

Amir Banbaji

DEFENDING HASKALAH POETRY ON ITS OWN TURF: POETRY, TIME AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF SELFHOOD IN MIKHAL'S *SHLOMO VEKOHELET*

This article revisits the difficulty encountered by scholars who study the rise of romanticism in nineteenth-century Hebrew poetry. Taking issue with both romantic and structuralist readings of the poetry of Micah J. Lebensohn (Mikhal) and paying particular attention to Joseph Ha'efrati's attack on Haskalah poetry, this new examination of Mikhal's seminal Shlomo vekohelet shows, first, that inscriptions of romantic subjectivity are not only present in Mikhal's work, but are also critiqued and ironized. Read closely as an (auto)biographical poem, the article demonstrates that Mikhal's narration of Solomon's career as a poet begins with a depiction of what amounts to a Wordsworthian experience of self, but ends with an assault on the "egoistical sublime," typical of early romantic poetry. Second, the article attempts to defend Haskalah poetry from critical skepticism. Challenging the structuralist premises employed by recent scholars, the article shows how Mikhal's poetry uses the best resources of language, rhetoric and the experience of time for unsettling, rather than tendentiously promoting, as the common accusation goes, the basic tenets of Haskalah ideology.

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As presented in the literary historiography of the Haskalah period the work of Micah J. Lebensohn (Mikhal, 1828–1852) vacillates inconclusively between romanticism and neo-classicism. Earlier critics, many of whom were ideologues and active participants in the national revival of Hebrew culture in the first half on the twentieth century, perceived Mikhal's poetry as a spark of sensuous expression in the context of Haskalah poetry's general inclination towards rationalism and abstraction. A sickly child of the Lithuanian Haskalah poet Abraham D. Lebensohn (Adam Hakohen) Mikhal infused Haskalah poetry with the lyrical and colourful tone it lacked. Writers of the national renaissance generation felt that Mikhal, immersed in the pain of unreciprocated love and affected by the threat of untimely death (he contracted tuberculosis at the age of 17), had created poetry with sentimental overtones that clearly distinguished it from Judah L. Gordon's political satire, or from the verbose poetry of Mikhal's father, who would rather "watch his poetic themes lie lifelessly before him like corpses" than give up writing them.¹ Mikhal's work was a vindication of Haskalah poetry and was

regarded as a welcome precursor to the great romantic literature written in the post-maskilic era of national renaissance. For Jacob Fichman,

[M]ikhal was the poet of youth. His sparkling eyes looked directly into our hearts. His sorrow was overflowing red blood, blazing and full of exultation. Even as we grew older, and time replaced the poets of the Haskalah with a newer sensation, the voice of his misery still followed us, retaining its purity.²

Critics active in the second half of the twentieth century were less convinced by the notion of Mikhal's supposed romanticism.³ Influenced by Anglo-American New Criticism and European formalism, critics like Simon Halkin, Yehudit Bar-El, Yosef Ha'efrati and Reuven Shoham sought to delineate Mikhal's literary legacy by looking into the structure of his poetic imagery (Ha'efrati), his clever use of various imported genres (Bar-El) or the subjective mood and modality of his poetic hero (Shoham). Their literary-historical and structural examination of Mikhal's poetry departed from the earlier critics' ideological-historical reading. While critics like Jacob Fichman viewed Mikhal as a unique literary phenomenon, capable of exploding the maskilic lineage, the later critics viewed him as bound by the limits of what the predominant Tel Aviv school of poetics referred to as the "literary system." This cursory look at the history of Mikhal's reception leaves us with two mutually exclusive views of Hebrew literary history. Critics who subscribe to what I shall call, following Paul de Man, the *romantic* view of literary history, perceive Mikhal as a contrarian, a romantic whose poetry defies established notions of historical continuity, while the *structuralist* critics, pouring cold water on their predecessors' praise, argue that Mikhal's work should, in fact, be seen as confined to the predominantly neo-classical norms and affiliations espoused by the Haskalah literature "system."

Not surprisingly, these opposing positions are related to key elements in Mikhal's writing, which is often focused around a conflict between two divergent forms of subjectivity which the "romantic" and the "structural" critics utilize to support their respective readings of his poetry. For example, the first part of his *Shlomo vekohelet* (1851) places at its centre (46–49, 65–128)⁴ a depiction of Solomon's writing that is reminiscent of the self-aware subject of romantic poetry, who articulates his deepest spiritual insights by visualizing nature. As Wordsworth put it in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*,

[t]he poet ... considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature.⁵

This poet uses his unmediated association with nature to establish the moral infinitude of man, indeed his ability to *transcend* nature and assert man's infinity as a powerful masculine being whose spirituality and freedom allow him to dominate the sheer physicality of nature. As Barbara C. Freeman puts it in her feminist critique of Wordsworth's sublime,

[Wordsworth's] paradigm of romantic transcendence [as reflected in "Tintern Abbey"] celebrates a kind of power that was forbidden to women. It also privileges a subject who subsumes all experience into an infinitely expanding "I," as if the goal of the Wordsworthian sublime was to consume the very otherness it appears to

bespeak and demonstrate mastery over an experience that had seemed overwhelming.⁶

As I demonstrate below, this expression of the “egotistical sublime” (according to critics of Wordsworth after John Keats)⁷ plays a major role, both favourable and unfavourable, in Mikhal’s depiction of Solomon’s poetic career in *Shlomo vekohélet*. This form of triumphal subjectivity is arguably what appealed to both Fichman and Joseph Klausner, who found in Mikhal’s poems a nascent universal humanity, as well as a harbinger of national self-determination.

However, the egotistical “I” is also frustrated and made to fail in key moments of Mikhal’s work. Solomon, like Samson, Yael or Judah Halevi in other seminal narrative poems included in *Shire bat tsiyyon* (1851) is a subject whose desires were frustrated by the unaccommodating reality they had to confront. For anti-romantic readers of Mikhal, this failure could serve as a realistic wake up call, a de-mystification of the overblown subject who must face the mighty force of social causes unrelated to his own will. The structuralist critics who contested Mikhal’s romantic legacy implicitly used this de-mystifying strategy to claim that Mikhal himself was unable to break the rigid boundaries of neo-classicism, and that the complimentary title of “romantic poetry” should be reserved for much later Hebrew poetic accomplishments.

