

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: HASIDIC HAGIOGRAPHY IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION – A HISTORICAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

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“Hasidic Hagiography in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” sheds light on a neglected genre in the scholarship of modern Hebrew literature – Hasidic hagiography. Nineteenth-century Jewish Enlightenment activists, influenced by Romanticism with its perspective on “primitive,” “national” literatures, read Hasidic hagiographies as folklore; until today this genre is excluded from the canon of Modern Hebrew literature and from critical literary discourse. My work challenges this myopia and offers a critical perspective on the complex relationships among religion, mysticism, and modernity within the Hasidic stories; it shows how Hasidic hagiography represented an alternative path for Jewish modernization that rejected

the binary lens of the Enlightenment's secular rationalism. The dissertation's title references Walter Benjamin, who revolutionized an understanding of literature as a reaction to changes in society wrought by industrialization and market capitalization. My dissertation applies a similar perspicacity to the study of Hasidic hagiography.

The 1848 revolutions, the growing political and cultural awareness, and the influences of print-capitalism in Galicia, prompted two Hasidim—Menachem Mendel Bodek (1825-1874) and Michael Levi Rodkinson (1845-1904) to print oral Hasidic hagiographical stories in the popular format of folktale collections, thereby constituting Hasidic hagiography as a new genre in Hebrew literature. These projects marked a sharp transition from oral and intimate gatherings with the tsadik to popular printed experience of the masses. The process through which mechanical reproduction replicates the first-hand meeting with the tsadik for the masses, reflects the Hasidic engagement with the project of Jewish modernity. Distributed through networks of popular media, Hasidic hagiography became the device through which Hasidism integrated into contemporary Jewish and secular discourses, responding to ideas such as nationalism and individualism.

The goal of this project is twofold: first, to offer a new critical methodology for reading those texts and establish a framework for discussing similar cases of marginalized texts in world literature; and secondly, to offer a new understanding of the political role of Hasidic hagiography and its promise for modern Jewish experience and literature. Finally, my dissertation contributes to our understanding of the political and cultural functions of popular literature, and illuminates alternatives to historiographies of national literatures.

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A HISTORICAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

by

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DEDICATION

To my grandparents whose life experiences are the seeds from which my work grows. Their voices are the living sounds that I search in every word that I read; conversing, arguing, singing. May my own voice join their singing for my children to seek.

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Chapter 1: Rethinking Hasidic Hagiography

A. Introduction

Formed in the second half of the eighteenth century, Hasidism succeeded in translating mystical values into sociopolitical terms, thereby establishing itself as a mass movement that dominated Eastern European Jewish life until World War Two.¹ Hasidism has grown to produce many subgroups that are organized as “courts” or dynasties and that are headed by a “*tsadik*” (pious leader) or “*rebbe*” (rabbi) until this day. While each Hasidic group emphasizes different values and practices, a fact that makes it hard to define Hasidism as one solid movement, there are some principles that tie all groups together. “Above all – Hasidic theology emphasizes divine immanence – that is, that God is present throughout the material world.”² When Hasidism first emerged as a movement, this core philosophical principle challenged the traditional rabbinic establishment by shifting the attention from Torah scholarship of the elite to devotional practices practiced by ordinary Jews. Spirituality and holiness could now be achieved by anyone, through the mundane and common.

Critical to the transformation of Hasidism into a mass movement were its hagiographical stories (idealized stories about a saint’s deeds), which were pivotal in constructing the communal ethos. These stories were initially transmitted orally, in

¹ Marcin Wodziński, *Historical Atlas of Hasidism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 1-4, 46-50; Uriel Gellman and Marcin Wodziński, “Toward a New Geography of Hasidism,” *Jewish History* 27, (2013): 171–199; Marcin Wodziński, *Hasidism: Key Questions* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2018).

² David Biale, David Assaf, et al., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 2.

Yiddish, by Hasidim (followers of Hasidism) who had witnessed the tsadik's deeds, however political and economic developments in Galicia during the mid–nineteenth century later impacted the social structure of Hasidic communities, changing the way in which ideas and information was shared.

Hasidic hagiography,³ as commonly held, emerged in 1814 with the publication of *Shivhei HaBesht* (“In the Praise of the Besht”) in Kopyts (Kapust), then part of the Russian Empire. *Shivhei HaBesht* is a hagiographical account following the biography and deeds of the founder of Hasidism – Rabbi Yisrael Ben Eliezer (1690/1700–1760), known as the Ba'al Shem Tov (mystic healer) and referred to as “the Besht.”⁴ Despite its popularity, *Shivhei HaBesht* did not prompt a new wave of Hasidic literature.⁵ In the fifty years that followed its publication, the so-called “fifty years of silence,” Hasidic hagiography was barely published. Starting in the 1860s, however, story collections about tsadikim and Hasidim began to be published in Hebrew at a rapid pace, mainly in Lemberg (Lwów, Lviv). It was this group of

³ I want to clarify that the stories and books that I deal with in my work fall under the category of hagiography (*sifrut ha-shevaḥim*).

⁴ On the figure of the Besht and the scholarly debate about his importance for the Hasidic movement, see, for example, Shimon Dubnow, *Toldot HaHasidut: Al Yesod Mekorot Rishonim, Nidpasim v'Kitvei Yad*, 3rd edition (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1966/1967), 41–75; Moshe Rosman, *HaBesht Mechadesh Hasidut*, trans. David Lovish (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999); Emmanuel Atkes, *Ba'al HaShem: HaBesht – Magia, Mistika, Hanhaga* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2000); Gedalya Nigal, *HaBesht: Agadot, Apologetika, u'Metziut* (Jerusalem: The Center for the Study of Hasidic Literature, 2008/2009); Gershom Scholem, “Dmuto HaHistorit shel R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov,” in *Tzadik v'Eda: Hebetim Historiim ve-Hevratim beHeker HaHasidut*, ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2001), 66–92.

⁵ See: Moshe Rosman, *Stories that Changed History: The Unique Career of Shivhei HaBesht* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2007); Elchanan Reiner, “Shivhei ha-Besht: mesirah, 'arikha, hadpasah,” *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C: Thought and Literature, vol. 2: Jewish Thought, Kabbalah and Hasidism, Jerusalem: The World Union for Jewish Studies, 1994, 145–152.

publications that defined the literary conventions of the genre and established it as a modern genre of its own.⁶

This dissertation focuses on this critical moment in history, when new technological and economic opportunities, namely capitalist print production, effected a change in the transmission of knowledge within the Hasidic community, and it explores the aesthetic and political expressions of this change as reflected in Hasidic hagiographical writing. As Walter Benjamin argues in his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” from 1935, “mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual...the instance the criterion authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.”⁷ Following Benjamin’s observation, I seek to examine Hasidic hagiographies at the point when it emerged as a new modern genre, as the genre was being shaped in print, and highlight its impact on the modernizing Jewish discourse of its time.

During the nineteenth century, romantic interest in the “authentic” agrarian peoples of Europe spawned a frenzy of folktale collecting, as the story of the rural population was perceived by the urban elite as an expression of the ancient and “real”

⁶ Between 1860 and 1870 fifteen books of Hasidic hagiography were published. These evaluations are based on the bibliographies compiled by Yoav Elstein, “Bo’u Litkon” in *Ma’aseh Sipur: Mehkarim ba-Siporet ha-Yehudit mugashim le-Yoav Elstein*, eds. A. Lipsker and R. Kushellevsky (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2006); Gedalyah Nigal, *Ha-Siporet ha-Hasidit: Toldote’hah ve-Nose’hah* (Jerusalem: Y. Marcus, 1981), 295–308; Zeev Kitsis, “Safrut ha-Shvachim ha-Hasidit me-Reishitah ve-ad le-Milhemet HaOlam HaShniyah: Tekufot, Kanonizatzia v’Darhei Gibush” (PhD dissertation, Bar-Ilan, 2015), 217–310.

⁷ Walter Benjamin. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” (217-252) *Illuminations* trns. Harry Zohn. Ed Hanna Ardent New York: Schocken 2007, 224.

spirit of the nation.⁸ Hasidism, which by that time had spread throughout much of Eastern Europe, was swept up in this wave of romantic longing for folkish authenticity and, as a result, was perceived by the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment movement) as a true, if primitive and degenerate, form of Jewish experience.⁹ Hasidic hagiographical stories, which, like traditional Jewish religious texts, were written in the rabbinic Hebrew “jargon,” were thus considered part of a quaint, backward-looking Jewish folklore. For this reason, this body of literature was excluded from the accepted canon of modern Hebrew literature and from concomitant critical literary discourse about nascent Jewish nationalism and modernization.

Yet this approach to Hasidic literature, which has remained the predominant scholarly approach until today, significantly overlooks the contribution of this genre to modern discourse. My dissertation, *Hasidic Hagiography in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: A Historical and Literary Perspective*, strives to correct this myopia by arguing that Hasidic hagiography from the second half of the nineteenth century should actually be understood as a body of literature that was profoundly engaged with the modern experience and did not ignore contemporary thought and expression. “Hasidic Hagiography in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” proposes that this Hasidic writing should be viewed as responsive to the discourses of the modern world both that took place within the different Hasidic communities and the Jewish world at large throughout nineteenth-century Europe. Hagiography was, in fact, a mode of

⁸ Timothy Baycroft and David M. Hopkin, *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe during the Long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Leiden, 2012); Peter Brock, *Folk Culture and Little Peoples: Aspects of National Awakening in East Central Europe* (Boulder, Colo.: Eastern European Quarterly, 1992).

⁹ Olga Litvak, *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 32.

modern expression within the Hasidic community that sought to claim a position for Hasidism within the world.

In this dissertation I further argue that Hasidic hagiography played a constitutive role in the modernization of Jewish culture and the construction of a new modern phenomenon in the Jewish experience, namely, a national Jewish consciousness and identification with the Jewish masses. Hasidic hagiography offers us a case study of what may be identified as modern hagiography: a genre that reflects the interplay of religiosity and secularization, individualism and community. “Modern hagiography” offers a literary model of mass culture that poses an alternative to the aesthetic and rational scales of Enlightenment thinking and the politics of nationalism. While scholarship on modern Hebrew literature still speaks in hierarchical terms of “low” and “high” literary forms, referring to the *beautiful* as its standard for canonization, Hasidic stories reject this Enlightenment economy and instead emphasize the aesthetics of rhetoric and the politics of the masses.

Hasidic hagiography took advantage of political and cultural opportunities that became available in the Habsburg Empire between the 1848 revolutions and the emancipation of the Jews of Galicia, in 1867. The intersection of liberal thought and print-capitalism (printing press proliferated by a capitalist marketplace)¹⁰ had a broad influence on the Galician crown land and allowed Hasidism to offer alternative paths

¹⁰ Coining the term “print-capitalism,” Benedict Anderson explains that capitalist entrepreneurs printed their books and media in the vernacular (secularizing the script-language) in order to maximize circulation. As a result, readers who spoke various local dialects became able to understand each other, and a common discourse emerged. Referring to the novel and newspapers, Anderson claims that “nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing number of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.” See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 36, 44–45.

of literary expression, particularly expressions of newfound Jewish political consciousness. “Hasidic Hagiography in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” focuses on Hasidic booklets printed in Galicia during the 1860s by Menachem Mendel Bodek (1825–1874)¹¹ and Michael Levi Rodkinson (1845–1904),¹² followers of Hasidism, who are considered the founding fathers of this genre.

Joseph Dan rejects the inclusion of Rodkinson among Hasidic literary collectors and claims that Rodkinson is not an “authentic” Hasid, but rather a maskil (follower of the Haskalah, that is the Jewish Enlightenment), who shaped Hasidism as a nostalgic Romantic artifact for his profit.¹³ The exclusion of Rodkinson from the Hasidic circle by Dan demonstrate the simplistic understanding of Hasidic hagiography by scholarship. In the most updated study of Rodkinson’s character,

¹¹ Gedalyah Nigal, *Melaktei HaSipur HaHasidi* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1995), 30-52; Ze’ev Gries, *Hasefer Ha-‘Ivri Perakim Letoldotav* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2015), 288-289. Nigal, *HaSiporet HaHasidit*, 31-36. See also Nigal’s introductions to annotated editions of Bodek’s books in *Sipurim Hasidiim: Hotsaah Bikortit ‘im Mavo, He’arot, umaftethot*, ed. Gedalyah Nigal (Tel Aviv: Yaron Golan, 1990); *Sipurim Hasidiim m’Lemberg-Lvov: Sifrei Frumkin-Rodkinson u’Bodek* (Jerusalem: The Institute for the Study of Hasidic Literature, 2005). I recently became aware of a dissertation written about Bodek, but unfortunately, due to current circumstances and the quarantine resulted from the COVID-19, the libraries are closed, and I could not reach this work and respond to it. At this stage I will only note it here: Hana Hendler, “Ha-sipur ha-Hasidi – ‘itsuvim sifrutiyim ve-‘emdot meta-fiziot: ‘iun be-yetsirato shel Manachem Mendel Bodek,” (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003).

¹² Jonatan Meir, *Shivchei Rodkinson*; Nigal, *Melaktei HaSipur HaHasidi*, 19-29; Nigal, *HaSiporet HaHasidit*, 28-31. See also Nigal’s introduction to the annotated edition of Rodkinson’s books in *Sipurim Hasidiim m’Lemberg-Lvov*. Rodkinson distanced himself from the Hasidic community at a certain point in his life, but also according to Meir’s current research, printing the Hasidic tales was one of the first projects that Rodkinson took upon himself and was done while he was still an upstanding member of the Hasidic community and before he adopted Enlightenment thought and turned to Enlightenment projects.

¹³ Dan distinguishes between Hasidic literature that originated within a specific Hasidic dynasty and reflects its particular discipline, and Hasidic literature “that originates outside of any specific Hasidic community, and is not connected with a specific contemporary Zaddik or dynasty; its subject is Hasidism as a whole, all its Zaddikim throughout its history”. According to him, “the first and most important creator of this second kind of Hasidic literature was Michael ha-Levi Frumkin.” See Joseph Dan. “A Bow to Frumkinian Hasidism,” *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May, 1991), 181. Dan’s claim is derived from the fact that at a certain point in his life Rodkinson drifted away from Hasidism and turned to Haskalah.

Jonatan Meir pushes against Dan's claim and explains that such perceptions "assume that no reasonable person could believe in such fantasies—an assumption of the maskilim that was surprisingly well accepted by modern scholars—and so whoever writes them is surely some kind of fraud. In fact, Rodkinson was a Hasid through and through when he printed his hagiographic works."¹⁴ Dan's claim reflects the maskilic misconception that Hasidim did not, and could not, take part in the modernization of culture. This dissertation seeks to break away from this perception in particular.

So, influenced by changes occurring in the Galician public sphere, especially in Lemberg, Bodek and Rodkinson decided to write down and print stories that had only been transmitted orally among Hasidim. The codification and publication of what had until then been an interpersonal oral experience granted a type of Hasidic cultural agency by affirming authority and promoting the participation of a Hasidic literary voice in a modern discursive enterprise, namely, the genre of the folk story.

During the "fifty years of silence" that followed its publication, *Shivhei HaBesht* was republished in at least seven editions (some of them in Yiddish), and became a very popular book.¹⁵ However, aside from *Shivhei HaBesht*, only three more hagiographic books were published during that time. The turning point in the genre's evolution that took place in the 1860 included the publication of about 16 new hagiographic books in one decade. Similar to *Shivhei HaBesht* the popular Hasidic hagiographic works were published as cheap thin booklets, about 60-80 page long,

¹⁴ Jonatan Meir. *Literary Hasidism: The Life and Works of Michael Levi Rodkinson*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016), 112.

¹⁵ Rosman, *Stories that Changed History*, 1–20. About the readership of Hasidic Hebrew books and the need in Yiddish editions see Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 210–213.

and usually had several editions. For example, Rodkinsons's *'Adat Tsadikim*, which was first published in 1864, had at least four editions before 1870. Hasidic hagiographic booklets were, as will be discussed further later in this dissertation, a combination of the romantic folktale collections and the medieval hagiography, with influences of the descriptive novel. The booklets contained anecdotes (one paragraph), short stories (a few pages), and sometimes even novellas that are based on historical events and are designed as tales.

The critical goals of this project are twofold: first, to offer a new method of reading these texts that is beyond the confining strictures of romantic literary assumptions and that allow us to reread them in a new light. Hasidic hagiographical literature of the nineteenth century, as this dissertation argues, constitutes an important and potentially far-reaching case study that establishes a theoretical framework for discussing other examples of marginalized "primitive" texts in world literature. Second, "Hasidic Hagiography in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" also suggests a new explanation for the position and political role of Hasidic hagiography in the history of modern Hebrew literature.

B. From Orality to Literacy

The shift in Hasidic printing habits during the mid-nineteenth century requires in-depth examination. What caused a society that so strongly emphasized intimacy to move from the face-to-face ecstatic practice of storytelling to the impersonal communication of print? What deep structural change in Hasidic sociology does it indicate? And what literary forms did this change produce?

Many scholars have offered explanations for the “fifty years of silence.” Joseph Dan, Jonatan Meir, and others offer explanations such as the power of governmental censorship, the primacy of *Shivhei HaBesht*, or the Hasidic concerns over the critical responses of maskilim (followers of the Haskalah movement) and mitnagedim (those who opposed Hasidism from within the traditional Jewish world) to new hagiographical works.¹⁶ Zeev Gries claims that from an intra-Hasidic perspective, the *book* simply had no significant value as a cultural agent. Rather, the intimate experience of observing the tsadik and transmitting information from one Hasid to another, in person, was fundamentally important to Hasidism, and thus they had no urge to print.¹⁷ However, as Meir highlights, the multitude of explanations for the absence of publications for half a century suggests that there is not one simple explanation for this phenomenon and that the truth is probably a combination of all these explanations.¹⁸ What is important to this project, however, is not why Hasidim didn't produce almost any hagiography for fifty years, but rather what pushed them to start printing again, intensively, in the 1860s. This focus will help us identify the key

¹⁶ Joseph Dan, *Ha-sipur ha-hasidi* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 186–195; Ira Robinson, “Hasidic Hagiography and Jewish Modernity,” in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, et al, eds., *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 404–412; Zeev Gries, *Sefer, Sofer, v'Sipur Beraishit HaHasidut: Min HaBesht v'ad Menahem Mendel m'Kotzk* [The Book in Early Hasidism – Genres, Authors, Scribes, Managing] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1992), 35–37.

¹⁷ See Gries, *Sefer, sofer, vesipur*, 18–19; Haim Liberman, “Bedaiah ve-emet bidvar batey hadfus ha-hasidim,” in *Tsadik ve-'eda: heybetim historiyim ve-hevratyim be-heker ha-Hasidut* [Zaddik and Devotees: Historical and Sociological Aspects of Hasidism], ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2001), 186–209.

¹⁸ Jonatan Meir, *Shivhey Rodkinson: Michael Levi Frumkin-Rodkinson vohaHasidut* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2012), 120–123.

elements that shaped Hasidic hagiographical literature and highlight the genre's literary characteristics.

Some scholars have offered different answers for explaining the shift from orality to printing, but most of these answers are too general and ignore the historical background of when the printing occurred – Galicia of the 1860s. Meir claims that that many different trends and conditions influenced this shift: the spreading and strengthening of Hasidism in the second half of the nineteenth century that produced a large audience of Hasidim; the proliferation of print of other religious Hebrew genres (such as homiletic literature); and the growth of anti-Hasidic maskilic literature (fiction and nonfiction) that drove a Hasidic reaction.¹⁹ Ira Robinson claims that as Jewish history shows, an urge to collect, canonize, and fixate oral materials appears in times of crisis when Jewish tradition is being challenged by outside forces. He explains that maskilic writings challenged the traditional world both in terms of attracting readers to the secular ideas of Enlightenment and by misrepresenting the traditional Jewish world, Hasidism included.²⁰ Gries approaches the question from a wider social perspective, arguing that this burst of Hasidic printing was simply inspired by the German-originated romantic fashion of the time to collect folktales.²¹

These answers are important but not particularly satisfying. The change in the Hasidic medium of communication signifies a much deeper change in Hasidic communal practice and culture. A significant practice of Hasidism was, and still is,

¹⁹ Meir, *Shivhey Rodkinson*, 126–130.

²⁰ Robinson, “Hasidic Hagiography,” 407.

²¹ Gries, *Sefer, Sofer, ve-Sipur*, 38.

pilgrimage to the tsadik's court and observation of his behavior with no mediation.

The Hasidic principle that lies at the basis of this practice is that the tsadik is a vessel through which God's light or spirit flows to individuals. "What may be central for the nature of the Hasidic righteous man," explains Moshe Idel "is ... his capacity to bring down and distribute divine power, or influx, to the community he serves as spiritual mentor."²² Each individual has the opportunity to connect with the divine through the charismatic character of the tsadik. In his court a tsadik would usually give a sermon on the afternoon of the Sabbath (Saturday), during the traditional third meal.

Attending the sermon was not merely an intellectual activity, but a spiritual, even ecstatic, experience. In some cases, the tsadik would tell a story as part of this ecstatic moment. The sermons were performed in an intimate and highly spiritual atmosphere and were subsequently conveyed orally from one Hasid who had witnessed it to another, producing narratives that praised the miraculous and divine powers of tsadikim. These narratives founded the Hasidic ethos and perhaps even contributed to the forging of Hasidic communal consciousness.

C. Literature Review

The nature of Hasidic hagiography – its theological values, folktale structure, and historical content – led researchers to analyze it through one of the three prisms: history, Jewish thought, or folklore. Literary scholarship relegated this literature to the sidelines of literary criticism following the Neo-Hasidic trends at the turn of the

²² Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 204.

twentieth century. Neo-Hasidic maskilim appreciated the stories as naïve ethnographic materials that represent authentic traditional “old” Jewish life. Their romantic attraction to the Jewish past led them to produce pseudo-Hasidic stories that contributed to the historical consciousness of the new modern Jew. The literary value of Hasidic hagiography has therefore only been considered thus far by critical literary discourse concerning their secondary appearance in neo-Hasidic writings.

a. Historical and Philosophical Perspectives

Historians have used these texts as a resource, albeit constrained by other factual sources, for illustrating historical events.²³ To name a few: Immanuel Etkes and Moshe Rosman wrote new biographies of the Besht and disagreed about the significance of *Shivhei HaBesht* in restoring his historical character. While serving as one of the few resources on the life of the Besht, *Shivhei HaBesht* is not a reliable account of his biography.²⁴ Ada Rapoport-Albert showed how the hagiographical stories of Chabad²⁵ Hasidim were written with the intention of reconstructing their

²³ Rafael Mahler used Hasidic hagiography in his historical account of the Hasidic movement and has struggled with the quality and reliability of the sources. Rafael Mahler, *HaHasidut veba-haskalah* [Hasidism and Enlightenment] (Merhavia: Sifriat po'alim, 1961). See also Nahum Karlinsky, “Bein biografía lehegiografía: hasefer *Beit Rabbi* vereshitah shel hahistoriografía hahasidit-ortodoxit” [Beit Rabi: A Text of Orthodox-Hasidic Historiography], in *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C: Thought and Literature, vol. 2: Jewish Thought, Kabbalah and Hasidism, Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1993, 161–168.

²⁴ Immanuel Etkes, *The Besht: Magician, Mystic, and Leader*, trans. Saadya Sternberg (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 203–248. See also Etkes’s response to Rosman’s approach in “The Historical Besht, Reconstruction or Deconstruction?” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 12 (1999), 298–306.; Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley: University of California, 2006); Glenn Dynner, “The Hasidic Tale as a Historical Source: Historiography and Methodology,” *Religion Compass* 3/4 (2009), 655–675; Dubnow, *Toldot HaHasidut*; Scholem, “Dmuto hahistorit,” 66–92.

²⁵ Chabad is one of the most famous streams of Hasidism, particularly known for its outreach activities. It was founded by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745/1749–1812), and its name is an acronym of (חכמה, בינה ודעת) Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge – the first three attributes or

history and image of their rebbe so as to claim that their stream of Hasidism was the only true reflection of the Besht's philosophy.²⁶ David Assaf highlights the line between history and fiction in Hasidic hagiographies and shows how these works either avoid dealing with controversial moments in Hasidic history or, alternatively, obscure or endow the truth with alternative interpretations. Constructing collective Hasidic hagiographies made it possible to repress shameful events such as the conversion of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi's son to Christianity.²⁷ The historical content of hagiographical Hasidic stories drew the attention of historians, but the fictional and political functions of the stories have raised many debates about the value of hagiography as a resource for understanding Hasidic history and concerning the appropriate methodology for engaging with this genre.²⁸

Others take a different historical approach to the texts, seeking to highlight the place of Hasidic hagiographies in their contemporary intellectual environment. Jonatan Meir, for example, treats Hasidic hagiography through a more specific historical lens – the clash between Hasidism and maskilic writings in the early nineteenth century. He explains that despite what is commonly believed, Hasidic

emanations through which the divine (God) reveals itself according to the Kabbalah. This name represents the intellectual character of Chabad Hasidism.

²⁶ Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Hagiography with Footnotes: Edifying Tales and the Writing of History in Hasidism," *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 119–159.

²⁷ David Assaf. "Heybetim Historiim v'Hevratim b'Hecker HaHasidut," in *Tsadik ve-'eda: hebetim historiym ve-hevratim be-heker ha-Hasidut* [Zaddik and Devotees: Historical and Sociological Aspects of Hasidism], ed. David Assaf, 9-32. (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2001); David Assaf, *Untold Tales of the Hasidim: Crisis and Discontent in the History of Hasidism* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012).

²⁸ Uriel Gellman presented a historical account of the process of producing hagiographical booklets in the turn of the twentieth century. Following a case study from 1900, he discusses the economic and personal motivations behind late production of Hasidic booklets. See Uriel Gellman, "An Author's Guide: Authorship of Hasidic Compendia," *Zutot* 9 (2012): 85–96.

hagiography preceded the appearance of maskilic Hebrew satires from the first half of the nineteenth century and was actually the driving force behind the satires' emergence.²⁹ The two genres' influence on one another was dynamic, as Meir points out; Hasidic hagiography was in many ways a response to maskilic criticism, and Hasidic hagiographies from the mid-nineteenth century responded to popular maskilic satires that mocked Hasidism and portrayed it as a corrupt movement, but the new view Meir offers grants Hasidic hagiography power in the nineteenth century cultural and intellectual economy.

While Gershom Scholem argued that the Hasidic *derashah* (sermon) best expresses Hasidic thought,³⁰ Martin Buber claimed that Hasidic stories actually expressed the essence of the Hasidic dialogic existential philosophy.³¹ Scholars of Jewish thought have primarily followed Buber's line of thinking.³² Focusing on the mystical and religious values embedded in the texts, contemporary scholars highlight the humanist aspects of Hasidic philosophy that are expressed in Hasidic hagiography. Tsippy Kaufman, for example, focuses on the Hasidic narrative ethics to

²⁹ See Jonatan Meir, *Hasidut medumah: 'iyunim bi-khetavav ha-satiriyim shel Yosef Perl* [Imagined Hasidism: the anti-Hasidic writings of Joseph Perl] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2013). It is also interesting to see Rachel Manekin's discussion about Perl's writing in that period as compared to non-Jewish enlightened writers. See: Manekin, "From Johann Pezzl to Joseph Perl: Galician Haskalah and the Austrian Enlightenment," in *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe: Shared and Comparative Histories*, vol. 8, ed. Tobias Grill (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 61–71.

³⁰ Gershom Scholem (1879–1982) was a prominent scholar of Jewish mysticism.

³¹ Martin Buber (1878 – 1965) was a modern Jewish philosopher of existentialism.

³² Gershom Scholem, "Martin Buber's Hasidism," *Commentary* 12 (Oct 1, 1961): 305–16; Martin Buber, "Interpreting Hasidism," *Commentary* 36 (September 1963): 218–225; Maurice Friedman, "Interpreting Hasidism: The Buber-Scholem Controversy," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 33, no. 1 (1988): 449–467; Rachel White, "Recovering the Past, Renewing the Present: The Buber-Scholem Controversy over Hasidism Reinterpreted," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (2007): 364–392.

draw the essential Hasidic attitude toward religious life.³³ Yakir Englander investigates Hasidic rituals through Hasidic hagiographical stories and reveals their expression of a Hasidic philosophy of the body.³⁴ Many scholars of Jewish thought focused on the spiritual philosophy of Reb Naḥman of Breslev's tales, but since they are not hagiographical but rather fictional stories laden with symbolism, I will discuss them separately .

The historical and philosophical studies on Hasidic hagiography contributes to our understanding of the genre's multiple functions and highlight the ambivalent goal of its storytelling. But while the historical and philosophical aspects of Hasidic hagiographical writing have received critical attention, the examination of its literary form and function is far from being exhausted. As a modern innovative mode of popular culture, the genre requires a literary definition.

b. The Exception of Reb Naḥman's Tales

The dominant approaches to Hasidic hagiography emphasize the religious and social values of the stories and marginalize its literary meaning and aesthetic. Critical readings of the texts don't view it as a form of modern leisure, but as a didactic and practical vehicle for transmitting communal knowledge. As a result, scholarship in

³³ Kauffman discusses Hasidic hagiography as a resource for identifying Hasidic mystical beliefs. She sometimes discusses specific principles and their variations (such as the role of the *tsadik*), and sometimes she highlights the more general Hasidic innovations in Jewish thought. See Tsippy Kauffman, "Massa'o shel HaBesht le'ereṣ Israel," *Zion*, (forthcoming); Idem., "The Hasidic Story: A Call for Narrative Religiosity," *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 22 (2014): 101–126. Kauffman argues that the centrality of storytelling in Hasidism reflects its awareness of the restrictive nature of traditional Judaism and its innovative approach highlighting the infinite path to God.

³⁴ Yakir Englander, "Ha-metaḥ sviv ma'amad guf hatsadik: 'iun besipurey ba'al 'Ahavat Yisrael' mi-Vizhnitz," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 27 (2014): 103–131.

the field of Hasidic literature has focused on Hasidic texts that do not treat historical events or follow didactic religiosity, but that are explicitly fiction. *Reb Naḥman's Tales (Sipurai ma'asiot)* were first published in a bilingual, Hebrew-Yiddish edition in Ostrog, in 1815. Written down by Natan Shternhartz (1780– 1844), the stories told by Rabbi Naḥman of Breslev (1772–1810) do not attempt to reflect a realistic or historic representation of the time, place, and people.³⁵ They are highly symbolic and allegorical stories or parables that are atypical of nineteenth-century Hasidic literature, which produced mostly hagiography. There is no question as to the literary classification of *Reb Naḥman's Tales*, as opposed to Hasidic hagiography, which resists classification and wavers between the categories of fiction, history, and religious ritual.

Scholars have been attracted to the strong symbolism of Reb Naḥman's stories and to the singularity of this work in the realm of Hasidic literature. Mendel Piekartz, Joseph Weiss, and others highlight the dialectical nature of the stories, showing how they were written as materialistic vehicles to uncover the light and spirituality of God imbedded in this world. According to Weiss, the stories also reflect Reb Naḥman's dialectic personality.³⁶ Literary critics recognize *Reb Naḥman's Tales* as a modern literary masterpiece and even included it in the body of Jewish literary

³⁵ Natan Shternhartz was Reb Naḥman's student. Reb Naḥman, like many Hasidic leaders, did not write down his sermons, philosophy, or stories, but told them orally. They were later written down, edited, and published by his closest student, Reb Natan.

³⁶ Joseph Wiess, "Iunim betfisato ha'atsmit shel R. Naḥman mibreslev," *Tarbiz* 27, vol. 2/3 (1958): 358–371; Joseph Weiss, "'Ha"kushia' betorat R. Naḥman mibreslev," *Aley 'ain: minḥat devarim leShlomo Zalman Shoken* (Jerusalem: Schocken 1952), 245–291.; Mendel Piekartz, *Hasidut Breslev: Perakim Behaiey Meḥolelah uvikhtaveya* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1971), 83–131; Shaul Magid, ed., *God's Voice from the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002); Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Naḥman of Bratslav* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1979).

historiography.³⁷ Unlike their treatment of Hasidic hagiography, critics treat these stories as worthy of critical response.³⁸ Reb Naḥman's stories have also received great attention from scholars of Yiddish literature, as they were first published in a bilingual edition (Hebrew and Yiddish) and because they had great influence on Yiddish writers.³⁹

Nineteenth-century Hasidism produced mostly hagiographical literature, but Rivka Dvir-Goldberg has shown that there were other Hasidic rebbes besides Reb Naḥman who produced fiction, a well-known one being Rabbi Yisrael of Ryzhin.⁴⁰ This phenomenon of Hasidic fiction is fascinating, but it is not part of the subject

³⁷ *Reb Naḥman's Tales* is missing from Klausner or Lachower's Hebrew literary historiographies. For more about the treatment of Reb Naḥman's stories by Hebrew literary criticism, see Yoav Elstein, *Ma'ase ḥoshev: 'iunim basipur hahasidi* (Ramat Gan: 'Akad, 1983); Yoav Elstein, "Parashat habikoret vehaparshanut," in *Pa'amey bat melekh: hikrei tokhen vetsura besipuro harishon shel R. Naḥman miBreslev*, ed. Yoav Elstein (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1984), 66–71. In more recent scholarship, however, *Reb Naḥman's Tales* has been considered part of the evolution of modern Hebrew literature. See Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Towards a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Yiddish historiography was more open to the literary value of *Reb Naḥman's Tales*. See Chone Shmeruk *Sifrut Yiddish: perakim letoldoteiah* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1978); David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Contemporary criticism about Jewish bilingualism discusses Hasidic literature, especially the innovative literary approach of *Reb Naḥman's Tales*, which first appeared as a Hebrew-Yiddish publication. See Chana Kornfeld, "The Joint Literary Historiography of Hebrew and Yiddish," in *Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Joshua Miller and Anita Norich (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 15–35.

³⁸ For a comprehensive discussion concerning the scholarship on *Reb Naḥman's Tales*, see Zvi Mark, "Mavo" [Introduction] in *Kol sipurey Rabbi Naḥman miBreslev: hama'asiot, hasipurim hasodi'im, hahalomot vahaḥezionit*, ed. Zvi Mark (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute and Yediot Sefarim, 2014); Ora Wiskind-Elper, *Tradition and Fantasy in the Tales of Reb Naḥman of Bratslav* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998); Arnold Band, "The Function of the Enigmatic in Two Hasidic Tales," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, eds. Joseph Dan and Frank Talmadge (Cambridge: Association of Jewish Studies, 1978), 185–210; Pickarz, *Ḥasidut Breslev*; Arthur Green, *Ba'al hayisurim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1980). Yitzhak Lewis, *Intransitive Beginnings: Nachman of Bratslav and Jewish Literary Modernity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2020). (forthcoming)

³⁹ Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing*, 20–55; Jeremy A. Dauber, "Looking Again: Representation in Nineteenth-Century Yiddish Literature," *Prooftexts* 25, no. 3 (2005): 276–318.

⁴⁰ Rivka Dvir-Goldberg, *Hatsadik ha-hasidic vearmon halivyatan: 'iun besipurei ma'asiot mipi tsadikim* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2003).

matter of this dissertation. Although there are some philosophical similarities between Reb Naḥman's fiction and 1860s Hasidic hagiography, I will not be examining Reb Naḥman's work in this dissertation, as my focus is specifically on the interplay of genres in Hasidic hagiography and its literary poetics, which stresses rhetoric over allegory, and seeks to rethink its literariness.

c. Literary Criticism: Folklore, Form, and Theory

Historical and theological approaches to Hasidic literature provide an essential understanding of the social conditions surrounding the production of the literature, in addition to setting the scene for critical analysis. These perspectives contribute to the literary understanding of Hasidic hagiography and to the social and religious values that stand behind them. They do not, however, place aesthetic questions at the center of their research, leaving the literary aspects of Hasidic hagiography unexamined and obscure. The current scholarship's approach lacks a literary methodology that can explain the *effect* of Hasidic hagiography's *form*.

Pioneering works by Gedalyah Nigal and Joseph Dan accepted the view of Haskalah scholars and approached the texts through the lens of folklore studies. Nigal's pioneering works map the themes and tropes of the stories and provide a historical lexicon of the stories' collectors. (In my reading of the genre I consider the collectors to be the authors).⁴¹ Recent works by Zeev Kitsis follow Nigal's line of thinking by focusing on social and folkloric aspects of the stories and classifying the

⁴¹ Nigal, *Hasiporet HaHasidit*; Gedalyah Nigal, *Melaktey hasipur hahasidi* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1995). Nigal also edited and reprinted many Hasidic books in new annotated editions, thereby making them accessible to contemporary readers.

different booklets based on their social function in Hasidic communal life.⁴² Zeev Gries focuses on the history of the Hebrew book and sees Hasidic booklets through the prism of nineteenth-century literary trends and social context. His approach places Hasidic booklets at the center of nineteenth-century Romanticism.⁴³ The connection Gries makes between Hasidic booklets and romantic projects of collection and ethnography serves as a starting point for me that on one hand allows me to place Hasidism among other modern literary trends, but on the other hand, allows me to deconstruct the Romantic view of Hasidic books, which sees them as naïve, almost unliterary, literature.

Nigal's work joins Joseph Dan's comprehensive 1975 literary work on the Hasidic story, which describes in general terms the historiography of the Hasidic tale. Dan discusses the literary religious tradition of Hasidic hagiography while pointing out its unique innovation – the sanctification of the story. Highlighting the poor didactic indoctrination of the Hasidic story, Dan suggests a new definition of Hasidic hagiography, proposing that it should essentially be viewed as a folkloric genre that

⁴² Kitsis, *Safrut Hashvachim hahasidit*. As part of his folkloric approach, Kitsis produced Hasidic collections of his own. One project is a digitized archive of Hasidic stories called *Zusha* that is available online to anyone who wishes to engage with Hasidic storytelling. See <https://www.zusha.org.il/>. The second is a popular book that presents a collection of fifty Hasidic stories selected by Kitsis with commentary. He presents a simple interpretation that is relevant to contemporary readers. Kitsis, *Hamishim Keriot besipurai Hasidim* (Hevel Modi'in: Kineret Zemora-Dvir, 2017).

⁴³ Gries, *Sefer, sofer, vesipur*; Zeev Gries, *Hasefer kesokhen tarbut bashanim 1700 – 1900* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2002), 118–30; Zeev Gries, *Hasefer Ha'ivri prakim letoldotav* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2015), 25–26. Gries's approach allows us to investigate Hasidic hagiography in a modern context and illuminate its uniqueness among Enlightenment and romantic literary projects and ideologies. See also Zeev Gries, "The Hasidic Managing Editor as an Agent of Culture," in *Hasidism Reappraised*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996), 141–158; Biale and Assaf, *Hasidism*, 457–474.

follows religious literary traditions.⁴⁴ Unlike Nigal's work, which focuses on classification and themes, Dan's work paves the way for critical literary examination of the stories by discussing their aesthetic form. Dan's innovative project provides general literary categories for examining Hasidic hagiography; however it limits the genre to religious categories such as the *derasha* (sermon) and overlooks Hasidic hagiography's cultural effect as a modern popular printed medium.

Yoav Elstein was the first to suggest a coherent methodology that shifts the literary perception of the genre. Instead of classifying it as folkloric medium that served as didactic communal literature, Elstein moved Hasidic hagiography to the realm of fine arts. He argues that the aestheticization of oral stories and the shaping of Hasidic stories into written, printed form reflect the authors' literary consciousness and intention in producing literature.⁴⁵ Elstein broadens Dan's analysis by identifying sources from world literature that influenced the shaping of the Hasidic stories. He shows how Hasidim collected materials that they found in non-Jewish folktales to produce spiritual ecstatic stories that reconstructed the Hasidic ethos.⁴⁶ Elstein's work is essential and represents a critical turning point in the study of Hasidic hagiography. It also highlights the great absence of literary criticism in this field and the large amount of work that remains to be done. Elstein claims that a new framework is

⁴⁴ Joseph Dan, *Hasipur Hahasidi* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975); Joseph Dan, *Hanovela hahasidit* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1966); Joseph Dan, "Leberur darkey hameḥkar besipurey Hasidim," in *Proceedings of the Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1965), 53–57.

⁴⁵ Elstein, *Ma'ase ḥoshev*, 63–72; Yoav Elstien, "Transformatsia shel ma'arakhot 'iun letaḥbir sipuri," *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 9 (1982): 25–38.

⁴⁶ Elstein. *Ma'ase ḥoshev*; Yoav Elstein, "Hayesod hamiti basipur hahasidi kemekhonen toda'ah extatit," in *Hamitos baYehadut*, ed. Haviva Pedaiah (Be'er Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 1996), 226–238.

needed, one that exceeds the stories' philosophical and religious infrastructure. Yet although he invites us to view Hasidic hagiography with fresh eyes, Elstein's own criticism remains within the bounds of the conventional folkloric and religious discourse and does not address modernization, cultural and political struggles, or the contrast with maskilic literature.⁴⁷

Recent studies by Hannan Hever present a new critical approach, one that places the Hasidic hagiography within the contemporary Jewish cultural and political arenas. Hever focuses on the pivotal role of the tsadik in these stories, highlighting how the stories' focus on the tsadik gives the tales a political function that singles out the tsadik as the absolute sovereign. Through magical realism, Hever explains, the Hasidic text portrays the tsadik as the ultimate authority, and in this way the stories serve as a vehicle to communicate a repressive political order that reinforces the power of the tsadik over his followers. The Hasidic story idealizes the independent and closed Hasidic social system, celebrating the Jewish diaspora over and in opposition to nascent contemporary discourses of Jewish nationalism.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Elstein offers two methods: first, revealing the worldwide sources and materials that found their way into a specific tale in order to reveal the universal ideas that it reflects. Second, combining the structuralist-formalist investigation of the text's resources with the Hasidic principle of *ecstasy*, which is, according to him, the essence of the Hasidic narrative. This two-stage methodology beautifully acknowledges the deep cultural connections between Hasidic narratives and the European environment as well as the Hasidic philosophical roots. Despite Elstein's efforts to avoid folkloristic examination of those texts, this method is very similar to the one that is used in the fields of folklore; philology; tracking routes of material exchange; comparison of different versions; searching for tropes; and thematic cataloging. This approach ignores national aspects of the texts. As a product of the nineteenth century, Hasidic hagiography was engaged with romantic trends; the prevalent projects of collecting folktales and the intellectual national search for the "spirit of the people" was accompanied and motivated by the awakening of European nationalism in general and Jewish politics and nationalism in particular. Elstein's methodology perceives the text as a spontaneous naïve product of intercultural influences. Although I do agree that we should acknowledge the "folkloric" characteristics of those texts, I also think that it is limited and misses the political role of the texts and of the author.

⁴⁸ Hannan Hever, "HaHasidut v'HaEmperia HaRusit: Politica Yehudit lefnei HaZiyonut b'Sipur HaHasidi," in *HaZiyonut v'HaEmperiyot*, ed. Yehuda Shenhav (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute and HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2012), 110–36; Hannan Hever, "The Politics of From of the Hasidic Tale,"

My own approach follows Hever by situating Hasidic stories within their sociopolitical context and examining the political effect of their poetics, but it also seeks to go beyond the constraint of Jewish national discourse, which has come to dominate the field of modern Hebrew literature on a broad scale. My dissertation suggests a new comprehensive framework for reading Hasidic hagiography, one that examines its role in the modernization of Jewish society in Eastern Europe in particular and the modernization of nineteenth-century literature in general.

D. Rethinking Hasidic Hagiography

My work refuses to accept the view of Hasidic hagiography as sentimental, traditional texts, and instead seeks to develop a critical perspective on the complex relationships among religion, mysticism, and modernity portrayed within the stories. I show how the stories presented an alternative path for Jewish modernization that rejected the binary lens of the Enlightenment's secular rationalism. While Hasidic stories certainly weave traditional elements into their literary fabric, the historical and political context within which Hasidic hagiography emerged as a printed genre reflects the literature's engagement with the project of Jewish modernity. Indeed, Bodek and Rodkinson transformed the traditional medieval model of hagiography – a long narrative that followed the biography of one saint that could be found in synagogues (or *batei midrash*) or monasteries. Instead, they produced something decidedly different and modern: cheap booklets containing stories and anecdotes

Dibur 2 (Spring 2016): 57–73; Hannan Hever, *HaPolitica shel HaSipur HaHasidi uMitnagdav* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press) (forthcoming).

about tsadikim and Hasidim, which were intended to appeal to the masses. Bodek and Rodkinson adjusted the literary format presented in *Shivhei HaBesht*, the archetype of the Hasidic hagiographical genre, and developed Hasidic Hagiography to fit the new cultural sphere. *Shivhei HaBesht* presents a transitional text which stands between the medieval norm of religious long biographical texts and the modern popular literary market of folktale collections. In its new form, Hasidic hagiography was accessible not only to Hasidim, but to any Hebrew reader (later, they were translated into Yiddish as well).

This production was part of a larger change that took place in the 1860s Lemberg and which was influenced by print-capitalism. The numbers of Hebrew and Yiddish books printed in Lemberg started to grow within a few decades following the revolutions. Between 1840 and 1850, 359 books were printed, while between 1861 and 1870 the number was doubled with 747 books. These results show clearly that the book market was experiencing a boom during the 1860s.⁴⁹ Distributed through networks of popular and cheap media, Hasidic hagiography became the device through which Hasidism spawned the emergence of modern Hebrew mass culture.

My criticism focuses on the moment in which economic and political conditions enabled the widespread publication and popularity of Hasidic booklets. The development of the public sphere (proliferation of public places like the coffee shop) and of mass communication (through cheap printing like newspapers) of

⁴⁹ These numbers are based on a search made in the National Library of Israel website (Merhav) for books printed in Lemberg in Yiddish and Hebrew. Between 1840-50, 359 books; between 1851—60: 508 books; and between 1861-70: 747 books were published. I want to thank Rachel Manekin for her assistance in this search.

Galicia during the mid–nineteenth century allowed, as Jürgen Habermas claims, a “‘horizontal’ communication between thinking citizens, who [were] involved in politics and [could] influence the political climate.”⁵⁰ It is within this changing atmosphere that Hasidic hagiographical writings should be examined. The 1860s transition from an ecstatic intimate religious ritual of observing the tsadik or listening to his stories to transmission of the stories via a popular press indicates a change in the social role of the story. As Walter Benjamin explains, “Mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual.... The instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.”⁵¹ Criticizing Benjamin, Theodor Adorno argues that the belief in the power of the masses to liberate or democratize the artistic act is a utopia that ultimately crashes under the weight of “cultural industry,” in which individuals are consumers with no independent thoughts of their own.⁵²

Acknowledging the dialectical tension between the liberating and controlling aspects of the Hasidic hagiographical text gives us a more complex understanding of its cultural function. The Hasidic printing project allowed individuals to engage with the tsadik from a distance and perhaps even reduced the political power of pilgrimage, but at the same time, the poetic of the stories preserved the oral intimacy,

⁵⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 224.

⁵² Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, Ed. J. M Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001).

forged communal consciousness, and strengthened communal supervision. The Hasidic text therefore serves as a unique model to discuss cultural criticism and its failures.

A major force in establishing Hasidism as the mass movement that dominated Eastern European Jewish life (before the Holocaust), Hasidic hagiographical stories reflect not only the construction of a communal ethos, but also the institutionalization of the movement. During the nineteenth century, Hasidism became firmly established through the strengthening of the Hasidic social structure—the tsadikim’s courts—and through its collaboration with other ultra-Orthodox groups in opposing the Haskalah movement. This institutionalization has been viewed by early scholarship as a decadency of Hasidism and the loss of its radicalism.⁵³ Recent works take a different view by arguing that the nineteenth century was the Hasidic “Golden Age.”⁵⁴ They see the movement’s growth and its institutionalization as the features that granted it political power and allowed it to participate in the modern state and cultural politics. This duality regarding the movement’s success reflects a change in Hasidic political agency— it turned from presenting radical criticism on traditional Judaism to gaining political capital by institutionalization and conformism.

Intertwining nineteenth-century Jewish and general sociopolitical history with literary theories, I argue that Hasidic hagiography played a constitutive role in the

⁵³ Joseph Dan, “Kefel ha-panim shel ha-meshiḥiut ba-Ḥasidut,” in *Be-ma’agalei Ḥasidim: Kovets Meḥkarim le-zikhro shel Prof. Mordechai Vilensky*, eds. Immanuel Etkes, David Assaf, and Elchanan Reiner (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999), 299–315; Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 221–223; Gadi Sagiv, *Ha-Shushélet: Beit Chernobyl Umekomo be-toldot ha-Hasidut* [Dynasty: The Chernobyl Hasidic Dynasty and Its Place in the History of Hasidism] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2014), 15–16.

⁵⁴ Biale and Assaf, *Hasidism*, 257–90.

modernization of Jewish culture and in the construction of a new, modern phenomenon in Jewish experience, namely, the Jewish masses. The transformation of the Hasidic medium of communication shows the movement's engagement with modern politics and aesthetics; it reflects the Hasidic recognition of romantic common trends, the political rise of the individual, and the Jewish struggle over the aesthetic of Hebrew. *Modern hagiography* as was shaped by Hasidism played an essential part in the shaping of the new mass culture that developed in Galicia in particular, and in Eastern Europe in general.

E. Nineteenth-Century Romanticism

In order to understand Hasidic hagiography as a serious cultural product we must examine it within the wider context of Romanticism, which influenced Europe during the nineteenth century. As a movement, Romanticism cannot be fully defined.

“Romanticism was by its very nature provisional: it reacted against what lay around it, was constantly mutating, and was often defined by what it was not.”⁵⁵ The different forms and shapes of Romanticism highlights above all its core characteristic – search. The movement was “a quest for wonders, a constant endeavour ‘to seek strange truth in undiscovered lands.’ This quest could take many forms. There was the feeling, encouraged by post-Kantian idealism, that the so-called ‘physical’ world

⁵⁵ David Blayney Brown, *Romanticism* (London: Phaidon, 2001), 8. On the definition and history of the term Romanticism, see Lilian R. Furst. *Romanticism* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969), 1–13.

was pervaded or surrounded by mysteries which men might sense and art adumbrate.”⁵⁶

This agitation in thought and art that characterizes Romanticism relates to historical revolutionary events and their failure to emancipate the masses in Europe. The American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 sparked new ideas and optimism, but Napoleon’s rise and fall eventually dashed Europeans’ hopes and ultimately brought about reactionary and uninspiring governments, as well as restored monarchies (France, Germany, Italy, Spain). These political developments were followed by the revolutions known as The Spring of Nations, first in 1830, in France, and then throughout Europe, in 1848. “Romanticism was born in opposition and sorrow, in social or national crisis and in individual trauma.”⁵⁷ Out of contentious discussions over the essence of the individual, his/her humanistic qualities and political rights, grew the romantic search for new existential possibilities. The struggles over new definitions of community and nationality that overwhelmed Europe influenced individuals and encouraged the emergence of an entirely new culture in which an individual could be deep, complex, and independent.

The appearance of Hasidic stories in the 1860s cannot be separated from these European artistic developments. The adoption of the popular romantic format of folktale collections also marks the connection between the Hasidic printing project and the romantic search for things spectacular and new. Despite its popularity and obvious connection to the zeitgeist of the era, the Hasidic stories were not taken

⁵⁶ Siegbert Praver, ed. *The Romantic Period in Germany* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 4; Hugh Honour, *Romanticism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 11.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Romanticism*, 11.

seriously as a modern romantic project that bore tidings for modern Jews. It was rejected and dismissed as a worthy type of literature first by the scholars of its time and embraced instead as folklore whose romantic voice was condescendingly viewed as naïve rather than artistic.

Early maskilim were devoted to the Enlightenment's struggle against mysticism, superstition, and religious enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) and therefore fought against Hasidism and its cultural products.⁵⁸ Using satire, maskilic literature mocked what it considered Hasidic degeneration. Publications in both Yiddish and Hebrew were then produced to praise rationalism and portray Hasidism as a corrupt movement.⁵⁹ By the very end of the nineteenth century, however, the maskilic view on Hasidism had changed its course. Hasidism and its cultural artifacts began to be viewed not as social inhibitions that jeopardized the future of modern Judaism, but as innocuous remnants of an "old world" to be looked upon nostalgically. Jewish

⁵⁸ Raphael Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment: Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985); Shmuel Feiner, *Milhemet tarbut: tnu'at ha-haskalah ha-yehudit ba-meah ha-19* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2010). Rachel Manekin suggests that this cultural war between maskilim and Hasidim in Galicia was not a struggle between secularization (as a vehicle for modernization) and tradition, but "was part of a project to refashion and invigorate religion, rather than to limit the place of religion in society." See Rachel Manekin, "Galician Haskalah and the Discourse of *Schwärmerei*," in *Secularism in Question: Jews and Judaism in Modern Times*, eds. Ari Joskowitz and Ethan B. Katz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 190. Olga Litvak suggests viewing Haskalah as the ultimate form of Jewish Romanticism, she discusses their struggle against Hasidism as part of the romantic aspiration for religious revival. She writes: "Maskilim were the bearers of a modern Jewish metaphysics and the founders of a new Romantic religion that would provide a cure for the contemporary decline of Judaism, identified both with secularization (a "false enlightenment") and the "degeneracy" of popular piety exemplified by Hasidism" See: Litvak, *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism*, 32. I argue in this dissertation that Hasidism was part of Jewish Romanticism as well. See the discussion below about Hasidic writing and Romanticism.

⁵⁹ For example, Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn's play *Silliness and Sanctimony* (1794); Joseph Perl's *Megale Tmirin* (1819); Israel Aksenfeld's *The Headband* (1861); Yitsik-Yoyl Linyetsky's *The Hasidic Boy* (1867); Isaac Mayer Dick's *The Panic* (1868); and many others. See also Meir, *Hasidut medumah*, 18-23.; Rachel Manekin, "From Johann Pezzl to Joseph Perl: Galician Haskalah and the Austrian Enlightenment," in *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe: Shared and Comparative Histories*, ed. Grill Tobias (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 61-71.

ethnography found Hasidic life to be a topic for documentation and preservation, and formed an arsenal of stereotypical images that served Jewish collective memory.⁶⁰ Jewish literature abandoned the mocking tone of satire and started to show empathy toward the common Jews of Eastern Europe, whom they generally (and stereotypically) portrayed as Hasidim.⁶¹ These neo-Hasidic trends were used by modern Jews who had abandoned their parents' traditional world as a means of maintaining a continuum of Jewish identity.⁶²

a. Neo-romantic Trends and the Romanticizing of Hasidism as Folklore

Following these neo-romantic trends, Hasidic literature was cataloged as naïve folktales that expressed an “authentic” voice of the people” through the “rabbinic jargon.” While early nineteenth century maskilic satires had mocked Hasidism not only by ridiculing its rituals and beliefs but also by mimicking and ridiculing its

⁶⁰ A famous example is the 1912–1914 expedition of the ethnographer Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport (1863–1920; known by his pseudonym S. Ansky) to the Pale of Settlement to collect artifacts of Jewish folk life, among them Hasidic artifacts. See also: Litvak, *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism*, 62. On the romantic attraction to the life of “the little people” and the field of ethnography, see Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., *Microhistory and the Lost People of Europe*, trans. Ernst Branch (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

⁶¹ Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: A Study in the Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973); Nicham Ross., *Masoret ahuva u-senuah: zehut Yehudit modernit u-khetivah neo-Hasidit be-fetah ha-meah ha-‘esrim* (Beer-Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2010); Nicham Ross, *Margalit Temunah baHol: I. L. Peretz uMa’asiut Hasidim* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2103), 1–20; Shachar Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 299; Nicham Ross, “I. L. Peretz’s ‘Between Two Mountains’: Neo Hasidism and Jewish Literary Modernity,” in *Modern Jewish Literatures: Intersections and Boundaries*, eds. Sheila E. Jelen, Michael P. Kramer, and L. Scott Lerner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 114–15.

⁶² Following the Holocaust, the need to reconnect with the Jewish past became stronger, especially among Jews in the United States. See Eliyana R. Adler and Sheila E. Jelen, eds. *Reconstructing the Old Country: American Jewry in the Post-Holocaust Decades* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017); Sheila Jelen, *Salvage Poetics: Post-Holocaust American Jewish Folk Ethnographies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press) (forthcoming).

“corrupt” Hebrew, neo-Hasidic writers from late nineteenth century embraced this same Hebrew when they felt that neo-classicist Hebrew (based on biblical structures) was too strict. They found the Hasidic Hebrew to be a more “natural” Hebrew with which to develop Hebrew realism and conversation. The Hasidic literary “rabbinic jargon” was then romanticized by neo-Hasidic writers and perceived as an expression of “authentic” Jewish expression. Neo-romantic writers viewed Hasidic stories as reflecting the “spirit of the people” and therefore adapted them for secular readers, presenting them as naïve folktales collections.⁶³ Yet, as I show in this dissertation, this neo-romantic approach to the stories, which views them as classic nineteenth-century romantic projects, overlooks the stories’ self-conscious voice. The rabbinic Hebrew used by Hasidim in the hagiographical stories is in no way “authentic”; Hasidic stories were transmitted orally in Yiddish. The Hasidic authors were aware of the Hebrew they were using and its cultural meaning. It was an aesthetic choice that reflected cultural politics, not an “authentic” mimicry of “real” common Jews.

