Against Anti-Semitism: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Polish Writings. Ed. Adam Michnik and Agnieszka Marczyk. Trans. Agnieszka Marczyk. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xliii, 375 pp. Index. $34.95, hard bound.

Anti-Semitism in Poland, Against and Beyond

Against Anti-Semitism: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Polish Writings, edited by Adam Michnik and Agnieszka Marczyk, is an anthology of writings by Polish journalists and essayists that belongs on the shelf of any student of Poland's history, politics, or literature. This collection brings together twenty-two essays ranging from the 1920s through to 2009, each a singular voice addressing some aspect of antisemitism in Poland. Several of these pieces are well-known but worth re-reading, such as Jan Błonski's "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto." Others have never before been available in English: Stanisław Ossowski's response to the Kielce pogrom, written in 1946; Leszek Kołakowski's contribution to the 1956 debates on Stalinism; Tadeusz Mazowiecki on "The Anti-Semitism of Kind and Gentle People." Each essay is introduced with a short contextual note on the author's role in Poland's intellectual milieu at the time of writing. Thus, *Against Anti-Semitism* is, among other things, a collection of primary sources, from which the instructor or researcher can pull to add depth to any discussion of the twentieth century in eastern Europe. Many of the post-1990 pieces (an essay on Jedwabne is included, although no writing by Jan Gross) were originally published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*; hence, the crucial role of Adam Michnik in bringing this project to fruition. The collection is prefaced by a lengthy introduction by the editors synthesizing Polish-Jewish relations from pre-war to postwar to post-communism. There is plenty to take issue with in this section (and it does have some strengths), however, one does not read an anthology for the introduction, so the less said here the better.

Reading across the span of the twentieth century, one is immediately struck by the enduring persistence of systematic antisemitism in Poland. As most readers of *Slavic Review* are aware, an extensive scholarly literature has developed recently documenting the specific forms it has taken throughout Polish history. This scholarship focuses mostly on violence. Drawing on local archives and local settings, emphasizing "ordinary" people, this work includes William Hagen on spontaneous and ethnically-tinged brutality targeting Jews in the context of the Soviet-Polish War; Jan Grabowski on local communities pursuing, torturing, and turning in Jewish individuals during the Nazi occupation; Jan Gross on postwar plunder; Anna Bikont on Jedwabne; Barbara Engelking on the treatment of Jews seeking help in rural areas; and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir on postwar pogroms, just to name a few.[1] This work

1. William W. Hagen, *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1914–1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 2018); Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*

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demonstrates that the exploitation of Jewish communities at their most vulnerable became normalized at particular times and places. For example, Jan Gross shows that the theft of Jewish property during the Nazi occupation became a regularized "social practice" (77) in Poland, and continued after the war as villagers searched the sites of the Jewish genocide for lost or hidden objects. This "anti-Semitism as cultural practice" literature draws on shifts in historical methodology that treat local sources and testimonies (of both perpetrators and victims) as more valid than they have been viewed in the past. All of these books also show that "average" Poles treated Polish Jews with extreme and criminal brutalization in specific instances. These instances of torture, murder, and rape are interwoven with antisemitism in complex ways. In addition, the role of antisemitism has become more consistently integrated into treatments of Polish history that do not take it as their main topic, such as Robert Blobaum's study of Warsaw during the First World War.[2]

Most of the Polish scholarship on this topic treats antisemitism within the relationship between Jewish and ethnically Polish communities, that is, "Polish-Jewish relations."[3] The Holocaust in particular is an area of new research revising our views on familiar topics, such as Anna Bikont on the Catholic rescuer of Jewish children, Irene Sendler.[4] Drawing on an array of archival sources, Bikont reframes the tale of Sendler's actions from those of a singular hero to those of one person among many negotiating the complex landscape of welfare organizations moving Jewish adults and children from place to place in Warsaw, including the funding such a project required. Bikont's account demonstrates that anti-Semitic understandings of human beings shaped the conditions under which people who were not Jewish participated in the "rescue" undertaking. It influenced how donated money was distributed, how much money one could charge for hiding a person, and how those being hidden, moved, and hidden again made sense of their identities. As Bikont unravels Sendler's lived experience, it is clear that the antisemitism of others—expressed or anticipated—influenced how Sendler herself told her own story.

