

THE IMAGE OF A WEALTHY JEWISH FAMILY IN THE ANTI-SEMITIC POLISH WEEKLY *ROLA*

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Abstract: For more than six years, *Rola* – a Warsaw periodical that appeared weekly from 1883 to 1912 with a circulation of two thousand copies – published a series of articles about the position of wealthy Jewish families in Polish society. This series was commissioned by editor-in-chief Jan Jeleński and was of a quasi-documentary character (fictional but based on facts from real Jewish families with changed names). The title of the series was “Podskarbiowie Narodu” [The Treasurers of the Nation].

The vocabulary used in this series expressed the phobias and anxieties of *Rola*'s staff, among which the biggest was the fear that Jewish families would take over Polish society and infect it with cynical philosophy, ruled by money. This would confirm the negative stereotype of the Jew always preoccupied with money and chasing after a “golden calf.”

Jeleński and his colleagues believed that the Jewish nature was different than the Polish one, being based on lower-level values and therefore very dangerous. Once infected, Polish families could later imitate that cynical approach. They were also afraid of the way Jewish families supported each other strongly. Jeleński perceived this support – though of great value for the Jews themselves – as a great threat. He worried that Jewish families grew stronger and united, building a new kind of clan of a nouveau-riche character based on fictitious splendor and dominant influence.

In the history of the Polish press in the second half of the 19th century, *Rola* – a weekly and the first openly anti-Semitic title – had a special place. The magazine was established by Jan Jeleński in 1883 in Warsaw, from where he published it for the next 25 years until his death in 1909.¹ From its beginning, *Rola* took as its goal the struggle against the dominant role of “foreign elements” over the Polish economic sphere. Among the most serious threats for the existence of Polish society, Jeleński and his colleagues pointed to the buy-out of land from Polish owners and its being taken over by representatives of foreign communities, above all by Germans and Jews. In the context of Poland's lack of nationhood at that time, the issue of sale or care of the land was not exclusively an economic or socio-economic matter, but became a question of the national “to be or not to be.” The land being owned by Poles was a kind of patriotic obligation. Actually, the very title of this magazine referred to this issue.

¹ The magazine was finally closed in 1912; see Jaszczuk 1986, pp. 210-220; Pąckiński 1994, pp. 129-147; Cała 2012, pp. 264-272.

As far as the above aspects are concerned, *Rola* was no different from most of the Polish liberal press at the time, in which (as far as was possible given the strict censorship of the press) the necessity to defend Polish land ownership was almost a stronghold of the Polish national identity. The major difference lay in the fact that *Rola* consciously used these issues (understandable given the situation of the time), tinged additionally with anti-Semitic themes; however, apart from the traditional anti-Judaism, the publisher and his colleagues consciously made use of the modern anti-Semitic program borrowed from Western Europe, especially from France and Germany,² and openly marked their magazine as “anti-Semitic.” It is no wonder that a vast number of the texts published in the periodical concerned Jews and presented them in an unfavorable light.

Originally, however, the brunt of Jeleński’s criticism and his magazine focused not only on Jewish elements, but on German ones too. This attitude was presented in the early platform articles in *Rola*, but the interest in the German question which Jeleński presented before the weekly came into being, quickly weakened, giving way almost entirely to Jewish themes.³ It seems impossible to describe the entire picture of anti-Semitic ideology and rhetoric manifested on the pages of *Rola* here; one can generally see that for Jeleński and his circle the most serious problem and the major ideological enemy were Jews who were assimilating or integrating with the Christian majority. While traditional Jews were recognized as elements who were sometimes annoying, but did not considerably influence the entire picture of social life in Poland, modern Jews were perceived as a serious threat not only to the economic existence of Polish society, but to its moral or even spiritual existence too. In short, this conviction can be summarized by the words of Teodor Jeske-Choiński: “Since you are a Jew, be one! An uncivilized Jewish orthodox is more likeable to us than a civilized zero because the former one believes in something, whereas the latter does not give any guarantee.”⁴

This opinion resulted in particularly severe criticism of wealthy modern Jews on the pages of *Rola* – not only of individuals, but also very often of the whole families of Jewish plutocracy who were forming at that time. This criticism was undertaken in texts of various types, not only in regular journalistic articles but also in the pieces of fiction that were published systematically by *Rola*. In general, both of them expressed the same content. It is worth pointing out that the fiction published in *Rola* was not of a high literary quality.⁵

There were also such publications that do not explicitly fit into the categories of fictional or journalistic pieces. The series entitled “Podskarbiowie narodu” (“Treasurers of the Nation”) published in 1890-1896 is recognized as one of them. Its form resembles one between fiction and journalism, but definitely closer to journalism. In fact, readers were presented with the same content that was in journalistic texts, yet presented in a slightly fictional form, depicting fictional characters. The *Rola* circle itself described these publications as satires or pamphlets.⁶ The editorial staff gave them the common name of

² On the reception of German anti-Semitism in *Rola*, see Friedrich 2013, pp. 273-282.

