (2016): 102.

[48] Chone Shmeruk, "Preface," in Tuwim, *We, Polish Jews*, 7.

[49] All Citations of this poem are from Julian Tuwim, *We, Polish Jews*, ed. Chone Shmeruk, trans. R. Langer, 1984.

> poetry first seized me, it was in Polish words that it burst forth; because what in my life became paramount – poetical creation – would be unthinkable in any other tongue no matter how fluent I might become in it.

Polish landscapes and culture also have their hold, greater than any ancient Jewish roots or European ties:

> A Pole – also 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. Dearer for reasons which again I'd be at a loss to explain.

Becoming more personal still, Tuwim declares himself: "A Pole – because it was in Polish that I confessed to the quiverings of my first love, and in Polish that I babbled of its bliss and storm." And also because he admits to "having taken over from the Poles quite a few of their national faults." Importantly and provocatively as ever, he adds: "A Pole – because my hatred of *Polish* (original emphasis) Fascists is greater than my hatred of Fascists of other nationalities. And I consider that particular point as a strong mark of my nationality."

Tuwim closes his accounting of nationality as he began: "Above all a Pole – because I want to be." Tuwim anchors national identity in individual choice, not state nor social prescription. In murderously ethno-racial times, this was a brave if doomed stance to take. Yet it also harkened a more humane and liberating world.

Then in this lament poem, Tuwim felt compelled to explain – for Jewish skeptics – his unbreakable attachment to Jewishness. Here the poet unleashes deadly irony: "BECAUSE OF BLOOD" (original emphasis), Tuwim declares, hastily adding he is referring not to racialism's equation of bloodlines and identity, but to "the flood of martyr blood", to "the blood of Jews," a slaughter greater than ever "since the dawn of mankind." He pleads for Jews to accept him as one of their own: "Take me, my brethren, into that glorious bond of Innocently Shed Blood."

Radically, then, Tuwim in 1944, in this Holocaust lament continued to assert his double identity: Polish and Jewish. He would not give up either, despite criticism from both camps. It is also evident that very different forces drew Tuwim to each identity. His Polishness was rooted in many affirmations: childhood memory, love of language, landscape and culture. Not even Polish antisemitism nor Polish Fascists could break the bond. Conversely, Tuwim's attachment to Jewishness was a solidarity of suffering, an outrage over Jewish persecution.

Nor, Tuwim made clear, was he spared personal pain. He wrote of the "contrition and gnawing shame" he felt for being a Polish Jew "who by miracle or by chance remained alive." He referred to survivors as:

> …we ghosts, we shadows of our slaughtered brethren, the Polish Jews… who, from across seas and oceans, will some day return to the homeland

> and haunt the ruins in our unscarred bodies and our wretched, presumably spared souls. We – The Lament, the Howl, we – the Choir chanting a sepulchral El Mole Rachamim whose echo will be passed from one century to the next.

And writing all this from New York in Spring 1944, Tuwim reached back centuries for Jewish inspiration to convey his horrors – and yearning – for Poland:

> We, who sit and weep upon the shores of distant rivers, as once we sat on the banks of Babylon…On the banks of the Hudson, of the Thames, of the Euphrates and the Nile, of the Ganges and Jordan we wander, scattered and forlorn, crying: 'Vistula! Vistula! Vistula! Mother of ours! Grey Vistula turned rosy not with the rosiness of dawn but that of blood!'

Such was the intensity of Julian Tuwim's Polish Jewish attachments. Never in doubt, was that Tuwim could only be Tuwim – and live – in Poland.

Beyond a lament *We, Polish Jews* was also Tuwim's manifesto of what Poland and Christendom owed the Jewish remnants. He called on Poland to honour its murdered Jews after the war, by establishing 'The Order of the Yellow Patch' (referencing the Nazi-mandated armband or patch that Jews were forced to wear) as the country's highest award for the 'bravest among Polish officers and soldiers.' He urged all Polish cities and towns to preserve "some fragment" of their Jewish ghetto "so that the memory of the massacred people shall remain forever fresh in the minds of the generations to come, and also as a sign of our undying sorrow for them." Ever searching for connections and disruptions of traditional boundaries of belonging, Tuwim then confronted Christendom with a reminder of its own Jewish origins and culpabilities:

> We, who two thousand years ago gave humanity a Son of Man slaughtered by the Roman Empire, and this one innocent death was enough to make him God. What religion will arise from millions of deaths, tortures, degradations and arms stretched wide in the last agony of despair?

