

# Parallel of the collective fate of Poles in the novel *Bohni* by Tadeusz Konwicki

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Thirty years after the Paskiewicz's night in the Kingdom of Poland, on the so-called "Taken Lands"<sup>1</sup> On the night of January 22<sup>nd</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup>, 1863, the uprising broke out, and it lasted until autumn of 1864. The January Uprising took place not only in the Kingdom of Poland, but also in Lithuania.

It was a strong uprising which moved through Europe like a storm. It broke out suddenly then it calmed down. This strange uprising influenced lives of those people who have seen its beginning at the dawn, before they started their day, this unforgettable uprising which was present everywhere above crossings and manors<sup>2</sup>.

January Uprising had a huge influence on people who took part in it, their families and descendants. The fight was not successful and it has taken its toll on people living in later times. The defeat in 1864 ended the time period of fighting for independence, thus the January Uprising was very fresh in poles memories. It was a symbol of calamity but also a great sacrifice.

Tadeusz Konwicki dealt with the difficult post-uprising situation in his novel *Bohni*, which also becomes a journey to Wileńszczyzna. The narrator — author's alter ego — goes back in time, following unknown grandmother Helena Konwicka. People perceive this novel as one of the most beautiful manor's romance<sup>3</sup>. It was published in 1987. The book presents repetitive fate of polish people. The problem of "Polish Disease" was brought up by scholars who studied this "most unusual book written by Konwicki"<sup>4</sup>.

1 Territories of Lithuania and Ruś: Belarus, Ukraine, which Aleksander II wanted to take away from Poland

2 Konwicki T., *Bohni*, Warsaw 1987, p. 19.

3 Czapliński P., *Tadeusz Konwicki*, Poznań 1994, p. 172.

4 See.: Dąbrowski M., *Kresy w perspektywie postkolonialnej*, "Porównania" 2008, no. 5, p. 105.

This novel combines personal story with events concerning the whole country, nation and even the world in a very personal way. *Bohiń* is a picture of Polish repeatable fate<sup>5</sup>.

Later, other scholars also emphasised the recurrence of this collective fate of Polish people:

*Bohiń* depicts the corrupted, everyday life under occupation at the beginning of the century and heroic memory of uprising. The ambiguity is shown by a romance between a gentlewoman and a Jew<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, in the novel the arkadian image of eastern land is destroyed: History marked this place with suffering, war and disorder.

Przemysław Czapliński states that:

*Bohiń* presents another stage of author's experience, painful parting with the myth of Eastern Lands, where the order of life was commonly accepted<sup>7</sup>.

In 1875 Lithuanian province seems to be a peaceful place. The atmosphere of repetitive days, inexplicable anxiety and anticipation of inevitable catastrophe, leads us to believe that time stopped in 1863.

*Bohiń* Manor, where Michał Konwicki and his daughter Helena, who has his grandmother's personality features<sup>8</sup>, live, is a place where signs of uprising are still visible. Those events are still present in the memory of inhabitants and in their everyday existence. As if life has stopped in that particular moment. The main hero, 30 years old lady, realises that, when she watches the passivity and stagnation, prevailing in society and expressing themselves in aversion, and turning away from life:

(...) nobody even makes new clothes anymore. Everybody froze like stone figures.

Fighting for independence was once the only purpose in people's lives, now without it the despair is clearly visible in everyday activities. Future does not lead anywhere. According to Miss Helena there is no hope for tomorrow. In her thoughts one can see that she has been trapped in the past, which she relives many times. For her, as well as for others, existence

5 Kijowski A. T., *Oddalenie od miejsca*, "Twórczość" 1998, no. 9 (514), p. 97

6 Zieniewicz A., *Obecność autora. Style rzeczywistości w sylwii współczesnej*, Warsaw 2001, p. 144.

7 Czapliński P., op. cit., p. 176.

8 Strzeszewski D., "*Bohiń*" *Tadeusza Konwickiego, czyli kłopoty z zębem dinozaura*, "Tekstualia. Palimpsesty literackie, naukowe, artystyczne" 2005, no. 2, p. 62.

seem to consist of repeatable moments which combined together create everyday life:

Holly Mass in church, exuberant name-day (...) severe illness at the end of winter and prayer for the homeland and recollection of those uprisings which still live though they are long dead.

