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The Jewish Robinson Crusoe

TRANSLATION STUDIES HAS CHANGED significantly over the last thirty years from applied linguistics to a much closer relationship with a cultural studies "concerned primarily with questions of power relations and textual production" (Bassnett 135). The relationship between the text, the translator, and the two language systems has thus become an important means of studying "cultural interaction that is not offered in the same way by any other field" (Bassnett and Lefevere 7). Yet little work has been done to evaluate how canonical texts are introduced into a minority culture by minority translators, and how these texts serve to legitimate the translator as an authority by showing her or his access to the cultural commerce of a canonical work.[1] This essay considers this topic as it relates to the Yiddish version of *Robinson Crusoe.*

In 1820 the Jewish enlightener Yoysef Vitlin published a Yiddish adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe* entitled *Robinzon di geshikhte fun Alter-Leb* (Robinson, the history of Alter-Leb),[2] based on Joachim Campe's (1746-1818) 1779/1780 German reworking of *Robinson Crusoe* as *Robinson der Jungere* rather than Defoe's original.[3] Vitlin keeps much of the plot intact yet Judaizes the story: Robinson Crusoe is renamed Reb Alter-Leb and is a practicing Jew from Hamburg; Friday is renamed Shabes (or Sabbath) and becomes a practicing Jew; and the island is Judaized by recourse to Jewish iconography. In his version Alter-Leb yearns for adventure and accidently sets out on a voyage around the world. On the way to South America, the ship sinks and he is marooned on an island. Alter-Leb builds a home and with domesticated llamas begins to undertake simple farming. A volcano erupts (a variation on Defoe's earthquake found in Campe) that nearly destroys his home. He rebuilds but soon becomes deathly ill. Alter-Leb survives, undergoes a spiritual epiphany that brings a newfound faith in God, and establishes a daily pattern of gathering food, milking his llamas, and praying.

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[1] The polysystem theories of Itamar Even-Zohar, although a little dated, are still an excellent device for understanding the ways that translations are used to bring cultural legitimacy to an insecure population. In particular, see his article "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem."

[2] *Robinzon di geshikhte fun Alter-Leb* was published anonymously in two parts. A 1937 article by the Yiddish critic Ber Shlosberg states that it was written by the little known Galician Maskil Yoysef Vitlin (558). David Roskies cites personal communications with Dov Sadan that also identify Vitlin as the author (*Bridge of Longing* f. 20, p. 359). For a discussion of the work's date and place of composition see M. Viner (259).

[3] His was one of numerous translations into German of *Robinson Crusoe,* an extremely popular book with the German reading public (Robertson 218).

After three years, "savages" arrive with two bound men. Alter-Leb rescues one of them, renames him Shabes, and they live and work together, with Shabes teaching Alter-Leb such things as making fire quickly, and Alter-Leb teaching Shabes monotheism and civilized behavior. They build a small raft on which to escape from the island but soon find themselves helplessly set adrift. Alter-Leb prays to God and they rescue themselves. Soon a ship arrives, but it is empty except for a large goat. Yet another boat shows up, and the two men save a Spanish Catholic along with a "savage" who turns out to be Shabes's father. Finally, they rescue the captain of an English ship overrun by pirates. The captain promises to transport them back to Europe, and on the trip home Shabes's father dies. Alter-Leb and Shabes arrive in Germany to great acclaim, become successful craftsmen, marry, and raise devout, educated children.

In what follows I compare Campe's rewrite with Defoe's original, and then Vitlin's version with Campe's, in order to examine Vitlin's intentions in altering the text for a Jewish audience. On an island outside the boundary of the "civilized," the Jewish Robinson Crusoe marks out the limits of enlightenment mandates by showing how the universalist impulse of brotherhood (Defoe's and Campe's Christian everyman) confronts the specificity of Jewishness (Vitlin's Alter-Leb).

Vitlin's *Robinzon di geshikhte fun Alter-Leb* (Robinson, the history of Alter-Leb)[4] was a popular read for Yiddish speaking Jews in general and members of the Jewish Haskalah in particular (Viner 260).[5] In brief, "Haskalah" is the term for the Jewish "enlightenment," which came to Galicia, where Vitlin lived, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is based on the tenets of the German Jew Moses Mendelssohn, who sought "a community of Jews and Christians characterized by full tolerance and respect flowing from a common natural religion; and an enlightened, moral, unfanatic Jewry" (Meyer 40). Jewish enlighteners, called "maskilim," sought to make Jews more "civilized," Westernized, and less "backwards." Many maskilim believed that, in return for assimilating, the Jews would be emancipated. Although the Haskalah in the East was less extreme than in the West, it proposed a similar set of principles: that children should study secular subjects along with Jewish ones, that Jews should try to become full-fledged members of the broader society, and that Hebrew and the local languages should be elevated above the "crippled" language of Yiddish. "Ignorant" Jews had to be taught how to become enlightened (Mahler, *Hasidism* 58), and one of the best ways to educate them was through didactic literature that at first glance seemed respectably Jewish but on a closer look perpetuated maskilic tenets. *Robinzon di geshikhte fun Alter-Leb* is a paradigmatic example of this trend.

