

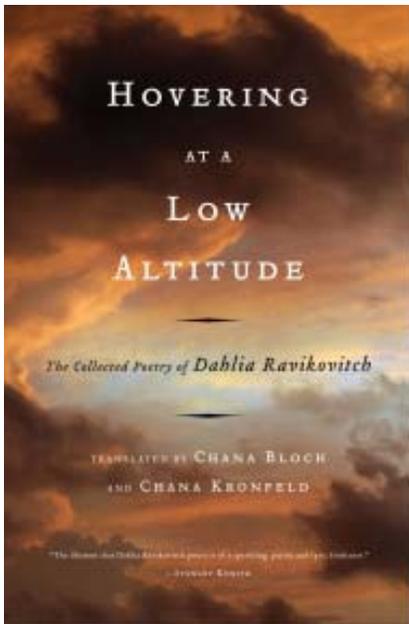
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Two Chanas celebrate Israeli poet Dahlia Ravikovitch
Sunday May 3

Jannie Dresser

Dahlia Ravikovitch, photographed by Dina Gona
When the great Hebrew poet Dahlia Ravikovitch died in 2005, it was front page news in Israel, a country that takes its poets seriously. At first, Ravikovitch's death was thought to be a suicide but the coroner established heart failure as the cause of death.



A book of Ravikovitch's poems, translated by Berkeley poet Chana Bloch and University of California Berkeley Hebrew scholar Chana Kronfeld, now presents her collected works to a wider English-speaking audience. *Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch* (Norton) was immediately noted and reviewed on the front page in *Ha'aretz's* April 2009 "Books" section by Professor Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi.

On Sunday, May 3, at 6:45, Bloch and Kronfeld will read Ravikovitch's poems at Congregation Beth El in Berkeley. The book includes major poems written in the last twenty years and many early poems that were long considered too difficult to translate, as well as extensive revisions of previously published translations.

Ravikovitch, born in Ramat Gan in 1936, lived most of her life in Tel Aviv. Her father, a Russian-born Jewish engineer, was killed by a drunken driver when Dahlia was six; she did not learn about that traumatic event for two years. Ravikovitch published 10 volumes of poetry in Hebrew, as well as three short story collections. She also translated English poetry into Hebrew, including poems by William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Edgar Allan Poe and *Mary Poppins*. In 1998, she won the Israel Literary Prize, and was awarded the Prime Minister's Prize in 2005, the year of her death. She was known as an outspoken peace activist, which brought her both admiration and condemnation.

Bloch describes the process of working on these translations with her longtime friend and literary collaborator Chana Kronfeld as "very rewarding." "Working with Chana K has been one of the

greatest pleasures of my life,” says Bloch. Sometimes Bloch would prepare a rough draft of a poem; sometimes Kronfeld would present a literal version. They would snatch a few hours here and there, sometimes working together for “marathon sessions” in front of a computer. “Kronfeld has changed my views about translation,” says Bloch, who has previously translated *The Song of Songs* with Ariel Bloch and the *Selected Poetry* of another master Israeli poet Yehudi Amichai (1924-2000). “I used to allow myself more liberties with the text.” In *Hovering*, Bloch says the two worked hard to convey the formal qualities of the Hebrew, including rhyme and meter. Kronfeld “convinced me that by retaining something of the strangeness, the foreignness of the original, we would be expanding the boundaries of English.”

Ravikovitch is celebrated in the land of her birth and taught in the schools as one of the greatest women poets. “She was also celebrated as a courageous and outspoken peace activist,” says Bloch. “She knew Mahmoud Darwish, the great Palestinian poet of exile who died in 2008, and accompanied him to the police station when he was under house arrest.”

Stanley Kunitz first heard Ravikovitch at an international poetry festival in Rotterdam; he urged that her work be made available in English. A number of other American poets have also championed her work.



Chana Bloch is well-known in the Bay Area poetry community as a beloved literature and creative writing instructor who nurtured students at Mills College for over 30 years and directed its Creative Writing Program. She has published three books of poems, *The Secrets of the Tribe*, *The Past Keeps Changing*, and *Mrs. Dumpty*, as well as a critical study of the English metaphysical poet George Herbert, and has received numerous prizes for her original work, her scholarship, and her translations with Kronfeld, including the 2001 PEN Prize for Poetry in Translation for Amichai’s *Open Closed Open*. She has just completed a fourth book of poems, *Blood Honey*, due in Spring 2010 from Autumn House Press. The title comes from the Book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible where Samson scoops honey to eat from the carcass of a lion that he has killed with his bare hands. Bloch says her latest book explores the mixture of sweetness and pain, violence and solace: “Life is like that; you find sweetness where you can, often in the darkest places.”

Bloch and Kronfeld will read again in the fall, on October 1st at the



Jewish Community Library in San Francisco (7:30 p.m.) and at Congregation Sha'ar Zahav in the same month. They are planning more readings locally and nationally.

***Hovering at a Low Altitude: The Collected Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch* will be presented by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld, Sunday, May 3rd, at 6:45 p.m. at Congregation Beth El, 1301 Oxford Street, between Eunice and Rose, in Berkeley. There are pedestrian entrances on Spruce and Oxford streets.**

**CLOCKWORK DOLL
by Dahlia Ravikovitch**

**I was a clockwork doll, but then
That night I turned round and around
And fell on my face, cracked on the ground,
And they tried to piece me together again.**

**Then once more I was a proper doll
And all my manner was nice and polite.
But I became damaged goods that night,
A fractured twig poised for a fall.**

**And then I went out to dance at the ball
But they cast me aside with the dogs and the cats
Though all my steps were measured and true.**

**And my hair was golden, and my eyes were blue
And I had a dress with flowers and all,
And a sprig of cherries tacked to my hat.**

(from The Love of an Orange, 1959)

BROTHERS

by Chana Bloch

**When I was the Baba Yaga of the house
on my terrible chicken legs,
the children sat close on the sofa as I read,
both of them together
determined to be scared.**

**Careful! I cackled, stalking them
among the pillows:
You bad Russian boy,
I eat you up!
They shivered and squirmed, my delicious sons,**

**waiting for a mighty arm
to seize them.
I chased them screeching down the hall,
I catch you, I eat you!
my witch-blade hungry for the spurt
of laughter--**

**What stopped me
even as I lifted my hand?
The stricken voice that cried: Eat him!
Eat my brother.**



Jannie Dresser is an Examiner from San Francisco. You can see Jannie's articles on Jannie's Home Page.

Parking Instructions: Congregation Beth El is located in a residential area with limited parking. There are spaces for members of the immediate family, the elderly and mobility-impaired guests and some limited parking on the street along the synagogue's frontage. Drivers should take care not to block driveways and entrances. There is additional free parking at satellite parking lots at Safeway, 1444 Shattuck Plaza, and in the parking lot of First American Title, 2089 Rose Street. Both parking lots are within walking distance of Congregation Beth El and are available for the event.