Common nineteenth-century folktale collections were produced by urban intellectuals who traveled around the country to collect the literature of “the people.” The collections of stories were generally documentation projects made by those who had either never been members of the community they were researching or had deliberately left it behind, and were therefore considered “outsiders.” Hasidic

⁶³ The best-known projects are Martin Buber’s *Die Legende des Baalschem* (1908) and *Das Verborgene Licht* (1924, translated into Hebrew, *Or HaGanuz*, in 1947). Buber was probably influenced by German Romanticism, which was characterized by “a quest for wonders, a constant endeavour ‘to seek strange truth in undiscovered lands’ There was the feeling, encouraged by post-Kantian idealism, that the so-called ‘physical’ world was pervaded or surrounded by mysteries which men might sense and adumbrate.” Prawer, *Romantic Period*, 11. This search of mysterious wonders pushed intellectuals to delve into the “primitive” folk and was characterized by religious revival and theologizing of feelings.

hagiographical writing, however, was not produced in this way. It was not meant to be an ethnographic documentation or preservation project. Authors from within the Hasidic community embraced the literary medium of popular story collection as a way to voice their response to the contemporary cultural and political changes. The dynamic of insiders and outsiders at this period in the Jewish community was indeed complex. Many of those whom we might consider “outsiders” came originally from the Hasidic community itself but chose to leave it in favor of a more open and liberal life. Later in the nineteenth century we can see this complexity in works that present homodiegetic narrators who articulate this complexity of insider/outsider identity through their interlocutors in the stories. Narrators of this kind are common in the works of Sholem Aleichem and Mendele for example. The question of identity was at the center of their writings as they were investigating the literary and existential options of modern Judaism. Being an outsider does not necessarily mean being secular or an opponent of Hasidism but being uncommitted to the ideological and social structures of the movements. During the nineteenth century many modern maskilic writers collected Hasidic and other traditional Jewish materials and produced anthologies of Jewish textual and folk traditions that could revive the “old” and “lost” texts and make them accessible and useful (again) to modern Jewish society.

Hasidic hagiographical books were not written to be a portrayal of the naïveté of the people nor a useful folkloric anthology, but to be as self-conscious, pleasurable, and artistic literary product. Instead of romanticizing these books and thereby dismissing their aesthetic and criticism, I suggest viewing them as part of nineteenth-

century European modernity, influenced by print capitalism,⁶⁴ state politics, and literary and philosophical romantic trends. Hasidic hagiography is a product of authors who recognized the zeitgeist and sought to claim a voice for Hasidism within the modernizing Jewish world.

b. Hasidic writing and Romanticism.

Hasidic Hagiography deviates from the norms of the romantic projects of folktales collections by the simple fact that its creators were not outsiders who came to document the “old” Hasidic world or the “authentic” people of the Jewish nation. Bodek and Rodkinson were insiders – Hasidim themselves who did not perceive the Hasidic community as a mysterious world that modern man needed to explore. They were Hasidim who chose to participate in the exciting artistic and social arena of their time, to which they had critical and aesthetic ideas to contribute. They embraced the romantic medium of folktale collections but rejected its naïveté. Instead they used it to express many ideas that Romanticism as a movement sought to investigate, such as religious revival, and individualism.

Hasidism and Romanticism share many characteristics that we cannot ignore when discussing Hasidic literature. Romanticism “was a youthful movement, pitted against every manifestation of age and experience”⁶⁵ in its search for the marvelous

⁶⁴ Israel Bartal explains that “the 1850s mark the beginning of a totally different period in Eastern Europe. This was the time of the massive penetration of the capitalist system that, within a few years, upended Jewish life.” See Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 38. Bartal refers to the Empire’s moving away from economics based on performing services (leasing of estate etc.) of the Polish nobility to a capitalist system.

⁶⁵ Brown, *Romanticism*, 8.

through which individuals may become magnificent. The new young writers wanted to break away from the past and from the neo-classicism of the Enlightenment to produce art that was original, creative, and genius – that came from the individual, who, they believed, should be free to express his personal experience spontaneously.⁶⁶ Or as Charles Baudelaire claimed, “To say the word ‘Romanticism’ it is to say Modern art – that is, intimacy, spirituality, colour, aspiration towards the infinite, expressed by every means available to the arts.”⁶⁷ This Romanticism that searched for new images that would spark the imagination of the individual and open his heart to “spirituality” and “aspiration toward the infinite” involved, among other things, a religious revival. Religious sensibility or theology of feelings played a powerful part in the projection of such images.⁶⁸

Hasidism cannot be simply considered as a movement of the common masses or “the folk,” as is sometimes stereotypically believed.⁶⁹ “This movement of spiritual awakening,” explains Gershon Hundert, “[included] members of all social classes and descendants of both distinguished and unknown families among adherents and leaders.”⁷⁰ One demographic characteristic of the Hasidic movement that can be “unmistakably” determined from the sources, claims Hundert, is its “youthfulness.”⁷¹

⁶⁶ Furst, *Romanticism*, 28–30.

⁶⁷ Brown, *Romanticism*, 13.

⁶⁸ Praver, *Romantic Period*, 7, 10.

⁶⁹ This perception was promoted by Mahler but had been discarded from scholarship. See following discussion which presents the studies of Hundert and Assaf.

⁷⁰ Gershon Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 208.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 179–181. About the attraction of young people to Hasidism and its youthful character, see Assaf, *Tsadik ve-‘eda*, 14.

These passionate young people were attracted to this spiritual movement because it emboldened *individuals* to explore matters of thought and spirit. Like many Romanticists, they were looking for new experiences. “That many of the early adherents of Hasidism, and its leaders, were young may have been a result of demographic and social conditions in which generational conflict was expressed by rejecting norms of behaviors, religious practice, and traditional institutional authority,”⁷² Hundert posits. These qualities of Hasidism can help us paint it with new colors of the social and artistic qualities of Romanticism.

Hasidism started to become institutionalized and stricter in terms of social orders, practices, politics, and economics during the nineteenth century. Hasidic hagiographical stories that appeared in the 1860s reflect this process. Technological and political conditions allowed individuals to express Hasidism as a movement and grant it cultural agency through literature, while at the same time, the popularity of the stories and their common style normalized and trivialized them and they lost their innovative and controversial aspects. But examining this critical moment through this new understanding of nineteenth-century Romanticism opens up new aspects of the Hasidic story that have not yet been considered – its aesthetics, its role in promoting individualism, and its involvement with the greater whole (the community or the nation).

Romanticism shaped the most influential principles of modernity: the rise of the individual, newly viewed as a singular entity with endless emotional depth, and the national collective whose unity is defined by shared history and language. Two

⁷² Hundert, *Jews in Poland*, 181.

literary genres played a significant role in this context: the novel, which reflected the new perception of the individual, and folktales, which were stories that supposedly expressed the spirit of the “real people” of the nation. Hasidic stories present a combination of these two principles and genres – their format is that of the folktale collection, but their historical content and their focus on elevated spiritual experiences of common individuals reflects characteristics of the novel.

In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt explains that the novel celebrates the modern understanding of individuals. It establishes the individual as a concrete and ordinary person through “formal realism” – a narrative that contains a realistic portrayal of timeline and environment. As opposed to folktales, which usually don’t provide a concrete time or place but rather use generalizations such as a “forest” or “midnight,” the novel places man in the context of history.⁷³ The emergence of the novel marked a shift in the subject of literature, a shift to modern thought, which moved the common man—the individual—from the margins to the center of philosophical discourse. In addition, language and representation in the novel were not focused on rhetorical elegance and concision, but on referential use of language, its closeness to reality, and its ability to report authentic human experiences.⁷⁴ The popularity and accessibility of the novel also reflected a social change – the rise of “the reading public.” Despite its relatively expensive price, social reservations, and limited audience, the novel became popular in the nineteenth century and impacted

⁷³ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 13–31.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

the shape of the new mass culture by appealing to a larger segment of the people, who, for the first time, could see themselves represented in literature.

Hasidic hagiography is unquestionably part of the nineteenth-century literary changes. Together with the maskilic novel, it established Hebrew print culture. The format of story collection allowed Hasidic hagiography to tell many short stories about different individuals and their fantastical experiences while at the same time abandoning the style of the long biographical narrative that followed the life of one saint. Although these new Hasidic stories were still hagiographical in that they praised the deeds of pious leaders, they highlighted the individual journeys of common men in search of spiritual fulfillment. As a mixed genre, therefore, Hasidic hagiography functions on two levels: it expresses a Hebrew epic that provides materials for constituting a modern communal Jewish consciousness, and it elevates the value of the individual, allowing him to become magnificent.

F. Approach and Goals

Although modernity is sometimes associated with secularization, this dissertation suggests viewing the modern religious texts as arenas that reflect the nineteenth-century conflict between two opposing forces – secularization and religious revival.⁷⁵ Seeing Hasidism as a modern movement and its literature as part of the nineteenth-century European zeitgeist allows us to reveal the complexities embedded in the Hasidic stories and their engagement with processes of modernization. Hasidism and

⁷⁵ Kimberly Cowell-Meyers, *Religion and Politics in the Nineteenth Century: The Party Faithful in Ireland and Germany* (Westport: Praeger, 2002). See also Litvak, *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism*, 32.

other spiritual and religious movements in Europe should not be seen “ab initio as a reaction to the Enlightenment” but rather as “coextensive with the Enlightenment,” not only because they emerged in the modern period, but also because these spiritual movements share with modernity the “emboldening of the individual to independence in matters of thought and spirit.”⁷⁶ In focusing on the intensive burst of publication of Hasidic tales in Galicia during the 1860s, this dissertation shows how these texts created an alternative path to the literature and nationalism of the Enlightenment.

My aim in this dissertation is to draw attention to a blind spot in the current literary methodology, which refuses to see Hasidic hagiography as a product of modern trends and politics, effectively excluding this genre from the canon of modern Hebrew literature. By focusing on the critical moment in the mid–nineteenth century, when Hasidic hagiography emerged as a printed and popular genre, this dissertation moves away from traditional academic views of this literature and contextualizes Hasidic hagiography within the general intellectual project of nineteenth-century Romanticism. By arguing that Hasidic booklets were a modern product, this chapter then claims that the same critical tools we use for modern literature need to be applied to Hasidic hagiography, especially considering that the genre developed in parallel to major milestones in the development of modern Hebrew literature.

In the second chapter, “Authority in Hasidic Poetics and the Galician Public Sphere, 1848–1867,” I focus on the emergence of the public sphere in Lemberg after the 1848 revolutions and the dominant role that mass media (print capitalism) played

⁷⁶ Hundert, *Jews in Poland*, 177. See also Jeremy Black, *Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1700–1789* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 189.

in shaping Jewish political consciousness of the time. After the 1848 revolutions, the Habsburg Empire was inclined toward a more liberal and civil approach that resulted in the emancipation of its subjects and a constitutional recognition of the national aspirations of minorities. The chapter examines how the literary qualities of Hasidic hagiographies that were published in Lemberg during this time reflect new political and economic (namely print-capitalism) developments. Bodek and Rodkinson embraced contemporary printing and literary trends and amalgamated them with the traditional Hasidic poetics of storytelling that offered a modern expression of unique Hasidic experiences. I show how the move from the oral form of Yiddish tales to the popular printed medium of Hebrew chapter books demonstrates Hasidic participation in both local and broad discourses within European Jewry, which was struggling to shape a modern Jewish political consciousness.

The third chapter, “Individualism and the Hasidic Praxis of Storytelling,” offers a broader perspective on these texts, as it examines the reaction of Hasidism (as expressed in these booklets) to philosophical and social trends of nineteenth-century European zeitgeist – namely, individualism and the national community. Focusing on the Hasidic chronotope—the representation of time and space in relation to each other—I analyze the ways in which Hasidic hagiography depicts the existential condition of man as an individual in relation to a community. In this light, Hasidic considerations of subjectivity share several of the themes and ideas that animated the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Buber. The Hasidic narratives depict self-fulfillment as something that is achieved when viewing one’s life through a mythical kabbalistic lens and turning this view into a communal practice of storytelling.

After establishing the Hasidic hagiographical text as a response to political and philosophical critical struggles within modernity, I then turn to explore its place within modern literary Hebrew historiography. The fourth chapter, “Hasidic Hagiography and the Historiography of Modern Hebrew Literature: Disruption and Nodes,” seeks to reshape the canon of modern Hebrew literature by shedding light on the lost chapter of the Galician Hasidic hagiographical project as Hebrew literature. Various political and aesthetic inclinations influenced the shaping of the Hebrew canon, such as nationalism, the social power of the Odessa writers, the supremacy of Hebrew over Yiddish, and so forth. Instead of using the imagined meta-history that still dominates contemporary scholarship, I borrow Sergei Eisenstein’s idea of *montage* in film theory. In this way I compare literary historical fragments like independent “shots” in a dynamic system, thereby rethinking Hebrew historiography as a complex of links, disruptions, and nodes. Through a comparison of Hasidic stories from 1860s Lemberg to canonical Hebrew maskilic writings from the same time period (such as Avraham Mapu’s *Ahavat Zion* [1853]), I am able to highlight the ways that Hasidic literary, theological, and ideological values differed from and, indeed, threatened the teleological itineraries of nationalist Hebrew writing.

In a complementary vein, the fourth chapter also examines the ways in which Hasidic hagiography served as a harbinger of Hebrew and Yiddish literary movements that sought to preserve aspects of Jewish tradition— “neo-Hasidism,” as they are called by scholars. By viewing Hasidic hagiographical stories as independent modern works that express a unique Hebrew experience, criticism is then able to release them from their secondary status in the canon. The two complementary

discussions in this chapter allows us to reconsider the historiography of modern Hebrew literature as a network of nodes.

The fifth, concluding chapter of this project sums up the aesthetics and ethics that nineteenth-century Hasidic Galician hagiography offers to the literary and political discourses of modernity. The new reading of Hasidic literature presented by this research pushes for new ways of studying contemporary Jewish culture, such as Haredi and Hasidic popular media. Looking beyond these ramifications for Jewish cultural studies, I work to develop in this chapter a theoretical framework that can be applied to reading other cases of marginalized popular writing in world literature. I use Hasidic hagiography as a case study for a theory of disruptive modes of writing that challenge the order of national canons by illuminating new categories of communal relationships that do not rely simply on nationalism as a way of organizing modern communities.

As this dissertation shows, Hasidic hagiography challenges two common ideas that have long held sway in our perception of literature and nationalism: Hayden White's "ideology of aestheticism," which makes a hierarchical distinction between the *useful* and the *beautiful*; and the abstraction of Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities." For Hasidic literature, it was the intimate face-to-face interaction between members of a community that drove the dynamics of communal imagination. The process of oral transmission, as the literature, was flexible and rapidly changing, and in that way offered a different model for how the individual might confront the modern world as a member of a community.

In the end, “Hasidic Hagiography in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” aims to illuminate a mode of writing that was marginalized by the political and literary elite, by offering a new methodological approach for understanding the genre’s aesthetic and ethical meanings. Hasidic hagiography as it developed in Lemberg in the hands of Hasidim who functioned as “organic intellectuals” did not merely empower the Hasidic community by putting their experience out in the marketplace and shaping communal consciousness. It offered Hasidic values to a modernizing Jewish world in an attempt to join a broad political and cultural conversation.

Chapter 2: “Stories that I have heard from men of truth”: On the Concept of Authority in Hasidic Poetics in the Galician Public Sphere of 1848-1867

A. Introduction

Although the nature of Hasidic hagiography – its theological values, folktale structure, and historical content – has received much attention from scholars of Jewish thought, folklore, and history,⁷⁷ various ideological considerations have relegated this literature to the sidelines of critical literary research. Yosef Dan’s and especially Yoav Elstein’s research laid the methodological literary groundwork for analyzing this literature, but they nonetheless continued to emphasize the conventional approach and left the texts within the framework of folk culture (Dan) or the spiritual Hasidic world (Elstein).⁷⁸ Only in the last few years has a new approach to Hasidic literature, one that emphasizes its literary and political qualities, developed. Hannan Hever’s work, which singles out the political function of the Hasidic text by showing the absolute power of the tsadik and the process of sanctifying the diaspora, has been a significant part of this trend.⁷⁹ Using critical

⁷⁷ See the comprehensive survey of the different approaches in the various fields in Chapter 1. In order to delineate the literary field, I will present the names of the major scholars who dealt with or are currently researching Hasidic hagiographic literature and who emphasize sociological aspects (such as the biography of the compilers) and analyze it from the perspective of folk culture (mapping the themes and types and comparing versions). See the work of Gedalia Nigal, Ze’ev Gris, Ze’ev Kitzis, Yonatan Meir, and more.

⁷⁸ Dan, Yosef. *HaSipur HaHasidi* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975); Dan, “L’birur Darchei HaMechkar BeSipurei Hasidim,” *Devrei HaKongress HaOlami L’Madaei HaYahadut*, Vol. 2. (Jerusalem: Magnus, 1956), 53-57; Dan, *HaNovella HaHsidit* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1966); Elstein, Yoav. *Ma’asei Hoshev: Iyunim B’Sipur HaHasidi* (Tel Aviv: Akad, 1983); Elstein, *HaEkstasa v’HaSipur HaHasidi* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1998).

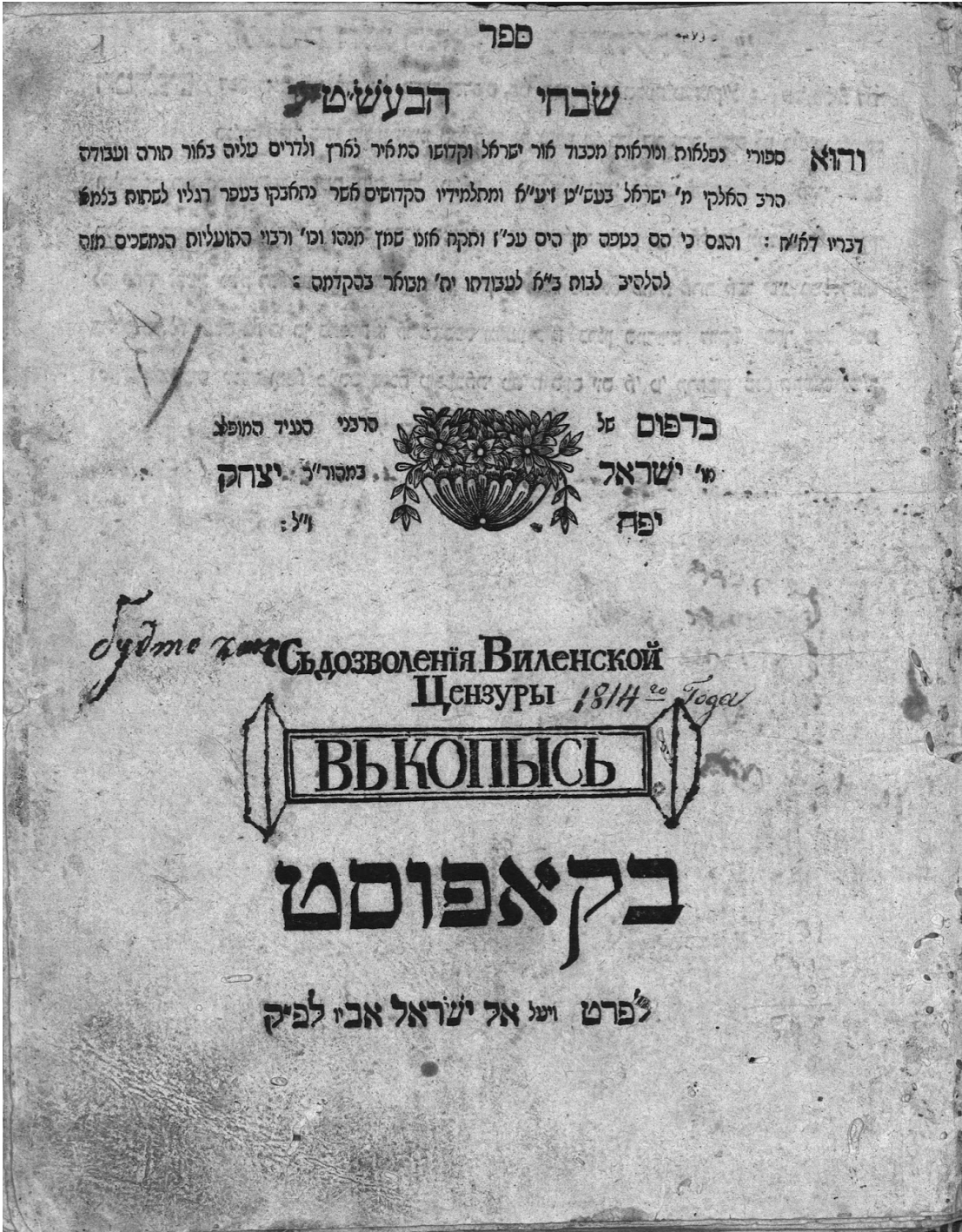
⁷⁹ Hever, Hannan. “HaHasidut ve-HaImperia HaRusit: Politica Yehudit lefnei HaZiyonut ba-Sipur HaHasidi,” *HaZiyonut ve-HaEmperiyot*, ed. Yehuda Shenhav (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute and HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2012), 110-136; Hever, Hannan. “The Politics of From of the Hasidic Tale,”

literary tools, this chapter expands the discussion on Hasidic hagiography and suggests that we view this literature as a reflection of the Hasidic community's social aspirations to participate in the modern conversation of their contemporary Jewish society.⁸⁰ In light of this desire, we will discover the centrality of this literature in the historiography of the Modern Hebrew literature, and its significance in forming modern Jewish identity not just in a secondary ethnographic manner through the maskilic (Jewish Enlightenment) literature and the neo-Hasidic movement.

This chapter focuses on the critical time period when Hasidic hagiography matured as an independent genre and was formulated as a modern text that wanted to take part in the Jewish political debates of its time. Even though *Shivhei HaBesht* (*In Praise of the Besht*), which was viewed as the archetype of Hasidic hagiography (praise literature), was first published in Kopyts (1814) in the Russian Empire (White Russia) and by the 1860s already had seven editions, it did not spawn any copycats or literary follow-ups for several decades. The one book did not spawn a genre. The multiple books printed in the 1860s and their follow-up editions both in Hebrew and Yiddish formed and consolidated a new Hebrew literary trend.

Dibur. Spring 2016 Issue 2. 57-73. Hever has a new book forthcoming (titled *HaPolitica shel HaSipur HaHasidi uMitnagdav*). I have not seen the manuscript so I cannot relate to the book.

⁸⁰ Early historical studies of Hasidism tended to view it as an opposition for Jewish modernization. Descriptions of Hasidism in these works is many times mixed with maskilic criticism, or alternatively with nostalgic and sentimental tone. See a critical overview of past major historical works on Hasidism in Israel Bartal. "The Imprint of Haskala Literature on the Historiography of Hasidism," in *Hasidism Reappraised*, edited by Ada Rapoport-Albert (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1997), 367-387. Recently this view has been challenged by new scholarly works that seek to understand Hasidism through the philosophical and political context of its time, and therefore view it precisely as a modern movement. See the most recent project: Biale, David, David Assaf, Benjamin Brown, Uriel Gellman, Samuel Heilman, Moshe Rosman, Gadi Sagiv, Marcin Wodziński, and Arthur Green. *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 1-11.



ספר

שבחי הבעש"ט

והוא ספורי נפלאות ומראות מכבוד אור ישראל וקדושו המאיר לארץ ולגרים עליה באור חורה ועבודה
הרב האלקי מ' ישראל בעש"ט זע"א ומחלמיו הקדושים אשר נחאבקו בעפר רגליו לשתות בלמח
דבריו דל"ח : והגם כי הם כטפה מן היס עכ"ז וחקה אלו שחן מנהגו וכו' ורצוי ההעליות הנמשכים מזה
להלביב לבות ב"א לעבודתו יח' מנאר בהקדמה :

הרבני העיר המופלג
במחור"ל יצחק
ויל :



כדפוס של
מ' ישראל
יפה

Съ дозволенія Виленской
Цензуры 1814^{го} *Fogel*

ВЪКОПЫСЬ

בקאפוסט

צ'פרט וועגל אד' ישראל אביו לפיק

Figure 1: Shivhei HaBesht cover page, first edition, Kopys 1814.

Only fifty years later, in the 1860s, in Galicia under the rule of the Habsburg Empire, did Hasidic literature start being widely printed in a new format.⁸¹ Many scholars have tried to explain the “Fifty Years of Silence” and the reasons that prevented Hasidic hagiography from being printed at this time,⁸² but this is not the place to expound on their answers.⁸³ In this chapter I want to answer the question of why this literary proliferation occurred specifically in the 1860s in Galicia, and especially in the city of Lemberg (Lwów, Lviv). Answering this question allows us to understand the factors that promoted the change in Hasidic publishing norms and thus to comprehend the social and political meaning of this poetic Hasidic form. In other words, this chapter sheds light on how Hasidic poetics responded to the changing consciousness of Galician Jews during the second half of the 19th century. Jews participated in state politics at a growing rate,⁸⁴ the organization of the Jewish community and its involvement in the political sphere changed, and modern Jewish culture went through rapid developments. In addition, this chapter elucidates the ways in which Hasidic poetics contributed to forming these changes in consciousness and

⁸¹ During the fifty years after the publication of *Shivhei HaBesht* only ten hagiographic Hasidic books were printed. By way of contrast, during the first decade of the wave of intensive printing that we are discussing, between 1860 and 1870, roughly fifteen hagiographic books were printed. These estimates are based on the bibliographies compiled by Gedalyah Nigal, Yoav Elstein, and the newest bibliography by Ze’ev Kitzis in his doctorate. See: Elstein, Yoav. “Bo’u litkon,” in *Ma’ase Sipur: Mechkarim b’Siporet HaYehudit Mugashim l’Yoav Elstein*. Vol 1. Eds., Avidav Lipsker and Rella Koshlovsky (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan, 2006), 447–536. This bibliography was published as a separate booklet under the name *Bo’u litkon*; Nigal, Gedalyah. *Ha-Siporet ha-Hasidit: Toldote’hah ve-Nose’hah* (Jerusalem: Y. Marcus, 1981), 295-308; Kitzis, Ze’ev. “Safrut HaShvachim Hasidic Meraishitah v’ad l’Milchemet HaOlam HaShniyah: Tekufot, Kanonizatzia v’Darchei Gibush,” (PhD diss., Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan, 2015), 217-310.

⁸² Gris, Ze’ev. *Sefer, Sofer, ve-Sipur Beraishit HaHasidut: Min HaBesht v’ad Menachem Mendel m’Kotzk*. (Israel: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1992), 35-39; Nigal, *HaSiporet HaHsidit*; Dan, *HaSipur HaHasidi*, 186-195; Meir, Yonatan. *Shivhei Rodkinson: Michael Levi Frumkin-Rodkinson veHaHasidut* (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2013), 120-133.

⁸³ See the extensive discussion in Chapter 1.

⁸⁴ Those Jews were rather few although they attempted to educate the larger Jewish public.

social activity. I read the formation of Hasidic authorship and examine the Hasidic conception of authority as it is reflected in stories through a focus on the political and social changes that took place between 1848 and 1867 in Galicia, as well as the economic opportunities that developed there in the mid-19th century. In this way we can see what the stories offered their evolving Jewish community.

My claim in this chapter is that the oral qualities and rhetorical emphases of Hasidic poetics express multiple performances of authority which, on the one hand, sees the reader as an individual and grants him creative and social authority, but on the other hand does not allow him to experience the freedom of intimate reading and the distancing of one's personal experience from the text. Instead, Hasidic poetics forcefully insert the reader into a judgmental community that shapes him as an (ideological) subject through a process of interpellation.⁸⁵ This kind of aesthetics is a modern expression of the Hasidic community that heretofore had only been presented by its detractors in literary works that attacked Hasidism – whether in traditional Mitnagedic pamphlets or in Yiddish maskilic literature – as a degenerate community whose members were boors and whose leaders were corrupt. In the eyes of the traditional community (during the first generations of Hasidism) and the Mitnagedic community especially, Hasidism was depicted as breaking rabbinical traditions and threatening the continuity of Judaism.⁸⁶ For their part, the maskilic community in

⁸⁵ Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London: Verso, 2014), 188–194. See especially the discussion on religious ideology (Ibid., 194–199).

⁸⁶ Mordechai Vilensky, *Hasidim u' Mitnagdim: l'Toldot HaPulmus Shebeineihem Bashanim Taklav-Taka'a* Vols. I and II (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1990). Orthodox Judaism's struggle against Hasidut was fierce, as Vilensky's sources show, but by the second half of the 19th century one changing attitudes in relation to Hasidut could be deciphered. This change can be attributed to the fact that the emphasis of the Orthodox community in the Jewish cultural wars was turned against the Enlightenment. See: Rephael Mahler, "Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment," in *Essential Papers*

Eastern Europe (in particularly during the first half of the 19th century) saw the Hasidic movement as a retreat from modernization and as a factor hindering the development of Jewish society.⁸⁷ In Galicia, where maskilim were all traditional, they saw Hasidism as an aberration of the Jewish religion and resistance to state laws.⁸⁸ Taking this into account, the growth of the hagiographic Hasidic genre allowed the Hasidic community to demand that their voices be heard and to position themselves within the contemporary Jewish discussions as a legitimate member, offering their values as a further alternative in modern social and political discourse.

on Hasidism: Origin to Present, edited by Gershon Hundert (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 423-425. And also: David Assaf, "Hebetim Historiim ve-Hevratim be-Heker HaHasidut," in *Tsadik ve-Edah: Hebetim Historiim ve-Hevratim be-Heker HaHasidut* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2001), 17.

With the formation of modern Jewish politics in Galicia in the second half of the nineteenth century, as Rachel Manekin shows, we can find concrete expressions of this change in relation to Hasidism on the part of traditional society, such as the founding of the organization *Machzikei Ha-Dat* in late 1870s which received support from the Admor of Belz. Establishing this organization was expressive of the struggle of Orthodoxy with the liberal Jews and their political activities. This struggle, placed Hasidism in the same camp as traditional Orthodoxy. Rachel Manekin, *Yehudei Galicia v'HaChuka HaAustriit: Raishitah shel Politika Yehudit Modernit*. (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2015), 122.

⁸⁷ According to members of the Enlightenment movement, "the battlefield of the Eastern European Jewish culture wars in the nineteenth century was described as exceptionally polarized." They stood as spreaders of light, while opposing them was the foolish culture and superstitions of the masses who were tied to the past, while Hasidism and its literature represented to the Enlightenment above all the mindlessness of this culture and was therefore an "obstacle limiting the absorption of the Enlightenment in the Jewish sphere." See: Shmuel Feiner, *Milchemet Tarbut: Tnu'a'at HaHaskalah HaYehudit BaMeah ha-19* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2010); Raphael Mahler, *HaHasidut v'HaHaskalah b'Galicia uv'Polin HaKongresait b'Machatzit HaRishona shel HaMeach HaTscha-Esrei, HaYesodot HaSocialim v'HaMediniim* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1961).

In Enlightenment literature (in Hebrew and Yiddish) Hasidism was presented mainly in the satiric genre while greatly criticizing its values. See, for example: Aharon Hallel-Wolfson, *Kolot Da'at u'Tzviut* (1794); Joseph Perl, *Megale Tmirin* (1819); Itzik-Yoel Linaski, *Na'ar Hasidi* (1867); Isaac Meir Dik, *HaBehalah* (1868).

⁸⁸ The struggle of the members of the Enlightenment movement who lived under the Habsburg Empire during the first half of the 19th century focused on Hasidism particularly since many of them were religious or traditional themselves and saw fighting Hasidism as a religious struggle. Therefore, they turned to the Empire's governments in a request to define Hasidism as *schwarmerei* and thus to limit as much as possible its influence. See: Manekin, Rachel. "Hasidism and the Habsburg Empire 1788-1867," *Jewish History* (2013) 27:271-297.

B. The Development of Galician Public Sphere and the Prosperity of the Hasidic Story in Lemberg, 1848-1867.

After the events of the “Spring of Nations” and the revolutions that the Habsburg Empire dealt with in 1848, the Jewish community began to ask itself about its collective definition and national affiliation, which differed from the questions that had previously driven its political conduct. The revolutions of 1848 signaled a change in the policy of the Empire and the political opportunities that were available to its subjects. Debates on equal rights started to become widespread in different societies, such as the Polish community, which began to demand recognition of their political rights both as individuals and as a collective.⁸⁹ In the Jewish world these changes raised hopes that conditions in the civilian sphere of life would improve, including aspirations to receive the same legal emancipation that surrounding social groups had been granted. Likewise, debates on national or cultural loyalty split the Jewish community of Galicia into two main camps: one supported adopting the Polish culture and nationality, while the other encouraged the tendency towards German

⁸⁹ Even though the rebellions were crushed, and the government became neo-absolutist, the liberal idea had become part of the discourse; it influenced in various ways the operation of the government and the consciousness of the citizens of the Empire. John Deak claims that we can think of the two decades after the events of 1848 as a gradual revolution and as an era of “constitutional experimentation” with the first decade (1850-60) emphasizing bureaucracy and the second decade representation, until the constitution was established and equal rights were granted to all citizens of the Empire in 1867. See: John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015), 99-10. The changes that the Empire underwent in the 50s shaped the life of the public and the economics of the Empire while forming its subjects as modern citizens (see *ibid.*, pp. 130-33). The war with Italy shook the Empire and led in the 60s to the creation of a representational system that limited the power of the monarchy and strengthened the power of the citizens and the local communities. Robert Kann notes that during these years different nationalities that lived under the Empire developed, even if not equally, from a cultural and intellectual perspective into a collective with a linguistic and national consciousness. Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526 – 1918* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press 1977), 367-405.

culture, which better suited the Austrian Empire. The stormy debates that took place in Lemberg, the capital of eastern Galicia, were expressed in the development of the public sphere and the popular social discourse. The development of this sphere signals the beginning of change in the political realm, as Habermas claims, since it allows a “horizontal” communication between thinking citizens from more or less the same social strata, who are involved in politics and can influence the political climate. The growth of the bourgeoisie after the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution allowed the development of public places (like the coffee shop) and mass communication (through cheap printing like newspapers).⁹⁰ The new discourse, which affected all of the citizens of the Habsburg Empire from every social class, was expressed in Lemberg by “taking it to the streets,” as Rachel Manekin shows.⁹¹ The debate did not remain closed up among members of the government and the aristocracy, but spread outwards and enlivened the daily and public discourse.

Israel Bartal states that “the 1850s mark the beginning of a totally different period in Eastern Europe. This was the time of the massive penetration of the capitalist system that, within a few years, upended Jewish life.”⁹² Print-capitalism, which influenced individuals to print cheaply, quickly, and in large quantities, was well suited to the emerging situation and created an intensive wave of printings that expanded the reach of the press and led to the creation of the popular publicist genre

⁹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

⁹¹ Rachel Manekin. “Taking it to the Streets: Polish-Jewish Print Discourse in 1848 Lemberg,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 7 (2008): 215-227. See also Manfred Gailus, “The Revolution of 1848 as “Politics of the Streets,” in *Europe in 1848: Revolution and Reform*, ed. Dieter Dowe (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 779-798.

⁹² Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*, 38

of cheap booklets and pamphlets. Lemberg had become a publishing center from 1782 with the opening of a governmental censorship office, which required the printing houses to move to the Galician capital in order to be closely supervised.⁹³ This geographic change added to vitality of the public sphere in Lemberg, as liberal debates surrounding minority rights during the 1848 revolutions took place. Leaflets and pamphlets in German, Polish, and Yiddish were printed in order to explain in clear and accessible language the new terminology connected to the modernization of the government and the political, or to encourage the reader to take part in the struggle and support the Polish nation that was fighting for political recognition and equal rights, or to support German culture and the Austrian regime. It is interesting to note that Hebrew was used in the leaflets only for poetic purposes; poems were published in Hebrew on issues that were vital to the Jewish community, but explanatory pamphlets and propaganda were printed in the vernacular: Polish, German, and Yiddish.⁹⁴

This political-social turmoil evinced a conceptual shift in Jewish Galician society which up until this point had not thought of itself in terms of national independence, but which now began to conceive of itself through modern terms of

⁹³ Haim Dubarish Friedberg. *Toldot HaDfus HaIvri b'Polania: Mraishit Hitpatchuto Bishnat Ratzad, Hashlamato, Divrei Yamav v'Histalsheluto Ad Hayom* (Antwerp, 1931/32); Haim Dov Friedberg, "Ha-dfus ha-'Ivri be-Lvov," in *Encyclopedia shel HaGahuyot: Lvov*, ed., N. M. Gelber (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Encyclopedia of the Diaspora, 1956), 552-539. A supplementary view of the Jewish printing situation can be found in Haim Liberman's article which discusses Hasidic printing at the beginning of the 19th century in Eastern Europe in areas that are not in Galicia. See: Haim Liberman. "Bediah ve-'Emet be-Divrei Batei ha-dfus HaHasidim: le-ofiyam shel Batei Ha-dfus HaIvriim b'Okrayna, Rusia HaLevanah v'Lita ad Shnat Taktzav (1836)," in *Tsadik ve-'Edah: Hebetim Historiim ve-Hevratim be-Heker HaHasidut*, ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2001), 186-209.

⁹⁴ Manekin, "Taking it to the Street," 220-221.

collectivism, as a civilian definition and cultural expression.⁹⁵ In addition, this upheaval created a practical change both in methods of communication, with the development of the public sphere and in the modes of political organization which became possible after December 1867 (with the approval of the constitution), whose possibilities had expanded. These changes crystalized into concrete political options between the revolutionary years until legal emancipation was granted to all of the Empire's citizens – Jews included – at the end of 1867.

During the two decades between the “Spring of Nations” and the establishment of the constitution and the granting of equal rights to Jews in Galicia (which was the last crown state in the Empire where the constitution was approved and implemented)⁹⁶ a few versions of fundamental laws connected to the rights of minorities appeared (in April 1848 and March 1849). The legal wording shows a change in the conception of minorities under imperial rule, which widens the recognition of them not only as religious or ethnic groups but also takes into account their characteristics or cultural (and even national) definitions. A clause from the April 1848 constitution referred to different minorities as *Volksstämmen* (ethnic groups) and promised them protection from affronts against their nationality (*Nationalität*) and language. The innovation in using the term nationality in reference to ethnic groups and in a legal context is even more prominent in later versions of the

⁹⁵ On the development of the understandings of nationality and the understanding of identity in Galician Jewish society during the 19th century, see: Shanes, Joshua. *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁹⁶ The Austrian parliament approved the constitution that granted legal equality to all the citizens of the Empire, but it was the responsibility of each political council in each one of the crown states of the Empire to approve of the constitution.

constitution, which emphasized the modern terminology of basic rights and civil equality before the law. In the wording of the March 1849 constitution, the various ethnic groups (*Volksstämmen*) receive *gleichberechtigt* (civil equality before the law) and are guaranteed the right to keep and nurture their nationality and language. After the rebellions were suppressed, these basic laws were cancelled, and the Empire returned to a more conservative form of government under the leadership of Franz Joseph I, who introduced an orientation towards neo-absolutism.⁹⁷ However, in the 1860s, the war with Italy and the defeat in the battle of Solferino (1859) caused civilian, economic, and security unrest. The government changed direction and moved from a neo-absolutist outlook to a representational system that adopted liberal tendencies, which led to the granting of a new constitution in December 1867.⁹⁸

This constitution reflected the new government's belief that its citizens, including Jews, were equal before the law and brought into play a national multiculturalism. In December 1867 the clause that related to minority groups was expanded from its wording in the previous constitutions to include the option of cultivating one's national language through education and the permission to freely use different languages in official government offices as well as in public life. For Jews, however, this was not a matter of developing an independent national outlook, especially in light of the fact that Hebrew and Yiddish were not included in the list of the eleven national languages recognized by the Empire (the opportunity that other ethnic groups had for national definition led to a debate among the Jews if they

⁹⁷ Deák, *Forging a Multinational State*, 100-135.

⁹⁸ Deák, *Forging a Multinational State*, 137-174; Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire*, 326.

should be included under the Polish or Austrian nation),⁹⁹ but nevertheless, it seems that there was a shift in the political and social consciousness of the Jews as a collective, which deviated from the Jewish political spectrum that had existed beforehand under the Empire.¹⁰⁰ The aspiration for equality in the civil and cultural realms propelled the development of political and cultural thought; this process is found in Galicia, especially Lemberg, from the 1860s onwards. Hasidic literature, which started being intensively printed in this decade and which adopted both poetic discursive forms and the system of mass production, can be understood in light of these changes as a Hebrew expression of the modernization of contemporary and local Jewish thought.

The Jewish culture that was created in Galicia between the revolutions of 1848 and the emancipation of 1867 included a flourishing press, new political ideas (the establishment of organizations became available after December 1867), a plethora of social assemblies, the founding of libraries, and more. During these years various booklets were printed that dealt with different cultural and historical topics of the Jewish people, and new newspapers were launched that addressed the Jewish reader in a variety of languages – Hebrew, Yiddish, and German. A few examples include: the weekly Hebrew magazine *HaMevaser* was first printed in Lemberg in 1861; the Yiddish paper *Zeitung* began in 1848 and appeared for two years; another

⁹⁹ Rachel Manekin, “‘Dietchen,’ ‘Polanim,’ o ‘Austrim’?: Dilemat HaZehut shel Yehudei Galicia (1848-1851),” *Zion* 68, second vol., 2002/2003, 223-262.

¹⁰⁰ Even though Jews were not officially recognized as a national group by the state, the national rights that the different groups around them were awarded gave rise to a national consciousness that found expression in official political activities (like petitions) or social activities of individuals and groups that wanted to fight the exclusion of Jews as a national group and achieve the recognition that the groups around them had won (Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia*, 30-40).

Yiddish paper *Die Juedische Post* dealt with “*Politische und Kaufmanische*” (politics and economics/trade) published its first issue in 1849; in the 1860s another Yiddish newspaper called *Juedische* appeared; in 1869 the German paper (in Hebrew letters) *Der Israelite* that was the organ of the political association *Shomer Yisrael* was first published.

The blossoming culture expressed the ways in which the political consciousness of Galician Jews was being modernized, including the desire to respond to pressing questions of individual and communal identity. The Hasidic community did not lag behind in this discourse. Their first encounters in the literary world had not been positive: they were represented negatively by their opponents and had been delegitimized by modern enlightenment groups, especially in enlightenment satire. The Hasidic community now started expressing itself through a modernization of the hagiographic genre. Ze’ev Gris claims that the outpouring in the Hasidic press after fifty years of silence denotes an adoption of the Romantic trend of collecting and printing folktales.¹⁰¹ Gris’s insight shows how modern trends were adopted by the Hasidic community, but it also ignores aspects in which the Hasidic genre deviates from the Romantic model. By using a framework from the Enlightenment era, it thus reinforces the scholarly approach that sees this literature as merely folktales. Ira Robinson expresses the same point of view with his claim that the flourishing of the Hasidic press is an expression of the drive to gather artifacts that occurs during

¹⁰¹ Gris, *Sefer, Sofer ve-Sipur*, 40.

moments of crisis in order to preserve a culture that is on the verge of extinction.¹⁰² But the fact that the Hasidic genre was essentially different from the Romantic one reveals that this was not simply a Romantic yearning to preserve folk culture but a matter of political involvement and literary consciousness on the part of the Hasidic community itself. The members of this community were not urban intellectuals who wanted to document the folk culture for the Jewish national “epoch”, but people who wanted their voices to be heard anew and to offer their perspective on modern times to the Jewish world. Bodek and Rodkinson developed this genre for both theological and economic reasons. The booklets were designed to as a means for Hasidim to engage the tsadik in a world that was ever expanding and changing the close-kint Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. The stated motivation for these books was a far cry from the anthropological project of the Grimms, for example, who set out to document what they perceived to be a set of myths and tales from a bygone age and culture.

Menachem Mendel Bodek (1824-1874) and Michael Levi (Frumkin)

Rodkinson, the founding fathers of Hasidic praise literature, operated as “organic intellectuals” when they started to print, one after another, the booklets of Hasidic stories in Hebrew in Lemberg, giving the Hasidic community “homogeneity and consciousness about the way it operated.”¹⁰³ The development of popular printing that reached the masses is an expression of the voice of the community and the fact

¹⁰² Ira Robinson. “Hasidic Hagiography and Jewish Modernity,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, eds. Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim, et al. (Hanover: Published by University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1998), 404–412.

¹⁰³ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International, 1973), 5-23.

that it was done by members of the community themselves indicates the process by which this group was integrated within the community at large. “the multiple Hebrew editions of Hasidic tales reflect their consumption by sizable segment of the male elite, while only their Yiddish versions could have been designed to “ensnare the masses.” Hasidic tales could be read by anyone who possessed literacy in a Jewish language, that is, a spectrum of Jewish society that included elites and “masses.””¹⁰⁴ This is a partial aspect – in our case an economic-cultural one – of a new type of social interaction, and it is clear that this kind of social interaction would become further specialized as it continued to develop organically.

Likely familiar with the public sphere that had developed in Lemberg, Bodek and Rodkinson, each independently, decided to adopt the popular medium of story collections printed as cheap booklets. The collections were written in Hebrew and included stories not only of tsadikim, but of regular, simple Hasidim as well. In their introduction Bodek and Rodkinson recognizes the new function of the stories as part of leisure and shape them as literary objects (rather than derashot, sermons) that both scholars, (אנשים גדולים בחכמה) and common people, “the common masses” (המון עם), could read and enjoy in their free time,¹⁰⁵ or in Rodkinson’s words “when they were idle from their [Torah] study” (“בעת ביטולם מלימודם”).¹⁰⁶ These literary decisions express, more than anything else, the movement toward modernization, as

¹⁰⁴ Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 218.

¹⁰⁵ Bodek, *Ma'ase Tsadikim*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 4.

the authors published the booklets with the intention of opening up the internal Hasidic discourse to the general Jewish world.

For the Hasidic world, a story is part of a cultural practice that expressed the intimacy of the community and strengthens its organizational structure.¹⁰⁷ Pilgrimage to the tsadik is a central custom in Hasidism, for it is believed that the charismatic character of the tsadik is the vessel through which individuals can connect to the divine.¹⁰⁸ Hasidim go to the tsadik to hear his sermons and learn Hasidic doctrine, but mostly for the purpose of observing his behavior with their own eyes. The delivering of a sermon by the tsadik (and in some cases the telling of stories) takes place at the table in his court, during the third Shabbat meal (*se'udah shelishit*). The Hasidim gather around their rebbe, taking in the aura of holiness in the room,¹⁰⁹ and the sermon is experienced as an ecstatic religious ritual.¹¹⁰ The spiritual experience at the rebbe's table included not only the act of listening to a sermon or a story but also

¹⁰⁷ Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society*, 198–99; Biale & Assaf, *Hasidism – A New History*, 220–22, 306–7.

¹⁰⁸ Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 189–208.

¹⁰⁹ While most tsadikim used to deliver sermons, it is well known that Rabbi Nachman used to tell fictional stories as part of his spiritual work. Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzin was also known for telling stories. See: Rivka Dvir-Goldberg, *Hatsadik ha-hasidic vearmon halivyatan: 'iun besipurei ma'asiot mipi tsadikim* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2003). Throughout the generations, telling stories (fictional or hagiographical) has become the custom among most tsadikim, as testified by Yisrael Yaffe about Rabbi Menahem Mendel: “On the holy Shabbaths he did not say Torah at the third meal as was his custom; instead, he used to sit at the dinner table with his companions... There was an old man with him, one of the Besht's disciples who told stories in praise of the Besht.” Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome R. Mintz, eds and trans, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov [Shivhei Ha-Besht]: The Earliest Collection of Legends about the Founder of Hasidism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 1; Avraham Rubinstein, ed., *Shivhei Ha-Besht: Mahadurah Mu'eret u-Mevoeret* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1991), 23–24.

¹¹⁰ Yoav Elstein, *HaEkstasa ve-HaSipur HaHasidi* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1998); Yoav Elstein, “HaYesod HaMiti b'Sipur HaHasidi Kemechonen Toda'ah Ekstatit,” in *HaMitos BaHasidut*, ed. Haviva Pedia (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute and the Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 1996), 226–38; Yakir Englander, “HaMetach Sviv Ma'amad Guf HaTsadik: Iyun b'Sipurei Ba'al 'Ahavat Yisrael' m'Viznitz,” *Mechkarei Yerushalaim baSafrut Ivrit* 27 (2014): 103–31.

singing, eating, dancing, and praying, all which created a unique atmosphere and an intimate connection among the participants and between them and the rebbe.

The stories about the tsadik’s deeds that had been witnessed by his Hasidim were usually passed on by word of mouth within the Hasidic community, and sometimes they were written down by hand in manuscripts. Bodek’s and Rodkinson’s projects, therefore, marked a sharp transition from orality to writing and from intimate gatherings with the rebbe to the printed story, which replicated the ecstatic, first-hand meeting with the tsadik, for the masses.

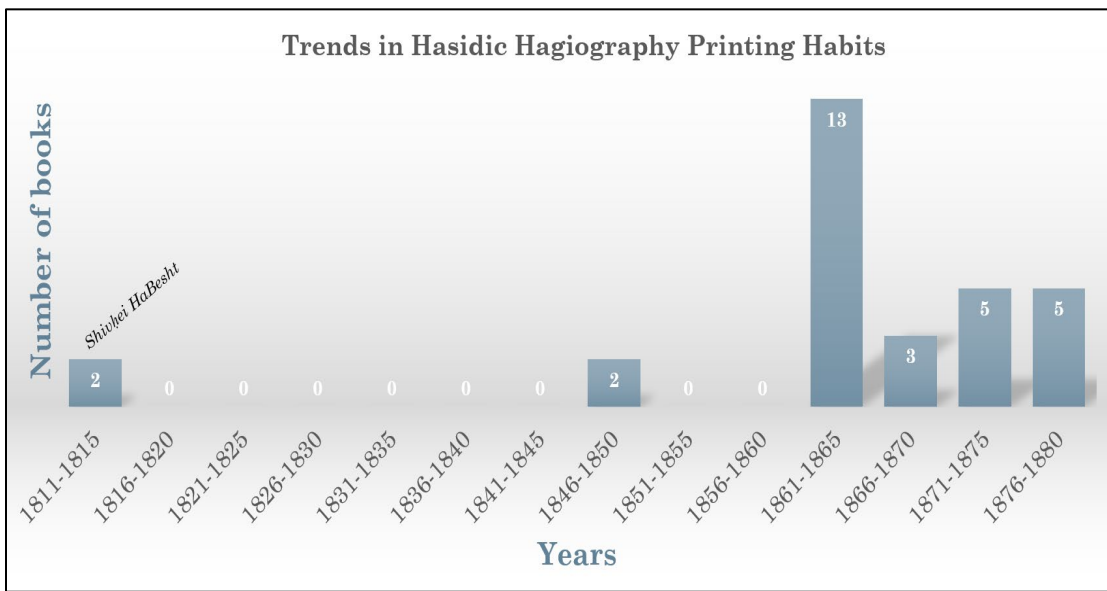


Figure 2: Trends in Hasidic Hagiography Printing Habits. Data is based on the bibliographies of Gedalyah Nigal, Yoav Elstein, and Ze’ev Kitsis

In the introduction to *Shivhei HaBesht*, Rabbi Yisrael Yaffe, the book’s publisher, writes in the name of the Besht that “when one relates to the praises of the

tsadikim, it is as if he concentrates on *Ma'ase Merkava*.”¹¹¹ By equating the telling of praise stories (hagiography) and learning about the secret expressions of God’s presence in the physical world, Yaffe legitimized the printing of what had been an intimate experience thus far. In the transition to print Bodek and Rodkinson chose for their projects a model which diverged from the more traditional hagiographical model used in *Shivhei HaBesht* and, afterward, in *Shivhei HaRan* (“In Praise of Rabbi Nachman,” 1816). These early Hasidic books were similar in their form and literary content to hagiography of the Middle Ages –which content-wise presented a comprehensive description of the life of one particular saint. While following the aesthetic of *Shivhei HaBesht* in using a rabbinic Hebrew mixed with Yiddish, and in providing the chain of storytelling by the narrator, Bodek and Rodkinson also made some adjustments in the Hasidic hagiographic genre. As opposed to medieval biographical hagiography, which one could find only in monasteries or beit midrash (Jewish house of study), the cheap booklets printed in 1860s Lemberg presented a fragmentary array of stories whose heroes were mainly different tsadikim but many times also simple Hasidim, and was designed for the market, intending to appeal to the masses. *Shivhei HaBesht* might be viewed as a transitional text which stands between the medieval norm of religious texts and the modern popular literary market.

The transition from an ecstatic, intimate, interpersonal religious moment to the individual experience of the popular press indicates, as Walter Benjamin writes in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” a change in the role of

¹¹¹ *Ma'ase Merkava* (literally means *Works of the Chariot*) is an esoteric mystical philosophy, (based on the book of Ezekiel), that seeks to understand God’s appearances in the world and how to participate in the attempts of Divinity to purify the upper sphere by mystical means. In Hasidism, as Yaffe testifies, tales about tsadikim were used for this purpose as well.

the story. “For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual...the instance the criterion authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.”¹¹²

The ritual of pilgrimage was never entirely replaced in Hasidism. While the printing of stories was increasing, Hasidim continued to frequent the tsaddik in order to experience the full spiritual and communal atmosphere in his court. The dialectical tension between orality and print, or, to use Benjamin’s terms, between auraic ritual and mechanical reproduction, was never fully synthesized, and it still figures in contemporary Hasidic life. Yet, Benjamin’s observation about the effect of mechanical reproduction offers a relevant critical prism through which to understand the shift in Hasidic aesthetics in the 1860s. The popular print of Hasidic booklets liberated the Hasidic story from its intimate, or ‘authentic’ intra-Hasidic context. As Iris Parush writes about the Hasidic printing “mania” in the mid-nineteenth century: "Once the written text broke free of its author’s control and could then be transformed, the disruption of genealogical continuity [of authentic transmission] reduced, even slightly, the possibility to treat the text as a reliable substitute for intimate contact with the tsadik and with "the one truth" that would issue from his mouth."¹¹³ In the nineteenth century, the popularity of Hasidism reached its zenith.

¹¹² Walter Benjamin. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* trns. Harry Zohn. Ed Hanna Ardent (New York: Schocken 2007), 224. My emphasis (C.E.M.)

¹¹³ Iris Parush, *Haḥoṭ'im bikhetivah: mahpekhat haketivah baḥevrah haYehudit bemizrah eropah bame'ah hatesha-'esreh* [The sin of writing: the writing revolution in nineteenth century Eastern European Jewish society] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2017), 146.

Examining the dynamics between the suppressive and controlling elements in the aesthetic of the Hasidic popular story can reveal the social-cultural function of Hasidic hagiography.

C. Narrative Authority and the Orality of the Hasidic Text.

Breaking down the “aura”, that is the constructed magical power of the original event, which in our case refers to the tsadik’s charismatic authority, and replacing it with the popularization of the story event, creates an opening for a democratization of the art form. Nonetheless, the move that Bodek and Rodkinson took in reforming narrative authority, which seems like a liberating step, did not completely relinquish the demand for authenticity but rather created a paradoxical combination of intimate religious authenticity and mass popularization with an eye towards the political. In the introductions to their books, both Bodek and Rodkinson acknowledge the value of the intimate occasion and the face-to-face encounter with the tsadik, while the literary expression of this aspect, which they established in their books, is described as secondary to it in value. The authenticity of the concrete encounter between the Hasid and the tsadik, Bodek claims in his introduction to *Sefer Ma’ase Tsadikim* (1864), cannot be replaced in a written text. The written text can serve for learning, but it does not have the effect of performance which evokes enthusiasm for repentance and holiness. “One who sees the behavior of the tsadik in a few instances, and also his manner of praying – how he prays from the bottom of his heart in a low spirit and energetic heart which cannot be estimated and cannot be understood from books, but only from seeing the tsadik fact to face – these things will fill his heart with

enthusiasm and emotions and will encourage him to follow the words of the Torah.”¹¹⁴

Similarly, Rodkinson in his book *'Adat Tsadikim* (1846) also strengthens the hierarchic relationship between the intimate forum of watching the tsadik in action or hearing a story from him in person and that of reading a tale in a book with his claim that the wonderous acts of the tsadikim make an impression and draw people's hearts towards the belief in God and the fear of him, and explains that his decision to put words to paper and to publish a book that is entirely composed of stories and is not a philosophical treatise is a last resort that stems from the low spiritual state of the Jewish nation. The tone that Rodkinson adopts in the introduction is largely apologetic (he even asks the reader not to judge him harshly), and the need to detail the reasons for publishing the book in its current formant indicate the embryonic nature of the project and its uncertain status.

¹¹⁴ Menachem Mendel Bodek, “Sefer Ma’ase Tsadikim, [1864]” in *Sipurim Hasidiim: Hotza’ah Bikortit ‘im Mavo, He-’arot u-Maftehot*, ed. Gedalyah Nigal (Tel Aviv: Yaron Golan, 1990), 24.

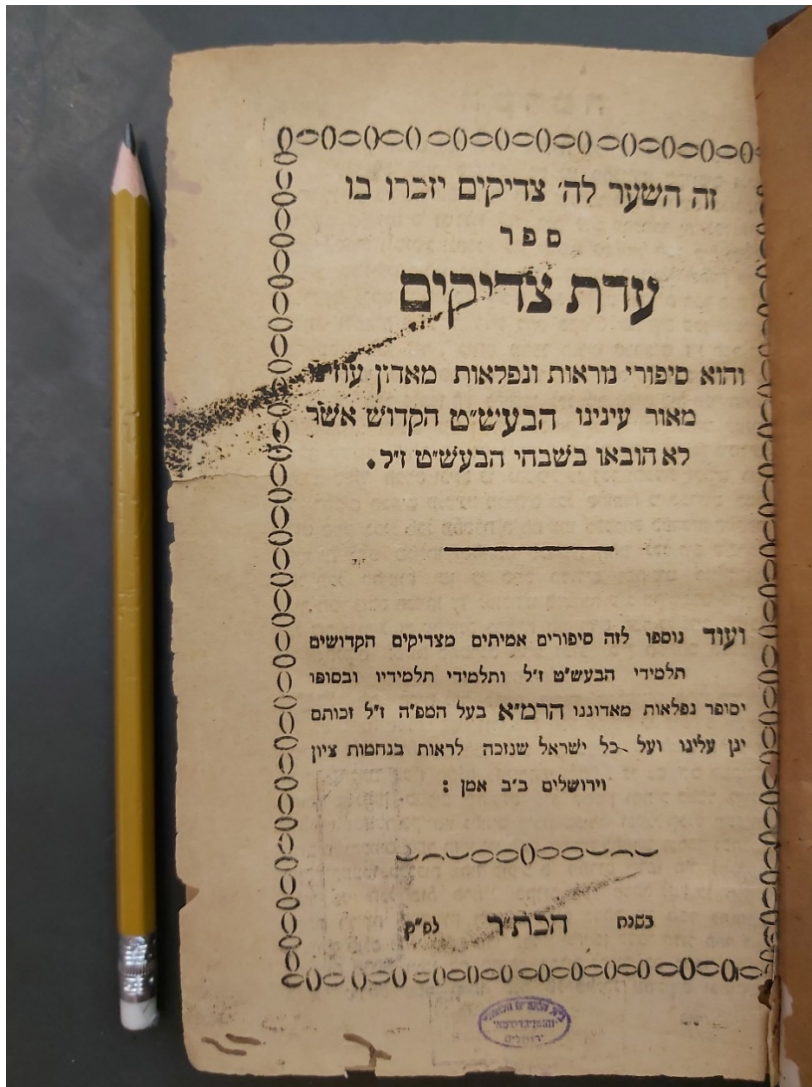


Figure 3: Rodkinson, 'Adat Tsadikim, Lemberg 1864.



