

Anna Margolin (1887-1952)
Readings with Beila Engelhardt Titelman
(Paideia 21.09.2020)



Rosa Lebensboim in 1903, she later published as Anna Margolin.
Critics claim she authored the finest Yiddish poetry of the early twentieth century
Book: Anna Margolin, **Lider** (1929), book in Yiddish:
<https://ia800302.us.archive.org/6/items/nybc208331/nybc208331.pdf>

Translation into Swedish: Anna Margolin, **Detta är natten**, Ellerströms, transl. by Beila Engelhardt Titelman, 2018.

Short introduction from Hellerstein, Kathryn

The Art of Sex Celia Dropkin and Anna Margolin

It is not surprising that Ezra Korman included poems by Celia Dropkin and Anna Margolin in his 1928 anthology, *Yidishe dikhterins*. Like their modernist contemporaries, the male poets of *Di Yunge* and *Introspectivism*, Dropkin and Margolin wrote poems that expressed **individuality and aestheticism; shook off obligations to political ideology; and experimented with the disruption of language and form, influenced by Russian Acmeism and German modernism**. But their writings differed from those by the men in that they advanced a new idea of poetry altogether—one that markedly announced the author as a sexual female. Like their contemporaries, Dropkin and Margolin chose to write in Yiddish, rather than in the non-Jewish languages of their European educations—Russian, German, or Polish—or in English, the language of their new home. This choice made sense in America, with its considerable Yiddish-speaking audience and press, Yet, although they rarely invoked traditional Jewish prayer, text, or custom, the frame of reference for the poetry of Dropkin and Margolin was as much Jewish as it was Western Civilization writ large, as much the Megillah as Rilke. The inherent Jewishness of the Yiddish language challenged these women modernists, alongside the men in the Yiddish literary avant-garde, to fashion poems that transcended culture and expressed the

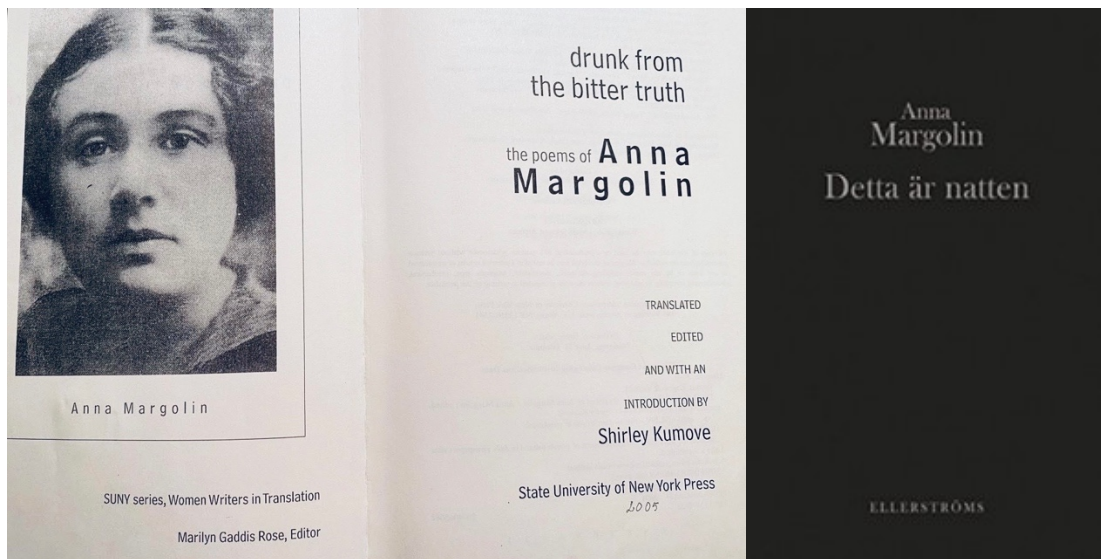
fragmentation and urgency of their moment. Both Dropkin and Margolin were among the very few women represented in the anthologies and miscellanies of the New York modernist movements, *Di Yunge* and *Introspectivism*. For example, Zishe Landau's 1919 *Yunge* anthology included one poem by Celia Dropkin as well as one by Fradl Shtok.

Following the example of Landau's 1919 collection of distinctive modernist poems, Anna Margolin edited a slender anthology, *Dos yidishe lid in amerike—1923* (*The Yiddish Poem in America*), which she described as a collection "not of poets, but of poems . . . the best of the year." Margolin's collection included (out of twenty-two poets and forty-three poems) only two poems by women—Celia Dropkin's "*Di royte blum*" (*The Red Flower*) and Malka Lee's "*Shtoyb*" (*Dust*)—and, oddly, omitted her own work.

