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THE JEWISH QUESTION IN *WIADOMOŚCI LITERACKIE* (1924–1939)

Being one of the leading cultural and literary periodicals, *Wiadomości Literackie* [“Literary News”] played an important role in shaping the literary tastes of members of the Polish intelligentsia, and was a peculiar institution in literary life itself. The primary goal assumed by the journal was to elevate the level of Polish culture and literature and to present the most recent phenomena of European culture to its readers. Starting from the first issue published on January 6, 1924, the weekly declared war on any phenomena that its editors considered parochial. It would have certain, significant consequences in the future, especially in relation to the Jewish issues presented by the periodical. The publisher’s brochure announcing the first issue of the periodical was published in December 1923, and contained an outline of *Wiadomości Literackie*. The weekly was addressed to a wide readership, which was meant to trigger free discussion on matters of Polish literary life, lead to its growth and stimulate the newborn movements in art. The periodical was meant to present reliable information and objective evaluation of various phenomena.

The model for the new weekly was the French journal *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, but it would rapidly become independent of its inspiration and gain its own character. *Wiadomości Literackie* was planned as a means of financial security for *Skamander* – a periodical led by the literary group known by the same name. In the brochure issued in 1923, the chief editor of both periodicals, Mieczysław Grydzewski, announced cooperation with well-known *Skamander* members: Karol Irzykowski, Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, Aleksander Wat, Anatol Stern and others. Although they were sceptical about the periodical initially, with time they would willingly cooperate with it, which would doubtlessly shape its artistic and ideological character in accordance with their own views and shape its attractiveness.

Mieczysław Grydzewski held the position of chief editor and Antoni Borman was in charge of administration from the first until the last issue of the periodical, published on September 3, 1939. The popularity of the weekly is best illustrated by the rapid growth of its circulation: it grew from 3,000 to 9,000 copies after the first year of activity and would range from 13,000 to 15,000 in the following years.¹ *Wiadomości Literackie* was published in the form of a daily newspaper with six densely printed slapstick slips containing from four to eight pages on average (special issues usually had many pages). As a token of its social influence and prestige, the periodical would grant its own literary

¹ It was 15,000 according to J. Stradecki (1977: 321), who quotes the calculations done by the editors, but according to A. Paczkowski (1972: 260) it would seldom exceed 10,000 during the 15 years of activity, while A. Kowalczykowa (1981: 178) claimed that after the first year of activity it was “always 14,000 issues.”

awards: *Nagroda Wiadomości Literackich* (The “Literary News” Award) and *Nagroda Czytelników Wiadomości* (The “Literary News” Readers Award).

During the 15 years of the periodical’s activity, there were 829 issues. That period was not homogenous and, in response to the demands of society and its readership, *Wiadomości Literackie* would address social, moral, political or even scientific and economical issues in addition to its usual literary agenda. Reports and columns would gradually gain prominence and limit the initial domination of extensive literary articles and reviews. Addressing current issues that were extensively discussed in the press and involved the readers emotionally was in complete accordance with the tendency to expand the scope of content found in the periodical. Information, discussions, columns or correspondence and notes related to the Jews, their activity and the arguments which they concentrated on were among the issues addressed.

Discussing publications linked to Jewish issues is not an easy task, as it requires handling problems belonging to various areas of social and cultural life. Above all, one needs to keep in mind the temporal distance between the contemporary reader and the origins of these issues, especially in terms of how much the perception and possibilities to address Jewish issues objectively changed with historical awareness. Some notions and the manner in which words are chosen have changed, as emphasized by Anna Landau-Czajka:

Many statements sound different to a modern reader than they would have sounded to a pre-war reader. The sensitivity of many recipients has changed. While reading the opinions quoted, one should be aware of a range of issues that may easily be neglected by a modern reader.²

The expressions such as “Solution of the Jewish Question” or “the Final Solution,” which after World War II would become euphemisms for the plans of extermination or would be understood as strictly connected to the language of Nazi propaganda, should be read differently. The manner of argumentation and the selection of vocabulary seem offensive and unacceptable today. The modern reader of the pre-war press should not be surprised to encounter offensive synonyms of the word “Jew” or tasteless Jewish jokes in various journals. To accept, often inconsiderately, the labels assigned such as “anti-Semite” or “anti-Semitism” used in the Jewish press that was critical towards *Wiadomości Literackie*, has a completely different meaning to a modern reader than it had to the readership of that time.

Until now, the Jewish Question raised by *Wiadomości Literackie* was mentioned only by way of analyzing the overall character of the periodical and associated issues. The article written by Magdalena Opalska entitled “*Wiadomości Literackie* – dyskusja nad kwestią żydowską (1924–1939)” [“Literary News” – The Discussion on the Jewish Question (1924–1939)] was published in *Przegląd Humanistyczny* in 1990.³ The author reveals the pro-Jewish and anti-Jewish areas of the issues addressed, but she does not grant readers an opportunity to see the basis for evaluation of the material. The overall picture is not full; it does not include the historical context and therefore is not objective.

Other publications addressing this issue treat it as marginal. Eugenia Prokop-Janiec shows an interesting and detailed picture of the Polish-Jewish literature between the

² Landau-Czajka 1998: 10.

³ Cf. Opalska 1990: 75–88.

wars, which in relation to the content of *Wiadomości Literackie* sheds light upon the way in which opinion-writers responded to a new phenomenon and the discussions around it that appeared in many periodicals, including *Wiadomości Literackie*.⁴ Understandably, this context included only the issues linked to the literature in between cultures and the influence of the Jewish background of the periodical's partners on the way in which they addressed many subjects. Similarly, Jan Błoński, in his essay entitled "Autoportret żydowski" [A Jewish Self-Portrait], included his thoughts on the difference in feelings of identity between Jewish authors and assimilated writers of a Jewish background, as well as a variety of sociological and cultural problems that this phenomenon triggered.⁵ Above all, he analyzed the way in which Jewish issues are depicted and the contribution of the Jews to the culture of Poland.

There is also a great deal of articles that address individual editorial and problematic issues linked to the activity of *Wiadomości Literackie*. Those may only highlight certain aspects of many problems, without aiming at evaluating the way in which the Jewish Question was addressed in the texts published by *Wiadomości Literackie*.⁶

The aim of this article is to present an analysis of the content of publications linked to the Jewish Question that were published in the periodical and relate them to a context that ranges far beyond the literary and guides the reader to political and social events, cultural phenomena and the discussions and arguments of the time between the wars. It is also an attempt at reconstructing the awareness that the reader and the authors of articles that addressed the Jewish Question in that period might have had. Let us look closely at these issues.

From the very beginning, *Wiadomości Literackie* and the chief editor himself were highly controversial among the members of the intelligentsia of Warsaw. Few members of the intellectual elite remained indifferent towards the issues addressed in the periodical and during the discussions taking place in cafes. The controversies were connected mainly to the atmosphere surrounding the periodical and the people who remained within its sphere of influence. Eugenia Prokop-Janiec shows particular attention to the context in which *Wiadomości Literackie* had to act:

It was an open secret that this weekly – the most popular and influential literary periodical at that time – was the voice of the elite of the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia. Irzykowski called *Wiadomości Literackie* a fortress of ingenious mimicry and devoted to it a considerable share in his outline of the Jewish contribution to Polish literature that was published in *Kurier Poranny*. Its title was spoofed as "Jadamoński Literackie" [Here go the literate Jews] and the periodical itself presumably suffered from a certain Jewish complex that it was unable to deal with.⁷

That complex was believed to find its expression in the fact that the issue of the ethnicity of the editors and authors was not addressed and that subjects linked to Jewish culture were mentioned sporadically or that the phenomena occurring on the border between the Polish and the Jewish culture were ignored. The expression was also used

⁴ Cf. Prokop-Janiec 1992.

⁵ Cf. Błoński 1996: 58–117.

⁶ Cf. Koźniewski 1976: 13–114; Zipold-Metterkowa 1984: 337–347; Pytasz 1985: 32–46; Stradecki 1997: 192–207; Szawerdo 2004.

⁷ Prokop-Janiec 1992: 106.

in reference to emotions from addressing the Jewish Question in *Wiadomości Literackie* and the periodical's reluctance to take a clear stand in discussing any subject in that scope. Was it really so? Let us first look at the environment and the atmosphere in which the periodical was created and existed.

At the time between the wars no one doubted that the origins of the main partners of the periodical – that is: Antoni Słonimski, Jan Lechoń, Antoni Borman, Julian Tuwim or Emil Breiter, Marian Hemar, Józef Wittlin, Stefan Napierski and many others – were Jewish. The “ethnic” argument would often introduce much confusion into social relationships, force one to declare one's identity or even trigger attacks from radical nationalists. The assimilatory tendencies and liberalism and universalism in the ideological domain proposed by the opinion-writers would also foster taking one's own identity into account. Jan Błoński put it in simple words:

The writers who stood at the periodical's crucible did not, of course, deny their Jewish home and tried to remain tolerant and enlightened in the national issues. Yet, they preferred to address their public as Polish in general and not as Polish Jews or Jewish Poles...⁸

Mieczysław Grydzewski (whose name, which he keenly tried to conceal, was Grycendler) himself belonged to the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia.

