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A NEW AND ANNOTATED TRANSLATION
OF BIALIK'S GREAT POEMS

Steven L. Jacobs

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
in Hebrew Letters and Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

1974

Referee, Prof. Werner Weinberg

To My Wife Judith

and

To Our Families

Who Helped Make This Dream

A Reality

He who reads his people's literature in translation
is like one who kisses his mother's face through a
veil.

--Chaim Nachman Bialik

THESIS DIGEST

A NEW AND ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

OF BIALIK'S GREAT POEMS

This thesis is a rendering into English--consistent with the original Hebrew text--of Bialik's four great poems: (1) המתמיד (THE YESHIVAH STUDENT), (2) כהי מדבר (THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS), (3) בעיר ההרגה (IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER), and (4) הבריכה (THE POND).

The aim in translation has been to be "as literal as possible, as idiomatic as necessary." Though all four have previously been translated into English, the translations themselves fall into either one or both of two categories: (a) sacrificing the literal meaning of the text in favor of the metrical rhythm of the poem or (b) sacrificing the metrical rhythm of the poem in favor of the literal meaning of the text. The goal of this translator has been to attempt a realizable balance between meaning and rhythm.

Footnotes have been provided, whenever and wherever possible, alerting the reader to Bialik's use of the Bible and other classical sources. This

has never before been done in English in any great detail.

Further, brief historical introductions to each of the four poems and a brief biography of Bialik have been included. The last chapter of the thesis is an attempt at a literary appraisal of Bialik.

The primary tools of this study have been the Alcalay Hebrew-English Dictionary, the Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon, the Jastrow Dictionary, the Mandelkern Concordance, and the New Megiddo Hebrew-English Dictionary. The major source for the notes has been A. Avital's Shirat Bialik Vehatanakh (Dvir, 1952).

The texts of the poems themselves have come from Kol Kitvei Ch. N. Bialik (Dvir, 1961).

It is sincerely hoped that these translations will, in some small way, help to expose Bialik to a new generation of English-speaking Jews and re-confirm Chaim Nachman Bialik as "the poet laureate of the Hebrew renaissance."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
FOREWORD.	1
The Art of Translation	1
Rationale.	5
A Unity of Three, Plus One.	5
The "Quality" of the Translations	6
The Date of the Translations.	8
Acknowledgements	10
INTRODUCTION.	12
Enumeration of English Translations.	12
The Translators.	16
A Bialik Chronology.	17
Methodology.	20
THE YESHIVAH STUDENT (1894 - 1895).	23
Introduction	23
Translation.	25
THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS (1902)	63
Introduction	63
Translation.	66
IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER (1904)	89
Introduction	89
Translation.	93

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
THE POND (1908).	120
Introduction.	120
Translation	123
RESUME	139
The Literary Value of Bialik's Work . . .	139
ENDNOTES	152
BIBLIOGRAPHY	157

FOREWORD

The Art of Translation

The "art of translation" is, perhaps, among the most difficult tasks confronting the student of literature, all the more so if he considers himself reasonably competent in a language not native to him. In effect, what he is doing is displaying that competence and providing others with the opportunity for judgment and evaluation. There is no immunity from criticism; the very act of translation subjects one to the critical eye of others.

Coupled with the above-mentioned situation are the very real differences between the two languages themselves. Every language, no matter how many points of contact it shares with another, is ultimately unique. Every index of language--structure, idiom, style, rhythm--points up significant differences, all of which must be taken into account by the translation and the translator.

Poetry, particularly, compounds the problems which confront the translator. A. Alan Steinbach has written:

The art of translation from one vernacular to another, and notoriously in poetry, entails complexities resulting in a certain degree of loss. It is like putting old wine into new bottles; there is an inescapable diminution in bouquet, in essence and depth. The words are captured and harnessed to the translated vehicle. But they are seldom if ever like the champing steeds in their uninhibited galloping. They are more like wraiths garbed in a masquerade of the original poem's unique mystique, of its images and language nuances, its heart's systole and diastole.

1/

Yet, almost in spite of these seemingly insurmountable difficulties, there is a great need for literary translations, for two reasons. Great literature, to the degree to which it is considered great, must NOT be confined to the language of its initial writing; indeed, only the widest possible audience--in a multiplicity of languages--can insure such literature of the permanence it deserves. Secondly, if the world is indeed smaller than it was one hundred years ago, and the media of communications can traverse thousands of miles, we need to know more than just the historical data of our neighbor's existence; we need to have some insight into his cultural milieu. Our very survival may depend on it.

For a literary figure such as Chaim Nachman Bialik, the first reason for a translation of his works, that of the continued survival of great literature, is more than applicable; it is imperative. So great was his impact upon the development of modern Hebrew literature that terms such as "poet laureate of the Jewish people"^{2/} or "poet of the Hebrew Renaissance"^{3/} are only incomplete approximations of his contribution and achievement. Though his primary medium of expression was Hebrew, he himself was not unware of the awesome challenge inherent in translation:

The craft of translating the work of a creative artist from one language into another is not only one of linguistic inventiveness, a successful re-bottling, it is far more than that - it is a battle of strength between divergent cultures, philosophies of life and spiritual treasures stored in two . . . worlds.

^{4/}

Indeed, toward the latter part of his life, he devoted his considerable creative talents to masterful translations of Don Quixote and Wilhelm Tell.

There is, finally, another reason why it behooves us to assimilate into ourselves Bialik's works in particular. Bialik was a Jew, and, no

matter how universalized his themes may appear to the objective literary observer, he addressed himself primarily to Jews. And, to the degree to which we consider ourselves committed Jews, Bialik speaks to us. The greatness of much of his poetry lies in the fact that it is not bound by historic circumstance; the problems which evoked Bialik's response are the same problems which should evoke our response, both inside and outside of Erets Yisrael.

To be sure, an English translation of a Bialik poem can never replace the Hebrew original. But to deprive those whose familiarity with the Hebrew language may be found wanting of at least an introduction to Bialik's poetry is a literary sin of the first magnitude. Yet when one consults the available translations of just his "Great Poems," the results are most interesting.

Rationale

A Unity of Three, Plus One

Of the six poems which comprise the "Shirot" or "Poems" section of Kol Kitvei Ch. N. Bialik,^{5/} four were chosen for purposes of translation. MEGILLAT HA'ESH or THE SCROLL OF FIRE was omitted because its length would have made it too unwieldy for thesis consideration. Furthermore, its very construction, that of free verse, places it closer to the free verse of Walt Whitman and ultimately in contradistinction to the remaining five. YONAH HA-CHAYAT or JONAH THE TAILOR, while also representative of Bialik's creative genius, is the least well-known of the six and was omitted for that reason.

Of the remaining four, THE YESHIVAH STUDENT, THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS, and IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER are universally acknowledged to be among Bialik's poetic masterpieces. In addition, they share a common thread in that they deal with specifically Jewish themes: traditional East European Jewish education, a Talmudic legend, and the devastating aftermath of a pogrom (which some have under-

stood as tragically prophetic of the "Shoah" or Holocaust). HA'BRECHAH or THE POND, none the less well-known, was included because it reveals yet another aspect of Bialik's complex genius--that of "nature poet." All four, to a greater or lesser extent, may further be linked by various autobiographical threads which aid our understanding of the poet as man, as Jew, and as creative personality, and which will be discussed later on.

The "Quality" of the Translations

All four of the poems chosen for translation by this translator have been rendered into English, on more than one occasion, by more than one translator. Indeed, three of the thirteen translators have translated more than one of the poems: two have translated two poems, and one, H. H. Fein, has translated three.^{6/}

However, with all due recognition to the fallacy inherent in generalization, the translations themselves, by and large, fall into either one or both of two categories: (a) sacrificing the literal meaning of the text in favor of the rhythm of the poem or (b) sacrificing the metrical

rhythm of the poem in favor of the literal meaning of the text. What necessarily results is a perhaps unavoidable distortion of precisely what it is Bialik is trying to communicate along with a "sense" of the rhythm inherent in each of his poems--and thereby forcing this latter consideration into the narrow confines of English poetic structure.*

Such difficulties are, I believe, solvable. The aim of this translator, with proper guidance, has been to provide translations "as literal as possible, as idiomatic as necessary." The goal has been to attempt a realizable balance between meaning and rhythm, with primary emphasis, however, on meaning. Of necessity, both alliteration and rhyme scheme, while readily apparent in the original Hebrew, have taken a back seat to meaning, and, more often than not, were discarded entirely; where they did occur was more an act of coincidence than planning. Furthermore, it was realized at a fairly early stage that the rhythm of the Hebrew

*This is not the appropriate place for a detailed analysis and evaluation of each of the thirteen translators, nor, we may add, is such an evaluation the intent of this thesis.

language could not be "translated" into English; rather, what was hoped for, was that a solid, literal translation would possess its own rhythm and thereby communicate to the reader, if only approximately, the power of Bialik's pen. This has indeed been the case.

The Date of the Translations

Taken as a group, these four poems have been translated into English a total of seventeen times between 1906 and 1973! Yet, were we to draw up a chronological list of translations, some very interesting facts would reveal themselves: Twelve of the seventeen translations appeared before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948; all but one of these before 1940. Furthermore, two of these translations, Frank's and Leftwich's translations of IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER, were based on the Yiddish text, rather than the Hebrew, although it was Bialik himself who translated his poem into Yiddish. THE YESHIVAH STUDENT has not been re-translated since 1936; THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS not since 1922.

Of the remaining five post-1948 translations, both Lask's and Nowomias't's translations of THE

DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS are incomplete. Thus, in the final accounting, what we are left with are only three "contemporary" translations of Bialik's "Great Poems:" Rosenberg's translation of IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER (1973) and Bateson's and Mintz's translations of THE POND (1962 and 1966, respectively). Certainly NOT a literary record appropriate to the "poet laureate of the Jewish people!" Indeed, were this thesis to content itself with translations of only THE YESHIVAH STUDENT and THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS, a gap of forty years would have been overcome. And were we to disregard Rosenberg's translation, which appeared after this translator's version was completed, revised, and approved, we would have been faced with a deficit of more than thirty years since a new translation of IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER last appeared on the American literary scene (i.e. Klein's) in 1940.

That much, much more work needs to be done in translating Bialik and introducing him to yet another generation of English-speaking Jews (and non-Jews) should be obvious from what has been noted above. That this thesis has played a small part in this most worthwhile of literary endeavors is reward enough. 1/

Acknowledgements

I would be seriously remiss in my responsibilities if I did not take this opportunity and say "Thank You" to all those who helped bring this project to fruition: To the staff of the Hebrew Union College Library, particularly Mrs. Marion Schild and Mrs. Minnie Levine, who answered all my innumerable questions and helped in the research-gathering aspect of this thesis--always with a smile.

To my two sets of parents, and to our families, whose constant encouragement was more than the proverbial "beacon in the night"--much more.

To Dr. Werner Weinberg, Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature, my thesis-advisor and my teacher, who taught me more than I could ever repay. This thesis, which grew out of an assignment in his Second-Year Modern Hebrew Literature class, is as much a tribute to his inspiration as it is to any meagre efforts on my part. (And to Mrs. Weinberg for graciously sharing her husband with me.)

To my wife Judith who has shared these long student-years with me, the hopes and the disappoint-

ments, who has given my life meaning and purpose where I thought none existed, and who has helped make me worthy of the title "Rabbi." Any success that I have had or ever will have is made all the more significant by sharing it with her.

INTRODUCTION

Enumeration of English Translations

I. THE YESHIVAH STUDENT

1. Fein, H. H.:

Titans of Hebrew Verse. Boston, Humphries, 1936, pages 28-44 & 224-225.

2. Frank, Helena:

a. Ausubel, N. & M. (Eds.). A Treasury of Jewish Poetry. New York, Crown, 1957, pages 86-92.

b. Snowman, L. V. (Ed.). Poems from the Hebrew. London, Hasefer, 1924.

c. The Jewish Forum, 3, 3. March 1920, pages 173-181.

d. The Jewish Review, 1, 2. July 1910, pages 164-172.

3. Samuel, Maurice:

a. Efros, Israel (Ed.). Complete poetic works, 1. New York, The Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1948.

b. ----- . Selected Poems of H. N. B., Rev. Ed. New York, The Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1965, pages 29-50.

c. Fleg, E. (Ed.). The Jewish Anthology. New York, Harcourt & Brace, 1925, pages 322-325. (Incomplete.)

d. Samuel, Maurice (Trans.). Selected Poems. New York, New Palestine, 1926.

e. Schwarz, L. W. (Ed.). A Golden Treasury of Jewish Literature. New York, Farrar & Rinehart, 1937.

f. The New Palestine, 8, 13. March 27, 1925, pages 301-306.

II. THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS

1. Lask, I. M.:

Artzi: Palestine Almanac, 5708. Tel-Aviv, Zionist Youth Department, 1957, pages 69-71. (Incomplete.)

2. Nowomiast, Peretz (Nof):

Here and Now, 2, 65. June 27, 1956, page 17. (Incomplete.)

3. Samuel, Maurice:

a. Efros, Israel (Ed.). Complete poetical works, Vol. 1. New York, The Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1948.

b. ----- Selected Poems of H. N. B., Rev. Ed. New York, The Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1965, pages 88-104.

c. Fleg, E. (Ed.). The Jewish Anthology. New York, Harcourt & Brace, 1925, pages 370-380.

d. Raskin, P. M. (Ed.). Anthology of Modern Hebrew Poetry. New York, Behrman's Jewish Book Shop, 1927, pages 84-99.

e. Samuel, Maurice (Trans.). Selected Poems. New York, New Palestine, 1926.

f. The Menorah Journal, 8, 5. October 1922, pages 281-291.

4. Snowman, L. V.:

a. (Ed.), Poems from the Hebrew. London, Hasefer, 1924.

b. The Jewish Chronicle Supplement, 16. April 28, 1922, pages i-ii.

III. IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER

1. Fein, H. H.:

A Harvest of Hebrew Verse. Boston, Humphries, 1934, pages 101-109.

2. Frank, Helena:*

a. Samuel, Maurice (Trans.). Selected Poems. New York, New Palestine, 1926.

b. Snowman, L. V. (Ed.). Poems from the Hebrew. London, Hasefer, 1924.

c. The Jewish Quarterly Review, 19, 1. October, 1906, pages 127-135.

d. The Maccabean, 12, 1. January, 1907, pages 14-20.

3. Klein, A. M.:

a. Ausubel, N. & M. (Eds). A Treasury of Jewish Poetry. New York, Crown, 1957, pages 258-264.

b. Efros, Israel (Ed.). Complete poetical works, Vol. 1. New York, The Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1948.

c. -----, Selected Poems of H. N. B., Rev. Ed. New York, The Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1965, pages 114-128.

d. The Canadian Jewish Chronicle, 28, 20. October 2, 1940, pages 9-11.

e. Jewish Frontier, 8, 9. August 1942, pages 16-19.

4. Leftwich, Joseph:*

a. (Ed.), The Golden Peacock. London, Anscombe, 1939, pages 30-38.

b. -----, The Golden Peacock, Rev. Ed. New York, Thomas Yoseloff, 1961, pages 50-57.

c. The Jewish Spectator, 7, 9. July 1942, pages 15-17.

5. Rosenberg, James B.:

The Jewish Spectator, 39, 2. February 1973, pages 7-12.

6. Roth, Samuel:

(Ed.), New Songs of Zion. New York, The Judean Press, 1914, pages 31-36.

IV. THE POND

1. Bateson, Mary C.:

Mosaic, 3, 2. Spring 1962, pages 30-40.

2. Fein, H. H.:

Titans of Hebrew Verse. Boston, Humphries, 1936, pages 50-56.

3. Feldman, Reginald V.:

a. Efros, Israel (Ed.). Complete poetical works, Vol. 1. New York, The Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1948.

b. ----- Selected Poems of H. N. B., Rev. Ed. New York, The Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1965, pages 129-136.

c. Views, 1, 3. June 1932, pages 224-229.

d. The Zionist Review, New Series, 6, 21. September 22, 1938, pages 33-34.

4. Mintz, Ruth Finer:

(Ed. & Trans). Modern Hebrew Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1966, pages 2-19.

*Translations based on the Yiddish version of IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER, rather than the Hebrew.

The Translators

(THE YESHIVAH STUDENT	I)
(THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS	II)
(IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER	III)
(THE POND	IV)

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Bateson, Mary C. | IV (1962) |
| 2. Fein, H. H. | I (1936), III (1934), IV (1936) |
| 3. Feldman, Reginald V. | IV (1932) |
| 4. Frank, Helena | I (1910), III (1906)* |
| 5. Klein, A. M. | III (1940) |
| 6. Lask, I. M. | II (1957)+ |
| 7. Leftwich, Joseph | III (1939)* |
| 8. Mintz, Ruth Finer | IV (1966) |
| 9. Nowomiast, Peretz (Nof) | II (1956)+ |
| 10. Rosenberg, James B. | III (1973) |
| 11. Roth, Samuel | III (1914) |
| 12. Samuel, Maurice | I (1925), II (1922) |
| 13. Snowman, L. V. | II (1922) |

*From the Yiddish.

+Incomplete.

A Bialik Chronology

<u>Year</u>	<u>Bialik</u>
1873	Born in village of Radi, Ukraine, Russia; traditional date, Tevet 10.
1879	Age 6: family moves to suburb of Zhitomir, a small country town.
1880	Age 7: father dies; sent to live with grandfather.
1886	Age 13: begins to study by himself in the Zhitomir Bet Hamidrash.
1889	Age 16: enters yeshivah in Volozhin, near Vilna.
1891	Age 18: goes to Odessa; meets Ahad Haam and Ravnitzki.
1892	Age 19: first published poem begins his literary career; returns to Zhitomir; grandfather dies.
1893	Age 20: marries; timber merchant in Korotishov; continues writing poetry.
1894	Age 21: writes THE YESHIVAH STUDENT (1894-5).
1897	Age 24: fails in business; becomes Hebrew teacher in Sosnowitz.
1900	Age 27: brought to Odessa by Achad Haam and others; becomes a major literary personage.
1901	Age 28: first published volume of poetry.

