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# A manuscript of Pejsach Bergman of blessed memory, according to a copy received from his son, Bronisław Bergman

Pesach Bergman

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**Abstract:** The text by Pesach Bergman (1898–1944) is an excerpt from his fictionalized memoirs about the life of the shtetl of Widawa from the late 19th century to the 1930s. Written in Yiddish, it was translated into Polish by Dr. Marcin Urynowicz, with the assistance of Sara Arm. It constitutes an original and unique literary genre in itself, which is closest to the meditation (Latin: *soliloquia*), combining elements of social criticism and sentimental recollections.

**Keywords:** Jewish history; history of Poland; antisemitism; interwar Poland (1918–1939).

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## Introduction

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir

We owe the following text to Baruch (Bronisław) Bergman, survivor of the Holocaust, a soldier in the Warsaw Uprising, whose wartime memories, entitled *Ani jednego dobrego Polaka*, were published in *Duży Format* (Bergman & Betlejewski, 2014a).<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt is taken from the manuscript penned by his father, Pesach Bergman (1898–1944). Written in Yiddish, it was translated into Polish by Dr Marcin Urynowicz, with the assistance of Sara Arm.

Pesach Bergman was born in Widawa, near Pabianice, then Russia, as the ninth of the ten children of Dawid Bergman and Bajla Gitl, née Kohen.

This is what his grandson writes about Grandpa Dawid:

according to Jewish tradition, he did not work but sat in the synagogue studying the Torah and holy books under the supervision of the local rabbi. His wife, my grandma, ran a modest little ironware store, called an *ayzngesheft* in Yiddish, where she sold nails and agricultural

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<sup>1</sup> On the “Radio dla Ciebie” station, Bronisław Bergman gave a three-hour interview to Rafał Betlejewski. It is available in the radio archives (Bergman & Betlejewski, 2014b). See also the interview with Baruch Bergman conducted by Joanna Roszak (Roszak, 2015, pp. 39–50).



Plac Wolności in Poznań, 1928. Baruch Bergman is holding his mother's hand and his brother Dadek (Dawid, Tadeusz), three years his senior, is holding the hand of his father (The photograph of the Bergman family is reproduced from: Roszak, 2015, p. 39).

utensils. They lived in a tiny apartment in the back of the store. They were so poor that there was not enough food to go around so, when my father turned six, Grandpa Dawid took him by the hand and went to a local baker, where he was to stay, getting a place to sleep and food. The whole family was very devout and kept kosher. At home, they spoke Yiddish only, like everybody else in Widawa.

In such circumstances, getting an education was out of the question. For some time, Pesach Bergman worked in Germany, but when Poland regained independence, he came back and moved to Łódź. He met his future wife Sara there. They got married three years later. In 1923, the young couple moved to Poznań, where they were given a tiny flat by the Jewish community at 32 Ulica Żydowska [Jewish Street], apartment no. 5.

Its windows overlooked the street with the Church of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus ("the next corner from our house in the direction of the City Hall"). Baruch Bergman remembers very well what was in this church and what has remained there until today: "In the back, on the ceiling, two paintings depict two Jews with appalling appearances, with aquiline noses, beards and eyes filled with hateful lust. They are stabbing the Holy Host with long knives" (Roszak, 2015, p. 46).

First, his father worked in a textile store. Then he opened his own business at 27 Ulica Kramarska, where he sold garment accessories. His three sons were born: Dawid, Baruch and Eugeniusz. They talked with their mother only in Polish, with their father – only in Yiddish.

Pesach Bergman, a self-taught man, was an avid reader. He spent every moment of his free time with books, he also tried his hand at writing. His brief texts were published by Jewish newspapers in Warsaw and Łódź.

The genre of his prose is probably closest to the meditation (Latin: *soliloquia*, from Latin: *solusloqui*, 'to speak to oneself'; Głowiński, Kostkiewiczowa, Okopień-Sławińska, & Sławiński, 2005, p. 517). It combines the freshness of oral culture with mature social reflections. It borders on sentimental memories and the premonition of the catastrophe in the face of rising antisemitism.

Two sons of the author survived the war. Their mother was also spared. He and his oldest son, Dawid, died during the Warsaw Uprising at 6 Ulica Wolska.

