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PhD Thesis

*Contemporary American Writers of Polish Descent. A Study of the Fiction of  
Anthony Bukoski and Stuart Dybek*

Supervisor: Professor Zbigniew Białas

Katowice 2013

WYDZIAŁ FILOLOGICZNY  
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Rozprawa doktorska

*Współcześni amerykańscy pisarze pochodzenia polskiego. Studium twórczości  
Anthony'ego Bukoskiego i Stuarta Dybka*

Promotor: prof. dr hab. Zbigniew Białas

Katowice 2013



*Składam wyrazy szacunku i serdeczne podziękowania za okazaną pomoc*

*Pani prof. UŚ dr hab. Teresie Pyżik*

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years ethnic issues and their embodiment in literature have commanded an inordinate amount of interest in both scholarly and public discourse. Although sociologists, historians and literary critics have written about literature and ethnicity for a long time, the boundaries between disciplines have often been blurred and, as Werner Sollors notices in his landmark study *Beyond Ethnicity*, “have sometimes had detrimental effects on some previous efforts of this sort.”<sup>1</sup> He clarifies his line of thought further:

ethnicity specialists sometimes tend to misread literature or misinterpret it as a direct social and historical evidence, whereas literary critics in many cases have stayed away from newer sociological and anthropological approaches to ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of the above, there exist some problems with the way in which literature is viewed by the theoretical analysts of ethnicity, who have resorted to literary works so as to demonstrate their theses. Sollors, for instance, provides a telling example of Robert Park, the representative of the Chicago school of sociology readings, who managed to corroborate his sociological theory of “moral dichotomy and conflict” as a probable characteristic feature of “every immigrant during the period of transition”<sup>3</sup> by referring to American Jewish autobiographies. Using Ludwig Lewisohn’s *Up Stream* as social evidence, Parks vindicated his theory of a marginal man in the 1930s, and outlined his conclusions in the essay “Human Migration and the Marginal Man” regardless of

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 9.

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the fact that, as Sollors aptly observes, “Lewisohn never dwelled in any ghetto, warm or otherwise.”<sup>4</sup>

One may encounter another weakness when confronted with literary criticism devoted to ethnic literature, for

sociologists may often overestimate and even exoticize literature (in the narrow sense of belles lettres) as supreme evidence while underestimating their own reliance on literary devices and story-telling techniques. Literary critics, on the other hand, tend to be either uninterested in anything but the leading American writers or unaware of the newer thinking on ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>

Thomas J. Ferraro’s work *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth-Century America* also convincingly demonstrates the problem with approaching ethnic literature by literary critics; in his words:

such writing challenges the critic to determine how sociological inquiry and literary inventiveness serve one another; where local understandings face off against national constructions of individuality, family and community; and which strategies of minority-culture self-representation and majority-culture forms undergo reciprocal transformations.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, the serious, considerable interest in ethnicity as a methodological approach to the study of American literature has started in the 1970s when MELUS, the Society for the Study of the Multi-ethnic Literature of the United States, began its mission to combine “the so-called ethnic works into a literary-historical discourse delimiting American literature.”<sup>7</sup> Even though the MELUS contribution to the study of ethnicity and its embodiment in literature may not be underestimated, Ferraro casts doubt on the early MELUS literary critics<sup>8</sup> who conducted an investigation into ethnic literature especially during the 1970s. On

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<sup>4</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 9. Additionally, Sollors makes a comment upon the fiction of Richard Wright which is incorrectly but often invoked in sociological accounts of the ghetto.

<sup>5</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas J. Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth-Century America* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Jelena Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence: Representations of Ethnicity in Contemporary American literature* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ferraro comments upon the achievements of MELUS critics, who worked in the 1970s in the shadow of the new ethnicity.

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the one hand, the author gives credit to their “indispensable contributions to bibliography, biography and republishing,” but, on the other hand, suggests that their analyses were inaccurate as “they relied, by and large, on sociological positivism, [mainly underscoring] the inherent value of each group and its struggle against discrimination.”<sup>9</sup> Ferraro also challenges the achievements of the early 1980s ethnic literary critics, implying that “they [...] failed to address the conventionality of ethnic writing, including its dependence on stereotypes, [and] neglected to pursue the departures ethnic writing made from conventionality, its subversion of convention, its determined creativity.”<sup>10</sup> The author of *Ethnic Passages* justifies his strong dissatisfaction with the early 1980s literary critics’ approach to ethnic literature stating that individual critics were not imaginatively engaged in their work, refused to make aesthetic judgments and “lacked interest in the deeper ambitions and larger receptions of individual texts.”<sup>11</sup>

While addressing the question of ethnic literary criticism, the author of *Beyond Ethnicity* reaches a conclusion that until 1986 (the year of publication of his seminal study) “scholarship of American ethnic writing [showed] comparatively little theoretical interest in American-made ethnicity.”<sup>12</sup> Literary critics, Sollors continues, had a tendency to approach ethnic literature with well-intentioned optimism, or focused on close readings of texts taking into consideration “static notions of descent, and [...] primordial, organicist, sometimes even biological – but in all cases largely unquestioned – concepts of ethnic-group membership.”<sup>13</sup> What literary critics often avoided was to indulge themselves into a full appreciation of texts in the context of newer theories of ethnicity. What is more, Sollors draws attention to the fact that instead of overemphasizing or exaggerating the ethnic dimensions of the literary texts,

works of ethnic literature – written by, about, or for persons who perceived themselves, or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups –

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas J. Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth-Century America*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 11.

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may thus be read not only as expressions of mediation between cultures but also as handbooks of socialization into the codes of Americanness.<sup>14</sup>

The major focus of Werner Sollors, thus, was not on the ethnic experience itself, but “[on] the mental formations and cultural constructions (the codes, beliefs, rites and rituals) which were developed in America in order to make sense of ethnicity and immigration in a melting-pot culture.”<sup>15</sup> Sollors’s work, as well as Mary V. Dearborn’s seminal study *Pocahontas’s Daughters* (published in 1986) and William Boelhower’s *Through a Glass Darkly*<sup>16</sup> (published in 1987) were quickly acknowledged by many scholars as presenting a significant challenge to the accepted view of ethnicity, mainly because they stood in opposition to the “separatist and ‘mirror into social history’ approaches of the preceding decade.”<sup>17</sup> *Beyond Ethnicity*, however, “has proved to be the most illuminating and controversial of these works,”<sup>18</sup> especially taking into account the fact that Werner Sollors differentiated between “consent,” i.e. contractual, self-made and “descent,” i.e. hereditary, ancestral. As Sollors remarks in his book:

American identity alone may take the place of a relationship “in law” (like “husband, wife, step-, -in law, etc.”), leaving ethnicity to fill the place of relationships “in nature” (“the natural child, the illegitimate child, the natural mother, etc.”). In American social symbolism ethnicity may function as a construct evocative of blood, nature, and descent, whereas national identity may be relegated to the order of law, conduct, and consent.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> William Boelhower breaks new ground and provides a model for an understanding of American texts, which discourages the readers to differentiate between the ‘mainstream’ and ‘ethnic’ texts because they cannot be meaningfully separated: “the ethnic sign is everywhere, and ethnic writing *is* American writing.” (William Boelhower, *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 3). Among various premises of his study, the author underscores the significance of Puritan origins and biblical texts for American “ethnogenesis” – the becoming of the American nation and its subjects. While outlining the process of identity formation, Boelhower notices that what is constitutive of the American national character is the Indian. (Jelena Sesnić also comments upon Boelhower’s study in: *From Shadow to Presence*, p. 17.)

<sup>17</sup> Thomas J. Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth-Century America*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 151.

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The conflict between consent and descent, the clash between two definitions of American identity, in Sollors's view, is "at the root of the ambiguity surrounding the very terminology of American ethnic interaction [and constitutes] the central drama in American culture."<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, Sollors emphasizes the fact that one may understand the essence of Americanness via analysing the literary texts created by writers of ethnic descent, who aspired to assimilate in the American culture. This idea seems to lie behind the following passage:

By looking at the texts produced by and about people who were descended from diverse backgrounds but were, or consented to become, Americans [...] we may learn something about how Americanness is achieved, [...] and how it is established again and again as newcomers and outsiders are socialized into the culture – a process which inevitably seems to revitalize the culture at the same time.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, Sollors points out that there is a widespread belief among critics to evaluate literature "against an elusive concept of authenticity" and "to stress descent at the expense of consent,"<sup>22</sup> which suggests that only biological insiders can fully appreciate and understand the literature of race and ethnicity.

What seems to be significant to notice is the fact that the notion of ethnicity as invention pivots on the already mentioned two points of conflict (consent against descent) as "ethnicity typically emerges not as a thing (let alone a static, permanent or "pure" thing) but as the result of interactions,"<sup>23</sup> which leads one to a conclusion that "ethnicity is a process."<sup>24</sup>

Sollors explains that the traditional way of looking at ethnicity rests on an assumption that "ethnic groups [are] natural, real, eternal, stable and static

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<sup>20</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Werner Sollors, ed., *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. xix.

<sup>24</sup> Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*, p. xiv.

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units”<sup>25</sup> and, as a subject of an analysis, “each group yields an essential continuum of certain myths and traits”<sup>26</sup> which should be preserved. Assimilation, thus, is perceived as the enemy of ethnicity because it leads to a destruction of “authenticity” and cultural heritage within the individual group. There have emerged, however, some challenges to this view as it has been concluded that ethnic groups are rather “eminently pliable, unstable, [they constitute] part of the historical process, [and] constantly change and redefine themselves.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, that newer anthropological, sociological and historical thinking postulates that ethnicity, as Sollors writes:

is not so much an ancient and deep-seated force surviving from the historical past, but rather the modern and modernizing feature of a contrasting strategy that may be shared far beyond the boundaries within which it is claimed.<sup>28</sup>

The concept of ethnicity as invention that is constantly being invented anew in contemporary America was also thoroughly examined by the influential anthropologist Michael Fischer. His account is culminating in the following:

ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual and that is often something quite puzzling to the individual, something over which he or she lacks control. Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic, often unsuccessfully repressed or avoided. [...] Ethnicity is a deeply rooted emotional component of identity.<sup>29</sup>

Fischer argues that, probably contrary to the sociological findings, ethnicity is neither a matter of a group process, nor it constitutes the matter of a straightforward transmission from generation to generation and, last but not least, it cannot be a matter of transition (assimilation).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*, p. xiii.

<sup>26</sup> Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*, p. xiv.

<sup>27</sup> Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*, p. xiii.

<sup>28</sup> Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*, p. xiii.

<sup>29</sup> Michael M. J. Fischer, “Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory,” in: *Writing Culture*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986), p. 195.

<sup>30</sup> Fischer, “Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory,” p. 197.

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The construct of ethnicity as invention has found resonance among literary critics interested in ethnic literatures and has been used by, for instance Thomas S. Gladsky, who has written his milestone study *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves*; and Fred L. Gardaphé, who has begun a serious inquiry into the Italian American literature, publishing in 1996 *Italian Signs, American Streets: the Evolution of Italian American Narrative*.

Focusing on Gladsky's scholarship it seems noteworthy that the author has been interested not so much in the question of what ethnic literature and the ethnic writer is, but what and where literary ethnicity is. Drawing primarily on Sollors's concepts of consent and descent, Gladsky analyzes texts which "may be read as contributing to the literary creation of ethnic selves and American ethnicity."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Gladsky perceives Sollors's thesis as the one which perfectly fits the struggle especially over Polish literary selves "and the way those selves have been invented by writers."<sup>32</sup>

Sollors's postulates and Fisher's notion of ethnicity as invention met also with a response of before mentioned Fred L. Gardaphé, who has become interested in "the establishment of critical dialectic which would be the first step toward validating the contribution that Italian American authors have made to American literature."<sup>33</sup> Gardaphé, similarly to Sollors, notices the drawbacks of the approach to the fiction produced by American writers of ethnic descent, (i.e. in this case, the fiction of Italian American writers) "through an essentially universal sociological paradigm related to understanding the process of Americanization through the experience of immigration."<sup>34</sup> The author of *Italian Signs and American Streets* alludes in his work to the observations of Giambattista Vico, one of the earliest critics of Western civilization, who stated that "[the traps] are inherent in

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas S. Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves. Ethnicity in American Literature* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves*, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Fred L. Gardaphe, *Italian Signs, American Streets. The Evolution of Italian American Narrative* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Gardaphe, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 9.

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such attempts to create universal methodologies.”<sup>35</sup> In order to explain his line of thought, Vico suggests that “there exists a dominant tendency in human beings to define the unknown (which often can be read as ‘other’) in terms of the known (which can be read as ‘self’)”<sup>36</sup> resulting, thus, in a tendency that was dominant in the first half of the twentieth century, which postulated “the creation of universal categories and criteria by which the literature under consideration is categorized and criticized.”<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Gardaphé gives notice to the fact that “[scholars] must avoid falling into the same monologicistic, methodological trap that reads Italian American texts through critical paradigms created by the dominant culture”.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, Gardaphé contends that the most interesting challenge constitutes the “culture-specific” criticism. To recall Gardaphé’s remarks:

The culture-specific approach [which] examines the multicultural contexts out of which emerges the “other” American text and relates texts to indigenous cultural histories and philosophies.<sup>39</sup>

While creating an ‘indigenous criticism,’<sup>40</sup> “a horizon that would enable readers to view Italian American literature in the context of its relationship to Italian, American, and Italian American cultures,”<sup>41</sup> Gardaphé proposes dividing contemporary Italian American writers into two categories: the “visible” and the “invisible.” The author writes:

Those Italian writers who choose to deal with the Italian American experience through Italian American subjects I will call the visible. Italian American writers who choose to avoid representation of the Italian American as a major subject in their works can be referred to as the

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<sup>35</sup> Gardaphe, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Gardaphe, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Gardaphé creates the so-called ‘self-inventory’ of Italian signs found in texts produced by Italian American writers i.e. the list that contains the characteristics, which distinguish Italian American literature from other American literatures. Among the assumptions that the author presents in the introductory section of his study one may find: “searching for linguistic examples of code switching, [looking at] oral and literate models in narrative performance and forms identified with the dominant and minority cultures,” as well as analyzing the attitudes expressed by Italian American writers in terms of the ideological culture which they are part of. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 12.

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invisible. [...] The invisible Italian Americans create works that are more implicitly Italian American; the visible Italian Americans are more explicit in their Italian Americanness.<sup>42</sup>

The notions of visibility and invisibility, which Gardaphé applied to Italian American writers, and their choice to either explicitly, or implicitly attend to the Italian American experience, may be linked with exercising Herbert J. Gans' "symbolic ethnicity."<sup>43</sup> Gans in the article "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America" advocates a somewhat different approach to ethnicity than that which has been put forward by others in the field. The author infers that the proliferation of ethnic signifying in contemporary American culture takes place due to the fact that "ethnicity may be turning into symbolic ethnicity, an ethnicity of last resort, which could [...] persist for generations."<sup>44</sup> Gans admits that the symbols the third or fourth-generation ethnics use in order to express their identity are more noticeable and evident than in the case of earlier generations, because, as the functions of ethnic cultures and groups wane and identity becomes the foremost way of being ethnic, "ethnicity takes on an expressive rather than instrumental function in people's lives."<sup>45</sup> Gans makes an assertion that that the third generation ethnics "can of course give up their identity, but if they continue to feel it, they must make it more explicit than it was in the past, and must even look for ways of expressing it."<sup>46</sup> For this reason, Gans makes a general claim:

expressive behaviour can take many forms, but it often involves the use of symbols. [...] Ethnic symbols are frequently individual cultural practices that are taken from the older ethnic culture; they are 'abstracted' from that

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<sup>42</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 123.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas J. Ferraro reminds that there are some scholars such as Irving Howe, Gunnar Myrdal, or Stephen Steinberg who accuse the descendants of American immigrants of exercising "a merely symbolic or cost-free ethnicity" but Ferraro strongly disagrees with them claiming that "[ethnicity] is a fact, vexing in the extreme, in which literature is especially implicated and to which it gives special access." Thomas J. Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth-Century America*, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1979), p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity," p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity," p. 8.

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culture and pulled out of its original moorings, so to speak, to become stand-ins for it.<sup>47</sup>

Expressions of symbolic ethnicity may take the myriad of forms starting with rituals, rites of passage, holidays, consumer goods and ending with ethnic characters in the media. What seems to be crucial to notice is also the fact that symbolic ethnicity, according to Gans,<sup>48</sup> is fueled by “a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country: a love of and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated into everyday behaviour.”<sup>49</sup> Although, as Fred L. Gardaphé’s observes, Gans’ notion of symbolic ethnicity cannot clarify all of the third generation’s perception and attitudes toward ethnicity, “it can help [one] read the symbols generated by writers who are the grandchildren of immigrants.”<sup>50</sup> Gardaphé reads the literature produced by third-generation Italian American writers by focusing in their writings on the immigrant figure, i.e. the grandparent, “[who] serves as the mythic *figura*, [...] the source of the ethnic stories created by the third generation.”<sup>51</sup> In *Italian Signs, American Streets* this issue is expounded as follows:

the key to reading literature produced by third-generation Italian American writers is observing the role that the grandparent plays in connecting the writer to his or her ancestral past.[...] Immigrant figures in third-generation writing are central to the construction of narrative myths of origin, and their portrayals in literature take on a mythic function both in documenting the immigrant past and in creating explanations of the cultural differences that were attributed to Americans of Italian descent.<sup>52</sup>

What may not be left unnoticed is the fact that while formulating his hypothesis, Gardaphé draws primarily on the postulates of Marcus L. Hansen, who theorizes the unique phenomenon of the third generation’s connection to the past. Hansen

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<sup>47</sup> Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity,” p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Additionally, Gans elaborates on the ethnic revival of the third generation ethnics in America and reaches a conclusion that “the ethnic scholars are publishing more energetically than their predecessors, who had to rely on small and poverty-stricken ethnic publishing houses, but they are essentially doing what ethnic scholars have always done, only more visibly.” Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity,” p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity,” p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets. The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, p. 119.

<sup>51</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 120.

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declares that it is not the first, or the second, but the third generation empowered with the special new force to salvage the heritage of its forebears and accomplish more than the previous cohorts could have obtained. Alluding to Hansen's theory,<sup>53</sup> Gardaphé highlights that "a significant difference between second and third generation writers is the presence of a grandparent figure who serves to reconnect the protagonist to a past out of which the protagonist fashions an ethnic identity."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the narratives produced by the third generation Italian American writers, in Gardaphé's view, might be perceived as the real or metaphorical journeys into the past, thanks to which one may understand the impact that both Italian and American cultures have had on the formation of Italian American identities. This is how Gardaphé describes the situation:

the result is a combination of memory and imagination that work together to explain the ethnic anxiety faced by those third generation writers, who are just alienated from the reality of the immigrant experience as they often feel they are from the very culture into which they were born. The effect of this ethnic anxiety is [...] 'a double life,' and a way of resolving problems of duality is the identity quest.<sup>55</sup>

For that reason, according to Gardaphé, the identity quest is also the key to reading the narratives produced by the third-generation Italian American writers, as they are nothing more than the cultural immigrants. To simplify somewhat, it is the immigrant who becomes the hero in these narratives. As Gardaphé contends:

a hero who battles forces larger than she or he. The re-creation of these battles and the representation of the sacrifices made by these figures serve more than a symbolic function integral in the formation of a self-identity of the third generation, [...] they become models of what [before mentioned] Michael Fischer terms 'reinventions of ethnicity.'<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, Sollors criticizes Marcus Lee Hansen's principle of "The Third Generation in America," which is known as Hansen's law (developed in the phrase: "what the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember," Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 215.) and claims that "Hansen strongly polarized second-generation traitors and third-generation redeemers on the basis of very little evidence" (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 216.) and reaches a conclusion that "[Hansen's law] does not even apply to the historian who phrased it" (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 218).

<sup>54</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 119.

<sup>55</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 120.

<sup>56</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 120.

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At this point Gardaphé quotes Fischer, who implies that such reinventions employ “retrospection to gain a vision for the future.”<sup>57</sup> What is more, Gardaphé suggests that it is possible to read beyond Gans’ nostalgia “and into the function that [a reinvented ethnicity] serves for the third and postimmigrant generations [...] as they fashion a usable past in which they can locate the cultural elements needed to create integral selves.”<sup>58</sup> The third-generation writers, thus, reinvent ethnicity through representing immigrant experience in their literary works, and it results not from the need to defend themselves, as Gardaphé explains, but from “the need to negotiate the present in terms of the past.”<sup>59</sup>

Taking into consideration recent critical approaches to ethnic American literature it seems valid to mention Jelena Sesnić’s study *From Shadow to Presence* (published in 2007), where the author attempted to depict how the terms and conditions of becoming American have changed in the post-1965 America. Analyzing selected contemporary US ethnic texts (created from the mid-1960s to the mid 1990s), Sesnić delineates four models of the cultural description of ethnic identities which simultaneously constitute four models of approaching such texts. The four interpretative frames include: cultural nationalism, ethnic feminism, borderlands/contact zones, and diasporic writing.<sup>60</sup> Although these are the four

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<sup>57</sup> Fischer claims that “ethnic memory is [...], or ought to be, future, not past, oriented.” Michael M. J. Fischer, “Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory,” p. 198.

<sup>58</sup> Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets. The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, p. 120.

<sup>59</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 121.

<sup>60</sup> While elaborating on the model of cultural nationalism Sesnić is concerned with the Civil Rights and Post-Civil Rights generations of male writers and addresses “the ways they employed the politics of cultural nationalism to remasculinize the concept of American ethnic/racialized manhood.” The author manages to depict how the remasculinization led to a process of “recoding grief, emasculation, racialization, gendering, and oppression” (Jelena Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence*, p. 84) so as to begin a redefinition of American nationality. In the ethnic feminism model Sesnić thoroughly examines “how the intersection of race and gender shapes the social location of ethnic women occupying textual space” (Jelena Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence*, p. 85) in the literary works of Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston. In the third chapter of her study devoted to the borderlands/contact zones, the author examines the texts of Rolando Hinojosa, Sherman Alexie and Denise Chavez “against the background of ethnography and historiography” (Jelena Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence*, p. 85). Finally, the author focuses her attention on “the ways in which some diasporic communities tack between ‘the mechanics of primordial sentiment’ and ‘the work of imagination, “ discussing at length the question of memory “as cultural and psychic structure [which serves] as a nodal point in [...] diasporic entities.” (Jelena Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence*, pp. 187, 191).

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major models, as Sesnić observes, “the texts represented in [her study] do not rigidly endorse the proposed schema [...] and may fit several models at once.”<sup>61</sup>

Having presented a review of the literature on critical approaches to ethnic American literature, and being aware of the fluid nature of the discipline in question, as it touches upon “long embraced and naturalized concepts arising from sociology, anthropology, political studies [or] history,”<sup>62</sup> my methodology shares Fred L. Gardaphé’s approach to reading literary works written by American authors of ethnic descent in that the literary works created by Anthony Bukoski and Stuart Dybek, the third-generation contemporary American writers of Polish descent, aptly fit into Gardaphé’s notions of visibility and invisibility. Neither of these writers, whose literary works are to be analyzed here, “totally transcends his ethnic background to melt invisibly into American culture.”<sup>63</sup> Even though, as in the case of fiction created by Stuart Dybek, the writer “relegates visible signs of his ethnicity to the margins under the surface”<sup>64</sup> and rarely chooses to deal with distinctly Polish American subjects.

The aim of the present dissertation is not to investigate the origins and ambiguities of the term “ethnicity” in its various disciplinary incarnations, although it seems valid to mention the findings of some theoreticians, who have tried to lay bare the lens through which fictional literature perceives ethnicity, but also to examine the concept of ethnicity as a social construct constantly reinvented and recreated (as Michael Fischer asserts) in short stories written by Anthony Bukoski and Stuart Dybek. Following Sollors’s statement that “Americanness is achieved” and “texts are not mere reflections of existing differences but also, among many other things, productive forces in nation-building enterprises”<sup>65</sup> the present study will attempt to investigate the ethnic culture of the American Polonia as reflected in the fiction of Bukoski and Dybek,

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<sup>61</sup> Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>62</sup> Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence*, p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets. The Evolution of Italian American Narrative*, p. 154.

<sup>64</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 154.

<sup>65</sup> Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*, p. xv.

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whose works may be read not only as “expressions of mediation between cultures but also as handbooks of socialization into [...] Americanness.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, in order to throw a considerable light on the ethnic culture of Polish Americans depicted in the literary works of Bukoski and Dybek it seems justifiable to consider the significance of Roman Catholic religion and family, i.e. Polish national religious tradition and strong family ties, which have had a lasting impact on the formation and the character of the ethnic culture (and its literary reincarnation) under consideration.

Taking heed of the fact that, as Karen Majewski convincingly demonstrates in her ground-breaking study, one may not “make much sense of Polish immigrant fiction [as well as the literature created by their descendants] in the face of America’s literary trends [...] or mythic self-representations without recognizing the heavy backdrop of Polish history,”<sup>67</sup> chapters devoted to the history of Polish immigration to the United States and assimilation processes have been crucial in the present dissertation. It is mainly due to the fact that in order to understand the elements that form Polish American communities and their literature, as well as to comprehend the formation of ethnic culture of the American Polonia, one should keep in mind the political and cultural conditions Polish immigrants left behind in Europe.

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<sup>66</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. 6.

## I. POLISH AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE UNITED STATES.

Immigrant literature did not win the critical appreciation until the 1970s, which marked the advent of “new ethnicity” initiated by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Earlier immigrant writings gained only limited interest of the immigrant or ethnic readers. The reason for such an “indifference” of the critics was the fact that immigration, in general, was perceived as a threat to American values, way of life, or even safety. It was only after the Second World War when these transfers of peoples were discerned as the phenomena crucial to American experience.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the fact that officially no legitimate bibliography of Polish American fiction exists, and little valuable criticism is available, according to Thomas Gladsky, Polish American literature was not of the main or profound interest to scholars, and “the New World culture and Old Country heritage of approximately fifteen million Americans of Polish descent are [probably] among multicultural America’s best kept secrets.”<sup>2</sup> The only exception is Karen Majewski’s study *Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish American Identity: 1880-1939*, published in 2003 by Ohio University Press, as it includes the list of Polish American immigrant fiction writers, who wrote their works in Polish. In Thomas Napierkowski’s opinion, Majewski’s landmark publication constitutes a credible bibliography even though, as Majewski herself maintains, “university repositories facilitated the process, it still meant tracking down clues and half-clues about authors and titles buried in Polish language histories and memoirs [...], [and] some works have undoubtedly been missed.”<sup>3</sup> Thomas Gladsky’s pioneering

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<sup>1</sup> Cf: Jerzy Durczak, “Immigrant/Ethnic Autobiography in the United States,” *American Studies*, Vol. XIV (1995), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” *Melus*, Vol. 20 (1995), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. xiii.

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study *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves* is also worth mentioning at this point because Gladsky was probably among the first scholars, who coined the existence of Polish American fiction and his literary work “has immeasurably enriched our knowledge of the treatment of Polish Americans in American literature.”<sup>4</sup> Although Gladsky offers his readers the analysis of the enormous number of works written by the host culture, i.e. consent writers, who wrote about Poles in America, as well as the analysis of the literature of descent penned by Polish American authors themselves, still there does not exist any official list of Polish American English language immigrant fiction writers.

The complicated nature of ethnic literature implies that the brief presentation of the literary history of Polish American penmen is far from simple or straightforward as the problems occur at the outset, and they are connected with defining the Polonian writer and Polish American literature itself. Franciszek Lyra in his article “Following the Cycle: The Ethnic Pattern of Polish-American literature,” published in 1985, suggests that “the whole subject [of Polish American writing] bristles with questions that cannot yet be answered, but they must be asked if satisfactory answers are [...] to become possible.”<sup>5</sup> Lyra asks:

Can we include [in the body of ethnic literature] letters and totally artless amateur memoirs? In the traditional genres of belles-lettres, how much emphasis should we put on aesthetic quality and form? What makes an ethnic author ethnic?<sup>6</sup>

Konstanty Symonolewicz-Symmons attempts to answer the question of who exactly might be considered as the Polonian penman and takes into consideration the author’s place of birth, choice of subject matter, and ethnic consciousness. Symonolewicz-Symmons expresses his dilemmas as follows:

Native Poles writing in English, whether Polish subjects play any kind of role in their works or not? Or American literati of Polish extraction,

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” *Polish American Studies*, Vol. LXII, No. 2 (2005), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Franciszek Lyra, “Following the Cycle: The Ethnic Pattern of Polish-American Literature,” *Melus*, Vol.12, No. 4 (1985), p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Lyra, “Following the Cycle,” p. 63.

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although their works have nothing in common either with Poland or with Polonia? Or authors of Polish nationality who write in English but on Polish subjects? Or writers of Polish nationality or Polish extraction who write in English but on subjects from Polonian life? Or, finally, writers and poets who write in both languages?<sup>7</sup>

Thomas Napierkowski, in his article devoted to the history of Polish American literature entitled “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” does not mention anything about the fiction about the Polish diaspora, written and published in Poland,<sup>8</sup> or the works of immigrant authors who eventually returned to Poland even though their literary works were published in the United States before the authors’ repatriation.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the above mentioned quotation and Napierkowski’s analysis prove that the answers to Symonowicz-Symmons’ question are definitely complex and probably a monolithic definition of Polish American literature does not exist. In a related vein, Karen Majewski concludes that one may observe “equally valid but oppositional definitions [of Polish American prose which] may suit specific purposes and highlight particular qualities.”<sup>10</sup> Clearly, apart from the literary works written in English and created by the second or third generation of Polish Americans, Polish American literature includes in its body also non-English-language texts,<sup>11</sup> for instance the long-forgotten or rather undiscovered until recently “approximately three hundred novels, novellas, short stories, sketches, and anthologies of short fiction [...] produced by the old immigration.”<sup>12</sup> In this context, the sizeable collection of Polish language immigrant works written in the United States and analyzed by

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<sup>7</sup> Symonowicz-Symmons, *Ze studiów nad Polonią amerykańską* as quoted in: Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> According to Karen Majewski, the evaluation of this body of literature, as well as the analysis of the works produced by authors who remained in the United States but who published in Poland (e.g. the works of Józef Watra-Przewłocki) has been conducted and initiated by Bolesław Klimaszewski, the author of “Sami o sobie?” and *Pod znakiem potu, łez, i dolara*. Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Majewski sustains that Czesław Łukaszewicz, Iza Pobóg and Karol Wachtl were the authors who went back to Poland but after some time returned to the United States; while Stefania Laudyn, Henryk Nagiel, Stefan Nesterowicz, Zygmunt Słupski, Helena Staś, and Rudolf Tarczyński were among the authors who returned to and remained in Poland. Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 170.

<sup>10</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Although Karol Wachtl, for instance, in his publication *Polonia w Ameryce* considered writers of the old immigration as exclusively Polish penmen but strongly influenced by the American experience. Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 3.

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Karen Majewski “put to rest forever the notion that Polish Americans of the old immigration lacked education,”<sup>13</sup> or, as Thomas Gladsky states, “cultural association necessary to the literary life [because Polish immigrants] concerned themselves [mainly] with survival, saving money to purchase land [...], and with work.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, just to re-emphasize, Majewski’s publication destroyed an old myth of illiterate Poles. In this context, Napierkowski’s conclusions are unambiguous:

[Majewski] reveals the Polish American community not as powerless, silent or sullen, [...] but as dynamic, independent, and pro-active, even pressuring American politicians to work for independence.<sup>15</sup>

The controversies connected with the rise of Polish American literature and the fact that little is known about works written and published in the United States by Polish immigrants and their children might also be connected with the prevalent opinion of scholars who have maintained that Polish Americans seem to have produced little literature of their own.<sup>16</sup> Stanislaus Blejwas, for instance, once the president of the Polish American Historical Association, in his article from 1988 entitled “Voiceless Immigrants,” which was published in *Polish American Studies*, comments:

[...] there does not exist a Polish American literature; that is, a literature penned by Polish immigrants and Polish ethnics about their existence in America, and readily available to the American reading public. While my seminar colleagues overwhelmed us with pages of ethnic literary bibliography (novels, poetry, plays, essays, biographies, and literary criticism), it was, and still is, impossible to locate more than a dozen Polish

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 33.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Napierkowski claims that the great acclaim in the American literary circles was won by authors such as Czesław Miłosz, W.S. Kuniczak, and Jerzy Kosiński – penmen who lived in the United States but who never addressed Polish American topics in their works. Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” p.25.

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American novelists and short story writers, while there is not a major Polish American poet or dramatist.<sup>17</sup>

Anthony Bukoski, who refers to Blejwas's article and analyzes possible causes for the lack of fully developed, or at least appreciated by the national audience, body of Polish American literature, admits that the oral tradition Polish peasants brought with them to America "did not fare well in an urban, industrial society,"<sup>18</sup> because the immigrants did not perceive gaining university education as a guarantee for "a profitable economic return." Additionally, again alluding to Blejwas's comments, Bukoski concludes:

[the] strict adherence to 'the inerrancy of [church] dogma and structure may have effectively stifled intellectual curiosity about the world in which man lives and struggles,' and that the rapidity with which many second generation American Polonia denied their ancestors' peasant roots 'manifested a sense of cultural and psychological inferiority' toward the past.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, what also deserves scholars' attention is, using Blejwas's terminology, the "serious" external causes for Polonia's lack of voice. In his view, these are American publishers' perceptions that Polish topics do not sell, and Polish Americans neither read nor receive any literary prizes.<sup>20</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, who puts forward several factors which might have influenced the lack of the impressive body of Polish American English language literature maintains that the post-World War II immigrants from Poland gave new strength to "the Polish roots of Polonia;"<sup>21</sup> in his words:

[post-World War II immigrants'] focus on Poland seems to have detracted from an emerging American agenda for the community. Similarly, the

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<sup>17</sup> Stanislaus A. Blejwas, "Voiceless Immigrants," *Polish American Studies*, Vol. 45 (1988), pp. 5-11.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "A Bottle of Milk for Poland: Nelson Algren and I" in: *The Polish Diaspora: Selected Essays from the Fiftieth Anniversary International Congress of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America*, eds. James S. Pula & M.B. Biskupski (East European Monographs distributed by Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Bukoski, "A Bottle of Milk for Poland," p. 193.

<sup>20</sup> Bukoski, "A Bottle of Milk for Poland," p. 193.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, "Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature," p. 41.

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revitalized use of Polish may have psychologically discouraged the use of English as a literary language for the community. This, combined with a general indifference to non-English literature on the American scene, no doubt took its toll.<sup>22</sup>

Napierkowski continues that the unfavourable and violent atmosphere of the years which preceded the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the ethnic awareness did not encourage Polish Americans to create works on their own or about their ethnic community. On the contrary, the “overwhelming pressure for assimilation devalued Polish American topics as a subject area for literature and [persuaded] aspiring writers to look elsewhere for their vision and their voice.”<sup>23</sup> Here is how Napierkowski explains the unwillingness to produce literary works by Polish Americans:

Polish Americans [...] found themselves branded as the racists and super patriots, a primary source of America’s domestic problems and supporters of unpopular wars abroad. It didn’t really matter that hard evidence disproved the first charge or that ethnics had little to say about American foreign policy and were drafted in high percentages. There was little reason for Polish Americans even to aspire to write about their ethnic identity or community (unless to repudiate or demean them) – let alone to try to find a national audience for such literature.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever the causes, there has existed a strong need to create Polish American English language literature, to give voice to the voiceless, so that they would not have to suffer from “cultural amnesia” or be “stereotyped by those who understand neither [them=Polish Americans] nor [their] experience.”<sup>25</sup> Artur Waldo, the author of *Zarys historii literatury polskiej w Ameryce*, stresses the significance of the development of Polish American literature (as well as the need to translate Polish language Polonian texts into English). He clearly explains:

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<sup>22</sup> Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “A Bottle of Milk for Poland: Nelson Algren and I,” p. 194.

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we have to give America Polish-American writing, Polish-American literature [in order ] to establish a foundation for the power of the Polish spirit in the United States.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the fact that more than a half of the century has passed since Waldo's publication of *Zarys historii literatury polskiej w Ameryce*,<sup>27</sup> his inducement to create Polish American literature seems to be still valid. Anthony Bukoski, for instance, relying on his own experiences in publishing his short stories, claims that even though Polish American writers have reached the era of multiculturalism, they still have to fight for a place in the American literary world as they are deprived of *any* representation in ethnic literary anthologies, special journal issues, multicultural readers, or are even excluded from the discussions of diversity. What might also be surprising, Bukoski continues, is the fact that even the idea of printing a Polish-American dictionary for "the second largest migrant group to the United States in the twentieth century"<sup>28</sup> met with considerable hostility as the panel of the National Endowment for the Humanities found it "difficult to be enthusiastic about."<sup>29</sup> Thus, analyzing in 1993 the position of aspiring Polish American authors and the obstacles the writers must encounter, Bukoski maintains that "[their] own amnesia will be forced on [them] from outside by an indifferent academy and by seemingly hostile media,"<sup>30</sup> and adds that "now in the decade of 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism' [they] are being denied [themselves] again, this time by diversity planners."<sup>31</sup>

Apart from their invisibility, another feature of Polonia's unenviable standing in the American literary world is strictly connected with the mentioned tendency of American authors to depict Polish Americans in a blatantly negative way, as if Polish Americans in their community and life "had no history, rituals,

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<sup>26</sup> Artur Waldo as quoted in: Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Waldo's *Zarys historii literatury polskiej w Ameryce* was published in 1938.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "A Bottle of Milk for Poland: Nelson Algren and I," p. 195.

<sup>29</sup> NEH Division of Research Program's Panel Comment Sheet Number RT-21280 as quoted in: Bukoski, "A Bottle of Milk for Poland," p. 195.

<sup>30</sup> Bukoski, "A Bottle of Milk for Poland," p. 196.

<sup>31</sup> Bukoski, "A Bottle of Milk for Poland," p. 197.

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or culture to sustain [them].”<sup>32</sup> Clearly, such a tendency results from the lack of American knowledge or authority to contest the prevailing negative impressions of Polish Americans in American literature. This may lead one back to the initial claim that the culture and heritage of Americans of Polish descent still remain a great mystery to mainstream Americans. Magdalena Zaborowska, for example, suggests that although Americans may have heard about the Revolutionary War battles in which Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski led American troops, they are generally not aware of the writings produced by immigrants from Poland, not to mention the whole body of Polish American literature which emerged after the World War II and was created by the descendants of Polish immigrants.<sup>33</sup> As it has already been suggested, the (American) perception of Poland and in particular the American perception of Americans of Polish descent, was influenced by the portrayals of Polish literary characters in numerous plays, fiction and poems created by more or less two hundred mainly American writers who eagerly employed Polish characters in their literary works. What seems to be significant however, is the fact that most of these unfavourable depictions <sup>34</sup> contain “abbreviated characterizations, predictably simplistic portraits, or, in some cases, merely composite Slavic cultural representations.”<sup>35</sup> The well known examples include Stanley Kowalski from *A Streetcar Named Desire* written by Tennessee Williams, or Nelson Algren’s literary characters.

Thomas Napierkowski goes even further and concedes that American writers in general failed at presenting the national mosaic of their society and many of their books reinforce negative stereotypes consolidating rather than

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> Cf: Magdalena Zaborowska, *How We Found America: Reading Gender Through East-European Immigrant Narratives* (Chapel Hill, London: University of Carolina Press, 1995), p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Gladsky claims that only a few writers of classic ethnic or immigrant fiction “sensitively explored” the culture of Polish-Americans among whom were: Karl Harriman, Edith Miniter and Joseph Vogel. Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” *Melus*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1995), p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism,” p. 105.

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bolstering the distorted images of ethnic minorities.<sup>36</sup> It seems that Caroline Golab and Thomas Gladsky share his opinion and add that such warped images unfortunately tend to transform Polish American culture into a caricature. Napierkowski lucidly spells out:

literature treating Polish Americans was marked by a distinct weakness of characterization [...] and, in some cases, presenting entire Polish American communities as not only depraved and backward but essentially subhuman.<sup>37</sup>

In order to prove his thesis, Napierkowski analyzes literary works of such American authors as Nelson Algren or Tennessee Williams, just to mention a few, whose novels, plays and short stories commanded attention of the national audience, as well as the respect of literary establishment, and at the same time moulded the popular negative opinion<sup>38</sup> about the American Polonia for years to come. Asserting that the general knowledge about Poles and Polish Americans is so scarce among the Americans, Napierkowski doubts whether American society is able to change their faulty beliefs about the American Polonia, and even announces that the time has come to “thoroughly investigate how American authors present Polish American selves.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Obraz Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia w literaturze amerykańskiej” in: *Polonia amerykańska: przeszłość i współczesność*, eds. Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz and Tadeusz Gromada (Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1988), p. 581.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Even though representations of Poles in American films are not the major concern in the present dissertation, it might seem vital to notice that scholars who deal with this subject (e.g. Caroline Golab, the author of the article “Stellaaaaa.....!!!!!” published in: *The Kaleidoscopic Lens, How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*; or John J. Bukowczyk, who presented cinematic representations of Polish Americans in his article “The Big Lebowski goes to the Polish Wedding: Polish Americans – Hollywood Style” published in: *The Polish Review*, Vol. XLVII, No. 2 (2002)) also notice the tendency of directors to present Polish Americans as laughably awkward. Caroline Golab ventures to claim that “if one wishes to show a crude, brutish, semi-civilized creature, if one wishes to convey the baser forms of lower-class life destroying higher forms of culture and refinement, if one wishes to portray bigotry in any form, one chooses the metaphor that everyone is most likely to know – the ‘Polak.’” Caroline Golab, “Stellaaaaa.....!!!!!” in: *The Kaleidoscopic Lens, How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*, ed. Randall M. Miller (Englewood, NJ: Jerome S. Ozer, Publisher, 1980), p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 24.

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These concerns notwithstanding, the space has begun to emerge for the serious study of works written by Polish immigrants in the United States and their descendants in order to gain a deeper understanding of how immigrant ethnicity was shaped. In this context, Thomas Napierkowski has observed that “recent scholarship has rediscovered a tradition and achievement of literary activity among Polish Americans which are both remarkable and exciting.”<sup>40</sup>

Although Polish language prose fiction penned in the United States by the Polish immigrants of the so called *stara emigracja* (the old immigration) is not the major concern here, it seems useful to provide some remarks upon this freshly reclaimed body of literature on the basis of the in-depth analysis provided by Karen Majewski. The author of *Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish-American Identity 1880-1939* notices at the very beginning of her analysis that “[so far] the rare discussion of diasporan literature has tended to concentrate on works by renowned nonimmigrant writers, such as Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Za chlebem*, [or] it has neglected the old peasant immigration in favour of writers of the World War II émigré generation.”<sup>41</sup> Thanks to Majewski’s study one may gain insight into early Polish American writing with its earliest identifiable Polish American narrative *Jak się zemścił borowy Zielonka nad Wojtkiem Bruchylą* (*How Greenie the gamekeeper got revenge on Wojtek Bruchylą*) written by Jan Niemir and published in 1880.<sup>42</sup> Majewski proves that the body of early Polish American literature was also rich in crime and detective novels, such as *Kara Boża idzie przez oceanem* (*God’s Punishment Crosses the Ocean*) by Henryk Nagiel, *John Neewen and Szumowiny* (*The Scum*) by Bronisław Wrotnowski, and the anonymous *Przygody polskiego detektywa* (*The Adventures of a Polish Detective*). Majewski also elaborates on the early narratives which fall into a category of “immigrant saga”:

They chronicle the physical, psychological, and cultural process of emigration, from the decision to leave the homeland through the initial period of adjustment to life in a new country. All deal to some degree with

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<sup>40</sup> Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>42</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 81.

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the immigrant response to new experiences and circumstances, and with the relationship to the Old and New Worlds that these responses forge.<sup>43</sup>

Majewski enumerates and conducts an analysis of the literary works which belong to this classification, for instance, Alfons Chrostowski's *Niewolnik Polski* (*The Polish Slave*), Julian Czupka's *Irlandczyk z Smorgonii* (*The Irishman from Smorgonia*), Bronisław Wrotnowski's *Za szlakiem dolara* (*On the Trail of the Dollar*) and Piotr Yolles' *Trzy matki* (*Three Mothers*). What seems to be important about Polish language immigrant sagas is the fact that these literary works touch upon such immigrant community issues like "language maintenance, religion, family relations, the work experience, interaction with other groups, and continued ties to the old country."<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the treatment of such concerns is influenced by "Poland's unique situation under partitions and, later, as a newly restored nation."<sup>45</sup> It should not be forgotten, however, that the above mentioned works were not published in English, and, as Thomas Gladsky asserts, English language Polish American literature lacks "the standard 'autobiography' or the traditional journey/cultural collision novel in the style of Mary Antin's *From Plotzke to Boston* or Ole Edvart Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*."<sup>46</sup> Karen Majewski comments upon the fiction of social criticism produced by the journalists who possessed various visions for Polonia, "demonstrating [...] a conviction of dynamic self-determination, with international consequences as they pressured American politicians to support Polish independence."<sup>47</sup>

Among the writers who engaged themselves in different forms of criticism of immigrant leaders, institutions, personages, powerbrokers or even the representatives of the Polonian clergy were: a political activist and journalist Czesław Łukaszewicz, an avowed Roman Catholic writer-activist Stefania Laudyn, Telesfor Chelchowski, who used to satirize Polonia's patriotic-military

<sup>43</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 77.

<sup>45</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 77.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939*, p. 120.

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organizations in *Baczność! Jeneral Tabaka ma głos!* (*Attention! General Tobacco has the floor!*), Stanisława Romanowska who focused in her *Nad Michiganem* (*On Lake Michigan*) on “political maneuvering and power struggles that divide the immigrant community and defeat its efforts on behalf of Poland.”<sup>48</sup> Karen Majewski also recalls Helena Staś, the lecturer on the problems of equal rights for women, the editor of a cookbook and the author of the book *Na ludzkim targu* (*In the Human Market*) which constitutes “a bitter expose of Polonia’s cultural debates and power struggles.”<sup>49</sup> In this work Staś presented her “harshest criticism for Polonia’s self-styled intelligentsia and self-serving institutional leaders, including its [Polonia’s] literary establishment.”<sup>50</sup>

Although, as Majewski observes, there was a wealth of Polish-language Polish American authors whose literary works criticized social reality of the American Polonia, one should not conclude that such writing was exclusively preoccupied with division, conflicts and contentions because it also called for the union or reunion. Majewski sums it up as follows:

If Polish immigrant fiction was often the battleground on which writers enacted their own versions of the national struggle, it was also the field on which an honorable union could be proposed. Such models of reconciliation are most apparent in the ‘ethnic romance,’ in which questions of collective identity are explored and resolved through the drama (and more rarely the comedy) of sexual attraction and marital alliance. These romance stories articulate most explicitly the varied criteria by which Polishness could be measured and circumscribed.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, the author also reserves a privileged place for the presentation of the authors, who focused in their literary works on love, sex and marriage, as “nowhere did the writers attempt to draw more compelling blueprints of an

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<sup>48</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 116.

<sup>49</sup> Karen Majewski, “Toward ‘a Pedagogical Goal’: Family, Nation, and Ethnicity in the Fiction of Polonia’s First Women Writers” in: *Something of My Very Own to Say: American Women Writers of Polish Descent*, eds. Thomas S. Gladsky and Rita Holmes Gladsky (Boulder: East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> Majewski, “Toward ‘a Pedagogical Goal,’” p. 56.

<sup>51</sup> Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939*, p. 122.

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enduring Polishness”<sup>52</sup> than in the fictional treatment of these themes. In this context, Majewski turns to the analysis of works such as *Marzenie czy rzeczywistość* (*Dream or Reality*) by Helena Staś, Stanisław Osada’s *Z pensylwańskiego piekła* (*From a Pennsylvania Hell*), Iza Pobóg’s short story “Ich syn” (“Their Son”) and Melania Nestorowicz’s *Sprzedawczka [sic!] z Broadwayu* (*The Salesgirl from Broadway*). What seems significant to notice, however, is the fact that “marriage [for these authors] is not a device for assimilation and the resolution of nativist immigrant differences, [but] it involves the creation and preservation of ethnic identity.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, the main message conveyed in the above mentioned narratives was rather obvious: “no matter how distant, no matter how complicated by other loyalties and affections, Poland and Polishness are always waiting to be reembraced.”<sup>54</sup>

Despite the fact that the non-English language body of Polish American literature which Majewski studied did not survive because, as the author herself confesses, “perhaps these works became irrelevant as the issues they engaged so passionately became less pressing [and] the incidents and personages they described passed from community consciousness;”<sup>55</sup> there are still some similarities between the turn-of-the-century writing and the body of Polish language literature in the United States created by the post World War II immigrants and the Solidarity era group. As Majewski maintains:

Together these groups [...] form a fluid community focused, like turn-of-the-century immigrants, on circumstances in Poland and, also like them, holding an often uncertain commitment to a future in the United States. It is this ambiguous relationship to America and to Poland that haunts the literature they produce.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 124.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939*, p. 144.

<sup>55</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 146.

<sup>56</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 147.

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Majewski also reminds the readers that modern immigrant writers (such as Zofia Mierzyńska, the author of *The Vacationer [Wakacyjuszka]*), like the writers representing the old immigration, have continued to draw inspiration from their day-to-day experiences, or struggles, and have focused on such issues as: economic survival, family relations, language maintenance, as well as conditions in the country of origin. What is more, modern-day immigrant authors are preoccupied with questions concerning “transformations of identity that living in emigration imposes, [...] disagreements over just who could properly be called a Pole, [...] or over the obligations Polishness demanded.”<sup>57</sup>

It seems significant to notice that the author of *Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish-American Identity 1880-1939* ends her study with a plea for publication of the English translations of the works included in her publication, “in order to facilitate comparative study.”<sup>58</sup> In Majewski’s concluding words:

what we learn from Polish-language writers and their works in this country contributes to our knowledge of Polish cultural and political history, to a more complete reading of American ethnic literature, and to a fuller understanding of America’s vital and evolving multiculturalism [...]<sup>59</sup>

Fortunately, Majewski’s appeal was rather quickly addressed as the publication of Danuta Mostwin’s<sup>60</sup> two novellas *Testaments: The Last Will of Blaise Twardowski and Jocasta* in English “open[ed] a new chapter in the history of literature of the United States and in the appreciation of Polish-American literature.”<sup>61</sup> Napierkowski believes that such a translation and publication might be a sign that the literature written by immigrants and their children began to attract attention,

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<sup>57</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 153.

<sup>58</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 154.

<sup>59</sup> Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles*, p. 154.

<sup>60</sup> Danuta Mostwin is the World War II-era émigré and a well-published novelist known until 2005 almost exclusively to Polish-language readers in the United States and Poland.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas J. Napierkowski, “Found in Translation: A New Chapter in American Literature,” in: *Testaments: Two Novellas of Emigration and Exile*, Danuta Mostwin (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 103.

