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Medium and Message in Contemporary Haredi Adventure Fiction

Fearful that emancipation and modernity would undermine Jewish observance, ḥaredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jewry has tried to shore up tradition through strict adherence to Halakhah, distinctive dress, deep-seated religious conservatism, social isolationism, and opposition to interaction with the non-ḥaredi world. Tracing its roots to the anti-modernistic ideology of R. Moshe Sofer (Ḥatam Sofer) and his students in mid-nineteenth century Hungary, ḥaredi Jewry has spread from Eastern Europe to Israel, the United States, and around the globe. It consciously rejects the non-Orthodox branches of Judaism that modernity has sprouted, as well as more liberal Orthodoxy, which it sees as an inadequate compromise with the threats of secular culture.

From the outside, ḥaredi society appears to be homogeneous and static, an anachronistic throwback to the Middle Ages that has somehow survived into modernity. This perception is reinforced by ḥaredi self-perception as the voice of an age-old Judaism that stands in lonely opposition to modern heresy and religious confusion. In fact, however, ḥaredi society remains in a constant and tension-filled dialogue with modernity and it has changed dramatically over time in response to ongoing historical, social, economic, and ideological pressures. In every

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environment it has found itself, ḥaredi Jewry has acculturated to at least some degree into outside society.¹

One example of ḥaredi acculturation and adjustment to changing conditions is the development in the past three decades of a vast ḥaredi popular literature. Thousands of titles in numerous genres are sold both in Israel and in the Diaspora. They are bought by the thousands. This literature include translations of and commentaries on classic Jewish texts, works of ideology and theology, guides for *ba'alei teshuvah*, halakhic codes, self-help and parenting guides, children's books, history and personal memoirs, cookbooks, periodicals, and fiction, among other categories.²

Orthodox popular literature in general, and fiction in particular, are natural responses to the conditions of Orthodoxy as a minority in modern society. Orthodoxy has a long tradition of imitating contemporary literary styles and genres for several reasons.³ Orthodox Jews of all kinds are often genuinely acculturated, and the same cultural forces which make a genre popular among the general public affect Orthodox Jews as well. They may prefer an Orthodox version of a literary genre, however, so that it will match their values and concerns. In addition, imitating the most contemporary styles helps make tradition seem sophisticated and up-to-date. This allows Orthodoxy to respond to modernity and its perceived anti-Orthodox biases on modernity's own terms.⁴

The explosion of this literature particularly in the past thirty years can be explained by at least four factors. First, Orthodoxy as a whole, and especially ḥaredi Jewry, has grown dramatically in terms of numbers and self-confidence during these years. A critical mass of self-consciously ḥaredi Jews became the market for this literature. Second, mainstream Western culture has become less traditionalist, more individualistic, and increasingly sexually explicit, pushing ḥaredi Jews to create alternatives to the Western popular culture which seemed less compatible with their religious values.⁵ Third, technological advances make writing, publishing, and distribution cheaper and more efficient, allowing for profitable publishing to a small market. Fourth, and most importantly, Orthodoxy in general and ḥaredi Orthodoxy in particular have pushed toward greater isolation during these years and developed an enclave culture.⁶ This enclave culture tries to create a complete social envelope for the individual, such that he or she will venture outside the enclave as little as possible. Ḥaredi popular literature discourages group members from extensively consuming secular popular culture by providing a distinctively ḥaredi alternative.

In fact, this literature is only one part of a wider ḥaredi popular culture that helps ḥaredi Jewry create distinctive communities with expansive social capital and a thick cultural atmosphere. Ḥaredi music, computer games and films, recreational activities, summer camps, jargon, and the like contribute to ḥaredi distinctiveness. Furthermore, a “material Judaism”⁷ has also emerged, a ḥaredi physical culture which includes ritual objects, games and toys, formal and casual clothing, decorative arts, food, house-wares, buildings and architecture, and even medicines.

Ironically, however, this isolationist popular culture also reflects the deep acculturation of the ḥaredi community, as the forms, styles, genres, language, and even values embodied by this popular culture are remarkably parallel to those of non-ḥaredi culture. For example, ḥaredi self-help books manifest marked similarities to their secular or Christian counterparts, and sometimes admit openly to borrowing from non-Jewish sources.⁸ By providing ḥaredi versions of non-ḥaredi cultural resources, ḥaredi popular culture allows ḥaredim to absorb what they want from the outside while still maintaining a fairly totalizing sub-culture.

From the perspective of its critics, literature from ḥaredi publishers like Artscroll, Feldheim, and Targum Press is simple-minded, shallow, and unsophisticated. At best, it should not be considered serious Torah scholarship; at worst it is an active distortion of history and truth.⁹ While much of the critique may be justified, I would like to argue that this approach makes it impossible to use this literature as a lens through which to examine the internal discourse and complex reality of the contemporary ultra-Orthodox community. Given the vast popularity of this literature, both within the ḥaredi community and increasingly within non-ḥaredi Orthodoxy, it is imperative to study ḥaredi popular culture in order to gain a richer understanding of the texture of contemporary Orthodox life.

When examined from this perspective, this literature reveals a great deal more nuance and complexity than the critics give it credit for. It reflects the ḥaredi struggle with the tension between tradition and modernity, between isolation and involvement. It encapsulates important ideological disputes within ḥaredi Jewry, challenging the stereotype of ḥaredim and their popular literature as being single-minded and monolithic. Recently, scholars have begun to examine the way in which the sacred and profane are intermingled in these works and in the daily lives of contemporary ḥaredi Jews.¹⁰

In this essay, I would like to focus on fiction, a genre of ḥaredi popular literature that makes no claim to be serious Torah scholarship and

is therefore least susceptible to attacks by Modern Orthodox intellectuals. In the first half of the essay, I will try to place this fiction in cultural perspective and examine the way in which the sheer novelty of ḥaredi fiction creates ideological challenges for such a conservative culture. In the second half of the essay, I will examine the works of Yair Weinstock—an Israeli ḥaredi author whose works have been translated into English and who was one of the first to write ḥaredi adventure and thriller fiction—as a case study through which to examine the ideological messages, social criticisms, and ambiguous religious agendas that can be embedded in this fiction. I will try to identify the ways in which these novels reflect the complexity of ḥaredi Jewry's attempts to navigate between its isolationist community and the outside culture.

I. Ideological Forces, Market Forces, and the Spread of Ḥaredi Fiction

While authors like Marcus Lehmann and R. Yudel Rosenberg had been writing (and, in the case of Rosenberg, plagiarizing) Orthodox fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,¹¹ the trend did not catch on extensively until the 1970's, when ḥaredi authors began widespread production of children's fiction to satisfy the voracious appetites of young readers whose parents wanted literature that would reinforce ḥaredi ideas and practice. After gradually spreading to teen fiction, the first works of adult fiction appeared in the mid 1990's, but only after pressure from authors and readers.¹² After all, adults should spend their spare time on Torah study and religious growth, not fiction. The ideological problems with adult fiction were eased by the fact that most of the literature was written by and for women, who have lesser obligations to study Torah.¹³ As these works began to sell, publishers and authors became bolder, producing the first works of crime and adventure fiction in the late 1990's.

The novelty of Orthodox fiction for adults is reflected in a 1993 collection of short stories, which is simply entitled *Fiction*, emphasizing the uniqueness of the genre itself.¹⁴ Yet, a community ostensibly dedicated to the conservative notion that “*ḥadash asur min ha-Torah*” (novelty is prohibited by the Torah)¹⁵ cannot easily accept such literary innovation. Some ideologues polemicized against the new fiction, calling it a waste of time, false, or a distraction from the true goals of a Torah life. The Jewish people “has produced hundreds and thousands of *seforim*. . . . We never

had any tradition of fiction! Stories of *Gedolim*, yes; fiction, no.”¹⁶ Similarly, one experienced educator railed that Orthodox Jews “must write only truth, pure truth. Any book of fiction contains falsehood. Why should we let the youth read books when there are *Gemara* and *Ein Ya’akov* [a commentary on Talmudic *aggadah*] and other holy books, passed from generation to generation? Reading [fictional] books distracts youth from learning [Torah], and creates lazy thinking habits.”¹⁷ One of the *haskamot* to Yair Weinstock’s biography of R. Moshe Sofer emphasizes “the importance of books which include *true* stories about the great and righteous men of Israel” (emphasis in original), implicitly questioning the value of the fiction which Weinstock himself had penned.¹⁸

The editors of *Fiction* try to respond to the critics by providing an ideological justification for fiction. “Good fiction—and we’ve got some of the best here—can be a luminous spotlight on life, allowing us to view others, and ourselves, in its unyielding ray. It enables us to examine conflicts, crises, and subtleties of relationships...in order to understand others—and ourselves.”¹⁹ This defense of fiction/*Fiction* depends on two arguments, one overt and the other covert. Overtly, the editors have adapted an argument popular in Modern Orthodox intellectual circles: that literature can be a useful tool for getting readers in touch with the complexities of the human condition.²⁰ Yet, this apparent agreement between the two approaches brings the editors’ covert argument to the fore, and emphasizes an underlying dispute between them. The claim that this collection contains “some of the best” fiction seems absurd if the stories are to be compared to the great works of the Western tradition. It seems, then, that the editors expect their work to be compared only to other works of ḥaredi fiction. The editors leave a critical argument unstated: that the reader will not, or should not, leave the confines of the ḥaredi enclave in order to find an entertaining and meaningful book. Other writers make this unstated argument explicit, perhaps more explicit than the editors of *Fiction* would be comfortable with. “Most [Western] literature” represents “a rebellion against God and His Torah.”²¹ Similarly, a “*ba’alat teshuvah*—or any religious woman who has drunk deeply from secular, Western literature—may find that she turned away from that literature because of its ethical vacancy.”²²

Other ideologues provide a narrower defense of fiction. Ḥaredi fiction is a means toward certain limited pedagogic ends. In the United States, where most ḥaredi children receive a basic high-school education, some educators advocate the replacement, at least partially, of the

elementary and high-school English curriculum with ḥaredi youth fiction. F. Diskind, for example, does not

reject . . . English language studies . . . [because] specific English skills . . . can be helpful. . . . These include the ability to express oneself effectively, both orally and in writing, and to critically interpret daily encounters as well as communal, national and international events. In addition, students learn to cull the main idea from verbose presentations of issues in both speech and writing.²³

Yitzchok Kasnett used a scientific scale to measure the grade-level of various works of ḥaredi youth fiction, and prepared a teacher's guide for another novel.²⁴ For these educators, ḥaredi fiction can teach certain technical communication and language skills without exposing youth to the dangers of pernicious Western literature.

According to another author of ḥaredi children's books, children's fiction teaches values, not only skills. Juvenile fiction is "important" because it is a "potent means of educating, of forming opinions, of bonding loyalties. A good story can often accomplish what hours—maybe even weeks or months—of direct education cannot do."²⁵ Yet, unlike the editors of *Fiction*, this author's stated goal is not to sensitize students to the complexities of the human condition, but to inculcate specific values. This author realizes that she must sacrifice compelling or attractive writing for the sake of ethical and religious edification.

How didactic should the book be? Most people, including children, don't particularly like being lectured at. But if you rule out didactics, how can you be sure your message will come across clearly? . . . How do we keep the heroes in religious books from being "goody goody"? Because if they are not basically good, we don't really want them as heroes, do we? But if they are too good, we don't particularly like them, either! . . . When dealing with teen novels, how much of the adult, contemporary world and its attendant problems do we want to bring into the pages of our books? Should marriage, divorce, sickness, death and other difficult subjects be given an airing?²⁶

The educational and ideological message must control the book's content, but that can prevent it from being entertaining or compelling.

