Dvora Baron (1887-1956)

Dvora Baron, a major writer of the Modern Hebrew Renaissance, or the *Tehiyah*, was one of the only woman writers to gain recognition in the Hebrew literary canon of the period. Born on December 4, 1887 to the town rabbi of Ouzda, on the outskirts of Minsk, Baron was educated by her father and her elder brother in ways that were highly unusual for girls of her geographical, historical, and religious milieu at the turn of the twentieth century. Women and girls, not systematically educated in Hebrew texts, were largely unable to bring their Hebrew textual skills to bear in the creation of a modern Hebrew literary idiom. Baron was a rare exception and much of the scholarship on Baron’s literary corpus focuses on her unusual achievement as a woman in the Modern Hebrew literary arena.

Baron’s achievement as a Hebrew writer, however, should not be limited to acclaim for her exceptionality as a woman writer in a male dominated milieu. Dvora Baron’s Hebrew and Yiddish literary output is remarkable for its highly skillful negotiation of Hebrew modernist trends, as well as her sensitive treatment of Eastern European Jewish life. Much Hebrew writing of the Modern Hebrew Renaissance was considered in light of the burgeoning Zionist movement, and therefore texts that treated regions or themes outside of Palestine were not particularly well received. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, however, some critics reconsidered Baron’s corpus and treated it as ethnographically valuable. Baron’s stories are moving psychological portrayals of the experiences of populations which were under-represented in the literature of the moment: girls, women, the elderly, the pious, and the impoverished. In a richly intertextual style dominated primarily by biblical allusion, but with allusions as well to rabbinic textual culture, Baron created a literary corpus distinguished by its stylistic virtuosity as a hybrid of cutting edge modernity and ancient literary texts and tonalities.

Baron’s first Hebrew stories were published in April 1902 when she was fifteen years old, and her first Yiddish stories appeared in February 1904. In December 1910, she emigrated, to Palestine. From 1923 until her death in 1956, Baron lived the life of a recluse in Tel Aviv. The reasons for her reclusiveness are not definitively known. Baron’s first collection of stories was published in book form in 1927: *Sipurim* (Stories). Her early, uncollected Hebrew and Yiddish stories were edited and published by Nurit Govrin and Avner Holtzman in *Parshiyot Mukdamot* [Early Stories] (1988), alongside the definitive biography of Baron’s life, in the same volume: *ha-Mahatsit ha-Rishonah* [The First Half]. Baron’s Hebrew translation of Flaubert’s Madame Bovary appeared in 1932. In 1934 Baron won the prestigious Bialik Prize for her volume of short stories Ketanot (Trifles) (1933). She won a second prestigious Hebrew literary award, the Rupin Prize, for her novella *le-‘Et ‘Ata* (For the Time Being) (1943) which treated the subject of the exile of foreign national from the Jewish settlements in Palestine during WWI. In 1951 Baron’s most comprehensive collection of stories, titled *Parshiyot* (Tales) received multiple honors, including the Brenner Hebrew literary prize.

Bibliography:

I. Works by Dvora Baron in Hebrew

*Sipurim* [Stories] (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1927)

*Ketanot* [Trifles](Tel Aviv: Omanut, 1933)

*Mah she-Hayah* [What Has Been] (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1939)

*Le-Et Atah* [For the Time Being] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1943)

*Misham* [From There] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1946)

*Ha-Lavan* [The Bricklayer] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved 1947)

*Shavririm* [Sunbeams] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1949)

*Parshiyot* [Tales] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1951)

*Huliyot* [Links] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1952)

*Me-Emesh* [Since Yesterday] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1955)

*Ha-Golim* [The Exiles] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1970)

*Yalkut Sipurim* [A Collection of Stories] Ed. Rivka Gorfein. Tel Aviv: Yahdav, 1969

*Shloshah Sipurim* [Three Stoeis] Ed. Yafah Kramer. Jeruslaem: The World Zionist Organization Division for Education and Cutlure in the Diaspora, 1975.

*Parshiyot Mukdamot* [Early Tales] Ed. Avner Holtzman and Nurit Govrin. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1988

*Kritut ve-Sipurim Aherim* [Divorce and Other Stories] Ed. Haim Beer. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997.

*Fradel u-Shifrah* [Fradel and Shifrah] Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2001.

*The Thorny Path and Other Stories*, Trans. Joseph Shachter, Ed. Itzhak Hanoch. Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1969

*The First Day and Other Stories*, Trans. And Ed. Naomi Seidman and Chana Kronfeld. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.

Related and Secondary Works:

Sheila Jelen, *Intimations of Difference: Dvora Baron in the Modern Hebrew Renaissance* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007) [New publications of previously un-translated stories are included in this volume].

*Hebrew, Gender and Modernity: Critical Responses to Dvora Baron’s Fiction* Eds. Sheila Jelen and Shachar Pinsker (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2007) [New publications of previously un-translated stories are included in this volume].

Amia Leiblich, *Conversations with Dvora: An Experimental Biography of the First Modern Hebrew Woman Writer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997)

Written by Sheila Jelen