



Reality and Folklore in Smolenskin's Novel: A Deadly Subject and Its Lively Background

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K*evurat hamor* is a socially tendentious novel, depicting the rise and fall of a maskilic protagonist, Yaakov-Hayim, against the background of Jewish society and the Jewish Kehilah (organized community) in the nineteenth century. In comparison to Smolenskin's other, longer stories, *Kevurat hamor* is typified by a certain compactness in the structure of the plot, in the depiction of characters, and in the scope of the narrative.¹ Most critics agree that this compactness endows the novel with its unique literary quality in relation to Smolenskin's other stories and in comparison with other contemporary writers.²

At the center of the novel is a conflict between a progressive maskil—who knows foreign languages, is uninhibited in his actions, and is somewhat libertarian in his thought—and the Jewish communal establishment. The novel does not present a polarity by portraying a conflict between the “heavenly” Haskalah (*Haskalah bat ha-shamayim*), or its representative, and traditional Judaism or the traditional community. Such is the polarized portrayal in Abraham Mapu's realistic novel and in Reuven Asher Braudes' stories. Instead, *Kevurat hamor* presents an encounter between a nonstereotypical maskil—portrayed as a complex character—and the traditional Jewish establishment. The tragic events that occur in the novel are the result of this confrontation. It is Yaakov-Hayim's character that dictates his fate; his weaknesses undermine his actions; and he deteriorates, “mi-dehi el dehi” (from bad to worse), as the subtitle of the novel implies.

“Mimetic” Foundations and “Historical” Background

Literary critics discussed the “mimetic” foundations of *Kevurat hamor* immediately after its publication and dwelled on the novel’s relation to reality. Later critics, in general, relied on the findings of their predecessors. There is very little or no discussion at all in the literature as to the way Smolenskin uses realistic materials for his novel. Neither is there a discussion of his unique literary art of transforming these materials into the novel, nor his use of other sources.

A brief survey of the development of the “historical” (realistic) approach to *Kevurat hamor* in Hebrew criticism will show that, as early as 1880–81, David Frischman had noted Smolenskin’s use of realistic materials. According to the critic, Smolenskin “had taken important material such as the material of the story ‘Kevurat hamor’ and had made it deficient.” Although Frischman did not indicate where Smolenskin had taken his material from or what kind of material he had taken, he was generally very critical of Smolenskin’s writings.³

A few years later, in 1888, Shmuel Zitron dwelled on the connection between *Kevurat hamor* and reality, asserting that “its foundations are based on an actual event that took place in the city of Shklov, and it does not even have a shade of imagination in it.” This observation was made with the intent to praise, as Zitron concluded: “This story will prove to us how great Smolenskin’s ability is to absorb in his memory the pictures and the portraits he has ever seen in all their minute and detailed lines, and to portray them at any time on paper as though they were alive.” Zitron considered this an authentic portrayal that was close to reality, and he wrote that the characters “bear the imprint of truth.”⁴

The full and detailed testimony cited by the critics is taken from Mordechai ben Hillel Hacoheh’s memoirs, which were published as a series of articles in 1896. He wrote:

Do you remember the end of “Yaakov-Hayim,” the protagonist of the story “Kevurat hamor”? Here Smolenskin decrees on him death by man, executed by the leaders of the community on their adversary, Yaakov-Hayim. And indeed it happened in the city of Shakulah [Shklov] where they drowned the informer Sinagov in the Arpadan [Dnieper] River, and this event is the cornerstone of the story. This event reoccurred a few years after the publication of the story as another Jew, named Parchovnik, was also killed in that very city Shakulah itself, and he, too, served as a paradigm for Smolenskin. Indeed, it is correct, for “Yaakov-Hayim” is an ubiquitous type in the life of our people, and that’s the way that the community executes informers, according to S.

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Conversely, Hacothen is of the opinion that “executing informers by the community has never happened, and at any rate, it is an exception.” As to the second reported episode, he asserts that “Parchovnik fell dead by his adversary in an economic war, and no community or public matters had anything to do with it.”⁵

Hacothen’s report establishes Smolenskin’s reliance on an event that had taken place, although he stresses that Smolenskin conceptualized the character as “an ubiquitous type” in Jewish reality. It is this archetypal nature of the character that attracted the author to depict him.

Another critic, Shalom Streit, termed the realistic background of *Kevurat hamor* as “classical.” He explained this term as “the true combination of life itself.”⁶ Seven years later, at the re-publication of the article in his book, Streit clarified what he had meant and defined classical as “the true and necessary combination of life itself.”⁷ But even this definition is ambiguous; Streit does not elaborate and does not clarify what this “true combination” is. One may surmise that Streit had in mind the closeness of the story materials to the materials of reality—an affinity that the critic regards as positive.

Yet, Fischel Lahover finds some fault in this closeness, saying that “the plot of this story is too realistic. It has in it [aspects] of the event that had taken place.”⁸ Lahover is clearly of the opinion that tying the story to an event damages the quality of the narrative art and does not contribute to the fictional fabric of the novel.

Another literary historian, Joseph Klausner, quotes from Hacothen’s cited report, “concerning an informer who was killed at the command of the community,” an event that “actually . . . happened in the city of Shakulah.” As to the significance of the relation between the novel and reality, Klausner asserts that “for literary criticism there is no difference whether the re-told event actually occurred or was the product of the author’s imagination, so long as the story is plausible . . . and indeed Smolenskin did make the story with the informer quite plausible through the character delineation of Yaakov-Hayim.”⁹ At any rate, Klausner believes that “a whole period is reflected in it, and the lives of the persecuted . . . were depicted in it with great talent. Whoever would not know how to read “*Kevurat hamor*” properly will never understand Russian Jewry one hundred years ago.”¹⁰

A very interesting development in the attempts to connect the realistic background to the novel took place in Jacob Fichman’s criticism. He writes that *Kevurat hamor* is,

according to its contents, a concentrated Jewish epos—ostensibly, an event that took place, yet it is also founded on a folktale. A Jewish informer was

always a legendary figure. The linking of events in the story is totally consolidated, and in its great moments it possesses the color of a ballad. Indeed, it is this legendary element that had stamped a note of naturality even on the psychological manifestation [of the protagonist].¹¹

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Fichman's classifying this work as a folktale and as a ballad with legendary elements is both interesting and intriguing. One may attribute his assessment to the elements of superstition and folklore attached to the institution of Hevra kadisha, the burial society, and its activities.

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Another first-hand testimony about the reliance of the story on a realistic event was reported (in 1943) by Zalman Shneur in his article "Peretz Smolenskin in Shklov," Shneur's own birthplace. Shneur identifies the places and people cited in *Kevurat hamor* and authenticates the proximity of the story to the actual event, of which he had heard several versions.¹²

In the 1950s, Avraham Shaanan terms the novel's connection to reality "authenticism"; he expresses his view that Smolenskin's stories are paved with "autobiographical episodes." As a result, Shaanan asserts that "the nature of things requires, therefore, a narrator's veracity toward the narrative."¹³ Later, in his history of Hebrew literature, Shaanan maintains that *Kevurat hamor* contains "nuclei of description and drawing on profound youthful experience."¹⁴

David Patterson, too, cites the realistic origins of the novel. He contributes another first-hand report of someone who saw the burial place of a person who had been given "a donkey's burial."¹⁵

Weinfeld accepts the realistic background of the novel as valid, in his introduction to *Kevurat hamor*, and he summarizes the above-cited sources (Zitron, Hacoheh, Shneur, and Patterson).¹⁶ Weinfeld proposes that the subject of "a donkey's burial," as perceived by Smolenskin, must be related to an article published earlier in *Ha-shahar* (in 1873, prior to the serialization of *Kevurat hamor*) by A. Zuckerman, who was that journal's agent in Warsaw.¹⁷ Entitled "Zivhei metim" (Sacrifices to the Dead), the article satirically depicts the preparations for the annual banquet of the burial society—an article that Smolenskin, as editor of *Ha-shahar*, could never have missed.¹⁸

