



## THE PICTURE AND PRICE OF JEWISH ASSIMILATION IN UNITED STATES AND POLAND AS SEEN IN SILENT MOVIES

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Theoretically, assimilation -- understood as a long process or as its final result -- is a universally accepted and well developed sociological concept. The 7-stage schema created by M. Gordon<sup>1</sup> has been applied with great success to a variety of populations. Most scholars divide this process into 2 phases, differentiating initial changes called acculturation<sup>2</sup>, amalgamation,<sup>3</sup> or accommodation (i.e. initial adaptation<sup>4</sup>) from the true final integration. Important here is the observation that assimilation is made to a social community rather than to a national or cultural community. And --even more importantly-- not to the *general* society but rather to the specific *layer* of the middle class that is closest to the values and aspirations of the allowed group. The goal of assimilation is fitting in as much as possible which means the loss of a large part of the previous identity. As a result, the group being assimilated into also changes a little. One of the objective measures of the pace of assimilation is the level of mixed marriages between members of the two groups.

Americans -- as members of a nation of immigrants -- treat assimilation very seriously. The Jews have been used as the focus of many theoretical and comparative studies. The concept of **melting pot**,<sup>5</sup> formulated by Israel Zangwill (1864-1926) in 1908 (as the title of his play), became a classic and popular interpretative tool. Zangwill was a British-Jewish journalist and writer with Polish-Latvian roots, called -- not without reason -- "The Jewish Dickens". He was the author of the famous *Children of the Ghetto* (1892), a Zionist-territorialist, a pacifist and an early spokesman for women's equality. Married into the privileged, well-to-do layers of English society he propagated socialism (Fabian style) and universalist solutions (like the League of Nations). Zangwill believed that Judaism is an anachronistic superstition which obstructs the adaptation of Jews to the requirements of present times. He was ready to sacrifice this cultural luggage in the name of the destruction of the ghetto's walls. In his play, dedicated to president Theodore Roosevelt, he cut ties with those who would like to conform America to Europe. The hero and the author's *porte-parole*, violinist David Quicksano, earlier a helpless witness of the Kiszyniow

<sup>1</sup> M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins*, New York 1964

<sup>2</sup> P. E. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women*, Washington 1995

<sup>3</sup> R. E. Park, E. W. Burgess, *Introduction to Sociology*, Chicago 1921, p. 735

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 737

<sup>5</sup> First used this phrase J. Crèvecoeur in his *Letters of American Farmer*, from 1790

pogrom, upon viewing Ellis Island with its Statue of Liberty addresses an impassioned tirade in honour of the New World.

*“Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians, all get into the melting pot. God creates Americans. Yes, East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross—how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God”<sup>6</sup>.*

Under the impression of his new homeland David composes a magnificent symphony and his prize for abandonment of “tribal” animosity is the love of Wiera, a daughter of a baron-officer, who had persecuted in Russia his family.

The idea of a melting pot, as taken up by scholars, became the dominant theoretical concept for considering assimilation during the first decades of the new century, displacing Anglo Saxon (WASP) “exclusivism,” which offers full social recognition only for select candidates. For many East European Jews running away from pogroms, the necessity of denying one’s identity was not viewed as something particularly painful.

“When I put my foot down on American soil. I was like a newborn” – recalls Adolph Zukor<sup>7</sup> who had come from Hungary. Another Hollywood tycoon, Louis B. Mayer, born in Minsk, when filling out his naturalization papers patriotically marked the 4<sup>th</sup> of July as his date of birth.

One of the first American-Jewish women writers - Mary Antin – arrived in the USA from Połock as a young girl in the middle of the 1890's. Her 1912 autobiography, characteristically titled *The Promised Land* describes the joy of rejecting, her previous life burdened by the stigma of inferiority, even while still on the ship to America<sup>8</sup>. All of these figures started their embrace of assimilation with a symbolic change of name.

Objections against unconditional assimilation began to arise in the United States only in the third decade of the twentieth century, paradoxically growing as Jews started to climb higher on the social and ethnic ladder.

