

Natasha Gordinsky, *Bishloshah nofim: yetziratah hamukdemet shel Leah Goldberg* (In Three Landscapes: Leah Goldberg's Early Writings). Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2016. 222 pp.

Yfaat Weiss, *Nesi'ah venesi'ah medumah: Leah Goldberg begermanyah 1930–1933* (Journey and Imaginary Journey: Leah Goldberg in Germany, 1930–1933). Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2014. 168 pp.

Leah Goldberg (1911–1970) is one of the most important 20th-century Hebrew writers and critics. She was born in Königsberg and spent her childhood largely in Kovno (Kaunas). The family fled eastward during the First World War; when they returned, Goldberg was enrolled in the Hebrew gymnasium – a fateful decision that would shape the rest of her career. A modernist poet, novelist, playwright, and literary critic, Goldberg's work straddled European and Hebrew literary culture. Until recently, however, the breadth and importance of her contributions to Hebrew letters have escaped critical attention. The publication of her diaries and her novel *Avedot* (Losses), and the republication of other prose works, have prompted a reconsideration of Goldberg's literary accomplishments, reintroducing an Israeli public to her groundbreaking modernist oeuvre. Thus, two recent books, Natasha Gordinsky's *Bishloshah nofim* and Yfaat Weiss' *Nesi'ah venesi'ah medumah*, push beyond Goldberg's poetic oeuvre – the best-known aspect of her work – to depict her development as an intellectual and modernist writer, with an emphasis on her education and early career in Germany. Both offer portraits of a writer who was shaped by her firsthand witnessing of the Nazi rise to power and who grappled with the scope of Nazi genocide in its aftermath.

Gordinsky focuses on Goldberg's early career from 1935–1945, beginning with her epistolary novel of 1937, *Mikhtavim menesi'ah medumah* (Letters from an Imaginary Journey), and ending with reflections on *Avedot*. She highlights the scope of Goldberg's early achievement and charts her transformation into a Hebrew poet, novelist, critic, and translator. Through Gordinsky's eyes, we see a young Goldberg adapting herself to her new home in Mandatory Palestine, where she arrived from Germany in 1935, while also sustaining her artistic and intellectual ties to the German and Russian literary cultures that had nourished her in Europe. Gordinsky excavates Goldberg's rich dialogue with European literary culture, placing her modernist project in the context of cultural memory and cultural translation. She illuminates how Goldberg turned to her European past in order to integrate her childhood landscape into a new modernist Hebrew culture. At the same time, she locates the moments of refusal and disconnect that mark the relationship between European and Hebrew culture in Goldberg's work. Some of the sharpest insights in the book, and there are many, come from Gordinsky's intimate familiarity with Goldberg's Russian and German literary influences. For example, we learn how Goldberg shared Anna Akhmatova's and Osip Mandelstam's "homesickness for a world culture" while also transforming this longing into a dynamic force for her Hebrew modernist poetry.

Gordinsky's reading of *Letters from an Imaginary Journey* uncovers and analyzes Goldberg's dialogue with Viktor Shklovsky's epistolary novel, *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love*, written in the 1920s. Whereas Shklovsky's novel centers on the flourishing

Russian émigré culture in Berlin, Goldberg's epistolary focuses on a darker moment – Berlin of the 1930s. Revising Shklovsky's project through her own historical and romantic grappling, Goldberg transforms the experience of immigration described by Shklovsky into a poetics that expresses her estrangement from Hebrew culture. Indeed, in a Hebrew-language novel replete with allusions and literary citations, almost none are from Hebrew. Rather, Goldberg turns to the West European writers so central to Russian modernists, then revises her relationships with these writers. Gordinsky's discussion of *Letters from an Imaginary Journey* also looks at the novel's conversation with Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Book of Hours* – in particular, the ways in which Goldberg transformed Rilke's religious and spiritual narrative into her own modernist secular idiom. The dialogue with Rilke enabled Goldberg to bring in the shared landscape of childhood, as she negotiated the complicated line between herself and her literary creation.

During these early years, Goldberg wrote quite a bit of prose, but she also continued to write poetry. Gordinsky focuses on the years 1935-1939 and shows the dramatic influence of Nathan Alterman's 1938 collection, *Kokhavim baḥutz* (Stars Outside), on the direction of Goldberg's poetic development. She argues that Goldberg's collection, *Shibolet yerukat ha'ayin* (Green-eyed Ear of Corn) marks a break with the early poetry penned before her immigration to Palestine. In contrast to her first collection, *Taba'ot 'ashan* (Smoke Rings), which sought to describe a European world in Hebrew, Goldberg in her second collection creates a new "native" Hebrew poetics. Alterman's poem cycles and his modernist practices provided her with a model to remake her poetry. Through Alterman, she developed a new mode of representing time and space, one capacious enough to include memory and to encompass her new life in Palestine.

