

Elias Schulman MS Collection

ARC MS15

Finding aid prepared by Dr. Felicia Figa.

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies
Creator	Schulman, Elias
Title	Elias Schulman MS Collection
Call number	ARC MS15
Date [inclusive]	1905-1986
Extent	15.5 linear feet
Language	English

Cite as:

[Identification of item], in the Elias Schulman Archive at the Archives of the Library at the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, [Box #, FF #].

Biography/History

Dr. Eliyahu Schulman, the well known researcher and critic of Yiddish literature, essayist, and writer, was born in the Russian Empire in the White Russian city of Slutsk, on the fifteenth of September, 1905, according to the original Russian birth certificate issued in Slutsk, which is found in his private archives. (In some biographies it is stated that he was born in 1907, in others, in 1909.) He comes from a merchants' and religious family. His father was also a parchment manufacturer.

In Slutsk, Schulman studied in Metukan Hebrew school, which was, at that time, a progressive educational institute. Besides bible and Talmud, he also studied the Hebrew language and grammar, calligraphy, history, recitation and other subjects. From his Hebrew school diploma we can infer that he was a very good and diligent student. After he completed his courses at this school he furthered his studies at the Slutsk business school. At the age of seventeen, in 1923 he emigrated with his family to America and settled in New York. There, he graduated from the Ellen's Evening High School in 1929 and later he graduated from City College. This was during the 1920's, years of great development of the Yiddish literature and press in America. There appeared new directions. There were heated discussions. This stream of Yiddish creativity carried with it the young Schulman. He used to attend literary meetings, where he listened to discussions, absorbing new ideas, thoughts, and accomplishments. He also participated in organizing youth groups. He studied and became steeped in the history of Yiddish literature and culture and began to set his first steps towards a literary sphere.

The desire and urgency to know and to learn led him to join a Yiddish creative center. He was connected with Warsaw, which was one of the most important centers, because since 1935 he as a constant co-worker of the periodical, "Literarische Bleter." (His membership card of the periodical is found in his private archives).

But Vilno, with its Yiddish scientific institute "Yivo" was also one of the most important centers of Yiddish cultural life in the world. When "Yivo" aspirant courses opened up, Schulman was one of the first to register (1935-1936). There, he studied economic history of Eastern European Jews under the tutelage of Dr. Friedman and actual economic problems of Jews under Yacov Leshichinsky. He studied Yiddish language under Noah Prilutsky, psychology under Dr. Armion, psycho-analysis under Max Weinreich and others.

From his notes on these lectures, which are found in Schulman's private archives, there is information and statistical material about Eastern European Jews and especially regarding those in the Soviet Union, which is of great significance and interest to researchers, even today. Under the supervision of Max Weinreich, Zelig Kaganovich and Zalman Reisin, Schulman wrote his first great product, the history of Yiddish literature in America between 1870 and 1900, issued in New York in 1943.

In the last days of June 1936, Schulman traveled to the Soviet Union. He stayed a short while in Minsk, and later in Kiev. There he had the opportunity to meet Jewish writers, to gather material about Yiddish culture and educational methods in the Soviet Union. He later employed this material in the 60's, when he became a doctoral candidate at Dropsie College in Philadelphia, where he studied Judaic science. There he earned his doctorate and wrote a dissertation on Jewish Education in the Soviet Union. This work was published in book form in English "History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union, 1918-1948", by KTAV Publishing House of New York, in association with Philip H. Levin of the Graduate Center for Contemporary Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 1971. This book was and remains a pioneering work. The critics praised it highly. The author gave a broad and thorough picture of the Jewish education and methods of teaching in the Soviet Union on the basis of the general Yiddish political and social life. The revival of the Yiddish educational system, after the victory of the Bolshevik revolution, (national in form, socialistic in content) until its liquidation, is related by Schulman, like a dramatic historic process. His book is also rich in information about Yiddish schools during the Czar's regime in Russia.

