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From the Naive to the Nostalgic in the Poetry of Haim Gouri

HAIM GOURI IS A PROMINENT MEMBER of the generation of Israeli poets who began publishing in the 1940s and came to prominence with the War of Independence. Like that of other poets of the so-called Palmach Generation (Amir Gilboa, Shlomo Tanay, Hillel Omer, Abba Kovner, Ozer Rabin, T. Carmi, and Natan Yonatan), Gouri's early poetry, collected in his first book, *Pirhei esh* (Flowers of fire, 1949), is preoccupied with the experience of war, the sacrifice of youth, the solidarity of comradeship, the fate of love in times of danger. Gouri, who was born in Tel Aviv in 1922, was dispatched to Europe to smuggle survivors into Palestine after the Holocaust and served in the Palmach in the battles of the Negev in 1948.

In the genealogy of modern Hebrew poetry, Gouri plays a significant role mediating between the poetics of two distinct generations: the high modernism of Avraham Shlonsky and Natan Alterman in the 1920s and 1930s, and the colloquial modernism of Yehuda Amichai and Natan Zach in the 1950s and 1960s. In this paper, I endeavor to sketch Gouri's struggle to find his own path between these two rival poetics. I view his early poetry under the sign of the naive; the poems' speakers inhabit a romantic world of which they are an integral part, and they speak in the inflational poetics of romance. Beginning around 1960, as a result of his encounter with Western literature and with the poetry of his younger contemporaries, Gouri's poetic speaker disengages from the naive world and begins to view it from the outside as an object of nostalgic longing. To appreciate the pathos of that change, we must first witness the mystique of innocence created in Gouri's early verse.

The young Haim Gouri tends to portray the world he creates by direct characterization—time and place, speakers and protagonists, and the relationship among all these—with a tendency to overstatement in his poetry. The qualities ascribed to the protagonists or the objects are polarized through the use of the qualifier “very”: very beautiful, very strong, with a preference for positive rather than negative aspects. This is true of all his poetry, starting with *Pirhei esh* and ending with *Haba aharai* (The next in line, 1994). The world created by Gouri in his poetry is typified by a tendency toward superlatives. The opening poem of *Pirhei esh*, “Tiyul balaila” (Night-time walk), provides us with some idea of that atmosphere:

נלכה — והשעה תהי אותה שעה עצמה,
 בה בוכים צונחים, בה נעורה הרוח.
 תפרח הזחלילית, תלין עלי צמח.
 פקיד סודית מאד, דממה תוליד דממה.
 ואנו נהלך יפים מאד — פרוצ
 ירטט הבגדו הסמוי, יחריד עטלפים,
 ירעיד אילן בדרך.
 הארנים יטיפו שרפים.
 הערפל יגבר, ידמים לו צעיפים,
 בקצות המשעולים אקרע, אגיש לך פרח.
 בו תעטרי ראשך האפלולי
 נחליף מלים קלות,
 נשיח חרשית עלי דברים בטלים
 ירח סהרור יעיר נצנוץ טללים
 על מחלפות הצאן. יפציע חלילו
 של עדר השעות, המת אל תורונו
 של שחר גרוש צינה.
 נעצר קמעה — תגשי על בהונות
 ונגשק פתאום.
 הנה קרבה פרצת הלילה בתנו
 והשעה תהי קדושה ואביונה.

Let's walk, and let it be the very hour, / Stars come down and the wind comes up. / The firefly takes wing, alights on a braid. / Like a very secret hand, silence breeds silence. / And we, very beautiful, walk on. / Wildly the hidden banjo twangs, / Shaking a tree on the road. / The pines drip sap. / The fog thickens, veiling silence. / Where the lanes end I stoop to offer you a flower / and with it you crown your dark head. / We exchange a few idle words, / Speak softly of trivial things. / A crescent moon makes the dew sparkle / on the fleece of the sheep. The flute / of the flock of hours sounds / dying into the pale chill dawn. / We pause a bit. You turn on your toes / and suddenly we are kissed. / Soon the night with its jackal will break / and the hour will be holy and destitute. (p. 7)¹

The scene is clear. In the middle, the poet places a very young couple, as we can learn from line 19. The couple is so young and naive that they do not dare to kiss each other. Instead, they are kissed passively by an unknown force, bringing out what the two want to do but dare not. Despite the supposed light, airy, and romantic atmosphere, and despite the idle words that the two young lovers will exchange, this night is about to end in daybreak as a holy time. It means that the midnight hour is also sacred and is not just a trivial romantic time. Accordingly, the innocent couple walk through the night like Adam and Eve in Eden, as if in "a very secret hand, silence breeds silence."

The hyperbole receives a double emphasis: the metaphorical hand is not just a hand, but a secret one, and not merely secret, but very secret. And as if this were not sufficient, this "hand" is responsible for the silence that by metonymy is also secret and also begets a silence more intensive than its progenitor. Then, in this hyper-secret silence, the youth and his girl are "very beautiful." The repetition of the word "very" is typical of his use of overstatement throughout this collection of poems, and it reverberates later in the book, too.² It is a world where overstatement prevails,³ also including adjectives and adverbs not qualified by "very." The function of this word and other similar ones is to create an intensity of emotion and action, to polarize the mood, the situation, and the feelings expressed in the poem. The young couple are an organic part of this moony universe. They intertwine in the fictive world with the stars, wind, firefly, bats, trees, moon, and sheep. The ultimate evidence of their acceptance, without any reservations, in this very beautiful and ideal world, is the speaker's belief that "suddenly we are kissed." The reader cannot know by whom, but he certainly can infer that what kisses is something or someone representing nature. The poetry of the young Haim Gouri does not create conflicts between opposing elements. When such a clash does arise, it tends to subside immediately, to slip into compliance and reconciliation between the opposing elements, which were only seemingly in opposition, if at all.

Thus, from the outset, Gouri's poetry deviates from the modernist norms adhered to by the generation of Shlonsky and Alterman, which subjected the imaginary world in their poems to the oxymoron (forcibly combining contradictory ideas) and to dualism.⁴ Nor do we find in *Pirḥei esh* the tension and ambivalence that first appeared at the start of the century during the revival of Hebrew literature (*shirat dor hateḥiyah*) and its continuation in the modernism of the 1930s and 1940s. The overstatement expressed through the qualifier "very" and by similar means helps to imbue Gouri's world with a homogeneous intensity because all the characterizations are very good or very bad without a clash. On the other hand, the use of this qualifier also shows that his poetry is far removed

from the ironic understatement that began to invade the language of poetry at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s with the publication of the poetry of Amichai, Zach, and Avidan. This places Gouri's poetry between two poetic trends and at the mercy of their critical crossfire: between the poetics of the 1930s and 1940s and that of the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ In his first books of poetry, *Pirhei esh* (1949), 'Ad 'alot hashahar (Until sunrise, 1950), and *Shirei hotam* (Signet poems, 1954), he seems to follow the path of modern poetry, occasionally deviating (but not rebelling), but in his later books, beginning with *Shoshanat ruhot* (Crossroads, 1960), he appears to be an unreliable fellow-traveler, secretly retaining old allegiances, as one can see from his semirealistic and fairy-tale novels *Hasefer hameshuga'* (The crazy book, 1971), *Mi makir et yosef g?* (Who knows Yosef G?, 1980), and *Hahaqirah: sipuro shel re'u'el* (The interrogation: The story of Re'u'el, 1980).

However, Gouri's poetry never falls in line with the poetry of Shlonsky, Alterman, or Greenberg, nor does it later jump unconditionally onto the triumphant bandwagon of the ironic poetics and sparse language introduced by Amichai, Zach, and Avidan. For the overstatement continues to reverberate in Gouri's poetry and also in his prose, even after *Shoshanat ruhot*. Paradoxically, he is one of the most Israeli of poets, perhaps the best able to evoke the Israeli experience of the War of Independence, and he aroused ambivalent reactions and more criticism than any other poet of his generation.

