

A Call for Papers

The Avant-Garde in Yiddish Culture: The 100th Anniversary of *Khalyastre*

The First World War and its aftermath created turmoil not only in the material world of Eastern European Jewry, with its changing boundaries; it also left a deep impression on its spiritual world and on Yiddish culture. Out of the ruins of that war arose the avant-garde of Yiddish literature. As the war broke out, aspiring writers found themselves on the battlefield, or else escaped from the devastation that the war left in its wake. Like their non-Jewish peers, these writers expressed in their works the feelings of existential angst as well as the hopes kindled by the October Revolution and by the collapse of the political order in Eastern and Central Europe. Just as crucial as the experience of the war was the violence of the pogroms that afflicted the Jews of Eastern Europe and which reached a peak during the civil war in Ukraine.

The avant-garde of Yiddish literature appeared after its three great classic writers died one after another in the years 1915-1917. In those years, the younger generation of Yiddish writers stood at crossroads, both ideological and poetic. The many vibrant poetic streams and ideological outlooks found expression in the joint artistic output of all cultural fields and in the fruitful reciprocal relations between literature, plastic art, theater, film and criticism. In this way, in 1917 the “Kultur Lige” was established in Kiev as an umbrella organization for wide spread cultural and educational efforts. This avant-garde activity was characterized by sporadic gatherings of authors and artists in different cities (Kiev, Moscow, Lodz, Warsaw, and even Berlin, which was, for a while, a home for Yiddish artists.) These centers produced a variety of journals, among them “Eygns”, “Shtrom”, “Rimon-Milgroym”, “Yung Yidish”, “Ringin”, “Khalyastre”, “Di Vog” and “Albatros”. The Sturm und Drang of the Yiddish avant-garde shook up the established literary world, and often met with misunderstanding by the reading public. It was even greeted with anger by such critics as Hillel Zeitlin. Nevertheless, the major representatives of the avant-garde would become some of the most notable artists of 20th century Yiddish. Even today, the poems of Peretz Markish and Uri Tzvi Grinberg are examples of extraordinary creativity within Yiddish literature. Three decades after the appearance of these works, some of these authors were among those murdered in the bloodbath that destroyed Yiddish literature in the Soviet Union.

On the 100th anniversary of *Khalyastre* The Rena Costa Center for Yiddish Studies at Bar Ilan University and the Center for Yiddish Culture (in process) at Ben Gurion University plan a conference in the Spring of 2022, that will be devoted to the different aspects of the Avantgarde in Yiddish literature. Among the topics are:

- The poetics of the Yiddish avant-garde.
- The Yiddish avant-garde and its relationship to other avant-gardes.
- The relationship between tradition and revolution.
- The collaboration between Jewish authors and artists in books and in journals.
- The collaboration between Jewish authors and artists and their non-Jewish colleagues.
- The Yiddish avant-garde in theater and film.
- Political and ideological issues in the history of avant-garde in the Soviet Union and Poland.
- The history of the “Kultur Lige”.
- The reception of artists and authors in the cultural centers of the U.S. and Palestine.
- The critical reception of the avant-garde.

Researchers in these and related fields are invited to send an abstract of their proposed papers (up to 200 words), their details (names, academic affiliation, contact information) until 31/07/2021 to the email below: Yiddish_avant_garde@yahoo.com

Conference organizers: Prof. Nathan Cohen,
The Rena Costa Center for Yiddish Studies,
Bar Ilan University

Dr. Roy Greenwald,
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