

MOSHE PELLI

Literature of Haskalah in the Late 18th Century¹

Hebrew Haskalah marks a turning point in the history of the Jewish people, its culture and letters in modern times. It began in Germany in the 1780s, as a group of ambitious young Hebrew writers in Berlin and in Königsberg undertook a new and daring mission: they aspired to revive the Jewish people by reviving the Hebrew language and Jewish culture.

As part of their plan, they began to publish a modern, up-to-date monthly journal in the Hebrew language named *Hame'asef* (Der Sammler). The periodical, which was published from 1783 to 1797 and from 1808 to 1811, was more than a literary journal patterned after contemporary German literary publications such as *Berlinische Monatsschrift* and *Magazin für die Deutsche Sprache*.² The journal became the ideological mouthpiece of a literary and cultural movement that began a concerted effort to affect a cultural revolution among Jews in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. It also served as an organ that published the literary works produced by its circle of writers. Through their literary endeavor, these writers ushered in the modern times in Jewish history and started the modern trends in Hebrew letters.³

From a historical perspective, Haskalah can be said to have emerged on the European scene as a reaction to both external and internal forces. Undoubtedly, it was a Jewish response to the new spirit generated by the European Enlightenment, yet it was certainly also an answer to a pressing need within the Jewish society for change.

¹ This article is an overview of important trends in early German Haskalah literature. It is based on a lecture given at the Einstein Forum at the University of Potsdam on May 4, 2000, co-sponsored by the Moses Mendelssohn Zentrum für europäisch-jüdische Studien at the University of Potsdam, where I was a Fellow in May 2000. The lecture presents a summary of conclusions I reached in my book *Sugot Vesugyot Besifrut Hahaskalah Haivrit* [Kinds of Genre in Haskalah Literature: Types and Topics] (Israel, 1999) [Hebrew].

² *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (1783-), *Magazin für die Deutsche Sprache* (1783-) and *Der Deutsche Merkur* (1782-).

³ I discuss this Hebrew periodical in an article, "*Hame'asef*: Michtav Hadash Asher Aden Beyamenu Lo Hayah" [*Hame'asef*: A New Publication Never Published Before], to be published in *Hebrew Studies* in 2000. It is part of the introduction to my forthcoming book *The Me'asef Index* (see note 26 below). On the subject of modernism in Haskalah, see my articles, "Criteria of Modernism in Early Hebrew Haskalah Literature," *Jewish Education and Learning*, Glenda Abramson, Tudor Parfitt, ed., published in honour of Dr. David Patterson (Switzerland, 1994), pp. 142-129, and "When did Haskalah Begin? Establishing the Beginning of Haskalah Literature and the Definition of 'Modernism'," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, XLIV (1999), pp. 55-96.

Revival of Hebrew Language

The first undertaking of the Maskilim – the exponents of Haskalah – was to revive the Hebrew language. In no other realm of their Enlightenment enterprise did the Maskilim face as difficult a task as in the area of language. They had to cope with the existing classical structures, forms and idioms of historical Hebrew that have been used continuously prior to the period of Enlightenment – in rabbinical responsa and halachic writings, in philosophical, historical and grammatical treatises, as well as in *belles lettres*.

The Maskilim's determination to revive the Hebrew language was prompted, among other things, by the general inclination of the *Aufklärung* to resort to the national language – German – in scholarly and literary periodicals and to eliminate the use of Latin. Following this trend of the *Aufklärung*, the Maskilim affirmed their interest in their own national language – Hebrew – and expressed a strong pride in it and in its aesthetic and innate qualities. Their mentor and guide, Moses Mendelssohn, elucidated on the beauty of Hebrew poetry in the Bible in his 'Be'ur' – the translation of and the commentary to the Pentateuch. In it, he stated his intention to "show that as the heavens are higher than earth so is the exalted state of religious poetry [in the Bible] over secular poetry..." "Religious poetry [of the Bible] has an advantage and a tremendous value [מעלה עצומה] in splendor and beauty over any other poetry," he wrote.⁴

Mendelssohn and Naphtali Herz Wessely, another seminal Maskil who shared similar views, followed Herder's dictum about the divine origin of Hebrew language and poetry.⁵ They further emphasized a strong belief in the potential of biblical Hebrew to be used for modern purposes. Thus, their followers – the young Maskilim – took it upon themselves to explore the modern linguistic capabilities inherent in that ancient language, which they still referred to by its traditional term "לשון הקודש" – the holy tongue.⁶

In keeping with the prevailing notion that language is "the mirror of the soul" (as postulated by Leibniz and others)⁷ and that language affects thought and morality, the Maskilim rejected Yiddish, which they considered to be a "corrupted language" (when compared to German). Instead, they preferred either the "purity" of German – not Yiddish – for their vernacular, or the

⁴ "Sepher Shmot" [Exodus], *Sepher Netivot Hashalom* (Berlin, 1783), p. 62b [Hebrew].

⁵ Joh. Gottfried Herder, *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, II (Gotha, 1890), S. 24. See Pelli, "On the Role of *Melitzah* [Euphuism] in the Literature of Hebrew Enlightenment," chapter 4 in *Hebrew in Ashkenaz [-] Language in Exile* (New York and Oxford, 1993), Ed., Lewis Glinert, pp. 99-110. I submitted an article on the poetry in *Hame'asef* and the Maskilim's perception of language and poetry to *Dapim Lemehkar Besifrut*, to be published in vol. 12 (2000).