The maskilic Jewish enlighteners represent what Andre Lefevere calls a "culture with a low self-image [that] will welcome translations (and other forms of rewriting) from a culture or cultures it considers superior to itself" (*Translation* 88). The superior culture is Western Europe, and its texts provide for the maskilim models of how to construct an enlightened society and literature.[6] By publishing

[4] There is no translation of *Robinzon* into English. All the translations are my own.

[5] It was reprinted five times (Roskies, "The Genres" 19).

[6] Examples of maskilim texts based on European models include Israel Axenfeld's 1840's *Dos Shterntikhl*, which shares numerous elements of German bourgeois comedy, and Shlomo Ettinger's

a Yiddish version of *Robinson Crusoe* that demonstrated his access to Western discourse and knowledge of "high" (or higher than Yiddish) literary culture, the maskil Yoysef Vitlin would thus have accrued for himself a sort of "cultural capital."[7] In doing so, he gained contact with the "fashionable repertoire" (Even-Zohar 48) of the times—a central concern of maskilim seeking to push themselves, and the Jews, to be more "modern" and less "backward." Indeed, for the Yiddish writers of Eastern Europe during the enlightenment (Haskalah) era, literary legitimation often came by making a prestigious Western text available to Jewish readers[8] in order to "move" the Jewish readership towards the cultural center of Western discourse.

Unlike in colonial settings where canonical texts were often introduced to natives by colonizers, in Jewish literature the intermediary was a fellow Jew. The Jews who "brought" Europe in the form of literature to the "ignorant" Jewish masses were members of the educated elite who both had access to European languages such as German and Russian and were fluent enough in Yiddish to translate originals. The dominant culture of Europe was transferred "home" and Judaized. Of course, the Jews who were being "brought" Europe were themselves living *in* Europe, but not in the cultural centers of Berlin or St. Petersburg. Deemed by the Jewish cultural elite to be intellectually and socially excluded from European discourse, they were at once *in* Europe but not *of* Europe. European narratives reworked into Yiddish became a tool to make them "Europeans," to educate them in the cultural system of the West. Yet by "revising" a canonical text for this Jewish-centric audience, a maskil writer such as Yoysef Vitlin paradoxically de-canonized it. That is, if for the Jewish reader the canonical text's conversion into a Jewish text is precisely what makes it legitimate and accessible, for the adaptor, in contrast, that very Jewishness delegitimates the text by in effect "de-Europeanizing" it. The "violence" that many feminist and postcolonialist critics have found inherent in the act of translation is in this case the reluctant by-product of the maskil translator's attempt to gain cultural and literary authority.[9]

As Pierre Bourdieu has shown, viewers or readers unfamiliar with a particular work of art are much more likely to resort to a personal ethos rather than aesthetics when trying to interpret it (*Distinction* 44). Vitlin likely realized this, and by making the setting and characters of his narrative Jewish, he sought to reflect the world his readers brought to the text. To prepare *Robinson Crusoe* for a Jewish

1830's play *Serkele*, which is modeled on European parlor comedies. Dan Miron differentiates between the radical maskilic writers, who while "influenced as they might have been by foreign literary and intellectual trends and values, are usually original artists," and the "nonradicals," who "often work as adaptors and compilers." He includes the author of the Yiddish Robinson Crusoe in the latter category. See *A Traveler* 253.

[7] My use of the term "cultural capital" follows Andre Lefevere's adaptation of Pierre Bourdeiu's original use of the concept: "cultural capital" is "what makes you acceptable in your society at the end of the socialization process known as education" ("Translation Practice(s)" 43). In the case of the maskilim, the education process is not traditional Jewish education but Western education. For Bourdieu's own definition of "cultural capital" see "The Forms of Capital," pp. 243-48.

[8] My use of the term "legitimacy" is based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu on literary fields. He maps out the "competing principles of legitimacy" in cultural production. See in particular his article "The Field of Cultural Production, or: the Economic World Reversed."

[9] For considerations of the violence of translation see Spivak 179-200, Simon 28-30, and Dingwaney.

audience this work of "high" culture was thus made "low" by Judaizing the original, eliminating much of the Westernized setting, and inserting a framing narrator who explains to the uneducated audience the meaning of the story.

