

*When Did Haskalah Begin? Establishing the Beginning of Haskalah Literature and the Definition of “Modernism”**

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When did modern Hebrew literature begin? Does its beginning coincide with the beginning of *Haskalah* literature? Is there a literary personality who signals the beginning of the new trends in modern Hebrew literature? These were some of the questions discussed by several literary historians in the early days of *Haskalah* historiography. For some time, such questions were frequently debated, but after a while, literary historians and critics apparently lost interest in them. The topic has recently been revisited by a few contemporary *Haskalah* scholars. The questions now being asked echo earlier themes, though more profound queries have emerged: What is “modern” in “modern Hebrew literature”, and how is “Hebrew modernism” defined?

The most significant trend in *Haskalah* historiography has highlighted the elements, which distinguish *Haskalah* literature from the corpus of traditional Hebrew literature through the ages. *Haskalah* was considered to be new, modern and different. Proponents of this notion designated *Haskalah* as the beginning of modern Hebrew literature, while endeavouring to identify a major writer or group of writers who, to them, signal the beginning of *Haskalah*. There was, however, another trend, the major spokesman of which was Dov Sadan (and perhaps also, to some extent, Shmuel Werses, as discussed below). Sadan did not emphasise the distinctions between bodies of literature. Instead, he established different outlooks, which group together various types of literature and form a different concept of periodisation. He considered *Haskalah* literature to be part of the corpus of Hebrew literature in its historical perspective, without paying attention to the criteria which characterised its modern or secular inclinations.

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The main assumption of most historians of Hebrew literature who have dealt with this topic was that the beginning of modern Hebrew literature also signals the beginning of modern Jewish history.¹ From the start, the discussion of *Haskalah* encompassed both historical and literary domains. Terms were flowing from one discipline to another, from the literary to the historical and vice versa. Consequently, the ensuing discussion will address issues in the domain of both disciplines, namely, establishing the beginning of *Haskalah* literature and attempting to probe modernism and its manifestations in the context of *Haskalah*. The combination of the two scholarly areas, however, may be problematic because of the different methodologies applied in each discipline. In spite of this risk, an interdisciplinary approach to *Haskalah* may be welcomed, with the understanding that it will not substitute for a historical or socio-historical treatment of the subject matter. Our discussion will concentrate on the literary and the intellectual history aspects of *Haskalah*.

The question of the periodisation of Jewish history and of establishing the beginning of modern times in the annals of the Jewish people has already been widely discussed. Historians such as Jost, Graetz, Dubnow, Dinur, Ettinger and Baron, as well as a philosopher, Krochmal, and a *Kabbalah* scholar, Scholem, have contributed to the historical conceptualisation of Jewish history. Historians have attempted to establish a transition from the Middle Ages to modern times (as seen in Shohet's statement below). They have often endeavoured to identify a major historical personality, such as Moses Mendelssohn (proposed by Graetz), as the initiator of that change. Others, such as Dubnow, suggested that the signalling change should be related to an important historical event; for example, the French Revolution may be considered the initiation point of modern times in Jewish history. Such historical analyses were examined a few years ago by Michael Meyer. He concluded his discussion by questioning the significance of establishing a definite date for the beginning of modern times in Jewish history.²

The topic of modernism in its broader context has become very popular recently, especially as it is extended to the discussion of "post-modernism". Both "modernism" and "post-modernism" have been used in a variety of disciplines, from history to literature, encompassing a wide range of historical periods, from the European Enlightenment to our own day and age. Understandably, such a broad use of identical terms may result in generalisation and ambiguity, leading to errors and misconceptions. As fashionable as "modernism" sounds, it is a

¹See F. Lachover, *Toldot Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, I, Tel Aviv 1928, p. 1: "... It [modern Hebrew literature] echoes the modern times [*ha'et hahadashah*]"; Joseph Klausner, *Historiah Shel Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, I, 3rd edn., Jerusalem 1960, p. 9: "The name 'Modern Hebrew Literature' should be referred to as the Hebrew literature of the modern times [*ha'et hahadashah*]."; H. N. Shapira, *Toldot Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, 2nd edn, Ramat Gan 1967, p. 59: "Modern Hebrew literature was born ... in the great change that occurred in the Jewish people on the threshold of our new history."; Shimon Halkin, *Derachim Vetzidei Derachim Basifrut*, I, Jerusalem 1970, p. 155: "Modern times in the history of the world and the nation gave birth to modern Hebrew literature." (The above quotations originally in Hebrew, as are all quotations from Hebrew sources; translation is mine.) The term "modern" in Hebrew is often expressed by the word *hadash* [new] as well as *moderni* [modern].

²Michael A. Meyer, "Where Does the Modern Period of Jewish History Begin?", *Judaism*, vol. XXIV, No. 95 (Summer 1975), pp. 327-338.

relative term, the meaning of which changes with context. Our context is Jewish and Hebrew modernism in relation to eighteenth-century Hebrew *Haskalah*. My working hypothesis is that this “modernism” began at the end of that century. Questions related to modernism, modernity, or post-modernism in other contexts will not be discussed in this study.

One of the most frustrating aspects of reviewing past discussions concerning the beginning of *Haskalah* stems from the fact that the terms “modernism” and “secularism” have not been defined. It has been generally assumed that “modernism” is exemplified in an alleged clear-cut transition from traditional, normative Judaism to “secularism”. As will be shown, my approach towards a definition of modernism is different, and it will be developed step by step.

By the term “*Haskalah*” (which Shavit has recently examined³) this article refers to Hebrew *Haskalah* literature in Germany in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century. The controversy of whether a distinction should be made between *Haskalah* literature and the *Haskalah* movement is not addressed here. For the purpose of our discussion, it is assumed that the two were closely bound together, especially at this early stage.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL THEORIES: SECULARISM AND MODERNISM

Joseph Klausner, who in many respects has laid the groundwork for *Haskalah* research (although he was not the first literary historian to explore the topic), will be the starting point of our discussion. It was Klausner who enunciated his views on the “essence and the beginning of new [modern] Hebrew literature”. In the introduction to his monumental work *The History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, a seminal work consulted to this day, he characterised the “new” Hebrew culture as “essentially secular”. Klausner asserted that “it started a new direction – to enlighten the people and resemble in its form and contents more or less the literatures of all European peoples”.⁴

The terms “new direction” and “to enlighten” may signal the criteria for modernism which Klausner had in mind. This is due to the use of the term “new” in Hebrew to designate “modern” as well (*Sifrut Ivrit Hadashah*). However, this meaning is not obvious from the text itself. Unfortunately, Klausner did not clarify what he meant by the term “secular”. Nor was Klausner the first to highlight the notion of secularism as a criterion of modernism in *Haskalah*. Early in the century, Nahum Slouschz employed the term “secular literature” and “secularism” to characterise *Haskalah* literature. He discovered in *Hame’asef* (The Gatherer) “a great innovation whose value will last for generations to come, in its secular contents and format, and in disrobing the religious attire from language and literature”. Slouschz considered the publication of *Hame’asef* to be a modern phenomenon: “It opened by its very publication the gate to modern

³Uzi Shavit, ‘Ha“*Haskalah*” Mahi: Leverur Musag Ha“*Haskalah*” Basifrut Haivrit’, *Mehkerei Yerushalayim Besifrut Ivrit*, XII (1990), pp. 51–83.

⁴Klausner, *Historiah Shel Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, p. 9.

literature, and became the forerunner of the modern period, the period of *Haskalah*.”⁵ Yet, it is obvious that the term “secular” (*Hol*), as used by Slouschz, is not identical to a similar term used by Klausner (*Hiloni*). Slouschz does refer to “secular” in terms of form and contents, but it is not entirely certain that he also meant “secular” as an intrinsic essence.

In the second decade of our century, Yaakov Rabinowitz discussed the periodisation of Hebrew literature throughout Jewish history and observed that modern Hebrew literature, in distinction from its predecessors, is “essentially secular”. What did he mean by “secular”? Rabinowitz defined it as literature “that came to free the individual and the people and to resuscitate them”. To him, the corpus of Hebrew literature is distinguished by its religiosity. Even secular concepts which were cited in it are merely “proverbial [references] for God and the people of Israel”. The guiding principle of modern Hebrew literature, on the other hand, is “the desire for normal life based on a humane and national foundation”.⁶

Other critics and literary historians, such as Jerucham F. Lachover⁷ and later Abraham Shaanan⁸, continued to use the term “secular” without defining clearly the essence of this concept and what they meant by it.

Both terms, “modern” or “modernity” and “secular” or “secularism”, were first offered on an intuitive level. Only after the 1930s and 1950s do we find serious efforts to explain the nature of secularism. General historians and social historians of the old generation, such as Bernard Weinryb, Jacob Katz, Azriel Shohet and Shmuel Ettinger, probed the social phenomena that had prevailed among West European Jews prior to *Haskalah*. They alleged the existence of the phenomena of “secularism” even before the “modern” age of the Jewish Enlightenment. Thus, some of them endeavoured to advance the *Haskalah* to the first part of the eighteenth century. In another vein, Gershom Scholem argued his case for “a clear dialectical development leading from the belief in Shabbetai Zvi to the religious nihilism of Shabbetianism and Frankism . . . to the new world of *Haskalah*”.⁹ Historians of the middle generation, such as Michael Meyer, Emmanuel Etkes and younger historians, David Sorkin and Shmuel Feiner and others, have reviewed and scrutinised accepted notions in Jewish historiography.¹⁰ Etkes, for example, questioned Shohet’s observations and

⁵Nahum Slouschz, *Korot Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, I, Warsaw 1905/6, pp. 27 and 9; see also his English book, *The Renaissance of Hebrew Literature (1743–1885)*, Philadelphia 1909, pp. 29–34.

⁶Yaakov Rabinowitz, ‘Letoldot Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah’, *Masulei Sifrut*, I, Jerusalem 1971, p. 5; the article was first published in 1919/20.

⁷Lachover, *Toldot Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, I, p. 4: “the inclination this time was towards secularism”. See discussion below.

⁸Avraham Shaanan, *Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah Lizrame’ah*, I, Tel Aviv 1962, p. 18: “the process of penetration of secularism into the Jewish world of beliefs and ideas”.

⁹Gershom Scholem, ‘Mitzvah Haba’ah Ba’averah’, *Knesset*, II, Tel Aviv 1937, p. 351. See also Shmuel Werses, *Haskalah Veshabta’ut*, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 11–14.

¹⁰Dov Weinryb, ‘Gormim Kalkaliyim Vesotzialiyim Bahaskalah Hayehudit Begermanyah’, *Knesset*, III Tel Aviv 1938, pp. 416–436; *idem*, ‘Hame’ah Hasheva Esreh Kehakdamah Litkufat Hahaskalah’, *Perakim*, IV (1966), pp. 113–142; Jacob Katz, *Masoret Umashber*, Jerusalem 1958, chaps. 20, 21, 23, 24; *idem*, *Tradition and Crisis*, New York 1977 3rd edn.; Azriel Shohet, *Im Hilufe Tekufot*, Jerusalem 1960; *idem*, ‘Resheet Hahaskalah Beyhadut Germanyah’, *Molad*, XXIII, Nos. 203–204 (Sep-

complained about the lack of clarity in his definition of terms. He noted that Shohet did not distinguish between the phenomena of assimilation, exiting the ghetto, and “*Haskalah*”. Thus, “the distinction between *Haskalah* and phenomena which were concurrent to it but not identical with it is completely blurred”. Etkes proposed to define the essence of the Jewish Enlightenment movement (in Eastern Europe, only) by delineating its ideological stand in the subjects of theology, *halakhah*, the study of Torah, the Hebrew language, and attitudes towards European society and Western culture. He has also probed the subject of the early forerunners of *Haskalah*.¹¹

KLAUSNER’S SELECTION OF WESSELY

It is possible to deduce the meaning of Klausner’s terminology elsewhere from his continued discussion of the beginnings of modern Hebrew literature. He developed his literary theory by applying it to a literary personality, whom he designated to mark the beginning of the *Haskalah* period. As is known, Klausner rejected Lachover’s choice of Moshe Hayim Luzzatto as the originator of modern Hebrew literature. Instead, Klausner ostensibly preferred Naphtali Herz Wessely. However, Klausner’s discussion of the beginning of modern Hebrew literature and its originator is not without ambiguity. As early as 1926, Klausner established the beginning of modern Hebrew literature “from the *me’asfim* generation, more accurately from the publication of the first pamphlet of *Divrei Shalom Ve’emet* (Words of Peace and Truth) by Naphtali Herz Wessely (1781)”.¹² Klausner did not select the *me’asfim* (the editors and writers of the journal *Hame’asef*), but the generation of the *me’asfim*, and specifically, one person in that generation, namely Wessely. Klausner explained his choice by saying that Wessely was “a new man” who “fought for a new life, a new education, and a new Hebrew style”.¹³ Elsewhere in his book, Klausner writes that Wessely “was the initiator and the creator of that period”.¹⁴

Klausner’s selection of Wessely to represent the beginning of modern Hebrew literature, for the stated reasons, is problematic. It raises the question whether

tember 1965), pp. 328–334; Shmuel Ettinger, *Toldot Am Yisra’el Ba’et Hahadashah*, Tel Aviv 1969, pp. 66–67; see references to Michael Meyer and Shmuel Feiner, above, note 2, and below. Also see Moshe H. Graupe, *Hayahadut Hamodernit Behithavutah*, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv 1990, and David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry 1780–1840*, New York 1987. I just received Shmuel Feiner’s ‘Early Haskalah in Eighteenth-Century Jewry’ *Tarbitz*, LXVII, No. 2 (1998), pp. 189–240, dealing with the phenomena of early Haskalah.

¹¹ Emmanuel Etkes, ‘Lishe’elat Mevasrei Hahaskalah Bemizrah Eiropah’, *Tarbitz*, LVII, No. 1 (Tishrei-Kislev 1988), pp. 95–114; reprinted in the anthology *Hadat Vehahayim: Tenu’at Hahaskalah Hayehudit Bemizrah Eiropah*, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 25–44. A number of studies on modernity were published in *Toward Modernity: the European Jewish Model*, ed. by Jacob Katz, New Brunswick 1987. (Publication of the Leo Baeck Institute.)

¹² Klausner, *Historiah Shel Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, I, p. 9. Klausner used similar expressions in his earlier article, ‘Shalosh Tekufot Beafrut Hahaskalah Haivrit’, *Mada’ei Hayahadut*, Jerusalem 1926, p. 7. The publication date is 1782 and not 1781, as stated erroneously by Klausner.

¹³ Klausner, *Historiah Shel Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, I, p. 10.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 42.

Wessely was indeed “a new man”. Klausner did not make it clear what he meant by the term. However, if we assume that this expression encompasses the new *Weltanschauung* envisioned by the *maskilim*, as depicted in scores of articles, stories, fables and other works, it would be improper to consider Wessely as the representation of the new man of Hebrew *Haskalah*. It should be noted, nonetheless, that the *maskilim* did consider Wessely an exemplary figure in Hebrew poetry.