Addressing Mikhal’s poetry after Paul de Man’s reassessment of the New Critics’ concept of romanticism,⁸ my paper is less interested in figuring out whether Mikhal is a romantic poet or not but, rather, focuses on the precise lineaments that construe the experience of self in Mikhal’s poetry. Mikhal’s *Shlomo vekohélet* expresses, I argue, both the egotistical, self-constituting I, and its existential critique. Solomon begins his mature writing career as a romantic subject, but as he grows older, becomes a subject whose interests lie less in the infinitude of his subjectivity and more in revealing the authentic meaning of his “finitude,” his death. Portraying Solomon’s biographical path from the Book of Proverbs to the Song of Songs, and from there to the Book of Ecclesiastes, a careful, if unorthodox reader of Mikhal’s poem cannot escape the feeling that the different modes of writing expressed in these texts in fact correspond to different modes of being. While Solomon’s situation during the writing of the Book of Proverbs corresponds to a spiritual state of self-transparency, his writing under the influence of the nihilistic Ecclesiastes should be read less as an expression of philosophical or religious error and more as a confrontation with time and death, a critique of his earlier mode of being that now seems to be inauthentic. The aged Solomon is not a repentant nihilist but a daring existentialist, whose consciousness of time and death, undermines the—ultimately inauthentic—egotistical, romantic mode of being, praised so powerfully earlier in the poem.

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With the possible exception of Dan Miron’s insightful, but brief, remarks, Hebrew criticism of the post-statehood period reacted forcefully against the laudatory, romantic appreciation of Mikhal.⁹ Thus, for example, noting the concrete location-specific tone of Mikhal’s depictions—a departure from the everywhere and anytime style of Adam Hakohen’s poetry—Yehudith Bar-El argues that Mikhal’s achievements should nevertheless be properly considered as part of the “neo-classical norm”¹⁰ that pervaded

Hebrew poetry until H.N. Bialik and Shaul Tchernichovsky began to dominate it during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Like Bar-El, Reuven Shoham's uses the tools of structural analysis for pointing out the poetic elements in Mikhal that disagree with his alleged association with romantic poetry.¹¹ His ultimate litmus test, the presence of irony, disqualifies Mikhal's presumed romantic legacy. According to Shoham, the desires of Mikhal's heroes are not "spoiled" or tinged by irony because their wishes are always sanctioned by Mikhal's narrator, who idealizes his heroes as eirons, or characters that seem *less* than what they really are.¹² Mikhal's heroes are unwitting containers of their author's wishes, or of the author's *idealized* picture of himself, one that is not subjected to the checks and balances of reality. There is no irony in Mikhal's poetry because the poet never lets other characters or other consciousnesses upset or ridicule his heroes' desires, which remain pure and justified even, and especially, when reality refuses to fulfil them.

Shoham's observation leads us to examine his definition of irony. Shoham believes that irony constitutes a relationship of superiority or inferiority between two empirical or psychological selves. Following Baudelaire and de Man, I assume that the concept of irony is somewhat broader. What, in fact, turns Solomon into a target of irony (but not ridicule) is not a communicative, inter-subjective relationship of superiority that renders him a victim of a joke. Rather, he is stung by the sting of irony because he participates in what Baudelaire calls "absolute comedy," a situation in which the subject (or hero) is mocked not by another person but, rather, by an entirely different entity, which could be nature, Being, language or poetry.¹³ Shoham's definition of irony is restricted to the interpersonal comic situation. It therefore cannot account for Solomon's situation in the second part of the poem, in which (as a psychological and historical character) Solomon confronts "something"—but not another person—that radically upsets his sense of self. What captures the sudden unravelling of Solomon's early, confident subjectivity is not interpersonal irony, but the broader definition of ironic language that "splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of language that asserts the knowledge of this authenticity."¹⁴ As we shall see below, the split between King Solomon and Solomon the poet is ironic in de Man's sense: Solomon unravels in the second part of the poem not because he loses faith, but because he undertakes the mission of writing, which lends a voice to an audacious double (the "authentic" Solomon, who "exists only in language," as de Man puts it) who turns his irony against the "earlier," empirical Solomon.

[3]

Joseph Ha'efrati's attack on Haskalah poetry, made in his posthumously published study of modern Hebrew poetry¹⁵ is still considered to be a major expression of the views about Haskalah poetry advocated by critics of the Tel Aviv structuralist school of literary criticism. Critics affiliated with this group, mostly first generation Israel-born, were eager to judge the accomplishments of Hebrew literature according to the severe standards of universal aesthetic quality. As Miron recently put it in a retrospective account of that period in Hebrew criticism, the Tel Aviv critics used the tools of structural literary analysis for promoting their investment in what they imagined to be the "normalization" Jewish life in modern Israel.¹⁶

Conceding, following W.K. Wimsatt,¹⁷ that Haskalah poets abide by literary norms similar to those employed by the English metaphysical poets, Ha'efrati nevertheless proceeds to point out that "modern readers" (he refers to this unspecified readership time and again in his essay) often consider Haskalah poetry to be unpalatable, or even "ridiculous."¹⁸ What "modern readers" supposedly prefer is post-Haskalah romantic poetry whose main achievement, Ha'efrati believes, lies in its ability to renounce the restrictive conditions of ordinary language.

Ha'efrati locates the gravest problem of Haskalah poetry in its "subjugated" use of language. Haskalah poets fail to use the resources of poetic language for overcoming the "difficulties" inherent in the natural language of communication.¹⁹ These difficulties become especially acute when a poet attempts to write a description of nature. Here, the *diachronic* and *abstract* character of language interferes with the *simultaneous* and *concrete* nature of our immediate and ordinary vision of nature.²⁰ While Haskalah poets succumbed to this impediment, romantic poets developed a poetic language capable of eluding what is excessively *temporal* (i.e., diachronic) or excessively *categorical* (i.e., abstract) in natural language. This new romantic poetic language manages to visualize nature in a way that Ha'efrati believes is transparent and unencumbered by the awkwardness and abstracted conceptuality of language. Using various structural devices (such as parallelism, repetitions or foreshadowing) the romantic landscapes composed by Bialik and Tchernichowsky communicate to their readers an "illusion of actually grasping the concrete and tangible character of the landscape represented in the poem."²¹

By contrast, Mikhal and his associates slavishly "adapted" themselves to the temporal and abstract character of language. Unappealing to the "modern readers" taste, their descriptions suffered from excessive signification. The maskilic depiction of spring or a morning, for example, is nothing more than the ornamented listings of objects the poet presents according to a pre-determined metaphysical hierarchy (plants, animals, heavenly bodies and so on). The problem with such lists is that they do not correspond to the speaker's perception of these natural phenomena. Further, Haskalah descriptions tend either to pile up too many details about natural objects or, conversely, to diminish these natural objects by reducing them to what is typical and universal.²² The description is, in other words, either too elaborate or too categorical. In both cases it is "too linguistic" or too textual in that it abides by the temporality or order dictated by linguistic or metaphysical categories, and not by the speaker's subjective experience.

