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THE EPISTOLARY STORY IN HASKALAH LITERATURE:
ISAAC EUCHEL'S "IGROT MESHULAM"¹

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ABSTRACT

This study of the epistolary genre in Hebrew Haskalah literature examines several epistolary pieces published in Hame'asef, the journal of German Haskalah. In particular, it looks at Isaac Euchel's "Igrot Meshulam ben Uriyah Ha'eshtemoi," considered the first epistolary writing in modern Hebrew belle lettres.

Past literary criticism attributed Euchel's piece to the influence of Montesquieu's Lettres Persanes. I argue that many of the arguments for such an influence are based on a superficial resemblance of the two works, and I suggest that such similarities exist in other literary works belonging to the genre of epistolary writing and to Enlightenment literature in general, which are in effect literary conventions of the genre.

A number of representative works in the epistolary, psuedo-oriental genre published prior to 1721—the publication date of Lettres Persanes—as well as works published subsequently, such as The Jewish Spy, Turkish Spy, and Chinese Spy, were studied to see whether the alleged similarities could be found in these works as well. The result undermines the theory of an exclusive dependence of "Igrot Meshulam" on Montesquieu and shows its possible affinity to other epistolary writings. More importantly, the writer argues that Euchel's non-fictional epistolary work, "Igrot Yitsḥaq Eichel Letal-mido Michal Friedländer," which was also published in Hame'asef, sheds more light on the fictional work.

The use of letters as a literary tool was widespread in Hebrew Haskalah literature just as it was prevalent in 18th-century European literature. The novel-in-letters was one of the most popular genres, to such an extent that one fifth of all fiction produced in that century was devoted to the epistolary genre. The rise of this genre and its reception are said to be related to the emergence of other cultural

¹ An early version of this article appeared as "The Beginning of the Epistolary Genre in Hebrew Enlightenment Literature in Germany: The Alleged Affinity between *Lettres Persanes* and 'Igrot Meshulam,'" *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 24 (1979) 83–103, presented originally as a paper at the Fourth International Congress on the Enlightenment, Yale University, July 18, 1975.

and literary phenomena in Europe. First and foremost, the popularity of authentic, intimate letter writing should be noted. This type of writing had its own literary style and characteristics, which developed into a common tool of communication. Not only did the correspondents read these letters for enjoyment and entertainment, but so did their relatives and acquaintances. In time, this interest in letter writing prompted the publication of letters as a literary medium for commercial purposes. Concurrently, guides to and manuals of letter writing, as well as sample letters, were published.²

The increasing popularity of epistolary writing brought about its adoption by various other literary genres such as travelogues, autobiographies, and satire. Its use also extended to nonfiction writings on philosophy, history, politics, and other subjects. In addition, the growing popularity of diary writing and of the use of dialogue for literary and non-literary purposes contributed to the reception of epistolary literature.

Epistolary writing in the first person points to an affinity between epistolary literature and autobiographical writing, although these two genres differ greatly from each other. Epistolary writing is imbued with unique literary characteristics that attracted many contemporary authors to use it. Writers such as Samuel Richardson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Tobias Smollett, and others published novels in letters, such as *Pamela*, *Clarrisa Harlowe*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and *The Expedition of Humphry Clincker*. As has been observed by Frank Gees Black, this genre was distinguished also by its subgenres and subcategories, such as the romance, the novel of manners, the sentimental novel,³ as well as the letters of the foreign visitor, or the noble savage, in the style of *Lettres Persanes*, to be discussed below. First-person writing in the form of a letter can be more convincing in a novel than the convention of using third-person voice, because the former conveys the writer's personal experience and emotions ostensibly in an authentic way. Yet, even though epistolary writing purports to address its correspondent in the second person, it is in effect addressing the reader, as has been observed by Natascha Würzbach in her study of the novel in letters.⁴ Thus, a

² Natascha Würzbach, *The Novel in Letters: Epistolary Fiction in the Early English Novel 1678–1740* (Coral Gables, 1969), p. ix.

³ Frank Gees Black, *The Epistolary Novel in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Eugene, Oregon, 1940), pp. 19–36.

⁴ See n. 2 above.

major trait of writing a novel in letters is exemplified, according to A. M. Kearney, by the feeling of active participation that is passed to the reader through the personal, private letter.⁵ The simple, spontaneous, and natural type of writing, too, is one of the attractive features of literary epistolary writing. In Ian Watt's words, the major advantage of the letter is its being "the most direct material evidence of the inner life" of its writer.⁶

The epistolary novel should not be deemed static. The letters themselves partake in the events that advance the plot. They are written, sent, intercepted, stolen, copied, hidden, and, at times, they may even reach the wrong destination.⁷ The novel in letters presents a more complete picture to the reader, including needed explanations, unlike authentic letters that may lack a full and continuous explanation for the complete cycle of events.

It is well known that the use of letters for didactic purposes did not originate with Haskalah literature, as Judith Halevi Zwick demonstrates in her study of *The Hebrew Brifsteller*, although Hebrew Haskalah utilized this medium extensively for such purposes. Several important Haskalah writers published collections of letters either in chrestomathies and catechisms for students, or as handbooks for adults. Among them were Zeev Buchner's *Tsaḥut Hamelitsah*, Shalom Hacohen's *Ktav Yosher*, David Zamocz's *Mafteah Beit David*, or Mordechai Aharon Günzburg's *Kiryat Sefer*, and *Devir*.⁸

⁵ A. M. Kearney, *Samuel Richardson* (London, 1968), p. 68.

⁶ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Middlesex, 1970), pp. 198–199.

⁷ Alan D. McKillop, "Epistolary Technique in Richardson's Novels," *The Rice Institute Pamphlet* 38.1 (1951) 36, reprinted in John Carroll, ed., *Samuel Richardson* (Englewood Cliffs, 1969), p. 139.

⁸ On the didactic epistolary writing, see Judith Halevi Zwick, *The Hebrew Briefsteller (16th–20th Century)* (Tel Aviv, 1990). Zwick defines the Hebrew term *igron* as "a collection of letters, mostly fictional, composed for the purpose of teaching and example" (p. 9). In the introduction to her book, Zwick delineates some of the early literary buds appearing in these letters (p. 122). See also: Judith Zwick, "Ha'igronim Ha'ivriyim," *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1986), 3:219–224; Yitzḥak Rivkind, "Al Sifrut Ha'igronot," *Hadoar* 40 (No. 32, 27 Tamuz, 1961) 574–575; Uriel Ofek, "Lelamed Bnei Yehudah Keset Hasofer," *Hadoar* 40 (No. 29, 25 Sivan, 1961) 522–523; Zvi Scharfstein, "Sifrei Igrot 'Ivriyot," *Shvilei Hahinukh* 22.4 (Summer 1962) 226–233; Israel Cohen, "Kinah 'al Ha'igeret," *Moznayim* 35.5–6 (1973) 390–394; published also in his book *Behinot Umidot* (Tel Aviv, 1973), pp. 385–394. See the following collections of didactic epistolary writing: Zeev Buchner, *Tsaḥut Hamelitsah* (Vilna, 1835); Shalom Hacohen, *Ktav Yosher* (Vienna, 1820); David Zamocz, *Mafteah Beit David* (Breslau, 1832); Mordechai Aharon

The epistolary genre permeated into Hebrew Haskalah literature in its non-literary manifestations. David Caro, for example, used the epistolary mode in 1820, in the first part of *Brit Emet*, to present a multiplicity of topics in philosophy, religion, culture, and general humanities.⁹ Likewise, several Haskalah periodicals in the 19th century, such as *Kerem Hemed*, published exchanges of scholars' correspondence on the topics of *Hochmat Yisrael*.

As in other genres of Haskalah literature—which I discussed elsewhere¹⁰—European literature constituted only one source of influence on the modern Hebrew genre. There is substantial evidence of intrinsic affinity between the Haskalah genre and traditional Hebrew epistolary writings. Clearly, the synthesis between the European and Hebraic styles in forming the maskilic genre exemplifies the way Haskalah literature, in general, combined the two literary traditions on which it drew. These epistolary phenomena in early Hebrew literature were further developed in the 19th century to a full-fledged novel in letters, with all its generic traits and literary conventions. These later phenomena are manifested in Joseph Perl's satire *Megaleh Temirin*, or, to some extent, in Abraham Mapu's *Ayit Tsavao'*, and in Smolenskin's *Hato'eh Bedarkhei Haḥayim* within the confines of the realistic novel.¹¹

Günzburg, *Kiryat Sefer* (Vilna, 1835), and *Devir* (Vilna, 1861). Meir Halevi Letteris collected many letters from these and other sources and published them in *Sefer Mikhtevei 'Ivrit* (Vienna, 1868).

⁹ David Caro, *Brit Emet* (Constantinople [Dessau], 1820), pp. 3–20. Nine of the letters are written by Amitai to Ovadyah.

¹⁰ A detailed discussion of other genres may be found in Hebrew in my book *Sugot Vesugyot Besifrut Hahaskalah Ha'ivrit* (Tel Aviv, 1999).

¹¹ Joseph Perl, *Megaleh Temirin* (Vienna, 1819); Abraham Mapu, *Ayit Tsavao'* (Vilna, 1869); Peretz Smolenskin, *Hato'eh Bedarkhei Haḥayim* published first in *Hashaḥar* (1869–1871) (published as a book: Vilna, 1901). On the literary use of letters, see, for example, Shmuel Werses, "Shitot Hasatirah shel Yosef Perl," *Sipur Veshorsho* (Ramat Gan, 1971), pp. 9–12, 18–21; published earlier in *Tarbiz* 31 (1962) 377–411; Werses, "Ha'igronim Bitkufat Hahaskalah Umashma'utam Hasifrutit," *Proceedings of the Second World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 19–20; David Patterson, "Epistolary Elements in the Novels of Abraham Mapu," *Annual of the Leeds University Oriental Society* 4 (1964) 132–149; David Patterson, "Epistolary Elements in the Hebrew Novel of the Period of Enlightenment," *Annual of the Leeds University Oriental Society* 5 (1963–1965) 86–99; David Patterson, "Hayesodot Ha'epistolariyim Baroan Ha'ivri shel Tekufat Hahaskalah," *Proceedings of the Fourth*

Epistolary Writings in Hame'asef

The epistolary phenomenon is discernible as early as the first volume of *Hame'asef* (1783/4) with the publication of single letters, which lacked the literary qualities of the epistolary style. Those were in effect articles sent to the journal and published in the original format of letters addressed to the editors or the society of Hebraists, named in the introduction, although their content was essentially that of an essay. For example, in the first volume, the editors published a series of articles on education, in the epistolary form, under the title "A Letter from a Respectable Person."¹² In subsequent volumes they published other epistolary articles concerning education, the Hebrew language, biblical commentary, and the halakhic correspondence between Moses Mendelssohn and Jacob Emden on the issue of the early and immediate burial of the dead.¹³ Altogether, there are sixteen such epistolary entries on different subjects listed in the *Hame'asef* Index, the computerized, annotated index of the ten volumes of the Hebrew journal, published recently by this writer.¹⁴

Within the genre of literary epistolary writings, *Hame'asef* published only two pieces, both by Isaac Euchel. Euchel was actually the first author in modern Hebrew literature to use the epistolary genre for a literary or a semi-literary purpose. Euchel's first work in this genre is "Igroṭ Yitṣṣhak Eichel Letalmido Michal Friedländer."¹⁵

Following the style of this genre, these letters may address a single topic either through a series of letters, or through one letter divided into sections. The latter, too, may be indicative of some influence of the European epistolary novel. "Igroṭ Isaac Euchel" is

World Congress of Jewish Studies 2 (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 59–64; also see David Weinfeld, "Hato'eḥ Bedarkhei Haḥayim (part 4)," *Mehkerei Yerushalayim Besifrut 'Ivrit* 5 (Jerusalem, 1984) 95–120. In the beginning of his article, Weinfeld reviews the epistolary tradition in Hebrew literature.

¹² *Hame'asef* 1 (1783/4) 36–38.

¹³ For example, *Hame'asef* 4 (1788) 17–31 (Hebrew grammar); *Hame'asef* 2 (1785) 154–155, 169–174, 178–187 (Halakhah, burial of the dead). Cf. the use of the epistolary form in nonfictional works in the second half of the 18th century in England: Frank Gees Black, *The Epistolary Novel in the Late Eighteenth Century*, pp. 3–4.

