Katarzyna Zechenter UCL: The Need to Suffer: The Case of Poland.

The article explores the construction and various representations of Polish collective suffering and victimhood in Polish literature. It argues that the loss of independence (1795-1918) and the subsequent struggles to regain it can be read as Poland's most important cultural trauma that heavily marked Polish identity. It discusses how the paradigm was created and established, and the unsuccessful struggle with the paradigm of suffering over the subsequent years. Overall, it argues that literature after 1945 lost its power over the national imagination as Polish identity is no longer bound by the past representations of suffering.

All humans and all nations suffer and remember their suffering yet the process of remembering, articulating and manufacturing that suffering is neither clear nor obvious. The remembrance of suffering influences nations and individuals: it has the power to build new people or unite a country.[1] Some nations accept their suffering with 'a thirst for self-destruction" or even welcome their suffering.[2] Yet, as Steven J. Mock argues, "commemorations and narratives of national defeat display wide variation" as the understanding of the role of collective suffering, the interaction of suffering of different peoples upon each other, as well the understanding of various narratives about suffering and the role of suffering in the construction of identity differ among nations, religions and individuals.[3]

This article argues that the collective suffering inflicted by other states can be read as a 'cultural trauma' that leaves 'indelible marks upon group consciousness'[4] and thus permeates the construction of nations' identities. Poland's loss of political independence (1795-1918) and the subsequent suffering over that period and later can be read as the most important trauma in that country's history that marked Polish identity. The continuous trauma was understood through its major element – the suffering of the people. Multiple narratives about that suffering were in the 19th century

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1 Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity. The Jewish Paradigm*. Trans. G. M. Goshgarian, London New York: Verso, 2010, p. 175.

2 Viacheslav Ivanow [In:] *The Slave Soul of Russia: Moral Masochism and the Cult of Suffering*, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, New York London, New York University Press 1995, p. 3.

3 Steven J. Mock, *Symbols of Defeat in the Construction of National Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012, p. 4

4 Jeffrey C. Alexander, Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma, [In:] *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, J. C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, [Eds.], Berkely, University of California Press 2004, p. 1.

read as a part of God's plan that would lead to positive outcomes. The belief not only informed Polish identity two hundred years ago, but even today.

The purpose of this article is to analyse various representations of collective suffering in Polish literature to understand how suffering, its instrumentation and multiple representations have shaped Polish identity. Why and how does suffering still influence Polish national identity despite Poland being fully independent since 1989? Why and how has suffering become such an intrinsic aspect of Poland's 'imagined community'? Why does the generation born after 1989 continuously return to the concept of suffering in their cultural choices, such as dress and music?

This article argues that the focus on Poland's past suffering, namely the loss of independence in the 18th century, the tragedy of multiple uprisings to regain national independence in the 19th century, the suffering during WWII (1939-1945) play a crucial role in the very concept of Polish identity. Following Alexander, I argue that it is not the suffering itself, but the very concept of the Polish struggle to the end, no matter what the cost; the belief that Poles prefer to suffer and die rather than to abandon their ideals[5] that represents the most enduring aspect of Polish identity, often expressed in literature and in 'the national sensorium".[6] The focus on suffering in the name of freedom and the implied purity of the sufferer (Poland) is thus presented as a moral stand because 'for traumas to emerge at the level of collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises'.[7] As such, my goal is to investigate collective 'suffering' as seen through Polish literature because since the beginning of the 19th century literature possessed a place of authority: the loss of independence replaced traditional Polish channels of authority with that of Russian, Prussian and Austrian. It was literature that reinforced the historically constructed myths of the value of suffering.

5 Katarzyna Labnauer at a "Freedom March", Warsaw May 12, 2018, http://www.pap.pl/en/news/news,1409683,opposition-leaders-stress-freedom-at-warsaw-rally.html

6 Geneviève Zubrzycki, "History and the National Sensorium: Making Sense of Polish Mythology", *Qualitative Sociology,* 34(2011), p. 21-57.

7 Jeffrey C. Alexander, Towards…, p. 10.

The usage of a special word to define the history of Polish suffering namely *martyrologia*, [martyrology] clearly points to the importance of the concept in Polish culture. Sometimes a Polish word, *męczeństwo*, (męczyć się-to suffer) is used instead of *martyrologia*.[8] The word comes from the Greek *martys* (the witness), the Latin *martyr* (martyr) and *logos* (word), and focuses on the lives of Christian martyrs. In Polish however, the word *martyrologia* focuses on suffering of Poles, namely those under partition (1773-1918), under German and Soviet occupation (1939-1945) but also in places such as Siberia[9] where thousands of Poles were sentenced from the mid-18th century to 1953. It is also used to recount the suffering during WWII of non-Polish ethnic groups that lived in Poland, especially of Polish Jews[10]. Recently, the word has also been used to describe the fate of the Polish Roma with a growing understanding of *Porajmos*.[11] In general, however, the word refers mostly to Poles or to social groups that were particularly targeted during WWII such as the intelligentsia[12], clergy[13] or villagers[14]. Very rarely it refers to the fate of Allied soldiers imprisoned in German camps in what today is Poland[15] although it seems to reflect the phenomenon of *dark tourism*.[16]

When did suffering become an essential aspect of Polish identity and seen as a collective, Polish and Poland defining, not an individual human experience? Almost

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8 *Męczeństwo i zagłada Żydów w zapisach literatury polskiej* Irena Maciejewska [Ed.], Warszawa: KAW 1988; Mark Bernard, *Męczeństwo i walka Żydów w latach okupacji,* Warszawa: Biblioteka Narodowa 1963.

9 Antoni Kuczyński, *Syberia. 400 lat polskiej diaspory. Zesłania, martyrologia i sukces cywilizacyjny Polaków. Rys historyczny.* Krzeszowice: Kubajak 2007, p. 4; *Sybiracy. Martyrologia Polaków na Wschodzie*. A. Wirski [Ed.], Koszalin: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Bałtyckiej Wyższej Szkoły Humanitycznej 2000.

