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## THE ADVENTURE OF THE MAHARAL OF PRAGUE IN LONDON: R. YUDL ROSENBERG AND THE GOLEM OF PRAGUE

### I. PROLOGUE

Several years ago, a book dealer's catalogue with the following entry crossed my desk:<sup>1</sup>

Leah Rosenberg, *The Errand Runner: Reflections of a Rabbi's Daughter* (Mordecai Richler's mother). Toronto: Wiley, 1981. 149 pp., illustr., \$6.

Clearly, the enterprising book dealer inserted the parenthetical note—identifying the author as Mordecai Richler's mother—in order to attract the attention of potential buyers. As the title makes clear, however, the author preferred to identify herself as her father's daughter, i.e., as the daughter of Rabbi Yudl Rosenberg (1859-1935), rather than as her son's mother. A perusal of the book's content, which offers a vivid, sympathetic, and extensive portrait of R. Yudl while barely mentioning Mordecai Richler, underscores the irony of the catalogue entry.

The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* contains a 250 word entry devoted to Mordecai Richler.<sup>2</sup> There is no entry on his grandfather, R. Yudl Rosenberg.<sup>3</sup>

### II. INTRODUCTION

In his חסיפור החסידי,<sup>4</sup> Joseph Dan writes:

Without doubt, R. Yudl Rosenberg was one of the most prolific, creative,

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and startling personalities of our literature in recent generations. So long as his writings are not properly investigated, we will not be able to fathom the lines of inner development of modern Hebrew literature. Sadly, little has been written about this unusual personality, and little is known about him. . . . In his writings, and in what has been said about him, it is difficult to find the slightest flaw in his character. Doubtless, he was a devoted Jew, loyal to the Torah, and to its ethical teachings and commandments. His personal integrity, however, did not necessarily carry over to his literary works, in the sense that we apply "integrity" to literature today. Many of his literary works, bearing his name, can only be labeled forgeries. Thus, for example, he published a book entitled *חכמת מהר"ל*, which describes a disputation between the Maharal and a priest named Johann Sylvester regarding the principles of the Jewish faith. Several of the letters ascribed to the Maharal in this volume reflect an attempt by Rosenberg to rely on the authentic material from the Maharal corpus. But, for the most part, Rosenberg did not attempt to do this in a serious manner. He uses the language of his time, and his own personal style of writing. The forgery is blatant. . . . If, however, we consider R. Yudl a forger with regard to historical texts, it is quite another matter with regard to belles-lettres. Here he must be viewed as creative, original, and prolific without peer.

It seems that Rosenberg viewed himself as a descendant of the Maharal of Prague. He devoted the best of his work to this figure. This found expression especially in his major contribution to belles-lettres, the *נפלאות מהר"ל*, a collection of popular legends connected to the Maharal of Prague, most of them imaginary. This book was widely distributed and was profoundly influential because of its many tales about the Golem allegedly created by the Maharal. . . . Due to Rosenberg's tales, Maharal's rich intellectual and literary legacy was mostly eclipsed. This great thinker is now known primarily as the creator of the Golem. It is difficult to find a parallel in the present century, whether in Hebrew or worldwide literature, of a book that has so captivated the popular imagination. Every child knows about the Golem of the Maharal. But very few know about the Maharal's authentic literary contribution. Rosenberg is largely responsible for this [skewed image of the Maharal].

Dan's account emphasizes the profound significance of R. Yudl's contribution, even as it laments the lack of scholarly attention R. Yudl has been accorded to date. Precisely because of this lack of scholarly attention, Dan's analysis itself is flawed. Thus, for example, Dan indicates that R. Yudl published a book entitled *חכמת מהר"ל*, which Dan then labels a "blatant forgery." R. Yudl never claimed to be, nor is it likely

that he was, the author or editor of *חכמת מהר"ל*.<sup>5</sup> Dan suggests that R. Yudl may have considered himself to be a descendant of the Maharal, hence his literary obsession with the Maharal. In fact, R. Yudl claimed descent from a variety of leading Jewish authorities, ranging from R. Judah Hasid (d. 1217) to R. Yaakov Koppel of Mezhirech (d. 1740) and R. Meir of Apta (d. 1831).<sup>6</sup> He never claimed descent from the Maharal of Prague, despite ample opportunity to do so.<sup>7</sup>

Given the confusion that abounds regarding almost every aspect of R. Yudl's life, ranging from the date of his birth<sup>8</sup> to the date of his death<sup>9</sup>—and including all that happened in between—we shall attempt to make a contribution, however modest, toward an intellectual portrait of R. Yudl. We shall focus primarily on R. Yudl's Maharal corpus.

### III. חשן המשפט של הכהן הגדול

R. Yudl's Maharal corpus consists of the following works:

1. הגדה של פסח עם פירוש ומנהגי הגאון קדוש עליון מהר"ל מפראג, Warsaw, 1905.
2. נפלאות מהר"ל, Piotrkow, 1909.
3. חשן המשפט של הכהן הגדול, Piotrkow, 1913.

