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Introduction: Khone Shmeruk was a central scholar of Yiddish Studies in the twentieth century, earning his doctorate from Hebrew University in 1961 and serving as a professor of Yiddish Studies at the university through the 1980s; later he also returned to Poland to help renew Jewish and Yiddish Studies in Warsaw, Kraków, and Łódź. Heir to the scholarly tradition of Dov Sadan, Shmeruk’s research was astonishingly wide-ranging, taking on the entirety of Yiddish culture with philological intensity and deep historical and comparative contextualization. Shmeruk wrote about sixteenth-century biblical epics and the contemporary fiction of his close friend Isaac Bashevis Singer, about the origins of the *purim-shpil* and interwar children’s literature – among many other topics. Shmeruk was never satisfied with the perceived boundaries of Yiddish literary studies. A master of the short article, Shmeruk opened up many new paths for research, many of which remain to be taken up by today’s scholars.

One of the most cited of these is his 1983 article on *shund*, Yiddish popular literature, originally published in Hebrew in the prestigious Jerusalem journal *Tarbiz* and translated into English here for the first time. The article is an invitation to rethink the boundaries between canonical and non-canonical writing in Yiddish and urges scholars to account for the centrality of entertainment fiction to Yiddish culture. “As with the study of non-canonical literature in other languages, in Yiddish, too, there is an almost complete disregard for non-canonical literary phenomena. In Yiddish, these phenomena have not even received a preliminary basic study.” While there have been scattered studies of newspaper novels and some investigations of a handful of popular writers and editors over the intervening forty years, for the most part Shmeruk’s call has largely gone unheeded. While we continue to produce important scholarship on “classical writers,” on the varied forms of global Yiddish modernism, and on neglected interwar and postwar writers (in particular with an eye toward gender and undoing the erasure of women from Yiddish literary history), we still know very little about what the vast majority of Yiddish speakers actually read on a daily basis, from the mid-nineteenth century into the postwar.

Some of this can be attributed to the challenge of resources, as Shmeruk himself admits: “Since we currently lack a comprehensive bibliography of the content of the Yiddish press, the data in library catalogues and encyclopedic entries about Yiddish authors are necessarily inadequate with respect to non-canonical literature.” It is simply hard to find *shund*, buried as it often was in the daily press or printed on the flimsiest of pamphlet paper and only rarely collected by libraries and archivists. With recent technological innovations, however, some of these challenges can now be met. The Historical Jewish Press, the Yiddish Book Center digital holdings, the Index to Yiddish Periodicals (a project initiated by Shmeruk), the digitization efforts of YIVO and several other institutes and university libraries, as well as my own forthcoming *shund* database now provide the tools to begin attending to the complexities of *shund*. We present the translation of this article into English in order to encourage further this return to *shund* and to highlight how much of popular Yiddish culture remains to be explored.

- Saul Noam Zaritt

Translator’s Note: I imagine that Shmeruk experienced pleasures and challenges in taking *shund* seriously. In translating Shmeruk’s article, I aimed to sustain his scrupulous Hebrew prose style while also unearthing the elegance of his insights into the conditions and meanings of *shund*’s production. Shmeruk’s attentive and principled exploration of textual adaptation was itself a pleasure and a challenge to translate into English. I am very grateful to Matt Johnson’s work on the Yiddish transliterations and his skillful edits, as well as to Aya Elyada.

- Tsiona Lida

Thanks are due to the *Tarbiz* journal and Khone Shmeruk’s heirs for granting permission for this translation.

When comparing between the original and the translation, please note that what appears as footnote 28x in the original text is footnote 29 in the translation. As a result, footnote 29 in the original is footnote 30 in the translation and so on.

On the History of ‘Shund’ Literature in Yiddish

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I.

I know very well that the concept “*shund*” in Yiddish, even when given in quotation marks, is not appropriate for a reasonable historical-theoretical discussion. Judging by its origin as well as its common meaning and usage in Yiddish, the term is too broad, tarnishes from the outset, and, in its essence, only serves to disqualify. Nevertheless, I have preferred not to avoid using it in these inquiries, despite my clear reservations about it. This is due to the fact that, despite having been borrowed

from the outside and being relatively new in Yiddish, at least in the field of literature, the concept has already taken root in everyday linguistic usage and in criticism for more than eighty years, to the extent that it is not possible to avoid it, even when literary research supposedly offers better terms and definitions that are, at base, less derogatory. Our discussion focuses on non-canonical or trivial literature, its nicknames and its different definitions, the equivalent in Yiddish being the all-inclusive concept *shund*, which refers to the clear and supposedly unequivocal obverse of recognized, canonical, artistic literature, with all its possible definitions. And as in the overall literary system in any language, we lack commonly accepted and precise insights into non-canonical literature, and this becomes especially perceptible in the grey and overlapping borders that separate canonical and non-canonical literature.¹ It is important to reiterate that in Yiddish, too, the concept of *shund* includes broad areas whose character and scope have neither been evaluated nor defined.

The Yiddish literary concept *shund* is borrowed from the common usage in German. Originating in German from the slaughterhouse trade, it literally refers to the disgusting waste and stench resulting from the moment of skinning butchered animals. In German, the idea is adopted for everything loathsome and worthless, and indeed it is also used in relation to literary phenomena. According to the High German dictionary [*Deutsches Wörterbuch*] of the Brothers Grimm, Lessing already used the definition *shund* in relation to English literary types that were, in his opinion, inadequate.² During the nineteenth century, the term was widely used in Germany, and it has remained in use until today, but typically only with reference to those facets of trivial literature that are considered harmful and damaging to educational values and, therefore, subject to legal restrictions on their distribution.³

The verb *shinden* (to strip skin) is used in the same sense in both German and Yiddish. And it is possible that the noun *shund*, which is derived from the verb, was accepted in Yiddish in its original meaning.⁴ But its adoption into the literary field almost certainly only came about in the decade between 1888 and 1898. For in Sholem Aleichem's *Shomers mishpet* [The Trial of Shomer] from 1888, this term does not yet appear, and there is no doubt that Sholem Aleichem would not have avoided using it, had he known of its existence. To my knowledge, its first usage was in an essay that was published in New York in 1898. There it serves as a literary

¹ See Hans Friedrich Foltin, "Die minderwertige Prosaliteratur. Einteilung und Bezeichnungen," *DVG* 39 (1965): 288-323; Helmut Kreuzer, "Trivialliteratur als Forschungsproblem. Zur Kritik des deutschen Trivialromans seit der Aufklärung," *DVJ* 41 (1967): 172-192 (this article was translated into Hebrew: *Hasifrut* 18-19 (1974): 20-24); Gideon Toury, "Leshe'lat te'ur hasifrut kerav-ma'arekhet," *Hasifrut* 18-19 (1974): 1-19. In this article there are references to additional literature on the subject. G. Toury needed to review earlier models. He proposed his own model, in which one of his principles was the possibility of "changing" the place of the boundary between both systems (the canonical and non-canonical). "...in this way, a phenomenon, which prior to the boundary change was included in one system, might move to the second system." See here p. 16.

² Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, IX, (Leipzig, 1899): 2000-2001.

³ See Foltin (note 1), 301-302.

⁴ Alexander Harkavy, *Yidish-englishes verterbukh* (New York, 1898), 325. Harkavy cites the word *shund* and translates it as "filth, trash," without any relation to literature. On the other hand, in his later dictionary, he translates the word *shund* as "trash, rubbish" and finds it appropriate to note "by way of transferring to literary works of a poor type." *Yidish-english-hebreyisher verterbukh* (New York 1928), 492.

definition, which the author assumes his readers are already familiar with.⁵ As time passed, even Sholem Aleichem caught onto the term and used it in his writings (see below). It is almost certain that over the years the term's original source was completely forgotten. And when trying to grasp its meaning, someone correctly traced it to the verb *shinden* but interpreted the *shund* in literature to mean the "skinning" of publishers by the suppliers of worthless literature.⁶

The foreign origin of the term was quickly forgotten, so much so that there were those who saw *shund* literature as something specific and unique to the field of Yiddish:

Der bagrif 'shund' lozt zikh ober nisht ibertransponirn tsu andere kulturele felker, vu der min shafn vert batseykhnt als 'kitsh', 'kvatsh', 'shmire' un dos glykhn. Dos alts iz ober nokh vayt hintershtelik fun undzer spetsifish-yidisher derfindung vos vert batseykhnt als 'shund'.⁷

The concept of *shund* cannot be transferred to other cultural peoples, where this kind of work is normally referred to as 'kitsh,' 'kvatsh,' 'smut,' and so on. All these, however, still lag far behind the specifically Jewish invention, which is referred to as *shund*.

It could be that there exists in Yiddish a specific notion of *shund*, which has not yet been defined in relation to parallel phenomena in other cultural fields, but *shund* certainly should not be seen as a "specifically Jewish invention." It is possible that the extreme attitude of a theatre-person like Yonas Turkov, who fought for the artistic Yiddish theatre, and whose words are quoted above, was formed through close contact with the reality of the Yiddish theatre, which he understood intimately. And his words remind us that the term *shund* indicates not only particular revelations in literary prose, but also in the field of drama and theatre – the only field in which, to my knowledge, *shund* still shows tangible signs of life in Yiddish. And of course, as in all literatures, non-canonical Yiddish literature is not limited to a single genre alone but rather can appear in many generic manifestations. But in Yiddish, like in other literatures, the essence of critical engagement with *shund*, to the extent that this engagement exists at all, is in fact limited to the subject of fiction and especially to the novel. And likewise in our discussion we cannot diverge from the scope of fiction and the novel.

It is worth commenting once more on the meaning of this term. It seems that in Yiddish literature and perhaps also in German, *shund* is often misidentified with signs of erotica, which are interpreted as sexually stimulating and therefore declared as pornographic and obscene. It goes without saying that the assessment of erotic elements as pornographic and as harmful to good taste is very subjective and varies in different periods and at different levels of Jewish society. At the same time, I fear that at the popular level and in naïve criticism in Yiddish, there has been a real rapprochement between the idea of *shund*, whose origin has been forgotten, and the semantic field of the concept *shand* (shame, disgrace, and also nudity), which is the

⁵ P. Vernik, "Vi lang vet unzer literatur blihen?," *Der nayer gayst, monatsshrift fir visenshaft, literatur un kunst*, New York 6 (1898): 355: "Es iz keyn tsveyfl, az di shund-romanen-peryode un der yidisher literatur in Amerike iz azoy gut vi heriber."

⁶ Shmuel Yankev Imber, "Di moyre far 'shund'," *Haynt* (Warsaw, 16 January 1931).

⁷ Yonas Turkov, 'A mageyfe vos ruft zikh: shund,' *Literarische bleter* 2 (Warsaw, 1938): 27.

nearest-sounding word to *shund*, leading to a discourse that is erotically ambivalent. Perhaps here originates the widely accepted identification of *shund* with pornography. But of course, in the same way that there exists canonical literature in which the erotic elements ought not to be interpreted as pornographic, so too the attitude that identifies the erotic or the pornographic as a distinct hallmark of *shund* literature and as its unavoidable and necessary ingredient is misleading. There also exists *shund* literature without eroticism. And, paradoxically, it is evident that some non-canonical novels in Yiddish even strive for demonstrable modesty.⁸

II.

