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War and Diplomacy in East and West

A Biography of Józef Retinger

M. B. B. Biskupski



Finally, we've lived to see a reliable and comprehensive work on the life and activities of Józef Retinger – a Polish politician with incredible connections and influence in the Western world, the Godfather of the European Union, founder of the Bilderberg Group, and author of many initiatives of international importance that shaped the political image of the world in the twentieth century. The author of this book made use of a broad base of sources, including sources not presented so far, which shed new light on the activities of this extremely interesting character. The work of Biskupski has high scientific value and the efficient narrative makes pleasant reading.

Andrzej Pieczewski, University of Łódź, Poland

The mystery of Europe's notorious *éminence grise* is finally unveiled in a fascinating deconstruction of the myth of Józef H. Retinger, international agent of Polish origin. Did Retinger really influence the results of both world wars, revolution in Mexico and the creation of the European Union? Was he a Jesuit, free-mason or Soviet spy? Biskupski's brilliant life's work provides the thoroughly documented answers.

Władysław Bulhak, specialist in the field of intelligence studies,
Warsaw, Poland

Józef Retinger was a key figure in the Polish government-in-exile during the Second World War, often referred to as General Sikorski's *éminence grise*. His political career, before the war, in this government and as one of the founders of the movement for European integration has been the subject of much speculation and mystification. This well-researched and highly readable biography provides a definitive account of his political career and is essential reading for all interested in the history of World War II and of the post-war years.

Antony Polonsky, Emeritus Professor of Holocaust Studies, Brandeis University and Chief historian, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw, Poland



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War and Diplomacy in East and West

The New York Times said of Józef Hieronim Retinger that he was on intimate terms with most leading statesmen of the Western world, including presidents of the United States. He has been repeatedly acknowledged as one of the principal architects of the movement for European unity after World War II, and one of the outstanding creative political influences of the postwar period. He has also been credited with being the dark master behind the so-called “Bilderberg Group,” described variously as an organization of idealistic internationalists, and a malevolent global conspiracy.

Before that, Retinger involved himself in intelligence activities during World War II and, given the covert and semi-covert nature of many of his activities, it is little wonder that no biography has appeared about him. This book draws on a broad range of international archives to rectify that.

M. B. B. Biskupski holds the S. A. Blejwas Endowed Chair in Polish History at Central Connecticut State University, USA.

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First published 2017
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested.

ISBN: 978-1-138-21845-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-43765-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by HWA Text and Data Management, London

Moim ukochanym dzieciom, Olesi, Jadzi, Mietkowi, Misi i Stasiowi, tę książkę poświęcam. Tata.



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Preface

Józef Hieronim Retinger, one of the most mysterious figures of the twentieth century, was a much misunderstood man.¹ Accused of everything, credited with prodigious accomplishments, cursed for supposed evil machinations, suspected of uncountable secret if not nefarious acts and missions, he was basically a man of large goals sought through complex methods. There is no part of his life which is free from controversy, and, at many points, his actions must either be inferred from scanty resources, or merely speculated upon. Nonetheless, when reconstructed in its whole, this is the career of a brilliant man: imaginative, influential, resourceful almost beyond belief, frequently disingenuous if not deceitful, but, withal, of singular motivation. But, we shall need to study the whole of his life to prove that final point. We should remember the observation of an English chronicler: “Every Pole has conspiracy in his blood.”²

Relatively little has been written regarding Retinger. A version of his memoirs compiled by his secretary, Jan Pomian, is the usual source for virtually all writing on him. It has gaps, however. Despite this, it is an indispensable source containing excerpts from Retinger’s letters and a shrewd commentary by Pomian, who was Retinger’s secretary and friend. There are four different attempts at a full biography. Bogdan Podgórski’s is most helpful and exploits a number of archival sources, but far from all. He is heavily indebted to Pomian.³ The second is the “sketch” by Denis de Rougemont. The third is a Dutch-language biography by Taverne which is also heavily indebted to Pomian, and contains no reference indications, but includes a lengthy secondary-source bibliography.⁴ All rely heavily on Pomian. A strange, anonymous, online minibiography is really quite good and contains many excellent quotations. It bears the odd title “Józef Retinger: Happy Birthday, Józef!”⁵ A full-scale biography by Pająk is really an endless search for conspiracies with scant evidence in support.⁶ In addition, there are a few books which discuss his post-World War II efforts at constructing a federal Europe, all of quite recent authorship, a good effort being Pieczewski’s,⁷ a shorter account by Witkowski, and the writings of Thierry Grosbois in exploiting Western European archives for Retinger’s later career, but he does not know Polish. Hugh Wilford has integrated Retinger into his larger work

on Cold War international politics. Two dissertations deal with Retinger's connections with the mysterious Bilderbergs.⁸ Wapiński is the author of a fine, albeit very brief, biographical outline in the *Polish National Biography* series (*Polski Słownik Biograficzny*).⁹

Retinger makes brief appearances in many memoirs, letter collections, and studies of related themes: these are often tantalizing but not fully explanatory, leaving many blind allies. His materials, some quite skimpy, are scattered about in many archives. I have tried to exploit all of the major repositories in many languages, and as many of the minor ones as I could.

I would like to thank a number of colleagues who have been kind enough to tender me their advice over the years relating to Retinger and my depiction of him. These include Piotr Wróbel of the University of Toronto, Piotr S. Wandycz of Yale, Neal Pease of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, the late Anna Cienciala of the University of Kansas, Grzegorz Witkowski of the University of Warsaw, Linda Biesele Hall of the University of New Mexico, Jean Szczypien of the Fashion Institute of Technology, Jürgen Buchenau of the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, Christopher N. Fritsch, and particularly Jan Pomian, Retinger's last secretary, with whom I kept in regular correspondence to discover his unmatched knowledge and insightful views concerning Retinger. I should also like to thank the late Feliks Gross, President of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, Andrzej Pieczewski of the University of Łódź, and Richard J. Aldrich, of the University of Warwick. All of these scholars have helped me.

I am also grateful to Teresa A. Meade of Union College; Ann Hudak of the University of Maryland's Hornbake Library; Thierry Grosbois of the Catholic University of Louvain, Guido Koller, Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern EDI, Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv BAR, Dienst Historische Analysen; Mary Carr of the Historical Archives of the EU in Florence, Dobrosława Platt of the Polish Social and Cultural Association in London; Anna Stefanicka of the Polish Institute and Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (PISM); Lucyna Janas, of the Archiwum Retingera at the Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny Krakowski, and Katarzyna Tarnawska of the same institution both for their extraordinary kindness in procuring vital documents.

There are those who deserve special attention for reading all or part of the manuscript and communicating their comments: Andrzej Pieczewski, Bułhak, and the late Michael Alfred Peszke deserve special thanks for this. Władysław Bułhak of the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, also located and sent me invaluable documents on Retinger's World War II career, as did Pieczewski. My research assistants include Chris Abraham of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and Museum who carefully selected post-World War II Retinger documents; Hywel Masten, and Rosalie Spires for their tireless work at the National Archives in Kew, the Birmingham University Library, and at the Imperial War Museum. Wims Maas worked at the Dutch National Archives and Guido Perlini found much of value at the Historical Archives

of the European Union in Florence. Martin McCarthy, now a practicing attorney in Rochester, New York, was long ago my research assistant assigned to ferret information from the press regarding the many suspicious characters that dot the text. I have later received additional research assistance from a number of people at Central Connecticut State University: I am especially indebted to Nick Pettinico of the university administration who supported my research efforts with intelligence and loyalty. My colleague, Renata Vickrey, always helped when I needed her, as did April C. Armstrong of the Seeley G. Mudd Library at Princeton. Of all, special thanks go to Magda Jacques, my secretary, who was unflagging in helping and dealing with my idiosyncrasies.

