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"Outside the Natural Order": Temerl, the Female Hasid*

Abstract: Women are far more present in Hasidic tales than they are in Hasidic teachings. Temerl Sonnenberg-Bergson, a famous wealthy patron of Poland's *tsadikim*, is the heroine of a number of Hasidic tales. She is esteemed for her support of *tsadikim*, but is looked upon as a woman who deviates from the rigid social order of which she is a part, making her a threat to community norms. This article focuses on the literary figure of Temerl, who, within Hasidic discourse, comes to represent a kind of hermaphrodite: on the one hand, her wealth augments her material, feminine side and intensifies her sexual attraction; on the other, her power and influence construct her as masculine, casting the *tsadik* whom she supports in a feminine role which he must strive to overcome.

Keywords: Hasidism, Hasidic story, women, gender, Temerl, Simha Bunem of Przysucha, Josef Perl.

Women are far more present in Hasidic tales than they are in Hasidic teachings.[1] They frequently make their appearance as characters in need of help, or as members of the *tsadik*'s family (his wife or his widow) whose fame is derived primarily from the *tsadik*'s own light reflecting upon them.[2]

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[1] For discussions regarding women as protagonists and narrators in Hasidic stories, see Justin Jaron Lewis, *Imagining Holiness: Classic Hasidic Tales in Modern Times* (Montreal, 2009), 159–206; Rivka Dvir-Goldberg, "Ha-Ba'al Shem Tov u-'mahbarto ha-tehorah': ha-yahas le-nashim be-siporet ha-hasidit," *Masekhet* 3 (2005), 45–63.

[2] On women and Hasidism, see Shmuel Abba Horodecky, *Ha-hasidut ve-ha-hasidim* (Tel Aviv, 1953), 65–71; Ada Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism: S. A. Horodecky and the Maid of Ludmir Tradition," in Ada Rapoport-Albert, Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.),

Sometimes they are described as independent figures whose lives and activities are meaningful in and of themselves.

One fascinating woman appears as the heroine in a number of Hasidic tales: Temerl Sonnenberg-Bergson, a famous, wealthy patron of Poland's *tsadikim*. She was a woman in a powerful position—an extraordinary phenomenon in the social structure of the time. She is esteemed for having provided *tsadikim* with financial, political, and moral support; yet, at the same time, she is looked upon as a woman who deviated from the rigid social order of which she was a part and behaved "outside the natural order," making her a threat to the community norms. In the tales told of her, we find both admiration and derision.

Temerl (a Yiddish diminutive of "Tamar") was born in about 1765, the daughter of the learned and wealthy Avraham of Opoczno.[3] She was married in 1787 to Berek Sonnenberg-Bergson, the son of Poland's wealthiest Jew, Shmuel Zbytkower. In general, Zbytkower was favorably disposed towards Hasidim, though his relationship with them was complex and at times ambivalent.[4] His son, Berek Sonnenberg, was a wholehearted supporter of Hasidism, using his wealth, political contacts, and influence to promote the growing movement, with Temerl as a full partner in these efforts.[5] Temerl proved

Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky (London, 1988), 495–525; ead., "The Emergence of a Female Constituency in Twentieth Century Habad Hasidism," in Ada Rapoport-Albert, David Assaf (eds.), *Yashan mi-penei hadash: mehkarim be-toledot Yehudei mizrah Eiropah ve-tarbutam, shai le-'Imanu'el Etkes* (Jerusalem, 2009), 1: 7*–68* (English Section); Nehemia Polen, "Miriam's Dance: Radical Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought," *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992), 1: 1–21; Naftali Loewenthal, "'Daughter/Wife of Hasid' or 'Hasidic Woman,'" *Mada'ei ha-Yahadut* 40 (2000): 8*–21* (English Section); id., "Women and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism," in Immanuel Etkes et al. (eds.), *Be-ma'agelei hasidim: kovets mehkarim le-zikhro shel profesor Mordekhai Vilenski* (Jerusalem, 1999), 7*–65* (English Section); Gedaliah Nigal, *Nashim be-sifrut ha-hasidut* (Jerusalem, 2005); Moshe Rosman, "Al nashim ve-hasidut: he'arot le-diyun," in Rapoport-Albert, Assaf (eds.), *Yashan mi-penei hadash*, 1: 151–164; Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World* (Berkeley, 2003); Lewis, *Imagining Holiness*, 159–206; Marcin Wodziński, "The Hasidic 'Cell,' The Organization of Hasidic Groups at the Level of the Community," *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 10 (2012), 111–122; id., "Women and Hasidism: A 'Non-Sectarian' Perspective," *Jewish History* 27 (2013), 399–434.

[3] See Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (Oxford, 2006), 105. See also Marcin Wodziński, *Hasidism and Politics: The Kingdom of Poland, 1815–1864* (Oxford, 2013), 169–173, 195.

[4] Dynner, *Men of Silk,* 97–99.

[5] Dynner stresses the far-reaching significance of this patronage and the central role played by the Bergsons in the growth of Polish Hasidism, such that the industrial revolution, despite its rejection by the Hasidic antimodernist attitude, actually facilitated its sponsorship on an unprecedented scale. Moreover, the mercantile *élite* seems to have promoted and protected Polish Hasidism, despite the conventional historiography that associates this group with the Enlightenment and assimilation. See Glenn Dynner, "Merchant Princes and

even more eager to support Hasidism than her husband was: according to Dynner, many of Berek's acts of benevolence towards the Hasidic community were undertaken at the behest of his wife, who continued as a patron after his death in 1822, until her own passing in 1830.

In 1807 the Bergsons built both a Hasidic synagogue and a study hall in the Warsaw suburb of Praga, and eight years later made a generous donation towards the purchase of books. In 1814, Berek convinced Warsaw *mitnagdim* to collaborate with Hasidim in combating the *maskilim*,[6] a joint effort whose success was a double triumph for Hasidism.

