On the Road at Night There Stands the Man

The Effects of Trauma on the Creative Process in the Poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

Graduate Rabbinic Program

New York, New York

February 1, 2010

27 Shevat, 5771

Advisor: Dr. Stanley Nash

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The purpose of this thesis is to look for connecting threads between Dahlia Ravikovitch's personal history of trauma and her creative works. The thesis also includes original translations of two short stories, not previously translated into English.

The course of Ravikovitch's life and career is followed in a roughly chronologic fashion, intertwining analyses of her poems, short stories, interview material, and academic articles to better understand her imaginative and at times enigmatic poetry. In addition, several hypotheses are explored which attempt to clarify Ravikovitch's importance as a poet for Israel, the Jewish people and in universal terms.

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Introduction

As an American Jew the experience of my brothers and sisters in Israel can be distant and remote. Living in Israel during the first year of rabbinical school gave me a taste of the Israeli experience. I had the opportunity to become more familiar with the land, the calendar, the language, the politics and most importantly a variety of Israeli's from different backgrounds and communities. All this helped me draw closer, but I still felt a great distance from the inner experience of individuals living in Israel. It takes a long time to begin to understand another people and culture even when there is a shared religion and elements of common history. Increasing my understanding and commitment to the State of Israel, the Hebrew language and the Jewish people were some of the personal goals I had established for myself when I entered rabbinical school and after the year in Israel I better understood the task and the challenges.

When I returned to the New York campus I had the opportunity to study Hebrew and Israeli women poets with Dr. Wendy Zierler, and Hebrew literature and Israeli protest poetry with Dr. Stanley Nash. Through the medium of poetry, the reader is privileged to enter the private world of the poet and also to see the wider world through the prism of the poem. In continuing to study with Dr. Stanley Nash I discovered the work of Dahlia Ravikovitch. Her large body of work partially emerges from her own experience with trauma following the death of her father. I developed a particular

interest in her poetry because her use of imagery, biblical and midrashic references, and the psychological dimension of her poetry. In addition, her work has an important place within the larger canon of Israeli poetry. The aim of this thesis is to explore the life and work of Dahlia Ravikovitch, from a personal as well as a literary perspective. Her poetry speaks of her own private pain and pleasures, and is also attuned to Israeli concerns and universal issues.

The first chapter will touch on the role of poetry in Israeli society, especially in the realm of war and protest poetry, to orient the reader to the general issues. The rest of the thesis will focus more specifically on Ravikovitch: her early life and her almost immediate acceptance into the canon of Israeli poetry, her marriage and the birth of her beloved son Ido and the poetry related to love and motherhood, the pain and bitterness following her divorce with the loss of custody of her son, and the final more overtly political poetry where she openly identifies with the pain and suffering of all victims.

Chapter One

Israeli War Poetry

> Israeli poets have provided notable representation of the elemental experiences and emotions associated with life under constant duress, coupled with memories of historical catastrophes. The study of Israeli war poetry may serve, therefore, as a window into a prime constituent of Israeli existence, with a significance reaching beyond that of poetry per se.[1]

One human response to traumatic events is to engage in a creative process. Writing poetry is one way to express thoughts and feelings about painful experiences of loss, injury, and disruption. Many Israelis have been moved to write poetry about their experiences of war, to commemorate loved ones, and to express political beliefs or protest. The trauma of successive wars has lead to an increased number of people who are impelled to express themselves in poetic writing in an attempt to master the raw emotions of wartime experiences.

Poetry captures the intensity of experience by stimulating the senses through imagery. It is a way to develop sensitivity to the inner experience of another human being. The closely detailed accounting of a subjective experience can allow the reader to reach a depth of intimacy and emotional engagement with the poet. The study of Israeli war poetry from a literary, psychological, and historical perspective is one way to learn about the effect of the ongoing state of war on the creative and emotional life of the poet. It is also an opportunity to develop a more nuanced and complex understanding of the Israeli experience. A strength of the Jewish people, and also a universal human capacity, is resilience and creativity in response to traumatic events. The act of writing is one way to unleash this process of transformation from trauma to creativity.

Israel has fought seven wars during the first sixty years of its existence as the Jewish state. The type of poetry written in response to war has commonalities but there

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[1] Raizen, Esther, *No Rattling of Sabers, An Anthology of Israeli War Poetry. xii*

are also distinguishing features depending upon the social and historical context of each particular conflict.

> Hebrew war poetry written during World War II and in the early years of the Jewish State was characterized by the need for synthesis of the horror with the message of deliverance. This need gave birth to poems that, although not ignoring the death and the agony, tended to minimize them by weighing them against national necessities and gain.[2]

אז תשאל האומה שטופת דמע וקסם
והשניים שוקטים ,"?מי אתם" :ואמרה
אנחנו מגש הכסף" :יענו לה,
שעליו לך ניתנה מדינת היהודים".

Then the Nation asks, flooded by tears and wonderment,

Who are you? And the two softly

Answer her: We are the silver platter

Upon which was served to you the Jewish state.

The camaraderie, *reut,* between the young soldiers was idealized in Alterman's *Silver Platter.*[3]

The initial optimism and euphoria associated with the creation of the State of Israel faded as the reality of constant war set in. " Israeli poetry from the late fifties on became increasingly characterized by understatement, cynicism, and skepticism… and also by bitter self criticism."[4] Following the 1967 war there was a positive shift in the national mood although poets such as Eli Alon and Yehuda Amichai,[5] wrote about "the

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[2] Ibid. xix
[3] Ibid. xx
[4] Ibid.xxi
[5] Ibid xxi

enormous cost of the victory." Poetry that openly expressed opposition to war became more prevalent after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Full-blown protest poetry exploded after the first Lebanon War in 1982 and with the massacre of Palestinian civilians by Christian militia in the Sabra and Shatilah refugee camps.

According to Raizen, the period of overt protest poetry was short lived and there was a return to lyrical poetry, although it will be argued later, that the lyrical poetry of Dahlia Ravikovitch also expressed protest against cruelty and dehumanization. There were poets who persisted in writing overt war poetry and political poetry such as Ramy Ditzanny, Eitan Kalinsky, and Aryeh Sivan.[6] Raizen observes that following the Scud missile attacks on Israel during the Gulf War in 1991 and continuing onward into the nineties war poetry was characterized by " great fatigue and quiet despair."

Tal Nitzan[7] in her introductory essay to *With An Iron Pen* titled "Every Fear, Every Doubt, Every Protest" also discusses the history of protest poetry beginning with the first Lebanon War. She is more impressed with the continuing vitality of protest poetry but observes that it is far more complicated to write about an ongoing struggle with fault to be found on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, as opposed to the clear cut protest in the eighties following the invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent massacre at Sabra and Shatila. She also notes the shift in popular sentiment following the second Intifada and the wave of suicide bombings, with a general political shift to the right and discouragement among the peace activists because of the reality of violence on both sides.

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[6] Ibid. xxiii

[7] Nitzan, T. & Back, R.T., *With An Iron Pen, Twenty Years of Hebrew Protest Poetry*, 1-9.

Dahlia Ravikovitch and Protest Poetry

Tal Nitzan discusses how the genre of protest poetry expresses feelings of sorrow, lament, doubt, loathing, weariness, despair and pessimism.[8] There is also prophetic indignation and chastisement, and in the case of Dahlia Ravikovitch the "poetics of empathy."[9]

> This stance is dominant in the work of Dahlia Ravikovitch, one of the first Israeli poets who refused the national monopoly on bereavement, resisted any hierarchy of suffering or distinction between victims, and consistently and vigorously protested both the usage of "our" (as in, Israeli) dead as justification for war and the glorification of death as holy and heroic. One cannot overstate the degree of resistance apparent in this type of poetry, which goes beyond compassion and identification with the victims. The oppression of another people necessitates a denial of their humanity; thus, empathy toward that same people is dangerous and forbidden, for it might undermine the certainty of the finger on the trigger or the foot on the bulldozer's pedal. Indeed the subversiveness of these poems expresses itself in their insistence on foregrounding the humanity and humanness of "the enemy." These texts of poetic empathy focus fiercely on the individual, the face and name behind a statistic quickly forgotten from the collective memory.

This type of radical empathy is similar to Hamutal Tsamir's understanding of Ravikovitch, to be discussed in greater depth later, as speaking with a prophetic voice of authority from the midst of the painful and confusing events, " not a 'watcher of Israel' from an external or higher point of view, but, rather, she watches it from the inside."[10] In addition, Ravikovitch and other Israeli poets[11] use biblical texts to emphasize moral concerns. By using intertextual references the poetic work resonates with longstanding religious and cultural beliefs and values in disturbing ways. In a stark example, "Asher

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[8] Ibid. p. 3
[9] Ibid. p. 5
[10] Tsamir, Hamutal.
[11] *With An Iron Pen.* p. 6-8 , Tuvia Ruebner, Aryeh Sivan, Asher Reich, Rami Saari, Aharon Shabati , Liat Kaplan, and Zvi Atzmon.

Reich transforms 'the land flowing with milk and honey' into ' a land flowing with darkness and deceit, '" or in Aryeh Sivan's poem "I Protest" the staging of Joseph's death by his brothers on his way to Shechem, becomes the actual death of a Palestinian boy from Nablus shot in the chest by bullets. The powerful plea from psalm 121: 1, *I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence cometh my help?* is incorporated into Aharon Shabati's poem "The Fence[12]." The answer is " I lift my eyes to the hills and what do I see? / Cube after cube of evil,... as rooftops curse the sky, " and in Dahlia Ravikovitch's poem "Hovering at Low Altitude[13]" " She doesn't ask, Whence cometh my help....And if she runs for cover or cries out -/ there's no place to hide in the mountains." In both cases, psalm 121 is referred to but the meaning is subverted. In Shabati's poem the act of looking at the hills is a reminder of the problem and offers no solace and the poem ends with rooftops cursing the sky, an image of anger, futility and desperation. Likewise in Ravikovitch's poem the request for help is not even voiced; all the girl is implicitly asking for is to be left alone to tend her sheep. She is humble without any grand aspirations or expectations of Divine favor. But she is not secure; in fact she is open and exposed without a hiding place. The nature of the landscape offers no protection and there is no benevolent force protecting her. In Ravikovitch's poem the imagery from the psalm, which is used traditionally to offer comfort, becomes the opposite. Instead of comfort the mountains are a cold and heartless landscape that offers no protection.

The poets use their personal experience, and their cultural and literary heritage to make meaning out of the events of daily life through the creation of poetic expression. In war and protest poetry the current political circumstances or human tragedy percolates

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[12] Ibid. p.91
[13] Bloch &Kronfeld, *Hovering at Low Altitude,* 175-176.

through the poets mind and emerges through writing and poetry in a form that communicates the poet's perspective. Merle Feld[14] touches on this poetic process in writing about her own use of poetry as a way, "To break through the cerebral, the polite, the conventional, the pseudointellectual, and speak face to face, human to human, heart to heart, soul to soul." Moreover,

> [t]he poet, as she journeys, is like a human camera. She takes in the details- the smell of the Shabbos cholent, the glistening sweat after the wedding dance, the sound of the dirt as it hits the coffin. All the details are collected, stored away by the poet. And then she sits with pen, with paper, and makes a record, a particular picture, along the road we travel." [15]

Ravikovitch's poetry embodies the synthesis of personal and national concerns with a close attention to sensory details and also is in dialogue with a variety of literary traditions:

> [T]raditional forms and an archaizing language resonant with biblical and liturgical echoes...alongside experimental verse that invokes surrealist parable, avant-garde opera..., from 1969 on...Ravikovitch renounces some of these rhetorical riches for a charged plain speech...political slogans, military lingo, Israeli pop songs, even Yiddish lullabies...Her work early and late, also engages in dialogue with English and American poetry, from Shakespeare... through Dickinson...to Thomas, Sexton and Plath....the canonical texts, above all the Bible, lend her poems their astonishing resonance. Sometimes simply a word- 'dove," "potsherd," "whirlwind," "tarry"- can summon up an entire universe of discourse.[16]"

Ravikovitch straddles the gamut of poetic expression; from the purely personal and lyrical to expressions of political protest and human sorrow, which are written in both direct and lyrical styles. Dahlia Ravikovitch's particular traumatic background, along with her education, great intelligence and talent, was part of the internal driving

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[14] Feld, Merle. A Spiritual Life, p. 4.
[15] Ibid. p. 53
[16] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* 22-23.

force leading to her creative efforts. In an interview first published in the newspaper "Yediot Achronot," Ravikovitch speaks about the role of trauma in her life.

> *Negev: Many writers (Amos Oz, Yona Wallach, Yair Hurwitz, Meir Wiezeltier) lost a parent like you at an early age. Do you find a connection between bereavement and the need for artistic expression?*
>
> I do agree with the wound theory. Perhaps the wound is preserved within me and is not crusted until I heal it with writing. Every person who had a bad childhood began his life as a helpless victim, and when I write I turn an unpleasant situation of helplessness into an active process. But at a certain stage, like there is a law of obsolescence on felonies, there is obsolescence on traumas, and a person should be responsible for his own deeds, the trauma cannot be used as an excuse.[17]

Ravikovitch felt like a victim but she also understood that eventually the role of victimhood must be set aside while using her sensitivity and depth of feeling to express the plight of those who are continuing to suffer . She was able to use her own experiences of pain and suffering to empathize with the pain of others and to travel to places of suffering that are beyond the reach of many. Ravikovitch commented on her poem " The Story of the Arab Who Died in the Fire," " If I had not experienced torment, I could not have felt the exploited man's tears, and understood the fear he felt before death liberated him."[18] " The fire took him all at once,/ such a thing hath not its likeness,/it peeled away his clothing/ seized upon his flesh,/... all he wanted was to stop burning." The radical empathy evident in her war and protest poetry has its roots in her early life experiences. Her lyrical and imaginative poetry also evokes the same images of pain but also passion. The fire is not always the literal fire but the burning of shame and the burning of desire.

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[17] Negev, Eilat. *Close Encounters with Twenty Israeli Writers*, p.85.
[18] Ibid.p.89.

Chapter 2

The Love of an Orange – The Early Years

Ravikovitch burst onto the literary scene at age twenty- three in 1956 with the publishing of her first book of poems, *The Love of an Orange.* Her poetry was well received, and her high school literature teacher and mentor, Baruch Kurzweil,[19] gave her positive reviews.

> Dalia Ravikovitch has her own lyrical voice," the esteemed literary scholar Baruch Kurtzweil wrote in the daily Ha'aretz in 1959, upon the publication of the poet's first book, The Love of an Orange (the Hebrew term for orange is, literally, "golden apple"). "She does not have to imitate contemporary modernist trends, as other poets do," he added, "because her poems are inherently unique. Even the defiant exoticism in her poems does not come from anywhere but her inner world, from a unique reality that is transformed into genuine poetry capturing one's heart with its profound musicality. ...[20]

Despite her youth and rococo[21] style, not typical of the straightforward style of her generation, she was accepted into the elite group of leading poets. Even prior to the publishing of her first book at the young age of eighteen there was interest in her ability as a poet. She was encouraged to publish by Avraham Shlonsky, the leading poet of the

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[19] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude.* p. 191. Kurzweil her teacher and mentor committed suicide in 1972, Ravikovitch wrote *They're Freezing Up North* in 1982 in his memory.

[20] Cohen, Zafrira Lidovsky, *Dalia Ravikovitch*, Jewish Women's Archive. http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/ravikovitch-dalia

[21] Description provided by Professor Bill Cutter

pre- State Hebrew modernists, and Leah Goldberg, the major women poet of the time.[22] Her reputation as a serious poet was established with *The Love of an Orange.* Below is a translation written and annotated with the aid of Dr. Stanley Nash and the published translations by Bloch and Kronfeld[23].

אהבת תפוח הזהב[24]

תפוח זהב

אהב את אוכלהו

טבו מראיו

למאכלהו

שם אל לבו

.כי הוא הרואהו

:אתרוג בו ירהב

,חכמתי ממנו

:אילן התעצב

.ימת ואיננו

,פחז נחשב

?מי ישיבנו

:אתרוג בו סרהב

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[22] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* 16-17.
[23] Ibid. p. 49.
[24] Rabikovitch, Dalia, *The Complete poems So Far.* Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publsihing House Ltd., Tel-Aviv, Israel, 1995. 15- 16.

הבונה הפתי!

אילן התקצף:

סרה היא וחטא היא,

חזר בך היטב

כי כסל שנאתי.

תפוח זהב

אהב את אוכלהו

אהב את מכהו

בכל אבריו.

תפוח זהב

אהב את אוכלהו,

הלך אל מכהו

ברות לשניו

תפוח זהב

נבלע באוכלהו,

בא בעורהו,

אף בבשריו.[25]

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[25] " Miri Baruch points our the plural "besarim" is a distinctively sexual usage." Dr. Stanley Nash.

The Love of An Orange

An orange did love

The man who ate it.
Its appearance to him so appealing
As to be his repast
The orange paid notice
That he was the one gazing at it.

The etrog[26] boasted:

"I am smarter than he"

The tree grew sad:

"It will die and be gone.
Its reckless[27] attitude
Who can condone it?"

The etrog pleaded:

"Wise up you fool!"

The tree became wrathful:

"She is wayward, she sins,
Reform your ways fully
For I detest folly."

An orange
Loved the man who ate it.
Loved the man who flayed it.
Every single limb of his.

An orange
Loved the man who ate it,
Went to the man who flayed it

A tasty morsel for his teeth.

The orange swallowed by the man who ate it,

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[26] "Rabikovitz is using the Mishnaic style wherein the indefinite form can be definite." Dr. Stanley Nash.
[27] Talmudic usage, to act rashly, impetuously

Becoming one with his skin,

Becoming one with his flesh

The title, *The Love of an Orange,* probably refers to Prokofiev's surrealist comedy opera,[28] *The Love for Three Oranges.* In this opera the oranges are the object of love and desire, and the oranges magically transform into princesses when peeled. One princess becomes the love interest of the protagonist. Another influence may be Rilke's, *Sonnets To Orpheus.*[29]

> Dance the orange. Who can forget it? / How, drowning in itself, it struggles to/deny its sweetness. You possess it./ It preciously converts itself to you...Create the liason/ between the pure, forbidding rind,/ and the juice, with which this happy fruit is filled!

The poem also resonates with biblical sources. The language echoes Genesis 2:9, " every type of tree, desirable to look at and good to eat."[30] We are reminded of the Garden of Eden by the use of this similar language. Also in Genesis the imagery of woman being formed from man is reversed. In this poem, woman reenters the man's body. In being eaten the orange returns to a merged state, a state of unity with the man who eats it. This idea is also expressed in the Rilke poem " It preciously converts itself to you.." and in Gen. 2:23 " bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh[31]". In the Genesis story the woman is emerging from the substance of the man's body and in the poem she

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[28] Ibid. p.49.
[29] Rilke, R.M., *Sonnets To Orpheus I, 15.* Translated by Howard A. Landman.
[30] Fox, Everett , *Schocken Bible.*
[31] JPS Tanakh

is merging back into him, by being eaten. There is another reversal in the poem in relation to the Genesis story. In the poem the man gazes longingly at the fruit, while in Genesis it is the woman who is first attracted. (Genesis 3:6)

> When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.[32]

In Genesis, eating the fruit is swiftly followed by the reduction of sensual pleasure and leaving the idyllic and sensual environment of the garden. Ravikovitch's poem contains a reversal. The eating brings sensual pleasure despite the destruction of the individual as a separate entity. The orange merges with the flesh of the man, returning to his bone and returning to his flesh. The message of this poem is pleasure and sensuality at all cost, even if it requires the loss of the self. The orange is flayed, chewed and swallowed prior to being incorporated into the body of the man she loves.