This book is dedicated to my beloved children who may wish to know about the most fascinating Pole of modern times.

Colchester, CT, 2016

Notes

- 1 Robert Eringer, *The Global Manipulators: The Bilderberg Group, The Trilateral Commission: Covert Power Groups of the West*. Bristol: Pentacle Books, 1960, 16.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 3 Podgorski also wrote the much shorter “Józef Hieronim Retinger, 1888–1960,” available online from Archiwum Retingera, Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny Krakowski.
- 4 W. Chr. Taverne, *Wat nemand schumt te weten: J. H. Retinger het striven naar een verenigd Europe* (Hoogeveen: Horizont, 1987).
- 5 “Józef Retinger: Happy Birthday, Józef,” <http://bilderberg2013.co.uk/jozefretinger/>. Accessed on May 9, 2013.
- 6 Henryk Pająk, *Retinger, mason i agent syjonizmu* (Lublin: Retro), 1996.
- 7 Andrzej Pieczewski, *Działalność Józefa Hieronima Retingera na rzecz integracji europejskiej* (Łódź: Marszałek), 2008.
- 8 Ungeborg Philipsen, “Diplomacy with Ambiguity: The History of the Bilderberg Organisation, 1952–1977,” København Universitet, 2009 and Thomas W. Gijswijt, “Uniting the West. The Bilderberg Group, the Cold War and European Integration, 1952–1966,” Ph.D. diss., Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2007.
- 9 Roman Wapiński, “Retinger, Józef,” *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 1988, Vol. 128, 148–152.



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Introduction

He was the “Father of Europe.”¹ At Józef Hieronim Retinger’s funeral in 1960, Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens remarked that he had “complete entrée in every political circle.” Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands reckoned him one of the few men to make an indelible mark on his time, albeit in virtual anonymity. The *New York Times* said of him: “Mr. Retinger... was on intimate terms with most leading statesmen of the Western World, including presidents of the United States.”² He has been repeatedly acknowledged as one of the principal architects, indeed *spiritus movens*, of the movement for European unity after the Second World War, and “one of the outstanding creative political influences of the postwar period.”³ What Retinger was, or indeed, who he was, has baffled a generation of historians who have discovered his name or his influence in a myriad of places, seemingly unconnected, often implausible, sometimes incomprehensible.

Throughout his long and mysterious career on the international political scene, Retinger was described as an agent of British, American, French, German, Austrian, Mexican, or perhaps Japanese intelligence, and the chief architect of a Vatican-inspired plan to re-organize central Europe under the guidance of the Jesuit Order during World War I. He was also, simultaneously, a major link between, Polish socialists and the left-wing of British politics,⁴ and, also, between London financial circles and the Warsaw government. A report to the Polish prime minister noted, almost with astonishment, that Retinger enjoyed the respect and friendship of the “highest English officials” who regarded him as a “politician of broad competence,” whose views on European problems – not just Polish affairs – were accorded serious attention.⁵ In the same decade, Retinger was the principal financial advisor to the revolutionary government of Mexico during the interwar era, and briefly the inmate of an American jail. Throughout much of the interwar era, Retinger inveigled himself in political plots and was deeply involved in the opposition to the increasingly authoritarian government in Warsaw, joining scattered, disgruntled émigrés like the erstwhile premier Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the populist leader Wincenty Witos, and the soldier and statesman General Władysław Sikorski among others. By the 1930s, however, he was back in Europe, again a link between Polish politics and

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the British political left; according to some he was a “fellow-traveler” at the very least if not an agent of the Comintern, perhaps even a link between the British Communist Party and the Kremlin.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, Retinger was rumored to be a major figure in “international Jewish masonry,” and a high official of the British B’nai B’rith. Soon thereafter he was described – most ardently as a British agent, perhaps a Soviet asset, a patriotic Pole, and possibly all three. That he was the principal advisor to General Władysław Sikorski, Prime Minister of the Polish government-in-exile is beyond question. In April, 1944, though far from young, and in poor health, he was parachuted into German-occupied Poland. Though ostensibly on a mission from his own government, Retinger may also have then been acting for the British.⁶ As late as 1966 Colonel Sir Colin Gubbins, chief of the ultimate secret agency, the Special Operations Executive (SOE), insisted that certain details of his remarks about Retinger’s mission remain secret. Hugh Wilford has recently argued that Retinger acted as a SOE agent.⁷ Certainly Retinger’s World War II activities show very close relations with the British – often to the outrage of his own countrymen.

So secret was Retinger’s 1944 mission that he entered the aircraft wearing a mask, and was clad in the uniform of a British army captain. Retinger’s loyalties to Poland were so suspect that members of the Intelligence Division of the Polish General Staff decided to have Retinger assassinated in 1944. Retinger’s activities during the war are still unclear and controversial. It is obvious, however, that he had direct access to the highest reaches of the British government

In the postwar era, Retinger was active in the movement for European unity, serving as co-founder of the European League for Economic Cooperation, and Secretary General – “his favorite function” – of the European Movement. In addition, he was dedicated to negotiating reconciliation between the Church of England and the Vatican, and even managed to have an audience with Cardinal Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, in this vain enterprise. Until the last months of his life, he was actively intriguing in Polish émigré politics; a figure of controversy to the end. Until his death and long after, an often repeated explanation for Retinger’s actions was that he was, perhaps for many years, a secret agent of the British government acting under the direct orders of its highest officials. Finally, he has been credited with being the dark master behind the so-called “Bildberg Group,” described variously as an organization of idealistic internationalists, and a malevolent global conspiracy

Observers of Retinger’s long career have repeatedly confronted severe difficulties. Many of the episodes in which he participated are impossible to reconstruct clearly. A sympathetic biography by his secretary, with frequent Retinger quotations, is indispensable yet incomplete.⁸ Documentary evidence concerning his highly secretive “diplomatic” activities is exceedingly rare, fragmentary, and contradictory. Most of his contemporaries were suspicious

of him, and all of them were bewildered by his mysterious travels, meetings, and activities. What or who guided his actions? Was he ultimately, a foreign agent, as has been repeatedly asserted by many Poles, or was he, as a contemporary historian has charitably deemed him, “a citizen of the world rather than a spy,”⁹ perhaps, a global diplomat? Pieczewski describes him as “our greatest European,” not a cosmopolitan, but rather, ultimately, simply – but not too simply, a Pole. Here we have a fascinating insight by a Czech writer who captures Retinger’s grandiose schemes in a few words: a man obsessed with a goal and dedicated to launch great schemes to achieve it. As Vaclav Fiala rewrote:

It is typical of the Polish nature that it conceives a great aim without being unduly concerned with the possibilities of attaining it, and without weighing the required strength on accurate scales. It prefers vain but grandiose efforts to moderate and repeated successes or to small settlements of current issues. In the Polish dictionary the word compromise is not an expression *comme il faut*.¹⁰

This volume has three goals. First, to reconstruct Retinger’s activities to discern the motives and goals of his actions. He seemed to gambol about, always off to some adventure in a series of disconnected episodes. In reality, Retinger was guided by simple goals the fundamental one being how to serve Poland. Very early in his life he was painfully aware of the fact that Poland was not only lacking independence, but that its reconstruction seemed quite impossible, unless some outside powers could be involved. This led him to Austrophilism – a not uncommon disposition of Poles living under the Habsburgs. His efforts to help Austria leave the war – an effort, incidentally, which was repeated by other Poles – were not Austrian patriotism, but Polish. The failure of the Habsburgs to survive World War I was the end to his interest in Austria. Austria was a means not an end.