Instead of hope for the future, the darkness covers everything. Even time is counted since the year 1863.

With great sadness and nostalgia Helena goes back to memories about profound moments when people were awaiting uprising with hope. That war was a fight for a new beginning, for reborn:

Not so long ago there was an uprising, which was supposed to start a different life. Conversations during night. Setting of at dawn. Unstrung piano. Distant shoots in forests. Sometimes loud noises in the morning.

But poetry and classical music describing uprising were far from reality. Shoots were not distant but actually close. The sound of galloping horses was accompanied by endless fear for kin. The desire to act and images of warfare proved to be unrealistic.

Every man in Helena's life was influenced by uprising. Her suffering was connected not only with her father's participation in war or the lost of family house. Time stopped for her in 1863 when she lost her fiance Piotruś Pieślak. Being a widow, she stayed faithful to the one who does not need her anymore, and necessity of living in a new, difficult reality. Her lonely journeys to the cemetery became a habit.

Standing over her lover's grave, Helena ponders over his appearance, but she also recalls traumatic image of his dead body lying under the tree for the whole spring. She wonders what would happen if Piotruś was alive. "How would our life look like?". Her lover, Eliaasz Szyra, a Jude from Bujwidz, also participated in the uprising and after it he was forced to emigrate. Helena cannot escape those memories also because of her father's silence "He said once during the supper: there is nothing to talk about. I will speak when our country is free" (p. 33). Trauma of the defeat became a burden for his daughter.

Michał on the other hand is concerned with the memories of his country being torn apart (p. 95).

His office became an altar of martyrdom of the Polish nation. Among books that fill Konwicki's room one can find texts of Polish, Russian and Lithuanian writers. Works about shame of Polish nation, rewritten texts from occupation period and Mickiewicz's *improvizacja*.

National relics survived in memory and hearts, thanks to this repeated fate. Often during 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the moments of despair poles unanimously said “Boże, coś Polskę” and up to now one can hear the text of Mazurek Dąbrowskiego “Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła”.

The memory of uprising completely changes character's lives, whether or not they participated in it. Nourishing those memories connects people like nothing else. This also removes social differences and obstacles. When handmaiden Emilka is sent for bandages she says “They have been lying in a box since that time”. Everyone knows what time she is referring to.

Not only people but also places reminds readers about the uprising. Old servant Konstanty Konwicki wonders about battlefields and resistance hideouts. “I always remember it when I am here” (p. 13) especially places marked with death. “Not far from here they have found Piotruś”. Resistance graves. Not only graves, cemeteries and mourning — after relatives and country — brings back memories. Even forest became natural statues, it was there that resistance lived. Soldiers left their houses and sought hideouts in forests. Helena states it subconsciously that “This forest is our house” Her words are commented by isprawnik “I know what you need forests for” (p. 68). Forests served as a home, shelter, fortress also during Kościuszko Insurrection and November Uprising. They also return during first and second World War. As Krystyna Kralkowska states “Poland repeats itself in rebellion and fights<sup>9</sup>”

Places where soldiers died are sacred like altars. In *Bobin* similarly to *Nad Niemnem* one particular place — Powstańcza Góra — becomes the mass grave for uprising participants.

Real experience of soldiers becomes a symbol of fight, brotherhood and freedom. Apart from places and events which gained symbolic meaning and which are important for society, also stories became essential. Those stories create a myth of place and time<sup>10</sup>. Konstanty tells such a tale. On the river Wilia, on a boat, there are two emperors: Aleksander and Napoleon and each one is rowing in different direction. It lasts for about half-century. They appear before the dawn, and the old man states that, they are harbingers of important events. He saw them before the uprising — probably as a warning.

Another legend among people leaving near Wilia is one about Schickelgruber<sup>11</sup>, who kills people. Text does not clearly state who she is and

9 Kralkowska K., *Gorąca aktualność, gorąca tradycja. Na marginesie “Czytadła” Tadeusza Konwickiego*, “Fa-art. Kwartalnik literacki” 1993, no. 2–3 (12–13), p. 96.

