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| Goldberg, Leah (1911-1970) |
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| Leah Goldberg (1911-1970) was a prolific modernist poet, novelist, playwright, translator, and literary critic. Born in Königsberg, Goldberg grew up in the Russian-speaking milieu of Kovno. Her early education was in Russian and German and she read widely in both languages. During World War I the family fled Kovno. Upon their return in 1918 Goldberg’s parents enrolled her in the Hebrew gymnasium and there she studies Hebrew and language and literature. In 1931 she traveled to Germany to begin graduate work in Semitic Studies in Berlin and later in Bonn, where she completed her doctorate. In Germany, Goldberg witnessed the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi rise to power—two historical events that haunt her work. In 1935, Goldberg immigrated to Mandatory Palestine and found a place for herself as a prominent member of the *Moderna*, a group of Hebrew modernist poets that included Avraham Shlonsky and Nathan Alterman, quickly establishing herself as an important intellectual and cultural figure of her generation. She played this role not only as a poet and writer, but also as a scholar. Goldberg taught at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she founded the Department of Comparative Literature. |
| Leah Goldberg (1911-1970) was a prolific modernist poet, novelist, playwright, translator, and literary critic. Born in Königsberg, Goldberg grew up in the Russian-speaking milieu of Kovno. Her early education was in Russian and German and she read widely in both languages. During World War I the family fled Kovno. Upon their return in 1918 Goldberg’s parents enrolled her in the Hebrew gymnasium and there she studies Hebrew and language and literature. In 1931 she traveled to Germany to begin graduate work in Semitic Studies in Berlin and later in Bonn, where she completed her doctorate. In Germany, Goldberg witnessed the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi rise to power—two historical events that haunt her work. In 1935, Goldberg immigrated to Mandatory Palestine and found a place for herself as a prominent member of the *Moderna*, a group of Hebrew modernist poets that included Avraham Shlonsky and Nathan Alterman, quickly establishing herself as an important intellectual and cultural figure of her generation. She played this role not only as a poet and writer, but also as a scholar. Goldberg taught at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she founded the Department of Comparative Literature.  More than other poets of her generation, Goldberg was drawn to classical European culture, engaging with writers ranging from Dante to Rilke. She eschewed the avant-garde turning to classical poetic forms such as the sonnet and the terza rima. Her Hebrew modernist poetics blend Jewish and European exilic tropes from Genesis to Dante in order to express her complicated and multivalent relationship to exile and home, to European and Hebrew culture. She published her first collection of poetry, *Taba’ot ashan* (*Rings of Smoke*), in 1935. The poems in this collection capture her childhood landscape in a minimalist post-symbolist aesthetic. In one poem, ‘Halom na’arah’ (The Dream of a Girl), the lyrical voice imagines herself as Jesus seduced by Mary Magdalene in Carlo Crivelli’s fifteenth century painting ‘Saint Magdalene.’ In her 1955 collection *Barak be-boker* (*Morning Light*) she published her much adored Petrarchan sonnet cycle, ‘Ahavatah shel Teresa de Meun’(The Love of Teresa de Meun), which tells the story of an imaginary 16th century French noblewoman. In her final collection, *Im ha-laylah ha-zeh* (*With This Night*) she grapples with her own poetic legacy, called into question by a younger generation of poets, in poems such as ‘Dyokan hamesshorer ke-ish zaken’ (The Image of a poet as an Old Man).  In her poetry and prose, Goldberg sought to create a secular modernist aesthetic from a language tied to the sacred. She envisioned a Hebrew literary culture that would transcend its Jewish roots. She also sought to reconcile her faith in European literary culture with the horrors of the Nazi genocide. She addressed these concerns most directly in her prose fiction. Her semi-autobiographical modernist novel, *Ve hu ha-or* (*That is the Light*)*,* describes the struggles of a young women, schooled in Semitic languages, who can neither imagine her future in a Europe mired in anti-Semitism nor envision her place in a new Hebrew state. In her unpublished novel, *Avedot,* Goldberg describes the travails of a Hebrew poet and student of Semitic languages whose Hebrew poems are exploited by an aspiring Nazi Orientalist. Goldberg’s entire oeuvre, which includes poetry, prose fiction, memoir, plays, literary criticism, and children’s books, marks her as one of the most important Hebrew literary figures of the twentieth century. A position that literary scholars are only just beginning to recognize, precisely because of her idiosyncratic modernist practices. |
| Further reading:  (Gordinsky)  (Karten-Blum and Weisman)  (Ruebner)  (Schachter)  (Schachter, Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century)  (Ticotsky)  (Weiss)  (Yeglin)  (Yoffe) |