Beyond succumbing to the temporal and categorical nature of language, Ha'efrati's analysis of Mikhal suggests that Haskalah poetry prevents the reader from experiencing the actual "sensuous picture" of nature, and from being able to appreciate the full meaning of the natural landscape. Being controlled by the author, Mikhal's images are not allowed to signify anything that the poet does not intend or imply.²³ The modern readers resist this excessive intentionality, for they are entitled to ask "what do these words represent in their *full meaning*?" without being "enslaved"²⁴ to the author's intentions.

Ha'efrati's version of Wimsatt's New Critical persuasions is, to my mind, a futile attempt to escape the curse of language. For de Man,

[I]n everyday language [we observe] the impossibility of making the actual expression coincide with what has to be expressed, of making the actual sign

coincide with what it signifies. It is the distinctive privilege of language to be able to conceal meaning behind a misleading sign, as when we hide rage or hatred behind a smile. But it is the distinctive curse of all language, as soon as any kind of interpersonal relation is involved, that it is forced to act this way.²⁵

Ha'efrati hopes to repress, or render transparent, the difference between representation and reality. He feels that Mikhal's poetic language is "subjugated" to the forces of excessive textuality (excessive *Jewish* textuality, but this is another matter), and that it has passively "adapted" itself to the historical, religious and existential burden that weighs down on *language as such*. Ha'efrati's substitute for these shortcomings is a fantasy of poetic language that denies the unpalatable aspects of ordinary language: a complex system of signifiers that ultimately leads us back to an unmediated proximity with nature.

I believe that my discussion below demonstrates that Ha'efrati's idea of poetry and literary experience diminishes precisely that which is valuable in Mikhal's poetry: its attempt to embrace the alien and awkward in language, keeping it as moments of critique and de-mystification that target romantic subjectivity. Speaking in the name of an elusive "modern reader"—presumably an emancipated individual, a "normal" Israeli who espouses a secular liberal ideology—Ha'efrati ends up draining Haskalah poetry of its very essence.

[4]

The reading of Mikhal's remarkable (but not quite flawless) *Shlomo vekohélet* by various critics has been heavily influenced, to be sure, by Mikhal's own notes on the poem.²⁶ Subserving to the ideologues of the Haskalah, notably Solomon D. Luzzatto, his remarks inculcate a watered-down version of the Haskalah as a harmonious merger of reason and revelation. Mikhal's remarks, however, are inconsistent with the much more demanding, both philosophically and experientially, intricateness of his poem, and they prove, if anything, that Mikhal is the worst interpreter of his own poetry.

Those who read the poem in keeping with Mikhal's stated interpretation, believe that there exists a clear-cut dichotomy between a wholesome and happy life (guided by poetry, faith, love, and a restrained use of reason), on the one hand, and a life of misery, guided by a reckless use of reason. They read Solomon's story as a passage from a blissful youth, suffused with faith and reason, to desolate adulthood, ridden with scepticism. The first part of the poem portrays Solomon as the writer of the Book of Proverbs and the Song of Songs. Protected by his faith in God, surrounded by nature, and imbued with the universal spirit of humanity, the young Solomon is, it seems, a wholesome and happy person. This picture is confounded, however, once the aged Solomon becomes the writer of Ecclesiastes. The loss of faith, caused by his reckless pursuit of scientific inquiry and Enlightenment rationalism, brings about the tragedy of his old age. Stricken by doubts, he no longer enjoys beauty, hope, or love. The older Solomon is a paradox: a highly accomplished ruler, he is nevertheless devastated. His dire situation, however, is not caused by his political enemies but by his loss of faith. Everything that was valuable or meaningful for the younger Solomon becomes void, all that was solid melts into thin air due to reason and science. The experience

of love and beauty, the belief in the eternity of the soul, in free will, and in God's providence, are all vanquished by the demystifying thrust of reason. Unable to elude these destructive aspects of (modern) knowledge, the dying Solomon is on the verge of a denial of God's existence.

It is only then, at the conclusion of the poem, just before Solomon's death, that Mikhal saves the day with a new conceptual distinction, reverberating with the concluding phrases of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Realizing that human reason must be blocked before its quest for knowledge undermines the belief in God, Mikhal causes Solomon suddenly to visualize God, holding in his lap an allegorical figure that he calls "elevated Wisdom." Solomon is saved when he accepts the distinction between *God's* wisdom (we are told that this wisdom is "confined" within the "light of truth" and "defended by God's sword") and the reckless *earthly* wisdom (*Hokhmat erez*) that has caused him to suffer these tribulations.

While many critics speculated that Mikhal's concluding lines (73–74, lines 645–676) were written under the influence of his stern father, I believe this is an interpretative overkill: Mikhal seems to have relied directly on the concluding lines of the Book of Ecclesiastes, *themselves* presumably written under the influence of some devout, mystifying agent, that warn the readers against the unrestrained use of reason. In any case, this reading of the poem is a strongly worded restraining order issued against human reason. This order is signed by God, who hands it over to the dying, repentant Solomon, who understands, just before his death, that only reason coupled with faith can sustain a meaningful and wholesome life.²⁷

I believe that the poem's complex engagement with questions of time, knowledge, and death undermines this un-dialectical distinction between disciplined and undisciplined use of reason. Solomon's experience of poetry and knowledge, as I hope to show, does not allow us to take his expression of repentance in the concluding lines of the poem seriously. In other words, the poem does not pit the right Solomon against the wrong Solomon, or the young Solomon against the old one. While I believe that the poem does revolve around a split that transpires in Solomon, this split, or rather, this complex process of divergence and convergence, occurs horizontally, throughout the poem, and it is derived from a distinction (crucial also for the history of Haskalah literature, as we shall see) between two literary forms of the presentation and writing of the self.

