

**RYSZARD LÖW – RELENTLESS RESEARCHER OF POLISH LITERATURE. IN
RELATION TO THE BOOK: *LITERACKIE PODSUMOWANIA: POLSKO-
-HEBRAJSKIE, POLSKO-IZRAELSKIE* [LITERATURE SUMMARIES: POLISH-
HEBREW, POLISH-ISRAELI], JAROSŁAW ŁAWSKI AND MICHAŁ SIEDLECKI
(EDS), (“PRZEŁOMY/POGRANICZA.” STUDIA LITERACKIE IX), WYDZIAŁ
FILOLOGICZNY UNIWERSYTETU W BIAŁYMSTOKU, BIAŁYSTOK 2014, 256 PP.
ISBN 978836401132)**

Preparing a review of a work of monumental character is no easy task. After all, it has been customary to say that a proper review should be written with a sparkle. Reviewers point to different flaws of an author(s), which gives them the chance to show off their learnedness. Ryszard Löw (Loew) offers no such opportunity. His oeuvre is perfect, with unrivalled erudition. Löw is the finest exponent of the generation of pre-war Kraków Jews (born February 1, 1931 in Kraków), comprehensively educated and familiar with international culture. He studied in Kraków and took his Matura exam there, before studying history and economics in Kraków, Paris and Tel-Aviv. In 1952 he settled in Israel, where he worked as a bibliographer in a Tel Aviv library. He carried out extensive research in the history of Polish literature and mutual relations of Polish and Jewish and Israeli literature, and the history of the antiquarian market in Poland (with special attention to Kraków).¹ He was the author of numerous books, including *Pod znakiem starych foliantów. Cztery szkice o sprawach żydowskich i książkowych* (Kraków 1993), *Hebrajska obecność Juliana Tuwima. Szkice bibliograficzne* (Tel Aviv 1993), *Znaki obecności. O polsko-hebrajskich i polsko-żydowskich związkach literackich* (Kraków 1995), and *Rozpoznania. Szkice literackie* (Kraków 1998). Löw also established a strong position as a features writer, and became a scholar and editor of *Kontury*, a literary paper issued in Israel. The question now arises: what is the aim of the review presented here? In fact, Ryszard Löw's excellent oeuvre does not have to be known among the youngest generation of historians and Judaists. He wrote extensively, but his work appeared in niche publishing houses. These were mainly limited-edition works, published in Poland or in Israel; access to them is difficult. The reviewed book, with great respect to the effort put in by its editors and publishers, was not publicized widely. University publications suffer the same fate. People who manage these institutions often do not have enough determination and sources to promote their books. Advertising for private publishers is obvious. However, their offer is not always equal to the price. In these circumstances, I get the impression that Löw's book did not encounter adequate publicity. The fact that it did not gain a mass readership is no cause for undue distress. Worse would be for it to be ignored by professionals. Hence the reason for preparing this review.

¹ See: R. Löw, “O żydowskich antykwariuszach księgarskich w Krakowie,” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce* 1992, no. 2-3 (162-163); *idem*, *Pod znakiem starych foliantów. Cztery szkice o sprawach żydowskich i książkowych*, Kraków 1993.

Literackie podsumowania constitutes a collection of studies published previously, in various joint publications and journals appearing in Poland and Israel (bibliographical note on pages 243-244). Gathering these works in one place is a value in itself. The volume's editors went to great lengths to select those articles which as a whole are characterized by perfect coherence. It should be a positive that, as the editors write, "the Author's style, its elegance, complex structure of sentences, sometimes even old orthographic and punctuation forms, were preserved" (244). Löw's work is fascinating and interesting not only for historians and Judaists but also for linguists. Worth mentioning is the fact that the book provides an index of names, making searching for information easier, and a summary in English. Barbara Olech's afterword also enriches the book. Olech makes no secret of her friendship with Löw, but her text is not a proverbial "good write-up." It is a substantive and thorough presentation of Löw's profile, full of crucial information which cannot be found anywhere else. I'd like to take the opportunity to add that the academic community is still waiting for a biography of Ryszard Löw, as well as a separate monograph devoted to his scientific and journalistic oeuvre.