During the Years 1961-1975 he was the director of the library Board of Jewish Education in New York. In 1967 he took over the editorship of the periodical, "Der Veker". He occupied himself with pedagogical activity, from 1971, when he became professor of Yiddish literature and cultural history, in Queens College, and of Yiddish literature at the teachers seminary, which was then an important tribune of Yiddish writers and intelligentsia. Since then, he regularly published articles, essays, research works, studies, and greater works on literary historical themes, activities, and critical analyses of novels. The list of periodicals that he participated in is large. It includes: "On the Way", "Celebrities", "Der Veker", Yiddish Language, Yivo Papers, "Folk and World", "Folk Papers", "Forwards", "Free Worker's Voice" "Tsukunft", "Culture and Education", "Culture and Life", "Chicago", and others.

Schulman also published articles and greater works, about Yiddish literature, in many Yiddish and Hebraic editions, outside of the United States. His articles were printed in Israel: "At Home", "The Golden Chain", "Today", "Voice of Israel", "Literary Papers" (before the second world war), "Voice of the People" (after world war I~). In France: "Our Word", and also in other countries.

He also collaborated with several English periodicals: "The Ammerican Zionist", "Chicago Jewish Forum", "Jewish Book Annual", "Jewish Quarterly" (London), "The Jewish Quarterly Review", "Jewish Social Studies", "The Jewish Spectator", "Judaism", "Midstream" "National Jewish Book Center", "Partisan Review", "Point of View", "Reconstructionist", "Russian Review", "Soviet Jewish Affair", "Studies in Bibliography", and "Booklore".

From 1977, he was a collaborator of the Yearly Encyclopedia: Brittanica, in which he wrote about new Yiddish books. He participated in a number of collectable books, in which he exposed many important works: In the collector's book celebrating the 250th year of the Yiddish press in New York, in 1957; in "J. Steinberg's Memorial Book" in New York; in 1961, and the publication "Lita" (Vol. 2, II), Tel Aviv, 1965; "Shlomo Bikel Anniversary book", New York, 1967; "Abraham Golomb Anniversary Book", Los Angeles, 1970; in the "Journal for the Research of Yiddish Literature and Press" (three volumes), New York, 1975. He wrote several biographies of Yiddish writers, printed in the Encyclopedia Judaica (in Jerusalem). Well known are Schulman's prefaces to worthy works by Yiddish writers: to Leon Weiner's "History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century", the new edition of Max Erik's "History of Yiddish Literature" (New York), 1979, J.L. Peretz (New York) 1985, David Pinsky's "Yankel der shmid", (New York), 1979, Leon Cobrin's "Yankel Boyle" and the "Yiddish, Drama of the Twentieth Century" (New York) 1979. He, also wrote biographies of Yiddish writers published in the Lexicon of the New Yiddish Literature, Volume VII and VIII.

Dr. Schulman also published in book forum a number of works. Certain of his researches are of individual themes, others are collections in which he includes previously printed publications. In book-form he includes "History of Yiddish Literature in America 1870-1900" (New York) 1943; "Young Vilno" 1929-1939 (New York) 1946; "Soviet Yiddish Literature" (New York) 1971; "Studies on the History of the Yiddish Language" (in Hebrew) Tel Aviv, 1969; "Israel Zinberg" (Paris) 1971, the above- mentioned dissertations on Yiddish education in the Soviet Union, New York 1971 (in English: "The History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union) Portraits and educates" (New York) 1979.

For more than a half-century, Dr. Schulman was occupied with problems of Yiddish literature as a literary historian, critic, and also as a chronicler who has, with great care, observed and recorded the emergence of its actual development. Among the literary critics in America he held a prominent position, as the only one who responded to every new Yiddish book that was published in the world. With particular interest, he followed everything that was transpiring in the Soviet Union on this subject.

He was absorbed in the Yiddish literature, not only as a timely researcher, but also because of a personal intimacy with its creators and with the Yiddish press. The list of the newspapers and other periodical publications that he wrote for, already tells us how much he was personally involved with the Yiddish press and other publishing vehicles. Particularly, as he was an editor and co-editor of periodicals. This diversified knowledge of the Yiddish writers, and Yiddish newspapers and other publications was reflected in his publications of hundreds of articles and studies.

This alone would be enough to establish that no future researcher of Yiddish literature could disregard with indifference such a source of knowledge as the works of Eliyahu Schulman and the Schulman archives.