The conversation between the trees and the orange is structurally similar to Jotham's[33] parable of the trees, where the trees were trying to choose a king (Judges 9:8-15) and 2 Kings 14:9 where the trees were sending messages to each other. The *etrog* tree is moralistic and claims to be wiser. The *etrog* is also inedible, so not of interest to the hungry man and less empathetic to the pleasures of being consumed. It is enough to smell and admire the fruit of the etrog with no thought of eating the dry and bitter fruit, so it's easy for the etrog to moralize. The content of the discussion is more reminiscent of Job's "comforters" who come to criticize him[34]. The orange is being criticized for being

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* p. 49.
[34] Ibid p. 49.

too rash and impulsive. The sexual and sensual world is too important for the orange and she will be consumed by desire.

Two jarring and discordant images are merged. One is the sexual union, the joining of the man and woman, the man and the orange, the eater and the consumed suggested by the word *"besarim"* associated with sexual union[35]. The other is suggested by the word *"barot"*[36] meaning food. In the context of Lamentations 4:10, the only place in the Tanakh where this form of the word is found (an example of *hapax legomenon,*[37]) it refers to the horrific image of mother's cooking their children and preparing them as food during the siege of Jerusalem. A deeply disturbing image of mother's eating their own children is elicited in the reader who is familiar with the biblical text. Below the surface of this poem Ravikovitch is evoking primitive imagery in relationship to love and union. She is throwing caution to the wind and embarking on deep and strange explorations of love and intimacy stretching back to childhood, babyhood and the early phases of physical and emotional experience; to consume and be consumed, and to bite. These are the experiences of the nursing infant and the young child grappling with their own intense feelings. The boundaries of the skin can be crossed and even the thick skin of an orange is no protection for the sensitive stuff within. This is also eluded to in the Rilke poem, "Create the liason/ between the pure, forbidding rind,/ and the juice, with which this happy fruit is filled!" which may have influenced Ravikovitch in writing this poem as well.

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[35] see footnote 25.
[36] Ibid. p. 50.
[37] Ravikovitch was fond of using Biblical words in this category.

These themes and symbols will continue to appear in Ravikovitch's poetry, but here she has thrown down the gauntlet: she will not "repent, reform, or desist from folly." Ravikovitch has begun her exploration of the dark, sensual, and disturbing side of human nature and she will not desist.

In 1968 Ravikovitch published a book of children's poems entitled *Misebah Mishpachtit* (A Family Party) which also contained a poem about an orange.

What did the Orange Think?[38]

An orange drew near to the fire
And really thought and tried to guess:
What is this fire and what is the reason
We built her a brick oven?
And why doesn't she rest at all
Like all the fruits inside the basket?
And why doesn't she sleep in silence
Like the vegetables in the ground?
And why is she red and then orange,
Who is she close to and what is she similar too?

And in this manner the orange really thought
And looked at how the fire, flamed up
Then proposed an objection and tried to guess,
And in the end, he said to himself : alas, fool,
Look in the mirror and understand from now on
That the fire is the skin of the orange.
[39]

In this lighthearted children's poem Ravikovitch further elaborates on the themes of the orange, skin, and fire, which recur in her adult poetry. Here the orange realizes that he is not the same as the other fruits but shares something in common with the restless

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[38] Ravikovitch, Levi and Dahlia, *A Family Party.*
[39] my translation

This idea appears in a more serious form in her poem *Habeged* (The Dress) which was published in 1969, *ein alei beged bechlal, harei zot ani ha'boerat,* " I'm not wearing a dress at all, can't you see what's burning is me." In the children's poem we sense that Ravikovitch sees the fire as different and exciting. Not like all the other fruits and vegetables but alive and multicolored. She is also engaged in a philosophical debate, in trying to understand the nature of a thing, by comparing it to herself and other categories that she is familiar with. There is an educative and didactic quality to this children's poem. Ilana Szobel notes that " ..most of Ravikovitch's work presents a paradoxical strategy of subversion from within the boundaries of the formal rule...it maintains the symbolic order while simultaneously disturbing it."[39] To extrapolate from this understanding it seems like even in this most playful of poems, Ravikovitch is expressing her feelings about identity, difference and vulnerability even within the structure of this children's poem. The book itself " A Family Party," is Ravikovitch's attempt to create a sense of wholeness. The author's of the book are Levi and Dahlia Ravikovitch. She intermixed her poetry with her father's poetry, and she signs the introduction " In the name of the family, Dahlia." [40]

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[39] Szobel, Ilana, *Forever Beholden: Orphanhood in the Work of Dahlia Ravikovitch,* p. 235.

[40] Illustrations from this book are provided in the appendix.

Chapter 3

Ravikovitch's Relationship with Her Father

Before proceeding to further discussion of her poetry it is important to take note of one of the formative events of her life: the death of her father. The loss of her father had a profound effect on the course of her life in many different ways and the way her father's death was handled by her family left a long lasting scar. Her family decided to shield her from the facts of her father's death pretending instead that he was convalescing somewhere and would eventually return. It wasn't until two years later while living on Kibbutz Geva that she learned the truth of her father's death through a casual remark.

The circumstances of her family were radically affected by the death of her father. The family moved from Ramat Gan to Kibbutz Geva and Dahlia had difficulty adjusting to this new way of life. Ilana Szobel comments on *ulam 'az kevar hayyiti bubah misug sheni,* " But I was a doll of a second sort." in the poem "Clockwork Doll" (*Bubah memukenet*). She remarks that "this is a vernacular usage referring to something that is reduced, decreased, second-rate...She is ridiculed and has become less valuable."[41] This interpretation resonates with Dahlia's childhood experiences on the kibbutz. She had trouble making friends and was lonely and isolated. The close proximity between the birth of her twin brothers and her father's death may have also led to a double sense of

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[41] Ibid. p. 232.

loss. Dahlia, as do most children, probably experienced some stress and anxiety during her mother's pregnancy and following the birth of the twin boys. As she was adjusting to her new role as the older sister, and the changes in the family that must have occurred to accommodate the care of two infants, the family experienced a devastating blow. The death of her father, coming on the heels of the birth of twins may have stressed her mother's capacity to cope and offer Dahlia the attention she needed. Ilana Szobel comments on this event.

> The traumatic event of her father's death is a fundamental experience in Dahlia Ravikovitch's writing. This loss and the simultaneity of the death's presence and its concealment create an emotional mechanism of psychological imprisonment in the orphan's world.[42]

Several of Ravikovitch's poems will be discussed in order to better understand her reaction to this tragedy as she looks back on her relationship with her father.

Her short story " Twenty Five Years" offers her understanding of her father's character and memories and reconstructions of the early years of her parent's marriage. By reconstructing this period in time she is revisiting her childhood as an adult and establishing a coherent narrative about her father's personality and life, even envisioning a future trajectory if he had lived. This is allowing her to mourn him in a way that she was unable to mourn as a young child. She is also mourning for him by relating empathically to the manner of his death which was not heroic, completely random, and without purpose. She sensed that with his strong desire to be useful and accomplish something worthwhile, his untimely death would have irked him especially because of the lost and wasted opportunities. As a young child she was not told of her father's death and she also was not capable of understanding the complexities of his personality. In this

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[42] Ibid. p. 240.

piece she briefly addresses the devastating loss she and her family experienced on a personal level while mainly focusing on commemorating her father. What follows in the next section is a translation of Twenty- Five Years written with the assistance of Dr. Stanley Nash.

Twenty- Five Years [44]

Twenty-five years ago, on the 19th of Cheshvan, my mother went out for an afternoon walk, pushing the double carriage in front of her, it contained my four-month-old twin brothers. I also went along on this walk, with the dubious status of a big-sister, not grown up and not small.

Half – way, close to the police station in Ramat Gan, my mother heard a rumor and hurried to return home. It was also absorbed in my ears " A collision with many injured," but I didn't understand how this affected us.

In our courtyard we found my grandfather, my mother's father, fainting and sobbing. I thought that my grandfather was wounded in the accident and I became pale from panic. My mother's facial expression was very serious, and she like the rest of the members of the family was fussing all around my grandfather. One could not detect any reaction or signs of more serious trauma in my mother. That same evening my father did not return home but because of the general tension, I didn't attach great significance to this. In the coming days, they said to me that he was injured and was recovering from his injuries. On my birthday, that was celebrated two months after this event, I received as a

[44] Ravikovitch, Dahlia. 1979

present, notebook and pencil, and my uncle said that this is a present that was sent to me from my father.

From that day, whose events were carved upon my consciousness in a fragmented and misleading fashion, I didn't see my father. And it is obvious in hindsight, that in truth, his funeral was conducted the day after his death. Only ten years later did I become aware that my father was run over by a British military driver. One rumor was that he was a drunk driver. He was killed on the spot, without external lacerations. As much as this detail is lacking in importance, to this day, I find comfort in the thought that his body remained whole.

My father was killed at age thirty-three and some months. For several years after, my mother was accustomed to say with bitterness, that he didn't even reach age thirty-four. At the present time, I think that this has no importance; after all, even if he reached age thirty-five, it would not have been easier for us to say good-bye to him. Nonetheless, people cling to dates and markers that have no tangible reality in themselves. No person apart from us, no one outside the family, is capable of expressing what really happened to us, upon the death of my father.

Obviously, after his death one cannot attribute to my father any feelings. But, I am capable of guessing at his feelings of having missed out, especially in regard to the manner of his death. He was killed in the end of 1942 as the World War reached one of its climaxes, and the Nazi army closed in with a pincer movement from Egypt and Syria upon the Land of Israel. In Mandatory Palestine, the bread was rationed and the stores sold black, crude sugar. For many years my mother preserved the half- empty sugar jar

that my father used to take with him to work. My father worked as an engineer at Reading Station and he was bored to death.

He was a sensitive man, a little eccentric, and possessor of absolute self-confidence in areas that related to his abilities, but of complete helplessness in dealing with people who were more sly than he. He endured the nonsensical nature of the work that did not demand from him any inventive ability, and he was easily offended by the vulgarity of his fellow employees, from their cursing , and their allegedly class-based union organizing, which was really only a mask for egoistical self-interest. The only holiday I never heard of until age six was the First of May.

Not withstanding the fact that he was suspicious concerning the class organizing of these "workers", within my father there was a relentless need that never was pacified; to be of benefit to society and to do something of value. In his private notebook there remained after his death, sketches of strange machines, and one of which was, as I understand it, a hot water heater that absorbs the warmth of the sun. This was at least ten years before they began the manufacture of solar water heaters in Israel. In the period of my father's life the scientific research in Israel was totally undeveloped. With his powerful inclination for research, I can only imagine how exciting and saturated with lively interests his life could have been, if only he had lived until an era in which his talents would have been in greater demand; but he died before his time. I can only guess that with his thirst for knowledge the conquering of outer space would have left him intoxicated. Nevertheless, I don't know what my father would have done during the strikes of the engineers, because these violent methods and the excessive demands as the basis of the strike would have awakened anger within him. Notwithstanding this, I must

remind myself that my father died at a very young age, and he probably would have matured.[44]

As the World War intensified my father sought to volunteer for the British Army. His hearing was not sharp (he couldn't distinguish between Hatikvah and Techezakna [45]) and considering that he was an excellent engineer he thought he could be of use as an artillery officer. In contrast to the others he didn't have to worry that his delicate hearing would become defective, as it already was impaired. My mother, who was pregnant, discouraged him from volunteering. So when my brothers, the twins, reached four months of age, he met his death in a manner that was particularly meaningless and ironic considering he was taking the safe course, in deference to my mother's concerns about his safety.

The short episode of his life is in my view the most tumultuous I have ever known in my entire experience, but clearly, this is not an unbiased opinion.

It is possible that from certain vantage points my father was an ordinary man, that is to say, if he was alive today he would certainly have been a senior engineer, without any sense for business, living quietly with his family, and he would not have made a name for himself outside of this limited circle. Nonetheless, he had qualities that I see

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[44] Ravikovitch writes with a slightly sarcastic edge. To become "mature" an individual like her father must shed his idealism and become more pragmatic.

[45] The anthem of Zionist labor, Chaim Nachman Bialik's "Birkat Ha'am" ("The People's Blessing"), better known as "Techezakna."
http://blogs.forward.com/jj-goldberg/127687/#ixzz13J51YXw2

myself as obligated to rescue from the oblivion that envelops[46] the majority of the deceased, twenty five years, half a jubilee[47], after their death.

In spite of his talents, that had the quality of an organic force of nature, both in his occupation and in his sensitivity to art and poetry, my father was not shrewd. He had a naiveté that sometimes bordered on simple mindedness. My father was not capable of intrigues, not only because he rejected them from a moral perspective, but also in addition they were beyond his abilities. There are two positions I am incapable of imagining my father occupying – one in a business office and the other in the espionage service. His inability to lie was so extreme that it could be seen as a deficit. My father never even reached the stage where he could choose truth and abhor falsehood. When he was required to lie (and who isn't obliged to do this in hard times) he would become as helpless as an infant.

My father was a very rigid person. His fervent attachment to his principles made him captive to them.. Usually there was no connection between his ability to think brilliantly and his inflexibility as far as daily life matters were concerned.

One day a difficult fight broke out between him and my mother. In those days of food rationing and fear from the successive victories of the Nazi army, it's no wonder that my mother like the other mothers would hunt after food. One day she happened upon a windfall in the form of a container of imported cocoa. My father who returned from work and found the "abomination" in his house, threw the container out the window. (This is the point to clarify that my father was a supporter of purchasing

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[46] The word Ravikovitch uses, *aufefet*, root letter aleph, pey, pey is the same root used in Jonah 2:6 , where the water closes over Jonah and he is lost in the depths of the ocean.
[47] Leviticus 25:10

products of Eretz Yisrael.) After exchanging harsh words, my mother refrained from talking to my father for the entire day. Yet despite the unpleasant outcome in relation to my mother (my father was not able to bear hostilities[48]) I don't know if he understood the extent to which he had behaved in an unrealistic manner.

After his death (or alternatively, his mysterious disappearance) when we moved to a different place and I had to describe my father to the new children, I told them he was a painter. Truth to tell, my father was not a painter, although he painted well. I didn't think that he had the ability to paint as a professional artist, but the combination of a sharp eye and an adroit hand yielded pleasant creations on paper. In the small amount of time he lived I thought that he could do everything, and this impression, albeit exaggerated, was not totally mistaken. He was extraordinarily good with his hands and he had a desire to construct things himself. My father would plan and implement the building of furnishings for the children's room and install light fixtures, both for the sake of the pleasure of fashioning things, but also because he felt that in this way he would fulfill in a more complete fashion his role as the father of the family.

He had a sense for aesthetic that expressed itself only temporarily and marginally, both because this was a period of financial distress (hardship) and anxieties, and in addition because his humility would present an innate barrier to his esthetic inclinations. There was nothing that my father hated more than self-aggrandizement.

Usually, it appears to me, he dressed in khaki pants, but I remember in particular two Shabbat[49] suits of his, one of white cotton and the other of cream-colored silk. He brought the two suits with him from China. These were actually typical colonialist

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[48] Jeremiah 15:10 *ish riv umadan*
[49] Dressy

outfits, but in my father's manner and in the way he dressed it was impossible to discern any signs of social class, and certainly not a class known for showing off. Just as my father differentiated himself from the strident pride of the worker class, likewise was he far from the taste of the bourgeoisie. He was lacking class definition intentionally because he didn't believe in personality being acquired through belonging to a social framework.

Privately, for himself, he wrote poems. These poems were not kept secret, but he also did not share them publicly. If he showed the poems to someone from amongst his close friends I do not know it. Even though he left a sizable number of poems he did not see himself as a poet, and rightfully so. He knew that his command of Hebrew was too weak. Without jealousy he admired the poets he loved, a few of whom were not famous in that period of time. My father was not the kind of person who would automatically admire individuals whom others admired, and equally he would not just dismiss those who were dismissed by others. His ideas (and his erroneous ideas, too) he arrived at independently on his own. He did not make an effort to fashion for himself the persona of an exceptional individual. He was exceptional in the most natural way, because the ordinary was not appealing to him, and upon matters of taste, he decided by himself.

An example of his astute self - awareness that did not have any bit of self-delusion, was the awareness that he was not a poet. Nonetheless, precisely because of the intimacy in his poems, they possess a marvelous charm. After my birth he decided to write poems for children. It's strange that despite his underdeveloped hearing he had an excellent feel for rhythm.

The time period in which he made aliya to Israel in the early thirties also influenced and is inseparable from his personality. My father emigrated from Harbin, a Chinese district city that contained a large community of Russian Jews. What for others was in the realm of theoretical Zionism, was for my father, already by high school age, an urgent existential issue. His longings for the land of Israel were marked by an intensity that usually exists only in interpersonal relations. Immediately after he completed a Russian technical school in Harbin (and during the course of twenty years dwelling in China my father and his family never learned a single word of Chinese, whereas by contrast they spoke Hebrew very well) he made aliya (emigrated to Israel). In the beginning, he did not find work in his occupation instead he worked in the orchards. Afterward he was engaged by the electric company and took part in the establishment of the electric authority for the settlements of the Northern Galil. In any event, the name of Pinchas Rutenberg[50] was known to me before the name of Herzl.

It was amidst concepts and names like electricity, night shifts, Reading Station[51] and Naharayim[52] that the first years of my life transpired. These concepts were beloved to me no less than the red jello treat that my mother prepared for me. The economic state of my parents, who needed to support my father's family, never was strong, but I had no awareness of this. From the other side, the house was enveloped in fear of the World War. But it was not a matter of urgent danger to our welfare, actually not too bad at all,

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[50] Founder of the Israel Electric Company

[51] Power station supplying Tel Aviv

[52] Naharayim (Hebrew: lit. "Two rivers") is a site on the border between Israel and Jordan where an hydroelectric power-plant was established in 1930. [1]The Yarmuk River flows into the Jordan River at Naharayim. The plant, established by Pinchas Rutenberg, produced much of the energy consumed in the British Mandate of Palestine until Israel's War of Independence in 1948. The plant was abandoned and destroyed during the war. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naharayim

except for the period preceding El Alamein.[53] But my father was consumed with guilt feelings over the fact that he was leading a happy family life during the time that the world was caught up in the Shoah. A less sensitive and humble person might be callous but my father had a sense of an obligation he was not fulfilling.

In actuality all the hopes and wishes of his life were sabotaged over the course of time. He wanted to raise a serene family and normal children without faults, as one of his diaries discloses to me. And in the final analysis, not only does he have a poet for a daughter, but in addition, I smoke.

Every summary in which I strive to capture the individuality of my father is only a partial summary, because his personality did not reach the stage of ripening and full development . It is possible for me to imagine better fathers than he, and men with a wider perspective than he. But it is difficult for me to conjure up in my imagination a man endowed with a more perfect soul than his, a sense of justice more developed, or a greater sensitivity to injustice.

My father did not maintain wide social contacts, but his impact on the small number of his intimates was unforgettable. For more than ten years after his death, his close friends made a pilgrimage on a yearly basis to his grave, together with the family. Again, as I have noted, I am not able to present myself as an impartial sketcher of his portrait, but even till this day , twenty five years after his death, he exists for me in a tangible way, as an unfading reality not dulled or diminished in the least.

The living occupies all of daily life, and it is only natural for the dead gradually to be forgotten. My father was not a man to whom governmental ministers and public

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[53] Battle in WW II

personalities dedicate monuments in his name. It is possible that there are many others like him. If that is the case, then behold there are many people upon whose demise an extraordinary beauty becomes lost to the world.