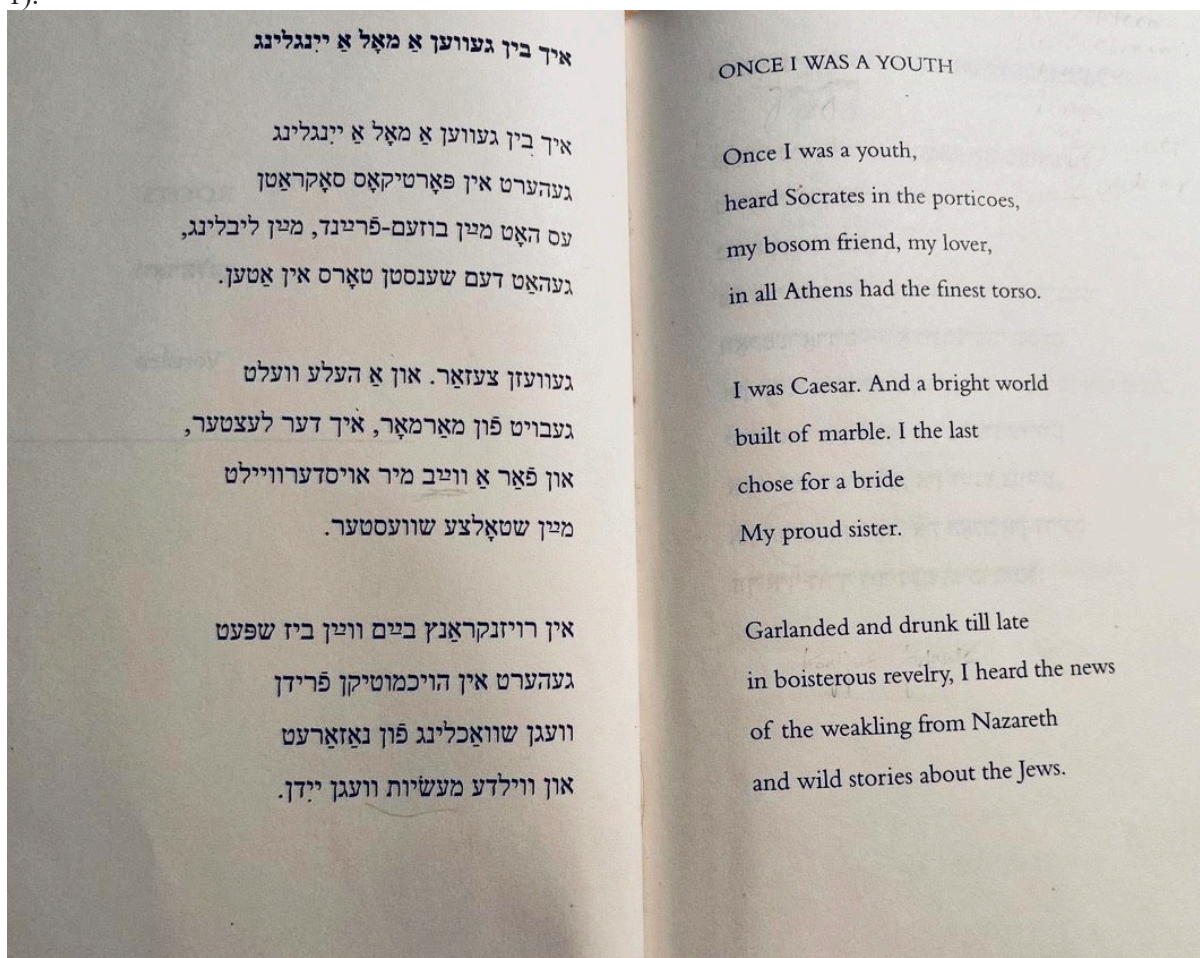
In his substantial 1927 *Modern Yiddish Poetry: An Anthology*, Samuel J. Imber sought to "offer to those uninformed or misinformed a glimpse of the modern poetical works of Yiddish literature, a literature hidden from them by the barriers of the Hebrew alphabet and by the slight strangeness of the misjudged language of the ghetto." In this effort to enlighten an English-literate American audience, Imber presented transliterated Yiddish texts and prose translations of 166 poems by 77 poets, including 8 poems by 5 women—Celia Dropkin, Rokhl Korn, Anna Margolin, Fradl Shtok, and Miriam Ulinover.