Although the difference between the poetry of Gouri and that of the 1950s and 1960s is almost self-evident, even after 1960, and has been emphasized by the above-mentioned critics (see note 5), the difference between Gouri's early poetry and Alterman's should be more clearly defined. There is a need to countervail the criticism, which dealt with his poetry from a specific point of view (under the influence of the "prose poetry" and poetics of Zach) and tended to stress the similarity between the two to the point of making their affinity axiomatic.⁶ For instance, if we compare Alterman's opening poem in *Kokhavim bahutz* (Stars outside) "Od hozer hanigun" (The melody is sounding again), with the opening poem of *Pirhei esh*, "Tiyul balaila" (Night-time walk) (p. 7, mentioned above), we find they are both thematically "road" poems and their frames of reference are similar.⁷ But this similarity will also bring out the significant difference between the poetry of Gouri and that of Alterman and his generation.

עוד חוזר הנגון שזנחת לשוא
והדרך עודנה נפקחת לארץ
וענן בשמיך ואילן בגשמי
מצפים עוד לך, עובר-ארץ.

והרזח תקים ובטיסת נגרות
 יעברו הכרקים מעליך
 וכבשה ואילת תהינה צרות
 — שלטפת אותן והוספת לכת —
 — שנידך ריקות ועירך רחוקה
 ולא פעם סגרת אפים
 לחרשה ירקה ואשה בצדוקה
 וצמרת גשומת עפעפים.⁸

The melody you disowned in vain is recurring again / And the road still opens ahead / And a cloud in the sky and a tree in the rain / Still await you, the wayfarer. // The wind will rise and lightnings like swings / Will strike over your head / And a sheep and a doe will testify / That you stroked them as you went ahead — // — That your hands are empty and your city far / And you have bowed more than once / To a green grove and laughing wench / And to tree-tops' eyelashes brimming with rain.

In Alterman's poem, there is tension from the very first line between the protagonist and the realm of the road, with its obsessive melody. Phrases and lines like "The melody you disowned in vain is recurring again," "the road still," "Still await you," and "more than once" inject tension into the vivid surface relationship. It implies the biblical motif: "I shall escape from you to you," suggesting that the protagonist is aware of his poetic-prophetic or pseudo-prophetic destiny and is seeking to escape it. There is a hint of some kind of muse or demonic revelation pursuing the protagonist,⁹ and it compels the poet, trying to flee his destiny, to accept his own, which is embodied in that melody (*nigun*), in order to lead him back to the long highway of the obsessive *nigun*. Alterman's wanderer fled his poetic mission like Jonah, who tried in vain to flee his prophetic mission. In contrast, the speaker in "Tiyul balaila" invites his beloved for a walk: "Let's walk, and let it be the very hour, / Stars come down and the wind comes up" (p. 7). The speaker is the protagonist himself, so this is not a situation where he is being forced by some supreme power to accept an unwanted mission.¹⁰ In this poem, the youth invites his beloved to take a romantic walk in a pine wood, and where the path ends he promises to kneel before her and to "offer" her "a flower." They will "exchange a few idle words, / Speak softly of trivial things." Nothing crucial is involved except the erotic tension between two adolescents afraid to follow their sexual impulse. Though both poems mention paying some ritualistic homage to the other sex, in Alterman's poem the experienced protagonist actually kneels before the woman, who laughs hoarsely like a *qdesha* (a cult prostitute),¹¹ while Gouri's youth, young and inexperienced, tries to follow the chivalric romantic code, bending the knee before a chaste and equally inexperienced lady. Many of the motifs

in Alterman's poem also appear in Gouri's, but in a gentler, more mellow form. In Alterman's poem, the wind rises, buffets the swings, and brings on storms and lightning, whereas in Gouri's poem, this raging, harassing wind loses its power and turns into a warm night breeze. The lightning of *Kokhavim bahutz* becomes a firefly resting on the girl's plait. The storm dies down, as we know, "Like a very secret hand, silence breeds silence." "A cloud in the sky" and "a tree in the rain" tensely awaiting Alterman's wanderer, serve Gouri merely as scenery: pine trees dripping with resin instead of the agitated tree, and the warm night mist replacing the clouded rainy sky. The sheep's fleece gleaming in the "crescent moon" replaces the sheep and the doe, which are to serve as two witnesses at some future trial, when sentence is to be passed on the wanderer as to whether he has fulfilled his mission.¹² Finally, the tyrannical melody that the protagonist of *Kokhavim bahutz* is trying to escape sounds as background music on the "hidden banjo twangs" whose wild notes are able only to frighten the bats and a tree beside the road. There is no hint of a fate forced upon the youth against his will. The only possible indication in Gouri's poem of anything beyond naive love between two romantic youngsters may be found in the secret silence in the last two lines, which were omitted by the poet in the second edition of *Pirhei esh* (1961, p. 9): "Soon the night with its jackal will break / and the hour will be holy and destitute." This is the first clear hint of "holy mythical time," in contrast to "concrete time" of daily life,¹³ as though great events are about to occur as soon as the sunrise has roused them from their numbness. However, the speaker shows no sign of an ambivalent feeling, either toward a mission imposed from above or toward the reality of which he, without reservation, is an integral part, and certainly not toward the maiden with the plait. As opposed to the tense ambivalent feeling of the wanderer for his partner, in *Kokhavim bahutz* and *Simhat 'aniyim* (Joy of the poor),¹⁴ overstatement and naive innocence prevail in Gouri's poem. In a homogeneous world with typical romantic components, the youth and the maiden create the image of a very naive couple, paragons of virtue, for whom the world is almost a Garden of Eden.

Everything in Gouri's world is pleasant and congenial, and the protagonists are beautiful and perfect.¹⁵ Through the ongoing use of overstatement, the poetry of Gouri retains its affinity to the poetics that Shroder, following Harry Levin, calls "inflational poetics."¹⁶ This term, free of any negative connotations it may have in the social and economic sphere, is used to describe the poetics pertaining to the original basic tradition in the history of literature. It is at the root of the romantic mode, eventually giving rise to the novel, which rebelled and adopted a totally different—deflationist—approach. The poetics of the romance reflected the wishes of humankind, giving expression to people's deeper yearnings

and fears. This inevitably led to the use of inflationary overstatement and to the exclusion of the understatement adopted by the realistic novel, which discarded human aspirations to describe reality as it is. We also observe this process in the renascent Hebrew poetry. The poetry of the Enlightenment and the *Hibbat tsiyon* naturally adopted inflationary poetics, then turned for a short period at the beginning of the century to poetics typified by deflation.¹⁷ However, the modernism of the 1920s and 1930s reinstated inflationary poetics, as in the poetry of Shlonsky, Greenberg, Penn, and Alterman. Thus, Gouri's poetry belongs to a historical tradition rooted in the mythic-romantic dawn, just like the poetry of the *moderna* of Erets Israel. However, the *moderna* is typified by an inflated oxymoronic conflict of dualism, while Gouri's inflation is of a homogeneous vision of the world. The deflationary norm of the poets of the 1950s and 1960s (Zach, Amichai, Pagis, and others who began to publish in the mid-1950s) derives from the tension and the swing of the pendulum in the history of literature, which is forever moving back and forth between the portrayal of what exists and what is only a "dream" (including the tormented dreams of Kafka, Huxley, and Orwell).

The tradition of romance postulates heroic figures larger than life, monstrous antagonists, worlds of exceptional beauty, extraordinary deeds: legendary battles, awesome trials, invincible true love, abysmal hatred, and extreme cruelty; nothing may resemble the life of ordinary mortals.¹⁸ From a rhetorical point of view, Gouri's overstatement places his poetry in the tradition of inflationary poetics. The reader has to ignore the criteria of modernist poetics, which makes free use of oxymoron, and the criteria of deflationist poetics, necessitating a totally different way of reading, reacting, and evaluating.