Figure 4: Bodek, *Mif'ala lot HaTsadikim*, 1865

Despite the apologetic rhetoric that attributes an inferior power to literature, Bodek and Rodkinson chose to print not just one book but many subsequent ones, thereby establishing Hasidic praise literature as its own genre that participates in

modernizing not only the political consciousness of the Jewish community but also the literary qualities of Hebrew. Deviating from the total authority of the tsadik in the telling of the stories and the hypnotic power of the religious gathering gave rise to the necessity for an authority figure who, on the one hand, does not undermine the central place of the tsadik and the need for intimacy and authenticity, but on the other hand allows for a democratization and dynamism of the artistic act. To achieve this goal, both Bodek and Rodkinson took the following steps: they redefined the reader's pleasure in the text as a religious event (or conversely defined the religious event as aesthetic pleasure); they molded the voice of the narrator as the voice of an actual writer and thus preserved the orality, concreteness and intimacy in the encounter between members of the community. This strategy is originated from the traditional moral and teaching Jewish literature and characterizes the genre of Jewish Hagiography;¹¹⁵ they dismantled the concept of authority to something fragmentary and even dynamic and thus prevented the canonization and fixation of the discourse and Hasidic literature.

These three cultural and literary methods indicate a transition in Hasidic culture that contains seeds of redemption or a utopia of equality, but as we know today, and as Theodore Adorno commented on Benjamin's approach, the belief in the power of the masses (the proletariat) to take part in liberating or democratizing the artistic act is a utopia that ultimately crashes under the weight of the "cultural industry," in which individuals are consumers with no independent thoughts of their

¹¹⁵ Haya Bar-Itzhak, "Agadot kedoshim ke-janer ba-siporet ha'amamit shel 'edot Yisrael" (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1987), 260–282.

own. The transformation of art into a consumer product, Adorno claims, creates a system in which art serves as an expression of industrial exploitation and thus recreates and reinforces the power structure that already exists.¹¹⁶ This turning point in the production of Hasidic literature can serve as a source for formulating the different options that are inherent in the creation of modern art and its political development.

Bodek's and Rodkinson's attempt to position Hasidic literature as a modern product that enables authentic continuity of the intimate communal experience begins with the Hasidic conception of sanctifying the everyday, which allows one to define personal pleasure that results from the aesthetics of the story as a collective religious action. By placing the story at the center of the religious experience, Hasidism expressed the belief in what we can term the democratization of the ritual act. The ability to connect to God through daily and secular actions while at the same time participating in the redemptive act of elevating the hidden sparks in the world is one of the basic principles of Hasidism. A more specific conclusion of this belief is the Hasidic approach to speech and words; just as the world was created by God's utterances, so too pure speech creates reality and aids in establishing and protecting the world. Speech, words, and letters are the foundation stones of the world.¹¹⁷ Bodek

¹¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001), 180–182; Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928 – 1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 127-134.

¹¹⁷ On this approach, see: Dov Baer of Mezeritch, *Ohr HaTorah* on Psalm 148 teaching 233 (רל"ג), see: *Or Torah HaShalem*, (Brooklyn New-York: Otzar HaHasidim, 2006), 290. Rabbi Ya'akov Yoseph of Polonah, Introduction to his book *Toldot Ya'akov Yoseph*, where he describes the power of speech in doing harm and in repairing the world; Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, *Likutei Moharan*, Part 1, Section 64; Moshe Idel, "'L'Olam HaShem D'varcha Nitzav BaShamaiim:' Iyunim b'Torah Mukdemet shel

and Rodkinson continue in this direction, which was already established by Israel Jaffe and Dov Baer with the publication of *Shivhei HaBesht*, where reading stories about tsadikim is a holy act just like reading the Torah scroll. They strengthen this approach in the introductions to their books by emphasizing different elements of the story. While Rodkinson highlights the truth of the story as the source of its power and influence, Bodek foregrounds the effect of the words as creating new conditions in the world. Rodkinson connects the holiness of the story to its truthfulness and its ability to recreate the impression of the tsadik's miraculous act that awakens faith, on the principle that "the heart follows action." In his view, the godly truth that was revealed during the miraculous deed and affects the world is preserved and expressed when the story is told by "honest people" who can be relied upon. Bodek, as opposed to Rodkinson, relies on the words of Yehiel Michael of Zloczow who commanded his followers to tell stories of the tsadikim since "the letters of the story arouse the root of all the miracles, because all can be found in the letters," and explains that this great power to influence others derives from the fact that words create reality.¹¹⁸ If that is the case, the effect of the story in Hasidic thought operates on two levels: the modern age and the mystical experience. One level is the individual experience, where aesthetic pleasure (catharsis) is connected to religious ecstasy;¹¹⁹ the other

HaBesht v'gilgulehah baHasidut," *Kabbalah* 20 (2008), 219-286; Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 55.

¹¹⁸ Bodek, "Sefer Pe'er Mikdoshim,[1864/1865]" in *Sipurim Hasidiim: Hotza'ah Bikortit 'im Mavo, He-'arot u-Maftehot*, ed. Gedalyah Nigal (Tel Aviv: Yaron Golan, 1990), 142. On the importance of Yehiel Michael of Zloczow's figure to Galician Hasidism see Biale, Assaf, et al, *Hasidism: A New History*, 142-144.

¹¹⁹ According to Elstein, the Hasidic story is ecstatic since it connects in its substantive and local content and familiar (socio-local) nature the concrete and the mystical, as opposed to the Kabbalistic story which is disconnected from actual/historical reality. Elstein, *Ekstasa*, 32-38.

level is the collective experience, where communal practice redeems the spirit of the world. This redefinition that derives from the ways in which Rodkinson and Bodek formulate their projects displays the ambivalent discourse that Hasidism tried to have with the surrounding public.

But beyond these paratextual elements, which are connected to formatting the physical shape of the textual product and containing the narrative, in their contemplative introductions Bodek and Rodkinson propose a poetics that expresses the attempt to preserve verbal experience of the community that consists of the tradition of scholarship textuality as well as the oral intimacy that lies at the heart of the structure of the Hasidic community, and which originally occurred only when the members of the community gathered together in one spot where the religious event took place. Bodek and Rodkinson offer a textuality that emphasizes the orality, rhetorical power, and performativity of the text while drawing the reader into the judgmental and communal discourse. Orality is emphasized in the Hasidic story by the multiplicity of linguistic styles – including modern Hebrew, Biblical allusions that are in common use orally,¹²⁰ Yiddish slang, Yiddish grammatical forms in Hebrew, Aramaic, and even Polish – that sound like unprocessed utterances, and also by uniting the voice of the actual author with the voice of the narrator while deviating from mimetic representation to performative discourse.

The linguistic multiplicity of the Hasidic text, which is designed as a combination of a speech act and a writing act, is an expression of the ambivalence the

¹²⁰ Lily Kahan argues that utilizing biblical features in the Hasidic text “serves the important purpose of helping to establish the tales’ status as heirs to the tradition of biblical historical narrative.” See: Lily O. Kahn. “Biblical Grammatical Elements in the Nineteenth-century Hasidic Hebrew Tale,” *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 11 (2012), 323. This point will be discussed further in chapter 4.

authors felt in presenting Hasidic language in print. On the one hand, the mix of languages and the lack of grammatical coherence represent spontaneous modes of verbal expression, but on the other hand the decision to print the stories in Hebrew is removed from Hasidic authenticity since all of the oral stories were told in Yiddish. There are examples in the stories of sentences like this one: “Because it was always his way when he smoked his *lulke* when the Sabbath was over,”¹²¹ where the Yiddish word *lulke* (pipe) appears quite naturally in the Hebrew sentence and seems like an unpolished, spur-of-the-moment expression.¹²² This happens in other places as well, where phrases in Aramaic and common biblical verses are scattered in the text. Similarly dispersed in the text are idioms taken from various discursive events such as the opening of folk tales (“*There was once* a sermonizer, who travelled from village to village . . .”¹²³), phrases from sermons (“From this we should observe that we should not stick our head in and get involved in disagreements and say, God forbid, something not good about the tsadik . . .”¹²⁴), or introductions to Hasidic praise literature (“A wonderful tale from the tsadik, the genius, the famous man of God, the president of the court of the holy city Afte, may his memory be a blessing.”¹²⁵ Choosing to write the stories in a multi-faceted Hebrew which continues

¹²¹ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 5.

¹²² The Yiddish word *Lulke* appears already in *Shivhei ha-Besht*. In general, Bodek and Rodkinson were part of a tradition of rabbinic writing which was more flexible than Enlightenment writing about integrating different languages and different registers of Hebrew in their texts.

¹²³ Bodek, “Mifalot HaTsadikim” [1866], in *Sipurim Hasidim m’Lemberg-Lvov*, ed. Gedalyah Nigal (Jerusalem: Hamachon Leheker Hasafrut HaHasidit. 2005), 331.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 275.

¹²⁵ Bodek, “Ma’ase Tsadikim” [1864] in *Sipurim Hasidim m’Lemberg-Lvov*, ed. Gedalyaa Nigal (Jerusalem: Hamachon Leheker Hasafrut HaHasidit. 2005), 219.

the traditional religious writing that one can find in Jewish response for example, indicates an aesthetic conception that reveals the learned and the oral roots of the Hasidic community.

The transition from Yiddish to Hebrew can be understood in two main ways: the first is the need to justify printing the stories within the religious tradition and to situate them as a holy text, and the second is the recognition of the dynamic state of Jewish politics and the massive development of modern Hebrew culture in Lemberg and the concurrent desire to take part in it. Formulating Hebrew as a multi-faceted and broken language can be seen as standing in almost complete opposition to the “pure” literary Hebrew that was developing with the publication of *Ahavat Zion* by Avraham Mapu in 1853 under the Russian Empire. This book was enthusiastically accepted by contemporary Hebrew readers and was right away considered to be the first Hebrew novel. It laid the foundations for the Hebrew literature that came after it. The “pure” biblical Hebrew that *Ahavat Zion* was written in reflects the romantic Jewish epic; it was the first step in establishing a Hebrew consciousness in order to define a modern Jewish nationality. As opposed to this approach, Hasidic Hebrew reflects what Mikhail Bakhtin calls *heteroglossia*. In contrast with the lyrical poetics and the national ideological epic that is expressed by the Hebrew of *Ahavat Zion*, Hasidic Hebrew, which is taken from the traditional religious Jewish writing, reflects a layered multi-speakers speech. It offers an alternative linguistics that was “consciously opposed to this literary language. It was parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time. It was heteroglossia that

had been dialogized.”¹²⁶ As opposed to the centrality, totality, and coherence of the national and ideological language that is reflected in *Ahavat Zion*, Hasidic heteroglossia expresses the multiplicity of social dynamism. Thus, the use of Hebrew, even though it is not authentic from the perspective of performative Hasidism, nonetheless demonstrates a recognition of the concreteness of the social situation in which the tales were written and reflects the political dynamism that the Jews of Eastern Europe and Lemberg in particular struggled with.

Alongside the multi-faceted language, the source of the literary expression – the narrator – is constructed in the text as an actual figure who is speaking to the reader, and thus recreates, continues, and becomes the performative occasion of narrativity. The voice of the author appears not just in the paratextual spaces like the introduction but rather within the narrative itself. It is not a hidden voice but a present, engaged, and substantial voice that shapes the author as a traditional storyteller. The storyteller in the Hasidic narrative is identified with the actual historical author, which blurs the boundaries between mimeses and discourse and creates a rhetorical-narrative space that serves as a substitute for the intimate performative gathering. Both Bodek and Rodkinson allude to themselves in the narrative, not only when they turn directly to the reader through the use of affectionate terms like “my brother,” “my dear love,” “dear reader,” but even when they provide details about their lives, the methods by which they became familiar with the stories, when they express their opinions by adding moralizing comments,

¹²⁶ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in The Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 273.

and when they provide historical details. The authors thereby add an autobiographical aspect as well as a traditional scholarly rhetorical aspect to the work. The voice of the author that appears in the work not only demands its right to authority from its private right to tell stories and create art but also shapes this voice as a source of considerable authority that is approved or granted by the community during the traditional intimate gathering of storytelling. Elstein has already pointed out the significant structure of authority that is created in the Hasidic text when he described the influence of external factors in formulating *Shivhei HaBesht*,¹²⁷ but we are interested in the poetic expression of the multiple sources of this authority and how it affects the social function of the text.

One of the main strategies for demanding authority used by the persona of the author that appears in the text is noting the source of the story, in most cases the original oral storyteller who told the author the story. This strategy enhances the author's credibility, situates him within the social chain of transmitting information, and gives him the social status of a storyteller. For example, in his book *'Adat Tsadikim*, Rodkinson writes at the beginning of one of the stories that he heard it from his father: "A story from the Rabbi, the genius, our holy teacher Israel Preacher of Righteousness of the holy city of Kaznitz. I heard it from my father, my teacher, the

¹²⁷ Elstein, *Ma'ase Hoshev*, 71-72. Elstein claims that the great authority that was accorded to *Shivhei HaBesht* is due to the following factors: the authority of the Besht as the source of the story; the authority of the generations who have told the story orally (from the Besht's inner circle); the authority of the editor (Rashaz of Ladi); and the linguistic authority of the printer (Rabbi Yisrael Yaffe) and the *moyser*, the deliverer, (Rabbi Yehuda Leib Ben-HaMesaper). However, he deliberately refrains from dealing with the storyteller and the question of his perspective (see note 10 on page 71), and thus circumvents dealing with issues of discourse and politics of the aesthetic expression that is our central concern in this chapter.

rabbi, who should be granted a long life.”¹²⁸ Sometimes he even goes into detail and lists the generations that have transmitted this story: “And I heard all of this from the Rabbi of Zlatfale, may his light shine, who received the story from his father, who heard it directly from the tsadik the Grandfather of Shpoli, may the holy tsadik’s memory be a blessing.”¹²⁹ In other cases he does not specifically mention the names of those who told him the story but describes them as people who can be relied upon: “a great person,”¹³⁰ “a trustworthy person,”¹³¹ and so on, while at times Rodkinson even emphasizes that the transmitter himself witnessed the event that he is telling.¹³²

Bodek uses identical methods for grounding the communal practice of transmission and forming his authority as an integral part of this kind of technique, as for example when he testifies: “I heard two stories from a trustworthy person, who heard it firsthand from the holy mouth of the Rabbi the tsadik R’ Shalom of Belz, may his memory be a blessing;”¹³³ “I heard this story from an elderly Hasid from the Hasidim of Lublin who himself was in Zeditchov when it took place.”¹³⁴ As we have seen in the introductions to their books, Rodkinson’s emphasis is on the veracity of the stories; the trustworthiness of the transmitters or the close proximity to them

¹²⁸ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 5.

¹²⁹ Rodkinson, “Sipurei Ḥasidim” in *Sipurim Ḥasidiim m’Lemberg-Lvov: Sifrei Frumkin-Rodkinson u’Bodek* (Jerusalem: The Institute for the Study of Hasidic Literature, 2005), 132.

¹³⁰ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 22.

¹³¹ Bodek, “Mifalot Tsadikim,” 246.

¹³² See, for example, Rodkinson, “Sipurei Ḥasidim” 115. “I heard from an old man from Bonitsch who was with R’ Leib Sarah’s in the capital city Vienna and I want to offer it to the reader at length.”

¹³³ Bodek, “Mifalot Tsadikim,” 73.

¹³⁴ Bodek, “Kahal Kedoshim” [1865] in *Sipurim Ḥasidiim: Hotsaah Bikortit ‘im Mavo, He’arot, umaftēhot*, ed. Gedalyah Nigal (Tel Aviv: Yaron Golan, 1990), 222.

strengthens the reader's belief in the validity of the stories and their details.¹³⁵ That is, for him the power of the story derives from its proximity to truth and the communal transmission techniques reinforces this aspect.¹³⁶ Even though Bodek does not express the same level of apprehension regarding the truth as Rodkinson does, it is clear from his rhetorical language that the communal practice of telling stories is the axis around which the Hasidic narrative is organized. However, what is the meaning of the narrator's authority which, on the one hand, is determined to turn itself into a concrete presence in the text, and which, on the other hand, avoids taking full responsibility for the story that he is presenting to the reader? What is the meaning of this kind of literary authority that relies on communal approval and what does it reveal about the meaning of the concept of authority for Hasidism? In order to answer these questions we must first understand what the literary meaning of Hasidic rhetorical poetics is.

Constructing the narrator in a way that emphasizes the rhetoric and performance of language suggests that Hasidic literature as it was shaped in Lemberg wanted to create a space for communal and religious discourse that had an immediate effect on the audience, an action that deviates from the norms of the literary model as

¹³⁵ Mentioning the chain of transmission was already used in *Shivhei ha-Besht*. As mentioned above, Bodek and Rodkinson were part of the Hasidic literary tradition, and although they made changes in the style, they also kept many of the literary methods used in *Shivhei Ha-Besht*, the archetype of Hasidic hagiography.

¹³⁶ In addition to the details about the transmission of the story, Rodkinson many times tends to add details that are connected to the situation of a specific story, for example at what time of year the teller told the story or where he told it. See for example: "Once . . . that the holy genius godly Rebbe of all sons of exile Avraham Yehoshua Heschel may the tsadik's memory be for a blessing of Afte told a story when he was in Beditshev (Rodkinson, *'Adat Tsadikim*, 8); "This is the tale that the holy genius godly R' Yisrael Dov of Viladnik may the tsadik's memory be for a blessing would tell on the seventh day of Passover his whole life (Rodkinson, *'Adat Tsadikim*, 10).

it had developed in the nineteenth century. The “ideology of aestheticism of the nineteenth century,” as Hayden White defines it, distinguishes between literacy and literature as part of the process of consolidation and expression of nationality and ultimately of the nation-state and its social organization. This included adopting capitalism as a “transformation of the masses from subjects into citizens capable of taking their place as functionaries in a system of production and exchange for profit rather than use.”¹³⁷ White explains that as part of this process the ideology of aesthetics in the nineteenth century defined literature as a specific instance of literacy which has the quality of an added value, of privilege:

The ideology of aestheticism from now on will teach that the difference between literary and merely literate writing is only a special case of the more fundamental difference, amounting to strict opposition, between *beauty* (or the beautiful) and *utility* (or the useful). Literature is beautiful writing – writing that appeals, even fascinates, by virtue of its form alone, irrespective of its content or subject matter. The value of writing that is merely literate, by contrast, will be held to reside less in its form than in its function, specifically its communicative function, its usefulness in serving as medium for the transmission of information, thought, and – perhaps more crucially – commands, within every department of social life organized for the realization of purely practical ends or purpose. The ideology of aestheticism has it, as a

¹³⁷ Hayden White, “The Suppression of Rhetoric in the Nineteen Century” [1997] in *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007*, ed Robert Doran (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 294.

matter of pride, that society does not need literature in the way it needs literacy. Literature is a *luxury* . . .¹³⁸

White explains that this ideology created a repression of rhetoric as opposed to a preference for the poetic or “beautiful.” This hierarchy follows the values of the Enlightenment and modernity, which saw in the rhetorical voice an unethical element due to the fact that it diverts the interaction with “philosophic truth” that literature deals with to other forms of communication and impure interests of linguistic expression. If this is the case, it would appear that Hasidic literature, which did adopt modern elements but also did not suppress its rhetorical tone, wanted to preserve its internal communal ideology. By using the persuasive rhetorical voice, Hasidic literature expresses an urgent need of an organized and supportive community; a need that pushes aside the option of reading in the texts as a privilege of freedom.

However, as White reveals, the ideology of aestheticism and the binary distinction between the literate and the literary created the illusion that the scientific and beautiful – or literary – is ethical and honest while rhetorical poetics is corrupt.¹³⁹ If so, how should we understand the process that Hasidic literature underwent which, despite adopting modern literary models, continued to express its rhetoric as an integral part of its poetics and aesthetics? By rejecting the premise of 19th-century aesthetics, did Hasidic literature convey a social promise to expose the author’s interests to the criticism of the reader or to establish a repressive ideology of persuasion in order to preserve the Hasidic communal structure? A deeper

¹³⁸ Ibid, 295. My emphasis.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 297-303.

examination of the social status of the storyteller in the Hasidic community as expressed in Hasidic praise literature reveals the meaning of Hasidic poetic rhetoric and the model of authority that it proposed.

D. The Storyteller and the Hasidic Community.

The central role of the storyteller in Hasidic poetics is presented and highlighted wonderfully in one of Rodkinson's stories in his book *'Adat Tsadikim* (Lemberg, 1864). In this story Rodkinson describes the archetype of the Hasidic storyteller. The tale focuses on the historical moment where storytelling became institutionalized for Hasidism following the instructions the Besht left before he passed away. The story follows the figure of one of the closest students of the Besht, Reb Ya'akov, who was authorized by his teacher to tell stories and was commanded to wander from city to city in Eastern Europe and tell stories about the miraculous deeds of the Besht. The story opens at the critical moment where the founding father¹⁴⁰ of Hasidism is about to depart from this world and leaves instructions for his closest students:

The Besht, blessed be his memory, gathered his students before his death and instructed them how to behave and what their livelihood would be after he was gone. To a few of them he revealed what the future would hold. One

¹⁴⁰ On the figure of the Besht and the scholarly debate about his importance for the Hasidic movement, see, for example: Shimon Dubnow, *Toldot HaHasidut: Al Yesod Mekorot Rishonim, Nidpasim v'Kitvei Yad* (3rd edition) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1966/1967), 41-75; Moshe Rosman, *HaBesht Mechadesh HaHasidut*, trans. David Lovish (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999); Immanuel Etkes, *Ba'al HaShem: HaBesht – Magia, Mistika, Hanhaga* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2000); Gedalyah Nigal, *HaBesht: Agadot, Apologetika, u'Metziut* (Jerusalem: The Center for the Study of Hasidic Literature, 2008/2009); Gershon Scholem, "Dmuto HaHistorit shel R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov," in *Tsadik ve-Edah: Hebetim Historiim ve-Hevratim be-Hecker HaHasidut*, ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2001), 66-92.

student who was his assistant was there as well, and his name was Reb Ya'akov. The Besht called him and said, "You will go to all of the places where I am known and tell stories about my deeds that you have seen, and this will be your livelihood." Reb Yaa'kov was very disappointed and replied, "What is the purpose of being a wanderer and telling tales?" The Besht said: "Do not be disturbed because you will get rich doing this, God willing." When the Besht was buried and rose to heaven and left us bereft, his students followed his orders and the aforementioned Reb Yaakov began traveling from place to place, telling tales about the Besht, and making a good living.¹⁴¹

It is interesting to note that as presented in the opening of the story, the Besht's closest students did not understand the importance of roaming and spreading the miraculous stories, but were suspicious of this assignment, as expressed in Reb Ya'akov's question, "What is the purpose of this?" but especially interesting is the Besht's response. As opposed to what we might have expected, the Besht does not try to convince Reb Ya'akov to accept upon himself the task of a wanderer by emphasizing the power of the spiritual influence of the stories or the political importance of spreading his teachings, but actually relates to the economic meaning of the work for Reb Ya'akov himself. The Besht responds to Reb Ya'akov's anxiety with, "Do not be disturbed because you will get rich doing this."

The Besht's tale relates to the role of the storyteller as that of physical labor; it is a job like any other. The Besht understands that Reb Ya'akov, a family man, does not have the privilege of dealing with stories as a luxury and therefore tells Reb

¹⁴¹ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 24.

Ya'akov in his description of the job that it will be a source of income. In describing the role of the storyteller, Benjamin distinguishes between three elements that define his activity: soul, eye, and hand. Benjamin claims that the storyteller's role is creative but also productive; it is a job that functions within the economic market of a given community at a given time.¹⁴² The storyteller, says Benjamin, observes reality and processes what he sees through the creation of connections to his spiritual or mystical life, and finally presents it to his community, or, in other words, returns to reality a useful product in the form of advice or common sense.¹⁴³ Even though in modernity the power of the hand in the process has diminished, it is essential for the operation of the storyteller since he is a craftsman. The storyteller has a responsibility to process the raw material of experience, his and others, "a steady, helpful and singular processing."¹⁴⁴ The physical labor of the craftsman storyteller, according to Benjamin, is always performed within a communal or "local" structure since the product that is presented by the craftsman is formed out of the reality that he saw with his own eyes and is given to those standing before him. That is, the act of craft/art is always particularly suited to the immediate physical and social reality of those who are involved in it.

The intimacy that Benjamin describes between the author-storyteller and his audience that takes place within the physical system of the community and operates as an integral part of it is the type of intimacy that Hasidic narratives require. This is

¹⁴² Walter Benjamin. "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *Illuminations*, trns. Harry Zohn. Ed. Hanna Ardent (New York: Schocken 2007), 107.

¹⁴³ "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience -his own or, that reponed by others. And he in tum makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale," (Ibid, 87).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 107.

verbalized by the Besht's guiding words to Reb Ya'akov to only go to the places where the Besht is already known and to tell the stories that Reb Ya'akov himself witnessed. These two instructions outline a local space within which Reb Ya'akov can peddle his wares – the stories. Indeed, as long as Reb Ya'akov stays within the communal space that allows for the narrative to take place, the economic arrangement operates as the Besht expected it would, and the narrator confirms that Reb Ya'akov “made a good living.” A creative-productive harmony continues for two and a half years but is shaken once Reb Ya'akov decides to deviate from his instructions due to personal needs and to leave the borders of the familiar community.

Exhausted from his travels, Reb Ya'akov decides to expand his income and go to a new market that seems economically promising and that will enable him to stop travelling for at least a year. One day, “Reb Ya'akov heard that there was a rich lord in Italy who was willing to pay a Roman coin in exchange for a story about the Besht. He calculated how many coins he would need in order to stop wandering around for at least a year or more.”¹⁴⁵ Even though at first glance it seems that there is nothing unusual in Reb Ya'akov's decision, the narrator's description emphasizes that this decision was different and even dangerous. First of all, the narrator says that the journey was “very long” and that it required special preparations, like buying a horse and hiring a servant, and that it lasted no less than seven months. But the main sign that Reb Ya'akov's behavior is out of the ordinary is the choice to go to Italy, which symbolizes leaving the familiar territory of Hasidism which was widespread in Eastern Europe, and thus highlights more than anything else Reb Ya'akov's deviation

¹⁴⁵ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 24.

from the instructions given to him by the Besht. In the consciousness of a Galician (Eastern European) reader from the 1860s, Italy symbolized the borderline of the familiar or local political sphere since in the 1840s and 1850s Italy fought for independence against the Habsburg Empire. As part of the 1848 “Spring of Nations” revolutions, Italy unsuccessfully rebelled against the Empire, but in 1859, during its second war of independence, Italy managed to achieve unity despite the efforts of the Emperor Franz Joseph to strengthen the parts of it that belonged to the Empire. This event greatly damaged the economic system of the Empire and created a sharp crisis that pushed the Empire to change its political system to one that was representative.¹⁴⁶ The choice of Italy as a destination thus symbolizes leaving the known sphere for one unknown and underlines Reb Ya’akov’s blunt decision in fulfilling his own spiritual and economic needs before those of his master.

Only after Reb Ya’akov runs into trouble fulfilling his role as a storyteller does he contemplate his decision to stray beyond the borders of the local and familiar. When it comes time for Reb Ya’akov to tell a story about the Besht in the home of the wealthy Italian on Friday evening in front of all of the curious members of the community, Reb Ya’akov mysteriously loses the ability to tell stories. “As they were sitting around the Sabbath table, after the traditional singing of Sabbath songs, the lord asked Reb Ya’akov to tell something about the Besht as was the custom. However, Reb Ya’akov completely forgot all the tales! He could not recall a single

¹⁴⁶ Deák, *Forging a Multinational State*, 137-174. This crisis forced the Empire to change its political system and replace the bureaucratic mechanism to a representational system. Italy achieved full independence after its third war of independence against the Austrian Empire in 1866.

story.”¹⁴⁷ Despite the surprising failure, Reb Ya’akov gathers his strength together to try to tell his stories a second time during the Sabbath lunch and for a third time during the third meal, but all of his stories are completely forgotten and no action that he does in order to jog his memory helps him. In response the disappointed members of the town despise him and call him a liar. Reb Ya’akov then begins to wonder why this has happened to him and “he wore himself out trying to find an explanation that would allow him to understand why this had happened. He thought that perhaps the Besht was angry with him for not wanting to go to places where people knew him, but instead *travelling to a foreign country*, where the people are not worthy to hear such stories.”¹⁴⁸ Reb Ya’akov guesses that two forces are at work in his surprising memory loss: the fact that he transgressed the Besht’s instructions and that he left the local environment. Even though ultimately a third reason is revealed that explains why Reb Ya’akov was prevented from fulfilling his role as a storyteller and distanced him from carrying out his dream of becoming rich and ceasing his wanderings, the emphasis that Reb Ya’akov puts on the strangeness of the place as an explanation for his situation points to his deep understanding of the occasion of storytelling as an intimate communal occurrence. Reb Ya’akov guesses that the authority to tell stories was taken from him by the Besht since he harmed the intimacy that is necessary for narrative. Moreover, Rodkinson’s decision to shape Reb Ya’akov’s inner debate around the issue of space, since no other reason is presented to us, reveals the Hasidic

¹⁴⁷ Rodkinson, *‘Adat Tsadikim*, 25.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. My emphasis.

ideology regarding the importance and centrality of the communal structure for the story-event and the opportunity for creating meaning.

In order to remember the forgotten stories and save himself from embarrassment, Reb Ya'akov tries various methods. As opposed to the linguistic and rhythmic molds that classic oral tradition highlights such as memorization, preservation, and transmission, Reb Ya'akov does not try to recall words but rather descriptions of people or familiar landscapes: "He tried to draw the figure of the Besht in his mind, or the image of Medzhybizh, or the image of his friends as a prompt for remembering any story."¹⁴⁹ Even though this method does not work on the first attempt, Reb Ya'akov chooses to continue with it through further repeated failures. "Reb Ya'akov cried all night long and tried to picture the image of his friends, but nothing helped him. He had completely forgotten how to tell a story about the Besht, as if he had never seen the Besht."¹⁵⁰ Reb Ya'akov tries to regain the authority to tell stories by trying to revive his experiences and memories, but for reasons that are not yet clear to him he is unsuccessful. The loss of the ability to remember the reality of the components of the story is described not just as a loss of memory, but also as a loss of identity. Reb Ya'akov is described as being "*like a baby who had just been born*. He broke his head to pieces trying to remember but it did not help him at all."¹⁵¹ Reb Ya'akov, whose sole role is to tell stories and who came to the court of the wealthy man in order to do so, loses the ability to earn a living as he

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. My emphasis.

loses his identity and authority as a member of the Hasidic community; all this takes place when he leaves the local environment for a foreign locale.

Benjamin distinguishes between two types of storytellers: one, is the man “who has come from afar”, and second is the man “who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions”.¹⁵² However, Benjamin notes, these two types can mix to provide the fullness of storytelling when the author himself constitutes the ability to amalgamate the local and foreign. Even when telling about an incident that happened in a foreign environment, the process of processing it before the audience, the performance, constitutes part of the present. That is, by transforming his personal experience into a story that has a practical meaning connected to the existing and local environment, the storyteller provides a story-product to his listeners. Only by embodying the distant and the imaginary with the local and the concrete, can the storyteller fulfill his mission. What the storyteller offers his listeners is the “continuation of the story which is just unfolding.”¹⁵³ The breakdown in Reb Ya’akov’s personality prevents him from succeeding and connecting his past with the here and now. The exile to Italy, which for the storyteller who “stays in his country and is well-versed in its stories and traditions” remains an exile, since he has not yet managed to become an authoritative storyteller who has the ability to connect and find the intimacy that allows for creativity and production.

Reb Ya’akov’s maturation process and his growth as an authoritative storyteller who can connect between different spaces while seeing and recognizing

¹⁵² Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 84.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 86.

the present as he creates the story occurs at the moment when Reb Ya'akov gives up and turns to leave the city, greatly disappointed. "He went to the rich man to get permission to leave, and the rich man gave him a generous donation. Reb Ya'akov went to sit in the carriage to drive off, but once he sat in the carriage, he remembered an amazing tale about the Besht. Reb Ya'akov went back to the rich man's house and sent his servant to tell him that he remembered a precious tale. The rich man called him into his room and said, "Please tell me." So Reb Ya'akov told him the following tale."¹⁵⁴ The carriage is a liminal place. Even though it is still in the city, its ability to move means that it is already outside the city, and it allows Reb Ya'akov to view himself already on his way home. The beginning of the journey towards home, back to local and familiar places, awakens his memory and he returns to the rich man's house to tell a story. This time the storytelling is done not in front of the townspeople but intimately, one-on-one with the rich man. The occasion of telling the story when only the rich man and Reb Ya'akov are present ultimately becomes a very personal meeting.

Reb Ya'akov tells the rich man about a mysterious journey that the Besht made on Easter to a city whose name he does not remember. The Besht demanded that Reb Ya'akov interrupt the priest as he was delivering his sermon to a crowd in the town square and bring him to the Besht for a private conversation. "I don't know what happened to that bishop, and until today I don't even know the name of the town, and the Besht didn't tell me,"¹⁵⁵ Reb Ya'akov concludes. Reb Ya'akov's story

¹⁵⁴ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 26.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 27.

seems to trail off without an ending and does not have any particular value since Reb Ya'akov's lack of knowledge prevents him from adding anything of his own to the story, such as presenting advice to his audience. Even though he manages to technically perform his role of storyteller, Reb Ya'akov cannot process this experience in order to produce a useful product. He does not take responsibility for what happened but rather emphasizes his lack of understanding and the disconnect between the event that happened in his past and what is going on in the present.

However, once Reb Ya'akov completes his story that seems to lack a conclusion or any value, a revelation takes place that illuminates the story anew and reveals the meaning of the story for the auditor (i.e. the rich man) and surprisingly for the storyteller as well. "When Reb Ya'akov finished speaking, the rich man raised his hands and praised God. He said to Reb Ya'akov: 'I know that your words are true. Right when I saw you I recognized you, but I kept silent. And I will tell you the events. Know that I am the bishop that you summoned.'"¹⁵⁶ The rich man reveals his past to Reb Ya'akov and tells him that they are actually not strangers, but they had met a decade earlier during the event that changed his life. The rich man tells Reb Ya'akov that he was a Jew who had apostatized and became a bishop, but with the Besht and Reb Ya'akov's help he was saved from "spiritual impurity." The rich man explains to Reb Ya'akov that the day before the Besht arrived in his city he had a dream in which the Besht appeared to him and told him to repent, but he chose to ignore the dream, which is also why he initially refused to come with Reb Ya'akov to see the Besht, who was waiting for him in a house in that city. But Reb Ya'akov

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

twice risked his life by walking through an impassioned Christian crowd who wanted to catch and kill Jews, as was the custom of that place on Easter, and Reb Ya'akov called to him in the "Hebrew tongue" awakening his spirit to stop its actions, go meet the Besht, and repent. "But when you called me again I became a totally different person, and I went with you. Then the Besht instructed me in how to mend my ways and I completely repented."¹⁵⁷ During this private meeting between Reb Ya'akov and the rich man, we can see that the closeness that they experience through their common past and belonging to a shared community allows the teller to become a listener and the listener to become the teller. The rich man's story fills in the gaps in Reb Ya'akov's story, which shows that the authority to tell and create meaning is equally divided between the teller and the listener.

The story that Reb Ya'akov transmits without understanding its importance and without the ability to make it relevant for his audience is revealed to be a very significant story for both the listener and the teller, not just because it reveals the closeness between them and fills in the parts that Reb Ya'akov was missing but because it gives new meaning to their lives. The former bishop explains that included in the instructions the Besht had given him on how to properly repent was a sign that would show him when his repentance had been accepted. "This is how you will know that your transgressions have been removed and that your sins have been atoned: when someone comes and tells you your own story."¹⁵⁸ The sign that the Besht gives the rich man situates the communal act of transmission at the center of a personal

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 28.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

religious experience. The story event that took place shows, in light of the rich man's words, that what controlled Reb Ya'akov's ability to tell the story was external to him. In the rich man's eyes, this was the spiritual godly sphere that limited Reb Ya'akov's authority to tell stories and prevented the story-event from taking place up until the moment that the rich man increased his repentance. According to his interpretation, Reb Ya'akov's authority is delayed, limited, or dependent on a few factors: the spiritual realm that is represented by God and the Besht, and the actions of the audience, that is, the rich man.

The split authority as presented in Reb Ya'akov's story rejects, on the one hand, the modern conception of art that assumes that creativity flows exclusively from the inner world of the artist, and, on the other hand, the Romantic view that assumes that folk culture is anonymous since it represents something greater than the individual – the spirit of the nation. As an alternative it offers a model of a multiple authority that develops from the orality of the Hasidic community but does not cancel out the power of the individual. As Walter Ong proposes in *Orality and Literacy*, the development of deep self-consciousness as we understand it today occurred alongside the ability to write, which allowed for self-reflection and observing one's thoughts and feelings. Writing allows the self to go inward and binds it securely and independently to itself. Therefore, Lange emphasizes, at the root of societies that are essentially oral, even modern ones, rests a bicameral consciousness in which verbal expression is always understood as a double voicing of the individual alongside other

voices that are beyond his control.¹⁵⁹ Accordingly, as a printed literature which is based on the communal oral experience placed at the center of its poetics, Hasidic literature offers a poetics of authority dependent on God, on the practice of the individual, and the approval of the community.

In addition to taking responsibility for Reb Ya'akov's story and filling in the blanks in the plot, the rich man adds another level to the story by interpreting the events happening in the present as a continuation of the common past that the two storytellers share. The rich man who discovered that his repentance had been accepted as Reb Ya'akov tells his story, continues his speech and in his explanation responds to Reb Ya'akov in the same key and allows him to find his own salvation.

Therefore, at the moment I saw you I greatly increased my repentance, and when I saw that you have forgotten all of the tales I realized that this had happened to you because of me, because my sins had not been fully atoned. I did what I could and my prayers were a great help, because you remembered the story. Now I know that, blessed be God, my sins have been removed and I have made amends for everything, thank God. And you, you no longer need to wear yourself out with traveling and telling tales because I will give you many gifts that will last you for the rest of your life. May the merit of the Besht help us both so we can worship God our whole lives, with all our heart and soul, amen.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1991), 29-30. Elstein already pointed out the multiple structure of authority that is created in the Hasidic text when he described the intervention of outside factors in the formation of *Shivhei HaBesht*.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Aside from filling in the blanks in the story, the rich man explains to Reb Ya'akov that the forgetfulness that surrounded him during the past few days was the result of an event that was not connected to him. According to his interpretation, since the rich man had not completed his repentance Reb Ya'akov was prevented by heaven from telling his story and was delayed until the appropriate moment when the listener could receive the message that the story was concealing. The rich man, who operates here as an experienced storyteller, transforms the distant story or the experience of the past into material that is relevant for the mysterious present that had seemed to be meaningless. The immediate interpretation that the rich man gives Reb Ya'akov's story removes it from the type of aesthetics that remains silent when dealing with reality as mimesis and moves it into a web of current events.

Even though both stories, Reb Ya'akov's and the rich man's, were meaningful for the listener, the aesthetics of Reb Ya'akov's story is essentially different from the way the rich man shapes his story. Rodkinson opposes the two storytellers to each other and shows the two forms of poetics they represent. The gap between them can be compared to the gap between a novel and a story.

What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature – the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella – is that it neither comes from oral tradition, nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving

examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others.¹⁶¹

Benjamin explains that the detachment between the author of a novel and what he conveys results from observing the world as something over which we have no influence, from the bourgeois process of the reader and the story. The story told in a novel is one of hopelessness, of people's lives whose meaning is revealed only after their death. "What attracts the reader to the novel is the hope to warm their shivering lives with the warmth of death that they are reading about."¹⁶² This is catharsis that comes about from observing a distant object that provides the auditor with ease or deep sleep in his life. As opposed to the novel, the story carries the quality of the performative meeting and the oral expression, and thus allows current social and personal drives to be expressed. That is, instead of repressing them, the storyteller helps the listener be overwhelmed with his experiences in the present and search for a solution to his condition. It seems that Reb Ya'akov's story, which kept its silence, has novelistic qualities that allow the reader to create interpretations within the distant space that is between them and the work. The rich man's story, however, forces the listener to take part in it and offers him an interpretation from within their face-to-face encounter in the current reality.

The Hasidic storyteller, as reflected in the relationship between Reb Ya'akov and the rich man, is a craftsman who offers his listeners a story with a concrete, useful meaning. That is, the story always relates in a clear and substantial way to the

¹⁶¹ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 87.

¹⁶² Ibid.

lives of the listeners; thus, Reb Ya'akov's ability to tell the story was limited to the right time in front of the right person. The rich man's story liberated Reb Ya'akov mentally and economically, and for that very reason the Besht's instructions from the outset limited the presentation of local materials to a familiar community and space. This line is continued by the author-narrator of our story, who is Rodkinson. Even though the story is completed, and even though it has a moral or "advice" as Benjamin calls it, which is explicitly stated by the characters "so we can worship God our whole lives, with all our heart and soul, amen,"¹⁶³ Rodkinson chooses to interfere in the narrative and make his authority as the concrete narrator clear to the reader. He turns directly to the reader and adds: "And now, reader, see how great is the power of repentance. Know that this story is real and the moral lesson is plain as day. If you are a man of soul, you will understand the significance of the events on your own and may the merit of the tsadikim (pious men) protect you and keep you safe, amen."¹⁶⁴ This choice by the Hasidic narrator reflects the Hasidic aesthetic that continues in this genre to the present day. Even though they made the choice to move from orality to print, the Hasidic narrator struggles to preserve the oral quality of the text not just by imitating Hasidic language (as can be found in a multitude of neo-Hasidic literature), but also in his commitment to the practical lives of the readers. Rodkinson, in his direct appeal to the reader, gives his own interpretation to the story and creates a pseudo-intimate space that recreates the oral event through the text. Thus, he also limits the understanding of the story within the system of spiritual and halakhic

¹⁶³ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 28.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

commitment as it is organized in the Hasidic community, which is why he emphasizes the “power of repentance” and the “merit of the tsadikim.” By emphasizing the rhetoric that bursts out from the mimetic language to the cultural discourse in the printed product, Rodkinson creates a unique Hasidic model of poetics that seeks to blur the boundaries between art and craft and between narrative and discourse.

E. Narrative Authority and Political Authority: Hasidic Agency in Modern Discourse

Hasidic poetics that have been presented here can be viewed, on the one hand, as a poetic of transparency that contains within itself the liberating qualities associated with criticism, but, on the other hand, as a poetics that reinforces and improves Hasidic propaganda in modern tools. In the introduction to the book it seems that Rodkinson is aware that the printed text does not create the same kind of religious ecstasy that occurs at the Hasidic *tisch*.¹⁶⁵ The result is that the reader is potentially free from the influence that the stories should have. However, instead of ignoring this breached space and repressing the spiritual gap that it entails, Rodkinson chooses to address it and in a roundabout way also asserts his authority over this breach. After he claims that the story teaches us about the power of repentance and it is as “plain as day,” he retracts this and adds, “If you are a man of soul, you will understand the significance of the events on your own.”¹⁶⁶ More can be learned from this story, says

¹⁶⁵ See discussion about the authors’ introductions and Rodkinson’s justifications for printing in unite C above.

¹⁶⁶ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 28.

Rodkinson, but the reader has to come to these conclusions without any guidance. From this statement it seems that Rodkinson is allowing the reader to have his own independent experience by limiting his authority and releasing the text from the intimate framework that had been created through the rhetoric. But, the power that comes from interfering with the text and speaking in his own voice, supposedly encouraging “independent thinking” that is “natural” to the hagiographical genre, seems to have the opposite effect. In fact, this keeps the reader within the Hasidic communal-religious system and emphasizes the political qualities of the text.

The Hasidic author uses his historical, discursive, and rhetorical voice within the mimetic text and thus shapes it as a platform for creating an intimate communal experience. Hasidic poetic destabilizes the aesthetic distance of the 19th-century literary model. Even though it adopted the technology of mass printing, this poetic has the audacity to preserve its communal structure, in which the story is a central practice that operates on spiritual and political levels. The voice of the actual author in the text appears in three forms that shape his authority: the first is the repeated statement that the stories are true and not fiction; the second is the detailed list of the transmission of the story and the illumination of the social mechanism that stands behind the stories; and the third is the transparent formation of the text as it is expressed in the substantive voice of the author, which disrupts the textuality/mimetic quality of the text and insists on orality. This tripartite voice opposes the idea that “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every source,”¹⁶⁷ and that textual unity is

¹⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 143.

possible only for the reader. For the Hasidic text, the reader is never “a man without history, without biography, without psychology”¹⁶⁸ which allows for endless versions of the text and possible meanings, but a concrete and political figure. In his voice, the Hasidic author marks the perimeter that preserves the dialogue within a concrete discursive framework. However, this perimeter does not immobilize the text as an expression of absolute truth but creates a continuum of experiences and human voices. The text is not an object that is severed from reality and then meets it again arbitrarily through an anonymous reader, but it is part of the social fabric in which it was created. The usefulness of the poetic craft unwaveringly ties it to the methods of production, which is the social system of transmitting stories and their interpretation. If that is the case, the presence of the authority of the author does limit the range of activity and meaning of the text, as Barthes claims, but as opposed to his conclusion in which presence blocks the voice and interpretation of the reader, the means of expression in the Hasidic text do not limit the reader nor his activity. Limiting the opportunities for dialogue does not mean freezing the text but rather presenting the political situation which forces the reader to take part in it. The reader is turned into a subject through the process of interpolation and is placed against his will into the Hasidic arrangement of wondrous stories. He becomes a new link in the “narrative chain.”

Hasidic poetics, which appears both as a mimesis of the physical reality but also as a living concrete action, is anchored in the complex presence of the actual author within the text. This vocal expression serves as a focal point that contains the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

multiple voices of the community members who have passed on the story from one to another, and allows for the continuation of the dynamics by drawing the reader into the same system. But what is the meaning of the concept of authority within the ambivalent system that moves between political reality and an enjoyable imitation? The Hasidic text, as it evolved in the 1860s, hovers between biography, which is focused on history, and fiction, which allows the expression of imagination. In her book *The Distinction of Fiction* Dorrit Cohn discussed the definitions that distinguish between fictitious and historical writings. Her discussion about the relation between the narrator and the real author and about the possibilities that this relation creates for expressing consciousness, focuses on the biographical (and autobiographical) genre. She claims that the use of the first-person in writing that presents itself as historical allows the reader to criticize it because it exposes the structure of the narrative, that is to say it presents the reasoning and choices of the writer – the act of constructing a narrative from historical events. This way the historical value of “truth” is presented as “purported truth” and enables readers the freedom to believe it or not. The range of freedom is influenced by changes in the textual emphasis on the voice of the narrator and the content.¹⁶⁹ The Hasidic text claims to tell “historical” stories while insisting on inserting the voice of the author’s persona into the text and therefore presents a “heterogenous textual surface.” In this textual structure the authority of the narrator is impaired by the intertwining of stories that are told by an omniscient narrator

¹⁶⁹ Dorrit Cohn. *The Distinction of Fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, 30. For an extended discussion about the distinguish between fiction and history see pages 19-30. See also Genette’s discussion on tension between the voices of the author and the narrator Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 212-262.

(historical or fiction) and the frame-stories that are told by a first-person account of the supposedly author. This narratological game between fiction and history in the Hasidic genre expresses a commitment to the real on the one hand, and the freedom to tell about it on the other. It asks both the author and the reader (the storyteller and listener) to be committed to actual history and to their personal objective life conditions while at the same time granting them the freedom to tell about reality and create meaning.

In another work Cohn explains that the deviation from narrative freedom is expressed by introducing different elements into the text (like history and behavior), which allows it to operate as avant-garde, but this function, she emphasizes, exists for a brief space of time since the narrative adopts the deviant mode and ultimately turns it into something natural that plays into the hands of the bourgeoisie:

In this way the narrational level plays an ambiguous role: contiguous with narrative situation (...), the narrational level opens out into the world where the narrative is consumed. Yet, at the same time, acting as a keystone to the preceding level, this level closes the narrative, constitutes it once and for all, like the speech act of language which anticipates and even carries its own metalanguage.¹⁷⁰

The process of transforming the “Hasidic avant-garde” into a conventional genre plays into the hands of Hasidic authors on two levels. First of all, it allows the Hasidic voice to enter the hegemonic discourse, which gives the community agency; in

¹⁷⁰ Dorrit Cohn. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 265-266.

addition, this process allows the Hasidic community to take part in forming modern Hebrew literature and thought by bringing in historical materials and poetic forms that lead to the development of alternative aesthetic paths – which can be seen in the growth of neo-Hasidic trends in Hebrew literature nearly two decades later.

The authoritative model that derives from Hasidic poetics presents a type of multiple authority that converges in the performative voice of the author. The dynamics between the text and the reader assumes that the reader is a real-live entity, like the text itself, in the economic and political market. The text is the product and the reader is the consumer. The purchasing power and production power of the individual in the Hasidic community is made present in the textual product through the religious-individual element and also through the political-societal element. The author's notes about the transmission of the stories among the members of the community places him within the communal tradition that breaks the exclusive power of the single author with a synthetic voice who presents the text as the ultimate expression of the community. The individual is only one part of the broad communal structure. But as one of the parts he also has the power to demand authority and to offer his interpretation when he positions himself in the role of storyteller.

The voice of the historical persona of the author in the mimetic text is a platform for the creation of communal intimacy and highlights its centrality. This substantive voice that appears beyond the pages of the booklets encourages a direct relationship between the text and the reader and a face-to-face relationship between real people who are drawn together in the economic market. The authority that is created in this system lessens the power of the author since it places him more as a

messenger than a creator and limits his creativity to stories that have already been approved by the community, that have passed the “community test” since they have been told and passed on orally. This split in authority emphasizes the power of the multitude but also the momentary power of the individual in deviating from the traditional chain of transmission by creating the text and presenting it as an old-new product to the wider community. On the one hand, the author is not considered to be an individual creator. His “halo,” if we want to use Benjamin’s term, is broken within the communal system, but on the other hand, his action – the creative and craft act that he implements – is what causes the communal gathering where the political and spiritual event takes place, and this is what shapes the community.

Hasidic poetics, both in its aesthetics and in its content, opposes the separation of the beautiful from the useful and the creative from the productive, and thus overrides the accepted mechanism of transition and formation of cultural materials between individuals and communities. In these stories the individual is always a part of the mechanism; he is not an abstract figure, separated from the stories he hears. This is expressed not only by the choice of printing popular pamphlets, the multiplicity of the language, and the rhetorical transparency, but because Hasidic praise literature never created an internal evaluation system for its books. Different stories were reprinted in other editions, collected and reworked in new booklets by new authors, and new stories were continuously written by contemporary members of the community. Aside from the centrality of *Shivhei HaBesht*, no other book was determined by a unified hegemonic system and defined as “more important” than others in Hasidic hagiography. Hasidic poetics created a system that did not allow for

canonization since its results were always in flux. The author was a part of the market and not an element floating above it, outside of it. It is true that members of different Hasidic streams preferred to read hagiography from their own dynasty, but there was no elimination of books with the claim that they were not relevant while keeping and preserving other texts as a kind of central cultural Hasidic arsenal. The religious significance of the texts and their anchoring in the popular system created a dynamic system that shifted and innovated from generation to generation. This non-concentrated model reverberated throughout the structure of the Hasidic movement, which had followed this framework already at its start, as Ada Rappaport-Albert says in her influential article “The Hasidic Movement After 1772: Structural Continuity and Change.”¹⁷¹ It illuminates the pluralistic principle that was essential to Hasidism and which allowed the multiplication of courts that still consciously belonged to the same movement.

The pluralistic redemption that Benjamin saw with the transition to a technology of mass reproduction is expressed in how Hasidism chose to shape the hagiographic genre. Nonetheless, for the same reasons that Adorno pointed out, this did not lead to the liberation of the masses but to the creation of a new mechanism of control. Hasidic poetics as formed by Rodkinson and Bodek in the 1860s in Galicia plays a double game and stands on the border between religious ecstasy and Jewish politics. The imagined reader of Hasidic hagiography is bound to its poetics and

¹⁷¹ Ada Rappaport-Albert, “HaTenu’ah HaHasidit Aḥarei Shenat 1772: Retsef Mivni u’Tmuraḥ,” *Zion* 1990, 183-245. On Hasidic pluralist leadership see also Mendel Piekarz. *Hahanhaga haHasidit: Samkhut ve-Emunat Tsadikim be-Aspaklariyat Sifruta shel HaHasidut* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1999), 52-54.

tethered to its rhetoric while giving religious meaning to the text and preserving himself within the communal organization. The pluralistic principle expressed in the structural organization of the movement and in its literary genre contains the seeds of redemption but these seeds do not sprout: just as the early pluralist organizational structure of Hasidism transformed into a strict system of dynasties that reduces the Hasid's power of free choice.¹⁷² Thus, in its literary manifestation, the individual, who should on principle be able to create his own stories, becomes a consumer whose thoughts are limited.

The ambivalence that results from the principles, organization, and literature of Hasidism allows the renewal in interest and attraction of many to Hasidism that can be seen in recent years on the one hand, and the religious rigidity and seclusion of Hasidic communities on the other hand. The alternative system that Hasidism offered the modern world is one in which free and deterministic elements passionately play alongside one another while also blurring each other. The current varied manifestations of Hasidic ideas in Jewish society today (from within and without) reflect the problem of attempting to understand Hasidism only through Western definitions of nationality, individuality, and aesthetics. Hasidic literature chose to respond to the desire for these definitions and to present an alternative. The hagiographic genre that appeared as the 19th-century Jewish community in Galicia was undergoing a renewal of political and social thought expresses the Hasidic

¹⁷² Ibid, 271; Gadi Sagiv, *HaShushalet: Beit Chernobyl u-Mekomo Ba-Hasidut* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2014), 11-18, 22-31.

literary response to the modern world in which it wanted to take part and to which it wanted to offer an alternate model for development.

Chapter 3: Hasidic Chronotope and the Praxis of Storytelling.

A. Introduction

The previous chapter suggested that the literary form of Hasidic hagiography carries the potential to emancipate the masses. It is designed as a popular genre, whose poetics inserts the historical and real into the mimetic realm by voicing the real author as he faces the reader through the text. By highlighting speech and rhetoric over allegorical mimesis, Hasidic hagiography expresses its understanding of literature as something that hovers between the beautiful and the useful. As a hybrid of beauty and utility, or in other words a hybrid of privilege and necessity, this genre allows for the transparency of its political function. The poetic mechanism of placing the factual and the fictional on the same level of representation grants the reader the power to participate in the political event of reinforcing (or resisting) the Hasidic social structure. Hasidic poetics recognizes the reader's individuality as it openly addresses him while attempting to "hail" and bring him into the community. This recognition, however, occurs only within the communal framework and under its supervision and control (through the approval of the rebbe or of Hasidim as they transmit the stories). The reader is thus defined as a subject of the imagined hasidic community and its social institution.

Despite this disciplinary poetic mechanism and the literature's limiting communal application, this chapter seeks to bring into the foreground the redeeming quality of speech and storytelling as they are described in the stories. Presented as daily practices that serve the comprehension process, speech and storytelling allow

individuals to free themselves from the determinism of history and time. The practical application of the act (praxis) of telling that interacts with the abstract and holy helps individuals overcome the epistemological crisis that overwhelmed the modern world and suggests a healing technique to man.

Emerging in modernity, Hasidism was influenced by and responded to modern philosophy as it adjusted its medieval and mystical kabbalistic roots to the spirit of time. Self-realization through speech, as this chapter shows, reflects the kabbalist myth of creation. Based on the biblical story of creation through speech (“and God said, “let there be light,” and there was light”)¹⁷³ Hasidism granted the human act of speech a Godly quality. The story about God realizing himself through speech serves as a model for connecting matter and spirit as well as allowing the meeting of two entities – God and humans. Vocal utterance and storytelling as described in Hasidic stories allow individuals to overcome the gap between mind and the corporal body as well as the loneliness of the romantic individual as he faces his overwhelming surroundings. This kabbalist-Hasidic approach shapes modern individualism as something that is not sealed off and detached from other worldly movements. The Hasidic individual is not only open to the world, but also depends on and is defined by inter-subjective reactions. Focusing on the Hasidic chronotope and the movement of individuals in time and space, this chapter highlights Hasidic representations and perceptions of individualism and community.

In order to understand the form of individualism that Hasidism offered as an alternative to other contemporary trends, we must first understand the place of

¹⁷³ Genesis, 1:3.

individualism in the developing modern world of nineteenth-century Europe. Modern thought offered the nineteenth century the notion of individualism as it aimed to deal with the epistemological crisis that challenged human comprehension and cognition. Aiming to make the individual distinct from the deterministic flow of time, Cartesianism viewed the human mind as whole and separate from the corporeal body and its deterministic materialism. It granted the individual the power to observe the world from the outside, relying on his logical mind to produce knowledge and shape philosophy. As a response to this perception of the mind, nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers searched for new ways to define man, his ability to comprehend his surroundings, and his ability to reconcile what seems like an insurmountable gap between mind and body, cognition and experience, self and the world.

