Haim Nachman Bialik in Vienna

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Abstract

This article examines Haim Nachman Bialik's pivotal activities in Vienna in 1913, during and immediately after the 11th Zionist Congress, highlighting two landmark lectures that advanced core elements of Zionist cultural ideology.

In his closing address at the Congress on September 9, 1913, Bialik articulated a powerful vision for establishing "The University of the Jewish People" (later realized as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem). This speech bridged Theodor Herzl's earlier practical Zionist foundations in Vienna with a deeper spiritual and educational dimension, marking a significant step from abstract ideal to concrete institutional planning.

Shortly afterward, on August 26, 1913, at the Second Conference for the Hebrew Language and Culture, Bialik delivered his influential lecture "The Hebrew Book." The paper presents a new English translation of this lecture (based on the 1913 *Ha'Shiloah* version rather than the later edited 1935 collection), accompanied by extensive annotations. Bialik called for a national project to compile, select, and concentrate Hebrew literary treasures, both ancient and modern. He advocated "reduction and concentration" over unchecked expansion: rescuing Jewish works written in foreign languages through Hebrew translation, distinguishing essential national literature from

the peripheral (echoing historical processes of canonization and *Genizah*), and creating accessible, scientifically grounded yet popular editions for the broader Jewish public.

Bialik's address emphasizes the organic connection between literature and national life, the centrality of the Hebrew language, and the need to reclaim scattered Jewish spiritual assets. The lecture showcases his distinctive stylistic technique of creatively reworking biblical, Talmudic, and rabbinic phrases to generate new meanings.

Overall, Bialik's 1913 Vienna appearances are presented as defining moments in which he championed the spiritual and cultural infrastructure—particularly Hebrew education and literature—as essential complements to political Zionism, laying intellectual groundwork that continues to influence Jewish cultural revival.

Key Words

Haim Nachman Bialik, Vienna 1913, 11th Zionist Congress, Hebrew University, The Hebrew Book, Hebrew cultural revival, Jewish literary canon, Spiritual Zionism

I. The idea of establishing "The University of the Jewish People."

The idea of establishing "The University of the Jewish People" has been integrated into the Zionist vision from its beginning. However, there was one specific day, September 9, 1913, when this vision began to move from an abstract idea to a materialized dream. This happened in Vienna, during the closing lecture held by Haim Nachman Bialik, "The Hebrew National Poet", at the 11th Zionist Congress.

When Bialik came to Vienna as a representative of the congress, it was, in some respects, the closing of the circle that had been opened 35 years earlier, when Theodor Herzl, "The Visionary of the Jewish State," had moved with his family. Herzl was 18 years old then, just old enough to start his academic studies at the University of Vienna, where he later received a PhD in law. While living in Vienna, he wrote his most famous and influential book: *Der Judenstaat*: *Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage*. [1]Herzl had phrased the main principles of Jewish education. Still, he concentrated on

[1]Theodor Herzl. *Der Judenstaat*: *Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage*. Leipzig und Wien, M. Breitenstein's Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1896.

the practical rather than the spiritual and never went beyond the theoretical stages needed to materialize these principles.

It was Bialik who had spoken explicitly at the largest and most important Jewish conference about his vision for the Hebrew University. Indeed, almost 12 years passed from Bialik's Viennese lecture and the actual opening of the Hebrew University, but it should be considered a miracle that it did not take longer. Bialik returned from his 1913 European tour a few months before the outbreak of World War I. The land on Mt. Scopus in Jerusalem, along with the Gray-Hill mansion, was purchased for the university from Sir John Gray-Hill before the beginning of World War I. But only towards its end, on July 24th, 1918, the cornerstone for the university was laid. It took another 7 years until it opened on April 1, 1925.

Here is the full German version of Bialik's lecture delivered at the closing session of the 11th Zionist Congress in Vienna in September 1913. The lecture was given in Hebrew. However, as the full Hebrew version was not published in the congress's official documents, it was later translated from German into Hebrew by A. Shavit. A short version was published in Hebrew in "Ha'Olam" [=The World], vol. 39, pp. 9-10, 1913. The German version is from: Bericht des Aktions-Komités der Zionistischen Organisation an den XI Zionisten-Kongress, Druck von Siegfried Scholem, Berlin-Schöneberg, 1914. It is published here as Appendix 1.

II. "The Hebrew book."

The idea of collecting the treasures of Hebrew literature, compiling them, grading them according to their importance, and recommending them for various readers – from schoolchildren to scholars - had been the core of Bialik's agenda for many decades. However, Bialik's most famous, most influential lecture, named "The Hebrew book," was held in Vienna after the Zionist congress, on August 26, 1913, at the second conference for the Hebrew Language and Culture. I hereby offer the reader an English translation accompanied by dozens of references to the Hebrew version of this lecture,

first published in Ha'Shilo'ah.[2] This version is quite different from the one published in *The Complete Writings of Bialik* (1935). As Werses (1984 [1981]) had already compared these two versions in length, I hereby offer but a concise comparison of the versions, as well as an explanation of my decision to choose the 1913 one.