But as of 1928, when Korman's anthology went to press, neither Dropkin nor Margolin had published a volume of her own poetry. In this chapter, I argue that the rebellious, **apparently non-Jewish poetry of Dropkin and Margolin** can be seen to advance a specific idea of Yiddish literary tradition and the place of a woman poet within it. Dropkin's poems challenged the cultural **ideas that women should be tsniesdik (modest)** and that **their sexual purpose was reproductive**. Placing an unbridled female sexuality at the center of her poems, Dropkin suggested that within it lay a woman poet's creative powers. **Margolin, in turn, challenged the notion that a woman poet was subject to a narrowly defined cultural Jewishness through her sexualized vocabulary of paganism and Christianity**. In different ways, both Dropkin and Margolin took to task the notions of what Yiddish poetry should be and how women poets should write. To clarify, in the following discussion I do not assume that the poetry of Dropkin and Margolin is literally autobiographical. Rather, through my readings, I argue that within each collection of poems lies a submerged narrative about the figure of a woman poet.

Source: Hellerstein, Kathryn. *A Question of Tradition* (Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture) (p. 243- 244). Stanford University Press.



1).



I WAS ONCE A HANDSOME BOY

Anna Margolin

I was once a handsome boy,
heard Socrates in the porticos,
my darling, my bosom-buddy,
had Athens' most stunning torso.

There was Caesar. And a bright world
built of marble, the last was I,
and selected as my wife
was my proud sister.

Rose-wreathed, over wine, all night through,
I heard in the highest of spirits
about that weakling from Nazareth
and wild stories about Jews.

— Translated by Maia Evrona

איך בין געווען אמאל א אינגלינג

איך בין געווען אמאל א אינגלינג,
געהערט אין פארטיקאס סאקראטן,
עס האט מיין בוזעס־פריינט, מיין ליבלינג,
געהאט דעם שענסטן טארס אין אטהען.

געוועזן צעזאר. און א העלע וועלט
געבויט פון מארמאר, איך דער לעצטער,
און פאר א ווייב מיר אויסדערוויילט
מיין שטאלצע שוועסטער.

אין רוזנקראנץ ביים וויין ביז שפעט
געהערט אין הויכמוטיקן פרידן
וועגן שוואכלינג פון נאזארעט
און ווילדע מעשיות וועגן אידן.

I. וואַרצלען VORTSLEN

איך בין געווען אַ מאָל אַ יינגלינג
IKH BIN GEVEN AMOL A YINGLING

Ikh bin geven amol a yingling,
gehert in portikos Sokratn,
es hot mayn buzem-fraynt, mayn libling,
gehot dem shenstn tors in Aten.

Gevezn Tsezar. Un a hele velt
geboyt fun marmor, ikh der letster,
un far a vayb mir oysderveylt
mayn shtoltse shvester.

In royznkrants baym vayn biz shpet
gehert in hoykhmutikn fridn
vegn shvakhling fun Nazaret
un vilde mayses vegn yidn.

I.

RÖTTER

JAG VAR EN GÅNG EN YNGLING

Jag var en gång en yngling,
hörde Sokrates i arkaderna,
min själsfrände, min älskling
hade den vackraste torson i Aten.

Jag var Caesar. Och en ljus värld
byggd av marmor, jag den siste,
och till hustru valde jag ut
min stolta syster.

I rosenkrans med vin till sent
hörde jag med högdraget lugn
om veklingen från Nasaret
och vilda historier om judar.

Anna Margolin

KIEDYŚ BYŁAM MŁODZIEŃCEM

Kiedyś byłam młodzieńcem,
słuchałem Sokrata pośród portyków.
Mój drogi przyjaciel, ukochany,
miał najpiękniejszy tors z Ateńczyków.

I był raz Cezar. Jasny świat
budowałem z marmuru – ja, ostatni,
a na żonę sobie wybrałem
mą własną siostrę o dumnej twarzy.

W różanym wieńcu do późna słuchałem,
w dobrym humorze, oparach wina,
o słabeuszu z Nazaretu
i niestworzonych historii o Żydach.

przełożyła Karolina Szymaniak

2).

Just As My Glance Full of Tears

Just as my glance full of tears,
the night is intimate and blue.
Say your cruel words,
but with a voice that is tender.

And, here and there, in your voice
there will suddenly bloom
in the moonlight a garden,
in the moonlight a face.

And the play of sorrow
on a sick conscience again:
I know so much, my tired one,
oh, I don't want to know anymore.

But listen, oh, like so, until late
for the coming of the shadow of love,
sad as river grasses,
tender as the names of the flowers.

Azoy vi mayn blik der farrerter

Azoy vi mayn blik der farrerter
iz der ovnt bloy un intim.
Zog dayne kalte verter,
nor mit a tsartlakher shtim.

Un in dayn shtim do un dortn
vet ufblen umgerikht
in levone-shayn a gortn,
in levone-shayn a gezikht.

Un dos troyer-shpil vider
fun a krankn gevisn.
Ikh veys azoyfil, mayn mider,
oh, ikh vil mer nisht visn.

Nor hern azoy-o biz shpet
dem shotn fun libe kumen,
troyerik vi tsheret,
tsart vi di nemen fun di blumen.

3).

