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## **Mieczysław Jagoszewski – Life and Works**

### **Summary**

The presented thesis is the result of almost ten years of study and research on the life and work of Mieczysław Jagoszewski (1897–1987), a prose writer, publicist and cultural reviewer, in his time the oldest active journalist in Poland, and above all an original poet, nowadays recognizable mainly in two circles: connected with Łódź city regionalists and media workers and experts in obscene literature. For the first of these, he is an important figure due to six decades of his professional activity in Łódź, where (except for the years 1943–1945, so the period of imprisonment in German concentration camps) he lived from 1923 until his death. When working he as a teacher in local secondary schools, simultaneously published his theatrical impression in the local press. In 1929, he resigned from teaching, dedicating himself to journalism. He was the editor of several local magazines (among other things „Rozwój“, „Hasło Łódzkie“, „Ilustrowana Republika“, „Express Wieczorny Ilustrowany“, „Panorama“, „Wędrowiec“, „Karuzela“, „Pionier Komunikacyjny“, „Łódzki Express Ilustrowany“, „Dziennik Łódzki“), occasionally writing also for other magazines (for example „Światowid“ from Kraków or „Ilustrowany Kurier Polski“ from Poznań). Taking up mainly cultural topics in his articles, he often went beyond the professional framework, engaging in a number of social initiatives, one of the most important of which was his participation in the establishment and post-war reactivation of the Society of Friends of Łódź.

Among experts in literary obscenities, Jagoszewski is known rather as the author of two publications bearing *nom de plume* Sylwester Podolski – *Paszkwil na ks. Piotra Skargę* from 1929 and two years later a collection of frivolous ballads entitled *Chujoturniej rycerski*. Today, selected works from these two volumes of indecent poetry are included in both professional and hobbyist anthologies of adult literature, but their author is not always correctly identified; there are also distortions in the duplicated text.

One of the aims of this thesis is to clarify the inaccuracies contained in the studies published by both of these communities. In the publications of regionalists and journalists from Łódź, Mieczysław Jagoszewski's biography is too often presented superficially - usually in the light of (not always true) anecdotes left by other local journalists. There is a noticeable negligent approach to the most basic biographical data, such as parents' personal details, date

and place of birth, and completed schools. On the other hand, where Jagoszewski's obscenities are published, the selection of texts is sometimes described incorrectly or without biographical references at all. The crude and sometimes iconoclastic works are detached from the background of the author's entire, or even just humorous, literary legacy.

This work consists of five chapters – a biographical analysis presented in the first chapter, and four further ones, dedicated to Jagoszewski's work – respectively: poetry, short stories, novels and journalistic achievements.

The construction of the biographical chapter gives some idea of the shortcomings of the collected studies. The analysis of the most popular and most frequently cited sources, on which Jagoszewski's image has been built so far, is confronted here with the knowledge stemming from archival documents published (mostly for the first time), often undermining the existing narratives. An interesting balance for this contrast seems to be a subchapter based on the statements of Jagoszewski himself, coming from interviews he gave and fragments of his novels, imposing an autobiographical view.

The chapter dedicated to poetry not only deepens the current view of Jagoszewski's obscene lyric poetry, but also explains its philological context, trying to extract the possible origins of specific works and not avoiding criticism of distorted publishing variants and texts attributed to Jagoszewski. At the same time, it contains the first research look at his „Young Poland poetry“ from the volume *Serce na masce* and reflections on a collection of humorous texts, entitled *O bogobojnem siedzeniu ascetycznego fakira*, which is the author's literary debut. Although published after 1918, both publications gave the impression of being marked by the spirit of overripped literary modernism, knowing them seems important for understanding the author's entire writing strategy.

The next two chapters deal with Jagoszewski's prose. The third chapter presents his short stories against the background of the assumptions of the genre – and it is also the first study of any kind on short stories by this author. The next chapter analyzes his novels printed in the years 1931–1939 and 1946–1953 in mainly Łódź magazines. A lot of space is dedicated to the contexts of Łódź, but it also emphasizes what makes Jagoszewski's more extensive prose texts interesting even after many years - their contributing function to the literary portrait of epochs, despite their mediocre literary role. In the case of pre-war literature, the atmosphere of sensation, determined by the model of the popular novel, plays an important role; however, there is also a reckoning with the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or an attempt to define a social position in the new geopolitical situation.

Post-war texts, although dominated by propaganda, through details and digressions refer to the historical tradition of free Poles, their national character and specific mental maps.

