לקט

ℵ יִידישע שטודיעס הײַנט

Jiddistik heute

Yiddish Studies Today

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Der vorliegende Sammelband לקט eröffnet eine neue Reihe wissenschaftlicher Studien zur Jiddistik sowie philologischer Editionen und Studienausgaben jiddischer Literatur. Jiddisch, Englisch und Deutsch stehen als Publikationssprachen gleichberechtigt nebeneinander.

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Herausgegeben von Marion Aptroot, Efrat Gal-Ed,
Roland Gruschka und Simon Neuberg

Band 1

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Lawrence Rosenwald

On Itzik Manger's *"Khave un der eplboym"*

The following essay is meant both as tribute and as experiment. The tribute offered is to a poem of Itzik Manger's called חוה און דער עפלבוים ("Eve and the Apple Tree"); it was first published in Manger's וואָלקנס איבערן דאַך (Clouds over the Roof) in 1942, and in that collection is dated "London, 1941." Manger was forty-one when he wrote the poem, in gloomy exile from Nazi-infested Eastern Europe.

The experiment has to do with the mode of analysis: what the American critic Reuben Brower called "reading in slow motion," and what is more often called New Criticism.[1] "Reading in slow motion" is meant to yield extended, complex accounts of particular literary works and parts of works. The works are at the center, full of meaning, alive, sometimes almost self-contained. The accounts are not for the most part extensively footnoted. They are not rooted in, or at least not bound by, historical or biographical or even literary context; rather they are derived, in Brower's phrase, from "words and their arrangement."[2] When New Critics are at their best – for example, William Empson in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* – they are dazzlingly illuminating; we see the work being described more clearly and more richly than we have ever seen it before. (For readers schooled in Jewish tradition, reading such critics can feel like reading biblical commentators, from Rashi through Aviva Zornberg; both the critics and the commentators see significance in every aspect of the text, refuse to subordinate part to whole, and seek maximum illumination rather than maximum coherence.)

By and large, Yiddish literary critics have not been drawn to New Critical methods, and few Yiddish poems have been the subject of New Critical analyses. Why this is the case is not clear. What is clear is that Manger's poem is just the sort of work New Critics liked to write about:

1   Though I treat them as similar, Brower and some of the more prominent New Critics had their differences. For Brower's position, see Brower 1962: 7–22. For good secondary accounts, see Jancovich 2000: 200–218 and Wood 2000: 219–234.
2   Brower 1962: vii.

ironic, witty, mysterious, unobtrusively complex, its form and meaning indissoluble, every word the right word and in the right place. Trying to bring out some of those qualities by New Critical means is, therefore, an experiment worth undertaking.

First, however, a crucial bibliographical clarification is necessary. In Khone Shmeruk's magisterial 1984 edition of Manger's poems, "Eve and the Apple Tree" is the first of the חומש־לידער.[3] It makes a wonderful beginning. If it were Manger's beginning, we would need to read it as such, deriving our sense of its meaning at least in part from its position. But it is not Manger's beginning. Manger published the *Khumesh-lider* as a separate volume in 1935. The apple tree poem does not appear there. (In *Volkns ibern dakh* the poem is simply one poem among many, not first, not last, not even one of the poems that Manger singles out in the introduction for dedication to various friends and relatives.) It is legitimate to consider it on its own; the other *Khumesh-lider* are relevant as a field of comparison, but not as an organic structure of which the poem is, above all, the beginning.

Here is the poem, in Yiddish and in (my) strictly lexical English translation:

חוה און דער עפּלבוים	Eve and the Apple Tree
חוה שטייט פֿאַרן עפּלבוים.	Eve stands before the apple tree,
דער זונפֿאַרגאַנג איז רויט,	the sunset is red,
וואָס ווייסטו, מוטער חוה, זאָג,	what do you know, mother Eve, say,
וואָס ווייסטו וועגן טויט?	what do you know of death?
דער טויט דאָס איז דער עפּלבוים	Death, that is the apple tree
וואָס בייגט די צווייַגן מיד.	that wearily bends its branches.
דער אָוונט־פֿויגל אויפֿן בוים	The evening-bird on the tree
וואָס זינגט זייַן אָוונטליד.	that sings its evening-song.
אָדם איז אַוועק פֿאַר טאָג	Adam has gone before daybreak
אין ווילדן וואַלד אַליין.	into the wild wood alone.
אָדם זאָגט: „דער וואַלד איז ווילד	Adam says, "the wood is wild
און יעדער ,ווילד' איז שיין".	and every 'wild' is beautiful."