⁶ See *The Age of Haskalah* (Leiden, 1979), chapter 4, and an article on the revival of Hebrew in Haskalah, "The Revival of Hebrew Began in Haskalah: *Hame'asef*, the First Hebrew Periodical as a Vehicle for the Renewal of the Language," *Leshonenu La'am*, 50, 2 (1999), pp. 59-75 [Hebrew].

⁷ See E. A. Blackall, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language 1700-1775* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 4-5. See also in note 2, the English proverb: "speech is the picture of the mind."

revived form of Hebrew as a literary medium of expression. Wessely, the poet laureate and linguist of Haskalah, asked the following question in his treatise on educational reform: "Why is the holy tongue used for matters of faith and Torah [the five books of Moses], and the German language used for discourse with other people and for secular studies?"⁸

Indeed, the natural inclination of these young writers was to use biblical Hebrew, which they considered the pinnacle of linguistic purity. They rejected the contemporary rabbinical idiom because of its careless use of grammar, and mixture of various layers of Hebrew with Aramaic.⁹ They could muster the biblical idiom in sublime poetry and in exalted biblical epics. However, biblical Hebrew lacked the vocabulary and linguistics forms adequate for philosophical or grammatical treatises, let alone contemporary issues and modern ideas in secular subjects such as education, history, and the sciences. For how would they say in biblical Hebrew "The proper study of mankind is man" – this phrase by Alexander Pope that became the motto of the century?¹⁰

Trained in the medieval works of Jewish philosophy and theology (as autodidacts, to be sure), the Maskilim's solution was to turn to medieval Hebrew for their non-belletristic writings. And indeed, Isaac Euchel, a student of Immanuel Kant and an editor of *Hame'asef*, was able to render Pope's adage in his then modern Hebrew, using in medieval Hebrew: "יסוד כחאנוח", that is: The essence of the probe of man is man.¹¹

Linguistic Expansion

The literary and linguistic works of these Maskilim represent the first major effort in modern times to search for ways to expand the Hebrew language in order to encompass all facets of modern Jewish life. Their experiments with the revised Hebrew language facilitated its revival as a practical language for use in secular subjects, in mundane matters, and in scientific disciplines. It was a long process that transformed this literary language eventually into a vernacular.

However, at this point we note an ambivalent attitude toward the Hebrew language. On the one hand, the Maskilim still refer to Hebrew, as mentioned above, as 'Leshon Hakodesh' – the holy tongue; they hold a mystical concept

⁸ N. H. Wessely, *Divrei Shalom Ve'emet* [Words of Peace and Truth] (Berlin, 1782), pp. 13a-b [Hebrew].

⁹ See Pelli, "On the Role of *Melitzah* [Euphuism] in the Literature of Hebrew Enlightenment," *Hebrew in Ashkenaz [-] Language in Exile*, pp. 99-110.

¹⁰ Alexander Pope, *An Essay of Man* (Dublin, 1764), p. 18 [Epistle II]. The original version in the first edition (as cited in a note, *ibid.*) reads: "The only science of Mankind is man." Cf. The seventh edition (London, 1736), Epistle II, of the original version: "Know then Thyself, presume not God to scan; The only Science of Mankind is *Man*."

¹¹ "Igroi Meshulam ben Uriyah Ha'eshtemo'i," *Hame'asef*, VI (1790), pp. 38-50, 80, 85, 171-176, 245-249; the quotation may be found on p. 176; A similar use of this saying occurs in Euchel's article on the burial of the dead controversy, *Hame'asef*, III (1786), p. 203: "חכליח" הקידה הצדק הניצ-הצדק (The purpose of the investigation, or probe, of man is man").

of it as endowed with unique traits and as carrying the innate values of the Hebrew *Geist* and Hebrew *Kultur*. On the other hand, they attempt to reduce the *sacred* aspect of the language to a secular one. This ambivalence between the sacred and the *secular* continued to haunt the Maskilim on a grand scale, and characterizes the tenets of early Haskalah.

Revival of Hebrew Literature: New and Renewed Literary Genres

Simultaneous with its effort to revive the Hebrew language, early Haskalah in Germany launched a major drive to revive Hebrew culture and Hebrew literature.

A major characteristic of Haskalah as a modern, up-to-date literature was manifested by its writers experimenting with a variety of new or revived literary genres. They constantly searched for new literary forms and modes of expression and found them in the classical Hebraic corpus and in the surrounding European literatures. It was a time of renewal and revival, a time of hope and aspiration, a time of new ideas, and innovations.

Current Views of Some Critics and Historians

Yet, when one reviews the attitude of some critics and literary historians toward Haskalah literature, one is impressed in general by their negative assessment of this literature. Historically speaking, many writers and critics of early 19th-century Haskalah were in effect praising the literary contributions of their predecessors. They held them in great esteem and they even republished selections from *Hame'asef*.¹² This trend changed in the late 19th-century, when Hebrew writers and literary critics, generally speaking, became quite critical of Haskalah. Rebelling against the old school of Haskalah, they were laboring to formulate a new trend and a new orientation of literature, and thus, as is customary, rejected the ways of the old guards.

