Polish-Jewish Female Writers and the Women's Emancipation Movements in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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ABSTRACT
Between 1880 and 1914, a small group of Jewish female authors writing in Polish approached the vital-at-the-time woman question from different angles. Although they incorporated discussions of women’s sexuality, for these Polish supporters of women’s emancipation, access to education remained the focal point. This article explores the writings of seven Jewish women authors in the historical context of the emerging women’s emancipation movements in the Polish lands, demonstrating that their educational aspirations were not always identical to those expressed by Polish emancipationists. By examining the involvement of Polish-Jewish women writers in Polish women’s organizations, the article complicates the picture of the Polish suffrage movement and highlights the interconnectedness of Polish and Jewish social history.

KEYWORDS: acculturation, girls’ education, Polish-Jewish literature, Polish-Jewish press, Polish–Jewish relations, woman question

In 1913 Kazimiera Bujwidowa, a women’s rights activist renowned for her anticlerical and liberal views, an initiate of the first gymnasium for girls with a curriculum enabling them to study at universities, and a fighter for higher education for women, wrote a review of Córki marnotrawne (The Prodigal Daughters), a novel by Polish-Jewish writer Aniela Kallas (a penname used by Aniela Korngutówna). In her rather harsh review, Bujwidowa criticized the morality of the novel’s heroines, who, in order to acquire education, lie to their parents, steal from them, and mislead their fiancés. She wonders whether “in this milieu the interpersonal relationships are so different” that she cannot understand them, or perhaps whether Kallas is mistaken, because Bujwidowa claims to have met a number of “prodigal daughters” and they were honest. In order to highlight her point, she poses rhetorical questions about the reasons behind...
the heroines’ choices, the lack of consistency in their pursuit of their goals, and the results of their activities. Finally, she writes, addressing the prodigal daughters: “However, if you find the suffocating atmosphere of the ghetto really overwhelming, I only see one solution: to cut all ties (especially financial ones) with your homes or persuade your parents that there is an abyss between their perception of their children’s happiness and their daughters’ actual desires.” The quoted passage, together with Bujwidowa’s views on Jewish marital rituals, provoked a response from the editors and from Aniela Kallas. The former focused only on Bujwidowa’s remarks regarding Jewish marital rites and family ties. Aniela Kallas, on the other hand, began her response by stating that she was a spokeswoman for the “prodigal daughters,” who come from an environment that Bujwidowa did not understand. She agreed with the editors that cutting ties with one’s family, especially if one comes from an Orthodox Jewish family, is not as simple as Bujwidowa claimed. Finally, she answered the rhetorical questions, showing her surprise that the reviewer postulated, as a solution for young girls, having a job rather than remaining financially dependent on their parents. In Kallas’s view, it was extremely difficult for a young educated woman to have a proper job. She stated: “There’s no such thing as independence if we don’t have any rights!”

This interaction illustrates well the focus of this article, specifically the reflection of the so-called woman question in Polish-Jewish literature and the relationship between Polish-Jewish and Polish women emancipationists. The article attempts to present a complex, pluralistic view of the Polish women’s rights movement at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It focuses on the period between 1880 and 1914; in these years before the outbreak of World War I, a number of Polish-Jewish literary texts explored the woman question, and the women’s emancipation movement was emerging. This period also saw the proliferation of various social movements and ideologies, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in the Polish lands, including Zionism, socialism, and nationalism. This article explores the aspects of women’s emancipation that were the most crucial for Jewish acculturating woman writers and the scope of Polish-Jewish women’s involvement in the women’s rights movement. The article’s geographical focus is narrowed to the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia, because Warsaw, Kraków, and Lviv were the major centres of Jewish acculturation into Polish society between 1880 and 1914. Jews coming from the former parts of Poland belonging to the Russian Empire were called Litvaks and were perceived by Polish Jews as different from them in terms of tradition and habits. Jews residing in the third partition of Poland belonging to Prussia were mostly Germanized and differed significantly from those residing in the other two partitions.

Polish-Jewish integrationist literature between 1880 and 1914 was largely devoted to the so-called woman question and included a larger number of texts written by women than men (approximately 220 to 130). The central theme that linked the literary texts written by different Polish-Jewish female writers was education (accounting for around 80 percent of all texts devoted to the woman question). As a result, this article pays close attention to that aspect of the women’s emancipation movement. However, it interrogates the literary texts for other themes, such as sex education and women’s sexuality in general, that were important for supporters of women’s emancipation. Such discussions reveal the differences in the approaches toward women’s education among Polish and Polish-Jewish women’s emancipationists.
In her response to Bujwidowa discussed above, Kallas highlights the goal of her novel—she wanted to give a voice to young acculturating Jewish women who were trying to emancipate themselves through education. She tried to show that for a Jewish girl, gaining education came at a higher price than for a Christian girl, as education in fact meant secularization and cutting ties with one’s own community. Bujwidowa seemed not to see that. Education played an important role in Jewish culture. Jewish women were often literate; they were sent to schools, sometimes to cheders (Jewish religious elementary schools), but the focus was on boys, who, unlike girls, were not excluded from studying Torah. Therefore, even Orthodox parents would pay attention to their daughters’ education and if it was possible to send them to state schools, they would eagerly do so. Paradoxically, in such a way they unwittingly helped their daughters to acculturate and as a result loosen their ties with their community.

Both Bujwidowa and Kallas employ a patronizing tone, indicating a common problem of communication between a minority group and a majority, wherein the majority makes generalizations about the minority and does not notice any nuances, while the minority claims that only its members can utter opinions for the group. In 1861, the Warsaw milieu of acculturating Jews established a weekly journal, Jutrzenka (The Dawn), to acquaint Polish elites with Jewish culture, tradition, and religion, which was supposed to help the two groups to integrate. The idea was further developed by another Polish-Jewish weekly, Izraelita (The Israelite) (1866–1915), when Jutrzenka closed in 1863 as a result of tsarist repressions after the January Insurrection. For Bujwidowa, Kallas, and the editors of Tygodnik (The Weekly), as for all intellectuals at the time, literature reflected reality almost entirely. They treated it not as works of fiction, but as reportage. They discussed the life choices of fictional characters as they would discuss sociological or anthropological studies. The notion that a literary text is an equally reliable source of knowledge on everyday reality as a research study or a newspaper article was deeply embedded in the nineteenth-century perception of media. Both Jutrzenka and Izraelita used literary texts as a means to spread the idea of integration. The pragmatic features of a literary text were often, for nineteenth-century Polish and Polish-Jewish writers, more important than their aesthetical value. Although the discussion between Kazimiera Bujwidowa and Aniela Kallas took place in 1913, such a view of literature remained common among Polish intellectuals. This article is based on fourteen widely unknown Polish-Jewish integrationist literary texts (two novels, eleven short stories, and one play) written by seven female authors. The majority of the analyzed Polish-Jewish literary texts were published by the Polish-Jewish periodical press, including Warsaw-based Izraelita, Lviv-based Jedność (Unity), and Lviv-based Ojczyzna (Fatherland); only a few were published in book form and did not appear in the periodical press.