SHE OF THE COLD MARBLE BREASTS

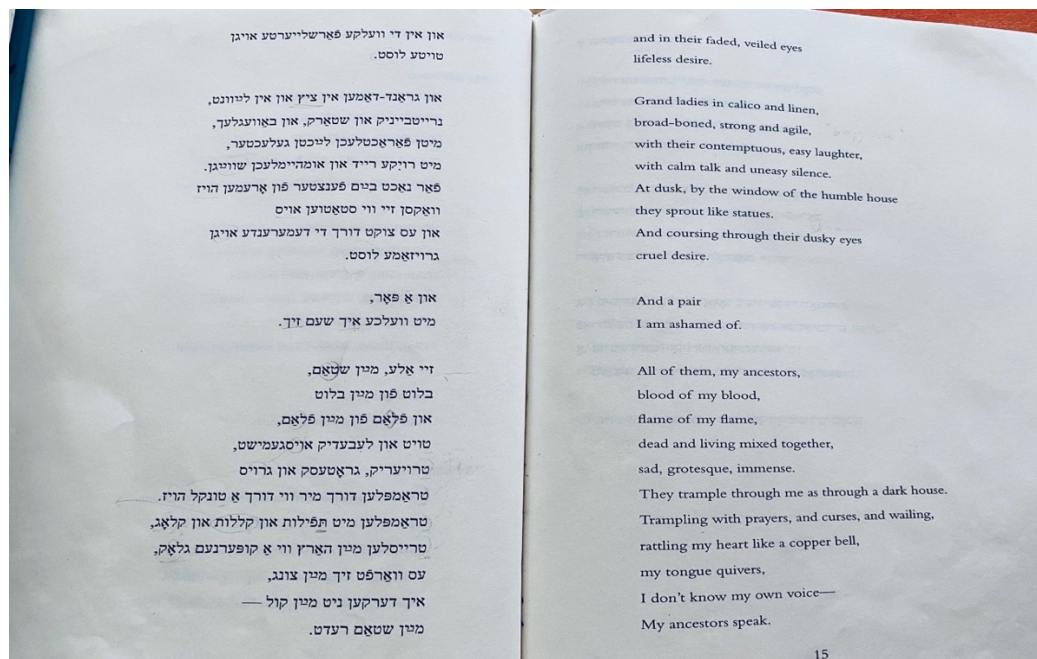
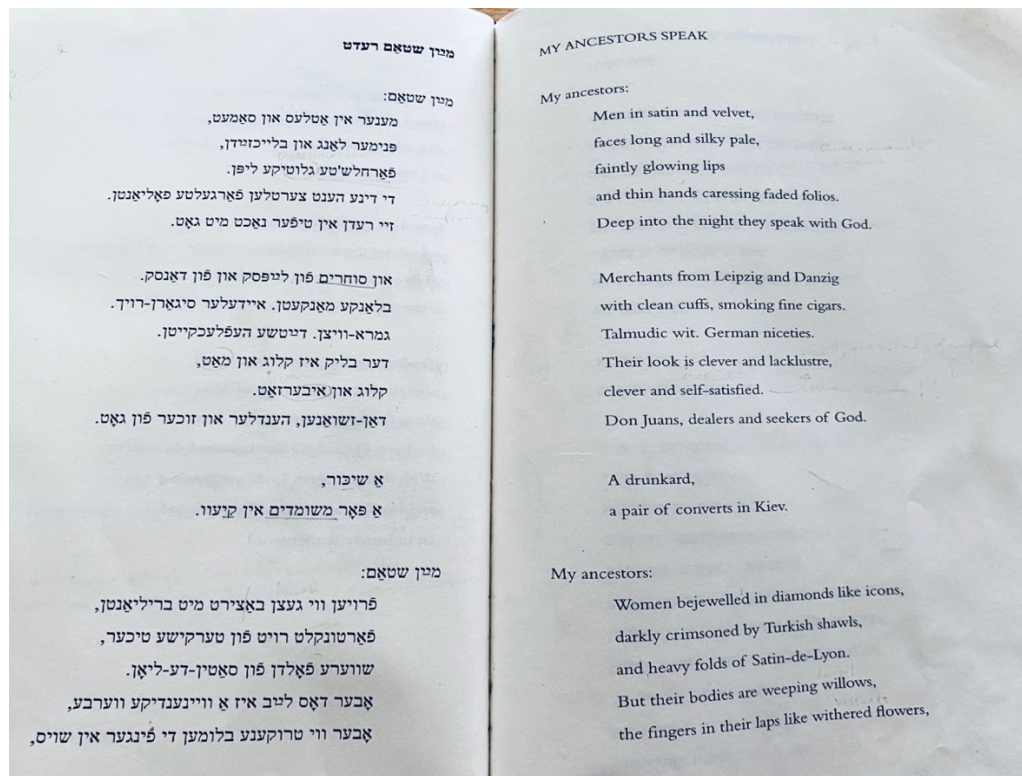
She of the cold marble breasts
and the slender, light hands—
she squandered her beauty
on rubbish, on nothing.

