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# The Rhetoric of Embodied Memory in “In the City of Slaughter”

SARA R. HOROWITZ

IN “BE’IR HAHAREIGAH,” BIALIK’S POWERFUL and disturbing poem inspired by the poet’s witnessing of the remains of the pogrom at Kishinev, the would-be witness is enjoined to collect impressions but not to release them. Trapped inside him, horrifying visions of Jewish suffering lodge in the throat, the heart, the body of the belated visitor to the City of Slaughter. As the memories choke the witness, they take on a physicality that is different from, but in some way approximates, the experience of the pogrom victims. Despite Bialik’s remove from the brutal events at Kishinev, despite the remove of the figure in the poem from the brutality in the unnamed and archetypal City of Slaughter, the poem sets up a rhetoric of embodied memory that anticipates the shifting paradigms of later Holocaust representations.

The poem progresses through the landscape of atrocity as the speaker of the poem guides the witness from ruin to ruin, asking him to imagine the horrors that shocked turn-of-the-century Jewry. Alan Mintz and others have noted that the poem builds on the paradigm of the prophet-poet, ordered by God to witness, rebuke, and comfort after Jewish catastrophe. In the extended monologue that constitutes Bialik’s poetic response to the massacre at Kishinev, the speaker—God—orders a modern-day poet-prophet to the site of atrocity and bids him to collect impressions by reading the evidence at hand. In reality, it was Bialik who was ordered, by a group of European Jewish intelligentsia, to sift through the remains of the pogrom at Kishinev, to collect firsthand accounts

from the surviving Jews of the city, and to prepare a report for wide dissemination. Indeed, Dan Miron locates the roots of the poem in Bialik's journalism. In "Be'ir hahareigah," the addressee is guided through some of what Bialik himself saw at Kishinev, as well as through what he could only imagine, based upon firsthand accounts as well as his own extrapolation from the physical evidence.

The result is a sensory memory of a pogrom, presciently presented as prototypical. The addressee of the poem is commanded to know the massacre not only by seeing and hearing, but to know it with his entire body. The first of his senses to be engaged is sight, immediately followed by touch and by smell. His eyes and ears, but also his hands, feet, and nose are brought into the experience of witnessing, of immersion in catastrophe. Bialik's poem engages in the act of testimony by impressionistically suggesting what greets the addressee's senses—what the poet sees, touches, smells, walks in and through, what he sinks into—as he tours the memory site. Already in the second line of the poem, the addressee is commanded to see and then to touch, to engage not only his eyes but his hand: וּבְעֵינֶיךָ תִּרְאֶה וּבְיָדְךָ תִּמְשֹׁשׁ. Canadian poet A. M. Klein's powerful translation stresses the physical engagement of the poet's own body: "with thine own hand touch, and with the eyes of thine head / Behold" (English line 3; reversing the sensory order of the Hebrew). In line 11, the poet's feet sink into feathers and shredded pages of sacred texts: וְטָבְעוּ רַגְלֶיךָ בְּנוּצוֹת וְהִתְנַגְּפוּ עַל תַּלְי־תַּלִּים. "There will thy feet in feathers sink, and stumble / On wreckage doubly wrecked, scroll heaped on manuscript" (English lines 12–13). In lines 15–16, the poet's nose is evoked: וְזָלְפוּ בְּאַפְּךָ בְּשָׁמִים, / וְצִיצִיָּהֶן חֲצִיִּים נוּצוֹת וְרִיחַן כְּרִיחַ דָּמִים. "The perfumes will be wafted from the acacia bud / And half its blossoms will be feathers, / Whose smell is the smell of blood!" (English lines 16–18). These physical immersions in atrocity are processed bodily, and the poet's emotional response is also depicted in bodily terms: the cry that rises in his throat, which he chokes down. The memory, then, remains inside him and becomes incorporated rather than externalized in a cry or moan or scream.

As Mintz has noted, the poem operates metonymically. The feather, the nostril, the nail, the belly, the bits of brain—all these stand for, and stand in for,

horrors that are indicated by indirection. One might say, then, that the addressee touches, sees, smells—that is, absorbs into his own body—not only the traces of an event that has passed but the event itself—the tearing, the hatcheting, the disemboweling. These become a physical part of the prophet-poet. In contrast, Bialik himself arrived at Kishinev at some remove from the events that had occurred there. By then, over a month after the pogrom, many of the traces had become more muted than the poem's descriptions; thus Bialik had to rely largely on the recollections of eyewitnesses. This separation from the experience of atrocity collapses in the poem, however, as the poet-prophet of the poem makes the events his, taking them inside his body. As the language of the poem sets it up, the observer becomes not only one of the assailed, but a composite of all the victims.