¹⁴ Moshe Pelli, *Sha'ar Lahaskalah, Mafteḥ Mu'ar Lehame'asef, Ktav Ha'et Ha-'ivri Harishon* (Jerusalem, 2000).

¹⁵ "Igroṭ Yitṣṣhak Eichel," *Hame'asef* 2 (1785) 116–121, 137–142 (cited henceforth "Igroṭ Isaac Euchel"). See detailed discussion following n. 92.

actually only one letter divided into several parts, and sent in one direction only—from him to his pupil, Michal Friedländer. The rest of the letters have not been published. Thus, Euchel's Letters may signal the beginning of epistolary writing in modern Hebrew Literature, even though Euchel's epistolary techniques are rather limited.

The second and more important work is "Igroth Meshulam ben Uriyah Ha'eshtemoi," which is the first epistolary writing in modern Hebrew *belle lettres*.¹⁶ It represents a significant development in the epistolary technique, employing letters written by several people expressing different views, which appear to contrast and contradict each other.

Isaac Euchel: Originator of Literary Genres in Haskalah Literature

The author, Isaac Euchel (1756–1804), one of the first Hebrew writers of the German Haskalah and one of its dominant figures, appeared at the outset of the movement in the last quarter of the 18th century. In his personality and in his literary and public activities, Euchel may embody many of the cultural changes that took place within the Hebrew Maskilim in Germany, but until recently his contributions to Hebrew letters were not duly recognized by traditional literary historians of Hebrew literature. In the last quarter of the 20th century, however, literary critics of Haskalah, myself included, have revisited Euchel's writing and reexamined his works and his life. Indeed, in the 1970s, I pointed out Euchel's importance and pivotal role in Haskalah literature.¹⁷

¹⁶ "Igroth Meshulam ben Uriyah Ha'eshtemoi," *Hame'asef* 6 (1790) 38–50, 80, 85, 171–176, 245–249, published anonymously; see n. 27 below. Euchel's piece has been republished in Hebrew with German translation by Andreas Kennecke, ed. and trans., in Isaac Euchel, *Vom Nutzen der Aufklärung* (Düsseldorf, 2001).

¹⁷ A list of Euchel's publications and some biographical data apparently supplied by Euchel himself were published by V. H. Schmidt and D. G. Mehring, *Neuestes Gelehrtes Berlin* 1 (Berlin, 1795) 116–117. Among his publications Euchel lists the letters of the Oriental travelers. A brief summary of "Igroth Meshulam" is included in the second part of my study of Euchel, "Isaac Euchel: Tradition and Change in the First Generation Haskalah Literature in Germany," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26 (1975) 151–167; part two, 27 (1976) 54–70. A bibliography on Euchel appears in that study, part one, pp. 151–152. This study is incorporated as chapter 10 in my book *The Age of Haskalah* (Leiden, 1979). A general discussion of Euchel and his work appears

As a major figure of Hebrew Haskalah in Germany, Euchel initiated in 1783 the first modern Hebrew journal, *Hame'asef*, establishing an important vehicle for introducing changes, advocated by Haskalah, into the social, cultural, and religious life of German and European Jews. He served as its editor for seven years, continuously contributing his own articles and creative works to the journal. Before launching *Hame'asef*, Euchel founded a society of Hebraists, *Heverat Dorshei Leshon 'Ever*, which published the journal. Euchel continued his public activities in the following decade by organizing the *Gesellschaft der Freunde*, a society of which he was the director from 1797 to 1801.¹⁸

Among his other contributions, Euchel should be credited with introducing several European literary genres into Hebrew literature. A follower of Moses Mendelssohn, Euchel composed the first modern book-length biography in Hebrew on the Jewish philosopher. Reflecting the attitude of the Hebrew Maskilim toward "the Socrates of our time,"¹⁹ as they referred to Mendelssohn, this glorifying biography was first serialized in *Hame'asef* in 1788, and published as a book the following year.²⁰

Euchel also wrote the first modern Hebrew satire, "Igrot Meshulam," employing the European genre of the fictional letter for this purpose. Several parts of this piece are thought to constitute the first utopian writing in modern Hebrew letters, and his other epistolary work, "Igrot Isaac Euchel," is also considered to be a travelogue.

In addition, Euchel was one of the first translators of the traditional prayer book into German, and contributed to biblical scholarship in his translation and commentary on the Book of Proverbs.²¹ Exemplifying another aspect of the dual nature of Hebrew Haskalah

also in my article "Jewish Identity in Modern Hebrew Literature," *Judaism* 22.4 (Fall 1976) 448–452. See also Shmuel Fiener, "Yitshak Eichel—Ha 'yazam' shel Tenu'at Hahaskalah Begermanyah," *Zion* 52 (1987) 427–469. See also the chapter on the epistolary genre in Pelli, *Sugot Vesugyot*, pp. 28–47.

¹⁸ See Ludwig Lesser, *Chronik der Gesellschaft der Freunde* (Berlin, 1842), p. 8, and list of functionaries at the end of the book. See Shmuel Feiner's article cited in the previous note.

¹⁹ Cited in *Hame'asef* 1 (1783/4) 43.

²⁰ Itzik Euchel, *Toldot Rabeinu Hehacham Moshe Ben Menahem* (Berlin, 1789), serialized in *Hame'asef* 4 (1788).

²¹ *Mishlei* (Berlin, 1790).

is Euchel's contribution to Yiddish literature: he is considered to be the writer of the first modern Yiddish play, *Reb Henoch; oder was thut men damit*.²²

Unquestionably, Euchel was one of the aesthetes of Hebrew literature, and the author who helped build a bridge between European literature and its emerging Hebrew counterpart.

"Igrot Meshulam": The Hebrew Maskil in Search of His Identity

In spite of its limited scope, the epistolary piece "Igrot Meshulam" is a complex work whose characteristics may relate it to several literary genres. In addition to being an epistolary story, it is also a satire, an imaginary travelogue and a utopia. These additional features of "Igrot Meshulam" are discussed elsewhere.²³

In choosing the epistolary conventions to apply to Hebrew literature, this work of fiction by Euchel displays the literary predilection and creative orientation of Haskalah at its inception. Attesting to that are the literary techniques employed in the portrayal of the Maskil protagonist, in the development of plot, and in the dialogue. Especially outstanding in this regard is the use of epistolary methods that enable the reader to hear not only the author's views and his direct messages but also opinions presented from various points of view. These viewpoints harbor the author's covert position, which the reader should try to decipher, and this process involves the reader literarily and experientially in this work, as he applies modern critical tools and conventions to his reading. The letters in this epistolary story create the illusion of a dialogue, as if the writer were conducting a discussion with his correspondent; however, the letters actually go only one way. Thus, this epistolary piece creates what Surtz calls a one-way dialogue.²⁴

The story begins with an introduction that provides background information, the time and place, the main protagonist, and the general history of the manuscript and how it got to the editor. Such an introduction, a literary convention in this kind of work, enables the author to invent the fictive persona of a publisher/editor who facili-

²² Published in German as *Reb Henoch oder was thut me dermit* (Berlin, 1846).

²³ See Moshe Pelli, *Sugot Vesugyot*, pp. 229–309.

²⁴ Edward Surtz, "Utopia as a Work of Literary Art," *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New York, 1963), p. cxxxix.

tated the publication of the letters. Here he is identified by the acronym MPST,²⁵ and he is said to have had the letters for “many years.” According to the introduction, the provider of the letters inherited them from his brother-in-law, who had copied them from a manuscript obtained from a “Sephardi scribe.” The scribe, a teacher at the household of Meshulam’s father, translated the letters into “the holy tongue.”²⁶ The creation of distance between the “original” writer and the published work by reporting that the manuscript was found in a library or private collection and translated is a common feature of the epistolary genre.

Following a brief description of the “writer” of these letters, the publisher/editor reports that they were originally written in Arabic. The protagonist sent them to his friend in his hometown, and consequently these letters made their way to the publisher/editor. According to the introduction, twelve letters were sent to the journal, of which only six have been published. Thus, the publisher/editor begins the exposition of the story: in 1769, twenty years prior to the publication of the letters, a young Jewish lad of 18, Meshulam, was sent by his father, Uriyah Ha’eshtemoi, from Aleppo in Syria to Europe to learn “the customs of the people of these countries and their disposition.” The story of his adventures is told through a series of letters sent to Baruch, his friend back home.

Meshulam’s letters are sent from Madrid, his first destination. He joins a Marrano Jew, returning to his home in Spain, whom he befriends on the boat. While in Spain, Meshulam becomes acquainted with two religious phenomena: first, the life and customs of the Marranos, a crypto-Jewish phenomenon, which Meshulam experiences in person, getting to know firsthand their limited practice of Judaism. Secondly, he is confronted with Catholic worship, which is totally foreign to him, as he comes from the Near East. In the wake of these phenomena, Meshulam is overwhelmed by existential doubts, which he presents as tantalizing questions regarding the observance of Judaism. He reveals his own questions and doubts about the Jewish religion and customs practiced by traditional Jewish society. Manifesting the viewpoint of a skeptic Maskil, Meshulam begins to

²⁵ S. T. is the acronym for “Sepharadi Tahor,” pure Sephardi, a term denoting his ancestry as coming from Spain. Regarding his identity, see Pelli, *Sugot Vesugyot*, p. 32, n. 22; p. 44, n. 75.

²⁶ “Igrot Meshulam,” p. 39.

question the observance of the *mitsvot*, and alludes to the presence of foreign influence in Jewish religious customs.

While searching for his own course, Meshulam is faced with two basic interpretations of Judaism from which to choose. They are presented in the form of two letters, each one providing advice on how he should conduct himself as a Jew while away from home. The first is from his grandfather, representing traditional, normative Judaism. Meshulam's grandfather places emphasis on strict observance of the *mitsvot* and customs, including fasting twice a month, a practice which, to the average reader, looks rather exaggerated. Using satirical devices in the epistolary mode, the author intervenes subtly in doctoring the grandfather's letter, organizing the presentation of its materials and manipulating its manner of expression and its argumentation in such a way that annuls the traditional perception of Judaism as expressed by the grandfather. I have adduced elsewhere that the literary structure of the grandfather's letter is done with a great deal of satirical sophistication and epistolary dexterity: grandfather's arguments are arranged so that they begin and end with commonly accepted demands for Jewish observance. They envelop the inner core, which contains exaggerated demands selected for the satiric purpose. Moreover, these arguments are arranged in a gradual manner so that they become more and more extreme, as they continue to employ farfetched, exaggerated, and decontextualized explanations. At times, the argumentation is given "doctored" documentation that turns out to be unsupportive and contradictory, and of course that is done to serve the satirical goals of this work. In spite of all this authorial manipulation, the statements by the grandfather seem authentic, since the author cleverly presents them in the spirit of the grandfather's extreme position.²⁷

The second letter that Meshulam receives depicts the point of view of his father, Uriyah Ha'eshtemoi, and represents moderate Judaism intertwined with moderate Haskalah. Compared to the manner of presentation of the grandfather's letter, this letter is straightforward and serious, lacking any hint of irony, satirical allusions, or exaggerations. Uriyah's concept of Judaism stresses several basic human values in the spirit of Haskalah. He recommends limited but quality observance of Judaism rather than attention to a wider range of Ju-

²⁷ See discussion and text analyses and the epistolary, satirical methods of the author in the chapter on Euchel in Pelli, *The Age of Haskalah*, pp. 217–218.

daic precepts without devotion. This approach to Judaism purports to be based on common sense as both guide and measuring rod so that the individual might achieve happiness and fulfillment in this world. In this vein, he calls for tolerance and understanding of other people. These statements by Meshulam's father are accepted without any reservation since they authentically represent his ideological position. Importantly, they are arranged in such a sophisticated way so as to serve as counterpoint and contradict the essence of the grandfather's suggestions.²⁸

Meshulam represents the figure of the Hebrew Maskil as a young man. He is searching for his distinct spiritual, intellectual, and religious identity and for his cultural and social orientation, and he is able to find them only through the encounter with the culture of European Enlightenment. The very search itself, and the fact that the protagonist is searching for an unknown goal outside of normative Judaism and outside Jewish culture altogether, are signs of troubling discontent among the circles of the Maskilim. The beginning of such a search may be a sign of the changes that permeated Haskalah Judaism,²⁹ yet, in the mind of the author, as presented in the frame story by the publisher/editor, Meshulam is not deviating from Judaism. He is portrayed in very positive strokes: "He is intelligent, with a clear mind, and speaks the language of his people and languages of other peoples as well." He is well educated in the classical tradition: his father has taught him "wisdom and knowledge, rhetorics, music and logic, astronomy and geometry, and other qualities required of a person who is destined to meet dignitaries." Typically, his looks reflect his inner qualities: He is "good looking, good hearted, and very pleasing to all his acquaintances." Haskalah's perception of an ideal Maskil is exemplified by this characterization of Meshulam, which culminates in his adherence to Judaism: "he has been god-fearing all his life." Through this literary technique and others, the author implies that he identifies with his protagonist.³⁰

The epistolary method pretends that each point of view is presented objectively, ostensibly by the letter writer himself, without any editorial interference by the author, as though he does not have an opinion and does not partake in the dispute. However, under this

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219. "Igrot Meshulam," pp. 47–50.

