

## FIVE

## Strategy and Ruse in the Haskalah of Mendel Lefin of Satanow

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## I

STANDARD historiography depicts Mendel Lefin of Satanow (1749–1826), the east European maskil who spent time in Berlin among Mendelssohn's circle in the 1780s and returned to Poland and Galicia to spread the message of the Haskalah, as a populist. Born in Satanow, Podolia in 1749, Lefin lived in Berlin from 1780 to 1784, then returned to Poland, where he settled in Mikolajow, Podolia, and participated in the debates of the last Polish parliament (the Four Year Sejm of 1788–92). In the first decade of the nineteenth century he lived in Russia on the estate of Joshua Zeitlin, the generous patron of many east European maskilim; at the end of his long life, he moved to Austrian Galicia, living first in Brody (1808–17) and then in Tarnopol, where he died in 1826.<sup>1</sup> Prolific from the 1790s until his death, Lefin penned works which cover a broad spectrum of maskilic concerns: biblical translations (into Yiddish), philosophical speculations, programmes for the moral and cultural reform of the Jewish community, dissemination of medical and scientific information, and translations of German literature.

Implicit in the image of Lefin as a populist is the view that his Haskalah, or programme for enlightening the Jews of eastern Europe, was 'nationalist' in that it was directed towards the Jewish masses.<sup>2</sup> N. M. Gelber, for example, concluded that

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<sup>1</sup> General biographical information about Lefin can be found in the following sources: Samuel Joseph Fuenn, *Kiryah ne'emanah* [Faithful City] (Vilna, 1860), 271–3; Joseph Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature* (Heb.), 6 vols. (Jerusalem, 1952–4), i. 201–22; Raphael Mahler, *Chronicles of Jewish History* (Heb.), vol. i, bk. 4 (Rehavia, 1956), 71–2; Israel Weinslö, 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow: A Biographical Study from Manuscript Material' (Yiddish), *YIVO Bleter*, 1 (1931), 334–57, and id., 'Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanow' (Heb.), *Ha'olam*, 13/39–42 (1925), 778–9, 799–800, 819–20, 839–40; Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, vol. vi (New York, 1975), 275.

<sup>2</sup> The use of the terms 'nationalist' and 'nationalism' for the late 18th and early 19th cents. is extremely problematic, although very widespread. For example, though Isaac Eisenstein-Barzilay makes the distinction between modern Jewish nationalism (the will for political, economic, and cultural autonomy) and the nationalism (a 'consciousness of uniqueness', or a 'deep consciousness of their

'his books were widely disseminated; they reached a broad audience and had a great "cultural-national" impact on the Jewish community', and depicted Lefin himself as one who 'endeavored that the circle of enlightened Jews in Brody should not be isolated from the people, but rather they should be intimately connected to the everyday life of the masses'.<sup>3</sup> Historians such as Raphael Mahler and Israel Weinslö contrasted Lefin to Herz Homberg (1749–1841), the German maskil who as supervisor of Joseph II's schools in Galicia was viewed with deep suspicion by east European Jewry, and to other Berlin maskilim whom they believed to be anti-nationalist and assimilationist. They saw 'explicit democratic justifications'<sup>4</sup> in Lefin's utilitarian use of Yiddish to disseminate the ideas of the Haskalah. Lefin, Weinslö wrote, 'tried to approach the masses and to be endeared to them. He loved his people, the simple people, [with] a real love and, in contradistinction to [Homberg], he was one of the first to "descend" towards this people to speak with it in its language [Yiddish] and in its spirit.'<sup>5</sup>

Lefin's populist image is the result of a naive reading of his published materials, virtual neglect of manuscript materials,<sup>6</sup> and a bias in modern Jewish historiography which, up to the 1960s, viewed the Jewish past in polarities, pitting the allegedly open, corrosive West against the closed, authentic East and searching for members of the intelligentsia who were committed to the 'people'. In this reading, the maskilim of western Europe were damned as assimilationists for their use of German and embrace of Western, non-Jewish culture and, together with their east European peers, censured for their identification with and support of the gentile state.<sup>7</sup>

common past and future destiny') of the maskilim he still refers to both historical phenomena as 'nationalism'. Despite Eisenstein-Barzilay's clarity about the difference between these two types of 'nationalism' I believe the term is obfuscating, inherently carrying the layered meaning of the later (late 19th- and 20th-cent.) political, economic, and cultural nationalism. Its use is anachronistic for the late 18th cent. and should be avoided. See Isaac Eisenstein-Barzilay, 'The Enlightenment and the Jews: A Study in Haskalah and Nationalism' (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1955), pp. xi and xii, and id., 'National and Anti-National Trends in the Berlin Haskalah', *Jewish Social Studies*, 21/3 (July 1959), 165–92, esp. p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> *Arim ve'imahot beyisra'el* ['Cities and Mothers of Israel'], vol. vi: *Brody*, ed. Y. L. Maimon (Jerusalem, 1955), 179 and 224.

<sup>4</sup> Mahler, *Chronicles*, 79. See also Weinslö, 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow: A Biographical Study', 344. Despite Max Erik's venomous opinions about Weinslö's Zionism, he, too, regarded Lefin's Hebrew style as democratic. See Erik, *Studies in the History of the Haskalah* (Yiddish) (Minsk, 1934), 147, and Meir Weiner, *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Yiddish) (Kiev, 1940), 7, on the democratic element in modern Yiddish literature generally. <sup>5</sup> 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow', 819.

<sup>6</sup> On the importance of manuscript materials for the history of the Haskalah see Shmuel Werses, 'The Joseph Perl Archives in Jerusalem and their Wanderings' (Heb.), *Ha'universitah*, 19/1 (Mar. 1974), 38.

<sup>7</sup> On the etatism of Galicia's maskilim see Raphael Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment: Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (New York and Philadelphia, Pa., 1985), 121–5, 221–9. Mahler's critique of the Haskalah as being etatist is only partly incorrect; the maskilim of Galicia in the generation after Lefin were oriented towards Vienna and the absolutist Austrian state. But Lefin was oriented towards Poland and, in particular, towards his mag-nate patron. Moreover, Mahler's negative assessment of the political loyalty of the maskilim—to

Nationalist historians praised the early Haskalah for its Hebraism, but depicted the late Berlin Haskalah as a force for communal and national disintegration.<sup>8</sup> They saw Lefin's criticism of the radicalization of the Berlin Haskalah<sup>9</sup> and his decision to write in Yiddish as proof that he was more sympathetic to the Jewish masses than were his Berlin compatriots.

Lefin may have written in a popular style, but we should not confuse the medium of his Haskalah with its message, and retrospectively project a 'nationalist' vision on to him. When he employed popular literary forms he did so precisely because of his critical perspective on east European Jewish life. His turn to Yiddish, to mishnaic Hebrew, and to popular literature all resulted from the perspective he shared with other maskilim that the Jews of eastern Europe, through their own ignorance and failings, had become intoxicated with mysticism and were desperately in need of enlightened leadership. Lefin made no secret of his belief that east European Jewry needed the guidance of maskilim like himself in the battle against hasidism.<sup>10</sup> He recognized that, without the creation of an accessible and comprehensible literature, the message of the Haskalah would be lost to them.

