



Conversations with Dvora: An Experimental Biography of the First Modern Hebrew Woman Writer (Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society)

Amia Leiblich

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The life of Dvora Baron (1887-1956) evokes both inspiration and mystery. She was born in a Russian *shtetl*, the precocious daughter of a rabbi. Her intellectual gifts garnered her an education usually reserved for boys, and she soon proved a brilliant writer, widely published while still in her teens. At age twenty-three she immigrated to Palestine, married a prominent Zionist journalist, and joined the literary intelligentsia of the emerging nation. Her writing showed startlingly modernist points of view (a day-old baby girl in "The First Day" and a female Jewish dog in "Liska," for example), and she took on such topics as divorce ("Fradl"), incest ("Grandma Henya"), and domestic violence ("A Quarreling Couple"). But when her beloved brother died in 1923, Baron retired to her apartment. There she spent the last thirty years of her life, in touch with the literary community but rejecting her early stories as "my rags." She never left her residence and spent most of her time in bed, tended by her daughter.

Israeli writer and psychologist Amia Lieblich was seventeen when Dvora Baron died; the two women never met. But Lieblich has written this biography as a series of conversations taking place in Dvora's darkened room during the last year of her life. Lieblich's vividly realized portrait elicits Dvora's memories of childhood; the descriptions of traditional women's lives in her writing; a view of her eccentric marriage and odd relationship with her daughter; and her thoughts on work, life, and death.

Dvora is a living presence in these conversations; Lieblich approaches her as one of the great creative spirits of Hebrew literature. Having undergone a crisis in her own life, Lieblich seeks out Baron as a source of wisdom and direction. The result is an unusual and moving literary-psychological adventure that merges Dvora Baron's world with that of an Israeli woman today.

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