Non-canonical literature in Yiddish, which has won the epithet *shund* over the years, became a permanent component of the comprehensive body of modern Yiddish literature in the second half of the 1870s, when the early books of Nokhem Meyer Shaykevitch, who soon became known by the alias “Shomer,” began to be published. This pioneer of non-canonical literature, whom Yankev Glatshiteyn twice crowned with the title “Great Uncle of Jewish literature,”⁹ admittedly received a lot of attention in Yiddish literary criticism for a fairly long time, and yet there is still no complete and reliable bibliography of the author to be found.¹⁰ As with the study of non-canonical literature in other languages, in Yiddish, too, there is an almost complete disregard for non-canonical literary phenomena. In Yiddish, these phenomena have not even received a preliminary basic study. And it is no wonder; in the absence of conventional definitions of what should, by all accounts, be included in the concept of *shund* in Yiddish, it would be difficult to expect a bibliography of narrative and novelistic literature to account for its various forms, because the distribution of *shund* was not limited to books alone, as was common in Eastern Europe in the days of Shomer – in the 1870s and 1880s. It should also be taken into account that non-canonical novels were printed and distributed on a considerable scale in series, in individual pamphlets, and in newspapers in New York at least since the 1890s. Over the years, these forms of distribution also penetrated Eastern Europe and were already developed and commonplace in Poland before the First World War. Since we currently lack a comprehensive bibliography of the content of the Yiddish press, the data in library catalogues and encyclopedic entries about Yiddish authors are necessarily inadequate with respect to non-canonical literature. These catalogues and encyclopedic entries, which are currently the primary and almost exclusive bibliographies related to this subject, are also limited in the field under discussion in

⁸ On Yiddish *shund* literature’s ‘modesty,’ compare the words of A. A. Akavya in his letter to M. Grossman, cited below.

⁹ In Glatshiteyn’s famous poem “Shomer,” *Yidishtaytshn* (Warsaw, 1937), 70-72, and also *Fun mayn gantser mi* (New York, 1956): 278-279. The poem was written to mark the 25th anniversary of Shomer’s death. See also: Yankev Glatshiteyn, “Undzer elter-feter Shomer,” *Morgen zshurnal* (New York, 24 November 1940). This article was also written to mark the 25th anniversary of Shomer’s death and was also included in Glatshiteyn’s book *Prost un poshet* (New York, 1978), 130-134.

¹⁰ The most detailed lists of Shomer’s books can be found at the end of the entries about him in the second lexicon of Yiddish authors: Zalmen Reyzen’s *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologye* (Vilna, 1929), 797-808 (the edited bibliography is arranged here in alphabetical order of the book names); *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, vol. 8 (New York, 1981), 735-745 (the edited bibliography is arranged here in chronological order, according to the year of their first publication). In addition to the regular challenges of editing the extensive bibliography of Shomer, whose books have many editions in Eastern Europe as well as in the United States, there is also the difficulty of distinguishing the multiple fakes by publishers who used his famous name when in fact printing books by other authors. See below, note 14.

other respects. They may become useful only when we know in advance the names and aliases of the authors who were the suppliers of *shund*. But a significant part of this non-canonical production in Yiddish was published without indication of the name or alias of the author, or in aliases that were indecipherable. And of course, this output, without known owners, did not find its way in an acceptable manner into library catalogues, and only in exceptional instances was the output recorded or hinted at in encyclopedic entries.

All this and more. Only a fraction of the suppliers of *shund* literature in Yiddish saw it as their main or exclusive task. From the point of view of the dynamics of the overall literary system and the reciprocal penetration between canonical and non-canonical literature, the most important and interesting to us are those producers of *shund* in Yiddish who belonged to elite literary circles and who produced their canonical creations while they simultaneously wrote and published non-canonical literature anonymously and under various aliases. I'm afraid that today it is possible to identify the authors of these non-canonical works in only a few individual cases. And without expanding on the details, I can say that we are dealing here with an amorphous corpus, enormous in its scope, which cannot be easily accounted for, even exclusively in the bibliographical sense. This kind of bibliographical effort, if it is ever done, should be preceded – if it is at all possible – by basic, clear, and valid definitions in relation to the overall literary system.

III.

Also in Yiddish, as in the literatures of other peoples, discussions about non-canonical literature focus, in particular, on its implications and meanings from cultural, social, and educational perspectives, while the literary phenomenon itself is almost never discussed in its own right. Moreover, the rejection of non-canonical literature by criticism that makes normative demands in accordance with canonical poetics leads to a situation in which the “history of *shund* literature... is [in fact] the history of the struggle against it.” These words are taken from an overview of German *shund* literature from the end of the 1920s,¹¹ and they also ring true today, when we speak of Yiddish literature.

As stated, the beginning of modern Yiddish *shund* literature was in the 1870s. Shomer began to publish his books in Yiddish in 1876. By the end of the 1870s he had published at least seventeen books and pamphlets, some of which were defined already then as novels, almost definitely a new term in this period of Yiddish literature.¹² He became successful and continued to rapidly increase his activities during the 1880s. According to one source, he succeeded in rewarding Yiddish readers with one hundred novels before 1888,¹³ and already by the 1880s some of them were printed in subsequent editions in thousands of copies. Shomer's success led to the rise of a considerable number of his colleagues, students, and imitators in Eastern Europe in the 1880s, and among them were those who used his famous

¹¹ See H. Beyer, “Schundliteratur,” *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, Band III (Berlin, 1928/29), 201.

¹² According to the bibliography in the 1981 lexicon (see note 10 above), Shomer's first books were: *Khosn damim oder di blutike liebe* (187?); *Di printsesin in vald oder dos valdkind*; *Khatskil der bobes zun*; *Mekhutonim fun sonim, a kurtser roman*; *Amieser toes*; *Atuter beoylem haze*; *Tsvey teg un tsvey nekht* – they were all published in Vilna in 1876.

¹³ *Shomers mishpet oder der sod prisyzashnikh oyf alle romanen fun Shomer, stenografirt vort-am-vort durkh Sholem Aleichem* (Berditchev, 1888), 47, 48, 90 [hereafter: *Sholem Aleichem, Shomers mishpet*].

name to sell and distribute their goods.¹⁴ The better known among them were Yehoshua Budzan, Shimen Bekerman, Ozer Bloshteyn, Avrom Yitskhok Bukhbinder, and Ulrikh Kalmus.¹⁵ Together with Shomer and others of their collective, they contributed to the massive expansion of Yiddish literature in the 1880s and 1890s.

It came to pass that Shomer and his followers took control of the Yiddish book market. If the presumption is correct that increased supply reflects increased demand, also where literature is concerned, then it is possible to illustrate the situation according to the complete lists of books in Yiddish that appeared in the years 1888 and 1889 in the Russian Empire. The number of books Shomer and his colleagues produced over these years was higher than all the other books that were published in Yiddish. And it must be remembered that in the lists before us, religious books and textbooks are also included, not just belletristic literature and dramas. In 1888, only one book by S. Y. Abramovitsh appeared in Yiddish (a new edition of *Fishke der krumer*), as opposed to the nineteen books by Shomer out of the seventy-eight books total in the annual list. In 1889, S. Y. Abramovitsh published two books (a new edition of *Di klyatshe* and the beginning of a new version of *Dos vintshfingerl*) compared to thirty-five books by Shomer out of about one hundred books on the list.¹⁶ And already Sholem Aleichem had begun to resent the astonishing disproportion between the circulation of Abramovitsh's writings and that of Shomer and his colleagues.¹⁷

It was "mass" literature (*Hamon-Literatur*), as Simon Dubnov defined it, in both senses: literature that achieved mass circulation because it was geared towards the masses.¹⁸ In the polemical and critical commentary on Shomer, even his opponents tend to accept the claim that Shomer and his writings did much good. This literature taught the uneducated reading masses to read in Yiddish, as they were not yet accustomed to reading modern books. Shmuel Charney, who persistently reproached Shomer in response to every attempt to rehabilitate his name,¹⁹ also

¹⁴ See, for example: *Der ferloyriner khosn* (Warsaw, 1882). But at the bottom of the title page in Russian: "Compiled by A. L. Kartushinsky," about A. L. Kratoshinsky, who also signed with the initials A.L.K., see the lexica above, note 10. For more on this matter, see Shmuel Charney's book *Dertseylers un romanistn* (New York, 1946), 93. [*In geveb* Editor's Note: On the use of the name "Shmuel Charney" as opposed to the author's pseudonym see Eli Bromberg's "We Need to Talk about Shmuel Charney," *In geveb* (October 2019).]

¹⁵ About these, see the lexica above, note 10.

¹⁶ Solomon Esbikher (= Sholem Aleichem), "A reester iber ale zorganizishe bikher vos zenen opgedrukt gevorn inm yohr tarmakh," *Yudishe folksbibliothek* 1 (1888): 469-473; K. A., "A reester... inm yohr tarmat," *Ibid.*, 2 (1889): 135-139. The 1889 list also indicates the size of the editions: 5,000 copies of S. Y. Abramovitsh's book *Di klyatshe* were printed; by contrast, six of Shomer's books were published in editions of 6,000 copies, four of which were published in second editions after the first edition (which was also published in 1889) sold out. Moreover, 3,000 copies of the first edition had already been issued in an earlier print run. For more about this, see also Charney (note 14), 91.

¹⁷ Sholem Aleichem, *Shomers mishpet*, 94.

¹⁸ See Charney, *Dertseylers un romanistn* (note 14), 88.

¹⁹ The most thorough and blunt attempt to rehabilitate Shomer from an allegedly 'proletarian' perspective was made in the Soviet Union by the writer and critic A. Vevyorke in his book *Revizye* (Kharkiv/Kyiv: Melukhe-farlag 'Literatur un kunst,' 1931). This book received a very harsh reaction, based on a study of Shomer's books, by the critic and scholar Meir Wiener in his articles "Tsu der problem fun literarisher yerushe," as well as "Materialn tsu A. Vevyorke's Shomer-legende," in the co-authored book of M. Wiener and A. Gurshteyn, *Problemes fun kritik* (Moscow, 1933), 129-175, 233-270. On the reconciliation between Yankev Glatshiteyn and Shomer, see note 9 above. The author's family, and especially his daughter Rose Shomer Bachelis, did much to rehabilitate Shomer in *Undzer foter Shomer* (New York, 1950), where words praising Shomer were copied, including those of

spoke of this literature as positive and helpful from a cultural-educational perspective:

Zi [...] iz geven far zey ['di hekhst-umvisndike lezers un lezerins fun der mase'] nitslekh nit bloyz ongenem, oykh dermit vos azoy vi di frume khasidishe dertseylungen, hot zi zey gevoynt tsu hern un oykh take tsu leyenen maysey, un nit eyner un nit eyne fun di vos hobn ongehoyn mit leyenen ot-di hamoyn-literatur, zenen mit der tsayt gevorn leyeners un leyenerins fun der folks-literatur. Es zenen ober zikher geven oykh azelkhe, vos leyenendik di hekhst-interesante romanen hobn zey kalye gemakht zeyer geshmak un zenen shoyn geblibn baym shund.²⁰

[Shomer's particular *shund* literature] was [for the ignorant masses] not only enjoyable but also useful. Similar to the pious Hasidic story, this literature accustomed them to hearing and also to reading stories. And many who began this reading of popular literature became, over time, readers of folk literature. But there were also certainly some for whom reading more popular novels corrupted their taste, and these readers never moved beyond *shund*.

There is reason to doubt the reality of *shund* literature's educational role in preparing the average reader for other forms of literature, even that which, in Charney's words, was referred to as *folks-literatur* (folk literature), the nature of which is not entirely clear to me. For example, are the novels of Mordkhe Spektor so substantially different from the novels of Shomer?²¹ Yiddish reading habits require further examination and proof, if it is indeed even possible to base such an examination on actual documentation. I suspect that in those lands in which free book and newspaper markets existed, the proportion of *shund* readers relative to readers of canonical literature in the field of Yiddish literature did not change until the Second World War.

