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One of Many Untold Stories of Jewish Life in Polish Lands Before the Shoah

Abstract

The example of Czesława Rosenblat's (1877–1949) interesting biography is used to show alterations that could be made to the core exhibition of the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. The article seeks to answer the question why Jewish herstories are still not much commemorated at the Polin Museum, in spite of increasing research on women's stories in Polish and Jewish historiography. Rosenblat's biography serves as a means to show complex, non-obvious Polish-Jewish relations. The article reveals the fascinating biography of one of the Jewish women writers who chose Polish as their language of expression. Finally, it shows the complex intertwining of the Polish and Jewish cultures in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Keywords: Jewish literature, women's biographies, Polin Museum, feminism, women's emancipation movement, Polish-Jewish relationships.

In 1903, *Izraelita* (a Warsaw-based Jewish weekly in Polish aimed at the integration of Jews with Polish society) published a letter signed “Czesława En...”. The editors decided to introduce the letter and somehow explain their reasons for publishing it – a practice quite uncommon for the weekly. They emphasised the author's deep love for others and her “really feminine at-

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titude towards human destitution”, which had convinced them to publish the letter. So, what was in the letter that made the editors so cautious? It started with a statement that real compassion does not judge – this was a criticism of the admission rules at the maternity shelter for Jewish pregnant women and their babies.¹ In a tone showing her outrage, Czesława En... wrote:

In Warsaw, there are 7 shelters for pregnant women, 6 of them funded by the Warsaw Philanthropic Society [Warszawskie Towarzystwo Dobroczynności], that admit women regardless of their marital status, while the one and only institution dedicated to Jewish women admits only married women. ... A married woman, even the poorest one, such as a petty trader, labourer or middlewoman, always has her own digs. It is true, though, considering the situation of the Jewish proletariat, that the word “digs” must be used here as a description of a very small lodging. It is true that a poor Jewish married woman gives birth in the worst possible health conditions. Yet, she does not have to be afraid that she will be thrown out on the street. She may, for a day or two, lie on a shabby bed, being in some way cared for by her husband, mother or sister. So, the situation of an impoverished married woman is extremely sad, but the situation of an unmarried woman in labour in the same conditions is not sad, it is the abyss of misery, the utmost pits of misery. Most often abandoned by her family, mocked by her neighbours ... when she knocks on the door of the institution that has written the word “Compassion” on its banners, she is also rejected and told to go away. Fortunately, the Jewish hospital admits all women in labour regardless of their marital status, but it is far from the city centre and has a limited number of beds.² ... More than once have I heard: “It’s indecent that married women in labour are sharing the room with unmarried ones”. (Czesława En...,³ 1903, pp. 271–272)

The letter ends with the conclusion that, although many young Jewish women have children out of wedlock, rejection does not improve their situation nor help them. The shelter for Jewish pregnant women was funded by women, most of whom belonged to the same milieu as the editors of *Izraelita*. Thus, it might have been convenient for the editors to distance themselves from the letter, especially since, despite the introduction, Czesława En... was

¹ There were seven shelters for pregnant women in Warsaw at the time; only one was for Jewish women, but the other six shelters usually admitted women regardless of their faith (Bołdyrew & Sosnowska, 2015, p. 35).

² The Jewish hospital in Warsaw was built in 1894 in Czyste, which was incorporated into the city in 1916 (Groslik, 1895; Lis-Udrycka, 2012).

³ Unless indicated otherwise, all quotations have been translated by the author. I also keep the original spelling of Czesława’s surname in references to her published texts. In journals, her surname had the suffix *-owa* emphasising that she was a married woman. In my references to her I use the basic form of her surname without this suffix, because that was what she used and because I do not want to describe her through her marital status.

not just a reader – she was one of *Izraelita's* collaborators, writing under the penname of Czesław Halicz. Hence, it may have been that the letter was not in fact a real letter but a fake one, aimed at highlighting the problem of the elites' patronising attitude towards the lower classes.

However, the introduction to the letter is also interesting for other reasons. The editors supposedly suggest that the critical tone of the letter results from the fact that the author is a woman, i.e. someone allegedly more emotional and sensitive to human destitution than a man. Due to women's alleged higher emotionality, they were not allowed to study at universities in the Russian Empire. Additionally, Jewish women were not welcome in the world of Yiddish or Hebrew literature. They were only allowed to write poetry, as this was an emotional genre, unlike "rational" prose (Lisek, 2018, p. 173; Szymaniak, 2024, p. 12). Such an opinion is not surprising for the time of the letter, nor for the milieu gathered around the editorial board of *Izraelita*. Yet, it is rather surprising that such a way of thinking can still be found today. The way that Jewish life in Polish lands is commemorated at the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews is a good example of the still-present masculine approach to history and heritage (Krasuska, 2019, p. 249). I present the biography of Czesława En... against the background of commemoration practices of Jewish culture in Poland visible in the core exhibition at the Polin Museum in Warsaw. As Karolina Krasuska points out, Polin is "currently the largest Jewish museum in Europe" (Krasuska, 2019, p. 247), and it is the most important Jewish museum in Poland. Because Czesława En...'s literary texts have already been discussed by academics (Kołodziejska, 2014, 2016; Kołodziejska-Smagała & Antosik-Piela, 2018; Wydrycka, 2015), I will focus more on her biography and social activities, which clearly show a complex picture of Jewish identity in early 20th-century Central and Eastern Europe.