10 *Upowszechnianie wiedzy o Holokauście i martyrologii narodów. Stan obecny i zamierzenia. Referaty*. Wałbrzych: Muzeum Gross-Rosen 2001. Conference in Duszniki Zdrój 17-19 Jan. 2001; Marina Fuks, *II wojna światowa. Martyrologia i walka Zydow polskich*, Warszawa: KAW 1988; Jan Przedpełski*, Zydzi płoccy. Dzieje i martyrologia 1939-1945*, Płock: Fraza 1993; L. Brener, *ל. ברענער / ווידערשטאנד און אומקום אין טשענסטאכאווער געטא, Ṿidershṭand un umḳum in Ṭshensṭokhoṿer geṭo, Martyrologia i walka w getcie częstochowskim,* Wrocław: Yidisher hisṭorisher insṭiṭuṭ in Poyln, 1950.

11 W. Chrostowski, *Martyrologia Żydów i martyrologia Romów. Studium porównawcze zagłady i pamięci o niej*, "Dialog-Pheniben" 1997, nr 2-3; Szlakiem-martyrologii-Romow, Gość.pl, 22 July 2011 (no author), http://gosc.pl/doc/907664.Szlakiem-martyrologii-Romow.

12 Marek F. Frankowski, Jan Frankowski, "Martyrologia inteligencji polskiej w Forcie III w Pomiechówku", *Notatki płockie*, 1983, 28/3-116, pp. 20-26; http://docplayer.pl/59405848-Martyrologia-inteligencji-polskiej-w-forcie-iii-w-pomiechowku-1.html

13 A. Galiński, "Martyrologia duchowieństwa katolickiego w latach 1939-1945 w świetle dokumentów IPN", *Przegląd Zachodni,* 4/2003, pp. 129-144.

14 Ewa Kołomańska, *Michniow. Martyrologia wsi polskich*. Kielce: Muzeum Wsi Kieleckiej 2010.

15 *Przewodnik po terenach poobozowych w Żaganiu (Sagan). Guide to the site of the former POW camps in Żagań (Sagan).* J. Jakubiak [Ed.], Żagań: Dekorgraf, 2008.

16 *Turystyka martyrologiczna w Polsce na przykładzie Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, Jadwiga Berbeka [Ed.], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Proksenia, 2012.

nothing is known of pre-Christian Poland due to the "brutal Christianisation."[17] The religious consciousness and spirituality of Medieval Poland was shaped strictly by the Church with suffering seen as the result of sin or a just punishment for sin. Renaissance Poland was a prosperous, peaceful, multi-religious and multi-ethnic state ruled by the Jagiellonian dynasty that had a strong tradition of religious tolerance, "an isolated haven" in Europe.[18] Polish Renaissance authors, from Callimachus, Gregory of Sanok, Dantyszek to Kochanowski had, not only an understanding of the Epicurean philosophy of happiness, but they saw the world in general as a place where life should be affirmed, together with the merits of justice, prudence, friendship, peace, and in connection with stoic virtues.[19] For Kochanowski, the world was a place of 'order and beauty."[20] His translation of *David's Psalter* brought a rich and inventive vocabulary connected with suffering that influenced later literature focussing on the suffering of Jesus and Mary (*literatura dolorystyczna*).[21] In 1580 Kochanowski lost his beloved daughter. His personal suffering led to a deep ontological and theological crisis to which he devoted his masterpiece, *Laments* (1580). Yet he was able to conclude that suffering represents a major part of human fate and has to be accepted as such. Kochanowski's contemporary, Sep Szarzyński, focussed almost exclusively on suffering, death[22] and decay[23] in his *Rhythms* (1601) within the struggle between the soul and bodily desires in the tradition of the Spanish mystics.[24] Although contemporaries, both poets

17 Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury*, Krakow: WL 2007, p. 17.

18 Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*. London: Pimlico 1997, p. 493.

19 Estera Lasocińska, *Epikurejska idea szczęścia w literaturze polskiej renesansu i baroku. Od Kallimacha do Potockiego*. Studia Staropolskie. Series Nova XLI, Warszawa IBL 2014, p. 203.

20 Marta Piwińska, "Mickiewicza jazdy gwiazd", [In:] *Romantyzm, Poezja, Historia. Prace ofiarowane Zofii Stefanowskiej*. Maria Prussak, Zofia Trojanowiczowa [Ed.], Warszawa:IBL 2002, p. 156.

21 Mirosław Korolko, "Słowo i cierpienie w literaturze staropolskiej. Rekonesans badawczy", [In:] *Cierpienie w literaturze polskiej,* K. Dybciak, S. Szczesny [Eds.], Siedlce: Wydawnictwo Akademii Podlaskiej 2002, p. 14.

22Anna Grudzień, *Death and suffering in the poetry of John Donne and Mikolaj Sep Szarzynski*. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1999.

23 Jan Błoński, *Mikolaj Sęp Szarzyński a początki polskiego baroku,* Kraków 2001, pp. 68-69; Czesław Hernas, *Literatura baroku*, Warsaw: PWN 1999, p. 22-25.

24 Krzysztof Mrowcewicz, *Trivium poetów polskich epoki baroku: klasycyzm –manieryzm-barok. Studia nad poezja*. Warszawa: IBL 2005, p. 95-119.

perceived the world differently, yet suffering for both of them represents a universal, not a Polish, characteristic.

Seventeenth century Poland, on the other hand, was not a peaceful state. Although without religious wars, Poland was weakened by bloody wars with Sweden, rebellions in Ukraine, and by a crippled parliament. The gradual loss of the political importance of this once 'most powerful Slavic state'[25] clearly points to a place where suffering was commonplace. Counter-Reformation proved exceptionally successful and soon, thanks to the Jesuits, Poland became a devout Catholic country. Their focus on education resulted in opening multiple Catholic colleges and academies that monopolised education with the numbers of Protestant academies dwindling fast. Poles were drawn to the Jesuit version of Catholicism with the power of the Church, opulent decorations and attractive rituals[26] such as in a town of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska surrounded by traces of the Passion of Christ in which the faithful participated (then and now) in an realistically re-enacted crucifixion of Christ.[27]

The Jesuits taught not only religion but also sciences, arts and the Classics. Their education promoted 'a universal mania for writing"[28] that created masterpieces such as Jan Chryzostom Pasek's *Memoirs* (written 1690-1695, published 1836). This uniquely Polish genre of *silva rerum* were memoirs or chronicles written by generations of nobility on political issues of the era, familial history or military campaigns.[29] *Silvas* described various types of suffering as the authors participated in military campaigns and dealt with suffering on many a battlefield. The authors presented it as a part of military life without much concern for the victims but also included texts on Poland's suffering during difficult periods such as W. Chrościński's *"Lament of the Distraught*

25 Harold B. Segal, T*he Baroque Poem: A Comparative Survey*, NewYork: Irvington Publishers, p. 44.

26 *Chrześcijaństwo w Polsce. Zarys przemian 996-1979*, J. Kłoczowski, L.Muller [Eds.], Lublin KUL, 1992, p. 88.