3   *Khumesh-lider* are *lider*, poems or songs, on motifs of the *khumesh*, the five books of Moses. Manger is not the first Yiddish poet to write such poems; he is, however, the first to devise a name for them. See on this, Gal-Ed 2012 (forthcoming). Shmeruk's edition (Manger 1984) begins with Manger's dedication of and prose prologue to the work, written for its publication in 1935. Then comes "Akeydes Itsik" ("Itsik's Binding"), first published in 1937; then Manger's original verse prologue; then "Eve and the Apple Tree"; and only then the first poem in the 1935 collection.

נאָר זי האָט מורא פֿאַרן וואַלד.
זי ציט צום עפּלבוים.
און קומט זי נישט צו אים צו גיין,
קומט ער צו איר אין טרוים.

But she is afraid of the wood,
she prefers the apple tree.
And if she doesn't go to him,
he comes to her in dream.

ער רוישט און בייגט זיך איבער איר.
זי הערט דאָס וואָרט „באַשערט".
פֿאַרגעס וואָס „ער" דער גרויסער „דער",
וואָס ער האָט דיר פֿאַרווערט.

He rustles and bends over her.
She hears the word "bashert." [4]
Forget what "he," the great "he," [5]
what he forbade you.

און חוה רייסט אַן עפּל אָפּ
און פֿילט זיך מאָדנע גרינג,
זי קרייזט פֿאַרליבט אַרום דעם בוים,
ווי אַ גרויסער שמעטערלינג.

And Eve breaks off an apple
and feels strangely light,
she circles lovingly around the tree,
like a great butterfly.

און „ער", וואָס האָט דעם בוים פֿאַרווערט,
ער זאָגט אַליין: „ס׳איז שיין",
און האַלט נאָך אויף אַ רגע אויף
דאָס גרויסע זונפֿאַרגיין.

And "he" who forbade the tree,
he himself says, "it's beautiful,"
and holds the great sunset
back for a moment.

דאָס איז דער חלום יעדע נאַכט,
טאָ וואָס זשע איז די וואָר?
און חוה פֿילט ווי ס׳טרערט דער בוים
אַראָפּ אין אירע האָר.

That is the dream every night,
but what is the truth?
And Eve feels how the tree weeps
down into her hair.

„ווײן נישט, שיינער עפּלבוים,
דו רוישסט און זינגסט אין מיר
און דו ביסט שטאַרקער פֿונעם וואָרט,
וואָס וואָרנט מיך פֿאַר דיר".

"Don't cry, lovely appletree,
you rustle and sing in me
and you are stronger than the word
that is warning me about you."

און חוה נעמט דעם עפּלבוים
מיט ביידע הענט אַרום,
און איבער דער קרוין פֿון עפּלבוים
ציטערן די שטערן פֿרום...

And Eve takes hold of the apple tree
with both hands around,
and over the top of the apple tree
tremble the pious stars ...

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4   Meaning "fated" – but one can speak of one's beloved as being "bashert," as we might
say, "you were the only one for me."
5   "Der groyser 'der,'" the great "der". "Der" is the masculine form of the Yiddish definite
article. So one might say, "the great he-guy."

The poem's first stanza seems almost neutral, clinically descriptive, structurally predictable. Eve stands by the apple tree. No background, no motivation, we begin in *medias res*. No placement in large-scale time, in relation to the creation; only a placement in time in relation to the day: the sun is setting. The sunset is red, we learn. Most sunsets are, in life and still more in literature; is this too a neutral notation? Or is there perhaps something ominous in the explicit redness of this particular sunset, an ominousness suggested in the Yiddish by the rhyme between *royt* and *toyt*, "red" and "death"?

Someone (we are not told who) asks Eve a question, and with that question the inner drama of the poem begins. That is partly because there are no quotation marks surrounding it. Later in the poem there are quotation marks in abundance. They enclose a statement by Adam and a word heard by Eve. They function as scare quotes, ironic enclosing terms referring to God the Forbidder – as we might write, "Don't believe what 'the man' tells you." They enclose a statement made by God and a speech made by Eve. All of these uses feel familiar. But there are no quotation marks here to set off this first and crucial utterance, and their absence is significant.[6] Quotation marks externalize; they establish a distance between the quoter and the words quoted.[7] The effect of the absence of the quotation marks here, especially in relation to the abundant and diversely functioning quotation marks later, is to annihilate that distance. The dialogue between Eve and her unmarked interlocutor seems to be taking place inside a single mind.