(...) Before the war, many malicious remarks were made due to his Jewish origins and the similar genealogy of the members of the Skamander and *Wiadomości Literackie* social environment. On the other hand, Grydzewski would describe the “decent Polish anti-Semites” and would refer to the ideological pillar of the Polish nationalists' political movement National Democracy as “worthy and touching Professor Stroński”. He exceptionally valued Adolf Nowaczyński and denied his being an anti-Semite.⁹

According to Magdalena Opalska, the way in which Grydzewski struggled with his peculiar “complex of the origins” significantly influenced the information he presented and the way in which he selected content.¹⁰ One may think that such conclusions are too precipitate, as consistent fulfillment of the liberal periodical idea and striving towards maximum objectivism in presenting many issues would have given the same result. The need to address one's own identity was caused by pressure from the outside, repelling attacks coming from both right-wing extremists and the Jewish press.

The first piece of evidence, and a very visible one, of dealing with the label of a Jewish periodical was an almost insane attention to using correct Polish language in all published texts. The chief editor, who was ruthless towards mediocre or low-quality writing, even if written by eminent authors, would torment his partners with corrections and reviews. Grydzewski was comparably diligent in his perception of the national issues. Being attached to Poland and feeling Polish through and through, he expressed his patriotism many times. This would not prevent him, though, from despising intolerance

⁸ Błoński 1996: 72.

⁹ Dybciak 1995: 1.

¹⁰ Opalska (1990: 88) describes the *Wiadomości Literackie* complex defined as a specific social situation of the group of editors who shaped the overall image of the weekly. They were the elite of the Jewish intelligentsia, assimilated in the Polish nation. The writers linked to the periodical and its chief editor were continuously “forced to show evidence of their ‘integral Polishness’ and defend their membership in the cultural elite of Poland – a compromise was imposed on them in the matter of the Jewish Question.”

and all forms of narrow-minded nationalism, which was in full accordance with the periodical's profile and was consistently abided by until the last issue.

Involvement, which was a trap many assimilated Jews fell into, is in evidence in the issue of Grydzewski's potential attempt at claiming compensation for the disposal of *Wiadomości Literackie* (as he lost his employing establishment). The chief editor firmly stated the following:

The lawyer thinks I could claim compensation for the loss of *Wiadomości Literackie*. I refused. [...] Because the lawyer told me that I was eligible for it as a Jew and I would accept it only as a Pole.¹¹

The controversy growing around the periodical soon triggered attacks that became powerful in the mid-1930s. The extreme right-wing press (*ABC, Prosto z Mostu, Falanga*) would accuse the periodical of a pacifist propaganda, cosmopolitanism, favoring Jewish writers (regardless of their own identity statements or assimilation level), supporting the Jews and their expansion in various domains of life. The conservative (*Mysł Narodowa, Gazeta Warszawska*) and left-wing newspapers (*Lewar, Oblicze Dnia, Robotnik*) also opposed the political standing of the periodical and its model of culture. The accusations included flattening culture, pursuit of sensations at the expense of relevant information and moral responsibility for the published content, as well as seducing the readers and adapting to their often lowbrow taste.¹²

On the other hand, one could hear voices of the stirred Jewish press in Polish that ferociously combated the myth of the Jewish identity of *Wiadomości Literackie*.¹³ The Jewish press would strongly differ with the opinions expressed by the periodical, especially the accusations of backwardness and having a ghetto mentality. Another controversial issue was the negative attitude of *Wiadomości Literackie* towards Zionism and the deep assimilation propaganda that would already at that time be reminiscent of the ideas of the Enlightenment or Positivism. It is not difficult to realize that *Wiadomości Literackie* would fight its competitors for Jewish readership as well. That is why *Nowy Dziennik, Nasz Przegląd, Opinia* or *Chwila* were criticized on a regular basis, yet not more than other opponents.¹⁴ Jewish environments were ridiculed mostly on the basis of their backwardness, inability to use correct Polish, lack of adaptation to living in modern Warsaw, and so on. The Jewish periodicals perceived the presence of *Wiadomości Literackie* as part of the assimilation problem, therefore propagating Polish-Jewish culture only as a cultural and literary phenomenon was linked to underlining the links with the *Wiadomości Literackie* and Skamander environment that the Jewish authors had. The affinity of ideas was sensed, but at the same time the Jewish identity of the periodical was being denied.¹⁵ Despite arguments of various kinds, Grydzewski's periodical was one of the most important points of reference for the Jewish press using the Polish language.

¹¹ Krassowska 1996: 208.

¹² Cf. Makowiecki 1998: 1176.

¹³ Cf. M. Kanfer, *Czy Wiadomości Literackie są pismem żydowskim?*, *Nowy Dziennik* 1932, No. 219.

¹⁴ Cf. A regular column by Julian Tuwim, *Camera Obscura*.

¹⁵ Cf. Prokop-Janiec (1992: 115) wrote: "It is true that the argument between *Wiadomości Literackie* and the Polish-Jewish groups was a struggle of assimilation proponents and the Zionists, but only in one aspect of the problem. Indeed, the group gathered around *Wiadomości Literackie* was, to the Polish-Jewish writers, an epigone of a finished ideology. It was a conflict between two models of Jewish identity. The difference of

The attitude of the chief editor and the directions in which the periodical developed were highly problematic for both Poles and Jews, not to mention the difficult and not definitely specified (or rather existing in many forms) situation of the assimilated Jews who cooperated with *Wiadomości Literackie*.¹⁶ There were instances of writers such as Wiktor Weintraub, Artur Prędski, Aleksander Dan, Jehuda Warszawiak and Henryk Adler, who wrote both for *Wiadomości Literackie* and the Jewish press. Mieczysław Braun would complain in *Nasz Przegląd* that *Wiadomości Literackie* had not permitted him to publish in Jewish papers,¹⁷ while Roman Brandstaetter, initially writing also for the weekly, demonstrated the evidence for its harmfulness to the Jewish intelligentsia in *Opinia*.¹⁸ The involvement of the periodical in ideological arguments of various kinds, which were continued not only on its own pages, was proof of its separateness. The stance towards the Jewish Question gave the impression of attempts at scouting the social and political situation and preparing background for a factual yet multi-faceted discussion rather than presenting a program.

Another important issue that influenced the attitude of *Wiadomości Literackie* towards the Jews was doubtlessly the matter of Jewish readers as potential readership of the periodical. With its agenda of impartiality and presentation of contemporary cultural phenomena, the weekly addressed a wide public. Yet, despite its attractive appearance and alluring content, *Wiadomości Literackie* had a narrow group of recipients.

Doubtlessly very readable, the periodical actually expressed the views of only some of the members of the Polish intellectual elite. Addressed to the educated man whose interests covered a wide scope of cultural issues, it tried to shape his worldview. The readership consisted not only of the proponents of liberal views or specific political and social programs; the weekly was also read by its protagonists and ideological opponents. Some wanted to fulfill their need to read literature and opinion, others searched for arguments against the proposed model of culture. Still, the periodical had a countrywide readership.

The Jewish reader who treated the periodical as his “secular Bible”¹⁹ was highly controversial. The Jewish intelligentsia made up nearly half of all who received the weekly on a license fee basis.²⁰ Opalska mentions a subject that was irritating to Grydzewski, that is the Jewish income coming from both subscriptions and advertisements placed by Jewish companies.²¹ On the other hand, Błoński suggested that the Jewish reader of *Wiadomości Literackie* was proof of a far wider phenomenon that affected Polish culture between the wars. This was a completely new reader seeking contact with culture. The

attitudes shows that conflict in full: “When *Wiadomości Literackie* defends the rights of the assimilated to full participation in Polish culture, the Polish-Jewish writers support Jewish culture in the Polish language. When *Wiadomości Literackie* gathers Poles of Jewish origins, the Polish-Jewish Press turns to Jewish writers who write in Polish.”

¹⁶ Cf. Sandauer 1982: 5–8.

¹⁷ Cf. M. Braun, *Wiadomości Literackie w ogniu*, *Nasz Przegląd* 1937, No. 267.

¹⁸ Cf. R. Brandstaetter, *Głosy i echa literackie w oczach Żyda*, *Opinia* 1935, No. 18.

¹⁹ Cf. Błoński 1996: 67.

²⁰ Błoński 1996: 67.