27 Małgorzata Skowrońska, "Kalwaryjskie misteria budza emocje", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13 April 2006

28 Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1983, p. 118.

29 J. Niedźwiedź, 'Silva rerum', [In:] Andrzej Borowski [Ed.], *Słownik sarmatyzmu. Idee, pojęcia, symbole*, Kraków: WL 2001, pp. 188-190.

Homeland". Yet the understanding of collective suffering of the era is located within the religious context within the highly rhetorical and stylised comparison between Job and Poland.[30]

Probably the most important role in suggesting that Poland had a special mission to fulfil that later developed into Messianism with its emphasis on suffering, was played by a masterly Jesuit orator and a royal preacher, Piotr Skarga, and his highly popular *Sermons to the Diet* (1610). Skarga was also the author of *The Lives of the Saints* (1579), one of the most popular books of the era in which he argued that "virtue, prowess and the greatness of the spirit" are impossible without "suffering, sacrifice and victimhood".[31] It was Skarga's vision of Poland as a place chosen by God to defend the Catholic faith that began an influential fusion between politics and Catholicism in Polish culture that is still clearly visible.[32] For Skarga, the reason for Poland's misfortunes in the seventeenth century was the tolerance towards the 'heretics' that became "characteristic of the Baroque mentality of the *Sarmatia* opponents of the Enlightenment."[33] Yet in his *Sermons* he also argued that no other state could compare to Poland's happiness because Poland had never created tyranny – another topos later employed by the Romantics. When in 1863 King Jan III Sobieski won the Battle of Vienna, and with Poland's earlier *antemurale Christianitatis* tradition, Skarga began to be read as a visionary and a national prophet.[34]

Such was the close connection between politics and religion that in 1841 Mickiewicz saw in Skarga's absolute love for Poland the foundation for what was later

30 Leszek Teusz, "Wojciech Stanisław Chrościński - człowiek i dzieło", *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne*, Seria Literacka 16 (36), pp. 227-264.

31 Mirosław Korolko, Słowo…, p. 21.

32 In June 2018, in Poznań, a Catholic foundation, *Vide et Crede*, placed posters commemorating 100 years of the regaining of independence showing a map of Poland with spilled blood and the crown of thorns on it with a sign, "There is no patriotism without the sign of the cross": https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/billboard-na-100-lecie-niepodleglosci-nie-ma-patriotyzmu-bez-krzyza-6262349536217217a

33 Andrzej Walicki, *The Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Nationhood. Polish Political Thought from Noble Republicanism to Tadeusz Kościuszko*. Trans. E. Harris, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame 1989, p. 89.

34 Ignacy Chrzanowski, *Optymizm i pesymizm polski: Studia z historii kultury*, Warszawa: PWN 1971, p. 43.

regarded as the "special national destiny" of Poland.[35] As Schöpflin points out, conceptualisation of national myths helps to strengthen the cohesion of a group by uniting various elements into a coherent whole and creating boundaries for the imagined community.[36] Polish seventeenth century nobility viewed Poland as a place chosen by God. W. Dębołecki, a Franciscan monk and composer argued that Adam and Eve spoke Polish in Paradise.[37] Another Franciscan monk, F. Jaroszewicz, compiled a book: *Poland, the Mother of the Saints* (1676). While Skarga mentions barely twenty-two Polish saints, Jaroszewicz increases that number to more than 350 to prove Poland's chosenness. Named a "monument to national vanity"[38], his book nonetheless marks the growing conviction that Poland is a country with 'a special mission in God's strategic plan'.[39]

The literature of the eighteenth century united various strands of popular beliefs about Poland such as its chosenness by God, implied moral superiority, devotion to Christianity, love for the ideal of Poland, even if the literature of the era brought works lamenting the selfishness of the nobility and their lack of respect for the law[40]. Poland's wars with non-Catholic countries strengthened the sense of Poland as a bastion of Catholicism with growing elements of Messianism visible in works by Dębołecki, Kochowski or Szemiot.

Despite highly successful educational reforms, the progressive Four-Year Diet (1788-1792) was unable to change Poland's fate: the country lost its independence in 1795. Yet, it was the Enlightenment that created the foundation for modern Poland with its rational criticism of society, secular perspective, focus on society as a whole,

35 Czesław Milosz, *The History*.... p. 94.

36 George Schöpflin, "The Function of Myth and A Taxonomy of Myths", [In;] *Myths and Nationhood*, G. A. Hosking, G. Schöpflin, [Eds.], London: Hurts 1997, pp. 19-23.

37 Wojciech Dębołęcki, *Wywód jedynowłasnego państwa świata*, Warszawa 1633, drukarnia J. Rossowski, https://polona.pl/item/wywod-iedynowlasnego-panstwa-swiata-w-ktorym-pokazuie-x-woyciech-debolecki-ze,ODE4MTg/8/#info:metadata.

38 Czesław Hernas, *Barok. Historia Literatury polskiej,* Warszawa: PWN 1973, p. 392.

39 *Literatura polska od średniowiecza do pozytywizmu.* J. Z. Jakubowski [Ed.], Warszawa PWN 1974, p. 211.

40 Janusz Pelc, *Sarmatyzm, Slownik Literatury staropolskiej. Sredniowiecze, Renesans, Barok*, Terasa Michalowska [Ed.], Wrocław: Ossolineum 1998, p. 836.

promotion of societal responsibilities, equality, and the popularisation of sciences. The period not only employed Western ideas, but also "discovered" Polish Renaissance with its interest in Epicurean "sensual joy" and "delight".[41] It also employed 'the language of Sarmatian republicanism" with the myth of Poland's superiority.[42] Some poets did write about suffering but it was not the centre of their attention as their focus was on the opposite – human, universal happiness.[43]

After the loss of independence in 1795, however, multiple poets devoted their work to the collective suffering of Poland, for example, the works of J. Morelowski, J. P. Woronicz, H. Kołłataj, or S. Karpiński. They mourned the loss of freedom, but they also presented the past as the guarantor of "national identity" and narrated Poland's history before 1795 as proof of God's special love [44] while "proclaiming the eschatological role that the revived Poland would play in the history of the nations."[45] This literature also created an arsenal of attributes of suffering used later by the Romantics with their focus on "the universal tone of bitterness, sorrow and despair".[46] The Polish approach to suffering in the second half of the eighteenth century also suggests the growing gap between the understanding of humanity by Western and Polish thinkers. When Western thinkers focussed on the individual right to happiness- the opposite of suffering - the political situation in Poland resulted in a greater focus on collectivity, on suffering and its expressions. Jeremy Bentham in his 1776 Preface to *A Fragment on Government* attempted to discover a method that would allow measuring "goodness" outside religion and outside the church.[47] The United States Declaration of Independence of 1776 presents happiness as one of the "unalienable rights" of humanity

41 Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temeriusz, "Neoepikureizm", [In:] *Słownik literatury staropolskiej*, Ibid. pp. 572-574.