Not all ḥaredi critics think that authors have adequately solved this problem. Some accuse ḥaredi fiction of exhibiting poor literary quality precisely because the inspirational message squelches creativity. A ḥaredi journalist critiques the available ḥaredi children's fiction for being formulaic and preachy. "When the message is too clear, this may be a book that is too shallow. There is little chance that the desired edu-

cational message will be heard. . . . Of the tens of books that I read...I found very few where the literary style” was adequate.²⁷ Similarly, “[a]ttempts at writing ‘Orthodox fiction’ have too often been amateurish. . . . Fiction written in this style is not unlike the type of literature which the Soviet Union has encouraged.”²⁸

The disputes between these justifications for fiction notwithstanding, market forces may be more important than ideology to publishers, authors, and readers. Writers and publishers will produce what the public will buy, whether or not the ideologues can justify its existence. One store owner indicates that he keeps in stock any book written by an author or sold by an agent who looks *haredi*. He allows readers to determine what they will or will not buy.²⁹ Another factor that allows authors of fiction to write and sell potentially questionable works is the lack of formal rabbinic review. Authors of fiction do not need *haskamot* the way authors of theological or halakhic works do.³⁰ Indeed, the leading *haredi* rabbis have kept strangely silent about the value of this fiction, reflecting at least tacit acceptance of the phenomenon.

This places *haredi* authors in a unique position between the official rabbinic leadership and the common person. Popular fiction, by the nature of things, appeals to the masses. It derives its power not from tradition or from the rabbis, but from the fact that people read and enjoy the literature, and are concerned with the issues it addresses. Even more than rabbis and scholars, authors of popular fiction gain their authority and weight from the “street,” and are consequently relatively unbound by the shackles of formal authority or institutional self-interest. Still, authors are not common people; they represent a certain segment of the educated elite. An author of fiction can play the role of a *haredi* public intellectual. Many *haredi* adult novels address important ideological and religious issues that face the community and are not unambiguous or one-dimensional in their treatment of them. Furthermore, many of the authors have read widely from Western literature, and have a much better education in the humanities than the average *haredi* Jew. Authors to whom I spoke felt it important to move *haredi* fiction forward in order to educate a more literate and sensitive reading public, even as they questioned the quality of some of the other works.

Still, as Malka Schaps has argued, the voices of these authors remain “filtered.”³¹ They are filtered by publishers’ willingness or refusal to publish certain things, readers’ willingness or refusal to buy certain things, and by rabbis’ and educators’ tacit acceptance of some works and opposition to others. In addition, people may say things in private that they

would be reluctant to put in print, even when designed for an exclusively ḥaredi audience. Furthermore, as in other communities and genres, literature gives voice only to those who have the capability, willingness, self-confidence, time, and money to write. The discourse in ḥaredi fiction may be different, in subtle or evident ways, from other aspects of internal ḥaredi discourse.

Indeed, a number of the recent adventure novels have raised the ire of some ḥaredi critics, who claim that these books have broken too much literary ground in depicting shady characters and questionable behavior. One ḥaredi journalist attacks all ḥaredi adventure novels because they encode the positive values of “military heroics and physical strength.” Children might be better off reading non-ḥaredi adventure novels in which gentiles are the heroes so that ḥaredi children will not become confused into thinking that ḥaredi Jewry values adventure.³² A number of adventure novels, including Weinstock’s own *Bilti Hafikh* (*Blackout* in English, published in Hebrew under the pseudonym M. Arbel) and Moshe Garylak’s *Ketonet Passim* (*The Runaway* in English, published in both Hebrew and English under the pseudonym Chaim Eliav) were attacked vehemently when they appeared in Israel since they were, in the eyes of many readers and educators, too critical of ḥaredi educational and rabbinic leadership.³³ Numerous schools in Israel pulled the books from their libraries, though an official ban was never pronounced, and the publishers modified the English version of *Bilti Hafikh* to remove the elements that drew the sharpest criticism.³⁴ One critic publicly attacked “one of the latest, best-selling, techno-thrillers” for its “lengthy accounts of the behavior of ‘turned off’ youths, momentarily disenchanted with all we cherish.”³⁵ He, like some ḥaredi leaders in Israel, organized a campaign to pressure booksellers to remove the “dangerous” literature from stores. Profit beat out ideology in the end, and these books remained in stores, where they sold well. In the case of *Ketonet Passim*, the fact that the author was also the editor of *Mishpahah*, the ḥaredi weekly in which the novel was originally serialized, gave him more power to ignore his critics.³⁶

Weinstock, the author who will be studied most carefully here, makes no ideological attempt to justify his thriller novels. In fact, one of Weinstock’s own heroes projects an attitude to life that would leave no room for thriller fiction. Implicitly criticizing both the author and the readers, one of the heroes of *Eye of the Storm* explains that “Man was born to toil [paraphrasing Job 5:7]. A person is not born into this world in order to indulge himself in good and luxurious sleep. He was born in

order to work—hard. Wasn't this world only the entrance to the next?"³⁷ By these strict standards, relaxing in the reading of a thriller novel, no matter how Orthodox, can hardly be justified.

Weinstock did, however, write an ideological introduction to his collection of inspirational stories, *Tales for the Soul*.³⁸ He justifies these inspirational stories, but not thriller novels. Stories, he claims, have a long-standing place in Jewish tradition because they are in continuity with Biblical narrative, because they can make the listener feel attached to the past, and because they can bring "healing and salvation." Most importantly, the stories are true (at least, so the author claims).³⁹ One sentence in this introduction could explain, although not justify, thriller fiction. "A person's soul . . . desires to travel to faraway places. . . . [While reading] you are transported to other worlds, you travel a thousand years into the past, you jump from country to country." Human nature craves adventure, a craving vicariously satisfied by thriller novels.

The tension between attraction to and opposition to adventure is reflected in the plot of Weinstock's *Calculated Risk*.⁴⁰ Israel's security forces need a ḥaredi agent to go on a sensitive and dangerous mission to save a kidnapped rabbi. There are no qualified agents. "You would need a religious intelligence man. There is no such thing" (78). The hero of the novel had been a Mossad agent before leaving the profession when he became Orthodox. Adventure and crime-solving, it seems, are not what a ḥaredi Jew should be dedicated to. The novel explores the tension between the attraction and rejection of adventure through a series of role-reversals, in which religious and secular Jews switch their respective positions. A secular backpacker and thrill-seeker, dressing up as a quiet yeshivah student, becomes the best replacement for the non-existent religious agent. The novel's climax reveals that the kidnapped rabbi is also a secular agent who was surgically modified to look like the rabbi. Similarly, the now Orthodox retired agent returns temporarily to a life of action and danger in order to help solve the crime, during which time he struggles to maintain his habitual level of prayer, Torah study, and observance. These role reversals echo what these novels can do for the ḥaredi reader, who can vicariously live a life of adventure despite the fact that the novel itself had presented this a secular value. The ḥaredi readership is attracted to the very values which it defines as non-ḥaredi. This may be no different than the attraction of these genres to the general public. Much mass-market adventure fiction allows readers to imagine doing what, in reality, they would neither do nor want to do.⁴¹

The way in which ḥaredi thriller fiction undermines the very values that it works to uphold points to a wider tension between ḥaredi popular culture and official religious values.⁴² Like other aspects of ḥaredi popular culture, thriller fiction may run the risk of profaning the sacred rather than sanctifying the profane. One ḥaredi writer, critiquing the perceived abuses of ḥaredi popular literature, explains that “we must clearly distinguish . . . what is *kodesh* (sacred) and what is *chol* (secular).”⁴³ Another critic asks sarcastically, “How is it that they are selling fiction in stores for holy books? Perhaps they will start selling toys in stores for holy books!?”⁴⁴

Despite the problems, “It is impossible to negate this kind of [adventure] literature completely,” in the words of one ḥaredi author of fiction, if for no other reason than that “there is a demand for it.”⁴⁵ The community’s religious values may call for certain kinds of literature and activities, but publishers produce books that the community will buy, and the community will buy things that perhaps it shouldn’t. Further, publishers and writers have an interest in pushing the borders of legitimacy, as controversy can create interest and improve sales. Yet, pushing too hard could risk an outright confrontation with the rabbinic leadership, which could hurt the publisher’s and author’s needed reputation as being “kosher.”

There are further paradoxes in this ḥaredi adaptation of the thriller novel. Some scholars have emphasized the conservative nature of formula fiction, which can help maintain the social status quo in the predictable repetition of cultural conventions and social myths.⁴⁶ Even as others have identified greater complexities and social critiques in formula fiction,⁴⁷ part of the appeal of this fiction is its predictability. Yet, what happens when an author adapts a formulaic genre for a community that has no tradition of that formula? Ironically, the formula becomes appealing because it is new and unexpected. Rather than the formula reinforcing existing expectations, its very existence serves to challenge convention. The aspect of popular fiction as a potentially subversive social critic is heightened. This invites the reader of ḥaredi adventure fiction to examine the way the novels present, and critique, ḥaredi society, religion, and ideology. The second half of this essay will examine the ways in which Weinstock’s novels do just that.

II. Haredi Ideology in the Works of Yair Weinstock

Yair Weinstock is one of the pioneers of haredi thriller fiction. Born to a Hasidic family, Weinstock has lived his forty plus years entirely within the haredi community in Israel and currently resides in Ma'alot Dafna, in the heart of Jerusalem's haredi enclave. As a young man, he studied in both Hasidic and Lithuanian yeshivahs, but he still found time to read popular children's literature at a time when distinctively haredi fiction had not yet developed. Under the influence of his mother's poetry and his father's writings, he came to feel an existential need to write, which took time from his budding career in teacher training. In addition to no fewer than five thriller novels—*The Gordian Knot*, *Blackout*, *Eye of the Storm*, *Calculated Risk*, and *Time Bomb*⁴⁸—Weinstock has published several volumes of inspirational stories, a biography of Hatan Sofer, and a number of children's books.⁴⁹ He currently divides his time between authoring thriller novels and writing biographies of great rabbis.

Weinstock's adventure novels imitate the best-selling mass-market thrillers. *Eye of the Storm* involves international intrigue: Middle Eastern terrorists, Russian nuclear weapons, and the struggle of Israel's security services to save the country by thwarting the terrorists' plot. *Calculated Risk* involves Saddam Hussein's plan to kidnap the world's greatest scientists and develop a technological arsenal that would bring the free world to its knees. As in secular thrillers, the lives of innocent and unsuspecting individuals—in this case haredi families and yeshivah students—are dragged against their will into the danger. As the plot develops, the heroes work to uncover the nature of their plight, and only their brilliance and creativity help to save themselves, their nation, and the world.⁵⁰ With almost no reference to Orthodox Judaism, one could easily confuse the blurb on the back cover of *Time Bomb* with that of a recent best-selling novel by an author like Robert Ludlum.

A long-buried childhood secret and a cryptic message send Rabbi Shmuel Bilad on a perilous journey from Israel to Europe to South America. In Czechoslovakia, he discovers a 19th century document revealing a shocking treachery. Suddenly, the lines between friend and enemy blur. Who can be trusted? He must watch every step as he makes his way through a hazardous maze of intrigue. Political revolution, international turmoil and an explosive chain of events add to the heart-pounding excitement. Masterfully drawn characters come to life, and an absorbing plot weaves four suspenseful storylines together until the final astonishing episode.

Weinstock began by serializing his adventure novels in the widely

circulated Hebrew ḥaredi weekly, *Mishpaḥah*, before publishing them as separate books. In Hebrew, Weinstock chose a pen name, M. Arbel, at a time when he did not yet see his career as an author of fiction. He may also have understood that he was likely to be criticized for pushing the boundaries of legitimate ḥaredi publication.⁵¹ He used his own name in English, responding to his success in Hebrew and perhaps to the fact that the more secularly educated American ḥaredi public might be more open to the new genres.

