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Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by
Hollis Seidner

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

Avant-Garde Symbolism in the Hebrew
Short Stories of Y.L. Peretz

Hollis Seidner's study of a group of Peretz's stories that have been widely acknowledged to be "enigmatic" is an outgrowth of my own fascination with the work of the late Uri Shoham. Shoham's book, Ha-Mashma'ut ha-aheret is study of the trend towards allegorical writing in Hebrew literature from the Haskalah to A.B. Yehoshu'a. Ms. Seidner shared this fascination, and she also had an abiding interest in Peretz from the time she took an advanced seminar with me some years ago. Her thesis represents a very close reading and translation of these tales as well as considerable reflection on the applicability of Shoham's categories. In order to read Shoham intelligently Hollis had to exercise no small measure of linguistic and conceptual acumen. Moreover, she strove throughout her writing to deal with Shoham critically and to advance her own independent critical reading of Peretz.

By and large, Ms. Seidner succeeded in elucidating three levels of meaning: 1) the bare bones of Peretz's tales; 2) Shoham's reading; and 3) her own -- usually divergent -- reading of Peretz. By returning to the deeper meaning of the Cain and Abel story as she contends Peretz saw it, for example, Ms. Seidner was able to engage Shoham in a rather profound debate. Because of the complexity of the issues, it was occasionally difficult for her to make clear the demarcations between the various levels of her argument. We attempted to revise and edit some of the unclear selections, but because of the insufficient time Ms. Seidner allowed for writing and revisions, some of the lack of clarity remains here and there.

A large section of the thesis is devoted to the Cain and Abel story. To elucidate her own interpretation, Ms. Seidner also adduced the views of Eli Wiesel. This view of the two brothers as equally, or reciprocally, both guilty and innocent, is immensely provocative. From this first chapter Ms. Seidner pivoted to a consideration of the major theme of "the prophet" as this theme appears in all of the stories under discussion. She makes some intriguing comments about the stories "Prometheus," "Madness" ("Holelut)," "A Mother's Vision," and "The Birth of Moses" against the backdrop of the general theme of "Shadows and Light" -- which is the general theme of this grouping of Peretz's stories.

There can be no doubt that Shoham isolated a provocative dimension of Peretz's writing. The aphoristic quality of some of these tales may, in fact, reflect the influence of such a work as Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Much more remains to be done in this area of identifying the influences on Peretz. What is certain, however, is that Hollis Seidner, building on Shoham's work, has made these allegorical tales and their implicit cultural rebellion available to the English reader for the first time. Her assertion that Peretz was extracting his views from a hidden dimension of rebellion intrinsic to the Bible stories themselves is provocative but debatable. Shoham did not view the Biblical framework of the Peretz story as anything more than a convenient skeletal structure for Peretz's totally original allegories. Hence, Ms. Seidner's analysis of the Noah story in relation to the story "Holelût," for example, may leave us with some lacunae of understanding. But she has made a noble and intelligent effort to decipher the succession of riddles in these stories.

The large number of works cited by Hollis in her bibliography reflect actual research and reading which she did and discussed with me. Ideally, these wide-ranging studies of Peretz might have yielded a comprehensive introduction to the massive general theme of Peretz might have yielded a comprehensive introduction to the massive general theme of Peretz studies. However, forced to choose between breadth and a more focussed study-in-depth of a limited body of material, Ms. Seidner elected, wisely, to narrow her attention to the allegorical tales in the light of Shoham's methodology.

AVANT-GARDE SYMBOLISM IN HEBREW SHORT STORIES OF Y.L. PERETZ

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

Date: 1989

Referee: Professor Stanley Nash

AVANT-GARDE SYMBOLISM IN HEBREW SHORT STORIES

OF Y.L. PERETZ

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express a profound sense of appreciation for my thesis advisor, Professor Stanley Nash, and to acknowledge his invaluable guidance in my thesis process. At every stage of this process Professor Nash was ready to offer his assistance and to freely exchange ideas with me. In the initial stages, Professor Nash offered abundant stimulation for thought and interesting avenues to research. He was very patient with the unorthodox way I "incubated" the ideas, analyzed my research material and then "hatched" the written thesis. While the method was nearly painless for me, I understand that it caused a degree of consternation for him. I appreciate most of all his concern and total support. I have studied much fascinating modern Hebrew literature with Professor Nash, and I have gained, herewith, a new sense of self-confidence about my abilities. I thank him.

I owe much gratitude to Ms. Lisa Moss for her expertise in the production of this thesis, her incomparable speed and accuracy in typing, her suggestions regarding format and her general eagerness to be helpful. It was indeed a pleasure to have worked with her.

I would also like to acknowledge with gratitude Dr. Philip Miller's greater than encyclopedic knowledge of any topic and his welcome sense of humor, Ms. Frayda Ingber's generous advice and support, and Mr. Henry Resnick's

responsiveness to my research needs. They have all helped to make the academic process a humane and interesting one.

My rabbinic school years have been difficult in the face of personal loss and illness. Throughout these years I have been blessed with a faculty advisor, professor, rabbi and friend in Dean Norman J. Cohen. I have benefitted from his guidance during this time in immeasurable ways. Every time I read a text in Aramaic or a midrash I am grateful to him. I know that in the years to come in my rabbinate I will find reasons to remember his advice, his approach to text, his positive outlook, his gentle encouragement and his principled stands, and I will continue to be grateful. My debt to Rabbi Cohen's mentorship is profound. I am rewarded with the knowledge that I am not the only rabbinic student to have been so blessed with knowing him, but that, God willing, under his guidance, the Graduate Rabbinic School Program of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion will truly be educating rabbis for many years to come. While I cannot find the words with which to thank him at this time, I would like to express my hope that students and congregants I touch along the way will find in me some of the wisdom I have found in Professor Cohen.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis, a small piece of work but one I love and of which I am proud, to the memory of my father,

MARVIN SEIDNER,

HIS MEMORY IS A BLESSING.

During my year in Israel we corresponded, and he told me that he wondered how a rabbinic school takes people and turns them into rabbis.

I venture now the answer to that question. HUC-JIR accepts people worthy of respect and admiration, teaches them how to study their tradition, and trusts that in the course of the years of the program these people will become good rabbis. As I submit this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination, I pray that I have become a worthy candidate for ordination, that I will be a good rabbi, and that my father would be proud of me.

I. INTRODUCTION

Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, in their Introduction to I.L. Peretz Selected Stories, asked, "What kind of stories did Peretz write?"¹ The difficulty in answering this query derives from the scope and variety of material Peretz drew from for his short stories and the tone of his writing. In relation to Western literature they note that:

"Perhaps the closest comparison - admittedly, not very close - is to be made with the stories of Hawthorne, also composed out of a quasi-allegorical intent, a heretical moral probing based on a lapsed religious orthodoxy, and some half-hidden, even sly touches of cleverness. Perhaps, too, there is a shade of comparison worth making with some of Kafka's shorter pieces."²

Such has been my approach to several obscure Hebrew short stories, which will be unfamiliar to the general reader of Peretz, from Volume V, Mashal V'Dimyon, of Kol Kitvei Y.L. Peretz. In this thesis I chose to analyze several of these pieces and Peretz's intent in writing them.

The modern Israeli critic Uri Shoham subscribes to one of the views of Howe and Greenberg, cited above, which would describe these stories as "quasi-allegories." I have discussed his approach, applied it to other short stories of

¹P. 16.

²Ibid.

Peretz, and analyzed what I considered to be its value to the reader who wishes to understand this genre of Peretz's.

This approach was not completely satisfactory to me, however, for I found that the relationship of these stories to Biblical material is so striking, I felt the work bore further analysis. I have proceeded in much the same way to understand these stories as Howe and Greenberg understand Peretz's Hasidic and folkloristic tales to have gone "beyond the limits of Jewish sensibility,"³ to have been reworked in many different ways by Peretz, so that "what matters is moral discovery, spiritual action, the location of hidden weaknesses in the soul, the search for new sources of strength."⁴ I began to read these stories from Mashal V'Dimyon as Peretz's reworking of Biblical material for the sake of engaging the Jewish mind in "self-reflection, self-argument, self-criticism, but most of all, self-discovery..."⁵ -- in short, as modern midrash.

The stories chosen have not been published in English translation. The only story of this distinctively allegorical genre which has been available to the English reader is the short story, "The Hermit and the Bear," in Howe's and Greenberg's collection, which may be considered

³Ibid., p. 17.

⁴Ibid..

⁵Ibid., p. 19.

one example of allegorical fantasy. A Jewish shopkeeper decides to completely turn away from evil in the world and ends up living alone in an abandoned ruin of an ancient palace on a river bank, where he conjures up the incarnation of evil in the natural world in the form of a bear. They face each other in a day-long stand-off as a result of which the bear is tamed. The hero's quest for purity is over, not because he has achieved it, but because evil has been conquered, or at least tamed and harnessed. In the process, the hero has changed as well. Peretz ends with a memorable quote: "There is no end to evil. The bear has become partly human, and the human partly a bear. And a saint who lies down with a bear cannot wake the soul of the world."⁶ "The Hermit and the Bear" is a wisdom story, an allegory, a fantasy, and a criticism of Hasidic pietism. The modern scholars who have analyzed this genre of Peretz's work have not yet dealt with "The Hermit and the Bear," or with many of the other short stories in Mashal V'Dimyon. Therefore, it is my hope that my translations will provide non-Yiddish and non-Hebrew reading audiences with greater access to this genre of Peretz's work.

⁶Ibid., p. 37.

I. CRITICAL VIEWS OF PERETZ WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE VIEWS OF URI SHOHAM

At the outset I am presenting the views of Uri Shoham on the symbolism in Peretz's allegorical and avant-garde short stories. Shoham's work, Ha'mash'ma'ut Ha'aheret: min hamashal ha'alegori v'ad hasipur hapara-re'alisti has provided us with invaluable insight and clarification into the structures and symbolism of Peretz's stories. Shoham gives us the views from other Hebrew and Yiddish critical literature on Peretz's work, his own analysis of the allegorical structures therein, and studies of several stories in which Peretz's "Promethean Hero" figures prominently. My own analysis will focus mainly on four of the stories appearing in Shoham's fifth chapter, entitled: "The Promethean Hero - on the Allegorical Stories of Peretz," namely, "What is its Name?" "Cain and Abel," "Madness," and "Prometheus," as well as three others, all but one of which appear in Hebrew and in translation at the translation section of the thesis.

According to Shoham, of all the Hebrew authors from the latter days of the Enlightenment, no individual's work has been considered more difficult to explain in its various forms than that of Y.L. Peretz. In establishing the allegorical foundations in the work he is analyzing, Shoham cites many critics of Peretz's work as allegory. Most of

these critics did not write in English, making a summary of their views from Shoham useful for our purposes here. Shoham points out that Ya'akov Fichman searched for the solutions to some of the puzzles in Peretz's work in Peretz's life.⁷ Yosef Klausner's assessment of the metaphorical imagination in Peretz's work is that, for all its richness, poetry and artistry, it never concerned itself with rationality or with a correspondence to the conscious world. Hence, Klausner said, Peretz's writing must be felt and experienced, but perhaps never fully explained.⁸

Lachover, by contrast, felt that Peretz had been searching throughout his life for a form of expression in his work that would convey a poet's sense of the visionary. In his earlier work he continued the use of dreaming and fantasy found in the satirical stories of Isaac Erter.⁹ The mysterious garb in which the tales were wrapped meant more, said Lachover, than their rationalistic content or inner core. The rationalist is after "revealed truth;" the romantic seeks that which is "hidden," and so uses symbols. Peretz's work, for Lachover, is either both Realistic and Symbolic or neither. In fact, Lachover felt Peretz used symbolism to hide revealed truth, and was, rather, an

⁷Ibid., p. 134.

⁸Ibid., p. 135.