I argue that the core exhibition at the Polin Museum often presents, possibly unintentionally, male discourses on Jewish history and culture in Polish lands (see also Krasuska, 2019, p. 256). I present differences between the story of Jewish women presented to non-Polish speakers and to local people at the exhibition itself and on the museum website. On the example of the biography of Czesława En..., I want to show why and how commemorating such figures may enrich the discourse on the Jewish past and the complex image of Polish Jewry.

I use Czesława's biography to present the linguistic, cultural, religious, and social entanglements of Jewish lives at the beginning of the 20th century. A tendency to focus on microhistory rather than macrohistory is a well-established approach in historical studies (Gorbatcheva, 2012, pp. 83–85). It



is also the approach used by the founders of the Polin Museum. However, I argue that the less obvious herstories may bring new value to the core exhibition. The recently increasing interest in the history of Jewish women in various cultural contexts, both in global and local Jewish studies (Kołodziejska-Smagąła, 2022; Lisek, 2018; Manekin, 2020; Prokop-Janiec, 2010; Rybińska, 2024; Schachter, 2021; Seidman, 2019; Szymaniak, 2015; Taczyńska, 2024; Wobick-Segev, 2023),⁴ brings a growing awareness of the necessity for much wider inclusion of Jewish herstories into Jewish history. Yet, it seems that there is a tendency among researchers to separate Jewish and non-Jewish cultural influences in Jewish women's biographies. Writers, social activists and artists who chose non-Jewish languages of expression are thus often omitted in today's research, especially in the United States (Schachter, 2021). This is also visible in the Polin Museum core exhibition. I try to give the reasons for this.

The study is based on press articles, literary texts and archival materials as well as my correspondence with Czesława's great-grandchildren. Due to the fact that I follow Foucault's belief that culture is discursive (Foucault, 1972, pp. 135–140), I treat literary texts as discursive and as an epoch's documents rather than as artistic expression and vision. At the time of Czesława's literary activity, literature was treated as a source of knowledge and as a tool of reform (Kołodziejska, 2014, pp. 13, 50). The article is also based on my notes from my visit to the Polin Museum in February 2025 as well as on Polin's publication *Legacy of Polish Jews* (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Sztyma, 2021).

A Secondary School Girl Becomes a Writer

The complex personal experience of the author of the quoted letter is revealed in the various names that she used at different stages of her life. As Cypa Brandau, she appeared in 1895 in *Izraelita* with a note that she was one of a few Jewish girls who graduated from a secondary school (*gimnazjum*) for girls in Łódź ("Ze szkół", 1895, p. 207). Then, six years later, as the wife of well-known Warsaw gynaecologist Zygmunt Endelman (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1961, p. 395), she published her debut piece: "Ryfka Piszczyk", a short story about a poor Jewish woman in her thirties who leaves the Jewish quarter in Warsaw to buy some eggs from a farmer. It is the first time in her life that she

⁴ The turn towards herstories is well embedded in Polish historiography (Dobrowolska, 2020; Kałwa, 2001; Klich-Kluczevska, 2024). Even though historians of Jewish culture have included women studies in their research since the 1990s, it was in the first decade of the 21st century that gender and women studies became a field revealing new aspects of Jewish culture. Thus, they are now an inseparable part of Jewish studies around the world.



Figure 1. Czesława Endelman, photograph from an article in *Bluszcz*, dated 1911 (public domain; r., 1911).

encounters nature: trees, fields, flowers and birds singing. Overwhelmed by the beauty of this world, she falls asleep, to be awakened by a group of young Polish boys who destroy the eggs she bought from the farmer (Wodziński & Jagodzińska, 2015, pp. 362–365). Social awareness and compassion for those less privileged are the main characteristics of all of Czesława’s literary works (Kołodziejaska, 2016, p. 74). It may seem surprising that a Polish-Jewish weekly published a literary text written by an anonymous woman. Yet, it was not a coincidence but a practice well-rooted in the ideology of the milieu of acculturating Jews.