These works make a fascinating case study of ḥaredi fiction. First, the borrowing from secular genres brings to the fore the tension between isolation from and involvement with general culture. Second, these novels are mainstream, popular in the very centers of ḥaredi life. Whether despite or because of the controversy, Weinstock's adventure novels have sold well and are readily available in ḥaredi neighborhoods in both Israel and New York. According to the author, *Gordian Knot* and *Blackout* each sold some 13,000 copies in Hebrew and a parallel number in English, a staggeringly high quantity by the standards of ḥaredi publishing.⁵² Third, and most importantly, like much ḥaredi fiction for adults, Weinstock's novels seamlessly merge entertainment, ideology, and social criticism. In Weinstock's case, the ideological messages are overt and close to the surface. While other novels have different religious or ideological concerns, they too are concerned with raising related matters of concern to the ḥaredi public agenda.⁵³

There are (at least) four ideological messages embedded in these novels: 1) Internal criticism: pointing to flaws in current ḥaredi life, and arguing for the legitimacy and necessity of honestly confronting identifiable ḥaredi weaknesses. 2) Justifying limited openness to change and modernity for ḥaredi Jews. 3) Strengthening the self-consciousness of the ḥaredi in-group by arguing for unity and cooperation between the different subgroups of ḥaredi Jews. 4) Defining the ideal relationship of ḥaredi Jewry to various out-groups, like secular Zionists, religious-Zionists, and gentiles. Without getting caught up in the philosophical conundrum of authorial intent, Weinstock agreed in conversation that these are issues central to his concern.⁵⁴

Self-Criticism as a Value in Haredi Life

As a minority which perceives itself as threatened, ḥaredi Jewry is reluctant to air its faults in public. This should not, however, be confused with an absence of self-criticism.⁵⁵ Novels are a particularly comfortable place to raise internal criticism. First, the literature is ideologically dri-

ven, and authors are aware of their roles as ḥaredi public intellectuals. Second, these novels are expected to be read almost exclusively by the in-group, and there is less fear of exposure to outsiders than in other forums. Third, the criticism can be subtle. Unlike a newspaper editorial or a rabbinic *musar shmooze* (lecture on ethics), the author can criticize without saying anything overt. The message will emerge from the behavior of different characters—who represent different segments of ḥaredi and surrounding society—and the way the narrative comments on that behavior. An author can say between the lines what he or she might not say openly.

The plots themselves defend the necessity of honest ḥaredi self-criticism. In *Blackout*, Gili—a *ba'al teshuvah*, newspaper reporter, and hero of the book—is assigned to write an exposé of various Ḥasidic groups for the secular press. Along with praise, the articles include negative aspects of Ḥasidic life: “alliances and enmities in the Ḥasidic] court . . . behind the scenes . . . [and] weak links” (*Blackout*, 142). While the article is “free of any hint of slander . . . it doesn’t merely pat them [ḥaredim] on the back, in ‘with us everything is perfect’ style” (*Blackout*, 170). This passage questions the wider ḥaredi tendency “not to speak about real issues, to sweep everything under the rug” (*Calculated Risk*, 68). Slander for the sake of voyeurism or self-promotion is problematic. While “[n]ot everything that is true has to be aired in public” (*Calculated Risk*, 68), ignoring real problems is neither believable nor productive. Weinstock’s own works, like Gili’s newspaper articles, are meant as constructive criticism, for the sake of ḥaredi self-evaluation and eventual improvement.

The articles’ constructive criticism and open-airing of problems contrast with the dangers of secrecy, another theme of *Blackout*. Ḥaredi Jewry is vulnerable to outsider attackers because of secret conflicts which fester under the surface of ḥaredi public life. The Israeli secret service (GSS) plants a mole in the ḥaredi community to uncover the underlying fights, so that anti-ḥaredi GSS leaders can publicize the problems and fan the flames of internal ḥaredi strife. These anti-ḥaredi forces expect the ḥaredi community to tear itself apart from the inside. The comparison to Gili’s articles is critical. If ḥaredi Jewry tries to hide its faults, and does not address them constructively, then ḥaredi enemies will air them destructively.

This call for open discussion of communal problems fell, at least to some degree, on deaf ears. Many ḥaredi parents and educators were sure that *Blackout* had overstepped the bounds of legitimacy in its description of communal faults and in criticizing ḥaredi leadership. Some edu-

cators removed the book from school libraries. Readers were particularly troubled by the description of a bitter battle for succession among the descendants of a Ḥasidic rebbe, events which were expurgated from the English translation of the novel.⁵⁶ Critics were also upset by the presentation of a particularly ambiguous character, R. Avrum Roosenthal, a charismatic, miracle-working rabbi. His life was motivated by an overwhelming desire to control people, which led him, in part against his will, to neglect his own stepchildren and to cooperate with the GSS plot. By this description, he is an utterly evil figure. Yet the novel does not question his psychological and mystical powers, which he uses to help people. Though Roosenthal was originally motivated by a desire for control, over time he becomes genuinely concerned for his followers. Furthermore, Roosenthal accepts no payment for his services. By the end of the novel, he repents and works actively to sabotage the GSS plan and to repair the damage he has done.

Roosenthal is one of a number of figures in Weinstock's novels who suffer from the dangers of charismatic leadership. Weinstock's books include many rabbis whose motivations are pure, who give good advice because of their objectivity and lack of selfish motivation, a position in line with the general ḥaredi emphasis on rabbinic authority and *da'at Torah*. But charismatic leadership is also potentially dangerous. A hero of *Time Bomb*, a lecturer in yeshivahs, undergoes an ongoing personal and psychological crisis because he is not charismatic enough to attract a following. These attacks on the dangers inherent in charismatic leadership hit too close to home, with readers concerned that figures like Roosenthal represent faults in ḥaredi rabbinic leadership as a whole (though Weinstock denied in his conversation with me that this was his intention). In the English version of the novel, Roosenthal was changed from a well-respected figure to a social and religious outcast, viewed skeptically and warily by mainstream rabbis.⁵⁷

Social Isolation and In-Group Cooperation

These novels also work to legitimate the less isolationist wings in the contemporary ḥaredi community and to encourage cooperation between ḥaredi subgroups. They even encourage more isolationist and rejectionist elements to become more open. Weinstock's heroes include ḥaredi Jews from all walks of life: *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim*, *ḥasidim* and *mitnagedim*, men and women, full-time yeshivah students and ḥaredi professionals, *ba'alei teshuvah* and those born Orthodox, rabbis and laymen, kabbalists and halakhists, Israelis and Jews from the Diaspora, etc.

Each novel involves cooperation between ḥaredi heroes from different backgrounds, who might have reasons to be on different sides of the ideological and religious fences that divide ḥaredi Jewry.⁵⁸ This pluralistic stance matches Weinstock's own biography. In the introduction to *Tales for the Soul*, he emphasizes the beneficial things that he learned from his ḥasidic family and his mitnagdic yeshivah training.⁵⁹

Rejecting intra-ḥaredi enmity is central to the plot of two novels. As we have seen, *Blackout* identifies inter-ḥaredi rivalry as a central weakness of ḥaredi Jewry. Similarly, a central sub-plot in *Time Bomb* involves the nineteenth century Orthodox community in Prague, which nearly destroys itself due to controversies and hatred fostered by interpersonal and inter-group rivalries. Weinstock opened the Hebrew version of *Blackout* with the following talmudic statement: "Peace is the only vessel which The Holy One, Blessed Be He, found to hold a blessing for Israel" (*Ukzin* 3:12). In Weinstock's novels, when one ḥaredi subgroup de-legitimizes another, this tactic is almost always revealed to be mistaken. For example, an otherwise faultless *rosh yeshivah*, R. Schmidt, accuses the kabbalistic miracle worker, Baba Bozoglo, of being a "con artist" and a "charlatan... nurtured from a rotten root" (*Blackout*, 237). This characterization is false. Bozoglo is no fraud, but a genuine kabbalist, whose amulet helps to protect the book's hero—though he does charge a great deal of money for his services (*Blackout*, 260-264).

These novels also seek to legitimize, in the eyes of the more isolationist Israeli readership, the more open American ḥaredi approach. The American ḥaredi heroes in *Eye of the Storm* are white-collar professionals who are presented in a positive light. They are heroic because of their worldly concerns, not despite them.⁶⁰ For example, Aharon Flamm has his yeshivah studies cut short when the U.S. State Department discovers that, despite his thorough lack of academic training, he is a brilliant foreign policy analyst. While working hard for a living, he finds time to complete a definitive supercommentary on the Tosafists' interpretations of a major Talmudic tractate. As another American ḥaredi writer put it, "You can be a baal habayis [layman] and still be a talmid chacham [Torah scholar]."⁶¹

This American model of ḥaredi professionals should, according to these stories, penetrate more deeply into Israeli ḥaredi life. *Calculated Risk* involves a ḥaredi-run computer training school in Israel, which produces highly talented ḥaredi computer specialists. The school gains the support of the ḥaredi rabbinic leadership because it is perceived in part as a philanthropic activity. "If impoverished married yeshivah stu-

dents can work on the side, at night, on a computer at home, and earn a good salary, both [employer and employee] . . . will benefit” (101). In Israel, the notion of ḥaredi men leaving full-time study to earn a living is still perceived as a threat, and the novel records this ambivalence (100-106, 183ff). Overall, however, the enterprise is still presented as valuable and necessary (149-150, 184).

Eye of the Storm also presents ḥaredi heroes of a different variety: full-time yeshivah students who have no formal concerns outside the yeshivah. The *rosh yeshivah* wants nothing more than to build a *mussar* yeshivah, partially modeled on the Nevardok yeshivahs of Eastern Europe,⁶² where students can “forget about the rest of the world” and become a person for whom “to grow and rise spiritually is not just part of his identity, but his *whole* identity” (p. 74, emphasis in the original). The two groups of ḥaredi Jews—the yeshivah students and the businessmen—are mutually dependent. The isolationist yeshivah is supported by the wealth and work of the businessmen. The businessmen pay for the yeshivah because it allows them to be involved in Torah study vicariously.

Yet, despite the praise for these full-time yeshivah students implicit in these novels, they cannot remain completely isolated in the yeshivah because they have responsibilities towards the rest of the Jewish people. They are an integral part of the plan to thwart the terrorists who threaten Israel. The yeshivah’s prize student is invited by his uncle, a secular police officer, to a secret meeting to plan strategy for locating a nuclear weapon being smuggled by terrorists into Israel. He is invited because the officer assumes that talmudic training will help the young man think clearly. The student is the only one who figures out the smugglers’ secret plan. “I am not a *navi*. I just deduced things from the facts. . . . Studying Gemara helps me learn to analyze things” (210).⁶³ In the same novel, the *rosh yeshivah* must interrupt his studies to convince the terrorist not to detonate the bomb (344-348).

The very attempt to write an adventure novel about yeshivah students requires contact between them and the outside world. Still, the students’ emergence from the protective walls of the yeshivah is presented as heroic, thus staking ideological ground within ḥaredi discourse and implicitly criticizing some of ḥaredi Jewry’s more isolationist wings. While one recent Israeli ḥaredi book on education explains that “none of the atmosphere of the street should penetrate it [the yeshivah] at all, [and the yeshivah should be] hermetically sealed [with] . . . special insulation,”⁶⁴ Weinstock’s novels argue that complete isolation is neither possible nor desirable.

