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# Preface to the English Edition

**T**his book requires a few explanatory remarks for the sake of its English-speaking readers. The original version was published in Polish in 2008. Fortunately, it proved to be of interest to readers from outside of Poland too, paving the way for this edition. In keeping with the first edition, the early parts of the book contain a rather detailed account of more than a century of debate on Bolesław Prus's attitude towards Jews and the so-called Jewish question. Perhaps English speakers will regard it as too detailed, but please allow me to explain why I decided to leave it in this American edition too.

On the one hand, Prus himself was a central figure of Polish intellectual life in the decades between the January Uprising (1863), a key event for Polish consciousness, and the outbreak of the First World War. Unsurprisingly, therefore, his views were of interest to commentators and scholars—at first only Poles, but later also those from abroad. On the other hand, Jewish issues—so complex and yet so crucial to the development of modern Polish society—attracted similar interest. Views on Prus's position on Jewish issues changed over time and were strongly influenced by ideological concerns. The intricacies of this reception therefore largely constitute a record of the changes in Polish intellectual life in the last century, and to a certain extent even reflect the transformation of Western humanities regarding Jewish issues as a whole. I therefore believe that a detailed tracing of the debate on Prus and his attitude to Jews might also be useful for readers from outside of Poland.

This issue is closely related to another—the state of research on Jewish issues in Poland and the world. In the dozen or so years that have passed since my book was published, numerous studies have been published on diverse aspects of Jewish life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the development of antisemitism and Zionism. A number of books on Bolesław Prus have also been written. To address them fully I would essentially need to rewrite the book in full. I therefore decided to retain the original form, making minor adjustments and additions and not changing the overall message. The

book in this form should therefore be taken as a kind of record of the state of research at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with all the consequences this entails.

To complete these short remarks, I would like to thank the people who contributed to the English-language edition of my book. Above all, I am grateful to Antony Polonsky for his kind recommendation which gained the interest of the publisher, as well as to Academic Studies Press for taking the trouble to edit it and the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, which funded the translating and editing work (within the National Programme for the Development of Humanities). My thanks to François Guesnet for his helpful review. I also thank my colleagues, Magdalena Ruta and Jolanta Galecka, whose help led me through the bureaucratic intricacies surrounding the whole process. Finally, I am grateful to Ben Koschalka for excellent collaboration and a superb translation of my book.

# Introduction

Two years after Bolesław Prus's death, Teodor Jeske-Choiński wrote the following: "In his numerous columns he had little to say about Jews; he largely ignored them, mentioning them only from time to time, yet whenever it befell him to refer to this national malady of ours, he always opposed the so-called anti-Semites, and defended Judah."<sup>1</sup> Precisely three-quarters of a century later, Alina Cała examined the same area of Prus's writing, drawing the opposite conclusion: "Bolesław Prus was one of those leaders and ideologues of positivism who succumbed to the stereotypical way of perceiving Jews and struggled to escape it. Elements of an unfavorable image of the Jew appeared in his opinion articles extremely often. With remarkable ease he passed generalizing judgments, harsh verdicts and condemnations."<sup>2</sup>

These are fundamentally differing opinions. A reader without a comprehensive knowledge of Prus's work might wonder who the great writer was: a consistent defender of the Jews,<sup>3</sup> or their unjust critic. Moreover, one might ask what role Jewish issues really played in Prus's writings—the marginal one of which Jeske-Choiński speaks, or, as Cała would have it, a major one.

The latter concern is relatively easy to explain: over the course of almost four decades of essayistic journalism, which Prus himself called his "farm work," the writer referred to Jewish issues, themes and individuals on more than 300 occasions (i.e. on average once every six weeks). These mentions were often fleeting, used merely as embellishments, but he often gave them individual attention. Many of his works—including some of his most important texts—include statements that address fundamental aspects of the Jewish

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1 Teodor Jeske-Choiński, *Żyd w powieści polskiej. Studium* (Warsaw: nakł. Księgarni Kroniki Rodzinnej, 1914), 54.

2 Alina Cała, *Asymilacja Żydów w Królestwie Polskim (1864–1897). Postawy. Konflikty. Stereotypy* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1989), 257.

3 Alongside Jeske-Choiński, Jan Jeleński, another essayist with anti-Jewish leanings, called Prus a "Judeophile." Jan Jeleński, "Odpowiedź krytykom-żydofilom," in Jan Jeleński, *Żydzi, Niemcy i My* (Warsaw: J. Noskowski, 1880).

question. Prus frequently developed Jewish plots and characters in his fiction, often engaging with contemporary social issues. For all of these reasons, Jeske-Choiński's view is incorrect.<sup>4</sup>

The former concern—whether to consider Prus as a philosemite or an antisemite—constitutes more of a challenge. This question was difficult to answer even for the author's contemporaries. A statement published in 1897 in *Izraelita* [Israelite], which had been engaged in a debate with Prus for some time, is characteristic in this respect. The polemicist first addresses the matter in terms of Prus's intellectual integrity, which led him to take an ambiguous, protean position in the debate, noting that:

This is the reason why Jews call him an “anti-Semite” and yet anti-Semites regard him as a “philo-Semite.” In the Jewish question and in other matters, Prus has remained faithful to himself, “undisciplined in his convictions.” He walks in the middle of the road, sometimes coming close to one side or the other depending on what suits his beliefs better, and accepting from doctrinal extremes only the elements favorable to both sides. With his own aims and pride in his vocation, he does not look sideways, but walks straight ahead carrying the banner of “faith in one's principles.”<sup>5</sup>

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- 4 Perhaps from the point of view of a writer who dedicated a significant part of his professional activity to Jewish issues, Prus's comments did indeed appear marginal. My thanks to Prof. Bogdan Burdziej for bringing my intention to this possible interpretation of Jeske-Choiński's assessment.
- 5 Cor., “Prus i Żydzi,” *Izraelita*, no. 15–19, 1897. Unfortunately, I was unable to determine the identity of the writer going under the non de plume “Cor.” This pseudonym is not mentioned by the authors of the *Słownik pseudonimów literackich* [Lexicon of literary pseudonyms] or in Dobrosława Świerczyńska's *Polski pseudonim literacki* [The Polish literary pseudonym], 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1999); it is also not identified by the authors of the volume of the “New Korbut,” the bibliography of Polish literature, devoted to Prus (cf. *Bibliografia literatury polskiej. Nowy Korbut*, vol. 17/1, *Bolesław Prus* (Aleksander Głowacki), ed. Teresa Tyszkiewicz, (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), 104); neither is the pseudonym deciphered in the “Calendar of the Life and Work of Prus,” which in fact gives it in a distorted form, as “Car.”—see *Bolesław Prus 1847–1912. Kalendarz życia i twórczości*, ed. Krystyna Tokarzówna, Stanisław Fita, Zygmunt Szweykowski (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1969), 498. A similar, albeit not identical pseudonym (COR) is noted by *Słownik pseudonimów i kryptonimów pisarzy polskich oraz Polski dotyczących*, ed. Adam Bar (Kraków: Gebethner i Wolff, 1936), 81, which associates it with Kazimierz Sterling. This lawyer of Jewish origin was an advocate of assimilation; for more on Sterling, see Józef Lichten, “Uwagi o asymilacji i akulturacji Żydów w Polsce w latach 1863–1943,” trans. Adam Szostkiewicz, *Znak* (396–397), no. 5–6 (1988): 59.

This lack of “discipline” on Prus’s part is something that we might today call “non-conformism.” Was this the main source of the controversies he caused among his contemporaries, but also contemporary readers and interpreters of his statements about Jewish subjects? Or perhaps this indiscipline should be seen rather as simply the contrariness and scathing grit of a renowned columnist, which make it difficult to separate the core beliefs of the writer from his use of expressions that often sounds jarring to today’s reader, differing greatly from the demands of “political correctness,” and yet were rendered necessary by short-term polemical tactics. One should also not forget the dualism at play in Prus’s work—a long-discussed and still relevant struggle between “overwhelming feeling” and “cool reason”<sup>6</sup> that was often decisive in his writing at the time. Finally, it is worth recalling the words of Ludwik Krzywicki, who described Prus’s mind as “strangely intricate, complicated and paradoxical.”<sup>7</sup>

Of course, the views of the writer’s contemporaries do not answer the question of whether or not he was an antisemite, yet they do cast light on this difficult and thorny issue. In fact, explicitly labelling Prus as a “philo-Semite” or “anti-Semite” becomes possible only at the cost of an ideologically charged reduction of the entire issue. Also worth bearing in mind are the thoughts of Israel Bartal, a leading Israeli scholar of the literature and history of Central European Jews, on these two contradictory terms: “One might be a philo-semite or an antisemite. What do these words actually mean, what do they say? If I say ‘Jews are always the ferment, the germ of something new, that could be something positive or something negative. [...] it depends most of all on the context and on who is taking part in the discussion.’”<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that the contemporary perspective on the disputes taking place in the nineteenth century is colored by awareness of the tragedy that befell the

6 Ludwik Włodek’s expressions are cited by Edward Pieścikowski in his introduction to a collection of articles on Prus, in which he demonstrates the presence of the Young Poland period in Włodek’s vision of Prus’s work: Edward Pieścikowski, ed., *Prus. Z dziejów recepcji twórczości. Wybór tekstów* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwa Naukowe, 1988), 27.

7 Ludwik Krzywicki, *Wspomnienia*, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1958), 425.

8 “Sentymenty i urazy. Z profesorem Israelem Bartalem rozmawia Agnieszka Friedrich,” *Znak* 520, no. 9 (1998): 163. Norman Davies expressed a similar view, albeit placing the emphasis on another aspect of the issue: “Anti-Semitism is an inappropriate term. It is a word that only obfuscates the situation, [...] its use leads to absurdity. Everything has to be either pro-Jewish or anti-Jewish.” “Polskie mity i europejskie stereotypy,” *Odra* 6, no. 9 (2000), cited in Krzysztof Lewalski, *Kościół chrześcijański w Królestwie Polskim wobec Żydów w latach 1855–1915* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2002), 87.