One of their spokesmen, Mordechai Ehrenpreis, attempted to create a polarity between the earlier period of Haskalah literature and his contemporary Hebrew literature (known as *Hamahalach Hehadash* - the New Path). He expressed his views without any ambiguity, writing: "The literary work in which we are engaged now is not a *continuation* of the work of earlier generations from the Me'asfim [the writers of *Hame'asef*] on, but indeed the *beginning* of an entirely different undertaking which is new in its form and contents."¹³ Regrettably, it seems that several modern-day critics adopted this criticism of and general attitude toward Haskalah without examining its literature in depth.

¹² Selection from *Hame'asef* were published in *Bikurei Haitim*; a second edition of the first volume of *Hame'asef* was published in 1862 by M. H. Letteris.

¹³ Mordecai Ehrenpreis, "Le'an? [whither?]," *Hashilo'ah*, I (1897), pp. 489-503, especially p. 489. [Hebrew]. Republished in *Le'an?* (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 105-133, edited by Avner Holtzman.

In all fairness to these critics, it should be noted that some of the 'classical' criticism and literary history of Haskalah literature tended to dwell on tedious bibliographies and biographies of authors. Consequently, they did not pay enough attention to the merit of Haskalah as a literature. Some modern critics following them, then, and just rejected Haskalah as none literary or as not possessing lasting literary qualities. It should be noted, though, that several contemporary critics who specialize in Haskalah literature did explore that literature and showed its literary merits.

A study of the literary production of early Haskalah literature reveals two leading trends. The first is the trend of *continuity* in which Haskalah adopted inherently Judaic genres from the internal corpus of classical Hebrew letters. The second trend indicates the *innovative* nature of modern Hebrew literature that embraced external literary genres prevalent in 18th- and 19th-century European literatures. These two trends, however, are not mutually exclusive and there is a correlation between them. Thus, Haskalah was true to its early goals, namely, to combine the old and the new, and create a new symbiosis between Judaic civilization and Western culture.

Commenting on this issue of the old and the new – tradition and modernity – Joel Brill made an epigrammatic observation worth citing because it summarizes the view of the Maskilim on that issue. This Maskil, a grammarian and an editor of *Hame'asef*, wrote in 1789 in *Hame'asef*:

Do not cast your eye upon the glass whether it is new or old
Set your eye at the wine itself
For there is a new [glass] full of old
Yet also an old [glass], where there is no drink at all.¹⁴

Indeed, the Maskilim desired to examine the content of old vessels. "Probe their truth," proclaimed another Maskil, Isaac Satanow, following the tendencies of the Enlightenment and Deism.¹⁵

Neo-Classical Tradition

Let us examine briefly the neo-classical orientation of Haskalah. One of the most prolific writers of Haskalah, Isaac Satanow (1732-1804), whose quotation was just cited, undertook the task of reviving some existing genres in classical Hebrew literature presenting them with a modern slant. In one of his literary endeavors, he selected the genre of biblical wisdom writing as a model, and patterned a series of books of proverbs entitled *Mishlei Asaf* (Proverbs of Asaf; published: 1789-1802) on this classical form. Certainly, the adoption of biblical style attested to the Haskalah's desire to return to biblical Hebrew and to develop a new Hebrew style based on it.

¹⁴ J. Brill, "Al Na Bakos" [Don't Look at the Cup] *Hame'asef*, V (1789), p. 1 [Hebrew]; it is based on Avot, 4: 20.

¹⁵ *Mishlei Asaf*, I (Berlin, 1789), p. 60a [Hebrew]. See detailed discussion in my book *Bemaavkei Temurah* [Struggle for Change] (Tel Aviv, 1988), p. 125 [Hebrew].

Satanow selected this particular genre because of a number of reasons: first, the style of the proverbs is authoritative, addressing the reader directly in the imperative, calling him for action. This style is characterized by its succinct, condensed and definitive expression – very much like a slogan, which is easily remembered and easily repeated. As such, the proverb was very attractive to the Haskalah, serving its goals very well. This pseudo-biblical wisdom literature encompassed ideas, opinions, and general comments about life and life experiences, befitting the wise writer of Haskalah who wants to instruct his readers. The subject matters are often timeless, such as praising wisdom and condemning foolishness or wickedness; or, calling for improving one's conduct and manners, and advocating love of God, search for truth and pursuit of justice. Yet, many of these topics were stated in the context of Haskalah and did undergo a subtle and significant metamorphosis. For example: the biblical concept 'Hochmah' – wisdom – assumed the Enlightenment connotation of reason and common sense. "Search for Truth" was not necessarily search for the biblical divine Truth, but the universal truth of reason – human reason of the *Aufklärung*. Likewise, improving one's morality was advocated independent of a religious context.

To make his book more attractive, Satanow said that he had found an ancient text and attributed it to a Levite of yore, Asaf, thus the title – *The Proverbs of Asaf*. He, Satanow, just added his own commentaries below the text, he said, and published the book. In so doing, Satanow emulated the traditional façade of a canonical book, which has a venerated biblical text that is accompanied by a traditional commentary. He re-created the traditional two-tier structure of an 'ancient' text combined with a 'contemporary' commentary. This age-old practice in Jewish writing became a versatile literary device employed for the dissemination of the ideology of Haskalah.