A Bialik Chronology
(cont.)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Bialik</u>
1902	Age 29: writes THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS.
1903	Age 30: writes IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER
1905	Age 32: establishes Moriah Hebrew Publishing firm in Odessa; world-wide fame.
1915	Age 42: writes "Dance of Despair"; period of "silent work" begins--few poems, much "practical" work.
1921	Age 48: leaves Russia during Bolshevik Revolution; establishes Dvir Hebrew publishing house in Berlin.
1924	Age 51: settles in Tel-Aviv, Palestine; writes legends, folktales, children's poems; edits anthologies, collections, commentaries, notes, etc.; Dvir a great world Hebrew publishing house.
1925	Age 52: speaks at opening of Hebrew University as member of its Board of Governors.
1926	Age 53: visits America on behalf of Keren Hayesod (Palestine Foundation Fund).
1927	Age 54: tours Poland on behalf of Hebrew culture; founds and conducts first Oneg Shabbat in Tel-Aviv.
1929	Age 56: last published poem.

A Bialik Chronology
(cont.)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Bialik</u>
1933	Age 60: world-wide celebration of his birthday.
1934	Age 61: dies, following an operation in Vienna, on Tammuz 21.

*Adapted from Eisenberg, Azriel and Abraham Segal. Presenting Bialik: A Study of His Life and Work. New York, Jewish Education Committee of New York, 1956, pages 22-26.

Methodology

The translated poems which comprise this thesis may be said to be "literal translations," or, as has been (previously) remarked in the FORWARD, "as literal as possible, as idiomatic as necessary." Such translation follows a two-fold orientation: (a) a linear or line-by-line translation from the Hebrew original, with particular attention to any and all punctuation used by the poet, and (b) an almost slavish adherence to the dictates of "good English"--as opposed to the rampant use of "poetic license" common in many so-called "translations."*

My "plan of attack" was, in reality, quite a simple one. With the aid of the various dictionaries and concordances, duly noted in the BIBLIOGRAPHY, I sought a translation which, almost word for word, paralleled the Hebrew original of Bialik. Oftentimes, however, this was well-nigh impossible, for what may have taken only one Hebrew word to express, necessitated two or even three English words. This

*I would prefer to label such efforts "poetic paraphrases," rather than actual translations, for they convey the "spirit" or "intent" of the poet and not his actual words.

problem became all the more acute when one considers the relative ease with which the Hebrew language may be "prefixed" and "suffixed." Thus, the actual length of my translations is slightly greater, although the line-count remains the same.

Further, what is unique with this thesis is the use of a detailed "critical apparatus": a line-by-line reference to Bialik's use of Biblical phraseology. The bulk of this work has actually been done by A. Avital in his book Shirat Bialik Vehatanakh.^{1/} But this master-work is in Hebrew and, except for the most blatantly obvious Biblical phrases, these "notes" have never before been set down for the English reader. Indeed, one aspect of Bialik's genius has been his ability to link two or more Biblical phrases in a single line of poetry and thereby create a new appreciation of the power of the Biblical poet.

A word is perhaps here in order regarding the two punctuation marks which are found in the apparatus. The ampersand (&) has been used to indicate where a particular phrase occurs in more than one place in the Bible, while the semi-colon (;) has been used to show where Bialik made

use of more than one Biblical phrase in a given line of poetry. Thus, for example, in line 2 of THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS, the phrase "No glory of Bashan" may be found in Isaiah 35:2; the phrase "choicest of its oaks" in Isaiah 35:2 and Jeremiah 37:24 and Amos 2:9; and the phrase "fell . . . mightily" in Isaiah 10:34.

All references were checked against The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text, the two-volume English-Hebrew text published by The Jewish Publication Society of America in 1955.

Lastly, all previous English translations of each poem were closely studied, and the critical eye may observe what appears to be the same translation. This should not be ascribed to plagiarism, but to the simple fact that, here and there, there was simply no other way to render the Hebrew. More often than not, however, taken as a whole, the translations are indeed different. Had that not been the case, there would have been little need for this project.

THE YESHIVAH STUDENT

Introduction

The most blatantly autobiographical of the four poems included here, THE YESHIVAH STUDENT harks back to Bialik's days in the Bet Hamidrash at Zhitomir and the Yeshivah at Volozhin--and to his ultimate dissatisfaction with the traditional type of cheder-education he was forced to undergo. The yeshivah student of the poem is both Bialik and the thousands of other Jewish boys whose awakening youth was sacrificed on the "altar of Torah."

Yet, the poem is not bitter in its renunciation, but, rather, paints the tragic picture of one caught between two opposing forces: the obligation to study imposed upon all Jewish males and the obligation of the heart to experience the joys of growing up amid the wonders of nature. Like Bialik who longed for the lush countryside of his native Radi but was forced to sublimate his desire to wander its fields, the student, too, sadly turns away from the rhythms of night and day and turns instead to the rhythmic chanting of a page of the Gemara.

And in his turning away, his martyrdom, Bialik found anew the symbol for the eternal vigilance of the Jewish people, its single-minded dedication to serving the One God, against all outside pressures and obstacles. Longing for nature and the world of alien delights, the Jew knows that such is not to be his and returns to the houses of study and prayer, there to communicate most directly with his God. Neither wealth nor power are to be his rewards, but, like the student, to return home wearing a "crown of Torah" makes one the richest of kings.

Seven years in the writing, the poem appeared in installments in the Hebrew periodical Hashiloach beginning in 1894 and became Bialik's most popular poetic creation. Depicting a world no longer extant for us today, reading and re-reading THE YESHIVAH STUDENT reminds us that much more was lost in the Holocaust than six million lives, that the flame of Jewish spirituality shines less brightly because the yeshivot of Eastern Europe are no more.

THE YESHIVAH STUDENT

Still there are desolate cities in the scatter-
ings of the Exile,

Wherein smoulders in a secret place our ancient
light;

Still our God preserved for a great deliverance
A fiery ember upon the ash heap.

5 And like plucked brands briefly smoulder

Wretched people, pitiful souls

Who live without their days and grow old without
time

Like grass which rises in a land of great drought.

When you go out alone at the approach of night

10 In one of these blessed cities,

When stars twinkle from above,

The grasses whisper together and the winds recount,

And your ears hear from afar a moaning voice,

And your eyes see from afar a twinkling light,

15 In the window, and through it the image of a man,
who resembles

1 Job 15:28; Jeremiah 25:34. 3 Genesis 45:7;
Isaiah 1:19. 5 Amos 4:11; Zechariah 3:2; Isaiah
28:10 & 13. 7 Job 15:32; Ecclesiastes 7:17.
8 Hosea 13:5. 12 II Samuel 12:19. 13 Isaiah
30:21; Nehemiah 12:43; Jeremiah 6:23 & 50:42.
14 Psalms 139:6 & Proverbs 25:7; Genesis 37:18
& Job 39:29. 15 Deuteronomy 10:16.

The shadow of a corpse swaying, struggling,
 Struggling, quaking, and the stifled sound of
 a moan

Is lifted up to you upon the springs of silence-----
 Then a yeshivah student in one of the prison
 houses

20 Tarrying late in the evening--your eyes behold.

In that house, between these walls
 Not a day--but six years passed over his soul;
 Here his boyhood ripened early, his youth ceased,
 And here the light of his eyes was extinguished
 and his face became pale.

25 Not a day--but six years, ever since he turned
 his face

To the wall into the gloomy corner,
 Even a single ray of light he did not see before
 him,

Beside the webs of spiders and the dull plaster
 of the wall.

17 Isaiah 16:7. 18 Job 38:16. 19 Isaiah
 42:22. 20 Isaiah 5:11. 22 Psalms 124:4-5.
 24 Isaiah 29:22. 25 II Chronicles 35:22.
 25-26 Isaiah 38:2; II Kings 20:2. 28 Proverbs
 30:28; Ezekiel 13:10-12.

Hunger, no sleep, rotting flesh, lean of
face-----

30 What are they that he should give heed to them?
Does he not yet know how they studied from of
old?

Does he not yet know that in the end his glory
will come?

Six full years, years of boyhood and youth,
Like the shadow, as if without life are forever
lost.

35 And as if they had not touched even the prison,
And as if they had not passed over the corner of
the youth.

Like a strip of every living thing from the
pleasing earth

And the earth would blot out the other side of
the partition,

And as if it would not wear from year to year

40 The shrouds of winter and the garments of
summer;

29 Psalms 37:19; Isaiah 3:24 & 5:24 & Zechariah
14:12. 31-32 Isaiah 7:16 & 8:4. 33 Exodus
21:2; Leviticus 25:30. 34 Job 4:20. 35 Jere-
miah 37:15. 36 Job 28:8. 37-38 Genesis 7:4
& 23; Deuteronomy 11:6. 39 Exodus 13:10 &
Judges 11:40.

As the sun extinguished the other side of the
 window

And as if the light of its radiance had not
 striven toward the house

In its seizing to descend between the branches
 of the oak tree,

Which stands lonely by the window of the yeshivah;

45 And as if there had been no clear day nor moonlit
 night,

And spring had not enchanted with pleasures and
 pleasantries;

And as if the boy had not yet turned into a youth--

Like the shadow, as if without life, six full
 years!

Many days such as these--also a muddled swamp
 stands

50 Like the yeshivah--would they visit with the
 news,

Thus also for her sons a live heart, a passionate
 inclination,

42 Job 24:16. 44 Genesis 15:2. 45 Psalms
 121:6. 47 Genesis 2:5. 49 Proverbs 25:26.
 49-50 Isaiah 24:22. 51 Isaiah 57:15 &
 Psalms 69:33.

Also these two feet would dance during the year.
 And so--also the wind would shake her walls:
 Benches added, benches taken away,
 55 Young men would come in, young men would go out.
 There were those who would return to their homes
 for the Days of Awe,
 And there were those who would scatter to the
 nearby villages,
 And remain distant from the eye of the dreaded
 overseer
 Let them rejoice in glory in the home of good
 people
 60 Who love the rabbis and respect those who study
 Torah.
 Also, there were those who were dismissed and
 went forth in haste,
 One man returns to the house of his father in
 sorrow:
 The one--on account of his playing cards in the
 evenings,

59 Psalms 149:5. 61 Esther 3:15 & 8:14; II
 Chronicles 26:20. 62 Leviticus 22:13; Lamenta-
 tions 1:4.

The second--on account of his talking to
 maidens in the evenings,
 65 The third--because the shamash found him
 smoking
 His pipe on Shabbat in a well-known place,
 The fourth--having hidden himself with "The
 Guide for the Perplexed"
 In the attic, the fifth--none knew why.
 Also, there was one chosen for a bridegroom,
 and a maiden
 70 A village girl, coarse, fat was his lot,
 And it happened that one of the secluded ones
 was given redemption
 Who became a great rabbi in a worthy town--
 But the one stands like a hammered nail,
 The deeds, the years pass by behind him;
 75 And before him? Before him a wall of iron is
 planted,
 A dim corner and parchment scrolls are seen.

71 Leviticus 25:24. 75 Ezekiel 4:3.

Ever since he acquired his place in the corner
 he did not see
 Either youth or secluded one when he came in
 and when he went out;
 And also, even the shamash did not notice the
 time
 80 When he came in, when he would return to his
 home.
 The dawn, the moon or the night's darkness,
 Only they alone knew his appointed rounds,
 For even the light of the fair sun above
 Did not know his way nor burn him.
 85 In the dawn, in the dawn before they could dis-
 tinguish
 "Between blue and white, between wolf and dog";
 When from the silent darkness shine
 All the stars of the morning, a myriad host;
 When the city-dwellers finally sleep their sleep,
 90 None disturbs their resting place, not even the
 voice of the cock calling out,

78 II Chronicles 23:7. 80 Nehemiah 2:6; Job
 7:10. 82 Jeremiah 8:7. 83 Isaiah 30:26; Song
 of Songs 6:10. 84 Psalms 95:10; Job 28:7.
 85 Ruth 3:14. 86 B'rachot I:2. 88 Job 38:7;
 Numbers 10:36. 89 Psalms 76:6.

And even before those who precede the night-

watches arise

He strengthens himself like the lion for the

worship of the Creator;

When every living substance silently waits and

hopes,

Until, bestirred, there arises new life,

95 As he dreams his final dream, as he contains

Within the secrecy of his wings riddles and

spells,

And enwraps his face in majestic silence,

A feeling hides itself between the fringes of

his garment--

Then awakens the youth from his brief sleep,

100 Dresses himself in the darkness and runs to his

corner,

And marches hurriedly from the lane to the

garden

Wherein he will arrive at the yeshivah,

Only the ears of the straying winds hear

91 Psalms 119:148. 93 Lamentations 3:26.

96 Psalms 61:5. 97 I Kings 19:13. 103
Psalms 92:12.

And the eye of the stars keeps watch upon the
path.

105 Then it happens that the unstable wind like
Satan to greet him
Dances from the abundant blue sky,
And flatters him and curls his ear-lock,
And entices him secretly, uttering foolishness.
And the eyelids of the youth's two eyes would
cling,

110 As piteously they would entreat: "Be gracious
unto us, our brother
Your black eyes--they consume away beneath us,
We are weary for with you are we exhausted.
A whole day, a summer day have you tired us out
And a watch in the night--we are exhausted, our
brother!

115 Lie down again and rest and we too,
Before you have fallen asleep will our strength
be sufficiently restored"--
But suddenly the youth passes his lean hands

104 Psalms 66:7 & Proverbs 15:3. 107 Psalms
73:18. 108 Job 31:27; Proverbs 6:19. 111
Zechariah 14:12. 113 Joshua 10:13. 114
Psalms 90:4. 115 I Samuel 3:5 & 6. 116
Isaiah 40:31 & 41:1.

Over the eyelids of his two clinging eyes
 As one who is driving such thoughts away--And
 the sound of his urgent steps

120 The empty streets hear.

Then descends the wind to the garden foliage,
 It charms, it entices with a still small voice:
 "Behold, beloved youth, how green is my bed,
 Enjoy before your lungs rot away."

125 "Also we are asleep" whisper in their dreams
 Grasses and herbs from the four corners,
 And also the stars beckon from their high place:
 "We are sleeping and our eyes are open."
 And the pleasant odors of the garden grass come

130 Of their own accord into his nostrils, making
 him drunk,

And by itself falls a shaft of wind into his
 mouth--

And a great relief into his breast, into his
 throat.

122 I Kings 19:12. 123 Daniel 10:11 & 19;
 Song of Songs 1:16. 126 Ezechiel 37:9. 127
 Job 22:12. 128 Jeremiah 32:19. 129 Isaiah
 37:27 & Psalms 129:6. 130 Ezechiel 39:19.

Then the youth opens wide his mouth and

inhales,

And widens the opening of his open shirt.

135 And like a man who moves stones and is weary

All his insides implore, beg for rest.

And he sends forth to the wind his strengthless
hands

As one who implores: "Take me, wind, carry me
away!

Let us fly away from here and find us a place of
rest,

140 Narrow to me is this place here, I am weary
here!"

But a sudden jolt by the garden hedge

Reminds the youth that he has strayed from the
path,

And he remembers his obligation and he remembers
the corner,

And like fleeing from the sin and flees the
yeshivah.

133 Isaiah 57:4 & Psalms 81:11 & 35:21. 135
Ecclesiastes 10:9. 136 Ruth 3:1. 137 Job
26:2. 139 Genesis 8:9 & Isaiah 34:14 & Lamen-
tations 1:3. 140 Isaiah 49:20.

- 145 In the empty yeshivah a holy silence,
 But the youth swallows the holiness first,
 For there in the corner wait for him three
 Of his comrades who befriended him the day he
 came hither--
- A burning candle, his desk-stand and a volume
 of Talmud;
- 150 And as if to take refuge in the fleeting moments
 trembling
- He hurries to his comrades and begins his study,
 And as he stands--he stands like a hammered
 nail.
- A whole day, half the night from his place he
 does not move,
- There he eats his morsel of black bread for his
 hunger--
- 155 And who are you, Shamir¹? Who are you, flint
 Before a Hebrew youth who is occupied with the
 Torah?

146 Numbers 4:20. 148 Judges 14:20. 153
 Isaiah 46:7.

¹
 Legendary worm or stone, created on the Sabbath
 eve, that cuts stone.

"Oh, oh. . .Rabbah said, oh. . .the Rabbis
have learned!"

The dawn, the garden and the smell of the field
Flew like a bird and blotted out like a cloud;

160 The earth and its fullness forgotten, lost,
The earth and its fullness--Here, here in the
corner,

Where suns shine forth like many rubies--
And full of strength the youth shakes,
And his eyes like two coals of fire ignite.

165 The eastern sky reddens, the sun rises,
The joyous earth awakens and shines forth,
The wind is filled with the joyous shouts of
birds,

Every living thing brightens its face, every
mouth sings a song.

Even the yeshivah students are as freshly-
washed children

170 Who climb up from their washing to their mothers'
lap,

158 Genesis 27:27. 159 Hosea 9:11; Isaiah
44:22. 160-161 Isaiah 34:1 & Psalms 24:1.
162 Isaiah 54:12. 164 Leviticus 16:12 & II
Samuel 23:13. 165 Genesis 19:23. 168
Psalms 104:15. 170 Song of Songs 4:2;
Lamentations 2:12.