Solomon's character is primarily split between his *royal biography*, and his *personal autobiography*. This distinction resonates with the opening page of a famous autobiography written by Mikhal's fellow Lithuanian maskil, Mordechai A. Günzburg (1795–1846).²⁸ Dedicating his preamble to the introduction to the Hebrew readership of this new genre, Günzburg observes that while historical *biography* recounts the great deeds accomplished by great men in the history of mankind, autobiography is a private history of the self, written by ordinary people, endowed with a knowledge of their own self, and committed to an unashamed exposition of their shortcomings:

The histories of men of renown (biographies) provide us with the life stories of men of high esteem—exceptional individuals who have achieved fame for their wisdom, bravery and mighty deeds. Such biographies are considered an aspect of universal history (*allgemeine Geschichte*) ... [the writer of such biographies] must single out with insight and precision all that is elevated and praiseworthy in their life-histories

and in a spirit of truth and scientific enquiry [*mishpat tiv`i*] he must lay bare the motivations of their wondrous deeds, the underlying principles of their achievements, that his account may serve as an exemplar and yardstick of human potential ...

He who recounts the history of his own life (*selbstbiographie*), the times he lived through, his fortunes and misfortune, his actions and opinions, is not bound by the same conditions. As one who is well aware of his own defects, such a writer will, for the most part, make it his aim to expose his shortcomings, the manner in which his character was distorted by those who reared him, by his teachers, friends or contemporaries.²⁹

Marcus Moseley, who has written a pioneering study of Hebrew autobiography, believes that the sources for Günzburg's distinction are Rousseau's *Confessions* and Solomon Maimon's *Lebensgeschichte*.³⁰ While we cannot be sure that Mikhal actually read parts of Günzburg's autobiography, we can certainly assume that the sources indicated by Moseley were quite familiar to Mikhal, who knew and admired Günzburg.³¹ In any case, the opposition of the historical depiction of great men's "bravery and mighty deeds," which constitute the universal "yardstick of human potential," and the acknowledgement of "misfortunes, defects, sins and shortcoming" is highly significant for understanding the main processes which befell Solomon in *Shlomo vekohélet*.

While Günzburg presented this distinction without attributing any value judgment to it (in fact, he himself also wrote a substantial biographical and historical work),³² in Mikhal's case, the distinction is a key factor in the gradual development of irony. For unlike Günzburg, for Mikhal the ordinary person, who speaks candidly about his shortcomings is *identical* to the great historical figure. In a crucial sense, the storyline of Mikhal's poem is determined by the convergence and divergence of the "royal Solomon" and "Solomon the poet." As we shall see, Mikhal's narrator shows that at the culmination of Solomon's career as a poet, which occurs during the writing of the Book of Proverbs, the two Solomons merge into a single person (47, lines 89–92): the sublime poet on the mountain of Lebanon is both the ruler and the poet. This high point in Solomon's life, however, is unravelled as Solomon proceeds to write. The writing of the Song of Songs separates the political king from the sexually involved individual who becomes contemptuous of the political life of his internal nemesis. Later we watch Solomon at his nadir when the narrator begins the second part of the poem by posing the question about the gap between the illustrious king and the desolate poet-philosopher, both of whom, ironically, reside in the same person. At this point in the poem, Solomon is divided between an *ontological self*, whose encounter with death and time has turned him sceptical and desolate, and an *empirical self*, whose material wealth, beauty and wisdom has made him into a public object of jealousy and reverence. The two selves never coincide again. The poem ends with a clear admission of poetry's inability to bridge the abyss, into which it cannot stop staring.

Mikhal's poem leads us through three discrete moments in Solomon's poetic life, all of which are named after biblical books traditionally attributed to Solomon. First, the writing of the Book of Proverbs, (48, line 128) second, the writing of the Song of Songs (56, line 304) and third, the writing of the Book of Ecclesiastes (58, line 325). In all these instances, Mikhal does not describe Solomon's known texts in any detail

(in fact, he departs from them completely). Rather, by loosely alluding to the three biblical texts (or parallel-writing them, as it were) he speculates about the diverging internal experiences that brought them into being: the aesthetic sublime (the Book of Proverbs), a love story (the Song of Songs), and a consciousness of inauthenticity (Ecclesiastes).

Mikhal communicates his narrator's act of parallel writing by repeatedly "exposing" (four times in the course of the poem, as we shall see in greater detail below) Solomon's identity as the writer of a certain text, or the subject of a certain experience. This belated exposure creates the feeling of simultaneity, the feeling that the parallel writing of Solomon's experiences occurs during the present time of poem. The narrator often uses elevated rhetoric for revealing the (obviously known) fact, that "it is Solomon" who wrote this or that poem, or experienced this or that spiritual event. I believe that these four moments of delayed revelation suggest an important sub-division of the poem, as each of them summarizes Solomon's experience in the preceding lines. While the first part of the poem (entitled "Shlomo") contains three such moments of exposure (46, line 64; 48, line 128; 56, line 304), the second part features only one similar moment, in which Mikhal "reveals" Solomon's identity (58, line 325). My interpretation of the poem, then, follows the four stations of Solomon's life and career as a writer, and examines the way each of these phases contributes to the construction and deconstruction of Solomon's selfhood.

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The first such moment of belated exposure occurs at the beginning of the poem, in a section that beautifully depicts the early stages of Solomon's life. Living his life among the "cultivated lands of Zion, a city that unites the glory of all splendours" (43, line 2), Solomon's spiritual and physical perfection mirrors the magnificence of the city that serves as the political and economic hub of the Davidic dynasty. Describing Jerusalem, Mikhal writes

The daughters of poetry longed to dwell there
Where, amidst scent-emitting flowers, an exalted poem thrives.
Poems and flowers convene together in Jerusalem
Her flower is a song; her lofty tree, a hymn for God.

In this consummation of beauty, in this land of poetry,
Each stone is a book; each rock a writing board (43, lines 10–16)

In this situation, Solomon's first song seems redundant. The world does not need the active mind of a poet, simply because "poetry," here, the elevated expression of glory, emerges directly from the unity of Jerusalem's natural and cultivated landscapes. Its glory is so supreme that it does not need any linguistic mediation. Not unlike Jerusalem Solomon, too, is still unfractured by reflection, writing or the need for self-presentation: sorrow, misery or jealousy do not impinge on his happiness and hope. He lives in a state of undisturbed bliss, wherein no "sound of gloom" and no "sunset of sorrow" can yet be discerned (44, line 36).³³

Mikhal's text implies, however, that what ultimately sustains this blissful existence is a certain degree of self-mystification. Avoiding any questions about the meaning of the world, Solomon's faith functions as a "waist girdle" (45, lines 45–58) that checks the young boy's mind. Mikhal allegorizes "Faith" as holy and chaste; her head is "illuminated with light" and her face is "covered with a shroud of mist" (45, lines 59–60). This section of the poem often uses temporal qualifications such as "not yet," implying that Solomon's absolute blissfulness is already fraught with a consciousness of time (44–45, lines 36, 41–42, 50). Finally, Mikhal marks the picture of the world tendered to Solomon by the allegorized Faith as partial, rosy and false. Faith reveals to Solomon only the positive parts of the world, concealing the hardship and the menacing presence of death, which Solomon believes is a "pleasant respite" or a "complacent cradle" (45, lines 53–54). The combination of Solomon's faith with the stubbornly repeated "not yet" is an invitation for an ironic reading of his situation. Mikhal's elevated diction must not mislead us. Despite the hyperbolic language, these lines criticize Solomon's naiveté.