The essays in *Against Anti-Semitism* should be viewed in this frame of social relations. Almost all offer fully developed, sustained engagements with what they call "Polish anti-Semitism," a concept that varies by time period, context, and author. The essays are above all efforts at diagnosis, in the sense of effortful, intentional parsing out of the symptoms, on the one hand, and the source, on the other. While the form of the Polish essay is frequently meandering (for the non-Polish reader), most of the contributions in *Against Anti-Semitism*

(Bloomington, 2013); Jan Tomasz Gross with Irena Grudzińska Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (Oxford, 2012); Anna Bikont, *The Crime and the Silence: Confronting the Massacre of Jews in Wartime Jedwabne* (New York, 2015 [orig. 2004]); *Barbara Engelking, Such a Beautiful, Sunny Day* (Jerusalem, 2016); Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Pogrom Cries: Essays on Polish-Jewish History, 1939–1946* (Bern, 2017).

2. Robert Blobaum, *A Minor Apocalypse: Warsaw During the First World War* (Ithaca, 2017).

3. See, for example, Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, eds., *Następstwa Zagłady Żydów: Polska 1944–2010* (Lublin, 2011).

4. Anna Bikont, *Sendlerowa: W Ukrycie* (Warsaw, 2017).

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are lucid, precise, and enlivened by genuine emotion. The strongest is Jerzy Andrzejewski's, composed in 1946 prior to the Kielce pogrom. Andrzejewski finds antisemitism to be a stain on Polish national character, irrational, and limiting of Poland's moral capacities. It is "propaganda . . . defying good sense and fundamental human dignity" (99). He argues that antisemitism succeeds as a distancing tactic because it stems from a deep insecurity on the part of non-Jewish Poles regarding Jews, exacerbated by the war. This insecurity continues to be, postwar, a flaw in Poland's social landscape. The postwar period, Andrzejewski argues, offers an opportunity to remake this landscape newly committed to what he calls more than once "human values." For those who know Andrzejewski only through Czesław Miłosz's critique or through his novels, this piece adds complexity to his reputation. It is also an example of how some writers of the time translated wartime losses into a call for "solidarity" (111) in the form of Communist Party rule (although Andrzejewski does not directly refer to politics in this case).

A second contribution worth mentioning is Stanisław Ossowski's "With Kielce in the Background," published in 1946. As a sociologist, Ossowski begins with a broad conceptual sweep of the social and economic factors shaping Jews and gentiles in prewar Poland and the radicalizing impact of World War II. The essay takes a sudden turn when he insists that such an analysis cannot explain the Kielce pogrom. "A far-sighted man . . . would have to be a cynic of the highest order, or a psychopathic misanthrope, to predict that—in liberated Poland—there would be a tendency to continue the Nazi system of murder," which is how he characterizes the Kielce events (119). Ossowski then engages with a number of contemporary arguments and stances on antisemitism, referring to politics, culture, psychology, and history with clarity and persuasiveness. He refuses to rationalize antisemitism. He dismantles any such attempt by others. He keeps the pogrom outside of the explicable, in the realms of "barbarity," superstition, and criminality, yet firmly inside the "scope of our responsibility" (126). Ossowski brings his argumentation, at the end, into line with the coming political realities for Poland—socialism—but unlike Zagajewski this is more of a grace note than an animating spirit.

The overall effect of a slower, more careful reading of this anthology is a grasp of antisemitism in its multidimensionality: as a specifically Polish disease emerging from Poland's experience; as a phenomenon of central and eastern Europe, tied to imperialism and war, with violent, ultimately genocidal, effects; and as an ideological temptation for politicians and communities across the globe in the past and present. In other words, one finds persuasive insights in *Against Anti-Semitism* regarding each of these facets of the phenomenon. In addition to what is discussed above, the anthology's essayists include arguments identifying the root of antisemitism as, variously, poverty and the absence of any route forward economically; social gullibility and the Nazi "orchestration of rage" (Michał Borwicz); psychological responses of inferiority; politicized notions about citizenship rights; the machinations of political cliques; and the lack of a truly Polish morality or a truly moral Polishness, among others.

