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Yiddish Poetry in Translation

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Bridges: A Jewish Feminist Journal, Volume 11, Number 1, Spring 2006, p. 39 (Article)

Published by Bridges Association



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Introduced by Faith Jones

Esther Shumiatcher was born in Gomel, Belarus in 1899, but emigrated as a child to Calgary, Canada. As a young woman she married Peretz Hirschbein, the well-known playwright who was twenty years her senior, and with him she traveled extensively and became a figure in literary and cultural circles. After her marriage she switched from writing in English to Yiddish, her first language. The marriage was an extraordinary melding of their lives and artistic visions, and Hirschbein's support of her work was a sustaining force in her creative life. Her groundbreaking poems on pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood followed the birth of their only child, Omus Hirshbein, now retired from his career as a

performance producer in New York. Shumiatcher's poems of eros, widowhood and grief, such as the one published here, were written after Hirschbein's death from ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) in 1948. Her early widowhood left her both creatively and financially straitened, and she wrote much less in the last 30 years of her life. She died in New York in 1985. Her books are: *In tol* (In the Valley, 1920); *Pasn likht* (Streaks of Light, 1925); *In shoen fun libshaft* (In the Hours of Love, 1930); *Ale tog* (Every Day, 1939); *Lider* (Poems, 1956). This poem appeared in *Lider*, and is here translated for the first time by Myra Mniewski. *Bridges* is grateful to Omus Hirshbein for permission to publish this poem.