

THE TRUE WAY TO LOVING GOD: NATURE IN THE *HASKALA*

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Abstract

The *maskilim* (those committed to a Jewish Enlightenment) considered the study of nature necessary for any cultured, civilized person. It is thus not surprising that *maskilim* began to translate and adapt European texts on natural and scientific subjects into Hebrew and Yiddish, in order to spread general knowledge among Jewish readers. A number of scholars have discussed these scientific/natural texts, their content, the characteristics of the translation/adaptation process, and their approaches. However, less attention has been paid to works of *maskilic belles lettres* which include descriptions of natural phenomena. This central aspect of *maskilic* writing about nature, the religious/moral aspect, has been largely neglected by scholars.

Writing about natural phenomena provided the *maskilim* not only with an opportunity to improve readers' general education but also to counteract superstition. In the eyes of the Enlightenment, wonder seemed imbued with disruptive forces of enthusiasm and superstition. Yet the newly revealed intricacies of seemingly "everyday" phenomena such as the human eye, a fly's wings, or explanations of changing weather conditions, could be simultaneously wonderful and scientifically explainable. The *maskilim* followed this Enlightenment strategy of decoupling wonder and fear. They emphasized what John Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor have referred to in their work *Reconstructing Nature: The Engagement of Science and Religion* (Edinburgh: OUP, 1998, 337–9) as the delights of "natural wonders at the expense of awe-inspiring divine interventions." Indeed, as Cantor and Brooke continue, "Thus domesticated, wonder excited the soul to the contemplation and admiration of God's works rather than to terror at His wrath."

In this article I will discuss how the *maskilim* employ nature in works of *belles lettres*, specifically sea adventures in Hebrew and Yiddish published between 1784 and 1899, as a test case of the *maskilic* approach to nature, which they saw as a means of promoting positive piety and love of God, gaining a deeper understanding of the wonderful intricacies of creation, and as the proper antidote to superstitious beliefs.

Keywords: *Haskala*, *maskilim*, Jewish Enlightenment, Yiddish, literature, translation, nature, reason, pedagogy.

1. The *Haskala*: Aims and Methods

It is generally accepted that the *Haskala*, or Jewish Enlightenment, began in the early years of the 1780s,¹ when Habsburg Emperor Joseph II published the *Toleranzpatent* (1781), Naphtali Herz Wessely (1725–1805) published *Divrey shalom ve-emet* [Words of peace and truth] (1782),² and *Hame'asef*, the first modern Hebrew monthly journal, began publication (1783 until 1791, and again in the years 1808–1811).³ In the early nineteenth century the center of the *Haskala* moved to Galicia and, by 1825 had reached the Russian Empire where it flowered until the last quarter of the 19th century.

The *Haskala* was a reaction to a combination of internal and external forces, among them the European Enlightenment, the effects of the failed messianic movements of the seventeenth century, and the breakdown of the *kehila*.⁴ Supporters and activists of the *Haskala*, the *maskilim*, sought to "normalize" European Jewry in keeping with current European trends, within limits preventing the annihilation of Judaism: the *maskilim* sought to reform Judaism and Jewish identity, not destroy them or to encourage total

¹ Amongst the wide variety of literature on *Haskala* see for example Shmuel Feiner, *Haskala and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness*, trans. Chaya Naor and Sandra Silverston (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002); Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, trans. Chaya Naor (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Centre for Jewish History, 2004); Feiner, *Milhemet tarbut: ten'uat ha-haskala hayehudit be-me'a ha-19* [The Jewish enlightenment in the nineteenth century] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2010); Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation 1770–1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); on the *Haskala* in Russia see Jacob S. Raisin, *The Haskala Movement in Russia* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913) and Mordechai Zalkin, *Be'alot ha-šahar: ha-haskala ha-yehudit be'imperiya ha-rusit be-me'a ha-19* [A new dawn: The Jewish Enlightenment in the Russian Empire – social aspects] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000). On figures who exhibited what could be called *maskilic* tendencies, in terms of secular learning and calls for social change and educational reform, prior to the 1780s, see Feiner, *Milhemet tarbut*; and Immanuel Etkes, "Le-she'alat mevasrey ha-haskala be-mizra'at eyropa" [On the question of harbingers of the *Haskala* in Eastern Europe], *Tarbiz* 57, no. 1 (1987): 95–114.

² Naphtali Herz Wessely, *Divrey shalom ve-emet* (Berlin: inukh ne'arim, 1782).

³ Moshe Pelli, *Dor ha-me'asfim be-šahar ha-haskala: terumatam ha-sifrutit šel halutsey ha-me'asef* [The circle of Hame'asef writers at the dawn of the *Haskala*: the literary contribution of Hame'asef writers to the *Haskala* (1783–1811)] (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001). This was not the first Hebrew language journal but had been preceded by two issues of Moses Mendelssohn's *Ḳohelet musar* in 1755.

⁴ See Ayim Shoham, *Be-tsel haskalat Berlin* [Inspired by the German Enlightenment] (Tel Aviv: Porter Institute, 1996); Katz, *Out of the Ghetto* and Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. Bernard Dov Cooperman (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

assimilation (i.e. conversion).⁵ Shmuel Feiner describes the *maskilim* as having “assigned themselves the historic task of leading their brethren in the transition from the epoch of immaturity to the epoch of maturity.”⁶ In practice, despite the many programs of comprehensive reform drawn up by *maskilim*, their main activities were in the fields of literature and education.⁷

Education, particularly the incorporation of general subjects into the traditional Jewish curriculum, was a major focus of *maskilic* calls for reform. In *Divrey shalom ve-emet*, Wessely called for the study of general subjects to be considered equal to, or of even greater importance than Torah learning, especially since general knowledge is vital to understanding the Torah itself. As Moshe Pelli notes,

Wessely says in effect that Judaism in modern times is subservient to western civilization, and it could not exist as an entity by itself. Judaism is no longer self-sufficient as it had been till the age of Enlightenment..... In other words, a Jew could be a man, that is to say, part of humanity, if he lacks Judaism yet adheres to western civilization; however, a Jew could not be regarded as a Jew if he does not have secular knowledge even though he fully adheres to Judaism.⁸

⁵ Wessely noted in his response to *Nahal habesor* [The brook besor], the call for contributions to *Hame'asef*, that the editors of this journal needed to take care to remain within the boundaries of Jewish tradition. These boundaries varied among *maskilim* and underwent changes through the generations of the *Haskala*. There was no one set of guidelines as to what constituted the line that *maskilim* were not willing to cross in pursuit of reform. Moshe Pelli notes that the “authors in the early Haskalah in Germany...are more traditionally oriented than Enlightenment oriented” and that Wessely represents “the conservative element of the Hebrew Haskalah which endeavoured to preserve traditional Judaism,” Moshe Pelli, “Naphtali Herz Wessely: Moderation in Transition,” *The Age of Haskalah: Studies in Hebrew Literature of the Enlightenment in Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 130. For more on this question see Moshe Pelli, “□Emdatam šel ha-sofrim ha-□ivri'im ha-metunim be-še□alat ha-dat ber□eshit ha-haskala” [the stand of the moderate authors of the Hebrew Enlightenment with regard to religious issues] in *Hesed le-Avraham: sefer ha-yuval le-Avraham Golomb*, ed. Moshe Hizkuni-Schtarkman (Los Angeles: YIVO, 1969), 717–730. The radical *maskilim* in the later stages of the *Haskala* attacked not only what they saw as antiquated and superstitious traditions, but also moved towards anti-clericalism, see Feiner, *Milhemet tarbut*, 231–278.