Temerl herself was very successful in running the family businesses and developing contacts and influence in broader circles. She founded a bank, ran a salt company, and acquired a house on a Warsaw street that was technically off limits to Jews. In 1826, she established another Hasidic synagogue. In addition, Temerl employed many Hasidim and future *tsadikim* in her various businesses.[7]

Temerl's activities are recorded in various sources, including government documents, official investigation reports, financial contracts, and testimonies of her contemporaries, including those found in the hagiographies of the *tsadikim* R. Yaakov Yitshak Horowitz (the Seer of Lublin), R. Simha Bunem of Przysucha, and R. Yitshak of Warka, among others.

The Hasidic stories were transmitted orally for many years before being transcribed and published. For the most part, these tales were recounted during communal Shabbat meals and other formal and informal gatherings. Scholars are divided as to the proper attitude towards these accounts in which reality and imagination, testimony and admiration, fact, exaggeration and sheer fiction are closely intertwined. [8]

Tsadikim: The Patronage of Polish Hasidism," *Jewish Social Studies* 12 (2005), 1: 64–110, esp. 65–67. On Berek Sonnenberg, see also Marcin Wodziński, "Tsevaato shel Berek Sonnenberg: ha-karierah ha-mafti'ah shel nadvan al korho," *Gal-Ed* 22 (2010), 143–158.

[6] Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 102–104. On this matter, see also Marcin Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland: A History of Conflict* (Oxford, 2005), 116–153.

[7] Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 104–114.

[8] See Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Hagiography with Footnotes: Edifying Tales and Writing of History in Hasidism," in ead. (ed.), *Essays in Jewish Historiography* (Ottawa, 1991), 119–159. The main discussion is focused on the stories about the Besht, but its implications are relevant for other figures as well. See Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley, 1996); id., "Hebrew Sources on the Baal Shem Tov: Usability vs. Reliability," *Jewish History* 27 (2013), 153–169; Immanuel Etkes, *The Besht: Magician, Mystic, and Leader* (Boston, 2005). For research on the later Hasidic story, see Joseph Dan, *Ha-sipur ha-hasidi* (Jerusalem 1975), 189–263; Jonatan Meir, *Shivhei Rodkinson: Michael Levi Frumkin-Rodkinson ve-ha-hasidut* (Bnei Brak, 2012); Glenn Dynner, "The Hasidic Tale as a Historical Source: Historiography and Methodology," *Religion Compass* 3 (2009), 4: 655–675.

In general, scholars seek to ascertain whether a certain tale has historical value, and, if so, how the historical details might be extracted from the fictional or exaggerated literary wrapping. Concerning Temerl, Dynner has already pointed out the ambivalence conveyed in Hasidic tales regarding Temerl's financial support of *tsadikim*, noting that unambiguous praise would "run against the society's patriarchal grain."[9] However, his approach to these tales, like that of other historians, is to treat them primarily as a source of information that is useful for historical reconstruction.

In this article I focus on the literary Temerl. In accordance with the methodology of cultural poetics,[10] Hasidic tales should be treated first and foremost as literature. As such, the reader must pay attention not only to relevant details, but also to the tale as a whole: its structure, motifs, symbols, characters, and so on. At the same time, this literature cannot be detached from its historical community context. Indeed, the conflicts, values, and attitudes that are reflected in the stories reveal significant aspects of the culture within which they were created and to which they were addressed. Therefore, while the historical Temerl is not examined here, the historical Hasidic culture is present through her literary figure. The Hasidic tales below are analyzed with a view to illuminating Temerl's image as an example of Hasidic gender construction.

Praise for Temerl

At first glance, Hasidic tales seem to present Temerl in a positive light. Examples include the following depictions:

> For several years, the *Admor* [our Master, Teacher and Rabbi] R. Simha Bunem of Przysucha resided in Ruda, serving as a bookkeeper, before he was appointed as Rebbe. Along with him, Temerl employed several of the leading Hasidim. They dedicated a few hours of their time to clerical duties and managing the rich holdings, though Temerl did not demand even this. They dedicated the remain-

[9] Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 19.

[10] On the cultural poetics assertion that history is shaped by the people who live it, and the literary text should be viewed as culture in action, without too sharply a defined distinction between an artistic production and any other kind of social production, see Stephen Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture," in H. Aram Veeser (ed.), *The New Historicism* (New York, 1989), 1–13. For further references and the application of this methodology to the study of Lurianic Kabbalah, see Shaul Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash: Myth, History, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Lurianic Kabbala* (Bloomington, 2008). See also Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, 2004), 151–201.

> ing hours of the day and night to Torah study and religious worship. This wealthy woman established a spacious study house, whose doors were open day and night. The wealthy Temerl believed with all her heart that it was thanks to this study house, and her clerks, who were great Hasidim, that she was growing increasingly wealthy, being delivered from all troubles and complications.[11]
>
> Rabbi Shmuel [Zbytkower] had a son, Dov Baer, whose nickname was R. Bereky [that is, Berek Sonnenberg-Bergson], and he was a great lord . . . though all his deeds were nothing in comparison to the good deeds of his wife, the reputable, righteous, pious Madam Temerl, of blessed memory, whose acts are famous throughout the Jewish world.[12]

In contrast to many other Hasidic tales, the descriptions of Temerl's actions and conduct here are entirely positive. At the same time, they are gender-neutral: one could easily replace the name "Temerl" with "Berek" in these texts without changing their essence. The descriptions are also generalized, offering an overall characterization rather than a narrative focused on a specific event. When it comes to narrating specific events concerning Temerl's relationship with Hasidim, the picture becomes more complex. In the following pages, I will analyze several narratives illustrative of the way Temerl is characterized and constructed.[13]

[11] Yehuda Leib ha-kohen Levine, *Rav pe'er*, in Hanoch ha-kohen Levine of Będzin, *Yekhahen pe'er* (Jerusalem, 1964), 30–31 (translation is mine). See Dynner, "Merchant Princes," 81. The author of *Rav pe'er* is a twentieth-century, postwar author who follows the Hasidic tradition of Gur. This paragraph is part of a long text written as a historical description of the chronicles of his grandfather, R. Hanoch ha-kohen Levine of Będzin, the son-in-law of R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter of Gur (Góra Kalwaria). The mention of Temerl is casual and seemingly marginal in this context.

