

## The Jews of Galicia and Bukovina in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Workshop

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### "An Identity in Flux: The Life and Work of Wilhelm Feldman in fin-de-siècle Urban Galicia."

In his 1922 essay on Wilhelm Feldman, "Z Profilu," Jan Rawicz quotes a famous Zionist who remarked, "Wilhelm Feldman from the very beginning of his spiritual development was a Pole. He did not cease to be a Jew, because he was never one. Only internal bonds of relations connected him with the Jewish masses, mercy and general human sympathy—nothing more. A common worldview perspective could not arise from common blood, because the soul from the very beginning fed itself with Polishness, with ideals of bards and romantics."<sup>1</sup> This characterization, although harsh, nonetheless hints at the complex identity of Feldman. In the late nineteenth century, Wilhelm Feldman assumed a pivotal, and largely unexpected role, in the development of Polish nationalism culture. In his role as author and publisher Feldman helped to spearhead a revival of Polish literature in urban Galicia. Additionally, Feldman was active in contemporary social issues, most notably in the matters of Polish nationalism and Jewish assimilation of Galician Jewry. Feldman's undeniable literary and social successes were nonetheless achieved while transcending the often-clashing Polish and Jewish cultures.

At his core Feldman was an individual driven both by a desire for justice for the unenlightened Jewish masses and by a desire to foster a knowledgeable and enlightened citizenry for the independent Polish state. Born in Zbaraz, a small town in present-day Ukraine, Feldman's upbringing was traditionally Jewish. The "unenlightened" nature of Zbaraz, led Feldman to advocate complete cultural and political assimilation as the only possible path for Galician Jewry.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Feldman used his work in periodicals such as *Ognisko*, *Ojczyzna*, and *Krytyka* not only to publish Polish literature but also as a means to defend his political, social and cultural views.

Feldman's traditional Jewish origins coupled with his cultural work beg the question: how was it possible for a Jew, such as Feldman, to play such a pivotal role in Polish nationalist and cultural re-awakening? My dissertation analyzes how Krakow's cultural public urban sphere was shaped in the fin de siècle. This research also will consider questions such as: how did the process of ethnification affect the creation of this public sphere? How did this climate affect Feldman and his work?

My dissertation seeks to address two important and glaring lacunas in European historiography. First, historians largely have analyzed the experience of urbanization in

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Rawicz, "Z Profilu," in *Pamięci Wilhelma Feldmana* (Krakow, Poland: Czcionkami Drukarni Narodowej w Krakowie, 1922), 143.

<sup>2</sup> Eisenberg, Filip, "Wilhelm Feldman Szkic Biograficzny," in *Pamięci Wilhelma Feldmana* (Krakow, Poland: Czcionkami Drukarni Narodowej w Krakowie, 1922), 24. In a sketch of Feldman's life, Filip Eisenberg characterizes life in Zbaraz to consist of "dirt, over-crowding, lack of sunlight, narrow little streets, an overwhelming struggle for survival," while the intellectual climate was a mixture of harsh realism and mysticism

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the context of Western European cities. Scholarship on Eastern European cities is lacking in this regard. Historical developments in Eastern European cities differed from Western cities, such as London and Paris. Most Eastern European cities were characterized by great ethnic diversity, which made daily urban life more complex. Thus, I contend that urban transformation in Eastern Europe followed a differed path from Western Europe. The second lacuna relates to urban inter-ethnic relations. I do not suggest that no scholarship exists on this topic, on the contrary much has been written about it. However, a great majority of this scholarship focuses on issues of conflict and violence, specifically related to the Holocaust. Additionally, where scholarship does exist it treats the Jewish and Polish histories as two separate histories.<sup>3</sup> I hope that my focus on Krakow's cultural development will allow me to move away from the Western centric narrative of urban history and to integrate the Jewish and Polish experiences.

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<sup>3</sup> There are some exceptions to this among them Marci Shore's excellent study of Warsaw, *Caviar and Ashes*.