Under the light of this Faith only good things happened in the world,
 Its shroud conceals any evil under the skies—
 And lo, it is Solomon—if thou ask whose son he is—
 The Son of David, the King of Jerusalem (45–46, lines 60–64)

This revelation, overstated as it would seem for some readers, does not mean to surprise us, but simply to remind us that Solomon's life unfolds as we are reading the poem, and that Solomon's "now" corresponds to the poem's "now." The recognition "lo, it is Solomon!" communicates to us that we enter the present time of Solomon's young life as a poet. Despite its almost childish tone ("if thou ask whose son he is") there is nothing simple-minded or naïve in this scene of belated recognition, for it manages to establish, by means of rhetorical figures, a shared experience of time.

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In the second section of the poem (46–48, lines 65–128) Solomon's mystified picture of the world completely vanishes. The major experience he undergoes in this remarkable segment is a defining moment of his life as a poet. Immediately following the first recognition of Solomon, the poem has us accompany the newly-minted poet into the writing of what will be his first work of art. Contrary to his earlier adulation of Jerusalem, Solomon's second experience, much more mature and difficult, now happens in the untamed natural landscape of the mountains of Lebanon. While the first encounter presents nature and humanity as harmonized, the second encounter presents nature as a supreme entity that overwhelms human morality and human knowledge. This magnificent section begins when Solomon is suddenly struck (Mikhal refuses to supply a biographical motivation for this sudden urge) with a resolve to "visualize the majesty of fear" (46, line 72).³⁴ The young man decides to wander to the mountains of Lebanon, seeking the sublime experience of fear, which only untamed nature can induce. Climbing late at night to the mountain's top, Solomon witnesses the fearful vision of the sunrise. At first, his "violin" turns mute while his spirit is raging and overwhelmed with awe (lines 85–88). These silent moments, saturated with nature's most

intense meaning, will soon be retrospectively recollected as a flow of feelings, worthy of poetry.

And these moments—how elevated and mighty are they!
 In these moments the human spirit pulsates, and a man's heart expands.
 Happiness and trembling made Solomon's eyes stream
 As Solomon, the most revered man, scorned the land of the dead. (47, lines 88–92)

...

Only then does man realize who his creator and God is
 And only then the ideas of immortality become established in his soul. (47, lines 96–98)

The certainty of the soul's immortality, the feeling of being higher than nature, is (as argued by eighteenth-century theories of the sublime) a consequence of man's proximity to such awe-inspiring natural phenomena.³⁵ While earlier, death meant for Solomon a "pleasant respite," now it turns into an object of deep scorn. The origin of this scorn is Solomon's newfound feeling of immortality, which emerged in the wake of his encounter with the grandiosity of the mountains of Lebanon. It is here, during the "visualization of the glory of fear," that Solomon transcends nature and finds within him the spiritual infinity that *overpowers* nature, as man becomes conscious of his superiority over nature. The aesthetics of the sublime, articulated in this seminal moment of Hebrew poetry, is for Mikhal a wholly positive moment, in which the newly spiritualized man (not a woman, as pointed out earlier) becomes aware of his ability to conquer and dominate nature, even to the point of denigrating death.

The outcome of this experience culminates in the writing of the Book of Proverbs. The metaphorical "violin" that was mute at the onset of this encounter, regains its power as the view of nature rages inside Solomon, who then "plucks the strings of his violin" (line 108), and writes the first book of his wisdom.

There is another important reason for arguing that this experience is the most potent one in Solomon's life as a poet. By referring to Solomon the poet as "the most revered man" (an epithet that evokes the more familiar "wiser of all men"), and by stressing repeatedly (47–48, lines 89–90, 97–98) that Solomon's sublime experience on the mountain of Lebanon is common to all humanity, Mikhal, in fact, claims that Solomon's autobiography as a poet and a private man converges here, for a brief moment, with Solomon's grand biography as a king.

It is only at this moment in the poem that Solomon's two personalities are not at war with each other. As we shall see below, in the third section of the poem (based on the love story of the Song of Songs) Solomon the poet, who is passionately in love, views with irony the political life of his nemesis, Solomon the king. Conversely, in the fourth section of the poem, the accomplished king mocks the desolate situation of the poet-philosopher. Contrary to these moments of rupture, Solomon's experience in the second section of poem, on the mountain of Lebanon, features a rare moment in which his personality is *not* ridden with ironical contradiction or self-deprecation. The poet and the king equally revere each other on the mountain of Lebanon: they cherish the sublime experience of nature in the same manner and for the same reason. Together they constitute a human subject who is not split and who does not mock himself over his passions, or obsessions.

At this moment poetry is credited with the ability to unite the grand subject of history (the king) with the evasive subject of ordinary consciousness. As noted earlier, these were the two forms of writing, which Günzburg presented in his preamble as constituting an exclusive literary and psychological dichotomy. At this rare moment, Solomon's historical stature ("the most revered man," or in Günzburg words, the "yardstick of human potential") is written together with his private, internal experience of the aesthetic sublime. These two branches of his personality—the great king and the isolated poet—do not interfere with each other, psychologically or politically, but rather cohere into a totality. The external writing of biography converges with the internal writing of autobiography. The grand historical "I" of the royal Solomon coincides with the psychological "I" of the ordinary man. Poetry, here, the experience of the sublime, is crucial in achieving this unifying feat. In this brief moment, poetry seems to demonstrate that Solomon's royal grandiosity is not necessarily inauthentic, and that conversely, his reflective mood is not solipsistic or frivolous. High Politics and intimate poetry, the movers of history, and the seekers of idiosyncratic emotions, seem to enjoy a brief moment of rapport on the mountains of Lebanon. This moment of merger does not reflect the bad faith that normally accompanies our popular culture's interest in the "small lives of great men." What explains the difference is Mikhal's ability to erase, again, very briefly, the jealousy and irony that otherwise mar the relationship between the great personality and the ordinary individual. In Solomon's irony-free experience of the sublime, all men can be kings and all kings can be men.