Chapter five is an attempt to summarize Jagoszewski's professional activity as a journalist. The connection between the author and the theater, which many of his contemporaries perceived as his favorite topic, was treated as a separate reflection. In the course of the analyses, references were made both to his long-term activity as a reviewer, as well as to interesting episodes in the work of a translator, literary director of Łódź theaters and a popularizer of drama among workers. The closing of chapter five and the whole thesis is a subchapter that develops considerations about Jagoszewski's professional cultural interests and deals with his attitude to the arts, protection of monuments, literature and publishing policy of the communist Poland, as well as his entanglement in pre-war journalism and „creative“ reporting, sometimes not quite compatible with journalistic ethics.

Since the discussion about Jagoszewski's work is still a marginal phenomenon (as mentioned earlier, many of the issues raised in this work appear as the subject of analyzes for the first time), so the literary assessment of his entire oeuvre is not yet established. Undoubtedly, the most recognizable part of his output is obscene poetry, which, although gravitating towards literary pornography, is at a high artistic level compared to many contemporary texts collected in obscene lyric anthologies. Jagoszewski's ability to use the convention of parody, pastiche and travesty makes us pay attention to his early works, perhaps even more valuable, but less attention-grabbing precisely because of their merely frivolous, not radically obscene, character.

Both this part of Jagoszewski's poetry devoid of humorous accents, as well as his prose, although not devoid of technically original elements (the use of onomatopoeia, ambiguity), can mostly give the impression of being average. Their value appears mainly as contextual sources, from which an astute observer can draw a handful of observations about the portrait of the illustrated epochs – especially about the literary portrait of Łódź (which is already revealed in the author's prose after 1946). The novels themselves reveal the weakness of the dialogue structure, its artificiality and sentimental accretions. The advantage of Jagoszewski's epics, on the other hand, is the skilful use of digressions, reminiscences and story within a story.

Undoubtedly, an interesting field for further analysis is the journalistic output of Jagoszewski, to which researchers of the history of Łódź and its vicinity should pay particular attention. The characteristics of local, pre- and post-war cultural and educational institutions, profiles of artists, meticulously commented on the cultural agenda of the city - all these

resources, despite their dispersion, can be used for many valuable items (both contributing and synthetic), focusing on the history of culture of the „fourth capital“. In this context, almost seven decades of Jagoszewski's creative work has the undoubted advantage that, on the basis of his writings, it is possible to summarize the artistic careers of the people whose activities he followed from their debut to their silence, an example of which is the stage biography of Jadwiga Andrzejewska.

Jagoszewski's journalistic legacy is no less valuable in the perspective of scientific investigations into the role of journalists both as creators and exponents of public opinion. It should be noted that while in the scientific discourse the issue of the presence of propaganda accents favorable to the communist reality in the author's post-war prose has already been initiated, extensive material for the analysis of the interdependence of the "fourth power" with the camp of political decision-makers can be provided by Jagoszewski's cultural journalism from the period after 1946 – although today it can undoubtedly evoke ambivalent feelings.

Last but not least, the biographical significance of the dissertation should be mentioned, as all his artistic activity is somehow determined by the times in which the discussed author happened to live. It seems that the hitherto very rare studies not only completely ignored the fact from environment Jagoszewski came from and what consequences it had for his future choices, but also how he signed up against the background of the social class he represented. The value of the submitted doctoral thesis is the extensive reference to the roots of the author and the presentation of the Jagoszewski family and families related to it as a typical example of the liveliness of the Galician nobility, transforming into the clerical intelligentsia. So far, no attention has been paid to archival sources which, in the context of Mieczysław's biography, proved the involvement of the Jagoszewskis and their relatives in historical processes. This is the first study in which you can find a summary of the clerical career of the writer's father - Józef Kazimierz - or mentions of the independence and pro-state activities of, for example, the Pankiewicz family (family on the mother's side). The excerpts from school, university and military archive materials, published for the first time, objectively broaden the knowledge about the author of the novel *Sygnal w ciemnościach* to a significant extent, often undermining the assurances of anecdotal narratives passed down in popular circulation. Since Jagoszewski's biographical references have so far been published with fundamental errors and numerous inaccuracies, the aim of making the archival materials available to a wider audience is to eliminate these shortcomings. The data on his educational path, military involvement or the beginning of his professional career, obtained as a result of the process of source criticism, are an indisputable

counterargument to the superficially, on the basis of „second-hand“ information, biographical notes, commonly used today among the general public as a certainty (or at least as with all probabilities).

While it is possible to argue with the findings resulting from the analytical and interpretative strategy adopted in the submitted thesis regarding Jagoszewski's literary and professional work, the presentation of archival sources used to explain biographical shortcomings should be read in terms of a kind of scholarly progress – even if the dissertation's protagonist is a writer perceived in terms of *minorum gentium*.

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