In the interwar period he tried to play a role in advancing the Polish cause both domestically and internationally. He thus was at work stimulating Polish-Mexican economic ties, and negotiating loans from England for Warsaw. The goal of his myriad but cloudy actions was to replace the Warsaw government with one more democratic with broader popular support. Poland’s position in the world, never assured after 1918, declined during the 1930s, and Retinger’s patriotism motivated his political activities.

In the midst of the interwar era, Retinger met with General Sikorski and they became both close friends as well as having many shared political beliefs. Central to this partnership was the belief that the geo-political arrangement of Europe did not secure Poland a position of security, possibly not even independence. The solution was an essential transformation of the continent along federalist lines which would protect members from the aggressive inclinations of powerful Germany and Russia. Poland, in an eastern bloc, could be defensible, and thus avoid both international threat and assure the

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basis of domestic political stability. Retinger's federalism was doubly rooted: an old Polish political tradition of strength through federal ties (beginning in the fourteenth century), and the ruminations of a long series of thinkers about uniting European civilization to avoid its disastrous in-fighting. If a free Poland could join a series of similar states, Europe would be transformed but, more important Poland would be safe and independent.

Retinger's fascination with European unity through federalism became especially evident during World War II when he became the chief political advisor of the Polish exile government under Sikorski. Retinger worked tirelessly to convince the other exile governments to create a postwar federated Europe – which would assure Polish independence. This effort eventually failed due to Czech intransigence, the lack of Western support, and Russia's overpowering role in the postwar world. During the war Retinger's dedication to European federation was inseparable from that of Sikorski. This was part of a larger Polish *Weltanschauung*. Federation required some reconciliation with Russia – a “realism” that they shared. Without this federation, Poland was doomed to Russian domination.

His actions were always rooted in Polish goals and connected with patriotic activities worldwide, thus he could be broadly defined as a Polish agent no matter which government he was working with. As his vision expanded to include the continent, then Atlanticism, and finally dabblings in global politics, Poland always was the center.

Two other questions remain. Chronologically the first is whether he was guided by a kind of political Catholicism. Was his vision of a united Europe both a solution for Poland as well as the advance of a – at least partially – unified Europe under Catholic influence? The episodes which reflect this are scattered about chronologically: his original Catholic roots; the early contacts with the Vatican and the Jesuits during World War I; his network of Catholic acquaintances both before and after World War II, and his repeated efforts to reconcile European Christians.

In the postwar world, he was in the pay of the CIA in his efforts to create the rudiments of an international consultative body, the Bilderbergs. Moreover, whereas the Bilderbergs have been repeatedly criticized for striving to be more than a loose body of important global figures, but an agency seeking a powerful world role, we must not forget that Retinger had long favored continental coordination to consider basic and pressing problems, a private, elite, international center of discussion of indeterminate consequence.

It is important to follow the bases of his actions: Poland, with horizons far beyond its truncated borders, what is deemed political Roman Catholicism (though his piety was dubious), and a blurry political leftism. He was always an elitist repulsed by mass politics. In his early life he was at least inferentially connected with rightist Polish organizations. Later his politics were clearly left, indeed, radically so. Finally, in the waning years, Retunger was seeking to create political influence by powerful people linked by common purpose and willing to impinge on national sovereignty.

The purpose of this study is an attempt to explain Retinger in his international context and in the Polish world into which he was born and really never left. It is my contention that amid the farrago of activities one can discern a design which remained constant throughout his long career.

Notes

- 1 This is Thierry Grosbois' conclusion of how contemporary historians regard Retinger; see his "Activities," 13.
- 2 "Joseph Retinger, Polish Democrat," *New York Times*, June 24, 1960, 27.
- 3 David C. Riede, "Retinger, Joseph Hieronim," in Warren Kuehl, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Internationalists* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 606.
- 4 Wincenty Witos, *Moja tułaczka* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1967), 460.
- 5 Adam Roniker to Grabski, March 12, 1924, in Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Kapitały obce w Polsce, 1918–1939* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1964), 89.
- 6 Józef Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War*, New York: Hippocrene Books, 1985, 113.
- 7 Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left, and the Cold War*. (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 228.
- 8 Jan Pomian, Retinger's secretary and confidant during his last several years, published as *Joseph Retinger: Memoirs of an Eminence Grise* (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1972). In 1990, a Polish-language edition, "corrected and enlarged," was published: *Józef Retinger: Życie i pamiątniki 'szarej eminencji'* (Warsaw: Pelikan, 1990). Yet another Polish edition appeared in 1994, *Józef Retinger: Życie i pamiątniki pionera jedności europejskiej* (Warsaw: PAVO, 1994). The two Polish-language editions have identical texts, though they vary in format. All citations in this book are from the 1990 edition, hereafter cited as Pomian: *Pamiątniki*. A valuable critique of this work is Siemaszko, "Szara eminencja," 172–185. The fate of this version is unknown; see Spencer Curtis Brown to Retinger, March 24, 1953.
- 9 Roman Wapiński, "Retinger, Józef Hieronim," in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 30/1 1988 (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1988), 152.
- 10 This passage, translated from the French, is quoted in Piotr S. Wandycz, "Poland in International Politics," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1972), 408.

1 The formative years, 1888–1914

Retinger was born in Kraków, which was under Austrian rule, in 1888. Despite his German name (his ancestors spelled it Röttinger), and original Bavarian ancestry, the family was completely polonized after their arrival in the late eighteenth century.¹ Retinger described his family as “ardent patriots and very ardent Catholics” with “a very strong anti-Russian and anti-German complex ... maybe reactionary ... and not without an anti-Jewish bias.”² According to his grandson, the rumors that Retinger was of Jewish origin were created and circulated by his detractors and have no basis in fact, but is little more than an anti-Semitic invention.³ However, Podgórski has uncovered documents which indicate that Retinger’s great-grandfather was, indeed, Jewish but he and his family converted to Catholicism in 1827.⁴ If this were a conversion to polonism it was rapid and profound: Retinger’s grandfather was killed in the 1846 Galician jacquerie aimed at the Polish elite.⁵

Retinger’s possible Jewish ancestry, despite his many denials, and the blunt rejection by his last secretary, Jan Pomian, has considerable support. In his papers, a French-language notation describes him as being “a good Jewish bourgeoisie family, Polish by façade.”⁶ Jan Hulewicz says virtually the same thing.⁷ There are similar references sprinkled about, however the dispositive evidence was possibly provided by Retinger’s own guardian Władysław Count Zamoyski, who referred to Retinger’s father as a convert to Roman Catholicism from Judaism. Zamoyski, by way of explanation, noted that he had known Retinger for years and that Retinger’s father was his attorney, until the former’s death.⁸