The narrator in the first line calls Eve by her Yiddish name, *Khave*. Elsewhere in the *Khumesh-lider* Adam calls her by her German one, *Eva*; he is being characterized as pretentiously genteel. The interlocutor does as the narrator does, but prefaces *Khave* with the Germanic word *muter* ("mother"), preferring it to the Yiddish one, *mame*. Probably the formal term is chosen to evoke the biblical account of Eve's name:

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6   I have not looked at the manuscript, and thus cannot say for sure that the pattern constituted by the presence and absence of quotation marks is Manger's. To me as a reader it seems likely to be, not only because it creates compelling poetic meanings, but also, and more importantly, because it is so unusual.

Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* began as a reflection on punctuation; Empson's teacher I. A. Richards tells the story as follows: "At about his third visit he brought up the games of interpretation which Laura Riding and Robert Graves had been playing with the unpunctuated form of 'The expense of spirit in a waste of shame.' Taking the sonnet as a conjuror takes his hat, he produced an endless swarm of lively rabbits from it and ended by 'You could do that with any poetry, couldn't you?'" (Haffenden 2005: 207).

7   Meir Sternberg's excellent account of literary quotation (1982), disappointingly does not include an account of punctuational practices.

"And the man called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living " (וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הוּא [הִיא] אֵם כָּל־חָי).[8]

Hardly worth commenting on, were it not for the fact that the *Khumesh-lider* are so seldom read as biblical commentary; critics have rather laid emphasis on Manger's transplantation of the biblical stories, from their biblical origins to the largely Eastern European settings Manger so vividly suggests.[9] Manger himself lays emphasis on this aspect of his work, saying in the prologue to the *Khumesh-lider* that "the knowing reader will understand that the landscape in which the biblical figures move is not a Canaanite landscape but rather a Slavic one; I was thinking of East Galicia." [10] Manger and the critics have a point; the transplantation and its attendant anachronisms are brilliant and provocative – for example, the transformation of the three angels who visit Abraham into three Turks with red beards, or the transplantation of Abraham's trysts with Hagar to the side of a railroad.

But the emphasis on transplantation obscures the presence of commentary. This is true of the *Khumesh-lider* generally, but has special importance for this poem in particular, in which no transplantation has been effected, no traces of Eastern Europe are to be found, there are no anachronisms in sight, and the encounter with the biblical text is front and center. That encounter begins here, with the allusion made by *muter*.

The interlocutor's question to Mother Eve is sudden, tempting, and, in its repetitions, urgent. Eve has been told, as we know from the biblical account, not to eat of the tree, lest she die. She knows what the tree is. But how can she know what death is? Being made to realize her ignorance by the question, she will find the commandment undercut, made ambiguous. The biblical serpent tempts Eve by putting in doubt the certainty of her death: "you shall not die," he says (לֹא־מוֹת תְּמֻתוּן). Milton's Satan as serpent, tempting Eve, refers in *Paradise Lost* to "the pain / of death denounced (whatever thing death be)" (9: 695). To ask what "thing death be" undermines the commandment that threatens death as punishment.

8   Gen 3: 20. Richard Fein suggests that an additional effect of *muter* is to make Eve's motherhood universal rather than tribal (personal communication).
9   E.g., Roskies (1995: 258): "No need to tread lightly across the biblical story: [Manger] and his father and mother were the biblical story. No need to reimagine the ancient Near Eastern setting: eastern Galicia was the biblical setting. No need to study Scripture and midrashic commentary because Yiddish language and folk-lore were the sacred texts." There is much truth in what Roskies writes, but some of what Manger accomplishes in the present poem is getting lost.
10   Manger 1984: 3 (my translation).

Who, then, is this intimate, tempting interlocutor? It cannot be the serpent; there is no serpent in the poem (nor in any of the Eden poems in the *Khumesh-lider*). It cannot be the apple tree, though later in the poem the tree offers his own tempting words to Eve; in Eve's response to the question the tree is spoken of in the third person. It must be the poet. But the poet is as intimate with Eve as the apple tree will become, and the question as fatally tempting as that which the serpent would have asked. Poet as serpent, poet as tree.