The concept of glorifying the charms of cultural pluralism -- a concept competitive to unconditional assimilation -- was born in 1916 due to German-born sociologist and philosopher Horace Mayer Kallen. Kallen was the son of a Silesian rabbi and a strong supporter of Zionism. For Kallen the typical expectation that new Americans would quickly fully assimilate was not only unrealistic and even cruel, but also harmful for America itself. In his opinion multiethnic states should provide for each of its groups the optimal conditions for the development of their cultures. In place of one big melting *a la* Zangwill, he proposed the liberal version of the nation as a wealth of diversity. He compared such a nation to the symphonic orchestra, which resounds much better and louder than individual instruments on their own. In the sixties the concept of multiculturalism and ethnic federalism was founded upon his long-forgotten ideas.

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<sup>6</sup> I. Zangwill, *The Melting Pot*, London 1909, p.60

<sup>7</sup> A. Zukor, *The public is never wrong*, London 1954, p. 21

<sup>8</sup> M. Antin, *The Promised Land*, New York 1912, p.40

At the same time the idea of the melting pot had to survive crushing criticisms from Nathan Glazer and Patrick Moynihan<sup>9</sup>. The authors of *Beyond the melting pot*, used statistics to prove that this idea was just an ideological delusion. *The point about the melting pot...is that it didn't happen* – they concluded. Jews had -- as had Puerto Ricans or Irishmen -- retained their original ethnic consciousness. So is it possible that their grandfathers and parents were victims of collective hallucination? Or, maybe, that future leaders of neoconservatism, leading authors of “Public Interest” and “Commentary”, came to the conclusion that the less radical solution, marked by the ambivalent assimilation of Jews in Central Europe proved the better solution.

This talk tries to analyze the typical *phenomenons* accompanying the assimilation of Jews on Polish and American soil; phenomenons observed through silent movies – sources which are very important, but rarely used by historians. There is, naturally, another important reason to refer to the products of this new industry – the overrepresentation of Jews and people of Jewish origin among the producers who shaped the ideological face of Hollywood. The Jewish component in undeveloped Polish cinema was of course much weaker. This entanglement of early moving pictures in the process of assimilation makes them a source of paramount value for scholars.

To begin one should notice that Polish literature on assimilation of the followers of the Mosaic religion, compared to American literature on this topic, looks minor. Despite important studies by Artur Eisenbach, Aleksander Hertz, Alina Cała, and, for a later period, of Irena Hurwitz-Nowakowska, many questions are still not worked out.

For many reasons Jewish assimilation in Central-Eastern Europe proceeded slower and differently than in North America. Jews were here (speaking from Poland) part of the resident population, not an incoming group. In many places they formed big clusters so we may not treat them as a diffused minority or people on the margins of society. Acculturation and integrational processes started here in Poland on a mass scale in the middle of the twentieth century and never stopped before 1939. Isaiah Berlin has compared them to the slow melting of big glacier: succeeding top layers melt, but the hard core stays intact<sup>10</sup>.

In the USA everything was done during the lifespan of two generations ( between approximately 1905 and 1950). As Samuel Goldwyn – born in Warsaw as Szmuel Gelbfisz in 1879 or 1882 – joked “during one life we made a journey from Poland to polo play”<sup>11</sup>. In Poland, the situation accompanying assimilation was totally different because of the partition of Polish territory. Modernizing Jews had to decide to whom to assimilate – to ruling nations (Germans, Russians, Austrians), or to enslaved ones (Poles, Ruthenians). Most, naturally, preferred the first choice. Standing up for Polishness required a little bit of heroism. All this went on after 1848 during a phase of increasing confrontation between the small nation’s integral nationalisms.

Among belated Central European nationalisms, Jewish nationalism was forming late and – like Lithuanian Nationalism - strongly influenced by the romantic political thought of the Poles. In ethnically Polish territories it developed only after 1905, and, naturally, greatly influenced the course and range of assimilation. Thanks to the

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<sup>9</sup> N. Glazer, P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, New York 1963

<sup>10</sup> I. Berlin. *Jewish Slavery and Emancipation*, Oxford 1951. More in my article *Żydowskie kłopoty z tożsamością narodową w ujęciu Isaiaha Berlina a doświadczenia Żydo Poskich ostatnich stuleci*, „Kultura i społeczeństwo”, 1996, vol. XXXVIII, no 2, p. 64-78

<sup>11</sup> C. Shindler, *Hollywood in Crisis. Cinema and American Cocirty, 1929-1939*, London and New York 1996, p. 60

camera lens we are able to see some of the changes which are characteristic of that epoch. These views, caught by movies, deserve a moment of reflection.

