

# Messianism Refigured: Tadeusz Zygfryd Kassern's Musical Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

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This essay explores the commemorative stance of Tadeusz Zygfryd Kassern's opera *The Anointed* (1951) toward the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and situates the work within an early and volatile period of cultural responses to the Holocaust in Poland and the United States. Through a close examination of the opera's literary sources and musical setting, as well as the archival materials related to its creation, the essay shows how the opera treats Polish Romantic messianism as a symbolic language with which to grapple with Jewish resistance to the Holocaust, even as similar messianic tropes were being used to consolidate Polish ethnonationalist memory of World War II.

In 1951, the Polish-Jewish composer Tadeusz Zygfryd Kassern completed a four-act opera entitled *The Anointed*. The English-language opera retold the downfall of Sabbatai Zevi, the seventeenth-century messianic claimant who was born in Ottoman Turkey and gained immense popularity among worldwide Jewry before he converted to Islam in 1666. Kassern treated Sabbatai's story as a lens through which to view the more recent past: he intended *The Anointed* to serve as "a dramatico-musical monument (the first in the history of opera) to the fight of the Jewish nation for freedom" and as "a ghetto-uprising memorial," as he wrote in a letter from 1950.<sup>1</sup> The opera was thus meant to commemorate the insurrection in the Warsaw Ghetto in which Jewish fighting forces held off deportations to death camps from April 19 to May 16, 1943.<sup>2</sup>

*The Anointed* is not easily placed within a single national milieu of early Holocaust commemoration, since the work's genesis reflects Kassern's experiences in both Poland and the United States. He had been hiding on Warsaw's so-called "Aryan side" as the Ghetto Uprising unfolded, and he had first felt compelled to compose an opera in honor of the ghetto at this time. Five years later, in autumn 1948, he was offered a commission by Poland's Ministry of Culture and Art to compose an opera and he proposed *The Anointed*. In intending to memorialize the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Kassern was engaging with one of the most public and volatile symbols through which Holocaust memory was enacted in postwar Poland.<sup>3</sup> But with the rising tides of official antisemitism sweeping Poland in late 1948, his proposal was sharply rejected. Soon afterwards, he defected from Poland and became a refugee living in New York City. *The Anointed* was the first work that he completed after breaking ties with Poland. Composed between 1949 and 1951, it is, as far as I am aware, the earliest opera that commemorated the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> Although it is a large-scale musical memorial that sheds light on an early moment in the formation of Holocaust memory, it has never been published, staged, or recorded, and it remains largely unknown to this day.<sup>5</sup>

The present essay is the first in-depth examination of the opera's commemorative stance toward the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.<sup>6</sup> It analyzes Kassern's changes to the opera's literary source material, explores

the musical setting of the libretto, and draws on previously unconsidered archival sources—both Polish and American—to document the opera's creation and Kassern's contemporaneous professional activities. The essay situates *The Anointed* within an early moment of Polish and American Holocaust memory, in which there was considerable interest in memorializing the murder of European Jewry, but the conventions for so doing were in a state of flux.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, at first glance, the opera's connections to the Ghetto Uprising may seem unclear. Its highly fictionalized retelling of the days preceding Sabbatai's conversion to Islam makes no allusions to the twentieth century, much less to the Warsaw Ghetto. (The opera's plot is summarized in Appendix 1.) There is no dedication or subtitle that reveals Kassern's commemorative intentions, and the letter quoted above provides one of the only clues to this background.<sup>8</sup>

*The Anointed's* commemorative stance toward the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising comes into focus, however, when the opera is read against the Polish intellectual and cultural milieu with which Kassern identified and for which he had first intended the work. Central to my interpretation are Kassern's responses to a deep-rooted discourse in Poland that saw suffering as a defining component of national identity and as necessitating heroic acts on behalf of the nation. These ideas, promulgated in the nineteenth century by Romantic poets following the loss of Polish statehood, provided a paradigm through which Poles made sense of the cataclysms of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> They were also, as I will show, embedded in the opera's source material, the play *Koniec Mesjasza* (The Messiah's Demise), published in 1911 by the Polish-Catholic author Jerzy Żuławski. In this play, the Jewish Sabbatai becomes an archetypal Polish Romantic protagonist, who is transformed into a freedom fighter driven to contest both earthly and divine authority by the suffering of his people. Rather than downplaying Żuławski's projections of Polish cultural politics onto Sabbatai, Kassern's adaptation embraces these tropes in the libretto and musical setting, I argue, while modifying the play's Romantic links between suffering, nation, and failed rebellion to address the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

*The Anointed's* turn to Polish Romantic messianism to help commemorate the Uprising is striking because it runs against the predominant use of Polish Romanticism after the War to form an ethnonationalist collective memory of Polish wartime suffering. Although in the first half of the nineteenth century, Polish Romantic thought had been rather inclusive, stressing action on behalf of the nation rather than "the description (or creation) of an ethnically and culturally homogenous social collective," these roots were beleaguered by the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>10</sup> The notion of a more inclusive Polish identity, extending across ethnicity and religion, was further undermined by the failure of much of Polish-Catholic society to adequately aid Polish Jewry during the Holocaust, and by the violence that Holocaust survivors encountered when returning home.<sup>11</sup> After the War, Romantic tropes helped form a collective memory that privileged Polish wartime martyrdom in ways that often minimized and de-Judaized the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> Yet rather than erasing Jewish experiences, Kassern directs the ideas of Polish messianism towards Jewish history and nationhood, treating Romanticism as a foundation from which to commemorate Jewish resistance. The opera thus suggests that Polish Romanticism, at least for Kassern, continued to hold potential to process experiences of suffering and resistance beyond the Polish ethnic identities to which its ideas were often welded in the postwar period.

## BECOMING KASSERN

With its connections to Polish, Jewish, and American milieus, *The Anointed* raises vexing questions about Kassern's stance toward his multifaceted identity; however, his published writings, extant letters, and autobiographical reflections reveal little about his views on national, ethnic, or religious identity. Nonetheless, we may glean a sense of the various cultural worlds through which he passed through the core biographical facts of his life. Zygfryd Kassern was born in 1904 to an acculturated Jewish family in the city of Lemberg, then in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (today Lviv, Ukraine). At sixteen, he chose to be baptized into the Catholic Church, adding the "Tadeusz" to his name.<sup>13</sup> He was trained in

music at the local conservatory and later studied law in Poznań. As an adult, he worked as a lawyer in the State Treasury Solicitors' Office (Prokuratoria Generalna) in Poznań, but he was also active in the city's musical life, writing hundreds of concert reviews for the *Nowy Kurier* and *Dziennik Poznański*.<sup>14</sup> His most famous work from the prewar period, his 1928 Concerto for Voice, drew heavily on the harmonic language of Karol Szymanowski. It saw performances across Europe, many by the renowned soprano Ewa Bandrowska-Turska (Figure 1).<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 1.** Tadeusz Zygfryd Kassern circa 1930, courtesy of Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe.