At the end of August and the beginning of September 1931, Nakhmen Mayzel examined about thirty daily newspapers out of the fifty newspapers that appeared in Yiddish at the time, and compiled a list of the serialized novels that were published in them. Fifty serialized novels were published in thirty newspapers. There were newspapers that supplied their readers with three serialized novels at the same time (*Unzer lebn* – Bialystok, *Hayntige naves* – Warsaw, *Post* – London, *Parizer haynt* – Paris, *Radio* – Warsaw). Nine newspapers published two serialized novels

Vevyorke and Glatshetyn. The book was published in a Hebrew edition with a preface by Dov Sadan, *Avinu Shomer* (Jerusalem 1953); Rose Shomer Bachelis kept and collected her father's poems and memoirs and prepared them for print, with a preface by Dov Sadan and remarks about Shomer's poems by K. Marmor (Jerusalem, 1952); Miriam Shomer Zunsler, *Yesterday, A Memoir of a Russian, Jewish Family*, (ed. by her grand-daughter Emily Wortis Leider) (New York, 1978). S. Charney's consistent position is expressed in the article summarizing the polemic: "Shomers mishpet oyf Sholem Aleichemen – a kapitl yidishe kultur-geshikhte," *Di tsukunft* (New York, 1947): 41-47, 111-116, 232-236, and also in his review of the family books mentioned above: "A nayer revizye fun 'Shomers mishpet'," *Yidisher kemfer* 1152 (March 1956, for Passover 1956): 33-38. Regarding Shomer's part in the history of the Hebrew book, see the index of the book by D. Patterson, *The Hebrew Novel in Czarist Russia* (Edinburgh, 1964).

²⁰ Charney, *Dertseylers un romanistn* (note 14), 89. All emphases in the original.

²¹ In this context, compare Mordkhe Spektor's words in *Dertseylers un romanistn* (note 14), 119-120, in which Spektor's recollections about readers who identified his novel as Shomer's are quoted. And Charney himself notes that the difference between them can only be recognized in their language.

simultaneously. There were novels that were published in installments simultaneously in two newspapers. It is true that in Mayzel's list we can also find novels that can be considered canonical, such as Y. Y. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb* and Sholem Asch's *Die muter*. But the analysis of the list undoubtedly confirms Mayzel's conclusions about *shund's* hold over the serialized novel in newspapers of that period:

Der grester rov [fun di romanen] zenen alts 'shpanende', 'sensatsyonele', 'hekhst-interesante' 'sensatsyonel-erotische', 'sensatsyonel-shpanende' romanen un di nemen fun di mekhabrim fun der hagode... Di romanen hobn di iker-oyfgabe tsu kitslen dem oylem, tsu farkhaphn im, tsu varfn im in kafakele fun zind, hefkeyres, tseloznkayt, untermelt, vakkhanalye, farbrekhns. Di nemen bloyz fun di romanen redn fil: *Di froy fun der nakht*, *Di nekome far der muter*, *Farshtoyzene un opgenarte*, *Far fremde zind*, *Dos buffet-meydl*, *Di froy in flamen*, *Di zindike mame*, *Heys blut...*

Der tsaytungs-roman undzerer hot zikh oysgeglitsht un falt barg arop. Di oyfgabe fun di yidishe kultur-institutsyes (arayngerekhnt oykh di shrayber-fareynen un zshurnalistn-sindikats) iz ernst a trakht tsu tun vuhin di yidishe prese in ir grestn rov krikht un farkrikht mitn tsaytungs-roman.²²

The majority (of these novels) were 'thrilling,' 'sensational,' 'exceedingly interesting,' 'sensational erotic,' 'sensational thrillers.' The names of their authors – fictitious... the main purpose of these novels is to titillate the audience, to tease it, to throw it into the purgatory of sins, lawlessness, rebelliousness, the underworld, debauchery, crime. Even the names of these novels say a lot: *Lady of the Night*, *A Mother's Revenge*, *Seduced and Cheated*, *Because of Strange Sins*, *The Canteen Girl*, *The Tortured*, *The Woman in Flames*, *The Mother Who Sinned*, *Hot Blood...*

Our newspaper-novel plummeted and fell lower and lower. The purpose of Jewish cultural institutions (including the writers' unions and journalists' syndicate) is to seriously consider the deterioration of most of the Jewish press along with the novel published in it.

It is doubtful whether Mayzel's call had the power to change the status quo.²³ Not only did the novels continue to be published in newspapers, but Poland also enjoyed a "pamphlet epidemic," which indicates that, even in the book market, the attitude did not change.

The journalist A. Pshepiurke claimed in 1937 that while an "artistic work," as he defined it, could sell no more than two hundred copies in Poland, the anonymous *Sabine*, a distinct product of *shund*, sold 100,000 copies that were grabbed,

²² Nakhmen Mayzel, "Unzer tsaytungs-roman," *Literarische bleter* 38, 437 (Warsaw, March 16, 1932): 599-601.

²³ Compare Mayzel's own words in his article "Mikoyekh dem shund-roman," *Literarische bleter* 45, 496 (November 10, 1933): 709-710. And see there his remarks on *shund* in Poland until the Second World War.

pamphlet after pamphlet, from the news-sellers' stands.²⁴ Even if, let's say, the numbers that Pshepiurke offered were exaggerated, in both directions, it seems that his words must be taken seriously. And it will not surprise future researchers to discover that from the appearance of *shund* literature in Yiddish in the 1870s until the Second World War, this literature, which must include the serialized novels that appeared in newspapers, completely dominated the free literary system from the perspective of readership and production and, in this sense, it overshadowed canonical literature.

IV.

The secret of the success of *shund* literature in Yiddish, if there is indeed any secret, was that it was maximally geared towards all the possible expectations of its audience. And Sholem Aleichem pointed this out as early as 1888, when he launched his infamous, scathing attack against Shomer and his genre's control of the Yiddish book market. In *Shomers mishpet*, the advocate defending the accused, Shomer, voiced the following argument:

Ot aza min skhoyre fodert fort dos publikum, der umgebildeter klas lezer, un aza min art romanen zukht nokh der moykher sform, der pakn-treger, velkher darf gor nit keyn besers – er zukht nor bilik un a sakh... Ikh freg aykh, mayne hern, vos iz shuldik Shomer, az m'kumt tsu im un me batsolt im funem boyn, az er zol onshraybn aza un aza verk, es zol heysn ot azoy un azoy.²⁵

The public, the uneducated class of readers, in any case demands goods of this kind. The bookseller and the peddling distributor also seek novels of this kind. They have no need for something better than this – they look for huge quantities and cheapness... I ask you, gentlemen, is it truly Shomer's fault that they come to him and pay him by the page, for him to write such works, that will be titled this or that?

Here Sholem Aleichem pinpoints one of the essential characteristics of the sociology of *shund*. The printers, the publishers, the editors, the newspaper owners, and the distributors joined together to design literature that suited the expectations of the widest potential readership, according to the lowest possible common denominator. And it was they who actually dictated the content and forms of this literature down to the finest detail, including the names of individual works. Here we thus have an extremely pragmatic response to the taste of mass readers and their capacity to absorb and understand, which does not usually take any other factor into consideration, other than the promise of profits. This literature is commissioned according to predetermined formulae. All the evidence that we have about *shund* literature in Yiddish certainly confirms this element, which is characteristic not only of our *shund* literature, including that which was created after Shomer, but probably also of wide strata of trivial literature in other languages to this day. In contemporary Germany, publishers of trivial literature not only reserve the right by standard

²⁴ Pshepyurko's words appeared in the Warsaw newspaper *Dos vort* in 1937. Here they are cited according to the collection *Fun noentn over 3* (New York, 1957), 354.

²⁵ Sholem Aleichem, *Shomers mishpet*, 90-91.

contracts to introduce changes at their will in books that were commissioned according to a fixed model and a pre-agreed size; they also control the aliases under which the books are published, when in fact there is more than one author behind them.²⁶

It is also possible to observe in the history of *shund* the history of the business side that deals with its production and distribution. Here, periods of saturation in the mainstream market are evident, a saturation that leads to changes in the method of distribution – from books to serialized pamphlets and from serialized pamphlets to series in the daily press and so on and so forth. Of course, this had a great influence on the structure and the form of the serialized novel, which needed to ensure suspense at the end of each installment so as to bring its readers to tomorrow’s newspaper or to the next pamphlet.

Shomer and his colleagues’ era was the era of the Eastern European book, and it seems that it lasted until the end of the 1890s or until the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁷ The New York of the 1890s brought new forms of mass distribution in the field of Yiddish. The New York affair, known as the “pamphlet epidemic” (“di heftn-epidemye”) that began in 1892, undoubtedly belongs to the important milestones in the history of *shund* in Yiddish. According to one report, it was actually a Yiddish version, in pamphlet form, of the American industry of trivial and sensational storytelling, which reached us by way of German pamphlets of the type that appeared in New York. Here too, the traditional connection between Yiddish literature and German literature is maintained at the mass and popular level. And here’s the story: a wise Jewish merchant, Sigmund Kantorovits, happened upon a series of German pamphlets about the “mysteries” of the Russian Royal Court. After the sensational and thrilling reading material captivated him until the end of the series, he realized that such pamphlets would also be successful in Yiddish, and it would be possible to develop and become rich from such commercialized literature. He managed to convince the owner of a Jewish printing house, Yankev Safirshteyn, to partner with him, and commissioned a journalist, Avner Tanenboym, to translate the German pamphlets into Yiddish in a form adapted to the potential readership.²⁸ These eighty-one pamphlets of *Mysteries* were an extraordinary success, which brought great profits to the partners and thus, the “epidemic” began.²⁹ According to

²⁶ See W. Nutz, *Der Trivialroman, seine Formen und seine Hersteller* (Köln-Opladen, 1962), 77-78.

²⁷ This literature had already been distributed in Eastern Europe during this period as pamphlets in installments. This requires a thorough bibliographic examination. Regarding an adapted novel about the Dreyfus affair that was published in Warsaw in 53(?) pamphlets, the editor, M. Y. Freyd, said “Der ershter yidisher sensatsyoneler roman (a kapitl fun mayne literarishe zikhroynes),” *Literarishe bleter* 18 (1927): 340-342. At the national and university libraries in Jerusalem, there are only pamphlets 2 and 3 of *Dreyfus’s brief, fun frantseyzishen ksav-yad iberzetzst durkh M. Y. Freyd* (Warsaw, 1898). At the end of the third pamphlet there is the mark “end,” though this should be compared against Freyd’s own words in his aforementioned memoirs.

²⁸ See Y. Heykin, *Yidishe bleter in Amerike* (New York, 1946), 77-80.

