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Edited by

MICHAEL C. STEINLAUF

and

ANTONY POLONSKY

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Exploiting Tradition: Religious Iconography in Cartoons of the Polish Yiddish Press

EDWARD PORTNOY

SINCE the thirteenth century Jews have borne the force of an antisemitic caricature that has grown in ferocity from its medieval inception to the modern period.[1] By the early twentieth century, when vast numbers of east European Jews began the process of secularization and modernization, the progeny of such anti-Jewish caricatures were standard fare in the satirical press in both Europe and America. It was also at this time that, alongside the mainstream press, a Jewish satirical press began to flourish in the Yiddish language in both eastern Europe and America. In addition to jokes, humorous stories, poems, and many parodies, Yiddish satirical journals would come to include numerous cartoons and caricatures. Never having been seen previously in Jewish life, such visual parody was an unprecedented innovation among Yiddish-speaking Jews in Poland, partly because of its sheer novelty and partly because art without a religious connection was discouraged among Jews.[2] Moreover, the vast majority of Jewish texts, particularly those used on a daily basis, did not contain illustrations of any kind. The cartoonists of the Yiddish press were therefore engaged not only in a radical subversion of Jewish tradition but also in a reassessment of what Jewish caricature should be, as opposed to the antisemitic caricature of the non-Jewish satirical press. In addition, Jewish cartoonists frequently applied traditional Jewish themes to critical commentary on current cultural and political events. By appropriating a popular format that had not appeared before in Jewish life and filling it with Jewish content, the cartoonists of the Yiddish press in Poland were able to furnish a wide audience with a form of visual commentary that referenced the texts and traditions of their own minority culture. It is this use of traditional material in cartoon form, ranging from biblical quotation to religious articles, obligations, and folklore, that will be explored here.

[1] For examples and historical insight into such caricatures, see, among others, E. Fuchs, *Die Juden in der Karikatur* (Munich, 1922); E. Lucie-Smith, *The Art of Caricature* (Ithaca, 1981); J. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1983).

[2] S. Wolitz, 'Experiencing Visibility and Phantom Existence', in S. Goodman (ed.), *Russian Jewish Artists in a Century of Change: 1890–1990* (New York, 1995), 14.

As works of graphic parody and artistic social commentary, these cartoons lay at a crossroads between art and literature, and politics and culture. What is unique about them is their distinctly Jewish orientation and their reflection of modern Jewish history and politics as their central feature during a wave of secularization and construction of national identity. Additionally, they are an important example of internal Jewish dialogue in a particularly factious, chaotic political and cultural environment. As documents representative of a wide array of attitudes towards an equally wide variety of subjects, the cartoons of the Yiddish press reflect virtually all aspects of Jewish political and cultural life from their inception just after the turn of the century to their ultimate disappearance in the wake of the Holocaust. This is of import not only because a significant portion of the artists and their audience was destroyed, but because the cartoons evoke long-forgotten attitudes on myriad political and social issues in the life of Polish Jewry that have been left out of both popular and academic histories.[3] For these reasons, they are a unique form of cultural and historical documentation of an urban Jewish history, which itself has barely been explored.

If, as is frequently argued by its scholars, critical study of the field of cartoons and caricature has been neglected until recent times, such study within the realm of Yiddish culture has been scarcely touched.[4] Not quite art, nor literature, cartoons contain elements of both, though their primary feature is an often insolent form of social commentary. They belong to what Adam Gopnik calls an 'underbelly culture, a tradition of social criticism or raw, outlaw drawing'.[5] Cartoons and caricatures often take cheap shots and aim for cheap laughs. In spite of being a widespread phenomenon, they may have been neglected because of an association with low culture. But the most serious complication is that the 40- to 90-year-old cartoons of the Yiddish press have entirely lost their topicality and, as a result, their efficacy. Moreover, the destruction of their audience and its culture has played a key role in their neglect. These problems, combined with the fact that many of the minor details of Polish Jewry's political and cultural past have been forgotten, have caused this entire genre of Jewish creativity to fade deep into the background of Jewish history.

A great many of the cartoons that appeared in the Yiddish press of Poland were extremely rich in their synthesis of traditional and folk material with modern

[3] As Marian Fuks notes, the satirical press can be a rich, if peculiar, place to study the history of the Jews of Poland (see Fuks, 'Żydowska prasa humorystyczno-satyryczna', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* (Warsaw) (1980), nos. 2–3 (114–15), 31–54).

[4] Although academic work in the field of cartoons and comics has increased over the past decade, nearly every text begins with a lament about the lack of attention the field receives. The subject of Yiddish-language cartoons has been considered in depth in the following works: J. Fishman, 'Cartoons about Language: Hebrew, Yiddish and the Visual Representation of Sociolinguistic Attitudes', in L. Gleinert (ed.), *Hebrew in Ashkenaz* (New York, 1993); S. Stein, 'The Creation of Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish Newspaper Cultures in the Russian and Ottoman Empires', Stanford University Ph.D. thesis, 2000, esp. ch. 5, in which she analyses the sudden appearance and disappearance of cartoons in the pages of *Dos lebn/Der fraynd* in the wake of the 1905 Russian revolution.

[5] K. Varnadoe and A. Gopnik, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York, 1990), 11.

secular and political life. Although this fusion of Jewish folk culture and modern expression is often attributed to celebrated Jewish artists such as Boris Aronson, Marc Chagall, and El Lissitsky, this same synthesis initially appeared early on in cartoons of the Warsaw Yiddish press.[6] What Seth Wolitz writes about these artists applies quite well to the cartoonists of the Yiddish press:

> By creating their own artwork, Jewish artists in Russia brought to an end the monopolization by the Other of the visual definition of the Jew. Jewish artists asserted their own gaze, removing Jews from their marginalized condition by reading them into the center of their cultural representation . . . Thus, Jewish artists constructed Jewish cultural identity from their own gaze, beholden neither to the Other nor to Tradition as defined by the shtetl leadership. Jewish artists acquired by their performance their own voices and authority.[7]

Like these respected, 'high' artists, the cartoonists of the Yiddish press also 'constructed Jewish cultural identity from their own gaze'. But instead of 'normalizing . . . the Jewish body and its cultural presence', they contorted and stretched it in directions previously unknown. Engaging in appropriations and reinventions of tradition and applying them to new experiences, they mined the rich quarry of Jewish tradition as fodder for their satire. The cartoonists of the Yiddish press, most of whom had been raised in a traditional Jewish environment, exploited customs and folklore in order to create biting political and social commentary. Items ranging from folk tradition to talmudic quotation to daily and holiday liturgy to cult objects were employed in order to invent a unique and new form of Jewish commentary. By applying Jewish symbols—together with the values that are associated with them—to their work, they created cartoons that reflected a deeply Jewish sensibility.

The Yiddish satirical press was a significant phenomenon within the Yiddish press as a whole: from 1862 to 1916 satirical publications comprised fully 25 per cent of the Yiddish press of the Russian empire.[8] However, it should be noted that that figure does not include other popular humorous publications such as joke booklets and *badkhonishe bikhlekh* (booklets by *badkhonim*, 'wedding jesters'), both of which were extremely popular and published in large numbers during the nineteenth century.[9] Most Yiddish satirical journals nevertheless appeared after the Russian revolution of 1905. This reflects the severe restrictions placed on the publication of Yiddish periodicals by the tsarist regime: if daily and weekly newspapers were not permitted through the 1890s, it makes all the more sense that

[6] R. Apter-Gabriel, *Tradition and Revolution: The Jewish Renaissance in Russian Avant-Garde Art, 1912–1928* (Jerusalem, 1987), 11.

[7] Wolitz, 'Experiencing Visibility and Phantom Existence', 14.

[8] This statistic is based on a close survey of A. Kirzhnits, *Di yidishe prese in der gevezener rusisher imperye, 1823–1916* (Moscow, 1930).

[9] J. Shatzky, *Geshikhte fun yidn in varshe*, vol. iii (New York, 1953), 268 n. 11. David Roskies's bibliography of I. M. Dik's publications includes at least ten joke books published by Dik. See 'An Annotated Bibliography of I. M. Dik', in M. Herzog (ed.), *The Field of Yiddish*, vol. iv (Philadelphia, 1980). On *badkhones*, see also Ariela Krasney's and Yaakov Mazor's chapters in this volume.

satirical journals, with their penchant for stripping emperors bare, would be banned outright.[10] Ironically perhaps, the Yiddish press in America was more developed than the Yiddish press of tsarist Russia at the turn of the century.