42 Henryk Hinz, "The Philosophy of the Polish Enlightenment and Its Opponents", *The Slavic Review*, 2(1971), p. 346.

43 Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Cierpienia oświeconych, [In:] *Cierpienie w literaturze…* Ibid. *, p.* 23.

44 Zofia Rejman, "Żale, sny i smutki - o poezji patriotycznej 1795 roku", *Napis* 3 (1997), p.103.

45 Joel Burnell, *Poetry, Providence and Patriotism: Polish Messianism in Dialogue with Dietrich Banhoeffer*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications 2009, p. 54.

46 Zofia Rejman, "Żale…, p. 102.

47 J. H. Burns, "Happiness and Utility: Jeremy Bentham's Equation", *Utilitas*, 1(2005), pp. 46-61.

together with the right to liberty, suggesting greater emphasis on the individual, not on the collective. Yet, in Poland those were the years of fervent attempts to change the political system to prevent the loss of independence, not the time to strive for personal happiness outside collectivity. Rather, it was the time for uniting individual attempts for the collective struggle for Poland.

It is Polish Romantic Messianism that elevated suffering to its position as a cornerstone of Polish identity because 'the tragedy of the nation was explained in terms of a struggle between the forces of good and the powers of darkness" since Poland was "made fit for martyrdom by special favours."[48] Messianism, a 'type of religious consciousness closely bound up with millenarism"[49] explained the role of Poland by creating an intellectual parallel between the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus and the collective sacrifice and suffering of Poland. Since the crucifixion of Christ resulted in an individual salvation, the collective suffering of Poland was seen as a 'pre-condition for collective, social and political salvation on earth.'[50]

Suffering within the religious outlook was thus seen not only as necessary but also as a constructive part of the mission to liberate the world to "freedom to the people", not just to the Poles. I call such suffering 'a messianic suffering" as it was characterised by three major features. First it had to be purposeful and its purpose was clearly defined: to bring "freedom to the people" through the suffering of Poland. Second, the suffering had to represent a sacrificial offering for the greater good of the collective: in the struggle between the individual and the collective, the weight was awarded to the collective (Poland), not to the individual.[51] Third, the suffering had to be fully altruistic**.** If the ultimate culmination of the suffering was suicide then it would

48 Waldemar Chrostowski, The Suffering, Chosenness and Mission of the Polish Nation, [In:] *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 4(1991), p. 5.

49 Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland*, Oxford: Clarendon 1982, p. 240.

50 Ibid, p. 245.

51 Stefan Chwin, "Romantyzm i prawo do własnej smierci", [In:] *Księga Janion.* Z. Majchrowski, S. Rosiek [Eds.], Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz 2009, p. 223.

be, according to the Romantics, accepted by God despite the fact that the Catholic Church does not condone suicide. The three major features of messianic suffering, especially voluntary participation, not only rationalised and explained the suffering but made it purposeful and logical because at the very base of Polish Messianism was the strong belief in God's intervention in human history. The fusion of purposefulness of suffering with older ideas of Poland's chosenness by God, known from earlier works and from the works of early Romantics such as K. Brodziński or L. Królikowski, lead to the popularity of the *topos* of 'suffering Poland" as a logical explanation of Poland's fate in the 19th century. Thus Królikowski in 1833 compared Poland's suffering to that of a pregnant woman whose birth pains were necessary because they "would bring new life to the world".[52]

Mickiewicz's major works focus on the purpose of Poland's suffering from his 1828 *Konrad Wallendrod*, *The Forefathers'Eve* (1832), named "a gospel of Polish martyrdom for the nation"[53], *Books of the Polish Nation and the Polish Pilgrimage* (1832) to his Sorbonne lectures as the first holder of the *Chaire de langues et littératures slaves* when he equated the future independent Poland with that of the resurrection of Christ. In the 1840s under the influence of a mystic, Andrzej Towiański, Mickiewicz argued that Poles were chosen to participate in "God's work"[54] as they are, in Towiański's words "the brothers and the martyrs of freedom prepared for martyrdom".[55] Other Romantics, such as Z. Krasiński, strongly believed that Poland's martyrdom furthered the progress towards general salvation.[56] Karol Libelt, a

52 Ludwiki Królikowski, List apostolski z Warszawy, [In:] *Spór o mesjanizm. Rozwój idei. Klasycy polskiej nowoczesności*, A. Wawrzynowic [Ed.] Warszawa: Fundacja Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego 2015, p. 109.

53 Wacław Lednicki, *Bits of Table Talk on Pushkin, Mickiewicz, Goethe, Turgenev and Sienkiewicz*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956, p. 119.

54 Zofia Stefanowska, Legenda słowiańska w prelekcjach paryskich Mickiewicza, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1968, 59/2, p.53.

55 Andrzej Towiański, Przemówienie w katedrze Notre-Dame, [In:] *Spór o mesjanizm,* Ibid., p. 131.

56 Zygmunt Krasiński, Psalm wiary: "You are going towards Father's capital. What do you have to go through? – Through labour and martyrodom. https://literat.ug.edu.pl/psalmy/0001.htm [Transl. K. Zechenter]

philosopher, wrote in 1844 that the fields of battle will be transformed into "national altars where burnt and bloody sacrifices take place for the endless spirit".[57]

As Maria Janion, Poland's leading scholar on Romanticism, points out, with the fall of the January Uprising in 1864 the "national ritual of martyrdom and death"[58] began. The everyday terror started earlier during the 1861 mass demonstrations in Warsaw. This was also a period of Polish-Jewish unity: for instance, Michał Landy, who was Jewish, was wounded on April 8 (he died a day later) when, at the demonstration, he held a cross that he took from the hands of a dying Catholic priest. These deaths were commemorated with postcards emphasising the wounds of the dead as 'photography became part of national theatre"[59] because 'national mythology is not only located in texts or oral tradition, but also embedded in visual images'[60]. Here, the suffering was on display accessible to all.

