

and Tohorot” [Hebrew] [Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1969], 306–16; Aharon Oppenheimer, *The Am Ha-aretz: A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* [Leiden: Brill, 1977], 42–49, 63–66; Avraham Aderet, *From Destruction to Restoration: The Yavneh Way in the Reestablishment of the Jewish People* [Hebrew] [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998], 173–362), there is a great deal of evidence that the laws of purity and impurity were in practice in the second century (and after) and were strictly observed (see, e.g., T. Demai 2:2—R. Meir’s words; Louis Ginzberg, *A Commentary of the Palestinian Talmud* [Hebrew] [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1961], 3:222). In this case, just as in others, Fonrobert is highly familiar with the scholarly material (see 226 n. 24), yet she insists on denying any historical evidence from the talmudic sources. Note that in this case, denying the historicity of the sources does not teach us, in the absence of outside sources, that the laws of purity and impurity were not actually observed during the period of the Mishnah, but rather leaves the question open. Hence, Fonrobert’s decisive statements about the theoretical nature of the laws of purity and impurity following the destruction of the Temple remain puzzling.

The Eternal Maskil

Moshe Pelli. *The Age of Haskalah: Studies in Hebrew Literature of the Enlightenment in Germany*. Studies in Judaism in Modern Times, vol. 5. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979, 255 pp.

———. *Bema’avkei temurah: ‘Yunim bahaskalah ha’ivrit begermanyah beshilhei hame’ab hayud het* [Struggle for change: Studies in the Hebrew enlightenment in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century]. Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects, 1988, 194 pp.

———. *Dor hame’asfim beshavar habaskalah* [The circle of Hame’asef writers at the dawn of the Haskalah]. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001, 223 pp.

———. *Moshe Mendelssohn: Bekhavlei masoret* [Moses Mendelssohn: Chains of tradition]. Tel Aviv: Alef, 1972, 156 pp.

———. *Sba'ar labaskalah: Mafteah mu'ar lehame'asef, ktav ha'et ha'ivri harishon* [The gate to Haskalah: An annotated index to *Hame'asef*, the first Hebrew journal]. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000, 221 pp.

———. *Sugot vesugyot besifrut habaskalah ha'ivrit: Hag'aner hamaskili va'avizareihu* [Kinds of genre in Haskalah literature: Types and topics]. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999, 357 pp.

What is the literature of the Haskalah worth? Why should we read it? Granted that the period has high historical interest, representing a watershed moment in Jewish history—the point of rapid and startling transition from “traditional” to “modern” Jewish society—does Haskalah writing possess a literary, as opposed to merely a historical, value? These are some of the questions that in recent years have been engaging Moshe Pelli, the foremost scholar of the Haskalah in the United States and one of the most prominent worldwide. He is decidedly in the affirmative camp, and his answers to these questions, relying on recent scholarship of genre theory, provide some of the richest readings of this literature yet and strengthen the claim of Haskalah supporters that this body of writing is rewarding to read in and of itself. For Pelli, along with other senior Haskalah scholars, a defense of the literature that they teach and write about has particular urgency today. The number of classes devoted to this material continues to decline in Israel and elsewhere, a trend that threatens to render both Haskalah literature and its scholarly pursuit a dead, dust-bound field of letters. Pelli's remarkably productive scholarship aims to impress upon contemporary Hebrew readers a sense of this material's liveliness and imaginative power.

Moshe Pelli's career has been characterized by his passionate devotion to the Hebrew language, pursued in a variety of channels and genres, reminiscent of the heroic efforts of the German Maskilim he has so diligently chronicled in his scholarly writings. He has written the authoritative history of the Histadrut Ivrit in America (*Hatarbut ha'ivrit ba'amerikah*), a movement in which he himself has served vigorously over the years as editor of two of its journals and as a committee member. Scarcely a field of literary activity has he left unplowed: he has authored two novels in Hebrew, eight children's books, and an introduction to the Hebrew

