

WEISINGER LECTURE

Friedrich Schiller in the Jewish Provinces: Fradel Shtok and the Aesthetics of Jewish Prose

Allison Schachter, Vanderbilt University



TUESDAY
March 6th, 2018

6:30 pm Reception

7:00 pm Lecture

The Magnes Collection
of Jewish Art and Life

2121 Allston Way
Berkeley, CA

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Celebrated as the poet who wrote the first sonnet in Yiddish, Fradel Shtok was also a masterful modernist stylist. Her short fiction grapples with the relationship between the aesthetic and the everyday. She published a single collection of short fiction in 1919 that was dismissed by critics for its embrace of prose narrative techniques that made her more akin to Flaubert than to Sholem Aleichem. Moshe Olgin, the socialist critic, described her narrative style as “cold” and “heartless.” The lore about Shtok is that traumatized by negative reviews, she repudiated Yiddish, and died in an asylum. This was not true: she continued to write in Yiddish, and died in LA years after news of her tragic death. Why was the literary establishment so quick to “kill her off”? Was it her outrage at the sexist reception of her work, or was it her daring prose fiction?

This talk examines Shtok’s modernist feminist aesthetic, which grapples with the revolutionary potential of prose fiction and the everyday reality structuring women’s participation in the genre, and offers a revised account of Yiddish modernism--one that acknowledges the centrality of woman to the modern Jewish revolution.

Allison Schachter is Associate Professor of English and Jewish Studies, and Director of the Program in Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford 2012). She is currently working on a book entitled: *On Jewish Prose: Women Writing Jewish Modernity in the Twentieth Century*. She has published widely in a range of journals including, *PMLA*, *mlq*, *Comparative Literature*, and *Jewish Social Studies*. At Vanderbilt, she is a founding member of the Trans Area Literature Collective.

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