During the Second World War, Kassern survived both Soviet and German rule, experiences that informed his postwar outlook. In September 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, Kassern was evacuated as part of the Solicitors' Office eastward to his hometown, which soon fell under Soviet rule. Just over a year later, in October 1940, Kassern fled from the Soviet occupation zone to the Nazi-controlled city of Cracow. He likely left Soviet-controlled territories because he feared that as a former Polish public servant he would be deported to the Soviet interior if he remained.<sup>16</sup> Kassern worked in Cracow for the publishing house Gebethner and Wolff, but near the end of 1942, he was

denounced to the Gestapo, forcing him to leave Cracow and flee to Warsaw. There, he assumed the identity of his brother-in-law, an (ethnically Polish) forestry engineer who had been killed in the 1939 defense of Poland. It was thanks to this assumed identity that Kassern could remain living on the “Aryan side” of Warsaw and ultimately survive the Holocaust. When the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began, Kassern was living less than a mile away from the ghetto and recalled watching smoke rise from its walls.<sup>17</sup>

Despite these challenging conditions, he continued to compose. The war years saw him turn to early music, and especially what he described as “the immeasurable simplicity and strength of expression” of Gregorian chant, the medieval liturgical music of the Western Christian Church. In addition to composing a *Gregorian Triptych* and a *Polish Mass*, both based on chant, he also began sketches for an opera based on Sabbatai’s life. Kassern was thus engaging with music foundational to Catholicism when he first began composing his Jewish-themed opera. All of these compositions and sketches, however, were subsequently lost.<sup>18</sup>

In November 1945, just a few months after the war in Europe concluded, Kassern left Poland for the United States to take a position as a cultural attaché for the Polish Consulate General in New York City.<sup>19</sup> He advanced through the diplomatic ranks, serving as a culture and education advisor beginning in January 1947 and then as consul from that August.<sup>20</sup> While his fluency in English and legal training likely gained him the post, he was also drawn to the work because it allowed him to promote Polish compositions in the United States.<sup>21</sup> He showed considerable interest in his new American surroundings, writing long letters and reports to his musician-colleagues in Warsaw, which described the status of classical music in the United States and how Poland could learn from American arts policy.<sup>22</sup>

In fall 1948, Kassern’s conviction that he could further Polish culture by working for the Polish state fell apart. He was summoned to return to the country for a visit in November and early December, but was struck by the changes brought about by the consolidation of communist rule since 1945. He returned to the US and defected. His publishing contracts in Poland were broken and in spring 1951 he was removed from the Union of Polish Composers. Eventually, he found some measure of stability by teaching piano lessons at the Third Street Music School Settlement in January 1949 and by lecturing at the New School later that September.<sup>23</sup>

His former position as an official of communist Poland, however, was a considerable liability in an era of paranoia about “Red” infiltration in the United States.<sup>24</sup> His immigration travails attracted press attention, less because he was a notable composer than because he was an early defector. In 1955, he attempted suicide because his application for citizenship had been denied, an event which was covered by the Associated Press.<sup>25</sup> The publicity of the suicide attempt prompted Francis E. Walter, then the chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and primary sponsor of the restrictive and anti-communist Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952, to declare that he viewed Kassern not as “a diplomat but a former member of a Red propaganda organization.”<sup>26</sup> Shortly thereafter, the New York senator Herbert Lehman introduced a bill to grant Kassern and his wife, Longina, lawful entry, although it was not passed into law.<sup>27</sup> The Kasserns were granted permanent visas in September 1956 (it is unclear how this came to pass), but Tadeusz died of cancer eight months later.<sup>28</sup> *The Anointed* was thus composed during a time when Kassern’s immigration status was murky and his role as a former official of a communist state was suspect.

## THE POLITICS OF HOLOCAUST COMMEMORATION BETWEEN WARSAW AND NEW YORK

Late 1948—when Kassern visited Warsaw—was a volatile moment in postwar Poland. The relative ideological openness of the first postwar years was giving way as communist politicians consolidated power over the state. Moreover, a new wave of anti-Jewish measures swept the USSR and Eastern Europe following the formation of the state of Israel (and its alignment with the Western Bloc). In the USSR, the

Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was shut down and its leader Solomon Mikhoels was murdered, the prelude to a widespread repression of Yiddish and Jewish-national culture.<sup>29</sup> In Poland, Jewish organizations began repudiating Zionism, Bundism, and all forms of purported “Jewish nationalism” during the summer in favor of communist orthodoxy.<sup>30</sup> By early 1949, the so-called “anti-cosmopolitan” campaign was well underway across the Eastern Bloc.<sup>31</sup> Even for non-Jewish composers, late 1948 was a time of rapid ideological changes: socialist realist aesthetics had reached musical circles that summer and fall, accompanied by increasingly pointed attacks on Western “formalism,” a catch-all for modernist compositional trends.<sup>32</sup>

That Kassern believed it was viable for the Ministry of Culture and Art to commission *The Anointed* and to organize a performance of Arnold Schoenberg’s *A Survivor from Warsaw* under these conditions suggests that he had profoundly misread Warsaw’s political environment.<sup>33</sup> *The Anointed* was a Jewish-themed work, at a time when Jewishness was being suppressed. *A Survivor from Warsaw* was even more problematic since, besides its subject matter—the murder of Jews—it was written by a Jewish composer whose name was fast becoming synonymous with decadent Western formalism.<sup>34</sup> Kassern’s description of how the opera was rejected, as conveyed in the letter from 1950, suggests that the proposal was received in Warsaw through the lens of the tightening anti-“Zionist” rhetoric. As this is the only extant document describing the failed commission and Kassern’s intentions for the work, I quote at length:

“The Anointed” has been conceived as a dramatico-musical monument (the first in the history of opera) to the fight of the Jewish nation for freedom. The hero of my opera, the powerful, great cabalist, Sabbatai Zwi, was the speaker for this fight in the 17th century. The idea of composing “The Anointed” (now being done to an English text) received a strong impetus during the war years when being in Poland under the Nazi occupation I witnessed the most inhuman tragedy that befell the Jewish nation. Since that time the urge to contribute a musical monument to Jewish history never left me. After the war, in Poland, I was offered a large commission to write an opera. I suggested “The Anointed” as a ghetto-uprising memorial, but I was severely rebuked and forbidden to write this opera because the Communist Government considered it as favoring Jewish “nationalistic” tendencies and this the Communists strongly opposed. You will understand why I am so deeply attached to writing and doing this work here in this free country.<sup>35</sup>

The official with whom Kassern spoke in Warsaw concerning the commission, the musicologist Zofia Lissa, was attuned to Poland’s latest antisemitic direction. She was a party member with connections to its upper echelons and also of Jewish background. Accusations of supporting “Jewish ‘nationalistic’ tendencies” would have been especially consequential for her.<sup>36</sup> Further, *The Anointed* could well have become Poland’s first newly composed opera after the War, a mantle on which officials placed considerable weight as a marker of Poland’s musical modernization under state socialism.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, Kassern’s proposal arrived at a turning point in the refashioning of memorializations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Poland. From 1945, there had been yearly celebrations of the anniversary of the Uprising, which were held in Warsaw and elsewhere in Poland.<sup>38</sup> The Warsaw events included participation from both left-wing Zionists and communists in displays of a revolutionary aesthetic that the historian Marci Shore has described as a “Zionist socialist realism.”<sup>39</sup> The fifth anniversary of the Uprising, in April 1948, continued this trend, and was especially significant because of its scale and the unveiling of Nathan Rapoport’s Monument to the Ghetto Heroes (see Figure 2).<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 2.** Nathan Rapoport's Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, circa 1948, courtesy of Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe.

The 1948 anniversary also included rich musical celebrations. A choir of Jewish orphans performed as part of the anniversary and the radio broadcast Mikhail Gnesin's op. 63 piano trio.<sup>41</sup> Leon Wajner, a composer active in the relaunching of Jewish musical life, had composed a cantata for the occasion that set a Yiddish translation of Władysław Broniewski's poem "Żydom polskim" (To the Polish Jews).<sup>42</sup> Yet just months after the fifth anniversary, communists attacked the celebrations for their alleged Zionism.<sup>43</sup> From this point on, the ideologically diverse coalition that led the Uprising was written out of the official history and, instead, the Uprising was portrayed as part of an international communist class struggle that had little to do with Jewishness.<sup>44</sup> Needless to say, Kassern's proposal for an opera commemorating the Uprising by portraying it as an instance of Jewish national struggle contradicted the official drive to de-Judaize it and to bring it into line with communist ideology.