The sources of antisemitism have almost nothing to do with Jews—the choices, beliefs, and lived experience of those identifying as Jewish. But can

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we say they stem from some kind of distortion in Polish-Jewish relations? In gentile-Jewish relations? Or are its sources purely a non-Jewish, Polish problem, that is, a problem rooted in the anti-Semite and those tolerating her presence? These questions are complicated by the compelling Jewish voices that have taken part in the debate. Julian Tuwim, the Polish-Jewish poet, in this collection states unequivocally, "I am a Pole because I like it that way." His contribution is distinct in this volume because of his powerful claim of a Polish "I" in this formulation, and then an equally powerful Jewish "we," to bring the Jewish wartime experience into the Polish experience. "We, the Polish Jews . . . We, the truth of the graves . . . We, asphyxiated in gas chambers . . . We are a shriek of pain . . . so prolonged that the most distant ages will hear it" (66–67). The essay provides the most vivid Holocaust imagery in the collection, through prose and poetry; the most immediate and personal tone; and the most urgent call for overcoming antisemitism in Poland. Mieczysław Jastrun, less well-known than Tuwim but also a Jewish poet committed to Poland, is less poetic and more direct in his 1947 essay: the continuation of antisemitism in Poland after the war "is no less horrible than that of the mass-scale Nazi crime" (86).

Yet there are limits to the understanding of antisemitism as a problem plaguing a relationship between two communities. One way to approach these limits is by juxtaposing *Against Anti-Semitism* with Rachel Feldhay Brenner's 2014 book, *The Ethics of Witnessing: The Holocaust in Polish Writers' Diaries from Warsaw, 1939–1945*, which analyzes the diaries of five prominent Christian Warsaw writers as they respond from inside the city to the experiences of Poland's Jewish population.[5] Feldhay Brenner's subjects are Stanisław Rembek, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Maria Dabrowska, Zofia Nałkowska, and Aurelia Wyleżyńska. These five voices were considered leading lights in the Polish literary universe. One expects much from them. What Feldhay Brenner discovers across these texts is a struggle to sustain a belief in a cohesive moral universe that accommodated both universal humanistic values and Polish nationhood. These diarists thought of themselves and of prewar independent Poland as having a core Enlightenment-inspired capacity for empathy with any individual. They had immersed themselves in European humanist thinking. They were politically active in resisting the Nazi occupation and Wyleżyńska worked directly to protect Jews. But the tools with which they had equipped themselves could not help them sustain genuine empathy with the Jewish individuals and families trapped in the ghetto. In the diaries cited by Feldhay Brenner, we see evasion, distancing, and revulsion at the degraded state of Jews on the street, paralysis and pity. To take just one example of many, Rembek writes in 1941 that "streets seem empty without Jews, but their absence has had a positive impact . . ." (148). Here Feldhay Brenner asks us to notice the ambivalence in the formulation. The repetition of the anti-Semitic cliché that Jewish economic activity undermined Poland's prosperity is stated in the second clause, but first Rembek takes note of the emptiness of public life resulting from Nazi regulations. Empathy is attempted but retreats.

5. Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *The Ethics of Witnessing: The Holocaust in Polish Writers' Diaries from Warsaw, 1939–1945* (Evanston, 2014).

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Others are paralyzed by despair. Nałkowska writes, of herself: "All the efforts to bear it, not to go insane, to somehow sustain oneself in the midst of this horror evoke guilt" (8).

Rembek's and Nałkowska's quotes above are just two of many instances assembled in the text to build a compelling case that these writers could not sustain a commitment to ethical witnessing during the Holocaust. Such witnessing, in Feldhay Brenner's view, is fundamentally receptive. It is the acknowledgement of another's experience as if it could be one's own, such that an open pathway of identification is created. The five diarists have the tools to name what they see but not to "receive" it, to engage with it ethically. One possible reading of *The Ethics of Witnessing* is that the dehumanizing nature of the Nazi project is the crucial factor that disabled these (and other) potential witnesses.[6] Another interpretation focuses instead on the failure of European humanist values to merge with the imagined Polish nation. This view can be expanded by returning to Jan Błoński's well known essay, "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto," reprinted in *Against Anti-Semitism*. Similarly concerned with the ethics of witnessing, Błoński writes that "we [Poles] had the greatest moral responsibility toward the Jewish people" (284) but ultimately chose not to include Jews inside the community to be defended to the death. In either case, antisemitism is not a function of Polish-Jewish relations but instead a symptom of a disabled Christian gaze.