The most controversial element of Kazimiera Bujwidowa’s review, which provoked the editorial response, was the claim that “prodigal daughters” should cut ties with their families. That this was controversial illustrates the communication problem between Jews and non-Jews. For Bujwidowa, the happiness of a daughter was the most important thing for a parent, but she seemed not to take into account that for a Jewish mother the happiness of an individual should not bring them into conflict with the community. It must be remembered that parents of a daughter who decided
to leave the community or to baptize herself often mourned her as though she had died. Therefore, leaving one’s community meant something different for a Jew and for a non-Jew. Bujwidowa’s review presents a secular, middle-class perspective, and although Kallas and other Polish-Jewish female writers belonged to that class too, they tried to retain their Jewish identities, which were often defined by religion.

This article reveals the complexity of different perspectives and different approaches to social issues. It examines how Polish-Jewish women writers perceived the role of a woman. Historiography often separates Jewish history from non-Jewish history, but in the Polish lands the two communities for many years lived together and influenced one another. As a result, it is important to consider the Jewish perspective in Polish culture. The activity of Polish-Jewish female writers provides a good example of the complex nature of the Polish women’s emancipation movement.

**Polish-Jewish Feminists—Who They Were**

Polish-Jewish women did not have their own press bodies to promote their ideas; they published their articles either in Polish-Jewish weeklies like *Izraelita* (1866–1915), *Jedność* (1907–1912), and *Ojczyzna* (1881–1892), or, more eagerly, they wrote fiction and published it in Jewish and non-Jewish periodicals. The circle of Jewish female authors who were active between 1880 and 1914 was not large in number (roughly counting around fifteen), but was nonetheless significant. As mentioned above, these women wrote almost twice as many literary texts as men—Aniela Kallas herself published around thirty novels, short stories, and plays in this period alone. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to determine the reception of their texts, as it is difficult to approximate the circulation of the Polish-Jewish weeklies that published the majority of them. One reason for this is the lack of full data. The circulation also changed over time (for example, *Izraelita* was published for almost fifty years) and the financial struggles that *Izraelita* and *Ojczyzna* encountered can be easily traced. However, the data that can be collected indicates, for example, that the circulation of *Izraelita* reached around one thousand copies, which was quite low considering the number of potential readers in the Kingdom of Poland or in Warsaw alone. Yet, as Agnieszka Jagodzinska highlights, the circulation of Polish weeklies in the Kingdom of Poland did not reach more than one thousand copies either. It should also be remembered that one issue of the weekly was often read by the entire community, especially in smaller towns, so the number of subscribers, for example, does not reflect the real impact of the journals. Nevertheless, it seems that the fact that a considerable number of acculturating Jewish intellectuals in the Polish lands spoke Polish was, to a certain extent, related to the influence of the integrationist milieu and the circulation of the Polish-Jewish press.

The identity of the Polish-Jewish women writers has been well described by one of them: “Raised in a Jewish religious tradition, I am a Jewess who passionately and warmly loves her nation, but as much as I love my religion and my poor, downtrodden nation, I also love my home country, where my ancestors found shelter during the most violent persecutions in Western Europe. I felt I’m a citizen of the country, a sister of its people.” The passage indicates two important elements of Polish-Jewish
identity: the attachment to the Jewish religion or, in more general terms, tradition; and a desire to be a part of the non-Jewish majority. The latter was achieved through the acquisition of the Polish language and culture. However, the issue was complex and it seems impossible to make generalizations, as individual choices and experiences influenced one’s identity throughout one’s life. Aniela Kallas, for example, became less active in Polish-Jewish literature over the years, and in independent Poland she contributed mostly to Polish culture. Salomea Perl, on the other hand, after publishing a few short stories in Polish, decided to become a Yiddish writer. Their choices were often externally motivated, for example by rising antisemitism. The approach toward one’s identity also depended on which part of the Polish lands one came from. For example, by the 1870s, only in the Kingdom of Poland, and Warsaw especially, did the idea of Polish-Jewish double identity dominate among Jewish intellectuals. The core of this idea was to adopt the Polish language and culture of the majority, while preserving Jewish religion and traditions related to Judaism. This process, occurring throughout Europe, eventually led to full assimilation, especially in Western societies. In the Polish lands full assimilation also occurred, but often later, in the 1920s and 1930s, and was much less widespread. As Benjamin Harshav noted: “What was clear to the children of the shtetl was, that to regain the dignity of human existence they would have to embrace the culture and ideas of the ‘civilized’—that is, Western European—world. And this could be done in one of two ways: either join it or imitate it.” Yet the milieu of Jewish intellectuals discussed here deliberately did not undergo full assimilation, choosing instead a third way—acculturation—and creating, as Harshav puts it, a “parallel culture” using a non-Jewish language.

Galician Jews, who were also influenced by the Haskalah (Jewish enlightenment) movement, at first chose German culture. The autonomy that Polish elites gained from the Austrian authorities between 1860 and 1873, which established Polish as an official language and local Polish authorities who controlled, for example, the school system, also shifted the position of Jewish progressive circles, who began, with the appearance of a new Polish-speaking preacher, Szymon Dankowicz, to integrate into Polish culture. These changing identity politics are reflected in the perspectives of the various journals: Ojczyzna and Jedność appeared much later than Izraelita and Jutrzenka. In fact, by the time that Jedność began publication, Izraelita had begun its slow decline, along with the failure of the idea of double identity. The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the proliferation of different Jewish identities. But, over the following years, the choices available to Jews shrank, such that Polish-Jewish literature of the 1920s and 1930s lost its integrationist character to the Zionists, while many members of the integrationist milieu underwent the process of assimilation.