²⁹ The number of pamphlets of the story of the Russian Royal Court is according to Heykin’s book, page 80. His words seem to relate to the first edition of 1892, which appeared, as above, in partnership with Kantrovits and Sapirshteyn. I could not find a single complete copy or a single booklet from this edition. It is likely that Kantorovits entered into a new partnership with Katsenelenbogen (about whom I could not find any details) and, in the 1890s, they arranged the whole book anew. One edition of this new partnership is kept in Harvard University Library in 13 booklets of

one source, following the first series, sixty-five novels were created in the years 1892-1898 alone.³⁰ Fifteen writers and journalists dealt with their preparation, including writers with recognized and respected standing in Hebrew and Yiddish literature in the United States.³¹ Even Shomer himself, who migrated to the United States in 1889, actively joined in the shaping of this industry and contributed to the “pamphlet epidemic.” Another source estimated that, during the days of the “pamphlet epidemic,” 150 novels circulated, which were distributed in a great many

160 pages each, totaling 2080 pages! Here is the title page of this edition: “*Di geheymnise fun rusishen kayzerlikhen hof*, iberzetzst fun A. Tanenboym, Ferlag fun Kantrovits und Katsenelenbogen, 54 Ludlow Street, New York.” There is no mention of the year of publication, but on the first pamphlet there is a library acquisition stamp from 22 December 1898. In some of the pamphlets there is an illustrated cover and, in it, before the translator’s name, the words “fray iberzetzst” (free translation). On the back cover of the fourth pamphlet was printed: “Unzer katalog fon unzer eygenem ferlag,” and heading the list: “*Di geheymnise fon rusishen hoyf*, 130 heften, 3.00 d[oler].” In my possession there is another edition of the book, this time in four bound books, which were published by the Hebrew Publishing Company (New York, 1927). This edition consisted of 1300+784 pages! Following the great success of *The Mysteries of Paris* among readers in the 19th century (on the subject of adaptation to Yiddish see below, note 44), a tendency to imitate the book emerged – at least in the use of the word ‘mystery’ in the titles of works of trivial literature. During the ‘pamphlet epidemic’ in New York, that tendency was also conspicuous in Yiddish publications. In Harkavy’s list (see next note) alone, we can find *Geheymnise* (Mysteries, number 6), *Geheymnisfole yerushe* (Mysterious Inheritance, number 9), *Geheymnis inzel* (Mystery Island, from Verne, number 56), and *Yerushe, geheymnise fun di yezuiten* (Inheritance, Mysteries of the Jesuits, number 58). In the Harvard University Library there are two more series of ‘mysteries’ in Yiddish that appeared at the beginning of the ‘pamphlet epidemic’ in New York, which I did not find a trace of in the available lists or lexica. These series are also linked to events in Russia: (1) “*Di geheymnise fun der russishen yustits (sod) oder Miryam di tokhter fun dem fershikten, eyn zehr interesanter historisher roman*, ershaynt eyn mol vekhtlikh, ferlag fon A. Ginsberg Nyu-york.” The first and only pamphlet of this series kept at Harvard is dated 18 January 1892. (2) “*Di geheymnisse fon der russishe politsey, eyn zehr interesanter ontsihender roman*, fray bearbaytet fon dem berihmten shrayber Sholem Mikhelzohn, ershaynt eyn mol vekhtlikh, ferlag fon A. Ginsberg Nyu-york” Of this series only pamphlets 4-7 are kept, all from June-July 1892. I have not found any traces of the author of the adaptation.

³⁰ Americanus (=Alexander Harkavy), “Di yidish-daytshe literatur in Amerika un der morale tsushtand fun di hige yidishe masen – an entfey oyf a korespondents tsum ‘Ha-Melitz,’” *Der nayer gayst* 6 (March 1898): 352-353. At the end of the article there is a detailed list of authors and their books, which is one of the few bibliographies of the literary field in question. But, of course, it is incomplete. See above in note 29 and below in note 31. Harkavy’s article appeared in response to M. Reysin’s article, “Min ha’arets haḥadashah,” *Hamelits* 288 (29 December 1897). On the same subject see also Vernik’s article (note 5).

³¹ Among the authors in Harkavy’s list (see previous note) we find the names of the following Hebrew authors: Menahem Mendel Dolitzki, Alexander Harkavy, Moshe Zeifert, Getzel Zelikovitch, Itzhak Rabinovitz (the Man from Kovno), N. M. Shaykevitch (Shomer). They are all mentioned in G. Karsel’s *Leksikon hasifrut ha’ivrit badorot ha’aharonim* (Merhavia, 1967). In a special chapter titled “Der yidisher farvaylung-roman in Amerike,” in A. Shulman’s book *Geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur in Amerike* (New York, 1943), 84-104, there is a kind of attempt to summarize the affair of the ‘pamphlet epidemic.’ Shulman hinted there that the ‘guilty’ are mainly bourgeois authors and Hebrew authors (“Di shraybers, vos hobn geshribn ot dem sort laykhtn roman, zaynen dos rov gekumen fun der yidisher brgerlekher velt un fun der hebreyisher literatur,” 85). On the other hand, radicals and semi-assimilated Jews created serious publications in Yiddish, as well as artistic novels (ibid.). Beyond these arbitrary generalizations, it is certainly worth paying attention to the distinction between canonical works in Hebrew and non-canonical works in Yiddish made by various suppliers of non-canonical Yiddish literature, and not only those operating in the United States. See more below about A. A. Akavya from Warsaw. The material requires a thorough examination on a wider scale of the cultural trilingual multi-system that existed in the modern era across the Yiddish diaspora; and it is mentioned, moreover, that among the suppliers of novels in the time of the ‘pamphlet epidemic’ there were also respectable Yiddish writers. See entry on G. Zelikovitch in Z. Reyzen.

thousands of pamphlets until the turn of the century. Following the great success of the serialized novels in pamphlets, which dealt a severe blow to the Yiddish daily press, the newspapers were forced to print two to three serialized novels simultaneously, which helped them to overcome their competitors and put a stop to the “epidemic.” The Jewish publishers in New York, who joined together to form the Hebrew Publishing Company, compiled the product of the “pamphlet epidemic” days in books. They traded these compilations with publishers and printers of sacred books overseas and thus flooded the Yiddish book market in Eastern Europe at the turn of the century with this literature.³²

The non-canonical serialized novel penetrated the Yiddish daily press as a fixed feature in Eastern Europe at the initiative of Shmuel Yankev Yatskan, who was a gifted journalist in both Hebrew and Yiddish and the diligent and sharp publisher of the popular Yiddish daily press in Warsaw after the revolution of 1905. Together with the Finklshteyn brothers, Yatskan began producing the daily newspaper *Haynt* at the beginning of 1908. In this newspaper, the suspenseful and sensational novel became a permanent component of the strategies geared towards increasing the circulation among those readers who previously neither read newspapers nor often acquired books. The beginning of a suspenseful story would be distributed in free pamphlets, in very large numbers of copies, in which it was mentioned that its continuation would appear in the following day’s newspaper.³³ Other newspapers in Eastern Europe followed in Yatskan’s footsteps. Especially prominent in this regard were, as already mentioned, the midday newspapers that appeared in Warsaw between the two world wars – *Hayntige naves* and *Varshever radio* – which used to print up to three serialized novels every day.

A unique and illuminating testimony has come to us from the writer and scholar of the Hebrew calendar A. A. Akavya, who was known in Yiddish as Aryeh

³² See Heykin (note 28), page 83. Extremely edifying echoes on the distribution of American ‘merchandise’ in Eastern Europe are to be found in G. Bader’s article “In unzer literatur,” *Yidisher folkskalender* (Lemberg, 1899): 104-105: “Di hekhst-interesante romanen hobn zikh tsuzamen mit Shomern ibergetrogn fun Rusland keyn Amerike, dort hobn zey zikh shtark antviklt un zenen oysevaksn, keyn eyn-hore zol zey nisht shatn, tsvantsik mol azoy groys vi in der heym. Undzers a mentsh ken zey shoyt afile gor nisht nemen in di hant arayn. Zey zenen tsu lang far zayn zikorn un tsu tayer far zayn keshene. Es muzn zikh ober dokh gefinen balonim oyf dem min skhoyre, az a vilner moykher-sforim halt di ale amerikaner ‘shmates’ tsu farkoyfn.” We have confirmation of the exchanges about which Heykin wrote in the words quoted here. Bader cites from the list of a bookseller named Katsenelenbogen nine examples of that American merchandise, while mentioning the quantity of pamphlets (below in parentheses) and the price of the whole series: (1) *Beroymbt un ferloren* (160 pamphlets); (2) *Tsvishn mentshen-fresser* (270); (3) *Di tiranische muter* (113); (4) *Di ungluklike Amalya* (117); (5) *Der gebildeter merder* (92); (6) *Di giftmisherin* (150); (7) *Unshuldig geliten oder der vampir* (129); (8) *A nekome fun a tokhter* (96); (9) *Di blutike grefin* (92). The first and last series do not appear in Harkavy’s list (note 30).

³³ For example, regarding the distribution of the pamphlets in which the beginning of the novel *In nets fun zind* was published, we find an announcement in *Haynt* 146 (26 June 1909). The novel would be printed only the following day, from the point at which the story had stopped in the pamphlet, but, before its continuation, a short summary of the novel’s beginning would be provided. On this novel see Kh. Shmeruk, “Teudah nedirah letoldotehah shel hasifrut halo-kanonit beyidish,” *Hasifrut* 32 (in print). And so on. The beginning of the novel *Di blutige froy* was distributed in a pamphlet on 18 February 1910, and its continuation appeared, as above in *Haynt*, only on 20 February. See more on this novel below. These pamphlets were not preserved and, for this reason, some of these serialized novels have reached us without their complete beginning.

Leyb Yakubovitch and used the alias L. Shrayber for his serialized novels. He was one of the suppliers of novels for Yatskan's newspaper and he disclosed some of their work to us. In the middle of 1909, Yakubovitch began his work with Yatskan by adapting stories about a Russian chief of police in line with the taste of readers of the Warsaw press. And here's his story about his work:

Approximately a month before finishing printing the aforementioned novel, Yatskan invited me again to his room and handed me a novel translated into Russian (he himself didn't know any other foreign language then; his readers were the Finkelshteyns and probably a number of women from their families and from his own circles of friends); the author of the novel was a Frenchman (I think it was Montépin), who was famous for his sensational popular novels, which had won great success. Yatskan suggested that I adapt this book for *Haynt*. I read it and decided to accept his offer. As per his demand, I wrote the first chapters (in the form of a pamphlet of one printed sheet). For at the time, and maybe already before, Yatskan initiated the custom of printing the beginning of a novel in a special pamphlet in enormous numbers of copies (because the circulation of *Haynt* at its height was more than one hundred thousand copies) and handing them out for free on the streets to every passerby. And yet this time, Yatskan took over the first chapter not just to read, but also to edit: He added "corrections," whose purpose was to slightly tantalize the reader and strengthen the novel's appeal. These "corrections" were nonsense: for example, if a young man kisses a young woman, the editor added a few more kisses, if the man presses her to his chest, the editor added something like "very forcibly," and so on. But in no way did they amount to pornography or obscene language. These accusations were leveled at the *Haynt* novels only by resentful competitors who themselves not only imitated Yatskan's actions but committed worse deeds than him. Of course, these silly expressions were also bad in my eyes, not just because they were morally objectionable, but also for their stupidity, but Yatskan added corrections of this kind also in the chronicles and in everything else his assistants produced that passed into his hands, and no one objected to it, and as I mentioned, I regarded my work as journalistic writing without my signature. Worse than these corrections was the name that Yatskan (and only he) gave to this new novel, *Di blutike froy*.³⁴

When Yakubovitch fell out with Yatskan, who had promised but failed to raise his wages, he stopped supplying installments to the novel. But, to his astonishment, he found that the novel had continued in the newspaper, completed by Avrom Goldberg, the deputy editor. The novel continued based on a different book!³⁵ It appeared in the

³⁴ A. A Akavya, 'Igeret el Moshe Grossman,' *Hasifrut* 32 (in print). This letter was published previously with abbreviated translation to Yiddish by M. Grossman, "Vegn di sensatsyonele romanen in haynt un zeyer mekhaber," *Fun noentn over* 2 (1956): 53-67. And for more about A. A. Akavya, see my article mentioned in the previous note. The novel *Di blutige froy, a merkverdige geshikhthe fun varshever geheymnisn* was printed in *Haynt* from 20 February 1910 to 13 January 1911 (on the pamphlet distributed earlier please see the previous note).