## **A manuscript of Pejsach Bergman of blessed memory, according to a copy received from his son, Bronisław Bergman**

### **1. Foreword**

For remembrance...!

The reader of this book will find here contemplations on the everyday history of a township which has nowhere been remembered so far... Of a township which has bred the most diverse characters and figures, including some grand minds which shone all the time among the glittering stars but – having been extinguished [too] early – they were forgotten...

[...]

### **2. The Holocaust of Widawa. Stories from the present life of Jews in Poland**

#### **A.**

Widawa is a little town in the wilderness, in a corner of the Polish state, where the houses are small and low on Ulica Bożnicza [Synagogue Street], attached one to another; with a market square and little streets leading all the way up to the goy water-mill. The water which roars and swooshes through the town, day and night, is like a rich goy miller with all his stuffed sacks scattered around and waiting for the mill wheel. The wealth which starts in the town's surrounding replete bread fields, and leads to this water which envelops the whole township with little bridges, is envied so much by everybody living in their poor, bare and wonky, tiny rooms. Across this water people live peaceful lives, satiated and abundant, with all kinds of goods under their window. Peace-

ful and replete, they come together at the Jewish town square. With satisfied faces, they sometimes spend all days [there], looking across the open spaces at the riches on the other side of the water...

A low house stands squeezed in in the middle of the market. The sharp edges of the stones protrude from its grey, dilapidated walls. The entrance is narrow and low – you have to bow slightly as you enter through a pair of narrow doors hanging outside. A taller [person] can easily reach the roof if they stand on tiptoe. Right next to the roof it can be seen that the wall used to be whitewashed. The threshold lying right in front of the doors leading to the store is made from a rectangular stone which moves as you walk in and out. When you step on it, you have to be most careful so as not to move it too much. But it brings no harm to anybody – those who fall, immediately get up and nobody has been hurt so far. Getting inside, into the store, is worse – the floor inside is very low and there are no steps. You have to brace yourself for a leap there and it's only inside that you get to see this huge distance. It's only now that we feel more cozy, more confident, inside.

Everything in the store is assembled in a highly elaborate manner. You immediately recognize that the planks were nailed together by a bungler, it's all put together in the most primitive way. The middle of the floor is patched up with little planks. This is the main passage to the inside of the residential chamber, which is connected by additional steps leading to a little windowed door. The planks lining the store are accompanied by numerous patches of slippery red bricks which have been worn smooth since they were laid there. Each brick is placed well away from the next one, and the rest [is covered] by various pebbles, larger and smaller, and quite big ones, half-embedded in the floor. In many places, large fragments of stone emerge, combined with boards and planks, and with only one worn path, leading to an elevation in the middle and then to the residential chamber. By the elevation, there is a counter painted red on one side, with some scales and weights hanging above the table tied together with a string, [starting] with the largest weight, which is fixed to the table with all kinds of hooks made of nails and wood. The color of the table is different in different places, it can be said to be red-black-white, [it has] all kinds of colors, the way it is in a paint store. The shelves are assembled from different boards obtained from chests, they are not planed, they come as they were torn off, shorter and longer ones – they make a perfect match there. More than one client has left this place with a splinter, having tried to serve himself, more than one has leapt backwards, face contorted in pain as he danced on one leg in agony.

It was to be named an ironware store, meaning that all iron goods are offered there, not only nails, big and small, but every type of ironware, not only locks, big and small, hanging over the table on strings, [but] even a bunch of wheel rims and several long pieces of iron. Nevertheless, this ironware store reminded you more of a paint shop, but it actually was a store which had no name in the first place... On the shelves made of narrow and unplanned boards stood rows of greasy bottles, open and corked, empty and full, big and small, bottles of all colors, small and big, and quite tiny. The greasy