Retinger’s mother’s family was not Jewish, and Retinger was raised a Catholic, hence the ultimate answer to the question whether Retinger was Jewish is: not by any reasonable standard. Zamoyski noted in what may serve as the final word on this subject: “On peut être absolument sûr de ses sentiments polonaises.”⁹ Retinger returned the compliment: Zamoyski was “a saint.”¹⁰

Both Retinger’s parents died when he was young, leaving five children.¹¹ From an early age, Retinger was intended for the priesthood. After initial preparations in Poland, he was sent to Rome at eighteen. Due to the influence of Cardinal Rampolla, he was admitted to the Academie dei nobili

ecclesiastici. Soon after he left: in his own words “to serve my faith and my country as part of the laity.”¹²

Retinger’s father was an intriguing personality. Born in Tarnów, and the descendant of successful merchants, the elder Józef was a devoted Polish patriot and fought in the Polish anti-Russian rising of 1863–1864 (the so-called January Insurrection). A lawyer by education, he was a prominent member of the Kraków urban patriciate and was decorated by the Habsburg government. He became a member of the city council and president of the advocates’ society. He was a member of the literati: translator of German works, and a playwright as well, indeed man of many parts.¹³ He was also a landowner – a category the significance of which is difficult to convey apart from its Polish context but it is more of symbolic than financial significance.¹⁴ It denotes membership in the traditional elite of Polish society. He was closely connected to Kraków’s famous Jagiellonian University, a relationship immensely strengthened when he married Marynia Czyniańska, daughter of the rector of the university. The elder Czyniański was a distinguished chemist and the co-founder of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Polska Akademia Umiejętności), there is a bust of him in Kraków’s famous university church of St. Anne.¹⁵

The elder Retinger had a close relationship with Zamoyski which was of vital significance in his son’s life. Retinger Sr. was the attorney for Zamoyski in the territorial dispute with Hungary over the territory of Morskie Oko.¹⁶ Retinger won the complex legal battle and the territory has remained Polish ever since. The premature death of Retinger’s father made young Józef the unofficial ward of the count, scion of one of the wealthiest families in Poland. Zamoyski supported Retinger generously, allowing him to complete his education at the Sorbonne, from which he received a doctorate in 1908, perhaps the youngest contemporary European to earn that distinction.¹⁷ He later studied in Germany, Italy, and England, preparing his for his later continental career including the mastery of many languages. Zamoyski was also politically active in France in support of the Polish cause.¹⁸

Retinger later recalled the Zamoyski family as his “link to the legitimist tradition of European aristocracy from the era before Napoleon III ... the living example of the famous encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*.”¹⁹ Beyond their profound intellectual imprint, the Zamoyskis allowed Retinger immediate access to the highest circles of European wealth and distinction; a world of influence that expanded rapidly over the next few years. In Paris, he became acquainted with the French cultural elite. Cousins of Retinger, the Godębski family (similarly French citizens of Polish origin) maintained a well-known Parisian salon to which he was at once admitted. Thus, in the years before World War I, Retinger established an extensive assortment of influential “contacts”: Cardinal Alfred-Henri-Marie Baudrillart,²⁰ Marshal Hubert Lyautey, and the bizarre dandy, Marquis Boni de Castellane – of whom more later. This relationship was most fruitful, for de Castellane was on close terms with the then Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, whereas

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Boni's wife, the American Annie Gould, was reputed to be the wealthiest heiress in the world, the daughter of the financier Jay Gould.²¹ De Castellane himself served briefly in the French parliament and had very powerful friends in both British and French political circles, especially on the left. In the world of the arts, Retinger became acquainted with André Gide,²² Jean Moréas, François Mauriac, Arnold Bennett, Léon-Paul Frague, Valéry Larbaud, Paul Valéry, Maurice Ravel, Pierre Bonnard, François Poulenc, Léon-Paul Fargue, Claude Terrasse, Manuel de la Falla, Jean-Aubry (with whom Retinger wrote articles about Poland), Eric Satie, Edward Vuillard, and, from the political world: the aforementioned de Castellane, Prince Sixte de Bourbon-Parma (the exact date of their acquaintance is unclear), Charles-Louis Philippe, the press magnate Lord Northcliffe, and publisher Bernard Gasset, among innumerable others.²³ Retinger inherited 100,000 francs from his family but squandered it. Zamoyski described Retinger as having "too much self-assurance and too much imagination." He had powerful friends, but enemies as well.

After brief periods in London, Munich, and Italy, about which little is known, Retinger returned to Kraków, published a literary review which enjoyed a *success d'estime*, and created thereby a network of friends among the Polish literary establishment.²⁴ The authors he published included such literary giants as Leśmian, Morstin, Staff, Strug and many others. It is probably during this brief stay (1911–1912) that Retinger's political career began.

Retinger had, apparently, been approached by the representatives of the National Council (Rada Narodowa, RN), a nationalistic organization of the Polish political right, headquartered in Galicia, (Austrian Poland) which was attempting to establish a network of filial organizations throughout Europe and North America.²⁵ The RN was militantly anti-German and emphasized that in any future war, Berlin would be the principal enemy of Polish independence. This meant that the geo-strategic disposition of the RN followed the line of the founder of modern Polish nationalism, Roman Dmowski.²⁶ This reflected Retinger's youthful rightist views which later moved dramatically to the left.²⁷

Retinger was to establish an information office in London (1911) and, acting in the spirit of the RN's anti-German orientation, distribute propaganda in the English-speaking world in favor of the Polish cause.²⁸ Significantly, the anti-German position of the RN was coupled with a rather indulgent view of the Habsburgs; hence anti-Austrian propaganda was decidedly not one of Retinger's tasks.²⁹ His pamphlet – *The Poles and Prussia* – denouncing German policy towards Poland made him *persona odiosa* in Germany.³⁰ At the same time it endeared him to the Polish nationalist right.

The work argued to its British audience that the conclusion that the "Polish Question" was a closed chapter in European history was mistaken. The British did not realize that Prussia really had an incorporated Polish history and that the population there was "swallowed, but never digested."³¹ To prove his point, Retinger essayed a highly emotional aperçu of Prussia's

history. We may summarize this briefly to grasp the basis for Retinger's attitudes towards the Germans.

In Europe of the ninth and tenth centuries, the area northeast of an imaginary line drawn between Hamburg to Leipzig was populated by two equally uncivilized people: the "kindly and peaceable" Slavs and the "violent" "aggressively cohesive" Germans. The Germans used their penchant to "accept leadership" to conquer most of the land by "massacre and rapine." Then Poland emerged.³²

Distractions to the east prevented Poland from "doing justice" to this problem in the north. The barbaric paganism of the "Borussians", that is, native Prussians, forced the Poles to seek to "repress the murderous raids," hence the appearance of the Order of Teutonic Knights and the long, complex and controversial epic of Polish relations with the Order.³³ Soon after moving to historic Prussia, the Knights became "monsters of greed and ambition."³⁴ The local population, suffering under their rule, rebelled and was virtually annihilated in response.