In part, Kassern misjudged the appetite for his ideas in Warsaw because of the slow travel of official policy (and unofficial supposition) from Warsaw to New York. Yet, as a diplomat abroad, he was also exposed to, and helped to promote, a rather different view of the Polish stance on Jewishness than that ascendant in Warsaw. Kassern's day-to-day work sometimes involved projecting an image of Poland as tolerant of Jewish minority rights, part of a policy aiming to shore up international support for the country.<sup>45</sup> After the Kielce pogrom on July 4, 1946, in which over forty Jews were murdered on false allegations of blood libel, he argued for a distinction between the acts of individual Poles and the policies of the state, all while pointing out to his superiors the challenges that the pogrom had created for his work.<sup>46</sup> For instance, he implored the renowned Polish-Jewish pianist Artur Schnabel in 1947 to "Please believe me that incriminating the entire country for [the Kielce pogrom]—and thus also musicians and Polish music—would be an injustice for them, just as one cannot hold an entire national or state community responsible for racial or national persecution anywhere on the entire globe."<sup>47</sup> While Kassern was working at the consulate, the Consul General linked the memorialization of the Ghetto Uprising with Jewish resettlement into the western territories that Poland had gained from Germany, suggesting Poland was a ready homeland for survivors.<sup>48</sup> When he met with the Ministry of Culture in Warsaw it is possible that he had not so much misread Poland's attitude toward Jewishness as confused its foreign-facing stance with its domestic one.

In the United States, where Kassern eventually completed the opera, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was also a topic of popular attention. American Jewry had turned to it as a prominent topic in early Holocaust commemorations.<sup>49</sup> Non-Jewish audiences also had considerable interest in the Uprising. For instance, a fictional account of the events by Pulitzer Prize-winning author John Hersey, entitled *The Wall*, rapidly climbed the bestseller lists in 1950, while Kassern was composing *The Anointed*.<sup>50</sup> The generally positive American reception of Schoenberg's 1947 *A Survivor from Warsaw*—although a highly inaccurate recounting that conflates details of the Uprising with murders in a death camp—further confirmed the appetite for ghetto-themed artwork among American audiences.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the same organization that commissioned *A Survivor from Warsaw* also commissioned *The Anointed*: The Koussevitzky Music Foundation, led by Serge Koussevitzky, a preeminent conductor, Russian-Jewish émigré, and champion of American new music.<sup>52</sup>

### NATIONALIZING THE MESSIAH

Kassern's interest in the operatic possibilities of Jerzy Żuławski's play about Sabbatai, *Koniec Mesjasza* (The Messiah's Demise), predated the Holocaust. In 1937, he had suggested that *The Messiah's Demise* would lend itself to operatic adaption thanks to its "exotic setting" and "strong expression."<sup>53</sup> This attitude, reflective of an orientalist outlook that was common among Polish composers before the War, certainly appears in the opera, especially in the portrayal of the Ottoman court and Sultan. Kassern portrays the Sultan as a ruthless ruler, supported by unthinking crowds, a common trope of orientalist operas.<sup>54</sup> He also paints the Ottoman setting in sensual terms, as suggested by the large groups of dancers and slaves who entertain the Sultan. The opera's exotic setting, as Renata Skupin has pointed out, is also strongly signaled in musical terms through extensive evocations of the Adhan (Islamic call to prayer) in act 3, scene 2.<sup>55</sup>

Kassern's early attraction to the play as an exoticist text, however, does not fully explain why it continued to hold purchase with him during and after the War, nor does it explain why he believed it offered a historical prefiguration to one of the most significant instances of wartime Jewish resistance. To probe its status as a post-Holocaust text, we thus must consider the cultural significance that Sabbatai had acquired by the twentieth century and examine the political valences that Żuławski brought to his version of the messiah's downfall.

As a baseline for this discussion, a brief overview of the historical Sabbatai's life and the Sabbatian movement are in order. Born in 1626 in Smyrna (today, Izmir, Turkey), he was a kabbalist scholar, but also prone to manic mood swings and transgressive behavior that had him expelled from his native Jewish community. In May 1665, he publicly declared himself the messiah and, with incredible speed, a full-blown messianic awakening was underway by late 1665 in Palestine and Egypt. It quickly spread, largely through letters and rumor, across the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Europe. The resulting movement would become, according to the historian Matt Goldish, "The most widespread and influential Jewish messianic movement since Christianity."<sup>56</sup> Yet just as quickly as the Sabbatian movement took off, it began to fray. When Sabbatai was taken before the Ottoman authorities in 1666 and interrogated about his activities, a physician at the court, an apostate Jew, suggested that Sabbatai could save himself from punishment if he converted to Islam. Surprisingly, Sabbatai chose this path, and he was given a title and a stipend after so doing. His conversion did not immediately end the movement, however; significant pockets of Sabbatian followers continued to believe in the messiah for years after his demise. Movements derived from or inspired by Sabbatianism, such as the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes and the Frankists in Poland, continued his legacy for centuries to come.<sup>57</sup>

Kassern's turn to Sabbatai as a symbol through which to consider more contemporary issues had precedent in the reception of Sabbatianism from the late nineteenth century onward. By Kassern's time, Sabbatai had been subjected to dozens of literary and historical treatments in numerous languages.<sup>58</sup> Jewish writers were attracted to Sabbatianism for a number of reasons, but Sabbatai's success at amassing a large following across the diaspora and his conversion to Islam were central interests. Ultimately, as David Biale has argued, he came to function as "a kind of cultural code for authors working on the borders between Judaism and modernity, as a projection back onto the seventeenth century of modern

problems of Jewish identity and assimilation.”<sup>59</sup> Żuławski was not Jewish and did not experience firsthand the tension between Judaism and modernity as other authors did. Yet he had shown a fascination with Jewish topics and especially Jewish mysticism, interests that led him to read (in German) Sholem Asch’s 1908 play *Sabbatai Zevi* and to create his own version of Sabbatai’s downfall.<sup>60</sup>

In *The Messiah’s Demise*, Żuławski projects contemporary concerns backwards onto the seventeenth century as was common in other retellings, but he adds a set of political stakes rarely seen in earlier literary treatments of Sabbatianism: Polish national self-definition during a time of Polish statelessness. Messianism, albeit in a highly Christianized manner, had taken on considerable importance among Polish intellectuals who were attempting to develop a Polish national identity and philosophy of national action in the aftermath of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793, 1795) and the failed November Uprising of 1830–1831. In this view, the suffering of the Polish nation, brought about by its oppression by the partitioning powers, made it a Christ of nations: much like Jesus’s sacrifice was needed for the redemption of individuals, so too was Poland’s sacrifice needed for “a collective and terrestrial salvation of mankind.”<sup>61</sup> This view was promulgated by Romantic poets, such as Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, and became a core component of Polish national identity from the mid-nineteenth century onward.<sup>62</sup> Romanticism and ideas of Polish messianism exerted a strong pull on fin-de-siècle Polish writers, and Żuławski’s other works engaged with these themes.<sup>63</sup>

While Sabbatai in *The Messiah’s Demise* speaks about the Jewish people, the model of nationhood according to which he acts is that of the Polish Romantics. A core idea to which the play returns numerous times is the collectivization of national suffering onto Sabbatai. Throughout the play, Sabbatai is one who suffers on behalf of his people—through the hairshirt he wears, his self-flagellation, and his asceticism. Further, his collectivized suffering is empowering. When he first confronts the Sultan, for instance, he explains how his wardrobe interweaves national glory and pain. “Sultan, you saw me in my royal attire: this is the power, magnificence, and glory of my nation .... But this painful hairshirt is woven from the deprivation, tears, suffering, and humiliation of my children: this is my own fate!”<sup>64</sup> Here, Żuławski implies that the transference of collective (Jewish) suffering onto the individual redeemer accounts for his power, making him a figure who is both national and Christ-like.