Psychologists of the Freudian and Jungian schools claim that from a psychological angle, the growing up of the hero—his apprenticeship, wanderings, and triumph over the monster—reflects the development of every human being: the story of descent, then ascent, from darkness to light, from the dark unconscious of infancy, childhood, and adolescence, to maturity and self-awareness. This process is conveyed, on the one hand, through images of the hero's descent into ocean depths, a monster's belly, a labyrinth, a cave, and so on; and, on the other hand, through such images of ascent as dawn, sunlight, a mountain, a temple, the center. The images of descent and ascent symbolize the liberation of consciousness and awareness from the chains of the subconscious and the myth and the attainment of self-control, and they are also rendered concrete in the rites of passage in various ancient societies.¹⁹ If, following Frye, we expand our limited psychological interpretation to include the human

need and urge to ascribe to the great natural and historical cycles a comic rather than a tragic significance,²⁰ we may understand how these texts have survived and still enchant us, even though the canonical basis of the literature created by modern men and women is mainly tragic, ironical, and pessimistic.²¹ This interpretation, limited or expanded, also explains why so many authors return to myths and, in particular, to the mythical hero; and why, in spite of our being at the ironic stage of literary cycles, which has created the well-known anti-hero (such as Kafka's K, the uncommitted detached "hero," *hatalush*, of the literature of the "*Hatehiyah* generation," "the stranger" of Camus, etc.), we discover in this type of literature a mythical basis that brings us back to the comic origin of myth and romance. Additional proof lies in the great popularity of every kind of science fiction and fantasy—written, drawn, or filmed.

The speaker of Gouri's poetry as a young poet is a true naive one, retaining unmistakable features of the mythic-romantic hero. One of the key words of Gouri's poetry written in his youth is "naive" in all its forms, and it is repeated frequently, especially in the first three books (*Pirhei esh*, 'Ad 'alot hashahar, and *Shirei hotam*). It disappears almost completely from his poetic vocabulary, perhaps not surprisingly, beginning with the book *Shoshanat ruhot* (1960), which undoubtedly marks a turning point, but is also in some ways in line with his earlier poetry. The word *tamim* (naive) has at least three meanings: the first is "entirely whole," "without a physical blemish," which leads to the second, "whole morally and spiritually," without regard for personal well-being. The third meaning derives from the above: "inexperienced," has not yet made the inevitable compromises that impair integrity. The naive adolescent has not yet reached the stage where experience leads to compromise in order to survive. He has not yet undergone the sobering experience that will cause him to lose his "wholeness," his *naïveté*, to realize that an abyss has opened between him and his experience, and that the bridge between them has collapsed.

Returning to Gouri's poetry, we initially encounter the modifier "naive" or "innocent" (*tamim*) in the first stanza of the poem "Doron haruah" (The gift of the wind) in *Pirhei esh*:

הרוח עברה כדורון הנשלח ואובד.
 רטטו תלתלים וגבעול, וקרעי עננים האפירי.
 עורבים שוטטו על תלמים פעורים.
 כבד ממשיך, וכובב מנצנץ ורועד,
 ראשוני ונקר ותמים. בדרך העירה
 כבד ליל . . . פנטי החשמל בוערים.

The wind passed as a gift—dispatched and lost. / Locks and stalk trembled,
 and tatters of clouds turned gray. / Ravens were vagrant upon furrows wide

open. / It's already dark, and a star is glittering and shimmering / Primeval, precious and naive. On the road to the city / It's already night . . . The electric lanterns are lightning. (p. 16)

In the ideal evening, outside the city, the young speaker describes the star in the sky as "glittering and shimmering," and also with superlatives: "primeval, precious, and naive." The three modifiers describing it are in ascending order—"Primeval" (ancient and original), "precious" (dear), and "naive" (innocent), the last being the climax, containing all the positive attributes of the star; the words "glitter" and "shimmer" enhance the escalation still more, culminating in "naive." The image of the star is set within the night landscape of wide open spaces outside the city, lit by electric light, which has ousted its primordial naïveté. But here, the star serves indirectly as a metaphor for the protagonist who wanders below, alone in the dark autumn night permeated by damp mist, in the somber forests outside the city (in the second stanza). Both the star and the wanderer are making their way, but they remain outside the precincts of the city and its electric lights: the star passes through the sky, and the wanderer, like the star, is primeval, precious, and naive. The wanderer, therefore, is an organic part of the universe.

The opening poem of the cycle "Migrant Bird," in *Pirhei esh*, which confronts the speaker with the Holocaust survivors in Europe after the Second World War, is "At the Railway Station." Here, the speaker characterizes the "we" as those who are sworn to give themselves over entirely, out of love as a supreme value, and who are not merely going through the command of the superego. The first two stanzas are:

שוב נלך בדרךים הריקות — אל השיר.
 ונשא יגונים ותלאה, וקרבות מני פתח אל פתח.
 ונזכר, איך הפחד סמר בעיני הנשים,
 צנת בית־נתיבות אכזרית בשתיקה אנושית,
 לא הניפה מטפחת צחורה, קשעתנו קרבה מרשטת.
 לא נשבחנו שלום לדרךים שאהבנו אי־פעם.
 רק נשבחנו אהב, עד המנת ישא את חיינו.
 רק היינו טובים ופשוטים, בךממה וברעם.
 גם נפשונו בר־ב תמימותה אל העצב כרעה,
 וקמטים בני־יומם, בבלי קול, אט פרחו בהלקת להוינו.

Let us walk again on the empty roads—to the poem. / And let us suffer agonies and suffering, and fighting from doorway to doorway. / And let us recall how the fear bristled in the women's eyes, / A cruel chill of the railway station with human silence, / Did not wave a white handkerchief, when our time approached trembling. // We did not swear farewell to the things we loved once. / We just have sworn to love, until death carries off our lives. / We were only good and simple, in silence and thunder. / Also our soul in its

complete innocence knelt down to sorrow, / And day-old wrinkles, soundlessly, slowly bloomed on our smooth cheeks. (p. 25)

Gouri characterizes the “we” as naive, assuming, perhaps unconsciously, at least when *Pirḥei esh* was published, that naïveté is a necessary condition for the spiritual existence of the redeeming hero(es). Only the naive hero who identifies unconditionally with the tribulations of his tribe and his brothers can arise to perform a deed of salvation. The direct characterization of innocent youths, devoting themselves until death to the things they love, is supported, again, by three attributes that reinforce one another in a single superlative direction: they are good, they are simple, and, above all, their souls are not innocence, but “complete innocence.” It is they who stand, in their perfect naïveté, before the destroyed, misshapen, post-Nazi Europe. Against perfect goodness is posed perfect negation, which has to be annihilated through “agonies and suffering” in “fighting from doorway to doorway,” and all because “we have been sworn to love, until death carries off our lives.” However, the naive speaker and his comrades utterly identify not only with the suffering of the battered tribe in wounded Europe, but with the existence that they left behind (with the “things we loved once”). The speaker, here and everywhere in Gouri’s poetry, refuses to allow reality to alter him, to change him from a naive into a wise and bitter man. He refuses to be transformed from a man of a naive sense of the world, which believes that a good end will indeed come, into a man of a tragic sense of the world, one who knows that a good end is an illusion. He and his comrades walk “again” “on the empty roads—to the poem” (25) despite knowing the “agonies” and the “suffering” and the ceaseless fighting; despite acquaintance with the “fear” that bristled “in the women’s eyes,” and the sucking “mire” that reaches “to the knees” (third stanza). Despite all these things, and not through lack of experience, the poem ends on an optimistic note, which can be formulated only by a speaker who is naive:

ונביט רגע קט למרום, ונשקה עם הדרך דרכנו.²²

And for a moment we turn our eyes to heaven, and our road was blessed with a kiss.

In the poem “Panay mul paneha” (Face-to-face with her), the speaker describes his beloved—of flesh and blood—as the paragon of perfection:

נדמה לי, כי אבוא לבית דל וקט,
 ובו אראך יפה ובת-אלמות,
 ובו אראך אחת ויחידה.
 חלמתי את דמותך עד תם געגועי.

לכן עודך חיה, חוורת עוד ושבה,
תמימה מאד, נוגה וחרדה.