Satanow's contemporaries did not appreciate his inventiveness, and called him 'a forger.' We, students of world literature, however, know many other such forgers who enriched world literature with similar artistic works....¹⁶

Religious Disputation: Satanow's Divrei Rivot

Satanow's creative energies knew no boundaries; he soared to the medieval period and gleaned from it the well-known historical Judeo-Christian religious disputations, known also as the polemics and apologetics.¹⁷ Before engaging in this new enterprise, Satanow published the classical work of Yehuda Halevi, the *Kuzari*, with his commentary.¹⁸ Written in 1140, the *Kuzari* is a polemic treatise composed as a philosophical dialogue mostly

¹⁶ Lessing published Reimarus' controversial fragments anonymously; d'Holebach published his *A Letter from Thrasybulus* saying that he had found it in a library. In Haskalah, Wolfsohn published his *Dialogue of the Dead* (see below) anonymously, as did David Caro in his *Brit Emet* [True Covenant] ([Dessau], 1820) [Hebrew].

¹⁷ I discuss the genre of religious disputation in detail in chapter 4 in my book *Sugot Vesugyot Besifrut Hahaskalah Haivrit*.

¹⁸ See *Bemaavkei Temurah*, pp.129-139.

between the king of the Khazar and a Jewish sage about the tenets of the true religion, the fundamentals of Judaism, and the attributes of God, leading eventually to the conversion of the king to Judaism. It is based on the historical conversion to Judaism of the Khazars in the 8th century.

It is interesting to note that Satanow used the genre quite differently from its initial intention. The medieval example is usually classified as a theological or philosophical treatise, and it did not have inherent literary or fictional orientation (although it did have literary forms). However, Satanow's adaptation was literary and fictional in nature, even though it was intended to serve also the non-literary, ideological goals of Haskalah in the Jewish and general social, cultural and educational spheres.

Satanow's fictional neo-religious disputation entitled *Divrei Rivot* (Words or Matters of Dispute; published around 1800), is a drama-of-ideas. The king summons the representatives of Christianity and leaders of the political establishment to discuss the Jewish faith and the social status of the Jews in his kingdom. The Bishop follows the classical arguments of the Church, attempting to show the supremacy of his religion and the low status of Judaism. A Jewish physician, speaking on behalf of normative Judaism, presents his religion as an enlightened religion, a religion befitting the Enlightenment.

Consequently, the king proclaims religious tolerance, freedom of speech, freedom of thought and freedom of religious practices throughout the land. He then proposes a plan to ameliorate the condition of the Jews by reforming Jewish education and making changes in the structure of the Jewish kehillah, the community, and in the institute of the rabbinate. These reforms in Jewish education were similar to the ones advocated by Naphtali Herz Wessely in his book *Divrei Shalom Ve'emet* (Words of Peace and Truth, published in 1782).

This renewed genre served to redefine Judaism in a fashion favorable to the Enlightenment, defending the Jewish faith from the assaults of Deism and Atheism. This piece is also considered as a utopia in which the Hebrew author presents his wishes for a better society – as a reality.¹⁹ Satanow's dialogue promotes the ideas and ideals of Hebrew Enlightenment.

Pseudo-Halachah: Saul Berlin's Besamim Rosh

Another neo-classical genre was introduced by Saul Berlin (1740-1794), a traditionalist rabbi, and a Maskil. I call this genre pseudo-Halachah. He attempted a daring, and to some, a deceitful endeavor by composing a new *Shulhan Aruch* (Jewish code of law). Saul Berlin published it in 1793 under the title *Besamim Rosh* (Incense of Spices). Using a pseudonym to conceal his involvement, Saul Berlin attributed this halachic book of responsa to the medieval authority on Halachah, Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel, of the 13th and 14th centuries, known by the acronym of ROSH. Berlin said that he only

¹⁹ I discuss the genre of Utopia in chapter 10 in my book *Sugot Vesugyot Besifrut Hahaskalah Haivrit*.

added his commentary to the manuscript that he had found in some old library. Actually, he also supplied the invented, or if you want falsified, rabbinical approbations.²⁰

The 'Incense of Spices' that Rabbi Saul Berlin concocted were very pungent; for the book advocated a new approach to Halachah and even hinted at religious reform. This book became the center of a controversy, and its author was excommunicated. Several contemporary rabbis proclaimed that the book was a forgery, as did many latter-day scholars. However, it is still to be proven that the whole book is a fraud. As a matter of fact, it was suggested that parts of it are indeed authentic.²¹

I, for one, regard this book as a *parody* on rabbinical writings and I treat it as such. I think that through this traditional genre, Saul Berlin ridiculed the casuistry – known in Hebrew as 'Pilpul' – of scholastic-like rabbinical learning, and delivered a scathing criticism on the abundance of religious restrictions, ordinances, and customs in Jewish life.

Saul Berlin had to pay dearly for his creativity – he lost his job as a rabbi and left for London where he committed suicide in 1794. However, Hebrew literature was given this literary gem in his memory....

This preoccupation with some of the old formats based on the heritage of past Jewish literature indicates that the Hebrew Maskilim did not desire a complete break with their tradition. Their plans for reviving Hebrew letters were founded, as mentioned earlier, on a synthesis of their own culture and European culture. However, in the eyes of their rabbinical adversaries, it was indeed a complete break from tradition, for which they were never forgiven.