Kantian thought of the eighteenth century deepened the Cartesian separation of man from his surrounding as it constructed the individual as an independently thinking creature who relies only on his senses and logic to produce knowledge and shape morality, laying the groundwork for relativism. According to Kant, one's movement in time and space and one's worldly experience are all forms of human sensibility. As opposed to Descartes, this new thought assumed that the noumenal world, as an object of its own, is inaccessible. Thus, the understanding of the world derives from one's personal-sensual experience and logic. This tension between the noumenal and phenomena led to a new movement that emphasized the experience of man, and put at the center his existential standing in the world rather than his logical analysis of it. While Kant defined reason as the essence of the human (*animal*

rationabile),¹⁷⁴ thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to emphasize man's existential condition and instead of reason and scientific truths they placed experience at the heart of their philosophy. Romantic trends added to the modern image of the intelligent individual an emotional depth and bodily sensuality and called for a more harmonic experience of life. Those trends emphasized the authenticity and singularity of the thinking man, and encouraged him to experience life at all levels of existence. All of these philosophical strands produced the concept of individualism which became the central principal of modern movements.

Thinkers of modern nationalism who accepted this new individualism sought to redefine the relationships between the individual and the nation. Influenced by Rousseau's celebration of independence and subjectivity of individuals, Hegel discussed the tension between one's free will, determinism, and the form of modern community, the state.¹⁷⁵ Although often defined as the opposite of collectivism and institutional structures, it has been shown that the relationship between the modern individual and the institutionalized society are more complex. The romantic individualist goal of exercising one's desires while opposing any external interference by society or institutions has failed the historical test. Although modern forms of social order such as the nation-state and capitalist economy support the self-

¹⁷⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology: From a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell (Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 1996), 238.

¹⁷⁵ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy And, the Social Contract*, trans. Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); G.W.F Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W Wood. Trans. H. B Nisbet (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On the relationships between Rousseau and Hegel's perceptions of the individual and his/her relation to the state see: Z.A. Pelczynski, "Political Community and Individual Freedom in Hegel's philosophy of state," in *The State and Civil Society: Studies in Hegel's Political Philosophy*, ed., Z.A. Pelczynski (Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 55-76.

realization of individuals, contemporary theories have shown that the relationship between the individual and these modern institutions is paradoxical. Individualism is achieved only within the framework of the nation-state that protects one's universal human rights, and can be executed only through the operations of the capitalist market and consumption.¹⁷⁶ Individualism is achieved within modern social order, not in a struggle against the institution. As a spiritual movement that emphasized individuality in the worship of God, Hasidism addresses the tension between individuals and institutions that arises with the aspiration for self-dependence and self-realization.

Placing the immanence of God at the center of its theology, Hasidism highlights the power of individuals to connect with God through mind and body equally and on many levels addresses the epistemological crisis that the enlightened world has tried to reconcile. The idea of immanency of God is carried to the extent that he is called *HaMakom* (The Place, The Omnipresent). Moreover, "*leit atar panui miney*" (no place is empty of him).¹⁷⁷ Individuals in Hasidic stories seem to merely serve as focal points through which Godly truth is exposed in its totality. According to Hasidism, it is the presence of God in the world that grants individuals their fullness and authenticity. This perception contradicts the notion of individualism constructed by modern philosophy that defined the individual as a self-dependent

¹⁷⁶ Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York: Collier Books 1969), 20; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 5; Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁷⁷ Aramaic. *Tikunei Zohar* 122:2.

subject. *How can we understand the tension between Godly totality and the Hasidic individual?*

Hasidic hagiography, as a nineteenth century product, expresses individualism as part of its mystical philosophy. The Kabbalist philosophy that constitutes the base of Hasidic philosophy contains humanistic qualities that were developed in Hasidism into existential ideas of the individual. “What has really become important,” explains Gershom Scholem, “is... the mysticism of the personal life.” In Hasidism, according to Acholem “almost all the Kabbalistic ideas are now placed in relation to values particular to the individual life, and those which are not remain empty and ineffective.”¹⁷⁸ These ideas, echo nineteenth century philosophy of the individual especially the ideas of deepening one’s emotions and experiencing them as was developed in Nietzschean thought which influenced Jewish nationalism greatly.¹⁷⁹ However, bearing religious and mystical concepts, it rejects the notion of an autonomous subject and problematizes it in light of God’s infinite power. Instead of a coherent entity Hasidic stories express the ambivalence of individualism. They shape

¹⁷⁸ Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (N. Y.: Schocken Books, 1995), 341. See also Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 147, 169, 209.

¹⁷⁹ Nietzsche perception of authenticity is expressed in his demand of the new man to live his life to the fullest. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche writes that the new man needs to continuously fight with himself and with the environment in order to find his truth. He should not be satisfied with what society dictates. He is always in a struggle of living his life to the fullest and this leads to an existential condition of loneliness. Man is singular, and thus lonely. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams. (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press. 2001); Walter Kaufmann, ed. *The Portable Nietzsche*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), 14–19.

Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* had a great impact on Hebrew writers who sought new categories for defining the New Jew. See: Glenda Abramson “The first of those who return”: Incarnations of the New Jew in modern Hebrew literature,” *The Journal of Israeli History* Vol. 30, No. 1, (March 2011), 45–63; Eric Zakim, *To Build and Be Built: Landscape, Literature, and the Construction of Zionist Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 35, 64, 78; David Ohana, “Zarathustra in Jerusalem: Nietzsche and the ‘New Hebrews.’” *Israel Affairs* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 38–60; Anita Shapira. *Yehudim Yeshanim Yehudim Hadashim*. (Tel Aviv: ‘Am ‘Oved, 1997), 155–174.

the individual as a being that on the one hand is essentially separated from the totality of God, but on the other hand as an entity that is imbedded in the absolute presence of God in the world. *In what ways do inter-subjective encounters contribute to the Hasidic understanding of individualism and existentialism?*

Analyzing Hasidic narratives, this chapter exposes the Hasidic answers to this ambiguity, while placing them alongside other trends in modern philosophy, considering mainly Kierkegaard, Buber, and Nietzsche. Kierkegaard's and Buber's philosophy allows us to draw the connection between modern philosophy and religion, and Nietzsche provides us with concepts for understanding the role of individualism in the shaping of modern community, especially in light of his great influence on modern Jewish nationalism and literature. We shall then ask what Hasidic hagiography adds to this discourse and why it was rejected by modern Jewish nationalism.

Responding to this modern and kabbalistic paradox the Hasidic protagonist redeems himself not by diving into his own mind, reflecting on his feelings, and comprehending his situation, but by turning outside to his surroundings using speech. I argue that Hasidic individualism as expressed in hagiographical stories is achieved through *inter-subjective relationships* and *praxis*. It is a result of or achieved by human interactions of projection and approval. In its unique paradoxical interpretation of modern individualism, Hasidic literature offered to the Jewish world of its time an alternative definition of modern man.

B. Speech and Hasidic Individuality

As was demonstrated in Chapter 2, mid-nineteenth century Hasidic authorship expresses the tension between the private and the public; the momentary and the infinite; or in other words the singular and the absolute. The voice of the author allows the singularity of the reading experience through his emphasis of the specific event of reading as a spiritual event, despite the popular format of the booklet and the transition to print and mass production. The infinite and total is emphasized in the religious and ritualist aspects of the book; its status; the content of the stories; and the content of the author's moral lessons. The stories stress that the recognition of God's totality is the only means for explaining and comprehending one's existence. The act of storytelling, as we have seen in the former chapter, expresses this tension since it requires authority that is granted by the approval of God and of the individuals in the audience.¹⁸⁰ Claiming authority, the storytellers of Hasidic booklets use Hebrew, the holy language of God. Through reading about the good deeds of holy people in Hebrew one (the reader) can redeem the sparks of the Godly light that are hidden in the world, while achieving wholeness and salvation. This tension within the structure of authority between the personal and the total is also reflected in the notion of individualism as expressed in Hasidic stories. However, focusing on the human act of storytelling as a powerful praxis that is executed in front of others, Hasidic stories carry a promise for a dynamic relationship between man and God – the individual

¹⁸⁰ See for example the description of the event of storytelling in the rebbe's court in *The Life of Shlomo Mymon*, where the rebbe knows each guest by his name and directs his sermon to each one of them. *Haiei Shelomo Maimon: Katuv Bidei 'Atsmo*, trans. I.L. Baruch (Tel Aviv: Masada, 1952/52), 144.

being and the totality of omnipotence – and offer new understandings of individualism and community.

Like Rodkinson, Menachem Mendel Bodek was one of a few Hasidim who took upon themselves the responsibility to voice Hasidism in the literary sphere. His first hagiographical work, *Sefer Ma'ase Tsadikim*, is consistent with Rodkinson's style of storytelling, but unique in the framing of his work. Maybe less courageously than Rodkinson, Bodek decided to publish the stories with an additional section at the end of the book containing wisdom sayings and moral parables, mainly by tsadikim. Bodek may have done so for different possible reasons. First, it strengthens his authority and attracts more readers, who may have reservations about buying a book of tales; religious morals better fit their perception of holy and Hebrew books than fiction. Second, the book follows a more well-known genre of Hebrew collections. Influenced by romantic trends and the contemporary growing attraction of the "authentic" people of a certain nation, usually urban scholars created collections of traditional sayings and folk tales that they had gathered while travelling in rural areas. In the Jewish world we can find, for example, several publications in Germany of collections in German containing excerpts from the Talmud, Jewish folk tales, and Jewish sayings.¹⁸¹ By following this trend, Bodek places his project among other, more prestigious literature that was accepted by Jewish intelligentsia. Third, Bodek may have compiled his collection to enrich or highlight the Hasidic emphasis on

¹⁸¹ Haim Liberman "Bedaia ve'emet bidvar batey hadfus hahasidi'im" in *Tsadik ve-'eda: hebetim historiyim ve-hevratyim be-heker ha-Hasidut* (Zaddik and Devotees: Historical and Sociological Aspects of Hasidism), ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2001), 186–209; Ze'ev Gries. *Sefer Sofer ve-Sipur be-Reshit ha-Hasidut*. (The Book in Early Hasidism – Genres, Authors, Scribes, Managing). Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1992), 38.

speech as a tool for creating reality. Hasidic storytelling as a performative and ecstatic event exceeds in the printed form the particular holy moment of communal storytelling in the rebbe's court to reach the daily life of more individuals. Framing the stories with this section of sayings, Bodek shows that stories and the use of words, whether in writing or orally, is a praxis that occurs beyond the realm of individual consciousness and should not end with the silence of reading. Like the comments of the persona of the author within the text, this section of sayings emphasizes the power of speech and highlights the contemporary urge to shape Jewish communal consciousness.

Speech is a performative and communicative element that is essential to the Hasidic communal structure and therefore is highlighted by Hasidic authors in their literary projects. This Hasidic emphasis undermines the common perception of reading as a private process of comprehension. Instead it suggests that reading is a version of interpersonal experience. The eruption of the communal into one's private sphere raise questions about the possibility and value of individualism. What is the role of speech in establishing a state of individualism? What does it add to our understanding of the way individuals move in space and their placement in the stream of time? How does this performative communication shape communal relationships?

In the Reb Ya'akov story we saw that the event of storytelling assisted both the storyteller and the listener in revealing something essential about their lives, about the essence of their existential experience. The story that Reb Ya'akov told the rich Italian which was based on his own experience, turned out to be the life-story of the listener, unknowingly confirming the completion of his repentance. This surprising

turn-around led to a reaction that revealed another dramatic layer of existence. The rich Italian, who just achieved his desired redemption, rewards the first storyteller with a story that is based on his personal experience, and that also offers a spiritual interpretation to the events that happened to Reb Ya'akov, the storyteller. This overwhelmingly intimate and intense encounter between the two Jews stresses the significance of storytelling as an act that enmeshes the connections between members of the same community and that helps each one of them to find meaning for their movement and placement in time and space. Echoing each other, they find their place not only within the community, but also within the spiritual world.

The story problematizes this mutual liberation by reminding us that both of their experiences were mediated by the Besht's vision and controlled by the totality of God. In light of this the Hasidic communal mechanism does not seem to assist them in freeing themselves from what Nietzsche describes as "rotten" norms and the sadness that comes from the "eternal recurrence" and emptiness of meaning. Within the frame of the story they never "overcome" all the things that "kills passion." Rather, the mutual storytelling echoes the powerful depressing mechanism of society that ties the individual with dogmatic social and religious practices and represses his passion to be courageous, to "live dangerously," and to "rise higher" instead of "flow[ing] out into a god."¹⁸²

Nietzsche argues that the passion for beauty and aesthetics is natural to man, and art and style are required to express one's natural self and existential condition. These tools, which have been repressed throughout history unless related to the

¹⁸² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 136–137.

divine, are necessary for man to overcome his limitations and become great. Only through style can one embrace his own nature and live his life to the fullest. “One thing is needful,” Nietzsche writes. “To “give style” to one’s character that is a great and rare art! He who surveys all that his nature presents in its strength and its weakness, and then fashions it into an ingenious plan, until everything appears artistic and rational, and even the weakness enchant the eye – exercises that admirable art”¹⁸³ Man should recognize his nature, give freedom to his strengths, and fight his weaknesses with everything he can. Man needs to fight an epic fight that will make him supreme and his character sublime. Putting man’s existential condition and experience at the center of art was common during the modernizing 19th century. Can the centrality of the story in Hasidism be seen as a reflection of Nietzschean thought?

Hasidic hagiography turns the experience of individuals into stories that function as both entertainment and a religious ritual. Yoav Elstein argues, that the Hasidic story is a transformation of the kabbalistic Godly story into narrative syntax. According to this, the Hasidic storytelling process is limited to the divine and does not allow the expression of the passionate nature of the individual.¹⁸⁴ Elstein explains that the innovation and uniqueness of the Hasidic story lies in its combination of three elements: preserving deep and ancient codes of human behavior, replacing the myth of world redemption with the idea of a private redemption that is expressed as an ecstatic experience of the individual, and allowing the interpretation of reality in light

¹⁸³ Ibid., 140.

¹⁸⁴ Yoav Elstein, *Ma’ase Hoshev: ‘iunim basipur hahasidi* (Ramat Gan: ‘Akad, 1983), 29–60. This chapter was published earlier as an article, see: Elstein, “Transformatsia shel ma’arakhot ‘iun letaḥbir sipuri.” *Da’at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 9 (1982): 25–38.

of the kabbalistic godly myth.¹⁸⁵ According to Elstein the core of the Hasidic narrative is the Godly system and its earthly manifestation. All stories and human happenings are merely a reflection of the divine. The human is always a form of the holy entity of God. The story-narrative, Elstein claim, is structured based on contemporary and local social and semantic norms, thus there is a close similarity of the Hasidic story to other Eastern European folktales.¹⁸⁶ The Godly is superior to the human, says Elstein. It is the divine totality that not only frames the human experience but dictates it to express its earthly presence. Elstein's approach does not leave room for the human to challenge the divine. The human merely contributes the materials for the earthly incarnation of God. Elstein's perception places the Godly at the center of the Hasidic story as it projects its absolute presence on its surroundings. According to this approach, it seems that the Hasidic story does not treat the modern human condition, but instead uses contemporary forms to reinforce the totality of God. It is a complete opposition to the Nietzschean idea of individualism that depends on the declaration that "God is dead."

C. Leaping Into the "Eternal Certainty of Forms"

In *Sefer Ma'ase Tsadikim* Bodek tells us about a young student of the tsadik Tzvi Hirsh Leib Landau from Olyka¹⁸⁷ (אליק) who goes through a similar experience of self-revelation as Reb Ya'akov's, but unintentionally and not as a storyteller. This

¹⁸⁵ Yoav Elstein, *HaEkstasa veHaSipur HaHasidi* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1998), 112.

¹⁸⁶ Elsten, *Ma'ase Hoshev*, 27–32.

¹⁸⁷ A Ukrainian town.

young student remains unnamed and is called generically “the student” or “the Hasid student” referring to his piety (חסידות) or his belonging to the Hasidic movement. The story introduces us to the student by providing three details about him: his social status (a student of the rebbe Hisch Leib); his economic status (very rich); and his spatial placement that expresses his location in relation to the other two aspects (his source of money and his teacher). “Among the Hasidim and the men of note who accompanied and were attached to the holy and saintly rabbi who is mentioned above was a young student, the son-in-law of a wealthy man from a distant city, about 150 miles from Olyka,”¹⁸⁸ we are told that the student’s in-laws (with whom he was probably living, as was customary at the time) were wealthy and live very far from the rebbe’s court, at a distance of about 150 miles from Olyka. These details, as we will learn later on in the story, are required to explain the development of the events. His economic status will reverse from a source of mental stability and physical comfort to one of worry and a sense of instability. The student’s location in space and his movement between home and the rebbe’s court will lead to the solution to his troubles.

The story begins on Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the Jewish year, which is traditionally a time for repentance. During Jewish holidays, especially the Days of Awe, Hasidim travel to their rebbe, asking for his spiritual guidance and hoping to be influenced and protected by his holy spirit. The protagonist of our story, a follower of the rebbe of Olyka, spent Rosh Hashanah at the rebbe’s court, and decides to return

¹⁸⁸ Menachem Mendel Bodek, “Sefer Ma’ase Tsadikim,” in *Sipurim Hasidiim: Hotzaah Bikortit ‘im Mavo, He’arot u’Maftehot* (Tel Aviv: Yaron Golan, 1990), 45.

home, to his in-laws and young wife when the story begins. However, at the liminal moment of departing from the Tsadik's court, his plans are derailed, and he finds himself stuck at a midway point for a few months. The dramatic events happen in the liminal space between two communal locations - the Hasidic court, and the family home. Those two spaces provide essential resources for the student's life – one is a source of spiritual fullness and the second is a source of economic stability. The drama begins due to the distance that stretches between the two locations and the uncertainty it creates. The solution that emerges from the liminal spatial experience highlights the tension between the two aspects that home and the tsadik's court represent in the student's life. The on-the-road solution allows the student's story to expand in both time and space as it goes beyond real-time to divine eternal time, thanks to the involvement of another person who is a member of the Hasidic/Jewish community in the student's story.

Beyond the logical reasons for the events and the delay in the student's journey, caused by a distress in his father-in-law's business and the need to find a job, the narrative encourages us to consider geography and economy as expressions of something deeper than a chronological reasoning of storyline. Geography is a significant element in Reb Ya'akov's story too – the distance from home, from the familiar sphere of Hasidism, turns him into a different man (explicitly by forgetting his past), and allows him to experience self-revelation and to attain a new meaning to his life. Likewise, economic concerns push Reb Ya'akov to stray from the planned course of his trip and travel to a foreign country (Italy), where the completion of self-fulfillment is achieved.

Similarly to Rodkinosn's work, Bodek's writing highlights the role of placement in space in establishing existential meaning. The setting of the story is not technical or generic and cannot be replaced with an abstract location (as in folk tales). Rather, it is specific to the life of the character both by being part of the historical reality, and by being replete with spiritual and social meaning. Space and time are concrete, expressing daily life routines and the real habits of Hasidim, and therefore fundamentally and directly connected to the characters' destiny. As discussed earlier, the story immediately provides information about the location and time of the events, "It was after Rosh HaShanah, when the Hasidim come to bid farewell to their Rebbe and to receive a blessing from him, that the student we mentioned before came along with this group."¹⁸⁹ This short statement place the protagonist within a specific social and historical context; it identifies the Hasidic habit of going to the rebbe's court during the holidays, highlights the intimate relationships of the Hasidic community, and demonstrates the importance of personal contact and face-to-face practice, by describing how Hasidim depart from their rebbe by receiving individual blessings from him.

In his famous work on the *Chronotope*, Mikhail Bakhtin analyzes early Christian hagiographies (as a form of ancient novels) in which space and time are rooted in the daily life and habits of the characters and the historical society. These "*crisis hagiographies*," as Bakhtin defines them, are stories about saints that do not portray the biographical life in its entirety, but instead focus on moments of crisis that

¹⁸⁹ Bodek, "Sefer Ma'ase Tsadikim," 45.

change the protagonist fundamentally.¹⁹⁰ In this type of novel space is concrete, described through daily-life routines and folklore, and time is episodic, constituted of a non-linear non-cohesive timeline with junctions and omissions that unite only in the level of mythology or theology.¹⁹¹ Bakhtin calls this novel “the adventure novel of everyday life,”¹⁹² as the chronotope builds a direct relationship between characters and their daily lives. The drama or adventure, that shapes the individual, develops and occurs within the real and the routine: “It is precisely the courses of the hero’s life in its critical moments that makes up the plot of the novel”.¹⁹³ Echoing the characteristics of Hasidic hagiographies, Bakhtin’s discussion places our analysis of Hasidic hagiography within religious traditions of storytelling. *How does the modern context, within which Hasidic hagiography developed, influence these traditions of representation and the religious chronotope? How do these spatial and temporal qualities of the dramatic event shape the experience of the individual? To what extent do Hasidic stories reflect theology in their portrayal of the modern Hasid?*

As Bakhtin argues, the chronotope of an *everyday life adventure* reveals some of the real essence of the protagonist for whom daily life is only one level of existence that he actually tries to liberate himself from in order to expose the mythical or theological level of his existence.¹⁹⁴ Discussing the early religious genre, Bakhtin

¹⁹⁰ Michael Bakhtin. “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in The Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, edited by Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 115

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 113, 146-152

¹⁹² Ibid., 111.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 121-122

analyzes *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius (2nd century) as its literary ancestor and identifies the drama of the novel as a process of “metamorphosis” of the protagonist. The theme of metamorphosis is an influence from ancient Greek folklore, but in the religious genre it developed into a more abstract idea of a deep and fundamental transformation of the hero. The course of one’s life is identified by Bakhtin in that context as an actual course of travel and wandering within the local folkloric sphere.

The wandering of our young student in Bodek’s story starts before we meet him. Leaving his home, the young protagonist enacts the Hasidic ritual of traveling to the rebbe, and starts his journey. However, eliding the moment of departure from home from the narrative suggests, based on Bakhtin’s theory, that this act is not a dramatic event and has nothing to do with the establishment or fulfillment of the student’s individuality; it is not part of his “metamorphosis.” Departing from his rebbe, however, is described in the text at length (relatively), implying that existential meaning is drawn only from the framework of Hasidism. In addition to being the first scene of the story, this moment constitutes the first dramatic event. Before leaving the rebbe’s court, Bodek tells us, the rebbe turns to the young student and supposedly gives him a blessing: “May the Omnipotent one prepare a place for you where you can be and may he find a livelihood for you.”¹⁹⁵ At first glance it seems like a common blessing for livelihood, but the student, who comes from a very wealthy family and has a stable social status starts to worry. He asks himself why the rebbe gave him such a blessing when he knows that the student is rich. With these concerns

¹⁹⁵ Bodek, “Sefer Ma’ase Tsadikim,” 46.

and questions the student starts his way back home. This is the first critical moment in the student's journey and in the course of his personal development.

This scene beautifully expresses the function of the social-religious-economic model that emerged in Hasidism around the practice of *pidyon* (redemption), as Haviva Pedaya shows. The ritual of redemption changed in structure and social meaning as it was transmitted from medieval Hasidism into the modern Hasidic movement. The annual (sometimes bi-annual) *Aliya Laregel* (pilgrimage) to the tsadik's court, where individuals either donated or received money based on their economic and spiritual status, formed new economic channels that contributed to the building of the Hasidic community.¹⁹⁶ Economic distress, which is the focus of the story's drama, link the spiritual status of the student with the economic structure of the Hasidic court and highlights the complicated system of Hasidism through the descriptions of ritual and human interaction. We will see later on how this complex mechanism structures the individual and establishes his existential condition. The personal or familial economy turns out to be, as Pedaya shows, a matter of the Hasidic collective as money is moved around according to the needs of the rebbe and the maintenance of his court.¹⁹⁷ The *pidyon*'s money is no longer separated from larger economic movements serving the individual private ritual of redemption, but a fragment of the Hasidic economy that enables the spiritual society to function.

¹⁹⁶ Haviva Pedaya. "Lehitpathuto shel hadegem hahevrat-dati-kalkali baHasidut: Hapidion, haHavura, veba'Alyia Laregel," *Dat Vekalkala: Yahasey Gomlin*, ed. Menahem Ben Sasson (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 1994/1995) 311-373.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 345-348

In his vague wording, the rebbe links the economic condition of the student's family and the student's spiritual experience in the Hasidic court. Instead of being clear regarding the family condition, the rebbe's encrypted message keeps the student tied to the Hasidic community as he attempts to decode the meaning behind his rebbe's words even after departing from him and leaving Olyka. Knowing his family's economic status to be good and stable, the rebbe's message confuses the student and opens the storyline of the journey to another layer of time. As we will learn later on, the family's condition has not changed at all throughout the student's period of travel. The rebbe's words about livelihood were meant to open the student's journey back home to other series of events. Instead of one clear route back home, the abstract words about his material condition exposes the student to the multilayered time of Hasidic existence and the openness of experience and meaning.

This moment of distress and vagueness stretches the space between Olyka and the student's home, while allowing for the unexpected in the course of traveling. In the same way, time is fractured by the insinuation that the student's livelihood might be at risk in the near future, implying the urgency of pro-action and the interplay of present and future. The hidden meaning and the rebbe's intention, however, constitute a source for the student's motivation and actions, as it suggests that time *is* united and the course of traveling *is already* planned – all that awaits is for the student to merely be exposed to the singular truth. Hovering between what seems to be known to his master but is hidden from him, the student's individuality can be fulfilled only within the limited space and deterministic flow of time that only seem open. Nevertheless, couldn't the determinism of time be shown to us without the rebbe's direct words to

the student? If time and space are closed and determined, and the drama exists merely in the interplay between what is hidden and what is seen without any room for honest adventure and openness of experience, then why does the narrator bother to describe this conversation between the rebbe and the student? Why insert the drama into the experience of the characters when it could exist on the level of the omniscient reader and achieve the same effect?

The words of the rebbe keep reverberating in the student's mind, and on the way home he decides to stop at an inn with his friends who try to cheer him by buying him a drink. As they sit down, eating and resting from their trip, they start speaking words of Torah and scholarship (דברי תורה). Our protagonist exceeds everyone with his wisdom and knowledge that is compellingly and pleasantly articulated. Hearing his words, the owner of the inn decides to ask him to stay and be his children's tutor. The young student recalls the rebbe's blessing and reasons that this is the opportunity that the rebbe was talking about; this is his opportunity to improve his seemingly poor economic condition. Nevertheless, he refuses the offer, and only after the inn owner pleads and urges him to take the job and promises to take care of all his needs, does the student agree to stay. To himself the student thinks "Surely our holy rabbi intended in his blessing that I be in this place, where they are encouraging me to say. I will stay with them until God, blessed be He, has mercy on me and will show me how the events should conclude."¹⁹⁸ Although it was the rebbe's words that evoked feelings of doubts in his heart, the student turns to God in asking for an explanation. In the student's eyes, the rebbe's message is not a

¹⁹⁸ Bodek, "Sefer Ma'ase Tsadikim," 46.

command and his intention is not some kind of a mystical truth that caused his residency in the inn but are a call to be sensitive to reality and careful about God's will.

The description of this long scene highlights the student's critical thinking. We first have a long description of the student's refusal to accept the job opportunity despite realizing that this might be his rebbe's plan for him. Alongside this description we are exposed to the student's inner doubts and thoughts. And in addition to this, the narrator chooses to shift from calling the protagonist *Hasid* (חסיד, a follower of Hasidism) or *avrech Hasid* (אברך חסיד, a Hasid student) to simply calling him *avrech* (אברך, a student), emphasizing the quality of independent thinking. The first few scenes of the short story depict a type of man who is unusual in his views and who does not follow the iconic and stereotypical figure of the "Hosid"¹⁹⁹ that was common in modern literature of Jewish enlightenment and particularly in the maskilic satire. The critical thinker-protagonist challenges the perceptions of the maskilic reader first by his high economic status and second by his wisdom and independence. Is Bodek responding here to the Enlightenment by trying to follow the outlines of the figure of a modern scholar? Although he was "among Hasidim" who came to the rebbe, he was not entirely one of them. Distinguishing him from the crowd Bodek describes him a "young student" from a rich family, who stands out in his wisdom from his group of friends. These qualities paint him as an individual

¹⁹⁹ "Hosid" reflects the Yiddish pronunciation of the word Hasid. I use it here to emphasize the Enlightenment's view on Hasidism as the "authentic" Jewish past. This pronunciation ascribes Yiddish to this "old" world and expresses the dismissing of Yiddish as a "low" language by maskilim. Most maskilim preferred Hebrew which was considered the classis language of the Jewish nation, and therefore the most appropriate for modern Jewish expressions. It is important to note, however, that some socialist maskilim embraced Yiddish as the language of the Jewish proletariat.

rather than a folkloric archetype. This individuality is what drives the story's progress.

The singularity of the student makes him essential to the development of the story, which is dependent on his behavior rather than on a miraculous event, and it allows for the emergence of another story. As time goes by, the innkeeper's intellectual appreciation of the student grows into a deep fondness as he listens to him teaching his sons with great dignity and enthusiasm "The innkeeper saw that the student was acting faithfully and he greatly loved the Hasid teacher."²⁰⁰ This moment in the story reflects not merely the development of the student and innkeeper's work relationships, but the growth of a deep existential connection between them to the point of mutual reliance. From the innkeeper's point of view the student is not merely a scholar who works for him, but a "*melamed Hasid*" (a Hasid teacher). This change in the student's appellation expresses two things: there is a change in his status – he is not a student anymore, but a *melamed* (teacher); and a change in his relationship with his surroundings – he is no longer an individual, but part of a community of *Hasidim*. The closeness that is established between the teacher and the innkeeper defines the protagonist as a Hasid, but in what way? Does the deep connection between them reflect Hasidic fraternity? Or does the Hasid's passionate teaching style reflect Hasidic ecstasy?

The innkeeper's fondness for his sons' teacher increases to the extent that he makes it a habit of standing behind the door and listening to the Hasid's voice while

²⁰⁰ Bodek, "Sefer Ma'ase Tsadikim," 46.

he teaches his sons. One day, the innkeeper hears through the door that the Hasid teaches his sons about the laws of inappropriate sexual relationships and adultery. Although these laws are not new to the innkeeper, the words of the Hasid touches him deeply and “his heart burned within him like fire.”²⁰¹ Passionately he bursts into the room. He asks his sons to leave him alone with their teacher and then, standing alone before the Hasid, he confesses all of his sins and asks for his advice on how to make amends and atone for his wrongdoings “The innkeeper said to the Hasid, “my beloved tsadik. I am the evil one of whom you taught. I have transgressed and sinned the forbidden sexual acts. I have slept with a woman during her menses, a maidservant, a non-Jewish woman, and a harlot. My sin is too great to bear. Oh what shall I do?”²⁰² This confession resonates in many ways with the Catholic ritual, especially the spatial separation between the sinner and the clergyman by the screen. However, as opposed to the Catholic tradition, the innkeeper opens the door and stands directly before the teacher, a move that expresses the search for a more personal aspect of the religious experience. In Jewish tradition, nevertheless, confession is a necessary stage in the process of repentance but is also very personal, usually performed when man confesses his sins to God. The innkeeper’s choice to address a person that he both appreciates and loves indicates his need for a supportive community and human contact.

Arresting his daily life by sequestering himself with the Hasid in a room, the innkeeper presents his life story to another person as a secluded representation of his

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

emotional state. This gesture is depicted as a completely isolated event – the closed room within which the gesture of confession takes place is described as an arc in the midst of frozen sea of snow “At this time it was the long and cold nights of Tevet, when the snow and the cold was very great, no one came or went.”²⁰³ Addressing the loneliness of the individual and the emptiness of modern life, Kierkegaard suggests that the gesture that the individual performs before the ultimate other – before the infinite and total, is the paradoxical solution to this modern existential crisis.²⁰⁴ The choice of an individual to act out of faith and to offer his life as a completed object to another is the ultimate gesture. It is the moment in which life pauses to present itself before the other. “The gesture” that Kierkegaard talks about, as Lukács explains beautifully, “is the leap by which the soul passes from one into the other, the leap by which it leaves the always relative facts of reality to reach the eternal certainty of forms.”²⁰⁵ It is the leap into eternity while holding a shred of the breath of life. As he attempts to separate his distress and elevate it as a form of his ultimate individuality, the innkeeper realizes that his confession is not radical enough.

The Hasid, who functions in that scene as an advisor, does not satisfy the innkeeper’s passion for the absolute and total. The fire of regret that fills his entire being requires the absolute devotion and totality of the moment. Not realizing this,

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, “Fear and Trembling,” *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie, 1–234. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1913), 121–129. It is paradoxical because it means absolute faith in the movement before the other without really knowing whether it is the right or wrong act. It is the brightness of seeing, while closing one’s eyes and accepting blindness; it is the elevation of life and existence while at the same time sealing them unto death.

²⁰⁵ György Lukács, *Soul and Form*, eds. John T Sanders, and Katie Terezakis. Trans Anna Bostock (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 45

the Hasid-student suggests that they will postpone the solution and wait until the winter is over to go to the rebbe of Olyka. But the innkeeper cannot wait any longer to be saved and wants to immediately fulfill his religious-spiritual-social duty. He urges the Hasid to go “right now, in the middle of the night, without pausing for a moment”²⁰⁶ and when he is rejected by his listener he decides to go outside alone in the snow and pray to God until he achieves a complete repentance. There, tragically, he finds his death.

The rejection of the Hasidic system, driven by the urgency of passion and regret, reflects the ultimate moment of individuality; the innkeeper’s feelings fill his entire being to the extent of sacrificing himself. Like Kierkegaard’s Abraham, the innkeeper is a tragic figure who fulfills his individuality by ignoring logic and leaping completely devoted out of time and into eternity. This individuality is achieved paradoxically by a “sudden metamorphosis of the entire being of man.”²⁰⁷ In the innkeeper’s story the idea of personal development unfolds “spasmodically” as a “line with ‘knots’ in it”²⁰⁸ as it reflects the dismissal of systematic understanding of time and existence.²⁰⁹ Instead his story embraces Kierkegaard’s view of individuality. The system is arbitrary and therefore, paradoxically, living to the fullest means

²⁰⁶ Bodek, “Sefer Ma’ase Tsadikim,” 46.

²⁰⁷ Lukács. *Soul and Form*, 48.

²⁰⁸ Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in The Novel,” 113.

²⁰⁹ Another example for the uniqueness of the temporal sequence of the Innkeeper’s story can be found in the unclear mentioning of a death of two children in the woods not very far from where the Innkeeper found his own death. The story doesn’t explain how this is related to our story, but merely mentions this another event that happened in a close proximity to where the innkeeper found his death. Only later on we learn about the connection.

leaping into eternity by sacrificing even one's own understanding;²¹⁰ embracing the ultimate otherness of God with blind faith and through that act realizing one's individuality.

But Bodek does not end his story with the tragic sacrifice of the innkeeper. The story is not about the ultimate believer and patience. Instead the story continues following the young student. After sketching individuality with an emphasis on the total separation of things, the arbitrary system of life, and the miraculous change in man's entire being, the story keeps unfolding as it tracks the consciousness of the protagonist to suggest what I believe to be another model of individuality.

D. Facing the Realized Other

In the previous section we showed that when the narrator describes the events through the innkeeper's perspective, he addresses the young student as a Hasid, and we have noted that this is a result of the deepening of their relationship. Here, however, at the almost-cathartic moment of confession, the innkeeper turns to the Hasid and calls him, "my love the tsadik". The passionate tone and wording are consistent with the growing fondness of the innkeeper for the student that we have pointed out, but why does he name him "tsadik"? The word tsadik seems to be functioning here on two levels; in its literal meaning it highlights the piety of the student, and in the context of Hasidism, it carries a social significance. By addressing him as a tsadik, the innkeeper grants the student a position of authority from which he can provide counsel and

²¹⁰ Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling," 107–112.

guidance for the process of repentance. Together, these two meanings of the word echo the social role of the Hasidic leader.

In the book *Likutey moharan (A Collection from our Teacher and Rebbe Nachman)*, Rabbi Natan explains, based on the teachings of Reb Nachman of Breslow, that each (Jewish) person can be his friend's tsadik.²¹¹ For Reb Nachman, tsadik is a mode of existence that highlights the fundamental and existential responsibility that men bear for each other. According to Reb Nachman, the ultimate tsadik is God. He is the one to whom should aspire to grow as close as they can, and his words are the ones that should guide us. But, since it is difficult to acknowledge God's presence in one's life every moment, and it is difficult to understand the meaning of the words that he speaks to us, man needs a mediator. Each individual needs someone who can talk to him intimately and help him reveal the truth about his own life and experience, while drawing nearer to the good or to the Godly light that is embedded in their life and in him as an individual. God or the tsadik serves as the "intimate other" through which one can comprehend his life.

Attracted by the social life of Hasidim and influenced by Hasidic thought, Martin Buber's philosophy in *I and Thou* develop this idea of intimate encounters as he addresses Nietzschean thought and the modern search for an authentic experience of the individual. Unlike Nietzsche, however, Buber's idea of authentic existence does not require that man overcome his given physical and social restrictions as he becomes magnificent in body and spirit (*Übermensch*) and full of passion for life.²¹²

²¹¹ Nachman of Breslov, in *Likuty Moharan* part I, written down and edited by Natan Sternhartz, teachings 20,21, 23.

²¹² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, aphorisms number 283 (137-138) and 285 (138-139).

Instead, Buber suggests that what allows one to live his life to the fullest is not turning away from life conditions to a larger vision of them, but rather looking deeper into one's surrounding and turning the object-subject relationship he maintains with them into what he calls a "I-thou relationship". As he argues in *I and Thou* one's essence is exposed or "come into being" through meetings with others. The individual fulfills his existence only when recognizing the other as "Thou" rather than "it." Viewing the world as an overflow field of the holy, encountering segments of reality and especially other human beings becomes an opportunity for touching the holy. Individuals then can take part in humanizing the world as they look deeper into the existential being of world objects. This state of mind turns existence into a holy arena in which individuals expose the living essence of things that might seem to be "dead" objects. The dialogical position replaces the instrumental relation to things and to others and allows the authentic existence and the realization of one's humanist being.²¹³

This standpoint derives from Buber's perception of existence as whole and harmonic, a net whose different units move together like a wave. It resonates with the Kabbalist-Hasidic view of the world as full of God's light that unites everything as sparks of it throb in the heart of all objects and grant them vitality. In turning the look towards the other into a passionate look that rejects the existence of things as instruments, the I is able go beyond merely studying and appreciating the qualities of

²¹³ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner Classics, 2000); David Barzilai, *Ha-Adam haDialogi: Terumato shel Martin Buber laFilosofia* (Jerusalem: Magnes The Hebrew University Press and Leo Back Institute, 2000), 156-170. More on the relationships of Buber's philosophy to that of Nietzsche, see in Barzilai, *Ha-Adam haDialogi*, 87-95.

the other; he can touch the essence of the other; the light that lies inside of him; the vitality and passion that drive his existence and make him unique. Experiencing relationships with the other at such a deep level of existence, the I realizes his humanity. Exposing his deepest struggles to the student in the intimacy of the tightly closed room, the innkeeper seeks to go beyond the normative “instrumental” relationships he has with the student and turn them into an “I-thou” relationships. The passionate teaching of the Torah to the innkeeper’s sons painted the character of the young student in a much more attractive way than the intellectual impression the innkeeper had of him at first. The enthusiastic scholarship touches a deep cord in the innkeeper’s heart and made him speak openly and confess.

The student who becomes a teacher, and who is not pushed to transform into a tsadik, a guide, and a close friend, rejects the innkeeper’s invitation and insists on keeping their relationship at the same instrumental level. Instead of responding to the innkeeper’s call for a deeper relationship and speaking freely, the student pushes back the human responsibility that was thrust upon him and shifts the innkeeper’s libido towards the authority he himself recognizes – the rebbe of Olyka. The student does not recognize his own singularity and does not understand the innkeeper’s need for an authentic response that will save him from his misery. Instead of fulfilling his human potential to communicate on a deeper authentic level and by that to expose the light embedded in reality, the student chooses to provide a functional systematic resolution by turning to the Hasidic system for help.

After the innkeeper’s honest confession and the young student’s refusal to take upon himself the role of a “tsadik,” he suggests that they go meet the holy rebbe

of Olyka, who will certainly know how to help him. But, as mentioned above, anxious to complete his penitence the innkeeper asks to go right away. The young student, who still fails to recognize the human drama that is occurring before his eyes, refuses again. Being practical he thinks “How shall I risk my life in this great cold to journey at night?”²¹⁴ At this point in the story, the young student goes back to simply being called an *avrekh* (student) and the narrative seems to take a pause from telling his story.

Highlighting the student’s failure to take on a more meaningful role, the narrator leaves the young student in the background and brings the story of the innkeeper’s penitence to the foreground. This change in the course of the story is characterized by an even more spasmodic line of narrative that includes some events that seem arbitrary and irrelevant. Driven by the extensiveness of his misery and despair, the innkeeper decides to redeem himself right away by going outside to the woods and praying until God forgives him. In a very compelling description the narrator tells us about the determination of the innkeeper, whose devotion to the process of penitence is so strong that despite the freezing cold he stays outside for hours attempting to make amends for his sins, and eventually cries himself to death. After telling us about this cathartic and tragic moment, the narrator adds a note that seems to be out of place. He tells us that at the same night two gentile children who went to the forest to gather some pieces of wood, died as a few branches collapsed and rolled over them right next to the innkeeper’s dead body. Without explaining the connection of their death to that of the innkeeper’s, the narrator brings to a close the

²¹⁴ Bodek, “Sefer Ma’ase Tsadikim,” 46

innkeeper's story. In the morning, we are told, the people of the town, who have noticed that the innkeeper is missing, start to search for him. But it is the young student who finds his body and the bodies of the two children who died next to him. Here, the short episode of the innkeeper's repentance concludes and the story goes back to focus on our protagonist.

Afraid of being accused of murder, the student, who from now on is called "the Hasid,"²¹⁵ runs away, not home as we would expect, but to "*his* holy rebbe, to the town of Olyka."²¹⁶ Instead of completing his journey, the student goes back to the place where the drama began, where he first started to be concerned, doubtful, and uncertain. He goes back to his rebbe's court hoping to find answers, and knowing that there, he will find shelter from his accusers. In the Olykaer's court, after telling his story to the rebbe, the latter provides him with a long explanation that ties together the innkeeper's sins and the two dead young gentiles, who apparently were the innkeeper's illegitimate sons. In addition to that, the rebbe suggest his interpretation of the student's role in the innkeeper's repentance.

The interesting part, though, is the language that is used in this section of the story to describe the young student and his relationship with the rebbe. Conveying their conversation, the narrator uses the longest name used to describe the student so far; he writes "and the holy rebbe told *his pupil, the Hasid student*,"²¹⁷ repeating the scholastic characteristic of the student once as a general noun and twice as a category

²¹⁵ He is sometimes called "the hasidic student", or "the hasidic teacher," names that demonstrate the changes in his instrumental position but that highlight the essence of Ḥasidut that is now constantly attributed to him.

²¹⁶ Bodek, "Sefer Ma'ase Tsadikim," 47. Stress is mine.

²¹⁷ Ibid. Stress is mine.

of belonging to emphasize that he is not merely a student anymore, but a student of the tsadik of Olyka's. Here, the protagonist 'officially' becomes the rebbe's follower and part of the community of Hasidim. When the rebbe addresses the student he talks to him with great fondness, calling him "son" and "my precious".²¹⁸

In his explanation of the events, the rebbe tells his student that during the time he spent at his court, he had noticed the student's innocence and honesty, and that he knew that a person who speaks straight from the bottom of his heart, without interest or pretense, is the only person whose words can penetrate into the heart of this sinner. Again, we can see here how relationships that are based on close observations of the other, on seeing the passion that lies inside one's personality establishes an I-thou relationship that the Hasidic experience emphasizes. As the narrative suggests, being a tsadik means functioning on a deeper level of existential observation and communication. It is a title for a person who observes the world by searching for the Godly light that is in everything, and especially that is embedded in people. The student failed to take on this role earlier for the innkeeper, as opposed to the Hasidic rebbe, who has this role for his followers.

Comprehending the world through human actions and experience, as presented through the character of the rebbe, suggests that meaning is produced only when mind and body come together; when what is seen touches the deepest instincts of the self. Contrary to Kant, Buber insists on the inseparability of man from the world. As a response to Kantian thought, Buber argues that comprehension and experience cannot be divided, that man is always in-the-world and his recognition is

²¹⁸ Ibid.

essentially part of his being-in-the-world, being in an intimate relation with what is outside him. While Kant emphasizes loneliness as a fundamental quality of man and explains that the world is constructed by one's consciousness alone, Buber argues that man is never lonely. Man is always *already* in-relationship, in confrontation with his surroundings and with other entities (whether it is another man, or the infinite presence of God).²¹⁹ The student discovers his singularity in his conversations with the rebbe. His instinctive and emotional escape to the rebbe's court placed him in an honest and authentic relationship with the person he appreciates. Unlike their first more instrumental encounter, here the student is facing the rebbe as *his* student.

The story implies that beyond the gesture of leaping into infinity with absolute faith, as Kierkegaard suggests, realizing one's individuality goes through the Buberian I-thou relationships. In other words, accessing the light of God and inserting one's singular experience into infinity requires the process of humanization. The student had to escape town alone and confused immediately, but his self-elevation of his individuality happened as he was facing another person. The student's revelation of his human quality and his special role in the enlightened stream of existence, are exposed only after he found a way to connect to another person; to communicate on a deep human level that engages both mind and emotions, that integrates intellectual curiosity and corporal instincts, that requires mental absorption of meaning and bodily travel in space.

²¹⁹ On the philosophical relationships between Kant and Buber see: Barzilai, *Ha-adam ha-dialogi*, 156-170.

E. The Praxis of Narration

Individuality, as suggested by the story so far, seems to require the movement of a person in both horizontal and vertical directions. It is realized by jumping into the deep and infinite stream of Godly light and its spiritual meaning that fills the world but can be comprehended and internalized by the individual only after an inter-subjective encounter. These two aspects of ecstatic spirituality and human intimacy characterizes Hasidism. However, the Hasidic narrative under discussion here does not exhaust the notion of individualism with these two aspects. A deeper look into the structure of the story exposes another layer that expresses a practical aspect in the Hasidic philosophy of individualism.

The framing of the story emphasizes two major Hasidic habits – the ritual of visiting the tsadik, and the act of storytelling. Stressing these two practical habits, the story insists on turning human encounters into practical opportunities for self-growth and realization. The story begins and ends with the Hasidic ritual of visiting the rebbe. The first visit takes place during Rosh Hashanah which is a known and common ritual, already part of the Hasidic system and expected of the rebbe's students. But the second visit is authentic and driven by the student's existential need. The story suggests that an occasional pilgrimage to the rebbe's court is a practice through which individuals learn about their own existential condition and recognize their singularity.

The rebbe's explanation connects all of the different events together and provides the student with closure, marking the end of the story. Reviewing the cryptic happenings of the past few months, the rebbe shows the parallels between the stories

of the innkeeper and the student. Both men go through a process of a deep change, a metamorphosis; one transforms from a sinner into the greatest penitent, compared by the rebbe to Rabbi Elazar ben Dordaya, the Talmudic archetype of a penitent,²²⁰ and the other turns from being a person who lives within himself, (in a state of I-it, in Buber's terms), to a person who lives in relation to someone, in a state of confrontation (I-Thou). In addition, the rebbe's interpretation of reality cohesively organizes the spasmodic and arbitrary development of the events. The explanation he offers connects the death of the two young gentiles and the death of the innkeeper on a spiritual level. The rebbe explains that the children who died were the innkeeper's illegal and impure children and that they had to die after he completed his repentance. In his interpretation, the rebbe exposes the mythical layer of reality that allows for the production of a narrative and meaning.

In his explanation, the rebbe organizes the experience of the student, who came to him confused. Listening to the odd happenings, he constructs a narrative and offers it to the student. The narrator's choice to end the story with the rebbe's explanation emphasizes the role of Hasidic habits. Practice is a mode of power and necessary for allowing an authentic existence. Unlike the student, the tsadik knows that when another person faces him, it is not enough to be sympathetic (as the student was when the innkeeper came to him), or to merely stand in a position of I-thou. Rather, one must act beyond this position, make something out of the encounter, insert the emotional, spiritual, or existential moment of I-thou into daily actual experience. It is not enough to wander in the world, intellectually recognizing the

²²⁰ Avoda Zara, 17a.

vitality that is embedded in the other. One needs to *make* a story out of these eye-opening transient meetings, to return the mind to reality, to *shape* reality, to form reality. One needs to actively recognize his actions as part of his authentic existence; he needs to turn it into a practice.

In the former chapter we saw a similar use of storytelling both as a practice of narrating *and* as a practice of intimate encounters. Reb Ya'akov used to perceive himself as a single authority when it came to telling a story, but never actually understood the meaning of his actions. Along his journey, he finds out that he and his daily routine are inherently part of someone else's story, and this revelation exposes to him his singularity.

For Buber the story is a form of necessary detachment. It results from an I-thou relationship but always in retrospect as a necessity that allows for human survival:

It is not possible to live in the bare present. Life would be quite consumed if precautions were not taken to subdue the present speedily and thoroughly. But it is possible to live in the bare past, indeed only in it may a life be organized. We only need to fill each moment with experiencing and using, and it ceases to burn. And in all the seriousness of truth, hear this: without It man cannot live. But he who lives with It alone is not a man.²²¹

As Buber sees it, the story is part of the I-it relationship. It is always outside of the existential authentic experience. The experience depicted in a story is told from a

²²¹ Buber, *I and Thou*, 44.

distance and despite telling us about the vitality of things, it extinguishes them. A story is an organized and closed product that allows us to learn and analyze things that we can add to our arsenal of experiences.

It is clear that from this point of view Buber and other neo-Hasidic scholars found the contribution of Hasidic stories to modern Jewish literature to be merely ethnographic. Buber extracted from the stories the spiritual and human values he found in them, but he never saw them as a binding practice. In his collection of Hasidic tales, Buber edited the stories and shaped them according to his understanding of literary aesthetics so it would be more attractive to the modern reader. Buber believed that Hasidic narratives are aesthetically backward and thus irrelevant to the modern reader as they are.²²² Instead he shaped them as a closed “authentic” picture of the Jewish past that can serve the modern Jewish imagination. In a letter to George Lukács from 1911, Buber apologetically admits that he modified the stories, so they are not “authentic,” and merely kept the “innermost motifs.” Believing that “the broad historical tradition of Hasidism ... is dead – gone,” and that “its renewal can come only from the very narrow confines of the human brain,” Buber overlooked the potential of storytelling, (and of ritualist non-spontaneous meeting), as a redeeming *praxis*.²²³

Differently from Buber, I argue that Hasidic stories suggest that vitality and individuality are accessible and fulfilled (respectively) only through the praxis of

²²² Ran HaCohen, “The Hay Wagon Moves to the West: On Martin Buber’s Adaptation of Hassidic Legends” *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 28, Number 1, (February 2008): 1-13.

²²³ Judit Marcus and Zoltán Tar Eds. *George Lukács: Selected Correspondences 1902 – 1920. Dialogues with Weber, Simmel, Buber, Mannheim, and Others* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 176-177.

narrating; turning experience into a product that is voiced before the other. It is the words, and the narration itself, that contain the essence of man. Reb Ya'akov did not reveal or comprehend his own essence, and he did not realize he was standing in an I-Thou relationship until it was framed in the bishop's story. Likewise, the young student learned about the quality of his existence only after hearing the rebbe of Olyka's explanation. The individual who recognizes the theological unity of time and place can bring arbitrary world events together in the narrative only when he also recognizes the power of his own individuality. Narrating is the singular act of pouring the infinite into one moment that is held by the gaze of the other. It is a praxis that approves and redeems individuals from the arbitrary chaotic world.

F. Narrating the Utterance of Individuality

This idea of wording as a redeeming praxis is emphasized and radicalized in another story by Rodkinson from *'Adat Tsadikim*. The story, told by “the genius pious divine rabbi Yisrael Dov of Velidnyky (...) on the seventh day of Passover every year throughout his life,”²²⁴ tells about the Besht's time in Constantinople when he wanted to go to Erets Yisrael (The Land of Israel). Telling it every year on Passover, the rebbe aims to inspire his listeners or even restore the spiritual experience of the Besht, since his attempt to arrive in Erets Yisrael took place during that time of the year.

Opening with the extraordinary *seder* the Besht had in Constantinople during Passover, the story frames this journey with the Jewish command of telling. The main

²²⁴ Michael Levi Rodkinson (Frumkin), *'Adat Tzaddikim*. (Lemberg, 1864), 10.

law of Passover is to tell the national story of exodus to the next generation. “And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.”²²⁵ Every man should tell that story while seeing himself as an actual part of this national story: “In each and every generation a person *must* view himself as though he personally left Egypt.”²²⁶ This setting of the story, regardless of its historical roots, emphasizes the role of storytelling in man’s life. One should see his life as part of a larger story – be it a national or a mythical one – that has to be uttered before another person. *To what extent does language or the oral confrontation of a people redeem the individual from living as an object among objects? Does the setting of the story – a journey to the land of Israel during the time of Passover – point to an ideological nationalist intention by the author?*

In the most extraordinary scene of the story, a very radical conception of language and its redemptive quality is exposed. Right after the first days of Passover, the Besht and Rabbi Tsvi Sofer look for a way to get to the Holy Land. Rabbi Tsvi Sofer finds different excuses not to go (such as there is no ship with fellow Jewish passengers), but eventually the Besht forces him to go with him on that trip and they get on a ship. On the way the weather becomes extremely stormy, the ship gets lost, and eventually arrives at an unknown island. The Besht and Rabbi Tsvi Sofer get off the ship to explore the island, but lose their way. A group of robbers “whose language they didn’t understand,” captures them and sentences them to death. Feeling hopeless, Rabbi Tsvi Sofer turns to the Besht and urges him to do something magical that will

²²⁵ Shemot, 13:8.

²²⁶ Pesachim, 116b.

save them, but the Besht answers, “I do not know anything at this moment, all of my power has been taken away from me”.²²⁷ The line of the narrative encloses them as they first lose their orientation at sea, then on the island, and finally in their minds. This perplexity is the low point from which, as Tsvi Sofer sees it, only a miracle performed by the Besht can extricate them.

Debased by his extreme disorientation, the Besht loses his unique and magnificent powers, and instead of being the hero, the position he has occupied in the narrative so far, he turns to Tsvi Sofer for help. “Maybe you” he says to him, “remember something that I have taught you and you can remind me.”²²⁸ It is the Sofer indeed who eventually turns out to be the hero of this absurd situation. By remembering the fundamentalists of his profession, the Sofer manages to initiate the escape. Rabbi Tsvi Sofer was the Besht’s personal scribe (*sofer* in Hebrew).²²⁹ He was very close to the Besht and his job was to document and write down everything that the Besht needs (according to Hasidic tradition he wrote two of the Besht’s Torah scrolls, the *shema* scrolls of the *tefilin*, and other ritual articles).²³⁰ In response to the Besht, the *sofer* answers that he only remembers the alphabet. Despite the *sofer*’s doubts, the Besht holds on to that fragment of knowledge and urges him to start reciting the letters.

²²⁷ Rodkinson, *‘Adat Tsadikim*, 12.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Rabbi Tsvi Sofer occupied the role of being the Besht’s scribe after Rabbi Alexander Shohet, who was the father-in-law of Rabbi Dov Be’er Shohet from Linitz who wrote *Shivhey HaBesht*.

²³⁰ Yehoshua Tabersky, *Behatsar HaTsadik: Sipurei Ma’ase* (Tel Aviv: Zion, 1978/79), 136–138.

As the *sofer* recites the letters, the Besht immediately repeats after him “Loudly and with great enthusiasm as was his custom with holy matters”²³¹ Surprisingly this odd ritual brings the Besht’s strength back and he manages to tear almost all the ropes that were tying them up. Eventually they are saved by the crew of another ship that arrives at the shore and scares away the bandits. The other ship takes them back to Istanbul right on the last day of Passover. Then, the story tells us, the Besht understood that his trip to the Holy Land was not desired by God and he returns home.

The degradation of the Besht and the *sofer*’s identities is extreme and affects their best qualities: the Besht loses his ability to create wonders, and the *sofer* loses all he had learned from the Besht. It is only through the rudiments of the *sofer*’s profession – the letters of the alphabet – that they manage to save themselves. The mutual and deep relationship of the two is realized by their words, which awaken their consciousness, illuminating both of their vital uniqueness. As mentioned earlier, Hasidic philosophy, based on kabbalist ideas, suggests that the world was created by the words of God and is maintained by his words every single moment. This belief developed into the perception of language as a powerful tool that can affect the real world.²³² Furthermore, God himself was realized through words, by addressing someone. The creation of the world and of God himself was allowed by the emergence of space, time, and the other voice.

²³¹ Rodkinson, *‘Adat Tsadikim*, 12.

²³² See chapter 2.

God facing humanity constitutes the dialogical nature of the world, which Buber and Kierkegaard emphasized in their philosophy. Responding to the secular philosophy of Kant and Hegel, Kierkegaard emphasized the intimate relationships of man with his creator as a source for his vitality and as the means for escaping his restricting life conditions and fulfilling his individuality. Truth, according to Kierkegaard, lies not in the crowd, but in the individual who can separate himself from the false crowd by hearing and replying to God's intimate call to him.²³³ Influenced by Kierkegaard, Buber follows this line of thought, but only to a certain extent. By defining God as the ultimate "Thou", Buber allows for the translation of these relationships into human terms.²³⁴ Hasidic narrative, as we have seen so far, follows these ideas that emphasize the role of God as the source of the vitality of the world, and the significance of facing the other in fulfilling one's individuality.

These metaphysical and mystic ideas resonate with Lacanian psychoanalysis that assumes the establishment of the self (in the Symbolic stage) through linguistic orders of the world. Linguistic utterances express the fundamental and inevitable connection of the self to the other. The confrontation with the other through language is the process that redeems the self from the chaotic stage of the Real and allows him

²³³ Søren Kierkegaard, "That Individual," in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed., Walter Kaufmann (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1965) 92–99.