I imagine I shall come to a humble and tiny house, / In it I'll see you, beautiful and immortal, / In it I'll see you, the one and only. / I dreamt your image till my longing was over. / Therefore you are still alive, coming back and forth, / Very naive, sad and troubled. (fourth stanza, pp. 31–32)

She is “beautiful and immortal,” “the one and only,” “very naive, sad and troubled.” The two key words combined represent the climax of the descriptive crescendo, as in the two previous examples; it is as though the speaker were incapable of restraint, because the words could not adequately portray innocent perfection and do it poetic justice. This also seems to be the reason, or at least one of the reasons, why he is not content with an indirect, metonymic description. This might suffice to describe familiar daily phenomena, more or less befitting the deflationary mode. However, through realistic images, the reader can only construct and perceive commonplace reality, the physical, emotional, and spiritual reality that he knows from experience. Gouri's starting point is different: he seeks to render the naive in all its purity, the “very . . .” or even the “exceedingly . . .,” namely the exceptional, or, with all due caution, the “idea” in the Platonic sense, which the reader will not encounter in real life; for this purpose, indirect, realistic images are insufficient. Yet the idea that he wishes to impose upon the reader cannot be rendered directly by one modifier only, and he is compelled to use the inflationary overstatement or descriptive crescendo, as if this were the only feasible solution.

In the same way, the speaker also describes himself in the third person in the poem “Terem shaḥar” (Before sunrise):

לדי, אולי אפלו מדי עיניך ההוות,
וילדותך שלך תמימה עוד וחיה,
ונשמתך וכה מאביבים וקץ.

My child, your visionary eyes may have become too woeful / And your naive childhood is still alive, / And your soul purer than springs and summer. (*Pirḥei esh*, p. 41)

In every line, there is an overstatement associated with perfection: “too” replaces “very,” “naive” becomes the underpinning for the following escalation, which culminates in the third line, when the speaker states that the soul of the child (in fact, the “I” being addressed) is purer than springs (plural, not one season only) and the idea of summer. Thus, it is purer than the two main seasons during which the most important life-giving processes take place.

In the fourth poem of the series “Baderekh labustan” (On the way to the orchard) in *Shirei ḥotam*,²³ we find the hyperbole containing the word “naive” as a key word:

וְזֶה יֵלֶךְ עוֹבֵר כְּמוֹ לְפָנַי שָׁנַיִם,
 בּוֹגֵר בְּתַמְיֵמוֹתָיו, תָּמִים בְּכֹל שְׁנוֹתָיו,
 עַל מִטְעָנֵי הָאוֹר אֶל שַׁעֲרֵי הַסֶּתֶר,
 עַל פְּרַע שְׁעָרוֹ בְּחוֹךְ הַעֲנָנִים.
 וְעַד עֲלוֹת שַׁחֲרָךְ רִבֵּץ עַל אֲבָנִים,
 חִבּוּי בְּסִלְעֵיֶיךָ כְּמוֹ בְּחִיק אִשָּׁה,
 וְרוּחַ יָם רְחוֹק נִשְׁאַה אֶל הַטֶּרֶשָׁה
 דִּירוֹן אָפֵל: צְנָה וְעֲנָנִים.

And this child of yours passing by as he did years ago, / Grown up and yet naive, naive throughout all his years, / With the burdens of light unto the autumn gates, / Upon his ruffled hair in the clouds. // Till the break of dawn on a bed of stones, / Concealed in your rocky embrace as in a woman's lap, / And winds driving from the distant seas over the wasteland / Sinister gift: chilling air and clouds. (p. 13)

The speaker, a veteran of the War of Independence, addresses himself to his motherland and declares his loyalty and uncompromising commitment by repeating the word "naive." He uses this attribute to describe himself, and also his loyalty, preserved in spite of his being an adult whose experience would tend to sap his naïveté and destroy it. As in the poem "Beveit hanetivot" in *Pirhei esh*, the youth who has grown up and experienced the horrors of war refuses to lose his naïveté. It is indeed because of his self-awareness and his realization that maturity and naïveté are in conflict that he declares (a dangerous declaration in the poetic climate in Israel at the time) that in spite of his having grown up, he has remained naive and in harmony with his existence and his motherland.

The protagonist, with ruffled hair, a Samson-like figure, a hermit (Num. 6:1–5; Judg. 13:3–5; 16, 17), has come out of the darkness into the light without losing his naïveté: like his ancient forefather Jacob, he lay till dawn on the stones (Gen. 28:10–19), embraced by Mother Earth as though by a woman or as though in the womb of the "great mother," in harmony with himself and his being, from which he has emerged and whose mouthpiece he wishes to be.²⁴

After *Shirei hotam* (1954), the inflated language seems to disappear, though the modifier "very" continues to play a central role in Gouri's poetry. The word "naive" in any form appears only once in *Shoshanat ruhot* (1960), in the poem "Ma'aseh beyonah" (A tale of a dove, p. 27); and for the last time (so far) in his canonical corpus, in *Mar'ot gehazi* (The visions of Gehazi, 1975), in the poem that begins "'Ul'orekh haderekh ra'iti baqashot rabbot" (And along the way I saw many wishes," p. 56). In

these two poems, and particularly in "Ma'aseh beyonah," where "naive" is repeated three times in the same verse, the speaker seems to be taking leave of that concept and its spiritual world:

מעשה ביונה
 שינדה על כתפי ממרומים,
 קלה מאד,
 מנגות עיר הנסוד והרחמים
 דמננו יחדו
 שעה תמימה ובינינו הרונ.
 רציתי לאמר לה:
 תמימה, יונה תמימה,
 מצאת לך מקום לנוח.
 מעשה ביונה
 שצנחה עד כתפי,
 לבנה, חמה.
 עד נגעו בה שפתי
 והיתה נוצתה ארמה.

A tale of a dove / That descended on my shoulder from heaven, / Very light, / From the roofs of the charitable and merciful city. // We fell silent together / For a whole hour and the wind between us, / I wanted to tell her: / Naive dove, naive, / You've found a place of rest. // A tale of a dove / That dropped onto my shoulder, / White and warm. // Till my lips touched her / And stained her feathers red. (*Shoshanat ruhot*, p. 27)

Although "naive" is repeated three times (in the Hebrew text), reminiscent of the magic number three, and "very" appears in the first stanza, both these words play an entirely different role from that in Gouri's earlier books. The overstatement relates only to the dove, not to the speaker. While in his earlier poetry, "very" and "naive" typified the speaker-protagonist and his world, the one merging with the other, here the speaker is left outside the domain of the dove. Only the dove represents the naive world, still clinging to it, to the youth who is no longer naive. The dove is not aware of the change he has undergone, but he realizes that a romantic abyss has opened between them. The text seems to express a complete change in the speaker's attitude to the world: from naïveté to sad soberness. While the first three books reflected a naïveté, from *Shoshanat ruhot* on we find a detached speaker, striving to keep some of his lost naïveté. Still, we must admit that Gouri, unlike most of the poets who grew up on the poetry of Bialik and the modernism of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, does not entirely abandon the naive world. In this, he resembles poets Saul Tchernichowsky, Esther Raab, Hillel Omer, Zerubavel Gil'ad, and others. The resentful or rather elegiac irony in the

words of the speaker to the naive dove and the kiss of blood that ends the poem evoke a clearly romantic situation, the speaker wishing to relate to the world of the dove—but this is no longer possible. The dove, as a topos, comes from a higher world, archetypal, charitable, and merciful, light and naive, a utopian world unlike the reality to which the speaker belongs. As opposed to the dove, there is no description of the speaker, but the text suggests he is guilty of spilling blood, albeit against his will; he is essentially different from the dove, both physically and spiritually, and the relationship between him and the world has changed, much to his sorrow. Although the text does not make any open analogy between the speaker and Noah, one can infer a connection between the two. The dove wants to get home to the ark, but the new Noah is not the perfect and righteous innocent any longer (Gen. 6:9). Unlike the dove, the modern “Noah” has lost his innocence in the flood and has become a man of blood.

Naïveté has vanished from the world, and there is no alternative but yearning for it. Clearheaded wisdom has supplanted naïveté. From this point onward, one encounters “if only” sentences, expressing wishes never to be fulfilled in the real world. Conditional sentences characterize the language of someone who has lost his naive world but wishes again to be part of it. His yearning to return to the Garden of Eden is thwarted, and he walks on, banished.