[12] Avraham Issakhar Alter, *Meir eynei ha-golah* (Piotrków, 1925), 34, par. 62. The excerpt continues: "Apart from aiding anyone who was poor and destitute, she supported—in overt and covert ways—all the *tsadikim* and Hasidim of Poland. She visited the courts of these holy men many times and spent money like ashes in order to be able to talk with them. She was especially devoted to supporting great Hasidim who were disciples of the Rabbi, the Maggid [of Kozienice] and the '[holy] Jew' [Yaakov Yitshak Rabinowicz], of blessed memory, and she made efforts to appoint renowned Hasidim as clerks for her many commercial transactions. Rabbi Bunem of Przysucha, of blessed memory, worked in her timber business, transporting timber from Warsaw to Danzig [Gdańsk] on the Vistula River, and she took care of all his expenses." This description of Berek and Temerl is followed by the account of their desire to marry their daughter to a great Torah scholar and their efforts to invite the Maggid of Kozienice to perform the wedding ceremony. During the marriage, the Maggid made fun of Berek's father, Shmuel Zbytkower. Thus, Temerl's praise is merely the background for a contrasting of the rich (and not necessarily righteous) patron and the *tsadik*.

[13] It should be emphasized that each story is independent of the others. Where relevant, we note the specific context and interests affecting the literary construction in each instance. Nevertheless, the picture arising from the accumulation of tales is of great importance here.

Hierarchy

The tales about Temerl reflect both acceptance/appreciation and rejection/devaluation. Several tales convey a narrative in which Temerl is lowered from her lofty position as a rich and influential patron to the level of a mere (commercial) partner of the *tsadik*, or even a servant or someone in need.

For instance, there is a story recounting how, after Yom Kippur, the Seer of Lublin informed his disciple, R. Simha Bunem, that the latter would soon lose all his money. Sure enough, R. Bunem loses his fortune and travels to Warsaw in search of a livelihood. Staying at a local inn, he weeps bitterly over his destitution:

> Afterwards, a messenger arrived from the famous woman Temerl, suggesting that he work in her distillery . . . On hearing this, he said to himself: "Well, if God has helped me and reopened the gates of success . . . I don't want to work for her, I demand to be a full partner!" When this lady heard his answer, she was furious at him and she did not send [the messenger] again. Nevertheless, Rabbi Bunem, feeling greatly relieved, sat and studied Torah calmly, since God had already helped him. A few days later, she summoned him again, having reconciled herself to making him a full partner in all her businesses, and she also gave him money to cover all his debts. That year, they made a lot of money, and then he returned to the Seer of Lublin.[14]

Initially, Temerl makes her appearance as R. Bunem's potential savior. However, Bunem's patience and trust in God upset the hierarchy, making him her equal. In fact, his status is implicitly higher, in that Temerl later courts his partnership as though she were the one in need, an idea reinforced by the tale's last line—"That year, they made a lot of money"—implying that it was his participation that brought success to her enterprises. In other words, the narrative leads the reader from a point where Temerl is the generous savior and R. Bunem the helpless individual in need, to a point where R. Bunem is the trumpeted source of abundance and blessing who is responsible for the financial success, while Temerl is the needy side of the equation.

Another tale reverses the hierarchy in a different way. According to this story, R. Bunem and his disciples were staying at the Carlsbad baths and they ran out of money:

[14] Israel Ber Yitshak Simha Berger, "Or Simhah," in *Simhat Israel* (Piotrków, 1910), 24–25, par. 56. Israel Berger (1855–1919) was the rabbi of Bucharest and the publisher of anthologies of Hasidic stories. *Simhat Israel* is a volume dedicated to the praises of R. Bunem.

> One day the pious Rebbe of Przysucha arose early in the morning, looked out of the window and told his great disciples: "You should know, gentlemen, that today we will find relief concerning our finances." And indeed, the pious woman, Temerl, of blessed memory, arrived, bringing money with her. She also took some laundry vats and she herself washed their clothing.[15]

In the original Hebrew text, the hot springs of Carlsbad are called *ma'ayanei ha-yeshu'ah*, meaning "the Springs of Salvation," a term based upon the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and will not be afraid . . . therefore you shall draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation" (Isaiah 12:2–3). The use of this unusual term[16] in this context—with a great Hasidic rebbe awaiting Temerl's salvation in order to continue his stay at the baths—strikes the reader as ironic. What exactly is the source of salvation? The water of the springs? God? Temerl? What about *tsadikim* themselves as sources of salvation? Setting aside these questions, within the overall tale of the rabbis resting by the Springs of Salvation and awaiting deliverance by Temerl as God's messenger, the storyteller awards our heroine an unexpected position in the hierarchy: rather than appearing as a savior, she turns out to be a maidservant, who personally washes the rabbi's laundry. In other words, her praise lies precisely in her ability to subordinate herself, an act that reflects back on the financial deliverance that she has wrought, showing that she is only the mediator of God's abundance. Temerl's act, belying her high social status, might be interpreted as an act of "self-abnegation" (*bitul ha-yesh*), an important Hasidic virtue. The reader is impressed by her humility. She behaves like a Hasid towards his rebbe, performing *shimush talmidei hakhamim*, serving a Torah scholar. On the other hand, by acting as a benefactor to the *tsadikim*, she becomes a conduit or vessel through which Divine abundance flows, a role traditionally attributed to

[15] Yehoshua ha-kohen of Sochaczew, *Ets avot, megilat yuhasin, tahat ha-ets*, in Elazar Ber Zeev Wolf ha-kohen, *Hidushei maharah* (Warsaw, 1898), 2: 2b. Yehoshua ha-kohen, who compiled this genealogy, was the son of R. Elazar, the author of this halakhic work. The genealogy is appended at the end of the book to glorify the author's rabbinical lineage and to demonstrate his close connection to the Hasidic rabbis of Przysucha, Kock, and Gur.