Most of these critics rely on Hacoheh's memoirs. It is generally accepted that Hacoheh is a reliable source since "he knew Smolenskin well and even began to translate the novel into Russian."¹⁹ Another major source for this information is Zitron's rather general statement of 1888, three years after Smolenskin's death.²⁰ Zitron's report is also deemed reliable because he had been a frequent visitor to Smolenskin's home—as was Hacoheh—and wrote a memoir about him.²¹

These critics failed to notice that, even during Smolenskin's life, a

note was printed in *Ha-shahar* itself that attributed the origins of the story to an actual event. More important, perhaps, we have Smolenskin's own comment inserted in the printed note. It is found in an article entitled "Tohelet memushakhah" (Long Expectation), written by M. Kamionski²² and published about a year after the start of the serial publication of the *Kevurat hamor* in *Ha-shahar* in 1873. Kamionski criticizes the religious and cultural condition of the Jews in Russia. He further complains about the lack of proper and authentic description in Hebrew literature that documents this difficult reality, with the exception of Smolenskin's depictions in his novels *Ha-toeh be-darkhei ha-hayim* (The Wanderer in the Paths of Life) and *Kevurat hamor*. Later in the article, Kamionski makes a few suggestions about how Haskalah can ameliorate the condition of the Jewish people.

In a footnote printed in the beginning of his article, Kamionski clearly states:

It is known to all the inhabitants of Maafelyah, that the informer Sinagog [*sic*] (called R. Yaakov-Hayim in *Kevurat hamor*) was drowned through the craftiness of the community leaders who sent one person disguised as a gendarme to call him to the district governor. The disguised person took him in a prepared, harnessed carriage, and he rode with him and threw him into the water. His wife became *agunah* [deserted but not divorced], and later she became an apostate.

Kamionski gives important information about the "informer":

Sinagog belonged to a high family and was flawless. They say about him that when he prayed his prayer was pure and wholehearted, and on the High Holy Days he used to pray while screaming and crying like one of the more devout. In addition, all that was related in the two stories are totally true without any exaggeration, and it is amazing in our eyes how Mr. Smolenskin remembers all that had happened in all the minute details even though it has been about fifteen years since he had been to Shakulah.²³

Kamionski knew Smolenskin well, had corresponded with him, and lived in Vienna from 1875 to 1877 and in 1881.²⁴ Nevertheless, his testimony on the alleged religious devotion of Sinagog is quite puzzling: why should the community do such a thing to a devout Jew? We may, however, view Kamionski's positive depiction of Sinagog as an attempt to exaggerate his positive aspects in order to highlight the inequity committed by the community.

Faced with the writer's expressed amazement as to Smolenskin's memory and talent for reproducing a detailed reality accurately, the publisher—namely, Smolenskin himself—added his own comment:

There is no need to wonder over the author's capacity for memory, for indeed he had not known at all about that man Sinagog. However, events such as these occurred almost daily, and stories that were included in *Ha-toeh* actually happened *afterwards*. Such is the story of the sinning woman in the city of Shakulah²⁵ which happened in that city two years after *Ha-toeh* had been published.²⁶

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Oddly enough, the name of the informer here is "Sinagog," whereas Hacothen reports it as "Sinagov."

In his explanation, Smolenskin ostensibly desires to preclude an attempt to relate the novel to any definite and specific event in reality. However, he supports the notion that the story is indeed patterned on an existing and prevailing reality that actually occurred *after* the publication of the novel. According to this concept, the novel's materials are congruous with materials of reality. One does not have to document any *specific* event on which the novel is based, for there are *general* testimonies about similar "everyday occurrences." Literary truth is not founded on a unique event but on a *general* event that may occur, indeed does occur, and will even occur in the future. A similar perception appears in the novella *Nekam berit* (A Covenant's Vengeance), the subtitle of which is "An event that was, is, and will be in every place and in all times (about the calamities in Austria) . . . told for eternity to this generation."²⁷

Establishing a story on an actual event was a common practice in Haskalah literature of the time. For example, Abraham Gottlober's story "Kol rinah vi-yshuah" (A Voice of Joy and Redemption), published in *Hahshahar* in 1875, acknowledges in the subtitle its indebtedness to an event "that took place in little Tonis."²⁸

In Smolenskin's own testimony, he claimed he had not known about the specific case of Sinagog, or Sinagov, and perhaps the mistake in the spelling of the name attests to that. Apparently, he did not rely on this particular episode but on similar events that took place in Jewish reality. The "mimetic" aspect of the story, according to Smolenskin's literary perception, is in the general rather than the specific truth.

Origin of the Story: In Early Haskalah in Germany

Smolenskin's inclination to employ realistic materials is generally accepted. Similarly, it is generally acknowledged that he used anecdotal materials for his writings. Weinfeld shows the possible source for an anecdote concerning the stealing of cookies. He also points out the relation of *Kevurat hamor* to the inner traditions of Haskalah literature, and he asserts that the negative portrayal of Hevra kadisha in Moshe

Lilienblum's satire *Kehal refaim* (Assembly of the Shades), which Smolenskin praised profusely, apparently left its mark on the latter's writings. "It is not inconceivable that Lilienblum's maskilic irony left its imprint on Smolenskin's story," Weinfeld writes.²⁹ Indeed, Lilienblum's piece contains similar satiric aspects related to the Hevra kadisha, such as gulping wine like water and devouring cookies in the annual religious feast.³⁰ In addition, Weinfeld cites several articles critical of the Hevra kadisha that came out close to the publication of *Kevurat hamor*.³¹

However, even critics who have cited these sources have not discussed the relation between the original event in reality to its literary adaptation, as manifested through Smolenskin's creative prism. Neither have they shown how Smolenskin utilized the realistic materials for his literary use. Consequently, one is led to believe that their interest was mainly to discover the origin of the novel without its effect on the literary portrayal. It may prove to be very rewarding to have this aspect examined thoroughly in the future.

Moreover, even critics who were aware of Smolenskin's inclination to use realistic materials for his stories were oblivious to another source that constitutes a central anecdote in the novel. Consequently, they could not and have not discussed this particular anecdote, although it is thematically central to the novel. Typically, this anecdote concerns the motif of a living person disguising himself as dead and reappearing before the living.

Let's review this anecdote briefly and attempt to understand its significance. Yaakov-Hayim's return to Keshulah following his initial escape is arranged through a very unusual episode that happened to Geitzel-Shmaryahu, Yaakov-Hayim's father-in-law. Apparently, the figure of Yaakov-Hayim's late father surfaces before Geitzel-Shmaryahu from the netherworld. It wears a very impressive white beard and is covered with shrouds. The dead stretches his hand towards Geitzel "and with a terrible voice, as though from the depth of Sheol [hell]," exclaimed: "Geitzel-Shmaryah, you are going to die this year!"

The dead person approaches Geitzel because he had caused a separation between a man and his wife. The spirit assures Geitzel that, if he rectifies the situation, the spirit would pray that God would prolong his life.³² Indeed, Geitzel makes a vow that he will bring Yaakov-Hayim back to his house and will make him his heir. Only later do we find out just who appeared as the dead person: it was the very living person of Yaakov-Hayim himself.

The interesting thing about this story is that another, identical story appears previously in the novel. It is depicted as a trick perpetrated by Yaakov-Hayim against the Mashgiah, the Yeshiva supervisor:

[F]or he did a malicious deed to the Mashgiah, with whom he was angry because the Mashgiah beat him during the day. Thus he attacked him at night, wrapping himself with a white sheet, strangling him, and screaming “you will die this year.” As a result of this fright, the Mashgiah became ill, and his sickness became so grave that the Yeshiva students’ hope that they would free themselves from him forever almost materialized. However, Yaakov-Hayim boasted his doing, and had he not skipped town who knows if the Mashgiah’s wife would not have annihilated him.³³

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The occurrence of this story twice in the novel should call our attention to the importance of this event in forming the protagonist’s character and to the significance of the disguise motif.