Thus, pure and shining come the pioneers
 With their large Gemarot to their tables;
 And all of them together begin their Torah,
 The young men roar like lion cubs,
 175 Entreating, murmuring and likewise praying
 And singing praises to the Lord every bowel
 and kidney.
 From outside upon the window-sills of the
 yeshivah
 The swallow awakens its nest--her tender off-
 spring,
 To recount the praise of the noble sun,
 180 The righteousness of its dispensing among those
 who dwell in darkness;
 For also the eye of the world joyously looks
 At morningtime opening into the inside of the
 yeshivah
 To sweep away from within the shadows of dark-
 ness
 With a golden broom--with a lovely light.

173 Ezra 6:20; Isaiah 42:4. 174 Jeremiah
 51:38. 176 Psalms 9:12 & 68:33. 178 Deu-
 teronomy 32:11; Genesis 33:13. 180 Judges
 5:11; Psalms 107:10.

- 185 The light filled the dimmed eye of the yeshivah,
 And draped with gold her black walls;
 And shouting filled the yeshivah,
 And singing birds outside give her strength,
 Also the aged oak tree left over from the woods
 190 Which stands by her from of old,
 Whose days are already fulfilled and the root dried
 up
 And has already ceased from yielding acorns--
 Also it as it awakens beautifies its head,
 Which grew moist overnight, from the refreshing
 dew,
 195 And looked upon the birds as one looks upon the
 members of his family
 Who come to bless him in the morning with song.
 And like a river of delights overflows Life,
 Flooding the earth, the living and their wings--
 Let him who has eyes satisfy his eyes!
 200 Let him in whose nostrils there is Life enjoy!
 Yet not one of the youths moved from his place,

187 Isaiah 22:2. 189 Isaiah 17:9. 190
 Ezechiel 38:17. 191 Genesis 29:21; Hosea
 9:16 & Job 18:16. 192 Jeremiah 17:8. 194
 Jonah 4:10. 197 Psalms 36:9. 200 Genesis
 2:7 & Isaiah 2:22.

Behind him and beyond Life, Light--
 Who are you, Shamir? Who are you, flint
 Before a Hebrew youth who is in love with the
 Torah?

205 Thus stands the youth daily by his place
 Ever since the morning light unto the beginning
 of the nightwatch,
 For precisely he divides his day into portions:
 The one for his need, the three for Torah;
 And like a lonely prince among brethren, a
 captive to his corner,
 210 Stands the youth white-faced, wrinkled brow,
 And formed within the Gemara the fulness of his
 every breath,
 And formed--and shut himself up forever.

"Oh, oh said Rabbah, oh said Abaye!"--
 Is this here the potter's house for the soul of
 the nation?

206 Judges 16:2 & I Samuel 14:36; Judges 7:19
 & Lamentations 2:19. 209 Genesis 49:26 & Deu-
 teronomy 33:16. 212 Genesis 7:16. 214 Jere-
 miah 18:2-3.

215 Is this the fountain of her blood, which is
 planted within her ever-
 Lastingly, which overflows out of her fire and
 warmth?
 Is this here her majesties--future lights,
 Which form her spirit upon the birthstones?
 For what are the thunderings and the lightnings
 220 Which lift up the soul to the heart of heaven!
 Who hid the spells among the worn-out scrolls
 of parchment,
 Who gave power to these mouldy words
 To hew out flames from broken hearts
 And to cut off gleams from dimmed eyes?
 225 "Oh, oh said Rabbah!"--Do you understand, do you
 not feel
 The ruination of the soul, of the strong love?
 Have they not yet rent your heart of brass
 Every utterance hewn fire, every word sprinkled
 blood?
 Will a great glorious hand not hurl you

215 Leviticus 20:18 & Deuteronomy 12:23. 215-
 216 Daniel 12:2. 218 Zechariah 12:1; Exodus
 1:16 & Jeremiah 18:3. 219 Exodus 20:15. 220
 Psalms 25:1 & 143:8; Deuteronomy 4:11. 222
 Genesis 4:12 & Deuteronomy 8:18. 223 Psalms
 29:7; Psalms 109:22. 224 Psalms 6:8. 226
 Deuteronomy 28:65 & Psalms 84:3 & 119:81.
 227 Job 6:12. 228 Psalms 29:7; Leviticus
 4:6. 229 Exodus 14:31; Exodus 15:6.

230 To an unexplored height, an unknown distance?
 Will your spirit not be enveloped in a tempest
 And your heart like the fish which has been
 seized in the net?
 Do you not tell of the speech of the timid bird,
 What the chirping dove moans there forlorn
 235 In the dark corner with the sound of pure
 prayer,
 Which is poured out together with his heart on
 the pages of the Talmud?
 Since dawn arose, his heart was not faint,
 And his knees knew not stumbling or knocking
 together,
 From reading "Said Rabba." The sun goes down,
 240 The voices subdued, the souls weary.
 Every lip worn, every throat parched,
 The tongues are dried up; and with impatience
 They wait for the shamash to come and call out
 Those who learn about the Lord for evening
 prayer.

231 Isaiah 30:20; Ezechiel 1:4. 232 Eccle-
 siastes 9:12. 233 Amos 4:13. 234 Isaiah
 38:14 & 59:11. 235 Job 16:17. 237 Genesis
 19:15 & 32:27. 238 Psalms 109:24 & Nahum
 2:11. 240 Ecclesiastes 12:4. 241 Genesis
 11:7 & Exodus 18:18; Psalms 69:4. 242 Deu-
 teronomy 28:65. 244 Isaiah 54:13.

245 And with the light which the descending sun
 poured out
 Upon the capital of the Ark and its cherubim
 up above
 Like the splendor of divine grace, my fullest
 desire, pleasure,
 Departs the Shechinah and divine majesty
 ascends;

And with one sceptre of light the sun commands
 250 The dark narrow corner of the youth,
 Yet over it ascended a burning brightness
 In a quivering reddish fire at brightness.
 Then one joyous voice full of strength is
 heard-----
 The voice is the voice of the youth knowing not
 defeat.

255 Like a boy embracing, like a son yearning
 He learns his portion pleasantly, reverently,
 And like a ray of light which is shattered
 toward strips of swimming waters,

245 Leviticus 22:7 & Micah 3:6. 247 Psalms
 52:3. 253 Psalms 68:34; I Samuel 1:13 &
 Isaiah 65:19. 254 Genesis 27:22; Exodus 32:18.
 257 Ezekiel 47:5.

His timid voice bursts forth among enfeebled
 voices.

Like the arrow runs his word, pages flee,
 260 Leaf pursues leaf, the columns are consumed.

"Oh, the Rabbis have learned--who surely knows
 whether

Or not, that I sacrifice my soul and my might
 Upon the altar of Torah, then from the corner
 Will I exalt myself and the earth be full of
 my glory?"

265 "Oh, the Rabbis have learned--also Rabbi Akiba
 Up to the fortieth year empty and ignorant,
 And arose and went to the yeshivah
 And he became a standard for his people--But I
 am still a youth."

"Lord, Take what Thou wilt take! my fat and
 my blood-----

270 I swear before You and before Your Holy Torah,
 I will not refrain the quivering of my lips
 and my voice will not be silent,

259 Psalms 147:15. 262 Deuteronomy 6:5.
 264 Psalms 72:19. 267 Genesis 25:34. 268
 Isaiah 11:10; Jeremiah 1:6. 269 Ezechiel
 44:7 & 15. 270 Genesis 22:16. 271 Job 16:5.

I will not move from my place, abandon my
 corner,
 My heart will know no rest and to my eyes
 Will I not give sleep--until I quench my thirst
 for Your Word;

275 The dawn wakes me, midnight will put me to
 sleep,
 Until I complete the "Shass" and become wise
 in the Torah-----

And with this--Said Rabbah. . ."And full of
 strength arose

A clear voice makes the air quake in a tempest-----

It seems to me, there upon the Ark up above

280 Like a smile of the perfect righteous one, light
 shines forth-----

The Shechinah delights in the vanity of the mouth
 of a suckling.

Or perhaps it mocks her sacrifices,

Who bury their lives in the darkness, in the
 prison-cell,

Who deliver gallantly their souls up to it?

273 I Kings 2:44. 273-274 Psalms 132:4-5.
 274 Amos 8:11 & Psalms 104:11. 275 Psalms
 57:9. 280 Job 12:4; Job 3:4.

- 285 The sun set and descended into the depths,
 And the light arose from the heads of the
 cherubim.
 Further still are the voices crushed, covered
 over
 Like the buzzing of bees, like the humming of
 flies.
 The hoped-for shamash comes, silencing the
 murmurers
- 290 For the Minchah prayer. Hurriedly is the prayer
 Concluded. The young men of the yeshivah disperse,
 Slip off to flee outside, outside.
 The grove, the field--into a place where
 Even crushed bones, youth will shout with joy;
- 295 To the sloping hill--into a place where grow
 Rosy-cheeked maidens and red apples.
 How the heart swells up and how deeply breathes
 the lung!-----
 The wind, as if filtered, gentle, pure, cooled,
 And with its soft hand it wipes away the sweat

285 Exodus 15:5. 286 Ezekiel 9:3. 293-294
 Psalms 51:10. 297 Isaiah 60:5.

300 Dripping from the wrinkles of the cloudy
 forehead.
 In the yeshivah stillness. The four walls
 Stand as if absorbed in gloomy silence.
 Of all her students only two withered pious
 ones
 Are left to engage in idle conversation-----
 305 Then the voice of a lonely youth penetrates
 Moaning like the dove from a corner of the
 yeshivah.
 Why does he moan, why is his sick heart depressed?
 Why does it murmur, why does his sad song cry out?
 Does he now remember a good, a beloved mother,
 310 A poor and destitute father--and yearn for them,
 And his soul, like a bird springing forth from
 its cage,
 Longing, drawn to feast upon their faces-----
 As they too remember from the distance
 Daily their son in their pure prayer,
 315 And like those who wait for the Messiah they
 sit and wait,

307 Psalms 42:12 & 43:5. 310 Psalms 82:3;
 Joel 1:20 & Psalms 42:2.

That he would return to them, with the crown of
Torah?-----

Who knows for sure the struggles of the heart
of a youth?

But always when those who fear God pass by the
yeshivah,

And incline their ears and stand to hear

320 His piercing voice, his plaintive song,

The old ones stand, they praise his work

And a silent prayer from the heart they pray:

"Happy is the son whose labor is in Torah,

And happy are the parents who raised up such a
one as him."

325 "Oh, oh, said Rabba. . ." When Life and its
tumult

Cry out in the highest voice

Your ears not even a whisper thereof will take,

But like a deaf-mute you do not hear its speech-----

"Oh, oh, said Rabba. . ." And for the cry of
your soul

318 Exodus 18:21 & Malachi 3:16. 319 Jere-
miah 7:24. 321 Job 36:24. 327 Job 4:12.
328 Psalms 38:14. 329-330 Job 24:12.

330 From your parched throat daily you implore,
 From the cruelty of the first of its power,
 the violence of the first of your strength,
 You hide your ears so as not to hear-----
 And so as not to hear, you shut out its prayer,
 And continue to crush the head of its every
 wish,
 335 To strangle in the darkness its small passion,
 To uproot and to trample the last of her flowers-----
 Until your soul exhausts itself in its cry,
 exhausts itself,
 And falls asleep forever dried up and starved,
 With thirst not quenched nor desire fulfilled,
 340 Without being loved, without loving,
 And the two eyes which were created for seeing,
 Which could see the earth and its fullness,
 Flicker, darken and see nothing,
 And without any wish they perish into ruin;
 345 And in a life already gone like the image you
 move

331 Genesis 49:3. 332 Lamentations 3:56. 333
 Lamentations 3:8. 334 Psalms 74:14. 339
 Proverbs 13:12. 342 Isaiah 34:1 & Psalms 24:1.
 343 Genesis 39:23. 344 Isaiah 49:4. 345
 Psalms 39:7.

And you seize like the spider forsaken paths-----

And why were they created in vain, and why

Without cause will these souls be lost?

And it happens also the youth's spirit becomes

desolate

350 In its worthless toil and as embittered;

And at times in the winter cold reigns and

tempest,

Heavens like smoke, the earth muddied;

And burdened clouds dripping rainy days

Tired and gloomy pulled along-----

355 The sun if only for a small moment would brighten
the faces!

Or if only the sun could raise a meagre portion
of light!

And a green spider, comes from somewhere

To pitch its web into the corner walls,

And a two-fold gloom in the corner, in his
heart,

346 Proverbs 30:28; Judges 5:6. 347 Psalms
89:48. 352 Isaiah 51:6. 353 Proverbs 27:15.
355 Isaiah 54:7; Psalms 31:17. 356 Numbers
15:19. 357 II Samuel 1:3 & Job 2:2.

360 And in all the chambers of his soul trembling
 and chill-----
 Then knows the youth that he is forgotten,
 That his soul is lonely, forgotten, forsaken;
 And he feels that he is weak and his strength
 is spent,
 And the flame in his soul almost dies down.
 365 And his voice is heard as if rising
 From a tired soul about to die;
 The voice of a heart smitten like the grass,
 a sick heart
 Full of supplications and bile spilled out.
 His study becomes a bitter dirge,
 370 And he cries, and he covers himself up, and his
 voice asks for mercy-----
 Are afflictions dear to you, O precious son?
 Does the unfortunate one know that he indeed is
 unfortunate?

 The unfortunate one?--Why? Who can offer proof
 That man was spaciously created?

364 Numbers 11:2. 365 Exodus 28:35. 366
 Jeremiah 31:24 & Proverbs 25:25; Genesis 25:32.
 367 Psalms 102:5. 368 Job 16:13. 370 Pro-
 verbs 26:25. 371 Jeremiah 31:20. 374 Genesis
 34:21 & Psalms 104:25.

- 375 And further, why can't the youth rejoice
 In his corner cubit which is just enough for
 his feet to stand?
 The wide Torah, the Torah lighting up
 Darknesses and narrows every seeking
 From the dark womb God's hand passes on
 380 From fathers to sons its inherited light.
 In caves, on roofs--there sit our sons
 Also they learn in stealth, in secret they study,
 And lights ascend from the caves to us.
 And glories descend from the roofs to us.
 385 For right for the Torah is the life of suffering,
 Also her people and its sons in poverty were
 kept-----
 And why should it be bad in the youth's eyes
 If the earth and its fullness shut up in his
 face?
 Two complete Sedarim arranged and preserved
 390 Upon the lips of the youth--two whole Sedarim!
 And jealously all the young men look at him

379 Job 19:21. 387 Genesis 21:12 & 38:10.
 388 Deuteronomy 33:16. 389 II Samuel 23:5.

And in their hearts they perceive for him

pleasant days;

Two complete Sedarim--how pleasant is his lot!

And how can his inside not rejoice, not stir-----

395 When even his eyes can see the reward of his

labors-----

For "dilligent one" and "prodigy" they do call

him.

Only one gold diadem upon the priestly forehead,

One fine gold crown upon the heads of the

princes,

For the poet, for the hero one wreath of

laurels-----

400 Upon the head of our youth blossom two crowns!

Both "dilligent one" and "prodigy," two high

rungs

On the exalted, majestic ladder of Torah,

And like a step between them and the height of

the Geonim

Are there many worthy of greatness such as this?

394 Isaiah 16:11. 395 Genesis 45:12 & Deuteronomy 28:32. 297 Exodus 28:36-38 & Leviticus 9:9; Pirke Avoth IV:17. 398 Psalms 21:4.
403 I Samuel 20:3.

405 And the youth hopes--for the flower of hope
 Also his broken spirit secretly refresh;
 And show him an end, reward of his stolen youth,
 And unify his heart to love his corner.
 And like a grinder moves upon his grinding
 wheel
 410 And lets fly sparks from forged iron,
 So he grinds his brain in the corner
 And sharpens it on the difficult problems of
 the Talmud.
 And when the heart of the youth on winter nights
 was merry,
 When he wrestled and prevailed--over a difficult
 problem
 415 Which pressed his brain and gave it desolation
 And it was in his eyes as if he had brought down
 a fortified city-----
 Then hope would come and weave a garland
 For the head of our hero, reward of his victory,
 And he dreams a dream in the peace of knowledge

406 Proverbs 15:13. 407 Deuteronomy 32:20 &
 Jeremiah 12:4. 410 Job 41:11; Ezechiel 27:19.
 413 Esther 1:10. 414 Genesis 30:8. 416
 Proverbs 21:22. 417 I Kings 6:32.

420 Seized like a bird in the follies of his imagination.

Then would he dream of the day of his return to
his city, carrying,

Writ of ordination in his pocket, "Shass" and
Codes within him,

His praise in the city, the joy of his parents
in his house,

The great jealousy among his peers and friends.

425 And his name which was covered to this day in
darkness,

Shining forth like lightning from Mir unto
Volozhin,

And he will become a blessing, a praise, and
a Gaon-----

And a Gaon? Really? Will the vision come to
pass?

Thus--"Said Rabba, oh, oh said Rabba!"

430 And according to what he dreams thus will his
heart cleave

420 Ecclesiastes 9:12. 421 Ezra 2:1 & Nehemiah
7:6. 423 Isaiah 42:10 & Habbakuk 3:3. 424
Zechariah 1:14 & 8:2. 425 Proverbs 26:26 &
Ecclesiastes 6:4. 427 Genesis 12:2 & Zechariah
8:13; Jeremiah 13:11.

In the narrow corner, in the wide Gemara,
 To love his afflictions, his sufferings and
 his hunger,

And thus will his voice erupt, girded with
 strength--

Yet, who is he who casts the bitter drop
 435 To rend our heart in restrained grief
 Bound and hidden among the songs of the
 Gemara?