1. The feeling of listening to Bialik

In 1913, shortly after the lecture "The Hebrew book" was held, the first version of this essay was published. Reading it gives the feeling of listening to Bialik, such as had been the case for many hundreds of people who had attended his Tel Aviv Saturday lectures for years. Avraham Levinson (1888-1955), the noted researcher in pediatric neurology who pioneered the study of cerebrospinal fluid, had maintained personal correspondence with many Zionist figures during the 20ites and 30ies. He offers a short but also accurate summary regarding the feeling Bialik had induced on those listening to him:

> It is interesting that "the oral Bialik"[3] almost made us forget his writings. We related to him as Ultra-Orthodox Jews relate to the Torah. We were listening to Bialik speaking, Bialik the speaker, the "oral Bialik", while the "written" Bialik was handed to school children. If they read Bialik, they read more about him than his writings. Historical-critical, as well as linguistic and social-philosophical research literature was written about Bialik; his phrases, words, even letters were analyzed, but the influence of his vivid vision seemed to cease… (The Abraham and Ida Levinson Papers, 1910-1955).

2. Bialik as an addressee for questions, requests, and threats

For many decades, Bialik was the addressee for problems, questions, suggestions, and requests for explanations, clarifications, and comfort in times of grief, disaster, or danger.[4] Thus, the choice of translating Bialik's lecture rather than his heavily edited

[2] C. N. Bialik, The Hebrew Book. Ha'Shilo'ah 29, 1913, pp. 413-427.

[3] Bialik she'ba'al pe (oral Bialik), meaning the gathering and publication of the stories, anecdotes, aphorisms, etc. that used to pour forth in the course of many public and private meetings he was listened to with awe (Patai, 1992, p. 147).

[4] See: Avneri, S. "Whom shall I approach but to his honor": Bialik as the supreme address for questions, requests and threats. *Haaretz*, 11.12.2007. Retrieved from https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/2007-12-11/ty-article/0000017f-db5b-df9c-a17f-ff5b6c050000

essay based on it might help the reader feel "being a part of the Bialik community," namely, not only a reader of Bialik but also to experience the popularity of the direct way Bialik approached his listeners. Bialik treated those who approached him with both respect for their knowledge, for being able to understand his many references to many layers of Jewish literature, and understanding of their need for advice from a leader who would be a scholar showing them the right way in questions or problems such as "what is the name I should choose for my daughter" or "what is the source of a certain Talmudic expressions" (ibid).

3. The power of change: Bialik's unique technique of creating new expressions by minor changes of [biblical] phrases

Bialik's writing – whether poetry or prose, short stories, essays or articles, translations of plays, eulogies, and letters - is characterized by a distinctive feature: his extensive use of phrases from the Bible, the Mishna, the Babylonian or Jerusalem Talmud, the Midrash, etc. However, in almost all cases, these sources are cited with major or minor changes, changes that often alter their original meaning; this change is often used as an ironic means, a subtle way of criticism that remains hidden from the unscholarly reader. Thus, the reading of Bialik requires both fluency in many layers of the Hebrew language, in the "sister-languages" – at least Yiddish and Aramaic- and in old and Modern literature, and some flexibility in the use of language. Bialik himself described this very clearly:

> I fight against the 'pasuk' [= verset, versetto] whenever our writers use it for beauty, as a flowery phrase, in every place where it smells like archaism, mold […]. The secret of the contemporary writer using a "pasuk" is to start one but not finish it, and instead integrate it into an original "pasuk" of his own. This is the redemption of the pasuk from its old form; it is a real "Tikun" in the new literary work (Ovadyahu, 1945, p. 58).

As will be demonstrated in the dozens of references to the Bialik text, Bialik was a virtuoso at dismantling and reassembling Hebrew Pesukim [the plural of pasuk], drawing on all the treasures of 2000 years of written Hebrew literature as available sources. This unique aroma has been entirely lost in the 1935 version.

III. Literary-personal remarks

During 1995-2004, I was part of the "Bialik team" at the Katz Research Institute for Hebrew Literature, Tel Aviv University. The team began work on the scientific edition of Bialik's work in 1970 and, until 2000, published the first 3 volumes: two of the canonical songs and the third on Yiddish poetry, nursery rhymes, and dedicatory verses.[5] The four ready-for-publication volumes: two of the scientific edition of Bialik's short stories and two of his letters are still waiting to be published.

I have made it a goal to publish as many of Bialik's unpublished treasures as is within my limited powers. This article is but a humble effort to offer Hebrew- and English-reading scholars a glimpse into Bialik's research. I translated the text into English to make it available to as many scholars as possible. Unfortunately, those who love Bialik and are interested in his literary or historical-philosophical influence on Jewish culture currently have no access to his complete works and thus cannot study them. As *Wissenschaft des Judentums* has not been very popular in Israel in the last decades, as can be observed by the sharp decline of students and scholars in the humanities in general (e.g. Barshay, 2021), and in Jewish studies in particular,[6] I have supplied the reader with as many sources as possible – unlike in all traditional editions of Bialik's works so that both the learned and less learned will benefit from them.

[5]D. Miron, U. Ofek, H. Hoffman, S. Tretner, Z. Shamir, C. Shmeruk, & R. Shenfld (eds.). Ch. N. Bialik. Collected Poems, Vol. 3: Yiddish poetry, nursery rhymes, dedicatory verses. Tel Aviv: Dvir and the Katz Research Institute for Hebrew Literature, Tel Aviv University, 2000.

[6] The decline in the number of students in Jewish studies in Israeli higher education institutes had started a long time before that of the humanities. See, for example, David, 1998). According to the Education Committee of the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, there has been a decreased of 36% of undergraduates and 23% among MA students of Jewish studies, while the number of students increased by 30% between 2000-2009 (Fikarsh, 2009; Joffe, 2011). On the other hand, the number of Yeshaiva and Kollel students has been increasing rapidly**.** "There was There was a dramatic increase of 8.5% in the number of yeshiva students in January 2024 relative to January 2023. This is the largest increase we have seen since 2015" (The Israel Democracy Institute, 2025).