We note in this first stanza, not for the last time in the poem, the counterpoint between simplicity of structure and complexity of person. Two lines set the scene, two lines ask a question. The first two lines are neatly bifurcated: Eve and the apple tree in the first, the red sunset in the second. The second two are also: the first begins the question, the second finishes it. All familiar symmetries, against which emerges the unnamed, unquoted, speaking, tempting questioner.

The second stanza offers us what we presume is Eve's answer. This too is printed without quotation marks, part of the dialogue more inward than dialogue. She answers as best she can; she has no experience of death, and says what she "knows" of it by means of two images, one of weariness, one of evening. No Romantic poet could have chosen better, but in the context the answer is ominously casual. Death as she understands it is the law of gravity acting on the tree, the law of nature leading the evening bird to sing his evening song, the regular recurrence of sunset and sunrise. The ending of life is a long way from being envisionable, the threat of death a long way from being efficacious.[11]

Like the first stanza, the third has two lines of narrative followed by two lines of discourse – this time, for the first time, discourse in quotation marks. The similarity of structure between the two stanzas invites a comparison of meaning. Eve in the first stanza is associated with the apple tree and sunset and evening, and in the second stanza becomes a commentator on both. Adam in the third stanza is an early riser, associated with morning and the wood, the "wild" wood as the narrator says, and Adam echoes the narrator.[12] In fact, he goes further than the

11   There is just a hint of autumn in Eve's speech, in that one possible reason for the branch to be wearily bending down is its being weighed down by the ripe apples hanging from it. An admittedly speculative reading, but it reminds us of other poets – John Keats in "To Autumn," Robert Frost in "Come In!," more proximately Rainer Maria von Rilke in *Herbsttag*, which Manger knew – whose images of autumn, and for that matter of the evening songs of birds, connote death. Autumn was Manger's best-loved poetic season, and his images of it are often ominous. See, on all of this, Gal-Ed 2011.

12   The *vald* ("the wood"), sounds in Yiddish similar to the *vild* ("the wild").

narrator; he is the explicit advocate and theorist of wildness, claiming an association between wildness and beauty.[13]

What are we to make of Adam's views? In the non-Jewish literature of the west, associating wildness and beauty is commonplace. "I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty," writes Ralph Waldo Emerson in *Nature*; and still more boldly, "in the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages." In Jewish traditions, such associations are less common; we remember Sholem Aleichem's Tevye being almost traumatized when temporarily lost in the woods, and imagine him puzzled or repelled by Emerson's claims.

More specifically pertinent here is that the biblical passage Manger is drawing on locates beauty elsewhere than in the wild, locates it in fact just where Eve locates it, in the apple tree. We read in Gen 2: 9 that the tree is „נֶחְמָד לְמַרְאֶה" ("pleasant to the sight"), and in Gen 3: 6 (just before Eve tastes the apple) that it is „תַאֲוָה [...] לָעֵינַיִם" ("a delight to the eyes"). These are the only instances of the relevant Hebrew words in the scene. Whatever beauty there is in the Garden is located by the text in the tree, and Adam's aesthetic preference for the woods makes him an outlier both geographically and textually. (A daring outlier, perhaps worth investigating, but Manger chooses not to investigate; this is Adam's last appearance in the poem.) Eve's aesthetic preference is more in accord with the biblical diction and scheme of values. Whatever sins she may commit later, she begins as what we might call an obedient reader of the biblical text.

Manger as poet was no systematic feminist; he did not, as modern feminists do, seek out the Bible's marginalized women characters, Dinah or Tamar or Potiphar's wife; he wrote no poems that help us to imagine Sarah's anguish or rage at the Binding of the Isaac, and the last poem of the *Khumesh-lider* is all about men, Jacob and his sons rehearsing the *purimshpil*. But he was too good a poet not to explore women's sensibilities when the biblical stories offered an evident opportunity, from Eve to Esther and Ruth, and too sharp-minded a satirist not to direct his satire even against the Patriarchs and Adam Firstman. The sympathy and the satire often work together to put him on the women's side, as they do here.