Following a motif common in Scripture, the landscape is depicted as the repository of memory, bearing witness to human or divine events. But the rhetoric of the poem transforms the natural landscape and man-made structures into a brutalized human body. At first, the description appears to rest simply upon physical contact between the landscape and the gore of human remains: על-הגדרות / ועל העצים ועל האבנים ועל-גבי טיח הכתלים / את-הדם הקרוש ואת-המח (Hebrew lines 2–4), “on tree, on stone, on fence, on mural clay, / The spattered blood and dried brains of the dead” (English lines 4–5). But the elements of natural and man-made landscape do more than bear these last remains. They share the fate of the human victims. Like the pogrom victims, the inanimate structures are shattered, broken, split, burned. In one of the few metaphors that the poem employs, these structures are compared to “open mouths of such wound that no mending shall ever mend” כפיות פתוחים של-פצעים אנושים וסחרים (Hebrew line 9; English line 10).

As though in refusal to interpret the wounded body, “Be’ir hahareigah” is an anti-narrative and anti-liturgical poem, declining, for the most part, to tell the story or to turn the story into prayer. The absence of narrative is heightened by the poem’s indication that stories *were* told, while presenting them only in truncated form—as in the four lines (Hebrew lines 46–49; English lines 58–61) that begin with the introductory formula *ma’aseh be-*, “a tale of.” This

repetition, the reiterated promise of a story never allowed to unfold, signals that the eyewitnesses—*‘edim hayyim* . . . *‘edei re’iyah*, “living witnesses . . . eyewitnesses”—passed on more extended accounts. (Indeed, Bialik’s own notes on Kishinev indicate that this is so.) The introductory formula *ma’aseh be-* may bring to mind the section of the Haggadah so introduced, reinforcing the expectation that here, too, stories will be told and retold, thereby kept in living memory. But the suggestion that the stories of the Kishinev massacre will be repeated and eventually codified into Jewish collective memory, ritually evoked and mourned, is thwarted. The stories are cut short, as we learn only that accounts exist, but not what they are. The disjointed bits are horrifying enough; the withholding of narrative suggests that the reader cannot bear the impact of the full story. In addition, the poem is temporally located post-destruction, and the dead cannot tell their stories. Instead, one learns by the magic of touch. The stones and structures come into contact with human remains, bear witness synecdochically to the fate of the victims, and finally become themselves the victims. The poet-prophet who wanders through these ruins comes into contact with these spattered and wounded structures, touches them, and in doing so, touches the victims, literally and figuratively. Like them, he cannot narrate what occurred; he chokes on his words. Again, like them, he is wounded in a way that has no *takkanah*—no mending.

Yet within the poem, there are several isolated moments of narrative. Because they are rare and go against the impulse of the poem, they draw our attention. The absence of storytelling draws our attention all the more to the few narrative moments in the poem, each associated with the feminine. The first narrative moment occurs in the final line that is introduced by the formula *ma’aseh be-*. Although it is a brief moment, it is more elaborate than the preceding three lines, each of which begins with the same wording but does not exceed a single line. This final *ma’aseh* extends for two lines and contains subordinate clauses. וּמַעֲשֶׂה בְּתִינוּק שֶׁנִּמְצָא בְּצֶד אִמּוֹ הַמְדֻקְרָה / כְּשֶׁהָיָה לֵשׁוֹן וּבְפִי פִטְמַת שָׂדֶה הַקָּרָה (Hebrew lines 49–50)—“Of a babe beside its mother flung, / Its mother speared, the poor chick finding rest / Upon its mother’s cold and milkless breast” (English lines 62–64). The most extended narrative section of the poem occurs not long

after that (Hebrew lines 61–64, 68–85; English lines 79–112). This segment describes the brutal rape of Jewish women, mothers and daughters gang-raped within sight of one another and also within sight of their male relatives, who cower in hiding and pray for their own survival. This rape narrative begins with a four-line description of sexual atrocity (Hebrew lines 61–64; English lines 79–83). As with the witnessing of brutality generally, the addressee is then enjoined to absorb the horror synecdochically, by touching the bodily remains on the cushions and pillows where the rapes were perpetrated. This imperative, along with references to the bestiality of the perpetrators, forms a brief interlude, a break in narrating the episode.