⁶ See Shmuel Feiner, “Towards a Historical Definition of ‘Haskala’” in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, ed. Shmuel Feiner and David Sorkin (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 187–189.

⁷ Moshe Pelli, “Haskalah Literature — Trends and Attitudes,” *Jewish Book Annual* 39 (1981–2): 92.

⁸ Pelli, “Naphtali Herz Wessely: Moderation in Transition,” 128. In this article Pelli discusses Wessely’s statements on education in *Divrey shalom ve-emet* in light of his

Wesseley emphasized the need to combine the study of language and grammar (both Hebrew and German), social behaviour, and good manners, with study of the law of God, the Bible, religious precepts, and Talmudic and Rabbinic literature. This call was to become one of the central principles of the *Haskala*.

Many *maskilim* perceived it as their duty to bring the behaviour and moral values of Jewish society into line with Enlightenment norms, and thus took upon themselves the role of preachers or writers of ethical (*musar*) literature.⁹ *Maskilic musar* writers found themselves in direct competition with popular kabbalistic *musar* works, for example Tsevi Hirsh Koidanover's *Sefer kav ha-yashar* [The just measure] (first published in Frankfurt am Main in 1706), which attacked religious laxity, sought to rouse readers to repentance, and advocated greater observance and intense personal piety. Works of kabbalistic *musar* emphasized the significance of the next life rather than the present, often calling for ascetic penitence in order to secure a promising afterlife, and they often sought to instil the fear of God in their readers by threatening punishment.¹⁰ In contrast to these works, *maskilic musar* writers sought to create a worldly morality, based on rational principles.¹¹ By embracing these values, they claimed, Jews would improve themselves, enabling them to enter fully into European society. As Harris Bor notes:

Ethics formed an important element of suggestions for new school curricula, and the founding letter of *Hameasef*...promised to 'gather from all branches of science and ethics [*musar*] articles and essays which will benefit and delight the soul which longs to sit in the shade of wisdom'. In addition, the *Haskala*

earlier and later writings, concluding that "most probably Wessely did not fully comprehend the meaning and implication of what he had written concerning Judaism. Yet significantly he was expressing the *Zeitgeist* of the Hebrew Haskalah which prevailed amongst the Hebrew maskilim." He concludes that although many of his writings contain clearly anti-Enlightenment tendencies, he came to be regraded by *maskilim* as a symbol of *Haskala*: "possibly his fellow *maskilim* saw in him more than he saw in himself" (Ibid., 129–130).

⁹ Harris Bor, "Enlightenment Values, Jewish Ethics: The *Haskala*'s Transformation of the Traditional Musar Genre" in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, 48–63, esp. 49–52, describes *musar* as the "theoretical underpinning for *halakha*" or "theological grounding for religious life."

¹⁰ Ibid., 52.

¹¹ They often looked back to medieval Jewish rational works which assigned the commandments tasks of ethical improvement rather than just pure obedience. Ibid, 60–62.

produced numerous treatises and primers for children that dealt specifically with the questions of ethics.¹²

Prominent among early *maskilic musar* works is Menachem Mendel Lefin's *Heshbon ha-nefesh* [Moral accounting],¹³ which outlines the importance of calmness, patience, order, cleanliness, justice, frugality, diligence, silence, tranquillity, and truth.¹⁴

The study of nature and science was seen as the means for the *maskilim* to achieve a number of their aims. It would at once help “to reform and invigorate a moribund Judaism,” since knowledge of science and nature was necessary for Jews to be accepted by and take an active role in surrounding society,¹⁵ impart general knowledge,¹⁶ and allow *maskilic* writers to pursue their role as *musar* preachers, promoting positive appreciation and love of God through an appreciation of the wonders of creation. The *maskilim* sought to tread the fine line between modern and traditional forces—they did not seek to overthrow Jewish law and tradition, but encouraged Jews to embrace the values of the Enlightenment, balancing them with traditional Judaism. As

¹² Ibid., 48, brackets in original.

¹³ Menachem Mendel Lefin, *Heshbon ha-nefesh* (Lemberg, 1808).

¹⁴ Lefin's work is an adaptation of Benjamin Franklin's *Moral Accounting*. On this see Nancy Sinkoff, “Benjamin Franklin in Jewish Eastern Europe: Cultural Appropriation in the Age of the Enlightenment,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 1 (2000): 133–152.

¹⁵ Noah Efron, *Judaism and Science: A Historical Introduction* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2007), 153–58.

¹⁶ For example, Gumpel Schnaber Levison, *Ma'amar hatorah ve-ha-ḥokhma* [Dissertation on the Torah and science] (London, 1771); Menachem Mendel Lefin, *Refu'at ha'am* [Medicine for the people] (Zolkiew, 1794); Barukh Lindau, *Rešit limudim: kolel 'eser shi'urim beḥokhmot limudiyot ve-tiv'iyot* [The beginning of studies, including 10 lessons in educational and natural studies] (Berlin: □inukh ne□arim, 1788). For background on this phenomenon and an in-depth discussion of the last of these see Tal Kogman, “Baruch Lindau's Rešit Limmudim (1788) and Its German Source: A Case Study of the Interaction between the Haskalah and German Philanthropism,” *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 9, no. 2 (2009): 277–304. For discussions of some of these texts see Mordechai Zalkin, “Scientific Literature and Cultural Transformation in Nineteenth Century Eastern Europe Jewish Society,” *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 5 (2005): 249–271; Tal Kogman, “Yetsirat dimuyey ha-yed□a be-te□stim le-yeladim yehudi'im be-□artsot dovrot ha-germanit be-tekufat ha-haskala” [the creation of images of knowledge in texts for children and young adults published during the Haskala] (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2000); and Iris Idelson-Shein, “‘Barukh mešane ha-briyot': Demuto ve-šimušo šel ha-□e□soti be-ne□urut ha-yehudit” [Blessed is the changer of beings: uses and representations of ‘the exotic’ in the Jewish Enlightenment] (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2010). Textbooks such as these will not be discussed in this article.