drops in the white bottles standing there show that they contain various liquids that are connected by different secrets, and only the shop owner knows what's inside. The bottles must not be touched by anybody, even the home-dwellers and relatives... And all the things you could buy in this ironware store, everything from soap to shoemaker's awls... Entering the store for the first time, his [salesman's] clients from the surrounding villages asked ironically: "Have you got 'awl soap?'" They meant "awl and soap." Many addressed him "Mr Awl Soap," that was a local nickname he had. Strangers would ask for an ironware store, they never named it otherwise, so this name had stuck for a long time. The shelves were filled with packages tied with strings, tightly bound together, most likely for decades, the packages bound with red and yellow strings, nobody knew what they hid, except the owner, who was most secretive about it... A lot of his clients would enter this cramped shop with utmost respect, carrying empty bottles prepared in advance. People would whisper into each other's ear there, some complained about the local apothecary and – with tears dwelling up in their eyes – requested help... Then they would address him with his true name and different titles on top of that. Tall peasants, who were ashamed to show their illnesses in public, and many others who had even tried the apothecary's stuff but got no relief... There, they would simply fall at the feet of their "Lewek," they were never dishonest with their learned "Lewek." He greeted them with reverence, this "great savant" particularly specialized in skin diseases. His patients left his place joyful, hurrying back home and carrying the bottles filled with ointment, as great treasures, to treat their embarrassing and painful skin diseases... The smell of sulfur and sulfate, turpentine and wood tar, little barrels guarded as the greatest treasures, different herbs to be placed in separate parcels. This "ironware store" was all a drug-store... People would come from far away, having learned about his enormous knowledge, the fame of the "ironware store" grew and the shopkeeper's name was therefore [known] well beyond the borders of the surrounding villages. They believed that their "Lewek" was quite a great man, in particular due to his honesty and precision. "Lewek" Lejbusz Alejhes was an ordinary shopowner in the town, he did not talk much to others. He would hitch his horse to the cart and take side roads, so as nobody in the town learned what and when, everything was a secret. From time to time, Lejbusz Alejhes, would ride his cart to the most remote places to provide his "ironware store" with fresh supplies. As he was leaving, his cart was loaded with different barrels and other vessels which he needed for his druggist business tied around it.

[...]

## **B.**

Yes, maybe there still are a few people with noble, matter-of-fact and serious personalities in the township of Wid[awa]. Yet there are fewer and fewer of them every day, and you can hardly see them. Worms are eating up more and more tree leaves. They are leaving our ranks for good and there are no new people to replace them. Years ago,

they [Poles] sometimes showed a bit of shame, they were scared of foreign newspapers which talk about every trifle that happens around the globe, after all their shame was great, [therefore] nakedness<sup>2</sup> was covered up a bit with whatever was at hand, so that the body, the nakedness could not be seen outside.

These times have long gone, nobody remembers them, [nobody] wants to remember about them, who would need that and what for? The hare is being surrounded closer and closer every day, everyone is waiting [only] for it, and once it tries to stick its ears out from its hideout, it'll end up in the dogs' jaws. Nothing else can be heard among the crowd but the following words: "this one moved out yesterday and left, today one more, another one, the third, the tenth one is running away" – that's the only thing you hear, that is not good, and they are on the run again, selling [houses] and doing whatever it takes – this one is packing up, another one beginning to pack things, all the bustle and panic makes you scared. The whole township has been sold down to the last bit... And it did not begin today [or] yesterday, it has been on sale for years, but in the past, there were only individual cases, the selling plague started in the township of Wid[awa] much earlier, before Colonel Miedziński<sup>3</sup> gave his sermon about the Polonization of towns and townships, [saying] that, for instance, Żychlin should look like a [racially] pure western township, like those you can see in the Poznań region.

Well, one feels like asking: where to run – that no one knows yet. Anyway, who needs to rack their brains over this, over this disturbing element, if every day there are shouts: "Run!" but there is no appropriate place. You run from one place to another, this one here, another one there, someone comes back, you run again, you don't hear anything except everybody else running around. Well, you see some of these prophecies with your own eyes, and the curse coming from the great deceased one, whom no one can contradict any more. This is what this great-one-who-saw wept bitterly over, foreseeing the sad end of this township even then. Even babies in their cribs know about this black specter, they notice it with every step they take and feel it on their own skin. Time does not stop for a minute or a second, everything is moving with incredible speed, and it only seems that the clock is making its slow "tick-tock" and everything is following its natural rhythm, that the world will never collapse and there will never be another flood across the world, ever.

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2 "Nakedness" (Polish: *golizna*) meaning antisemitism.