Vitlin's Judaizing of *Robinson Crusoe* was also central to his decision to present his adaptation in Yiddish. Rewritten texts—translations, adaptations for anthologies, movie versions—are crucially important in understanding how cultures use literature, since many "nonprofessional" readers gain much of their exposure to literature in the form of rewrites (Lefevere, *Translation* 7). This is certainly true of the development of Yiddish literature, much of which—from the *Bovo Bukh* (a 1541 adaption of an Italian romance) up through the Jewish enlightenment—reworks Western literature directly or indirectly. It was primarily through these rewrites that East European Jews learned about Western literature, and, as a result, these adaptations of Western literature shaped the "center of the polysystem" (Even-Zohar 46) of Yiddish literature.

The maskilim, of course, greatly preferred the languages—Russian or German—of cultures with high status to the "crippled jargon" of Yiddish, a Germanic language written in Hebrew characters. As Dan Miron writes:

> The objection of the maskilim to Yiddish . . . had basically to do with the function of this specifically Jewish language as a social and cultural barrier between Jews and their non-Jewish environment. Yiddish, the most prominent feature of Jewish specificity, had to be obliterated in order to accomplish cultural rapprochement between Jew and non-Jew. (*The Image* 51)

Yet in *Robinzon di geshikhte fun Alter-Leb*, as in other maskilim texts, Yiddish is used, albeit reluctantly, because it is the language most Jews speak and read. Both the high-status English of Defoe's original and the high-status German of Joachim Campe's *Robinson der Jungere* must thus be replaced by the despised Yiddish. The delegitimation of *Robinson Crusoe* is therefore two-fold: both the plot and the language are made un-European.

One of the main appeals of *Robinson Crusoe* is its fantastic yet recognizable reality: Defoe chronicles an adventure that an ordinary person might undertake (Watt 151). The journey to a new land re-charts the literary terrain, as do all adventure tales, but also makes it familiar and recognizable. The Jewish version of *Robinson Crusoe* extends the border of the Jewish world to a distant island with unrecognizable flora and fauna. For Jewish readers without a tradition of sea stories and adventures[10] the setting is more exotic than for a European readership versed in adventure tales. The new territory is nevertheless made familiar by the use of Jewish iconography (1:22, 46), Jewish rituals (1:26, 30, 35), and Jewish speech (2:41-42). The distant island is also fertile ground to slyly introduce enlightenment precepts: although he is far from Europe, the Jewish Robinson Crusoe learns to construct his own enlightened society, thus providing the book's Jewish readers with some key examples of the tenets of "civilized society."

Robinzon di geshikhte fun Alter-Leb is a paradigmatic maskilic text that exemplifies virtually all the basics of maskilic literature: a series of legitimation tactics to make the text respectably Jewish (for example, the extreme faith of both Alter-Leb and the narrator); a disparaging of Yiddish as the language of composition

[10] Roskies points out that the sea adventure genre was "the main area of maskilic contribution to Yiddish popular literature before Ayzik-Meyer Dik" (*Working Papers 18*).

(1:2)[11]; a perpetuation of key maskilic ideas—Jews are too superstitious (2:12), need to learn to love all men equally (1:15, 18, 28), and should learn manual labor (2:6); an emphasis on the Jewish Bible, as opposed to the Talmud (2:45, 74)[12]; and a narrative of a man growing intellectually and morally by leaving his town and setting out for the broader world (in contrast to Jewish isolationism). As David Roskies states, "this most maskilic of works was also the most thoroughly Judaized of them" ("The Medium" 283), since the more extreme the propaganda, the more necessary its "camouflage." Moreover, because Vitlin was a member of the Galician Haskalah, an embattled group "slight in numbers and in power, surrounded by a hostile environment" (Zinberg 33), pressure to legitimize the text for a traditional Jewish readership was even more extreme than for maskils writing in more secure conditions. The author was thus part of a two-way legitimation: the Western text legitimated him and his perspective by showing his worldliness in choosing a canonized European narrative, while the Judaization of the text legitimated the text for Jewish readers who needed to recognize the literary terrain as Jewish.

The main character, Alter-Leb, makes the island a miniature *Jewish* kingdom. The impulse is not Zionist as political Zionism did not yet exist. Rather, Vitlin's version combines the Robinson Crusoe myth, as handed down to him by Campe, with Old Testament Jewish visions of kingship. While both Defoe and Campe also suggest that Robinson Crusoe is the king of his island, for the Jewish reader of Vitlin's rewrite, such notions of kingship are inevitably connected to the Jewish Bible.