The notion of the legitimacy, even potential sanctity, in non-yeshivah endeavors is magnified in *Gordian Knot*, a novel which revolves around a talented musical family. One theme of the novel is that music, even classical music, can be a powerful force for serving God and bringing estranged Jews back to the fold. When used as a tool for wealth or self-aggrandizement, however, it becomes destructive. “Use this power [of music] only for the good, for it is a tool given to you by the Creator to use in serving Him. If you are not true to its trust and use it for profane things, it will bring great troubles upon you” (*Gordian Knot*, 445).⁶⁵

These novels also indicate that each man must find his place within the range of legitimate possibilities between the full-time yeshivah student and the working yeshivah alumni. One of the anti-heroes in *Eye of the Storm* is a young man whose father had pushed him to become a scholar, even though his teachers understood his limitations. The young man became so frustrated and disenchanted with his studies, and his relationship with his father became so strained, that he abandoned his *haredi* lifestyle, and enlisted in the dangerous and antinomian group, “Friends of the Mikdash” (Chapter 13). Here, Weinstock joins a growing *haredi* voice concerned that *haredi* education demands too much conformity and puts too much pressure on students to excel academically. In this novel, the fault does not lie with the educational system or the rabbinic leadership—two aspects of *haredi* life about which criticism is most carefully guarded and muted—but in an overzealous and misguided father. Other popular *haredi* literature has become more open in its criticism of the educational establishment, particularly in the context of conversations about yeshivah drop-outs and delinquency among *haredi* youth: “It would almost seem as though our educational institutions are conspiring to disenfranchise large numbers of our children.”⁶⁶

Along with the cooperation between different models of ideal male heroes, these novels emphasize the cooperation between men and women.⁶⁷ If the male heroes reflect images of ideal *haredi* men, the female heroes represent ideal *haredi* women. Women are minor characters, and do not take initiative, leaving the male characters to solve the problems. Women occupy domestic and supporting roles, reinforcing the notion that “Man’s sphere is the external world, while woman is the instiller and protector of the vital, internal values of the Jews,” reflected in her role in “raising a family.”⁶⁸

For example, the wife of the *rosh yeshivah* in *Eye of the Storm* finds “ingenious” ways to dry the laundry of her ten children during the rain, without a gas dryer (48), and works hard to free her husband from

domestic concerns so he can study and teach. When her husband hides what is happening from her, she is silent because “she trusted her husband’s judgment implicitly.” The most extreme example of a woman in a domestic and supporting role is the wife of the wealthy businessman who supports the yeshivah in *Eye of the Storm*. Despite her wealth, she works as the yeshivah’s cook because “that’s how she expresses her love for Torah. . . . You should see her in her apron, surrounded by all those enormous pots. Her face shines” (*Eye of the Storm*, 175). Her domestic tasks are not an unpleasant burden, but a religious ideal.⁶⁹ In contrast to these domestic women, one of the villains in *Gordian Knot* is led down the wrong path when his wife takes public initiative, trying to manage his musical career and urging him to use his talent to earn fame and fortune (217). There are two ḥaredi career women in *Calculated Risk*. They live in a “Modern Orthodox” neighborhood, and one, as we shall see, is accused of hypocrisy for working, despite ideological opposition to doing so (*Calculated Risk*, 83, 114).

Between Isolation and Openness

The cooperation between working ḥaredim and full-time yeshivah students is part of a larger concern with finding the right balance between isolation and openness, between rejection and acceptance of modernity, particularly in the form of technological advances. *Calculated Risk* reflects on the potential value of ḥaredim working in high-tech jobs. Computers, according to some characters, are threatening. They open the door to the dangers of the Internet, television, and movies. They are addictive. They transform people into unfeeling robots. Finally, they drag ḥaredi Jews out of the safety of the ḥaredi enclave and into spiritually hazardous secular offices (102-107). The novel’s Hebrew title, *Sikkun Meḥushav*, was translated as “Calculated Risk,” but is a play on words that hints at “computerized danger.”⁷⁰ In this novel—as in many popular technological thrillers—technology makes the entire world vulnerable. Master hackers have no trouble shutting down subway service, major airports, and America’s nuclear arsenal. The terrorists’ goal is “to penetrate the systems that Americans used daily and show them how vulnerable the American public was to disaster” (*Calculated Risk*, 200).

Yet the dangers of technology do not justify an utterly isolationist or rejectionist attitude, and the novel ultimately advocates computers as a profession for ḥaredi Jews. One of the anti-heroes in *Eye of the Storm*, Akiva, exemplifies the dangers of extreme rejectionism. As a result of his father’s death in an electrical accident, Akiva developed an irrational

hatred of electricity, science, and technology (80-81). He became a social outcast and was eventually drafted into the treacherous “Friends of the Mikdash.” Akiva represents the utter rejection of change, development, or technological progress. Yet, his approach is both unrealizable and, more importantly, ideologically misguided. One night, as Akiva makes his way toward the heroes’ yeshivah, he “was helped... by, ironically, electric light.” In an ensuing conversation, one of the yeshivah students explains to Akiva that “[E]lectricity also brings life into the world. If everyone got rid of electricity . . . people would die on operating tables. Sick people who are attached to respirators would stop breathing. . . . True, it’s artificial, but it’s also a gift from Hashem, Who put the potential for electrical power into water, into coal, into the atom, and gave men the wisdom to figure out how to use it” (119). This overtly positive attitude toward technological development contrasts with the reported position of another ḥaredi leader, R. Ya’akov Perlow (the Novominsker Rebbe), who explains that “electricity, the telephone, and all sorts of other technological marvels [are] . . . the great *bedi’eved* [acceptable only after the fact].”⁷¹

The continuing dialogue between Akiva and the yeshivah students places Akiva’s rejectionist stance in broader historical and cultural perspective. Akiva tells the yeshivah students that life was simpler and more holy in the pre-technological past, and the yeshivah students agree. Yet, they explain that, “The world has changed a little, my friend. Have you ever heard about the guy who yelled, ‘Stop the world, I want to get off?’” (120).⁷² The ideology of “*ḥadash asur min ha-Torah*” is not only impossible to implement, but incorrect ideologically. Ḥaredi Judaism is not and should not be an utter rejection of change or novelty as such.⁷³ Proper Judaism, according to the yeshivah students, filters modernity, accepting what is valuable while rejecting what is unacceptable. Indeed, as we have seen, that is just what much of ḥaredi popular literature does; it allows positive (and some less-positive) aspects of modernity to filter into ḥaredi culture without inordinate exposure to the dangers of the outside.

Another character points to a lack of ḥaredi self-awareness, if not overt hypocrisy, regarding the relationship to technology and change. In *Calculated Risk*, a young ḥaredi woman, Avigayil, works as a programmer for a large computer company despite her ideological opposition to computer use. “She spews fire and brimstone against the computer... arguing that it’s addictive and that it slaughters the soul of our generation, while she herself is a superior programmer who spends many hours a

day in front of a screen” (114). Identifying Avigayil’s hypocrisy, the novel points to the irony of a ḥaredi community that rails against the horrors of modern culture while being so deeply acculturated into it.

Instead of rejecting change, it is necessary to openly deliberate on the values and dangers of different aspects of modernity. In the ongoing discussion of computers in *Calculated Risk*, one wise school teacher conducts a school-wide debate over the issue. Students on both sides of the question address the school and its staff, airing their opinions in a rational and polite manner. The debate allows students to clarify the issues, and its success derives in part from the fact that the spokesperson against computers, Avigayil is herself the daughter of a successful programmer (103-106). In what is undoubtedly a response on Weinstock’s part to educators who removed his books from schools, this novel advocates a relatively open educational program (by ḥaredi standards), which allows people, including students, to openly debate the educational and ideological issues at the center of the ḥaredi agenda. This education forces students to challenge their natural assumptions, to think for themselves, and to move beyond what they are told by their parents or surroundings.

The Zionist Establishment: Between Belonging and Rejection

If, as we have seen, one of the social functions of ḥaredi popular literature is to strengthen the cultural power of the ḥaredi enclave, then it is not surprising that these novels are concerned with painting an image of outsiders that is useful for insiders. Yet, part of the agenda of these novels is to challenge the flat stereotypes which many ḥaredi Jews have of non-ḥaredim. The novels walk a thin line between a desire to portray non-ḥaredim in a balanced and non-monolithic way and between using the non-ḥaredi figures as a foil against which to define ḥaredi values. The novels criticize non-ḥaredim at the same time that they try to balance that criticism of the “other” with ḥaredi self-criticism.

These novels are particularly ambivalent about the secular Zionist establishment. The ḥaredi heroes identify with the State of Israel. Both *Eye of the Storm* and *Gordian Knot* involve terrorist attempts to destroy Israel and the efforts of ḥaredi Jews to thwart the threats. The basic identification with Israel is presented in Weinstock’s works as self-evident and unproblematic, something which requires no theoretical or ideological justification, despite the long-standing dispute between Zionists and ḥaredim. As another ḥaredi author puts it, “Israel is a blessed reality in the present life of world Jewry.”⁷⁴

Still, these novels portray secular Israeli characters who function as a vicious and hate-filled “other” against which ḥaredi Jewry can define itself, an enemy despite which ḥaredim can survive and triumph. Some elements in the Zionist elite hate Judaism and ḥaredim to the core. In *Time Bomb*, members of the left-wing secular establishment—including Israel’s deputy Prime Minister and an influential judge—are in fact part of a broad Christian conspiracy to destroy Judaism and Israel from the inside by promoting suicidal peace plans with Palestinians and by imposing an anti-Torah secular value system on the Israeli people. In *Blackout*, the secular GSS leader develops a plan to destroy the ḥaredi community. These characters point to a self-hating, almost anti-Semitic, secular elite. This portrayal supports the self-understanding of ḥaredi Jewry as being the heroic remnant of authentic Judaism in the face of overwhelming threats. These unrealistic and unbelievable plot twists—the very stuff of thriller fiction—exaggerate more modest ḥaredi fears about the secular establishment (which would probably not make them any more palatable to a secular reader).⁷⁵

At the same time, more sympathetic secular voices always balance this hatred. After the head of the GSS reveals his plan, one department head exclaims, “The *chareidim* . . . posing a danger to the state? Fantasy!” Another GSS leader declares that the proponents of the plan have “lost all sense of proportion. Danger from *chareidim*? I have a few *chareidi* neighbors; they are as quiet as sheep” (*Blackout*, 65-66). Apparently criticizing the ḥaredi tendency to live in exclusively ḥaredi neighborhoods, it seems that one key to preventing hatred between the secular and the religious is that they know each other, meet one another, and even live near one another.⁷⁶ However, this call for emergence from the ḥaredi enclave stands in tension with the isolationism inherent in distinctively ḥaredi adventure fiction. How will ḥaredi and secular Jews come to know each other better if they do not even read the same best-sellers?

Be that as it may, in these novels the vicious hatred comes from elements within the Israeli elite, not from the masses of secular Israelis. When Gili, the hero of *Blackout*, begins publishing his sympathetic but still critical articles about the ḥaredi world, they are well received by the secular audience, which is eager to see things in a more sympathetic light. The articles open “a fascinating window into the world of the *chareidim* for the secular reader. . . . The reports were . . . free of any hint of slander, and yet enjoyed sustained success, perhaps because the lack of smut: even the secular reader had grown tired of [the] . . . underhanded tactics” typical of the secular press (*Blackout*, 170-171).⁷⁷ The

newspaper articles eventually receive the prestigious “Golden Pen Award” because of the role they play in “the unification of a divided nation” (*Blackout*, 172). When the secular press paints ḥaredim in entirely black strokes, there is no hope of creating unity between the secular and ḥaredi factions of Israeli life.⁷⁸

These articles were not intended to turn secular Jews into ḥaredi ones, nor did they have that effect. It is difficult for ḥaredi Jews to acknowledge the legitimacy and long-term staying power of secular Judaism and these novels support the idea that secular Jews should become Orthodox. Still, moderating the mutual hatred between ḥaredi and secular Jews is valuable in and of itself, without reference to *ḥazarah bi-teshuvah*. The novels include sympathetic Jewish characters who demonstrate no interest in Orthodoxy, like a Viennese Jewish couple who help and protect the heroes of *Gordian Knot*. There is a secular public which is likely to remain secular, and both sides of the divide have an interest in maintaining good relations.