[7]

The next stage in Solomon's career is associated with the writing of the Song of Songs. With the exception of a few inconsequential divergences written in the form of an ode, the structure of belated recognition repeats itself here, too. After narrating Solomon and Shulamith's love story (49–56, lines 41–180, 213–256, 261–304), Mikhal's narrator again alludes to the sound of the violin, which signifies, this time, the writing of the Song of Songs, a recollection of the emotional and sexual experience just depicted by Mikhal.

As noted briefly earlier, this section of the poem features an entirely different description of Solomon. Whereas Solomon of the Book of Proverbs was a coherent subject, the writer of the love poem is a split subject. His happiness is now dependent upon keeping the distinction between the private man and the king. The poem makes clear that as opposed to the transcendent experience of the sublime, equally revered by ruler and poet, the experience of romantic love is incompatible with the kingly aspects of Solomon's subjectivity. In order to love Shulamith, Solomon has to relinquish (or at least feel ironical toward) his role as a king.

This renunciation is reflected in the poem's transition from the sublime (second section) back to the beautiful and the pastoral (third section). This move is already set out at the beginning of the section, as the narrator replaces the mountains of Lebanon with more tempered imagery, which suggests the harmony of the classical *locus amoenus* or pleasant place.³⁶ The glory of landscapes, evoked in the previous section, is replaced by a land owned and ploughed by men, a land that supplies material as well as spiritual, sustenance (49, lines 141–156). Dwelling in this pastoral scenery

after forsaking the “noisy city,” Solomon falls in love with Shulamith. The *locus amoenus* is depicted, in a way compatible with the pastoral tradition of both European and Hebrew literature, as an alternative to, and critique of, city culture. And yet, Mikhal goes even further when noting that Solomon conceives his love for Shulamith as a *substitute* for his role as a political ruler. His love for Shulamith, or the writing of the Song of Songs, causes the unravelling of the all-encompassing selfhood we have met in the previous section. Watching Shulamith tending her brother’s cattle, Solomon is wounded by the “arrows” that Love has pointed in his direction.

Then he forgot his people and his throne.
 Substituting his royal sceptre for the shepherd’s rod,
 All his soul wandered, wanting to herd Shulamith,
 And walk with her to a mountain or a valley.

For her beauty is his kingdom, and her eyes are his throne
 She was for him taller than Jerusalem’s Tower of David (51, lines 163–169)

Should we read these substitutions as merely rhetorical flourishes? While in these lines the poem suggests an antagonistic relationship between the experience of love and the realm of politics (i.e. the contrast between the “royal sceptre” and the “shepherd’s rod”), the concluding lines of the section present the experience of love and sexuality as an avoidance of history and politics. When Solomon and Shulamith become lovers, the narrator, wishing to prolong Solomon’s blissful, though unsustainable, intimacy with Shulamith, approaches nature, requesting

Oh apple tree, spread your shadow on the lovers!
 And stars yon, do cease and hold your light for a brief moment!
 Envelop yourself in grimness, you, setting moonlight
 Please do not wake the slumbering love! (56, lines 293–294)

Solomon’s experience of selfhood is no longer as coherent as it was earlier. The sustainability of love is dependent on its being shielded from the reality of those forces the narrator attempts to soothe, lest they “wake the slumbering love.”

If the sublime experience of nature signified the coincidence of Solomon’s two selves, the pastoral experience of love is presented as a private situation, which cannot coincide with Solomon’s royal life. As the above stanzas show, the tension between the love affair and the world of politics becomes so intense that Mikhal’s narrator must interfere and call on nature to watch over the precarious existence of intimacy for just a few more moments. If the second stage of Solomon’s writing career signified the unity of his life through poetry, the third stage shows how the writing of the Song of Songs undermines what looked so promising earlier. In an astonishingly sober manner, Mikhal demonstrates the fragile nature of romantic love: Solomon’s love for Shulamith represents an abdication of sublimity and romanticism and an embrace of the conditional and privative in the modest life of the individual. His love represents the triumph of the psychological “I” and its passionate desires over the experience of the egoistical sublime that had been manifested, indeed overblown, on the mountains of Lebanon.

[8]

The fourth and last section of the poem, in which the knowledge of death permeates Solomon's consciousness, signifies an intensified critique of the poetic achievement described earlier. While the third section of the Song of Songs dealt mostly with the distinction between the historical self and the psychological self, the fourth and bleakest section of the poem addresses another conflict that further complicates the process of Solomon's unravelling, as it features the confrontation of the existential or ontological "I" with Being and time. While the empirical Solomon, the writer of the Song of Songs, is presented in the poem as the sum total of his passions, namely as a creature driven by the desire for life and happiness, the existentially-minded subject is deeply interested in the Being of world, in his ability to raise the question about the world's existence: "why is there Being at all instead of nothing."³⁷ The existential inquiry into the world's Being is not for the sake of accumulating knowledge but, rather, for the sake of understanding one's own situation in the world. According to Martin Heidegger, "*Dasein* is distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, Being is an *issue* for it ... *Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being.*"³⁸ Substituting knowledge with understanding (or epistemology with ontology) the authentically living *Dasein* ("being there", or "I") is less interested in the empirical amassing of facts, and more with disclosing his own commitment to, and relationship with, the world's Being. This understanding is always belated, partial, and ultimately unsuccessful, for the basic situation of the human being is to be thrown into the world. The human subject cannot capture the origins of the world into which he has been thrust, nor can he or she reveal its meaning or purpose. We are thus left with the crucial task of interpreting the world into which we were born, of recovering the meaning of our past and our future.

This is the situation in which the older Solomon finds himself in the second part of the poem. The fourth section begins with a change in the poem's presentation of time. While all preceding sections used the rhetoric of belated recognition ("lo, it is Solomon!"), the fourth section inverts this structure, as Mikhal opens the section by recognizing Solomon as the writer of *Kohelet*, or Ecclesiastes (58, line 325). That is to say, it is only in the section dedicated to Solomon's decline that Mikhal uses the retrospective mode of narration: the text of Ecclesiastes is revealed as a foregone conclusion, and Mikhal's narrator refers to it and quotes from it as if it were a written past.