Tropes such as "island," "home," "colony," and "adventure" also speak differently to a Jewish East European readership than to German or English readers.[13] For one thing, the territorial imagination is different: home means both the here and now of Eastern Europe and the longed for home of mythic Eretz-Israel (land of Israel or Zion). To make the island "home" thus brings up issues of empowerment and disempowerment (residency rights, etc.) that are markedly different for non-Jewish readers. For instance, for Defoe the "island" trope is bound up with ideas of colonialism and expansionism. As Michael Seidel writes,

> He sustains in Crusoe the national mission, the hoped for westward course of British empire, by having him represent in his island reign the settlement ethos over and beyond the absolutist ethos of home rule . . . In the Crusoe fable, England literally comes out from under Stuart hegemony to test her future sea legs in the arena of world commerce. (53-54)

But, whereas Defoe's island marks a new global framework of British outward settlement from the locale of "home" rule, Vitlin's "home" and "island" are bereft of a global, expansionist perspective. Instead, the island delineates the *psychologi-*

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[11] Viner makes an excellent point that the author may have added an appendix in German that retells the whole Yiddish tale in brief to encourage Jewish readers to learn German (259). This focus on pushing the populace towards German was a central tenet of the Galician Haskalah (Mahler, *Hasidism* 39-40).

[12] The maskilim believed that Jews should be encouraged to replace Talmud study with Torah study. See Mahler, *A History* 596.

[13] I am referring to Vitlin's readership as East European Jews, even though *Robinzon* was composed in Galicia, because Yiddish texts of this type tended to be read by East European Jews rather than West European ones, who did not always speak or read Yiddish.

cal (versus political) movement of the Jews from an overly entrenched and static cultural and political perspective to one that embraces a universalistic world view.

Indeed, a story of a young man traveling the world, becoming stranded, and then creating a home and society was typically used to educate the Jewish masses on the need to look beyond their small, isolated, and parochial world (as viewed by maskilim) toward the great world beyond. By Judaizing the adventure tale, the great beyond is made seemingly accessible to any Jew. Yet for Jewish readers travel for the most part was understood not as adventure, but as the necessary response to poverty or antisemitism (Garrett 34-36). In fact, all the key themes of Robinson Crusoe, generated as it was by a writer with artistic, political, and economic freedom, shift markedly when placed within East European Jewish society. Even if Vitlin believed that Defoe's and Campe's Robinson Crusoe was truly an "everyman" who could as easily be Jewish as Christian, in a text intended for Jewish readers that everyman must actively be Jewish. These contradictions give Vitlin's version an interesting tension: the European text asserts an idealized freedom that its Jewish translation necessarily refutes. Vitlin's diverges most crucially from both Defoe's and Campe's texts whenever Jewish specificity overrides the everyman status of Robinson Crusoe.

Joachim Campe, the author of the German version of *Robinson Crusoe,* was "the most important publicist of pedagogy in the late Enlightenment" (Green 58). Since "members of the Haskalah movement were preoccupied with pedagogical issues and their primary 'maskilic' objectives were in the field of education," Campe was an extremely, if not the most, legitimate author of the time to appropriate (Shavit 43).[14] Moreover, his friendship with the leading Maskil, Moses Mendelssohn, made him an idealized figure—even if the friendship was much more important to Mendelssohn than to Campe (Shavit 49; see also Altmann).

Campe was originally inspired to write a version of *Robinson Crusoe* because of Jean Jacques Rousseau's statement in *Emile* that *Robinson Crusoe* is the best tool for teaching children "natural education" (Campe iv-xii). With this pedagogical mandate as a starting point for his adaptation, Campe made some key changes to Defoe's original: he adds a narrative structure in which a father tells the story to his children; he depicts Robinson arriving with no tools and nearly naked so as to show extraordinary examples of human ingenuity; he vigorously condemns slavery; and he provides a detailed account of how to run a perfect colony or new society. As I will show, these divergences serve to make the work a more effective pedagogical tool, to demonstrate the ability of reasoned action to overcome all hindrances, and to perpetuate enlightenment anti-slavery precepts.

Campe's altered narrative structure clearly reinforces his belief that *Robinson Crusoe* is an excellent text for teaching children moral precepts. Rather than a first person account by Robinson Crusoe himself, a father tells the tale to his children. The story of Robinson Crusoe is meant to instruct the readers on what is important (honesty, faith, hard work) and to show that moral precepts can best be transmitted through example. After telling part of the story, the father

[14] Roskies points out that seven different adaptations of Campe's writings were published in Yiddish ("The Genres" 22).

asks his children leading questions about Robinson's actions, and allows the children to reach their own conclusions. The father points to parts of the story that serve as examples of correct behavior (19, 158-59) and uses *Robinson Crusoe* to check up on the children's education (56-57).[15] Both the narrative frame (a father using the story to teach his children) and the story itself ostensibly teach Campe's readers that literature can (and should) serve as a pedagogical tool to help readers work through moral questions about how to be good, just, and useful in the world. The narration is divided into thirty nights, or one month, of storytelling. The breaks in narrative arise when it is time for the children to have dinner or go to sleep (34, 97, 130). For Campe the pauses are also a pedagogical tool: by stopping at the moments of highest tension the father teaches his children the virtue of patience. Vitlin's narrator also ends the sections by ostensibly taking a break, stating "gute nakht libe kinder, az mir veln derlebn morgn vel ikh aykh vayter kinstlikhes dertseyln" (Good night beloved children. As we live to see morning, I will again tell you more of the story, 1:24). In both cases the breaks build the tension while diffusing the moments of high drama.