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“although that attention was slow to take hold, was restricted to works written in English, and generally was granted only to selected immigrant groups.”<sup>62</sup>

The task of recovering Polish American poetry written in the United States before the World War II will be, as Thomas Napierkowski suspects, “even more daunting than it was for fiction,”<sup>63</sup> although Karen Majewski suggests that there exists a substantial body of Polish-American poetry written in Polish by the old immigration which is just waiting to be recovered.<sup>64</sup> Dr. Tadeusz Mitana, the editor of *Antologia Poezji Polsko-Amerykańskiej* (*Anthology of Polish-American Poetry*) which was published by the Polish Arts Club of Chicago in 1937, is probably the first scholar who sheds some light upon the Polish American poetry composed before the World War II. The anthology consists of one hundred and seventy-eight poems written by fifty five poets, both in Polish and in English. While commenting upon the bulk of poems published in the volume, the editor confesses that “their achievement lies not so much in formal or aesthetic criteria but in their ‘degree of candor and truthfulness of emotion;’”<sup>65</sup> and emphasizes at the same time that the replacement of Polish by English is inevitable.

In addition to Mitana’s collection, three more anthologies of Polish American poetry were published fifty years later: *The Blood of Their Blood: An Anthology of Polish-American Poetry*, edited by Victor Cantoski (New River Press, 1980), *Concert at Chopin’s House: A Collection of Polish-American Writing* (New River Press, 1987), edited by John Minczeski,<sup>66</sup> who is himself a poet; and *Józef Wittlin and Modern Polish and Polish-American Poetry* (Polish Cultural Institute, 2001), edited by Piotr Gwiazda. There were also several articles on Polish American poets from the middle part of the century who wrote mainly in English, among them are: Helen

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<sup>62</sup> Napierkowski, “Found in Translation,” p. 103.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939*, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Tadeusz Mintana as quoted in: Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 38.

<sup>66</sup> John Minczeski is the author of four collections of poems ( *The Reconstruction of Light*, 1981; *Gravity*, 1991; *Circle Routes*, 2001; *A Letter to Serafin*, 2009), two chapbooks (*November*, 2007; *The Grass Elegy*, 2007) and the editor of three anthologies. <http://johnminczeski.com/default.aspx> (2 Sept. 2010)

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Bristol (*Let the Blackbird Sing*, 1952 and *After Thirty Years: Poland Revisited*, 1939), Victoria Janda (*Singing Furrows*, 1953; *Walls of Space*, 1945, and *Star Hunger*, 1942), Edmond Kowalewski (*Deaf Walls*, 1943), John Drechney (*Nature Smiles*, 1947), and Edmund Szymański (*Against Death in Spring*, 1934, *From the Fourth Province*, 1934, and *Fallen Stars*, 1961). Nonetheless, Polish American poetry in English “has not yet been sufficiently investigated or studied”<sup>67</sup> and, as Janusz Zalewski acknowledges, the time has come to stop “the conspiracy of silence,”<sup>68</sup> and raise the awareness of the Polish readers that Polish American poets do exist. As a result, *Okolica poetów*, for instance, has issued a volume on Polish-American poetry created by the promising American poets of Polish descent, who were born in the 1950s. Among them one may find Jill Bialosky (*Subterraean*, 2005), Karen Kovacic (*Metropolis Burning*, 2005), Denise Szuba Dee (who is also a playwright, a photographer, and a short story writer, *Sowkins*, 2003), as well as a prolific poet Cecilia Woloch (*Sacrifice*, 1997; *Tsigan*, 2002; *Late*, 2003; *Narcissus*, 2008; *Carpathia*, 2009).<sup>69</sup> Additionally, the editor includes in the volume the poets born in the 1960s, such as Lori Lubeski (*Sweet Land*, 1994; *Trickle*, 1997; *Estranged Domain*, 2005; *Has the River of the Body Risen*, 2005)<sup>70</sup> and Mark Nowak (*Shut up, Shut down*, 2004) as well as the poet born in the 1970s: Karl Koweski (*Can't Kill a Man Born to Hang*, 2005).<sup>71</sup> The list of talented Polish American poets should probably also include John Guzlowski, a memorable persona in the current renaissance of Polish American poetry, who published three collections of poems (*Language of Mules*, 1999; *Third Winter of War: Buchenwald*, 2006; *Lightning and Ashes*, 2007), where he depicted “universal themes anchored in Polish and Polish American[environment], [and recorded] a story of a neglected segment of the

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 39.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Janusz Zalewski, „Wprowadzenie,” in: *Okolica poetów*, ed. Jacek Napiórkowski (Rzeszów: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Stanisława Piętaka, 2005), p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> <http://ceciliawoloch.com/> (17 Aug. 2010)

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.bu.edu/celop/about/faculty/lubeski.html> (17 Aug. 2010)

<sup>71</sup> Janusz Zalewski, *Okolica poetów*, pp. 301 - 308.

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Polish American community, including that segment's experience in World War II."<sup>72</sup>

Among various literary forms which the first generation Polish immigrants found most satisfying was the play. Theatricals were especially appreciated and favoured and this is what Franciszek Lyra has to say about them:

the play by its audio-visual nature was directly linked with oral culture, the dominant style of the peasant's aesthetic experience. It upheld the native language, fostered community solidarity, nurtured the feeling of continuity with the high culture of Poland.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, amateur theatrical clubs and societies blossomed during the first forty years of Polonia's history; some of them were organized to perform only one play, others continued to stage the plays for many years, thus, becoming professional companies. Natalie Kunka, who presents a brief history of amateur theatre among the members of Polonia in the essay "The Amateur Theatre Among the Poles," claims that dramatic activities were initiated by almost all Polish Roman Catholic parishes and their peak was reached in 1917, the year when the motion pictures started to become extremely popular.<sup>74</sup>

Taking into consideration the repertoire of theatrical companies, the most ambitious clubs relied on classical drama, however, the majority of theatrical societies preferred light entertainment.<sup>75</sup> Due to the fact that until 1918 Polonian theatres were not financed and had to support themselves on their own, it was the theatre managers' task to attract the public and offer the audience the variety of plays. Therefore, the constant changes within the repertoire constituted the guarantee of the theatre's success.<sup>76</sup> As a consequence, Polonia's playwrights,

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, "Lightning and Ashes: The Poetry of John Guzlowski," *Polish American Studies*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (2008). <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/pas/65.1/napierkowski.html> (1 Sept. 2010)

<sup>73</sup> Franciszek Lyra, "Following the Cycle: The Ethnic Pattern of Polish-American Literature," p. 65.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, "Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature," p. 39.

<sup>75</sup> Franciszek Lyra, "Following the Cycle: The Ethnic Pattern of Polish-American Literature," p. 66.

<sup>76</sup> Emil Orzechowski, *Koniec Polonii w Ameryce?* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1996), p. 83.

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such as Anthony Jax [the author of more than fifty dramas, for instance: *Wolność i Niewola* (*Freedom and Slavery*), *Niemiec Kosynierem* (*The German Scythebearer*), *Kuzynka z Ameryki* (*The Cousin from America*), or *Z Pennsylvanii do Kalifornii* (*From Pennsylvania to California*)]<sup>77</sup> and Szczęsny Zahajkiewicz, apart from creating their own plays, also attended performances of popular American plays, took notes and rewrote them in Polish, so that Polish-speaking audience could see the performances on their own stages.

Not only did the Polonian playwrights aim at propagating in their plays patriotic feelings towards Poland, but they also focused on Catholic devotion and postulated life of frugality and thrift. It was also quite common for the playwrights to include in their plays some moral guidance for their readers encouraging the audience to fight against “treachery, drunkenness, and a low culture of everyday life.”<sup>78</sup> Emil Orzechowski claims that before 1918 plays were written by the Polish American playwrights of various qualifications. These were authors who often possessed different aesthetic tastes and represented various political or ideological orientations. There were well educated playwrights, such as Paul Sobolewski and Theofilia Samolińska, a socialist A. Chrostowski and an anti-clerical free-thinker C. Łukaszewicz. The language used by those playwrights also varied, some of them appreciated jargon and used dialect in the characterization of nationalities or vocations of people, others used language spoken in particular sections of partitioned Poland. Emil Orzechowski sustains that Polish American drama includes even the plays written in the mountaineer’s dialect, or the plays with various English words incorporated in the text, yet with Polish spelling (for instance Anthony Jax’s comedy *Panicz w Ameryce* [*His Lordship in America*]).<sup>79</sup>

The ultimate demise of Polish language theatre in the United States is attributed mainly to four factors, which are enumerated by Arthur Waldo in his

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<sup>77</sup> Joseph Krzyszkowski claims that the works of Anthony Jax were not classical either in imitation of the ancients or in literary form and often the playwright was not appreciated by the scholars because of “his faulty grammar [...] and his extensive use of linguistic barbarisms.” Rev. Joseph Krzyszkowski, “Anthony Jax - A Forgotten Playwright,” *Polish American Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1/2 (1952), pp. 17 - 21.

<sup>78</sup> Cf: Emil Orzechowski, *Koniec Polonii w Ameryce?*, p. 88.

<sup>79</sup> Orzechowski, *Koniec Polonii w Ameryce?*, p. 87.

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essay “Polish American Theatre.” Waldo maintains that “restriction of immigration from Poland after 1920, the introduction of radio and later of television into all homes, the Anglicization of all ethnic groups, and the economic crisis of 1929-1933”<sup>80</sup> constituted the major causes for the decline of non-English language Polish-American theatre. Even though such a decline took place, it did not mean that, as Thomas Napierkowski reminds, Polish drama completely ceased to exist, “for Polish theatre directors and managers themselves moved into radio to continue their work.”<sup>81</sup>

In the area of English language Polish American prose, Thomas Gladsky notices that with the exception of Monika Krawczyk’s short stories, published in the 1930s and Wiszniewski’s *Life Record of an Immigrant*,<sup>82</sup> descent Polish American literature is a post Second World War development, and it drew considerable attention of literary critics only after the publication of novels, such as Wanda Kubiak’s *Polonaise Nevermore*, Anne Pellowski’s *First Farm in the Valley* and Richard Bankowsky’s *A Glass Rose*.<sup>83</sup> Despite the fact that the body of Polish American literature in English is probably not as impressive as Polish language Polish-American literature produced before the World War II, Thomas Napierkowski admits that there are “several Polish American writers, who are carrying on [...] tradition,”<sup>84</sup> and who “have achieved some considerable success – even a share of national notoriety and critical attention.”<sup>85</sup> However, in Napierkowski’s words:

these are figures whose identity and status as ethnic writers call for further clarification, whose handling of ethnicity (their own and that of the Polish American community) deserves continuing debate, and whose literary strengths and accomplishments demand closer examination.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Arthur Waldo as quoted in: Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 40.

<sup>81</sup> Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” p. 40.

<sup>82</sup> *Life Record of an Immigrant* appeared in Thomas and Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*.

<sup>83</sup> *Polonaise Nevermore* was published in 1962, *First Farm in the Valley* in 1960 and *A Glass Rose* in 1958. Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Sehes*, pp. 3, 35, 227.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 26.

<sup>85</sup> Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” p. 41.

<sup>86</sup> Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” p. 41.

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Among Polish American writers who have produced acclaimed fiction in English Thomas Gladsky distinguishes: Darryl Poniscan, the author of the 1970s novels (such as: *The Last Detail*, *Goldengrove*, *The Accomplice* and *Andoshen, Pa.*) about the Eastern Pennsylvania Buddusky family; Matt Babinski, who wrote urban Massachusetts novels (for instance *By Raz*); and Gary Gildner,<sup>87</sup> who published his first novel *The Second Bridge* in 1987.<sup>88</sup> However, during the last two decades there have also appeared on the contemporary literary scene several Polish American authors whose reputation gradually increases. Therefore, thanks to their publications, Polish American community is being given a growing voice in the world of literature.<sup>89</sup>

Suzanne Strempek Shea is a prolific contemporary Polish American writer, whom Gladsky defines as “the first to sell, the first to attract a large readership, and the first to be enthusiastically accepted and praised within the ethnic community.”<sup>90</sup> Often described as the Amy Tan of the Polish American community, Strempek Shea has been gaining a critical success after publication of her six well received novels (*Selling the Lite of Heaven*, 1994; *Hoopi Shoopi Donna*, 1996; *Lily of the Valley*, 1999; *Around Again*, 2001; *Becoming Finola*, 2004) and two memoirs (*Songs From a Lead-Lined Room*, 2002; *Shelf-Life: Mystery, Drama and Other Page-Turning Adventures From a Year in a Bookstore*, 2004).<sup>91</sup> The plots of the first four novels are set in the Connecticut River Valley of Western Massachusetts, which is believed to be the largest agrarian Polonian community in the United

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<sup>87</sup> Gary Gildner is also a poet and a short story writer. He has published various collections of poems, for instance: *First Practice* in 1969, *Nails* in 1975, *Blue Like the Heavens: New and Selected Poems* in 1984, and *The Bunker in the Parsley Fields* in 1997. Additionally, Gildner has written a memoir, *My Grandfather's Book: Generations of an American Family* (published in 2002), which received the title of “Top Ten University Press Book of the Year” by ForeWord Magazine. Brad L. Roghaar, “Writing a Life: A Conversation with Gary Gildner,” *Weber Journal*, Vol. 21.2 (2004).

<http://weberjournal.weber.edu/archive/archive%20D%20Vol.%2021.2-25.2/Vol.%20212/Gildner%20Roghaar%20Con.htm> (20 Aug. 2010)

<sup>88</sup> Cf: Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, pp. 238, 249, 276.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “Marketing Ethnicity: The Case of Suzanne Strempek Shea,” *The Polish Review*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 3 (2003), p. 318.

<sup>91</sup> The latest publication of Suzanne Strempek Shea is *Sundays in America: A Yearlong Road Trip in Search of Christian Faith*, 2008 which is the result of her project, whose aim was to attend 52 different churches in one year and report author's impressions. <http://suzannestrempeksha.com/> (20 Aug. 2010)

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States. Strempek Shea's presentation of ethnicity, however, distinctly differs from other Polish American authors' approach to this matter. It is due to the fact that the author, as Thomas Gladsky notices, "has successfully combined ethnic themes with broader and current issues – the single woman, self-discovery, love, [...] loneliness, [and] the complexities of living within an ethnic community."<sup>92</sup> Therefore, although the protagonists of her novels have an ethnic dimension, their problems are familiar to all readers, regardless their ethnicity, and the themes that Strempek Shea touches upon become universal. What should also be remembered is the fact that Strempek Shea successfully caught and depicted Polish Americans in a moment of transition, i.e. when the immigrant culture of Poles is transforming itself into an ethnic culture of Polish Americans. Thomas Gladsky, for instance, describes this moment as the point when *pierogi*, prayer and polka are substituted with Grunwald, Sobieski, and Reymont.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, the author is often perceived as the follower of the tradition of ethnic women writers of the early twentieth-century America. Urszula Tempska claims that despite the fact that Strempek Shea's fiction might be characterized by containing "[...] deadpan humor, [...] unaffected language, kitchen-table realism and quirky fantasy,"<sup>94</sup> its subject matter, narrative plotting, themes and motifs forcefully solicit comparisons with the fiction of Anzia Yezierska, Mary Antin, Maxine Hong Kingston, Louise Erdrich or Judith Ortiz Cofer.<sup>95</sup>

Another author whose popular success gives powerful voice to the Polish American community is Leslie Pietrzyk. Her first novel, *Pears on a Willow Tree*, published in 1998, was perceived as the "debut of a genuine and fully developed

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<sup>92</sup> Thomas Gladsky, "Marketing Ethnicity: The Case of Suzanne Strempek Shea," p. 319.

<sup>93</sup> Gladsky, "Marketing Ethnicity," p. 326.

<sup>94</sup> Urszula Tempska, "From (Ethnic) Mama's Girl to Her Own (New Ethnic) Woman: Gender and Ethnicity in Suzanne Strempek Shea's 'Selling The Lite of Heaven,'" in: *Something of My Very Own to Say: American Women Writers of Polish Descent*, eds. Thomas S. Gladsky and Rita Holmes Gladsky (Boulder: East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 287.

<sup>95</sup> Grażyna J. Kozaczka, "The Invention of Ethnicity and Gender in Suzanne Strempek Shea's Fiction," *The Polish Review*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 3 (2003), p. 327.

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talent with a most promising future,”<sup>96</sup> and praised within literary circles for the depiction of “a multigenerational roadmap of love and hate, distance, [...] closeness, and the lure of roots that both restrain and sustain us all.”<sup>97</sup> While presenting a tale of Polish American women in the four-generation Marchewka family, Pietrzyk, focuses on the hardships of emigration and assimilation in the twentieth-century America on the one hand, but, on the other hand, also “treats universal questions such as the complexity of mother-daughter relations, [and] the complicated identities women must forge.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, Leslie Pietrzyk, like Suzanne Strempek Shea, contributes to the feminist dimension of the Polish American literary scene. *Pears on a Willow Tree* is, on the one hand, a novel about the communal Polish American celebrations centered around “good-smelling food [and] the kitchen [...] where the traditions live on;”<sup>99</sup> but, on the other hand, it is also a book about the harmful Polack jokes,<sup>100</sup> alcoholism which results from the very same “traditions, which feel like a straitjacket to a second-generation daughter;”<sup>101</sup> and the inability of the protagonists to escape from the hold of the past because “no matter what [they] do, or where [they] go, they are [the descendants of Poles], they just are.”<sup>102</sup> Apart from writing novels (Pietrzyk’s second work *A Year and a Day* was published in 2004), the author also creates short stories, which have been published in literary journals including *The Iowa Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Literal Latte*, *New England Review*, *The Sun*, and

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<sup>96</sup> Roland Merullo, “Pears on a Willow Tree: An Immigrants’ Tale that Bears Plentiful Fruit” (Special to the “Washington Post,” October 19, 1998), p. D09. <http://www.lesliepietrzyk.com/POAWTRevised.htm> (22 Aug. 2010)

<sup>97</sup> Roland Merullo, “Pears on a Willow Tree: An Immigrants’ Tale that Bears Plentiful Fruit,” p. D09. <http://www.lesliepietrzyk.com/POAWTRevised.htm> (22 Aug. 2010)

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 45.

<sup>99</sup> Leslie Pietrzyk, *Pears on a Willow Tree* (London: Granta Books, 1998), p. 125.

<sup>100</sup> Pietrzyk includes several Polack jokes in the novel, e.g. “Why do they put bowls of honey on the table at Polack weddings? To keep the flies off the bride,” or “ [w]hat are the three greatest years of a Polack’s life?” Fifth grade!” Leslie Pietrzyk, *Pears on a Willow Tree*, p. 142. The question of the popularity of Polack jokes has been touched upon by sociologists, e.g. Andrzej Kapiszewski, who explains the phenomenon of ethnic jokes in his study *Stereotyp Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia* (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1978), pp. 86-95. This topic, however, is beyond the scope of the present dissertation.

<sup>101</sup> Roland Merullo, “Pears on a Willow Tree: An Immigrants’ Tale that Bears Plentiful Fruit,” p. D09. <http://www.lesliepietrzyk.com/POAWTRevised.htm> (22 Aug. 2010)

<sup>102</sup> Leslie Pietrzyk, *Pears on a Willow Tree*, p. 150.

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*Gargoyle*. Furthermore, Pietrzyk has won many writing awards and she is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee.<sup>103</sup>

Another significant literary figure establishing a promising career for himself on the Polish American scene is the Wisconsin novelist, Ken Parejko, the author of an immigrant farm novel *Remember Me Dancing*, published in 1996, which has been praised for its technique and vision.<sup>104</sup> Thomas Napierkowski points to the existence of a new wave of Polish language literature being written by post-Solidarity immigrants. But, there does not exist any bibliography of their works, and, as Napierkowski acknowledges, the novels of those authors are still waiting to be assessed by the host-culture and Polish American critics. Therefore, this body of Polish American literature invites further research, study and debate in both, Polish and American literary circles.

There are probably more Polish American authors who have been writing or wrote either in Polish or English, whose names have not yet been mentioned here. It is mainly due to the fact that, on the one hand, the aim here is to provide an overview of Polish American literary history focusing only on the most prominent writers on Polish American literary scene. On the other hand, however, some new, promising Polish American authors might have been omitted here because, alluding to conclusions reached by Thomas Napierkowski, “we are just beginning to appreciate the existence and scope of the literature created by Polish Americans [and] in the case of Polish-language literature, an enormous task of discovery and recovery lies ahead.”<sup>105</sup> What seems to be vital, though, is the fact that descent literature of Polish Americans is beginning to capture the attention of the American audience. To quote Napierkowski again:

[Polish American literature] will document that Polonia has contributed not just economically, politically, and physically to the fabric of American life but artistically, culturally and spiritually as well. It will also preserve the

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<sup>103</sup> Amina Hafiz, “On Being a Writer, Food and Stubbornness: An Interview with Leslie Pietrzyk.” [http://www1.american.edu/cas/lit/folio/2005winter\\_inter.html](http://www1.american.edu/cas/lit/folio/2005winter_inter.html) (31 Aug. 2010)

<sup>104</sup> Cf: Thomas Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature,” p. 45.

<sup>105</sup> Napierkowski, “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” p. 46.

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memories of the community and protect them from distortion and falsehood.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Napierkowski, "Does Anyone Know My Name?," p. 46.

## II. THE AMERICAN POLONIA

The purpose of this chapter is to shed some light upon Polish American culture in order to understand what makes the Polish American community, or the American Polonia, a unique and identifiable group. The analysis of Polish American culture inevitably poses a question concerning the meaning of the term “Polish American” and of the diversified terminology used with reference to Polish communities in the United States.

A considerable number of sociologists have attempted to grasp the meaning of this term. Among them was Rev. Waclaw Kruszka who, probably as one of the first scholars, defines Poles in America in his pioneering work as “a collection of people with a common origin and heritage”<sup>1</sup> which seems to be a simplistic definition. Helena Znaniecki-Lopata states that the term “Polish-American” (here, noticeably, written with a hyphen) has been used to denote “a local, ecologically separated community or interconnected communities in different American cities whose members share the same national origin and [Polish] culture.”<sup>2</sup> The meaning of “Polish American” was also defined by a sociologist, Eugene Obidinski, who emphasized the fact that the members of the Polish community “are those who have Polish ancestors and relatives, share common interests, speak and understand Polish in various degrees and retain other cultural traits transmitted from various areas of Poland.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, John Bukowczyk notices that the meaning of “Polish American” changes with the appearance of the descendants of “Polish pioneers,” i.e. Polish participants of the great migration wave at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. In *And My Children Did Not Know Me. A History of the Polish-Americans* Bukowczyk states:

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<sup>1</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. x.

<sup>2</sup> Helena Znaniecki-Lopata as quoted in: Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research* (Boston: Community Sociology Training Program, Department of Sociology, Boston University, Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Obidinski as quoted in: Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 2.

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[t]he second – Polish-American – generation [of the Polish immigrants who came to America between 1880-1913] was harder to define. [...] Their culture had Polish elements and American ones, but really it was a new Polish-American synthesis that resembled the cultures of America's other blue-collar, Catholic ethnic groups. Most second-generation Poles had divided loyalties and identities, which were still rooted in the parish, the family, and the neighbourhood.<sup>4</sup>

However, Rev. Joseph Swastek, The Orchard Lake<sup>5</sup> priest and the president of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, offers a different explanation, which can be applied to both: the first<sup>6</sup> and the second generation of Polish immigrants.<sup>7</sup> In his view:

[t]he Polish-American is of common folk, peasant origin [...] for the most part Roman Catholic in belief, culturally shaped by four major formative influences: religious idealism; an agrarian, semifeudal peasant background; Poland's political and cultural bondage; and the American Dream.<sup>8</sup>

The above notwithstanding, John Bukowczyk notices that defining who a Polish-American is, became a more complicated matter, especially for third or fourth generations of the Polish immigrants who came to America at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. As Bukowczyk asserts:

[...] ethnicity for them often seemed an intangible thing. Some, [...] remained snugly sheltered in the older, blue-collar Polish-American communities, living and working as their parents had done, marrying within the group. [...] The rest [...] were more integrated into the larger society around them. [...] 'Polish-American' was something that they called themselves – or that others called them – but only sometimes, if at all. [...] They were Polish-Americans only when they wanted to be<sup>9</sup>

According to Andrzej Brożek, Polish immigrants living in America were first called "Poles in America," nevertheless, together with the change of the ethnic/national consciousness and the degree of Americanization, the new

<sup>4</sup> John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me. A History of the Polish-Americans* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 144.

<sup>5</sup> The Polish Seminary of SS. Cyril and Methodius in Detroit (founded in 1885), which later changed its name into Orchard Lake as the increasing enrollment and the need for more space led the second rector, Father Witold Buchaczowski, to transfer the seminary in 1909 to the rural village of Orchard Lake, northwestern Detroit. <http://www.sscms.edu/history.asp> (16 Sept. 2009)

<sup>6</sup> Polish immigrants who took part in the great immigration (1880-1913) to America.

<sup>7</sup> The descendants of the Polish immigrants who took part in the great immigration (1880-1913) to America.

<sup>8</sup> Rev. Joseph Swastek as quoted in: John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me*, p. 144.

<sup>9</sup> Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me*, pp. 144-145.

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terminology was introduced in order to reflect the exceptional character of the Polish ethnic group. Polish immigrants and their descendants started to perceive themselves as: “American Poles,” “Polish-Americans,” “Polish Americans” (without a hyphen); and, finally, “Americans of Polish descent or extraction.”<sup>10</sup> The transition of Poles into Polish-Americans is inseparably connected with the processes of nativism and Americanization in the early 1920s. Bukowczyk implies in the following fragment of *And My Children Did Not Know Me. A History of the Polish-Americans*:

Polish immigrant leaders [...] concluded that they could only preserve their communities, their culture, and their Polish identity in America by modifying them. To defend themselves against charges of disloyalty and foreignism, middle-class Polish leaders embraced Americanism, founded civic and political clubs, and plunged into naturalization work.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, seeking not to be permanently suspect because of their origins, Poles in America became Polish-Americans (with a hyphen) and began enjoying substantial and tangible benefits. The following passage from Bukowczyk’s study may serve here as an explanation of such a change:

[i]n ‘Polish-Americanism,’ Polonia’s elite found a new avenue of career mobility via government service and American party politics.[...] All Poles reaped huge, intangible benefits from calling themselves Polish-Americans and therefore campaigned hard for Polish monuments and street names during the 1920s and organized Pulaski Day parades. Through these activities, they stood up and shouted, we helped build America!<sup>12</sup>

In the light of the above, Bukowczyk asserts that becoming a “Polish-American” in the 1920s was primarily “a matter of political loyalty to their adoptive country and the intention to remain in it, nothing more.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Andrzej Brożek, *Polonia amerykańska 1854-1939*, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me. A History of the Polish-Americans*, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me*, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me*, p. 71. Taking into consideration the broader socio-cultural context, one may remember that, with the influx of Poles restricted by the Immigration Quota Act and the Immigration Act of 1924, “Polonia lack[ed] ‘fresh troops’” (Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me*, p. 71) and the processes of Americanization were at work. Therefore, immigrant Poles feared that, on the one hand, their children (i.e., the members of the second generation of Polish immigrants from 1880-1913) would repel “their Polish part [that seemed] steadily shrinking” (Bukowczyk,

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The question of the hyphens, which, again, dates back to the 1920s and emphasizes the existence of the so-called “hyphenated Americans,” was also problematic<sup>14</sup> since “in a pluralistic [American] nation of immigrants hyphens could connect as well as divide.”<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Devere Brody suggests that “the hyphen performs – it is never neutral or natural.”<sup>16</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson alludes to Brody’s statement and explains that while ‘hyphenated Americanism’ was equivalent to un-Americanism in the 1910s and at that period of time it became the subject of surveillance, the perception of the hyphen changed two generations later. The discourse on hyphenation is summed up in the following words:

the Americanism performed by the hyphen has risen above reproach [and] ethnic hyphenation, if not neutral, has at least become a natural idiom of national belonging in this nation of immigrants.<sup>17</sup>

Since the end of the nineteenth century, “Polonia” became the key term used to define Polish immigrants and the descendants of the massive peasant economic migration who settled outside of Poland before the outbreak of the Second World War. Now the term “American Polonia,” however, refers to all pre- and post-Second World War Polish immigrants (i.e. the Old Polonia and New Polonia) dwelling in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

It also seems essential to notice that Poles who immigrated from Poland especially during the first two decades of the twentieth century, were convinced about the temporary character of their immigration which was reflected in the so-

*And My Children Did Not Know Me*, p. 71) in favour of their American part. On the other hand, however, the same immigrant Poles, i.e. their fathers, who belonged to the mass migration at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, “wanted to be American on the outside [proving their loyalty to the new homeland] but culturally Polish within” (Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me*, p. 71).

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson explains that “there is such a thing as hyphen-nationalism, [...] [and] this mode of American nationalism is founded in large part on white primacy. However appealingly draped in a celebratory rhetoric of diversity and inclusion, [...] it serves in part to protect that primacy.” Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me. A History of Polish-Americans*, p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Devere Brody as quoted in: Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America*, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America*, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Stanisław Blejwas, “Polska diaspora w Stanach Zjednoczonych 1939-1989,” in: *Polska Diaspora*, ed. Adam Walaszek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), p. 93.

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called “fourth partition” ideology. According to its principles, the Polish nation was divided into three partitions (in Europe), but the fourth one was formed by the masses of Polish immigrants, who decided to settle in the United States. Posern-Zieliński admits that “fourth partition” ideology became especially popular among the members of the American Polonia between the 1880s and 1918 who strongly advocated the need to fund and offer military support to their compatriots in Poland.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, since Polish immigrants of the “great” migration took into consideration the possibility of returning to their land of origin, and they believed that Polish traditions, culture and language were threatened with extinction in Poland,<sup>20</sup> “they felt the necessity to preserve in America their Polish, national, cultural heritage.”<sup>21</sup> For Polish immigrants, who came to America between 1880 – 1913, the cultivation of Polish culture, their mother tongue, as well as the liberation of their homeland were perceived by them as their national, Polish, duty.<sup>22</sup>

The self definition of the American Polonia changed with time and this change might be illustrated by the so called “Polonian Declaration of Independence” (as it was later described by Mieczysław Haiman), written in 1934 by Professor Franciszek Świątlik during a meeting held in Warsaw by the World Union of Poles from Abroad (*Światowy Związek Polaków z Zagranicy*, or *Światopol*<sup>23</sup>).

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<sup>19</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej* (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1982), p. 148.

<sup>20</sup> The partitions of Poland executed by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Habsburg Austria (successively in 1772, 1793 and 1795) aimed at the division of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lands and annexation of those lands by the Russian, Prussian and Austrian invaders, which resulted in the elimination of sovereign Poland and Lithuania. What followed was the suppression of Polish language, heritage and culture. Cf: James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 1. The Russian, Prussian and Austrian occupation lasted until 1918 when Poland reaffirmed its independence by the Treaty of Versailles.

<sup>21</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 148. Additionally, Posern-Zielinski notices that in the mid-war period the “fourth partition” ideology was no longer of great importance since “the continuous flow of the [Polish] immigrants was interrupted by order of the authorities and the citizens of the fourth partition became the Americans of Polish descent.” Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 200.

<sup>23</sup> The aim of the organization was the unification of the Polish minorities and Polish immigrants living beyond the territory of Poland, as well as the subordination of their activities in the interest of the established Polish government. Blejwas admits that “care about the good name of the Polish nation was [...] a common goal of ‘all Poles’ and ‘the most honourable and highest obligation of every Pole.’” Stanisław A. Blejwas, “Old and New Polonias: Tensions Within an Ethnic Community,” in: *Polish American Studies*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2 (1981), p. 55

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Świetlik represented the Polish National Alliance<sup>24</sup> and was speaking on behalf of the American Polonia. According to Świetlik:

Polonia in America is neither a Polish colony nor a national minority, but a component part of the great American nation, proud, however, of its Polish origin and careful to implant in the hearts of the younger generation a love for all that is Polish.<sup>25</sup>

Such a statement was the proof that the American Polonia did not fully become “American” and simultaneously refused to be exclusively “Polish.”<sup>26</sup> The phenomenon of the formation of the Polish ethnic group in America had also been studied by Thomas and Znaniecki, who describe the American Polonia in the following way:

[ It is] a society which in structure and prevalent attitudes is neither Polish nor American but constitutes a specific new product whose raw materials have been drawn from Polish traditions, partly from the new conditions in which the immigrants live and from American social values as the immigrant sees and interprets them.<sup>27</sup>

The above description is, in Theresita Polzin’s view, an appropriate definition of the *Polonia Amerykańska*: “a complex entity composed of Polish Catholic institutions, and values coupled with American urban, industrial conditions and democratic ideals.”<sup>28</sup>

The American Polonia underwent significant numerous demographic, economic, political, social, as well as cultural changes, especially in the period

<sup>24</sup> The Polish National Alliance (the PNA) and the Polish Roman Catholic Union (the PRCU) are the two largest and oldest Polish American fraternal organizations. The Polish National Alliance was founded in 1880 in Philadelphia, built the monument of Thadeusz Kościuszko in Washington and contributed to the establishing publishing and educational institutions in America, e.g. The Polish Library in Chicago and Immigrants House in New York. The PNA “would provide mutual assistance for its members, and organize commemorations of Polish anniversaries and fulfill ‘the obligations demanded by national honor.’” Stanisław A. Blejwas, *The Polish Singers Alliance of America* (Rochester, Woodbridge: University of Rochester Press, 2004), p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Blejwas, “Old and New Polonias,” p. 57.

<sup>26</sup> Mieczysław B. Biskupski, „Polska diaspora w Stanach Zjednoczonych 1914-1939,” in: *Polska Diaspora*, ed. Adam Walaszek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), p. 90.

<sup>27</sup> William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, vol. II: Organization and Disorganization in America*, p. 1469.

<sup>28</sup> John V. Swastek as quoted in: Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither* (Denver, Colorado: Franciscan Publishers, 1973), p. 73.

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between 1939 and the year 1989. One of the reasons which facilitated these modifications was the arrival of the representatives of the so-called New Polonia, which embraced post Second World War political émigrés, refugees, escapees, displaced persons, Solidarity immigrants and a considerable number of economic migrants.<sup>29</sup> In contrast with the Old Polonia immigration, i.e. Poles who came to America prior to 1939, the new waves mostly consisted of middle-class individuals who received a better education than the “after bread” immigrants. It cannot be denied that most of the new immigrants led relatively quiet, economically secure lives back in their homeland, where many of them held eminent and prestigious posts, and their immigration was mainly triggered by political situation in the country.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, it was estimated that many newcomers, especially those who came to America after the Second World War, were not able to find jobs suitable to their already obtained qualifications or education. Anna D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann emphasizes, however, that among the displaced persons there was also an energetic and vital group of intelligentsia, who did manage to climb the American social ladder, rose rapidly to positions of prominence, and became the leaders.<sup>31</sup>

There were many sources of tensions between the two Polonias. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, both groups even engaged in a heated debate about immigrant responsibilities,<sup>32</sup> expectations, assimilation issues and collective involvement in the Polish affairs in the United States. The frictions between two

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<sup>29</sup> Cf: Stanisław A. Blejwas, “Polska diaspora w Stanach Zjednoczonych 1939-1989,” p. 91.

<sup>30</sup> Cf: Stanisław A. Blejwas, „Nowa i stara Polonia: napięcia w społeczności etnicznej,” in: *Polonia amerykańska: przeszłość i współczesność*, eds. Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz, Tadeusz Gromada, Gromada (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1988) p. 720. Stanisław Blejwas relies on Danuta Mostwin’s research and statistical data presented in her dissertation entitled “The Transplanted Family: A Study of Social Adjustment of the Polish Immigrant Family to the United States after the Second World War.”

<sup>31</sup> Cf: Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, “The Polish Post-War II Diaspora: An Agenda for a New Millenium,” p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Cf: Anna D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, “The Polish Post-War II Diaspora: An Agenda for a New Millenium,” p. 55.

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distinct Polonias,<sup>33</sup> as Charles Keil admitted, “the pretending Polonia of the polonaise and the real Polonia of the polka,”<sup>34</sup> may still be observed even today.

The latter political immigrants, for instance, recognized for themselves the right to be morally superior over the Old Polonia members assuming that only the post Second World War immigrants were politically involved in the fight for the Polish independence. Blejwas goes even further and assumes that New Polonia immigrants believed to be entrusted with a political mission in exile to free their homeland<sup>35</sup> and expected the members of the earlier Polonia waves to fight for Poland, preserve Polish culture and remain the Polish minority in America until Poland becomes independent from the Russian influence. Due to the fact that the new arrivals perceived their desertion from Poland as an - almost - literal “extraction from the vivid flesh of the nation,”<sup>36</sup> their sense of loss was intense, and the willingness to fight implacable. Such an attitude of the new immigrants is justified by Danuta Mostwin:

[o]bligations to the [Polish] nation, its biological continuation and unrestricted flourishing of its culture constitute simultaneously the obligations to a specific part of oneself which was left in Poland. These obligations need action because otherwise they would result in anxiety.[...] As much as Old Polonia needed striking their roots in [their] Polishness, the political immigration yearned for action in the name of the homeland.<sup>37</sup>

The New Polonia’s perception of the Old Polonia was incompatible with the actual condition in which the Old Polonia was in the United States. New arrivals envisaged the former immigrants as a “well-organized and prominent community which would wait for the newcomers with open arms and express some brotherly, patriotic love;”<sup>38</sup> whereas “the general success of the new

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<sup>33</sup> The tensions were also exacerbated by the arrival of post-1965 immigrants, who constituted mostly intellectuals, professionals, white-collar workers and scientists. Cf: James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 138.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Keil based his opinions on socioeconomic classes of the American Polonia. Keil quoted in: Pula, *Polish Americans*, p. 138.

<sup>35</sup> Cf: Stanisław A. Blejwas, “Polska diaspora w Stanach Zjednoczonych 1939-1989,” pp. 94, 97.

<sup>36</sup> Danuta Mostwin, *Trzecia wartość. Formowanie się nowej tożsamości polskiego emigranta w Ameryce* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1985), p. 98.

<sup>37</sup> Mostwin, *Trzecia wartość*, p. 98.

<sup>38</sup> Mostwin, *Trzecia wartość*, p. 10.

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immigrants was often resented by the older settlers, who felt that the newcomers should work as long and hard to succeed as had [the Old Polonia] and their ancestors.”<sup>39</sup> James Pula adds in the conclusion:

[t]o the [post Second World War] immigrants, the established Polonia was only marginally Polish, [...] knowing little of Poland beyond the superficial celebration of holidays and anniversaries that had long since lost their original significance.<sup>40</sup>

Post Second World War immigrants firmly believed that the Old Polonia members would allow them to occupy the most eminent posts within their already established Polish organizations. On the one hand, earlier immigrants permitted the newcomers to take the leadership in the Polish affairs, on the other hand, however, they felt competent enough to claim a right to decide about the affairs of the American Polonia.<sup>41</sup> Blejwas also notices that the well-educated newcomers mastered English, were able to become white collar workers without much effort, and did not repeat the “Old Polonia odyssey.” As a result, the Old Polonia developed an inferiority complex which, among other factors, might have led to the rise of the conflict-prone Polish American environment, or even active hostility.<sup>42</sup>

Especially that the Polish immigrants who came to America from the “old” country prior to the Second World War were also often mocked by the New Polonia waves because of their “broken, unsophisticated Polish American dialect.”<sup>43</sup> Feliks Gross notices that Old Polonia used to inhabit mostly rural areas back in Poland, and, forced to learn English upon their arrival in order to adjust to the new social, as well as physical American environment, they developed a new dialect characterized by a considerable number of borrowings from English. Even though the Old Polonia language has been, as Gross explains:

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<sup>39</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 120.

<sup>40</sup> Pula, *Polish Americans*, p. 120.

<sup>41</sup> Cf: Stanisław A. Blejwas, „Nowa i stara Polonia: napięcia w społeczności etnicznej,” pp. 721 - 722.

<sup>42</sup> Cf: Blejwas, „Nowa i stara Polonia,” pp. 721 - 722.

<sup>43</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 120.

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neither “corrupted” nor “inferior,” it is simply a unique language or a unique dialect, an unusually interesting linguistic phenomenon but not and unusual one [and] its distinctiveness can survive [creating] a unique language built on the Polish language,<sup>44</sup>

the political and “intellectual” post Second World War immigration perceived it as that of the uneducated and crude.<sup>45</sup> Contrary to old immigration, one of the newcomers’ ultimate goals was the sustainability and preservation of the “distinctness and ‘purity’ of the Polish language, avoiding fusions of Polish and English.”<sup>46</sup> Such care for the Polish language was also justified by the fact that the post Second World War Polish immigrants “possessed a distinct awareness of the diasporic imagination characterized by the conviction that their immigration was not permanent but temporary.”<sup>47</sup> That was the reason why the New Polonia promoted the usage of their native language and yearned for the cultivation of those Polish national traditions which, in their view, were in danger of disappearance back in their land of origin. It was also presumed that without the proper knowledge of the Polish language it was not possible to sustain any ties with the Polish culture, not to mention the ability to protect Polonia communities from the processes of assimilation.<sup>48</sup>

The integration of the Old and the New Polonia with the American society and the differences between both groups which result from this fact were also reflected by the two Polonias’ eagerness to settle among the Americans. While it is known that, in general, Polish immigrants did create their own communities (urban villages) and they flocked together establishing various organizations, cliques, clubs devoted to preservation of the memories and aspirations of their native land, or “recreational patterns involving native customs

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<sup>44</sup> Feliks Gross, “Notes on the Ethnic Revolution,” p. 165.

<sup>45</sup> Cf: Gross, “Notes on the Ethnic Revolution,” p. 166.

<sup>46</sup> Gross, “Notes on the Ethnic Revolution,” p. 166. Gross also claims that despite the New Polonia’s attempt to preserve the distinctness of the Polish language “after several years, conversation occasionally shift[ed] from Polish to English because language [was] ‘functional,’ it serv[ed] certain purposes and it [was] functionally related to a given situation and to certain fields.” Gross, “Notes on the Ethnic Revolution,” p. 166.

<sup>47</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>48</sup> Cf: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 192.

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[...], and a network of personal friendships with their compatriots,”<sup>49</sup> the New Polonia immigrants tended to avoid settling within Polish neighbourhoods. According to Danuta Mostwin, post Second World War immigrants’ felt an ardent desire to isolate themselves from the Old Polonia. Mostwin explains that living far away from other compatriots in exile, is closely connected with “bearing the sense of guilt for deserting Poles and [...] the homeland.”<sup>50</sup>

The dissimilarities between the two Polonias and the lack of understanding on both sides also resulted from the fact that the New Polonia wave cultivated the “high” national tradition while the Old one, as Aleksander Posern-Zieliński observes, “was deeply rooted in the Polonian subculture stemming from the Americanized folk culture.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the post Second World War Polish immigrants considered numerous Polish American organizations, clubs or even parishes as the substitutes for free Poland itself, while the earlier waves perceived them as the Polonia-unifying institutions, which constituted a lasting and vital link with the cultural heritage of the old country. A different manifestation of the divisions that traditionally split Polonia might be seen on the example of Czesław Miłosz – Stanisław Blejwas exchange of views on the pages of *New York Times*, in 1987. In his interview, Miłosz accused Polish Americans of their “incredible cultural crudeness”; in a letter of response, Stanisław Blejwas, a professor of history, asked:

Why a poet, an individual concerned with human values, resorts to that intolerant prejudice unique to intellectuals, namely, the contemptuous condemnation of the masses who do not read or understand him?<sup>52</sup>

James Pula, who commented upon the polemic, concluded that “it was a conflict between the culture of the newly arrived Poles and that of the old,” adding that

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<sup>49</sup> Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 134.

<sup>50</sup> Danuta Mostwin, *Trzecia wartość. Formowanie się nowej tożsamości polskiego emigranta w Ameryce*, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 212.

<sup>52</sup> Stanisław A. Blejwas, “Miłosz and the Polish-Americans,” *New York Times Review*, October 22, 1987, p. 47.

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“it [also] represented [...] a lingering manifestation of the old class divisions between the *lud* [simple folks] and the *szlachta* [gentry].”<sup>53</sup>

In the course of the previous deliberations on the American Polonia, it can be observed that, because of its diversification, the presence of various generations and the descendants of Poles in America, there is no one Polonia and one Polonian culture. The ambiguity of the term “Polonia” does not allow one to connect it with a single specific community or environment. Posern-Zieliński suggests that, for the above mentioned reasons, Polonia, as a whole, constitutes an “assemblage of different generation groups and immigration waves which, on a local micro scale, create a specific mosaic of communities”<sup>54</sup> with a common, Polish, cultural heritage.

## **2.1. Assimilation of Polish Immigrants in the United States and Cultural Changes of the American Polonia.**

It has already been mentioned that the diversified groups of the American Polonia have been under the lasting impact of the assimilation processes, which became the object of examination for numerous sociologists, anthropologists and culture scholars. In the light of the above, research focusing on the degree to which Polish Americans are becoming “Americanized” has been common and intensive.<sup>55</sup> Although assimilation of (Polish) immigrants is a highly

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<sup>53</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 139.

<sup>54</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 213.

<sup>55</sup> Irwin T. Sanders and Ewa T. Morawska, for instance, gathered in their study “Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research” sociological data on multiple Polish American communities in the United States. Numerous facts, figures and other findings connected with Polish American life presented in this work were also collected by Eugene Obidinski, Teresa Lopata-Znanięcki, Józef Chalasiński, Peter Ostafin, Stanley Mackun and Neil Sandberg, to name only a few. Additionally, Paul Wrobel published in 1979 his thorough assessment of the working-class Polish Americans from Detroit (*Our Way: Family, Parish and the Neighbourhood in a Polish-American Community*, Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979) and Grzegorz Babiński presented his findings on the transformations of the American Polonia from New Jersey in the seminal study *Lokalna społeczność*

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complex phenomenon, the present chapter is an attempt to address that problem and to investigate assimilation ideologies which have been postulated in America since the debate over the assimilation of immigrants started at the beginning of the twentieth century. The major concern here is, particularly, acculturation of Polish Americans and their willingness to sustain their own Polish cultural uniqueness in the United States. Finally, the purpose of the present section is to reflect on some of Posern-Zieliński's findings connected with ethnic culture of the American Polonia.

Due to the fact that the assimilation processes, shaped by the clash of various cultures and interactions among numerous ethnic communities and the Native Americans, are complicated phenomena determined by political, economic, ideological and cultural factors,<sup>56</sup> there exist various definitions which sociologists use to describe the "meeting of peoples." Therefore, before examining the problem of the assimilation of Polish Americans in the United States exclusively, it may seem essential to explain what the assimilation process is and what it relies on.

An early and influential definition of the assimilation process was proposed by two sociologists, Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgees, according to whom:

[a]ssimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups, and, by sharing their experience and history are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.<sup>57</sup>

In a later definition Park adds that "peoples of different origins have to achieve the cultural solidarity" to become assimilated. He concludes:

An immigrant is ordinarily considered assimilated as soon as he has acquired the language and the social ritual of the native community [...] This implies among other things that in all the ordinary affairs of life he is able to find a place in the community on the basis of his individual merits without

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*polonijna w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki w procesie przemian* (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1977).

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Andrzej Kapiszewski, *Asymilacja i konflikt. Z problematyki stosunków etnicznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki* (Warszawa, Kraków: Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego DCCXXXIII, Prace Polonijne, zeszyt 9, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984), p. 85.

<sup>57</sup> Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgees, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, as quoted in: Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 62.

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invidious or qualifying reference to his racial origin or to his cultural inheritance.<sup>58</sup>

What is crucial, however, is the fact that an immigrant does not only have to be willing to assimilate; it is also the matter of the receiving group to foster social participation.<sup>59</sup>

Andrzej Kapiszewski admits that assimilation process in the United States differs from the process of adaptation in Europe. It is due to the fact that the American nation finds itself in a constant act of creation, accompanied by “massive immigration processes which persistently influence the shape of the collectivity, alter its population structure and culture.”<sup>60</sup>

As Richard Schaefer notices, the assimilation process in the United States has been referred to as *Americanization*, suggesting that the immigrants adapt to American culture. Newcomers, being the members of the out-group, become an integrated part of the in-group.<sup>61</sup> Taking into consideration the fact that American society is a multicultural society, the difficulty arises when the immigrant needs to become a part of the in-group because it is problematical and difficult to delineate what constitutes the dominant culture in the United States.<sup>62</sup> Kapiszewski claims that not only does assimilation process generate many controversies because of its complexity, but also because the adaptation is not precisely defined in terms of an objective social process, an ideology, or a scientific theory.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Robert E. Park, “Assimilation, Social,” as quoted in: Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 63. Multiple definitions of the process of immigrant assimilation can be found in: Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, pp. 60-71.

<sup>59</sup> Arnold Green, *Sociology: An Analysis of Life in Modern Society* as quoted in: Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 66.

<sup>60</sup> Andrzej Kapiszewski, *Asymilacja i konflikt. Z problematyki stosunków etnicznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, p. 32.

<sup>61</sup> Cf: Richard Schaefer, *Racial and Ethnic Groups* (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), p. 38.

<sup>62</sup> Joshua Fishman, for instance, has proposed the term *core society* and *core culture* in American life to explain this phenomenon. In his view, the core society is “made up essentially of White Protestant, middle-class clay, to which all other particles are attracted,” (Joshua Fishman, “Childhood Indoctrination for Minority-Group Membership and the Quest for Minority-Group Biculturalism in America” as quoted in: Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 72) and to this group the immigrant strives to assimilate.

<sup>63</sup> Andrzej Kapiszewski, *Asymilacja i konflikt. Z problematyki stosunków etnicznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, p. 38.

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According to Andrzej Kapiszewski, there are several well known assimilation ideological tendencies, or the “philosophies – the preferred goals of adjustment,”<sup>64</sup> using Milton Gordon’s terminology. These central ideologies appeared at different stages of the formation of the American nation and they might be divided<sup>65</sup> into:

- Anglo conformity,<sup>66</sup> which constitutes the ideology of the dominant group, and the melting pot ideology.<sup>67</sup> Both of these philosophies advocate the disappearance of ethnic distinctiveness and homogenization of the American national culture,
- cultural pluralism<sup>68</sup> postulating that the evolution of the American nation leads to the preservation of cultural separateness of its races and culturally distinct communities and the New Ethnicity.<sup>69</sup> In accordance with these philosophies all participants involved in the process of formation of the American nation, on the one hand “acquire fundamental values of their common culture but, on the other hand, preserve their ethnic character.”<sup>70</sup>

However, in Kapiszewski’s opinion, “none of these ideologies properly reflected the actual progress of the assimilation process,”<sup>71</sup> because in every single one of

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<sup>64</sup> Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 84.

<sup>65</sup> The division was suggested by Kapiszewski in: *Asymilacja i konflikt. Z problematyki stosunków etnicznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>66</sup> The *Anglo conformity* entails renunciation of the immigrant’s culture in favour of the behavior and values of the dominant Anglo-Saxon group and expresses the desire to maintain modified English institutions and the English language. Cf. Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, pp. 85.

<sup>67</sup> The *melting pot* ideology envisaged fusion of various groups, merging of the Anglo-Saxon peoples with immigrants from other cultures and creating a new indigenous American type. Such a belief became popular in the first part of the twentieth century, nevertheless it was not successful since the American marriage patterns indicated reluctance to marry out of religious groups, as well as of nationality groups. Richard Schaefer, *Racial and Ethnic Groups*, p. 36.

