



Men, Who Supported Emancipation

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book review

Maciej Duda

Emancypanci i emancypatorzy. Mężczyźni wspierający emancypację Polek w drugiej połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku (The Men Who Supported the Emancipation of Polish Women in the Second Half of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Centuries) Uniwersytet Szczeciński, Rozprawy I Studia T. (MLVII) 983, Szczecin 2017

Polish title of the book starts with two words taken from 19th century Polish, so old fashioned and forgotten, that the English translation omits those terms. “Emancypanci” or “emancypatorzy” might be presented in English as “emancipators” but such a translation loses gender aspect of those names, originally addressing male gender. After development of herstorian studies in Poland, observed from early nineties of previous century, after more and more studies on women’s emancipation published every year, and, finally, after popularisation main female heroines of early feminist movement, it is high time to focus on its male supporters. Maciej Duda is a grandson of one of them, he also represents contemporary supporters of women’s movement in Poland, not only by his research works.

In this book, Maciej Duda returns to his previous research experience. His brilliant book

on Polish war on gender (*Dogmat płci. Polska wojna z gender*, 2016) analysed public anti-gender discourse, emanation of anti-gender movement, powerful especially in Central and East Europe. Here, in *Emancypanci...*, he conducts analysis of past discourses, observed in journalistic texts, delivered statements, proclamation, and polemics, published in 19th and 20th century, in socio-cultural, historical and literary dissertations, he studies both the texts and activities of protagonists of his story, to show un-saved story of men-allies of Polish emancipation of women.

History of 19th century emancipation movement, 20th century first wave of feminism and contemporary experience of equality activism is not the story of women struggling alone against males – as Maciej Duda stated in an interview for “*Wysokie Obcasy*”, women’s supplement for main daily journal. “*Gazeta Wyborcza*” (from July 28th, 2018): the struggle

for equality had both male backers and female antagonists, not every 19th century woman was an emancipist or suffragist, not each contemporary woman is feminist. Therefore the knowledge of the past may be useful for understanding contemporary challenges for gender equality, and reconsideration of some myths and stereotypes concerning men's and women's involvement, making equality the objective for both men and women.

Maciej Duda not only describes main characters of his story, reminds their works, summarises past discussions. He also asks whom were those male emancipators from the view of cultural construction of masculinity, and finds out that they were also revolting against this construct, in fact, their involvement, and their biographies were also redefining traditional definitions of masculinity. Still, such a process may be also observed in contemporary equality movements, requiring new gender roles contract. Finally, while the historical debates might seem outdated or even backward from our perspective, the biographical dimension of the book is more vivid, and its final part devoted to Odo Bujwid and his autobiographical writings addressed to his late wife, Kazimiera Bujwidowa, an icon of Polish suffrage movement, make the best symbolic topping for the history of grandfathers of contemporary male feminists. 👁

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