This structural inversion explains the division of the poem into two parts: the difference between the first part, entitled *Shlomo*, and the second part, entitled *Kohelet*, does not correspond to the doctrinal dichotomy between "faith" and "reason." What, in fact, divides the fourth section from the first three is its *temporal* structure. While in the earlier sections, Solomon's poetry unfolded during the poetic present, in the last section the poem refers to Solomon's work as a past.³⁹ This structure communicates a sober observation about Solomon's poetry and about poetry in general. Earlier, the use of reason and poetry guaranteed—fully (section two) or partially (section three)—Solomon's ability to coincide with himself, to know himself fully, or, in the third section, to enjoy the fullness of the present while repressing the presence of looming death. By contrast, the fourth section is written with a clear recognition that such moments of total self-presence are naïve.

Instead of shadow writing and free indirect discourse, for the first time in the poem the narrator uses the common instrument of direct, parenthetical quotation. For the

first time we hear Solomon's own voice, which is clear but, alas, finite. The narrator no longer *performs* Solomon's writings but simply quotes them. This structural inversion suggests an existential realization: if Solomon believed earlier that the past could be recovered and re-presented in the present (that is to say, that it could be turned, rhetorically, into a present), Solomon of the second part realizes that poetry and knowledge cannot guarantee a full recovery of the past.

What has brought Solomon to this realization? While the religious and humanist reading of the poem (by critics who espouse the harmonization of reason and revelation) indicates that the cause of Solomon's despair is in his reckless use of reason, I believe that Mikhal does not reproach his hero for lapsing into rationalism. Mikhal implies, rather, that Solomon's lapse is *necessitated* by his new, authentic mode of being, his new existential commitment, determined by his writing the book of Ecclesiastes. The reason for Solomon's wretched end is not a psychological error but, rather, an existential inevitability. The cause of this lapse is not a bad decision but the good decision to pursue writing. It is Solomon's career as a writer that causes him to try to attain a fully engaged understanding of the world. This attempt encounters an inevitable barrier: the interpretation of the world can never fully capture truth, simply because time and language always intervene between the subject and what he or she attempts to capture. The temporal aspect of Being and language is precisely what challenges our pretension to know the world fully. This realization, that neither knowledge nor poetry can outwit time or mediation, is what has brought about Solomon's crisis.

If we disregard for a moment the concluding stanzas of the poem, it should become clear that all Solomon's complaints against Wisdom (*hokhmah*) derive from the consciousness of the passing of time. The fourth section of the poem recounts how wisdom and its allegorical son, Doubt, ruin Solomon's maskilic, or religious and humanist, belief system. Thus, the beauty of a blushing woman is reduced to nothing more than "shifting, defiled arteries, filled with blood" (63, lines 442–444), while her smile is a "tendon of flesh" that moves about her face; spring foliage and flowers now feel like "petrification," or a "blossoming death," while even the light emitted from the heavenly bodies is, for Solomon, a sign of their inevitable death. (64, lines 463–464)

If Wisdom preys on beauty, then Doubt, its son (64–65, lines 477–488), targets the most fundamental religious notions (God, free will, and the eternity of the soul). As the aged Solomon mourns the death of Shulamith, Doubt causes him to deny the immortality of her soul (64, lines 463–470); facing the death of his mentor, the prophet Nathan, Solomon goes on to deny man's free will, arguing that morality is wholly determined by the physical conditions of "moving tendons," or "splinters and drops" of flesh and blood. Finally, paying a Shakespearean visit to a dead friend's grave, Solomon, holding his friend's cranium, questions the divine origin of man and the pre-eminence of humans over beasts (68, lines 503–514). The sheer materiality of death and time pull the rug from under the most profound ideas of enlightenment and natural religion. It is the consciousness of passing time, then, that is responsible for ruining the threefold metaphysical system of Beauty, Truth and Morality. The flowers, the lover, the stars and nature can longer express God's supreme wisdom simply because the veil of timelessness, so artfully woven in the first part of the poem is torn to pieces in the second part.

From this point the vertiginous movement becomes unstoppable. Solomon takes a short detour into hedonism and debauchery (70–71, lines 565–576). Unsatisfied, he moves on to pursue every possible form of human wisdom, ancient and modern,

Jewish and gentile (71–72, lines 581–620), but all for nothing. Having already denied providence, Solomon dies while regretting the day he was born (73, lines 636–644).

Solomon's sudden consciousness of time, death and decay is portrayed in the poem as a consequence of a *structural* shift in the poem's rhetoric of temporality that occurs, as we have seen, when Mikhal inverts the device of belated recognition. This inversion, that involves a sudden emergence of existential inquiry, leads Solomon into the path of destructive self-irony. This new consciousness of time does not allow Solomon to indulge any longer in the confident knowledge of the world gained through science. The poem shows that scientific and popular knowledge, which lack real understanding of the world's temporal character, is an empty shell. The grim depreciation of beauty, hope, and happiness is Solomon's realization that knowledge of the world cannot capture it in its *temporal* wholeness. Solomon is miserable not because of scientific knowledge, as the pious reading argues, but in spite of it. The reduction of beauty to "moving tendons" is an ironic attack on scientists' inability to grasp the meaning of the knowledge they accumulate.

As, like Hamlet, he holds his dead friend's skull, Solomon realizes the extent to which time (represented here as its effect on the human body) has taken its revenge on the humanistic belief system he has held so dear. As soon as the experience of time and of being thrown into the world enters the poem, the edifice of humanistic Western metaphysics disintegrates. Poetry that mystified Solomon into believing in the synchronicity of time acts, in the second part of the poem, as a cruel agent of de-mystification.

[9]

It seems, then, that what Mikhal proclaims as the vocation of poetry is very different from what modern poetry is about, according to Ha'efrati's assumptions with which we started. Ha'efrati demanded that poetry express the liberty of the modern individual: his or her ability to visualize nature by transcending the strictures imposed on the human spirit by language. Emancipating the experience of poetry from the awkward mediation of ordinary language and from the burden of the author's intentions, Ha'efrati believes that he has grasped the essence of poetry as an expression of the individual's freedom.

