

ENGLISH ABSTRACTS

FEMALE TASTES AND MALE EXPECTATIONS IN SIXTEENTH
CENTURY YIDDISH PROSE

Josef Bamberger

Old Yiddish literature is not generally regarded as being literature with a special appeal for women, even though many old Yiddish books refer to women on their cover page or in the preface. An examination of the content and character of these books shows that the Yiddish books were addressed to the general public of men and women, and sometimes even exclusively to men.

On the other hand, there were certain Yiddish manuscripts from the sixteenth century that were copied especially for women. In these manuscripts are included, among other texts, translations and adaptations of talmudic legends into Yiddish. A comparison of a sample of stories that were adapted for women with their talmudic sources, and also the nature of the adaptation of the same stories in the famous Yiddish compilation of stories (Basel, 1602) that was published for general readership, shows that in each manuscript the translator and editor, as a man, does not relate to the expected taste of his specific addressee, but to his expectations as regards the taste of female readership.

THE WHITE-SLAVE TRADE IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH
CENTURY, AND MENDELE MOKHER SEFARIM'S
"BE'EMEK HABAKHA": A LITERARY-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Gur Alroey

At the beginning of the twentieth century, networks of Jewish white slave traders in Eastern Europe traded young

Jewish women to brothels overseas. Various contemporary historical sources documented this phenomenon. This article claims that the story “*Be’emek Habakha*”, written by Mendele Mokher Sefarim, could be used by the historian as an additional primary source. The historian can learn aspects of white slave trading that do not exist in historical sources from the story.

THE VOICES AND THE CHOIR; YIDDISH WOMEN’S POETRY IN
THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Avraham Novershtern

Yiddish women’s poetry emerged as a significant presence in the context of Yiddish literary creativity after World War I in all of its main centers, both in Eastern Europe and in the United States. The anthology, *Yidishe dikhterins (Yiddish Women Poets)* (1928), edited by Ezra Korman, played a major role in shaping this corpus as a distinctive literary entity with common distinctive features, and in claiming its own tradition.

Challenging these assumptions, this article explores the interplay of cultural factors that influenced the critical reception of Yiddish women’s poetry in this period. It analyses the underlying factors that affected the attitude of Yiddish critics toward women’s poetry. On the one hand, their approach was basically positive for a very specific reason: the wish to see women as active participants in the creation of modern Yiddish literature. They saw this as a fit response to the process of linguistic and cultural assimilation in Eastern Europe, which was apparently more widespread among women than among men. On the other hand, Yiddish literary criticism, almost completely dominated by male writers, had a shared set of expectations regarding the very nature of women’s writing. According to them, it had to be

lyrical, personal, sincere and tender. The preference shown by Yiddish women writers for poetry over other genres met these expectations.

A comparative analysis of the output of three prominent Yiddish women writers in the interwar period – Celia Dropkin, Rokhl Korn and Kadia Molodowsky – challenges the very possibility of understanding their poetry in the framework of a shared set of literary norms, due to the striking differences in their thematic range, their shaping of the lyrical persona, and their approach to gender issues.

“*FROYEN*”: FEMINISM AND EXPRESSIONISM IN THE POETRY
OF MALKA HEIFETZ-TUSSMAN

Aviva Tal

In her first book, *Lieder* (1949), the Yiddish-American poet Malka Heifetz-Tussman (1893-1987) explores the feminist trend in a special chapter called “*Froyen*” (“Women”). While presenting a typology of Jewish women in the modern era, she not only describes a dichotomous group of feminine types, but explores the relationships between men and women during intimate encounters, focusing on the female point of view. At the peak of the feminine portrayal stands a new creation – an androgynous being with an Expressionist scream of assertive existence. At the end of the chapter, the ode “*Ikh Bin Froy*” (“I am Woman”) presents a new feminine ideal, integrating the history of Jewish Femininity with the achievement of both career and family life in the modern era.

KADYA MOLODOWSKY'S STATUS AND ACTIVITY IN THE
JEWISH LITERARY MILIEU IN WARSAW

Nathan Cohen

The article reviews Kadya Molodowsky's activity in Warsaw's literary milieu. Emphasis is put on her involvement in cultural and public issues, such as women's writing, "*shund*" literature, children's literature, and Polish-Jewish relations. Molodowsky was also involved in the pro-Communist newspaper *Der fraynd*, and in various political debates that occurred around it.

ESTER KREITMAN – A SCION OF THE SINGER FAMILY –
THE REJECTED SISTER

With Hebrew Translation of her Story "The New World"

Lea Garfinkel

The story tells the tale of a woman who suffers bitter disappointment from the day of her birth. This day, which should have been a happy one for the family, was viewed as a nuisance. The story, partly biographical, is about a baby who was given away to a poor nursing maid immediately after birth. There was no room for the baby's cradle in the nursing maid's shabby home, except for a small spot underneath a dusty table. This initial experience of rejection would haunt the author, as later testified by her family members, both orally and in her writing, until the day she died.

LEA GREENSTEIN – MOTHER AND POET

Shalom (Kaplan) Eilati

Lea Greenstein was born on 2 August 1903 in the small town

of Seda (Siad) in northwest Lithuania, where she spent her younger years. She attended the first Yiddish middle school, located in Ukmerge (Vilkomir), and then moved to Kaunas (Kovno), where she worked as a secretary in an orphanage. She later trained as a nurse, and worked in the local Jewish hospital. In Kovno she became a member of a number of literary circles, and, in 1931, married the teacher and writer Israel Kaplan. Two children were born to the couple: Shalom in 1933 and Yehudith in 1937.

Lea Greenstein published her first poem – “*Ich Vart*” (“I Wait”) – in 1930. Thereafter, she published poems in local Jewish papers and journals, which, after World War II, were partially traced in Israeli archives. Her poems are suffused with a deep lyrical mood, and they sensitively observe the human condition. At the time, they received favorable reviews, and were much appreciated in literary circles. Some of her letters that have survived from the 1930s speak of her wide interests in literature and art, and express serious reflections on these subjects. They also indicate how she was torn between the duties of a housewife and her desire for independence.

In 1940, Lithuania was occupied by the USSR. Lea Greenstein’s last poem reveals the support and enthusiasm with which she greeted the Soviets, using the image of an itinerant Gypsy woman who will now give birth in a clean bed and not in a barren field. Her joy was short-lived. In summer 1941, German armies occupied Lithuania and she, together with her family, like all the Jews, was imprisoned in the ghetto. Less than a year later, Israel Kaplan was deported to the Riga ghetto and Lea was left to fend alone for herself and her children.

For the next two and a half years, Lea Greenstein worked in a felt factory outside the ghetto. Miraculously, she and her small family survived several *Aktions* until, at the beginning of 1944, she managed to smuggle her seven-year-old daughter out of the ghetto and, sometime later, her son as well. Both children were hidden with Lithuanian people.

Lea Greenstein perished when the Germans liquidated the ghetto in July 1944. Her daughter Yehudith was denounced by the people who had sheltered her. Israel Kaplan managed to survive several German death camps and, after the war, was reunited with his son Shalom, who survived as well.

This essay contains Lea Greenstein's eleven surviving poems in Hebrew translation, together with a bibliography. Further details about her life, especially the final years, can be found in Shalom Eilati's autobiography, *Crossing the River* (forthcoming in English translation). A publication, currently under preparation, includes the original Yiddish poems, several reviews and essays dealing in detail with her life and poetry, and a selection of her letters. The publication will be entitled *To Burn, Better to Flicker*, a title based on a citation from one of her letters to the writer Nathan Greenblatt (Goren).