³ The most complete picture of Jeleński’s early views is included in the publication *Żydzi, Niemcy i my*, 4th ed., Warszawa 1880. See Friedrich 2003, pp. 199-213.

⁴ Pancerny [Teodor Jeske-Choiński], “Na posterunku”, *Rola* 1883, no. 19, p. 9.

⁵ See Domagalska 2008, pp. 377-390.

⁶ *Ćwierćwiecze walki. Księga pamiątkowa “Roli”* 1910, pp. 35-36.

“pictures from nature,” which aimed to assure readers that the phenomena and processes or even real people were hidden behind fictional surnames and situations. Some perfect examples of the almost direct incorporation of phenomena known from the realities of the time into this semi-fiction include references to the Panama Affair and the Dreyfus⁷ case, or words informing readers about the fact that one of the characters was the author of “a famous report about the situation of Jews in the country of ‘losers’,”⁸ which in an obvious way refers to the controversial Memorandum of the Stock Exchange Committee announced a few years before.⁹

It is crucial that thanks to these semi-short stories *Rola* was able to express its opinions in a more open way than in cases of publications of a strictly journalistic character. Publishing fictional stories concerning characters with fictional names, the editor and writers in *Rola* did not have to feel restricted by the potential legal reactions of people they had attacked, which consequently gave them freedom to express their convictions and conceptions very openly. For this reason, when considering the attitude of *Rola* towards various phenomena of social life at the time, it is worth taking into account these fictional stories. In total, there were six works of this kind published, each with between five and ten parts.¹⁰ The fact that these “pictures” were given great importance is supported by the fact that each episode of the cycle was published, by principle, on the first page of the weekly.¹¹ Both the individual careers of rich Jews and the stories of whole families, even Jewish clans, were described there. Let us therefore take a closer look at the way the anti-Semitic circle of *Rola* viewed rich Jewish families and relations within them.

One should start with the very title of the series, “Treasurers of the Nation” (“Podskarbiowie narodu”), which is an ironic title. The term “treasurer” in old Polish was a positive one, and was linked to a high-ranking function held in the past by members of Polish noble families. Obviously, the function of “treasurer” was linked to financial matters, which in the new capitalist times were taken over by representatives of other social groups, including Jews. These “new” people were becoming a new aristocracy, one of money, plutocracy, which gradually superseded the traditional aristocracy of blood, very often taking over old aristocratic titles. Jeleński and his co-workers looked at these processes disapprovingly, which undoubtedly resulted in this ironic title of the cycle.

It must be pointed out that it was not *Rola* that used this name to refer to Polish Jews, or to be more precise members of the assimilating Jewish plutocracy; “treasurers of the Nation” had earlier been used by the leading Polish writer and publicist of the time – Bolesław Prus.¹² However, when spoken by Prus, this expression had a positive meaning. Prus noticed a chance for Polish Jews to become a middle class of Polish so-

⁷ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Kanaliensohny, *Rola* 1896, no. 6, p. 84.

⁸ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 32, title page.

⁹ On the Memorial see Eisenbach 1983.

¹⁰ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) I: Pan Baron u siebie, *Rola* 1890, nos 31-35; “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) II: Pan Prezes, *Rola* 1891, nos 13-17; “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, nos 25-32; “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) IV: Ten najlepszy, *Rola* 1891, nos 51-52 as well as 1892, nos 1-8; “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Szteinpelesy, *Rola* 1893, nos 1-8; “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Kanaliensohny, *Rola* 1896, nos 1-9.

¹¹ The exception is the last part of the cycle “Kanaliensohny”, *Rola* 1896, nos 1-9.

