



TAUBE
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**TWO ESTEEMED POLISH ACADEMICS TO SHARE
2012 IRENA SENDLER MEMORIAL AWARD**

Award Commemorates “Righteous Gentile” Sendler and Honors
Poles Who Preserve Jewish Heritage in Poland

SAN FRANCISCO — For the first time since its creation, the Irena Sendler Memorial Award will honor two Polish scholars: **Prof. Dr. Maria Janion** and **Dr. Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs**. The award is granted annually to non-Jewish Polish men or women who have worked to preserve Jewish heritage and foster Jewish cultural renewal in Poland. It was created in 2008 by the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture in memory of the late Irena Sendler, a “Righteous Gentile” who courageously saved 2,500 children from the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. This year’s award was announced on May 12, the fourth anniversary of Sendler’s passing.

“These outstanding academics each exhibit an unwavering dedication to the preservation of memory and the promotion of dialogue between Poles and Jews that has fostered the rebirth of Polish Jewish life since the 1989 fall of Communism,” remarked Tad Taube, Honorary Consul for the Republic of Poland and Chairman of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture.



Prof. Dr. Maria Janion (b. 1925) has been almost universally acclaimed as the grande dame of Polish humanities. Author of more than twenty fundamental books, and of several hundred scientific papers, she has received every major Polish academic and cultural award that exists.

Having spent her youth in Vilnius, in 1945 she left the city together with the rest of its Polish population, and eventually established herself in Warsaw, where in 1951 she graduated from the Institute of Polish Philology, Warsaw University. Most of her academic career is connected with that University, and with the Polish Academy of Sciences, as well as with the Pedagogical College in Gdańsk. Appointed professor extraordinary in 1963 and full professor 10 years later, she lost her teaching position in Gdańsk (though not in Warsaw) in the wake of the anti-Semitic, but also anti-intellectual campaign of 1968 (she is not Jewish).

From the 70s onwards, she was also deeply involved in the intellectual dissident movement, and again lost her recovered teaching position in Gdańsk after the military coup of December 1981. Her intellectual views, harshly critical of anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination, made her remain an intellectual gadfly far beyond the democratic breakthrough of 1989 through to present day.

Her academic discourse has focused on the position of the Jew in Polish romantic thought, and therefore in Polish life in general. In her seminal work “The hero, the plot, and death – Jewish lectures” (Warsaw 2009), she addresses the role allocated to the Jew by Polish society, and deconstructs it to reveal the inherent biases and limitations. Jews were seen as alien unless they

did what Poles did, but better – in order to overcome the initial stigma of their Jewishness. But if they actually managed to occasionally be better at being Polish than the Poles, the Jews automatically generated Polish resentment and hostility.

Ultimately, Janion teaches, the analysis of the Polish Romantic mythos enables us to understand the limited symbolic roles allocated to Jews. But because self-negation and irony were very much a part of the Romantic character, it is through that prism also that one is capable of showing Jews and Poles ways of escaping the constraints of stereotype and engaging as heirs of a shared tradition.



Dr. Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs is the first director of the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and teaches at the Institute of European Studies at Jagiellonian University. She is a member of the Polish delegation to the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research and 2011-2012 Ina Levine Invitational Scholar at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The Center for Holocaust Studies at Jagiellonian was established in 2008. While there are other academic centers in Poland that carry out such research, the Center for Holocaust Studies is the first university-level body whose sole purpose is to conduct research, educate and commemorate the Holocaust.

Dr. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs recently spearheaded the inauguration of a Masters Program in Holocaust Studies at the Jagiellonian, which is a joint program of the Center for Holocaust Studies and the Institute for European Studies. This pioneer program is the first of its kind in Poland. In addition, she facilitated the addition of a course on the Holocaust for medical students at the Jagiellonian University Collegium Medicum.

Currently, Dr. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs is on a yearlong fellowship at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, where she is researching the development of education about the Holocaust in comparative context and doing empirical studies on attitudes towards Jews and memory of the Jewish past.

She received a Ph.D. in Humanities from Jagiellonian University and was a Pew Fellow at the Center for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University, a visiting fellow at Oxford University and Cambridge University, and a DAAD fellow at the Memorial and Educational Site House of the Wannsee Conference. Dr. Ambrosewicz-Jacobs is the author of *Me – Us – Them. Ethnic Prejudices and Alternative Methods of Education: The Case of Poland* (Cracow: Universitas, 2003) and *Tolerancja. Jak uczyć siebie i innych* [Tolerance. How to Teach Ourselves and Others] (Cracow: Villa Decius, 2003, 2004).

The award will be presented in person at the Kraków Jewish Culture Festival on July 4, 2012 by Hon. Tad Taube, Chairman of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture and Honorary Consul for the Republic of Poland in the San Francisco Bay Area, and Shana Penn, Executive Director, at an official celebration.

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Nominations for the award were reviewed by a panel made up of Foundation advisory board members and leaders of the Jewish community in Poland. For more information about the award program or to schedule interviews, please email: info@taubephilanthropies.org.

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