The narrative resumes by depicting the behavior of the Jewish men—husbands, bridegrooms, and brothers of the rape victims, those who ordinarily would be cast in the role of their protectors and defenders. Here, the men are depicted as cringing in dark hiding places, watching their wives, brides, and sisters violently violated, while praying for their own miraculous rescue from harm. Finally, when the pogrom has run its course and the danger has passed, the women who survive this brutalization emerge profoundly traumatized. The poem notes וְאַלֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָיו מִטְּמֵאתָן וְהִקִּיצוּ מִדְּמֹן— / וְהִנֵּה שָׁקְצוּ כָּל־חַיֵּיהֶן וְנִטְמָא אֹר עוֹלָמָן / שְׁקוּצֵי (Hebrew lines 78–80). Klein’s translation treats the pronouns ambiguously, so it is unclear whether the raped women or their male relatives bear the trauma of the event: “Those who survived this foulness, who from their blood awoke, / Beheld their life polluted, the light of their world gone out” (English lines 104–5). In Bialik’s poem, however, it is clear that the women bear the repercussions of the atrocity that they experienced. Having left the women to their fate during the brutal attack, the husbands respond after the fact by running to rabbinic authorities to inquire, as a matter of halakhah, whether they may resume marital relations with their violated, shell-shocked wives: רַבִּי! אֲשֶׁתִּי מָה הִיא? מְתָרֵת אוֹ אֲסוּרָה? “Rabbi, tell, is my own wife permitted?” (Hebrew line 84; English line 110). In other words, the men inquire whether, after viewing their wives being raped, they may themselves resume sexual relations with them. Although classical rabbinic texts and responsa literature do indeed deal with the halakhic ramifications of rape during war and

persecution, here Bialik sets up the inquiry as a measure of calumny, callousness, and cowardice.

The rape episode is notable for several reasons. Forming the most extensive passage of narrative in this anti-narrative poem, the poem gives the rape of the Jewish women of the City of Slaughter a central and special place in representing the horrors of the pogrom. As Anita Shapira has correctly noted, the victims in “Be’ir hahareigah” remain anonymous, presented as an undifferentiated mass. Yet the experiences of women emerge as distinct. On one level, the brutal and humiliating gang rape serves as an emblem for the pogrom at Kishinev. Humiliated and overrun, Jews are feminized by their victimization—that is, turned into a nation of women by their powerlessness. In that sense, the women being raped and the men cowering are not two separate groups but one; the men’s experience merges into the women’s. The description of the City of Slaughter that precedes this episode anticipates and fortifies this idea. The poet views a shattered landscape that, like a human female body, has been violated. The walls are breached—*peratsim* (Hebrew line 5; English line 7)—and have holes; *haketalim hanekuvim* (Hebrew line 6; English line 6), the poem calls them, the word *nekuvim* invoking human orifices and also the feminine, *nekeva*, the one with orifices to be breached and violated, the traditional human spoils of war. Like the traumatized women who return to a life-in-death after the rape, the stones are wounds that cannot be healed, אֲשֶׁר אֵין לָהֶם תִּקְנָה עוֹד וְלֹא־תִהְיֶה לָהֶם תְּרוּפָה, “no mending / Shall ever mend, nor healing ever heal” them (Hebrew line 10; English lines 10–11).

Later, the female word repeats as the poem reflects upon the response of the secondary witness to atrocity. After enjoining the addressee to walk through the detritus of horror, to observe, to touch, and to absorb the stories of eyewitnesses, the poem notes the traumatizing of the secondary witness—who comes after the horror has ended and the destruction has been brought to a close. Echoing the depiction of the shattered courtyard walls and anticipating the narrative of the violated women, the secondary witness is described as shocked beyond measure and beyond repair by *ma’asim nokevim et hamoah*, “[t]ales that do puncture the brain” (Hebrew lines 54–55; English line 69)—or, one might say, accounts that feminize the brain, place the brain in the position of the female, as it is put forth

rhetorically in the poem: violated bodily, and, by consequence, violated in spirit. Precisely these puncturing tales (and tales of puncture) murder the spirit of the witness עולמית גמורה — “sever / Thy body, spirit, soul, from life, forever!” One might say that the act of witnessing “womanizes” the poem’s addressee and, in turn, its reader.