³⁵ Akavya, *ibid.*

newspaper in 238 serial installments and at the end, it was signed under the alias G. Brill.

According to various testimonies, *shund* literature in Yiddish had also been used, since Shomer's time, as reading material for children and youth.³⁶ Isaac Bashevis Singer himself testified that when he was six years old, he used to read the novel *Di blutike froy* in *Haynt*.³⁷ But this important issue concerning young readers with an interest in adult literature, and first and foremost non-canonical literature, exceeds the scope of our discussion. What may be most instructive here is that the same six-year-old boy who experimented with reading *Di blutike froy* himself adapted novels of this type for a different Warsaw newspaper in the early 1930s. Bashevis's words about this deserve to be quoted at length:

Emets hot gehat gezogt dem redaktor fun *Radio* az ikh vayz aroys shrayberishe feyikaytn. Er hot oykh dermont az ikh zets iber fun daytsh. Der *Radio*, vi andere yidishe tsaytungen, hobn gedrukt shpanendike romanen in forzetsungen. Der redaktor hot ersht nor gehat bakumen fun Daytshland a shpanendikn roman, vos iz geven dort a riziker derfolg. Di mayse iz ober vos der yidisher leyener volt nisht geven tsufridn mit a roman, vu di handlung kumt for in a fremder shtot, Berlin, mit fremde gasn, fremde nemen. M'hot gedarft dem roman nisht bloyz iberzetsn, nor baarbetn azoy az di aktsye zol forkumen in Varshe un di heldn un di heldins zoln zayn heymishe yidishe froyen, nisht epes keyn daytshkes. Der redaktor hot mir forgeleygt di dozike baarbetung. Er hot mir geheysn kumen tsu im in der redaktsye un ikh bin nisht gegangen, nor gelofn. Ikh hob fargesn zayn nomen, ober er shteyt mir far di oygn... Er hot aroysgenumen fun shufloed a dik bukh in daytsh. S'hot oysgezen tsu hobn efsher toyznt zaytn. Er hot es mir derlangt un gezogt: - khapt a blik.

Ikh hob ibergeleyent di ershte zayt un gefregt:

- Vel ikh darfn ongebn mayn nomen?
- Keyn shum nomen.
- O, dos iz far mir absolut a glik! – Hob ikh gezogt visndik derbay az s'iz nisht mayse soykher aroystsuvayzn vi girik m'iz ontsunemen. Ikh hob geshtamt fun a shtub vu m'hot nisht gevust fun keyn diplomatsye. Der redaktor hot a zog geton:
- Mir'n aykh gebn zekhtsik zlotos a vokh.

Zekhtsik zlotos hobn ongetrofn in yener tsayt nisht mer vi velkhe elf oder tsvelf dolar, ober in Poyln iz dos geven a groyse sume. Gantse mishpokhes hobn gelebt oyf aza gehalt.³⁸

³⁶ See: A. Litvin (=Shmuel Horowitz), "Di zshargonishe literatur in bilder, III, n.m. Shaykevitsh (Shomer)," *Di tsukunft* (New York, 1905): 367; R. Shomer-Batshelis, *Undzer foter Shomer* (New York, 1950), 199-203.

³⁷ I. Varshavski (=Bashevis), "Fun der alter un nayer heym," *Forverts* (25 October 1963).

³⁸ I. Bashevis Singer, "Gloybn un tsveyfl," *Forverts* (30 July 1976), and in the English translation: I. Bashevis-Singer, *A Young Man in Search of Love* (New York, 1978), 167-168.

Someone told the editor of *Radio* that I had literary talent. He also mentioned that I translated from German. The newspaper *Radio*, like other Yiddish newspapers, printed serialized novels. The editor had just received a suspenseful novel from Berlin that was a huge hit there. The problem was that the Jewish reader would not be satisfied with a novel, the plot of which takes place in a foreign city like Berlin, on foreign streets, with foreign names. The novel needed not only to be translated, but also adapted to a form in which the plot happens in Warsaw, and the male protagonists would be Jewish and the female protagonists would be familiar Jewish women, and not some German women. The editor offered me this work. He ordered me to come to him at the publishing house. And I didn't walk, I ran. I forgot his name, but he stood right opposite me... he took out a thick book in German from the drawer. It seemed to encompass a thousand pages. He handed me the book and said: "Take a look."

I read the first page and asked: "Would I need to sign my name?"

"No name at all."

"Well then, it would be a true pleasure!" – I said, even though I knew that it was not a trader's style to show eagerness to accept (the work). I was raised in a home where we didn't know what diplomacy was.

The editor quickly stated: "I'll give you sixty zloty per week."

Sixty zloty was the equivalent to no more than 11-12 dollars, but in Poland it was a large amount. Whole families survived off such an income.

These words speak for themselves. The name of Bashevis's adapted novel was *Flamen fun laydnshaft*. Bashevis confirmed the name of the novel to me, but it was unclear if he or the newspaper owner had chosen the name. He did not remember the name of the German book. At present I have not managed to find the newspaper in which the novel was printed.

From then until his departure from Poland in 1935, Bashevis made a living by writing sensational serialized novels, which he termed "shmontses," and which were routinely published in the daily newspaper *Parizer haynt*. The newspaper's owner was none other than Shmuel Yankev Yatskan.³⁹ Historical continuity existed here in every detail.

A "pamphlet epidemic" also came to Yiddish readers in Poland between the two world wars. Following *Sabine's* great success, which we recall from earlier, other similar series appeared in Warsaw in the second half of the 1930s: *Vanda*, *Regine*, *Di farfolgte*, and so on.⁴⁰ This Warsaw output was also successfully distributed in the

³⁹ I. Varshavski (=Bashevis), "Fun der alter un nayer heym," *Forverts* 1 (7 November 1964).

⁴⁰ Y. Shtern, "Dos bisele shund zol gornisht untergeyn," *Literarische bleter* 44 (1937): 699-700. See more below.

Land of Israel.⁴¹ In the 1950s, *Sabine* was newly printed in Tel Aviv and, according to tradition, it was distributed as a serialized novel in pamphlets. But this period digresses from the scope of our discussion.

V.

Already in Sholem Aleichem's first work in Yiddish, a story with autobiographical resonances from 1883, the young teacher Rabovsky mocked his student and suspected that she had "already read all of Paul de Kock, Dumas, Xavier de Montépin."⁴² It is no wonder that these words repeat themselves in Sholem Aleichem's memoirs on this period, where it is told, already quite clearly, how the teacher, who is the young Sholem Aleichem, and his student, Olga Loyeva, his future wife, "devoured" together many books:

Di greste klasiker, vi Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy, Goethe, Schiller, Gogol oysgemisht mit di ergste shund-romanen fun Eugène Sue, Xavier de Montépin, Escher, von Born un nokh azelkhe puste shmirers funem frantsoyzishn bulvar.⁴³

The great classics, such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy, Goethe, Schiller, Gogol, were mixed together with the worst *shund* novels of Eugène Sue, Xavier de Montépin, Escher, von Buren and other such vacuous wafflers from the French boulevard.

It turns out that between the active, unreflective reading, which he shared with his wife, and the writing of the story *Tsvey shteyner*, his observations became increasingly refined and explicitly disapproving of those books that he later came to define as *shund*. The young Sholem Aleichem and Olga Loyev would certainly not have read the French novels in Yiddish, because they didn't have translations then

⁴¹ S. Y. Pineles (=Penueli) resented this in an article that appeared in *Davar*, 15 March 1938. He argues that "cratfuls of 'Sabines' and 'Regines' arrived from Poland." His words elicited an angry reaction in the Yiddish periodical press of Israel because of his identifying of Yiddish literature and that of Polish Jewry with 'Sabine-Regine': Z. S-L (=Y. Z. Shargl), *Dos polishe yudntum...*, *Naye shtamen, bleter far literatur un kritik* (Tel Aviv, May 1938), page 22 and the continuation of the book cover on page 3. The article was copied in *Foroys*, the literary journal of the Bund in Warsaw. Shargl pointed out that also in Tel Aviv such literature is abundant in Hebrew, and he mentioned "Hashvuyah betel-aviv" and *Tamara* in his article. The latter book, by S. Kemer (?), *Tamara: roman mehayey hahoye ha'erets-yisra'eli*, is listed in the bibliography in appendix A, page 48, of an article by Zohar and I. Shavit, "Letoledut 'sifrut hapesha' haivri b'erezt-yisrael," *Hasifrut* 18-19 (1974). The importation of *Regine* and *Sabine* pamphlets to Israel only strengthens the claim of the article's authors "that it is worth examining the similarity between the serialized entertainment literature in the Yiddish press in Poland and the 'crime-romance' stories published in the land in the 1930s and 40s" (Ibid., page 44, note 35). It appears that the contact took place directly in the country itself. According to Sh. Mendelson, "Di naye shund khvalye," *Foroys* 1 (Warsaw, 10 December 1937). The publishers of *Sabine* and *Regine* were the respectable daily newspapers *Der moment* and *Haynt*, which appeared in Warsaw.

⁴² "Tsvey shteyner" first appeared in *Yudishes folksblat* 26, 28 (1883). Here it is cited according to Sholem Aleichem, *Ale verk*, Volume 1, "Verk fun di yorn 1883-1886" (Moscow: Melukhe-farlag 'der emes,' 1948), 34.

⁴³ *Ale verk fun Sholem-Aleichem* (New York, 1917-1921), *Funem yarid*, tsveyter bukh, page 202.