²³⁴ This move from vertical relationships to horizontal relationships is similar in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, especially in *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority). Unlike Buber, however, Levinas emphasizes the infinite separation between the Self and the Other, as his goal suggests an ethical philosophy after the failure of modernism, while Buber's goal was to understand individualism as an essential element for the modern reconstruction of society, especially a national society.

to form himself as an individual, an I.²³⁵ Buber and Kierkegaard talk about a process of recognition and self-contemplation that happens when facing the other, but Hasidic stories add the power of speech in allowing for the authentic existential experience of the individual. They emphasize the creation of a “symbolic” system, as we saw in Reb Ya’akov’s story, with the student of Olyka’s story, and in the story of the Besht in Constantinople. In all of these stories, the moment at which individuals acknowledged and fulfilled their authentic individuality included an utterance before the other. Framing one’s life-event before the other, as we saw in both Reb Ya’akov and the student’s case, demonstrates the perception of literature as emerging from real life. In a similar way, the *sofer’s* role as the Besht’s scribe highlights this point as well. Restoring their identities from a very disorienting situation requires the order of language as it is uttered and echoes between two individuals.

G. The Hasidic Chronotope: A Folkloric Adventure of Inter-Subjective Individuals

Discussing the idea of “folkloric realism,” Bakhtin explains how the “adventure novel of everyday life,” the chronotope that characterizes crisis hagiographies, shows that man becomes great and fulfilled only within the realistic present of the folklore:

The spatial and temporal growth of man, calibrated in forms of here-and-now (material reality) (...) is a direct and straight-forward growth of a man in his own right and in the real world of the here-and-now (...)

²³⁵ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as a Formative of the Function of the I,” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Tavistock, 1977), 1–9; Jacques Lacan, “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2002), 10–31.

Therefore the fantastic in folklore is a *realistic* fantastic: in no way does it exceed the limits of the real, here-and-now material world, and it does not stitch together rents in that world with anything that is idealistic or other-worldly; it works with the ordinary expanses of time in great breadth and depth. Such a fantastic relies on the real-life possibilities of human development – possibilities not in the sense of program for immediate practical action, but in the sense of the need and possibilities of man, those eternal demands of human nature that will not be denied.²³⁶

Man, according to realistic folklore, achieves completion within folkloric possibilities – the routine, habits, occupation, community, and comradeship of other people.

As a modern development of the hagiographic genre, Hasidic stories also depict the magnificent within everyday life and the folklore – the student realizes his singular power not when he is at the mid-way point between home and the Hasidic court, but when he encounters his rebbe face-to-face; when performing a Hasidic routine in a familiar space and before his Hasidic comrade, a tsadik. Reb Ya'akov realized his qualities while doing his job and only after the Italian nobleman turned out to be a familiar face. The Besht and the *sofer* restored their identities by echoing each other and by drawing power from the *sofer's* occupation. The drama of the individual in Hasidic stories is attached to the performance of professional practices or religious rituals that also involve narration. The meaning of verbal utterances that intend to affect reality can be viewed through these stories in two ways. One, as a

²³⁶ Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. 150-151.

daily practice for realizing the Hasidic form of individualism, and two, as a measure for reinforcing Hasidic religious ideology and for community building.

First, storytelling for Hasidim is a significant daily-life practice for spiritual metamorphosis and the self-fulfillment of individuals. Based on the Sofer's case, we may even extend this category to include all types of speech that narrate reality and frame real events for people. We define speech as a practice that makes a real other present as it treats real-life materials by putting them in order and giving them a structure.²³⁷ In Reb Ya'akov's story, storytelling is a profession. A solution for his economic situation, storytelling becomes the daily practice that defines his "possibilities". In the young student's story, the narration of the events as an explanation by the rebbe is a marker of a new set of practices, a new form of daily communication that he acquires as a follower of the rebbe. In the Besht and the Sofer's story it is both a profession and the basis of a daily channel of communication (and mutual resonance).

Reb Nachman discusses the power of speech as a tool for redemption since it is fundamentally directed towards the other. In *Likutey Moharan* he analyzes a situation in which man experiences an extreme condition of loss of meaning and loneliness.²³⁸ This man who has no faith, explains Reb Nachman, has a question to which he has no answer. But due to his existential position of doubt and disorientation, he does not even know what to say or ask. For Reb Nachman this is

²³⁷ In this regard we may want to consider Maurice Blanchot in *L'Entretien infini, I* (The Infinite Conversation), where he discusses the infinity of conversation, of speech that keeps on going even when we are silent. For Blanchot, however, there is clear distinction between speech and the real existence of things. This distinction enables the continuum of the conversation.

²³⁸ Nachman, *Likutei Moharan*, Part II (*tenina*) teaching 12.

the rock-bottom of existence – being lost and alone. At this point, Reb Nachman suggests that the only thing that can save this individual is a call, a shout, that emerges from the heart of his desperate situation. This call, he emphasizes, is not a statement and not even a full question, but merely one word “אייה?” (“Where?”). This desperate minimalistic call, that only emphasizes his spatial and spiritual disorientation, is the only thing that can redeem him. Despite expressing one’s disorientation and lack of understanding of where he is and what or whom he is looking for (he does not ask “where are you, God?” but merely “where?”), this call is delivered to space, presuming there is another entity out there. By uttering words, even one minimalistic word, the individual carries himself out from the loneliness of his internal despair. With the ability to address something or someone, the individual redeems himself from hovering chaotically in an empty vacuum. The words that are said out loud presume otherness and make it present. They leave a mark on the emptiness of space, a mark that inherently allows for orientation, meaning, and communication and inherently validates the individual. Hasidic stories reject the Kantian process of recognition or comprehension as something that happens within one’s mind. Rather, they insist on the fundamental connection between the material and corporal experience and a spiritual comprehension. It is the actual daily practice that allows for the full recognition of existence.

Another way to explain the strong emphasis Hasidic stories put on practice, ritual and speech is through ideology. As I suggested in Chapter Two, Hasidism responded not merely to the philosophical Zeitgeist, but recognized the political scene of the Jewish world. We may argue then, that Hasidic narratives aimed to establish

storytelling as a communal practice for reconstructing Hasidism as a modern legitimate community. By shared practices, especially those that tighten the connection between members, Hasidic storytelling serves as a vehicle for establishing communal consciousness.²³⁹ As Louis Althusser claims ideology is “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,”²⁴⁰ and thus constitutes an essential part in the state apparatus and superstructure. As such, Hasidic literature may be viewed as a tool for merely reinforcing the Hasidic social structure in which the tsadik holds power over his followers.²⁴¹ Looking at the political arena of Galician Jewry in the 1860s, the time in which Hasidic narratives emerged as a printed popular genre and the decade in which our stories were printed, we may consider complicating this argument about the politics of the text beyond the Hasidic realm.

The development of the Habsburg Empire throughout the nineteenth century as multi-national, raised in the Jewish world questions of identity that were perceived mainly through ethnic and religious lenses. Preceding state-seeking Zionist nationalism, the national tendencies of Eastern European Jews, and particularly Galician Jews of the mid-nineteenth century, were varied and touched on a broad scope of national expressions and goals.²⁴² Modern Jewish national consciousness

²³⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37–46; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁴⁰ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus: Notes towards an Investigation,” in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 109–115.

²⁴¹ See Hannan Hever, “The Politics of Form of the Hasidic Tale,” *Dibur 2* (Spring 2016): 57–73.

²⁴² Joshua Shanes discusses what he calls “Diaspora nationalism,” the various breadth of political opportunities, threads and tendencies of Galician Jewry. See: Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For

that had been developed over the nineteenth century, however, was still very much attached to the older religious and ethnic perceptions of nationality. As such, the process of constructing and responding to modern trends challenged traditional forms of power structures and control such as rabbinical authority and the *Kahal* (Jewish community council). These changes opened the possibility not merely of forming new institutions, parties, and organizations, but also new identities. Individuals now had the opportunity to rethink their communal belonging and reshape their self-definition.

Hasidism became more structured, institutionalized, and fixed towards the end of the century as opposed to its radical and even revolutionary qualities in the early years of the movement.²⁴³ By the mid-century print-capitalism and mechanical reproduction gave birth to mass culture, and eventually contributed to the fixation of the movement. But the drastic growth in reproduction of Hasidic tales also implies that around the 1860s individuals' self-definition was relatively flexible. The struggle over cultural and communal belonging was active and the borders between different streams of Jewish groups was blurred.²⁴⁴

example, the struggle over Jewish culture touched the political question of whether Jews should support Austrian/German culture or Polish culture. A question that beyond its legal ramifications touched on the intra-Jewish struggle over the shaping of modern Jewish identity and its national characteristics. See: N.M. Gelber, ed., *Entsiklopedia shel Galuio: Lvov* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Encyclopedia of the Diaspora, 1956), 292-293; Rachel manikin "'Dietchen,' 'Polanim,' o 'Austrim'?: Dilemat Ha-Zehut shel Yehudei Galicia (1848-1851)," *Zion* 68, (2002/2003): 223-262.

²⁴³ See Ada Rapoport-Albrt "Hasidism after 1772: Structural Continuity and Change," in *Hasidism Reappraised*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1996), 76–140.

²⁴⁴ David Assaf explains that in the mid-nineteenth century (1815–1881) the structure of the Hasidic movement has changed. It became the mass movement that dominated Eastern European Jewish life on the one hand but has split into many different "courts" (or sects) on the other hand. Along these changes there was a movement of individuals between different streams of Hasidism as well as loos boundaries between Hasidim and Mitnagdim (Orthodox who were opponent of Hasidism) which allowed cultural exchange. See David Assaf, "Hebetim Historiim v'Hevratim b'Heker HaHasidut," in *Tsadik ve-'Eda: Hebetim Historiyim ve-Hevratiyim be-Heker ha-Hasidut* (Zaddik and Devotees: Historical and Sociological Aspects of Hasidism), ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2001), 17-19. See also discussion about the diversity of the different streams of

Hasidim participated in the lively cultural and political arenas of 1860s Galicia, but not as a coherent group or groups and not by taking active part in organized movements, but as individuals. Although the major Jewish active political groups in Galicia, and especially in Lemberg, were religious, Hasidim did not join either of them as official members.²⁴⁵ The liberal organization *Shomer Yisrael* was established in 1868 and never included Hasidic members, and the Orthodox organization *Mahzikei Ha-dat* that was established a decade later as a counter reaction to the liberals, was indeed supported by Hasidim (especially Belz Hasidism), but only externally and not in formal terms. Only decades later Hasidim officially joined Orthodoxy and were included on *Mahzikei Ha-dat* members' lists.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, during the mid-century Hasidim were likely aware of the changes surrounding them and inevitably were an integral part of them, not as a one-dimensional group and not even as part of a specific court, but as individuals with political consciousness. For example, in his memoir Shimon Bernfeld recalls L'viv of his childhood and provides us with a description of Hasidim who went to Shomer Yisrael's library to look at books and read the newspaper out of curiosity and social engagement.²⁴⁷ The Jewish

Hasidism, their customs, and their definition and boundaries flexibilities in David Assaf, David Biale, et al eds., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 362.

²⁴⁵ In the first half of the 19th century maskilim fought against Hasidism also through political channels See: Rachel Manekin, "Galician Haskala and the Discourse of *Schwarmerei*". *Secularism in Question: Jews and Judaism in Modern Times*, eds. Ari Joskowitz and Ethan B. Katz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Rachel Manekin, "Hasidism and the Habsburg Empire 1788-1867," *Jewish History* 27 (2013): 271.

²⁴⁶ Assaf, Bial et al., *Hasidism: A New History*, 519–520; Rachel Manekin, *Yehudei Galicia v'HaHuka HaAustri: Raishitah shel Politika Yehudit Modernit* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2015), 126–128.

²⁴⁷ Shimon Bernfeld, "Zikhronot," *Reshumot: Measef leDivrei Zikhronot, leAntropologia uleFolklor* Vol. 4, eds. A. Druyanow, Y. H. Rawnitzki, and H. N. Bialk (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1925), 187.

discourse of the mid-nineteenth century was an open arena within which individuals recognized their modern spiritual, cultural, and political options.

This openness and haziness of the Jewish political sphere allows us to view the stories as part of a broad process that goes beyond the reinforcement of the power of the tsadik. The Hasidic emphasis on the dialogical narration of real-life events is not merely an ideological mechanism that intended to organize Hasidim as subjects under the magical powers of the tsadik, but might be understood as an answer for individualistic questions of belonging and destiny. We can view this emphasis on the power of speech as an expression of the communal attempt to keep individuals connected to each other as they search for their singularity. It is offered as a way to preserve one's authenticity within a familiar and safe community and through the communal spiritual kabbalist ethos. It grants individuals power not as subjects of a nation or of a closed Hasidic court, but as humans under God.

H. The Inversion of Time and the Meaning-Inserting Praxis of Narrating

Dialogic narration is a practical mechanism that allows individuals to reveal and shape the meaning of their individuality through communal mythology. The different fragments of real-life events and the arbitrary spasmodic timeline come together in the Godly time that Hasidism embraces as its communal framework. Mythology penetrates man's daily life as it reverses his experience of time. "The historical inversion of the folkloric chronotope," Bakhtin explains, "happens as mythological time locates such categories as perfection and purpose in the past rather than in the

future.”²⁴⁸ For example, the notion of a lost Paradise, and, in our case, the infinite Godly presence that is broken or hidden in the present. The combination of mythical time and concrete and historical folkloric space that we find in this type of chronotope, and in the Hasidic story as well, presents eternal qualities as “something simultaneous with a given moment in the present.”²⁴⁹ And thus, past and the present become full at the expense of the future. The energy of things and of man lies in and is revealed through realistic aspects of the folkloric story. The essence of man never lies in the future as something one always aspires to reach but never does (as it is always in the distance). Rather, realizing one’s authentic essence is invariably possible as it is rooted in the mythical *and* the concrete-historical past. Meaning is accreted to the present from what one has had in the past and from the eternal that underlies everything. Meaning is created from what has always already-been, and is reified in the materiality of the present.

The process of narrating is significant to the individual comprehension of things and the self in modern world. Hasidic stories reject the possibility of knowing or recognizing the meaning of things as they appear or happen. Meaning is achieved through the practice of retrospective narration. It is not transparent and immediate as it might have been in ancient times. In the industrial capitalist world, explains Lukács, direct transparency does not exist. Human alienation and the gap between man and real matter, worker and product causes existential alienation. This gap can be blurred, however, by the ideality of the epoch that paints the stream of life naturally and

²⁴⁸ Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in The Novel,” 146-151.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 148.

coherently. The storytelling of the epoch, according to Lukács, reinforces capitalist social structure and creates false consciousness. The bourgeoisie is not familiar with the process of production, with the materiality of the product, and only sees the static completed object as a whole from a privileged and philosophical perspective. Echoing Kantian philosophy that initiated the separation of consciousness and the corporal experience of the material, capitalism offers individuals the perception of things through surplus; through what is always beyond the thing itself, as it covers the existential gap that is impossible to bridge.

The combination of Kantian and capitalist worldviews offers individuals the tool of observation and places them at a distance from the labor of production; it offers the tool box of the philosopher, not of the worker. Responding to this worldview, Lukács argues that one is required to face the gap and break down individuals' false consciousness not only for the sake of connecting body and mind, but in order to grant the masses the power to control the conditions and meaning of their life and realize their individuality. This revolutionary process, he explains, starts not with the mindful ponding of philosophy, but with the labor of literature.

Like the worker, the author sees the process of production, and has the opportunity to insert objects into history by choosing to write about them, to capture them, to reproduce them in his representation of reality. The novel, a product of modernity, follows an individual who searches for meaning in a world without meaning. The heroes of the novel are lonely subjects who are detached from their environment, which cannot fulfill them. The role of the author of the novel, according to Lukács, is to emphasize the process of the search, the movement of the individual

in the world, and the failure to find meaning. The novelist does this, stresses Lukács, by using realism to depict raw materials, the unprocessed, the unfinished open world. This realistic representation undermines the privileged capitalist outlook that pretends to comprehend objects as whole. Thus, in the eyes of Lukács, the real hero of the novel is not the protagonist, but the author who tells about the failure of the attempt to reconcile spirit and matter, life and essence as if they were naturally united and whole. While philosophy offers an abstract, ideal, and unobtainable future, literature, suggests Lukács, offers a concrete vision of the possibilities embedded in the present.²⁵⁰

The Hasidic stories we have analyzed so far offer storytelling as a daily ritual that empowers individuals while providing them with a community of authentic relationships. Each individual, they stress, should turn his life into a story and operate by the practice of narration. Life is depicted as a field of unfinished events and materials that are offered as opportunities for spiritual fulfillment that can be achieved by what Lukács calls *praxis*. The existential condition of man is expressed through *praxis* that allows him to enter into history, to mark reality with his singular existence. Man's acts and choices that express his relation to reality and the power he has over them constitute the drama of the novel. The meaning of objects and events is acquired by their relation to man's existence. It is not the detached Kantian

²⁵⁰ Fredric Jameson, "The case of George Lukes" in: *Marxism and form: twentieth-century dialectical theories of literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 160-205.

contemplation of the world that generates meaning, but material and human relationships, the act of production that is carried out by the author.²⁵¹

Looking to articulate an ethical Marxist theory of literature, Lukács embraces materialism but rejects the determinism it compels. He argues that the author, who is the entity that produces meaning, must sustain in his depiction a balance between the materiality of reality and human acts. Naturalism, for example, is unethical in Lukács opinion, because it flattens the convolutions of reality and human inequality. The emphasis on praxis allows the drama of the novel and the humanity of individuals to unfold, and the critical view of the author enables ethical decisions as he evaluates and arranges the different episodes and materials.²⁵² *Holding on to the religious kabbalist view of the world, how can we understand the ethics of Hasidic stories? Does the Hasidic emphasis on storytelling as praxis grant individuals the power to participate in the shaping of history and of the infrastructure? Or does it cover their authentic existence with the ultimate story of God provided by Kabala?*

While Lukács discussed *praxis* as a literary expression of the view of the author, Hasidic narratives grant this power to any individual. They encourage individuals to insert *themselves* into history through storytelling that includes narration (the act of choosing and framing) and communal sharing (the dialogical aspect). Lukács' idea of the author, however, is of a philosopher or a prophet. With his ideological Marxist views, the author seeks to educate readers by exposing the

²⁵¹ Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" in *Writer and Critic and other Essays*, edited and translated by Arthur D. Kahn, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1971), 110–158.

²⁵² Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?," 122-124.

gaps between matter and value and to push them towards socialism.²⁵³ Hasidic stories highlight storytelling itself as a socialist act. The power to tell gives individuals not merely the opportunity to realize their authenticity and singularity, but also to influence the shape of the social order and the relations between people. Storytelling in Hasidism is not only a way to tell and educate the masses about the acts of other individuals, but a daily practice in and of itself.

The difference in the ideologies that shape the socialist novel and the Hasidic tale reveals another aspect of representation that can teach us about the perception of time and the limited range of human possibilities and freedom. The view of the Marxist author shapes the events retrospectively as it holds on to the ideological utopia of revolution and socialism. However, according to Lukács, it should represent time and space from the present time and present reality based on the energy of things as they are; based on the possibilities that materiality allows. The retrospective of the author guides the plot from the future and exposes the overlooked socialist possibilities. The dependence on Marxist ideology is fundamentally embedded in the author's outlook and paradoxically expresses totality.

²⁵³ In "Critical Realism and Socialist Realism" Lukács goes beyond the distinction he made earlier between critical realism and bourgeois modernism to compare critical realism and socialist realism. He claims that socialist realism does not merely present socialist perspective, which is possible within the framework of critical realism, but rather uses this perspective "to describe the forces working towards socialism *from the inside*." Lukács explains that "by the 'outside' method a writer obtains a typology based on the individual and his personal conflicts; and from this base he works towards social significance. The 'inside' method seeks to discover an Archimedian point in the midst of social contradictions, and then bases its typology on an analysis of these contradictions." See: Georg Lukács *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 93-94. Despite this valuable analysis of the different methods of socialist representation, Lukács' discussion remains on the level of representation and he does not highlight storytelling itself as a socialist method that should be inserted into history by active powerful individuals.

In contrast, Hasidic narratives draw their meaning from the past, from the mythological story of creation. The scope of free possibilities is derived from the eternal and constant repetition of the Godly story and the Godly utterance. The author shapes the events from within this mythological framework, and by voicing himself in the text and addressing the reader directly, or in other words by exposing the materiality of his contemporarily, he presents the limits of his authority. At the end of the student's story the narrator adds "May the Holy One, Blessed be He, have mercy on us . . . and send us salvation speedily in our days, amen selah." The Hasidic author is never total. He is a man who tells his readers about things he have witnessed or have heard from other Hasidim, but not an omniscient totality. His Godly ideology about the imminent presence of God in the world is total (in the same way that socialism is), but the praxis of storytelling breaks down the totality of representation. Emphasizing the dialogical narration as a daily practice in both content and form, Hasidic stories call individuals to reconcile the gap between spirit and matter as they insert meaning to their own life.

I. Conclusion

In *Siaḥ Sarfey Kodesh* it is told: "I heard in the name of the holy rabbi [of Kotzk] that he once asked the great men of his generation, "Where does God live?" and they laughed at him because all the world is filled with his glory. And the holy one responded to them in these words that God lives "wherever one lets him in".²⁵⁴ In

²⁵⁴ Io'etz Kim Kodesh, *Siaḥ sarfey Kodesh I* (Lodz: Mesorah, 1927/1928), 71. "I have heard in his holy name [of the Rebbe of Kotzk] that one time the holy rebbe asked the wise men of his time "where does God reside?" and they laughed at him and said that "the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3)

this anecdote the rebbe of Kotzk expresses his belief in the power of individuals to control the level of Godly energy in their life. The transition from Hebrew to Yiddish here and the repetition of “in these exact words” (בזה הלשון) demonstrate the authentic utterance that constitutes the Hasidic *praxis* that allows individuals to become magnificent as they reflect on their lives before a significant other.

The Hasidic chronotope that we define as “A Folkloric Adventure of Inter-Subjective Individuals,” depicts man in his daily-life conditions and emphasizes the fullness of folklore and the potential that is latent in the relation of man to things. It calls on individuals to insert themselves into history by using narrative as a dialogical *praxis* of comprehension and redemption. The stories that enact this common Hasidic habit demonstrate the power of storytelling as a communal ritual that exposes the possibilities that are imbedded in the present and are open for individuals. In the Hasidic story, daily rituals of dialogical narration allow man to achieve the fullness of his existence as an individual.

Hasidic stories offer a form of individualism that intersects with modern philosophy. By highlighting elements from the theories and philosophies of Buber, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Lukacs, I have shown that Hasidism did not merely react to modernity, but rather participated in shaping modern Jewish life and literature as it offered its own values and practices. Buber’s notion of I-Thou relationships touches on an essential element in Hasidic existentialism, but it overlooks the power of practice and the routine. Highlighting the “wholeness” of reality and the connection

and the holy rebbe replied with these exact words, that “God blessed be he lives (in Yiddish:) where one lets him in.”

of man to the infinite spirit that flows in everything, Buber marginalizes the importance of action in realizing this spirit and achieving wholeness. For him it is the comprehensive state of mind that allows one to live in the I-Thou state.²⁵⁵

Kierkegaard's innovation of the singularity of the God-man relationship contributed to our discussion by illuminating the intimacy that is required to carry out the dialogical relationship. His philosophy provides us with social reasoning for the fullness of the individual who faces God, an aspect that adds to the kabalistic and Hasidic myth about the immanency of God's presence. The importance of Nietzsche to our discussion is connected to his influence on Buber, but in addition it allowed us to situate our discussion of existentialism in Hasidic narratives within contemporary romantic trends and the search for authenticity. And Lukacs's view illuminates the emphasis Hasidic stories put on the practice of storytelling (both in the plot itself and the experience of the characters, and in the broader framing of the stories by the Hasidic narrator and the popular genre) as a mode of individualism.

²⁵⁵ Buber mentions practice as important for human survival and for preventing one from losing touch with reality, but as a secondary element to the epistemological view.

Chapter 4: Hasidic Hagiography and Hebrew Literary Historiography – Disruptions and Nodes

“Yudka roused himself. ‘I wish to announce,’ he said in a low voice, ‘that I object to Jewish history’ ...” (“Hadrasha,” Haim Hazaz)

A. Introduction

Haim Hazaz’s 1942 story “Ha-Drasha” (The Sermon) depicts the ambivalent and polyphonic speech of Yudka, a Haganah member, who dares to challenge the orthodoxies prevailing in the Yishuv by declaring that he “object[s] to Jewish history!” The story, which has traditionally been understood as reinforcing Zionist ideology, is in fact more complicated than it first appears.²⁵⁶ As Iris Parush and Bracha Dalmetski-Fishler argue, the multi-layered nature of Yudka’s Hebrew, his hesitant tone, and his incoherent, sometimes even contradictory, arguments all present a subversive approach to Zionist national and ideological views of history.²⁵⁷

After his initial announcement about objecting to Jewish history, Yudka continues his “sermon,” intending to clarify its meaning. He stands before his indifferent Haganah comrades and tries again: “‘I don’t *respect* Jewish history!’ repeats Yudka

²⁵⁶ Shlomo Zalman Shragai, “Drasha shel Dofi,” *Hatsofe*, October 16, 1942, 5–6; A.B.A. Arikha, “‘Ein Ha-Koreh,” *Hamashkif*, October 30, 1942, 4; Dan Miron, “‘Al ha-Derasha (keptihah): Midrash haHistoriah beKitvei Hazaz,” *Haim Hazaz: Asufat Maamarim* (Merhaviah: Sifriyat Po’alim, 1959), 11–26. See discussion about the reception of the story in Berakha Dalmetski-Fishler and Iris Parush, “‘Ma anahnu osim kan?’ (Od kria be’HaDerasha’),” *Iunim betkumat Israel*, Vol. 16 (2006): 1–3. Later critics pointed out the complex and inconsistent argument of Hazaz and showed how his “sermon” criticizes Zionism as well. See: Dov Landau, “Mi Mefahed min ha-Derasha shel Yudka,” *Nativ* vol. 2, (1989): 71–81; Michael Keren, *Ben Gurion vebaIntellectualim: ‘Otsma Da’at ve-Karizma* [Ben Gurion and the Intellectuals] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1988), 132–135.

²⁵⁷ Dalmetski-Fishler and Parush, “‘Ma anahnu osim kan?,” 1–40.

as if he could not advance much further. ‘Except that it’s not a question of respect. It’s a question of what I said before: I *object* to it...’²⁵⁸ Yudka repeats this declaration multiple times during his sermon, but he never offers an alternative to the Jewish history to which he objects. The repetitive nature of his sermon indicates that he does not seek to replace ‘Jewish history’ with another kind of history, but to push back against it and allow other options that have been repressed by the Zionist atmosphere in Palestine to be heard.

Yudka, who is depicted as quiet, marginal, and feminine (we are told that his wife left him for another Haganah member) is awakened from his “silent nature” due to a sense of urgency. His request to *speak* to the secret unit of the Haganah’s elite group surprises everyone. In 1942, facing the extermination of European Jewry, Yudka experiences an existential crisis. He is confused, his mind is disoriented, and he wants the leaders of the Yishuv to provide him with a history that will help him understand the contemporary situation. “‘I don’t understand a thing. I’ve stopped understanding. I haven’t understood for years...’ ‘What don’t you understand?’ asked the leader gently, like a judge who is used to all kinds in his court. ‘Everything!’”²⁵⁹ The simplicity of Zionist history does not allow him to feel sorry for the loss of Jewish diasporic culture that is currently taking place. Rather, it provides him with a messianic explanation that justifies the destruction and situates it in the right place in the historical time. Published in the midst of the horrifying events of World War II, Hazaz presents Yudka as abandoning his strategy of silence to confront the cultural

²⁵⁸ Haim Hazaz, “The Sermon,” in *The Sermon and Other Stories*, trans. Hillel Halkin (New Milford, Conn.: Toby Press, 2005), 235.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 234.

hegemony, in particular the Yeshuv's conformism that turned Zionism into an oppressive mechanism, instead of the revolutionary movement it originally meant to be – calling on Jews to rethink their identity in modern terms.

Unlike Yudka's sense of urgency, the Yeshuv establishment is portrayed as self-confident and calm. While Yudka looks for new ways to address the past, the leadership tenaciously holds on to its self-evident ideology. Instead of looking "back" at the Jewish life of the diaspora and asking questions about the present, Zionism fixates its gaze on the present and future in Palestine. The Haganah of 1942 represents the well-founded establishment of the Yeshuv and the transformation of Zionism into an institutionalized cooperative milieu. Sitting comfortably around the table, the Haganah members 'generously' give Yudka permission to speak, unworried and unable to expect his surprising announcement. Hazaz uses Yudka – a character who superficially does not fit into the conventional Zionist masculine ideal, to offer an alternative. Yudka's alternative, however, is not that of a counter-history, but that of stuttering.

Yudka tries again and again to explain his intentions, but his disorientation and the interruptions of his listeners, who try to make sense of his intentions, cause the stuttering of his *derasha* (sermon). The incoherent and fragmented flow of his speech breaks the classic structure of sermons and adds an ironic tone to the story's title. The title "Ha-drasha," which is linked to a long tradition of exegetic texts and practices, builds on our expectation to reach a moral lesson or a conclusion at the end of Yudka's speech, as we would expect from a traditional *derasha* in the synagogue on the Sabbath. However, Hazaz plays with this anticipation and removes the last

component of a traditional sermon from the story: a conclusion, or any other type of closure, is missing. Instead, the story ends the same way it opened – Yudka is given another chance to speak and explain himself from the start. The confused audience is still there, waiting to hear what they came for – a bottom line.

The sermon's open ending moves the conversation that Yudka is trying to encourage beyond the borders of the story, to the audience of readers. Hazaz chooses to recognize the passing of time and its implications on Yudka's search for meaning; every moment of reading is also a moment in which the reader listens and reacts to Yudka. His sermon makes room for recognizing new fragments of Jewish history while questioning the meaning that Zionist historiography has given them. His incoherence, doubts and stuttering during the sermon are the symptom, the "acting out," of the repressed memories of modern Judaism that calls for a new approach to the Jewish past and invites us to reconstruct history and tell new stories that address the urgency that Yudka represents.

Hazaz's story indicates a problem that would be recognized and addressed by Jewish historians and scholars of modern Hebrew literature only decades later – Jewish history, Hazaz's story claims, cannot explain Jewish experience, and its ideology is destined to fail. There are too many components that have been repressed or overlooked that deserve our attention. Recognizing them, argues Hazaz, will eventually lead us to "object to Jewish history." Jews of the Yeshuv in Hazaz's generation, however, could not see this argument between the story's lines. They could only hear a story that follows Zionist ideology, which sought to establish a "New Jew" who would be the opposite of their abortive diasporic past. Early critics

of the story interpreted it as an affirmation of Zionist historiography.²⁶⁰ In 1942 when Jews needed Zionism to save them from extermination it was impossible for them to recognize the fragments of Jewish experience and the historical connections and contradictions that Yudka raised from the darkness of unconsciousness in his stuttered speech.

The goal of this chapter is not to present Hasidic hagiography as a lost archeological find, but to use it in order to undermine the coherent linear story presented by accepted historiographies, and to offer a new historical model that reflects Yudka's stuttering. I wish to raise Hasidic hagiography from its silenced corner and position it, like Yudka, before mainstream Zionist historiographies in order to challenge them. This chapter does not offer an alternative historiography, but seeks to find a new approach for addressing the literary events of the past; an approach that places dynamism at its center; an approach that recognizes the political work of the historian in his reconstruction of the historical story and keeps these politics exposed on the surface. Instead of scientific projects that seek to tell "the truth", the approach that this chapter offers is one that tries to reveal the negative dialectical relationship that different fragments of past reality have with each other; relationships that do not reach a synthesis but rather, constantly push against a stable historicist order. For this purpose, I borrow Sergei Eisenstein's idea of *montage*²⁶¹ from film theory, which will allow us to examine history through its fragments and their dialectic relations. Historical fragments of literary events can be examined as

²⁶⁰ See footnotes 256 and 257 above.

²⁶¹ Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed., Jay Leyda, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), 45–63.

independent “shots” that achieve their cinematographic effect of dynamism and visual movement, not when they are placed side by side, but from the effect of being piled on top of each other. The effect of motion, Eisenstein explains, is achieved when the spectator experiences the dialectic relations between two different shots. The effect lies in the shift from one image to another, the moment in which the two shots collide. The beauty of film lies not in the epic of a motionless image, but in the dynamics of conflict.

The confrontation between Hasidic hagiography and common historiographies of modern Hebrew literature allows us to break down the traditional linear historicist and ideological story of Hebrew literature’s evolution. The collision of different fragments of historical reality enables us to build a dynamic understanding of modern Hebrew literature and to draw a multidimensional picture of networks and nodes; of beautiful moments of drama and conflicts. The inclusion of repressed fragments of Hebrew and Jewish experiences in the story of modern Hebrew literature is inevitably accompanied by the comparative view that will enable us to find new connections between fragments of Jewish reality and new moments of drama in the modern use of Hebrew. The “dynamization of the traditional view”²⁶² exposes new meanings and possibilities for experiencing and understanding modern Judaism. Instead of the linear story that is dictated by the imagined meta-history of contemporary

²⁶² “Each sequential element is perceived not next to each other, but on top of the other. For the idea (or sensation) of movement arises from the process of superimposing on the retained impression of the object’s first position, a newly visible further position of the object.... From the superimposition of two elements of the same dimension always arises a new, higher dimension” (Eisenstein, “A Dialectical Approach to Film Form,” 49)

scholarship, this modeling of montage dynamism focuses and explores negative dialectic tensions that lie between different fragments of literary history.

B. The Historiography of Modern Hebrew Literature

Hasidic hagiography was marginalized by literary scholarship because it did not fit into the story that the hegemonic messianic and Zionist historiographies wanted to tell. Early historiographies of modern Hebrew literature that claimed to be comprehensive regarding the development of modern Hebrew literature are structured as philological monolithic historical pictures that confirm the same linear story, according to which Hebrew literature started in multiple centers that eventually converged into one ultimate center in the land of Israel.²⁶³ The confluence of all of the different diasporic literatures in Palestine expedited the standardization of a national culture, and the establishment of both one major style of Hebrew and the ideal Jewish identity. Lachower (1948-1927), Klausner (1930),²⁶⁴ Shanan (-1962

²⁶³ See Ze'ev Gries's discussion about the role of Zionist ideology in dictating the story told by historiographies of modern Hebrew literature in Ze'ev Gries, *Hasefer kesochen tarbut, 1700-1900* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz hame'uhad, 2002), 107-116.

²⁶⁴ Klausner's multi-volume project was one of the earliest attempts to explore modern Hebrew literature for the sake of "pure scientific investigation." His primary goal was to "clarify the historical truth of the facts" (Klausner, *Historia shel hasifrut ha'Ivrit haHadasha* Vol. 1, (Third edition) [Jerusalem: Ahiasaf, 1960], v). After he was criticized by Sadan for not including literatures of Orthodoxy and Hasidism, Klausner explained that his goal was not to include *all* of the details about Hebrew literature, but to provide a history of its evolution. For that purpose, he argued, Orthodox and Hasidic literatures had nothing to contribute. Based on "scientific facts," he claimed that the founding fathers of modern Hebrew literature – Adam HaCohen, M. J. Lebensohn, A.D. Gordon, M. L. Lilienblum, Mapu, Peretz Smulanskin, Braudes, and Mendele – came from Lithuania, where Hasidism was not influential (Klausner, *Historia shel hasifrut ha'Ivrit haHadasha*, viii). Klausner's project focuses on texts that intended to "start a new period," that presented themselves not merely as modern, but also as fundamentally different from what preceded them.

1977),²⁶⁵ and Shaked (1998-1977)²⁶⁶ – all created monumental accounts that provide us with an understanding of major trends in European Hebrew literature. Baruch Kurtzweil, who followed in the footsteps of these Historicist approaches, argues that there is an extreme and fundamental rift between old and new forms of Hebrew literature and presents a Hegelian model for understanding the development of modern Hebrew literature. According to him, modern Hebrew literature is not a continuum of past Jewish literature. “It is European Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and only them, which caused the fateful turning point that left its mark on the path of our literature.”²⁶⁷ The secularization of Hebrew literature is a result of an existential void caused by the emptying of the spiritual Jewish world.

Dov Sadan pointed out first in 1949 and then again in his better-known 1962 book *Avney Bedek*, that the historiographies of modern Hebrew literature embraced the worldview of the Enlightenment in their approach to the history of the Hebrew text. Focusing on “high literature,” he argues, their projects overlooked two other major streams in Jewish literature – traditional society and Hasidism – because they did not fit the national story. Believing this scholarly myopia should be fixed, Sadan called for a more complex model that would examine the dialectic connections among

²⁶⁵ Avraham Shanan, *Ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Ḥadashah li-Zeramehah* (Tel Aviv: Masada, 1962–1977). Shanan accepted the views of his predecessors and defined modern Hebrew literature as a secular literature that intended to create something entirely new by rejecting everything that characterized the “old” Jewish world (13–19).

²⁶⁶ Shaked’s monumental historiographical project also follows the assumptions of early scholarship – the aesthetic scale of the Enlightenment, the definition of modern literature as secular, and a model of modern Hebrew literature as a confluence of multiple centers into one coherent center in Israel. See Gershon Shaked, *Ha-Siporet Ha-Ivrit 1880 – 1980* Vol. 1-5 (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 1977–1998). And especially his discussion in Vol. 1, 35-39.

²⁶⁷ Baruch Kurtzweil, *Sifrutenu ha-ḥadasha – hemshekh o mahapekha* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shoken, 1971), 6. (translation is mine)

all the different spheres (Enlightenment, traditional society, and Hasidism) of Hebrew literature. (Sadan argued even further that one should also consider Yiddish literature when examining the interrelationships of these three domains of Jewish European literature, and that, he claimed should be done through Hasidic literature).²⁶⁸

Sadan's call has not received serious attention until recently. In the last decade contemporary scholars have started to examine new layers of dialectical tensions that lie within canonical Hebrew texts. Hannan Hever, for example, discusses the presence and effect of theology in modern Hebrew. In his book *Bekoah ha'el*, he exposes the power of political theology in Zionist writings despite the attempt of modern writers to "secularize" Hebrew.²⁶⁹ In their joint book *Sifrut u-ma'amad :li-kerat historyografyah poliitit shel ha-sifrut ha-'Ivrit ha-ḥadashah* (Literature and Class: Towards a Political Historiography of Modern Hebrew Literature) Hever and Amir Benbaji reject the liberal-national viewpoint in the scholarship of modern Hebrew literature that is rooted in the Enlightenment, and they offer an alternative historiography that deconstructs the national literary image. Exposing class power-relations in the Hebrew text, they discuss the mechanism that sought to claim coherency in the national literary body.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Dov Sadan, *'Al sifrutenu: masat mavo* (Jerusalem: Department of Youth and Pioneer Affairs, The Zionist Organization, Rubin Mass Press, 1949); Dov Sadan, "Masat mavo," *Avney bedek* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz hameuhad, 1962), 9-13, 26-38. David Roskis discusses this issue and provides an overview of the interactions between Hebrew and Yiddish literatures see: David G. Roskies, "Modern Jewish Literature," in Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The Modern Jewish Experience: A Reader's Guide* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 213-227.

²⁶⁹ Hannan Hever, *Bekoah Hael: teologia upolitika basafrut haivrit hamodernit* (Tel Aviv: Van Leer and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2013).

²⁷⁰ Amir Benbaji and Hannan Hever, *Sifrut u-ma'amad :li-kerat historyografyah poliitit shel ha-sifrut ha-'Ivrit ha-ḥadashah* (Jerusalem: Van Leer and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2014).

The most recent work on the historiographical question of Modern Hebrew Literature is Avidov Lipsker's book *Ekologyah shel sifrut* (Ecology of Literature) (2018) in which Lipsker presents his theoretical alternative for a historical examination of Hebrew Literature. He offers the term 'ecologies of literature' and claims that we should reject the belligerent "modernist discourse" according to which each generation rejected what preceded it in a linear progression of development. This discourse assumes a hierarchical structure of a center, "the literary republic" that supposedly was the most important in shaping modern Jewish consciousness, and unimportant or less-important repressed margins. This model still dominates the scholarship of modern Hebrew literature, and although many scholars have questioned it they nevertheless keep following its assumptions and focusing on "classic" writers and movements.²⁷¹ Even Dan Miron, who offered in his book *From Continuity to Contiguity* the term *contiguity* as a critical means for liberating the discourse of modern Jewish literature from meta-historical narratives and processes of canonization, focuses on great Jewish writers who already have a place in the Jewish Canon. He offers to view Franz Kafka and Mendele as models for the contiguity of Jewish writing. By doing so his critique on historiography, despite its usefulness as a theoretical model, remains within the same borders of textual discussions.²⁷² Lipsker

²⁷¹ Yigal Shwarts *Me'et le'et: Historya Biographya vesifrut* (Hevel Modi'in: Devir, 2017).

²⁷² Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Towards a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Unlike Miron's methodology, I believe that by examining new texts that have not been introduced in the modern Jewish canon we can learn about the historical relationships between different literary projects. Examining Hasidic writings in their historical context exposes the negative dialectical tensions between Hasidic and its contemporary maskilic writings. Only by recognizing this could I challenge the historicist approach of early historiographies and offer the method of montage. See Lital Levy and Allison Schachter's critique on Miron's work in Lital Levy and Allison Schachter, "Jewish Literature / World Literature: Between the Local and the Transnational," *Pmla* 130, no. 1 (2015): 95. See also the important review of Sheila Jelen which

suggests that texts should be examined as part of an organic “ecosystem” in which social, economic, political, literary and ideological elements take part in its production. Texts and languages, he argues, are not products of a meta-history or of an ideology, but of habits, mimicry, plagiarism, graphomania, and many other daily practices. Therefore in order to understand modern Hebrew literature we need to look into what he calls the “average taste,” which are the practices that overwhelmed the literary sphere of their time, to draw the ‘difference’ between them and their contemporary literary “peaks,” and then to characterize them as “exemplary representatives of their generation which will be recorded in the historiographical memory.”²⁷³

Hasidic hagiography was indeed a peak of a common literary practice during the era in which it was published; I have argued that it should be reconsidered by literary scholarship as a modern Hebrew genre.²⁷⁴ The current chapter continues Lipsker’s approach in its rejection of the classic hierarchical modernist discourse. I would like to respond to Sadan’s call for new historiographical approaches that include Hasidism by placing Hasidic hagiography in Yudka’s position – standing up to the conventional historiographical perceptions and challenging their presumptions about the evolution of modern Hebrew as well as their historical viewpoint. My purpose in this chapter is not that of the archaeologist – finding a ‘lost shard’ and adding it to the familiar story of modern Hebrew literature. Rather, beyond

illuminate the theoretical intervention of my project in light of Miron’s lack of theoretical “blueprint for deploying his model,” in Sheila E. Jelen, “Book Review: From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking.” *Religion & Literature* 43, no. 3 (2011): 253–55.

²⁷³ Avidov Lipsker, *Eḳologyah shel sifrut* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2019), 9.

²⁷⁴ See more in chapter 2.

recognizing the contribution of Hasidic stories to the development of modern Hebrew literature, I want to use these stories to problematize and undermine the dominant approach to Hebrew historiography. Adding to Lipsker's proposal, I suggest that after examining a specific organic literary-historical ecosystem, a scholar should use the comparative method to reconstruct a historical story, not *the* historical story, that will provide new meanings for understanding the usage of Hebrew in modern times and its ramifications for Jewish consciousness.

In what follows I will examine Hasidic stories and their social "niche," to use Lipsker's term, in comparison to a contemporary "Enlightened" novel, *Ahavat Zion*. Then, I will move forward in time to examine the similarities and differences between Hasidic stories and their "modern" adaptations in the projects of Buber and Agnon. These comparisons will allow us to expose the alternatives that Hasidism offered to modern Hebrew writing and Hebrew ideologies. Agnon's work will be discussed beyond his particular interest in Hasidic literature as it illuminates, most of all, the need to rethink the common literary-political historiography of modern Hebrew. The unique aesthetic of Agnon's writing posed a challenge to critics of modern Hebrew literature as it never really fit into the story of the Enlightenment. A standard account of the cultural history of Hebrew, shows that history to be mired in ideological self-blindness, repressing, as it does, the rich history of the language and literature that would include non-Enlightenment Hebrew writing. Due to his ambivalent place in the historiography of modern Hebrew literature, a study of Agnon not merely provides an example of how Hasidism could make its way into modern Hebrew literature. Rather, a study of Agnon is necessary in order to see the possibilities that Hebrew afforded to

various responses to modernity. His work shows that in order to properly account for modern Hebrew literature and modern Jewish responses to modernity we must account for the influence of Hasidism.

I argue that Hasidic booklets from the mid-nineteenth century contain theological (religious and non-religious) and linguistic (old and new, Hebrew and Yiddish) components that are not synthesized, but maintain tense relationships and allow for the playfulness of the tongue. The Hebrew that Hasidic hagiography offered to modern Jewish readers is a dynamic utterance that rejects national standardization and undermines its own linguistic coherency. This “stuttering” of the tongue keeps it dynamic and open to the ever-changing existential conditions of its users. Like Yudka’s ‘derasha’, Hasidic stories stutter and await a response. I will use the unique Hasidic approach to the literary tongue as a model for historiographical thought. The heteroglossic storytelling of Hasidism mixes the historical with the mythical through fragmented literary depictions and provides a meaningful response to the present. History for Hasidism is never a fundamental empirical truth but a story that should be told again and again, every time slightly different. It is a story that responds to the *Jetztzeit* and the urgency of the moment. Hasidic time is never a “homogeneous empty time” but a construct of fragments that is always open to metaphysical hope.

C. Historicism and the Dynamics of Stuttering

Scholars of Modern Hebrew Literature have produced monumental projects that masquerade as scientific, presenting a coherent and comprehensive history but without ever questioning their aesthetic assumptions. They sought works that were

“new” and represented in their collections only what they thought suitable to the fundamentally new period in Jewish experience and literature. The prominent historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi explains in his famous book *Zakhor* (1982) that the emergence of modern Jewish historiography was rooted in two processes that characterized the sudden departure of Jews from the ghetto: assimilation from without and a collapse from within.²⁷⁵ This existential and cultural crisis produced what seemed to be an irreconcilable rift between modern Jews and their past. Modern science offered “objective” tools for addressing this crisis, tools that could assist in organizing the historical events in a reasonable way that tacitly approved the new cultural order. This scientific act of writing Jewish historiography was an entirely new practice, explains Yerushalmi, and it presented the Jewish historian in the Western world with a paradox. “It is the very nature of what and how I study, how I teach and what I write, that represents a radically new venture. I live within the ironic awareness that the very mode in which I delve into the Jewish past represents a decisive break with that past.”²⁷⁶ When writing from ‘without’, from a scientific objective point of view, about what defines one from within, historians must construct a binary and hierarchical framework that will justify their choice of the new Enlightened venture.

During the nineteenth century, history evolved as a positivist empirical discipline. This process was dominated by a branch of historicism that viewed history as a flow of causal events and assumed that historical truth is definite and can be

²⁷⁵ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982).

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

traced by a thorough search through archival documents. The scientific method that dominated the field focused on *information* and “pure” facts, and attempted to avoid any storytelling-like style. “The divorce of history from literature” explains Yerushalmi, “has been as calamitous for Jewish as for general historical writing. Not only because it widens the breach between the historian and the layman, but because it affects the very image of the past that results. Those who are alienated from the past cannot be drawn to it by explanation alone; they require evocation as well.”²⁷⁷ The danger in this scientific alienated treatment of the past not only gives the illusion of eternal validation but makes the past irrelevant at best, and disruptive at worst. “To address Yudka meaningfully, and all the many modern Jews who have experienced the other radical “breaks” that modern Jewish experience has entailed, some reorientation is required,” argues Yerushalmi.²⁷⁸ Before digging for archeological proofs, the modern Jewish historian should recognize the ambivalence of Jewish history that results from the mixture of myth and memory. Historicist “objectivity” does not suffice and only presents a false image of Jewish memory that is certainly more than just details.

The scientific empirical method of Historicism not only attempts to repress the imaginative connection history holds with fiction, argues Walter Benjamin in “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” but also to hide the fact that the history it tells is that of the victors and oppressors.²⁷⁹ Claiming objectivity derived from an

²⁷⁷ Yerushalmi, 100.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 101.

²⁷⁹ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 256–257.

exclusive reliance on facts, the scientific methodology papers over the existence of other histories that do not coincide with the homogenous empty and “natural” time that hegemonic historicist historiography outlines. In the case of Modern Jewish historiography, the story told is not a result of scholarly curiosity, but is shown to be an ideology, one of many answers to the crisis evoked by the struggle for Jewish emancipation and “universal” recognition.²⁸⁰

Benjamin rejects the Historicist illusion and argues that instead of a flat surface of past events, history should be viewed as a sequence of fragments, a (non-directional) continuum of infinite present moments. The work of the historian is thus not to find all the pieces in the historical story, but to take an ethical approach and write a history that responds to the present, to the *Jetztzeit*. The historical materialist must “blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history” for the purpose of revolution.²⁸¹ They must recognize the material conditions of their time, which inevitably influence the writing of history. They quarry out of the historical time materials and ideas for the revolution in the present. The historical materialist approaches the urgent craft mission out of a strong sense of their own lifework, era, and experience. They are required to break down historicism and allow the quilting of the present with patches of redemption, because it is their role to “[fan] the spark of hope in the past.”²⁸² While Historicists look at the past as a totality that can be captured with scientific tools, the historical materialist is interested in understanding

²⁸⁰ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 85.

²⁸¹ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 263.

²⁸² *Ibid*, 255.

his own individual (and generational) experience of the past; understanding the present moment from which he looks at the past.

The historical materialist perceives the present as an infinite moment, a monad in which all times – past and present – flow together to produce meaning. For the historical materialist any moment can be declared as an emergency, as a call for pushing against the oppressing conformism and blindness of historicism. In each moment of emergency, one must not only write history but *construct* a history. This historical construct is the expression of the fullness of the present moment in which the past converges into one fragmented point of redemption and hope. For Benjamin, history-writing should open the possibility for those oppressed in the present to form a revolution of their own. This ‘revolutionary’ history, however, is not eternally perpetuated. Historical materialists acknowledge the limits of their story and the fragmented nature of time. Their goal is not to provide a “complete” history, but rather to treat the ethics of the present and the future. The meaning of the relationship they create between different historical events and materials is dynamic.²⁸³

Yudka’s sermon is a symptomatic expression of someone who is both repressed and oppressed. Yudke’s sense of urgency motivates him to play the role of a historical materialist. He tries to reconstruct a historical story that will address the crisis of his time. He questions the history that was written from the perspective of the Zionist hegemony and to “blast” free the repressed fragments of Jewish history and

²⁸³ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 254–255. Yerushalmi presents a similar claim according to which the Jewish historian should “sew” the shards of Jewish experience with a new story that responds to the existential repressed (and symptomatic) crisis. Nevertheless, the historian should not accept this story as final, but as a starting point for telling new stories in the future (Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 132)

culture. He tries to resist what Yishuv conformism has transformed into 'homogeneous empty time' but fails to do so. Hasidic hagiography can take Yudka's position in the literary discourse and help us in re-opening the historiographical discussion on modern Hebrew literature. It can allow us not merely to expose the ambivalence and paradoxes in the Hebrew canon as Hever, Benbadji, and others have offered, but to reconstruct a new model that rejects the assumptions of canonization itself. Hasidic hagiography does not fit the hegemonic model of dialectic development of modern Hebrew literature according to which each generation rebelled against what preceded it; it rejects the binary of "high" and "low" literature; the separation of history from literature, and of rhetoric from poetics. It suggests addressing the historiographical work not as Historicist archeologists, but as storytellers.

Like Yudka's sermon, a historiographical discussion on Hasidic hagiography will expose the negative dialectic relationships between linguistic, ideological, and traditional elements in the evolution of modern Hebrew literature. Hasidic hagiography can further serve us in exposing the "symptomatic" moments of incoherency in canonical works. The model I offer for discussing the historiography of modern Hebrew literature does not seek new coherency in Hebrew writings nor in the understanding of its chronological development. Rather it seeks to illuminate the fragmentation of modern Jewish experience and identity, and the incoherency of modern Hebrew. I suggest viewing history as a *montage*, as a self-aware form of storytelling that leaves its incoherency, its "stuttering," exposed. The exposed passages and gaps between "pictures," between historical moments, are where

meaning lies. The urgency of history lies not in the past it relays but in the way in which it connects historical moments to the present. “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means *to seize hold of a memory* as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”²⁸⁴ A montage-like approach to historical narrative recognizes the limits of the history it tells. Depending on fragments, on independent “shots,” literary historiography that focuses on intellectual dialectics seeks to produce knowledge and thought, and not to perfect the historicist picture. “Montage is valuable only when it doesn’t hasten to conclude or to close: it is valuable when it opens up our apprehension of history and makes it more complex, not when it falsely schematizes; when it gives us access to the singularities of time and hence to its essential multiplicity.”²⁸⁵

The goal of re-opening the historiographical conversation is not to replace one “factual” totality with another, a move that Miron has already shown to be unproductive. But, to offer a modeling that allows us to see the singularity of each moment and to expose historical, aesthetic, and ethical meanings from the superimposition of independent literary “shots.” This modeling also points out that each and every historical story that we tell is a response to a certain present. This way it also preserves our critical thinking and rejects historical and ethical conformism. The historiographical modeling of montage that I offer is derived from the alienation

²⁸⁴ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 255.

²⁸⁵ Georges Didi-Huberman, “Montage-Image or Lie-Image,” *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 120-150. Didi Huberman discusses this quality of montage-like narrative when facing the difficulties in telling the history of the Holocaust through four images from the Auschwitz’ crematorium. Answering his critics, he clarifies that he does not intend to tell THE history of the concentration camps, but to tell a story, a strong and clear one, that also recognizes the limits of its own view.

between Hasidic and common historiographies. This modeling does not seek to reconcile between different historical stages and tell a coherent story of evolution. Rather, the modeling of historical montage focuses on the negative dialectic relationships between literary forms and historical moments of Hebrew writing.

D. Stories of Hebrew

Historical montage recognizes the reconstructive quality of history and instead of a consistent and stable story it exposes the tension between historical fragments. The strangeness of Hasidic hagiography in comparison to the historiography of modern Hebrew literature points out the insufficiency of meta-history and the critical need for historical montage. A montage approach to Hebrew historiography allows us to place the *Hasidic literature within the same literary apparatus as the maskilic projects and discuss the endless negative-dialectic relationship between dominant and repressed elements in the historiography of Hebrew literature*. The goal of this section is to examine different ideologies of Hebrew from which we can draw alternative approaches to the writing of history. While maskilic Hebrew developed out of a hierarchical approach to language according to which literature represents the ideal and stable roots of a nation,²⁸⁶ Hasidic language presented a heteroglossic perception of the tongue, which rejects linguistic centralization and standardization. Instead of linguistic purism, the Hasidic poetic tongue focuses on human experience that attains its essence from a kabbalistic mythical story.

²⁸⁶ Shemuel Werses, *Megamot Vetsurot Besifrut Hahaskalah*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University Press, 1990)16-17; Itamar Even-Zohar, "Lebirur Mahutah Vetifkuda shel Lashon Hasifrut Hayiafa Bediglossia," *Hasifrut* 2, (1970): 286–302.

a. The Maskilic Story

Nineteenth-century traditional linguistics focused on diachronic research of the historical development of languages.²⁸⁷ The main motivation for this research was to preserve and interpret canonical and classic texts. This approach served the Romantic search for “authentic,” “real,” and “stable” sources of the primitive nation, from which a modern nation could grow. Nineteenth century maskilic Hebrew developed in this context. It turned to the Bible, and developed thereby the *Melitzah*, (a poetic style of Hebrew that follows biblical grammar and syntax) as the most canonical and classic Hebrew text that was meant to constitute the infrastructure of modern Hebrew. This historical perception of the modern language produced a hierarchical ordering of Hebrew writings, according to which literary and scientific works must be written in the classic *Melitzi* style.²⁸⁸ ‘Rabbinic Hebrew,’ which was always useful in religious contexts – especially responsa – and which Hasidism embraced in its stories, could not serve as the vehicle for producing modern national masterpieces. It was too “raw,” in the eyes of maskilim, and reflected not an ideal mythological nation, but the urgency of the present moment. Maskilim wanted to construct a national tongue that was pure and ideal in order to appropriately represent the greatness of the nation. The

²⁸⁷ Joep Leerssen, “Oral Epic: The Nation Finds a Voice,” in *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe during the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds., Timothy Baycroft and David M. Hopkin (Leiden: Leiden, 2012), 11–26; Joseph Leerssen, “Literary Historicism: Romanticism, Philologists, and the Presence of the Past,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2004): 221–44.

²⁸⁸ Lily Kahn, *The Verbal System in Late Enlightenment Hebrew* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009); Brakha Fischler and Iris Parush, “Shikuley lashon, sifrut, ve-ḥevra ba-vikuaḥ ‘al ha-taharanut,” *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 15 (1995): 107-135.

language constituted the focal point around which modern national culture would be constructed.

Early maskilim, especially from Germany and the Russian empire, supported a purist approach to literary Hebrew.²⁸⁹ This approach claimed that high literature in Hebrew must draw its grammatical and stylistic structures from the Bible and rejected the diasporic and dynamic grammatical nature of rabbinic Hebrew. The claim that “Biblical language is appropriate for literature, and rabbinic language – for science and wisdom,” implies a fundamental difference between the beautiful and the useful; between aesthetics and utility.²⁹⁰ Moshe Kunitz’s (1774–1834) *Ma’ase hakhamin* (1805, Vienna) is an apt example for this perception of literary Hebrew. This work is divided into two parts. The first part is a historical account reconstructing the life of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi; written as a scientific work, it follows contemporary trends in Jewish Studies. The second part is a play about the same topic.²⁹¹ The generic division between beautiful and high literature and a more topical account is expressed not merely through the spatial division of two sections in the book, but also through the Hebrew used to write each account; the first part is written in rabbinic Hebrew and the second part is written in biblical Hebrew. The opening of the historical account discusses the sources for Rabbi Yehuda’s name. It follows the *Talmudic* references to Rabbi Yehuda while embracing the *Talmudic* jargon and using Aramaic words such as *hainu* (meaning), and the acronym *HaNaL* (the above-mentioned).