The Hebrew Book

[Lecture held at the second conference for the Hebrew Language and Culture, Vienna, August 26, 1913

Sirs,

In this lecture, I am honored to present on the Hebrew book; I will not discuss the various needs of the literary profession. I rather intend to focus on one thing that, in my opinion, is the most important one for our spiritual and even concrete existence. I will neither propose, for example, suggestions for establishing literary institutions for the enhancement of literature and books. Such things, such institutions, can improve only through natural development, and depend more on objective life than on our wishes. In addition, I see no exalted aim in *enlarging* [the italics appear in the Hebrew source – H.D.] the national assets and the national institutions. Indeed, the main difference between the cultural and the non-cultural does not depend on the quantity of their assets and not even on their quality per se, but on the advantage their holders can obtain from them, whether their holders know how to use them properly, and if these assets serve as a vessel that could contain blessings for them.[7]

This is why I am not going to talk about creating new things, namely, about things we do not have, but rather about assets we do own.

We have both old and new literature. Our old literature comprises many alternative shapes that can be substituted for one another. [We also have] a large treasure of national forces, of human talents, of historical storms. We also have a young literature, rich in talent, that has already produced many important works of art, despite the difficult situation the nation is facing.

[7]Reference to Mishnah, Masechet Uktzin chapter 3, 12: "[…] R. Simeon ben Halafta said: the Holy one, blessed be He, found no vessel that could contain blessing for Israel save that of peace, as it is written: 'The Lord will give strength unto his people; The Lord will bless his people with peace'" (Psalms 29, 11). Bialik recites the Mishna quite frequently, maybe because it is written in Hebrew, unlike the Babylonian Talmud, the book studied in all Yeshivot, which is Aramaic. It should also be mentioned that Bialik wrote his own commentary on the Mishna, but he finished only the first of the six Sedarim, Seder Zeraim (Dvir, Tel Aviv, 1932).

We have got so many [assets]! So why is it that our soul, the Hebrew soul, not fully content at the sight of this wealth? Why can we not fulfill our spiritual hunger? Why are we standing wrapped in our souls, hungry and thirsty at the entrance of heaven?[8]

It is true that books with universal value, creations of great personalities, are scarce even in the general literature.[9] Had we wanted to judge ourselves even by classical criteria [demands?], even then we would not be in an inferior position.[10]

So why is it that our literature does not serve us as each other's literature serves its own owners?

To understand that we should properly evaluate books in general and their connection to nationality [in particular].

A book is not a creature of its own, a lonely independent organism,[11] but rather a part of the nation, a bone of its bones,[12] a living organ of the national body. The writer is not an *incident* in the life of the nation, but the summary of the powers preceding it.

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[8]The reference is to Zohar, Lech-Lecha, Chapter 1, 1: "When a soul leaves the world, it enters The Cave of the Patriarchs or the Cave of Machpelah [in Hebron] where the entrance to heaven is located, and it meets Adam and the Patriarchs there". Bialik used the Aramaic expression for "the entrance of heaven" rather than the Hebrew.

[9]The exact translation would be: "[…] in the literature of [other] nations". As Bialik probably meant to stress the rarity of such excellent literature rather than focus on the difference between Hebrew literature and non-Hebrew literature, I preferred the term "general literature".

[10]Bialik used the Mishnaic expression, which translates literally as: "[even then] our hand will not be to the bottom". He had done than probably for the beauty of expression, as its source is the long Talmudic discussion about Regulations concerning hiring laborers, cattle, or transferring goods, the responsibilities of the drivers, etc., starting in the Mishnah, Bava Metzia, Chapter 6.

[11] The Hebrew original, "Briya" [בְּרִיָּה] means "a creature", and "an organism". "Briya" has the root "b-r-’", the same as the second word in the book of Genesis:"Bereshit [בראשית=In the beginning] [He] bara [ברא=created]". "Yetzur" [יצור =creature] has the root of "Y.Z.R.", which means both creating or producing in general, and used quite often in Modern Hebrew as well, and "drive" – appears in Modern Hebrew mostly in sexual connotations. A more exact translation for "Yetzer" [יֵצֶר] would be the German "Trieb".

[12]Reference to the creation of woman, genesis 2, 23: "And Adam said This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of man".

The book is a historical necessity for the nation and is therefore ruled by the nation's minister. He needs his approval, his consent. Without this divine seal, the book cannot act or influence its own nation.

When looking at our literature through this mirror, what are we to find? We shall find two facts: *at present*, there is no understanding in the nation for our old literature, and the nation has not yet approved our new literature.

But these two can be reduced to just one, originating from the living nation or in the nation's life. And what is life? [It is] the best educator! This educator is able not only to educate the nation and train it [so that] it enjoys the fruits [it produces], but also to grant the international fruits the value they deserve.

Hence, what are we to do?

We should solve the problem of training our people to understand the old literature.

We need the nation's approval for the new literature.

We shall make an effort to translate Hebrew literary works written in foreign languages[13] for the Hebrew reader.[14]

[13]The Hebrew origin is "Am Loez" (Psalms 114, 1) translated by RASHI [Rabbi Shlomo Ytzhaki, 1040-1105] as: "a nation that speaks a language different from Hebrew". This Psalms chapter is very famous as it is a part of the Hallel (Hebrew: Hallel, "Praise"), a Jewish prayer used for praise and thanksgiving, recited as a part of the morning prayer on Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the month and holidays. Another possible reference would be to the 1730 Rabbi Yaakov Culi's commentary of the Bible written in Ladino it is perhaps the best known publication in that language, and has been used for many generations of Sephardic Jews.