Only someone who passed by the yeshivah
 In the stillness of midnight, in the silence
 of dawn,

And through a shining window his ear attending
 440 Sings a solitary voice, the song of a tarrying
 "dilligent one,"

Which pours out secretly upon the whispering
 wind

His sweet bitterness, his bitter sweetness-----
 Only he can understand how piercing, how burning,
 How painful, how said this tune of the Gemara.

433 Psalms 65:7. 435 Joel 2:13 & Hosea 13:8.
 438 Psalms 119:62. 439 Isaiah 32:3 & Psalms
 10:17. 440 Zephaniah 2:14.

- 445 What has poisoned your voice, who has poured
 out gloom,
 To those imprisoned in the corners, with your
 sad song?
 Do they lament your ever-more buried days
 Your soul downtrodden, your spirit exhausted?
 Will your lamentation surely come upon the deso-
 lation of your world?
- 450 Do you bare your soul, the bitterness of your
 spirit?
 Do you mean to revive within the essence of your
 soul
 The dried up words; which withered your vigor?
 Do you cry out for salvation, do you call out
 for your Redeemer,
 Perhaps the Merciful One will hear and come and
 be gracious unto you?
- 455 And will the seeing eye behold your toil,
 And will the knowing heart understand your
 destruction?

450 Psalms 141:8; Proverbs 14:10. 452 Deuteronomy 34:7 & Ezekiel 17:24. 453 Psalms 18:42. 455 Proverbs 20:12; Psalms 66:7 & Proverbs 15:3. 456 Isaiah 6:10 & Proverbs 14:10.

Alas, unfortunates! No ear is attentive!
 Like an exiled prayer and wandering soul
 In the darkness of the night and in the still-
 ness of death,

460 Without being heard, your lament is lost.

There is only one ear close by to hear
 The moan of the early youth, the woe of a
 tarrying "dilligent one,"
 To give ear to the bitterness of the laments,
 Which are carried to it upon the wings of the
 dawn-----

465 He is the head of the yeshivah, its prince and
 ruler,

That the cock-crow--the voice of the first
 "dilligent one"
 Raises from its bed his feeble body
 The chirp of his bird will not let him sleep.
 And when he hears the voice of the "dilligent
 one" awaken the dawn

470 He loves to listen with much attention silently,

457 Nehemiah 1:6 & 11. 461 Isaiah 50:4. 463
 Jeremiah 31:15. 464 Psalms 139:9. 465 Jeremiah
 30:21. 468 Ecclesiastes 5:11. 469 Psalms 57:9.
 470 Isaiah 21:7.

And hear the echo of his youth, and remember
 The long chain of the life of the soul.
 And remembers--and two teardrops fall
 And are suspended in the silver hair of his
 white beard.

475 And by the dim light of a candle of the
 "dilligent one" tremble
 Like two stones of fire from gold settings.
 Why does your heart moan, old man? Does he
 remind you
 Of all the years of your affliction--this sight
 of the youth?
 The day when you went forth from your house and
 were exiled from your city,
 480 Days of your wandering, during your youth--all
 your life of pain?
 Too the years of your perserverance lovingly
 you remember-----
 And why, old man, is your spirit stirred?

473 Jeremiah 14:17. 475 Jeremiah 25:10. 476
 Ezechiel 28:14; Exodus 28:11 & Psalms 45:14.
 477-478 Psalms 132:1. 479 Deuteronomy 16:3.
 482 Genesis 41:8 & Daniel 2:3.

Behold surely you were mightily afflicted--

but you prevailed!

And through a way of darkness to light God led
you.

485 Or perhaps your heart will show you in a vision
Our mighty strength lost and consumed
When the wind blows blight and leanness upon us,
When we are defenseless and fade like a leaf?
Or does your heart tell you the future, O youth,
490 And you behold: An errant lamb, a blind worm;
An errant lamb--lost in a wasteland and tempest,
A dumb worm--in closed darkness?

In my boyhood, I heard these voices,

I saw these silent workers;

495 Their wrinkled foreheads, their large eyes
Their pallid faces--as though asking for mercy.
Every wrinkle and glance silently expressing to
me

Strangled feelings, sparks which were extinguished;

Every wrinkle and glance moved my thoughts,

484 Psalms 35:6 & Proverbs 2:13; Genesis 24:27
& Exodus 13:17. 486 Psalms 71:9. 487 Isaiah
40:7. 488 Numbers 14:9; Isaiah 64:5. 490
Psalms 119:176. 491 Psalms 119:176; Psalms
107:4.

500 My heart recoiled and my innards were seared.
 Thus every time I remember their voice, alas
 their voice
 Which cries in the nights like the groaning of
 the fallen,
 My heart implores--Master of the world!
 These powers--why do they perish?

505 My fate did not cause that I be lost with you.
 Poor unfortunates--from your threshold was I
 separated.
 I forsook my Torah, on account of bread I
 sinned,
 And in another path I alone was lost.
 The times changed, and far away from your boundary,
 510 I erected my altar, I set my threshold-----
 Yet still do I remember all of you, all of you,
 Your image accompanies me, it does not budge
 from my heart.
 And I remember how strong the kernel, how
 healthy

502 Jeremiah 8:23 & Lamentations 1:2; Ezechiel
 30:24 & Jeremiah 51:52. 503 Job 24:12. 504
 Psalms 71:9. 507 Proverbs 1:8 & 6:20; Proverbs
 28:21. 509 Joel 4:6. 510 Genesis 33:20;
 Ezechiel 43:8.

The seed which is hidden in your accursed plot
of land;

515 How great the blessing it brought to us,
If a single ray of light had warmed it by its
warmth;

How many sheaves in joy would we have reaped,
If a single willing spirit blew upon you
And cleared "the way of Torah" from which we
rebelled,

520 And paved a path of life into the yeshivah;
And I remember your end how filthy and polluted-----
Alas! I am very much afraid, I am afraid, my
wretched people!-----
How barren the plot of land and how cursed,
If seeds such as these become mildewed within it.

1894 - 95

517 Psalms 125:5. 518 Isaiah 40:7; Psalms
51:14. 519 Malachi 3:1; Pirke Avoth VI:4.
520 Job 19:12. 521 Zephaniah 3:1. 522
I Samuel 28:15 & II Samuel 24:14. 524 Joel
1:17.

THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS

Introduction

In the Babylonian Talmud, Baba Bathra 73b-74a, Rabbah b. Bar Hana relates how he was travelling in the desert where he was joined by an Arab merchant. After informing Bar Hana that they were only eight parasangs away from an oasis, he said to him: 'Come and I will show you the Dead of the Wilderness' (i.e. those Israelites who died during the forty years wandering in the wilderness, on their way to the Promised Land). Bar Hana reports:

. . .they looked as if in a state of exhilaration. They slept on their backs; and the knee of one of them was raised, and the Arab merchant passed under the knee, riding a camel with spear erect, and did not touch it. I cut off one corner of the purple-blue shawl of one of them; and we could not move away. He said unto me: 'If you have, peradventure, taken something from them, return it; for we have a tradition that he who takes anything from them cannot move away.' I went and returned it; and then we were able to move away. 1/

From such brief information, Bialik has fashioned what many believe to be his greatest poetic creation, his masterpiece (e.g. Manachem Ribalow, Shalom Spiegel,

and Meyer Waxman, among others). The power of his descriptions of the desert and its inhabitants, true evidence of his genius, is made all the more remarkable by Bialik's having never been even remotely close to a desert. When his intimate friend Maurice Samuel asked him how these wonderful images had come to him, Bialik replied: "outside my father's inn there was a little hill. I used to lie on it face down, thinking myself into the desert".^{2/}

The poem itself may be divided into three parts: The first is a description of the sleeping giants of the wilderness and the awesome strength and power of their bodies. The second is where the bodies are "resurrected" and declare to the world the now-famous line: "The last generation of slavery and the first for redemption are we!" (161). The third, and last part of the poem, is its conclusion. The visitors have gone, the sleeping giants return once again to their sleep, and their whereabouts remain the province of legend.

Although various interpretations have been adduced for THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS, most of

its interpreters agree that it is a "song of rebellion": Jacob Segal writes:

It allegorizes the revolt of the Jew against the imprisoning bonds of his tradition, as well as against his bitter fate of exile. But it is also a mighty hymn of glory to strength and daring. It contains a powerful affirmative note lacking in most of Bialik's earlier poems. It affirms that Israel's powers of survival are eternal. It proudly asserts that even when the national spirit is slumbering, and our people is imprisoned in the wilderness of Exile, they are nevertheless immune to destruction. Though enemies lurk all about them, plotting their ruin, they cannot be harmed. Israel lives forever.

3/

In sum, two elements make THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS perhaps Bialik's greatest gift to Hebrew literature. The first, previously mentioned, was the descriptive power of those things which he had seen only with his "mind's eye." The second was, and is, his ability to convey to his Jewish reader the tremendous sense of frustration of these exiled sleeping giants; not only to convey this to the reader, but to enable him to internalize it, so that their frustration is the frustration of Jews the world over who bitterly lamented the long night of Exile, and fervently prayed to be reunited with our Land.

THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS

'Come and I will show you the Dead of the Wilderness.'
(Baba Batra 73b)

No herd of young lions and old cover there the
face of the steppe,

No glory of Bashan and choicest of its oaks
fell there mightily-----

Near their dark tents glants lying in the sun,
Among the yellow dunes of the wilderness like
lions securely stretching out.

5 The sand settled beneath the resting-place of
their hard, bony bodies,
Mighty ones clinging to the earth, slumbering--
their weapons about them:

Knives of flint by their heads, their javelins
between the expanse of their shoulders,
Quiver and sheath on their belts; their lances
stuck in the sand.

Sunk onto the earth their heavy heads with hair
grown wild,

1 Exodus 10:5 & 15 & Numbers 22:5 & 11.
2 Isaiah 35:2; Isaiah 37:24 & Jeremiah 22:7 &
Amos 2:9; Isaiah 10:34. 4 Isaiah 14:30. 6
Psalms 44:26; Deuteronomy 23:14. 7 Joshua
5:2 & 3. 8 I Samuel 26:7. 9 Numbers 6:5.

10 Their locks of hair dragging and appearing like
 lions' mane;
 Their faces strong and sun-burnt, their eyes
 like dull copper,
 Sport for the sparkling of the sun's arrows
 and target for the raging wind;
 Hard their foreheads and strong, directed
 toward Heaven,
 Their eyebrows--terrible, from their thicket
 horrors lay in wait,
 15 The curls of their beards coiling like the
 gathering of serpents' meanderings
 Solid like carvings of flint, their chests
 swelling up about them,
 Protruding like iron anvils, ready for the
 beating of hammers,
 As if, forever, were hardened by them with
 the sledge-hammer of time and with its
 hammer
 Unfathomable mighty forces they became hard
 and silent forever;

11 Deuteronomy 28:50; Ezechiel 1:7 & Daniel
 10:6. 12 Zechariah 9:14; Psalms 11:6. 13
 Ezechiel 3:7. 14 Leviticus 14:9. 17 Psalms
 74:6. 19 Job 34:24.

20 Only the furrows of their horrible faces and
 the cuts of their naked chests,
 The arrow's chisel and the spear's, sword's
 engravings and their inscriptions,
 Like the writing on the tombs of stone, for
 the descending eagle they announce,
 How many spears broken and the number of
 arrows shattered
 At these rock-hardened hearts, at those strong
 backs, boards of flint.

25 The sun rose and set, jubilees upon jubilees
 passed,
 The wilderness was quiet and the storm, the
 silence returned as heretofore;
 As if amazed by that which was before, the
 cliffs rise in the distance,
 Haughty in the splendor of their silence and
 arrogant in eternal solitude.
 Four hundred by four hundred miles round
 about, no sound, no noise, no listening.

23 Isaiah 21:17 & Job 41:20. 24 Psalms 73:26;
 Zechariah 7:12. 25 Ecclesiastes 1:5; Isaiah
 29:1. 29 II Kings 4:31.

30 The wasteland has swallowed up forever the
 echo of the shout of the generation
 of the strong,
 The storms erased the traces of their steps,
 terrors of the wilderness.
 Mountains of sand piled beneath them and rocks
 sprouting in their place,
 The wilderness shutting up its soul and
 putting to sleep its fortresses forever;
 The burning-heat consuming their strength and
 congealing their glory in the wilderness,
 35 The blistering sand sharpening the rock-like
 blades at their heads,
 Rays of the blazing sun fall against the
 height of their spears,
 Flying off in myriads of sparks; the copper
 of their faces burning.
 And bare here to the blazing sun generations
 upon generations destroyed,
 The east wind drying up their strength and
 the storm of the south scattering it,

30 Isaiah 25:8; Daniel 11:38 & 39. 33
 Isaiah 23:11. 35 Nahum 3:3 & Job 39:23.
 38 Exodus 3:15 & Psalms 72:5. 39 Isaiah
 21:1 & Ezekiel 19:12.

40 Carried by the dust to earth and trod by the
 feet of dwarfs,
 The tongue of live dogs licking there the
 dust of eternal strength and the rot of
 their power
 Licking and wiping their mouths--no remembrance
 of a generation of lion-like men
 Who fell and are silent forever among the
 yellow dunes of the wilderness.

Sometimes a sudden shadow falls and floats on
 the face of the steppe-dune,
 45 And arrives at one end of the camp of car-
 casses and flutters above their backs,
 Hovering and sailing in one criss-crossing
 flight-----
 Suddenly it lingers over one of the flattened
 bodies--and stops,
 The full spread of the shadow over their backs
 darkens the body and half its neighbor;
 Suddenly the air shakes--a rushing of wings--
 and swoop!

40 Isaiah 26:6 & Ezekiel 34:18. 41 Psalms
 68:24 & Ecclesiastes 9:4. 42 Proverbs 30:20;
 Psalms 6:6. 49 Isaiah 33:4 & Ezekiel 3:13.

50 Struck by the full heaviness of his body and
 falling upon his prey at once
 A great-winged eagle, son of rocks, of bent
 beak and twisted claws;
 The killer directing his claws of quartz at
 the breast of flint
 Setting the sharpened beak against the hardened
 face-----
 A moment more--the eagle at the cadaver, iron
 gouging iron. . .

55 But suddenly, as if the proud one was startled,
 as he returned his weapons;
 Alighting before the glorious tranquillity and
 the majestic strength of the slumberer-----
 He spreads his wings and is lifted up, flying
 and rising towards Heaven,
 He beats a mighty wave on high and shrieks
 against the splendor of the sun,
 Rising and lifting up to the clouds and in the
 brightness of the firmament he disappears.

51 Isaiah 40:31 & Ezekiel 17:3. 52 Jeremiah
 17:1. 54 Proverbs 27:17. 55 Genesis 38:29.
 56 Psalms 89:18. 57 Jeremiah 49:22. 58
 Zechariah 10:11; Psalms 93:4. 59 Jeremiah
 51:9; Daniel 12:3.

60 And for a long time trembling below, caught in
 the sharpness of a lance,
 One of the eagle's feathers, which had fallen
 unbeknown to its parent;
 Forsaken and orphaned there fluttering and
 shining until it falls to the earth-----
 The silence returned as heretofore; the mighty
 lie there and none makes them afraid.

 Sometimes when the wilderness faints in the
 burning-heat of the afternoon--behold
 65 Like the thick branch a leopard-like viper,
 of the great serpents of the wilderness,
 Bursting forth to fondle in the heat the rings
 of his soft slithery flesh:
 At times doubled up in the sand, crouching in
 one place--neither movement nor wind,
 All melting from softness and becoming delicate
 in the abundant brightness,
 At times he awakens, struggles and draws him-
 self toward the sun,

61 Ezekiel 17:3. 63 Nahum 3:18; Leviticus
 26:6. 67 Exodus 23:5. 68 Deuteronomy 28:56.

- 70 Opening wide his mouth to its brightness,
 glittering in the gold of his coat of
 scales
 Like a favored child of the wilderness, soft
 and alone before the desert-----
 Suddenly the serpent shakes itself, rushes
 from its place and slithers
 Sliding, twisting and tripping on the face of
 the burning sea of sand,
 And encounters the corpses' camp, interrupts
 his pace--and stops,
 75 Raises up a third of his back as if he were a
 pillar spotted with hieroglyphics,
 Raises up his golden head, haughty and glaring,
 Surveying from one end to the other the slumber-
 ing enemy camp:
 The camp great and large, without number, with
 no end to the corpses,
 All their faces uncovered heavenward and their
 eyebrows angry-----

70 Psalms 119:31. 71 Jeremiah 31:20; Proverbs
 4:3. 76 Ecclesiastes 12:16; Isaiah 3:16; Job
 16:9. 78 Genesis 41:49; Nahum 3:3.

80 The hatred of the ancient serpent pent-up till
 now flared up
 It became a green flame in the glittering eyes
 of the viper,
 A trembling of anger passed over him from his
 head unto his painted tail;
 Behold he bends down, all moving, shaking and
 excited,
 Stretched like a rod of anger upon the back of
 the nearest slain,
 85 The cruel vipers' head extended and the rage
 of the serpent's mouth heard,
 Trembling, angry, the two black fangs of his
 tounge blazing. . .
 Suddenly--the serpent is startled and as if
 drawing back his head,
 Alighting from the glorious tranquillity and
 the majestic strength of the slumberer,
 Jumping his full length backward, turns aside
 and slithers away,

80 Genesis 15:16. 84 Exodus 8:12 & Isaiah
 10:5. 85 Deuteronomy 32:33. 87 Genesis
 38:29. 88 Psalms 89:18.

90 Whispering, hissing and flashing in the glow
 of the bright distance-----
 The silence returns as heretofore; the mighty
 lie there and none makes them afraid.