To what degree the collective suffering of Poland and the actual suffering of individuals was united could be glimpsed from the book *Martyrology that is the Suffering of the Unites in Podlasie Region* about the destruction of the Unite communities from 1864 to 1882. The Unites were not Catholics but since the Union of Brest (1596) they accepted the authority of the Pope in Rome so their persecution by Russia was severe. The two volumes of *Martyrology* pedantically enumerate the beatings and tortures of the peasants (bullwhipping, horsewhipping, breaking teeth, pulling out hair, sentencing to Siberia), the subsequent suicides, the lists of the dead and those forced to baptise children in the Russian Orthodox Church. Their fate points out, not just the magnitude of the suffering, but it also highlights the connection

57 Karol Libelt, [In:] *Spór o mesjanizm. Rozwój idei. Klasycy polskiej nowoczesności*, A. Wawrzynowic [Ed.] Warszawa: Fundacja Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego 2015, p. 263.

58 Maria Janion, Maria Żmigrodzka, *Romantyzm i historia*, Warszawa: PIW 1978, p. 549.

59 Iwona Kurz, Pięciu poległych" jako metaobraz kultury polskiej połowy XIX wieku, *Widok* 10(2015), http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/312/590

60 Geneviève Zubrzycki, "History and the National Sensorium: Making Sense of Polish Mythology", *Qualitative Sociology, 34(2011), p. 24.*

between religion and collective suffering in Poland, attesting to the degree when the suffering entered "the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity."[61]

It was not just the poets who expressed their belief in a soteriological value of suffering. In 1848, young Stanisław Maroński, later a historian, published *The Song of the Nation of Suffering* which employs the messianic understanding of Poland's suffering – as it is purposeful ("the flower of freedom will grow"), sacrificial ('all people run towards death"), and altruistic ("to spread justice to the world").[62] Even women were targeted and treated as active insurgents, if convicted. Governor-general of the Vilnius region, Muraviov, declared collective punishment for families of women wearing black as it was seen as a form of commemoration for those who died during the 1863 uprising.[63]

The so-called 'epigones of Romanticism' also employed the concept of messianic suffering. Kornel Ujejski, a poet of "national suffering"[64] published in 1862 a poem, *For the Russians,* in which he refers to the transformative power of Poland's suffering as it will free Russians "from their spiritual slavery"[65]. In Jassy, where he went to organise Polish battalions, Ujejski wrote a call to arms to all Poles: that is "Poles, sincere Russians", "the noblemen, Israelites, peasants" because the future battle would be their 'blood baptism'[66]. For Ujejski, as for the Romantics, Polishness did not imply ethnicity but love for the lost country.

The positivists turned against the focus on suffering and against the obligation to suffer. Some, such as E. Orzeszkowa, in her novel *Nad Niemnem* (1888) searched for consolation in the heroism of the fallen with a strong postulate to learn from past mistakes to change society. Prints of forbidden works of art about suffering, such as A.

61 Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Towards*…, p. 10.

62 Stanisław Maroński, *Pieśn o narodzie cierpienia*, Gniezno 1848, pp. 39 and 35.

63 William Ansell Day, *The Russian government in Poland. With a narrative of the Polish insurrection of 1863*, London: Longmans 1867, p. 197.

64 Arkadiusz Bagłajewski, *Ostatni romantyk. Twórczość liryczna Kornela Ujejskiego*, Lublin: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 1999, p. 352.

65 Kornel Ujejski, *Dla Moskali. Wyjatek z niewydanych poezyi Kornela Ujejskiego*, Lipsk 1862, p. XIV.

66 Kornel Ujejski, *Melodyje biblijne. Wiersze różne*, Przemyśl 1893, p. 194.

Grottger's cycle of drawings *Polonia* or *Lithuania* (1863) were highly popular. Maybe the most direct attack against the sacrificial element of messianic suffering came from Boleslaw Prus' masterpiece, *The Doll* (1890). The protagonist, Stanisław Wokulski, who earlier was sentenced to Siberia, is positioned in the middle of the struggle between the collective and the individual. Wokulski fights against the obligation to sacrifice himself for the collective because he believes the collective to be indifferent towards individuals. His defiance and rebellion does not end well – he either commits suicide or escapes Poland[67] supporting Alexander's argument that the construction of cultural trauma is always embedded in everyday life.[68]

Sienkiewicz oversimplified and glorified Poland's collective suffering. His novels were to 'lift the nation spirit" but they also succeeded in presenting military traumas and the multiple faults of the Poles as their moral victories. Yes, the Poles in his novels did suffer and so did Poland but death, including a 'military suicide', was applauded as an ethical victory. Although Sienkiewicz's historiosophy was condemned as too conservative and nationalist[69], his novels nonetheless became an extremely popular reading in Poland due to their intellectual simplicity and presenting past suffering as morally beneficial, Poles as superior to others thus preserving the stability of the collective in "terms of meaning, not action".[70]

If the messianic suffering was perceived by the Romantics as purposeful because it was based on their belief in God's active participation in history, for the positivists the belief was impossible as their outlook was heavily influenced by the enormity of the suffering they experienced and witnessed during and after 1863, and by their scientific approach to the world. Positivists opposed metaphysics and Messianism, thus the very concept of messianic suffering with its demand for collective

67 Zygmunt M. Szweykowski, *Twórczość Bolesława P*rusa, Warszawa: PIW 1972, p. 223.

68 Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Towards*…, p. 2.