Perhaps she wanted it, perhaps lusted after it:
the unhappiness, the seven knives of anguish
to spill life's holy wine
on rubbish, on nothing.

Now she lies with shattered face.
Her ravaged spirit has abandoned its cage.
Passerby, have pity, be silent—
say nothing.



4). My Ancestors Speak



Mayn shtam:

Mener in atles un samet,
penem'er lang un bleykhzaydn,
farkhaleshte, glutike lipn.
Di dine hent tsertlen fargelte foliantn.
Zey redn in tifer nakht mit Got.

Un sokhrim fun Laypsk un fun Dansk.
Blanke manketn. Eydelers sigarn-roykh.
Gemore-vitsn. Dayshe hefekhkeytn.
Der blik iz klug un mat,
klug un iberzat.
Don-Zhuanen, hendler un zukher fun Got.

A shiker,
a por meshumodim in Kiev.

Mayn shtam:

Froyen vi getsn batsirt mit brilliantn,
fartunklt royt fun terkishe tikhet,
shvere faldn fun satin-de-lion.
Ober dos layb iz a veynendike verbe,
ober vi trokene blumen di finger in shoys,
un in di velke farshleyerte oygn
toyte lust.

Un grand-damen in tsits un in layvent,
breytbeynik un shtark, un baveglekh,
mitn farakhtlakhn laykhten gelakhter,
mit ruike reydn un unheymlakhn shvaygn.
Far nakht baym fentster fun oremen hoyz

Min stam:

Män i satin och sammet,
ansikten långa och silkesbleka,
kraftlösa, glödande läppar.
Tunna händer smeker gulnade folianter.
Sent på natten talar de med Gud.

Och köpmän från Leipzig och Danzig.
Skinande manschetter. Fin cigarrök.
Gemore-skämt. Tyska artigheter.
Blicken är klok och matt,
klok och mycket mätt.
Don Juaner, handlare och sökare av Gud.

En suput,
ett par konvertiter i Kiev.

Min stam:

Kvinnor som avgudar, prydda med diamanter,
mörkt röda av turkiska sjalar,
tunga veck av Satin-de-Lyon.
Men kroppen är en grätande pil,
och händerna som torra blommor i knäet,
och i de visna beslöjade ögonen
död lust.

Och fina damer i chintz och linne,
breddbenta, starka och smidiga,
med föraktfulla lätta skratt,
med lugnt prat och obekvämt tystnad.
På kvällen vid fönstren i fattiga hus

vaxn zey vi statuen oys
un es tsukrt durkh di demerende oygn
groyzame lust.

Un a por,
mit velkhe ikh shem zikh.

Zey ale, mayn shtam,
blut fun mayn blut
un flam fun mayn flam,
toytn un lebedik oysgemisht,
troyerik, grotesk un groys
trampeln durkh mir vi durkhn a tunkl hoyz.
Trampeln mit tfiles un kloles un klog,
treyslen mayn harts vi a kupernem glog,
es varft zikh mayn tsung,
ikh derken nit mayn kol –
mayn shtam redt.

växer de upp som statyer
och genom deras mörknande ögon skälver
grym lust.

Och ett par,
vilka jag skäms för.

De alla, min stam,
blod från mitt blod
och flamma från min flamma,
blandade döda och levande,
sorgsna, groteska och stora
trampar genom mig som genom ett mörkt hus.
Trampar med böner, eder och jämmer,
skakar mitt hjärta som en kopparklocka,
min tunga darrar,
jag känner inte igen min röst –
min stam talar.