This central event in the story is patterned on an anecdote that had surfaced in the beginning of the German Haskalah pertaining to a maskil who disguised himself as a dead person. The motif of the dead—or one who appears dead—who resurrects and spreads horrors all around him is not foreign to Hebrew Haskalah literature. It may be said that Smolenskin stood on tilled soil, selecting materials for his novel based on motifs that were prevalent in early Hebrew Haskalah. This “seminal” anecdote was published in *Yodea sefer* as an explanation of why the journal *Ha-measef* ceased publication in 1797:

And as soon as this issue [1797] was published, the lions, namely the rabbis of that time, rose against it and aimed their wrath at the Hacham R. Wolf of Halle [Aaron Wolfsohn] about his piece “Sihah be-erets ha-hayim” [A Dialogue of the Dead], published in that volume and concerning the article on the delayed burial of the dead by R. Itzik Euchel. Particularly since [the event occurred] following the death of a famous rich man in the city of Breslau that year, a few days before the days of Purim, and the people of the burial society hurried to bury him on that day as R. Wolf and his friend Joel Brill were watching.³⁴

And it came to pass during the day of Purim that a group of friends sat at the rabbi’s house to eat the Purim meal, and many, many people came there in disguise, dressed in Gentile clothes and masks on their face, as is the custom. And behold R. Aaron was coming with them, dressed in shrouds as a dead person, and a mask on his face in the image of that dead person with wounds and bruises all over his body, on his hands and his feet. A note was attached to his back, stating the following: I am so and so. I fainted, and the members of the [burial] society hurried to bury me, and they almost cruelly spilled my blood, but with God’s help and by the strength of my own hands, I broke my confinement, and I am standing here as an example for the public. The guests were scared to death, especially family members of the deceased, who were among the guests. They all screamed bitterly at the disguised person, and they did not become quiet and did not rest until they

had chased him out of their city, and totally banished him. Consequently, the *Ha-measef* ceased publication, and no one was able to bring it to his home.³⁵

I do not know where the author of *Yodea sefer* got his information or whether the event actually took place. However, even if it were a maskilic anecdote, it was unquestionably circulating among the maskilim, like many other anecdotes that were readily told and published, reconstructed and recycled.³⁶ Likewise, I do not know whether Smolenskin saw the book *Yodea sefer*, the first edition of which came out in 1875.

Nevertheless, it looks as though an event that took place in early Haskalah in Germany, or its maskilic anecdotal equivalent, is used as background material for Smolenskin's novel. This anecdote exemplifies early Haskalah fighting against extreme religious orthodoxy, base superstition, and utter stupidity. As cited before, Smolenskin amplifies this anecdote by using it twice in the novel.

Comparing the maskilic anecdote to Smolenskin's story will show certain affinities: a person disguises himself as dead by wearing shrouds and attempts to transfer a message to the living. In the original anecdote, the message is given in writing, whereas in its belletristic rendition the message is offered orally. The very text itself is not identical, and, as stated above, I do not have any information about the sources used by the author of *Yodea sefer*. Consequently, one may conclude that the relation between the anecdote and Smolenskin's novel is rather general and is not without some questions.

Nevertheless, a case may be made for establishing an affinity between the theme of the novel and some realistic antecedent in the history of Haskalah based on its resemblance to some aspects of the burial-of-the-dead controversy. The "life and death" issue crystallized the tension between the maskilim and the rabbis in early Haskalah in Germany. Writings on this lively topic continued to be published for 30 years and even later, to the end of the nineteenth century, in journals, pamphlets, responsa, and books. The issue began as a controversy over the demand of the civil authorities to delay the Jewish practice of an immediate and early burial of the dead. It culminated in the 1780s with the publication in *Ha-measef* of the correspondence between Moses Mendelssohn and his former teacher Rabbi Jacob Emden. Major Hebrew writers of the period and others expressed their thoughts and views on the subject. Among them were Saul Berlin, Isaac Euchel, Tuvia Feder, Dr. Marcus Hertz, Solomon Pappenheim, Aaron Wolfssohn, and, after some time, David Caro. The maskilim even established their own burial society to

bury their dead according to the new procedure outside the framework of the Kehilah.³⁷ In summary, this issue occupied the attention of Hebrew Haskalah for a long time, and it could have influenced Smolenskin even at a later date.

The motif of the dead who is resurrected and reappears to the living exists not only in Haskalah anecdotes but indeed in Haskalah literature. Isaac Erter, for example, relies on a similar motif of the dead in his satire “Gilgul nefesh” (Transmigration of a Soul). He places the undertaker as one of the figures in the continuous processes of transmigration of a soul. Erter depicts satirically the semi-religious feasts (*seudot mitsvah*) of the undertaker, which are also depicted by Smolenskin. In this stage of his transmigration, the undertaker tells about a corpse that, upon being hit by the undertaker on its lower back, got up and, as described by Erter:

The dead swayed, and stared at me with his eyes; he soared in rage, and got on his feet. And my heart died within me, terrors of the shadow of death got hold of me. I wanted to run away but could not, as my strength had left me. I roared, I pleaded, and I screamed bitterly from the groaning of my heart. As I became weak, I fainted, and I fell down, and expired and died.”³⁸

There are similar elements in both descriptions: both depict fear as well as the inability to move and to run away, and falling down. In addition, there is a satiric depiction of the undertaker’s feast in these works.³⁹

A similar motif of scaring those who believe in the reappearance of the dead may be found in Mordechai Gunzburg’s *Aviezer*. The autobiographical narrator tells a story of an orphan friend who entices him to do mischievous tricks and to scare the fearful. The boys used to “make big snow golems [dummies], and to plant embers in their heads for eyes, and to place them in front of the houses where we knew their inhabitants believed in the appearance of the dead.”⁴⁰

A closer use of the motif of the dead who “appear” from the underworld in order to change a certain marriage decision is made in two of Mordechai Brandstadter’s stories. Significantly, those stories had been published in *Ha-shahar* prior to the publication of *Keurat hamor*. It is inconceivable that Smolenskin, as editor, had not read Brandstadter’s stories, as is evidenced from the correspondence between them.⁴¹

In the story “Mordechai Kizowitz,” published in 1869,⁴² Brandstadter introduces a ghost-like figure that ostensibly reveals itself in a dream, as told in a letter written by the protagonist maskil. The ghost is responsible for the cancellation of an unwanted marriage between the maskil’s lover

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and another man. Not only is the ghost responsible for preventing the unwanted marriage but it actually facilitates, in effect forces, the happy-ending marriage. The appearance of the ghost is told as follows:

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And it came to pass at midnight as I fell asleep. And behold, I saw in my dream a small, thin-faced, and thin-bodied woman standing by my bed. "Who are you?" I shouted in fright, for I was afraid of her, "and what do you want of me, terrible woman?" "I am Malkah, the Rabanit, the first wife of Rabbi Shraga, and I have been dead now for eighteen years. If you are desirous of life, return immediately to the city of Nizba which you had left today, and annul the marriage contract which you had signed with my only daughter Pesele."⁴³

Similarly, in Brandstadter's second story, "Ha-niflaot me-ir Zidichuvka" (The Wonders of the City of Zidichuvka), which was published in 1872,⁴⁴ a year prior to the publication of Smolenskin's *Kevurat hamor*, we find the same motif. Here the emerging dead does actually appear—in the narrator's report—so as to effect a change in a certain marriage decision. As told in the story:

When the Shamash [beadle] went to awaken the members of the morning-prayer society, and as he passed by the synagogue, lo and behold! Ah, fright and dread! The dead Rabanit was standing by the door, and she snatched the hammer from his hand and called: "If you desire to live, stop and listen; do not fear nor should you be frightened, for nothing should happened to you by listening attentively."⁴⁵

Obviously, the shrouds wrapped around the "dead" cannot conceal our protagonist—who is very much alive and is trying to annul the unwanted, forced marriage so that he can marry his beloved girlfriend. As told in the story: "For Rephael disguised himself by wearing white clothes as a dead man's clothes, and he deceived the Shamash and the rest of the community with his deceit."⁴⁶

The affinity between this motif as presented by Brandstadter and that presented by Smolenskin is quite convincing. In both there is the disguise of a dead person and the use of a superstitious belief in the appearance of the dead—to benefit the maskil. It is conceivable that there was some cross fertilization between the two writers. However, the question we must address is: If indeed there were some influence, who exerted influence on whom? Ben-Ami Feingold writes in his introduction to the Dorot edition of Brandstadter's stories that "it is customary to view the relations between Brandstadter and Smolenskin as a typical

relations between a 'teacher' and his 'student.'"47 From the context of Feingold's discussion, I assume that he meant Smolenskin was the teacher who exerted influence on Brandstadter.