In spite of the restrictions on the Yiddish press in general, and on the humorous press, satire and parody were already common fare in Yiddish literature. Parody was, in particular, central to maskilic propaganda. Moreover, satire had been central to the beginnings of modern Yiddish literature. Its most significant contributors, Sholem-Yankev Abramovitsh (Mendele Moykher Sforim) and Sholem Aleichem, based much of their work on bitingly satirical portrayals of east European *shtetl* Jewry. Satirical journals published in Yiddish continued this tradition of internal criticism, and their contents ran the gamut from crude jokes to clever satire to vicious invective. They contained stories, poems, and parodies of nearly every type of religious text. Many of these one-time journals (known in Polish as *jednodniówki*) were published to coincide with major Jewish holidays and based much of their humour on issues relating to the holiday during which they appeared.

The tradition of printing a journal on holidays was partly an outgrowth of Yitskhok Leybush Peretz's *Yontev-bletlekh* ('Holiday Leaves'), a series of subversive literary journals disguised as religious material which were published on Jewish holidays to circumvent the tsarist ban on periodical literature in Yiddish.[11] Titles that denoted Jewish holiday imagery typically reflected a liturgical, cultural, or culinary element of the relevant holiday. Titles of issues of the *Yontev-bletlekh*, such as *Grins* ('Greens'), *Der shoyfer* ('The Shofar'), *Heshaynes* ('Willow Twigs'), *Lekoved peysekh* ('In Honour of Passover'), and *Homen-tash* ('Purim Cookie'), would later also be used as titles of satirical journals.[12] Indeed, the majority of these journal titles denote some relationship to traditional Jewish life. This suggests the importance of tradition and religion in nascent modern Jewish popular culture. It also stands in direct contrast to the titles of Polish and Russian satirical journals in the period following the failed revolution, the majority of which were connected in some way with violence or horror. This marks a sharp distinction in the cultural orientation of co-territorial satirists and artists. The contrast is evident not only in the titles of the journals, but also in their cartoons: Polish and, even more so, Russian journals of the period after 1905 contain numerous cartoons of horrific violence.[13] Such images were a rarity in the Yiddish press.

[10] On the tsarist restriction of the Yiddish press, see D. Fishman, 'The Politics of Yiddish in Tsarist Russia', in J. Neusner, E. S. Frerichs, and N. M. Sarna (eds.), *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding. Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, vol. iv (Atlanta, Ga., 1989).

[11] M. Bernshteyn, 'Yontev-bletlekh un humoristishe oysgabes ba yidn', *Yidisher kemfer* (New York) (29 June 1962), 22.

[12] There are also a number of stories by Sholem Aleichem that share titles with satirical journals. They include *Arbo koyses*, *Akdomes*, *Der seyder*, and *Blintses*.

[13] For examples of Russian titles and images, see M. Betz, 'The Caricatures and Cartoons of the 1905 Revolution', City University of New York Ph.D. thesis, 1984; S. Isakov, *1905 god v satire i karikature* (Leningrad, 1928); D. King and C. Porter, *Images of Revolution* (New York, 1983).

Unless earlier examples are found, the first cartoons in the Yiddish press of Russian Poland seem to have appeared in Heshl Epelberg's Warsaw-based *Peysekh-blat*, a magazine of Passover-related poems, short stories, and historical sketches published in 1904, which closed with a small humorous section entitled 'Kneydlekh' ('Matzah Balls'). One of the cartoons was a caricature of Jews' heads on the bodies of two crows, another a non-caricatured image of a traditional Jew reading a newspaper that was combined with humorous text.

These images, however, do not appear to have been created specifically for Epelberg's *Peysekh-blat* but were appropriated from outside sources.[14] Their origins can be traced to a satirical journal entitled *Der yidisher pok* ('The Jewish Puck'), published in New York by Shomer (Nokhem-Mayer Shaykevitsh) from November 1894 to June 1896.[15] These early cartoons are not typical of those that would eventually appear in the Yiddish press in Poland, nor is their quality exceptional. They are simply the first and therefore warrant attention. That they were not drawn for the journal, but were lifted from another, was a common occurrence in the industry.

The failed revolution of 1905 provided the atmosphere in which the satirical press flourished throughout the empire. It was during this period that preliminary press censorship ended, albeit temporarily. Almost immediately an unruly, snowballing satirical press began to savage the rulers of Russia and their minions. From late 1905 to early 1907 over 400 of these journals appeared in nearly all the languages of the empire. Approximately forty satirical journals appeared in Yiddish during this period, most during 1906 and 1907.[16] But whereas Russian and Polish satirical journals were rife with original cartoon art, the Yiddish satirical press, for the most part, was not. However, desirous of keeping up with current publishing trends, editors of such journals who could not afford to hire Jewish artists began to appropriate caricatures from Russian and Polish journals and translate their captions into Yiddish.

It was in 1906 that more efforts were made by a few Yiddish publications to provide original cartoon art by Jewish artists rather than reprint and translate non-Jewish cartoons. As such, the three main satirical periodicals that were published during 1906—*Der fraynd* ('The Friend')'s humorous supplement, *Der bezem* ('The Broom'); *Der sheygets* ('The Smart Alec') in St Petersburg; and the Warsaw-based *Di bin* ('The Bee')—all contained original cartoon art drawn specifically for the magazines.[17]

[14] Heshl Epelberg was the publicist who devised the idea of publishing *Yontev-bletlekh* to circumvent the tsarist ban on Yiddish periodicals, and whose idea Y. L. Peretz borrowed to print his own.

[15] *Der yidisher pok* (its editors rendered it as the *Hebrew Puck*) was a vaguely socialistic, humorous monthly, and eventually weekly, which contained cartoon images mainly stolen from the popular American and German-language satirical press and re-captioned in Yiddish.

[16] See Kirzhnits, *Di yidishe prese*; King and Porter, *Images of Revolution*; Isakov, *1905 god v satire*.

[17] Although *Der fraynd* (including its incarnation as *Dos lebn*) with its *Bezem*, as well as *Der sheygets*, were published in St Petersburg, most of their staff, as well as their audience, was based in Warsaw and elsewhere in Congress Poland. Additionally, *Der bezem* moved its operations to Warsaw in 1908, to be followed a year later by its parent, *Der fraynd*.

The Yiddish satirical journals, including periodicals and one-time publications, were typically printed on 23 × 30 centimetre pages and ranged from four to sixteen pages, the latter being more common. Their print runs ranged from 1,000 to 17,000, although the average was 5,000. Of the nearly 300 Yiddish satirical journals published in Russian-ruled and independent Poland between 1889 and 1939, more than two-thirds were published in conjunction with Jewish holidays. Of these, only eight were printed specifically for Rosh Hashanah, as opposed to twenty-five for Sukkot, eight for Hanukah, thirty-six for Purim, thirty-nine for Shavuot, and seventy-seven for Passover.[18] It should be noted that more one-time journals appeared in the period that preceded the First World War than during the inter-war period, mainly owing to the appearance thereafter of more successful humorous weeklies,[19] as well as the inclusion of regular Friday humour pages in the daily press. Many journals that called themselves 'illustrated' would often have only a cartoon on the cover. Journals that were published as supplements to major dailies, or were connected to papers in some other way, typically had more original cartoon art than one-time publications, a fact that can be attributed to better financial support.