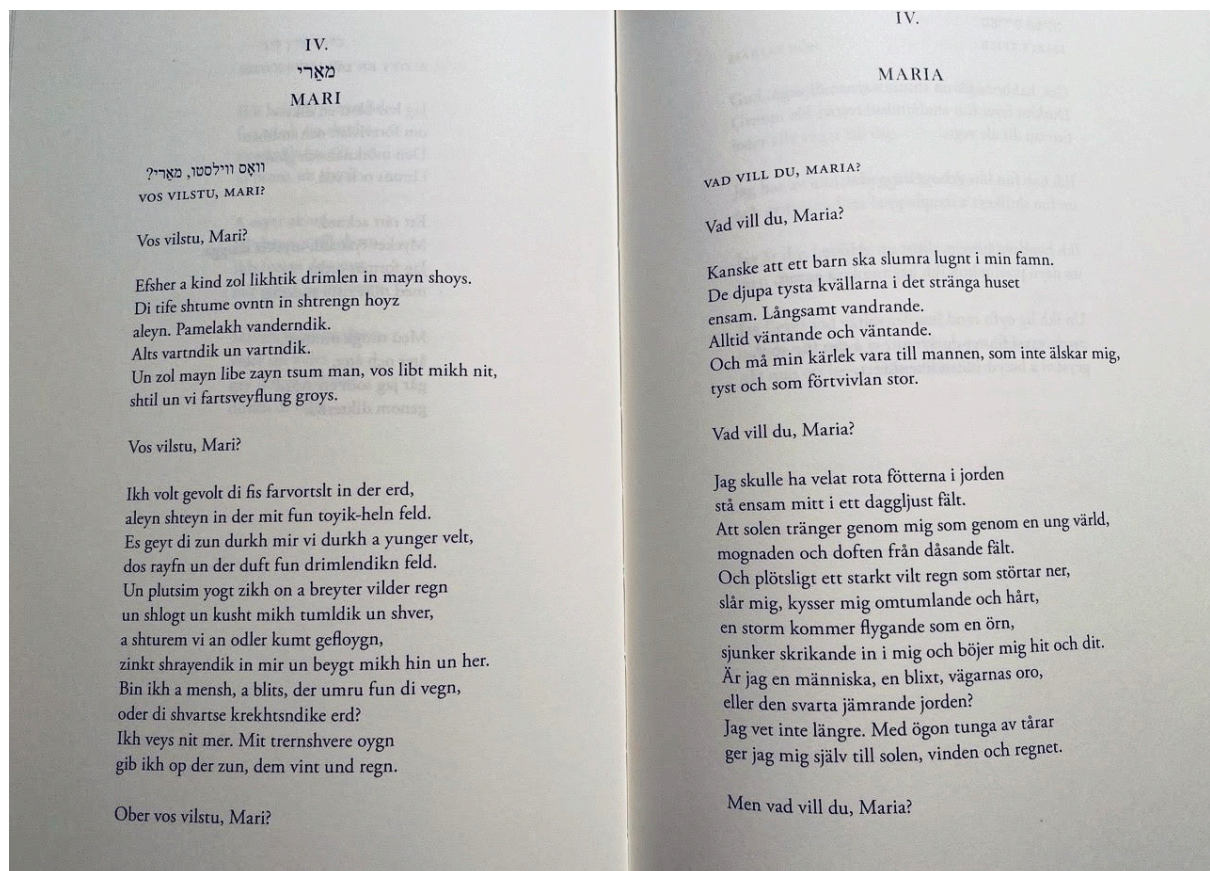
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