



Words in My Lovesick Blood: Poems by Haim Gouri

By Haim Gouri

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Haim Gouri has been a major figure in Israeli literature since the War of Independence in 1948-1949. The poems collected in *Words in My Lovesick Blood*, in their original Hebrew and in English translation, introduce Gouri to English-speaking readers and reflect the range of Gouri's extraordinary achievement as a modernist poet from the 1940s to the 1990s.

In his work, Gouri documents the spirit of the Palmah generation, the generation that effectively established the State of Israel. His voice is not especially patriotic or heroic, but surpassingly humane, testimony to a lyrical mythic and sensual imagination, a complicated and striking Mediterranean sensibility, and a subdued awareness of the tragic facts with which the Jews and the Middle East have had to cope over a lengthy and intricate history. The Hebrew Bible and Greek mythology have a presence in his oeuvre, as does the Nazi Holocaust.

Influenced by such Hebrew poets as Yonatan Ratosh, Uri Zvi Greenberg, and Natan Alterman, French symbolist poets Jules Laforgue, Paul Verlaine, and Guillaume Apollinaire, and Russian poets Akhmatova, Pasternak, and Mandelstam, Gouri also reveals his interior life in his poems—his loves, regrets, doubts, and above all the charm in the magic of his poetic vision. In *Words in My Lovesick Blood*, readers will discover an eloquent and civilized means of experiencing the innumerable vicissitudes of Israeli existence.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Gouri is a major figure in Israeli cultural life. Yet his diverse achievements as novelist, journalist, documentary filmmaker and poet (he won the Israel Prize in 1988) have, until now, been little known in America. This well-chosen retrospective, drawn from the septuagenarian's 12 volumes of poetry (which date from the 1940s to the present), is a promising beginning to the reversal of that oversight. Rabbi Chyet, of Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, successively renders into English 85 pieces. At the end of WW II, Gouri, who had served in an elite unit that was the forerunner of the Israeli Defense Forces, joined the European mission to rescue survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, some of whom were themselves later to fight with him in the 1948-49 War of Independence. The inspiring consciousness formed by Gouri's generation--"the culture of remembrance," he elegiacally calls it--poignantly resonates in this introductory collection. While never ethically boastful and more secular than religious in tone, Gouri's humane body of crisp modernist verse mingles learned references, Mediterranean sensuousness, melancholy and mundane colloquialism with biblical allusions, Hebraic traditions and a defining sense of the solidarity of a people "born with a knife in their heart."

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Language Notes

Text: English, Hebrew (translation)

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About the Author

Haim Gouri was born in Tel Aviv in 1923. He is the author of twelve collections of poetry, including *Flowers of Fire*, *Fearsome*, and *The One Who Came After Me*. Not only as a poet but equally as novelist, journalist, and documentary filmmaker, Gouri has been intent on keeping alive the memories of destruction and the renewal which shaped the consciousness of his generation in Israel. In 1988 he was awarded an Israel Prize in recognition of his achievement. He and his wife live in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Stanley F. Chyet is a professor of American Jewish history and Director of Edgar F. Magnin School of Graduate Studies at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles. The author and editor of many books, he earned his Ph.D. from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati.

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