Lefin was not a simple popularizer; indeed, his writing is characterized by an extraordinary range of literary strategies. Here was a member of the east European Jewish intelligentsia consciously creating different texts for different audiences in a multiplicity of languages—Hebrew, Yiddish, French, German, and Judaeo-German (German written in Hebrew characters).<sup>11</sup> Two of Lefin's works, *Masaot hayam* and *Essai d'un plan de réforme*, allow us to observe his method.

whichever 'vertical' authority, Polish or Austrian—is an anachronistic criticism based on his own belief in the need for an autonomous Jewish political culture for the self-emancipation of the Jewish people. On modern Jewish politics and the maskilim see Eli Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics* (New York, 1989); for the classic discussion of the 'royal alliance' see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet yehudah*, HUCA Supplements, 1 (1976).

<sup>8</sup> See Jonathan Frankel, 'Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?', in Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 1992), 1–37. See also Michael F. Stanislawski's broad critique of the historiographic assumption in modern Jewish history in which the authenticity of eastern European Jewry is contrasted with the assimilationism of Western Jewry: *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York, 1988), 5.

<sup>9</sup> For Lefin's critique of *Hame'asef* see [Mendel Lefin], *Essai d'un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses mœurs* (Warsaw [1791]), in Artur Eisenbach, Jerzy Michalski, Emanuel Rostworowski, and Janusz Woliński (eds.), *Materiały do Dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego* [Materials on the History of the Four Year Sejm], vol. vi (Wrocław, Warsaw, and Krakow, 1969), sects. 45–7 and n. 9 (pp. 413 and 420).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. his famous rebuke of Nachman Krochmal's alleged philosophical retreat from the responsibility of engaging and enlightening the Jewish masses: Meir Letteris (ed.), *Mikhtavim* [Letters] (Lemberg, 1827), 33–5.

<sup>11</sup> For subtle analyses of Lefin's Yiddish translation of Proverbs see Chone Shmeruk, 'Regarding Several Principles of Mendel Lefin's Translation of Proverbs', in id., *Yiddish Literature in Poland: Historical Research and Insights* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1981), 165–83; on his *Heshbon hanefesh* [Moral Accounting], see Hillel Levine, 'Between Hasidism and Haskalah: On a Disguised Anti-Hasidic Polemic', in

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Throughout the nineteenth century, east European maskilim answered Naphtali Herz Wessely's clarion call in *Divrei shalom ve'emet* (1782) that 'the forms of the lands and the oceans (geography)' should be an obligatory element of the secular curriculum.<sup>12</sup> For example, Lefin's disciple Joseph Perl (1773–1839) encouraged the study of natural science and geography in *Luah halev*, the second section of his calendars (the *Luhot*) which appeared in 1814–16; Samson Halevi Bloch (1784–1845) penned *Shevilei olam*, the first general geography in Hebrew, in the 1820s; and Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg (1795–1846), the noted Lithuanian maskil, devoted considerable energy to spreading historical and geographical information among Russian Jewry through translations of German histories and of non-Jewish travel accounts.<sup>13</sup>

One of the vehicles favoured by maskilim for disseminating geographical knowledge was the translation and adaptation of the writings of Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746–1818), a leader of the German Philanthropin movement and a correspondent of Moses Mendelssohn. Campe's philosophical and pedagogical writings emphasized belief in divine providence, the immortality of the soul, reward and punishment, and the possibility of improving one's life through good deeds. Campe sought to base his new educational system on a 'realistic' approach which eschewed fixed texts, workbooks, and rhetorical exercises that were divorced from the actual lives of the students.<sup>14</sup> Jews who translated Campe's work into Hebrew and Yiddish, however, often removed the texts from their Philanthropin framework in order to use them as a means of teaching geography to the Jews of eastern Europe.<sup>15</sup> At least five of Campe's books were translated into Hebrew and Yiddish and Lefin himself translated and adapted at least two of Campe's *Reisebeschreibungen* in his *Masaot hayam*; however, little scholarly attention has been paid to this work, which was published in Zolkiew in 1818.<sup>16</sup>

Immanuel Etkes and Joseph Salmon (eds.), *Chapters in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and the Modern Period* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1980), 182–91.

<sup>12</sup> *Divrei shalom ve'emet* [Words of Peace and Truth], 2nd edn. (Vienna, 1826), 3, 13.

<sup>13</sup> On Perl's under-studied *Luhot*, see Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment*, 149, 167. On Bloch, see Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, ii, 354. On Guenzburg see Israel Bartal, 'Mordechai Aaron Guenzburg: A Lithuanian Maskil Faces Modernity', in Frances Malino and David Sorokin (eds.), *From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe 1750–1870* (Oxford, 1990), 126–47.

<sup>14</sup> Ernst A. Simon, 'Pedagogic Philanthropism and Jewish Education', in Moshe Davis (ed.), *Jubilee Volume in Honor of Mordecai Kaplan* (Heb. section) (New York, 1953), 149–87.

<sup>15</sup> In the 1810 issue of *Hame'asef*, Moses Mendelssohn of Hamburg's translation of Campe's *Entdeckung von Amerika* was praised for the benefit it would bring to 'the dear people of Poland, who will not read [gentile] books'. Quoted in Tsemah Tsamriyon, '*Hame'asef*': *The First Modern Periodical in Hebrew* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1988), 83.

<sup>16</sup> *Masaot hayam* [Sea Journeys] (Zolkiew, 1818; 3rd edn., containing pp. 37–52, Lemberg, 1859), contains translations of two travelogues by Joachim Heinrich Campe, which originally appeared in Campe's *Sammlung interessanter und durchgängiger zweckmässig abgefasster Reisebeschreibungen für die Jugend* (Reutlingen, 1786–93). Citations from *Masaot hayam* are from the 1818 edn. up to p. 36, and

In broad outline, the first journey included in *Masaot hayam* tells of the travails of a group of British sailors who, after departing from the Chinese port of Macao, become shipwrecked on the island of Pelew.<sup>17</sup> From the earliest moments, it is clear that the trip will be a difficult one, and the story describes how the sailors are ultimately saved by their own ingenuity, the generosity of the natives they encounter on Pelew, and, most of all, God's providence.<sup>18</sup> In an introduction to *Masaot hayam* which remained in manuscript, Lefin informs his readers that he intended his translation to remind those who had fallen into dire straits, like the sailors of Campe's tales, of God's eternal vigilance: 'But one who is drunk with misfortunes is likely to forget the divine providence of the Holy One, blessed is He, [and he is likely] to despair of his life and to lose all expectation and hope forever.'<sup>19</sup> He emphasizes continuity with traditional rabbinic views of God's soteriological power and of divine reward and punishment, beliefs which were consonant with the Philanthropin ideology, based as it was on notions of natural religion. Lefin urged his readers to take Campe's descriptions of extraordinary human suffering ultimately redeemed by a compassionate God as succour during their own misfortunes. Moreover, he urged those who had been saved from danger to spread the story of their salvation as widely as possible. This desire to emphasize God's providence does not seem particularly innovative or subversive; yet he also included the following vague comment in his introduction: 'Moreover, sometimes one teaches, incidental to this [to publicizing God's salvific power], another kind of suggestion or stratagem [*tahbulah*] unrelated to the original event.'<sup>20</sup>