Poetic Remembrance of Levi Ravikovitch

In comparison to this rational and somewhat idealized story about her father is a poem that deals with her more troubling feelings of anger and loss that were missing from the narrative. In *The Complete Poems So Far*[54] there are two poems about her father under one title, *Kaf yad* resha`ah.[55] The second poem, untitled, following the asterism begins with "On the road at night there stands a man." The merging of the poems suggests a link between the first and second poem.

The first poem:

קף יד רשעה
קוים של עשן נטו במלכסן
. אבא שלי הכה אותי

כל העומדים צחקו למראה
מה שסיפרתי אמת ויצי ב

קוים של עשן נטו במלכסן
אבא הכה על כפידי
הוא אמר שהיא כף יד רשעה
מה שסיפרתי אמת ויציב

.קוים של עשן נטו במלכסן

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[54] Rabikovitch, Dalia. The Complete Poems So Far. Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House Ltd., Tel Aviv, 1995.
[55] Ibid. pgs. 23-24

אבא חדל מהכות אותי
היד הרשעה צמחה אצבעות
וכל מעשה שריר וקים.

קוים של עשן נטו במלכסן
פחד לוחך את הכף הרשעה
אבא חדל מהכות אותי
אך הפחד הזה שריר וקים

The Wicked Hand

Smoke rose in the slanted light
And my daddy was hitting me.
Everyone there laughed at the sight.
I'm telling the truth, and nothing but.

Smoke rose in the slanted light.
Daddy slapped the palm of my hand.
He said, It's the palm of a wicked hand.
I'm telling the truth, and nothing but.

Smoke rose in the slanted light
And Daddy stopped hitting me.
Fingers sprouted from the wicked hand,
Its works endure and will never end.

Smoke rose in the slanted light.
Fear singes the wicked hand.
Daddy stopped hitting me.
But the fear endures and will never end.[57]

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[57] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude.* 54-55

In this poem we discover a different aspect of the relationship between Dahlia and her father. Each stanza begins " Smoke rose in the slanted light." This image is not directly related to the topic of the poem but the fact that it is used as a refrain highlights the importance of this image. It is like a snapshot of a memory with vivid sensory impressions. The rising smoke and the particular quality of the slanting light are associated in Dahlia's mind with this episode of punishment, fear and humiliation at the hands of her father.

Eilat Negev discussed with Dahlia Ravikovitch the circumstances that are the background for this poem.

> When Dalia was four, her father taught her reading and writing and she felt she had to be smart for his sake: He had strict standards. Once we visited friends and I fought with their young daughter. Father was shocked : " You beat the hosts' child? Show me the hand that did that! With the innocence and insolence of a child, I said, I can't remember which hand it was, and he hit me on both. She felt court – martialled and never forgot the insult. Years later she revived the incident in a poem named , " The Vicious Hand".[57]

This memory of her father beating her is an example of a screen memory[58]. The unpleasant events remembered are also a cover for the deeper and more devastating trauma associated with the disappearance of her father at age six. This is symbolized in the structure of the two poems. " The Wicked Hand" precedes " On the road at night there stands a man." This is the poem about her relationship to her dead father, and her inability to mourn his loss. This poem is hidden behind "The Wicked Hand," unnamed and not obviously related.

The wicked hand is Dahlia's hand, the hand that sprouts fingers, but it is also her father's hand, the hand that beats her. She is being punished for something involving her wicked hand and the punishment is being inflicted by her father's wicked hand. Twice

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[57] Negev, Eilat, *Close Encounters with Twenty Israeli Writers.* 84-85.
[58] Freud, S., *Standard Edition, Vol. III, 47-69.*

she repeats, "I'm telling the truth, and nothing but." There is an innocent and childlike quality to this statement. Ravikovitch is accusing her father for beating and embarrassing her in public. This punishment by her father is also described as a source of her creativity, "And Daddy stopped hitting me./Fingers sprouted from the wicked hand,/Its works endure and will never end." Along with the creativity is a chronic fear and sensitivity as if her hand has been burned. " Fear singes the wicked hand./ Daddy stopped hitting me./ But the fear endures and will never end."

According to the biographical story she is being punished for aggressive behavior and insolent words. In the poem the reason for punishment is less clear. At age four a little girl is often struggling with her oedipal feelings of love and attraction towards her father and aggressive feelings towards her mother. A rebuke by her father would be particularly troubling because it might imply that he didn't love her as much as he loved Mommy. The punishment could also help her to rein in and sublimate her sexual and aggressive impulses and use that energy for creativity and learning as symbolized by the sprouting of fingers and the ability to create poetry. Another possibility is that her own inner sense of shame and humiliation was so intense that it increased her anger to the point of rage towards her father. This anger, in average circumstances, would be contained by the parents and would abate through the many daily positive encounters between parent and child. But the intensity of the fear and humiliation expressed in this poem suggests that there is a displacement of the feeling of unending fear from some other source.

Ravikovitch proceeds to name one of the likely sources of this unending fear in the continuation of the poem.

עומד על הכביש בלילה האיש הזה
שהיה בשכבר הימים אבא שלי
וחיבת אני לגשת אליו למקום עמדו
מפני שאני הייתי הבת הב-
כורה שלו.

ובכל לילה וליל הוא עומד לבדו במקומו
אני חיבת לירד למקומו ולבוא
ורציתי לשאל את האיש עד מתי חיבת אני.
וידעתי זאת מראש שתמיד חיבת אני.

במקום שהוא עומד ישנו חשש סכנה
כביום שהלך בכביש ודרסה אותו מכונית
וכך הכרתי אותו ונתתי בו סימנים.
היה פעם אבא שלי.
שזה האיש
עצמו

והוא אינו מדבר לי מלת אהבה אחת
למרות שהיה בשכבר הימים אבא של
ולמרות שאני הייתי הבת הבכורה שלו
הוא אינו יכול לדבר לי מלת אהבה אחת.

"On the road there stands the man"

On the road at night there stands the man
Who once upon a time was my father.
And I must go down to the place where he stands
Because I was his firstborn daughter.

Night after night he stands alone in his place
And I must go down and stand in that place.
And I wanted to ask him: Till when must I go.

And I knew as I asked: I must always go.

In the place where he stands, there is a trace of danger
Like the day he walked that road and a car ran him over.
And that's how I knew him and marked him to remember:
This very man used to be my father.

Not one word of love does he speak to me
Though once upon a time he was my father
Not even though I was his firstborn daughter
Not one word of love can he speak to me.

In this final section of " A Wicked Hand " there is further understanding of her sense of estrangement and difficulty mourning her father. The phrase "once upon a time" evokes storytelling and in fact, the story of Ravikovitch's life is broken and she is trying to fix it by writing poetry. The circumstances of her father's death, her young age, the recent birth of her twin brothers, the move to the kibbutz and most especially her mother's secretiveness and inability to tell her about and help her mourn her father's death, have left Ravikovitch struggling with the ghost of her father. "On the road there stands a man/Who once upon a time was my father."

Ravikovitch spends the rest of her life attempting to fill the hole within. " And I wanted to ask him: Till when must I go./ And I knew as I asked: I must always go." It is easier to mourn the loss of a parent if a person has had the chance to establish a fairly secure and positive relationship with their parent. In Ravikovitch's own words,

> However, a six year old that loses a parent torments himself that, had he been a better child that would not have happened. Some people feel this way in

> adulthood as well, and each loss causes them an awful reduction in their self image.[59]

Prior to her father's death there were also other sources of stress within the family. Dahlia's mother, Michal, suffered a tragic and complicated loss when Ravikovitch was an infant. Michal's older sister Miriam had dated Levi, Ravikovich's father, prior to meeting Michal. When Miriam introduced Levi to the family, he and Michal experienced a strong attraction, fell in love and married. Miriam never married and killed herself when Dahlia was a baby.

> I was born in 1936 and the vicious gossips in our family say that I caused my aunt's death. Because Mummy, in her great bliss, was a bit tactless, and wrote to her sister how happy she was with this wonderful man, and what a perfect love-child I was. I read Miriam's letters, and I don't think mother ever realized how bitter they were. Miriam couldn't bear it, and ended her misery, but made it fatal for all of us: when a person kills himself, he kills something in those who love him. Mother was devastated; she wasn't so thick as not to understand her contribution to her sister's suicide. I was a baby, and remember nothing, but it may have had an effect on the way I was brought up.[60]

In addition, the birth of the twins, affected the family dynamics and Dahlia was still in the process of adjusting to these changes when her father died.

> My brothers were handsome from birth, and I admired them. When they came along there was no room left for me, because they were two. I considered myself very unattractive, and felt great sorrow that from such a handsome father, an ugly daughter was created. Nevertheless I always preferred to be a woman, because a woman gives life, and I always felt sorry for men.[61]

All of these factors; her mother's emotional state, and her sense of being replaced by her brothers, exacerbated by the family secret surrounding her father's death, may have increased her anger and frustration towards her father before and after his death. In

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[59] Negev, Eilat. *Close Encounters with Twenty Israeli Writers.* p.89.
[60] Ibid. p. 83.
[61] Ibid. p.84.

the child's mind there is egocentric and magical thinking before a clear understanding of cause and effect and self and other is fully understood. There is also an attempt to master traumatic situations by imagining that there is a connection between a persons actions and the trauma as a way of gaining some measure of control, even if the result is a feeling of guilt and responsibility. According to this line of reasoning, Dahlia as a child might have experienced great anger at her father for disciplining her, as in " A Wicked Hand," and when he disappeared from her life she may have blamed herself. She may have been afraid that her own angry wishes caused his disappearance and even his death. She desperately holds onto the fragmentary and disturbing memories of her father and his death. This litany of woe is her painful history. As Ravikovitch recounted to Eilat Negev:

> I remember one foster – mother saying at dinner 'and now Dalia will tell us how her father died' Like a complete idiot I did, not realizing that I could refuse her.[62]

This is speculation on my part, but it is also possible that the cruel remark from the foster mother was in response to Dahlia's need to tell the painful story as a way to hold on to her father and his memory in an imperfect way, "This very man *used* to be my father." (my italics) Dahlia may have told the story of his death so many times that it became a source of derision. Ilana Szobel describes how Ravikovitch in the story " I am Joseph" describes a character, Ehud, who cannot move forward from his father's death because he is constantly longing for a reunion.

> His brothers have made it, they are no longer two orphan babies... but rather fathers", but Ehud still cries out for his father. As opposed to the biblical Joseph." Ehud's character represents a typical position in Ravikovitch's writing: the paralysis of orphanhood, a disability from which there is no recovery.

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[62] Ibid. p. 86.

> Orphanhood is not a condition to be overcome, but a fundamental experience and an ongoing emotional state of mind that establishes the character's subjectivity.[63]

Ravikovitch was not able to fully integrate her relationship with her father as a positive source of love and self - esteem because of his premature death and the circumstances discussed. "Not one word of love does he speak to me/Though once upon a time he was my father/Not even though I was his firstborn daughter/Not one word of love can he speak to me." She cannot completely free herself from the loss, pain, unremitting anger, sense of abandonment and unworthiness that haunts her. Ravikovitch believed that she had been significantly damaged by this loss of her relationship with her father, although she continually tried to compensate for this trauma in an attempt to fulfill both her own and her father's wishes.

> And I had to fight for my autonomy, keep on living according to my father's principles, and become what he wanted me to become. He sent me on my way, the best he could for a six- year old girl, but he did not have the chance to raise me to womanhood. Had he stayed alive, I would have been a much more harmonious and self-confident woman.[64]

In her poem " There Is No Fear of God in This Place,"[65] in the collection *New Poems*, published in 1995, Ravikovitch revisits the death of her father and elaborates on the effect of his death on her life. She imagines him speaking to her from his picture on her wall. "'Surely there is no love in this place, nor will there ever be.'/ Father would tell me/ from his picture hanging on the wall year after year,/ ' and human mercy is like a barleycorn/ that teeth gnaw upon,' / so Father would tell me. ' When I was run over and killed on the black road,/ in an eyeblink, alone,/ struck to the ground, startled and

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[63] Szobel, Ilana. *Forever Boholden,* p.237.
[64] Negev, Eilat. *Close Encounters with Twenty Israeli Writers.* p. 85.
[65] Bloch & Kronfled, p. 231.

shamed,/ in that eyeblink I knew:/ In all the years to come/ like me you'd remain startled/ you wouldn't beware of fire/ nor of ocean torrents;/ like me you would have no hand/ to wrest you away from danger. Fifty years and more I'd be gazing at you from that picture/ and all of a sudden we'd burst out laughing/ for no apparent reason./ Surely there is no love in this place/ except for the love between two./ And whoever tore you from me-/ there is no fear of God in his heart,/nor will there ever be."

This poem also alludes to the relationship between Ravikovitch and her son, for she was extremely angry that her ex-husband and the judge tore him away from her and gave custody to her ex-husband . This will be discussed in more detail later but this devastating loss of the custody of her son resonated with the earlier loss of her father. She poignantly describes how the sense of security, love and trust was shaken in the blink of an eye and how her ability to be self protective was forever damaged, " struck to the ground, startled and shamed...like me you'd remain startled...no hand to wrest you away from danger... surely there is no love in this place/accept for the love between two." Some of the corrosive effects of trauma are related to the element of surprise. The shame and horror of being caught defenseless is the feeling that often haunts survivors of trauma. Also the long period of time between her father's death and Dahlia's knowledge of his death gave her fertile imagination a large amount of time to imagine all sorts of terrible scenarios.

> In October 1942, the 33 –year-old Levi Ravikovitch was ran over by the car of a drunken Greek soldier who was serving in the British Army. Dalia was told that he was only injured, and for her sixth birthday, two weeks later she received a school bag and a pencil case, a gift from her father. Two years later, Dalia secretly confessed to one of her schoolmates that she suspected that her father was dead.

'What, didn't you know?" the girl exclaimed. Ravikovitch was left hanging by a thread.[66]

References to her father's death and the trauma associated with not knowing are present in many of her poems. In "Knowledge Comes Easy to the Wise," " Knowledge comes hard to the fool./ They saw me as one deluded./ They said: Your father is deluding you./ No, he wouldn't make a fool of me. / Among galley men be it known...He would not make a fool of me." Or in "Six Hundred Thirteen Commandments Plus One," *Six hundred thirteen commandments were given to Israel and seven to the Sons of Noah. Even the dead are bound by one.* " And the dead man come home again/ To tell his sons about his death / Lest they shudder to hear another tell / That horrifying tale...And so he told the tale of his death,/ Expounding word by word, For he believed that if we heard/ We too might be consoled./ Albeit peace befits him now,/ He will return if we entreat, / Never will he pass us by/ Nor close his eyes to our pain; he will shoulder an equal share/ Of that horrifying tale...When we are overcome by grief,/ He cannot help but come."

In these poems Ravikovitch in conversation with her father repairs the trauma of his death. Her father would have told her the circumstances of his death. He understands the importance of telling her directly about the death to avoid the terrible pain of hearing it in the wrong way from the wrong person. Her father knows that the telling of the tale of his death is comforting to his daughter and he is willing to face her pain. But it is hard for Ravikovitch to hold on to this kind and comforting thought. The next poem "Conversation with a Photo[67]," expresses her anger and frustration. " Why don't you even try, man?/ Leaning against the wall, you can see/ yet you keep your mouth

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[66] Negev, Eilat. *Close Encounters.* p.84
[67] Bloch & Kronfeld. *Hovering at a Low Altitude.* p. 232.

shut...What willpower I invest to grant you/ years of virtual existence./ And you want and you don't want/ and you pass yourself off as a man who can see/ and you do not do, you do not do/ anymore/ what a beloved father would do." Here the photograph of her father becomes a tormentor rather than a comforter. Instead of watching over her protectively and even sharing a laugh," Fifty years and more I'd be gazing at you from that picture/ and all of a sudden we'd burst out laughing/ for no apparent reason.[68]" the photograph is a hollow reminder of the loss of protection she suffered following her father's death.

There are many more poems with clear references to her father's death. In the " Central Pillar[69]" Ravikovitch uses religious and Kabbalistic imagery to retain the image of her father's immortal soul. She also has a fascination with the heroic and quixotic French writer and aviator, Antoine de Saint- Exupery. She wrote a poem in his memory, which has clear allusions to her father who died around the same time. Antoine de Saint- Exupery had the heroic death of a fighter pilot[70] that Ravikovitch felt her father deserved and was a successful writer, something her father may have aspired to as well. There was also some mystery around de Saint – Exupery's death, like her father.

" A terrible glowing moon/ reminded me in the middle of the night/ how in the year nineteen forty- three/ Antoine / de Saint- Exupery died...It's not the same world anymore, /grass and wind,/ wind and sand./ That's the look of a world/ in which there is no/ Saint – Exupery...but if he'd been rescued/ that time/ in March, in the year nineteen

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[68] Ibid, p. 231. From the poem " There Is No Fear of God in This Place. " This section of the poem from "Fifty years... love between two" is inscribed on her tombstone.
[69] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering.* p. 51.
[70] Ibid. 128-129.

forty – three,/ he'd be with us still/ a glowing speck,/ lily in the wind,/ laughter in the clouds."

This image of " the terrible glowing moon" has a similar quality to " a red globe flares, not yet a sun. A lesion of frost, flushed and sickly," in *Hovering at a Low Altitude.* Nature becomes ominous, " those craggy eastern hills/streaked with ice/ where grass doesn't grow/ and a sweeping shadow overruns the slope." With the absence of warm human protection, with the absence of the father the world changes forever, " It's not the same world anymore."

The merger of the loss of her father and the death of Antoine de Saint- Exupery is also present in *sof hanifilah.* Here Ravikovitch expresses her hopes for care and protection for the man who falls from a plane in the middle of the night. This is how de Saint – Exupery died and her father's death also has a similar quality, as he too died alone, in the dark road way in the middle of the night. *If a man falls from a plane in the middle of the night/ God alone can raise him./ God appears at his side in the middle of the night, touches the man and soothes his agony...In God's eyes the man is a little child./ He gets up clumsily on all fours and wants to walk,/ then senses he has wings to fly./ The man is still confused: He doesn't know/ it feels better to hover than to crawl./ God wishes to stroke his head/ though he tarries;/ he would not want to frighten the man/ with portents of love.*[71]

This poem is interesting from several perspectives. In general, Ravikovitch is not religious and does not generally refer to God as a deity or even as a literary character.[72] This expression of closeness with a personal God is exceptional for Ravikovitch. She

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[71] Ibid. p. 119.
[72] Ibid. p.23.

challenges and reverses the meaning of biblical verse..*does not wipe away his blood/ for the blood is not life./ God does not coddle his body/ for the man is not flesh.*[73] Here Ravikovitch is "reversing the basis for the law in Deut. 12:23, 'for the blood is the life'"[74] but in fact she is aligning herself with a Jewish belief in the afterlife and the eternal nature of the soul, and receiving comfort from this. In addition, the theme of hovering comes up in this poem from 1969, almost twenty years before *Hovering at a Low Altitude. Adayin ha'eish mvulbal v'ano yodeah/ shenaim yoter l'rahef measher l'zahol* . (The man is still confused: He doesn't know/ it feels better to hover than crawl.) Here hovering has a positive connotation. Hovering is an ability that allows the man to rise up from his traumatic death. Hovering is associated with distancing from the human condition of pain and death so in this poem, like in the later poem, hovering has a dissociated quality. God is also careful not to overwhelm the recently traumatized person. There is a play on the usual context of the word *mitmamehha.* (tarries), which usually refers to the belief in the coming of the messiah despite the fact that the messiah tarries. Here God wishes to stroke the man's head and comfort him but holds back so as not to frighten the man with *signs of love.* In this poem, I believe that Ravikovitch is identifying with God. One potential sequel of early trauma and loss is the life long belief that ones love as well as anger can be damaging. Loving her father too much could have also led to his death. Her love and inability to fully separate from Ido was also considered damaging. Ravikovitch, like God, must hold back her passionate nature from the men she loves so as not to harm them.