The Romantic agenda of *The Messiah’s Demise* emerges strongly in the play’s pivotal scene, in which Sabbatai engages in an unrequited dialogue with God. Indeed, this scene recalls one of the best-known passages of Polish Romantic literature: Konrad’s improvisation from Adam Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (Forefathers’ Eve) part three. Both are set in a prison—Konrad is imprisoned in Russia for challenging the Tsar’s authority, Sabbatai in Ottoman Turkey for challenging the Sultan’s. Both involve a free-wheeling monologue by a national freedom fighter directed toward a silent God. In both, this nation is described as one plagued by suffering, which the protagonist absorbs:

**Konrad:**

Now my nation is incarnate in my soul:  
My body’s swallowed her spirit whole—  
I and the fatherland am the same.  
My name is Million, for the millions’ dole  
I love as my own pain.  
I look upon my Fatherland  
As a son sees his father strapped to the wheel.  
I feel the sufferings of my land  
As a pregnant mother her child’s woe must feel.<sup>65</sup>

In both, God is silent in response to these narratives of misery:

**Konrad:**

Thou art silent? Silent!<sup>67</sup>

**Sabbatai (as written by Żuławski):**

I told You about the misery of the people, whom  
You after all call Your own, of bodies broken  
under wheels, of blood .... I told You of the  
sword of the enemy and the knife of the robber,  
of indignity, contempt, and dishonor ....  
Here I have taken onto myself the pain of all pains  
and the misdeed of all guilt and place them  
before You.<sup>66</sup>

**Sabbatai:**

I have called to You, how many times already ...  
and you do not reply.<sup>68</sup>

And in both, the silence leads the protagonist to challenge God's authority:

**Konrad:**

Now, give me power! Just its baser part,  
A crumb of what on earth was won by pride,  
And with it, how much happiness I'll fashion! ...  
Respond! I take aim at Your very nature,  
And if I can't completely devastate Your  
Substance entire, I'll shake to the foundations  
Your realm.<sup>69</sup>

**Sabbatai:**

Yes, I must go alone .... Against my enemy, against  
myself ... even against God<sup>70</sup> ....  
Forgive me, that being unable to wait for Your sign,  
I made myself into the redeemer—forgive me  
that I took for myself power and might.<sup>71</sup>

Żuławski's portrayal of Sabbatai's "demise" likewise echoes themes of the Polish Romantics. In *Dziady*, Mickiewicz takes a somewhat critical stance toward Konrad's ravings, suggesting that his heretical statements had nearly allowed him to be seized by Satan.<sup>72</sup> A more tempered view of the national redeemer is presented in a following scene by Father Piotr, who expounds ideas about Poland as the Christ of nations and then proclaims that a redeemer will emerge years later born "Of foreign mother—heroic blood of yore."<sup>73</sup> Żuławski likewise foregrounds the inadequacy of Sabbatai's acts on behalf of national freedom. For all the strength he seems to hold, he is defeated rather easily, when he is seduced by his wife (who has promised to never make love with him) and thus breaks his ascetic vows. Yet, much like Mickiewicz shows a tempering of Konrad's rebellion into eventual national redemption, Żuławski portrays Sabbatai's defeat as portending eventual salvation: a true messiah will someday arise, declares a prophet near the play's conclusion.

Given this patina of Polish Romanticism, it is not difficult to interpret *The Messiah's Demise* as an allegory for Polish national rebellion. In this reading, Sabbatai's downfall stands in for the failure of the Romantic-messianic ideal to free Poles from foreign rule.<sup>74</sup> It is also possible, however, that this interpretation of the play reads a hardened ethno-national division between Polishness and Jewishness onto a literary tradition that had often endorsed interethnic affinity and mutual struggle. The Polish Romantic poets, much like Żuławski himself, had shown considerable respect and openness towards Jewishness.<sup>75</sup> Mickiewicz drew analogies between Polish messianism and Jewish messianism, despite the former's clear grounding in a Christian worldview, and he saw an affinity between Jews and Poles as stateless nations.<sup>76</sup> In this light, it is unclear whether *The Messiah's Demise* should be read as a gesture of Polish-Jewish solidarity, in which the similarities between Jewish and Polish national struggle are highlighted, or one of appropriation, in which a Pole has used Jewish history to clarify his own national concerns. What remains certain, however, is that Kassern could not adapt the play without also grappling with its core Romantic themes of how suffering begets action and how failed acts can portend national liberation.

### KASSERN'S OPERATIC MONUMENT

Ideas of Polish messianism, such as those found in *The Messiah's Demise*, had taken on renewed significance in Poland during the War. The repression of Poles led many to deploy this familiar framework for understanding the nation's suffering and to call for resistance on its behalf.<sup>77</sup> Yet whereas messianism had often been mapped onto a Polish-Catholic identity, *The Anointed* turns these ideas towards an affirmation of Jewishness. Indeed, as I will show below, Kassern did not attempt to remove the Romantic and Polish-nationalist veneer that Żuławski had applied to the Sabbatai story. Rather, he at times strengthens the ideas of Romantic nationhood in Żuławski's play by underscoring the sense of national collective in the work. *The Anointed* thus raises the intriguing possibility that Polish messianism offered Kassern a symbolic language with which to grapple with the experiences of the Holocaust and Jewish resistance—at the same time that these tropes were being used to marginalize and de-Judaize the Holocaust in Poland.

Kassern opens the opera with a chorus of Jews who describe their anguish and pain. As the curtain rises, the chorus implores the Lord to send them the Messiah, in a text based on Psalm 79:

Hear us, hear o Lord!  
 Hear Thy people  
 Crying unto Thee!

Hear, o hear us Lord!  
 Unto Thee we cry.  
 Save Thy people  
 From the heathen  
 Who defiled Thy holy shrine.  
 Ah, ah,

Slain they have  
 Thy sons,  
 Shed their blood  
 Like water  
 Round Jerusalem....

The Messiah send, us, Lord!<sup>78</sup>

A shortened version of this psalm is sung in act 1, scene 1 of Żuławski's *The Messiah's Demise*, where it emerges out of the background and is bookended by ongoing dialogue.<sup>79</sup> Kassern brings it front and center to the very beginning of the opera. In adapting the surrounding text, Kassern removed the extensive dialogue between Sabbatai's followers who come from Spain, Amsterdam, and Poland, instead painting the followers as a unitary people. He also removed the descriptions in Żuławski's play of more contemporary anti-Jewish violence, such as the Khmelnytsky massacres and the Spanish Inquisition, undermining the grounding of Sabbatai's movement within an early modern context. The audience is left to imagine the acts of bloodshed and calls for salvation in the chorus as echoing from biblical times into the present.

Musically, the opening chorus of *The Anointed* evokes earlier portrayals of Jewish suffering on the operatic stage. Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (1877) opens with such a chorus and Verdi's "Va, pensiero" from act 3, scene 2 of *Nabucco* (1842) is perhaps the best-known example of a Jewish chorus, which like Kassern's is a lament based on a psalm. Indeed, "Va, pensiero" may well have offered Kassern a precedent for connecting historical Jewish suffering to contemporary national causes, since by the late nineteenth century (if not before), the enslaved Hebrews' nostalgia for a lost homeland in "Va, pensiero" cued up Italian ambitions for unification and independence.<sup>80</sup> But whereas Verdi underscored national unity through a homophonic setting (and, indeed, the first two verses are sung in octave unison), Kassern instead presents the Jewish masses as slowly coming together into a cry for salvation (see Figure 3). The orchestra begins the scene with a repeating three-chord motive that ascends from low D octaves on the downbeats, supported by a steady, half-note beat in the timpani. Against this backdrop, two main musical ideas are presented in the chorus: the bass begins singing the text, often departing from the three-beat metrical pattern of the orchestra and in response to the bass's call for the Lord to "hear us," the alto enters with an extended cry on the syllable "Ah." The construction of these melodies, which generally move by step or small leap across a narrow range, likely exemplify Kassern's ongoing interest in archaic musical styles such as Gregorian chant.<sup>81</sup> The setting also partakes of the well-established tradition of gendered communal lament, in which the work of grieving is placed onto the female voice.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, throughout the opening of the chorus, the lower male voices (bass and tenor) speak to the Lord, while the higher female voices (alto and soprano) cry out on "Ah." Kassern begins to collapse this division, stressing instead communal unity, in measure thirty-six, and at the climax in measure forty, both upper and lower voices sing for salvation from the Lord.

Curtain up

**17** Andante slentando (♩ = 42-48)

Piano *p pesante*  
*Timp.*  
*Timp. sim.*

**21**

S  
A  
T  
B

*p pesante*  
Hear us, hear o Lord, hear Thy

**21**

S  
A  
T  
B

*p*  
Ah,  
peo - ple cry - ing un - to Thee.

Figure 3. Act 1, mm. 17–40, AKP, Mus. CLXIX rps 1. Used with the kind permission of Krystyna Dymaczewska.

