

Interpretive Aspects in Multi-version Tales: A Study of Three Tales in *Sefer ha-Ma'asim*, a Collection of Stories from Medieval Northern France

Rella Kushelevsky

This paper proposes that multi-version tales offer interpretive options manifested in a hypothetical dialogue among their various versions. Interpretive potentials in earlier versions are realized in their later parallels through creative adaptation, such as filling in plot gaps and other poetic and stylistic means. In that sense, every subsequent version is both a new creation and an interpretive event. The anonymous copyist, who is often the narrator as well, preserves the basic plot structure of the story as it appears in the collective versions of past generations, while at the same time re-forming it from his own historical perspective. This hypothesis is presented via a study of three tales in *Sefer ha-ma'asim*, a thirteenth tale collection from northern France: 'R. Akiva's daughter and the Snake,' 'The Cow that Observed the Sabbath,' and 'A Valley Filled with Gold.' Differences between each tale and their earlier sources in the Talmud, Midrash, and the medieval collection *Midrash aseret ha-diberot* are introduced in this paper as interpretive clues. They require decoding through a consideration of their medieval historical and cultural context, yet in awareness of the contemporary reader's own subjectivity in verbalizing those codes as well.