[14] The term "The State of Israel" was first suggested in 1886, in the Hebrew translation of *Der Judenstaat* of Yitzhak [Itzi] Fernhof from Buchach [Buczacz, eastern Galicia, the hometown of Shmuel Yosef (S. Y.) Agnon, the 1966 Nobel Prize winner in literature]. However, the term "Israeli" was not in use until David Ben Gurion chose it as the name of the state he was to be the first Prime-minister of in 1948. Thus while "Hebrew works" refer to works written by Jews or dealing with Jewish subjects, the "Hebrew reader" is, in Bialik's language, the Jew living in Israel, "Israeli" in the language used since 1948.

We should make an effort to ensure that Hebrew works of literature written in foreign languages are delivered to the reader of Hebrew.

[Indeed], effort had been invested in all these subjects until now, but those who put that effort did not give themselves an explicit report about their aim and purpose. They printed, for example, large libraries;[15] they printed books purposelessly. The publishers did not profit much from the large libraries, and the books did not have much value. In my opinion, this is not the right way [to do it]!

There is one way our earlier ones had outlined. The leader of the nation had always chosen a totally different way to rescue the nation when he saw his nation getting close to a crisis.[16]

This way is called *compiling*![17]

Once the founders [of Jewish scripts] decided on the compilation of the Holy Scriptures, the Mishnah, and the Talmud.

This was as opposed to another method: *Genizah* [literally: storage]![18]

[15]Bialik uses the word "Bibliothek" with the Hebrew suffix plural feminine for "library": "Bibliothekot" as the Hebrew word "Sifriyya" [plural: "Sifriyyot"] even though the Aramaic form of "the house of books" appears in the book of Ezra (6, 1). "Midrash Abarbanel: The House of books" in Jerusalem was opened by the B'nai Brith organization in 1902; in 1920 became the basis for a university library: Jewish National and University Library [in Hebrew: "the house of books"].

[16]Reference to "[…] for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth" [2 Kings 19, 3]. The Hebrew "Mashber", which is the exact translation of "crisis", had been interpreted by Rashi as "the set of the woman giving birth" and by Radak [Rabbi David Kimhi, 1160-1235]: "the exit from the womb". This metaphor compares the situation of the Hebrew literature to that of a woman trying to give birth under unfavorable circumstances: she is weak, she is at the edge of succeeding, and if she has enough strength for just one final intensive effort she is to give birth to a living new baby.

[17]The Hebrew term is "Hatima"; its root is "H.T.M." meaning "closing". "Hatima" also means "signature" or "signing" in Modern Hebrew, as well as subscription, ending, completion, conclusion and finale.

[18]A Genizah, "storage", is the store-room or depository in a Jewish synagogue (or cemetery), usually specifically for worn-out Hebrew-language books and papers on

What was compiled, and what was stored?

Anything the scholars perceived as a living part of the nation, eternally living or, at least, living for a long time; anything they found in natural, fresh power, striving in an essential aspiration to the central [main?] point of creation of the nation, and thus has the power to save the nation from spiritual chaos, from a national absent-mindedness [confusion][19] – this has been taken out as "the precious from the vile",[20] and will compile with our holy treasure.

And what did they store? [They stored] what was perceived [by them] as having but a coincidental value, with no necessity for the existence of the nation. They were said to be called "External books".[21]And it is written: "My son be admonished of making many books there is no end…"[22] The scholars knew that when a nation is at a Crossroads, it should consider its pat very carefully, or create in the treasure of its memory the substantial milestones it had crossed walking in its historical journeys, because it is only according to them it could continue its way safely, without being distorted in chaos,[23] dead end. [24]They knew that until the process of clarifying the old is complete,

religious topics that were stored there before they could receive a proper cemetery burial, it being forbidden to throw away writings containing the name of God.

[19]The Hebrew term used is "Pizur Nefesh", literally: "scattering of the soul".

[20]Reference to: "[…] and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth" [Jeremiah 15, 19].

[21]Reference to the apocryphal books.

[22]The book of Ecclesiastes, 12, 12. This is considered the only biblical reference to the Deuterocanonical and apocryphal books.

[23]The Hebrew term is "Tohu", a biblical term appearing for the first time in Genesis 1, 2. In Hebrew it also means failure, as in: "The paths of their way are turned aside; they go to nothing, and perish" (The book of Job 6, 18) or "He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way"(Psalms 107, 40). In German, however, the biblical term has been preserved, though it is used quite rarely, as in "Tohuwabohu".

[24]The literally translation of the Hebrew term "Ein Derech" is "no way", but the meaning is dead-end. The German term: "eine Sackgasse" is a much more accurate translation of the Hebrew original because neither in Hebrew nor in German this term contains a connotation of death, as in English.

the present generation is not ready to accept new values. If the sprigs[25] are not cut from the tree before nature makes its decisions [as to the future of the tree], no new growth appears…

This is the value of compiling and storing!