⁹Ibid.

allegorist, a lover of parables.¹⁰ Niger emphasizes the dualism of Peretz's life. As a Rationalist and a Romantic, he exhibited these two poles in the crafting of his stories. Combining the mystical and starkly logical, these stories are linked together by their literary forms of parable and allegory. Niger thought that the stories' content was, in fact, psychological and rationalistic, and that only their mode of expression was un-rationalistic, mysterious, or religious. That is to say, Peretz is a mix of romanticism on the one side and ethical, didactic rationalism on the other.¹¹

Shoham, therefore, divides the schools of criticism into the one group which views Peretz's stories as comprehensible only to the Holy One Blessed is He, and a second group which finds parable and allegory at work, but no real "mystery." Shoham believes, moreover, that both views are correct and, sometimes, incorrect, for, although some of the stories fit into these categories of pure allegory, some stories are only "naive allegories," only partially partaking of these descriptions. Shoham says that we cannot know for sure. Shoham also says that what Peretz calls "aggadic" may only be "window-dressing," or they may be true allegories or midrashim. Those stories collected in

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 135-136.

the fifth volume of Peretz's collected works, Mashal V'Dimyon, which are truly parable or fantasy, are, in Shoham's words, "visions" and not aggadah. The vision is cloaked in a difficult parable and concealed; the author is pointing toward the message or the ideal which cannot be stated directly for religious, social and aesthetic reasons.¹²

Shoham points out that allegory in Peretz's stories is often found in portions of those stories which develop into complicated allegories on their own, allegories fashioned out of certain aspects or facets of the heroes' characters. Sometimes those portions overwhelm the stories. Their motivating ideals and the heroes/protagonists who strive to realize them are analyzed by Shoham below. In Volume 5, Mashal V'Dimyon, Shoham says there are parables, allegories, and Realistic stories with foundations in fantasy. The third category is the subject of his study. It is characterized by "the thicket of profound opposites,"¹³ which, according to Shoham, is the attempt to achieve an allegory in which the hero meets the creations of his own spirit that are imaginings and ghosts struggling with each other, as they come upon the protagonists' way.¹⁴

¹²Ibid., p. 137.

¹³Ibid., p. 147; a quote from Peretz's short story, "Shalosh K'riot," p. 46 in Volume 5 of Kol Kitvei Y.L. Peretz.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 147.

II. SEVEN STORIES OF Y.L. PERETZ AND ANALYSES BY URI SHOHAM, ELIE WIESEL AND THE AUTHOR:

"What is Its Name?"¹⁵

This story exhibits almost all the classical characteristics of an allegory. The first person-narrator finds himself wandering down a road seeking "something" without knowing what he is after. He cannot rest and fear seizes him at the thought of stopping. This fear, says Shoham, is the allegorical hero's fear of not realizing his destiny. At the outset of his journey the hero does not know his destiny; this is essential. Perhaps the leave-taking and the journey itself are part of the hidden quest and discovery of the ideal. Any moment of rest might become the moment in which the soul's root may be lost, or the revelation of the ideal could spoil its actualization. The hero meets two men on his way who help him to learn both the root of his soul and the purpose of his life.¹⁶ He learns that he is seeking "Sorrow." But that is only the name which we on earth call it; its true name is a secret and hidden from us.¹⁷

¹⁵"Mah Sh'mo?" from Kol Kitvei Y.L. Peretz, Volume 5, "Mashal V'Dimyon," pp. 17-19.

¹⁶Shoham, op. cit., p. 147.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 148.

It appears that this is a story about "Mission." The old man who appears before the narrator on his way, is bent, white-haired and bright-eyed, older and taller than real life. He is "born before time," out of the depths of the void and chaos from which the world was created and will be returning to it. The narrator feels the old man must know the purpose of his mysterious search and asks him, only to be told that it is something wondrous and secret and he must continue to look for it.¹⁸

Then he meets a strange child, also male, smaller than life, dwarf-like, hairless and very ugly. Identifying himself as "Sorrow," the incarnation of illness, ugliness and burden, this magician-dwarf insists that he is the object of the protagonist's quest. The two strangers are referred to as brother, the younger born at the commencement of time and destined to die at the end of time. His true name is not "Sorrow." It is hidden and concealed from the creatures of this world; only they call him that. A classical allegory in its plot structure, this is a tale of quest.¹⁹

The hero is compelled to find a mission, which requires a metaphysical kind of strength. The purpose of the mission is timeless and unconnected to the physical world of here

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 147-148.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 148.

and now. He tries to track his purpose in life and the roots of his soul in a hidden realm. Being sent requires a kind of eternal strength, even though his mission belongs to this world, symbolized by the ugly "Sorrow." Peretz's prophet, then, is one who succeeds in finding the timeless, unspeakable, beauty and light on the boundaries of the journey through time and space, as we know it, ugly and burdensome as it is. The prophet is a pioneer; he does not remove the veils or masks from the images he encounters, images of the spiritual sides of his nature, those creations of his mind and heart that become the meaning not found in other parts of life; he keeps them masked -- he experiences Sorrow but asks: What is its true name?²⁰

Also significant in this model of the classical hero of allegory are the two "brothers" or twins he encounters and with whom he struggles, does battle or wrestles.²¹

²⁰Ibid., p. 148, (emphasis mine).

²¹Ibid., pp. 148-149.

"Cain and Abel"²²

This story, about "Everyman" split into two archetypes, paints the figures of those two brothers, Cain and Abel. We, the readers, says Shoham, are the "Everyman." As we reconcile these two parts of human nature represented in the story, we complete, the story, as it were. We are the ones being "sent" to encounter these parts of our souls, or psyches, through all the versions/generations of the story: Cain as one of the prophets of humanity; Abel as the nihilist; and both Cain and Abel together as the two poles in the allegorical search for meaning. We encounter Cain, the prophet in each of us, and Abel, the nihilist in each of us, and the plots of the story bring each of those parts of our psyche into collision in the proverbial search for meaning in our existence.²³

But into this polar configuration Peretz throws a curve, literally and figuratively. This is a tale of ascents or degrees in the sense of spiraling or revolutions of a wheel. The plot plays itself out over and over again in new, sometimes more complicated, but always the same, ways. Cain seeks God, hears God, believes in God, worships God and wants his brother Abel to share in the triumph of his spiritual quest. Abel laughs at and mocks him, scorns

²²See the Hebrew text and my translation on pp. 49ff., below.

²³Shoham, op. cit., p. 149.

his actions and makes fun of his God, in Whom he refuses ever to believe. So Cain ends up killing Abel in the name of God (Who would have forbidden him from doing so), and is killed by a wanderer or wild animal. Abel always pushes Cain to this point, Cain always suffers for it. Neither one learns or changes -- Abel deceives himself, denies God, mocks Cain, and is killed; Cain is always killed in return for shedding his brother's blood.²⁴

Peretz also calls this a story of bloodshed and lies. Shoham feels the two brothers are not the Bible's two brothers. They are two sides of one humanity which created, and continues to create a barrier for preventing the redemption of the world.²⁵ Up to this point I agree with Shoham. The Bible and Peretz are both dealing with the same universal questions. The Bible story is not a mere skeleton or disguise as the deceptive subtitle of his story "The Thought," namely "an Arabic legend," might well have been for Peretz. However, Shoham thinks that Peretz chooses Cain and Abel for his allegory not because the Biblical version itself intended them to symbolize all that Peretz saw in them, but because they were merely handy tools for the allegorical crafting of his own version of human nature.²⁶

²⁴Ibid., p. 150.

²⁵Ibid., p. 149.

²⁶Ibid.

I don't agree. I think Peretz chose Biblical stories and figures precisely because they were an ancient version of what he felt must be re-interpreted in order to come to new conclusions.

Here is my interpretation of the Bible story as it informed Peretz's choice of this material. In the original story, Cain and Abel are opposites, and, as the first two humans born on earth, they are as archetypal of humanity in the Biblical view as they are in Peretz's allegory. The Biblical Cain and Abel formed a pattern of relationship to each other and to God. Cain was the first to make an offering to God; he spoke to God; he tried to speak to Abel. Abel never spoke. The actor and reactor, the sensitive and the insensitive, the man of words and gestures and the man of duty, the leader and the follower -- each plays into the hand of the other and each suffers. Cain's punishment is to wander alone isolated and alienated, knowing that the God he so yearned to please would forever be turned away from him. Abel is slain for no reason, other than for imitating his brother, ultimately down a path to tragedy. In the end, neither brother represents the Lord or lives or dies, in His Name. Yet each one represents parts of human nature which are eternal ... and Peretz's version is, therefore, a midrash on the Biblical account. He reworks the same elements, spins a never-ending, spiraling extension of the first text into an open allegory involving our own time and

existence. He suggests a solution for each character: If only Cain would learn not to murder no matter what the cause, and if only Abel would learn there is God and meaning in the world, this would put an end to the human condition as we know it.

I do believe Shoham is on the mark in his assessment of God in Peretz's tale. Peretz is suggesting that God is the creation of our own souls, the fulfillment of our inner needs and longings. "Cain was ... seeking God Who was inside him." Abel ridiculed this inner need and rebelled against this existence of God in any form. Each character, then, was a killer: Cain kills his brother the non-believer, and Abel kills belief.²⁷ Shoham further interprets Peretz's allegorical story as saying that the prophetic impulses of man often kill their opposition because deep down these believers are not certain that they have created a God of Truth for themselves.²⁸ Likewise, the nihilistic impulses will always question and negate the religious ones. That is what Peretz means by the phrase: "Abel kills God with his scorning words (b'hevel piv)." In his analysis of the paradigmatic story of the prophetic hero, "Cain and Abel," Shoham shows us the paradox of the

²⁷Ibid., p. 150.

²⁸Ibid.

prophetic instinct which we will see further elaborated in the tale, "A Mother's Vision."

To expand upon the commentary of Shoham and my analysis above, I am presenting the commentary of Elie Wiesel on Cain and Abel as well. Elie Wiesel has also written about Cain and Abel as "Messengers of God" (the counterpart to Peretz's "Promethean prophet").²⁹ Like Peretz, Wiesel sees, in the Biblical portrait of these two brothers, a universal condition of mankind.³⁰ Wiesel treats the relationship between Cain and Abel and between each of them and God, as paradigmatic of human nature in much the same way as Peretz does. For Wiesel, however, they symbolize executioner and victim, aggression and resignation, pure violence and pure innocence. Always pitted against each other, Wiesel sees in the figures of Cain and Abel, and God, as well, villain, victim and accomplice. He reworks the story into three versions which each paint different characters in those roles:

"We could read this taut linear narrative as a tragedy in three acts with a cast of three to be played three times and on three different levels. At the first reading, Cain would be the villain. At the second, it would be

²⁹Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends, "Cain and Abel: The First Genocide," pp. 37-68.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 38.

Abel. At the third, it would be He who manipulated them."³¹

For all his attempts to understand the meaning of the Biblical text, Wiesel can only experience the story as "one that contains no call, no transcending quest; nor does it open gates of hidden sanctuaries. It suggests evil on its lowest, most primitive level. Raw, unembellished instincts dictate the rules of the game; instincts and not divine command."³² Wiesel calls the action of Cain in this story "irrevocable,...irreversible, his search ended in senseless brutality, in darkness and not in prayer."³³

In the above two quotations Wiesel both disagrees and agrees with Peretz's view of the story. While both commentators conclude that Cain and Abel bring no new light into the world, that they do not achieve any goals, and that we, the rest of humanity, are not better off for their having lived and died as they did, Wiesel feels that there was no transcending quest, no call,... i.e. no reason for Cain's feelings and actions.

In contrast, Peretz painted Cain as the prophetic man, the one who could hear God calling, who wished to find Him, worship Him properly and share the uplifting experience (the light), with others. Misguided, according to Peretz,

³¹Ibid., p. 40.

³²Ibid., p. 39.

³³Ibid., pp. 38-39, (emphasis mine).

because he did look for a transcendent God, a Being outside of himself, when God was within him, immanent, all along, Cain was, nevertheless, a force for higher consciousness, reverence, constructive endeavor, artistic expression and, generally, for meaning in the world. He was trying to fulfill the wishes of a God Who did not speak to him often or clearly enough. And in the absence of God's voice, says Peretz, Abel the nihilist, the anti-prophet, was able to deny His existence. For Peretz, they are both tragic because neither one could recognize God where God was (and is): for Cain, inside himself, and for Abel, all around him. For Wiesel they are tragic: Cain for his method of rebellion; Abel for his silence.