Early silent moving pictures, at least until the time of D. W. Griffith, were dominated by documentary films, both in quality and quantity. This type of moving pictures developed its own, peculiar language of narration which was necessary to take up more complex subjects. Therefore it is not a coincidence that viewers of that epoch derived their knowledge about the lives of other people from movies in the form of travelogs (travel reports) or *actualités*. Due to its universality, popularity, and availability for people of different cultures and different cognitive competences, silent movies soon started to be an active force co-shaping social consciousness. Informing about the world, they shaped its image at the same time. Movies not only strengthened or weakened existing myths and prejudices but they also produced their own new ones. They created a new cultural code, readable at any latitude. So, they facilitated, as J. Cohen<sup>12</sup> showed in his work, the Americanization, modernization and finally, assimilation of immigrants.

In American documentaries from the beginning of the twentieth century (produced by Biograph, Edison, Kalem or Lubin) and, as a rule, imitating the earlier achievements of the brothers Lumière film operators – “The Jews”, those who colonize the Holy Land or those who arrive on Ellis Island - are the perfect embodiment of the “Stranger.” They represent exoticism. It is their exoticism that makes them an interesting subject for the movie camera which was continually looking for what would be attractive for the audience.

Antisemitic stereotypes begin to appear on a larger scale in features around 1910. Until then (?), Europeanized Jews did not arouse special interest. We should remember that contrary to legend, Jewish immigrants in America by no means occupied the lowest rungs of the social ladder. That place was reserved for the Chinese and – more generally – for Asians, treated commonly as the “Yellow Peril” (The greatest danger of the time). Compared with the force of anti-Chinese prejudices in popular culture at that time, antisemitism could be classified as marginal. Before the twenties Jews were treated as Europeans and their advance was incomparably simpler than the advance of Asians who were condemned to live in sort of ghettos<sup>13</sup>. Only when Jews started to leave the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and their Brooklyn communities, do we start to notice unfavorable changes in ethnic classification, immigration quotes, formal entry bans, and prohibitions of belonging. These changes move in tandem with the antisemitic propaganda of Henry Ford and the activity of a rejuvenated KKK. The removal of anti-Jewish barriers of this epoch – in science, culture, sport and social life would be finished only in the Fifties<sup>14</sup>. Paradoxically, at just that time American Jews start to be eulogists of the success of integration and, in Hollywood, the main producers of “the American Dream”.

In contrast to the United States, in Poland Jews were not exotic. Here they were not “Strangers”, but “Others” – a minority deeply entangled in all important Polish problems. It is probably not a matter of chance that despite this – or maybe because of this – pioneers of Polish cinema try persistently not to see them. To materialize as subjects

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<sup>12</sup> J. Cohen, *Yiddish Film and the American Immigrant Experience*, “Film & History” 1998, v. 28 (1-2), p. 30-44

<sup>13</sup> Amy Kashi-Wabara, *The Appearance, Disappearance and Assimilation of the Asians-Americans*, Los Angeles 1999

<sup>14</sup> A. Klingenstein, *Jews in the American Academy, 1900-18940. The Dynamics of Intellectual Assimilation*, Boston 1991; L. Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, Oxford 1994

which are attractive for the camera, they have to die first. All early Polish documentaries presenting Jews concern funerals. "Urania" from Lodz presented reportage from the funeral of Maksymilian Silberstein – a well-known industrialist (Oct. 16, 1907). E Stremer Theatre displayed *The Funeral of I. Epstein in Vilna* (Sept. 27, 1909), and "kinematograf Casino" had in its repertoire *The Funeral of Chaim Eliaz Majzel from Lodz* (May 4, 1912)<sup>15</sup>. Someone gifted with good eyesight may notice representatives of the Progressive Synagogue laying wreaths at the Statue of poet Adam Mickiewicz unveiled in Lwow on October 30, 1904. And that is all in about 500 hundred documentaries before 1914. There's a chance that some Jewish snapshots were included in lost *Scenes from Vilna life* by Kazimierz Prószyński (1902).