In common, the title pages of these books indicate that they were published by R. Yudl Rosenberg and were based upon authentic manuscripts from the Royal Library in Metz.<sup>10</sup> At this point of our investigation, we will focus on the least known member of R. Yudl's Maharal corpus, the *חשן המשפט של הכהן הגדול*.

In 1913, the very year that he would leave his native Poland for Canada, R. Yudl published an astonishing tale in a booklet entitled *חשן המשפט של הכהן הגדול*.<sup>11</sup> It consisted of two separate accounts of an event that purportedly occurred in London in 1590<sup>12</sup> and involved the Maharal of Prague.

According to R. Yudl, the first account was drawn from a long forgotten Hebrew manuscript that had been gathering dust on the shelves of the "Royal Library in Metz." R. Yudl prepared the publication copy of the account by personally copying it out "letter by letter" from the original manuscript. The manuscript was an autograph copy of R. Manoah Hendel's (d. 1612)<sup>13</sup> *כלי המקדש*, a treatise devoted to the various utensils that had been in use in the Temple service in Jerusalem. In his discussion of the whereabouts of the utensils that had survived the destruction of the Temple, R. Manoah Hendel incorporated a story he

had heard personally from his teacher, the Maharal. Indeed, the Maharal had ordained that the story be recorded for all generations.

Briefly told, the Maharal related how in 1590 he learned that the twelve precious stones of the Jewish High Priest's breastplate (יָשָׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט)—which had survived the destruction of the Second Temple and ultimately made its way to England—had been stolen from the Belmore Street Museum in London. The Maharal immediately left for London where, by posing as a wealthy collector of antiquities, he managed to make contact with a certain Captain Wilson, who was both a charlatan and a thief. Wilson had ingratiated himself with a former curator of the Belmore Street Museum, Professor Andreas. Through Andreas, an innocent victim of Wilson's intrigues, Wilson gained entry to the museum's inner vaults and succeeded in pirating away the twelve precious stones. The actual theft took place after a new curator had been appointed: Professor Edward Mortimer. After the Maharal and Wilson had settled on a rather steep purchase price, the Maharal sought and obtained a two week reprieve, ostensibly in order to raise the agreed-upon exorbitant sum of money. In fact, the Maharal used the two-week period to wreak havoc with Wilson's personal life by means of a series of miraculous interventions into Wilson's daily routine. By the end of the two week period, Wilson was a broken man who repented and was only too happy to rid himself of the precious stones at no cost to the Maharal. At the advice of the Maharal, Wilson confessed the crime to Andreas, handed him the precious stones, and requested that they be restored to the Belmore Street Museum in a manner that would not incriminate him (i.e., Wilson). So ends the first account, i.e., the account of the Maharal as recorded in R. Manoah Hendel's כְּלֵי הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, which, however, provides no details as to whether or how Andreas managed to restore the jewels without implicating either Wilson or himself. This would be the task of the second account, appended by R. Yudl to the first account.

According to R. Yudl, the second account was drawn from the memoirs of Professor Edward Mortimer, noted archaeologist and Curator of the Belmore Street Museum in London. Mortimer, successor to Andreas as Curator, served in that capacity when the jewels were stolen, and, later, when they were returned. The account, written originally in English, became widely known through the efforts of an English publicist, and eventually appeared in print in Russian translation. R. Yudl assures his readers that his Hebrew version is a "verbatim" rendering of the Russian translation. The second account is brief; it simply corroborates the first account and provides a happy ending, tying

together the various loose ends that remained from the first account. In order to underscore the veracity of the accounts, R. Yudl appended a personal letter (addressed to him and dated April 1, 1913) from a Jewish scholar in London who testifies, among other things, that he is aware that the Jewish High Priest's breastplate is still in England and that he has seen the original English version of Professor Edward Mortimer's account of the theft and eventual return of the jewels.

Despite R. Yudl's efforts at verisimilitude, both accounts are imaginary and have no basis in fact. There never was a Royal Library in Metz; R. Manoh Hendel did not author a work entitled כלי המקדש; there was no Belmore Street Museum in London in 1590 or at any other time; and the Jewish scholar's letter appended to the accounts is a literary hoax.

More importantly, R. Yudl lifted virtually the entire plot, including the very names of its leading characters (Captain Wilson, Professor Andreas, and Curator Mortimer) from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's short story entitled *The Jew's Breastplate*. First published in *Strand Magazine* in 1899, it appeared in book form in 1908.<sup>14</sup> Shortly thereafter it appeared in Russian translation,<sup>15</sup> and R. Yudl—who was fluent in Russian<sup>16</sup>—appropriated it for his Maharal corpus.<sup>17</sup> If done properly, this would have required extensive editorial revision on R. Yudl's part, for Conan Doyle's short story is set in Victorian England whereas the Maharal belongs more properly to sixteenth century Bohemia. R. Yudl, however, seems not to have been overly concerned with smoothing away the anachronisms that abound.<sup>18</sup>

