

*Presents:*

## A Display of Rare Books Celebrating the Life and Poetry of Rachel Bluwstein (1890 - 1931)

9. דרכה של דגניה: סיפור 50 שנות הקבוצה [*Degania's Path: The Story of the Kibbutz' 50 Years*]. Tel-Aviv: Davar, 1961.

A wonderful collection of memoirs written by members of Degania, Israel's first kibbutz, founded in 1911 on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Here open to a memoir of the year Rachel spent in the kibbutz following her return from Russia at the end of WWII. The memoir is accompanied by a charming black-and-white sketch of Rachel in pioneer garb by Nahum Gutman (1898-1980), one of the most important artists in the State of Israel both before and after Independence.

10. Zalman Shazar. אורה זרוע [*Her Light is Scattered*]. Printed in רהל ושירתה [*Rachel and Her Poetry*], a collection of memoirs and essays. Edited by Mordechai Senir and Shimon Kushner. Tel-Aviv: Davar, 1971.

A memoir of Rachel by the man to whom the poetess dedicated some of her finest love poems. Shazar, who was to become the third president of the State of Israel, first met Rachel in 1910 on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Writing with deep admiration but not without humor, Shazar describes his first glimpse of the young Rachel as she led a flock of geese out to pasture at dawn. The title of Shazar's memoir plays on the title of אור זרוע [*A Scattered Light*], a famous religious work from the Middle Ages.

11. Lynne Avadenka. *Now A Poem Begins*. Kibbutz Cabri, 2014. Two color monoprints with chine colle.

This diptych was created by American artist Lynne Avadenka in the Gottesman Etching Center at Kibbutz Cabri in northern Israel. It was displayed at the artist's solo exhibition in Yeshiva University Museum in New York: *How a Poem Begins: Lynne Avadenka and the Poet Rachel* (February 28 – July 24, 2016). The artist "chose an intense palette of reddish brown, magenta, and an ethereal greenish gray . . . colors that evoke earth, blood, and a dawn sky" (from Exhibition Catalogue). The swirling forms are interwoven with facsimile images of Rachel's hand-written drafts and notes.



The display follows the presentation:

***"Will you hear my voice?"***

***Rachel Bluwstein: Hebrew Poetess and Pioneer***

by Ann Brener, Hebraic Area Specialist

Thursday, January 26, 2017

12 noon - 1:00 p.m.

African and Middle Eastern Reading Room,

Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

One of the most beloved of all Hebrew poets, Rachel Bluwstein (most commonly known simply as “Rachel”), was born in Saratov, Russia, in 1890 and died in Tel-Aviv in 1931 of tuberculosis. She settled in the Land of Israel at the age of 19, eventually joining the farming community of *Kinneret*, whose fields and sweeping views of Mount Hermon and the Sea of Galilee inspired some of her loveliest poems. Rachel’s poetry is noted for its lyricism and ostensible simplicity, often rich in biblical associations. Today’s display from the treasures of the Library of Congress is a tribute to her unique and individual voice – and we hope that you enjoy it.

- Ann Brener, Hebraic Section,  
African and Middle Eastern Division

## Checklist of Items on Display

### I. Editions of Rachel’s Poetry

1. הלך נפש [A Soul Has Gone]. *Ha-Shiloah* 37 (Warsaw, spring-autumn, 1920).

This was the first of Rachel’s poems to see print. It was dedicated to A.D. Gordon (1856-1922), an iconic figure in the history of Zionism who advocated a return to the land and the pursuit of agricultural labor. Rachel deeply admired Gordon, whom she had met during her first years in the Land of Israel some ten years earlier.

2. ספיה [Aftergrowth]. Tel-Aviv: Davar, 1927.

The first collection of Rachel’s poems, including a number of poems previously printed in the pages of *Davar*, an important newspaper published in Tel-Aviv. Here open to the poem עץ אגס (“The Pear Tree”), with accompanying translation.

3. מנגד [Across From]. Tel-Aviv: Davar, 1930.

The second collection of Rachel’s poems. Here open to the famous גן נעול [A Locked Garden], a poem in which Rachel uses the biblical metaphor from Song of Songs 4:12 to express the ultimate loneliness of the human condition.

The copy displayed here contains Rachel’s handwritten dedication to “Rebecca” and lines from two poems printed inside. One of these is the first stanza of the opening poem, in which Rachel mentions her “white book of poems,” a reference to the plain cover that was to become the hallmark of all her books. This autograph copy of Rachel’s poems was presented to the Library of Congress by Ann and Lisa Brener in memory of their mother, Isabel Feldstein Brener.

4. נבו [Nebo]. Tel-Aviv: Davar, 1932.

The third and final collection of Rachel’s poems. The title refers to Mount Nebo, which Moses ascended before he died in order to gaze at the Promised Land he was not allowed to enter (Deuteronomy 34: 1). Like the title of her second book *Across From* (no. 3 above), this title reflects Rachel’s own sense of loss over all she had missed in life.

5. *Flowers of Perhaps*. A bilingual edition of selected poems by Rachel Bluwstein. Translated by Robert Friend with Shimon Sandbank. New Milford, CT - London: Toby Press, 2008.

The title of this book comes from a poem in Rachel’s second book (no. 3 above).

6. Frances Jammes. תפילה [Prayer]. Translated from the French by Rachel. *Hedim* 1 (1922-1923), pp. 34-35.

A prose-poem written by Frances Jammes (1868-1938), a French poet known for his poetry of the natural world. He was greatly admired by Rachel, who published this translation of his writing in the very first issue of *Hedim* [Echoes], a literary journal published in Tel-Aviv. Rachel also wrote an appreciation of Jammes on the facing page, writing among other things that:

Jammes never demands anything, any more than he would make demands on the animals of the fields or the birds in the skies; his soul is sister to their soul and he is filled with . . . “the recognition of the one truth shared by us all.”

### II. Responses to Rachel in Art and Literature

7. Shoshana Bluwstein. עלי כנרת [Leaves of Kinneret]. Tel-Aviv: Haverim, 1939. 67 pp.

A memoir by Rachel’s sister, Shoshana Bluwstein, describing daily life in the early years of Kinneret, a training farm for young women established by Chana Maisel in 1911 on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The two sisters lived there together with twelve other young women for two years. Written in impressionistic style but with a wealth of detail about daily life, the memoir is dedicated “to Rachel, my sister: a few leaves from the tree under whose shade we sat.”

8. דבר הפועלת [The Woman Laborer]. A supplement published by the Hebrew newspaper *Davar* in Israel, beginning in 1933.

A supplement firmly committed to the ethos of labor. Most of the articles were written by the young women laborers themselves and include many first-hand accounts of life in the newly emerging agricultural villages. Rachel’s life and poetry were frequently celebrated in its pages; on display here is a letter which Rachel wrote to her friend Deborah Dayan during her stay at a hospital in Safed in 1921. Dayan (the mother of Moshe Dayan) also includes a brief memoir of the first time she saw Rachel, then a healthy young woman fresh from Russia who was running along the shore of the Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee), playfully tried to keep pace with a sailboat. This letter and memoir appear in the issue published on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Adar, 1937; the same issue contains an article about Russian poetess Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966) and includes Rachel’s translations of her poetry.

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