There were many so-called "movies with views" shot in Warsaw, Lwow, Vilna or Lodz, but all of them do not feature the Jewish quarter. *Galicia in kinematograph*, a film made with great pomp in the summer of 1912, with the help of Pathé, under the high auspices of countess Maria Lubomirska, created for a foreign audience, does not leave the impression that Jews live here although by contrast there *are* scenes with dances of highlanders and of Hutsuls ceremonies.

Such a procedure was in great contrast to the content of foreign movies which abounded in picturesque scenes with orthodox Polish Jews. Among the 30 short movies prepared in 1902 on the streets of Vilna and Warsaw by Warwick operators, there is no less than 12 with Jewish subjects. Even in these films, however, there is no place for modernized, enlightened Jews. There is no Polish equivalent of the American movies which present life on the Lower East Side or seamstresses from Hester Street in New York. The lack of movies presenting the Jewish part in the revolution of 1905-1907 may be explained by ubiquitous censorship and political conditions.

One can risk the statement that as a muse for the Polish pioneers of the twentieth century the Jews from Palestine were much more interesting than those from Warsaw's Nalewki. According to Natan Gross, between 1910 and 1914 on behalf of Warsaw and Galicia there were 10 movies made in Palestine for the Polish audience<sup>16</sup>. It seems that such expensive productions with an exotic topic were much more profitable.

Compared to documentaries, the early, primitive features allow us to capture more important details. First of all, they place the contemporary modernized Jew in their field of view. For the authors of silent documentaries such a Jew was almost imperceptible because he didn't stand out from the background.

American features before 1919 can be divided into two separate groups. In the first – reluctant to portray Jews – or even disposed to portray them mockingly, the Jews aiming at social advancement are presented as comic, sometimes even dangerous characters. Movies of the second group – sympathizing with Jews – treat their success as well-deserved compensation for previously suffered wrongs in Europe. Glorifying Jews, they glorify America and American way of life as well. Both types of feature films are aware of Jewish activity, but evaluate it differently. They also both feature the stereotyping of characters and insufficient internal differentiation of their portrayed environments.

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<sup>15</sup> Inf. from M.Hendrykowska, *Śladami tamtych cieni. Film w kulturze polskiej przełomu stuleci 1895-1914*. Poznań 1993

<sup>16</sup> N. Gross, *Film żydowski w Polsce*, Kraków 2002, s. 34

Realistic stories showing the difficulties of adaptation or hard living conditions are practically non-existent. Exemplary are, naturally, film adaptations of Zangwill's works, with *The Melting Pot* (1916) among them. Typically, the success of Jews is preceded by dramatic complications. In *A Boy and the Law* (1914) based on the authentic life of one William Eckstein (who plays himself) – a boy threatened with arrest in Russia for belonging to a secret organization runs away to Salt Lake City in Utah, where he lives with his uncle. Ignorant of obligatory rules, he comes into conflict with the law and is sentenced to compulsory reeducation in a camp for youth on the farm. Elected by his peers as “mayor” of the camp, he copes so well with his obligations that a couple years later we see him as the head of this project<sup>17</sup>. A less lucky turn of events is depicted in *Civilisation's child* by Charles Giblyn (1919). Berna, it's heroine, runs away to New York after a pogrom by Cossacks in Kiev. There she is a victim of unfinished courtship and vengeance from her employer. She loses her husband and the right to the custody of her child and reacts by killing her former boss, who is a judge now. In *Żółty bilet* (*The Yellow Passeport*) (1916) -- whose German version two years later is very well known to film historians as the international debut of Pola Negri -- Sonia, the talented musician, orphaned after the attack of the Black Hundred people, stays in the city and continues her studies. She has to take the so-called Yellow Passeport, meaning she is a prostitute. Persecuted by Okhrana she has to leave Russia. In the United States she makes a skyrocketing career as an Opera diva and when her past is disclosed her friends from Russia come to the rescue presenting evidence of her innocence. A similar formula is used in *The Yellow Ticket* (1918) produced by studio Astra, with immigrant Fannie Ward as Anna Mirrel who gets a yellow ticket in order to visit her dying father in Petersburg. The only movie that breaks out of this pattern seems to be *The Jewish Christmas* (1913) - an early example of what would become typical for the next decade. We have here all the necessary ingredients: intergenerational conflict between the not yet assimilated rabbi Isaac and his Americanized daughter Lea, the marriage of Lea with a *non-jew* and Lea's father disowning her. In the end we have, naturally, a tearful and eloquent scene of reconciliation: on Christmas Eve the rabbi sells his valuable prayer book to buy his daughter her longed-for, wonderful Christmas tree. It symbolizes the accommodation of Jewish traditionalism to American reality.