3 Bogusław Miedziński (1891–1972) – a lieutenant colonel of the Polish infantry, an officer in military intelligence, Member of Parliament and Deputy Speaker of Sejm [the lower chamber of Polish parliament], senator and Speaker of the Senate, minister in the cabinets of Józef Piłsudski and Kazimierz Bartel. He was removed from public office after fraud was revealed in the Ministry of Post and Telegraph, which he was in charge of. He returned to politics when Józef Piłsudski died, and became an activist in the Camp of National Unity (OZN), one of the most influential advisors to Edward Śmigły-Rydz and an active promoter of the antisemitic policy of the Polish state. The author of the memoir may be referring to Miedziński's parliamentary speech of January 11, 1937, where he said:

"As a nation we have the right to regulate the abnormalities arising in our lives as a result of the activities of alien and hostile forces. As concerns the Jews, an immigrant population artificially concentrated in certain territories, the Polish nation – being the historic and actual organizer of its state – has a full right to change the relations in this field. Therefore, in our opinion, it is understandable and useful for the Polish state to pursue obtaining territories that the immigration movement could be directed to, primarily taking into consideration this element whose excess in our territories results in grave economic complications and in the political disturbances those breed" (Adamczyk, 1999, p. 171).



If you couldn't see it with your own eyes, it wouldn't even occur to you, such a natural event appearing like a kaleidoscope in front of your eyes, like pictures you can see through wizardry, through black magic, you see buildings collapsing, burning on all sides, surrounded by hellish fire, entire towns and worlds are being destroyed, it is all being blown up with dynamite, it is spreading on and on, and people are standing there and enjoying this sensation of utmost satisfaction under the disguise of good repair – of allegedly saving the world. The pictures of ancestors, dragons, black, white, red, different colors; in a mere minute, second, our attitude to the surrounding reality is changing, the sea has burst its shores and it will destroy the world in a moment, swallow it, and there will only be chaos,<sup>4</sup> darkness, and the world's collapse – only birds of prey will be spared.<sup>5</sup>

It somehow seems that these are still the old times, and when you forget it – for a minute – what it's like in the world, you walk from one end of the town to the other like at home, like [in your] own home. Who would have reckoned that they would be tripped up everywhere, but you quickly remember that such are the times and you have to take every blow with a smile.<sup>6</sup> It's gone – this is your new tragedy re-ignited again today, this is your new paint which has to be used afresh.

All those the town believed to be rich, strong and great people, have suddenly fallen to the very bottom, fallen inside. Jewish children are being treated now like ugly worms, like leeches that spread all over the body and that do not want to slither down. They call them, Jewish children, by most hateful names of worms, comparing them to vampires-parasites, spiders, insects and the like. Everybody is facing tomorrow with indifference, hands are as if broken, legs won't take you anywhere. Those townspeople who used to eat meat for dinner, now gratefully thank the heavens for dry potatoes. Suddenly, the greatest sages, the greatest foretellers, heroes – have become powerless, passive, apathetic, they do not want to take things in [their] hands anymore – a twisted, stunted end of the world, they are only awaiting miracles, they are looking at far-away roads and heavens, maybe someone will descend from the other world and they will be told to pack up their stuff – they are all standing ready [to leave]<sup>7</sup> given any opportunity. They spend all their lives that way – waiting for some unknown aid which might come someday, as days and years pass by...

It is a great blow to the town that all these evil things about the Torah and the Ten Commandments have been told, things you can hear at every turn. Even the smallest shaygetz<sup>8</sup> already knows how to tell [hurtful stories], and make all kinds of faces<sup>9</sup> to accompany them, [stories] that have recently been poured out like filth, by buckets. People

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4 In the original, Hebrew: *Toyu-vovoyu*.

5 In the original, Yiddish *veln vartn* (English: 'will wait') is crossed out and replaced by Yiddish *veln zikh rateven* (English: 'will be spared').

6 Literally "with love" (Hebrew: *beAhava*).

7 In the Yiddish original *tromayter* (English: 'trumpeter'). Literally: "They are standing next to the first trumpeter [signaling when to leave], all ready."