²⁹ See Pelli, *Bema'avkei Temurah* (Tel Aviv, 1988), chap. 1.

³⁰ "Igrot Meshulam," p. 39. See Pelli, *The Age of Haskalah*, p. 216.

external structure there is an internal configuration, as noted earlier, that organizes the material of the letters to the narrator's satirical advantage and uses the plot to his own ends. Thus, the narrator manipulates the story and navigates the reader with the sole purpose of promoting Haskalah's agenda.

It appears that the above-mentioned two perceptions of Judaism by Meshulam's grandfather and father vie with each other about forming Meshulam's Jewish identity as they attempt to dictate to him the proper way of observing Judaism. However, Meshulam is inclined toward neither of these ways. His own view is represented through rhetorical questions concerning the essence of Judaism and the observance of the *mitsvot*:

I do not know whether these things were truthful [correct], for according to my thinking the success [happiness] of the Israelites is tied to the observance of the *mitsvot* alone, and if it were possible to have wholesomeness [achieve perfection] and to be happy without the observance of the *mitsvot*, would not Socrates the Greek and Zoroaster the Hindu [!] have as much wholesomeness and be as happy as any Israelite? Let me know, my brother, your view in this inquiry.³¹

Even though Meshulam's views are masked with questions, the plot presents him already at the beginning of the story as having made a cardinal decision that affects his life, a step that signals his Jewish orientation. Before leaving home he follows his father's advice, disregarding his grandfather's dictum, and changes his Middle Eastern clothes for the European fashion. Meshulam explains his action, saying that "this custom [wearing particular clothes] does not fall under the laws of god, and it changes occasionally with the changing times and places."³²

This important statement is replete with deistic notions that are discussed in contemporary European literature and in Haskalah literature concerning the relativity of all positive religions.³³ On the level of plot, it appears that Meshulam's decision to conform to European clothes actually saves his life, and thus it may signal the author's belief that this kind of change is inevitable and necessary

³¹ "Igrotes Meshulam," p. 44. See Pelli, *Bema'avkei Temurah*, pp. 13–14, and *The Age of Haskalah*, p. 222. See discussion following n. 76.

³² "Igrotes Meshulam," pp. 40–41.

³³ See *The Age of Haskalah*, chap. 1, on Deism, pp. 7–32.

under the circumstances. The act of change of clothes is interpreted by most critics as Euchel's call for assimilation. However, a close and contextual reading of this story refutes this interpretation.³⁴ In my opinion, Euchel's intentions in this story, identified with those adhering to moderate Hebrew Haskalah, were to advocate that Jews acculturate and adopt Western values and culture. This is a far cry from assimilation.

Alleged Affinity between "Igroth Meshulam" and Lettres Persanes

Hebrew literary scholarship has assumed a direct link between Euchel's "Letters of Meshulam" and Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*.³⁵ The supposed dependence of the Hebrew work on its French counterpart has not, however, been substantiated conclusively and convincingly by textual analysis. Historians and some critics of Hebrew literature, noting a few superficial similarities between the two works, have concluded too hastily that Euchel's epistolary work is indebted to *Lettres Persanes*.³⁶ They neither discuss in depth the nature of these similarities nor offer detailed proof of Euchel's alleged indebtedness to Montesquieu. The notion of this alleged connection may be attributed to Klausner who asserted that Euchel's work looks

³⁴ *Ibid.*, chapter on Euchel, p. 221, n. 121.

³⁵ *Lettres Persanes, Oeuvres Complètes de Montesquieu* 1 (Paris, 1875). For an English translation, see Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, translated with an introduction by C. J. Betts, Penguin Books (England, 1993).

³⁶ Avraham Shaanan, *Iyunim Besifrut Hahaskalah* (Merhavyah, Israel, 1952), pp. 75–80, and in his *Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Haḥadashah Lizrameah* (Tel-Aviv, 1962), 75–77. In a more elaborate study, Shaanan virtually reiterates his contention of a direct influence of *Lettres Persanes* on "Igroth Meshulam," although, at times, he would refer to "Montesquieu and others." See his study "'Igroth Meshulam' Kesimptom Ukhegenre," *Sefer Baruch Kurzweil* (Tel Aviv, 1975), pp. 355, 356, 363, 364, 366, 368, 369. In another article, Morris Neiman refers to Euchel's work as "A Hebrew Imitation of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*." See his article of that title in *Jewish Social Studies* 37 (1975) 163–169. Nieman reiterates some of the superficial analogies between the two works, cited already in Shaanan's *Iyunim*, and adds a few other cursory similarities without even the slightest attempt to analyze the alleged analogies. Yehuda Friedlander published his article "Petiḥta Lasatirah—'Igroth Meshulam ben Uriyah Ha'eshtemoi' Leyitshak Eichel," *Moznayim* 44.2 (January 1977) 107–118. He published it with the text of "Igroth Meshulam" in his book *Perakim Basatirah Ha'ivrit Beshilhei Hame'ah Ha-18 Begermayyah* (Tel Aviv, 1980). Friedlander accepts Shaanan's affinity theory without reservation.

like "an imitation of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*."³⁷ Following in Klausner's footsteps, Shaanan—and subsequently Friedlander and Neiman—followed suit.³⁸

The alleged affinity between "Igroth Meshulam" and *Lettres Persanes* should be reexamined and reevaluated in order to clarify the accepted assumption that Haskalah literature is indebted only to European literature. This notion does not take into account the inner impact of traditional Hebrew literature on Haskalah. In addition, a reassessment should be made whether a single work, in this case *Lettres Persanes*, could be the sole influence on the Hebrew work under study, rather than the impact of a series of works in the same genre. Both notions will be revisited. The intrinsic influence within Euchel's own work will be studied as will kindred works to *Lettres Persanes*.

The external resemblance between Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* and Euchel's "Igroth Meshulam" is apparent. In addition to belonging to the same genre of epistolary writing, there is also some external similarity in the identity of the protagonists in these two works. In both of them, exotic Near Eastern visitors travel to Europe and evaluate its culture, society, way of life, and institutions from a supposedly non-biased point of view vis-à-vis their own society and culture. In this regard, Shaanan already pointed out that similar details found in both works may indicate that Euchel did borrow from his French predecessor. These similarities may suggest a connection between Usbek, the protagonist of the *Lettres Persanes*, visiting Smyrna and Livorno, and Meshulam, the Hebrew protagonist, who also visited these two cities.³⁹ Freedom of women in Europe is

³⁷ Joseph Klausner, *Historiah shel Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Ha'hadashah* (Jerusalem, 1960) 1:161. Similarly, Gedalyah Elkoshi, in his articles on Euchel in the *Hebrew Encyclopaedia* (Jerusalem, 1957) 2:815, and the translated version published in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971) 4:957, also suggests that Euchel imitated Montesquieu: "... and which seemed in some respects to imitate Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*." The Hebrew version has: "which contain signs of imitation of the *Persian Letters*." G. Kressel writes that "Igroth Meshulam" "are patterned after Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*" (*Cyclopedia of Modern Hebrew Literature*, Merhavayah, Israel, 1965, 1:89). Werses is more careful in his observation; he relates "Igroth Meshulam" to "this kind of 'Persian Letters' and their transformation in German literature" (Werses, *Sipur Veshorsho*, p. 11).

³⁸ See n. 36 above.

³⁹ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 19 p. 14, letter 23 p. 16; "Igroth Meshulam," letter 1 p. 39, letter 4 p. 171.

a topic discussed by Usbek in the French work as well as by Meshulam in the Hebrew piece.⁴⁰ Rica, one of the *Lettres Persanes*' protagonists, visits libraries in Europe, expresses his impressions of them,⁴¹ and discusses topics related to literature,⁴² as does Meshulam.⁴³ Protagonists in both works find great interest in Spain and are critical of the religious fanaticism found there.⁴⁴

Because of these similarities, Shaanan asserted, on one hand, that Euchel's work "is perhaps an original work," but, on the other hand, that it may even be "a free translation."⁴⁵ He further argued that Euchel "adjusted the French satire to the problems confronting the Jewish milieu," although "not always did the Hebrew writer grasp the pungency of the French irony." Accordingly, "Montesquieu ridiculed Christian Europe intentionally through the naïve, admiring Muslim, whereas the Hebrew Maskil [Euchel] regarded Europe to be the epitome of wisdom, which should be transplanted into the 'tents of Shem.' Thus, he [the Hebrew writer] accentuated the lights of Europe" rather than its darker sides.⁴⁶

According to Shaanan, Montesquieu was critical of European society and culture; however, Euchel is portrayed as insensitive to the satire and irony of *Lettres Persanes*, and to its criticism of the social, cultural, and religious institutions and customs of Europe. Allegedly, Euchel did not always comprehend the Frenchman's irony, and accepted the latter's work at face value. Consequently, Euchel is said to have made it the model of his own epistolary work. This view presupposes that Euchel was singularly influenced by *Lettres Persanes* and that it was his intention to imitate them to the letter, and perhaps even to render Montesquieu's satire in "a free translation."⁴⁷

This notion is to be rejected altogether. Even if it is assumed that "Igrot Meshulam" was inspired by *Lettres Persanes*, a question to be discussed below, Euchel not only adjusted his satire to the problem

⁴⁰ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 23 p. 16; "Igrot Meshulam," letter 5 pp. 175–176.

⁴¹ *Lettres Persanes*, letters 133–137 pp. 91–94, and letter 78 pp. 54–55.

⁴² *Ibid.*, letter 137 pp. 93–94.

⁴³ "Igrot Meshulam," letter 5 p. 176.

⁴⁴ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 78 pp. 54–55; "Igrot Meshulam," letter 2 p. 45. See Shaanan, *Iyunim*, pp. 76–80.

⁴⁵ Shaanan, *Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Ha'hadashah Lizrameah*, 1:76. This is a very strange statement, which has no foundation, as shall be discussed below.

⁴⁶ Shaanan, *Iyunim*, p. 77; Shaanan, "The Letters of Meshulam as Symptom," p. 356.

⁴⁷ Shaanan, *Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Ha'hadashah Lizrameah*, 1:76.

facing Jewish society, but he indeed “converted” the satire to Jewish reality, and aimed its arrows toward targets that were not identical with those of Montesquieu.

Clearly, Euchel’s interests were not those of Montesquieu, nor did he have the same literary and social objectives. Euchel obviously had no intention of writing as voluminous a work as Montesquieu’s: In the introduction to “Igroṭ Meshulam,” he alludes to only twelve letters.⁴⁸ It is unfortunate that even this number of letters was not published, for the Hebrew work is comprised of only six letters. It stands to reason that Euchel had to confine his writing to a limited number of issues and subjects. His scope, then, is limited at the outset. Naturally, one expects a limitation in the number of protagonists and locales. Instead of three protagonists traveling through Europe, as is the case in *Lettres Persanes*, Euchel has only one, Meshulam.