Movies critical of Jews typically present them as seemingly modernized, dressed modernly and ostensibly faithful to American values but in reality, cultivating old bad habits and customs and burdened by old defects. *Cohen*, the hero of a popular comic serial is a sly, greedy, stingy individual who is ruthless towards the weak; he is an upstart, not aware of his ridiculousness. The hero of another comic serial is some Levi (or Levitzky) whom we get to know as a pickpocket and prisoner.

A special sub-group is formed by moving pictures which refer to true conflict of that time between Jews and Irishmen. Both national groups are depicted fighting for acceptance and a better position in multiethnic American society. They each display solidarity, attachment to their respective religions, and a liking for the metropolitan environment. So, they were doomed to rivalry.

At the same time in Polish territories assimilation was hampered by the deteriorating atmosphere of Polish-Jewish relations. Relations deteriorated due to the prolonged Beilis trial in Kiev with a ritual murder as accusation, and because of the anti-Jewish campaign of Endecja (National-Democrats) who promoted the narrow concept of the

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<sup>17</sup> Content of American movies taken from descriptions in : *The American Film Institute Catalog*, v. 1-3 and *Jewish Film Directory*, 1992

“Pole-Catholic”. Most Poles were also unprepared for the emergence of Jewish political nationalism. At the end of the Great War there was a wave of pogroms in Eastern Galicia under the pretext of Jewish sympathy for the Bolsheviks. One can find very little of this analyzing synopses of Polish features with Jewish characters. Aleksander Hertz, close to banking circles and at the same time a typical member of the Polonized liberal intelligentsia of Jewish descent - as a founder and boss of studio Sfinks – supported patriotic content, digestible for censorship, and tried to avoid controversial topics. His *Meir Ezofowicz* (1911) based on Eliza Orzeszkowa does not include contemporary themes. Sharpening the meaning of the original, it strongly opposes Jewish Progressives and fanatical orthodox members of the Elders group<sup>18</sup>.

Similar are Jewish-language movies from 1911-1913 – a specific Polish phenomenon on the World scale. Productions of studio Siła by Mordka Towbin or of Kosmofilm (S. Ginsburg and H. Finkelstein) never bring up the actual controversial / contemporary (?) topics. They draw inspiration from 19<sup>th</sup> Century Jewish playwrights and, astonishingly present the point of view of those who live in the country, even that of Jewish farmers which were rather rare. The presented milieu are, as a rule, alienated from the Polish context. Interesting threads are perceptible in a short, 20 minute long adaptation of Jacob Gordin’s drama *God, Man, and Devil* (*got, mentsh, un tayvl* (*Got, mentsz und tajwl* - 1912). The pursuit of wealth proves to be a mortal sin here. We see the God-fearing Hersz, tempted by the devil, buying lottery ticket. He wins and invests all of the winnings in a *talis* factory, which is a death blow for the cottage workers. Finally, he commits suicide. In *Dem khazns tokhter* (*The Cantor’s daughter* – 1913) produced a year later and based on Zalman Libin’s play *Broken hearts*, we follow the drama of Gintele – a liberated woman -- with action that is centered in New York. The Girl unknowingly gets wrapped up with a married man, against the will of her parents. They have a child and the family is only finally reconciled on her deathbed. The message of both works is unequivocal: Going beyond the frame of tradition, even with the best of intentions, leads to tragic consequences, namely here the death of the main characters.