I believe both writers chose this theme of Cain and Abel against which to work out inner conflicts between their personal feelings for Judaism and the spirit of their times. Wiesel's Cain-as-senseless executioner/Abel-as-passive victim/God-as-silent-witness seems a glaringly obvious allegory for the circumstances of the Holocaust. Yet he does not call his version, his three-act tragedy, an allegory, although his characters all do personify people or nations or forces with more complicated and influential identities than the figures of two brothers before God. Cain represents Nazi Germany, and all tyranny, all oppression, and all violent evil in the world committed by the hand of man. Abel represents the Jews, and all victims.

God plays Himself, and all witnesses, all judges, all accomplices. Wiesel can see in the Biblical tale, a foreshadowing of genocide and specifically of the Holocaust to come. In his quest for an explanation and an accounting, Wiesel examines his own historical experience of being the Jewish victim of a murderous Nazi executioner while his silent God says and does nothing, within the setting of the Genesis narrative. In every nuance he can possibly find for the text, within it and in the Midrashim about it, Wiesel searches for the meaning of such behavior towards our fellow man. "The Midrash," says Wiesel, "was well aware that all questions and all answers must begin and end with man: even those questions to which there is no answer."³⁴

And so, on the question of responsibility in this story, Peretz agrees with the Midrashic view: the actors themselves are to blame. Likewise, Peretz's version, like the Talmudic treatment of the story, limits itself to two characters, absolving God from involvement, and saying that the story was between only Cain and Abel. This is another reason why I read Peretz's "Cain and Abel" more as a modern midrash than simply as an allegory, and why I differ with Shoham on that point. For, as in the instance of "The Thought" -- which Peretz subtitles agada ar'vit/"an Arabic legend" to throw us off the track of its universalistic

³⁴Ibid., p. 52.

message -- I believe here too Peretz subtitled "Cain and Abel," "a different version," to throw us off the track, as it were, again. As in the previous instance where, Shoham has pointed out, the veil of allegory helped to disguise a socially or religiously unacceptable message, here too I think Peretz is calling this nusha aharitha/"a different version" (and he expresses this in Aramaic), precisely because it is not a different version. His "Cain and Abel" is how he has come to understand and wants us to consider the meaning of the original text. The use of Aramaic may be to trick those readers who would condemn his heresies into thinking he has written a story about other Cains and Abels, or an imagined version of retribution for the Bible's Cain, or perhaps lost tales of the same pair, but not his real meaning for the original story. The Aramaic makes it sound rabbinic and midrashic and thereby acceptable.

For Peretz's version is heretical in its view of God, which is that we create Him in our own image, or we deny Him in any form, both approaches leading us to tragedy. And in this Wiesel says we are to blame:

"This brings us to the leitmotif of this tale: responsibility. The two brothers were responsible one for the other. Neither was entirely guilty or totally innocent; both were, each in his own way, indifferent to the other...

"...man is responsible for his fellow - man, himself and God. What he does commits more than his own person, his own world."³⁵

Peretz concluded similarly. He blamed Abel for his insistence on meaninglessness, destruction and disrespect for others and Cain for his objectification of God and relationships. Wiesel explains a midrash from God's point of view,

"What you have done, Cain, you have done also in My name; you have shared with Me your projects and daydreams; you have made Me responsible for your acts as I make you responsible for My creation."³⁶

The protest that we hear implied here is that God wants no responsibility for our acts, He does not want to become involved in human affairs and would resent Cain trying to force Him to respond to his pleas, his offerings, his worship or the sacrifice of his brother. Wiesel says he would prefer to read the story as Cain acting in protest against what he perceived as God's indifference to man and God's harsh judgment of Adam and Eve. He calls him a nihilist revolutionary, the very role Peretz assigns to Abel! They both agree that Cain was the actor who tried to change the status quo and that God was an impassive on-looker.... Wiesel's conclusion to this version is hauntingly similar to Peretz's version,

³⁵Ibid., p. 59, (emphasis mine).

³⁶Ibid., p. 60.

"Cain killed his brother - one half of mankind - out of disillusionment and perhaps out of love, weeping over all men and himself. His purpose? to destroy, to uproot creation. His reasoning? If this is man, I refuse to share his fate; if this is life, then I don't want it. Cain killed Abel, and it was only a first step. He will follow him into death. Every murder is a suicide: Cain killed Cain in Abel..."

Well, that is what I would like to think."³⁷

He, too, sees that the brothers can represent two sides of the human whole, that murder leads inevitably to murder no matter what the cause, and that sometimes we must accept the fact that we do not always understand the meaning in creation when we see it is perishable.³⁸

These commentaries by Elie Wiesel and Y.L. Peretz on the Biblical narrative of Cain and Abel are profound and universal in import. In this tale both found much to learn about the human psyche, and each writer rewrote it to explain his position in history.

³⁷Ibid., p. 61.

³⁸This last theme will be discussed below in the section dealing with "Lights and Colors."

"Lights and Colors"³⁹

In this story, Peretz describes the evolution of light from the heavens into delicate, perishable flowers. This is the second in his series of four stories entitled "Shades of Light." We must examine this story closely, for it provides us with the most enigmatic, but the most important, symbolism of all the stories.

This story follows "Cain and Abel," and refers to them each as slain, their blood filling the earth. It is their blood which nourishes the flowers in the ground from below. Their spirits are invoked, as well, to infuse creation with the drives to grow and to die. Cain, portrayed in the previous story, as the seeker of God, builder of altars, and one to offer sacrifices, is named for the spirit of growth, and Abel, who was the embodiment of nihilism and negation before, lends his name to the withering and death that overtakes all of the flowers.

When people argue about the relative value of beauty (of the flowers), some claiming that beauty is false and meaningless and others that it is true and meaningful, Peretz says: "Flowers are neither false nor true; for just as they sprout and wither, they are the flowers of Cain and Abel!" All that is perishable, all that is mortal, all of creation (even the sun and stars which will eventually be

³⁹See the Hebrew text and my translation, pp. 59ff., below.

extinguished), contains the two realities within it. Inasmuch as it partakes of life and growth and constructiveness, it is beautiful; inasmuch as it partakes of death and decay and emptiness, it is not. Since nothing that lives escapes death, everything is twofold: true and false, faithful and doubtful, being and nothingness. It is an ironic reference, pirhei Kayin v'Hevel (the flowers of Cain and Abel), since Abel was slain before his time and Cain's line of descendants was cut off when God sent the Flood neither one "blossomed" or produced a viable line of offspring.

In fact, in turning to the Genesis narrative to which this story would correspond, chapters 6-9:19, we see the story of Cain and Abel is long forgotten. Their names are but a memory, no one is left from their lines. However, what they had produced and bequeathed to humanity: violence and lawlessness, had taken hold and spread.

The profound diminishing of the human lifespan and of divine intervention on earth is reflected in the levels of Peretz's story as well. In the first level, light is available to people from the sun and from the stars but they scorn it or complain about its great distance from them or its inaccessibility. Only the people who travel through the desert or on the high seas at night value it anymore, and know how to make use of it to guide them on their way. In the second level of the story, the light is refracted

through precious stones or crystals which break the light into colors, absorbing most of it and releasing only single aspects of the light, satisfactory enough for the simple (women, slaves and children). In the last level, the colors become flowers. Flowers drink in dew and light from above, the blood from the earth below, and sprout up according to their kind, all kinds and all colors -- another way that light becomes color. The flowers grow and fade, sprout and wither, in an eternal cycle of life and death, on a scale that is only now a fraction of the original possibility for light and truth on earth.

I find the parallels between "Light and Colors" and the Genesis narrative leading up to the Flood and culminating in God's rainbow and his new understanding with Noah most striking.

The beginning of the story about light ("which is knowledge"), corresponds to the events leading up to the Flood. All of the Divine Plan for creation and human beings has been strained to its limits, first by Adam and Eve, then by Cain and Abel, and finally, in our story, by the generations that followed, behaving miserably and spreading all manner of evil over the earth. Peretz refers to such characteristic blasphemy, arrogance and greed in his few individuals who speak in this section. There is utter degeneration and light has been completely shut out by the inhabitants of earth.

At the end of this section Peretz writes,

"But the caravan drivers through the sandy desert and those in charge of the ropes while out at sea can guide themselves with the stars at night..."

If Peretz's "night" is Genesis' "Flood," and the people in question are Noah and his family, who were the only righteous ones on earth and who made their way through the Flood to survival, the parallels build.

The refracted light and different colors in Peretz's story parallel the rainbow, God's sign of peace and truce with creation. It is a sign of concession to a world which cannot absorb and appreciate God's pure light -- His presence, His providence or His original plan for creation. The inhabitants on earth before the Flood are ingrates, disrespectful and heedless of the beauty all around them and in each other. Peretz captures this in his depictions of people in the first level of his story. They complain, want only what they cannot have, feel they own it all and waste the earth's resources to acquire material wealth. They mock and scorn the God-given gifts of light (enlightenment), and deny God as its source.

The tone of resignation in which the last level of the story is written reflects the new covenant God made with Noah. God acknowledged that people would continue to be as disappointing as they had already shown themselves to be before the Flood. God would try to curb their bloodthirst,

but never again destroy His creation. And so the flowers (those parts of the original light from God intermingled with blood from man) will not last forever. They will sprout up and live, as the remaining diminished manifestation of God's presence on earth, in which we can see beauty and truth and right. Then they will die, sometimes within the span of a day.

The significance of this story is its overarching theme which is Peretz's theme throughout this series, "Shades of Light." "Light," Peretz's symbol for enlightenment and divine knowledge, appears in this story as the main focus, but with many transformations, dimensions, and refractions until we are left with "shades of light," or "colors," fleeting glimpses in the perishable realm of the pure beauty from the eternal realm. It is humanity which cannot accept pure light, make proper use of it, or appreciate it. With this light comes goodness, the knowledge of how to behave towards one's fellow man, but when man rejects it, man must learn to live with more and more darkness, more shadows, more colors, though less light, more evil and more bloodshed. Those who seek the light, more light, Peretz is saying at the end, must wait for tomorrow's morning light. Peretz's thrust is to claim we cannot give enlightenment to those who do not seek it; the world will live forever in the shadows of light. This theme was begun in "Cain and Abel" with its well-known tragic ending. It appears in "Madness"

as Mrs. Madness races towards a sunrise, which is, joltingly, surprisingly, wallowing in waves of blood. The theme culminates in "Prometheus," the tragic hero who tried to bring heavenly light to man, but was deceived by his beneficiaries and by the god who kept the light to himself, and ultimately awoke to discover he had deceived himself. A close reading of these tales, therefore, reveals both their thematic connection to each other and, as I will continue to show below, their striking parallels to the Genesis narrative.

"Madness"⁴⁰

"Madness" is a strange story, as Shoham acknowledges. Mrs. Madness gets up in the middle of the night, hitches a team of horses to a wagon or "ark," which is called, parenthetically, Noah the Drunk's Ark, and sets out on a galloping journey, a mad dash you could say, toward the sunrise. She is laughing and wild during the race. The horses have blinders on so that they can see only what's directly in front of them. Although they are paired, they can only communicate by whispering into each others' ears, and then they are whipped. They fall as exhaustion overtakes them, and are trampled under the stampede of the horse teams and wagon as it dashes forward over them, unheeding. Mrs. Madness, at the whip, sees only the sunrise to the east, bathed in waves of blood, and knows only that she is heading there.⁴¹

Shoham treats this story, the third in Peretz's series called "Shades of Light," as a sketch of allegorical suggestion about the ambivalence inherent in the prophetic figure. Mrs. Madness portrays, then, the darker side of the

⁴⁰See the Hebrew text and my translation, pp. 65ff., below.