There are [people] who are afraid of the word "Genizah".[26] Their fear is natural, as they assume that such an artificial clarification can stop the natural spring of creativity and its natural development. But this is an unfounded fear.[27] This clarification is not artificial at all, but rather a natural vision made without effort. *The compiling and storing are done by life itself.* Our scholars who were storing books and intended to separate the grains [from the husk] and blend the husk,[28] had not objected to nature, but rather helped it. Storing is as good for literature as trimming for the grapevine. Furthermore, when it happens that there is a separation between nature and those who help it, nature wins. The nation's opinion, the Holy Spirit of the people: "[…] The sages wished to hide the book of Ecclesiastes" (Talmud Shabbat 30, 1), but they did not, because *life* did not hide it…

But among us, there are "revolutionists," those who object to the tyranny of a few individuals, of experts.[29] "We are sorry for the first [ones]", they complain, "for those who have overturned the mountain upon us like an inverted cask,[30] so that we accept

[25] The Hebrew word "Zalzal" [זלזל=sprig] appears the title of one of Bialik's most famous poems: Tzanach Lo Zalzal [="A sprig had fallen down"]. This poem, written in 1911, was the last one Bialik wrote. Though the Viennese congress took place only two years after the poem was written, Bialik probably knew by then that his "spring of creativity" had been drying, as prior to 1911 Bialik had been a highly productive poet.

[26]When the Hebrew world "Genizah" is between quotation marks I used its English transcription rather than the translation to "storage". "Genizah" is also the scientific short term for the Cairo Genizah, which is famous for both its size and contents.

[27]"Un-based fear" first appears in Bialik's letter to Friedman in November 1892, sent from Odessa. Retrieved from http://benyehuda.org/bialik/letters_03.html

[28]Reference to Jeremiah, 23, 28: "What hath the straw to do with the wheat?"

[29]Bialik uses the word "Otoritatim", which is the plural of "Autorität" rather than "Mumchim" [מומחים], the Hebrew translation for "experts".

[30]Reference to the Talmudic legend to Exodus 19, 17 "And they stood under the mount". R. Abdimi b. Hama b. Hasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be

their tastes and ideas, and [now] you add [yourselves] to them"! We answer these people because their objection to the compiling concept has no reason. The compiling is not a caprice[31] of a few individuals, but rather the wish of the *History of compiling!* Even we, when we get to compiling, we do not wish to imitate the deeds of our ancestors, but we rather wish to re-*compile* [our literary treasures] in time of a terrible *scattering* which is dangerous to the existence of the nation. This compiling, that you are so very afraid of, is not gathering in a religious sense, but rather in a national one. It is the gathering method of all god things in Israelite literature and its gathering to one whole, united entity. You have concerns about building a system that might have a tendency to an extreme. But in this *method* the ancient way is not to be used. On the contrary, we are to be more successful and our work is to be more fertile and suits the benefit of the nation better if we adjust according to the spirit of *life*, and when we adjust our work to the living present.

The influence of literature on people is large nowadays. We all must remember that, and remembering is currently the main duty of our Hebrew Congress and our organization. Gentlemen, if you just listen to the demands of our life, to the voice of history and to its natural aspirations, the people will acknowledge your deeds and bless your names.

In summa, by compiling [the literary work] we do not wish to undermine contemporary pieces of work. On the contrary: we wish to enlarge them, improve them.

Regarding the compiled work, everything depends, of course, b the method of choosing the materials and combining them. This arrangement must include the best works *from Genesis until today*. Its colors will be verified, but its essence will be united.

He, overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] cask, and said to them, 'If ye accept the Torah, 'tis well; if not, there shall be your burial" (Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Shabbath, 88a).

[31]Bialik used the Hebrew transcription for "Kaprice" [=Kapriz] as the Hebrew term "Gachma" [גַּחְמָה], though already suggested by Eliezer Ben Yehuda in 1900, was not used widely used or even known yet.

This way the Hebrew book will regain its former respect, restore [the strength] of the tired[32] and strengthen the weary**.** Maybe those from far away will also hear [about restoring the respect of the Hebrew book] and will return to the source…[33]

Despite seemingly being too supreme,[34] this work[35] is still within our powers. "It *is* not in heaven"![36] And indeed, even without our will, it materializes, unintentionally, by time preparing[37] [it] secretly, and at its end is done by itself, but if this work is done *only* by nature and without our assistance to History's wish, it will not succeed, the work is not to be perfect or satisfactorily complete.[38]

I have already spoken about *the purpose of this work*. The purpose is to allow every Jew, even if mediocre and simple, access to our best old and new literature, the *Hebrew book* from outside and inside.[39]

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[32]Reference to Psalms 23, 3: "He restoreth my soul, He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake".

[33]The Hebrew term is "Beer", well. However, as in Hebrew "well" means "a source of fresh [living] water", "returning to the well" means going back to the origin, to the beginning rather than to the literary meaning of "well".

[34]"Sublime" is the exact translation from the Hebrew "Nisgav".

[35]The German translation for the Hebrew work "Avoda", Arbeit, is much more accurate than any of the English alternatives: task, job, or work.

[36]Reference to Deuteronomy 30: "For this commandment which I command you today *is* not *too* mysterious for you, nor *is* it far off. It *is* not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor *is* it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word *is* very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (11-14).

[37]The Hebrew verb "Rokem" means "embroidering".

[38]"Davar Shalem U'Metukan" [=a fixed whole thing] is an expression used by Bialik also in the essay: "The pains of [giving birth to] a [new] language" [=Hevlei Lashon] published in *Ha'Shioah* in 1908. The focus on that essay was similar to Bialik'k claim here though its subject was the Hebrew language rather than literature. Bialik's claim was that the revival of the Hebrew language, existing as a "dead language" for almost 2000 years, had to be, first of all, by re-adopting words, terms and phrases found in old layers of the Hebrew, such as in the bible, Mishnah, Midrash or Medieval poetry and only later by inventing new words or translating words from foreign languages.