69 Stanisław Brzozowski, *Wczesne prace krytyczne,* Warszawa: PIW 1988, pp. 133-168.

70 Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Towards*…, p. 10.

sacrifice appeared nonsensical. They accepted that at that time there was no hope for Poland's independence so they shifted their focus towards "organic work" and "the work at the foundations" with their faith in altruism and help, but not sacrifice. Literature was to be utilitarian, should educate, improve the fate of peasants, women and Jews, and promote not 'the suffering nation" but rather the society. Yet, the belief in the purposefulness of suffering was strong as in the final words of the 1872 anonymous novel, *The Last Sacrifice,* that suggest the degree to which collective suffering has proven "more convincing than the historical facts"[71]: "the idea of love without an end-to reject temporal happiness-to sacrifice without boundaries-for the Homeland."[72]

Although positivists acknowledged the influence of Romantic poets, it was the beginning of Modernism that was heavily influenced by Messianism and the concept of suffering because according to S. Przybyszewski positivism explained neither Polish essence nor martyrdom.[73] Some critics, following Brzozowski, saw in the literature of the era a form of synthesis between Realism and Romanticism, especially in the works of A. Asnyk, and his promotion of selfless self-sacrifice for the future.[74] Yet, Brzozowski argued against the fascination with the concept of suffering as a substitution for intellectual work[75] as he realised the danger of pride in the acceptance of suffering; a danger clearly pointed out by Mickiewicz in his *Books*.

Among writers who emphasized the enormity of Poland's suffering was Stefan Żeromski. Seen as a charismatic leader of his generation[76] just as Mickiewicz was for his, Żeromski was heavily influenced by Romanticism[77] and Brzozowski believed that

71Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, Vol. 1, New York: Columbia U Press 1982, p. 18.

72 *Ostatnia ofiara*, (Anonym.), Gniezno 1872, p.

73 Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Szlakiem duszy polskiej*, Poznań: Ostoja 1920, p. 86-103.

74 Henryk Markiewicz, Młoda Polska a dziedzictwo pozytywizmu, *Pamietnik Literacki,* 2(1995) p. 82.

75 Stanisław Brzozowski, *Legenda Mlodej Polski*. Vol. 1, Kraków: WL 1997, p. 390.

76 Eugenia Loch, Niektóre problemy osobowości twórczej Stefana Żeromskiego, [In:] Stefan Zeromski. O twórczości literackiej, Lublin: Lubelskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1994, p. 9.

77 Stanisław Brzozowski, *O Stefanie Zeromskim*, Warszawa 1905.

Żeromski's novels expressed "the stigmata of suffering"[78]. Yet, for Żeromski, unlike for the Romantics for whom history was "a place of fulfilment of higher sense, purpose and desires'[79], suffering did not perform a soteriological function. More importantly, Żeromski rejected the Romantic vision of Poland as a blameless victim whose "martyrdom and resurrection would begin a new era of freedom in the history of the world"[80] and although his characters face purposeless evil without hope that their action might lead to any positive outcome, they also realize that the old collective traumas were responsible for some of the evil in the first place.

Regaining independence in 1918 meant consequently that the focus on messianic suffering changed as fiction moved away from the dichotomic representation of suffering either as a moral stand which implied Poland's superiority and innocence (e.g. Sienkiewicz's approach, even if the story is set in Africa[81]), or suffering as a point of reassessment of Polish history (Żeromski's tradition).

In the immediate years after 1918, writers and poets expressed delight at the release of literature from representing national traumas. Probably the best known expression of this joy is A. Słonimski poem, *The Black Spring*, in which he choses artistic freedom over "writing the Polish way" in favour of another, such as the "French or Chinese way' because "my homeland, my homeland is free/ I throw away from my shoulders the coat of Konrad" referring to the iconic character in Mickiewicz's drama. Similarly, J. Lechoń in his poem "Herostrates" (*Herostrates*) demands to be free from patriotic representations: "during the spring, let me see the spring, not Poland". Both Słonimski and Lechoń belonged to a poetic group, 'Skamander', whose manifesto proclaimed focussing on the present and not the troubled past; poetry was to bring joy

78 Eugenia Loch, Szkice o twórczości literackiej Stefana Żeromskiego, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2008, p. 11.

79 Maria Janion, Cierpienie i śmierć w myśleniu mesjanistycznym, *Twórczość*, 1(1983), p.137.

80 Maria Janion, Cierpienie…, p. 137.

81 Anna Cichoń, "W kręgu zagadnień literatury kolonialnej. *W pustyni i w puszczy* Henryka Sienkiewicza", *Er(r)go. Teoria-Literatura-Kultura*. 1(2004), pp. 91-108.

and pleasure to the reader. They felt themselves to be of a generation free from Romantic obligations and they expressed it: Wierzyński, for instance, used to recite his poems in a café, 'Under the Picador' and 'conquered the public with poems that were pure shouts of joy".[82] Another poetic group, 'Kraków Avantgarde', proclaimed its love for the future, all that was new and progressive while rejecting the Romantic notion of poetry as a prophetic act and saw poetry as an intellectual endeavour requiring discipline.[83] Yet, the full rejection of martyrology was difficult with prayers for a universal war being a fixed part of the major romantic narrative[84] although a few pacifist novels appeared in the late 1930s: brutally honest S. Rembek's *In Action* and J. Wittlin's *Salt of the Earth* where the suffering of individuals was not redeemed by the victory of the collective. Also, writers presented 'resurrected' Poland as corrupted and cynical although some novels, such as a family saga *Nights and Days* (1932-1934) by M. Dabrowska argued that collective suffering has become a fixed and essential aspect of Polish identity.[85]

Barely twenty years later, Poland had lost its independence again. WWII was a long and unprecedented period of suffering for the different people and nationalities in occupied Poland. It did not end in 1945 either, thus representations of suffering became the main topic of Polish literature afterwards, and to some degree they are still central to Polish identity even now through the politics of memory.[86] If writing about suffering under German occupation was encouraged, works about life under Soviet occupation had to be published abroad, either in Paris or in London.[87]

Shortly after 1945 suffering was read through what could be called "a

82 Czesław Miłosz, *The History…,* p. 395.

83 Bogdana Carpenter, *The poetic avant-garde in Poland 1918-1939*, Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 1983, p. 63.

84Adam Mickiewicz's 'The Pilgrim's Litany' which is a prayer for a universal war, concludes his 1832 Messianic *The Books of the Polish Nation.*

85 Ewa Borowiecka, "Koncepcja szczęścia w powieści Marii Dabrowskiej *Noce i dnie*, [In:] *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska,* (22), 1967, p. 52.

86 Dorota Szeligowska, *Polish Patriotism after 1989. Concepts, Debates, Identities*. Nationalisms Across The Globe, Vol. 17, Bern: Peter Lang 2016.