 With the descending of a moon-lit night and
 settling down upon the steppes of the
 wilderness and its rocks,
 Wrapped in whites and blacks the desert covers
 itself but also reveals itself
 Mile upon mile of sand and desert are lost in
 the whiteness of the light,
 95 And in the recesses of its steep cliffs the
 heavy shadows lie,
 Resembling giant beasts, ancient beasts with
 teeth from the Beginning,
 Congregated hither that evening to be silent
 about an ancient secret,
 Before the ascending dawn they arise, slowly
 going to their world from whence they
 came-----

91 Nahum 3:18; Leviticus 26:6. 92 II Samuel
 17:16. 98 Ecclesiastes 5:15 & 12:5.

The form of a gloomy moon looks on a three-
fold secret:

100 Night, desert and ancient ones--the hidden
light poured over them;

The desert grieves and dreams a cruel dream
of eternal desolation,

Silently wails the desert and laments its
length and breadth-----

Then suddenly it happens that a lion glorious
in strength, pounces

Pacing confidently without hurrying; approaching
the camp and stopping.

105 Lifting its proud head and raising up its
adorned nape,

His two burning coals of eyes spying out the
enemy camp:

The camp great and wide and great the silence
in the camp,

The mighty one sleeping, silent, moving neither
hair nor eyelid;

99 Song of Songs 6:10. 101 Jeremiah 51:62.
102 Deuteronomy 32:10. 103 Deuteronomy 33:22;
Exodus 15:6. 108 Isaiah 10:14.

Appearing as if bound with the black straps
 of the spears' shadows,
 110 The moon whitening their strong faces and
 their dark eyebrows. . .
 The lion stands amazed at the glorious strength
 of the slumberer-----
 Suddenly the tail strikes, the lion roars,
 And four hundred by four hundred miles round
 about shakes the desert and its wings,
 The echo falls and explodes among rocks and
 silent mountains,
 115 Shatters to thousands of thunders unto the ends
 of the wide desert,
 And the jackals respond to his voice, the hoot-
 ing of owls answers him,
 The braying of wild asses rises and fills up
 the trembling desert-----
 Is this not the howling of the wilderness and
 the cry of the bitter desert
 When it awakens in its fetters, exhausted,
 famished, its soul desolate-----
 110 Ecclesiastes 8:1. 112 Amos 3:8. 116
 Isaiah 13:21 & 22. 117 Exodus 6:5 & Job
 6:5. 118 Deuteronomy 32:10; Genesis 27:34
 & Esther 4:1. 119 Isaiah 29:8.

- 120 The lion stands yet a moment, considering his
 thunderous power,
 Then turns away from the corpses, secure and
 proud as before,
 Lifting his feet and going his way, the flame
 of contempt in his eyes,
 Marching and shaking his locks and going far
 away with royal splendor-----
 The desert stirs yet a long time, swaying and
 cannot be silent,
- 125 Moaning, groaning and in pain; angrily accept-
 ing its afflictions.
 Dawn--tired in its groaning, slumbers full of
 rage and unsteady,
 Half-awake, half-asleep, slowly wailing, as
 the bitterness of the nearby day terrifies
 it-----
- The eye of the moon grows dim and the edges
 of the firmament become pallid,
 The shadows melt away from beneath the slopes
 of the mountains.

120 Job 26:14. 121 I Samuel 17:30 &
 Ezekiel 10:16. 122 Genesis 29:1; Job
 12:5. 123 Psalms 145:12 & Proverbs 14:28.
 124 Isaiah 57:20 & Jeremiah 49:23. 126
 Psalms 6:7; Job 14:1. 127 Job 3:5.

- 130 The rocks are revealed--and behold they are
 strong, displeased and sullen;
 The wilderness trembles and is silent from
 fear of their glorious majesty.
 Still a moment is angry in its bosom, barks
 but its voice is not heard-----
 The sun rises, the wilderness is silent--
 eternally silent as it was,
 The mighty lie down as they have lain, and
 jubilees upon jubilees pass.
- 135 Yet sometimes becomes disgusted the wilderness
 and grows weary of the eternal stillness
 It awakens to be avenged with one big vengeance
 for its desolation by its Creator,
 Lifts itself up against Him with a tempest and
 with pillars of sand rebels against Him.
 Suddenly it arises and kicks the Creator and
 shakes Him on the Throne of Glory.
 Daring to heap abuse on His face and hurl it
 in angry wrath to His feet
- 130 I Kings 20:43 & 21:4. 131 Psalms 29:8;
 Lamentations 3:26. 132 Psalms 19:4. 133
 Psalms 104:22. 136 Judges 16:28. 138 Hab-
 bakuk 2:7. 139 Deuteronomy 29:27 & Jeremiah
 7:20 & 21:5 & 44:6.

- 140 To confound on account of Him all of His world
 and restore chaos unto its former status-----
 Then the Creator shakes and grows angry and the
 face of Heaven changes,
 And like a white-hot bowl upon the rebellious
 wilderness is it capped,
 The angry red vision emanating from them and
 permeating
 His worldly space even unto the tops of the
 roasted rocks blazing-----
- 145 The wilderness has become embittered and groans,
 shaking in the abyss and boiling
 All the nether-regions of Sheol and the top of
 the world; there a single confounding,
 Lions and tigers swept away in the whirlwind
 of the turning storm,
 Torn by the tempest, seized by sudden fear their
 mane standing on end,
 They gallop, roaring and chasing; their eyes
 spraying sparks,

140 Genesis 40:13 & 41:13. 144 Numbers
 23:9. 146 Deuteronomy 32:22 & Psalms 86:13.

150 And then appearing as if flying in the air,
 perplexed and beaten by the confusion.
 At that moment-----
 Seized by violent strength awake the menacing
 mighty,
 All of a sudden awakes a generation powerful
 and strong, a generation strong for battle
 Their eyes flashing and their faces burning-----
 155 And their hands to the swords!
 The mighty thundering with their voices,
 sixty myriads
 A voice splitting the tempest and contesting
 the roaring of the angry wilderness,
 Round about them storming; round about them
 raging.
 They call out:
 160 "We are warriors!
 The last generation of slavery and the first
 for redemption are we!
 Our hand alone, our strong hand

153 Numbers 6:9 & Isaiah 29:5; Psalms 24:8.
 154 Isaiah 13:8. 156 Job 37:4 & 5. 158
 Psalms 50:3. 162 Exodus 3:19 & Numbers
 20:20.

The heaviness of the yoke from upon our proud
 neck did cast off.
 And raised our head heavenward and it was
 narrow in our eyes-----
 165 We fled to the wilderness and said to the desert
 'Our Mother!'
 Upon the heads of rocks between expanding
 clouds
 We drank from its source freedom with all the
 eagles of Heaven-----
 Who is Master to us?!
 Even now--if the God of vengeance shut up His
 desert over us,
 170 Hardly touches us the song of power and rebellion--
 and we shall rise up!
 To the swords! To the spears! Unite! To the
 right!
 Against the wrath of Heaven and its fury-----
 Here we are; let us ascend-----
 Into the tempest!"

163 Genesis 27:40. 165 Job 30:3. 166
 Job 37:16. 167 Lamentations 4:19. 168
 Psalms 12:5. 169 Exodus 14:3; Psalms 94:1.
 170 I Samuel 6:9. 171 Ezechiel 21:21.
 172 Jeremiah 32:31. 173 Numbers 14:40.

- 175 "Here we are; let us ascend!
 If God has withdrawn His hand from us
 And His Ark from its place does not depart-----
 Let us then go up without it!
 Under His angry eye, before the lightning wrath
 of His sight,
- 180 Let us subdue before us these mountain heights,
 Let us look face to face at the armed enemy!
 Hearken!
 The tempest is also calling out to us: 'Dare!'
 To the swords! To the spears! The mountains
 break apart, the hills break asunder
- 185 Or let our carcasses fall in heaps-----
 Here we are; let us ascend
 Up the mountain!"----- -----

 The wilderness was at that moment a most dread-
 ful tyrant-----
 Who can subdue it?
- 190 A sound of terrors rose in the tempest, a
 braying of replies-----

176 I Samuel 14:19. 177 Isaiah 46:7. 178
 II Kings 18:25 & Isaiah 36:10. 180 Isaiah
 41:2; Psalms 95:4. 181 II Kings 14:8 & II
 Chronicles 25:17. 182 Deuteronomy 32:1. 185
 Numbers 14:29 & 32. 186-187 Numbers 14:40 &
 Deuteronomy 1:41. 190 II Kings 2:11; Job
 15:21.

Not this

Rather the wilderness forming within it de-
struction,

A bitter thing, a thing cruel and terribly
awesome.

The tempest passed. The wilderness is silent
from its anger and pure.

195 Mightily shines the clear sky and great is
the silence.

And caravans, which the storm overtook at one
of the places,

Rise up from being prone and praise the name
of their god-----

And here, as at the beginning, spread upon the
sand, sixty myriad corpses

And upon their faces like a sparkling light:
Death reconciles them also with their God,

200 And there is no man on the earth who knows their
place or when they fell or when they rose-----

192 Psalms 55:12. 193 Psalms 64:4 & 5.
195 Job 37:21. 196 Judges 19:13 & II Samuel
17:9 & 12. 197 I Kings 8:54; Psalms 96:2 &
100:4 & II Chronicles 20:26. 198 I Samuel
30:16. 199 Psalms 44:4 & Job 29:24. 200
Genesis 19:31.

The tempest heaped up mountains surrounding
 them and shut them up over them.

Yet sometimes a bold horseman separated from
 one of the caravans

Who spurs his mighty horse, and travels into
 the desert sea

Stuck to the saddle of his mighty steed, flies
 like a bird in flight,

205 Hurling his spear and catching it within his
 running gallop,

So that it seems as if the lightning continues
 rushing before him,

And he pursues after it and seizes it, sending
 it again forth to freedom.

The view is hidden in the distance; the horse
 rushes on and lifts up

Its rider to the summit of a high cliff above
 the clouds--and suddenly

210 The steed sways, is raised up and springs back
 erect!

The horseman amazed, shading his eyes with his
 left hand and looks-----

202 Isaiah 56:11. 203 Jeremiah 50:11. 206
 Nahum 2:5. 207 I Samuel 17:53; Exodus 21:26
 & 27. 208 Jeremiah 8:6.

Turns suddenly together with his horse; God's
terror upon his face

Beats his steed authoritatively and like the
arrow sent forth--backwards. . .

Overtakes the caravan and tells them every
vision of his eyes in the stillness-----

215 The Bedouins hear, silently; each man turns to
his neighbor amazed,

Observing the mouth of the eldest of the company--
and he, one of the "holy" and venerable-----

The old man begins speaking: "Praise the Name
of Allah, O Believer!

By the beard of the Prophet your eyes beheld
the Dead of the Wilderness!

God's camp is this, ageless generation, a
people awesome in strength, ancient of days;

220 Truly courageous and hard as desert rocks was
this people:

They embittered the soul of their prophets and
even challenged their God-----

212 Genesis 35:5. 213 II Samuel 22:15.
214 Isaiah 11:3. 215 Isaiah 13:8. 217
Numbers 23:18. 218 Deuteronomy 4:9. 219
Genesis 32:3; Daniel 7:9. 221 Psalms 106:32
& 33; Jeremiah 50:24.

And He shut them up among the mountains and
 caused an eternal sleep to fall upon them,
 He commanded the wilderness concerning them
 that it keep them for a memorial through-
 out the generations-----

Allah has preserved His Believers from touching
 even the edges of the corners of their
 garments!

225 It once happened that an Arab who took one
 thread from the fringe of the corner of
 their garment-----

That immediately all of his body dried up until
 he returned the sin-offering to its
 place-----

And they, they are the forefathers of the
 People of the Book."

Thus did the old man conclude his speech;
 The bedouins heard and were silent; the fear
 of Allah upon their faces,

222 Genesis 2:21. 224 Deuteronomy 22:12.
 225 Haggai 2:12. 226 I Samuel 6:3.

230 Walking quietly by the sides of the camels
loaded to exhaustion;
A long time shining white from afar the white
shawls on their heads
And the humps of the camels slowly moving off
and hiding in the distant brightness,
As if they carried away from here upon their
backs yet one more ancient legend-----
The stillness returns as heretofore and the
desert stands forsaken.

February - March, 1902, Odessa.

230 Isaiah 46:1. 233 Joshua 4:3.

IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER

Introduction

In the 26 July - 1 August 1973 issue of the Washington, D.C. Jewish Week and American Examiner, the following brief notice appeared:

Kishinev vandalism

The Jewish cemetery in Kishinev, Ukraine, was desecrated, and a stone commemorating the 1905 [1903] pogroms and purge against Jews was defaced. Jews living in the vicinity of the cemetery also reported acts of hooliganism and vandalism, and appealed to authorities to tighten security. No arrests were made.

And no further information was reported by the American-Jewish press. No cries of protest went out from the world-wide Jewish community. No rallies were held, or speeches made. The incident passed all but unnoticed by the majority of America's Jews; one more such tragic happenstance to the spectre of growing Soviet antisemitism.

What a radically different reaction than that which took place more than 70 years previous, when the pogrom of Kishinev was brought to world attention! ^{1/}

The facts of that massacre were these: During the Easter holidays, April 19-20, 1903^{2/}, an attack broke out on the Jewish quarter of Kishinev, the capital of Bessarabia, Ukraine, encouraged by the police authorities and inflamed by the antisemitic publisher and editor Krushevan. For two days, the mobs butchered, raped, and looted the hapless victims.. The results: 47 Jews were killed; 790 seriously or slightly injured; 700 houses demolished; 600 businesses destroyed; 2,000 Jewish families left destitute and grieving.

Bialik was then sent by the Jewish Historical Society of Odessa to collect information. His report was never published because the Society lacked the funds to do so. For more than four months afterward, however, Bialik worked on a poem recording his impressions of the tragedy; the result is his most famous poem IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER. The poem itself was published in the Hebrew quarterly journal of St. Petersburg, HaSeman.

Ironically, the poem was published under the Hebrew title Maasa Nemirov (THE BURDEN OF NEMIROV), to get it past the prying eyes of the Russian censor. Nemirov was the scene, in 1648-1649, of one of the

most successful pogroms of the Cossacks, led by the Hetman of the Ukraine, Bogdan Khmelnitsky; about ten thousand Jews perished there. Apparently, the censor saw no connection between that tragedy and what had occurred at Kishinev.

Besides, the poem itself could in no way be construed as an attack on the Russian people or government. For what Bialik was attacking was his own people, their cowardice in the face of the enemy, their refusal to fight back, and the subsequent shame and humiliation they and the rest of Jewry bore because of it. Like sheep to the slaughter, they had let themselves be killed, raped and pillaged. The first half of the poem is as vivid a description of such horrors as that which appears in any literature; the second half, Bialik's rage, protest, and reproach to the people who had let such a thing happen.

Reactions to the poem were beyond belief! Never had one living hero of the Jewish people so bitterly chastized those he loved. And never had one people taken such a message to heart and vowed never to let such a tragedy be repeated. IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER became, not a challenge to further introspection and lament, but a clarion call to militant

action. Vladimir Jabotinsky, founder of the Jewish Legion, wrote:

The revival of Maccabean tendencies in the Ghetto really dates from that poem; the self-defense organizations which sprang up everywhere in Russia to meet the new pogrom-wave two years later, the Shomrim (Yeomanry) movement in Palestine, even the Jewish Legion which fought for the Holy Land in 1918--they are all Bialik's children.

3/

Such is the poem which, more than any other, established Chaim Nachman Bialik as the national poet of the Jewish People, its voice and its conscience. Neither time nor history has diminished the vitality of its message.

IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER

Get up, go to the city of slaughter and you
will come to the courtyards,
And with your eyes you will see and with your
hands you will touch the fences
And the wood and the stones and upon the plaster
walls

The congealed blood and the hardened brain of
the fallen.

5 And from there you will come to the ruins and
you will pass over the breaches

And you will cross over the perforated walls
and the demolished ovens,

Into a place where the smashing deepened and
crushed, widened, enlarged the holes,

Uncovering the black stone and exposing the
burnt brick,

And they appear as open mouths of wounds mortal
and black

Title: Jeremiah 7:32. 1 Genesis 12:1 & 28:2.
2 Deuteronomy 3:27. 6 Leviticus 11:35. 7
Isaiah 30:33.

- 10 Which no longer have a remedy nor will have a
cure,
And your feet drown in the feathers and stumble
upon many heaps
Of broken splinters and tiny fragments and ruins
of books and parchments,
Destruction of inhuman deed and double fruit of
rigorous act;
Do not remain at the ruin but continue from
there on your way-----
- 15 The acacias bloom opposite you and sprinkle
spices into your nostrils,
Their buds half feathers and their odor like
the odor of blood;
And in your anger and in your wrath you will
bring their strange incense
With the pleasure of spring in your heart--and
you will not find it loathsome;
And with ten thousand golden arrows the sun
will pierce your liver

11 Jeremiah 13:16. 13 Psalms 73:5; Exodus
1:13 & 14. 14 Leviticus 19:6 & Obadiah 1:14.
17 Jeremiah 32:31; Exodus 30:9. 18 Numbers
11:20. 19 Proverbs 7:23.

- 20 From every glass splinter seven beams will
 rejoice at your calamity.
 For God called forth the Spring and slaughter
 together:
 The sun shone, the acacia bloomed and the
 slaughterer slaughtered.
 And you will flee and come to a courtyard, and
 in that courtyard a mound-----
 Upon this mound are beheaded two: A Jew and
 his dog.
- 25 One axe beheaded them and on one dung-heap were
 they thrown;
 And in the mixing blood of the two, pigs
 scratch and roll themselves;
 Tomorrow will the rain descend and wash it away
 to one of the wasteland streams-----
 No more will the blood cry out from the gutters
 and from the dung-heaps,
 For in a great deep will it be lost or irrigate
 a thornbush to abundance-----

20 Proverbs 1:26 & 17:5. 21 II Kings 8:1.
 22 Nahum 7:17. 27 Isaiah 7:19. 28 Genesis
 4:10. 29 Isaiah 51:10 & Psalms 36:7.