The musical score is written for a choral ensemble (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano. The time signature is 3/2. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

**First System:**

- Soprano (S):** Melody with lyrics "Ah," and "Ah,". Dynamics: *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte).
- Alto (A):** Melody with lyrics "Ah,". Dynamics: *p* (piano).
- Tenor (T):** Melody with lyrics "Un - to Thee we cry". Dynamics: *mf* (mezzo-forte).
- Bass (B):** Melody with lyrics "Hear, o hear us, Lord,".
- Piano (P):** Accompaniment. Measure 28 is marked. Dynamics: *p* (piano).

**Second System:**

- Soprano (S):** Melody with lyrics "Ah,".
- Alto (A):** Melody.
- Tenor (T):** Melody with lyrics "o Lord, hear us, Lord, Hear us".
- Bass (B):** Melody.
- Piano (P):** Accompaniment.

Figure 3. (Continued)

The musical score is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The Soprano part has a long rest. The Alto part has a melodic line starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The Tenor part has a melodic line starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Bass part has a melodic line starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a complex, rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a simpler pattern in the left hand. The second system continues the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The Soprano part has a long rest. The Alto part has a melodic line starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The Tenor part has a melodic line starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Bass part has a melodic line starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The lyrics are: "Lord! Save Thy people from the heath - en who de - filed Thy ho - ly shrine. Save Thy peo - ple from the heath - en who de -".

Soprano (S):  
Ah, \_\_\_\_\_

Alto (A):  
Ah, \_\_\_\_\_

Tenor (T):  
Lord! \_\_\_\_\_ Save Thy peo - - ple from the

Bass (B):  
Save Thy peo - ple,

Piano:  
*mf* *f* *sf*

Soprano (S):  
Ah, \_\_\_\_\_

Alto (A):  
Ah, \_\_\_\_\_ Ah, \_\_\_\_\_

Tenor (T):  
heath - en who de - filed Thy ho - ly shrine.

Bass (B):  
Save Thy peo - ple from the heath - en who de -

Piano:  
*mf espr.*

Figure 3. (Continued)

**S** *f* Hear, o hear us, Lord, un - to Thee we cry. Save Thy peo - ple! *f*

**A** Ah, Ah, *f*

**T** Save us, save us, Lord! *f*

**B** filed Thy ho - ly shrine. O Lord! Oh, Lord *f*

*espr.* **37**

**S** Save us, save us, Lord! *f*

**A** Save us, save us, o Lord! *f*

**T** Un - to Thee we cry! *f*

**B** un - to Thee we cry! *f*

Figure 3. (Continued)

While the opera's opening strongly links nation and suffering, a core Romantic trope, the crux of Kassern's response to the Romantic traits of Żuławski's play occurs in act 3, the psychological core of the opera. Here, Sabbatai enacts his Konrad-like prayer to God, before losing his messianic status by making love with his wife. (Kassern changed her name from Sarah to Miriam.<sup>83</sup>) Her portrayal as a seductress in *The Anointed* may appear, at first glance, to replicate well-established operatic tropes that connect sexual temptation with the exotic.<sup>84</sup> Yet her placement within an imagined "East" is complicated by the fact that the historical Sarah was an orphan of the Khmelnytsky massacres in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, thus making her the only European-born character among the opera's leading roles. Indeed, prior interpretations of the Sabbatai story had embraced this ambiguity, suggesting that her seductions did not operate as an orientalist pull away from the "West," but rather as a metaphor for the forces of modernity and integration that were affecting Jewish communities in Europe.<sup>85</sup>

Kassern's musical setting of the scene amplifies the ambiguities surrounding Miriam's role in Sabbatai's downfall. He maintains from Żuławski, with relatively few changes, the monologue in which Sabbatai doubts his messianic mission. At the beginning of the solo, he asks for God's forgiveness for having "made myself a savior in absence of an answer from Thee." He then asks God not to tempt him with "With images of happy a life" (Figure 4) or, slightly later, with a reminder "That there is love."

**Andante con moto**

119

*p dolce*

cre - - - -

121

- - - - - scen - - - - - do

124 SABBATAI

*p*

Mas - ter, do not lead me in - to temp - ta - - - tion with

*pp*

**Figure 4.** Act 3, mm 119–28, AKP, Mus. CLXIX rps 1. Used with the kind permission of Krystyna Dymaczewska.

127

i - ma-ges of hap - py a life,

*p dolce*

*m.g.*

Figure 4. (Continued)

This passage is set in a lyrical and contemplative style that contrasts with harsher evocations of God and mission earlier in the scene. Sabbatai's concern that God may send him temptations suggests that Miriam's appearance in the later part of the scene could be seen as a divine sign that would confirm, rather than precipitate, Sabbatai's demise. Indeed, the music seems to confirm this interpretation: when Miriam sings of her love for him, the opera returns to the 6/4 andante of the "happy life" lines (albeit now "Andante sostenuto" rather than "Andante con moto") and the orchestra echoes the melody that accompanied the first evocation of a happy life, which Miriam also echoes in measure 267 (Figure 5). Further, when Sabbatai finally falls for her, he enters a trance-like state, in which he repeats her lines "like hypnotized" (m. 304), before the two make love.<sup>86</sup>

### Andante sostenuto

*(con profondo sentimento)*

MIRIAM *pp* (with intense feeling) *p* *dolcissimo*

O Sab - ba Sab - ba, my Sab - ba, if you knew, if you knew

*p dolce*

*pp*

Figure 5. Act 3, mm. 261–69, AKP, Mus. CLXIX rps 1. Used with the kind permission of Krystyna Dymaczewska.



Figure 5. (Continued)

In addition, Kassern rewrote the role of Miriam to minimize her heretical tendencies, reinforcing her role as a quasi-divine emissary. He cuts dialogue from the play (from act 2 of *The Messiah's Demise*), in which she questions Sabbatai's messianic calling.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, in the dialogue directly before they make love and before Sabbatai loses his messianic status, Kassern softens the moments when she questions his messianic calling or suggests he should embrace a life of happiness. We know that Kassern thought carefully about these moments because he made these cuts when revising a draft of the libretto.<sup>88</sup> Compare these passages, the first of which is from Kassern's draft and hews closely to Żuławski's original:

**Draft Libretto**

**Miriam:**

What do I care for all the kingdoms!  
The time has come to put an end to this comedy!  
I have suffered enough looking at you ...  
You are torturing yourself ...  
Exposing yourself to certain death ...  
and what for?  
For a ridiculous illusion,  
for sheer folly!<sup>89</sup>

I won't leave you ...  
God has given you but sufferings ...  
I am better than God ...  
I will give you happiness ... for ever ...!<sup>90</sup>

But now you are Messiah no longer!  
You know it now yourself ...  
'Tis better so!  
You are a human being now ...  
You will be happy.  
You would have lost your mind ...  
God gave me this inspiration to save you!<sup>91</sup>

**Final libretto**

**Miriam:**

What do I care for all the kingdoms!

*This passage is entirely cut from the final libretto.*

But now you are Messiah no longer!  
You know it yourself.  
It is better so,  
You are a human being now.

In removing these heretical and tempting insinuations, Kassern lessens the role of Miriam's seductiveness or cunning in Sabbatai's downfall. Nonetheless, sin does still play a role: Sabbatai blames himself for losing his messianic powers and declares to his followers near the conclusion that "God

has not anointed me. Through sin have I lost salvation.”<sup>92</sup> Yet the audience who had attentively followed act 3 would see a greater ambiguity for the causes of his downfall than these statements alone suggest: when speaking publicly, Sabbatai does not acknowledge, after all, the doubts in his mission and divine silence that preceded his downfall.

Although there are doubtless several literary and artistic reasons for Kassern’s changes, they also address one of the major weaknesses of too literally employing *The Messiah’s Demise* as a historical antecedent for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. If audiences were to connect Sabbatai’s acts on behalf of his nation and his eventual defeat with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and its defeat, as Kassern seems to have intended, then they might be left with the implication that the Uprising failed because of the personal shortcomings, even sins, of its fighters. Turning Miriam into a divinely sent emissary places Sabbatai’s downfall into a realm over which he has no control. If the opera asks us to hear the Uprising as an act of rebellion met only with silence, then we are also reminded that its defeat was outside the agency of its leaders.