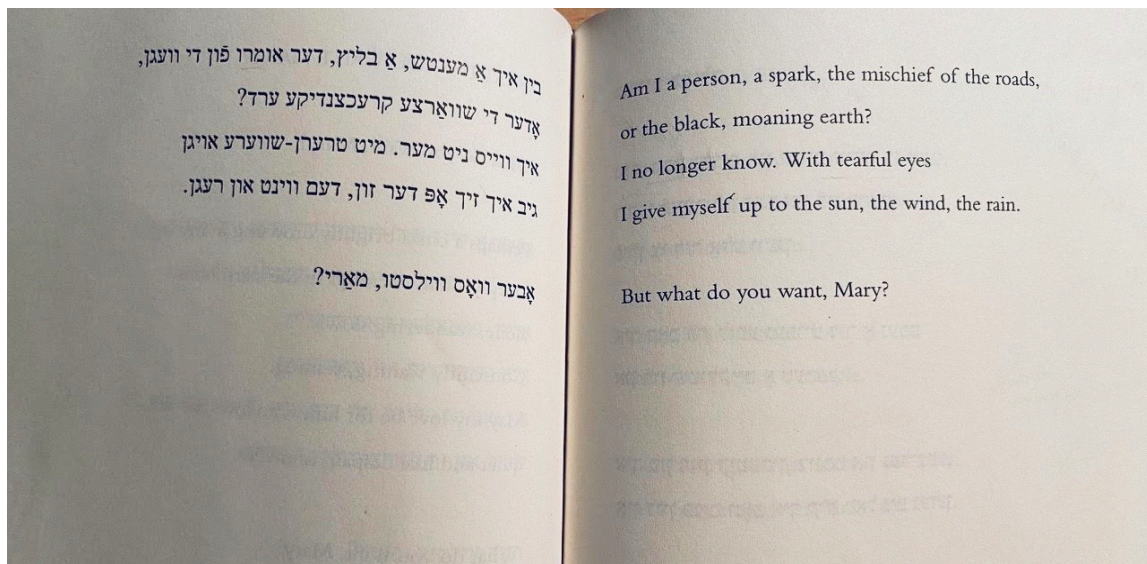
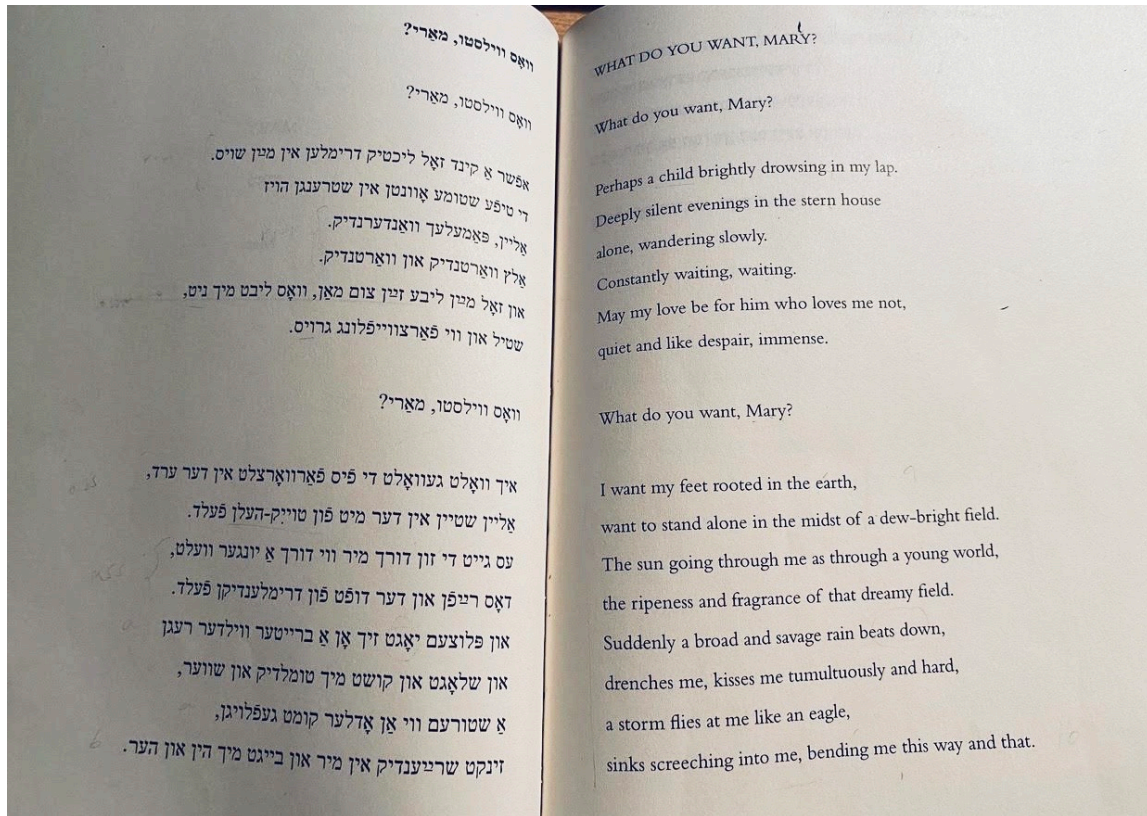
My Tribe Speak