The Twenties -- remembered in the United States as the Age of Jazz -- were, for Jewish immigrants, a time of stabilization and of general improvement for their social image. At the same time, however, the negative side of the assimilation process began to appear. The quickly Americanized young generation was losing contact with their parent’s insistence on living according to tradition. Families became less tight-knit, and the role of religious observance dwindled. The situation of women changed particularly drastically. We can trace these changes in Hollywood productions. The 6 biggest Studios were governed by immigrants from Central-Eastern Europe who understood the financial and entertainment potential of the Tenth Muse sooner than native-born Americans. They were witnessing the failures of their fathers who held on tightly to the old recipes for life. They left the Jewish “ghettos” on the Western shore at a young age. They made a fortune learning from mistakes. They tried to replace severe gaps in their educations with careful observation of life in America. They arrived in Hollywood with a deep belief in success and with a good plan-of-action. Quite soon they were breaking off contact with Jewish institutions and were reluctant to raise risky ethnic topics in their movies. Despite efforts to be like “normal” WASPs they were still vulnerable to attacks and political pressure from the defenders of nativism. Patriotic

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<sup>18</sup> Content of Polish pre-war movies is based on S. Janicki, *Polskie filmy fabularne, 1902-1988*, Warszawa 1990 and *Historia filmu polskiego*, v. I, red. Sz. Banaszkiwicz, Warszawa 1966

content was therefore obligatory. Such movies also characteristically contained “moguls” glorifying assimilation<sup>19</sup>. Even though the count of mixed marriages among Jewish immigrants was very low at the time, plots of “Jewish” movies, as a rule, featured marriages with a partner of a different creed. But this time it was not seen as the germ of a tragedy. Optimism reigned. Movies registered the attainment of the next inaccessible footholds: sports (the very important role of baseball), higher education, the elegant quarters of the city. Schemas of plots repeat themselves *ad nauseam*.

The “rags-to-riches” formula is well known. For instance, in Universal’s *Cheated love* (1921) -- whose heroine, Sonia, is played by Carmel Myers, Hollywood starlet and authentic daughter of rabbi Isidore Myers -- the pinnacle of success for a doctor coming from Russia is marriage with a wealthy American heiress. Such typical success stories show deep divides in Jewish families which were sources of sharp disagreements. In more ambitious screenings of journalistic texts, as well as in novels of the third decade, one can find examples of conflicts determined by class, creed, or habit differences. Helpless immigrants are victims of Jewish scammers, poor tailors are exploited by greedy and ruthless Jewish capitalists, fathers lose authority in the eyes of their children, and children dare to oppose their fathers. All the traditional institutions are in crisis and the old community breaks down irreversibly.

Nothing of this can be seen in fairy-tale Hollywood movies. There, the pinnacle of courage is to show that when a wealthy loving son gives his parents an elegant house in suburbia, it makes them deeply unhappy, distracting them from their world (*Younger Generation* of F. Capra, 1929). The often used schema is a rift between generations that distances children from their parents. Many melodramas are based on the separation of a family by the ocean. Some movies (with an obligatory happy ending) settle for presenting how new Americans overcome difficulties. Even Jewish-Irish relations are presented more and more optimistically.

It is not by chance that a more subtle and more detailed picture is contained in novels. In tales of Anzia Yeziarska, Edna Ferber, or Fannie Hurst there’s a place for in-depth reflection on the consequences of assimilation as a thoughtful choice, or on the need of accepting Americanization while preserving one’s identity<sup>20</sup>. These tales and novels present very diverse attitudes for the latest wave of immigrants from Polish territories<sup>21</sup>. Let’s look for instance at Sid Goldin’s film *Ost and West* (1923) made in Austria. A wealthy New York Jew goes to Poland with his supermodern daughter (played by Molly Picon – in shorts and boxing gloves!) to be present at the marriage of his brother’s eldest daughter. The journey back turns out a streak of blunders and cultural misunderstandings. “This is