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[73] Ibid. p. 119.
[74] Ibid. p. 119.

Ravikovitch also in a playful way tries to continue her relationship with her father as if he had lived. In 1968 she published a children's book " A Family Party." She includes her name and her father's name as authors. The book contains selections from her father's children's poetry and her own. In the introduction she gives a short biography of his life and a brief recounting of his death, and then proceeds to create a happier moment where she and her father are united in the publishing of this joint effort. So that the " party shall be complete," she dedicates the book to her mother, Michal, and to Roie, Michal's grandson.

Chapter Four

Fragile Emotional States in Ravikovitch's Poetry

Ravikovitch has the ability to express the emotional state of women in difficult circumstances. Her own experience of pain and her ability to empathize with the internal states of others and then capture these feelings in poetic expression is her great skill and gift. In *Clockwork Doll*[75] *"Bubah Memukenet,"* Ravikovitch may be alluding once again to the death of her father, but whatever the precipitating trauma may have been the poem is about the shattering of the sense of self. Ilana Szobel describes it in this way:

> Perhaps the frantic breach did not stem from within her at all, but rather was caused by an aggressive and destructive activation of the doll. That is, the speaker understands her psychotic crisis as a result of external forces; what has been forced upon her is not the symbolic order, but the crisis. She experiences and understands her psychosis not as an immanent part of her personality, but as an external force exerted upon her on one specific night.[76]

This poem resonates with women who have experienced trauma, and in fact all people who have been damaged by a traumatic experience. In addition, most people do not go through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood completely untouched by emotional pain

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[75] Ibid. p. 63.
[76] Szobel, Ilana. *Forever Beholden: Orphanhood In The Work of Dahlia Ravikovitch.* p. 229.

and self-doubt. In Israel, where individuals have coped with an ongoing state of war and the trauma of the Shoah, Ravikovitch's ability to communicate the after effects of sustained stress and trauma is particularly appreciated. [77] *I was a clockwork doll, but then/ That night I turned round and round/ And fell on my face and cracked on the ground,/ And they tried to piece me together again.* The effort to piece the clockwork doll back together like Humpty Dumpty was not really successful. Although her outward appearance, or the surface of her personality was repaired, the deep damage remained. *Then once more I was a proper doll/ And all my manner was nice and polite./ But I became damaged goods that night,/ A fractured twig*[78] *poised for a fall.*

Oppenheimer[79] makes a similar point in the section entitled " *hitparekut ha- Ani*" the " coming apart, dismantling, deconstruction of the 'I'" (ego or sense of the self).

> If we pay attention to the self - portrait she poses, we will discover a personality whose strongest feeling is the feeling of *hitparekut.* After the *hitparekut* at the party there is no true gluing together (mending) of the fragments, but rather an adroit technical mending.[80]

Oppenheimer also mentions the poem *Gaavah,* " Pride" as another illustration of her fragile sense of herself. "Even boulders get broken—they do not move

so thus they hide the fissures/ This is a kind of pride..when boulders break it happens

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[77] Bloch & Kronfeld, p. 63.
[78] Ibid. p. 63. A reference to the Bialik poem, *A Twig Fell.* Bialik also compares himself to a damaged twig barely holding on to the branch.
[79] Oppenheimer, Yochai. "Hi Ta`atsor Et Ha-`Olam Pit'om'; Lyrikah U-Fo'etikiah Be-Shirat Dahlya Rabikovitz." *Ha-Zekhut Ha-Gedolah Lomar Lo: Shirah Politit Be-Yisra'el,* p.323. Dr. Stanley Nash translated and assisted with this interpretation.
[80] Ibid. p.323 Dr. Stanley Nash translated.

as a surprise/ And how much more so is this the case with human beings."[81] The identification with stone is also noted in the poem " Even for a Thousand Years,"

> But time makes people grow tough as fingernails,/gray as rocks/stubborn as stone./ It 's a seductive prospect, perhaps- to turn into a block of salt./With a mineral power./ To stare empty – eyed at this potash and phosphate factory/even for a thousand years.[82]

In this poem we see the end result of the *hitparekut.* "The anxiety over coming apart whether it is the anxiety that comes from the explosion of forces from within or that which comes from the fear of penetration and infiltration from outside, turns into a melancholy, exhausted and defenseless, resignation."[83] The reference to the block of salt with mineral power, staring with empty eyes is another way to express the damage that was done. There is a hardening and a strengthening in become stone but also immobilization and emptiness. The block of salt also is reminiscent of Lot's wife and the pillar of salt. Genesis 19: 24-26.[84]

But YHWH rained down brimstone and fire upon Sedom and Amora, coming from YHWH, from the heavens,
he overturned those cities and all of the plain, all those settled in the cities and the vegetation of the soil.
Now his wife gazed behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi, 1160-1235, Narbonne, France) commented on the order of the sentences. First brimstone and fire descend and the cities are overturned, then Lot's wife, looked back and became a pillar of salt. Radak interprets this to mean that Lot's wife stopped and looked and this delay lead to her demise. She was trapped in the

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[81] Ibid. p. 325
[82] Bloch& Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude,* p. 134.
[83] Oppenheimer, Yochai. "Hi Ta`atsor Et Ha-`Olam Pit'om'; Lyrikah U-Fo'etikiah Be-Shirat Dahlya Rabikovitz." *Ha-Zekhut Ha-Gedolah Lomar Lo: Shirah Politit Be-Yisra'el,* p.325.
[84] Fox, Everett. *The Schocken Bible.* New York: Schocken, 1997. Print

storm of brimstone, which according to Radak is a synonym for salt.[85] She was caught because she remained at the scene. This theme of being frozen in place, caught up in the events and unable to leave, is another aspect of the trauma also consistent with Ilana Szobel's idea of " forever beholden," never able to extricate oneself from the traumatic loss of the parent.

The poem " *Ha'marioneta"* "The Marionette[86]", published ten years after " *Bubah Metukenet"* also contains a similar theme of fragility. In this poem Ravikovitch imagines that Donna Elvira, the powerful Contessa of Seville, waited on hand and foot by "three hundred maidservants," would end up as " a porcelain marionette/ or a waxen doll."

Later in the paper there will be a full translation of Ravikovitch's short story " Winnie Mandela's Soccer Team" which is a fictional account of a mother's loss of a custody hearing. The mother feels powerless and ill equipped to deal with the judge and the bureaucratic system and then fantasizes about being Winnie Mandela, a powerful woman with protection from a gang of young men. In contrast, in the poem " The Marionette" a powerful woman, Donna Elvira, is transformed into a fragile doll. Ravikovitch portrays Donna Elvira as a strong woman who is not capable of sustaining her strength. It is as if the woman in the courtroom is the weak descendant of the vibrant Donna Elvira. . *Donna Elvira, Contessa et cetera, was gathered unto her people./ She left two sons and a daughter/ to a gloomy future./ In the twentieth century, on a precious gray dawn,/ how fortunate to be a marionette./ This woman is not responsible for her actions,/*

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[85] Based on Deuteronomy 29:22
[86] Ibid. 138-139.

the judges opine./ Her fragile heart is gray as the dawn,/ her body hangs by a thread. Ravikovitch's family also consisted of two sons, the twins, and a daughter, herself. Donna Elvira, as a fragile doll, bears similarities to the woman in the custody hearing, who is also closest to Ravikovitch's own voice and circumstances. The mother (Ramah) is overcome with depression and futility symbolized by the gray light that infuses the courtroom., "The window was gray. The room was gray and the light was gray. 'You failed in your responsibilities as a mother,' the judge said to Ramah without looking in her direction."

In addition, Donna Elvira is a reference to the character in Mozart's *Don Giovanni,*[87] a character who was seduced and betrayed. *Don Giovanni* is the story of a statue of a man, the Commandant, coming to life and exacting revenge on Don Giovanni, his murderer. Donna Elvira is one of the women seeking justice for the murdered man. Don Giovanni also betrayed her but for Donna Elvira " in spite of wrongs she herself has endured, she cannot hate Don Giovanni or efface his image from her heart."[88] There may have been personal losses or betrayals in her love life inspiring this poem, but at the very least the disappearance and death of her father would have been experienced by a young child as a betrayal and abandonment. In the oedipal phase, around the age of five, when a little girl especially longs for her father's love and affection the disappearance could also be interpreted as a complete rejection. Ravikovitch discussed her keen sensitivity to loss in her interview with Eilat Negev:

> When I experience loss, such as the ending of love or the loss of a child, I sink into depression. It is also a professional illness, because a writer, who looks into

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[87] Ibid. p. 138.

[88] Wagner, Paul. © 2005-11 musicwithease.com. All Rights Reservedhttp://www.musicwithease.com/don-giovanni-synopsis.html

> himself and is activated by his unconscious, lives at high risk. All my depressions are reactionary, although a stronger person would react less devastatingly. When I am depressed, I am less than a fallen leaf.[89]

In " The Marionette" Ravikovitch takes these many strands and weaves them into a poem that is simultaneously, evocative of powerful and contradictory emotions of revenge, passivity, strength, power, fragility, love and hate. In Mozart's *Don Giovanni* the statue of stone comes to life to exact revenge. In contrast in " The Marionette" Donna Elvira has a premonition that she will end up frozen and ineffectual. *But only when she beheld that handkerchief of fine silk/ did she know her end:/ to be a porcelain marionette/ or a waxen doll.* The silk of the handkerchief foreshadowed the silk threads that would fence her in. But the paradox is that Ravikovitch also longs to be the marionette so as not to experience the painful feelings of hurt and depression. The poem begins: To be a marionette./ In this precious gray predawn light/ to sweep under the new day,/ diving down/ through the undercurrents./ To be a marionette,/ a pale slender doll of porcelain/ hanging by a thread./ To be a marionette./ And the threads that wreathe my life/ are genuine silk./ A marionette / also has her reality./ She has her memories. "The woman's fragile heart is as gray as the dawn,/ her body hangs by thread." Better to be an actual marionette, made of porcelain or of wax than an actual living human being who must endure sadness, and the gray, darkened mood of depression, and loss. After all a marionette has memories too and genuine silk threads, a form of cocoon that wraps and protects. A living human has no such defenses. In the next poem, " The Dress," Dahlia Ravikovitch evokes feelings of painful intensity and passion that are difficult to bear. In a

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[89] Negev, Eilat. *Close Encounters with Twenty Israeli Writers.* 88-89.

way the state of burning is the opposite extreme from the deadened state of the fragile doll.

"The Dress" is said to be Ravikovitch's favorite poem. This poem is dedicated to her second husband , Yitzhak Livni, who remained a life long friend after their brief marriage ended. This poem is based on the myth of Medea and Jason. Jason deserted Medea to marry Glauce, the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth. Medea exacted revenge by sending the bride a wedding gift, a magnificent golden robe and crown, infiltrated with a poison that burned the princess to death, along with her father the king who embraced his dying daughter. The poem alludes to this myth, but the connection to the mythical story is not altogether clear.

The poem is a conversation between two women. They are discussing a situation of danger: " You know she said , they made you a dress of fire./ Remember how Jason's wife burned in her dress? It was Medea, she said, Medea did that to her. You've got to be careful, she said, / they made you a dress that glows like an ember,/ that burns like coals of a fire." This beginning bears a resemblance to " The Love of an Orange." The woman is being warned that the man's gaze, in the case of the orange, or the dress of fire, in this poem, are dangerous and must be avoided. The woman is warned again about the danger. " Are you going to wear it, she said, don't wear it./ It's not the wind whistling,/ it's the poison seething....Remember, I told her, that time when I was six?/ They shampooed my hair and I went out into the street./ The scent of shampoo trailed after me like a cloud./ Then the wind and the rain made me ill./ I didn't know yet how to read Greek tragedies,/ but that fragrance filled the air and I was very ill./Now I can tell that perfume was unnatural./ What will become of you, she said/ they made you a burning dress./ They

made me a burning dress, I said. I know./ So why are you standing there, she said, you ought to beware./ Don't you know what that means, a burning dress?/ I know , I said, but not to beware./ The scent of that perfume confuses me./ I said to her: no one has to agree with me, / I don't put my trust in Greek tragedy./ But the dress , she said, the dress is on fire./ What are you saying , I shouted, what are you saying?/ I'm not wearing a dress at all, can't you see/ what's burning is me.

This powerful and mysterious poem contains many of the important elements in Ravikovitch's life story and interests. For the sake of the analysis of this poem I am making the assumption, that Ravikovitch's voice is heard most strongly in the women who is wearing the burning dress. Like in the poem, *Diyukan Yehudi,,* there is a surprise ending that requires an entire re- reading of the poem. At the end of this poem we learn that the burning dress is only an illusion, and Ravikovitch herself is the one burning. Here Ravikovich may be taking responsibility for burning, rather than attributing her state of burning to someone or something else. This all consuming passion and destructive force is described in other poems as well. Most notably in " The Love of An Orange" where the orange is consumed by the man, and she as the orange submits to and embraces being eaten. Here Ravikovitch is burning. Is she burning with passion, or rage, or humiliation, or a mixture of all these emotions? There is another voice in the poem, another woman. Who is this woman? Is she a friend, or is she another side of Ravikovitch, the calmer, more mature voice that tries to help her manage her burning intensity. For the sake of the analysis, I will call the other voice, her friend. Once again like in " The Love of An Orange" the friend resembles the trees, or Job's comforters, as they try to reason with the passionate orange. Here the friend says, " So why are you standing there, she said, you

ought to beware." Ravikovitch cannot beware. She has lost the ability to protect herself and this is related to the death of her father. "On the road there stands a man" and she must go down and stand in that place. She cannot avoid the pain and the passion. She is forever stuck in that place of pain, guilt, anger, sadness and longing. Ilana Sobel describes how Ravikovitch's speaker is imprisoned in her orphanhood.

> All of the poems and short stories dedicated to the traumatic experience of her father's death refer to the state of orphanhood as an essence and identity, and as a state of doom that destines the speaker to feelings of injustice, longing, need, deprivation and helplessness.[90]

Ravikovitch mentions Greek tragedies in this poem and the narrative setting is the story of Medea's burning dress. This story is about the intensity of love and revenge. Medea is herself a powerful and mystical figure in Greek mythology. She has powers of healing and magical abilities and insights that help Jason master impossible tasks. Once Medea has helped Jason obtain the golden fleece and achieve his goals, Jason leaves her for Glauce , the princess. If one imagines that Medea is Jason's mother, and she has helped him navigate the challenges of growing up, this would be a happy story. Jason would marry and Medea would give his bride a beautiful gown. But this is a Greek tragedy, and the unnatural perfume in the air signals that there will be a tragic problem. The unnatural problem is the enmeshment of the generations and the intense feelings of love, jealousy, desire, rage, and envy that lead to tragedy.

Ravikovitch related to these intense feelings. The death of Ravikovitch's father at a time in her life when she was vulnerable lead to feelings of confusion, guilt, and rage She needed to feel loved and accepted by her father and reassured that he would help her navigate through adolescence into adulthood, but this was not to be. She was left hanging

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[90] Szobel, Ilana. *Forever Beholden*: Nashim : 19, 2010 p. 236.

with intense feelings, confusion and secrets. In the Medea story the princess and her father die together as her father attempts to comfort her. Dahlia keeps her father alive in her poetry and in her imagination because the intensity of her feelings towards him never had the opportunity to cool down and mature. Dahlia's father's death and the secret of his death, was the " wind whistling, the poison seething," the loud background noise that Dahlia was always trying to shout above. Dahlia had difficulty sorting out the myriad of complicated and intense emotions that left her burning and her poem, " The Dress," captures this state.

Chapter Five

Motherhood

Dahlia's Relationship with Her Son, Ido

I always believed that a woman's role was to be a good mother and raise children, and that literary creation came from itself and is less important than femininity. Today it is obvious to me that both are important, but if I had to chose one of them, I have no doubt that I'd give up poetry and choose motherhood and love. Fifty years from now, I don't mind if I am remembered as a poet at all, I just wish that when my son reflects on his life, he'll feel that he had it good.[92] – Dahlia Ravikovitch

חמצן[93]

שממית על קיר ביתך, עדן,
אני רוצה להיות.
עלה שרך מן הצמחים שבעציץ.
פסת ניר, מפת שלחן מאפרה.
מחברת אקטואליה או ציור.
כל אלה מלוים אותנו יום
רואים אותך ונקלטים
בתוך מרחב שדה ראיתך.
אין צרך לחפש תגובה רגשית
אני רוצה להיות בסביבתך המוחשית
מנחת לא נראית
כלולה בסתמיות בתוך חלל
שבתוכו אתה שואף, נושף, שואף, נושף
חמצן.
אנינו מדברים על אהבה, עדו
אני רוצה להיות סיד הקירות
משקוף חלון או מגרת גרבים
בחדר הסופג את תהליך
חלוף החמרים שלך
שמונה שעות בכל לילה.

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[92] Negev, Eilat, *Close Encounters.* p.90.
[93] Rabikovitch, Dalia, *The Complete Poems So Far.* p. 313.

Oxygen[93]

A tiny lizard on the wall of your house, Ido,
that's what I want to be.
One frond of the fern in the planter,
a sheet of paper, a tablecloth, an ashtray,
a current events notebook, a drawing.
All these are your daily companions,
they see you and are absorbed
into your field of vision.
No need to look for an emotional response.
I just want to be in your physical vicinity,
set down, unseen.
With no purpose,
enclosed in a space
where you inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale
oxygen.
We're not talking about love, Ido.
I want to be the whitewash on the wall,
the window lintel, the sock drawer
in the room that soaks up the process
of your metabolism
eight hours every night.

Ravikovitch's personal life by all accounts was not easy. After her father's death she could not adapt to life on the kibbutz.

It was like living in the worst Gulag: hard labour, horrible treatment and terrible food. At age eight we already worked in the fields or cleaned our rooms, and I had aching hands, covered with a red rash. They despised intellectuals, even the teachers were considered inferior, because they did not do manual work. They humiliated and mocked everything that was good in me: being an excellent student and writing poetry.[94] – Dahlia Ravikovitch

At age thirteen her mother allowed Dahlia to leave the kibbutz and return to Tel Aviv. She lived with a series of foster families and felt abused, all the while staying in touch with her mother with weekly telephone calls.[95] She had two brief marriages before

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[93] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude.* p. 232.
[94] Negev, Eilat. *Close Encounters* p. 86.
[95] Ibid. p.87.

establishing a long term relationship with Haim Kalir. They lived together for thirteen years and their son Ido was born in 1978 when she was forty-two. Following the break-up of their relationship Dahlia lost custody of her son when Haim Kalir was awarded full custody by the district court judge in Tel Aviv.[96]

Dahlia was devastated when she lost custody of her son in 1989. Her connection with Ido remained the central bond in her life, and it occasioned the most tender poems in her oeuvre.[97]

The poem "Oxygen" and her statement about motherhood points to the tremendous importance and the depth of feeling she experienced as a mother. Eilat Negev reports that Ravikovitch, who had been prone to depression, had no episodes of depression during the eleven years she cared for Ido, before custody was awarded to his father. Although a fact like this is difficult to confirm it does suggest that being a mother fulfilled a very important function for Ravikovitch and provided her with great happiness and satisfaction.