As noted, *We, Polish Jews* was widely disseminated across the Jewish diaspora, inspiring a range of polarised responses. In the Soviet Union, for instance, Polish refugees published the work into Polish. As a Polish-Jewish refugee there himself, Chone Shmeruk observed:

> …thus it reached hundreds of thousands of Polish refugees dispersed throughout the vast areas of the Soviet Union and stunned not only the Polish Jews. No expression of Jewry's agony at the catastrophe, comparable in its force, had until then appeared in any language in the Soviet Union and, according to Ilya Ehrenburg, Tuwim's words, which were "written in blood," were "copied by thousands" because no Russian translation appeared in print.[50]

[50] Chone Shmeruk, "Preface," 7.

Conversely, other Jewish readers denounced both the work and the writer. Foremost in condemnation was the yiddishist educator Abraham Golomb, writing from escape in Mexico. The title of his critique delivered the harsh verdict: "*Tsu shpet*" ('Too Late'). Golomb charged it was too late for Tuwim to now declare Jewish attachment, while also declaring fealty to Poland. Truer to the spirit of the age, Golomb declared: "One is either a Jew *tout court,* or not at all…No one has two mothers, two Gods, or two nations."[51] This was the conventional thinking regarding identity among both Jews and Poles that Tuwim was up against. And in Palestine, a recurring refrain among his contemporary Polish Jewish literary figures was that Tuwim should abandon attachment to Poland and join them in building a homeland for the Jewish people.[52]

Instead, Tuwim returned to Poland in 1946, together with his wife. Only then did he learn of his mother's fate: murdered in her psychiatric residence outside Warsaw, her body was then thrown out from an upper floor of the building onto the pavement below. Tuwim was able to reclaim the body, and move it for re-burial to the Jewish cemetery of Łódź, where it still resides. The death and re-burial of Adela Tuwim is the only memorable poem Tuwim wrote in his final years back in Poland, from 1946 to his death in 1953. After the Holocaust, and after his mother's brutal murder, the poem "Mother"[53] is extraordinary for the poet's determination to dress his mother in both Polish and Jewish words:

I
At the cemetery in Łodź
The Jewish cemetery, stands
The Polish grave of my mother,
My Jewish mother's tomb
The grave of my Mother, the Pole,
Of my Mother the Jewess;
I brought her from land over Vistula
To the bank of industrial Łódź.
A rock fell on the tombstone,
Upon the face of the pale rock
A few laurel leaves
Shed by a birch tree.
And when a sunny breeze
Plays with them a golden game,
The leaves are patterned into
The Order of Polonia.

II
A fascist shot my mother
When she was thinking of me;

[51] Cited in Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota, "Jewish Jews on Tuwim," trans. Teresa Prout, POLIN: *Studies in Polish Jewry,* vol. 28, 2016, 411.
[52] Sobelman, "Zionists and 'Polish Jews'", 99–109.
[53] Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 49.

A fascist shot my mother
When she was longing for me.
He loaded – killed the longing.
Again began to load,
So that later… but later
There was nothing left to kill.
He shot through my mother's world;
Two tender syllables;
Threw the corpse out the window
Upon the holy pavement.
Remember well, little daughter!
Recall this, future grandson!
The word has come true;
'The ideal reached the pavement'

Beyond reflecting the deep emotional bond between mother and son, this poem is remarkable for the relentless weaving of both Polish and Jewish markers around Tuwim's mother. The first two stanzas recurringly convey this dual identity. The next two stanzas invoke symbols both Jewish (rock on tombstone) and Polish (birch trees and the Order of Polonia).

Additionally, Tuwim's poem "Mother" echoes and invokes two iconic 19th century Polish poems: Adam Mickiewicz's "Poem to a Polish Mother" (1931), and Cyprian Norwid's "Chopin's Piano" (1863–1864). Both poems were written in response to momentous occasions of Polish resolve and trauma: the unsuccessful and brutally suppressed uprisings of 1830 and 1863 against Russian rule. Tuwim portrays his mother as one more martyr in Mickiewicz's lament for maternal sacrifices to Mother-Poland.

Drawing on Norwid, Tuwim closes the poem "Mother" by associating her among the highest rank of contribution and sacrifice to Poland. In a classic line of Polish poetry, Norwid describes how vengeful Russian troops in 1863, suppressing rebellion, ransacked Chopin's Warsaw living quarters, and threw his piano onto the street below, where it lay smashed to bits. Norwid conveys this act's essence in a memorable line: "The ideal reached the pavement," which Tuwim borrows in tribute to his mother, "my Mother the Pole… the Jewess." Tuwim proclaims that she too, alongside Chopin, contributed to Polish culture, beauty and truth through her spirit, and by inspiring a literary son and daughter. To the end, Tuwim held onto his dual identities, for himself and those he loved most.