This, however, is precisely what Mikhal's poem attempts to deny. The psychological-philosophical process which Solomon has undergone in the course of his writing life begins with an acceptance of the fantasy of pure language, but ends with its deconstruction and repudiation. Solomon enters the realm of poetry and language as the wisest of all men, but leaves it as a person to whom wisdom and poetry have brought misery. Poetry begins as a promise of freedom and happiness relating to nature and the world, but ends with a de-mystification of this promise. Reading this poem as a biography of a poet, and paying close attention to the poem's inversion of its temporal structure in Part II, it becomes apparent that Solomon's quest for poetry and writing has been the cause of the unravelling of the romantic fantasy of happiness and freedom. The vocation of romantic poetry, then, is both celebrated and rescinded in Mikhal's poem. As such it provides us with concrete answers to Ha'efrati's charges. The historical subjectivity that motivates Mikhal's poetry is not the secularist subjectivity of the "normal", modern man. Mikhal uses the resources of poetry—language, time and writing—not only for celebrating the freedom of the

individual, but mainly for highlighting its boundaries. What strikes us most strongly in Mikhal's poem is not a muddled form of Jewish enlightenment but, rather, a radical criticism of the broken promises of romantic poetry.

Notes

1. Fichman, "Micah Joseph," 9.
2. Ibid.
3. For a fuller survey of Mikhal's critical reception see Shoham, *Baderekh hakasha*, 30–32.
4. All references to the poem are given parenthetically, citing the page number in the 1962 edition of Mikhal's poems (Lebensohn, *Shirei Mikhal*) followed by a line number. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Hebrew are mine.
5. Cited in de Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, 77.
6. Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime*, 8.
7. See Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime*, 8–9, and Kaufman, "Negatively Capable Dialectics," 369–371. The critique of Wordsworth's "egotistical sublime" has been made from various literary and political stances. De Man, for example, shows that Wordsworth's language brings about the complete unraveling or deconstruction of the overblown romantic subject; Freeman, in turn, posits a "Feminine Sublime" that serves her as a feminist corrective to the male romantic sublime. Kaufman argues from a Marxist point of view that Keats's concept of *negative capability* (i.e., the ability to remain in an extended and speculative "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" [the citation appears in Keats's letter to George and Tom Keats, dated December 1817]) together with his "highly wrought, objectified odes" offer an "investigative, non-dominative" alternative to Wordsworth's all encompassing I." (Kaufman "Negatively Capable Dialectics," 369). My own reading of Mikhal is mostly inspired by de Man's Heideggerian commitment to expose the "ontological subject"—the subject who authentically seeks to understand the temporal dimension of his "being in the world"—beyond the "psychological" or "empirical I." *Shlomo vekohélet* should be read as a narration of Solomon's life as a poet (the personal history of his lifelong encounter with Being, if you will) which begins, as we shall see, with an experience of the Wordsworthian sublime, but ends—in a section named after the anti-hero of the Book of Ecclesiastes—with its complete unraveling.
8. De Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*.
9. Miron, "Ben takdim lemikreh", 173–176.
10. Bar-El, *Hapo'ema ha'ivrit*, 64.
11. Shoham, *Baderekh hakasha*, 30, 66. See also Wimsatt, "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery," 26–30.
12. Shoham, *Baderekh hakasha*, 66, emphasis added.
13. Baudelaire, *Selected Writings*, 140–161; Banbaji, *Mendele vehasipur hale'umi*, 234–236; de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 212.
14. De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 214.
15. Ha'efrati, *Hamar'ot vehalashon*.
16. Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 21–56; cf. Banbaji, *Mendele vehasipur hale'umi*, 69–79.
17. Wimsatt, "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery"
18. Ha'efrati, *Hamar'ot vehalashon*, 23, 25, and elsewhere.
19. Ha'efrati, *Hamar'ot vehalashon*, 11.

20. Natural language of communication is “diachronic” because, like music, it is spread over time, as one has to read a poem continually, from beginning to end; it is “abstract” because a word such as “tree” designates an infinite number of things that fall under the abstract concept, designated by this sign.
21. Ha’efrati, *Hamar’ot vehalashon*, 11.
22. *Ibid.*, 13–14.
23. *Ibid.*, 23–24.
24. *Ibid.*, 25, 26.
25. De Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, 12.
26. Lebensohn, *Shirei Mikhal*, 104–107.
27. Although entirely my own, parts of this reading of the poem derive from the following commentary: Klausner, *Historia shel hasifrut*, vol. 3, 252–255; Fichman, “Micah Joseph,” 29–31; Zeitlin “Shlosa meshorerim”, 386–387; Ben-Yeshurun, *Hashira harusit vehashpa’ata*, 46–49; and Lachover, *Toldot hasifrut ha’ivrit haḥadashah*, vol. 1, 122–124.
28. Günzburg, *Aviezer*.
29. Günzburg, *Aviezer*, 67–68, translated by Marcus Moseley: see Moseley, *Being For Myself Alone*, 334–335.
30. Moseley, *Being For Myself Alone*, 335.
31. For Mikhal’s eulogy, dedicated to Günzburg see Lebensohn, *Shirei Mikhal*, 165–167. For a detailed account on the composition history of Günzburg’s autobiography see Moseley, *Being For Myself Alone*, 335–344.
32. See Feiner, *Haskala vehistorya*, 219–223.
33. For further commentary on these lines see Cohen, *From Dream to Reality*, 184–185.
34. Mikhal’s calculated use of the Hebrew word “mora” (fear) is crucial in this context. Since “mora” can also refer to God (as in Psalms 76:12), Mikhal’s depiction of Solomon’s urge to view the sublime is also caused by a religious will to face God. This double meaning of “mora” in the poem—both the aesthetic sublime and the fear of God—highlights the tense coexistence of religious and aesthetic sentiments in Mikhal’s work. I thank the anonymous reviewer of this paper for suggesting this important implication to me.
35. For a famous and influential treatment of the sublime see Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*.
36. Curtius, *European Literature*, 193–200. Note that while here, in the third section, beauty has to be secluded and isolated from the urban world of politics, this was entirely not the case in the first section, where beauty was organically tied to both nature and civilization. For a useful and comprehensive analysis of the literary imagination of the land of Israel in Haskalah poetry see Cohen, *From Dream to Reality*, 154–205.
37. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysic*, 1.
38. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32.
39. Note, however, that the first six stanzas still depict the old Solomon in the present tense.

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Amir Banbaji is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Hebrew Literature, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. His first book, *Mendele and the National Narrative* was published in 2009. He is currently working on a comprehensive study of the history of Hebrew aesthetics in the Haskalah period. Address: Department of Hebrew Literature, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, PO Box 653, Beersheba 84105, Israel. [email: amir.banbaji@gmail.com]