The poem " Oxygen" has some resemblance to " The Love of An Orange." Ravikovitch makes an interesting comment in the midst of the poem, " We're not talking about love , Ido." in contrast to "An orange did love / The man who ate it." Ravikovitch is still dealing with intense feelings of closeness and merger but they take a different form in her parental role. Here she is intensely preoccupied with Ido and only wants to be near him. She doesn't want to intrude, interfere or even interact with him but she wants to be close to him and in his presence. After Ido was born Ravikovitch describes her first reactions to him.

I don't remember how many minutes passed until a diapered infant was placed on

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[96] Ibid. p. 88.
[97] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude.*. p.17

> my bed next to my head and I only hoped that someone would take him from me quickly, because I was totally helpless and an infant must not be left for a second in the responsibility of a helpless adult. I was not curious to know what the boy looked like, because I had complete trust in him. A week later I received the birth certificate. It said: 'Male child born weighing 3.300 kilograms.' I never had a wish in my life that was realized in full and in a form that is absolutely the epitome of beauty (and I do not mean the beauty of the boy, about which there is also nothing to complain about) like that child, whose eyes were brown and whose head was covered with fairly long hair ...
> And I - I had no further wishes for him. I did not hope that he would grow up and discover a cure for cancer or circle the world in a hot-air balloon or be a gifted child or the director general of the National Lottery, which is a far less prestigious job than the aforementioned ones, but nevertheless pays pretty well. I wanted that in all the days of his life to come, he would know satisfying contentment so that I would be pleased that he had been born, and that I would be a sufficiently good mother to contribute my share to that contentment, and henceforth begins a story which is already not mine and I have no right to tell it, and I trust my son to have enough words to tell his story.[98]

This description of " a wish fully realized" is captured in the blissful description of her enchantment with him, although in the interview she speaks more of allowing him independence and freedom to be his own person, while in the poem she shares her intense longing to remain close to him in a non- intrusive but ever present way. She doesn't want to watch him or see what he is doing, but she wants to be physically merged with his environment. The most dramatic phrase, *shebetocho, ata, shoeif, nosheif, shoeif, nosheif/ hamtsan* (enclosed in a space/ where you inhale, exhale, inhale,exhale/oxygen.) has the reader breathing along with Ravikovitch and Ido, letting us experience for ourselves the sense of protective merger that Ravikovitch is describing. She wants to be "" the whitewash on the wall, the window lintel, the sock drawer/ in the room that soaks up the process/ of your metabolism/ eight hours every night." This is very close to merger but different because she remains on the outside. She becomes part of the room

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[98] http://zuzzazzonia.blogspot.com/search?q=Ravikovitch&updated-max=2009-04-15T01%3A40%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=20

that contains her sleeping son Ido. This is different from " Becoming one with his skin/ Becoming one with his flesh," in 'The Love of an Orange,' which has a sexual connotation.

Ravikovitch wrote in a humorous manner about the joys and difficulties of being a mother in a children's book of poetry titled *Emah Mvulbelet*, "A Confused Mother[99]." This collection was published in 1981 before she lost custody of her son Ido. In this funny and confessional poem, Ravikovitch describes how Ido's confused mother tries to do the right thing but often becomes confused and distracted. This poem isn't necessarily autobiographical but she uses her son's name, Ido.

A Confused Mother[100]

Little Ido
Has a confused mother
Instead of opening windows
She opens the door.
You must place in the soup
A few bones and a few vegetables
And heat it with a high heat
this is the way soup is now prepared.
But the absent minded mother
Instead of pepper she took paprika
Instead of a carrot – a clove of garlic,
Skin of an orange instead of zucchini
Mixed, mashed, mushed
Until a kind of porridge emerged.
And little Ido cried:
He didn't want this kind of soup.

Little Ido
has a confused mother
When she wants to sneeze
She coughs.
A baby occasionally likes
to lie in the warm waters.

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[100] my translation

Within a bathtub, on his back
A baby really likes to lie down.
But the absent –minded mother
Went and placed the boy
Within a dry and empty bathtub
And little Ido cried:
He doesn't like a bathtub like this.

Little Ido has a confused mother
She calls Mr. Politel
Mr. Elifelet.
A baby likes to sleep in the playpen
With his body wrapped in a diaper
A clean diaper is very desirable
that is baby clothing,
but the confused mother
doesn't understand or ask questions
why is the baby so delicate
Within the playpen he cannot rest
And little Ido is sad:
He doesn't like a wet diaper.
Little Ido
has a confused mother
but she tries hard
and makes efforts
to be a little less
confused.

Another poem in the same volume is *benenu.*

Just Between Us

Just barely approached
Just barely touched
And my Ido
Is bursting with laughter
That a grown up woman
Really is besides herself
Really going crazy with happiness
Over a baby.[101]

Here in this playful and delightful poem, Ravikovitch is imagining that Ido's spontaneous, bubbling and joyful expression of happiness and laughter has an ironic

[101] My translation with the aide of Dr. Stanley Nash

quality and Ido is laughing at her for being so taken with him. There is a role reversal between the child and the adult. The child is "bursting with laughter," about the mother's overexcited state. However, it would be a mistake to over emphasize the problematic aspects as most of Ravikovitch's poetry concerning her relationship with Ido express love, awe, maternal concern and delight. In "Ido Awakes"[102] *Sweet child,/whenever the spirit moves him/he smashes a pan or a spoon./ My love in the morning/ my love in the evening,/ my love all the livelong day. (March 1979)* Or " Little Childs Head."[103] *Things like that don't vex me anymore,/ not the ways of wickedness nor the heart's folly,/ nor the prevailing blend/ that has a bit of both./ The coarse ripples on the water grow calm/ No wind stirs the swamp reeds./ A little child's head rests here on the pillow./ Deep in concentration, I see him./ What passes between us, head to head,/ before his eyelids close,/ in the light of his lovely face, in the glance of an eye, I dare not take upon my tongue.*

When she lost custody of Ido her depression increased and her sense of anger and outrage toward the judge who ruled against her found expression in a work of fiction heavily influenced by her experiences with the judicial system in the family court. This short story was translated with the aide of Dr. Stanley Nash.

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[102] Bloch & Kronfeld p. 167.
[103] Ibid. p. 167-168.

Winnie Mandela's Soccer Team

"I request, from my lord, that we forgo lawyers", said Ramah, using language that she thought that the judge would like, " The matter before us is human and not legal."

His Honorable Yehudah Chai Poraz said, "The case is legal and not human, the lawyers will participate in the deliberations."

Is it that I spoke in a weak voice or the judge is hard of hearing? Ramah asked herself.

Doctor Yehudah Litman, older than Ramah by a generation, with a wide body and face, stood on the other side of the judge's elevated desk. By his side, stood his lawyer, as if he was ready at a moment's notice to support him bodily. Curly, gray, thin hair was combed over the scalp of the lawyer from right to left, half covering his bald spot.

Doctor Litman was pale, and his facial expression was tormented. Out of respect for the court trial he had trimmed his hair too much, and his short haircut emphasized his heavy jowls. He wore a dark suit that had fallen out of fashion. Ramah smiled inwardly for a moment. For years, she had asked him to buy new clothing, but to talk to him was like talking to the wall. Dr. Litman, the respected Dr. Litman, Ramah repeated mindlessly and then thought to herself , a mensch you'll never be.

Judge Poraz leafed quietly through the file of documents that was open before him, in spite of the fact that he had studied them thoroughly the night before. The details of the case were clear to him, and were especially sweet to his palate like a dish with a peppery sauce. Judge Poraz had wavy grey hair, square rimmed glasses, and a reddish face. Through his glasses his eyes appeared without a defined color, as if they had been born out of the frame. His reputation preceded him as an experienced and level-headed judge. He not only didn't listen to Ramah, he did not even raise his eyes to look at her.

Dr. Littman's attorney of the pasted down curl, delivered to Ramah, quick, stealthy glances. A mixture of disparagement and worry were intermingled within him. If the medical documents that were found in the file were reliable, it's impossible to know what Ramah was capable of. Nevertheless, his arrogant pride trumped his concern , and he was certain that the judicial ruling he wanted was in the bag. Like Dr. Litman, his

attorney was a top quality professional. He had no doubt that Nitzah would remain in her father's custody.

Ramah was careful, in the morning, to dress in a manner that would not emphasize her youthful age. She removed her rings and retained only her thin wedding band. Out of her dresses she chose a polka dot dress with a wide collar, and she was careful not to have a speck of the color red, as if she was going to meet a bull in the bullfighting ring. But her hair remained loose, curly and in a youthful style so that her face would not look severe and unattractive. Ramah knew that, heaven forbid, the judge should not think that she was a flirtatious women, but he must also not be repelled by her appearance. Ramah's attorney requested to nullify the damaging psychological assessment about the personality of his client.

"Dr. Hirsch presented two contradictory opinions" , said Ramah's attorney, " I request to disqualify her and her status as an expert."

"I accept the expert testimony" asserted Judge Poraz.

"My lord, pay attention to the deposition, of the neighbor Yehoshuah Machnes, on the conduct of Dr. Littman." added Ramah's attorney.

" In my opinion hearsay is not taken into consideration," said Judge Poraz. "The window was gray. The room was gray and the light was gray."

" You failed in your responsibilities as a mother," the judge said to Ramah without looking in her direction. " Your responsibility was to be concerned about the individuation and separation between yourself and your daughter, the minor. You are endangering her development."

" I wasn't confident in myself." said Ramah, " Because of this I sent the girl to a psychologist at age seven."

"The age of seven is too late." said Judge Poraz " You should have begun at age three."

" I was always by myself in the house with Nitzah, therefore we became so very attached to each other. My lord, you must remember that Dr. Littman spent time abroad six months of the year. Also in the period that he was in Israel he did not get close to Nitzah."

Doctor Littman cast a side glance at his attorney of the greasy curls, but this was a person who had no need of encouragement..

" The mother caused damage to her daughter and prevented her from forming social connections with children her age. Ramah Littman is a danger to her daughter, especially now, when she has abandoned the home and become attached to a dubious man."

" I went to visit Nitzah every day," said Ramah, " But Yehudah would always come at the same time and would stir up nasty scandals in the presence of the girl. Afterward he forbade me from coming."

" The documents before me do not show you in a favorable light" said the judge Poraz to Ramah.

Ramah's lawyer waited for a chance to break into the conversation, but Ramah did not relent. She did not have a choice, she was obligated as a loving mother to demean herself if this would help her get Nitzah back.

" In Paris, I was acquainted with a professor of education who was a student of Piaget," she showed off, " He said to me that people like me have an excellent understanding of children." " Piaget?" the judge tried to remember, " He wrote about the education of girls in equatorial Africa?"

The book 'The Children of Equatorial Africa' had been published in Hebrew a short time before. Several paragraphs of criticism were written about it in the book review section of the newspaper. Ramah Littman was not of the status to explain to the judge that Piaget is an expert on child development and not on Africa .

Nitzah's father continued to stand with obvious tension, and his jaw clenched, because he was enduring a difficult period in his life ; but concerning the legal battle his situation was improving from moment to moment.

"If he were to lift his eyes from the papers and look at us, he would see who here is the true parent." thought Ramah with bitterness.

" My lord is requested to forbid Nitzah from leaving Israel." said the attorney for Ramah.

" I request to cancel the prohibition during Passover vacation. I want Nitzah to travel with her father during vacations." Ramah interrupted.

Her lawyer looked at her with disappointment. It's not enough that he has a hostile judge, in addition his client is a crazy person.

" Let them travel to Eilat or to Ein Gedi," said the attorney.

" I request that they travel outside Israel." repeated Ramah.

Judge Poraz, lifted his eyes and saw Ramah as if only at that moment had she appeared in front of him.

" Nitzah Littman will remain in her father's custody," the judge decided the deliberation.

"The mother has not proven she has the capability to take care of her, and has not facilitated the separation and individuation of the girl. Visitation rights of the mother will be established by the social welfare clerk. The additional court hearing will be postponed for half a year.

When they went out from the hall of justice, Dr. Yehuda Littman and Ramah spoke to each other for the first time in months. Dr. Littman gave Ramah a lift in his car to meet Nitzah. Nitzah returned from school and she was tense and confused. She had grown taller in the two months that Ramah had not seen her. Ramah remained in the house until the evening, and together the two of them watched the television programs for children and a horror movie video that Nitzah brought from the library. After dinner Ramah left the house. She felt that she had lost her daughter.

Winnie Mandela lived without her husband for twenty eight years. Around her assembled a group of black youths that watched over her and served her. They also murdered for her. Winnie Mandela was protected, in the hands of tough and brutal men who were prepared to give their lives for her.

" A year and a half ago my motherhood license was invalidated" Ramah said to her sister " I am not able to get over this."

" I know that Nitzah loves you. In this regard you can be completely at ease." said her sister.

" But I am continuously eaten up inside. It doesn't matter to me that she remains at Yehudah's if she prefers to stay with him now, but why was it necessary to disqualify me? I wouldn't have kidnapped her by force?"

" The relationship between you and Nitzah is a clear cut matter" said her sister.

The bodyguards of Winnie Mandela did not take their eyes off her, twenty four hours a day. Nelson Mandela was incarcerated in prison, but Winnie was not left helpless. The body guards of Winnie Mandela were extremely brutal, but they never slacked off in their devotion to Winnie Mandela. Winnie was judged, and sentenced to imprisonment on account of the actions of her body guards, but the sentence has not been carried out as yet. It is not easy to get at Winnie Mandela. She is a protected species.

Ramah is not able to succeed in falling asleep at night despite swallowing sleeping pills. She lies in the bed too exhausted to read, turns on the radio and turns it off if the songs played at night don't appeal to her. She turns over on her stomach, clings to the mattress, and unpleasant sharp pains, wrack her legs. She falls asleep only when the dawn breaks. After she falls asleep, she sleeps until the afternoon and she doesn't hurry to get up from the bed. She has no routine order to the day and she does not work. Over and over she tidies her apartment, stretches and squeezes together the folds of the curtain, and straightens the chairs. She especially decorates Nitzah's room, hangs pictures and cleans the writing table and bookshelf with a damp rag. When Nitzah sleeps at her place she falls asleep easier, but Nitzah prefers to sleep in her permanent room in the apartment of Dr. Littman.

Twice a week Nitzah comes to lunch at Ramah's. On those days Ramah gets up earlier and goes out to buy fresh potatoes and trout that Nitzah likes fried in butter and garlic. Nitzah rings the bell of the intercom and Ramah hurries to the door to turn on the light. On the way she hurriedly takes off the cooking apron and she drops it on any convenient piece of furniture she passes on her way to the door. They kiss each other warmly while still in the stairway at the entrance to the house. Nitzah throws her school bag on the easy chair and hugs Ramah again.

"Mother, I love you so much, I think about you all day long," said Nitzah.

"Mother you are something extraordinary" said Nitzah. But after lunch, she becomes restless, and she wants to return home to her father's house.

Occasionally, Ramah goes along with her and tolerates a long visit in the home of Dr. Littman. Nitzah prepares homework or paints with water colors.

"Stay longer," begs Nitzah , " Father comes home late and I am always alone." The medical clinic of Dr. Littman is teeming with sick people whom he takes care of until late in the evening. Dr. Littman is a specialist in the care of juvenile diabetes.

Nitzah occasionally invites friends over, but frequently she remains by herself, eating alternately, yogurt and chocolate. It is not good for Ramah to be in the home of Dr. Littman. She sits on the sofa like an unwanted guest and reads the newspaper.

" I want to buy you a mini-skirt," says Ramah to Nitzah, " A mini will look good on you." but Nitzah prefers pants. Ramah buys Nitzah necklaces and rings, but Nitzah doesn't wear jewelry. Ramah thinks: If they're in the house, perhaps suddenly she'll discover them and she will want to wear them.

"At least wear a watch," requests Ramah, " Without a watch you don't know what time your class will end."

" My mother," laughs Nitzah " You really have an uncontrollable urge to buy things."

Ramah calls Nitzah every day at the time she is supposed to return from school. If the phone rings and is not answered Ramah becomes anxious. I've lost my little girl, thinks Ramah.

Ramah uses beautiful fruit to decorate the house. Oranges were more beautiful to her eyes than flowers. The flowerpots in her house were sad looking, possibly from excessive watering, or perhaps from a lack of sunlight. The shutters in her home are nearly always closed. Ramah closes up her apartment from all sides and waits. For what does she wait? For Nitzah and for better times.

" Mommy, make me food like only you know how to," Nitzah says in an ingratiating manner, and Ramah flips the trout in the frying pan. Once the phone rang and the fish burned. How she hated herself, because with a good mom the food never burns. Does Winnie Mandela cook for her children, or does she have a servant who does the housework? If she cooks, she certainly prepares spicy African food and not trout.

Anyway, the children of Winnie are already grown and perhaps have left home. Does Winnie cook for her group of body guards, or do they send her to rest and cook for themselves? Who prepares the coffee in the home of Winnie Mandela? Perhaps she prefers alcoholic drinks for herself and her guests? Which hard liquors are there anyway in Africa? Not Ouzo, not Tequila, Slivovitz. Ramah didn't know what drinks the blacks drank in South Africa.

" On Friday I'll stay here with you to sleep," said Nitzah, but when Friday comes she changes her mind and asks her father to come and get her. Doctor Littman arrives and does not delay for a moment; his car is parked in a bad spot.

Winnie Mandela is an ageless woman. Her face peers at Ramah from pictures in the newspaper, yes, beautiful and full of vitality. She is always well groomed. Ramah wouldn't want Winnie to be her sister or her mother. She herself wanted to be Winnie Mandela. Why do they call the group of youth that watch over Winnie a soccer team? Perhaps they play soccer? But they also play other games, they dedicate their lives to Winnie, and God knows with what Winnie repays them. Not sex. The group of Winnie Mandela does not engage in sex, except by force. That is their diversion. They bask in the light of Winnie's face and in her secret power that only their strong arms are able to implement.

Ramah spends time in her bed for the majority of the day, at a loss. She has no strength. In the summer she will turn thirty and she feels like a seventy-year-old woman.[104]

Thou hast no age or youth
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both

Like this, Shakespeare, wrote about Ramah. She doesn't read, but only leafs through in her memory phrases and sentences that she read in the past.

After a fitful daytime sleep Ramah awakens and she had no respite from a nightmare she dreamt. She dreamed that she resided in a residence for the emotionally disturbed on Montefiore Street in Tel Aviv and Dr. Littman took her apartment. She dreamed that she called, from a public telephone, the medical clinic of Dr. Littman and

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[104] Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah was like a seventy year old man, BT Berkhot 27b-28a.

requested that he return her apartment. Yehuda said, " I don't have time to talk now, we'll talk a different time" and hung up.

Ramah is not able to get up from her bed because of the overpowering rage. She daydreams that Dr. Littman would be injured in a traffic accident, he would break his neck and remain paralyzed and then Nitzah would return to her. She did not want Dr. Littman to die so that Nitzah would not become an orphan.

But the one who eats at her like acid, even though he never appears in her nightmares, is the judge, Judah Hai Poraz. She sees him sitting forever on the elevated judge's chair, his head sunken in the papers in front of him, and he is not looking at her but announcing, as if to empty space, in the grey room, that Nitzah will be transferred to the custody of her father and the visitation rights of Ramah will be established by the welfare clerk. A judge with white hair who decrees the fate of children and reads books about equatorial Africa. If the judge had taken Winnie Mandela's children, the youths from the soccer team would pour acid on his face. Injuring him and disappearing. The authorities would never find any evidence linking them to the act of revenge. The blind judge would never be able to identify them.

Ramah and Nitzah would go out on a stroll, wrapped in the warmth of the sun. Nitzah would go skipping on the wide pavement and Ramah would widen her stride so as not to straggle behind her. As they are walking, a blind and wicked person would come their way by chance, groping his way with the aid of a cane. Ramah and Nitzah would bypass Judge Poraz hurriedly and skip onward with an easy and happy step.