(except for the translation of *The Mysteries of Paris* from the 1860s);⁴⁴ they also didn't read the books in French. The books could be found in Russian translations, and it was in this language that they reached the young educated Jews. Additionally, the distinction between canonical and non-canonical literature, which emerges clearly in the author's memoirs, is likely based on the Russian criticism that rejected this translated literature, leading apparently to Belinsky.⁴⁵ Sholem Aleichem's sources of critical influence require more comprehensive examination, and not only in the field that directly concerns us here.⁴⁶

However, what seems clear and without doubt is that the criticism of the novels from the "French boulevard" itself also gave rise to Sholem Aleichem's sharp criticism of Shomer's books. Charney was incorrect when he claimed that Shomer first attacked Sholem Aleichem, and that it was not Sholem Aleichem who started the polemic.⁴⁷ Already in 1884, Sholem Aleichem attacked Shomer. And even though he did not call out his name explicitly, there is no mistaking to whom his critique was quite explicitly addressed. He did this in the novel *Natasha*, which was later adapted into *Taybele* and first appeared in 1884. I believe that these words were overlooked by those involved in the Shomer-Sholem Aleichem affair, and they deserve to be quoted at length:

⁴⁴ *Mistori Pariz di geheymnise fon Pariz*, iber gezetst fon frantsezishen, ershter, driter, finfter, zibenter, naynter band (Warsaw, 1865-1866). Each volume, apart from the 9th, consists of two quires with combined pagination but with an additional cover. Altogether 105+106+75+76+73 pages. The covers are also in Polish with the name of the translator: *Mistere Paris, Tajemnice Pariza; Tłomaczona z Francuzkiego, na Żydowski Niemieckie przez S. G. Munk*. The censorship license was granted in Warsaw on 15 November 1864. The translator Yehoshua Gershon Munk did not gain recognition in lexica of Yiddish literature, and the translation of this book has not hitherto caught the attention of Yiddish literature researchers. Y. Shatski mentions him only once as "mekhaber un farleger, hot in 1887 gepruvt mazl vi a drucker un iz durkhgefaln" (*Geshikhte fun yidn in Varshe* 3, New York, 1953), 255. Copies of the book in all its volumes are kept in the National and University Library in Jerusalem (the beginning is damaged) and in the HUC Library in Cincinnati. In the 1890s the book also appeared in New York translated by Y. Paley (according to Harkavy's list – see note 30). So far only later prints without publishing dates were found in the HUC and YIVO: *Geheymnise fun Pariz (The Mysteries of Paris)*, ferfast fun yidishen si, iberzetst fun Yohan Paley in tsvey teyl (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company) (in another seemingly later edition, the words "mistori Pariz" were erased). Both editions are from the beginning of the 20th century. I heartily thank Dina Abramowicz, director of the YIVO Library, and Dr. H. Zafran for their help in these inquiries and for the photos. In the research literature, I found no trace of the New York translation of the work, even though in both translations the name *The Mysteries of Paris* was used on the cover, taken from the well-known Hebrew translation of Kalman Schulman. A cursory inspection showed that the two translations, which were independent, did not require the Hebrew translation of the book. Munk's style is a very interesting mixture of Yiddish in a religious dialect with Polish-isms and Russian-isms. The books are abbreviated relative to the source.

⁴⁵ Compare in the writings of the famous Russian critic his criticism of *The Mysteries of Paris*, of literature from the French Boulevard and explicitly Dumas and Paul de Kock: V.G. Belinsky, *Aesthetics and Literary Criticism* II (Moscow, 1959), pp 85-104, 629, 649, 670, 676.

⁴⁶ It is worth mentioning that sharp criticism of the French Boulevard novels was very common among Russian authors of the 19th century. In the anthology of criticism on Russian authors, *Russian Writers: On literary work* II (Leningrad, 1955), I found words by Nekrasov (page 174) and by Chernyshevsky (page 227) against Dumas, by Saltykov-Shchedrin against Paul de Kock (page 583) and against Sue (page 673, 682). And there is no doubt that the young Sholem Aleichem was influenced by these accepted opinions.

⁴⁷ In his article in *Tsukunft* (note 19), page 111 onwards.

Undzere zshargon-lezer zenen iberhoypt gevoynt gevorn, az der held oder di heldin fun dem roman darf zayn entveder a malekh oder gor a shed, er darf zayn azoy gut, azoy erlekh, azoy orntlekh, azoy reyn, vi a malekh fun himl, vos gehert zikh mit der erd vintsik on, vos tut nor guts fun zikh aley, un azoy vi di velt iz zindik, kumt nebekh der malekh op oyf der zindiker erd, me yogt im oyf yedn trit; far libe tsolt men im mit fayntshaft (sine), far zayn erlekhkayt – mit merderay, un azoy vert der bidne malekh, nebekh farshvartst; biz der roman kumt tsu ende, vert er plutsem gliklekh, un es vert im opgetsolt far zayn maysim toyvim hundert mol azoy fil, un der merder, der shlekhter held, bakumt zayn shtrof funem mekhaber un hot mapole... Di lezer zogn a shvakh dem ‘klugn’ farfaser far zayn ‘sheyner’ bove-mayse, vos hot mit der puster fantazy tsunoyfgeflokhtn azelkhe shreklikhe geshikhtn, vos varfn undz in hits un in kelt, nokhgetantst di frantseyzishe volvele romanistn. Mir veln do keyn loshn-hore nit redn oyf undzer fabrikant, oyf undzer Paul de Kock...⁴⁸

Our Yiddish readers generally became accustomed to the idea that the hero or heroine of the novel must be either an angel or devil, he must be so good, so honest, so sensible, so pure like an angel from the heavens, that he has almost no contact with earth and he does, selflessly, only good things. However, since the world is (submerged) in sin, this wretched angel suffers on earth (immersed) in sin; he is chased with every step, for love they pay him in hate, and for his honesty – in murder. And thus, the miserable angel suffers terribly; until the novel reaches its end and then he suddenly becomes happy, and he is rewarded for his good deeds a hundred times. And the murderer, the evil hero, received his just punishment from the author in his downfall... the readers praise the ‘wise’ author for his ‘beautiful’ fabrication, in which his vacuous imagination forged such bad stories as these, which drop us in hot and cold, imitating cheap French novelists. And we shall not slander here our own manufacturer, our Paul de Kock...

It is, already here, not difficult to observe the words said more comprehensively four years later in *Shomers mishpet*, and there is also no mistaking the identity of “our own manufacturer, our Paul de Kock.” In 1884 it was only possible to write words like these about Shomer. After all, one of Sholem Aleichem’s core complaints against Shomer was that “almost all Shomer’s novels, pardon me for saying, were stolen from

⁴⁸ The story “Natasha” first appeared as a supplement to *Yudishes folksblat* in 1884. In 1913-1914 Sholem Aleichem adapted it again with the name “Taybele,” and it is included under this name in the second volume of *Ale verk* in the Folks-fond edition. The excerpt quoted above had been removed from the later version, which is the reason it has been overlooked. Here the citation is according to Sholem Aleichem, *Ale verk*, Vol. 1, *Verk fun di yorn 1883-1886* (Moscow: Melukhim-farlag ‘der emes,’ 1948), 522-523. It is worthwhile to examine this excerpt in its full context, *ibid.*

foreign literature.”⁴⁹ And what relates to this complaint is that Shomer’s books do not belong to Jewish reality, and the things that supposedly happen to Jews in the Pale of Settlement are in fact nothing but the crude and artificial Judaization of foreign novels:

Shomer hot dos alts genasht bay zey [‘di barimte frantseyzische pseydoromanistn’] un hot aribergetrogn zeyere heldn fun Paris keyn Niesvizsh, fun Marsel keyn Barditshev un fun Bordo keyn Eyshishok...⁵⁰

Shomer took all this from them (the famous French pseudo-romantics) and transposed their protagonists from Paris to Nyasvizh, from Marseilles to Berdychiv, from Bordeaux to Eišiškès....

Moreover, in this direct context, Sholem Aleichem mentions the names of the well-known French “pseudo-romantics” that we know from previous quotations.⁵¹ On page 28 of *Shomers mishpet*, Sholem Aleichem claims that Shomer’s novel “*Der oremer milyoner iz ibergemakht, ibergenitsevet, nokhgetantst, nokhgekrimt nokh dem gevisn roman Di geheymnis fun Pariz*” (“*The Poor Millionaire* is an adaptation, restitching, imitation of the well-known novel *The Mysteries of Paris*”), and in a comment on the same page the typesetter ‘*Habokher hazetser*’ (?) attests that this isn’t the case: “*Der oremer milyoner iz nokhgemakht gevorn pinktlekh nokh Dumas verk (Graf Montekristo) nor di frantseyzische nemen fun di heldn, in yidishn*”⁵² (“*The Poor Millionaire* is an exact imitation of Dumas’s work [The Count of Monte Cristo], all but for the protagonists’ French names which were Judaized”). I am not aware if it was ever examined as to how Shomer adapted this novel into Yiddish, or any other novel of a non-Jewish origin.

⁴⁹ Sholem Aleichem, *Shomer’s mishpet*, 7. And it turns out that these accusations against Shomer have been aired before. In the collection *Bilder fun’m leben, Kharakteristische ertsehlungen, komedien...* ferfast fon N. M. Shaykevitsh, tsveyter theyl (Odessa, 1883), 24, we read a response of the author “tsu dem H. B.” in the following words: “Ikh hob gehert az ir vilt oysvayzn ale kvele fun vanen ikh hob mayne ale romanen gegangvet. Ikh vel aykh derfar zeyer dankbar zayn. Den koym gefinen zikh virklekh azelkhe romanen in andere shprakhn iz dos a simn az ikh bin a farfaser glaykh mit ale groyse.” But beyond jokes of this kind, we find in the fourth pamphlet of Shomer’s collection from 1884, his direct remark and confession, at the margins of his correspondence with David Yeshayahu Silberbusch: “I admit without shame that the two syuzhets of the *Blinde yesoyme* and of the book *Di eyzene froy* are taken from foreign stories. But I took only the syuzhets themselves and adapted them using well-known stories taken from the lives of our people which do not share anything in common with the original source. And, in any case, with regard to these two stories, I noted that their content was taken from foreign stories but, because of the buyer, these words were omitted, which gave voice to my many envious detractors and haters who produced the distorted accusation that I appropriated the success of others.” *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 and similarly on pages 30, 81, 85; see also the previous note.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11, 27-29, 81, and arbitrarily “bulvarne romanen” on page 40. Lists of French authors of boulevard novels are repeated in a very similar manner in other writings of Sholem Aleichem in those years. Thus, for example, we find a similar list in “Velt-rayze” (printed first as an addition to *Yudishes folksblat* in 1887-1888); we see in the volume cited above, in note 48, page 351: in “Sender blank” (printed first as an addition to *Yudishes folksblat* in 1888) we read: “Punkt vi in frantsoyzishn roman fun Montépin, Sue, Dumas oder lehavdil a yidish hekhst interesantnem roman in tsvelf teyl farfast fun Shomer...” Sholem Aleichem, *Ale verk*, Vol. 2, Kinder-shpil, sender blank, lider (Moscow, 1948), 314, in addition to words that Sholem Aleichem omitted in later editions of the book.

⁵² The play on words with the ‘typesetter boy’ is not entirely clear to me. On *The Mysteries of Paris* see above note 44.

And it isn't solely about Shomer. From the above discussion it is already clear that not only Shomer based his novels on foreign ones without attribution, but this was the main path taken by *shund* literature in Yiddish from its inception and until the Second World War. According to Sholem Aleichem, these were Shomer's ways, and Shomer himself admitted to it on various occasions.⁵³ Avner Tannenbaum did this in New York, and in Warsaw – Yakubovitch and Bashevis. And all of their works have not yet been examined, and we know neither the nature of reproducing a setting in a Jewish domain, nor how Judaization has been implemented in modern literature.

The list of novels of 1898, mentioned previously,⁵⁴ includes books from Verne, Dumas, and other authors. Were these adequate translations into Yiddish? In Paris and in New York in the 1890s and around 1900, books by Zola, Daudet, de Maurier, Mordovtsev and others appeared in print. They were said to have been adapted into Yiddish – “bearbeytet” or “fray bearbeytet” in the original – by B. Garin or A. Tannenbaum. What was the nature of these adaptations? I have not encountered any attempt to examine these adaptations in terms of their affinity to another area of Judaized adaptations in this period, namely drama intended for the Yiddish theater. And perhaps it suffices to hint here that Shomer also Judaized Gogol's *The Revizor* for the Yiddish stage.⁵⁵

In light of all the findings brought forward thus far, a logical and fundamental question is raised – is there any romantic non-canonical literature in Yiddish that does not draw directly from a foreign source? A. L. Yakubovitch claims in his confession that, from a certain period, he no longer needed any source for the serialized novels that he wrote for his newspaper.⁵⁶ Certainly there were also others who took a similar approach. Was there any essential difference between such a novel, based on a foreign source, and an original non-canonical novel? What are the proportions between various “borrowings” and original novels of this kind? What is the affinity between the non-canonical novels of this kind and a canonical novel in Yiddish and vice versa, since the last quarter of the nineteenth century? At present, none of these questions have any answer whatsoever. It is therefore very doubtful whether it is possible to comprehensively and fundamentally discuss the Yiddish canonical novel and its history, before we can evaluate these and other questions that arise from engaging with *shund*.