87 Gustaw Herling Grudziński's *The World Apart* was first published in English in 1951 in London, then in Polish, also in London in 1953. In Poland the book could appear only in 1988.

universalisation lens"; it was "people that dealt this fate to people" to employ Nałkowska's famous motto in her 1946 factual stories, *Medallions*, as a response to the racist principles of racial segregation during WWII.[88] Suffering was not presented an act of God, as God was absent; it was humanity that was responsible for this new "monstrous civilisation"[89] without a clear division between victims and torturers in Borowski's factual stories that rejected traditional martyrological patterns.

After WWII the vast majority, if not all, of Polish-Jewish writers and non-Jewish writers mediated their suffering by representations that eventually altered Polish understanding of collective suffering although the earliest representations focused on the inability of the language to express these experiences despite 'the absence of narrative capacity or a refusal of narrative indicates an absence or refusal of meaning itself."[90] Some poets, especially T. Różewicz, took upon themselves the task to 'create poetry after Auschwitz' in his dialogue with Adorno, and laid bare the inadequacy of culture, and art in general.[91] For Różewicz, the enormity of the suffering did not, because it could not, have any justification, metaphysical or otherwise. As he argued in his 1968 poem *Falling*: "there was no bottom", no absolute, and no language to express the suffering of the modern man, except for "the recognition of his own state".[92] Różewicz, just like Borowski, Konwicki, Mrożek or Białoszewski rejected the paradigm of the patriotic victim/sufferer in their struggle of de-heroization of war within history outside the teleological dimension.[93]

By the late 1960s Polish and Jewish suffering was presented as separate within the dominant narrative of the "fighting and suffering Poles" and "helpless Jewish

88 Artur Sandauer, *O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku*, Warszawa 1982, p. 5.

89 Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas,Ladies and Gentlemen and Other Storie,.* Barbara Vedder [Transl], London: Cape 1967, p. .111.

90 Hayden White, *The Content of the Form.Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore 1990, p. 2.

91 Leszek Engelkind, Laleczki na sprzedaż. *Musicalia XI, Judaica* 3, http://www.demusica.pl/cmsimple/images/file/engelking_muzykalia_11_judaica3.pdf

92 Jennifer J. Day, Modes of Falling in Tadeusz Różewicz's 'Spadanie", *The Polish Review*, 4(2000), p. 415.

93 Jerzy Kałążny, "Kiedy właściwie skończył się romantyzm? O (nie)trwałości paradygmatu romantycznego w kulturze polskiej i niemieckiej*", Interakcje. Leksykon komunkowania polsko-niemieckiego*, http://www.polska-niemcy-interakcje.pl/articles/show/31

victims"[94] which was particularly visible in mass culture, namely in film adaptations of popular novels, such as R. Bratny's *The Columbuses.* Although mentioned, for instance, in many of Konwicki's novels on the Borderland[95], the Holocaust was not seen as a part of Polish cultural trauma or even Poland-defining trauma. It was poetry by M. Białoszewski, T. Borowski, J. Ficowski, H. Grynberg, C. Miłosz, M. Jastrun, A. Kamieńska, Z. Herbert, W. Szymborska, and many others that internalised and symbolised that suffering sometimes while also rejecting the Polish mythology of persecution. The greater recognition of the role of the Holocaust came only in the late 1970s when the Communist censorship grew weaker: it began with K. Moczarski's account of SS commander, Jürgen Stroop, who was responsible for the massacre of the Warsaw Ghetto and H. Krall's phenomenally popular *To Steal a March on God* about the last leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Marek Edelman, that brought Jewish suffering into the main Polish narrative because "although we do not always realize it, the Holocaust informs the entire system of contemporary culture, all the questions and dilemmas of post-modernity.'[96]

One of the most enduring elements of Polish mythology since the Great Emigration was the trauma of exile, the suffering "pilgrims" to freedom, and exile as dispossession. Some writers, however, saw in it not just a 'terminal loss' but rather a 'creative benefit'[97] that informs Polish paradigms. One of Mrożek's most famous short stories, "Moniza Clavier" (1967), brings the story of a Pole from communist Poland desperate to impress the rich Westerners, but who, as a Pole "lacks a definite form".[98] The only form he can present to the West is the never-ending suffering of Poland. During a party, the unnamed hero points to his missing back teeth: "'Here, here', I

94 *Literatura polska wobec Zagłady*, A. Brodzka-Wald, D. Krawczyńska, J. Leociak [Eds.], Warszawa: ZIH 2000.

95 Katarzyna Zechenter, **"**New Forms of Writing about Jews in Polish Fiction after 1986", American Association for Polish Jewish Studies, http://www.aapjstudies.org/index.php?id=203

96Maria Janion, *Bohater, spisek, śmierć. Wykłady żydowskie*, Warsaw, 2009, p. 63.

97 Leszek Kołakowski, 'In Praise of Exile', [In:] *Altogether Elsewhere*, Marc Robinson [Ed.], Winchester: Faber and Faber 1994, p. 191.

98 Halina Stephan, *Transcending the Absurd: Drama and Prose of Sławomir Mrożek*, Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997, p. 241.

screamed […] pointing to my molars. 'Here, sir, they knocked them out, for freedom, sir, they knocked them out.' They got quiet, unable to understand […]. And I only wanted to demonstrate clearly the suffering of my people. The fact, that they did not appreciate martyrology made me very angry."[99] Mrożek's character suggests not only superficiality of understanding of the concept itself, but also the degree to which suffering became synonymous with the cult of suffering as an excuse for all possible ills and shortcomings, including poor oral hygiene. By emphasising that the protagonist misses his back teeth, which cannot be 'knocked out', Mrożek argues that primacy of collective suffering represents Poland's most apparent identity, and that the phantom of suffering allows every Pole to partake in the realisation of the community by proving attachment to the trauma through imagined suffering.[100]

The struggle with the "cult of suffering" (*cierpiętnictwo*) began soon after the fall of the 1863 uprising but was not successful. Prus or Brzozowski fought it as an excuse to avoid responsibility and lack of realism as did Mrożek or W. Gombrowicz who, in 1957 wrote in his provocative attacks on "the Polish cannon" that he "simply wants the Pole to stop being the product 'of' an exclusively collective life and 'for' collective life."[101] When Konwicki published *A Minor Apocalypse* in 1979, he attacked another aspect of the simplified phantasm of suffering: being forced by others to suffer (in this case to self-immolate) to prove one's "true" Polishness. The biting satire of his novel, including its title, derives from the fact that Konwicki presents Poles as eternal sufferers who repeat empty patterns of collective behaviour while eroding Polish values such as remembrance of Poland's multi-national past.[102]

The dramatic changes that took place in the late 1980s were not only political in scope but cultural as they manifested themselves in the metafictional character of

99 Sławomir Mrożek, *Moniza Clavier*, Kraków: WL 1983, p. 25. [Transl. by K.Zechenter]

100 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism.* London, New York: Verso 2006, pp. 142-144.