The appearance of cartoons and caricature was evidently such an innovation in the Jewish publishing world that Warsaw's popular *Roman tsaytung* ('Novel–Newspaper') published an unsigned article in May 1908 explaining what caricature was and the purpose behind it. It commented that 'caricature has played a great role in the life of all civilized peoples, but with us Jews, as with many other things, it has, until recently, been practically unknown'.[20] This article was the first acknowledgement of graphic satire in Yiddish. Cartoons had quickly become a natural occurrence in the Yiddish press without much notice on the part of its usually vociferous critics.[21]

THE CARTOONISTS

Despite the large number of Jewish artists and the brief vogue for cartoons in the Russian and Polish press, few Jewish artists wished to dirty their brushes with the unholy ink of caricature, particularly in obnoxious satirical journals, where their

[18] Statistical information regarding the publication of satirical journals was culled from Kirzhnits, *Di yidishe prese*; Y. Szeintuch, *Preliminary Inventory of Yiddish Dailies and Periodicals Published in Poland between the Two World Wars* (Jerusalem, 1986); and the card catalogues of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, and the New York Public Library. There were undoubtedly more journals published that are not catalogued in these sources.

[19] Weekly humorous journals such as *Der takhshit*, *Der mashkhes*, and *Der blofer* continued to publish special holiday issues similar to those of the one-time journals.

[20] 'Karikaturn', *Roman-tsaytung*, no. 17 (1 May 1908), 538–9.

[21] A. Mukdoyni (Aleksander Kappel) wrote apparently the only article on Yiddish satirical journals during the pre-war period. His 'Undzere vits-bleter' appeared in *Der vokhnblat* (suppl. to *Der fraynd*), no. 22 (7 Feb. 1913), 2–4. It is extremely critical of the state of both textual and caricatural material.

work might get them into trouble with the authorities and, possibly, with their colleagues. The first political cartoons that appeared in the Yiddish daily press of eastern Europe did so in *Dos lebn* ('The Life', the temporary name of *Der fraynd* from December 1905 to July 1906). These simple black-and-white cartoons, mainly relating to the revolution, appeared on an almost daily basis from February to June 1906. All were drawn by Arnold Lakhovsky, who also contributed cartoons to *Der bezem* and *Der sheygets*, as well as a number of Russian satirical journals. Interestingly, very few of the cartoons he drew for *Dos lebn* touch on Jewish issues. In fact, they are a decidedly un-Jewish element within the most important Yiddish daily of the time.[22] Specifically Jewish subject matter was reserved for the paper's newly separated satirical supplement, *Der bezem*.[23] In stark black and red ink Lakhovsky drew cartoons of political protest that considered the general and Jewish political predicament. Evidently the only Jewish cartoonist in St Petersburg, he also drew for *Der bezem*'s local competitor, *Der sheygets*. Lakhovsky's cartoons disappeared from *Der bezem* in mid-1908, when he left St Petersburg to teach drawing at the Bezalel School of Art in Jerusalem.[24]

In March 1906 Shmuel Yatskan, then publisher of *Yidishes tageblat* ('Jewish Daily Paper'), Warsaw's first 1 copeck daily and the first glimmer of sensationalistic journalism in Yiddish, began to publish *Di bin*, a monthly satirical journal with original cartoon work. Not to be outdone by his St Petersburg competitors, Yatskan hired the well-known Warsaw artist Yankev Vaynles (Weinles) to draw cartoons for *Di bin*. In fact, prior to the appearance of the first issue, advertisements appeared in *Der fraynd* and *Yidishes tageblat* announcing the forthcoming publication in Warsaw of a new humorous journal 'illustrated by the famous artist Y. Vaynles'.[25] This phrase was in bold print, suggesting that cartoons would be an important element of the new journal. Vaynles, a popular artist known for his sympathetic portrayals of traditional Jewry, drew simple, yet cutting, cartoons for *Di bin* that addressed Jewish cultural and political issues.[26]

Although *Di bin* got off to a strong start with Vaynles's cartoons, they disappear from the journal after the fourth issue in favour of cartoons appropriated from outside, probably Polish, possibly Russian sources. A few unsigned, amateurish cartoons also appear. It is likely that either Vaynles tired of drawing cartoons or Yatskan tired of paying him. Whatever the case, it was evidently easier for Yatskan

[22] This, perhaps, reflects the brief unity of nationalities behind a banner of Russianness following the events of 1905. For a closer look at this notion, see Stein, 'The Creation of Yiddish', 142, on what she calls the 'rossiiskaya' orientation of *Dos lebn*'s cartoons. It may also be that Lakhovsky intended to 'double-dip' and publish these cartoons in both Yiddish and Russian publications.

[23] *Der bezem* had appeared yearly, since 1903, within the body of *Der fraynd*. In March 1906 a separate journal was created out of it. See Stein, 'The Creation of Yiddish', ch. 5, for an analysis of the sudden appearance and disappearance of cartoons in *Dos lebn*.

[24] J. Bowlt, 'Jewish Artists and the Russian Silver Age', in Goodman, *Russian Jewish Artists in a Century of Change*, 45.

[25] See *Dos lebn*, no. 49 (1 Mar. 1906), 4.

[26] See Y. Sandel, *Plastisher kunst ba poylishe yidn* (Warsaw, 1964), 83–7.

to lift cartoons from the Polish- or Russian-language press than to create original work for his journal. *Di bin* folded about a year after it began, and cartooning in the Yiddish press seemed to suffer a temporary decline throughout 1907. It may be that cartoons were seen as diminishing the importance of the written word. With so many writers eager to get into print, a cartoon took up much-needed space. Additionally, in the period after the failed revolution censorship was reinstated and it may have been problematic to print political cartoons, which can often be understood without the benefit of text.

After Lakhovsky and Vaynles left the scene, younger, Warsaw-based artists soon began to contribute to the satirical journals. The cartoons that followed Lakhovsky's departure contain more Jewish content and are also far more inclined towards physical distortion and caricature than his more realistic work. One wonders whether this was the difference between 'Jewish Warsaw and goyish St Petersburg', a charge levelled at Shaul Ginzburg regarding the absurdity of publishing a Yiddish newspaper in the Russian capital, where comparatively few Jews resided at the time.[27]

In mid-1908 cartoons and caricatures signed by Warsaw-based artists Leyb Brodaty, Khayim Goldberg, and 'Homunkulus' began to appear in *Der bezem* and in other, less well-known one-time journals and periodicals. Brodaty (1889–1954), who left Warsaw for Russia in 1915, would eventually achieve fame as a Soviet caricaturist: he published the first political cartoon to appear in *Pravda* in 1917 and founded the first Soviet satirical journal, *Krasnyi d'yavol* ('Red Devil') the following year. He later published caricatures in *Krokodil* ('Crocodile'), illustrated numerous books, and taught at the Moscow Polygraphical Institute. Biographical sketches about Brodaty are terribly vague about the period preceding the First World War and only note that he lived in Warsaw and was arrested there in 1914 for participating in an 'illegal gathering'. After that he lived illegally in Petrograd.[28] Yet from 1908 to 1915 Warsaw's Yiddish satirical press was replete with his caricatures. In 1908 he had evidently stepped in to fill the shoes of Lakhovsky at *Der bezem*. His cartooning style differed greatly from that of Lakhovsky and bore a greater sense of caricature and a humour based on wild incongruousness. Indeed, he was the only cartoonist praised by the critic A. Mukdoyni in his otherwise caustic review of the Yiddish satirical press.[29] Along with Lakhovsky, Brodaty was responsible for creating some of the earliest caricatures of Yiddish writers, thereby helping to advance the concept of Jewish celebrity into the Pale of Settlement.

[27] S. Ginzburg, *Amolike peterburg* (New York, 1944), 192. When it became known that Ginzburg had obtained permission to publish a Yiddish newspaper in St Petersburg, he wrote that the Warsaw writers complained, 'Why in Petersburg and not in Warsaw? The place for a Yiddish newspaper is not in goyish Petersburg, but really in Jewish Warsaw!'

[28] Biographical sources on Brodaty include S. Vavilov (ed.), *Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, vol. vi (2nd edn., Moscow, 1951), 123; J. Milner, *A Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Artists, 1420–1970* (London, 1993), 90; *Mastera sovetskoi karikatury* (Moscow, 1990), 1–4; *Rossiskaya evreiskaya entsiklopediya*, vol. i, ed. H. Branower (Northvale, NJ, 1998), 213.

[29] Mukdoyni, 'Unzere vits-bleter', 4.

But, in spite of these contributions to cartooning in the Yiddish press, Brodaty has been remembered only as a Soviet caricaturist.