From the moment the gates of heaven closed and there was nothing left but nostalgic longing for the past, the speaker lived in a world of wishful thinking. In such a world, one must compose “conditional sentences,” as the speaker declares in *Shoshanat ruhot* (p. 53), the first time in Gouri’s poetry. Subsequently, in *Mar’ot gehazi*, the speaker actually lives in a city “full of black dreams,” between “rare conjectures,” and “conditional improbable sentences” (p. 53). The poem “Ra’al” (Poison) opens like this:

צריך היתה להיות אהרת, כמו במשפטי-הנאי נפלאים.
 ומה אתה רוציה!
 מה שאמור היתה להיות פשוט ונכון מאד הלה והסתבר
 ללא מוצא למרות הנפש הרוציה.
 השד יודע מודע זה קורה ומי אשם בכך.
 עקשו בקר מאחר מדי. במרחבי גופי הולכות ונפתחות
 יומם ולילה
 ועדות המקירה, גובים בי עדיות.
 חבל, אפשר היתה להיות, לא לפספס את השמיני בחדש
 ולרבו כחות בנקודה הנכונה.
 לא להתרוצץ כמו משגעים על פני ההשערות
 והמדבריות, לתקן בעוד מועד את הטעות, שתספק,

כל עוד נפשי,
 מנות ציאן־קלי לחיי, ליד החקמים שלאחר,
 בידים המאגרפות באלקלא.

It should have been otherwise, as in wonderful conditional sentences. / And what do you want?! / What was supposed to be simple and very true became complicated / Insoluble in spite of the soul's desire. / Only the devil knows why it happens and who is to blame. / Now it is too late. In the open spaces of my body interrogations committees / Are opened, more and more, / Day and night, taking evidence. / What a pity, it was possible to live, not to miss the eighth day,²⁵ / To concentrate the troops at the right point. / Not to rush around like lunatics upon the assumptions / And the deserts, to fix in time the fault, that will provide, / As long as I live, / A dose of cyanide to my life, nearby the wise men of too late (after the event), / With fists full of if not. (*Ayumah*, p. 55)

The failure of the counterattack on the Suez Canal during the Yom Kippur War here becomes a symbol of the sense of failure, both on private and national levels, and a burst of longing for the simple, good old days. "It should have been otherwise, as in wonderful conditional sentences," but it is not! Times change, Israeli reality has lost the innocence and the idealism of the 1940s, so it is not surprising that in *Mahberot elul* (1985) he longs for "The Blessed Day" ("Hayom hamevorakh"):

היום המברך הוא שימשך כמו עוד אפשר
 והרשות להעמיד פנים, ללכת הלאה אל דלתות שתפתחנה שם.
 ובעלי החלומות ישובו, יהיו לגבורים!
 על מה ולמה יגרע חלקי? הייתי שם!

That blessed day as long as it can last / And the right to pretend, to walk on to the doors that will open there. / And the dreamers will return, will become heroes again! / Why should my part be denied me? I was there too! (p. 11)

The speaker, as one of the dreamers, wishes to turn back the wheel of time, so that heroes will be heroes again, not just dreamers of wishful thinking, like now. On that day, "The wishes and regrets will be heard as part of the love poetry" (*ibid.*)—the naive poetry.²⁶

However, we must point out the difference between the longing for the naive in Gouri's poetry and in romantic Hebrew poetry, written by Ḥayyim Nahman Bialik, and even Avraham Shlonsky and Uri Zvi Greenberg, the modernists. The naïveté of romantic poetry relates mainly to childhood. As soon as the child has become a youth, setting out on "the difficult journey," the *quest*, he appears as having fallen or been exiled from Eden to commonplace reality, and in more extreme cases, to a defiled reality.²⁷ Maturity exacts a price that is often unbearable, since it is connected to enlightenment and self-awareness that cut the umbilical

cord to nature, and he must now confront it as an exile. There is now an abyss between them. The bridge is extremely narrow,²⁸ if it exists at all (as in the poetry of Bialik), and therefore, the sentimental element in that poetry is usually limited to longing for the Garden of Eden of lost childhood. However, Gouri's speaker states his wish explicitly (as above) that the dreamers may return and become heroes. Here, naïveté is not limited to childhood, but is present in maturity. The romantic heroes, dedicated to the quest²⁹ in all its phases, are part of the naive world lost on the way. Thus, the poet not only clings to the naive like a child; it permeates life at every stage: childhood, adulthood, old age, death. Gouri's poetry, beginning with *Shoshanat ruhot*, is full of naive mature figures, even some old people. We perceive this in the heroes and the naive visionaries in "Tzlihat hanahar" (Crossing the river), who pay a high price for crossing the river at night, while the speaker wonders "Why did they go, why didn't they sit at home at the feet of the wise and experienced?" (*Shoshanat ruhot*, p. 22). The answer we are to supply is: because they are naive heroes. Finally, eagles also serve as a metaphor for those naive heroes who people *Shoshanat ruhot*, as in the poem "Hanupa lanesharim" (Flattering the eagles):

הַנְּשָׂרִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים אֶת הַלְּאִוֹת.
 עוֹפוֹת מִמְּשָׁכִים וְחֻזְקִים.
 אֵינָם קְלִים לְהַתְּיַדֵּד.
 אֵינָם גְּרִים עַל הַגְּגוֹת.
 אֵינָם קְרוֹאִים, מִשְׁחָרִים,
 לְלָקוּט בְּכַבְרוֹת שְׁטוּפוֹת יוֹנִים,
 לְנַחַח רְעוּדִים עַל כְּתָף.
 . . .
 נְעִים לְאֵט, שְׁחוֹרִים, עַל פְּצַע הַשָּׁמַיִם.
 וְשָׁם, אִתִּי, עוֹדִם עִפִּים הַנְּשָׂרִים.

The eagles are never weary. / Persistent birds and strong. // They do not make friends easily. / They do not live on roofs. / They cannot be called or bribed, / To feed in squares flooded with pigeons, / To rest trembling on my shoulder. // . . . / Move slowly, black, on the wounded sky // And there, they still fly with me, the eagles. (p. 23)

As in the poem "Ma'aseh beyonah," quoted above, the eagles metaphorically and metonymically represent the naive hero at the height of his strength, his wisdom, and awareness; yet they are an inseparable part of nature. They are not nostalgic birds, in contrast to the speaker, who observes them admiringly and wishes to be one of them, as the last line shows.³⁰ Gouri's eagles remind the reader of the majestic vulture in Tchernichowsky's poem "Ayit! 'ayit 'al harayikh" (Vulture! vulture on

your mountains).³¹ One finds the same motif and the same mood in the two poems: a deep longing of the "I" for the naive time and existence.

Why is it that the crisis and the transition from the naive to the nostalgic occur at this point, in *Shoshanat ruhot*, and not earlier—for instance, in *Shirei hotam* (1954)? It is difficult to offer a plausible answer. One may suggest more than one hypothesis: it may reflect some development in the character and personality in the poet or in his point of view, or a change in the spiritual climate of a particular generation or period; it may stem from a sudden crisis or a long process of disillusionment. A partial solution, not single and definitive, may be given. At the beginning of the 1950s, when *Shirei hotam* was published, a new kind of poetry was appearing in the journal *Liqrat* (Toward), written by poets who began to publish in 1951 (Amichai, Avidan, and Zach, as previously mentioned, as well as Moshe Ben-Sha'ul, Moshe Dor, Aryeh Sivan, and others). These poets tried to turn away from the modernist ideological poetry of the 1930s and 1940s toward more individualistic poetics.³² This poetics once more focuses on the "young lonely" hero, reminiscent of "the hero" of the poets of the *Hatehiyah* generation (Micha J. Berdyczewski, H. N. Bialik, Uri N. Gnessin, J. H. Brenner, and others). The uncommitted stranger and anti-hero is back, and is forced to become "the mandatory hero," who, in Amichai's poem, says, "I want to die in my bed."³³ Gouri's heroes were never compelled to become heroes by outside exigency; it was the result of an inner urge. But the spiritual climate in the country, which spread like wildfire, imperiled Gouri's poetry and his status as a national poet, which he had attained immediately with the publication of *Pirhei esh*. The mood was one of disillusionment, "the morning after." Those who fought in the 1947–48 war experienced frustration on their return from the battlefields, finding everything as usual, materialism and corruption, a country very different from what they had dreamed about when they went into battle, ready to sacrifice their lives).³⁴ Gouri's first three books of poetry had been free of this mood, but it was reflected in the literature of his generation and of the group contributing to the journal *Liqrat*. It began to influence him, as did Western poetry, to which he was exposed in France after the War of Independence. The soberness revealed in *Shoshanat ruhot* is part of the price that his poetry paid to the social and poetical climate in the country at the time, a price, as noted, paid unwillingly. The soberness is mainly pessimistic: it senses the rift and refuses to accept that the bridge has collapsed. Yet Gouri's poetry, like Alterman's, knows that behind this rupture stirs a rebirth, and therefore, the starting point is basically existential. Even now, despite its loss of naïveté and acceptance of the world of "if only" and "would that,"