Jews in the twentieth century. While it is certainly impossible to disregard the Holocaust entirely, dwelling on these issues when reflecting on the past all too often leads to hasty, or even false conclusions. Alina Cala's opinions are an example of this tendency. I firmly believe that understanding the present cannot take place at the cost of condemning the past. This general proposition also applies to Prus. Calling him an antisemite—an inexcusable tag in the post-Holocaust world—in no way accounts for the meaning of the writer's statements in the complexities of the disputes of his time. Finally, let us cite the assessment of Brian Porter, a scholar of nineteenth-century Polish nationalism, who locates Prus's views, in spite of their scientistic provenance, in opposition to the social Darwinism that characterized the position of the National Democracy movement.<sup>9</sup>

It is therefore difficult to accept such a one-sided vision of Prus's position towards the Jewish question as that presented by Cala. At the same time, one must conclude that it is hard, or even impossible, to describe this attitude in unequivocal terms. Józef Bachórz expressed this sentiment, writing that the Jewish question in Prus's work, especially in his series of "Chronicles," became a "lengthy topic [...] that was dramatically complicated, crammed with polemics and intellectual meandering, constantly complemented with new insights and impossible to describe in any one abbreviated form."<sup>10</sup>

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It was my discomfort at this major discrepancy regarding evaluations of the writer's position towards Jewish issues that was one of my motives in deciding to tackle the subject of Prus and the Jewish question. Perhaps initially I even hoped to solve the dilemma: was Prus a philosemite or an antisemite? The more I learned about his abundant oeuvre, however, the more obvious it became to me that it made no sense to make this the objective of my book. But before trying to present the aims that did motivate my work, I feel compelled to outline what has previously been written on the presence of Jewish topics in Prus's work.

The first scholar to take a careful look at the Jewish question in Prus's writings from something of a historical perspective was Ludwik Włodek, the author

9 Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 219.

10 Józef Bachórz, "Wstęp." In Bolesław Prus, *Kroniki. Wybór*, edited by Józef Bachórz (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1994), lxxxiii.



of a pioneering monograph on the writer published in 1918.<sup>11</sup> Yet this is not to say that Prus's interest in this issue was not noted prior to this. As early as 1897, the aforementioned first attempt to summarize the writer's position on the subject was made in *Izraelita*. As a voice in an ongoing debate, it also bore certain hallmarks of generalization. The extensive article is divided into four instalments, citing numerous statements by Prus indicating his intellectual independence from both philo- and antisemitic angles.<sup>12</sup> In 1913, just a year after the writer's death, the subject of Jewish issues in his work was raised by Konstanty Wojciechowski. The following quotation provides a good summary of his view on the matter: "Prus was always an enemy of anti-Semitism, and never an enemy of the Jews; but he was faithful to his principles, and did not conceal the shortcomings that he perceived among Jews."<sup>13</sup> Importantly, however, this rather unequivocal opinion was based on an analysis of Prus's literary works, which only reflect part of the complexities of the writer's views expressed in his journalistic articles.

This is not the case with Teodor Jeske-Choiński, whose notorious antisemitic book from 1914 refers to the treatment of Jewish issues in both Prus's artistic prose and his articles and essays. Apparently, however, Jeske-Choiński was unable to find sufficient evidence of these matters, as he reaches the surprising and not entirely accurate conclusion (cited above) that Prus only tackled the Jewish question as a marginal pursuit. Where his book is worthy of our attention, however, is in its framing of an argument made almost directly by the aforementioned Ludwik Włodek. Jeske-Choiński argues that "A doctrine has different eyes from an artistic observation. A doctrine sees only itself, whereas an artistic observation sees what it is—reality"<sup>14</sup> (needless to say, for the author of these words with his antisemitic bias, the role Jews played in that reality was negative). It is also important to note that Jeske-Choiński, who essentially regarded Prus as a philosemite,<sup>15</sup> discerned in his views an evolution leading him to see the problem with a "more sober eye," as manifested in particular in the Jewish characters of his novel *The Doll*.<sup>16</sup>

11 Ludwik Włodek, *Bolesław Prus. Zarys społeczno-literacki* (Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff, 1918), 226–246 and 323. This book is discussed by Pieścikowski in his introduction to *Prus. Z dziejów*, 25–26.