All of the texts listed above, in their efforts to lay bare the specific distortions that antisemitism takes, the specific failures of a society to protect its intimate neighbors, and the continuation of anti-Jewish attitudes—at times murderous—into the postwar period and then into the twenty-first century, testify to the difficulty in talking one's way out of antisemitism. Neither historical truth-telling nor persuasive argumentation, while valuable in and of themselves for many reasons, can cure this disease. We might at this point consider that the patterns of representation embedded in the discourses constituting "Polish-Jewish relations" cannot provide a pathway out of a moral universe that collapses when faced with the challenge of receiving Jews and Jewishness. This is the concern of the somewhat overlooked edited volume by Phyllis Lassner and Lara Trubowitz, *Antisemitism and Philosemitism in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries*.[7] For the authors in this volume, which include Sara Horowitz and Sander Gilman, ". . . antisemitism and philosemitism are best understood as expressions of a common, albeit complex tendency to treat Jewishness, wittingly or not, as if it were always and only a representation" (8). Alongside books by Carol Zemel (*Looking Jewish*) and Lisa Silverman (*Becoming Austrians*), Lassner and Trubowitz's contributors problematize commonly used representational strategies that delineate the possibilities for

6. This is Peter Fritschke's interpretation. See "The Ethics of Witnessing: The Holocaust in Polish Writers' Diaries from Warsaw, 1939–1945 by Rachel Feldhay Brenner," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2015): 510–11.

7. Phyllis Lassner and Lara Trubowitz, eds. *Antisemitism and Philosemitism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: Representing Jews, Jewishness, and Modern Culture* (Newark, DE, 2008).

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Jewish subjectivity, hoping to open up a space for a Jewish presence not dictated by externally produced categories of identity or behavior.[8]

Thus, antisemitism does not require Jews, but it does require representations of Jews. For these reasons, opponents of antisemitism at times resort to counter-representations, which ends up as a debate with a winner on technical points (historical truth) but with no conversions on the part of the losers. The essayists in *Against Anti-Semitism* are sufficiently outraged at their fellow citizens, but the latter are unmoved by the emotional, moral, or aesthetic criticisms of their behavior. *Against Anti-Semitism* cannot take us *beyond* antisemitism. One possibility that public intellectuals, scholars and students may consider is to pursue a deeper engagement with the interiority of the Jewish experience in Poland, such that it stands on its own terms, delinked from Christianity, and to explore methods of bringing this interiority into an encounter with Christianized communities that does not assign "otherness" to either.

There is no essential "Jewish experience," of course. We might say, however, that there are touchstones for how Judaism orders the spiritual and material world that individuals may adhere to; reject, revise, but provide the ground against which Jewishness makes itself known on its own terms. Whatever this ground is in its specificity, it is not a subset of the Christian ordering of the (moral, epistemological, material) world, nor does it depend on or refer to the Christian ordering of the world. Historically speaking, Jewish communities in Europe and Russia have had to grapple with the tensions that emerge from these co-existing paradigms; often it has seemed that empires, states, local groups and individuals have interpreted Christianity as delivering to them the right to keep Jews vulnerable, fearful, and excluded. Why has antisemitism persisted in so many settings, taken so many forms, if there has not been, at its heart, a core of anti-Judaism? This is the concern of Jerzy Jedlicky in his 2009 contribution in *Against Anti-Semitism*. He notes the rise of Polish-Jewish relations as a topic of scholarship in Poland, but finds that the accumulation of historical evidence on Polish antisemitism does not translate into changes in popular attitudes. This was evident in the reaction to Jan Gross's *Neighbors*. He writes: "Yet the greater our ability to learn—should we wish to—about the events of the past century, and the more thorough our studies, the more helpless we feel in the face of our knowledge" (349). By "helpless" Jedlicky means that scholars cannot alter the defensiveness and anti-Semitic stances that politicians and social groups resort to in response to "tomes" of scholarship. Antisemitism, he fears, has become a "cultural norm." Its power lies not in social or political conditions (poverty, ideology, Nazi occupations) but something that must be deeper, given its persistence. The reader is left with the suggestion that Christian anti-Judaism continues to shape all discourse on difference in Poland.