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<sup>19</sup> See N. Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, New York 1988; L. D. Friedman, *Hollywood’s Image of the Jew*, New York 1982; L. Quart, *The Triumph of Assimilation: Ethnicity, Race and the Jewish Moguls*, “Cineaste” v.18, no.4/1991, p.8-11

<sup>20</sup> Carol Batker, *Literary Reformers: Crossing Class and Ethnic Boundaries in Jewish Women’s Fiction of the 1920s – Critical Essay in:* Melus, Spring 2000, p. 38-567; O. Olafsson, *Journey home*, New York 2001; L. Henriksen, *Anzia Yeziarska: A writer’s life*, New Brunswick 1988.

<sup>21</sup> See M. Berman, *The Attitude of American Jewry Towards East European Jewish Immigration, 1881-1914*, New York 1963; G Sorin, *Mutual Contempt, Mutual Benefit*, “American Jewish History”, 81 (1993), p. 34-59; I. A. Mendel, *Attitude of American Jewish Community Toward East-European Immigration*, “American Jewish Archives”.3 (1950), p. 11-36



The Book, not a checkbook”<sup>22</sup> he hears from his brother when he pretends to read a prayer holding the book improperly (opposite). The same Goldin makes a very interesting adaptation of Sholem Ash’s *Uncle Moses* in 1932.

In the latest publications of gender studies there is a stress on topics which were not visible earlier: the victimization of women, and the Zionist masculinization of Jewishness<sup>23</sup>. In the famous *The Jazz Singer* by Alan Crosland (Warner Brothers, 1927) and especially in the minstrel performances of Al Jolson (a rabbi’s son himself) previously undiscussed racism and complexities have been raised.<sup>24</sup>

The Polish film industry of the Twenties -- both technically and artistically -- was no match for Hollywood but, like the American film industry, it zealously supported assimilation and Polish-Jewish brotherhood. Historic exemplifications of Jewish Polish Patriotism are presented in movies like *Lamed wow* (1925) and *In Polish Woods* (1924 based on J. Opatoszu novel, *Pan Tadeusz* (1928)). Movies made in Yiddish typically consolidated the image of the United States as a modern Promised Land. The theme of “Żydokomuna” (Jews as seedbeds of communism) exists only in the beginning of Twenties as in the film *Grave lacque secret* of Edward Puchalski. In this movie the dangerous Roza Łajkin, head of the Bolshevik intelligence network, pretends to be countess Czartonska. *The Secret of Nalewki street* (1921), an adaptation of Henryk Nagel’s sensational novel, presents the fight with prejudice that complicated Jewish engagement in modernization

We may risk the statement that due to the considerable presence of Jews and people of Jewish origin in pre-war Polish Cinema it was free of antisemitism but, unfortunately, it was theatrically stilted and thematically bound. Above all else, it does not present a realistic vision of the assimilated layers of Jewish society in II Polish Republic. The picture of assimilation is much more fragmented here<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> D. Claussen, *Nowy świat. Żydowska emigracja na Zachód a kino jidysz*, „Powiększenie”. X/1-4. p. 110-111

<sup>23</sup> P. A. Hyman, op. cit.; Ch. Baum, P. Hyman, Ch. Michel, *The Jewish Woman on America*, New York 1975; J. Antler, *The Journey Home: Jewish Women and the American Century*, New York 1997; E. Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, New York 1985; S Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, Cornell UP 1990

<sup>24</sup> M. Alexander, *Jazz Age Jews*, Princeton 2001; “Legacy, v.1 no.1. *History of the Jewish Presence in Hollywood – From Cowboy to Corporate Leader*.

<sup>25</sup> Among the most important publications on assimilation of Jews as movie topic are works: R Wright, *The Visible Wall. Jews and Other Ethnic Outsiders in Swedish Film*, Uppsala 1998; S. B. Cohen (ed.), *From Hester Street to Hollywood*, Bloomington 1983; L. D. Friedman, *The Jewish Image in American Film*, Urbana & Chicago 1991; Th. Cripps, *The Movie Jew as an Image of Assimilationism, 1903-1927*, “Jou. of Popular Film and Television”, vol.IV, no. 3 (1975), p. 190-207