language, aside from numerous book reviews. Pelli's main contribution to Hebrew literary scholarship lies in the sustained attention he has given to the work of the German Maskilim, a group that has been generally overlooked or dismissed by mainstream Hebrew academics. Building upon the efforts of Shmuel Werses, the leading figure in Haskalah studies for the past several decades, Pelli has offered expanded treatments of the most interesting writers of the group—Saul Berlin, Isaac Satanow, Naftali Herz Wessely, and Isaac Euchel—as well as dusting off significant works by lesser lights. In Pelli's writing, these writers demonstrate an intellectual ferment and literary resourcefulness little suspected heretofore. Berlin and Satanow in particular, both authors of multilayered pseudepigraphic gems, emerge in their full genius in Pelli's writing. Author of dozens of articles over the past decades, including pioneering studies of Haskalah literature, Pelli has recently begun to reap the fruits of his labors in several handsome books that represent the culmination of his scholarly career. Although he cannot turn this *oeuvre* into great literature, he has succeeded in making it interesting—much more interesting, on the whole, than one would find the work reading it without Pelli's guidance.

The *me'asfim* (writers for *Hame'asef*) and their contemporaries were amateurs in the true sense of the word: they called themselves *dorshei sefat 'ever*, “seekers of Ever's language [i.e., Hebrew],” and their writing always bears the stamp of an overriding passion. Simple, partisan propagandists for abstract notions such as “light” and “truth,” they often seem unbearably naïve or flavorless in their works, a degree or two removed from the relevant issues and debates of the day. Whether out of fear of offending conservative forces or a genuine desire to support slow, gradual change, the *me'asfim* (especially early on) rarely show their hand by directly articulating demands for religious, political, or educational reform. Instead, they cloaked their concerns within grammatical treatises on biblical Hebrew, creating a strange kind of code that, from our distance, seems scarcely worth deciphering. As Pelli (positively) puts it, “The basic assumption of Haskalah writers was that their work, founded upon the Jewish tradition, would reach an audience of readers capable of reading the hidden messages, an audience trained in linguistic complexity and aware of the levels of Jewish interpretation.” Contemporary readers are generally not as knowledgeable about Jewish interpretation, but even for those who are, the payoff from Haskalah literature is not nearly as satisfying as from, say,

medieval poetry. The programmatic manifesto announcing the creation of *Hame'asef*, entitled *Naḥal besor*, demonstrates the editors' concealment of political and religious objectives: the periodical will carry articles on language, Bible, knowledge and ethics (one category), and Talmud, as well as biographies of Jewish greats. Of course, all the articles written on these subjects were thoroughly infused with the larger goals of the Haskalah—e.g., reading the Talmud in order to extract the basics of halakhah, and not to get bogged down in argumentation that left little time for other areas of study—but the vehicles of change are so indirect that, from our historical distance, it is difficult to remain awake while reading them. (For all his partisanship, Pelli is not deaf to the obstacles presented by this corpus: “Hence [the Maskilim’s] preoccupation, at times tiresome and pedantic, with Hebrew grammar, with the definitions of various words, and their modern exegeses of difficult passages in the Bible.”) Equally off-putting is the quaint, archaic language that is more difficult and less rewarding to read than almost any other historical stratum of Hebrew. Pelli’s special genius lies in unearthing the creativity long buried in the forgotten pages of Haskalah tomes, bringing to life the originality and subversive intelligence at play in this literature.

Pelli’s career as a scholar of the Haskalah can be divided rather neatly into two distinct phases. His earlier work concentrates on philosophical analysis, and his later scholarship on genre study. In both phases, he favors the exegesis of individual texts characteristic of literary criticism. The following sums up the first phase: “The Age of Haskalah . . . is an age of change; thus a probe into this age is a probe into change.” He is interested here in the history of ideas, the ways that early Maskilim walked the tightrope between Western Enlightenment and traditional Jewish thought, adjusting and strengthening the tension until the rope could no longer hold. This historical approach follows a prominent strain of Israeli literary criticism (e.g., Halkin, Kurzweil, *inter alia*), concerned to gauge the degree of Jewish and non-Jewish elements characteristic of modern Hebrew literature. What distinguishes Pelli’s scholarship is the competent manner in which he weaves together philosophy, intellectual history, and literary analysis.