¹² Jan Jeleński in *Rola* refers to this term used by Prus, see Kamienny, “Na posterunku”, *Rola* 1889, no. 44. According to Jeleński, Prus used the term “treasurers of the nation” in *Gazeta Polska*, when he proved that both the owner of the magazine as well as “other financial potentates of the old convent class are benefactors.”

ciety, which lacked a strong bourgeois class. In consequence, he thought that the richest of Polish Jews could become a Polish economic elite – Polish financial circles. Obviously, a necessary condition for the demanded process was their assimilation with Polish national identity. Jeleński and his colleagues definitely rejected this point of view, reproaching Prus for naming Polish Jews “treasurers of the Nation,” which they considered to be preposterous.¹³ First of all, this resulted from the fact that authors connected with *Rola* questioned the very idea of assimilation, treating it as a pipe dream; secondly, in the activities of Jews they could not see any productive values, but only sponging off the Polish social organism.

With such a point of view, *Rola* could only use the expression proposed by Prus ironically. Essentially, five years before publishing the cycle in question, a publication with the same title appeared: “Podskarbiowie narodu” (“Treasurers of the Nation”), which, after recollecting various kinds of economic activities of Polish Jews and considering them harmful, stated bluntly: “The name of treasurers of the nation, if they were entitled to it, would be only as a huge joke. This is how we also understand this name.” And further on: “God save us from such ‘treasurers of the nation’!”¹⁴ From this time *Rola* consistently used the term in such a way.¹⁵ So when in 1890 the publication of interesting “pictures from life” under the common title “Treasurers of the Nation” started, regular readers of Jeleński’s weekly must have had no problem in recognizing its ironic overtones.¹⁶

The author of these stories¹⁷ presented their characters as members of a larger community, mostly of “families” of various sizes. The importance of the family aspect in these “pictures” is strengthened by the fact that a half of them simply had the surnames of the described fictitious families in their titles.

The dozens of references spread over the pages of these short stories allow us to sketch a certain synthetic picture of an assimilated or assimilating rich Jewish family (because only such families were interesting to the author), obviously seen through the eyes of an anti-Semite.

Thus, the roots of the families are usually at the beginning of the 19th century, when some ancestor of a family, making use of favorable circumstances, made his first bigger money. Usually, these are some unclear and questionable transactions, sometimes based on cheating Christians who were willing to help. Frequently, these transactions are of a legal but grotesque character. An example is the career of Aron Szejnpeles, who made

¹³ Jeleński often had a dispute with Prus. See Friedrich 2015 (forthcoming).

¹⁴ Spokojny, “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Z notatek wieśniaka), *Rola* 1885, no. 16, p. 185.

¹⁵ See Kamienny, “Na posterunku,” *Rola* 1887, no. 5, p. 54; Kamienny, “Na posterunku,” *Rola* 1887, no. 27, p. 319; “Gospodarka finansistów warszawskich,” *Rola* 1887, no. 43, p. 506; “Nie do uwierzenia... (Z gospodarki krajowej),” *Rola* 1888, no. 25, title page.

¹⁶ See also *Ćwierćwiecze walki. Księga pamiątkowa “Roli”* 1910, p. 35.

¹⁷ The question of the authorship remains unclear, though there are certain clues that point to Antoni Skrzynecki being the Stranger (“Nieznajomy”). First, Antoni Skrzynecki in *Wędrowiec* weekly magazine used the pseudonym “Ignotus,” which in Latin means “Nieznajomy” (a stranger) – the signature appearing under the first four parts of “Podskarbiowie narodu”: “Pan Baron u siebie,” “Pan Prezes,” “Pantersohny” and “Ten najlepszy.” We know that “Ignotus” was Antoni Skrzynecki’s pseudonym from his bio, cf. Gajkowska 1997/98, pp. 440-441. Second, in another work written by Antoni Skrzynecki – the novel “Warszawa 2000” (written under a different pseudonym, “Werytus”) – he uses the name “Steinpeles” which is a title of one of the series pieces and is a unique (if at all existing) name in itself; third: the zest and verbiage resemble that of Antoni Skrzynecki. To learn more about his style and vocabulary, see Domagalska 2004, pp. 307-318.

money on running “the flea circus.”¹⁸ These kinds of pictures aim to devalue the origin of these fortunes.