The Polish-Jewish women authors who supported the idea of women’s emancipation considered here were born in the late 1860s and early 1870s—with the exception of Czesława Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa (born 1879). By the time of the intensive debates over women’s emancipation they were in their late twenties. The majority of them worked, unlike earlier Polish-Jewish women writers like Malwina Meyersonowa or Róża Saulsonowa, whose literary activities were in addition to their duties as wives and mothers. The younger generation found employment as teachers or private tutors (Amelia Reichmanówna, Regina Pniowerówna, Aniela Kallas, Róża Centnerszwe-
rowa), as those were the professions open to women of their educational level. Some of them, apart from their original literary work, did translations from other European languages (Róża Centnerszwerowa, Aniela Kallas, Maria Blumberg). All of them lived in big cities—Kraków, Lviv, or Warsaw—but some of them came from smaller towns: for example, Czesława Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa was born in Piotrków, attended a gymnasium in Łódź, and moved to Warsaw, where she got married; while Kallas came from Podgórze, at the time a small town bordering Kraków. Their backgrounds and educations were similar to those of educated Polish feminists. Most likely, all of them attended schools in which Polish was taught, officially for those living in Galicia and unofficially for those from the Kingdom of Poland. At the time of their childhoods, there were no modern Jewish religious schools for girls. The Beit Yaakov network only emerged some time later. The fact that they were teachers had an important consequence—they were often unmarried (the exception was Róża Centnerszwerowa), and in that regard they did not fulfill the expected role of a Jewish woman. As Rachel Elior emphasizes, “In Jewish religious thought there is almost no room for a sovereign woman who is not under male patronage and ownership . . . The word ‘spinster’ does not exist in Scripture, because there is no such status in a society which sees all its females as virgins, engaged or married women, pregnant and giving birth.” It is impossible to state whether the Polish-Jewish women writers decided to be teachers because, for various reasons, they wanted to remain single, or because they could not get married and being an educator seemed better than a servant or a seamstress. Being a teacher might also enable them to spread ideas of acculturation and in that way improve, in their opinion, the lives of their fellow Jews. If even Eliza Orzeszkowa, one of the most prominent and popular Polish female writers at the time, was unable to make a living from her literary work (she was a landowner, which gave her some profits), it is rather certain that Polish-Jewish women writers had to have additional jobs apart from their literary and journalistic activities. It should be noted that the economic situation of the majority of landowners in the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia was precarious. Due to poor management, competition in the European markets, and reluctance to modernize, many landowners encountered financial problems and were forced to parcel out their lands. To make ends meet, for example, Eliza Orzeszkowa taught young girls of the intelligentsia in her mansion, including the daughters of the prominent Polish-Jewish activist doctor Henryk Nusbaum. Additionally, the correspondence of Aniela Kallas shows that being either a teacher or a novelist was not very profitable. In various letters to Bolesław Wysłouch (1855–1937), a socialist, co-establisher of the Polish Peasants Party, and editor of Kurier Lwowski (Lviv Daily), she mentioned her difficult financial situation.

Literature was the main medium through which Polish-Jewish women writers could freely express their opinions. The texts that described the so-called woman question most boldly (Córki marnotrawne by Kallas and Młodość Hanny Turskiej by Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa) were not published in the Polish-Jewish periodical press, but in book form, probably because they were too bold, since the Polish-Jewish press promoted a rather “conservative” view on women’s emancipation. The main perspective regarding the woman question expressed in the Polish-Jewish press was that the education of girls should be reformed to focus on the subjects that would
be most useful for future wives and mothers.38 Higher education could be made available to women, but only those who decided not to have a family. The proposed choice was: a career or a family. One of the correspondents to the editor-in-chief of Izraelita wrote that “one cannot dance at two weddings at the same time.”39 As Agata Zawiszewska claims, the perception that women’s emancipation through education would lead a girl to become a better mother and wife was expressed most vividly by Eliza Orzeszkowa, a role model for many integrationists.40 Thus, it is even more interesting that literary texts written by women, and published in Izraelita, often expressed an entirely opposite view. Some of them, like Aniela Kallas’s “Przeznaczenie” (Destiny), published in Izraelita in 1907, concluded that in order to spread the idea of integration among the non-Jewish majority, an educated Jewish women should become a teacher and educate young girls and boys rather than have a family. The text clearly shows that a heroine could be happy and fulfilled only as a single, independent working woman.41 The aim here shifted from the private sphere to the public one. It echoed Polish positivists’ idea of elite social engagement. Others stories, like Lena Bandówna’s “Neofitka” (The Neophyte Woman), contradicted the abovementioned alternative and presented a heroine who balanced her work as a doctor with family life.42

Overall, Polish-Jewish feminists were middle-class, considerably well-educated women who attempted to live independent lives. Amelia Reichmanówna was an auditor at the Faculty of Philology of the Jagiellonian University (winter 1897/1898, summer 1903/1904, winter 1904/190543), and Czesława Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa received a PhD from the University of Brussels in the field of sociology presumably in 1911, but she was rather ahead of her peers.44 They all came from Jewish families and decided to be culturally integrated with Polish society, hence their choice of the Polish language and their attempts to be a part of the Polish intellectual elite. The question arises: how did they perceive the role of a woman, and did their ideas reflect the program of Polish women’s emancipationists?