Reading Wessely’s writings in totality, and not only *Divrei Shalom Ve’emet*, one is impressed that Wessely was essentially a traditionalist, representing the normative viewpoint of Judaism. More than any other writer in early Hebrew *Haskalah*, Wessely epitomised in most of his writings – with the exception of *Divrei Shalom Ve’emet* – the traditional values of Judaism. He represented the norms of traditional Judaism, rather than the as yet undefined “modern secularism”. Thus, naming him “a new man” without the necessary elucidation, is indeed questionable. Paradoxically, his writings did contain a major innovation, which Klausner failed to discern, and which will be discussed below.¹⁵

The attitudes of Klausner and the school of his followers towards *Haskalah* literature may in fact be understood as an antithesis, when viewed against the backdrop of the criticism of *Haskalah* waged in the previous generation. Klausner was able to achieve a perspective that enabled him to assess critically and unemotionally the contribution of early *Haskalah* and its writers to Hebrew literature. Attitudes towards early *Haskalah* went through variegated developments, representing a myriad of viewpoints in the nineteenth century. What started as a very positive attitude, in the first part of the *Haskalah* period, evolved into the negative attitude that Perez Smolenskin, in his harsh criticism of Mendelssohn, expressed. This negative attitude continued during the next literary period, known as *Hamahalach Hehadash* (the New Move). Concurrently, an attitude of some disrespect was exhibited towards the authors of *Haskalah*. Mordechai Ehrenpreis offered a complete rejection of *Haskalah* in his article entitled ‘Le’an?’ (Whither?). Published in the first volume of *Hashilo’ah* in 1897, it represented the transition that had taken place between the literary periods.¹⁶ Certainly, Ehrenpreis attempted to create a polarity between the earlier period of *Haskalah* literature and contemporary Hebrew literature, which was represented by *Hamahalach Hehadash*. 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* on, but indeed the *beginning* of an entirely different undertaking which is new in its form and contents”.¹⁷ According to his assessment, the *me’asfim* did not have any “programme” (plan), and their intention was, in effect, to annul the concept of “literature”. It stands to

¹⁵Cf. Moshe Pelli, *The Age of Haskalah*, Leiden 1979, chap. 6; *idem*, *Bema’avkei Temurah*, Tel Aviv 1988, pp. 47–55; see also H. N. Shapira, *Toldot Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, p. 57, for his rejection of Wessely’s choice as the author marking the new age; and Mordechai Ehrenpreis’s article (see note 16), pp. 491–492.

¹⁶Mordechai Ehrenpreis, ‘Le’an?’, *Hashilo’ah*, I (1897), pp. 489–503. Republished in *Le’an?*, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 105–133, ed. by Avner Holtzman.

¹⁷*ibid.*, p. 489.

reason that this kind of rejection did not represent a balanced historical analysis, but is certainly a rejection based on ideological considerations. Ehrenpreis was obviously ignoring the subject which Y. E. Trivush raised three years later in *Ahi'asaf*, asserting modern Hebrew literature's indebtedness to *Haskalah*: "They have to be very grateful to the early *maskilim*, for only because of them have we arrived at this point. It is not our generation that created modern Hebrew literature, but those poor *maskilim*. They were the ones who resuscitated it, they toiled over it, they fought for it, and were the ones who went begging for it".¹⁸

LACHOVER: LUZZATTO ORIGINATOR OF MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE

In 1928, Lachover began publishing his *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, in which he traced the signs of "the new spirit", ostensibly exemplifying the beginning of modern Hebrew literature, to the figure of Moshe Hayim Luzzatto and his literary work. This literary historian seemed to be following in the footsteps of H. N. Bialik's classic article on Luzzatto.¹⁹ Concurrent with his selection of Luzzatto (a mystic, Kabbalist, and moralist, who considered himself a Messiah) as the originator of modernity, Lachover adopted the notion of secularism as characterising modernity. He expressed this notion of modernity as "Hebrew secular literature", which represents "the new spirit" in Hebrew literature in Italy and in Holland. He also asserted that the inclination of modern Hebrew literature towards secularism is manifested through "free humanism". "The eyes were searching for 'Torat Ha'adam'", he wrote, using the term Wessely employed to designate humanism.²⁰ Although these additional definitions shed light on the concept of "secularism" they are still rather vague and overly general. In addition, Lachover's attempt to combine two seemingly contradictory notions, namely the selection of Luzzatto with the criterion of "secularism", made it easy for his critics (Klausner, Kleinman,²¹ Shapira, and others) to dismiss his choice of Luzzatto as a modernist. They did this mainly on the grounds that Luzzatto's world was completely ruled by the old order and the traditional way of life, as were his Kabbalistic tendencies and his spiritual outlook. Importantly, Lachover acknowledged that Germany was the locus of the new literary movement in Hebrew letters, rather than Italy, where Luzzatto functioned. Nevertheless, other scholars, such as Meyer Waxman and recently

¹⁸Y. E. Trivush, 'Bichvod Hahaskalah', *Ahi'asaf*, VIII (1900), n.p.

¹⁹H. N. Bialik, 'Habahur Mipadova', *Kitvei H. N. Bialik*, II, Tel Aviv 1935, pp. 307–310.

²⁰Lachover, *Toldot Hasifrut Haiivrit Hahadashah*, p. 4. Others, too, selected Luzzatto. In 1907, Bar-Tuvia wrote an article, 'Bresheet Sifrutenu Hahadashah', *Hashilo'ah*, XVI (1907), pp. 18–23, in which he considered Moshe Hayim Luzzatto and Abraham Mapu as the creators of modern Hebrew literature. However, his observation is more poetic than critical, as it lacks the detailed discussion and critical analysis. The fact that he combined different periods and localities cast doubt about his proposal. Bar-Tuvia is identified as Dr. P.[?] Frankel in *Otzar Beduyei Hashaem*, Vienna 1933, p. 81.

²¹Moshe Kleinman, *Demuyot Vekomot*, Paris 1928, p. 13.

Uzi Shavit, continued to support Lachover's position concerning Luzzatto's alleged "modernism".²²

Among literary historians, it was H. N. Shapira who selected the *me'asfim* as the initiators of modern Hebrew literature, referring to them as "the new people of Israel".²³ He stipulated that *Haskalah's* major distinction from previous Hebrew literature is its demand to return to the real, mundane, and terrestrial world. Shapira identified the direction of *Haskalah* – both the movement and the literature – as "introcentric national orientation", encompassing the revival of "terrialism". It is known that Shapira's usage of his own coined terms and formed expressions in Hebrew are somewhat esoteric and unclear. They become clearer as he delineates the perimeters and characteristics of *Haskalah* literature, which "turned its back to personal Judaism and to its anchored spirituality". He asserted that *Haskalah* "exhibits a strong and mighty desire for a fundamental, earthly existence, and . . . longing for nature and natural life". "All the *maskilim* in Germany were introcentric, 'terrialistic' people. They all desired to be free men, liberated from the yoke of any subjugating spiritualism. They were inclined to subject themselves to the soaring, free spirit and to the dictates of earthly life, rooted in mother Earth, and glued and consolidated to its resources and real assets."²⁴ I believe that Shapira's selection of the *me'asfim* is correct. Some of his observations may be somewhat exaggerated, but in general they do summarise several trends of *Haskalah*.

The question of the beginning of modern Hebrew literature was raised again in 1947 by Hayim Bar-Dayan at the World Congress for Jewish Studies. A student of Klausner, Bar-Dayan rejected Lachover's selection of Luzzatto, whom he considered "the forerunner of the period in our literature", but not "its father and its initiator". Bar-Dayan, like Klausner, selected Wessely "who was fit in many respects to fulfil this role". Bar-Dayan saw in Moses Mendelssohn "the person who paved the road and prepared the grounds for the establishment of the new literature, but not as its founder". In his view, the revival of modern Hebrew literature stems "from the appearance of a major, central personality, who possessed great creative power, and was aware of its mission, carrying new ideas and establishing a well-developed, enlightened generation of students". He added several other factors: "the historical and social circumstances, and the readiness and preparation of a certain public, having a certain economical class and living in a populous, homogenous community, to absorb and cultivate the new".²⁵

²²See for example Meyer Waxman's article 'Yoseph Klausner Kehistoryon Shel Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah,' *Bitzaron*, 39, No. 2 [205] (Kislev 1959), p. 109; in his book *A History of Jewish Literature*, III, New York 1936, p. 107, Waxman asserted that Luzzatto was a forerunner of *Haskalah*, and that Wessely was the initiator of the period. On Shavit, see below.

²³H. N. Shapira, *Toldot Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, pp. 57–58. Yaakov Rabinowitz selected the *me'asfim* before Shapira, see *Maslulei Sifrut*, I, pp. 16, 44.

²⁴*ibid.*, Shapira, p. 67.

²⁵H. Bar-Dayan, 'Lishe'elat Resheetah Shel Sifrutenu Hahadashah', *Hakinus Ha'olami Lemada'ei Hayahadut*, Summer 1947 (1952), pp. 302–306.

KURZWEIL: METAMORPHOSIS OF HEBREW LITERATURE

The subject of “secularism”, raised earlier by several historians, gained recognition in the 1950s in the writings of Baruch Kurzweil. He made a concerted effort to examine and define secularism, while emphasising his theory of the unique “secular” nature of modern Hebrew literature. He asserted that there was a major gap between traditional Hebrew literature, as it developed throughout the ages, and modern Hebrew literature. Kurzweil further argued that the corpus of Hebrew letters functioned on the foundations of a sacral world. However, modern Hebrew literature has emerged out of a “spiritual world that was void of its primordial religious certainty” which encompasses the totality of life and provides the sole criterion for its values.²⁶ Kurzweil considered “secularism” as the most dominant feature of the new Hebrew literature. This secularism is not merely dealing with secular subjects as compared with sacral literature, such as liturgy, *piyut*, found in traditional Hebrew literature; it is the totality of its spiritual world that has been completely changed. There is one major problem in the thesis of Kurzweil and other theoreticians. Kurzweil undertook to define “modern Hebrew literature” *in toto*, and not necessarily the beginning of *Haskalah* literature. As a result, his approach to the topic is overgeneralised and erroneous. It contains an anachronistic application of late phenomena to early *Haskalah*. This point will be elaborated on below.

In his lectures of the 1950s, Shimon Halkin addressed the issue of modernism, suggesting that the “appearance of humanism in Jewish history and in Jewish literature” exemplified the modern tendencies in Judaism. Accordingly, modern Hebrew literature is characterised by the shift from theocentricity in traditional Judaism (regarding man’s relations to God) to the homocentricity in modern Judaism. The latter outlook is based on contemporary European Enlightenment thought, in which man is the centre of interest. Halkin borrowed this concept from European Enlightenment and applied it to *Haskalah*, while stressing that the European humanists were indeed men of religious conviction. Accordingly, modern Hebrew literature’s shift towards humanism should not be viewed as a “revolution” (a notion Kurzweil advocated), “which detaches the past from its roots, but as a continuity, affecting some serious changes”.²⁷

In the 1950s, Isaac Barzilay published a series of articles concerning the German and Italian *Haskalah*, in which he ostensibly makes a distinction between the two. He proposes a definition of the Berlin *Haskalah*, and analyses its principal values and ideology. Among these values he lists the following: the ideal of reason, the brotherhood of man, and the return to reality (which he divides into the return to nature, hedonism, love, heroism, the pursuit of beauty,

²⁶Baruch Kurzweil, *Sifrutenu Hahadashah Masoret O Mahapechah*, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem 1960, p. 16. Also, p. 44: “modern Hebrew literature is secular because it comes out of a world void of divine holiness that had been hovering over the unity of Jewish culture”.

²⁷Simon Halkin, *Zeramim Vetzurot Basifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, I, Jerusalem 1984, p. 29. Halkin had formulated his views earlier in *Modern Hebrew Literature*, New York 1970 [first published in 1950], p. 36. Halkin’s lectures from the 1950s were published in *Mavo Lasiporet Haivrit*, Jerusalem 1978, pp. 9–12.

the economic rehabilitation of Jewry, and education). His articles provide the appropriate textual citations to support his thesis, which shed light on the tenets of *Haskalah*.²⁸

In 1967, Avraham Holtz presented an overview of existing trends in the historiography of *Haskalah*, and proposed a revision in the approach to its study. He argues against the existing theories of Klausner, Lachover, and those literary historians who have followed in their footsteps. In his view, these theories are rather weak because they rely on non-literary theses. Some of their arguments, he claims, were cited out of context. Others were based on summaries of poetical and prose texts for the purpose of presenting an ideology of the reviewed material, rather than treating it as a work of art. Holtz adds that these theories are deficient, since they do not pay attention to important bodies of Hebrew letters, such as oriental Jewish literature as well as *Hasidic* and *Mitnagdic* writings. He also considers the use of the prevailing terms, "secular" and "modern", as another weakness of these theories. Holtz insisted that Hebrew literature should be approached as literature. Consequently, the student of Hebrew literature should examine the Hebrew literary tradition for its linguistic, stylistic, and generic characteristics. In sum, Holtz called for a revision of the critical literature of *Haskalah*.²⁹

In the early 1980s there had been very little discussion on the beginnings or perimeters of *Haskalah*. When Yehuda Friedlander surveyed the existing views regarding *Haskalah* in 1980, he did not even mention it as a topic worthy of discussion. Neither has the subject of its beginning been touched in my two articles on trends, attitudes, goals and achievements of *Haskalah*.³⁰ It would appear that the subject matter had been exhausted in the existing theories. A few years later, Werses likewise suggested that current research showed a lack of interest in the question of periodisation in Hebrew literature.³¹

SHAVIT: BELIEF IN INTELLECT, GOD AND BEAUTY

We find another trend emerging during the 1980s in Hebrew *Haskalah* scholarship, as a few contemporary scholars offered new ways to approach the study of

²⁸ Isaac Eisenstein-Barzilay, 'The Ideology of the Berlin Haskalah', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, XXV (1956), pp. 1–37; *idem*, 'The Jew in the Literature of the Enlightenment', *Jewish Social Studies*, XVII, 4 (October 1956), pp. 243–261; *idem*, 'The Background of the Berlin Haskalah', *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought*, New York 1959, pp. 183–197; *idem*, 'The Italian and Berlin Haskalah', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, XXIX (1960–1961), pp. 17–52; *idem*, 'Livdikot Mahut Hahaskalah Uviktortah', *Hado'ar*, XLIII, Nos. 19 & 20 (1964), pp. 320–321, 347–348.

²⁹ Avraham Holtz, 'Prolegomenon to a Literary History of Modern Hebrew Literature', *Literature East and West*, XI, No. 3, (1967), pp. 253–270.

³⁰ Yehuda Friedlander, 'Be'ayot Yesod Babikoret Uvamehkar Al Sifrut Hahaskalah', *Peles*, Tel Aviv 1980, pp. 33–45. See Moshe Pelli, 'Haskalah Literature Trends and Attitudes', *Jewish Book Annual*, 39 (1981/1982), pp. 92–101; and *idem*, 'Ye'adim Vehesegim: Megamot Unetiyot Besifrut HaHaskalah Ha'ivrit Beresheetah', *Hadoar*, LXI, Nos. 34, 35, 36, (10, 24 September, 15 October 1982), pp. 558–560, 586–587, 604–605.