His first book, *Mosheh Mendelssohn: Bekhavlei masoret*, is a deceptively straightforward two-part exposition of Mendelssohn’s Jewish thought and influence. It reads as a work of philosophical history, the kind you might find in a series

of introductions to great philosophers. The great question to be asked of all Jewish philosophers is, Do they dwell more in Athens or in Jerusalem? As Leo Strauss noted, true philosophers, no matter what their language and religion, are ultimately Athens-bound. Pelli leaves the question open at the beginning of the book: “[Mendelssohn] was a tent-dweller—the tents of Shem and the tents of Japhet”; however, the biblical terms he uses to set up the problem suggest Pelli’s compass point guiding him to a solution. Mendelssohn himself may have believed that one could be equally at home in Jewish and European society, traditional and Enlightenment thought, but no one who has written about him, even among his greatest admirers, has agreed. Unlike a long list of Mendelssohn scholars who have regarded him as a Japhet in Shem’s clothing, Pelli locates Mendelssohn “in the bonds of tradition,” more a Jew than an enlightened philosopher, who adapted the language and concepts of Western rationalism to his own fairly conservative religious agenda. Pelli takes a position that has since become standard: that Mendelssohn was fundamentally a traditional Jew, and in no way advocated the kind of religious reform that was later carried out in his name.

While Pelli attempts both to clarify and to “save” Mendelssohn’s work for Jewish thought, he does not ignore its serious weaknesses hindering it from serving as a viable philosophy of Judaism. Mendelssohn emerges as a heroic but doomed pioneer who tried to do the impossible by having it both ways. The book’s title, *Bekhavlei masoret*, means, literally, “in chains of tradition,” a phrase that suggests a dark shade of ambivalence toward Judaism. Pelli sees Mendelssohn as a Jew almost despite himself. In his analysis, this attitude emerges most clearly in Mendelssohn’s explanation of the reason that Jews must observe the mitzvot. According to Mendelssohn, the mitzvot are a burden that the Jews have no choice but to perform because God gave them. This is the uninspiring rationale that Mendelssohn was left with after excising the grandiose supernatural reasons—the *ta’amei hamitzvot*—that the Enlightenment abhorred as superstition. Little wonder that Mendelssohn’s children and followers were glad to relieve themselves of this burden, the only obstacle that they could see between themselves and the society that they lived in.

The Age of Haskalah begins Pelli’s exploration of Mendelssohn’s heirs, the German Maskilim, which would be Pelli’s chief scholarly interest throughout his career. Like its predecessor, *The Age of Haskalah* emphasizes the religiously

conservative side of the German Haskalah, concentrating on figures who were struggling within “the bonds of tradition.” Pelli himself evinces some ambivalence toward the objects of his study. On the one hand, the writing of the German Maskilim overall demonstrates “the mediocrity of Hebrew Haskalah” compared with later Russian Maskilim (not to mention greater writers). On the other hand, the “themes and subject-matters which these Maskilim treated are still meaningful and somehow relevant even in our day and age” because they “heralded not only modern Hebrew literature, but indeed the modern era of Judaism” (112). Herein lies the heart of the dilemma in which scholars of the Haskalah (especially the German one) find themselves: how to provoke the reader’s interest in a study of a body of writing that is admittedly, by and large, second-rate. Why should we read a book about writing that the majority of us have never read and are unlikely to read? After all, a reissue of the collected works of Naftali Herz Wessely or Isaac Euchel is not likely to hit the bookstores anytime soon, and for good reason. Pelli’s answer in *The Age of Haskalah* is, if you read these writings with an eye trained to read between the lines—as they demand to be read—you will find that they contain highly creative responses to the clash between traditional Judaism and enlightened Western culture. Most scholars, Pelli claims, pass along the judgments of others without bothering to immerse themselves in the original texts. Readers gain the impression of staleness largely because not only have they not encountered the source material, but the people upon whose judgments they rely have themselves merely served up secondhand views. An unprejudiced encounter with Maskilic sources, then, is required to bring out a true impression of the writing’s freshness, intelligence, and vigor.