[39]Reference to a number of Talmudic sources dealing mainly with pure and impure vessels (e.g. Chullin, 25a).

In what shape will this work of ours be manifested? What shape is the Hebrew book going to have?

This work must be *scientific in its hidden root and popular in its visible shape*. Namely, the book itself contains the extract of the essence of its content, the main thing; the last consequences without any negotiations or scientific debate, in one word: scientific results[40] in a popular style and popular form. At the end of each book or after compiling all books special space will be dedicated for arguments,[41] articles[42] and for Torah chattering.[43]

Now we are asking: what is to be taken out and what is to be put in? This issue is twofold: the exterior one concerns the languages [used]; the interior one concerns the content.

Here is an in-depth explanation of the first issue.

Our spiritual powers are spread around the world. Many Hebrew books are written in foreign languages. What shall we do for our books on the day when she shall be spoken for?[44]

Aramaic is the first language in question. This language relates pleasantly, wonderfully to Hebrew. Aramaic has always been connected to Hebrew with love and affection, as a maid loving her mistress as much as a daughter loves her mother. It tried to get closer to Hebrew at all times, by all means – external and internal, in shape and content; Aramaic was always there for Hebrew, helping her in difficult times and completing

[40]Bialik used the word "Rezultatim", the Hebrew plural of the German "Resultat", as the currently used Hebrew term "Totza'ot" was not used yet.

[41]Biaik used the Hebrew term, "Masa U'Matan" [משא ומתן] for "negotiations", which was the translation of the Aramaic "Shakla VeTarya" [שקלא וטריא].

[42]Bialik used the word "Traktatim" [טרקטטים], the Hebrew plural of the German "Traktat".

[43]This half-Hebrew, half-Aramaic expression, "Pitputei De'Oreita" is taken from the Jerusalem Talmud (Sanhedrin, 11:5: א"ר יוסי פיתפותי בצים היו שם). Its original meaning is: "[Even] if it is [just] Torah chattering, it is good".

[44]Reference to: "We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts; what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?" (*Song of Songs*, 8, 8). In the original it means: what is to happen when our little sister gets a marriage proposal while still un-prepared for marriage?

her with what was missing in bad times [e.g., words, expressions]. She did not let her heart go to sleep even at night, during the darkness and distress of the Middle Ages, during non-logical ignorance and the ruling of secrecy and mystery; this wonderful language was standing there, whispering into our ears "the secret discourse of God's angels"[45] of Kabbalah and the secret wisdom.

And see what a wonder! Despite the great things Aramaic has accomplished, and despite the many favors it has contributed to the Hebrew nation, despite it being spoken among the people for more than 1000 years and contributed many books and prayers remaining in the memory forever – despite all these had never allow herself to push her mistress away." *Twice Torah (text) and once Targum (translation)*",[46] it is always Hebrew that comes first, as in truth it is not life *here* gives language the right to be a monarch, but rather *spiritual* life; it is not in the air of the world that the kingdom of a national language flourishes but in the air of souls…

Both partners, especially the Hebrew nation, have benefited from this affectionate relationship. Look at the good influence of Aramaic on the Hebrew language in the Mishna, Talmud, and Midrash! Look at its good influence also later, even nowadays! Is it not that we use Aramaic as a treasure from where we borrow foreign words and whole expressions [adopted] into the Hebrew language, fitly set,[47] as Sapphires set in a pure vessel.

Nowadays, various Yiddishists prove their opinions by using Aramaic. They rely on Talmud and Kabbalah that the Hebrew nation has always written its top quality books in spoken language. But proofs from Kabbalah contradict this assumption, as when Kabbalah [scriptures] were compiled, Jews did not speak Aramaic any more. [but] even the Talmud is no evidence [to that assumption], as we can observe that its casuistic part becomes more and more Jewish, e.g. all [discourses starting with] the Rabbis have

[45]Reference to "siyach sod sarfei kodesh" (Kedushah, from the Yom Kippur prayer, Musaf [מוסף=additional service]).

[46]Rav Huna bar Yehuda says in the name of Rabbi Ammi: "one should always complete the reading of one's weekly Torah portion with the congregation, twice from the *Mikra* [מקרא, i.e. Torah) and once from the *Targum* (i.e. Aramaic translation)" (Berachot, 8a).

[47]Reference to Song of Songs, 5, 12.

taught [=Tanu Rabbanan], it was taught [=Tanya], it was said [=Itamar] and the like; most legends are in Hebrew, and the later they were written they are "more Jewish" [my quotation marks – H.D]. Even the first Kabbalah books, such as the *Heichalot books* [from the Hebrew word for "Palaces", relating to visions of ascents into heavenly palaces] or the [Angel] Raziel[48] and the like are [written] in Hebrew.

We [thus] see that the aspiration, the tendency of our literature regarding its clothing, its language, always emerges and comes towards the *Hebrew* center, namely, from [all] ten exiles our Divine Spirit [=Shchina] had been exiled to, it aspires to its source – the forefather's language, the Hebrew language!

We also have to do so! We are here today to make a declaration about the superiority of the Hebrew language. We shall also try to raise the holy sparks, wasted and scattered to other worlds, and bring them back into our own Hebrew world. We shall try to bring back the distant sons to their mother's home.

Let us look at our spiritual scattering and at the book we have in a foreign language.