The Jewish community in Europe did not live in a cultural void, but was subjected to political, social, cultural and ideological changes. Thus, it was no coincidence that around the same time, European Jewish and non-Jewish intellectual elites felt a need to reform society, and they were influencing one another (Wodziński, in press).⁵ In the early 1860s in the Kingdom of Poland, the second generation of followers of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) felt, much more strongly than their predecessors, an “attachment

⁵ The recently finished *Two Enlightenments* project headed by Marcin Wodziński provides an in-depth discussion on the relationship between the Polish and Jewish enlightenment.

to the Polish language and the Polish *raison d'état*" (Wodziński, 2003/2005, p. 159). Jewish journals and literature in Polish originated as a result. *Izraelita*, which was published between 1866 and 1915, was the longest-running among them, and shaped the whole Jewish intelligentsia milieu in Polish lands. Despite the fact that it was based in Warsaw, it influenced Jewish intellectuals in other parts of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Kołodziejska, 2014, pp. 18–26). A characteristic feature of Jewish literature in Polish was the considerable number of women writers, who, from the very beginning, were active contributors to journals also as translators, correspondents and journalists (Kołodziejska-Smagala, 2022). Since women did not have easy access to Hebrew and Yiddish literature at the time (Cohen, 2005, pp. 58–59; Lisek, 2018, p. 173), and Polish 19th-century literature was an area of women's activity, writing in Polish became a natural choice for those Jewish women who wanted to express their voices. By the end of the century, the number of literary texts written in Polish by Jewish women was greater than those by men (Kołodziejska-Smagala, 2022, p. 111). Thus, the so-called "woman question" became an issue often discussed in *Izraelita* by women themselves, which at the time, when there were no journals for Jewish women, played an important role. Czesława Endelman's writings quickly started to appear more often in the weekly, leading her to become one of its permanent collaborators in 1910 (Kołodziejska, 2014, p. 19).

The aforementioned story of Ryfka Piszczyk does not only address the need for acculturating Jewish intellectual circles to get closer to ordinary Jewish people, to better understand their beliefs and folklore (Kołodziejska, 2014, p. 29), but it also reflects the discussion among physicians and social activists on the dreadful living conditions in Jewish quarters in big cities, and the role of women in reforming them. This may have been inspired by Czesława's personal life. Like other physicians, Zygmunt (or Samuel⁶) Endelman mingled with the same group of Jewish intellectuals as the *Izraelita* editors and collaborators.

The Polin Museum, which aims to present various fields of Jewish cultural activity, follows the mainstream approach to Jewish cultural history, classifying literary texts written in Polish as reflecting the idea of assimilation. However, I consider this to be a much more complex phenomenon. On the one hand, a linguistic choice is an ideological declaration, but on the other, the fact that someone wrote in Polish, Russian or German did not necessarily mean that they did not want to be a part of Jewish culture. The museum declares that Jews were multilingual, and the catalogue to the Legacy gallery

⁶ This is the name written in documents issued by the administration of Belgium in 1907.

presents various Jewish writers, discussing the ease with which they transgressed one cultural system (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Sztyma, 2021, pp. 27–46), but I doubt that this is the picture with which the average visitor leaves the museum. Considering that women could not write freely in Yiddish or Hebrew in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, their linguistic choice was not so evident. It was possible to write in Polish and be an influential religious figure, as research on Sara Schenirer's Polish diary well shows (Schenirer, 2024, p. XXXVII). One of the Polish-Jewish writers (Anda Eker) is present in the museum's core exhibition, but her two volumes of poetry have been left – without any commentary – on one of the tables in the room that imitates the interior of the Ziemiańska Café. A similar conclusion, that the “very few artefacts [presenting reflections on gender] fulfil only an illustrative function”, is drawn by Krasuska. She argues that the “lack of gender reflection undermines [the] principles of the exhibition”, making the narrative “teleological and deterministic” (Krasuska, 2019, p. 249). It also shows a lack of agency among Jewish women, which will be repeated in the Holocaust gallery (Krasuska, 2019, p. 256). In spite of a number of journals in the Polish language being shown in the core exhibition, there is a simple division into those who were “real Jews” and spoke Yiddish, Hebrew-speaking Zionists, and assimilated Jews who abandoned their Jewish roots. Such a simplified version of Jewishness was criticised by Czesława Endelman in her article published in 1903 in *Izraelita*. She wrote:

I recently witnessed a seemingly unimportant yet meaningful situation in one of the houses of the Jewish intelligentsia. One of the guests started to recite one of the newest Hebrew poems ... Everyone was listening with excitement when a servant holding a tray suddenly appeared in the open door to the dining room. “Cessez pour un instant”, the hostess quickly uttered. It was worth watching the confusion, even shame on the faces of the hosts and other guests ... Although a feeling of civil duty makes us respect the religion, beliefs and tradition of the nation we live in, we must not ever deny our own tradition and religion. (Endelmanowa, 1903)