Furthermore, in these novels ḥaredi isolationism shares the blame for hatred and conflict. While doing research for his articles, Gili approaches a yeshivah, hoping to interview its leaders and students. The *rosh yeshivah* is reluctant to grant the interview for several reasons, all of which the story ultimately criticizes. First, the *rosh yeshivah* explains that, “The vast majority of journalists work in the sewers; they’re a bunch of blood-sucking leeches. . . . The reporter will probably be some gentile dressed like a German skinhead, with two rings in his nose and three in his ear, a gentile who doesn’t know a thing about Judaism.” Second, there is a fear that, “exposure in a secular newspaper . . . will lead to nothing but trouble . . . I’m afraid of *chilul Hashem*.” Third, meeting with the reporter wastes time from Torah study. “To decipher an incredibly difficult contradiction in *Rambam* on a hot summer’s day in front of 50 young students” is a difficult and worthwhile task; the interview with the reporter, by contrast, would be valueless. Yet, the yeshivah’s administrator hopes that a write-up in the paper might gain the attention of “a few philanthropists,” and “a bureaucrat or two will give the new building a stamp of approval” (*Blackout*, 159-160). The secular Israeli establishment can be used to secure economic or political support for ḥaredi interests.

The yeshivah leadership is wrong on all counts, and is blind to the potential to ease tensions between ḥaredim and the secular population. The reporter is not an ignorant Jew, dedicated to the hatred of Judaism or religion. He is a formerly secular reporter who is gradually adopting

Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the success of the article has nothing to do with support for the yeshivah. Rather, the fair and balanced article presents a kinder and more honest vision of the ḥaredi world than the usual fare. Isolationist elements in the ḥaredi world must be willing to sacrifice some of their own Torah study to help heal the wounds of inter-group conflict. Similarly, Orthodox Jews like the reporter, who work in the very heart of the secular establishment, can also serve as a unifying force.

Of course, these novels are quite critical of secular Zionist culture. One secular Israeli refers to his Shabbat routine of reading newspapers and watching soccer games as “recycled garbage,” and his Orthodox friend explains that, “the nonreligious community has lost its sense of modesty and sensitivity” (*Calculated Risk*, 67-68). Though he agrees with this characterization, the secular Israeli cannot bring himself to admit as much publicly. Contemporary secular Zionist culture is presented as empty and lacking the idealism that it had once possessed. *Gordian Knot*, for example, contrasts the old-style Zionist music, “the beautiful songs of idealism,” with the “stupid” and “dead” music of the contemporary Israeli rock scene (320). Much of the secular Zionist establishment has become self-serving and egocentric, unconcerned with the Jewish unity which these novels advocate. Israeli officials in *Eye of the Storm* fight among themselves for recognition and power, and, therefore, botch any attempts to track down the missing nuclear bomb. The Mossad, police, and GSS argue bitterly among themselves over who should get the assignment to find and neutralize the bomb. “No one wanted to miss out on a chance for glory” (*Eye of the Storm*, 169). One Mossad operative goes so far as to infect the GSS agent with the flu, assuring that the latter will be unable to participate in the search. In his enthusiasm to gain the credit, the arrogant Mossad agent is easily led astray by a money-hungry Russian double agent, who sends the Israeli defense establishment on a wild goose chase.

In short, the Mossad, in its arrogance, is “playing Russian roulette with millions of lives for the sake of a few extra moments of glory” (*Eye of the Storm*, 261). This accusation combines two long-standing themes in ḥaredi criticism of the Israeli establishment. First, secular Zionists have long been willing to sacrifice Jewish lives and beliefs for their own perceived interests. Particularly, the Zionist establishment did little to save religious Jews from the horrors of the Holocaust, and arranged to destroy the religious commitments of Sephardic immigrants.⁷⁹ Indeed, *Gordian Knot* opens with a conversation between two fresh immigrants,

one a Holocaust survivor and the other a Sephardic Jewish refugee, who are sent by the Zionist establishment to serve as cannon fodder in the disastrous battle of Latrun during the War of Independence. Second, Israel's material success has led Israeli culture away from the secular idealism that it once possessed. Contemporary Israeli culture is mired in materialism and selfishness. As another ḥaredi author put it, "Zionism may have lost its hold, nothing has replaced it besides emptiness."⁸⁰ The degeneration of aspects of Zionist culture into individualism and selfishness is represented by some of the most evil characters in these novels: secular Israeli turncoats who betray their nation for money in *Eye of the Storm* and *Gordian Knot*.

The novels promote greater unity not only between ḥaredi and secular Jews, but between different groups of secular Israelis as well. The Israeli establishment eventually succeeds in tracking down the bomb in *Eye of the Storm*. The secret to Israeli success is not in its power, technology, or strategic sophistication, but in cooperation and unity. "The three agents—so recently divided in competition and animosity—made a pact of friendship for the purpose of destroying their common enemy" (307). From that moment on, the defense establishment suddenly succeeds. Even Arab terrorists understand that Israel "had a population that could devour itself in strife during peacetime, but it would stand together in awesome unity against a common enemy—the unity of the Jews was an incomparable secret weapon" (*Eye of the Storm*, 66).

Along with the secular Jews who remain secular, each of the novels includes at least one important character who sees the beauty of Torah over the course of the narrative and becomes more committed to observance. It seems that it is a positive development if Israelis become ḥaredi. This echoes a general trend in ḥaredi popular literature, which emphasizes *ba'alei teshuvah* above and beyond their numbers. As one writer put it, "Every rabbi that I consulted said that none of us have heard enough *baal teshuva* stories."⁸¹ Most of the popular literature ostensibly written for *ba'alei teshuvah* is probably read in large numbers by those born into Orthodoxy. The emphasis on *ba'alei teshuvah* plays an important educational role for "frum-from-birth" readers. It stresses the positive aspects of Torah observance, and helps support the self-confidence of a community that feels threatened. A secular Jew who adopts a ḥaredi approach indicates to the community that its commitments are not irrational or mistaken. Furthermore, since any Orthodox commitment in the modern world is by definition voluntary, many committed Orthodox Jews identify closely with *ba'alei teshuvah*. They

may not have adopted Orthodoxy, but they have at least chosen not to abandon the Orthodoxy into which they were raised.

Even here, however, the novels push only so far in their encouragement of *ba'alei teshuvah*. Many characters begin to see value in Torah, but do not (yet?) make the jump into Orthodoxy. In *Eye of the Storm*, a group of secular teens are invited to the yeshivah for Shabbat, reinforcing the claim that yeshivahs must not remain utterly isolationist. During the Shabbat in the yeshivah, “a small door opened in their hearts, so long starved of spiritual fare” (*Eye of the Storm*, 178). Yet, these teens disappear from the story as quickly as they appear. We do not know where their newfound appreciation for Torah leads them. Similarly, a teen-age rock star in *Gordian Knot* softens in his antagonism to Torah over the course of the novel, but he never makes the leap into observance.

Blackout is even critical of some of the methods used to bring non-Orthodox Jews into the fold. The narrator reveals some of the less-than-honest techniques of the *maḥzirim bi-teshuvah*. The lecturer at a *teshuvah* seminar,

began with a shaky proof [for the truth of Torah], the “scapegoat” of his lecture, an easy kill for his attackers. The listeners perked up: This one was going to be fun. A hail of questions and objections rained down upon him. He . . . readily agreed that there were some weaknesses in his argument. During the course of the question and answer period, he himself brought down his own initial hypothesis. Now everyone was listening intently. This was a good speaker, one who agreed with his audience! It soon became clear, though, that the attackers had fallen into a trap, wasting their ammunition on a decoy. Now it was time for the incisive proofs (*Blackout*, 30).⁸²

To summarize, these novels maintain an ambivalent attitude to secular Israelis and their culture. Despite vicious criticisms of many elements in secular Israeli life, the value of Jewish unity requires cooperation and warm relations between all Jews. While non-Orthodox Jews should adopt Orthodoxy, they remain valuable members of the Jewish people even if they do not. Yet, as much as the novels struggle not to paint a monolithic picture of the secular Israeli “other,” they are hardly an attempt to present secular Jews as they would present themselves. The secular Israelis in these novels—both sympathetic and unsympathetic—present images that serve ḥaredi needs, and they are defined in ḥaredi categories. The hate-filled secularists are a threat that can help create and maintain solidarity among the threatened. The more friendly secular Jews are not ideologically committed to a secular Zionist worldview out of real and considered conviction.⁸³ Secularism is not a positive commit-

ment to something, but rather the absence of, or active antagonism toward, “authentic” Judaism.⁸⁴ There is no serious conversation or debate between ideologically committed groups, and secular Zionism is not taken seriously as a coherent worldview worthy of consideration. For all their deliberately constructed openness, these novels do not break out of the “ḥaredi-ocentric” worldview of the author and the intended readership. As a ḥaredi author, Weinstock pushes the envelope quite far, but these novels remain inspirational literature, designed to maintain in-group solidarity, even as they struggle for a more open attitude.

Religious Zionism

There is one group of characters who are ideologically committed to a non-ḥaredi religious worldview: the messianic, Temple-building, “Friends of the Mikdash” in *Eye of the Storm*. This nature-loving agricultural group is dedicated to the destruction of the mosques on the Temple Mount and to rebuilding the Temple. They represent a caricature of religious Zionism. While the novels are devoid of mainstream religious Zionists, the description of “Friends” points to where religious Zionist ideology might lead if it is taken to its (logical?) extreme. “Friends” allows for ideological debate between religious Zionism and ḥaredi Judaism in a carefully constructed environment in which the ḥaredi side cannot lose.

Since its inception, important elements in religious Zionism have emphasized the necessity for human effort to resettle the Land of Israel and help usher in the messianic age. Recently, religious Zionism has become increasingly concerned with issues relating to the reconstruction of the Temple. Groups like “The Temple Mount Faithful” have remained on the fringe, but other organizations, like “*Makhon Ha-Mikdash*,” which work to educate people about the Temple in preparation for its imminent reconstruction, have made a comfortable place for themselves in mainstream religious Zionist discourse in Israel.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the combination of religious extremism, a militant ideology, and a love of nature and agriculture is a model that has developed at the edges of religious Zionism.⁸⁶ “Friends” may be an exaggeration, but it is hard to miss the echoes of broader trends in religious Zionism.

The “path to holiness [of ‘Friends’] is distorted.” The book’s heroes accuse the group’s leaders of provoking Arab hostility, of ignoring the opinions of the generation’s “Torah leaders” and verbally attacking “great Rabbis,” of denying God’s providence and “His power to rebuild the *Beis Hamikdash* Himself,” of doing nothing to eliminate the “cause-

less hatred” and other sins which were the “reasons for the Temple’s destruction,” of not being motivated “*l’shem Shamayim*, for Heaven’s sake” (*Eye of the Storm*, 180, 228-229, 231, 288-289). Their ideological deviations lead them to antinomian attempts to bring sacrifices and perform Temple-based rituals before the Temple’s reconstruction (103-104, 247-248). This group is willing to sacrifice *Halakhah* for the sake of furthering its messianism.⁸⁷ Ultimately, their faulty religious ideology and naive enthusiasm for the Temple lead “Friends” to cooperate unwittingly with Arab terrorists.