10 Dąbrowski M., op. cit., p. 101–103.

11 Anna Maria Schickelgruber was a surname of Adolfa's Hitler grandmother, thus the devil in *Bobini foretells* the appearance of one of the biggest dictators and tyrans of all times.

where she is from, but it is worth mentioning because of Konstanty's words: "There always has to be someone who kills the nation" (p. 30). It is easy to connect this devil from *Bohiń* with Hitler. Far away there is a man with moustache who murders people and burns their bodies. Despite the fact that his name does not appear anywhere, its presence is obvious because of the sounds coming from the forests which foretell the scream, despair and suffering which will be brought upon people by XX century.

Despair was close. It hasn't reached people yet but it has already appeared on the horizon. Optimists say it is just a storm, but the most sensitive seismographs say otherwise. This great despair will come<sup>12</sup>.

The second demon is omnipresent Dżugaszwili. He moves around like strong wind. Thus, Stalin is mentioned by name.

Terrifying sounds do not refer to one particular moment in history thus, they can be treated as a prophecy of the "century of totalitarian rules"<sup>13</sup>. "The devil is an emptiness personified in human"<sup>14</sup> It appears that this devil has much more in common with people than with its literary counterpart. It is the Devil, who influences the world presented in the novel. It combines metaphysics with everyday life and through this, it refers to the most profound emotions<sup>15</sup>. After many years of absence among people, the Devil, mentioned by Konwicki, again starts to appear. Wars and catastrophes are imminent. They are foretold in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the appearance of two devils who haunt small community. Taking into consideration participation of those two devils in upcoming events, it is difficult to be positive about the future.

Almost everyone takes part in this story: Antoni Sieniuć was fighting in the uprising, even priest Siemaszko believes more in Belarussian riot than in God's help and for his deeds he is moved to Bujwidze. He also recalls his past from the times of Wiosna Ludów.

Konwicki cannot forget about uprising because he was expelled from his home — Miłowidów village situated near Bohiń Grange. After 1864 keeping wealth and land in Polish hands was endangered and sometimes even impossible. This happened to Michał Konwicki. Helena's father was a head of powiat, and when after the defeat of the uprising his participation in it was revealed, his possessions had been taken away and given to Korsakow.

12 Konwicki T., *Kalendarz i klepsydra*, Warsaw 2005, p. 180.

13 Strzeszewski D., op. cit., p. 63.

14 Laurentin R., *Szatan — mit czy rzeczywistość?*, Warszawa 1997, p.103.

15 Błażejewski T., *Diabeł uczłowieczony — wersje współczesne*, "Acta Universitatis Lodzensis. Folia Literaria Polonica" 2001, no. 4, p. 181.

New owner of Miłowidów is a traitor who changed his name to boost his career and he is tsarist servant. But in his own mind he is a true patriot who fought in war on Krym and who supports uprising with all his heart.

Korsakowski seems to be familiar for a reader who is aware of historical events of the 1880's. His attitude and behaviour is understandable for people living in his times and times of his grandmother. Korsakow tries to befriend the previous owners of Miłowidy by visiting them, giving presents and making conversations. When this proves to be ineffective, being obsessed with a need of acceptance, he goes on war with them. He creates the impression of common interest and then lies to Konwicki, that he has found a trunk full of National Documents hidden after the defeat of uprising. He either says he has burnt them or insists on trying to find out who wrote and hid them. One minute he apologises and begs for forgiveness, the other he blackmails or threatens them saying: "Mister Michal, You'd better not be angry with me" (p. 63). Staszewski points out "the atmosphere of suspicion, moral blackmailing and accusations<sup>16</sup> (...) which accompanied the activities of the resistance. During 1980's Korsakow makes threats:

I will have you all sent to Sybir (...) I know you plot against our beloved Tsar and mother Russia. You have gatherings in forests at nights. (p. 83-84)

Moreover Korsakow agitates for russian government. In his thrilling speech he talks about an alliance with Moscow, voluntary union with the eastern empire and stopping resistance:

This are all lies<sup>17</sup>. Our destiny is to sink in Russian sea. Stop opposing and become a part of Russian nation (...) resistance and fights will bring us all doom. The doom of speech, thought, culture and whole nation. We have to survive inside, because there is no hope outside (...). We have to cooperate. This is the only way. I wan to redeem you (p. 162).