³¹ Shmuel Werses, 'Al Mehkar Sifrut Hahaskalah Beyameinu', *Megamot Vetzurot Besifrut Hahaskalah*, Jerusalem 1990, p. 358, published first in the *Yedi'on*, the Newsletter of the World Union of Jewish Studies, 25 (Summer 1985) and 26 (Winter 1986).

Haskalah. Uzi Shavit, for example, argued against Kurzweil's notion of "secularism", as related to modern Hebrew literature. Shavit claims that such "secularism", which reflects, according to Kurzweil, "a spiritual world that was void of its primordial religious certainty", is inappropriate for early *Haskalah*. According to Shavit, these statements do not fit "the world of the *Haskalah* fathers, led by Mendelssohn, Wessely, and the editors of *Hame'asef*". Nor do they fit the spiritual world of next generation *maskilim* in the nineteenth century, such as Shmuel David Luzzatto, Shlomo Yehuda Rappaport, and Nachman Krochmal.³² Indeed, Kurzweil's error, duplicated by some literary historians, is that he failed to distinguish between early and late *Haskalah*. As mentioned earlier, he conceptualised the complex phenomena of *Haskalah*, covering more than a century and several geographical locations, in a generalised way.

In my opinion, the spiritual world of the early Hebrew *maskilim* was not portrayed accurately by Kurzweil. Even those who were dichotomous in their viewpoint, exhibiting some dualism and ambiguity about *Haskalah*, tradition and modernity, could not be characterised as *telushim*. They were not detached, uprooted and lost (as this Hebrew term implies), as were some of the late nineteenth-century authors and their literary protagonists. Mendelssohn and Wessely, to cite the major figures, were completely immersed in traditional Judaism while also adhering to their *Haskalah* point of view. Even a *maskil* such as Rabbi Saul Berlin, by far among the more extreme and radical of the *maskilim* in his religious outlook, was totally immersed in the world of tradition. His pseudo-epigraphic writing (to use Werses's terminology) is ingrained in the world of *halakhah*, as his work, *Besamim Rosh* (Incense of Spices), exemplifies. Isaac Euchel, and Isaac Satanow as well, hovered next to the world of traditional Judaism.

Shavit presented his own case, arguing that it is not "secularism" that characterises these early and late proponents of *Haskalah*. It is, rather, "the belief in man's intellect, the power of free thinking and enlightenment, and the assurance that, as a result of the rule of reason, understanding and science, humanity – and Jews as part of it – was destined in the foreseeable future to achieve a better, improved society, where each individual would be able to live in it safely, freely and peacefully".³³ Subsequently, Shavit cites some of the characteristics of *Haskalah* literature, which are definitely correct. In his opinion, the most important characteristic of modern Hebrew literature is not its alleged secularism, but rather its *hofshiyut*, its libertarianism, freedom, and freethinking.³⁴ Shavit borrowed these terms from Yosef H. Brenner, who used the expressions "free Jews" or "free Hebrews".

This characterisation of "free Jews" does not apply easily, in my view, to figures such as Mendelssohn and Wessely, or even to Euchel, Satanow and Saul Berlin. Clearly, the term is vague, and may result in some misconceptions. If "free" refers to Jews who were "free" from the observance of the *mitzvot*, and were totally "liberated" from traditional Judaism, it is evident that most of the

³²Uzi Shavit, *Shirah Ve'ideologyah*, Tel Aviv 1987, pp. 14–15.

³³*ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁴*ibid.*, p. 16.

early Hebrew *maskilim* were not such persons. If this term means that these Jews believed in free thinking or libertarianism, (and there is no question that the more extreme did so), this by itself would not make all the *maskilim* “free Jews”. They still operated within the framework of organised Jewish communal life, or in its margins even though they endeavoured to reform it. Euchel was trying to set up a substitute for the organised Jewish community, while Saul Berlin still functioned within the very rabbinic institution which he attempted to destroy.³⁵

One may further deduce the meaning of *hofshiyut* from Shavit’s reliance on Brenner. The combination of “Jew” and “Hebrew” on one hand, and the notion of a “free Hebrew” on the other, related to an identity phenomenon that had not existed during the period of early *Haskalah*. It would be inappropriate to attribute it to the *maskilim* themselves, as it was completely anachronistic to their thinking. It is interesting to note that Shapira used a similar expression (“the modern Hebrew man”) which *Haskalah*, in his view, began to personify (*legalem*). However, Shapira intended this concept as an imaginative, literary portrayal, and not as depicting actual personalities.³⁶ In addition, it is rather difficult to reconcile this theory of *hofshiyut* and Shavit’s choice of Luzzatto as the initiator of *Haskalah*, because of the great influence he exerted on it.³⁷ Was Luzzatto also a “free Jew”, or a “free Hebrew”, according to Shavit? It is inconceivable to think of this Kabbalist and traditionalist as a “free Jew”.

Shavit dealt at length with the question of Luzzatto’s role in *Haskalah*, and reached the conclusion that the roots of *Haskalah* literature originated in the previous generation with Luzzatto, who exerted a great influence on it. Shavit’s most convincing argument concerns Luzzatto’s reception among the *maskilim*. In a hundred years of *Haskalah*, there were 23 published editions of Luzzatto’s *Layesharim Tehilah* (Praise for the Upright). In Shavit’s words: “It can be confirmed with certainty that indeed Luzzatto (together with Mendelssohn, Wessely and the editors of *Hame’asef*) is the ‘initiator [opener] of the period’.”³⁸ He argues that *Layesharim Tehilah* must be viewed as “an allegorical drama based on reality [actuality], which clearly expresses the spiritual climate of its time, that of the stages of the scientific revolution, rationalism and *Haskalah*”.³⁹

It is ironic that Shavit’s criticism of Kurzweil and the latter’s definition of secularism may be applied to his own concept of “libertarianism”, and in effect may cancel it altogether. Apparently, Shavit himself sensed that his attempt to characterise *Haskalah* through one criterion had an inherent weakness. He proceeded to propose three criteria, “three fundamental and basic principles”, which, he

³⁵See the chapters in Pelli, *The Age of Haskalah* and *idem*, *Bema’avkei Temurah*, on Euchel, Berlin and Satanow, respectively. See also Shmuel Feiner, ‘Yitzhak Eichel – Ha“yazam” Shel Tenu’at Hahaskalah Begermanyah’, *Zion*, 52, No. 4 (1987), pp. 427–469. On Brenner’s attitude towards tradition and his use of “Hofshiut”, see Shmuel Schneider, *Olam Hamasoret Hayehudit Bechitvei Yoseph Hayim Brenner*, Tel Aviv 1994, pp. 81, 84.

³⁶Shapira, *Toldot Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah*, p. 572.

³⁷Shavit, *Shirah Ve’ideologyah*, p. 98.

³⁸Uzi Shavit, ‘Layesharim Tehilah Leramhal: Hitbonenut Mehudeshet (He’arot Hadashot Levi-ku’ah Yashan: Mesayem Tekufah O Pote’ah Tekufah?)’, *Mehkarim Al Toldot Yahadut Holland*, IV, Jerusalem 1984, pp. 179–217; see especially quotations on pages 214–215.

³⁹*ibid.*, p. 213.

believes, served as the basis of the *Haskalah* movement from the 1780s to the middle of the nineteenth century. In his opinion, these principles complemented each other, and constituted the basis for “one, wholesome and harmonious spiritual world”. The three principles consisted of “the belief in the human intellect, in understanding and in science”, “the belief in God and in the religion of revelation”, and “the belief in the power of beauty and the sublime”.⁴⁰ Shavit’s criteria suit the early *Haskalah*, to be sure. However, it should be asked whether these criteria shared the same weight in the late *Haskalah*. Even if they are correct and indeed characterise the Hebrew *Haskalah*, they do not reflect the *essence* of modernism in *Haskalah* literature, as will be discussed below.

BAND: MODERNISM TRACED TO BERDICZEWSKI

In 1988, Arnold Band explored the question of modernism and the beginning of modern Hebrew literature. He reviewed existing theories, and applied Hans Robert Jauss’s theory about the reception of literary texts by a certain audience to Wessely’s *Shirei Tiferet* (Songs of Glory) and Luzzatto’s *Layesharim Tehilah*. Indeed, both works of these writers were influential during early *Haskalah* and exerted seminal influence on subsequent *Haskalah* writers. However, no one has considered any of them as “modern” in the sense of being “secular” or as works that contain rationalistic ideology. Band proceeded to offer his own theory of modernism, suggesting that the beginning of modernism in Hebrew literature be traced to the works of Micha Josef Berdyczewski.⁴¹ Certainly, Berdyczewski was considered as *Aher* (the “other”) in his time. Nevertheless, when compared to such contemporary writers as David Frischmann, Ahad Ha’am, Hayim Nachmann Bialik, and Shaul Tschernichowsky, there is no justification to assign the notion of “modernism” uniquely to Berdyczewski. Even if Berdyczewski had advocated a non-normative Judaic orientation, he could not be exclusively termed a “modernist” just because of that. He and the other authors cited above were products of *Haskalah*. Upon its demise, they remained active in literature, each of them experiencing differently the changing of the literary guard and the rise of Jewish nationalism. For example, Berdyczewski’s unique stature as *Aher* is diminished somewhat when compared to Frischmann. Nevertheless, there is nothing in that to belittle Berdyczewski’s literary importance and contribution to Hebrew literature. Certainly, the 1890s represent a new direction in Hebrew letters and epitomise modernism at its height. However, the beginnings of that very modernism had appeared earlier in *Haskalah*.

Also in 1988, Hayim Shoham was attempting to address the question “What is Hebrew-Jewish *Haskalah*?”. He, too, believed that “the essential beginnings of Hebrew *Haskalah* literature, as part of *Haskalah* movement, should be found in the latter third of the eighteenth century”. He selected this period because it was marked by the publication of “*Hame’asef*, the first secular Hebrew period-

⁴⁰Shavit, *Shirah Ve’ideologyah*, p. 25.

⁴¹Arnold Band, ‘The Beginnings of Modern Hebrew Literature: Perspectives on “Modernity”’, *AJS Review*, XIII (Spring-Fall 1988), pp. 1–26.

ical” and “Wessely’s *Shirei Tiferet*, the secular biblical epic”. According to Shoham, it is then that Hebrew literature became a continuous and successive secular literature.⁴²

In the 1990s Shmuel Werses took stock of his own research activities, and characterised his approach to the study of *Haskalah* in terms of adhering to its broader and more comprehensive concept. His approach differed from the trends of *Haskalah* historiosophy, which tended “to highlight *Haskalah*’s defined and confined perimeters, in accordance to its stages of development and periodisation”. These trends in the study of *Haskalah*, he writes, attempted to emphasise the essential differences between *Haskalah* literature and the types of Hebrew literature preceding and following it. In his research he also pursued the phenomena of continuity and succession in Hebrew literature, apparently following in the footsteps of Dov Sadan.⁴³ Indeed, Werses’s studies testify to the existence of affinities between traditional literature and modern Hebrew literature, manifesting aspects of continuity. Yet, he also dwells on various new aspects of this literature and its indebtedness to European literatures.

SUMMARY OF THEORIES: SYMPTOMS AND RESULTS BUT NOT THE ESSENCE

The variety of the generally perceptive viewpoints regarding *Haskalah* is impressive, but there is a lack of textual reference and substantive proof based on literary sources. This has enabled successive Hebrew critics to question their validity and their applicability to the totality of *Haskalah* literature, and even to refute them altogether. Many literary theoreticians did exactly that, while they formulated their own new theories of the beginning of modern Hebrew literature and the notion of modernism in Hebrew letters.

Some of these definitions are so general that they purport to encompass several periods in Hebrew literature, during *Haskalah* and even post-*Haskalah*, while retaining some common denominator within *Haskalah* literature *per se*. It is for this reason that we must ascertain whether they exclusively define the beginning of modern Hebrew literature (which is to be found in *Haskalah* literature). Even though they may have some relevance, they cannot qualify as a unique definition of *Haskalah*. Some definitions contain deficiencies that may preclude their use for Hebrew *Haskalah*.

Other definitions appear to be based on generalities, which address complex and complicated issues in a simplified, and perhaps even an oversimplified manner. They attempt to attribute a complex social process and major ideological and cultural changes to a single individual or to a single idea that they consider represents the new trends.

Additionally, while some of these observations relate to aspects of the new

⁴²Hayim Shoham, ‘Mahi Haskalah Ivrit-Yehudit?’, *Hado’ar*, 67, Nos. 33 & 34 (1988), pp. 16–18; 46–48; reprinted in *Betzel Haskalat Berlin*, Tel Aviv 1996, pp. 9–21.

⁴³Shmuel Werses, ‘Orhot Ushevlim Beheker Sifrut Hahaskalah’, *Mehkeri Yerushalayim Besifrut Ivrit*, XIII (1992), p. 19.

trends, they are not necessarily the only criteria, as is asserted. Consequently, some of these criteria for evaluating modernism or the new trends are only partially correct.

In order to define these criteria critics have explored the question, "what characteristics are common to *Haskalah* writers?" They identified various religious, spiritual, cultural, social, and/or literary phenomena, and asserted that they, and only they, reflect the shift towards modernism.

Some of the criteria cited in the critical literature as representing the tenets of Enlightenment and its counterparts in *Haskalah* are listed below:

Emphasis on mundane, this-worldly matters, in contrast to other-worldly matters, and an emphasis on man and humanism;

Critical attitude towards religious institutions, the deterioration of the stature of the church and the rabbinate, and the decline of the authority of religion and the Scriptures;

Belief in man's reason as the ultimate criterion for the evaluation of all phenomena of life; freedom, freedom of thought, freedom from prejudice and superstitions; scepticism and rationalism;

Belief in a universal truth and the ability to discover it through the use of man's reason; belief in progress and in a better future; belief in the brotherhood of man and a desire to improve man's lot and humanity's future; optimism;

Universalism, utilitarianism, pragmatism, and empiricism; emphasis on science and secular studies, etc.

These criteria, representing tendencies in European Enlightenment which were adopted by Hebrew *Haskalah*, are undoubtedly correct. They summarise, on different levels of importance, various aspects of the general Enlightenment. Some of them represent a philosophy of life and modes of expression, while others form social or ideological trends. All in all, they characterise in one way or another the tenets and tenor of European Enlightenment, which were applied to *Haskalah*.

These concepts appear to reflect the transformation into modernism, and indeed may serve as authentic characteristics of *Haskalah*. Moreover, these notions occurred concurrent with these changes. Nevertheless, they were the *results* of the occurring changes and *not* their common denominators. They were symptoms of the transition process that has brought about modernism. They certainly characterise this transition, but they do not constitute the main components nor the unique aspects of this transition. Many of the criteria cited above may be helpful in identifying aspects of the Enlightenment. However, they do not represent the essence and uniqueness of modernism in *Haskalah*.

The modernism that we are trying to identify is a combination of *mega-trends* which epitomise the all-encompassing phenomena of modernism in *Haskalah*.

HYPOTHESES IN EVALUATING MODERNISM

A discussion of Hebrew modernism must be predicated on a few fundamental premises. First, it is assumed that changes have taken place in Jewish society, its

ways of life and its culture (as have always occurred to some degree), but that there were also phenomena of continuity. We assume that modernism is a process, which could be traced and reconstructed on the basis of such components as discussed below and not only through overt changes in the social and cultural order. Since our discussion is based on literary research, we shall look for manifestations of these changes in works of literature and in their periphery (as well as in other related areas of human endeavour).