At one point, one of the “Friends” overhears the yeshivah students studying topics associated with the Temple, though they have no plans of doing anything to actually build it. “Maybe they’re the ones who are really rebuilding the *Beis Hamikdash*, and not us? Every midnight debate over their Gemaras [books of Talmud] was adding another stone of fire [to the supernal Temple]” (*Eye of the Storm*, 113. Also see 117-119). The Messiah will come and the Temple will be rebuilt not through the religious Zionist program of pragmatic effort, but through ḥaredi dedication to Torah study and performance of religious rituals. “To do *mitzvos*, to learn Torah, to improve our characters, especially when relating to our fellow man. Our tradition tells us that our good deeds will merit the coming of the third *Beis Hamikdash*, which will descend from heaven completely built” (*Eye of the Storm*, 229).⁸⁸

The absence of a positive or neutral religious Zionist character, and the portrayal of religious Zionism in caricature form, prevents the need—unacceptable in much ḥaredi rhetoric—to acknowledge a serious theological debate between rival understandings of Jewish Orthodoxy.⁸⁹ According to its own self-understanding, ḥaredi Judaism is the only legitimate understanding of Judaism. Debating religious Zionism on equal ideological or religious grounds would implicitly grant it credibility. It is, ironically, easier for this ḥaredi author to paint secular Jews in positive light than to do the same for non-ḥaredi Orthodox Jews.

Gentiles

These novels have little or nothing good to say about gentiles.⁹⁰ They call for unity within the ḥaredi community, and between ḥaredim and secular Israelis, but there is no such call for unity with non-Jews. The most villainous characters are Muslim Arabs, who are almost universally terrorists. “The Islamic Religion is based on murder and bloodshed” (*Eye of the Storm*, 347). Arab plots to murder masses of Israeli Jews are central to *Eye of the Storm* and *Gordian Knot*. No mention is made of

Arab national ambitions or collective self-interest; their sole desire is to kill Jews and destroy Israel. Even Arabs who are Israeli citizens are terrorists (*Gordian Knot*, 59, 128-129). This presentation of Arabs help support the notion, common in ḥaredi self-understanding, that the Jewish people is an eternally threatened minority. It aims an ideological arrow at Zionism for its failure to eliminate anti-Semitism and normalize the Jewish people.

Even here the novels struggle with a more nuanced approach. Individual Arabs, though just individuals, do appear in a conspicuously positive light. *Eye of the Storm* includes an Israeli-Arab surgeon who treats one of the heroines (*Eye of the Storm*, 162-165). His identity raises the patient's suspicion. "I don't trust that doctor. He's an Arab" (*Eye of the Storm*, 165). These fears are unfounded. This doctor, like a similar Arab surgeon in *Blackout* (378-379), does nothing wrong. The fact that these doctors are Arabs plays no role in the plots other than to indicate that there may be individual good Arabs.

Christians fare no better than Arabs. They are not terrorists, but they share the Arab hatred for Jews and for Israel. *Time Bomb* revolves around the Church's attempt to draft missionaries into Israel's fifth-column secular left as part of a plan to destroy Israel and Judaism. "The Christians want to be rid of the Jewish state as much as we [Arabs] do; we're just more daring" (*Eye of the Storm*, 316; also see 288).

Gentile Russians also emerge as villains, a theme which echoes ḥaredi rhetoric about masses of non-Jewish Russians who emigrate to Israel under the Law of Return. In *Eye of the Storm*, a gentile Russian immigrant to Israel tries to earn money by smuggling the nuclear weapon into Israel. Another Russian character explains, "From the beginning of time, money has been the engine that has driven man. See me? I'm 68 years old and believe in only one thing: the power of money" (*Eye of the Storm*, 254). Here, as well, there are signs of humanity in individuals. Realizing what a terrible thing he has done, the Russian terrorist-scientist in *Eye of the Storm* regrets his actions at the last minute, and thwarts the plan to explode the nuclear weapon. Even in their most unguarded attacks on gentiles, the novels emphasizes that individual gentiles may not be all bad.

Conclusion

“There are many good reasons for studying popular fiction. The best, though, is that it matters. . . . Popular fictions saturate the rhythms of everyday life. In doing so, they help to define our sense of ourselves, shaping our desires, fantasies, imagined pasts and projected futures.”⁹¹ In the case of ḥaredi Jewry, this fiction indeed matters. Ḥaredi authors of fiction, and ideologues who argue about its value, are defining themselves, shaping ḥaredi senses-of-self in ways that move beyond stereotypes of ḥaredim in general and their popular literature in particular.⁹² The ḥaredi Jewry revealed in these novels is not a monolithic, conformist, unquestioning remnant of the past, hermetically sealed in a closed culture. Rather, it is dynamic, struggling with the tensions between the past and the present, between conformity and individualism, between authority and autonomy, between isolation and acculturation. It is a ḥaredi Jewry willing to break new literary ground and question existing habits and norms, even as the ḥaredi concern with communal boundary maintenance places limits on how open this literature can be, particularly in its criticism of contemporary ḥaredi Jewry and its portrayal of non-ḥaredim.

In this literature, cultural forms and genres which have their sources outside the ḥaredi world are transformed to fill internal ḥaredi needs. Ḥaredi literature, even when designed primarily to entertain, contains some substantive ideological message that serves to justify its very existence. Authors and publishers explore ideological issues that stand at the center of ḥaredi discourse, even as they do so in an entertaining way. Ḥaredi authors can use their stories to help explore the borders between the in-group and the out-group and the people in between. The literature serves as a mouthpiece for internal criticism, particularly in raising issues from a layer of the literary, if not the rabbinic, elite.

Notes

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1. For a basic overview of ḥaredi Jewry in different contexts, see Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, "Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of Haredim," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago, 1991), 197-264. On diversity and tensions within contemporary Israeli ḥaredi society, see the articles collected in *Ḥaredim Yisraelim: Hishtalvut be-Lo Temiah?*, ed. Kimmy Caplan and Emmanuel Sivan (Tel Aviv, 2003).
2. For an internal ḥaredi debate about the value and usefulness of this literature, see Hanoch Teller, "English Translations—Rejoice With Trepidation," *The Jewish Observer* 16, 2 (March 1982): 24-27; Mendel Weinbach, "English Translations—From Trepidation to Joy," *The Jewish Observer* 16:3 (May 1982): 12-14; and the collection of letters in response, "Rejoice With/Without Trepidation," *The Jewish Observer* 16:5 (September 1982): 16-19. Opposition to this literature seems to have had little effect on its growth.

The Jewish Observer is a critical resource for the study of American ḥaredi Jewry. The pages of the *Observer* include essays and ideas by the rabbinic elite, by mid-level rabbinic leadership, by educators, by lay leadership, and even by laymen and women. The "letters to the editor" section includes some heated debates over issues that stand at the center of ḥaredi discourse. The advertisements reflect changes in Orthodox marketing and material culture. Further, the changes which the magazine has undergone in content and editorial policy can help trace some important developments in ḥaredi ideology and self-perception since the magazine's inception in the mid 1960's.

3. The academic literature has focused on this trend primarily regarding the development of Orthodox historiography. See Haim Gertner, "Reishitah Shel Ketivah Historit Ortodoksit be-Mizrah Eipah: Ha'arakhah Mehudeshet," *Zion* 67 (2002): 293-336. Yisrael Bartal, "ha-Haskalah be-Masveh: Historiografiyah Ortodoksit be-Milhamtah ha-Anti-Ziyyonit," *Ziyyonut ve-Hinukh le-Ziyyonut* 7 (1997): 79-88 and "'True Knowledge and Wisdom': On Orthodox Historiography," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 10 (1994): 178-92.
4. See Murray I. Friedman, "What is Our Historical Imperative? On the Function of Torah-True Literature in Our Times," *The Jewish Observer* 1, 1 (Sept. 1963): 19-20.
5. See Malhi, below n. 10.
6. On enclave cultures see Emmanuel Sivan, "The Enclave Culture," in *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, ed. Martin M. Marty (Chicago and London, 1995), 11-68. On trends in the direction of isolationism, at least in

- the transition between Eastern Europe in the United States, see Yoel Finkelman, "Haredi Isolation in Changing Environments: A Case Study in Yeshiva Immigration," *Modern Judaism* 22 (2002): 61-82.
7. To paraphrase Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven and London, 1995).
 8. See, for example, Miriam Adahan, *Appreciating People* (Jerusalem, 1988), 4-5, and Andrew R. Heinz, "The Americanization of *Mussar*: Abraham Twerski's Twelve Steps," *Judaism* 48, 4 (1999): 450-69, on R. Abraham Twersky's adaptation of 12 step therapy for Orthodox Jews (n. 10 below). Others, despite obvious parallels to contemporary non-Jewish theories, deny the influence of gentile sources on their self-help books. See, for example, Lawrence Kelemen, *To Kindle a Soul: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Parents and Teachers* (Southfield, MI, 2001), 21-22.
 9. See B. Barry Levy, "Our Torah, Your Torah and Their Torah: An Evaluation of the Artscroll Phenomenon," in *Truth and Compassion: Essays on Judaism and Religion*, ed. H. Joseph, et al. (Waterloo, Ontario, 1983), 137-89, "Judge Not a Book By Its Cover," *Tradition* 19,1 (1981): 89-95, and "Artscroll: An Overview," in *Approaches to Modern Judaism*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (Chico, CA, 1983), 111-40; Jacob J. Schachter, "Facing the Truths of History," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 8 (1998-1999): 200-76; Jonathan Helfand, "Striving for Truth: Struggling with the Historical Critical Method," *The Edah Journal* 2, 1 (Tevet, 2002), unpaginated.
 10. Kimmy Caplan, "God's Voice: Audiotaped Sermons in Israeli Haredi Society," *Modern Judaism* 17 (1997): 253-79, idem, "'Yesh Rikavon Rezini ba-Hevrah Shelanu u-Zerikhin le-Hakir Et ha-Emet': Bikoret Azmit be-Si'ah ha-Penimi Shel ha-hevrah ha-Haredit be-Yisrael" in *Mi'utim, Zarim ve-Shonim: Kevuzot Shulayyim ba-Historiyah*, ed. Shlomit Volkov (Jerusalem, 2000), 299-330 and "The Holocaust in Contemporary Israeli Haredi Popular Religion," *Modern Judaism* 22 (2002): 142-68; Heinz, "Americanization of Musar" (n.8); Jody Elizabeth Myers, "The Myth of Matriarchy in Recent Writings on Jewish Women's Spirituality," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, 1 (1997): 1-27; J.E. Myers and Rachel Litman, "The Secret of Jewish Femininity: Hiddenness, Power, and Physicality in the Theology of Orthodox Women in the Contemporary World," *Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition*, ed. T. M. Rudavsky (New York, 1995), 51-77; Ira Robinson, "That Marvelous Middos Machine: Audio Tapes as an Orthodox Educational Medium," in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, ed. Simcha Fishbane and Stuart Schoenfeld (Hoboken, NJ, 1992), Vol. 2, 161-71; Yossi Vilian, "Motivim Merkaziyim be-Sippurei ha-Yeladim be-Olam ha-Haredi," *Ma'agalei Keriah*, 22 (Dec. 1993): 43-66; Orit Yaffah, "Hebetim Psikhologiyim Shel Sifrut Yeladim Haredit: Tefisat ha-Yeled u-Tefisat ha-Azmi," *Megamot* 41,1-2 (2001): 19-41; Esther Mal'hi, "Sifrut ha-Yeladim ha-Haredit ke-Tofa'ah Tarbutit Yisraelit," *be-Emet!* 6-7 (February, 1993): 29-47; Leah Hovav, "Sifrut Yeladim Haredit: Realistit O Didaktit," *Sifrut Yeladim ve-No'ar* 20, 3-4 (1994): 20-35. These Hebrew articles on children's fiction present it as more formulaic than I think the evidence justifies, and some suffer from an almost blatant polemical tone. Also see Alyse Fisher Roller, *The Literary Imagination of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women: An Assessment of a Writing Community* (Jefferson, NC and London, 1999), which combines overt pro-haredi apologetics with an at times insightful critique of academic discourse about haredi women.