Immanuel Etkes notes, the study of nature was justified on the basis of precedent, since “although not common in traditional society, in any case [it] was not alien to its spirit.”¹⁷ In fact, many *maskilic* justifications of study or contemplation echo sentiments found in Medieval Jewish rationalist thought.¹⁸

2. The Basis of Jewish Engagement with Nature

Researchers of Jews and the study of science, such as David Ruderman and Noah Efron, agree that the “overwhelming sentiment of the rabbis toward the natural world was positive. Many were fascinated by the operations of nature, tried to understand and master them, and saw natural knowledge as a prerequisite for knowing and appreciating God.”¹⁹ For example, Baḳya ibn Paḳuda in *Hovot ha-levavot* [Instruction in the duties of the heart]:

Contemplate, therefore, God’s creatures, from the largest of them to the smallest, and reflect on those matters which are at present hidden from you... it is our duty to study them and meditate on them until the whole matter becomes established in our souls and abides in our consciousness.²⁰

Maimonides also perceived nature as an example of God’s power and a means to achieve both love and fear of God, two fundamentally linked emotions, writing in his *Mishnah Torah*:

And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him and the fear of Him?
When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and

¹⁷ Immanuel Etkes, “Mevḳo”, *Te’udah be-yisra’el: Photocopy of the Vilna Edition with an Introduction by Immanuel Etkes* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1977) (my translation). For background on Ashkenazi Jewry and the study of nature, science, and philosophy see the articles in Gad Freudenthal, ed., “Science and Philosophy in Early Modern Ashkenazi Culture: Rejection, Toleration and Appropriation,” special issue, *Simon Dubnow Yearbook 8* (2009), especially Freudenthal’s introduction, 17–24.

¹⁸ See part 2, “Jews and Natural Philosophy” in Efron, *Judaism and Science*.

¹⁹ David Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 17. For example, Abraham ibn Ezra noted the importance of studying nature in order to understand the Biblical text, see Efron, *Judaism and Science*, 87–92.

²⁰ This text was written in Arabic in 1040 and translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon in the years 1161–80. The English translation is from Baḳya ibn Paḳuda, *Duties of the Heart*, trans. M. Hymanson (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishing, 1962), vol. 1, 133.

from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom, which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and long with an exceeding longing to know His great name, even as David said, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:3). And when he ponders these matters, he will recoil frightened, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge.²¹

However, throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern period there continued to exist significant opposition to the study of nature for fear of *bitul torah*, “nullifying the Torah.” This was a fear that natural learning “would crowd out traditional Jewish disciplines.”²² Indeed, the *maskilim* faced opposition to their encouragement of the study of nature from traditionalists and thus needed to present convincing arguments to persuade readers of its importance.

In *Divrey shalom ve-emet* Wessely summarizes the importance of the study of nature and natural phenomena, linking them directly with the achievement of true love of God:

The study of courtesy, nature and educational topics, apart from the fact that they are a source of pride for those knowledgeable in them, prepare their students to be an aid to the law of the kingdom and its inhabitants, are fundamental pillars of faith and in addition form the roots of the fear and love of God, the glorification of God, His works, and His holy words in the heart of man.²³

²¹ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: The Book of Knowledge*, vol. 1, trans. M Hymanson (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishing, 1971), 2:2, 35b. See also Efron, *Judaism and Science*, 137–138 and Norman Lamm, “Maimonides on the Love of God,” *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992/3): 133.

²² Efron, *Judaism and Science*, 107–108. In the early modern period, the universality of science and nature, its insensitivity to divisions between religions led some to disparage its study and others, such as the Maharal, to conclude that its study was acceptable. Yet the Maharal also believed that since the study of nature was common to all men, Jews should concentrate on spiritual matters in order to differentiate themselves from those who practise other religions. Thus it is not surprising that Jews turned to the study of the spiritual and not the natural. For more on this period see Efron, *Judaism and Science*, 114–116, 140.

²³ Wessely, *Divrey shalom ve-emet*, 17. The text is not paginated: counting from the first page of text. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are the author’s own. Biblical translations are taken from the *JPS Bible* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1917).

Wessely posits a Jewish precedent for this, but does not detail his sources (nor does he mention non-Jewish sources) since “there is no need to go into detail on this matter, because earlier writers...wrote at length about this.”²⁴

The *maskilic* interest in nature as widening general knowledge and promoting positive spiritualism is evident in the volumes of *Hame’asef*, which contain many descriptions of natural phenomena (in directly pedagogical contributions, descriptive texts, translations of idylls from European languages, and philosophical/contemplative prose).²⁵ The often poetic descriptions of God’s omnipotence through contemplation of natural phenomena take on almost prayer-like quality, expressing the writer’s love of his creator and thus carrying out a form of divine service. Such is the case with Yosef Br’h Br’n’s “Ra□yoney ish ba□alot ha□ar” [Thoughts of a man at dawn]:

But the Lord God, creator of all creations, omnipotent, created and made everything; He designed the sky with wisdom; founded the earth on its pillars; brings out the whole host of stars by number (Isaiah 40:21) and counts the sand on the sea shore, how good it is for man to understand these, that he will strive to know his maker and contemplate His works and investigate all the wonders of nature.²⁶

An anonymous review of Barukh Lindau’s *Rešit limudim* [The beginning of studies] explicitly states that the purpose of the study of nature is to correctly and lovingly serve God:

And it came to pass when Job saw this, and he saw the works of God that they are wondrous, and he knew what sin he had sinned against God, that he had served Him from fear and fright and not from true fear which is the fear of His supremacy, that is rooted in the heart of man by contemplating God’s works and deeds... and this is the greatest good that exists for man upon the earth, to know the glory of the creator through His creations...²⁷

This approach was a pillar of the *Haskala* as it evolved chronologically and geographically. The virulently anti-Hasidic Yosef Perl, in his *Luah ha-lev* [tablet of the heart], a prose almanac containing much general and edifying

²⁴ Wessely, *Divrey shalom ve-emet*, 19

²⁵ For a full list see Moshe Pelli, *Ša’ar le-haskala: mafteah mu’ar le-ha-me’asef, ketav ha-’et ha’ivri ha-r’iṣon* [The gate to Haskala: An annotated index to Hame’asef, the first Hebrew journal] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000).

²⁶ Yosef Br’h Br’n, “Ra□yoney ish ba□alot ha□ar,” *Hame’asef* 3 (Nissan 1786): 118–122.

²⁷ Anon., “Sefer rešit limudim (bikoret),” [Review of Sefer rešit limudim] *Hame’asef* 5 (Tishrey 1788): 24–32.

knowledge attached to the calendars published by Perl in the years 1814–1816 (*Tsir Ne'eman*), presents rational explanations of natural phenomena as a counter to Hasidic “wonders” and superstitions, and as an indication of the greatness of God and His love and concern for mankind.²⁸ Yitsḥak Ber Levinzon, in *Te'udah be-yisra'el* (Vilna, 1828)—a manifest which guided the Eastern European *Haskala*, and which, despite the interlude of half a century and the geographical divide, was remarkably similar to Wessely's *Divrey shalom ve-emet*—emphasizes the study of nature as an essential component of loving service to God—only through the combination of understanding the act of creation and obedience to God's law can one achieve true love of God. Quoting a response from the Yabetz Gaon, Levinzon describes the study of nature as not simply permitted by Jewish law but rather demanded by it: the contemplation of God's wondrous works is an absolute necessity.²⁹ Later in the work he claims that without this “we cannot perform any of God's commandments.” Levinzon calls upon his readers to be amazed by both what is “normal” and what seems “new.”³⁰

3. Nature and Loving God in *Maskilic* Sea Adventures

In their search for suitable texts of pleasurable instruction³¹ to present to their Jewish audience in the 1780s, 1790s, and early 1800s, *maskilic* writers selected works from recent, but past, phases of German literature, texts which were to a certain extent canonized, having once occupied a dominant position at the centre of the German system.³² Gideon Toury asserts that the reason for

²⁸ Feiner, *Milḥemet tarbut*, 111–112, discusses study of nature as a point of polemic between *maskilim* and *ḥasidim*, specifically in relation to Perl's *Luah ha-lev*. Mendel Lefin, who is believed to have made substantial contributions to the *Luah*, also believed that “the study of natural science as a handmaid in the effort to encourage traditional piety was consonant with the scientific understanding of eighteenth-century natural philosophy, whose practitioners saw no contradiction between scientific empiricism and belief in a benevolent God.” See Nancy Sinkoff, *Out of the Shtetl: Making Jews Modern in Polish Borderlands* (Providence: Brown University Press, 2004), 124.