This division into masters and slaves was clearly visible, especially during *Solidarność* and martial law period. Common good was just a lie, underneath it there was a new colonization, but in reality it was identical to the previous one. The government had absolute power, all manifestations of rebellion and striving for sovereignty were to be exterminated.

In *Bobini* isprawnik Dżugaszwili, with his behaviour towards Helena demonstrates that slavery never changes. Slave master does not ask, but de-

16 Strzeszewski D., op. cit., p. 71.

17 Interestingly, the words spoken by Korsakoff recall other significant sentence: "No lies, gentlemen" — said the leadership of Tsar Alexander II, visiting Warsaw in 1856.

mands “My Lady doesn’t speak Russian at all? May I ask why? (...) It’s high time we knew national language” (p. 120)

Isprawnik Wissarion Josifowicz Dżugaszwili is a local evil spirit. Plater depicts him as an ordinary man who was elevated by famous Wieszatiel after November uprising. His appearance causes fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Even his surname tells a lot about him<sup>18</sup>. He is considered to be a traitor and could be very well moved into author’s times. He spies on people and seeks every threat that could endanger the system. It is said that he “Sniffs like a police dog. Rumour has it that revolutionists, foreigners or students appeared somewhere” (p. 24)

In 1880’s everyone was spied on, observed and controlled. Students were perceived as people who gives no benefits to the country and spread revolutionary ideas because of their love toward literature and history. They cause distortion and are troublesome for the government. In *Bohin* insprawnik carefully watches newcomers, especially Szyra.

Historical analogies are also visible in government’s language which is represented by Dżugaszwili and to some degree by Korsakow. Rhetoric style is characteristic for Tzar’ bureaucracy<sup>19</sup>.

As Strzeszewski mentions:

It has inward persuasion mechanism, it uses perverted euphemism, it deals with political matters (...) like a crime chronicle. It creates negative associations<sup>20</sup>.

Announcements appear in novel also in reference to post uprising period. Style which Wissarion Josifowicz uses is similar to the one characteristic for secret police. One can easily provide examples; short, imperative sentences sounds like orders, prohibitions and injunctions: “(...) I urge you to be mindful of foreigners. There can be riots in our area. It is up to us to provide security” (p. 43), or: “I have orders to watch strangers and prevent distortions” (p. 43). “It is our utmost duty to observe strangers and prevent unrest” (p. 68). During the conversation about Mickiewicz “Oh, that mutineer (...) his brother was a good and faithful citizen (...) but he, a criminal and a liar, escaped country to continue his unlawful activities (p. 120). He said to Helena: “It is easy to lose path in a forest” (p. 119). He over uses the word *anxiety* but what he really means in *uprising*. It was decided not to use

18 Isprawnik may be associated with Józef Stalin (Josif Wissarionowicz Dżugaszwili), who was also Georgian.

19 See. Głowiński M., *Nowomowa po polsku*, Warsaw 1991, s. 34–57; M. Głowiński, *Mowa w stanie oblężenia: 1981–85*, Warsaw 1996, p. 151–165.

20 Strzeszewski D., op. cit., p. 70.

the latter so that Poles would not remember about past events. Uprising was a riot, a disobedience, something that should never have happened.