Contemporary European Writings

As another means of bringing Hebrew literature up to date, writers of Hebrew Enlightenment have adopted contemporary European literary genres and modes. Three important genres were selected for our discussion.

The Epistolary Story:

Isaac Euchel's "Igrot Meshulam ben Uriyah Ha'eshtemo'i"

One of the major literary pundits and leaders of Haskalah was Isaac Euchel (1756-1804), a prolific writer and editor of *Hame'asef*. He was indeed a literary innovator and a bridge builder between cultures, and is credited for

²⁰ Saul Berlin's *Besamim Rosh* is discussed in my books *The Age of Haskalah*, chapter 9, and *Bemaavkei Temurah*, chapter 4.

²¹ Anecdotally, it may added that a few years ago, an abridged edition of this book was published in Mea Shearim, the ultra-Orthodox quarters in Jerusalem, with the approbation of no other than Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, former Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel and now the spiritual leader of the Shas party.

introducing a number of European literary genres to Haskalah literature. One of the genres was the epistolary story.

As is known, the epistolary genre in European literatures is found mostly in novels-in-letters. Suffice it to mention such authors who contributed to this genre as Samuel Richardson and his novels *Pamela* and *Clarrisa Harlowe*, Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, and Jean Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Following the general pattern of Montesquieu's well-known *Lettres Persanes*, Euchel published anonymously an original epistolary piece entitled "Igroṭ Meshulam ben Uriyah Ha'eshtemo'i" (The Letters of Meshulam Son of Uria of Eshtemo'a), which was printed serially in *Hame'asef* in 1790. It should be noted that non-fictional epistolary writings prevailed in Hebrew literature before the Haskalah and many such pieces were published in *Hame'asef*.²²

This is not only the first fictional epistolary story in modern Hebrew letters, but also one of the early modern satiric pieces, and in addition, it may also be considered as a utopia in its portrayal of an ideal picture of a Jewish society.

The story centers on a Jewish youth of 18, named Meshulam, who is sent by his father, Uriah, from Syria to Europe. The purpose of his trip is to learn "the customs of the people of these countries and their disposition," namely, to acquaint himself with Western culture. The story relates the interesting experience and encounters which Meshulam has had in Spain and in Italy. In Spain, he learns and experiences the clandestine observance of quasi-Judaism by the Marrano Jews, who underwent forced conversion to Christianity in order to save their lives. There, he is also exposed to the Christian way of worship, which is foreign to the 'middle eastern' young Jew.

In the heels of these encounters, Meshulam is asking some very painful questions, and thus he exposes his own doubts, as a Maskil, about the observance of traditional Judaism and the influence that Christianity has had on some Jewish practices. He asks one of the most important questions facing the Jews in the modern age: Is it possible for the Jew to be happy and wholesome [achieve perfection] without the observance of the religious commandments?²³ In other words, how would a Jew retain his identity as a Jew while attempting to adopt the non-religious aspects of European culture? This was one of the early expressions of doubt regarding this basic concept in Judaism.

This satiric piece, unfolding in the form of letters, is critical of the extreme position of traditional Judaism, presented by the zealot grandfather, in its customs and practices, way of life and *Weltanschauung*. The story presents

²² See the chapter on the epistolary story and additional reference to non-literary pieces published in *Hame'asef* and to secondary references in *Sugot Vesugyot Besifrut Hahaskalah Ha'ivrit*, p. 29.

²³ *Igroṭ Meshulam*, p. 44: "I did not know," Meshulam writes, "whether these things were truthful (correct), for according to my thinking the success (happiness) of the Israelites is in the observance of the *mitzvot* alone, and if it were possible to have wholesomeness and to be happy without the observance of the *mitzvot* would not Socrates the Greek and Zoroaster the Hindu have as much wholesomeness and be as happy as any Israelite? Let me know, my brother, your view in this investigation."

alternatives to the existing traditional form of Judaism, which at that time was the only way of Jewish worship.

In Italy, our protagonist, Meshulam, visits the Jewish community of Livorno and he is impressed by its traditional, yet modern, way of life. This segment of the story is considered to be utopian in nature, which is also one of the genres of European Enlightenment and Haskalah.

In this epistolary genre, typically, the writer is able to present authentically three different viewpoints concerning Judaism, written by three generations of Jews: the grandfather, father, and son, Yet, in a subtle way, the author alludes to the point-of-view that he espouses in order to present the ideas and ideals of Haskalah. Meshulam, his protagonist Maskil, has to find his own answers, his own way, and his own interpretation of Judaism.

Dialogues of the Dead: Aaron Wolfssohn's "Sihah Be'retz Haḥayim"

Another unique genre prevalent in the 18th century, which is rarely used today, was the Dialogues of the Dead. This popular genre was modeled on the classical tradition of the satiric Dialogues of the Dead, written by Lucian in the 2nd century. These early dialogues were translated into modern European languages and gained recognition and wide circulation. Consequently, hundreds of compositions bearing the marks of the Dialogues of the Dead have been published throughout Europe. Among the writers were Fénelon, Fontenelle, George Lyttleton, Henry Fielding, David Fassman, and Christoph Martin Wieland, who translated Lucian's pieces into German.