8 Shaygetz – non-Jewish rogue, scoundrel, rascal.

9 Hebrew: *hevot* (English: 'grimace, gesticulation').

have been ridiculed and spat on, dealing with even the smallest matter they come across corrupted ones, and the overall experience shows that the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” is misinterpreted, G-d meant something else, while the [commandment] “Thou shalt not covet” is kosher for everybody. Holiness is something other than what you are familiar with and, willy-nilly, you have to acknowledge that. The museum in the town is holy – you can’t get too close. Whoever enters there, this temple abounding in valuable objects, has to be prepared first – put on a pair of slippers, rub the floor moving in slow, soft steps, respect the regulations and articles [instructing] how to move around, do not move during your entire stay there, do not, G-d forbid, move too close, the steps [separating you] are calculated, and from a distance, you behold a few treasures, if you can call them that, a couple of old copper coins or animal shapes, the bones of an Egyptian horse.<sup>10</sup> [It has been gathered] for historical reasons, they claim, those people with brass buttons down their housecoats,<sup>11</sup> who guide you around from the inside, and watch your step, making sure that nobody falls down suddenly and forgets for a minute where they are, and making sure that nobody even tries to lift their finger [to touch] the things carefully arranged under glass and cunningly locked up.<sup>12</sup> All this is only to take a look, with astonishing inscriptions, at the bones of the bird whose name is “Trachodon,” well, you know what it is and how holy that is, or “Diplodocus,” or “Stegosaurus,” another local bird that has been lying there several hundred years and is protected like the apple of your eye; or a guise of a Baba Yaga. You are also guided around there, between the thick vaulted walls, you are shown holiness, and the smell of chloroform and other liniments wafts up from there, and this, this penny-worth thing which you see as the cheapest thing – this is guarded and sanctified in thousands of eyes. And your things? Your things will be mocked, ridiculed, heckled.<sup>13</sup> [Your] Tehillim, your Tanakh, the Decalogue, who knows when... Wotan, Jupiter – these are gods, the Nordic man, this is what is the cleanest, the rest is less important, everybody can be treated like worms.

The present [Polish] school that teaches the young generation, brings it up the way it should, in line with what modern times require. Every day the teacher shows him [the student] who his true enemy is. They put all their hopes in the young generation now, this means that there will be something to look forward to, that they will know how to settle the accounts properly [with this enemy]. A child at school is shown the towns in the east as opposed to those that have already been purged [of Jews]; for instance, every dot on the map in the Poznań region is shown to him [the student] by the teacher, he is merely turning adolescent [and already has such] problems to tackle with his fresh, inexhaustible strength, this is truly something to lean on. Never mind.

10 Yiddish: *beyner fun a mitsrish ferd*.

11 “Brass buttons” meant officers – people in state posts.

12 Yiddish: *zorgfeltig hinter a gloz – ligt es treplekh / un kintser farmakht*.

13 Yiddish: *Dayn gebit* – English: ‘your area, territory, region, domain.’ *Dayn gebit vert geshendet* can be literally translated as: ‘your territory (area) is defiled.’



Even young boys<sup>14</sup> can be seen these days, who pass a Jewish shop asking in surprise: what is that, a Jew is sitting here? – and they are bewildered by his [strange] garments, something exotic is sitting here, where does it come from? They immediately set about chasing him away, maybe a stone will do? [So] they do the good deeds of the new Torah. Boycotting Jews is disapproved of by them, by his young society attending schools for children and higher grades. Who – us, boycotting? Who has it been done for, what significance does it have? Such things used to be done in the past by the old society from Dmowski's childish school. In their newspapers they raised alerts about trifles [reminiscent of] child's tiny toys, [that's] what it looks like to them now. Such things as speeches only? They are obsolete and out of fashion among the present youth. Today, there are enough resources, enough people, they are short of nothing. What is so special, let's say, about me making a bomb that every Jewess can build at home<sup>15</sup> – all that is silly.