The Polish-Lithuanian union of 1385 brought powerful forces into the field against the Knights. The result was the crushing Polish victory at Grünwald (Tannenberg) of 1410, which Poland did not exploit because the "tolerant Pole" never takes "full advantage of his victories." Subsequently the Order became secularized, adopted Protestantism, and became the hereditary possession of the Hohenzollern family.³⁵

The Prussians hated their former Polish overlords, and it was largely vengeance that motivated their participation in the Partitions of Poland at the close of the eighteenth century – perhaps "the greatest crime in history."³⁶ The ultimate result was the 1871 German Empire. Retinger is quick to remind his readers that Poles played an important role as unwilling soldiers of the Prussians and thus had an ironic part to play in the creation of the modern German Empire.³⁷ However, Berlin declared "war against" its Polish subjects which it declared historically or perhaps racially inferior (*der minderwärtgen Nation*)." In Prussian Poland the Poles offered resistance, but the Polish Jews were "always apt to side with those in power."³⁸ The Germans responded with a "monstrous" policy of repression – the *Kulturkampf* – which Retinger details.³⁹ A discussion of the later school-strikes and German mistreatment of children followed—a truly foul episode.⁴⁰

Retinger concluded by urging the British not to ignore this Prussian chronicle of dastardly deeds which illustrate German behavior in the contemporary world: Prussian methods of empire building.⁴¹ The purpose of this brief chronicle is obvious: the Poles are history's victims and the Germans seemingly-civilized barbarians. The British must familiarize themselves with the Prussian past to understand what they are facing in this Central European threat.

Retinger's prejudices are clearly indicated: Catholic loyalties, Polish patriotism, the conviction of the innate nobility and goodness of the Polish people, and the contrasting murderous traditions of the Germans. It is in this pamphlet, written on the eve of the war that we are given Retinger's

conception of the Germans. Historical circumstances never allowed Retinger to essay a similar summary of Polish-Russian relations: it would have allowed an edifying comparison. Lacking that, we may conclude simply that he regarded the Germans as the historical enemies of the Poles and exceptionally foul ones at that. There is no evidence that this disposition changed. Indeed, twenty years later, Retinger wrote that Poland had been forgotten in the nineteenth century and had disappeared from the consciousness of the world; leaving the Poles beset by feelings of inferiority.⁴²

At the end of 1911 (or perhaps in early 1912), Retinger moved to London, – “the center of world politics” – established a so-called Polish Bureau for the National Council, in a single pathetic room on Arundel Street,⁴³ attended classes at the London School of Economics, and avidly continued his practice of cultivating prominent and powerful Britons and others. He used his position at the Bureau to become involved with Polish relief agencies with distinguished patrons.⁴⁴ To the dramatist Arnold Bennet, whom he had met in Paris, he added Stafford Cripps, later a Labour politician.⁴⁵

At the time he captured his political philosophy succinctly: “Russians were ‘the enemies of my country’.”⁴⁶ In his efforts on behalf of the RN, Retinger met and actively cultivated two of his countrymen, then in England, maestro Ignacy Jan Paderewski, and, more consequentially, novelist Joseph Conrad.⁴⁷ Indeed, Retinger rapidly became an intimate of Conrad who was a great admirer of the youthful Retinger, crediting him with almost limitless political and diplomatic talent.⁴⁸ Retinger, in turn, was able to use Conrad’s fame as an entrée to influential circles in Great Britain. Indeed, so close was the Conrad-Retinger relationship that it has been noted by a contemporary Polish journalist, perhaps half-facetiously, that Conrad “recommended Retinger to British intelligence.”⁴⁹

Retinger arranged, through the family of his wife (the Zubrzyckis), Conrad’s nostalgic visit to Poland in the summer of 1914 – the émigré’s return after more than twenty years.⁵⁰ Podgórski has argued, persuasively, that Retinger may well have had political motives for arranging this trip: to win Conrad over to active support of the “Polish Question” in England. Conrad had not previously been open in his support of Polish issues.⁵¹

Unfortunately for Conrad, his arrival coincided with the mobilization antecedent to the First World War, bringing his visit to a dramatic close. However brief his stay, Conrad was most active regarding Polish affairs. He held a great many meetings with Polish political activists and produced a most intriguing memorandum. In this document, Conrad clearly enunciated what has come to be called the pro-Austrian or “Austrophile” position regarding Poland’s possible rebirth. Conrad resolved to win British support for the Polish cause and London’s sympathy for Austria. Russia, Conrad decided, would certainly be defeated. By contrast, the defeat of Germany was scarcely imaginable; hence England must support Austria against Germany at any future peace conference to lessen the danger of German domination. Ultimately, London should be encouraged to “support Austria’s Polish

policy” while opposing German and Russian goals.⁵² The reconstruction of the Habsburgs Empire as a trialist state, with Poland, the third portion, was a first step to a federated Europe.⁵³

For Retinger, also, the abbreviated visit had political significance. He later recalled that after seeing to the safety of the Conrad family he

went to Lwów, knowing that the major Galician leaders [of Polish politics] were found there. I met with archbishop [Józef] Bilczewski,⁵⁴ with the Armenian-Catholic archbishop [Józef] Teodorowicz⁵⁵, and the representatives of the major political parties, [Tadeusz] Cieński⁵⁶ and [Jan] Dąbski,⁵⁷ and others. They asked me to go, as fast as possible to France and England on their behalf...I was to work on behalf of Polish independence with all the boldness and determination I could manage. They assured me that they would support all my actions in this regard.⁵⁸

Retinger was given letters addressed to the French and British ministries of Foreign Affairs, a letter from the Polish episcopate to Archbishop Bourne of Westminster, and rather vague instructions. This was the beginning of Retinger’s relationship with another Galician organization, the Central National Committee (Centralny Komitet Narodowy, CKN). The CKN was a short-lived political congeries of rightist parties which were moderately pro-Austrian as regards the war.⁵⁹ This new affiliation supplanted, though perhaps did not formally sever, his earlier linkage to the right-wing RN.⁶⁰

Retinger’s return voyage to London in the summer of 1914 was certainly “remarkable” as noted by Włodzimierz Suleja.⁶¹ His journey from Kraków to Vienna was arranged by archbishop Bilczewski with considerable aid from the Austrian authorities. In Lwów a Pole, curiously named Rheinlander, arranged for him to meet the Austrian commander at Lwów. The Viennese Ministry of War provided him with an exit visa, initialed, notably, by the German ambassador in Vienna, Heinrich von Tschirsky, as well.⁶² He met, serendipitously, an old man on the train who happened to be the chief of the railroad who facilitated Retinger’s travels. Later Retinger would refer to this as “I had luck again.”⁶³ Through the assistance of Retinger’s Austrian contacts, and the efforts of the American ambassador in Vienna, Penfield, the Conrads were able to exit as well and return to England.

Arriving in Switzerland, Retinger received a visa from the French authorities – he also carried, *mirabile dictu*, a Russian passport. He made good use of his time there. He met with the French ambassador to Berne (Neau), and Grant Duff, the British ambassador. The latter did not trust him and even frisked him. He soon continued to Paris where, thanks again to Zamoyski,⁶⁴ he met with the highest officials in the Foreign Ministry, including Phillipe Berthelot, and Foreign Minister Stephane Pichon himself.⁶⁵

His further journey to London was arranged by the French authorities who facilitated his travels. Berthelot, he claims, personally came to free him from the French jail where he was briefly held. This astonishing chain of

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immensely useful contacts propelled the twenty-six-year-old Retinger onto the international stage. He later claimed that his “amazing adventures” put him immediately good terms with Berthelot and was well regarded by both the British and the French who accepted him as “the unofficial representative of Polish interests.”⁶⁶ His Galician origins and long residence in France had borne fruit.