Lefin used the word *tahbulah* in all of his writings. Its origin lies in Proverbs 1: 5: 'A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain to wise counsels [*tahbulot*].' However, *tahbulah* carries other meanings in different biblical contexts, and can indicate 'tactics', 'strategies', 'ruses', or 'evil

from the 1859 edn. for later page nos. On Jewish interest in Campe, see Zohar Shavit, 'From Friedländer's *Lesebuch* to the Jewish Campe: The Beginning of Hebrew Children's Literature in Germany', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 33 (1988), 407; on Guenzburg's translation of Campe's *The Discovery of America*, see Bartal, 'Mordechai Aaron Guenzburg', 141-2; on the genre of travelogue in general see Moshe Pelli, 'The Literary Genre of the Travelogue in Hebrew Haskalah Literature: Shmuel Romaneli's *Masa be'arav*', *Modern Judaism*, 11 (1991), 241-60.

<sup>17</sup> The first journey is an adaptation of Campe's 'Ein Bericht von den Pelju-Inseln, nach den Aufzeichnungen des Kapitain Wilson aus dem Jahr 1783', published in his *Sammlung*, vol. ix, and based on the English version of the story, *The Shipwreck of the Antelope East India Packet, H. Wilson, Esq. Commander, on the Pelew Islands, situate in the West Part of the Pacific Ocean; in August 1783* (London, 1788), 'by one of the unfortunate officers'.

<sup>18</sup> *Masaot hayam*, 2a, 11b; cf. Campe, *Sammlung*, ix, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Perl Archive, Jewish National University Library Archive (JNULA), folder 124; this folder consists of one single page of text. Though there is no date on the document itself, the watermark on the paper is legible as 1806. Self- or external censorship may have been the reason why the introduction was not included in the published version of *Masaot hayam*, but Lefin himself gives no indication why the text remained in manuscript.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Perl Archive, folder 124.

designs'.<sup>21</sup> In *Heshbon hanefesh*, a detailed behaviourist guide to moral education and self-improvement modelled on the thirteen principles of conduct Benjamin Franklin had outlined in his *Autobiography*, Lefin uses the word to indicate both a benign method to guide behaviour and a conscious subterfuge to counter the spread of hasidism.<sup>22</sup> As we will see below, Lefin chose to use the word *tahbulah* in his unpublished introduction to *Masaot hayam* precisely because of its complex, double-edged meaning.

To what kind of 'suggestion' or 'stratagem' was Lefin referring? First, *Masaot hayam* implicitly shared with other maskilic translations of Campe's work the conviction that east European Jewry should have a wider knowledge of the world.<sup>23</sup> Second, an obvious 'suggestion' inherent in Lefin's translation was the value of appreciating an experience, even if its source was non-Jewish, that affirmed the theological assumptions shared by all enlightened men. The tales told by non-Jews who believed in divine providence were worthy of being heard for their own sake, without any reference to their 'enhancement' of traditional learning.<sup>24</sup> Because Lefin intended his translation to be read by traditionally educated east European Jewish youth, he was careful to justify his 'suggestion' with proof-texts from the rabbinic tradition:

It is not sufficient to listen to stories of triumph that occurred before us; rather, one must always pursue and honour the events of men come what may, either to listen to them or to read them. As the Sages wrote: 'Who is wise? The one who learns from every man',<sup>25</sup> and they said: 'whether from a non-Jew or from Israel or from a slave or from a handmaid, the Holy Spirit rests upon him according to his deeds'.<sup>26</sup>

Lefin's citation of rabbinic sayings was not only a strategy to give his work the imprimatur of tradition. It also reflected his sincere conviction that a rational Judaism could be open to the universal values inherent in the experiences and knowledge of enlightened gentiles.

This conviction is implicit in the tales Lefin selected for translation, choosing those in which the encounter between enlightened, 'civilized' Europeans and 'noble savages' figures prominently as a leitmotif. A central component of the eighteenth century's discourse on non-European peoples, the image of the 'noble savage' contrasted the natural purity of non-Western tribal society with the depravity and

<sup>21</sup> See also Prov. 11: 14, 12: 5, 20: 18, 24: 6, and Job 37: 12.

<sup>22</sup> Even Lefin's opponents, such as the maskil Tobias Feder, who ridiculed his Yiddish translation of Psalms, identified Lefin with the word *tahbulah*: 'It [the debased translation of Proverbs into Yiddish] is the deed of R. Mendel Satanow and his stratagems [*tahbuloiav*].' Quoted from Yehuda Friedlander, 'Tuviyah Gutmann Feder: *Kol mehatsetim* (*Voice of the Archers*)' (Heb.), *Zehut* (May 1981), 290. On the anti-hasidism of *Heshbon hanefesh*, see Levine, 'Between Hasidism and Haskalah'.

<sup>23</sup> Mahler, *Chronicles*, 79.

<sup>24</sup> See Immanuel Etkes, 'On the Question of the Precursors of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe', in id. (ed.), *Religion and Life: The Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1993), 25-44.

<sup>25</sup> Mishnah, *Pirkei avot* 4: 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Tana deveit eliyahu rabah*, 10: 1.

corruption of European civilization.<sup>27</sup> The 'savages' of Pelew, in Lefin's rendering, are described as 'proper and good men'.<sup>28</sup> Through their travail, the unfortunate Europeans learn (to their surprise) the important Enlightenment message that character, not pedigree, is the essence of mankind. In the second travel story included in *Masaot hayam*, which describes an ill-fated search for the North-East Passage,<sup>29</sup> a sailor affirms the Enlightenment's belief in man's universal nature: 'And this is a faithful testimony that God, may He be blessed, casts sparks of compassion in the heart of every man; he can be from any people that can feel pity and have compassion, one man for his brother, and can empathize with his pain.'<sup>30</sup> Although the natives encountered on Pelew are pagan, they, too, believe in the immortality of the soul and in the world to come. Raa Kook, a Pelewan native who is the very embodiment of the noble savage,<sup>31</sup> explains to Wilson, the British captain, 'In our land, too, it is true that the wicked remain in the earth and the righteous rise to the firmament and are illuminated in a great radiance.'<sup>32</sup> The first travelogue is full of anthropological descriptions and digressions about the people of

<sup>27</sup> For European representations of the New World, see Brian Fagan, *Clash of Cultures* (New York, 1983); Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford, 1991); Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990). The first encounter between the British and the natives of Pelew is characterized by mutual wonder. Later in the narrative, however, the British compare, to their dismay, their selfishness and suspicion to the generosity and compassion of the Pelewan natives. See *Masaot hayam*, 4b, 28a, 31a, and 31b.

<sup>28</sup> *Masaot hayam*, 4a; Campe, *Sammlung*, ix. 27: 'Er fügte hinzu, daß dieser König ein sehr guter Mann und sein Volk eine sehr freundliche Menschenart wäre' (He saw that this king was a very good man and that his people were a very friendly race of men).