Like another Polish-Jewish writer, Aniela Kallas, Czesława Endelman used different pennames depending on the audience she wanted to reach. In *Izraelita*, she used Czesława Endelman or Endelmanowa, or En... until 1905, while in Polish journals, like *Wędrowiec*, she would hide her real identity under the male pseudonym Czesław Halicz or C. Halicz. Male pseudonyms could give women easier access to publication in a still masculine literary world. Thus, she functioned as Czesława En... or Czesława Endelmanowa in acculturating Jewish circles, and as Czesław Halicz in Polish circles. However, the literary world knew that Czesław Halicz was a woman. When she won



second prize in the First Polish Drama Competition in 1911, *Nowa Gazeta* wrote that the pseudonym was used by a young writer, “Dr Czesława Rosenblatt”⁷ (“Echa konkursu”, 1911, p. 4). A year later, a Kraków-based journal reported that her award-winning play *Sąd* [The Court] had premiered at one of Kraków’s theatres, also explaining that the penname belonged to a young woman: “Dr Czesława Rosenblatt”. But how did Czesława Endelman become Czesława Rosenblatt?

Problematic Date of Birth and the Difficult Year 1905

Biographical information on Czesława Rosenblatt is scarce. Even her date of birth is problematic. The already mentioned article from *Nowa Gazeta* states that she was born in 1881 in Piotrków (“Echa konkursu”, 1911, p. 4), and this date would appear in other Polish newspapers. Yet, documents from the office of L’Administrateur Directeur Général in Brussels as well as documents issued by an appellate court in 1924 give the exact date 17 March 1877 and say that she was born in Piotrków as Cipa Braudau (archives of Min. Just. Police,⁸ 1). She herself signed documents with the spelling Cypa, presumably due to the fact that Cipa could be associated with the Polish colloquial word meaning vagina. However, documents of the communal administration issued in 1906, when she came to Belgium, state that she was born on 14 May 1878 and that she was a daughter of Nathan Braude and Sprinza Horowitz⁹ who lived in Warsaw at 100 Karmelitzka Street (archives of Min. Jus. Police, 1). Another document from the same office, issued a year later, states that she was born as Brandau Cipa in Piotrków. However, this seems to be a wrongly transcribed letter ‘u’ from handwritten documents. The same typo appears in the already mentioned note from *Izraelita* (“Ze szkół”, 1895, p. 207). On the other hand, documents from the Université Libre de Bruxelles, where she and her future husband were studying, state that she was born on 17 March 1879, while documents issued by the same Department of Social and Political Science a year later say that she was born on 16 May 1880 (archives of ULB). Eventually, in

⁷ In all official documents, her second husband’s surname is written as Rosenblatt or Rozenblatt. The version with the double t at the end only appears in Polish journals. Thus, I have decided to write her surname according to official papers, including her autobiographical note. I only use the spelling with the double t when citing sources.

⁸ References to archives have been abbreviated to the first letters of the archive’s name. A full reference can be found in the notes section.

⁹ In the marriage certificate, the name of Czesława’s mother is spelled Herowitch, but it seems to have been mistakenly transcribed from handwritten documents, so I assume that her name was Horowitz, which was also a much more popular Ashkenazi surname.

1928, in her own autobiographical note submitted to the Minister of Justice in order to be naturalised as a Belgian citizen, Czesława wrote that she had been born in Piotrków on 17 March 1877 (archives of Min. Just. Police, 56 (7)). Thus, it is safe to say that she was born in the late 1870s, but I assume that the date she gave was the correct one.

Nevertheless, it is certain that she was born in Piotrków, a city in the south-east of today's Poland. In the late 19th century it was part of the Kingdom of Poland (the Russian partition) or, as the Belgian documents state, Russian Poland. When she was 10, her parents moved to Łódź, where she attended a secondary school (*gimnazjum*) for girls. Her father was a merchant (*Acte de marriage*). She graduated from the school in 1895, aged 18, according to her autobiographical note, which is compatible with the already mentioned information from *Izraelita* ("Ze szkół", 1895, p. 207). Two years later she married Zygmunt Endelman, an acculturated Jew living in Warsaw, where she moved as well. The quoted documents say that her parents were also living in Warsaw at that time. The Endelmans' only daughter – Halina – was born on 14 May 1898. It seems that the marriage was not a happy one, and the couple got divorced in October 1905. A year later Czesława Endelman moved to Brussels to join her parents, who had left Warsaw a few months earlier. Presumably the reason why her parents left the Kingdom of Poland was related to the lack of social and political security in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century, especially considering that her father was a merchant and that they were rather affluent (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1961, p. 396). The 1905 Revolution, which is still not a subject of mainstream Polish historiography, was an important generational experience that shaped the political scene in the Kingdom of Poland (cf. Gabryś & Stępnik, 2005). It was also a crucial moment for women's emancipationists, because their clandestine meetings could now become official. Thus, the feminist journal *Ster* [Helm] could be published in Warsaw¹⁰ (Dadej & Leszczawski-Schwerk, 2012, p. 27; Żarnowska, 1994, p. 20). For the Jewish minority, the 1905 Revolution brought a culmination of pogroms and a growing feeling of insecurity (Kijek et al., 2019).