[16] As far as we have been able to ascertain, Hasidic tales usually refer to hot springs by their location, like Carlsbad and Marienbad. See Yo'ets Kim Kadish of Przytyk, *Siah sarfei kodesh he-hadash* (Bnei Brak, 1989), part IV, 61:7, 166:7, 171:23, 172:31. Other tales use the term 'baths,' see, for example, Isaiah Wolf Tsukernik, *Sipurim nifla'im u-ma'amarim yekarim* (Lwów, 1908), 2. There are other metaphoric or symbolic terms used in Hasidic and other sources, each with its own semantic field. See Miriam Zadoff, *Next Year in Marienbad: The Lost Worlds of Jewish Spa Culture* (Philadelphia, 2012), 13–16.

the *tsadik* himself.[17] Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the gender roles embodied in the story the moment Temerl takes the vats in hand. Despite her status as a wealthy and influential woman, the laundry signals, above all, her proper place in the household. For a woman, washing laundry entails neither humiliation nor self-abnegation; it is simply doing what is expected of her, according to social norms. In the final analysis, even the wealthy and powerful Temerl is still a woman, with the inferior social and cultural status that this implies.

Each tale has its own particular way of devaluing Temerl, and, taken together, the stories suggest that her power and status aroused a sense of discomfort. In the next example, the lowering of Temerl's status is less blunt and more sophisticated:

> When Rabbi Bunem, may peace be upon him, became a [Hasidic] leader, the woman Temerl from Warsaw came to him and requested a blessing. He began to wonder: "Who am I? Can I bestow a blessing? What is my blessing worth?" And then he said: "[I will agree] only if I am given a hundred ducats." He reasoned as follows: "If someone were to give a hundred ducats for my blessing, it would be altogether outside the natural order, and a great wonder; thus, it could also be beyond nature that I would be able to bring deliverance for others, and that God would send His aid. King David, too, wondered about this (Psalms 78:70): "He . . . took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that give suck He brought him."[18]

This short, sophisticated tale depicts R. Bunem as both humble and haughty— conflicting traits whose common root is a lack of self-confidence. From a psychological perspective, we might say that the novice rebbe questioned his own power of blessing, not yet having solidified his position as a *tsadik*. He therefore needed external indicators to confirm his position, such as the reactions of his Hasidim, rather than relying on his own intuition and experience. In political terms, this story can be seen as a justification for receiving money from the Hasidim; in other words, the external reality of Hasidim who are willing to give the *tsadik* their money is God's way of affirming the *tsadik*'s actual status as such. Sociologically speaking, the fact that R. Bunem's first "test" involved Temerl, his first

[17] See Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (New York, 1995), 189–207.

[18] Hanoch Zvi ha-kohen Levine of Będzin, *Hashavah le-tovah* (Piotrków, 1929), 28a. The compiler is the grandson of R. Hanoch Henich ha-kohen of Aleksandrów (Alexander), one of the great disciples of R. Bunem, and himself the second rebbe of Gur. This is a collection of his teachings, sprinkled with some anecdotes about his teachers and contemporaries.

Hasida,[19] provides us with a deeper reading, in the light of their previous recipient-benefactor relationship. Temerl had encouraged R. Bunem's development, supporting him financially and enabling him to reach the point of becoming a Hasidic leader. Until now, she was "blessing" him; at this point, she is asking him to bless her. This would seem to be a rite of passage for R. Bunem. Temerl's request for a blessing signals a role reversal and the construction of a new hierarchy in which R. Bunem is the source of blessing and Temerl the receiver. However, R. Bunem— or the storyteller—is not yet satisfied. The new hierarchy needs to be defined in clear terms. Temerl not only asks for a blessing, but has to pay for it, in a manner that is "outside the natural order." Ironically, R. Bunem asks—or demands—that Temerl continue sponsoring him as before, though the act is now defined differently. R. Bunem not only receives a large amount of money, but also gains recognition as a *tsadik* to whom people are willing to contribute money for the sake of a blessing. The preexisting social order gains doubly: firstly, by transforming Temerl into a receiver—a status lower than that of benefactor (and, of course, lower than that of the *tsadik*), and secondly, by defining her actions—and herself, by association—as being "outside the natural order." Paying attention to the literary molding, including the biblical allusion, I would also dare to say that the reference to King David, whom God brought from "the ewes that give suck," hints at Temerl's earlier position as the "great mother" who initially suckled the *tsadik*, and to the maturation of the "lamb," who is now free of his mother's influence, even though Temerl actually continues to support him. I suggest that the phrase "outside the natural order" has significance that goes beyond the context of this particular story and defines Temerl's relationship with her society in general. She is looked upon as a woman who stands outside the normative social structure, as we will see in further stories below.[20]

[19] Defining Temerl as a Hasid/a is not a simple matter; see Wodziński, "Women and Hasidism." The scope of the present discussion precludes elaboration on this question. For our purposes suffice it to say that women were surely not "Hasidim" in the organized sense of male Hasidim. Nevertheless, Hasidism enabled them to enrich some aspects of their religious life as female Hasidim. Even though this was only a partial experience, it was all they had—and we posit that for them it was the full meaning of belonging to the Hasidic movement. Temerl herself, in the tale discussed here, came to the rebbe and requested a blessing, paying a *pidyon*—a contribution brought to the *tsadik*. We see no reason to interpret this situation as anything other than a routine manifestation of the Hasid-*tsadik* relationship.

[20] Another story expressing an inversion of the hierarchy describes a Hasid who comes to R. Bunem and bemoans his penury. The rebbe responds, "But do you have

Opposition

R. Simha Bunem was the *tsadik* who maintained the most significant ties with Temerl, and it is no wonder that most of the Hasidic stories that mention her concern R. Bunem or are attributed to him. Factually, it is clear that Temerl supported R. Bunem and that he did not actively oppose this. The stories, however, have a note of criticism or opposition interwoven in them. The following two stories pertain not to money directly, but rather to its derivatives: power, influence, and control. These are attributed here to Temerl, and R. Bunem expresses his objection—whether as a politically and/or socially expedient necessity, or as a sincere statement with an attempt to restore control to himself.