It will be recalled that R. Yudl's first account, allegedly drawn from a late sixteenth or early seventeenth century manuscript that had been languishing in the Royal Library of Metz, already knows the names of all the key places and characters, e.g., the Belmore Street Museum in London, Captain Wilson, Professor Andreas, and Curator Mortimer. But the Belmore Street Museum and precisely the names of those three characters are attested in only one other existing document, namely, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Jew's Breastplate*, first published in 1899. Given the fact that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle could not read Hebrew,<sup>19</sup> it is highly unlikely that he derived the plot and the characters from an alleged Hebrew manuscript at the Royal Library in Metz. R. Yudl, however, could read Russian. Given the priority of publication on the part of Conan Doyle, it is quite obvious that R. Yudl borrowed from Conan Doyle and not vice versa. Except for Conan Doyle's mention of the Belmore Street Museum, there is no record of the existence of a museum by that name in London.<sup>20</sup> It will be obvious to almost any reader

of *The Jew's Breastplate* that the Belmore Street Museum is patterned after the British Museum as it appeared in Victorian England. The British Museum was founded in 1753;<sup>21</sup> neither it nor the "Belmore Street Museum" existed in 1590. In short, the evidence is overwhelming; R. Yudl's first account is imaginary. It is drawn from a Conan Doyle short story, with some imaginative additions on R. Yudl's part.

All this doesn't bode well for the historicity of the remaining members of R. Yudl's Maharal corpus, all of which are ascribed to the Royal Library in Metz. A diehard R. Yudl (or: Maharal) enthusiast may wish to claim that while it appears that R. Yudl's חשן המשפט של הכחן הגדול was not based upon an authentic manuscript from the Royal Library in Metz, this in no way impugns the existence of that library and its other Hebrew manuscripts. Against such a claim, it should suffice to note that R. Yudl's publications aside, there is no record of either Jew or Gentile who has ever set foot in, or seen a manuscript from, the Royal Library in Metz.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, regarding the specific Hebrew manuscripts that R. Yudl mentions in conjunction with the Royal Library in Metz, no copies of these manuscripts are known from any other library, nor are their titles mentioned anywhere in Jewish literature prior to R. Yudl's announcement of their existence.<sup>23</sup> What remains to be determined is whether the Royal Library in Metz was a figment of R. Yudl's imagination, or whether R. Yudl was duped by an enterprising forger named Hayyim Scharfstein.<sup>24</sup> If the former, and the evidence seems to point in that direction,<sup>25</sup> the moral issue of passing off fiction as fact needs to be addressed.<sup>26</sup> Since R. Yudl authenticated quasi-halakhic texts (such as Maharal's Passover Seder practices in פירוש מהר"ל להגדה של פסח עם פירוש מהר"ל; and גורל העשירות [Warsaw, 1904], a treatise on divination by lottery which he attributed to the otherwise unattested Rabbi Zemach b. Ahai Gaon) by ascribing them to the Royal Library of Metz, the moral issue looms large indeed.<sup>27</sup>

#### IV. נפלאות מהר"ל<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, the most influential work of R. Yudl's Maharal corpus was *נפלאות מהר"ל*, which, ascribed to the Maharal's son-in-law, Rabbi Isaac b. Samson Katz (d. 1624), purports to be—among other things—an eyewitness account of how the Maharal created the Golem of Prague.<sup>29</sup> While generally recognized in academic circles as a literary hoax, it is incredible that neither a scholarly monograph nor even a single scholarly study has been devoted to an examination of this specific issue.<sup>30</sup> This is indicative of the present state of scholarship regarding R. Yudl.<sup>31</sup>

In brief, *נפלאות מהר"ל* tells the following story. In 1572, the Maharal was appointed Chief Rabbi of Prague. Upon his arrival, he learned that the Jews in Prague were repeatedly the victims of blood libel. In order to stave off further accusations, the Maharal turned to the head of the Christian community in Prague, Cardinal Johann Sylvester, and offered to engage in a debate with him about the false blood accusations. The terms of the debate were agreed upon, and the debate took place over a thirty day period. The Cardinal was persuaded by the Maharal's defense, and a copy of the proceedings was sent to the King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolph II (d. 1612). The King too was persuaded by the wisdom of the Maharal's arguments, and on the first day of Shevat, 1573, he granted the Maharal a private audience in the royal palace. Rudolph agreed to draft and enforce new legislation which would protect the Jews against the blood libel. Despite these impressive political gains, the Maharal decided in 1580 that it was necessary to create a Golem in order to protect the Jews against their enemies. On 20 Adar, 1580, the Golem was created; on *Lag Ba-Omer*, 1590, it was destroyed. The bulk of *נפלאות מהר"ל* is devoted to a detailed account of the adventures of the Golem during its ten years of service to its master, the Maharal of Prague.