At this point – surprisingly, breathtakingly even, in mid-stanza – the nature of the story changes: "And if she does not go to him [the

13   The Yiddish phrase, *yeder "vild,"* is difficult. "*Vild*" is apparently a nominalized adjective or a rare noun, and its effect is as odd, and as fruitfully ambiguous, as "every 'wild'" in English. (The Yiddish poet Malke Heifetz Tussman published a collection of poems called *Mild mayn vild* ["Mild My Wild"].)

apple tree, *boym,* being a masculine noun in Yiddish], he comes to her in dream." The apple tree becomes a character, gendered, capable of movement and speech. The narrative moves from the real world to the world of dreams, the world of the Dreamlord who, as Sholem Aleichem writes, "does not hold back on colors, freely dispensing fantasies never seen on land or sea." [14] The narrative stays in that world until stanza eight, where a summarizing gesture is made to indicate that the dream is over. What happens during the stanzas in between?

New Critics love to explore the difference between what readers think they know and the knowledge that poems actually provide; one name for that difference is "ambiguity," a crucial New Critical term of praise, and there is a significant ambiguity to be dealt with here, just as the dream begins. We think we know that this is Eve's dream. Whose else could it be? But the poem does not assign the dream to a dreamer – *kumt er tsu ir in troym* ("he comes to her in dream") is all it says. More than the absence of a possessive pronoun authorizes the reader's uncertainty. The apple tree has a gender and a capacity for motion; in the dream he has a capacity for speech; after the dream is over he weeps and is addressed in the second person, and as a second person, by Eve. He has the capacities that being the dreamer would require. The two lines introducing the dream are perfectly symmetrical, suggesting that Eve and the tree are ontologically alike rather than different. If she does not go to him, he comes to her: two beings, two pronouns, two verbs of motion.

Common sense tells us that Eve is the dreamer. Common sense is probably correct. The goal in raising the question, in denying or at least delaying the obvious answer, is not to win the apple tree's case; it is to tease out the ambiguities lurking in the apparently clear narrative structure. The uneasy, half-imperceptible uncertainty described earlier, about who is making the opening speech, the absence from that speech of boundary-establishing quotation marks, are reinforced here by Manger's choice not to name the dreamer. In someone's dream, the apple tree comes to Eve; that is all we know.

The observed details of the dreamscape are more precise. The tree is in motion, and its motion is audible. The word chosen to describe that motion echoes Eve's earlier characterization of the tree, in particular her use of the verb *beygt* ("bends"). But earlier that word suggests passivity, an inanimate object's obedience to the law of gravity. Here it suggests activity, as if in the dream the tree had become one of Tolkien's Ents. Moreover, the tree can now speak – which capacity, in

14   Sholem Aleichem 1924: 130 (my translation).

a poem, is as fundamental an ability as can be. (Even that, if we seek to hold ourselves strictly to the facts of the poem, is going too far. Eve hears the word *bashert* – in quotation marks, separate. We presume the apple tree is the speaker. But Manger does not say so.)

Whoever its speaker may be, the word is doubly evocative. *Bashert* as "fated" belongs here, in this story that moves inexorably towards its fated, biblically established ending. But so does *bashert* as "beloved," the second sense making explicit the implicit erotic charge of the scene: the abandoned wife beneath the attentive, sinuous, swaying tree, attending her in dreams as she attends him when awake.

Again, in this first stanza of the dream two lines of narrative are followed by two lines of utterance:

> He rustles and bends over her.
> She hears the word "bashert."
> Forget what "he," the great "he,"
> what he forbade you.

Again, the lines of utterance are printed without quotation marks; again, the effect is one of intimacy, as if the tree were inside Eve's mind, or Eve in the tree's; in neither case is there need of speech to communicate.

The tree's commandment – if it is indeed the tree's commandment – is to "forget" the divine prohibition; a disturbing message in a culture so focused on remembering! "You remember all the forgotten things," says the ונתנה תוקף, paying tribute to the majesty of God. Disturbing, in particular, because the thing to be forgotten is a divine prohibition stated in the biblical text.

In the poem, however, all we know of the Forbidder is his gender. He is not qualified as "divine" or named as "God." He is a creature made of pronouns and definite articles, all of them masculine.[15] His masculinity is excessive. Manger foregrounds an aspect of the biblical story that feminists would call attention to: that a male has imposed a prohibition on a female. But he sets that insight in a conventional context; given the tree's already established grammatical and erotic masculinity, the lines in question evoke classic seduction scenes, the sort in which a male lover encourages a female beloved to ignore a husband's or father's commands.