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The publication of Brandstadter's two relevant stories *prior* to Smolenskin's *Ke'vurat hamor* may point out, conversely, a different conclusion: namely, that the "student," Brandstadter, could have been among the authors who exerted influence on Smolenskin to select this literary device in which the protagonist pretends he were a dead person. It is not the intention of this article to examine the topic thoroughly, but I shall endeavor to discuss several aspects of their relationship.

A very interesting yet perplexing relation emerges from the correspondence between Smolenskin and Brandstadter. On the one hand, Smolenskin values Brandstadter's work and constantly urges him to continue writing.⁴⁸ He praises Brandstadter's story "Ha-niflaot," saying, "in it you have performed 'niflaot' [wonders], and it is superior to all the short stories ever written in the Hebrew language to this day."⁴⁹ Smolenskin expressed similar praise for Brandstadter's other stories.

On the other hand, the correspondence exposes quite vividly the existence of tension between the two. Several problems mark their relationship: Smolenskin loses a manuscript of one of Brandstadter's stories,⁵⁰ and the latter does not respond regularly to the editor's letters. To add insult to injury, Brandstadter does not deliver on his promises to send the editor several stories and even squabbles with him (as is evident from letter 76). Smolenskin complains about Brandstadter's eloquent silence in letters 41 and 42, using fascinating and meaningful imagery:

You were silent like a dead man in his grave, therefore today I shall be, to you, like the angel "Duma" [the angel in charge of hell].⁵¹ I ask you: What is your name? Are you not Brandstadter, the terrible joker who scares all miracle-workers from their rest? . . . You should know . . . that you, too, will dwell with me in the fire of hell so as not to have one of us in hell and the other in paradise.⁵²

Smolenskin's ghostly language and imagery are close to those of *Ke'vurat hamor*, and perhaps there is a psychological as well as a literary explanation of why he used this particular style in a letter to Brandstadter.

In yet another letter, Smolenskin accuses Brandstadter, with some

humor, of committing “a wanton deed, for you have come within my boundary, and you stole a whole section from my new story which has not been published yet. As a result, I had to revise it totally.” Smolenskin explains this “plagiarism” as follows:

Surely, you have probed into my heart, and you have seen what’s written there, for you have definitely not seen my manuscript. Since this is what you are doing to me, let me tell you that you should become the editor of *Ha-shahar*, and you should ask me to write novellas for you for *Ha-shahar*.⁵³

It would be difficult to know for sure what was hiding behind the supposedly humorous statement about the plagiarism that had been committed unknowingly and the meaning of the proposed identity exchange between them. The motif of the exchange of identities appears also in another letter. In it Smolenskin compliments Brandstadter, saying: “This story of yours is superior to everything you have written to date in its language and regimen, and after having read it I said, were I not Smolenskin, I would have liked to be Brandstadter.”⁵⁴ Brandstadter, too, plays a game of identity exchange in his story “Ha-niflaot”: “If Mapu or Smolenskin were in my place this time, they would have eternalized the name of all these [characters].”⁵⁵

This unique relationship is crystallized in yet another letter by Smolenskin about an ostensible competition between the two writers in publishing their stories. He writes that the readers of *Ha-shahar* enjoy reading Brandstadter’s stories, and consequently Smolenskin attempts, in his own words, “to share with you the [readers’] praises, for I cannot afford to let you inherit me while I am still alive.”⁵⁶

Can we conclude that these references point out some subconscious acknowledgment of the “student’s” influence on his “master”? Can we suspect that Smolenskin was apprehensive about the rival author? Ironically, the person whom he, as editor, needed to supply stories for the journal was the very author of whom he was afraid as a competitive, rising author who has attracted the readers. To make matters even worse, the venerated editor-author appears simultaneously to have been influenced by his rival and to have drawn material from his stories. Unquestionably, the above-cited letters are written with a wink to the reader and with friendly humor. Nevertheless, there is a bit of bitterness in them as well.

Even if there were no direct influence, we may assume some borrowing. Indeed, some feedback or cross fertilization existed between these two writers that merits a separate, thorough probe in the future. One such example is related to our subject: in 1878 Smolenskin published in *Ha-shahar* a story by Brandstadter whose title was “Me-hayil el hayil umi-

dehi el dehi” (From Strength to Strength and from Bad to Worse).⁵⁷ The editor did not hesitate to publish this title, though it was indicative of a direct borrowing from the subtitle of his *own* novel *Kevurat hamor o Mi-dehi el dehi*, or a recycled heading from a chapter in *Ha-toeh*.⁵⁸ Interestingly enough, in all the later editions of Brandstadter’s story, the title is “Me-hayil el hayil,” without the subtitle. Who is then responsible for the title that alleges affinity with Smolenskin’s novel—the editor or the author? And why was this subtitle omitted from the later editions of the story? This puzzle must be solved in the future as one probes into the relationship between these two writers. A similar phenomenon appears in Gottlob’s story “Kol rinah vi-yshuah”; the title of one of its chapters is “Simhat hanef ba-atzat Peti” (Joy of the Hypocrite [Godless] Through a Fool’s Advice),⁵⁹ signaling its indebtedness to Smolenskin’s *Simhat hanef* (if not to Job 20:5).

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The Struggle Against Superstition

To reiterate the main thrust of my discussion so far: a trick exemplifying the fight of early Haskalah against superstition—and one that became a recurring motif in several early maskilic satires—served as raw material for Smolenskin in molding Yaakov-Hayim’s war on *Mordei ha-or* (the “deniers of light”). Evidently, in *Kevurat hamor* Smolenskin follows in the footsteps of early Haskalah in its struggle against superstition.⁶⁰ His interest in disseminating the light and eradicating ignorance and folly is manifested in his editorship of *Ha-shahar*. In the journal’s second year of publication, Smolenskin published an article by “Z.H.L.” (Asher Zeilig Hacohen Lauterbach),⁶¹ under the title “Ha-nistarot vеха-niglot” (Covert and Overt Matters). In this anti-superstition article, the author exposes phenomena of superstition and magic, and he traces their sources in non-Jewish and Jewish literature. Consequently, he dismisses all credibility of such phenomena, using quotations from Judaic authorities such as Maimonides.⁶²