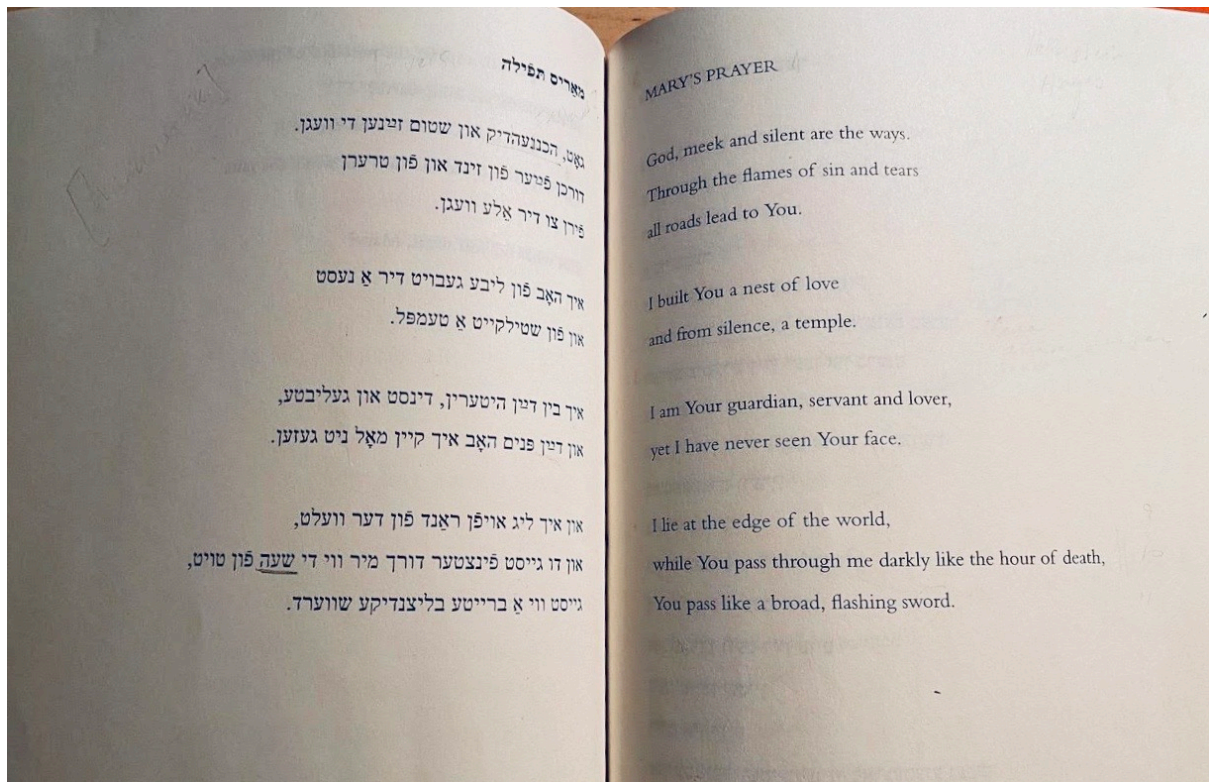
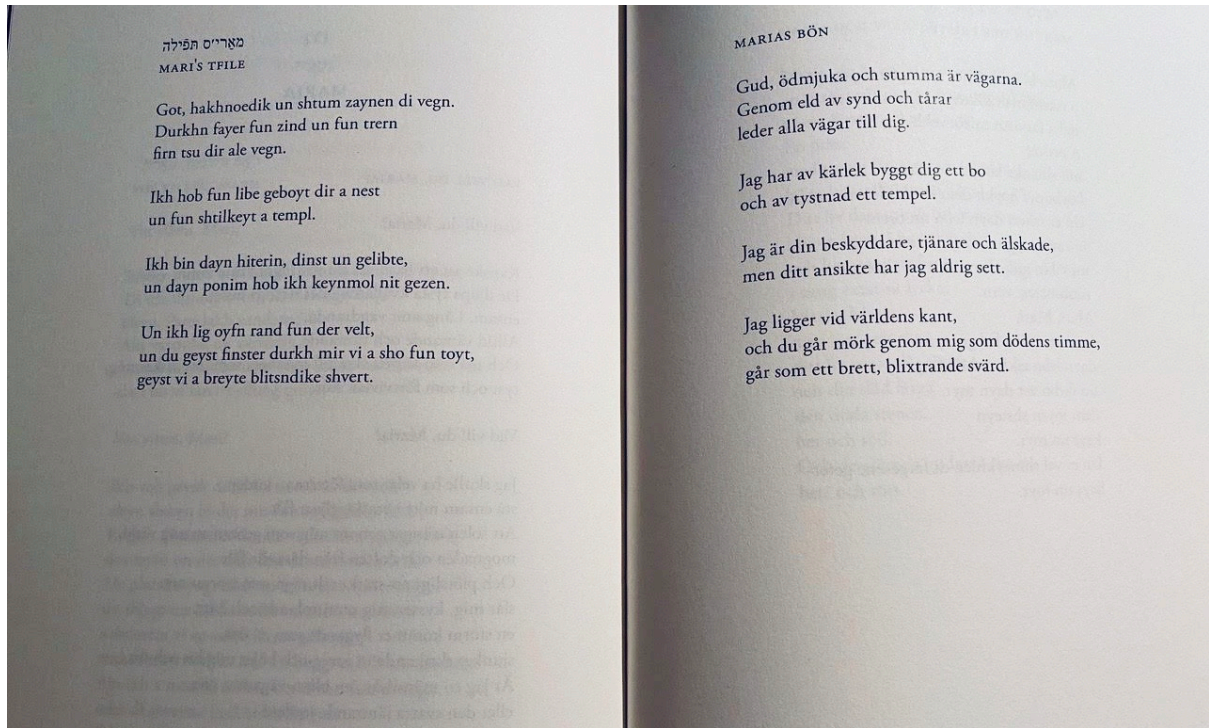
All of them—my tribe,
blood of my blood
flame of my flame,
the dead and the living mixed;
sad, grotesque, large,
they tramp through me as through a dark house,
tramp with prayers and curses and laments.
They shake my heart like a copper bell,
my tongue quivering.
I don't recognize my own voice—
my tribe speaks.
(...)

Excerpt taken from the dedication to the book by
Feldman, Deborah, *Exodus: A Memoir*. Penguin Publishing Group. 2014

5). Maria







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