⁴¹Shoham, op. cit., p. 150.

compulsion to search for light, or enlightenment, no matter what the cost.⁴² In addition, Shoham makes the following points:

Madness cuts down the oak trees and hews the poles for hitching the horses to the wagon ("drunken Noah's Ark"), by herself.

The sunrise, (her destination) is the boundary or edge of the heavens.

She knows where she is going but not why.

Since she is travelling toward a sunrise, i.e. a new light or a new day, she represents the positive prophetic influence in man; because she is mad (cf. Noah's drunkenness), and wild and reckless, she also represents the demonic, or anti-religious, influence, (cf. Abel's nihilism), on the other. Shoham sees this character as a combination of the opposite sides of human nature, depicted each as individuals, in "Cain and Abel." He calls this the paradox of the prophetic hero.⁴³

The sunrise, i.e. the enlightenment the prophet longs for and drives toward, is steeped in blood. Such is the paradoxical reflection of the prophet's paradoxical experience.⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid., p. 151.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

There seems to be much more symbolized here than Shoham indicates. The references to Noah, his ark and his drunkenness, which are direct Biblical references, must all be given more attention.

The fact that Peretz placed "Cain and Abel," "Lights and Colors," "Madness," and "Prometheus" in consecutive order within a series is significant; Shoham does not mention this because his focus is on the dissection of allegorical structure. Although the stories or midrashim told by Peretz only contain passing references to the Biblical counterparts, they nevertheless have more to do with the original texts than Shoham credits them as having.

First, the sequence of these short stories corresponds to the sequence of the story of man as told by Genesis: "Cain and Abel" reflect the stories of Genesis 4-5; "Lights and Colors" of Genesis 6-9:19; "Madness" of Genesis 9:20-10; and "Prometheus" of Genesis 11-11:9. Not counting the genealogies of these chapters (and conspicuously absent the creation of the world and the first man and woman), the corresponding Biblical narrative describes man's descent into lawlessness and less than obedient relationship to God. As soon as the Tower of Babel is frustrated by God, the story of Abraham begins, and man's first true vision of God and possible relationship with Him begins. *

Peretz surely intends to call our attention to the Biblical texts through his versions in this series. The use

of foreign material such as the Greek myth of Prometheus, and the seemingly secular, non-specific, backdrop in "Madness" should not throw us off this track. As Shoham mentions regarding "The Thought," which is subtitled agada ar'vit/"an Arabic story/legend,"⁴⁵ Peretz no more intends for us to believe it is truly Arabic than that Prometheus, the Greek mythical figure, actually carried on the inner dialogue quoted by Peretz. Inasmuch as both Peretz and the early Genesis narratives are treating the universal human condition, human nature, and man's relationship to God, there is no limitation to one ethnic group or bias. The cloak of ethnic or religious identity in Peretz is, as Shoham believes, an allegorical guise for a universalist, and not a particularist, message.⁴⁶

Regarding the references to Noah, his ark and his drunkenness in "Madness," many symbolic possibilities must be noted. Peretz juxtaposes Noah and Mrs. Madness. Noah is a passive, unquestioning man; he is chosen on his merit, commanded to build the ark, and commanded to take his trip. Noah's trip is in time, an appointed time and of a specific duration. It does not take him through space, however, from point A to point B. It is therefore, a trip marking time but going nowhere. Noah is commanded to gather pairs of

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 137.

⁴⁶Ibid., Shoham, citing Michael Murrin, The Veil of Allegory, University of Chicago, 1969.

creatures whose survival he must ensure. He is told why he must execute these plans, and what the new day he awaits will be. Peretz's Mrs. Madness, on the other hand, an aggressive female figure, devises her own vehicle, chooses her own time, and rides not on water but half on the ground and half flying through the air. While the time of departure is vague, the time of arrival is specific, but the reality is given to the "ground" or mileage/road covered, and only to getting where she is going. Her trip happens through space. Unlike Noah's floating, aimless voyage which, but for the pattering of rain, must have been rather quiet, and exceedingly long and boring, Madness's race seems to take place overnight: it is wild, raucous, murderous, linear and with a specific destination. Noah and the passengers he chose huddled together inside the ark as their God caused everyone else on the face of the earth to drown. Madness's company, her horse teams, and she, were on the outside of the structure or frame of the vehicle, if you will, and she cuts their harnesses as they drop beneath her galloping entourage to die in a cruel survival of the fittest.

Noah, whose name means comfort and relief, symbolizes the protector and caretaker of creation. Peretz's heroine, or anti-heroine, symbolizes the opposite. So when Peretz refers specifically to the ark of the drunken Noah, he is saying that this trip had nothing to do with the first, Noah

whom God had originally commanded, before the flood. This post-Flood Noah who became a tiller of the soil and became drunk, had never spoken to God or disobeyed God in any way. This Noah was the first man in whom God placed the responsibility for all creatures, to whom God gave all creatures for food, including meat but not with the blood still in it, and who was warned that God would require bloodshed for the spilling of animal or human blood. This was the Noah who had offered burnt offerings of clean birds and animals to God after the Flood and had received God's blessing and rainbow in return. He became a meat-eater. Slaughtering for food or sacrifice now became acceptable, permitted by God. Bloodshed would not really be forbidden, but rather regulated. Blood and wine are the symbolic elements of Noah's story after the Flood.

Noah has learned from God, it seems, that destruction of life will be accepted in certain contexts, despite all of the warnings and promises from God surrounding further bloodshed by man or Himself. This is the Noah who gets drunk, and this is the Noah whose ark is taken, transformed, and turned into a chariot of death and reckless revelry. Mrs. Madness is carrying the original plot to its ultimate conclusion for Peretz. Shoham says that she is the reflection of both the positive and negative sides of the prophetic impulse in man, (by which he means the impulse to

seek God outside of ourselves),⁴⁷ even though God, as already suggested by Peretz in "Cain and Abel," is our own creation and inside us.

I agree with Shoham's assessment of Madness, but with a slightly different twist. To Shoham, her wildness is the entire figure of Abel the nihilist subsumed into the prophetic protagonist/seeker like Cain that she also represents in this story.⁴⁸ Based on the references to the Biblical texts, I think she is a reflection of the people whom God wished to wipe out before the Flood, but whom He unfortunately created anew. For the generation which witnessed the destruction and saw the rainbow, were given animals to kill for food. They were forbidden to shed blood but had their sacrifices accepted by God. They witnessed total annihilation but were given all of creation to tend and protect. They did not know how to worship God any longer; they were confused and they got drunk. God created the paradox in His seekers. God then became paradoxical. To Peretz, the sunrise is steeped in blood.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

"Prometheus"⁴⁹

Peretz transforms the classical Greek myth of the gods in "Prometheus Bound"⁵⁰ into his ultimate allegory of paradox. In Peretz's version, after describing his horrible punishment by Zeus for stealing a spark of light, and giving it to mankind, Prometheus awakens and discovers that he was only dreaming, that he is not Prometheus but a mortal man. Shoham states that it is because the protagonist of this story, the first-person narrator, dreams of his own demise that he cannot be the god Prometheus, and must be relegated to mortality. Therefore, he says, we are meant to look, once again, at the subject of the missionary prophetic figure, and this time from the point of view of the god.⁵¹

He shows how both Zeus and Prometheus are exposed, in Peretz's version, as less than godly, not worthy of our expectations of true godliness.⁵²

Because the monologue that forms Peretz's story is a continuation of the ancient myth's story line, Shoham says Peretz wants us to imagine that this story, in a sense,

⁴⁹See the Hebrew text and my translation, pp. 73ff., below.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 152.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 151.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 151-153.

wrote itself, albeit infused with a new theme.⁵³ Of course, "Light," Peretz's symbol of enlightenment, idealism, and divinity, is inserted seamlessly into the ancient myth about Prometheus' spark of light from the heights of Olympus. Classically, Prometheus steals the light so that people might have fire. Peretz has his Prometheus lament that people used the light for fire instead of enlightenment, that they roasted calves with it as sacrifices for Zeus (i.e. to the very god from whom Prometheus stole because he felt Zeus unjustly kept earthlings in the dark!). Shoham notes that it was a reductivist, practical and primitive approach to using the gift that the people adopted, and that, according to Peretz, the creation of a whole system of sacrificial cultic practice was an example of the misuse of enlightenment, religious feeling, and prophecy.⁵⁴

The two rival forces of Peretz's concern, symbolized by the Olympian and the earthly, are embodied within Zeus. He is alternately majestic, ruling, powerful and judgmental or lustful, rapacious, greedy and stealthy. He descends to earth to grab voluptuous or special women at his will; he sires children within his family and without, and sometimes he masquerades as an animal to approach and to carry off his

⁵³Ibid., p. 152. Shoham cites Franz Kafka's article on "Prometheus" in Te'ur Shel Ma'vak. Jerusalem & Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1971, p. 78.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 152.

victims. In the story of Zeus and Europa, Zeus dressed in the hide of a bull. The double entendre that Peretz employs here involves the play on the Hebrew words for "hide" (or) and "light" (or) which sound the same, and the image of a bull in the heights, revealed to humans below through the "shades/shadows of light." This is the inspiration for their roasting calves to offer to Zeus. (I believe another play is intended here on the words for roasting and shadows, liz'lot and zil'lei (or) respectively.) So Zeus does not always surround himself with light, but for all his appreciation of both realms, he will not allow his light to be shared. Zeus will not transcend his whims -- he represents man's ignorance. Since Peretz really feels that we create God in our image (see "Cain and Abel"), this means Zeus here also represents God's ignorance. Prometheus, however, in his perennial attempts to outwit Zeus and bridge the earthly and the divine, represents enlightenment. Each god, then, becomes a symbol of an opposing influence in men.⁵⁵

The Promethean man, realizing how cruel his punishment will be for accomplishing his provocative mission, calls it "a bad dream"(!) and generally drops out of such a role or becomes the very rare specimen. Shoham points out that this story focusses the attention Peretz wants his readers to pay

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 152.

to the tragic dualism of his protagonists -- his Promethean heroes and heroines.⁵⁶

It seems to me that Peretz's critical modification to the original myth is the reversal of Prometheus's portrait. By painting his experience in defying Zeus and in enduring his punishment (traditionally venerated and celebrated by the Greeks), as a dream or nightmare (i.e. unreal) and by relegating him to the status of an average human being, Peretz is making his thematic statement about what is to be admired in humanity and in divinity: by showing them in their worst light. He is saying that there are ideals for which to strive; the prophetic mission exists for that purpose. As he has clearly shown in this depiction of Zeus, the gods are not perfect. Only that perfectly pure light which elevates mankind and opens our eyes should be sought and worshipped. Moreover, there are Biblical parallels which Shoham does not address. Peretz's "Prometheus" occurs fourth in this series of four. It corresponds to the account of the Tower of Babel in Genesis, as noted above. Clearly, both the Greek and the Hebrew myths concern the bridging of earth and heaven from one side to the other by giving earthlings access to what the gods possess. They also both serve to explain why such attempts have been frustrated from the beginning of time and why all humans

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 153.

cannot work together for or even recognize the highest good. In both versions, the Deity is displeased with their attempts and incapacitates their work or punishes them. He is a jealous God in both stories. This connection, ignored by Shoham, nevertheless makes his point about our attention to the Promethean prophet being focussed through the viewpoint of the god.

Peretz is also saying here, and especially in "A Mother's Vision" and "The Birth of Moses," that prophets do not choose, willingly, to carry out their mission. They are predestined to speak and act in defiance of darkness, oppression and suffering. No sane person would embark on this path, (hence the title of "Madness"). Suffering, punishment and mortal danger are involved, ("Prometheus," "A Mother's Vision," "Cain and Abel," "What is its Name?"). Likewise, the gods/divinity is our own creation (a "dream," a "longing," the "boundary of our eyes," something "inside" ourselves), and, as such, will never be all that we hope for when we find it, because of what we are capable of creating and of perceiving through "shadows of light." More on this theme of the object of the prophetic quest and the human search for God is discussed in the section on "Lights and Colors" above and in the CONCLUSION section below.