During World War I, Retinger first became involved with Polish-Jewish relations. Although details are scanty, Retinger at this time befriended leaders of the international Zionist community, including Chaim Weizman, Władimir Żabotyński, and especially Nahum Sokołow. Retinger criticized Roman Dmowski, the powerful leader of the Polish nationalist faction for his anti-Semitic views, which the latter dismissed.⁶⁷ Closely associated with Retinger’s views regarding European unity, and a perennial problem for Poland, was the Jewish question. Retinger discussed the issue with Jews in 1915–1916 and had the notion that the Church in Poland should act as the “protector of the Jews.” The details of this vision have not been recorded.⁶⁸ He also befriended Orthodox Jews from eastern Poland who, in Retinger’s words, “had tender feelings for Poland.” He also met a number of powerful American Jews: attorney Louis Marshall—who later played a prominent role at the Paris Peace Conference, Rabbi Stephen Wise, professor Magnus, and Judge Felix Frankfurter. This aspect of Retinger’s activities seems largely to have convinced his enemies that Retinger was a Jew.⁶⁹ In any event, there is a bit of evidence to suggest that Retinger was later a member of the Polish section of B’nai B’rith.⁷⁰

Notes

- 1 This is Aleksander Janta’s argument as presented in his “Refleksje Retingerowskie: Czy był i czym był agentem?” *Wiadomości*, No. 1325 (August 22, 1971), 2. Hereafter referred to as “Refleksje 1.”
- 2 “Chapter I,” Retinger Papers, drawer 4, Biblioteka Polska w Londynie (hereafter BPL).
- 3 This topic has evoked much contention. Retinger’s non-Jewish origins are the rather fervent contention of his grandson; see Stanisław W. Dobrowolski, *Memuary pacyfisty* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1989), 10–11. When the author inquired of Jan Pomian, Retinger’s last secretary, whether there was any truth to the rumors that Retinger was of Jewish origin, he dismissed them categorically (Pomian Interview). However, Stanisław Mackiewicz, a journalist au courant with twentieth-century Polish political gossip, regards Retinger as being of Jewish origin, stating that his father was a convert and a “great patriot.” See his *Lata nadziei 17 września 1939 – 5 lipca 1945* (Warsaw: Głos, 1945). It is significant that he was regarded as not always sufficiently sensitive to Jewish issues in this capacity, and Israeli historian David Engel suggests that Retinger was not well-disposed towards Jews (see his *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 53, 67–68, 85, 238 n. 79. Retinger claimed he was of German ancestry and never mentioned any Jewish origins; see Retinger to Gedda, July 17, 1949, Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (hereafter

- ANK), s. 8064. Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski considers him a convert; see his *Z mojego okienka: Fakty i wrażenia z lat 1939–1945*. Vol. I (Łomnianki, 2013), 710.
- 4 Podgórski further argues that another branch of the family remained Jewish and retained the double ‘t’ in the spelling of their name; see Bogdan Podgórski, *Józef Retinger: Prywatny polityk* (Kraków: Universitas, 2013) 20.
 - 5 Retinger to Gedda, July 17, 1949, ANK, s. 8064.
 - 6 See the untitled French-language notes in Retinger Papers, Box 25a, BPL.
 - 7 Z Papierow Hana Hulewicz, “Wspomnienia o J. H. Retingerze,” ANK, s. 10371; cf. Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski, 1864–1945. Tom III: Okres 1939–1945* (London: Gryf, 1981), 148n.
 - 8 Zamoyski, 1853–1924, was scion of perhaps the most distinguished of all Polish families. Born in Paris, and a French citizen, he had also represented France abroad. Despite this, he was an ardent – and munificent – Polish patriot. Doubtless his profound French connections must have been an enormous aid to Retinger.
 - 9 [Zamoyski] to NN, July 13, 1918, Retinger Papers, BPL, Box 17, BPL. Zamoyski’s authorship is not certain, however.
 - 10 Retinger, “Count Władysław Zamoyski,” Drawer 4, 1, BPL.
 - 11 Grzegorz Witkowski, *Józef Retinger: Polski inicjator integracji europejskiej* (Warsaw: ZBLIŻENIE, 2000), 29; idem. *Ojcowie*, 36.
 - 12 See the letter, marked “strictment personnelle et confidentielle,” July 17, 1949 from Retinger to Luigi Gedda; Korespondencja Józefa Hieronima Retingera, s. 8064, ANK.
 - 13 There is useful material about his in Dobrowolski, *Memuary*, 11ff.
 - 14 See Longina Jakubowska, *Patrons of History: Nobility, Capital and Political Transitions in Poland* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
 - 15 Dobrowolski, *Memuary*, 17.
 - 16 The literature on this episode is considerable; see, for example, Jerzy Roszkowski, “Rola hr. W. Zamoyskiego w sporze o Morskie Oko na tle dzieje kształtowanie się granicy w Tatrach,” <http://www.zamoyski.pl>; “Spór o Morskie Oko,” <http://www.scizga.pl> both accessed on January 17, 2013.
 - 17 There is some controversy over the year Retinger received his doctorate; see Wapiński, “Retinger,” 148.
 - 18 Podgórski, *Retinger*, 36.
 - 19 Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, 16.
 - 20 The Cardinal, something of a social butterfly, was close to the General Maurice Gamelin, of later ill-fame for his incompetence during the Second World War.
 - 21 There is a brief biography “Anna Gould” in *Retratos de la Historia*,” on-line at <http://retratosdelahistoria.lacoctelera.net/post/2006/11/07/anna-gould>, accessed on February 28, 2012.
 - 22 Gide’s memoirs indicate that he met Retinger – whom he described as “charming” – in May of 1907. Soon afterwards he referred to him as “le petit.” Retinger was then nineteen. The meeting was via the neo-romantic artist Witold Wojtkiewicz; André Gide, *Journal, 1889–1939*. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951, 243, 477–478.
 - 23 This list is a compendium of names drawn from Pomian, *Retinger* (22–23), as well as Pieczewski; see the latter’s, *Działalność*, 67. Retinger referred to this period in his life as “Education in Paris,” see his essay in 1, BPL.
 - 24 Valuable comments about Retinger’s brief publishing career and the cultural milieu in which he functioned can be found in the memoirs of his contemporary, Waclaw Lednicki; see his *Pamiętniki, Tom II* (London: B. Świdorski, 1967), 68–73, 98–105, 148; cf. Podgórski, *Retinger*, 31.
 - 25 The RN was founded in Lwów in 1908 and was dominated by adherents of the right, despite its putatively all-Polish protestations. Its president was Tadeusz