Despite the financial success, at the beginning these families follow their traditional way of life. They preserve their faith, and live a relatively modest¹⁹ life. With time, however, new elements appear. Enriched Jews unwillingly return to the beginning of their family’s fortunes and generally willingly deny their Jewish roots, which would remind them of their origins – from poor villages or small towns as well as, generally, from lower social groups. A Jew making a career in the world does not want to identify himself with his old grandfather from Pinczów,²⁰ while another enriched Jewish magnate orders that his poor aunt be thrown out when she starts to ask for an allowance in front of witnesses, making use of her close relations with her nephew, whose name was once Srul Kwiczała and is now Baron Achilles de Preval.²¹

This satirically presented name change directs attention to the next problem identified by *Rola*, namely the false identities produced by enriched Jewish families. They change their surnames from traditional Jewish ones (sometimes grotesque ones) to more distinguished ones. In this way, the Kwiczała known to us becomes De Preval and Kitzelwurst changes to Kolb.²² It is not only surnames, but forenames too are changed in a similar way. The Jewish “Hereszek” can serve as an example, becoming a Europeanized “Hugo.”²³ Frequently, these changes are of a group character, performed by parents for all of their offspring; consequently, Srul, Mosze and Lejzer gain new names which sound much more familiar to Polish ears, for example Waclaw, Witold and Justyn.²⁴ The custom of giving Polish names to children, which constitutes an obvious sign of the assimilation of Jews from the point of view of *Rola* (which was reluctant towards assimilation), also deserves criticism. To justify the above, one can look at the fictional and grotesque name Mnożysław, which was given to a son of one of characters of the “Sztejnpelesy” series.²⁵

However, it was not only changing of names that served the purpose of building a new identity for Jewish families, but also buying noble titles (for example the above-mentioned Baron de Preval), producing false genealogies as well as buying old mansions of noblemen whose secular histories were supposed to add splendor to newly rich families.²⁶

An example of the first process is Kwiczała, which changed into Baron Sachs-Goth,²⁷ or the aforementioned Baron Achilles de Preval, who pretended not to pay attention to his aristocratic title but at the same time took pride in it, informing his interlocutor that his family acquired the title for its achievements for the Eselburg Principality. Obviously,

¹⁸ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Sztejnpelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 2, title page.

¹⁹ For example, the Pantersohn family are a traditional family at the beginning. See “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 26, pp. 437-438.

²⁰ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Kanaliensohny, *Rola* 1896, no. 3, p. 35.

²¹ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) I: Pan Baron u siebie, *Rola* 1890, no. 33, pp. 553-554.

²² “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) II: Pan Prezes, *Rola* 1891, no. 13, p. 207. About the names see Jagodzińska 2008, pp. 201-253.

²³ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Sztejnpelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 4, title page.

²⁴ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) IV: Ten najlepszy, *Rola* 1891, no. 52, title page.

²⁵ This name came from linking two morphemes: “mnożyć” (to multiply) and the typical ending for Slavic languages “-sław”: “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Sztejnpelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 6, title page.

²⁶ For more on the process of adaptation of Polish names and surnames, see Jagodzińska 2008, pp. 201-253.

²⁷ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 31, title page.

the principality is fictitious, and its name – mocking – means nothing more than “the donkey’s castle.” However, if a reader had any doubts concerning the Jewish roots of a false aristocrat, the author points to the fact that in his study one could see many photos in “lavishly decorated frames” presenting “only Jewish men and women.”²⁸

The other phenomenon was described by the author of the cycle using the example of the life of Hugon Szejnpeles, who after making a fortune “lacked [...] only an estate and ruins of the castle from which he could dig out the ashes of his ancestors and call forth their spirits.”²⁹ Taking advantage of this desire, the architect who was commissioned to rebuild the old castle bought by Szejnpeles convinced him of the fact that the aristocratic title accompanied the castle, which the newly enriched entrepreneur took at face value. The nouveau-riche zeal of Szejnpeles was mocked in the scene in which he orders one hundred dozen buttons with his monogram and the prince’s crown. Criticizing these phenomena, the author of the short story “Pantsohny” wrote with biting irony that the Jews’ financial and social success was leading them to believe “firmly that [...] in a direct line they are descendants of Gottfried de Boullion or Richard the Lion Heart.”³⁰

Also, marriages with representatives of noble or aristocratic families served to build the new social prestige of newly enriched families. Marrying daughters to sons of historic families that were becoming bankrupt was for the richest Jews the major method of “mixing of their race with the national one.”³¹ The following scathing quotation from the story entitled “Pan Prezes” (“Mr President”) is evidence that this was a kind of deal in which financial issues played a crucial role: “Jakub Gottfried started to look for ‘sons in law,’ asked here and there, undecided if *he would buy* himself [my emphasis] princes, counts or only noblemen.”³² The proper selection of sons-in-law was to strengthen the high position of Jewish families in a traditional hierarchical society. However, if one is to believe the vision of *Rola*, this was not an easy task at all since well-born sons-in-law were “expensive goods to purchase, yet even more expensive to keep.”³³ However, “the craving for affinity”³⁴ was so strong that the attempts described above were made relatively often.