Khayim Goldberg, who worked under the pseudonym 'Khogay', also got his start in cartooning following Arnold Lakhovsky's departure from *Der bezem* in 1908. Goldberg, who was born in 1890 to a well-off hasidic family in Lukov (Łuków), attended yeshiva until he left to study graphic art in Germany. Upon returning to Poland, he became one of the most important figures in Jewish graphic art, his work appearing in nearly every Hebrew and Yiddish periodical publication that contained illustration. He founded the Grafikon, a zincography studio where nearly every cartoon that appeared in the Yiddish press during the inter-war years was prepared for publication. In addition to cartoons and graphics, in 1922 Goldberg published an article calling for the graphic reform of the Jewish alphabet, which apparently had some influence in the Yiddish printing industry.[30] He was also a founder of the Yidishe Artistn Fareyn (Jewish Artists' Union) in Poland. At the outbreak of war in 1939 he left Warsaw for Białystok, where he disappeared without trace in 1941.[31]

Another important figure, particularly in inter-war Yiddish cartooning, was Shaye Faygenboym, who was born in 1900 in Warsaw and perished in Treblinka in 1942.[32] His cartoon work is probably the most widespread of any artist that contributed to the Yiddish press. Unfortunately, very little is known about him. He was the artistic director of the periodical *Ilustrirte vokh* ('Illustrated Week') throughout the mid-1920s and participated in art exhibitions in Warsaw throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The scant biographical information available notes that Faygenboym 'occasionally did caricatures'.[33] This is an understatement: the Yiddish press is loaded with his cartoons from about 1918 to the end of the 1930s. In addition to contributing to many one-time journals, his cartoons appeared on Fridays in *Der moment* and he was a member of its editorial staff. However, he also drew a set of completely different cartoons for *Haynt*, which appeared as part of their Friday humour section. Faygenboym's work was so ubiquitous that an article in *Haynt* in 1931 complained that there was 'only one artist doing all the caricature' in the Warsaw press.[34] To a great extent, this complaint was legitimate.

[30] See K. Goldberg, 'Vegn reformirn dem yidishn alef-beys', *Bikher velt*, 4–5 (July–Oct. 1922), 379–84.

[31] Y. Sandel, *Umgekumene yidishe kinstler in poyln* (Warsaw, 1957), 83–4, and 'Khayim goldberg', in R. Feldshuh, *Yidisher gezelshaftlekher leksikon* (Warsaw, 1939), col. 660.

[32] According to Khayim Finkelshteyn, he perished in the Warsaw ghetto (see *Haynt: a tsaytung ba yidn* (New York, 1967), 227).

[33] J. Maurin-Białostocka *et al.* (eds.), *Słownik artystów polskich*, vol. ii (Wrocław, 1975), 187; this article cites an entry for Faygenboym in Feldshuh's *Gezelshaftlekher leksikon*, which only goes up to the letter *vov*. Perhaps J. Sandel, the writer of the entry, had access to an MS copy of the apparently unpublished volume.

[34] S. Shpigl, 'Di yidishe politishe karikatur', *Haynt*, no. 147 (26 June 1931), 7, continued in no. 153 (3 July 1931), 7.

Yoysef Tunkel (Der Tunkeler, 1881–1949), the most important Yiddish satirist of the inter-war period, was a unique exception to the circle of Warsaw cartoonists, having founded two important and successful satirical journals in New York.[35] Tunkel attended art school in Vilna in 1905–6 but left the Pale for New York at the end of 1906, where he joined up with the bohemian literary group Di Yunge (The Young Ones). Together with some of these writers he founded *Der kibitser*, a monthly forum for cartoons and satire. *Der kibitser* was a great success in New York and quickly became well known in Poland for its cartoons, many of which were initially drawn by Tunkel.[36] In its later incarnation as *Der groyser kundes* ('The Great Prankster') it became the most successful Yiddish satirical journal in any country, renowned for its plethora of original cartoon art.[37] But by the end of 1909 Tunkel had returned to Poland, lured back by Shmuel Rozenfeld to work at *Der bezem* in Warsaw.[38] As it turned out, *Der bezem* was published infrequently during 1910 and by the end of that year Tunkel accepted a position at the new daily, *Der moment*, writing a humorous column called *Der krumer shpigl* ('The Crooked Mirror'), which appeared weekly until August 1939. The column was initially accompanied by cartoons drawn by Tunkel, though by the inter-war period he generally left this to Shaye Faygenboym. In addition, Tunkel produced a number of one-time humorous journals from 1911 to the early 1920s. Although his skill as a satirist outweighed his drawing talents, Tunkel none the less applied his sharp wit to cartoon work.

A number of other artists, some of whom later became famous, also contributed cartoons to the Yiddish press in Poland. They include Artur Szyk (1894–1951), Yoysef Budko (1888–1940), and Menakhem Birnboym (1893–1944). In spite of the fame that some of them later achieved, their contributions to the Yiddish satirical press were sporadic and thus do not warrant close attention in this overview.[39] Additionally, as Fuks notes in his article on the Yiddish satirical press, many of the cartoons went unsigned and it is almost impossible to determine who drew them.[40]

[35] For more information on Tunkel, see Y. Szeintuch, *Sefer hahumoreskot vehaparodiyot hasifrutiyot beyidish* (Jerusalem, 1990).

[36] Tunkel left *Der kibitser* after eight issues and founded a new journal with the poet Yankev Marinov called *Hakibitser hagodl*, the title of which was changed in the following issue to *Der groyser kibitser*, and again to *Der groyser kundes*.

[37] Avrom Reyzn noted that no Yiddish satirical journal had as many cartoons as did *Der groyser kundes*. See 'Khayim gutman—der lebediker', in A. Mukdoyni (ed.), *Der lebediker yoyvl bukh* (New York, 1938), 25.

[38] Szeintuch, *Sefer hahumoreskot*, 26.

[39] All of these artists contributed during 1912–13. Some of the finest cartoons and caricatures of Jewish literary and political figures were drawn by the Berlin-based artist Menakhem Birnboym and appeared in *Der ashmeday*, of which he was the art editor. Allegedly, nine issues were published, but only five are extant. For more information on *Der ashmeday*, see Y. Szeintuch, 'Bere'i ha'ashmedai', *Huliyot* (Haifa, 2000), 397–429.

[40] Fuks, 'Żydowska prasa humorystyczno-satyryczna', 42.

CARTOONS

The importance of cartoons that relate to or exploit Jewish religious or folk themes lies in the fact that these images Judaized cartooning. They allowed the Jewish reading public to enjoy cartoons *in der heym*, that is, in the privacy of their cultural home. The religious iconographies they used were uniquely imbued with a Jewish sensibility, and had not been seen previously in cartooning. As such, they allowed cartoonists to create their works within a Jewish symbolic framework. With the rise of national consciousness, Jewish readers naturally anticipated Jewish images and concepts in their press. During a period usually noted for secularization, symbols common to the Jewish experience were necessarily exploited in order to provide a humorous Jewish commentary on all manner of events. One of the significant cultural aspects of east European Jewish 'secular' humorous journals was that much of the humour relied heavily on traditional and religious themes. Evidently, the satirists not only found it necessary to build jokes and parodies on traditional texts, but clearly wanted to, as evidenced by their frequency. Moreover, the secularism of the humorous journals relied on a tradition that was not at all reviled, but, in fact, went hand in hand with the parent that spawned it. This secularism was of a type unlike the revolutionary secularism of political parties that rejected religion out of hand, but one that relished it and used it to great advantage. Even parodies of religious texts in Yiddish satirical journals did not ridicule the original texts, but used the widespread familiarity of their forms to satirize other subjects. It is likely, therefore, that such journals appealed to a wide readership, not only secular, but also religious.

It is unknown whether there was any religious opposition to these journals, nearly all of which parodied all manner of religious material, both textually and visually. While the Orthodox press itself never contained cartoons, parodies and humorous material were published by and for traditional audiences. In spite of the apparent frivolity of the satirical press, there was evidently wide social approval of such publications.

Some of the cartoons in the Yiddish press are simple and can be easily understood by any reader with a modicum of Jewish knowledge. Others are obscure and require research to comprehend their meaning and purpose. The discussion that follows includes examples of both. Because all the cartoons employ traditional Jewish symbols as part of their texts, I will organize my discussion around Jewish holidays, limiting myself to cartoons concerning the holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Hanukah, Passover, and Shavuot.