12 See Cor, "Prus i Żydzi."

13 Konstanty Wojciechowski, *Bolesław Prus* (Lviv: Księgarnia Gubrynowicza i Syna, 1939, 75.

14 Jeske-Choiński, *Żyd*, 60. Cf. Włodek, *Bolesław Prus*, 227.

15 Jeske-Choiński, *Żyd*, 54.

16 *Ibid.*, 57–59. It is also worth quoting Prus's contemporary, the writer Waleria Marrené-Morzkowska, who wrote after publication of *The Doll* that "because of [young] Szlangbaum, Prus has been proclaimed an anti-Semite," *Przeglądy literackie*. 1. Bolesław Prus: 'Lalka,'

Unlike Wojciechowski and Jeske-Choiński, Ludwik Włodek drew upon a thorough knowledge of Prus's novels as well as his columns and articles, presenting the Jewish elements that they contained with real insight and at length, although in a distinctly ideological fashion. Włodek attempts to interpret Prus's statements from antisemitic positions, and this is especially evident with regard to the writer's early columns under his birth name, Aleksander Głowacki, whose "Judeophilia" (Włodek's term) is the source of some confusion to the researcher. Expounding upon this phenomenon, Włodek adopts Jeske-Choiński's distinction between Prus the columnist, who, writing "under the influence of a theory established in advance, judged Jews in the way this theory dictated," and Prus the novelist, who "always had his eyes open to the surrounding reality, and thus saw Jews as they are."<sup>17</sup>

Włodek seeks almost to justify the philosemitism of the young Prus, attributing this phenomenon to the writer's undeveloped intellectual independence. He also refers to the intellectual atmosphere in which he embarked upon his writing career, where Jews were "something of a taboo."<sup>18</sup> The ideological bias of Włodek's perspective is also expressed in the satisfaction with which he notes Prus's gradual progression to less favorable positions towards Jews. But he also recognizes that this turn did not take place as suddenly as in the case of Aleksander Świętochowski or Andrzej Niemojewski.<sup>19</sup> While noticing that Prus had been labelled an antisemite, he does not use this description himself.<sup>20</sup> Of the articles that Prus wrote after the 1880s, those that Włodek deemed particularly important were his opinion on the memorandum of the Stock Market Committee and the endowment of Baron Hirsch for Galicia, as well as publications concerning Zionism and the Dreyfus affair along with later contributions testifying to Prus's loss of faith in the prospects of a quick solution to the Jewish question. These selections suggest that Włodek had an excellent knowledge of the subject of Jewish issues in the writer's journalistic work and was able to point to the key concerns in this

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powieść współczesna," *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, no. 1, 1890, cited in Prus, *Z dziejów*, 97. Clearly, then, Jeske-Choiński was not alone in his interpretation.

17 Włodek, *Bolesław Prus*, 227.

18 *Ibid.*, 231–232.

19 *Ibid.*, 232.

20 On the contrary. On the article "Z powodu 12,000,000 guldenów" [For 12,000,000 gulden], one of the reasons for which Prus was accused of antisemitism, Włodek writes: "[T]he above article did not have the *slightest* [my emphasis] of anti-Jewish characteristics." *Ibid.*, 237.

regard. The obvious bias in Włodek's interpretation should not detract from these virtues.

Włodek's examination of Jewish issues in Prus's fiction is less insightful, evidently following his rather one-sided argument that, starting from the earliest treatment of these issues (according to him in the two novellas from 1875 *Sen Jakuba* [Jacob's Dream] and *Lokator poddasze* [The loft tenant]), "throughout Prus's novels and novellas, there is a succession of Jews who are in fact a parasitic class feeding off the population of Poland, the country they inhabit."<sup>21</sup> He fervently notes the negative Jewish types featuring in Prus's fiction—negative, that is, according to his interpretation. Even those which are characterized by both good and bad attributes, such as Szmul in *Anielka*, to Włodek are purely negative.<sup>22</sup> This strategy is particularly visible in his description of the main Jewish protagonists of *The Doll*: Szuman and the two Szlangbaums. It is telling that he only reserves any sympathy for old Szlangbaum—"an Orthodox Jew in the old style"—accusing both assimilated Jews of opportunism and dishonesty, and Szuman also of nihilism and "the destructive criticism of the Jewish intelligentsia."<sup>23</sup> The fact that Włodek's interpretation of such complex, and even tragic characters as Szuman and young Szlangbaum<sup>24</sup> is so one-sided offers further evidence of the profoundly ideological nature of his approach.

Włodek barely notices any positive portrayals of Jews, identifying just three whom he regards as sympathetic characters throughout the course of Prus's fiction. These are David, who blesses the general in the novella *Skarb zakopany* [Buried treasure], Jojna Niedoperz in *The Outpost* and, as noted above, old Szlangbaum in *The Doll*. The final example is slightly perverse, as Włodek

21 Ibid., 228.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 229–230.

24 The complexity of the characters of Dr. Szuman and young Szlangbaum, as well as their significance for the novel, was noticed by Jan Ludwik Popławski, "Świat marionetek," *Głos*, nos. 21–22 (reprinted in Jan Ludwik Popławski, *Szkice literackie i naukowe* (Warsaw: E. Wende, 1910); on Szuman and Szlangbaum, see 76–77. Cf. also more recent interpretations of the two characters, e.g.: Henryk Markiewicz, "Lalka" Bolesława Prusa, 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1967), 23; Józef Bachórz, "Wstęp," in Bolesław Prus, *Lalka*, ed. Józef Bachórz (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1998), 112–115; Henryk Grynberg, *Prawda nieartytyczna* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1994), 56; Ewa Paczoska, "Lalka" czyli rozpad świata (Białystok: Trans Humana, 1995), 82–83; Józef Bachórz, "O doktorze Szumanie w 'Lalce' Bolesława Prusa," in *Bolesław Prus. Pisarz. Publicysta. Myśliciel*, ed. Maria Woźniakiewicz-Dzidosz and Stanisław Fita (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2003), 97–112.