30 And everything will be as nought, and every-
 thing will return as though it never was.

And to the attics you will climb and stand
 there in the darkness-----

Still the fear of bitter death hovers in the
 silent dark;

And from the dim holes and from the corner
 shadows

Eyes, behold silent eyes observing you.

35 Spirits of the "martyrs" are they, mournful
 and desolate souls,

Confined to one corner beneath the rooftop--and
 silent.

Here the axe found them and to this place did
 they come

To seal here with the glances of their eyes a
 last time

All the sorrow of their senseless death with
 all the curse of their lives,

32 I Samuel 15:32. 34 Psalms 66:7; Proverbs
 15:3.

- 40 And nestle here sweating and fearful, and
 together from their hiding-places
 Silently demanding satisfaction for their
 shame with their eyes asking: Why?-----
 And who but God is there in the land who can
 bear such a silence?
 You lift your eyes roofward--and behold also
 its tiles are silent,
 Overshadowing you and quiet and you ask of the
 spiders;
- 45 Living witnesses are they, eye-witnesses and
 they inform you of all that took place:
 A tale of a belly torn open and filled with
 feathers,
 A tale of nostrils and nails, of skulls and
 hammers,
 A tale of men slaughtered who were hung on
 beams,
 And a tale of a suckling who was found at the
 side of his mother stabbed

42 Psalms 77:14. 43 Ezechiel 18:12. 44
 Genesis 24:57 & Joel 9:14. 45 Joshua 2:23.

50 While he slept and in his mouth the nipple of
 her cold breast;
 And a tale of a child who was torn asunder who
 breathed his last "Mama"!-----
 And behold also his eyes are here, asking an
 accounting of me.
 And more of these and of those will the spider
 recount to you
 Tales piercing the brain with the power to put
 to death
 55 Your spirit and your soul, a complete eternal
 death-----
 Yet you restrain yourself and strangle within
 your throat the groan
 And you bury it within the innermost recesses
 of your heart before it erupts,
 And jump up from there and go out--and behold
 the land is its usual self,
 And the sun as heretofore, wasting its brilliance
 earthward.

52 Deuteronomy 10:12. 59 Genesis 31:2 & 5;
 Genesis 38:9.

- 60 And you will go down from there and will come
to the dark cellars,
A place where the daughters of your people were
defiled among the vessels,
O n e woman under s e v e n uncircumcized
ones,
The daughter before the eyes of her mother and
the mother before the eyes of her daughter,
Before slaughtering and at the moment of
slaughtering and after slaughtering;
65 And with your hand you will touch the defiled
pillow and the cushion dyed-red,
Lair of wild boars and resting-place of horse-
like men
With an axe dripping boiling blood in their
hands.
And behold, yea behold: In the darkness of
that corner,
Beneath this matzah-trough and behind that cask,
70 Lay husbands, bridegrooms, brothers, peeping
from the holes,

61 Ezekiel 13:17. 66 Psalms 80:14. 68
I Samuel 24:12.

While holy bodies quivered beneath asses'

flesh,

Being strangled in their impurity and swallowing

the blood of their throats,

And like a man dividing his delicacies so the

abominable Gōi divides their flesh-----

Lying down in their shame and seeing--neither

stirring nor moving,

75 Their eyes they did not gouge out nor did they

go out of their mind-----

But perhaps a man even prayed in his heart for

his life:

Master of the world, make a miracle--and let

not evil come upon me.

And those who survived their defilement and

awoke from their blood-----

Behold all their lives were they abhorred and

the light of their world was defiled

80 Eternally abhorred, defiled in body and soul,

outside and in-----

71 Ezekiel 23:20. 72 Job 39:30. 73 Daniel
11:26; Isaiah 49:7. 74 Jeremiah 3:25; Esther
5:9. 75 Judges 16:21. 77 Jeremiah 5:12 &
Micah 3:11.

And their husbands burst forth from their holes
and ran to God's house

And praised the Name of God their Salvation and
their Refuge for the miracles;

And the priests among them went out and asked
their Rabbi:

"Rabbi! My wife, what is she? Permitted or
forbidden"?-----

85 And everything will return to its usual manner,
everything will return to its proper form.

And now come and let me bring you to all the
hiding-places:

Toilets, pig-pens and other filthy places,

And you will see with you own eyes where were
the hiding-places of

Your brothers, sons of your people and grandsons
of the Maccabees,

90 The great-grandsons of lions mentioned in
"The Father of Mercy" and seed of the
"martyrs",

81 Genesis 28:22 & Judges 17:5. 82 Psalms
18:3. 86-88 I Samuel 23:23. 89 Leviticus
19:18 & Ezechiel 3:11 & 33:2.

Twenty souls in one hole and thirty, yea,
thirty,

Who exalted my Glory in the world and sanctified
my Name among the many. . .

They fled the flight of mice and hid themselves
in a hiding-place of bedbugs,

And died the death of dogs there where they were
found,

95 And the next morning--the surviving son went out
And found there the corpse of his father blood-
stained and despised-----

Why do you cry, son of man, and why do you cover
your face with your hands?--Gnash your
teeth and melt away!

And you will go down the slope of the city and
find a vegetable garden,

100 And with the garden a large stable, the stable
of slaughter.

Like a giant camp of owls and fearsome bats

93 Leviticus 26:36. 94 Judges 17:8 & 9. 96
Psalms 15:4. 97 Jeremiah 51:43 & Ezechiel 2:1
& 3. 97-98 I Kings 19:13. 98 Lamentations
2:16. 99 I Samuel 9:25; Deuteronomy 11:10 &
I Kings 21:2.

Which are spread over their slain blood-drunk
and spent.

There upon the stable ground are spread out
Nail-studded wheels like fingers sent forth to
murder,

105 And their points still stained with the blood
of man and brain.

And it will be toward evening, as the sun declines
westward,

Enveloped in clouds of blood and girded with
flaming fire,

You will open the gate softly and come to the
stable

Dark fear devours you, a chasm of horror unknown:

110 Terror, terror round about. . .it wanders in the
stable,

It rests upon the walls and is pressed within
the silence.

And from underneath the heaps of wheels, from
between the holes and fissures,

102 Amos 6:4; Deuteronomy 32:42 & Isaiah
49:26. 103 Numbers 11:32. 104 Isaiah 58:9.
105 Isaiah 9:4. 106 Judges 19:9. 107 Hosea
7:6 & Lamentations 2:3. 108 Ezechiel 56:12.
109 Genesis 15:12. 110 Jeremiah 6:25 &
Psalms 31:14.

Skin you will feel like the spasm of crushed
limbs,

Shifting the wheels heaped high upon their
backs,

115 Twisting in their agony and rolling in their
blood

A last muffled groan--a tortured faint sound
Above your head still suspended as if congealed,
And like troubled sorrow, eternal sorrow, excited
there and afraid.

It is the very spirit of contrition, much-
afflicted and greatly chastized

120 Imprisoning itself here within this prison-
house,

Thrust here into eternal wretchedness and no
longer desirous of leaving,

A black Shechinah, tired of sorrow and
exhausted,

Perplexed here in every corner but finding not
rest for itself

115 Ezekiel 16:6 & 22. 116 Exodus 32:18.
119 Judges 7:14; Isaiah 57:15. 122 Job 3:17.
123 Genesis 8:9 & Lamentations 1:3.

Wanting to weep--but not able, desiring to
 groan--but keeping silent,
 125 Silently would she perish in her mourning and
 secretly be strangled,
 Spreading forth her wings over the shadows of
 the martyrs; her head beneath her wing,
 Shadowing over her tears and weeping without
 speech-----

And you, you too, son of man, close the gate
 behind you
 So that you will be shut up here in the dark
 and direct your eyes to the ground
 130 And stand here a long time and become one with
 the sorrow
 And fill your heart with it for all the days of
 your life,
 And when your soul is destroyed and all your
 strength ceases-----
 It will be an escape for you and a poison fount,

126 I Kings 8:7; Psalms 91:4 & Ruth 2:12.
 128 Jeremiah 51:43 & Ezechiel 2:1 & 3; II
 Kings 4:4 & Ezechiel 46:12. 130 Judges 3:25.
 131 Genesis 3:14 & 17. 133 Genesis 32:9.

Crouched in you like a curse, waiting to
destroy you like an evil spirit.

135 Embracing you and oppressing you like the
oppression of a nightmare;
And in your bosom you will carry it to the
four winds of the heavens,
And you will seek but not find for it an
expression.

And you will go to the outside of the city and
come to the cemetery,

No man will see you in your journey and alone
will you come there,

140 And you will visit the graves of the martyrs
from the youngest of them to the eldest,

And you will stand by their crumbling dust
and I will let silence rule over you;

And your heart will melt within you from
oppression, pain, and disgrace-----

And I will close your eyes; there will be no
tears,

134 Deuteronomy 29:19; I Samuel 16:14 & 15.
135 Amos 2:13. 136 Numbers 11:12 & Psalms
89:51; Daniel 8:8 & 11:4. 137 Hosea 2:9 &
Song of Songs 3:1 & 2; Isaiah 57:19. 138
Leviticus 14:45; Ecclesiastes 12:5. 140
Jeremiah 31:34. 142 Psalms 107:39. 143
Ezekiel 24:16.

And you will know that it is a time to low
 like an ox bound for the slaughtering-
 place-----

145 And I will harden your heart and a sigh will
 not come out.

Behold the calves of slaughter, they are lying
 there all of them-----

Is there reward for their death--Speak, with
 what will it be paid?

Forgive me, eternally wretched, your God is
 poor like you,

Poor is He in your life, so much the more so
 in your death,

150 When tomorrow will you come to your reward and
 knock upon My door-----

I will open it to you, come and see: I have
 become impoverished!

I grieve for you, my children, and my heart,
 my heart grieves for you:

Your slain--have been slain for nought, and I
 and you

145 Isaiah 63:17; Job 3:24. 146 Psalms 44:23.
 150 II Kings 10:6; Genesis 30:33; Judges 19:22.
 151 Malachi 3:10. 152 II Samuel 1:26. 153
 Isaiah 22:2.

Do not know why you died, for whom, because
of what you died,

155 There was no reason for your deaths just as
there was no reason for your lives.

And the Shechinah, what does she say?--She
hides her head in the cloud

And withdraws from oppression, pain, and dis-
grace and is ashamed. . .

And even I, night after night, go down to
the graves,

Stand looking at the slain, shamed secretly-----

160 However, as I live, saith the Lord, I will let
no tear descend.

The pain is very great and very great is the
disgrace-----

And which of the two is greater?--Speak, son of
man!

Or better--Be silent! Be my silent witness,
For you have found Me in My disgrace and have
seen Me on the day of My calamity;

160 Numbers 14:21 & 28; Jeremiah 13:17 &
Lamentations 2:18. 161 Job 2:13. 162
Jeremiah 51:43 & Ezekiel 2:1 & 3. 164
Jeremiah 18:17.

165 And when you return to the children of your
 people--do not return to them empty-
 handed,

For take with you the chastizement of My
 disgrace and bring it down upon their
 head

And you take My pain with you and set it to
 their bosom.

And you turn to go from the graves of the
 dead, and the carpet
 Of grass surrounding delays your eyes for one
 moment,

170 The grass tender and juicy, like it should be
 at the beginning of Spring:

The buds of death and grass of graves you see
 with your eyes;

And you pluck from them a handful and scatter
 them behind you,

Saying: Uprooted grass is the people--Is there
 hope for the uprooted?

165 Isaiah 55:11. 166 Job 20:3; Psalms 7:17.
 167 Psalms 79:12. 168 Deuteronomy 16:7. 170
 Genesis 18:7. 172 Ecclesiastes 4:6. 173
 Isaiah 40:7; Job 14:7.

And you close your eyes from seeing them; then
 will I take you and cause you to return
 175 From the cemetery to your brothers who survived
 slaughter,
 And you will go with them on their fast-day,
 to their houses of prayer
 And you will hear the cry of their destruction
 and be swept away by their tears;
 And the house will be full of wailing, crying,
 and wild groaning,
 And the hair of your flesh will stand on end
 and fear will call out to you and
 trembling-----
 180 Thus will groan a nation which has surely
 perished. . .
 You will look into their heart--behold desert
 and wilderness,
 Could there grow in it wrath of vengeance--
 no seed will survive,
 Not even a single potent curse will you bring
 forth from their lips.

174 Isaiah 33:15. 175 Numbers 14:38. 176
 Isaiah 58:3 & Jeremiah 36:6; Isaiah 56:7.
 177 Isaiah 15:5. 178 Isaiah 6:4; Exodus
 6:5 & Job 6:5. 179 Job 4:14-15. 182
 Ezechiel 24:8; Genesis 19:32 & 34. 183
 I Kings 2:8.

Are their wounds then not true--why is their
prayer deceit?

185 Why do they lie to Me on the day of their
calamity, and what profit is there in
their lies?

Behold, yea behold: Still they explain in
their agony,

All of them steeped in tears, raising lamen-
tation in their wailing

And behold they are beating their breasts, con-
fessing their sin

Saying: "We have trespassed, we have dealt
treacherously"--

190 Can a shattered idol sin, can potsherds be
guilty?

Why then do they make supplication to Me?--
Speak to them and let them roar!

Let them raise a fist against Me; let them
demand satisfaction for their humiliation,

184 Proverbs 27:6. 185 Psalms 18:45; Malachi
3:14. 187 Isaiah 15:3; Ezekiel 27:32. 188
Nahum 2:8; Leviticus 26:30 & Nehemiah 1:6.
190 Jeremiah 22:28. 191 I Kings 8:33 & 47;
Exodus 14:15.

The humiliation of every generation from the
 first unto the last,
 Let them break asunder the Heavens and My
 throne with their fist.

195 And you also, son of man, do not separate
 yourself from their congregation,
 Believe the plagues of their heart but do not
 believe their supplication;
 When the Chazan raises his voice: "Do it for
 the sake of the slaughtered!
 Do it for the sake of the sucklings! Do it
 for the nurselings!"
 The pillars of the house tremble at the outcry
 of mourning,

200 And the hair of your flesh will stand on end
 and fear will call out to you and
 trembling-----
 Merciless will I be to you--do not cry bitterly
 with them,

194 Isaiah 66:1. 195 Jeremiah 51:3 & Ezechiel
 2:1 & 3; Numbers 16:21. 196 I Kings 8:38.
 199 Job 9:6.

And if your roar breaks through--I will kill
it between your teeth;

They alone will desecrate their trouble--you
must not desecrate it.

The trouble will stand throughout generations--
trouble not lamented,

205 And your tears you will have stored up, tears
not spilled,

And you will build upon it a fortress of iron
and copper wall

Of deadly wrath, hell-like hatred, and pent-up
enmity,

Caught in your heart and nurtured there like a
viper in its nest,

And you will suckle them one from the other
and you will find no rest;

210 And you will starve it and make it thirsty--
and afterwards destroy its wall

And on the cruel head of vipers will you
send it forth to freedom

202 Numbers 11:33 & Zechariah 9:7. 206
Ezekiel 4:2; Jeremiah 1:18. 208 Isaiah
11:8. 209 Jeremiah 45:3. 210 Ezekiel
26:12. 211 Deuteronomy 32:33; Exodus
21:26 & 27.

Upon the people of your wrath and your pity on
a thunderous day you command it.

Now go out from here and return hither at dusk
And you will see the end of a people's mourn-
ing: Behold all these souls

215 Who were afraid woke in the morning--returned
at evening and fell asleep.

Those exhausted by crying and those of contrite
spirit now stand in the darkness,

Still the lips move, praying--but the heart
pierced within,

Without a spark of hope in the heart and with-
out a glimmer of light in the eye

The hand will grope in the darkness, seeking
support--but there is none. . .

220 Thus, still will smoke the wick after the end
of its oil,

Thus will continue an old horse whose strength
is broken.

212 Isaiah 10:6. 214 Jeremiah 12:4;
Jeremiah 6:26. 215 Psalms 34:19. 217 I
Samuel 1:13; Ezekiel 15:4. 218 Job 18:5.
219 Deuteronomy 28:29; Isaiah 41:17 & Ezech-
iel 7:25.

Would that a single tale of consolation could
 free them of their trouble,
 To be for them restoration of soul and sustain
 their grey hair!

Behold the fast is finished, they have read
 "Vayechal" and said "Alenu"--why

225 Does the congregation tarry--Have they still
 to read "Echah"?-----

No! Behold the preacher ascends the pulpit,
 Behold he opens his mouth, stammers and stutters
 his words,

Plastering whitewash and muttering verses upon
 their fresh wound,

Not even one divine word from His mouth can
 escape,

230 Nor one small spark does he kindle within their
 heart;

The flock of God stands with its old men and
 with its young;

These hearing and yawning and those shaking the
 head;

223 Psalms 19:8 & Ruth 4:15. 228 Ezechiel
 13:10; Isaiah 1:6. 229 Deuteronomy 4:33;
 Ezechiel 34:10 & Psalms 119:43. 231 Jeremiah
 13:17; Exodus 10:9. 232 Psalms 22:8.

Death marked their forehead and their hearts
 were crushed to destruction.

Their spirit died, their strength has gone, and
 their God has forsaken them.

235 But you do not pity them, do not vainly shake
 their wounds,

Nor overfill for nothing their overflowing
 trouble;

Wherever your finger touches--there will be a
 mortal wound,

All their flesh hurts--but they have grown old
 with their pain

And made peace with their lives of shame, what
 profit is there that you console them?