One story[21] tells us about a government ban on Hasidic pilgrimages to *tsadikim*, which Temerl, using her contacts in high places, successfully petitioned to have annulled. The story first praises her, but a few lines later, R. Bunem criticizes Temerl's successful intervention. He remarks, perhaps somewhat facetiously, that Temerl failed to understand that the *tsadikim* themselves had favored the ban, since they prefer seclusion and solitary worship to having to deal with their Hasidim. Despite this critique, R. Bunem states that her intention was "for the sake of heaven"; meaning that she meant well, although the results of her actions are regrettable. This hints at R. Bunem's dissatisfaction with the idea of being helped by her and benefiting from her political power and influence; he objects to the very necessity of her intervention.

Another story concerns a seemingly minor matter, but it reflects R. Simha Bunem's opposition to the element of control in the relations between Temerl and himself:

good health?" The man answers, "Yes." "Do you have an appetite for food?" Again, he answers, "Yes." R. Bunem then tells him, "If that is the case, then you possess a sum of six hundred rubles, since the wealthy *Hasida* Temerl, wife of the benefactor R. Berek of Warsaw, journeyed to try out different cures in order to regain an appetite for food, and it cost her 600 rubles. Since you have an appetite, you already possess 600 rubles." *Siah sarfei kodesh he-hadash* (1989), part III, 152:15. At the beginning of this story the poor man is poor, while Temerl is presumed to be wealthy. R. Simha Bunem uses information that he possesses concerning Temerl's health problems to invert the situation, persuading the Hasid that he has greater riches than the richest of women—thereby undermining her lofty position.

[21] Yehoshua ha-kohen of Sochaczew, *Ets avot, megilat yuhasin*, 2b. See Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 110. For more on governmental inquiries and opposition to Hasidic pilgrimages, see Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hasidism*, 86–94.

> I heard from the saintly R. Yosef Yehiel ha-levi Eibeschits, of blessed memory, that once R. Bunem of Przysucha visited the matron Temerl Bergson, of blessed memory. He was sitting there by the window, and outside there was a man who was painting a portrait of his holy countenance, and our holy rebbe felt it right away. He asked someone who was standing near him what this was about, but he did not wish to tell him. He asked a second time, and he was forced to reveal to him that his portrait was being painted. Our rebbe said, "So long as I am alive, it's all there, but when I die I will take it all with me." And so it was, for immediately after he died, any portrait that anyone had of him disappeared. In Warsaw there remained one portrait belonging to a certain man, and he traveled with that portrait to show it to the holy rebbe of Radzymin. When the holy rebbe of Radzymin saw this portrait he rose from his chair and said, in these words: "This is the holy rabbi, R. Bunem"—and then that portrait, too, disappeared.[22]

Thus, Temerl exploits the fact that R. Bunem is visiting her to commission a portrait of him without his knowledge. In the light of the narrator's emphasis on the fact that R. Bunem felt that something was going on, but was unable to understand what it was, it seems reasonable to assume that this story took place during the period when he was blind.

Beyond the fact that painting the portrait without his knowledge or his agreement is an act of coercion and control, the very idea of owning a portrait of the rebbe reflects a desire for control. The portrait is a representation of the rebbe. Ownership of it facilitates his publicity and perhaps promotion, on the one hand, but also represents control of him: for instance, the owner might put the portrait—in other words, make the rebbe present—in places where he would not want to be. According to the story, R. Bunem is disturbed mainly by the idea of the portrait remaining after his death, representing a form of his immortalization. He decrees that the portrait will cease to exist at the time of his own death, thereby regaining control of his portrait-image-presence. Temerl's instruction to paint a portrait of R. Bunem is a form of objectification and appropriation, which is a mode of control generally manifest in culture by men towards women, and not the other way around. The struggle over control of the portrait, as I see it, is a literary reflection of R. Bunem's sense of loss of independence as a result of his connections with Temerl, and his efforts to limit or reduce her control, whether tangibly or symbolically.

[22] *Siah sarfei kodesh he-hadash* (1989), part IV, 176:48. The compiler of this book, Yo'ets Kim Kadish, was himself a Gur Hasid. His extensive collection of tales, written in the years following the First World War, is dedicated mostly to the *tsadikim* of Przysucha.

Money and *mitzvoth*

In a tale about the precocious childhood of R. Yehezkel Panet, mention is made of Temerl in an unusual context. The young Yehezkel, four or five years old at the time, overhears a discussion between his father and several other rabbis on the subject of positive, time-bound commandments (from which women are generally exempt):

> In the midst of their discussion they told him a wondrous new idea: "In Warsaw, there is a woman called Temerl, whose property is worth as much as a million, and she is an extremely estimable woman, who observes scrupulously even those commandments from which women are exempt, and she wears a *talit katan* [four-cornered undergarment with ritual fringes]."
>
> When the child Yehezkel heard that, he was amazed and asked them: "How can that be? It is written in the Torah, 'A man's garment shall not be upon a woman.'" The scholars were amazed at the young child's astuteness, and the Gaon, the author of the book *Shemen rokeah*, told his father: "I'm sure that he is going to be a rabbi."[23]

Most striking in this account is the depiction of Temerl as a renowned and pious woman who used to wear a *talit katan*. But if we read the story as a cultural product, we can deduce much more. The tale juxtaposes the woman and the child, both of whom are regarded within halakhic discourse as partial or even silent members of Jewish community, since neither is fully bound by Jewish law. However, whereas childhood is temporary, femininity is (usually) constant. In our story, both characters are wondrous in their exceptionality: a child is not expected to shed light on a learned discussion or to have a halakhic opinion (although it is not surprising that a child of that age would be curious about gender distinctions), nor is a woman supposed to be involved in those aspects of Divine Service pertaining to men, such as wearing a fringed undergarment or performing other time-bound commandments.