Gordinsky also tracks the evolution of Goldberg's essayistic oeuvre, giving us an important perspective on her aesthetic political thinking during and after the Second World War. We see Goldberg's intellectual development as she articulates her sense of the link between aesthetics and politics. In her essays (often written pseudonymously), Goldberg sought to offer Hebrew readers an aesthetic education to preserve and propagate European humanist ideals. Like Friedrich Schiller, she viewed an aesthetic education as a necessary component of a healthy state, serving, in this case, to inoculate a newly forming citizenry against the dangers of totalitarianism. In this regard, Gordinsky considers one of Goldberg's best-known and influential essays, "Haometz leḥulin" (Courage for the Mundane). Written in 1938, the essay, comprising four seemingly unrelated sections, is notoriously difficult to interpret. Gordinsky decodes its historical and political context – for instance, by reading Goldberg's defense of romanticism in the opening section in dialogue with Roman Jakobson's famous essay on Vladimir Mayakovsky, showing how the latter responded to Soviet anti-Romantic discourse.

One of the more revelatory sections of Gordinsky's book deals with Goldberg's relationship to Rosa Luxemburg, whose prison letters she translated and published in 1942. Despite their very different political paths, Goldberg and Luxemburg had much in common: both were raised with Russian literature and with an attachment to German literature; both left their homelands and took up writing in a language not their mother tongue; both shared a belief in the existence of universal values and the

importance of preserving them in the face of political violence; and both were intellectuals writing at a time of war. In addition, Luxemburg's refusal to write about the hardships of prison, and her delight in nature, confirmed Goldberg's position on the role of the poet in times of war and her own surprising refusal to write war poetry. Here and elsewhere, Gordinsky's analysis illuminates the political and aesthetic dimensions of Goldberg's writing.

Yfaat Weiss' book, while also dealing with Goldberg's early years, takes a very different approach, as her main interest lies in uncovering the historical and archival contexts of Goldberg's life as a student in Germany and her evolving stance vis-à-vis that formative period. In particular, Weiss illuminates how Goldberg's doctoral studies in Semitic philology at the Oriental Institute in Bonn shaped her career as a writer and thinker. In narrating this story, Weiss mines Goldberg's rich correspondence, her diary, and her literary works in conjunction with the history of German Orientalism. She shows how Goldberg's choice to study Semitic languages in the secular context of German Orientalism reflected her complicated position as a modern Hebrew writer who divorced Hebrew from its Jewish sources, immersing herself in Oriental studies while at the same time highly aware of the field's limitations.

The book's first chapter portrays a young Goldberg trapped in provincial Kovno. Established as a democratic state in 1918, Lithuania at first gave lip service to civil equality, but this quickly disappeared with the rise of a right-wing authoritarian government. In 1929, Goldberg was studying at a university without books, in a language that she felt had no substantive literature – receiving what she presumed to be a worthless education. Not surprisingly, like many other young Jews of her generation, she sought to escape. Goldberg saw herself as a 20th-century, female Solomon Maimon, and she identified with his project of self-enlightenment and search for knowledge in Germany. With the help of a U.S. scholarship fund, she was granted the means to escape Lithuania and pursue her studies in Berlin, and then Bonn.

Weiss focuses on Goldberg's friendships in Bonn during the period just preceding and following the Nazi rise to power, as she witnesses the implementation of Nazi Aryan racial ideology. She describes how Goldberg identified with immigrant students from India who, like her, were studying their heritage through Orientalist eyes. Goldberg shared their sense of displacement and homesickness; through her friendships with them, Weiss shows, she sought to negotiate her own position with regard to questions concerning diaspora and homeland. Weiss also investigates the presence of these friendships in Goldberg's prose fiction of the period. For example, she draws attention to the surprising reference in *Letters from an Imaginary Journey* to the Dutch anticolonial novel, *Max Havelaar, or The Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*, written by Eduard Douwes Dekker (under the pseudonym Multatuli) in 1860. Goldberg's interest in the novel lies not only in its anticolonial politics, Weiss argues, but also in such formally innovative practices as its multi-vocalism and layered structure.