The phenomena of this kind, satirized by *Rola*, obviously constituted the reflection of the real processes connected with the assimilation. Thus, it is no wonder that *Rola*, which was reluctant to the assimilation, did not have a positive attitude towards it.³⁵

²⁸ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) I: Pan Baron u siebie, *Rola* 1890, no. 33, title page.

²⁹ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Szejnpelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 7, p. 98.

³⁰ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 31, title page.

³¹ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Szejnpelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 1, pp. 1-2.

³² “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) II: Pan Prezes, *Rola* 1891, no. 15, p. 245. See also: “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) I: Pan Baron u siebie, *Rola* 1890, no. 32, p. 537, or “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 25, p. 422.

³³ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Szejnpelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 1, p. 1. On the problems caused by the “coat-of-arms sons-in-law,” see also e.g. “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) I: Pan Baron u siebie, *Rola* 1890, no. 32, p. 5. The term “coat-of-arms sons-in-law” also comes from *Rola*, see “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) IV: Ten najlepszy, *Rola* 1891, no. 52, p. 896.

³⁴ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Szejnpelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 1, title page.

³⁵ For more about mixed marriages in the novels printed in *Rola*, see Domagalska 2006, pp. 167-174, esp. 170. It is worth pointing out that the works of Skrzynecki described by Domagalska show a lot of similarities with the series “Podskarbiowie narodu.” See note 17. We should also add that the theme of mixed marriages in *Rola* bore a certain significance, as (according to Kołodziejska) it could have influenced the

A different way of establishing a social position was marriage within the Jewish plutocracy. An example of this situation is the marriage of Jonasz Pantersohn to a daughter of one of the country's biggest financial potentates – Leopolder. As a result, as the author of the story writes, the Pantersohn family was linked to a “great ‘mansion’ of Leopolder.”³⁶ Again, it does not seem difficult to see, on the one hand, an irony – the term “house” was reserved for great monarchical or duke families; on the other hand, this term points to the fact that in the reality of the time money made the new dynasties which the great bourgeoisie turned into.

It is obvious that since the institution of marriage was treated as an element of this kind of social transaction, the problem of misalliance appeared. However, the hitherto aristocratic criterion of birth was replaced by a bourgeois criterion of wealth. This misalliance was described in the short story entitled “Kanaliensohny,” in which an exceptionally ugly daughter of a Jewish rich man marries a considerably poorer but promising Jew.³⁷ On this occasion the mechanism of domination in marriage of this part that provided finance was described. A poor husband satisfies his rich wife's most foolish whims in order not to lose the possibility of using his father-in-law's wealth.

However, even in the world in which marriage is de facto a transaction, sometimes love matches also happen.³⁸ The authors of *Rola* write about them with sympathy, but they can point to only a few, just two to be precise. One of them was between the daughter of a rich Jew and, as it seems, another Jew, about whom *Rola* writes characteristically that he was “an exceptionally decent man for the son-in-law of a famous financier.”³⁹ The next example is more interesting, since it refers to the assimilation processes, as well being linked to religious questions. In this case, the son of a rich Jew is baptized and marries a non-Jew, presumably a Catholic. But the reader finds out that this love match was established against the will of the groom's family; what is more, the groom was disowned by his father. However, on his death bed the father forgives the couple in love. This story does show, though, how much significance was given at that time to the question of obedience to the parents' will, or even, in a broader sense, to the family's will, since the author wrote about “the father's will and the relatives' will.”⁴⁰

The story focuses our attention on one more problem, namely on religious questions. These were very significant at that time as well. Keeping the ancestors' faith or coming to any Christian religion was not only a spiritual choice but also a social one. This conscious act of conversion was a platform of the economic career that was described in the short story entitled “The Best One” (“Ten najlepszy”), in which the main character, Justyn Diebmann, undergoes the conversion to Lutheranism for mercenary reasons. Yet it is interesting that his brothers make different choices – Witold sticks to Judaism and Waław enters the Roman Catholic faith.⁴¹ The anti-Semitic *Rola* did not believe in the honest intentions of Jews undergoing religious conversion, proof of which can be found

development of the Polish-Jewish reformative romances in fiction printed in *Izraelita* being a response to the topics from the anti-Semitic works, see Kołodziejska 2014, p. 259.

³⁶ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 29, p. 490.

³⁷ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Kanaliensohny, *Rola* 1896, no. 6, pp. 84-85.

³⁸ Domagalska (2012, p. 194) mentions a rare case of a marriage out of love in Bałucki's novel.

³⁹ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) II: Pan Prezes, *Rola* 1891, no. 15, p. 246.