Peretz's Promethean hero/heroine, in his/her different evolutions, is an allegorical figure which finds itself on the "way" (on a journey or on the road), climbs the "tower,"

flees to the "desert," in short, travels in landscape/("soulcape") scenery," which is part of the scenery of his/her soul. It is divided in two, three, or into camps (people, birds), which war with each other.

In Peretz's use of an allegorical structure, (especially wherein the protagonist is a paradoxical embodiment of the faithful alongside the rebellious), he creates a "pseudo-literary" tool used for didactic purposes. He is like the other modern Hebrew authors (Mendele, Frishman, Agnon, Megged, and A. B. Yehoshua) who are in this vein. He uses this tool to mold the "new pioneer" who has abandoned his ancient theology but does not have the strength to build a new one in its place.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 159.

"A Mother's Vision"⁵⁸

Two additional stories about the prophetic persona, treated in Promethean terms in the "Shadows of Light" series, are "The Birth of Moses" and "A Mother's Vision." The latter one opens the Mashal V'Dimyon volume of Peretz's collected works. In both pieces, Peretz views the prophet from someone else's point of view.

This time through the eyes of a prophet's mother, a loved one, Peretz describes the life and work of a prophet as miserable and misunderstood. Peretz seems to be saying that the child is already chosen; he will not choose his own life; that no one who cared about him (not even the one who would convey the messages to him) would choose such a life for him; that this is unjust, but that without the prophet there can be no justice in the world.

The point of view is the mother's and it is attributed to a "vision" she has upon awakening from her dozing by her son's cradle. This "vision" is similar to Prometheus's "dream" or "nightmare" in Peretz's "Prometheus." In both of these stories, the mortal who dares to consider the life of the prophet, is invited to a view of cruel, unrelenting punishment and misunderstanding by those he would be trying to assist.

⁵⁸See the Hebrew text and my translation on pp. 77ff., below.

The Biblical parallels to this story, Sarah, Rebecca, and Hannah, all have visions or are visited by angels and are told about the future of their children: how they will affect the world and what their lives will be like. The Bible wants us to believe these visions are real. Similarly, ~~Peretz~~ does not intend to lead the reader into thinking the "dream" or "vision" is unreal. In spite of the fact that the mother falls asleep, her vision is meant to reveal the truth which is otherwise unknown to others. Likewise, Prometheus's "dream" in no way diminishes the "reality" of his vision.

Such foreshadowing of lives and pre-existing knowledge is given, Biblically, to the mothers. (Moses's mother may, therefore, be included in this grouping, as her "foresight" and Miriam's secure for them knowledge of Moses's welfare and destiny.)

The angel in this story, too, is a Biblical throwback. The angel is very honest with the mother and answers all her questions. He explains what a prophet does in terms relevant to her life. He tells her that the prophet is not rewarded, nor appreciated, nor dealt with fairly, but that he will engage in the mending of the world from the human side by bringing law and light and love from God's side.

"The Birth of Moses"⁵⁹

In "The Birth of Moses," the entire story is a picture of the world into which Moses was about to be born, as it greeted the news of his arrival. Moses would live in Pharaoh's palace as one of his family, have free access to the Egyptian court, eventually flee to the desert, become a shepherd, and continue to wander, with his people through various types of terrain in the Ancient Near East. These locations, with which he will become intimately familiar later in his life, are the subjects in the story. As the tidings of his arrival are carried on the wind to each location and ultimately to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt, there is a corresponding reaction to the news. From the desert to the forest to the fields, vineyards, and expanse of the sky, earth rejoices, blossoms and sparkles with the news. "Only the Nile of Egypt was wearing darkness and gloom..." The palace, temples, idols and whole political infrastructure of Pharaoh quake and crumble in the face of Moses' birth. Pharaoh responds by trying to prevent the inevitable, and out of a great fear, issues the edict to throw all newborn sons into the Nile.

I believe Peretz chose the figure of Moses, again, to show that the Biblical narrative contains within it the truths he wishes to express. Peretz's beliefs about the

⁵⁹See the Hebrew text and my translation, pp. 85ff., below.

kind of person a prophet is, how he affects others, why he is driven to do what he does, in spite of the fact that he will always suffer for it -- all of these themes are further expressed in his midrashic treatment of the Biblical texts.

In "The Birth of Moses," Moses never appears. The action takes place before he is born. The picture Peretz is painting for us, then, conveys a sense of the prophet's predestination. The prophet is born into his role, at any given place or time he is needed. Once there, he will not be able to forfeit his role; it is thrust upon him; it is inevitable. This theme of inevitability is crystallized in the last line: "Every son who will be born you will throw in to the Nile!" We see the irony in Pharaoh's command for we know from the Biblical account that it is precisely because Moses was put into the Nile that he was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, remained safe, and became the savior of the Hebrews and the cause of Pharaoh's downfall. Pharaoh is tragically the instrument of his own demise and of the success of Moses' mission!

One might say that the story is not related to the Biblical text for these reasons. There are hints of universalistic significance in the geographical depictions and the actual absence of Moses. The desert that is cooled and refreshed is not called Sinai or inhabited by any of the people the children of Israel are to meet later in their wanderings. The forest seems totally unrelated to the

original narrative; the fields and vineyards are, perhaps, only dreams of the Promised Land but not part of the story in Egypt or the desert. Likewise the sky and the birds do not strike familiar chords. Peretz might have conjured up this scene, in the Biblical setting, because it would evoke a paradigmatic image of the Prophet, since Moses was the greatest of all prophets, to Peretz. He may have intended to say, only in general terms, that these conditions of inevitability accompany all prophets.

Each geographical location represents another inner need of mankind in a geography of the human soul, as it were. Peretz is expressing the universal need for the prophet, the ready acceptance and appreciation of him that exists in places he must seek out. He must not be daunted in his mission or he will be destroyed by those he threatens.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that Peretz's work is a midrash, based on the Biblical text, about Moses, just as much as it is about prophecy in general. Elie Wiesel examines Moses in the Written Tradition, and tells the story of Moses's importance through a composite portrayal of death:

"When Moses finally agreed to accept the inevitable, he begged God not to place him into the hands of the Angel of Death, who frightened him. And God promised. Three times did the Angel of death move toward Moses, yet he was powerless to do anything but look at him from afar.

Moses spent his last hour blessing Israel's tribes. He began blessing them one by one, but

time was running out and so he included them all in one benediction.

Then, escorted by the priest Eleazar and by his son Pinhas, and followed by his disciple Joshua, he began to climb Mount Nebo. Slowly he entered the cloud waiting for him. He took one step forward and turned around to look at the people following him with their gaze. He took another step forward and turned around to look at the men, the women and the children who were staying behind. Tears welled up into his eyes, he no longer could see anyone. When he reached the top of the mountain, he halted. You have one more minute, God warned him so as not to deprive him of his right to death. And Moses lay down. And God said: Close your eyes. And Moses closed his eyes. And God said: Fold your arms across your chest. And Moses folded his arms across his chest. Then, silently, God kissed his lips. And the soul of Moses found shelter in God's breath and was swept away into eternity.

At the foot of the mountain, shrouded in fog, the children of Israel wept. And all of creation wept. And in his sorrow, Joshua forgot three hundred commandments and acquired seven hundred doubts. And the bereaved people, blinded by grief, wanted to tear Joshua to pieces for having succeeded Moses, the saddest and loneliest and the most powerful prophet of Israel and the world.

But up above, the exulting angels and seraphim gave him a rousing welcome. Their joy reverberated throughout the celestial spheres. Everywhere Moses was celebrated as having been the most faithful of God's servants. The events that had filled his life on earth were glorified. Heaven glorified him seven times. And the waters glorified him seven times. And the fire glorified him seven times. And all of human history continues to glorify his name."⁶⁰

Peretz created the same midrashic effect with his depiction of Moses's birth -- all of creation rejoiced at the news, heralded by a wind, like a messenger, (carrying a breath of God?) blowing across the landscape. Just as all

⁶⁰Wiesel, op. cit., "Moses: Portrait of a Leader," pp. 203-204, (emphasis mine).

creation wept at his death, all creation must have rejoiced at his birth, Peretz seems to be saying, in his mirror-image midrash.

Wiesel also said that Moses was the greatest prophet because although he was in direct communication with God, he always returned to his people; whenever he had a disagreement with God he voiced it; he faithfully transmitted each party's messages to the other.⁶¹ He was no less a prophet to God than he was to Israel. Together, he and God forged a people and a law to keep them for all time.

This is the paradigm of prophecy that intrigues Peretz, I believe, for Peretz felt we create God in our own image. The true prophet must be one, then, who can speak to the divine in man and who is aware of the faults of the God we created or of the God that we are capable of perceiving. This is exaggerated in his "Cain and Abel," but clearly stated, nonetheless: "Cain can not yet hear God's word: 'Thou shalt not murder!' and Abel has not become wise...he continues to say, 'This is not God.'" Moses was capable of confronting God and calling Him to task, and equally ready to punish his people for their disobedience. He lived in two realms. Therefore, I see in Peretz's "The Birth of Moses" a midrash which glorifies Moses's stature and importance to all of creation. This is a mirror-image of

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 202-203.

the Midrash about his death, lending an other-worldly air to his existence.

The geographical subjects of "The Birth of Moses" appear less general and more specific to the life of Moses, then, when we hear Psalm 96 resonating throughout the story.

"Sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord, all the earth...All the gods of the peoples are mere idols,...Declare among the nations, 'The Lord is King!' the world stands firm; it cannot be shaken; He judges the people with equity. Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult; let the sea and all within it thunder, the fields and everything in them exult; then shall all the trees of the forest shout for joy at the presence of the Lord, for He is coming, for He is coming to rule the earth; He will rule the world justly and the peoples in faithfulness."

These are the geographical locations mentioned by Peretz in the story, and they are greeting the arrival of God, Who will be brought by Moses, to establish a relationship with our ancestors for all time.

III. CONCLUSION

Shoham aptly states:

"We certainly hear Torah from the mouth of Nahman'ke the Tsadik [a character from "Ha'Otot V'ha'G'vilim,"] which is essentially beautiful to Peretz the author; an author who works in the ideas of a useful religion that serves his allegorical hero, who is at times a symbol of the ideal which has far transcended the bounds of religious tradition to the world which is completely opposed to it."⁶²

This is the aspect of Peretz I feel is represented in the preceding stories and which I would like to further consider below.

Peretz's Promethean hero wants to bring "light" (enlightenment) to the world (eg. "Prometheus," "The Thought") and he (the narrator, hero, or first person) tells you so. However, he discovers when he does that the world doesn't embrace the enlightenment ("the thought/daughter," the "light") and so changes it instead into something more practical and more readily accepted as a gift from the divine realm, into something manageable and useful.

If Peretz sees himself as such a messenger, then the allegorical form is his concession to the world as it is; the kernel of his truth is hidden within the form. We might understand Peretz's stories to be about himself. Consequently, they must be about his people, Israel. For in

⁶²Ibid., p. 146.

the same ways that the solitary prophetic figure is described by Peretz, Israel, as the "light" unto the nations, is a similarly prophetic messenger, destined to bring enlightenment to an uninterested world...an ironic but unshakeable thought for one such as Peretz, who was struggling to make sense of Israel's role and demeanor in a newly "Enlightened" world.

I believe Peretz's fascination with, empathy and compassion for the prophet, or any man of God, comes from his heretical assertion in "Cain and Abel" that we create God in our image. The prophet, then, is one who tries to keep together those parts of the human psyche which seek enlightenment, a higher good, a source of love outside of itself, and those parts which deny the others and block out the light.

The world in which Peretz lived had come to a new understanding of knowledge as accessible to all through education, a world of newly separated religious and secular identities, and a world open to new ideas. With ideas such as Romanticism, Symbolism, Realism, Zionism and Enlightened intellectualism influential in Peretz's life, his religious identity and notions of faith may have undergone radical modernizing. However, he could not escape this idea of the prophet which remained with him. Man is responsible for bringing enlightenment to the world, and so Peretz opens his

section Mashal V'Dimyon with "A Mother's Vision" and closes it with this vision of the light from a child's face.