In fact, much of the information provided by *נפלאות מהר"ל* is historically inaccurate. In 1573, Rudolph II was neither King of Bohemia nor Holy Roman Emperor. In that year, Maximillian II (d. 1576) served in both capacities. Indeed, Maharal was granted a private audience with Rudolph II. A contemporary account of this meeting has come down to us; it states unequivocally that the meeting occurred in 1592!<sup>32</sup> Alas, not only did no Cardinal by the name of Johann Sylvester serve in Prague during the lifetime of the Maharal, but no Cardinal by that name seems to have served at any time in Prague or, for that matter, anywhere else.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, *נפלאות מהר"ל* was not written by the Maharal's son-in-law. It appears to be a literary hoax, and like all the other alleged manuscripts from the Royal Library in Metz, it was a modern forgery published by R. Yudl Rosenberg.

Did the Maharal create a Golem? If our only evidence for the Maharal's Golem came from the writings of R. Yudl, we would perforce conclude that the Maharal's Golem is imaginary. In fact, the tradition that the Maharal created a Golem antedates R. Yudl. Already in 1837 (before R. Yudl was born), legends about the Maharal and the Golem appeared in print.<sup>34</sup> The early printed accounts indicate that these legends had an

oral history before being recorded.<sup>35</sup> They probably go back at least to the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Unlike R. Yudl's version, these accounts never speak about blood libel, and they know nothing about a Cardinal Johann Sylvester. Nonetheless, the gap between the death of the Maharal in 1609 and the first printed account in 1837 is striking.<sup>37</sup> There is certainly no evidence contemporary with the Maharal that he—the Maharal—created a Golem. Rationalists dismiss the late accounts out of hand; mystics hold on to them dearly, though they often seem unaware of just how late and thin these traditions really are.

A Chief Rabbi of Prague, the noted scholar and משכיל, R. Solomon Judah Rapoport (d. 1867), once wrote:<sup>38</sup>

The Maharal's hands did not produce a Golem. His great wisdom is reflected not by the fact that he produced a Golem, but rather by the fact that he produced its opposite, i.e., he produced a great disciple, the Gaon and glory of Israel, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, author of the *Tosafot Yom Tov*.

More recently, the distinguished Jewish educator, Rabbi Moshe Einstadter, wrote:<sup>39</sup>

Was there a Golem that walked the ghetto streets during the last quarter of sixteenth century Prague? Did Maharal indeed create a homunculus-like man to serve and protect a victimized Jewish populace? Let us but say that *if* asked, the question must be phrased: Did Maharal *in fact* create such a being? However, as to whether the Master, who so clearly saw the antecedents of the material world in the ideal spiritual one and how the former was determined and formulated by the latter, and who moved so freely and intimately from the one level to another—whether he could have created a Golem is no matter for debate at all.

## V. IN DEFENSE OF R. YUDL

נפלאות מהר"ל is clearly a work of fiction. Due to the literary conventions adopted by R. Yudl, such as identifying the original author as R. Isaac b. Samson Katz and ascribing the manuscript to the Royal Library of Metz, many mistook fiction for fact. Was R. Yudl guilty of fraud?

Much, it would seem, depends upon the motivation and claims of the author. If it could be demonstrated that R. Yudl deliberately passed off fiction as fact in order to deceive his readers, let us suppose for monetary gain, we would surely conclude that נפלאות מהר"ל is a crude for-



gery.<sup>40</sup> Nowhere, however, in his voluminous writings did R. Yudl suggest that he considered *נפלאות מהר"ל* an authentic historical document. Nor is there any testimony from his contemporaries that R. Yudl ever claimed—either publicly or privately—that *נפלאות מהר"ל* was fact rather than fiction. To the contrary, there is evidence that he admitted openly that *נפלאות מהר"ל* and *חשן המשפט* were works of fiction.

On Wednesday, February 18, 1931, the Jewish community of Montreal celebrated R. Yudl's seventieth birthday. A souvenir journal was published and distributed at the banquet in his honor.<sup>41</sup> It includes a detailed biography in Yiddish that could only have been written by (or: with the aid of) R. Yudl.<sup>42</sup> In it, R. Yudl's literary oeuvre is subdivided into three categories:

1. רבנישע ספרים
2. דרוש און קבלה ספרים
3. פאלקס-ליטעראטור

Listed prominently in the category of *פאלקס-ליטעראטור* are *נפלאות מהר"ל* and *חשן המשפט*! Clearly, R. Yudl did not attempt to misrepresent the fictional character of either book. Much like his older contemporary, Marcus Lehmann (d. 1890) of Mainz,<sup>43</sup> R. Yudl wrote historical novels and short stories for the masses. These were intended to inculcate Jewish values, provide Jewish heroes for juveniles, and offer a religiously acceptable alternative to the proliferation of German and French novels at the turn of the century. That many mistook his fiction for fact cannot be blamed on R. Yudl.

