

**Title:** Polish Demons, Yiddish Demonology: Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joan of the Angels* and *The Dybbuk*

**Author:** Natalia Vesselova, University of Ottawa

In an obituary published in *The Independent*, John Riley quotes one of the last interviews given by Jerzy Kawalerowicz, where he declares pointedly: "I do not think it possible to find in my work the influence of any school or director." His films contradict this unpersuasive statement. In my presentation I am going to reveal and analyze the influence exerted on Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joan of the Angels* (*Matka Joanna od Aniolów*, 1961) by Michał Waszyński's Yiddish-Polish film classic *The Dybbuk* (*Der Dibuk*, 1937). In Kawalerowicz's film, a priest comes to a rabbi (both roles played by the same actor) in search of an answer to the mystery of demons possessing the Ursulines in the local nunnery. The rabbi refuses any revelation, saying that he cannot summarize in a few words the knowledge gained by generations of his forefathers, and admits having no clear explanation of demonic nature. What he tells the priest, though, is the story of his own unsuccessful exorcism of a girl possessed by the spirit of her dead lover. This is an exact reproduction of *The Dybbuk*'s plot, so that the rabbi himself can be viewed as a character imported from the Jewish film. In addition to the parable of love as diabolical possession, Kawalerowicz borrows from the earlier film's symbols (the white bridal garments), narrative elements (opening one's soul to evil spirits voluntarily), and visual effects (chiaroscuro and camera technique). The philosophical, metaphoric, and cinematographic parallels between the two films are striking. The notion of duality expressed in the episode, particularly by the rabbi's remark "I am you and you are me" could be interpreted as Kawalerowicz's comment on Polish-Jewish relationships and the cultural interconnection that disappeared with the Yiddish civilization portrayed in *The Dybbuk*.