15   Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig chose to translate the Tetragrammaton with the pronouns ER, IHN, IHM, and SEIN, all in small capital letters reserved for this purpose, which when read have something of the effect of Manger's language here, though without his irony. For Rosenzweig's justification of the practice, see his "A Letter to Martin Goldner" in Buber and Rosenzweig 1994.

The dream concludes with the poem's strangest image, nearly grotesque. Eve breaks off an apple. She "feels strangely light." She is in love, we know this, and in her love circles around the tree, in an erotic dance with her lover. But why like a butterfly? That the comparison should be with a flying creature is plausible. Whether flying in dreams is really a symbol of sexual intercourse or not, it was so understood in 1941 by anyone who had read Freud or been influenced by him, and Manger was certainly one of those.[16] That it should be with a butterfly is at first more enigmatic. But butterflies turn up elsewhere in the *Khumesh-lider* and are consistently associated with sexuality. A butterfly flutters around the lamp of Lot's daughters as they prepare to seduce him. Isaac sees a butterfly on a flower, sees it fly away, imagines it as a husband deserting his wife. The image of Eve as a butterfly is more daring than these passages, but generally in accord with them.

The deeper enigma here is a perspectival one. Eve circles around the tree "like a great butterfly." Who is making the comparison? The perspective has shifted; we are not watching the events of the dream, but having them made the subject of similes. In her dream, Eve breaks off an apple, feels strangely light, circles in love around the tree. But she is not creating the simile; the creator of that exemplary poetic figure must be the elusive poet, making an unannounced entrance here, as at the beginning.

The dream concludes on what seems at first a happy note. The unnamed male who has forbidden Eve to eat of the tree says in the dream that "it is beautiful" – "it," not "he" or "she," not Eve or the apple tree, rather the scene as a whole. The sunset itself delays its movement for a moment, presumably to gild the scene with its light as long as possible. Idyllic; but here, as before, troubling, in the always present if often latent biblical context. Previously beauty is a focus of unease in the poem because Adam mislocates it, seeks it where it is not. Here the unease is more general and theological. The biblical God expresses positive judgments in moral terms: "and God saw that it was good." Beauty is occasionally noted in the biblical text, but has no power, no exculpatory force. When God makes the sun stand still for Joshua, God's goal is not the preservation of beauty, but the successful pursuit of war. Beauty at this point in Manger's poem is not being mislocated by a creature; it is being misapplied by the Creator, as if the whole moral framework of the biblical passage were being distorted.

16   Gal-Ed (personal communication).

But of course all this is taking place in the dream, not in the Garden of Eden, and now the dream seems to end, an ending marked by its being named here as at its beginning: "That is the dream every night." A marker of order, like a punctuation mark. But it is followed by a puzzling question: "so what's the truth?" Nothing provokes this unnecessary and therefore significant question. Sometimes, we may well think, Eve goes to the apple tree when awake; sometimes she dreams of the apple tree when asleep, or the apple tree dreams of her. Nothing in that schematic account would motivate a question; we would move from the account of the dream to an account of whatever the next event might be in the world. "That is the dream, every night. / But when the morning comes …" Manger might write. But the question is asked, suggesting that the schematic account is insufficient, that there is trouble at the borders.

That suggestion is strengthened by the narrated action that follows: "and Eve feels how the tree weeps / down into her hair." "Weeps" may refer metaphorically to the dripping of gathered moisture down from the tree at dawn or dusk, but that is not all it is doing; it also suggests that the tree is here again animate, even outside the dream, and weeps as a lover might weep in a romantic poem. That ambiguity supports another ambiguity, the one previously proposed by the question, namely, that between the dream and the truth; if the tree is weeping in the Garden, then dream and truth are intermingling. "So what's the truth?" is an all too reasonable question.