## VI. AN IMAGINARY TREATISE ASCRIBED TO A DISCIPLE OF RABBI JACOB EMDEN

Having become familiar with R. Yudl's predilection for passing off fiction as fact, and for inventing imaginary books and libraries, we began examining his halakhic and kabbalistic works to see to what extent his belletristic tendencies affected his scholarly work. One sample is astonishing.<sup>44</sup>

R. Yudl's translation of the *Zohar* into Hebrew was nothing less than a messianic act on his part. As he explains in the introduction to his translation, the *Zohar* itself claims that the spread of its teaching will culminate in the messianic age. But, asks R. Yudl, how could its teaching spread among Jews who, for the most part, do not understand Aramaic, the language of the *Zohar*? Hence the necessity of translating the *Zohar* into Hebrew.<sup>45</sup>

In the introduction to his translation of the *Zohar* on *Leviticus*, published in 1925, R. Yudl discusses the controversy surrounding the authenticity and antiquity of the *Zohar*. In passing, he notes that Rabbi Jacob Emden (d. 1776), the distinguished rabbi and polemicist, was among the *Zohar's* severest critics. Indeed, added R. Yudl, Emden concluded that the *Zohar* was post-talmudic in origin.<sup>46</sup>

Apparently, R. Yudl regretted publicizing the fact that a distinguished rabbi considered the *Zohar* a post-talmudic work (i.e., a work falsely ascribed to R. Shimon bar Yohai and, therefore, inauthentic). Emden's view, in effect, undermined the very purpose of R. Yudl's translation. So later in 1925, in a supplement to his translation of the *Zohar*,<sup>47</sup> R. Yudl stated that while in Lodz he chanced upon a worn copy of a book entitled צור דבש. The title page was torn and lacked the portion with the name of the author. But a careful reading of the volume enabled R. Yudl to establish that its author was a disciple of R. Jacob Emden. According to R. Yudl, the volume contained some brief legal responsa, as well as a series of letters, written by Emden. R. Yudl cites a passage from one of Emden's letters which supports the antiquity and authenticity of the *Zohar*. The passage explains away the earlier position of Emden which offered a scathing critique of the antiquity and authenticity of the *Zohar*.<sup>48</sup> It does so by indicating that the earlier position was intended only as a means of pulling the rug out from under the feet of Sabbatian teaching and, therefore, was not to be taken seriously by normative Jews. While the alleged Emden passage cited by R. Yudl may well be an accurate reflection of Emden's sentiments,<sup>49</sup> the book from which it is drawn does not exist. Apparently, neither the title nor the passage, neither the legal responsa nor the letters, have been cited (or: sighted) by anyone other than R. Yudl. It would appear that the volume was on loan from the Royal Library in Metz.

## VII. R. YUDL ROSENBERG: WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE

This brief discussion has touched upon a host of issues relating to R. Yudl Rosenberg, most of them neglected by modern scholarship. What follows is a preliminary list of scholarly desiderata. First, a comprehensive bibliography of R. Yudl's writings needs to be compiled.<sup>50</sup> As indicated above, works ascribed to him may not be his.<sup>51</sup> Conversely, works not ascribed to him may be his.<sup>52</sup> Regarding those works of R. Yudl that appeared in Hebrew and Yiddish versions, one needs to determine whether both versions were authored by R. Yudl and, where rele-

vant, the priority of one version over the other.<sup>53</sup> Differences between the Hebrew and Yiddish versions need to be accounted for.<sup>54</sup> To what extent did R. Yudl borrow from others? Was he guilty of either plagiarism or literary fraud?<sup>55</sup> In what sense was he a creative and original writer? How did he relate to his contemporary Hebrew and Yiddish literati?<sup>56</sup> What was his standing as a talmudist?<sup>57</sup> Halakhist?<sup>58</sup> Kabbalist?<sup>59</sup> What motivated him to contribute to specific literary genres and not others? Can one chart turning points in his literary career when he abandoned one literary genre for another? In the light of the anachronisms and inaccuracies (deliberate or otherwise) that abound in the Maharal corpus, R. Yudl's translation of the *Zohar* needs to be reexamined.<sup>60</sup> Did he translate accurately? What portions of the *Zohar* did he omit from his translation? What portions did he revise? To what extent were R. Yudl's literary efforts—including his translation of the *Zohar*—a Jewish response to modernity?

R. Yudl was a talmudist, halakhist, kabbalist, hasid, professional rabbi, and author of belles-lettres in a major period of transition. It would be too much to claim that he excelled in all these areas. One suspects that in each of these areas it would not be difficult to identify contemporaries of R. Yudl who were more competent than he. It is precisely R. Yudl's multi-dimensionality, and the specific configuration of areas of expertise listed above, that render him at once unique and complex. A sharply focused intellectual portrait of R. Yudl will emerge only after his contribution in each of these areas is viewed and evaluated in proper literary, historical, and social perspective.<sup>61</sup>

## VIII. EPILOGUE

Apparently unaware of R. Yudl's חשן המשפט של הכהן הגדול and its origin, Professor Arnold L. Goldsmith, in an analysis of R. Yudl's and Hayyim Bloch's<sup>62</sup> treatment of the Maharal and his Golem, wrote:<sup>63</sup>

In several stories of Rosenberg and Bloch, Rabbi Loew assumes the role of Sherlock Holmes. . . . In [the story entitled] "Solomonic Wisdom," Rabbi Loew solves the case in a manner that would have pleased Arthur Conan Doyle.