<sup>29</sup> The travelogue is an adaptation of Campe's 'Jakob Heemskerks und Wilhelm Barenz nördliche Entdeckungsreise und merkwürdige Schicksale', which first appeared in vol. i of his *Sammlung*.

<sup>30</sup> *Masaot hayam*, 54b; cf. Campe, *Sammlung*, i. 106: 'Seht, ihr jungen Menschen, so giebt es, Gott sei Dank! unter allen Zonen und in allen Ständen Leute, denen die Pflichten der Menschlichkeit heilig sind, und die sie gern und ohne Eigennutz erfüllen! Solcher Beispiele muß man sich erinnern, so oft man schlechter Menschen lieblose und ungerechte Handlungen sieht, damit man nicht in Versuchung gerathe, um einiger solcher Menschen willen, die ganze Menschheit für böse und lieblos zu halten' (See, young men, how there are—thank God!—people in all regions and among all classes to whom the duties of mankind are sacred and who willingly and without self-interest fulfil them. One must remember these events in order not to be tempted, as often as one observes the unkind and unjust actions of evil men, to consider, based upon a few of this kind, all humanity as evil and unkind).

<sup>31</sup> For descriptions of the nobility of the Pelewan natives, see *Masaot hayam*, 18a, 60, 63. Raa Kook is described concisely in *The Shipwreck of the Antelope* as appearing to be 'above every species of meanness' (p. 28), a quality which is embellished by Campe: 'Dieser verständige und lebenswürdige Mann äusserte bei jeder Freundschaftsbezeugung, die man ihm erwies, die größte Erkenntlichkeit; er bemühte sich, die englischen Gebräuche und Sitten anzunehmen; und stöste durch sein ganzes Betragen Jedermann die höchste Achtung für die Geradheit und Güte seines Charakters ein' (This intelligent and kind man expressed the greatest gratitude for each sign of friendship that was shown to him; he strove to adopt English customs and morals and by his example pushed everyone to pay the greatest attention to the uprightness and goodness of his character). *Sammlung*, ix. 37–8.

<sup>32</sup> *Masaot hayam*, 70.

Pelew and how they compare physically and culturally to the hapless British.<sup>33</sup> But the differences between the two cultures are rarely a source of discord. The value of recognizing that which is universal in men is underscored by the cultural exchange that takes place at the end of the story; a British sailor decides to remain in the East Indies while Lee Boo, the King of Pelew's son, sails to England with the British once they have repaired their ship.<sup>34</sup> In parting from his son, the King of Pelew tells him to regard Wilson as a father, and urges the captain to instruct his son in all the customs suitable for a British citizen.

These paeans to universalism notwithstanding, Campe's text was still imbued with the belief in Western superiority which informed the eighteenth-century image of the noble savage. Europeans ardently projected a utopian nobility on to non-Western peoples, but saw them as childlike, and remained firmly convinced that their nobility was still inferior to the mature, though problematic, advances of civilized life.<sup>35</sup> Lee Boo is confronted with the limitations of his paradisaic island upbringing when, on landing in England, he realizes the liability of being unable to read or write.<sup>36</sup>

Lefin was well aware of the cultural dissonance inherent in the tales. In fact, in the realm of metaphor, he appears to be comparing the 'noble savages' with east European Jewry and the British and their world with Western, non-Jewish culture, and depicting their encounter as the result of a tumultuous journey.<sup>37</sup> By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the image of the east European Jew as culturally backward was already well on its way to becoming an immutable stereotype among Germans, German Jews, and east European Jewish maskilim who moved in German cultural circles.<sup>38</sup> In *Masaot hayam*, the savages (or east European Jews)

<sup>33</sup> *Masaot hayam*, 4a, 7b, 9b, 15b. In fact, Lefin added two chapters to Campe's version of Wilson's voyage. These chapters comprise a quasi-anthropological exploration of the culture of the Pelewans and are devoted to 'their customs, crops, houses, utensils, weapons and how they built boats', and to their 'marriage, burial and religious customs, and to their virtues'. See *Masaot hayam*, 64–71.

<sup>34</sup> *Masaot hayam*, 29a; cf. Campe, *Sammlung*, ix. 170. This kind of cultural exchange was typical of the period. In 1774 a Tahitian native was brought back to London by Captain Thomas Furneaux. See Fagan, *Clash of Cultures*, 111.

<sup>35</sup> Fagan, *Clash of Cultures*, 90; Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Masaot hayam*, 36a.

<sup>37</sup> Moshe Pelli suggestively ends his article on Shmuel Romanelli's *Masa be'arav* with a similar thought. He suggests that Romanelli's trip from Germany to Morocco may be seen metaphorically as a maskil's 'voyage to, and exposure of, the unenlightened segment of the Jewish people, not only in Morocco, but in other places closer to home' ('The Literary Genre of the Travelogue', 257). Note, too, that other east European Jews seemed to feel that their encounter with modernity was as turbulent as a ship's voyage on a tempestuous sea. See the letter to Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg cited in Bartal, 'Guenzburg', 126 and the letter by Samuel Joseph Fuemm cited in the introduction to *From Militant Haskalah to Conservative Maskil: A Selection of S. J. Fuemm's Writings*, ed. Shmuel Feiner (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1993), 12, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1823* (Madison, Wis., 1982), 3–32. See also Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif., 1994), for an analysis of the creation of the construct of 'eastern Europe' in the minds of the philosophers.

are described as men in the fullest sense of the word, but men who are living within the confines of a parochial, island-bound world. Lefin compares the King of Pelew's surprise on meeting the white-skinned British and their Chinese deck-hands for the first time, and his concomitant realization that 'his little nation was [not] the only one in the world, and that the world [did not] only extend as far as what his eyes could see of the neighbouring islands', to the experience of the daughters of Lot in Genesis 19: 31 who, after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, fear that their father is the only man left in the world.<sup>39</sup> In Lefin's mind, east European Jewry, too, lived in a circumscribed world, one in which non-Jewish learning was suspected of heresy.<sup>40</sup> He took it upon himself to journey to the west in order to acquire the knowledge necessary to enlighten his people, whose culture he believed was unnecessarily restricted. In *Masaot hayam*, Lee Boo, the 'noble savage' ever conscious of his people's shortcomings, travels to England in order to acquire knowledge and skills for their advancement. The obstacles he encounters, such as his illiteracy and his inability to ride a horse, spur his efforts at self-improvement 'for the benefit of his people'.<sup>41</sup> Lefin too, returned to his native Poland after his sojourn in Berlin armed with the knowledge that he believed would 'benefit' his 'backward' people.

Clearly, Lefin translated Campe's tales, which were well respected by his fellow maskilim, as a way of broadening the geographical and cultural horizons of Polish Jewry. The beliefs the tales embodied—in God's providence, divine reward and punishment, and the immortality of the soul—were not discordant with rabbinic Judaism, and Lefin hoped that his effort to expand Jewish life beyond the limits of the traditional curriculum would disarm suspicion.