In its core exhibition, the Polin Museum presents the time of unrest in the Russian Empire in the years 1903–1907, focusing on the pogroms and the way they were portrayed in the press. It is worth noting that this part of the exhibition uses photographs of sexualised violence; the same mode is applied in the Holocaust gallery (Krasuska, 2019, pp. 254–256). However, it does not show the other side of the coin, i.e. some social liberties that were a conse-

¹⁰ Between 1895 and 1897 the journal, edited by Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, was published in Lviv.



quence of the 1905 Revolution. One such consequence was the establishment of Związek Równouprawnienia Kobiet [Association for Women's Emancipation] (Dadej & Leszczawski-Schwerk, 2012, p. 31), which was a forum where Jewish acculturating women were also active. It seems that the core exhibition at the Polin Museum does not pay much attention to Jewish women's involvement in the feminist movement. There is, however, an educational path called *Jewish Women* that can be taken virtually as well as during a visit to the museum (Virtual Tour of the Core Exhibition 2025).¹¹ Yet, regardless of the small number of women it features (12 names in the 1,000-year-long Polish-Jewish history), the fact that it was created may suggest a deeply rooted male perspective in our perception, which sees women as Other by emphasising the extraordinary character of such a path (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 6). Women social actors are not presented in other paths, but they have their special "zone". One of the figures presented in the path is Paulina Appenzlak, editor-in-chief of a Zionist women's weekly published in Polish: *Ewa* (1928–1933). However, her story and the publication of the weekly appear rather out of the blue, while in fact, various Jewish women social activists who worked on different arenas in various parts of partitioned Poland prepared the ground for journalists like Appenzlak. The caption within the virtual tour reads:

"A Jewish woman demands her representation, which she should be rightfully granted ... Moreover, we are not concerned only with purely women's issues: we want a decisive voice in all the issues," wrote Paulina Appenzlak in 1928. Paulina, a prominent feminist and journalist, founded *Ewa*, a widely read magazine in Polish for Jewish women. In its pages, she urged women to exercise their voting rights and to run for parliament and public office. She also ran a campaign for conscious motherhood. (Virtual Tour of the Core Exhibition, 24 February 2025)

Without diminishing Appenzlak's contribution to Jewish feminism, it is surprising that the museum does not present the first and only Jewish woman in the Polish parliament: Róża Pomeranc-Melcer, who became an MP in 1922, and who was the founder of Koło Kobiet Żydowskich [Jewish Women's Circle] that operated in Lviv between 1910 and 1939 (Leszczawski-Schwerk, 2021). It is also surprising because *Ewa* was quite conservative with regard to the woman's social role, seeing it mostly as that of a wife and mother, which was in accordance with the Zionist vision of a woman.

¹¹ Surprisingly, the description of the core exhibition on the museum's website is different in English and in Polish. The Polish version is much more detailed and mentions the various paths as well as the Legacy gallery. The latter is described using gender-indicating suffixes. In the English version it is striking that women are mentioned once, as housewives, and the exhibition is described in general terms.



Czesława, on the other hand, transgressed various social barriers. As mentioned earlier, she divorced Zygmunt Endelman and moved to Brussels, leaving their daughter with her father. It was a bit of a scandal in Jewish Warsaw. In a volume of her recollections published almost 15 years after WWII, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa still expressed her outrage that Halina had been left with her father:

Around 1905 Mrs Czesława Endelmanowa divorced her husband and moved abroad permanently. Her daughter, Halusia, was left with her father in Warsaw, in a big, empty flat full of memories. Extremely sensitive and tender, very attached to her mother, she took the separation and loneliness very hard. (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1961, p. 396)

Mortkowicz presents Halina's childhood as unhappy, and she suggests that Halina's social awareness and compassion for those less privileged only resulted from her encounter with well-known socialist Stefania Sempołowska (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1961, pp. 397–398). However, the image she presents is very simplified. First of all, Czesława could not take her daughter with her, as Russian civil law stated that a child belonged to the father, so in case of divorce, children had to be left with their fathers (Walaszek, 1994, p. 152). This might be one of the reasons why divorces were not popular at that time. Czesława kept constantly in touch with her daughter, and when the latter was 22, she came to Brussels to study and lived with the Rosenblats. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa accentuates the fact that mother and daughter wrote two different stories for children that both had the same motif – friendship between a bourgeois girl, the daughter of a doctor,¹² and the impoverished daughter of a caretaker (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1961, p. 395). She also suggests that the stories were based on Halina's biography. Thus, it seems that Czesława tried to teach her daughter a degree of sympathy and compassion for the less privileged, which was later strengthened by her teacher Stefania Sempołowska. Such an approach to the social duties of the intelligentsia stood in accordance with the letters, reviews, articles and literary texts that Czesław Halicz published.