The “Woman Question” Reflected in Literary Texts by Polish-Jewish Women Authors

Education

The broadest subject that all the writers presented in their texts was the education of girls. The debate focused on higher education and access to universities.45 After the partitions, three different schooling systems functioned in the Polish lands. For that reason, reformers in the Kingdom of Poland faced different obstacles than their fellows in Galicia or in the Grand Duchy of Posen, although the latter is beyond the scope of this article. The focal point of the discussion on girl’s education was whether it should enable girls to live independent lives or to fulfill their duties as wives and mothers.46 Due to the political situation in the Kingdom of Poland, formal higher education was not available for women—yet those who wanted could attend the so-called “Flying University” or the “Petticoat University.”47 The first name’s origin was in the fact that this was a secret institution, and consequently often changed its location, as lectures were held in private homes. The other name referred to the fact
that many women were among its students. In Galicia, where the education system differed substantially—starting in the late 1860s, the school system was administered by the autonomous National School Board and Polish was the official language of education—women were able to study at the Jagiellonian University and in Lviv’s university by the last decade of the nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, Europeans across the continent engaged in discussions about girl’s education, including Jewish intellectuals living in different countries. In the Polish lands, the debate is clearly visible in *Izraelita*, which published literary texts alongside articles discussing the advantages and disadvantages of higher education for women. Although *Jedność* and *Ojczyzna* did not publish many articles about education, literature devoted to that question can also be found there. Because in Galicia elementary education was compulsory starting in 1869, the situation of girls, both Jewish and non-Jewish, was different from that in the Kingdom of Poland. In Galicia, the majority of Jewish girls attended either private or public primary schools. As a result, they became acculturated and no longer always agreed to marry young men educated in a more traditional manner. This problem—or, on a wider scale, the lack of compatibility between young Jewish girls and boys—became a vital topic for various Polish-Jewish women writers. In the Jewish tradition, marriages were arranged by families, and that custom was much criticized by “progressive” Jews in the second half of the nineteenth century. Polish-Jewish integrationist literature was dominated by the issue of family and marriage, because it was mostly aimed at Jewish women, who were supposed to bring up new generations of Jews. Therefore, the reform romance genre, originating in the 1820s in Anglo-Jewish literature, accentuated the issue, since the love story plot supposedly attracted a female reader. The aim of such literature was to show in an easily apprehended form the direction of the reforms (mostly education in secular sciences and acquisition of non-Jewish languages) postulated by Jewish “progressive circles.” Together with the Polish *obrazek* (picture) genre, reform romances presented the whole spectrum of problems related to marriage, yet forced marriage, demonized in the press, was not the most popular theme. Although marriage would often lead to a conflict between parents and daughters, like in Kallas’s *Córki marnotrawne*, in the majority of cases, the family would eventually reconcile with the daughter.

In reform romances, the conflict was usually provoked by education, as is clearly shown in “Z pamiętnika młodej Żydówki” (From the Memoir of a Young Jewish Woman), one of the few Polish short stories by Yiddish writer Salomea Perl. Rachela, the heroine of Perl’s text, comes from a religious family, but when she is ten, her parents hire a private tutor who teaches her Hebrew, Polish, math, and some aspects of Jewish history. Gradually the girl drifts apart from her girlfriends, who no longer understand her. When her parents present their marriage candidate, she realizes that her secular education makes it impossible for her to live with a religious Jew who has no knowledge of the world around him. Eventually she decides not to get married at all. Rachela represents the modern world, which was not compatible with the traditional world of the Jewish religious masses. The education of girls, instead of reforming the entire Jewish community, excluded educated women from it. Polish-Jewish women’s literature indicates the price that Jewish girls had to pay for their emancipation. Po-
ish feminists remained unaware of this issue, as the exchange between Bujwidowa and Kallas shows. Because Polish-Jewish women’s literature was available for the Polish-speaking majority, it was supposed to be a platform for a cultural exchange. Through their literary forms, Polish-Jewish feminists presented an additional voice in the debate on girls’ education, showing that in their community girl’s education could not be separated from that of boys. Salomea Perl’s short story is one of a number of literary texts that depict frustration with the opportunities that education offered to young Jewish girls. A similar experience is shared by the heroines of “Szare dole” (Gloomy Fates) by A. Mirowska (Amelia Reichmanówna), “Naszą żydowskim światem: Z pamiętników przyjaciółki” (Our Little Jewish World: From the Memoirs of a Friend) by Aniela Kallas, and “Przeznaczenie” (Destiny) by the same author.

By the late 1890s, disappointment with the opportunities that education offered to young Jewish girls dominated the Polish-Jewish narrative. Earlier, Polish-Jewish women writers frequently advocated for the idea of girls’ education, which would help the entire Jewish community develop and, as a result, become an equal part of society. “W chwili rozłąki” (In the Moment of Separation) by Maria Blumberg serves here as a good example of such an optimistic approach. Blumberg’s heroine is educated and independent, and at the same time she is a pious Jewish mother and wife. The text ends with praise of womanhood and a suggestion that women are the motors of acculturation: “I would like [my children] to take after their mother, her character and heart . . . . Our mothers and wives make our way to development easier.”

Marriage, Birth Control, Sex, and Women’s Labor

Since a woman’s main obligations were as a mother and a wife, regardless of her cultural, ethnic, or religious context, it is not surprising that the private sphere and marriage were of great concern among intellectuals in the early 1900s. Due to the high inequality of access to education and well-paid jobs for women, marriage was also a necessity for financial support in adult life for the majority of women, especially those from the more privileged classes. Aniela Kallas’s unpublished play about a young girl who marries a much older, but affluent man who eventually dies, thus making her an independent widow, serves as a good example of such an attitude. However, Polish-Jewish women writers, including Kallas, just like Polish-speaking feminists, focused instead on the idea of women’s labor and romantic love. All literary examples of a happy family life describe romantic love between an educated woman who works for the community and an educated man who does likewise. Women’s labor was directly linked with education. As one of the Polish feminist journals noted, vocational education for women was more neglected than for men, and the gender pay gap was huge. Although Polish-Jewish women authors focused on that question, and their heroines struggled to make ends meet, the majority of their literary texts described women from their own social and economic class; that is, the middle class. Their heroines would usually be teachers, typists, or physicians. In stories describing typical Jewish life, the heroines worked either in trade, or as servants (among others, see “Ryfka Piszczyk” by Czesława Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa). The Polish-Jewish press, while discussing women’s labor, emphasized the need for vocational education.
for girls, and supported all initiatives aimed at the development of practical skills and knowledge. Yet it seems that for Polish-Jewish writers it was easier to describe the life of their peers.