ROSH HASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR

The high holidays were a time for serious reflection, not for humour. If a satirical journal appeared during this time of year, it usually did so in conjunction with

Sukkot. More than double the number of journals appeared on Sukkot than during the high holidays. Nevertheless, a small number did appear in connection with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Moreover, these journals, like all the other holiday *jednodniówki*, exploited religious texts and icons for political and cultural commentary.

One of the most familiar images connected to Rosh Hashanah is that of the sounding of the shofar, the ram's horn, which has come to symbolize the ushering in of the New Year. The drama of this moment has been reproduced by both Jewish and non-Jewish artists. One unsigned cartoon (Fig. 1) makes use of folklore relating to the shofar and attempts by the devil to confound its sounding.[41] The image, from a publication called *Der shoyfer* dated September 1923, is entitled *Der sotn hot zikh farleygt* ('Satan Sat himself Down'), and portrays a character labelled 'Folks-partey' sitting in a shofar inscribed with the words *natsyonal-blok* ('nationalities bloc'). The shofar is being blown by the leader of Poland's General Zionists, Yitskhok Grinboym (Grünbaum). The caption reads, 'Blow harder, Reb Itshe, and you'll drive this Satan away from the Jewish street'. Satan, in this case, appears to be portrayed by a tiny caricature of Noyekh Prilutski (Prylucki), leader of the Folks-partey, and Grinboym's political adversary.[42] Although he is labelled 'Folks-partey', and not Prilutski, the caricature resembles him enough to warrant a clear connection. Grinboym, on the other hand, is seen blowing the metaphorical shofar of the National Minorities Bloc, the parliamentary coalition which included Ukrainian, German, and Belarusian parties, among others. It is of note that he is dubbed Reb Itshe, a folksy appellation reminiscent of a *shtetl bal-tkiyo* (shofar-blower). This diminutive contrasts the Zionist leader Grinboym, imagined here as one of the common folk, with Prilutski, head of the party that allegedly promoted the way of the folk. The basis behind this role reversal is that the Folks-partey, in the November 1922 election, refused to join the National Minorities Bloc due to ideological disagreements with the other Jewish parties and also chose to remain outside the Koło (Jewish Circle) in parliament.[43] Although other Jewish parties also refused to join the Minorities Bloc, Prilutski bore the brunt of public reaction from its supporters.[44] As the cartoon indicates, the success of the Minorities Bloc

[41] Although unsigned, this cartoon was most likely drawn by Shaye Faygenboym.

[42] As an example of their personal animosity towards one another in connection to their ideological and political battles, Grinboym and Prilutski got into so fierce an argument in the cafeteria of the Yidisher Literatn un Zhurnalistn Fareyn (Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists) at 13 Tłomackie Street in Warsaw that it concluded in their throwing ashtrays at each other. Though 'they didn't aim for the head', the fight was memorable enough to warrant a mention in a biographical sketch of Prilutski by Melekh Ravitsh, then secretary of the Fareyn. See Ravitsh, *Mayn leksikon*, vol. i (Montreal, 1945), 176.

[43] For more on Prilutski and the Folks-partey, see K. Weiser, 'The Politics of Yiddish: Noyekh Prilutski and the Folkspartey', Columbia University Ph.D. thesis, 2001.

[44] A. Haftke, 'Dos politishe lebn fun yidn in poyln', in Haftke (ed.), *Yidisher gezelshaftlekher leksikon* (Warsaw, 1939), cols. 168–72.

Fig. 1. *Der sotn hot zikh farleygt* ('Satan Sat himself Down'), unsigned; probably drawn by Shaye Faygenboym. *Der shoyfer* (September 1923)

depends on blowing Prilutski and his Folks-partey out of the shofar and out of the Jewish political scene.

The cartoon is based on the page in the Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 16*b*), which explains that the shofar is to be sounded while standing, in order to create sounds loud enough to confound Satan. Undoubtedly aware of this, Satan, in turn, attempts to thwart the blowing of the shofar in some manner. That Satan would sit in the shofar to block its sounding was planted deeply in the folklore that surrounds the sounding of the shofar. Such themes were further expanded upon in the medieval *Sefer ḥasidim* and by later kabbalists, and became part of hasidic folklore relating to the shofar. The cartoon also plays upon what Finesinger notes as the dual usage of the shofar: one to announce the arrival of a new order (a new political base in the National Minorities Bloc) and the other to scare off Satan (Prilutski and the Folks-partey).[45] Additionally, the cartoon parodies traditional, ornate shofars,

[45] S. Finesinger, 'The Shofar', *Hebrew Union College Annual* (Cincinnati), 7–11 (1931–2), 194.

which were often inscribed with special blessings, by ironically inscribing it with the words *natsyonal-blok*, a thoroughly unreligious concept in which Jews were seen to be uniting with non-Jews for the unholy purpose of political gain.[46]

The cartoon is accompanied by a story entitled 'Kateyreg hasotn' ('Accuser of Satan'), and is subtitled *khsidish* ('Hasidic'). Written by the editor of the journal, Avrom Rozenfeld, under his pen name, Bontshe, it is a story told in the style of a hasidic *mayse* (tale) about how Satan attempted to obstruct the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, but was foiled as a clever congregant surreptitiously brought in a new one. The traditional story is offered in full, without the injection of humorous commentary. However, a note following the story comments: 'What's it worth? Later on didn't they find the half a challah and three squashed prunes in the neck of the first shofar? . . . Yeah, yeah. That's how far it had got . . .'.

Rozenfeld evidently felt the need to bolster the image with its 'authentic' hasidic folkloric variant. But he also offered a rational (and humorous) afterword to the story that defeats the concept of the hasidic miracle. After all, this was an allegedly secular satirical journal. To print a hasidic *mayse* without a secular punchline would have been sacrilege to the gods of humour.

The cartoon is an example of how traditional Jewish folklore, even that which reached back to ancient times, was able to serve a newly modern, often secular Jewry. Whether a majority of the readers of this 1923 cartoon was actually aware of the folk origins on which the humour is based is unknown. One imagines that knowledge of such folklore was duly pervasive, even among secular Jews. If readers were not familiar with the folklore, the 'hasidic' story below the image served to inform them of it.

Another popular image common to the high holidays was that of *shlogn kapores* (Hebrew: *kaparot*). This ritual, performed by men and women on the eve of Yom Kippur, in which a rooster (for the man) or a hen (for the woman) was waved above the head of the supplicant and then killed in order to expiate his or her sins, had received only ambivalent support from rabbinic authorities. It was, however, deeply ingrained in folk culture and commonly practised. The ritual is at least 1,000 years old and mentioned in ninth-century geonic sources.[47] In spite of numerous injunctions against it by an array of rabbinic luminaries, such as Moshe ben Nahman (Ramban) and Joseph Caro, who opposed the practice as superstitious, others, most notably the kabbalist Isaac Luria and the Kraków rabbi Moses Isserles (Remu), promoted it as an integral part of the Yom Kippur ritual. By the late nineteenth century *shlogn kapores* was a familiar sight on the eve of Yom Kippur throughout

[46] Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 113. Trachtenberg also includes a report from 18th-century Frankfurt that, when a shofar does not function, it is the result of Satan sitting in the horn. For a similar report, see Y. H. Zehavi, 'Rosh-hashone folklor', *Der moment*, no. 216 (14 Sept. 1928), 11.

[47] J. Z. Lauterbach, 'The Ritual for the Kapparot-Ceremony', in S. Baron (ed.), *Jewish Studies in Memory of George Kohut* (New York, 1935), 414.

east European Jewish communities. It was portrayed by artists such as Hermann Junker, whose painting was reproduced as a postcard, an indication that the ritual was extremely well known.[48]

In 1913 the satirist Yoysef Tunkel exploited the image of *shlogn kapores* as a basis for commenting on the furious verbal brawl that was taking place in Warsaw's daily press between *Haynt*'s editor, Shmuel Yatskan, and the columnist Hillel Tseytlin (Zeitlin) of *Der moment*. Appearing on the cover of his one-time Rosh Hashanah journal *Kapores*, the drawing (Fig. 2), possibly one of the crudest ever to appear in the Yiddish press, seems appropriate to the atmosphere created by the mud-slinging writers. Drawn by Tunkel, it shows Yatskan performing *kapores* with a rooster on which Tseytlin's head has been drawn. The rooster, or Tseytlin, wreaks his revenge on Yatskan by defecating on him. The caption reads, 'Did you ever see such a rooster? I tried to *shlog kapores* with him and he goes and pulls this trick on me . . .'.