<sup>68</sup> *Cultural pluralism* is an alternative to assimilation announced in the late 20s of the twentieth century, which posited the preservation of sub-national communal life and significant portions of the culture of the immigrant groups within the American context. The implicit assumption of this theory is the coexistence of various groups within one society and maintaining the barriers which exist between them. Cf. Schaefer, *Racial and Ethnic Groups*, p. 45.

<sup>69</sup> *New Ethnicity* emphasized one’s own right to sustain the cultural separateness and achieve equal rights. The main goal of this ideology was to motivate white Americans to fight for “the appropriate place in American society.” New Ethnicity became the result of the fears which tormented the whites, who believed that the American government’s policy was focused only on the improvement of the position of African Americans. Cf. Andrzej Kapiszewski, *Asymilacja i konflikt. Z problematyki stosunków etnicznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, p. 41.

<sup>70</sup> Kapiszewski, *Asymilacja i konflikt*, p. 47.

<sup>71</sup> Kapiszewski, *Asymilacja i konflikt*, p. 85.

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the before mentioned philosophies there are only some true theses which might be accepted only at the particular assimilation stages.<sup>72</sup>

Apart from the central assimilation ideologies there also exist some assimilation theories applied to either the first group of the already mentioned philosophies (e.g.: Frederick Jackson Turner's theory of the West, George R. Steward's transmuting pot theory, Robert E. Park's and Louis Wirth's theoretical considerations concerning race relations), or the second group (Horace M. Kallen's federation of cultures theory, Will Herberg's religious triple melting pot theory, Milton Gordon's structural assimilation theory, Andrew Greeley and Michael Novak's theories of ethnic revival).<sup>73</sup>

The complexity of the process of immigrant assimilation, its theories, as well as multiple aspects of this phenomenon prove that the newcomers had to experience a bitter struggle to become fully respected citizens of their new homeland. They chose various ways to adjust: some of them tried to forget about their ethnic, national, religious heritage, others emphasized it, still others wanted to live their usual, "old world" lives, but outside they endeavoured to mix with the rest of the society. What seems to be true in all cases, however, is the fact that immigrants changed themselves and striving for it or not, in the end, they became Americans.

Assimilation has been a very difficult and long lasting process also for Polish immigrants. Poles came to America with their own cultural traditions and they were not simply launched into a new American cosmos, but they held to earlier attachments and orientations. In this context, the Polish immigrant either had to adapt to the new society (in most cases break with the past), but then "members of the minority group who [chose] not to assimilate look[ed] upon

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<sup>72</sup> Kapiszewski states, for instance, that Anglo conformity realistically functioned only at the early stage of the creation of the American nation and the assimilation based on the melting pot ideology actually never occurred. The author also admits that some concepts of the multi melting pot theory (e.g. the religious triple melting pot advocated by Will Herberg) and the ideas of the "transmuting pot" were supported in reality. Cf: Kapiszewski, *Asymilacja i konflikt*, p. 86.

<sup>73</sup> Kapiszewski elaborates on assimilation theories in: Cf: Kapiszewski, *Asymilacja i konflikt*, pp. 53-85.

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him/her as a deserter,”<sup>74</sup> or refuse to do it, which could also lead to the development of the deeper set of prejudices against him/her on the side of the core group. Thus, assimilating to a new culture and leaving the old community can be read as a “sign of dissatisfaction with the existing conditions.”<sup>75</sup> In such a case the remaining members of the minority group may condemn the Polish immigrant because “s/he does not want to stay with them to bear solidarily the common burden.”<sup>76</sup>

Andrzej Brożek notices that most of the immigrants from Poland associated the process of Americanization with analogous political phenomena which they painfully experienced in Poland, i.e. with the so-called program of Germanization and Russification. For that reason, Polish immigrants started their futile attempts to separate themselves from the American culture; in Brożek’s words:

[Polish immigrants wanted to] shut themselves inside their own milieu – the Polish ghetto – and engage in a losing battle against the real and effective Americanizing pressure from the non-Polish environment in the United States.<sup>77</sup>

It has also been maintained, however, that while Germanization or Russification implied the actual resignation from Polish cultural heritage and embracing the culture of the enemy, Americanization did not pose similar serious threats to Polish newcomers. In the opinion of Brożek:

Americanization was made out to be something entirely different, [...] as it could not be an acceptance of the American cultural heritage, since such was as yet non-existent, it by needs must stand for the acceptance of the essential elements of American reality – American civilization, the temperament of the people inhabiting that country, their way of thinking as a result of the highly progressive socio-economic structures and an acceptance of the institutions of American public life.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Richard Schaefer, *Racial and Ethnic Groups*, p. 38.

<sup>75</sup> William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, vol. II: Organization and Disorganization in America* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958), p. 1484.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas, Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, p. 1484.

<sup>77</sup> Andrzej Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939* (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1985), p. 175.

<sup>78</sup> Brożek, *Polonia amerykańska 1854-1939*, p. 175.

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In the light of the above, as Bożek admits, there were two different kinds of Americanization for the Polish immigrants. On the one hand, they could embrace the already mentioned features of American reality neglecting those aspects which were considered unimportant, e.g. English language, religions, “haughtiness vis-à-vis Americans and everything viewed as American faults or ‘bad habits,’”<sup>79</sup> If such Americanization was accepted, the immigrants were allowed to cultivate their Polish traditions and retain their native language. On the other hand, however, it was assumed that the second option for the Polish immigrants was the incorporation of the non-essential features of American reality (which have been already enumerated above) and, simultaneously, rejection of the Polish cultural heritage. In this context, Americanization was perceived in terms of Germanization or Russification and, hence, such an attitude was widely condemned.<sup>80</sup>

As Posern-Zieliński admits, the first stage of adjustment to the new American reality for the Polish immigrants took place during the years when the nativistic anti-immigrant policy was especially popular.<sup>81</sup> As a result, “the peasant folk tradition of the Polish immigrants and its ways of life led in the ethnic ghettos were perceived as the primitive legacy - the obstacle in the process of assimilation.”<sup>82</sup> The situation started to change gradually at the beginning of the twentieth century when the melting pot theory became voiced. Nevertheless, the American lack of interest in the Polish cultural heritage and immigrant life “facilitated the reconstruction of the [Polish] ethnic environment and its relative isolation.”<sup>83</sup> What seems significant is the fact that seeing their homeland under partitions, Polish immigrants in the United States developed a deep national awareness and a lasting attachment to their native traditions. As a consequence, the patriotic feelings of the immigrants and their awareness that they recognize the ability, at least to some extent, to foster and preserve their Polish traditions in

<sup>79</sup> Brożek, *Polonia amerykańska 1854-1939*, p. 175

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Brożek, *Polonia amerykańska 1854-1939*, p. 175.

<sup>81</sup> It was the second half of the 19th century, mainly the years of the new/great migration, and first two decades of the 20th century.

<sup>82</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 150.

<sup>83</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 150.

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the American environment allowed them to resist the process of Americanization, although, as Posern-Zieliński adds, the assimilation process and its impact on the immigrants could not be completely neglected and eliminated.<sup>84</sup>

While analyzing the assimilation process of Polish immigrants in the United States it seems significant, at this point, to allude to Posern-Zieliński's findings connected with the reconstruction of cultural and social changes of the American Polonia, and his interpretation of these changes from the point of view of assimilation and acculturation<sup>85</sup> theory. He believes that there exist two contrary tendencies which may be discerned in the Polish ethnic subculture in America: one of them is the process of diminishing of ethnic and cultural diversity, while the other entails the maintenance of ethnicity. Both of these processes are considered to be the two emanations of the same phenomenon, i.e. of the Polish ethnic group gradually growing into American society. In order to explain the essence of the already mentioned tendencies Posern-Zieliński writes:

[o]n the one hand, it is the process of the slow disappearance of ethnic and cultural separateness, or the so-called *de-ethnification*, which is connected with the gradual assimilation into the host society, or, in other words [it is the process of] Americanization. However, on the other hand, one can differentiate here the opposite tendency, which is based on sustaining of one's own cultural peculiarity, on the conscious and unconscious efforts which lead to the strengthening of the bond with the heritage and traditions, [as well as] the language and the history of their ancestors' homeland.<sup>86</sup>

The maintenance of ethnicity of the Polish immigrants and their descendants is immensely influenced by the tradition, cultural heritage, folk culture, folklore<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 151.

<sup>85</sup> The term *assimilation* is usually used by sociologists while *acculturation* is commonly coined by anthropologists, whose areas of study include symbols and changing patterns of behavior, which are formed when different cultural systems clash. Pondering along with Posern-Zieliński on these two phenomena it may be stated that as long as the culture cannot be separated from the civilization or society, it is not possible to detach assimilation from acculturation. Cf. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 64. Nevertheless, there are also some scholars who treat acculturation as one of the stages in the assimilation process. Milton Gordon, for instance, suggests that acculturation is the second out of seven diverse assimilation subprocesses. In his view, acculturation "is a change of cultural patterns to those of host society;" and "is likely to be the first of the types of assimilation to occur when a minority group arrives on the scene." Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, pp. 71, 77.

<sup>86</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 63.

<sup>87</sup> Folklore "constitutes an element of ethnic tradition and performs crucial symbolic, integrating and compensating functions" (Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 92) but because of the fluid nature of the field and the fact that it is built from so many influences and interconnections between tradition and folk culture there exist multiple and broad definitions of folklore. (Cf. Martha C. Sims, Martine Stephens,

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and folklorism,<sup>88</sup> as well as the role of urbanization and mass culture in equalizing intercultural differences.<sup>89</sup> Such a phenomenon of the maintenance of ethnicity is usually defined as the process of “cultural maintenance” (*zachowawczość kulturowa*), “faithfulness to tradition, cultural persistence, persistence of ethnicity” (*trwałość kulturowa lub etniczna*), or “cultural loyalty” (*wierność kulturowa*).<sup>90</sup>

In the deliberations upon the cultural changes induced by the assimilation processes in the Polish ethnic group, Posern-Zieliński also notices that, with time, some elements of the Polish ethnic culture disappeared, altered their functions, or were superseded by the elements of American culture. Consequently, what might have been observed was the process of acculturation which led to the “disintegration” of the native culture and the emergence of the ethnic immigrant culture.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, while it was possible for the Polish immigrants to reconstruct to some extent their ethnic environment in America during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, in the mid war period the Polish American immigrant culture started to be formed. Its emergence became the outcome of “the adaptation of [Polish] tradition to the urbanized ways of life, selecting some elements of Polish culture and [...] accepting American elements.”<sup>92</sup> It has been noticed, however, that the Polish American immigrant culture soon became the Polonian ethnic subculture, which constituted the catalyst helping the immigrants in their acculturation process.<sup>93</sup> The Polonian ethnic subculture constitutes; to quote Posern-Zieliński again:

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*Living Folklore* < Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2005> pp. 8–11.) Additionally, Posern-Zieliński notices that native Polish folklore was modified, “Americanized” and transformed in the new environment, but it remained a “living and authentic form of folk art among the ethnic masses.” (Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 93.)

<sup>88</sup> Józef Burszta claims that “folklorism is a form of adaptation of “traditional” folklore and folk art to contemporary lifestyle and constitutes an attempt to find one’s own cultural identity.” (Burszta as quoted in: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 95.) In order to differentiate folklorism from native, “original” folklore, folklorism is usually referred to as fakelore or phony folk culture, but still folklore and ethnic folklorism are inseparably connected and interwoven. (Cf: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 97.)

<sup>89</sup> Cf: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, pp. 70-99.

<sup>90</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 77.

<sup>91</sup> Cf: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 66.

<sup>92</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 151.

<sup>93</sup> Posern-Zieliński presents Paluch’s model of changes in the Polonian communities and explains that thanks to the emergence of ethnic subculture, the first generation of immigrants might participate in two

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[t]he new product of culture which was born in the ethnic ghettos of big cities, both in the Polonian environment and [the environment of] other immigrant groups, constituted a kind of a transitory and temporary structure. It was the result of the hybridization of various cultural patterns and their syncretism which led to the selective acceptance of some elements and the rejection of the others.<sup>94</sup>

Andrzej Brożek reaches similar conclusions and claims that it was during the early 1920s (1905 – 1914) when the Polish ethnic group moved from the first stage of the assimilation process to the second. Referring to the findings of Hieronim Kubiak, Brożek comments:

In the first phase, [...] the immigrants as a whole realized their cast of features – due to their linguistic and ethnic community – and their common interests and slowly transformed into a collectivity held together by a strong social bond: this phase concerned the first generation of immigrants.<sup>95</sup>

During the second stage of the assimilation process, the next generation of the Polish immigrants became more active and “is characterized by the growing strength of [the] assimilating group.”<sup>96</sup> Such a feature of the American Polonia was visible especially between 1914 and 1918.

As far as the Polish American culture in the mid-war period is concerned, it has been deduced that there were several crucial factors which had a dominant influence on the culture of the American Polonia during that period of time. Among them were: inevitable and far-reaching processes of assimilation and acculturation, alterations in the demographic, social and generational structure of the Polonia, and the transformations in their cultural, as well as national attitudes.<sup>97</sup> Apart from the fact that the number of people who belonged to the second generation of Polish Americans drastically grew in the 1930s, it was

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cultures simultaneously. Nevertheless, for the third generation of Polish immigrants the ethnic subculture possesses more of a symbolic, emotional or intellectual character. Cf: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, pp. 53, 55.

<sup>94</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 151.

<sup>95</sup> Andrzej Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 181.

<sup>96</sup> Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 181.

<sup>97</sup> Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 154.

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estimated that they also gained better education, mastered English and identified to a greater extent with the American cultural patterns and way of life. The result of such changes was the generation conflict<sup>98</sup>: the second generation of Americans of Polish descent (people of Polish parentage born in America) and their parents perceived the American culture and Polish traditions differently.<sup>99</sup> Brożek claims that this new Polonian generation confronted the problem of “inhabit[ing] two worlds simultaneously; at school they were too foreign, at home, paradoxically, too American.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, facing the dilemma of whether to adopt the set of Polish or American cultural traits, the young Polish Americans chose the culture of their new homeland.<sup>101</sup>

Together with the increase of the number of Polonian population, Polish Americans started to become more diversified in respect of class divisions and professions. Consequently, children of the parents who ran the so called “small businesses” usually climbed the social ladder and became the white collar workers with high intellectual skills. The rise of their social status was quickly reflected in the change of their interests and cultural needs. It was realized that the younger generation expressed the desire to “search for the new ways of participation in the Polish culture and traditions, which would be satisfactory for their aspirations and new social rank.”<sup>102</sup>

The second stage of the assimilation process is also characterized by the willingness of Polish Americans to become entangled in their ethnic affairs and to ensure the permanence of the Polish cultural patterns transmitted to America

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<sup>98</sup> Will Herberg writes about the shattering crisis which the East European immigrants faced when they confronted the second generation, their American children. Herberg states that “the second generation, desperately anxious to become unequivocally American, was resentful of the immigrant culture which the older generation seemed so eager to transmit to it.” Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew. An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960, 1983), p. 183. Similar conclusions are drawn by Oscar Handlin who elaborates on the second generation of Jewish immigrants and claims that “the whole process of its upbringing had emphasized the contrast between ‘American’ and ‘foreign’; for the children, Judaism was still associated with the foreign, [...] the second generation became the in-between layer which had broken with the Jewish past and lost faith in a Jewish future.” Oscar Handlin, *Adventure in Freedom* as quoted in: Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, p. 184.

<sup>99</sup> Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 157.

<sup>100</sup> Andrzej Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 184.

<sup>101</sup> Cf: Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 184.

<sup>102</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 158.

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from Poland. Nevertheless, the American Polonia did not perceive at this point the preservation of the Polish customs as the act of weighty patriotic duty, which they were burdened with. On the contrary, such a cultivation of the Polish traditions became the “manifestation of their sentimental and symbolic ties with the homeland of Polish Americans’ descendants.”<sup>103</sup> One of the major aims of Polish Americans was to gain the higher prestige for the Polish ethnic subgroup by showing the rest of the American society that they were able to contribute to the American civilization and become the integral part of it.<sup>104</sup> According to Posern-Zieliński:

[Polish Americans] cultivated those selected traditions which would be successfully passed on the future generations so that the new generations would not be deprived of their roots as they become the members of the [American] nation.<sup>105</sup>

The American Polonia entered the third phase of the assimilation process after the Second World War and their ongoing adaptation was simultaneously accompanied by the process of homogenization. Having gained higher education and having been mobilized by the war, Polish Americans were further differentiated and diversified. Their diversification was mainly caused by the arrival of the better educated new Polonia immigrants, who joined in huge numbers the previous Polish ethnic groups already rooted into American reality; therefore class differences intensified. Despite the fact that the majority of Polish Americans belonged to working classes (even though they were well educated), many individuals started to enjoy higher incomes and wages. Thus, taking into account their index of income, it was measured that at the turn of the 1960s and

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<sup>103</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 159.

<sup>104</sup> The “theory of contribution,” which became popular in the interwar period, postulated that in every single ethnic culture there are some elements worth cultivating and distributing within the limits of American civilization. It was assumed that such exterior ethnic element as music, traditional dances, ethnic cuisine, literature and arts were the most valuable. Cf: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, pp. 160-161.

<sup>105</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 159.

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1970s Polish Americans were predominantly in the lower-middle and middle-middle class.<sup>106</sup>

The increased mobility of Polish Americans should be also mentioned because it contributed to the further diversification within the Polish ethnic groups. As Posern-Zieliński observes, crowded Polish ethnic neighbourhoods which usually existed near the industrial zones were abandoned. Polish Americans found more comfortable lives in the suburbs where they could merge with other members of the pluralistic American society.<sup>107</sup>

John J. Bukowczyk also notices the significance of the 1950s mass consumption economy which became the real homogenizing force during the postwar years. He writes:

[b]reaking with the immigrant generation pattern of frugality and underconsumption, Polish Americans, [...] filled their homes with mass consumption goods – refrigerators, ranges, washing machines, toasters, recreation equipment, cars – that revolutionized and flattened out the differences in their everyday lives. As a homogenizing force, mass consumption was accompanied by marketing and mass culture.<sup>108</sup>

Therefore, in Bukowczyk's opinion, Polish Americans "Americanized by Madison Avenue and Hollywood, [...] assimilated by becoming mass consumers."<sup>109</sup>

Surveying the Polish ethnic group's cultural landscape in the postwar period it has been concluded that, in general, Polish Americans faced the process of cultural, territorial, generational and social fragmentation and, finally, assumed the shape of separate Polonian ethnic groups. In such a collectivity, "every group led a slightly different style of life and was characterized by different attitudes towards the Polish cultural heritage."<sup>110</sup> As a consequence, during the third phase

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 190.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 209.

<sup>108</sup> John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me. A History of the Polish-Americans*, p. 109.

<sup>109</sup> Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me*, p. 109.

<sup>110</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 209.

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of assimilation process “multifunctional [Polish] ethnic groups gradually transformed themselves into communities distinguished on the basis of their attitudes towards some values or institutions.”<sup>111</sup>

In approaching the problem of assimilation of Polish immigrants and the cultural changes of Polonia, which became the results of the adaptation mechanisms, it may be noticed that Polish American collectivity possesses the heterogenic character. Polish ethnic culture should not be treated as a unified whole because “within its borders there are various elements [e.g.] of folk culture, national culture of the country of origin mixed with the elements of popular, mass, and elite culture of the host country.”<sup>112</sup> In other words, the transplanted Old World traits are intermingled with the elements of the American culture and, additionally, there are still some other cultural elements created in the new (American) environment but based specifically on the Polish heritage.<sup>113</sup> These are new, unique cultural traits different both from American and Polish patterns. Despite the existence of such a heterogeneity of the Polish ethnic culture in America there exist, however, some common key elements. Posern-Zieliński identifies them:

the minimum of common features connected with the ethnicity of the members of this group which include, on the one hand, common elements of cultural heritage and traditions with the ethnic symbols, on the other hand, however, the common attitude towards those cultural values.<sup>114</sup>

In the light of the above, as Posern-Zieliński analyzes the cultural changes which accompany the adaptation of the American Polonia to new life conditions from the second half of the nineteenth century to the 1970s, he draws the conclusion

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<sup>111</sup> Hieronim Kubiak as quoted in: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 209.

<sup>112</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 49.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 48.

<sup>114</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 49

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that there are three different mutations,<sup>115</sup> which reveal the heterogeneity of Polish ethnic culture.

The first trend is the one of ethnic popular culture connected with the proletarian ethos of ethnic neighbourhoods, which were created by the members of the massive economic immigration. This trend is formulated by Posern-Zieliński as follows:

Th[e] trend recalls strongly to the proletarian culture of the European cities, though in American conditions this complex of traits is the original product of Polonia communities.<sup>116</sup>

Among the phenomena by means of which this trend manifests itself, one may find parochial celebrations, “polka” bands, Polish American restaurants, parades and picnics. What is significant, however, is the fact that in the first trend there are some elements of folk culture intermingled with the working class or lower-middle class American lifestyle and this tendency is mainly connected with family life, neighbourhood and the Polonian community on the local level.<sup>117</sup>

The second trend is the trend of ethnic folkloristic culture of a symbolic character and, as it is assumed, its basis is the “transformed tradition of folk culture which under conditions of immigration [took the form of ethnic folklorism and] became the distinctive feature of the Polonia group.”<sup>118</sup> The trend reflects those exclusively Polish elements, which are explicit, untranslatable, “genetically connected with the Polish village and peasant immigration.”<sup>119</sup> One of its manifestations is the romanticized image of the “merry, colourful and dancing” Polish village (alluding at this point to the cultural heritage of the Polish

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<sup>115</sup> The three mutations were developed on the basis of three fundamental traditions, which were created and fostered by the Polish immigrants or their descendants: immigrant tradition (*tradycja imigracyjna, kultura środowisk imigracyjnych*), cultural ethnic tradition (*subkulturowa tradycja etniczna*) and the tradition of ethnic origin (*tradycja etnicznego pochodzenia*). The last tradition alludes mainly to stereotypical ethnic symbols and aims at presenting ethnicity of Americans of Polish descent. All mutations are seen in the sphere of values attributed to given elements of the tradition. Cf. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 288.

<sup>116</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 300.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 288.

<sup>118</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 299.

<sup>119</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 289.

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immigrants or their descendants), which becomes an attractive spectacular show, not only for the members of this ethnic group but also for the wider American audience.<sup>120</sup>

The third trend is the ethnic elite trend, which is based on the classical achievements of Polish national culture and the cultural achievements of Polish intellectuals who live either in Poland or abroad. People who adhere to this trend are mainly intelligentsia members who attempt to promote Polish culture in America by establishing various cultural clubs or foundations.<sup>121</sup>

To conclude, the above mentioned trends constitute a complete image of the ethnic culture of the American Polonia and they were developed with time as immigrants were assimilating to the American reality. Even though each tendency is of a different origin, none of these trends may be omitted because they interweave and do not appear in clear form. Only together do they reflect the heterogenic character of the Polish ethnic collectivity. Therefore, as there is no one unified Polonia in America, one should not assume that there exists only one specifically defined ethnic culture of the American Polonia because “despite the fact that it possesses many common elements, it reflects itself in various forms depending on the chronological period and social environment.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Cf: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 289.

<sup>121</sup> Cf: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 289.

<sup>122</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 288.

### III. THE ETHNIC CULTURE OF POLISH AMERICANS

In the course of deliberations concerning assimilation processes and the creation of the Polonian ethnic culture, some special attention has been paid to the concepts of traditional/primordial ethnicity<sup>1</sup> (*tradycjonalizm rodzimy*) and the ethnic traditionalism<sup>2</sup> (*tradycjonalizm etniczny*) as there exists a sustaining link between these notions and the efforts to incorporate, as well as preserve particular elements of the native/Polish culture (*kultura rodzima*) in the new immigrant environment. Ethnographers, for instance Walerian Sobisiak,<sup>3</sup> examines the phenomenon of fossilization and preservation of particular Polish cultural elements in the foreign immigrant setting. Nevertheless, as Andrzej Paluch<sup>4</sup> later notices, such research relies mostly on an attempt to disintegrate the ethnic cultural reality into separate components and an endeavour to find the ones that are originally Polish; yet, such a study is futile since “the ethnic culture cannot be reduced to its genetically primordial elements even though they constitute its vital and intrinsic part.”<sup>5</sup> Posern-Zieliński adds that the ethnic culture is in a constant phase of transition because it continually develops and it is impossible to analyze the Polish ethnic culture in America taking into consideration only the Polish perspective.<sup>6</sup> Similar conclusions have been drawn by Paul Wrobel who deduces that “Polish American culture may be different from both Polish and American culture,”<sup>7</sup> and, therefore, it should not be

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<sup>1</sup> Primordial ethnicity is expressed by the willingness of the immigrants (especially the representatives of the first generation of immigrants) to preserve and cultivate selected elements of the native (Polish) culture which were perceived as the integral components of the Polish tradition. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, pp. 79 - 80.

<sup>2</sup> Ethnic traditionalism is expressed by the desire to sustain the ethnic tradition, which constitutes “the symbolic expression of the ethnic pride, the visible proof of the cultural separateness in a pluralistic society.” Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Walerian Sobisiak’s conclusions have been presented in: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, pp. 82 - 83.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Andrzej Paluch as quoted in: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, pp. 82 - 83.

<sup>5</sup> Hieronim Kubiak as quoted in: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Wrobel, *Our Way: Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community* (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 24.

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measured by the extent to which a particular subject is exclusively Polish or American.

Relying on some important insights provided by the sociologists and examiners of Polish American culture, such as Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, Paul Wrobel, Deborah Anders Silvermann, Irwin Sanders, Ewa Morawska, Helena Znanięcka-Łopata and others, one of the central concerns in the present chapter is the presentation of some features, or attributes, of the ethnic culture of the American Polonia. It seems vital to emphasize once more that Polish ethnic culture in America has its roots in the folk/peasant Polish culture but with time, as Posern-Zieliński maintains, it has become a synthesis of native Polish patterns brought to America by the immigrants and the patterns of the alien country of settlement. Only if these patterns are taken all together, do they create the unique character of the Polish ethnic collectivity.

While analyzing the development and the emergence of the Polish ethnic group in America, Posern-Zieliński pays special attention to the gradual alteration of the immigrant tradition (associated with the native Polish culture/*kultura rodzima*) into ethnic tradition, and finally, the transition from the ethnic tradition to the tradition of the ethnic descent (*tradycja etnicznego pochodzenia*). In the course of these transitions, some selective mechanisms concerning the adaptation of the old forms and the acquisition of the new ones have been involved and they have relied on a variety of criteria.<sup>8</sup>

Due to the fact that one of the most pervasive and traditional cultural values that Poles brought with them to America was Catholic faith, as well as family and community ties, it seems important to focus on these fundamental values in order to gain a broader picture of Polish American ethnic culture. For the American Polonia their ethnic and religious bonds have been strictly

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 85.

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connected and, as Barbara Leś sustains, they mutually condition each other.<sup>9</sup> Daniel S. Buczek delves into the question of Polish nationality and religion even deeper and maintains that “for the Polish immigrant, language and religion defined his/her nationality.”<sup>10</sup> James S. Pula also notices that Poles who came to America at the end of the nineteenth century brought with them a strong association of Catholicism with Polish nationalism. Paul Wrobel, who analyzes almost a century later the Polish American neighbourhood of Detroit, reaches similar conclusions stating that “[it] cannot be expected to separate what is Catholic and what is Polish American about the behavior and values of Americans of Polish extraction.”<sup>11</sup> The main reason for that is the fact that “[Polish Catholic] faith [has been] shaped by the adversity of national partition during which Catholicism became a symbol of resistance to the partitioning powers.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the Polish national bond is also the family bond because it is the family which constitutes the venue for the transmission of the religious and national heritage. In this context, Danuta Mostwin explains:

throughout the years of enslavement and occupation the passing of the Polish cultural heritage [onto future generations] did not take place because of the public institutions but at home, by the family members.<sup>13</sup>

For these reasons, Catholic religion and the family are the values inextricably woven into the Polish American worldview and they have had a lasting impact on the shape of the Polish American ethnic culture.

Even though not all of the Poles who immigrated to America were Catholic, as the Polish Jews also managed to settle in America in great numbers, the analysis of their cultural traits, system of values and adaptation patterns in the United

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Barbara Leś, „Życie religijne Polonii amerykańskiej” in: *Polonia amerykańska: przeszłość i współczesność*, eds. Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz, Tadeusz Gromada, Gromada (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1988), p. 326.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel S. Buczek, “Polish-Americans and the Catholic Church,” in: *The Polish Review, Bicentennial Issue*, Vol. XXI, No. 3 (1976), p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Wrobel, *Our Way: Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community*, p. 96.

<sup>12</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Danuta Mostwin, *Emigranci polscy w USA*, p. 109.

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States is not presented in the present dissertation. The major reason for that is the fact that Polish Jews differed from the Polish immigrants as in their denomination and lingua-ethnic separation.<sup>14</sup> As Brożek further explains:

the political [or] ideological disintegration of the Polonia community in America in the period before the First World War and in the interwar period [...] did not help shape a uniform model for Polish-Jewish relations in the USA and it made it impossible for unity of action to be reached in the face of attacks from a common enemy – the ideology of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, Polish immigration transplanted to America the old, deep resentment and prejudice towards Jews and the new frictions between these two ethnic groups arouse in the hostile American environment after the First World War.<sup>16</sup>

### **3.1. The Importance of Roman Catholic Religion.**

In the United States, religion, church and the parish have become, in the opinion of Posern-Zieliński, the symbol of ethnic separation and the starting point for the immigrants to reconstruct their previous socio-cultural environment in the New World. Religion has become imbued with the elements of the national (Polish) culture and, as a consequence, it developed into the “ethnic mutation of the supra-ethnic religious system.”<sup>17</sup> Religious folk customs, celebrations, national symbols and the cult of the patron saints have intermingled and overlapped, creating some distinct types of religious experiences for particular Catholic immigrants of different ethnic origin. For these reasons, Catholicism of Irish immigrants, for instance, differed from Catholicism of Polish immigrants.<sup>18</sup> Taking into consideration the ethnic functions of religion, however, it may not be denied that, regardless of national origin, religious faith

<sup>14</sup> Andrzej Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> Cf: Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 42.

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constituted for the immigrants “the expression of their national values which acquired the rank of the sacrum.”<sup>19</sup>

Roman Catholic religion has played a significant role in the shape of Polish American ethnic culture because, historically, Poles identified themselves, especially, through Catholicism. As a consequence, their faithfulness to Polish Catholic rites and Polish language made them distinct among multiple ethnic groups in America, and their Catholic religion was often perceived as the symbol and the instrument of “Polishness”<sup>20</sup>- the “elusive, ephemeral ‘Polishness’ of language, values, loyalties, and culture.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, not only did the Catholic religion of their fathers and grandfathers become the emanation of their “Polishness;” but, for the immigrants who left Poland during the last decades of the nineteenth century, it was also the ultimate value which they had to defend against all odds.<sup>22</sup> Theresita Polzin, alluding to the history of Poland, also explains that the terms “Polish” and “Catholic” became almost synonymous due to the fact that the tormented European Poles were, for a long period of time, under the dominion of three political entities<sup>23</sup> and the only national institution they were allowed to preserve was the Catholic Church. As Polzin notes:

the Church was to serve as an instrument keeping alive the flame of patriotism and ardent love of freedom, as well as the language and culture of the nationality group by providing the means for a complete life isolated from other cultures until the nation was politically reborn.<sup>24</sup>

Paying closer attention to the significance of Catholic religion for the American Polonia, Deborah Sanders Silverman concludes:

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<sup>19</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 127.

<sup>20</sup> Cf: Barbara Leś, „Życie religijne Polonii amerykańskiej,” p. 338.

<sup>21</sup> John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me. A History of the Polish-Americans*, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 127.

<sup>23</sup> The partitions of Poland executed by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Habsburg Austria (successively in 1772, 1793 and 1795) began the period of Russian, Prussian and Austrian occupation which lasted for more than a century.

<sup>24</sup> Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 87.

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[Catholic] religion historically provided an important source of cultural coherence and social unity for Poles; in America, the bonds fostered through religion compensated for their sense of isolation.<sup>25</sup>

In the light of the above, it seems vital to notice that those individuals who belonged to the Polish ethnic church in America had a tendency to establish their own ethnic parishes rather than to enroll to the already established ones.<sup>26</sup> Barbara Leś explains the source of such actions stating that Polish immigrants' religiousness was closely connected with the non religious elements (Polish history, traditions and customs) and the immigrants "fanned their religiousness via ethnicity and vice versa."<sup>27</sup> The result of such a close, mutual relation between the sphere of sacrum and profanum<sup>28</sup> led Polish immigrants and their descendants to the resistance against the assimilation processes, emphasis on the integration of the Polish settlers in the United States, and the sustenance of their ethnicity.<sup>29</sup> Well known were the attempts of some Polish clergymen, who wanted to become the spiritual leaders of Polonia in America and also fight for their place in the hierarchy of the American Catholic church.<sup>30</sup> Having been

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<sup>25</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 88.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Leś explains that during the first decades of the twentieth century Polish immigrants launched a crusade for Polish parishes and Polish bishops because the Polonian Roman Catholic church was bound by the American Roman Catholic church, and the latter refrained from establishing ethnic parishes and substituted, for example, Polish priests with Irish or German clergy. Barbara Leś, „Życie religijne Polonii amerykańskiej,” p. 334.

<sup>27</sup> Leś, „Życie religijne Polonii amerykańskiej,” p. 332.

<sup>28</sup> Posern-Zieliński claims that such a close relation between these spheres was visible especially among the European immigrants who came to America before 1925 and originated from rural areas (Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 42) but Barbara Leś assumes that it was a universal feature for the American Polonia in general, even though the religious life of the Polish-Americans fluctuated with regard to the conditions and character of various immigration waves, their levels of education and social/professional status or the length of time of particular ethnic parishes (Cf: Barbara Leś, „Życie religijne Polonii amerykańskiej,” p. 337).

<sup>29</sup> Cf: Leś, „Życie religijne Polonii amerykańskiej,” p. 336.

<sup>30</sup> Buczek reminds that the Roman Catholic Church was seen as a foreign, esoteric, non-American institution mainly because English was not used in its practices, and its structure was "hierarchical and paternalistic, thus in contrast to the democratic structure of most Protestant churches." (Cf: Daniel S. Buczek, "Kultura religijna Polonii. Analiza zagadnień," in: *Polonia amerykańska: przeszłość i współczesność*, Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz, Tadeusz Gromada, eds., (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1988), p. 300.) It seems also worth mentioning that because of the controversies concerning e.g. the nationality of the priest, the language of worship, the nature of the religious festivals, and the limitations imposed on the Polish Catholics by the American Catholic hierarchy, the Polish National Catholic Church was founded and it broke off from the Catholic Church. (Cf: Joseph A. Wytrwal, *The Poles in America*, pp. 49, 50)

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under pressure of the American Roman Catholic priesthood, the Polish clergy wished to take and adopt the appropriate attitude towards the question of Americanization of the immigrants since the immigrant intelligentsia “developed a defence mechanism against a dehumanizing American culture.”<sup>31</sup>

Since it was noticed that Polish immigrants and, later, Polish Americans clustered themselves around the Polish ethnic parishes because the parish provided them with a place where they could worship within the framework of their cultural heritage, the non-religious functions of the ethnic parish should be taken into consideration. Despite the fact that the official purpose of the Roman Catholic parish was to fulfill the religious needs of parishioners, the parish itself was also “a formally organized structure with a recognized leader whose authority [was] clearly defined within a system of norms and values based on ecclesiastical regulations.”<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the Polish ethnic parish performed social functions that “served as a strong source of social control in the subject neighbourhood,”<sup>33</sup> and, at least for some time, definitely contributed to the bonding of Poles in America. Among the non-religious functions of the parish Barbara Leś discerns: the celebration of anniversaries of the significant events from the Polish history and the casual meetings based on the customs derived from *Stary Kraj* which were often perceived as obligatory to attend for the Polish Catholics.<sup>34</sup> The parish, therefore, became the club, the meeting hall and the municipal or community centre in one, because within its borders both: performances and even church bazaars were arranged. In general, the ethnic parishes helped to preserve the sociocultural traditions of the Polish ethnic group through organizing their activities and influencing attitudes.

Thomas and Znaniecki, referring to the parishes of the early 1900s, defined the Polish ethnic parish as “simply the old primary community,

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<sup>31</sup> Daniel S. Buczek, “Kultura religijna Polonii. Analiza zagadnień,” pp. 308, 309.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Wrobel, *Our Way: Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Wrobel, *Our Way*, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> Cf: Barbara Leś, „Życie religijne Polonii amerykańskiej,” p. 339.

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reorganized and concentrated.”<sup>35</sup> Other sociologists also seem to support this statement, claiming that the parish was “a replica of the village and church in Poland and of all the activities associated with them,” “the heart of the Polish American community”<sup>36</sup> or “the second, private homeland for the immigrants,”<sup>37</sup> who lived in the same neighbourhood and shared similar language, customs, mores, sentiments or memories. The parish was also treated as the most universal institution which organized the lives of Polish immigrants because wherever Polish settlements appeared on the map of the United States, first the church building was erected, then the parish was created (usually named after St. Stanislaus, St. Casimir, or some other Polish Saint), and, finally, other social institutions and agencies were established. The erection of a church building was seen as the first expression of Polish ethnicity and it drove the immigrants to insist that the parish epitomized the hopes of the immigrants for finding a piece of “real Poland” in the foreign country,<sup>38</sup> their attempt to resurrect the martyred homeland. Even the geographical names that the Polish Americans used with reference to their territory prove that they generally identified themselves closely with the parish. When inquired about their district, Poles claimed, for instance, that they inhabited “*Stanisławowo*” (St. Stanislaus parish), or “*Wojciechowo*” (St. Adalbert parish).<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the church building became the visible sign of the prestige of the Polish group and a form of manifestation of their position within the American society. For these reasons, the parishioners were collecting funds to purchase church bells and gold liturgical instruments or construct church buildings. Nevertheless, such actions were often explained by the sociologists in terms of the “demonstration effect”<sup>40</sup> which resulted from the inferiority complex of the Polish peasant, whose wish was to “show off in front of both the Protestants

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<sup>35</sup> William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce, tom 5: Organizacja i dezorganizacja w Ameryce* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1976) p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 136.

<sup>37</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 117.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Andrzej Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 44.

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with their modest sacral buildings and the Irish”<sup>41</sup> and “realize immigrants’ ambitions rather than fulfill actual needs of the parishioners.”<sup>42</sup> The major goal for the Polish immigrants, however, was to prove themselves to be successful in the new surroundings<sup>43</sup> and to maintain cohesion of the primary group, which the church and the parish organization allowed them to obtain.

Apart from the already mentioned socialization process, the church and the parish were also helpful in establishing the whole network of various organizations and associations, which performed liturgical, charitable, administrative or economic functions. Additionally, there existed numerous church organizations which performed mostly secular functions and were not strictly connected with one particular parish, but operating on a national scale. These included: hospitals, orphanages or homes for the aged.<sup>44</sup>

One of the primary functions of the parish, however, was the formation of the parochial school system and the establishment of the Polish Catholic Parish Schools which began in the late 1860s. The first Polish parochial school in the United States was founded in St. Stanislaw parish, Milwaukee, under the direction of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, a non-Polish sisterhood.<sup>45</sup> John Bukowczyk maintains that the enterprise started with a motley group of instructors, and occasionally priests. Nevertheless, the real turning point was reached when the Polish female religious congregations were invited to furnish teaching nuns for the American parish schools. Having moved to the new environment, religious orders of women, such as the Sisters of St. Felix (or Felicians) and the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth founded convent houses in the United States<sup>46</sup> and had a lasting impact on the future generations of Polish immigrants and the Polonia’s youth as it is clearly shown in the following passage:

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<sup>41</sup> Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 44.

<sup>42</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 117.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 118.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Barbara Leś, „Życie religijne Polonii amerykańskiej,” p. 332.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Joseph A. Wytrwal, *The Poles in America*, p. 47.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me. A History of the Polish-Americans*, p. 72.

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nuns inculcated in their students virtues prized by Church leaders and immigrant parents – loyalty to family and community, obedience to authority, Marian devotion, prayer, humility, and respect.<sup>47</sup>

In the light of the above, it may be stated that, on the one hand, the parochial schools and the sisterhoods formed a veritable bulwark against assimilation nourishing a deep emotional attachment of Polish immigrants to Polish language, Catholic religion, and, what follows, strict adherence to the traditional rules and values promoted by Roman Catholic Church which were simultaneously deeply embedded in Polish culture. Posern-Zieliński presents the parochial school as:

[institution that] expanded the ethnic life space, within which the representatives of the second generation familiarized and reinforced their ethnic patterns, studied them, learnt to believe in them and began to highly appreciate them as the elements of their tradition. [In such a context] ethnicity and the ethnic tradition gradually assumed the character of the ethnic ideology, where the national symbols, learnt attachment to tradition [...] started to dominate over the non reflective acceptance of the native/Polish culture (*kultura rodzima*).<sup>48</sup>

In order to preserve Polish religious and cultural traditions most early schools offered education through the sixth or eighth grade,<sup>49</sup> with special emphasis on Polish history, reading and spelling; all prayers and religious services were conducted in Polish.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, however, the Polish parochial schools fostered also American patriotism, and, as Theresita Polzin observes, “this was deemed essential if the parochial school was to be recognized as an equal of the public school.”<sup>51</sup> For this reason, the American flag, as well as the Polish Eagle, was always displayed in

<sup>47</sup> Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me*, p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 120.

<sup>49</sup> Cf: James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Having been faced with the representatives of the second or third generation of Polish immigrants who, although of Polish descent, could not speak the language of their forefathers, the Polish Catholic sisterhoods were forced to accept the applicants who had only the command of English. Firstly, the system of one-half-day-Polish and one-half-day English studies was introduced but later the basic focus on teaching Polish language became strictly dependent on the language abilities of the novices. Consequently, Polish parochial schools became bilingual since English was slowly replacing Polish. Cf: Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>51</sup> Polzin, *The Polish Americans*, p. 91.

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the school and the American merits, ideals and culture were equivalently propagated so that the fundamental goal would be accomplished: the union of Polish, Catholic and American symbols and values.<sup>52</sup>

In the context of deliberations relating to the importance of ethnic parishes for Polish immigrants and their descendants, it seems vital to comment upon the role and the authority of the priest within the Polish/Polish American communities and districts. Owing to the fact that, in the Old Country, the pastor was very often the only educated person in the community, his status was beyond questioning and he performed the role of the leader in both religious and practical affairs. In the United States his role seemed to be preserved because, apart from being a religious supervisor, he was also a teacher, fatherly advisor, business and legal advisor, chief officer of a group of villages (*wójt*), and an ambassador for the group as a whole.<sup>53</sup> For the above mentioned reasons, the leadership in the settlement was usually relinquished to the priest. Paul Wrobel comments upon the role of the pastor for the Polish Americans:

pastors evoke strong feelings [...], people not only view them as heads of communities but as intermediaries with the larger society. And, more important, pastors are symbolic figures. They provide the means through which a community expresses its sense of unity and individuality.<sup>54</sup>

What seems to be important to observe is the fact that the life cycle for the Polish immigrants of the great migration and their descendants was “unimaginable without a priest to baptize, wed, bury and bless.”<sup>55</sup> Therefore, it was the pastor who, within the Polish American communities, probably became the central figure, at least partially responsible for the process of cultural preservation (*proces trwałości i zachowaniażności kulturowej*).<sup>56</sup> The priest played a focal

<sup>52</sup> Cf: Polzin, *The Polish Americans*, p. 94.

<sup>53</sup> Cf; Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 100.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Wrobel, *Our Way: Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community*, p. 88.

<sup>55</sup> Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 86.

<sup>56</sup> Posern-Zieliński claims that the processes of cultural preservation, cultural selection, diffusion and acculturation constitute the fundamental phenomena which shape the ethnic culture of the immigrants. Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 123.

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role in transmitting the Polish and Catholic values (since the notions of “Polish” and “Catholic” were interconnected) and his teachings affected the daily existence of the parishioners. Usually, these were the leadership skills and talents of the priest which proved to be crucial in keeping the group cohesion. As a consequence, the pastor’s abilities were reflected in the church attendance.<sup>57</sup> Sociological research proves that, as the Polish American communities became more Americanized, the authority of the priest as the carrier of ethnic tradition and ethnic identity weakened.<sup>58</sup> After the Second World War the pastor still retained an honourable, eminent position taking part in some official meetings and Polonian celebrations, but his role was limited to delivering some opening speeches. It was also argued that the priests often “[failed] to recognize the possibilities in stimulating interests of the parishioners in their Polish heritage.”<sup>59</sup>

Irwin Sanders and Ewa Morawska point out that the maintenance of the church role in Polish American communities might have varied because of the local conditions, rural or urban settings, and probably the generational differences. There also exist discrepancies in the reported sociological findings as some writers emphasize, for instance, the decline of the communal role of the Polish parish, while others claim that their functions still persist.<sup>60</sup> The study of Chicago’s Polonia proved that, by the thirties, the Polish parish “was losing its all-embracing role as the social and cultural leader.”<sup>61</sup> Similar conclusions were drawn by Helena Znaniecki-Łopata, who analyzed Chicago’s Polish parishes in the mid-fifties, and by Donald Sellers, who conducted research on the Polish Church in Detroit in the 1970s and observed that there was “the decline of Church influence of community mores.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cf: Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*, p. 101.

<sup>59</sup> Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*, p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> Cf: Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*, p. 95.

<sup>61</sup> Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*, p. 95.

<sup>62</sup> Irwin T. Sanders and Ewa T. Morawska comment upon the findings of Helena Znaniecki-Łopata and Donald Sellers in: Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*, p. 96.

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Although the gradual disintegration of the Polish ethnic parishes was temporarily stopped when the flow of the Polish political refugees and other forced migrants (D.P.s) reached America, it could not be entirely prevented.<sup>63</sup> In assigning reasons for the slow dissolution of the Polish ethnic parishes, Andrzej Brożek mentions the social mobility of the parishioners, who managed to be socially promoted and entered the upper classes. As a consequence, Polish Americans began to steadily leave the familiar neighbourhoods, where “their parents and grandparents had lived huddled around the Polish parish,”<sup>64</sup> and changed their places of dwelling depending on the place of work.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the ethnic characteristic feature of Polish Americans, i.e. the significance of the Polish ethnic parish, gradually started to vanish.

Additionally, scholars noticed a different sociological phenomenon: the ethnic neighbourhoods, previously populated by Polish Americans, started to be gradually flooded by African Americans and, as a result, Polish American inhabitants either lost contact with the previous parish or the ties with old Polonian districts became remarkably weaker. Such a migration, which was initiated in the 1940s, was often described as the process of the disintegration of Polish districts and it continues until the present moment.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the fact that the natural consequence of the American Polonia’s evolution was the transformation of the role and the character of Polish ethnic parishes, as well as the lessening of the authority of Polish priests, it is a fact that the share of parishes in enhancing social control and group cohesiveness among American Poles was indispensable.

The peasant background of the majority of Polish immigrants exerted a considerable influence on the shape of the ethnic culture of the American Polonia. Posern-Zieliński asserts that its basis was the peasant ethos, Polish folk

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Daniel S. Buczek, “Polish-Americans and the Catholic Church,” p. 60.

<sup>64</sup> Andrzej Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 52.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854-1939*, p. 51.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, pp. 224, 219.

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culture and the specific character of folk religiosity. Taking into consideration the fact that the peasant philosophy of life was closely entwined with magic and religion, Polish Americans recognized and cherished folk and ritual celebrations. The main reason for such a syncretical relationship of the Christian liturgy and the magical relics of the past was that the peasants acknowledged the cyclic passage of time (as they were observing the cycles in nature), instead of accepting time linearity. In the religious and magical life of the Polish peasants “natural objects are always in some way related to the man’s life and welfare.”<sup>67</sup> Hence, the anthropomorphization of months and days (as peasants had an inclination towards using individual names rather than specific numbers for the dates), of some natural phenomena (e.g. wind, or frost that can reward, or punish people for the wrong cultivation of the land), as well as the commonly held belief that animals are endowed with some consciousness.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, in peasant’s life, solidarity of nature proved meaningful while folk customs became the essential elements ensuring that the world was stable, providing people with goods, and helping them to achieve great prosperity.<sup>69</sup>

Paying closer attention to the significance of folk religiosity in the larger panorama of Polish American life, Deborah Sanders Silverman emphasizes the fact that there exists a fundamental difference between the Polish American folk group’s beliefs and the official Catholic religion since; in her words:

folk prayers, the worship of objects and human vestiges, magic behavior patterns in pilgrimages and sanctuaries, miraculous letters and healings [...] are, at least potentially mediators of Christian values.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. Monograph of an Immigrant Group, vol. I: Primary-Group Organization* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1918) p. 206.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas and Znaniecki give various examples of such reasoning. In peasants’ perception of the world, for instance, fruit trees grow well and bear fruit because in this way they show their gratitude to the owners who treat them well; some animals “condemn immoral actions of man, [...] the bees will never stay with a thief, the stork and the swallow leave a farm where some evil deed has been committed.” Cf. Thomas, Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, pp. 209 – 210.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 106.

<sup>70</sup> Deborah Sanders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 89.

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Thus, such religious beliefs in the Polish American community are usually described in terms of “paraliturgical customs” and they were frequently practised by immigrants of peasant ancestry, i.e. mainly Polish immigrants of the “great” migration. Among the accepted folk beliefs were various forms of superstitions, prophecies, “beliefs in angelology and demonology, expressed respectively via beliefs in guardian angels and the evil eye,”<sup>71</sup> beliefs in evil spirits, vampires or witches, which were able to cast a spell over people. In this context, it is not a hyperbole to assert that the folklore customs and beliefs, for instance the folklore associated with guardian angels, which was closely investigated into by Silverman, “helps transmit traditional values of the Polish-American culture, which emphasizes cooperation and refuses to equate the mere amassing of goods with goodness.”<sup>72</sup> These values stand in opposition to mainstream culture which favours individualism, mobility, acceptance of changes, competition and materialism.<sup>73</sup>

Many representatives of the early Polonia turned also to quackish practices, as plants played a decisive role in Polish and Polish American peasant rite-of-passage celebrations, folk and herbal medicine.<sup>74</sup> Plants guaranteed people’s mental well-being, and, finally, were believed to have unimpaired and remarkable power to protect homes against evil forces. That is why it was a popular activity, for instance, to hang wreaths of herbs and flowers on the wall above holy pictures in order to ward off the natural or manmade disasters.<sup>75</sup> In this context, one may not minimize the importance of the tradition of blessing of herbs and flowers which was manifested both in Poland and America via the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother (*Święto Matki Boskiej Zielnej*, Our Lady of the

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<sup>71</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 89.

<sup>72</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, pp. 89, 93.

<sup>73</sup> Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 48.

<sup>74</sup> The early American Polonia adhered to the tradition of self-healing since self-doctoring was a widely accepted and recognized practice back in Poland. The illiterate peasants were forced to rely mostly on folk medicine and women’s knowledge of herbs to cure illnesses, simply because they did not have an access to proper medical treatment, and the medical education during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries hardly existed in the homeland. Cf: Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 101.