Although most literary texts devoted to the question of marriage focused on the divide between young Jewish women and men created by their different education, one short story described a phenomenon that even today is taboo in Poland—domestic violence and the role of religion in sanctifying it. A writer using the pen name Maria Alfa (I have not found any other texts signed by that author), in a novella called Bez rozwodu (Without a Divorce), describes a hard-working, religious Jewish seamstress who lives in a shabby attic with her six-year-old son and her husband, a shoemaker. After her husband beats her, she goes to the rabbi to ask him to persuade her husband to divorce her, because according to Jewish law a woman has to get her husband’s permission for a divorce. The rabbi sympathizes with the woman, but ultimately he cannot help her, and because her husband refuses to agree to a divorce, she has to live with him until her premature death. In the text, religion functions as a tool to sustain patriarchy. The text points to a specifically Jewish problem of gender inequality in Jewish laws concerning marriage, and to the more general question of marriage as a form of female subordination. In contrast, feminists imagined a marriage in which the bond between the spouses was built on partnership. An article signed with the initials C. W. (probably Cecylia Walewska) expressed such a hope. Instead of spending her time on socially useless activities such as “hair fluffing” or “nail filing,” a modern woman would be able to balance her career and motherhood with the help of welfare institutions such as kindergartens and nurseries.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when women’s bodies became a vital issue, the question of marriage was increasingly linked with sex. Interestingly, the topic was widely represented in Polish-Jewish women’s literature, which is a rather extraordinary phenomenon, as it seems that contemporary Polish literature did not explore the theme to such an extent. A few Polish-Jewish short stories and novels approached the topic from different perspectives. A scene from Córki marnotrawne in which the heroine calls the wedding night a “legitimate act of rape” points out the consequences of the lack of sex education, an issue discussed in the feminist and general press in the early 1900s. The novel also describes sexual abuse. Alternative approaches to the issue appeared in four other texts. In the 1885 story “W ostatniej obronie” (The Last Defense), a young Jewish girl, whose grandparents run an inn that belongs to a landowner, escapes from a rapist, who is the landowner’s heir. Two of Kallas’s short stories, “Pożegnanie” (Farewell) (1908) and “Ofiara” (The Victim) (1897), have heroines who succumb to nonconsensual sex in order to achieve their goals in culture or in science. Yet the most dramatic version is depicted in “Opowieść o pomaranczy” (A Tale about an Orange) by Czesława Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa. The text narrated by the titular orange tells the story of a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl who is sexually abused by an old shopkeeper in exchange for an orange she spotted in his shop window. The narrator comments that the girl is not aware of what exactly was done to her, but she is certain that it was something terrible. However, these are not the only literary texts that explore the question of female sexuality. Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa, in her novel Młodość Hanny Turskiej (The Youth of Hanna Turska), cre-
ates a heroine who tries to live independently and to enjoy the pleasure of the sexual act, even if extramarital. She does not treat it as her disgrace, or moral downfall, unlike Wanda from Kallas’s already-mentioned short story “Pożegnanie” (Farewell), who cannot, despite being an artist, free herself from social conventions and enjoy her romance with a married man. Contemporary discourse, even that present in the feminist press, found poverty and desperation, along with inborn predisposition, the only explanations for sex work. Kallas did not break social conventions, yet a few years later in 1919, in the epistolary novel Kobiety uczciwe (Decent Women), she challenged that view by creating a heroine who resembled Hanna from Rosenblattowa’s novel. Regardless of their choices, these heroines are eventually punished by patriarchal society for their attempts to live unconventional lives and for violating the gender-structured social rules: as Zosia from Czesława Rosenblattowa’s “W noc świętojańską” (At Saint John’s Night) points out, the same act of adultery committed by a man is treated differently than that committed by a woman. Abortion and birth control are noticeably absent from the Polish-Jewish literature; a short story by Regina Pniowerrówna, in which a girl who becomes pregnant hears from her lover that it is her own responsibility and problem, is rather an exception.

Relations between Polish and Jewish Feminists

Polish-Jewish women writers active at the turn of the century treated the woman question seriously and wanted to express their views on it in literary form, which was perceived as an effective tool in provoking social change. Nevertheless, it seems that the majority of Polish-Jewish women writers engaged in writing about the woman question to some extent also participated in the Polish women’s emancipation movement. Certainly, some of them had contacts with Polish emancipationists. Because they came from the milieu of Jewish integrationists, they wanted to be members of Polish organizations, including the women’s suffrage movement. Jewish women’s associations such as the Warsaw-based Bnos Tijon (Daughters of Zion), established in 1903, often supported the Zionist movement and emigration, which stood in contrast with the aims of the integrationists. Another reason for their engagement in the Polish movement might have been that they supported the idea of Poland’s independence, and the Polish women’s movement, like other Eastern and Central European ones, was focused on the question of state independence. It should be noted that supporters of woman’s emancipation in the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia did not have a homogeneous vision of the scale of emancipation, and ideological disputes sometimes resulted in organizational divisions. The scarce sources showing Polish-Jewish women writers’ engagement in the movement indicate that such contact was limited and that their primary public activity was literary.

One of the best examples of the professional contacts between Polish and Polish-Jewish emancipationists is the relationship between Eliza Orzeszkowa and Malwina Blumberg. Blumberg offered to translate Orzeszkowa’s texts into German. In her letters she wrote about her Jewish identity and encouraged Orzeszkowa to translate her manifesto to German women into French and English, as “in France and England
the women’s right[s] movements emerged, and were more popular.”76 Interestingly, Blumberg did not want a fee for the translation of Orzeszkowa’s manifesto to German women, because, as she put it, “My conviction that I contribute a little to that social duty is a sufficient and great reward.”77 Even though Eliza Orzeszkowa was not a radical feminist, she understood feminism narrowly as an opportunity for women to hold particular positions in education and public activities. In her texts, sexual desire is presented as a disgraceful behavior for a woman, yet she was a symbol of women’s emancipation in the Polish lands. She was invited to women’s congresses and celebrated as one of the pioneers of women’s emancipation.78 Aniela Kallas and Gabriela Zapolska, who had a personal relationship, planned to coauthor an article about Polish women, but they never did.79