Cursory appearances to the contrary, *Bema’avkei temurah* is much more than a Hebrew translation of *The Age of Haskalah*. The title itself, through its formal similarity to the subtitle of the Mendelssohn book, indicates its relationship to the latter; these are the writers who started to break out of the tradition that held Mendelssohn in chains. *Bema’avkei temurah* offers a focused and diachronic picture of the early Maskilic period in Germany, based on a sense of historical progression, from traditional (Wessely) to reformist (Breslau). *Age*, by contrast, presents the various figures—mostly the exact same writers—in a static way. The effect is the difference between a movie and a portrait gallery. The various changes from the

earlier to the later book all enhance this new sense of movement. *Age* devotes half its pages to various historical issues, all interesting in themselves (e.g., the impact of deism, did the Maskilim “hate the Talmud?”) but which cumulatively read as a collection of essays that detract from a sense of a larger narrative. *Bema’avkei temurah* limits its introduction to one chapter that elegantly frames the individual figures as part of a dialectical drama in Jewish history. *Bema’avkei temurah* treats only four writers—versus five in *Age*—but it devotes more space to those writers, in particular greatly expanding the space dedicated to Isaac Satanow. In the later book, Pelli traces Satanow’s entire writing career, unlike *Age*’s concentration on his most famous book (*Mishlei asaf*). The result is that Satanow’s *oeuvre* now appears representative of the “struggle for change” characteristic of the age as a whole. The closing chapters reveal the contrast most forcefully. *Age* ends with “Isaac Euchel: Tradition and Change,” continuing the careful sifting of the complex ratio between traditional Judaism and Western Enlightenment. *Bema’avkei temurah* abandons Euchel and closes with a very brief chapter on Mendel Breslau, entitled “Path to Change: A Conference of Rabbis.” Breslau published a manifesto in *Hame’asef*, urging the leading rabbis of the day to come together and relieve the “burden” of the mitzvot. He represents a convenient bookend for the early German Haskalah, loudly calling for religious reform, while still hoping that a change might come from the religious authorities. For Maskilim after Breslau, the religious balance shifted rapidly toward the scale of change, and they took it upon themselves to lighten their religious yoke.

The second phase of Pelli’s Haskalah scholarship started in the early eighties with his research into literary forms and genres. Evidently, he felt a need to pay more attention to the literary aspects of the writings that he had been researching, concluding that the historical issues, especially regarding the complexity of their Jewish character, had constituted a path that was, by now, all-too-well trodden. A fresh approach to the material was imperative, and Pelli felt secure that he had found it through a focus on genre. As he wrote in the foreword to *Bema’avkei temurah*, “When I have a chance to finish my work [on Maskilic genres]—I hope soon—and to bring my observations on Haskalah literature to print—they will complete the chapters presented here and illuminate an important chapter in our modern literature from a new perspective.” Eleven years later, Pelli organized his

various studies into three new books, published in successive years, a majestic culmination to twenty years of patient spadework.

Genre studies have become far and away the dominant methodological approach to the study of Haskalah literature in recent years. This approach has enabled scholars to uncover a large number of texts, many previously unknown or long unread, and also to breathe new life into relatively canonical texts by interpreting them within the literary horizons of their time. The turning point came with Yosef Haefrati's call, in a 1969 article in *Hasifrut*, to avoid evaluating literature of the Haskalah through anachronistic frameworks or judging it by ahistorical standards. Since then, researchers have sought to describe the structures of works in light of contemporary literary norms for a wide variety of genres: satire (Yehuda Friedlander), autobiography (Alan Mintz, Ben-Ami Feingold), neoclassical poetry (Tova Cohen, Reuven Shoham), the poem (Yehudit Bar-El), biblical drama (Shmuel Avishar), the romance (Tova Cohen again), and occasional verse (Nurit Govrin). Pelli's writing advances this trend by exposing many more genres than previously known, thus thematizing genre—in its diversity and its pursuit by Maskilim—as a defining characteristic of the age of Haskalah.

