Preface

Polish literature is a literature of Jewish experience; indeed, it is the greatest European literature of Jewish experience, a proposition that seems unlikely at best. Widely regarded as notoriously anti-Semitic, the Poles seem hardly likely to have encompassed Jewish experience in their literature in any but the most negative terms. But this is not the case.

Poland has the richest Jewish history of any country in Europe, and one of the richest in the world. Jewish habitation, which can be traced back as early as the late tenth century, expanded in time to such an extent that on the eve of the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, Jews constituted over 10 percent of the total population of the country. But dry statistics can scarcely do justice to the impact of the Jewish presence on the Polish consciousness. Whatever their relations with the Poles, which changed as Polish fortunes changed in the course of history, whatever the estrangement of the majority of the Jews from mainstream Polish society, no significant Jewish emigration from Poland occurred until the twentieth century. Poland in fact had achieved its sizable Jewish community because of Jewish migration into the country in past centuries. And even with the increasing emigration to Palestine and elsewhere in the period between the two world wars, the Jewish community still numbered some three and a half million in 1939. Whatever preconceived notions may exist concerning the Poles' treatment of their huge Jewish population, the fact remains that that population, as indeed all of European Jewry, was targeted for extinction by the Germans, who invaded Poland in September 1939 and occupied the country until 1945. Polish-Jewish relations at their worst cannot even remotely approximate the magnitude, and horror, of that genocide.

This book is an attempt to look at Polish-Jewish relations from the perspective of Polish literature. Or to be more specific, from the viewpoint of that Polish imaginative literature written by Poles who were not, or are not, Jews. Assimilated Jews who spoke and wrote Polish began contributing to Polish literary culture only in the twentieth century, mainly in the interwar period. Their number includes some of the finest literary talents in the Polish language in this century—the poets Julian Tuwim and Aleksander Wat, the prose writers Bruno Schulz and Kazimierz Brandys, and the playwright and director Tadeusz Kantor—but so complete has been their identification with Polish culture, and so strong their desire to be regarded as *Polish* writers, that very few Jewish writers in Polish have turned to Jewish subjects or relations between Poles and Jews in their works. Ethnic Polish writers, however, free of the constraints and inhibitions of Jewish as-

simulation, and representative of the host culture, have attempted to come to grips with the huge but largely alien Jewish community in their midst for centuries.

In the virtual absence of a living Jewish culture in Poland today, historiography and other forms of recovery of the past collaborate on at least a documentary and iconographic reconstitution of the lost Jewish community. In so doing the Poles are attempting to recover a now extinct dimension of their own past. Their efforts are paralleled by the extraordinary scholarship on virtually every facet of the history of the Jews of Poland which has occurred in both the English-speaking world and Israel in recent years.

With this book I seek to make a modest contribution to the ever-growing literature on the Jews of Poland and the history of Polish-Jewish relations. Through a carefully selected collection of texts, the great majority from works of imaginative literature, Polish literature has been called upon to disclose its own shifting perspective on the Jewish community in Poland. The importance of literary culture in Poland and the immense presence of the Jew in that culture enhance the value of such an endeavor.

The huge body of texts available for an anthology of Polish literature on the Jew could easily fill more than a single volume. Limited, however, by practical considerations, I have tried to choose texts that are generally regarded as of major significance in Polish literary culture yet representative of Polish literary treatment of the Jew in any given period. For texts from the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries and for a cross-section of the anti-Semitic popular press of the period 1915–1929, I incorporated political and social commentary where it seemed useful to complement, or to compensate for a paucity of, appropriate imaginative literature.

Since it was impossible to include entire novels, novellas, plays, and lengthy poems, excerpts had to be chosen with an eye to their interest and typicality for the individual text. Each selection is preceded by its own concise introduction whose purpose is to provide basic information on the author and the text from which it comes so that the reader has a helpful frame of reference. In some instances, for example, novels, I have interpolated brief summaries of the narrative at key junctures.

No selection of texts such as this one, to say nothing of the process of excerpting itself, will please everyone familiar with the material. I would have much preferred to include whole texts, but that was out of the question if the book was to materialize in what I regard as its most useful form. I also deeply regret not being able to include every author I would have liked, from Asnyk to Żeromski; but the line had to be drawn somewhere. In view of the scope of the book, however, I regard omissions as regrettable but not grievous.

Since the purpose of the book is to illuminate non-Jewish Polish attitudes toward the Jews of Poland and patterns of Polish-Jewish relations through the ages, Polish writers of Jewish origin have been omitted. The sole exception is

Antoni Słonimski, who had an impressive Jewish pedigree but was raised as a Catholic. Perhaps that is why Słonimski felt more comfortable writing about Jews than a fellow writer of Jewish origin such as Julian Tuwim, at least until the Holocaust revived Tuwim's sense of Jewishness. Until the interwar period there was no significant Jewish contribution to Polish literary culture except for the literary and art criticism of the nineteenth-century writer Julian Klaczko, who began writing in Hebrew and then switched to Polish and French. When writers of Jewish origin began making their presence felt in Polish literature they rarely wrote on Jewish subjects, notwithstanding efforts by some scholars to identify patterns of subliminal and subtextual Jewishness, as, for example, in the case of Bruno Schulz. For obvious reasons, the impressive Yiddish literature that blossomed in interwar Poland was similarly excluded from consideration. The works of a Yiddish writer such as Isaac Bashevis Singer, which conjure up their own world of old Polish Jewry, make splendid reading for comparative purposes but have no integral place in the present anthology.

All translations from the Polish are my own except where indicated otherwise in the notes. Information on the original texts used for translations also appears in the notes. All Polish and Jewish names appear as they do in the original except for Jewish first names, which have been transliterated from the Polish spelling of the Yiddish and Hebrew originals. Thus Mosze appears as Moshe, Szloma as Shloma, Jankiel as Yankel, Cipa as Tsipa, and so on. For the sake of avoiding undue Anglicization and in order to preserve the Polish flavor of the original, Polish terms of address have been retained. Hence: *pan* ("mister," "sir"), *pani* ("mrs.," "madam"), *panna* ("miss"), *panowie* ("sirs," "gentlemen"). The sole exception is the character Irma Seidenman in Andrzej Szczypiorski's novel *Początek*. Since my excerpts have been taken from the published translation, *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman*, I thought it best not to change "Mrs. Seidenman" back into "Pani Seidenman." Finally, Yiddish and Hebrew terms occurring in Polish texts have generally been left as they appear in the originals as a way of showing the greater or lesser familiarity of the authors with these terms.

The concept for this book grew out of an international conference on Polish-Jewish relations through the ages which I organized in 1983 in my capacity as director of the Institute on East Central Europe of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. The lecture I delivered at the conference, on images of the Jew in Polish literature, was repeated subsequently on other public occasions in somewhat altered versions. The response to these lectures, and the comments I received at other forums, encouraged me to proceed with the anthology and to attempt to realize it in its present form.

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Stranger in Our Midst