Although both protagonists originate in the Near East, Usbek comes from Persia while Meshulam comes from Syria.⁴⁹ Not only are their places of origin different but so is the main locale where each story takes place. The center of activity in *Lettres Persanes* is Paris, whereas the Hebrew work does not deal with France, the French, or with Paris. Instead, the *mise-en-scène* is Madrid, and the people described are Spaniards, who are contrasted with Italians. The Spanish locale was selected by Euchel in order to call attention to Marrano Jews and to their predicament in Spain. *Lettres Persanes*, it is true, does have excerpts of letters coming from Spain and describes the Spaniards and their customs and institutions, but this material is not central or germane to the French work as the Spanish references are in Euchel’s work.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ “Igroṭ Meshulam,” p. 39. In his introduction, which is addressed to the editors of the journal and the members of the society of the Maskilim, the publisher/editor writes that he is submitting twelve letters for publication. He expresses his willingness to send them the rest of the letters, which he still possesses. Shaanan suspects that Euchel originally intended to compose a comprehensive work similar to those in the genre (“The Letters of Meshulam as Symptom,” p. 369).

⁴⁹ From Ḥaleb, or Aleppo, which was known for its well-established Jewish community. The fact that both protagonists come to Europe from the Near East is cited as parallel by Shaanan, *Iyunim*, p. 77; *Hasifrut Ha’ivrit Haḥadashah Lizrameah*, 1:76, and Neiman, “A Hebrew Imitation,” p. 164.

⁵⁰ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 78, pp. 258–263; “Igroṭ Meshulam,” p. 174. Shaanan maintains that Rica visited Spain, and that Meshulam, in the Hebrew work, comes to Spain “in his footsteps,” thus alluding to a direct borrowing by Euchel from Montesquieu.

The alleged indebtedness of Euchel to Montesquieu is based on the notion that Euchel aimed at imitating *Lettres Persanes*, or even, as mentioned earlier, that perhaps “Igrot Meshulam” should be considered a “free translation” of the former work. Some deviations from the original French work are explained as Euchel’s misunderstanding of the original irony and satire.⁵¹

Careful comparison of the two works, however, shows that most of the items used to validate resemblance are no more than external, superficial, and peripheral similarities. No internal, profound, or meaningful resemblance has been found. Thus, there is no conclusive evidence of borrowing, because the same elements are to be found elsewhere in the epistolary literature of the period, as will be discussed below.

It may be supposed, nevertheless, that Euchel was familiar with *Lettres Persanes*, as he was probably familiar with other writings within the genre.⁵² Euchel, as a student of Kant and as a *Maskil par excellence*, was certainly versed in the important Enlightenment works of the 18th century. Euchel’s writings show that he was abreast of the Enlightenment issues of the time and some of his topics and ideas are adopted from general writings produced during the Enlightenment period.

One should note the fundamental difference between the two works, for they do not have the same literary goal. Although both are satirical works, they do not share the same objective in their uses of satire. Moreover, the satirical target in one is the subject of glorification in the other. Euchel not only used satire to address the problems and the predicament of Jewish society, but he directed his satire at Jewish life itself.

(*Iyunim*, p. 78; *Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Haḥadashah Lizrameah*, 1:77). However, Rica does not pay a visit to Spain; he only cites from a letter, which he received from a Frenchman who had visited Spain (letter 78). See n. 58 below.

⁵¹ Shaanan, *Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Haḥadashah Lizrameah*, 1:76.

⁵² Shaanan believes that Euchel was “an indubitable student of Montesquieu” (*Iyunim*, p. 75). In this early study, Shaanan states that Euchel had undoubtedly read the *Lettres Persanes*, although he was familiar with German imitations as well (p. 77). However, in his last study, Shaanan raises the possibility that Euchel had not read Montesquieu in the original (“The Letters of Meshulam as Symptom,” p. 355). Nieman, on the other hand, is sure that “Euchel read the *Lettres Persanes* in the original” (“A Hebrew Imitation,” p. 164). However, no documentation is given.

A better insight to the essential difference between these works may be gained by exploring their respective overall satiric concept, or guiding principle. The *satiric* legend for reading Montesquieu's work presupposes *satirically* that the exotic Oriental, that is Near Eastern, culture and its society are highly superior to corrupt European culture. Euchel, on the other hand, has an antithetical presupposition. According to him, Meshulam's culture, the culture of the Near East, is a reflection of Jewish culture, which, in his view, is inferior to the progressive culture of Europe. European Enlightenment, considered by Euchel and his contemporary Maskilim to be the epitome of the latest cultural trends, is thus the guide to be followed.⁵³ According to this view, the adoption of European Enlightenment values would advance the social and political state of the Jews, and would facilitate their progress in the areas of culture, science, and education. This basic difference between the two writers dictated their differing approach to the subject matter.

The common denominator of both Euchel and Montesquieu is that they undertook to write satires on the society in which they live. However, each writer had a different attitude, guided by his own value system, which dictated a distinct approach to the subjects with which he was dealing.

In contrast to these thematic and philosophical topics where the Hebrew and French authors differ from one another, Euchel does follow Montesquieu in matter and in spirit. However, Euchel develops these subjects and adapts them to his own uses without any textual connection to Montesquieu's book.

Even if one is to assume some influence of Montesquieu's satiric work on Euchel, it is incumbent upon the student of Haskalah and Enlightenment literature to examine other examples of epistolary literature in 18th-century Europe. Only through a thorough probe of the genre would it be possible to ascertain the relation between "Igrof Meshulam" and other European epistolary writings.

⁵³ Expressions of the superiority of European culture abound in the writings of the early Maskilim in Germany, especially in their journal, *Hame'asef*. For one such example, see Pelli, "The First Call of a Hebrew Maskil to Convene a Rabbinic Assembly for Religious Reforms," *Tarbiz* 42 (1973) 484-491 (English summary, p. xiii), included as a chapter in my book *Bema'avkei Temurah*, pp. 166-174. It should be noted that both Shaanan and Neiman, in their respective studies, arrive at the same conclusion.

A number of representative works in the epistolary, pseudo-Oriental genre have been selected, and a comparative study has been conducted to check whether the alleged similarities can be found in these works as well. Works published prior to 1721, the publication date of *Lettres Persanes*, have been selected as well as works published subsequently, so as to examine the alleged exclusive dependence of "Igrot Meshulam" on Montesquieu and its possible affinity to other epistolary writings.

Following this search for sources of influence on "Igrot Meshulam," and the impact of the European cultural milieu and Enlightenment literature on Hebrew Haskalah, this study will explore intrinsic factors as well. In this particular case, it is believed that "Igrot Meshulam" is better understood when studied against Euchel's previous writings, probing Euchel's own experience within the Jewish spheres.

The study of the alleged dependence of Euchel upon Montesquieu may be classified into four categories of apparent similarities and one category of dissimilarities between their respective works. Some mentioned earlier in passing will be elaborated below.

Similarities Stemming from the Epistolary Genre

The first category consists of those similarities that result from the epistolary genre itself. The form of epistolary writing requires certain literary devices, which, since they are generally found in other such works, should not be taken as conclusive evidence of the influence of *Lettres Persanes* on "Igrot Meshulam." One such device is the introduction of the fictional publisher/editor, who allegedly provides the letters to the journal or to the publishing house; this fictive persona is found in both works. However, this literary device is common in other epistolary writings such as the *Turkish Spy*, *Letters from the Dead to the Living*, and *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century*,⁵⁴ and

⁵⁴ "Introduction," *Lettres Persane, Oeuvres Complètes de Montesquieu*, 1:51–53; "Igrot Meshulam," pp. 38–39. Shaanan, 'Iyunim, p. 77, cites the epistolary form as "reminiscent of Montesquieu's invention" (cf. G. L. Van Roosbroeck, *Persian Letters Before Montesquieu*, New York, 1972). In order to substantiate our contention, a number of representative works in the epistolary, pseudo-Oriental genre, published before

hence may not be cited as evidence of Euchel's dependence upon Montesquieu.

Similarly, the presentation of the letters as translations from an Oriental into a European language is found in both works, as, indeed, in other works of the genre.⁵⁵ Another technique frequently employed in epistolary writings is the inclusion of stories within the letters.⁵⁶ The "foreign observer," too, mentioned above, is conventional in these writings, so that use of this feature does not constitute

1721—the publication year of *Lettres Persanes*—and following that year, were examined. See Thomas Brown, *Letters from the Dead to the Living*, 3rd ed. (London, 1703), preface; Giovanni P. Marana, *The Eight Volumes of Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*, 18th ed. (London, 1707), vol. 1, "To the Reader," pp. 1–2; cf. Arthur J. Weitzman, ed., "Introduction," *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* (New York, 1970), pp. viii, x; Daniel Defoe, *A Continuation of Letters Written by a Turkish Spy at Paris* (London, 1718), preface, pp. iii–viii; Samuel Madden, *Memoires of the Twentieth Century* (London, 1733), preface, pp. 18–22; George L. Lyttelton, *Letters from a Persian in England to His Friend at Ispahan*, 4th ed. (London, 1735), vol. 1, p. v, "To the Book-seller"; Lyttelton, *The Persian Letters* (vol. 2 of *Letters from a Persian*), (London, 1735), p. iii. It should be pointed out that some of the topics compared in these categories were suggested by the Hebrew critics while others are offered in this article for the purpose of checking any possible connection between the French and Hebrew works.

⁵⁵ "Introduction," *Lettres Persanes*, p. 52; "Igrof Meshulam," pp. 38–39. See also Brown, *Letters from the Dead*, preface, p. 4 (my pagination); Marana, *Turkish Spy*, vol. 1, "To the Reader," p. 3 (my pagination); cf. Weitzman, "Introduction," *Turkish Spy* (1970), p. viii; Defoe, *A Continuation of Letters*, preface, pp. iii–viii; Madden, *Memoirs*, p. 22 ("translating" the 20th-century English into 18th-century English); Lyttelton, *Letters from a Persian*, p. v; Lyttelton, *The Persian Letters*, "The Translator's Preface," p. iii.

⁵⁶ *Lettres Persanes*: letters 11–14: The story of the Troglodytes; letter 141: The story of Zuleima; letter 142: A mythological story; "Igrof Meshulam" has the story of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (pp. 81–83), and the story of Don Joseph Pichon (pp. 101–102). See also: Defoe, *A Continuation*, pp. 34–35: The story of the merchant of Rochel and the skull; pp. 40–41: The story of the woman pope; p. 249: The story of Atlantis; Madden, *Memoirs*, pp. 101–128: A catalogue of relics; Lyttelton, *Letters from a Persian*, pp. 18–25: The love of Ludovico and Honoria; pp. 81–117: The story of Polydore and Emilia; Marquis d'Argens, *The Jewish Spy*, 3rd ed. (London, 1766), 1:22–23: The story of the Carmelite father Ange; pp. 52–54: The story of the priest who was canonized through a miracle performed at his grave; pp. 134–140: A letter within a letter; Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World*, in *Persian and Chinese Letters* (Washington, 1901; published in 1762), pp. 360–364: The story of Catharina; pp. 382–385: The story of the princess and her two daughters.

proof of direct borrowing from *Lettres Persanes*.⁵⁷ The genre also has features in common with the travelogue and hence some inherent similarities.

Similarities Abound in Enlightenment Literature

The second category includes certain subjects and ideas that abound in Enlightenment literature in general and also in epistolary writings. Some of these are apparently common both to *Lettres Persanes* and "Igroṭ Meshulam"; however, they do not necessarily prove a direct borrowing from a single source, let alone from Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*. For example, the interest in Spain could be narrowed down more specifically to similar characterizations of Spaniards in both works as phlegmatic, lazy, having an aversion to work, and as being extremely proud. In addition, the Spanish Inquisition is cited in both works as cruel, and Spanish religious institutions as extremely intolerant. These latter references are said by some scholars to be a conclusive proof of affinity, but Euchel certainly did not have to resort to *Lettres Persanes* for information on the cruelty of the Inquisition and on Spanish intolerance; nor, for that matter, did he necessarily draw from Montesquieu his clichés about the Spanish character. This material is readily available in other epistolary writings,⁵⁸ to say nothing of works of other genres, which were available to Euchel.