However, he was not only a chronicler and communicator. He was an original analyst, and from the works he treated, he tried to derive answers to cardinal problems whether it was regarding Yiddish culture or Yiddish life, in general. His approach is reflected in his treatment of Chaim Nakhman Bialik which is included in his book "Portraits and Educates". Schulman devotes himself to this task, especially with analyzing Bialik's Yiddish poems and translations: "Bialik as a Yiddish poet and his place in Yiddish poetry. However, in this study there is another theme which is no less interesting and important -- Bialik's

relationship to Yiddish and how it differed from his relationship to Hebrew. Also, there is another problem: should we evaluate Bialik's relationship to Yiddish as positive, and is he justified in saying that Yiddish culture and Yiddish language has no future?

Schulman did not only analyze the approach and opinion of others. In his writings he did not only pose the question. He took his own stand and defended the thought that Yiddish literature and generally Yiddish culture and language, has a future. He even considered the problem of the probability of having Yiddish literature in a non-Yiddish language. For example, a Yiddish literature in English. Moreover, regarding this subject, he not only pointed out that such a problem existed, but he defended the thought that it is not possible to have a Yiddish literature in a foreign language. He also pointed out that Yiddish literature in a foreign language is not Yiddish, even though it is written by Jews and the figures and themes are Yiddish.

With great affection, Schulman was linked to Yiddish writers of the past and to their works. In the Yiddish literature of the past he saw hope for its future. In "How Much the Yiddish Literature Has Accumulated Treasures" he wrote in the New Yorker "Forwards", April 21, 1974 and it has full storehouses of really authentic works, so much does it exist and will exist as long as the Jewish nation will exist."

With such great belief, he became the chronicler of Yiddish literature. He listened daily to its breath and registered its pulse. This establishes his special role as a critic of Yiddish literature.

Dr. Schulman defended the creators of the "accumulated treasures", the great masters of Yiddish literature of the past, and also because of methodological motives. He was engaged in polemics their critics as using a false no-historical method in comparing the Jewish life of the past with the Jewish life of today, not taking into consideration the different living conditions. This is also related to his approach to the works of the Jewish writers of the Soviet Union. Characteristic is Schulman's controversy with writers like Abraham Golomb, Jacob Glatstein and Knib Abraham, who criticized greatly Mendele Mokher Sforim, the "Grandfather of the modern Yiddish literature". They accused him of concentrating too much on the dark side of Jewish life. In his work, "Mendele Mokher Sforim On the Fifteenth Anniversary of his Death" (printed in "Zukunft, March-April, 1968, and included in the "Portraits and Educates" , Schulman answered them: "The three writers believe that Mendele did not approach the Jewish life with enough consideration, understanding and sympathy therefore they think that Mendele's works are not of great value to us, according to how he was rated until now. All the three writers quoted from Mendele's creations in order to back up their opinions, and their proof is impressive. We must remember, however, they approach Mendele's work from a modern, subjective point of view, not from the historical one that is necessary when one evaluates a writer without making a changed of editorship. When we study Mendele's works from the proper perspective then we can understand their value for today's generation."

A separate meaning has the observation about employing the proper perspective regarding Yiddish literature in the Soviet Union. Writing about the talented soviet Yiddish literature-historian and belletenist, Meyer Weiner, Schulman emphasizes that when a Jewish writer is linked with the Communist party in the twenties, you can't use the same evaluation as you would employ in the 70's, because in the twenties Communism had enough strength to spread many illusions. Another methodical statement: the works of the Soviet Yiddish writers are "full of Stalinist defects", and this is unavoidable.

But this does not mean that there is no value in these works. They include values. You have to cleanse them of what is improper and enter them into the treasury of Yiddish literature. Schulman emphasizes that due to the necessity of conforming to the Communist party standards and dogmas were lost in the Soviet Union, many talented people and Yiddish culture suffered great losses long before the physical total liquidation of Yiddish culture and her creators in the 1940's and in the beginning of the 1950's.

Dr. Jacob Shatsky once noted that the "self-criticism" of the Soviet-Yiddish writer, Max Eric, was like confession of a "Maronite". In Schulman's writings, the expression is his proof that the forced "Maranism" played a great role in the development of the Yiddish literature in the Soviet Union.