In this fictional story Ravikovitch imagines the satisfaction of revenge and the idealized relationship that the mother could reestablish with her child once the father and judge were out of the picture.

Mother's in Ravikovitch's Poetry

The relationship of mother's and children was always important to Ravikovitch. Her interest in particular mother's and their stories is present in her poetic works. She

wrote about herself as a mother, her own mother, her grandmother, a mother of a soldier who died in battle, a mother whose baby died in utero as a result of a military action, and Rachel the matriarch, to name only a portion of the mother's she was interested in and wrote about.

Before Ravikovitch became a mother herself she wrote *Kimo Rachel* (Like Rachel). In a footnote to Bloch and Kronfeld's translation of this poem[105] they note that " Ravikovitch invokes here poems about the biblical Rachel by precursor poets Rachel Marpurgo (1790-1871) and Rachel [Bluvstein] (1890-1931)." In this poem Ravikovitch is less interested in the relationship between mother and child and is more concerned about Rachel's experience of death. Ravikovitch may also be taking her place among the great modern Hebrew women poets by writing about Rachel the matriarch.

In Ravikovitch's interpretation of Rachel's death, Rachel is also a woman, like the orange, who was consumed by a man. *Kamah kasheh/ Ahavat Yaakov achlah bah/ b'chol peh.* " How grueling./ Jacob's love ate away at her/ with a greedy mouth.[106] In this poem Rachel is ready to break free from the constraints of her body, and the demands of life. " To die like Rachel/ when the soul shudders like a bird, / wants to break free./ ... All the days of her life/ turn head over heels inside her/ like a baby that wants to be born." Wendy Zierler in discussing Rachel Morpurgo remarks " she adopts the voice of Rachel as a source of personal identification and inspiration."[107] Ravikovitch is using the persona of Rachel the matriarch in a similar fashion.

Over fifteen years later, when Ravikovitch had become a mother, and lost custody of her son, she wrote a poem for another Rachel, Rachel Melamed- Eitan, *Aval Hayah Lah Ben,* " But She had a Son." In this poem Ravikovitch identifies with the mother who refuses to adjust, accept and move on from the death of her son in battle. .." A kindly woman, conciliatory,/ She had a son,/ a fallen soldier..../A hot lunch is always ready on the table./ All this in an absolute refusal/ to adjust./ In her own way, as if unperturbed,/ she can stop the world short./ It's hard to know what she might do. /Without putting it into words,/ she stakes her claim./ Didn't they take away her son?/ No way will she see

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[105] Bloch & Kornfeld p. 156.
[106] Ibid. p. 156.
[107] Zierler, Wendy, *And Rachel Stole The Idols.* p. 75.

any justice at all/ in that taking. / And who would dare tell her:/ Come wash your face, it's time,/be strong./ whatever happened, happened. / She sets out on an arduous journey,/ a circular journey, to and fro./ With her own hands she heaps coals of fire beneath her,/ deliberately strews the embers over her body./ She is Rachel. Which Rachel?/ The one who had a son./ And she tells him night and day,/summer and winter, feast day and holiday:/ I am Rachel your mother/ of clear mind and free will,/ I will not be comforted."[108]

In this poem Ravikovitch invokes the image of Rachel from Jeremiah 31:15, " Rachel, weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not." We see her great admiration for Rachel – Melamed Eitan in her refusal to accept the loss of her son as the way of the world and her insistent on remaining in a continual state of outrage against the injustice of his death. Ravikovitch has used her own suffering to empathize with and support a mother who with "clear mind and free will" will not be comforted. This mother is in a position of strength and clarity which parallels Ravikovitch's own emergence as a strong and forceful voice for human rights and a spokesperson for mothers and children. The coals of fire and embers are reminiscent of Ravikovitch's burning skin, signifying her identification with this mother who refuses to allow herself to be soothed and comforted and accentuates her own pain as a way to hold on to her son's memory and her struggles in his name.

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[108] Bloch & Kronfeld. p. 212-213.

Chapter 6

Ravikovitch as a Poet - Prophet

In this final chapter, I will discuss Ravikovitch's position as a poet - prophet and a moral authority in Israeli society, beginning with a comparative analysis of Dahlia Ravikovtich's poem, "Hovering at a Low Altitude," and concluding with an analysis of " A Jewish Portrait," and Hamutal Tsamir's concept of the poet/prophet.

> *Common symptoms of Depersonalization Disorder[109] are, "continuous or recurring feelings that you're an outside observer of your thoughts, your body or parts of your body, numbing of your senses or responses to the world around you, feeling like you are living in a dream or a movie, the sensation that you aren't in control of your actions, feeling emotionally disconnected from people you care about, and feeling like you are observing yourself from above, as if you were floating in air."*

Dahlia Ravikovitch's poem *Hovering at Low Altitude* is an enigmatic story about a young shepherd girl on a desolate mountainscape quietly tending her flock while a mysterious, omniscient narrator observes the scene from the surreal position of hovering above the landscape. The poem contains a striking refrain *ani lo kan, I am not here.* This paradoxical statement echoes through out the poem. What does it mean to be present and absent simultaneously? How can one witness and feel but also be absent and unmoved?

The mysterious and haunting quality of this poem has stimulated much speculation and analysis. The poem has been analyzed by Barbara Mann, Nili R. Scharf Gold, and Chana Kronfeld.

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http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depersonalization/DS01149/DSECTION=symptoms

The three analyses of the poem are each compelling in their own way. In addition to the literary aspects of the analyses, Mann places the poem in a historical context and describes the evolution of political poetry, Gold represents a psychological perspective, and Kronfeld uses a political lens. Mann's approach is comprehensive and brings evidence to support a balanced understanding of the poem without making definitive assumptions about Ravikovitch's motivations.

Barbara Mann quotes Dahlia Ravikovitch from an interview with *Ma'ariv* in 1991, " I am a witness to things that I haven't the ability to change, and I hope that this doesn't dull my revulsion." Mann considers "the problem of witnessing" as the essence of this poem. The narrator remains aloof and separate but also empathizes with the vulnerability of the young girl.

According to Mann, this is a transitional poem for Ravikovitch. The poem is not explicitly about war and in her poetry collection *True Love*[110], it is not placed with other poems that relate directly to war, however it does express moral concerns. At times, the narrator expresses an attitude of moral indifference to what she is witnessing: *devarim ger'uim me'elleh ra'iti b'chayai, mahshevotai riffeduni birefedah shel moch, efshar l'histalek u l'dabber al lev atzmi : ani davar lo ra'iti.* (I've seen worse things in my life, my thoughts are padded with cotton quilting, I can get away and say to myself: I haven't seen a thing.) Mann points out that by the end of the poem the narrator's disavowal of concern for what has occurred is not completely convincing. For example, the use of the word *efshar,* where the narrator considers the possibility of escaping, suggests a hesitancy

[110]Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at a Low Altitude.* p.215.

to leave the scene of the attack, and the vivid description of the shepherd girl's dry palate and bulging eyes bring into question the supposed detachment of the narrator.

This poem suggests that Ravikovitch is awakening from a period of personal detachment. In the poem, *The Window,* opening the section in *True Love,* which also contains *Hovering at Low Altitude,* the narrator describes years of passive observation from her window. Now the narrator has emerged from a withdrawn state and a period of inaction and is in an intermediate state of hovering; there but not there, witnessing and remembering but also not fully present and also trying to forget.

Mann places Ravikovitch within the context of the history of Israeli poetry and society. Leah Goldberg, a poet and important literary figure admired by Ravikovitch, believed that poetry was meant to celebrate life, love and nature rather than promote heroic, political agendas. In the sixties and seventies Ravikovitch and many Israeli poets, such as Yehudah Amichai and Natan Zach turned inward and gave voice to more personal and individualistic ideas and yearnings. Mann quotes Ravikovitch's statement when she published her first collection of poetry in 1959 " she (Ravikovitch) claimed that as a poet she was not preoccupied by the 'problems of the generation: the establishment of Israel, the ingathering of the exiles, making the desert bloom, even the atom bomb.'"[111] But Mann makes the point that both Goldberg's nature poetry with its subtle political and collectivist messages and the highly personal and individualistic poetry of Ravikovitch respond to and critique larger societal trends.

In *Hovering at Low Altitude* the tension between the narrators desire to distance herself from this unpleasant and disturbing scenario, while at the same time exhibiting a

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[111]Ibid p.215.

preoccupation with and closeness to the victim, illustrates a complex amalgam. Mann describes Ravikovitch as delivering a prophetic message.[112]

> Thus, a poem that ostensibly depicts an individual's flight from involvement in the world -'I am not here' – reverberates with the words of the prophets, who, one might say, invented the problem of personal responsibility toward the nation.[113]

Ravikovitch, in this poem, is moving from the personal to the collective in several different ways. There is a personal moral dilemma that the narrator grapples with and by analogy she challenges the community to examine its ethical stance toward innocent victims. The narrator is a person who has experienced or at least witnessed great suffering and notices that she has become inured to the suffering of others. She feels powerless to help protect the victim or to change the course of events. This private feeling of powerlessness and lack of responsibility can also be applied to the larger ethical issues that face Israeli society.

Nili R. Scharf Gold interprets the poem from a different perspective. According to her reading, the poem remains in the realm of the individual and is " first and foremost a personal, lyrical poem."

Gold understands the poem as primarily preoccupied with a traumatic experience from the narrators past. She believes that the hovering narrator has experienced a horrific trauma in childhood and is attempting to psychologically work out this painful memory by developing a coping mechanism of "hovering." This distancing maneuver allows her to confront traumatic memories from the past and survive psychologically. Gold partially bases this interpretation on a grammatical analysis that assigns significance to

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[112]Ibid p. 217.
[113]Ibid p. 217.

ambiguities in meaning. For example, there are two points in the poem where the distinctions between the hovering narrator and the shepherd girl blur, where the subject of the sentence can be read as either the woman or the child. Gold infers that there is a unity between the two protagonists based on this lack of clarity. Gold points out the lack of quotation marks around:

She does not ask, from whence cometh my help.

This omission of quotation marks, (around from whence cometh my help) allows the reader to interpret the subject of *ezri* (my help) as the adult observer [She (the girl) does not ask, from whence cometh my (the narrator's) help.] As Gold describes[114],

> For that fleeting moment in the poem, the adult who is recounting the story and the helpless girl become one and the same...the narrator identifies increasingly with the little girl, and the text intimates that it is a reworked reconstruction by an adult of her own childhood experience. As the adult looks back she may ask questions about the event, but the child undergoing the trauma does not.

Similarly, Ravikovitch's choice of line division and punctuation in the fourth stanza is ambiguous and can be translated with two contradictory meanings.

She seems distracted, but no, she is alert.[115]

or

Absent minded, seemingly/attentive, as a matter of fact[116]

Gold states, "Here, too, the punctuation plays a similar role, pointing to the adult's and the girl's duality and unity at once." The girl is unaware and distracted but the narrator representing the adult women, looking back on this trauma, is acutely aware.

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[114] Ibid p. 224.
[115]Ibid p. 237.
[116]Ibid p. 225.

Gold cautiously entertains commonalities between Ravikovitch's personal history and descriptions of the shepherd girl, such as the characteristics of her skin, and her sensitivity to cold, further reinforcing her hypothesis. She believes that a close reading of the text supports an interpretation that the women and the girl are one and the same person, separated in time and that the hovering woman is looking back on a traumatic episode from her past described allegorically in this poem.

Gold emphasizes, as opposed to Barbara Mann's focus on witnessing, that the main theme of the poem is abandonment.

> [117]"Abandonment and its terrifying consequences may be at the core of this poem, the emotional wound that motivates this text."

The bleak and desolate landscape and the shepherd girl's utter aloneness on the mountain illustrate this. She has no one to hear her screams or protect her; she is completely lost and abandoned.

Gold interprets this poem as an expression of and attempt to master Ravikovitch's traumatic past. She notes the repetition of the phrase, *bemakom she,* in the opening stanza (*in the place where the grass doesn't grow*) and in Ravikovitch's autobiographical poem "On the Road at Night" (*in the place where he stands, there is a fear of danger*).[118] Gold makes a connection between these two places and these two poems. The trauma associated with the death of Ravikovitch's father and her sense of profound loss and abandonment is revisited in this poem with a new attempt at mastery through "hovering."

> What is described in the poem as "Hovering at a Low Altitude," then, is a psychological defense mechanism that enables a survivor of trauma (or a victim in the midst of an assault) to distance herself from the pain. In this poem, it is as if

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[117] Ibid p 221.
[118]Ibid p.227.

> the speaker leaves her body and is able to look down upon it from above, at one of the worst moments of her life[119].'

Chana Kronfeld understands the defense of " hovering" in quite a different fashion. In fact, her entire understanding of the poem suggests that she sees Ravikovitch as purposefully crafting a poem with a strong political message.

Kronfeld interprets the hovering metaphor "in the slangy, escapist sense."[120] She draws a parallel to the slang word *lerahef*[121] "hovering" meaning a detached and "cool" state of mind. In Kronfeld's words,

> This disengaged mode of existence marks the attempt to dissociate oneself from the 'political situation' (*hamatsav*), its pressures and moral implications." Continuing with Kronfeld, "The poet's self critical account of her own-and her generation's-'disengaged' aestheticism resonates with the urgency of ethical condemnation and extends to the culture of political detachment and escapism.

The poem is a critique of "the Tel Aviv State of mind,"[122] as illustrated above with the verb *lerahef.*

Now that the collective Israeli conscience has veered off course the sensitivity of the poet, similar to the prophet in Mann's analysis, is especially needed to respond to human suffering and awaken an "alternative national consensus"[123] that can protest and oppose national policies, such as the decision to wage the Lebanon war. Even though Kronfeld is aware that *Hovering at Low Altitude* was written and submitted for publication before the Lebanon war broke out, Kronfeld has little doubt that the poem is about the rape and murder of a young Arab girl in the hills of Lebanon, and she offers

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[119] Ibid. p.226.
[120] Ibid. p.239.
[121] Ibid. p.237.
[122] Ibid. p.239.
[123] Ibid. p.232.

textual evidence to support this interpretation. She describes Ravikovitch's use of a string of feminine endings or feminine sounding endings to words as a way to signal a subtle, inevitable identification with the helpless female victim. The narrator may attempt to remain aloof but the language and structure of the poem pulls her and the reader closer to the victims perspective through the use of " a rich orchestration of nouns, adjectives, possessive pronouns, and third- person singular verbs – all with the feminine ending – ah."[124]

> [125] the pattern runs through the poem like a persistent wail that reaches its apex in the attack scene. (line 60) *rehifah begovah* (title), *ro'ah ketanah* (6), *hegihah*(8), *yomah, hayaldah* (10), *belo'a* (13), *hamah* (14), *semukah* (15), *balo'a* (16), *vehaktanah hishkimah* (17), *gronah* (18)...*kasha laftah, se'arah ve'ahazah bah* (60), *hemlah* (61)."

Returning to the image of hovering, Kronfeld's understanding of this image is essentially different but has some commonalities with Mann's interpretation[126] of hovering as aloofness and abrogation of an ethical responsibility. Ravikovitch's description of "hovering" from Kronfeld's perspective includes a heavy dose of irony. Instead of seeing "hovering" as a result of an ethical quandary and a need for distance, or as a psychological defense (Gold) against traumatic memories, Kronfleld states:

> These attempts at being not here, wherever the 'here' happens to be, are exposed as ethically and poetically insupportable in the last three lines of stanza 5, one brief poetic moment before the violence begins to unfold. Ravikovitch ironizes the speaker's attempts to justify her hovering as a 'compromise solution' between involvement and dissociation: "I've found a very simple method,/ not with my feet on the ground, and not flying-hovering at a low altitude."[127]

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[124] Ibid p.237.
[125]Ibid p.237.
[126] Ibid p.214.
[127]Ibid p.239.

Reading this as irony, makes it clear that Ravikovitch is fully aware of the impossibility of this stance. It defies the laws of physics and also defies biblical law.[128] Kronfeld draws a comparison between "not with my feet on the ground" and the Hebew idiom[129] " having no foothold in" (*lo midrakh kaf regel).* Kronfeld points out that this idiom only appears once in the Bible (Deut. 2:5) and she assumes that the Israeli reader will associate the metaphor with the biblical quotation and understand the implied condemnation of the occupation of Palestinian land. The biblical context is the prohibition against attacking the land that belongs to the children of Esau (*al titgaru bam, 'ad midrakh kaf regel.).*

Kronfeld shows how Ravikovitch uses language in this poem to challenge and subvert a variety of central beliefs that are embedded in Israeli national identity, biblical texts, and in male dominated society. She makes a convincing argument that Ravikovitch uses lyrical language and techniques, and a personal approach, to deliver a political message and critique of Israeli society. Kronfeld does not see any ambivalence or uncertainty in Ravikovitch's writing of political poetry. Kronfeld reads this poem as an artfully crafted story that uses '[130] a heightened sense of the genders of grammar and the grammars of gender" and in addition she "[131]performs her most nuanced work in the radical use of biblical allusions to undo stock interpretations produced by the culture." According to Kronfeld, Ravikovitch is attempting to "[132] predict and subvert a stereotypic reaction to the Arab girl and the 'hard hand' (*yad kashah)* that murders her."

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[128] Ibid. p.239.
[129]Ibid. p.239.
[130]Ibid. p.234.
[131] Ibid. p.241.
[132]Ibid. p.240.

Ravikovoitch, in this poem, is stripping away assumptions and stereotypes, and turning these very assumptions upside down in order to awaken the reader and chip away at the complacency and "hovering" that she sees around her in Israeli society. She does this by challenging and recasting the nation as woman metaphor that is expressed in the Bible and reverberates through Israeli culture in many complex ways.

Ravikovitch uses her authority in Israeli society as a mother[133] to develop an ethical and prophetic voice. She then systematically deconstructs cultural attitudes towards women.

[134] In order to upend the modern misogynist reaction of blaming the rape victim, Ravikovitch chooses a rather large target: she challenges the validity of the biblical metaphor of the nation- as- woman. In this metaphorical system... the nation is figured as woman or wife; God, speaking through the (male) prophet poet, is figured as the husband, and the nation's ethical and religious conduct determines whether it will be figured as a beloved, faithful and obedient wife or as a loose woman whose behavior must be punished...given the power and dominance of this cultural topos and its profound effect on the discourse of the nation, a reversal of the biblical metaphor is bound to be rife with implications: the Arab girl is not a metaphor. As an Arab, she is not metonymy for the Jewish nation. Literally, she is not even a woman, never mind a whore. She is simply a hardworking young shepherd ... all aspects of the stock metaphor are negated one by one... The Arab girl does not fit the sexual seduction model, she doesn't represent other stereotypes of normative 'feminine behavior, and she doesn't express dependence on a higher authority.

Ravikovitch, according to Kronfeld, is rejecting the dehumanization of the innocent, Arab, female victim.[135] Ravikovitch is criticizing the ethical standards of Israeli society and the underlying assumptions and stereotypes that are based on a metaphorical model of female sexuality that is destructive to this little shepherd girl, to all women, and even, ultimately to the society that accepts these values.

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[133] Ibid. p.233.
[134] Ibid. 242-243.
[135] Ibid. p. 244.