Finale

Julian Tuwim died in Poland in 1953, at age 59. Lifelong attraction to liquor contributed to his ill health, and it has been suggested that his continued consumption of alcohol and final days coincided with diminishing will to live.[54] Tuwim spent the final eight years of his life in Poland. He willingly,

[54] Urbanek, *Wylękniony Bluźnierca*.

enthusiastically, returned to a post-war Poland under Soviet tutelage. He believed a Sovietised Poland was the best hope for the country and its remnant Jewish population, at a time when fending off fascist aftershocks was the most pressing necessity. He was wary of any further encroachments from Germany. He regarded the Polish government-in-exile in London itself as rampant with antisemitism. Conversely, he was attracted to the heroic anti-fascist wartime record of the Soviets, and to their egalitarian rhetoric. He publicly supported the Soviet-backed government of Poland, which provided him with comfortable stipend and housing.

Tuwim's final years were lean in literary output, as he confined himself to translating Russian classics and producing officially commissioned works. To be sure, the political climate was not conducive to literary creativity. But it is also evident that exile and Holocaust had taken their toll. Fellow poet, and longtime friend Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz observed that Tuwim returned from exile to Poland "a broken man. He could not forget and one cannot blame him for this."[55] Indeed, once back in Poland, Tuwim insisted on seeing the full horrors of Nazi occupation and genocide. Tuwim was unable to see, and not feel. Czesław Miłosz was especially struck by Tuwim's sensitive fragile persona: "One might also say he [Tuwim] was like someone without a skin, protected by nothing from impulses from without, whether, feelings, images or ideas."[56] For all his bravado, and counter-attack, criticism and horrors stung Tuwim deeply.

Interestingly, one of the few enthusiasms to stir Tuwim in his final years was the creation of the state of Israel. Tuwim had long been what might be termed an 'absentee supporter' of the Zionist project. It was for other Jews – not him – to forge a new Jewish world in Palestine, notwithstanding his envy of Polish Jews who moved there before 1939.[57] Several factors prevented his making the move: his attachment to Poland was too strong; neither air travel nor sea travel was appealing; and he regarded the Mideast climate as uncongenial. But as we saw earlier, Tuwim did attribute much of Jewish misfortune to their lack of a national homeland. He regarded younger Polish Jews as prime candidates for emigration to Palestine, since they had not yet forged deep Polish roots. And during the war, in transit across Europe in flight from Nazi occupied Poland, he and Stefania had applied for visa to Palestine. It was not forthcoming, therefore they made their way to Brazil.

Back in Poland after the war, Tuwim followed, cheered and championed the creation of Israel. In April 1948, Tuwim was a keynote speaker at the inaugural unveiling of Nathan Rappaport's Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, on the grounds of the former Ghetto. His address included praise for "the fighting Jew in Palestine."[58] For Tuwim, both the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Jewish struggle for Zion, were a welcome departure from his own image of Jews as a weak, passive, homeless people of exile.

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[55] Magnus Kryński, "Politics and Poetry: The Case of Julian Tuwim," *Polish Review*, vol. XVIII, no. 4 (1973): 24–25.

[56] Cited in Polonsky, "Julian Tuwim, the Polish Heine," 28.

[57] Low, *Hebrajska Obecność Juliana Tuwima*, 40.

[58] Julian Tuwim, "The Memorial and the Grave," in Tuwim, *We, Polish Jews,* 24.

Demonstrating his commitment to the new Jewish state, in 1948 Tuwim accepted an invitation to serve as President of Friends of the Jerusalem Hebrew University in Warsaw. In accepting the position, Tuwim pledged:

> I will do everything within my power to strengthen the bonds between the world's only center of Hebrew wisdom and culture and the Jewish remnant in Poland. The country of my birth, which the Fascist oppressor turned into a huge communal grave of Jews such as has never been known before, will thus lay the foundation stone for eternal memory in honour of the oppressed Jewish people."[59]

As a priority, Tuwim sought to establish a Chair in the history of Polish Jewry at the Hebrew University. In a 1949 interview with the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Tuwim went still further in connecting Poland, Jews and Israel. Asked how he felt about the creation of Israel, Tuwim replied: "I am happy and proud of the establishment of the Hebrew state. Could it be otherwise? For it is a state established by Jews from Poland, and I am also one of them."[60]

Julian Tuwim had extraordinary capacity, and need, to embrace a dual, hybrid Polish- Jewish identity. He interpreted and wrote his whole world through this prism. Israel, he regarded, as a veritable overseas Polish Jewish project. His Polish Jewish mother would rest for eternity in her Polish grave in the Jewish cemetery of Łódź. He himself was a Polish Jew, regardless of what either side felt. He fiercely held onto opposites constructed and imposed by the world around him. Tuwim was ever hunting for the words that could change his world and ours.

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[59] Cited in Shmeruk, Preface, 10. The Organization Friends of the Hebrew University in Warsaw was dissolved in 1950, as the Soviet bloc's view of Israel became more critical.

[60] Alexander Kharim, "In the Presence of Julian Tuwim," trans. Sydney Nestel, *Haaretz,* 14 October 1949.

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