<sup>75</sup> Cf: Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 99.

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Herbs), even though, as Silverman reminds, it was “a Slavic custom rather than part of the universal Catholic ritual.”<sup>76</sup>

Additionally, it was registered that the practices of fortunetelling, dream interpretations and some magical rituals connected with the child protection, especially wearing red ribbons to defend against the evil eye or the practice of removing the ill-feeling (*uroki*) and transferring charms to some other objects, were also quite common.<sup>77</sup>

Owing to the fact that Polish American communities had a great respect for Virgin Mary, who occupied a place second to that of her son in the Polish peasant’s hierarchy, they developed a unique pattern of ethnic, devotional practices of Madonna. Frequent were the prayers or blessings in which Polish Americans invoked the aid of the Blessed Virgin Mary against maladies, illnesses or imminent deaths.<sup>78</sup> There were also multiple celebrations in the liturgy calendar which worshipped St. Mary or other saints, and the members of Polish American communities often expressed reverence for God and Our Lady via iconographic displays inside of their homes. Silverman points out:

miraculous pictures of [the Virgin Mary] are venerated throughout the country, including the smoke-darkened Black Madonna of *Częstochowa*, the object of many pilgrimages and the subject of legends.<sup>79</sup>

The cult of Madonna was intense among the Polish American parishioners mainly because “her worship is closely linked to the deep respect for human

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<sup>76</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 100.

<sup>77</sup> According to the study conducted by Silverman, such practices were popular even in the 1950s. Only recently the belief in the evil eye has virtually disappeared among the Polish Americans in New York communities, but the author does not give any details concerning the belief in this superstition among Polish American communities in other regions of the United States. Cf: Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 92.

<sup>78</sup> Cf: Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 95.

<sup>79</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 96.

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motherhood<sup>80</sup> and, as Sula Benet observes, those who are in need, who are afflicted with diseases, and the innocent ones are attracted to Mary's tenderness.<sup>81</sup>

Additionally, St. Mary epitomized the ideal woman "with her submission, her purity, [...] her gentleness, [and] acts positively through the principal man in her life, who is her son."<sup>82</sup> Such a concept was clearly reflected in Catholic, usually patriarchal, families of the American Polonia where, as Marina Warner concludes, "a woman is considered to have sovereign powers in the family, [...] yet has little or no rights beyond her role as a mother."<sup>83</sup> Ethnographer Sula Benet also notices that "wives are revered and referred to as 'mother' by husbands with a degree of the veneration accorded to the Virgin Mary."<sup>84</sup>

In addition to cherishing love of the Blessed Mary within the domain of the house or church, worshippers also organized Polonian sacred street processions honoring the Virgin Mary. The emotional street marches were often perceived as the "public display[s] of faith, ethnic affiliation, [...] neighbourhood identity,"<sup>85</sup> and they could serve as a "way for the urban ethnic community to tell a story about itself and for itself."<sup>86</sup> Simultaneously, however, such acts were also perceived by Americans as "archaic throwbacks, perhaps quaint and superstitious folkways that add colour to gentrifying neighbourhoods."<sup>87</sup> Because the character of the processions was often sorrowful, grievous and the demonstrations themselves prompted the questions of death, sin or responsibility, these practices "represent[ed] [in a non-Catholic America] a strange or incomprehensible, perhaps even sacrilegious, form of devotion."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Sula Benet as quoted in: Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, pp. 95 - 96.

<sup>81</sup> Benet as quoted in: Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, pp. 95 - 96.

<sup>82</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex. The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador Pan Books, 1976), p. 288.

<sup>83</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 288.

<sup>84</sup> Sula Benet as quoted in: Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 68.

<sup>85</sup> Ann Hetzel Gunkel, "The Sacred in the City: Polonian Street Processions as Countercultural Practice," *Polish American Studies*, Vol. LX, No. 2 (2003), p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Sciorra as quoted in: Hetzel Gunkel, "The Sacred in the City," p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> Hetzel Gunkel, "The Sacred in the City," p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> Hetzel Gunkel, "The Sacred in the City," p. 18.

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Ann Hetzel Gunkel, who examines the cycle of processions at St. Helen's Chicago Polish American parish, and analyzes the Good Friday Procession, as well as the rituals forming the core of Polish Roman Catholic Corpus Christ devotions, i.e. Corpus Christi Altars (*Boży Domek*<sup>89</sup>) and the Procession, explains:

the ritual of procession marks and makes sacred space of the otherwise public streets. Molded in the traditions, iconography, languages and religious vernacular of ancestors, these events function as acts of cultural resistance. Religious processions are, thus, 'dramatic demonstrations and confirmations of group identity organized around the display of a central religious' icon.<sup>90</sup>

Ann Hetzel Gunkel also asserts that the preservation of such processions might be read as a proof that urban Polonia, unlike other Catholic ethnic groups, has been able to maintain a devotion, which was lost with the suburbanization of the middle class American Catholic ethnics. Finally, in Gunkel's view, not only are these rituals the visible manifestations of passionate love of place in urban neighbourhoods, but they are also successful attempts to sacralize those regions which were considered as profane<sup>91</sup> by American tradition.<sup>92</sup>

Apart from adorning the houses with iconographic displays of Madonna, Jesus and saints, Polish immigrants brought to the New World another tradition from Poland, which became especially popular in rural areas (e.g. in central Wisconsin) and went beyond the domain of the house: the custom of putting up crosses and erecting roadside shrines. Despite the fact that, as Deborah Sanders Silverman alleges, the origin of the crosses and shrines is dubious, "it has been hypothesized that they are a Christian sacralization of pagan rituals."<sup>93</sup> Historically, the shrines were usually located at the edge of the village since, as Benet claims:

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<sup>89</sup> Altars built for Corpus Christi processions.

<sup>90</sup> Ann Hetzel Gunkel, "The Sacred in the City," p. 21.

<sup>91</sup> Gunkel explains that the immigrants were perceived by Americans as "too foreign, too dirty and too Catholic" (quoting at this point Mary Patrice Erdmans), consequently immigrant Catholic devotion was often described to in terms of 'ghetto Catholicism' – "an obscurantist form of cult worship." Cf: Hetzel Gunkel, "The Sacred in the City," p. 20.

<sup>92</sup> Cf: Hetzel Gunkel, "The Sacred in the City," p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 90.

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[they established] the boundary line [...] and the crossroads [were] believed to be a favourite haunt of evil spirits, who may be held in check by the beneficial influence of a sacred figure.<sup>94</sup>

Usually, these were the sites of suicides, murders, witch burnings or heavenly apparitions where the construction of the shrines and crosses took place. However, in America the backyard shrines featuring, for instance, the Sacred Heart of Jesus have been also erected and they function as the family monuments. The intention of the builders of such outdoor displays of faith, was probably to recreate the monuments of their native villages in Poland, or to display stunning religious statues which are not exhibited in contemporary American Catholic churches anymore.<sup>95</sup>

Although Posern-Zielinski maintains that the importance of the peasant ethnoreligious folk customs started to gradually fade away as Polish Americans reached subsequent stages of assimilation processes,<sup>96</sup> Irwin T. Sanders and Ewa Morawska claim that “folk religiosity was the best preserved component of ethnicity,”<sup>97</sup> it was “the ritual linking generations,”<sup>98</sup> and, what is more, the “folk religious customs may soon become the main carrier of ‘external’ ethnicity in Polish American communities.”<sup>99</sup> It needs to be emphasized, however, that folk religious customs and beliefs, “Polish religious objects, folk prayers and blessings coexist with the official Catholic faith,”<sup>100</sup> and were modified only to meet the contemporary needs of the next generations of Polish Americans.

According to some pertinent findings revealed by Gould, folk religious patterns that “involve[d] a performance of a linking-generations ritual, [were] the

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<sup>94</sup> Sula Benet as quoted in: Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 90.

<sup>95</sup> Cf: Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, pp. 90 - 91.

<sup>96</sup> Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 129. Posern-Zieliński explains that the peasant ethnoreligious folk customs were mainly cultivated by the first generation of Polish immigrants who came to America at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>97</sup> Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 228.

<sup>98</sup> Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*, p. 117.

<sup>99</sup> Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*, p. 228.

<sup>100</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 98.

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best indication of ethnicity [...] of Polish American community life.”<sup>101</sup> The linking-generations rituals involve especially the rite of passage celebrations (events which mark person’s transition, e.g. initiation ceremonies) together with the observance of such customs as the tradition of Polish wedding, christening feasts or funeral dinners (*stypa*). Furthermore, the significance of Polish American Easter or Christmas celebrations may not be underestimated, for during these two major calendar Catholic events Polish Americans create a strong sense of ethnic identity and they “manipulate carefully selected symbols and signs in their public celebrations.”<sup>102</sup>

Being the occasions for demonstrating kinship ties and ethnic group solidarity, the rite of passage celebrations are believed to be the events during which the commitment of Polish Americans to ethnoreligious folk customs is particularly visible. Silverman explains that because of the feeling of anxiety, which usually accompanies births, weddings and deaths, these memorable moments “provide perfect opportunities for a folk community to educate and initiate, often through special rituals filled with songs [and] proverbs.”<sup>103</sup>

During the first phase of Polish immigration to America the newcomers tried to preserve and observe the old traditions connected with the christening of a child. Like in Poland they organized large, lavish feasts<sup>104</sup> and cling to the complex web of deeply-rooted folk beliefs regarding fertility, pregnancy and protection of the baby infant.<sup>105</sup> The changes occurred in the mid-war period as the christenings became smaller in scale, and godparents’ role of the patrons and protectors was diminished.

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<sup>101</sup> Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 229.

<sup>102</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 30.

<sup>103</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 51.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 124.

<sup>105</sup> Many beliefs reflected the fear that a child would be born with some physical deformations, others shielded the infant against sudden death. Finally, there were also the beliefs which forbade the baby to be taken outside the domain of the house until after christening; otherwise the baby would die of some disease contracted outdoors. Cf: Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, pp. 53, 54.

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In comparison with the christening rituals, funeral customs of the American Polonia underwent more radical and discernible changes. Many superstitions were not transplanted to the New World, but there were other prevalent rituals which had to be sustained during the throes of death or at the moment of the formal leaving-taking of the deceased person from the house. Silverman maintains that it was a common practice even until the 1950s to call the priest to the dying person to administer the sacrament of extreme unction, hear the final confession, and later to embalm the deceased. The members of the family would gather at the bedside to bid farewell and the *gromniczna* candle was often put in the hand of the dying person to ease his/her agony. Polish American families usually respected also the three-day lapse between the death and the funeral (probably because Jesus was laid in the tomb for three days) and then the procession, either on foot or by automobile, was formed to take the body to church. Nevertheless, as the insurance companies and the funeral parlors became widespread, some old world funeral customs had to disappear.<sup>106</sup>

Elaborating on the ethnic religious celebrations and Polish American funeral rituals, Posern-Zieliński observes one more characteristic feature of the early American Polonia: their attachment to the land of their fathers. Death in a foreign country, and the burial in alien soil, far away from the homeland was a particularly painful experience for the relatives and friends.<sup>107</sup> Silverman adds that “even now there are accounts of relatives bringing Polish soil back to be sprinkled over the graves of the immigrants.”<sup>108</sup> Therefore, the *stypa*, a ritual meal prepared as a sign of respect for the dead, did not have such a joyous character like in a peasant Poland,<sup>109</sup> and was rather solemn and short in early Polonia times.

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, pp. 58 – 59.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 124.

<sup>108</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 59.

<sup>109</sup> In peasant Poland the mourners honoured the deceased by organizing the funeral meal, which was probably at odds with the tenor of the somber burial itself, as *stypa* was filled with music, singing, and even dancing. Cf. Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 60.

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The wedding in Polonia communities is regarded as one of the most significant religious celebrations and also a festive family gathering when Polish Americans and their descendants are able to manifest their mutual sense of kinship and let many Old World wedding customs and superstitions thrive. Despite the fact that the institution of the *swat*, or go-between vanished at an early stage of Polish settlement in America, and the permanent and powerful dowry institution was eventually replaced by the American bridal showers; innovations were introduced into the Polish American wedding ritual, including, for instance, the famous Buffalo choosing party (*wybieranki*), when bridesmaids and ushers selected their partners for the wedding ceremony. Sociologists notice,<sup>110</sup> however, that the tradition of the unveiling or capping ceremony (*oczepiny*) and the organization of the smaller party held on a day following the wedding (*poprawiny*) were not abandoned and seem to be resilient to change. The same may be said about the customs of the blessings for a prosperous marriage given by the bride's parents to a young couple on a day of their wedding.<sup>111</sup>

As it has been already observed, Easter or Christmas celebrations, and blessings associated with these events (blessing of Easter food, sharing of the Christmas wafer and blessing of the homes with the KMB<sup>112</sup> writing on the doors at the Feast of the Epiphany) might be regarded as the best preserved indicators of maintenance of Polish religious customs.<sup>113</sup> It should not be forgotten that Polish Americans and their descendants have always tried to emphasize the Polish character of these celebrations, although some of the rituals associated

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<sup>110</sup> Helen Stankiewicz-Zand describes courtship, wedding and christening customs in Polish American communities and notices, for example, that “[all participants of the wedding] make a great effort to be gay and have a good time, for the belief persists that the young couple’s life will be what the wedding is – *jakie wesele, takie życie*.” Helen Stankiewicz-Zand, “Polish-American Weddings and Christenings,” in: *Polish American Studies*, Vol. 16, No. ½ (1959), p. 28. Additionally, Stankiewicz-Zand mentions that some superstitions were retained intact or in ever-weakening form, for instance, “the belief [...] that it was an omen of death if a candle [during the wedding ceremony] went out; [...] a rainy wedding day was considered unlucky, but it was a good omen if the bride wept.” Helen Stankiewicz-Zand, “Polish-American Weddings and Christenings,” in: *Polish American Studies*, Vol. 16, No. ½ (1959), p. 26.

<sup>111</sup> Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 125.

<sup>112</sup> KMB – the initials of the names of the Magi: Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar.

<sup>113</sup> Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 228.

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with Easter and Christmas lost their ethnic dimension with the passing of the years.

One may not neglect the significance of the Holy Saturday custom of *święconka* for Polish American Catholic families – the tradition of blessing Easter baskets filled with food samplings, which “has proven to be the single most long-lasting feature of Polonian Catholicism, even for those who have no more ties to Polish language, neighbourhoods, and parishes.”<sup>114</sup> Not only is the custom practised among Americans of Polish extraction but, since the 1980s, it has become well-liked among the representatives of non-Polish parishes in western New York state. Except for being more of a holy ritual, sharing of the *święconka* food when the Easter fast is broken, also became “an emotional way of celebrating ethnicity and group solidarity.”<sup>115</sup> For that reason, *święconka* meals were organized for many years in various Polish American social clubs during which “a priest may be present to bless the food, [...] [and] recorded polka music may be playing softly in the background.”<sup>116</sup> Such meetings were definitely the products of the Polish American ethnic culture rather than the continuation of the Polish tradition.

Another relatively newly invented tradition,<sup>117</sup> using the terminology of Eric Hobsbawm, which was constructed for novel purposes and connected with the Easter celebration, was the Dyngus Day party in Buffalo. According to Anders Silverman:

[the Dyngus Day party entails] the presence of a leading Polish-American priest who performs the *święconka* blessing in Polish before the food is

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<sup>114</sup> Ann Hetzel Gunkel, “The Sacred in the City: Polonian Street Processions as Countercultural Practice,” p. 13.

<sup>115</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 37

<sup>116</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 39.

<sup>117</sup> In Hobsbawm’s view, an invented tradition “is a set of practices, [...] of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions” in: *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1. Hobsbawm adds that “all invented traditions [...] use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.” Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” p. 12. Anders Silverman sustains that Polish American traditions can be described as “invented traditions.” Cf. Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 30.

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consumed; spring flowers and pussywillow for sale at a flower stall reminiscent of those in Warsaw [...] and young, costumed folk dancers, a reminder of the party's appeal to all ages.<sup>118</sup>

In addition to the food tasting of traditional Polish Easter foods, (such as ham, Polish sausage, hard-boiled eggs, or *lazy pierogi*, to enumerate only a few) the participants of the Dyngus Day Party usually manifest their ethnicity wearing red and white clothing (alluding to Polish national colours). Other elements which make a statement about their Polish American ethnic identity include:

Dyngus Day button and T-shirts, "Polka Maniac" headbands sold by various party sponsors, red and white bowties, and hats, [...] banners saying *witamy*; red and white balloons.<sup>119</sup>

Taking into consideration the fact that Chicago and South Bend, Indiana, began organizing similar parties in the early 1990s, the Dyngus Day party seems to show potential for the future; and the ambition to organize "the largest Dyngus Day celebration in the world;"<sup>120</sup> or to create the occasion to "show Polish pride and flirt with pussy willows."<sup>121</sup>

The ritual of a Lenten observance, which reveals a more solemn side of Polish Catholicism both in America and Poland, precedes the Easter time and includes the veneration of the faithful parishioners at a tableau of Christ's Tomb, called the *Boży Grób*, as well as singing the Polish lamentations (*Gorzkie Żale*). Even though such services continued to be a common practice among the members of the American Polonia, Posern-Zieliński asserts that these rites, which lie at the core of Polish Catholicism, are gradually, but not entirely vanishing from the churches. The main reason for a slow disappearance of the above mentioned traditional practices is the fact that the dramatization of the

<sup>118</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 38.

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.dyngusdaybuffalo.com/> (16 Aug. 2009) The official website of the Polish Dyngus Day in Buffalo.

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.dyngusdaybuffalo.com/> (16 Aug. 2009)

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Lord's Passion and "the display of the [life-sized] crucified Christ's grave [were] disapproved of by the Catholic American clergy."<sup>122</sup>

Although it has been widely accepted that the Easter *święconka* and Christmas Eve *wigilia* are probably the most popular traditions among the Polish American families, the gradual process of institutionalization of the ethnic religious/family celebrations has not evaded the rituals connected with the Christmas time, because "there have been many adaptations [in Polonia's Christmas celebrations] in response to the urban New World environment."<sup>123</sup> Americanization, however, depends on the generation of Polish Americans, for the Second World War Polish immigrants, and those who came to the USA later, are more willing to observe the Christmas traditions regarding, for instance, the traditional selection of dishes and the odd number of the served dishes (following at this point the belief that the odd number allowed for the possibility of increase.)<sup>124</sup>

Polish immigrants from the "great" migration period, on the other hand, strictly observed the custom of singing Polish carols and attending the midnight Mass of the Shepherd, or *Pasterka*, a lengthy service which, likewise in Poland, could only be omitted by the very old, the sick or the very young.<sup>125</sup>

Above all, the consecrated bread wafer constituted the core and essence of the Christmas Eve not only throughout Poland but also in America. The act of sharing of the communion-like wafer (*opłatek*) within the family circle was a central blessing ritual during the Christmas dinner whose purpose "was to bring about a spirit of forgiveness and unity."<sup>126</sup> It was also a common practice to send wafers via traditional mail to those living in America (and to kin who will be

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<sup>122</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 125.

<sup>123</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 43.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 41.

<sup>125</sup> Sophie Hodorowicz Knab, *Polish Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 2002), p. 41.

<sup>126</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 93.

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absent from the *wigilia* table<sup>127</sup>) as it was perceived as a goodwill gesture, “with the knowledge that [the relatives in the New World] would reciprocate in kind.”<sup>128</sup> Such a close adherence to Polish Christmas traditions among the Second World War and postwar Polish Americans, as well as special procedures to be followed on Christmas Eve emanated from a desire to preserve the Polish character of the so called *Gwiazdka*.

Similarly to the invented tradition of *Dyngus* Day party, Polish Americans developed another “carefully crafted public expression of ethnicity,”<sup>129</sup> which is religious in nature and emphasizes identification with the ethnic group during Christmas time, i.e. the *Koledy* (Christmas Carols) Night. Deborah Silverman clarifies that a folk-Christian carol repertoire was usually sung in Polish American taverns until late 1980s and “taverns would hire a polka band and then break for the singing of *koledy* in Polish and American carols in English.”<sup>130</sup> The custom was recreated in Buffalo, in 1991 by a polka band leader and polka booster group; and its aim was to fill the void, which was left when the old tavern tradition was rejected. During the typical *Koledy* Night the manger scene is exposed, the wafer is shared by the crowd and the wandering polka band “strolls through the party performing carols.”<sup>131</sup> Taking into account the fact that it is too recent a custom, it might be difficult to predict whether *Koledy* Night is going to be as firmly ingrained in the American environment as *Dyngus* Day parties.

While deliberating upon the ethnic celebrations with a strong religious element which influence the ethnic culture of Polish Americans and their descendants, it is probably not possible to forget about the official celebrations commemorating: Polish fights for freedom, uprisings, anniversaries of the achievements of the Polish nation (such as the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Jagiellonian University, the anniversary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> May Constitution), and, finally,

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 44.

<sup>128</sup> Sophie Hodorowicz Knab, *Polish Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, p. 37.

<sup>129</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 45.

<sup>130</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 46.

<sup>131</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 46.

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the famous and prevalent Pulaski Day. All of the before mentioned events are usually accompanied by a votive Catholic Mass, which might be read as a proof that religion is still a unifying factor and a haven for the expression of Polish nationalism or, at least, a sign of attachment to the land of the fathers. It seems important to notice, however, that these celebrations are highly Americanized. In this context, Posern-Zieliński writes:

they merge the elements of spectacular folklore, ritualized history, popular entertainment, religious and ethnic symbols [...] with the typically American models of meetings, banquets, speeches, [and] parades.<sup>132</sup>

In general, all celebrations which are rooted in the Catholic religion and are arranged and held by Polish Americans, or Americans of Polish ancestry until the present moment have assumed mainly integrating functions. However, the celebration of the anniversaries of some major events of historic rank, have an important role “providing the participants with some arguments to feel the ethnic pride, which they wish to alter into an authentic ethnic prestige.”<sup>133</sup>

In conclusion, due to the fact that there exists a relationship between ethnicity – in this case Polish – and Catholic religion, the chief aim of the present chapter has been to illustrate the influence of Catholicism on the shape of the ethnic culture of Polish Americans and Americans of Polish descent. Apart from the analysis of the focal role of Polish American parishes and parochial schools in maintaining community cohesion and transmission of the cultural values, some light has been shed on the role of the priest as the central figure in Polish American communities. It has also been attempted to examine the complex phenomenon of folk religiosity, which is believed to be the best preserved component of ethnicity, and is reflected in the lives of the Polish Americans and their descendants in the form of: folk beliefs, iconographical displays, street processions, and the cult of Virgin Mary. The scope of the inquiry here has not only extended to the presentation of the commitment of Polish Americans to

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<sup>132</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 249.

<sup>133</sup> Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 249.

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ethnoreligious folk customs via the rite of passage, Easter and Christmas celebrations, but also to the deliberations upon the new invented ethnoreligious traditions of the Polish American ethnic culture.

### 3.2 The Significance of the Family in Polish American Communities.

According to Will Herberg, religion and family constitute the “enduring, elemental ways and institutions of mankind”<sup>134</sup> whose connection has been strong from earliest times. Family, in his view, “equals permanence and stability, the meaning and value [the immigrants] crave amid a world falling into chaos,”<sup>135</sup> i.e. it provides a sense of rootedness and solidity in an era of economic and social uncertainty. Of outmost significance is also the fact that since; in Herberg’s words:

a culture is preserved through the primary institutions of a group,” [it is therefore the family, within which the] “new-born and growing individuals internalize the value system underlying cultural patterns, learn their roles in life, and absorb the norms which provide them with a sense of location, identity, and continuity.<sup>136</sup>

Similar conclusions have been reached by Posern-Zieliński who indicates that the family “undeniably provides the most vital link of the cultural transmission between the immigrant generation and the generation born in America,”<sup>137</sup> its role may not be diminished because the family shapes the ethnic orientation, interests and sentiments of the representatives of the second generation.<sup>138</sup>

Relying on sociological research conducted throughout the twentieth century by Theresita Polzin, Peter Ostafin, Jurczak, Eugene Obidinski, Danuta

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<sup>134</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew. An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, p. 61.

<sup>135</sup> Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, p. 61.

<sup>136</sup> Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” *The Polish Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 3 (1976), p. 40.

<sup>137</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 93.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność*, p. 114.

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Mostwin<sup>139</sup> and others, as well as taking into consideration historical information, general studies and reports of American immigrant families which characterized the Polish ethnic group, it has been concluded that “family and religion were the defining characteristics of the Polish group in America.”<sup>140</sup> Not only has the family been performing an indispensable role in prolonging the life of the sub-community by resisting Americanization, but it has also been “providing a gradual adjustment to change”<sup>141</sup> - since, as Polzin and Posern-Zieliński point out, multiple transformations have occurred in family structure, value orientations, and social controls as the socioeconomic status changed for the Polish American family.<sup>142</sup> However, the reasons for those changes are complex.

It is not a hyperbole to assert, however, that one Polish American family type does not exist as “the variations by social class and region in Poland combine with the influence of location, cohort and generation in America,”<sup>143</sup> thus creating different types of families. As a consequence, the heterogeneous character of Polish American families and lack of sufficient data taken as a whole, often prevent scholars from formulating generalizations which would relate to all Polish American families. Helena Znanięcka Łopata maintains that even though some scholarly investigations have been conducted, they address too few problems with specific regard to Polish American families, therefore, the terrain

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<sup>139</sup> Ostafin carried out his research in the 1930s and concluded that “urban Polonia gives priority to the family over organizations;” Pedersen analyzed the significance of the family among the Polish Americans in the 1940s and Jurczak in the 1950s – both of them “found the family to be the most important factor in Polish-American life.” Obidinski, who conducted his study in the 1960s, supported the previous and firm conclusions concerning the value of the family unit and stated that “the family and religion [were] most resistant to change.” Cf: Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 139. The immigrant family adaptation to the new living conditions in the USA was also the major area of study for Danuta Mostwin, who conducted her research in this field in the 1970s and 1980s; Mostwin concluded that all analyzed immigrant groups (which Mostwin divided into: “the Founders,” “the Soldiers,” “the Consumers” and “the Solidarity immigrants”) were characterized by their common family loyalty. Cf: Danuta Mostwin, *Emigranci polscy w USA*, p. 158.

<sup>140</sup> Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 139.

<sup>141</sup> Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 104.

<sup>142</sup> Cf: Polzin, “The Polish American family,” p. 104.

<sup>143</sup> Helena Znanięcka-Łopata, *Polish Americans* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1994), p. 72.

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is, unfortunately, still quite barren and the proclaimed contentions remain subject to further scholarly investigation.<sup>144</sup>

The traditional Polish peasant families constitute the subject of most frequent sociological analyses. They came to America in the 1880s, during the economic immigration, and brought to American settlements the already established relations. Their family relations reflected the Polish rural culture patterns which were characterized by an extended family structure, a value orientation including a dominance of the social over the individual, a deeply rooted and steadfast loyalty to the Catholic church, as well as a social control functioning through the interdependence of family members.<sup>145</sup>

One of the most explicit examples of the existence of an extended family structure of Polish American families may be viewed through the large number of children, who were considered as a good investment and a valuable asset both on farms in Poland and in American urban settings. In *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither* Theresita Polzin states:

[t]he peasant immigrant saw improvement for the future of his children, for in Poland inheritance meant the division of land. Thus, if the number of children was large, each received little despite what he had contributed to the family working the fields. In America [...] each generation would improve the economic lot. The children would contribute to the growth of the colony and to the well-being of the family.<sup>146</sup>

Additionally, Polonian couples tended to adhere rigidly to the conservative Catholic Church doctrines and because of their deep Catholic faith they thought of children as “blessings from God.” One may also bear in mind the fact that majority of Poles of the New Immigration were willing to return to Poland, where prestige was attached to large families. In the rural agrarian economy of

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<sup>144</sup> Cf: Helena Znaniecka-Łopata, “Rodziny polonijne,” in: *Polonia amerykańska: przeszłość i współczesność*, Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz, Tadeusz Gromada, eds., (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1988), p. 343.

<sup>145</sup> Cf: Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 105.

<sup>146</sup> Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 207.

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the Old Country it was widely accepted that extended close-knit families formed the basic economic unit; therefore all the members of the family had specific functions to perform for the benefit and survival of the group.<sup>147</sup> Despite the fact that, as available research indicates, the number of children in Polish American families decreased as they became part of the industrial society, such an attitude of parents towards children was often marvelled at by sociologists.<sup>148</sup>

Among the keystone familial principles of the Polish peasant families which they brought from the Old World was the unquestionable parental and, in particular, father's authority within the family and in his relations with children. The absolute and undisputed obedience by the wife and offspring belonged to the internalized norms in expected family behaviour and it was a deeply rooted element of the Polish traditional family culture.<sup>149</sup> The maintenance of the strict parental authoritarian attitudes over children in Polish American communities was also reinforced by Catholic religion as children from an early age were taught to be subjected to severe parental control. It has been noticed, for instance, that the prayers of the children for their parents distributed by the Orchard Lake Seminary (even as recently as in the 1970s) say:

O Almighty God, who has given unto me my father and mother and *made them to be an image of Thy authority...* and has commanded me to love, honor and obey them in all things.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, Theresita Polzin re-emphasizes a telling, durable and inseparable connection between the institution of the family and religion, and it is clearly visible in the following passage:

it was the religious value system [...] of the Poles that preserved their family system in America to a greater degree than other ethnic groups had been able to preserve theirs. The sanction of religion controlled Polish Americans to a greater degree than the social sanction, so that although the social

<sup>147</sup> Cf. James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 25.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Theresita Polzin, "The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants," p. 108.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 150.

<sup>150</sup> Helena Znaniecka-Łopata as quoted in: Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*, p. 155.

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sanction disintegrated, the Poles in America had the religious value as a source of control.<sup>151</sup>

Polzin illustrates a certain pattern of superiority, and it is the subordination imposed on children and their parents by the Catholic Church. Children and youth, as it was observed, were “indoctrinated with the Old World beliefs in the desirability and indispensability of form, authority, obedience and discipline.”<sup>152</sup> Along with Polzin’s conclusions, Finestone also contends that “the Polish mode of interpreting experience is deeply imbued with the conception of sin: moral categories are widely applied in the judgment of human conduct.”<sup>153</sup> Therefore, as a result of such a mistrust of human nature a system was created, which was designed to authoritatively and patriarchally control children’s conduct. In the light of the above, not only was the father supposed to be the breadwinner but he also retained the role of a lawgiver and a disciplinarian.

In this context, daughters found themselves in the most unfavourable position since the family exerted a strong patriarchal control especially over them. It was a girl’s reputation which had an immeasurable and paramount influence on her marriage chances and, as a result, on the family status. Young women were destined to follow the steps of their mothers who, in many first generation families, “did not work outside the home, as that was contrary to tradition [and, additionally, their] large number of children provided a full-time job for [them] at home.”<sup>154</sup> Fathers and husbands, on the contrary, by God given right<sup>155</sup>, gained

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<sup>151</sup> Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 207.

<sup>152</sup> Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 113.

<sup>153</sup> Harold Finestone as quoted in: Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 75.

<sup>154</sup> Polzin, “The Polish American family,” p. 110.

<sup>155</sup> Znanięcka-Lopata gives the example of the prayer by parents for children which says: “Assist me, o Heavenly Father, in discharging my duty to my children. Endow me with true Christian wisdom to know what to grant and what to deny... Enable me always to give them good example, to preserve them from bad company...” Znanięcka-Lopata as quoted in: Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 155.

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“control of the economy, restricting the mother to her ascribed role of homemaker and child socializer while sharing in farm work.”<sup>156</sup>

The sociological findings examined by Bay Green in a Polish American community, in one of the Massachusetts towns at the beginning of the twentieth century, prove that daughters “were not considered an economic asset to their parents and for [them] as early a marriage as possible was thought the best solution.”<sup>157</sup> Along with the persistence of authoritarian attitudes towards girls, sociologists also encountered negative attitudes toward education among Polish parents in the 1930s and 1940s. Young Polish American girls were constrained to gain education or to work away from the immediate neighbourhood because “woman’s place is in the home,” and it was widely accepted that “the status gain based on educational or occupational achievement was [simply] being denied to girls by Polish-American families.”<sup>158</sup>

The strict discipline that prevailed at home and the emphasis which was put on submissiveness, obedience and compliance of children also stemmed from the fact that, as Robert A. LeVine deduces, there was a clear and distinct relationship between child-rearing patterns and their economic status. By adopting authoritarian attitudes, working-class parents are “anticipating the occupational demands their children will face.”<sup>159</sup> Wrobel explains it further:

[Their] parental values are forged from experience, from economic insecurity and uncertainty, from what it takes to succeed working day after day, hour after hour, on the line, never complaining, always following the boss’s orders – from being obedient.<sup>160</sup>

Therefore, the emphasis put on parental power was, in the parents’ belief, necessary in order to prepare the offspring to live outside the shelter of the

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<sup>156</sup>Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 111.

<sup>157</sup> Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 152.

<sup>158</sup> Sanders, Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life*, p. 166.

<sup>159</sup> Paul Wrobel, *Our Way: Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community*, p. 82.

<sup>160</sup> Wrobel, *Our Way*, p. 83.

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Polish American communities. Taking into consideration the fact that family economic status was of crucial importance for the first and second generations of Polish Americans, the failure on the part of the children to positively contribute to the family status (by turning to crime, for instance) could lead to serious consequences. In this context, it was observed that “those who dishonor or shame the family are either written off, legally disowned, or simply ignored as much as possible.”<sup>161</sup>

In many cases, as it was reported by Chalasiński, Warner and Srole,<sup>162</sup> parental authoritarian attitudes and the pattern of male dominance in the family unit resulted in acute intergenerational conflicts. Sociologists noticed that, for instance, among Polish American families in Chicago and Yankee City, the young generation of respondents frequently felt contempt for the European attitudes and the Old World beliefs represented by their parents. It may be added that the children of Polish Americans experienced truly critical conditions because they were to choose either the values offered to them by their descendants or the American style of life. Sometimes, as Posern-Zieliński observes, the children were overwhelmed with a feeling of shame because of the heritage of their Polish culture which was perceived as “lower, [...] exotic, full of superstitions [and these], in general, evoke associations with poverty, indigence and obscurantism.”<sup>163</sup>

Znanięcka-Łopata claims that parents and children of the first and second generations did not agree in their ranking of the significance of Polish and American cultures. The main reason for such a turn of events was the fact that young members of the families who had been socialized in the American environment did not feel culturally dependent upon their male heads of the family. This point of view is also supported by Polzin, who comments:

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<sup>161</sup> Helena Znanięcka-Łopata, *Polish Americans*, p. 76.

<sup>162</sup> The sociological research of Chalasiński, Warner and Srole was conducted in the 1930s. Cf: Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 151.

<sup>163</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 164.

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[i]n the traditional Polish home children were controlled by the fear of physical punishment. At the same time their exposure to middle class American behaviour patterns and ideals resulted in resentment against pressures to act according to the ethnic behavioural modes and even in a questioning of the parents' right to control their offsprings' behavior.<sup>164</sup>

Being torn between two cultures, children of the first and second generation of Polish-Americans often adopted the avoidance strategy and followed the pattern of silent protest, i.e. sons and daughters avoided the use of Polish language, did not participate in the local Polish community activities or “displayed an ‘exaggerated sensitiveness to the opinion of the natives.’”<sup>165</sup>

Even though the complete authority was held as the only valid base for husband–wife and parent–child relationships, the situation started to change gradually as Polish Americans began to adopt the values of the American society. As a consequence; as Polzin recounts:

the authoritarian, patriarchal control [of the inter-relationships in the Polish and Polish American families] was superseded by a tendency toward the democratic and equalitarian in terms of authority and parental role.<sup>166</sup>

The familial and group solidarity ties became weaker and the individualization of life led various members of family to disperse.<sup>167</sup> The impact of industrial economy should also be taken into consideration, as well as contacts with the outgroup culture, as they exerted an overpowering influence on the Polish Americans who were forced to open themselves to other value systems, and, the pressures of the middle class American educational system. All of the above mentioned factors definitely contributed to changes in family interaction patterns.

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<sup>164</sup> Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 112.

<sup>165</sup> Abel's findings concern Polish Americans in Sunderland in the late 20s. Cf: Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 151.

<sup>166</sup> Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 112.

<sup>167</sup> Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 164.

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It has been already mentioned that in the traditional Polish peasant families of the economic immigration the family relations which they brought to the New World were firmly based on interdependence of the individual and the rest of the family. Such interdependence, however, had a specific character and differed in the Old Country and in the United States. In a patriarchal Polish village woman's position within the family was low and remained such until she was older and had children of her own (desirably sons) because girls were not allowed to inherit property unless there were no sons to take it over. The Polish woman was elevated to the managerial position as soon as some younger women were introduced to the family unit and relieved her of physical tasks. What was noticed, though, was the fact that "in matters of reciprocal response [...] the sexes equally depended upon each other, [and] the greatest social efficiency [was] attained by a systematic collaboration of men and women in external fields."<sup>168</sup> Hence, as Znaniecka-Lopata writes:

[woman's] behavior and direct contribution to the economic and social welfare of the family unit were important for its reputation, so that although the patriarchal authority was absolute, her status was not as low as it might have been under such a system.<sup>169</sup>

Polzin explains that the agricultural family had been traditionally self-sufficient because it provided the resources for its own survival and remained relatively independent of other outgroups. For these reasons, it was easier for the Polish peasants in America to cling to the familiar patterns of interaction and power structures (e.g. parental authority), as well as to produce a stronghold for enduring resistance to change.<sup>170</sup> At the same time, however, the immigrant families could not recreate a similar pattern of life in America "since [they] settled for the most part in an area with no inheritance of land or other possessions."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. Monograph of an Immigrant Group, part I: Primary-Group Organization*, p. 82.

<sup>169</sup> Helena Znaniecka-Lopata, *Polish Americans*, p. 73.

<sup>170</sup> Theresita Polzin, "The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants," p. 111.

<sup>171</sup> Helena Znaniecka-Lopata, *Polish Americans*, p. 73.

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In addition, due to the fact that the newcomers found themselves mostly in urban settings, the breadwinners of the families were compelled to work among the members of other groups. Consequently, “the father, socialized to the role of giving orders and making decisions, became the subject of orders, deprived of any part in decision making.”<sup>172</sup> The mother, on the other hand, being left at home as her husband sought better working conditions outside their ethnic group, became accustomed to leading her family. Analogously one finds a similar observation in Znaniecka-Lopata’s study:

[t]he kind of jobs the men were able to get often kept them away from home for many hours, six days a week, the children did not have much time with their fathers and turned, instead, to their mothers. The fact that each woman could establish her own household [...] helped to increase her influence over the family. Being freed from the male kinship group, women acquired much more power than the young peasant women.<sup>173</sup>

Under such circumstances, just to re-emphasize an earlier point, there was a slow alteration in authoritarian rule. The interdependence of the family members was seriously weakened in course of time as American law system protected women and took care of family members individually rather than collectively; the American industrial economy guaranteed the newcomers public or government services as substitutes for relatives.<sup>174</sup>

Together with the gradual shift from patriarchal authority system which characterized family life among Polish immigrants in the early 1900s there was also the change in the division of labour on the basis of sex. While the female representatives of the first generation of Poles in America remained “locked” in their housewife roles as they dealt with domestic chores and were viewed mainly as “mothers of children, [people] who [took] care of the meals and laundry for the family’s benefit,” women of the second-generation families experienced more

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<sup>172</sup> Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 110.

<sup>173</sup> Helena Znaniecka-Lopata, *Polish Americans*, p. 73.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 108.

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freedom of choice. Polish American wives of the second generation achieved status and power within the family and their husbands became “more flexible, [for] they realized that when a wife worked the family benefited by affording things otherwise unobtainable.”<sup>175</sup>

At this point one is tempted to focus attention on the fact that the Polish American family life is usually centered on children and their future, because sometimes it seems as if “men and women [do not] exist as individuals [...] but as mothers and fathers whose primary responsibility is sacrificing themselves for the sake of their children.”<sup>176</sup> The major parental goal, thus, is to forfeit one’s own life for the sake of the children so that they may be able to have a better life than their parents. The research conducted by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb indicates that such an attitude of the parents towards children may have paradoxical consequences because “children, especially sons, are asked to take their father’s life as a warning rather than as a model,”<sup>177</sup> and, as a result, they are discouraged from becoming similar to their parents. Parents’ sacrifice does not guarantee that they will be satisfied in the future, which leads to a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, unless the children become successful the parents feel betrayed; on the other hand, however, when children are raised to be successful in the outside world and they enjoy prosperity, parents feel betrayed anyway because “the sons and daughters of immigrants have been required to reject their cultural heritage in order to be successful in the larger society.”<sup>178</sup>

It has been observed earlier that the lingering influence of religion was most pronounced in the area of family and served as an integrating factor in Polish American family life. Not only did the Catholic church provide norms for the proper individual and social behavior but it also “integrated the rural economy through its liturgical cycles of recurring feasts and fasts, an inseparable

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<sup>175</sup> Paul Wrobel, *Our Way: Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community*, p. 76.

<sup>176</sup> Wrobel, *Our Way*, p. 77.

<sup>177</sup> Wrobel, *Our Way*, p. 79.

<sup>178</sup> Wrobel, *Our Way*, p. 85.

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linking of the ethnic with the religious.”<sup>179</sup> One of the visible proofs for the deep attachment to religion which reflected itself in the family life was the attitude of Polish-Americans towards the marriage bond, for “monogamous indissoluble marriage was a basic value of Poles; and matrimony was considered a Sacrament of union, effective until death.”<sup>180</sup> Theresita Polzin asserts that since marriage was regarded as the permanent union, separation and divorce were both socially and religiously intolerable because they led to ultimate marriage conflict. Hence, “when the internal forces fail to maintain family stability, community and religious attitudes and values served as pressures for its maintenance.”<sup>181</sup> Whenever conflicts between the spouses arose, the disagreements were viewed by the community and the church as either originating from the misbehaviour and immorality of a wife, or from the obstinacy of ungrateful and undisciplined children.

Interethnic and interreligious marriages were openly discouraged by the church and, therefore, Polish Americans tended to avoid them. It might be explained by the ingrained prejudice that Polish immigrants indulged in, because, as Polzin informs:

in the minds of the first generation, the Polish language was inseparably linked to God and religion [and] what was not Polish was sometimes referred to as pagan.<sup>182</sup>

Nevertheless, on the basis of the findings of Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy, it may be concluded that because of the occupational and educational factors which gave Polish Americans an opportunity to establish contacts outside of their communities, ethnic isolation was no longer possible. Consequently, ethnic endogamy began to steadily decline, but, simultaneously, interreligious conjugal

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<sup>179</sup> Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 105.

<sup>180</sup> Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 203.

<sup>181</sup> Theresita Polzin, “The Polish American family – The sociological aspects of the families of Polish immigrants to America before World War II, and their descendants,” p. 105.

<sup>182</sup> Polzin, “The Polish American family,” pp. 113 – 114.

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bonds were still not approved. It was estimated that during the period of seventy years (1900 – 1970) the rate of interreligious marriages increased only slightly and the most common interethnic combinations of marriage were contracted between Polish-Irish and Polish-Italian nationalities.<sup>183</sup>

Early researchers, such as William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, who accepted the social disintegration theory, claimed that “traditional Polish family life was not transplanted to America, leading to a deterioration of values and individual relationships.”<sup>184</sup> In fact, various scholars, such as John Thomas and Herbert Blumer, point out some miscalculations of the coauthors of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (the lack of the statistical verification of their representativeness, and the disregard for the internalized religious value system sustained by the parish church and the ethnic community constitute the major accusations). They maintain that the Polish American family had retained its values and ideals “sufficiently to share them with American society, rather than the reverse.”<sup>185</sup> Additionally, and at the same time contrary to the findings of William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, John Thomas argues that ingroup marriages could not lead to the deterioration of the marriage bonds because “sharing the same cultural background reinforced the values of the marriage partners and [therefore] contributed to the stability of marriage.”<sup>186</sup>

What is more, it was reported that in Polish homes in America usually there lived a large number of relatives within a single household unit. When such a place of dwelling was not guaranteed and some family members inhabited separate homes, then “they lived in proximity to one another and maintained traditional family ties.”<sup>187</sup> Even though, as Theresita Polzin insisted, sometimes families were divided because of financial problems, the modified extended family did

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. Polzin, “The Polish American family,” p. 115.

<sup>184</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 24.

<sup>185</sup> Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 211.

<sup>186</sup> John Thomas as quoted in: Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 209.

<sup>187</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 24.

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exist in the United States.<sup>188</sup> The occurrence of very strong interpersonal relationships both: within the Polish American families and with other members of the same community might be explained by the fact that the Polish nation throughout its turbulent history was to endure severe hardships which drew people together and, as a consequence, strengthened social ties. Daniel H. Krymkowski writes:

during the past two centuries, Poland has been ravaged by partition, war and foreign domination, all of which increased the extent to which Poles had to rely on their significant others for social support.<sup>189</sup>

Krymkowski conjectures that despite the lack of recent research which would systematically compare social ties in Poland and the United States, and basing on some related work and research conducted during the 1980s by Wedel, the published findings of Thomas and Znaniecki from the beginning of the twentieth century may be still valid. Strong social ties among members of Polish American families and the great frequency of interaction with neighbours characterized the first and second generations of Polish immigrants<sup>190</sup> in America. The strength of social ties among Polish Americans, as Krymkowski observes, was closely connected to traditional, rural life in Poland.<sup>191</sup>

It seems important to notice that such a typical, traditional *Gemeinschaft* (community) life, using Ferdinand Tönnies' terminology, was caused by "the low population density and lack of geographical mobility in [...] rural societies, [which, as a result] create[d] links within families and among neighbours that otherwise would not exist."<sup>192</sup> Theresita Polzin also claims that Polish newcomers of the economic immigration were characterized by the so called '*Gemeinschaft*

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<sup>188</sup> Cf. Pula, *Polish Americans*, p. 24.

<sup>189</sup> Daniel H. Krymkowski, „Family, Friends and Neighbors in Poland and the United States,” *The Polish Review*, Vol. XL, No. 1 (1995), p. 83.

<sup>190</sup> Although Krymkowski, for instance, hypothesizes that strong social and family ties may be visible among the Polish American communities even nowadays.

<sup>191</sup> Krymkowski, „Family, Friends and Neighbors in Poland and the United States,” p. 89.

<sup>192</sup> Daniel H. Krymkowski, “Family, Friends and Neighbors in Poland and the United States,” p. 89.

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mentality,' i.e. "they could trust only persons they or their friends knew and recommended, they could not trust strangers who dealt with them impersonally."<sup>193</sup> What may also not be deprived of some significance is the fact that peasant economy found in villages further strengthened social links, as well as the pursuit of tilling the land in village areas.

Although sociologists emphasize the importance of extended kinship and social bonds as the source of close interpersonal relationships among members of the family and neighbours, Paul Wrobel reminds in his study that Polish American "community families differ considerably with regard to the nature and extent of their contacts with relatives."<sup>194</sup> The degree of the contacts among different members of the families is conditioned by a family's stage of development (e.g. whether young parents have children or not), the physical accessibility of kin, and immigrant generation. Once children enter school, Wrobel notices, parents rely less on the help of the grandparents, and the focus shifts from extended family relationships to the nuclear family. However, the contacts among the next of kin are still retained as there are numerous, usually religion-related occasions, such as the First Holy Communion, Christmas and Easter holidays, or non-religious celebrations, like birthdays and graduations. Such occasions create the opportunity for the members of the family to socialize with relatives. Again, there exist exceptions, for patterns of interaction between families and relatives largely depend on the physical distance: families which dwell in the immediate neighbourhood tend to maintain rather close and constant contacts. Recent immigrants, in Wrobel's opinion, may also be perceived as the exceptions to the "independence of the nuclear family" pattern.<sup>195</sup> Taking into consideration Norman Davies' observations concerning the concept of Polish locality it should not be left unnoticed that in a situation when the immigrant felt alienated from the new community, s/he withdrew into the community of

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<sup>193</sup> Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 105.

<sup>194</sup> Paul Wrobel, *Our Way: Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community*, p. 64.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Wrobel, *Our Way*, pp. 66-67.

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her/his compatriots who had come to America with her/him, or even earlier.

Davies describes this phenomenon in the following words:

[t]he traditional term in Polish for the locality was *gniazdo* or nest [and] it aptly expresses the strong sentimental bond, which tied people to the one small area where most of them would spend their entire lives<sup>196</sup>

Therefore, it was natural that in immigrants' helplessness, "[they] reached for some arm to lean upon"<sup>197</sup> and yearned to reestablish the Old Country's "village way of living" in the American environment. The village and the rural system which Polish immigrants left behind, were of the highest importance to them.

Handlin theorizes it in *The Uprooted* and writes:

the bonds that held those men to their acres were not simply the personal ones of the husbandmen who [...] mix their sweat with the soil, but the ties were deeper, more intimate. For the peasants were parts of a community and the community was held to the land as a whole.<sup>198</sup>

Peasants who came to the United States at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and Polish peasants in particular, stressed the significance of the village in their lives; "this was the fixed point by which they knew their positions in the world and their relationships with all humanity."<sup>199</sup> In addition, the members of the community regarded themselves as a clan connected within itself by ties of blood and were seeking similar integrity in the New World. To quote Milton M. Gordon:

the settlers had the desire to recreate, necessarily in miniature, a society in which they could communicate in the familiar tongue and maintain familiar institutions, and [...] the necessity to band together for mutual aid and mutual protection against the uncertainties of a strange and sometimes hostile environment.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Norman Davies as quoted in: Daniel H. Krymkowski, "Family, Friends and Neighbors in Poland and the United States," p. 89.

<sup>197</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 152.

<sup>198</sup> Handlin, *The Uprooted*, p. 8.

<sup>199</sup> Handlin, *The Uprooted*, p. 8.

<sup>200</sup> Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 134.

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The newcomers flocked together establishing various organizations, voluntary associations usually within the framework of the parish, Polish-American groups, circles, choirs, or immigrant banks, thus creating the whole network of well established communities. The function of these associations varied and the plethora of activities in which Polish Americans were involved ranged from social, recreational, educational to religious. It seems noteworthy that Polish American associations, for instance, apart from fulfilling an economic function, had a psychological power to unify their members due to the motivations rooted in their common background and culture; “[they] kept alive their national consciousness.”<sup>201</sup> Polzin goes even further and maintains that even though various organizations and clubs of American Polonia established within the neighbourhoods could retard assimilation, they also encouraged the newcomers to learn the patterns of behaviour and the value system of Americans. The neighbourhoods with their communities were not created simply as replicas of the Old Country elements; they always progressively reflected the influence of American conditions and events, serving as a bridge between the old and the new.<sup>202</sup> Polish American organizations “retained the stabilizing force of some familiar cultural elements while accepting new unfamiliar ones.”<sup>203</sup> Polzin claims that because of the existence of multiple organizations the links of the old European commune could temporarily be established and group loyalty was stimulated. What is more, “the new interpersonal primary ties had tremendous potential for counteracting personal demoralization, psychological isolation, and despair.”<sup>204</sup> Therefore, the image of the neighbourhoods as completely disorganized slums in which demoralization of the Polish peasants in America was growing rapidly, proposed by Thomas and Znaniecki, again, does not include

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<sup>201</sup> Theresita Polzin, *The Polish Americans. Whence and Whither*, p. 107.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 244.