Overnight, new flowers sprout that are unknown to you, which exude a hateful smell, while one is told to love one's neighbor,<sup>16</sup> but who is that supposed to mean? The one who yesterday dried the stains of blood off his sword and put it away for some time. It does not mean you, you are not the one embraced by the holy words of love – on the contrary, this is aimed against you: noxious gases, death rays, other chemical mixtures... all that is not enough... It's all like child's toys, there are many weapons around to be readied with time [to be used] when they are needed. Of [such] things they sometimes already talk in the town, though not everybody can understand, for instance, the latest news: an association has been set up in the town under the name of Credit – well, do you know what this is? Don't respond [yes or no], it briefly means that you are not allowed to be a member, and the factory recognizes only those people who make all their purchases through "Credit"... With all its statutes and statutes, and maybe someone with a smirk will feel like [saying], "Well, there is nothing to envy here – penalties are listed there, including hard labor and being thrown out onto the street by the landowner." And the association of "Polish Owners," or an association named "Interest-Free?"<sup>17</sup> They don't mean your "Gemiles Chesed"<sup>18</sup> association here, do you know the purpose of it all? There is a multitude of explanations available, but it's done in view of the far-reaching, true goals, noble and pure ideas [...].<sup>19</sup> [An officer] duly takes out a form and asks you to send it. You'll see the meaning of it all and what it results in. [Polish clients] look at the signboard<sup>20</sup> when they do their shopping, so as not to fall into the hands of the

14 In the original text, the Polish word "boys" [*chłopcy*] is written in the Hebrew alphabet.

15 In the original Yiddish text: *vos yede Yidene ken dos in der heym tsunoyshkeln* (English: 'that every Jewess can assemble at home').

16 This is a reference to a Christian commandment.

17 This is a reference to an interest-free savings and loans association "for Christians only."

18 *Gemilut Chesed* (Hebrew: 'good deed, charity, interest-free loan') – this is a reference to a branch of the free loan association "Gemilut Chasadim," established in the 1930s on the initiative of JOINT – a network of associations granting interest-free credit (Żebrowski, 2017a, 2017b).

19 Illegible word or sign.

20 The decree of June 7, 1927, on the industrial law required that the site of every "industrial enterprise" (which meant every business, regardless of whether it dealt with manufacturing or trading) should bear a sign specifying the first and last name of its owner. Art. 33 of the same decree stipulated that "entrepreneurs shall appropriately identify their industrial enterprise on the outside. This identification shall feature the entrepreneur's exact

enemy.<sup>21</sup> Their internal feelings about [this] enemy are not everything – there are other plans here involving your good paths. Those who do all these things<sup>22</sup> have a habit of shouting that they will not calm down until they see with their own eyes the unwelcome guest<sup>23</sup> grab everything he can [and run away]... After all, the rest belongs to us, it has grown on our holy soil, they've had enough of our bread, [they should] just flee. This music is playing every day. Whoever happens to need you, wants to remind you in passing why we [Jews] are afflicted with this great punishment.

And memories come of the things that only happened yesterday. [Let's recall, for instance] some things from the road to Kozienice, the grave has just been refreshed a bit there, or the newly erected cover [of the grave?] of Rabbi Majzels<sup>24</sup> – there still [are] noble people here, who haven't forgotten everything. And now about other faithful [Jewish] children who have devoted their body and soul, and hurried to perform their holy work in times of misery, and spilt their blood across all Polish fields and swamps; therefore a question comes to mind, whether it is fair that all this is happening to me, and all because they performed this holy work to the very end. This will be forgotten before this year's snow or [before] the frost. Perhaps it's not this blood<sup>25</sup> that was spilt everywhere, the blood that reddened the water, the blood that has made the soil rich and fertile? Is that forgotten so rapidly? This is how merits are rewarded now, why necks are broken today and [that] is what we are mocked above our heads [for].<sup>26</sup>

Advice follows advice [to ridicule], to get rid [of us] faster, and everybody is plodding along the bloody roads as one. Some [Poles] who have shed the clothes of a Russian or German patriot overnight are deafening us with strange noises every day, with different shouts and cries: "Help! Stop the thief!"<sup>27</sup> This is how they try to satiate their desire for blood, they are shouting, advertising, agitating, they are speaking all those things known as hatred and hostility, [using] different caricatures in all those newspapers, whatever their titles, with twisted Jewish names, with the great bold print they use to mark the