It is not incidental that Bialik chooses this particular instance of atrocity to narrate. Michael Gluzman traces the representation of gendered trauma in the poem’s rape narrative to a graphic and detailed firsthand account told to Bialik while he was in Kishinev, and recorded in his notes. The brutal testimony seems to have triggered in Bialik a childhood memory of physical abuse by an older cousin. In a letter written while still at Kishinev, according to Gluzman, Bialik mentions this memory in language strikingly similar to the Kishinev testimony. Earlier versions cast this memory as a form of sexual abuse: the cousin pulls down young Bialik’s trousers, and the child cries, and feels ashamed. Gluzman sees the prophetic style of the poem as a masculine voice evoked in compensation for this associated memory of emasculation.

My own reading of the gendering of embodied memory in “Be’ir hahareigah” moves in a different direction. Bialik’s use of masculine and feminine imagery intersects in telling ways with other representations of gender under the sign of atrocity.

Consider Jean Améry’s famous essay “Torture” (Améry 1980). Based on Améry’s own brutal interrogation at the hands of the Gestapo as a member of the Belgian resistance, the essay describes and analyzes the experience of torture and its continued resonance in Améry’s life. The language employed is deliberately spare and unadorned, grounded in concrete details of atrocity, and coolly analytical. Although he comes up against the limited capacities of language to describe the extreme pain of torture, Améry consciously resists the impulse to employ metaphor. “It would be senseless to try and describe here the pain that was inflicted on me. Was it ‘like a red-hot iron in my shoulders,’ and was another ‘like a dull wooden stake that had been driven into the back of my head’? One comparison would only stand in for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turn on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what



it was" (ibid.: 33). Yet at the center of the essay, Améry utilizes a metaphor. He describes his experience as having been "like a rape, a sexual act without the consent of one of the two partners" (ibid.: 33). In a piece of writing marked by a strong resistance to figurative language, Améry's singular use of the metaphor "like a rape" is notable. The likening of torture to rape is a consciously selected comparison with the experience and aftereffect of torture.

Metaphor rests upon both likeness and difference. Améry's use of the metaphor "like a rape" to depict a Gestapo interrogation suggests that torture has elements in common with rape and, at the same time, was not rape. In comparing his own experience with something most commonly associated with the victimization of women, Améry sets up both an identification with and a distancing from the feminine. Other retrospective reflections about Nazi atrocity reflect a similar ambiguity, simultaneously linking and separating the association between women and victimization, between Nazi brutality and the rape of women.

The language that Améry uses to describe physical torture evokes sexual violation. "At the first blow . . . trust in the world breaks down. This other person, *opposite* whom I exist physically in the world and *with* whom I can exist only as long as he does not touch my skin surface as border, *forces his own corporeality on me* with the first blow. *He is on me* and thereby destroys me. It is like a rape, a sexual act without the consent of one of the two partners" (Améry 1980: 28, emphasis mine). Anticipating later theorists on pain, torture, and rape (see, for example, Scarry 1985: 794), Améry presents Nazi atrocity as an assault on body as well as on what he refers to as spirit, psyche, or soul. Two decades after the interrogation, Améry understands that memory is embodied: "The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self." As Améry observes, although both torture and rape may leave visible markings that may serve to corroborate to the eyes of an unknowing onlooker what had been perpetrated upon the victim, the real wound inflicted by such atrocities is essentially hidden. Implicit in the dynamics of torture and sexual violation is the recognition that others have the ability to negate the will of the victim. "They are permitted to punch me in the face, the victim feels in numb surprise and concludes in just as numb certainty: they will do with me whatever they want" (ibid.: 27). The other wields absolute

and malevolent power—what Améry refers to as the torturer's "sovereignty." This profound and total helplessness that Améry recollects erases his sense of physical and psychological agency in the world. "The border violation of my self by the other . . . can be neither neutralized by the expectation of help nor rectified through resistance" (ibid.: 33).

Immediately and for always, the experience of extreme atrocity alters one's relation with one's self, with others, with the world. Destroying the presumption of reciprocity between the victim and the torturer, torture distorts relationships with loved ones, who remain outside of the assault, as the husbands in Bialik's "Be'ir hahareigah" have remained outside the rape of their women. Through no fault of their own, those outside the torture prove unreliable, irrelevant. "Whoever would rush to the prisoner's aid—a wife, a mother, a brother, or friend—he won't get this far" (ibid.: 27). Atrocity disables a wife from functioning as a wife, a mother from functioning as a mother, and so on, thereby extending its self-destroying capacity beyond the epicenter of violence. Conventionally, narratives of war and violence depict men protecting women. Yet Améry first mentions the protective agency of wife and mother and, only then, brother. Reversing traditional gendered narratives of appeal, Améry's formulation further blurs gender boundaries. Améry's metaphor of rape suggests that torture constituted a kind of unmaning, a destruction of certain rights, powers, and privileges that have come to be associated with the masculine. One might say that torture places Améry in the position of woman.