VI.

In the entry on Getsl Zelikovitch in Zalmen Reyzen's lexicon, we read:

Tsulib parnose beshayte geshribn, oykh unter pseymonim [...], eynike
shund-romanen far di nyu-yorker farleger, vi dos hobn damolst geton di

⁵³ See, for example, note 50.

⁵⁴ See above and note 30.

⁵⁵ In almost all the books of Jules Verne, Alexandre Dumas, Émile Zola that appeared in Yiddish in the 1890s and the beginning of the 20th century there are to be found the terms “bearbaytet,” fray bearbaytet,” “fray iberzetst,” “iberzetst un bearbaytet.”

⁵⁶ Akavya (note 34).

ongezeenste yidishe shriftshteler in Amerike – Philip Krantz, Leon Zolotkoff, Morris Rosenfeld un andere.⁵⁷

For the sake of his livelihood, he also wrote several *shund* novels under a pseudonym (or pseudonyms) for New York publishers, as did the most respectable writers in the United States at the same time – Philip Krantz, Leon Zolotkoff, Morris Rosenfeld and others.

Apart from M. Rosenfeld's name, the names mentioned in Reyzen's lexicon, including that of Zelikovitsh, also appear in the list of Yiddish novels of 1898.⁵⁸ And in this list we may encounter other names of authors whose involvement in the creation of *shund* in Yiddish may surprise us. It turns out that the bleak financial situation of the Jewish writer led him more than once to accept commissions to engage in work that was not honorable, making it advisable to hide one's traces with a pseudonym. Shomer and his colleagues had canonical pretensions and they did not find any flaw in their work. But it seems that the phenomenon of authors who didn't pride themselves on their non-canonical dealings, and preferred that their names not be revealed, began in New York in the 1890s. And already before the First World War in Warsaw, writers such as Yakubovitsh confessed to the financial difficulties that led them to submit to Yatskan's suggestions. Yakubovitsh, for instance, did not sign his non-canonical works under his name.

Bashevis recounts in his memoirs that during the 1920s he rejected a commission from the Warsaw newspaper *Haynt* to provide a sensational serialized novel.⁵⁹ But as time passed, in the early 1930s, he was happy, because of his difficult situation, to accept the offer of the newspaper *Radio*, as is clearly illustrated by his words quoted above. He also didn't sign his name to the "shmontses," as he called it, that he provided to the newspapers.

In the 1920s, and until at least the second half of the 1930s, the author Yoshue Perle wrote non-canonical novels for the Warsaw newspaper *Moment*. He signed his novels with the symbol of three typographic stars. This became known and sparked fury and maybe also envy from his fellow writers and from the educated youth.⁶⁰ But he was forced to continue his work until he received a permanent position with the *Folks-tsaytung*, the daily newsletter of the Warsaw Bund.

The poet and writer Yisroel Rabon made his living by writing sensational serialized novels. In the 1930s alone, I found three of Rabon's novels of this kind in the Warsaw newspaper *Haynt: Hinter a forhang* (134 installations of sequels from 13 October 1929 to 10 April 1930); *Dos tsveyte lebn fun Dovid Verdiger* (from 13 September 1935 to 22 January 1936); *Der fal Rizenberg* (from 26 March until 30 September 1937). Each of the three novels had identical sub-headings: "Roman fun yidishn lebn in Poyln," according to the formula already familiar to us from the

⁵⁷ Z. Reyzen, *Leksikon* (note 10) A, 1106-1107.

⁵⁸ See above, note 30.

⁵⁹ I. Varshavski (=Bashevis), "Fun der alter un nayer heym," *Forverts* (4 July 1964).

⁶⁰ Compare the chapter on Yehoshua Perle in M. Ravitch's book *Mayn leksikon*, A (Montreal, 1945), 168-170, as well as in the foreword of L. Finklshteyn to the revised edition of Y. Perle, *Yidn fun a gants yor* (Buenos Aires, 1951), 11-12; M. Weichert, *Zikhroynes*, Vol. 2, Warsaw 1918-1939 (Tel Aviv: Menorah, 1961), 196-197.

words of Yakubovitch and Bashevis. Yisroel Rabon was, however, exceptional in the writers' community in Poland, and this is expressed in his non-canonical works as well as in his attitude towards *shund*. As far as I know, he was the only one of the well-known writers who openly signed his name to his serialized works that were printed in *Haynt*.⁶¹ Moreover, Rabon dared to come out in defense of *shund*. In the literary periodical *Os*, which was published under his editorship, he printed some favorable words about *shund* literature in Yiddish, though, in this instance, rather anonymously or, more precisely, under fabricated names. This was in the days of the "pamphlet epidemic" in Warsaw in 1937. Rabon firmly rejected the newspapers' hypocritical arguments that caused a great deal of fuss on account of these pamphlets. He rightly claimed that:

In der farflakhung un farfelyetonizirung fun dem yidishn beletristishn shafn iz nisht shuldik keyn andere, vi di yidishe teglekhe tsaytung on untershid fun rikhtung in ibertseygung. In ir geyeg ontsukhapn di pole funem lezer tsvingt zi dem shrayber tsu derniderikn dem nivo fun zayn gayst produktsye.⁶²

By making shallow and by "feuilleton-izing" belletristic works in Yiddish, the guilty are none other than the daily Yiddish newspaper, without difference of direction or view. In their pursuit of readers, the author is forced to lower the standard of his mind's creation.

Rabon dismissed as ludicrous the claim that reading *shund* literature corrupts one's values and that it exerts a damaging influence on its reader. In an amusing mystification of statistical materials, which have allegedly emerged from the pen of the well-known demographer Yakov Leshchinsky, arguments of this kind were brought to the point of absurdity:

In di tsayten, ven Shomer hot gelebt, hobn akhtsik yidishe mames untern aynflus fun zayn roman *Di shtifmutter*, geharget di mener, vos hobn shlekht bahandlt zeyere kinder. In Byalotserkov zenen 15 khasidim, loytn bayshpil fun Nete Hakshlos, a held fun Shomern, gevorn boydem-ganovim. In Zshelokhov hobn fir yidishe kekhins, nokhmakhndik di mamzel Rebeka, avekgevorfn dos yidishe loshn un ongehoynb tsu redn frantseyzish...⁶³

In Shomer's days, and under the influence of his novel *The Stepmother*, eighty Jewish mothers killed the men who had mistreated their children. Following the example of Neta the locksmith, Shomer's hero, 15 Hasids from Byalotserkov became attic thieves. In Żelechów, four Jewish cooks imitated the mamzel (young lady) Rivka. They stopped speaking Yiddish and started speaking French.

⁶¹ This is probably the novel *Dos bufet-meydl (a sensatsyonel-erotisher roman fun der lodzher virklekhayt)*, signed with the nickname of Yisroel Rabon, Rabbi Yisrael. The novel appeared in the newspaper *Nayer folks-blatt* (Lodz). For more about it, see Mayzel's list above, note 22, page 600.

⁶² A. Ringel (= Yisroel Rabon), "Der gayst fun Zshelokhov," *Os* 6 (1937): 38.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 40.

But the point is that Rabon showed in this essay an insightful and balanced outlook of an overall and “complete” literary system and tried to convince the readers of the literary and canonical newspaper under his editorship that literature lacking in non-canonical works is “not literature at all,” or as we might phrase his words today, it is a deficient literary system. Rabon’s words are also worth quoting:

A folk, vos farmogt nisht keyn farbrekher, iz nor faran in der fabl. A lange tsayt hot men getsveyflt, tsi Tel Aviv iz virklekh a shtot, makhmes dort zenen nisht geven keyn ganovim. In gikhn hot men oyf a boydem oyf der Bialik-gas oropgeganvet zeks por hemder, un di situatsye iz gevorn geratevet. Tel Aviv iz gevorn urbanizirt. A literatur velkhe farmogt nisht als nebn-kheder a shund-literatur iz iberhoypt nisht keyn literatur. Es iz lekherlekh tsu farlangln fun hunderter toyznter mentshn, vos farshteyen untern bagrif literatur di farplontertset, oysergeveynekhe, shtoynde mayses, tsu fodern fun panyenkes mit gepuderte nezlekh un fun alte mames fun taytsh-khumesh, az zey zoln leynen nisht andersh vi di poemen un romanen fun Melech Ravitch un Alter Kacyzne.⁶⁴

A people without criminals exists only in fairytales. Most of the time there were doubts if Tel Aviv was indeed a city because there were no thieves there. Soon enough, six shirts were stolen from an attic in Bialik Street and that saved the situation. Tel Aviv became successfully urbanized. Literature without such an annexed space as *shund* literature is not literature at all. It is laughable to demand from hundreds of thousands of people, whose understanding is that literature is made up of complicated stories, extraordinary and amazing stories, to demand from young women with powdered noses and from elderly mothers of *Taytsh-khumesh* [the Pentateuch in Yiddish] – that they read nothing but the long poems and novels by Melech Ravitch and Alter Kacyzne.

VII.

Three authors, who even from today’s perspective are recognized as the most important representatives of Yiddish prose in interwar Poland, supplied the daily newspapers with serialized *shund* literature, while simultaneously creating their important canonical works. It would be reasonable to expect signs of contact and the diffusion of elements accepted as characteristic of non-canonical literature into the important canonical works of Perle, Rabon, and Bashevis. And, in turn, the influence of canonical writing techniques also presumably raised the level of serialized novels that came from the pens of these authors. Accordingly, it seems that examining the non-canonical novels of these three authors of the same period ought to happen, not only within the scope of Yiddish *shund* literature per se, but also as an expression of the internal dynamics within the entire literary system. Here I can only briefly point

⁶⁴ Ibid. And it should be noted that there is a sense that Yiddish literature is a faulty system due to the lack of renditions of many foreign books worthy of translation; this feeling was expressed bluntly earlier, if not with modern terminology, by M. Vanvild, “Tsi iz shoyn faran a yidishe literatur?” (Warsaw, 1929).

out some of these contact traces between their non-canonical and canonical works and the literary thinking of the aforementioned authors.

After the appearance of his book *Yidn fun a gants yor* [Everyday Jews] (Warsaw 1935), Yoshue Perle continued with his family saga, while changing the characters of the book significantly; for he actually reworded significant parts of *Yidn fun a gants yor* in what we think of as the continuation of the trilogy, in the novel *Di gildene pave* [The Golden Peacock] (Warsaw 1937).⁶⁵ Already in *Yidn fun a gants yor* it was possible to discern the presence of non-canonical literature quite substantially, when its young protagonist, who is also the story's narrator in the first person, describes at length his mother's reading of a booklet of stories called *A zun fun tsvey mames* [A son of two mothers] and highlights the influence of this reading on an audience who enthusiastically followed the stories of Rudolf der batrigger [Rudolf the Cheat] and Karoline di sheyne [Carolina the Beautiful].⁶⁶ In *Di gildene pave*, this booklet of stories transforms, in the words of an all-knowing invisible narrator, into a constant object of comparisons, which pass through the book as a leitmotif, and as a background to the suspenseful description of the entangled love affairs of the novel's protagonists.⁶⁷ And although we have faithful testimony from the writer's childhood friend that "Beautiful Ruchtshe," the main heroine of *Di gildene pave*, was faithfully modeled on the author's sister,⁶⁸ it is difficult in her case to avoid disturbing associations with visible elements of tension and eroticism, which are certainly characteristic of Yiddish *shund* literature.