11. On Yudel Rosenberg and his literary activity, see Ira Robinson, "Literary Forgery and Hasidic Judaism: The Case of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg," *Judaism* 40,1 (1991): 61-78, and Shnayer Z. Leiman, "The Adventures of The Maharal of Prague in London: R. Yudl Rosenberg and the Golem of Prague," *Tradition* 36,1 (2002): 26-58.
12. On genre developments in ḥaredi fiction, see Malka Schaps, "The One-Way Mirror: Israel and the Diaspora in Contemporary Orthodox Literature," *Shofar* 16,2 (1998): 32-47, and "The Filtered Voice: Genre Shifts in Orthodox Women's Fiction," *To Be a Jewish Woman*, ed. Margalit Shilo (Jerusalem, 2003), 116-28. Schaps, a professor of mathematics by profession, has authored several ḥaredi novels. In an interview (Ramat Gan, Israel, June 23, 2003), Schaps indicated that her book, *A Time to Rend, a Time to Sew* (Jerusalem, 1996), which appeared under the pseudonym Rachel Pomerantz, was only accepted for publication a decade after its submission, after pressure from readers convinced a publisher that it would be well received. It then sold well.
13. See the discussion of the distinction between the value of boys and girls consuming ḥaredi children's fiction in S. Fried, "Koaḥ ha-Ma'asiyyah," *Yated Ne'eman*, 23 Sivan 5749 (June 26, 1989): Supplement, 16. While we know almost nothing about how ḥaredi fiction is marketed and consumed, I suspect that women are the primary audience for adult fiction in the ḥaredi community. Thriller novels may have increased readership among teens and men as well. In the ḥaredi lending library which I frequent in Kiryat Sefer, Israel, the women's hours are exponentially more expansive than the men's hours. According to the owner, the preponderance of women explains why novels, including thriller novels, are the most popular books in the library. Unfortunately, in the context of this essay, it is not possible to include a wider study of the differences between the kinds of literature written for different age groups and genders.
14. Miriam Zakon and Libby Lazewnik, *Fiction: Twenty Contemporary Jewish Stories* (Southfield, MI, 1993).
15. *Shut Ḥatam Sofer*, 1:28. Ḥatam Sofer did not himself practice this simple vision of an unchanging Judaism. See Meir Hildesheimer, "The German Language and Secular Studies: Attitudes Towards Them in the Thought of the Hatam Sofer and his Disciples," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*, 62 (1996): 129-163 and Aaron M. Schreiber, "The Ḥatam Sofer's Nuanced Attitude Towards Secular Learning, 'Maskilim', and Reformers," *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 11 (2002-2003): 123-73.
16. Asher Sabo, "Judaica vs. the Classics in the Yeshiva English Department," *The Jewish Observer* 22,9 (Dec. 1989): 27. Emphasis in the original.
17. Quoted in Fried, 16. Also see Roller, *Literary Imagination*, 84. This polemic about the inherent falsehood of fiction echoes some of the parallel evangelical Protestant arguments against parochial fiction. See Jan Blodgett, *Protestant Evangelical Literary Culture and Contemporary Society* (Westport, CT and London, 1997), 20-23.
18. Yair Weinstock, *Ish ha-Elokim* (Jerusalem, 2001), unpaginated *haskamah*.
19. Pp. 7-8. Cf. to the Introduction to Sarah Shapiro (ed.), *Our Lives: An Anthology of Jewish Women's Writings* (Southfield, MI, 1991), 3-7, which reflects on the experience of writing among female Orthodox authors.
20. See Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence or Conflict," in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures*, ed. Jacob J. Schachter

- (Northvale, NJ and Jerusalem, 1997), 217-92.
21. F. Diskind, "General Studies in the Yeshiva: Benefits and Booby Traps," *The Jewish Observer* 19,7 (Oct. 1986): 45-51. Also see Yitzchak Kasnett, "'Rebbe, That Was Great!': Yeshiva English Studies, Another Dimension," *The Jewish Observer* 19,7 (Oct. 1986): 53-58. Cf. Shalva Mintz, who responded to Kasnett and Diskind, explaining that Western literature is not all bad. It is "either compatible with, derivative of, or hostile to Torah values." See *The Jewish Observer* 20,2 (March 1987): 31.
 22. Roller, *Literary Imagination*, 142. Cf. R. Abraham Isaac Kook, who explains that, "The literature of holiness must emerge. . . . All the thoughts . . . of sanctified logic, of free poetry, founded in the soul's originality, must become sheltered in the form of literature. One will stand against the other: [the holy literature will stand] against all the evil thoughts of man's unclean soul, which are revealed in literature, and which makes the world stink in its decaying reek. The literature which derives from the source of a holy life will come and serve as a foundation for the world. This foundation, when it matures, will transform the entire stink into good." R. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Shemonah Kevazim* (Jerusalem, 1997), Sec. 1, para. 512.
 23. F. Diskind, 47.
 24. Yitzchak Kasnett, "A Meaning-Centered Approach to Reading," *The Jewish Observer* 21,4 (May 1988): 26-30 and "Rebbe, That Was Great!," and the debate which ensued in *The Jewish Observer* 20,2 (March 1987): 31-37; Sabo and Kasnett, "Judaica vs. the Classics," 27-34. Also see F. Diskind, "Finding a Way When There is No Choice," *The Jewish Observer* 20,2 (March 1987): 31-38. For an example of Kasnett's educational philosophy translated into practice, see his high-school history textbook, *The World That Was* (Cleveland Heights, 1996). For examples of ḥaredi fiction for these educational purposes, see Feldheim's "*Shlavim*" series of easy readers for young children.
 25. Yaffa Ganz, "You Can't Sell a Book by Its Cover (But It's a Good Place to Start): The Complexities of Religious Juvenile Publishing," *The Jewish Observer* 21,4 (May 1988): 31.
 26. *Ibid*, 32-33.
 27. Fried, 16, 18.
 28. Yaakov Jacobs, "The Drama of Orthodox Life in Search of an Author," *Jewish Observer* 4,7 (October 1967): 9. Admittedly, Jacobs wrote prior to the current wave of ḥaredi fiction. The quality of ḥaredi fiction may have improved since then. On the way in which the didactic message affects the quality of ḥaredi fiction, see Hovav and Yaffah. Cf. the critique of inspirational Catholic fiction in Anita Gandolfo, *The New Catholic Fiction in America* (New York, Westport, CN, and London, 1992), xi-xii, 17-21.
 29. Fried, 16. In an April 2003 interview, one author, who prefers to remain anonymous, said that publishers have no ideological limits on what they are willing to publish. Their self-censorship derives entirely from economic considerations of what would or would not sell. Schaps, in a private correspondence of Nov. 23, 2003, explained that she "strongly disagree[s]" with this assessment.
 30. Interview with Schaps.
 31. Schaps, "Filtered Voice." Schaps reports that a group of female writers which met regularly complained bitterly of the "restrictiveness of the Orthodox publishers' standards of what could or could not be discussed." "The Filtered

- Voice,” 118. For this reason, we should not accept Roller’s assertion (*Literary Imagination*, 1-2) that the ḥaredi women’s literature which she studies “is the insider’s voice” (emphasis Roller’s) or that it is “an unmediated view of how ultra-Orthodox Jews talk to one another, how they see themselves.” Cf. Blodgett, 1-3, 69-70. Blodgett emphasizes the way in which the ideologies of publishers, authors, and readers of contemporary evangelical popular fiction work to moderate each other. I imagine that much publishing operates with related kinds of internal censorship, and that the differences between ḥaredi publishers and secular publishers is a matter of degree rather than of kind. For examples of similar self-censorship in the school textbook market, see Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn* (New York, 2003).
32. Fried, 17-18.
 33. *Bilti Hafikh* (Jerusalem, 1997), *Blackout*, trans. Miriam Zakon (Brooklyn, 1998); Chaim Eliav, *Ketonet Passim* (Jerusalem, 1997), *The Runaway*, trans. Libby Lazewnik (Brooklyn, 1998).
 34. Cf. *Bilti Hafikh*, 108, 159ff, 210-11, 216-17 to *Blackout*, 101, 153ff, 200-01, 207.
 35. Pinchos Jung, “Let the Reader Beware,” *The Jewish Observer* 33,9 (Nov. 2000): 42-43. He does not specify to which novel he refers. Both *The Runaway* and *Blackout* appeared well before this article.
 36. I was not able to find references to the debate in the Hebrew ḥaredi press, though I thank Garylak, Weinstock, and Zakon, for their assistance in looking for it (interviews in July, 2003). According to Weinstock, most of the debate did not make it to print, occurring from mouth to mouth in conversations between educators, librarians, parents, youth, and authors.
 37. Yair Weinstock, *Eye of the Storm*, trans. Libby Lazewnik (Brooklyn, 1999), 52.
 38. Yair Weinstock, *Tales for the Soul*, trans. Miriam Zakon (Brooklyn, 1999), v-viii.
 39. Cf. Edith Hindy Krohn, *The Eternal Thread* (Southfield, MI, 2000), 13, who admits that she stretches the truth in her inspirational stories.
 40. I first explored this tension between attraction and rejection of what these novels represent in a conversation with Yael Shenkar. I thank her for her insight.
 41. Cf. Weinstock’s use of play-acting in *Calculated Risk* with Annette Kuhn’s discussion of cross-dressing in Hollywood films, “Sexual Disguise and Cinema,” in *Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, and Reading*, ed. Tony Bennett (London and New York, 1990), 169-207. Just as films with cross-dressed characters allow viewers temporary “release from the ties of sexual difference that bind us” (170), so too the characters in *Calculated Risk* allow ḥaredi readers temporary freedom from the ties of religious affiliation that bind them to certain non-adventurous social relations and modes of behavior.
 42. In general there is relatively little conflict between elite and popular ḥaredi religion. On these potential tensions or lack thereof, see David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York, 1989), Chap. 1, and Esther and Robert Cohen, “*Tarbut Amamit ve-Tarbut Ilit: Ashlayat ha-Niggudim*” in *ha-Tarbut ha-Amamit: Kovez Mehkarim*, ed. B.Z. Kedar (Jerusalem, 1996), 13-30.
 43. Sabo, “Judaica vs. the Classics,” 27. This issue has received much attention

- regarding Orthodox music. See Mordechai Schiller, "Chassidus in Song—Not for the Record," *The Jewish Observer* 10,8 (March 1975): 21; Breindy Leizerson, "Set the Record Straight," *The Jewish Observer* 20,4 (May 1987): 40-41; Dovid Sears, "Who Took the 'Jewish' Out of Jewish Music?," in *The Jewish Observer* 29,10 (Jan. 1997): 12-16. Similarly, ḥaredi "rebbe cards" were produced to mimic the baseball cards so popular among American youth. Play, too, could be sanctified, training children to lionize the Torah giants rather than the San Francisco Giants. Of late, some elementary schools have banned rebbes cards, thinking it inappropriate to trade, "flip," or compare the relative value of the community's holy rabbinic leadership. (Conversation with Mr. Mendy England, Queens, NY, April 2003.) Cf. the critique of evangelical Protestant popular culture in Carol Flake, *Redemptoriana: Culture, Politics, and the New Evangelicalism* (n.p., 1984).
44. Fried, 16.
 45. Fried, 17.
 46. See John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago and London, 1976), Chap. 1.
 47. See, for example, Christopher Pawling, "Popular Fiction: Ideology or Utopia," in *Popular Fiction and Social Change*, ed. Stephen Pawling (New York, 1984), 1-18.
 48. *The Gordian Knot*, trans. Miriam Zakon (Brooklyn, 1997); *Eye of the Storm*, trans. Libby Lazewnik (Brooklyn, 1999); *Calculated Risk*, trans. Avigdor Cohen (Brooklyn, 2000); *Time Bomb*, trans. Miriam Zakon (Brooklyn, 2002). *Gordian Knot* was also translated into Italian, *Il Nodo Gordiano*, trans. Angela Rostagno (Milano, 2000). Another novel, *Ne'emanut Kefulah*, appeared after completion of this paper, and another novel is currently being serialized in the pages of the weekly *Mishpaha*.
 49. In English, for example, *Tales for the Soul*, trans. Miriam Zakon (Brooklyn, 1999-2001); *Holiday Tales for the Soul*, trans. Libby Lazewnik (Brooklyn, 2002); *Tales from the Gemara*, trans. Shaindel Weinback (Brooklyn, 1988-1990).
 50. Unlike mysteries, westerns, romances, and detective fiction, the "thriller" has not received wide attention from scholars of popular culture.
 51. In an interview, Weinstock provided the first explanation for the pseudonym, though I am not prepared to discount the second explanation as well.
 52. I have no way of verifying these numbers. According to Schaps, "One-Way Mirror," the first printing of ḥaredi novels in Israel usually includes 1,500-2,000 copies.
 53. For examples of other novels that work to raise social and religious issues to the public agenda, and which include more than a small dose of internal ḥaredi criticisms, see Pomerantz, *A Time to Rend, A Time to Sew and As Mountains Around Jerusalem* (Jerusalem and New York, 1999); Libby Lazewnik, *Give Me the Moon* (Southfield, MI, 1996); Ruthie Pearlman, *Against the Wall* (Southfield, MI and New York, 2004); Eliav, *The Runaway and The Spider's Web*, trans. Miriam Zakon (Brooklyn, 1996). In light of these and other novels, Roller's claim that "subversive narrative strategies in this [ḥaredi women's] fiction are unlikely and unintentional," does not seem accurate (*Literary Imagination*, 147). Another author of ḥaredi adventure novels argued in conversation with me that the ideological messages in Weinstock's novels are too apparent and obvious.