Korsakow, neither happily nor sadly, said something that is still viable today (but nowadays it sounds more facetiously) “you have to be on good terms with police force” (p. 43)

Awareness of spies and betrayers in 1880's, after the uprising, forced people into being very cautious. Admonitions in Konwicki's novel are like collective conspiracy. “Hush, be quiet, don't say a word” (p. 25 priest Siemaszko) “Better be careful” (p. 24 count Plater). Fear and anxiety make people always mind their words and actions. Priest Siemaszko has a feeling of being spied upon, thus in conversation with Helena he declares that “wherever I look, I see eyes watching me. This is madness” (p. 116). The repeatability of the experience of the Polish community can also be seen in the scene of a “formal” search of the manor house inhabited by Konwicki:

“I bet somebody has made a delation — said Helena. Dżugaszwili looked at here with curiosity — Delations happen all the time” (p. 78)

This is easily associated with PRL period when delation was one of the tools used by government to control society.

Another feature of repeatability of Polish collective faith was rhetoric — “friend-foe” assigned not only to the occupation period because of the division into Polish slaves and foreign oppressors. This problem was also brought up by Dąbrowski who summarised it briefly in one sentence:

The border town of Bujwidze, where one goes to a Catholic church, which serves the local Polish landowners, the population is mainly Jewish and the rulers are Russians<sup>21</sup>.

Division into friends and foes is obvious for everyone living in post uprising reality. “They”, “foreigners” are Russians who impose their own perspective upon Polish nation. This is an evil government, which arouses fear, oppresses — the same which filled graves with men, demolished houses and widowed Polish women. Konstanty, who was the oldest, many times felt the division into friends and foes, for him this is repeated since the last partition of Poland. Telling stories about rebels — also about Piotr Pieślak — he states that: “You should have escaped into our territories” and also “If the death must come, may it come on our lands” (p. 13). Even Korsakow is aware of this division: “People told me that Mr. Michał visits only those he trusts” (p. 43).

21 Dąbrowski M., op. cit., p. 96.

Uncertainty surrounding Korsakow poses problems with his categorisation. It is difficult to tell which side he is on. Once he is depicted as someone familiar (p. 25) not entirely Russian, another time he is perceived as a traitor and stranger. He himself states that “it is fortunate that I was there — your friend” (p. 61) or “I am among friends here”. His portrait demonstrates a union between Poles and Russians — there are no friends and foes, there is unity under the patronage of Russian authority “Mine, yours, common”. In the end even Helena, tired and disappointed states “this Georgian is like Russians, Korsakow is also like Russian, I guess we are all like Russians now” (p. 182).

Elias Szyra is treated in an ambiguous way. “Although familiar and assimilated he is still a Jew. He is from nowhere, neither friend nor foe, it would be better if he had disappeared”. Even Helena is strict for him. It is also unknown why Michal Konwicki murdered his daughter’s lover.

The division into “friends” (common people) and “foes” (government and law enforcement officers) was prominent in people’s minds through the whole “totalitarian century”. It was especially visible during the martial law up to 1990’s when one had to be wary of other citizens because of spies, secret agents and invigilation<sup>22</sup>.

Among the similarities of collective experience one can also see the problem of freedom — present during the period of unrest and political conflicts. “Urgent case of freedom<sup>23</sup>” is not indifferent to poles living in Konwicki’s times. The similarity of the problems of late XIX century with the PRL period are expressed by Helena:

Will I be free? Thought Helena. Was I free so far? How should freedom look like? I have to work (p. 45). I always wanted to be free. I am free, so what? Will I have something to go back to? To my freedom within slavery of life (p. 131). I wanted to be free in my prison. (p. 175)

Helena’s search for freedom may be an allusion to the martial law period. The feelings of anxiety is further boosted by fear and uncertainty. Helena often repeats: “what will happen to us?”, “what is going on with us all?” “what does all this mean?”

Her anticipation of the end of the world is also visible. The storm which is so dreadful is still to come. This anxiety can be perceived in terms of upcoming political unrest. “There will be a terrible storm unlike anything

22 *Instrukcje pracy operacyjnej aparatu bezpieczeństwa (1945–1989)*, Ruzikowski T., Warsaw 2004, p. 142.

23 Strzeszewski D., op. cit., p. 69

we have seen” (p. 48). Konwicki mentions this when he ponders over 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was a lot different than 19<sup>th</sup> century:

In 20<sup>th</sup> century every book has a negative ending, every biography seems silly or tragic, every calamity leads to further destructive events (p. 277).

