

support the Whites against the Reds. The author waves off any competition to his hero's pedestal, such as General Tadeusz Jordan Rozwadowski. He also passes over in silence the suicide of Piłsudski's two jilted girlfriends and the murder of General Włodzimierz Zagórski by the marshal's death squad. Piłsudski's trip to Japan is seen as a "diplomatic mission," even though his contacts were military intelligence officers. A useful critique of Piłsudski's eulogists can be found in Ryszard Świątek's *Lodowa ściana: Sekrety polityki Józefa Piłsudskiego, 1904-1918* (Kraków: Platan, 1998). Reading Heatherington I was reminded of one of my teachers at Columbia, Joseph Rothschild. The professor was also fond of the *Komendant* and no amount of argument to the contrary could change that. Piłsudski did have a magnetic personality, volcanically overwhelming mere mortals with his power, courage, and charisma.

*Unvanquished* is a delight for the layman. Let me qualify this. By layman, I do not simply mean an average English-speaking enthusiast who will find this particular portrait of Piłsudski enchanting and exciting and who will gladly lend his ear to the triumphs and tragedies of Poland's past; by layman I mean an average historian or other social scientist at an American university. This applies to most Europeanists, including many so called "Eastern European experts." Hetherington deserves much credit for overcoming layers of cultural prejudice against Poland and presenting before the American people Józef Piłsudski, his times, his compatriots, and his nation without the customary uninformed venom. *Unvanquished* is a stupendous improvement over the prevalent acute ignorance afflicting America's relation to Poland's history. Once again, Piłsudski has been blessed posthumously by Lady Luck. ▲

## Portraits in Literature

### The Jews of Poland

An Anthology

**Compiled, edited and introduction by Hava Bromberg Ben-Zvi.** London and Portland, OR: Valentine Mitchell, in association with The European Jewish Publication Society, 2011. xxxix + 331 pages. Bibliography and Glossary. ISBN 978 0 85303 873 3. Cloth.

**Bożena Shallcross**

In recent years publishers are beginning to pay more attention to English-language anthologies of Jewish Polish literature as the publications of such anthologies are increasing in number. The latest is Hava Bromberg Ben-Zvi's compilation. Besides the goal stated in her introduction, the editor's aim is clear and can be reconstructed from the trajectory inscribed in the table of contents. The book is intended to narrate the history of the Jewish people in Polish lands. However, the editor decided to skip premodern representation of Jews in Polish literature. Her selection thus begins with nineteenth-century realist writers such as Sholem Asch and, on the Polish side, the Polish Positivists. This first part is titled "Our World of Yesterday." The largest and central to the anthology is the second part titled "Years of Flame and Fury." It deals with the Second World War and the Holocaust. The third and last part, tellingly entitled "To Live Again," narrates postwar emigration of Polish Jews to America and their return to their homeland in the Middle East. Thus the literary history of Polish Jewry is compacted into, more or less, 150 years of modernity. It receives an obvious linearity informed by the Diaspora, the pivotal events brought upon the Jews during the Shoah, the postwar exodus from Poland, and the subsequent rebirth of the Jewish nation. This works under the guiding assumption that the reader can extract the rest from the introduction, but above all it serves to speak of history in a nearly mythologizing tone.

Instead of dwelling on the shortcoming (and its consequences) of limiting oneself to only 150 years—the excluded works of Polish Romantic literature would have enriched the anthology greatly—I feel obliged to address the most striking and positive aspect of Bromberg Ben-Zvi's anthology: her inclusion of little-known and unknown voices. It appears that this strategy is meant to complement two previously published anthologies: Harold B. Segel's *Stranger in Our Midst: Images of the Jew in Polish Literature* and Antony Polonsky's and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska's *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland*. Both books have their own merits and both offer selections from the canonical literature or from the recent literary production that is currently entering the canon. Bromberg Ben-Zvi's perspective is more inclusive as she includes texts written by such women as little-known personalities Vlada Meed, Anna Cwiakowska, and many others. The effect is definitely eclectic and, occasionally, surprising since the texts are not limited to literary works (in spite of the title, which so suggests), but include testimonies and essays. The

editor's sources are possibly other anthologies, some of them forgotten or at least not properly acknowledged.