Maria Janion's essay in *Against Anti-Semitism* narrows in on the dehumanizing consequences of positioning Jewish experience within a Polish

8. Carol Zemel, *Looking Jewish: Visual Culture and Modern Diaspora* (Bloomington, 2015); Lisa Silverman, *Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture Between the World Wars* (Oxford, 2012).

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Catholic frame when she explores the problem of underground Polish commentary on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: Jewish ghetto fighters were admired for their martyrdom, which paradoxically allowed condemnation of "other," passive Jewish victims of Nazi brutality. She cites Home Army bulletins, which praise Jewish "death on the battlefield [which] can bring new values into the life of the Jewish people, giving the Jewish ordeal in Poland the glory of armed struggle . . ." (331). Janion calls the practice of posing particularly Polish experiences and values (here, death on behalf of a nation) as universal and then judging Jewish actions from this stance "ethical arrogance," which is for her the root of antisemitism. Waldemar Kuczyński's emotional essay on the Jedwabne pogrom is aligned with Janion's impulse. Kuczyński deplores the inability of Poles to imagine themselves in the place of Jews. He calls out: "Let us free our imagination from its shackles, from the certainty that blocks it—the certainty that we, Poles, would have been incapable of something like this" (345). Both Janion and Kuczyński take the first steps toward dislodging Christianity in its Polish manifestation from its universalist position, but we can also see the ambivalences of representation in their conceptualization of "Pole" and "Jew." (These pieces can be productively contrasted with those by Jerzy Turowicz and Henryk Muszyński, who find the problem with antisemitism is that it mars genuine Catholicism.)

One step forward may be to revisit some of the outstanding recent studies of Jewish communities, in Poland specifically and east Europe and Russia generally, that set aside the "Polish versus Jewish" frame and instead detail the dynamics of cultural change as people and institutions living as Jews responded to rapidly changing political environments. In addition to Antony Polonsky's unparalleled *Polin* series, several recent works provide deeply contextualized, precise and in-depth documentation of how Jewish individuals, families and communities shaped the territory they lived in, even when under extraordinary duress. These include Yohanin Petrovsky-Shtern's study of how productive tensions among Jews, Polish landowners, and Russian authorities allowed a vibrant "shtetl" to emerge in the early 1800s; Evgeny Finkel's investigation of the range of strategic choices made by Jews under Nazi occupation; Joanna Michlic's edited collection on how the Nazi occupation altered the structure of the Jewish family; and Elissa Bemporad's book on Soviet-Jewish identity in Belarus.[9] These works seek to trace the processes by which options for those identifying (and identified) as Jewish were circumscribed but also co-produced by the interaction of Jewishness with those seeking to shape, tame, or erase it.

Thus, we have ample opportunities to move forward in understanding how the encounter between the Jewish and the Christian universes affected Judaism, Jewishness, and Jews. It seems as if we are in a scholarly moment in which there is a proliferation of studies on how Jewish identity has been lived

9. Yohanin Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe* (Princeton, 2013); Evgeny Finkel, *Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival During the Holocaust* (Princeton, 2017); Joanna Michlic, ed., *Jewish Families in Europe, 1939—Present: History, Representation, and Memory* (Waltham, Mass., 2017); Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington, 2013).

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out, but few on whether "Christianity" constitutes an identity at all. Ultimately, what remains to be explored is the importance of Judaism for the development of Christianity as the latter has manifested itself in east European contexts. In other words, how has Christianity as it appears in Poland been shaped by its encounter with other logics, other worlds of faith and reason? Can we make Christianity the object of inquiry, not just the unnamed ground? Here there may be some potential cross-disciplinary connections with historical theology, such as the work of David Nirenberg on how Christianity had to accommodate "other" orderings of the world in the Middle East and Daniel Boyarin on how Judaism perceived early Christianity.[10]

While these questions appear to be out of the orbit of "Slavic Studies," certainly antisemitism itself is not, and its urgency is once again pressing. Many readers of this journal stand appalled, often speechless, at what is happening in our countries of citizenship or origin, as outraged as were the Polish intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s, casting out for some kind of way forward.

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10. David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Judaism and Islam in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago, 2014); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2004).

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