Yet there is an even more covert message within *Masaot hayam*. Of the three editions published in the nineteenth century,<sup>42</sup> none contains a preface and, as mentioned above, Lefin's introduction remained in manuscript. Lefin opened the 1818 edition by alluding to Psalm 107: 23–4—'They that go down to the sea in ships [yoredei hayam be'oniyot], that do business in great waters; these saw the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep'—on the title-page, which reads, 'The Book Journeys By Sea, They are God's Deeds and Wonders Seen by Those who Went Down to the Seas [yoredei hayamim] in Dutch and British Boats [be'oniyot]'. A paraphrase of the psalm also appears in an abbreviated form in the translator's note of the anonymous 1823 edition, while the 1859 edition cites Psalm 107: 23–4

<sup>39</sup> *Masaot hayam*, 9b. This is a clear example of how Lefin Judaized Campe's text, which makes no mention of the scriptural typology; other examples of Judaization include Lefin's use of the names of Hebrew months and allusions to biblical language.

<sup>40</sup> See Lefin, *Likutei kelalim* [Collections of Rules], a pamphlet on the internal life of the Jewish community of Poland, which was published as the second appendix in N. M. Gelber, 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow's Proposals for the Improvement of Jewish Community Life Presented to the Great Polish Sejm (1788–1792)' (Heb.), in *The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1964), 287–301. In para. 66 (p. 300), Lefin complains that 'the study of wisdom and science and the rest of the sciences is considered apostasy [among the Jews of Poland]'.  
<sup>41</sup> *Masaot hayam*, 58, 64.

<sup>42</sup> Zolkiew, 1818; Vilna, 1823; Lemberg, 1859.

on the back of the title-page. On the one hand, Lefin's use of the psalm as an introduction to his translation served to make the work more palatable to a traditional audience; its simple meaning suited the contents of the story well.<sup>43</sup> But his choice was not merely literary; the decision to use this particular proof-text was part of his larger campaign against the mystification of traditional rabbinic Judaism.

A hasidic commentary on Psalm 107, which was popularly known as 'Commentary on Hodu' and attributed to the Ba'al Shem Tov, was first published as *Sefer ketan* in Zhitomir in 1805 and printed a second time in Leszczow in 1816.<sup>44</sup> The commentary on the psalm was well known among both hasidim and kabbalists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and was cited by the disciples of the Besht, including the Maggid of Mezhibezh, Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, Levi Isaac of Berdichev, Nahum of Chernobyl, and Samuel Shmelke Horowitz of Nikolsburg. The mystical interpretation of verses 23–6 glosses the verbs 'descend' and 'ascend' in the psalm to address the dilemma faced by human souls inextricably mired in sin.<sup>45</sup> In the most general terms, this problem is known in hasidic thought as *nefilat hatsadik*, in which the *tsadik*'s special responsibility to the sinful men of his generation requires that he, the leader of the generation, should descend to their base level in order to elevate them as he ascends to the divine.<sup>46</sup> This dangerous 'descent' of the 'higher souls' was the supreme test faced by the *tsadikim*; the successful 'ascent' or redemption of captive souls was predicated on taking that risk. Indebted to the ideas within Lurianic kabbalah which it transformed, the hasidic interpretation of the adventure of descent into *she'ol* led to the creation of the new ritual of reciting Psalm 107 on the Sabbath eve.<sup>47</sup>

The importance of Psalm 107 for mystical circles within central and east European Jewry was known to their opponents as well. Eleazer Fleckeles (1754–1826), a leading rabbinic figure in Prague, which was the centre of Frankism until the beginning of the nineteenth century, devoted the fourth part of his *Olat hahodesh* to a lengthy sermon, *Ahavat david*, against Shabbateans and Frankists.<sup>48</sup> In the early

<sup>43</sup> Later in the century, the maskil Isaac Meir Dick also employed a paraphrase of the psalm in his popular Yiddish travelogues entitled *Pilei hashem* [Wonders of the Lord] (Vilna, 1856). See Zalman Reizen, 'Campe's "Entdeckung von Amerika", in Yiddish', *YIVO Bleter*, 5/1 (1933), 36 n. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth-century Hasidic Thought* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 342. Menahem Mendel of Bar was also credited with penning *Perush al hodu* [Commentary on Hodu], an attribution Gershom Scholem believed to be more faithful to the historical record. See Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: The Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996), 122–3.

<sup>45</sup> Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, 347, 354.  
<sup>46</sup> Isaiah Tishby and Joseph Dan, 'Hasidic Thought and Literature', in Avraham Rubinstein (ed.), *Chapters in the Doctrine and History of Hasidism* (Jerusalem, 1977), 263–4, 266. See also Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, 367–8 n. 43, on the psychological dimensions of the doctrine of the 'descent of the *tsadik*' in hasidic thought.

<sup>47</sup> Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, 367–8. In normative rabbinic practice, Psalm 107 was recited either on the eve or the morning of the first day of Passover (ibid. 344).

<sup>48</sup> *Ahavat david* [The Love of David] (Prague, 1800). On Fleckeles's battle against Shabbateanism, see Shmuel Werses, *Haskalah and Shabbateanism: The Story of a Controversy* (Jerusalem, 1988), 63–98.

pages of *Ahavat david*, Fleckeles uses the talmudic discussion of Psalm 107: 23–6 (*Baba batra 73b*), in which Rabbah bar Bar Hana relates a series of extraordinary sights that he encountered when travelling by ship as the springboard for his homily against the deviance of the kabbalists and Shabbateans. Fleckeles compares the water in the psalm to the ‘water’ of the Torah and states that only men who have sufficiently plumbed its depths, through immersion in the Talmud, and the halakhic authorities, are worthy. His sermon also plays on the well-known talmudic discussion of the four permissible forms of interpretation, simple (*peshat*), symbolic (*remetz*), homiletic (*derash*), and esoteric (*sod*), in which the last mode of interpretation, the esoteric, was only to be studied after the first three forms had been mastered.<sup>49</sup> Punning on the acronym *pardes* (orchard) for the four modes of interpretation, Fleckeles referred to *sod*, the mode favoured by the Shabbateans and kabbalists, as the wine produced only at the end of the season. The kabbalists who have not mastered the Talmud and the halakhic authorities err like ‘old drunkards’, who become intoxicated on ‘cellared wine’ before they have drunk water. Steeped in kabbalah, they will emerge tottering and reeling, inebriated by the esoteric tradition, an allusion to Psalm 107: 27: ‘They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end’.<sup>50</sup> The leitmotif of the sermon is that the Shabbateans bypass the traditional system of learning which permitted only those who had mastered the whole rabbinic corpus to turn to mysticism.<sup>51</sup>

Joseph Perl gives further evidence of the widespread knowledge of the hasidic interpretation of the psalm among both mitnagedim and maskilim in eastern Europe. On a small slip of paper, found buried in his archive, Perl had noted that in his opinion Psalm 107: 26 referred to *nefilat hatsadik*. Taking exception to Fleckeles’s commentary, he wrote:

In my limited opinion, it seems that the interpretation of ‘they ascend to the Heavens, they go down again to the depths’ (Psalm 107: 26) is that sometimes the *tsadik* descends to *katnut* [the ‘minor’ or ‘imperfect’ state in which profane activities are carried out] in order to raise up the evil ones (see their holy books); the meaning of ‘they go down again to the depths’ is that the *tsadik* needs to descend to the depths, meaning to *katnut*, in order to ‘ascend to Heaven’, to raise the evil ones to Heaven.<sup>52</sup>

Lefin was well acquainted with anti-Shabbatean rabbinic writings and frequently mentioned the writings of Jacob Emden (1697–1776), the great anti-Shabbatean polemicist, as a source for his own perspective on the links between the publication of the Zohar, the spread of Shabbateanism, and the emergence of hasidism.<sup>53</sup> The

<sup>49</sup> BT *Hagigah* 14b.