The dialogic framing structure of a father conversing with his children also enables the text to be self critical as it unfolds: the children raise questions along the way that presumably identify the flaws in Defoe's original. They ask their father why Robinson acts in particular ways, what he feels about things that happen, the lessons he is learning (133, 160-61). This structure enables the text to open up beyond a simple first person narrative into a conversation between the reader, the characters, and the narrator about the meaning of the book. The dialogue between the father and children is in essence a critical commentary on Defoe's original. Indeed, in Campe, the father and children take on a literary weight equal to Robinson and Friday, and their story progresses along with that of the characters. Where Robinson develops morally, the children do as well (115, 126-27). By the end of the book, they, like Robinson, have grown into clear-sighted, ethical individuals.

Although Vitlin addresses his readers as "Jewish children" (1:3) at the beginning of *Robinzon di geshikhte fun Alter-Leb,* it is unlikely that Vitlin's version of the story was intended—like Campe's—primarily for children. (As Zohar Shavit has shown, Jewish children's literature in fact began as a result of the maskilim reading Campe's books for children [51].) Rather, "Jewish children" means Jewish readers, for, as the author states, the book is intended for the "common people" (1:6). Campe's father educating his children is thus transformed into a narrator speaking to a readership he views as naive yet malleable children. Moreover, unlike Campe's children, this audience has no ability to respond.

In his address to the readers, Vitlin lists the virtues that he believes to be most important: intellectual curiosity, brotherly love, and reason—all typical values of the maskilim (1:3). Next he states that the wise man who wrote the original has composed a work that shows ten key ideas, including: the importance of a healthy and strong body and a "frum" (devout) soul; the value of using one's reason to

[15] I am using pagination from the 1821 version of *Robinson der Jungere.*

overcome unhealthy habits; a belief in God; the difference between good and evil; the prevalence of the human desire to better oneself; and a vision of a world where people live together in goodness and devotion (2:3).

The author goes on to describe the narrator as a wealthy Lemberg merchant, who is also an ideal traditional Jew: he is devout, prays regularly, and is knowledgeable in Torah. He teaches his children piety, a full knowledge of Jewish sacred texts, good habits and virtues, and the love of man. Not surprisingly, people come to this Lemberg merchant to hear stories that educate them about themselves and the world. Amongst his corpus of tales is that of Robinson Crusoe (1:6).

The stock type of a wealthy merchant narrator "was held up in the Haskalah literature as a model for Jews," because "wealthy merchants provided the spokesmen as well as the patrons of the Galician Haskalah" (Mahler, *Hasidism* 34, 33). The Lemberg merchant thus represents the best of both worlds. He is devout and respectful of the culture of the "masses" for whom the narrator claims to write, but he is also enlightened along the beliefs of the Haskalah (Roskies, "The Medium" 283). A typical example of the merchant narrator's maskilic agenda comes when he explains that this is a tale about the range of human inventiveness. Through a combination of reason and intelligence, Jewish civilization adapts itself to different challenges and situations. Thus, an explanation of how medical knowledge developed in Egypt ends with an explanation of why this led to so many Jewish doctors (1:32). The narrator ends his explanation by saying that as humans have been inspired by necessity to use their reason to develop a whole range of inventions, so too Alter-Leb's need will drive him to invention (1:33). From the narrator's "enlightened" perspective, reason and intelligence can make anything happen; there is no chaos, and life is inherently logical.

Alter-Leb desires to see the world and sets sail. Whereas in Defoe and Campe leaving home, while rash, is nevertheless culturally acceptable in an age of "individualism" (Watt 165), in Vitlin its resonance is far more radical, since among his potential readership only a small minority (the maskilim) affirmed the mandates of individualism. Once aboard, the narrator describes for his landlocked Jewish readership the basics of ship travel—for instance, what an anchor (1:10) and lighthouse (1:11) are. The explanations are educational and broaden the readership's corpus of knowledge about the world. Campe's children also need to have the basics of ship travel explained to them from time to time (206, 212), but not to the extent or with the frequency found in Vitlin's tale. Indeed, Vitlin seems to have assumed that the adult Jews for whom he wrote were more ignorant in many instances than Campe's child audience.

The readership's lack of knowledge about ships is matched by Alter-Leb's total ignorance of geography: for example, he believes that London is only a few miles from Hamburg (1:10). In fact, he does not even intend to undertake such a long journey, but once underway there is nothing he can do to turn back. His ignorance of geography of course provides a lesson to Jewish readers, who are thereby urged to become more aware of the greater world. And, again, by making Alter-Leb naive the author can explain things such as geography and ship travel to what he believes to be an uneducated readership.