צללי אור

א

קין והבל

(ניסחא אחריחא)

שיר המעלות משאול תחתית צרה עד מרומי אין-סוף:
שיר המסילה, העולה בית-אל, מגוש עפר עד בעל כנפים —
הרוח, שיר קין והבל, הכתים בלא עתם, טרם מלאה סקודחם
על הארץ, והשבים לתחיה בכל דור ודור, למות בלא עתם.
מבלי מלאות תפקידם על הארץ... שיר המעלות — שיר שקר
ודם...

עודם צרומים, אך אזור-עור במתניהם, וקין דורש את
האלהים, והבל — ממלא סיו צחוק.

IV. HEBREW TEXTS AND AUTHOR'S TRANSLATIONS:

(The reader may wish to observe in the Hebrew how the continuous usage of the "vav hahipuch" creates a style strongly suggestive of Biblical narrative text.)

Shades/Shadows of Light

1

"Cain and Abel"

(A Different Version, Another Version)⁶³

A song/hymn of ascents from the lower depths of Sheol to the boundless heights; a song of journeying that rises to the House of God, from a clod of earth/dust to the winged bird - the wind/(Spirit). A song/poem/epic saga of Cain and Abel, who die before their time, before their tasks have been fulfilled on earth, and who are resurrected in every generation, to die before their time, without fulfilling their appointed roles on earth...a song of ascents - a song of falsehood and blood...

They were still naked, only a loincloth on them, when Cain began to seek/sought God, and Abel's mouth was filled with laughter/mockery.

⁶³Peretz's strange use of the Aramaic nusha aharitha connotes many layers of meaning, among which he may have intended: An Idolatrous Version, An Apostate Version, A Substitute Version, The Last Version, The Ultimate Version, A Version of the End, A Version of the Remnant, A Version About Responsibility, A Version About Remaining Behind, An Anonymous Explanation.

וקין נע ונד כל הימים לבקש את האלהים, אשר בקרבו.
והבל הולך אחריו וצוחק. כי הכל הבל!
ויהי היום, וירא קין אבן גדולה באבני השדה, ויכרע
וישתחו לסניה, כי נפל סחד האבן עליו, ויאמר: אכן, היא
האלהים!

או רנח לקין סתאום, כי מצא את שאהבה נפשו ואת
תאנתה... ותנח עליו רוח האלהים, ויפן אל הבל אחיו, ויאמר:
בא קץ לעצבי ולרגוזי, ולכליון נפשי על חיימים, כי ברית
כרתי עם האלהים...

ויוסף: ואתה, הבל, שמעני — כה אמר האלהים...
ולא נתנו הכל לכלות דבריו בשם האלהים, ויסער בצחוק
סיו, ויגש אל האבן הגדולה, וישם את רגלו עליה, ויאמר:

ראה, הנני דש את האלהים בעקבי, וגם ירוק ירק בסני האבן.
ויאמר: ראה, כזו אכח לאלהיך! אין אלהים!
ונהפך לב קין בקרבו, ויקם על הבל אחיו, ויהרגהו...

And Cain roamed/wandered all his days in search of/seeking God, Who was within him, and Abel⁶⁴ filled his mouth with laughter. BECAUSE EVERYTHING WAS FUTILITY!⁶⁵

Then one day Cain saw a great stone amongst the stones of the field and he bowed and prostrated himself before it, for an awe of the stone came upon him and he said, "INDEED, THIS MUST BE GOD!"

Then Cain was suddenly relieved, for he had found that which his soul had loved and longed for...and he was inspired by God/the spirit of God settled upon him/he was moved by God and he turned to his brother Abel and said, "The end of my worries and woes and my soul's longing has come for all time, for I have made a covenant with God..."

And he added, "And you, Abel, listen to me,... 'Thus says God...'" But Abel did not allow him to finish speaking God's words, for his mouth erupted in laughter; and he approached the great stone placing his feet upon it and said, "Behold, here I am, trampling God with my heels," and he even spat in front of the stone saying, "See, I scorn your God! There is no GOD!"

Cain's heart turned inside him and he rose up against Abel his brother and killed him...

⁶⁴Play on Abel's name, Hevel, which means futility; puffs of air or nothingness, emptiness.

⁶⁵See footnote 64.

וזאב טורף יצא מן היער, ויטרוף את קין, בכרעו על נבלת
הבל...

וינלדו קין והבל שנית...
וקין עודנו דורש ומבקש את האלהים, אשר בקרבו.
ויהי היום, ויחקע קין ביער, וירא והנה עץ רענן מתנשא
על כל עצי היער... ובין ענפיו להקת צפרים אומרת שירה,
ויכרע קין לפני העץ, והבל עומד מאחוריו וצוחק:
— אחה משתחוה לאילון, ואת פריו יכרסם חזיר!
וישסוך קין את דם הבל בשם האילון-האלהים, וגם הוא כח
בלא עתי...

וינלדו שוב...
וחבלי לידה באו לקין — חבלי לידת אלהים...
וילך קין אל היער, ויכרות אלון קדוש, ויקח מעצד וכלים
מכלים שונים, ותנח עליו הרוח, ויחטוב לו אלהים מן העץ,
בצלמו, בצלם קין חטבו, ויסתח לו עינים גדולות לחללו של
עולם, ואזנים קשובות לרינה ולתפילה, ואף למען יריח —
קטורת... וידים עשה לו גדולות ואמיצות.

And a ravaging wolf left the forest and tore Cain apart, while he was kneeling over the corpse of Abel...

And Cain and Abel were born a second time...

Cain still sought after God, Who was inside him. Then one day, when Cain had pitched a tent in the woods, that he looked and beheld a flourishing, luxuriant tree, elevated above all the trees of the forest... and amongst its branches a flock of birds was singing a song. Cain knelt before the tree, but Abel stood behind him laughing: - "You are bowing down to an oak, while a pig (can) devour its fruit!"

And Cain shed Abel's blood in the name of the tree-God/deity, and he, too, died before his time...

So again they were born...

And birthpangs/labor came upon Cain - the pangs of giving birth to God...

And Cain went into the forest and cut down a holy tree, taking a plane and tools of different sorts, and, inspired, he hewed for himself a god from the tree, in his image; in the image of Cain he fashioned it; and he carved into it great open eyes looking out into the world and ears open to rejoicing and prayer, and a nose for the sake of smelling - incense...and he made great strong hands for it and placed

יחן גרין בימינו

וחרב כשמאלו, לשפוט ולענוש את העולם...
ולמען מצוא חן בעיני אלהים־שופטים, לקח אבנים קדושות
מאבני השדה: אבנים, אשר לא דרכה עליהן רגל איש ולא
הונף עליהן ברזל, ויבן מזבח לאלהים...
ואת הנותר מן האלון לקח, ויערוך מערכה על המזבח,
ויבחר רחל חמימה מן העדר, ויעקדה על המערכה, ויצח אש
חתייה...

ותעל העולה בעתר העשן...

ותסעם רוח קין, וישמע את קול אלהים מדבר, ויסן ברחמים
גדולים אל הבל אחיו, ויאמר: כה אמר האלהים... ותכל סער
סיו בצחוק, ויאמר: ראה, הנה העשן עולה מעל לראש אלהיך,
ואתה — אך למעשה ידיך תשתחוה!
וישפוך קין את דם הבל אחיו בשם האלהים, ויו מדם
הבל על המזבח...

וקין נפל שדוד מידי נע ונד־כמוהו...

אך ברגע מותו נשא עיניו בעקבות העשן — למרום...

an axe in its right hand and a sword in its left, with which to judge and punish the world...

And in order to please the gods of justice he took sacred stones from the stones of the field: stones upon which no human foot had tread nor iron had struck and he built an altar for God...

He took the rest/remainder of the tree/wood and arranged a pyre on the altar, chose a pure lamb from the flock and bound it on top of the pyre, kindling a fire underneath...

And the offering rose in the richness of the smoke...

And Cain's spirit was troubled⁶⁶ and he heard God's voice speaking so he turned in great mercy to his brother Abel and said: "Thus says God..." And Abel's mouth split with laughter and he said: "See, here is the smoke rising over the head of your God, and you - it is only a work of your hands that you are bowing down to!"

So Cain shed the blood of his brother Abel in the name of God, and he splattered Abel's blood on the altar...

And Cain fell, slain at the hands of a wanderer like himself...

But in the instant of his death he raised his eyes in the wake of the smoke - heavenwards.

⁶⁶Cf. Genesis 41:8. This is the word used to describe how Pharaoh felt after his dreams. Cf. Peretz's other story "The Birth of Moses" in which another Pharaoh's sense of impending doom is elaborated in more detail.

ודור הולך, ודור בא...
וקין דורש ומבקש אלהים, והבל ממית את אלהיו בהבל
סיו, וקין הורג את הבל, וגם הוא מת בלא עתו...
וקין הורג את חבל גם בשם היושב בשמים. כי אמר הבל:
אך את הגבול לעיניך אתה רואה בדמות רקיע — אין שמים
ואין אלהים!...
ודור הולך, ודור בא, ועולמים ינקוטו, טרם ישמע קין את
דבר אלהים: לא תרצח! וטרם יחכם הבל ויאמר: לא זה
הוא האלתיים.

So one generation comes and another generation goes...

And Cain seeks God and Abel kills his god with his scorn⁶⁷ and Cain kills Abel as well, in the name of THE ONE WHO DWELLS IN THE HEAVENS. For Abel said: "It is only the boundary of your eyes that you see as the form of the firmament - there are no heavens and there is no god!..."

And one generation comes and another generation goes and the cycle of time passes, Cain can not yet hear God's word: "Thou shalt not murder!" and Abel has not yet become wise when he speaks and therefore he continues to say, "No, THIS IS NOT GOD."

⁶⁷Hebrew: b'hevel piv/with the nothingness/derision from his mouth. This was a more common Yiddish expression, not common Biblical usage. It referred to blasphemous, mocking and ridiculing expressions. Thanks to Professor Harry M. Orlinsky for his consultation on this phrase.

אורות וצבעים

והאור הוא הדעת.
אך היום קצר מן הדעת, והאור איננו ממלא חללו של
עולם, ואל תוך הדברים לא יחדור אולי לעולמים...
וככה השמש, ויתנוצצו הכוכבים.
וכני הארס מתאוננים.

— תגביהוני אליהם, או הורידום אלי ואמושם — מתחנן
העיור.

— הכוכבים הם פרחים בלי ריח — אומר בעל-החוטם.
ובעל-הבית עוזב את הכוכבים בבוז, ומדליק נר בפרוטה,
וקורא — בספר חשבונותיו...

ובנו בכורו המרקד בוז יבון להם, כי לא יצלחו גם לאותות-
מחול בתג מסכות, ואחיו הצעיר ממנו, בעל עצבים הוללים
וקיבה חולנית מיום הנלדו, שורק בבוז גם הוא: יש גם זכוכים

Lights and Colors

And the light is knowledge.

But the day is shorter than knowledge, and the light does not fill up the space/the whole⁶⁸ world, and does not ever penetrate to the core of things...

The sun is extinguished and the stars twinkle.

And people complain.

"Raise me up to them, or lower them down to me that I might touch/feel them," pleads the blind one.

"The stars are flowers without scent," says the one with a nose. And the bourgeois person leaves the stars behind, in scorn/mockingly, and kindles a candle/wick/lamp for a p'rutah (penny candle), and reads - in his ledger books...

His firstborn who dances⁶⁹ scornfully/scorning them, (who dances around/prances around/parades around, scorns them), for they also are not fit ever as signs of the dance on the festival of masquerade, and his younger brother, who had wild nerves and a sickly lame leg since the day of his

⁶⁸This phrase appears also in "Cain & Abel" re: the expanse of space or the whole world taken in by the eyes of the idol made by Cain.

⁶⁹The expression hasatan m'raked l'fanav means Satan dances in front of a man planning a sin until he commits it.

מחנוצצים...

אך מנהיגי האורחות במדבר חול ורבי־חובלים בלב ים
מתייעצים עם הכוכבים בלילות...