²¹ Cf. Opalska (1990: 83) wrote: “Indeed, *Wiadomości Literackie* had a large group of Jewish readers and Grydzewski, because of obvious reasons, reluctantly revealed the significance of that group to the periodical. Furthermore, there was no clear line of division between the Jewish environment concentrated around the weekly and the readers of the national Jewish press published in Polish.”

chief editor had to take him into account as a potential (and actual) recipient. It remains unknown whether he realized the significance of this fact for the evolution of Polish culture. The author of *Autoportret żydowski* highlights the role of the Jewish literary audience that forced the necessity of looking at Polish society in a different manner, taking into consideration the national tensions and the phenomena of assimilation and acculturation:

Yes they, though they are barely visible, seem to be the true movers (and the subject) of the debates that took place in *Wiadomości Literackie* and, or even more, around *Wiadomości Literackie*... They silently claim their share in the Polish literary culture... and not only literary. In other words, they want free access to the social elite! Did it imply assimilation to Polish identity as well? Sometimes yes, but often no. The distinction that the *Wiadomości Literackie* environment failed to understand. Especially as that Jewish claim was answered with visible resistance. It is obvious that Polish society – as a whole – failed to face the challenge... Saying yes or no did not entirely match political and more specifically political party divisions. It was rather a matter of civilization – ethical and cultural.²²

Being aware of the fact that the periodical existed on the verge of many visions of culture, Grydzewski treated the weekly as a platform, on which many views were meant to be shared. He allowed both the proponents and the opponents of the model he supported to have their say. Acting instinctively on many occasions, he wanted his readers to understand that culture is a living organism, a mixture of many strands. Discussions and arguments were not necessarily linked to the ability to formulate clear and unambiguous opinions, as well as correct reasoning, which often requires a view from a mainly temporal distance. Magdalena Opalska sees some instability of the whole periodical's character in the ambiguity of the chief editor's position:

The journalistic achievements of *Wiadomości Literackie* as far as the Jewish Question is concerned may not be evaluated as better than ambiguous. [...] Despite the fact that it was the best literary periodical ever issued in Poland and that it had many great victories in verbal and intellectual duels with opponents, its overall vision was an anachronism that was tragically incompatible with the tendencies taking the lead in Europe between the wars.²³

There were vast differences in understanding acculturation and defining assimilation among the columnists featuring in *Wiadomości Literackie*. In brief, the periodical considered full assimilation of the Jews as possible and even necessary for them to function better in Poland. Jewish environments regarded this as a complete misunderstanding, anachronism and lack of understanding towards the diversity of Jewish society. Polish readers had similar thoughts on the ideas of liberalism. *Wiadomości Literackie* began to look at the slogans critically as late as the mid-1930s, but did not renounce them completely. The emphasis was then put on propagating ethical values in defending the Jews against violence and terror.

In the early years of its existence, *Wiadomości Literackie* granted its readers access to copious information on Jewish culture, both foreign and native. The periodical would print biographies and pieces of writing by writers like: Lion Feuchtwanger, Max Brod,

²² Błoński 1996: 67–68.

²³ Opalska 1990: 88.

Joseph Roth, Israel Zangwill.²⁴ Much space was devoted to the successes of Marc Chagall; his works were discussed and the reproductions of his paintings were willingly published by the periodical.²⁵ The successful debut by Franz Kafka was noted as well.²⁶ The weekly would attentively observe the development of Soviet literature and acknowledge the important contribution of the assimilated Jews.²⁷

As far as Polish-Jewish literature was concerned, *Wiadomości Literackie* began to take a stand quite early, that is as soon as it went outside the Jewish press.²⁸ The pressure of the reviewers who wanted the message to be universal entangled with the assimilation-minded attempts at counting Jewish writers as Polish poets with Jewish origins. The whole effort was directed at drawing those Jewish writers from the backwaters in order to introduce them into the native literature. In debut collections, the reviewers were looking for culturally universal elements that were easy to assign to the mainstreams of creativity between the wars. Such elements were considered valuable and desired, constituting the value of a work. The elements judged to concentrate on ethnic bonds were not taken into account.

It must be remembered, though, that the approach to Jewish literature was assimilation-minded. It strictly rejected superficial or false assimilation. The linguistic bridge connecting both cultures was perceived as positive, so linguistic correctness was evaluated in the first place. The reviews of the debut volumes of Maurycy Szymel, Karol Dresdner, Stefan Pomer, Anda Eker, Roman Brandstaetter and Jakub Lewittes were cordially received by the top eminent critics cooperating with *Wiadomości Literackie* and the authors of the reviews: Stefan Napierski, Karol Zawodziński, Józef Wittlin, Leon Piwiński.²⁹ There is no doubt that the reviewers used Skamander criteria to evaluate Polish-Jewish poetry. The prose written by Gustawa Jarecka and Debora Vogel was also appreciated by Emil Breiter, although it was accused of being too sentimental.³⁰

Yiddish literature and culture was treated as inferior to the usually appreciated Jewish poetry written in Polish. It was noticed sporadically, and good translations from Yiddish were reviewed. The books by Szalom Asz entitled *Motke Ganef* and *Kidusz Haszem*,

²⁴ Cf. Zgon Zangwilla, *WL* 1926, No. 38: 3; [as], Powieść Broda o księciu żydowskim, *WL* 1927, No. 31: 2; J. Wittlin, Książki o prześladowaniu Żydów (*L. Feuchtwanger "Rodzeństwo Oppenheim"*, *M. Matveev "Les tragues"*, *J. Roth "Tarabas"*), *WL* 1934, No. 41: 4; S. Lenkowski, Druga część 'Wojny żydowskiej' (*L. Feuchtwanger, "Die Sohne"*), *WL* 1936, No. 30: 3.

²⁵ Cf. A. Słonimski, Sztuka rosyjska. B. Aronson: Marek Szagał, *WL* 1924, No. 6: 2; Kronika ilustrowana, *WL* 1925, No. 44: 5; Ze współczesnego malarstwa i rzeźby, *WL* 1926, No. 34: 3; E. Woroniecki, Groteska artystyczna Chagalla, *WL* 1927, No. 12: 1; M. Chagall, Cyrk (reprodukcje), *WL* 1929, No. 20: 3.

²⁶ Cf. A. Prędski, Arcydziało Franza Kafki, *WL* 1927, No. 38: 2; J. Berman, Ameryka Kafki, *WL* 1928, No. 36: 3.

²⁷ Cf. A. Dan, Rozmowa z rzekomym Bablem, *WL* 1930, No. 21: 2.

²⁸ Cf. Prokop-Janiec 1992: 107. The author places the first manifestos in the early 1930s and describes the earlier rivalry of views on that subject and sporadic addresses of authors.

²⁹ Cf. J. Wittlin, Wśród książek K. Dresdner, Heine i nieznamoma, *WL* 1928, No. 40: 3; S. Napierski, Powrót do pseudoklasyków, *WL* 1928, No. 27: 3; S. Napierski, M. Szymel, Powrót do domu, *WL* 1931, No. 48: 4; S. Napierski, U poetów. J. Lewittes, 'Posthumus', *WL* 1932, No. 36: 5; S. Napierski, M. Szymel, 'Skrzypce przedmieścia', *WL* 1933, No. 49: 6; S. Napierski, S. Pomer, 'Elegie podolskie', *WL* 1932, No. 41: 5; L. Piwiński, Powieść i nowela, *WL* 1931, No. 30: 3; K.W. Zawodziński, Poeci Erec Izraelu i ghetto, *WL* 1938, No. 26: 4; K.W. Zawodziński, Dwie poetki, *WL* 1938, No. 29: 5.

³⁰ Cf. E. Breiter, Dwie powieści kobiece, *WL* 1936, No. 11: 4; E. Breiter, Interesująca powieść, *WL* 1934, No. 45: 3.

I.J. Singer's *Josie Kalb* and collections of stories by Saul Czernichowski, Józef Opatoszu and Icchok Lejb Percec³¹ belonged to that group. The periodical published articles on the poetic works of Chaim Nachamn Bialik,³² and notes about Hebrew poetry³³ as well.

The publications were received with friendliness and interest, but in comparison with the description of other phenomena in Polish and European literature, there was little attention in general towards Jewish poets and writers (whether they wrote in Polish or Yiddish). The opposite phenomenon was noted and the classics of the Polish literature translated into Hebrew and Yiddish were presented with pride.³⁴ The Wilner Trupe did not miss a description.³⁵ The reviewers would also note interesting publications of rather unknown Jewish writers that addressed the issues of identity and ghetto.³⁶ One may take into account a small column entitled "Kronika żydowska" [The Jewish Chronicle] that may be found only in a few issues from 1927 and yet presented a review of interesting cultural information from the Jewish press, especially "Literarische Bletter" [Literarische Bletter], which added to the high level of the whole periodical.³⁷ Information about Jewish publishing houses, institutions or reviews of Polish works in the Hebrew press was brief and provided only sporadically.³⁸

It could be seen as symptomatic that Jewish literature was described by those opinion-writers who also had bonds with the Jewish press: Adler, Warszawiak, Dan. The others though belonged to the group of the assimilated Jews (like Breiter, Wittlin, Napierski, Ettinger), which shaped the kind of poetry and prose they would propagate and whose opinions were dependent on the level of assimilation of the authors.