Through his travels, Alter-Leb develops morally and intellectually: he learns geography, becomes more worldly, and, most important, from his encounter with some Turks, becomes a voice promoting the brotherhood of man (1:15). His travels, while undertaken rashly and to the dismay of his parents, educate him about the world in general and the tenets of the Haskalah in particular. In Defoe and Campe, on the other hand, the ship travel does not broaden Robinson Crusoe's mind in such a radical way. The major changes in their protagonists only occur once Robinson Crusoe is settled on the island.

Within hours of landing on the island, Alter-Leb is outwardly transforming into a devout Jew: he chants Hebrew prayers (1:26), manifesting for the first time that he practices Judaism. His prayers bring comfort and give him strength. Inwardly the tie with Jewishness may be seen as both a connection to a lost, missed community and, at the same time, a reconnection with his religion that will be played out in the island conversion narrative. Alter-Leb thus faces his loneliness and fear with songs of faith in God (1:29). Perhaps this is intended to show the Jewish readers that as they enter the broader, new world their Judaism can be a source of comfort, for in the schema of Vitlin devotion always brings material rewards. The prayers to God are also a way to Judaize the foreign terrain of the island. Alter-Leb not only prays Jewishly, he also eats Jewishly. Where Robinson Crusoe finds oysters (which of course are not kosher and would not work for Vitlin's Jewish Robinson Crusoe), Alter-Leb instead finds herring, an acceptable Jewish food (1:29).

At the same time that Alter-Leb's prayers tie him to the collective Jewish community back in Europe and so represent a return to faith, Vitlin also extends the notion of "community" on the island to include non-Jews. Alter-Leb's new community includes "savages" and Christians, much as Defoe (and Campe) extend the idea of community on their islands to include other faiths and outlooks. But, whereas in Defoe an extended notion of community intersects with expansionism and colonialism, in Vitlin the extension of the community to include non-Jews emphasizes once again the maskilic mandate against Jewish isolationism.

The Judaization of the island intensifies when on his second day Alter-Leb decides to make himself a calendar in order to mark (and keep) the Sabbath and to track the Jewish holiday cycle (1:39). For Alter-Leb, "a Jew alone" as he labels himself, the Jewish calendar is necessary to living a Jewish life on the forsaken island. Upon completing the calendar he realizes that it is Rosh haShana (1:40). Island time is now Jewish time, with his first day on the island being the Jewish new year and the beginning of the Jewish calendar. On this Eden of sorts, Alter-Leb is like the first Jew (at one point he calls himself Adam, 2:15) and his calendar the beginning of Jewish history.

Alter-Leb is soon joined by Friday, who is renamed Shabes. Alter-Leb tells him first that Shabes is his "guest" (suggesting the island is now his home), then that Alter-Leb is his master, and ultimately his king (2:27). Alter-Leb's role, like that of the maskil generally, is to teach Shabes how to be civilized (2:41). At the same time, Alter-Leb is also teaching Shabes to be Jewish. He teaches him prayers (2:46), discusses God (2:43-46), and even teaches him Yiddish (2:40-42). Soon Shabes is sprinkling his conversation with Hebraism's such as "Khas vesholem" (God for-

bid, 2:42). In fact, Shabes gradually becomes a fully voiced, independent, and autonomous character, far more developed than his counterpart in Defoe (and Campe), where "there is throughout a remarkable lack of interest in Friday as someone worth trying to understand or converse with" (Watt 168). If in Defoe Robinson Crusoe is Friday's "spiritual deliverer" (McKeon 331), in *Robinzon* Alter-Leb is Shabes's "spiritual brother." Clearly, Vitlin's intent is to make Shabes, like Alter-Leb, into a representative of the new, enlightened Jew: Jewish by language and religion, yet "civilized" like non-Jews.[16]

In Defoe's original, Robinson Crusoe first avows he is the king of the island[17] and later its governor with "subjects" of a variety of religions, all of which will be tolerated (236). Campe shifts the paradigm from a monarchy to a colony (although there is a clear suggestion of colonization in Defoe's version), and describes in detail how to properly administer a colony that has freedom of religion and is ruled by an enlightened despot (283-84). In Vitlin's version the complete absence of issues involving colonization reflects a very different relationship to land, home, and colonized spaces. For Defoe's and Campe's European readership, "nationhood" connotes homeland, motherland, and a settled space inhabited by members of the same nation. For the Jews of Eastern Europe who composed Vitlin's audience, "nationhood" meant two distinct ideas: a nation where the Jews live but which is the homeland/motherland of others, and a religious and cultural term for the Jews meaning peoplehood. The Jewish "nation" is thus not Poland or Germany but the Jewish people. The homeland is a mythic space called Eretz Israel—a mythic space that might easily be represented by an island.