Those feelings are present in Bohiń. On the one hand there is the technological advancement, on the other crematoriums. This tragedy is emphasized by panic, awaiting, paranoid fear of unknown and stagnation. Everything is covered in darkness. “There was madness everywhere, it was clearly manifesting its presence” (p. 32). Helena hears mysterious, unreal sounds “again she heard deep, frightening sound coming from below the surface” (p. 23).

Strzeszewski<sup>24</sup> points out that the image of fall and decay can be compared to the look of Warsaw during the last periods of PRL. It is striking even more because it should shape the idea of arcadian space. The myth of peaceful, quiet and save eastern lands is destroyed.

This old, ugly park covered with dust (p. 8). In front of the stables, Konstanty fetches dirty and skinny horses. The cart also looks poor. Inside an old, useless hen waited for its death. (p. 8-9)

Literature from eastern lands deals with eviction and longing for homeland. Czapliński talking about common fate mentions “desperation of slaves<sup>25</sup>” who lost their land and were deprived of any hope of returning to it. Poland did not exist from 1795 to 1918 and this period could be described as “state of colonization<sup>26</sup>”. Eviction is a repeatable motive. As an outcome of September Uprising and Kościuszko’s Uprising many people lost their property and had to run away from the oppressors.

The Great War together with 1917 revolution brought another expulsions. Polish citizens left their homeland which were demolished by revolutionary forces.

Obligatory dispossession and eviction were also a problem during and after second world war. Stalin ordered to move polish inhabitants from eastern lands into Siberia from 1941 to 1945. Some of them went to so called regained lands, which were western territories from where Germans had been evicted. This great migration and dreams about *paradise lost* give birth to eastern myths.

In the novel, leaving homeland is compared to Eden expulsion:

24 Ibidem, p. 66.

25 Czapliński P., op. cit., p. 173.

26 Dąbrowski, op. cit., p. 96.

This was a paradise described in the Bible. First people were evicted from here and they went along this river (...). That is way Wilia is so winding, because they were weaving, backtracking and trying to deceive God and themselves. They felt regret and then they realized that one must leave so that one day they may come back (p. 149).

It sounds like consolation and justification of things that happened. To regain something valuable one must first lose it.

Szyra is a wanderer and his fate can be perceived in two ways. It is a symbol of polish people's misery, misery of exiles, expatriates and refugees but it also represents a Jude vagabond. After January Uprising Jews' laws were respected and they were acknowledged as minority. But 20th century — as is mentioned in Bohin — brings about attempts to exterminate the whole Jewish nation<sup>27</sup> (p. 34).

Konwicki goes back to uneasy relationship between Poles and Jews in *Kalendarz i klepsydra*:

Coexistence of Poles and Jews was complicated. There were good years, even wonderful, but also sad, upsetting and even tragic. (...) It is difficult to forget that fate spared us and let us exist in this universe. This salvation (...) obliged us to remember about people that were close to us and foreigners, those we loved and those we hated, all those who shared our tragic fate<sup>28</sup>.

Konwicki was writing about anti-Semitism with disgust but also with fear and apprehension. He stated that those who propagate anti-Semitism want Poland's downfall, and that it is a direct attack on our country<sup>29</sup>.

Eliasz comments his exile and rebel activity „I left this land because I had to” (p. 39). Here one can ponder over similarities with the events of 1980's, when exiles and internment were part of everyday life. Similar formulas were visible in works of authors who used biographical topics in literature and historical analysis<sup>30</sup>. It is worth mentioning that Szyra's parents were to emigrate to United States. Young Jew wanted to take Helena there, in spite of the fact that he had visited many other places. In 1980's America was the destination of polish emigrants.