Whether in dream or in truth Eve responds, this time in quotation marks. The marks suggest a greater distance and formality of speech; Eve is becoming oratorical. She tells the tree – the "beautiful" tree, since Eve, like the Forbidder and like Adam, is all too occupied with beauty – not to weep. She at least does not consider the tree's weeping only a metaphor for a natural process; she reads it psychologically, implying that the tree is weeping at the sad thought that the Forbidder's commandment will separate him from Eve. For this thought she has a remedy, namely an assurance to the sounding, singing tree: "you are stronger than the word / that warns me against you." Not stronger than the Forbidder, than the big He; stronger than the word. In a Christian context, "the word" would be "the Word" spoken of in the Gospel of John, "in the beginning was the Word." Not here, probably, even given Manger's interest in the figure of Christ, since his interest in that figure was not a theological one.[17] But in any poem, whatever its religious context, to be stronger than "the word" is to be very strong indeed –

17   See, yet again, Gal-Ed (2010, 2011).

the poem itself being strong precisely in virtue of the strength of the words it brings together. The tree, the almost non-verbal tree (its one utterance, "*bashert,*" is identified only as heard, not as spoken), with its musical, sonorous power, is stronger than the word of warning.[18]

In the final stanza we seem to be once more in the world of lucid narrative. Eve takes hold of the apple tree with both hands, takes hold of it *arum* ("around"). But the word evokes her circling of the tree in the dream, *arum dem boym*; here too, it turns out, the dream and the truth are in accord. With that, the earthly action ends; Eve does not in this apparently real world pluck an individual apple, still less eat one, still less tempt Adam to eat one; her embracing of the apple tree is as far as Manger will allow the narrative to proceed, as if he, like the Forbidder, wanted to hold off the world-historical sunset for a moment more, the final moment of the poem being the moment before the commission of the world-transforming sin.

He also shifts his gaze away from the scene where the sin will take place; the poem ends not where it has been situated for most of its length, with Eve and the apple tree in the Garden, but above: "above the crown of the apple tree / the stars are trembling piously." These are not the only admonitory stars in the *Khumesh-lider*; in Manger's poem about the Binding of Isaac, a "pious blue star" shines overhead. Whatever Manger's habits of imagery, though, the scene is easy enough to read. Eve is about to transgress, to behave in a way the very opposite of *frum*, and what else would *frume shtern* do but tremble? But tremble is all they can do; no God intervenes or witnesses, and the drama ends with the remote scintillations of the stars, scintillations made still more remote and ineffectual by the indecisiveness of the ellipsis with which the poem ends.

One negative goal of New Criticism is to avoid the imposition of synthesizing interpretations when such interpretations risk, as they often do, excluding from consideration important aspects of a work, or forcing those aspects into a false congruence with other aspects of it. In a sense, therefore, a New Critical explication should have no conclusion of the usual sort. The conclusion offered here is therefore of a different and humbler sort, a simple assessment and classification of the observations made in the body of the essay. Some of these bear on vivid, precise aspects of Manger's account of the biblical story. They note the foregrounding of death, beauty, gender, sexuality, domesticity, Eve, the tree; they note the backgrounding (sometimes the deleting) of Adam, morality, sin, wildness, piety, the serpent, God, the divine. These obser-

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18   The Yiddish *vort* ("word") and *vornt* ("warns") are similar in sound, as if to suggest that warning is what words do, not contingently but intrinsically.

vations are relatively straightforward, and just such as one might expect to offer about a poem juxtaposing traditional Jewish material to a modern poetic sensibility; such observations would suffice to describe other modernist rewritings of biblical stories, even such adroit and challenging ones as Kafka's "The City Coat of Arms" or Rilke's "Esther."

Less straightforward are observations about what one might call voice and person: who is speaking and when, where the poet can be found or is hiding, what distinctions and fusions there are between one character and another, between serpent and Eve and poet and tree and Forbidder, between one world and another, between dream and truth, even sometimes between one word and another, *vild* and *vald* or *vornt* and *vort*. The blurring of boundaries produces a quite different effect from that brought about by the poem's lucid if challenging precision: vision and mystery come together beautifully. The poem is sometimes sharply in focus and sometimes obscure, sometimes brilliantly legible and sometimes suggestively indecipherable. The counterpoint between these two aspects of the poem is its profoundest excellence.[19]

Manger in 1941 was very much alone; he had no public and no literary field in which to operate, and the Nazis were destroying his people and his linguistic and cultural community. In a few years, after the 1948 publication of דער שנײַדער־געזעלן נטע מאַנגער זינגט, and with the destruction of his people and community tragically complete, he would largely stop writing poetry. But in his 1941 state of exile, perhaps in response to that state of exile, he wrote this wonderfully haunting and troubling poem.

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19   The effect is oddly similar to that of the poem's great and monumental counterpart, Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers*, the final volume of which appeared in 1943 – Mann was working on it in 1941 – and which, on a far grander scale, balances these same two essential literary qualities of clarity and mystery.

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