Vitlin does not assert this specifically, but when he uses words like "king" to describe Alter-Leb's status on the island (2:28), for a Jewish readership Alter-Leb's island kingship inevitably resonates with biblical kingship. Likewise, when Alter-Leb, alone on the island, likens himself to Adam, the island becomes associated with Genesis (2:15). Thus the island experience of Alter-Leb is connected to Jewish cultural notions of the individual and his or her land: the island with a single man as Adam in Eden; the island inhabited by a group (Alter-Leb, Shabes, the freed captives) as mimicking kingship. The island is not only Judaized by action and iconography, but it is closely tied to the Jewish Bible as well.

The island is also representative of a third concept: the Jewish diaspora. Near the end of his stay there, Alter-Leb calls it his "galus" (the religious term for the diaspora) (2:107). However, the home to which Alter-Leb will return is not Eretz Israel, but Europe, since "by its very program, Eretz Yisrael and Return to Zion could not occupy a prominent place within the Haskalah movement or its literature (Mahler, *Hasidism* 51). In *Robinzon*, the sanctified binary of galus/Eretz Israel becomes "away" (the island) and "home" (Europe) so as to construct a new, secu-

[16] The dialogical framework used by Campe and Vitlin negates the use of a journal, as is central to Defoe's narrative (although there is an "incompletely hidden author" in Defoe, Zimmerman 25). Without a journal, the possibility of entering into the internal world of the main character is limited. Vitlin makes Shabes a more fully developed character than Friday and delves into Alter-Leb's psyche through his frequent, deep conversations with Shabes. In Campe's version, Robinson Crusoe does not have such deep conversations with Friday, so the reader knows much less about his internal world.

[17] For a discussion of the limitations of the idea of Robinson Crusoe as a monarch see Sill 160-62.

lar territorial consciousness. This consciousness echoes the desire of the Jewish Enlightenment to make Russia and Eastern Europe the homeland of the Jews, as is shown when Alter-Leb asserts how wonderful Europe is (1:55).

At the end of his reign on the island, Alter-Leb, like Campe's Robinson Crusoe, comes up with a list of tenets for the members of his new island society: "azoy azoy mit seykhl vi a rekhter meylekh hot er zikh tanoim oysgenumen" (and so with the wisdom of a proper king he stipulated the terms, 2:90): 1) they must accept Alter-Leb as the king of the island, obey him completely, and hold his laws sacred; 2) they must be willing to fight like soldiers for the island and the king; 3) they must be willing to work in the fields and lead devout lives; 4) those who are evil or sinners must leave the island; 5) they must not make false accusations, and if anyone suspects, hates or envies another person he or she should defer to a judge to resolve the issues at hand; 6) and a portion of the community shall be plowers, flax weavers, blacksmiths, cobblers, tailors, and a variety of other types of workmen, so that the entire island will be self-supporting, like a family (2:89-90).

The contract documents the rule of an enlightened despot over an agrarian society. The push to be loyal to one's monarch was "one issue uniting all the Maskilim" (Mahler, *Hasidism* 53), and Alter-Leb suggests that kingship is a natural and good way to order a society. The Jews must be utterly loyal to the tsar or emperor, and be willing to die for him, yet they also must respect the judiciary as an intermediary between individuals. This new society will be one where the Jews (and Christians, since the island society includes a rescued Christian) are laborers working together for the common good. In a time before political Zionism, this new society shares aspects of what will later follow in Zionism's focus on agrarianism.

This pact between Alter-Leb and his subjects is a remarkable expression of maskilic tenets interfacing with European despotism. Here the Jewish enlightener is pushing for a return to a premodern, agrarian, despotic society, all for the good of the subjects. It is not a utopia—the anticipated discord of the society is prepared for in the call for legal recourse. Nor is it a Jewish land; the societal family includes non-Jews such as the Christian they have saved. It is autocratic but for the common good. The lesson for the text's Jewish readers is clear: their "island" is not some distant land; it is their current place of residence in Eastern Europe under the tsar or the Austro-Hungarian emperor, and as citizens of these nations they must obey the laws and join the common societal family. By making Alter-Leb's "distant island" the here and now of Europe, Vitlin negates the other "away" of the longed for Jewish monarch of mythic Eretz-Israel. Yet, in order to negate a Judeocentric perspective the narrative paradoxically relies on Jewish resonances such as Davidic kingship. The contract is also interesting because of its differences from the pact in Campe upon which it is based (283-84). Vitlin's most important changes—the call to be soldiers and to work in the fields, together with the explication of the variety of labors (blacksmiths, plowers)—spell out to his Jewish readers in the clearest way possible that they should become workmen and soldiers loyal to their leader.