Another basic assumption is that modern-day students of *Haskalah* are able to discern the tenets of these changes as well as trends of continuity. Furthermore, it is assumed that they are able to establish the proper criteria to distinguish between the two periods or two types of literature being discussed. We must, however, take into consideration that the notion of changes during the first generation *Haskalah* in Germany is not universally accepted. Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginzberg), for example, was of the opinion that the early *maskilim*, such as Wessely and Salomon Maimon, did not desire to create a new Hebrew literature with a new base, but wanted to develop the traditional Hebrew literature that had ceased to grow.⁴⁴

A more modern scholar, Dov Sadan, who was cited before, expanded the perimeters of modern Hebrew literature to encompass *Hasidic* and *Mitnagdic* literatures, in addition to *Haskalah* literature. Sadan also broadened the linguistic framework beyond Hebrew, to include Yiddish and other European languages employed in Jewish literature.⁴⁵ In Sadan's theory, the question of modernism does not concern itself with the criterion of secularism as epitomising the modern age. Thus, the concept of modernism becomes even more nebulous.

Second, we should consider the fact that the process of change was gradual, and that its scope was relatively limited within the framework of Jewish society, as applied to the individual, or in literature. We should note that the process of *Haskalah* and its acceptance among the ranks of the Jewish people was limited in its magnitude and intensity, especially at its inception. Certainly, *Haskalah* did not embrace the totality of the people (even in the centres of Enlightenment in Western and later in Eastern Europe), nor did it cover the totality of Jewish experience in the Diaspora. We should not assume that the shift to *Haskalah* was universal or uniform, even within a group of writers who identified themselves as *maskilim*. The *maskilim* represented the wide spectrum of *Haskalah*. Some of them were more extreme than the others, some were more moderate, and some were even conservative. Therefore, any attempt to achieve a single definition should be considered only as an attempt to establish a boundary, whose total applicability is not guaranteed even by the definition itself.

Moreover, we are dealing with phenomena in the realm of culture and the humanities, bordering in the imaginative and creative arts. These phenomena

⁴⁴Halashon Vesifrutah', 'Lishe'elat Halashon', *Kol Kivei Ahad Ha'am*, Tel Aviv 1956 5th edn., p. 95. See also Z. Kalmanovitch, 'Ahad Ha'am Utehumei Hasifrut Haivrit', *Molad*, XII (1954-1955), pp. 510-520.

⁴⁵Dov Sadan, *Al Sifrutenu Masat Mavo*, Jerusalem 1950, pp. 1-9; first chapter published earlier in 'Al Tehumei Sifrutenu Hahadashah', *Molad*, II (1948-1949), pp. 38-41. Sadan reiterated his views in other articles and in 'Al Sifrutenu - Masat Hitum', *Yerushalayim*, XI-XII (1977), pp. 162-171.

attest to intellectual self-scrutiny, and to a probe and a quest for secularism, as manifested in literature. They are spiritually tantalising, soul searching, creative and cultural inner struggles. They are indicative of covert imaginative and intellectual processes of changes within the individual that may not have materialised externally at this point. This concept of change is an inner perception that came to fruition only later. This is the most important aspect of our search for the early manifestations of secularism and modernism in their inception in *Haskalah*. As suggested by the Enlightenment historian Norman Hampson, "the Enlightenment was an attitude of mind rather than a course in science and philosophy".⁴⁶ These precautionary perceptions, still hidden in the innermost thoughts of *Haskalah*, expressed the spirit of modern times in Judaism and in Hebrew letters.

Third, in light of past attempts to define modernism, it is incumbent upon us to abandon a single-sentence definition attempting to encompass the meaning of modernism in Hebrew literature. It is a complicated subject, involving a complex process in many areas of human endeavour within Jewish society. This process was manifested in the realm of society, religion, culture, and literature. No magic formula could contain the total scope of the new phenomenon of modernism.

Thus, we must acknowledge the complexity and the multiplicity of the *Haskalah* phenomena as a basis for our discussion. The term "*Haskalah*", which, as mentioned earlier, has recently been reviewed and re-examined by Uzi Shavit,⁴⁷ and the term "*maskilim*", were applied to various individuals and groups, in several localities and in different times, as if they were all identical in their "*Haskalah*". Even within a single group of *maskilim*, in the same place and the same time, we can discern diverse positions. Ostensibly, some of them embraced a *Haskalah* viewpoint with an individual interpretation of *Haskalah* ideology, different from the one advocated by the others. Some also differed in the way they applied their ideology in a practical and empirical fashion. *Haskalah*, as has been shown elsewhere, cannot be delineated as a straight, direct line, but rather as a spiral, advancing and then, to some extent, regressing.⁴⁸ It is my conclusion that we should not expect to find the answer to modernism in one person or one definition.

Another premise, adopted for the purpose of identifying modernism in Hebrew literature, acknowledges that its beginnings can probably be found in the early period of German *Haskalah*, while some of its forerunners may be traced to certain phenomena in Italy. It is my working hypothesis that the dominant and decisive beginning of modernism will not be found in later literary periods, such as the *Tehiyah* (Rejuvenation). The phenomena of this late period belong to different currents in Hebrew literature. This hypothesis does not preclude the examination of other periods and other arenas with the same tools. The purpose of such

⁴⁶Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment*, London 1968, p. 146.

⁴⁷Uzi Shavit, 'Ha "haskalah" Mahi', pp. 51-83.

⁴⁸*Bema'avkei Temurah*, chap. on 'Haskalah Vehitmaskelut', pp. 35-40. See Feiner's new article cited in note 10.

an examination is to locate and identify aspects of the modern period and its literature which are significantly different from those of the previous period. My working premise is based on my studies and research in this field. This research has established that Hebrew *Haskalah* in Germany, more than any other single literary phenomenon that preceded it, contains definite signs that mark the beginning of the trends leading into “modernism” (a term that is still to be defined). This premise does not purport to negate any theory of continuity, from medieval or renaissance Hebrew letters to the modern phenomena. Nor does it reject the notion that there were definite signs of the development of earlier literary genres and styles in *Haskalah* literature. *Haskalah*, as we conceive of it, does not only represent innovation; it combines continuity as well as change. This dual tendency complicates our question and poses additional challenges to the scholar who explores it. For now it is his duty to identify literary phenomena that belong to the new currents, as well as those phenomena indicative of indebtedness to a traditional literature.

Lastly, and most importantly, the definition of modernism should come from the literature itself. Our definition will not be content with only the modern scholar’s interpretations, based on his research in *Haskalah*. Neither will we only cite *Haskalah* sources that, according to our interpretation, characterise modernism. We will demand that *Haskalah* literature itself will present its own concept of modernism. It would be preferable if we found the appropriate text where *Haskalah* itself offered a definition of modernity, or an attempt at a definition. If our premise is correct, we should search contemporary literary works for a proper definition, or else we should search for the proper literary phenomena that represent the new orientation in Hebrew literature.

However, we must make a clear distinction between *symptoms* of modernism that are indeed important, relevant and correct, and a *major* transformation in *Weltanschauung*, which is the essence of modernism. It is this major shift (unlike the symptoms of the changes) that signifies the beginning of the all-encompassing spiritual, intellectual, and cultural mega-trends, constituting a revised outlook on Judaism. It represents a revised attitude towards Jewish existence and Jewish values. It also incorporates a revised Jewish self-concept as related to Jewish heritage and Jewish view of the surrounding cultures and societies. Yet, these changes did not mark the “spiritual world void of its primordial religious certainty” suggested by Kurzweil.

The need to find a definition from within the corpus of these writings is appropriate for literature, which is by nature able to register overt and covert expressions of the changing spiritual and cultural trends. Thus, it can be argued that literature may offer special insights into the essence of modernism, which may surpass in their value any other social or historical record.

AWARENESS OF TRANSFORMATION

In order to define the awareness of modernism, which began to permeate Hebrew writings, the literary historian and critic will have to identify and track this ostent-

sible feeling of modernism. He will have to scrutinise the literary and linguistic expressions of that perception of transformation, as manifested in the writings of the early Hebrew *maskilim*. Subsequently, he will have to interpret those expressions critically, as he would any other literary text or literary phenomena for accuracy and insight. He should be especially sensitive to the linguistic manifestations which exemplify the transformation occurring in the Hebrew language. To do that, he must be attuned to the rhythm of the period, listen to the nuances of transition, and be familiar with the formation of new linguistic patterns, as the “holy tongue” was being transformed into mundane, secular Hebrew. For language itself was one of the tools leading to change and simultaneously undergoing this very change itself.

The modern critic should not automatically assume that every *Haskalah* author possessed this awareness of modernism, nor that he was necessarily aware of the changes that were taking shape. Neither can it be easily assumed that the historical, cultural, and spiritual processes of change were expressed in his writings. Obviously, not every author was sensitive to this metamorphosis, and not every one reacted to it. However, upon identifying such reactions, we should examine them and weigh the possibility that they represent timely observations and perhaps contain significant insight into these processes. On the other hand, it can be argued that certain timely phrases which we selected to represent modernism may reflect the author’s contemporary enthusiasm, reacting uncritically to events that appear to him at that moment as momentous and earthshaking. In historical perspective, however, they may turn out to be of lesser significance. In addition, the “artificiality” of *Haskalah* Hebrew, and its inclination to resort to euphuism, the high-flown turgid style of *melitzah*, may exaggerate an event beyond its objective importance. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the student of *Haskalah* to watch out for linguistic and conceptual traps. We must question whether we can rely on the historical ability of contemporary individuals to evaluate the essence of an occurring change, and to discern properly the historical, cultural, or spiritual developments of that change. Likewise, we must weigh our ability to rely on our own reading of these historical texts, and actually to discern change by means of the Hebrew language. We must be certain that there indeed is a change, and that it is not merely a linguistic ornament, or a lexical *Fata Morgana*, reflecting something that had not actually occurred.

Another methodological problem related to the interpretation of *Haskalah* texts stems from the intention of *Haskalah* writers to spread the notion of change as part of their ideology. It is not inconceivable that they purposely exaggerated their depiction of change in order to disseminate their cultural and social agenda. Therefore, we must not rely blindly on their writings, but should assess them critically and historically. Additionally, we should not rely on one source, but look for a number of textual proofs, which will be interpreted in context.

DIRECT STATEMENTS ON THE CHANGE:
OVERT AWARENESS OF THE NEW TIMES

As we look for overt manifestations of an awareness of the new times, we should pay attention to several expressions, by the early Hebrew *maskilim* in Germany, found in *Hame'asef*. Its prospectus, *Nahal Habesor* (the Brook Besor, or Good Tidings) contains explicit expressions concerning the new times. The editors proclaimed the emergence of a new age by saying: "And behold wisdom now cries aloud outside." While employing a paraphrase from Proverbs I:20, the statement highlights three important concepts relevant to the new components of change during the Enlightenment: the concept of time ("now"), the principle of wisdom, and the dichotomy between "inside" and "outside". A call for immediate action follows: "Hurry up to call her in, hasten to bring her indoors."⁴⁹ The use of the biblical idiom and the parallelism between the two components of the statement intensify the message and suggest the image of a bridge, leading from the outside world into Jewish society.

These statements are indicative of a profound awareness of metamorphosis (possibly leading into modernism). The editors accompanied these phrases by demands that their fellow Jews follow in the footsteps of European Enlightenment and adopt its new ideology. The *maskilim* believed that the times demanded a change from the traditional Jewish way of life, to a more updated (and perhaps "modern") course. Many of these statements heralded the dawn of the new age of reason in Europe, constituting the litmus test for discerning the emerging modernism. They are euphoric, hopeful, high-flown, and naive. However, they certainly form the literary and linguistic expression of the awareness of the changing times which we are trying to identify.

The Book of Proverbs, from which the paraphrased quotation came, served like some other similar pronouncements, as a source of slogans for promoting and inaugurating the new age. The use of the sacral biblical idiom to present a new, contemporary concept, related to the new times, is of special interest. It signals the accepted method, during early (and late) *Haskalah*, of employing "the sacred tongue" to express secular concepts. The Hebrew language itself – the revived vehicle for communication – subtly reflected, in its sensitivity, the complex transition to modernity. Modernism was exemplified by the use of the traditional "holy tongue" to express new, modern, and perhaps secular notions. Thus, it should be reiterated that our study of *Haskalah* must focus on the problems of the resuscitated Hebrew language.⁵⁰

Haskalah writers sensed that a new age had emerged in Europe. They referred to it as "the days of the first fruits of knowledge and love in all the countries of Europe."⁵¹ It is significant to note that the two concepts signifying the new epoch are "knowledge" and "love", that is "tolerance", and that the two are

⁴⁹ *Nahal Habesor* bound with *Hame'asef*, I (1783–1784), p. 3.

⁵⁰ The topic of the revival of the Hebrew language during the *Haskalah* is discussed in an article submitted by the author to *Leshonenu La'am* 1999.

⁵¹ *Nahal Habesor*, p. 3.

connected. In other words, this phrase suggests that receptivity to happenings in the areas of culture and the humanities in Europe may impact on the social level in human relations and in the attitude towards the Jews.

This feeling intensified in the early years of the publication of *Hame'asef*, as seen in the writings of the *maskilim*. In the news section 'Toldot Hazman' (Chronicles), published in the first volume in 1784, Hayim Keslin portrayed the new age with the familiar metaphors: "Ever since the light of knowledge has shone among the nations, and ever since the veil of ignorance has been lifted from the face of the peoples among whom we dwell, God has remembered us as well and has made their leaders act in our favour . . . and they [now] consider us as brothers."⁵²

Discerning the change in 1786, the Italian *maskil* Eliyahu Morpurgo used a similar metaphor: "Now that the sun of wisdom has come out on the earth in this wise generation."⁵³ He highlighted this changing time by comparing it to the earlier period: "Now it is unlike the early days for the remnants of this people, as the seed of peace has given its fruits, fig and vine have brought forth their crop – the crop of wisdom – and the tree of knowledge has given its fruits . . . and a clear spirit [wind] has passed throughout the world, a cloud will spread its lightening [light], and will saturate it under the entire heavens, and its light [will reign] over the corners of the earth."⁵⁴

The *maskilim* argued that recognising the emerging changes on the (non-Jewish) European scene necessitated that Jews, too, pursue a course of action to implement that change among themselves. They proclaimed that: "The age of knowledge has arrived among all the nations; day and night they do not cease teaching their children [both] language and book. And we, why should we sit idly by? Brethren, let us get up and revive [those] stones from the heaps of dust."⁵⁵

The commitment to the mission which *Haskalah* undertook upon itself and the strong sense of urgency to act permeate Shimon Baraz's poem 'Ma'archei Lev' ('Preparations of the Heart'). The poem was published in 1785, at the first anniversary of the founding of the Society for the Seekers of the Hebrew Language, the umbrella organisation of the *maskilim*. This Hebrew writer used the seasonal revival of nature as the metaphor for the revival of the Jewish people and Jewish society. He emphasises the notion of the group working together for a unifying goal so as "to teach understanding to those who erred in spirit; enlightenment and knowledge to the impatient; and the earth should be full of knowledge as the water [cover the sea]".⁵⁶ The latter part is a partial biblical citation, based on Isaiah, purposefully omitting the name of God. Another *maskil*, David Friedrichsfeld, summarised the goals of *Haskalah* in this new age, expressing his wish in the form of a prayer: "May God make this community [of *maskilim*] the

⁵²H. K. (Hayim Keslin), in *Hame'asef*, I (1784), p. 111.