Ultimately, the opera’s conclusion suggests that Sabbatai’s defeat—and by extension that of the ghetto fighters—will eventually be transcended and that Jewish collective freedom will be realized. The key area of F major plays an important role in conveying this optimism.<sup>93</sup> At the end of act 1, F major signals the belief among Sabbatai’s followers that their freedom is imminent. They believe that he is the Messiah and that his confrontation with the Sultan will gain them their freedom, a hopefulness expressed through a Hallelujah chorus in F major. This same key area is recalled in the opera’s final scene, after Sabbatai’s downfall. Here, the chorus once again sings of freedom, although they have lost hope in an immediate salvation through Sabbatai. Kassern sets the text “The day will come / The day of our freedom” with the chorus of Jews singing a sustained F-major chord, recalling the earlier hopeful predictions of Jewish freedom from the end of act 1. In both of these moments, the orchestra does not join the F major of the choruses. Yet, at the very end of the opera, the orchestra finally arrives on F major. Calling to the ear these earlier associations with Jewish freedom, the opera’s conclusion, musically at least, suggests that the hope of Jewish freedom might eventually be realized, even if outside the scope of the opera’s narrative itself.

The opera’s conclusion further suggests that Miriam’s love of Sabbatai is consonant with the coming freedom of the Jewish people. After the chorus sings of freedom, Miriam reappears on stage. While standing over the collapsed Sabbatai, she sings the final line of the opera: “at last! Mine!” repeating “Mine” a second time in *Sprechstimme* (pitched recitation), as she kisses his hair (see Figure 6). The text here would seem to emphasize her vindication of having Sabbatai for herself.<sup>94</sup> But the music tells a different story. Her vocal line concludes with a descent from the note G to F, thus calling to the ear the F-major key that had earlier indicated Jewish freedom. Two measures later, the orchestra arrives on a fortissimo F-major chord and the opera concludes. Miriam’s voice could be heard as quietly joining this triumphant conclusion; her declaration that Sabbatai is “mine” has become consonant with the larger arc of eventual Jewish freedom that is indicated by F major. Musically at least, Miriam’s envelopment in F major and the opera’s conclusion in this key suggest that her carnal love for Sabbatai, and more generally, his failure to achieve freedom for his followers, has been subsumed into a longer, ultimately more hopeful future of the Jewish people. If, as Kassern intended, the work was to portray Sabbatai and his failure as an allegory for the Warsaw Ghetto fighters, then the implication is clear: while the Uprising failed, its mission of Jewish freedom will eventually succeed.

[Con moto, ma non troppo] **Maestoso** (Miriam embraces Sabbatai and presses her lips to his hair)

202 MIRIAM *ff* at last! Mine! *f* Mine, —

**Curtain**

204 *ff* *f* *fff* *fff*

**End of the opera**

Figure 6. Act 4, mm. 202–205, AKP, Mus. CLXIX rps 1. Used with the kind permission of Krystyna Dymaczewska.

### REHEARSING THE HOLOCAUST

In the years following the completion of *The Anointed*, Kassern continued to compose and completed two new operas. His 1952 chamber opera *Sun-Up*, which he described as an American folk opera, saw a premiere and favorable review, although his 1953 opera *Comedy of the Dumb Wife* remained unproduced until recently.<sup>95</sup> He did not abandon his interest in Holocaust commemoration either. In June 1953, he began sketches for an opera based on another Żuławski play, *Eros and Psyche*.<sup>96</sup> In Kassern's retelling of the myth, the forces of good and evil are reincarnated through conflicts in classical Greece, the early Christian era, the French Revolution, Auschwitz, and Moscow's Lubyanka prison.<sup>97</sup> These last two stages are especially important because they confirm his interest in placing the Holocaust within larger historical narratives, and they suggest that the Holocaust's evil had been inherited by the Soviet Union. The Lubyanka scene fits well enough with the anti-communist era of the 1950s United States, as well as his own experience of both Nazi and Soviet oppression during the Second World War. Yet the opera's ambitious historical scope also resonates with Kassern's larger project explored in this article.

Like *The Anointed*, it refracts the Holocaust through historical precedents and projects its significance into the future. Unfortunately, we do not know how Kassern might have completed the opera, since it remained an unfinished sketch when he died in 1957 at the age of fifty-three.

James Young has observed that Holocaust monuments cannot be separated from the their “public life”—the acts and rituals they have engendered—and writes “that the social function of such art is its aesthetic performance.”<sup>98</sup> What then, of Kassern’s “dramatico-musical monument,” which although intended for public performance, has never been brought to the stage and thus the public? It is tempting to suggest that the work has had no public life because it was written in one country for the public of another. If it is within a lineage of Polish cultural responses to trauma that *The Anointed* becomes comprehensible, as I have argued here, it was nonetheless only possible for Kassern to turn such messianic ideas toward Jewish experience while in exile from Stalinist Poland. If one consequence of this exile was that the opera has fallen through the cracks of performance and scholarship, the other is that it allowed Kassern to memorialize the Holocaust beyond the official strictures imposed on the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in postwar Poland by drawing on older affordances of the country’s literary and political culture. The reasons for its obscurity are also, without a doubt, more prosaic, relating to the difficulty of staging modern opera and Kassern’s early death. When *The Anointed* does receive the public airing that it deserves, it will join later operas commenting on the Holocaust, such as Mieczysław Weinberg’s *The Passenger* (1967–1968) and Harry Bialor’s *The Uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto* (2019). The myriad artistic decisions that a production of *The Anointed* would entail will also bring Kassern’s ideas about nation, suffering, and rebellion into dialogue with these and other Holocaust memorializations of the more recent past.

## APPENDIX 1. SYNOPSIS

### *The Anointed*, a lyric opera in four acts-movements

The opera takes place near Adrianople (modern day Edirne, Turkey) in the year 1666.

#### ACT I. SINFONIA

**Scene 1.** Sabbatai’s followers, wearing torn and ragged clothes, sing of their plight outside of the castle where Sabbatai has been imprisoned. A group of Talmudists claim that Sabbatai is not the Messiah and argue with Nathan, Sabbatai’s prophet. Sabbatai greets his followers.

**Scene 2.** Inside the castle-prison, Sabbatai discusses with his wife Miriam the suffering of his people. The Sultan’s envoy arrives and tells Sabbatai that he must appear before the Sultan later that day.

#### ACT II. SCHERZO

In the Sultan’s gardens near Adrianople. The Talmudists tell the Sultan that Sabbatai is challenging his authority, and in response the Sultan has the Talmudists murdered. Sabbatai arrives. The Sultan challenges Sabbatai to prove that he is the Messiah by surviving a volley of poisoned arrows. Just as the Sultan quivers the first arrow, however, the sky turns black. Thunder and lightning interrupt him, which the Sultan interprets as a divine sign. The trial is postponed.

#### ACT III. ADAGIO

**Scene 1.** Sabbatai’s bedroom in the castle where he is imprisoned. Sabbatai is alone and speaks to God. He interprets the lightning bolts in the previous act as a sign that God opposes his mission. He begins flagellating himself, and his wife, Miriam, enters. The two make love for the first time, violating Sabbatai’s commitment to asceticism.

**Scene 2.** Sabbatai’s bedroom. Sabbatai and Miriam wake up the next morning after having made love. Sabbatai states that he is no longer the Messiah. He is called back to the Sultan for a reprise of the trial by poisoned arrows.

## ACT IV. RONDO FINALE

The Sultan's gardens. Sabbatai appears before the Sultan and announces that he is not the Messiah. He converts to Islam. The Sultan says that he will give him a sable cloak and a castle. The chorus declares that the day of Jewish freedom will come. Miriam embraces Sabbatai and states that he is at last hers.