In like manner, the topics of death and burial become recurring themes in *Ha-shahar*, indicative perhaps of certain psychological processes affecting the editor. For example, in 1871 Smolenskin published a poem entitled “Ba-hatsar mavet” (At the Cemetery) by Yaakov Zvi Shperling.⁶³ This trend continued even after the publication of *Kevurat hamor*, when Smolenskin proceeded to publish stories with the general topic of death and burial. In 1875 he published a long, three-part story entitled “Hazut ha-kol” (The Vision of All This; or The Most Important Thing) by Daniel Ish-Hamudot, the pseudonym of Aaron Samuel Lieber-

mann.⁶⁴ Apparently following Smolenskin's lead in *Kevurat hamor*, Ish-Hamudot tells a story of a Jewish person who was erroneously deemed to be dead. This piece contains motifs taken from the burial-of-the-dead controversy, such as the early and premature burial of a living person,⁶⁵ and citation of the proverbial concept "Kevurat hamor." Furthermore, the author dwells on the meaning of that expression: "You should be given a donkey's burial, and they will lay you in impure ground."⁶⁶ It goes on to describe the tortures undergone by the person being buried alive in the best macabre tradition of the burial-of-the-dead literature.⁶⁷ The motif of the "living dead" who is resurrected and, as he gets up, creates havoc all around him, appears here as well:

He hurried up and took me out of my grave and untied the knots of my attire and placed me naked in a sack he had brought with him. In my craving [for life], I breathed, and the motion, too, revived me. As I got up on my feet, the man saw me. He was stricken with terrors of the shadow of death, and he stepped back, and I followed him in order to find the way to my hometown. He . . . did not dare to stop me. . . . He was in front of me and I followed him; and he looked at me and he saw me running . . . and he screamed: Alas! And he fell down his full height, and as I was in a hurry I passed him and hastened to enter my home.⁶⁸

This was also the year that Smolenskin published Gottlober's "Kol rinah vi-yshuah," in which one finds the elements of death and burial as well as the motif of the dead appearing in a dream.⁶⁹

Beyond the scope of Smolenskin, a very interesting phenomenon emerges toward the end of the century. This death motif in Jewish life, which undoubtedly is initially realistic,⁷⁰ assumes a completely different shape in Reuven Asher Braudes' 1898 piece "Olah mi-ben ha-kevarim" (Rising from the Graves). With the rise of expectations for the revival of the Jewish people on the heels of the Zionist Congress, Braudes depicts Jewish reality now as "tehiyat hametim," the resurrection of the dead. This is conceptualized as an advanced stage in the process of national demise and destruction. Accordingly, the resurrection of the dead is perceived and depicted as a metaphor for spiritual revival: the spirit that revives the proverbial dry bones. Braudes writes: "And this cemetery is not here on earth, and the dead being resurrected are not human dead. I am not talking here about dead people or burial places in the ground—I am referring to the burial grounds that are deep within us."⁷¹

Ascribing a metaphorical meaning to the revival of the dead at the fin de siècle may enrich the significance of depicting death, dying, and burial as Jewish reality—especially in relation to the problems of Jewish

existence in the 1870s and 1880s. The feelings of demise, destruction, and helplessness add a metaphoric dimension to a theme which may be central to the end-of-Haskalah, pre-Zionist period, namely: Death.

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Yaakov-Hayim and a Donkey's Burial

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Characterizing Yaakov-Hayim in accordance with well-established literary traditions common in early Haskalah literature indeed enriches the portrayal of the persona. As we have seen in our discussion so far, not only do we understand Yaakov-Hayim better, but we also get an insight into the origins and the inspirations of Smolenskin's creative endeavor. We have noted that Smolenskin employs a central topic that had occupied the attention of early Hebrew Haskalah, while updating it and applying it to his times and circumstances. As I have pointed out, the topic is exemplified by the Haskalah's bitter fight against superstitions. However, Smolenskin's struggle against superstition is conceptualized somewhat differently. It seems that this proclivity concerns itself not so much in the religious aspects of enlightenment as in its social ramifications vis-à-vis the Jewish ills that he desires to remedy as part of Haskalah's war against "the deniers of light."

It may be more meaningful to note that Yaakov-Hayim's figure possesses a certain demonic, ghostly trait. The reality in which he grew up may be characterized as demonic, ghostly, macabre. His father, the undertaker, has taught him to live comfortably with the dead in this "spiritual" world, so to speak. There is a macabre depiction of the father-undertaker himself taking a nap next to corpses without any inhibition. The father has raised his son not to believe in ghosts and spirits, and to deny superstitions, in contrast to the practices prevailing among the Jewish masses.

It is only befitting that a great portion of the novel takes place in the prayer house of the Hevra kadisha (where the protagonist escapes from his fellow Yeshiva students who annoy him). His natural habitat is the "other reality," which a regular Jewish person shies away from. No wonder the central event in the novel takes place during *seudat mitsvah*, the annual semi-religious feast of the burial society. According to the novel's inner literary "grammar," which emanates from its re-created reality, Yaakov-Hayim's punishment is a donkey's burial. It is a severe punishment that bans the dead and removes him from the established Jewish community even after his death.

Unquestionably, there are light, anecdotal, fluttering, noncommittal, and even amusing aspects in the character of Yaakov-Hayim. He is

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characterized by his name, Yaakov, after the first pretender in the Bible. His middle name, Hayim, serves as an ironic reference to his macabre upbringing and his acquaintance with death.

However, what is even more important about his personality is that we can detect in him the figure of the rootless maskil. He is the type of person who has detached himself from his ties to the traditional Jewish community and is still searching for his own identity. The literary motif of “disguise” and changing into someone else may reflect this lack of identity, which signals the continuous deterioration of the old, traditional structure of the Kehilah and the breakdown of the established framework of traditional Jewish society. This confusion about one’s identity may epitomize the lack of a clear demarcation between Jew and non-Jew resulting from the emergence of the modern Jew. The notion of an identity crisis in the novel is further strengthened in another instance.

As Yaakov-Hayim searches for a way out of his problems, he looks into the possibility of joining the Hasidim in *Tsvoael* (a name connoting hypocrisy). For a person who is used to assuming various identities and personalities, he has no scruples about becoming a Hasid.⁷²

The title of the novel is taken from Jeremiah 22:19: “He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.” It denotes a shameful burial: “enacted in a contemptuous manner, ‘dragged away and thrown out of the gates of Jerusalem.’”⁷³ The Talmudic expression, developed later on, is “Kevurat hamorim,” and Rashi interprets it to mean “that they throw [them] into the pit.”⁷⁴ The sages referred to it as a shameful burial.⁷⁵ The popular notion in later Judaism is that “Kevurat hamor” means “a burial outside the cemetery fence for whoever sinned in his lifetime against the community”; his punishment was burial “out of the camp or outside the cemetery.”⁷⁶

The halakhah itself apparently does not have a formal concept of “Kevurat hamor.” *Yoreh deah* does discuss the treatment of those who deviated from the rest of the Jewish public by “unloading the yoke of mitzvot and thus are not included as part of the totality of Israel . . . and so are apostates and informers for whom one does not mourn nor grief with the exception of their brothers and other relatives.”⁷⁷ Nothing in the halakhah is said, however, about burying them outside of the fence of the cemetery.

The halakhah does cite the case of the excommunicated, for whom “one leaves a stone on his coffin” as a token of contempt or a symbol of Skilah, death by stoning.⁷⁸ An annotation on excommunication and banishment asserts that “the religious court has the authority to be strict with the banished and decree that his sons should not be circumcised

and that he should not be buried once he died.”⁷⁹ As to the location of the burial place, there is a tradition “not to bury the wicked next to the righteous.”⁸⁰ “The dead while excommunicated, should be buried eight feet away,” and “the dead while banished, his coffin should be stoned.”⁸¹ *Encyclopedia Judaica* reports that apostates were buried in the corner of the cemetery.⁸²

The term “*Kevurat hamor*” actually appeared in warnings and writs of excommunication as a threat by the established community against persons deviating from the religious norms. *Pinkas vaad arba ha-aratsot* (The Annals of the Four-Country Association) reports on a warning of excommunication dating from 1676, which states that if the banishment was still in effect “when the person died, and he had not repented, one should not engage in burial preparations with a quorum, but should show great contempt and scorn and should stone his coffin.”⁸³ In an excommunication dated 1684 and executed in Amsterdam upon “bad and sinful people” who defamed the local Rabbi David, the writ warned: “No one should be within four feet of their person . . . nor should they be buried in a Jewish cemetery, their burial should be a donkey’s burial, and they should be like the refuse in the field.”⁸⁴ A more recent mention of a “donkey’s burial” in Haskalah is reported by Klausner to the effect that Solomon Maimon “was buried a donkey’s burial outside the fence” of the Jewish cemetery.⁸⁵