I personally found Chana Kronfeld's argument compelling. She presents textual evidence to prove that Ravikovitch intentionally used irony, biblical imagery and language, cultural and linguistic references, and a close attention to grammatical forms, to deconstruct, and negate cultural preconceptions and stereotypes. Kronfeld's analysis attributes full control and mastery by Ravikovitch over this poem and over her craft. According to Kronfeld, Ravikovitch is not in transition from personal lyrical poetry to political protest poetry, as Mann suggests, and she is not reworking a childhood trauma, as Gold states, but is intentionally attacking the detachment of Israeli society that continues to ignore violence perpetuated against innocent women and children.

I am persuaded by her analysis but I also resonated with Nili R. Scharf Gold's understanding of the defense of depersonalization, used as a protection against overwhelming physical or psychological trauma, as a method to withstand painful assault. The haunting and repetitive quality of the phrase *ani lo kan* , and the analysis of the compromise of hovering, *not with my feet on the ground, and not flying-hovering at low altitude*, is better explained with a psychological understanding of the capacity of the mind to protect itself when the mind or body is under attack. It seems more than coincidental that the psychological description of dissociation (see introductory quote) is so close to Ravikovitch's poetic description of avoidance and hovering. Understanding the description of hovering in ironic, military or political terms is less convincing, although these elements may be present.

Gold's understanding of Ravikovitch's personal pain and sense of loss and abandonment when her father disappeared from her life points to a deep source of pain in Ravikovitch's own life that may have helped her see more clearly the pain of others

around here. Pain, loss, and horror, are beneath the surface of this poem. Cool detachment and smug acceptance of negative stereotypes of women and Arabs, are also present, but Gold's analysis addresses the frightening emotional tone of the poem, filled with foreboding of violence to come. She also captures the contrast between the simple straightforwardness of the innocent girl before the attack, and the hovering women whose thoughts are confused and contradictory. In fact, we don't really know if the girl, who *won't live out the day*, is going to experience physical death, or the death of her innocent childhood, and inner sense of purpose and safety.

Hamutal Tsamir's article, *Jewish-Israeli Poetry, Dahlia Ravikovitch, and the Gender of Representation*[136] considers the role of Dalhlia Ravikovitch and her poetry in Israeli society and her function as a poet/prophet. Tsamir attempts to explain Ravikovitch's importance compared to other poets of her generation and to society in general.

Poetry has been a barometer of the changing and developing sense of the Israeli experience since before the founding of the state. Poets as sensitive and communicative members of society are tuned in on conscious and unconscious levels with the forces shaping the social, and political scene. Dahlia Ravikovitch was embraced early in her career as an important poet although she was not typical of the "*Likrat*"[137] generation of poets. Her grasp of the Hebrew language, including biblical, midrashic, and archaic forms, and her prodigious talent and expressiveness certainly contributed to her early acceptance into the canon but Tsamir believes that there is a deeper unconscious reason

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[136] Hamutal Tsamir, "Jewish-Israeli Poetry, Dahlia Ravikovitch, and the Gender of Representation," Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society n.s. 14,no.3 (Spring/Summer 2008): 85-125

[137] Ibid. "Toward" later known as "Dor hamedinah or "the Statehood Generation."

for her importance. She believes that Dalhia Ravikovitch is the voice of a new kind of national poet and poet-prophet who speaks about deep and hidden issues that are the cracks and fault lines[138] of Israeli society. Ravikovitch through her long and varied career has become a "watcher of Israel" (ha-tsofeh le veit yisrael).[139] Tsamir traces the shifts that have occurred in Israel from the pre-statehood period until the present and she suggests that Ravikovitch's poetry has served as a mirror and a lighthouse, both reflecting and illuminating the Israeli condition through this time of transition.

Tsamir has analyzed *Deyokan Yehudi* with these two functions in mind. The poet herself mirrors the state of society and also illuminates aspects of Israeli society that were previously hidden in the shadows. In Tsamir's words.

> Deyokan yehudi" (A Jewish Portrait; 1982), in particular, will serve here as a poignant manifestation of her poetic and political positions, as both a lighthouse and a mirror, which reveal in a new light the entire sensibility of time and space of its era-including, inevitably, "us," her readers.[140]

The mood and dominant societal themes in Israel pre and post statehood are reflected in the poetry of the time. In the pre statehood period the poetry was highly symbolic, heroic and related to national destiny. The individual destiny was representative of and embedded within the larger destiny. Also the entire society and culture were shaped by the desire to become a nation. Once statehood was achieved the atmosphere in the culture and society began to change. The new generation of poets was more interested in their personal concerns and the role of the individual in relation to the larger society and collective goals. Tsamir differentiates between this focus on the

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[138] Hamutal Tsamir, "Jewish-Israeli Poetry, Dahlia Ravikovitch, and the Gender of Representation," Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society n.s. 14, no. 3 (Spring/ Summer 2008): 85-125
[139] Ibid. 85-125.
[140] Ibid. 85-125.

individual and what she sees as Ravikovitch's more radical prophetic voice. She understands this in light of major shifts in cultural symbols, beginning with the changes that occur as a result of the realization of the desire for a home and revitalized culture for the Jewish people.

> Thus, in the Zionist "desire-machine," many other desires are entangled with and symbolized in the constitutive desire to found a nation-state: the desire to turn from "old Jews" to "new ones"; from exile to sovereign; from weak and sick to healthy and strong; from "parasites" to independent and productive citizens; from uprooted to rooted in one's land; from primitive to modern, enlightened, and Western; and, of course, from feminine to masculine. There is also the desire to revive a more authentic, more internal Jewish identity-archaic, pre-exile, biblical (as imagined and constructed in the literature of the Jewish Enlightenment)-and to purchase and own a national territory, to belong to it as natives and be born from it, and to revive the Hebrew language. All these desires are incorporated and symbolized in the desire to found a nation-state, but this very desire is a means to the fulfillment of another, more fundamental desire: to give birth to the Jewish people and to the Jewish collective identity in a new form, which is also, in turn, a means to another desire: to preserve the Jewish people by renewing it, by giving re-birth to it. [141]

Hamutal Tsamir describes two different societal phases, which she describes as operating first pre-state in linear- progressive time and then following the establishment of the state in commemorative – reproductive time. Linear - progressive is goal oriented and pointed toward the future. Commemorative – reproductive time is focused on preserving and protecting the state through the development and elaboration of this new national identity and culture. One possible example of this, following Tsamir's argument is the development of the state religion with holidays and rituals that build upon traditional observance such as mourning on *Yom Hazikaron* followed by celebration on *Yom Ha'atzmaut.* Once statehood is achieved there is this dramatic shift. The struggle to push forward and create a nation has been achieved and the new challenge is to preserve,

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[141] Ibid. 85-125

protect, develop and strengthen this new nation. In this new phase there is more soul searching, and turning inward and attempting to weave and reconcile many competing forces that have been quieted during the more active and dramatic phase of establishing the nation. Tsamir identifies this new phase as "feminine" because of the association with interiority, reproduction, and an a-historical here and now.[142]

In contrast, Tsamir describes the formation of the state as symbolically masculine. Birth, a feminine activity, is appropriated as a masculine symbol with a bloody war and the willingness to sacrifice ones individual life to give birth to the nation. Once the state is formed then the country moves into a new phase. The masculine goal of creating a state is achieved and there is a shift and the symbol of the state becomes feminine. Tsamir gives an example of poetry that capture this sense of transition. In the Pinkus poem the ship can be understood to represent the ship of state.

> Israel Pinkas was one of the most important poets of the Statehood Generation. His poem "Mah osah oniyah kshe-hi" (What Does a Ship Do When She; 1961) is among many written at that time about ships, boats, and water. In this poem, the ship is in a peculiar situation: she has reached her destination yet "her longed for destination" remains beyond reach. She is already empty, "no loading and unloading," and is in constant motion with no purpose: "She floats, she floats, she floats, . . . / Around herself and around her territory." The ship wishes "she could make her way back," and "She wants to fly but does not fly," yet "She cannot sink"-implying that she would like to sink. Eventually, "Memory consumes her mind"-so that there is some relief in forgetting: "A crazy sweet light weariness." Both memory and forgetting are thus revealed as forms of destruction and loss. The constant floating is a troubling state of stagnation and impotence, of constant movement but no progress. Indeed, the only destination that is not mentioned in the poem is forward. This, then, is a moment of exhaustion, emptiness, and arrest, which recurs often in the poetry of the 1950s, in many different forms.[143]

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[142] Ibid. 85-125.
[143] Ibid. 85-125.

The state of floating and aimlessness following the heroic and exhausting efforts to found the fledgling state is an aspect of the new commemorative reproductive period. Here Tsamir suggests, Dahlia Ravikovitch becomes the poet-prophet who can address the concerns of a country struggling to find its way. Ravikovitch's understanding of life on the margins, and coping with loss and trauma, paired with a keen sense of justice and concern for the vulnerable, also gives her poetic voice the power of a prophetic voice.

Tsamir does not cite this but Ravikovitch also wrote a poem about ships that was released in the posthumous collection of her poetry, " Many Waters."

Many Waters

> A ship/ afloat with no anchor./ She does have a sail/ but the sea has no wind./ The sea expands,/spills into the ocean./All across the horizon/ no shade./ … The captain despairs./ Jumps into the waters. /He'd rather drown./ Meanwhile he floats/ not far from the ship./…A sailor gnaws on a rotten plank./ The hunger's horrific./ The ship will get nowhere./ She's gone astray./ This ship/ is the *Dahlia Maria.*/ She will sink today/ she is sinking today.

As Though I Were Not

> … I am a ship/ and you are a ship,/ better armored, perhaps./ How can you and I navigate/such unquiet waters./ Hide not thyself, do not blot me out, and do not behave/ as though I were not,/ for whatever you do unto me/ will turn back on you,/ and often I too appear to myself/ as though I were not.[144]

Both of these poems are intensely personal. The ships are not the ships of state but represent Dahlia Ravikovitch explicitly, " This ship/ is the Dahlia Maria" and "I am a ship." Ravikovitch appears to be in a state of great despair and distress, " The captain despairs. The hunger's horrific…She is sinking today." Using Tsamir's understanding of

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[144] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at Low Altitude,*239 – 241.

the prophetic voice, Ravikovitch's despair also mirrors a national despair. The use of the personal in the prophetic message is also within the biblical tradition. Hosea's marriage to Gomer also delivers a prophetic message from within a distressing relationship.

> Rebuke your mother, rebuke her… else will I strip her naked. And leave her as on the day she was born: And I will make her like a wilderness, Render her like desert land, And let her die of thirst. Hosea 2: 4-5

In the biblical tradition Gomer symbolizes the people of Israel who have gone astray. Hosea is sadistic towards his wife Gomer as a way of expressing God's prophetic message to Israel. Ravikovitch's personal story and pain infuses her work but her expression of these feelings in poetic form then begins to serve another purpose. Her personal pain speaks to a national pain.

Tsamir rejects the categorization of Ravikovitch's poetry as strictly personal and stereotypically feminine and biographical. She contrasts it with poetry of male contemporaries who deal with the personal as well.[145] An example of this is the poet as anti-hero. "The poet is perceived as a regular person, merely human and even limited, who rejects all representative authority in relation to the collective."[146] Tsamir understands this focus on the individual and the personal by leading male poets as less radical.

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[145] Tsamir, Hamutal, "Jewish-Israeli Poetry, Dahlia Ravikovitch, and the Gender of Representation," Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society n.s. 14, no. 3 (Spring/ Summer 2008): 85-125.
[146] Ibid. 85-125.

> Zach's canonical position and Amichai's status as national poet of sorts – precisely because of his anti-national poetic identity (alongside his rejection of this status)- are two manifestations of the continuous work of representation. The relationships between their poetry and hegemonic ideology are just as strong as before but are now denied and suppressed, thus reproducing the false opposition between the individual and the collective. At the same time, and more important for our discussion, the poet – prophet and dual representation continue to exist in a more radical transfiguration, one that is more explicit and yet more hidden: he becomes a woman. .. The female national poet represents the nation from within, from the depths of its existence as a symbolically feminine entity residing in a commemorative – reproductive time.[147]

> Ravikovitch's internal position has an absolute and radical political meaning of being in the depths of the political unconscious. As a border subject of the Jewish-Zionist-Hebrew-Israeli-Palestinian "entity," included in it as an excluded being, she has direct access to its "in-formation" – the fissures as they are embodied and inscribed in her body and mind-and she discloses them.[148]

Marginality and difference is the deepest truth of Israeli society according to Tsamir and Ravikovitch embodies these truths and expresses them. This is why her very private and enigmatic poetry resonate with so many.

> Ravikovitch's principal innovation is that interiority, marginality, and Otherness are not excluded here from representation, authority, and power but, rather, are their very source.[149]

Tsamir's overall point is that Ravikovitch's personal perspective, and concerns are attuned to deep and troubling issues related to the national identity. "The writer Yitsak Laor observes: ' Unlike others who over the years have zigzagged politically, Dahlia remained consistent. Evil was always defined for her through the eyes of a defenseless child.'"[150] In the poem "Deyokan yehudi" which is thoroughly discussed and

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[147] Ibid. 85-125.
[148] Ibid 85-125.
[149] Ibid 85-125.
[150] Bloch & Kronfeld, *Hovering at Low Altitude*, p. 17.

translated by Tsamir, Ravikovitch skillfully weaves a multiplicity of perspectives into the character of one woman.

A Jewish Portrait – *Deyokan Yehudi*

An exilic Jewess glancing sideways
In fear.
Wearing an old-fashioned dress
Her hair is tied back unbecomingly.
She does not unpack her bags.
Why should she unpack her bags?
Any place she'll find
Is a provisional place.
Her bed is not made
Provisionality does not need decoration.

On the road.
Caravans pass by her
Wagons of Ukrainian farmers
And dark-skinned refugees shouting;
Babies are dehydrating in the heat of the sun on arms,
Flies are hovering on their eyes.
People are carrying mattresses on their heads.
Pots and pans are rattling.

People curse her in her passing,

She is slow,

She holds the caravan up.

She goes off to the side of the road and stands still.

She doesn't have a baby

She can wait for the nightfall.

She suddenly sees a coin glinting in the dust.

She laughs.

She imagines little watersprings flowing in the bushes.

It would be a mistake to think that she has lost her mind.

A kernel of a blush of sun shines in her heart.

See she has become calm.

She has no interest in this issue Jerusalem.

Each and every day they fight on the Temple mount

Each man hits and curses his brother

And the dead prophet shrieks:

Who asked you for this desecration of my court?

By the time the caravan will have passed by

Night will come and she will arrive home.

Her legs are battered by sharp pebbles

The dust streaking her dress.

She will bolt the inner door

And close the shutters.

Only her feet she'll wash

So great is her fatigue.

In the dark she knows her facial features

The way a blind person knows the touch of his temples.

Her eyes are blue Khazari eyes

She has a broad face,

the body of a native woman,

Third generation in the Land of Israel.[151]

"Deyokan yehudi" is ostensibly a poem about a Jewish refugee. She is slow and can't keep up and retreats to the side of the road where she loses herself in a pleasurable reverie. Her reverie is disrupted by the realities of political conflicts over Jerusalem. The prophetic voice of Isaiah then emerges to condemn this behavior. The reader is then surprised to discover that the woman is not a refugee but actually has a home and is a third generation dweller in the land. This revelation at the end of the poem in turn casts the entire poem in a different perspective. The "Deyokan yehudi" the Jewish portrait, presents a complex and kaleidoscopic image. It can be understood as a portrayal of Jewish refugees, refugees in general, and also a self portrait of Ravikovitch. "Deyokan yehudi" begins with a disclaimer " She is not your sort." We are told not to identify with her. She is different, "a fearful Diaspora Jew." Ultimately according to Tsamir, the

[151] Ibid. 85-125. Hamutal Tsamir's translation.

poem will do the reverse, and this is the powerful effect present in much of Ravikovitch's poetry. Instead of telling us about the "Other" the poetry will tell us about ourselves.

One powerful image in the poem is the caravan. At first "caravans pass her by." The plural form is used *sheyarot.* But then she holds up the caravan, *sheyarah,* in the singular. There has been a shift to a particular caravan.[152] At first it appeared as if she was on the outside observing the caravans but then somehow she is in the midst, but not fitting in with the flow. The caravan appears in another poem, "Rough Draft."

"Not to leave footprints/not to leave a trail of signs/ anyway I'm not going to stay in this place/...In the dark to withdraw from the moving caravan/perhaps after a grave illness/like Rachel. This business/has no dignity, no importance:/dust on the roads/rising up to the sky./I have no need to arrive. August 1983"[153]

In "Rough Draft" she withdraws from the moving caravan in the dark, like Rachel. Rachel refers to Rachel Bluvstein, one of the first women poets writing in Hebrew in the pre-state Yishuv, [154]who died of tuberculosis. Rachel also refers to the biblical Rachel who died in childbirth along the road to Efrat.

She appears to be an outsider among the Ukrainian peasants and the dark skinned refugees and is a refugee among refugees, not really a part of the distinct groups. At this point she steps to the side of the road and is outside of the collective journey of the other refugees. She is now physically on the margins of the road and symbolically on the

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[152] Ibid. 85-125.
[153] Bloch & Kronfeld, Hovering at Low Altitude, p. 164
[154] Ibid. P 164.

margins of this society. Now on the side of the road she becomes entranced by the sparkle of a coin in the dust. She has found a treasure and this entertains and distracts her. This moment of joy is typical of Ravikovitch's writing.[155] Alone, away from people, can be a time of freedom and pleasure although the concern about loss of the sense of reality also arises at these moments, as it does in this poem. " It's wrong to think she has lost her mind." The average person might think she has lost her mind, playing with a coin in the dust, but she has not.

> It is not surprising that the happy freedom of imagination is inspired on the margin of the road away from the main thoroughfare and from the people. Similar moments recur in many of Ravikovitch's poems, most notably in "Zikhronot hammim," in which dust is a child's only companion... and yet, it is perhaps only thanks to the dust that she can be "full of joyful carelessness." In "Deyokan yehudi" the woman's moving to the side of the road, whether by choice or by force, carries this dual meaning of neglect and joy.[156]

At this point there appears to be a rupture in the narrative flow of the poem. There is a shift to national and political issues. The woman is ostensibly not interested in the political and religious conflicts occurring in Jerusalem regarding the Temple Mount. Now the voice of the "dead prophet" emerges.

> The last line is a quotation from Isaiah 1:12 in which Isaiah quotes God, who rejects the people's attempts to find favor in His eyes with futile offerings, because "Your hands are full of blood." By quoting Isaiah, not only does the woman take upon herself the mission of prophecy but also she herself becomes the prophet. It is as if she is possessed by his spirit and as if he himself, albeit dead, "shrieks" from her body. This is indeed a moment of ventriloquism. Although it is a direct continuance of the most idiosyncratic moment of near madness and joyful hallucinations, it is also the extreme opposite of that moment: a committed public engagement from a national, moral, and religious authoritative position. Perhaps it is also a continuance of the "kernel of a blush of sun" that

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[155] Ibid. 85-125.
[156] Ibid. 85-125.

> shone in her heart, which is revealed as designating not merely peaceful hope but also burning fire.[157]

Here Tsamir hypothesizes that we see a shift in the woman's perspective and actions that are consonant with Ravikovitch's own personal shift. This woman has become a powerful voice of conscience commenting on the national political scene. She is channeling the prophetic voice of Isaiah, decrying hypocrisy and violence.