54. As he does not read English, he did not review the article, but expressed general agreement with my verbal summary of the main arguments.
55. Caplan, "Bikkoret-Azmit."
56. See above, n. 34.
57. Cf. *Bilti Hafikh*, 108 to *Blackout*, 101. The most extreme critique of charisma involves a Jewish South American boy, "blessed with a powerfully charismatic personality" (*Time Bomb*, 244) who becomes a leader of a Chechnyan terrorist group. In the end, "The charisma had not been enough. As soon as it became clear that the daring coup had failed, he had been cast out" (375). For a more open attack on charismatic miracle-working kabbalists, see Yaakov Hillel, *Faith and Folly: The Occult in Torah Perspective*, trans. E. van Handel (Jerusalem, 1990). This book admits that kabbalah can be used to perform miracles, but condemns anyone who does so, particularly if he takes money.
58. Beside ideological commitment to inter-ḥaredi cooperation, one should not disregard the possibility that including heroes from across the ḥaredi spectrum is likely to increase readership and sales. Cf. Ganz, "Can't Sell a Book," 34, who addresses a supposed tendency to present characters in novels from only one segment of ḥaredi Jewry.
59. *Tales for the Soul*, vi-vii.
60. On the differences in attitude toward working for a living between American and Israeli ḥaredi Jews, see Amiram Gonen, *me-ha-Yeshivah la-Avodah: ha-Nisayon ha-Amerikani u-Lekahim le-Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 2000). Cf. *Gordian Knot*, which includes a hero of the old-style Poalei Agudat Yisrael, who works as a farmer in a *shmittah*-observant farm (and even serves in the army, albeit with some reluctance). Still, there are limits to the legitimacy of ḥaredim working for a living. A ḥaredi couple, he a successful businessman and she a seller of fashionable wigs, destroy their family because they are so busy with business that they ignore their children. Their children become selfish and violent, and eventually rebel (*Blackout*, 131).
61. Chana Juravel, "Reclaiming Aspiration: Instilling a Healthy Self-Image in Our Students," in *Timeless Parenting: Raising Children in Troubled Times*, ed. Nissin Wolpin (Brooklyn, 2000), 223.
62. On Nevardok yeshivahs, see David Fishman, "Musar and Modernity: The Case of Novaredok," *Modern Judaism* 8 (1988): 41-64 and "The Musar Movement in Interwar Poland," in *The Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman et al. (Hanover and London, 1989), 247-71.
63. Cf. Miriam Stark Zakon, *Gemarakup: Super Sleuth* (Brooklyn, 1990), a series of children's stories modeled after Donald J. Sobol's *Encyclopedia Brown* books. Gemarakup is the nickname of a young yeshivah student who uses passages from classical Jewish sources to help solve petty crimes.
- The claim that secularly uneducated rabbis know more about the world than the supposed experts is common in ḥaredi popular literature. For example, one popular author explains that the Hazon Ish (a twentieth century rabbinic leader) was able to provide a surgeon with a diagram of how to perform delicate surgery, despite the fact that the rabbi "had no formal medical training." See Akiva Tatz, *Anatomy of a Search*, (Brooklyn, 1987), 39. Similarly, the ḥaredi State Department official in *Eye of the Storm*, "had more knowledge in his little fingernail than 100 professors carried around in their heads" (11).
64. S.N. Brozovski (*Admor mi-Slonim*), *Kuntres Netivei Olam ha-Yeshivah* (Jerusalem, 1991), 76.

65. Also see *Blackout*, where Gidi's talents as a journalist are put to good use.
66. Rabbi Yaakov Bender, "Only for the Chosen of Our People?" in Wolpin, *Timeless Parenting*, 260. For some of the public conversation regarding "at-risk youth," see *The Jewish Observer* 29,3 (June 1999); 29,7 (October 1996): 6-21; 32,9 (November 1999); and 33,3 (March 2000). For a strong statement against conformism in ḥaredi education, see R. Shlomo Wolbe, *Planting and Building: Raising a Jewish Child*, trans. Leib Keleman (Jerusalem and NY, 1999).
67. These novels, like all ḥaredi fiction I have seen, are devoid of sexual themes. For a particularly striking example, see Pearlman, *Against the Wall*, a surprisingly sympathetic fictional portrayal of the struggles of drug-using drop-out ḥaredi teens, which unrealistically ignores any sexual aspects of their lives. This ḥaredi approach is in contrast to evangelical Protestant popular literature, which is considerably more open about sexuality. The best-selling *Left Behind* series, for example, opens with a hero seriously considering an extra-marital affair. See Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, (Wheaton, IL, 1995), 1-2. Also see Flake, *Redemptorism*, Chap. 3, and Joshua Kurlantzick, "The New Bodice-Rippers Have More God and Less Sex," *The New York Times*, Sept. 21, 2004.
68. Yitzchak Coopersmith, *The Eye of a Needle: Aish Hatorah's Kiruv Primer* (Jerusalem and New York, 1993), 88-90.
69. Also see Sara Shapiro's poem, "Washing Dishes," in Wolpin, *Timeless Parenting*, 94.
70. On ḥaredi ambivalence regarding the Internet, see Neri Horowitz, "Ha-Ḥaredim ve-ha-Internet," *Kivvunim Ḥadashim* 3 (2000): 7-30; Karine Barzilai-Nahon and Gad Barzilai, "Cultured Technology: Internet and Religious Fundamentalism," *The Information Society* 21,1 (2005): 25-40. Also see *The Jewish Observer* 36,9 (November 2003): 8-27, and 37,2 (February 2004): 19-31.
71. R. Yaakov Perlow, "The Clash Between Modernity and Eternity," *The Jewish Observer* 26,10 (Jan. 1994): 10.
72. "Stop the World—I Want to Get Off" is, in fact, the title of a musical comedy that opened on Broadway in 1962. Cf. *Calculated Risk*, 106: "In a way, your words [against computers] are no longer relevant. The war against the computer is a waste of time. You're tilting at windmills. The computer is here to stay and is deeply entrenched throughout religious society."
73. See Michael Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York and Jerusalem, 1992), 23-84. Silber points to ways in which complete rejection of change is internally contradictory and impossible to implement.
74. S.Y. Klein, *The Jew in Exile* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), 103. Also see the remarkably positive portrayal of Israel (and other non-ḥaredi Jews) in Nachman Zakon, *The Jewish Experience: 2,000 Years* (Brooklyn, 2002), 177ff.
75. The translator, Miriam Zakon, indicated to me that she felt uncomfortable with these plot lines, though the English publisher chose not to make any changes in these particular aspects of the novels. The author, in contrast, indicated that he thought such events were exaggerations of more realistic scenarios.
76. Also see *Eye of the Storm*, 175, and *Blackout*, 38-39.
77. Also see *Eye of the Storm*, 59. Cf. *Calculated Risk*, 134.
78. Cf. this vision of a basically sympathetic but still critical portrayal of the ḥaredi community in Israel's mass media with, *ha-Ḥazer*, a soap opera about a Ḥasidic court, which appeared on Israeli television in 2004-2005.

79. On the Holocaust, see Dina Porat, "Amalek's Accomplices: Blaming Zionism for the Holocaust, Anti-Zionist Ultra-Orthodoxy in Israel during the 1980s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992): 695-735. Kimmy Caplan, "The Holocaust in Contemporary Haredi Popular Religion," *Modern Judaism* 22 (2002): 142-68.
80. Yonason Rosenblum, "The Chickens Come Home to Roost—Zionism's Internal Contradictions and the Peace Process," *The Jewish Observer* 27,5 (Summer 1994): 18.
81. Kenneth Broodo, "Report from Dallas," *The Jewish Observer*, 35:5 (May 2002): 16. Also see Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition* 28,4 (1994): n. 19; Kimmy Caplan, "Israeli Haredi Society and the Repentance ("Hazarah Biteshuvah") Phenomenon," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 8 (2001): 369-98.
82. Another author not only defends this tactic as legitimate, but explains the problematic passages in the book of Ecclesiastes in the same way. King Solomon "was a diligent teacher. Like every good teacher he started at the level of understanding of his pupils. He would win them over by repeating their statements, no matter how heretical, in all seriousness. Then he would hold the statements up to the light and examine them. Frequently he would sprinkle his talk with skeptical thoughts that had been part of his own inner struggle. These, no doubt, delighted the listener; they felt that he was one of them." Harold I. Leiman, *Koheleth: Life and Its Meaning* (Jerusalem and NY, 1978), 14-15.
83. Gili in *Blackout* is presented as a committed atheist in the few pages of the book before he becomes Orthodox.
84. See Aviezer Ravitzky, "*Ha-Agalah ha-Mele'ah ve-ha-Agalah ha-Rekah: ha-Zioni ha-Hiloni be-Mahshavah ha-Ortodoksit*," in *Herut Al ha-Luhot* (Tel Aviv, 1999), 225ff.
85. See <http://www.temple.org.il>.
86. See Shlomo Kaniel, "*Mityashvei ha-Geva'ot: ha-im Zabar Tanakhi?*" in *Ziyyonut ha-Datit: Idan ha-Temurot*, ed. Asher Cohen and Yisrael Harel (Jerusalem, 2004), 422-74.
87. For other examples of this kind of critique of religious Zionism see Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman, "The Hebron Disaster: A Torah Perspective," *The Jewish Observer*, 27,3 (April 1994): 4-9, and Rosenblum, "The Chickens," 21-22.
88. Cf. Moshe Schoenfeld, "The End of the Golus? Or the Beginning of the Geulah?: An Examination of the Messianic Implications of the Jewish State," *The Jewish Observer* 10,4 (October 1974): 12-17.
89. See Alan Yuter's polemical essay, "Positivist Rhetoric and its Functions in Haredi Orthodoxy," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 8,1-2 (1996): 127-88 for a study of the way in which haredi rhetoric de-legitimizes other interpretations of Jewish religion.
90. Cf. Robinson's description of haredi children's musical tapes, where gentiles are portrayed as non-threatening. Robinson, 166.
91. Tony Bennett and Graham Martin, "Series Editors' Preface," in Bennet, *Popular Fiction*, ix.
92. How this literature is received and consumed by different subgroups of haredi Jews and in what ways it impacts on the self-understanding and ideological commitments of its readership, are important questions, but would require a different kind of methodological approach than the one adopted here.