Yet, while Temerl is initially praised for her observance of commandments from which she is exempt, we are immediately informed that at the very moment she performs them, she is transgressing a biblical prohibition—and this, from the mouth of the four-year-old future rabbi. Temerl's

[23] Issakhar Dov Friedman, "Toledot rabeinu Yehezkel," in Hayim Betsalel Panet, *Derekh yivhar* (Munkach, 1894), 1. The author is the son-in-law of the grandson of R. Yehezkel Panet, one of the great disciples of R. Menahem Mendel of Rymanów and a Hasidic rebbe in his own right.

apparent righteousness is actually a transgression (caused, perhaps, by the hubris of being "worth as much as a million"), and her shame is inversely proportionate to the child's glorification. His greatness is bound up literarily with her smallness, such that her misguided piety actually prepares the ground for the revelation of his righteousness, even as a child.

Temerl and Yehezkel both deviate from their social and religious station. But whereas Yehezkel's deviation reveals him as a future *tsadik*, and is actually a recognized and positively regarded social anomaly, Temerl's deviation is considered a transgression, and reveals the fact that, owing to her challenging of the traditional feminine role, she lacks an authentic category and place within Hasidic society.

It seems that her "million" and what it symbolizes—the traditional male role of patron —leads inexorably to her being perceived in masculine terms,[24] for example, her fulfillment of male-oriented commandments. In her case, however, her actions represent a religious transgression, which further implies that her wealth is also a type of violation of the social order and its gender roles. Thus, Temerl is placed again and again "outside the natural order," that is, outside social standards and categories.[25]

A different story attributes to Temerl another commandment from which women are exempt: the writing (or commissioning) of a personal Torah scroll. In truth, even men are not obligated to own a personal Torah scroll, but it is usually men of means who are able to donate a Torah scroll to a community or synagogue, or to commission one for themselves. In this context it is interesting to compare two variants of the same story, offering a glimpse of the way in which Hasidic tales come into being and develop.

The book *Siah sarfei kodesh he-hadash* cites a tradition in the name of the rabbi of Serock (Yosef Levinstein, d. 1924, a source of many Hasidic tales) according to which R. Simha Bunem entered into a marriage agreement (contracted between parents of a bride and a groom) with R. Shraga Feivel of Grójec, as a result of which R. Shraga Feivel fell into great debt. "Then Temerl, wife of R. Berke, called upon him to write for her a Torah scroll, and gave him the sum [he needed]."[26]

[24] Wealthy Jewish women occasionally played a role as patrons of scholars and of communal institutions. However, this was quite rare within Hasidic society, and we suspect that other female patrons were likewise perceived as anomalous.

[25] The question of the social structure which seems to be (or poses as) "natural" has troubled many theorists of gender, from Simone de Beauvoir to Judith Butler, and many others.

[26] *Siah sarfei kodesh he-hadash* (1989), part IV, 172:30.

In a book that collected later traditions, focusing on the Aleksandrów Hasidic dynasty, which was founded by R. Shraga Feivel, the story is related differently:

> When the Rebbe, R. Shraga Feivel, was writing himself a Torah scroll—during the actual writing—he had open before him the book *Urim ve-tumim*, by the Rebbe, R. Yehonatan [Eybeschuetz],[27] and one of his disciples read before him the *Tur* and the *Beit Yosef*. He also wrote a Torah scroll for his teacher, the elder Rebbe of Warka. The renowned matron, Temerl of Warsaw, also pleaded with him to write for her a Torah scroll, and she paid him fifteen hundred rendlich—a huge sum in those days—which he used to marry off three orphans.[28]

According to the first version, the rebbe of Grójec initially lacked the money to pay for the wedding of his son to the daughter of R. Simha Bunem; he acquired the sum he needed as a result of being commissioned by Temerl to write a Torah scroll for her. The same basic facts—Temerl's desire to have a Torah scroll of her own, the commissioning of R. Shraga Feivel as the scribe, and the great sum paid—appear in the later version, too. This later version also elaborates on the manner in which R. Shraga Feivel would engage in his holy work, and the fact that R. Yitshak of Warka, an important *tsadik* in his own right, also commissioned a Torah scroll. These details amplify the religious significance of Temerl's desire for a Torah scroll, since what the story conveys about the two rabbis is also projected onto what it relates about her. But in contrast to the earlier version, in which Temerl "called upon" the scribe to "write for her"—meaning, she instructed or demanded that he do so—in the later version we read that she "pleaded with him," meaning that she had to ask and persuade him in order to obtain her scroll. Moreover, this version also implicitly justifies the writing of the scroll for Temerl by noting that the payment was used for charity, to marry off orphans. In other words, the scribe would need a good reason to accede to Temerl's unusual request. Who are the orphans referred to here? Is there any connection between them and the scribe's own son? It may be that the

[27] *Urim ve-tumim* is a commentary on one of the four parts of the halakhic code *Shulhan arukh*.

[28] Yehuda Moshe Tiberg of Aleksandrów, *Kedushat Yitshak* (Jerusalem, 1952), 23, par. 17. The compiler served as the first rebbe of Aleksandrów in Israel. In his collection he aimed to preserve the memory of the dynasty of Aleksandrów following its annihilation in the Holocaust. The collection is dedicated to the rebbes of Warka, Biała, and Aleksandrów.

disciples who authored the praises of R. Shraga Feivel and his descendants were uncomfortable with the description in *Siah sarfei kodesh he-hadash*, which implied that R. Shraga Feivel was in desperate need of Temerl's support, and that her request was a reasonable one. Slight amendments to the account transformed Temerl into a needy individual "pleading" for R. Shraga Feivel's services, and her request into one requiring some justification—the payment which could be given to charity.