> The poem thus juxtaposes the most internal and private position with the most political and public one. Indeed, these two positions have always been dominant in Ravikovitch's poetry, though they are usually perceived as separate-the way they seem here at first, in the seeming non sequitur of the two stanzas. In fact, however, they are profoundly linked.[158]

Tsamir points out that the poem's shocking conclusion requires a complete reassessment of the poem. Many of the descriptions in the poem need to be revisited in light of the revelation at the end of the poem. The refugee woman is now merged with the native of the Land of Israel. This woman has a home but she is also the "Other." She has blue Khazari eyes. *K-zar* in Hebrew means "as a stranger,"[159] in addition the history of the Khazari people is shrouded in mystery and ambiguity, " the people who wanted to belong and be Jewish but failed- a people essentially foreign and other."[160] Dalia Ravikovitch herself had blue eyes and a broad face, and this brings in the autobiographical aspects more explicitly. We are presented with a collage, a fragmented identity that contains many contradictions and uncertainties.

> The moment of resolution and redemption – the state of rest and security that she will supposedly reach when she enters her home-turns out to be a moment of

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[157] Ibid. 85-125.
[158] Ibid. 85-125.
[159] Ibid. 85-125.
[160] Ibid. 85-125.

> revelation of the secret correspondence between her various identities, bringing us back to the beginning of the poem in a repetitive process...[161]

There is no clear rest or redemption. She is home, but in a state of physical exhaustion. She manages to wash her own feet which also may be symbolic of her fractured status as the stranger, whose feet are washed as a gesture of hospitality[162], and also as the native woman who washes the feet of her guest. Only in the darkness can she integrate the complex amalgam of identity.

> It is as if these two "women"- the exilic and the native- can only discover that they are one and the same, in the dark.[163]

Ravikovitch also uses this same type of double representation[164] when she writes about childhood. She is often regarded as childlike figure stuck in a traumatic childhood, but at the same time she has perspective on her experience. Her poetry expresses flight into fantasy but also expresses conflict over the desire to escape reality.

> There is always another perspective in her poems, one that is mature and realistic. There is never only innocence or "blindness" but always also seeing and knowing. Ravikovitch is never only a child or a victim of circumstances but always also an adult woman who revisits her childhood, actively and powerfully. This is the double representativeness that she realizes in relation to the nation in its statehood stage while once more passing through the marginal and inherently internal figure of woman/child.[165]

Ravikovitch speaking from a place of deep pain and loss with its roots in childhood is able to sense and describe the constructive and counterproductive ways in which the pain and lingering trauma is similarly expressed in individuals and society.

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[161] Ibid. 85-125
[162] Ibid. 85-125.
[163] Ibid. 85-125.
[164] Ibid. 85-125.
[165] Ibid. 85-125.

These experiences have fueled her creativity and inspired her prophetic voice. Her life and experiences mirror the loss and pain that surrounds her, and her poetry like the lighthouse illuminates and is a guide and beacon for " the uprooted Israeli soul of recent generations."[166]

[166] Ibid.85 -125.

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Appendix:


מִטָּה
מִשְׁפָּחְתִּית
מֵאִת לֵוִי דֶּבִיקוֹבִיץ
וְדָלְיָה דֶּבִיקוֹבִיץ
צִיְּרָה בַּרְמָלָה טַל

הוצאת עם

מִכְתָּב לְקוֹרֵא

קוֹרֵא חָבִיב,

אֲנִי רוֹצֶה לְסַפֵּר לְךָ עַל לֵוִי רָבִיקוֹבִיץ, שֶׁכָּתַב כַּמָּה מִן הַשִּׁירִים שֶׁבַּסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה.

לֵוִי רָבִיקוֹבִיץ הָיָה מְהַנְדֵּס צָעִיר שֶׁעָלָה מֵאֶרֶץ סִין לִפְנֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים וְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנָה. הוּא עָבַד בְּתַחֲנַת הַחַשְׁמַל שֶׁל נַהֲרַיִם, וְהִשְׁתַּתֵּף בַּהֲקָמַת רֶשֶׁת עַמּוּדֵי הַחַשְׁמַל בְּעֵמֶק יִזְרְעֶאל וּבַגְּלִיל הַתַּחְתּוֹן. בְּתְקוּפַת הַמְּאָרָעוֹת, לִפְנֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה, הָיוּ כְּנָפַיִּים עֲרָבִים מִתְנַפְּלוֹת לִפְעָמִים עַל יְהוּדִים. לָכֵן הָיְתָה אִמָּא שֶׁלִּי דוֹאֶגֶת מְאֹד כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה לֵוִי רָבִיקוֹבִיץ מְאַחֵר לַחֲזוֹר הַבַּיְתָה. שָׂכַחְתִּי לְסַפֵּר, שֶׁלֵּוִי רָבִיקוֹבִיץ הָיָה אַבָּא שֶׁלִּי.

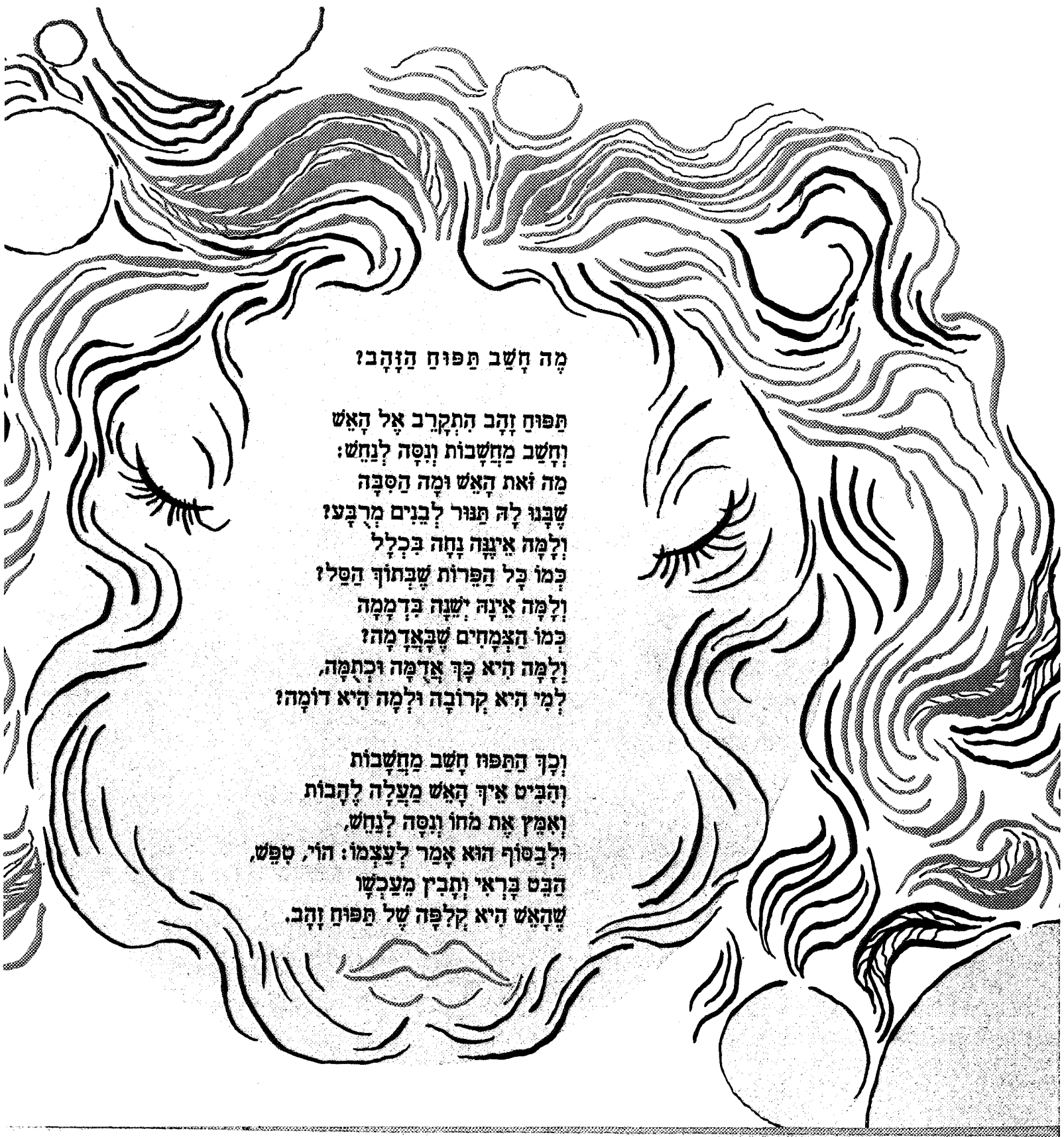
אֶת עֲבוֹדָתוֹ בַּהֲקָמַת רֶשֶׁת הַחַשְׁמַל בַּגָּלִיל וּבְעֵמֶק יִזְרְעֶאל סִיֵּם לֵוִי רָבִיקוֹבִיץ בְּשָׁלוֹם. אֲבָל לִפְנֵי עֶשְׂרִים וְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנָה, בְּעִצּוּמָהּ שֶׁל מִלְחֶמֶת הָעוֹלָם, נִדְרַס לְמָוֶת עַל יְדֵי נָהָג שִׁכּוֹר. בְּמוֹתוֹ הָיִיתִי בַּת שֵׁשׁ, וַאֲחִיקָם וְעַמִּירָם, הַתְּאוֹמִים שֶׁלָּנוּ, הָיוּ בְּנֵי חֲמִשָּׁה חֳדָשִׁים.

כְּשֶׁגָּדַלְתִּי הִתְחַלְתִּי גַּם אֲנִי לִכְתֹּב שִׁירִים, וְעַכְשָׁו אָסַפְתִּי אֶת שִׁירָיו שֶׁל לֵוִי (׳מְכוֹנִית וַיַּלְדָּה׳; ׳הַיֶּלֶד אֵלְיָהוּ׳; ׳מִי צוֹחֵק בַּחֲשֵׁכָה?׳; ׳בְּעָיָה׳; ׳אֲחִיקָם וְעַמִּירָם׳; ׳אִמָּא אֶת בִּתָּהּ הִשְׁכִּיבָה׳; ׳בַּלַּיְלָה, בַּחֹשֶׁךְ׳) וְאֶת הַשִּׁירִים שֶׁלִּי יַחַד בְּקֹבֶץ הַנִּקְרָא ׳מִסְבָּה מִשְׁפַּחְתִּית׳. כְּדֵי שֶׁהַמִּסְבָּה תִּהְיֶה שְׁלֵמָה, מָקְדָּשׁ הַסֵּפֶר לְמִיכַל רָבִיקוֹבִיץ (גּוֹר־אַרְיֵה) שֶׁהִיא אִמִּי, וְלַיֶּלֶד רוֹעִי, שֶׁהוּא הַנֶּכֶד שֶׁלָּהּ.

וּבְזֹאת אֲנַחְנוּ פּוֹתְחִים אֶת הַמִּסְבָּה.

בְּשֵׁם הַמִּשְׁפָּחָה,

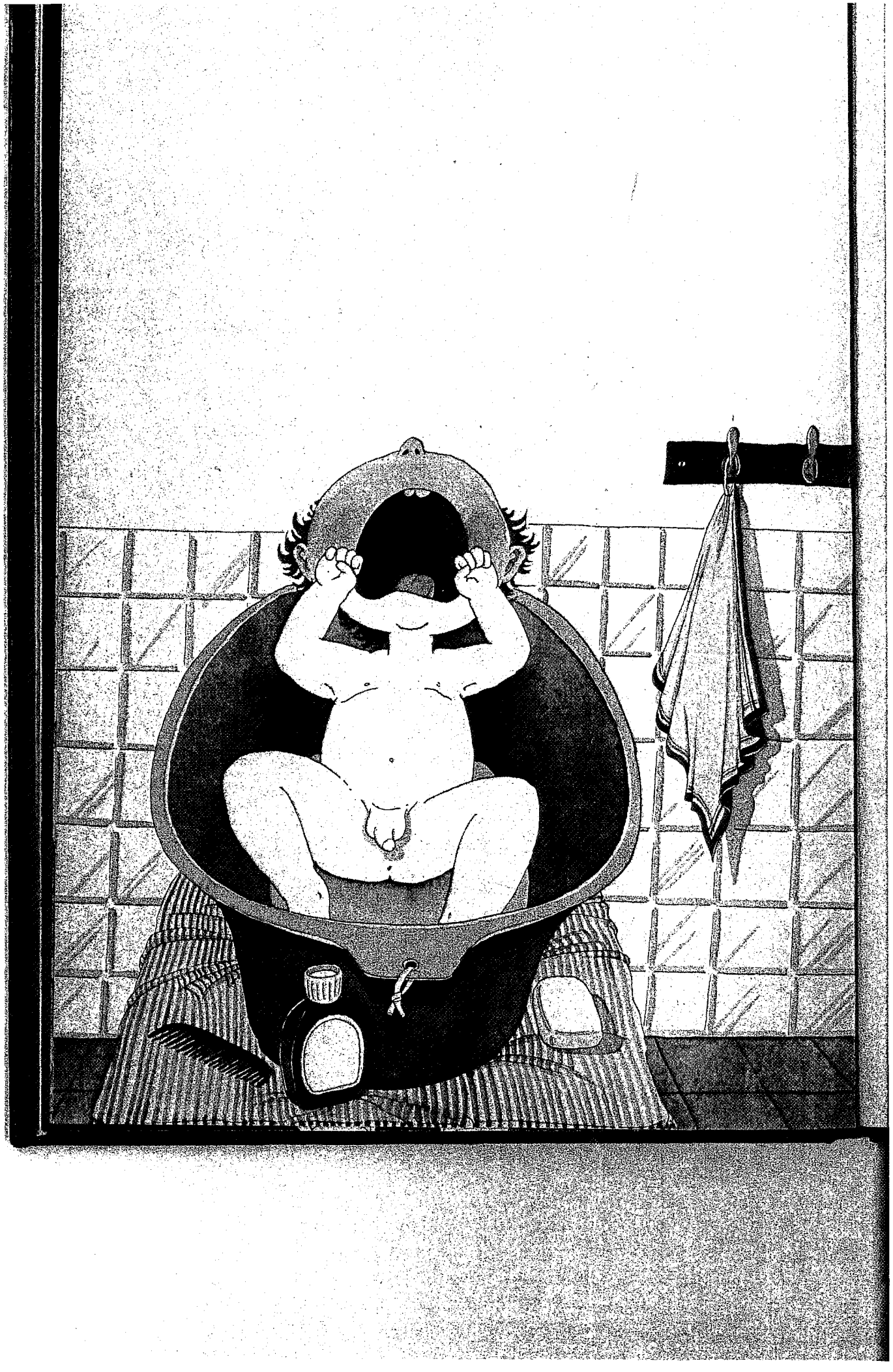
גלי כ



מֶה חָשַׁב תַּפּוּחַ הַזָּהָב?

תַּפּוּחַ זָהָב הִתְקָרֵב אֶל הָאֵשׁ
וְחָשַׁב מַחֲשָׁבוֹת וְנָסָה לְנַחֵשׁ:
מַה זֹּאת הָאֵשׁ וּמָה הַסִּבָּה
שֶׁבָּנוּ לָהּ תַּנּוּר לְבֵנִים מְרֻבָּע?
וְלָמָּה אֵינֶנָּה נָחָה בְּכְלָל
כְּמוֹ כָּל הַפֵּרוֹת שֶׁבְּתוֹךְ הַסַּל?
וְלָמָּה אֵינָהּ יְשֵׁנָה בְּדֻמָּמָה
כְּמוֹ הַצְּמָחִים שֶׁבָּאֲדָמָה?
וְלָמָּה הִיא כָּךְ אֲדֻמָּה וּכְתֻמָּה,
לְמִי הִיא קְרוֹבָה וּלְמָה הִיא דּוֹמָה?

וְכָךְ הַתַּפּוּז חָשַׁב מַחֲשָׁבוֹת
וְהֵבִיט אֵיךְ הָאֵשׁ מַעֲלָה לֶהָבוֹת
וְאָמַץ אֶת מֹחוֹ וְנָסָה לְנַחֵשׁ,
וּלְבַסּוֹף הוּא אָמַר לְעַצְמוֹ: הוֹי, טִפֵּשׁ,
הַבֵּט בָּרְאִי וְתָבִין מֵעַכְשָׁו
שֶׁהָאֵשׁ הִיא קְלִפָּה שֶׁל תַּפּוּחַ זָהָב.



אִמָּא מְבֻלְבֶּלֶת

לְעִדּוֹ הַקָּטָן
יֵשׁ אִמָּא מְבֻלְבֶּלֶת
בְּמָקוֹם לְפִתְחַ חֲלוֹנוֹת
פּוֹתַחַת דֶּלֶת.
צָרִיךְ לָשִׂים בְּתוֹךְ מָרָק
קִצָּת עֲצָמוֹת וְקִצָּת יָרָק
וּלְחַמֵּם בְּחֹם חָזָק
כָּךְ מְבַשְּׁלִים הַיּוֹם מָרָק.
אַךְ זֹאת הָאִמָּא הַמְבֻלְבֶּלֶת
בְּמָקוֹם פִּלְפֵּל לָקְחָה פְּלָפֶלֶת
וּבִמְקוֹם גֶּזֶר–רֶבַע שׁוּם,
קְלַפַּת תַּפּוּז בְּמָקוֹם קִשּׁוּא
וְעַרְבָּבָה, מֶרָסָה, גֶּרָסָה
עַד שֶׁיָּצְאָה שָׁם מִין דַּיְסָה.
וְעִדּוֹ הַקָּטָן בּוֹכֶה:
הוּא לֹא רוֹצֶה מָרָק כָּזֶה.

לְעִדּוֹ הַקָּטָן
יֵשׁ אִמָּא מְבֻלְבֶּלֶת
כְּשֶׁהִיא רוֹצָה לְהִתְעַטֵּשׁ
הִיא מִשְׁתַּעֶלֶת.
תִּינוֹק אוֹהֵב לוֹ לִפְעָמִים
לִשְׂחֹק בַּמַּיִם הַחַמִּים.
בְּתוֹךְ אַמְבַּטְיָה, עַל הַגַּב
תִּינוֹק מְאֹד אוֹהֵב לִשְׂחֹק.
אֲבָל הָאִמָּא הַמְבֻלְבֶּלֶת
הָלְכָה וְשָׁמָה אֶת הַיֶּלֶד
בְּתוֹךְ אַמְבָּט יָבֵשׁ וָרִיק
וְעִדּוֹ הַקָּטָן צוֹחֵק,
וְעִדּוֹ הַקָּטָן בּוֹכֶה:
הוּא לֹא אוֹהֵב אַמְבָּט כָּזֶה.

לְעִדּוֹ הַקָּטָן
יֵשׁ אִמָּא מְבֻלְבֶּלֶת
לְמַד פַּלְטִיאֵל הִיא קוֹרֵאת
מַר אֶלִיפֶלֶט.
תִּינוֹק אוֹהֵב לִשְׂחֹק בַּלּוּל
כְּשֶׁלִּגּוּפוֹ כָּרוּךְ חִתּוּל
רָצוּי מְאֹד חִתּוּל נָקִי,
זֶה הַמַּלְבּוּשׁ הַתִּינוֹקִי,
אֲבָל הָאִמָּא הַמְבֻלְבֶּלֶת
לֹא מְבִינָה וְלֹא שׁוֹאֶלֶת
מַדּוּעַ הַתִּינוֹק הָרַךְ
בְּתוֹךְ הַלּוּל אֵינֶנּוּ נָח
וְעִדּוֹ הַקָּטָן עָצוּב:
הוּא לֹא אוֹהֵב חִתּוּל רָטוּב.

לְעִדּוֹ הַקָּטָן
יֵשׁ אִמָּא מְבֻלְבֶּלֶת
אֲבָל הִיא מְנַסָּה מְאֹד
וּמִשְׁתַּדֶּלֶת
לִהְיוֹת קִצָּת פָּחוֹת
מְבֻלְבֶּלֶת.