

I'd Like to Say Sorry, but There's No One to Say Sorry To: Stories

Mikołaj Grynberg

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The haunting short stories of Mikołaj Grynberg's collection concern Jewish life and identity in Poland.

The book's thirty-one short stories alternate between being told from Jewish and non-Jewish perspectives, illustrating the longstanding conflict between the two groups, and showing how the former's oppression at the hands of the latter left enduring scars. The conflict is the angular cornerstone of stories like "My Five Jews," in which the focal character is rampant in her discrimination of Jewish people.

But the conflicts are not only external: internal conflicts are even more prevalent, and intergenerational grief and trauma are palpable. In "An Elegant Purse," a woman who lost her family in the Holocaust finds it hard to communicate with her daughter, driving a years-long chasm between them. Loneliness and silence, which are intrinsically linked, also dominate: many families make the fear-based decision to keep their Jewish heritage a secret, resulting in isolation. Community becomes the solution, as can be seen in stories like "The German Boy," wherein two children's supposedly German, but truly Jewish, surnames bind them together in a hostile environment.

The stories' emotional effects are enhanced by their lyrical prose. Paradoxes abound, matching the ambivalence and inner conflicts of the characters. Flashes of humor are also present, often in throwaway lines that make the seriousness of the issues handled more vibrant and noticeable. Each story is told in the first person, thus augmenting their intimacy and confessional tones.

I'd Like to Say Sorry, but There's No One to Say Sorry To is a poignant short story collection about being a Polish Jew.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (March / April 2022)

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