⁴⁰ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Szteinpelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 7, p. 99.

⁴¹ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) IV: Ten najlepszy, *Rola* 1892, no. 2, title page.

in the short story entitled “Pan Prezes” (“Mr. President”).⁴² The situation described there concerned the alleged conversion to Lutheranism of a young Jew, who, following the instructions of Jewish religious leaders, was supposed to practice his ancestors’ faith in secret.⁴³ One way or another, according to the authors of *Rola* all religious questions served only the purpose of increasing wealth, and it was gold that functioned as the only Jewish religion.⁴⁴ With this point of view presented by *Rola*, it is no wonder that it perceives a Jewish family as a “company” or “a business cooperation,” in which all members of the family take part in making common but not always legal business, sometimes even ordinary swindles.⁴⁵ Worse still, these questionable models are passed on to the younger generations, and in many episodes one can see the motif of taking bad habits by children right within the framework of the family business.⁴⁶

Simultaneously, this family character of running a business is a symptom of supporting “our people,” which according to *Rola* and in accordance with anti-Semitic stereotypes is a typical feature of Jews.⁴⁷ An exceptionally vivid example of this kind of behavior is the Pantersohn family, which the author of the cycle calls “the company,”⁴⁸ pointing to the fact that “all of them always act together.”⁴⁹

In the name of the family business, they obviously aim at total control of enterprises, which is done, for example, by making their sons members of the boards of directors. At the same time, these high functions are to ensure high apanage to them, which they can spend light-heartedly on revels and needless luxury. Yet the authors of *Rola* apparently make the distinction between the older generation of rich Jews and the younger one. No matter how often the older Jews made some equivocal business against their conscience and used dishonest methods in building the power of their families, still they were at the same time – even if done in a coldly calculated manner – polite, reserved, foreseeing and in a way hard-working. None of the above features can be ascribed to the young ones.

Here it is worth quoting a longer paragraph that clearly shows this discrepancy between generations:

Fathers (...) were or still are the Jews of the old school (...) taught to bend their neck and to crawl where they could not jump despite their ‘flair for business,’ they remained meek and polite – even when they came to the forefront, they did it as if they were under pressure

⁴² Though *Rola* was very suspicious towards neophytes, it was nevertheless ready to accept them if the motivation behind the conversion was sincere and bereft of financial benefits, see Kamienny, “Na posterunku” (“List neofity”), *Rola* 1886, no. 21 and Kamienny, “Na posterunku (przypomnienie ‘Listu neofity”),” *Rola* 1888, no. 2. Additionally on *Rola*’s attitude towards neophytes see Lewalski 2002, pp. 204-205.

⁴³ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) II: Pan Prezes, *Rola* 1891, no. 13, p. 206.

⁴⁴ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) IV: Ten najlepszy, *Rola* 1892, no. 2, title page.

⁴⁵ An example of dishonest practices can be brothers who run rather suspicious business (cf. “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Kanaliensohny, *Rola* 1896, no. 2), or the collaboration of a mother and a son in cheating (cf. “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) IV: Ten najlepszy, *Rola* 1891, no. 52).

⁴⁶ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) IV: Ten najlepszy, *Rola* 1892, no. 1, title page; “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) IV: Ten najlepszy, *Rola* 1892, no. 5, title page; “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Szteipelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 7, title page.

⁴⁷ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) V: Szteipelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 6, title page.

⁴⁸ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 25, p. 422.

⁴⁹ “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 29, title page. It should be added that the surname *Pantersohn* is of some significance. For a description of this surname see “Podskarbiowie narodu” (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 27, p. 454.

from the majority of local inhabitants that respect them and love them. (...) It is a different matter with the youth that were in a prominent school, although all the time they came across abundant examples of how to crawl when they could not jump, they became arrogant and impudent without any inhibitions (...). The old ones collected money by adopting subservient positions, kissing the arms and knees of those who they planned to bring to ruin; the young ones, with the millions earned by the old ones at their disposal, asked for themselves from the gods of Olympus... horns and they gore everything they come across.⁵⁰

The representatives of the younger generation sin not only with their arrogance. They despise work⁵¹ and the money hard-earned by their fathers is wasted on debauchery and pleasures⁵² or balls in Paris.⁵³

This total unrestraint of the younger generation is seen by the author as a kind of punishment meted out for the elders. He writes: "Looking at such persons, one could assume that fate takes revenge on their fathers for abusing human rights by giving them such offspring".⁵⁴ This degeneracy happens despite all the attempts of the fathers, who provide their children with a good education as well as allowing them to take over their business.⁵⁵