⁵⁷ Cf. Van Roosbroeck, *Persian Letters Before Montesquieu*, pp. 22ff., 40, 41ff.; and Newell Richard Bush, *The Marquis d'Argens and His Philosophical Correspondence* (Ann Arbor, 1953), p. 52. Once the foreign observer has become a literary convention, one notes an attempt on the part of the publisher/editor to authenticate his use of the foreign observer figure. Lyttelton, in his introduction "To the Bookseller," in *Letters from a Persian*, writes: "I am aware that some People may suspect that the Character of a *Persian* is *Fictitious*, as many such Counterfeits have appeared both in France and England. But whoever reads them with Attention, will be convinc'd, that they are certainly the Work of a perfect Stranger. The Observations are so *Foreign* and *Out of the Way*, such *remote Hints* and *imperfect Notions* are taken up, *our present Happy Condition* is in all Respect *so ill understood*, that it is hardly possible any *Englishman* shou'd be the Author" (p. v).

⁵⁸ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 78, pp. 258–263; "Igroṭ Meshulam," p. 174. The cliché of the Spaniards being extremely proud is used in other writings. See, for example, Marana, *The Second Volume of Letters of Writ by a Turkish Spy*, book 3, letter 26, p. 244: "The *Spaniards*, are the *Proudest People* in the World"; and *The Jewish Spy*,

Again, both writers depict their Oriental protagonists as driven to undertake their respective European journeys by their desire to acquire knowledge and examine the unfamiliar customs of Europe. As a result of their encounters with an alien culture and religion, both Usbek and Meshulam are made to voice doubts concerning their own religious practices. "I have doubts," Usbek writes to the "servant of the prophets . . . I must trace them down." Thus, the dependence of Euchel's work on Montesquieu's is alleged.⁵⁹ Significantly, however, the desire to seek knowledge on the one hand, and the voicing of skepticism about one's religious practices and beliefs on the other, are in no way unique to *Lettres Persanes* or to "Igrof Meshulam." They abound in such epistolary literature under review as the *Turkish Spy*, *The Jewish Spy*, and *The Citizen of the World*.⁶⁰

vol. 1, letter 37, p. 279. The treatment by both Montesquieu and Euchel of the Inquisition is cited by Shaanan (*Iyunim*, p. 78) and Neiman ("A Hebrew Imitation," p. 166) as linking the two authors. The intolerance and cruelty of the Inquisition in the Vatican and in Spain are highlighted in many such writings. See, for example, Defoe, *A Continuation of Letters*, pp. 6, 19, 56, 271; *The Jewish Spy* 1, p. 56 ("That Inquisition which thirsteth after the Blood of *Israel*"), p. 176.

⁵⁹ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 17, p. 93; on his desire to acquire knowledge see letter 1, p. 54. In "Igrof Meshulam," see p. 39 (his goal: acquisition of knowledge and learning other people's cultures, customs and opinions), and pp. 40, 44, 45 (Meshulam's skepticism). Cf. Paulina Kra, "The Invisible Chain of the *Lettres Persanes*," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 23 (Geneva, 1963) 23–24. The desire to acquire knowledge is cited by Shaanan, *Iyunim*, p. 77, and Neiman, "A Hebrew Imitation," p. 164, as a proof of resemblance of the French and Hebrew works.

⁶⁰ While the mission of the "spy" in the spy series (such as *Turkish Spy*, and *A Continuation of Letters*) is understandably the acquisition of knowledge, the foreign observer stories have it too. See, for example, Lyttelton, *Letters from a Persian*, pp. 1–2: Selim writes to Mirza that since Usbek (of *Lettres Persanes*) had not provided them with a firsthand report on England, he has "an ardent Desire to know the rest" of the places; he is thus going on this trip so "that I might be able to gratify thy Thirst of Knowledge." Similarly, Aaron Monceca, in *The Jewish Spy*, is "being resolved to see every Thing with my own Eyes" (1:29). And Lien Chi Altangi, in his first letter, advises his correspondent: "I begin to learn somewhat of their manners and customs" (*The Citizen of the World*, 1:295). As to the special interest of the foreign observer in manners and customs" see n. 97 below. Skepticism develops gradually by foreign observers as they begin to realize the relativity of all religions. Upon comparing religious dogmas and practices with their own, they discern some positive aspects of the foreign religion as well as some negative aspects of their own religious principles and practices. One necessary step in the road to skepticism is the realization on the part of

God's love for humanity and the corollary obligation on the part of human beings to love one another are recurrent themes in both works, and provide further confirmation of their affinity. Yet, these are not uniquely Montesquieu's ideas, nor Euchel's, for they are to be found in other Enlightenment writings.⁶¹ That the ordinances of religion ought to benefit all of mankind is also emphasized in both works, but this notion, too, may be found in other writings of the Enlightenment.⁶² The figure of the ultra-orthodox Muslim Mullah

the observer that each religion claims that it alone possesses truth, and that believers of all other religions are destined to damnation. Thus, the Turkish spy finds some positive aspects in Christianity: some precepts in Christianity, if truly observed, are no less holy than those in Islam. "As for me," he writes, "I begin really to think, That there may be *Saints* amongst the *Christians*, as there are amongst *Us*." Following that, he dwells on the relative nature of religious truth: "They have one *Article* that puzzles me. They affirm, There is but one Truth, so that we are lost, if we are not *Christians*, or they are damned, if they are not *Mahometans*" (*Turkish Spy*, vol. 1, book 1, letter 11, p. 27). In *The Jewish Spy*, however, it appears that the Jewish writers are skeptical from the outset, and it did not result directly from their travels or from their experience in comparing religions.

⁶¹ *Letters Persanes*, letter 46, pp. 464–466. Cf. Nieman's allegation of resemblance of the two works on account of the similarity in discussion of "the ideal of 'love for fellow man'" ("A Hebrew Imitation," p. 167). In the Enlightenment literature, for example, the five principles of Natural Religion in Herbert of Cherbury, *The Antient Religion of the Gentiles* (London, 1705), pp. 3–4, and cf. Charles Blount's version in his *Religio Laici* (London, 1683), pp. 49–50; J. J. Rousseau, "Profession de Foi du Vicairé Savoyard," *Émile, Oeuvres Complètes de J. J. Rousseau*, 1 (Paris, 1852), pp. 590–591. These notions are to be found also in epistolary literature. See, for example, the Turkish spy's characterization of Islam as love, and his rejection of the Christian damnation of nonbelievers, in Defoe's *A Continuation of Letters*, p. 21. The Chinese writer characterizes the "Divine Being" as held by the Persians as "wise and just, and such as all those ought to have who don't suffer themselves to be blinded either by Prejudices, or by Sophistry of their own forming" (Marquis d'Argens, *Chinese Letters*, p. 196). The Jewish writer depicts God's attributes as goodness and justice (*The Jewish Spy* 1, letter 36, p. 263). Worship, according to him, was handed down for man's happiness and not for his destruction; it is inconceivable that God should create men in order that they may be damned (pp. 268–269).

⁶² *Lettres Persanes*, letter 46, pp. 464–466; letter 49, pp. 239–242; "Igot Meshulam," p. 48. In addition to the sources cited in n. 60, see also Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (London, 1730), pp. 31–49. The Turkish spy writes to Bedredin, "Superiour of the Convent of Dervises": "But dost thou not believe, thou, who art a *Dervis*, the most illuminated, That a Man, of what Religion soever he be, provided he be a good Man, may be happy after his Death? Tell me, I pray thee, thy Opinion herein; it is a Point very important to be decided" (*Turkish Spy*, vol. 1, book 1,

may be thought to parallel Meshulam's grandfather. Their religious mentality is very similar, and their manner of validating the authenticity of respective Islamic and Jewish ordinances and laws may be very similar.⁶³ But as such techniques are generally adopted by authors when, in satire, they present the figures of orthodox persons in a pseudo-authentic way, or make use of their religious naïveté,⁶⁴ the dependence of one work upon the other is not conclusively established.

The two protagonists' similar interest in history and, more importantly, their special interest in historical processes, while resembling one another, are not necessarily evidence of influence, as asserted, since similar features are found in other works as well.⁶⁵ Again, al-

letter 11, p. 27). Aaron Monceca writes to Isaac Onis, "a Rabbi at Constantinople," regarding the ceremonies: "Ceremonies ought to be observed when it may be done without risking one's Life, and the Lives of a thousand Innocents; but when there is such evident Danger impending, the Use thereof may be suspended. It is not the same Thing as to the Substance of Religion, from which nothing can nor ought to excuse us" (*The Jewish Spy* 1, letter 24, pp. 175–176). He further writes that precepts were abolished in the past so as to facilitate the survival of the Jews. Thus, Spanish Jews, namely, the Marranos, who are not observing circumcision, "at this Day," fearing for their safety, are justified (p. 176). It should be pointed out that Meshulam, too, is very appreciative of the Marranos in their desire to adhere to the fundamentals of Judaism, while discarding those precepts whose observance may endanger their lives. In his sympathy for the Marranos, and his emphasis on "the worship of the heart which is fundamental" ("Igrof Meshulam," p. 44), Euchel comes close to the views expressed in *The Jewish Spy* underlying which are found some tenets of Judaism and deism. The similarity between deism and Judaism is stressed in *The Jewish Spy* (vol. 1, pp. 27–28; and cf. the Index, Letter D, "Deists of France," where the idea is put forth overtly: "*Deists of France*, skillfully painted under the character of *Jews*"). For more discussion of the Marranos see also p. 28. The similarity between *The Jewish Spy* and "Igrof Meshulam" points to a common source, i.e., the Jewish code.

⁶³ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 16, pp. 91–92; letter 18, pp. 95–97; letter 39, pp. 150–152 (Hadji Ibbi); "Igrof Meshulam," letter 2, pp. 46–47 (grandfather).

⁶⁴ See, for example, *Turkish Spy*, vol. 1, book 1, letter 9, pp. 17–20; and *A Continuation of Letters*, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 136, pp. 422–424; "Igrof Meshulam," pp. 81–83, 171–172. Shaanan (*Iyunim*, p. 79) stresses some similarity in the protagonists' interest in history books. An interest in contemporary historical trends is indeed very much the business of the "spy." See, for instance, in *A Continuation of Letters*, a description of the fall of the English king (pp. 12–17) and the war between France and Germany (pp. 22–27). There is, however, also an interest in past history: the history of the Arab nation and its culture (pp. 126–131). *The Jewish Spy*, discussing the writing of history, criticizes several history books (*The Jewish Spy* 1, p. 286), and mentions sources that may be used for the writing of history (p. 285).

though the protagonists of both works pass through Smyrna⁶⁶ and Livorno (Leghorn), there are many other locales that do not correspond in the two works.

Consequently, although there are various similarities between *Lettres Persanes* and "Igrot Meshulam," these similarities are only superficial. In addition, the cited similarities abound in epistolary literature written both before and after Montesquieu, and some of the items also are found in other writings of Enlightenment literature. Thus there is no convincing evidence of specific influence by *Lettres Persanes* upon the Hebrew work in regards to the ideas and topics addressed in both texts.

Antithetical Treatment of Topics

The third category consists of themes which, though found in both *Lettres Persanes* and "Igrot Meshulam," are accorded antithetical treatment in these works. This material, like that of the other categories, may also be found in other writings of the period.

While women's freedom is satirized by the French writer, Euchel praises the social role of European women and the degree of freedom they have achieved. In spite of the obvious dissimilarities in this topic, advocates of affinity cite it as support of their contention.⁶⁷ Understandably, Euchel's purpose in such praise is to suggest that the Jewish people adopt this new attitude toward women and thus modernize Jewish social life. As a Maskil, his aim is to reform Jewish life, and to model its society, religion, and culture along the lines of its European counterparts. Significantly, women's issues are dealt with in various ways in such epistolary literature as the *Chinese Letters* and *The Jewish Spy*.⁶⁸ In regard to this subject matter,

⁶⁶ Both Shaanan (*Iyunim*, pp. 77–78; *Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Haḥadashah Lizrameah*, 1:76) and Nieman ("A Hebrew Imitation," p. 168) emphasize the resemblance in locale between Montesquieu and Euchel. Similarity in locale is found also in the epistolary literature under review. Aaron Monceca, too, passes through Smyrna (*The Jewish Spy* 1, p. 13). See also n. 50 above.

⁶⁷ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 26, pp. 115–118; letter 38, pp. 147–149; letter 52, pp. 186–188; "Igrot Meshulam," pp. 84–85, 175. The discussion of European women, while differently treated by Montesquieu and Euchel, is nevertheless mentioned by Shaanan (*Iyunim*, p. 78; *Hasifrut Ha'ivrit Haḥadashah Lizrameah*, 1:76) and by Nieman ("A Hebrew Imitation," p. 168) as correlating the French and the Hebrew works.

