**Anna Margolin (1887-1952)**

Anna Margolin is a Yiddish poet of the first half of the twentieth century, and though she produced only a single volume of poetry, Margolin is often considered one of the most important and influential Yiddish modernists. Born Rosa Lebensboym in the Lithuanian town of Brisk, she traveled widely and restlessly between eastern and western Europe, Palestine, and the United States before settling in New York in 1913. While reporting on women’s issues for the Yiddish press, including the urgent issue of women’s suffrage, she began contributing to Yiddish literary journals of the time under the pseudonym Anna Margolin, which she would later adopt as her own name. Her poetry, at times impressionist, symbolist and post-symbolist, imagist and expressionist was difficult to categorize for the critics of the period and as a result she was both praised and harshly criticized by her contemporaries. Her work did not completely adhere to the demands of the two rival poetic schools of the period, the symbolist Di yunge and the more overtly modernist Introspectivists, though she was ultimately respected by both. Margolin’s status in between the dominant poetic modes of the period comes out of her refusal to adhere to the radical idealism practiced by many of her contemporaries. While much of Yiddish Modernism relies on the transcendental possibility of the literary object, Margolin’s poetry is always haunted by the specter of ruin and failure, a poetic performance under the sign of destruction. For instance, Margolin often employs conventional rhyming structures but frustrates normative expectations of sound and sense with slant rhymes that highlight the absurd or shocking connections between native Yiddish words and foreign ones. Thematically, her poetry expresses the disappointment and despair of a fractured self, foregrounding the poet’s struggle with the apparent impossibility of the female subject. The poetic self is never able to find full expression or cathartic release in her poetry and instead is constantly hidden by hard, irremovable masks or embodied in shattered monuments of stone. Such a poetic renders Margolin unique in Yiddish literature in her ability to confront and confound expectations that her work adhere to Yiddish literature’s tradition of “women’s poetry,” in which a woman’s poetic voice is assumed to conform to the conventions of a soft, personal lyricism. Margolin’s intentional multiplying of voice, gender, and self refuses the imposition of an essentialized female subject and defers any redemptive, transcendent, or universalizing horizon of meaning. Such a stridently despondent poetic mode proved difficult to maintain, both in her writing and in her personal life. Soon after publishing her first and only volume, Margolin withdrew from the public sphere and remained a recluse until her death.

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