An insight into the burial society—the focal point of the novel—and its role throughout the generations in accordance with halakhic literature is published in a collection of source materials by Rabbi Joseph Hachohen Schwartz, *Hadrat kodesh* (Splendor of Holiness). The book contains letters by rabbinic authorities addressed to the author, citing additional burial society customs. They portray the character and authority of Hevra kadisha as viewed authentically from within the traditional Jewish circles. A report dated 1931 relates that the members of the Hevra kadisha were authorized to keep an eye on the living, supposedly in order to know how to treat them upon their death. The burial society was authorized to warn the living, to try them in a religious court and to execute punishment, and even to record the matter in the “burial society book.”⁸⁶ Several sources report on various practices of “punishing” the dead for the purpose of penitence (such as in *Sefer yehara de-shakhvei* [The Book of the Beloved Dead]).⁸⁷ Similar reports most probably were known to the maskilim and surely have not engendered any positive attitude toward the Hevra kadisha. This, of course, explains the negative portrayal of this benevolent society in Smolenskin’s novel.

The religious feast, which stands in the center of the novel *Kevurat hamor*, is also reported in the literature.⁸⁸

Reality as Viewed by Smolenskin

[160] The total reality in *Kevurat hamor* is saturated with the existence of ghosts and demons. There is a strong belief in the evil actions of spirits. Death and burial are everyday occurrences in this actuality.⁸⁹ The literary fabric created by Smolenskin is satiric and the tone is mocking, which winks to the enlightened reader and hints at the maskilic legend for the proper reading of the novel.

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This reality is characterized belletristically by selecting the Hevra kadisha as the focal point around which Jewish life centers. The total mentality, *weltanschauung*, and the world of imagery constitute a macabre, demonic, and ghostly world. Death fills the totality of life. For example, the lustful, greedy materialism of members of the so-called holy society, which is not that holy, and the much ado about stealing cookies, creates exaggerated, distorted dimensions of reality. The satiric goal of this technique is to portray the complete collapse of the Jewish value system.

The narrator intensifies this perception of reality by an exaggerated use of the term “Kevurat hamor”—which is uttered repeatedly by many characters in the novel. This expression becomes a sacredly profane slogan that reigns supreme in the life of all the members of the sacred society, the Hevra kadisha, the clerics and the religious ministrants, and all the on-looking idlers joining them. Everyone threatens to bury everyone else in a donkey’s burial. The expression itself is repeated dozens of times throughout the novel.⁹⁰ In one instance, the narrator attempts to explain to the reader, tongue in cheek, the meaning of the expression lest the reader think that a “donkey’s burial” means they bury people with donkeys, or that they have prepared a cemetery for donkeys.⁹¹

According to this almost existential attitude toward the concept of “Kevurat hamor,” even Yaakov-Hayim wishes to take revenge on his enemies by giving them “a donkey’s burial.”⁹² Of course, there is a dramatic irony here because his own fate is foreshadowed in it.

Other linguistic usages also enhance the atmosphere of death throughout the novel. Most of the characters are fearful of death (as is Zevulun, the “melamed,” for example [70, 72]). The narrator weaves into the text many expressions that are indicative of the macabre, hellish fabric of Jewish existence. He employs imagery taken from the ghostly world even without any connection to the subject of the dead or to depicting the burial society. For example, Zevulun’s wife is depicted as someone “whose mouth is open as an open grave” (65); the Jew, in general, is described as someone “who opens his mouth like hell [abyss,

grave] and stuffs himself with food" (69); describing the women's section of the synagogue, the narrator tells us that there "was a grave's darkness there" (74). On another occasion, the protagonist tempts the melamed, Zevulun, to taste from stolen cookies, saying, "do not be afraid, there is no poison [*sam mavet*, deadly drug] in it" (71). In another instance the narrator describes the melamed: "his face was like the face of the dead" (84).

Using these linguistic techniques, the narrator permeates the described reality with demonic and ghostly elements and thus authentically re-creates the "spiritual" world of his protagonists.

Moreover, the early chapters are saturated with many expressions denoting death. The list includes such words and expressions as Sheol [hell], grave, demons, evil spirits, destroying angels, the angel in charge of hell, pangs of hell, specters dwelling in grave, dead, netherworld, and the angel "Dumah." The titles of chapters, too, serve a similar purpose: for example, chapter 3 is entitled "The Harmful Demons and the Destroying Angels" (64).

The primary strength of the novel—which corresponds to Smolenskin's artistic achievement as an author—lies in the application of a maskilic anecdote to the depiction of a social and cultural constellation of Jewish life, which he endeavors to condemn. Even though Smolenskin attempted to distance himself from early Haskalah, he remained indebted to it and in some ways followed in its footsteps.

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Notes

This article is based on a paper that was originally presented in Hebrew at the International Inter-Disciplinary Conference on Peretz Smolenskin on the 150th Anniversary of His Birth, which was held at the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies in the summer of 1991. The paper was published in *Dappim le-mekar be-sifrut* 10 [1996].

1 In 1969, the Israeli critic Menahem Brown made the intriguing suggestion that Peretz Smolenskin's *Kevurat hamor* (A Donkey's Burial) should be read as poetry "for all intents and purposes." One may question the validity of his suggestion if it is to be

accepted at face value. As to the originality of the idea, it was Jacob Fichman who had considered this novel "great poetry," although he possibly used the term in its Germanic meaning; see his "Smolenskin ha-mesaper," *Moznayim* 13, nos. 1–6 (1940–41):

- 273–79, esp. 273. See also Menahem Brown, “Sheloshah mumhim la-davar,” *Yediot aharonot*, Literary Supplement (Feb. 7, 1969), 21, and his article “Sifrut le-sofrim,” *La-merhav* (Jan. 17, 1969).
- 2 Since the early 1970s, several studies have been published on Smolenskin. See, for example, David Weinfeld, “Ha-mesaper bi-ytsirato shel Peretz Smolenskin,” *Sefer ha-yovel le-Shimeon Halkin* (Jerusalem, 1975), 503–32; Weinfeld, “Deotav shel Peretz Smolenskin Be-inyenei sifrut,” *Peles* (Tel Aviv, 1980), 87–104; and Weinfeld, “‘Ha-toeh be-darkhei ha-hayim’ (helek D) Le-Peretz Smolenskin ke-roman epistolary,” *Mehkerei Yerushalayim be-sifrut ivrit* 5 (1984): 95–120. See also Yair Mazor, “Traces of the Enlightenment Hebrew Novel: Between Dickens and Smolenskin,” *Hebrew Studies* 25 (1984): 90–103, and Mazor, *Haskalah be-sum sekhel* (Tel Aviv, 1986), 82–95. Previously Mazor wrote a dissertation, “Panim u-megamot ba-poetikah shel ha-mivneh ba-siporet ha-ivrit ha-‘realistit’ bi-tekfut ha-haskalah: Iyunim be-ekronot ha-mivneh” (Tel Aviv University, 1981), which discussed various aspects of Smolenskin’s literary art. I have not seen Rivka Maoz’s dissertation on Smolenskin submitted at Oxford University, but she also wrote a paper on Smolenskin the editor as a novelist, “Peretz Smolenskin ha-orekh ke-romanistan: Tekst, kontekst ve-intertekstualiyut,” *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1980), 81–88.
 - 3 David Frischman, *Kol kitvei David Frischman*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Warsaw, 1938), 12.
 - 4 Shmuel Loeb Zitron, “Al Israel ve-al sifrut,” *Otsar ha-sifrut* 2 (1888): 299–352, esp. 344–45. See also his *Mapu u-Smolenskin ve-sipurehem, ma-amar bikoret* (Kraków, 1888), 46–47, which is identical to the previous article.
 - 5 Mordechai ben Hillel Hacohen, *Me-erev ad erev*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Vilna, 1923), 138, 141.
 - 6 Shalom Streit, “Peretz Smolenskin,” *Maabarot* 2, nos. 10–11 (1920): 382–88, esp. 386.
 - 7 Shalom Streit, *Ba-alot ha-shahar* (Tel Aviv, 1927), 83.
 - 8 F. Lahover, *Toldot ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadashah*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1963), 233.
 - 9 Joseph Klausner, *Historyah shel ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadashah*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem, 1955), 198.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, 202.
 - 11 Fichman, “Smolenskin ha-mesaper,” 275.
 - 12 Z. Shneur, “Peretz Smolenskin bi-Shklov,” *Tav shin gimel, Davar*, Annual Supplement (1943–44): 71–82, esp. 79. Published also in *Bitsaron*, Peretz Smolenskin Issue, Adar 1–2 (1943).
 - 13 Avraham Shaanan, “Mirdo shel Peretz Smolenskin,” *Orlogin* 6 (August 1952), 83–87, esp. 85.
 - 14 Avraham Shaanan, *Ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadashah li-zrameah*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1962), 58.
 - 15 David Patterson, *The Hebrew Novel* (Edinburgh, 1964), 244: “The story is based in a real episode which occurred in Yaneve near