²⁸⁹ Werses, *Megamot Vetsurot*, 29–30.

²⁹⁰ Fischler and Parush, “Shikuley lashon, sifrut, ve-ḥevra,” 116–117, 118 – 119; Werses, *Megamot Vetsurot*, 19–22.

²⁹¹ A second century Eretz-Yisraeli rabbi and chief redactor and editor of the Mishnah.

Although this account does not include marks of Yiddish, it still stands in opposition to the pure *Melitzi* account in the second part. The characters in the play speak in Biblical vocabulary and syntax. A sentence such as: “The day has passed, the evening has already arrived” (עתה חלף היום, כבר הגיש הנשף לבוא) presents the adaption of biblical syntax; the structure of the sentence follows the common biblical parallelism which consists of a (usually two-part) pattern of intentional repetition, in our case: “The day has passed” and “the evening has already arrived.”²⁹²

The adoption of the biblical *melitzah* allowed maskilim to avoid not only the “jargonistic” rabbinic Hebrew but also rabbinic law. Reviving Hebrew culture through the Bible was an opportunity to break from the traditional *halachic* past and begin a secular modern Jewish identity.²⁹³ This maskilic approach to modern literature was embraced by Klausner in his account of the historiography of modern Hebrew literature. Klausner argues that the historiography of Modern Hebrew literature should begin with Naftali Hertz Wessely (1725-1805) who started something new, not in the aesthetics of the Hebrew text but in its meaning. Wessely, according to Klausner, was not merely “the first to revive Hebrew *Melitza*,” as the German maskil Moshe Mendelson said, but as the Russian maskil and poet J. L. Gordon described him “the first to open the doors of the temple and dress holy-poetry with every-day clothes. His poetry is the passageway from the holy to the profane.”²⁹⁴

²⁹² Moshe Kunitz, *Ma'ase Hahamim*, (Vienna, 1805).

²⁹³ Fischler and Parush, “Shikuley lashon, sifrut, ve-ḥevra,” 126; The main goal of the *Verein für die Cultur und die Wissenschaft der Juden*, the pioneering society of Jewish science and culture was to “covert” Judaism from religion to culture in the age of secularization. See: Rachel Livneh-Freudenthal, *HaIgud: halutsei haIehadut beGermaniah (Verein: pioneers of the science of Judaism in Germany)*. (Jerusalem: Leo-Beack Institute, 2018).

²⁹⁴ Klausner, *Historia*, 150.

The secularization of Hebrew marks the beginning of the modern era in Jewish culture.²⁹⁵

The priority of biblical Hebrew for literature and the rejection of rabbinic jargon was common in maskilic circles, notably in Germany and the Russian Empire.²⁹⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the German Jewish Enlightenment no longer believed that Hebrew could serve as a medium for writing literature. *Hameasef*, the first Hebrew journal that began to appear in Berlin in 1783, and was famous for its poetry section, ceased to exist completely in 1829. The German maskil I. M. Jost claimed in 1846 that Hebrew is “a dead language... that inhibits the natural flow of emotions.”²⁹⁷ By that time, Western maskilim were inclined to use other languages for the purpose of poetic expression, but in Western Europe the case was different. Between 1850 and 1860 Galician maskilim still argued about the “purism of Hebrew.” The Galician discussion presented different approaches regarding the appropriate genres (literature and scientific research), and the appropriate style of Hebrew used for each one, but it kept the binary distinction between the rabbinic and the biblical registers. As Parush and Dalmatski-Flesher

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 9-11. Shanan disagrees with Klausner regarding the innovative nature of Wessely's work, but he does agree that modern Hebrew literature is a result of secularization, and like Klausner focuses on Enlightenment literature. *Ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Ḥadasha Lizrameiya*, 14–15.

²⁹⁶ Werses, *Megamot ve-Tsurot*, 13–27; Fischler and Parush, “Shikuley lashon, sifrut, ve-ḥevra,” 124.

²⁹⁷ Werses, *Megamot Vetsuror*, 30. Other contemporary German maskilim such as Abraham Geiger, Moritz Steinschneider. By mid-nineteenth century German maskilim felt Hebrew could not express the contemporary modern emotional experience because it was too strict, ancient and dry, so they turned to write in other languages. See: Shemuel Werses, *'Hakitsa 'Ami': Sifrut ha-Haskalah be'Idan ha-Modernizatsiah* ('Awake, My People': Hebrew Literature in the Age of Modernization) (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2000/01), 193–237. Mapu rejected these claims and especially the claims against the strict ancient Biblical Hebrew. He argued that the *melitzi* Hebrew is filled with emotion and wrote Hebrew biblical novels. See: 'Azriel Shohat. “Yaḥasam shel maskilim beRusia el halashon haIvrit,” *Sefer Avraham Even-Shushan: Mehkarim be-Lashon be-Mikra be-Sifrut u-vidi'at Erets-Yisrael*, ed., Luria Ben-Tsion, (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1987), 379, 411.

show this discussion was anachronistic.²⁹⁸ Mixed rabbinic and biblical Hebrew was already an extant option (mostly used in maskilic historical accounts). Nevertheless, Hebrew writers continued to prefer using biblical diction for poetic purposes.

S. J. Abramowitch is considered a pivotal figure in the historiography of modern Hebrew literature since he invented a linguistic mixture of all registers of Hebrew in order to represent daily life and conversation in prose, known as “*the nusach*.”²⁹⁹ Nonetheless, he began his literary career as a purist Hebrew writer.³⁰⁰ According to Parush and Dalmatski-Flesher, his inclination towards the maskilic trend in his early writings was drawn from a belief that poetic language should be simple and direct, allowing the artist to clearly point to objects and ideas in the world.³⁰¹ In *Kitsur toldot hateva*’ Abramowitch presents a conception of biblical Hebrew as a language that maintains a direct relation between sign and signifier.³⁰² Unlike the rabbinic intertextual *drash* (homiletic exegesis), the biblical *pshat* (literal meaning) is transparent in its meaning. In addition to its historical significance,

²⁹⁸ Fischler and Parush, “Shikuley lashon, sifrut, ve-ḥevra,” 133.

²⁹⁹ H. N. Bialik. “Yotser hanusach,” *Kol Kitvey Hayim Nachman Bialik vol. 3* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1956-1957), 199-205; Shaked, *Ha-Siporet Ha-’Iverit* Vol. 1, 83-89.

³⁰⁰ Fischler and Parush, “Shikuley lashon, sifrut, ve-ḥevra,” 125–126.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 133. They also explain that Abramowitch believed that biblical Hebrew is more accessible to common Jews than rabbinic Hebrew, which is directed to scholars of the Halacha. From that standpoint, they argue that Abramowitch’s biblical project sought to democratize Hebrew. This explanation is not convincing. Halachic Hebrew was rooted in the vernacular because it was based on *responsa* – questions and answers. It was directed towards the specific needs and doubts of people in a certain time and place and therefore was continually updated. The Bible, on the other hand, is known to have been inaccessible to diasporic Jews. This is the reason for the old Mishnaic law “שניים מקרא ושניים תרגום” (As Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi told his sons: Complete your portions with the congregation, the Bible [text] twice and [the] translation once) (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, 8b) which means that in addition to the requirement to hear the weekly reading of the Bible in Hebrew, there should be a reading of the weekly Bible portion in translation.

³⁰² Fischler and Parush, “Shikuley lashon, sifrut, ve-ḥevra,” 125.

biblical Hebrew seemed to serve in the eyes of maskilim as a stable idiom for expressing high culture and philosophical truth.

Despite following the maskilic prioritization of Biblical Hebrew,³⁰³ Abramowitch also wrote in Yiddish. From the second half of the nineteenth century he established himself as a very popular Yiddish writer. He is considered as one of the most prominent Yiddish authors and is known as the “grandfather” of modern Yiddish literature, (followed by the “son” I. L. Peretz, and the “grandson” Sholem Aleichem). He even gave himself a pen name after his loveable Yiddish character *Mendele Moycher Sforim* (Mendele the Book Peddler).³⁰⁴ Only in the 1880s did Abramowitch return to Hebrew and, drawing on Hasidic literature, he “invented” the *nusach*.

The “first Hebrew novel,” *Ahavat Zion* (1853) also expresses the maskilic obsession with the Bible, even when other approaches to literary Hebrew existed.³⁰⁵ Mapu’s stylistic choice reveals the ideology behind the maskilic scientific linguistic claims. He expanded the *melitzi* style from flowery poetry to descriptions of reality.

³⁰³ Abramowitch started writing and then publishing his Hebrew poem in the *Melitzi* style and on biblical topics at the age of 17. Later he established himself as a renowned publicist and writer when publishing *Kitsur toldot hateva* (1867) *Ein mishpat* (1867), *Ha'avot vehabanim* (1868).

³⁰⁴ Abramowitch’s *Dos kleyne Mentshele* (1863) introduces the character of Mendele moycher sfarim (Mendele the Book Peddler). During that decade Abramowitch published another work in Yiddish *Fishke der Krumer* (1869). Both works reflect the maskilic critique on traditional Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

³⁰⁵ Other examples for this maskilic inclination towards Biblical Hebrew can be found in Reuven Asher Brodes’s novel *Hadat Vehahaim* (1876/1877), as well as in maskilic translation of international literature such as Yithak Rumash who translation of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (see Keren Dubnow. “Leshon Mikra Be-ai shomem: ‘Iun bareshonot shel hamaskil Yitshak Rumash be-“Kur ‘oni”, girsu ‘Ivrit shel hasefer “Harpatkaot Robinson Crusoe.” In *Nit’ey Ilan: Mehkarim ba-Lashon Ha-‘Ivrit Uveahaioteyha mugashim leIlan Eldar*, edited by Moshe Ben-Asher and Irit Meir, (Jerusalem: Karmel, 2014), 523–541.) and Mordechai Aharon Ginsburg’s translation of Eugène Sue’s *The Mysteries of Paris*.

Ahavat Zion is a love story that takes place in the ancient kingdom of Judah, when the Temple in Jerusalem and the voice of God transmitted through the prophets still constituted the center of Jewish life. Through the biblical ethos, maskilim constructed the modern Jewish consciousness, and especially Jewish nationalism. The *melitzi* tongue represents both the historical perception of maskilic modern Jewish consciousness and the maskilic “scientific” and ideological approach to language and to literature.³⁰⁶ *Ahavat Zion* became very popular and was translated into Yiddish in several different versions to address different audiences.³⁰⁷

The novelty of *Ahavat Zion* was recognized by the historiography of modern Hebrew literature, which follows a pivotal principle in the maskilic thought on literature – the secularization of Hebrew. The greatness of Mendele is thus considered in view of that first stage in modern Hebrew literature – the *melitzah*. The story that most historiographies tell claims that modern Hebrew literature (inevitably) resulted from the secularization of the ancient authentic national Hebrew (the biblical) thereby allowing its modernization, and from the integration of “authentic” forms of Hebrew expressions which gave it vitality. It is a story that ideologically skips traditional developments or traditional processes of modernization, thereby ignoring the Hasidic story. The perception of Hebrew that serves as the infrastructure of these historiographies implies a stable core of Jewish identity that has one linguistic root and one national origin estranged from the long experience in the diasporic.

³⁰⁶ Ya’akov Fichman, “Introduction,” *Ahavat Zion*, (Tel Aviv: Yzra’el, 1966).

³⁰⁷ Samuel Werses, *Hatirgumim Le-Yiddish shel ‘Ahavat Zion’ le-Avraham Mapu*. (Jerusalem: Magnes Hebrew University Press, 1989).

b. The Hasidic Story

Parallel to the maskilic *melitzi* projects, Hasidim presented stories whose linguistic and linguistic values would be appreciated by maskilic and Zionist Hebrew writers only decades later. Hasidism preceded Mendele, Peretz, Shalom Aleichem and many other canonical Hebrew writers in granting Hebrew a literary vitality; nevertheless, it was not considered a serious alternative because it did not undergo the process of secularization. On the contrary, Hasidism turned the daily and mundane into something holy and magnificent. As Joseph Dan explains, Hasidism sanctified the story in a way that combined aesthetic pleasure with religious practice.³⁰⁸ The Hebrew Hasidim used for writing down the oral stories was not a “new” Hebrew nor was it “authentic” to the contemporary Jewish life in Eastern Europe which was dominated by Yiddish. It was not derived from one stable center, not even from the rabbinic idiom as is commonly perceived. Rather it was disoriented by mixing biblical and rabbinic Hebrew with Yiddish syntax, and when necessary even with Yiddish words.³⁰⁹ It presented the literary space as fragmented, and through the mix of Yiddish and Hebrew expressed the existential and political complexity of contemporary Judaism. Instead of offering the modernizing Jewish consciousness a biblical epoch, such as *Ahavat Zion* offers, Hasidic hagiography gives Jewish consciousness a kabbalist myth that addresses the diasporic common life of Eastern European Jews.

³⁰⁸ Joseph Dan, *Ha-sipur Ha-hasidi* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 40–55. See also chapter 2 section B.

³⁰⁹ See chapter 2; Lily Okalany Kahn, “Biblical Grammatical Elements in the Nineteenth-century Hasidic Hebrew Tale,” *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 11 (2012): 323-44.

The “rawness” or “corruption” of the Hasidic language that stands in opposition to the maskilic biblical/Hebraic purism, is not artistic negligence, but an expression of Hasidic mystical and non-national ideology. What seems like Bodek and Rodkinon’s lack of knowledge of the grammatical rules, is actually their lack of urgency to participate in the construction of a modern Hebrew grammar. While maskilim argued about the “correct” form of words, aiming to produce a modern national language, Hasidic literature was more concerned about addressing the experience of their readers, which often included inconsistencies in the language, such as the Mishnaic inconsistency of gender tenses. Hasidic literature was of course influenced by trends and changes in the literary norms, so later on – towards the end of the nineteenth century – when Hebrew became broadly used in literature and more formalized, Hasidic Hebrew started also to follow the new grammatical rules that had been established, but this was only to a certain extent. Hasidic stories never gave up on integrating Yiddish. As opposed to the linguistic purity national standardization aspires to, the Hasidic mystical philosophy of the tongue “taught that just as divine sparks of holiness permeate mundane life, waiting for the pious to capture and rekindle them, so too the sparks of Holy Tongue permeate everyday language.”³¹⁰ The mystical belief that God is present in every aspect of existence sanctions the use of any measure for achieving holiness. As opposed to the traditional approach of Hebrew as the exclusive holy tongue, Hasidism appropriated the ‘profane’ for religious worship, thereby allowing other registers of Hebrew as well as Yiddish to be part of the literary pleasurable and holy text.

³¹⁰ Lewis Glinert, *Story of Hebrew*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 171–172.

Hasidic Hebrew presents itself as a spiritual adventure that draws its energy from the mystical myth of creation and is manifested through folklore. This combination of holy myth with daily folklore and practice allows for the flexibility of Hebrew and the linguistic integration of biblical quotes, Yiddish vocabulary and syntax, Aramaic (Talmudic) idioms, and Mishnaic Hebrew.³¹¹ Lily Kahan argues that utilizing biblical features in the Hasidic text “serves the important purpose of helping to establish the tales’ status as heirs to the tradition of biblical historical narrative.”³¹² Alongside this tradition, however, Hasidim placed both rabbinic and Yiddish traditions without attempting to reconcile them. They did not create a new cohesive linguistic system but kept the dialectic tension between all registers. Hasidic Hebrew is not a mimicry of past epics but an expression of contemporary dynamism.

The story about the Besht’s journey to the Land of Israel in Rodkinson’s *Adat Tsadikim* (1864) expresses the Hasidic decentralized approach to Hebrew.³¹³ The story follows the Besht’s unsuccessful attempt to travel to Eretz-Israel and focuses on the events that occurred to him in Constantinople and at sea. The opening of the story “מעשה מנסיעת הבעש"ט לקאנסטאנטינאפול” *Ma’ase minesiat haBesht lekonstantinople* (a tale about the Besht’s trip to Constantinople) is written in a Yiddish syntax. *Ma’ase mi-* is a direct translation of the Yiddish structure “א מעשה פון” a *mayse fun*. In

³¹¹ See discussion in Chapter Two about the *heteroglossic* nature of Hasidic Hebrew.

³¹² Lily O. Kahn. “Biblical Grammatical Elements in the Nineteenth-century Hasidic Hebrew Tale,” *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 11 (2012), 323.

³¹³ The story about the Besht’s journey to Eretz-Israel is told several times and in different versions in many hasidic works. For example, in Bodek’s *Maa’see Tsadikim* the story focuses on the Besht’s relationship with Istanbul’s Jewish community and the island adventure is not mentioned at all. About the different versions of this story see Tsippy Kaufman, “Mas’ao shel haBesht leEretz-Yisrael,” *Zion* (forthcoming).

Hebrew an appropriate opening would be על מעשה *ma'ase 'al* or ב מעשה *ma'ase be-*. Similarly, Rodkinson keeps the Yiddish structure when describing the Polish passenger “והנה איש אחד נוסע מארץ פולין בהרחוב” *vehine ish ehad nose'a me'erets Polin beharehov* (and behold, there was one person from Poland riding in the street) the word street is presented here with the unconstructed case ה ha' (the) as is in the Yiddish syntax *in di gas*, although in the Hebrew it should simply be ברחוב *barehov* with a constructed case, this change in the form of the case also changes the sound of the word.

Another example for an explicit Yiddish infrastructure of the Hasidic Hebrew comes a few lines later: “and this tale,” Rodkinson tells us, “ – the genius holy divine rabbi Yisrael Dov... was telling ... on the seventh day of Passover all his life.” The noun *tale* מעשה (*ma'ase* in Hebrew, *mayse* in Yiddish) receives a feminine pronoun *vezu* (feminine ‘this’) in this sentence, following the Yiddish gender of the word, while the word *ma'ase* in Hebrew is in fact masculine and should receive the pronoun *veze* instead.

The story’s vocabulary integrates typical biblical words in biblical syntax such as ותען *vata'an* (answered), with explicit Talmudic words, such as בצוותא (together) and דייקא (especially), and with Yiddish words, such as קאפיטאן (ship captain) and הידאמאקטס (highwaymen). Unlike modern Hebrew writers who turned to non-Hebrew vocabulary when there was a lexical gap in Hebrew (such as the word “cigarettes,” which, naturally, are not mentioned in biblical or Talmudic sources), Hasidic writers sometimes preferred the Yiddish version even when there was a Hebrew one available. For example, in the story under discussion Rodkinson could have used the

biblical word רב-הובל instead of the Yiddish קאפיטאן (captain). In the case of highwaymen, he places the Hebrew word גזלנים and the Yiddish היידאמאקטס side by side without deciding between them.

Beyond the playfulness of the Hasidic language, the story touches upon the connection between the national epoch and language in its content. Rodkinson chooses to frame the story within the context of Passover – the holiday that marks the birth of the Jewish nation and that is centered around the commandment of telling the national epoch to the new generation. First, Rodkinson tells us at the opening of the story that Rabbi Yisrael Dov Be'er from Wladnik (Vilednik) (1789 – 1850) used to tell this story on the fourth day of the holiday every year. Second, the Besht's journey itself took place during this time.

The first episode of the story focuses on the Besht's Seder – the ceremonial dinner in which one must fulfill the biblical command to tell the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt to the next generation.

Later in the story, Rodkinson presents another linguistic-centered scene that stands in opposition to the Seder episode and presents a different utilization of language. While the Seder scene is built around the festive holiday meal and the historical depth of the national story, the next scene uses language as an expression of distress and of spatial and mental disorientation. After Passover, the Besht and Rabbi Tzvi Sofer try to find a way to get to the land of Israel, but eventually find themselves lost at sea. When the holiday is over, the Besht and Tzvi Sofer board a ship, but due to a thunderstorm they reach a mysterious island and are captured by a group of highwaymen. At this unfortunate moment they also lose their memory, and

concomitantly the Besht loses his powers and the ability to make miracles. In order to regain his powers and save them from the spatial and mental crisis they are in, the Besht asks his scribe, Tsvi Sofer, to remind him of something that the Besht taught him. By holding on to that piece of knowledge, the Besht believes he can regain his own memory and thereby his powers. But the Sofer too does not remember anything. He tells the Besht that the only thing he can recall is the alphabet – the basic and raw fragments that constitute the Hebrew language. “Then the Besht called, ‘So why are you silent? Recite the alphabet before me!’ So Rabbi Tsvi Sofer started calling out Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Dalet, and the Besht called out after him, loudly and with great enthusiasm as his usual manner when engaging with the holy, until he restored all his power from before.”³¹⁴

This adventure in the mysterious island challenges the Besht’s misuse of language during the Seder in the earlier scene. This juxtaposition of the language-centered holy events illuminates the different approaches to language each scene represents. While the Seder’s scene presents language whose meaning is clear and even aggressive, the island adventure presents language as fragmented and unclear. The alphabet recitation expresses the Besht and Tzvi Sofer’s distress and yearning for help. It shows their disorientation and self-doubts, thereby allowing for an unexpected and spontaneous outcome. This usage of language recognizes the limits of intentions, and the unavoidable intervention of other elements and meanings. Unlike the coherent Exodus story during the Seder, the island adventure renders language as broken and incomprehensible. The detached letters express the Besht and Sofer’s disorientation,

³¹⁴ Rodkinson, *‘Adat Tsadikim*, 12.

not knowing what to ask for or even how to ask for what they need. This use of language recognizes the limits of constructing a narrative. The minimalist shouts of the alphabet represent language as shattered and expose the gaps that are usually covered with the reconstruction of narrative by intentions or politics. It implies that language is merely an *attempt* to create order in an essentially fragmentary existence.

After the Besht and Tzvi Sofer recite the alphabet with great enthusiasm and spiritual intention, they are saved by an unexpected passerby. As the Besht planned, his spiritualization of the alphabet did help him remember who he was and regain his superpowers. But that was not what eventually saved them. “And right when he was about to cut the bonds off [with his revived powers], and behold – a sound of bells rang in their ears, it was an old captain who appeared there suddenly with his men of valor and scared the highwaymen away. And he released the captives from their imprisonment.”³¹⁵ The miraculous act that the Besht was about to perform was disturbed by the sudden appearance of the ship and the mysterious captain. The narrative does not offer a clear explanation whether this event was a result of the Besht’s *hishtadlut* (efforts) or a random coincidence. Even if we accept this as a causal development of events, the arrival of the ship remains an unexpected twist in the story. This is emphasized by the narrator’s choice to stop the Besht from cutting the ropes himself; he tells us that the Besht “*was about to*” do it. Even after the bandits fled, it was the captain who cut the ropes and set them free and not the Besht, who was, according to the narrator, able to break the chains all by himself.

³¹⁵ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 12.

The Besht's journey turned out to be nothing like he planned. His personal Passover story deviates from the biblical epic and instead of arriving in Eretz Yisrael he and Rabbi Tzvi Sofer return to Constantinople on the fourth day of the holiday. The Besht then decides to go back to his diaspora homeland. The Besht's Passover tale is embraced by the Rebbe of Wladnik, who used to "tell it on the fourth day of the holiday." This storytelling ritual that occurs every year on the fourth day of the holiday constitutes a dialectic relationship with the storytelling ritual of the Seder. The Besht's story does not end in the Land of Yisrael; instead of the Haggadah (the book used during the Seder which contains the Exodus narrative), which is written in Hebrew and quotes the Bible and the Talmud, the Besht's story is told in Yiddish. The Rebbe of Waldnik does not replace the Haggadah with the Besht's tale, but tells both stories, each on its historical date: the Exodus on the day of departing from Egypt and the beginning of the journey to Eretz-Yisrael, and the Hasidic Passover tale on the day in which the Besht returned to Constantinople and turned his back on the Land of Yisrael. These two tales stand in Rodkinson's story as alternatives that clash and collide but that are also framed together, presenting a complex picture of Jewish linguistic experience. This picture embraces dynamism as essential to understanding the literary Jewish past and present. The linguistic dialectic that is reflected in the story's plot and tongue manifests the Hasidic recognition of an existential dialectic. The breaking down of language into its minimalist and raw components demonstrates the fluidity of language and of the creation of meaning. It represents the infinite possibilities man can assemble but also constructions that are totally arbitrary.

The story of the Besht's journey to the Land of Yisrael is told many times in the Hasidic hagiography tradition.³¹⁶ Another version of this story that was published at the same time (1864) and place (Lemberg) as Rodkinson's *'Adat Tsadikim* is found in Menachem Mendel Bodek's book *Ma'ase Tsadikim*. Bodek's version of the Besht's journey to Eretz Yisrael focuses on the events that occurred to him and his daughter Adele in Istanbul (Constantinople), and aside from a small comment in the opening, it entirely ignores the goal of the journey – arrival in the land of Yisrael.

Tsippi Kauffman has argued that the different versions of this journey in the Hasidic literary tradition expresses the authors' perception of the journey as either a failure or a success. Some authors, she claims, depict the Besht as an unfulfilled messiah, while others emphasize the significance of his role as a diaspora figure. According to Kauffman, Rodkinson's version of the tale stresses the individual and private aspects in the Besht's spiritual work, averting any messianic meanings in his journey, and Bodek's version discusses the Besht as a leader, as a messiah who is condemned to act for his people in exile.³¹⁷ Problematizing Kauffman's distinction of the two roles, a critical literary reading of the stories shows that the Hasidic story does not choose between these two possible roles; Rodkinson's story does not withhold messianic meanings from the Besht's actions, and Bodek's version does not simply accept the failure of the messianic mission. Instead, the literariness of the

³¹⁶ Other sources that are mentioned in Kauffman's essay: *Toldot Ya'akov; Shivhei HaBesht; Nativ Mitsvoteikha veOtsar Hayim; Ma'ase Tsadikim; Adat Tsadikim; HaHasidut, Kesset Hadio*. Another version of the story that Kauffman does not mention can be found in *Sihot Yekarim* (1930).

³¹⁷ Kauffman, "Massa'o," [18-24]. Kauffman stresses the lesson that the Besht learns from his experience on the island – his "simple and earthy" concerns about the holiday meal and his personal *midat habitahon* (his trust in God) [18-20]. This reading, however, skips the first episode of the story during the Seder – his function as a man who performs miracles and helps his 'flock' – and the complications that arise when comparing this episode with the island episode.

stories raises the conflicts between different aspects of the tsadik's experience. Rodkinson's story is a dialogue between the tsadik and God; it is a dialectic relation between the tsadik's ability to control reality and his impotence when clashing with God's totality; between a narrative and its fragmentation. Bodek's story reflects these literary dialectics as well.

The story opens with a description of the Besht's poor mental condition during the journey. The strains of traveling influenced his emotional state "till one time he become sad and the holy spirit withdrew from him." The Besht's poor state escalates in Istanbul when Passover approaches and "they had no matzos and no wine to bless the four cups of the Seder, and anything else they needed for the holiday." Adele sees "that her father's spirituality has gone, and that he is in *Katnut* (state of smallness), lying in the beit-midrash as one of the people, and the holy spirit and all the grand qualities that he used to have are gone."³¹⁸ This description of the Besht's condition is reminiscent of the island scene from Rodkinson's story – both are moments in which the Besht loses his intellectual and spiritual powers. In Bodek's story this crisis is solved by the appearance of a rich man who takes care of all their holiday needs and who invites them to celebrate the first night of the holiday at his mansion.

Similarly to Rodkinson's literary style, Bodek's account reflects the linguistic cacophony of Hasidic Hebrew. The different registers of Hebrew are used by Bodek carefully. For example, the revival of the Besht's mental state is described in the story through the halachic Talmudic discussion about drinking wine on the eve of Passover

³¹⁸ Menachem Mendel Bodek, *Ma'ase Tsadikim* (Lemberg: 1864), 9.

(before the Seder). The Besht arrives at the fine house of the rich man where he is invited to enter a room that is “very lovely” There, the rich man offers him wine which fills him with joy and leads to the return of his lost mental and spiritual powers. It is customary in some places to taste the wine that will be used for the Seder meal beforehand to test its quality. However, doing so on the eve of Passover is problematic according to halacha (Jewish law) because it might damage one’s appetite and pleasure during the Seder. The Gemara is concerned that one will not enjoy drinking the four cups of wine and eating matzah during the Seder, which are the physical means through which one should feel and appreciate his/her freedom deeply and fully. Bodek tells us that the Besht drank a lot of wine, but he justifies the Besht’s behavior by explaining it with an Aramaic quote from the halachic tradition “ ויקחהו הגביר אל חדר אחד שהיה יפה עד למאוד ושמה כבודוהו עם כוס יין ואח"כ עוד כוס אחד מפני ” (And the lord took him into a room that was very lovely and there they honored him [the Besht] with a glass of wine and another one because of the reason that the sages of the Talmud, blessed be their memory, gave: *purta sa'id vetuva megrir gerir*.” The Gemara permits drinking wine on the eve of the Seder because “פורתא סעיד וטובא מגריר גריר”³¹⁹ (a lot of wine stimulates, but a little satisfies). If one has to drink on the eve of Passover, says the Gemara, then it is better to drink a lot because this way the appetite is

³¹⁹ The discussion in the Gemara Berakhot 35:b goes as the following: Apparently, oil nourishes. Rather, (there is another distinction between wine and oil:) Wine satisfies, oil does not satisfy. (Wine not only nourishes, but it is also filling. The Gemara asks:) And does wine satisfy? Wouldn't Rava drink wine all (day on) the eve of Passover in order to stimulate his heart, (i.e., whet his appetite) so that he might eat more *matza* (at the Seder? Wine does not satisfy, it whets the appetite. The Gemara answers:) A lot (of wine) stimulates, a little satisfies.

stimulated and one will be able to enjoy the drinking of the four cups and the eating of the matzah.

Bodek integrates this Talmudic Aramaic idiom into his narrative and contextualizes the Besht's behavior within the halachic tradition. This stylistic decision creates a tension between two linguistic layers of the text, Hebrew and Aramaic, which expresses a dialectic between two discursive fields – a behavior and its explanation, *peshat* and *derash*.³²⁰ The need to explain, to provide justification implies that Bodek was worried about his reader's reaction. The description of the Besht drinking glass after glass might evoke feelings of disgust by maskilim who rejected the Hasidic behavior that appropriated drinking and dancing as means for spiritual elevation.³²¹ Bodek uses halachic terminology to situate the Besht within the long Jewish conventional rabbinic tradition, while also telling us that drinking wine led to the Besht's spiritual elevation. "And when the Besht, blessed be his memory, drank the wine, the wine cheered him up and his spirit and all the great levels of spirituality that withdrew from him while he was in small mindedness because of the worrying and exhaustion from traveling returned to him as before."³²² Contextualizing the Hasidic habit of drinking within the Talmud positions it in line with the halacha, but the stylistic choice keeps the tension between the internal and external views on Hasidism. Bodek plays here with the different registers of Hebrew and of Jewish experience.

³²⁰ *Peshat* and *derash* are terms that are used in Judaism to indicate two levels of reading in the holy texts. *Peshat* means the literal and simple meaning of the text, and *derash* means the deeper meaning of it and the act of interpretation.

³²¹ Ze'ev Gries, "HaSimḥa ba-Ḥasidut: Korot uMekorot," *Kabbalah* 38 (2016/17): 171–184.

³²² Bodek, *Ma'ase Tsadikim*, 9.

Although Bodek justifies the Besht's drinking and appropriates it to fit the rabbinic tradition, he later tells us that the drinking did indeed interrupt the Seder. After drinking the Besht asks to rest "a little" so they "will be able to tell the story of Exodus at night with no exhaustion." But he falls into a deep and long sleep and the Seder is delayed. The rich man is concerned because the night is about to end, and they have not yet started the Seder. The different rituals of the Seder depend on time; most of them must be performed during the night (even by specific hours during the night, according to some opinions). Concerned about the order of the Seder, the rich host goes to check on the Besht and he notices that he is crying in his sleep. The rich man stands there amazed while the Besht's crying becomes stronger until "his eyes almost popped out of their sockets." Then the Besht cries out and wakes up. Later, the Besht tells them that he had had a vision about an upcoming edict which would expel the Jews from the town and allow them to be killed without any consequences for the murderers. While he was sleeping, explains the Besht, he begged God to pardon the Jews and cancel the edict.

This strange episode disturbs the order of storytelling during the Seder and just as in the island episode from Rodkinson's story, it poses an alternative to the organized and controlled experience of the ceremonial Seder. The spiritual experience that happens in the Besht's subconscious is essentially opposed to the deliberate and coherent intention that is required to fulfill the obligations of the ceremonial Seder. The structured rituals of the Seder (which literally means *order*) requires full attention and intention at each stage of the performative storytelling of the Exodus – eating while reclining to one's left as free men do, reciting loud the significance of eating

each symbolic food (representing mortar, misery, sacrifice, or haste from the Israelites' story), and asking questions. When the Besht awakens he cleans himself up and starts the evening ceremony right away without saying a word. Because of his unanticipated visionary experience, the Seder had been postponed.

Like Rodkinson, Bodek places unstable behavior and unclear mystical utterance – shouts – amidst the normative, structured and halachicly-controlled ceremony of the Seder. The Besht's behavior challenges the norms and the rich man's expectations of Passover eve. In the morning, after they finish the Seder, the Besht explains to his disturbed host that while he was sleeping his soul rose to higher levels and mitigated a harsh predestination of punishment that threatened the Jews of Istanbul. This unexpected spiritual subconscious experience that resulted from his overindulgence in wine, pushed aside the biblical national story due to a contemporary crisis. Similarly, this experience challenges the Besht's own expectations from his journey to the Land of Israel. According to Bodek's opening, the goal of the Besht's visit to Israel was to "meet the holy rabbi, the author of *Or Hahayim*", Rabbi Hayim Ben Atar. A meeting with him, according to Hasidic tradition, would have brought salvation to the world.³²³ His Istanbul experience however, forced him to recognize that he has an important role to play in the diaspora.

³²³ In her essay about the Journey of the Besht to Erets-Yisreal, Kauffman presents the the first mention of the story that mystically ties between the Besht and R. Hayim Ben Atar. This connection is presented in Yitzhak Yehuda Yehiel Seffrin from Komarno's *Nativ mitsvoteicha ve'otsar hayim*. This tradition is mentioned again in Yitzhak Dov Ben Tzvi Hirsh's *Kahal Hasidim Ha-Hadash*. About the character of R. Hayim Ben Atar in the eyes of Hasidism see: David Assaf, *Neahez Basvach: pirkey mashber umevucha betoldot haHasidut* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2006), 235-37; Dan Manor, "Rabbi Hayim Ben Atar bemishnat haHasidut," *Paamayim* 20 (1984), 88-110; Gedaliah Nigal, "Shivhey Rabbi Hayim Ben Atar," *Mehkarey mizrah uma'arav* (Jerusalem, 2001), 99-120.

c. Montage story

Unlike the happy ending of *Ahavat Zion*, the Besht's journey, as depicted in Hasidic stories from that period, is a failure. In contrast to the union of Tamar and Amnon (the protagonists lovers of the novel), the clarity of God's will through his prophets, and the centrality of the kingdom of Judah, the Besht never reaches Eretz Yisrael, God's will is unclear to him and others, and space is fragmented by sea and islands. Hasidic literature, as both stories demonstrate, offers an alternative to the ideal language and the epic vision of maskilic literature. Instead of a "pure" elevated biblical language, it proposes a cacophony. The Hasidic story's use of language accepts the value of all registers, allowing for the expression of conflicts and of mystery. Hasidic stories confirm the diasporic contemporary conditions of their readers. They acknowledge and express the contemporary social tensions between halachic law and mysticism, between national aspirations and local needs, and between Yiddish and Hebrew. Instead of an ideal vision and aesthetics offered by contemporary maskilic literature, Hasidic stories present a decentralized Jewish aesthetic and experience.

Maskilic popular approaches to the Jewish tongue sought to create a consistent and pure Jewish expression and identity, but eventually found this consistency too dry for depicting the messiness of reality. Western maskilim (mostly German) decided to abandon Hebrew because it was stuck in the epic mode, and Eastern European maskilim decided to revive it with the "corrupt" Hasidic version. Hasidim, however recognized the value of multi-layered language. Hasidic Hebrew

seeks to elevate the sparks embedded in each medium of expression, allowing the dialectic dynamism of existence to be expressed. Each layer is an opportunity to communicate with God; an opportunity to form a separation between the two entities, God and man, that collide. Although Hasidic stories offer comfort and resolution, they also push individuals to place themselves in front of the other, in front of God, and use any means necessary to voice themselves. Adding to the traditional Exodus story, the Rebbe of Wladnik told the story of the Besht's abortive journey as a counterpoint to complicate the traditional holiday. In the same way, Rodkinson retells this story in 1864, (after the death of the Wladnik rebbe) and as a response to the cultural development of his time, expanding the market of Hebrew literature.

Yet, Hebrew literary historiography essentially and exclusively starts with the secularization of ancient national Hebrew by the maskilic *melitzi* project. Only after establishing a fundamental break from the traditional past could it accept the integration of "authentic" forms of Hebrew. The Hebrew that serves as the infrastructure of this historiography implies a stable core of Jewish identity that has one linguistic root and one national origin. Using *montage* we overcome the nearsightedness of this historiographic approach and see modern Hebrew literature as a network of disruptions and convergences. Hasidic literature was influenced by maskilic writings and vice versa, but they refused to reconcile. Rather, they stand as two poles in a negative dialectic system of Hebrew that keeps challenging our understanding of modernity and of literary aesthetics. While historiography separated between these two events of literary history, the method of montage refuses to view them as separate events. The effect and meaning of historical narratives are derived

by intellectual dialectics, by placing these two events one “on top of the other.” Contrasting with the clash of registers and flexibility of Hasidic Hebrew, the strict purity of biblical Hebrew seems in many ways surprisingly *unmodern*.

E. Two Tickets to Modernity

The Hebrew language had “two tickets to modernity,” argues Lewis Glinert – Enlightenment and Hasidism.³²⁴ The Hasidic path, however, did not receive recognition as a serious possibility but was merely considered through its secondary role in neo-Hasidic Hebrew literature from the turn of the twentieth century. Hasidic literature was finally acknowledged by maskilim at the turn of the twentieth century when Hebrew writers, known as “neo-Hasidim,” sought to revive the dry biblical Hebrew and to develop Hebrew realism. They turned to Hasidic stories as an ethnographic resource for extracting “authentic” representations of the “old” Jewish world. Despite its modernity, Hasidic texts were regarded in the same way as the Bible – an ancient “authentic” source for dredging up Jewish images. Likewise, both texts were “secularized,” regarded outside of their religious and traditional contexts. As opposed to the Bible, however, turning to Hasidic stories was considered a shameful move. While the Bible was the revered classic resource, Hasidism was, in the eyes of maskilim, a corrupt and decadent movement.

In 1902 Ahad Ha’am wrote in response to the condition of Hebrew literature of his time that it is “*with shame*, we must admit that if we want to find some shade of original Hebrew literature at this time, we must turn to the literature of Hasidism, (...)”

³²⁴ Glinert, *Story of Hebrew*, 169-73. Emphasis is mine (C.M.E)

which the stamp of Hebrew originality is imprinted on it, in a way that is much more than we can find in the ‘Enlightenment’ literature.”³²⁵ Despite this confession by one of the most influential figures of modern Hebrew culture, the accepted historiography of modern Hebrew literature recognized the contribution of Hasidic literature to modern Jewish consciousness only through the works of maskilim. As we can see in Ahad Ha’am’s apologetic tone, Hasidism was a source of shame. Drinking from the same traditions, the historiography that scholarship still follows is that of the Enlightenment. Hasidism had no place within maskilic categories of modernity, and thus national ideologies dictated the canon of modern Hebrew literature.³²⁶

The ‘road not taken’ of Hasidic Hebrew and literature was used indirectly by Hebrew writers who sought to insert some energy into their “old world” characters first, for the purpose of mocking and criticizing them, and later in the century, in order to admire their strong sense of community or portray a nostalgic Jewish past. These literary representations of Hasidism only emphasize the romantic view of the past and the aspiration of Jewish maskilim to define themselves in opposition to what Hasidism offered.³²⁷ This second-hand representation of the ‘Hasidic voice’ produced what Sheila Jelen calls *salvage poetics*— “Salvage poetics are a series of framing

³²⁵ Ahad Ha’am “Tehiat haruah” *Hashiloah* vol. 10, no. 5-6. 1902.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 179-195, 205-211.

³²⁷ For example, I. L. Peretz embraced Hasidic values that he found valuable for his socialist beliefs. He adapted and integrated them into his stories. See: Adi Mahalel, “The Radical Years of I. L. Peretz,” (PhD Diss., Columbia University, 2014), 313–370; .Adi Mahalel, “Weaving The Revolution: I.L. Peretz The Social Protest Writer,” *In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies* (May 2016): Accessed Mar 05, 2020. On the ambivalence in other Maskilic writers see Dan Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000); Nicham Ross, *Masoret ahuva u-senuah: zehut Yehudit modernit u-khetivah neo-Hasidit be-fetah ha-meah ha-‘esrim* (Beloved-Despised Tradition: Modern Jewish Identity and neo-Hasidic Writing at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century) (Beer-Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2010).

devices wherein primary cultural materials in the form of text or image are mediated, translated, explicated, personalized, and/or valorized in an effort to create an accessible description of a lost culture. Salvage poetics represent a marriage of aesthetic and ethnographic impulses, a streamlining of popular desire on the part of an audience and specialized linguistic and cultural knowledge on the part of authors who seek to educate that audience.”³²⁸ Hasidic literature and culture allowed modern Judaism to reflect on its past and reconstruct the modern Jew in light of this past – either by drawing ethical conclusions from it or rejecting it while offering an opposite version of Judaism. In any case, it was not regarded as a legitimate option that modern Jews should consider following and developing. They could not accept the Hasidic tradition of Hebrew which reflects a negative dialectic complex of religiosity and modernity, individualism and community.

Hasidic literature contributed to the revival of the Hebrew language and the Hebrew culture, long before it was discovered by maskilic writers. “As much as the *melitzah* of the maskilim has been regarded by cultural historians as a precursor of modern Israeli Hebrew prose,” claims Glinert, “it was Hasidim who were reconnecting Hebrew with spoken language – and long before Zionists did.”³²⁹ Hasidism naturally used Hebrew since it is part of a long tradition of religious communication and religious philosophy. For them, Hebrew was never “dead.” In order to take part in religious life, Hebrew had to be used and it had to be useful. It is Hebrew that allowed the halachic conversations between Jewish communities around

³²⁸ Sheila Jelen, *Salvage Poetics: Post-Holocaust American Jewish Folk Ethnographies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020).

³²⁹ Glinert, *Story of Hebrew*, 172.

the globe. In addition to the scholarly biblical interpretations and Jewish philosophy, responsa, the halachic literature that treats contemporary issues, was also written in Hebrew. Likewise, Hasidic rebbes often delivered their sermons in Hebrew, or made use of Hebrew in their sermons to enhance the spiritual experience of their audience. Nahum Sokolov testifies that he first heard spoken Hebrew in 1866 from the Hasidic rebbe Shmuel Abba of Zikhlin (a student of Sokolov's grandfather), who on Shabbat would speak only in the Holy Tongue. "I was then seven, and he tested me in Talmudic problems ... the talk in the Holy Tongue with Talmudic intonation really fascinated me, and from that moment on, the desire to speak Hebrew never left me."³³⁰ Despite the dominance of Yiddish in the life of Eastern Europeans, Hebrew was an expressive option. It was *helpful*. This was not an idealistic mechanical Hebrew, but an integral element of the spoken experience of Jewish life. Its linguistic register was that of the present within which all useful modes participate in the linguistic cantillation of expression. This style was indeed adopted by maskilim who wanted the "authenticity" of a spoken language but it was also adapted by them to fit the maskilic ideology because they felt that the Hasidic version was too "raw," too mystical and did not present a new modernist stage in Jewish experience.

The story that most historiography follows claims that modern Hebrew literature started – essentially and exclusively – with the secularization of the ancient national biblical Hebrew. Only after establishing a fundamental break from the traditional past

³³⁰ Nahum Sokolov. *Ishim* Vol. 2, (Tel Aviv: A.I. Shtible 1934), 13. And see Sokolov's discussion about the *melitzah* there, 5-6, and Eliezer Ben Yehuda's project, 14-19. Glinert brings this quote in his discussion about the simple spoken Hebrew of Hasidim as a contradiction to the complicated *melitzah* of the maskilim. See *Story of Hebrew*, 173.

could it develop further and integrate “authentic” forms of Hebrew expressions, such as the Hasidic ones, to assert its vitality. The perception of Hebrew that serves as the infrastructure of such historiographies implies a stable nucleus of Jewish identity that has one linguistic core and one national origin. Hasidic literature on the other hand presents Jewish modernization as a process that weaves the profane and the sacred together, as well as the practical and daily with the mythic. As a movement, Hasidism sought to overcome the narrow experience of the Beit-midrash, the study hall. As part of this move, they embraced aesthetic pleasure and offered their literary version – collections of hagiographical stories – as an integral part of the Jewish market. Through these booklets, Hasidism invented Hebrew popular culture.

F. Neo-Hasidism? Buber, Agnon, and the ‘Hasidikum Project’

Hasidic stories were finally recognized and appreciated by maskilim at the turn of the twentieth century. This change in the approach to Hasidism in general and to Hasidic literature in particular is called by scholarship the “Neo-Hasidic” trend. In this section I will briefly present the change in literary trends at the turn of the century and then devote most of the discussion to the well-known ‘Hasidikum projects’ of Martin Buber and S. Y. Agnon. Buber’s and Agnon’s projects reflect their different approaches to Hasidic literature. A montage of their approaches will illuminate another level of dialectical tension that lies in twentieth century Hebrew literature and its treatment of the culture of the Jewish “past.”

As Theodor Adorno argues about modern Western transcendent criticism, Buber’s Hasidikum project reflects his detachment from Hasidic praxis and from Hasidic

material conditions and politics.³³¹ His collection of stories is a critical response to Hasidic culture, but one that ignores the mechanism of production and the Eastern European market. He therefore embraces and appropriates Hasidic existential ideas (such as the human dialogue) while rejecting and opposing the “barbaric” and corrupted Hasidic language and mysticism. Agnon, however, recognizes both the Hasidic practice and market, as well as the fact that he himself is part of the Jewish and Hasidic economy of praxis. His Hasidic story collections preserve the Hasidic linguistic economy and his later writing projects (which due to lack of space will not be discussed here) provide us with a complex criticism of Hasidic literary culture that uses and reproduces the same forms of representation *while also* criticizing their oppressive cultural meanings.

a. Neo-Hasidism

The malleable Hasidic “stuttering” tone has been used and shaped by different Hebrew and Yiddish authors for various purposes – sometimes in order to mock Hasidism and reject their “backward” values, sometimes to praise Hasidic life and inspire modern Jewish life, and sometimes as a means to develop Hebrew realism and conversation.³³² Maskilic satires mimicked what they perceived to be a stuttered, garbled, and inarticulate Hasidic voice only to highlight the backwardness of Hasidism.³³³ The publication of Hasidic hagiography expedited the production of

³³¹ Theodor Adorno. *Prisms* Trans. S. and S. Weber (Neville Spearman: London, 1967), 22-34.

³³² See footnotes 327 and 328 above.

³³³ For example Josef Perl’s *megale tmiring* (1819), and see a broad discussion about that satire in Jonatan Meir, *Hasidut meduma: 'Iunim bihtavav hasatiryim shel Yosef Perl* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2013); Joseph Klausner, *Historiya shel hasifrut ha'ivrit hahadasha* vol 2 (Jerusalem: Ahiasaf, 1960),

satirical writings which “are dressed in Hasidic cloak and reverse the original praises from the inside.”³³⁴ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century many authors embraced the Hasidic voice as they believed it to be the best way to represent the daily life of Eastern European Jews. Aiming to present a realistic picture in their Hebrew writings, they turned to the Hasidic tone as the closest representation of a spoken language.³³⁵

In other cases such as I. L. Peretz, M. J. Berdyczewski, Martin Buber, and others, non-Hasidic Jewish writers and philosophers drew on Hasidic anecdotes to extract the values they believed could best contribute to modern Jewish life.³³⁶ Peretz, for example, was attracted by Hasidic humanism and communal loyalty, which inspired his engagement with the masses in general and with the working-class in particular.³³⁷ However, as Agnon explains, “His talented eyes did not see the Hasidim nor Hasidism. The ideas that embellish his drawings, and his drawings that surround the ideas – they have nothing in common not with Hasidim, nor with Hasidism.”³³⁸

307. I. L. Peretz in his early works. Later (be specific about years), he changed his opinion about Hasidism and highlighted its communal quality. See: Nicham Ross, *Margalit Temunah baHol: I. L. Peretz uMa'asiut Hasidim* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2103), 6–20. Joseph Dan argues that Steinberg’s stories on Hasidism are not satirical but present an intellectual conversation with Hasidic theology. He argues that Steinberg criticized Hasidic theology for being unethical, backward, inappropriate, and unfitting to modern life. However, argues Dan, Steinberg did so after learning Hasidic philosophy in depth, as opposed to maskilic satirist who criticized Hasidism based on what they could see from their position outside the community. Joseph Dan. “*Hasidim mithasdim besipurey Yehuda Steinberg*,” *Moznaim* 2 (July 1975), 114-23.

³³⁴ Meir, *Hasidut meduma*, 19. (translation is mine)

³³⁵ In Yiddish literature it was easier to represent an authentic dialogue because Yiddish was a spoken language, so they did not have to turn to Hasidic literature. See for example the case of Mendeli mokher sfarim in DAN Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl*, x-xi; David Roskies. *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 18.

³³⁶ Ross. *Masoret Ahuva Vesnua*, 13.

³³⁷ Mahalel, “The Radical Years of I. L. Peretz,” 313–370; Mahalel, “Weaving the Revolution.”

³³⁸ Shmuel Yosef Agnon. *Me'atmi el 'atmi* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2000), 274.

In his introduction to *Sefer Hasidim* (1900), Berdyczewski explains that Hasidism served as a resource for reconnecting with his Jewish past, after having left it for a more enlightened and liberated culture. The vitality of life that Hasidism expresses in its philosophy of the sanctification of the mundane as well as the dynamic in Jewish tradition that it represents in its rejection of the rabbinical scholarly order allowed him to shape a more progressive Jewish existence without severing his connection with Jewish tradition entirely. Influenced by Romanticism in general and Nietzsche in particular, Berdyczewski was looking to create a new, more progressive and vital Jewish experience.³³⁹ *Sefer Hasidim* demonstrates this detached view through its language, which follows the contemporary “nusach”. Rejecting folkish Hasidic Hebrew, Berdyczewski wrote both the introduction and the stories in a clean, clear and standardized Hebrew. In this work particularly we can see the literary shift and the expression of a new “ex nihilo” style of his generation. Following the “creator of the nusach,” Mendele, Berdyczewski’s style (and content) “assisted his generation to think their thoughts and feel their feelings.”³⁴⁰

b. Buber

Buber, who was a Romanticist in many respects, was attracted to the authenticity of Hasidic anecdotes. His collection project, published first in German and only later in

³³⁹ Galenda Abramson, ““The first of those who return”: Incarnations of the New Jew in Modern Hebrew Literature,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 30/1 (March 2011), 45–63; Anita Shapira. *Yehudim hadashim yehudim yeshanim* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997), 155-74; Hever. *Bekoah hael*, 18-39.

³⁴⁰ H. N. Bialik. “Yotser hanusach,” 199-205; Shaked, *Ha-Siporet Ha-’Iverit* Vol 1, 83-89.

Hebrew, reflects this romantic search for authenticity.³⁴¹ Hasidim as representatives of the old world express something about the spirit of the Jewish nation. As he testifies about himself, Buber first addressed Hasidism as an external observer, examining, thinking and understanding Hasidism from a distance.³⁴² In his early projects he sought to illuminate the authenticity of life presented through the testimony of sincere witnesses. The “legendary anecdote,” he says, “has not developed out of literary presuppositions on the path of literary attempts, but out of the simple necessity to create a verbal expression adequate to an overpowering objective reality. It was the reality of the exemplary lives, of the lives reported as exemplary.”³⁴³ For Buber, the Hasidic tale is the life-event that speaks.³⁴⁴ This romantic view of the stories ignores the politics imbedded in the aesthetics. As was mentioned earlier, Hasidic tales did not reflect the true or “natural” way in which Hasidism spoke historically. Rather, the cacophony of the stories presents a political response to contemporary conditions and a recognition of the aesthetic market.

Later on, Buber tells us, he realized that these life-events of Hasidic hagiography speak not merely to Hasidim, but also to the modern Western individual: “The kernel of this life is capable of working on men even today, when most of the powers of the Hasidic community itself have been given over to decay or destruction,

³⁴¹ Buber published *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman (The Tales of Rabbi Nachman)* in 1906, *Die Legende des Baalschem (The Legends of the Ba'al Shem Tov)* in 1908, and *Das Verborgene Licht (The Hidden Light)* in 1924. The claim presented in the discussion here is applicable to all of Buber's Hasidic projects. But I will focus only on *The Hidden Light*, a project that he shared with Agnon.

³⁴² Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man*. Edited by Maurice Friedman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), 2-4.

³⁴³ Ibid. 4.

³⁴⁴ Ibid 5.

and it is just on the present-day West that it is capable of working in an especial manner.”³⁴⁵ “What is of greatest importance in Hasidism, today as then,” Buber explains “is the powerful tendency, preserved in personal as well as in communal existence, to overcome the fundamental separation between the sacred and the profane.”³⁴⁶

Buber believed that this Hasidic daily-life philosophy is manifested in the Hasidic stories more than it was expressed in the Hasidic teachings.³⁴⁷ Nevertheless, he found the aesthetic of these stories old-fashioned and inappropriate for modern readers. For him Hasidic hagiography was “crude and shapeless traditional material.”³⁴⁸ Buber’s blindness to the political role of Hasidic aesthetics resulted from his transcendent critical position which “places culture in vigorous and consistent opposition to the growing barbarism of economic hegemony.”³⁴⁹ Fighting the corrupted barbarism of the Hasidic tongue and the Hasidic popular genre, Buber attempted to cause modern Jewish society to progress.

The Hasidic raw form of expression was one of the obstacles that prevented modern readers from seeing all the worthy values that Hasidism had to offer.

³⁴⁵ Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man*, 5.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ While Gershom Scholem argued that the Hasidic *derashah* (sermon) best expresses Hasidic thought, Martin Buber claimed that Hasidic stories actually expressed the essence of the Hasidic dialogic existential philosophy. See: Gershom Scholem, “Martin Buber's Hasidism,” *Commentary* 12 (Oct 1, 1961): 305–16; Martin Buber, “Interpreting Hasidism,” *Commentary* 36 (September 1963): 218–225; Maurice Friedman, “Interpreting Hasidism: The Buber-Scholem Controversy,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 33, no. 1 (1988): 449–467; Rachel White, “Recovering the Past, Renewing the Present: The Buber-Scholem Controversy over Hasidism Reinterpreted,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (2007): 364–392.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴⁹ Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Neville Spearman: London, 1967), 24.

According to Buber, this obstacle had to be removed. “Whenever cultural criticism complains of ‘materialism’, it furthers the belief that the sin lies in man’s desire for consumer goods, and not in the organization of the whole which withholds these goods from man: for the cultural critic, the sin is satiety, not hunger.” According to Adorno, Buber could not accept the barbarism of Hasidic common language and the materiality of the popular booklet because “were mankind to possess the wealth of goods, it would shake off the chains of that civilized barbarism which cultural critics ascribe to the advanced state of the human spirit rather than to the retarded state of society. The ‘eternal values’ of which cultural criticism is so fond reflect the perennial catastrophe. The cultural critic thrives on the mythical obduracy of culture.”³⁵⁰ Buber’s transcendent criticism turned Hasidic tales into an abstract idea for Western civilized readers. Ran HaCohen explains that Buber “changed the image of Hasidism from the incarnation of superstition and ‘oriental’ backwardness which it had been for non-Jewish and Jewish (German) readers alike into a literary presentable phenomenon, *by dressing it in state-of-art new-romantic, later expressionistic language and style*, and by associating it with other mystical traditions, especially those of the medieval Church and various oriental religions.”³⁵¹

As a Romantic philosopher, Buber examines culture as separated from its production apparatus and treats Hasidic culture as an abstract object that criticism can use. Adorno explains that transcendent critics are drawn by mythology and the past. They find past culture attractive because it provides finite objects that can be used by

³⁵⁰ Ibid. 24-25.

³⁵¹ Ran HaCohen, “The Hay Wagon Moves to the West: On Martin Buber’s Adaptation of Hassidic Legends,” *Modern Judaism* 28/1 (February 2008), 1. The emphasis is mine.

abstract thought.³⁵² Buber's cultural project turns the 'mythological Hasidic ideas' (mainly the dialogue) into new abstract notions, while rejecting the materiality of their aesthetics and its political role in the Eastern European market, represented partly by the Hasidic language. Beyond the philosophical ideas that Buber constructs based on Hasidic stories, his collection project is in itself a new material object in the contemporary modern economy and should be examined and criticized as a political popular product.

Buber's Hasidic project can be better understood when presented through montage in the dialectical relationships it holds with Agnon's projects. As is commonly known, Agnon and Buber shared an interest in Hasidic stories, and even cooperated on a joint collection project. However, with time and for various reasons their ways drifted apart. As early as 1917 Agnon and Buber started sharing Hasidic materials and considered working on Hasidic stories together.³⁵³ Agnon used to copy stories into his notebooks from Hasidic booklets he came across, and sometimes even wrote down stories he heard himself, and then shared his findings with Buber. And Buber, for whom this project was an intellectual and scientific one, introduced Agnon to the breadth of Hasidic publications. However, after the manuscript of the first volume of their collection was burned in a fire at Agnon's house in Homberg in 1925, Agnon decided to quit this ambitious project.³⁵⁴

³⁵² Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," 23.