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## NOTES

1. Letter from Kassern to Julius Rudel, October 22, 1950, Archiwum Kompozytorów Polskich at the University of Warsaw Library (AKP), uncatalogued Kassern papers.
2. On the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, see Israel Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994) and Yitzhak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, ed. and tran. Barbara Harshav (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
3. Marci Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda: Kształtowanie historii powstania w getcie warszawskim w latach 1944–1950," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 48, no. 4 (1998): 44–61; Bożena Szaynok, "Mémoire de l'insurrection du ghetto de Varsovie (1944–1989)," in *Juifs et Polonais, 1939–2008*, ed. Jean-Charles Szurek and Annette Wiewiorka (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009), 413–33.
4. An extensive literature has explored musical responses to the Holocaust. For an informative introduction, see Bret Werb, "Music" in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, ed. Peter Hayes and John K. Roth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Recent studies of musical commemoration and the Holocaust include Daniel Elphick, *Music behind the Iron Curtain: Weinberg and His Polish Contemporaries* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), ch. 5–6; Amy Lynn Włodarski, *Musical Witness and Holocaust Representation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015); James Loeffler, "In Memory of Our Murdered (Jewish) Children: Hearing the Holocaust in Soviet Jewish Culture," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 3 (2014): 585–611; and Joy Haslam Calico, *Arnold Schoenberg's A Survivor from Warsaw in Postwar Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
5. The manuscript score of the work is held at AKP: Mus. CXXXV rps 1 (full score), Mus. CLXIX rps 1 (vocal score), and Mus. CLXIX rps 3 (libretto). This essay is based primarily on the vocal score, the text of which differs at some points from that given in the libretto.
6. The groundwork for studies of Kassern has been laid by Violetta Kostka's excellent *Tadeusz Zygfryd Kassern: Indywidualne odmiany stylów muzycznych XX wieku* (Poznań: Rhythmos, 2011). On *The Anointed's* musical language, see Kostka, *Kassern*, 183–209, and Kostka, "Expressionist Features of the Opera *The Anointed* by Polish Composer Tadeusz Kassern," *Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa* 17 (2016): 122–32. For a brief overview of *The Anointed's* genesis, see Kostka, "Opera *The Anointed* Tadeusza Kasserna jako kompozytorska odpowiedź na Holocaust," *DeMusica: Muzykalia VII-Judaica* 2, [http://demusica.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/kostka\\_muzykalia\\_7\\_judaica21.pdf](http://demusica.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/kostka_muzykalia_7_judaica21.pdf) (accessed November 18, 2021). Renata Skupin considers the opera's orientalist elements in "Tadeusza Z. Kasserna ujęcie Orientu w operze *The Anointed* według dramatu *Koniec Mesjasza* Jerzego Żuławskiego," *Aspekty Muzyki* 3 (2013): 83–109.
7. Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Polish Literature and the Holocaust: Eyewitness Testimonies, 1942–1947* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press,

- 2019). These scholars have persuasively contested the claim that there was widespread avoidance of Holocaust memory during the first postwar decades.
8. A reticence around explicitly stating a cultural work's commemorative intentions toward the Holocaust was not unusual during this period, especially in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. See Olga Gershenson, *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013); Loeffler, "In Memory of our Murdered (Jewish) Children"; and Barbara Milewski, "Hidden in Plain View: The Music of Holocaust Survival in Poland's First Post-war Feature Film," in *Music, Collective Memory, Trauma, and Nostalgia in European Cinema after the Second World War*, ed. Michael Baumgartner and Ewelina Boczkowska (New York: Routledge, 2020), 111–37.
  9. Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), ch. 1.
  10. Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16.
  11. Joshua D. Zimmerman, ed., *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), ch. 2; Anna Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944–48* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
  12. Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, eds., *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 38; Dorota Glowacka and Joanna Zylinska, eds., *Imaginary Neighbors: Mediating Polish-Jewish Relations after the Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945–1979* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), 49–52.
  13. Kostka, *Kassern*, 18–21. For English-language biographical information, see Violetta Kostka, "An Artist as the Conscience of Humanity: Life in Emigration and the Artistic Output of Tadeusz Zygfryd Kassern," *Musicology Today* 8 (2011): 134–62.
  14. Kostka, *Kassern*, 66–79, 286–300.
  15. "Sylwetka Kompozytora," AKP, uncatalogued Kassern papers.
  16. Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 197–200.
  17. Kostka, *Kassern*, 132.
  18. "Sylwetka Kompozytora," AKP, uncatalogued Kassern papers.
  19. Letter from Kassern to Tadeusz Ochlewski, November 7, 1945, Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie 2334 (henceforth ANK), file 119.
  20. Kostka, "An Artist as the Conscience of Humanity," 134.
  21. "Sprawozdanie z prac działu kultury i sztuki New York, 1946–47," Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (henceforth AMSZ), Z.21-W.87-T.1187.
  22. Letter from Kassern to Stanisław Wiechowicz, March 18, 1947, AKP, uncatalogued Kassern papers; Letter from Kassern to Tadeusz Ochlewski, September 10, 1947, ANK, file 119.
  23. Kostka, "An Artist as the Conscience of Humanity," 138–40.
  24. An extensive literature examines the impacts of the Red Scare on American composers. Examples include Jennifer DeLapp-Birkett, "Aaron Copland and the Politics of Twelve-Tone Composition in the Early Cold War United States," *Journal of Musicological Research* 27 no. 1 (2008): 31–62; and Barry Seldes, *Leonard Bernstein: The Political Life of an American Musician* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
  25. "Ex-Polish Consul Attempts Suicide," *Baltimore Sun*, October 1, 1955; "Help Offered to Ex-Consul: Suicide Attempted by Pole over U.S. Citizenship," *Baltimore Sun*, October 3, 1955.
  26. "Walter Explains View on Kassern: Representative Holds Polish Ex-Envoy Should Reveal Past to Gain U.S. Aid," *New York Times*, November 2, 1955.
  27. A Bill for the Relief of Tadeusz Z. Kassern and His Wife, Longina Kassern, S.3157, 84th Cong. (1956).
  28. "Kasserns Receive Permanent Visas," *New York Times*, September 27, 1956; "Kassern is Dead," *New York Times*, May 3, 1957.
  29. Zvi Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union: 1881 to the Present*, second edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 145–55.
  30. Jaff Schatz, *The Generation: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 243–63.
  31. Marci Shore, "Children of the Revolution: Communism, Zionism, and the Berman Brothers," *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 3 (2004): 40–43.
  32. Lisa Cooper Vest, *Awangarda: Tradition and Modernity in Postwar Polish Music* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021), 26–34.
  33. The failed attempts at a premiere are explored in Calico, *Arnold Schoenberg's A Survivor from Warsaw*, 112–13.