- Kovno where Smolenskin spent some time. Mr S. Goldsmith of London affirms that the grave of the victim was pointed out to him by local residents. It lay outside the boundary of the cemetery.”
- 16 Peretz Smolenskin, *Kevurat hamor*, ed. and intro. David Weinfeld (Jerusalem, 1968), 7–37, esp. 25–27.
- 17 See M. Kamionski, “Smolenskin ve-*ha-shahar*,” *Ha-shiloah* 32 (1915–17): 140–44, esp. 140.
- 18 Weinfeld’s introduction to Smolenskin, *Kevurat hamor* (1968), 26–27.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Shmuel Loeb Zitron, “Peretz ben Moshe Smolenskin (Mi-pinkas zikhronotai),” *Ahiasaf* 13 (1923): 173–92.
- 22 M. Kamionski, “Tohelet memushakhah,” *Ha-shahar* 5 (1874): 393–404.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 393–94.
- 24 [Peretz ben Moshe] Smolenski[n], *Mikhtevei Peretz ben Moshe Smolenski: Meah mikhtavim*, collected and edited by R. Brainin, vol. 8 of *Kol sifrei Smolenskin* (Vilna, 1901), letters 58–70 by Smolenskin to Kamionski. See also Kamionski’s memoirs, “Smolenskin ve-*ha-shahar*,” 140–44. See an obituary on Kamionski by Moshe Rosenblatt, “Moshe Kamionski Z.L.,” *Ha-doar* 6, no. 21 (1926).
- 25 [Peretz ben Moshe] Smolenski[n], *Ha-toeh be-darkhei ha-hayim*, in *Kol sifrei Peretz ben Moshe Smolenski*, vol. 1 (Vilna, 1901), 121, chap. 9: “Ha-hotet” in the city of Maafelyah!
- 26 Kamionski, “Tohelet memushakhah,” 393–404, esp. 394n.
- 27 [Peretz ben Moshe] Smolenski[n], *Nekam brit*, in *Kol sifrei Peretz ben Moshe Smolenski*, vol. 5 (Vilna, 1901), title page.
- 28 Abraham Gottlober, “Kol rinah vi-yshuah,” *Ha-shahar* 6 (1875): 157–69, 190–206, 254–70, esp. 157, 164.
- 29 Smolenskin, *Kevurat hamor* (1968), 26; David Weinfeld, *Omanut ha-roman shel Peretz Smolenskin* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1975), 316–20.
- 30 Moshe Leib ben Zvi Lilienblum, *Kehal refaim* (Odessa, 1870), 18, 19–20.
- 31 Weinfeld, *Omanut ha-roman shel Peretz Smolenskin*, 314–16.
- 32 Smolenskin, *Kevurat hamor* (1968), 102; Peretz ben Moshe Smolenski[n], *Kevurat hamor o mi-dehi el dehi*, in *Kol sifrei Peretz ben Moshe Smolenski*, vol. 4 (Vilna, 1901), 75.
- 33 Smolenskin, *Keurat hamor* (1968), 94; *Kevurat hamor* (1901), 66.
- 34 Or, despite the opposition of R. Wolf and his friend Joel Brill—based on Isaiah 3:8.
- 35 Eliezer Rosenthal, *Yodea sefer*, vol. 2 of M. Roest, ed., *Catalog der Hebraica und Judaica aus der L. Rosenthal’schen Bibliothek* (Amsterdam, 1966 [orig. ed. 1875]), 176. Simon Bernfeld tells the same story based on the same source in *Dor tahapukhot*, vol. 1 (Warsaw, 1914), 92–93.
- 36 The story of the fish that called “Shema Yisrael” was repeated several times in the literature of Haskalah, such as Isaac Erter’s

story "Gilgul nefesh" in *Ha-tsofeh le-vet Yisrael* (Vienna, 1858). See Moshe Pelli, "Mi-shitot ha-sipur shel Erter ba-satirah 'Gilgul nefesh,'" *Bikoret u-farshanut* 11–12 (1978): 121–39, esp. 126. An updated, revised version of this article appeared in *Ha-doar* 76, nos. 8–10 (February–March 1997).

- 37 Erter, "Gilgul nefesh," 27. See more about it in Moshe Pelli, *Moshe Mendelssohn: Bekhavlei masoret* (Tel Aviv, 1972), 48–52, and Pelli, *The Age of Haskalah* (Leiden, 1979), 207–11. More recently, Moshe Samet has summarized in detail the burial controversy in his comprehensive study "Halanat ha-metim[,] le-toldot ha-pulmus al keviat zman ha-mavet," *Asufot* 3 (1989): 413–65, where he reviews its historical and halakhic development and cites the wide range of literature on the topic. The subject of presumed death and the danger of premature burial of a living person continued to occupy the attention of Hebrew writers until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1889 Elazar David Finkel translated a book on the topic and published it under the title *Metsarei sheol* (Warsaw, 1889). In it he advocates a delayed burial and cites from the professional literature horrible stories of people being buried alive, reminiscent of the literature earlier in the controversy. The book discusses the value of life and the signs of actual death. News of premature burial or of last-minute rescue from burial

continued to appear in the twentieth century. See, for example, the daily *Ha-doar*, April 6, 1922, where a news item displayed prominently on the first page, "Resurrection of the Dead in the Mortuary," tells the story of a person presumed dead who came back to life.

- 38 Erter, "Gilgul nefesh," 27. See also Pelli, "Mi-shitot ha-sipur shel Erter," 124–25. There is some affinity between the first anecdote and Erter's story: both use the expression *malbush nochri* (a foreigner's dress) in connection with the dead. It should be noted that the motif of the dead appearing to the living, to do harm or good, is found in folklore and has been recorded in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1956), E200, E300. Thompson also documented a folktale in which living people pretend to be ghosts in order to scare others (vol. 4 [1957], K1833).
- 39 Erter, "Gilgul nefesh," 26.
- 40 Mordechai Aaron Gunzburg, *Aviezer* (Tel Aviv, 1967 [orig. 1864]), 129–30.
- 41 Smolenskin, *Mikhtevei*, letters 38–54, 76–92. In letter 52 Smolenskin praises Brandstadter for his story "Ha-niflaot."
- 42 Mordechai David Brandstadter, "Mordechai Kizowitz," *Ha-shahar* 1, no. 7 (1869): 17–31.
- 43 Mordechai David Brandstadter, "Mordechai Kizowitz," in *Kol sipurei M. D. Brandstadter*, vol. 1 (Kraków, 1895 [facsimile ed., Tel Aviv, 1968]), 1–24, esp. 16.