Although *Sba'ar lahaskalah: Mafteah mu'ar lehame'asef, ktav ha'et ha'ivri harishon*, Pelli's index to *Hame'asef*, was not published first, work on it began long before the other two books—in the early 1970s—and it served as inspiration for Pelli's other studies. This undertaking has helped Pelli crystallize the numerous studies he had made over the previous twenty years, by approaching the output of the German Maskilim in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Since *Hame'asef* has the distinction of being not only the first Hebrew journal but *the* mouthpiece for the early German Enlightenment, the periodical is an indispensable resource for Jewish scholars, who will be grateful to Pelli for this handsome and useful index. There are many difficulties to overcome in indexing a publication not designed with modern categories of indexing in mind, and Pelli always errs on the side of completeness, a decision aided by the relatively small amount of material (there were only ten volumes of *Hame'asef* published over a span of nearly thirty years). For example, the spelling of names often varied; Pelli lists each spelling separately, along with the items published under that spelling. He also lists pseudonyms, quite popular in *Hame'asef*, the true identity of the authors often remaining speculative or

unknown. Pelli provides the reader with as many ways as possible to draw a connection between pen name and putative author. The letters *‘ayin peh*, for example, are believed to be a pseudonym for Isaac Euchel (according to Euchel himself), and so besides six entries for *‘ayin peh* (based on different permutations of dashes and periods) Pelli adds a section for “Euchel, Isaac [conjectured author].” Regrettably, authors and subjects are jumbled together in one index. Subjects include not only humor (one entry) and history (twenty-nine) but catchall categories such as Editorial and Announcements (usually for a new book or a request for financial support). The German supplement to *Hame’asef* is indexed separately, with subjects categorized in Hebrew and names in Latin letters at the end of the index. The catalog is accompanied by an introduction that deftly traces lines of relation between *Hame’asef* and contemporary European periodicals. Pelli raises the thorny issue of defining *Hame’asef*’s character as a periodical. Despite similarities to certain contemporary journals and trends, *Hame’asef* does not fit into the categories available at the time. Pelli presents and dismantles various scholarly opinions on the subject but does not offer his own stab at a definition—whether as an acknowledgment to the journal’s uniqueness or a concession to the task’s futility. Pelli is less adroit at tracing the history of *Hame’asef*, with its sporadic stops and starts and changes of direction. The historical section, the largest of the introduction, gets bogged down in details and does not give a clear picture of the important lines of development.

Pelli’s ambivalence toward the quality of the material he studies has diminished but has not entirely vanished over the intervening years. In *Sugot vesugyot besifrut habaskalah ha‘ivrit*, he claims that “the negative image of Haskalah literature is incorrect and incomplete” (11), seeming to hedge his bets with the second adjective. The main thrust of the book is that the diverse range of literary genres reveals this literature to be much richer and more rewarding than had previously been suspected. The low status of Haskalah literature, in Pelli’s view, was largely the fault of literary critics and scholars. In describing Haskalah literature in their histories of Hebrew literature, scholars had inadequately presented the range of material to be found there, inadvertently bolstering the impression of narrowness that has clung to its reputation. The didactic and ideological emphases of Haskalah writing sunk its

reputation during periods that prized “pure” literature. Some critics disagreed with the central premise of the Haskalah, that “instruction” and “delight” (in the classical formulation) were both essential and inseparable elements of literature. The contentious and ideological nature of much modern art, then, might enhance our appreciation of this earlier period.

Pelli’s chief contribution here lies in mapping out the terrain of German Maskilic literature (surprisingly) for the first time, showcasing its unsuspected range and fascinating qualities. He considerably expands our appreciation for the period: *Sugot vesugyot* describes ten genres employed by the Maskilim, from the familiar fable and satire to the charming period genres of the epistolary story and the dialogue of the dead. In nearly every case, the example he provides is not the only one to be found from the period; and *Dor hame’asfim* fills in the picture by devoting long chapters to Maskilic experiments in verse and short fiction. These two books reveal not only the diversity of means that the Maskilim employed, but also the cleverness and resourcefulness with which they manipulated literary forms to achieve their polemical ends. Pelli greatly enhances our awareness of the Haskalah as a literary age by placing numerous Hebrew works within the context of a vast European tradition. The only drawback is that Pelli stretches the parameters of his subject in order to enhance the sense of diversity: although most of *Sugot* treats the same period of the early German Haskalah, he includes a couple of books written later and farther east; and two works he treats as examples of two different genres each. Pelli seems to be trying to extend Haskalah literature somewhat further than it will give.