240 Too wretched are they that one could be angry
 with them, too lost are they that one
 could be merciful to them;

Leave them alone and let them go--Behold the
 stars come out,

233 Ezechiél 9:4; Isaiah 24:12. 234
 Deuteronomy 34:7; Psalms 71:11. 235 Jeremiah
 16:5. 237 Jeremiah 15:18. 238 Job 14:22.
 241 Nehemiah 4:15.

Mourners with heads covered and shamed like
thieves

Each man with the plagues of his heart returns
homeward,

His back more doubled over than before, his
soul emptier than before,

245 Each man with the ravages of his heart goes to
bed

Rust upon his bones and rot in his heart. . .
And it will be when you arise the next day and
go out to the crossroads-----

You will see the mass of broken men groaning and
moaning,

Assembling at windows of rich men and camping
upon doorways

250 Publicly displaying their wounds like a peddler
his merchandise,

One whose skull was crushed and another the
wound of his hand and a bruise

242 Esther 6:12; Jeremiah 2:26. 243 I
Kings 8:38. 244 Isaiah 29:8. 246 Habakkuk
3:10. 247 Judges 19:9 & Job 1:5; Ezechiel
21:26. 248 Ezechiel 9:4. 251 Proverbs
23:29; Isaiah 1:6.

All of them stretching forth a feeble hand or
 uncovering a broken arm,

And their eyes, beaten servants' eyes, at the
 hand of their masters,

Saying: "I have a crushed skull, my father is
 a martyr--give their reward"!

255 And the rich men, merciful men, are filled with
 mercy for them

Give them from within staff and haversack for
 each of them,

Saying: "Good riddance"!--and the beggars are
 consoled.

To the cemetery, beggars! Dig up the bones of
 your fathers

And the bones of your martyred brothers and fill
 your haversacks

260 And carry them on the shoulder and go out to the
 road, prepared

To do business with them at all of the markets;

252 Isaiah 52:10 & Ezekiel 4:7; Job 38:15.
 253 Psalms 123:2.

See for yourself a place at the crossroads,
 for the eye of the seeing,
 And spread them before the sun upon your filthy
 rags,
 And with a parched throat sing a beggardly song
 over them.

265 Call out for charity to the nations and pray
 for nations' mercies,
 As you have stretched a hand so will you stretch
 it; as you have schnorred so will you schnorr.

And now what are you doing here, son of man, get
 up, flee desertward

And carry with you there the cup of sorrow,
 And rend your soul there into ten pieces

270 And give your heart food for powerless wrath
 Let your great tear descend there at the head
 of the rocks

And your bitter roar send forth--that it may
 be lost in the tempest.

June - October, 1904

262 Ezekiel 28:18. 263 Jeremiah 8:2.
 264 Psalms 69:4. 265 Proverbs 14:34. 267
 Jeremiah 51:43 & Ezekiel 2:1 & 3; I Kings
 19:9. 269 I Kings 11:31 & Joel 2:12. 270
 Isaiah 40:29. 271 Lamentations 2:18. 272
 Genesis 27:34.

THE POND

Introduction

Considerably fewer words have been written about THE POND than about the other three poems with which the name of Chaim Nachman Bialik is usually identified. One reason may possibly be that its subject matter, life in a wooded glade, is not an overtly "Jewish" theme or concern. Another may be that it reveals a side of Bialik which is alien to our standard ways of thinking about the poet and his work. Here, juxtaposed to Bialik the national poet of the Jewish People, is Bialik the nature poet, Bialik the lyrical poet. Here is revealed yet another facet of the many-sided genius of the poet.

Like so many of his other poems, it, too, is divided into two parts. The first part is further subdivided into descriptions of the pond as it appears in the morning, on a moonlit night, during a storm, and at dawn. The second half of the poem is concerned with the poet's thoughts as he sits by the side of the pond, drinking in its beauty.

Though not translated for purposes of this thesis, Bialik's poem SPLENDOR (ZOHAR) is said to be the other half of THE POND; both are believed to be dealing with the same pond, the same source of Bialik's inspiration. Ribalow writes:

In Splendor and The Pool, that are essentially one poem of light and radiance, a whole world is astir--a mirrored, refined and distilled world. The myth of childhood has come to life again. It is an undefiled and sacred precinct whither no speck of sinfulness or baseness finds its way. It is the Garden of Eden whence the man of today has been banished. Now this world appears to us as congealed, where ancient forms and images have become hardened into cold crystal, a world upside down in which the tree stands with its branches downward, a heroic world lying like Samson bound in the coils of Delilah. We no longer feel the great strength of that world, its reality has receded into our memory and has taken on a dreamlike insubstantiality. But to Bialik it is the most real world, the most beautiful. He lavishes all the passion of his soul upon that crystal-clear life which he has conjured up from his union with the mystic sources of creation.

1/

With THE POND, Bialik returned to the world of his visions and dreams, a world which he longed to experience in reality but was denied the opportunity to do so. For him the pure world of childhood

found its most concrete expression in this forested pond of the Garden of Eden. Here was beauty unlike anything created by mortal creatures. Nature poem, lyrical poem, THE POND is, first and foremost, a religious poem, in the most noble definitions of that word.

THE POND

I know a forest, and in the forest

I know a modest pool:

In the density of the thicket, secluded from
the world,

In the shadow of a lofty oak, blessed of
light and accustomed to storm

5 Alone she dreams for herself a dream of an
inverted world

And quietly keeps for herself her golden
fish-----

And no one knows what is in her heart.

In the morning,

When the sun bathes the braides of the forest's
splendor

10 Pouring out a sea of brilliance upon his
ringlets;

And he, the steadfast one, stretches out all
his golden nets,

As is his want, like Samson in Delilah's
 hands, stands captured,
 With an easy laughter and the light of a
 lover's face who feels his strength,
 With a golden net of his own, receives his
 shackles in love,
 15 And raises his crowned head beneath the sun's
 might
 As if saying to her: Wash me away, cherish
 me or bind me up
 And do with me that which your heart desires-----
 The pond at this moment, if she be judged
 worthy or not
 By a single ray from on high-----
 20 Swoons in the shadow of her shield of many
 boughs,
 Silently suckles his roots and her waters
 are calm;
 As if she silently rejoices in her portion

12 Judges 16:4-20. 13 Job 29:24. 15
 Numbers 6:9 & 18; Judges 5:31.

That she merited to be a mirror for the strong
one of the forest.

And who knows, perhaps she dreamt secretly,

25 That not only his image together with his
young shoot are in her-----

But all of him grows up within her.

And on a moonlit night-----

When heavy mystery crouches upon the thicket

And a silent secret light sprinkling between
his branches,

30 Stalking and passing over upon his stems,
And embroidering there in silver and in light-
blue

His embroidered wonders-----

And silent every shrub, and silent every tree!

Each one over-shadowing upon himself by his
tree-top

35 And meditating privately for himself the
meditation of his heart.

31 Exodus 35:35 & 28:23.

And the thicket stands before him with much
scheming, fully requiring

One glorious royal secret, of great honor
and ancient,

As if there in the innermost part, in the
hiding-place of his strength,

Upon a couch of gold, hidden from the eye
of all the living, she sleeps

40 In all her completeness, perfection of beauty
and eternally young,

Daughter of a queen from of old who was
bewitched,

And he, the thicket, appointed to count her
breath

And keep a holy watch on her secret maidenhood
Until the prince would come, her beloved,
her redeemer, and redeem her-----

45 The pond, at this moment, if she be judged
worthy or not

By a meagre silver ray from on high-----

38 Habakkuk 3:4. 39 Job 28:21. 40 Job
21:23; Ezechiel 27:3 & Lamentations 2:15.
41 Psalms 78:2. 43 Numbers 3:28 & 32.

Wraps herself in the shadow of her shield
 of many boughs.

And is still with double silence,
 As if the stillness of the thicket and the
 majesty of his secret

50 Are doubled there in the mirror of her
 sleeping waters.

And who knows, perhaps she dreams in secret
 That but for nothing does he wander, does
 the prince go astray
 And seek in eternal forests, in wildernesses
 of sand and sea bottom

The lost daughter of the queen-----

55 This hidden treasure in her great brilliance
 Hidden is she here with her in the depths-----
 In the heart of the sleeping pond.

On the day of the tempest-----

Upon the head of the forest was already gathered
 a nimbus of clouds

53 Amos 9:3. 56 Deuteronomy 32:34. 58
 Amos 1:14. 59 Psalms 18:22 & II Samuel
 22:12.

- 60 With combat in their hearts,
 Yet still they forbore and subdued their
 fire momentarily
 And secretly thunder excited their belly,
 And cloud to cloud, as portends a nearby
 evil,
 Hastily sent forth hints of lightning:
- 65 "Beware"!
 And before it is known who the enemy is
 And from where the enemy will come-----
 The forest all gloom stands prepared
 For all of the retribution which is in the
 world.
- 70 And suddenly--a spark! Flash-fire! The
 forest becomes pale,
 The world scorches,
 Crash! Thunder explodes, the forest shudders-----
 And boils!
- 75 And six hundred thousand violent winds
 Which see and are not seen,

62 Psalms 81:8 & Habakkuk 3:16. 66 Isaiah
 7:16. 67 I Samuel 30:13.

With wild shrieks set upon its mighty ones
 And seize them suddenly by their braids,
 And hurl them about, striking their heads-----
 With thunderbolt after thunderbolt!

- 80 And from within the tempest came the tumultuous
 voice of the forest,
 Great tumult, heavy uproar,
 Like the rush of distant breakers heavy of water,
 And all of it making noise, noise, noise. . .
 At the moment of this confusion--the pond,
 85 Surrounded by a wall of mighty thickets,
 Still conceals deeply within her abyss her
 golden fish,
 And like a frightened babe hidden on a night
 of horror
 Eyes closed under the skirts of his mother
 And every flash-fire flashing, eyelid shaking-----
 90 Thus face distorted, waters black and gloomy,
 Enwrapping herself in the shadow of her shield
 of many boughs-----

78 Isaiah 22:17; Judges 5:26. 83 Psalms 29:9.
 88 Psalms 91:4 & Ruth 2:12.

And all of her trembling, trembling. . .

And who knows,

Is she afraid for the glory of the forest's
 cloak

95 And for the heights of its destroyed tree-
 tops,

Or was she distressed on account of the
 beauty of her modest world,

Clear of dreams, pure of visions,

When a wind suddenly passed over it and
 stirred it up,

And a crowd of visions of glory, her heart's
 cares,

100 Reflections of day, and reflections of night,
 In a moment of anger the wind puts it up to
 wrath.

With the dawn-----

Still the forest is silent, still there are
 angry and trembling ones

Its last shadows are confined in hiding-places

96 I Samuel 13:6. 98 Numbers 5:14 & I Kings
 22:24. 101 Joel 1:7.

- 105 Yet warm milky vapors creep in the dust,
 Begin already offering up to it, and behold
 they go astray
 And are hung in tatters upon its tree-tops.
 And small, sweet, warm tongues of wind,
 Like the soft tongue of a baby upon his mother's
 cheeks,
- 110 Already gone out in the gloom to pacify the
 forest
 From the chill of the night and from its
 anger.
 And they seek out softly, lightly, comfortably,
 between the leaves
 Wandering from shrub to shrub, from a tree
 to its neighbor,
 Licking the milky-white vapors
- 115 Or falling to the opening of a nest and moving
 there unbeknownst
 The feather of a soft and sleeping fledgling-----
 And there upon the heights of the forest
 pausing to relax
- 105 Deuteronomy 32:24.

A celestial retinue--abundance of clouds,
 They are truly the clouds of glory, clouds
 of dawn,

120 Whose form is like the assembly of chiefs of
 old, exalted sages,

Who carry hidden scrolls, royal wrath, in
 their hand

From one world to another world.

Then stood the forest shuddering and silent,
 Suffocating in fear and with breath suppressed

125 Every movement, every light chirp of a bird
 awakening,

And all say trembling and glorious awe

At this moment the sleeping pond

Unwraps herself, carefree, warm, smooth,

In a sheet of light and white--a pallid vapor,

130 Slumbering the slumber of the dawn-----

And who knows, if she does not dream now,

That but for nothing honored on high, lofty
 princes,

121 Proverbs 19:12. 126 Psalms 29:9.
 132 Hosea 12:12.

Would wander far off to seek out another world

Across the sea and the ends of the heavens-----

135 And this other world, it is so close, so close-----

Behold it is here below, here below

In the heart of the modest pond.

And I, in the days of my youth, delight of

my days,

When fluttered upon me first the wind of the

Shechinah,

140 And my heart still knew yearning and longing

and the mystery of silence

And to seek a hiding-place for its prayer,

I used to depart in the heat of a summer day

To a kingdom of the most superb tranquillity-----

To the density of the forest.

145 And there, between the trees of God hearing

not the echo of an axe,

On a path which only the wolf or mighty

hunter knows

133 Psalms 55:8. 134 Deuteronomy 30:13;
Psalms 148:4. 142 Genesis 18:1. 145 Psalms
104:16. 146 Job 28:7; Genesis 10:9.

I used to wander alone whole hours,
 Alone with my heart and my God until I had
 come,

Skipped and passed over snares of gold,
 150 To the Holy of Holies which is in the forest--
 pupil of its eye:

From within to the curtain of leaves,
 There is a small green island, grass-covered,
 An island alone by itself, like a small world
 in itself.

A serene holy sanctuary, hidden between shadows
 155 Of the forest ancients of wide boughs and
 heavy tops;

Its ceiling--like a small light-blue dome,
 Which really is bent and laid upon the trees,
 Its floor--glass: A pond of pure water,
 A silver mirror within a frame of damp grass,
 160 And within it still another, a small world,
 a second world,

150 Psalms 17:8 & Lamentations 2:18. 151
 Exodus 26:33 & Leviticus 16:2. 153 Hosea
 8:9. 154 Psalms 28:2. 158 Nahum 2:9 &
 Ecclesiastes 2:6.

And in the middle of this dome, in the middle
 of that pond,
 Opposite one another, two fixed rubies,
 Two large and shining rubies-----
 Two suns.

165 And when I sat there upon the bank of the pond,
 looking
 Into the enigma of two worlds, a world of
 twins,
 Without knowing which of the two of them came
 first,
 Bending my head beneath the blessing of the
 thicket's aged
 Dripping with shadow and light; song and
 resin together-----

170 I used to feel clearly in the flowing silence
 Like a fresh new abundance toward by soul,
 And my heart, thirsting for a great, holy
 mystery,
 Then would go and fill itself up with quiet
 hope,

172 Psalms 44:22.

- As if it seeks still more, and watches
 175 For the appearance of the nearby Shechinah
 or for the appearance of Elijah.
 And while my ear is attentive and hopes,
 And with its holy desires my heart hopes,
 perishes, dies-----
 And the divine voice of God hides itself
 Explodes suddenly from the silence:
 180 "Where are you"!?
 And the meadows of the forest were full of
 great wonder,
 And mighty cypresses, invigorated citizens
 Observing me with majestic dignity, silently
 amazed,
 As if to say: "What about this one amongst
 us"?
 185 There is a silent language of the gods, a
 language of secrets,
 Having neither sound nor syllable but many
 colors;
- 176 Psalms 130:2. 177 Psalms 55:5.
 178 Isaiah 45:15. 178-180 Genesis 3:8-9.
 182 Psalms 80:11; Psalms 37:15.

But having charms and images of a glory and

a host of visions,

In this language, God will make Himself known

to the chosen of his spirit,

And in it the Ruler of the world will think.

His thoughts,

190 And Artfull Creator, embody in it the meditations
of His heart

And find a solution in it for the dream without
sound;

This is the language of visions, which reveals
itself

In a band of sky-blue firmament and its expanses,

In the purity of silver clouds and in the black-
ness of their mass,

195 In the quivering of golden corn and in the
majesty of a mighty cedar,

In the fluttering white wing of the dove

And in the span of an eagle's wings,

188 Numbers 12:6. 195 Ezechiel 17:23.

197 Isaiah 8:8 & Psalms 80:11.

In the beauty of a man's back and in the
brilliance of an eye's glance,

In the anger of a sea, in the retreating of
its waves and in their laughter,

200 In the abundance of night, in the stillness of
falling stars

And in the noise of fires, roaring of a sea
of flames

Of a luminescent sun and its sunsets-----

In this language, language of languages, also
the pond

Propounded to me its eternal riddle.

205 And hidden there in a shadow, bright, serene,
calm,

Looking into everything and everything foreseen
in it, and with everything changing,

She appeared to me like an open pupil

Of the Ruler of the forest, full of secrets

And long of thoughts.

September - October 1908

201 Isaiah 5:30. 205 Isaiah 49:2. 207
Jeremiah 32:19.

RESUME

The Literary Value of Bialik's Work

In his review of the German edition of Ernst Simon's book Chaim Nachman Bialik: An Introduction to His Life and Work^{1/}, I. M. Lask sets forth what he believes distinguishes the "really great artist" from the mediocre:

The really great artist is the person who can make the reader or onlooker feel that he too is an artist like the person whose work he reads or observes. The artist is a magician who must evoke from his audience an echo or reflection of that which he bears within him; he must make his reader feel that the author is his mouthpiece. . . In general the world an artist creates must be true to itself within its own limits: it must also leave a door open, as it were, whereby anybody else can enter into that world and find it true to itself. And strangely enough, whatever has local and temporal truth has general and eternal truth.