⁵³Eliyahu Morpurgo, in *Hame'asef*, III (1786), p. 131.

⁵⁴*ibid.*, p. 68, based on Job XXXVII:11.

⁵⁵*Nahal Habesor*, p. 13.

⁵⁶Shimon Baraz, *Ma'archei Lev*, Koenigsberg 1785, based on verses from Isaiah XXIX:24; XXXV:4; XI:9.

teachers of knowledge and the clarifiers of good tidings, so that the children of Israel will walk in their light.”⁵⁷

It may be argued that these statements carry a tone of exaggeration and essentially propagandise the *Haskalah* agenda. Thus, they ought not to be taken as naive, innocent observations, authentically reflecting the current condition. However, even if these are attempts to disseminate propaganda, they represent a clear indication of the *maskilim*'s awareness of the changing times. To reiterate, this awareness of the ensuing change undoubtedly was coupled with the *maskilim*'s strong desire for such a change. It was part of their recognition that this change was possible and that they were committed to pursue it. These tendencies represent a new and innovative thrust, signalling a transition from a rather passive attitude towards Jewish existence to a more active one. The occurring change transforms a lofty slogan into an ideal that must be realised and into an enterprise that must be brought to fruition. Since its inception, and for some time to come, Hebrew *Haskalah* literature has been a tendentious literature, whose goal was to revive the Jewish people and its culture. Hebrew literature undertook a “national” mission: to bring about a cultural revival for the ultimate rehabilitation of the Jewish people, and had adopted a revolutionary goal and had mobilised its resources to initiate action to effect the change. The clear signals of modernism that began to emerge from within the pages of *Hame'asef* were thus manifested by the awareness of the need for change, striving to define it, and struggling to execute it. These expressions of modernism, in its myriad, complex forms, continued to gain momentum. Even this awareness gained momentum, while leaving its cumulative impact on the beginning of modern times among the European Jews. It did not occur in one day, nor in one place. Yet, the theme repeated itself like a leitmotif, indicative of this historical trend and attesting to the validity of our observations.

The feeling of newness, innovation, and regeneration was the thrust of the first proclamation the new editors presented in *Nahal Habesor*. The publication of the periodical was noted as a new phenomenon: “A new publication which has never materialized in our times” (of course, they were in error, for they apparently were not aware, at that time, of the earlier publication of *Kohelet Musar* [Preacher of Morals]).

Undoubtedly, the editors of *Hame'asef* discerned that a momentous change had taken place in Europe. They advocated that their fellow European Jews partake in this process and reap its fruits. As *Haskalah* progressed, their concerted efforts to introduce the ideas of European Enlightenment started to bear fruit. In a long, continuous process lasting over a century, they effected acute change in the attitude of modern Jews towards traditional Judaism. These Hebrew *maskilim* were cognisant of the innovative nature of their activities and of the fact that they had formed a new social and cultural framework. They knew that they had created a new ideology which spoke on behalf of the new movement. They established a new literary centre, aiming to produce a new type of Hebrew literature, even if they did not name it “*Haskalah*”. The *maskilim* did not refer to this new

⁵⁷David Friedrichsfeld, ‘Hadlah Mimlitzat Yehudit Hatiferet’, *Hame'asef*, II (1784–1785), p. 34.

orientation as *Haskalah* literature, the *Haskalah* movement, or the *Haskalah* period, as Shavit has recently pointed out.⁵⁸ However, as Shmuel Feiner proved in his dissertation, the eighteenth-century *maskilim* developed a full historical awareness, and it served them in shaping the self-consciousness of the period.⁵⁹

MESSIANIC CONCEPTS APPLIED TO THE NEW AGE

Awareness such as this usually surfaced in public manifestos, which targeted a certain audience and carried a social message. A writer of such a proclamation usually felt the need to cite the occurring change as the reason for implementing a reform, as he was arguing his position and advocating his cause. One such manifesto was published in *Hame'asef* in 1790 by Mendel Bresslau, an editor of the periodical. Bresslau called on contemporary rabbis to form a rabbinic assembly in order to alleviate the burden of religious ordinances.⁶⁰ He cited the new age as reason for his demand, saying: "And who is too blind to see that the day of the Lord is coming, and in a short while wisdom and knowledge will become the faith of the times".⁶¹ Bresslau's phraseology is based on messianic hopes that were transformed and applied to the new age. In spite of the traditional metaphors, the reference to the proverbial Prophet Elijah, and the designation of the forthcoming great day as "the day of the Lord", Bresslau was far from considering it a divine or heavenly phenomenon; rather, he deemed it an earthly one. "You should pay attention to the splendid and awesome things that God has amazingly done in our times. And whosoever would not close his eyes in malice will indeed notice that it is God's hand . . . And why are you indolent to arouse the heart of the people, who are seeking to benefit our people in their toil, to re-establish the name of Jacob . . . My heart cries because of the evil that is happening in Israel . . . Not so are the ways of the other peoples around us, for they are improving the ways, and remove falsehood from the truth . . . Be ashamed, the house of Israel, for you have been doing the opposite, and truth is wanting."

These words are charged with great emotional vigour and attest to the great excitement among the Hebrew *maskilim*. It has been demonstrated elsewhere that Bresslau's article was written against the background of the call by the English deist Joseph Priestley for the "return of the Jews", in his book *Letters to the Jews*.⁶² Bresslau's article is indicative of the awareness of the pending changes. Evidently, the Hebrew language is deceiving us, playing a game of allusion and illusion,

⁵⁸Shavit, 'Ha"hasalah" Mahi', p. 51. Shavit argues that the *maskilim* were not aware that they were "maskilim". I tend to disagree with his notion if by this he meant that they did not consider themselves as *maskilim*.

⁵⁹Shmuel Feiner, *Hahaskalah Beyahasah Lahistoryah – Hakarat He'avar Vetfukdo Bitnu'at Hahaskalah Hayehudit (1781–1881)*, A Doctoral Dissertation, Jerusalem 1990, in the introduction and chapter one. Published as *Haskalah Vehistoryah*, Jerusalem 1995.

⁶⁰Mendel Bresslau, 'El Rodfei Zedek Vedorshei Shelom Aheinu Bnei Yisrael', *Hame'asef*, VI (1790), pp. 301–314. See *Bema'avkei Temurah*, chap. 5 on Bresslau.

⁶¹*ibid.*, p. 301.

⁶²See Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Jews*, New York 1794 [first edition: 1787]. See Pelli, *Bema'avkei Temurah*, pp. 167–174.

replete with sacred expressions and hope for a heavenly redemption. Nevertheless, the thrust of the article is completely secular, and its intent and tenor are mundane and earthly. The problem is that the author makes use of the “holy tongue”, with its religious and biblical allusions, in order to communicate with his contemporary readers. However, to read it naively and literally is incorrect.

Bresslau’s article and his use of the Hebrew language raise questions about our reading of the text. Is our reading tendentious? Do we read in the text what we wish to see in it? Is it possible that we interpret the above statements out of context? Could these statements be naive expressions which are based on textual allusions in the style of *Haskalah* and rabbinic writings of the time? Or perhaps these expressions represent emotional outpouring, uttered in a lofty, turgid language, while the author did not have in mind any new phenomena at all. Even if he did, was he correct in his observations about the so-called “new phenomena”? These questions – which were alluded to before – will continue to confront us in our discussion below. Yet, we should not be misled by Bresslau’s quasi-religious statements to think that all the *maskilim* – even the early ones – were devout supporters of the rabbinic establishment. Nor were all of them very strict about the religious observance of the *mitzvot* in a full-fledged, rabbinic manner. Many of the *maskilim*’s pronouncements were said in a certain way in order to appease the rabbis. Many of these statements were intended as lip service to placate the apprehensions of the Orthodox circles so as to win the support of the moderates among them, who were proverbially “sitting on the fence.” Bresslau “recruited” the Almighty to serve the *Haskalah* as it were, employing the messianic concept of “the day of the Lord” in order to assure his audience that his intentions were honourable.

KOHELET MUSAR AND DIVREI SHALOM VE’EMET EXAMINED FOR NEW AWARENESS

In order to examine the validity of our observations, we will apply the same method to search for overt expressions of the changing times in the early periodical *Kohelet Musar*, published by Mendelssohn in the 1750s. No such expressions are to be found in that ephemeral publication. There are references to the author’s contemplations on the world, citing “various changes”, but they allude to seasonal changes in nature. The thrust of those statements reflects certain aspects of contemporary *Weltanschauung*. There is an emphasis on man as the crown of creation, but this concept is found also in traditional Judaic sources. Gilon’s contention that *Kohelet Musar* “opens, in the humanities, the period of modern Judaism”,⁶³ will not be discussed here as it exceeds the scope of this article.

⁶³ *Kohelet Musar*, Issue I, p. 1, a copy of the edition at the British Library, London. Meir Gilon, *Kohelet Musar Lemoshe Mendelssohn Al Reka Tekufato*, Jerusalem 1979, p. 1. Gilon found in this periodical “the first attempt to form a *Weltanschauung* that is a synthesis of both the teaching of Judaism and the culture of European Enlightenment, and by this it opens up, in the realm of the humanities, the period of modern Judaism”. I discuss Gilon’s stand in the introduction to my book (temporary title) *Hame’asef Index*, submitted recently. This is also discussed in Pelli, ‘Hame’asef: Michtav Hadash Asher Aden Beyamenu Lo Hayah’, to *Hebrew Studies*, 1999.

A very interesting reference to the passing times is found in the original, handwritten comment that Shlomo Dubno marked on his personal copy of *Kohelet Musar*. On the cover page, which is now at the British Museum, he wrote: "This pamphlet has been composed by two individuals who are well-versed in Torah . . . and it was their intention by that to awaken the sleepy ones and to revive the slumbering persons out of the slumber of time, so as to get them accustomed to morality, by improving their manners, and to stir hearts by the beauty of the rhetoric of the holy tongue, which had been lost from us because of our own iniquities." However, Dubno's reference about the changing times does not address the kind of changes we are looking for, namely: quintessential and far-reaching "mega-changes". No doubt, Dubno cited important changes that the editors of *Kohelet Musar* were attempting to effect. These were secondary signs of contemporary innovation with an emphasis on the aesthetic of language, which indeed was one of the tenets of the modern age.

A comparable search in Naphtali Herz Wessely's timely writing, *Divrei Shalom Ve'emet*, will bring similar results. Even though this work contains many overt expressions relevant to the notion of modern times, it is generally immersed in a totally traditional ethos that was not indicative of the new age. Unlike Bresslau's external use of the "holy tongue" – the only one available to him – Wessely's tenor is traditional, as is typical of his other writings. For example, Wessely wrote: "In our generation the kings of Europe are wise, man-loving and virtuous, and they display benevolence and compassion towards us, may God remember it in their favour."⁶⁴ While Wessely's style may resemble that of Bresslau, the thrust of Wessely's text is totally ingrained in normative Judaism. He portrays contemporary events in the European arena as initiated by the Almighty – "he who announced the generations from the start" (based on Isaiah, XLI:4). Note that as Wessely proposed to enact the desired change, there appeared to be some hesitation in the thrust of his message: "And perhaps it is the assigned time to remove the hatred from the people's heart".⁶⁵

Interestingly enough, in another comparable search of a *maskil's* writings sixty years later we find an echo similar to the one in *Hame'asef* concerning the changing times. Mordechai Aharon Ginsburg proclaimed in 1843: "Behold the new age comes upon you, and we, the authors, are the scouts that she has sent before her, to herald her coming, and to command you to search out a resting place for her and to prepare for her needs."⁶⁶

If our observations in these examples are correct, the editors of *Hame'asef* and several of the writers who contributed to the journal were indeed the representatives of modernism, and were among those who promoted it in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ We have certainly noted the beginnings of the aware-

⁶⁴ *Divrei Shalom Ve'emet*, I, Berlin 1782, p. 14 [my pagination].

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Mordechai Aharon Ginsburg, 'Kikayon Deyonah', *Hamoriyah*, Warsaw 1878, pp. 47–48, which was written in 1843, and published posthumously.

⁶⁷ H. N. Shapira selected the writers of *Hame'asef* as those that opened the new era, as cited above, in his book, *Toldot Hasiyfrut Haivrit Hahadashah*: "Modern Hebrew literature does not have one initiator, but initiators, and they are the authors who published and participated in *Hame'asef* the literary

ness of change in their writings. Of course, not everything in their writings indicated change, as I have shown in some of the other examples. Change may be noticed not only in this early period, but also in later periods of *Haskalah*. Moreover, in this early generation of transition, one can find manifestations of both the old and the new in the same writing.

COVERT EXPRESSIONS OF CHANGE: JUDAISM SUBSERVIENT TO WESTERN CULTURE AND DEPENDENT ON IT

The forthcoming change towards modernism was expressed not only overtly, as discussed above, but also covertly in the works of several *Haskalah* writers. Unlike the overt expressions, covert enunciations were subconscious and clandestine. They are indicative of existing undercurrents and growing sensitivities with regard to phenomena which had barely begun to emerge. Nevertheless, these suggestions of awareness have foreshadowed the forthcoming new trends. They may be even more important than the overt expressions because of the latent message which they harboured concerning Judaism and the Jewish religion in modern times. Those subtle signs found in Hebrew literature manifested the emerging notion that normative Judaism, as it had been transmitted and practised throughout the ages, was no longer self-sufficient and self-contained. The *maskilim*, who expressed their innermost thoughts, inferred that Judaism could no longer continue to exist as an entity on its own, independent of the surrounding cultures, and could no longer provide total support to its adherents. Indeed, there was a strong feeling of the inadequacy of rabbinic Judaism to address the needs of modern man. In order for Judaism to survive, they argued, it could not continue to be isolated as in the past, but it must adjust to the new circumstances.

Moreover, the transformation of these Hebrew writers' outlook assumed another tone, manifested by the notion that traditional Judaism was subordinated and subservient to Western civilisation, inferior to it and dependent on it. This notion should not be interpreted to mean that these *maskilim* had any inferiority complex because of their adherence to Judaism. On the contrary, many of them expressed their pride in the pristine form of Judaism. They did consider contemporary rabbinic Judaism, which had allegedly deteriorated as a result of *galut* (exile), to be inferior, in contrast to the original form of Judaism. In fact, one of the *maskilim*, Satanow, expressed his opinion about the superiority of ancient Judaism, and implied that the Jewish Enlightenment should advocate a return to it.

This awareness represented a new phenomenon in eighteenth-century Judaism. The new awareness shattered the notion taken for granted in traditional Judaism, that the latter was an all-encompassing way of life. Judaism was considered to have addressed the needs of the individual Jew and Jewish society.

organ of the new people of Israel. From this *Hame'asef*, that is from 1784, we have to start reckoning modern Hebrew literature.", p. 58.