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and clear first and last name, or the company, and the type of industry [activity] conducted, specifying beyond any doubt whether this is in the manufacturing, trading or service sector. The first, middle and last names exhibited have to be identical with those submitted when registering the enterprise, applying for a concession or with those in the company's entry in the commercial register" ("Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 7 czerwca 1927 o prawie przemysłowym" ["The decree of the President of the Polish Republic of June 7, 1927, on the industrial law"], 1927, p. 701). Local governments and right-wing press regularly reminded about this provision in the 1930s with a clearly stated purpose to facilitate the boycotting of Jewish shops and businesses by the Polish right (Matyjaszek, 2016, p. 29; "Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 7 czerwca 1927 o prawie przemysłowym" ["The decree of the President of the Polish Republic of June 7, 1927, on the industrial law"], 1927, p. 701).

21 Yiddish: *un dos vos git arumkukn zikh oyf der shild beys du geyst epes koyfn, tsu nor nisht amol aryngfaln tsum soyne*.

22 I.e., antisemitic regulations, boycotting Jewish businesses and other state and private antisemitic initiatives.

23 Literally: "occupant."

24 This may be a reference to the grave of Dov Ber Meisels (1798–1878), a rabbi from Warsaw and political activist from the time of the 1863 uprising (the January Uprising). Meisels was buried in the Jewish cemetery on Ulica Okopowa in Warsaw.

25 Possibly meaning "not proper," "not Polish enough."

26 Yiddish: *un yeder ayner traybt katoves iber undzere kep* (English: 'and everybody's making jokes, pouring jokes over our heads').

27 Yiddish: *vos farhilkhen yeden tog mit mshunhdige koyles, mit farshidene geshrayen un griltserayen karaul! khapt dem ganew*.

worst content to be read, the most vile things [bred] from venom and fury, because the grass has already grown over the grave...

[...]

There were some renowned persons in the town once, and some goys had a bit of respect for them but even that is gone now... A war of “good deeds” is being waged in the town now, and every single one may join this war. There is even a cannon without other warlike tools, without soldiers, unrecognizable... Well, what do you know... Only the people from the township of Wid[awa] are walking in circles like in a stupor, it’s not for them [to bear such a burden], they are indifferently looking at their gruesome future and they don’t care anymore. “You’re most welcome, on the contrary, so be it” – they are saying, each and every one of them – “let them [Poles] find the cannon balls that would put an end to it all.” They are suddenly fed up with life, they rather wish to be dead, such madness has come over the town. Not for every head [to handle]: they are comparing [it to] the Spanish inquisition, a bit like a humoresque. Everybody keeps telling them: look, the only salvation is to flee.

Where and how [to flee] no-one of them knows [however]. “Run away” – they are shouting – “wherever you [can].” They have given up [everything] else. Even today the township of Wid[awa] can be compared to some townships in Germany at present. Travelers who go to such townships these days are astonished and amazed: what is this, a Jewish synagogue with other sanctities, a Jewish cemetery with thousands of matzevahs of rabbis and other great [persons], only no Jews can be found there any more, they have all scarpered. The township of Wid[awa] will soon be comparable to such German townships. Everything is for sale, [Jews] are ready to sell everything, the last shirt from their back, they spend whole days moving around the town market, waiting for a client who’ll buy everything off them. They all want to flee, every one of them, they are designing plans upon plans but when you ask any one of them where [he is to flee], nobody can answer.

The synagogue, mikvah, all other sanctities – they could sell them all as they are, [together] with Jewish houses, whose number has become so critical that you can count them one by one. You are surprised to hear that Lipman Strykowski has sold his house next to the synagogue.<sup>28</sup> In a moment another one, and another, and the tenth one comes carrying the same news. It spreads like a fire, moving on and on. The other side of the synagogue, the market square is right there and that’s the end [there are no more Jewish homes]. And the selling started much earlier, before Colonel Miedziński gave his sermon about Żychlin, that he would rejoice seeing such towns purged of Jews like those you can see in the western borderland of Poland. What has happened to the house of Ide Lejb Kris and his patch of field and fruit garden, and Ajzyk Handelsman and his taproom, and the entire street of houses on the side of the synagogue, and Majer Blacharz in the middle of the market square, and Mendel Berliński in Dawidek’s field, and the yellow

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28 Yiddish: *Vunderst zikh derherendig az Lipman Strikowski hot zayn hoyz farkoyft bald neben di shil.*

tenement house of Mejer Lejb with its bricked sukkah<sup>29</sup> and pear trees, and Reb Icie Fiszel? And the houses of Herszl Czacz and his fields, and Markiewicz's fields, the whole market square is filled with signboards [advertising] pork and signboards with sausage slices,<sup>30</sup> and whatever else you can get nowadays from these new owners: [ranging] from thread and needle, to onions and garlic.