Gouri's poetry, like Alterman's, is still far removed from the tragic vision of the *Hatehiyah* generation, 1900s–1920s, and that of the 1950s and 1960s.

The change that took place in the speaker, beginning with *Shoshanat ruhot*, is evident, for instance, in the motif of psychomachia, which begins to show itself for the first time in this book. The speaker introduces himself by the overstatement of the "Syrian-African rift." That "rift" splits him into a dual personality, as in the poem "Shever" (Rift, p. 64). This *shever* is the result of a mighty tectonic shift, which indeed symbolizes the split personality of the speaker. Several poems in *Shoshanat ruhot* variously reflect some kind of experience of collapse within the speaker and his spiritual world. For instance, in "Im'um la'orekh" (Obscurity along the way), the "I" tells the reader about someone who "continues on his way," disappearing in the distance, while the "I" collapses helplessly (p. 58). The disappeared one is also the chosen one, the favorite alter ego (ibid.). This is the archetypal situation of Cain and Abel, Isaac and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Ephraim and Menasseh, David and his brothers, the pair of youths in Bialik's "Megilat ha'esh" (Scroll of fire), and the poems of the brothers in Alterman's *Kokhavim bahutz*. One of them is naive, the favorite, and therefore, his nostalgic twin, his double, knows that his brother is the "dearer" than he, that "He is to you the good one, the only one."³⁵ Only the naive brother is the chosen, while his double remains outside God's providence. It is a transition from an inner homogeneous world to a dualist one, where an inner battle rages, a kind of everlasting psychomachia between the "brothers" throughout their quest in *Kokhavim bahutz*.³⁶ In *Shoshanat ruhot* there is also a struggle, but it is concealed, as in the poem "Im'um la'orekh" (p. 58), or exposed, without the dramatic split into two antithetic twins while reflecting psychomachia taking place within the "I," as in the poem "Milhemet ezrahim" (Civil war):

אני מלחמת אֶנְרָחִים
 ומחציתי יורה את אֶנְרָוֹנִיה
 אל קירות המִנְצָחִים.
 בית־דין־שנה,
 העובד במשמרות,
 ושם אורות לא־דוֹעֵכִים.
 ושם הצורך־ים יורים בִּיתֵר הצורך־ים.
 ואחר־כֵּן בא שקט
 מצד־ךָ מִצִּיפּוֹת וְחֲשֻׁכוֹת של תְּרַמִּילִים רִיקִים.
 אני לִלְלָה בְּעִיר פְּרוֹזוֹת
 לְכָל דְּבַפִּיִן.

I am a civil war / And half of me shoots my last ones / At the walls of the defeated. // A field court-marshal, / Working in shifts / Where the lights are not dimmed. // And there the righteous shoot the other righteous. / And then there is silence / Welded from weariness and the darkness of empty shells. // I am night in an unwallled city / Open to each and everyone. (p. 65)

The homogeneity, the total naïveté that typified the speaker and his world in the poet's first books, is apparently replaced by a split, broken figure. However, in this poem, at least, the civil war is not between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, as, for instance, in the psychomachia raging in the heart of Bialik's youth "with pale eyes" in "Megilat ha'esh." In Bialik's long poem, the youth confesses that his soul is "a viper's cave and eagle's nest, black and white."³⁷ It is certainly not a replay of the fight between Cain and Abel, and others like them, easily labeled by moral criteria of good and evil, the white soldier beating the black. This is a civil war in which right is on both sides; all are Sons of Light. It is not a civil war in which two sides of the same coin are fighting for primacy—the dark against the light, the id against the superego, and so on. Both sides represent light, pertain to the same aspect, and the same nature. The speaker is grasped even here, despite the rift and battle, as a basically homogeneous figure, potentially capable of calling a cease-fire, of making peace with himself and once more functioning without obvious serious scars. Therefore, he is not essentially a dualistic figure, since he is outside the circumstances that have caused the rift.

From the above analysis, we may venture to say that the hero in *Shoshanat ruhot*, at the crossroads of Gouri's poetry, has not undergone a major change but has evolved from the poet's earlier poetry. In poem 9 from the cycle "Oto 'erev bemabiyon" (That night in Mabiyon), which opens the last part of the book, and is called, like the entire book, *Shoshanat ruhot*, the speaker declares:

עמדתי בכפר אחת שהיתה שושנת-רוחות,
 בעיר שאין לה שם ובשעה שאין לה זמן,
 באמצע שנותי ההולכות ממני,
 מבלי שאוכל לומר או לעשות דבר-מה.
 עמדתי בין-השמשות לא לילה ולא יום,
 ליד כותל אבן עתיקה ממני ובבדה,
 תחת השמים הסגלים השוכים לשארית היום.
 עמדתי תחת השמים הנמוכים והמעוננים מאד,
 בלי דגל ובירה ואגרופים מלאים
 בקריצות המטרף ובחנות המלקחיות.

I stood in a square which was a crossroads, / In a nameless, timeless city / In the midst of my years passing from me / Unable to speak or do anything. // I

stood in twilight, neither night nor day, / Near a stone wall more ancient than me and heavy, / Under the violet sky belonging to the remnant of the day. // I stood under the low and very cloudy sky, / Without flag or citadel, and fists full / With crazed zeal and delight in battles. (pp. 85–86)

The youth, who has grown up since *Pirḥei esh*, *‘Ad ‘alot hashahar*, and *Shirei hotam*, has reached middle age and stands at the crossroads, a defeated hero in a world to which all roads lead, unable to speak or act positively, as he used to do. He resembles the passive, paralyzed anti-heroes populating Hebrew poetry of the *Hatehiyah* generation and the “State generation” (1950s and 1960s), starting with Amichai: a hero who has grown up into a new and different reality to which he must adapt by shedding his illusions and losing his vitality in the process of change. But not even the new reality has brought about a total change of personality. Though he has remained without a flag or citadel, his fists are “full with crazed zeal and delight in battles,” a romantic Don Quixote, bereft of any satire. He has lost his naïveté, he has become transformed from “Noah, the just man and perfect,” into Jonah, the skeptic (*Ayumah*, pp. 25–29). However, soberness and skepticism can be expressed in different ways, every poet has his own way of treating it: satirical, absurd, humorous, dramatic, heroic, elegiac. In Gouri’s poetry, we find repeated attempts to give soberness a romantic, naive aspect. He wishes by way of “wonders and miracles” to revive heroic naive reality, where choice is meaningful, and so is “the one chosen” who walks on; or, stated differently, to know that from the silence “he rises up tonight—a different person,” in “Neginat beina’im” (Intermezzo, *Shoshanat ruhot*, p. 66). Gouri’s speaker does not give in. He continues to struggle in order to make “the other” similar, or even identical to the naive “I” who has reached the crossroads, and he long deliberates over where to channel the abundant energy locked in his fists, which drives him crazy.