<sup>203</sup> Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 108.

<sup>204</sup> Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 108.

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the widespread network of social relations which sustained the institution of family.<sup>205</sup>

The ethnic neighbourhood is not only the place which performs the function of the decompression chamber in which the newcomers could, at their own pace, make a reasonable adjustment to the new forces of American society strikingly different from the one they had left in Poland, but the neighbourhood also maintains some features of the extended family.<sup>206</sup> These are neighbourhoods, communities which “provide [the immigrants with] warmth, familiar ways, and sense of acceptance that prevented the saga of ‘uprooting’ from becoming a dislocating horror;”<sup>207</sup> areas successively replenished by new relatives, friends and neighbours who continued to arrive.

Together with the changes that occurred within the context of the family, neighbourhoods, i.e. places that provided a sense of identity to the psychological well-being of urban Polish American residents, gradually began to alter their ethnic character. Sociologists documented a steady flight of Polish Americans to suburbia initiated during the period of the World War II which was caused mainly by the slow migration of African Americans to districts previously inhabited by immigrants of European origin, and by the modernization of cities. As a result, the inhabitants who remained behind in the decaying ethnic neighbourhoods constituted the elderly representatives of the first or second generations of Polish Americans. Such residents were neither affluent, nor educated enough to move to a better district and buy a house which would manifest their potential higher social status.<sup>208</sup>

Among the lasting family values cherished and recognized by Polish Americans were security and homeownership. The Polish concern with the above mentioned cultural traits was formed under the Old Country conditions and, as

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<sup>205</sup> Cf: Helena Znanięcka-Łopata, “Rodziny polonijne,” p. 351.

<sup>206</sup> Cf: Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 8.

<sup>207</sup> Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, p. 106.

<sup>208</sup> Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 218.

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Ewa Morawska observes, fixed in Polish American attitudes. The desire for security and stability, as well as for one's own place of dwelling resulted from the fact that Polish peasants had been denied security in Poland for several generations, and homeownership was seen as the status symbol.<sup>209</sup> It has already been pointed out that folk culture and folk religiosity were the basis for the creation of Polish American ethnic culture. Additionally, placed a great emphasis on the attachment to the land and the house, perceived both: as the building itself and the family. On the one hand, Polish peasants were nostalgically attached to the land of their fathers, on the other hand, however, this attachment was also reinforced by the feudal rule of assigning the peasant to the land. Its consequence was the small mobility of peasants and the focus was on the family issues, neighbourhood, parish and community.<sup>210</sup> The peasant philosophy of life was strictly connected with the land, religion and even magic. Time was not perceived in a linear but cyclic way, measured according to seasons and the forces of nature. As Krysa contends:

Days were marked out by the sun, by the responsibilities of family members; weeks by the 'un-work' day or Sunday.[...] Years were marked out by births and deaths and the wrinkles of time which fall between them. [...] Celebrations of birth, death, and marriage were regulated by herbs, myrtle, song and exchange of significant types of food and drink.<sup>211</sup>

It is probably not surprising, thus, that Polish peasant paid special attention to traditional, folk family ceremonials because "they brought harmony to the world and guaranteed prosperity to people."<sup>212</sup> The union between the man, family, land and the festivals made Polish peasants appreciate the gifts of the earth and "respect to treat the environment not as another commodity to be consumed, but

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<sup>209</sup> Cf. Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, p. 164.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 106.

<sup>211</sup> Rev. Czesław Michał Krysa, "Foreword" to: Sophie Hodorowicz Knab, *Polish Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, pp. 12, 13.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 106.

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rather as a home which must be nurtured.”<sup>213</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman also observes that the goods obtained from the land, such as garden vegetables, carried for Polish Americans symbolic value because “they were fulfilling the immigrants’ dream of owning the land.”<sup>214</sup> The peasant folk cultural background of American Polonia was so influential and powerful that yearning for one’s own land, and a house was not only the desire of the first generation of immigrants, but also of future descendants and Polish newcomers. Although Posern-Zieliński maintains that in the urbanized American world of the mid war period, for instance, the wish for owning a piece of land changes often into a desire to possess something material that the Polish American will be able to have for one’s own in permanence. Such a shift might be explained by the influence of the American way of life which encouraged people to buy one-family detached houses.<sup>215</sup>

The attachment of Polish peasants to the land and the house, the value which was transplanted into the new American environment and modified by the process of Americanization, also stems from the fact that the parallel of “a house and a man,” the union between the human being and a place of dwelling, is especially reflected in the Polish folk tradition and family ceremonials. In the Polish folk culture the house coexists with its inhabitants from the very birth, through various stages of their lives until their death; and possesses a profound influence on the life of all its dwellers. According to Danuta and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, the “house symbolically participates in all crucial events of human life.”<sup>216</sup> There are many superstitions, series of ritual gestures and activities, which are supposed to be performed by the owners who are building a new house; in order to protect it from evil forces and bring happiness to its inhabitants. It is justified by Benedyktowicz in the following passage:

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<sup>213</sup> Rev. Czesław Michał Krysa, “Foreword” to: Sophie Hodorowicz Knab, *Polish Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, p. 14.

<sup>214</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 164.

<sup>215</sup> Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, p. 182.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Danuta & Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej* (Wrocław: Wiedza o kulturze, 1992), p. 95.

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[i]n the folk culture and tradition the space within the house appears as some kind of a symbolic scene where the perpetual ceremonial of the creation and re-creation of the world takes place. [...] Family life is also a ceremonial which is repeated in the regular routine of work, meals and exculpations.<sup>217</sup>

What also seems significant is the fact that the house appears to constitute the closed, isolated space focused on itself and the family circle; but at the same time the house extends its territory, “becomes the reflection of the garden, farm, field, and the world.”<sup>218</sup> Benedyktowicz explains that everything that happens within the domain of the house has some consequences and refers to the events which take place outside the borders of the house.<sup>219</sup> Hence, the May Marian processions in the ethnic neighbourhoods (commented upon previously), or the belief that the table is the most sacred place in the house as it replaces the church altar and becomes an “analogue,” the image of the field and the farm.<sup>220</sup>

While commenting upon the importance of the house in the Polish folk tradition and its meaning for Polish Americans, it seems important to mention that the house is seen as the equivalent (*dwojnik*) of the mother because “[the house] completes the mother in the social and legal sphere of education and protection of children.”<sup>221</sup> According to Danuta and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, one may easily notice the connection between the house, the mother, and the family: the mother and the house guarantee a family sovereignty, protect its dwellers and mediate between the inhabitants and the outside world.

It should be remembered that Polish and Polish American womanhood has been deeply embedded in the Catholic religion and, consequently, mothers and women in general, were expected to fulfill specific roles within the family. The Polish

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<sup>217</sup> Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej*, p. 59.

<sup>218</sup> Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej*, p. 78.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej*, pp. 69, 78.

<sup>220</sup> Danuta and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz explain that, according to folk traditions, all the Christmas meals, for instance, were to be prepared on the basis of the goods collected from the field; or there existed a custom of “sowing” oats in the rooms. Cf. Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej*, p. 71.

<sup>221</sup> Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej*, p. 113.

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Catholic ideal of womanhood derives from the image of St. Mary, the Mother of God. In Bukowczyk's words:

Polish and Polish American girls and young women were taught to venerate and emulate the Blessed Virgin Mary, they were presented a template for thought, behavior, comportment, aspiration, demeanor, and feeling out of which they could construct – or be constructed into – the Ideal Polish Woman.<sup>222</sup>

The Polish and Polish American woman, in accordance with her religion, was expected to embrace the Marian virtues, such as meekness, mildness, long-suffering, empathy, purity, chastity, devotion, self-denial and self-sacrifice.<sup>223</sup> Nevertheless, despite being involved in catechism instruction, church liturgy and Marian devotionism which, all together, brought a young lady closer to the image of the Ideal Polish Woman, Polish American women were also perceived as the advocates of Polish traditional values, guardians of Polish culture and language. Additionally, they fostered social contacts and bestowed social care, by establishing various organizations. For that reason, the roles of Polish American women, contrary to popular belief, were not limited to the issues of childcare and household chores.<sup>224</sup>

Along with the parallel “the house – the mother,” Danuta Mostwin notices also the emergence of the symbol of the mother as a homeland. Mostwin concedes that Poles foster a unique personal attitude towards their country which might be explained by several factors such as geographical conditions of Poland, high dependence upon the land and its goods, as well as tremendous admiration for Virgin Mary. As a result, symbolic mother-Poland is tender, calls for noble actions, sacrifice and is in constant need of protection. This is what Mostwin says about the parallel “the homeland – the mother”:

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<sup>222</sup> John J. Bukowczyk, “Holy Mary, Other of God: Sacred and Profane constructions of Polish-American Womanhood,” *The Polish Review*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 2 (2003), p. 199.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Bukowczyk, “Holy Mary, Other of God,” p. 199.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. Helena Znaniecka-Lopata, “Rodziny polonijne,” p. 358.

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in [such a] relationship where ungraspable loyalty ties connect, similarly to family relationships, the child and the mother, one has noticed the development of the [acute] feeling the child will never fully repay its mother the debt of duty (*dług powinności*).<sup>225</sup>

Therefore, when the immigrant finds himself/herself in the new country and his loyalty priorities begin to change along with the process of assimilation, s/he experiences a vague, inexplicable feeling of anxiety. In Mostwin's view, this is anxiety of a child, who is swayed by a conviction that his/her behaviour might be condemned by the mother and, consequently, s/he would be deprived of mother's love.<sup>226</sup>

Although the lives of Polish immigrants changed drastically in the American environment, it was fairly easy for them to transplant the family customs and ceremonials to the New World since they were maintained in the family circle, usually within the domain of the house. The interior of the houses of the first generation of immigrants usually reflected their deep devotion to Catholic religion: holy pictures on the walls, bouquets of herbs blessed by the priest on Holy Saturday or holy water fonts near the entrance to the house. All the interior decorations in the Polonian houses were to resemble those in their homeland. But due to the hybridization of culture, Polish American communities started to transform in time and began to manifest it in the material culture. Therefore, members of the second generation began to remove featherbeds, or large blessed candles (*gromnica*) (which used to be outstanding and indispensable in immigrants' homes several years earlier) out of sight.<sup>227</sup>

Another important issue that scholars have begun to address is the significance of foodways in transmitting the Polish familial and communal values in the United States. Foodways constitute a crucial symbol of ethnic identity and

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<sup>225</sup> Cf: Danuta Mostwin, *Trzecia Wartość*, p. 15.

<sup>226</sup> Cf: Danuta Mostwin, *Trzecia Wartość*, p. 15.

<sup>227</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 24.

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belong to the most durable categories of ethnic folklore. Deborah Anders Silverman comments:

[foodways] are rooted in the family, the origin of an individual's earliest emotional memories of group membership. [...] Polish peasant culture privileged the family over the individual, which partly explains why the food preferences of the family and the larger Polish community would be maintained over many generations.<sup>228</sup>

Due to the fact that Poland was an agricultural country for many years, its inhabitants mainly relied on what they produced in the fields. Additionally, taking into consideration the fact that, as it has already been mentioned, Polish religiosity as well as familial values and rituals were also connected with the land, one may not underestimate the sacral character of food in the lives of Polish Americans. Scholars note that “meals were invested with an almost sacramental significance; eating was an intimate affair, and food could not be wasted.”<sup>229</sup> Food, prepared especially during the Christmas or Easter time, “was believed to have great magical potency, [so] waste or irreverent treatment of it was proscribed.”<sup>230</sup> In general, preparation of festive meals evoked a special aura of thoughtfulness and solemnity, while people who were involved in the preparation process had to adhere to the established rules and taboos regarding, for instance, the number of meals. In addition, cooking meals constituted a participatory event for the whole Polish American family, which tended to retain Polish food vocabulary. Therefore, the Polonian house was a place where Polish traditions and language were still cultivated, and “traditional foodways [...] continue[d] to bear meaning for many, although they may [have] experience[d] difficulty in explaining the significance of various foods used in holiday celebrations.”<sup>231</sup>

The holiest of all foods was bread, perceived both: as the staple in the Polish diet and the secular counterpart to the body of Jesus Christ. This is the reason why it

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<sup>228</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 159.

<sup>229</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 163.

<sup>230</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 163.

<sup>231</sup> Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 169.

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was to be treated with respect and reverence. Despite the fact that foodways and meals have evolved as a result of interethnic marriages or food ingredients, they still remain a fundamental part of the Polish heritage; and their preparations are often perceived as the indications of one's ethnic identity.<sup>232</sup>

Even though Polish American families possess a heterogeneous character, scholars prove that some common cultural characteristics can be observed. Danuta Mostwin sustains that the traditional peasant family and its values have influenced to a great degree Polish American families in general. Mostwin found that Polish Americans of the second generation "retained the characteristics of an agricultural, traditional family"<sup>233</sup> more than any other ethnic groups. Other scholars also encountered a similar phenomenon among the third and fourth generations. James S. Pula's passage from *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community* may serve here as an example to prove this statement:

[t]o some extent, Polish American families fell victim to the same external forces, yet there is strong evidence that the traditionally strong family values of Polish Americans made them, as a group, less susceptible than others.<sup>234</sup>

Mostwin emphasizes, however, that the family cultural values which Poles in America were so willing to pass on to their offspring were not exclusively Polish, but also American. Echoing Posern-Zieliński's theory of the development of Polish American ethnic culture, Mostwin claims that the culture of American Polonia constitutes a constellation of the three environments: the heritage of the country of origin, the ethnic community, and American society; these three elements combined create a Polish American subculture.<sup>235</sup> The family values of this subculture, just to reemphasize an earlier point, are not synonymous with the values of the country of origin.

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<sup>232</sup> Cf. Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore*, p. 170.

<sup>233</sup> Danuta Mostwin as quoted in: Pula, *Polish Americans*, p. 142.

<sup>234</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 142.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. Danuta Mostwin as referred to in: Pula, *Polish Americans*, p. 142.

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Turning to a discussion of the most fundamental family values cherished by the post Second World War Polish immigrants, who joined the already established Old Polonia, one may distinguish fervently displayed patriotism, honour (which is believed to be the most significant recognizable feature of Polish national character) and family loyalty.<sup>236</sup> Mostwin explains that the strong sense of patriotism and honour are instilled in the Polish child at very early stage of his/her childhood due to often referred examples of national heroes depicted in legends, songs, or memories recalled in family circles. National heroes, such as Kazimierz Pułaski, Prince Joseph Poniatowski, or Zawisza the Black of Garbów, thus, turn into the carriers of some historic truth and embody specific values or orders, such as the deeply ingrained belief that one may not surrender, disavow one's promise or concede defeat. Accordingly, national heroes become the symbols of ethnic identification strengthening the group solidarity.<sup>237</sup> Hence, Polish Americans pay great attention to the festive and sublime character of various anniversaries which commemorate the most memorable events from the Polish or Polish American history.<sup>238</sup> Family loyalty was a remarkably and dominantly manifested feature of the Solidarity immigrants for whom the unswerving loyalty of the family members was transmitted to other family circles. It should be remembered that family loyalty is the common feature of all immigrant groups and becomes a trait which "lasts irrespectively of disagreements, resentment, prejudice, rows and distance [among the family members.]"<sup>239</sup> The only difference is the place of the family loyalty in the hierarchy of values.

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<sup>236</sup> Cf: Danuta Mostwin, *Emigranci Polscy w USA*, p. 152.

<sup>237</sup> Danuta Mostwin, *Trzecia Wartość*, p. 85.

<sup>238</sup> Cf: Aleksander Posern-Zieliński, *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, pp. 90, 91.

<sup>239</sup> Danuta Mostwin, *Emigranci Polscy w USA*, p. 158.

#### IV. ANTHONY BUKOSKI'S LITERARY WORLD OF POLKAHOLICS.

Anthony Bukoski <sup>1</sup> is a contemporary Polish American writer whose creative work explores the complex experiences of Polish immigrants and their descendants caught between the ethnic and the dominant host cultures. Bukoski is a considerably new, important voice of the American authors of Polish descent in the United States. The author created the literary town Superior, modelled on the real Polish neighbourhood in Superior city, in the state of Wisconsin, (which is the place of his birth) and has succeeded in making of the Polish culture of Superior a microcosm of the world. Bukoski published his first collection of short stories *Twelve Below Zero* in 1986, and even though only one short story from this collection portrayed Polish Americans, his subsequent publications, such as *The Children of Strangers* (published in 1993), *Polonaise* (published in 1999), *Time Between Trains* (issued in 2003), and the latest book *North of the Port* (printed in 2008) are peopled with Polish American cultural exiles, who “assess and reassess,

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Bukoski was born in 1945, in East End, the Polish neighbourhood of Superior, Wisconsin. His parents came to the United States from the suburbs of Warsaw, and were peasants. In one of the interviews (John Merchant, Maciej Urbanowski, „Piszac splacam dlug Bogu...- rozmowa z Anthony Bukoskim,” *Arcana*, vol. 29, no. 5 (1999), pp. 87-91.) the author mentions his grandparents, who also immigrated to America: Bukoski's paternal grandfather worked in Wisconsin's rolling-stock company, his maternal grandfather, Wincenty Franckiewicz, was the chair factory labourer. Taking into consideration the generational location, some scholars tend to perceive Bukoski as the second generation writer, (Michael Longrie, “Replaying the Past: An Interview with Anthony Bukoski,” *Wisconsin Academy Review*, vol. 42, issue 1, 1995-1996, p. 29.) nevertheless, since both the grandparents and the parents immigrated to the United States and Bukoski was raised in the two generational Polish American home, he equally may be perceived as the representative of the third generation of Polish Americans. Werner Sollors mentions the problems with numbering the generations which are not unusual in American culture and claims that “in American culture it is possible for one individual to be both second and third generation.” (Werner Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*, p. 219). Bukoski graduated from the elementary St. Adalbert's school, which is often depicted in his short stories, and later continued his education in Cathedral High School because his father wanted him to obtain the deep and thorough Catholic education. Between 1964-1967 Bukoski served in the navy, he also took part in the Vietnam war but after the war he graduated from college in Superior specializing in literature. In 1984 Bukoski obtained his Ph. D. degree and started teaching at the Northwestern State University in Louisiana, but then moved to Wisconsin State University where he teaches American literature until today. (Thomas Napierkowski, „Polscy sasiedzi. Proza Anthony'ego Bukoskiego.” *Akcent*, Vol. 1-2, No. 39-40 (1990), p. 246). At present he's working on his fifth collection of short stories probably entitled *Midsummer Fires* or *Report of the Guardian of the Sick* (from the private correspondence with the author, 28 Feb. 2006).

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discover and confront [their] loyalties, the ethnic self, the buried past.”<sup>2</sup> The stories cover the last 50 years of the twentieth century and are loosely connected by characters who appear in different tales. Unlike, often criticized by the Polish organizations, fiction of Nelson Algren, Anthony Bukoski’s prose has been valued and appreciated by both Polish and American literary critics. His collections of short stories attracted widespread recognition and gathered a number of awards; for instance, the author was awarded the Sarmatian Review Literary Prize in 2002 for the “superb ability to transform the often mundane and inarticulate lives of ordinary Polish Americans into art of the highest quality.”<sup>3</sup> He was also the winner of the Oskar Halecki Literary Award, and the Ann Powers Book-length Award granted to the best authors from Wisconsin. After the publication of Bukoski’s first collection of short stories filled with eccentric and engaging characters, William Patrick Kinsella, a widely appreciated Canadian writer, compared Bukoski’s literary works to the prose of Carson McCullers and Flannery O’Connor, and even named Bukoski a “Northern Gothic writer.” Later collections, which were devoted strictly to the presentation of Polish American experience proved, however, that he might be perceived more as the follower of Sherwood Anderson rather than the successor of Southern Gothic writers.<sup>4</sup>

Keeping in mind Sollors’s notion of ethnicity as invention, or a “cultural construct”<sup>5</sup> crucial in the social construction of reality, the aim of the present chapter is to examine the concept of ethnicity constantly reinvented and recreated in the fiction of Anthony Bukoski on the basis of his depiction of the culture of American Polonia. Ethnic expression in Bukoski’s short stories is especially grounded in the controlling forces of folk religiosity, the network of family relationships, the ubiquitous nostalgia for the past, attachment to the land, and polka music, which permeates the community life within the ethnic reality, “mythologizes the land of the ancestors [and] provides focal points for family

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas S. Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 264.

<sup>3</sup> A letter from Ewa M. Thompson, the editor of *The Sarmatian Review*, September, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ray Olson, “Anthony Bukoski. ‘Time Between Trains’ – a review,” *Booklist*, July 2003, p. 1863.

<sup>5</sup> Werner Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. xv., ix.

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life.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the above mentioned aspects of the culture of American Polonia depicted in Bukoski’s fiction will be taken here under close scrutiny.

Taking into consideration the fact that, in the last chapter of Jelena Sesnić’s study devoted to breaking and re-making ethnicity, she elaborates on the concept of nostalgic imagination and nostalgia “heavily invested in the melancholic complex, [...] [which] is identified in [some] aspects of ethnic literary representations,”<sup>7</sup> it seems vital to give closer attention to the notion of homesickness because nostalgia, or “an ambiguous symptom of cultural malaise,”<sup>8</sup> occupies a prominent place in the fiction of Anthony Bukoski. Addressing the notion of homecoming in this context appears to be crucial because, as Gladsky aptly observes, “Bukoski despairs for the past, [...] for old values and old ways [but, while mourning, he simultaneously] points toward a redefined sense of ethnicity, an awareness by the young that something out there must be preserved; toward a new dialogue, a new expression of ethnicity,”<sup>9</sup> which, consequently, is to be analyzed in the present chapter.

Contemporary America has discovered, in the opinion of some experts, high, cultural, therapeutic, as well as commercial values in the notions of history, memory and nostalgia.<sup>10</sup> The renewed interest in languages of ethnics, their literatures and the Old World customs has been observed in the USA especially since the 1960s, and constitutes, according to some sociologists, an evidence of the surge in ethnic identity.<sup>11</sup> At the same time the awakening of the collective memory of various ethnic groups, reconstruction of the lost ethnic identity, opening of the immigrant museums and establishing the new university departments with scholars whose areas of interest include history, memory and the study of [sometimes neglected or forgotten] cultural identities, is also the

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<sup>6</sup> Grażyna J. Kozaczka, “The Invention of Ethnicity and Gender in Suzanne Strempek Shea’s Fiction,” *The Polish Review*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 3 (2003), p. 334.

<sup>7</sup> Jelena Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence. Representations of Ethnicity in Contemporary American literature* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 189.

<sup>8</sup> Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence*, p. 188.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 266.

<sup>10</sup> Cf: Dubravka Ugrešić, „Konfiskata pamięci,” in *Nostalgia. Eseje o tęsknocie za komunizmem*, eds. Filip Modrzejewski, Monika Sznajderman (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2002), p. 250.

<sup>11</sup> Cf: Richard D. Alba, *Ethnic Identity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 29.

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result of the nostalgic fascinations.<sup>12</sup> Whether there is something more here than nostalgic fascination, it is still an open question. This renewed interest might probably be explained by the fact that nowadays there exists some sort of an “epidemic of nostalgia,”<sup>13</sup> using Svetlana Boym’s terminology, and in her opinion it is a craving for a reconstruction of the community tied by the specific, common, collective memory, the desire for a continuity in the fragmented world.

The American nostalgic ethnic revivalism affected also Polish American studies and Polish American literature, even though the latter is - as it has already been emphasized - probably still establishing its place in the canon of American literature, and has undergone a long struggle to be considered as an object worthy of scholarly research.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that Anthony Bukoski, according to David Ruenzel, is “too good a writer to engage in nostalgia,”<sup>15</sup> his short stories lament the loss of the past, and his protagonists yearn for the sense of rootedness, security and belonging, which can only be provided by the rusting away Polish American neighbourhood. Thomas Gladsky asserts that “Bukoski juxtaposes the end of ethnicity through the death of the immigrant generation with the ethnic awakening of the younger generation,”<sup>16</sup> but it may not escape one’s attention that the voices that tell his stories are mostly sorrowful, regretful, and at times, carry too heavy Polish cultural baggage on their shoulders. It may probably result from the fact that Polishness in Bukoski’s short stories, apart from the web of family relationships, abiding Catholic faith and polka music, evokes “foods, a sprinkling of myths, proverbs, [...] Polish language phrases, and occasional

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<sup>12</sup> Cf: Dubravka Ugresic, „Konfiskata pamięci,” p. 250.

<sup>13</sup> Svetlana Boym, „Nostalgia i postkomunistyczna pamięć,” in *Eseje o tęsknocie za komunizmem*, eds. Filip Modrzejewski, Monika Sznajderman (Wolowicz: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2002), p. 274.

<sup>14</sup> The participants of the annual meeting of the Chicago Chapter of the Kosciuszko Foundation held at the Polish Museum of America in the year 2000 noticed that “Polish studies at American universities are kept in a perpetual state of partial birth abortion.” (Alex S. Kurczaba, “Polish Studies in American Higher Education,” *The Sarmatian Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2001): 30 Aug. 2006 <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/101/211kurczaba.html>) Although nowadays the situation is changing, in the year 2001 only four American colleges or universities offered an undergraduate major in the Polish language. It might be astounding taking into consideration the fact that Polonia in America is the largest Slavic community in the United States.

<sup>15</sup> David Ruenzel, “A Way of Life Rusts Away in the North,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, No. 2 (1994), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 266.

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references to history and geography.”<sup>17</sup> His characters, however, can hardly conceive of happiness in America without their ethnicity grounded in humility, endurance and loyalty to family and nation. Bukoski’s protagonists, however, are far from being sanctified by the author. Literary Polish Americans are not elevated to such a point that they are without any fault. On the contrary, Bukoski draws his readers’ attention to the fact that his characters are far from being models of virtue. In Bukoski’s words:

the people [he] writes about are gamblers and adulterers and sometimes they are unscrupulous in their business dealings and have all the failings of the rest of humankind. On the other hand, [Bukoski] sees the great charity and generosity of spirit and nobility that these old people [he] remembers and [writes] about showed.<sup>18</sup>

Nostalgia does not only imply mourning over displacement and irreversibility of time, but it also denotes craving for a place or home which does not exist anymore, or has never existed. Nostalgia, in Svetlana Boym’s view, may be compared to a romance with one’s own imagination, a blend of two perspectives: the reality and sheer fantasy, the past and the present. It would probably be hard to unequivocally define what people long for because the alluring target is perpetually ungraspable. Nonetheless, it has been assumed that nostalgia denotes homesickness and the desire for a different dimension of time, especially the time of one’s own childhood, or youth.<sup>19</sup> Anthony Bukoski openly states that “writing his simultaneously imaginative and real stories brings [him] consolation [...]. I can return to the past time and become younger,”<sup>20</sup> he adds.

Nostalgia might be also catalyzed by the displacement from a cultural community. Roberta Rubenstein defines this kind of feeling as the “cultural mourning” which, in her view, signifies “an individual’s response to the loss of something with collective or communal associations: a way of life, a cultural

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<sup>17</sup> Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Longrie, “Replaying the Past: An Interview with Anthony Bukoski,” *Wisconsin Academy Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (1995-1996), p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Svetlana Boym, „Nostalgia i postkomunistyczna pamięć,” p. 274.

<sup>20</sup> John Merchant, Maciej Urbanowski, „Pisząc splanam dług Bogu...- rozmowa z Anthony Bukoskim,” trans. Sonia Caputa, p. 87.

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homeland, [...] or the related history of an entire ethnic or cultural group from which [one] feels severed.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Rubenstein asserts that “culturally displaced or exiled people may mourn their separation from homeland, community, language, and cultural practices [or ways of life] that contribute to identity.”<sup>22</sup>

In case of Bukoski’s short stories, it seems that his Polish American literary characters are tormented by nostalgia for Polishness, for cultural distinctiveness and the vanishing Polish American community of Superior, for whom Catholic religion and family values are of the highest importance. Although Bukoski has never visited the homeland of his grandparents, his prose has been characterised as the living memory of the American Polonia. Yet, the author confessed in one of the interviews that “the vital Polish and Polish-American culture and heritage in the stories exists more in [his] mind than in reality, and [...] probably the one remaining vestige, or at least most visible vestige, of this heritage is [their] Polish Club, [...] the Thaddeus Kosciuszko Fraternal Aid Society [...],”<sup>23</sup> which he often refers to in his prose.

The protagonists of Bukoski’s short stories possess a great sentiment for the immersed in Polishness, dilapidating neighbourhood of Superior, which does not simply constitute a place of their dwelling, but becomes their landscape of Polish American memory, an emotional space. Some of his characters are even preoccupied with remembering the geography of the place. For example Thaddeus, one of the characters of the story “A Geography of Snow,” returns to Superior for a short period of time during the interval in his military service in Vietnam, he drunkenly kisses and vacantly stares at a map of the Polish neighbourhood because “the map’s contours [are] the contours of his life,” and “when he gets killed, it’ll be close by so a medic can get it for [him] while [he’s]

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<sup>21</sup> Roberta Rubenstein, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women’s Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Rubenstein, *Home Matters*, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> David Bowen, “The Land of Graves and Crosses. An Interview with Anthony Bukoski,” *Main Street Rag*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2003), p. 15.

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dying.”<sup>24</sup> Bukoski, using the map as the trigger, endows his character with better knowledge of himself and, consequently, the map becomes a tangible marker which has a special emotional appeal for him, because it joins the protagonist with his ancestors who used to live in Wisconsin and earlier also in Poland. Thaddeus states:

I suddenly believe this map [...] should include other people who've lived in the East End of Superior and sat together on stormy nights in kitchens, as well as the people on the Old Country map you see at the Warsaw Tavern.[...] Maybe it's storming in Old Country Poland now, too. It's possible, I think, that the herb connects us - the herb, our history, and this old Polish language.<sup>25</sup>

Bukoski does not hide his deep and sentimental attachment to the Polish neighbourhood where he lives and where “lies more drama for the writer – and more reason for his characters to drink and suffer heart problems.”<sup>26</sup> As the author says in one of his interviews:

we [inhabitants of Superior] are at the end of the line geographically and, I like to think, figuratively. [...] People drink [here] heavily, and the weather is snowy, rainy, or cold. Then, too we are an economically depressed city and have been this way most of my life. Where do you go from here? This is it – you've reached the end when you've come to Superior. The Polish neighbourhood, the entire city [...] is afflicted with guilt. <sup>27</sup>

The Polish part of the literary Superior is inhabited by the characters for whom the Polish American neighbourhood transforms into a cultural repository and becomes the Polish American identity marker. It carries its own emotional history and supports the ethnic identity of its dwellers. The narrator of “The Wood of Such Trees” says:

[...] If someday I got lost, I would have the map of this Polish neighborhood to direct me back. I'd have rosaries, scapulars, and a prayer book with a

<sup>24</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “A Geography of Snow” in: *Time Between Trains* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2003), pp. 11, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Bukoski, “A Geography of Snow,” p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> David Bowen, “The Land of Graves and Crosses. An Interview with Anthony Bukoski,” p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Bowen, “The Land of Graves and Crosses,” p. 13.

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Table of Movable Feasts I could pray from no matter where I was. I had a coal man's insignia, too, and now the snow outside the house where I was born, I am saying the litany, 'Lord Have Mercy on Us... Christ Have Mercy On Us,' for I was never so good in the ensuing years and have looked in mirrors and felt the worm of sin. And now I must study the map that has led me to a house someone else inhabits. *Dzĩa-dzĩa* [sic!] and my parents died long ago.<sup>28</sup>

As Bukoski's literary characters mourn over the transformation of the town and the deaths of the representatives of the older Polish American generation, it may seem that in fact they grieve for Polishness, the cultural heritage threatened to be - as if - forgotten, lost or wiped out by the children of strangers, the Americans who "have taken only a minute to learn about centuries of struggle and grow bored."<sup>29</sup> That is the reason why his protagonists cling so tightly to the last remnants of the Polish culture in literary Superior. For instance, in a short story "President of the Past," the narrator, Rick Mrozek, returns home to become president of the local Polish Club and realizes that the club building is going to be taken over by some other businessmen, and eventually closed. The narrator of the story is not able to accept the fact that another Polish American organization will sink into oblivion, and that he would be deprived of the place where he could "find solace" and cherish his heritage. The protagonist confesses:

with our past stored away, the club could disappear like Superior's Polish and Slovak churches. Churches gone, lodge membership dwindling, old people gone. If it keeps up, we'll have no memories. They'll all be in storage. [...] How can we let this go? How can I myself let the club go? [...] I don't want to leave the hall. I don't want the hall's memories to go. I'm afraid of what will happen when they do. I, Rick Mrozek, am the president of the past.<sup>30</sup>

Polish buildings, backyards which once belonged to Rick Mrozek's ancestors, the picture of Black Madonna, or the old photograph depicting the Polish American society named after Tadeusz Kościuszko together evoke sacred and poignant

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "The Wood of Such Trees," in: *Polonaise* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1999), p. 148.

<sup>29</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "Children of Strangers" in: *Children of Strangers* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993), p. 89.

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "President of the Past," in: *Time Between Trains* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2003), pp. 183, 186.

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memories, which possess the power to bring the apparitions from the past back to life. Rick “could get from them the answers [he] seeks to make this remembering easier.”<sup>31</sup>

There is an enduring spirit of Poland in short stories written by Bukoski, and most of his protagonists are desperate lovers of the past. According to Thomas Gladsky, ethnicity reconstituted and rekindled in Bukoski’s stories is not only limited to symbolic gestures connected with the past because the majority of his youthful protagonists do sense their connection with the past and witness the immigrant dilemma. Some of the characters happen to fantasize about Poland, or they brim with nostalgia for the Polish national heroes striving to become paragons of virtue themselves. Tad, a young soldier from the short story “A Geography of Snow,” and a namesake of Tadeusz Kościuszko, endeavours to “do something brave, [...] to be remembered as the East End man who wore a Purple Heart on his chest. [...] I want to be [Kosciuszko], I want to win the war. I want to be a hero.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Tad reasserts his ethnicity by expressing his wish to become the Polish hero.

Heroism belongs to the fundamental Polish values respected by Polish Americans the most. Danuta Mostwin observes in one of her sociological publications<sup>33</sup> that the sense of heroism and national patriotism is inculcated and passed on from one Polish generation to another. In her view, a Pole is not allowed to give up, has to keep his/her promise and should defend his/her beliefs. Since honour is the most recognizable virtue of the Polish national character, the offence of one’s ethnic identity is equal with the offence to somebody’s honour.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, after joining the Polish Club, Tadeusz will have to cherish traditional Polish values and these include “the fostering among club members the feeling of love and brotherhood, for the defending of Polish

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<sup>31</sup> Bukoski, “President of the Past,” p. 188.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “A Geography of Snow,” in: *Time Between Trains* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2003), pp. 14, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Danuta Mostwin, *Emigranci Polscy w USA* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1991), p. 154.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Danuta Mostwin, *Trzecia wartość* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1985), p. 85.

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honour, and finally for the futherance of the principles and immortal deeds of one of Poland's greatest sons."<sup>35</sup>

The reassurance and redefinition of one's ethnicity through expressing the wish of becoming the new president of the Kościuszko Club is also depicted in the short story "The Wand of Youth." The narrator, Tadek Ostrowski, is a teenager, who is honoured to take part in the Memorial Day service at the cemetery, and together with Mr. *Szynka* (the elderly, constantly inebriated, disease-prone president of the Polish Club) carries the inexpensive and old-fashioned Polish Club's wreath. The narrator describes the garland as follows:

the Polish Club's wreath [...] represents the old-timers including my dad and grandpa in the neighbourhood – and many who live elsewhere in Superior – is built of three hard wires forming a crooked A. Leaves and vines no one has dusted during the year hang from it. Plastic daisies peek out from plastic greenery. Plastic ivy dangles in back. The wire frame is four feet high, the wreath three feet around.<sup>36</sup>

The shock that prompts Tadek's self-reexamination comes at the solemn moment when he passes two rows of people that form an aisle to place the Thaddeus Kosciuszko Club wreath, and indulges himself in the memories of his Polish American uncles, Walt Ostrowski and Augie Fronckiewicz, who are the war veterans. The narrator says: "no matter what Mr. Ham looks like in a work shirt, nor how funny looking the wreath, our people are as important as anyone's, [...] my heart sinks with sorrow for the lost."<sup>37</sup> Tadek's ethnic identity is so well defined that, despite the moment of shame brought upon him by Mr. Ham's loss of balance after drinking intoxicating beverages, the young narrator straightens his posture to make sure anyone coming past will be able to read the Thaddeus Kosciuszko streamer. Tadek gains the knowledge of himself and realizes that by "wearing the wreath around [his] shoulders and carrying the wire frame in one hand, [he] has done the Club proud by taking over for veterans who've had to

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<sup>35</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "A Geography of Snow," p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "The Wand of Youth," in: *North of the Port* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2008), p. 91.

<sup>37</sup> Bukoski, "The Wand of Youth," p. 91.

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work today.”<sup>38</sup> The narrator, as a young ethnic growing up in the context of the American culture of material success, maintains the attitude of pride about the country of his ancestors. The profound gratitude for Tadek’s proper behaviour, and admiration for his habit to salute to all, who deserve his respect and towards those who served in wartime, is also expressed by his father who states:

I’m proud of you for everything, [...] I keep thinking how ‘From a good nest come good children. Don’t let nobody [sic] tell you it isn’t important to be Polish.’<sup>39</sup>

As it has already been observed at the outset of the present chapter, ethnic expression in Bukoski’s fiction is deeply rooted in simple, folk, highly emotional religiosity. According to Deborah Anders Silverman, “although a Polish-American’s relationship with God is intense, it is also complex and mediated by priests, the Virgin Mary, and a host of saints who act as intercessors for the faithful.”<sup>40</sup> Such an interdependence between the pious, the saints, priests and the Virgin Mary which, in result, provides the Polish American protagonists with an access to God, is perfectly depicted in Bukoski’s fiction. His short stories are characterized by God’s constant presence in the daily lives of St. Adalbert’s parishioners, who pray to their patron saints, to Virgin Mary, in front of the pictures of Black Madonna “with wounds that have saved the Polish nation over and over,”<sup>41</sup> and, in return, God responds with physical signs to the pleas of the people.

Lesczyk [sic] Iwanowski, the narrator of “A Guide to American Trees,” openly admits that “Jesus’ mysteries appear in East End, [Superior];” in “The Wand of Youth” Tadek prays for a blithe life of his mother, a new wreath for the Polish Club and health for his sister Janina, being confident that “the Madonna would

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<sup>38</sup> Bukoski, “The Wand of Youth,” p. 92.

<sup>39</sup> Bukoski, “The Wand of Youth,” p. 97.

<sup>40</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 89.

<sup>41</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The Shadow Players,” in: *North of the Port* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2008), p. 49.

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heal her regardless of what Dad says privately about her chances.”<sup>42</sup> Catherine Kalinowski, a 17-year-old character from “North of the Port” finds a tiny crucifix that had belonged to her grandmother and places it beneath her tongue to assert control over her sexuality, “to keep [her] soul safe from the devil,”<sup>43</sup> thus, making sure Jesus would protect her from her sexual concupiscence and lust for the older Polish sailor her family has boarded since he jumped ship to escape communism. Bukoski makes Catholic religion an important part of the cultural and spiritual world of the community: the lives of the protagonists are governed by the yearlong cycle of holidays and family rites of passage celebrations. Occasionally, it seems that even the whole Polish American neighbourhood physically responds to particular religious holidays, as it is depicted in the short story “Gossamer Bloom”:

[...] on Assumption Day in August 1950, when the Blessed Virgin is taken soul and body into heaven, thousands of threadlike strands began falling from a sky as blue as the Virgin’s robes.[...] With the sunlight reflecting off of them, the long threads of Assumption Day fell over the coalyard and the ore dock. They caught on the front door of the church, caught against Polish faces, settled softly on the hair and clothes of Polish workmen. <sup>44</sup>

It is probably not a coincidence that the inhabitants of Superior act peculiarly under such specific conditions. Magda Podgorak, for instance, the protagonist of “Gossamer Bloom,” loses herself in the mysteries of Catholic faith and, trying to find Jesus, commits suicide because, as the narrator of the short story notices, “what but a sign from Jesus could have possessed a churchgoing woman to gaze heavenward, take a deep breath, and soar outward from the trestle[...]?”<sup>45</sup>

Faith and ethnicity in Bukoski’s fiction are inseparable since his protagonists equate Polishness with their religious affiliation and justify most of their actions with Catholic faith. This particular stance is aptly illustrated by one of the key quotes from the short story “Gossamer Bloom”:

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<sup>42</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The Wand of Youth,” p. 97.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “North of the Port,” in: *North of the Port* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2008), p. 157.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Gossamer Bloom,” in: *North of the Port* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Bukoski, “Gossamer Bloom,” p. 2.

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[Magda Podgorak, who committed suicide in fact] had made the sacrificial flight for Poland, the “Christ of Nations,” which has suffered through much of its history but, like Jesus, would come again in glory. She had leapt from the trestle for Mr. Zielinski, dying of heart problems in the East End; for Ada Borski, [...] for St. Adalbert’s nuns, who had little. [...] “For my country America, for my country Poland, and for You, I will give myself, Dear Lord *Pan Jezuu*.”<sup>46</sup>

What seems significant is also the fact that even though the protagonists reconsider their ethnic identity they never enter the sphere of religious doubt. In the story “The Case for Bread and Sausage” two teenage boys, Wally “*Gówniarz*” Moniak and Ted, the narrator of the story, serve during the Catholic Mass and look with disdain at the new non-Polish American priest, who is to substitute Father Nowak. Nowak, who also reappears in other short stories, is an elderly stroke victim who had served St. Adalbert’s Parish for forty years, and had become the paragon of virtue for the members of the younger generation. Although the new priest is the man of God, Polish American boys have doubts if he is worthy of the sacred profession as “[there is] the beer smell on him [and it would be possible] to tuck a sign that reads “*Na Zdrowie*” into one of his three chins.”<sup>47</sup> As the teenagers administer the sacrament of Communion holding their patens to catch tiny crumbs from the Host, Ted realizes that the Polish American worshippers have a lot of longing for the Eucharist “that fills them in a different way than it fills people like [him].”<sup>48</sup> Despite the fact that the youthful narrator perceives Communion, perhaps surprisingly, as another meal to “edge off of [his] hunger [...] even if it can’t fill [him] as much as a Ritz cracker”<sup>49</sup> or “a lunch of Polish sausage and ring baloney,”<sup>50</sup> he confesses that “it’s a mystery what [his] grandma or Mrs. Kosmatka, [his] neighbor, get from It, in their case [he] wonders if it has something to do with what they remember from Poland.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bukoski, “Gossamer Bloom,” p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The Case for Bread and Sausage,” in: *North of the Port* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2008), p. 55.

<sup>48</sup> Bukoski, “The Case for Bread and Sausage,” p. 57.

<sup>49</sup> Bukoski, “The Case for Bread and Sausage,” p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> Bukoski, “The Case for Bread and Sausage,” p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> Bukoski, “The Case for Bread and Sausage,” p. 57.

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Because the young ethnics are away from their ancestral country due to physical space and time, their perception and understanding of certain Polish/Catholic rituals is different from the older generation's awareness of the very same customs. The adolescent protagonists growing up within the American reality but, at the same time, in the Polish American neighbourhood, have to construct and redefine their ethnicity anew because, as Grażyna Kozaczka reminds, "ethnicity is not an attribute transplanted miraculously from the old country, but rather it is created by individual migrants and their communities to fulfill their needs."<sup>52</sup> Even though the characters cannot fully comprehend the mystery of the sacrament of Communion, they see that the new priest does not practice one of the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy – to feed the hungry – as he devours all the food, leaving the hungry boys only with dirty breadcrumbs, which they eventually feed on. In the final, symbolic scene of the story Ted and Wally, after saving some bread crusts in their shirt pockets, share them with the famished and grief-stricken Father Nowak, who only then finds solace and finally stops sobbing. At that moment the young ethnics understand that "Father Nowak senses [they] will someday be good men who practice the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy; [...] lowly eaters of bread, [they] are feeding the hungry."<sup>53</sup>

The young descendants of Poles in America realize that they have a mission to accomplish, that they provide continuity; they are the remnants, the living memory of their Polish American community, the representatives of the pious who still cherish Catholic values in the consumer America. The simple crumbs of bread they collect and share, acquire more meaning in the broader context; bread is not only the secular counterpart to the body of Jesus but, in the Polish tradition, it is also the symbol of prosperity and wealth. Ultimately, the protagonists of the story remind themselves that their ancestors came to the New World from Poland "for bread, *za chlebem*" in order to be saved. Therefore, because of the sacral character of this food, Ted and Wally become aware of the

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<sup>52</sup> Grażyna J. Kozaczka, "The Invention of Ethnicity and Gender in Suzanne Strempek Shea's Fiction," p. 337.

<sup>53</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "The Case for Bread and Sausage," p. 59.

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fact that the Eucharist is holy bread and “if [they] drop a piece of bread at home, when [they] pick it up, Mother makes [them] kiss it.”<sup>54</sup>

Because Poland with its history and old customs is a felt presence in Bukoski’s short stories, most of his Polish American literary characters listen to music composed by Chopin or Paderewski. For Bukoski’s protagonists Polish music is a route to the reconnection with roots; it reminds them of the ancestors, “express[es] Polish people’s courage and spirit”<sup>55</sup> and carries the echoes of the Old Country. The narrator of “Children of Strangers” claims that “[these] are haunted melodies that hurt a person with their sadness, the unforgotten music of the past,”<sup>56</sup> and it is probably the reason why Bukoski’s characters are, paradoxically, happy in their grief when they listen to Polish composers’ music. Other Polish Americans in Bukoski’s prose are polka lovers who approach the music with a frenzy akin to religious devotion, immersing themselves completely in “polka happiness.” Despite the fact that polka originated not in Poland but Czechoslovakia, and the connection with Poland is probably expressed only in its name, Deborah Anders Silverman asserts that polka as a distinctive American form of ethnic music occupies a central position in Polish American culture, it is the class and identity marker, and the polka musicians play a vital role of the “gatekeepers of the Polish culture.”<sup>57</sup>

In a short story “Polkaholics,” Superior in Wisconsin is depicted as the phantasmagorical Polish homeland, or rather “Polka Country” with its roaring polka jamborees, and melancholic and grief-stricken wailing of the accordions. “Polkaholics” offers the image of a frozen in time and petrified culture, from which there is no way of escape, because polka haunts its inhabitants. The polka land is a background for presenting the conflict between the younger representative of the Polish descendants, Edek Patulski, and his sincere, self-sacrificing and fiercely patriotic father, Stash, the king of the polka, “that poor,

<sup>54</sup> Bukoski, “The Case for Bread and Sausage,” p. 59.

<sup>55</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Leokadia and Fireflies,” in: *Time Between Trains* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2003), p. 156.

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 87.

<sup>57</sup> Deborah Anders Silverman, *Polish-American Folklore* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 132.

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foolish man [who] would put on his miller's cap like he missed work, sit out in the shade of the elm tree, and dream about the Yankovic boys."<sup>58</sup> For Edek, the nostalgic fascination of his father with the Polish culture, the usage of Polish language at home, as well as his devotion to Catholic faith is a source of shame, annoyance and embarrassment. With time however, the narrator gets infected by the father's obsession with the polka and attempts to experience what it means to be a polkaholic. Unable to do that, he "lies about being Polack. [He] eats beef and ham on days of fast and abstinence. He wipes off his Ash Wednesday ashes from [his] forehead."<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, when Stash passes away, his son, not being fully aware of his actions, turns on the polka radio station, "makes tapes on a tape recorder and plays them back to [himself], [or] maybe to [his father] if he's out there listening."<sup>60</sup> The narrator confirms that the memories will never fade away and the Polish values, which he often sneered at, finally become meaningful to him because the polka dance functions as a thread that connects him to his father, and at the same time to his lost ethnicity. Music, therefore, allows the narrator to reinvent his ethnicity; he gains the final understanding that polka playing fulfills his own internal need and Stash, after all, "really had done something with his life by working, by raising a family, by paying his bills on time [...],[he] should have worn the Military Cross the Polish Army gives for bravery."<sup>61</sup>

The cultural marker of Polish identity in the United States, the polka music, sometimes turns into a catalyst of nostalgia for a lost childhood, like in a short story "The Moon of the Grass Fires." Here, the narrator, retired Joe Lesczyk [sic!], finds the church confessional (another cultural marker of the Polish identity since Polish Americans are known for their devotion to Catholicism) in an industrial waste landfill and brings it home because "he [can]

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<sup>58</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "Polcaholics," in: *Children of Strangers* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993), p. 134.

<sup>59</sup> Bukoski, "Polcaholics," p. 138.

<sup>60</sup> Bukoski, "Polcaholics," p. 144.

<sup>61</sup> Bukoski, "Polcaholics," p. 143.

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not stand the sight of the crucifix poking out from demolition debris.”<sup>62</sup> The church confessional becomes an impulse for Joe to retrieve emotional memories of some Polish American parishioners and especially his mother, who was addicted to Asthmador Powder and the polka dance. It is revealed, however, that Joe’s mother, frequently lost in her drug induced-hallucinations, used to send her son with a polka request to the local polka-playing musician, Buck Mrozek. Whenever the accordionist started his performance, Stella Lesczyk gave herself completely to the music, achieving the state of “polka catharsis.”<sup>63</sup> Even though Mr. Lesczyk told his son that “[mother’s drug oblivion] has nothing to do with polka,” the polka dance becomes the narrator’s nightmare because he associates it only with his mother’s addiction. “She shouldn’t give polka a bad name,”<sup>64</sup> Joe’s father adds, suggesting that his wife – as if - disgraced the dance by her unseemly behaviour. However, on the day of her death Joe credulously believes that only “the right combination of words and polka music [would] keep [his mother] alive.”<sup>65</sup> With Stella gone, the polka era has reached its end, leaving the narrator with the painful problem – his memory of the past time and bitter dreams of childhood.

Polka tunes, just like religion, permeate the family life within Anthony Bukoski’s ethnic reality; they constitute the tool which breaks the barriers among the representatives of different generations, and enables the Polish Americans to feel some connection with the land of their ancestors. Polka jamborees and the sound of the accordion become the unifying factor, which promotes the family harmony. After all, everybody joins in front of the radio to listen to the “Polka Hour,” or gathers in the kitchen to enjoy nightly music entertainment provided by the father, who plays “Hoopi Shoopi,” “I’m from Planet Polka,” or the Polish national anthem “Our Poland Shall Not Perish While We Live.”

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<sup>62</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The Moon of the Grass Fires,” in: *Time Between Trains* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2003), p. 101.

<sup>63</sup> Bukoski, “The Moon of the Grass Fires,” p. 101.

<sup>64</sup> Bukoski, “The Moon of the Grass Fires,” p. 102.

<sup>65</sup> Bukoski, “The Moon of the Grass Fires,” p. 102.

