



Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland before the Holocaust

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A collection of autobiographies written by young Polish Jews in the 1930s. The candid writings reveal not only the personal struggles, ambitions and dreams of 15 young authors, they also reveal with unprecedented intensity the nature of ordinary Jewish life in Poland in the years between the world wars. Unlike later writers for whom it became impossible to view this time except through lenses tinted by nostalgia or horror, these adolescent Jewish authors, unaware of the catastrophic future that awaited, tell their stories with a simple directness, describing their lives as they understood them at the time. The autobiographies presented in the volume are selected from hundreds that were written for contests in the 1930s sponsored by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, then based in Vilna. Nine male and six female authors write from a variety of circumstances that reflect the great diversity of Jewish life in interwar Poland; some of the writers are ardently secular and others, devoutly religious; some are impoverished and others come from the working class or middle class; some are highly-educated and others, self-taught. They come from big cities, small towns, and villages, and they are affiliated with Zionists, Bundists, communists, multiple political groups, or none. Often surprising in their opinions and feelings, the young people also display different personalities, writing styles, and views of life. Their voices speak now across the chasm of history, providing a moving testament from the vantage point of young Jews in the final years before the Holocaust.

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