In the 1930s, the editors of *Wiadomości Literackie* were attacked by the Polish right-wing press and accused of "corrupting" Polish culture. A perfect membrane for those events and all the insanities linked to that topic was of course *Kronika tygodniowa* [Weekly Chronicle], in which Antoni Słonimski emphasized:

Each of the authors who discuss the influence of Jews on Polish culture makes exceptions for some Jews "sincerely" involved in "Polish life" [...]. The choice obviously depends on personal sympathies and antipathies [...]. It would be the simplest to say that all influence of Jews on Polish culture is so scant that there are only three or four poets with Jewish origins in Polish literature, that those writers may be fought with for their views just like others, that

³¹ Cf. Sz. Asz: "Motke Ganef", *WL* 1925, No. 19: 4; H. Adler, *Literatura żydowska w Polsce*, *WL* 1928, No. 23: 2; I.J. Singer, "Josie Kalb", *WL* 1934, No. 59: 3; H. Adler, *U poety żydowskiego – hellenisty*, *WL* 1926, No. 27: 2; *Wśród książek*, *WL* 1929, No. 20: 4.

³² Cf. J. Warszawiak, C.N. Bialik, *WL* 1931, No. 40: 6; J. Warszawiak, N. Bialik o Polsce, *WL* 1932, No. 3: 3; J. Warszawiak, C.N. Bialik, *WL* 1934, No. 32.

³³ Cf. H. Adler, *Prozaik hebrajski* (wywiad z N. Bistrickim), *WL* 1927, No. 171; S. Wolf, *Najmłodsza proza hebrajska*, *WL* 1926, No. 132/133.

³⁴ Cf. R. Brandstaetter, *Pan Tadeusz* po hebrajsku, *WL* 1925, No. 100; J. Warszawiak, *Żydzi a Polska. Przekłady na hebrajski*, *WL* 1927, No. 34: 2; M. Bałaban, *Przekład z polskiego na hebrajski* (J. Warszawiak: "Polin"), *WL* 1936, No. 27: 6; *Literatura polska po żydowsku*, *WL* 1927, No. 1: 2.

³⁵ Cf. Z. Tonecki, *Teatr żydowski w Polsce*, *WL* 1932, No. 33: 3.

³⁶ Cf. L. Szenwald, *Dzieciństwo na wygnaniu* [review of a book of the same title by Shamary Levin], *WL* 1933, No. 16: 2; H. Adler, *Ciekawy poemat żydowski* [review of *Metamorfozy* by Menachem Borejsza], *WL* 1927, No. 30: 2.

³⁷ Cf. *Kronika żydowska*, *WL* 1927, No. 30: 4; No. 31: 4; No. 37: 4.

³⁸ Cf. P. Ettinger, *Judaica*, *WL* 1934, No. 40: 5.

using Jewish origins as an arguments is a merely comfortable trick and that using such tricks does not bring more glory into writing and will never elevate the level of literary discussions.³⁹

By acknowledging the undoubted contribution of writers with Jewish origins and writers who openly declared their Jewish identity to Polish literature, Słonimski captured the inequality in fighting in defense of his own work against racist charges. At the same time, he demonstrated how unstable the ideals of assimilation that his periodical and he himself preached were.

The periodical also hosted a debate with Jewish papers on whether the existence of Polish-Jewish literature was possible. It lasted invariably until the outbreak of World War II. That argument was impossible to solve as it concerned two different models of Jewish identity and the possibility of participating in Polish culture. The editors of *Wiadomości Literackie* claimed that to follow the ideology of Zionism blindly meant taking the opportunity to be part of the European culture away from the Jews. The Jewish nationalism that Słonimski described and fought against hinders creating an open environment and closes it in the same ways as superstitious Jewish traditionalism and keeping wrongly understood Talmudic Law. The idea of Polish-Jewish literature was not welcomed by the periodical, because it was understood as a form of revival of Jewish pride and national particularism.⁴⁰

A range of arguments linked to culture also appeared in a series of articles entitled “Pisarze polscy w kwestii żydowskiej” [Polish Writers on the Jewish Question], printed in 1937–1938. The statements of writers revealed the way in which not only the separateness, spirituality and tradition of Jews was seen, but also a conviction about the fruitful cooperation of nations or lack thereof. Manfred Kridl saw the Jewish element as an indispensable component of Polish culture.⁴¹ To him the propositions to rid the country of the racially alien, venomous element postulated by the anti-Semites were equal to rejecting part of the highly precious cultural richness of Poland. In fact, Kridl supported the idea of two creative elements, Polish and Jewish, existing within one culture, but he did not define the rules of that coexistence. Many controversies were raised by Jerzy Hulewicz’s article, in which he defended Polish culture against Jewish influences that he considered strong and threatening. In his opinion, Jewish culture was wishy-washy, and therefore finding common ground with it would only lower the national spirit.⁴² These views were confronted by Andrzej Stawar, whose views were far left-wing. He criticized the Poles for ignoring the phenomena going on between the two cultures because of the subject being too alien in itself.⁴³ He did not deny the fact that immense Jewish cultural richness existed, but he was surprised that the Jews known worldwide paid attention to small Jewish villages and remained locked in local circles. It was difficult for him therefore to discuss the influence of Jewish culture on Polish culture, as its character was to a large extent regional. He defended a similar thesis in his review of a collection of

³⁹ A. Słonimski, “Kronika tygodniowa”, *WL* 1937, No. 37.

⁴⁰ The complexity of the subject is described by E. Prokop-Janiec (1992: 9–156), who includes not only the attitude of the Jewish press, but also the attacks of the Polish right-wing press and the opinions of the assimilation proponents, which complicated the discussion.

⁴¹ Cf. M. Kridl, *Przypomnienie starych i prostych prawd*, *WL* 1937, No. 45: 3.

⁴² Cf. J. Hulewicz, *Może to jest źródłem sporu*, *WL* 1937, No. 16: 3.

⁴³ Cf. A. Stawar, *Jeszcze o antysemityzmie*, *WL* 1937, No. 22: 2.

short novels entitled *Plomienie i zgliszcza* [Flames and Ashes] translated from Yiddish, in which he accused the leading Jewish prose writers of deaf, narrow particularism and strong nationalism.⁴⁴

The argument contained the overall view of the periodical about the necessity to search the literature of minorities for the universal element that stretches beyond cultural particularism and separateness and therefore creates the works of the borderline and the possibility to participate in European culture.

Little known and recognized only instinctively and superficially, the acculturation of the Jews was considered by the periodical to be a marginal phenomenon that existed on the verges of Polish culture. The phenomenon was as alien as it was exotic, yet doubtlessly remained in a lower phase of evolution than the flourishing literary life of the period between the wars. That is why, in these lines of thinking, acculturation meant the awareness of functioning on the verges of two cultures rather than an opportunity to affirm any elements of one's Jewish identity.⁴⁵ Jewish writing, morality and symptoms of cultural life were often looked down upon (unfortunately, Słonimski did so in his columns) as dealing with the folk, regional subjects that the periodical considered to be outside of the boundaries of high culture. During a conflict with the Jewish periodicals, it was possible to indulge in ferocious arguments on the contribution of the Jews to Polish culture.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, before the scope of that notion and a common terminology had been specified, World War II brought an end to all discussion, as if in the middle of a sentence.

Wiadomości Literackie presented its own lines of thinking about Jews and the Jewish Question. The environment of the assimilated Jews who cooperated with the periodical considered the problem of self-definition or demonstrating Jewish identity as a tender topic, so it was often put aside. To answer the question how to be a Jew in the new political and social situation and how to deal with having Jewish origins everyone searched for his own answer. Assimilated, sometimes even going back generations, Jews often denied the existence of this problem due to their own stable feeling of membership in the Polish nation. That, in turn, was undermined by the anti-Semite right-wing groups and pushed them into the "between" category (this tragically experienced split is visible mainly in poetry). In this context *Wiadomości Literackie* was considered on the one hand an anti-Semite periodical that denied the possibility of the existence of Polish-Jewish culture, but on the other hand as a forum for liberal pro-Jewish statements. It could hold the position of a vigilant beholder of the social and political reality of the period between the wars, in which the Jewish Question was impossible to solve (*sic!*).

The periodical's evolution went from strictly literary presentation to being open to social and political problems. It would publish reports and articles that had not much in common with literature. This is proof that views on the Jewish Question grew radical and the polarization of the weekly was much easier to be seen in the context of social issues.

⁴⁴ Cf. A. Stawar, *Prowincja i nacjonalizm*, *WL* 1925, No. 28: 4.

⁴⁵ Cf. Prokop-Janiec 1992: 50.