As Agata Zawiszewska points out, the bases for Polish women’s emancipationists’ activities were different organizations: various associations, the Flying University, women’s reading rooms, and so on.80 These, along with salons,81 also functioned as contact zones for female Polish-Jewish and Polish activists. For example, Amelia Reichmanówna was one of the organizers of Eliza Orzeszkowa’s soirée in the Women’s Reading Room in Kraków. She also gave a lecture on a book about education to the group.82 Róża Centnerszwerowa, on the other hand, followed the notion found in Polish-Jewish literature that in order to make real change, boys’ education had to be reformed. At the 1905 Polish Women’s Congress in Kraków, she delivered a paper on coeducation in schools. She also translated from English into Polish the first Polish guide to sex education83 and collaborated with Nowe Słowo (New Word) and Bluszcz (Ivy)—two women’s magazines. Aniela Kallas reported on the Polish Women’s Congress for the Vienna-based women’s magazine Wiener Mode (Vienna Fashion). She also presented profiles of various Polish women.84 On the cover of the first issue in 1907 of the newly revived feminist magazine Ster (Helm), under the headline “Until Now the Collaboration Was Promised By,” the names of Róża Centnerszw, Adela Zylbersztajnowa, and Bronisława Neufeldówna appeared next to the names of such important figures of the Polish women’s emancipation movement as Kazimiera Bujwidowa, Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska, and Maria Szeliga.85 It seems that the magazine editors recognized the engagement with the woman question of the Polish-Jewish writers and journalists mentioned. However, in 1912 Józefa Bojanowska, one of Ster’s editors, announced a boycott of Jewish businesses. The anti-Jewish attitude caused a split in the woman’s emancipationist movement as several authors (including Teresa Lubińska and Stefania Sempołowska) ceased their collaboration with Ster.86 As woman’s emancipation movements are part of modernization processes and feminists are perceived as progressive, their anti-Jewish sentiment seems to challenge that view. Yet the question of systematic antisemitism among Polish elites requires further research. The boycott supported by members of the Polish intelligentsia was further evidence for acculturating Jews that despite their efforts to become equal members of society, the widespread resistance to the integration of Polish and Jewish identity among Polish cultural elites meant that the idea of double identity could not be realized. Therefore, many Jewish integrationists either had to assimilate or become involved in the foundation of modern Jewish culture. This might also be a reason that their literature was marginalized.
Conclusion

The Polish-Jewish literary sources discussed in this article suggest that the woman question was a crucial issue for Polish-Jewish female writers and that they tried to approach it from different angles. Education seemed to be the most important aspect of the issue for them. Although they supported Polish emancipationists in their notion that girls' education had to be reformed, they realized that it alone was not a sufficient solution and postulated the need to reform boys' education as well. Aniela Kallas, in her discussions with Kazimiera Bujwidowa, highlighted her role as a spokesperson for the “prodigal daughters.” She and her fellow writers, by choosing Polish as their language of expression, drew the attention of Polish feminists to the problems encountered by Jewish women. Their texts were supposed to function as bridges between the two groups. They shifted the heart of the discussion from suffrage to the self-determination of women, introducing the notion of female sexual desire, which contradicted the popular view of the time that women were passive participants of sexual acts.

The traces of their relationships with Polish feminists add a complexity to the picture of the Polish women’s suffrage movement. It seems, despite the scarce biographical data, that Polish-Jewish women writers tried to live the lives of modern, educated, independent women, like the heroines of their texts. However, their original voices became forgotten over time, partly because of World War II and the annihilation of the Jews and their culture in Poland. The time has come to discover them again, as they constituted an interesting milieu and contributed to feminizing nineteenth-century Polish-Jewish literature on an unprecedented scale. Neither Yiddish, nor Hebrew, nor Polish literature of the time had such a strong female voice. Their perspective offers a different image of Polish culture. Although Polish-Jewish women writers were not numerous and their impact on the Polish women’s emancipation movement was probably not significant, their participation exposes a more complex picture of such efforts and highlights the interconnectedness of Polish and Jewish culture and history.

Acknowledgments

This article was written as a part of a project financed by the National Science Center, Poland under grant no. 2014/13/D/HS2/01767. The research on sources regarding Polish feminists was conducted within a project financed by the National Science Center, Poland under grant no. 2019/33/B/HS3/00993. The translations of non-English sources are by the author.

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Notes

2. Ibid., 3.
4. Polish-Jewish refers to literary texts on Jewish themes written and published in the Polish language by Jewish authors who identified themselves with Jewish culture. Such a definition has been used since the 1860s. Zuzanna Kołodziejska, Izraelita (1866–1915): Kulturowe i literackie znaczenie czasopisma [Izraelita (1866–1915): Cultural and literary importance of the periodical] (Kraków: WUJ, 2014), 225–228. Although sometimes, fully assimilated authors are referred to as Polish-Jewish, recent research by Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, Maria Antosik-Piela, and Zuzanna Kołodziejska-Smagała has shown that such references are incorrect. Zuzanna Kołodziejska-Smagała and Maria Antosik-Piela, Literatura polsko-żydowska 1861–1918: Studia i szkice [Polish-Jewish literature 1861–1918: Studies and sketches] (Kraków: WUJ, 2018), 7.
5. Due to the partitions, Polish women’s organizations did not emerge at the same time in the entire area of former Poland. In the Prussian partition, because of its conservative rule and strong Germanization, Polish women’s emancipation movements were virtually absent. In the Kingdom of Poland, the movement was strong and women’s organizations could operate officially after the 1905 Russian Revolution. In Galicia, Polish women’s organizations appeared in the late 1890s and early 1900s. See Katarzyna Sierakowska, “Aspiracje polityczne Związku Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich” [Union for equal rights for Polish women], in Kobieta i świat polityki: Polska na tle porównawczym w XIX i w początkach XX wieku [Women and the world of politics: Poland against the background of other countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries], ed. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (Warsaw: DIG, 1994), 245–254, here 245–247.
7. Integrationists were a group of Jewish intellectuals who advocated for the integration of Jews with the Polish majority through culture. They encouraged learning Polish and engaging with Polish issues, while also preserving the Jewish religion. Kołodziejska, Izraelita (1866–1915), 11–14. See also endnote 11 below. With the emerging Zionist movement in the late 1890s, Polish-Jewish literature became a tool for promoting that idea among Polish-speaking Jewish intellectuals. See Maria Antosik-Piela, Tożsamość i ideologia: Literatura polsko-żydowska wobec syjonizmu [Identity and ideology: Polish-Jewish literature and Zionism] (Kraków: WUJ, 2020), 7–19, 153–158.
8. Anonymous texts and those with undeciphered initials were not taken into account, and thus the calculation is not accurate, but it shows the general tendency.