Konwicki recalls January Uprising in his works. It is not however the main theme but rather a reference to characters' personalities during important historical events, particularly Second World War. Soldiers who took

27 See.: Czapliński P., op. cit., p. 176.

28 Konwicki T., *Kalendarz...*, p. 269.

29 Ibidem, p. 270.

30 Zob. Strzeszewski D., op. cit., p. 69.

part in this great conflict are compared to rebels from January Uprising<sup>31</sup>. Konwicki showed mental differences between participants of the uprising and those who fought in Second World War and emphasized things that differentiated them from each other. Czapliński points out that one of the heroes of *Rójsty* is questioning the meaning of the fight and hopes for its victorious finale, and compares the attitudes of the fighters:

(...) Bonza scornfully reminds that the Second World War guerrillas are not the heirs of the insurgents of 1863, because they share a “small difference”, i.e. the fact that those insurgents had a social mandate, a specific goal, deep faith, while their “colleagues” fight for a vague matter, without support and without faith, which was replaced — with unequal enthusiasm — by the role of the partisan<sup>32</sup>.

Moreover, “insurrection complex infested with Polishness<sup>33</sup>” return in other Konwicki’s works:

Uprising and defeats, Euphoria and depression. I have seen it all (...). I have seen January Uprising, and before that I saw Bar Confederates<sup>34</sup>.

Krystyna Kralkowska thought it was necessary to emphasise that Polish history, in its incredible repeatability despite changing times and different political situations, which determines the fate of Polish nation:

Writer many times goes back to the same national problems that have been with Polish nation for ages. Orzeszkowa, Żeromski and Rodziewiczówna write about uprising, rebels and guerrillas in terms of unchanging Polish fate<sup>35</sup>.

Moreover, repeatability of Polish fate allows to save past from oblivion, distortion and repression. It is impossible to detach present, everyday life, political situation and reality from history. For the present and future are inextricably linked with the past.

Everyone takes part in history in two ways — in their own, small history and in big history concerning the fate of whole nation. Everyone is a part of it and at the same time creates it. Everyone has their own secrets. Longing for past is often connected with nostalgia. What does one seek? Maybe their own origin, or maybe their place in the universe. Maybe they look for something that cannot be found.

31 Konwicki had same fighting experience himself. see.: Arlt J., *“Ja” Konwickiego*, Cracow 2007, p. 23.

32 Czapliński P., op. cit., p. 17.

33 Kralkowska K., op. cit., p. 96.

34 Konwicki T., *Rzeka podziemna, podziemne ptaki*, Warsaw 1984, p. 29.

35 Kralkowska K., op. cit., p. 96.

Literature about eastern lands, with historical background, refers to the nostalgic loss very conspicuously. Past and present become parallel. The fact that Poland and its inhabitants repeat themselves connect what was in the past with current events. *Bobin* — as is emphasised by some scholars — is a search for grandmother, father<sup>36</sup>, homeland but also identity, connection with history and ancestors, similar patterns in past and present — as if seeking confirmation that these are the same people, the same country just times have changed.

All those facts mean, that since 80's we seek language which will define us and to do so we turn our heads toward past. In the past we also look for a myth<sup>37</sup>.

However, when it comes to the author's identity, Konwicki himself wrote in *Kalendarz i klepsydra*.

(...) I don't suffer from lack of identity. I have more than I need, just the right amount to take readers through landscape of failures, forests of disappointment and wilderness of hurtful feelings.

Indeed, a reader accompanied by a painful feeling is abducted by this “manorial romance”; better be careful, because there is much more drama, sadness and pain in it than it may seem. There is a tragedy here, which is sprayed in air — through the time of reading, even the recipient is inhaling it.

Unchanging Polish history is a phenomenon. Entanglement in history, repetition of actions, disasters and attitudes is astonishing, but also becomes a remedy for oblivion. The parallels of the collective fate of Poles have been captured on the pages of literature, especially in the case of writers who faced the Great History themselves. Tadeusz Konwicki is definitely one of them.

When we bring together previous considerations, it can be said that history has always been governed by the same laws, and man — like a cog in its mechanism — has no choice but to give up.

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36 Arlt J. See.: Arlt J., *“Ja” Konwickiego*, Kraków 2007, p. 58–66; Arlt J., *Mój Konwicki*, Cracow 2002, p. 113–136.

37 Czapliński P., Śliwiński P., *Literatura polska 1976–1998. przewodnik po prozie i poezji*, Cracow 1999, p. 155.

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