At the close of Campe's original, Robinson returns to his family and tells the members of his hometown that they must teach their children to live a life of

piety, moderation, and hard work (309). As for the children, he states that they should obey their elders, be studious, fear God, and avoid idleness (309-10). Robinson and Friday remain best friends, never marry, and spend a day each week living as they had on the island (310). They have learned all the lessons of the island, have developed morally, and now spend the rest of their lives as contented beings—partners living as if on an island matching the one they have left.

The tight ending of Campe's narrative differs radically from Defoe's, in which Robinson Crusoe finds no great homecoming, his parents dead, and no funds to support him. Instead of remaining at home he departs for Portugal to receive large funds from the Brazilian plantation he had owned before being shipwrecked—a plantation that has been worked by slaves during the thirty-five years he was away (277). Whereas in Campe there is a clear indictment of slavery (248-49), Defoe's Robinson Crusoe lives off its fruits, although that dependence is "relegated to his 'wicked' youth" (Phillips 33). And while "neither Crusoe nor Defoe have excessive qualms about slavery," nevertheless "the larger action in the narrative is set up in such a way that Crusoe appears to undergo some kind of penance for the moral vacuum of past actions" (Seidel 107). Defoe thus shows the negative aspects of slavery through the plot (Robinson Crusoe's shipwreck for instance is the result of a "slave trade disaster," Seidel 106), rather than by verbal condemnation.

Vitlin, like Campe, overtly indicts slavery, his narrator stating at one point that a ship crash near the island was likely the work of God to enable the slaves to escape (2:71). Although Vitlin may have simply been following Campe's lead in attacking slavery, I would suggest that slavery necessarily generates some very specific reactions among Jewish readers because of its inevitable associations with the story of Moses heroically leading the enslaved Jews out of Egypt, a heroic vision necessarily intermingled with a Jewish discomfort with slavery born from a long history of discrimination. The slaves that escape in Vitlin's tale reflect, I believe, both of these peculiarly Jewish associations. Indeed, I would even argue that Defoe's failure overtly to condemn slavery would have been impossible in a Judaized text.

Vitlin's conclusion also recalls Campe's tight, clean, optimistic ending. Both Alter-Leb and Shabes have been permanently transformed for the better and live the remainder of their lives together based on what they learned on the island (2:113). The lessons learned, however, are specifically maskilic. On his return, Alter-Leb exhorts the townspeople to see him as an example of how to live a better life than they have thus far (the townspeople of course are the Jewish readers). He tells the townspeople/readers that to have a peaceful and good life for their families they must teach their children "leshoynes melokhes mides un mayles gut un mentshn lib tsu hobn" (languages, trades, habits, good virtues and to have brotherly love, 2:114). The "languages" are the local languages rather than just Yiddish; the "trades" are another call for manual labor over book-learning; "good virtues and habits" likely means decorum; and "to have brotherly love for mankind" reiterates the call against Jewish isolationism.

Alter-Leb has become the perfect representative of maskilic culture and moreover has taught Shabes to do the same. They both become workmen, live a Jewish

life, and, in a departure from Campe, marry and have children (a change that reflects the importance of marriage in Jewish culture of the time). The closed, optimistic ending bespeaks the didactic nature of the text: once one lives and learns by enlightenment precepts, one gains a good, easy life. At this point the optimism of the mythic narrative subverts Jewish specificity, making a happy ending possible for all, rather than incumbent on outside forces as was often the case for East European Jews seeking to have a good life in a nation with harsh anti-Jewish edicts.

Robinzon di geshikhte fun Alter-Leb as a whole represents a series of intersections that show the cultural interface between Jewish and Western culture, as it is read/written as translation, adaptation, literature, didactic prose. The work, brought to a Jewish readership by an elitist maskil, reflects the insecurity of the maskilim in relation to a Western culture and literature they deemed "higher" than their own. It also shows the disparity between the maskilim, seeking to Europeanize, and the Jewish readers, deemed reluctant to change.

The Jewish adaptation of Defoe's original was thus written by an author speaking to two audiences: the Jewish maskilim, who turned to Western cultural models to teach Jews how to become Westernized, and a Jewish readership perceived to need Judaized landscapes to be comfortable with Western literature. The text of *Robinson Crusoe* legitimates the Jewish author, and the Jewish author in turn legitimates Defoe's narrative by Judaizing it. This two-way legitimation—the text validating the adaptor, the adaptor validating the text—extends the model for understanding how texts are used in societies. For disempowered groups, an "outside" text can legitimize an author and make his or her perspective more culturally strong. The text itself thus becomes much more than an artifact to be transmitted by the intermediary of the translator. It becomes a tool to empower the adaptor's own voice. It makes sense therefore that adaptations are a key format of Jewish literature in Eastern Europe, for they enable a politically weak populace to strengthen its voice by appropriating outside texts. However, the outside voice has also to be adapted for Jewish readers. Thus the voice is made Jewish.

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