Similarly, Professor Eli Yassif, unaware that R. Yudl's חשן המשפט של הכהן הגדול was borrowed directly from a Conan Doyle short story, suggested that there were affinities between חשן המשפט and two of

Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* and *The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone*.<sup>64</sup>

Elementary, my dear professors, elementary!<sup>65</sup>

## NOTES

1. S. Matlofsky, Bookseller, *Judaica Booklist* 105, May 1988, item 295.
2. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1971, vol. 14, col. 159.
3. Nor has the omission been rectified in the supplementary volumes. See, e.g., the various *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Books* and cf. the 1973-82 and the 1983-92 *Encyclopaedia Judaica Decennial Books*.
4. Joseph Dan, הסיפור החסידי, Jerusalem, 1975, pp. 220-221. Cf. his "לתולדותיה" 1(1981), pp. 85-86.
5. חכמת מהר"ל, Piotrkow, 1911, appeared anonymously in Hebrew and Yiddish editions which differ slightly from each other. Although the work is clearly dependent upon R. Yudl's נפלאות מהר"ל, Piotrkow, 1909 (חכמת מהר"ל assumes that a debate took place between Cardinal Johann Sylvester of Prague and the Maharal—a fact known only from מהר"ל), it does not appear to have been authored by R. Yudl. R. Yudl did not ordinarily shy away from claiming authorship or editorship of works he published. His name appears prominently on the title pages of the first editions of the works he published (see, e.g., below, pp. 48, 50 and 52). Moreover, he often listed the titles of his earlier works on the title pages of his later works. See, e.g., R. Yudl's מאור החשמל, Montreal, 1924, where he lists 11 of his previous publications and 2 of his unpublished manuscripts (awaiting publication) on the title page. He was especially proud of his Maharal literary corpus (הגדה של פסח עם פירוש מהר"ל מפראג; נפלאות מהר"ל; חשן המשפט); his name is prominently displayed on the title page of each work of the corpus. חכמת מהר"ל, having appeared anonymously, does not conform to this pattern (see below, pp. 55 and 56). Moreover, nowhere does R. Yudl list חכמת מהר"ל as one of his works. Significant too is the fact that R. Yudl's נפלאות מהר"ל, pp. 6-11, provides a detailed summary of the content of the alleged debates held between Cardinal Johann Sylvester of Prague and the Maharal. Yet חכמת מהר"ל, which purports to present the full text of the same debates, does not address 4 out of 5 of the key issues summarized by R. Yudl in נפלאות מהר"ל! Also, a close reading of חכמת מהר"ל (essentially a series of theological discourses based upon genuine passages from the Talmud and the writings of the Maharal) sets it quite apart, both in content and style, from the other members of R. Yudl's Maharal corpus.

It would appear that the author (at the very least: editor) of חכמת מהר"ל was Dovberish Tursh (ca. 1863-1935). This is obvious from several passages in the Hebrew version of חכמת מהר"ל, where the text—using the first person Hebrew—refers the reader to passages from previous works by