writes that of the Szlangbaums, he is “undoubtedly the most sympathetic, since exploiting Poles does not prevent him from wishing them well.”<sup>25</sup>

To sum up the significance of Włodek’s publication for the subject matter of this book, on the one hand we should emphasize its serious deficiencies, the most important of which is his tendency to go too far in his interpretations<sup>26</sup> and tailor Prus’s views to the needs of the conceptions of National Democracy, as Pieścikowski demonstrated.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, however, it is of great value. Firstly and most importantly, notwithstanding his interpretive bias, Włodek correctly identifies the most major points of Prus’s work in the period in question, especially with regard to his journalistic writing. Secondly, this is the most extensive statement on the writer’s stance on the Jewish question, as expressed in both his journalistic work and his fiction,<sup>28</sup> to be found in the literature devoted to his work, and as such inevitably marks an important point of reference for later researchers. One might very well ask how Włodek’s book retains such a key position in research on this subject, despite the more than eight decades since its publication. The answer to this question is both very easy and very difficult at the same time. On the one hand, it is obvious that it remained the most complete examination of the Jewish question in Prus’s oeuvre because of the lack of serious works tackling the same issues in the interim. On the other, though, the reasons for this absence are much harder to pinpoint; was this a typical example of academic *désintéressement*, or rather, as Bogdan Burdziej suggests, were the political circumstances and censorship to blame?<sup>29</sup> It is also possible that in the first postwar decades, Jewish issues as a whole were associated with such great trauma that they were subconsciously avoided in discussions of literary history. For all these reasons, it is impossible to identify the real reasons without a careful analysis of the phenomenon. And yet, even if it did indeed prove possible to explain the marginalization of Jewish issues in research on Prus’s writings carried out after 1945, this would

25 Włodek, *Bolesław Prus*, 230.

26 Cf., for example, Włodek’s comments on the “physical disgust” that Jews supposedly aroused in Prus, which stemmed from Prus’s satirical writings, and furthermore concerned “cultural” rather than “physical” (racial?) issues; Włodek, *Bolesław Prus*, 242.

27 Pieścikowski, *Prus. Z dziejów*, 26.

28 A comparable attempt, albeit rather shorter and limited to the feature writing, was made only in 1989, in the aforementioned work by Alina Cała.

29 Bogdan Burdziej, “‘Lalka’ Prusa o genezie pogromu warszawskiego (1881). Rekonesans problemu,” in *Jubileuszowe “żniwo u Prusa.” Materiały z międzynarodowej sesji prusowskiej*, ed. Zbigniew Przybyła (Częstochowa: Instytut Filologii Polskiej Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1998), 171.

still not assuage all concerns. After all, in the interwar period too there was very little interest in this aspect of the writer's work—might we assume that Włodek's book was adjudged to be sufficiently insightful? Given the sketchiness of her conclusions, particularly regarding Prus's fiction, this hypothesis certainly seems doubtful.<sup>30</sup>

Regardless of the sources of this phenomenon, the marginalization of Jewish issues by "Prusology" following Włodek remains a fact. Let us therefore take a look at how this question surfaced in later works devoted to the writer's oeuvre. For example, Feliks Araszkiewicz's book from 1925 makes only a passing reference to the subject, based on just one very late statement (from 1910). Araszkiewicz reconstructs Prus's views as follows:

Prus wants, for the health of the Polish social organism, through intensive accomplishment of life ideas, to achieve independence from the Jewish element. Naturally, such a release from the harmful Jewish element must be calculated for centuries, because the Polish nature cannot be molded so quickly; this is why people are impatiently resorting to more violent methods. Prus in fact did not resolve the Jewish question *practically*, but only gave methodical instructions for its *slow* resolution. In this regard, therefore, he is not a surgeon, yet who knows whether a surgeon might not be needed in social issues.<sup>31</sup>

This quotation demonstrates that this too is an ideologized vision, which also confirms Pieścikowski's general opinion about the utilitarian objectives of Araszkiewicz's book, as well as his reconstruction of Prus's views "to resemble the concepts of Christian Democracy."<sup>32</sup>

Araszkiewicz writes even less about the Jewish question in his book published after the war, which is largely devoted to social issues in Prus's work. One might expect Jewish issues to occupy a prominent place within such a topic, yet the author writes only one brief paragraph on them (while discussing the emancipation of the bourgeoisie). Furthermore, he ignores Prus's journalism

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30 Between the wars, nothing was published that might compare, for example, to Irena Butkiewiczówna's discussion of Jewish issues in Eliza Orzeszkowa's works: Irena Butkiewiczówna, *Powieści i nowele żydowskie Elizy Orzeszkowej* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1937).