⁴⁶ Prokop-Janiec (1992: 48–52) describes the creation of the model of Polish-Jewish culture in the conditions of assimilation and acculturation that emerged in the interwar period. The description includes mainly the discussions in the Jewish press issued in Polish and emphasizes the point of view of the Jews who had to choose from participating in Polish culture or trying to generate a qualitatively new cultural entity, with the features characteristic of the fringe of culture.

Despite the fact that extreme views started to be represented in the periodical (which in fact were not frequent or so radical in preaching anti-Semitic propaganda as those found in the right-wing and nationalist press or in fighting anti-Semitic propaganda, as in the left-wing press⁴⁷), *Wiadomości Literackie* clearly supported the idea of multi-cultural or multi-ethnic Poland, national but not nationalist. The Jews were meant to be seen on a par with other national minorities, despite their everlasting tendencies towards isolationism. Frequently published features and free reflections of writers would show how little the Poles knew about the life, religion and morality of their Jewish neighbors. It was proved, however (as Słonimski clearly stated in “Kronika tygodniowa”), that one could be both Polish and Jewish, as these terms are not mutually exclusive.⁴⁸

Issues related to Judaism and Christianity appeared on more than one occasion in the periodical, although we should not ignore the fact that they did so only by the way of a review of a book by Tadeusz Zieliński. The reviewers attempted to relate issues linked to the religion of the Jews to the wider context of Judeo-Christian culture. Paweł Hulka-Laskowski and Ignacy Wieniewski continued their discussion of the origins of Christianity, while Henryk Ułaszyn confronted the anti-Semitic circles of clergy.⁴⁹ These articles fit perfectly into showing the areas of Jewish heritage that are an integral part of the universal European tradition.

Topics related to the Jews were frequently related to in Słonimski’s “Kronika tygodniowa.” The author would comment on current affairs in an interesting manner and share his observations with readers, highlighting the paradoxical and ridiculous points linked to the so-called Jewish Question. He would also deliver witty retorts to his opponents. Identification of the point of view presented by Słonimski with the overall profile of the periodical was so deep that quotations from “Kronika tygodniowa” and his public statements were believed to reflect the opinion of the editors completely.

Before Słonimski became known as the author of “Kronika tygodniowa,” he had become a highly controversial character due to an article significantly entitled “O drażliwości Żydów” [On the Touchiness of the Jews],⁵⁰ published in the second half of 1924. It was his first contribution to *Wiadomości Literackie* that was so strong, uncompromising and direct in criticizing the society of the Jews of Warsaw. This article initiated a certain mode of writing, in which the periodical would address the Jewish Question. It could be seen as an embodiment of the Positivist program of assimilation of the Polish Jews, which triggered controversies over the author. The Jewish press issued in Polish called him an anti-Semite and a troublemaker.⁵¹ Yet, by reacting with full outrage, the Jewish circles only proved the arguments used by Słonimski, as he had accused them of being too sensitive to criticism. He considered their “touchiness” to be rooted in a conviction about their peculiar mission as the chosen nation. Calling the Jews “the

⁴⁷ Cf. Koźniewski 1976: 42.

⁴⁸ Cf. A. Słonimski, “Kronika tygodniowa”, *WL* 1931, No. 11; 1935, No. 25; 1939, No. 29.

⁴⁹ Cf. I. Wieniewski, Sąd nad judaizmem, *WL* 1927, No. 38: 3; *idem*, Cios w próżnię, *WL* 1927, No. 42: 3; P. Hulka-Laskowski, Nieprawidłowości proceduralne w sądzie nad judaizmem, *WL* 1927, No. 40: 2; *idem*, Dyskusja, a nie dysputa, *WL* 1927, No. 46: 3; H. Ułaszyn, Chrześcijaństwo a Żydzi, *WL* 1932, No. 2: 3; *idem*, Jeszcze z powodu artykułu Chrześcijaństwo a Żydzi, *WL* 1932, No. 11: 6.

⁵⁰ Cf. A. Słonimski, O drażliwości Żydów, *WL* 1924, No. 35: 3.

⁵¹ Cf. Prasa żydowska o wybryku *Wiadomości Literackich*, *Nasz Przegląd* 1924, No. 251, and W. Berkelhammer, P. Antoni Słonimski czyli o drażliwości Żydów, *Chwila* 1924, No. 1971.

world's most chauvinistic nation" was a serious accusation, as it gave them no moral right to complain about Polish nationalism.

"Kronika tygodniowa," as a regular column placed usually on the last or penultimate page, gave Słonimski the opportunity to verbalize his thoughts to a larger extent. Following the debut in 1927, it was always present until the last issue of *Wiadomości Literackie*. The Jewish Question was a recurring topic or a thread interwoven into various domains of life, sometimes connected to remote branches of social activity or unexpectedly sneaking into the social meetings. In the form of a column (also due to the great talent of the author), Słonimski was capable of loosely putting together various intentions: personal, literary, social or even strictly political. During the early years of "Kronika tygodniowa," Słonimski presented above all an assimilation-minded attitude, consistently repeating the arguments used in his article "O drażliwości Żydów." He criticized the narrow-mindedness and belief in superstition among the layer of Jewish society that would not assimilate and would even show a tendency to isolate and lock itself in a ghetto. Słonimski ridiculed this attitude mercilessly, and stigmatized anachronistic behavior and the inability of some Jews to adapt to the reality of the 20th century. This criticism depicted the Jews of Warsaw as backwards, closed and incapable of compromise.⁵² It is important to emphasize here is that Słonimski criticized some layers of Jewish society, and not the nation as a whole.

The same message would be transmitted by the features by Wanda Melcer, who would, seeing the peculiarity of Nalewki in Warsaw, give a provocative title to her series "Czarny Łąd – Warszawa" [The Black Continent – Warsaw].⁵³ The title itself enforced a certain interpretation of the phenomena described. The capital was depicted from the perspective of Jewish nooks, overpopulated cheders and tenement houses where trade flourished along with family and religious life. The goal of the features was to make Jewish life and customs seem less remote. Because the author chose the poor as a collective protagonist for her features, she did not give an opportunity to see the essence of Judaism, but stigmatized the backwardness and anachronistic lifestyle of the Jews. Orthodoxy and strong attachment to religion were the area that received most criticism, along with the way in which the rabbis and tzadiks applied pressure to the common folk. As an astute observer of social life, Melcer managed to show many problems that a simple man from a Jewish ghetto had to face: she illustrated the role of women in Judaism, pointed to many imperfections and problems in Jewish law and the flaws and inadequacy of the Jewish educational system. She did not, however, investigate the origins of this state of affairs. Not surprisingly, the features were met by strong objections among Jews, while the press tried to repel the imprecise conclusions of the author.⁵⁴

A similar point of view was presented by Helena Boguszewska, the author of a feature entitled "Dwukrotne odwiedziny w Centosie" [Two Visits to Centos], presenting the situation of the orphanage and impaired children facility in Otwock.⁵⁵ In spite of all

⁵² Cf. A. Słonimski, "Kronika tygodniowa", *WL* 1930, No. 9; 1934, No. 23.

⁵³ Cf. W. Melcer, Dziecko żydowskie rozpoczyna ziemską wędrówkę, *WL* 1934, No. 14: 1; *ead.*, Młodzieniec żydowski wstępuje w świat, *WL* 1934, No. 22: 2; *ead.*, W mykwie i pod baldachimem, *WL* 1934, No. 40: 1; *ead.*, Żona i matka, *WL* 1935, No. 4: 2; *ead.*, Business is business, *WL* 1935, No. 14: 2; *ead.*, Religia i befsztyk, *WL* 1935, No. 15: 2; *ead.*, Modlitwa i umieranie, *WL* 1935, No. 36: 3.

⁵⁴ Cf. S. Hirschhorn, *Nasz Przegląd* 1934, No. 278.

⁵⁵ Cf. H. Boguszewska, Dwukrotne odwiedziny w Centosie, *WL* 1933, No. 36: 2.

the appreciation for the work of the facility and the limitless patience of the guardians, the superstitious Jewish practices and lack of sufficient attention for raising children in a Jewish family received many words of criticism. The same subject was undertaken by Dr Henryk Rubinraut, the author of “Podrzutki czystej i nieczystej rasy” [The Foundlings of a Pure and Impure Race],⁵⁶ who presented the picture of life in two borstals: for Christian and Jewish children. The children stigmatized with Jewish origins were affected by the consequences of the ill state. It was caused by Jewish isolationism – the Orthodox Jews did not accept foundlings to the Jewish orphanage, as they were not confident that the blood in the boys’ veins was actually Semite.