1. We have books whose origin was in Hebrew, but only their translation survived. Naturally, we have an obligation to translate them back to Hebrew.

2. There are books that have been written in a foreign language because of "It is time for thee, Lord, for example, Maimonides [Mosheh ben Maimon] books, or those of Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paquda.

3. Books that were written in foreign languages simply because their authors did not know Hebrew, for example: Epistle to the Alexandrians, or books written in Arabic up to now. All these books belong to us and are a part of our national assets. But the curse of exile hanging over us has deported these sons from their father's table and forced them to sing the Lord's song in a strange land.[49] Remember the Jewish Philo of Alexandria[Ἀλεξανδρεύς],[50] Spinoza, and Heine! Remember Heine, a loyal son to his homeland even after his death, wanders [under the cover of his monument, statue] from

[48]*The Angel Raziel* was first printed in Amsterdam in 1701. It can be downloaded from: http://huberheights.co.il/kabbala-index-2a.htm

[49]Reference to Psalms 137, 4: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

[50]Also known in Hebrew as Yedidia, literary translated as: "the friend of God".

state to state and from town to town, expelled from his hometown, restless in the beautiful island among the waves of the sea! These Hebrew souls demand us repair[51] by Hebrew translation, and at least this will be their tombstone, a shaken tombstone to our miserable geniuses!

4. But we also have books of a different kind. These authors knew Hebrew, but because of various reasons, not national at all, wrote their books in the languages of their countries. We have complaints against these authors who had fatally beaten the Jews in their countries. These people, in spite of their belonging to the [Jewish] community, shall not be mistaken when considering them spiritual converts. They led the surviving remnant[52] to a catastrophe it was not able to recover from! But nevertheless, in spite of the grunge we hold against these people, Jews such as [Leopold] Zunz, [Abraham] Geiger, and the like – we cannot give up on them!

5. Finally, there is folk literature in the various Jewish languages, pieces that were created by Jews during many years. These works belong to us, and clearly and naturally they need to be a part of our literature.

Reduction and concentration

In order to achieve what we have just described, we are obliged to follow the general idea of Hebrew redemption. Instead of expansion – reduction and concentration of materials; instead of expansion[53] of the Hebrew spirit – its reduction and concentration.

[51]The Hebrew term used, *Tikkun*, is a shortening of "Tikkun Olam", "repairing the world" (or "healing and restoring the world") which suggests humanity's shared responsibility (with the Creator) "to heal, repair and transform the world". In Judaism, the concept of *tikkun olam* originated in the early rabbinic period. The concept was given new meanings in the Kabbalah of the medieval period and further connotations in modern Judaism.

[52]Reference to Ezra, 9, 14: "should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed *us,* so that *there would be* no remnant or survivor?" And to Chronicles, I, 4, 43: "And they smote the rest of the Amal'ekites that were escaped, and dwelt there unto this day" .The first references deals with intermarriages that might bring a disaster [for the sons of Israel]; the second – with actual destruction of a people [the Amalekites]. In contemporary Hebrew "the surviving remnant" means the surviving Jews from the Nazi holocaust.

[53]Bialik used the word: "expansia" [German: “Expension"] when he repeated this idea. The use both the Hebrew term as well as one taken from a foreign language – mostly

Indeed, there are people among us who hold an opposite opinion. Some had meant to sentence the Jews the decree of *Yiddish*.[54] The opinions of these people have no root in Jewish history. As already said, even Aramaic, which at its time had been much stronger in the market of life than Hebrew had finally descended from the stage of history, and left its reminiscences only in Yekum Purkan and Kaddish.[55]I doubt if Yiddish get even such a respectable burial service.

German or Yiddish – appears quite frequent in Bialik's prose. As Hebrew was spoken by just a small minority of Jews during Bialik's life, he probably used this means not only due to the lack of parallels in Hebrew, but also as means to introduce New Hebrew words and terms to the spoken and written Modern Hebrew.

[54]Bialik uses the Hebrew transcription of "Jargon" instead of the widely accepted "Yiddish".

[55]Yekum Purkan (יקום פורקן; literally: "may deliverance arise"), the name of two prayers recited in the Ashkenazi rite immediately after the reading of the **haftarah* on the Sabbath. Written in Aramaic, the prayers derive their name from their opening words. Both are very similar in form. "The first consists of a prayer for the welfare of the students in the academies of Ereẓ Israel and Babylonia, their teachers, the exilarchs, and the judges. Many of the phrases of this prayer resemble those of the *Kaddish de-Rabbanan* (קדיש דרבנן; "the scholars' *Kaddish*"). In modern times, some communities have added the phrase *Ve-di be-khol arat galvatana* (a disruption of וְדִי בְכָל אֲתַר וַאֲתַר, meaning: "and all that are in the lands of the dispersion") in order to make this prayer more meaningful (Baer's *Siddur,* 229). The second is a more general prayer for the welfare of the congregation, similar in content to the Hebrew prayer *Mi she-Berakh* which follows it. The prayers are not found in the Babylonian *siddurim* of *Amram Gaon and *Saadiah Gaon, although they were probably written in Babylonia. The first is found in the *Maḥzor Vitry, and the second in the *Roke'aḥ* of *Eleazar b. Judah of Worms (1160–1238). Both prayers are absent from the Sephardi rite, although a similar but a more lengthy prayer entitled "Prayer for the Congregation" is found in some Yemenite prayer book manuscripts" (Duschinsky, in bibl., pp. 194-197).