ויש גם אבנים טובות, אבני יקר, בולעות־נגוחות, יונקות
אור... אך לא כבולען כך פולטן... לא ישיבו את הכול, ועוד
שבור ישברו את הקרנים, והיה האור לצבעים — לנחת
רוח לנשים, לעבדים ולקטנים...

וצבעים גם לפרחים...

כי רותה הארץ מדם קין והבל נתצמח פרחים למיניהם.
והפרחים יונקים טל ואור ממעל, ודם מן הארץ מתחת, והיה
האור לצבע...

ורוח קין מכה כל פרח ופרח, ואומר לו: עלה וגדל! ורוח
הבל מנשב: גבלו והקברו! והפרחים נוצצים ונובלים, נוצצים
ונובלים...

ובני האדם באים ומלקטים, ומתנכחים, זה אומר: שֶׁקֶר
החן! וזה אומר: אמת היוסי... והפרחים אינם לא אמו, ולא
שקר.

birth, he also whistles/shrills with contempt: "Flies also twinkle..."

But the guides in the sandy desert and those in charge of the ropes in the middle of sea assist themselves with the stars during the nighttime...

And there are also precious stones, jewels, that absorb light, they suck in the light...but not easily as they take them in do they let them out...they will not return it all, and in the meantime a hole will break/refract the rays; and the light becomes COLORS - to the pleasure of women, slaves and children...

And the colors also turn into flowers...

Because the earth was saturated with the blood/bloodshed of Cain and Abel and flowers sprouted/grew according to their kind. And the flowers suckled on dew and light from above, and blood from the earth below, and (so) the light became color...

And the spirit of Cain strikes every flower, and says to it: "Arise and grow!" And the spirit of Abel blows: "Wither and be buried!" And the flowers sprout and wither, sprout and wither...

People come and gather them, and dispute/disagree, this one says: "Beauty is a LIE!" And that one says, "Beauty is TRUTH"... and the flowers are not truth and are not a lie,

כי אם נוצצים ונובלים, פרחי קין והכל!
ואמנם יפים הם הפרחים הרכים, אשר יתפתחו לאור בוקר
ביום המחרת...

because if they sprout and wither, they are the flowers of
Cain and Abel! Indeed/Truly the delicate flowers are
beautiful/lovely, that open to the morning light of
TOMORROW...

הוללות

ומרת הוללות כרחוק אלונים ביער, ותעש מהם מוטות
לכל עברי התיבה, היא תיבת נח השפורה, ותקם בעוד לילה,
ותפתח את אורנתה, ותוצא את סוסיה, ותאסרם אל התיבה,
צמדי סוסים למוט, צמדי סוסים למוט...
והסוסים רצים לפניהם, כי כסותי-עינים להם, כסותי עור,
לבל יביטו ולבל יטו ימין ושמאל... וכל דרך ישרה בעיני הסוס,
כיושר היצול... והם רצים, ויש סוסים דוהרים, ויש מושכים
כמו בעול: יש ויפן הסוס אל רעהו ויגרד את צנארו, וילחש
באוזניו דבר מתוק מדבש — אז תשמע שריקת השוט, ונטו
החבלים כמיתרי הכנור... והסוסים יטנו כל אחד לעברו. כך
לכל צמד סוסים דרך אחת — דרך הישרה, דרך היצול...
— ולאן תרוצו, סוסים?

Madness

Mrs. Madness cut down oak trees in the forest and made poles for every side of the ark out of them, (which was the drunken Noah's ark), and she got up while it was still nighttime, opened her stable and led out the horses, hitched them to the ark, a pair/couple of horses (a double yoke of horses) to every pole...

The horses ran forward, for they had blinders on, blinders made of leather, so that they could neither look nor veer to the right or to the left...And every road/path was as straight ahead in the horses' eyes as the straightness of a plough-shaft... And so they ran. There were galloping horses, and there were horses pulling as if in a yoke: at times a horse would turn to his partner and scratch his neck, and he would whisper something as sweet as honey in to his ears - then the crack of the whip would be heard, and the reins would tense like the strings of a violin⁷⁰...And every horse could turn to his side. And so it was one way for every pair of horses - a straight path, a path like a plough-shaft.

So, Horses, to where do you run?

⁷⁰Violin: a symbol? Peretz wrote a short story, "The Violin," which appears in the same volume of stories as those presented above.

— קדימה, קדימה! שם גבול השמים, שם מחוז חפצנו...
 וחפץ הסוסים הוא חפץ השוט, והשוט ביד הוללות... והתיבה
 תיבת נח דוהרת, דוהרת וחושבת להשבר... והתיבת דולגת
 ומקפצת, והוללות צוחקת וצוחקת...
 וגם סכין ביד ההוללות... וכי ייעף סוס וייגע, ותושיט
 יד, ותכרות את חבליו, ויפול הסוס, ותעבור עליו התיבה,
 ותעזוב סגר מובס מתבוסס בדם... אך הסוסים עיניהם בראשם,
 ומעוסם קדימה! קדימה!
 — ולאן את דוסקת, הוללות?
 — למורח שמש! למורח שמש! שם תעלה, שם תראה
 בשערותיה הפרועות והבוערות בגלי דם...
 — ולמה לך, הוללות, השמש הרכה ושערותיה הפרועות?
 — אינני יודעת, אינני יודעת...
 ותיבת נח דוהרת ומקפצת על סגרים מתבוססים בדם.

Forward, forward! There is the edge of the heavens,
there is our destination.

And the horses' desire is the whip and the whip is in
Madness' hand...and the ark is Noah's ark...galloping and on
the verge of crashing...and the ark leaps and skips⁷¹ and
Madness laughs and laughs...

There is also a knife in the hand of Madness... When a
horse tires and becomes exhausted, a hand extends and cuts
the reins; the horse falls and the ark runs over him and
leaves a trampled corpse wallowing in blood...but the
horses' eyes are facing ahead of them, and they surged in a
flight forward, forward!

And to where are you driving on, Madness?

To the east! To the east! There it (the sun) is
rising, there it is seen/appearing with its hair wild and
burning in waves of blood...

And why, Madness, do you need (what do you have to do
with) the gentle sun and her wild hair?

I don't know, I don't know...

And Noah's ark gallops and skips over the corpses
wallowing in blood.

⁷¹Cf. Song of Songs 2:8 "(my beloved) leaping upon the
mountains, skipping upon the hills."

פרומיתיאוס

הוי נקמת אלים אכוריה!
 הוי לב אלהים אכורים, לב ברזל, לב נחושת!
 בכבלי ברזל אסרוני עירום ועריה אל הסלע הקר!
 וממרומי האויר הכבד והלח יורד נשר, בעל כנפים גדילות
 ושחורות, וברק אכורי קר בעיני הנשר!
 והסלע ימוץ את חום בשרי, והנשר ירד ויאכל את כבדי...
 לאטו ימוץ הסלע, לאטו יטרוף ויאכל הנשר, נתח, נתח יאכל...
 ולעולמים כה אסכול, לעולמי עד...
 כי שוב ישוב החום אל בשרי, וכוחי יתחדש תמיד, למען
 יינק הסלע, למען יטרוף הנשר...
 הוי — רוצח!
 את הנצח לא שלל ממני, את האלמות לא לקח! לעולמים
 יסעם חלבי, ימוץ הסלע, יטרוף הנשר...
 זה חסצו, זאת היא נקמתו!
 נקמת ציאוס!

Prometheus

"Oh, cruel revenge of the gods!

"Oh, the heart of a cruel God, a heart of iron, (a heart) of bronze!

"With iron chains they bound me completely naked to a cold rock!"

And from the heights of the heavy, damp air an eagle descends, of tremendous black wings, and a cold, cruel gleam is in the eyes of the eagle!

"The rock sucks/squeezes out/drains the heat of my flesh, the eagle descends and eats my liver... Slowly, the rock drains, quietly the eagle preys and cuts, a piece at a time he eats...and I shall suffer thusly forever, forevermore...

"For the heat will surely return to my flesh, and my strength will always be renewed, so that the rock will drain, so that the eagle can prey!...

"Oh - murderer!

"Eternity he did not take from me, immortality he did not take away! My heart will beat forever, the rock will absorb, the eagle will prey...

"This is his wish, this is his revenge!

"The revenge of Zeus!

ועל מה?

על כי גנבתי את האור! על כי שמתי בכפי שביב אור
קטן בשביל בני האדם! וחטאו — חושך על פני תהום! תאנת
ציאוס — עינים נשואות ממאפליה, עינים כלות ומייחלות
לאור, עינים מתקנאות בעטופי-אור, במרומי האולימפוס...

וכי תקוץ נפשו בחברת אלים אדירים עטויי האור, יתגנב
וירד בלאט לתוך הערסל לחטוף משם נחח טוב ושמן, פנינה
מן היסוד...

ואני נתתי להם אור! שביב אור קטן, ויסקחו עיניהם,
ויראו את האולימפוס בצללי אורות, ואת ציאוס בעור הסרה!

אך למה יתמהמה הנשר?

"And for what?

"Because I stole the light! Because I placed a tiny spark of light in my palm for the benefit of mankind! And what did he desire - darkness over the face of the deep! The desire of Zeus - eyes raised up from deepest darkness, pining and longing for the light, eyes upon the fog/(thick darkness), eyes failed from longing and wasted away longing for light, eyes that are envious of those enveloped in light, in the heights of Olympus.

And when he becomes disgusted with the company of majestic gods who are enveloped in light, he steals away and descends quietly into the mist to snatch a good, fat piece of flesh from there, a pearl from the sea!...⁷²

"And I gave them light! A tiny spark of light, so that their eyes could open and they could see Olympus in the shadows of lights, Zeus in the skin of a cow!⁷³

"So why does the eagle hesitate?

⁷²I.e. to rape human women he desired.

⁷³The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of the Classical World by Michael Avi Yonah and Israel Shatzman, p. 197. In the classical Greek myth of Zeus and Europa, told by Homer, Moschus, and Ovid, Zeus disguised himself as a beautiful bull after falling in love with her and carried her off on his back to Crete. Europa became identified with a local Cretan goddess and the bull with the constellation Taurus, and possibly aetiologically, with the myth of the Cretan bull-riding rite. This reference by Peretz may serve as well to re-emphasize the baser sides of Zeus' lust. There is also a play on the Hebrew word or/"the hide" (of a bull), and Prometheus' contrast of the or/(light) he wishes to bring down to earth to share with mortals.

סוב יסוב במרומים ואינו יורד...
הלהטיל את חתיתו עלי לראשונה למען יגדל סחד העונש
מן העונש
ואוני שומעות את משק הכנסים השחורות, את שריקת
האוויר סביב להן... והוא מרחף, מרחף...

אך שקר, שקר הדבר
על דבר שביב אש לא יכעס ציאוס! הלא עוטה הוא אור
כשלמה! והוא ברקים רב לכל יום הולדת, וגם של הצעירות
בבנות האלים...
האין זאת, ציאוס?
וחביטה נא ממרומים וראה! אש נתתי להם ולא אור! הם
לקחו את האש לא למאור... עגלים יצלי, ראה — עגלים להם
ולך, ציאוס! לריח ניחוח לאסך, ציאוס!

הוי אלים נבערים ובני אדם שוטים!
הלמענכם אסכול עולמים!

"He circles round and round in the heights but he does not descend...

Is it first to terrorize me?

So that the fear of the punishment should be greater than the punishment?

"And my ears hear the beating of the black wings, the rush/whistle of the air around them...while he is hovering, hovering...

"But the matter is a lie, a lie!

"About the matter of a spark of fire Zeus should/would/will not get angry! Does not he surround himself with light like a garment?

"And doesn't he multiply lightning flashes for every day of a birth, and even for the youngest of the daughters of the gods?...⁷⁴

"Is this not so, Zeus?

"So please look down now from the heights and behold! I gave them fire and not light! They took the fire not for illumination...they roast calves, see - calves for them and for you, Zeus! For a pleasing aroma to you, Zeus!