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Ed Cieslicki, stage name *Wally na Zdrowie*, the protagonist of “The Wally na Zdrowie Show,” was once a fine polka musician admired in the Polonian circles but now, suffering from arthritis, he is too crippled in his arms and wrists to get the accordion out of the case. Being left with no funds to sustain the family, as he, additionally, loses his job in the factory, Ed Cieslicki ponders on selling his beloved instrument. The story is written in the form of Ed Cieslicki’s letter to his children, Tadeusz and Karen, for whom, as the father recalls and wrongly assumes, listening to polka music was more of a chore rather than pleasure. It appears that the father, after several years spent dwelling only with his wife, attempts to explain to his grown up offspring his polka obsession and also accounts for the significance of having the doors opened at home while he was playing the accordion. It occurs that Ed’s intention was to fill the Polish American house with music because if the family decides to sell the house one day, “the Polish anthem will remain in the rooms and closets of every floor.”<sup>66</sup> The narrator addresses his children and states:

you might have thought it was for air circulation between the rooms, but I didn’t want us – not you, Karen or your friends when they came over – separated by having the door closed on me like that. Those were songs I had played for my dear father. I tried to connect you and Karen to your mother, to your grandfather, to the old country and me, but you were teenagers.<sup>67</sup>

At the end of the story, as the father laments his inability to produce polka music, and grieves over both: the absence of his children who were soaked in by the American culture and the lack of need to prepare meals from the mother’s “Treasured Polish Recipes” book, he receives a phone call from his daughter, who begs him to make *bigos* and play “Hoopi Shoopi” during the vacation stay in her family home. It appears that the children’s most intimate connection with their father rested in their appreciation of polka music and it seems natural

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<sup>66</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The Wally na Zdrowie Show,” in: *North of the Port* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2008), p. 141.

<sup>67</sup> Bukoski, “The Wally na Zdrowie Show,” p. 137.

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because the young descendants of Poles could not have become immune to the influences of the Polish American ethnic culture.

While addressing the question of the emergence of ethnicity as a social construct Grażyna Kozaczka notices that the invention of Polish American identity relies on the attempts of the immigrants and ethnics who “by blending the Polish with the American recreate many of the rituals that become powerful ethnic markers.”<sup>68</sup> Various gatherings and festive celebrations which have religious, family or social character are, in fact, reinvented in the American context by a mixture of customs brought to the New World from different parts of Poland, adopted from the host culture, or created by a particular community. In this context, the characters in Bukoski’s short stories are the leaders of the sodality Polish ladies worship groups, like the eccentric Mrs. Pilsudski, the character from “Holy Walker.” Some protagonists collect pasture weeds and bring them to the church believing that they are “old-time talismans against thunder, witches, weak eyes”<sup>69</sup>; some others are passionate and devoted members of the bowling teams who win the trophies for the Polish parish and attach to their cars rear bumper stickers “You betcha your dupa I’m Polish” as Al and Pete Dziedzic, the protagonists of “Report of the Guardian of the Sick.” It is also common that Bukoski’s Polish Americans fly the Polish flags in their yards to honour their ancestors because they “have sworn to act justly for the good of all Slavic-descended people of America,”<sup>70</sup> they have decals of an eagle and the word *solidarność* in white letters on their front windows, they put on the Polish mountaineer outfits, or wear *rogatywka*, a four-cornered cap a person in the Old Country might wear, just to make themselves noticeable among the Americans.

Ethnicity of some characters is well defined as Bukoski emphasizes even their Polishness or Polish Americaness via the descriptions of their physical features. Miss Nude Poland, a strip dancer, who appears in the short story

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<sup>68</sup> Grażyna J. Kozaczka, “The Invention of Ethnicity and Gender in Suzanne Strempek Shea’s Fiction,” p. 336.

<sup>69</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Winter Weeds,” in: *Time Between Trains* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2003), p. 46.

<sup>70</sup> Bukoski, “Antoni Kosmatka Resists the Goddess of Love,” in: *North of the Port* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2008), p. 126.

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“Antoni Kosmatka Resists the Goddess of Love,” has perfumed breasts compared to the Carpathian Mountains and the pass between her breasts is described in terms of the “steep valley.” While presenting the vivid description of the Polish dancer, the narrator observes as follows:

four red ribbons fell from her honey blonde hair. Her blue eyes widened and gleamed at the applause. She was wearing a peasant costume, a white blouse, a wide red skirt. At the sight of her plump lips, Mr. Kosmatka remembered an old song, “*Dziwiczka [sic!] z Buzią Jak Malina*, Lass with Lips Like Red, Red Berries.”<sup>71</sup>

Antoni Kosmatka, the Guardian of the Sick, an elderly member of the Thaddeus Kosciuszko Club, claims that at the sight of her “he’d never loved the old country so much.”<sup>72</sup> Kosmatka is described as a knight of King Boleslaw, who managed to rescue his marriage by rejecting the promiscuous stripper and resisting the temptation most men would have succumbed to. He is also depicted as the fierce patriot who “would awake and ride forth [...] if Poland needed him,”<sup>73</sup> thus, suggesting that he wishes to save the martyred country of his ancestors and retrieve its glorious history.

Anthony Bukoski’s fiction is also grounded in the so-called “culinary nostalgia,” using Anita Mannur’s expression; ethnic food ways have their place in American ethnic literature and, as Fred Gardaphé and Wenying Xu observe, “food often has an ability to last longer as a signifier for ethnicity than other markers, such as language and fashion.”<sup>74</sup>

There exists a meaningful relationship between food and ethnicity because the “language of food offers a portal to ethnic history, culture and roots, [and] this language forms a gastronomic contact zone situated in cafes, kitchens, and homes where displaced individuals meet and reestablish identities.”<sup>75</sup> Ann Hetzel Gunkel maintains that, apart from playing a “significant role in the work of ethnic

<sup>71</sup> Bukoski, “Antoni Kosmatka Resists the Goddess of Love,” p. 124.

<sup>72</sup> Bukoski, “Antoni Kosmatka Resists the Goddess of Love,” p. 125.

<sup>73</sup> Bukoski, “Antoni Kosmatka Resists the Goddess of Love,” p. 128.

<sup>74</sup> Fred Gardaphé, Wenying Xu, “Introduction: Food in Multi-Ethnic Literatures,” *Melus*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2007), p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Gardaphé, Xu, “Introduction: Food in Multi-Ethnic Literatures,” p. 5.

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memory,”<sup>76</sup> food imagery serves as a powerful vehicle for exploring the ethnic self in various literary contexts. Most of the Polish American characters depicted in Bukoski’s fiction eat *pierogi*, (which are even eaten by the soldiers in Vietnam, who “ask for *pierogi* when they come back from search-and-destroy operations near An Ho,”<sup>77</sup>) sauerkraut, *kielbasa*, pigs’ feet, horseradish soup, or *bigos*, a hearty hunter’s stew, consumed in order to “gain strength for the Advent season.”<sup>78</sup> They also drink vodka at the “Warsaw tavern” raising a toast to somebody’s health, or *zubrówka*, convincingly described by the narrator of “A Geography of Snow” as “bison brand vodka flavored with an extract of the fragrant herb beloved by the European Bison,”<sup>79</sup> which, as the narrator additionally reminds, possesses an amazing quality of hypnotizing. Food, and especially *bigos*, often becomes a common denominator, it serves as a sort of elixir, or linchpin which binds people together, like at the end of the before mentioned story “The Wally Na Zdrowie Show.” One may encounter Polish recipes in Bukoski’s stories which, as Ann Hetzel Gunkel observes, “work as an apt metaphor for the reproduction of culture from generation to generation.”<sup>80</sup> Although Bukoski does not depict in his stories Polish American *busias* (grandmothers), who teach the third generation ethnics how to prepare Polish meals, the young descendants of Polish immigrants always associate their childhood days in the Polish American neighbourhood with the smell of the freshly baked bread and other Polish culinary specialities.

Since cuisine and food ways most often have been the province of women in the domestic sphere, some male characters, while longing for a woman, yearn also for a particular Polish meal. In “Winter Weeds” the Polish American priest, Father Marciniak, lusts for Ewa Zukowski, who has “deep red

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<sup>76</sup> Ann Hetzel Gunkel, “Of Polka, Pierogi and Ethnic Identity: Toward a Polish American Cultural Studies,” *Polish-American Studies*, Vol. LXII, No. 1 (2005), p. 39.

<sup>77</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “A Geography of Snow,” p.11.

<sup>78</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Winter Weeds,” in: *Time Between Trains* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2003), p. 51.

<sup>79</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “A Geography of Snow,” p.8.

<sup>80</sup> Ann Hetzel Gunkel, “Of Polka, Pierogi and Ethnic Identity: Toward a Polish American Cultural Studies,” p. 39.

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lips stained like currants in the Polish meadows,”<sup>81</sup> the only woman in the neighbourhood who made *zajac pieczony* to perfection, the rabbit Father Marciniak is constantly ravenous for. Apart from the concupiscent priest, who committed a sin by “kissing Ewa to show her the powerful intercession of God’s love,”<sup>82</sup> Ewa is adored by Stanislaw Coda, a potential candidate for Ewa’s husband (even though she has already been married to a Pole, whom she is expecting to come to America). Coda, like Father Marciniak, realizes that he lusts for Ewa’s body as much as for her Polish food. Therefore, the only possible way to control his desire is to stop seeing the adulterous Polish American woman and to begin the period of a fast, because, as Stanislaw confesses (in the confessional box), he is “trying to improve by starving.”<sup>83</sup> At the end of the story Ewa becomes a ghostlike figure: tormented with the spiritual remorse, she leaves Stanislaw and Father Marciniak hungry, as well as sexually unsatisfied and, trying to fulfill her self-imposed penance, decides to refrain from eating herself.

Bukoski’s conception of ethnicity as a social construct constantly reinvented and recreated is further problematized in “Tango of the Bearers of the Dead,” “Old Customs” and “A Chance of Snow.” According to Thomas Gladsky, young ethnics depicted in these short stories might represent a new expression of ethnicity because as they “witness and acknowledge endings, they are forming beginnings, gathering together fragments and images, filtering them into the self and becoming more comfortable with themselves, as a result.”<sup>84</sup>

The narrator of “Tango of the Bearers of the Dead” is *Babusia* (granny), who contemplates her adultery while she is watching over the dead body of her husband, the man she had been married to for fifty years. Tormented by her guilt, *Babusia* (Róża Mizińska) paints her wardrobe mirrors to block out reflections, to make all her memories vanish and to stop time because she is avidly seeking forgetfulness and oblivion. As Róża is struggling with the burden of memory wishing to forget the past, her grown up, inquisitive and persistent

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<sup>81</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Winter Weeds,” p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> Bukoski, “Winter Weeds,” p. 57.

<sup>83</sup> Bukoski, “Winter Weeds,” p. 55.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 267.

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grandson, Vincent, strives to remember the “things the grandmother wishes to forget”<sup>85</sup> because he knows “[he is] the bearer of something.”<sup>86</sup> Vincent realizes that he knows very little about his grandfather’s military service in the Russian army (even though “as most Poles [his grandfather] hated the Russians”<sup>87</sup>) or about the grandparents’ Polish lives, not to mention their early days in America. Nevertheless, the young protagonist understands that in order to find out who he really is and what his roots are, he must begin his search for the self by digging into his family’s past. Róża Mizinska admits that “the dreams and memories intoxicate [her] grandson and make him a lover of the past,”<sup>88</sup> but unlike Vincent, the grandmother pleads “[him] to forget about all of [them] who’ve gone before [him] [...] and all the things that embarrass a family and make it small.”<sup>89</sup> It seems that, using Fred Gardaphé’s words, Vincent, as the third generation Polish American, “[tries] to fashion a usable past in which he can locate the cultural elements needed to create the integral self,”<sup>90</sup> and desperately attempts to unravel what his grandmother refers to as “the knot,”<sup>91</sup> i.e. time that has shrouded events, some of which the grandmother cannot explain.

The profound influence of the past on the present lives of the third-generation Polish American characters is also shown in “Old Customs” and “A Chance of Snow,” perceived as two most positive short stories presenting the connection between the older and the younger generations. Thomas Gladsky asserts that the past plays a meaningful role in Bukoski’s short stories because the young ethnics presented in his fiction gain a new understanding of who they are by the discovery of the continuum of time. As the old representatives of Polish American community are dying away, “they see themselves slipping out of history,”<sup>92</sup> but the younger characters are taking over, they are blending the

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<sup>85</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Tango of the Bearers of the Dead,” in: *Children of Strangers* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993), p. 95.

<sup>86</sup> Bukoski, “Tango of the Bearers of the Dead,” p. 95.

<sup>87</sup> Bukoski, “Tango of the Bearers of the Dead,” p. 95.

<sup>88</sup> Bukoski, “Tango of the Bearers of the Dead,” p. 96.

<sup>89</sup> Bukoski, “Tango of the Bearers of the Dead,” p. 98.

<sup>90</sup> Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 120

<sup>91</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Tango of the Bearers of the Dead,” p. 95.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 267.

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Polish ways with the American ones, recreating many rituals that become powerful ethnic markers yet “they are slipping into history.”<sup>93</sup>

Gladsky maintains that the third-generation protagonists usually associate ethnicity only with their parents, or grandparents. As Gladsky insists:

even [though] these stories document the end of ethnicity, ethnicity is reconstituted, rediscovered as the past takes on new meaning in a world forever changed.<sup>94</sup>

Both stories feature young girls who attempt to learn more about their heritage and themselves. In “Old Customs” Marta Davidowski looks after an elderly aunt, Frania Pomerinska, and listens to her engrossing stories about a valley of trees near Warsaw which produces music when the wind blows. Marta seems to be helplessly suspended between dying past and desolate future; she talks about the old customs practised after somebody’s death, like washing the dead body of a family member in the house, putting black crepe on the door, or gathering on the third day relatives for the rosary. She senses that her beloved aunt approaches death, therefore, she desperately tries to make up for lost time. She reads to her aunt a book on interpreting dreams and, to Frania’s satisfaction, consults the Polish dictionary reading aloud the Polish equivalents of the English words. As John Merchant observes, the young ethnic does everything to “make sense out of the clues”<sup>95</sup> and understand the prompts left for her by the dying aunt. Marta is desperate to learn as much as she can about the Polish customs and the Old Country; she holds on to various bits and pieces of the Polish heritage and confesses:

at recess I bring my geography book down there to study Europe. Poland, because of its light blue color, looks like a butterfly on the map. With everybody outside during recess, it is just me and the beautiful butterfly country. [...] I should bury something, [...] my scapular, my silver dollar.

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<sup>93</sup> Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 267.

<sup>94</sup> Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 267.

<sup>95</sup> John Merchant, “Recent Polish-American Fiction,” *The Sarmatian Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (1998). <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/sarmatia/198/merchant.html> (28 Jul. 2011)

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Before I get home I should study geography, trying harder to learn about the old country. I should help her [aunt] in the garden.<sup>96</sup>

John Merchant believes that “A Chance of Snow” is not so much of a story about passing away of the older generation and the beginning of another, but it is a text in which Bukoski perfectly depicts the possibilities of “regeneration and rejuvenation in the Superior Polish community.”<sup>97</sup>

Agnieszka, the character from “A Chance of Snow,” is considered to be the best representative of ethnicity reborn. The story touches upon the subject of a Polish sailor’s defection from Poland, probably in the 1980s, and his short stay with the Kiszewski family, who give him shelter and accept as one of their own. The appearance of Łukasz Cedzyński in the Polish American household makes Kiszewski’s daughter, Agnieszka, examine herself. Up to this moment, “Polishness [was for the young girl] a curious and somewhat baffling phenomenon in the distant past.”<sup>98</sup> A sense of Polishness was mainly articulated in the story via the Polish government bonds with the eagle emblem that “her father, being a good Pole, would never cash in;”<sup>99</sup> via her parochial school dress, devotional ornaments hanging on every wall in the house, or the photographs of the students who used to learn in the St. Adalbert school. Agnieszka describes her ancestors in the school photos as people overwhelmed with sadness, and claims that “[those] students were torn from something and in between countries.”<sup>100</sup>

The fact that the youthful narrator regarded her ethnicity as a mark of inferiority is also important: she uses Polish words and expressions only to insult her little brother, Steven (for instance by calling him “*gacie*,” or using their last name so as to pour scorn on him). In this context, it seems noteworthy to observe that

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<sup>96</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Old Customs,” in: *Children of Strangers* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993), pp. 75-76.

<sup>97</sup> John Merchant, “Recent Polish-American Fiction.” [http://www.ruf.rice.edu/sarmatia/198/merch\\_ant.html](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/sarmatia/198/merch_ant.html). (28 Jul. 2011)

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 267.

<sup>99</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “A Chance of Snow,” in: *Children of Strangers* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993), p. 50.

<sup>100</sup> Bukoski, “A Chance of Snow,” p. 55.

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Bukoski often uses Polish sentences or single words which are grammatically or stylistically incorrect, for example “*takerze,*” “*ja proszę abys my mie pomóg Bóg,*” “*bardzo szczęśliwy jesteśmy mieć was znamy.*” It is not known, however, whether Bukoski makes grammatical mistakes in Polish on purpose, or whether it is an unconscious stylistic manipulation. In Bukoski’s short stories both: young descendants of Poles speak broken Polish, and older representatives do not possess a good command of the Polish language either. In Thomas Napierkowski’s view, such an inappropriate and widespread use of the Polish language only preserves and exhibits the realistic character of Bukoski’s short stories.<sup>101</sup>

The appearance of Łukasz Cedzyński drastically alters Agnieszka’s conception of herself. Suddenly, she notices that she is “part of the language [her father and the sailor] speak,”<sup>102</sup> and, even though she would want everything the way it was before Mr. Cedzynski’s arrival, “it never goes back that way, [therefore] [Agnieszka and her brother] have to appreciate what’s close to [them].”<sup>103</sup> That is the reason why the Polish American girl considers asking her father to teach her Polish and is successfully encouraged by her supervisors at school to write essays about the country of her ancestors. The narrator realizes that now, living with a ‘foreigner’ under one roof, Poland is not only the country they talked or sang about. Agnieszka describes her experience thus:

with [Łukasz Cedzynski] it was different. He was the living proof, an example. You could look at and listen to Mr. Cedzynski and know he was real and an authentic foreigner. Maybe not understanding him was best. When everybody around here spoke Polish, they were still Americans. But not Łukasz. He was authentic. I couldn’t wait to see him in the morning.<sup>104</sup>

The presence of the Polish sailor prompts Agnieszka to speculate what it means to be foreign, and, as a consequence, she gradually notices her own otherness. “Maybe I was foreign, [she confesses] I fit in OK; [...] yet the older girls at East

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, „Polscy sąsiedzi. Proza Anthony’ego Bukoskiego,” p. 249.

<sup>102</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “A Chance of Snow,” p. 54.

<sup>103</sup> Bukoski, “A Chance of Snow,” p. 54.

<sup>104</sup> Bukoski, “A Chance of Snow,” p. 55.

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or in the neighbourhood didn't have much to do with me.”<sup>105</sup> Agnieszka's perplexity also results from the fact that when the sailor is near her, she feels more connected with the distant past, she is drawn back to her roots. The young sailor stands for the world of descent, he seems to “represent everything that [Agnieszka] has been trying so hard to eradicate and to build boundaries against; he is defined by contrast.”<sup>106</sup> Such an interpretation is viable in the light of the comments about consent and descent made by Sollors in his study *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. What is more, Agnieszka is bewildered when she understands that “Łukasz misses the stones in the roads [while staying in America]”<sup>107</sup> and he always carries a rock from Poland in his duffel bag. Due to the fact that she becomes an eye witness of the immigrant experience, the girl realizes what it means to be suspended between two worlds and to be desperately trying to fit in.

John Merchant reaches a conclusion that by the depiction of the sailor, who eventually decides to return home because he cannot assimilate, “Bukoski succeeds in illustrating how a new seed can be planted for the next generation of Polish-Americans”<sup>108</sup>. At the end of the story, when the sailor is gone, Agnieszka is intrigued and begins to wonder “what was back there that Mr. Cedzynski missed, [and] what was so special in the old country that he'd return to it just because of the stones in the road.”<sup>109</sup> Thomas Gladsky admits that Agnieszka, as a young representative of Polish American ethnics, “is primed [...] to step into [her] ethnic shadow,”<sup>110</sup> and manages to change emotion, puzzlement, anxiety and loss into something positive, even into a sort of affirmation.

Aloosh Szczniewicz, the narrator of “The Wood of Such Trees,” the story mentioned earlier, may also be perceived as a character who shaped and recreated his ethnic self. The story is told from the point of view of a grown up

<sup>105</sup> Bukoski, “A Chance of Snow,” p. 55.

<sup>106</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 161.

<sup>107</sup> Bukoski, “A Chance of Snow,” p. 56.

<sup>108</sup> John Merchant, “Recent Polish-American Fiction.” [http://www.ruf.rice.edu/sarmatia/198/merch\\_ant.html](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/sarmatia/198/merch_ant.html) (28 Jul. 2011)

<sup>109</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “A Chance of Snow,” p. 63.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 268.

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man, who visits his Polish American neighbourhood forty years after he moved out of the ethnic area and returns in order “to remember [whom he really is].”<sup>111</sup> Aloosh remembers his childhood years spent with his grandfather playing Oginski’s Polonaise “Farewell to My Country,” (*Pożegnanie Ojczyzny*) and his father teaching him how to become a decent, honest man. As Aloosh’s father paid a lot of attention to the Catholic education of his son and ingrained in him the sense of responsibility for other members of the family, the protagonist understands that, being bound by faith and family obligations, he was expected to follow his father’s steps and fulfill his promises since he was another “bearer of something.” The narrator thinks about his destiny when he reminds himself his father’s broken English: “Aloosh, we have Polish saying: ‘What the father forgets, the son remembers,’ [...] you good son. I have no trouble with you. I see myself when I look at you.”

One of the most binding promises that the young ethnic vowed to his father was to “remember these [sic!] house when [Aloosh is] fifty, sixty years old.”<sup>112</sup> Such a promise may not be left unnoticed, especially taking into consideration the fact that Bukoski’s Polish Americans are obsessively fond of, and attached to their domiciles. Most of his protagonists constitute topophilic identities<sup>113</sup> which express their desire to belong to a place (home), to a neighbourhood, or a piece of land which they would be able to call their own. In this context, a single word *dom* signifies both a home and a house. On the one hand, a place where one belongs and identifies with, and, on the other hand, its material embodiment, a human abode one built and furnished to inhabit. Home, in the view of Bożena Shallcross,<sup>114</sup> constitutes also the peculiar intimate space that implies “Polishness” – the set of Polish cultural traits transmitted from one generation to

<sup>111</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The Wood of Such Trees,” p. 149.

<sup>112</sup> Bukoski, “The Wood of Such Trees,” p. 147.

<sup>113</sup> They refer to attachments to geographical spaces.

<sup>114</sup> Bożena Shallcross, *Toward a Definition of the Polish Home* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002), p. 6.

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another.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, when the adult narrator returns to his neighbourhood after so many years spent on “the loss and the recovery of faith, [...] anger, hostility, the war in Vietnam,”<sup>116</sup> what finally matters is coming back to the roots and remembering instead of “weep[ing] for how things have turned out.”<sup>117</sup>

The reassessment of the ethnic self of the young Polish American characters usually takes place in Bukoski’s fiction upon the death of a relative associated with the immigrant generation. This may be the passing away of grandparents who represent the old generation, as it was depicted in “Children of Strangers,” or it is the moment of death of a father figure, like in “The Shadow Players.”

“Children of Strangers” is one of the heartbreaking stories which depicts the corroding way of life of a generation of Catholic Polish Americans. Ralph and Josephine Slipkowski, the main characters, are preparing themselves for the moving and dignified ceremony of paying tribute to Sister Bronisława, the last living Polish American nun in the neighbourhood, who devoted fifty years of her life to the service in the parochial school. Such a celebration makes the protagonists wonder and, as they observe the changes in their neighbourhood, it becomes apparent for them that the Polish American community withers. Josie expresses her bitterness as follows:

some of the Polish people have died, others gone away. The city purchases their houses for below market value, and in rush the newcomers. Now the children of strangers break glass on the sidewalks, roar down the alleys on motorcycles, and let their dogs loose in the streets.<sup>118</sup>

Bukoski’s spokesmen painfully come to understand that the Polish American neighbourhood is in the state of deterioration and all the virtues the characters were taught to live by, such as “to work, to honor the Polish flag, to

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<sup>115</sup> Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish Community Life: A Survey of Research*, (Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, Inc., Boston University, 1975), p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The Wood of Such Trees,” p. 148.

<sup>117</sup> Bukoski, “The Wood of Such Trees,” p. 146.

<sup>118</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 82.

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grow up in the faith,”<sup>119</sup> seem to be meaningless now, especially when “people without a heritage who draw public assistance have overtaken [them].”<sup>120</sup> The bitter tone of quiet despair is visible in the story further, when the young cultural intruders, who are the new residents, i.e. the threatening children of strangers, violently enter the church hall where the ceremony is held, disrespect the parishioners and remorselessly invade their lives. When the two boys observe the old Polish people, “they stare at the face of Poland, whose age and civility mean nothing to them;”<sup>121</sup> and when the smirking teenagers pass the parishioners they do not look at them “but through [them] as though [they] count for nothing at all on this earth.”<sup>122</sup> Ralph Slipkowski reaches a conclusion that any representative of the Polish American group gathered in the school building could tell the children of strangers everything about the Polish history, describe the fierce battles with the enemies of the nation, elaborate on the redemptive power of Polish Catholicism and “the two intruders wouldn’t care.”<sup>123</sup>

For Josephine Slipkowski there is no hope for a better future, “no tomorrow, no ethnicity reinvented,”<sup>124</sup> as Thomas Gladsky reiterates. “How we’re losing,” the woman says to her husband. “Except for their years at Szkoła Wojciecha, what will distinguish the young [Polish Americans] who change their names and move away? Beyond St. Adalbert’s, what remains?”<sup>125</sup> Josephine despairs. The woman instinctively senses that “what’s coming will be worse,” she doubts whether she can survive and believes that “extinction might be better.”<sup>126</sup> The elderly couple is fully aware of the fact that the old ones have only faith that is left, “faith that has travelled far,”<sup>127</sup> the great spirituality, the dogged perseverance in Catholic loyalty which provides a continuity and gives the Polish Americans a sense of direction. It does not really matter how loud they can sing

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<sup>119</sup> Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 83.

<sup>120</sup> Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 83.

<sup>121</sup> Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 88.

<sup>122</sup> Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 89.

<sup>123</sup> Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 89.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 265.

<sup>125</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 86.

<sup>126</sup> Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 83.

<sup>127</sup> Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 85.

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“Joining Poland’s Sons and Daughters, We’ll be Poles Forever,” the growing realization is that their ethnic generation is coming to an end. Being afraid of the loss of memory and the general obliteration of Polish history and heritage, Ralph and Josephine Slipkowski come to understand that, in fact, their ethnicity resides “in the mirrors in the Polish homes and in the wrinkles of the old faces and in the eyes and deep within the memory.”<sup>128</sup>

In “Shadow Players,” Pete Dziezic, a toothless Vietnam war soldier who comes back home from the front, discovers that his father, once the polka music star in the Polish American community, is dying from polio. In order to sooth his father’s pain, Pete involves him in a childish game of making silhouettes with his hands and fingers on the beige wallpaper. At first, the young protagonist starts with some unsophisticated riddles, but, shortly before his father’s death, Pete frantically strives to show in the shifting light “the Polish flag, the white eagle symbolizing that nation, the words ‘*Pod Twoją Obronę Uciekamy Się.*’”<sup>129</sup> Despite the fact that Al’s son perceived himself as a failure because his girlfriend left him and even the wounds that he received during the war were not inflicted on him in the battlefield but during the infantile fight with a private, Pete understands he is everything to his father. Even though “[Pete’s] hands weren’t tough from work [because] in the past months he’s done little more than make outlines on a wall,”<sup>130</sup> he seems to be the one who perfectly understands how to approach his father and what to do in order to guarantee his peaceful passing away. It appears obvious that there exists the mutual trust and a strong father-son connection between the protagonists. “I think Dad knows what I’m trying to make,”<sup>131</sup> says Pete when he attempts to form Virgin Mary’s silhouette on the wall. Ultimately, Pete is the only one who knows exactly that his father saw the Holy Mother entering the shadows of the bedroom “to match his father’s suffering with Her

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<sup>128</sup> Bukoski, “Children of Strangers,” p. 89.

<sup>129</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The Shadow Players,” in: *North of the Port* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2008), p. 50.

<sup>130</sup> Bukoski, “The Shadow Players,” p. 51.

<sup>131</sup> Bukoski, “The Shadow Players,” p. 50.

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own.”<sup>132</sup> Catholic rituals performed at Dziezic’s bedside, Pete’s fascination with the reproduction of Madonna’s picture “with a paper label on the back reads ‘Made in Poland,’”<sup>133</sup> whose tragic history the young ethnic distinctly recalls, holy candles lit by Al’s bed, all serve as a trigger to ensure Pete who he is, to rekindle his ethnicity.

The presentation of ethnicity as a social construct constantly reinvented, or recreated, on the basis of Bukoski’s depiction of the culture of American Polonia is not limited, as it has been previously stated, only to the “symbolic gestures to the past or a reexamination of the self.”<sup>134</sup> Some of his stories feature stepping out of the ethnic boundaries, going beyond the Polish American community in Superior, and forming tenuous and firm ethnic, or racial bonds with the representatives of other ethnic groups. Thomas Gladsky defines it in terms of the “formation of new alliances and a reassessment of the old ones,”<sup>135</sup> while Anthony Bukoski in one of the interviews admits that by writing about the connections with other ethnic groups he attempts to “elevate us all and to bring us all together, at least within the world of these stories.”<sup>136</sup>

The Polish American characters, nevertheless, are always loyal to their own heritage and, as John Merchant posits, the union with other ethnic groups leads only to a positive alteration and the growth within the Superior Polish American community.<sup>137</sup>

In the short story “The River of the Flowering Bank” Bukoski depicts the friendship of two altar boys in the summer of the 1960s: the Polish American, Warren Slipkowski, and the Chippewa Indian, Gerald Bluebird. The plot of the story focuses on the union between Polish Americans and Native Americans via the presentation of a wedding and a funeral. When Warren, the narrator, describes Trudy Bluebird and Richard Bozinski’s marriage ceremony he discerns

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<sup>132</sup> Bukoski, “The Shadow Players,” p. 51.

<sup>133</sup> Bukoski, “The Shadow Players,” p. 49.

<sup>134</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 268.

<sup>135</sup> Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 269.

<sup>136</sup> Michael Longrie, “Replaying the Past: An Interview with Anthony Bukoski,” p. 29.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. John Merchant, “Recent Polish-American Fiction.” [http://www.ruf.rice.edu/sarmatia/198/merch\\_ant.html](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/sarmatia/198/merch_ant.html) (28 Jul. 2011)

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how “Polish people were hugging the Indians from Bad River and Lac du Flambeau [and was utterly amazed at what he observed claiming that he] had never seen anything like it.”<sup>138</sup> What seems interesting is the fact that the two youthful protagonists are not really aware of the cultural differences between them; they simply enjoy spending time together, hanging around the river or working free for the nuns. In a conversation between Warren and Gerald the narrator even claims that “[he] thought [they] were pretty much alike.”<sup>139</sup> Their friendship is tested when they become the witnesses of the desecration of a Native American burial site by some workmen who perform their duties for the State of Wisconsin clearing the way for the new development. The sight of the removal of the coffins of Native Americans and the act of placing them near the Catholic cemetery without proper respect forces Warren to ponder. The Polish American boy comes to understand the sacrilege in the following passage:

it wasn't fair for Gerald Bluebird because he was the Indian kid who served Mass at St. Adalbert's and he figured that made him the white man's Indian, but then he saw how the church treated people – Catholic or not. “Lookit [sic!] how they dug ‘em up out there on the Point and just threw them down anywhere! Where's the service? Where's anything... did anybody notice that?”<sup>140</sup>

Fortunately, “the unified ethnicity of ‘otherness’ is restored,”<sup>141</sup> as John Merchant observes, when courageous Father Nowak in a solemn ceremony incenses the graves of the Indians, strengthening the bonds between the two ethnic minorities and stating “we're your guests.”<sup>142</sup> The experienced priest passes his knowledge on the disoriented Warren and says:

[Warren has] got to look at things differently than how Sister Benitia at school or how the nuns teach [him] to look at the world.[...] We didn't

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<sup>138</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The River of the Flowering Banks,” in: *Children of Strangers* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993), p. 171.

<sup>139</sup> Bukoski, “The River of the Flowering Banks,” p. 177.

<sup>140</sup> Bukoski, “The River of the Flowering Banks,” p. 177.

<sup>141</sup> John Merchant, “Recent Polish-American Fiction.” <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/sarmatia/198/merchant.html> (28 Jul. 2011)

<sup>142</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “The River of the Flowering Banks,” p. 180.

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none of us discover America, not me, not the Sisters. Not me and you especially, [...] we're Polish.<sup>143</sup>

Ultimately, the familiarity and kinship between the Polish and Native Americans is achieved and reaffirmed. According to Gladsky, this story might be perceived as Bukoski's turning point in the presentation of ethnic consciousness because the author marks a shift toward an expanded understanding of ethnicity. Gladsky also argues that Bukoski, with "The River of the Flowering Banks" reaches "an awareness that all minorities are the 'bearers of something.'"<sup>144</sup>

Apart from depicting Polish American protagonists who establish meaningful relationships with Native American characters, Bukoski also occasionally portrays friendships of Polish Americans with Scandinavians. In the story "Antoni Kosmatka Resists the Goddess of Love" the protagonist enjoys himself in the company of Eric Erickson and his friends who organized a bachelor party for him at the Polish Club bar. There is also a clear instance of the author's interest in the sensitive Polish/Polish American – Jewish relations, in the story "The Pulaski Guards," the topic that has not been frequently touched upon by other Polish American authors. A similar theme is also developed in the short story "Time Between Trains," where the author presents the infatuation of a lonely Jewish train inspector, Joe Rubin, with the breathtaking garden of an equally solitary, and withdrawn from the society, Polish schoolteacher, Sofia Stepan. Joined by their loneliness the two cultural exiles realize that they have a lot in common, not only because of similar experiences in America, but mainly because "Jews and Poles had lived together for centuries."<sup>145</sup> This is the main reason why, as Sofia admits, "you become like the company you keep... *Zkim* [sic!] *przestajesz takim się stajesz*."<sup>146</sup> The final part of the tale, when the Polish

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<sup>143</sup> Bukoski, "The River of the Flowering Banks," p. 176.

<sup>144</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, p. 270.

<sup>145</sup> Bukoski, "Time Between Trains," in: *Time Between Trains* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2003), p. 29.

<sup>146</sup> Bukoski, "Time Between Trains," p. 26.

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widow welcomes warmly the Wandering Jew in her house, becomes “a symbolic reconciliation of a tragically thorny history of two peoples.”<sup>147</sup>

Not only are they the descendants of Poles and Jews culturally distant and filled with grief when they witness the dispersal of the Polish and Jewish communities, but first and foremost, they are human beings, who can help one another in misery.

Interestingly, apart from “The River of the Flowering Banks,” there are not many short stories in Bukoski’s literary production which would depict mixed marriages of, for instance, non Polish American males and Polish American women who would reexamine the models of ethnicity, or femininity, passed on them by their community. There are not many pictures of young ethnic women who would be torn between the mores of American society, i. e. the conflicting culture of their non Polish American lovers, and the gender roles proscribed to them by the Polish American cultural tradition. If the marriages, or love affairs, are portrayed in Bukoski’s short stories, they are usually preserved among the members of the Polish American community. When Bukoski presents liaisons and nocturnal escapades of teenage ethnics, even though they are not frequent, these are hidden forays of mostly Polish Americans, who are romantically involved and not ethnically mixed couples. A telling example of such a liaison can be found in “The North of Port,” where the author focuses on a budding relationship of an excessively insubordinate and dominated by her teenage urges Catherine Kalinowski, who has just entered the period of puberty, and the Polish sailor, Stanislaus Piotrowski. Contrary to Bukoski’s other literary Polish American young women who are taught to be passive and submissive to the male authority, like their mothers and grandmothers, Catherine constitutes a more rebellious character. Despite the fact that the two lovers from “The North of Port” manage to elope, they are eventually spotted, reported to the sheriff and, as a result, the girl is forced to reconcile with her parents. At the end of the story, when Catherine realizes her foul deed, she cries, but she sheds some tears not for

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<sup>147</sup> Lilian Vallee, “Articulating the Polish American Experience,” *the Sarmatian Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (2004). <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/904> (5 Aug. 2011)

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“*Dziadus*, [...] not for [her] parents, [but] for whispers, for faces in mirrors, for the soul in its golden coil.”<sup>148</sup> It seems that the girl has completely internalized the Church promoted ideal of womanhood which suggests obedience at home and respect of the religious orders. That is the reason why the only thing she can do is to perform her penance, i.e. to “turn up the light on the vanity [and] pray to the Black Madonna of Częstochowa.”<sup>149</sup>

In “Bird of Passage” Bukoski focuses on an obverse side of marriages/love affairs among Polish Americans. This is an inability to create a meaningful and stable relationship of a Polish American with a person who does not have any Polish connections and the persistent search for the Polish/Polish American partner, even though it leads to a character’s emotional disintegration. The author explores in the story the borders of anguish and comedy as the main character, a recently widowed Władek Czipanski, refuses to become romantically involved with a non Polish American woman and instead becomes addicted to a Polish-speaking phone sex line “*Erotyczny, Seks, Romantyczny.*” When Władek finally finds a new wife, Mr. Kosmatka’s niece, Ewa, to whom first he writes love letters, as she lives in Poland, and then manages to bring her to the United States, eventually it turns out that the manipulative 29-year-old woman uses Władek for money and American citizenship. The vulnerable widower cannot accept the fact that he is only being financially used by his new trophy wife. He avoids noticing her avariciousness and duplicity, and remains indifferent even when Ewa falls asleep in the act of consummation, murmuring the names of other men and waking only for a short period of time as Władek loses his false teeth.

Despite the fact that Bukoski’s stories are often wrongly called by critics as “stories in which nothing happens,”<sup>150</sup> the author makes his readers familiar with the variety of issues, which have been momentous for the American Polonia: the labour movement in America, the American policy towards the post Second World War Polish refugees in the United States, or the displacement of

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<sup>148</sup> Anthony Bukoski, “North of the Port,” p. 173.

<sup>149</sup> Bukoski, “North of the Port,” p. 176.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Lilian Vallee, “Articulating the Polish American Experience.” <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/904> (5 Aug. 2011)

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the Polish population from the state of Louisiana to the northern states. It seems pertinent to note, however, that Bukoski's characters exhibit little interest in contemporary Poland, its culture, political life, or press. There are some vague allusions in a limited number of Bukoski's literary works to the Solidarity movement, people waiting in queues for bread during the early 1980s (like in the story "Leokadia and Fireflies"), or NKVD and ZOMO (alluded to in "The Wood of Such Trees," when the teenage Polish American boy promises to his father that "[he] couldn't report [him] to ZOMO if [they] lived in Poland"<sup>151</sup>). Most of the protagonists, however, focus mainly on Poland's past and, as Lilian Vallee observes, they are shaped by what Bukoski does *not* explicitly write about, i.e. "historical upheaval, disruption, displacement."<sup>152</sup>

There is an overwhelming fear that, especially, the older representatives of the American Polonia in Bukoski's fiction are gripped by and become the victims of. The ingrained fear that "bleeds into successive generations so that a war or defeat or forced labor or internment are not over when they are over."<sup>153</sup> This fear that the characters experience results from the fact that their lives, as well as the lives of their ancestors, had been influenced by the powerful historical and economic forces. Therefore, the normal existence was always precarious, tentative, poverty-stricken; always perceived as "a temporary armistice,"<sup>154</sup> rather than a permanent state of peace. Hence, the hardworking, long-suffering Polish Americans in Bukoski's stories lean onto their heritage, Catholic faith and the cultural repositories, such as the parochial school, St. Adalbert's church, or polka bands. They find solace in their connectedness and their hearts still yearn for the better lives and dreams are waiting to be fulfilled even in grim surroundings.<sup>155</sup> However, what is even more significant, they discover in the ethnic culture they

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<sup>151</sup> Anthony Bukoski, "The Wood of Such Trees," p. 146.

<sup>152</sup> Lilian Vallee, "Articulating the Polish American Experience." <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/904> (5 Aug. 2011)

<sup>153</sup> Vallee, "Articulating the Polish American Experience."

<sup>154</sup> Vallee, "Articulating the Polish American Experience."

<sup>155</sup> Donley Watt, "Live and Yearn. A Review of "Time Between Trains,"" *The Dallas Morning News*, (October 5, 2003), p. 9G.

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create “sagacity and the redeeming power which sustains [their] lives.”<sup>156</sup> It is probably due to Bukoski’s ability to find lightness even in the darkest corners. The overall picture seems to be that Anthony Bukoski is believed to possess, as one of his reviewers noticed, a “fine aesthetic sense of the grim, downward spiral of the lives he chronicles, but such gloom is offset by the author’s artistry and evident compassion.”<sup>157</sup>

To recapitulate, nostalgia produces significant emotional distress, and most of the Polish American characters in Bukoski’s short stories are full of despair and grief. They harbor warm feelings for the home of their ancestors, Poland and their Polish cultural heritage, Polish customs, because they constitute the integral part of their identity. They also long for their adopted domicile – the decaying Polish American neighbourhood of Superior associated with the sense of rootedness and belonging. They adhere to the last vestiges of Polish culture in the United States, hear echoes of the Old Country in polonaise or polka music, and nostalgically recall their childhood spent in the Polish American neighbourhood in order to preserve the past.

While approaching the notion of ethnicity as a social construct constantly reinvented and recreated in Anthony Bukoski’s fiction, as well as analyzed on the basis of his depiction of the culture of the American Polonia, one may reach a conclusion that Bukoski’s literary Polish Americans move from an absolute acceptance of their ethnic origin, through a conscious construction, or rejuvenation of their ethnic selves, towards the expanded understanding of ethnicity, when they step beyond the ethnic boundaries and establish meaningful bonds with representatives of other ethnic groups. As it has already been mentioned, ethnicity in Bukoski’s short stories is firmly grounded in folk religiosity, family unity and the Polish American neighbourhood which supports the ethnic identity of its literary dwellers. Therefore, in order to gain the knowledge of themselves, to preserve, renew or reinvent their sense of self,

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<sup>156</sup> Thomas Napierkowski, „Polscy sąsiedzi. Proza Anthony’ego Bukoskiego,” p. 249.

<sup>157</sup> Robert Rees, “Hometown Author’s Tales of Superior Turn Out to be Just That. A Review of ‘Children of Strangers,’” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, (September 4, 1994).

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Bukoski's protagonists turn to the ethnic culture they have created in America and manage to find stability as well as meaning in their ethnic identity markers.

The American Polonia in Wisconsin belongs to one of the oldest Polish American communities in the United States<sup>158</sup> which still cultivates Polish traditions. In the last ten years in America there has been observed an increase of the number of heritage clubs, genealogy groups and dance groups.<sup>159</sup> The ethnic cultural identity of the descendants of Polish immigrants and their longing for Polish spirit is probably best expressed in Wisconsin, during the annual Polish Festivals organized in Milwaukee, with "Krakus Polish Ham Non-Stop Polka Stages,"<sup>160</sup> Polish cultural villages, folk art demonstrations or food and beverages, the so-called "nostalgic enactment of identity," i.e. "the import[ed] [Polish] vodka and mead tasting."<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> The first Polish settlement in Wisconsin was founded in 1858. Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880-1939* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. 22.

<sup>159</sup> Sophie Hodorowicz Knab, *Polish Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 2002), p. 17.

<sup>160</sup> <http://www.polishfest.org/culture.html> (30 Aug. 2006)

<sup>161</sup> <http://www.polishfest.org/culture.html> (30 Aug. 2006)

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## V. PAN GOWUMPE, BUSHA AND EDDIE KAPUSTA - POLISH AMERICANS IN STUART DYBEK'S FICTION AND HIS POLONIAN MAGICAL REALISM.

Thomas Gladsky affirms that there are as many as fifty writers of Polish descent who have, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, explored ethnicity with different degrees of commitment.<sup>1</sup> Stuart Dybek, a third-generation Polish American born in 1942, is among them. Dybek belongs to the group of first writers of Polish descent to receive national recognition, he was awarded multiple literary awards (Bernard Malamud Prize, a Whiting Writers' Award), he is a recipient of a lifetime achievement award from the Academy of Arts and Letters. Not only is Dybek a short story writer, honoured for his three collections of short stories published in 1980 (*Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*), 1990 (*Coast of Chicago*) and 2003 (*I Sailed with Magellan*) but he also produced a volume of poetry entitled *Brass Knuckles* and a new collection of poetry *Streets in Their Own Ink*. Critics sometimes label him as a regional "Chicago writer," a Windy City chronicler of the ethnic neighbourhood life, a social critic who supports those on the margin, a belated naturalist, even a postindustrial magical realist<sup>2</sup> and the author who "possesses a gift – a sorcerer's ability to commix the commonplace and the grotesque, a volatile stew spiced by an imagery that's hard to equal among contemporary writers."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he has been often compared with Nelson Algren, Theodore Dreiser, James T. Farrell, or Sherwood Anderson, admired for the depictions of industrial landscapes of "factories, railroad tracks, truck docks, industrial dumps, scrap yards, El trains, expressways, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas S. Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Carlo Rotella, *October Cities. The Redevelopment of Urban Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Los Angeles Times, a fragment of the review available on the cover of "I Sailed with Magellan" edition.

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drainage canal”<sup>4</sup> but usually reviewers tended to ignore and neglect the ethnic dimension in his writings.

Dybek<sup>5</sup> is a descendant of the old peasant immigration from the 1880s, he was raised on the southwest side of Chicago, in the area called Pilsen/Little Village, the neighbourhood populated mainly by working-class Poles, Czechs, and Hispanics which became the background for his Polish American “childhood-based” narratives with strong Eastern European influences.<sup>6</sup> When the author attempts to describe his real Chicago neighbourhood, which, as it has already been mentioned, he often refers to in his short stories and was immensely inspired by, Dybek admits that there existed two realities: the ordinary reality “made up by bread trucks delivering bread, people going to work or kids playing on the sidewalk”<sup>7</sup> and a different world to which one had an access by opening the door of the Catholic church or a tavern, the two landmarks present on almost every corner of the street:

In the tavern there was the smell of alcohol. People told stories and behaved in ways that they would never behave on the street. [...] By just entering the doors of the church you just seemed to enter the medieval ages. There was the smell of incense, and there were statues of saints and martyrs in grotesquely tortured positions.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Carlo Rotella, *October Cities. The Redevelopment of Urban Literature*, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> Dybek was born on April 10, 1942. His father, Stanley, was a foreman at the International Harvest plant, which manufactured trucks and farm implements; his mother, Adeline (to whom he dedicates his last collection of short stories), worked as a truck dispatcher. He attended Catholic schools throughout his childhood, entered Loyola University of Chicago being the first in his family who went to college. After graduation in 1964 he became a caseworker for the Cook County Department of Public Aid for two years but later he turned to teaching, first at an elementary school in the Chicago suburbs, then at a high school in the Virgin Islands. He firmly believed that he finally found “some kind of job that [he] felt he could do with a minimum of compromises and that did have a benevolent effect on people’s lives.” In 1973 Dybek received his M.F.A and has been teaching at Western Michigan University since 1974. (Don Lee, “About Stuart Dybek. A Profile,” *Ploughshares – The Literary Journal at Emerson College*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1998). <http://www.pshares.org/issues/article.cfm?prmArticleID=4466> (15 May 2007)

<sup>6</sup> Mike Nickel, Adrian Smith, “An Interview with Stuart Dybek,” *Chicago Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (1997), p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> Nickel, Smith, “An Interview with Stuart Dybek,” p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Nickel, Smith, “An Interview with Stuart Dybek,” p. 87.

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Such vivid images of the ethnic neighbourhood may be also found in the literary world of Dybek peopled by, on the one hand, the literary characters of elderly outsiders and underground men, social recluses and eccentrics who are mostly of Polish origin, and, on the other hand, young, streetwise, prying third generation Americans. These are usually teenage boys who wander the streets of Chicago looking for entertainment; listen to the jukebox, love the White Sox baseball team, and who “know little, if anything about Poland’s past or present, or the cultural nuances of the immigrant generation from which they are descended.”<sup>9</sup>

While *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* and *The Coast of Chicago* are the collections of rather loosely intertwined short stories, the final volume of the story trilogy, *I Sailed with Magellan*, consists of eleven narratives which concern mainly the ethnic neighborhood life and Chicago voyages of Perry Katzek. Although the main focus of the author is placed on Perry and his family, there is the whole group of neighbours with Polish sounding or Mexican names who appear in the collection. Despite the fact that the author is consciously trying to break chronology in *I Sailed with Magellan*, his stories form one unified unit and gravitate around the ethnic lives of his Polish Chicagoans. Dybek describes his last work as a ‘novel in stories,’ which seems for him more adequate as it “offers other ways to look at reality [...] [resulting in] a more crystalline, gemlike, faceted form.”<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of the fact that Stuart Dybek constitutes the “voice from within” the Polish American community, the Polish Americanness presented in his literary works is rather unobtrusive in comparison with the writings of Anthony Bukoski. On the one hand, Dybek seems to be more implicit in the presentation of ethnicity and the ethnic culture of the American Polonia, (i.e. Dybek is an ‘invisible’ writer – echoing, at this point, Gardaphé) but, on the other hand, a discerning eye would notice that his short stories are filled with the

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Ligon, Adam O’Connor Rodriguez, Dan J. Vice, Zachary Vineyard, “A Conversation with Stuart Dybek,” *Willow Springs Magazine*, Vol. 61 (2008), p. 98. <http://willowsprings.ewu.edu/interviews/dybek.pdf> (8 Jul. 2012)

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recurring signifiers of the culture of Americans of Polish descent. What is surprising, however, is the fact that, as Thomas Gladsky notices, “the more ‘Polish’ the characters are, the more bizarre Dybek’s short stories”<sup>11</sup> seem to be.

The protagonists of Dybek’s short stories bear the names such as Leon Sisca, Pan Gowumpe (Mr. Pigeon), Big Antek, Eddie Kapusta, Stefush, Kashka Marishka (a Polish diminutive for Catherine Mary), Katzek, Swantek, and Kozak. Additionally, one can encounter here the whole kaleidoscope of *dzia dzias* and *bushas* (a shorter version of “babusha” which stands for the Polish grandmother) who attend morning Catholic masses in St. Stanislaus’ church. The - often primitive and vulgar - Polish language that protagonists use on various occasions, or rather scraps of Polish words with English spelling, or rhyming expressions which Dybek inserts into the dialogues, for instance “Gimme dat *zupa zupa zupa*, kick in the *dupa dupa dupa*”<sup>12</sup> or “Good-bye, Dupa Yash and Nothing Head,”<sup>13</sup> may suggest that the Polish Americans portrayed in Dybek’s fiction are not the representatives of the usually educated post-war and more recent Solidarity immigration but that they are the members of the peasant immigration and its descendants. Although, surprisingly, Dybek does not often mention the immigrants’ ancestry and their nationality, nor does he present the hardships connected with immigrant assimilation, what emerges from the pages of his short stories, is the covered and masked ethnicity. Gladsky describes it in terms of the Polish culture which enters through back door, and succinctly comments that “Polishness [of literary Polish Americans] is rather cumulative, dependent partly on recurring signifiers and partly on the interconnectedness of the stories themselves.”<sup>14</sup> The ethnic culture of Dybek’s characters, likewise in Bukoski’s short stories, revolves around three major elements: Catholic religion, the ethnic neighbourhood and family ties.