If, as Améry's essay suggests, the torment of men is absorbed into the rape of women, Bialik's poem takes care also to separate the experiences of Jewish men. Unlike the way in which "Be'ir hahareigah" treats Jewish men, the women victims are neither ironized nor criticized. The men are faulted not as Jews but as men, or as Jewish men who do not fulfill what is considered to be their role as men. Holocaust literature frequently depicts role reversals (children responsible for their parents' lives, wives rescuing their husbands), noting the shattering of manly roles as yet one more element in the dehumanization and torment of the victim. As depicted in literary representations of the Shoah, men fail, in essence, because they are placed in a situation that does not allow them to fulfill that

function, however much they may have wished to do so. In “Be’ir hahareigah,” Bialik isolates the man’s desire to save himself, suggesting it as a voluntary abdication of his role as husband or brother. The list of male onlookers includes husbands, bridegrooms, and brothers, but omits fathers, who may be imagined as rendered helpless by age; the younger men should be expected to enter into the fray physically. While Bialik’s poem debunks the sacredness of martyrdom and victimization, it is interesting that the sacredness of the women victims is not put into question. In that sense, the women are not real but iconic; the real Jews of the poem—the contemporary Jewish society whose values and behavior Bialik wishes to indict—are to be found in the fellowship of Jewish men. In that sense, it is not external persecution but rather their own failure to behave like men that feminizes the Jewish men of the City of Slaughter.

In one branch of liberal Judaism in America, Bialik’s “Be’ir hahareigah” has been excerpted and interpolated into the liturgy for Yom Kippur, incorporated into the martyrology section of the service. The 1972 Conservative *maḥzor* (Harlow 1972: 796) makes selective use of the poem, omitting the rape scene entirely (ibid.: 556–59). Also incorporated into the martyrology service of that *maḥzor* is another modern poem of atrocity, Hillel Bavli’s “The Martyrdom of the Ninety-Three Maidens” (ibid.: 561–62). Both modern poems are interspersed between sections of the medieval *piyyut* about martyrdom, “Eleh ezkerah.” Like Bialik’s poem, Bavli’s raises the specter of rape (or threat of rape), made to stand for atrocity.

Bavli’s liturgical Holocaust poem was written in the early 1940s in response to a news item carried by the *New York Times* (1943: 745). The poem narrates the story of a group of Orthodox adolescent girls who commit suicide together rather than submit to forced prostitution. Ordered *lemallei ta’avat libbam* (to “satisfy the lustful desires”) of Nazi soldiers, the young women instead *shafekhu et libban bitfillah veshatu kos ra’al veheshivu ruḥan leilohim* (“poured out their hearts in prayer and swallowed poison and returned their breath to God”). This story about female Jewish martyrdom during the war was interpolated into the Yom Kippur martyrology service in liberal American synagogues as early as 1948. Like Bialik’s poem, Bavli’s composition has an attenuated relationship with histori-

cal fact. As Nurit Govrin noted, Bialik’s Kishinev poem is taken as an accurate reflection of history; similarly, the story of the ninety-three seminary girls is presented as factual. By now, historians agree that the event that Bavli describes did not occur as such; as for “Be’ir hahareigah,” even Bialik’s own notebooks affirm a greater diversity of Jewish response than the poem admits. Both poems build upon a dialogue with biblical and prophetic texts, with strong intertextual links to classic rabbinic and medieval literature and an evolving tradition of Jewish martyrdom.

In “The Martyrdom of the Ninety-Three Maidens,” the suicide of the maidens serves as an emblem of the Shoah, and Holocaust atrocity becomes identified with sexual violation. Yet while it appears initially that the threat of sexual violation recounted in the liturgy is aimed at the body of the Jewess, the real assault is shown to be against the spirit of the Jew, which triumphs through martyrdom. As Bavli’s liturgical poem sets it up, in defending their sexual purity, the maidens defend against the degradation of Jewish values and dignity. The liturgy offers an interpretive framework that gives meaning to Jewish experience during the Shoah. While lamenting the death of the young women, the poem celebrates their enduring purity of body and soul. As liturgy, the poem provides emotional catharsis and spiritual inspiration, reassuring contemporary congregants that Jewish spiritual life continues meaningfully after the Shoah. The paradigm of Jewish martyrdom that Bavli utilizes suggests that Jewish deaths during the Shoah are inherently meaningful, sacred, and redemptive. The poem distills the essence of the Shoah into the attempt to violate the sexual chasteness of young Jewish virgins, who resist heroically by dying at their own hands. The Jew is thus feminized, and—echoing Améry—sexual violation becomes a trope for Nazi atrocity generally.