In *Sugot*, Pelli makes two big claims for the significance of Maskilic genres. The first is that “the period of the early Haskalah was unified in its continuous and untiring quest for new literary genres and modern means of expression.” Pelli assumes that his books prove this claim implicitly, by demonstrating a range of genres much greater than previously described. To be fully convincing, however, Pelli should have contrasted this variety with the output of previous Jewish writers. The word “quest” also seems to suggest a different kind of book, one that describes Maskilic literary activity as a search or research into form, the authors experimenting with different genres with varying degrees of success, and struggling to find their

proper genre. Instead, Pelli carefully traces the complex relationships between Maskilic books and contemporary texts and trends, revealing the authors' sophistication rather than their questing. Pelli's second big claim is that the change in literary genres and literary aesthetics at this time renders this material deserving of consideration as "the beginning of modernism in Hebrew literature." Even ignoring the strange use of the word "modernism," this claim is bolder and more troubling than the first. It's a shame that Pelli merely footnotes this claim with two of his own articles, choosing to throw this challenge away at the end of his introduction rather than at least sketching out his argument. For this claim could potentially serve as a powerful boost to his aim of enhancing the place of Haskalah studies in Hebrew literary scholarship, and as such it deserves wider treatment and circulation. *Dor hame'asfim* retreats from these grander claims into more limited, historically determined arguments. Haskalah literature is now seen as significant for its success in adopting and adapting a variety of European and Jewish literary genres, and because it serves as a crucial stage in the history of Hebrew literature. It is unclear whether Pelli is backing down from his bolder assertions or merely suspending them temporarily for this book, which is more historically circumscribed than its predecessor.

Dor hame'asfim beshabar hahaskalah completes Pelli's treatment of Maskilic genres by delving into those literary forms commonly found in *Hame'asef*: poetry, short fiction, fables, and epigrams. In each case, he examines the theoretical writings of the *me'asfim*, compares them with their European contemporaries, then describes the various examples or subgenres written for the journal. These lists of subcategories, although less interesting as literary criticism, serve one of the book's explicit aims—namely, to present material that can be used in the classroom. The chapters provide an effective guide for teachers of Hebrew literary history, acquainting the reader with the full range of material available and presenting historical and literary frames for studying it. The didactic goal of spreading the knowledge of Haskalah literature is more explicit here than in Pelli's other scholarly books. The book begins by noting the name change of Hame'asfim Street in Tel Aviv, an index of the decline of those eponymous heroes in cultural importance; and it ends with the hope that scholarly discussion of the Haskalah "will persevere and continue to clarify the importance and contribution of Haskalah literature to Hebrew literature." Pelli's

concern arises from the fact that, even as scholarship on Haskalah literature has increased in recent years, it is being studied less and less in the classroom.

A survey of Pelli's writing would be remiss in overlooking his style, at once eminently transparent and filled with unobtrusive, delightful flourishes. His sentences are peppered with occasional archaisms and Aramaicisms that lend a certain sympathetic contiguity between contemporary analysis and the material analyzed. His tone is both measured and subtle, and he is often alert to the lively ironies of historical fortune, such as in this acerbic explanation for Wessely's preeminence among his peers: "Paradoxically, one might say that precisely [Wessely's] mediocrity, the most characteristic quality of this Hebrew writer's thought and work, was itself to a certain extent the most typical characteristic of the early Hebrew Haskalah." Pelli's footnotes are themselves a marvel worthy of annotation. Their thoroughness knows no bounds; when located at the bottom of the page (in his older books), the text can run for two lines while the footnotes fill the rest of the page (and run over). Yet remarkably, they do not seem fussy or show-offy; no citation or clarification feels out of place. They provide the reader with a complete education on the documents and scholarship standing behind the claims made in the body of the work. One might easily shape a research project around the works cited in a Pelli footnote, and finish with a satisfying grasp of the subject.