In addition to tracing Goldberg's encounters with German Orientalism, Weiss tracks Goldberg's response to the rise of Nazism through her relationship with her teacher, Paul Ernst Kahle, who supervised her doctorate (completed in 1934). Kahle, who headed the Oriental Institute at Bonn, was a leading scholar of Semitic philology in Germany. Weiss argues that Kahle helped shaped Goldberg's political stance

on the role of the intellectual in the face of repressive political regimes. At the same time, she traces Kahle's and Goldberg's very different intellectual and political itineraries. Kahle's intellectual career was influenced by his missionary work as a Protestant pastor in Egypt, where he learned about the Cairo Geniza and later gained access to Geniza documents in Cambridge. In contrast, Goldberg arrived in Bonn as a Jewish student with a knowledge of modern Hebrew, interested in studying Semitic philology as part of her own personal ties to Hebrew and to Zionism. Studying with Kahle, Goldberg learned the importance of meticulous scientific work. Kahle, for his part, sought to protect both his Jewish students and his scholarly work. At great personal risk, he continued working with Jewish students and corresponding with Jewish scholars. For this reason, Goldberg regarded him as an opponent of the Nazi regime. However, Weiss offers a different view, showing his willingness at times to collaborate with the regime in order to protect his interests. In fact, it was Kahle's wife's subversive activities that ultimately led to his dismissal from the university and the family's departure to England. His wife recalls how her husband, so absorbed in intellectual affairs, did not always understand the very real dangers the family faced.

As does Gordinsky, Weiss discusses Goldberg's essay "Courage for the Mundane," reading it in light of Goldberg's relationship with Kahle. The essay, she argues, represents Goldberg's attempt to grapple with her experience as a student in the German university at the very moment of the Nazi rise to power, as well as her response to what she perceived to be Kahle's courage in pursuing his own scholarly work. Weiss' reading amplifies Gordinsky's insightful analysis of the literary intertexts underlining the essay's political and aesthetic arguments.

Weiss' book offers two intersecting stories: on the one hand, Goldberg's brief but productive time in Bonn and her successful rise to prominence in Hebrew; on the other, the downfall of her beloved professor. Weiss highlights Goldberg's and Kahle's disparate fates. As noted, the young Goldberg left Germany and ultimately immigrated to Palestine in 1935, whereas Kahle fled Germany toward the end of his life – cut off from his work, impoverished, and with little hope for his future. Goldberg learned of Kahle's exile in 1945 and wrote an article in praise of him, portraying him as a dedicated scholar who, while perhaps ambivalent toward Jews, still sought to protect them. From Goldberg's correspondence, we learn that Kahle was familiar with her Hebrew articles (which a friend had translated for him) and was pleased with the way in which he had been portrayed. Their relationship offers a unique view of the fate of Jewish and German intellectual cultures in the mid-20th century through the lens of Orientalism.

Weiss also looks at Goldberg's connection to Germany through her rekindled, postwar friendship with Ilsabe Hunke von Podewils, whom Goldberg first met during her brief period of study in Berlin. Weiss argues that Ilsabe is the model for Antonia, a character in two of Goldberg's novels, *Avedot* and *Vehu haor* (And This Is the Light [1946]). In both novels, there is a sense of uncertainty as to how Antonia will respond to the Nazi rise to power: Will she surrender her soul to Nazism or resist the regime? In real life, Goldberg accepted without question her close friend's assertion of innocence. The story of their renewed friendship and the ensuing correspondence between the two expands what we know about Goldberg and her personal history.

Weiss' essays on Goldberg's time in Bonn and her later relationship to Germany poignantly captures the personal, political, and aesthetic challenges that Goldberg faced as an East European Jewish student in Germany in the 1930s and as a Hebrew writer in the post-Second World War period who was attempting to locate herself both within and outside of Europe. Weiss is the rare historian who reads Goldberg's literary oeuvre without reducing it to biography (though there are moments, especially in the final chapter, when the weight of biographical detail gets in the way of interpretation). Her balance of biographical, historical, and literary context works to reframe Goldberg as a major Jewish intellectual and historical figure. Several of the chapters have appeared, in somewhat different form, in English- and German-language journals. Weiss's commitment to circulating her scholarship in multiple languages promises to bring Goldberg's work to a broader audience.

Taken together, these books illuminate the pivotal role Goldberg played in Hebrew culture from the 1940s onward. They show her to be an important European and Hebrew intellectual whose modernist and humanist commitments shaped the direction of Israeli letters in the second half of the 20th century. The time has come to recognize Goldberg as a major 20th-century intellectual and to read her multi-genre work in dialogue with contemporaries such as Hannah Arendt, Erich Auerbach, and Else Lasker-Schüler. Gordinsky and Weiss have done the important work to make such connections visible.

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