



To Tread on New Ground: Selected Hebrew Writings of Hava Shapiro, 1878-1943

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Themes developed across stories and apparent in letters and essays comprehensively illumine the philosophy of Jewish feminist writer Hava Shapiro.

Writing primarily in Hebrew around the turn of the last century, Hava Shapiro was among the first Jewish feminist writers, an important voice who valued Jewish tradition while also wanting more than its traditional gender roles. In *To Tread on New Ground: Selected Hebrew Writings of Hava Shapiro, 1878-1943*, editors Carole Balin and Wendy Zierler have translated and compiled an extremely thorough portrait of the writer, putting together dozens of short stories, diary entries, letters (to family members, editors, and a longtime lover), and essays by and about Shapiro. The result is a great resource for Shapiro scholars or fans, while the published works included in the book also provide a strong introduction for newcomers to her work.

The collected examples of Shapiro's short fiction show a writer in command of her craft. Her early included works are fables, and she develops themes across the stories, most depicting a rose or a bird (or in some more direct examples, a woman) experiencing a break with its (or her) expected role and gaining wisdom as a result. Other stories explore Jewish life in Eastern Europe in the early 1900s. The excellent "The Brothers From Slavuta" tells of two brothers persecuted for their religion, while the equally strong "Hanukkah Days" contrasts the family tradition of the holiday with the prejudice it brings outside the home.

In terms of the diary, Shapiro's was updated only sporadically—at one point she talks about writing in it for the first time in four years—and she seemed to use it primarily as a venue to chronicle her most difficult moments. In one entry, she writes about feeling disappointment rather than joy at seeing her first story in print: "Sometimes when I read my writings, I want to burn them, to annihilate and destroy them because they do not say what I want." Others are reactions to the deaths of her parents, being separated from her son, or hearing of random violence against fellow Jews.

In all, this is a comprehensive volume about an important writer, one that shows the range of her work and some of the ways the challenges she faced in her life influenced what she produced in print.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Fall 2014)

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