31 Feliks Araszkiewicz, *Bolesław Prus i jego ideały życiowe* (Lublin: Dom Wydawniczy Franciszek Głowiński i S-ka, 1925), 167–168.

32 Pieścikowski, *Prus. Z dziejów*, 26.

altogether.<sup>33</sup> Bogdan Burdziej is correct in suggesting that the reason for this is Araszkiewicz's self-censorship in his interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

Burdziej identifies a similar measure of self-censorship in Zygmunt Szweykowski's postwar monograph on Prus. The author, he reports, "is more restrained" in his assessment of Jewish issues than he was in his book on *The Doll*, published before the war.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, in his 1927 publication Szweykowski devotes some ten pages to Jewish topics in Prus's masterpiece. Even more importantly, he recognizes the complexity of these issues. On the one hand, he points to the numerous shortcomings of the Jewish protagonists in this work, the most important ones being the absolutization of money.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, however, he recognizes the writer's intention not to pin the blame for Jewish separatism on Jews themselves, but rather on Polish society, reluctant to abandon its prejudices and contempt.<sup>37</sup>

The astute and multifaceted approach from Szweykowski's 1927 book is not continued in his postwar publication. The numerous and diverse Jewish aspects of *The Doll* are essentially reduced to one paragraph, containing a distinct but rather one-sided interpretation of the famous final "We will!" uttered, among others, by young Szlangbaum. According to Szweykowski, the novel "concludes with the clear triumph of Jewish over Polish society."<sup>38</sup> He bases his claims on the argument that Jews had taken over trade, made the Polish aristocracy dependent on them, and in fact assumed control of social life as a

33 The whole of the passage in question is as follows: "Only one social advancement exists: through the individual becoming richer—to ... the salons of the aristocracy, strongly protected by the armour of social convention. This is the goal to which Szlangbaum aspires when standing at the helm of the society for trading with the Empire. The Jews representing this type in fact attain the influences of financial controllers of the entire landed gentry; an example being the banker Hirszgold in Bolesław Prus 'Placówka' [The outpost]; Feliks Araszkiewicz, *Bolesław Prus. Filozofia—Kultura—Zagadnienia społeczne* (Wrocław: Książnica-Atlas, 1948), 310.

34 See Burdziej, "Lalka' Prusa," 172.

35 Ibid., 172.

36 Zygmunt Szweykowski, *"Lalka" Bolesława Prusa* (Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff, 1927), 271.

37 Szweykowski, *"Lalka,"* 273. In spite of the author's evident desire to remain objective in his interpretation of Jewish issues in *The Doll*, Szweykowski's study was exploited by antisemitic propaganda. Władysław Augustyn summarised his views as follows, taking the analysis out of context and ignoring the passages that are favourable towards Jews: "He states plainly that there remained only dark, devious and insincere figures, who hamper the development of civilisation. Their god is money, to which they aspire in ways unworthy of an honest person." W. Augustyn "Bolesław Prus—a Żydzi," *Hasło Podwawelskie*, no. 28 (1933): 4.

38 Zygmunt Szweykowski, *Twórczość Bolesława Prusa* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1972), 176.

whole, as well as the plans to join the Jewry with the Polish population so they became “its intelligentsia.”<sup>39</sup> This idea comes from the words of Dr. Szuman, and Szweykowski concludes that “this is the limit to which life in Poland can go.”<sup>40</sup> According to Burdziej, later researchers neither accepted nor rejected this interpretation<sup>41</sup>—something that he finds surprising, given its rather polemical nature. Henryk Markiewicz, the author of the next books dealing with *The Doll*, also fails to wrestle with this subject, and like Szweykowski contents himself with occasional paragraphs to assess the Jewish question in Prus’s book.<sup>42</sup> Despite the brevity of Markiewicz’s comments, however, they are not insignificant. Particularly notable are his argument concerning the transformation undergone by Dr. Szuman and young Szlangbaum in the direction of Jewish separatism with the increase in antisemitic tendencies in the Warsaw press,<sup>43</sup> and his analysis of what he calls the “bankruptcy of positivism” in *The Doll*, in which liberal views gave way to aggressive nationalism.<sup>44</sup>

Let us return for a moment to Zygmunt Szweykowski, a key figure in research on Prus. Irrespective of whether or not Burdziej’s hypothesis about the motifs that guided him is correct, the fact remains that his treatment of the Jewish question was incomplete. Whereas he does pay attention to the Jewish protagonists of *The Outpost* and *The Doll*, he overlooks almost entirely what Prus wrote in his journalistic articles regarding not the Jewish question itself, but Jews in general.<sup>45</sup> There is no doubt that the reason for this was not—as one might assume in other cases—the fragmentary nature of the author’s knowledge; rather, it was a deliberate decision. After all, just before the publication of the second edition of the book, Szweykowski was finishing the monumental project of editing the *Chronicles*,<sup>46</sup> in which he furnished Prus’s numerous

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39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Burdziej, “Lalka’ Prusa,” 172.