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves*, p. 257.

<sup>12</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Blood Soup” in: *Childhood and Other Neighbourhoods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 49.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” p. 107.

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Stuart Dybek openly admits that apart from being influenced by the ethnic diversity of the place where he grew up and from which he derived great literary inspiration for writing, the person who became his “enormous teacher of emotion” was Julia Sala, his Polish grandmother on his mother’s side, who could hardly speak any English. In one of his interviews Dybek asserts that “she [the grandmother] has a lot to do with [his] attitude towards ethnicity”<sup>15</sup> and remarks that he valued her foreignness to such a degree because she constituted the opposite to everything he would consider “All-American.” Furthermore, she possessed, in Dybek’s view, the mysterious qualities, the entire aura of, what the author believed, was un-American. As a consequence, the foreign qualities of his grandmother and the fact that Dybek from the very early stages of his life was embedded in ethnicity made him “love ethnicity of any kind.”<sup>16</sup>

The grandmother or the grandfather figure plays a special role in Dybek’s fiction because the elderly ancestors help the younger protagonists to penetrate their own legacy and, thanks to them, the third generation ethnics constantly reshape their identity as they become aware of whom they really are. Grandparents give their teenage descendants some explanations of the cultural differences and they constitute the tangible memory of the unfamiliar past. *Dzia-dzia*, the protagonist of the short story “Chopin in Winter,” rediscovers his love for Chopin’s polonaise and Paderewski’s waltzes while listening to the piano lessons of his neighbor, Marcy Kubiak, and, being emotionally moved by the Polish music, teaches his grandson, Michael, something about his heritage. The grandfather tells the boy about Chopin’s death, the composer’s piano and friends, who managed to “remove [Chopin’s] heart and sen[d] it in a little jeweled box to be buried in Warsaw.”<sup>17</sup> With time, it occurs that the grandfather, who refused to communicate with the members of his family and, who had a habit of

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<sup>15</sup> James Plath, “An Interview with Stuart Dybek,” *The Cream City Review*, Vol.15, issue 1 (1991), pp. 1-13. <http://sun.iwu.edu/~jplath/dybek.html> (25 Jun. 2012)

<sup>16</sup> Janusz Zalewski, “Stulus – rozmowa ze Stuartem Dybkiem,” *Arcana*, Vol. 57 (3/2004), p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Chopin in Winter” in: *The Coast of Chicago* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1990), p. 24.

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disappearing without any warning, leaving all his responsibilities behind just to “suddenly show up out of nowhere [...] ragged and smelling of liquor,”<sup>18</sup> has established a meaningful communication with his grandson. *Dzia-dzia* feels fulfilled describing his offspring “the preludes, ballades or mazurkas,”<sup>19</sup> which sustained him in the New World. He also tells the teenager about his murderous winter walk from Cracow to Gdańsk, when he escaped service in the Prussian army, he mentions the demanding job of mining coal in Pennsylvania and working barges on the Great Lakes. All of the Old World anecdotes told by *dzia-dzia* are deeply absorbed by the grandson who, thanks to his grandfather, manages to avoid the dunce’s row at school, which was ran by the Catholic nuns, and corrects his grades. “Chopin in Winter” is a memory tale, therefore, the grandson, Michael, who is an adult now, recalls with a hint of nostalgia the childhood days spent with his grandfather and his attempts to hide “under the goose-feather-stuffed *piersyna* [sic].”<sup>20</sup> The most important thing, however, is the fact that by the presentation of the old man’s experiences, which he gained in the Old and New World, the grandfather figure “provides a cultural frame for the third generation, creating an image of what it means to be ethnic.”<sup>21</sup>

The grandson, belonging to the ethnic culture of Polish Americans, becomes a perfect example of the literary character, who embodies the cultural fusion. On the one hand, Michael seems to be firmly rooted in American culture, on the other hand, however, the Polish grandfather with his incessant talk “about the jumble of the past, [...] wars, revolutions, strikes, journeys to strange places, [...] and music, especially Chopin”<sup>22</sup> fascinates him and inspires Michael to deepen the knowledge about his ancestor’s past. The grandfather’s explanations of the cultural nuances and the boy’s reactions suggest, however, that the narrator knows more about the popular American culture rather than the Polish heritage.

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<sup>18</sup> Dybek, “Chopin in Winter,” p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Dybek, “Chopin in Winter,” p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Dybek, “Chopin in Winter,” p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” p. 107.

<sup>22</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Chopin in Winter,” p. 18.

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In the short story the grandfather affirms that Paderewski admired Chopin's accomplishment, but his grandson baffles him when he asks "Who's Paderewski? [Believing that] he might be one of *Dzia-Dzia's* old friends, maybe from Alaska."<sup>23</sup> The grandfather, nonetheless, realizes that the only possible way of providing an answer to such a question would be presenting the connection between their Polish and American culture, and hence, he responds:

'Do you know who's George Washington, who's Joe DiMaggio, who's Walt Disney?' 'Sure.' 'I thought so. Paderewski was like them, except he played Chopin. Understand? See, deep down inside, Lefty, you know more than you think.'<sup>24</sup>

Thomas Gladsky maintains that ethnicity for the Americans of Polish descent presented in Dybek's "Chopin in Winter" entails both: being familiar with Joe DiMaggio and Ignacy Jan Paderewski, as well as Disneyland and Cracow.<sup>25</sup> This might be the example of what Werner Sollors elaborates on at the very beginning of "Beyond Ethnicity," i.e. of how Americanness is achieved. The characters, as Sollors observes, are "socialized into the culture [...] [but they also] revitalize the culture at the same time."<sup>26</sup> They descend from diverse backgrounds but are consented to become Americans. It is the tension, as Gladsky also reminds referring again to Sollors, the cultural amalgamation, the conflict between what one obtains as an 'architect of one's fate' and what one inherits.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most powerful short stories which focuses on the presentation of family relations and depicts the redefinition of the legacy of ethnic's past through the grandmother figure is "Blood Soup." In the short story a young hero, Stefush, sets on a journey to find *czarnina*, a peasant soup made from duck's blood, since it is the only old-country remedy which would keep his dying

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<sup>23</sup> Dybek, "Chopin in Winter," p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Dybek, "Chopin in Winter," pp. 20-21.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Gladsky, "From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek," p. 107.

<sup>26</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Gladsky, "From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek," p. 107.

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grandmother alive. At the very beginning of the short story *Stefush*, the third generation Polish American, understands that finding *czarnina* is his priority because if his grandmother dies, “the world would be too unnatural without her.”<sup>28</sup> The unnamed narrator of the story comments:

Busha made him feel that secret he’d always felt between them, that in her seemingly unlimited power to love [all her grandchildren], she loved him specially. It was the kind of love he thought must have come from the Old Country – instinctive, unquestioning – like her strength, something foreign that he couldn’t find in himself, that hadn’t been transmitted to his mother or any of Busha’s other children.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from the instinctive and unquestioning grandmother’s love for *Stefush* that the grandson admires, there are some other typically ethnic qualities of the grandmother which render her exceptional and might be interpreted as markers of the Polish American ethnic culture.

Dybek, for instance, while describing the grandmother figure presents various allusions to Polish Catholicism and writes about “the holy pictures of Jesus and Mary [that gaze] down from over Busha’s bed with sorrowful eyes, [...] their flaming hearts crowned with thorns, pierced by swords and dripping blood.”<sup>30</sup> *Stefush* remembers being encouraged by the grandmother to kiss the icons on the walls and her fervent wish to “believe in them strongly enough [...] to pray for her.”<sup>31</sup> Dybek also mentions the Catholic practices of blessing someone by making the sign of the cross with the holy water although, as the grandson observes, “the evaporating holy water looked like urine with a cloud of residue at the bottom.”<sup>32</sup> It may not be left unnoticed, however, that were it not for the grandmother, the grandson would not be willing to discover his ancestry. While observing *busha* in her bed “clutching the crucifix,” the young protagonist fondly recalls the traditional Polish Easter tradition of blessing the food for breakfast

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<sup>28</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 27.

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and distinctly remembers his relatives gathering at busha's "with colored hard-boiled eggs, ham, kraut, *kielbasa*, [and] freshly grated horseradish."<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, it seems that Dybek skillfully manages to present here the connection between meals and growing up, which, as he highlights in a different short story entitled "Vigil," "gives food the power to summon back childhood."<sup>34</sup> Even though, at first, it may appear that Dybek, by the presentation of the traditionally Polish food prepared for Easter Sunday in "Blood Soup," attempts to emphasize the romantic notion of Polish heritage, (as food in Polish culture is sacred any time of year and the deliberate disposal of food is equal with a sacrilege) as well as the Polish love of *święconka*, it may not be true to admit that in this particular short story it was entirely Dybek's intention. It is mainly due to the fact that the author, surprisingly, alongside *święconka* mentions also busha's gruesome habit of keeping "two pickle jars of the [duck's] blood in the refrigerator, [...] and featherless duck heads on the lower shelf floating in a pot of clear water."<sup>35</sup>

Among the surface features of ethnicity presented in "Blood Soup" one may also notice rather frequent usage of Polish words (such as: *zupa*, *rozumiesz*, *kielbasa*, *usiadź*, *dupa*), which are incorporated in the text without any translation into English.

According to Thomas Gladsky the ethnic culture of Americans of Polish descent presented in Dybek's fiction is cumulative,<sup>36</sup> i.e. in order to clearly understand the ethnic dimension of one particular short story, one must search for some explanations in a different narrative, which provides the readers with some clarifications. For instance, as Gladsky asserts, "A Minor Mood" published several years later in *I Sailed With Magellan* can reveal some details concerning the

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<sup>33</sup> Dybek, "Blood Soup," p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Vigil," *The Atlantic Magazine*, Vol. 8 (2011). <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/08/vigil/8580/> (20 Jun. 2012)

<sup>35</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Blood Soup," p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Gladsky, "From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek," p. 107.

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unique features and abilities of the grandmother which the author touched upon in the before mentioned short story “Blood Soup.”

“A Minor Mood” portrays a third generation Polish American, Louis, who “peers in at the memory”<sup>37</sup> and recalls his grandmother as she nurtures him during his attacks of bronchitis (although in the short story the boy’s granny names his illness *the Krupa*; e.g. “you can bet your *dupa* you got *the Krupa*”<sup>38</sup>). The narrator evokes the memories of his grandmother who “twined her satiny babushka around his throat,”<sup>39</sup> prepared for him the medicinal drink including “stirred honey, [...] a splash of boiling water, [...] lemon juice, and last, but not least, a dash of whiskey – Jim Beam – which was the brand of choice for all [the] relatives,”<sup>40</sup> and then forced his grandson to “belt it down as if drinking a toast: *Na zdrowie, germs take this!*”<sup>41</sup> Despite the fact that Louis also keeps in his mind the images of his grandmother sipping whiskey straight from the bottle, singing in her Polish patois and dancing with him, he perceives these moments as the happiest minutes in his entire life. The narrative voice informs us:

Those were the mornings to be tucked away at the heart of life, so that later, whenever one needed to draw upon a recollection of joy in order to get through troubled times, it would be there, an assurance that once was happy and one could be happy again.<sup>42</sup>

Reliance on his grandmother as the source of strength in the moments of despair and seeking comfort in some aspects of the ethnic culture that the grandson and the grandmother were both engrossed in, become Louis’s effective remedy for his troubled soul. Having become an adult, the narrator finally comprehends that he is able to redirect nostalgia into the unremitting and potent source of strength and confesses that “memory is the channel by which the past conducts its

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<sup>37</sup> Stuart Dybek, “A Minor Mood,” in: *I Sailed With Magellan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 283.

<sup>38</sup> Dybek, “A Minor Mood,” p. 280.

<sup>39</sup> Dybek, “A Minor Mood,” p. 280.

<sup>40</sup> Dybek, “A Minor Mood,” p. 281.

<sup>41</sup> Dybek, “A Minor Mood,” p. 281.

<sup>42</sup> Dybek, “A Minor Mood,” p. 282.

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powerful energy; it's how the past continues to love."<sup>43</sup> In fact, it seems that for the third generation Polish American literary character it is necessary to remember the past in order to be able to shape one's own self anew being enriched with "the meaning abstracted from the past."<sup>44</sup> Gladsky defines it in terms of exploration of the ethnic past in order to find "the clues to the present altered state and to the future that awaits [him]."<sup>45</sup> Whereas Michael Fischer describes the same phenomenon as the "contemporary reinvention of ethnic identity through remembering."<sup>46</sup> What is more, Fischer posits that the sense of one's coherence is deeply rooted in a connection to the past and "the sense or struggle for a sense of ethnic identity is a re-invention and discovery of a vision."<sup>47</sup> In one of the interviews, when asked about the ability to conjure up images, sounds, and feelings from the past with meticulous precision, Dybek clarifies his line of thought and expounds that he is not merely composing the narratives about the past but he is writing about his present response to the past, i.e. he creates his literary works about "the power of the past in the present, and the participation of memory in [one's present life]."<sup>48</sup> In general, the ethnic past and memory become fundamental themes in Dybek's fiction and are strictly connected with the grandparent figures, who become the relics of the past. Grandparents, as the last remnants of the immigrant culture, are probably the only ones to interpret Polish traditions and customs for their ethnic grandchildren. As a result, *bushas*, *dżia-dżias* and other representatives of the first generation immigrants transform into the "voice of cultural memory."<sup>49</sup>

Ethnicity, religiosity, memory and a strong sense of place are elements firmly interwoven in Dybek's short stories. Having been named the writer of

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<sup>43</sup> Dybek, "A Minor Mood," p. 283.

<sup>44</sup> Michael M. J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory," in: *Writing Culture*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986), p. 196.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves*, p. 262.

<sup>46</sup> Michael M. J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory," p. 197.

<sup>47</sup> Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory," p. 196.

<sup>48</sup> James Plath, "An Interview with Stuart Dybek," pp. 1-13. <http://sun.iwu.edu/~jplath/dybek.html> (25 Jun. 2012)

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Gladsky, "From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek," p. 110.

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place, Dybek does not hide his strong sentiment for Pilsen, a place that was historically home of multiple immigrant families including his own, and the source of inspiration (“Little Village”, for instance, a short story printed in *I Sailed With Magellan* derives its title from the actual physical place<sup>50</sup> as it was the adjacent neighborhood to Pilsen). Dybek contends that his emotions towards both: family and place are unified and relegated to the same level. It is probably the main reason why the neighborhood in his literary works becomes personified and even turns into a part of the family.<sup>51</sup> Taking into consideration Dybek’s fascination with the area where he was raised and ethnicity in general, it is not surprising that most of his characters define their surroundings by means of referring not only to their physical neighborhood borders and El tracks, but mainly to the copper steeples of their parish churches, such as St. Kasimir’s, St. Adalbert’s, or St. Ann’s.

In the short story “The Wake,” Jill, the teenage protagonist, whose personal details as well as the cultural roundabouts remain unidentified, is heading towards Zeijek’s Funeral Home. As she is passing the truck docks she hears the tolling of the bells from St. Kasimir’s church and steps on the “viaduct [that] served as a natural boundary between her neighborhood and St. Ann’s, [which] was an old Slavic neighborhood that had become Spanish.”<sup>52</sup> Despite the fact that the plot of the short story does not concern the hardships of the immigrant experience, nor does it present the striking references to the Polish or Polish American culture, it may not be denied that the literary character is depicted within the ethnic landscape and conscious of the place to which she belongs. Jill observes the changes in her neighborhood resulting from the appearance of the Mexican people who seem to outnumber the Polish descendants turning in this way the territory into the ethnic enclave of Slavs and Hispanics. The narrator talks about

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<sup>50</sup> Zinta Aistars, “Talking to Stuart Dybek,” *The Smoking Poet Journal*, Vol. 18 (2011), p. 1. <http://thesmokingpoet.tripod.com/spring2011/id9.html> (30 Jun.2012)

<sup>51</sup> Aistars, “Talking to Stuart Dybek,” p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Stuart Dybek, “The Wake” in: *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 107.

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the older representatives of the Polish American community who decided to move out, mentions the altar boys who are now Mexican kids wearing “poor-looking gym shoes sticking out from black cassocks”<sup>53</sup> and alludes to “Father Wojtek, the pastor, [who] could say the service in five languages – Latin, Polish, Ukrainian, English, and Spanish.”<sup>54</sup> Whereas for Anthony Bukoski’s characters the transformation of the ethnic city landscape constitutes a shattering and damaging experience, it appears that for Dybek’s protagonists the demographic shifts are in the natural course of things and, for them, such phenomena simply have to be accepted.

Young ethnics in Dybek’s narratives are constantly on the move but wherever they go, they always seem to measure their position by finding the points of reference, which happen to be the ethnic markers. In other short stories the literary characters are either surrounded by some evidence of Polish American ethnic culture, or the ethnic markers of peasant immigrant culture of their grandparents.

In “The Apprentice”, for instance, Tadeusz and his Uncle arrange nocturnal escapades in their car and, trying to listen to the radio, they dial the radio stations “hunting [for] mazurkas among crackling static.”<sup>55</sup> The boys from “Blood Soup” see the birds “circling the copper green steeple of St. Kasimir’s”<sup>56</sup> as they are approaching the house of Pan Gowumpe; and the teenagers from “Blight” pass “the blue plastic shrine of the Virgin in the front yard of the Old Window”<sup>57</sup> when they roam around the neighbourhood searching for adventures. What is more, Mick, the protagonist from “Que Quieres?” who is constantly travelling, either in search of his beloved woman, or because he got used to living on

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<sup>53</sup> Dybek, “The Wake,” p. 107.

<sup>54</sup> Dybek, “The Wake,” p. 107.

<sup>55</sup> Stuart Dybek, “The Apprentice” in: *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 185.

<sup>56</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 32.

<sup>57</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Blight” in: *The Coast of Chicago* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1990), p. 55.

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Greyhound buses, is also marked by the compelling evidence of Polish American ethnic culture. Mick stops in Chicago with the intention to “travel back in time to visit [his father],”<sup>58</sup> who is about to undergo an exploratory surgery, and to rediscover “other shrines of memory.”<sup>59</sup> It is noteworthy; however, that the first move that Mick makes after reaching his old neighborhood is buying his father “a souvenir of Chicago – a kielbasa, [...] two long links of smoked Polish sausage from Slotkowski’s, which [...] was [their] father’s favourite butcher shop.”<sup>60</sup>

A similar approach to presenting the Polish Chicagoans and their friends with reference to the ethnic markers of the culture of American Polonia is also evident in “Hot Ice,” where Eddie Kapusta and Manny Santora decide to undertake a mission of visiting seven Catholic churches on Good Friday. As the characters “follow the invisible trail”<sup>61</sup> first from St. Roman’s to St. Michael’s, situated in an Italian neighborhood, so as to proceed to St. Casimir’s, St. Anne’s, as well as St. Puis’s and, finally, reach St. Adalbert’s. The narrator explains:

at first they merely entered and left immediately, as if touching base, but their familiarity with small rituals quickly returned: dipping their fingers in the holy water font by the door, making the automatic sign of cross as they passed the life-size crucified Christs that hung in the vestibules where old women and school kids clustered to kiss the spikes in the bronze or bloody plaster feet.<sup>62</sup>

It seems that it was Manny, a teenage Mexican American, who became more involved in the Catholic mystical practices associated with Easter time. The boy kneels at the altar, “stand[s] among lines of parishioners waiting to kiss relics the priest wipe[s] repeatedly clean with a rag of silk;”<sup>63</sup> and enthusiastically participates in the ‘station of the cross’ procession. Eddie, on the contrary, is

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<sup>58</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Que Quieres?” in: *I Sailed With Magellan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 248.

<sup>59</sup> Dybek, “Que Quieres?,” p. 248.

<sup>60</sup> Dybek, “Que Quieres?,” p. 249.

<sup>61</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Hot Ice” in *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 152.

<sup>62</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 153.

<sup>63</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 153.

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more ignorant of the Catholic religious customs and, because of that, appears to be at distance from his cultural roots. The protagonist sits in the back pew, pretends to pray, and, finally, being lulled by the chanting of litanies in Polish, he takes a nap hiding behind the dark glasses. Even though most of the physical traces of ethnic Polish American culture have been removed from the neighborhood and there are only a few remnants of the past left, like the church buildings and the twenty-sixth street bus – the Polish Zephyr, Eddie realizes that only old, praying women had endured and, now, they are tormented by “a common pain of loss [that] seemed to burn at the core of their lives.”<sup>64</sup> Having visited the seven neighborhood churches, Eddie, being a young ethnic, attempts to understand what constitutes the source of their mourning and tries to give the feeling a proper name. Kapusta claims that “he would have given up long ago, [and] in a way he had given up, [but] the ache left behind couldn’t be called grief.”<sup>65</sup> Eventually, the protagonist concludes, echoing at the same time Stefush from “Blood Soup,” that “the hymns, with their ancient, keening melodies and mysterious words, had brought the feeling back [...] but it eluded him as always, leaving in its place nostalgia and triggered nerves.”<sup>66</sup> As a result, Eddie who has been taciturn so far in expressing his interest in the ethnic culture of Polish Americans, suddenly becomes aware of the mysterious loss that he senses “almost from the start of memory”<sup>67</sup> and turns into an example of the protagonist for whom “the church represents the mystery of old world culture – of Polishness itself.”<sup>68</sup> The rituals of Eastern European Catholicism, thus, bring Eddie comfort as he finds them as something soothing and familiar in the changing and evaporating neighborhood but, simultaneously, the same powerful Catholic mysteries give rise to his mounting anxiety and “leave [him] crashing.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 154.

<sup>65</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 155.

<sup>66</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 155.

<sup>67</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 155.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” p. 108.

<sup>69</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 155.

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The sense of loss that Eddie cannot fully define is also the common overwhelming feeling for some, if not most, Dybek's Polish American characters. The narrator of "Nighthawks" in the last section entitled "The River" also experiences "an ache for something he couldn't name but knew was missing."<sup>70</sup> Whereas Michael from "Chopin in Winter" is conscious of the silence that remains after grandfather's death and Marcy's disappearing, although it is "not an ordinary silence of absence and emptiness, but a pure silence beyond daydream and memory, as intense as the music it replaced, which [...] had the power to change whoever listened."<sup>71</sup> A similar sensation troubles Perry Katzek from "Blue Boy" who defines it in terms of "the recollection of an old feeling from the neighbourhood"<sup>72</sup> which he has not named yet, but becomes acutely and painfully aware of it especially at his father's funeral. Not only does Perry have to become reconciled with his father's loss but also with the disappearance of the only existing link to answer the vital questions about "a past [he] knew so little about."<sup>73</sup>

One of the short stories which espouses Dybek's assertion that place is a source of memory and, at the same time, proves that the place is a contributing factor to the reinvention of one's ethnicity is "Sauerkraut Soup." Frank Marzek, once a rebellious student of the Holy Angels High School, returns to his neighborhood and visits the Polish restaurant in order to taste the soup of his youthful days. The homemade *zupa*, as he calls it, is "an antidote" and provides him with a temporary reprieve from the moments when he feels "teetering between futures"<sup>74</sup> and when the protagonist becomes aware of death. As an adult, Frank often daydreams he could go back to the shabby restaurant with the

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<sup>70</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Nighthawks" in: *The Coast of Chicago* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1990), p. 112.

<sup>71</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Chopin in Winter," p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Blue Boy" in: *I Sailed With Magellan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 157.

<sup>73</sup> Dybek, "Blue Boy," p. 159.

<sup>74</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Sauerkraut Soup" in: *The Coast of Chicago* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1990), p. 132.

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neon lights blinking on the awning because the mysterious sauerkraut soup had the power to create “certain mystical connection to these things.”<sup>75</sup> Never does the narrator define what “these things” are, but one may assume that the author alludes at this point to the things which are irreversible, to the immigrant culture that is fading away, to “disconnected glimpses of [Polish American] roots.”<sup>76</sup> In spite of everything, the literary character of “Sauerkraut Soup” firmly believes that the Eastern European immigrants he used to work with “knew something they were hiding.”<sup>77</sup> As Frank explains talking about the sauerkraut soup:

I was never happier than in the next two years after I'd eaten those [two] bowls of soup. Perhaps I was receiving a year of happiness per bowl. [...] I could have ordered more, maybe enough for years, for a lifetime perhaps, but I thought I'd better stop while I was feeling good.<sup>78</sup>

In no way can the protagonists of Dybek be perceived as similar to the literary characters drawn, for instance, in Anthony Bukoski's narratives. While Bukoski depicts his Americans of Polish descent as the mourners over the transformation of the city and the deaths of the representatives of older generations, or the desperate lovers of the past and Polishness, polka lovers who approach the music with a frenzy akin to religious devotion and elderly but rather healthy protagonists, Dybek offers drastically different images of the Polish Americans.

By taking a closer look, the readers may notice that very few of the Polish Americans, if any, are three-dimensional “normals,” using Gladsky's vocabulary.<sup>79</sup> Most of the immigrant Poles or their descendants may be described as grotesques living in a distorted landscape. What is more, it seems that the majority of Dybek's characters have acquiesced to the constructions of themselves as diseased, deformed or even mentally unstable.

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<sup>75</sup> Dybek, “Sauerkraut Soup,” p. 138.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves*, p. 260.

<sup>77</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Sauerkraut Soup,” p. 138.

<sup>78</sup> Dybek, “Sauerkraut Soup,” p. 138.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves*, p. 258.

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Stefush, the literary character from “Blood Soup,” who is struggling to obtain the old world soup for his dying *busha* meets Pan Gowumpe (“Mr. Pigeon” in English), the “grunting, lip-farting, pantomiming tremendous explosions”<sup>80</sup> madman who prepares the soup, raises pigeons and “sometimes sleeps on the roof with them.”<sup>81</sup> Pan Gowumpe, as the narrator notices, is lying in his room “staring blankly at the ceiling [while] the floor is spread with newspapers splotted by bird droppings and weighed down with bricks.”<sup>82</sup> Apart from the descriptions of the dirt and disorder of his crumbling tenement, the image of the elderly Pole itself poses questions whether he is a flesh and blood human being or in fact one of the birds he dwells with. Gowumpe calls himself a DP – a displaced person who knows how to be hungry, and confesses that if in need, “he would drink some blood, eat garbage or dog food” behaving more like an animal than as an ordinary human being.

Dybek also portrays Kashka Marishka, the character from “Live from Dreamsville,” who befriends various demented winos in the neighbourhood and lives with her husband Janush, who “miss[es] half his teeth.”<sup>83</sup> To the joy of the neighbourhood children, Kashka often surrenders to the bodily pleasures and has sex with her husband stirring up in this way teenagers’ imagination because they can only hear Kashka and Jano’s deafening groans and moans. What is more, Dybek definitely draws readers’ attention to the exaggerated physical features of the woman turning her into a typical grotesque character. The narrator describes Kashka as follows:

[a woman] built like a squat sumo wrestler. She had the heaviest upper arms [...], rolls of flab wider than most people’s thighs, folding like sleeves over her elbows. She didn’t have titties, she had watermelons.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 44.

<sup>81</sup> Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 30.

<sup>82</sup> Dybek, “Blood Soup,” p. 42.

<sup>83</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Live from Dreamsville” in: *I Sailed With Magellan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 26.

<sup>84</sup> Dybek, “Live from Dreamsville,” p. 26.

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The Polish American woman also appears in “Que Quieres” where she is depicted as a deranged inhabitant of the neighborhood who keeps chickens even though it is illegal and experiences the acute agony, “curses in English and Polish, weeps,[...] screams and fights the cops, while a bulldozer mowed down her crooked home-run fence.”<sup>85</sup>

Sometimes the descendants of Polish immigrants are presented as immoral and ill made, like in a short story “The Cat Woman,” where Old Buzka and her crazy grandson Swantek, a brawling drunk who “got crazier as she got older,”<sup>86</sup> both drown unwanted neighbourhood cats in their washing machine. Swantek also appears in “Sauerkraut Soup” and here he is described as a twelve-year old boy, who “was more psychotic than any other person”<sup>87</sup> from the whole neighborhood. It seems that Dybek constantly shows mental and physical deformations of his protagonists’ bodies, especially those bodies which belong to the descendants of Poles. For instance, the Cat Woman wears her cardboard-soled house slippers over “her bandaged, swollen feet and creeps through her house, fingering rosary,”<sup>88</sup> Swantek has the habit of “vomiting up cabbage in the corners and covering it with newspapers,”<sup>89</sup> and sometimes is seen “crouching naked by the chimney on the peak of his roof,”<sup>90</sup> while the immigrant workers in the ice factory are “Slavs missing parts of hands and arms that had been chewed off while trying to clean machines that hadn’t been properly disconnected.”<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Uncle, the character from “The Apprentice,” manifests the whole collection of animalistic features as he produces groans he is not even aware of. The narrator reveals that the man “carries on conversations with himself in

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<sup>85</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Que Quieres?,” p. 268.

<sup>86</sup> Stuart Dybek, “The Cat Woman,” p. 22.

<sup>87</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Sauerkraut Soup,” p. 132.

<sup>88</sup> Stuart Dybek, “The Cat Woman,” p. 24.

<sup>89</sup> Dybek, “The Cat Woman,” p. 24.

<sup>90</sup> Dybek, “The Cat Woman,” p. 22.

<sup>91</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Sauerkraut Soup,” p. 128.

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strange languages, slurp[s] soup, smack[s] lips, belch[es], fart[s], puff[s], snork[s] [and] stomp[s].”<sup>92</sup>

A similarly weird image of the Polish descendant whose body exhibits some conditions of malformation is offered in another short story entitled “Chopin in Winter.” Here, the protagonist - *Dżia-Dżia*, who is “tenderly” called by his wife *Pan Djabel* (Mr. Devil), possesses soles which are constantly “swollen nearly shapeless and cased in scaly calluses.”<sup>93</sup> The narrator adds that his “nails, yellow as a horse’s teeth, grew gnarled from knobbed toes, [and] white tufts of hair sprout from his ears.”<sup>94</sup> Finally, it is revealed that the grandfather had his legs frozen because of his debilitating and prostrating winter walk from Cracow to Gdansk, and later he had frozen them again while mining in Alaska.

It appears that the more one sinks into the literary world of Dybek’s neighbourhood, the more preposterous and whimsical, not to say horrifying, images of the Polish Americans come into view. These are not simply alienated individuals who accidentally appear to be of Polish descent, but in fact in Dybek’s narratives there is a great number of Polish American literary characters afflicted with the most unusual kinds of illnesses, people who are morally suspect or even associated with social pathology. The narrator of a short story “Blue Boy” discerns that, next to the Hispanics, the most visible and simultaneously the most invisible of all minorities are the Polish American cripples, bearers of disease and deformity clannishly residing with the Czechs in the literary neighbourhood. Dybek expresses their physical condition in the following passage:

A procession of the disabled from the parish emerged from the alley. A couple of World War II vets, mainstays from the bar and the VFW club, one with a prosthetic hook and the other with no discernible wound other than the alcoholic staggers. [...] It was a parade of at most a dozen, but it seemed larger – enough of a showing so that onlookers could imagine the

<sup>92</sup> Stuart Dybek, “The Apprentice” in: *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 181.

<sup>93</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Chopin in Winter,” p. 10.

<sup>94</sup> Dybek, “Chopin in Winter,” p. 12.

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battalions of wounded soldiers who weren't there, and the victims of accidents, industrial and otherwise, the survivors of polio and strokes, all the exiles who avoided the streets, who avoided the baptism of being street-named after their afflictions, recluses who kept their suffering behind doors, women like Maria Savoy, who'd been lighting a water heater when it exploded, or Agnes Lutensky, who remained cloistered years after her brother blew off half her face with a shotgun during an argument over a will. [...] With their canes, crutches, and the wheelchair, it looked more like a pilgrimage to Lourdes than a parade.<sup>95</sup>

It does not matter whether Dybek describes the elderly members or the younger representatives of the Polish American community because regardless of their age almost all of them reveal symptoms of some undiagnosed ailments, or are marked by some abnormalities. The central character of "Blue Boy," Ralphie Poskozim, was born a blue baby, "his body was covered with bruises, as if he was sucking on a ballpoint pen and his fingers were smeared with the same blue ink,"<sup>96</sup> but to everyone's astonishment he dies on *Gwiazdka*, the Christmas Eve not being able to attend his first Holy Communion. Dybek's protagonists include also Cyril Bombrowski with a metal plate in his head; Denny Zmiga who tortures cats; the woman who performs ritualistic fainting always at 11:15 mass in a Polish church; Michael the Wild *Goral* who "worked at his teeth with a pair of pliers, trying to pull the stubs out of his bloody gums so he wouldn't have to pay a dentist"<sup>97</sup> and eventually he ended in a state mental hospital; not to forget about the neighbourhood drunk who loses his senses. Dybek writes:

[the neighbourhood drunk] would do something crazy like wrapping himself up in the funniest section of the Sunday paper and going to sleep in the middle of California Avenue during rush hour. [...] Another time the hook and ladder had to come and get him down the high-voltage wires at the top of an electric pole where he'd spent the day drinking, swearing, and spitting down on whoever stopped below.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Blue Boy," p. 132.

<sup>96</sup> Dybek, "Blue Boy," p. 123.

<sup>97</sup> Dybek, "Blue Boy," p. 155.

<sup>98</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Neighborhood Drunk" in: *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 56.

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Furthermore, in a short story “Hot Ice” the readers may encounter Big Antek, the local wino, who had been a butcher but “drunkenly kept hacking off pieces of his hands, and finally quit completely to become a full-time alky.”<sup>99</sup> Big Antek leads his friends to an abandoned ice house where years earlier a grieving immigrant entombed his drowned daughter and during one of his intermittent bouts of drinking he had a vision of the dead girl. In the same narrative Dybek also mentions the Polish sounding names of the most legendary prisoners of the local jail. Among them one can find Milo Hermanski, “who had stabbed some guy in the eye,”<sup>100</sup> and “Ziggy [Zillinsky]’s uncle, [...] who one day blew off the side of Ziggy’s mother’s face while she stood ironing her slip during an argument over a will.”<sup>101</sup>

In “The Apprentice” young Tadeusz (sometimes referred to as *Dupush* or Josef) and his uncle spend nights driving the motorway and collecting remains of dead animals because the older protagonist has a gift of “rebuilding them;” he stuffs and sells them in his local taxidermy shop. In short, all of the characters of Dybek’s short stories who are of Polish origin are distorted, unpleasant and bizarre loners or eccentrics; their ethnicity contributes and increases their strangeness.

In the light of the above, it might seem that all the literary images of the descendants of Polish immigrants in America are the perfect examples of what June Dwyer calls “the catalogues of negative attributes describing the immigrant body.”<sup>102</sup> Dwyer conducts an analysis of the stories written by the Jewish immigrant writer, Anzia Yeziarska, and the third-generation Irish immigrant, Mary Gordon; she proves that both of them appear preoccupied with the effects of nativist sentiment on the immigrant body. What she concludes, however, is the fact that “immigrant body in America is [depicted as] unhealthy – unable and

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<sup>99</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 126.

<sup>100</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 133.

<sup>101</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 133.

<sup>102</sup> June Dwyer, “Disease, Deformity and Defiance: Writing the Language of Immigration Law and the Eugenics Movement on the Immigrant Body,” *Melus*, Vol. 28, No. 1, (spring 2003), p. 106.

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unfit to move into the established American society”<sup>103</sup> and “the official language of the law (alluding to the American immigration statutes, pseudo-science of eugenics and immigration law restrictions<sup>104</sup>) influenced the way immigrants saw themselves.”<sup>105</sup> According to Dwyer, the discomfort of immigrants with themselves is an important strain in their literature and even the literary works which touch the topic of immigration and which were produced at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century constitute the “testimony that the aura of disease, deviance, and deformity around immigrants did not diffuse easily.”<sup>106</sup> Therefore, it might be stated, Stuart Dybek’s short stories with their distorted images of the descendants of Polish immigrants also fit into this literary trend. It is not known, however, whether Dybek’s literary characters possess a sense of inferiority because of the fact that they are the descendants of immigrants in general or because of their Polish roots. What is striking is their physical and, in some cases, mental distortion.

While depicting Polish Americans, Dybek sheds some light upon their ethnic Polish American culture and, according to Thomas Gladsky, he relies mostly on names, words and surface features to establish an ethnic landscape.<sup>107</sup> In a short story “Blood Soup” the author depicts the interior of the house with vials of holy water and holy pictures; in “Neighborhood Drunk” Dybek skillfully describes “golden tiers of vigil candles burning under the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa”<sup>108</sup> and he frequently refers to elderly women from the Old World attending morning requiem masses, “wearing babushkas and dressed in black

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<sup>103</sup> Dwyer, “Disease, Deformity and Defiance...,” p. 116.

<sup>104</sup> Dwyer states that the eugenics movement advocated social engineering, its proponents wanted to better society through the latest application of scientific knowledge, they were able to prove that heredity played a key role in sprawling social pathologies, disease and immoral actions therefore immigrants became easy targets of professional and amateur advocates of this “science.” The author also quotes a statute from 1917 which posed restrictions on the admittance of immigrants to the US according to which the entry was not allowed to “idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded persons, epileptics, insane persons.” Dwyer, “Disease, Deformity and Defiance...,” p. 108

<sup>105</sup> Dwyer, “Disease, Deformity and Defiance...,” p. 120.

<sup>106</sup> Dwyer, “Disease, Deformity and Defiance...,” p. 111.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” p. 107.

<sup>108</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Neighborhood Drunk,” p. 56.

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[even in summer] like a sodality of widows, droning endless mournful litanies before the side altar of the Black Virgin.”<sup>109</sup> Apart from the occasional references to Easter practices of boiling eggs, eating ham and *kielbasa* in “Blood Soup” and “Que Quieres,” Dybek also elaborates on other ethnic meals and customs. In a funeral scene depicted in “Blue Boy,” Dybek alludes to drinking silent toasts of *wisniowka* to the memory of the narrator’s father and enumerates his father’s favourite delicacies, ethnically marked products which include: “*pierogi* and borscht, jars of herring, garlic dills, horseradish, kraut and smoked *kielbasa*.”<sup>110</sup> In “Je Reviens” the author presents the funeral ceremony of Uncle Lefty who is to be buried in the family plot in St. Adalbert’s Cemetery, often named as “the Old Polack Burial Ground,”<sup>111</sup> and then proceeds to the description of the *stypa* ceremony. The narrator of the story informs that after the service at the graveside the participants of the funeral would visit the “White Eagle Restaurant [...] for a huge spread of chicken, roast beef, *kielbasa*, kraut, *pierogi*, mashed potatoes, cucumbers in sour cream, and [...] platters of *kolacky* [presumably referring to the Polish pastry *kolaczek*].”<sup>112</sup>

Catholic religion becomes the central pillar in Dybek’s expression of Polish American ethnic culture in his fiction. Actually, religiosity seems to be so pervasive and ubiquitous in Dybek’s literary world that it is impossible to define what Polish Americanness is, or what it means to achieve Americanness for the young ethnics, without mentioning Catholicism. The author frequently refers to Eastern European Catholic practices and describes childhood experiences in parochial schools, or refers to some Old World religious rituals. However, in Gladsky’s view:

Catholicism in these stories is as suspect [...] as the eccentrics who roam the streets. [...] The religion of the church has become a cross almost too heavy

<sup>109</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Chopin in Winter,” p. 32.

<sup>110</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Blue Boy,” p. 157.

<sup>111</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Je Reviens” in: *I Sailed With Magellan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 296.

<sup>112</sup> Dybek, “Je Reviens,” p. 296.

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to bear, the specter of unpleasant memories, a creature of habit although not necessarily of comfort, a sign of culture unable to transfer its values to the present.<sup>113</sup>

In the opening story from "Childhood and Other Neighbourhoods," the Palatski Man ("palatski" being a slightly changed version of the Polish word *placki* - pancakes), is an exotic street vendor who sells crisp wafers stuck together with honey, which taste "like the Eucharist."<sup>114</sup> The narrator of the story reveals that the old peddler belongs to the group of ragmen and other impoverished cultural outsiders inhabiting the urban dumping ground. The Palatski Man, however, performs a more profound function because he reenacts mysteriously the Easter passion and turns himself into a priest who leads the procession of the rag pickers accompanied by the "mournful, foreign melody of a dilapidated accordion."<sup>115</sup> It seems that his characterization, together with that of his ragged colleagues increases their strangeness and alienation from the Polish culture, represented by the word "palatski." The whole scene which definitely carries some religious significance is observed by the sixth grade student, Mary, and her brother, John, who have followed the mysterious Palatski Man and tried to keep themselves out of sight. Eventually, when the children are caught red handed, they become involved in the highly exuberant ceremony of sharing the tiny bits of a giant *palatski* with the homeless rag pickers.

The initial children's fascination with the peddler, who spoke a foreign language and sold communion like wafers, first turns to horror, and then to a feeling of disgust resulting in the youngsters' decision to erase from their memory the mind-boggling meeting with the Palatski Man. Consequently, the protagonists attempt to dispose of the tangible proof of their forbidden escapade; that is the white ribbon, which is given to the girl by the Palatski Man as a present. The

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<sup>113</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves*, p. 259.

<sup>114</sup> Stuart Dybek, "The Palatski Man," in: *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> Dybek, "The Palatski Man," p. 16.

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teenagers throw it over the railing into the river although Mary “had an impulse to clench her fist”<sup>116</sup> and initially did not let the ribbon be taken away from her. At night, however, when Mary was drifting to sleep and was trying to say the nightly prayer, she had “a half dream that she woke out of with a faint recollection of Gabriel’s wings.”<sup>117</sup> Then, being in a dreamlike state and approaching the window, the girl sees the Palatski Man again, standing in front of her house and offering her some wafers.

No matter how hard the young protagonists want to forget about and separate from their religious background, as well as the rituals, which they often barely understand, it is impossible for them to achieve it. Their memories, visions or dreams that gain the religious importance always strike back with a double force leaving the ethnics with an inexplicable and sharpened feeling of awe, fear, or disbelief. Taking into consideration the religious dimension of the narrative, “The Palatski Man” might be also perceived as one of the short stories where Dybek presents the third generation characters, who are striving to come to accept and embrace the religion of descent.

For Dybek’s characters being an ethnic or, more precisely, being a Polish American means being a Catholic with a deeper or less passionate commitment. It is due to the fact that there is a fundamental difference between the perception, or attitude towards religion of the third generation Polish Americans, and the Catholic devotion of the literary representatives of the old, peasant immigration.

Young protagonists in “Neighborhood Drunk,” for instance, observe ladies murmuring the rosaries in front of the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa; in “Hot Ice” children hear old women ignoring the new liturgy and chanting litanies in Polish, and later see them walking on their knees up the marble aisle to kiss the relics. Nevertheless, even though the descendants of Poles participate in the

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<sup>116</sup> Dybek, “The Palatski Man,” p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> Dybek, “The Palatski Man,” p. 19.

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world of the church, the youthful literary characters perceive its rituals with a dose of skepticism.

In the before mentioned story, for instance, Eddie Kapusta and Manny Santora blame Catholic education for their best friend's sudden insanity and imprisonment. Pancho, Kapusta and Santora's companion, used to be a pious Mexican American teenager who believed in the guardian angel, saints and served as a humble altar boy secretly dreaming about becoming a priest. Eddie even recalls the times when the Mexican American boy "dressed in his surplice and cassock [and] looked as if he should be beatified himself, a young St. Sebastian or Juan de la Cruz."<sup>118</sup> Despite the fact that Pancho's fascination with Catholicism bordered with obsession, as the young ethnic covered himself with crosses dangling from his earlobes, tattooed on the arms, or attached to the necklace, he firmly believed in "miracles happening everywhere [but] everybody's afraid to admit it."<sup>119</sup> However, when Pancho resolves to earn for a living by posing for holy cards (choosing, as the narrator observes, St. Joseph as "his specialty") and eagerly announces his decision in court, Eddie and Manny unanimously affirm that "it was that nuns-and-priests crap that messed up his head, [...] if they [would have] let him be an altar boy all his life he'd still be happy."<sup>120</sup>

Taking into consideration the fact that Dybek often portrays Catholicism of the descendants of Poles in the form of their experiences in parochial schools, visits in church and Christmas, or Easter practices, it is probably not hard to account for the fact that Dybek's short stories are filled with the protagonists who are nuns or priests. In Dybek's literary world one may encounter Father Mike, Father O'Donnell, Father Kumbaya, Sister Mary Valentine, or Sister Lucy. Although in the majority of short stories the author presents the mystique of Polish Catholicism, and describes teenagers' enchantment with the church interiors, i.e. the statues in niches, the glow from the vigil lamps, and the enormous crucifixes

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<sup>118</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Hot Ice," p. 126.

<sup>119</sup> Dybek, "Hot Ice," p. 129.

<sup>120</sup> Dybek, "Hot Ice," p. 135.

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hanging over the altar, Dybek also draws his readers' attention to the obverse side of Catholic devotion. Under the veil of godliness that the Polish American characters expose, like the practices of lightening the ruby candles, as well as chanting prayers to the Blessed Virgin, Dybek also reports the incidents of cruel behaviour on the part of the clergy. In "Visions of Budhardin" the narrator mentions about the penance imposed by the priest, who forced the reckless ethnic to "wait until no one was looking, then to put his finger in the flame of one of the vigil candles and hold it there a moment"<sup>121</sup> contemplating the foul deeds that he performed. In "Sauerkraut Soup" the narrator reminiscences his parochial school days and confesses that the nuns had a bizarre and repulsive habit of sprinkling "floor compound on vomit whenever someone got sick in class [and, as a result, now] vomit fill[s] [the protagonist's] thoughts and memories."<sup>122</sup> What is more, in "Que Quieres" Mick is reported to be sharing intimate moments with a nun, Sister Claudia, and eventually he is caught in the very act although, as it is explained later, the woman was in the process of leaving her order. There is also Sister Monica who has an outburst of agitation in front of her pupils and, consequently, is forced to resign from her teaching assignment.

Nowhere is the skepticism towards Catholicism of the third generation ethnics more visible, however, than in the short story "Sauerkraut Soup" where young Franklin Marzek comments upon his Catholic education. Marzek is one of the protagonists who questions the demands of his Catholic faith and does not follow the religious doctrines imposed on him. Franklin arrives at an astonishing conclusion that it is obligatory to develop the principle of "the Double Reverse, [that is to] suspect what they teach you [and] study what they condemn."<sup>123</sup> As a matter of fact, Marzek's growing dissatisfaction is even voiced in the story further when the protagonist declares that his menial summer job in the ice factory altered his way of thinking more in one summer rather than his entire education.

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<sup>121</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Visions of Budhardin" in: *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 76.

<sup>122</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Sauerkraut Soup," p. 125.

<sup>123</sup> Dybek, "Sauerkraut Soup," p. 127.

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According to Gladsky, the before mentioned example is a proof that the teenage protagonists are inimical to the culture of their ancestors and, if Catholicism stands for ethnicity, they are not going to approve of it or support it.<sup>124</sup>

A similar attitude to Catholicism is expressed in the short story "The Woman Who Fainted" where the narrator, presumably an ethnic, declares that the only driving force which makes him participate in Catholic masses is a youthful allurements with a fainting woman, whose presence makes the service bearable. Additionally, his attendance is dictated by the fear that "his family [might] feel that, yet again, they'd failed to pass on something they believed was essential."<sup>125</sup>

The narrative voice says:

I had attended too many masses. I was bored and had come to resent the suffering, death, and even more, the fear underlying religion. To be free of the fear, it seemed necessary to be free of the faith.<sup>126</sup>

Despite the arousing distrust and the increasing suspicion of the Polish descendants towards the practices and teachings of the Catholic Church, it would be a foregone and tentative conclusion to admit that religion does not play a significant role in shaping their cultural identity and reinvention of their ethnicity. Catholicism is ingrained and rooted in the experience of Dybek's Polish Americans; they are not able to escape their religious background since it is "an indelible feature of their identity."<sup>127</sup> To the adolescent protagonists, the church represents the secret of the old world culture, and as Gladsky notices, the mystery of Polishness itself. Youngsters in Dybek's fiction feel the pull of Catholicism because religion, together with its aura of mysticism, offers them some familiarity. Elderly inhabitants of the neighbourhood, on the other hand, find in religious practices some comfort and stability, especially when they are gradually

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. Thomas Gladsky, "From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek," p. 107.

<sup>125</sup> Stuart Dybek, "The Woman Who Fainted" in: *The Coast of Chicago* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1990) p. 120.

<sup>126</sup> Dybek, "The Woman Who Fainted," p. 120.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves*, p. 259.

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becoming the witnesses of the demise of Polish American ethnic enclave and they cling to their grandchildren, hoping they would continue to preserve their legacy and rituals.

Some of the portrayed third generation Polish Americans become successful at it: Eddie Kapusta, the previously mentioned character of "Hot Ice," who visits seven churches on Good Friday; Michael from "Chopin in Winter;" the teenagers from "Blood Soup," or Ziggy Zilinsky, the central character of "Blight," who had the apocalyptic visions of winking saints, saw ghosts muttering in Polish, possessed the ability to communicate with angels, and was the one "the Blessed Mother used to smile at."<sup>128</sup> Some other literary characters neither become the paragons of piety nor do they express some interest in the cultivation of the culture of their descendants. This ambivalent attitude to Catholicism in Dybek's literary world which suggests, on the one hand the rejection but, on the other hand, the irresistible attraction to faith and religious rituals might also be interpreted in a different way. Gladsky, for instance, alludes to the assumption that, because of the Polish history and other potent factors, (which have already been discussed in great detail in the first chapter of the present dissertation) Catholicism is inseparably and historically connected with nationalism. In the light of the above, it might be implied that the literary characters who refuse to embrace Catholicism reject in this way the national (i.e. Polish) identity.<sup>129</sup> These characters are caught in the moment of cultural transformation, they are on their way to achieve Americanness, their selves are being formed constantly anew and, as Gladsky insists, they "simultaneously acquire and reject a cultural past."<sup>130</sup>

If Catholicism belongs to this cultural past and cultural baggage, so does the Polish language, which, except for a few short stories mentioned earlier, is not frequently used by the Polish descendants in Dybek's fiction. As a matter of fact, for the younger Polish American literary characters the knowledge and a good

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<sup>128</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Blight," p. 66.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Thomas Gladsky, "From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek," p. 109.

<sup>130</sup> Gladsky, "From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek," p. 110.