- Tursh. Thus, e.g., חכמת מהר"ל, p. 37, reads: כאשר הארכתי בזה בספרי מערת: מערת המכפלה, Warsaw, 1886. Again, חכמת מהר"ל, p. 58, reads: כאשר ידובר בזה בספרי מאוני צדק: מאוני צדק, Warsaw, 1895. Note too that Tursh's name appears in Russian on the title pages of the first editions of חכמת מהר"ל (personal communication from Professor Ira Robinson, dated October 26, 1988; see, e.g., below, p. 55). On Tursh, see לעקסיקאן פון דער נייער יידישער ליטעראטור, New York, 1961, vol. 4, cols. 62-63; and G. Kressel, לקסיקון הספרות העברית, Tel Aviv, 1967, vol. 2, cols. 18-19. Both reference works ascribe חכמת מהר"ל to Tursh. Cf. C. B. Friedberg, בית עקד ספרים, Tel Aviv, 1951, vol. 2, p. 372.
6. See, e.g., the title page to R. Yudl's קריאה קדושה, New York, 1919. Cf. B. Z. Eisenstadt, דורות האחרונים, (ספר ראשון), New York, 1914, columns 319-320.
  7. See especially, נפלאות מהר"ל, p. 76, where R. Yudl lists the Maharal's immediate descendants. R. Yudl makes no attempt to "plug in" to any specific line.
  8. Z. Rejzen, לעקסיקאן פון דער נייער יידישער ליטעראטור, Vilna, 1929, vol. 4, col. 114, lists 1865 as the year R. Yudl was born; most other sources list 1860. The correct date of birth is November 8, 1859.
  9. Kressel, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, col. 841, lists R. Yudl's date of death as October 12, 1936. The correct date is October 23, 1935.
  10. See below, pp. 47-52, where the title pages, together with the additional pages that refer specifically to the Royal Library in Metz, are reproduced. In גורל העשיריות, Warsaw, 1904, a work ostensibly edited by R. Yudl's son, Meir Joshua Rosenberg, R. Yudl and the Royal Library in Metz are mentioned together for the first time (pp. 53-54). The only other reference to the Royal Library appears in the introduction to the Yiddish version of חכמת מהר"ל (see above, note 5), Piotrkow, 1911 (see below, p. 57).
  11. The bibliographical history of חשן המשפט של הכהן הגדול is not without interest. For starters, the Hebrew edition is not listed in C.B. Friedberg, בית עקד ספרים, Tel Aviv, 1951, 4 vols. A Yiddish version, חשן המשפט פון כהן גדול דער מהר"ל מפראג מיט דעם, Lodz, no date, was probably published the same year as the Hebrew edition; the title page notes that R. Yudl "resides in Lodz." Copies of the first editions of חשן המשפט are not easy to obtain. Many of the great Judaica collections in Jerusalem, New York, Cincinnati, and Cambridge (Mass.) do not own copies. This highlights another problem plaguing R. Yudl Rosenberg scholarship: no library seems to own a complete set of R. Yudl's publications. Since it is essential that the Hebrew and Yiddish versions be compared to each other, and that first editions be compared to later editions, only the diligent and itinerant scholar is likely to advance discussion.
- Other editions of חשן המשפט are: Jerusalem, 1951, and New York, 1985 (the latter being a photographic reproduction of the Piotrkow edition). Taking its cue from the first Hebrew edition, the second Hebrew edition is not listed in M. Moria, בית עקד ספרים החדש, Safed, 1974-77, 7 volumes. חשן המשפט has also appeared in a variety of Yiddish and English versions. In common, none of these versions mentions R. Yudl; in some versions, the story is ascribed to a new author/editor. Minor changes in the plot, characters' names, and place names are commonplace. See, e.g., S. A. Hirshkovits, ed., "די גניבה אין בריטישען מוזעאום פון מהר"ל מפראג," Bnei Brak, no date; Anonymous, "די געהיימיניס פון חושן המשפט,"

- 7(1948), n. 1, pp. 4-6, n. 2, pp. 6-9, n. 3, pp. 8-10, n. 6, pp. 7-9; Israel Cohen, "The Choshen Mishpat: The Secret of the British Museum," *Haderech* 2(1953-54), n. 7, pp. 13-15, n. 8, pp. 7-9, n. 9, pp. 8-10, n. 10, pp. 9-12, n. 11, pp. 7-11 (reissued in *Haderech*, London, 1973 and 1979); Anonymous, "The Mystery of the Twelve Stones," *Talks and Tales* 18(1959), n. 215, pp. 6-9, n. 216, pp. 6-8, n. 217, pp. 8-11, n. 219, pp. 6-8, n. 220, pp. 9-11 (reissued in: D. Grossman, ed., *Leader's Guide: Shemot* [published by Agudath Israel of America], New York, 1986, pp. 196-208). G. Winkler's *The Sacred Stones: The Return of the Golem*, New York, 1991, is an original and imaginative novel based in part on R. Yudl's חשן המשפט.
12. The date 1590 was not arrived at arbitrarily. According to נפלאות מהר"ל, the Golem was created in 1580 (p. 13) and destroyed in 1590 (p. 69), at which point the narrative portion of נפלאות מהר"ל comes to a close. חשן המשפט picks up precisely where נפלאות מהר"ל left off.
  13. On R. Manoah Hendel, see *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, New York, 1912, vol. 8, p. 296. For a list of his published and unpublished writings, see his introduction to מנות הלכות, a commentary on Bahya Ibn Paquda's חובות הלבבות, Sulzbach, 1691 (also available in: S. Asaf, מקורות לתולדות החנוך, בישראל, Tel Aviv, 1954, vol. 1, pp. 41-43).
  14. See R.L. Green and J.M. Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 149-151.
  15. A. Conan Doyle's short stories were regularly translated into Russian, almost as soon as they appeared in print in England. See, e.g., R.B. De Waal, *The World Bibliography of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson*, Boston, 1974, pp. 79-83. Thus, for example, a Russian edition of Conan Doyle's collected works appeared in Moscow, 1904. Most New York libraries do not own complete sets of Conan Doyle's writings in English, much less so in Russian. Thus, I could not locate the earliest edition of *The Jew's Breastplate* in Russian. Nonetheless, there is no reason to question R. Yudl's claim that חשן המשפט was drawn from a Russian translation of the original English version.
  16. See Leah Rosenberg, *op. cit.* (above, p. 26), p. 22, who writes that her father R. Yudl as a youth "had studied the Russian language, saved his meager pennies to buy candles by which light he could read the forbidden Russian books in the attic." At a later stage in life, when he was serving as Rabbi in Tarlow, R. Yudl took and passed an examination in Russian in order to qualify for a government sponsored rabbinic post. See Z. Cohen and J. Fox, eds., רי יהודה ראזענבערג אבי"ד דמונטריאל, Montreal, 1931, p. 5; cf. N. Shemen, "יובל בוך תלמוד תורה עץ חיים", *רי יהודה (יודל) ראזענבערג ז"ל*, Toronto, 1943, p. 105.
  17. This will be obvious to anyone who reads Conan Doyle's *The Jew's Breastplate* and R. Yudl's חשן המשפט. Actually, R. Yudl as much as admits that he borrowed from Conan Doyle, though he doesn't reveal the full extent of the expropriation. In חשן המשפט p. 5, R. Yudl writes:
 