42 Henryk Markiewicz, “Lalka” Bolesława Prusa, 1st ed. (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1951), 179; Markiewicz, “Lalka” Bolesława Prusa, 2nd ed., 23.

43 Ibid., 1st ed., 179.

44 Ibid., 2nd ed., 23. In his later text, “Asymilacja Żydów jako temat literatury polskiej” in *Literatura i historia* (Kraków: Universitas, 1994), 25, Markiewicz writes surprisingly little about the Jewish protagonists of *The Doll*, considering the significance of the novel in the history of Polish literature.

45 An exception is the footnote in which Szweykowski cites Prus’s opinion that Jews are people endowed with the ability to make plans, in contrast to Poles, who, according to the author, act “blindly or routinely.” See Szweykowski, *Twórczość*, 249.

46 Bolesław Prus, *Kroniki*, vols. 1–20, ed. Z. Szweykowski (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1953–1970).



texts on Jewish issues with countless erudite notes demonstrating his extensive knowledge on the subject. A major virtue of Szweykowski's notes and comments is that they also record the reactions of Prus's main intellectual partner on the Jewish side—*Izraelita*, edited by Samuel Hirszt Peltyn. Szweykowski's notes without doubt constitute one of the most important academic accomplishments in this field, yet inevitably they are essentially factual rather than interpretive. So even this great expert on the *Chronicles* did not present a concise and comprehensive vision of the evolution of Prus's views on the Jewish question. The question of why this happened is perhaps one of the most important posed in Polish "Prusology." To answer it, however, would require a separate study going beyond the framework of this study.

Krystyna Tokarżówna and Stanisław Fita's "Calendar of the Life and Work" of Prus<sup>47</sup> (alongside Szweykowski's book, the other great achievement in research on the writer) contains a number of references to the Jewish question. Owing to the documental nature of this work, however, it too fails to offer a complete interpretation.

After 1945, for a long time Jewish issues in Prus's work were not the subject of literary research. As I have noted, it is hard to determine how much this resulted from censorship concerns,<sup>48</sup> and how much from a simple lack of interest (in the West too, where censors were of course not a problem.<sup>49</sup> It is also notable that Prus's columns and essays were almost completely ignored at the time, whereas there were references, albeit only occasional, to Jewish issues in his literary works.<sup>50</sup> But here too there were no attempts at a more detailed analysis of the problem. Only in the 1980s in the West, and later in Poland, did this subject begin to be reassessed: at first, Jewish topics in Prus's oeuvre were located in the broader context of Jewish issues in Polish literature,<sup>51</sup> with

47 Tokarżówna, Fita, Szweykowski, *Bolesław Prus 1847–1912*.

48 Cf. Burdziej, "Lalka' Prusa," 171.

49 With the exception of brief references in (mostly Hebrew) encyclopedia entries. Cf. Ryszard Lów, "Prus w domenie hebrajskiej (rekonesans)," in *Jubileuszowe "żniwo u Prusa,"* 491–492.

50 Cf. e.g.: Janina Kulczycka-Saloni, *Bolesław Prus* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1967 [1955]), 226, 264–265, 279, 314) (I used the third edition, in which the issues in question were expanded); Markiewicz, "Lalka" *Bolesława Prusa*, 2nd ed., 23; Stanisław Fita, "Placówka" *Bolesława Prusa* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1980), 29; the Jewish question is given only marginal treatment by Zbigniew Przybyła: "Lalka" *Bolesława Prusa. Semantyka. Kompozycja. Konteksty* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1995), 159, 160.

51 Henryk Grynberg, "The Jewish Theme in Polish Positivism," *Polish Review* 2525, nos. 3–4 (1980): 50–51; Henryk Grynberg, "Terra incognita," in Grynberg, *Prawda niearytystyczna*, 83–84 [the first printing of this text was published in West Berlin in 1984];



separate consideration given to the writer's individual treatment of the subject only later.<sup>52</sup>

This was also the time when researchers began to rediscover the Jewish topics in Prus's journalistic work, a practice that had been abandoned decades previously. Ewa Paczoska, Janina Szczęśniak, Bogdan Burdziej and Józef Bachórz all do this in their publications.