³⁵³ Emuna and Haim Yehuda Yaron, "Aharit," *Siurey HaBesht*, 237. In 1917, Agnon sent Buber a postcard on which he wrote three Hasidic stories. From then on they shared with each other the Hasidic materials they came across and eventually planned to compile a collection of Hasidic stories.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 238-39.

c. Agnon

Agnon had a great appreciation for Buber's project of Hasidic stories and Hasidic philosophy, but he also had some reservations. Hasidism, says Agnon, was "a gem in the rough" that many walked by it without noticing its glamor, until Buber came and observed it. He "bent over, picked it up, and cleaned it until the light of its spender brightened."³⁵⁵ But, Agnon adds, not everything that Buber presents is an authentic representation of Hasidism.³⁵⁶ Rather, it is the "spirit of the time" that Buber incorporated into his adaptation of the stories that attracts modern readers. This form of Hasidic stories is what allowed their effect to exceed the boundaries of the Jewish world. Buber's projects made Hasidic stories accessible and relevant not merely to modern Jewish readers, but also to general modern readers.

In *Me'atsmi 'el 'atmi* Agnon tells a story about a Galician family who was granted the right to live in Leipzig thanks to Buber's Hasidic stories. In his conversation with Rabbi Feldman, Agnon explains that when he went to talk to the Minister of Police about this Galician family they discussed the life of Eastern European Jews and the Hasidic movement. The Minister, says Agnon, was impressed by Hasidic life. "What does the Minister of Police have to do with folk tales about tsadikim?" questioned Rabbi Feldman. Agnon answered, "This Minister of Police is used to reading books of great authors. And since Buber is a great author who wrote great books about the Hasidim, the Minister has read Buber's book. And it is thanks

³⁵⁵ Agnon. *Me'atsmi el 'tmi*, 272, 276.

³⁵⁶ Ibid 275. Agnon writes that in Buber's first Hasidic stories one can find the "spirit of time", and the "spirit of foreign nations", but "from between the wings of the cherubim winds like that do not blow." In other words, this is not a representation of the Jewish and Hasidic spirit.

to Buber that a great favor has been made for one family in Israel”.³⁵⁷ From the way Agnon tells this story, we can see not merely his appreciation for Buber’s writing, but also the ways in which his own writing differs from Buber’s. Agnon’s personal relationship – his internal view of Eastern European religious life experience in general and Hasidic life in particular – led him to develop a different approach to Hasidic stories.

The anecdote about the power of Buber’s stories reflects Agnon’s complex understanding and use of the Hasidic story. On the one hand it aims, like Buber, to illuminate a Hasidic value – the appearance of the miraculous in reality – but on the other hand, it demonstrates how the story functions as a cultural product. Agnon follows the Hasidic attempt to illuminate the light of God in one’s daily experience. After Agnon tells Rabbi Feldman about the conversation he had with the Minister about Buber’s stories, Rabbi Feldman asks if beyond his attraction to the tales of *tsadikim*, the Minister actually believes in them. Agnon answers, “But it is clear that the miracle which happened by the tales that Buber wrote is undeniable”.³⁵⁸ Turning his own life experience into a miraculous story, Agnon seems to follow Hasidic traditions. In addition, recognizing the economy of these stories, he also illuminates the social meaning of the stories. His account of Buber’s stories exposes their political and material roles in Western culture.

As was argued in Chapter Two, the narrators of Hasidic booklets traditionally add an autobiographical twist to their collection projects. Agnon embraces this

³⁵⁷ Agnon, *Me’atsmi ‘el ‘atsmi*, 280-281. Translation from the Hebrew is mine.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid* 281. Translation from the Hebrew is mine.

Hasidic effect of orality. Hasidic storytellers invade the fictionality of their works and insist on making it a semi-historical or autobiographical representation, an object rooted in economy of daily life and production. Hasidic narrators tend to indicate the source of their stories; they usually explain from whom they have heard the story and point to the chain of transmission, casually revealing facts about their life. In addition, they tend to add a moral lesson to the stories or alternatively add a blessing to the reader and the people of Israel.³⁵⁹ For them stories must have a direct, rather than allegorical, relation to the reality of daily life. In this case Agnon tells a factual-historical first-hand experience he had, and his insertion of this small comment transforms the historical into a miraculous story. For Agnon Hasidic stories were not merely beautiful objects or philosophical resources, but real-life political experiences.

Although Agnon decided not to take part in Buber's collection project in the early twentieth century after the fire, he did not give up on these Hasidic stories entirely. Agnon kept working on Hasidic stories through the years. Settling in Israel, he found new Hasidic sources that were available to him orally ("from the old people of Jerusalem") and in print ("books that you could not find in one's collection you could find in the library of another's house"). He kept collecting and editing them, and during the 1940s and 50s he published Hasidic stories in newspapers and journals. A complete collection entitled "*Sipurim naaim shel Rabi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov*" was published in 1962.³⁶⁰ The fire was an opportunity for both Agnon and

³⁵⁹ See chapter 2.

³⁶⁰ Dan Laor. "Agnon-Buber: anatomia shel yahasim, 'O: 'aliato venefilato shen ha'korpos Hasidikum'," *Kovets Agnon Vol I*. Edited by Emuna Yaron, Rafael Weiser, Dan Laor, and Reuven Merkin (Jerusalem: Magnes, The Hebrew University Press, 1994).

Buber to rethink their goals and approaches to the Hasidic texts. This eventually resulted in two different projects.³⁶¹ A comparison of Buber's and Agnon's Hasidic stories show a fundamental difference in their approach to the Hasidic story. While Agnon was "conservative" and "loyal to the source", claims Laor, Buber had a "freer" approach to the texts.³⁶²

In his praising of Buber's mastery of the short story genre in general, and of Hasidic stories in particular, Agnon also expresses his ambivalence toward Buber's approach. When describing Buber's excellence in the Hasidic form, Agnon compares his writings to a pretty seashell: "Even though we enjoy seeing the seashell, we do not seek the living creature that used to pulsate within it."³⁶³ One could argue that Buber's fluency in the Hasidic form comes from the ethnographer's point of view. The stories as a cultural product had no useful meaning for Buber; it is only after he translated Hasidic life into his own language, only after "cleaning the gem" from the "dirt", that he could value it. For Agnon the collection project was different.

"One time," Agnon tells us, "when I was sitting with Buber and we talked about Hasidism, I told him a story. After I finished my story Buber pulled out a notebook, looked in it, picked up an unbound book, and showed me the story in print. The same happened for most of the stories I told him (...) Buber used to write down each story he found in those books of tales as well as each and every version. This thing was new to me, both for the order, and because it was the first time I saw

³⁶¹ Ibid, 121.

³⁶² Ibid, 129.

³⁶³ Agnon. *Me'atsmi 'el 'atmi*, 272.

multiple files of story tales collected in the hand of one person. Up until that day I did not know that there were so many collections of Hasidic tales, because I knew the stories from hearing them.”³⁶⁴ Agnon’s first-hand relationship with Hasidic stories, discourse, and habits influenced his literary works. The Hasidic expression was useful to him but not as an ethnographic image, frozen in time. For Agnon, this type of storytelling was familiar, alive, valuable, and practical.

While Buber’s approach to hagiographical stories is romantic, Agnon holds a more traditional view.³⁶⁵ For Buber, these stories express the spirit of a movement that by the turn of the twentieth century was considered to be a “dead” movement that has lost its revolutionary spark and relevancy and had become popular and barbaric. The Hasidic story for Buber was rooted exclusively in the idea of dialogic experience of an old pre-modern world. He found spiritual and ethical values in Hasidism and its writings, values that are relevant to the new and progressive Jewish man, but at the same time he found the practical, linguistic and political aspects of it to be irrelevant. Agnon, who grew up under the influence of the Hasidic story and Hasidic environment and who knew its economic function, adapted this writing style because for him it was very much alive, relevant, and political.

For Agnon, culture is part of the economic apparatus. He maintains his critical perspective from within by embracing the materialistic apparatus of the Hasidic language and storytelling, and recognizing its ideology and its political function. For him Hasidic stories were both social and aesthetic leisure. It was part of the market

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 248.

³⁶⁵ Nicham Ross distinguishes Agnon from neo-Hasidic trends and defines his writing as Neo-traditional (*neo-masoratiut*). Nicham Ross, *Masoret ahuva vesnuah*, 16.

not merely as a luxury (which was Buber's point of view), but also as a direct continuum of social production. Agnon presents a literary method of what Adorno calls "immanent criticism of intellectual and artistic phenomena," which "seeks to grasp, through the analysis of their form and meaning, the contradiction between their objective idea and that pretension. It names what the consistency or inconsistency of the work itself expresses of the structure of the existent."³⁶⁶

Agnon's approach to the Hasidic story was that of a traditionalist. Scholars have already pointed out the binary in Agnon's literature that combines tradition and progression and Gershon Shaked has offered the definition "a revolutionary traditionalist," an oxymoron that reflects the opposition between Agnon's traditional rabbinic language and his progressive criticism. According to Shaked, Agnon uses traditional forms in a new context by which he ridicules them and criticizes their 'original' meaning. As of many others, Shaked's claim about Agnon's "antitext" presumes a judgmental binary between naïve tradition and modern criticism. It depicts Agnon as a traditionalist who decided to stand on one side of the equation – the modern one.³⁶⁷ Agnon's writing reflects an integration of different linguistic systems indeed, but it also expresses a dialectical ethics. For example, Agnon doesn't use the Hasidic tale and its mystical qualities only as a form by which he could criticize the traditionalist naïve readers, but also as a worthy mechanism for ethically discussing one's existentialism. In his *Sefer ha-Ma'asim*, Agnon uses magical realism

³⁶⁶ Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," 32.

³⁶⁷ Gershon Shaked. *Shmuel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist*, trans. Jeffery M. Green (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 1–45; Gershon Shaked, "Shemuel Yosef Agnon hamahapchan hamasorati," in *Kovets Agnon* Vol. 1, ed., Emuna Yaron, Rafael Weiser, Dan Laor, and Reuven Merkin (Jerusalem: Magnes, The Hebrew University Press, 1994), 308–318.

that is both a modernist and a Hasidic style, as a way to highlight the human struggle with death and the past. Agnon's writing is indeed a combination of tradition and revolution, but its brilliance lies in the dialectical tension between the two elements that rejects their hierarchical binary, or as Nitza Ben-Dov puts it in his "art of indirection".³⁶⁸

Agnon saw himself not as an observer of the Hasidic movement but as a Jew who was also part of the Hasidic spiritual and linguistic traditions. Unlike Buber, who took the voice of the collector/narrator out of the stories when writing his Hasidic editions,³⁶⁹ Agnon kept these voices that indicated the chain of social transmission. In many stories he even inserts himself into the chain of tradition and tells his readers when and from whom he heard the stories.³⁷⁰ In the same way that mid-nineteenth century Hasidic authors inserted their personal experience with the hagiographical stories they wrote about, Agnon transforms the stories that he heard from others into an autobiographical story.³⁷¹ This Hasidic "voice-over," which emphasizes the

³⁶⁸ Nitza Ben-Dov, *Agnon's Art of Indirection: Uncovering Latent Content in the Fiction of S.Y. Agnon* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993)

³⁶⁹ See discussion above and especially Ran HaCohen's essay on Buber's adaptation of Hasidic stories.

³⁷⁰ Agnon, "Sipurim naaim shel Rabi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov," in *Ha'esh veba'etsim* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shoken 1962), 89-137. See for example pages 93, 98, 100, 105-106 and so forth. In some of the stories it is even very hard to distinguish the voice of the narrator (Agnon) from the voice of the people who told him the story. At the beginning of the story "'al hamitnagdim hare'shonim la'Hasidut," Agnon tells his readers that he heard the story from two different people who meant, by that story, to emphasize one thing – "how intense the opposition of the early *mitnagdim* was to Hasidism". At the end of the story Agnon the narrator turns directly to the reader and says "come and see how bold were the first *mitnagdim*" and he goes on to explain how blind they were from seeing the powerful influence the Besht had, to the extent that he and all of his followers sat in the sukkah happy and cheerful despite the rain (in times when no person can actually keep the mitzvah of sukkah), 99-100.

³⁷¹ For more on Agnon's adoption of the voice and style of the Hasidic narrator, see Michal Oron, "'al hamitnagdim harishonim' leS.Y. Agnon." (660-667), in *Halamish lema'aino maim: mehkarim bekabbala, halaha, manhigut vehagut mugashim leProf. Moshe Halamish*, edited by Avi Elkaiyam and Haviva Pedaiah (Jerusalem: Yerushalayim vekarmel, 2016), 663.

presence of the narrator and places him within the work of art itself, is repeated in most of Agnon's work. The craftwork and the social role of the storyteller are essential to Agnon's perception of literary aesthetics. Literature, like agada, drasha, and Hasidic tale, is part of an aesthetic tribal conversation.

d. "Agunot"

Beyond his approach to Hasidic stories, Agnon's literary work presents the most compelling example of the need for a new understanding of Hebrew literary historiography. Despite being the most prominent Hebrew writer of the twentieth century, Hebrew criticism cannot account for him. Agnon's unique style did not fit the story of Enlightenment. Similarly, many critics, despite being impressed with some elements in his writing, found it hard to accept him as a narrator of Hasidic tales.³⁷² Berdyczewski, for example, argued that Agnon is a folkloric imitator.³⁷³ Leib Yaffe praised Agnon's first story "Agunot" (1908) for being "real political artwork", but nevertheless criticized his style. He argued that the combination of Hasidic folkish style and modern fashion "disrupts the perfection of the piece."³⁷⁴ Discussing *Vehaya ha'akov lemishor* (And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight, 1912) F.

Lachower argued, as opposed to Berdyczewski, that Agnon's work is entirely folk

³⁷² Shaked, *Ha-Siporet Ha-ivrit* Vol. 2, 180-184. Shaked discusses the opponents to Agnon as well as those who sought appropriate his work according to the central strand of modern Hebrew literature that "started with Bialik and continued with Berdyczewski" (181).

³⁷³ Ibid, 181.

³⁷⁴ L. Yaffe, "Reshimot bibliografiot," *Ha'olam* 2. 1908, 10. Internet Archive. In his review, Shaked mistakenly attributes it to Ya'akov Fichman. He also does not take into consideration the last part of this critique where Yaffe relates to the political aspect of the story. I will discuss this political aspect later in our discussion.

literature, “not an imitation of the folkish style, and not merely a usage of the folk story content, but a complete coherent folk piece, where all its parts are in parallel to each other.”³⁷⁵

Agnon’s work not merely combines two worlds but presents dialectic monads that are linked to the Hasidic writing tradition. To keep our discussion as brief as possible, I will discuss the appearance of Agnon’s first Hebrew story published in Israel.

“Agunot,” tells the story of Dina and Ben-Uri – two lovers who fail to fulfill their love and be together erotically. According to Shaked, this is a story about “frustrated love and eternal anchoring” that are rooted in the traditional system.³⁷⁶ Titled “Agunot” the story is centered around the legal status of agunot (literally means “anchored”). Aguna is a term used for a Jewish woman who is trapped in her religious marriage when the husband refuses to “release” her from the obligatory marriage contract (i.e., grant her a divorce) or, as in the more classic case, when the husband left for a journey or war and is reported missing. Barring any further evidence of her husband’s death, the woman is not allowed to remarry.

I want to suggest that not the lovers, but the rabbi is the protagonist of this story. After Dina leaves Erets-Yisrael with her father and Ben-Uri disappears into the night, the story turns toward the rabbi. The rabbi, who is similar in many ways to a Hasidic rebbe, has recurring dreams about the lovers, and about other wandering souls who

³⁷⁵ F. Lachower “Vehaya ha’akov lemishor,” *Ha-tsifra* (Warsha), no 175 August 16, page 3. http://jpress.org.il/Olive/APA/NLI_heb/sharedpages/SharedView.Page.aspx?sk=4CAC4296&href=HZF/1912/08/16&page=3. Accessed 5/10/2019

³⁷⁶ Shaked, “Smuel Yosef Agnon hamahapchan hamasorati,” *Kovets Agnon* Vol 1. Edited by Emuna Yaron, Rafael Weiser, Dan Laor, and Reuven Merkin (Jerusalem: Magnes, The Hebrew University Press, 1994), 311.

are moored to social conventions and stuck between worlds. When the rabbi wakes up from his visions he decides to leave his wife and mend this social and spiritual crisis. “He washed his hands, enwrapped himself in his garments, took up his staff, a haversack he put on his back, and from the threshold of his house he called out to his wife the rebbetzin: ‘My daughter, seek not after me. For the duty of exile has been levied upon me, to redeem those moored in marriage.’ He kissed the mezuzah and away he slipped and was gone. They sought him but found him not...”³⁷⁷ The rabbi leaves his stable position in Jerusalem and goes wandering around the world in order to redeem the lost *agunot* souls.

After this dramatic and mystical ending of the inner story, the narrator adds a series of testimonies by people who allegedly saw the rabbi, an artistic move that mimics the Hasidic oral and literary tradition.³⁷⁸ The shift from the lovers to the rabbi and the strong emphasis on his mystical and social role in Agnon’s story indicates that the tale is about the deeds of a pious person, deeds that affect the lives of others in the community and that are documented by the community; a community of witnesses and storytellers of which he is part.

The narrator opens the story in a sermonic way and exclaims that his intentions are to express the pain that results from the distance between the people of Israel and God. There is an obstacle that prevents them from reuniting, which the narrator does

³⁷⁷ Agnon, “Agunot”, 65. Translation is mine.

³⁷⁸ He mentions the testimonies of one SHaDaR (acronym for Sheliah deRabannan, an emissary of the rabbis), and “many others,” and the young children of Jerusalem. In Hasidic hagiographies the author-narrator declares at the beginning of each story from whom (and sometimes when and on what occasion) he heard the story that he is about to tell. Usually the author-narrator adds an adjective that increases their and his credibility such as “people of truth” and “righteous.”

not tell us but instead presents us with this story. Based on this opening, one possible interpretation of the story is that the rabbi is the only person who can bring about the union and save the agunot – that is to say – the spirit of God (if we view the story as a parable) and the lost women (according to the internal story). Ironically, however, the rabbi who wishes to bring husbands and wives together deserts his own wife and turns her into *aguna*. Agnon's ironic and critical ending of this story suggests that it is the reader's responsibility to find its ethical "lesson". Agnon intentionally prevents the rabbi from completing his "salvage mission" in the borders of the story and instead brings in the voice of the narrator and the oral testimonies of people who continue to create the story and its meaning. This ending places the story in the core of social politics – it raises social political questions about the possibilities that individuals have to fulfill themselves within social norms and constraints and also the responsibilities individuals and society has as a whole to each other. The reader is needed to complete the chain of social responsibility.

Agnon's use of the Hasidic form demonstrates its function as immanent criticism since it "holds in evidence the fact that the mind has always been under a spell. On its own it is unable to resolve the contradictions under which it labours. Even the most radical reflection of the mind on its own failure is limited by the fact that it remains only reflection, without altering the existence to which its failure bears witness." Agnon recognized the advantages as well as the drawbacks and repressive elements of Hasidism and presented a critical response that allows for dialectical criticism and obtains ideological determination of the object – in our case the Hasidic literary expression. Adorno explains that "immanent criticism cannot take comfort in its own

idea. It can neither be vain enough to believe that it can liberate the mind directly by immersing itself in it, nor naïve enough to believe that unflinching immersion in the object will inevitably lead to truth by virtue of the logic of things if only the subjective knowledge of the false whole is kept from intruding from the outside, as it were, in the determination of the object”³⁷⁹.

Agnon’s response to the Hasidic literary tradition is more dialectical than that of Buber. Agnon uses here the qualities of the Hasidic story, which intertwines the focus on the role of social leader with the oral traditions and indicates the way these qualities work, appreciating and then criticizing them. Storytelling for Agnon is always a critical response and an economic material production. “Such criticism does not stop at a general recognition of the servitude of the objective mind, but seeks rather to transform this knowledge into a heightened perception of the thing itself. Insight into the negativity of culture is binding only when it reveals the truth or untruth of a perception, the consequence or lameness of a thought, the coherence or incoherence of a structure, the substantiality or emptiness of a figure of speech.”³⁸⁰

The combination of Hasidic tone and intellectual criticism in Agnon’s writing led scholars to focus on his literary resources.³⁸¹ Many studies have pointed out the Hasidic sources or origin of many of Agnon’s stories; some of them analyzed his adaptation of Hasidic tales and some highlighted his use of Hasidic mysticism.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” 31-32.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ S Werses. *S.Y. Agnon kipshuto, Keriah Bichtavyav*, (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2000), 329-33.

³⁸² Gedalyah Nigal, *S.I Agnon uMekorotav haHasidiim – ‘Iun beArba’ah miSipurayv* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1983); and see a comprehensive list of these works in comment no. 4 in Michal Oron, “‘Al haMitnagdim haRishonim’ leS.Y. Agnon,” in *Halamish lema’aino maim: mehkarim*

Taking these observations one step further, we can see now that Hasidic literature does not merely serve Agnon as a resource among many others as an intertextual form in his writings. Agnon, who never entirely fit into the common definitions and boundaries of modern Hebrew literature (especially according to Israeli standards), belongs to a more complex system of literary perceptions. Agnon's writing is a montage of literary traditions. His critical dialectic form of writing reflects the tensions between the romantic literary tradition of Jewish Enlightenment and the Hebrew literary tradition that is rooted in Hasidic writings, especially from mid-nineteenth century Galicia. Hasidic writing was not Agnon's exclusive inspiration; Agnon was influenced by earlier Hebrew writers as well as by world literature.³⁸³ For Agnon Hasidic literature drew the lines for an alternative path of modern Hebrew writing that despite being influenced by Enlightenment and Romanticism, had its own unique understanding of literature and of Hebrew. Agnon, the most unique figure in the Hebrew, and especially the Erets-Yisraeli landscape, was part of this "Hasidic-Hebrew" tradition. The montage view of Hasidic literature and of Agnon's writings can shed light on many aspects in his writings that scholars have been struggling with, since "his roots are in tradition and his crown is in modern existence."³⁸⁴

bekabbala, halaha, manhigut vehagut mugashim leProf. Moshe Halamish, eds. Avi Elkaiyam and Haviva Pedaiyah, (Jerusalem: Yerushalayim vekarmel, 2016), 660.

³⁸³ Shaked, *Ha-Siporet Ha- 'Ivrit* Vol. 2, 169–171.

³⁸⁴ Gershon Shaked. "Shmuel Yosef Agnon: Ha-Mahapkhan ha-Masorati," *Kovets Agnon* Vol 1. Edited by Emuna Yaron, Rafael Weiser, Dan Laor, and Reuven Merkin (Jerusalem: Magnes, The Hebrew University Press, 1994), 308.

G. Conclusion

Discussing Hebrew literary historiography through the new modeling and methods that Hasidic hagiography requires that “in every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.”³⁸⁵ The ‘stuttering’ or cacophony of Hasidic poetics challenges not only the coherency of Haskalah ideals and poetics, but the conventional method of historiography itself. It forces us to extend the scope of historical literary moments, re-edit the narrative that common historiography conveys and allow the juxtaposition of different literary events for the purpose of intellectual criticism. In this chapter I chose to use the ‘film strip’ that recorded the phenomenon of Hasidic stories from the 1860s and juxtapose them with the maskilic literary event, not for the purpose of completing the historicist picture, but for the purpose of criticism. By this ‘cinematographic’ montage I positioned maskilic and Hasidic ‘shots’ “one on *top* of the other,” and focused on Hebrew as the object that allows us to dynamize the historical narrative. Instead of the imagined chronological and hierarchical ordering that views Hasidic stories as “degenerate,”³⁸⁶ and maskilic literature as progressive, the montage modeling suggests that Hasidic and maskilic literatures are two images in the story of Jewish modernization that clash and dynamize the traditional historical view.

Yudka could not finish his speech because its main purpose was to offer criticism as a cultural means to his blind conformist audience. Beyond “blast[ing] a

³⁸⁵ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 255.

³⁸⁶ Olga Litvak, *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 32.

specific era out of the homogenous course of history,”³⁸⁷ and illuminating the cultural and aesthetic options embedded in Hasidic literature, the method of montage serves to present historiography as an open narrative, an arena for cultural criticism. This chapter is a fragment of an intellectual dialectic that stresses the effective role of criticism. It also recognizes, as Adorno pointed out, that criticism is inevitably part of cultural economy by relating to it in the first place, by the act of criticism itself. The production of criticism, the thinking process that constitutes culture as an object, is in itself a result of the material engagement with culture.³⁸⁸ Maskilic literature cannot be properly understood without Hasidic literature and vice versa. Critical thinking and the modeling of montage are the means by which we can undermine the imagined totality and definitiveness of historiography and uproot cultural conformism. Hasidim recognized the openness of the cultural system (and of any system, even the divine one), and reflected it in its literary poetic.

Common (Zionist-oriented) historiographies overlooked Hasidic literature and recognized some of its qualities only after they had already been “appropriated” by writers for modernity at the turn of the twentieth century. For those who held onto the values of the Haskala, Hasidic stories were perceived as naive folktales that lacked poetic style and were primitive in their stress on mysticism. Hasidic stories pushed back against contemporary Romantic norms and presented a serious response to modern aesthetic and philosophical questions. Bodek and Rodkinson recognized the power of storytelling and chose to print oral stories and shape them as literary objects

³⁸⁷ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 263.

³⁸⁸ Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” 17–34.

(rather than derashot, sermons) that both scholars, (אנשים גדולים בחכמה) and common people, “the common masses” (המון עם הפשוטים), could read and enjoy in their leisure hours,³⁸⁹ or in Rodkinson’s words “when they were idle from their [Torah] study” (“בעת ביטולם מלימודם”).³⁹⁰ Their projects reflect both in style and content the tension between individualism and totality (or God), between the words of God and human interpretation, and between the modern human aspiration to control one’s life conditions and the powers that push against it: random consequences, political struggles, or Godly intervention. *In literary terms, the language that Bodek and Rodkinson chose to use in their literary projects reflects the tension between coherency and cacophony, purity of national origin, and decentralized diasporic experience. It expresses the tensions between different layers of Jewish utterance and experience.*

Language is used in these stories as the arena in which cultural and theological struggles take place. It is the human vehicle for meeting God, but also the sphere in which man fights God. Hebrew is, as Hever showed, inevitably studded with religious and theological meanings despite attempts to secularize it by maskilim, due to its traditional origin in the Bible as the word of God.³⁹¹ Rabbinic Hebrew, however, can be viewed as reflecting the dialogue with God, the struggles between unity and pluralism, between fascism and democracy.³⁹² I do not mean to say that Hasidism is democratic; I have already discussed the complicated idea of authority in

³⁸⁹ Bodek, *Ma’ase Tsadikim*, 3.

³⁹⁰ Rodkinson, *Adat Tsadikim*, 4.

³⁹¹ Hever, *Be-Koah ha-El*.

³⁹² Famous in this context is the Talmudic story about the “Oven of Akhnai” from Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 59b.

Hasidic stories in Chapter Two and the interplay between redeeming elements and communal supervision and discipline. What I do mean to say is that when considered in the historiographic discourse and placed in their historical context, the literary form of Hasidic stories, the grammar and syntax of their narrative, express and can be helpfully explained by a montage modeling.

Hasidim embraced the rabbinic language and the Yiddish language that were already in use in their communities instead of following the ideal language that maskilim reconstructed. They worked with the materials that they had instead of restoring an epic past. The Hasidic Hebrew that was later embraced by Hebrew writers to reflect Hebrew conversation, was not, even for Hasidim, a spoken language. It was, however, a language that grew out of the contemporary linguistic conditions. Jews have always had a multi-linguistic experience, especially the Jews of Galicia in the mid-nineteenth century. Eastern Europeans prayed in Hebrew, studied Halacha in Aramaic, talked to each other in Yiddish, conversed with their neighbors in German, Polish or Russian, and read newspapers in Yiddish, German in Hebrew Letters, German, Russian, or Polish. The maskilic melitzi poetry aimed to distance Jewish imagination from that experience. It wanted to create a space for Jewish national experience that was detached from the contemporary local multi-linguistic and multi-national experience. Hasidic writers mastered Hebrew and its literary sources, yet, unlike maskilim they did not seek to standardize it and reconstruct it as a pure and modern (yet ancient) national language. Rather, they allowed social dynamics to influence it; they were open to dialectics between speaking, reading, and writing. Hasidic stories reflect the invasion and intervention of opposite elements in

the Hebrew text and the intervention of external (sometimes mystical) powers in the construction and shaping of a narrative.

Montage, as discussed in this chapter, works both within Hasidic Hebrew, and in the way we understand the role of Hasidic hagiography, within general literary historiography. The Hasidic tongue posed a challenge to maskilic conventions and therefore required a new understanding of the modern literary system as a whole. It required a new framework that functioned through intellectual dialectic. Eisenstein explains that the comparison, the counterpoint of images “may determine a whole new system of form manifestation.”³⁹³ This is what happens when we examine Hasidic literature with its contemporary maskilic literary events. Hasidic hagiography ‘fails’ to fit common historiography. This failure forces us to take apart the historical narrative we already know, and ‘stutter’. The modeling of montage that Hasidic literature offers allows us to keep the intellectual tension on the surface. As we pointed out regarding Yudka’s sermon in Hazaz’s story, the objection to Zionist conventions does not achieve reconciliation (at least not at this stage in history). Yudka’s montage sermon is not about finding an answer, but about continuing an intellectual dialectic.

Although Yudka’s sermon portrays a striking claim against the Yeshuv’s Zionist historical perception, the broken form of his speech is not directed to evoke specific enthusiastic emotions from his listeners as public speech usually does, but instead encourages them to step out of their conformity, listen carefully, and fill in the

³⁹³ Eisenstein. “A Dialectical Approach to Film Form,” 53.

gaps with meaning. His stuttering shares the same syntactic structure as montage (lack of conjunctions and prepositions) and allows us to see and follow his thought process, including the arguments that he considers and rejects.³⁹⁴ Eisenstein explains, “While the conventional film directs the emotions, this [montage] suggests an opportunity to encourage and directs the whole thought process as well.”³⁹⁵ Zionist history and historiography offer a clear story without hesitations. The tensions that montage allows us to see between different shots or in our case between different ideologies, languages, Jewish communities (especially the Yeshuv and the diaspora), and so forth allows the dynamization of the narrative.

The intellectual experiment conducted in this chapter seeks, as the Benjaminian historical materialist does, to illuminate a suppressed voice and to expose repressed relations between events in the past. Acknowledging the momentary nature of this task, and drawing from the Hasidic literary language itself, I find montage to be an effective tool for executing this critical experiment. It allows us to understand the oppositions that fought over their place in history while keeping the discussion open to reveal new fragments of historical events that can add new elements to the intellectual dialectic of criticism.

³⁹⁴ Michal Wasner attributes this effect of “Hadrasha” to its protocol-like structure. See Wasner, “*Zeken laprotocol: “Hadrasha” me’et Haiym Hazaz ketext protocols,*” *Mikan* 9 (2008), 42-56.

³⁹⁵ Eisenstein, “A Dialectical Approach to Film From,” 62.

Chapter 5: Conclusions: Hasidic Hagiography in the Jewish Context and Beyond

A. Hasidic Hagiography and Modernity

As this dissertation has shown, the Hasidic booklets published during the 1860s were part of the Jewish modernization of the time. Having emerged in Lemberg between the 1848 revolution and the 1867 emancipation, Hasidic literary hagiography was a response to political changes and the Empire's recognition of minorities' cultural rights. The Hasidic hagiographical genre reflects the Hasidic acknowledgment of the flourishing Jewish culture, especially Hebrew culture, in Lemberg, in which Hasidim were attempting to participate. Hasidic hagiography is a complex genre that combines religious worship with aesthetic pleasure; history-writing with fiction; and collective authorship with individualism. This complexity mirrors the dialectical character of the genre and the Hasidic mid-nineteenth century cultural turning point from communal intimacy to popular culture.

As Walter Benjamin argues, this critical moment, in which technology and politics enabled the mechanical reproduction of the performance of the tsadik in print, resulted in the detachment of stories from their authentic Hasidic origin. Breaking down the magical power of the original event, or the "aura," as Benjamin calls it, which in our case refers to the tsadik's authority, and replacing it with the popular story allows for the democratization of the work of art. Mechanically reproduced art, explains Benjamin, is accessible to masses, while the new techniques can "bring out

those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye... at will.”³⁹⁶

Thanks to the new format of popular story collections, Hasidic writers could select stories, frame them with their own experience, and insert their explicit and implicit interpretation of them. I argue that we cannot understand the Hasidic hagiographic genre without discussing its dialectic relationships with the performative origin and without considering the new practices, ideas and opportunities it offered to modern consumers. Bodek and Rodkinson’s mechanical reproductive projects released the stories from the closed Hasidic circles and made the Hasidic experience accessible to any Hebrew reader. “Technical reproduction,” explains Benjamin, “can put a copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself.”³⁹⁷

Whether Bodek and Rodkinson intended to reach out to non-Hasidim (maskilim and/or mitnagdim) and recruit them to join the Hasidic community or to integrate Hasidism into the new modernizing Hebrew culture, their works “detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition” and opens it to other influences.³⁹⁸

Benjamin argues that the mechanical technique of reproduction “substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence” and permits the reproduced object “to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation.”³⁹⁹ These processes contribute to the shattering of tradition and are intimately connected to the possibility of mass movement. In our case, Hasidim no longer had to go on a pilgrimage to the tsadik in

³⁹⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hanna Ardent, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 220.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 221.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

order to feel connected to their religious leader. They could now read about their rebbe's deeds and words while sitting in their houses. It is important to note that devoted Hasidim never stopped going on their pilgrimages to the rebbe. The books substituted for only a small fraction of the ecstatic experience at the rebbe's court, which included dancing, singing, and more. On the other hand, these hagiographic stories did provide an opportunity to take part in the Hasidic experience for those who could not go on a pilgrimage or who were not sufficiently motivated to make the trip. Any Hasid could now read these stories – even write and print them – without necessarily having had the firsthand experience of the actual event.

In the same way, any Hebrew reader could access Hasidic experience, criticize it, and respond to it. And maskilic readers indeed responded. After Hasidic hagiography became popular, they embraced its traditional Hebrew and, in some cases, appreciated what they believe to be humanistic Hasidic comradeship. While adopting Hasidic forms and values and sometimes even claiming them as its own, maskilic hegemony pushed Hasidic writings to the sidelines of modern discourse, overlooking its interventions. The different cultural struggles supports Benjamin's observation that "the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics."⁴⁰⁰

The approach taken in this dissertation is derived from the critical understanding of the change in the format and function of 1860s Hasidic hagiography. It examines the political and material conditions of the genre in the

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 224.

historical moment of its emergence, while considering its interactions with broader trends in modern culture. Focusing on form and literary theory, the dissertation investigates Hasidic hagiography and its responses to authority, individualism, and modern community (nationalism). It has shown that although technology allowed for the democratization of the work of art by releasing individuals from the authentic origin and granting them the skills and means to create and produce, it nevertheless did not emancipate the masses. The critical response of this dissertation to Hasidic hagiography focuses on the historical moment in which the literary form emerged as a dialectical interplay between democratic and suppressive elements.

This concluding chapter aims to take the historical and literary observations of the dissertation one step further to discuss *modern hagiography* through its cultural role as a printed popular genre. In what follows I briefly present the conclusions of the different chapters, while pointing out possible directions for future research. I then present a critical and theoretical response to the genre as I consider the dialectical conversation between Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and Theodor Adorno's critique of popular culture. I seek to identify instances in which modern Hasidic hagiography presents a possibility of criticism.

B. Open-Ended Conclusions

Until recently, literary criticism refused to see Hasidic hagiography as a product of modern trends and politics, effectively excluding the genre from the canon of modern Hebrew literature. Responding to this approach, I begin the dissertation by positioning Hasidic hagiography as an active player within the movement of

nineteenth-century Romanticism. While common scholarship relegates Hasidism to a passive role as the “exotic” object of romantic attraction and investigation, chapter 1 posits that Hasidim actively contributed to the building of Jewish individualism and Hebrew culture. These Hasidic writers from the 1860s took the first steps in shaping Hebrew authorship and Hebrew aesthetics. Their projects played an essential part in shaping the modern Hebrew writer and thereby contributed to the shaping of the Jewish culture and individual, the building blocks of the new Jewish collective national consciousness.

Chapter 2 examines the emergence of Hasidic hagiographical booklets within their specific historical contexts. The chapter considers the material, social, and political conditions of 1860s Galicia that influenced the shift in Hasidic printing habits, and it discusses how Bodek and Rodkinson, the founders of this genre, integrated the medieval genre of traditional hagiography with the popular medium of their time – tale collections. This combination of genres is reflected in the narrative style that hovers between history-writing and fiction. Truth and drama, daily life, and the miraculous are integrated together, forming a text that can serve both for religious worship and aesthetic pleasure. These characteristics come together to form what I would suggest calling “modern-hagiography,” an oxymoron that reflects the dialectics of Hasidic experience. While modernity echoes rationalism, democratization, and to some extent secularization, the medieval genre of hagiography is an expression of religiosity and mysticism.

At the center of chapter 2 lies a discussion about authorship of Hasidic stories as a manifestation of the Hasidic conception of authority. The chapter suggests that

Hasidic stories offer a model of authorship that reflects the multiple authority of Hasidic oral communication and transmission of stories. Originating from the tsadik's performance, this multiple authority does not cancel out the power of the individual but rather legitimizes his writing. The author, whose work constitutes the turning point between orality and literacy, has the power to function independently from the community and shape history as fiction, and moral lessons as aesthetic pleasure.

The (potential) independence of the author is manifested through the invasion of the persona of the real author to the mimetic text. The Hasidic author turns the communal stories into an autobiographical work by providing personal information and voicing his opinion and thoughts about the stories he tells. This intervention in the story creates a dialectical tension between reality and fiction. What we might call *author-in-the-text* can contribute to the field of narrative theory and explain many nineteenth-century hybrid texts that integrate autobiography with other styles of writing (such as fiction, scientific studies, religious responsa, and so forth) that helped to forge the modern individual writer and marked changes in the social conventions of literacy, developing writing and reading skills.⁴⁰¹

The discussion about authorship and authority in Hasidic hagiography led me to examine expressions of individualism in the stories that go beyond the author, especially in light of the dissertation's overall claim that Hasidic hagiography played a significant part in modernizing Jewish Eastern European society. Chapter 3 follows the nineteenth-century philosophy of the individual. Aiming to reconcile the

⁴⁰¹ Iris Parush, *Haḥoṭ'im bikhetivah: mahpekhat haketivah baḥevrah haYehudit bemizrah eropah bame'ah hatesha-'esreh* [The sin of writing: the writing revolution in nineteenth century Eastern European Jewish society] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2017), 27, 137.

epistemological crisis that began with Cartesian philosophy, nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers searched for new ways to define man, his ability to comprehend his surroundings, and his capability to reconcile what seems like an insurmountable gap between mind and body; cognition and experience; the self and the world. As a modern movement, Hasidism reacted to this crisis and the feeling of isolation that overwhelmed modern man. While accepting the idea of individualism and embracing it as an essential part of spiritual worship, Hasidism also challenged common nineteenth-century perceptions of the individual. It rejected the idea of man as an entity who only achieves the fullness of his/her individuality by overcoming social constraints and embracing independent critical thinking. Rather, individualism, as expressed in hagiographical stories, is achieved through *inter-subjective relationships* of projection and approval, and through *praxis*. Hasidic stories depict human essence as something that can be realized when individuals learn to view their lives through a mythical kabalistic lens, and work to turn them into stories by practicing communal storytelling.

The idea of individual realization through intersubjective and linguistic relationships echoes postmodern psychoanalysis. I imply some similarities to Lacanian psychoanalysis in the chapter itself, but I do not elaborate on this topic. In order to understand how Hasidic stories function as a means for social normalization, future research might examine them through the lenses of psychoanalytical theories. The Hasidic stories' strong emphasis on communal communication complicates Lacan's idea of society and its role in the "symbolic" stage and illuminates the creative potential of the individual Hasid and his/her boundaries.

Extending the discussion beyond Hasidic literacy, chapter 4 discusses the consequences of inserting Hasidic hagiography into the historiography of modern Hebrew literature, from which it is still excluded. The current historicist modeling of common historiographies is limited and cannot contain Hasidic hagiography. Chapter 4 offers a new modeling for discussing the evolution of modern Hebrew literature. Instead of the imagined meta-history that still dominates contemporary scholarship, I borrow Sergei Eisenstein's idea of *montage*,⁴⁰² which allows us to rethink Hebrew historiography as a complex of links, disruptions, and convergences. Eisenstein's *montage* invites us to break down the linear story, examine each stage or "shot" of Hebrew literature independently, and then explore the meaning of a work's dialectical dynamics. While the imagined chronological and hierarchical ordering of historiography presumes Hasidic stories to be primitive and maskilic literature to be progressive, the montage modeling suggests Hasidic and maskilic literatures are two images in the story of Jewish modernization that clash and dynamize the traditional scale. Focusing on the style and use of Hebrew, I argue that Hasidic literature offers an alternative to the ideal *melitzi* language and to the national epic vision of maskilic literature. The language of Hasidic hagiography recognizes the value of all linguistic registers and allows the expression of conflicts (such as between Hebrew and Yiddish) and mystery. Hasidic stories reflect the contemporary diasporic conditions of their readers and present a decentralized Jewish experience.

⁴⁰² Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1977), 45–63.

The comprehensive examination of Hasidic hagiography that I have conducted in this dissertation provided me with a broader understanding of the genre and its place among other modern literary genres. Hasidic hagiography functioned as a popular culture and contributed to the forging of a modern Hebrew consciousness. The consolidation of the Hasidic hagiographical genre in the 1860s is inseparable from a larger nineteenth-century phenomenon – the emergence of popular culture. A critical reading of Hasidic hagiography through the eyes of this modern phenomenon suggests that the case of Hasidic hagiographical literature expresses the essential failure of modernity and its emancipatory ideas.

C. Hasidic Hagiography and Popular Culture

As a modern encounter that reflects the independence of the product from its origin's aura of authority as a more democratic form on the one hand, and the institutionalization of the Hasidic social structure on the other hand, Hasidic hagiography serves as a case study for examining the ambivalent function of popular culture and the duality of modernity itself. While Benjamin claims that mechanical reproduction enables the democratization of the work of art, stressing its liberating characteristics, Theodore Adorno rejects this view and criticizes Benjamin for blindly believing in the power of the masses (the proletariat) to liberate themselves. He argues that Benjamin's thesis in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is a utopian idea that ultimately crashes under the weight of "cultural industry," in which individuals are consumers with no independent critical thinking. The transformation of art into a cheap and accessible product, Adorno claims, creates

a system in which art serves as an expression of industrial exploitation and thus recreates and reinforces the power structure that already exists.⁴⁰³ Adorno's claim is indeed applicable to the Hasidic case; Hasidim never stopped going on their pilgrimages to the rebbe because they had books to replace this experience and to rethink it from a new angle, as Benjamin would have expected.⁴⁰⁴ In the second half of the nineteenth century, Hasidism grew to be a strict and very closed movement, and Hasidim kept wanting to observe and experience the tsadik's ecstatic performance with their own eyes. The Hasidic hagiographical genre rarely allowed criticism and instead reinforced the Hasidic ethos and communal organization.

The literary forms that Bodek and Rodkinson adopted in their projects reflect the Hasidic ritual of observing the tsadik and the experience of living in an intimate community of storytellers, but at the same time, these literary forms allow for a mediated artistic reflection on this social costume. Rejecting the idea of *l'art pour l'art*, Adorno claims that art has a dual essence: it is both an autonomous (even spiritual) entity and an empirical fact, a materialistic element in the social mechanism.⁴⁰⁵ Works of art must therefore “integrate materials and details into their

⁴⁰³ In a long letter to Benjamin from March 18, 1936, Adorno expresses his reservations concerning Benjamin's ideas about the autonomy (from the origin) of the mechanical reproduced work of art and its revolutionary potential. See Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 127–34. Adorno's objection to Benjamin's “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is laid out over several letters. See, for example, his letter from September 6, 1966 (*ibid.*, 145–48).

⁴⁰⁴ The books could not substitute the spiritual and intimate experience that Hasidim had at the tsadik's court which included much more than the sermon or story and the performance of the tsadik. As mentioned earlier it included singing, dancing, and eating which constitutes a unique atmosphere.

⁴⁰⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. C. Lenhard (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 6–7. Adorno writes that “As artefacts, works of art communicate not only internally but also with the external reality which they try to get away from and which none the less is the substratum of their content.” (*Ibid.*)

immanent law of form,” and they “must not try to erase the fractures left by the process of integration, preserving instead in the aesthetic as a whole the traces of those elements which resist integration.”⁴⁰⁶ Adorno’s theory of aesthetics seeks a mechanism that encourages criticism—art should enable individuals to lose themselves in the work of art and contemplate but should also enable them to turn back and criticize their life conditions and society.

Considering Hasidic hagiography through Benjamin’s view of mechanical reproduction, we might claim that it is a successful form of art in Adorno’s terms.⁴⁰⁷ The Hasidic hagiographical booklets from the mid–nineteenth century take part in the communal oral transmission of stories, but they also preserve this orality as printed aesthetics; they represent the particular historical experience of the author-narrator while presenting the text as an autonomous entity. Despite being based on empirical praxes, which resist the idea of *l’art pour l’art*, Hasidic stories fail to emancipate individuals or allow for critical contemplation for mainly two reasons. First, from an inter-Hasidic perspective, the praxes that the stories reflect turn the work of art into a tool of worship that constitutes a continuum of the tsadik’s authority. As hagiography,

⁴⁰⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 9-10. See also Adorno’s discussion on the “both real and semblance” separation of subject and object in Adorno, “On Subject and Object,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 245–58. See also Robert Witkin’s discussion on Adorno’s view of the popular object and the modern subjects. Robert Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 8–9.

⁴⁰⁷ The Hasidic work of art seems to take part in a social system that is, as Robert Witkin describes, “constituted from below by mutual susceptibility of individuals to one another in interactional relations from which a social whole is continuously emergent and in which there is a mutual and reflexive susceptibility between this emergent whole and the individuals who constitute it.” Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture*, 8.

the stories are not independent from the dominant influence of the aura.⁴⁰⁸ Bodek and Rodkinson responded to the new conditions, namely the emergence of leisure and changes in the Jewish political situation, and they appreciated the power of literary and aesthetic pleasure. Nevertheless, they drew their legitimacy from the religious order, shaping their story collections in a way that reinforces it. Hannan Hever stresses this suppressive aspect of the Hasidic story. According to him, the effect of Hasidic hagiography fully overlaps with the ecstatic performance of the tsadik itself, leaving no room for individual autonomy.⁴⁰⁹

Second, from an external Hasidic perspective, the capitalist economy that gained momentum during the second half of the nineteenth century caused the newly emerged Hasidic story collections to drift away from the original communal practice. The Hasidic style had by then become a consolidated fixed popular form, a *commodity*. “The modern attitude attempts to commodify and sell cheap even the mimetic moment of art which is the opposite of thing-like essence,” explains Adorno. “The consumer is allowed to project his impulses and mimetic residues on to anything he pleases, including art, whereas in the past the individual was expected to forget himself into, lose himself in art in the process of viewing, listening, and reading,” he concludes.⁴¹⁰ The new technique that Benjamin views as an opportunity for emancipation is viewed by Adorno as bourgeois literature that serves individuals for projecting their urges while overlooking any otherness that might challenge them.

⁴⁰⁸ Hasidic hagiography functioned for Hasidim as a spiritual practice. Positioning the stories at the level of the holy scripture, Hasidic booklets served as traditional Torah scholarship/learning. See the broader discussion in chapter 2, section B.

⁴⁰⁹ Hannan Hever, “The Politics of From of the Hasidic Tale,” *Dibur* 2 (Spring 2016): 57–73.

⁴¹⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 25.

According to Adorno, this mechanical reproduction turns art into yet one other commodity among many in the popular culture that the masses consume.

An example of this capitalist apparatus of production in the Hasidic community is the case of Abraham Isaac Dzubas (1884–1947). In 1900, Dzubas decided to publish Hasidic stories in order to make a name for himself as a successful author.⁴¹¹ Uriel Gellman follows the production process of Dzubas’s literary project and shows how, guided by well-known Hasidic authors, he joined a Hasidic beit midrash, where he was able to hear “authentic” Hasidic stories. Dzubas went to these Hasidic centers to study and pray, but mostly so that he could overhear the Hasidim’s conversations. From his place as a bystander, Dzubas absorbed the Hasidic vibe and collected stories for his book. This example from the turn of the twentieth century demonstrates the influence of capitalist mechanism on Hasidic literature.

The capitalist pursuit of profit leads to de-sociation and de-skilling of labor.⁴¹² The monopoly of capitalism, especially in the twentieth century, created a fundamental detachment between praxis and product. When Dzubas’s book *Milin hadatin* (1901) came out, Hasidim accepted it with great enthusiasm, as they believed it was written by an aged and experienced Hasid. But when they found out that it was written by a young student, they became angry, and the Hasidic group which he had surveilled threatened to banish him from their midst. Nevertheless, Dzubas’s book became popular, and he succeeded as an author.

⁴¹¹ Uriel Gellman, “An Author’s Guide: Authorship of Hasidic Compendia,” *Zutot* 9 (2012): 85–96.

⁴¹² Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture*, 3.

“Although they may appear to be sophisticated literary productions of the Hasidic elite,” concludes Gellman, “not every Hasidic compilation should be considered a reliable representation of the tradition it claims to represent.”⁴¹³ By the time Hasidic stories became popular and/or profitable, they turned into a mere commodity. “Duped by the culture industry and hungry for commodities, the masses push for desubstantialization (*Entkunstung*) of art. Unmistakable symptoms of this tendency are the passionate urge to violate and meddle with the work of art in ways which do not allow it to be what it is; to dress it up; to shorten its distance from the viewer; and so on. The masses want the shameful difference separating them from their lives eliminated, because if art were to have any real effect on them it would be that of instilling a sense of loathing, which is the last thing they want.”⁴¹⁴ In that popular apparatus, the Hasidic praxis of storytelling is merely an accessory to the product, which becomes manipulative rather than an opportunity for contemplation and resistance.

Joseph Dan attributes this manipulative characteristic of the Hasidic literary product to works as far back as Rodkinson and therefore rejects the inclusion of Rodkinson’s work among Hasidic literary collectors.⁴¹⁵ Dan claims that Rodkinson is

⁴¹³ Gellman, “An Author’s Guide,” 94.

⁴¹⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 24.

⁴¹⁵ We can point at an earlier case in which the Hasidic voice was used manipulatively. Joseph Perl (1773–1839), a devoted maskil, criticized Hasidism for what he considered to be backward mystical beliefs and for what he believed to be a manipulative, corrupted social mechanism that exploited the masses. As a response to the archetype of the Hasidic hagiographical genre – *Shivhei ha-Besht* (1814) – he wrote the satire *Megale temirin* (1819), which imitates the Hasidic writing style and is a critical response that locks horns with Hasidism. The book, however, was received enthusiastically by Hasidim, who believed it to be an authentic Hasidic product and who therefore couldn’t see its cynicism and criticism.

not an “authentic” Hasid, but rather a maskil who shaped Hasidism as a nostalgic romantic artifact for his own profit.⁴¹⁶ Dan’s exclusion of Rodkinson from the Hasidic circle demonstrates scholarship’s simplistic understanding of Hasidic hagiography. From the moment of its emergence, Hasidic hagiography was a product in a capitalist mechanism that turned the genre’s originality and “authenticity” into a commodity. Rodkinson is no different from other Hasidim who stood at the turning point of the aestheticization of their own practices and beliefs. In his most updated study of Rodkinson’s character, Jonatan Meir pushes against Dan’s claim and explains that such perceptions “assume that no reasonable person could believe in such fantasies—an assumption of the maskilim that was surprisingly well accepted by modern scholars—and so whoever writes them is surely some kind of fraud. In fact, Rodkinson was a Hasid through and through when he printed his hagiographic works.”⁴¹⁷ Dan’s claim reflects the maskilic misconception that Hasidim did not, and could not, take part in the modernization of culture. This dissertation seeks to break away from this perception in particular.

Despite its dismissal of Rodkinson’s project as a Hasidic contribution to Hebrew modernity, Dan’s discussion touches upon a critical point in Rodkinson’s work. The literary projects of Rodkinson and Bodek laid the groundwork for maskilic

⁴¹⁶ Dan distinguishes between Hasidic literature that originated from within a specific Hasidic dynasty, which reflects its particular discipline, and Hasidic literature “that originates outside of any specific Hasidic community, and is not connected with a specific contemporary Zaddik or dynasty; its subject is Hasidism as a whole, all its Zaddikim throughout its history.” According to him, “The first and most important creator of this second kind of Hasidic literature was Michael ha-Levi Frumkin.” See Joseph Dan, “A Bow to Frumkinian Hasidism,” *Modern Judaism* 11, no. 2 (May 1991), 181. Dan’s claim is derived from the fact that at a certain point in his life Rodkinson drifted away from Hasidism and turned to the Haskalah.

⁴¹⁷ Jonatan Meir, *Literary Hasidism: The Life and Works of Michael Levi Rodkinson* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016), 112.

literary responses, especially those of neo-Hasidic writers from the turn of the twentieth century. The novel projects of Bodek and Rodkinson attempted to preserve the immediate relation between the literary product and the Hasidic praxis, a relation that supposedly allows the spontaneous participation of individuals. But the intensive printing of Hasidic hagiography enhanced the “institutionalization” of the form within the cultural industry. Hasidic story collections have become a commodity that allows for the development of literary manipulation both within and outside of Hasidic circles. Neo-Hasidic writers used it as an ethnographic form for supporting their imagined view of the Jewish past, from which they sought to break away and by which they shaped a new modern Jewish identity that maintained historical depth. The manipulation of the literary form, of the product, provided an *illusion* that the text had an immediate, intimate communal effect for Hasidim, or, alternatively, an immediate meaning for building an “authentic” Jewish identity for non-Hasidim.⁴¹⁸

The works of Rodkinson and Bodek mark a moment of change that should be considered carefully. In order to grasp the theoretical effect of the modern-hagiographical genre, we cannot separate the inter-Hasidic perspective, which sees the stories as a practice of worship, from the external Hasidic perspective, which views it as an ethnographic commodity. Bodek and Rodkinson expanded Hasidic participation in the Jewish culture of their time and produced a dialectical format. By introducing Hasidic praxis to non-Hasidim and claiming legitimacy through the

⁴¹⁸ “The classical experience of romantic feeling, therefore, is produced by the dialectical and historical process that constitute the work as a whole and not by the impression of any of its isolated moments. In the transition to neo-Romantic art, the assertion of the detail, the feature or part, leads to the latter taking upon itself the affective import that formerly belonged to the total structure.” Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture*, 14.

popular medium, they challenged maskilic elitist discourse. On the threshold of its emergence, Hasidic hagiography served as a potential vehicle for legitimizing Hasidim in the general Jewish society and for legitimizing individual authority as an alternative within inter-Hasidic traditions of production of knowledge. Hasidic popular booklets offered new opportunities for Hasidim to participate in the shaping of society, and they were cultural agents that granted Hasidim literary visibility. However, these opportunities and their potential for emancipation were diminished in the new apparatus of popular industry that so strongly contributed to the organization and fixation of Hasidism during the second half of the nineteenth century.

According to Adorno, the aspiration for freedom and the failure to obtain it, is the essence of modern popular culture. The economy of “capitalism monopoly,” he claims, gave birth to “culture industry” in which artistic forms are delivered to individuals as products that, from their outset, are part of the deterministic exploitive social system. In the modern popular culture, there are no spontaneous movements of parts – individuals, praxes, or literary motives – that can arouse criticism or inspire revolution.

Responding to Adorno’s critique of his essay, Benjamin agrees that his claims about mechanical reproduction could be “*more dialectic*,”⁴¹⁹ but he pushes against

⁴¹⁹ Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, 131. Earlier in this letter, Adorno lays out the criterion for the differences in their approaches. He writes, “You distinguished the idea of the work of art as a structure from the symbol of theology ... and from the taboo of magic. But I find it somewhat disturbing...that you have now rather casually transferred the concept of the magical aura to the ‘autonomous work of art’ and flatly assigned a counter revolutionary function to the latter. ... it seems to me that the heart of the autonomous work of art...is inherently dialectical, that is, compounds within itself the magical element with the sign of freedom.” Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, 128.

Adorno's determinism:⁴²⁰ "In my own essay I attempted to articulate the positive moments as clearly as you have articulated the negative ones," Benjamin wrote.⁴²¹ It is important for Benjamin to dwell on momentary instances of interactions between the parts in the economic-social mechanism. These instances of spontaneous dynamics (such as the emergence of a new technology) give birth to new aesthetics, representation and practices within which, as Benjamin claims, lie the hope for revolution, or at least, the possibility of criticism. Freedom, for Benjamin, can be measured at any moment by the relation of free elements to the elements that have already been absorbed by the system. It is the responsibility of the critic to dwell on these moments and illuminate the revolutionary potential embedded in new practices as a way to overcome Marxist determinism.

In his essay "These in the Philosophy of History," Benjamin discusses the responsibility of the historical materialist to separate himself and his mind from the empty homogeneous time of historicism, to break down the flow of the past into fragments upon which he can dwell and think. "Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. . . . In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history—blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific

⁴²⁰ Benjamin specifically refers to Adorno's work on jazz music.

⁴²¹ Benjamin writes this in a letter to Adorno from September 12, 1938. Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, 295.

work out of the lifework.”⁴²² The ethical responsibility of the critic is to dwell on specific moments from which new materials can be created, providing better understanding of political struggles.

Although Adorno points out the failure of popular culture, we still have the responsibility to dwell on the moments in which new literary forms emerge, in order to realize their critical potential that might bring about freedom.⁴²³ The popular printing of Hasidic hagiography inserted into the Jewish market new practices that contain a potential for emancipation. Although Hasidic hagiography ultimately failed to free the masses, this dissertation’s critical view of the moment when the genre emerged can instruct us on the interests and forces that allowed for both individual creativity and communal supervision and organization.

A follow-up study on Hasidic hagiography might focus on moments in which Hasidic hagiography was used to resist the organizing mechanism of inter-Hasidic hegemony. An interesting example for this might be the work of Malka Shapira (1894–1971), who wrote a Hasidic hagiographical book that presents a feminine version of the conventional Hasidic genre. Shapira was the daughter of Rabbi

⁴²² Walter Benjamin, “These in the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn. Ed. Hanna Ardent (New York: Schocken, 2007), 262-263.