"Woe ignorant gods and stupid people!

"Should I suffer on account of you forever?

⁷⁴Zeus seems to squander light all the time; why does he begrudge a tiny flash/spark of light for humans?

חלמענכם אתהסך בציריו הלא אלהים אנוכיו חלא עוד
כוחי במתני, צחוק עשה לי ציאוס — כבלי ברול לאלהים!

והתהסך אל צדו.

מה זאת, האם לא חלום חלמתי?

איה הנשר? במרומים קסא עם הענן! איה החכלים?
ישנתי נתחשש עלי השממית! והסלע? נתר רך ולא סלע,
בצפרני אחתוך בו כמו בבשר עגל...

ולמי היה אש? מאת מי גנבתיו מי הוא ציאוס?

חלום רע חלמתי, מי הגיד לי, כי אני סרומיתיאוס!

חא-חא-חא! בדות יננים רמאים!

"Should I contort in my travail for your sake? Am I not a god? I still have more strength in my loins. Zeus has played a joke on me - iron chains for a god!"

And he turned onto his side.

"What is this, isn't this a dream I have dreamt? Where is the eagle? In the heights he has been frozen with the clouds! Where are the chains? I slept and a poisonous spider seized me! And the rock? It is a soft soap and not a rock; with my fingernails I can cut into it like into the flesh of a calf..."

"And for whom was the fire? From whom did I steal it?"

"Who is Zeus?"

"I dreamt a bad dream. Who told me that I was Prometheus!"

"Ha, ha, ha! The invention/fiction of deceitful Greeks!"

חזון אם

וכאשר ינק הילד לשובע, ויפרחו לחייו כשושני השדה
ואשמורות עיניו נסגרו.

ותתבונן האם בבנה בנחת אין-סוף, ותשקוה בלאט,
ותשכיבהו על ערשו, ותשב על יד הערש.
לאט, לאט נרדמה גם היא.

ופתאום חרדה מתגומתה. ותפקח את עיניה. ותרא. והנה
מלאך אלהים עומד למראשותי הילד.

ותבך האם בלבכה לאמור: הנה זו בא לקחת את בני.
והנה לא יצא מפיה, כי נאלמה מפחד פתאום.
אך המלאך ידע את מחשבת האם, וישא את קולו כקול
העוגב ויען:

— לא לקחת את בנך מידך באתי.

ויאמר:

— יפה ממני מלאך חשינה הנצחת וכנסיו ארוכור
ומוהירות פי שבעה מכנסי.

ותבך האשה בלבכת שנית לאמור:

— הנה יתום יהיה בני, יתום נעזב מאמו, כי אלהים חיים
ראיתי, ומות אמות...

A Mother's Vision

When the little boy had nursed to satisfaction, his cheeks would blossom like roses of the field and his eyelids closed.

His mother studied her son's face with endless contentment, kissed him silently, put him to bed and sat beside his crib/cradle. Slowly she fell asleep as well.

Suddenly she awoke with a jolt from her dozing. Opening her eyes she looked and behold, an angel of God was standing at the boy's pillow.

The mother cried to herself saying: behold, this one has come to take my son. But no sound issued from her mouth because she became mute from sudden fear.

But the angel knew the mother's thoughts and he raised his voice like the sound of an organ and answered:

- I have not come to take your son from your hand. He continued:

- The angel of eternal sleep is seven times more beautiful/ handsome than I and his wings are seven times longer and more radiant than mine. And the mother cried to herself again saying:

- Behold, my son will become an orphan, an orphan abandoned by his mother, because I have seen the living God and I shall surely die...

וידע המלאך שנית את לב האשה, וינחמה, ויאמר:
— גם את לא תמותי, מלאך בשורח אנוכי ועל בנך צויתי.
ותחבונן האשה בסני בנה, והנה קרן אור סניו מנגוהות
כנסי המלאך ומאור סניו הטהורות.
וחמלאך מבשר ואומר:

— בנך זה יגדל וחיה לנביא!
ולא חבינה האשה, ותתאושש, ותכרע לפני המלאך,
ותשתחוה, ותאמר:

— סלח נא בגודל חסדך לאשה פתיה כמוני, כי טרם תדע
מה משפט הנביא...
והמלאך עונה:

— אין משפט לנביא! כי דורש משפט הוא!
— חידות לי דברייך, — אמרה האשה בעצבון.
ותשתחוה שנית ותשאל:
— וגידה נא לאמתך הפתיה: מה מלאכת הנביא?
הכונה הוא טירות והיכלים או

And the angel knew the mother's thoughts once again, and he comforted her, saying:

- You also shall not die; I am a messenger of tidings and I have been commanded concerning your son. And the woman looked into the face of her son, and behold, his face was emanating light from the illumination of the angel's wings and from the light of his pure face.

And the angel delivering his tidings said:

- This son of yours shall grow up to become a prophet.

The woman did not understand, but she recovered her composure and, kneeling and prostrating herself before the angel she said:

- Pray, forgive with your great mercy such a poor woman as myself because she does not yet know what is the lot⁷⁵ of a prophet...

And the angel responds:

- 'There is no justice for⁷⁶ a prophet! For the prophet is one who seeks justice!

- Your words are puzzling to me, said the woman sadly.

She prostrated herself again and asked:

- Please tell your simple-minded servant: What is the work of a prophet? Does he build castles and palaces or

⁷⁵The word means both lot/portion in life, and justice. There is a play on the word here during the interchange.

⁷⁶Emphasis mine. The prophet receives no justice because he is one who [too fanatically] demands justice.

מבצרים בשמים ובהרים

יחצוב, אם מסילות-ברזל יסול, א, אולי רפא ירפא ו

ודמעה התגלגלה מעסעף המלאך בענותו:

— סותר הנביא ובונה... סותר... הוא על פני האדמה ובונה
עליות בשמים... סולל מסילות הוא, אך בברזל תכחל נפשו,
ומסילותיו לא תחבוקנה חיק אדמה, הוא יסול מסילות ברוח
לבעלי כנפי-רוח... גם חוצב הנביא, כאשר דברת, אך לא
בהרים יחצוב, וגרון ביד לא יקח, הוא כלכבות יחצוב, ויחצוב
שלהבת, — שלהבתיה... גם ימחץ הנביא, ימחץ לכבות
ונפשות, אך גם רפא ירפא... לנפשות חולות, לשבורי לב...

ותבך האשה במר שיחה ותאמר:

— אם אומללה אנוכיו על בני ועל גורלי חדברי, ולבבי

סת משמועו

ותשתחוות פעמים, ותוסף ותשאל:

— ומת תהי משפחת בניו אולי אבין את זאתו

— אבנים! — ענה המלאך.

וברק שמחה נראה בעיני האם:

— גדול יהיה בניו

citadels in the sky? Does he carve tunnels in the mountains, does he lay railroad tracks or perhaps does he practice medicine?

And a tear rolled from the eyelids of the angel with his reply:

- The prophet tears down and he builds up...he destroys on earth and builds stairways to heaven...he lays tracks, but his soul abhors iron, and thus his tracks do not cling to the ground; he lays tracks in the air for those with wings of the spirit...the prophet also forges fires, as you said, but he does not do so in the mountains, and he does not take an axe in his hand, he forges hearts, and he kindles a flame, - a mighty flame⁷⁷...and the prophet also smashes, he bruises hearts and souls, but he heals as well...sick souls, broken hearts...

And the woman wept bitterly while she spoke:

- Such an unfortunate woman am I! You speak about my son and my fate, but my heart is unable to absorb this news!

She prostrated herself twice and inquired further:

- And what will be the W A G E S of my son? Perhaps I shall understand this!

Stones! answered the angel.

And a flash of happiness appeared in the mother's eyes:

- My son shall be great!

⁷⁷Or, flame of God.

- Not with silver and gold will he be paid like doctors and builders, but with stones: rare, precious stones...

But the messenger replied worriedly:

Not with precious stones or jewels, but with gravel and stones of the field...

- You are mocking your servant, angel! Be kind to me please and tell me the meaning of this!

The prophet will be stoned because he is a prophet!

The woman screamed a loud, bitter scream and fainted.

And when she recovered, the angel had already disappeared. Nevertheless the skin of the little boy's face was still shining.

הולדת משה

רוח צח שמיים מגשכ דרך המדבר ומצנן את החול, הכוער באש. ומשתעשע, ומצחק הרוח, בשורה טובה ישמיע: עוד מעט ויהי המדבר לשרון ולכרמל. כי יחיה, ינוב ויסריח בשפע חיים וברכה.

מן המדבר בא אל היער. העצים חרדו לקראתו בגיל וילבשו ירקרק נועם, במצהלות חדנה יתרגשו עלים, מרוב עונג יהמה הגוע. כי בשורה טובה בפי הרוח: עוד מעט ויחדל הכורת, וסר הגרון, ועצים רעננים ישליו וינובו בשיבה... ומן היער בא אל שדה וכרם, ולקראת בואו התעדנו וינובו כל פרי עץ ותבואת שדה, השושנה התפתחה באודם הכדוד ותעדה ככלת כליה, ותפלג רסיסי טל כספירים. והחכצלת התעוררה מחרדמחה, ומיף שבעתים בלזבן בדולח ושלג... ונגוהות בוקר צח התבוללו בקטורת הסמים, וריח ניחוח — בשלל צבע רקמת הטבע!

The Birth of Moses

A fresh wind blows across the desert cooling the fiery hot sand. (As) the wind frolics and plays it announces good tidings, "In just a little while the desert will become (like) the Sharon and the Carmel. For/Indeed it will be reborn, it will thrive and blossom in abundant life and blessing. From the desert it came to the forest. The trees trembled to greet it with glee, and donned lovely greenery; with shouts of joy their leaves tremble, from abundant rejoicing the tree trunks shout. For the wind has good tidings: "Soon the woodcutter will stop, the axe will turn aside and the fresh, young saplings will be safe/secure and will flourish in their old age."

And from the forest it comes to the field and to the vineyard, and to greet its arrival all the fruit of the trees and the produce of the field are rejuvenated and blossom; the rose opened with the reddening of rubies and adorns itself like a bride, and it strewed droplets of dew like precious sapphires. The lily awakened from its hibernation, and it was seventy times more beautiful than the whiteness of crystal and snow... And the glimmering/rays of a pure, clear morning interspersed with the incense of spices and a pleasing aroma - amidst the spectrum of color of nature's tapestry!

והשמים לבשו מלכות — שפיר וכלת... המית כנסי
שרפים נשמעה ברות, ועל כנסי הזמרה התנשאה נפש כל
צפור כנף... והד שירה חדשה, יורדת משמים ארצה, חודל אל
קרב ולב בני האדם...
אך יאור מצרים לבש קדרות, ומסחד פתאום יגרוש טיט
ורפש, והצפרדע תשרוק בזעם...
ותחת פרעה חרד הכסא ועל ראשו רעד הכתר. אז נבהלו
חכמיו ונבוניו, ומארבע כנסות ממשלתו באו צירים. לא אנשי
בשורה המה: קרסו, כרעו האלילים, סרצים בנוא אמון, היכל
השמש חושב לנסול, וחרדה בכל מצרים.
אז כבד לב פרעה ויקם מכסאו. ויתן צו: כל הבן הילוד
היאורה תשליכוהו!

And the heavens were adorned in majesty - a canopy of blue - the beating of angels' wings' - was heard in the wind, and the soul of every winged bird was borne on the wings of a song/melody... And the echo of a new song, descending from heaven to earth, permeating the body and heart of human beings...

Only the Nile of Egypt wore darkness, gloom, and in sudden fear it will cast out mire and muck, and frogs croaked with rage...

And the throne shook under Pharaoh, and the crown on his head trembled. Then his sages and scholars were alarmed and from the four corners of his realm there came delegates. They were not the bearers of good news: "The idols had collapsed and crumbled, fissures in No-Amon, the Palace of the Sun was about to topple, and there was great alarm throughout all of Egypt." Then Pharaoh's heart hardened and he arose from his throne. And he gave a command: "Every son who will be born you shall throw into the Nile!"

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