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- Cieński (1856–1925). It established branches throughout Western Europe before 1914 and one in Chicago as well. See the correspondence between Retinger and Woźnicki of 1913–1914 about the establishment of Retinger’s Polish Bureau under RN auspices in akc. 4386, Woźnicki Papers [34/I], Biblioteka Polska w Paryżu (hereafter BPP).
- 26 Grzegorz Witkowski, *Józef Retinger: Polski inicjator integracji europejski* (Warsaw: Zbliżenie, 2000), 33. Witkowski here relies on the writings of Aleksander Janta.
- 27 Aleksander Janta, “Refleksje (3),” Janta says nothing about Retinger’s putative Jewish origins.
- 28 Retinger was, at the time a proponent of the nationalist Roman Dmowski, Witkowski, *Ojcowie*, 41; cf. Podgórski, *Retinger*, 37.
- 29 He later noted that Poles were freer under the Habsburgs, which was certainly true; see his “My First Steps in Practical Politics,” drawer 2, BPL.
- 30 Pieczewski, *Działalność*, 69. Podgórski argues that Zamoyski probably inspired and financed the book; Podgórski, *Retinger*, 38.
- 31 J. H. Retinger, *The Poles and Prussia*. No place of publication, nor publisher, nor date of publication is indicated. From other sources we know it was published in London in 1910 or shortly thereafter.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 4–5.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 5ff.
- 34 To the Germans they were – and remain – heroes.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 6–7.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 9–13.
- 40 Retinger’s emotional presentation and lurid details of the German brutality towards Polish parents and their children is an outrageous example of Berlin’s mistreatment of its Polish minority; see John J. Kulczycki, *School Strikes in Prussian Poland, 1901–1907*. Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1981.
- 41 Retinger, *Prussia*, 15.
- 42 Józef M. Retinger, *Polacy w cywilizacjach świata*, (Gdańsk: np, 1991), 11–16.
- 43 For a characterization of the office, see Zdzisław Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 581 n. 3; cf. Pomian, *Retinger*, 28–29.
- 44 “Sprawozdanie Polskiego Katolickiego Towarzystwa Dobroczyńności,” [1914] in akc. 4430, Archiwum Kazimierza Woźnicki, BPP
- 45 Retinger, *Conrad and his Contemporaries* (Miami: The American Institute of Polish Culture, 1981), 55ff; Olgierd Terlecki, *Kuzynek diabła* (Kraków: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988), 11. There are multiple editions of Terlecki’s brief yet important biography of Retinger. It was first published in 1971 in a four-part series in the Kraków periodical *Życie Literackie* (nos. 1015–1018) under the title “Wielka awantura.” These parts were collected into a book bearing the same title and published by the Polska Fundacja Kulturalna in London in 1978. The identical text was re-issued as *Barwne życie szarej eminencji* by the Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza (Kraków, 1981). Finally, an expanded edition, again *Kuzynek diabła* appeared in 1988. All references are in this work exclusively to the 1988 edition.
- 46 “My First Steps in Practical Politics,” Retinger Papers, 2, BPL; Conrad regarded Russia as a “monster,” Pomian, *Retinger*, 35.
- 47 Retinger was introduced to Conrad by Bennett; apparently in 1909; see Retinger, *Conrad and his Contemporaries*, 64; cf. Pomian, *Retinger*, 31.

- 48 The fullest account of the burgeoning Retinger-Conrad friendship is in the exhaustively documented work by Najder, *Conrad*, 381ff, cf. Retinger to Helena Żółtowska, December 15, 1948, folder S, Box 19, Retinger Papers, BPL.
- 49 Terlecki, *Kuzynek*, 11.
- 50 J. H. Stape “The Chronology of Conrad’s 1914 Visit to Poland,” *Polish Review*, 29 (1984), 65–71; John S. Lewis, “Conrad in 1914,” *The Polish Review*, 20 (1975), 217–222. Retinger was married in 1912 to Otylia (or Otolylia) Zubrzycka, from a prominent family. Her family is discussed in an untitled biography with a number of errors in the archives of the Warsaw Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (hereafter IPN), file BU 01222/593/D.
- 51 Podgórski, *Retinger*, 314n.
- 52 This very important document was published as “Memorandum on the Polish Question,” in Ludwik Krzyżanowski, “Joseph Conrad: Some Polish Documents,” in Krzyżanowski, ed., *Joseph Conrad: Centennial Essays* (New York: Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1960), 138–139. Regarding Conrad’s geopolitical views concerning Poland see the essay by Eloise Knapp Hay, “Reconstructing “East” and “West” in Conrad’s Eyes,” in Keith Carabine, ed., *Contexts for Conrad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 21–40; cf. Conrad to Marian Biliński, November 9, 1914, Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, eds. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad: 1912–1916*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 258–259.
- 53 Dobrowolski, *Memuary Pacyfisty*, 37.
- 54 Józef Bilczewski (1860–1923) was Metropolitan of Lwów and also a professor at and later rector of the Jan Kazimierz University of Lwów. He was recently canonized.
- 55 Józef Teodorowicz (1864–1938), Archbishop of the Armenian Rite Catholic Church, Metropolitan of Lwów, member of the Austrian *Herrenhaus*, and after World War I, a member of the Polish parliament.
- 56 Cieński, earlier president of the RN, also became president of the CKN, established in Lwów in late July, 1914. Like the RN under Cieński it was pro-Austrian initially and only later became decidedly pro-Russian due to its antipathy to the Germans.
- 57 Jan Dąbski (1880–1931) was a populist leader in Galicia. His party was associated with the CKN.
- 58 This passage, ostensibly from Retinger’s memoirs, is reprinted in Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, 40. In his essay “Trip to England, 1914,” he also mentions meeting with Prince Czartoryski in Galicia in 1914; see drawer 3, BPL.
- 59 Regarding the CKN see Jerzy Holzer and Jan Molenda, *Polska w czasie wojnie światowej* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1973), 433. Cieński was the main figure in the CKN and Retinger met with him while in Poland in July 1914. Shortly afterwards the CKN was absorbed into the larger Supreme National Committee (Naczelny Komitet Narodowy, NKN) which was also a complex coalition of factions-across the political spectrum. The NKN worked closely with the Habsburg authorities and was, obviously, Austrophile.
- 60 Regardless of whether he maintained any formal connections with the RN, by the end of 1914 it was decided that Retinger was untrustworthy. Although evidence is scanty, the probable reason for its disenchantment with Retinger was the obvious connections he had already demonstrated with the CKN; see [Maciej] Loret to [Stanisław Osada], December 21, 1914, Papiery Wacława Gąsiorowskiego, s. 15226/II, Ossolineum, Wrocław.
- 61 See his “Szara emincja” in Zbigniew Frasz and Włodzimierz Suleja, *Poczet agentów polskich* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1995), 155–164.
- 62 Retinger’s version of this episode strains credulity: He contends that he misled military authorities in Lwów into thinking that his voyage to the West was at

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the behest of “very important personages,” conveniently un-named. He used the same tactic in dealing with the Austrian General Staff in Vienna, and even with German ambassador Heinrich von Tschirsky, suggesting always that he had grave matters to attend in Western Europe, vouchsafed by the mighty; see Pomian *Retinger*, 40ff. Suleja judges Retinger’s account “remarkable at the very least” (see his “Szara eminencja,” 156.). Terlecki clearly regards Retinger’s account of these extraordinary travels as implausible and concludes: “Ultimately we really know nothing about this episode” (see his *Kuzynek*, 18). Wapiński only notes laconically that Retinger moved about “without great difficulties;” see his “Retinger,” 149.

63 Pomian, *Retinger*, 43.

64 Wapiński, *Retinger*,” 149. Cf. Retinger, “Journeys Across Countries at War (August 1914),” drawer 2, BPL.

65 This account of Retinger’s 1914 journey from Lwów to London is based largely on his memoirs as published in Pomian, *Pamiętniki*, 32–35. The detail concerning his possession of a Russian passport is from the files of the British Intelligence Service; see Ciechanowski, “Retinger w świetle raportów,” 201. For the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs facilitating his international travels, see the untitled document attributed to French Intelligence in BPP, Woźnicki Papers; cf. Retinger, “Trip to England, 1914,” sz. 3, BPL.