¹² Mortkowicz-Olczakowa refers to Czesława Rosenblat's novel *W domu przy ulicy Żórawiej* [In a House in Żórawia Street] from 1913, which was serialised in the children's weekly *W Słońcu*, but the father of the main character was not a doctor but a company director.

Czesław Halicz Becomes Madame Cécile Rosenblat

As soon as Czesław Halicz arrived in Brussels, she enrolled at the École des Sciences Politique et Sociales at the Université Libre. In documents from the university, her name appears as Cécile Endelman (archives of ULB).¹³ Thus, she chose an easier-to-pronounce version of her Jewish name. She had done exactly the same in Polish, choosing Czesława, which sounds similar to the Jewish Cypora. Presumably it was in Brussels that she met her future husband, Henri (Henryk) Rosenblat, who was born on 28 July 1880 in Lublin to Meyer Rosenblat, a merchant, and Rosalie (Rozalia) Rabinovitch (Acte de marriage). Henri Rosenblat became an engineer, a specialist in heating systems. He owned a heating company, and in 1923 ordered a house design from well-known Belgian architect Adrien Blomme. The ground floor of the house was designed as the office of his company, while the upper floors were the family living quarters (*Rue des Échevins* 72, n.d.).

In 1909, a year after their wedding, the Rosenblats had a son, Georges Lucien (archives of Min. Just. Police, 21). Unfortunately, the baby died six months later. In 1912 the couple had a daughter, Jeanine Marie (d. 1998), who would become an award-winning Belgian poet and literary scholar, a member of L'Académie Royale de Langue et de la Littérature Française de Belgique. Her research and literary works were devoted to women's literature (*Jeanine Moulin*, n.d.). She married a young professor of sociology and medieval studies, Leo Moulin (1906–1996), with whom she had a son, Marc Moulin (1942–2008), a musician and journalist. Apart from her academic and literary work, Jeanine ran her father's company (*Jeanine Moulin*, n.d.).

Between 1908 and 1914, Czesława was still an active writer, playwright and journalist. She contributed to various journals in the Kingdom of Poland as well as to French-language Belgian press. Her plays were staged at theatres in Brussels (*Jeanine Moulin*, n.d.). At the university, she became acquainted with other students from Polish lands, for example Marian Dąbrowski and Maria Dąbrowska, who, like Czesława, belonged to the Polish Students' Association – Lelewel Society (Głębicka, 2005, p. 311). Czesława was active among Polish émigrés in Brussels. She was one of the organisers of the Polish section of the international museum in Belgium (L'Union des associations internationales – UAI). In an appeal of the section's organisers printed in one of the

¹³ I would like to thank Renaud Bardez, Director of Bibliothèque des Sciences humaines and R.O. Archives, Patrimoine et Réserve précieuse at the ULB, who gave me the files concerning Cécile Endelman, and who supported me in trying to resolve the mystery of her PhD dissertation.



Polish newspapers, Czesława Rosenblat is signed as the secretary of the Polish Section of the Museum, and her name is preceded by the Dr abbreviation, suggesting that she held a PhD (Halicz-Rosenblatowa & Joteyko, 1912, p. 115).

Life in Brussels



Figure 2. Czesława Rosenblat (Moulin Family Archives, Courtesy of Corrine and Denis Moulin)

This appeal from the magazine *Nasze Zdroje* is not the only source suggesting that Czesława held a PhD. In fact, her bios in other journals, such as *Bluszcz*, *Nowa Gazeta* and *Nowiny*, mentioned that she had a doctorate. In the biographical note that she wrote for the Belgian Ministry of Justice, she stated: “In 1909, after defending my thesis *La Valeur sociale de l’art*, I received a PhD in social sciences” (archives of Min. Just. Police, 56). Documents from the archives of the Université Libre confirm that she studied there between 1906 and 1910 (archives of ULB). However, the thesis entitled *La Valeur sociale de l’art* seems to be her master’s thesis, as there is no trace of a doctoral dissertation by Czesława (Cécile Rosenblat), neither in the archives of the ULB nor at the Université Nouvelle that was a part of the ULB at the time. So far it remains a mystery whether she held a PhD or not. Her university experience was presumably reflected in her novel *Młodość Hanny Turskiej* [The Youth of Hanna Turska] published in 1914. It is a text which clearly shows the difficulties that ambitious young women had to face while studying.