²⁹ Yitsḥak Ber Levinzon, *Te'udah be-yisra'el* (Vilna, 1828), 67.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 76, 77–78.

³¹ The concept of pleasurable instruction dates from the writings of Horace and Plato, and formed one of the “acknowledged cornerstones of neoclassical criticism.” On this see Charles L. Batten Junior, *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth Century Travel Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

³² On translation and literary interference see Itamar Even-Zohar, “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem,” in “Polysystem Studies,” ed. Itamar Even-Zohar, special edition, *Poetics Today* 11, no.1 (1990): 45–52; Gideon

this was the need to remain within a safe zone, avoiding suspicions of translating inappropriate literature, and the test for suitability was proven recognition in and by the German system.³³ Although the term “translation” is used here (and by scholars such as Toury and Itamar Even-Zohar), *maskilic* translations of German works were in fact free re-workings or adaptations, not close translations. They remove and add material, make changes in the narrative and plot, and often Judaize the source text.

Many *maskilim* found a perfect vehicle for their project in the works of Joachim Heinrich Campe, a German pedagogue and one of the first writers of children’s literature in German.³⁴ They turned particularly to his sea adventures, which combine exciting adventure with general and moral edification.³⁵ Among the works translated³⁶ were *Robinson der Jüngere* [*The*

Toury, “Translating English Literature via German—and Vice Versa: A Symptomatic Reversal in the History of Modern Hebrew Literature,” in *Die literarisch Übersetzung: Stand und Perspektiven ihrer Erforschung*, ed. Harald Kittel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1988), 139–57; and Shoham, *Be-tsel haskalat Berlin*, 1.

³³ Toury, “Translating English Literature via German,” 146.

³⁴ On Campe see for example Hans-Heino Ewers, ed., *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Aufklärung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991). Six of Campe’s works were adapted by *maskilim* for Jewish readerships: *Robinson der Jüngere*, *Die Entdeckung von Amerika*, *Theophron oder der erfahrene Rathgeber für die unerfahrene Jugend*, *Sittenbüchlein für Kinder aus gesitteten Ständen*, *Merkwürdige Reisebeschreibungen*, and excerpts from *Sammlung interessanter und durchgängig zweckmäßig abgefaßter Reisebeschreibungen für die Jugend*. *Robinson der Jüngere*, *Die Entdeckung von Amerika*, and excerpts from *Sammlung* were the most popular. There are seven extant Jewish adaptations of *Robinson der Jüngere*. On these, see Rebecca Wolpe, “Judaizing *Robinson Crusoe*: Maskilic Adaptations of *Robinson Crusoe* in Hebrew and Yiddish,” *Jewish Culture and History* (forthcoming) and five adaptations of *Die Entdeckung*, see Wolpe, “The Sea Voyage Narrative as an Educational Tool in the Early *Haskala*” (MA thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005). For more information on Campe’s influence on the *maskilim*, see (among her other works), Zohar Shavit, “From Friedländer’s *Lesebuch* to the Jewish Campe: The Beginning of Hebrew Children’s Literature in Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 33 (1988): 385–415; Zohar Shavit, “Literary Interference between German and Jewish Hebrew Children’s Literature during the Enlightenment: The Case of Campe,” *Poetics Today* 13, no. 1 (1992): 41–6

³⁵ The term sea adventure is used by David Roskies: see, “The Medium and Message of the *Maskilic* (Yiddish) Chapbook,” *Jewish Social Studies* 41, no. 3/4 (1979): 275–90. The term is used to designate the corpus under study here, the recurring characteristics of which include: the central presence of the sea, elements of the adventure genre; and shared ideological, and especially pedagogical, aims. However, the works also exhibit many influences from other genres. For further discussion see Rebecca Wolpe, “The Sea and Sea Voyage in Maskilic Literature” (PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012), 35–57.

younger *Robinson*],³⁷ *Die Entdeckung von Amerika* [The discovery of America],³⁸ and sections from *Sammlung interessanter und durchgängig zweckmäßig abgefaßter Reisebeschreibungen für die Jugend* [A collection of interesting and continuously appropriate travel stories designed for youth],³⁹ all of which include information on natural phenomena, geography, history, and a host of other topics.

This combination of didactic content and an exciting story was apparently popular: *maskilic* writers continued to employ it, publishing new translations and further editions of existing works throughout the nineteenth century. *Maskilic* translators in Eastern Europe in the 1850s and 1860s expanded the range of sea adventures to include works by Jules Verne, among others, and translations of Defoe's "original" *Robinson Crusoe*. The prolific Yiddish writer Isaac Meir Dik (1808–1892)⁴⁰ adopted the framework of these *maskilic* sea adventures, writing his own original, fictional, texts which include many of the core elements of the earlier works, and which he often presented as factual narratives.

Since they were intended for juvenile readerships, Campe explains natural phenomena as a didactic tool and a counter to superstitious beliefs. This is not surprising since, as Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park have noted, "A person self-fortified by reason can resist enthusiasm, superstition and imagination. But women, the old, young, primitive and uneducated, the

³⁶ See Wolpe, "Judaizing *Robinson Crusoe*"; and Wolpe, "The Sea and Sea Voyage in Maskilic Literature," 32–34.

³⁷ First published in Hamburg by Bohn, 1779–1708. This is an adaption of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (London: J Taylor, 1719) for juvenile audiences, written in the form of a dialogue between a father and group of children. It is a didactic text, intended to educate on many diverse subjects including nature, geography, history, science and morality. For a discussion see Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story* (Philadelphia: Penn University Press, 1991), 48–63. The *maskilim* used this adaptation as the basis of their translations of the Robinson Crusoe story until the second half of the nineteenth century. On the reasons for this see Wolpe, "Judaizing *Robinson Crusoe*," and Wolpe, "The Sea and Sea Voyage in Maskilic Literature," 66–71.

³⁸ Campe, *Die Entdeckung von Amerika*, (Tübingen: Wilh. Heinr. Schramm und Ehr. Gottl. Frank, 1782).

³⁹ An eleven volume collection of travel stories published between 1785 and 1793, provides the young reader with information on all parts of the globe, alongside historical education and pious and moral instruction. Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Sammlung*, vol. 5 (Reutlingen: Johannes Grözinger, 1785-1791), 11 volumes. Referred to from herein on as *Sammlung*.

