

At the age of 19 Bialik published his first poem in Hebrew, entitled "To the Bird" (*El HaTzipor* אל הציפור). This poem is a true landmark of modern Hebrew literature. It tells the story of a migratory bird that has returned to Europe after flying south to the Land of Israel for the winter. The poet, who has never been to the Land of Israel, welcomes the bird home with a barrage of questions, clearly indicating his deep longing to experience the Land of the Bible firsthand. The poem takes us on a virtual tour of the diverse landscape of Israel, fluctuating between the idealized Biblical past and the dour European present.

To the Bird, by H. N. Bialik (1891)

Translated from the Hebrew by Jonathan A. Lipnick

Greetings to you, kind bird, upon your return
From the hot lands back to my window
Back to your pleasing voice, My soul perishes
In the winter when you leave.

Sing, tell me, my beautiful bird,
About the wonders of the distant land.
Is it full of evils and hardships also
There in the hot beautiful land?

Will you bring me regards from my brothers in Zion, From my brothers far and near?
O happy they are! Do they know
How I suffer, O suffer, from grief?

Do they know how many accusers I have here,
How many, so many, rise up against me?
Sing, my bird, of the wonders of the land
The spring is coming, but to stay forever.

Will you bring me from the bounty of the land,
From the valleys and ravines, from the mountaintops?
Has God had compassion, has he comforted Zion,
Or is she still left to the graves?

Have the valley of the rose and the hill of frankincense
Produced their myrrh and spikenard?
Has the old man in the woods, the sleeping Lebanon, Awaken from his slumber?

Does the dew drip like pearls on Mount Hermon
Does it drip and fall like tears?
And how fares the Jordan and its clear waters?
And how about all the mountains, the hills?

Has the heavy cloud which spreads gloom
and the shadow of death departed?
Sing, my bird, of the land in which
My fathers found life and death!

Have the flowers which I planted
Not yet withered, as I have withered?
I recall days when I blossomed like they,
Now I have aged and my strength is no more.

Tell me, my bird, the secret of all secrets
And what did they whisper of their prey?
Did they offer comfort or hope for days
When its fruit like the Lebanon will roar?

And my brothers the workers who sow with tears,
Have they harvested the omer with joy?
O that I had wings to fly to the land
Where the almond and date-palm blossom!

What shall I tell you, good bird?
What do you expect to hear from my mouth?
From this cold corner of the earth you will not hear songs,
Only dirges and sighs and wailing.

Shall I tell you about the hardships
Which are known in the land of the living?
O who will count the number of passing sorrows,
The approaching and raging troubles?

Fly, my bird, to your mountain, your desert
You are happy for you have left my tent.
Were you to live with me, O wing of song,
You too would cry bitter tears at my fate.

But weeping and tears will bring no cure
These cannot heal my wounds.
My eyes have grown dim, a sack filled with tears
My heart has been struck like a weed.

Now the tears and the bruises have stopped
But the end of my sorrow has not yet come.
Greetings my dear bird upon your return
Oh please cry aloud for joy!