Despite the unclear status of her education, she was definitely a member of the intellectual elites – before 1905 in the Kingdom of Poland, and later in Belgium. With her second husband she created a home visited by various intellectuals from Europe, including Joseph Roth, Franz Hellens, André Baillon, and Germaine Lievens (*Jeanine Moulin*, n.d.). ULB professors and members of engineering associations gave Henri their references confirming that he was

a loyal citizen when he was trying to obtain naturalisation. Henri Rosenblat was a talented musician and he played music during the meetings. As Denis Moulin claims, he had once thought about becoming a professional pianist.

Although, in the passage quoted earlier, Czesława criticised those Jewish intellectuals who abandoned their tradition, it seems that in Belgium she became more acculturated. In the early 1920s she and her husband applied for naturalisation. For some reason, Henri got his certificate much sooner than she did, so she wrote letters asking to receive the same status as her husband. In one such document Czesława wrote: "I am heartfully attached to the country which I consider my homeland, towards which I fulfil all my duties as a citizen" (archives of Min. Just. Police, 59). Yet, her attachment to the culture of Polish Jews was not totally lost. In 1934 she published her last book, *Ludzie którzy jeszcze żyją* [People Who Are Still Alive], a volume of stories devoted to the unprivileged Jewish classes. Like her other stories, the book described unjust social relations, poverty and sexual abuse (Kołodziejska, 2016, p. 82). It is clear that, even if she led the life of a Belgian intellectual, she did not reject her Jewish background. This is also confirmed by her great-granddaughter Corrine Moulin, who told me that Jewishness was never an issue, but they were aware of the fact that some members of their family were Jewish, and were killed during WWII. Czesława survived the war and died in 1949. In 1945 she translated three letters in Polish for the Belgian Ministry of Justice (archives of Min. Just. Police, 84).

Contrary to the image presented by Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, Czesława Rosenblat had a proper relationship with her older daughter Halina, who returned to Poland after graduating from the university in Brussels. She and her husband Marian Górski, whom she met in Brussels, settled in Lviv. There she worked as a social activist, a member of the socialist party, and an editor of the socialist journal *Sygnaly* [Signals], to which her mother contributed articles (Halicz, 1938, p. 3). She worked with impoverished children, for whom she also wrote stories. She was murdered by the Nazis in 1942.

Conclusions

The aim of the core exhibition at the Polin Museum is to show Jewish history through the lens of everyday life:

Our focus is on life, therefore at each stage of the journey we strive to remain close to life by letting people speak – Jewish merchants, scholars or artists from a given era, rabbis, housewives, politicians, chroniclers and revolutionaries. We give the floor to those who perished and to those who survived. (*Polin Museum Core Exhibition*, n.d.)





Figure 3. Halina Endelman (Górska), photo from her 1921 visa application (archives of Min. Just. Police, 73)

Still, the stories are mostly told by men. Jewish women are usually commemorated in relation to men (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 6). A bust of Rosa Luxemburg presented in the fifth gallery – *Encounters with Modernity (1772–1914)* – is a good example of such a relationship. It is on display in the office of Izrael Poznański, a famous textile entrepreneur from Łódź, and an interactive screen shows fragments of her writings on the working conditions of the factory labourers (Virtual tour of the core exhibition, 24 February 2025). As the work of women and children was much cheaper, Poznański, like other manufacturers of the time, hired mostly women (Głowacka, 2025). Nevertheless, it seems that Rosa Luxemburg could have been presented in a different context in the same gallery, for example as one of the leaders of the social movements of her time. Together with Róża Pomeranc-Melcer, she could be featured in a gallery devoted to political life. Their appearance together with Halina Górska in a gallery devoted to Jewish political life might complicate the picture of Jewish history, but it would also emphasise the transnational character of history, while the museum is national in character, its aim being

to show Polish Jews.¹⁴ This might be one of the reasons why politically active Jewish women are not featured. It is noteworthy that their lack in the pre-war galleries results in their being pictured almost exclusively as mothers in the Holocaust gallery (Krasuska, 2019, p. 256).

Other women, e.g. Sara Silberstein and Ludwika Wawelberg, are presented in relation to their famous husbands. Even if some women, for example Judyta Zbytkower, are shown as having been independent, they are treated as extraordinary cases. It would undoubtedly leave a false image if an equal number of important male and female figures were shown, but it is my impression that something more could have been done to better represent women's involvement in Jewish history, especially in the galleries showing the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is striking that the sphere of literature is almost entirely filled with male authors, while in fact Jewish women actively tried to express their voices in all the languages spoken by Jews living in Polish lands. Jewish literature in Polish could be a great help here, and the biographies of such writers as Czesława Rosenblat, Aniela Kallas and Amelia Reichman, for example, could lead visitors through "stormy historical events" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Sztyma, 2021, p. 18), showing the context for the flourishing Yiddish literature written by women between 1918 and 1939. Although an extension of the core exhibition, the Legacy gallery, aimed at showing the "cultural heritage of Polish Jews and their contribution to civilisation – Polish, Jewish, and global" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Sztyma, 2021, p. 18), presents the biographies of 26 extraordinary Jewish people, only six of them are women. I believe that the museum has done this unintentionally – the catalogue of the Legacy gallery and the women's path are presumably the curators' attempt to add women's voices to the core exhibition. However, the fact that their voices are still very weak proves how deeply rooted the masculine perspective is in our perception of the world, and that, as Simone de Beauvoir claimed, women are the second sex (de Beauvoir, 2011, pp. 3–7).