It is interesting, however, that in *Rola's* opinion this care for the future of the family business serves the conscious aim of building the power of a family. In one of the stories it is mentioned, for example, that the father leaves four sons and is sure that "the famous family will not vanish."⁵⁶ Apparently, the prosperity of the family is one of the most important goals in the activity of the Jewish plutocracy, which is also supported by caring for building up a good reputation, among other things through a calculated and very often just false philanthropy.⁵⁷ The term "family" should be understood, however, in a broader sense, since even distant relatives take part in the family business.⁵⁸ What is more – and here we touch upon the major problem – according to *Rola*, all Jews are actually one big family which should be supported at the expense of "others" and which is characterized by the same stereotypical vices mentioned above. Samuel Pantersohn's speech directed to his sons is extremely significant in this respect: "Above all, remember that the whole profit does not necessarily have to go into your pocket; it is enough that part of it goes to you and the rest of it goes to other entities of our tribe."⁵⁹

In the last short story of the cycle, entitled "Kanaliensohny," this way of thinking plays a crucial role, in which the author directly claims that all Jews are actually one big family characterized by specific and common "family traits," indelible for generations. Even the very title is meant to convince the reader about this idea. It is a made-up surname given to all Jews by the author independently of the real surnames of individual

⁵⁰ "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 31, title page.

⁵¹ "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) V: Szteipelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 7, 99.

⁵² "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) V: Szteipelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 9, 131.

⁵³ "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) V: Kanaliensohny, *Rola* 1896, no. 6, 85.

⁵⁴ "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) II: Pan Prezes, *Rola* 1891, no. 13.

⁵⁵ "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) IV: Ten najlepszy, *Rola* 1892, no. 5, title page; "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) V: Szteipelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 8, title page.

⁵⁶ "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) V: Szteipelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 4, title page.

⁵⁷ "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 30.

⁵⁸ "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) V: Szteipelesy, *Rola* 1893, no. 7, title page.

⁵⁹ "Podskarbiowie narodu" (Obrazki z natury) III: Pantersohny, *Rola* 1891, no. 27, title page.

families. Additionally, it is an exceptionally offensive surname since it is rooted in the noun “kanalia” (a rascal/scoundrel), which means a mean and dishonorable man. Thus, by presenting these ideas *Rola* says to its readers that not only are Jews one big family against us, but also they are all rascals.

The series in question aroused divergent emotions. On the one hand, it was supposed to make *Rola*⁶⁰ popular among readers, yet on the other it provoked huge criticism of the magazine on the part not only of the Jewish and liberal press but also even *Przegląd Katolicki* (“The Catholic Review”). Because of certain ideological convergences between *Przegląd* and *Rola*, accusations made in the Catholic weekly deserve special attention. *Przegląd* pointed out that it was not done “to fight with ‘individuals’ and ‘send out journalistic probes’ to salons, studies and bankers’ halls”; it was not done “to interfere with bankers’ household matters and reveal to the world who this or that banker’s daughter ‘is marrying’ as well as what the intention of taking someone for one’s son or in-law is or marries his son to,” and generally it was not done “to occupy the public attention with this kind of questions and satisfy ‘reader’s spoiled taste’.”⁶¹

Disregarding here the essential difference of attitude between these titles in this regard, I would like to focus on a fundamental fact that is crucial for understanding the whole cycle of publications discussed here. *Przegląd Katolicki* treated the publication of *Rola* as a story of really existing individuals and families, weakly camouflaged by the fictitious names of the characters. And even though Jeleński himself without great conviction pointed out their fictional character,⁶² still for his reading audience it must have been clear that real characters were being described under false names. After years, in 1910, Skrzynecki himself admitted to having been – as I mentioned before – the author of “Podskarbiowie narodu.”⁶³ This is what he wrote about the origins of the series:

This artificial aura which Jewish bankers were draped with should be (...) dispelled, and *Rola* undertook this challenge having collected meticulously rich material for *authentic biographies* [my emphasis] of the whole cycle of “Podskarbiowie narodu.” The satirical storytelling was used not so much for the sake of sensation, but for the readability of biographical profiles in order to successfully disperse legendary odes and dithyrambs.