The features by Ksawery Pruszyński issued in “Podróż po Polsce” [A Journey through Poland] contained Jewish threads, though Jews themselves were not in the centre of any of the articles. In a feature entitled “Żółci ludzie” [The Yellow People] issued in 1936, the author reported the attack on a Jewish shop owned by Bluma Borowicka, carried out by the combat units of the young National Democrats, which caused harm to several people.⁵⁷ On the other hand, in his description of the Academic Youth Pilgrimage to Jasna Góra which was organized by the National Radical Camp along with the National Democrats and fascists,⁵⁸ he confronted the reader with the vast gap between the ideals of Christian humility and the spirit of prayer on the one side and the threats shouted at the Jews on the other side. In his recollection of the trial following a pogrom in Przytyk, the author remained cautious in his evaluations.⁵⁹ He declared both parties equally responsible for the disaster. The author considered the Jewish Question to be unquestionably linked to wider problems: the crisis of the Polish countryside, the attitude of the Church towards the racist slogans of the right wing and lastly the unhealthy competition in trade. A contemporary reader may see that there is no unambiguous condemnation of violence against the Jews, but the periodical had also published an unambiguous condemnation of violent acts against the Jews, such as an anonymous harsh reaction to pogroms in Brześć and Częstochowa.⁶⁰

The discussion on the ways of solving the Jewish Question in Poland on the pages of the weekly reached its apogee in the years 1937–1938 and was followed by the previously mentioned series entitled “Polscy pisarze o kwestii żydowskiej” [Polish Writers on the Jewish Question]. The harsh criticism targeted at unassimilated Jewish circles abated after 1935, when it was already obvious that full assimilation was impossible. The periodical took an unambiguous stand towards the attacks on Jews carried out by the radicalizing right-wing circles. All symptoms of racism and nationalism were met forcefully (even the symptoms of Jewish nationalism, which was demonstrated by “O drażliwości Żydów” [On the Touchiness of Jews] by Słonimski and his discussion with Roman Brandstaetter). There is no doubt that in this subject *Wiadomości Literackie* always supported the right moral, ethical and human values. Anti-Semitism was considered especially dangerous, and its symptoms were attacked in all circumstances. Some writers who rejected the propositions of National Democracy would take their arguments

⁵⁶ Cf. Dr H. Rubinraut, *Podrzutki czystej i nieczystej rasy*, *WL* 1933, No. 49: 2.

⁵⁷ Cf. K. Pruszyński, *Żółci ludzie z Łodzi*, *WL* 1936, No. 25: 1.

⁵⁸ Cf. *idem*, *Ślubowanie*, *WL* 1936, No. 26: 2.

⁵⁹ Cf. *idem*, *Przytyk i stragan*, *WL* 1936, No. 30: 1.

⁶⁰ *Przeciw barbarzyństwu*, *WL* 1937, No. 30: 8.

into consideration.⁶¹ There were also statements revealing the negative attitude towards the Jewish masses that justified the emergence of anti-Semitism, such as those evoked by Aleksander Świętochowski.⁶² Still, he was the one to realize what the main error was in the discussion about the Jews. The anti-Semites had a clear program:

[...] barbaric and unfeasible, it is still a program. The anti-Semites use brutal means that sometimes offend the elementary rules of law and morality, but they clearly know and say what they want. Those who defend the Jews on the other hands limit their activity to verbal stigmatization of the offenders and throwing slurs at them, without even mentioning how the coexistence of the combatants should be organized [...]⁶³

It is important, however, that most participants in the discussion postulated creating a forum to discuss the Jewish Question without aggression and questioning their right to live in Poland. Unfortunately, there were no specific results. On that basis, Grydzewski wanted to create a forum for the discussion that was as wide as possible, gathering and considering all the arguments and ideas that appeared in public on the pages of the periodical. That would also include the arguments he personally disagreed with and those that were incompatible with the ideological line of the periodical, which is why the arguments of the anti-Semites were present as well.

All intellectual efforts of the opinion-writers were targeted at denouncing the moldering mumbo jumbo of the proponents of racist policy and showing its dangerous consequences.⁶⁴ Apart from the features and articles connected with the Jewish Question in a moral context (which seemed to be superior and undisputable), there were also economic arguments and remarks criticizing the government for its indolence in dealing with the grey areas of legislation connected with minorities.⁶⁵ The Jewish Question was evidence of how weak the young state was, without a consistent policy towards minorities.

Besides, the government was closely watched by the periodical, especially as far as strict laws against minorities were concerned.⁶⁶ Neither the discussion on shechita,⁶⁷ nor the anti-Semitic rules introduced in sports were ignored by the periodical.⁶⁸

The fact that the discussion on that topic emerged was evidence that the need for comments on current issues in society was addressed. Undertaking a tender (also because of the controversies around the periodical mentioned above) subject of this kind proved that there were attempts at preparing the grounds for a factual discussion on how

⁶¹ Cf. K.W. Zawodziński, *Apel do serca i rozumu*, *WL* 1937, No. 19: 2; J. Łobodowski, *Tragedia żydowska*, *WL* 1938, No. 9: 2.

⁶² Cf. A. Świętochowski, *Antysemityzm*, *WL* 1937, No. 16: 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁴ Cf. E. Zegadłowicz, *Poza dyskusją*, *WL* 1937, No. 20: 2; K. Pruszyński, *W największym skrócie*, *WL* 1937, No. 21: 3.

⁶⁵ Cf. K.W. Zawodziński, *Apel do serca i rozumu*, *WL* 1937, No. 19: 2; P. Hulka-Laskowski, *Na marginesie sprawy żydowskiej*, *WL* 1937, No. 25: 2; M. Wardziński, *Antysemityzm – daltonizmem państwowym*, *WL* 1937, No. 28.

⁶⁶ Cf. J. Chmielowski, *Walna rozprawa*, *WL* 1938, No. 50: 6.

⁶⁷ Cf. S. Rogoż, *Sprawy żydowskie*, *WL* 1936, No. 9: 1; A. Słonimski, "Kronika tygodniowa", *WL* 1936, No. 10 and 11; W. Melcer, *Religia i befsztyk*, *WL* 1935, No. 15: 2; J. Zaruba, *Rzeczy nieprawdopodobne. Posłanka Prystorowa jako właścicielka jatki koszernej* [caricature], *WL* 1936, No. 16: 15.

⁶⁸ Cf. M. Hemar, *Paragraf aryjski. Felieton w trzech rundach*, *WL* 1938, No. 9: 6.

to prevent the real threat of fascism rising in society and the limitations of the freedom of culture. An astute analyst may say that the discussion was undertaken by *Wiadomości Literackie* too late to influence the events in the country in a significant manner, though this is difficult to evaluate.

In the meantime, European politics was changing. In the 1930s, *Wiadomości Literackie* observed the situation in Germany with growing concern. The periodical informed of the changes occurring in the countries of Europe, yet it would still emphasize its political neutrality. Presenting facts linked to the development of the Nazi movement in a blissful, often humorous, way using ironic comments reduced the seriousness of this news and generated a one-sided response. In the first issue of the periodical, readers were able to read the following about Hitler:

Who is Hitler? A few years ago he was known to nobody. [...] Then he suddenly became a candidate for the powerful personality that the German tribes missed. The slogan: "Blame the Jews!" allowed him to gain popularity in no time.⁶⁹

In parentheses, the author included anthropological considerations, showing to what extent pseudoscience may be the basis of politics. The tone of anxiety was covered with irony.

The crucial events in German political life that occurred in the 1930s made *Wiadomości Literackie* change their attitude. The periodical was investigating the tendencies towards dictatorships in Europe closely and the tone of the journalists gradually showed more seriousness and concern. The early 1930s was also a period rich in questions as to how the nationalist movements influence the younger generation due to "Kronika tygodniowa," where Słonimski devoted a whole column to the phenomenon of Nazism in relation to the Jewish Question:

The whole world has been stirred as a medicine before being applied. Germany, the Mecca of Jews, has become their greatest enemy. Thanks from the Jews to the Polish authorities protecting them from German pogroms – that is enough to make an old Jew feel confused. [...] Heavy and tragic is the handicap that the German Jews experience today. Patriotism, the Iron Crosses, Junkers and suddenly being hit on the teeth with a butt. No, this is not a spiritual handicap, this is real drama, disturbing in its horror. [...] It is interesting that voices have been raised in defense of the Jews, while the persecution of non-Jewish writers around is ignored. [...] A silence has fallen. New terror, new fury of barbarism in Europe has been answered with silence. Is it the silence of exhaustion? The cries of Jews will not fill in this emptiness; all in all it is just a detail of a new monkey's struggle against the passive society. Or perhaps people remain silent because they cannot see the truth? They cannot see it because the range of inventions has been enriched by a new one. The tortured are tortured to keep them from crying that they are being tortured.⁷⁰

The fact that the columnist took his stand so clearly was surprising. Even the radical opinions sounded harsher, because they were preceded by the silence of waiting. From that time on, "Kronika tygodniowa" would always refer to the subject of Nazism, and Słonimski, being an eye-witness of the new system's birth, would comment on the symptoms of fascism growing in the social and political life of Germany. It must be admitted

⁶⁹ S. Schayer, Wśród szowinistów i mistyków. Impresje niemieckie, *WL* 1924, No. 1: 2.