The use of non-Jewish languages is often linked to a lack of Jewishness or to full assimilation, but such an approach is ahistorical. One's identity is always in the process of forming and reforming (Giddens, 2001, p. 105). Local contexts and the intertwining of various cultural projects are often forgotten in Jewish historiography, as there has been a long-lasting trend to look for differences, to research Jewish culture in opposition to non-Jewish culture. However, the Jews did not live in a cultural void and the processes they created and were subjected to transgressed one another and influenced one another (Shmeruk, 1991, p. 309). That is why the biographies of people like Czesława Rosenblat can provide a more nuanced image of the Jewish past.

¹⁴ I leave aside the issue of the definition of a Polish Jew, which is also a complex matter.



Czesława Rosenblat's biography presents various aspects of Jewish culture in Polish lands. Thus, the presence of woman figures like her could mean expanding the aspects of Jewish history that the museum wants to show, like ways of commemorating the Jewish past as well as showing the multiplicity of Jewish life in Polish lands. The quoted passage from her letter to *Izraelita* indicates women's involvement in improving social welfare. Hospitals, shelters, public kitchens etc. were funded by men, who had the financial means, but they were organised and run by women. Although she was not involved in the feminist movement itself, like other acculturating Jewish women (e.g. Róża Centnerszwer, Aniela Korngut and Amelia Reichman), her life serves as a great example of women's practical emancipation. The question of the relations between Jewish and non-Jewish feminists is very interesting in itself, as the polarisation of feminist scholarship in the past can also be seen in today's research. Divorcing her husband and being forced to leave her child in order to pursue her ambitious educational goal was an act of rebellion. As I have tried to show, she was not a cold mother but a loving one, who decided that her daughter would be happy if her mother found fulfilment. Her letters to various Polish newspapers and journals show that she was, probably idealistically, fighting for a better world. All her literary texts are devoted to herstories, showing that the fate of women was really important to her. The fact that both her daughters developed her ideas (social involvement and women's rights) is not coincidental. Halina Górska's literary works may be forgotten today, but she is commemorated as one of the women socialists who fought for a better world (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1961; Rurawski, 1968).

Jeanine Moulin, on the other hand, became a recognised poet and literary historian who was a great defender of women's rights. As Czesława's great-grandson recalls, Jeanine and Halina were close despite the 14-year age difference. The fact that Halina, whose husband was ill and could not travel, was murdered by the Nazis was such a traumatic experience for Jeanine that she did not want to talk about her Jewish and Polish roots, nor about her parents. Yet, in rare moments of recalling her parents, she remembered them with fondness. Jeanine spoke Polish and Russian, her father played a lot of Chopin's music on the piano, which shows their attachment to Polish culture. As Denis Moulin recalls, the family story was that Czesława had a temper and when she argued with her husband, she always did so in Polish. Czesława, as the story recalled by Mortkowicz-Olczakowa shows, not only criticised the elites for their patronising attitude towards less privileged members of society, but also taught her daughters respect for people who had smaller social capital. It is remarkable that one family produced three talented, ambitious

and successful women writers who tried to change the world. Thus, Czesława Rosenblat's biography could be part of the Polin Museum core exhibition because it shows the complexity of Polish and Jewish relationships as well as the process of acculturation and the identity choices that were made by many Jewish inhabitants of Polish lands.

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Jedna z wielu nieopowiedzianych historii o życiu żydowskim na ziemiach polskich przed Zagładą

Na przykładzie arcyciekawej biografii Czesławy Rosenblat (1877–1949) artykuł pokazuje zmiany, które mogłyby zostać wprowadzone do wystawy stałej Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich Polin w Warszawie. Tekst stara się odpowiedzieć na pytanie, dlaczego żydowskie herstory wciąż nie są upamiętnione w Muzeum Polin, mimo rozwoju badań nad historią kobiet w polskiej i żydowskiej historiografii. Biografia Rosenblat służy jako środek do pokazania skomplikowanych i nieoczywistych stosunków polsko-żydowskich. Artykuł odsłania fascynujący życiorys jednej z żydowskich pisarek, które wybrały język polski jako język wyrazu artystycznego. Ponadto pokazuje skomplikowane splątanie polskiej i żydowskiej kultury w końcu dziewiętnastego i na początku dwudziestego wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura żydowska, kobiece biografie, Muzeum Polin, feminizm, ruch praw kobiet, stosunki polsko-żydowskie.

Note

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