Here we encounter two more key words in Gouri’s poetic dictionary, “wonders” and “miracles” (*Nisim venifla’ot*), which he first uses in *Shoshanat ruhot*. These words, which appear periodically, mostly as an idiom, express the speaker’s longing to relive the harmony he knew before the “civil war” and the “Syrian-African Rift.” We meet this phrase for the first time in the poem “Ma’aseh beshalal” (A tale about loot) in *Shoshanat ruhot*, when the speaker observes his own alter ego sitting in a world about to collapse, without boundaries:

ושם האורות נתקשים
והדברים אשר נוטלים אותם
רכוש נטוש, מתגולל.

ושם קירות אשר אינם עוצרים את ההולך,
 סלמות שאין נופלים מהם
 אל ושימון השחר העולה,
 . . .

ושם אני:
 גבור ידוע לתהלות,
 ליד השקט הנקנה בין חפצים זרועים,
 ליד שאריות נסים ונפלאות.

And there the dim lights / And the things which are taken / Abandoned property, scattered. // And there the walls which do not stop the walker, / Ladders from which none can fall / To the wasteland of the sunrise, / . . . // And there am I: / A hero of renown, / By the accumulated silence among the scattered objects, / By the relics of wonders and miracles. (p. 21)

There are two solid facts here: on the one hand, broken pieces, abandoned ladders that no one uses or falls from, neither angels (Gen. 28:12) nor fighters; on the other, a no less important fact—in spite of corroded reality, the alter ego, a renowned hero, sits by the relics of “wonders and miracles.” Though these are only remains, they have a holy aura about them and the hero refuses to part with them or despise them. In the poem “Tselihat hanahar” (Crossing the river, *ibid.*, p. 22), he speaks with admiration of “heroes and visionaries,” the naive ones who cross the river by night and pay for it with their lives, and he wonders, “Who is it that rouses the sleeper to walk to the wonders and miracles?” Thus, enchanted reality that seems out of this world returns and encroaches again and again on commonplace reality, existing on the ruins of the heroic and holy time. For the wonders and miracles are an inherent part of the naive holy world that forces itself upon its heroes at the critical moment. Yet the speaker knows well that “the disastrous sun will awaken— / The fake morning’s deception” (*ibid.*). This phrase appears again in the poem “Oto ‘erev bemabiyon” mentioned above. This cycle is undoubtedly among the most important in the book, if not the most important. Even though the speaker stands “in a square that was a crossroads,” in “a nameless, timeless city,” in the midst of his years that pass from him (pp. 85–86), and he is like Samson when he lost his locks and his strength, when we come to poem 9, the poet defines the naive starting line as present reality, or nearly so, by dint of the rhetoric that restores it:

קורה התקלה
 לילה. מחציתו חיים
 מחציתו תפלה
 שם,
 המקדשים

הנוצרים,
 עיר הצדק והתהלה.
 שם,
 שמש גבעון,
 ירח אילון,
 כתבת הפחד
 העז והגדלה.
 קו־ההתהלה.
 שמש-קר.
 גלגלת השיבת
 לעורכים ולמך־קר.
 למועד,
 לתלאות,
 לנסים ולנפלאות.
 אור על איש
 ועל עיניו העצומות
 אור על העתיד.
 על בקעת העצמות.
 ולא הרחק
 פסיפס המקדשים והסלם
 ובו עולים ובו יורדים
 המלאכים שאין מנוס ואין מנוח
 מפניהם ומקולם.

The starting line. / Night. Half life, / Half prayer. // There / The consecrated, / The destined, / The city of justice and fame. // There, / The sun of Giv'on, / The moon of Ayalon, / The writing of fear / The courage and the greatness. // The starting line. / Wild-sun, / A skull that belongs / To the ravens and the desert. // To the appointed time, / To the hardships, / To the wonders and miracles. // Light on the man / On his closed eyes. / Light on the future. / On the valley of bones. // And not far away / The mosaic of temples and the ladder / On it ascend and descend / The angels from them and from their voices / One cannot escape. (pp. 89–90)

The existence of that naive world is assured beyond all doubt. It is "there," centered on the place of prayer, of anointed heroes, of the "center," described as the city of justice and fame, on the miracle of the sun in Giv'on and the moon in Ayalon (Josh. 10:12–13). But as we suddenly discover, this is not only a world gone by, now dead, but there is "light," the eschatological "future," the valley of bones (Ezekiel 37)—surely no less a starting line. While in the poem "Ma'aseh beshalal" (p. 21), mentioned above, the ladders remain empty, here they are once more crowded with busy angels holding sway over the speaker and his

friends, and there is no evading them and their holiness, which is binding in the present.³⁸ All these and others make us wonder whether Gouri's poetry did, in fact, switch from naive to soberness, from "very" to "sufficient" or "barely sufficient," and we feel that even after he leaves the crossroads of *Shoshanat ruhot*, the pendulum still swings toward the naive. This is substantiated even more in his prose than in his poetry: *Hasefer hameshuga'*, *Mi makir et yosef g.?*, and *Hahaqirah*. This inclination to naïveté and great endeavors to mold and shape it in modern strategies is one of Gouri's unique characteristics in his late poetry.

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NOTES

1. The English translations here mostly follow Stanley F. Chyet's translation: *Poems by Haim Gouri, Words in my Lovesick Blood* (Detroit, 1996). Elsewhere, the poems are rendered in literal translation.

2. See, for example, the following from *Pirhei esh* (Merhavva, 1949): "So you go on living, always returning, / Very innocent, sad and troubled" (p. 32); "Soon the night watch will descend upon my life, / Its minutes will float by with despondent eyes, / Very many and loaded with voiceless words" (p. 51); "Silence . . . for some reason I was walking very much alone" (p. 62); "and they," the youths, "are very few" (p. 64); and many more such phrases, both in *Pirhei esh* and in later collections of poems.

3. See, for example, Gouri, 'Ad 'alot hashahar [Until sunrise] (Tel Aviv, 1950), p. 133; *Shirei hotam* [Signet poems] (Tel Aviv, 1954), pp. 20, 27, 28, 41, 98, 109; *Shoshanat ruhot* [Crossroads] (Tel Aviv, 1960), pp. 27, 42, 84, 86, 114; *Tenu'ah lemaga'* [Move for contact] (Tel Aviv, 1968), pp. 19, 20–21, 46, 52, 53; *Mar'ot Gehazi* [Visions of Gehazi] (Tel Aviv, 1975), pp. 10, 54; *Ayumah* [Terrible] (Tel Aviv, 1979), pp. 28, 48, 55, 69–70; *Mahberot elul* [Notebooks from the month of elul] (Tel Aviv, 1985), pp. 48, 49, 65, 75, 76, 82; *Haba ahrai* [The next in line] (Tel Aviv, 1994), pp. 12, 14.

4. The poets of the Israeli *moderna* of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s employed dualism and the oxymoron, some more (Shlonsky, Alterman), some less (Greenberg, and even less, Goldberg). See, for example, in Natan Zach, *Zeman veritmus etsel bergeson uvashirah hamoderanit* [Time and rhythm in Bergson and in modern poetry] (Tel Aviv, 1966), p. 34; Ziva Shamir, 'Od hozer hanigun [The vagrant bard: Avant-garde and Alterman's poetic style] (Tel Aviv, 1989), pp. 68–71.

5. Most of the attacks against Gouri took place after the publication of *Shirei hotam* (1954), while his first book, *Pirhei esh* was received enthusiastically. See, for example, Natan Zach, "Hatemimut, ha'aharayut, vehashirah" [Naïveté, responsibility, and poetry], in *Mevot* 15 (1954), reprinted in *Siman qri'ah* 1 (1972): 295–97; Nisim Kalderon, "Tenu'ah el haqalush" [A movement to the shallowness], 'Akhshav 21–24 (1968): 278–80; Hanan Hever, "Shirat hayim gouri: He'arot lesikum beinayim" [Gouri's poetry: Comments for an interim summary], 'Akhshav 33–34 (1976): 263–68. Most of the written criticism was by critics under Zach's influence. In fact, real criticism of Gouri's poetry is only now beginning to appear. For example: Dan Miron, *Mul ha'ah hashoteq* [Facing the silent brother: Essays on the poetry of the war of independence] (Tel Aviv, 1992), pp. 197–270; Reuven Shoham, "Besiman

kutonet hapasim" [The hero with the coat of many colors: The early poetry of Haim Gouri], in *Mehqerei yerushalayim besifrut 'ivrit* 12 (1990): 277–304; Chaya Shacham, *Hedim shel nigun* [Echoes of melody: The poetry of the Palmach generation and its ties with Alterman's verse] (Tel Aviv, 1997).

