



**Adam Michnik, Agnieszka Marczyk, eds..** *Against Anti-Semitism: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Polish Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 424 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-062451-4.

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The original Polish edition of this anthology comprises of three volumes of approximately nine hundred pages each and contains over three hundred newspaper articles, editorials, literary pieces, poems, essays, and scholarly studies (*Przeciwnicy antysemityzmowi 1936-2009*, 2010). I do not envy the editors their difficult task of narrowing this selection down. As a result of Adam Michnik's and Agnieszka Marczyk's effort, we have received a collection of twenty-two essays by Polish intellectuals who not only condemned anti-Semitism but also analyzed its nature, appeal, and durability in the Polish context. Most of the essays presented in the volume appear for the first time in English and it is in making this material accessible for the English-speaking readers that the greatest value of the anthology lies. Its contents will prove of interest for scholars and students of Polish history and Polish-Jewish relations as well as anti-Semitism.

The volume, the editors note, "is an experiment in cultural transposition—an attempt to bring a long-standing internal Polish debate to audiences beyond Poland" (p. xiv). Recognizing difficulties that a reader unfamiliar with Polish historical and cultural context might encounter while reading the essays, the editors decided to precede the entire collection with a historical overview of Polish-Jewish relations from the nineteenth centu-

ry onward. Additionally, each essay is accompanied by a short note about the author and the text itself as well as helpful endnotes.

The introduction, as might be expected, is too short to do justice to the complexity of the topic. It does, however, contain enough information and references to the literature on the topic to serve as a useful primer. An aspect of it that I find problematic is the implicitly posited symmetry between anti-Semitism and its condemnation in Polish culture: "The writers reproduced in this anthology condemn both antisemitism and silent acquiescence to it.... Individually, their voices were sometimes ... isolated," the editors admit. Treated collectively, however, "they constitute an important component of Polish history—one that is little known beyond Poland's borders. The goal of this anthology is to bring their voices together and show that resisting anti-Semitism is as deeply rooted in Polish culture as antisemitism itself" (p. xiii). That the protest against anti-Semitism constitutes a component of Polish history or, in other words, that there were Poles who considered anti-Semitism deplorable for a variety of reasons, is uncontroversial. But in what sense was this refusal to condone anti-Semitism important? Was it a reflection of a sentiment widely shared in Polish society? Did it have a profound and long-lasting influence on Polish culture? Is resisting anti-

Semitism really as deeply rooted in Polish culture as anti-Semitism itself? This question is open for debate and I do not believe it can be settled by enumerating examples of anti-Semitism on the one hand and of its rejection on the other.

What I see as the editors' implicit desire to present anti-Semitism as balanced out by opposite attitudes is reflected also in the following passage: "Without access—or even potential access—to enough sources to warrant definitive statistical conclusions about the relative frequency of various behaviors of Poles toward Jews during the Shoah, we are left with trends revealed by the ongoing analyses of available sources. And the emerging picture suggests that there were three general types of behavior. There was a silent and passive majority. There was a small minority of those who took advantage of the Holocaust and perpetrated violence.... And, finally, there was also a small minority of Poles who overcame fear and the surrounding abyss of violence and offered help" (p. xxviii). These words are offered as the conclusion of the "Poles and Jews during the Holocaust" section of the introduction. The preceding paragraphs contain references to the works of Jan Gross, Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, and Dariusz Libionka, whose research strongly suggests that one of those "small minorities" was considerably larger than the other. And yet the conclusion of the section reverts to the image of wartime Polish-Jewish relations that this very research has shown to be problematic.

I do not believe the anthology achieves its declared goal of showing that anti-Semitism and its rejection are equally ingrained in Polish culture and history. It presents writings of Polish intellectuals who had the courage to confront anti-Semitism they saw as pernicious and abhorrent. Judging by how easily the demons of anti-Semitism have been awakened in Poland in the recent months, it appears that their words were, lamentably, falling on deaf ears.

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