The genre possesses unique literary characteristics and employs its own poetic devices. The Dialogues of the Dead are based on the concept of bringing together great historical figures and contemporary personalities to discuss and debate timely issues. Its location in the afterlife makes the search for truth and the expression of truth ostensibly free of any 'worldly' bias. The dramatic confrontation made this genre very appealing to writers and readers alike.

Satiric Dialogues of the Dead were emulated by several Haskalah writers as part of an effort to introduce contemporary European literary forms and structures into the revived Hebrew literature.

The first Hebrew Dialogue of the Dead entitled "Sihah Be'erez Haḥayim" (Dialogue in the Land of the Living) was written in 1794 by Aaron Wolfssohn (1754-1835) and published in *Hame'asef*, which he edited at that time.²⁴ This is a satiric dialogue between the 12th-century philosopher and codifier Moses Maimonides, Moses Mendelssohn, who passed away in 1786, and a traditionalist Polish rabbi named "Rabbi Ploni" (Rabbi so-and-so). The topics that they discuss in the afterlife are no lofty matters, but are actually down-to-earth, contemporary issues of Haskalah. In effect, the 'shades,' as they were called, highlight timely controversies and disputes between the Maskilim and their traditionalist adversaries in this world.

²⁴ "Sihah Be'erez Haḥayim," *Hame'asef*, VII (1794-7), pp. 53-67, 120-153, 203-228, 279-298 [Hebrew].

The two major enterprises of the Berlin Haskalah are cited and discussed in the dialogues; they are: the 'Be'ur' – Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch into German, which the traditional circles – and the Polish rabbi here as well – disapproved of, and which the Maskilim embraced as the epitome of Jewish and Haskalah scholarship. They also debate Wessely's plan for educational reforms. And on all these major issues of Haskalah, Maimonides gives his seal of approval, thus rejecting the views of the traditionalist rabbi.

Other timely topics discussed in these dialogues include the tension between sacred and secular studies, superstition, observance of the mitzvot, and the authority of the rabbis. Wolfsohn 'recruited' the great medieval halachic authority, Maimonides, to support the ideology of modern-day Haskalah, and to criticize the rabbi, "Reb Ploni," for his superstitious customs and backward ideas. In this piece, Maimonides appears as a full-fledged Maskil.

The overall tenor of this Hebrew Dialogue of the Dead, in its satiric mode, is not of a dialogue that *relates* the two sides who talk with one another, but a dialogue that *separates* them. It conveys a sense of the abyss that existed between Haskalah and traditional circles.

The Fable: The Phenomena of the Fable in Hame'asef

Another genre, which was widespread in European literatures, was the fable. Hebrew Haskalah found the fable a suitable vehicle to express its ideas. In using the fable as one of its newly adopted genres, Haskalah not only followed the European trend at the time, but indeed the rich tradition of biblical, talmudic and medieval Hebrew fables. For example: Jotham fable in the Bible, or the *Fox Fables* (Mishlei Shu'alim) by Berachyah Hanakdan of the 12th or 13th centuries. Thus, the selection of the fable signals Haskalah's inclination to form a synthesis of both cultures, and to incorporate innovation with continuity of literary tradition, a trend we have seen in some other genres.

The Maskilim selected the fable also because of its unique literary qualities and its didactic nature. The fable united the two elements that have been considered to constitute good literature in the 18th century; namely, an attractive storytelling that results in enjoyment and entertainment, combined with the instruction in morality and the educational benefit that it brings to the reader. Writers of fables selected this genre as their medium of writing because of its universal message, its brevity, unity in structure, its aspiration to expose the truth, and to advocate the supremacy of morality.

It was the third most popular genre after poetry and the epigram in *Hame'asef*. In the Index of *Hame'asef*, which I have just completed and submitted for publication, I counted 55 fables, published in ten volumes of the Hebrew journal.²⁵

²⁵ *Sha'ar Lahaskalah* [The Gate to Haskalah], An Annotated Index to *Hame'asef*, the First Hebrew Journal, submitted for publication. The Index is an annotated, computerized index of

The Haskalah fable went through a similar transformation to the one that was noticed in the 18th-century European fable. The early French influence on German fabulists, especially La Fontaine's, is noted in Haskalah as well. The opposing concepts of the fable, presented in Germany by Gellert, Lessing, and others, emerged also on the pages of *Hame'asef*. Ostensibly, the aesthetics of the fable changed during the century from the ornate and poetic to the simple, brief, and straightforward in its form, structure, and language. The changes, occurring in German literature mostly under the influence of Lessing in his own change of the perception of the fable.²⁶

Like their European counterparts, Hebrew fabulists and writers such as Joel Brill, Isaac Euchel, Shalom Hacohen, and Judah Ben-Zeev, made an effort to define the genre and to elucidate their theories on the poetics of the Hebrew fable. Their efforts parallel similar discussions on the poetics of the fable in the writings of Dryden in England, and the works of Gottsched, Gellert, and Lessing, to cite a few, in Germany. Thus, the Hebrew Maskilim attested to their comprehensive approach to reviving Hebrew literature by defining various new genres which they now employed, and by setting their literary aesthetics and poetics.