10. Jewish women from the Polish lands constituted a considerable percentage of female students at different universities in Europe. Jan Hulewicz, *Sprawa wyższego wykształcenia kobiet w Polsce w wieku XIX* [The case of women’s higher education in nineteenth-century Poland] (Kraków: PAU, 1939), 265.

11. I deliberately use the term *acculturating* instead of the more common term *assimilated*, because the milieu the article discusses was undergoing the process of acculturation to Polish. They tried to keep two identities: the Jewish one—limited mostly to religion or roughly perceived tradition—and Polish, represented by their interest in Polish culture, language, and engagement in the fight for Poland’s independence.

12. The January Insurrection (22 January 1863–Autumn 1864) was a Polish rebellion against Russia in the Kingdom of Poland, Lithuania, parts of modern-day Belarus, and Ukraine. Because the underground government promised peasants the abolition of serfdom, peasants, workers, lower gentry, and other classes took part in the rebellion. There was also a group of acculturating Jews who fought during the insurrection. It was brutally crushed by Russian forces and resulted in the imposition of greater Russification and control over Poland. As a consequence, serfdom was abolished, which led to significant demographic growth. The January Insurrection also became an important literary motif. See Stephen R. Burant, “The January Uprising of 1863 in Poland: Sources of Disaffection and the Arenas of Revolt,” *European History Quarterly* 15 (1985), 131–156.


15. Jewish women’s periodicals like *Di Yiddishe Frojenwelt* [The world of Jewish women] existed. Some authors tried to publish in Polish feminist periodicals, but without success (for example, Kallas sent her novels to *Ster* [Helm]: “książki nadeslane” [Books sent], *Ster* 13 (1896), 224). Yiddish-language periodicals, for linguistic and especially ideological reasons, were not the medium in which the female Polish-Jewish authors wanted to publish.

16. There were around twenty-five Polish-Jewish women authors publishing between 1861 and 1918. However, it is difficult to state the exact number as some texts were not signed, some were signed with initials only, and not all of them have been deciphered. Among those twenty-five women there were around ten who published more than two texts. The number of men authors is also difficult to state, but roughly counting, there were around thirty of them. As a result, Polish-Jewish nineteenth-century literature was gender-balanced with regard to the authorship of texts, which seems to be an exceptional phenomenon, because neither Polish nor Yiddish literature of that time had so many women representatives. See Joanna Lisek, *Kol isze—głos kobiet w poezji jidysz (od XVI w. do 1939 r.)* [Kol ishe: The voice of women in Yiddish

17. The financial situation of *Izraelita* was variable and depended on many factors. In 1908 and 1909, publication of the weekly was suspended due to financial and other problems, while in 1867 and 1871 the editors complained about the number of subscribers. *Izraelita* 14 (1871), 112. *Ojczyzna* was closed in 1892 due to the lack of a sufficient number of subscribers. Wilhelm Feldman, *Asymilatorzy, syjonści i Polacy* [Assimilationists, Zionists and Poles] (Kraków: Księgarnia St. Barańskiego, 1893), 15–16.


19. Marian Fuks’s thesis that the number of subscribers did not reflect the exact number of readers was supported by one of *Izraelita*’s readers, who claimed that in a town called Turek, articles from the weekly were read to the public gathered once a week during a soirée organized by the community. M.S., “Korespondencja: Turek w lutym” [Correspondence: Turek in February], *Izraelita* 6 (1876): 46–47, here 47. See Marian Fuks, *Żydzi w Warszawie* [Jews in Warsaw] (Poznan: Sorus, 2010), 178.


21. Letter from Malwina Blumberg to Eliza Orzeszkowa, 28 December 1886, Archiwum Elizy Orzeszkowej [Archive of Eliza Orzeszkowa, AEO], rps. 287.


23. This group was not numerous, but for some years they played a crucial role in forming the relations between the non-Jewish majority and the Jews in the Kingdom of Poland.


29. As the reconstruction of their biographies is very difficult due to lack of sources (one should keep in mind that archives stored in Poland were predominantly destroyed during...
World War II and the Jewish archives nearly disappeared), there are some authors whose occupation, dates of life, education, family, and hometown are not known at all. Thus, I try to draw my conclusions considerately.


32. The progressive circles postulated acculturation as a means for the improvement of living conditions for the majority of Jews in the Polish lands.

33. Because there is little data on the financial situation of Jewish women writers, it has to be estimated using an analogy. Orzeszkowa was a prominent, renowned women writer and if she was unable to live purely on the income from her literary work, it seems highly unlikely that Jewish women, whose books were published in many fewer copies, could do so. On Orzeszkowa’s financial situation, see Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, “Tradycje szlacheckie a dążenia emancypacyjne kobiet w społeczeństwie polskim doby rozbiórów” [The nobility traditions and women’s emancipation struggles in Polish society in the partition era], in Kobieta i edukacja na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku [Women and education in the Polish lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries], vol. 1, eds. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (Warsaw: DIG, 1995), 9–24, here 20.


36. See, for example, Aniela Kallas to Bolesław Wysłouch 20 April 1907, Letters of Bolesław Wysłouch, 1887–1934, Ossolineum Library Manuscripts, rkps. 7178/II, 267; Aniela Kallas to Bolesław Wysłouch 19 October 1910, Letters of Bolesław Wysłouch Ossolineum Library Manuscripts, rkps. 7178/II, 283.

37. In fact, a fragment (Chapter 9) of Córki marnotrawne was published in Jedność in 1912 (issues 2–4), but it was devoted to relations between Poles and Jews and between the intelligentsia and peasants.