2/

Thus, while the term itself, "really great artist," is bland at best, the definition does focus in on what is perhaps most crucial in attempting to evaluate Bialik's literary value and position in modern Hebrew

literature: his singularly unique ability to express in poetic form the innermost thoughts of the Jewish People. And not in metaphoric language that only the most intellectual and educated student of poetry could understand, but in a language familiar to one well-steeped in Tradition. In fact, without a reasonably good understanding of Jewish Tradition, much of what Bialik had to offer is lost on the modern reader, as Alter notes:

It is hard for anyone unaccustomed with this tradition to imagine the kind of delight a Hebrew reader could take in a piquant combination of a phrase from Job with one from Psalms, or in the creation of a line that would perfectly simulate the style of Isaiah without actual quotation; even in the use of a rare biblical variant of a familiar word or the tricking out of a common root in an odd grammatical form could be a source of aesthetic pleasure.

3/

What made this gift all the more unique was the personality of the poet, the fact that all his life he remained "one of the people," never divorced from them in the ivory-tower world of academia for example, or the world of the exclusive wealthy. "His poetry is an expression of an extremely rich personality whose personal emotions often reflect the soul-stirring

emotions of an entire nation. . . In it the individual and national forces are fused into one harmonious whole".^{4/} Referring to him as "the mouthpiece of the folk," Spiegel writes of:

. . . the instinctive feeling of the people that this poet is the authentic mouthpiece of the folk-spirit. . . In Bialik the people have felt that something which pious faith calls divine inspiration. Alone among the whole generation of poets, they believed him to be the very domicile of the folk genius, so Jewish, so true to tradition, so "ritually pure" was the effect of his poetic art. . . he grew wholly out of the folk-soil, drawing his characteristic inspiration from Jewish sources, free from alien influences to a degree quite unique in modern times.

5/

Of no other modern Jewish literary figure can it be said that poetry, poet, and people were one.

To be sure, superlatives abound when referring to Chaim Nachman Bialik. He was "the greatest Hebrew poet in modern times",^{6/} "the foremost poet of the modern Hebrew Renaissance",^{7/} "the greatest of living Hebrew poets"^{8/} (written a decade before his death), "the most influential Hebrew writer of modern times",^{9/} "the greatest influence on contemporary Hebrew poetry, including the poetry of Israel",^{10/} "the most distinguished

poetic talent to use the Hebrew language in well over a thousand years"; ^{11/} "one of the great souls, one of the supreme artists, not merely of the Jewish people but of the whole world". ^{12/} But, more than anything else, Chaim Nachman Bialik was the national poet of the Jewish People. And here we must turn to Waxman for a definition:

A national poet is rather one whose poetic eye penetrates into the depths of the life of the nation and reveals to us those forces in action which supply strength and stamina to the people in its struggle for existence; one through whose poems and songs the manifold life of the people is revealed in its numerous expressions; one who gives voice to its joys and woes, to its hopes and disappointments, achievements and failures, nay even its very cry of despair and its impotent anger. The poet, through whom the spirit of the nation speaks, does not thereby lose his individuality, but on the contrary, the higher his genius rises in the scale of national expression, the more distinct is his individuality, for it is this distinctiveness which raises the bard above factions and parties and makes him the symbol of the nation as a whole, in whose poems and songs every faction and group find the reflection of their own thoughts and feelings. ^{13/}

To which Blumenfield would append a summary:

As far as Jewry is concerned, I believe that the following three elements are indispensable for the making of its

national poet: (1) the capacity to sense deeply and sincerely the tragedy of Jewry; (2) the ability to see the faults of the people and the courage to point out their failings; (3) above all, a burning and abiding faith in the people and its destiny. 14/

Yet, while this term of "national poet" is the one term which most completely characterizes the man and his poetry, it does not complete the picture. It says little, if anything, about his nature poetry (e.g. THE POND included here) or his love poetry which was so indispensable a part of his creative output. For, just as Bialik was the living symbol of the Jewish people renewing itself, he was also its foremost lyrical poet. "It is precisely as a lyric poet that Bialik comes closer in spirit to Judaism than does any other Hebrew poet. In this sense he has rightly been acclaimed the national poet of his generation."^{15/} His lyrical poetry reminds the reader of the Psalmists whose passionate displays of emotion best expressed the soul's yearning for the Living God. Bialik, too, in both his nature poetry and his love poetry, has glimpsed a vision of the ideal and now directs his creative energies towards that ideal.

Stylistically, he, too, can be identified with the Psalmists, for theirs is the finest expression of Hebrew poetry in all of Jewish literature until Bialik (with the possible exception of Judah Halevi) to whom he has most often been compared). His verse is the language of the Bible, adhering to its grammatical structure, but enriched by the classic sources of Judaism, Talmud and Midrash, with which he was totally familiar. He revived an ancient language by returning to it, by showing over and over again how it could be used in modern expression. Words and phrases which formerly had universally accepted meanings were now given added dimension by their juxtaposition in new combinations. By virtue of his own creativity, Chaim Nachman Bialik, more than any other figure of the Jewish-Hebrew literary Renaissance, restored to the Hebrew language the evocative power he knew it possessed.

Following Efros, ^{16/} we may divide Bialik's poetry into the following periods: (1) 1891-1900: Here, Bialik is occupied with themes of national Jewish import and the word which is most frequently found in his poetry is dim'ah, 'tear'. It is the tear of Bialik's childhood, the self-pity of one orphaned by a father at a young age. It is the tear of Bialik's

mother, forced to support her children until circumstances compelled her to send Chaim Nachman to live with his stern, unyielding grandfather, who little understood the fertile imagination of his young ward. It is the tear of the Jewish people intermixed with his own, as tragedy upon tragedy befalls the people. It is during this period that THE YESHIVAH STUDENT was written. (2) 1900-1905: The symbol has changed and now or, 'light', is frequently used, but not merely confined to rays coming from the sun. It is now a physical symbol, a symbol of the strength and potential strength of the Jewish People to direct its own destiny. Action, not introspection, is demanded of the people. Both THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS and IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER were written during this period. (3) 1905-1934. Bialik has now retreated from the world of national Jewish concerns and has become re-occupied with his private thoughts. His poetic output during this period is minimal in terms of number, not quality. His finest nature poem, THE POND, was written early in this period. Thoughts of childhood once again creep into his writing, not the bitter childhood of his own youth, but the mythically pure childhood of his imagination. Accompanying thoughts of love are now broodings about

death, as well as disillusionment with the ways of Europe. In 1921, he leaves Russia for a three-year sojourn in Berlin; his poetic powers quiescent. In 1924, he settles in Palestine, Tel Aviv, where he remained until the year of his death, 1934, following an operation in Vienna. During both his Berlin and Tel Aviv days, he has shifted course dramatically, now plunging full speed into book publishing, setting down folk tales, writing and editing for children, and translating the greats of world literature. SEFER HA-AGGADAH (THE BOOK OF LEGENDS), co-authored with his life-long friend Ravnitsky, and VAYEHI HA-YOM (AND IT CAME TO PASS), a collection of Solomonic legends were published in Palestine.

Much has been made of Bialik's poetic silence during this third phase of his life--in direct contradiction to Jabotinsky's statement that, "The less said about the poet's silence the better"^{17/} Perhaps his poetry had not achieved for him what he had wanted: to somehow aid in the rebirth of the Jewish People, out of the squalor of the ghettos of Eastern Europe into the blinding light of modern civilization? Perhaps his eventual dissatisfaction with Jewish religious Tradition had finally gotten the best of him and he needed to look elsewhere for

inspiration, but died before he was able to find it?

M. Z. Frank writes that:

One theory advanced by some critics (e.g. Jacob Fichman) grew out of Bialik's feeling that modern literature in Hebrew had little future unless the public had an adequate appreciation of the literature of the past. He seemed to consider the task of husbanding the literary heritage of the Jewish people and presenting it in readable Hebrew more important than that of writing his own poetry. 18/

Menachem Ribalow agrees with this theory, but notes that Bialik found in the Biblical legends in particular the natural vehicle to convey the past to the reader of the present. 19/

What is perhaps most surprising regarding this non-poetic aspect of Bialik's creativity is the seemingly non-existent pull of the Land of Palestine upon him, as Burnshaw et al note:

Palestine had little influence on his poetry; his new homeland failed to revive his creativity. He had written almost entirely in the Ashkenazic accent; only in a few children's poems did he shift to the Israeli [sic] idiom. It is one of the paradoxes of modern Hebrew poetry that its leading exemplar wrote in meters that are alien to it and may never be heard by the contemporary Hebrew speaker who reads them. Fortunately the biblical cadences, which Ashkenazi meters overlaid, now re-emerge as the rhythm of meaning displaces metrical stress. 20/

Yet, despite the period of silence, despite the lack of inspiration Bialik received from feeling the soil of Eretz Yisrael beneath his feet, how then do we evaluate his literary productivity? First and foremost, it was the work of a genius, of a man whose soul was intimately bound up with the soul of the people from whose bowels he sprang, yet a soul not eclipsed by that people. He wrote what the people needed to read at the precise time they needed to read it. They spoke to themselves and to the world through him.

It was Bialik's fate to write Hebrew at the time when the Hebrew language was the chief instrument in the Jewish national revival; and when tens of thousands of his potential readers had trodden the same conscious road as he himself had. These two facts, combined with his own mastery of the Hebrew word, turned him at a very early age into the leading Hebrew poet; that is, they caused general recognition, as it were, to be given to Bialik's pre-eminence some fifteen years or more earlier than would otherwise have been the case. Bialik became the Jewish poet laureate, with the responsibilities of a poet laureate, before he was thirty.

21/

Israeli critic Dov Sadan had significantly noted that, although Bialik's poetry appears at first appraisal to be a poetry of and for the people, this may have been more subconscious than conscious. Bialik bared his own

thoughts and soul before his world and the Jewish people who rightly claimed him as one of their own found that, in doing so, he had bared their soul with his. But, perhaps more importantly, taken as the testament of one human being, his poetry:

. . . evokes in varying ways a single archetypal scene: a large, dark space in the midst of which is a candle, flickering and casting shadows. The candle-flame in the darkness, Sadan suggests, is first the actual frail light Bialik knew as a boy in study-house and yeshiva, where he followed the traditional discipline of learning; then it is the altar-flame of the long-destroyed temple, a central memory in classic Jewish consciousness at once historical and mythical; and, finally, as the poet draws near to the light, plunges into it, it becomes a wholly mythical substance, the "hidden light" of primal unity at life's beginnings to which Bialik's poetry--in this respect recalling Wordsworth's--strives to return. 22/

Acknowledged by almost everyone to be among the great masterpieces of Hebrew literature, 23/ and to a lesser degree world literature, Bialik's poetry shared the limelight with him during his entire adult life. As his poetry was evidence of the revival of Hebrew literature, which was, in turn, the result of his own creative efforts in both poetry and prose, he himself became a living symbol of the best that the

Jewish people could produce, the finest of her sons. He had dedicated himself to revitalizing the cultural life of his people, and, together with others like Achad Haam and Ravnitzky, bequeathed to the Jews of Palestine and the world a renewed zest for the written word. As Eliezer Ben-Yehuda had provided the impetus for the revival of the spoken word, Chaim Nachman Bialik had provided the impetus for the revival of the written word.

The esteem in which this giant of modern Hebrew literature was held by the people of Palestine, and later the State of Israel, may be inferred from the ambitious program established by the Executive of the Jewish Agency in the spring of 1935, the year after his death. Known then and now as Mosad Bialik, the "Bialik Foundation," its aim was to:

. . .promote Hebrew cultural activities in the spheres of language, literature, science, and the arts. . .function as a publishing agency for such books and periodicals as were not likely to be taken up by private publishing houses which of necessity have to be guided by commercial considerations. . .award prizes for literary productions of outstanding merit and to promote the study of the Hebrew language and literature both in Palestine and abroad. 24/

To date, the Foundation has published more than 600

books, thus proclaiming for many generations to come that the name of Chaim Nachman Bialik will achieve its measure of immortality here on this earth. Of no other modern Jewish literary figure can it be said that poetry, poet and people are one. .

In conclusion, it is my sincerest hope that during this year, the one-hundredth birthday anniversary of Chaim Nachman Bialik, this thesis may play a small part in introducing Bialik to yet another generation of readers, and reintroducing him to old friends. 25/

ENDNOTES

FORWARD

1/

A. Alan Steinbach. "Special Reviews" (CCAR Journal, XVIII, 3). New York, June 1971, page 84.

2/

Azriel Eisenberg and Abraham Segal. Presenting Bialik: A Study of His Life and Work, page 19.

3/

Simon Halkin. Hebrew Literature In Palestine, page 10.

4/

Quoted in Mordecai Ovadyahu. Bialik Speaks: Words from the Poet's Lips, Clues to the Man, page 49-50.

5/

Tel Aviv, Dvir, 1961.

6/

See the INTRODUCTION: Enumeration of English Translations, pages 12-15.

7/

The source for this data, as well as the most complete listing of available English translations, has been Yochai Goell, Bibliography of Modern Hebrew Literature in English Translation, New York, Ktav, 1968, specifically pages 8-18.

INTRODUCTION

1/

Tel Aviv, Dvir, 1952.

THE DEAD OF THE WILDERNESS

- 1/
Soncino Talmud. Baba Bathra, pages 292-293.
- 2/
Maurice Samuel. Little Did I Know. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1963, page 225. Quoted in Edith Samuel (Ed.), Keeping Posted, XIX, 2, New York, November 1973, page 13.
- 3/
Jacob E. Segal (Ed.). A Bialik Treasury: Selections from the Works of Hayyim Nahman Bialik, page 113.

IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER

- 1/
For an excellent collection of American reactions and responses, see Cyrus Adler (Ed.). The Voice of America on Kishineff. Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1904.
- 2/
Regelson mistakenly dates the pogrom May 11-12, 1903. Abraham Regelson. "The City of Slaughter" (Jewish Frontier, IX, 8 (92)). New York, August, 1942, page 22.
- 3/
Vladimir Jabotinsky. "Introduction" to L. V. Snowman (Ed.). Chaim Nachman Bialik: Poems from the Hebrew. London, HaSefer, 1924, pages xv-xvi.

THE POND

- 1/
Menachem Ribalow. The Flowering of Hebrew Literature: A Volume of Literary Evaluation, page 35.

RESUME

- 1/
Berlin, Schocken, Verlag, 1935.
- 2/
I. M. Lask. "A Study of Bialik" (Palestine Review, 1, 15). New York, July 24, 1936, page 290.
- 3/
Robert Alter. "Hebrew Between Two Worlds" (Commentary, 45, 4). New York, April, 1968, page 65.
- 4/
Hillel Bavli. The Growth of Modern Hebrew Literature, page 12.
- 5/
Shalom Spiegel. Hebrew Reborn, pages 296-297.
- 6/
Charles Madison. Yiddish Literature: Its Scope and Major Writers, page 502.
- 7/
Elias Pater. Variations on Bialik Themes, page 9.
- 8/
Charles H. Sylvester. The Writings of Mankind, page 1048.
- 9/
Leon Feuer and Azriel Eisenberg. Jewish Literature Since the Bible, Book Two, page 3.
- 10/
Reuben Wallenrod. The Literature of Modern Israel, page 109.
- 11/
Lewis Browne (Ed.). The Wisdom of Israel, page 655.
- 12/
Eisenberg and Segal. Op. cit., page 11.
- 13/
Meyer Waxman. A History of Jewish Literature, Volume 4, page 228.

- 14/ Samuel M. Blumenfield. "Chaim Nachman Bialik, The Jewish Poet Laureate: On the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday Anniversary" (Jewish Book Week Annual). New York, 1942, page 59.
- 15/ Joseph Klausner. "Chaim Nachman Bialik, National Poet" (Jewish Digest, 1, 5). New York, February, 1941, page 81.
- 16/ Israel Efros (Ed. & Trans.). Selected Poems of Hayyim Nachman Bialik (Translated from the Hebrew), Rev. Ed., pages xvii-xxxvii.
- 17/ Jabotinsky. Op. cit., page xvii.
- 18/ M. Z. Frank. "Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1872-1934)" in Simon Noveck (Ed.). Great Jewish Personalities in Modern Times, page 190.
- 19/ Ribalow. Op. cit., page 63ff.
- 20/ Stanley T. Burnshaw, T. Carmi and Ezra Spicehandler (Ed.). The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself, page 19.
- 21/ I. M. Lask (Trans.). "Hayyim Nahman Bialik: An Introduction" in Hayyim Nahman Bialik: Aftergrowth and Other Stories, page 18.
- 22/ Summarized by Alter. Op. cit., page 69.
- 23/ The only seriously negative critical comments regarding Bialik's poetry found in English are those of Hillel Halkin. See his article in Samuel, op. cit., specifically pages 4-7, where he acknowledges Bialik's greatness as a lyric poet, rather than as a national poet.

24/

"The Bialik Foundation" (Palestine Review, 11, 22).
New York, September 17, 1937, page 391.

25/

Ironically, there is some dispute regarding the actual year of Bialik's birth, either 1873 or 1874. Bialik himself was not unaware of this "problem," though he did not consider it of much importance, as Kressel notes:

In his letter to Zalman Reisen (The Letters of Bialik, Volume II, 305-306), he (i.e. Bialik) wrote: 'I was born it seems to me on the tenth of Tevet 1873. But it is possible that there is an error here in the year; and the real year is (18)74. However, it is not something which I consider important.'

G. Kressel. Cyclopedia of Modern Hebrew Literature, Volume I. Merhaviva, Israel, Sifriat Poalim/Workers' Book Guild/Hashomer Hatzair, 1965, page 199. (Hebrew)

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*I have confined my bibliographic sources to those in English only, because, as the purpose of this thesis is to make Bialik's poetry available to the non-Hebrew speaking reader, it is fervently hoped that this same reader may likewise benefit from the vast literature on Bialik and his work(s) in English.

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