In my previous works of the Haskalah fable I classified the fables published in *Hame'asef* into several categories. For example: Aesopian fables, narrative fables, parables, poetic fables and allegories. As in other cultures and literatures, many of these fables have been adapted from the classical fables of world literature. Importantly, those selected by the Maskilim for adaptation underwent a full 'conversion' into the Hebrew setting. First and foremost, they were written mostly in biblical Hebrew. In addition, the Hebrew fabulists added biblical moral lessons, some of them from the book of Proverbs, as Promythium and Epimythium, the explanatory title on the top and the summary and concluding moral at the bottom, respectively.

Some of the fables received a special Haskalah treatment for the purpose

the first modern Hebrew periodical with cross-references to items reprinted in *Bikurei Ha'itim* (1820-1831), the second Hebrew periodical, which was published in Vienna. This alphabetical author-and-subject index is a comprehensive list, covering all articles, poems, fables, stories, news, editorial comments, announcements, and subscriber lists included in all sections and departments of the journal as well as an index of the German supplements that were published under the title *Der Sammler*. In addition, the Index lists all covers of the volumes and quarterly binding jackets, motto pages, and portrait plates. The entries include concepts, events, institutions and organizations, leading personalities and authors, literary genres and book titles, Judaic and secular disciplines, and the like. Annotations were added to many entries, identifying authors, deciphering initials, and providing cross-references and some bibliographical references.

²⁶ A comprehensive discussion of the *Hame'asef* fable and its relation to the fable in the European Enlightenment may be found in the chapter on the fable in my book *Sugot Vesugyot Besifrut Hahaskalah Haivrit* and in the my articles on the fable, "The Phenomena of the Fable in *Hame'asef*," *Hado'ar*, XLIII (No. 17, July 8, 1994), pp. 19-22 [Hebrew]; "The Genre of the Fable in Hebrew Haskalah in Germany: Manifestations of the Fable in *Hame'asef*," *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, III (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 45-52 [Hebrew]; "These are the Fables of *Hame'asef*: The Way of the Modern Fable at the Early Hebrew Haskalah," *Hebrew Studies*, XL (1999), pp. 169-189 [Hebrew].

of serving the ideology of Haskalah. Three examples will demonstrate this point: the first fable, "The Northern Wind and the Sun," which is based on the Aesop fable, gets a maskilic orientation.²⁷ It may be recalled that the fable tells of the wind and the sun arguing which one will succeed in forcing the heavily clothed man to remove his overcoat and hat. As the wind blows bitterly, the man continues to hold to his overcoat and hat. However, upon the appearance of the warm and pleasant sun, the man removes the unneeded coat and hat....

This is a fable of rivalry between two forces of nature, extended to human context to be a rivalry between two ideologies trying to affect change. The moral of the story is that change comes through moderation; persuasion should not be 'bitterly cold' and forceful – but warm and pleasant. The 'sunlight' of Haskalah, likewise, should send its rays softly and warmly. This is a universal message, but it has definite maskilic overtones. Removing the hat was *not* part of the original Aesop fable. Its addition to the Hebrew fable is significant because of its religious implication.

Likewise is the fable "The Star, the Clouds and the Wind." A new star appeared in the sky; the clouds were envious of the bright phenomenon and attempted to cover it so that no one would look at it. However, the wind came and scattered the clouds away. The moral at the end of the fable says: "As in the case of the star so is the case of anything new under the sun; and whatever happened to the clouds will happen also to the zealots." Here the fabulist presents a universal message; however, it also has an immediate Haskalah context. It attempts to strengthen the enlightened Hebraists against all those who were opposed to innovations and to new ideas just because they were new.

In another fable, which I classified as a fabulous story – actually it is a narrative fable – we find the mouse warning his son of the cat. The young mouse cannot identify his enemy because the father has not shown him what a cat was. Twice he comes in fear to his father thinking erroneously that the horse and the bull are his enemies. After making that mistake twice, the son does not come to consult his father. Toward evening he comes back to his father, telling him that he met this meek, beautiful and 'holy' animal that looked "like a righteous man." And the son continues to describe his new friend: "Such meek and humble animal with black and white spots on its fur was walking humbly with me. I will treasure his friendship, and I could swear by god that he thinks only good about me. I wanted to speak to him, but I was afraid to approach this holy man." The son learns, much to his chagrin, that this meek, humble and righteous creature is no other than his fearful enemy the cat. The father warns his son: "Don't look at his

²⁷ *Hame'asef*, I (1784), pp. 101-102 [Hebrew]. The Aesop version is "The Northern Wind and the Sun." The fable is found also in the Hebrew tradition in *Mishlei Shu'alim Lerabbi Berachyah Hanakdan* [Fox Fables by Rabbi Berachyah Hanakdan (the grammarian)] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1947), p. 61; in the Berlin 1921 edition of *Mishlei Shualim*, the fable may be found on pp. 61-62. La Fontain adapted it as well.

appearance, for he is a hypocrite, and the evil scheme he contrives against you is concealed inside him." The moral of the story instructs the son – and the reader – to look deeply into the essence of things or people and not to be misled by their superficial appearance.

The repeated references to the enemy as 'righteous' and 'holy person' suggest terms related to religious persons, in our context, in rabbinical Judaism; and the young 'Maskil' is now warned to watch out for their alleged hypocrisy.

Many of these fables were reprinted in Jewish catechisms and Hebrew textbooks intended for school children, and thus these fables had wide circulation.

It should be noted that in addition to the genres discussed so far there were several other genres and types which were introduced and practiced during the Haskalah. For example: travelogues, utopia, satire, biography, and autobiography. Some of the Hebrew authors also wrote allegorical dramas, biblical dramas, and biblical epics.