34. For an analysis of *A Survivor*, see Włodarski, *Musical Witness*, ch. 1.
35. Letter from Kassern to Julius Rudel, October 22, 1950, AKP, uncataloged Kassern papers.
36. J. Mackenzie Pierce, "Zofia Lissa, Wartime Trauma, and the Evolution of the Polish 'Mass Song,'" *Journal of Musicology* 37, no. 2 (2020): 231–66.
37. "Stenogram konferencji zorganizowanej przez Dep. Twórczości Artystycznej" (June 20, 1951), Archiwum Akt Nowych, 366/1, file 746. The opera that did take the mantle of first postwar Polish opera, Tadeusz Szeliński's *Bunt Żaków* (The Scholars' Revolt, 1951), portrayed academic unrest in sixteenth-century Cracow as a precedent for the social transformations of the communist era.
38. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-15.106M (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce, Wydział Kultury i Propagandy), reel 14, file 308/162.
39. Shore, "Children of the Revolution," 24.
40. James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning in Europe, Israel, and America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), ch. 6.
41. "Program obchodu 5-ej rocznicy powstania w getcie Warszawy," USHMM, RG-15.106M, reel 18, file 308/185, p. 288; Loeffler, "In Memory of our Murdered (Jewish) Children," 606.
42. The score is reprinted in León Wajner, *Cantos de lucha y resurgimiento, 1939–1962* (Buenos Aires: KIUM, 1962), 210–20. I wish to thank Bret Werb for bringing this composition to my attention.
43. Shore, "Children of the Revolution," 27.
44. Jacek Leociak, "Powstanie w getcie warszawskim: w zwierniaku prasy," *Polska—Israel: Informacja, historia, kultura* 2 (March–April 1993), 9–12; Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 71; Shore, "Język, pamięć i rewolucyjna awangarda"; Szaynok, "Mémoire de l'insurrection du ghetto de Varsovie."
45. Joanna B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 207–14.
46. "Sprawozdanie z czynności za czas od 16 maja do 15 lipca 1946," AMSZ, Z.21-W.87-T.1187. He explained how "antisemitic violations" (wykroczenia antysemityczne) had led Americans to not participate in a scholarship fund.
47. Letter from Kassern to Rubinstein, July 30, 1947, Library of Congress Music Division (LoC), Artur Rubinstein collection, box 21, folder 11.
48. "Sprawozdanie z czynności za okres od 1.IV.1947-31.VII.1947 dla działu Kultury i Sztuki Konsulatu Generalnego w Nowym Yorku—Konsula Tadeusza Kasserna," AMSZ, Z.21-W.87-T.1187.
49. Samantha Baskind, *The Warsaw Ghetto in American Art and Culture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018); Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, 66–77.
50. Nancy Sinkoff, "Fiction's Archive: Authenticity, Ethnography, and Philosemitism in John Hersey's *The Wall*," *Jewish Social Studies* 17, no. 2 (2011): 48–79.
51. Włodarski, *Musical Witness*, ch. 2. See also Ben Arnold, "American Composers Respond: The Holocaust," in *Music and War in the United States*, ed. Sarah Mahler Kraaz (New York: Routledge, 2019), 276–90.
52. Joseph Horowitz, "Serge Koussevitzky," *Grove Music Online*, <https://doi-org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2249993> (accessed January 1, 2022).
53. Quoted in Kostka, *Kassern*, 133. He made these comments in a discussion of the operas *Eros and Psyche* by Stanisław Różycki and *Ijola* by Piotr Rytel, both to librettos based on Żulawski.
54. Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 8. See also Jonathan Bellman, ed., *The Exotic in Western Music* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998).
55. Skupin, "Tadeusza Z. Kasserna ujęcie Orientu," 102–109.
56. Matt Goldish, "Sabbatai Zevi and the Sabbatean Movement," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 491–521, 491.
57. Cengiz Şişman, *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Paweł Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
58. David Biale, "Shabbtai Zvi and the Seductions of Jewish Orientalism," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 16–17 (2001): 85–110; Jacob Barnai, "The Impact of Sabbatianism on Society and Culture in the Yishuv and in Israel," in *Scholar and Kabbalist: The Life and Work of Gershom Scholem*, ed. Mirjam Triendl-Zadoff and Noam Zadoff (Boston: Brill, 2018), 153–70.
59. Biale, "Shabbtai Zvi," 86.
60. He published literary-poetic translations into Polish of the Talmud and Old Testament. Elżbieta Gryń-Frister, "Koniec Mesjasza," *Tygiel Kulturalny* 33–34, nos. 9–10 (1998): 64–65; Barnai, "The Impact of Sabbatianism," 161.
61. Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, 241.
62. Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate*, ch. 1.
63. Stanley Bill, "The Splintering of a Myth: Polish Romantic Ideology in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries" and Włodzimierz Bolecki, "A Concise Companion to Polish Modernism," in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, ed. Przemysław Czapliński, Joanna Nizyńska, Agnieszka Polakowska,

- and Tamara Trojanowska (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 48–67, 105–31. On Żuławski and Romanticism, see Łukasz Wodzyński, “Modernism Romanced: Imaginary Geography in Jerzy Żuławski’s *The Lunar Trilogy*,” *Slavic Review* 77, no. 3 (2018): 685–703 and Lucyna Wiśniewska, “Filozofia twórczości Jerzego Żuławskiego,” *Kieleckie Studia Bibliologiczne* 2 (1994): 211–25.
64. Jerzy Żuławski, *Koniec mesjasza: Dramat w IV aktach* (Lwów: Nakładem Towarzystwa Wydawniczego we Lwowie, 1911), 112.
  65. Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefathers’ Eve*, tran. Charles S. Kraszewski (London: Glagoslav, 2019), 213–14.
  66. Żuławski, *Koniec mesjasza*, 144–45.
  67. Mickiewicz, *Forefathers’ Eve*, 211.
  68. Żuławski, *Koniec mesjasza*, 143.
  69. Mickiewicz, *Forefathers’ Eve*, 215.
  70. Żuławski, *Koniec mesjasza*, 143.
  71. *Ibid.*, 144–45.
  72. Mickiewicz, *Forefathers’ Eve*, 216–17.
  73. *Ibid.*, 237.
  74. Lesław Eustachiewicz, *Dramaturgia Młodej Polski: Próba monografii dramatu z lat 1890–1918* (Warsaw: PWN, 1982), 375.
  75. Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, “Jews and Judaism in Polish Romantic Literature” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1990); Jadwiga Maurer, “The Omission of Jewish Topics in Mickiewicz Scholarship,” *Polin Studies in Polish Jewry* 5 (1990): 184–92.
  76. Abraham G. Duker, “The Mystery of the Jews in Mickiewicz’s Towianist Lectures on Slav Literature,” *The Polish Review* 7, no. 3 (1962): 40–66.
  77. See note 12.
  78. AKP, Mus. CLXIX rps 1, act 1, scene 1.
  79. Żuławski, *Koniec mesjasza*, 16.
  80. George Martin, “Verdi, Politics, and ‘Va, Pensiero’: The Scholars Squabble,” *Opera Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2005): 109–32.
  81. Likewise, a quotation of Kassern’s earlier archaic work, *Tryptyk Żałobny* (Mourning Triptych, 1945) appears in act 1, m. 46, borrowing from mm. 14–17 of the first song of the Triptych.
  82. On the gendered lament’s *longue durée*, see Martha Sprigge, *Socialist Laments: Musical Mourning in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 61.
  83. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s *Shabbtai Zewy* had made a similar change, perhaps in an attempt to associate her with Christianity (the name Mary, the mother of Christ, being a variant of Miriam). See, Biale, “Shabbtai Zvi,” 104.
  84. Linda Phyllis Austern, “‘Forreine Conceites and Wandering Devises’: The Exotic, the Erotic, and the Feminine,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, 26–42.
  85. Biale, “Shabbtai Zvi,” 99–104.
  86. AKP, Mus. CLXIX rps 1, act 3, scene 1.
  87. Żuławski, *Koniec mesjasza*, 135–42.
  88. “The Anointed: Opera in Four Acts,” LoC, Serge Koussevitzky archive, box 471, folder 36. Although this draft often cuts and rearranges material from Żuławski’s play, it translates the passages that it does use rather literally.
  89. *Ibid.*, 22. I have maintained Kassern’s idiosyncratic punctuation as it appears in the draft libretto.
  90. *Ibid.*, 26.
  91. *Ibid.*
  92. AKP, Mus. CLXIX rps 1, act 4, mm. 78–82.
  93. An evaluation of the opera’s harmonic language is outside the scope of this article, but see Kostka, *Kassern*, 189–95 for an introduction. Kostka, drawing on observations from Michał Kondracki, suggests that it is largely based on a modified twelve-tone system. Yet, as she also points out, most of the scenes and acts suggest a tonal center at their conclusion and many sonorities can be parsed as bi- or polytonal.
  94. Kassern likely alludes here to the conclusion of Richard Strauss’s opera *Salome* (1905), where Salome kisses the severed head of Joachanaan before she is killed. Kassern paints Miriam in a more musically sympathetic light than Strauss paints Salome, although intriguingly (if perhaps coincidentally) the F-major sonority of *The Anointed*’s conclusion is also that which accompanies Salome when she states that the kiss of the severed head tastes of love.
  95. Olin Downes, “Music: 2 One-Act Operas,” *New York Times*, November 11, 1954.
  96. AKP, CLXXI rps 5.
  97. AKP, uncatalogued Kassern papers, Notatki.
  98. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 13.