When Perle began working on the autobiographical trilogy, he declared that it would be modeled off of Maxim Gorky's book *My Universities*.⁶⁹ And if in *Yidn fun a gants yor* we can still grasp some kind of affinity that Perle feels for Gorky's book, it is quite clear that he changed his mind in *Di gildene pave*. Indeed, we receive a very instructive testimony from Perle himself in his letter to Melech Ravitch from 24 March 1936:

Ikh shrayb atsind a groysn roman fun etlekhe un fertsik yor yidish lebn in Poyln. Gehaltn in a primitiver form, loytn muster fun di alte folks-romanen.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Shortly before the beginning of the Second World War the continuation of the trilogy also appeared in Warsaw. I was not able to find the book outside Poland. In the National Library in Warsaw, there is an obligatory copy of part of the book: Y. Perle, *Gilgulim*, roman, "Di gildene pave," tsveyter teyl (Warsaw, 1929). In the microfilm sent to me from Warsaw there are in total 336 pages, but this is not the end of the book; the book was sent as installments in pamphlets to subscribers of *Literarische bleter*, and it seems that the last pamphlets were lost. According to advertisements in *Literarische bleter* 18, p. 781, 19, p. 782, from the dates June 26 and 30, 1939, it would appear that the book was published even then in its entirety.

⁶⁶ Y. Perle, "Yidn fun a gants yor," *Literarische bleter* (Warsaw, 1935): 256-257, 307.

⁶⁷ Y. Perle, *Di gildene pave*, roman in tsvey teyln, *ershter teyl* (Warsaw, 1937), 18, 48, 50, 64, 171-172.

⁶⁸ See the foreword of L. Finklshteyn (note 60), IX-X.

⁶⁹ "Ikh shrayb fun dem fargangenem dor – a bukh in dray khalokim, 30 yor yidish lebn... nisht gekent gefinen dem levush, dem ton biz Gorki mit zayn bukh *Mayne universitetn* hot mir ongevizn." From an interview with Perle published in the journal *Moment*, 16 January 1931. See also L. Finklshteyn (note 60), 10-11.

⁷⁰ I thank the manuscript department of the National and University Library in Jerusalem for the chance to use the letter kept in Melech Ravitch's archive.

At the moment I am writing a big novel about some forty years of Jewish life in Poland. It is written in a primitive form following the model of old folk novels.

What is the “primitive” form and what is “the model of old folk novels”? This almost certainly points towards Shomer’s novels, for which the two definitions included in Perle’s letter are fitting. An explicit reference to this is the name of the booklet of stories that is mentioned in Perle’s book, because we do have a novel by Shomer called *Eyn zohn fun tsvey mames* (Vilna, 1890).

And although we do not find Rudolf and Carolina, whom Perle told us about, in Shomer’s book, there is no doubt that this is the kind of novel that Perle meant when he spoke about “folk novels” and about their primitive form. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Shomer’s book served as the model for Perle’s *Di gildene pave*, even if only implicitly, and not explicitly and openly.

Yisroel Rabon’s novel *Di gas* [The Street] (Warsaw 1928) is a shocking book, which portrays the alienation and lack of options of a discharged Jewish soldier after the First World War in Lodz, Poland. Very diverse elements of a wild and fertile imagination join together in this book, insightfully combined with realistic elements, anchored in descriptions of the reality of that period. The book excels in its use of grotesque elements from different sources, including the stories of several different characters’ lives, which unmistakably find their origins in Yiddish sensational novels. For there is no other way to explain the fantastical and sensational stories of the Jewish wrestler Jason, his adventures and loves, including his participation in the Hungarian revolution and his miraculous rescue from certain death (*ibid.*, pp. 149-168, 182-186). The same could be said about the story of the Jew from Komarno in Galicia about his travels in China and his dealings there (*ibid.*, 252-274). Both these life stories are nothing more than variations on the theme of alienation, which Rabon also developed from *shund* elements as natural components in the grotesque fabric of the book.

And finally, Bashevis, for whom we will limit ourselves to two of his explicit statements taken from his autobiography:

Kh’hob geleyent ire drames – a breyre hob ikh gehat? Zey toygn nisht. A sakh reyde un veynik aktsye. S’felt der iker: di shpanung. Vart, ikh darf emetsn telefonirn.

Dr. Gliksman iz avek in ershtn zal, tsu telefon. Ikh bin geblibn zitsn aley. In di dozike verter vos Gliksman hot gezogt kilakher-yad hob ikh mit a mol gefunen dem basheyd tsu mayne eygene shrayberishe retenishn. Tsvor, mayne dialogn zenen nisht geven keyn lange, ober s’zenen dort geven tsu fil silderungen un tsu veynik shpanung. Fun leyenen di yidishe kritiker un teyl mol oykh di poylishe hob ikh mikh gehat ongenumen mit der idey az shpanung iz a sinonim fun shund. Di shund-romanen in der yidisher prese hot

men gerufn shpanendike romanen. Ober vi bald a prese darf hobn shpanung, far vos zol dos nisht zayn emes oykh vegn yeder sort literatur?⁷¹

I read her dramas – I had no choice. They are not worth anything. A lot of talk and little happening. They are missing the point: suspense. Wait, I need to make a call.

Dr. Gliksman went off to the first hall, to the telephone. I stayed alone. In these words that Gliksman said offhandedly, I suddenly found the solution to my own literary riddles. It is true that my dialogues were not long, but there were too many descriptions and not enough suspense. From reading the Jewish critics, and sometimes also the Polish ones, I realized that suspense is a synonym for *shund*. The novels in the Yiddish newspapers that were labeled as *shund* were called suspenseful novels. But if the press needs suspense, would the same not be true of any kind of literature?

In this passage Bashevis describes an encounter in the Warsaw writers' club, likely in the early 1930s, when he suddenly discovered suspense to be the essential component in literature. Similar and corresponding remarks are strewn across his other autobiographical writings.⁷² I imagine that anyone interested in examining the elements of suspense in Bashevis's stories and novels would have no choice but to engage with the novels in the newspapers, where the author found the elements that he himself lacked, until his aforementioned discovery, and which were absent, in his opinion, from canonical Yiddish literature. And of course, Bashevis's approach to the elements of suspense in literature, while it broke with commonly accepted opinions in Yiddish and Polish criticism, also needs to be examined against the broader backdrop of his uncompromising anti-modernist stance.⁷³

Bashevis also described himself as someone who enriched non-canonical literature with ideas and principles from "serious" and recognized literature. Here, the words are included in an evidently autobiographical novel, in which its hero Aaron Greidinger's identity is unmistakably the alter-ego of Bashevis in his youth:⁷⁴

Ikh hob ibergezetst un baarbet romanen far der yidisher tsaytung. Teyl mol hob ikh zey aleyn geshribn. In tukh hobn zey gehat di eygene tematik vos di azoy gerufene ernste literatur: libe, seks, farrat, meshugas. Di heldn un heldins hobn zikh in gantsn ibergegebn in reyshes fun di emotsyes vos zeyer rikhtung un zeyere komplikatsyes hot men keyn mol nisht gekent foroyzen.

⁷¹ I. Bashevis Singer, "Figurn un epizodn fun literatn fareyn," *Forverts* (24 August 1979). In this passage Dr. Avrom Gliksman (1883-1943) is mentioned, who was a well-known journalist in Poland in the interwar period. For more about him, see the *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur* (note 10), B, 277-278.

⁷² See for example: "Di verter shpanung un unterhaltung zenen geven treyf bay di yidishe shrayber un bay di kritiker. A shpanendiker roman iz geven a sinonim fun a shund-roman." I. Bashevis Singer, "Gloybn un tsveyfl (driter teyl)," *Forverts* (26 October 1978).

⁷³ This stance was clearly stated in an instructive attempt to summarize Yiddish literature in the interwar period while the war was still going on: I. Bashevis, "Arum der yidisher literatur in Poyln," *Di tsukunft* (August 1943): 468-475.

⁷⁴ On this novel see: Kh. Shmeruk, "Ben otobiyografiyah leroman biytsirat bashevis," *Molad* 41, 251 (Spring 1982): 174-186.

In di daytshe un poylishe shund-romanen⁷⁵ iz oft gekumen tsu mord, ober dos hot der yidisher leyener nisht gevolt. Vi tif ikh hob nisht gelozt faln di heldn, keyn rotskhim zenen zey nisht gevorn. Derfar zenen gor a sakh bagangen zelmord. Ikh hob zey arayngetribn in dilemes vos s'iz nisht geven fun zey keyn oysveg. Zey hobn mit protest un biterkayt tsurikgevorfn got zayne ramakh eyvrin, shisah gidim, un di mili-miliasn nervn, vos ven m'git nokh zeyere kaprizn arbt men do gehenem do oyf der velt. Zeltn emets fun di heldn mayne hobn gehat di emune un dem koyekh zikh optsuzogn fun zeyere laydnshaftn. Yeder fun di dozike bashraybungen hot bashtetikt Schopenhauers teze, az der viln iz blind, der seykhil iz zayn meshores, un az dos lebn iz a shpil tsvishn nisht derfilte tayves un umdertreglekher langvayl.⁷⁶

I translated and adapted novels for the Yiddish newspaper, sometimes I wrote them myself. They in fact had an identical range of subjects comparable to what is usually called serious literature: love, sex, betrayal, madness. The heroes and heroines submitted to emotions that would bring about trajectories and entanglements that could not be anticipated in advance. *Shund* novels in Polish and in German often lead to murder. But the Jewish reader didn't want that. No matter how far I'd go with the downfall of the protagonists, they did not turn into murderers. On the contrary, many of them committed suicide. I brought them into dead-end entanglements. In protestation and bitterness they cast back to God every fiber of their being, every tendon, and the many millions of nerves, that if one gives in to their impulses, their world will become hell on earth. On very few occasions did one of the protagonists have the courage to renounce their desires. Each of these descriptions confirmed Schopenhauer's thesis that desire is blind, the mind is its servant, and that life is nothing but a game between unfulfilled passions and insufferable boredom.

We need to further examine whether these words stated by Aaron Greidinger were indeed realized in those novels of Bashevis, which the author himself defined as "shmontses." But whoever disagrees with Bashevis's words cannot now avoid casting doubt on the very possibility of drawing a clear and unequivocal line between that which we sometimes think of as *shund* and those works that we think of as "serious" and which serve as legitimate objects of acceptable literary research. Research into non-canonical Yiddish literature, known as *shund*, promises to be a thrilling endeavor for those who engage in it, per the nature of the material, and it also promises to illuminate the dynamics of the [literary] system overall.

⁷⁵ It is worth noting that the best-known Polish *shund* book, *Trędowata* by Helena Mniszek, was probably translated into Yiddish already in the early 1920s: Helena Mniszek, *Di metsoyres, roman, yidish: bom* (Lodz: Farlag Lazar Kahan), 359 pages. There is no mention of the year of publication. But, of course, contact with Polish literature of this type should not be dated before the end of the First World War. It is not superfluous to remark that this book in Polish, in a new edition printed in Canada, is imported to Tel Aviv to this day.

⁷⁶ I. Bashevis Singer, "Neshome-ekspeditsyes," *Forverts* (24 October 1974). It is the version of the novel known nowadays by the name *Shosha*, prior to its adaptation to the English edition.