To cite some of them briefly, in satire, Saul Berlin, mentioned earlier, also wrote a satiric masterpiece, *Ktav Yosher* (An Epistle of Righteousness; 1795). He penned it in defense of another Haskalah writer, Naphtali Hertz Wessely, who was engaged in a dispute with traditionalist rabbis concerning educational reforms expressed in his book *Divrei Shalom Ve'emet*, cited above. This satire contains some of the most bitter and critical remarks about contemporary Judaism and Jews.

Another European literary genre, the travelogue, served the Italian Maskil Shmuel Romanelli (1757-1814) in depicting Jewish society in Morocco in the 1780s in his *Masa B'arav* (Travail in an Arab Land; 1793).

It was Euchel who contributed to the modern biography in his book-length portrayal of Moses Mendelssohn. This genre, too, served the purpose of Haskalah as it promoted the figure of the "Jewish Socrates," as Mendelssohn was called. Other biographies of Jewish luminaries, such as Isaac Abravanel and Moses Maimonides, were published in *Hame'asef*, which also serialized Euchel's biography of Mendelssohn. These personalities were selected for a biographical sketch because their philosophy was thought to be identical to and supportive of Haskalah ideology. Their portrayal, too, served to exemplify the typology of an enlightened and open-minded spiritual or intellectual personality who, while being engaged in intellectual pursuits or statesmanship, is still loyal to Jewish tradition.

Another area of their creative endeavor was in poetry. These Hebrew Maskilim published many poems in *Hame'asef*; as a matter of fact, I counted 122 poems in the ten volumes of the journal. Some of the lyrical poems reflect the changes occurring in German literature: echoes of the *Sturm und Drang* movement are heard in some of these Hebrew poems with the powerful depiction of natural phenomena of thunder and lightning. Concurrently, the enlightenment concept of the 'Vast Chain of Being,' based on Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*, is given its Judaic and Hebraic interpretation based

on the Jewish concept of man being "the crown of creation."²⁸ Following Herder's expressed wish to see an epos written by a Hebrew poet on Moses and the Exodus,²⁹ and Klopstock's *Der Messias*, Wessely took it upon himself to write a biblical epic, *Shirei Tiferet* (Songs of Glory, in 1789), glorifying the biblical story and its protagonist. He wrote a modern epos with a traditional inclination. Some other Haskalah poets wrote original hymns and others adapted German hymns glorifying God in the spirit of the biblical book of Psalms.

The Hebrew novel is a phenomenon that was to appear only years later, in 1853, with the historical novel, *Ahavat Zion* (The Love of Zion), by Abraham Mapu. The short story, too, emerges in the second half of the 19th century, although I have found initial attempts earlier in *Hame'asef*.

Literature as A Mission

In their effort to revive Hebrew literature, the Maskilim assigned a unique role and mission to Hebrew literature as an educational medium. Literature was viewed by the Hebrew Maskilim, along the lines of literary aesthetics of European Enlightenment, as combining the good and the beneficial. Literary boundaries were extended beyond the sheer enhancing of the sense of beauty and aesthetic enjoyment. Paraphrasing the verse in Proverbs, a Hebrew Maskil summarized the aesthetics of Haskalah, saying: "Grace is deceptive, beauty is illusory, the good and the beneficial are to be praised."³⁰ It was literature's role to advocate the ideology of Haskalah and to promote its ideas. This was generally a didactic literature whose proponents endowed it with a mission: to educate and teach the Jewish people in order to ameliorate the social, political, and cultural status of the Jews in Europe.

The Maskilim were convinced that the only obstacle to achieve equal rights for their fellow-Jews was their failure to adjust to the European Enlightenment ideology which advocated cultural and social changes. Consequently, they made a concerted effort to introduce the ideology of Haskalah, promoting these changes via the medium of Hebrew literature in order to achieve their goal.

Hebrew Haskalah in Germany was short-lived. *Hame'asef* ceased publication in 1797, and resumed its appearance in 1808/9 only to shut down three years later. There had been great expectations upon its foundation in 1783, and a bitter desperation at its end. It was Euchel who in 1800 bemoaned the changing times in his florid style: "I have also tasted the dregs of the cup of reeling [the cup of poison], which came on the nation of Judea and its

²⁸ S - G, "Mizmor Letodah," *Hame'asef*, VI (1790), pp. 3-7 [Hebrew], where the idea of the 'Vast Chain of Being' is cited. See Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man," in *Eighteenth-Century English Literature*, ed., Geoffrey Tillotson, et al. (Fort Worth, 1969), pp. 635-651.

²⁹ Herder, *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, II, S. 52-53.

³⁰ *Hame'asef*, I (1783/4), p. 132 [Hebrew].

enlighteners. The days of love have passed, gone are the days of the covenant between me [or between it, namely the Hebrew language] and the children of Israel. They have run away, and they have gone!"³¹

However, even though this center of Hebrew in Germany disappeared, its phenomenon was emulated as other centers of Hebrew literature came into being in Eastern Europe, continuing its initial struggle for Haskalah.

³¹ Shalom Hacoheh, *Ktav Yosher* [An Epistle of Righteousness] (Wien, 1820), pp. 95-96 [Hebrew].