⁷⁰ A. Słonimski, "Kronika tygodniowa", *WL* 1933, No. 22.

that he did so very accurately. Even though the word “fascism” appeared in “Kronika tygodniowa” as soon as in 1929, it was linked to Italian fascism, which had attracted more attention at that time. That word had a different tone then than nowadays. For Słonimski, it was still a word for the whole political and social system opposed to communism.⁷¹ Despite Słonimski’s attempts at expanding the context of nationalist “ethics,” the philosophical background and the ways in which masses were captivated to the level of abstract notions and to general moral rules, the short form of column did not allow him to study the phenomenon in depth. Yet, piecing together various parts of statements on fascism and Hitler that one could find in “Kronika tygodniowa” over the course of ten years, it is possible to present the view of the author on nationalism and the atrocious actions taken against the Jews.

Even though fascism was depicted as a real threat to all aspects of democracy, Hitler himself was presented to the reader as a small, impaired and ridiculous man. The satirical drawings by Jerzy Zaruba: “Hitler – malarz bardzo pokojowy,” “Nowe towary norymberskie” and “Po kongresie norymberskim” match the perception of Hitler in “Kronika tygodniowa” perfectly. The same may be said about Witold Leonhard’s drawing included in “Humor i satyra” (Humor and satire), depicting Hitler as a connoisseur of art with a designation telling the whole story: “Impressionismus, futurismus, expressionismus – alles ist bolschewismus” and Waław Umański’s “Pepek świata” [The cat’s whiskers].⁷² Moving within the basis of criticism against the idea of racism was impossible without specific application to the Jews. Słonimski would write about Nazi propaganda and include Aryan paragraphs. He wrote about the creation of a “new man,” who was convinced about his being more than human, transforming himself into a programmed machine without reason that loathes all different races and nations.⁷³ The analysis of anti-Semitism received a prominent place in “Kronika tygodniowa.” The author was especially disgusted with physical terror, legalized by the Nuremberg Laws. Słonimski would create a calendar of all ways in which the Jews were demoted in society.⁷⁴ The culmination point was the escalation of fascist hatred during *Kristallnacht*, described in “Kronika Tygodniowa.”⁷⁵

A particularly analytical approach to the political transformation in Germany, the racist witch-hunt and social issues was revealed by Antoni Sobański in his features in “Kronika zagraniczna” [Foreign Chronicle]. They were grouped into two series. The first of them was live material from Germany after the decisive Reichstag election that ended in the NSDAP victory. Entitled “W Niemczech po przewrocie” [Germany. After the Coup],⁷⁶ it presented an analysis of the situation and showed the nuances of the inter-

⁷¹ Cf. *idem*, “Kronika tygodniowa”, *WL* 1930, No. 6: 27 and 46.

⁷² Drawings by J. Zaruba (*WL* 1934, No. 17: 7; 1934, No. 39: 6, and 1936, No. 41: 7), Witold Leonhard (*WL* 1937, No. 33), and W. Umański (*WL* 1938, No. 13: 7).

⁷³ Cf. A. Słonimski, “Kronika tygodniowa”, *WL* 1933, No. 11; 1935, No. 32, and 1937, No. 48.

⁷⁴ Cf. *WL* 1933, issues 15, 17, 20, 22, 24, 32, 34, 42; 1934, 14; 1937, issues 28, 30; 1938, issues 21, 49; 1939, 17.

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, *WL* 1938, No. 49.

⁷⁶ Cf. A. Sobański, Berlin – Maj 1933, *WL* 1933, No. 27: 1; *idem*, Naród w mundurze, *WL* 1933, No. 28: 2; *idem*, Cywile, Reichstag, książki, *WL* 1933, No. 29: 3; *idem*, Rewolucja, *WL* 1933, No. 30: 2; *idem*, Kwestia żydowska, *WL* 1933, No. 31: 2; *idem*, Obyczaje i prawo, *WL* 1933, No. 32: 1; *idem*, Wahrhaftigkeit, *WL* 1933, No. 33: 2; *idem*, Wyjazd z Berlina, *WL* 1933, No. 34: 2.

nal policy of that country and the changes following Adolf Hitler's rise to power. It was focused mainly on the disturbing symptoms of the subsequent aspects of life being subordinated to the new system, the seizure of control over German education and changes in customs including the new cult of the dictator. The second series was entitled "Niemcy hitlerowskie po roku" [Hitler's Germany after one year]. It was a continuation of the observations and considerations made by the author. Among many references to the situation of Jews in the Third Reich, two features were fully concentrated on this issue. The article "Kwestia żydowska" [The Jewish Question], a detailed analysis of the anti-Jewish policies, was an attempt at determining why Jews, constituting only 1% of society, became victims of the Nazi system. The author had rightly noticed that the Aryan paragraphs and stigmatizing the people of Semite origins would jeopardize the development of German culture. Eminent scientists, Nobel Prize winners like Albert Einstein, James Franck and Fritz Haber who could not bear the racist humiliation had left their chairs, which had been in turn taken by the "specialists" commissioned by the Nazis. The author did not hesitate to call the new system threatening and dangerous. He stigmatized especially the lawlessness that was the most characteristic feature of the new system.

He returned to the topic after one year in order to investigate the pillage done in minds and hearts. In the aforementioned series entitled "Hitler's Germany after one year,"⁷⁷ the author described the apparent normality and its symptoms in German propaganda, the attempts at maintaining the same level of life and even at persuading the citizens that the social and political situation had improved dramatically, with more supplies in shops and fewer uniforms on the streets. After one year of Hitler's reign, the most visible phenomenon was the deteriorating situation of Jews in all aspects of their lives. Sobański was full of compassion and outrage when he wrote the following:

Harm has gained chronic features and, as we know, chronicity weakens compassion. In consequence, Germany has kept the ghetto and the Jewish financial elite, but lost intellectuals and artists.⁷⁸

This was not everything that needed to be said in the subject, which would be addressed by *Wiadomości Literackie* again, in factual comments and anxious considerations linked to the Nazi movement's growth in power.⁷⁹ The fact that the pseudoscience directed by the new government continued to seize new areas and that eminent German scientists of Jewish origins were bereaved of their citizenship caused the most clamor. *Wiadomości Literackie* expressed its protest against these developments by printing a letter by Thomas Mann following his honorary degree being revoked in connection with the loss of his German citizenship.⁸⁰

Among the foreign features concerning various aspects of Nazi influence on international relationships were texts containing serious charges against the policies of the European countries, especially Great Britain, which was unable to address the issue of

⁷⁷ Cf. *idem*, *Stolica i bezrobocie*, *WL* 1934, No. 25: 4; *idem*, *Czy istnieje opozycja*, *WL* 1934, No. 26: 3; *idem*, *Sytuacja Żydów*, *WL* 1934, No. 29: 4; *idem*, *Ikonografia i święto pracy*, *WL* 1934, No. 31: 1–2.

⁷⁸ *Idem*, *Sytuacja Żydów*, *WL* 1934, No. 29: 4.

⁷⁹ Cf. J. Łobodowski, *Nacjonalizm na bezdrożach*, *WL* 1939, No. 29: 3; *idem*, *Na rozdrożu historii*, *WL* 1939, No. 14 (confiscated); R. Lemkin, *Reforma prawa karnego w Niemczech*, *WL* 1934, No. 30: 7; K. Czapieński, *Krzyż czy swastyka?*, *WL* 1938, No. 24: 1.

⁸⁰ Cf. T. Mann, *List do dziekana uniwersytetu w Bonn*, *WL* 1937, No. 13: 1.

Jewish immigration.⁸¹ The author of this series of articles, Mariusz Dawn (pen name of Maria Morska) analyzed in detail the situation of the immigrants who saw England as the end of their exodus, most of whom were victims of the policy towards minorities in Germany. The features were compassionate towards the immigrants, yet the British, whose actions concerning the visas were quite clumsy, were treated with understanding.

In England, the Jewish Question grows in nobility, like a tragedy of an average man under the pen of a gifted writer⁸² – commented a reporter.

Zbigniew Grabowski, who analyzed the situation of the Jewish immigrants and the political attempts at curing the causes of tragedy, was less radical.⁸³

After examining the text that presented the fate of foreign Jews, one may reach the sad conclusion that the Jewish Question looked different abroad than at home. It was easier to remain objective and far-sighted in commenting the events taking place anywhere else in the world. A thorough observation of the policy introduced by the western neighbor of Poland, factual categories and categorical condemnation of racist slogans, as well as correct conclusions concerning their consequences, were common to all comments of foreign correspondents. The same feelings relating to Polish reality were voiced cautiously, without aggravating the atmosphere. It seems that the opinion-writers were capable of formulating objective opinions in a peremptory tone as far as the policy of other countries of Europe was concerned, but with respect to the Polish Jews, the periodical seemed surprised with their reluctance to assimilate even on the eve of war.