⁴⁰ Shalom Aleichem designated Dik, along with Shalom Yankev Abramovitsh (Mendele Mocher Sforim) and Yitshok Yoyel Linetski, as one of the writers who stood Yiddish literature on its own two feet, developing and improving it. See Shalom Aleichem, *Shomers mishpet* [Shomer's trial] (Berdichev, 1888), 4.

vulgar, barbarous, ignorant and unruly, were at risk.”⁴¹ The fact that the *maskilim* adopted many of Campe’s strategies is indicative of how they perceived the Jewish masses: as similar to children, primitive, uneducated, and with a tendency towards superstition.

Appreciation of nature at times leads to praise of God. For example, in *Robinson der Jüngere*:

It was a charming morning, the sun was rising in all his lustre as from the sea, and gilded the tops of the mountains and trees. A thousand small birds of various colours were now singing their morning lays, and rejoiced in the new day. The Air was so pure and so refreshing, as if it had just come out of the hands of the creator....

Robinson’s heart dilated with joy and gratitude to his God....⁴²

Yet declarations such as these are rare in Campe’s works. It is more usual for him to introduce Providence or God in episodes of salvation or provision than in discussions of natural phenomena.

In the Hebrew and Yiddish translations of Campe’s works expressions linking nature and religious sentiment become more frequent, the translators allowing themselves to alter Campe’s text or add to it in order to draw out religious messages. For example, whereas Campe states that the island to which Bontekoe took his sick sailors in order to recover was “der rechte Ort zur Erquickung kranke Seeleute,”⁴³ the Hebrew translation in the anonymous *’Oniya so’ara* [Raging ship]⁴⁴—a bilingual Hebrew-Yiddish translation of a story included in volume five of *Sammlung* describing a shipwreck in the

⁴¹ Lorraine Park and Katharine Daston, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 343.

⁴² Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Robinson the Younger* (Hamburg: C. E. Bonn, 1781), 90.

⁴³ *Sammlung*, vol. 5, 18.

⁴⁴ Campe’s German translation of Willem Ysbrantsz Bontekoe van Hoorn’s Dutch journal *Journal, of Gedenckwaerdige beschrijvinghe van de Ost-Indische Reyse van Willem Ysbrantz Bontekoe van Hoorn, begrijpende veel wonderlijcke en gevaerlijcke saeken hem daer in wedervaren, begonnen den 18 december 1618 en vol-eynt den 16 november 1625*, first published in 1646 (Hoorn: J. J. Deutel). *Sammlung*, vol. 5. The first edition of *Oniya so’ara*, a bilingual Hebrew/Yiddish edition, is unfortunately missing the title and first pages, thus its date of publication and author are unknown. The Hebrew text alone was reprinted at least four times 1823, 1825 (both Vilna), 1854, and 1879 (both Warsaw) and the Yiddish alone once in 1823 as *Historye oder fun shif brokh*. Although exhibiting the date and place of publication, the later editions do not bear the name of an author. Isaac Yudlov dates the first edition to 1818, see Yitzhak Yudlov, ed., *The Israel Mehlman Collection in the Jewish National and University Library* (Jerusalem: Bet hasfarim, 1984), 208. Many scholars attribute the work to Lefin. On this see Ken Frieden, “Neglected Origins of Modern Hebrew Prose,” *AJS Review* 33, no. 1 (2009): 3–43; Nancy Sinkoff, *Out of the Shtetl*, 133 ff.

Pacific Ocean— attributes the natural advantages of the island to God “because there the creator, Blessed be He, prepared a cure for those afflicted with the illness.”⁴⁵ In the forewords to their translations of *Die Entdeckung von Amerika*, both Moses Mendelssohn-Frankfurt (*Metsiat ha-'arets ha-ḥadasha* [The finding of the new land])⁴⁶ and Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg (*Glōt ha-arets ha-ḥadasha* [The finding of the new land] in Hebrew,⁴⁷ and *Di entdekung fun Amerike* [The discovery of America] in Yiddish⁴⁸) note that one of the reasons that they chose to translate this specific text was the opportunity to portray the wonders of God’s world. The Rabbinic authorisation to Guenzburg’s Hebrew translation also highlights this aspect: “From this they will look and see the work of God; His wonders and creations in the skies above and earth below are infinite and absolute.”⁴⁹

Many of these *maskilic* sea adventures employ Psalm 107:23–24 as a Biblical proof-text, justifying the subject material of the sea adventure to traditional readerships by means of these verses: “They that go down to the sea in ships that do business in great waters; These saw the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep.”⁵⁰ Among the works to cite these verses is the introduction to *'Oniya so'ara*, which designates the work as exposing the reader to the wonders of God as seen by sea travellers (quoting Psalm

⁴⁵ *'Oniya so'ara*, 9.

⁴⁶ Moses Mendelssohn-Frankfurt, *Metsiat ha-'arets ha-ḥadasha* (Altona: The Bonn Brothers, 1807).

⁴⁷ Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg, *Glōt ha-arets ha-ḥadasha* (Vilna, 1823).

⁴⁸ Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg, *Di entdekung fun Amerike* (Vilna: Rom, 1824).

⁴⁹ On this Rabbinical authorisation see Tsitron, *Yotsrey hasifrut ha'ivrit haḥadasha* [The creators of modern Hebrew literature] (Vilna: Shrebrek, 1922), vol. 1, 123.

⁵⁰ Focusing on the importance of Psalm 107 as a source text for both *maskilim* and *hasidim*, and its prominent citation in many accounts of sea travel written by both groups, both Frieden and Sinkoff suggest that whilst the *hasidim* allegorized the Psalm, attributing to it kabbalistic notions of descent and ascent, *maskilic* writers, among them Lefin, “cast it as an invitation for traditional Jews to gain a broader appreciation of the non-Jewish world.... He read the psalm literally...to introduce his translations of two treacherous sea-journeys.” This has led them to conclude that Lefin’s *maskilic* sea adventures formed part of the *maskilic*-hasidic polemic. However, many of the texts in the corpus under study use biblical quotations relevant to the subject matter in order to accomplish this very aim and not as a crusade against *hasidism*, as does Isaac Meir Dik in his later writings. The use of Psalm 107 in connection to sea literature is not restricted to Jewish literature, but is also to be found in European publications, clearly due to the subject matter of the verses. See Ken Frieden, “Neglected Origins,” 3–43.