The change in outlook did not occur instantly. Jewish intellectuals were transforming their behaviour and viewpoints in a process that took place over a long period of time. The process involved spiritual and intellectual debate, tantalising questioning, and soul-searching, representing the desire to bridge two worlds and to narrow the gap between two civilisations.

Halkin was correct in his observation that “the Jew’s total contentment with his inner life is what typifies him in his living within the walls up until the eighteenth century”. With the ushering in of that century, Halkin stated, “his contentment with his inner life begins to dissipate”, and he feels free to address “the hunger of a regular human being for the good life on this earth”. It was Halkin who related the appearance of modern Hebrew literature to the Jewish tendency towards the external civilisation, combined with the strong desire of these Jews to remain Jewish.⁶⁸ The tension between these two tendencies brought about the advent of modern Hebrew literature, according to Halkin.

WESSELY: JUDAISM SUBSERVIENT TO EUROPEAN CIVILISATION

Significantly, this new awareness regarding Judaism’s alleged inferiority, subordination to, and dependence on Western civilisation was first detected in the writings of the moderate *maskil*, Naphtali Herz Wessely. It is remarkable that even *maskilim* with a traditional orientation such as Wessely shared this feeling of the alleged inferiority of contemporary rabbinic Judaism to Western culture in the modern age, and that they expressed it covertly in their writings. I base these conclusions on my previous works on Wessely, and on my interpretation of his book *Divrei Shalom Ve’emet*, which deals with reforming Jewish education.

Wessely articulated his educational theory in relation to his perception of Judaism. He argued that Judaism incorporates two major entities: *Torat Hashem*, the laws of God, which consists of the laws or teaching of God, and *Torat Ha’adam*, the laws of man. He further expanded the first entity, *Torat Hashem*, to include not only the laws of God, but also Judaism and the Judaic corpus in general. Similarly, Wessely extended the concept of *Torat Ha’adam* to include not only the laws of man, but also Natural Law, or the “seven Noahide laws”, all secular disciplines – scientific knowledge, social customs, and Western civilisation *in toto*. Wessely developed his theory on both the educational level and the historical level. He argued that historically and chronologically the law of God, namely, Judaism, was subservient to the law of man. Now, in the modern age, it was completely dependent on Western civilisation. Accordingly, this traditionalist *maskil* took a position that Judaism in modern times could not remain an independent entity. It was subjugated to Western culture, which he considered to be superior. His position manifested a major revision in Judaic *Weltanschauung*. It looked as though Judaism was no longer a self-sufficient entity, whose spiritual strength supported all its needs. It was felt that Judaism at this

⁶⁸Halkin, *Derachim Vetzidei Derachim Basifrut*, I, pp. 156–157; Halkin, *Zeranim Vetzurot Basifrut Hairit Hahadashah*, I, p. 11.

modern age should extract itself from its particularistic isolation and assume its previously held character of universalism.⁶⁹

Wessely's reflections should be interpreted, neither as an attempt to assimilate, nor as self-denial *vis-à-vis* Western culture. Wessely was a devout Jew who was proud of his Jewish heritage. Wessely's *Torat Ha'adam* was not foreign to pristine Judaism. It was indeed integrated in it, although it had been neglected as a result of the Diaspora experience. This was a modern re-interpretation of Judaism, an attempt to rehabilitate it on the basis of its own inherent principles. Undoubtedly, this view represented a revolutionary revision of values of *Haskalah* Judaism. This was a complete about-face from the viewpoint of traditional Judaism. Thus, one of the important indicators of modernism in Judaism was in its deviation from the traditional outlook that viewed Judaism as a self-reliant, self-sufficient, all-encompassing entity. Instead, modernism considered Judaism in its present state to be inferior and subservient to European civilisation.

Wessely presumably expressed these ideas without realising fully and consciously their revolutionary nature. For this reason, his utterances have been classified within the *covert* statements. They are the most significant aspect of the modern period, because they expressed the social, cultural and spiritual undercurrents leading to the changes that were about to take place. Wessely was not and could not have been "a new man" "fighting for new life," as suggested by Klausner. He displayed a profound expression of the changes he sensed, although, I believe, he was not consciously aware of them, and did not intend them to be so extreme. Therefore, while Wessely's literary work was already within the perimeters of *Haskalah*, he should not be considered as one of the "heralds" of *Haskalah*, such as Emden, due to his traditional orientation. The early *maskilim's* inner world was not devoid of their Jewishness, as Kurzweil attempted to portray it. It was the beginning of a change that evolved into a complex process of transformation, a process that should not be entirely delineated only as linear, progressive and continuous.

JUDAISM RE-DEFINED

An important aspect of modernism in Hebrew *Haskalah* was manifested through conscious attempts to re-define Judaism. In the writings of the Hebrew *maskil* Isaac Satanow an allusion to rejecting the claim by contemporary rabbinic Judaism for the exclusive right to represent and interpret authentic Judaism may be found. Satanow identified a historical model which he thought represented the original, authentic form of Judaism. In his view, this historical Judaism should be emulated by *Haskalah* in order to revitalise the Jewish religion in modern times. Significantly, Satanow found the epitome of authentic Judaism in *early* rabbinic Judaism. He considered the periods of Mishnaic and Talmudic Judaism as representing Judaism at its highest point of flourishing,

⁶⁹See detailed discussion, Pelli, *Bema'avkei Temurah*, pp. 58–59, 76–77 (notes 80–81); *idem*, *The Age of Haskalah*, pp. 122, 127–128.

creativity, scholarship, and knowledge. It was in this period that Jewish civilisation made its lasting contribution to knowledge and humanism. The selection of earlier periods in the history of rabbinic Judaism was intended to crystallise the contrast between them and contemporary rabbinic Judaism. It aimed to return to the original, authentic Judaism, which should be adopted by *Haskalah* Judaism.⁷⁰

Thus began the modern trend in Jewish circles to be liberated from the rabbinic “birthright” and its exclusive, almost divine, religious authority over the definition of Judaism. In order to prove that historical Judaism embodied a multiplicity of viewpoints, the *maskilim* quoted repeatedly the passage, “*Elu ve’elu divrei elohim hayim*” (these and these are the words of a living God). To them, it showed that authentic Judaism encompassed ideologies that at times contradicted each other, and that the Talmudic sages showed no consternation in accepting them. Obviously, the *maskilim* wished to emphasise the openness of Judaism and the inherent freedom to interpret its tenets without resorting to a restrictive Orthodox position. Accordingly, the *maskilim*’s views of Judaism were as legitimate as those of contemporary rabbis. They believed that their views embodied an attempt to present an alternative to rabbinic Judaism.⁷¹

Modernism, therefore, may reflect not only secular trends, as is customarily accepted by most literary historians and critics, but also the religious tendency to re-define Judaism on the basis of a past model. Replacing normative rabbinic tradition with a re-defined, neo-traditional, modern version of Judaism was indeed the aspiration of many of the moderate *maskilim*. The phenomena referred to as the “forerunners of *Haskalah*” is not addressed here. However, Rabbi Jacob Emden, for example, is not considered part of *Haskalah* proper because of his *Weltanschauung*, his rabbinic post and orientation, and the tenets expressed in his writings.⁷² Thus, the axiom that modernism in modern Hebrew literature is essentially secular-orientated should not be accepted at face value. It should be re-examined for its validity *vis-à-vis* the reality of early *Haskalah*. For indeed we have found an all-encompassing and a more meaningful criteria that characterized the evolving modernism within the Hebraic and Judaic spheres of influence. The developing change did not distinguish itself necessarily by its “secularism”, although it is definitely characterised by revision in values.

Thus, it is incumbent upon us to review and re-assess some of the accepted notions in *Haskalah* criticism and its historiography concerning the attitude of the Hebrew *maskilim* towards Jewish tradition. One of the accepted myths, which I have established as erroneous, was the claim that the Hebrew *maskilim* possessed a negative attitude towards the Talmud, and that they had rejected its scholarship and learning. As I have demonstrated, this assertion should be revised because it is not applicable to many of the early *maskilim*.⁷³ Surely, the

⁷⁰Cf. *ibid.*, *The Age of Haskalah*, chap. 8; Pelli, *Bema’avkei Temurah*, pp. 120–122.

⁷¹*ibid.*, pp. 170–171, and the related footnotes where I cited the sources in *Haskalah* literature.

⁷²See Shohet, *Im Hilufei Tekufot*, chap. 10, ‘The Buds of *Haskalah*’, and pp. 220 ff. on Emden. See Feiner’s article cited in note 10.

⁷³See Pelli, *The Age of Haskalah*, chap. 3, on the attitude of the *maskilim* towards the Talmud.

more extreme *maskilim* embraced a radical “secularism”, which in effect removed them from the mainstream of Hebrew *Haskalah*. Thus, they are outside our domain and are naturally excluded from our discussion. The extreme religious reform orientation which occurred in German Jewry some seventy years later did not originate directly from early Hebrew *Haskalah*, some influence notwithstanding. We should not adopt the argument used by *Haskalah*’s Orthodox opponents in its time and afterwards about the alleged heresy of *Haskalah* as valid for a balanced, historical evaluation. This applies not only to the first period of *Haskalah*, but also to the later period. We do not refer to the more moderate of the *maskilim*, such as S. D. Luzzatto and Eliezer Zweifel, who were known for their traditionalist, moderate stand,⁷⁴ but to the more mainstream *maskilim*. For example, recently Israel Bartal studied Mordechai Aharon Ginzburg’s stand on modernity and concluded that Ginzburg was a very moderate *maskil* in spite of the image portrayed by the Orthodoxy to the contrary. Bartal concluded that Ginzburg “looks much closer to Orthodoxy than to the radical *maskilim* with whom he disagreed in his writings”.⁷⁵

It is evident that throughout the course of *Haskalah*, the *maskilim* themselves were very careful to make a clear distinction between the “true *maskil*” and the “false *maskil*”, and warned against confusing the two.⁷⁶ In time, however, the notion that *Haskalah* was leading to assimilation and conversion prevailed not only in Orthodoxy’s criticism (for example, Asher Pritzker’s writings), but also in general criticism.⁷⁷ A different notion prevailed during *Haskalah* itself, in its early period and even in the 1860s, as expressed by Abramowitz (Mendele Mocher Sfarim), to the effect that the *maskilim* wished to reconcile faith and *Haskalah*.⁷⁸

Haskalah criticism must, therefore, re-examine the cultural, neo-traditional elements in *Haskalah* Judaism. The term “neo-traditional” should not be interpreted as implying a complete Orthodox observance of the *mitzvot*, or “modern Orthodoxy” in the fashion of our contemporary Judaism. It is for this reason that Kurzweil’s concept of a total “revolution” in *Haskalah* is incorrect. Kurzweil anachronistically advanced the latter phenomenon, and makes a

⁷⁴See Shmuel Feiner’s article, ‘Eliezer Zweifel Vehahaskalah Hametunah Berusyah’, *Hadat Vehahayim: Tenu’at Hahaskalah Hayehudit Bemizrah Eiropah*, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 336–379.

⁷⁵Israel Bartal, ‘Mordechai Aharon Ginzburg – Maskil Lita’i Mul Hamodernah’, *Hadat Vehahayim: Tenu’at Hahaskalah Hayehudit Bemizrah Eiropah*, pp. 109–125.

⁷⁶In early *Haskalah*, the “false *maskil*” is described in Euchel’s letters, *Hame’asef*, II (1785), p. 140. In the later part of *Haskalah* the theme is addressed in Brandstaedter’s stories.

⁷⁷See, for example, Ruth Kastenberg-Gladstein, ‘Ofyah Hale’umi Shel Haskalat Prag’, *Molad*, XXIII, Nos. 201–202, (Tamuz-Av, 1965), p. 221: “we see the beginning of *Haskalah* movement, the ‘Berlin *Haskalah*’, as leading to assimilation, and also to conversion to Christianity”. See also Asher Pritzker’s books, *Sefer Hame’ilah*, Tel Aviv 1957; and *Sefer Hagut*, Tel Aviv 1958.

⁷⁸Abramowitz, in his article ‘Kilkul Haminim’, *Mishpat Shalom*, published in Shimon Halkin’s *Mekorot Letoldot Habikoret Haivrit Bitkufat Hahaskalah*, Jerusalem 1961, p. 287 [facsimile]. *Hamelitz* had the permanent motto on its masthead: “Hamelitz bein am yeshurun vehamemshalah, bein ha’emunah vehahaskalah.” (“Hamelitz [interpreter, mediator] between the people of Yeshurun and the government, between faith and *Haskalah*.”) In early *Haskalah*, such a notion may be found in Satanow’s writings (see below); see Pelli, *Bema’avkei Temurah*, pp. 93–99. This topic should be further discussed.

generalisation about that which was unique to a different period. It was not a “revolution”, as suggested by Kurzweil; rather, one can safely characterise *Haskalah* Judaism as advocating the continuation of the *status quo* with an eye on revolution. Kurzweil’s error is that he presented his view as a dichotomy in order to emphasise his point. However, the two polarities which he selected did not fit the reality of *Haskalah*. The latter encompassed a series of internal overt and covert processes, which represented progress (if this is the right word) as well as “retreat”. The “revolution” Kurzweil talks about came on the heels of *Haskalah* or at its end. However, this revolution has never been a complete one, typifying all *maskilim*.

REVISION OF THE JUDAIC VALUE SYSTEM

There was another covert expression of the pending shift about to take place in *Haskalah* Judaism. It was detected in the pronouncements of *Haskalah* ideology, as fundamental values in normative Judaism were questioned. These values formed the foundations of Judaism for many generations, and have been accepted as an integral part of Jewish tradition. Now, however, they became the target of probe and doubt. This phenomenon epitomised the beginning of great changes, which were about to occur in Judaism. As emphasised earlier, this was an internal, rather than external change.

Satanow’s creative writings and thought best reflect the Jewish experience in the emerging modern age. In his multi-faceted writings, Satanow alludes (according to my interpretation) to major changes in the perception of Judaism. Well-established fundamental values in the make-up of Judaism were scrutinized by this *maskil*. In his early work, Satanow, attempts to reconcile faith and *Haskalah*, and proposes an ideal unity between *hochmah* (wisdom) and Torah, an affinity between tradition and free investigation, which he presents as “twin sisters”. From this position, Satanow moves on later in his writing career to destroy the harmony that he had previously attempted to build.

