Harkhavi, Hedva. *Migo*. [Hebrew] Tel Aviv, Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2018.

Reviewed by Edith Covensky, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, USA

“Until I’ll Hear You Again:” The Use of Personifications in the Poetry of Hedva Harekhavi

Migo (a likely reference to the Spanish word Amigo, meaning friend) is divided into three sections: “Until I Hear You Again,” “Now,” and “Seemingly Death.” The entire book treads between the realization of the loss of a son and the illusion of his omnipotent presence. The collection is prefaced by a prose poem entitled: “Something Resembling Happiness,” which gives the tone to the entire book. The poem meanders between sanity and hallucinations describing a mighty and handsome son who slumbers into silence. The poem’s speaker insists on her total identification with her subject as she declares:

I breathed when he breathed, I smiled when he smiled, I leaped when he leaped, I shined when he shined, I became mute when he was mute, I dropped when he dropped. I sunk when he sunk. I continued when he continued. Together we collected the upheavals of life, together we covered them with flowers, together we placed the old corps of reality among tiny white bushes... (p. 12)

The rapport between mother and son is clear. In the poem, the speaker’s sense of identity with the son is unequivocal, leaving no doubt of their total symbiosis.

Most of the poems in this book extend over several pages in a series of bold images, confessions, imaginary dialogues between mother and son, and a myriad of examples giving life to stillness, creating interchangeable worlds revolving between the dead and the living: “It’s there that we continued to live with all our might/It’s there that we continued to die totally natural.” (p. 22)

In the poem which opens this volume, realities are seen intermingling and pursuing each other in contrasting worlds of the “Here and Now” and the “Then and There:”

Reality after reality is shoved into a broken vessel
And travels.
This is what I want to talk about: Juggling tricks.
Madness.

Riveting insights.
Intuition.
Imagination.
Sacrifice.... (p. 17.)

The poet renders these semi-realistic spheres real, vulnerable and threatening. This latter sentiment of threat and dread is also present in the motto of this collection. It is written by Elisha, Hedva Harekhavi's son who died at a young age leaving behind a traumatized mother and scores of poems dedicated to him. Elisha's motto quoting his mother's words sets the tone of the entire book: "Too much reality, she said. Too much reality, this is what she said." (p. 17)

This dense reality is central in these poems focusing on the "here" and the "beyond" while mixing longings and tears with morbid hallucinations. The mixture of real and delusional realities is further evoked by a myriad of sensations where intoxication, thirst, hunger, void, music and beauty dwell side by side. The specter of the son hovers over all of these imaginings while he himself "listens" to this crazed world around him. Ironically, he becomes utterly amused by all of this and bursts out laughing. Indeed, the absurdity of things turns into a haunting landscape merging into an inexplicable anarchy celebrated in festivity.

The speaker's personifications abound in consequent poems hauntingly connected to the mother and son relationship created and recreated obsessively in a reality that is both tangible and surreal. Furthermore, the speaker/mother, in her profound anguish and unquenched longings for her deceased son, personifies the whole universe begging for a dialogue. She hears the dusty roads treaded by her son's soles, the twilights spread on his cloths, and the silence passing through a faint light of the night protruding his breaths, and embracing his sweet and silent body as the rain contaminates his "purified" existence.

Harekhavi's eerie personifications continue in the poem entitled: "Now" (pp. 57-59), from a section in this collection bearing the same name. The speaker excels in evoking in this poem her sub-conscious in a most novel way, namely, "dragging it home," calling it "a hooligan" with whom she mingles and even lies on "his" bed, hallucinating at "his" side day and night. She later follows that "hooligan" among the fields covered with flowers, grasses, and thorns and continues through sand, floods, and slopes of reddened hills. Consequently, she transfers her unusual personifications

from the inner world to the outer world, imagining the “smiles of darkness,” and cosmic frontiers standing in a row bowing to her with an outlandish salute. She continues turning reality into an animated painting that starts to shiver because of the “cold” she feels in her heart. In contrast, the warmth of the coming sunrise gains depth transporting the speaker to a height from which she could possibly perceive the truth:

And the sun remembered,
and there was some depth to sunrise,
and there was height
and I could see the truth,
What is truth
What is really truth

What exactly is truth (p. 65)

The mother/speaker’s repeated questions about the real nature of “truth,” sheds light on her basic conception of reality wanting desperately to believe in the reverse order of things, meaning: that the real is at times fictional, and that her fancy about her son’s re-appearances as she stubbornly attempts to resurrect him, is real. Total truth might be somewhere between the tangible and the imagined realms of existence.

In a poem entitled “The last Transformation” (pp. 76-77), the speaker personifies the “old” sand while seeing it kicked by the “Animal of The Night.” This peculiar animal roams from desert to desert adorning itself with night flowers, and a holy wreath illuminated by pure light pouring out of the animal’s eyes. This surreal radiance connects with the poet’s deceased son who is often imbued with the purity of his defunct habitat.

The following poem, “See You Son” (pp. 78-85), re-uses the image of the “Animal of the Night” with a number of intense personifications where it is seen putting its head on the son’s shoulder while the latter listens to its opinions as if it were a human being. Oddly, the speaker gives a significant role to the trees in this poem which are black and very noisy while screaming and screeching - characteristics, perhaps, of that “Animal of the night,” and the mother’s piercing cries. The poem ends with another personification applied to the sun which is given “feelings” enabling it to yearn and pine, crave and desire. Even more striking is the fact that the sun is even able to

“applaud” the son, to cheer him, to become hypnotized by him, to carry on in frenzy the excitement of the mother celebrating a returning phantom which crystallizes in her mind.

In consequent poems, the speaker uses more personifications applying them to reality itself seen “walking” in a drunken state adorned by “sandals, blood and the shield of David” as if attempting to protect itself from the contrasting reality of the beyond (p.87). As more personifications are employed, the speaker hears “a door laughing with another door” (p.89), alluding to the mother and son longing to communicate through intimate laughter no longer possible. (p. 96)

Ultimately, in a crazed attempt to personify Death itself, the mother/speaker begs for compassion:

Oh, Death, imagine listening to the soul,
the spirit, the blood,
The inner life.
And nothing is planned.
And everything turns to thirst
To emptiness
To imagination.

This entire compilation turns to human’s abundant imagination creating almost seamless passages between the “here” and the “beyond.” The speaker’s tangible reality mingles with a freakish and unearthly universe created by her fancy. Her cries, laughs, memories, shouts, and whispers whirl in a “fire dance” imploring to hear her son’s voice, and to enjoy him once more in this cruel yet fascinating world.

Note: Translation from the Hebrew is by Edith Covensky.