107:23). Verses 23 and 24 are also quoted before the beginning of the text in Lefin's *Masa'ot ha-yam* [The sea journeys].⁵¹

The Jewish translators follow Campe, offering explanations in order to educate and enlighten, often adding detailed descriptions of natural phenomena that they felt would be unfamiliar to their Jewish readership. Chaim (Haykl) Hurwitz, in *Seyfer tsofnas paneyekh* [The book of the revealer of hidden things],⁵² the first Yiddish translation of Campe's *Die Entdeckung*, includes information not given by Campe on chocolate, lamas, and other natural phenomena from the New World. In the introduction to his Yiddish translation, Guenzburg includes a very basic explanation of the workings of the earth,⁵³ noting that the earth is round, people live on all sides of it; if there is light on one side, there is dark on the other; and why people do not simply

⁵¹ A translation of two stories from volumes one and nine of Campe's *Sammlung*: the accounts of Jacob van Heemskerck and Willem Barentsz's voyage to the Arctic and Captain Henry Wilson's account of his sojourn on the Pelew which is taken from an English re-writing of Wilson's journal by George Keate, *An Account of the Pelew Islands Situated in the West Part of the Pacific Ocean, Composed from the Journal and Communications of Captain Henry Wilson* (Dublin: Luke White, 1788). It is interesting to note that in spite of the inclusion of these verses, and his approach in other texts to on the importance of the study of nature as a means to piety (see footnote 28 above), in *Masa'ot hayam* Lefin does not draw out natural theological sentiments. In fact, Lefin's descriptions of the Pelew Islands in the first story and of the Arctic in the second are limited to the bare facts. It is possible that Lefin chose to focus in this text on the moral aspects of his enlightenment program, especially moderation, temperance, and social interaction and as a result not only did commentary on natural theology take second place, but he needed to tone down elements of wonder which stimulate imagination and excess. This may be connected to the intended audience of the text, especially in light of a comparison with Dik's later descriptions of the Arctic (see below), directed at women and uneducated readers, and full of expressions of awe which seek to play on their susceptibility to wonder. It is possible that the lack of expressions of piety and natural theology in *Masa'ot hayam* points to a change in Lefin's ideology in the later years of his career, especially since most of his comments on science and nature were made in the 1780s and 90s.

⁵² Chaim (Haykl) Hurwitz, *Seyfer tsofnas paneyekh* (Berdichev: Israel Bek, 1817).

⁵³ It is unclear quite how lengthy this introduction in fact was, since it was not reprinted in the 1857 edition of the book and the copy held in The National Library of Israel lacks the end of the introduction and beginning of vol. 1. Some of the missing pages from the beginning of the text were reproduced in Z. Reyzen's *Fun Mendelzon biz Mendele* [From Mendelsohn to Mendele] (Warsaw, 1923), 209–232. Also, as was noted earlier, there exists an 1857 version of the text printed in Lemberg anonymously under the name *Tsofnas paneyekh*. Although the language differs slightly at times, this work follows Guenzburg's 1823 text closely. Thus it can be relied upon to fill in the content (if not the language) of those missing pages.

“fall off.” Both these texts demonstrate the contempt of the writers for the Jewish masses, their superstition, and ignorance.

Like Campe, the translators deride the superstitious beliefs of Native Americans who shudder at lightening and eclipses, presenting rational scientific explanations for these events. Although God is often credited with causing a wind to blow up or saving crews from certain death, He is not depicted as actively contravening any of nature’s laws or performing supernatural events. The wonders described in this sea literature remain within the boundaries of nature’s laws, allowing the *maskilim* to present their descriptions of nature according to modern science without negating revealed religion and the possibility of God’s intervention.

When discussing natural phenomena with the intention of invoking awe and wonder, many of the Hebrew writers of this corpus use terms such as *gevurot Hashem* (God’s might) or *ma’asey Hashem* (God’s works). The term wonder (*vunder*) is found in the Yiddish text of *’Oniya so’ara*: the survivors of the shipwreck, starving on the open sea in their lifeboat, are fed with flying fish, a wonder granted by God to restore their flagging faith; yet it is a wonder perfectly explainable by science. Guenzburg openly states that his Yiddish work *Die entdeckung fun Amerike* is intended to replace such worthless yet “wonder”-ridden books as *A Thousand and One Nights*, and he competes with them by employing the wonders of nature.

The narrator of *Di geshikhte fun Alter Leb, eyne vare und vunderbare geshikhte tsum unterhalt und zur beleyung* [Robinson, The story of Alter Leb: A true and wonderful story for entertainment and instruction], a Judaized Yiddish translation/adaptation of *Robinson der Jüngere*,⁵⁴ takes a strong line on the necessity of studying nature in order to distinguish man from animal (through the faculty of reason) and to enable man to truly know God:

Is it not a sin before God that man does not learn everything in order that he should know God through the nature of everything and through all the great and small creations...and not live out his years as a beast?⁵⁵

In a song later in the work,⁵⁶ these sentiments are set out explicitly:

⁵⁴ The first (and incomplete) edition held by The National Library of Israel was printed in Lvov in 1850/1. However, this is not the first edition of the work, no copies of which are extant, which Leah Garrett dates to 1820. See Garrett, “The Jewish Robinson Crusoe”, *Comparative Literature* 54, no. 3 (2000): 215–228. It was reprinted in Vilna, 1894, Cracow, 1898, and Cracow, 1906/7.

⁵⁵ *Alter Leb*, 1:32.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:23–24.

All fools stand and stare
Asking who created such a beautiful world,
...
And do not understand that only God alone
Arranged everything cleverly and beautifully...

Yitshak ben Moshe Rumsch's *Sefer kur 'oni* [The furnace of affliction],⁵⁷ is the first *maskilic* Robinson story not based primarily on Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere*: in fact it claims to be a translation of Defoe's original English.⁵⁸ It was not in fact translated directly from the English but from a German version, Franz Rauch's *Robinsons Leben und Abenteuer* (Berlin, 1840). Rauch's work is itself not a straightforward translation of *Robinson Crusoe*, but includes a number of significant changes to the source text, including some influenced by Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere*. To complicate matters further, Rumsch also added to the work from Campe's text and on his own initiative, resulting in an innovative hybrid of texts. Rumsch mentions in his introduction earlier translations of *Robinson Crusoe* into Hebrew, criticising some and praising others.⁵⁹ This literary discussion provides an indication of Rumsch's awareness of the continuity of his work with other, earlier, *maskilic* works as well as the developments in the literary climate during the four decades between the first Hebrew translations of *Robinson der Jüngere* and his own, and the increased sophistication of Hebrew literature by the 1860s. What the Hebrew reader desired by this point were not such clearly instructional texts and tractates, but accomplished literary works.

Rumsch includes significant Judaization and the attempt to promote positive piety using descriptions of natural phenomena is evident when his hero is persuaded of the existence and power of God by his contemplation of the wonders of the sea:

⁵⁷ First published in 1861 in Vilna, again in 1872 in Eydtkuhnen, 1883, and 1910 in Vilna.

⁵⁸ On Rumsch see Mordechai Zalkin, "Itzhak Rumsch — beyn 'haskalat ha-periferiya' le-'haskala periferalit'" [Itzhak Romash, between 'educating the periphery,' and 'peripheral education'], in *'Olam yašan 'adam hadaš*, ed. Eli Zur (Sdeh Boker: Ben Gurion Institution, 2005), 185–213.

⁵⁹ He praises some (an unfinished translation, lost, by Yitshak Erter) and criticizes others— for example David Zamošz's *Robinson der yingere* [The younger Robinson] (Breslau, 1824) which he describes as a "word for word" translation, suited to children aged five or six years old (due to its retention of Campe's childish dialogue format) and written in very limited language. He also dismisses a further Hebrew translation by someone from Vilkovishk, clearly referring to Eliezer Bloch and Shimon Hakohen, *Ma'aseh Robinson* [Robinson story] (Warsaw, 1849).