Under the *deliberately clear false names* [my emphasis] (...) the whole gallery of “Podskarbiowie narodu” was presented. From the rich biographical material of these persons only the most characteristic details were chosen, seasoned only with slight satire.⁶⁴

Taking this into consideration, we can make an attempt to identify particular families in the series. The fewest doubts are raised as far as the identification of the fictional Pantersohn family with the quite real Natanson family is concerned. This identification is possible not only because of the information and allusions spread in many places of this fictional story as well as the remarks made by Skrzynecki, who in 1910 pointed to

⁶⁰ *Ćwierćwiecze walki. Księga pamiątkowa “Roli”*, 1910, pp. 35 and 117.

⁶¹ Quoted in J. Jeleński, “Na posterunku,” *Rola* 1891, no. 39, p. 661. Obviously, the publisher of *Rola* rejected the criticism of *Przegląd Katolicki* by attempting to prove that in the cycle mentioned above the focus was not on the domestic life of financiers of Jewish origin but on their functioning in the socio-economic life of the country: *ibid.*, pp. 661-662.

⁶² Jeleński wrote about the “data of ‘individuals,’ about which we did not even think,” J. Jeleński, “Na posterunku,” *Rola* 1891, no. 39, p. 661.

⁶³ See note 17.

⁶⁴ *Ćwierćwiecze walki. Księga pamiątkowa “Roli”*, 1910, p. 72.

the fact that the family who were the models for the Pantersohn family centered their business in one department store; to represent a significant financial power they started to influence the course of social life in Poland; to remain ardent Jews, simultaneously they worked on forming an opinion about their deep Polish patriotism; to spread their influence over numerous Polish environments simultaneously they were active in building the superpower of Alliance Israelite, and, what's more, they became "hidden leaders of the whole nationalistic Jewish movement in Poland."⁶⁵

The remarks quoted above correspond quite precisely to what *Rola* wrote about the Natansons in its other texts.⁶⁶ However, it should be noted that many of them could correspond to the description of other rich assimilated families. Nevertheless, in the quotation above there is a fragment which dissipates all doubts. This is the remark concerning the fact that the Pantersohns were editors of the so-called "Stock exchange memorandum," which in fact was prepared by Henryk Natanson.⁶⁷

As has been mentioned before, the group portrait of a Jewish family presented in *Rola* is clearly unfavorable. Without any doubt, this lack of a friendly attitude has its roots in *Rola's* anti-Semitic obsessions; simultaneously, however, this harsh criticism reflects fear of more general processes, namely forming a new type of society in which the economic status becomes more important than a traditional social hierarchy based on birth and heirdom. Many of the stereotypes presented by *Rola* concern in general a newly rich social group: the *nouveaux riches*. Both these elements interweave, and sometimes it would be difficult to separate the anti-Semitic component – let us say a racial or ethnic one – from the more general one which was commonly encountered in 19th-century Europe and did not concern Jews alone.

Making up false genealogies, affinity with traditional aristocracy of blood, buying titles, creating fictional splendor of a family by building or renovating pseudo-historic mansions, demonstrative consumption, philanthropy for show – these are all objections that were presented at that time, and that have been presented till now against the representatives of the newly rich. Thus, in this criticism, the irony and rancorous remarks made by *Rola* about Jewish families one can see the defensive mechanism thanks to which an old dominating sphere (at that time in Polish reality it was mainly nobility and landowners as well as old aristocracy) tried to devalue the new energetic powers arising from the bottom of the social hierarchy (which often meant Jews in Poland at the time).

Besides that general aspect, obviously there are elements which are unambiguously of an anti-Semitic character. This is, for example, the conviction that Jews in a certain natural way stick to illegal business, or at least to questionable activity. First of all, it is the strong belief that in fact all Jews form something like a big, supporting family whose aims stand in opposition to the non-Jewish majority. In this point *Rola* completely reveals its anti-Semitic worldview, which means that its authors present the question of a Jewish family in a distorting mirror.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶⁶ E.g. Kamienny, "Na posterunku," *Rola* 1885, no. 20; Kamienny, "Na posterunku," *Rola* 1885, no. 44; Kamienny, "Na posterunku," *Rola* 1886, no. 30; Substitute for Kamienny, "Na posterunku," *Rola* 1890, no. 15; Kamienny, "Na posterunku," *Rola* 1892, no. 35; Kamienny, "Na posterunku," *Rola* 1893, no. 26; "Z prasy russkiej. Pan Bloch i jego dzieła I," *Rola* 1893, no. 28.

⁶⁷ *Ćwierćwiecze walki. Księga pamiątkowa "Roli"*, 1910, p. 74. On the so-called stock-exchange memorandum, see Eisenbach 1983. See also Kamienny, "Na posterunku," *Rola* 1886, no. 30.

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