<sup>50</sup> Fleckeles, *Ahavat david*, 5a.

<sup>51</sup> Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1989), introduction, i. 40.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 59. On *katnut*, see Tishby and Dan, ‘Hasidic Thought and Literature’, 266, and Gershom Scholem, ‘*Devekut*, or Communion with God’, in id., *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), 219–22.

<sup>53</sup> See Joseph Perl Archive, folder 72, pp. 1b and 2a; Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, i. 40; Werses, *Haskalah and Shabbateanism*, 103–6.

fact that both a prominent anti-Shabbatean, Eleazer Fleckeles, and Lefin’s virulently anti-hasidic disciple Joseph Perl knew the mystical interpretation of Psalm 107 suggests that the Ba’al Shem Tov’s commentary was also known to Lefin himself. It is highly probable that he deliberately appropriated verses 23–4 for his own purposes: by using the psalm and its paraphrase to open *Masaot hayam*, he was attempting to uproot the biblical text from the mystical matrix into which hasidism had placed it. This was not the first time he had used such a strategy. As Shmuel Werses has shown in his study of a manuscript bearing on Lefin’s lost and unpublished *Mahkimat peti* (Making Wise the Simple), Lefin made ironic and caustic use of the verse from Psalms that formed the title of his work. Alluding to Isaiah Horowitz’s *Shenei luhot haberit*, in which the mystic interprets Psalm 10: 8 as an attack on the study of philosophy and an endorsement of kabbalah, Lefin used the psalm to rebut the authority of the Zohar and to denigrate the spread of mysticism.<sup>54</sup>

It is therefore clear that Lefin’s use of Psalm 107: 23–6 in *Masaot hayam* had compound meanings: using it as an epigraph gave his Hebrew translation of Campe’s tales a traditional cast, while, by appropriating the Ba’al Shem Tov’s use of the passage, he made a broad statement about the opposing world-views of hasidism and Haskalah. While the Ba’al Shem Tov and his disciples used the psalm to encode the biblical text with the religious significance specific to hasidism and its leaders, Lefin cast it as an invitation for traditional Jews to gain a broader appreciation of the non-Jewish world, which he believed shared with them such fundamental beliefs as the concept of divine providence. He read the psalm literally, that is as a *pashtan*, using its lyrical biblical poetry to introduce his translations of two treacherous sea-journeys undertaken by Europeans. Encapsulated in Lefin’s use of the psalm is his conception of a Haskalah faithful to rational rabbinic Judaism, open to non-Jewish culture, and inimical to hasidism and other forms of Jewish mysticism. Although *Masaot hayam* appears superficially to be a simple, popular translation of the travails of some British sailors and a celebration of God’s salvific power, it is in fact an example of Mendel Lefin’s subtle use of a literary form to disseminate his programme of enlightenment.

### III

In 1791 Lefin penned a French work entitled *Essai d’un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d’éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses mœurs*; he published it anonymously.<sup>55</sup> The pamphlet’s intended audience was the group of Polish reformers engaged in the debates of the Four Year Sejm and, in particular, those on the Committee for Jewish Affairs who were involved with the ‘Jewish question’.

<sup>54</sup> Shmuel Werses, ‘On the Tracks of the Pamphlet, “Making Wise the Simple”’, in id. (ed.), *Trends and Forms in Haskalah Literature* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1990), 326.

<sup>55</sup> In Eisenbach et al., *Materiały do Dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego*, 409–21. On dating the pamphlet, see Alexander Guterman, ‘The Suggestions of the Jews of Poland for the Reforms of their Legal, Economic, Social and Cultural Status’ (Heb.) (MA thesis, Jerusalem, 1975), 70.

The debates on the status of the Jews in Poland, which opened on 6 October 1788, focused on the issue of municipal citizenship, but grew to encompass discussion of Jewish attire, taxation, leaseholding on breweries and taverns, and communal autonomy. Lefin's pamphlet was part of the journalistic battle over the reform of Jewish life in Poland which raged throughout this unusually long session of the Sejm.<sup>56</sup> In the pamphlet's first forty-eight sections (of a total 160), Lefin outlined his theory of the development of Judaism, arguing that there were two parallel, if opposing, paths in Judaism's development which had shaped the current contours of Polish Jewish life. One was the rational tradition based on the teachings of Moses Maimonides. The other was the tradition of mysticism which had produced the kabbalistic text, the Zohar, which Lefin believed had spawned the hasidic movement of his own day. He argued that the staunch conservatism and low cultural level of his Polish Jewish brethren was caused by the kabbalah having too great a hold over them. Because he believed that religion was the core of Jewish life, all reform efforts had to begin with religious instruction.<sup>57</sup> Although he treated many of the same issues in his unpublished Hebrew pamphlet *Likutei kelalim*, in writing the *Essai* he directly addressed a gentile audience.

Lefin's interaction with the non-Jewish world is attested not only by his warm reception in the Mendelssohnian circle in Berlin, which included Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, but in his almost lifelong relationship with Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734–1823). When Lefin returned to Poland in 1784 after leaving Berlin, he settled in Mikolajow, which was under the jurisdiction of Czartoryski, then General of Podolia, one of Poland's most powerful magnates and an enlightened Polish reformer. Czartoryski was to become Lefin's patron: he first hired him to tutor his sons in mathematics and philosophy, and later published his political and literary works.<sup>58</sup> It was Czartoryski who made possible the publication of Lefin's 1794 *Sefer refuat ha'am* (Book of Popular Healing) and who undoubtedly played a role in his writing the *Essai*.

Czartoryski's influence notwithstanding, Lefin had his own reasons for writing the French pamphlet. As he explained in an unpublished manuscript entitled 'Teshuvah', it was composed in response to deputy Hugo Kollataj's order and the

<sup>56</sup> See Artur Eisenbach, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Poland, 1780–1870*, ed. Antony Polonsky, trans. Janina Dorosz (London, 1991), 67–112.

<sup>57</sup> Gelber, 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow's Proposals', 273–4.