- 44 Mordechai David Brandstadter, "Ha-niflaot me-ir Zidichuvka," *Ha-shahar* 3 (1872): 385–405.
- 45 Mordechai David Brandstadter, "Ha-niflaot me-ir Zidichuvka," in *Kol sipurei M. D. Brandstadter*, 41–69, esp. 57. See Moshe Pelli, "Darko ha-sipurit shel M. D. Brandstadter be-'Mordechai Kizowitz,'" *Bitsaron* 67, no. 320 (1976): 28–30. Perhaps an indication of some similarity between the two works in question is an expression that appears in the story "Ha-niflaot" that repeats itself a few times in *Kevurat hamor*. Brandstadter has his protagonist say the phrase "asher lo niheyta kamohu *mi-yom hivasdah arets*" ("which has never happened since the creation of the world"; my emphasis); see *Kevurat hamor* (1968), 50, 64.
- 46 Brandstadter, "Ha-niflaot me-ir Zidichuvka," in *Kol sipurei M. D. Brandstadter*, 1: 68.
- 47 Mordechai David Brandstadter, *Sipurim*, ed. and intro. Ben-Ami Feingold, (Jerusalem, 1974), 9.
- 48 Smolenskin, *Mikhtevei*, letter 50: 88.
- 49 *Ibid.*, letter 52: 90.
- 50 *Ibid.*, letter 39: 76.
- 51 See Moshe Pelli, "Kolot she-lo me-alma ha-den[:] Iyun be-Kol mehatsetsim le-Tuviah Feder besidrat sugyot be-sihot ha-metim be-sifrut ha-haskalah ha-ivrit," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983): 1–15, esp. 13.
- 52 Smolenskin, *Mikhtevei*, letter 42: 79.
- 53 *Ibid.*, letter 48: 84–85. The letter later indicates that he referred to the story "Dr. Yoseph Alfasi" in *Kol hitvei M. D. Brandstadter*, vol. 2 (Warsaw, 1910), 53–86. Ben-Ami Feingold quotes parts of this letter as indicative of a misunderstanding that occurred between them, and as a protest by Smolenskin against Brandstadter's alleged tendency to imitate his literary style (see Brandstadter, *Sipurim*, 9).
- 54 Smolenskin, *Mikhtevei*, letter 50: 87–88.
- 55 Brandstadter, "Ha-niflaot me-ir Zidichuvka," *Kol sipurei M. D. Brandstadter*, 1: 46; Brandstadter, *Sipurim*, 90.
- 56 Smolenskin, *Mikhtevei*, letter 51: 89.
- 57 Mordechai David Brandstadter, "Me-hayil el hayil umi-dehi el dehi," *Ha-shahar* 9 (1878): 374–84, 431–39, 477–86, 548–58, 592–604, 643–55.
- 58 Smolenskin, *Ha-toeh be-darkhei ha-hayim*, 183.
- 59 Gottlober, "Kol rinah vi-yshuah," 165.
- 60 See, for example, Juda Löw Mieses, *Kineat ha-emet* (Vienna, 1828).
- 61 His identity according to Saul Chajes, *Otsar beduyei ha-shem* (Vienna, 1933), 122.
- 62 He quotes from Maimonides, for example: "For all these beliefs are fallacious and are based on falsehood, and only the fools and ignorant will believe in them" (Z.H.L., "Ha-nistarot vehaniglot," *Ha-shahar* 2 [1871]: 177–84, esp. 181).
- 63 Yaakov Zvi Shperling, "Ba-hatsar mavet," *Ha-shahar* 2 (1871): 317–20.
- 64 Daniel Ish-Hamudot [A. S. Liebermann], "Hazut ha-kol,"

- Ha-shahar* 6 (1875): 45–57, 105–19, 145–52. It was also published as a separate book, with the same title, in Vienna in 1875. For the author’s identity, see Chajes, *Otsar beduyei ha-shem*, 100.
- 65 Ish-Hamudot, “Hazut ha-kol,” 49–50.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 111–12.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 151. See also Dan Omer, *Daniel Ish Hamudot* (Tel Aviv, [1980?]), 60–61.
- 69 Gottlober, “Kol rinah vi-yshuah,” 191–92.
- 70 See David Patterson, “Ha-hayim veva-mavet ba-roman ha-ivri shebi-tekufat ha-haskalah,” *Ha-Kongres ha-olami ha-shlishi le-madaei ha-yahadut* (Jerusalem, 1961), xviii–xviii/2. See also Patterson, *A Phoenix in Fetters* (Savage, Maryland, 1988), 44–52.
- 71 Reuven Asher Braudes, “Olah mi-ben ha-kevarim,” *Ha-eshkol* 1 (1898): 95–100, esp. 95.
- 72 Smolenskin, *Kevurat hamor* (1968), 96.
- 73 Judah David Eisenstein, *Otsar Yisrael*, vol. 9 (New York, 1952), 90–95, esp. 90.
- 74 *Baba Batra*, 101b.
- 75 *The Hebrew Encyclopedia*, vol. 29 (Jerusalem, 1977), 56–69, esp. 66.
- 76 Avraham Even-Shoshan, *Ha-milon he-hadash*, vol. 6 (Jerusalem, 1969), 2275; Eisenstein, *Otsar Yisrael*, 93.
- 77 *Shulhan arukh, Yoreh deah* (1956), Siman 345: 290a.
- 78 *Ibid.*, Siman 333: 281a-b.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 80 Hayim Hizkiyah Medini, *Sdei Hemed*, vol. 3 (Brooklyn, 1959), 747a.
- 81 Aharon Berechiah ben Moshe, *Sefer maavar Yabok* (Lemberg, 1867), 104b.
- 82 *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem, 1971), 275.
- 83 Israel Halperin, *Pinkas vaad arba ha-aratsot* (Jerusalem, 1945), 149, #352.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 196, #416.
- 85 Klausner, *Historyah shel ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadashah*, 1: 101.
- 86 Joseph Hacohen Schwartz, *Hadrat kodesh* (Oradea [Romania], 1931), (16) [pagination inaccurate; parentheses used in the original].
- 87 *S[efer] yekara de-shakhvei le-hevrat gomlei hasadim* ([Baghdad?], [192?]), 17, 20, 21.
- 88 *Takanot me-hevra kadisha gemilut hasadim de-veit ha-kneset ha-gedolah be-London* (London, 1810), item 37; Schwartz, *Hadrat kodesh*, 13a.
- 89 It is a reality that was to be depicted a few years later in a sensitive way, albeit differently, by Mordechai Zeev Feierberg as a Jewish world saturated with blood and sorrow (see, e.g., “Ba-erev” and “Zelalim” in *Ketavim* [Tel Aviv, 1964]). Obviously, Feierberg’s literary fabric is different from Smolenskin’s.
- 90 In chapters I to X (which I checked thoroughly for this particular use), the expression “Kevurat hamor” appears at least 21 times.
- 91 “Do not be scared, oh reader, when you hear that they bury people in donkeys’ burial places, neither should you think that they prepare a cemetery, an eternal resting place, for donkeys, for it is not like this at all! The sinners are not placed

among donkeys. Except that they will not wash them, will not dress them with shrouds, will not carry them on their shoulders, and will not dig a grave for them near their brethren's graves. Instead, they put them in sack while their clothes are on them, and carry them by carriage and bury them near the cemetery fence on the

outside. And this will be an eternal shame on all the family, never to be erased" (*Kevurat hamor* [1968], 78; *Kevurat hamor* [1901], 47).

92 *Kevurat hamor* (1968), 96; *Kevurat hamor* (1901), 68. Hereafter, the citations in parentheses in the text are from the 1968 edition.

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*Moshe
Pelli*



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