Another story about Temerl also revolves around the themes of money and commandments. Here the act attributed to Temerl does not belong to the category of commandments from which women are generally exempt, but the storyteller nevertheless depicts Temerl's behavior as problematic. The story concerns R. Yitshak Meir of Gur's refusal to receive a donation from Temerl:

> His grandson, Rabbi Israel Yossel of Gur, related what he heard from his grandmother, the *rabanit* of blessed memory, that once before the holiday of Purim, there was absolute poverty and destitution in her home . . . and on the day of the Fast of Esther, when her husband, our rebbe of blessed memory, went to pray *minhah* [the afternoon prayer] she remained at home in bitter lament, knowing that when her husband returned home after reading the *Megillah* [Book of Esther] she would have nothing to offer him after the fast, and she also had nothing to prepare for [the] Purim [feast]. As she sat there mired in sorrow, a messenger whom she knew to be from the household of the matron Temerl came to her, bearing a large bowl covered with a silk scarf. He told her that he had brought *mishloah manot* [obligatory gifts sent on Purim] to our rabbi, of blessed memory, from the rich man Berke, peace be upon him, and he set the bowl upon the table. When the *rabanit* removed the scarf, she saw that among the foods and delicacies there were many ducats. She was afraid to receive the delivery without her husband's permission, for she feared he would be angry. But in the light of the dire situation, she removed one ducat from the bowl and returned the rest to the messenger. She quickly bought what they needed for Purim and still managed to prepare dinner for our rabbi, of blessed memory. When he came home and saw the table set for dinner, he immediately asked how she had come by the means to prepare everything . . . That very night she was forced to sell a household item and find a messenger to send the ducat back to the matron Temerl, peace be upon her. Afterward, he explained to his wife, the *rabanit*, that there was a reason that he was not able to receive favors from anyone, and that for a very long time he would still have to live in poverty.[29]

[29] Alter, *Meir eynei ha-golah*, 64, par. 135. The compiler is the nephew of Avraham Mordechai Alter, the third rebbe of Gur, son of the author of *Sefat emet*.

The story presents a very clear male-female distinction. The rebbe is engaged in spiritual activities—praying and participating in the *Megillah* reading—while his wife waits at home, anxious about money and the need to provide food for her family. This scene in itself is not unusual for a Hasidic tale. What is interesting is the gender roles that are projected onto Berek and Temerl. The reader might initially assume that the traditional Purim delivery of portions of food is from one couple to another: from Berek and Temerl to R. Yitshak Meir and his wife. But the storyteller distinguishes—within the same sentence—between the commandment of *mishloah manot* and its embodiment (the actual package that the *rabanit* receives, containing money and food): the messenger with the "large bowl" (which, of course, contains the *mishloah manot*) is known to come from "the household of the matron Temerl," and the delivery is sent "back to the matron Temerl." But the *mishloah manot* (which, of course, lies in the big bowl) is identified very clearly as "*mishloah manot* to our rebbe, of blessed memory, from the rich man Berke." We posit that the assignment of the *mishloah manot* to one figure or another is not arbitrary. A close reading of the narrative reveals that Berek sends the *mishloah manot*, whereas Temerl has her unwelcome donation returned to her. Temerl's figure merges with that of the *rabanit*. They are both engaged in money matters and food—or, more generally, corporeality and the concern with the mundane, while the men are occupied with holy pursuits and the performance of the commandments, to the point of denying their corporeal needs. Thus we can see how the narratives deny Temerl the religious and spiritual benefits that she might have derived by virtue of her unique and influential position.

Interestingly, these stories, taken collectively, reveal two opposing trends: on the one hand, Temerl is praised for performing commandments which, as a woman, she is not obliged to observe, including the wearing of a *talit katan* and the procurement of a personal Torah scroll. In other words, she is viewed as adopting masculine behavior. On the other hand, there is an attempt to sever her from the commandments (or, perhaps more generally, the spiritual and religious experience) that do pertain to her, by presenting her as a woman whose concern and interest is limited to the physical, corporeal realm, and by accusing her of transgressing biblical prohibitions. These contradictory messages accord with our discussion concerning Temerl's anomalous social and financial situation. It is this anomaly, apparently, that leads to her being viewed as aberrant in the sphere of gender, too.

Money and Corporeality, Money and Sexuality

There are other stories reflecting rejection or devaluation in which Temerl is associated with corporeality and earthliness, and implicitly also with sexuality, which is an important aspect (if not the most important aspect) of female corporeality from a traditional point of view.

Before addressing two examples of suggested sexual contexts, let us first examine a story whose explicit aim is to criticize Temerl and heap scorn on her by comparing her to animals regarded as ritually impure. The story, which appears in Ahron Marcus's *Chasidismus*,[30] concerns a male relative of Temerl, who was disappointed to receive a meager gift from her. In response, he ridiculed her by way of a Hasidic homily: Temerl is a *Hasida*, which is not only the feminine form of the word "Hasid," but is also the Hebrew name for a stork. He cited the Talmudic statement (BT Hulin 63a) that the bird is called thus because it shows kindness (*hesed*) to its friends. But the stork is also an impure bird, which Jews are forbidden to consume according to the biblical dietary laws. Temerl, he claimed, was *this* type of *Hasida*, who shows kindness only to her friends, but not to her family—meaning, himself.

Curiously, among all the legends and tales about Temerl's generosity that Marcus (who was himself a Hasid) could have recounted, he chooses the one that deems her "impure." In other words, this depiction may reflect not only the opinion of the disappointed relative, but also the attitude of Marcus himself towards a woman in a position of power and affluence who was also proud to be called a *Hasid/a*. Marcus's own small contribution to Hasidic lore, then, is the lowering of Temerl the *Hasida* to the level of the impure animal.[31]

The highly unusual figure that Temerl represents against the backdrop of ordinary Hasidic women leads the storytellers to depict her symbolically in even more extreme terms—in this case, by association with the

[30] Ahron Marcus, *Der Chasidismus* (Pleschen, 1901); id., *Ha-hasidut*, trans. Moshe Shonfeld (Tel Aviv, 1954), 137. Scholem argues that as a history book, Marcus's work is very bad, but if we relate to him as a Hasidic storyteller, his book deserves attention. Gershom Scholem, "Ahron Marcus and Hasidism," in David Assaf, Esther Liebes (eds.), *Ha-shelav ha-aharon: mehkerei ha-hasidut shel Gershom Shalom* (Jerusalem, 2008), 384–392.