⁶⁸ Cf. Weitzman's introduction to his edition of the *Turkish Spy*, p. xii. Women, in general, become an object of the foreign observer's interest. The Chinese depicts their

then, there is no real similarity between *Lettres Persanes* and “Igröt Meshulam.”

Again, unlike the Persians who seem to ridicule French literature and French libraries, Meshulam is depicted as appreciative of Western literature and libraries. This interest is cited as a convincing similarity between Montesquieu and Euchel, although each treats the subject matter differently. Yet, an interest in libraries and literature is in no way unique to Montesquieu. It is found elsewhere in epistolary literature, for example, in *The Jewish Spy*.⁶⁹ In order to understand Euchel’s motives, one must bear in mind the state of Hebrew literature at the time, and the lack of public libraries devoted to Judaica. Nor is it surprising that when Meshulam compares Arabic poetry and Hebrew poetry, which is modeled upon Arabic poetry, to Italian poetry and its translation into Hebrew, he finds the latter worthy of much praise.⁷⁰ To Euchel, European literature is the model that Hebrew literature should adopt.

Both works pay much attention to customs and social practices. However, while Montesquieu’s intention is to satirize them, Euchel extols such customs, which he hopes to introduce into Jewish so-

customs, costumes and make-up (*Chinese Letters*, pp. 7–10). He is able to compare the liberty given to women by the Europeans with the strict attitude of the Persians toward their women only to conclude that the Chinese treat their women moderately (p. 98). To the Jewish writer in *The Jewish Spy*, Jewish women are the example of chastity unlike Christian, European women (vol. 1, pp. 3–5). He describes, tongue in cheek, the liberty of women in Italy—which Euchel praises so much (see n. 67)—as follows: “This Liberty which the Women have at *Genoa*, renders Society amiable and charming. There is not a City in Italy where a Traveller and a Foreigner may pass their Time more agreeably” (letter 34, p. 251). I do not know whether Euchel read or used *The Jewish Spy*. He could have read the German translation, by Friedrich Nicolai, *Jüdische Briefe*, which was published in Berlin in 1764–66. Whatever his sources were, he clearly used the material in a way that served his purpose, namely, advocating the liberation of Jewish women.

⁶⁹ *Lettres Persanes*, letters 133–137, pp. 414–427; “Igröt Meshulam,” pp. 44, 46, 174. Cf. *The Jewish Spy* 1, letter 13, pp. 85–92 (public libraries in Paris); and criticism of literature (pp. 255–262). The influence of Montesquieu on Euchel regarding Meshulam’s visit to a library is cited by Shaanan (‘*Iyunim*, p. 79; *Hasifrut Ha’ivrit Haḥadashah Lizrameah*, 1:77; “The Letters of Meshulam as Symptom,” p. 363) and by Neiman, “A Hebrew Imitation,” p. 169); Shaanan also adds Meshulam’s interest in “literary subjects” as another likeness between Montesquieu and Euchel.

⁷⁰ “Igröt Meshulam,” pp. 176, 245–249. Cf. a critical appreciation of a Turkish poet, Achmet Chelibi, as “extravagant” and “monstrous” in *The Jewish Spy* 1, p. 192.

ciety. Similarly, the French writer is critical of religious ceremonies whereas Euchel is highly respectful of them. It must be added, however, that an interest in European customs and practices on the part of the foreign observer is at the core of all similar writings, including such examples as the *Turkish Spy*, *Letters from a Persian*, and *The Jewish Spy*.⁷¹

Of a different kind are Usbek's comments regarding the benefits to the state from citizens who profess a minority religion. These people, according to Usbek's mode of thought, hope to advance socially and materially, and thus they become beneficial to the state.⁷² Behind this notion is the theory that religious pluralism and religious tolerance benefit the state. Euchel also cites the material ambitions of members of a minority group, but he does so in order to wage an all-out attack on the conceited Jews of his time, which he does through a historical analysis of the rise and fall of Spanish Jewry.⁷³ Euchel thus reverses the treatment of a topic also found in *Lettres Persanes*, in this instance, turning approval into disapproval, a technique that serves his purpose very well indeed. As in the other cases of comparison, European Enlightenment literature generally stresses the idea of religious pluralism and religious tolerance.⁷⁴

⁷¹ See n. 60 above, and n. 97 below.

⁷² *Lettres Persanes*, letter 85 pp. 278–281.

⁷³ "Igrot Meshulam," pp. 81–83, 172–173. See *The Age of Haskalah*, p. 225.

⁷⁴ On the necessity of religious pluralism, see Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (London, 1733), letter 6, "On the Presbyterians": "If one religion only were allowed in England, the government would very possibly become arbitrary; if there were but two, the people wou'd cut one another's throats; but as there are such a multitude, they all live happy and in peace" (p. 45). The Index has it clearly stated: "Religions, (Plurality of) these very necessary, and of Advantage to the Happiness and Prosperity of the English" (unpaginated). Yet, no one should suspect Voltaire of acknowledging religious tolerance in England. In effect, letter 5, "On the Church of England," spells it out: "England is properly the country of sectarists . . . Nevertheless, tho' every one is permitted to serve God in whatever mode or fashion he thinks proper, yet their true religion, that in which a man makes his fortune, is the sect of Episcoparians or Churchmen, call'd the Church of England . . . No person can possess an employment either in England or Ireland, unless he be rank'd among the faithful" (pp. 34–35). Harcourt Brown points out that the first quotation from Voltaire (p. 45) was written originally in English; see his article "The Composition of the Letters Concerning the English Nation," *The Age of the Enlightenment*, Studies Presented to T. Besterman, *St. Andrews University Publications*, No. 57 (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 22.

Another difference is found in the use of questions. Usbek addresses various questions in his letters to his correspondents in Persia, and he receives answers to those questions. The questions are intended to arouse interest, to create expectations and tension, and to form some continuity in the novel.⁷⁵ Meshulam, however, asks rhetorical questions for which he receives no answers. Perhaps Euchel planned to have these questions answered in subsequent letters that were not published or were never written. As they now appear, these questions are purely rhetorical: they are intended to allude to Euchel's views on important matters which he did not dare express openly.

The nature of the questions is manifested in the following example, mentioned above: "I do not know," Meshulam writes, "whether these things were truthful [correct], for according to my thinking the success [happiness] of the Israelites is tied to the observance of the *mitsvot* alone, and if it were possible to have wholesomeness [achieve perfection] and to be happy without the observance of the *mitsvot*, would not Socrates the Greek and Zoroaster the Hindu [!] have as much wholesomeness and be as happy as any Israelite? Let me know, my brother, your view in this inquiry."⁷⁶

Meshulam is asking one of the most important questions concerning Jews in the modern age: Is it possible for a Jew to be happy and have a sense of fulfillment without observing the religious commandments? In other words, how would a Jew retain his identity as a Jew while attempting to adopt non-religious aspects of European culture? Considering Euchel's other writings and the *Weltanschauung* of the Hebrew Enlightenment, I believe that Euchel's intention is to point out that indeed a non-observant Jew could be as happy as anyone else.⁷⁷ Finally, it may be pointed out that the technique of rhetorical questioning is frequently used in epistolary literature.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 16, pp. 91–92; letter 18, pp. 95–97.

⁷⁶ "Igot Meshulam," p. 44. See discussion in text at n. 31.

⁷⁷ See my articles on Euchel cited in n. 17.

⁷⁸ The technique of the question is frequently used in the epistolary literature. The Turkish spy asks questions (see the question in quotation, n. 62 above), yet we have only his letters as no replies were incorporated in the book. Rhetorical questions are often used in *The Jewish Spy* in the manner employed by Meshulam. Aaron Monceca asks Isaac Onis: "What thinkest thou, dear *Isaac*, to see so much Confusion and Disorder in the Manners and Customs of the *Nazarenes*?" (*The Jewish Spy* 1, letter 1, p. 3).

Themes with a Jewish Slant

The fourth category includes themes that, though common to both works, have a uniquely Jewish slant in Euchel's story. In most such cases Euchel attaches a meaningful Jewish touch, or a Jewish coloring, to the matter at hand. In both works, for example, the Oriental protagonists are aware of European clothes and are sensitive about their own different-looking attire, concluding that although their exotic clothes serve as a topic of conversation, their dress constitutes, in effect, a hindrance to their attempt to learn the truth about Europe.⁷⁹ Euchel goes further: the changing of clothes is seen as a very important symbolic act that transcends the meaning given to it in the French work, or in such a story as the *Turkish Spy*.⁸⁰ In addition, clothing becomes a controversial issue between Meshulam's grandfather of the old generation and his father, of the middle generation, each of whom represents a different perception and interpretation of Judaism.⁸¹ Meshulam, in changing his Oriental dress, takes the first step toward adopting European culture. Whether or not one is permitted by Jewish law to adopt European dress is a focal point

Onis does not answer this question directly, however, he does relate his own impressions from his first visit to Europe (letter 9, pp. 60–66). In the same vein, Monceca resorts to rhetorical questions as he relates a "discovery" he has made in Paris: "I have a crabbed Question to propose to thee, and desire thee to communicate it to other Rabbies of thy Acquaintance, that I may know both their Sentiments and thine. I have discovered a vast number of *Jews* at Paris, who do not believe they are *Jews*, or know any thing at all of the Matter. Thou wilt think, perhaps, that I only jest, yet nothing is more true. . . . I know not how we can refuse them the Title of *Jews*. They believe a God, who created the World, who rewards the Good, and punishes the Bad. What more do we believe? Is not that the Whole of our Religion, except a few Ceremonies that have been enjoined us by our Doctors and Priests?" (*The Jewish Spy* 1, letter 4, pp. 27–28). As in the previous case, Onis does not answer his questions. They are indeed rhetorical questions.

⁷⁹ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 30, pp. 128–129.

⁸⁰ *Turkish Spy*, vol. 1, book 1, letter 1, p. 2. The "spy," of necessity, must change his clothes so as to appear an ordinary citizen of the country. Monceca, too, wishes to appear European in his attire, thus—he writes—"I have left off my *Levant* Robe for a close-bodied Coat. . . . I would fain have kept on my old Habit, but was obliged to dress my self after the *French* Manner, or expect to be stared at by all the Eyes of Paris" (*The Jewish Spy* 1, letter 2, pp. 9–10). Although Monceca is not attaching any importance to the change of clothes, as does Meshulam, he does make an interesting analogy between the clothes' fashion and religious fashion (pp. 10–12).

⁸¹ "Igrot Meshulam," letter 2, pp. 46–50.

of discussion among the protagonists, who represent the various segments of Judaism in "Igroth Meshulam."⁸²

A comparative treatment of Christian and Muslim religious ceremonies is used to underline the preference accorded by Montesquieu to the original source of all religions, namely, natural religion.⁸³ It was his hope, as it was the hope of the deists among European thinkers of the Enlightenment, that natural religion should gain ground and eventually replace the existing revealed religions. The treatment of this theme by Euchel serves another purpose: he intends to point out that foreign elements penetrated into Judaism in the past and to show that the halakhic ability to make changes in Jewish religious law in the future will be based on such precedents.⁸⁴ Describing the Catholic worship in Spain as very similar to Jewish worship, Meshulam writes: "Most of their prayers are the songs of David from the Book of Psalms translated into their language . . . and I saw them observing customs like the customs of Israel: they pray *tefilat hashkavah* [the prayer for the dead], and light candles for the souls of the dead." And he concludes in the rhetorical manner noted above: "I do not know whether they had seen and followed the custom of Israel, or whether those customs came to us while we were in exile among them; for I do not know whether there is any mention of these customs in either the Jerusalem or the Babylonian Talmud. Let me know your view in this matter."⁸⁵ Meshulam implies here that some Jewish customs are not Jewish at all in origin, but do indeed constitute a direct borrowing from Christianity.⁸⁶

The Jewish perspective that Euchel lends to these themes makes it rather difficult, if not impossible, to trace their origin exclusively

⁸² "Igroth Meshulam," pp. 40–41, 43. Meshulam's grandfather opposes the change of his Arabic clothes to European ones while his father favors the change. Out of respect to his grandfather, Meshulam does not change his clothes until after he departed from him. The grandfather believes that a Jew must not change "the customs of his fathers [forefathers?]." However, Meshulam voices his opinion that there is no divine law concerning the custom of wearing a particular dress. Following the advice of his father, he changes his Oriental clothes. See my study of Euchel, cited in n. 2, for a full discussion of the subject and its meaning.