66 Undated, untitled document in Box 25a, folder “Życiorysy Józefa Retingera,” 2., Retinger Papers, BPL. Podgórski presents this extraordinary voyage of Retinger matter-of-factly; it is not convincing; see, Podgórski, *Retinger*, 41.

67 Pomian, *Retinger*, 54.

68 “Jewish Problem,” drawer 2, Retinger Papers, BPL, 12. There Retinger claimed he made representations to the Vatican in this regard.

69 Retinger “Jewish Problem,” in J. H. Retinger Papers, BPL, drawer no. 2.

70 Pieczewski, *Działalność*, 70.

2 World War I, 1914–1918

In Paris, Retinger made the rounds of the Polish émigré leadership and implored them to undertake no action which would associate the Poles with support of France in the war, but rather to adopt an entirely neutral disposition. This impassioned effort made a particularly negative impression on those Poles who were already attempting to raise Polish volunteers to join the French war effort.¹ Retinger regarded his first mission in wartime London to get Polish internees released – Russian Poles were regarded as Russians and not interned. It was this task which brought him to the British Prime Minister.²

Soon after arriving in London, Retinger was able to meet Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith with whom he apparently established an instantly warm relationship.³ This was an important step in what Retinger set as his goal: “penetrate into the inner circles of British politics.”⁴ Retinger was enormously impressed by Asquith whom he regarded, even long afterwards, as a great statesman.⁵ Retinger soon became a frequent guest at Asquith’s home, and met a number of the British political elite including both Winston Churchill – whom he never trusted – and Lord Kitchener.⁶ Retinger later provided a long list of his friends in key places in the British circles of power: Lady Maud Cunard – his link to Arthur James Balfour – Margot Asquith, Violet Asquith (later Lady Violet Bonham-Carter), the Duchess of Rutland, Lady Beresford, Lady Randolph Churchill, Lady Diana Manners – his link to Asquith: great ladies all, confirming the fact that for a man supposedly resembling a monkey, he had enormous appeal to females.⁷

Retinger’s bizarre status in England is well captured by Pomian:

Retinger’s situation was delicate. Success and even the possibility of acting – was due exclusively to the good will of people with whom he interacted. He was an Austrian subject, the citizen of an unfriendly state, beyond that, he tried to maintain contacts with a country controlled by the enemy from which also he received funds to undertake his activities. He was also an enemy of Russia, the ally of England. His letters of credence and his mandate could at any time placed in doubt both his countrymen, and his Western hosts. As it always is with émigrés in his sort of situation, he was taken and accepted as a Polish representative

only because, nobody better was around, and to the extent that it was decided to place faith in him. Were he to start to become weary, it would be easy to repudiate him as a pretentious sprig [młokos]. In this unclear situation, he had to act very carefully. He did not always do so which led him in the end to defeat.⁸

On August 31, 1914, Retinger called at the Foreign Office and presented a request, obviously from the Galician Poles (i.e. the CKN),⁹ whom he had met in Lwów, that the British government undertake to guarantee, in some unstated way, the recent Russian approach to the Poles (the August 14, 1914 Proclamation of the Russian Commander-in-Chief, the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich) which promised unification of partitioned Poland in exchange for Polish support for the Russian war effort.¹⁰

The Austrian Poles were at pains to inform the British that whereas the large forces of international politics had ranged them with the Central Powers, they were, nonetheless, anti-German, though they maintained an affectionate loyalty regarding Austria. This was, in its infancy, the logic behind Retinger's later efforts to help Austria desert the Berlin alliance and come to a separate peace. Retinger was, throughout, anti-German.

George Clerk of the Foreign Office understandably rejected this request as "out of the question," but Retinger's *démarche* evidently elicited considerable reflection. Clerk wanted to maintain the contact with Retinger against future possibilities; Sir Arthur Nicolson (permanent Under Secretary) was decidedly opposed. He refused to meet Retinger, and referred to the whole issue as "foolish." The final determination was by Foreign Secretary Edward Grey who ordered that Retinger not be "snubbed," but rather furnished with a sympathetic yet anodyne written assurance that the British government was "in thorough sympathy" with the Russian declaration and that public opinion had "welcomed cordially" the Russian step. Retinger was even allowed to publish the letter containing these assurances.¹¹ Grey, Retinger concluded, knew nothing of Poland.¹²

Having completed his first "diplomatic mission," Retinger now apparently made himself useful to his new friends. Some high officials of the British government, and circumstantial evidence suggests Asquith himself, decided to send Retinger to the United States (or make use of his already decided intention of going there¹³) in order to ascertain whether the Poles of America were seriously contemplating raising volunteers from among their compatriots to serve the cause of Britain and her allies.¹⁴ Retinger later claimed British initiative in the task a matter of controversy.¹⁵ Retinger also attributes to Asquith a more fundamental goal: to urge the Poles in the United States to be pro-Allied.¹⁶

In October, the Polish community in America sent the British, via Retinger, an offer of 100,000 trained men. Later he referred to his initial actions in America as contributing to Polonia's efforts to raise an army.¹⁷ The text is as follows:

The United Polish organizations of America, representing the whole of the three and one-half million Poles in the United States, have authorized me to offer to His British Majesty's Government and to the Government of France a body of armed Polish volunteers to serve, at their own risk and responsibility, with the Allies in the Western seat of war.

They are able immediately to supply 12,000 trained and fully equipped officers and men, and in the course of a very few weeks to increase this number to at least the strength of an army corps [!]. All these men have completed a course of military training in native organizations (one of which the 'Sokol,' numbered a few months ago no less than 30,000 drilled men).

In view of the active sympathy now manifested by the Poles in America with the common cause of the Allies are making on behalf of civilization, humanity, and the rights of oppressed nations, and in view of their own national aspirations, I am convinced that if the Governments of Great Britain and France are able to avail themselves of this offer, the Allies will have no more loyal and enthusiastic, enduring and courageous soldiers than the members of this potential Polish legion.¹⁸

The Foreign Office, after a plethora of minutes, decided to [probably the work of Arthur Nicolson] "give this very persistent gentleman a most civil refusal."¹⁹

Nonetheless, Retinger left for America. He arrived in the United States in November, 1914 letting it be known that he had access to the British government.²⁰ He journeyed from New York to Chicago, met with the major Polish leadership in the United States, and left them totally bewildered. His behavior oscillated between hauteur, with frequent claims of representing powerful forces, and virtual pan-handling as he asked his hosts to pay his hotel bills. In Chicago, Retinger explained that he had "received oral instruction from the English war ministry to come to the States in order personally to investigate the readiness of the local Poles to participate in the war."²¹ Apparently the existence of a large Polish community in the United States was one of the arguments Retinger used to alert the British to the possible importance of the Poles, a people about which the British were "singularly unenlightened."²² It was also useful that raising a Polonia legion was dear to the heart of Conrad.²³

However, given American neutrality, the British were unable to accept any offers from the American Poles to volunteer. Hence, Retinger had nothing to say and there was a no purpose in his coming. The American Poles were stunned by Retinger's behavior, decided he was not to be trusted, and regarded the whole episode as incomprehensible.²⁴ An intriguing and characteristic sidelight of Retinger's brief mission was his devoted effort to meet as many "eminent Americans" as possible, to which end he carried letters of introduction.²⁵ The American Poles thought that Retinger intended to use these introductions to help create a pro-Polish lobby in the United