<sup>58</sup> Abraham Baer Gottlob mentions the story, no doubt apocryphal, of Lefin's chance meeting with Czartoryski, when the noble was visiting a crockery shop in Mikolajow and noticed Christian Wolff's mathematical text in the store. The store just happened to be run by Lefin's wife, who eagerly called her husband to meet the prince; the fortuitous meeting led to lifelong patronage. See Gottlob, 'Memoirs' (Heb.), *Hamagid*, 39 (1873), 356. In a letter written by Joseph Perl to his mentor on 19 Mar. 1826, Perl reprimands Lefin for failing to be in touch with a 'Sir Count Babaweski' who, upon finding out 'accidentally the other day that you live in Tarnopol, felt hurt that he did not know about your presence in Tarnopol. He has very high regard for you. Soon I will be at his place, and will give him all the information.' According to Weinlös, Count Babaweski was not the only Polish aristocrat who had high regard for Lefin. See Weinlös, 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow', 355.

Commission for National Education's<sup>59</sup> agreement (later slightly modified by Father Piattoli) that all Jewish men should shave their beards.<sup>60</sup> No matter how well intentioned non-Jewish reformers might be, Lefin wrote, they did not know what was best for the Jewish community:

The ministers of the 'Deputation' themselves, and so much more so the advisers themselves, are sincere men of truth and justice who sit to legislate for the betterment of the world, to inculcate love and peace in our country, to banish injustice, and to enlighten the people with knowledge beneficial for a man's life. Nevertheless, the wise men of the gentiles do not know what is good for us, and they can err due to the delusions of ill-intended writings that are in their possession, as they will, God forbid.<sup>61</sup>

In the *Essai* Lefin emphasized the centrality of religion for the Jewish community in order to convince the Polish authorities that they should not intervene in internal Jewish affairs. This commitment to the preservation of Jewish communal autonomy is echoed throughout his later Hebrew work *Likutei kelalim*, where he not only mentions Emperor Joseph II's Edict of Tolerance as an example of misguided benevolence, but also refers to a dispute he had with Moses Mendelssohn over the appropriate degree of involvement on the part of non-Jewish authorities in the internal life of the Jewish community.<sup>62</sup> According to Lefin, Mendelssohn believed the selection of Jewish communal representatives should be shouldered by the ruling authorities. This represented a transfer of power to non-Jews that Lefin could not brook. In contradistinction to Mendelssohn and to the Polish reformers who advocated abolition of Jewish communal organizations (the *kahal*), Lefin sought to reform what he perceived was the community's rotten core in order to preserve internal autonomy. He believed that Jews themselves should select

<sup>59</sup> This Commission, established in 1773 with former Jesuit funds, oversaw the reform of education throughout the Commonwealth, and was Europe's first modern ministry of education. See W. H. Zawadzki, *A Man of Honour: Adam Czartoryski as a Statesman of Russia and Poland, 1795–1831* (Oxford, 1993), 17.

<sup>60</sup> N. M. Gelber refers to this document as *Teshuvot be'inyanei hadat* [Responsa on Religious Matters], but the manuscript itself carries no such title. See Gelber, 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow's Proposals', 300. On the top of the first page is simply the word *teshuvah* (responsum). See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, p. 1a. Kollataj's order read: 'All the Jews living or domiciled in the States of the Republic, with no exceptions, must shave off their beards and stop wearing the Jewish dress; they should dress as the Christians in the States of the Republic do.' Quoted in Eisenbach, *Emancipation*, 96.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, p. 3a; published in Gelber, 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow's Proposals', 276.

<sup>62</sup> Lefin, *Likutei kelalim*, para. 2, cited in Gelber, 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow's Proposals', 287. Emperor Joseph II promulgated the Edict of Tolerance on 2 Jan. 1782, which promised religious tolerance in return for the abolition of Jewish communal autonomy. In particular, Lefin is alluding to those sections of the edict which baldly admit the emperor's goal to make the Jews 'useful' to the state by directing them into artisanal trades and away from commerce. Most Jews perceived the series of edicts, which outlawed the use of Hebrew and Yiddish for commercial records, abolished the autonomy of the rabbinic courts, and imposed conscription as well as Germanic surnames upon the Jewish community, as an attack on their traditional way of life.

their communal supervisors and base all their reforms on the internal edicts (*takanot*) culled from the communal registers of 'upright' Jewish communities, 'those renowned for their reason and justice (such as the reforms of the communities [*kehilot*] of Vilna and Grodno, etc.).'<sup>63</sup>

In 'Teshuvah' Lefin not only clarified the reasons which compelled him to write the *Essai*, but also explicitly mentioned why he wrote in French and published anonymously.<sup>64</sup> Apparently the deputies of the Commission for National Education wanted to hear Lefin's opinion, no doubt on Czartoryski's recommendation, on the reform of Jewish life in Poland and wanted it to be presented in a way that would be received by the Sejm as a whole. In Lefin's account, they ordered him to write the pamphlet and to:

Conceal the name of the writer and not even to use the language spoken by him as one of our nation so that the words of this publication would not be suspected as the opinion of one who is affected by the matter, causing [its readers] to shut their ears to the reasonableness of his words. Rather [I should] arrange the words according to the tradition of the [gentile] states alone, and to direct the opinions of the legislators to thank themselves for the truthful uprightness of these edicts.<sup>65</sup>

In making every effort to ensure that his pamphlet's content did not unmask the ruse, Lefin tells us that he was guided by a story in tractate *Me'ilah*,<sup>66</sup> where Reuben, the son of Istroboli, responded to the Roman government's three anti-Jewish decrees (violating the sabbath, proscribing circumcision, and compelling transgression of the laws governing sexual relations) by disguising himself as a Roman. Sitting unrecognized among them, Reuben posed three questions, each carefully framed to elicit a response which would force the Romans to lift the respective edict. Reuben's

<sup>63</sup> Lefin, *Likutei kelalim*, paras. 4, 34, cited in Gelber, 'Mendel Lefin of Satanow's Proposals', 287, 292. Vilna, the capital city of Lithuania, was the home to the *gaon* Rabbi Elijah, who was considered the leader of rationalist traditional Judaism and on whom the rabbinic struggle against hasidism in the 18th cent. centred. See Immanuel Etkes, 'The Vilna Gaon and the Haskalah: Image and Reality', in I. Etkes and Joseph Salmon (eds.), *Chapters in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and the Modern Period* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1980), 192-217.

<sup>64</sup> *Essai d'un plan* was not Lefin's only anonymous work: he published his Yiddish translation of Proverbs (1814) anonymously; moreover, an anonymous anti-hasidic Yiddish comedy, *Di genarte velt* [The Foolish World], which probably appeared in the second decade of the 19th cent. and whose author had connections to the Galician Haskalah, relied on Yiddish translations of Proverbs that are very close to those of Lefin; one Yiddish scholar believed that Lefin himself had written the book. See Chone Shmeruk, *Yiddish Literature: Chapters in its History* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1978), 236-8, esp. n. 66.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, p. 3a. Gelber argued that in this section of 'Teshuvah' Lefin was referring to an anonymous French work, 'Pensées sur la réforme des Juifs de Pologne', which was translated from the Hebrew and found in Hugo Kollataj's library. This assessment does not make sense, as will be shown below. Hillel Levine has also noted the inaccuracy of Gelber's attribution, and concludes that 'Lefin's comments in "Teshuvah" better fit the anonymous *Essai d'un plan* [than 'Pensées']', yet he does not fully prove his conviction. See Hillel Levine, 'Menachem Mendel Lefin: A Case Study of Judaism and Modernization' (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1974), 176.