6. But see Miron, *Mul ha'ah hashoteq*, pp. 210–17, who emphasizes the essential difference between them. Recently, Chaya Shacham published her research; see n. 5 above. In it are many insights on the relationships between Alterman's and Gouri's poetry, especially pp. 174–204.

7. Benjamin Hrushovski, "Poetic Metaphor and Frames of Reference," *Poetics Today* 5 (1984): 1.

8. Nathan Alterman, *Kokhavim bahuts* [Stars outside], in *Shirim shemikevar* [Poems from the past] (Tel Aviv, 1972), p. 7.

9. On demonic powers and demonic heroes, see Angus Fletcher, *Allegory* (Ithaca, 1970), pp. 25–69. For a full interpretation of Alterman's poem, see Dan Miron, *Miperat el 'iqar* [Parts into whole] (Tel Aviv, 1981), pp. 79–87; and also Reuven Shoham, "Hamodus ha'allegori veshirat alterman" [The allegoric mode in Alterman's poetry], *Dappim* 1 (1984): 195–240; and concerning the demonic agent in *Kokhavim bahuts*, see *ibid.*, pp. 220–22, 225–30.

10. Yet Gouri's poem is part of a larger biographical framework that includes the acceptance of such a mission. See R. Shoham, *Mehqerei yerushalayim besifrut 'ivrit*.

11. Miron, p. 82.

12. Miron, *ibid.*, p. 84.

13. For "mythical" and "concrete time," see Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History* (New York, 1959), pp. 20–21.

14. See many poems in *Kokhavim bahutz* and also in *Simhat 'aniyim*, in Alterman, *Shirim shemikevar*, pp. 13–16, 54–55, 65–66, 68–70, 73, 78–79, 153–54, 155–56, 159–60, 161–63, 164–65, 166, 167.

15. According to Gestalt theory, the reader creates the whole from some of its parts, and thus the image of total perfection springs to mind, even though certain traits are not mentioned, such as intellectual and moral ones. According to literary conventions, a lovely young man or woman is perfect in every way, unless specifically stated otherwise. See Reuven Shoham, *Kol udyoqan* [Voice and image] (Haifa, 1988), pp. 11–30.

16. Maurice Z. Shroder, "The Novel as a Genre," in Philip Stevick, ed., *The Theory of the Novel* (New York, 1963), pp. 13–29.

17. Referring to Bialik's poetry, Halkin called this deflationist approach "diminution or limiting the reflection (or perspective)." Shimon Halkin, "Haqtanat hasheqef" [Diminuation of the reflection], in *Muskamot umasherim besifrutenu* [Conventions and crises in Hebrew literature] (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 72–77.

18. On the romance, see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 36–37; 49–51; 64–65; 107–8; 206–86; N. Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (London, 1976).

19. Sigmund Freud and D. E. Oppenheim, *Dreams in Folklore*, trans. A.M.O. Richards (New York, 1958); Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. J. Strachey (New York, 1965); Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, trans. F. Robbins and S. E. Jelliffe (Princeton, 1990); C. G. Jung, "The Development of Personality," in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, vol. 17 (New York, 1954); Jung, "Symbols of Transformation," *ibid.*, vol. 5 (Princeton, 1956); Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, 1968); Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History* (New York, 1959); Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (New York, 1962); and compare with N. Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, op. cit., pp. 95–158. Frye points out the motifs of ascent and descent typical of the heroes of the romance, without discussing their psychological significance. He also claims that, from a literary point of view, there is no need to differentiate between the myth and the romance, and I agree with him in this respect.

20. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 163–86; also, Alterman's long poem *Shirei makot mitsrayim*, in *Shirim shemikevar*, pp. 225–55. The poet's optimism, evident in this poem, bases its justification on traditional sources rather than on historical facts.

21. Frye, op. cit., pp. 40–49, 223–39.

22. Gouri deleted this ending in the second edition of *Pirhei esh* (Jerusalem, 1961).

23. In this collection, published in 1954, we find the word "naive" in all its forms even more frequently than in *Pirhei esh*.

24. See also *Pirhei esh*, pp. 39, 45–47, 48–49, 58, 60, 80, 81, 85–87; 'Ad 'alot hashahar, pp. 146, 161; *Shirei hotam*, pp. 9, 13, 23, 25, 36, 41, 44, 47, 50, 54, 58, 81, 91, 95, 109.

25. This text is connected to a specific incident that took place during the Yom Kippur War: the failure of General Avraham Adan (nickname Bren) in his counterattack along the Suez Canal, on 8 October 1973, and the investigation of the "affair" by a special state committee. However, this does not invalidate the symbolic significance of these events within the tragic world of the speaker.

26. Regarding "conditional" and "if only" sentences, see also *Ayumah*, pp. 15–16; *Mahberot elul*, pp. 40, 73, 81–82, and the poem "Nostalgia," where the speaker speaks openly of his nostalgic attitude toward the naive reality now lost (ibid., p. 37).

27. See, for example, Bialik's poem "Ve'im yish'al hamal'akh" [And if the angel will ask], in H. N. Bialik, *Kol kitvei h. n. bialik* [Collected works] (Tel Aviv, 1971), p. 47, and the interpretation of this poem in Reuven Shoham, *Baderekh haqashah* [The hard way] (Tel Aviv, 1990), pp. 91–108.

28. See Saul Tchernichowsky's poem "Ha'adam einu ela . . ." [The man is but . . .] and in the cycle of sonnets "Lashemesh" [To the sun] in Tchernichowsky, *Shirim* [Poems] (Jerusalem, 1940), pp. 466–69; 291–301.

29. See Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 187–90.

30. See also *Shoshanat ruhot*, pp. 58, 103, 112, 115; *Tenu'ah lemaga'*, pp. 9, 13, 14, 16, 20, 23, 24, 76; *Mar'ot gehazi*, pp. 14, 16; *Ayumah*, pp. 30, 34, 40, 45, 46, 51, 53, 60, 62; *Mahberot elul*, pp. 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 43, 48, 50. In fact, the books written in prose are also to be understood in this way: *Mi makir et yosef g.?* (Tel Aviv, 1980); *Hasefer hameshuga'* [The crazy book] (Tel Aviv, 1971); and parts of *HaHaqirah: sipur re'u'el* [The investigation: The story of Re'u'el] (Tel Aviv, 1980).

31. Saul Tchernichowsky, *Shirim*, p. 557.

32. See Amos Levin, *Beli qav: Ledarkhah shel "liqrat" basifrut ha'ivrit hahadashah* [Without a line: The path of the "Towards" group in modern Hebrew literature] (Tel Aviv, 1984); Gershon Shaked, *Hasiporet ha'ivrit 1880–1980* [Hebrew narrative fiction 1880–1990] (Tel Aviv, 1988), pp. 192–99.

33. Yehuda Amichai, *Shirim 1948–1962* [Poems 1948–62] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1962), pp. 82–83.

34. See Menahem Brinker, "HaHalutsiyut ba'am uvsifriteinu hatse'irah" [Pioneering in the nation and in our young literature], in *Mibifnim* 17, 3 (1954): 381–92; Nurit Gretz, *Hirbat hizah vehaboqer shelemohorat* [Hebrew fictional narrative of the 1960s] (Tel Aviv, 1983).

35. Nathan Alterman, *Shirim shemikevar*, p. 61.

36. Shoham, "Hamodus ha'alegori beshirat alterman," pp. 195–240.

37. Bialik, op. cit., p. 106.

38. For "Wonders and miracles" and the motif of the ladder, see also *Pirhei esh*, p. 112; *Tenu'ah lemaga'*, pp. 10–11; *Ayumah*, pp. 11, 19, 51–52.