101 Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*, Vol.2, L. Vallee [Transl], Ewanston: Northwestern University Press 1989, p. 14.

102 Katarzyna Zechenter, *The Fiction of Tadeusz Konwicki. Coming to Terms with Post-War History and Politics*, Lewiston: EMPress 2007, pp. 204-211.

new prose, a child-narrator who sees the world 'anew', and in the rejection of 'traditional' Polish preoccupations in search for a history that was silenced after 1945.[103] The approach includes suffering but not focus on Polish suffering, rather on suffering of the Other(s), while connecting individual narrations with national and martyrological ones.[104] The change was led by four spectacularly popular novels: A. Szczypiorski's *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*, P. Huelle's *Who Was David Weiser*?, T. Konwicki's *Bohin Manor* and J. M. Rymkiewicz's *Umschlagplatz* which began an open dialogue with Polish discourses of suffering – and accepting not only the suffering of the Other(s) but mainly challenging the final element of the Polish suffering paradigm - the innocence of the Polish victim by admitting Polish guilt of anti-Semitism and indifference without questioning the historically accurate Polish suffering.[105] Later novels suggested further loss of *sacrum* but also focussed on Ukrainian, German or Silesian suffering in works by A. Bolecka, T. Lubkiewicz-Urbanowicz, O. Tokarczuk, W. Odojewski or P. Szewc but also on suffering inflicted by the Polish patriarchal system in W. Kuczok's *Muck*.

Janion argued that after Poland joined the European Union (EU) in 2004 "we saw the last vestiges of the thoroughly trivialized Romantic paradigms trail away into oblivion."[106] She pointed out the shallowness yet durability of the rhetoric of suffering: "since we [the Poles] suffered because of her [Europe], she sold us out and now we would extract from her what is rightly ours"[107]. Yet Janion was wrong because the revision of national mythology was, and still is incomplete as J. Sowa argues.[108] In 2008

103 Przemysław Czapliński, 'Nieepicki model prozy w literaturze najnowszej", *Teksty Drugie* 5(1994) pp. 69-70.

104 Kinga Dunin, *Czytajac Polskę. Literatura polska po roku 1989 wobec dylemantów nowoczesności*, Warszawa: WAB 2004, p. 70.

105 Katarzyna Zechenter, "New Forms of Writing about Jews in Polish Fiction after 1986": http://www.aapjstudies.org/index.php?id=203

106 Maria Janion, "Farewell to Poland? The uprisng of a nation", *Baltic Worlds*, 4(2011), p. 4.

107 Maria Janion, "Farewell…", p. 6.

108 Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, Kraków: Universitas 2011.

a new journal *44. The Apocalyptical Magazine* appeared [109] with Rafał Tichy's "Neomessianic manifesto" that attempted to resurrect the soteriological function of Polish suffering and with it, the innate 'moral superiority' of Poland's past suffering. The same 'superiority' that has been attacked by Mickiewicz, Zeromski, Brzozowski, Błoński or Lipski as a form of national megalomania.[110] Tichy argued that "in the very centre of Messianism there is a question about the purpose of the suffering of our nation" that has to be connected with "the hidden eschatological dimension" of the modern world yet was unable to explain what in suffering constitutes "greatness" or why suffering as a trauma per se should be considered Poland's "greatness"[111] in the post-Holocaust world.

After the plane accident in 2010 in which President Kaczynski died, Poland saw yet another attempt to create a "new messianic myth"[112]; a repetition of patterns of suffering that last time were resurrected (albeit briefly) during the martial law of 1981. Thus W. Wencel, in his poem 'In hora mortis' written on the day of the crash, suggests that the accident represented the latest form of Polish eternal struggle: "Poland did not die yet, as long as we die,/as long as our older brothers travel to the earth." For him, Poland is the chosen nation precisely because of its continuous suffering even if this suffering is incidental: "the more senseless your death appears/ the more grateful you should be that you are a Pole." [113] His suspension of logic as well as the belief in the only "correct" paradigm of Polishness through martyrdom goes back to the 'mythical violence' of Polish Romanticism, yet now it locates Wenzel in the political sphere through the mythologisation of an accident presented as a conscious sacrifice to win at

109 The number 44 in Polish culture occupies a unique place as 44 is the cryptic name of the Messiah who was to save Poland; critics using gematria, alchemical symbolism, Kabala and the influence of the French mystic Saint-Martin debated its significance: Zdzislaw Kępiński*, Mickiewicz hermetyczny,* Warszawa: PIW 1980, pp. 292-334.

110 Jan Józef Lipski, "Two Fatherlands, Two Patriotisms", [In:] *Between East and West, Writings from Kultura*, New York 1990.

111 Rafał Tichy, 'Manifest mesjanistyczny", *44. Magazyn Mesjanistyczny*, http://44.org.pl/redakcja/manifest-neomesjanistyczny/

112 Maria Janion, *List do Kongresu Kultury*, 7 October 2016, http://www.kongreskultury2016.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/prof-kongres-kultury-6-7-pa%C5%BAdziernika-2016.pdf

113 Dariusz Kulesza, "Nowa poezja narodowa? O wierszach i prozie Wojciecha Wencla", *Kijowskie Studia Polonistyczne*, Vol. 19, 2012, pp. 336-346.,

‘the suffering olympics’.

Thanks to the belief system created by the Romantic poets, suffering during partitions and uprisings became the cornerstone of Polish national memory and identity in the 19th century. The loss of independence was, not doubt, Poland’s greatest cultural trauma that was constructed and transmitted by literature and culture within the national *imaginarium*. Despite multiple critical attempts to reject its power, suffering provided logical and potent construct of Polish identity while implying moral superiority of Poland as a perfect and blameless victim. The literature after 1945 rejected those patterns and emphasised the need for revision of Polish mythology that was fully possible only after 1989 with post-modern literature clearly proving that the sacred nature of Polish suffering is not seen as sacred anymore. And that even in the era without a unifying narrative, suffering has lost its power to unite because Polish identity is no longer bound by the past representations of suffering.