The story behind this cartoon image has its origins three years earlier, in November 1910, when Tseytlin, a popular columnist then at Yatskan's newspaper, *Haynt*, decided to move his column to the newly established daily *Der moment*, a decision that created a great deal of animosity between the two men. In addition, the two papers were in direct and often fierce competition with each another. This resulted in frequent accusations and sniping in polemical articles in both papers.

By late summer of 1913 Tseytlin, a secular intellectual who had 'returned' to traditional Judaism, became the centre of this increasingly heated press rivalry when he was attacked by the normally reserved daily *Der fraynd*. The first Yiddish daily in the Russian empire (it began publication in 1903), *Der fraynd* had been losing circulation to the newer, more sensationalist papers. The editor, Shmuel Rozenfeld, writing under his pseudonym 'R', lambasted Tseytlin for the latter's frequent polemical and critical attacks on other Yiddish writers. Tseytlin was also attacked for hypocrisy and accused of writing on the sabbath and eating pork on Yom Kippur. Coming from the editor of the secular *Der fraynd*, the accusations were difficult to believe. In fact, the overblown rhetoric of *Der fraynd* was probably a last-ditch effort to raise circulation. If that was the case, it didn't work, since the paper went out of business shortly thereafter. *Haynt* quickly picked up the mantle from *Der fraynd*; articles attacking Tseytlin began to appear ever more frequently. Pouring fuel on the fire, this time with an eyewitness, a report appeared in *Haynt* in which a correspondent from Pinsk reported that Tseytlin had been seen in a railway station restaurant eating pork.[49] Somehow this 'eyewitness' report seemed more

[48] See S. Sabar, 'Between Poland and Germany', in this volume.

[49] There is confusion regarding the dates and places of this affair in the memoir literature. According to Finkelshteyn (*Haynt: a tsaytung ba yidn*, 160), the event occurred in late 1910. In his article '*Der moment*', in *Fun noentn over* (New York, 1956), 248, Mendl Mozes writes that the correspondent was from Białystok. The original 'report', signed by Yokhenen Fridland, appeared in *Haynt*, no. 201 (11 Sept. 1913), 4.

Fig. 2. *Kapores* (1913), cover, drawn by Der Tunkeler (Yoysef Tunkel)

believable than Rozenfeld's initial foray. As such, it was a serious accusation about an observant writer who was seen as a hero by many traditional Jews. It created much turmoil among Tseytlin's readers, particularly in the provinces. Further articles accused him of hypocrisy in maintaining a façade of religiosity while promoting adherence to religious obligations.[50] Articles attacking Yatskan and Rozenfeld began to appear in *Der moment*, in addition to hundreds of letters and thousands

[50] See e.g. R [Shmuel Rozenfeld], 'Arop di maske!', *Der fraynd*, no. 188 (28 Aug. 1913), 2.

of signatures in support of Tseytlin. The controversy became so vociferous and rancorous that even the Polish press began to write about it. It was at that point that many felt the affair was becoming an embarrassment to the Jewish community, and arbitration between the two parties was attempted, mediated by the Zionist leaders Yitskhok Grinboym and Heshl Farbshteyn. To no avail: the two papers continued to snipe at each other. Only when the Beilis blood libel trial began in October 1913 did the rhetoric begin to recede.[51]

Tseytlin's alleged hypocrisy, his constant polemicizing against the secular, as well as his appearance, with a head of long, bushy hair and a wild, unkempt beard, contributed to his being a controversial figure and made him a frequent target for caricature. This, therefore, was not the first time that he had been lampooned. Although Tunkel was employed at *Der moment*, in his cartoon he does not appear to take sides in the matter. He does, however, call it as he sees it: an exceptionally vulgar affair. He uses the Tseytlin affair as a launch pad for commentary on how common invective was in Jewish press culture. The feud between the two writers was such a popular theme that 10,000 copies of *Kapores* were published, a significantly higher number than the usual 1,000 to 2,000 print run of the average one-time publication of preceding years.[52]

HANUKAH

There is no question that the foremost symbol of Hanukah is the menorah. One cartoon, drawn by Leyb Brodaty, is entitled *Undzere khaneke likhtlekh* ('Our Little Hanukah Lights') (Fig. 3), and appeared on the cover of the one-time journal *Khaneke-gelt* ('Hanukah Money') in December 1910. It features the most celebrated writers and critics of modern Yiddish literature as the 'lights' of the menorah. These writers include Y. L. Peretz, Sholem Asch, Hirsh Dovid Nomberg, A. Mukdoyni, Mordkhe Spektor, David Frishman,[53] Hillel Tseytlin, and, apparently, though the text is illegible, S. An-ski. On the surface, it would seem, the cartoon's intention was to lionize these artists as the beacons of a modern Jewish culture. But this is not the case. Instead, the image juxtaposes the notion that these writers were the 'brightest lights' of modern Yiddish literature and the folk insult 'You should be like a lamp, burning all night and snuffed out in the morning'. The traditionally garbed Jew to the right of the menorah cocks his thumb at the writers as if to comment ironically, 'So these are the best and brightest we've got?' The cocked thumb also recalls the emphatic gesture that accompanies a talmudic argument.

[51] Mozes, '*Der moment*', 249.

[52] Kirzhnits, *Di yidishe prese*, 110. The average print run for similar journals of the same year was 5,000.

[53] The token Hebrew writer, though Frishman also published in the Yiddish press and, of course, writers such as Peretz and Tseytlin published in Hebrew.

This argument, essentially that modern Yiddish culture literally cannot hold a candle to traditional Jewish culture, is made explicit in the poem below the image.

> What kind of new Hanukah lamp is this?
> What kind of candles are these? What kind of fire?
> How weak and foreign their shine?
> For them I should make a blessing, you say,
> To recall the heroism and wonder of the past,
> And they should be holy to me! . . .
>
> These measly candles—they should replace
> That once holy fire, the light of ancient times,
> That lit our way,
> That comforted me and gave me strength
> And kindled hope and yearning in my heart
> For better, happier days.
>
> No, little flames, your shine is for naught,
> Your winding, jumping, and dancing, for nothing—
> I know you and I know your strength!
> It won't be you in this dark, burdensome exile,
> You won't light our way,
> You will not light up my night! . . .

The lights of the Hanukah menorah provided a useful metaphor for derisive commentary on some of the foremost creators of modern Jewish literature, who by the time this journal appeared, in 1910, had attained celebrity status in the Yiddish-speaking community. The belletristic and essayistic works they published, primarily in the Yiddish press, shaped the new Jewish national culture that emerged after the 1905 revolution, and posited them as the de facto leaders of that culture, particularly in light of the increase in Jewish secularism. An important element of the Jewish secularism reflected in this cartoon is the creation and recognition of modern Jewish celebrity. There is little question that a person must be of some significance if he or she is caricatured; hence, the caricature, even if it denigrates, serves as a sort of backhanded compliment. With the concept of celebrity in mind, it is notable that there is no *shames* (principal candle) on this menorah. All egos, they are all *shamosim*—a pointed reference to their ultimate failure as leaders of the new Jewish culture.