Dr. Schulman's investigative, literary, and pedagogic work is closely connected with his social activity.

During his whole life, he was a convinced democratic-socialist and was connected with the Jewish socialist-democratic movement in America. He was also active in several cultural organizations. He belonged to the leadership of the World Culture Congress, also active in the Yiddish Pen Club and in J.L. Peretz writers farein. He participated in various world conferences which dealt with problems of Yiddish literature and culture.

In 1979, Dr. Schulman was awarded the Atron prize and in 1986 was awarded the Itsik Manger prize. The latter is considered the highest distinction awarded for Jewish writing. He was not able to appear personally to accept the prize. He died June 19, 1986, in Israel, as he arrived to participate in the award ceremony. His funeral took place in New York on June 23rd.

Scope and Contents

The archives reflect Dr. Schulman's life, his literary, the pedagogic and social activity. The collection consists of the following: personal documents, correspondence, manuscripts, printed materials in Yiddish; English works (original and translations from Yiddish) pedagogy, editorial and social activities; writings of assorted authors about Dr. Schulman, and photographs.

The personal documents include: Dr. Schulman's original birth certificate issued in Slutsk (White Russia) ; confirmations from schools in which he studied; membership cards from various institutions, organizations, and associations. Among these are identification card of "Litererishe Dlely" in Warsaw in 1935, to which he was a contributor; a membership card from the Union of Yiddish Writers and journalists in Vilna, 1936; passports, among which is a passport stating that he crossed the border in the Soviet Union in June, 1936; and biographical and bibliographical notices.

The second section includes his correspondence and family letters; letters from individuals and from universities, institutions, organizations, libraries; publication houses, editors, newspapers, etc. In the family letters we find letters from Dr. Schulman to his father written from Vilna and Kiev in 1935-1936. The letters from individuals are a rich collection, including letters from poets, writers, literary critics, historians, professors, social activists, friends, and others. Among these there are letters from Matis Olitsky, Hirsh Osherovich, Israel Berkowitz, Chaim Grade, Binim Heller, Meyer Kharitz, Wolfp Tambor (Romania), Joseph Leftvich, Abraham Sutkover, Aaron Zeitlin, G. Katsenelson, Melech Ravich, Jacob Shargel and others.

The letters are arranged in alphabetical order (by writer) with dates and remarks given.

In a third section are his manuscripts arranged alphabetically according to titles (with dates, where possible). The number of pages of all manuscripts is noted; whether it was published; and when and how it was printed. The notation "A.D." was used to indicate that no date is available.

The number of manuscripts is significant and includes articles, essays, speeches, biographies of writers, and larger works. In the same section there are lectures in the Vilna Yivo in 1935-1936.

The contents of the manuscripts are not always the same as the printed form. Not all of the manuscripts were published. Therefore published manuscripts are arranged in a fourth section, described in the same way as manuscripts Dr. Schulman published.

It was not necessary to separate the English publications into different groups, as there are few. These are works originally written in English, and others translations from Yiddish. They are arranged in the same way as the manuscripts and printed materials.

The fifth section, which includes educational and social activities is very interesting. There are materials from Queens college, where Dr. Schulman was a professor. These include various instructions,

information, reports, lists of students; a list of professors of Yiddish Studies; programs of Yiddish history, literature and culture; lists of text books, exam questions; writings by students. In the same section there are also materials of the Yiddish teacher seminar "Hertzliah", from the magazine "Der Veker" and also Dr. Schulman's lectures.

In the collection are found works of various writers, placed in a sixth section; poetry; prose; some greater works; a drama in three acts; a novel, mostly in Yiddish; and a few in English, manuscripts and printed. The authors sent him their works, soliciting his opinions or submitting them to be published in periodicals which he edited.

In the seventh section about Dr. Schulman and his works, there are criticisms and essays about his publications.

The final section includes agreements regarding various cultural undertakings and photographs. Names and titles are given according to arrangement of the original materials. Researchers will find Dr. Schulman's private archives a rich source of Yiddish literature and culture.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies
Finding aid prepared by Dr. Felicia Figa.

Access Restrictions

None.

Use Restrictions

None.

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Gift from Sylvia Schulman