This is not to say that his writing lacks bothersome touches. For example, one might question his anachronistic use of the term "haredi" throughout his career, to signify conservative defenders of traditional Judaism. Pelli's extensive self-citation, although justified by the fact that he has researched this material so thoroughly, sometimes leaves the unintended impression that one is reading a postmodern novel. From one Pelli book to another, readers find themselves often going over the same material, even if he expands the treatment or changes focus; for example, in both his books on Maskilic genres, he discusses the parables in *Hame'asef*. A larger issue lies in Pelli's staunchly optimistic evaluation of the continued relevance of Haskalah literature. Take, for example, the conclusion to his most recent book: "This creative material collectively forms a corpus of work that can no longer be avoided in modern Hebrew literary criticism." Pelli is, of course, aware that the focus of literary studies, not only in Israel but around the world, is turning more and more to the recent and contemporary, yet somehow the strength of his own work

and his faith in the material that he studies lead him to conclude that Haskalah studies will become a cornerstone of Hebrew literary research, even more in the future than it has been up to now. Pelli's unshakable optimism—most notable through the absence of a whisper of doubt or skepticism—struck Israeli reviewers of his book on the Histadrut Ivrit in America as a curiosity, especially considering the dim fortunes of Hebrew literature outside of Israel. Pelli seems to have carved out a niche as the scholar of lost causes, passionately and meticulously defending certain hothouse blooms that flourished and rapidly withered. Quixotically, however, he would never regard himself as such; he does not know nostalgia or the lament for what might have been. In his view, he is rather a botanist who identifies and purifies the vital seeds from past species in the firm belief that, for generations to come, they still have fruit to yield.

Along the same lines, Pelli's *oeuvre* so far lacks a critical overview of the German Haskalah evaluating the successes and failures, the strengths and weaknesses, of the collective enterprise of *hame'asfim* and their peers. Only on very rare occasions does one get a peek of a literary or historical judgment: the dismissal of Wessely above, for example, and the last sentence of a long chapter on Isaac Satanow—"However, while Mordechai Gumpel Shnaber's *Ma'amar hatorah vehahokhmah* and Saul Berlin's *Besamim rosh* have aged to a great extent, [Satanow's] *Mishlei asaf* and *Divrei rivot* maintain their vitality and freshness and are likely to be read with fluency and interest by the contemporary enlightened reader [*hakoreh hamaskil bizmaneinu*]." The last phrase reveals a similarity between Pelli and the writers he studies: the delightful, witty touch in depicting a contemporary "Maskil," with the simultaneous naïve optimism that such a type exists, and will continue to exist, in sufficient number to appreciate Satanow's prose. (Imagine a trend of Tel Aviv café-goers reading the latest edition of *Mishlei asaf*.)

Such optimism is both charming and a little frustrating, because thus far it has substituted for a more substantial investigation of the accomplishment of the Hebrew Maskilim. True, he has taken a first step in the introduction to *Bema'avokei temurah*, where he discusses the Haskalah's "goals and achievements." The formulation reveals what's missing: we don't learn about the failures, and the difference between stated goals and concrete achievements is often blurred. What's missing from Pelli's discussion is a critical perspective that would leaven the impetus of a

proponent with a healthy dose of honest realism. I would hope that, in some such balanced overview, Pelli would also elaborate upon the larger claims he has made regarding the place of early Haskalah writing in Hebrew literary history. Within this putative work, Pelli might spell out the importance of early Haskalah literature and describe in detail its influence on later writers; he might explain the stature of the major writers in the movement—Satanow, Berlin, Euchel—and compare them with better-known Maskilic figures, such as Perl, Mapu, and Y. L. Gordon; and he might offer a vision of the place of their writings within the general study of Hebrew literature. Such a monograph would provide a useful capstone to Pelli's career as a scholar of the Haskalah, serving as a synoptic frame for the studies discussed here and offering needed depth and perspective to the whole picture. Without that larger canvas, the figures and works that Pelli has studied appear possessed of the heroism and narrowness of scrimshaw artists, whittling their designs in shapes and materials long out of fashion. With it, however, Pelli's groundbreaking studies might renew the kind of interest in Maskilic writing—republication, scholarly editions, new scholarship, increased class use, and higher general appreciation among both the Israeli public and Hebrew specialists—that his efforts, and perhaps the material, deserve.

ELLIOTT RABIN

Director of Education

Makor / 92nd Street Y