⁴²³ In a study from March 1966, Adorno examined the German population’s reaction to a political event that was broadcasted in mass media. Surprised by the results, and despite his view on popular culture as a supervising and suppressing mechanism, Adorno asserted that “Apparently the integration of consciousness and free time has not yet wholly succeeded. The real interests of individuals are still strong enough to resist, up to a point, their total appropriation.” In his view, the spontaneous elements that lie in individual consciousness can turn into freedom. “I think,” Adorno says, “that there is a chance here for political maturity that ultimately could do its part to help free time turn into freedom.” See Theodor Adorno. *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2005) 174–75. For more on Adorno’s perception of the possibility of spontaneous or free movement, see Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture*, 7, 9. In a letter from May 28, 1936, Adorno describes an experience of his in the cinema that confirms Benjamin claim about the liquidation of the aura. See Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, 137.

Yerachmiel Moshe Hopsztain (1860–1909), the sixth rebbe of Kozhnitz Hasidism and the wife of Rabbi Avraham Elimelech Shapiro (1894–1966), who was the son of Rabbi Yisrael Shapira (1874–1943), the second rebbe of Grodzhisk Hasidism, and who was himself the rebbe of Grodzhisk Hasidism in Jerusalem. In her book *Midin le-Raḥamim: Sipurim me-ḥatsrot Admorim* (1969), Shapira uses the traditional literary structures of Hasidic hagiography, such as autobiographical framing of the stories.⁴²⁴ Nevertheless, and in spite of the book’s title that puts the *Admorim* (rebbe) in the foreground, her book focuses on Hasidic women. In the book, Shapira describes her mother and grandmother as storytellers and sermonizers, granting them the position and power of Hasidic tsadikim. The book also describes Shapira as a young child spending time in her grandfather’s company. As a young girl who invades the masculine-dominated Hasidic environment, her character functions as a cultural agent that allows the gender exchange of cultural practices.

As a new form of hagiography, Shapira’s work implicitly offers individuals options for resistance. This is, however, not the common case in Hasidic hagiographies. David Assaf has shown that most of the time, Hasidic hagiography served to reinforce the Hasidic elite’s hegemony and supervision by ignoring disruptive events, suppressing them, and attempting to conceal them from the collective memory.⁴²⁵ As has been argued in this dissertation, Hasidic hagiography is a complex genre that comprises elements of democratization and freedom as well as

⁴²⁴ Malka Shapira. *Midin le-Raḥamim: Sipurim me-ḥatsrot Admorim* (Jerusalem: HaRav Kook Institute, 1969).

⁴²⁵ David Assaf, *Untold Tales of the Hasidim: Crisis & Discontent in the History of Hasidism* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2010).

supervision and suppression. It is a product that on the one hand encourages freedom and spontaneity and provides practical tools for social participation and criticism, but on the other hand expresses the inevitable failure of popular culture. This complexity of Hasidic hagiography characterizes any type of popular culture and therefore can illuminate not merely the forces that operate in the Hasidic community, but those that operate in any other modern society.

The moment in which Hasidic hagiography presented a critical response to contemporary social change was also the moment of its failure. With the emergence of Hasidic popular stories, new poetic possibilities arose, offering new forms, experiences, and practices to the nineteenth-century Jewish society. Instead of dismissing Hasidic hagiography and excluding it from the Hebrew literary apparatus, I suggest dismissing the judgmental maskilic scale that separates between “high” and “low” literature and “pure” and “corrupt” language.

Modern culture should be understood as a complex mechanism in which each element shapes, reflects, and resists the other. In this way, we can reveal the power (suppressive or redeeming) that each force exerts on the system. The popular actions of Hasidism should be examined carefully if we truly want to understand the Haskalah (and vice versa). Hasidism exercises social supervision of the masses but at the same time resists other organizing ideologies such as nationalism. Pushing Hasidic aesthetics and ethics to the margins of critical discourse results in blindness—blindness to its effect on the masses and blindness to its critical responses to rabbinic traditions and the secular hegemony rooted in the Haskalah. Discussing popular

genres is important not only for pointing out their failure to free individuals, but also for extracting forms and practices that can turn conservatism into criticism.

Appendix: Hasidic Hagiographic Stories – A few examples

In what follows I bring a few examples for Hasidic hagiographical stories from the books discussed in this dissertation. While *Shivhei HaBesht* was translated into many languages, the stories from the mid-nineteenth century did not receive the same attention. A future project would be to produce an anthology of Hasidic stories from the 1860s. Due to time limit I could only translate one story into English. I bring it here in both Hebrew and English in addition to other Hebrew stories that are mentioned in the dissertation. I added a few more stories that are not mentioned in the dissertation in order to reflect the variety of Hasidic hagiography. The original stories do not have titles, they are barely punctuated and paragraphed, and have many acronyms and abbreviations. I decided to keep the stories as close as possible to the original format. Therefore, the titles that I provide here are simply the first words of the stories' openings. Similarly, I kept the original paragraphs and punctuation. I added punctuations only where it was absolutely necessary.

A. The Besht, blessed be his memory, called all his students before his death

Michael Rodkinson, 'Adat Tsadikim, Lemberg, 1864, pp. 24-28.

Translated by Chen Mandel-Edrei, Hannah Landes, Sheila Jelen, and Adele Berlin.

The Besht, blessed be his memory, called all his students before his death and instructed them how they should conduct themselves and how each one would earn his livelihood. To a few of them he revealed what the future would hold. One student who was his assistant was there as well, and his name was Reb Ya'akov. The Besht

called him and said, “You will go to all of the places where I am known and you will tell stories about my deeds that you have seen, and from this will come your livelihood.” Reb Yaa’kov was very disappointed and replied, “What is the purpose of being a ceaseless wanderer and telling stories?”⁴²⁶ The Besht said to him: “Do not be disturbed because you will get rich doing this, God willing.” When the Besht was buried and rose up to heaven and left us bereft, his students followed all that he had instructed them and the aforementioned Reb Ya’akov began traveling from place to place, telling stories about the Besht, and making a good livelihood from it.

Two and a half years after the Besht, blessed be his memory, had passed away, Reb Ya’akov heard that in Italy there was a wealthy man who was willing to pay a gold coin for every story about the Besht. He calculated how many coins he would need in order to stop wandering around for at least a year or more. So, he bought a horse with a servant and prepared himself for the journey, because it was a very long journey. His journey took him some seven months, because he tarried in each town he passed to collect money for travel expenses. When he arrived at the city where the wealthy man lived, he asked the people of the city about what kind of man he was, and they told him that he is exceedingly wealthy and that his court is like the court of a king and that he acts with piety that he sits and studies all day long, and his business is honest. He prays and studies throughout the day, and during each of the three Sabbath meals he asks people to tell him stories about the Besht, and after the Sabbath he pays one coin per story. Reb Ya’akov asked where the wealthy man was born and if he had been living in the city for a long time or not. They responded that

⁴²⁶ ‘ceaseless wanderer’, Genesis 4:12

he had come to the city about ten years ago and had bought the court from the ruler of the city who was a minister in Rome, and that he settled here and built a synagogue in his courtyard. The townspeople pray there morning and evening, and on the Sabbath most of the townspeople dine at his table. Reb Yaakov went to him and asked his attendants to inform their master that the assistant of the Besht had arrived and that he would tell him many stories, stories that he himself, and not a stranger, had witnessed with his own eyes. The attendant went and told his master, the wealthy man, all the above, and the wealthy man said, "Let him wait until the Sabbath and then he will tell us the stories." Until then the wealthy man instructed that Reb Ya'akov should stay with him, and they gave him a special room and he stayed there until the Sabbath. And behold, when the townspeople heard that he was the assistant and student of the Besht they all gathered together to hear stories from him, because ever since the wealthy man started living there, the people of the town had become used to hearing stories about the Besht, blessed be his memory. As they were sitting around the Sabbath table, after the traditional singing of Sabbath songs, the wealthy man asked Reb Ya'akov to tell something about the Besht as was the custom. However, Reb Ya'akov completely forgot all the stories! He could not recall a single story. When he tried to draw the figure of the Besht in his mind, or the image of the city Medzhybizh, or the image of his friends as a prompt for remembering the stories, he couldn't do this either. He had completely forgotten everything that had ever happened to him. Reb Ya'akov struggled very hard to remember these things, but whenever he tried to remember something that could serve as a link to a story about the Besht he forgot that too. He was like a baby who had just been born that day. He broke his head to

pieces trying to remember but it did not help him at all. Reb Ya'akov was confused, and all the people in the wealthy man's household and all the townspeople were angry at him because they figured he had lied about being close to the Besht, and that he probably had never even seen him. But the wealthy man himself was silent, and told him, "We will wait until tomorrow, maybe then you will be able to remember something." Reb Ya'akov cried all night long and tried to picture the image of his friends, but nothing helped him. He had completely forgotten how to begin to tell a story about the Besht, as if he had never seen the Besht. During the Sabbath lunch the wealthy man asked him again if he had remembered any story, and he did not know what to answer. Reb Ya'akov said to him, "Believe me, this is not a meaningless thing, nothing like this has ever happened to me before." The wealthy man said, "Let us wait until the third meal, maybe you will be able to remember." But he did not remember anything at the third meal as well, and was very despondent. In addition, the wealthy man's household wanted to humiliate him, saying, "How dare he make fun of our master with such lies." All of the townspeople were angry and mocked him greatly. And the righteous Reb Ya'akov accepted all of this with love, and was very astounded by this occurrence, and he wore himself out trying to find an explanation that would allow him to understand why this had happened. He thought that perhaps the Besht was incensed with him for not wanting to go to places where people knew him, but instead travelling to a foreign country, where the people are not worthy to hear such stories, and many other thoughts of this kind. But no excuse convinced him, and he was even more confounded and filled with agony. He prayed to God the whole Sabbath, and when the Sabbath was over, the wealthy man sent him a message, once

again, saying that if he had remembered anything, he should tell him. Each time he was asked, “Do you remember?” “Do you know?” it disturbed this pious man. Reb Ya’akov went to his room and cried, and then restrained himself and said, “Maybe Heaven does not want me to become rich, or does not want stories of the Besht to be told here. I know that this is not by accident, God forbid, and now I shall return home.” But the wealthy man asked him to wait until Tuesday and if he did not remember anything during those days he could go home. So Reb Ya’akov tarried until Tuesday but he did not remember anything. He went to the wealthy man to get permission to go on his way in peace, and the wealthy man gave him a generous donation. Reb Ya’akov went to sit in the carriage to drive off, but just as he sat in the carriage, he remembered an amazing story about the Besht. Reb Ya’akov went back to the wealthy man’s house and sent his servant to tell him that he remembered a precious tale. The wealthy man called him into his room and said, “Please tell me.” So, Reb Ya’akov told him the following tale:

“Once before the Christian holiday of Easter the Besht was very troubled during the whole Sabbath and paced back and forth in his house. Right after the third meal he ordered the horses to be saddled and took three men with him, I was among them. We sat in the carriage and drove all night, and no one knew the purpose of the journey and what our destination was. The dawn rose, and we arrived at an exceeding great city.⁴²⁷ The horses stopped next to a big house, and the doors and windows were shut. The Besht ordered us to knock on the door. An old woman came out, yelling bitterly, “What are you doing here? At this moment you all will be dragged to

⁴²⁷ ‘An exceeding great city’, Jonah 3:3

slaughter, for today the Christians stab any Jew who leaves his house, because today is their holiday. And if they do not find a Jew in the street then they cast lots for any Jew to take revenge for their messiah. And woe to the man who is caught by their lottery, for they drag him out of his house and torture him severely until he falls dead and beaten by their hands. And yesterday they cast lots and the rabbi was caught, because the Christians know that servants are careful not to walk on the street this day. And now, when one of the Christians will see you and know that Jews from Poland came here – surely you will all be dragged to slaughter and you will cause suffering to us as well. So now, hurry and run away from the town.” The old lady was wailing and groaning, and her hands were on her head. But the Besht did not pay attention to her and immediately went into the house, and he went into the large room that was there, and ordered us to bring all of our things into the house. The people of the house were all terrified. They were lying by the inner walls of the house and said not a word because they were scared. The old woman entered the house wailing and crying, and started arguing with the Besht, but he did not respond to her. Rather, he opened the curtain on a window and stood looking outside. The old lady kept shrieking, saying, why did he open the curtain, but the Besht did not pay her any attention. The Besht saw through the window that there was a big stage in the street with thirty steps leading up to it, and a large crowd was gathered around the stage, waiting for the bishop. After a short while many bells rang out, signaling the bishop’s arrival.

The Besht was standing next to the window, looking outside, when he suddenly called to me: “Ya’akov, go tell the bishop to come to me at once.” When all the

people in the house heard this they were panic-stricken and spiritless. They started yelling at him, “What are you thinking, you senseless man, sending a Jewish man to his death?! Surely this rabble will tear him to pieces, bit by bit.” They continued cursing him out of their bitterness, but he paid them no heed at all and shouted, “Ya’akov, go quickly, do not be afraid.” I knew that the one sending me on this mission knew exactly what he was doing and I walked out fearlessly into the street. I came to the stage and no one said a word to me. I said to the bishop in the Jewish tongue, “The Besht is here and he is asking for you to go to him immediately.” The bishop answered me: “I knew that he would be here. Tell him that after the sermon I will go immediately to him,” so I returned to the house. The people in the house had seen from afar, through holes in the closed shutters, that I had gone up onto the stage and spoken with the bishop. They saw and were indeed astounded, and they all became quiet and tried to soothe the Rebbe until I returned, but he paid no attention to their words just as he had paid no attention to their earlier statements and their later ones. When I told him the bishop’s answer he shouted at me: “Go to him again and tell him to come here right now and stop being such a fool!” I returned to the stage but he had started preaching. I tugged at his clothes and told him the Besht’s words. The bishop said to the crowd: “Wait just a few moments, I will be back shortly.” He followed me to the Besht. The two of them entered a special room, closed the door, and stayed there for about two hours. Afterwards, the Besht came out and ordered the horses to be saddled, and we drove away at once. I don’t know what happened to that bishop, and until today I don’t even know the name of the town, and the Besht didn’t

tell me. This is what I've now remembered. It has been about ten years since these events took place.”

When Reb Ya'akov finished speaking, the wealthy man raised his hands and praised God. He said to Reb Ya'akov: “I know that your words are true. Right when I saw you I recognized you, but I kept silent. And I will tell you the events. Know that I am the bishop that you summoned. I was originally Jewish, but later I fell deep into spiritual impurity because I was very smart and I had a magnanimous soul. The Besht with his great benevolence took me out of the depth of my spiritual impurity because of my ancestors' merit, for my ancestors were holy and asked him to help me. The Besht repeatedly asked me in my dreams to repent my evil ways. And that night I promised him that in the early morning watch I would run away from the city before the crowd gathered to hear my sermon, for in the sermon I was going to speak against God's people, and the Christians would become bloodthirsty to the point of killing a Jewish man. However, on that day, when I woke up at first watch, the spiritual impurity grew stronger. Even though I saw that the Besht had already arrived in town, I still couldn't decide. When I saw the throngs gathering, and when I took one step out of my house and the bells began ringing and signaling my arrival, then my evil inclination would not let me leave all of this honor, and I went to preach. Then, when you came and called me I wanted to preach before my mind could change. But when you called me again I became a totally different person, and I went with you. Then the Besht showed me how to mend my ways and I completely repented. I gave half of my money to the poor for I was very rich, and I gave the king a quarter of my money so he would let me go to live in another country because of an invented reason

that I told him. The Besht instructed me what to do each year to atone for my sins. He told me, “This is how you will know that your transgressions have been removed and that your sins have been atoned: when someone comes and tells you your own story. Therefore, at the moment I saw you I greatly increased my repentance, and when I saw that you had forgotten all of the stories I realized that this had happened to you because of me, because my sins had not been fully atoned. I did what I could and my prayer was a great help, with God’s help, because you remembered the story, and now I know that, blessed be God, my sins have been removed and I have made amends for everything, thank God. And you, you no longer need to wear yourself out with traveling and telling stories because I will give you many gifts that will last you for the rest of your life. May the merit of the Besht help us both so we can worship our Creator all the days of our lives, with all our heart and all our soul, amen.⁴²⁸

And now, reader, see how great is the power of repentance. Know that this story is true and the moral lesson is plain as day. If you have a soul, you will understand on your own the significance of the events, and may the merit of the tsadikim protect you and keep you safe from all evil,⁴²⁹ amen.

***B. הבעש"ט ז"ל קודם פטירתו קרא לכל התלמידים שלו
מיכאל לוי רודקינסון, עדת צדיקים, לעמבערג, 1864, עמ' 24–28.***

הבעש"ט ז"ל קודם פטירתו קרא לכל התלמידים שלו ויצוה להם איך יתנהגו וממה יהי' פרנסת כל אחד. ולקצת מהם גילה איך שיתנהג הזמן אתם. והי' אצלו תלמיד אחד אשר היה משרתו ג"כ שמו ר' יעקב.

⁴²⁸ Echoes the biblical idiom found in Deuteronomy 6:5; 2 Kings 23:3, 25, and elsewhere.

⁴²⁹ Echoes Psalms 121:7 “The Lord shall keep thee from all evil; He shall keep thy soul”

ויקרא לו הבעש"ט ויאמר לו אתה תיסע לכל המקומות אשר מכירים אותי ותספר מעשיות אשר ראית ממני ומזה יהי' פרנסתך. ויצטער הר"ר יעקב מאוד ויאמר לו מה יהי' התכלית מזה להיות נע ונד ולספר מעשיות. ויאמר לו הבעש"ט אל תדאג כי תתעשר מזה אי"ה. ויהי' כאשר נגנז ארון הק' ועלה לשמים ושבק לנו החיים. קיימו תלמידיו ככל אשר צוה עליהם והר"ר יעקב הנ"ל נסע לכל המקומות ויספר מעשיות מהבעש"ט והתפרנס מזה בריוח: והי' אחרי כלות שתי שנים ומחצה מפטירת רבינו הבעש"ט ז"ל. שמע הר"ר יעקב כי באיטלי' יש גביר אחד אשר נותן בעד כל מעשה שמספרים לו מהבעש"ט אדום זהב ונשאר בדעתו לאיזה סך מעות אדומים ואז לא יצטרך להיות נע ונס לכה"פ שנה או יותר. ויקנה לו סוס עם משרת ויכין עצמו לדרך כי הדרך רב מאוד. ויתעכב בנסיעתו ערך שבעה חדשים עד בואו לשם: כי התמהמה בכל עיר לבקץ על הוצאות הנסיעה: ובבואו לעיר אשר דר שם הגביר וישאל לאנשי העיר על מהות הגביר ויאמרו לו כי הוא עשיר נפלא מאד והחצר שלו הוא כחצר המלך והוא מתנהג בחסידות יושב ולומד כל היום ועל עסקיו יש נאמנים: והוא לומד ומתפלל כל היום ובשבת בכל הג' סעודות הוא מבקש שיספרו לו מעשיות מהבעש"ט ואחר השבת הוא נותן אדום א' עבור כל מעשה. וישאל הר"ר יעקב על הגביר מאין מקום מולדתו ואם הוא גר פה מכבר או לא. והשיבו לו כי זה כעשר שנים בא לכאן וקנה פה החצר מאדון העיר אשר הי' מניסטער ברומי ונתיישב פה ויבנה בה"כ בחצר שלו ומתפללים שמה אנשי העיר בוקר וערב. ובשבת הולכים לשלחנו מרבית אנשי העיר, וילך אליו הר' יעקב ויבקש לסריסיו אשר יודיעו להגביר כי בא הנה משרת הבעש"ט והוא יספר לו מעשות הרבה ממנו את אשר ראו עיניו ולא זר ויבא הסריס ויספר לאדונו הגביר כנ"ל, ויען הגביר ימתין עד השבת ואז יספר לנו. וכיני לביני צוה הגביר שיתאכסן אצלו ה' יעקב, ויתנו לו עלי' מיוחדת ויתגורר בה עד השבת, והנה כאשר שמעו אנשי העיר כי משרת ותלמיד הבעש"ט הוא, ויתקבצו כולם לשמוע מעשיו ממנו, כי הורגלו אנשי העיר מעת אשר גר הגביר פה. לשמוע בכל שבת סיפורים מהבעש"ט ז"ל, ויהי בעת אשר ישבו לסעודת שבת אחרי הזמירות כנהוג צוה הגביר לר' יעקב הנ"ל שיספר איזה דבר מהבעש"ט והנה הר' יעקב שכח לגמרי כל המעשיות ולא הי' יכול לזכור על שום מעשה ורצה לצייר צורת הבעש"ט במחשבתו או תואר העיר מעזיביז או תואר החבירים למען יזכור עי"ז על איזה מעשה, וגם זאת לא הי' יכול כלל כי שכח לגמרי מאשר קרה לו

מעודו, ונתייגע הר' יעקב מאוד להתבונן בזה ומכל מקום אשר הי' בדעתו לזכור על איזה ענין שיוכל להסתעף מזה איזה סיפור מהבעש"ט שכח ע"ז לגמרי כאלו נולד באותו יום, ולא הועיל לו אשר שבר את מוחו לרצוצים כי לא הי' יכול להזכיר על שום דבר כלל. ויהי הר' יעקב כמבולבל מזה וכל אנשי בית הגביר וגם אנשי העיר חרה להם מאד עליו כי שיערו בדעתם כי בדה מלבו שקר אשר הי' אצל הבעש"ט ובודאי לא ראה אותו מעולם והגביר בעצמו שתק ויאמר אליו נמתין עד יום המחרת אולי תוכל להזכיר א"ע ויבכה הרר"י כל הלילה ויחשוב ויצייר צורת החבירים ולא הועיל לו שום תרופה כי שכח לגמרי איך להתחיל לספר מעשה מהבעש"ט כאלו לא ראה את הבעש"ט מעולם ובסעודת שחרית של שבת שאלהו הגביר עוד הפעם אולי הזכיר א"ע על איזה מעשה ולא ידע מה להשיבו. אך אמר לו הר' יעקב תאמין לי אין זה דבר ריק ומעולם לא קרה לי כאלה. ויאמר הגביר נחכה עד סעודה השלישית אולי תזכור, אבל הוא לא זכר גם בסעודה השלישית שום דבר ונתעצב מאוד מזה. נוסף לזאת רצו כל אנשי בית הגביר לעשות לו בזיון באמרם איך מלאו לבו להלעוג מהגביר בדברי שקרים. וכל אנשי העיר היטב חרה' להם והציקו לו מאוד בדברים והצדיק ר' יעקב קבל את כ"ז באהבה והתפלא מאוד ע"ז והיה מיגע עצמו למצוא איזה תירוץ לזה שיכנסו הדברים בלבו כי כן צריך להיות בחושבו אולי נתרעם הבעש"ט עליו שלא רצה לנסוע במקומות המכירים אותו ניסע למדינה נכריה אשר אינם ראויים לשמוע סיפורים כאלו ועוד דברים רבים כאלו. אבל לא נכנס שום אמתלא כמוהו ע"ז והתפלא ע"ז יותר. והיה מלא יסורים מזה. והתפלל אל ה' כל יום השבת ולמוצאי שבת שלח הגביר עוד אליו אולי זכר דבר מה יגיד לו והדבר הזה הציקה מאוד את הצדיק הנ"ל אשר בכל פעם ששאלוהו 'הזכרת הידעת'. וילך הרר"י לחדרו ויבך שמה ויתאפק ויצא ויאמר אולי אינם רוצים מן השמים שאתעשר או שיספרו פה מעשיות הבעש"ט. הכלל יודע אנכי כי אין זה מקרה חלילה ועתה אשובה לביתי וישלח לו הגביר עוד כי ימתין עד יום ג' ואם לא יזכור מאומה ישוב לביתו. ויתמהמה הר"י עד יום ג' ולא זכר מאומה וילך לקבל רשות פרידת שלום מהגביר ויתן לו הגביר נדבר הגונה וילך לישוב על העגלה לנסוע וכאשר ישב על העגלה נזכר על מעשה נורא מהבע"ט וישוב הר"י לבית הגביר וישלח את משרתו להגיד לו כי נזכר על מעשה יקרה וישלח אחריו הגביר ויכניסהו לחדרו ויאמר ספרה נא לי. ויספר לו הר"י לאמר:

הנה פעם אחת לפני אידיהם פסח של הנוצרים ה' הבעש"ט טרוד מאוד כל השבת והלך בביתו
אנה ואנה: ותיכף אחר סעודה ג' צוה לקשור הסוסים ולקח ג' אנשים עמו בותכם הייתי גם אני ונשב
בהעגלה נסע כל הלילה ולא ידע איש מטרת נסיעתו אנה היא מועדת ונאור הבוקר ויבאו לעיר אחת גדולה
לאלקים ויעמדו הסוסים אצל בית גדול אחד והדלתות והחלונות היו סגורים ויצוה הבעש"ט לדפוק בהדלת
ותצא אשה אחת זקנה ותצעק מרה מה לכם פה לעת הזאת אשר תוכלו כולכם לטבח כי יום הזה דוקרים
הנוצרים כל העברי היוצא מפתח ביתו החוצה כי יום אידם הוא היום. ואם לא ימצא עברי בהרחוב אז
גורל ידו על איזה איש עברי ינקמו ממנו נקמת משיחם ואוי לו להאיש אשר ילכד בגורלם כי מסחבים
אותו מביתו החוצה ועושים לו עינוים קשים עד שנופל שדוד ומוכה בידם. ואתמול הטילו גורל ונלכד כן
הרב כי יודעים הנוצרים אשר עבדים נזהרים לילך ביום הזה בהרחוב. ועתה כאשר יראה אתכם מי
מהנוצרים כי באו לכאן יהודים מפולין הלא כולכם לטבח תוכלו וגם לנו יאונה רעה על ידיכם ועתה מהרו
לברוח מחוץ לעיר כי צעקה הזקינה הזאת בבכי' ואנחה וידיה מונחים על ראשה: אבל הבעש"ט לא השגיח
בה ותיכף הלך להבית ויעלה על העלי' הגדול' שהי' שם וצוה להכניס החפיצים לבית ואנשי הבית כולם
הוזים שוכבים בקירות הבין אין דובר דבר כי יראו. והזקינה נכנסה לבית ביללה ובצעקה ותריב עם
הבעש"ט ולא ענה לה דבר אך הסיר הוילון מחלון אחד ועד אצל החלון והסתכל בה והזקינה הוסיפה
לצעוק ולמה הסיר הוילון ולא השגיח בה ויראה הבעש"ט כי ברחוב העיר עומדת בימי⁴³⁰ גדולה ועליה
שלשים מעלות והמון רב מאוד נאספו אל הבימה והמתינו על הבישוף ואחרי שעה קטנה נשמה הקול
מפעמונים רבים מבשרים על ביאת הבישוף:

והבעש"ט עומד אצל החלון ומסתכל כן פתאום קרא אותי הבעש"ט יעקב לך ותאמר אל הבישוף
כי יבא אלי מהרה וכשמוע כל אנשי הבית את דברו ויחרדו כולם ולא נותרה במ נשמה, ויתנו כולם את
קולם עליו מה לך חסר דעת כי תשלח לטבח איש עברי הלא איברים איברים יקרעו מאתו כל ההמון רב
הזה. וירבו לקלל אותו במר נפשם אבל הוא לא השגיח עליהם כלל ויצעק יעקב לך מהרה אל תפחד.
ואנכי ידעתי את שולחי כי יודע הוא מה שהוא עושה והלכתי בלא פחד אל הרחוב ובאתי אל הבימה ואין

⁴³⁰ Spelling mistake in the original text

דובר אלי דבר ואמרתי אל הבישוף בלשון עברי הבעש"ט הוא בכאן קרא אותך שתבוא אליו תיכף. ויען לי הבישוף אנכי ידעתי מביאתו ואמור לו כי אחר הדרשה אבוא אליו תיכף והלכתי לחזרה ואנשי הבית ראו מרחוק בחורי החלונות הסתומים כי הייתי אצל הבימה ודברתי עם הבישוף המה ראו כן תמהו ויחשו כולם ויפייסו את הרב עד בואי לבית אבל היא לא שת לבו לדבריהם הקודמים ולא לדבריהם האחרונים וכאשר השבתי לו מענה הבישוף צעק אלי לך עוד הפעם ואמור אליו יבא תיכף ואל יהי שוטה. ושבתי אל הבימה והנה הוא התחיל לדרוש וסחבתי אותו בבגדו ואמרתי לו דברי הבעש"ט ויאמר הבישוף להעם חכו נא עוד מעט ואשובה אליכם וילך אחרי ויבא עמי להבעש"ט וילכו שינהם לחדר מיוחד ויסגרו הדלת בעדם ויהי שם כשתי שעות, יצא הבעש"ט ויצוה לקשור הסוסים ונסע משם תיכף ומה הי' עם הבישוף הנ"ל לא ידעתי וגם שם העיר עד היום איני יודע והבעש"ט לא הגיד לי. כן זכרתי עתה הנעשה עמי אז וזה כעשר שנים אשר היתה המעשה הזאת:

ויהי כאשר כלה הרב יעקב לדבר וירם הגביר ידיו וישבח לה' ויאמר להר' יעקב ידעתי כי כנים דבריך ותיכף כאשר ראיתך הכרתי אותך אך החשיתי ואנכי אגיד לך המעשה תדע כי אנכי הבישוף אשר קראת אז. ואנכי הייתי קודם יהודי ואח"כ נפלתי לעמקי הקליפות כי חכם גדול הייתי ונשמה קדושה הייתה לי והבעש"ט בחסדו הוציאני ממעמקי הקליפות כי יש לי זכות אבות כי אבותי קדושי' היו והם בקשו את הבעש"ט וידבר את הבעש"ט בחלום יום יום שאשוב מדרכי והלילה ההוא הבטחתי לו כי באשמורת הבוקר אברח מן העיר טרם יאספו ההמון לשמוע הדרשה כי בהדרשה הייתי מדבר סרה על עם ה' כי נתחממו לבות הנוצרים להרוג איזה איש יהודי אולם ביום ההוא כאשר קמתי באשמורת נתגברה הקליפה מאד אבל אנכי ראיתי כי הבעש"ט כבר בא לכאן והייתי פוסח על שתי הסעיפים עד אשר ראיתי כי ההמון הרב נתקבצו כולם וכאשר פסעתי פסיעה אחת מביתי הרימו קול כל הפעמונים ובשרו על ביאתי אז לא הנחני יצרי לעזוב כל הכבוד הזה והלכתי לדרוש וכאשר באת וקראת אותי רציתי לדרוש קודם שיגבר עלי יצרי אבל כאשר קראת אותי שנית נהפכתי לאיש אחר ממש והלכתי אז נתן לי הבעש"ט תיקון ונעשיתי בע"ת גמור וחלקתי את חצי ממוני לעניים כי עשיר גדול מאד הייתי וגם רבע הוני נתתי למלך שיניחני ליסע למדינה אחרת באיזה התנצלות אשר אמרתי לו וצוה הבעש"ט מה לעשות לתיקון

עוונותי בכל שנה ואמר לי בזאת תדע כי יסרו עונותיך וחטאתך כופרה אם יבא איש ויספר לך המעשה שלך. וע"כ תיכף כאשר ראיתך חזרתי בתשובה מאוד וכאשר ראיתי כי נשכח ממך כל המעשיות הבנות כי בעבורי היא כי לא נתקן עוד החטא כנצרך ועשיתי מה שעשיתי והועילה לי תפילתי בעז"ה כי נזכרת על המעשה ועתה ידעתי כי ב"ה סר עוני ותקנתי הכל ב"ה ואתה אינך צריך עוד לכתת רגליך לספר מעשיות כי אנכי אתן לך מתנות הרבה אשר יספיק לך כל ימי חיך וזכות הבעש"ט יעמוד לשנינו שנזכה לעבוד את בוראנו כל ימי חיינו בכל לב ונפש אמן:

ועתה המעיין ראה כמה גדלה כח התשובה התכונן נא כי המעשה הזאת אמיתית הוא וברורה כשמש לבד המוסר, הגדול היוצא מזה תבין מעצמך אם בעל נפש אתה וזכות הצדיקי יגינו עליך לשמרך מכל רע אמן:

C. ב' מעשיות ששמעתי מפי איש נאמן

מנחם מנדל בודק, ספר מפעלות הצדיקים, לעמבערג 1866, עמ' 14.

ב' מעשיות ששמעתי מפי איש נאמן ששמע מפיו הקדוש ממש דהרב הצדיק וכו' ר' שלום מבעלז זצ"ל:
הא' ז"ל הנה בהיותי בילדותי נסעתי להרב הקדוש ר' אורי מסטרעליסק. וכאשר באתי לשם התפלל הרב הנ"ל ועמדתי אחורי הרב הנ"ל ואז התחלתי להרהר. אסור להתפלל אחורי רבו ואח"ז עלה ברעיוני להיפך – מי יאמר שרבו הוא. אראה מתחילה מה טיבו. ויהי אחרי כן אחר אכילה שחרית, ענה הרב הנ"ל ואמר בזה"ל: מי ביקש זאת לבוא לנסיוני אם אני רבי אם לאו. להוי ידוע שבוודאי רבי אני ואסור והתפלל אחורי. אז הבנתי כי איש קדוש הוא ויודע מחשבות הוא. ואז קבלתי אותו לרב עלי.

המעשה הב' אח"כ כשהייתי מעט לאיש נסעתי להרב הצדיק הקדוש מוה' ר' יעקב יצחק מלובלין על שבת ובליל ש"ק נת לידי צליחות יין לשתות ומחמת שמנהגי היה שלא לשתות שום משקה המשכר ע"כ לא רציתי גם היום לשתות, ולסרב בדברי הרב ג"כ לא נכון ע"כ הנחתי את הכוס עומד על השלחן לפני ועמד כ"כ הרבה עד שנתבקע ונשפך היין. אז מילא כוס אחר עם יין והעמיד אצלי. ועמד ג"כ

כבראשונה עד שנתבקע ומילא עוד פעם ג' והעמיד לפני ואמר לי: שתה. הנה באת לשבר כל הזכוכית שלי, ואז ענית לי: אין אני שותה יין. ויעמד מליתן לי עוד.

D. מעשה מנסיעת הבעש"ט לקאנסטאנטינאפל

מיכאל לוי רודקינסון, עדת צדיקים, לעמבערג 1864, עמ' 10-12.

מעשה מנסיעת הבעש"ט לקאנסטאנטינאפל אשר רצה לנסוע לארץ ישראל וזו המעשה היה מספר הגאון הקדוש האלוקי ר' ישראל דוב מווילעדניק זכר צדיק לברכה ביום שביעי של פסח כל ימיו: הנה בעת אשר הי' הבעש"ט ז"ל בקאנסטאנטינאפל עם בתו ועם הרב ה' צבי סופר ז"ל ויתמהמה עד הפסח ויען כי לא הי' מכירים אותו שם הי' שם בלחץ גדול מאד עד כי בערב פסח ממש לא היה לו אפי' פרוסת מצה למצוה ולא כוס יין לכד חדרו אשר שכר לו ולבתו עם ר"צ ז"ל וכאשר לחצה אותי בתו כל היום מה יהיה לימי הפסח מה נאכל בו ענה לה השי"ת יזמיל לנו. והוא ישב כל היום ערה"פ בביהמ"ד ויהי לפנות ערב ממש והנה איש א' נוסע מארץ פולין בהרחוב אשר התאכסן עם הבעש"ט ז"ל וישאל איה פה ר' ישראל בר' אליעזר מארץ פולין אשר הגידו לו כי הוא מתאכסן פה ויראו לו אנשים את האכסני' של הבעש"ט ויבוא לשם עם אשתו וישאל את בת הבעש"ט אם יוכל להתאכסן פה כי רצונו להיות בצוותא עם אביה בימי פסח וכבר הכין כל צרכי הפסח כיד הגביר. ותען לו. אבי בבהמ"ד ותוכלו להתאכסן פה כי לא יקפיד ע"ז תיכף נשאו המשרתים שלו את כל החפיצי' לבית וערכו השולחן בכלים נאים ובמטה מוצעת ומהודרת והכין כל צרכי הסדר עם מצה שמורה הכל על צד המעולה והגבירות. והדליקו נרות גדולים הרבה ויהמהמו עד בא הבעל שם טוב ז"ל מבית תפלתו ויהי כאשר בא מבהכ"נ תיכף עשה קידוש על יין המשובח וקיים הסדר עד אחר כוס שני אז נתן שלום להאורח החדש וישמח עמו אח"כ אמר לו הבעש"ט הנה ידעתי מבוקשך כי אתה חשוכי בנים לכן עבור שהחיית אותי הנני נשבע לך כי אשתך הזאת (אשר הראה עליה באצבע) תלד לך בן ישמח האיש מאוד ויאמר לו כי גם את מחצית הוני אתן לאדוני. אם יזכני השי"ת בזש"ק, אך תיכף שמע הבעש"ט ז"ל כרוז כי ר' ישראל בעש"ט הפסיד חלקו בעולם הבא. יען כי בשבועתו את השי"ת כב"י לשנות המערכה כי האיש הנ"ל היה עקר בטבעו וגם האשה היתה עקרה ומחמת

שבועתו ההכרח לשנות סדרי הטבע. ויהי כאשר שמע הבעש"ט את הכרוז הנ"ל וישמח מאד בלבו ויאמר עתה ברוך השם כי אוכל לעבוד את הש"י בלי שום פניה אפי' פניית עולם הבא לא יהיה לי כי כבר הפסדתי חלקי ואל האיש שנה דברו לאמר לא ידעתי כי אתה עקר בטבעך לך עכ"ז אל יפול לבך כי לא יפול מדברי צרור ארצה ואשר נשבעתי יקויים בעז"ה ומחמת שמחתו זאת שמע תיכף כרוז כי החזירו לו כל זכויותיו על כי רצה לעבוד הש"י בלי שום פניה ויחוגו כן את שני ימים הראשונים בשמחה ובטוב לבב ובחזמה"פ פטר את האורח בכבוד לביתו והוא אמר לר"צ סופר כי רצינו לנסוע תיכף לאה"ק וילך אתו על החוף ולא מצא ספינה אשר בה יהודים אז אמר הבעל שם טוב להסופר ר' צבי אם רצונך אפרוש מטפחתי על הים רק שתזהר לחשוב בשם פלוני אשר אני מוסר לך ולא תניחו מרעיונך אפי' רגע כי אם חלילה תניח מחשבתך ממני נאבד אני ואתה ובתי כולנו אך אנכי רוצה לנסוע במס"ג ואתה החזק דעתך ונסע תיכף ולא רצה הסופר לסכן נפש הבע"ש ז"ל ולא הניח אותו לעשות כן יכרחו לשכור ספינה ויכנסו ביום ראשון של חזה"פ לספינה ומיד קם רוח סערה נשא את הספינה בלא דרך וכן הלכו בלא דרך שני ימים רצופים. וייצר להם מאוד ויחלו פני ה' ויהי ביום השלישי הוקם סערה לדממה ויאסרו את הספינה אצל אי אחד מאייהים וילכו כולם לראות האי ההוא כי המלח מהספינה לא הכיר את האי הנ"ל וילך הבעש"ט עם ר' צבי לטייל על האי וילכו למקום רחוק ויתעו ולא יכלו למצוא את הדרך להספינה וילכו אנה ואנה למצוא את הדרך ובתוך כך נפלו עליהם גזלנים (היידאמאקעס) אשר לא הבינו את לשונם ויאחזו במ ויאסרו אותם בעבותים ויניחו אותם והשחיזו את הסכינים ובתוך כך חלש לבם וישבו לאכול ויניחו את השבויים מאוסרים זה אצל זה אז אמר הר' צבי סופר להבעש"ט למה אתם מחשים העת לעשות עתה עשו זאת איפא איזה דבר באשר הסכנתם עד כה. ויען לו הבעש"ט כי אין אני יודע כעת מאומה ניטל ממני כל הכח שלי אולי אתה זוכר איזה דבר מאשר למדתיך הזכר אותי ויאמר ר' צבי גם אנכי אינני יודע מאומה זולת הא"ב הפשוט אשר אנוכי זוכר, אז צעק הבעש"ט ומה אתה מחשה קרא לפני את הא"ב, ויתחיל רצ"ס לקרוא לפני א' ב' ג' ד' והבעש"ט עונה אחריו בקול בהתלהבות אצומה כדרכו בקדש תמיד עד שהחזיר אליו כל כחו כמאז וכמעט אשר נתק העבותות והנה קול פעמון צולל באזנם מקאפיטאן א' זקן אשר בא פתאום לכאן עם אנשי חיל. והחריד את הגזלנים. וינתק השבויים ממאסרם ובאין אומר ודברים

לקח את הבעש"ט עם רצ"ס להספינה ויסע איתם עד הביאם ביום שביעי של פסח לסטאמבול ואז ראה הבעש"ט בחוש כי אין מניחים אותו מן השמים בשום אופן לנסוע לאה"ק ואז עשה הבעש"ט נסיעתו לחזרה לביתו והרה"ק אי"ד כאשר הי' מסיים המעשה הזאת בשש"פ הי' אומר תמיד וזה הקפיטאן הי' אלי' ז"ל זכותם יגן עלינו להדריכנו לעבודתו ית"ש וכל בעל נפש יבין את המוסר הגדול היום מזה המעשה כי אין צריך לרצות שום קבלת שכר עבור עבודתו ית"ש ואדרב' להתחזק דייקא לעבוד בלי שום פני' וסוף הכבוד לבוא אמן.

E. מעשה נפלא מהרב הצדיק וקדוש מו"ה הירש ליב אליקער זללה"ה

מנחם מנדל בודק, ספר מעשה צדיקים, לעמבערג 1864, עמ' 34–31.

מעשה נפלא מהרב הצדיק וקדוש מו"ה הירש ליב אליקער זללה"ה. בין החסידים ואנשי מעשה אשר נלוו והתחברו אל הרב הצדיק והקדוש הנ"ל היה אברך אחד רך בשנים חתן גביר אחד מעיר רחוק כששים פרסאות מעיר אלוק יע"א. ויהי אחר ראש השנה עת כאשר יבואו החסידים ליפטר מאת רבם ולקבל מאתו ברכה אז בא בתוך החבורה האברך הנזכר ויאמר לו רבו הרב הקדוש "המקום ב"ה יכין לך מקום אשר תהייה שמה והוא יזמין לך פרנסתך". והנה האברך החסיד מצטער מאוד מברכות אלו בידעו כי דברי רבו הקדוש אינם לבטלה והוא היה חתן גביר מפורסם והוא בעצמו היה ג"כ עשיר גדול ויחשוב דברים שונים ורוחו נהפך לו לעצב ודאגה. אך הוא נסע עם חברה חסידים וכאשר באו לאכסניא אחר איזה פרסאות נחו מעט וישתו משקה למען ישמחו את האברך הנ"ל ושלא ידאג עוד ובתוך כך דברו דברי תורה והאברך הזה הגדול על כלם בדברים נעימים לאוזן שומע והנה שמה רחוק ישב בעל האכסניא עם זוגתו ואמר לה "ראה אשתי, האברך הזה הוא מעולה על כל החבורה דבריו נעימים לשמוע ולדעתי אבחר לו להיות מלמד להועיל לבניי הבחורים.

ויקם בעל האכסני' וילך אל האברך הנזכר חתן הגביר ויאמר לו: בני הנה ראיתך מבחר מכל בני חבורתיך. היה נא פה מלמד אצלי ללמוד עם בניי. ויפול לב האברך החסיד מאוד בזכרו את דברי רבו הקדוש וברכתו אליו כי השם ב"ה יכין לו מקום לשבת שמה כי ראה דברים אלה על שורש אחד יסובבו

עם דברי רבו הקדוש. וימאן מתחלה האברך החסיד להיות שמה עד כי הפציר בו והבטיח לו כי ישגיח עליו היטב במאכלו ומשתהו ובשאר הצטרכותו. אז אמר בלבו תהיה מה רבינו הקדוש כיון בברכותיו על המקום הזה אשר יפצירו בי לשבת עמם. אנכי אשב עמם עד כי יחמול עלי השם ואראה אחרית דבר אשר יראני השם ב"ה ברוב רחמיו:

ויואל האיש לשבת שמה להיות מלמד לבני בעל האכסני' בעד הלחם אשר יאכל. ויבחן האיש את הבנים אם יודעים בלימוד גמרא וכדומה ולא ידעו מאומה ויסכים האברך החסיד בדעתו ללמוד עמהם חומש עם פירש"י ומעט מדיני ש"ע וספרי יראים למען השרש בלבם יראת ד' והיה לומד עמם בכל יום ספר ראשית חכמה הקדוש בהתלהבות גדול. וירא הבעל הבית אשר הוא עושה באמונה ויאהב מאוד את המלמד החסיד וימצא חן בעיניו עד כי כמה פעמים בא ויעמוד אחורי הפתח למען תקח אזנו שמץ מני דברי תורה אשר למד בדחילו ורחימו. ויהי היום למד ראשית חכמה שער הקדושה איך יש לו לאדם לשמור מביאות האסורות וגודל החטא מי שבא על נשג"ז ר"ל והבעה"ב שמע אחורי הדלת הדברים נכנסו הדברים בלבו ולבו בערה בקרבו כאש ויפתח הדלת ויאמר לבניו סורו נא מחדר הזה כי יש לי לדבר דבר עם רבכם החסיד וילכו להם.

ויאמר הבעה"ב אל החסיד: אהובי הצדיק אנכי הוא הרשע הזה אשר למדת וקראת בפיך. אנכי עברתי וחטאתי בבעילות האסורות בנשג"ז. גדול עוני מנשוא. אולי לי מה אעשה. ויאמר האברך: נסע נא אל בית הרב הקדוש לאלוק הוא יועיל לך ולמכאובך: ועת הזאת היתה בלילה בלילי טבת הארוכים והקרים אשר הקור והשלג גדול מאוד אין יוצא ואין בא:

והנה הבעה"ב מרוב יגונו וצערו אמר כי תכף ומיד באמצע הלילה יחפוץ לנסוע בלי איחור שום רגע. אך האברך הנזכר מיאן ואמר: איך אסכן נפשי בקור הגדול הזה ליסע בלילה. ויאמר הבעה"ב בלבו למה לי הרב הצדיק מה יושיעני הן גדול עוני מנשוא. אלך נא בלילה ביער בין האילנות ושמה אבכה על ימי ושנותי ולאור הלבנה אומר שירות ותשבחות תהלות אלקי יעקב מנעים זמירות ישראל עד כי יחמול עלי השם. וילך הבעה"ב ביער בתוך האילנות והתחיל לומר תהילים בבכייה ויללה גדולה עד למאוד ולאט לאט התחיל להתקרר מגודל הקור אשר היה אז, אמנם הוא קיבל על נפשו הכל למסור נפשו לד' בעברו

חטאתיו העצומים והנוראים. והקור הלוך וגדול והוא עומד שם בין האילנות ותגבר עליו הקור וכל גופו נתקרר וימוס⁴³¹ בתוך הבכי והזעקה מחמת הקרירות הגדול ויפול ארצה ולא ידע איש מזה. ויהי בבוקר וילכו שני ילדי ערלים ביער ליקח עצים מערמה הגדולה אשר שם ביער ונפל משא כבדה מהעצים על הילדים האלה ונהרגו שמה קרוב לבעל הבית הנזכר אשר מת בבכייתו:

ויהי כזרוח השמש על הארץ ויקימו כל אנשי הבית ממשכבם ולא מצאו את בעל הבית בביתו. גם המלמד החסיד חפשוהו כי הבטיח לו שיסעו יחדיו להרב הקדוש לאלוק. וילק ביער וירא את בעל הבית נפל מת ארצה גם שני ילדים ערלים ישכבו אצלו פגרים מתים ויחרד מאוד וירא פן יעלילו עליו כי הוא רוצח נפש ויברח החסיד אל רבו הקדוש לעיר אלוק ויספר לו כל אשר קרהו מתחלתו ועד סופו בעל האכסניא איך נהפך לבו ורוחו נשבר לרסיסים בשמעו לומד אותו את הראשית חכמה הקדוש ואיך יצא בלילה ביער וימת. גם סיפר לו משני ילדי הערלים אשר נהרגו שמה קרוב לבעל האכסניא. גם הגיד לו פחדו הגדול שלא יעלילו עליו כי רוצח נפש הוא ועל כן ברח.

ויאמר הרב הקדוש לתלמידו האברך החסיד: בני, ידעתי אותך זה ימים רוב תמימותיך בעבודה ולהשם ב"ה בלי פניות ומחשבת פגול חלילה. על כן שלחתי אותך למקום ההוא כי דברייך אשר יצאו מלבך יכנסו בלב האדם הזה אשר נלכד בעון גדול ועצום ולהשביר לבו הזונה ולהשיבו אל ד' בתשובה. ות"ל ית' וית' כי זכית לזה כי דברייך יעשו רושם בלב חוטא כמוהו והשיבו מני שחת וידוע תדע כי תשובתו היתה מעומקא דלבא כמו שהזכירו רז"ל באשר שהניח ראשו בין ברכיו וכו' אמנם תדע כי הי' חטא האדם הזה מענינים שזכרו רז"ל מעוות אשר לא יוכל לתקון: הבא על הנכרית והוליד ממזכ כי כבר היה לו שני ממזרים. ולכן אחרי כי יצאת נשמתו בבכי ויללה לא הניחוהו עדיין למעלה לילך בעולם הנשמות מפני הממזרים שהניח. ונעשה רעש גדול מפני שהיה בעל תשובה גדול אשר כבר לא היה כמוהו ועשו פסק דין כי שני הממזרים יהרגו תיכף וכן היה ואלה הילדים הם שני ילדיו הממזרים וכאשר נהרגו הלך למעלה למעלה. ועתה אתה אהובי תסע לביתך כי חותנך הוא גביר עצום גם

⁴³¹ Spelled like the eastern European pronunciation of the word וימות. The ם here replaces the grammatically correct ת, expressing the traditional vernacular verbal utterance.

כל בני ביתך הם עשירים גדולים והם שמחים ומצפים לקראתיך וכלם המה בשלום בלי שום פגע רע חלילה. הש"י ירחם עלינו לתקן כל הפגמים שפגמנו בשורש העליון וישלח לנו גואלנו במהרה בימינו אמן סלה.

F. מהבעש"ט בסטאמיל.

מנחם מנדל בודק, ספר מעשה צדיקים, לעמבערג 1864, עמ' 12-10.

נודע לכל ומפורסם מנסיעה מהבעש"ט ז"ל לארץ הקדושה כי רצה לראות א"ע עם הרב הקדוש בעל ספר אור החיים ומן השמים עכבוהו והיה לו צרות גדולות בדרך עד שפעם אחת נעצב וסר רוחו הקדושה ממנו מרוב התלאה ועמל הדרך כנודע לכל כי לפעמים יפול הצדיק ממדרגתו הגדולה מפאת חסרון השמחה אצלו אז בטל ממנו הרגשת האהבה והיראה ממנו. ולכן מגודל התלאות והצרות אשר מצאוהו בדרך נסתלק ממנו כל המדרגות הגדולות אשר היה לו מני אז. ויאמר הבעש"ט ז"ל: ומה לעשות אעבוד את הבורא עולם ית"ש כשאר בני אדם פשוטים. והיה לו אתו ספר תהילים אחד מה שלקח מעזבון הרב הקדוש ר' אדם בעש"ט ז"ל. ויהי כל ימי הנסיעה בספינה אמר שירות ותשבחות בספר תהילים כמו אדם פשוט עד בואו לסטאמבול עם בתו הצדקת המפורסמת מרת אדל אם הבנים האחים הקדושים המפורסמים מוהרר אפרים מסדליקב ז"ל. בעהמ"ח ספר דגל מחנה אפרים והרב הקדוש רבי ברוך ממעזיביז ז"ל. ויהי כבואם לסטאמבול בצר ובמצוק באין לחם ושמלה והימים ימי ניסן איזה ימים קודם החג הקדוש חג הפסח. מה עשה הרב הבעש"ט ז"ל, הלך לבית המדרש אחד דשם ושם היה דירתו ולמד והתפלל בקטנות המוחין. ויהי כשני ימים קודם החג הלכה הצדקת מרת אדל עם חלוק אחד אל הנהר לשטוף אותה ולכבסה על החג ליתן לאביה הקדוש בחג. ותזכור את מעמדה ואת מעמד אביה איך הם ריקים מכל בלי לחם ושמלה. כי אין להסלא מצות שמורה ולא יין לארבע כוסות וכל הצטרכות ותקטן עוד זאת בעיניה בראותה כי סר רוח אביה ממנו כי הוא בקטנות שוכב שוכב בביהמ"ד כאחד העם ורוח הקדושה וכל המדרגות הגדולות שהיה לו נסתלקו ממנו זאת הי' לה לצער גדול מאוד ותבקה מאוד אל יד הנהר ודמעות רב ירדו מעיניה באין הפוגות:

אז הלך על ספינה אחת גביר אחד גדול מאוד וראה הצדקת ההיא בוכה לא ידעה אך רחמיו נכמרו עליה בראותו כי עיניה נזלו דמעות לרבבות וישאל אותה: בתי מה זה תבכה. ותאמר: מה תושיע לי אם תדע. ויאמר לה: עוד הפעם אולי אוכל להושיעך, הגד נא לי. ותספר לו כי יש לה אב אחד קדוש ותספר כל המוצאות אותם ויאמר הגביר: בתי, מהר נא אל אביך וקרא אותו אלי ויהיה אתי בביתי מלחמי יאכל ומייני ישתה ויסמן לה המקום והבית אשר תבא שמה. ותמהר הצדקת אל אביה ותאמר לו כל הדברים כי גביר אחד מבקשהו על ימי החג להיות אתו וילך אליו בערב פסח אחר תפלת המנחה בזמן מנחה קטנה ויהי אך כדרוך הבעש"ט ז"ל על מפתן היכל הגביר ובראותו יפוי הבית וכל מכוניו עם הכלים היפים והנחמדים אשר עמדו שם נתמלא בשמחה למאוד ורחב לבו ואור פניו שב אליו. ויקחהו הגביר אל חדר אחד שהיה יפה עד למאוד ושמה כבדוהו עם כוס יין ואח"כ עוד כוס אחד מפני הטעם שאז"ל: פורתא סעיד וטובא מגריר גריר. ויהי כאשר שתה הבעש"ט ז"ל היין, אז היין שמח את לבבו ורוחו שב אליו וכל המדרגות הגדולות שנסתלקו ממנו בעת נפילת המוחין מהדאגה והתלאה חזרו עתה אליו כבראשונה. ויאמר הבעש"ט ז"ל: אשכב מעט ואניח למען נוכל לספר ביציאת מצרים בלילה ההוא בלי רפיון וישכב וישן וירדם. וכמו שעה עשירית בלילה הגביר הי' ממתין על הבעש"ט ולא התחיל לעשות הסדר זולתו. ויאמר הגביר: מה זה היה לאורח הזה, אלך ואראה מה הוא עושה. ויקח נר בידו ויבט בפניו וירא כי האורח ההוא ישן ושתי עיניו דמעות כנהר יזולין ותהי לפלא בעיניו מאוד ויעמוד שם מעט להביט ולראות מה תהיה סוף דבר, וירא כי בכל רגע ורגע נהפך לאיש אחר והדמעות ירדו מאין הפוגות עד כמעט עיניו יצאו מחוריהן ואז הרים קול וייקץ.

וירחץ הבעש"ט ז"ל פניו וידיו ויתפלל ערבית ויקם וילך אל השלחן ויספר ביציאת מצרים עד תומו בהתלהבות גדול כדרכו בקודש עד כי ירא הגביר מהביט אל פניו בראותו כי איש אלקים קדוש נורא הוא ויהי כאשר סיימו לאור הבוקר לספר ביציאת מצרים וישאל הגביר את הבעש"ט ז"ל מה היה בעת שהי' ישן. כי דמעות נזלו עיניו ולא כדרך הטבע כי אם כשתי צינורות מים ובהקיצו הרים קול גדול וכמעט נפשו יצאה בדברו ועיניו כמעט יצאו מחוריהן. ויאמר הבעש"ט ז"ל: הי' לי אז עליית נשמה ושמעתי גזירה גדולה שנגזרה על אחינו בני ישראל בעיר לגרשם מפה ולהרוג ולהשמיד ולייסרם בלי חמלה ובכיתי מאוד

במר נפשי לבטל הגזירה הרעה ולא שמעו אלי אז קבלתי עלי למסור נפשי לד' בשביל אחינו בני ישראל שלא ימחו ולא ילכו נדחים מפני צר ואויב. ואז קודם הקיצי מסרתי נפשי וכמעט נפשי יצאה, אז נתעורר רחמנות גדול למעלה ובטלו הגזירה גם בעבור שמסרתי נפשי בשביל אהבת ישראל נתנו לי נפשי בחזרה במתנה ואיקץ ואחר התפלה תתגלה הדבר ותדע קושט דברי אמת את אשר אספר לך.

ויהי בבוקר בעת התפלה לא באו להתפלל שני גבירים גדולים אשר התפללו שמה תמיד ערב ובוקר ויהי כאשר אחרו לבא עד כי עבר זמן התפלה ויתפללו כל העם זולתם ואחר כי השלימו התפלה באו שני הגבירים ויאמרו: יום טוב שלום שלום לנו ולכל ישראל. וישאלו העם מה זה חדש כי לא באו אל מועד התפלה ויענו כמעט קט נגרשו כל היהודים מעירנו ותהלה לאל יתברך כי בטל הגזירה רעה ר"ל.

ויספרו כל המוצאות אותם וכי רחמי השם יתברך גברה מאוד עליהם כי מצאו חן ביני אם המלך והיא היתה להם למליץ אצל המלך ויעבור את רעת שר אחד שונא היהודים אשר כתב לגרשם ולהומם ולייסרם. ותהי להפך כי המלך שלם גמולו בראשו ויצו להביאו במאסר תחת אזר חפץ לשפוך דם נקיים. ונתגלה אז הבעש"ט ז"ל והש"י יושיענו מכל צר ואויב וינקום נקמתינו וישלח לנו משיח צדקינו במהרה בימינו אמן.

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