The reviewed book consists of text dealing with various issues that are strongly reflected in the titles; thus the importance of quoting them here:

Part I: *Mickiewicz w kręgu hebrajskim, Julian Klaczko w literaturze i opinii hebrajskiej, „Trylogia” w oczach krytyki hebrajskiej, „Chłopi” w literaturze hebrajskiej, Brzozowski wśród lektur syjonistycznych, Syjonistyczna recepcja Żeromskiego, Aleksandra Zygi studium o problemie żydowskim w twórczości J. I. Kraszewskiego.*

Part II: *Rzecz o Berku Neumanie – drukarzu wileńskim, Rzecz o Józefie Chazanowiczu – lekarzu białostockim, Ukochała obydwą narody: Dora Kacnelson 1921 – 2003 – 2013.*

Part III: *„Kontury”. Pismo – tematy – autorzy – recepcja, Andrzej Sycz, Ażeby nie był zapomniany, O Yoramie Bronowskim, Pani Łucja, Józefa Baua znaki obecności, Różne oblicza samotności, Poprzez trwającą po nich ciszę, Późne pożegnanie, Poetka wydarta niepamięci, Z maską na twarzy, Ze wspomnień telawiwskich: ludzie wśród książek.*

As this shows, the book has a three-part structure: the first section is devoted to perception of Polish literature by Jews, mainly writers, critics and Hebrew-speaking readers; the second part encompasses three biographical texts; and the third one refers to the literary activity of Jews writing in Polish in Israel and in other countries. Each of the texts published here is intellectually inspiring and can serve as a basis for other separate scientific theses. Every text deserves a short review, but for reasons of space I shall refer only to a few. The selection is subjective and results from my own academic interests. In particular I would like to recommend texts which reveal from the inside the literary inspiration of Zionism. Tempting in its simplicity and seemingly logical is the perspective of dividing influences of coming into being and the development of Zionism into two categories. The first constitutes events of anti-Semitic backgrounds, mainly the wave of pogroms in Russia (from Odessa, in the southern part, to St Petersburg, in the north) and the famous case of Dreyfus in France. Besides, we make a note of other events that were unpleasant for Jews. The second category constitutes personal motivation – willingness to reconstruct their national domicile. The series of these events at the end of the 19th century was said to start at the beginning of the next century, a brave undertaking which finished on May 14, 1948. In the meantime, the development and formation of the ideol-

ogy and the Zionist movement constituted the outcome of minor and major events and processes. The Zionist activists drew from the papers of Leon Pinsker, Achad Ha'am, Władimir Żabotyński and Teodor Herzl. Not only scientific knowledge but also intuition dared to pose the question of whether the voice of intellectuals from the nations they lived among was also important for them. If a large number of Jews inhabited Polish lands, could we just think that the local intellectuals, writers and artists were not indifferent to the Zionists? a scientific explanation for these questions can be found in the work of Ryszard Löw. The popularity of the works of Mickiewicz, Reymont or Żeromski among the Zionists living in Poland and Palestine resulted not only from the genius of the authors. Also of utmost importance was the fact that, besides issues strictly related to Poland and its history, they raised topics of a general character. They discussed, for example, the role and the significance of peasants and political and economic situation of workers. The same issues interested the Zionists. Löw writes about the Hebrew translation of Władysław Reymont's *Chłopi* (*The Peasants*), which was published in Tel Aviv in 1928: "For the reception of *Chłopi* in Palestine, favorable social circumstances were created. A novel which defied the cultivation of soil and effort of a farmer, a novel where the main character is a community, its life, customs, traditions, moral norms, social and national awareness – such a novel was much-anticipated" (50). The perception of Polish literature had natural strong relations with the political division in the Zionist camp. Stefan Żeromski was in favor among the left wing of the Zionists. The activists of that trend linked national demands with class. The important Israeli critic and literary scholar Dov Sadan, born in Brody (1902-1989), named Żeromski as "one of the poets who advocated independence, who set the way to 'national and social independence'" (77). Then Löw writes: "The extensive bibliographical entries in lexicons and encyclopedias can be perceived as signs of remembrance, portraits as signs of tribute and attempts to put the Polish writer in the rank of an author of common significance" (77-78). The Zionist right wing was inspired by the works of Henryk Sienkiewicz: "Żabotyński wanted to instill in Jews the energy of winners, awake the awareness of loyal activity to reach national aims – on their own land, which had to be regained. The literature should deliver a stimulus, and *Trylogia* represented this kind of literature" (43).

The reflections presented above do not convey all the interpretative possibilities connected with the reviewed book, and do not fully reflect its informative qualities. Nevertheless, I think that they are sufficient to catch the reader's attention. I may risk the thesis that this is compulsory reading for all historians, Judaists, political scientists and philologists examining Polish-Jewish relations in the 19th and 20th century and its impact on the literary field.

Łukasz Tomasz Sroka (Pedagogical University of Kraków)