חלק השני של מעשה פלא הזה נכתב בספר ונדפס מכבר בלשון אנגליא עיי הסופר המפורסם והחוקר הגדול הנקרא קאנאן דזשוויל איש אנגליא. . . ואני העתקתי לכאן חלק השני משפת רוסיא מלה במלה כל הספור על פי כתבו של הפראפעסאר עדווארד מארטימער והסופר הנעלה קאנאן דזשוויל.

At p. 26 he writes: מעשה הזה נתפרסם בעולם המדע פעם ראשון בשפת אנגליה על ידי הסופר הגדול האנגלי הנקרא [sic] Conon Dyuil.

In the letter appended to the end of the two accounts, we read:

ולא מצאתי מאומה חדשות על דבר חשן המשפט הנמצא בבית גנוי המלך כי אם מה שכתב אודות זה הפראפעטאר [sic] Eduard Martimer והסופר הגדול האנגלי [sic] Conan Dqoil.

In any event, it is unlikely that R. Yudl's readers realized to whom he was referring. The earliest reference in print to the relationship between *The Jew's Breastplate* and חשן המשפט appears in N. Shalem, "החשן" in ספר אסופת מחקרים, Jerusalem, 1935, pp. 197-214 (reissued in: N. Shalem, מחקרים, Jerusalem, 1974, pp. 503-519). See also S. A. Halpern, *Tales of Faith*, Jerusalem, 1968, pp. 11-12. Cf. Halpern's revised account in his *The Prisoner and Other Tales of Faith*, Jerusalem, 1981, pp. 11-12.

18. A striking example, allegedly told by the Maharal in 1590, occurs when Captain Wilson explains to him that he succeeded in stealing the precious stones without being detected, due to the fact that he replaced them with fakes that were exact replicas of the original jewels. The text (on p. 11) reads:
 

והנה זאת עיקר החכמה הנפלאה שלי, שעל ידה עלה בידי לעשות הגנבה הזאת. שהכנסתי שמה מכונה פאטאגראפית קטנה ועשיתי לי פאטאגראף מן תבניתן ומידתן של ייב אבני החשן, ועל ידי זה היה ביכלתי לזייף את האבנים עם הכתובת אשר עליהן, ועשיתי ייב אבנים כאלה של זכוכית בלי שום השתנות.
19. See A. Conan Doyle, *Memoirs and Adventures*, Boston, 1924, pp. 9-13, where he indicates that he studied Latin and Greek in school after a fashion, and learned French and German on his own. Hebrew is not mentioned.
20. Personal communication dated October 9, 1987 from Andrea Reay, on behalf of the Head of the Reading Room, Bibliographical Information Service, The British Library.
21. See F. Francis, *Treasures of the British Museum*, London, 1971, p. 9.
22. See G. Scholem's review of H. Bloch's מקוריים [Vienna, 1924] קובץ מכתבים מקוריים in קריית ספר 1(1924-25), p. 106, where he writes regarding the Royal Library in Metz: "ספריה שלא היתה ולא נבראה". On a recent visit to Metz, I asked one of the head librarians at the Bibliotheque-Mediatheque, Metz' municipal library, whether he had ever heard of a Royal Library in Metz. He smiled, looked at me with disdain, and nodded his head back and forth, as if to indicate that my query confirmed his worst suspicions about American scholars and scholarship.
23. This includes, among others, R. Zemah bar Ahai Gaon's העשיריות, R. Manoah Hendel's כלי המקדש, the Maharal's גדולת ישראל (see נפלאות מהר"ל, pp. 4 and 80), and R. Isaac b. Samson Katz's נפלאות מהר"ל.
24. See below, pp. 49, 51 and 54.
25. Except for R. Yudl, no one seems to have met with, and bought manuscripts from, Hayyim Scharfstein. If one compares all the letters ascribed by R. Yudl to Hayyim Scharfstein, one notices subtle differences between the letters, which seem to cast doubt on their authenticity. In גורל העשיריות (1904), Scharfstein refers to R. Yudl as ידידי יקירי, not שארי בשרי. In (1905), Scharfstein—in a letter allegedly sent from Metz—refers to R. Yudl as שארי בשרי as well. The term refers to a blood relative, and it is unclear how between 1904 and 1905 Scharfstein and R. Yudl became blood relatives. In גורל העשיריות, Scharfstein refers to