Paczoska's book about *The Doll* devotes one chapter to Polish-Jewish-German relations, arguing that the novel portrays the Jewish question almost in the shadow of the forthcoming pogrom of 1881. In this context, the author examines two statements by Prus that expressed his direct reflection on the events of the time.<sup>53</sup> Yet she does not take any other of his other articles into account. For example, Paczoska (probably rightly) makes a connection between something said by Dr. Szuman ("in this country, only the Jews create some kind of impetus in industry and trade") with the main thesis of the famous memorandum of the Stock Market Committee, but fails to mention Prus's lengthy annalistic statement on the same subject.<sup>54</sup> This is all the more surprising as Paczoska discusses the memorandum itself at length. She sees the opinion pieces written by Jan Jeleński, meanwhile, as crucial. And this disproportion is striking in a text about the work of Prus, especially considering that Prus incessantly debated with Jeleński, not least regarding the latter's book *Żydzi, Niemcy i my* [The Jews, the Germans and us].<sup>55</sup>

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Magdalena Opalski, *The Jewish Tavern-Keeper and his Tavern in Nineteenth-Century Polish Literature* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1986), 27–28, 60; Magdalena Opalski, "The Concept of Jewish Assimilation in Polish Literature of the Positivist Period," *Polish Review* 3232, no. 4 (1987): 376; Grynberg, *Prawda nieartystyczna*, 56; Magdalena Opalski, Israel Bartal, *Poles and Jews. A Failed Brotherhood* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1992), 132–134, 141; Henryk Markiewicz, "Asymilacja Żydów jako temat literatury polskiej," in Markiewicz, *Literatura i historia* (Kraków: Universitas, 1994), 15–35; Harold B. Segel, "Polish Literature and the Jew," in *Poles and Jews. Myth and Reality in the Historical Context*, ed. John Micgiel, Robert Scott, Harold B. Segel (New York: Columbia University, 1986), 310–317.

52 Jan Błoński, "Żydzi Prusa i Zeromskiego," in Błoński, *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1994), 146–153; Paczoska, "Lalka" czyli rozpad świata, 69–107; Janina Szczęśniak, "Kreacje bohaterów żydowskich w twórczości Bolesława Prusa" in *Literackie portrety Żydów*, ed. Eugenia Łoch (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS 1996), 263–271; Burdziej, "Lalka" Prusa.

53 Paczoska, "Lalka" czyli rozpad świata, 86–87.

54 It is important to remember, however, that Szuman himself could not have been familiar with this memorandum, since it was published in 1886, i.e. later than the action of the novel; for more on the memorandum and Prus's reaction to it see chapter 3 of this book.

55 Cf. Prus, *Kroniki*, 4:190–193.

Paczoska examines Prus's pronouncements on Jews only in the context of the subject of her research, making no attempt to assess the nature of these statements. Janina Szcześniak has broader ambitions, meanwhile, in her rather too grandly titled article "Kreacje bohaterów żydowskich w twórczości Bolesława Prusa" [Creations of Jewish protagonists in the work of Bolesław Prus]. The author's main argument is that Prus's approach in his literary work differed from that in his journalism. It is true, of course, that his stance towards the Jewish question was manifested more distinctly in the latter, but I have serious reservations about Szcześniak's analysis. She in fact refers to just one, very early statement by Prus, yet this does not prevent her from making far-reaching generalizations. First, she unthinkingly adopts Alina Cała's assertion that Prus was one of those positivists "who succumbed to the stereotypical way of perceiving Jews" (incidentally, Szcześniak copies this opinion from Cała verbatim without informing the reader—alongside the superficial nature of her findings, this unreliability is one of the main characteristics of the article<sup>56</sup>). In her conclusion, the author expresses the extremely brave assertion, albeit one not backed up by any evidence, that:

Around the late 1880s, Prus's views, which, though not entirely unambiguous, had erred on the side of philo-Semitism, underwent an evolution. In keeping with the dominant moods of the time, the writer moved to anti-Semitic positions. In the novel *Children*, he portrayed Jews quite

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56 Cf. Cała, *Asymilacja Żydów*, 257; Szcześniak, "Kreacje bohaterów żydowskich," 265. Another example of the author's unreliability is the fact that elsewhere she distorts the title of Cała's well-known book entirely, referring to it as "Jews in Congress Poland (1864–1897) in Literature and Journalistic Writing" (266). She also lifts entire paragraphs almost word for word, without giving any indication that she is referring to somebody else's intellectual property. There is no room here for a detailed listing all such instances in detail; as an example, though, it suffices to compare Szcześniak's "reflections" on 265–266, which, not excluding the quotation from Prus's chronicle, along with cuts and distortions of the quotation straight from Cała's work (Szcześniak also adds her own distortions), gives the same views as Cała in their entirety, but also uses the same words; cf. Cała, *Asymilacja Żydów*, 258. Where Szcześniak does take the trouble to inject her own content, her conclusions are truly astonishing, such as the assertion that Prus's statement from 1865 "exemplifies his own, modified Jewish stereotype" (Szcześniak, "Kreacje bohaterów żydowskich," 265). Even if we overlook the fact that for most scholars, especially of cultural inclinations, "stereotypes only have meaning (indeed stereotypes are only stereotypes!" to the extent they are culturally shared" (Charles Stangor, Mark Schaller, "Stereotypes as Individual and Collective Representations," in C. Neil Macrae, Charles Stangor, Miles Hewstone, *Stereotypes and Stereotyping* (New York: Guilford, 1996), 5, this begs the question: what "own stereotypes" might the cited statement be a modification of, if it is the earliest known expression of Prus's views on the Jewish question?

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