You want to take a look starting with the first house [next to] the synagogue, it seems that devout wives are sitting on the threshold there, looking over the Cene uRene<sup>31</sup> at the eternal walls of the synagogue festooned for the Sabbath and festivities – you are making a mistake here, too. You want to go and draw some fresh water the way you did in the old, good times, from a deep well that was always considered a source of water, and you are met [there] by a new landlord, casting bad and angry glances, and you don't know where to run away.

Recently, they are saying, they have learned such things the whole town would never expect, such a thought would never have even occurred to anybody, until it came true and everybody could see it with their own eyes. Awrom Pesach, the richest man in town, danced the same dance and was swept by the [fleeing] crowd; and it is only now that one learns that everything was taken out there as well, and he was left a beggar in all this. He was spared but that was because he sold all his possessions, including many houses.<sup>32</sup> Now, the entire street with houses leading to the road to Łódź has also disappeared, the last stronghold has fallen, [so] he became fed up as well, he is justifying himself. People who still don't believe explain it in different ways, one says that he only did it because of fashion, because this is what everybody else in the town is doing, others explain it with advertising, some say [outright] that he did it out of poverty. Most often they strongly stick to the latter version, that he has been forced by circumstances. He addresses the general puzzlement saying one thing only: he was tormented too greatly, he could take no more. Who tormented, who was tormented – he adds with emphasis [turning] his eyes to the sky so that [the listeners] understand themselves.<sup>33</sup>

Translated from Polish by Katarzyna Matschi

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29 *Sukkah* – a temporary hut constructed for the festival of Sukkot, here as a permanent part of a brick house.

30 Yiddish: *Ibern gantsn mark fun shtetl hengen yetst khazir shilden un ofgeshnitene kolbas shildn.*

31 According to Małgorzata Barcikowska and Zofia Borzymińska, *Cene uRene* (Yiddish, Hebrew: 'go forth and see, come out and look') is "the most popular religious work in Yiddish, authored by Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi of Janów (approx. 1550–[1626] 1628), sometimes called the 'Women's Bible.' It is a homiletic paraphrase of the Pentateuch and excerpts from the Haftarahs, written in comprehensible language. It also includes the tale of the demolition of the Temple of Jerusalem and the conquest of Judah (with illustrations). It was intended to be read on the Sabbath by women who did not speak the Holy Language, that is, Hebrew" (Barcikowska & Borzymińska, 2017).

32 Yiddish: *geratevet hot er zikh nokh dermit vos er hot zayn gants fermegn fun umtsaylike moyern gemuzt ferkoyfn.*

33 Yiddish: *Ver gepaynikt, vos gepaynikt, dos kvetsht er tsu mit di oygen tsum himl, men zol es aleyn farshtejn.*

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### Manuskrypt błogosławionej pamięci Pejsacha Bergmana, wedle kopii przekazanej przez syna, Bronisława Bergmana

**Abstrakt:** Tekst Pesacha Bergmana (1898–1944) pochodzi z jego fabularyzowanych wspomnień, dotyczących życia sztettu Widawa w okresie od końca XIX wieku do lat trzydziestych wieku XX. Został zapisany w języku żydowskim, z którego – z pomocą Sary Arm – przełożył go dr Marcin Urynowicz. Ustanawia oryginalny, właściwy tylko sobie gatunek literacki, najbliższy rozmyśleniom (łac. *soliloquia*), łączącym elementy krytyki społecznej i sentymentalnego wspomnienia.

**Wyrażenia kluczowe:** historia Żydów; historia Polski; antysemityzm; Polska międzywojenna (1918–1939).

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Correspondence: [j.tokarska-bakir@uw.edu.pl](mailto:j.tokarska-bakir@uw.edu.pl)

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