Upon seeing the wide open sea before me...the waves in their glory, one moment rising up heavenwards, the next diving down to the depths and leaving no trace of their existence...my heart sensed at once feelings of pleasantness and sorrow..... The result was that my heart pronounced, “there exists a supreme God, creator of Heaven and earth...”⁶⁰

In the 1860s and 70s the first Hebrew and Yiddish translations of the works of Jules Verne were published in Eastern Europe.⁶¹ Nature plays a central, pedagogically-motivated, role in Verne’s works, which were guided by Positivist principles.⁶² Although commonly identified as “the father of science fiction,” it is more accurate to describe Verne as the father of “scientific fiction” (*romans scientifiques*), for almost everything in his works is scientifically feasible. The sum of his 63 *Voyages Extraordinaires* is one great travelogue, covering land, sea, and air (as well as the moon), and including detailed descriptions of geography, flora, fauna, and anthropology.⁶³

The first translations of Verne’s works aligned themselves with the *maskilic* adventure literature. In 1876 Israel Ze’ev ben Naftali Shperling published a Hebrew translation of *Vingt Mille Lieues Sous les Mers, Bimtsulot yam* [The depths of the sea]. Although this was the first work translated by Shperling, Verne had already published 14 works and this was neither his first nor his most recent. It is highly possible that Shperling saw this text as an opportunity to expand the corpus of *maskilic* sea adventures exemplified by *Robinson Crusoe*.

Shperling’s translation lacks many of the detailed scientific discussions found in the original as well as the emphasis on classification and long lists of

⁶⁰ Rumsch, *Sefer kur ‘oni* (Eydtkuhnen: Katsenelibogen and Sh. Rabinovits, 1872), 53.

⁶¹ A Yiddish series of *Ale verk fun Jules Verne* began with *Unter der zun fun Afrike: Visenshaftlikher roman* in 1860. In 1869 Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh published *Der luftbalon* [The air balloon], a Yiddish adaptation of Vernes’ *Cinq Semaines en Ballon* [Five weeks in a balloon, or, journeys and discoveries in Africa by three Englishmen], first published in French in 1863.

⁶² In opposition to the romantics, who validated the organic over the inorganic, the qualitative over the quantitative and consciously cultivated “escapism to cope with the alienation of modern life” evoking the pristine exoticism of foreign locales, the freedom of the New World and the virtues of pre-industrialized cultures, Positivists claimed that nature is objective and quantifiable. Everything can be explained through science. The Positivist publisher Pierre Jules Hetzel assigned Verne with the creation of a “literary home remedy” to pursue these aims and compensate for what he and his fellow positivists perceived as a gaping void in French education — the teaching of science through family readings. See Arthur Evans, *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 10–14.

⁶³ See Evans, *Jules Verne Rediscovered*; and Timothy Unwin, *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005).

fish or other creatures. That Shperling shared Verne's pedagogical aims in regards to nature is clear from his introduction. He states that the book holds within it "the wonders of nature's secrets" and that it is intended "for the use of the young people of our nature, thirsty for knowledge of nature." However, that Shperling also saw this work as promoting love of God through appreciation of the wonders of creation is evidenced by his comment in the introduction that the work describes "the contents of the depths of the various seas...and God's amazing wonder to be found therein."

4. Nature in the Sea Adventures of I M Dik

Like Rumsch and Shperling, Isaac Meir Dik,⁶⁴ built on the precedents of earlier *maskilic* sea adventures in order to widen readers' knowledge and to combat superstitious beliefs. His texts demonstrate the influence of Campe and *maskilic* translators, as well as didactic scientific and natural texts.⁶⁵ Yet Dik's works are innovative within this corpus, representing the first attempt at composing original Jewish (in this case Yiddish) sea adventures. Like his *maskilic* predecessors, Dik promotes appreciation and understanding of God through contemplation of and earning about nature, often linking this with what he perceives as true fear and service of God, using Psalm 107, as earlier *maskilic* writers had done.

Throughout his work, Dik makes frequent use of the word "wonder" (*pel'e*) or the Yiddish (*vunder*). His work *Pil'ey Hashem*⁶⁶ in fact derives its title from its plot—Dik's hero, Captain Enoch Gray sails the Arctic, encountering icebergs, whales, polar bears, and other natural phenomena, all of which are presented as a testimony to God's omnipotence. *Pil'ey Hashem* is a poetic account of God's greatness, the composition of which constitutes for the writer service to and praise of God, and which seeks to instil similar feelings in its readers. While for Lefin in *Mas'ot ha-yam* the backdrop to his tale of survival in the Arctic provides his readers with knowledge about natural phenomenon, for Dik the this region, with its chunks of ice in various shapes and sizes, amazing fish and wildlife, its light and darkness, is a source of wonder as well as

⁶⁴ On Dik see David Roskies, "An Annotated Bibliography of Isaac Meyer Dik," in *The Field of Yiddish*, ed. Marvin Herzog et al. (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1980), 117–184; and Roskies, "Isaac-Meyer Dik and the Rise of Yiddish Popular Literature" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1976).

⁶⁵ Examples include Dik's use of the Robinsonade, his discussions of slavery, exotic peoples and colonialism, and his depictions of natural phenomena. One specific instance of the later is his discussion of the mouse created to eat crocodile eggs which shows striking similarities to the text in Perl's *Luah ha-lev* (see above, footnote 28).

⁶⁶ Dik, *Pil'ey Hashem*, (Vilna: Rom, 1856).

knowledge, and these evidences of God's omnipotence are expressed in his lyric descriptions of the landscape in this work and again later in *Das ayngefrorene shif oyf dem ayzmer* [The frozen ship on the ice sea].⁶⁷

In *Ma'oz ha-yam oder di viste inzl* [The strength of the sea or the desert island],⁶⁸ Dik emphasizes again the concept of wonder in relation to natural phenomena: "Wonder of wonders, the greatest of all God's wonders that we can see in this world is the great sea..."⁶⁹ Dik's wonders are never comets, monsters, demons, or other supernatural phenomena, but always rationally explained intricacies of nature. For example, in the introduction to *Ma'oz ha-yam*, he writes that by reading this text about the sea, "we can learn...the greatness of God, pure fear of heaven and understand a few verses of the Torah, as the verse says 'They that go down to the sea in ships... These saw the works of the LORD'."⁷⁰ In '*Iyei ha-yam* [The islands of the sea],⁷¹ he describes to his readers how they can understand God's greatness through the example of the sea, using a verse from Jeremiah (5:22):

Fear ye not Me saith the Lord will ye not tremble at My presence who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea an everlasting ordinance which it cannot pass though the waves thereof toss themselves yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it.⁷²

In his rags to riches tale involving a journey from Lithuania to Jamaica, *Der melamed* [The teacher],⁷³ Dik counters superstition and ignorance with facts, detailing his hero's mistaken concept of why the moon gets larger and smaller each month and contrasting this with the true, scientific explanation. He includes many explanations of natural phenomena to modernize his readers and draw them into European culture and understanding, explaining the reflection of the moon in the water, distances, and measurements.