What is fascinating about this particular cartoon and the accompanying poem is its heavy, even overbearing, emphasis on the superiority of traditional religious culture. The attack on modern Yiddish literature as being unable to serve the Jews as cultural sustenance is an interesting and ironic point, since the use by the anonymous author (probably Tunkel) of a modern visual semiotic that includes caricatured images, not only of well-known Jewish writers but also one representing traditional Jewry, betrays both its medium and its message. The cartoonist wrangles with the possibilities for modern expression in Yiddish and concludes that it is futile, although he himself utilizes a thoroughly modern vehicle, a mass-medium

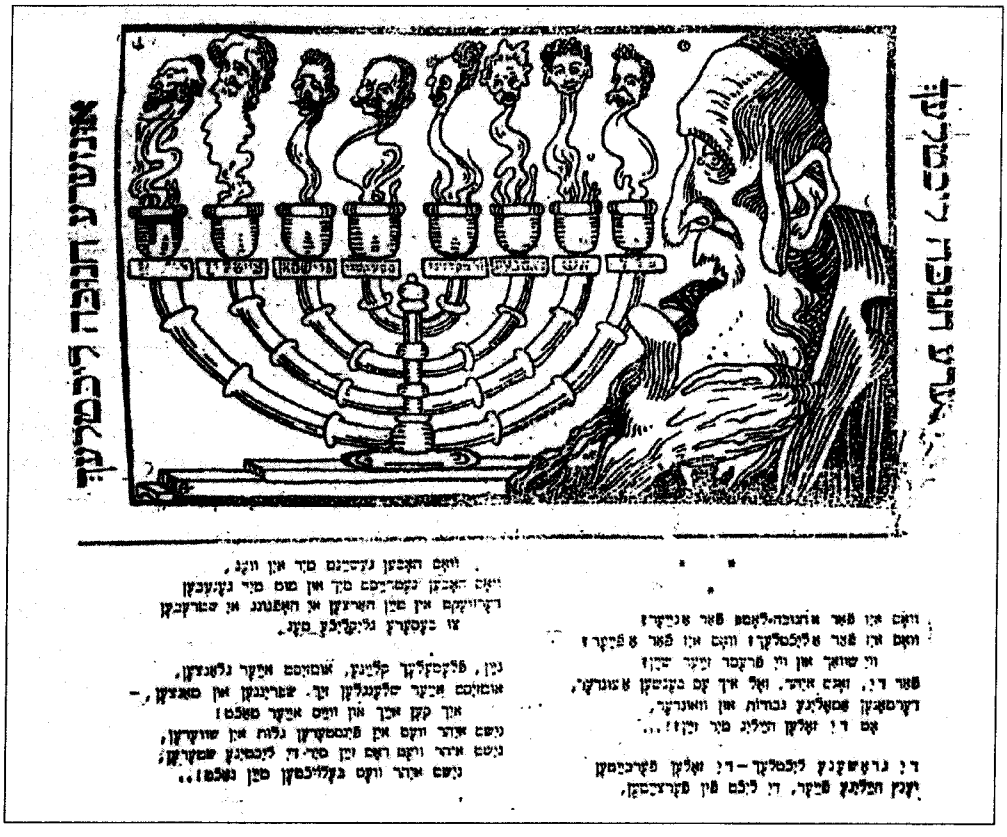

Fig. 3. *Undzere khaneke likhtlekh* ('Our Little Hanukah Lights'), drawn by Leyb Brodaty. *Khaneke-gelt* (December 1910)

illustrated satirical journal. This represents, on a small scale, the negotiations Jews made and attempted to make while struggling to reconcile tradition and modernity. The contradiction within the cartoon reveals the importance of the role of traditional Judaism, even in the new secular Jewish world. It is as if it is saying that, without the basis, without the grounding in an all-encompassing traditional Jewish culture, secularism is a meaningless endeavour. As such, the cartoon reflects the conflict between traditional content and modern expression within Jewish culture: it is the modern sensibility of publicistic caricature in a mass medium grafted onto Jewish tradition, clearly a troubling issue for the producers of such conflicted works.

PASSOVER

As noted, more one-time satirical journals appeared during Passover than at any other time of year. Of all Jewish religious texts, none has been parodied more than the Passover Haggadah, beginning as early as the thirteenth century.[54] Its

[54] I. Davidson, *Parody in Jewish Literature* (New York, 1907), 16–17.

popularity, familiarity, and fixed structure allowed for easy substitution of words or sections, and it became a mainstay of Jewish parodic literature.

Unlike other Jewish ritual texts, the Haggadah typically contains illustrations. These illustrations, which appear both in medieval illuminated manuscripts and in the popular booklets of the modern era, provided a basis for cartoonists to parody. The most common visual parody that appeared in the one-time Passover journals was that of the four sons (*arbo bonim*). In the Haggadah these sons—the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the one so ignorant as to be unable even to ask a question—represent four approaches to asking about the story of the Exodus. In cartoons the sons provided an excellent structure for satirists to mock a selection of politicians, actors, writers, and other public figures.

In *Der afikoymen*,[55] a Passover journal published by *Haynt* in 1925, the four sons are transmogrified into cartoon caricatures of Warsaw's Jewish daily newspapers (Fig. 4). Ostensibly about the founding of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, this unsigned rendering brings in a number of issues unrelated to that event. At the time the founding of the Hebrew University was a major Jewish press event and had received a great deal of attention in the Warsaw Yiddish- and Polish-language Jewish press. Under the question 'What do our four sons say about the university in Jerusalem?' the sons appear with newspapers as bodies. The wise son, on the right, portrayed by *Haynt*, is a rotund, self-satisfied Jew in a bowler hat. This reflects *Haynt*'s position as the most successful daily, less worried about competition or influence. Referring to the other papers, he says, '*Nu*, who's still the wise one—me or them?' The caption, playing on the importance of the founding of the Hebrew University, confirms *Haynt*'s support for Zionism, especially during the founding of a Jewish university in Jerusalem. Next to him stands the wicked son, the Bundist *Folkstsaytung*, depicted as a skinny and hatless character with a thin moustache and a scowl, offering his comments in Soviet-style orthography, incorrect though it may be, to indicate the Bund's anti-Hebrew stance.[56] He says, 'University, shmuniversity. *Zi ligt undz in der linker peye* ('We care about it as much as our left sidelock [a traditional idiom and image here entirely misplaced]'). Come to our meeting this Saturday.' The words play on the Bund's anti-Zionism, as well as its willingness to hold meetings on the sabbath in order to spite religious tradition. The simple son is the second most popular Yiddish daily, *Der moment*, portrayed as a thin, yet sturdy, bearded Jew in boots and the cap typically worn by Gerer hasidim. The latter, who wielded great political influence as a solid Orthodox block of voters, tended to read *Der moment* rather than *Haynt*, mainly because they were opposed to *Haynt*'s strident Zionism. Also suggested in the image of the thin, threadbare, traditional Jew is *Der moment*'s links to the nationalist but anti-socialist

[55] Refers to the piece of matzah whose eating concludes the Passover *seder*. Traditionally it is hidden by the adults, then searched for by the children, who 'sell' it back to the adults.

[56] Yiddish orthography in the Soviet Union was 'proletarianized' to rid it of its Hebrew component and spell all words phonetically; this practice was institutionalized in the 1930s.

Fig. 4. *Vos zogn undzere arbo bonim tsum yerusholayimer universitet?* ('What do our Four Sons Say about the University in Jerusalem?'), unsigned. *Der afikoymen* (April 1925)

Folks-partey, which appealed to the Jewish lower-middle class. He says, '*Mekhteyse* [be my guest]. There should be a Hebrew University too', suggesting that *Der moment* is hardly against such 'national' accomplishments, though its main focus is the Diaspora. Both *Der moment* and *Folkstsaytung* look askance at *Haynt*, an indication of their jealousy of the leading paper's success. The son who is unable to ask a question is the Polish-language daily *Nasz Przegląd*, who appears as a clean-shaven, thin man, with an odd look on his face and wearing plaid trousers. Depicted as an assimilated bourgeois imbecile dressed in caricatured Polish fashion, he says, in transliterated Polish, 'All right! Let's do university! There will be photos of it in our illustrated supplement.' *Nasz Przegląd*'s popular weekly supplement published a multitude of photographs with little text. Here the cartoonist pokes fun at the importance of the supplement at the expense of real news, at the paper's ignorance of events in the Jewish world, and at its eagerness to publicize whatever it happens to stumble across.[57]

[57] See M. Steinlauf, 'The Polish Jewish Daily Press', in A. Polonsky (ed.), *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from Polin* (London, 1993), 346.