It should be pointed out that the Polish titles contain numerous errors. As for the literary portrayals, the editor attempts to give a balanced view of the historical development of Ashkenazi Jews in Polish lands. This is not an anthology prepared by a scholar and, I daresay, it is meant not for scholars but rather for those readers who are interested in the trials and tribulations experienced by Polish Jews, as well as those who experience nostalgia for old times or have other personal or intellectual reasons to be interested in the subject. What I find particularly valuable about the anthology is the image of the editor herself as projected through her selections, her enthusiasm for historical memory, and her ability to reassemble into a new and engrossing whole individual voices scattered throughout the history of the Ashkenazis in Poland. ▲

## The Auschwitz Volunteer

Beyond Bravery

James E. Reid

**By Captain Witold Pilecki. Translated by Jarek Garliński. Introduction by Norman Davies. Foreword by Rabbi Michael Schudrich,** Chief Rabbi of Poland. Includes illustrations, maps, numerous photographs, and an extensive index. Los Angeles, CA: Aquila Polonica Publishing [AquilaPolonica.com], (2012). 401 pages. ISBN 978-1-60772-010-2. Paper. \$34.95.

Poland was under German and Soviet occupation in 1940. At 6:00 a.m. on the morning of September 19, Polish Army captain Witold Pilecki walked down a Warsaw street alone and voluntarily joined a group of men who had been captured by the German *Schutzstaffel* (SS) for transfer to Auschwitz. The group was transported to this German concentration camp, where over one million people mostly Jewish, were murdered before the camp was liberated by Soviet forces in 1945.

Given what we know now about Auschwitz, Pilecki's choice may appear incredible but at that time little was known about the operation of Hitler's Final Solution that eventually killed six million Jews. What was known, for various reasons, did not lead to action by the Allies. Pilecki wanted to know what was taking place at Auschwitz and what had happened to two of his Polish Catholic comrades imprisoned there. He

eventually escaped from the camp to join the Polish Home Army and fight against the Soviet occupation of Poland at the end of the Second World War.

*The Auschwitz Volunteer* is a translation of the final version of his diary that covers the period from the day he volunteered for Auschwitz in 1940 until shortly after his escape from the camp in 1943. A literate and observant military officer, Pilecki was also possessed of a good memory. His diary is clear and precise, and it propels the narrative of his imprisonment forward with great force. In spite of its subject matter, the clarity of his writing makes the book difficult to put down. All of the details of the operation of Auschwitz that he observed are carefully recorded here. Did he hope that an accurate record would prevent genocides on this scale from occurring again? It did not, as Matthew White's recent book on atrocities has shown. We may hope that Pilecki's book helps to reduce the frequency of these horrors.

His diary has been published without any noticeable editing. By honoring Pilecki's words as written, Aquila Polonica Publishing places the reader inside Pilecki's thoughts and decisions as they unfold. We remain inside his descriptions of the blind luck that preserves one man's life and ends another's. An intrusive editor might have altered these lines that occur on one page in proximity:

they dug their metal talons into the disintegrating corpses.

In places small fountains of stinking pus spurted.

The beautiful horse chestnuts and apple trees bloomed (p.175).

Pilecki's commitment to vividly describe what he saw trumps any concern about his style. His book shares the characteristics of the need for truth with accounts of others who have survived intolerable and hellish situations. Some of these include Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, Gert Ledig's description of surviving the Allied saturation bombing of Germany in *Payback* (*Vergeltung*), and a number of accounts by survivors of the starvation, cannibalism, and deaths of 40,000,000 people under Mao Zedong's rule. Many of these accounts share the detailed recall and sharp description of histories that must be told and preserved, but Pilecki's account is remarkable for its extensive description and attention to small details. These qualities are evident throughout this final version of the diary that he wrote after his escape. He has the capacity to quickly judge whether a fellow inmate can