Dik's use of the term "wonder" may have arisen as a result of his specific target audience and his overarching aims. It is not by chance that the ridiculed hero of *Der melamed* is a superstitious and ignorant *hasid*. Whilst Lefin sought to combat *hasidism* with tractates on moderation, Dik, writing for an audience of women and the uneducated, susceptible to wonder and imagination, provides his readers with "wonders" based on the rational and

⁶⁷ Dik, *Das ayngefrorene shif oyf dem ayzmer* (Vilna: Mets, 1882).

⁶⁸ Dik, *Ma'oz ha-yam oder di viste inzl* (Vilna: Zimel Tipograf, 1864).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Dik, '*Iyei hayam* (Vilna: Rom, 1856).

⁷² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷³ Dik, *Der melamed* (Vilna: Zimel Tipograf, 1864). The title specifically refers to a teacher of small children in a *heder*.

scientific to contrast those offered by miracle workers or by medieval works of Kabbalah and *musar*. Just as some exclaimed over the “exquisite workmanship” of nature, for example an insect’s wings or the human eye, so too Dik, by wondering at the beauty of ice formations, animals, and plants, directs his readers to rational wonders. Dik posits the existence of a creator God who set down the laws of nature and does not break them, encouraging his readers them to serve Him through contemplating and appreciating nature.

Conclusion

Dik was the last *maskilic* writer to promote the contemplation of nature as a means to achieving deeper piety. Although he did so until his death in 1892, most other writers had ceased to use nature in this fashion long before. Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (1836?–1917), more commonly known by his writing persona Mendele Moykher Sforim, in the first period of his career, his *maskilic* period, not only demonstrated an interest in nature but advocated love of God through contemplation of nature, as is evident in both his Hebrew and Yiddish works: his encyclopedic Hebrew work *Sefer toldot ha-teva* [Book of natural history],⁷⁴ his Yiddish adaptation of the devotional *Perek shira*,⁷⁵ *Der luftbalon* [The air balloon],⁷⁶ and his annual “useful” Yiddish calendar, *Der nitslikher kalendar*.⁷⁷ In the introduction to *Sefer toldot ha-teva*, one of the reasons he lists for undertaking this project is a “moral” reason (*musar*): through nature man can learn to appreciate God’s mercies (*hasdey Hashem*), learn to love God with all his heart, his soul, and his might, and learn to

⁷⁴ A translation of Harald Othmar Lenz’s *Gemeinnützige naturgeschichte* (Gotha: Beckersche Buchhandlung, 1835). It is a multivolume encyclopaedic textbook covering various natural sciences, the first volume of which was published in Leipzig in 1872.

⁷⁵ First published in Zhitomir in 1875. The text and Hebrew translation have recently been published by Shalom Luria. See Mendele Moykher Sefarim, *Perek Shira*, trans. and ed. Shalom Luria (Tel Aviv: University of Haifa and Zmora-Bitan, 2000).

⁷⁶ Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, *Der luftbalon* (Odessa: Kol mevaseer, 1869). No copies of the first edition are extant. The text can be found in Mendele’s collected works, *Ale verk fun Mendele Moykher Sforim*, vol. 8 (Warsaw: Tsentral, 1928).

⁷⁷ See above footnote 61. Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, *Der nitslikher kalendar* (Vilna: Rom, 1876–1882). Examples include his entry in the 1880 calendar “Di gevuros haborey in der luft” [The creator’s might in the air] in which he describes air currents, the dangers of winds for ships at sea, heat waves, and other phenomena. In a poem at the end of the article he praises God’s omnipotence and supervision of His creation.

improve his ways.⁷⁸ Divine worship lies at the very heart of his *Perek shira*, a Yiddish translation/adaptation of and expansion upon the short liturgical composition of the same name which, utilizing Biblical verses, places praise of God into the mouths of His creations (apart from man). However, aside from these examples, all of Abramovitsh's works demonstrate a movement away from pleasurable instruction in *belles lettres* towards straightforward instructional texts.

Along with his disillusionment with many aspects of the *Haskala*, Abramovitsh "came to regard this [study of nature] ... as yet another of the 'toys' or 'tricks,' the mastery of which would bring the Jews no closer to emancipation."⁷⁹ In the second edition of his Yiddish *Kitser maso'es Benyomen ha-shlishi* [*The concise travels of Benjamin the third*],⁸⁰ Abramovitsh describes his heroes' adventures on the river Pyatignilevka in a chapter entitled "Wonders and Innovations on the Pyatignilevka." Yet Benyomen and his companion Senderl see no natural "wonders" worthy of contemplation or study on the dirty and polluted Pyatignilevka: the only thing of interest is a green sward in the centre of the river. Indeed, the chapter parodies both traditional Jewish travel literature and the *maskilic* attempts to use travel writing (among them the translations, including his own, of Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires*) for educational and moral purposes, reflecting Abramovitsh's disillusionment with the *Haskala* and his belief that its methods have not, and cannot, lead to practical change in Jewish society.

An examination of *maskilic* sea literature demonstrates that for over a century (from the early 1780s to the death of Isaac Meir Dik in 1892), throughout the period of the *Haskala* and in all its locales, *maskilic* writers included discussions and descriptions of natural phenomena in works of *belles lettres*, particularly sea adventures, in their efforts to widen readers' general knowledge and as a counter to superstitious beliefs, particularly amongst hasidim. Moreover, a central motivating factor in choosing to discuss natural phenomena within works of *belles lettres* was the desire to promote the true

⁷⁸ Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, *Sefer toldot hateva* (Leipzig, 1862), vol. 1, xvi, referring to Deuteronomy 6:5, a verse recited twice daily as part of the *shema* prayer.

⁷⁹ David Aberbach, *Realism, Caricature, and Bias: The Fiction of Mendele Mocher Sefarim* (New York: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993), 79.

⁸⁰ The first chapters of the work first appeared in a preliminary form in *Der nitslikher kalendar* of 1876. The work as a whole was first printed in Yiddish by Rom (Vilna, 1878) and a Hebrew version by the author appeared in 1896. The section discussed here was first published in the 1878 edition. For a comparison of the various versions see Gali Drucker Baram, "Mas□a beyn mas□aot: diyun hašva□ati be-šaloš girs□aot 'Mas□aot Binyomin ha-šliši' me-□et Mendele Mokher Sefarim" [A journey amongst journeys: a comparative discussion of 'The Travels of Benjamin the Third' by Mendele Moykher Sforim], *Mehkarey yerushalayim be-sifrut 'ivrit* 24 (2011): 93–124.

way to love and serve God: by appreciating the intricacies of His creation rather than through fear and superstition. Many of the works in themselves constitute poetic accounts of God's glory through descriptions of natural phenomena and reflect an almost prayer-like quality: it is possible that some of the writers perceived the very writing of these works as expressing their love of God and as an act of worship. Many of the writers discussed herein support their claims that contemplation of nature is the true way to serve and love God with Biblical verses and quotations from medieval Jewish rationalist thought. Yet, as was the case with many of the literary trends of the *Haskala*, this use of nature was to pass out of favour, replaced by realist tendencies, as is demonstrated by the case of Abramovitsh's writings.

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