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command of Polish are not as significant as the ability to create meaningful relationships with other Americans/representatives of ethnic minorities. A telling example of such an attitude is depicted in “Hot Ice” where Eddie confesses that “Manny could be talking Spanish and [he] could be talking Polish [but] it didn’t matter.”<sup>131</sup> What mattered were: the unity, solidarity and companionship among friends; finding the common language, residing in a place devoid of some language barriers because the mutual understanding is of a higher importance. As Eddie describes:

What meant something was sitting at the table together, wrecked together, still awake watching the rainy light spatter the window, walking out again, to the Prague bakery for bismarcks, past people under dripping umbrellas on their way to church.<sup>132</sup>

The majority of Dybek’s literary characters do not perceive the language of their grandparents as the sign of inferiority, although Mick, the character from “Live from Dreamsville,” in the moment of anger urges his brother not to “ush” him (which stands for attaching the suffix ‘ush’ to his first name, thereby creating the ‘Polish’ diminutive form ‘Mickush’). Seldom do the protagonists use Polish as a helpful tool they can turn to in order to communicate with the elderly members of their ethnic enclave. The third generation literary characters are familiar with several Polish words which, for the English speaking readers, add some local colour to Dybek’s fiction and make the characters more grotesque, but the younger protagonists perceive the language of their ancestors as another, quite important element to become familiar with when one lives in the ethnic (especially Polish American) neighbourhood. Polish language is somewhat placed on par with other languages of American ethnic minorities and quite often used for purely practical reasons. Mick from “Que Quieres,” for instance, besides Polish speaks “a bit of German, Cambodian, Italian, French, Portuguese, Haitian

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<sup>131</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 151.

<sup>132</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 151.

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Creole, [Spanish], Chinese,”<sup>133</sup> and explains that in the places he has been employed English was always a second language.

It has already been noticed that the ethnic culture is the element as well as the emanation of ethnicity. Ethnicity, however, as Michael Fischer thoroughly discusses, is not static but dynamic, and thereby depicted in the literary works of Stuart Dybek. In this context, Thomas Gladsky comments upon the ethnic culture presented in Dybek’s short stories and concludes:

[it is] a new understanding of ethnicity that is based not on national origins but on a shared sense of ethnicity as a condition of Americanness. Dybek’s protagonists aren’t Poles; they are not even Polish-American by traditional definition. They have paradoxically, reinvented and reinterpreted themselves.<sup>134</sup>

This “shared sense of ethnicity as a condition of Americanness”<sup>135</sup> is perfectly reflected in Dybek’s short stories which touch upon the question of the relations between Mexican Americans and Polish Americans, for instance in “Blight,” “Hot Ice,” or “The Palatski Man.” One should remember at this point that Dybek, likewise Bukoski, apart from the presentation of the lives of Polish Americans and their descendants, focuses also on the demographic changes which took place in the Slavic neighbourhoods in the 1950s and 1960s as the Polish ethnic enclaves were flooded, first, by the immigrants of Hispanic descent, and then overtaken by the blacks. Out of the mists of the literary postindustrial city with its mixed neighbourhood of ethnic minorities, emerged the strong and lasting friendships among Dybek’s young literary characters, for example: Stanley ‘Stashu/Pepper’ Rosado (whose mother was Polish and father of Mexican descent), Eddie ‘Eduardo’ Kapusta, David (the descendant of Poles) and Ziggy Zilinski, the leading protagonists of “Blight.” The new contacts that are established between the Mexican Americans and Polish Americans lead to a

<sup>133</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Que Quieres,” p. 259.

<sup>134</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” p. 111.

<sup>135</sup> Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism,” p. 111.

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fusion and the creation of new forms rather than to a decline of the ethnic culture of the Polish descendants. As the active participants in American cultural life, the teenagers encounter with the cultural and literary opportunities of the decade. The youngsters admire the Beatniks; they are under the spell of Jack Kerouac's "On the Road;" they become infatuated with Screamin' Jay Hawkins's songs and attend the blues-shout contests, which eventually become the inspiration for forming their own band called 'No Names.' When the friends "spend the days of longing without cares, of nothing to do but lie on the sand,"<sup>136</sup> they truly enjoy each other's company. All of them chant the melodies to "Tequila," or listen to Frank Sinatra's master hits and enthuse themselves with the White Sox games. It seems that David identifies himself more with the culture of his Mexican friends rather with the culture of his descendants. He decides, for instance, to wear "the neck strap for [his] saxophone sort of in the same way that the Mexican guys in the neighborhood wore gold chains,"<sup>137</sup> orders a Coco-Nana and a cold *cerveza* in one of the famous pubs in the area which is called "Carta Blanca," and chooses a "CuCuRuCuCu Paloma" song instead of "She's-Too-Fat Polka." What is more, Eddie Kapusta, likewise David, succumbs to a strong fascination with Spanish language in "Hot Ice." The teenager sings in Spanish "La Bamba" and, despite the fact that he is not really conscious of what the lyrics of the song convey, he deduces that the song "sounded good."<sup>138</sup> Eddie also accompanies Manny and eagerly hollers *Padrecite*, as well as *buenas noches* in front of the prison building attempting, thereby, to contact with their captive friend. Additionally, the young descendant of Poles expresses his great admiration for the Spanish word "juilota" (pigeon) and states that he "[does not] remember any words like that in Polish, which his grandma

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<sup>136</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Blight," p. 45.

<sup>137</sup> Dybek, "Blight," p. 56.

<sup>138</sup> Stuart Dybek, "Hot Ice," p. 136.

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had spoken to him when he was little,”<sup>139</sup> but he is sure that in the past he used to know them.

In fact, Dybek has a tendency to pair his ethnic literary characters probably in order to emphasize the union that exists in his fiction between the Hispanic and Slavic protagonists. Apart from the already mentioned teenagers of “Blight,” there are also Eddie Kapusta (who reappears in other short stories), Manny Santora and Pancho in “Hot Ice,” Camille Estrada and Perry Katzek in “Blue Boy, as well as Ray Cruz and John in “The Palatski Man.” For Dybek’s young ethnic spokespersons their ethnic cultures often overlap and, as Gladsky aptly observes, “[who] they are does not really matter in terms of history, language [and] geography.”<sup>140</sup> That is the reason why, for example, Mick and Perry, the protagonists of “Que Quieres,” “roll *pastellas* which possess the intense smell of *gowumpki* [prepared by their mother] except that instead of a cabbage leaf, the filling was wrapped in a banana leaf,”<sup>141</sup> and the characters of “Blight” listen to the jukeboxes which “[are] filled up with polka [...] and with Mexican songs that sound suspiciously like polkas.”<sup>142</sup> It may be stated that for some protagonists of Stuart Dybek the traditional ethnic barriers have disappeared and they accept and embrace “the other” as their own. In this context, Eddie Kapusta, Perry and Mick might be the most adequate examples, as well as the grandmother, who appears in “Pet Milk” and listens to a plastic radio “usually tuned to the polka station, though sometimes she’d miss it [...] and get the Greek station instead, or the Spanish, or the Ukrainian.”<sup>143</sup>

The ethnic fusion that Dybek presents in some narratives is also reflected by, as Carlo Rotella insists, the “musical metaphors [...] across the permeable

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<sup>139</sup> Dybek, “Hot Ice,” p. 136.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” p. 111.

<sup>141</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Que Quieres,” pp. 265-266.

<sup>142</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Blight,” p. 68.

<sup>143</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Pet Milk” in: *The Coast of Chicago* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1990), p. 168.

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boundaries of [the] the urban world in flux.”<sup>144</sup> The teenagers from “Blight,” for instance, are joined together by blues and rock and roll music; they adore both: polka and Hispanic music notwithstanding their ethnic divisions; and feel some mystical connection with the gang of black children, who appear at the end of the viaduct and “[stand] harmonizing from bass through falsetto”<sup>145</sup> at the same time being applauded by Eddie and his friends (even though Kapusta and his companions, as the narrator sharply emphasizes, stayed on their side and the blacks remained on theirs).

Despite the fact that Dybek aims in his fiction at the presentation of ethnicity that transcends the national origins, postindustrial urban space, or cultural practices and becomes successful at depicting “a multi-layered and multi-dimensional ethnic self,”<sup>146</sup> it may not be forgotten that some of his portrayals of Hispanic – Slavic relations are far from being lighthearted. The new alliances are not always easy, as Stashu/Pepper Rosado concludes in “Blight” (referring at this point to his parents’ Polish – Mexican marriage) and claims that he knows it from his own experience because he dwells with his parents, the representatives of “two main nationalities in the neighborhood together in one house.”<sup>147</sup> The short story “Que Quieres” is probably the most illustrating example in this respect and strikingly resembles Anthony Bukoski’s sorrowful narrative “Children of Strangers.” The main body of the short story consists of flashbacks in which the readers discover how events have brought the literary characters to the circumstances in which the narrative begins. While in Bukoski’s short story the teenage intruders, the ‘children of strangers’ as Bukoski describes them, enter the gymnasium of the Polish school and violently interrupt the ceremony honouring the old Polish American nun, in “Que Quieres” the situation is converse. Dybek depicts in the story Mick and Perry Katzek, who want to visit their old Polish neighbourhood and are stopped by the Mexican American

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<sup>144</sup> Carlo Rotella, *October Cities. The Redevelopment of Urban Literature*, p. 111.

<sup>145</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Blight,” p. 48.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” p. 112.

<sup>147</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Blight,” p. 47.

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teenagers, the members of the Disciples gang, who guard the entrance to their new ethnic enclave and keep asking the Polish descendants the same question: *Que tu quieres?* (What do you want?). Being constantly provoked to fight with the Chicano adolescents, the Polish American ethnics try to explain to them the motives of their arrival knowing, at the same time, that their attempts are futile because it is impossible to retell one's own experiences and poignant memories giving them a meaningful response just in one sentence. When Mick and Perry start using Spanish to ease the hostility and, finally, are allowed to stand on the patch of earth that belonged to their family Mick concludes:

I see the shadows familiar enough to be recognized by their smell, the smell of a past that sometimes seems more real than the present, a childhood in which degrees of reality were never a consideration, when reality and a sense of identity that went with it were taken for granted.<sup>148</sup>

Mick realizes that he is tormented by the ethnic anxiety that results from his suspension between the world of his immigrant parents and the world of multiple possibilities offered by the American reality. Thus the issue is expounded as follows:

Mick was the one who seemed to feel foreign – foreign in the church and Catholic schools we went to as children; foreign in Memphis, Tennessee; foreign in the face of My-Country-Right-or-Wrong and the government that jailed him for refusing to fight a war he believed was a crime against humanity.<sup>149</sup>

The visit in the neighbourhood was supposed to help the young ethnic to regain some stability in his life and provide him with a sense of place that he seeks for, nevertheless, the encounter with the Mexican Americans makes him only realize that “the unquestioned conviction as to who they are is the advantage the

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<sup>148</sup> Stuart Dybek, “Que Quieres,” p. 272.

<sup>149</sup> Dybek, “Que Quieres,” p. 267.

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Disciples on the front steps have over him.”<sup>150</sup> Being uncertain about who he is and where he belongs, Mick is constantly disturbed by the questions concerning his own identity. In the final paragraphs of the story he finally reaches a conclusion that becoming an American requires the acceptance of fear that turns into an integral part of one’s existence and it is “familiar fear- the fear by which you know you’re home.”<sup>151</sup> Additionally, when the narrator senses the purposeless of his life, he realizes that it is not worth looking back, “stop[ping]for traffic, red lights, [...] stop[ping] for shrines or kneel[ing] beside the pauper’s gravestone where your name is inscribed in the Seaside Cemetery.”<sup>152</sup> The gnawing sense of uprootedness is also accentuated in the final statement of “Que Quieres” when Mick leaves the readers with the mysterious assumption that the only thing he truly wants is to “change smoke into a perfume of gardenias.”<sup>153</sup>

While exploring the ethnic culture of his literary Polish Americans, Dybek offers in his fiction the examples of ethnicity that goes beyond the national origins even though his narratives are firmly grounded in the Polish American Chicago. What makes Dybek’s treatment of Polish Americans special, however, is the placement of his characters in the context of immigrant experience but, simultaneously, the presentation of his teenage protagonists striving for the cultural fusion, or, in other words, aiming at the “experience, history, and ethnicity crossbreed.”<sup>154</sup> Dybek’s desire to present “the Polish self [that] is undergoing deepseated change”<sup>155</sup> might be also well reflected by the mottos that Dybek always included in his collections of the short stories; maxims and dedications written successively in Polish, English and Spanish as if providing his readers with a harbinger of the before mentioned cultural fusion that the author in his fiction reflects.

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<sup>150</sup> Dybek, “Que Quieres,” p. 272.

<sup>151</sup> Dybek, “Que Quieres,” p. 275.

<sup>152</sup> Dybek, “Que Quieres,” p. 275.

<sup>153</sup> Dybek, “Que Quieres,” p. 275.

<sup>154</sup> Thomas Gladsky, “From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek,” p. 112.

<sup>155</sup> Thomas Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves*, p. 262.

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One of the tools which helps Dybek to emphasize the reinvention of the selves of his Polish American literary characters and allows the author to reflect ethnicity that steps beyond the ethnic, cultural and geographical borders is blurring the boundary between the real and the magical. For this reason Dybek's literary works are different from the realist writings of other Chicago authors. What is more, Dybek himself is often described as more of the magical realist whose literary godparents might well include Latin American writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, or Alejo Carpentier.<sup>156</sup> Some scholars openly notice that, indeed, there are many elements in Dybek's fiction which render him similar to the before mentioned Latin American authors. For instance, the arrangement of Dybek's stories does not reflect a linear narrative and "seems to spiral outward [...] in ways that feel fluid and organic rather than planned"<sup>157</sup> resulting in the dreamlike quality of his fiction. Other reviewers assert that Dybek possesses the unique ability to mix contrasting elements like Catholicism and adolescent eroticism, the magic of childhood and violence; and such a mixture Dybek firmly grounds in the Polish American neighborhood with its own ethnic customs and traditions.<sup>158</sup> When being asked to shed some light upon the main subjects of his stories in the interview for the "Chicago Review" the author himself confesses that his intention as a writer is to search in the narratives "the doorways in which somebody leaves ordinary reality and enters some kind of extraordinary reality"<sup>159</sup> and childhood is one of those gateways. Dybek clarifies his opinion further in a different interview and draws his readers' attention to the fact that he belongs to a different breed of magical realists. Taking heed of the fact that the unique reality behind Dybek's stories is something of its own particular kind, Janusz Zalewski ventures to make a statement that Stuart Dybek is not only a magical realist but he can also be

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. Carlo Rotella, *October Cities*, p. 112.

<sup>157</sup> Samuel Ligon, Adam O'Connor Rodriguez, Dan J. Vice, Zachary Vineyard, "A Conversation with Stuart Dybek," *Willow Springs Magazine*, p. 96. <http://willowsprings.ewu.edu/interviews/dybek.pdf> (8 Jul. 2012)

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Janusz Zalewski, "Stulus – rozmowa ze Stuartem Dybkiem," p. 60.

<sup>159</sup> Mike Nickel, Adrian Smith, "An Interview with Stuart Dybek," p. 87.

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classified as the first Polonian magical realist. Consequently, Dybek's Polish American fictional characters may be labelled as the purveyors of *polonizm magiczny*.<sup>160</sup>

To be sure, Dybek attempts to present Polish American ethnic culture and the uniqueness of Polish Americans. He captures the flavour of this particular ethnic group, as he perceives it, thus his vision of the American Polonia is one sided. He stresses their mental and physical inferiority leaving the readers with a negative image of the American Pole who is stupid, ugly, repulsive, deformed, lost and disappointed with himself/herself. In this Dybek resembles another Chicago writer Nelson Algren. It seems that Dybek's fiction lacks many positive characters of Polish descent and, therefore, he appears to be prejudiced against Polish Americans, although he is one of them.

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<sup>160</sup> Cf: Janusz Zalewski, "Stulus – rozmowa ze Stuartem Dybkiem," p. 60.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present dissertation constitutes the study of the fiction of Anthony Bukoski and Stuart Dybek and examines the ethnic culture of Polish Americans and their descendants as reflected in the literary works of these two contemporary American writers of Polish origin. Being aware of the fluid nature of the discipline in question as ethnicity and its literary reincarnations touch upon “long embraced and naturalized concepts from sociology, anthropology, political studies [and] history”<sup>1</sup> the author presents critical approaches to reading ethnic American literature so as to share Fred L. Gardaphé’s method of reading literary works written by American authors of ethnic descent, as well as to rely on Michael Fischer’s concept of ethnicity as a social construct constantly reinvented and recreated in short stories written by Bukoski and Dybek.

Since Polish American literature is usually left out of most reference publications or anthologies, and little valuable criticism is available, the first chapter includes the brief presentation of the literary history of Polish American penmen and attempts to highlight some of the most significant literary works created by Polish immigrant writers in the United States and American authors of Polish descent. Taking into consideration the fact that such an endeavour seems to be considerably bold, problems do occur at the outset and are connected with defining the Polonian writer and Polish American literature itself. Some remarks upon English language and non-English language Polish American literature are provided and a great emphasis is put on the presentation of some promising, contemporary literary voices, which have recently appeared on the Polish American literary scene.

The purpose of the second chapter is to shed some light upon the Polish American ethnic culture, the emergence of the American Polonia, which

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<sup>1</sup> Jelena Sesnić, *From Shadow to Presence: Representations of Ethnicity in Contemporary American literature* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 61.

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underwent numerous demographic, economic, political, social as well as cultural changes, and the processes of assimilation of Polish immigrants in the United States. Starting with the explanation of the basic concepts, (such as ‘Polish-Americans,’ “Polish Americans” and “Americans of Polish extraction”) through the presentation of Posern-Zieliński’s sociological findings on the formation of ethnic culture of Polish Americans and its different stages induced by the assimilation processes, the chapter ends with some comments on the maintenance of ethnicity of the Polish immigrants and their descendants. Since assimilation has been a complicated and complex process the present chapter also includes the brief analysis of three different sociological trends/mutations which reveal the heterogeneity of Polish American ethnic culture.

In the course of deliberations presented in the second chapter, the next part of the dissertation is devoted to the presentation of some features of the ethnic culture of the American Polonia, relying heavily on the insights provided by the sociologists and examiners of Polish American ethnic culture such as Paul Wrobel, Deborah Anders Silvermann, Irwin Sanders, Ewa Morawska, Helena Znanięcka-Łopata, James Pula, William Thomas, Florian Znanięcki and others. In order to throw a considerable light on the ethnic culture of Polish Americans depicted in the literary works of the third-generation American authors of Polish descent, it has seemed justifiable to consider the significance of Roman Catholic religion (as Polish immigrants “fanned their religiousness via ethnicity and vice versa”<sup>2</sup>) and family (“the defining characteristic feature of the Polish group in America”<sup>3</sup>), i.e. Polish national religious tradition and strong family ties, which have had a lasting impact on the formation and the character of the ethnic culture under consideration.

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Leś, „Życie religijne Polonii amerykańskiej” in: *Polonia amerykańska: przeszłość i współczesność*, eds. Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz, Tadeusz Gromada, Gromada (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1988), p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> Irwin T. Sanders, Ewa T. Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research* (Boston: Community Sociology Training Program, Department of Sociology, Boston University, Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1975), p. 139.

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Taking into account Gardaphé's notions of visibility and invisibility the analyses of the depiction of the ethnic culture of Polish Americans in Bukoski's and Dybek's fiction show that, as it has been indicated in the introductory section of the present dissertation, neither of these contemporary American writers of Polish descent "totally transcends his ethnic background to melt invisibly into American culture."<sup>4</sup> However, both of these third-generation American authors of Polish origin approach the notions of ethnicity and ethnic culture in their short stories in a different way.

Anthony Bukoski's short stories are "more explicit in their [Polish Americanness]"<sup>5</sup> and his literary characters constitute distinctly Polish American subjects. Thus, Bukoski can aptly fit into Gardaphé's notion of "visible" ethnic authors. Despite the fact that Bukoski's Polish American protagonists are immersed in nostalgia, which produces significant emotional distress, they harbor warm feelings not only for Poland, the land of their ancestors, but also for the Polish cultural heritage, and their adopted domicile – the decaying Polish American neighbourhood of Superior associated with the sense of rootedness and belonging. Bukoski's Polish Americans seem to be the descendants of Polish peasant immigrants from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, and they firmly adhere to the last vestiges of their ethnic culture in the literary Superior. They hear echoes of the Old Country in polonaise or polka music, find solace in family unity and folk, highly emotional religiosity believing that God responds to their pleas; they also strive to become the members of the Kościuszko Club, or are engrossed in "culinary nostalgia" while eating *bigos* and *pierogi*. While approaching the notion of ethnicity as a social construct that is constantly reinvented, one may reach a conclusion that Bukoski's literary characters reinvent their selves by stepping beyond the ethnic boundaries and establishing meaningful bonds with the representatives of other

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<sup>4</sup> Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets. The Evolution of Italian American Narrative* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 154.

<sup>5</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 122.

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ethnic groups, e.g. Native Americans and the descendants of Jews. The redefinition and reinvention of their ethnicity is also visible when Bukoski's protagonists turn to the ethnic culture they have created in America, or to their ethnic identity markers in order to find stability and meaning.

While Anthony Bukoski overtly depicts the ethnic culture of his literary Polish American community, Stuart Dybek "choose[s] to avoid representation of the [Polish American] as a major subject"<sup>6</sup> in his fiction and "relegate[s] visible signs of [his literary characters'] ethnicity to the margins or under the surface."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Dybek can be referred to as the "invisible" ethnic writer. As a matter of fact, Dybek's short stories are pervaded with the recurring signifiers of the ethnic culture of Polish Americans and the more "Polish" his characters are, the more grotesque and uncanny his short stories seem to be. Most of the images of his Polish American protagonists are blatantly negative; the characters possess a sense of inferiority and, in most cases, are afflicted with the most unusual kinds of ailments. Even though Roman Catholic religion becomes the central pillar in Dybek's expression of the Polish American ethnic culture, his characters' fascination with Catholicism often borders with obsession. Family ties are not as significant as bonds of friendship, especially the comradeship between Mexican American boys and the descendants of Poles. Furthermore, while exploring the ethnic culture of Polish Americans, Dybek offers in his short stories the images of teenage protagonists that strive for the cultural and ethnic fusion. What seems interesting to notice, however, is the fact that the reinvention of the selves of his Polish Americans and the depiction of ethnicity that transgresses the national boundaries is reflected in Dybek's fiction not only via his characters' ambivalent attitude to Catholicism and their cultural past, but also via blurring the boundary between the real and the magical.

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<sup>6</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 153.

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Following Werner Sollors's statement that "works of ethnic literature [...] may be read not only as expressions of mediation between cultures but also as handbooks of socialization into [...] Americanness"<sup>8</sup> one may claim that Bukoski's and Dybek's literary works are the perfect examples of the presentation of "achieving Americanness."<sup>9</sup> Bukoski's and Dybek's Polish Americans are caught in the moment of cultural transformation and their selves are being formed constantly anew. To recapitulate, Bukoski's and Dybek's short stories present important but often neglected voices of the Americans of Polish descent in the making of multiethnic America.

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<sup>8</sup> Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 7.

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## POLISH IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

**1608** – the first documented Polish presence in America. The Polish group consisted of workers who specialized in the production of glass and established the first glass works in Jamestown, Virginia.<sup>1</sup>

**1659** – Alexander Carolosus Curtius (Kurczewski), a Polish Lithuanian, established the first Latin School in New Amsterdam, which would become New York State.<sup>2</sup>

**1775 – 1783** – the American Revolutionary War. The evidence shows that some eminent Poles, such as Kazimierz Kościuszko, Kazimierz Pułaski, Feliks Miklaszewicz and Maurycy Beniowski were involved in the American War of Independence.<sup>3</sup>

**1783 – 1861** – the period of time prior to the American Civil War witnessed a surge of mainly political-economic immigrations following the ill-fated Polish Uprisings against the Russian rule: the November Uprising in 1830-1831, and the January Uprising in 1863. According to James Pula, after 1830 two thousand political exiles played a crucial role in the beginning of Polish settlement in America. Their advent as a group contributed to the establishment of a permanent presence of Polish Americans in New York City.<sup>4</sup>

**1820 – 1880** the period of “old immigration,” which embraced mainly the Northwestern Europeans including the British, the Irish, and the Germans.<sup>5</sup>

**1835** – Polish November Uprising immigrants were given the land grant and dreamt about creating the settlement “New Poland” in the state of Illinois,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf: Wiesław Fijałkowski, *Polacy i ich potomkowie w historii Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1978), pp. 11 – 15.

<sup>2</sup> Cf: Fijałkowski, *Polacy i ich potomkowie w historii Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Cf: Fijałkowski, *Polacy i ich potomkowie w historii Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, pp. 30 – 31.

<sup>4</sup> Cf: James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community* (New York, London, Mexico City, New Delhi, Sydney, Toronto: Twayne Publishers, Prentice Hall International, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Cf: Thomas J. Ferraro, “Ethnicity and the Marketplace,” in: *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 380.

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between 1834-1842; however, due to strains within the exile community, their attempt collapsed and, eventually, the land was declared in forfeiture.<sup>6</sup>

**1854** – the first Polish settlement in America, named Panna Marya (after the Virgin Mary), was founded in Texas by about one hundred peasant families from rural Upper Silesia, who, in 1854, followed Father Leopold Moczygamba and established a colony there. Lured by the promise of free, arable land and tormented by widespread floods and potato famine which struck Europe in the very same year, the Silesians were soon followed by the chain migration of 1,500 other Poles, thus initiating the mass economic immigration later in the century.<sup>7</sup>

**1858** – Silesians from Texas opened the first Polish school in the United States.<sup>8</sup> They also formed the distinctive micro community resistant to the processes of Americanization. Andrzej Brożek admits that they successfully “persevered in their Polishness by force of inertia.”<sup>9</sup>

**1862** – the American Congress passed the so-called Homestead Act, which offered free farms to families and settlers; the policy of naturalization was adopted.<sup>10</sup>

**1880 – 1913** – the period of “new” or “great” migration, which embraced almost 25 million immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe: Russian and Polish Jews, Catholic Poles, Italians as well as the immigrants of British descent.<sup>11</sup> Intentionally, the new immigration did not constitute the “settlement migration,” i.e. the impoverished Polish newcomers did not aim at settling their roots in America; on the contrary, they endeavoured to grow rich in order to improve

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Florian Stasiak, *Polska emigracja zarobkowa w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki 1865-1914* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Andrzej Brożek, *Ślężacy w Teksasie. Relacje o najstarszych osadach polskich w Ameryce* (Warszawa, Wrocław: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1972), p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> The available data on this issue varies. Joseph A. Wyrwal claims that the first Polish parochial school in the United States was opened in 1868 in St. Stanislaw parish, Milwaukee, under the direction of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, and soon after the parochial school was started at Panna Maria, Texas. Joseph A. Wyrwal, *The Poles in America* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Lerner Publications Company, 1969), p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> Andrzej Brożek, *Ślężacy w Teksasie. Relacje o najstarszych osadach polskich w Ameryce*, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Andrzej Brożek, *Polonia amerykańska 1854-1939* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1977), p. 25, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas J. Ferraro, “Ethnicity and the Marketplace,” in: *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 380.

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their economic position in America, and then return to their homeland.<sup>12</sup> William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, authors of the monumental work *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*,<sup>13</sup> emphasize the fact that “the [Polish] community insist[ed] to the end that emigration be only temporary; it never reconcile[d] itself to the idea that the migrant may never return, may ever cease to be a real member of his original group,”<sup>14</sup> and add that “there [was] always a latent feeling of obligation to return.”<sup>15</sup>

During the last decades of the nineteenth century the new Polish immigration to the United States increased sharply and primarily due to economic causes. According to Florian Stasik, nations deprived of their statehood, such as Poles, were also motivated to migrate realizing that their national consciousness was in danger,<sup>16</sup> which was clearly the case at the end of the nineteenth century in Poland under partitions.<sup>17</sup>

**1870 – 1900** In the **Prussian-occupied Poland** Poles faced exploitation and oppression: education was secularized, Polish clergy was replaced with Germans and the Polish religious and patriotic song “Boże coś Polskę” (God, protector of Poland) was banned.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, much of the land passed from Polish ownership to German hands and, in effect, Poles started to be displaced. It was estimated that the Polish immigrants who reached American shores between 1870 - 1900 were those coming from the German-occupied areas of Poland and that this migration reached its peak in the 1880s.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf: Andrzej Brożek, *Polonia amerykańska 1854-1939*, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> The first edition of “The Polish Peasant in Europe and America” was published between 1918-1920. Cf: Herbert Blumer, *Critiques of Research in the Social Sciences. An Appraisal of Thomas & Znaniecki's 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America'* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1939), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, vol. II: Organization and Disorganization in America* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958), p. 1493.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, vol. II*, p. 1494.

<sup>16</sup> Cf: Florian Stasik, *Polska emigracja zarobkowa w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki 1865-1914*, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> The partitions of Poland executed by the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Habsburg Austria (successively in 1772, 1793 and 1795) aimed at the division of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lands and annexation of those lands by the Russian, Prussian and Austrian invaders, which resulted in the elimination of sovereign Poland and Lithuania. What followed was the suppression of Polish language, heritage and culture. Cf: James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Cf: James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Cf: Stasik, *Polska emigracja zarobkowa w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki 1865-1914*, p. 26.

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Unlike the immigrants from other partitioned lands, Polish migrants from the Prussian partition of Poland usually did not travel to America individually but with their whole families and were strongly motivated to fulfill their dream of having their own arable farms.<sup>20</sup> James Pula notices that the majority of the immigrants from the German-occupied areas were relatively urbanized or skilled enough to start their new lives in America and work as entrepreneurs and craftsmen. In fact, it was the Polish migrants from the German partition who formed most of the early Polish population in the areas of New York and Chicago.<sup>21</sup>

One of the main reasons for the exodus of Poles from the **Austrian-occupied Galicia**<sup>22</sup> and migration to America was the economic situation which, in general, was chaotic as “the Austrian government restrained economic development in order to retain large grain exports from Galicia to the rest of the Empire, [especially] the highly industrialized areas in Bohemia and Silesia.”<sup>23</sup> The severe “Galician poverty” which touched the inhabitants of that rural partition resulted from decreasing landholdings and rapid increase in population.<sup>24</sup> Owing to the fact that farms were subdivided upon the owners’ death, the plots of land became under-sized and, as Pula emphasizes, “peasants were extremely vulnerable to the vicissitudes of weather and market.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently, about fifty thousand people a year died of starvation.<sup>26</sup> In comparison with other partitioned lands, the process of economic impoverishment seemed to be accelerated rapidly, especially in Galicia.

The important factor which determined the Polish immigration from the **Russian partition** was the program of the so-called Russification implemented on a large scale on the territories occupied by Russia. Its pivotal aim was the elimination of Polish as the language of instruction in schools and weakening of

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<sup>20</sup> Cf: Wiesław Fijałkowski, *Polacy i ich potomkowie w historii Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, p. 148.

<sup>21</sup> Cf: James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Galicia constituted the territory in central Europe, located adjacent to the Tatra Mountains.

<sup>23</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Cf: Florian Stasik, *Polska emigracja zarobkowa w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki 1865-1914*, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Cf: Pula, *Polish Americans*, p. 17.

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the significance of the Polish clergy. The rapidly deteriorating economic conditions also greatly affected the inhabitants of the agricultural areas of Suwałki, Łomża or Płock and, as a consequence, Polish peasants from these provinces accounted for most of the immigration from the Russian partition until 1904. Taking into consideration the fact that the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) caused new economic problems for the inhabitants of Russian Poland, Poles continued their mass migration to America, but the majority of people who left the Russian sector after 1905 were not peasants, as previously, but rather industrial workers.<sup>27</sup>

While much is known about the composition of Polish migration between 1897 and 1913, one question still debated is the actual number of those who went to the New World. Estimations based on the U.S. immigration and census records are, unfortunately, incomplete. The discrepancies between the actual number of Polish immigrants who left partitioned Poland and those who entered the United States from 1897 to 1913 stem from the fact that the U.S. census did not record national origin of the newcomers until 1820, and prior to 1885 the Bureau of Immigration<sup>28</sup> did not list Poland as an option for “country of birth” because Poland officially did not exist on the map of the world. Additionally, at the end of the nineteenth century, Poland constituted a multiethnic area with Jews, Russians, Lithuanians, Germans, Tatars, Bohemians, Gypsies and Hungarians, who did not perceive themselves as Poles in the cultural sense; yet, on entering the United States, they were still listed as Poles.<sup>29</sup> Thus, as Andrzej Pilch assumes, all the known figures seem to be used only tentatively because the records were collected and evaluated on the basis of divergent data.<sup>30</sup> In the light of these facts, Andrzej Pilch attempts to present the approximate number of Polish immigrants

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, pp. 15 – 16.

<sup>28</sup> Pula also notices that the Bureau of Immigration “was not consistent over time, sometimes reporting all entrants together as a lump sum, sometimes reporting immigrants separately from visitors and other nonimmigrants, sometimes ignoring departures, and sometimes recording departures.” Cf. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Andrzej Pilch, „Emigracja z ziem polskich do Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki od lat pięćdziesiątych XIX w. do r. 1918,” in: *Polonia amerykańska: przeszłość i współczesność*, Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz, Tadeusz Gromada, eds., (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1988), p. 39.

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and deduces that almost 2 million Poles moved from the partitioned Poland to the United States between 1897 and 1913.<sup>31</sup>

**1921** – the Emergency Quota Act.

**1924** – Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act). The reduction of the influx of Polish immigration was the result of the immigration nationality quotas, which were imposed by American Congress in 1921 and 1924. However, those who did manage to be successfully admitted to the United States were better educated than the previous waves of immigrants. This change was caused by the overall gradual decrease in the rate of illiteracy in Poland (from 33,1% illiterate Poles in 1921 to 23,1% in 1931) and it was the outcome of the intensified educational activities after the rebirth of the Polish independence.<sup>32</sup>

**1939 – 1950** the World War II immigration. In comparison with the mainly economic immigration at the turn of the nineteenth-century, the World War II immigration (from 1939 until 1950<sup>33</sup>) became largely political: many Poles were compelled to leave their homeland due to political changes taking place in their country. Nevertheless, it was after 1945, i.e. during the initial phase of Polish postwar migration, when the United States became the major destination and the strongest magnet for the Polish veterans and displaced persons who were in desperate need of assistance.

**1948** – the Displaced Persons Act. In order to facilitate the entry of Poles to the US, the American Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act and, in 1953, the Refugee Relief Act which aimed at allowing the Polish refugees into the United States in numbers above the limited restrictions of the immigration quotas.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> More specific data on the number of immigrants from particular partitions in different time periods is presented in: Andrzej Pilch, *Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych (XVIII-XX w.)* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984), pp. 164-170, 202-207, 261-276.

<sup>32</sup> Cf: Mirosław Francić, „Emigracja z Polski do USA od r. 1918 do lat siedemdziesiątych XX w.,” in: *Polonia amerykańska: przeszłość i współczesność*, eds. Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz, Tadeusz Gromada (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1988), p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> According to Francić one may distinguish three waves of Polish immigration to the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century: immigration between 1918-1939, 1939-1945, and the postwar migration; but Feliks Gross introduces a different division: immigration during the decade of 1939-1950, migration of the 50s and 60s, and the 1965-1970 wave. Feliks Gross, “Notes on the Ethnic Revolution,” *The Polish Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 3 (1976), p. 161.

<sup>34</sup> Cf: Mirosław Francić, „Emigracja z Polski do USA od r. 1918 do lat siedemdziesiątych XX w.,” p. 52.

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Unlike the old “Polonia,” the World War II immigrants were generally energetic, talented, well-educated, versatile and some of them marked by the exceptionally high artistic potential. Due to the fact that they gained education during the mid-war period, the new immigrants, who included not only displaced persons and refugees but also university students, scientists and journalists,<sup>35</sup> brought to their earlier compatriots, who had already started their lives in the United States, an impetus toward intellectual development. Danuta Mostwin assumes that post World War II Polish immigrants travelling to America consisted of families which often included even three generations: grandparents, parents and children. Driven by the desire to find their own place within the American society, the “September” immigrants, using Mostwin’s terminology, intended to stay in the New World forever.<sup>36</sup> Theresita Polzin believes that “[the immigrants came to America] to escape from a country in which one’s life was constantly in danger, where a peaceful life, with even minimal freedom to develop intellectually, culturally, and economically, was blocked.”<sup>37</sup>

The Polish refugees, escapees and immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s, constituted mainly political immigration. Many of them were representatives of the intelligentsia with professional training and they fled from Poland because the country found itself under the Communist rule.<sup>38</sup>

**1965** – the Immigration Act. One of the crucial events which definitely altered the pattern of Polish immigration to America was the Immigration Act of 1965 whose purpose was the elimination of the quota system. As a consequence, Polish immigration to the USA was considerably constant but, at the same time, its component elements were complex and differentiated. Feliks Gross assumes

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<sup>35</sup> Cf: James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 120.

<sup>36</sup> Cf: Danuta Mostwin, *Trzecia wartość. Formowanie się nowej tożsamości polskiego emigranta w Ameryce* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictwa KUL, 1985), p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Theresita Polzin as quoted in: James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, p. 120.

<sup>38</sup> After the World War II and the Yalta Conference Poland found itself under the Soviet Communist dominance which lasted until 1989. The new communist government was formed in Warsaw and the Polish United Workers’ Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* - PZPR) under the leadership of Bolesław Bierut gained control over the People’s Republic of Poland. The new Poland of 1945 became more homogeneous; i.e. “ethnically Polish and predominantly Roman Catholic by religion.” R.F. Leslie, Antony Polonsky, Jan M. Ciechanowski, Z.A. Pelczynski, *The History of Poland since 1863* (Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 285.

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that there existed four distinctive categories within the post 1965-group of Polish immigrants. The first group included skilled artisans who dreamt about finding employment in the United States and firmly believed that their American Dream would come true. Therefore, Gross labeled them as “new economic immigrants.” Idealists committed to the working-class philosophy, who became disillusioned by the communist system, belong to the second category. Additionally, among the post-1965 immigrants there were also scholars, university professors and victims of post 1968 antiliberal and anti-Zionist drives, who did not find any considerable difficulties at obtaining employment in American colleges. Finally, the fourth group was formed by young students who participated in the student protests of the mid 1960s;<sup>39</sup> and then managed to find shelter in America.<sup>40</sup>

**1980 – 1984** – Only after 1980 did the Polish immigration to America escalate once again. The anti-communist Solidarity trade union was initiated at the Gdańsk Shipyard in 1980 and the period of martial law (from December 1981 to July 1983) began paralyzing and drastically restricting the lives of ordinary Polish citizens. It was estimated that between 1980 and 1984 almost 38 thousand Poles immigrated to the United States who would perceive themselves either as economic or political/”Solidarity” immigrants.<sup>41</sup>

Economic immigrants craved for the improvement of their standards of life and realized that it could not have been possible in Poland in the light of the severe economic crisis in the early 1980s. Being a “Solidarity” immigrant, however, was not necessarily tantamount to being a member of the Solidarity Trade Union. In the context of sociological studies devoted to transplanted immigrant families,

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<sup>39</sup> Student protests escalated in March 1968 as the play of Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady* (“The Forefathers”) which was to be staged at the Warsaw National Theatre, “was closed down by the authorities on the grounds that it provoked anti-Soviet outbursts among the audience.” Leslie, Polonsky, Ciechanowski, Pelczynski, *The History of Poland since 1863*, p. 389. As a consequence, students from Cracow, Lublin, Łódź, Wrocław and Gdańsk organized street demonstrations against the government of the People’s Republic of Poland. Riots were suppressed by the brutality of the police and, in the end, about 1200 students were arrested. Moreover, “a group of university professors [...] were declared to have been the ideological instigators [...] and were dismissed from their posts without legal authority” which, eventually, led to a greater control of the government over academic institutions. Leslie, Polonsky, Ciechanowski, Pelczynski, *The History of Poland since 1863*, p. 390.

<sup>40</sup> Cf: Feliks Gross, “Notes on the Ethnic Revolution,” p. 162.

<sup>41</sup> Cf: Danuta Mostwin, *Emigranci polscy w USA* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1991), p. 156.

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Danuta Mostwin explains that “Solidarity” immigrants were those who adopted the “Solidarity” ideology and accepted the leadership of the members of Independent Self-governing Trade Union “Solidarity” (*Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy “Solidarność”*). According to Mostwin, “Solidarity” immigrants were young, energetic, they clung to other members of the group and were extremely helpful to one another, expressing in this way their steadfast loyalty and deep solidarity.<sup>42</sup> Mostwin maintains that the family values of “Solidarity” immigrants were similar to family values which characterized previous Poles who decided to leave their country. However, in the case of “Solidarity” immigrants, the family loyalty was extended to other immigrating Polish families, regardless the actual blood ties.<sup>43</sup>

**1989** – the end of communist rule in Poland. According to statistical data gathered from Polish sources<sup>44</sup> and analyzed by Mary Patrice Erdmans, it was concluded that after the collapse of communism in 1989, more and more Poles living in America decided to return to their land of origin. Nevertheless, according to the American statistics, it seems that Polish immigration to the United States continued at a steady pace during the 1990s.<sup>45</sup>

**1990** – the Immigration Act of 1990 allowed for the increase of the number of potential immigrants and the majority of those admitted to the United States under these limitations were mostly family sponsored.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Cf: Mostwin, *Emigranci polscy w USA*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>43</sup> Cf: Mostwin, *Emigranci polscy w USA*, p. 157.

<sup>44</sup> Cf: Mary Patrice Erdmans relies on statistical data and states that between 1981 and 1990, 17,300 people immigrated to Poland, while between 1991 and 1996 there were more than 40 thousand people who decided to return to their native country. Mary Patrice Erdmans, “Polonia in the New Country: We Will Not Fade Away,” *Polish American Studies*, Vol. LVII, No. 1 (2000), p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Cf: Erdmans, “Polonia in the New Country,” p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Cf: Erdmans, “Polonia in the New Country,” p. 9.

## SUMMARY

The present dissertation constitutes the study of the fiction of Anthony Bukoski and Stuart Dybek and examines the ethnic culture of Polish Americans and their descendants as reflected in the literary works of these two contemporary American writers of Polish origin. Being aware of the fluid nature of the discipline in question the author presents critical approaches to reading ethnic American literature so as to share Fred L. Gardaphé's method of reading literary works written by American authors of ethnic descent, as well as to rely on Michael Fischer's concept of ethnicity as a social construct constantly reinvented and recreated in short stories written by Bukoski and Dybek.

The first chapter includes the brief presentation of the literary history of Polish American penmen and attempts to highlight some of the most significant literary works created by Polish immigrant writers in the United States and American authors of Polish descent. Some remarks upon English language and non-English language Polish American literature are provided.

The purpose of the second chapter is to shed some light upon the Polish American ethnic culture, the emergence of the American Polonia, and the processes of assimilation of Polish immigrants in the United States. Starting with the explanation of the basic concepts, through the presentation of Posern-Zieliński's sociological findings on the formation of ethnic culture of Polish Americans and its different stages induced by the assimilation processes, the chapter ends with some comments on the maintenance of ethnicity of the Polish immigrants and their descendants. The present chapter also includes the brief analysis of three different sociological trends/mutations which reveal the heterogeneity of Polish American ethnic culture.

The next part of the dissertation is devoted to the presentation of some features of the ethnic culture of the American Polonia, relying heavily on the insights provided by the sociologists and examiners of Polish American ethnic culture. It has seemed justifiable to consider the significance of Roman

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Catholic religion and family which have had a lasting impact on the formation and the character of the ethnic culture under consideration.

Taking into account Gardaphé's notions of visibility and invisibility the analyses of the depiction of the ethnic culture of Polish Americans in Bukoski's and Dybek's fiction show that neither of these contemporary American writers of Polish descent "totally transcends his ethnic background to melt invisibly into American culture."<sup>1</sup> However, both of these third-generation American authors of Polish origin approach the notions of ethnicity and ethnic culture in their short stories in a different way. While Anthony Bukoski's short stories are "more explicit in their [Polish Americanness]"<sup>2</sup> and his literary characters constitute distinctly Polish American subjects, Dybek "choose[s] to avoid representation of the [Polish American] as a major subject"<sup>3</sup> in his fiction and "relegate[s] visible signs of [his literary characters'] ethnicity to the margins or under the surface."<sup>4</sup> Thus, Bukoski can aptly fit into Gardaphé's notion of "visible" ethnic authors and Dybek can be referred to as the "invisible" ethnic writer.

Bukoski's Polish American protagonists are immersed in nostalgia, they harbor warm feelings not only for Poland, but also for the Polish cultural heritage, and their adopted domicile – the decaying Polish American neighbourhood of Superior associated with the sense of rootedness and belonging. His literary characters firmly adhere to the last vestiges of their ethnic culture, they hear echoes of the Old Country in polonaise or polka music, find solace in family unity and folk, highly emotional religiosity; they are engrossed in "culinary nostalgia" while eating *bigos* and *pierogi*. Bukoski's protagonists reinvent their selves by stepping beyond the ethnic boundaries and establishing meaningful bonds with the representatives of other ethnic groups. The redefinition and reinvention of their ethnicity is also visible when Bukoski's

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<sup>1</sup> Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets. The Evolution of Italian American Narrative* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 153.

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protagonists turn to the ethnic culture they have created in America, or to their ethnic identity markers in order to find stability and meaning.

Dybek's short stories are pervaded with the recurring signifiers of the ethnic culture of Polish Americans and the more "Polish" his characters are, the more grotesque and uncanny his short stories seem to be. Most of the images of his Polish American protagonists are blatantly negative; the characters possess a sense of inferiority and, in most cases, are afflicted with the most unusual kinds of ailments. Even though Roman Catholic religion becomes the central pillar in Dybek's expression of the Polish American ethnic culture, his characters' fascination with Catholicism often borders with obsession. Family ties are not as significant as bonds of friendship. The reinvention of the selves of his Polish Americans and the depiction of ethnicity that transgresses the national boundaries is reflected in Dybek's fiction not only via his characters' ambivalent attitude to Catholicism and their cultural past, but also via blurring the boundary between the real and the magical.

Bukoski's and Dybek's literary works are the perfect examples of the presentation of "achieving Americanness."<sup>5</sup> Their Polish Americans are caught in the moment of cultural transformation and their selves are being formed constantly anew. The short stories of Stuart Dybek and Anthony Bukoski present important but often neglected voices of the Americans of Polish descent in the making of multiethnic America.

In the final part of the dissertation (appendix) one may find the timeline of Polish immigration to the United States.

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<sup>5</sup> Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 7.

**Współcześni amerykańscy pisarze pochodzenia polskiego. Studium twórczości Anthony'ego Bukoskiego i Stuarta Dybka.**

**STRESZCZENIE**

Rozprawa doktorska pt. „Współcześni amerykańscy pisarze pochodzenia polskiego. Studium twórczości Anthony'ego Bukoskiego i Stuarta Dybka” jest analizą utworów literackich Dybka i Bukoskiego w kontekście kulturowym, jak i w ujęciu historyczno-kulturowym. Jest to istotne ponieważ Polacy w Stanach Zjednoczonych tworzyli grupę zamkniętą, nie chcieli się zamerykanizować, często tworzyli enklawy i bronili swojej polskości z trudem akceptując fakt, że mogliby do ojczyzny nie wrócić. Pisząc o kulturowych aspektach twórczości pisarzy amerykańskich pochodzenia polskiego autorka rozprawy zwraca szczególną uwagę na przedstawienie polskich tradycyjnych wartości, takich jak rodzina i religia. Polska więź narodowa jest u swojej podstawy więzią rodzinną, a przekazywanie dziedzictwa narodowego odbywało się przez długie okresy niewoli nie przez instytucje publiczne, ale w domu przez rodzinę. Obyczaje i rytuały zrosnięte są w kulturze polskiej z obyczajami kościelnymi, a na gruncie amerykańskim nadal przekazywane były kolejnym potomkom polskich Amerykanów, którzy wytworzyli (i nadal tworzą) w Stanach Zjednoczonych specyficzną kulturę etniczną Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia.

Rozprawa doktorska składa się z sześciu rozdziałów. We wstępie autorka przedstawia krytykę literatury etnicznej tworzonej w Stanach Zjednoczonych i główne postulaty teoretyków, które pojawiły w obrębie literatury amerykańskiej w ciągu ostatniego półwiecza. Zgodnie z tradycyjnym rozumieniem etniczności i literatury etnicznej, grupy etniczne postrzegane są jako niezmiennie, stałe, zmuszone do obrony przed procesami asymilacyjnymi. Natomiast nowy model etniczności stworzony przez Wernera Sollorsa, i wzmocniony postulatami antropologa Michaela Fischera dotyczącymi ciągłego odnawiania się etniczności, przedstawia etniczność jako naturalny i ponadczasowy proces, w trakcie którego grupy etniczne ulegają ciągłym przemianom i definiują się na nowo. W związku z tym, zgodnie z założeniami

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Sollorsa, etniczne teksty literackie stworzone przez Anthony'ego Bukoskiego i Stuarta Dybka nie są jedynie zapisem odmienności danej grupy etnicznej, ale elementami uczestniczącymi w procesie kreowania nowej tożsamości amerykańskiej. Autorka odwołuje się także do teorii podziału amerykańskich pisarzy pochodzenia włoskiego na „widocznych” i „niewidocznych” przedstawionej przez Freda L. Gardaphé i próbuje dowieść, że Bukoski i Dybek także spełniają kryteria podziału i reprezentują współczesnych, amerykańskich etnicznych autorów „jawnych” (*explicit*) i „ukrytych” (*implicit*).

W pierwszym rozdziale autorka przedstawia zarys literatury amerykańskiej tworzonej przez Polaków i ich potomków w Stanach Zjednoczonych od przełomu XIX i XX wieku aż do czasów współczesnych, a w kolejnej części rozprawy skupia się na Polonii Amerykańskiej, ukazując procesy asymilacyjne Polaków na gruncie amerykańskim oraz przemiany kultury Amerykańskiej Polonii od tradycji imigracyjnej poprzez tradycję etniczną, aż do tradycji etnicznego pochodzenia. Rozdział trzeci rozprawy poświęcony jest kulturze etnicznej Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia, który podzielony jest na dwa podrozdziały: w pierwszym z nich autorka przedstawia znaczenie religii rzymskokatolickiej w tworzeniu specyficznej etnicznej kultury Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia, a w drugim podrozdziale analizuje więzi rodzinne i instytucję rodziny, które także istotnie wpłynęły na tworzenie tej kultury.

Rozdział piąty i szósty rozprawy stanowi studium twórczości, najpierw, Anthony'ego Bukoskiego, a następnie Stuarta Dybka, z którego wylania się obraz kultury etnicznej Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia i dowodzi podziału sugerowanego przez Freda L. Gardaphé. W świetle tego podziału Bukoski i Dybek pasują do kategorii współczesnych, amerykańskich pisarzy etnicznych, którzy są „jawni” (Bukoski) i „ukryci” (Dybek). W rozdziale siódmym przedstawione są konkluzje, natomiast na końcu rozprawy autorka przedstawia zarys historii emigracji polskiej do Stanów Zjednoczonych z uwzględnieniem najważniejszych dat w dziejach Polonii Amerykańskiej.