

# 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: <a href="https://ia800302.us.archive.org/6/items/nybc208331/nybc208331.pdf">https://ia800302.us.archive.org/6/items/nybc208331/nybc208331.pdf</a>

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.



SUNY series, Women Writers in Translation

1).

Marilyn Gaddis Rose, Editor

# drunk from the bitter truth

the poems of Anna Margolin

TRANSLATED

EDITED

AND WITH AN

INTRODUCTION BY
Shirley Kumove

State University of New York Press

# Margolin Detta är natten

ELLERSTRÓMS

# איך בין געווען אַ מאָל אַ ייִנגלינג

איך בין געווען אַ מאָל אַ ייִנגלינג געהערט אין פּאָרטיקאָס סאָקראַטן עס האָט מײַן בוזעם-פֿרײַנד, מײַן ליבלינג, געהאַט דעם שענסטן טאָרס אין אַטען.

געוועזן צעזאַר. און אַ העלע וועלט געבויט פֿון מאַרמאָר, איך דער לעצטער, און פֿאַר אַ װײַב מיר אױסדערװײלט מײַן שטאָלצע שװעסטער.

אין רויזנקראַנץ בײַם ווײַן ביז שפּעט געהערט אין הויכמוטיקן פֿרידן וועגן שוואַכלינג פֿון נאַזאַרעט און ווילדע מעשׂיות וועגן ייִדן.

## ONCE I WAS A YOUTH

Once I was a youth,
heard Socrates in the porticoes,
my bosom friend, my lover,
in all Athens had the finest torso.

I was Caesar. And a bright world built of marble. I the last chose for a bride My proud sister.

Garlanded and drunk till late in boisterous revelry, I heard the news of the weakling from Nazareth and wild stories about the Jews.

#### 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 Cæsar. 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 שמשל ש אינגלינג

איך בין געווען אַמאָל אַ אינגלינג, געהערט אין פּאָרטיקאָס סאַקראַטן, עס האָט מיין בוזעם־פריינט, מיין ליבלינג, געהאַט דעם שענסטן מאָרס אין אַטהען.

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

אין רויזנקראנץ ביים וויין ביז שפעט געהערט אין הויכמוטיקן פרידן וועגן שוואַכלינג פון נאַזאַרעט און ווילדע מעשיות וועגן אידן.

### I. וואָרצלען VORTSLEN

איך בין געווען אַ מאָל אַ יינגלינג וגא 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. ter, britterson I. was

#### 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

## 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 fartrerter

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

Un in dayn shtim do un dortn vet ufblien 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.

#### 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.

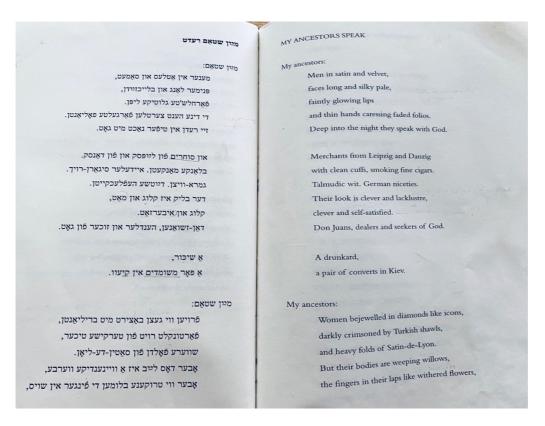
Her ravaged spirit has abandoned its cage.

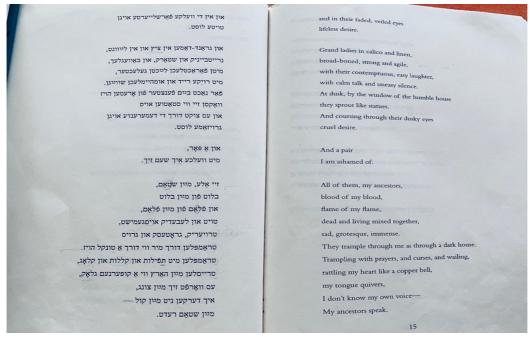
Passerby, have pity, be silent—

say nothing.



# 4). My Ancestors Speak





מטן שטאַם רעדט MAYN SHTAM REDT

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. Eydeler sigarn-roykh. Gemore-vitsn. Daytshe heflekhkeytn. 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 briliantn, fartunklt royt fun terkishe tikher, 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 laykhtn gelakhter, mit ruike reyd un unheymlakhn shvaygn. Far nakht baym fentster fun oremen hoyz

MIN STAM TALAR

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.

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

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

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vaksn zey vi statuen oys un es tsukt 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, toyt un lebedik oysgemisht, troyerik, grotesk un groys tramplen durkh mir vi durkhn a tunkl hoyz. Tramplen mit tfiles un kloles un klog, treyslen mayn harts vi a kupernem glok, 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.