⁸³ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 35, pp. 138–140.

⁸⁴ "Igroth Meshulam," letter 2, p. 45. An analysis of Euchel's text is found in Pelli, cited in n. 17.

⁸⁵ "Igroth Meshulam," letter 2, p. 45; *Lettres Persanes*, letter 40. Cf. Friedlander's article and book, cited in n. 36 above, p. 112.

⁸⁶ See my study of Euchel, cited in n. 17, part two, pp. 64–65, nn. 125–128 and their related text, and in *The Age of Haskalah*, pp. 223–224, nn. 125–128.

to *Lettres Persanes*. Indeed, various other epistolary writings treat religious themes in a similar manner.⁸⁷

The various religious practices and ordinances described in both works are, of course, seen in the Hebrew work from the Jewish perspective. Prayers are found in *Lettres Persanes* as well as in "Igrof Meshulam."⁸⁸ It is only natural that the prayers in the Hebrew work should be Jewish prayers. In the same vein, the pseudo-Islamic sermonizing, found in the French work, has its parallel in the old school, orthodox homilies of traditional Judaism, as represented by Meshulam's grandfather.⁸⁹ Similarly, the discussion of the achievement of happiness in *Lettres Persanes* is paralleled in "Igrof Meshulam," with the observance of the Jewish commandments.⁹⁰

Finally, the Troglodyte story, narrated at length in Montesquieu's fiction, has its apparent counterpart in "Igrof Meshulam" in the story of the Jews of Spain.⁹¹ As in the other examples discussed in this

⁸⁷ A common literary convention seems to prevail in these writings. It consists of the writer's ostensible discovery that those professing another religion and customs are virtually identical with their counterparts in the writer's own religion. For the foreign observer it is indeed a discovery; however, this device is employed in such a way as to convey the message of discovery to the reader. In addition to the objectives discussed above in the text (Montesquieu's and Euchel's), this technique adds a twist of irony to the story. See n. 78 above for such a use in *The Jewish Spy* 1, letter 4, pp. 27–28. It should be pointed out that mourning and burial customs are featured in the *Chinese Letters*, pp. 305–314. Unlike the glorifying tone of Meshulam in describing the church, Aaron Monceca draws a grotesque caricature of a church and the worship therein (*The Jewish Spy* 1, pp. 29–32).

⁸⁸ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 96, pp. 164–166; "Igrof Meshulam," p. 41.

⁸⁹ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 39, pp. 150–152, Hadji Ibbi's letter to Ben Josué, a Jew converted to Islam. In "Igrof Meshulam" the grandfather, Mordechai, employs the traditional homilies in his presentation of his will to Meshulam (pp. 46–47). See my analysis of his letter in the study cited in n. 17. Cf. The Mullah's reply to Usbek's request for religious guidance as interpreted by Paulina Kra, in "Religion in Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 72 (Geneva, 1970) 55–63.

⁹⁰ *Lettres Persanes*, letter 10, p. 75; "Igrof Meshulam," p. 44. See the previous note and its related text. Cf. Shaanan's "The Letters of Meshulam as Symptom," pp. 362, 367, regarding Euchel's yearning for mundane happiness.

⁹¹ *Lettres Persanes*, letters 11–14, pp. 76–88. The story of the rise and fall of Spanish Jewry ("Igrof Meshulam," pp. 81–83) is directly and openly critical of the conceit of the Jews in Spain, in contrast to the ostensible praise of the virtues of the Troglodytes by Montesquieu. I have elaborated on the Jewish theme in my study on Euchel cited in n. 17. On two interpretations of the Troglodytes story as allegory, see Alessandro S. Crisafulli, "Montesquieu's Story of the Troglodytes: Its Background,

category, the similarities between the Troglodyte story and that of the rise and fall of Spanish Jewry are too broad and too general to warrant the conclusion that Euchel's work is here indebted to Montesquieu.

Euchel's Other Epistolary Writing: "Igot Isaac Euchel"

Evidently, Euchel's possible sources may be said to be quite complex, exceeding the simple assumption of the direct and exclusive influence of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persane* on "Igot Meshulam." Clearly, then, one must look elsewhere for a more meaningful and significant point of reference for the interpretation of "Igot Meshulam." I believe that such a source may be found by a more thorough exploration of Euchel's other writings.

Students of Euchel's epistolary writing have thus far failed to examine "Igot Meshulam" against the background of Euchel's other Hebraic works. It is especially surprising that no attention has been paid to a similar epistolary work published by Euchel in 1785, which certainly should be compared with "Igot Meshulam." In that year Euchel published in *Hame'asef* a series of letters written to his student Michal Friedländer, under the title "Igot Yitshaq Eichel Letalmido Michal Friedländer." These letters were written on the occasion of Euchel's documented voyage to Copenhagen in 1784.⁹² Although the two epistolary works by Euchel are essentially quite different, there appears to be a close relationship between these authentic letters and his later fictional story in epistolary form. It is safe to assume that if the European epistolary writings mentioned

Meaning, and Significance," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 57 (1943) 372-392; Kra, "Religion in Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 40-55.

⁹²"Igot Isaac Euchel," *Hame'asef* 2 (1785) 116-121, 137-142. These letters were republished by Adam Martinet, *Tiferet Yisrael* (Bamberg, 1837), pp. 59-69; by Shmuel Yosef Fuenn, *Sofrei Yisrael* (Vilna, 1871), pp. 134-137; and by Pelli, *Mavo Lasifrut Ha'ivrit Ha'hadashah Bame'ot Ha-18 Veba-19, Mekorot* (Jerusalem, 1972), pp. 23-24, 26-27. On Euchel's trip and documents related to it, see H. Vogelstein, "Handschriftliches zu Isaak Abraham Euchels Biographie," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Juden* (Leipzig, 1916) 221-231. Both Shaanan and Neiman, and for that matter all students of Euchel, are oblivious to the relation between "Igot Isaac Euchel" and "Igot Meshulam." See additional references in my book *Sugot Vesugyot Besifrut Hahaskalah Ha'ivrit*, p. 39, n. 52.

above did exert any influence on Euchel, such influence was interwoven with his personal experience during his own travels, as evidenced in his letters to Friedländer.

As mentioned earlier, it is only in these literary attempts by Euchel that one notes the impact of the epistolary novel, which prevailed in European literature at the time.⁹³ Epistolary techniques in "Igrof Isaac Euchel" are rather limited, consisting of only one letter, sent from Euchel to his student. The letter is divided into sections based on the localities visited by the travelers, but the author failed to publish a continuation of the first letter. His second attempt at the epistolary form, "Igrof Meshulam," constitutes an important development of the genre, and contains several letters written by various people with differing views.

"Igrof Isaac Euchel" is an epistolary piece that may be classified as a travelogue, a genre which I discussed elsewhere.⁹⁴ Even though it is rather short and its scope may not be impressive as a travelogue, Euchel's authentic letters possess certain literary qualities that should interest the student of the epistolary genre. They contain detailed and colorful descriptions that the fictional "Igrof Meshulam" lack. For example, in "Igrof Isaac Euchel" the writer describes his departure from his student whereas in "Igrof Meshulam" there is no description of the protagonist's departing from his parents. Similarly, the former work contains various depictions of the purity of nature, which attracts a person to become immersed in it. One may detect the urban inclination to escape into nature, uncorrupted as yet by civilization, as following in the footsteps of Rousseau (p. 119). In his authentic letters Euchel exposes his feelings vis-à-vis nature, and his writing abounds with sentimental depictions of various persons displaying emotions and even crying (p. 137). His writing in "Igrof Isaac Euchel" is much more intimate than in "Igrof Meshulam," exhibiting the personal flavor of a teacher who desires to teach his students even while he is on vacation.

⁹³ See the appendices in Black's *The Epistolary Novel*, listing the epistolary fiction from 1740 to 1840, and the charts (p. 174); and Martha Pike Conant, *The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1908), pp. 155–199, on the epistolary satire.

⁹⁴ A detailed discussion of the travelogue may be found in Hebrew in Pelli, *Sugot Vesugyot*, pp. 205–236

The style of these letters, written in the first person, is that of a flowing conversation with a student, continuing such conversations conducted in the past. The tone is friendly, sometimes patronizing, as the writer endeavors to find a didactic touch in each of the topics discussed, and to transmit this knowledge to his correspondent. At times the didactic information is provided in appended footnotes, as is customary in this genre and others. One such reference instructs the student to check Mendelssohn's translation to Psalm 65:2, "Praise befits You in Zion, O God" (p. 119).

The author is aware of the relationship with his student, and of his stature as teacher and guide, and he presents himself as a figure whom a student should emulate. The religious and inspirational tone thus envelopes this piece. For example, facing nature, he writes: "My spirit was revived, and I was like a person prophesying, standing at the center of creation, witnessing God's works and his deeds" and praising God (p. 119). Subsequently, there is a long contemplative piece on the creation as a testimony of the Creator and man's place in it (pp. 120–121).

There is a citation of another letter given to Euchel by a friend to deliver to his parents. Euchel glorifies his friend's act and teaches his student to do likewise (p. 138). Inclusion of a letter within a letter, or citation of another letter, is customary in the epistolary genre.

There are a number of aspects that Euchel's two epistolary works have in common. Both are travelogues in the form of letters, and in this respect, they are unique in *Hame'asef*. Both works pay attention to customs and practices prevalent in European society, exhibiting them mostly from an admirer's point of view.⁹⁵ Both works intend

⁹⁵ Although Meshulam is critical of the Spaniards in general, he is full of admiration of their manner of worship ("Igot Meshulam," p. 45). The apex of glorification of Europe is found in his description of the Italians (p. 174). Interestingly, and significantly, the positive and glorified attitude toward the Italians has its reflection in Meshulam's similar depiction of Italian Jews (pp. 173, 174) and Italian Hebrew literature (pp. 245–249). Similarly, the negative attitude toward the Spaniards has its reflection in the generally negative attitude toward historical Spanish Jewry, excluding the Marranos (pp. 81–83, 171–173). The generally positive attitude toward Europe is discerned in Meshulam's tone of presentation of certain institutions (libraries, p. 174) and customs (women's liberation, p. 175). A positive depiction of the Italians (as contrasted with the Spaniards, see n. 58) is not unique to the Hebrew work. *The Jewish Spy*, for example, portrays the Genoese as "industrious, addicted to commerce" (vol. 1, letter 28, p. 205). Meshulam writes that they "are diligent in every trade and commerce" ("Igot Meshulam," p. 174). *The Jewish Spy* further depicts the Genoese as

to point out the highly advanced and enlightened position of European society vis-à-vis the alleged inferiority of Jewish society.⁹⁶ The same terminology regarding “customs” and “opinion” is used in the same context in both “Igrot Isaac Euchel” and “Igrot Meshulam.”⁹⁷ Prayer occupies an important place in both. It also plays a

“very polite” people, who “receive Persons that are recommended to them with very great Respect” (vol. 1, letter 34, p. 251). Meshulam depicts the Italians in general as follows: “They are modest and they welcome each person in accordance with his honor” (p. 174). These similarities, however, are not conclusive even in a limited sense, for *The Jewish Spy* contrasts the Genoese with the people of Rome who are portrayed as lazy and insolent . . . (vol. 1, letter 28, pp. 204–205). In his non-fictional letters, Euchel writes that, upon arrival in a new place, it is his goal “to pay attention to the characteristics of every city and condition of the people that dwell in it, and above all, [to pay attention] to our brethren the children of Israel that dwell there, [to] their condition and characteristics, [and to note] whether they are well or not, [and] whether they have begun to graze in the gardens of wisdom, or they refrained from touching it [wisdom]” (“Igrot Isaac Euchel,” p. 118). The phrase “whether they have begun to graze in the gardens of wisdom” is indicative of his point of view regarding the state of contemporary Jews in their adoption of Western culture and secular education and knowledge (= *hokhmah*, wisdom).