As is evident, it was with great ease that Yiddish parodists connected the four sons of the Haggadah to the metaphor of the four sons of the Warsaw Jewish press, and inserted the news of the day into one small segment of the Haggadah structure in order to create multi-level social commentary on issues ranging from the original story—the founding of the Hebrew University—to local newspaper competition, Jewish socialist culture, and assimilation. The incongruity of seeing the traditional four sons portrayed as Warsaw's top daily newspapers furthers the humour by attributing varying levels of intra-ethnic attire to the papers as well as their readers. This superficially simple rendering of the four sons suggests the complexity, diversity, and fractiousness of inter-war Polish Jewish life.

SHAVUOT

Shavuot was second only to Passover in the number of satirical publications it inspired; Purim was third. All three major holidays take place in the latter half of the Jewish ritual year, during spring or its approach. Purim is specifically associated with parody and merry-making; the Passover *seder* is a particularly popular observance; and Shavuot, associated with the giving of the Torah, occurs in a joyous atmosphere. The symbolism of all three seems to lend itself more easily to parody, both visual and textual, than that of the other holidays.

The two main symbols of Shavuot are green plants, a gesture to its connection with spring, and images of the Torah. Both were exploited in the holiday *jednodniówki*. Above all, however, the image of the tablets of the Ten Commandments provided grist for the parodists' mill during this time of year. This image was common, of course, not only to Jews, but to the whole of European culture, east and west.[58] It figured prominently in the Christian artistic tradition and can be found in every graphic rendering of biblical events, most notably the engravings of Doré. In Jewish iconography the tablets are extremely prevalent, frequently found on the title-pages of books and often crowning synagogue arks. The ubiquity of the tablets was due not only to their importance in Jewish tradition, but to the fact that they did not involve a human figure. They were therefore an easy and useful format for cartoon parody, both Jewish and non-Jewish.[59] What differed in the Jewish use of the image was the fact that it appeared only at a specific time of year—in journals that were published around the time of Shavuot.

In the satirical journals the tablets often appeared with someone holding them, mimicking the traditional image of Moses on Mount Sinai. The parodies included,

[58] For examples of the frequent use of the Ten Commandments tablets as political metaphor in post-revolutionary French art and caricature, see J. Ribner, *Broken Tablets: The Cult of the Law in French Art from David to Delacroix* (Berkeley, 1993).

[59] They even appeared locally in the antisemitic and reactionary daily *Novoe vremya* in 1906 as a comment on British imperial arrogance in a cartoon entitled 'The New Moses'; repr. in R. Douglass, *Great Nations Still Enchained* (London, 1993), 169.

Fig. 5. *Di nayste eseres-adabres (fun an endek)* ('The Latest Ten Commandments (of an Endek)') by Shaye Faygenboym. *Der nayer mekhabl* (13 June 1919)

among others, the ten commandments of modern women and the ten commandments of summer vacations. A cartoon drawn by Shaye Faygenboym and published in the *Der nayer mekhabl* ('The New Destroyer') on 13 June 1919 is an example of the exploitation of the tablets for political parody (Fig. 5). It is of particular interest because of its focus on Polish–Jewish relations. Entitled *Di nayste eseres-adabres (fun an endek)* ('The Latest Ten Commandments (of an Endek)'), it shows a Pole with the ubiquitous moustache favoured by the Polish gentry, wearing the four-cornered *konfederatka* hat. The hat implies that he is a Polish nationalist, or, in this case, a supporter of the Endecja (National Democratic Party), the primary nationalist and antisemitic political party, who, as Brian Porter has written, 'were brutal antisemites with a hateful, violent rhetoric'.[60] The cartoon was published on the heels of reaction to the Paris peace conference in early 1919, at which the Allies demanded

[60] B. Porter, 'Social Darwinism without Empiricism, Romanticism without Ethics: Polish National Democracy and the Concept of the "The Nation", 1863–1905', University of Wisconsin Ph.D. thesis, 1994, 900–1.

that minority rights be protected in Poland as well as other successor states, as well as after eight months of rising antisemitism including pogroms and other violence against Jews in Poland.[61] The tablets held by the Endek read as follows:

You may not travel on any train.
You may not have a beard.
You may not go on any pedestrian crossing.
You may not speak jargon [Yiddish].
You may not demand any rights.
You will allow pogroms to be made on you.
Do not protest abroad.
Do not request any commissions.
You may not vote for Prilutski.

Most of these 'commandments' do not require an explanation. They can be viewed as versions of Endek ideology writ absurdly into law.[62] 'You will allow pogroms to be made on you' reflects the popular belief that the Endecja was behind the pogroms of 1918–19. The Yiddish press reported on articles in the Polish nationalist press that were allegedly responsible for aggravating Polish–Jewish relations and fomenting pogroms. The commandments regarding not travelling on trains, using pedestrian crossings, and wearing beards are connected to anti-Jewish violence particularly committed by Polish troops commanded by General Józef Haller.[63] Traditionally dressed Jews were particular targets of attack; they were thrown out of moving trains and their beards were cut off. After pogroms in late 1918 Jews requested the United States Department of State to set up a commission of investigation. The Endecja consistently denied that any pogroms had taken place and heatedly opposed foreign commissions of inquiry in Poland. The references to 'not request[ing] any commissions' and 'not protest[ing] abroad' refer to these matters.

With the exception of a small group of assimilationists, the secular Jewish political parties all fought for minority and cultural rights, hence the commandment 'You may not demand any rights'. When this cartoon was published, the minority rights portion of the Versailles Treaty was causing much consternation in parliament. In spite of considerable opposition, the Poles had little choice but to sign the

[61] See I. Lewin, *A History of Polish Jewry during the Revival of Poland* (New York, 1990), 57–60, 171–5.

[62] While the Jews did indeed fear the Endecja as a political and cultural force, it did not stop the nine Jewish deputies in parliament from acting as a swing bloc and electing the Endek Trąmpczyński as speaker of the house in 1919. They argued that he was the least antisemitic of the fielded candidates (see Lewin, *A History of Polish Jewry*, 102–3).

[63] J. Tomaszewski, 'Polish Society through Jewish Eyes', in R. Scharf (ed.), *The Jews in Poland*, vol. i (Kraków, 1992), 409; see also Lewin, *A History of Polish Jewry*, 156–7.

treaty, which was ratified, with the minority rights segment intact, at the end of June 1919.[64] 'You may not vote for Prilutski' refers to Noyekh Prilutski, the leader of the Folks-partey and one of the most popular Jewish politicians in Poland at this time. Prilutski incurred the wrath of the Endecja for his staunch advocacy of Jewish minority rights in numerous speeches in parliament.

CONCLUSION

In a way, it seems strange to spend so much time researching and interpreting events that Jewish newspaper readers of the day understood immediately. Yet this is our only entry into ephemeral materials that have been overlooked as inconsequential both by their contemporaries and by subsequent historians. While they were taken for granted, the cartoons were hardly unnoticed in their time. Indeed, they were an essential part of the cultural landscape of Jewish Poland. Cartoons that appeared on magazine covers were undoubtedly displayed at news-stands throughout Jewish neighbourhoods. Individual issues of the satirical journals were passed from hand to hand. There is no dispute about their popularity; as early as 1909 in Łódź a play by Yitskhok Katsenelson entitled *Karikaturn* featured a *Gymnasium* student whose library consisted exclusively of satirical journals.[65]

Moreover, as Marian Fuks has rightly noted, the Yiddish satirical press has great value as a historical source, reflecting the wide variety of social, moral, and political issues that affected the daily lives of Polish Jews.[66] Central to these journals and their cartoons, as we have seen, was a powerful bond to traditional Jewish culture. The ubiquity of references to traditional texts and customs points to the complexity of Jewish experience during this period: one may have lived a thoroughly 'modern' life, but one's roots still extended powerfully into the traditional past. Beyond our simplistic polarities of 'secular' versus 'traditional', these forgotten Jewish cartoons hint at a far more complex—and interesting—world than the materials hitherto at our disposal have allowed us to imagine.

[64] Lewin, *A History of Polish Jewry*, 207–9; R. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and its Fate: 1918–1939* (New York, 1979), 359.

[65] Published in Warsaw in 1909, Katsenelson's play was performed by the Lodzer Fareynikter Trupe (Łódź United Troupe) in 1910.

[66] Fuks, 'Żydowska prasa humorystyczno-satyryczna', 31.