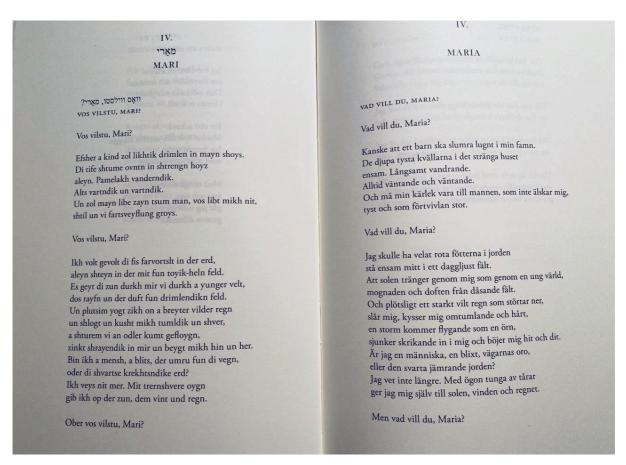
# **Fragment:**

#### 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



וואָס ווילסטו, מאַרי? WHAT DO YOU WANT, MARY? וואס ווילסטו, מאַרי? What do you want, Mary? אַפֿשר אַ קינד זאָל ליכטיק דרימלען אין מײַן שױס. אַפֿשר אַ perhaps a child brightly drowsing in my lap. רי טיפֿע שטומע אָוונטן אין שטרענגן הויז זי טיפֿע שטומע אָוונטן אין Deeply silent evenings in the stern house alone, wandering slowly. אַלץ װאַרטנדיק און װאַרטנדיק. Constantly waiting, waiting. און זאָל מײַן ליבע זײַן צום מאַן, וואָס ליבט מיך ניט, May my love be for him who loves me not, שטיל און ווי פֿאַרצווייפֿלונג גרויס. quiet and like despair, immense. ?וואָס ווילסטו, מאַרי What do you want, Mary? איך װאָלט געװאָלט די פֿיס פֿאַרװאָרצלט אין דער ערד, I want my feet rooted in the earth, אַליין שטיין אין דער מיט פֿון טוייַק-העלן פֿעלד. want to stand alone in the midst of a dew-bright field. עס גייט די זון דורך מיר ווי דורך אַ יונגער וועלט, The sun going through me as through a young world, דאָס רײַפֿן און דער דופֿט פֿון דרימלענדיקן פֿעלד. the ripeness and fragrance of that dreamy field. און פּלוצעם יאָגט זיך אָן אַ ברייטער ווילדער רעגן Suddenly a broad and savage rain beats down, און שלאָגט און קושט מיך טומלדיק און שווער, drenches me, kisses me tumultuously and hard, אַ שטורעם ווי אַן אָדלער קומט געפֿלויגן, a storm flies at me like an eagle, sinks screeching into me, bending me this way and that. זינקט שרײַענדיק אין מיר און בייגט מיך הין און הער.

בין איך אַ מענטש, אַ בליץ, דער אומרו פֿון די וועגן, אועגן, איך אַ מענטש, אַ בליץ, דער אומרו פֿון די וועגן, איר פין איר אי שווארצע קרעכצנדיקע ערד?

Am I a person, a spark, the mischief of the roads, or the black, moaning earth?

I no longer know. With tearful eyes
I give myself up to the sun, the wind, the rain.

But what do you want, Mary?

MARIAS BÖN מאַריים תפֿילה MARI'S TFILE Gud, ödmjuka och stumma är vägarna. Genom eld av synd och tårar Got, hakhnoedik un shtum zaynen di vegn. Durkhn fayer fun zind un fun trern leder alla vägar till dig. firn tsu dir ale vegn. Jag har av kärlek byggt dig ett bo och av tystnad ett tempel. Ikh hob fun libe geboyt dir a nest un fun shtilkeyt a templ. Jag är din beskyddare, tjänare och älskade, Ikh bin dayn hiterin, dinst un gelibte, men ditt ansikte har jag aldrig sett. un dayn ponim hob ikh keynmol nit gezen. Jag ligger vid världens kant, Un ikh lig oyfn rand fun der velt, och du går mörk genom mig som dödens timme, un du geyst finster durkh mir vi a sho fun toyt, går som ett brett, blixtrande svärd. geyst vi a breyte blitsndike shvert.

MARY'S PRAYER און שטום זײַנען די וועגן. הכננעהדיק און שטום זײַנען די וועגן. God, meek and silent are the ways. און פֿון טרערן פֿון זינד און פֿון טרערן Through the flames of sin and tears all roads lead to You. איך האָב פֿון ליבע געבויט דיר אַ נעסט I built You a nest of love און פֿון שטילקייט אַ טעמפּל. and from silence, a temple. איך בין דײַן היטערין, דינסט און געליבטע, I am Your guardian, servant and lover, און דײַן פּנים האָב איך קיין מאָל ניט געזען. yet I have never seen Your face. און איך ליג אויפֿן ראַנד פֿון דער וועלט, I lie at the edge of the world, while You pass through me darkly like the hour of death, און דו גייסט פֿינצטער דורך מיר ווי די שעה פֿון טויט, גייסט ווי אַ ברייטע בליצנדיקע שווערד. You pass like a broad, flashing sword.

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