In both Bialik’s and Bavli’s poems, the violation of chaste Jewish women marks the dark center of atrocity, standing for the whole of Jewish catastrophe. In “Be’ir hahareigah,” the sexual victimization of women is depicted without criticism of the victims. Although the movement of the poem is to unravel and ultimately debunk the cult of martyrdom, the women are presented as pure and sanctified—*benot ‘ammekha hakesherot*—and without recourse (line 61). Not only

are they sorely outnumbered—seven to one—by the brutal perpetrators, but the violation continues past death. The rapists are represented by their unsanctified sexual organs; they are referred to as *'arelim*, or uncircumcised, following the figurative rhetoric of the poem. In a poem that generally turns its anger inward, on the victims, criticizing both the dead and the living for cowardice and passivity, the violated women nonetheless remain impervious to criticism and anger, invoking only horror and bereavement. What, after all, could they have done under such circumstances? Moreover, in the universe of the pogrom poem, it is not the role of women to play the hero. If they were passive, the poem tacitly accepts it; indeed, the poem does not articulate the response of the women to the assault. Drawing on multiple biblical and rabbinic sources, the poem reproduces this trope of Jewish catastrophe in a manner that is continuous with the texts that precede it. However, the narrative of violation is coupled with the narrative of the cowering men who watch from the sidelines and pray for their own safety and then go on to inquire after their own sexual satisfaction. The trope of the violated chaste Jewish women functions here as a fulcrum by which the poet criticizes Jewish response to catastrophe. In this light, and in contrast to Bavli's emblematic use of the young maidens, for Bialik it is the Jewish men who represent Jews generally. The women, although central to the depiction of atrocity, are at the same time outside the progress of Jewish history and experience, as Bialik wished to move it forward. One might call their use here "iconic." It is similar to the way in which later writers about the Shoah invoke scenes of violated women as representations of ongoing Nazi brutality. In such works as Louis Begley's *Wartime Lies*, Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, and other works by male authors, the vista of women forced to perform sexual acts, often in the background of the central action of the narrative, serves to represent generalized Nazi atrocity and to highlight or intensify an atmosphere of violence and danger. The violation of women (most often followed by, or simultaneous with, the murder of the women) deepens the atmosphere of fear and brutality that assails the male protagonist. In that sense, rape may be said to function as it does in Améry's essay: it stands for brutality, humiliation, powerlessness, and trauma. At the same time, in contrast to Améry's depiction, the male protagonist, although endangered, is depicted

as safely removed from the specifics of sexual brutality. He is most frequently depicted as voyeur, but not potential victim. One might say that the trope of the raped Jewish woman functions as a screen, not only representing but also veiling the humiliation of the Jewish man, which is projected onto the Jewish woman.

As used liturgically, Bialik's poem is excised of its cultural-national critique. As Bialik intended, the unnamed City of Slaughter stands for pogroms generally, and—even more broadly—for the long history of Jewish persecution. However, only the early stanzas are reproduced in the *maḥzor*, so that the lines of the poem serve to eulogize the murdered Jews and—in contrast to the movement of the poem in its entirety—to absorb all catastrophe into the continuum of Jewish tradition and theology. The section on the violated women is absent, perhaps because it is so strongly linked with the response of the men, in ways that would disable the poem from functioning liturgically in the Yom Kippur service. On the other hand, the inclusion of Bavli's poem presents the specter of sexual violation, averted though the proactive heroism of Jewish women and sanctioned by tradition.

The sensory witnessing and embodied memory of Bialik's "Be'ir hahareigah" rejects traditional response to catastrophe by criticizing what has become of Jewish manhood in the long Diaspora. No longer sons of Maccabees or of lions, Jewish men leave their women vulnerable and unprotected. The witness of the poem, however, may be said to stand outside of gender, or else inside it ambivalently. Alan Mintz has linked the addressee of the poem not only with the prophets of the Bible but also with the figure of the Romantic poet. Both of these—the prophet and the poet—are frequently linked with an ambiguity of gender. This creates in the persona of the addressee an insider-outsider position, precisely the position that permits him to step outside the currents of his time and its paradigms to envision other ways of making history.