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Israel

Hamutal Bar-Yosef. *Lakahat Avir*. Tel Aviv. Massada. 1978.
57 pages.

Bialik dedicated an occasional piece of verse to a Hamutal "who would not learn at all," but here we have a later Hamutal who became a poet. So many women poets writing in Hebrew, from Rachel to Wallach, have been motivated by loneliness or ruled by unfulfilled passion and a certain anger, that those who reflect wholesome motherhood are the exception. Appropriately Bar-Yosef pays her homage to Zelda, who is more a poet of her own kind: "And where shall I find wisdom / If not in your faint voice / Like a thread with which / You knit a white and blue coverlet . . . while I like a curious pussycat / Pounce upon the ball" ("Wisdom"). In a purely domestic scene Bar-Yosef describes her skirts spread wide by four little ones pulling at her. She feels tied down like one of the tents of Israel in the wilderness and almost humorously concludes, "We shall not be going." Being "tied down"—that is the point. But she is not bitter. She accepts her role.

Having left a pot of fish boiling on the stove and gone off to take a nap (what Israeli housewife does not drop into a siesta if she can afford it?), she dreams of a bed full of soft, raw pieces of fish with eyes daubed white "like those of infants." A disturbing image, but in the context and tone of the poems it all makes for a sort of verse in which daily events, home life and friends become a source of reflection upon the greater mysteries of life. The poet is daughter, sister and mother, now writing about her father the teacher, (a theme dealt with extensively in her first volume of poetry), now of a brother to whose funeral she was taken as a child, and now of giving birth. Her father's spiritual fathers are her own. There is continuation, no generation gap. However, Imber of "Hatikva," the national anthem, did not see those bent over a topographic map and "shots, shots / within the heart." The Tolstoyan apostle of labor, A. D. Gordon, could not know that the land would be covered with a jungle—so try and find roots!

The mystique of poetry enters when Bar-Yosef describes an experience such as smoothing out a piece of tinfoil. She turns here from subject into object, as some unknown "finger" ("God's finger" is a common Hebrew phrase) straightens her out.

The poetry is secular, taking down sublime phrases and making them commonplace and human. There is humor and spontaneous excitement in poems such as "The Librarian" and "Whither" and also in the use of local lore. There is, in addition, much optimism, little conscious innovation, irony or rebelliousness. The poem "To Take a Breath" speaks of the need to take in a deep breath of compressed and concentrated

air against a time of crisis. You must lift you
above the waters, breathe deeply and "put away move
Like in the string of a bow."

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