Because of the epigrammatic and proverbial nature of some of his works, emulating the style of biblical wisdom literature, and his pseudo-traditional commentary offered on its side after the style of full-fledged biblical commentary, it is possible to trace Satanow’s changing views almost step by step. Thus, we can reconstruct his changing outlook (although it is impossible to prove its exact consecutive development). Viewing his reconstructed standpoint, it seems that Satanow was weighing the relations between freethinking, as a modern representation, and the traditional concept of fear of God, using the terms *hochmah* and *yir’ah* (fear of God). At first, Satanow placed *hochmah* and *yir’ah* as equals, saying that both “*Yir’ah* and *hochmah* are riding together.”⁷⁹ In the same vein he writes: “There is no contradiction between *hochmah* and Torah,” for the “true *hochmah* . . . will not object to Torah”. He reiterates: “It is best to have both *hochmah* and Torah, and when these two combine with one another . . . they will inseminate

⁷⁹Isaac Satanow, *Kuntres Misefer Hazohar*, Berlin 1783, on the title page.

and bring forth truth.”⁸⁰ Subsequently, Satanow modifies this notion, saying that the two entities complement each other: “*Yir’ah* and *hochmah* both may bring a person to the realm of perfection.”⁸¹ Ultimately, he revised his position, once again, saying that the two were interdependent: “[For] one who denies *hochmah*, it is as if he denied the very seal [of the Almighty], which is truth.”⁸²

Satanow’s personal path to enlightenment went through a transformation in viewpoint as he established the dependence of Judaism on secular *hochmah*. He writes: “The perfect person will not be able to know Him [God] except through *hochmah*.”⁸³ Similarly, he writes: “Faith without *hochmah* is like an open city without a wall.”⁸⁴ He then establishes that Judaism was subordinated to man’s reason, saying that *hochmah* “will probe faith, whether it is based on truth or on falsehood, for any faith which denies reason should not be trusted”.⁸⁵ Subsequently, he makes an about face similar to the one we found in Wessely’s writings: “Whereas *yir’ah* has a temporal priority over *hochmah*, behold *hochmah* possesses a virtuous priority over *yir’ah*, because it is the very essence of *yir’ah* and its objective”.⁸⁶ In this struggle between *yir’ah* and *hochmah*, between Judaism and Western culture, the latter seems to triumph.

The next stage in the development of Satanow’s viewpoint further crystallises the difference between *yir’ah* and *hochmah* and establishes the contradiction between the two. Here Satanow dares to touch upon the essence of Judaism, the *mitzvot*, saying that “the observance of the *mitzvah* and the existence of *hochmah* are two opposites”.⁸⁷ It appears that Faith, as an entity by itself, cannot compete with Truth, which to him is identical with *Haskalah*, and would not be able even to co-exist as an equal because of the polarity that exists between the two.

Thus, Satanow began his quest, groping for some form of semi-secular Judaism of the future, designated for modern Jews. He alludes to the solution that emerged, annulling the conflict between observing the *mitzvot* and the dictates of modern times. Accordingly, the new form of modern Judaism may have a different attitude towards the *mitzvot* – a position similar to Euchel’s (see below). In spite of this extreme position, Satanow should not be regarded as a free or secular Jew because he was anchored in the old world, drawing his creative energies and inner experience from it. Perhaps he was indeed “half a heretic and half a believer”, as was said about him. However, in his sensitivity he foreshadowed the very problem which modern Judaism was destined to face in the future.⁸⁸

In his writings we find the tantalising spiritual and intellectual struggle with the viability of basic tenets of traditional Judaism and the probability of their

⁸⁰ *idem*, *Sefer Hahizayon*, Berlin [1785], p. 4a.

⁸¹ *idem*, *Mishlei Asaf*, I, Berlin 1789, p. 12a.

⁸² *ibid.*, I, pp. 7b-8a.

⁸³ *ibid.*, I, p. 9b.

⁸⁴ Isaac Satanow, *Imrei Binah*, [Berlin] 1784, p. 12a.

⁸⁵ *idem*, *Mishlei Asaf*, II, Berlin 1792, p. 61a.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, I, p. 1b.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, II, p. 18a.

⁸⁸ See detailed discussion in Pelli, *Bema’avkei Temurah*, chapter on Satanow.

annulment in modern times. These articulations constitute the “measuring rod” of modernism, namely, the very changes in values that began to form inwardly and clandestinely in the thinking of this *maskil*. For example, Satanow began to question the tenet of *Bitahon Basherem*, which meant a total unequivocal trust in the God of Israel and in His personal providence, and is considered one of the basic principles of traditional Judaism. These assessments are based on my interpretation of selections from Satanow’s *Mishlei Asaf*. In the text, he writes: “Trust and action met, choice and decree touched.”⁸⁹ In his commentary to the text, the author explains that trust (in God) and man’s freedom of action contradict each other because “whoever trusts his master that He will provide his food, yet is actively looking for food, proves that his trust in his master is not complete”. Similarly, he stipulates that free choice and providence are contradictory.⁹⁰

Satanow goes on to examine and scrutinise other basic concepts of traditional Judaism. He reinterprets *Yir’at Hashem*, fear of God, and *Ahavat Hashem*, love of God, both basic tenets of Judaism, on the basis of his revised perception of Judaism. Satanow implies in the sub-text that *Yir’at Hashem*, in its classical meaning of an all-encompassing faith in God, is no longer obligatory in the modern age. God “will not blame you for not learning to fear him”, he asserts in a complex commentary to a verse in his text, while fostering additional doubts concerning the knowledge of God on the basis of tradition, as compared to the knowledge of God stemming from rational inner conviction.⁹¹

Satanow continues to examine the concept of *Ahavat Hashem* and concludes that a pure love of God, love for love’s sake, which lacks any ulterior motive, can no longer be achieved. “There is no love in the world which is caused by the love of the object alone, for self-love is the cause of all, so that the lover should benefit in some way from his love . . . and also all those who worship God with love, love Him because they love themselves, for their own benefit in this world and in the world to come, be it materially or spiritually.”⁹²

Instead of these fundamental values, Satanow proposes *Haskalah*’s substitute. No longer is it “trust in God” and “love of God”, but their antithesis; scepticism and doubt are the alternative values of modern Judaism, according to Satanow.

⁸⁹Satanow, *Mishlei Asaf I*, p. 4b.

⁹⁰“Mivtah va’alilah nifgashu, behirah ugzerah nashaku.” (“Trust and action met, choice and decree kissed.”) Satanow’s commentary is complex, at times ambiguous, and requires logical deduction which follows the pattern of biblical parallelism. For example: since the second part of the verse deals with divine providence and free choice, one is led to conclude – based on biblical parallelism – that the first part of the verse deals with divine matters, and thus the commentary follows the same orientation, and the term “master” refers to the Almighty. Thus, the trust is “trust in God”, which contradicts man’s action. Satanow proposes a compromise, saying that this basic contradiction was intended by God “who makes peace between them” (verse 2, in the text), for man must “trust God as a righteous man trusts [him], and adhere to diligence [in his actions] as if he did not trust God” (commentary to verse 3). At the end, the basic contradiction has not been satisfactorily resolved, and at least there remains some scepticism concerning the possibility of a complete trust in God. See the discussion in Pelli, *Bema’avkei Temurah*, p. 127. Compare, for example, the traditional notion of “trust in God” exemplified a hundred years earlier by Glückel in her autobiography, *The Life of Glückel of Hameln*, New York 1963, p. 6.

⁹¹See detailed discussion in Pelli, *Bema’avkei Temurah*, p. 127, note 57.

⁹²See details *ibid.*, p. 127, note 58.

He expresses it in the following passage: "Those who pass through the depths of confusion, for the reason that one does not fully comprehend the dictum of the Torah unless he had stumbled upon it; this confusion will become as a flowing fountain, which is the source of wisdom, and they will go from strength to strength in their understanding."⁹³

Thus, Satanow was re-forming the ideological, spiritual and ethical values of modern Judaism, modelled on the European Enlightenment. This trend should be considered as the budding of modern, secular Judaism, which began its long course of development in German *Haskalah*, and has continued to our days.

NEW PERCEPTION OF JEWISH HISTORY, CALENDAR AND TIME

Another way to identify modernism during this period is to probe the *maskilim's* perception of Jewish history and the historical processes occurring in it. We can discern the formation of significant changes in their view of Jewish history and their attitude towards it. The perception of Jewish history in *Haskalah* has been previously discussed by Reuven Michael. However, he dwelled on the legitimate historical corpus, namely those works written specifically within history proper – not literature – and the attitude of the *maskilim* towards the study of history.⁹⁴ Shmuel Feiner, too, dealt with the attitude of *Haskalah* towards history. He concentrated on the awareness of the historical past and its utilisation to promote the goals and ideology of *Haskalah*.⁹⁵

I found a unique perception of Jewish history in a literary piece during this period of *Haskalah*. It appears to be the first time that a Hebrew writer questioned the inevitability of Jewish history and expressed his doubts about its predestined course. It was an attempt to fathom the meaning of Jewish history and the historical significance of Jewish existence. The very efforts of Hebrew *Haskalah*, as a literature and as a social and cultural movement, to change somehow the course of Jewish history from within manifested the modern aspect of eighteenth-century Judaism.

The exponent of this new attitude was Saul Berlin, a rabbi and one of the most outspoken Hebrew writers of early *Haskalah* in Germany. His views of Jewish historiography are expressed in the satire *Ktav Yosher* (An Epistle of Righteousness), published in 1794, but in fact written ten years earlier in defence of Wessely. In this satire Saul Berlin, like Satanow, undertook to annul certain accepted concepts and basic tenets deemed as revered values of Judaism. He also attempted to debunk sacred myths in Jewish historiography. This extreme stand, with its acrimonious forceful tone and criticism concerning the very essence of Jewish existence, had not been heard prior to this time. These views represent a major aspect of modernism to be reckoned with.

Saul Berlin's medium is biting satire, which, as a literary vehicle, is part of the

⁹³ *Mishlei Asaf*, I, p. 25b, and see discussion in Pelli, *The Age of Haskalah*, pp. 169–170.

⁹⁴ Reuven Michael, *Haktivah Hahistorit Hayehudit*, Jerusalem 1992, pp. 96–113.

⁹⁵ Feiner, *Hahaskalah Beyahasah Lahistoryah – Hakarat He'avar Vetifkudo Bitmu'at Hahaskalah Hayehudit (1781–1881)*.

struggle for change. Berlin ridicules the revered attitude towards *Kidush Hashem*, martyrdom, a concept that has been sanctified in Jewish history. He criticises the Jews' willingness to accept their persecutions and catastrophes without any question or protest, as if they were divinely pre-destined and as if Jewish history must immanently lead to death and destruction. "Since the day the temple was destroyed and the sacrifices were abolished God does not enjoy anything better than to have us slaughtered and killed, like a sacrifice and a burnt offering for the sanctification of His great name . . . may I, the poor and humble, too, be worthy to be killed or hanged for the sanctification of His name", he writes scathingly. "And if because of their hatred, our foes are many . . . may we be worthy to sanctify heaven's name in the eyes of all the nations."⁹⁶ In so doing, this Hebrew writer criticises not only the mentality of the Jews, but also protests bitterly against the divine providence that singled out the Jews, and deplors this Jewish fate and destiny.

Berlin intensifies his criticism beyond examining the historical aspect of Jewish time and the individual Jew's attitude towards it. He begins by probing the concept of the Jewish calendar, that is, the essence of Jewish time, in its contemporary manifestation, and the individual's interaction with it. "And those who were killed in the [1648/9] Chmielnicki massacres in Poland were meritorious because the twentieth day of Sivan was designated for fasting and great lamentation to commemorate their killing. And therefore, why shouldn't we envy them for the great privilege that they had received and bestowed upon others as well".⁹⁷ The Jewish calendar – that system of daily sacred symbols – is saturated with memorial days for those historical calamities. The Jew is described as someone who experiences this twisted Jewish history also in his daily life. Saul Berlin now asserts that this practice be changed. He seems to have criticised the synoptic concept of Jewish history that considered every individual Jew in every generation as though that person had been a "participant" in every historical event in Judaism. Perhaps it is the beginning of the orientation that would transform the Jew from his atemporality back to time's normality, placing the Jewish people back into the course of human history.⁹⁸

This aspect of modernism is exemplified in Saul Berlin's attempt to crush some basic paradigms of Jewish existence, embraced wholeheartedly by traditional Judaism. For example, the concept of *galut* (state of exile) is scrutinised by Berlin together with its counterpart, *ge'ulah* (divine redemption). He employs the distorted mirror of satire, claiming that Jews have become so used to the state of exile and to their low ebb that they do not want to be extricated from it. It may be concluded from his writings that this condition is not irreversible and that it could and should be rectified in the modern age, which has witnessed a different

⁹⁶Saul Berlin, *Ktav Yosher*, Berlin 1794, p. 4b.

⁹⁷*ibid.*, p. 5a.

⁹⁸Detailed discussion on Saul Berlin may be found in Pelli, *The Age of Haskalah* and *idem*, *Bema'avkei Temura*, and in my two articles on *Ktav Yosher*: 'Saul Berlin's Ktav Yosher – The Beginning of Satire in Modern Hebrew Literature of the Haskalah in Germany', in *LBI Year Book XX* (1975), pp. 109–127; and 'Aspects of Hebrew Enlightenment Satire – Saul Berlin: Involvement and Detachment', *LBI Year Book XXII* (1977), pp. 93–107.

relationship with the peoples of Europe. The hope for redemption is depicted by this *maskil*, not as the Jews' desire to be redeemed, but as a limited manifestation of their worship.⁹⁹ In addition, Berlin implies that messianic redemption is no longer conceived as a divine act, and that it may be materialised in a mundane way through the person of a leader in their time. This contemporary redeemer "was destined to clear the way and to pave the road",¹⁰⁰ and Saul Berlin implied that it was none other than . . . Moses Mendelssohn.¹⁰¹

Another criterion designated to identify the transition to modern times in Jewish history was the desire to normalise the relations between the Jewish people and the other peoples of Europe, a goal undertaken by *Haskalah*. This aspect of Jewish modernism raised the question of the Jewish isolationism and the attitude of the Jews towards Western civilisation, both marked as targets for Berlin's satire. In his caustic satire, the author asserts that the gentiles' hatred for the Jews was benevolent because it facilitated Jewish martyrdom, *Kidush Hashem*. Accordingly, these Jews were better off, he suggests (aiming his satiric arrow), for they attained the same exalted eminence as the righteous people who had become martyrs. In order to achieve this desired goal, he contends, it is better not to seek the well being of the non-Jews. Ostensibly, Saul Berlin also attempts to reject the idea of the "chosenness" of Israel, showing in effect that this "chosenness" in effect brings a total annihilation to the Jews. He thus creates a satirical paradox, whose purpose is to place the existence of the people above the concept of Israel's "chosenness".¹⁰²

Those are intrepid expressions which marked the watershed point in Jewish history and Hebrew letters. They reflect the sense of change in the perception of Jewish history that certainly marked the advent of modernism in *Haskalah* Judaism. They epitomise a revised attitude towards Jewish history. No longer is there a passive, submissive acceptance of persecutions and catastrophes as God's punishments. Now, a pungent, accusatory, and defying protest emerged that would eventually lead to active implementation of the desired changes in Jewish

⁹⁹Berlin, *Ktav Yosher*, p. 5a: "And when we pray about the *galut* and for the coming of the Messiah, it is not in order that God will ameliorate our condition and give us pleasure and goodness, but in order that we may worship Him and perform the multitude of *mitzvot* which the contemporary rabbis place upon us, and it is not because of the poverty, destitution and grief that we have endured, for all of this does not bother us. On the contrary, this is what we desire. For the bitter *galut* and the hatred of the nations cleanse our iniquities."

¹⁰⁰*ibid.*, p. 15b.

¹⁰¹See Pelli, 'Aspects of Hebrew Enlightenment Satire – Saul Berlin: Involvement and Detachment', in *LBI Year Book, XXII* (1977), where this was written about in detail, citing the sources and analysing the text.