<sup>66</sup> See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, p. 3a.

strategy was successful until, as the Talmud notes, 'they came to know that he was a Jew, and [the decrees] were reinstated'.<sup>67</sup>

Lefin's unpublished 'Teshuvah' reveals more about his strategy in addressing a non-Jewish audience. Striving to deceive his readers even further, he remarks that he quoted 'as much as possible from their great writers on this [political] science, moreover, even from the books of the writers who are haters of Israel, so they would be obligated to say "yes" to the rightness of my words'.<sup>68</sup> A cursory glance at the *Essai* reveals at least one of those 'haters of Israel': on the last page Lefin cites Voltaire, arguably the eighteenth century's most dominant intellectual figure and a man known by his contemporaries, including the maskilim, as an enemy of the Jews.<sup>69</sup> In fact, the very title of Lefin's work may have been a deliberate allusion to Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs*, in which the French philosopher cavilled at alleged Jewish greed, misanthropy, and fanaticism. Although he quotes from Voltaire, Lefin argues against his belief in the fundamental incompatibility of Judaism and the modern state; to counter this view he gives prominence to the words of Montesquieu, the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment figure who was perceived as Voltaire's ideological opposite on the Jewish question. By citing Montesquieu on the title-page—'One must pay great attention to the disputes of theologians, but it is necessary to conceal it [that attention] as much as possible. . . Religion is always the best guarantee that one can have of men's morals'—Lefin both threw down the gauntlet in his covert battle with the hasidim and suggested to his non-Jewish readers that aggressive reform of the Jewish community that disregarded their religious tradition would be an unmitigated disaster.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> BT *Me'ilah* 17a. Given Lefin's own testimony as to why he deliberately disguised his origins and published *Essai d'un plan* anonymously, Alexander Guterman's conclusion ('Suggestions of the Jews of Poland', 71) that 'one should not suggest that the intention was to blur the Jewish identity of the author; the opposite is true' is quite surprising, particularly because Guterman had access to both Gelber's article and to folder 72 in the Joseph Perl Archive.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, p. 3a.

<sup>69</sup> This is conclusive evidence that the comment in 'Teshuvah' about his anonymous pamphlet refers to the *Essai*. Lefin apparently thought his pamphlet was successful in amending some of the deputies' more destructive proposals. As he wrote regarding his tactics of concealment and ruse: 'And it stood me in good stead, thank God, that through the words of explanation in this part, the slanderous mouths were closed shut, one by one, as they read it.' On Voltaire's attitude towards the Jews, see Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York and Philadelphia, Pa., 1968), esp. pp. 10, 286-7, 290, 297; Manuel, *The Broken Staff*, 193-201. See also Shmuel Feiner, 'The Rebellion of the French and the Freedom of the Jews': The French Revolution in the Image of the Past of the East European Jewish Enlightenment', in Richard Cohen (ed.), *The French Revolution and its Historiography* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1991), 240, on Voltaire as the blemish on the image of the Revolution for enlightened Jews who advocated political emancipation.

<sup>70</sup> In the endnotes which clarify the text of the *Essai* Lefin cites Montesquieu again, using the Frenchman's condemnation of Tsar Peter I's compulsory shortening of the beards and restrictions on the clothing of the Muscovites to underscore his conviction that the contemporaneous Polish decree ordering Jewish men to shave their beards was tyrannical. See *Essai d'un plan*, in Eisenbach et al., *Materiały do Dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego*, 320 n. 14.



## IV

Lefin's long life was characterized by the diversity of places he inhabited and the variety of cultural spheres he negotiated. He lived in traditional east European Jewish society, among the enlightened circles of maskilim in Berlin and Galicia, and had regular contact with distinguished members of the Polish nobility. The heterogeneity of his works bespeaks an ability to traverse these cultural realms with apparent ease. *Masaot hayam* and the *Essai* represent only part of his work, but they illustrate his remarkable talent for tailoring his writing to a specific audience. Although *Masaot hayam* was written for internal consumption and the *Essai* for non-Jewish readers, conscious subterfuge shaped the literary form of both. *Masaot hayam* attempted to broaden the geographic horizons of east European Jewry but also to usurp the hasidic movement's expropriation of the 'normative' rabbinic tradition through its mystical interpretation of the Bible. In the *Essai*, Lefin deliberately dissimulated in order to influence the hostile Polish deputies debating the reform of Jewish life in Poland at the Great Sejm, disguising his Jewishness through the work's anonymity, its language of composition, and its reliance on the writings of a well-known antagonist of the Jews. Ever conscious of the audiences he was addressing, Lefin was not someone who simply wrote in a popular style for the 'people', his fellow maskilim, or gentile readers. *Masaot hayam* and the *Essai* both exhibit his highly self-conscious and subtle sense of literary artifice.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> On the maskilim's camouflage of European secular literature as Yiddish didactic literature see David Roskies, 'The Medium and the Message of the Maskilic Chapbook', *Jewish Social Studies*, 41 (1979), 275-90.

## SIX

*The Struggle of the Mitnagedim and  
Maskilim against Hasidism:  
Rabbi Jacob Emden and Judah Leib Miseses*

YEHUDA FRIEDLANDER

IT is well known that the Haskalah shared a common source with the movements of the mitnagedim and the hasidim. In the words of Dov Sadan, 'beyond their superficial differences they draw nurture from common concealed roots; to be precise: from a single root, and they finally meet at the same pinnacle'.<sup>1</sup> Both the Haskalah and hasidism emerged from the *beit midrash* and the yeshiva, and even after they developed in different directions they clearly retained common spiritual elements. The impressive expertise in Torah literature displayed by the overwhelming majority of the maskilim, acquired in their pre-maskil days, served two purposes. First, they wanted to create a firm basis for the delegitimization of hasidism—in this respect their position closely resembled that of the rabbis who opposed hasidism, the mitnagedim. Their second goal was to lay an ideological foundation for the Haskalah as a legitimate movement within Judaism that was superior to other trends; one of the ways in which they did this was by engaging in an exegetical dispute concerning the sources in halakhic literature which were open to differing interpretations. The nature of the first goal has been examined by Shmuel Feiner, who has demonstrated the resemblance between the attitudes of the maskilim and mitnagedim to hasidism.<sup>2</sup> Both camps made strenuous efforts to delegitimize the movement, the mitnagedim because they regarded it as heresy, the maskilim because they saw it as anti-rational. But, beyond this common purpose, we should not lose sight of the maskilim's further objective: to establish themselves as more legitimate than the hasidim.

An example will serve to illustrate this point. The maskilim attacked the language of the hasidim, who were contemptuous of Hebrew grammar, as corrupt and distorted. Joseph Perl gave trenchant expression to this view in his satirical book

<sup>1</sup> 'Opening Essay, Article A: Testing the Framework', in *Avnei bedek* [Test Stones] (1947; Tel Aviv, 1962), 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1995), 130.