38. Such a view was common among Polish elites of the time. Andrzej Szwarc, “Aspiracje edukacyjne i zawodowe kobiet w środowiskach inteligencji Królestwa Polskiego u schyłku XIX wieku” [Women’s educational and career aspirations among the intelligentsia of the Kingdom of Poland in the late nineteenth century], in Kobieta i edukacja na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX


41. A. Kallas, “Przeznaczenie” [Destiny], Izraelita 17–21 (1907), here no. 21, 244.

42. Lena Bandówna, “Neofitka” [The neophyte woman], Izraelita 14–19, 21–26 (1898).

43. Catalogue of students 1897/1898; 1903/1904; 1904/1905, Archives of the Jagiellonian University, WF II 327, WF II 339, WF II 340.

44. Information that she received a PhD can be found in Nowa Gazeta [New journal] 42 (1911), 4. Her thesis was entitled “Œuvre sociale d’art en Belgique contemporaine” [Social work of art in contemporary Belgium]. She moved to Brussels in 1906 after divorcing her first husband, Samuel Endelman, in 1905. In 1908 she married Henryk Rosenblatt and according to the marriage certificate, at the time of the wedding she was a student. National Archives of Belgium, Etat civil, acte de mariage nr 505, Henri Roseblat, https://search.arch.be/fr/rechercher-des-personnes/resultats/q/persoon_achternaam_t_0/rosenblat/q/persoon_voor naam_t_0/henri/q/zoekwijze/p?M=0&V=0&O=0&persoon_0_periode_geen=0 (accessed 5 January 2022). More biographical information can be found in Kołodziejska-Smagała and Antosik-Piela, Studia i szkice, 44–45.

45. In Serbia, for example, the discussion on female education focused on primary and secondary schooling, as there was a high percentage of illiteracy. Ana Kolarić, “Gender, Nation, and Education in the Women’s Magazine Žena (The Woman) (1911–1914),” Espacio, Tiempo y Educación [Space, time, and education] 4, no. 1 (2017), 1–23, https://dx.doi.org/10.14516/ete.142. In the Polish lands the number of illiterate young people was not much smaller. This suggests that Polish intellectual elites were more focused on their own class than on the lower classes.

46. See, for example, Grażyna Kempa, “Formy edukacji żeńskiej w Królestwie Polskim (1815–1864) na tle poglądów naukowych i publicystycznych” [Different forms of girls’ education in the Kingdom of Poland (1815–1864) against the background of scientific and publicist opinions], in Szkolnictwo, opieka i wychowanie w Królestwie Polskim [Schooling system, care, and education in the Kingdom of Poland], ed. Hanna Markiewiczowa and Iwona Czarnecka (Warsaw: APS, 2016), 174–189, here 180.


48. Ibid., 30.


50. Contrary to the popular view that arranged marriages dominated in Jewish culture, they were popular among the middle and upper classes, while the lower classes could not afford matchmakers (shadchen). Shaul Stampfer, Families, Rabbis and Education: Traditional Jewish Society in Nineteenth Century Central Eastern Europe (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016), 38–39. See, for example, S., “Słówko o Szyduchim” [A word on Shidduhim], Izraelita 5 (1871), 37.

a common scheme known from popular literature to confront two worlds: here the world of metropolitan acculturating Jews was juxtaposed with the life of provincial “backward” Jews. See Kołodziejska, Izraelita, 253–265.

52. This genre was popular among Polish positivists and its main characteristic was an emphasis on its documentary character, which corresponded with the already-mentioned notion that literature was a reflection of everyday reality. Bachórz, Poszukiwanie realizmu, 8.


56. Maria Blumberg, “W chwili rozłąki” [In the moment of separation], Izraelita 17 (1893), 145.


60. The title of this short story is the name of the heroine, which in Polish is not neutral, because the surname comes from the Polish verb “to squeak,” and there is a saying in Polish that poverty is so dramatic that it “squeaks”; thus for a Polish reader, it is obvious that the heroine lives in almost unbearable conditions.

61. Maria Alfa, “Bez rozwodu” [Without a divorce], Ojczyzna 1–2 (1889); Kołodziejska-Smagała and Antosik-Piela, Antologia, 50–55.

62. C.W., “Ze świata” [From the world], Ster 21 (1897), 297.


64. The novels Życie [Life], by Marion (a pen name of Cecylia Glücksman, nota bene of Jewish descent), and those by Zofia Nałkowska, especially the one called Kobiety [Women], are Polish examples.

65. See, for example, issues of Świat Płciowy [Sexual world] from 1905; Anna Limprechtówna, “O prostytucji w małżeństwie” [On prostitution in marriage], Ster 1 (1907), 47–50.


68. C. Halicz [Czesława Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa], “Opowieść o pomarańczy” [A tale about an orange], Nowe Życie [New life] 2, no. 16 (Mar.–Oct. 1911), 507–512.


70. See, for example, Augustyn Wróblewski, “O moralności płciowej” [On gendered morality], Czystość [Purity] 3 (1905), 20–22, here 21.
71. On the sexual behavior of different Polish-Jewish heroines, see Kołodziejska-Smagała and Antosik-Piela, *Studia i szkice*, 147–188.
72. Czesława Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa, “W noc świętojańską” [At Saint John’s night], *Wędrowiec* [The rambler] 29 (1902), 574.
73. Compare the already-mentioned research by Ana Kolarič—see endnote 45.
75. I could not find any evidence regarding whether Malwina Blumberg and Maria Blumberg were the same person. Malwina was a translator, and Maria wrote novels and short stories, as well as translating literature from Russian, Yiddish, and German; both women, at least for some time, lived in Germany.
76. Malwina Blumberg to Orzeszkowa, 12 January 1892, AEO, rps. 287.
77. Ibid.
81. On Jewish salons in the Polish lands, see Ela Bauer, “From the Salons to the Street: The Development of the Jewish Salon in Warsaw at the End of the 19th Century,” *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* (2008), 414–429. The salons of Polish-Jewish intellectuals were places where Polish and Polish-Jewish intelligentsia could meet. For example, Jadwiga Kraushar organized meetings in which all of the most prominent Polish writers took part, including Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka, as well as the members of *Izraelita’s* editorial board.
82. *Naprzód* 113 (1903), 3.
84. Aniela Kallas to Bolesław Wysłouch, 12 October 1905, Ossolineum Library Manuscripts, rkps. 7178/II, 259. I thank Rachel Manekin for sharing with me the copies of *Wiener Mode*, including Aniela Kallas’s articles.
85. The cover of *Ster* 1–2 (1907).