¹⁰²Berlin, *Ktav Yosher*, p. 4b: "Since the destruction of the temple and the abolishing of the sacrifices, God does not enjoy anything better than to have us slaughtered and killed like a sacrifice and burnt offering for the sanctification of His great name. And happy were our forefathers and our forefathers' fathers in ancient times when the hatred of the nations prevailed, and every day our enemies were rising against them, slaughtering men, women, and children, young men and women, bridegrooms and brides, old men and women by the hundreds and thousands as the sanctified sheep were slaughtered on the holidays in Jerusalem on the altar, and their blood atoned as a sacrifice and burnt offering. And then their souls ascended to heaven, and Michael the archangel stood and slaughtered them again and spilled their blood on the heavenly altar, and happy are they that they achieved such great merit."

society. All of these notions were expressed in the writings of this enigmatic observant rabbi, a scion of a respectable rabbinic family, who turned out to be one of the most eloquent spokesmen of *Haskalah*. In the very dual role of his life and his personality, Rabbi Saul Berlin exemplifies the generation of *maskilim* in transition, advancing towards the forthcoming modernism.

SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS AND DISREGARD FOR *MITZVOT*

Another decisive mega-trend in the changing perception of modern Judaism signified the great transition between *Haskalah* and the preceding period. For the first time in the modern age (excluding the Sabbatian and Frankist phenomena), the question arose as to whether traditional Judaism can bring happiness to the modern Jew. Two *Haskalah* writers, Isaac Euchel, the editor of *Hame'asef*, and Saul Berlin expressed their agonising doubts whether traditional Judaism could bring happiness to the Jew as an individual and to Jewish society as a whole. It was European Enlightenment ideology that demanded the individual's right to achieve happiness. Several of the early *maskilim* adopted this ideal of Enlightenment in its concept of mundane happiness and arrived at a radical interpretation of Judaism. As a result, they demanded change in traditional Judaism.

Isaac Euchel planted the early seeds of scepticism in his satire 'Igrof Meshulam ben Uriyah Ha'eshtemo'i' ('The Letters of Meshulam ...'). Serialised in *Hame'asef* in 1790, this epistolary satire is set in modern-day Spain. Euchel describes the Marranos' clandestine practice of Judaism, barely observing the *mitzvot*. The protagonist, Meshulam, poses a naive, though consequential, question:

According to my thinking the success [happiness] of the Israelite lies in the observance of the *mitzvot* alone, and if it were possible to be wholesome [achieve perfection] and happy without observance of the *mitzvot*, would not Socrates the Greek and Zoroaster the Hindu be as wholesome [achieving perfection] and happy as any Israelite?¹⁰³

On the threshold of modern times, Euchel's intention was to express his doubts about the happiness that a Jew may derive from the observance of the *mitzvot*, and to infer that the modern Jew can achieve his happiness without fulfilling the *mitzvot*. As Judaism ceased to be the sole provider of happiness for the Jews, the door was opened to the "brave new world" of Western civilisation. This is the signal of the emergence of modernism, as it took shape in the minds and hearts of the early *maskilim*.

Three years later, Saul Berlin expressed a more extreme stand *vis-à-vis* the Jew's happiness, in his *responsa* book, *Besamim Rosh*, where he examines, among other things, the probability of abrogating the *mitzvot*. He presents it in a hypothetical question as follows: "And if, God forbid, it could be envisioned that there would come a time when the laws of the Torah and its precepts will cause harm to our people ... or even if it could be envisioned that they would

¹⁰³Isaac Euchel, 'Igrof Meshulam ben Uriyah Ha'eshtemo'i', *Hame'asef*, VI (1790), p. 44.

not bring happiness at all, then we should remove its yoke from our neck.”¹⁰⁴ As a *halakhic* authority, Saul Berlin was not satisfied with hints about the possibility of abolishing the *mitzvot* “le’atid lavo” – in the future, or in Messianic times (based on Niddah, 61b), as was done by some of the *maskilim*, but addressed the issue directly.

These two *maskilim* identified one of the most important tenets of the change into modernism: the desire of modern Jews to achieve mundane and immediate happiness, rather than the time-honoured promises for the transcendental world to come. Their stand attested to a mega-trend leading towards secularism, which manifests itself in modern Judaism to this day.

This outlook of the *mizvot* seems to represent an advanced development pursuant to Wessely’s re-assessment of the relations between Judaism and Western culture. Upon the removal of the exclusiveness from Judaism, as the only source providing the complete happiness for the Jew, the gate to modernism was thrown wide open, even for those who continued to observe the *mitzvot* and the tenets of Judaism.

WHAT IS SECULARISM?

At this point we must ask: What then is secularism? The dictionary definition of secularism (*Hiloniyut* in Hebrew) does not cover the whole gamut of meanings discussed above, as exemplified in *Haskalah* literature. *Hamilton Hehadash* (The New Dictionary) by Even-Shoshan defines the Hebrew word *Hol* as “anything that does not contain sacredness”. *Hiloniyut* is defined as “non-religiousness, lack of connection to the sacred” and *Hiloni* is “non-sacred, that which is not connected to religion”. *Hilun* is explained as “secularisation, abolishing sacredness, making secular”.¹⁰⁵ The Hebrew definition tends to approach secularism negatively, as something that is not sacred. Actually, the English definition is much broader in its approach to the subject, using positive terminology. Thus, Webster defines “secular” as: “Worldly, pagan. Of or related to the worldly or temporal as distinguished from the spiritual or eternal; not sacred; mundane. b. not overtly or specifically religious.”¹⁰⁶

Several scholars who studied the phenomena and meaning of secularism attempted to define the term “secular”. Wagar, in the introduction to *The Secular Mind*, examines several definitions and cites their weakness. It results from the ambiguity of the term which originates from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning the world. By convention, “secularism” means “to repugn or ignore religious considerations and substitute for them the values of this world”.¹⁰⁷ However, secularism is much more complex a phenomenon. Wagar dismisses Chadwick’s definition, stating that secularisation “is supposed to mean, a growing tendency in mankind to do without religion, or to try to do without

¹⁰⁴Saul Berlin, *Besamim Rosh*, Berlin 1793, p. 77a, item 251.

¹⁰⁵Avraham Even-Shoshan, *Hamilton Hehadash*, II, Jerusalem 1966, pp. 764, 769.

¹⁰⁶*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, New York 1971, p. 2053.

¹⁰⁷W. Warren Wagar, ed., ‘Introduction’, *The Secular Mind*, New York 1982, p. 2.

religion”,¹⁰⁸ as inadequate. Certainly, in context of the modern trends in *Haskalah* Judaism, Wagar’s position is accepted.

The issue becomes even more complex when viewed against Harvey Cox’s “secular theology” theory. Accordingly, secularisation “is the passage to a society characterized by the anonymity and mobility of urban living, by pluralism, tolerance, pragmatism, and profanity – the last defined as the disappearance from consciousness of any supermundane reality”.¹⁰⁹ At this point, one feels the necessity for a definition of the adjective “religious”. Martin defines it as “an acceptance of a level of reality beyond the observable world known to science, to which are ascribed meanings and purposes completing and transcending those of the purely human realm”.¹¹⁰ “Secularization is nothing less than the decline of religious beliefs and institutions.”¹¹¹

We will not readily follow Wagar’s contention that, facing the problematics of the question, “one is tempted to take refuge in Hermann Lübbe’s elastic definition of secularization as the historical relationship in which modern civilization stands to its indelibly Christian past”.¹¹² We may possibly consider this notion when “converted” to . . . “the Jewish past”.

As we have noted in our discussion, the dictionary definition of “secularism” in its meaning of “this-worldliness”, “temporality”, and “mundane”, does not fit the unique case of Hebrew *Haskalah*. Furthermore, the definition of secularism as “non-sacred”, or “not connected to religion”, is also unsatisfactory. As we have seen, the *maskilim*’s unique predicament was characterised by a spiritual struggle between the old and the new, between the desire to adopt European cultural criteria and the simultaneous desire to remain loyal to Jewish heritage. This precludes any clear-cut classification based on a dictionary definition. The *maskilim*’s Hebrew and Jewish culture cannot be defined solely on either the religious or the secular level. It floats in the spheres of the undefined culture which cannot be classified uniquely as secular or religious. This very problem – the ambivalence between the sacred and the secular – is the epitome of Jewish modernism. Therefore, our definition concentrates more on the inner spiritual and intellectual struggle, the feeling of the new, and the awareness of the pending change.

LITERARY CRITERIA FOR MODERNISM

Our discussion so far has focussed on attempts to define modernism on the basis of non-literary criteria that were borrowed from non-literary disciplines and applied to literature. Since our main subject is literature and literary periodisation, it is incumbent upon us to approach the definition of modernism also in

¹⁰⁸Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, London 1975, p. 17; Wagar, *The Secular Mind*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹As cited *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹⁰David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, Oxford 1978, p. 12. See Wagar, *The Secular Mind*, p. 4.

¹¹¹Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, p. 12; Wagar, *The Secular Mind*, p. 5.

¹¹²*ibid.*

literary terms. One of the most promising prospects for a literary definition is the renewed research on emerging new literary genres and new literary phenomena in Hebrew *Haskalah*, which should result in a new or revised concept of modernism in Hebrew letters. It is assumed that this new definition should concentrate on the transition from traditional Hebrew literature, found in the classical corpus, to the “new” literature. It should discern this transition by identifying new literary genres that were introduced to *Haskalah* or the new literary aesthetics adopted by it.

Until recently Hebrew scholarship has not produced a comprehensive study of the genres of Hebrew *Haskalah* literature, and Holtz has already pointed out this lacuna.¹¹³ An exception is my own recent book, delineating ten major literary genres, mostly in early *Haskalah*.¹¹⁴ However, the task is far from being completed as many more genres need to be studied, such as poetry and drama, as well as periods of *Haskalah*. Upon completion of such an endeavour, it will be possible to establish satisfactory literary definitions based on the phenomena of genres in *Haskalah* literature. For the time being conclusions based on my book will be used to guide us in this task.

Based on this research in the literary genres of *Haskalah* that encompass ten literary genres, it is possible to discern a dual tendency. On the one hand, there is definitely a trend of continuity in *Haskalah*'s use of literary genres. Many of the *maskilim* continued to use genres prevalent in the corpus of Jewish *belles lettres*. The fables, parables, and epigrams are examples of continued genres. Likewise, the use of the medium of *responsa* by Saul Berlin, in *Besamim Rosh*, for the purpose of parody and criticism, represents this trend of continuity with some slant. Obviously, the contents of these traditional genres reflect the backdrop of the new period.

As part of this tendency to adopt known genres in classical Hebrew letters, there was also a secondary trend to adopt an established genre and present it as authentic classical writing. This was the case of Satanow's *Mishlei Asaf* (The Proverbs of Asaf), allegedly based on an ancient manuscript found by the author to which he only added his commentary, thus enriching it with a fascinating literary dimension. At times, the genre was re-introduced in the classical mould without the guise of a discovered ancient manuscript. Such was Satanow's *Divrei Rivot* (Words, or Matters, of Dispute), patterned after *Hakuzari*. Thus, these revived genres should be considered as indicative of the new literary trends towards modernism.

Another dimension of modernism in Hebrew literature is manifested by the introduction of European genres into *Haskalah*. In my research I have identified and analysed several of these genres. They are: satire, epistolary writings, travelogues, biographies, autobiographies, dialogues of the dead, and utopia, to

¹¹³Holtz, 'Prolegomenon to a Literary History of Modern Hebrew Literature', p. 268. See also Werses's summary of *Haskalah* research, 'Al Mehkar Sifrut Hahaskalah Beyameinu', *Megamot Vetzurot Besifrut Hahaskalah*, pp. 356–408, and 'Mehkarim Hadashim Vegam Yeshanim Besifrut Hahaskalah Utekufatah', *Mada'ei Hayahadut*, 36 (1996), pp. 43–69.

¹¹⁴Moshe Pelli, *Sugot Vesugyot Besifrut Hahaskalah Haivrit*, Israel 1999.

mention a few.¹¹⁵ These genres represent a strong European influence combined with a Hebraic colouring, stemming from the classical tradition of Hebrew letters. If we were to select a single writer as contributing most to the introduction of these genres to Hebrew literature, it would be none other than Isaac Euchel. It is Euchel who wrote the first modern biography in Hebrew, an epistolary satire, a brief travelogue, a utopia, and others. However, as cited earlier, no single person and no single work can represent the beginning of modern Hebrew literature.

These new and renewed genres served the goals of *Haskalah* and promoted its ideology. Through the new genre of biography, *Haskalah* authors presented exemplary personalities whose character and achievements exemplified the ideals of *Haskalah*. The genre of utopia, for instance, envisioned and illustrated new modes of life, new social orders, and an ideal Jewish society. Satire, by its nature, attacked the old order and attempted to promote its own truth, a new agenda for modern times. The genre of the dialogues of the dead brought to life, in a manner of speaking, authoritative personalities from Jewish history in an ideological confrontation with contemporary rabbinic opponents of *Haskalah* to approve the stand of Hebrew Enlightenment.

Thus, it may be said that modern Hebrew literature began with the introduction of European literary genres into it. This change represents a major literary shift that we consider as modernism.

The search for literary definitions of modernism must take into consideration the subtle processes of change occurring within the Hebrew language. The secularisation process of the Hebrew language must be included in any study of modernism in *Haskalah*, as it reflects not only the changing viewpoint of literature, but also the new *Weltanschauung* of the Jewish people. Many sacred concepts and expressions, sanctified and venerated throughout the ages, underwent significant, though subtle, changes, and assumed secular, modern meaning. This is certainly part of the process of secularisation related to modernity. The secularisation of language bordered at times with its profanation. Indeed, the subject of language as part of modernism in Hebrew letters merits a separate study.

Haskalah aspired to resuscitate Judaism by reconstructing it from within. The *maskilim* were apprehensive that if they did not address the lurking, pressing problems confronting Judaism, it would not survive; thus the very existence of the Jewish people would be in jeopardy. The Italian *maskil* Eliyahu Morpurgo expressed this feeling best in an article about the need to introduce changes into Jewish education. He called on rabbis and community leaders to adopt *Haskalah* and modern education, “before your children’s light is extinguished and before your feet stumble upon the mountains of twilight”.¹¹⁶

Hebrew modernity is the awareness of change permeating *Haskalah* literature in the 1780s. It is manifested in the consciousness of the urgent need to implement such change. It is further expressed by the strong faith in the *Haskalah*’s ability to

¹¹⁵These genres are discussed in my book, cited in the previous note.

¹¹⁶*Hame’asef*, III (1786), p. 131, based on Jeremiah XIII: 16.

realise this change in order to save Judaism from extinction. All of this was expressed in *Haskalah's* endeavour to revive Judaism and to re-define it, as seen above in the cited texts of *Haskalah*.

Joel Brill's epigrammatic observation regarding the old and the new – tradition and modernity – reverberates now as it did some two hundred years ago:

Do not cast your eye upon the glass whether it is new or old
Set your eye at the wine itself
For there is new [glass] full with old
Yet also old, where there none to drink.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷J. Brill, 'Al Na Bakos', *Hame'asef*, V (1789), p. 1.