

was fond of Maeterlinck, and wrote a long review of his
 e of the ant (the review was published six months later
 s date), we may want to interpret the giant hand here
 terms; though undoubtedly in the last stanza—notwith-
 e difficulties connected with “vicious” and “jokester”—
 of God.

g day, Rachel wrote a companion poem, with an epigraph
 of Job: “. . . He smiteth, and His hands make whole”

ough the hand smiting has brought no healing,
 it has no balm to pour on the heart,
 l not against me—I chose my sorrow,
 with me well, for I wanted the smart.

d pain. A pain that triumphs,
 rifies, blesses, and brings forth fruit—
 ing blade to me like a plowshare,
 e like the early rains to my root.

andscape of grief, ripe corn now is standing,—
 waste threshing floor, a harvest prepared!
 the hand that wounded brought no healing—
 ty was great . . . its recompense shared . . .

the hand that links these two lyric statements may suggest
 r poem was, indeed, written as a bitter protest against the
 l ways of God. Now, without retracting one bit of the
 unter-statement suggests Rachel’s willing (some might call
 acceptance of her suffering. One recalls the “strange
 pain in an earlier poem; the idea, of course, is very old,
 e especially of the romantic poets.

(as in her last poem, “My Dead,” already quoted: “Our
 , she successfully fuses her private “tale” with imagery out
 al experience: “for my waste threshing floor, a harvest
 e may think, if we will, of “Rachel’s Garden” of fig trees
 or of the “white volume” of her poems; in either case,
 was great.” And the poems are a sufficient witness of the
 e profound sincerity, and the intense humanity of her life.

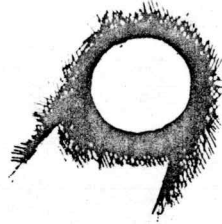
“The Fable of the Three and the Four” of H. N. Bialik

Ephraim E. Urbach

*There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I
 know not. The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock,
 the way of a ship in the midst of the sea and the way of a man with a
 maid.*

Proverbs, 30. 18–19.

*A matron once asked R. Yossé Bar Halafta, “In how many days did God
 Almighty create His world?” and he answered, “Six days, for it is written
 —‘In six days the Lord made heaven and earth.’” Asked she, “And since
 that time, what has He been doing?” Said he: “He makes matches . . .
 He mates them willy-nilly; he places a halter over the neck of one and
 leads him from one end of the world to his mate at the other end of the
 world . . . As in the story of King Solomon, who had a daughter lovelier
 than any in the Land of Israel, and consulted the stars to learn who
 was intended to be her husband, and found that he was an exceedingly
 poor man, none so poor as he in all Israel. Therefore he built a high
 tower in the sea, entirely surrounded by water, and he placed his daughter
 in it and with her seven eunuchs from among the elders of Israel. And
 this tower had no opening for a person to enter therein, and it was well
 provided with victuals. For, said he, I shall see the work of God. And it
 came to pass that this pauper who was her intended groom was walking
 on the open road one night and he was naked and hungry and thirsty
 and had nought upon which to lie and rest. He saw the carcass of an
 ox by the wayside and entered it and lay betwixt its ribs to shelter from
 the night. Then a great bird came and carried away the carcass to the
 roof of that same tower, directly above the maiden’s chamber. And there
 the bird began to feed upon the carcass and remained thus until dawn.
 When the maiden sallied from her room to walk on the roof as was her
 wont each morning, she saw the youth and asked him: ‘Who art thou*



and who hath brought thee hither?' 'I am a Jew of Akko,' said he, 'and indeed I was carried hither by a bird.' Then the maiden took him into her chamber where he bathed and clothed himself and dressed his hair, and lo, he was more beautiful than any in the Land of Israel! And the maiden loved him with all her heart and soul and became greatly attached to him. And the youth was sharp-witted and wise and a skilled scribe. One day she asked him, 'Wouldst thou have me for thy wife?' Said he, 'I do wish it,' and to do so he let a little of his blood and with it he wrote her a marriage contract and said: 'God is our witness and so are the angels Michael and Gabriel.' And he came to her as is the way of all men, and made her pregnant. And when the elders saw her pregnant, they said, 'It seems to us that thou art pregnant,' and she said, 'yes.' They asked her who had made her pregnant and she answered, 'Why must you know?' And their faces fell, for they feared King Solomon, lest he blame them, and they sent to him begging to appear before him. Then Solomon boarded a ship and came to them and they said, 'Our Lord and King, such and such a thing has happened, and we beg thee, do not

blame thy servants in this matter.' When he heard them he sent for his daughter and asked her about it. Then she told him, 'God Almighty hath sent me a young man, who is handsome and good and well-learned, and he hath married me.' She called to the young man and he appeared before the king and showed him the marriage contract that he had made for his daughter. Then the king asked him about his father and mother, his family and the town whence he came. And the king understood from the youth's words that he was the one whom the stars had shown him, and he rejoiced greatly and said, 'Blessed be He Who giveth all unto man, and even unto those who are solitary within their houses . . .'

Midrash Tanhuma ("Oxford MS"), published by S. Buber, in his Introduction.

Fifteen years ago, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Bialik's death, I gave a lecture, that was later published, on the subject of "Bialik and the Rabbinic Fables—Evaluation and Inspiration." I pointed out the difference between the approach of Bialik, foremost pioneer of the revived Hebrew language, to the treasure-trove which is the *Aggadah* (the rabbinical fables), and of Bialik the poet who uncovered ideas and themes in the fables, which he subsequently sank into the foundations of his great poesy. In this, he struggled with the problems of a nation caught between destruction and redemption, as well as with the problems of the individual trapped between the holy flame and the fire of Satan.

Here I should like to test that thesis in the light of a re-examination of the "Fable of the Three and the Four," which is the poet's last great work. We know that he published two works under that title, the first in 1919 and the second in 1929, and the difference between the two versions is, to my mind, precisely the difference already referred to between Bialik, compiler of the anthology *Sefer Ha'aggadah*, and Bialik the poet in relation to the *Aggadah*. In a letter written in 1933 he says:

"In writing 'The Fable of the Three and the Four' I relied principally on its abridged version as it appears in the Buber introduction to the ancient Tanhumah, and upon my theory that this legend was inspired by the verses in the Book of Proverbs (30.18-19): 'There be three things which are too wonderful for me . . .' This theory was later confirmed for me when I heard additional details of this tale from my wife. In her version, which she had heard in her childhood from an old woman, the serpent

ROMANCE

① Layering effect

- variations on the most common motifs
- aesthetic enjoyment: a favourite plot with a new twist
- reinterpretation of traditional motifs
- Judization of universal motifs

Peretz

- the penitent, י'י-11"ר, Elijah teaches Torah
- love conquers all
- serpent in the garden: reversal of Eden!

Agnon

- starcrossed lovers
- tragic, irreversible mistake
- exile

Bialik

- sleeping beauty: awakening the princess = painful transition from childhood → adulthood
- from harmony of parents/home → to matrimonial harmony

< Jewish Sources: Urbach >

| | שולמון עצמו | בת המלך הגוי |
|---------|---|---|
| Heroine | Solomon's own daughter | daughter of subjugated king Gentile |
| | opposition of class grounds consistent character | too limiting → universal harmony from Madonna → embodiment of sensuality when he appears |
| Hero | born in Akko | born on foreign soil son of a rebel |
| | seeks refuge in carcass of ox - totally passive whisked off up into the tower divine fate without man's effort | experiences death/despair before the rescue - reborn in the sea aware of terrifying gap between them superhuman struggle to reach her |
| Ending | Solomon reconciled | Personal - national - cosmic reconciliation |