“Kronika tygodniowa” by Słonimski, which was a perfect point of relation for the observation of the Jews in Poland, condemned all acts of intellectual or physical violence. The author took particular delight in denouncing thoughtlessness and paradoxes in the ideas of National Democracy.⁸⁴ He stigmatized anti-Semitism harshly, as a mental impairment.⁸⁵ Similarly, other articles in the periodical condemned all kinds of racism as well.⁸⁶ The press review conducted by the chief editor himself and the letters section did not ignore the disgraceful events in Polish schools.⁸⁷ Attention was drawn especially by the “racist contest” launched by the periodical, of which the aim was to ridicule the senselessness of racist propaganda by means of sharp satire.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Cf. M. Dawn, Hyde Park ma głos, *WL* 1938, No. 45: 3; *idem*, Londyn – Grochów – Czestoniew. Hitler dobrze przysłużył się sprawie żydowskiej, *WL* 1938, No. 46: 4; *idem*, Egzodus żydowski na tle Londynu, *WL* 1938, No. 44: 1; *idem*, Wrażenia z Anglii. W retorcji, *WL* 1939, No. 23: 1; *idem*, Wrażenie z Anglii. Imigracja Żydów do Imperium, *WL* 1939, No. 26: 2; *idem*, Wrażenia z Anglii. Tragedia hotelu Bloomsbury, *WL* 1939, No. 36: 3.

⁸² *Idem*, Londyn – Grochów – Czestoniew. Hitler dobrze przysłużył się sprawie żydowskiej, *WL* 1938, No. 46: 4.

⁸³ Cf. Z. Grabowski, Kwestia żydowska na cenzurowanym, *WL* 1938, No. 32: 4.

⁸⁴ Cf. A. Słonimski, “Kronika tygodniowa”, *WL* 1936, No. 52 and 1938, No. 44.

⁸⁵ Cf. *idem*, 1936, issues 33, 43; 1937, issues 4, 18, 48; 1938, 27; 1939, issues 12, 20, 29.

⁸⁶ M. Dawn (M. Morska), Piekło w domu rodzinnym, *WL* 1938, No. 9: 1; M. Choynowski, Rozprawa z rasizmem, *WL* 1936, No. 19: 1; P. Hulka-Laskowski, Przesilenie antysemityzmu, *WL* 1933, No. 18: 1; *idem*, Z czarnego frontu niemieckiego, *WL* 1934, No. 42: 1.

⁸⁷ Cf. M. Grydzewski, W obronie godności szkół akademickich, *WL* 1938, No. 7: 6; *idem*, Terror na wyższych uczelniach, *WL* 1939, No. 11: 8; O. Lange, Kultura polska zepchnięta do ghetta, *WL* 1937, No. 47: 9; J. Wyszomirski, Gdzież to wy idziecie?, *WL* 1937, No. 3: 3.

⁸⁸ Cf. Konkurs rasistowski, *WL* 1936, No. 16: 1; Rozstrzygnięcie konkursu rasistowskiego, *WL* 1936, No. 25: 8.

Palestine appeared in the periodical as well, but in the context of information encouraging readers to travel and visit the exotic country. This was the tone of a series of features by Maria Kuncewiczowa, who included her insights on Jewish settlements in Palestine, their adaptation to the environment and organization of life in her series entitled “Notatki palestyńskie” [Notes from Palestine].⁸⁹ The weekly also published the reviews of travel writing features on the Holy Land by Ksawery Pruszyński and Hanna Mortkowicz.⁹⁰ There was also an interesting contrast: a rather balanced article about Jerusalem by Adolf Nowaczyński was followed in the next issue by a caricature of the author, who was known for his resentment toward the Jews, depicted during his trip.⁹¹

Still, the periodical remained very cautious towards Zionism. Yet, there were many suggestions that the state would facilitate the emigration of the Jews without a political witch-hunt. In the late 1930s this issue became politically tender as well, and its echoes may be seen in the discussion on the Jewish Question in *Wiadomości Literackie*.⁹²

It is very difficult to evaluate the approach of *Wiadomości Literackie* to the Jewish issues due to the complexity of the problem itself and the ambiguity of expressions. It should be emphasized, though, that the issues linked to Jewish culture, social life and even matters of identity and assimilation were not ignored. Initially, the Jewish Question existed for the periodical mainly as the matter of assimilation of the Jewish masses. This is why, right from the first issue, the periodical would attack the parochial mentality and backwardness of the Jews living away from the matters of the nation among which they lived. Demonstrative religiousness and reluctance to assimilate were stigmatized. Still, due to the lack of a clear division between various Jewish attitudes, the criticism was rather general and targeted at the society as a whole, which would outrage the Jews of different political orientations. On the other hand, it should be noted that in the late 1920s and early 1930s, at the time when the culture of Jewish society was often and eagerly described, the periodical would present the work of writers, poets and painters both well known in Europe and just starting out. The strong bond with the Skamander group determined the evaluation of Polish-Jewish poetry, as its artistry was seen based on the ideology of that poetical group. It is true that Grydzewski decided to commission writers of Jewish origin, who remained in that cultural circle and cooperated with the Jewish press, to describe the matters of Jewish culture in the weekly. The reviews of Jewish prose and writing were done by assimilated Jews as well, which in most cases influenced the positive response towards Jewish writing and emphasizing its links to Poland. There were also writers who had to undertake the Jewish Question as if in spite of themselves, due to external social pressure. This was true mainly of assimilated Jews, for whom their own identity was unclear.

⁸⁹ Cf. M. Kuncewiczowa, Notatki palestyńskie, *WL* 1936, No. 31: 3; No. 36: 1; No. 41: 2; No. 45: 2; 1937, No. 43: 2; 1938, No. 39: 3.

⁹⁰ Cf. W. Giełżyński, Palestyna w oczach dziennikarza polskiego [review of K. Pruszyński's: *Palestyna po raz trzeci*], *WL* 1933, No. 51: 3; W. Kubacki, Wieczna Palestyna [review of H. Mortkowicz's: *W Palestynie. Obrazy i zagadnienia*], *WL* 1937, No. 21: 4.

⁹¹ Cf. A. Nowaczyński, Al-Haram i Al-Sharif, *WL* 1938, No. 17: 10–11; J. Bichels, Nowaczyński w Palestynie [caricature], *WL* 1936, No. 30: 5.

⁹² Cf. A. Świętochowski, Antysemitizm, *WL* 1937, No. 16: 3; K.W. Zawodziński, Apel do serca i rozumu, *WL* 1937, No. 19: 2; P. Hulka-Laskowski, Na marginesie sprawy żydowskiej, *WL* 1937, No. 25: 2.

The mid-1930s brought growing aggression against the periodical, and the editors significantly changed the way in which Jewish issues were presented. Social threads gained more prominence and cultural items were concentrated on sporadically. The rapid changes in the position of the Jews in Europe caused political discussions and reflections on the propositions of particular parties to gain prominence. One could also find analyses of patterns in the attitude towards Jewish issues in Poland, which had been created during the ages of Jewish presence among the Poles.⁹³ The late 1930s brought a confirmation of the words of Alfred Einstein, who said that the Jews are the weather-glass of the moral level of Europe.⁹⁴ When the level decreases, Jews are always in the centre of attention. This is why the Jewish Question was related to in *Wiadomości Literackie* in the specific context of ethical considerations – the columnists would always condemn all kinds of violence, both physical and psychical, and demonstrate their pacifism and objections against all sorts of nationalism.

It is true though that the inability to adjust their assimilative views to the changing conditions in the country on the part of the periodical became its weakness. The Jewish Question in Poland was considered troublesome and local, which was the wrong approach. The weekly did not manage to avoid entanglement in paradoxes and ambiguities stemming from the hackneyed way in which the Jewish question was thought of in Poland and the inability to establish a middle ground between different social and political groups. Efforts aiming at initiating factual discussions were appreciated by readers. In his correspondence, Dr. Sebastian Anszel would emphasize that the periodical, taking into account all arguments for and against, had made more of a contribution to understanding the Jewish Question than the attempts on the part of *Nasz Przegląd*.⁹⁵

In my estimation, the examples referred to above prove undoubtedly that in no circumstances can *Wiadomości Literackie* be considered an anti-Semitic periodical. Even if that expression was used, it has to be understood in terms of the years between the wars and the ideological and artistic controversies of that period. The periodical should be considered an important contribution to the discussion around the culture of the Second Commonwealth of Poland, which included a broad understanding of Jewish issues. It referred to many aspects of the subject – both domestic and foreign – as if they were a polyphonic choir directed by a conductor supporting assimilation.

ABBREVIATIONS:

WL – *Wiadomości Literackie*

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⁹³ Cf. J. Wyszomirski, Reminiscencje i skojarzenia, *WL* 1937, No. 34: 2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Cf. Dr S. Anszel, O *Naszym Przeglądzie*, *WL* 1938, No. 28: 8.

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