⁹⁶ The publisher/editor prefaces the letters by referring to the state of the Jews in exile (“he [God] lowered the glory of Israel to the dust”—“Igrot Meshulam,” p. 38), while praising the enlightenment activities of the Maskilim through their journal, *Hame’asef*. His utilitarian goal is clearly stressed in the preface. For Euchel’s attitude toward Jewish society in his non-fictional letters, see the previous note.

⁹⁷ The term *nimusim* (customs) and *de’ot* (opinions) are associated both in “Igrot Isaac Euchel” (p. 118) and in “Igrot Meshulam” (p. 40). Underlying the concepts in the two works is the notion of the relativity of customs and opinions. The fictional work goes one step further to stress the non-divine nature of these customs and opinions, and their dependence on time and place (pp. 40–41). The term *tekhunah* (characteristic) also appears in the same context in both (“Igrot Isaac Euchel,” p. 118; “Igrot Meshulam,” p. 39). A cursory check on the use of these terms in some of the studied works reveals some instances where “customs” and “opinions” do appear together as the principal interest of the given author. Lyttelton, in his introduction to *Letters from a Persian*, p. vi, writes about “their own admir’d Customs, and favourite Opinions.” Aaron Monceca, in *The Jewish Spy*, writes about “opinions” and “Manners” in one sentence (vol. 1, letter 2, p. 13). However, it seems that the accepted terms are “Manners” and “Customs,” which are more frequently used. See, for example, in the *Chinese Letters*, letter 2, p. 7; letter 5, p. 25. In *The Jewish Spy* 1, letter 1, p. 3; letter 3, p. 24 (by Monceca); letter 9, p. 60 (by Isaac Onis). By contrast, Usbek undertook the trip as a result of his desire for “knowledge” (“savoir”—letter 1), namely, his desire to become educated in Western sciences (“sciences de l’Occident”—letter 8). Usbek uses the term “customs” (“coutumes”—letter 13) and Rica employs the terms “European usages and customs” (“moeurs et . . . coutumes européennes”—letter 24).

vital role in the plot of the story and in its ideology. The narrator-protagonist is portrayed in both works as a true believer who occasionally finds it necessary to pray to his God.⁹⁸

The two epistolary writings manifest a considerable interest in the translation of poetry into Hebrew. The first deals with the translation into incorrect, sloppy Hebrew of a German poem, while the second offers an exemplary translation by the Hebrew poet Ephraim Luzatto of Metastasio's poetry. The latter further discusses the qualities of Italian poetry in comparison with Oriental poetry.⁹⁹

Both works have the same didactic, preaching tone, which is quite natural to "Igrof Isaac Euchel" where Euchel plays his role as a teacher, and where his intention, clearly stated, is to prove that it is possible to express oneself on all subjects through the medium of the Hebrew language.¹⁰⁰ In the fictional work the didactic tone is further complicated by the discovery of the author's covert point of view and the deciphering of the irony in the grandfather's letter.¹⁰¹ Meshulam's rhetorical questions, too, are didactic, since his questions are directed to the reader as well as to his correspondent. Clearly, Meshulam's moralistic preaching to his addressee is intended also for his reader.

As a writer, Euchel uses the persona of his narrator to exhibit his own presence as an educator. This feature is expressed in both works through educational footnotes, which unlike most footnotes in the satirical epistolary genre that in many cases serve for satirical ends, are serious, didactic, and educational.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ "Igrof Isaac Euchel," pp. 119–121 (two out of twelve pages); "Igrof Mushulam," pp. 41, 44, 45.

⁹⁹ "Igrof Isaac Euchel," pp. 140–142, a discussion of translation of a poem by Albrecht von Haller and of the translator occupies over two pages of this twelve-page work. "Igrof Meshulam" devotes almost four pages (out of some 27), more than a full letter, or a chapter, to Italian poetry and its excellent translation into Hebrew. As an example of poetry under the influence of the Oriental-Arabic poetry he cites a poem by the Jewish poet Shmuel Ibn Adiya. See also n. 70 above.

¹⁰⁰ "Igrof Isaac Euchel," pp. 117–118.

¹⁰¹ See my study cited in n. 17, part two, pp. 59–61, nn. 111–115 and their related text.

¹⁰² On the use of footnotes for satirical purpose by the Hebrew writer Perl, see Werses, *Sipur Veshorsho*, pp. 27–28. For the use of notes by the Hebrew author Erter, see Pelli, "Mishitot Hasipur shel Erter Basatirah 'Gilgul Nefesh,'" *Bikoret Ufarshanut* 11–12 (1978) 135–136; published as chapter 6b in *Sugot Vesugyot*, pp. 177–204; initially presented as a paper, "Narrative Techniques of Isaac Erter's Satire 'Gilul

In both works, Euchel employs a unique technique of landscape description, or point of view. His narrator observes the landscape from a central point, his own, and describes the scenery to his right and to his left.¹⁰³ In addition, an identical date—the Hebrew month *Iyar*—appears in the first letter of both works.¹⁰⁴ Some unique seafaring terminology is used likewise in both.¹⁰⁵

The protagonists of the two epistolary writings may also be related to one another. Michal, Euchel's student in the first letters, appears in the persona of Meshulam, a fictional figure who is searching for wisdom and truth. Isaac Euchel (Hebrew initials .נ .נ), the central, active protagonist of the first letters, turns out to be Uriyah Ha'Esh-temoi (the Hebrew initials of which are also .נ .נ).¹⁰⁶

Nefesh,'” at the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem, 1973). It should be stressed that the footnotes in *Lettres Persanes* are not intended for satirical purpose. Cf. Robert F. O'Reilly, “The Structure and Meaning of the *Lettres Persanes*,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 67 (1969) 95–96. Some of the footnotes are intended to highlight the role of the fictional translator who is mentioned in the introduction. Neither are the notes in *The Jewish Spy* of a satirical nature; they are learned and serious. Although the first footnote in the Hebrew work is signed *divrei Hame'asfim*, “the words of the editors of *Hame'asef*” (p. 39), and similarly the first footnote in each new installment (pp. 172, 246) are so signed, I tend to think that Euchel himself, a former editor of the journal, and a frequent contributor afterwards, provided the footnotes himself, and used the customary editorial signature. At least one such footnote (p. 40, note ***) plays an important role in deciphering the point of view of the publisher/editor regarding the central, thematic problem of changing one's customs in a foreign environment.

¹⁰³ “Igrot Isaac Euchel,” p. 119: “On my right is the big, wide river and on my left fertilized fields.” “Igrot Meshulam,” p. 42: “We passed the Grecian lands which are on our right, and the lands of the African part on our left.” The latter is an especially artificial point of view indicative of the use of a map rather than an actual seafaring near the Greek islands, for one does not see the African continent while traveling near the coast of Greece.

¹⁰⁴ “Igrot Isaac Euchel,” p. 116; “Igrot Meshulam,” pp. 39, 43.

¹⁰⁵ “Igrot Isaac Euchel,” p. 120; “Igrot Meshulam,” p. 40: “Rav ha'hoval vekhol mala'hav” (the captain and all his sailors). In his introduction to Mendelssohn's biography Euchel uses another expression: “Vehayiti ke'ish yored hayam bo'oniyah” (and I was like a seafarer on a ship) (*Toldot Rabeinu Hehakhm Moshe Ben Mena'hem*, p. 5, my pagination).

¹⁰⁶ Isaac Euchel used to sign all his books and articles in Hebrew and in Yiddish not by the Hebrew name Yitzhak; but by its Yiddish (or German) equivalent 'Itzek' (whose first letter is the Hebrew *aleph*). It is only in the title of the non-fictional letters that his name appears as Yitzhak Eichel. Thus, the abbreviation .נ .נ corresponds. 'Uriyah,' in Hebrew, also begins with an *aleph*. Similarly, it may be supposed

The identification of the protagonists in the two Hebrew works would lead the reader to conclude that these works are more than closely related. It appears that "Igrof Meshulam" in effect 'continues' "Igrof Isaac Euchel" in a fictional manner. Euchel's European trip in 1784 and publication of the authentic letters a year later apparently stimulated the author to follow up on the discontinued letters. Five years later, Euchel decided to publish the second series of letters. The passing years brought several changes in the function of the authentic figures as transformed into the fictional letters. Michal, in the guise of Meshulam, is now traveling to seek wisdom on his own, and can no longer rely on his teacher for that. True, he does listen to the advice given to him by the teacher-father Euchel, in the literary character of Uriyah. He still continues to receive his letters, he acts in accordance with his father's advice, and he considers his father an exemplary figure to be followed in religious and social matters. Yet, Meshulam must now experience the exploration of the new culture by himself. He must face reality by himself, and cope with his own problems so as to find his own truth. The identical dates in the beginning of the first letters in the two works are perhaps testimony that Meshulam follows in Euchel's footsteps.

The fictional names in "Igrof Meshulam" are also significant. The name Meshulam derives from the Hebrew root meaning "to be whole," or "to be perfect," and perhaps refers to one who is looking for his "wholeness" or "perfection."¹⁰⁷ Uriyah, meaning "the light of the Lord," or "the fire of the Lord," represents the enlightened person, although with a traditional orientation.¹⁰⁸ Uriyah's letter exhibits many views expressed previously by Moses Mendelssohn, the eminent guide of Hebrew Haskalah. In light of Euchel's biography

that the abbreviation of the grandfather's name, Mordechai Ha-Eshtemoi, may echo that of the Mullah, Mehemet Ali (*Lettres Persanes*, letter 16, p. 94). On an attempt to identify the protagonists of *Lettres Persanes* and consider it as a contemporary allegory, see J. L. Carr, "The Secret Chain of the *Lettres Persanes*," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 55 (1967) 333-344. Cf. n. 91 above.

¹⁰⁷ *Shalem*; see Friedlander's article (above, n. 36), p. 108, n. 9.

¹⁰⁸ *Or Yah*, or *Ur Yah*. The grandfather, Mordechai, may be the representation of Mordechai Hatsadik, "the righteous," after the book of Esther. See Ch. Szmeruk, "The Name Mordecai-Marcus—Literary Metamorphosis of a Social Ideal," *Tarbiz* 29 (1960) 76-98 (English summary, pp. v-vi). See also Friedlander's above-mentioned article, n. 8 and related text.

of Mendelssohn, one may conclude that Euchel created in the figure of Uriyah a composite both of himself and of Mendelssohn.¹⁰⁹

To sum up, then, Euchel could have been influenced by *Lettres Persanes* as well as by other such epistolary writings, yet this influence more probably reached "Igrot Meshulam" through the medium of his own experience as expressed in the authentic, non-fictional "Igrot Isaac Euchel"; hence, the differences in literary formulation and in the ideological objectives of the two authors, Montesquieu and Euchel. There is something uniquely Hebraic in Euchel's work, in his Haskalah perspective and in his treatment of vital problems that were the focal point of Jewish reality at that time. Euchel's field of vision is not as wide or as inclusively European as Montesquieu's; rather, his work concentrates on the Jewish and Hebraic aspects of the European milieu.

Thus, while Montesquieu treats the total range of European literature, with some obvious limitations, Euchel deals only with poetry and its translation into Hebrew. The French author discusses various aspects of world history, whereas the Hebrew author has in mind Jewish history in Spain. It should be pointed out again that Euchel's historical analysis is far from purely 'academic': it is not intended to be an irrelevant hypothesis on farfetched historical issues. More searching analysis of his discussion of the rise and fall of Spanish Jewry would yield significant insight into Euchel's views on the German Jewry of his day.¹¹⁰ The limitation of his field of vision, compared to that of Montesquieu, is necessitated by the narrower scope of Euchel's work.

In conclusion, "Igrot Meshulam" perhaps owes some features of its form and some of its topics to *Lettres Persanes* and similar epistolary writings, but failure to compare "Igrot Meshulam" with "Igrot Isaac Euchel" deprives the work of its significance as an artistic piece of literature. Through the epistolary story, the author presents a series of views and ideals which compete for the young Maskil's soul, attracting him to the polarities of Judaism and Haskalah.

¹⁰⁹ See my article cited in n. 17, part two, p. 62, n. 120, and its related text.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66, n. 129 and related text. Nieman seems to project the same view as to Euchel's intentions (in his article, p. 167).