These prayers are not recited on festivals. The reason given for this is to enable the worshippers to leave the synagogue earlier and enjoy the meals which they are permitted to cook on the holidays (S. Shuck, *Siddur Rashban* [Vienna, 1894], 20b).

Kaddish (Aramaic: "holy") is a prayer found in the Jewish prayer service. The central theme of the *Kaddish* is the magnification and sanctification of God's name. In the liturgy different versions of the Kaddish are used functionally as separators between sections of the service. The term "Kaddish" is often used to refer specifically to "The Mourners' Kaddish", said as part of the mourning rituals in Judaism in all prayer services as well as at funerals and memorials.

We do not give up the *content* of the book treasuries spread around the world, but rather their external dressing, their language. Their content belongs to us and will return to us. *All Jewish works written in foreign languages will be redeemed*!

[when this happens] I will be a very great day, a day of redemption and salvation to the spirit of the people, as the day when exiled sons return to the bosom of their mother. Everything that had left us in generations, and almost gotten lost when drown in foreign mud will come back to us. It will all come back to us if first filtered by the Hebrew language strainer.

Again, I protest against the strange wish of some individuals to raise Jewish jargons into the level of national languages. The use of language for speaking does not give it any right or power to rule nationally. Such a language has no ability or power, nor can it supply guarantee confidence to preserve the *content* of the people and its true spirit. This strange wish for expansion and tendency towards outside is just a foreign tendency of our abnormal condition. We have been familiar with the psychology[56] of the person in exile: he is used to name someone else as the owner of his assets.

But these assets belong o us, and we are allowed to retrieve them back both according to their content and their form. This form must be in Hebrew!

We have three kinds of spiritual assets:

1. We have a large amount of our own assets, the choicest according to the whole world;[57]

2. Many substantial assets are mortgaged;

3. New assets that are not ripe and have not been cooked yet. What shall we do with them?

[56]Bialik uses the term "Psychika" [פסיכיקה] which might be translated as "soul" as well.

[57]In spite of undermining all foreign languages used by Jews during the years of exile, Bialik uses, again, a common Aramaic expression: "Aliba De'Chulei Alma" [אליבא דכולי עלמא , namely "according to everybody", or "agreed by the whole world"] instead of translating it to Hebrew.

From the first group *Terumah*, priestly tithe on produce, needs to be removed and thus it will be reduced.

The second group need o be released from their imprisonment.

The third group must be nurtured and developed.

The method of reduction and concentration

For the compiling process let us divide the materials in the books o three groups: 1. First class books. They have a great influence on the nation, and they must be in whole to the collection. The bible is the first work at this stage; they are the essence of the nation's spirit, the intersection[58] of all Hebrew culture and its literature.

2. Second class books. These books do not have such an essential influence, but it is still national in its content or dressing. For example: arranged collections form the Alexandronian literature in Hebrew translation, parts of the Mishna and selected Aggada;[59]parts or whole books of poetic rose or poetry, the Kbbalah literature, Hasidic Judaism and new literature.

Such extracts that we choose will regain their basic national nature, and will be a very good means for strengthening the Hebrew spirit of the simple house owner, the mediocre Jew, who now must dive into the deep water in order to raise the pearls inside it to the surface.

But from these extracts certain parts can be separated, "collections post collecting",[60] collections for women and children, collections for youths etc. That was the custom during the time when the Jewish sprit had flourished.

[58]Bialik uses the expression: "the intersection of the tendons", term taken from *shechita*, the ritual slaughter of birds for food according to Jewish dietary laws.

[59]"Aggadah" means legend; here it refers to the homiletic and non-legalistic exegetical texts in the classical rabbinic literature of Judaism, particularly as recorded in the Talmud and Midrash.

[60]Bialik uses the Aramaic term: "Likutei betar likutei" [לקוטי בתר לקוטי], as this is the name of many important collections of Judaic literature.

3. *Third class books.* We must finally approach seriously this serious work of translating our classical literature to Hebrew. This deficiency, existing until now, lies upon us as a heavy rock of national shame. We must remove this shame from us.

In addition, we should also include at this stage books written by our writers in foreign languages in subjects such as Jewish studies,[61] history, or the history of literature.

I do not determine a definite rule or set restrictions. I have just shown the general path we have to take, the living one… In general, we need to rebel with all our strength against the spiritual scattering, as its end is total extinction. It is natural for a nation wishing to live to object to scattering and aspire to reduction and concentration. The work will not be too heavy at all. In the west, there is order; in the east, a lot of materials and national aspirations. We shall take both and rebuild our national palace.[62]

It is possible that nowadays the time of *holiness* of the book has passed, but its honor has not left it yet. In my opinion, the duty of the organization of the Hebrew language and culture is to return this honor to its place regarding our nation. Here lies its enormous strength, its gaining numerous benefits.

Sirs, not a light thing would it seem to you! Maybe it is within the strength of the Hebrew book to give us back the *land of the Jews*! The other work done in exile yields no positive results. Look both at the eastern and the Westerns. The Easterns created for us our new literature. The Westerns tried to get right to the nations. But what was at the end? Who really helped the people?

The book has been at the top! The rights had killed us, but the book had saved us. Those seeking for rights made us ready to be absorbed by Europe and its culture. But what had the first ones achieved? They prepared us for redemption! Prepared us for the revival of the spirit walking towards us, prepared us for a better future, for a new future in the land of Israel!

[61]The English translation is neither exact nor reflects the German term "Wissenschaft des Judentums" that Bialik referred to.

[62]Bialik used the word: "Heichal", which is also a synonym of "temple".

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