[31] Interestingly enough, the *mitnagdim* had already used the etymological connection between Hasid and *Hasida* (a stork) as a rhetorical attack on the Hasidim, although they applied it to Hasidim in general (meaning, men). See Uriel Gellman, *Sefer hasidim: hibur ganuz bi-genutah shel ha-hasidut* (Jerusalem, 2007), 59, n. 3.

animal kingdom and ritual impurity. In another story, the "otherness" hinted at concerns a gentile woman:

> Once he [R. Simha Bunem] went to Danzig with the timber of the wealthy Temerl's [husband] Bereky of Warsaw, and the price of timber declined significantly . . . He remained in Danzig for several weeks and did not sell the timber . . . Sitting at the inn, he began to weep: "Master of the Universe! The house of the Egyptian was blessed because of Joseph. Is it not fitting, then, that my master should be blessed because of me? For although I am not to be likened to the righteous Joseph, nevertheless my master Bereky is not to be likened to the Egyptian." As soon as he finished his prayer and supplication, an agent came to the inn with one of the merchants, asking if he still had the timber, for the price had gone up . . . and he sold it at great profit.[32]

In the very act of qualifying the comparison ("although I am not to be likened to the righteous Joseph, nevertheless my master Bereky is not to be likened to the Egyptian"), R. Bunem is also affirming it. R. Bunem is akin to the pious Joseph, and Berek, his employer, is compared to Potifar. Berek's wealth and influence place him somewhere outside regular Jewish society, as an "other"—a non-Jew. But why is Berek identified here as "the wealthy Temerl's [husband] Bereky of Warsaw"? Why is it she who is described as wealthy? The storyteller forces Temerl into the story, thus forcing her into the parallel with the biblical account. The subtext here is the withstanding of the temptation which Berek, and his wife Temerl, by whom he is identified, represent. In other words, not only is there a parallelism of blessing; there is also a potential danger of attraction—of becoming too connected to the wealthy man and of course to his wife. Certainly, there is no accusation that Temerl acts seductively, as Potifar's wife did, but her literary figure represents more than the desire for and the danger of money; there is an insinuation that she also symbolizes the danger of femininity: temptation and earthliness.

In yet another story linking Temerl and materiality, we learn of R. Menahem Mendel of Kock's refusal to accept a donation from her, despite his need:

> Once, the Kotsker Rebbe experienced several months of financial straits, yet did not ask anyone for money, as was his way. Rather, he went about in torn and shabby clothing. The holy and wise rebbe of Grójec came and told him that the rich woman Temerl, from Warsaw, was coming that day to Przysucha, and that he should go to her, and she would provide him with all he needed, as was

[32] Yo'ets Kim Kadish of Przytyk, *Siah sarfei kodesh* (Jerusalem, 1972), part II, 15:24.

her way. When the Kotsker Rebbe heard this, he shouted loudly, "Money! *Feh*!" The rebbe of Grójec said that upon hearing this utterance, "Money! *Feh*," he despised the desire for money so much that for weeks afterwards, whenever he heard something about money, he would begin to throw up and could not listen. It was only after a few months passed that gradually, with great effort, he could look at money.[33]

This story is about more than the rejection of a donation. Perhaps it is the association of the (physical) need for money with "the woman Temerl" that prompts such an intense response on the part of the Kotsker Rebbe—which in turn has such a profound impact on the rebbe of Grójec. The act of vomiting reflects the need of the body to rid itself of something repugnant. On the surface, what is rejected here is the desire for money, but it has a subtext. Underlying this act of release from money is a release from the possibility of interaction with Temerl, that is, dependence upon a woman. One cannot read this tale without recalling the story of R. Dov Ber, the Maggid of Międzyrzecz, who threw up before an open display of female immodesty.[34] (The Maggid's response is also not original. Its roots go back to R. Akiva's reaction upon seeing the wife of Turnus Rufus: the Talmud records that he spit, laughed, and wept.[35] This spitting is a reduced version of the future vomiting.) Returning to R. Menahem Mendel's intense response, we posit—in the light of the above—that the rejection of money should be understood as a rejection of "the woman Temerl's money," which might represent both desires: the sexual and the pecuniary.

This connection is not at all surprising, since in *musar* works and Hasidic teachings that speak of the "desires/temptations of this world," sexual desire is usually addressed as the central problem, with the desire for food and the desire for money in secondary place. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that this connection is in no way necessary or inevitable. Firstly, the connection between the *tsadik* and a patron appears many times in Hasidic tales with no mention whatsoever of any desire for

[33] Ibid., part IV, 73:39.

[34] Ze'ev Wolf of Żytomierz [Zhitomir], *Or ha-meir* (Jerusalem, 2001), *Hayei Sara*, 37. The story is part of a wider discussion concerning the challenge of feminine beauty, which has occupied Hasidic teachers and disciples alike since the movement's inception. See Moshe Idel, "From Platonic to Hasidic Eros: Transformations of an Idle Man's Story," in David Shulman, Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions* (Oxford, 2002), 216–235.

[35] BT Avodah Zarah 20a.

money, nor in any sort of critical or negative context.[36] Secondly, there are accounts of the Kotsker Rebbe receiving support from patrons[37] and even of him gaining a reputation as being funded by wealthy benefactors, which caused a certain man to refrain from visiting him.[38] In other words, in addition to the fact that *tsadikim* in general, including the Kotsker Rebbe himself, were supported by wealthy benefactors, this patronage is reflected even in most Hasidic tales as a positive phenomenon—or at least as a given fact. Where Temerl is concerned, however, this support somehow becomes an expression of desire. We contend that Temerl, by virtue of being a woman, is a powerful representation of the desire—sexual desire—that is embodied in the temptations of wealth with which she is more overtly associated. As further proof of this, the narrator of this story draws a clear connection to a discussion of abstinence from sexual relations. He writes:

> When [Moses] conveyed to them the commandment to separate [from their wives, prior to the Revelation at Sinai], this desire automatically became so repulsive to them that through his words he truly effected that abstinence, just as did the Kotsker Rebbe with the rebbe of Grójec, causing him an aversion to the desire for money.[39]

In summary, the Kotsker Rebbe's feeling of repulsion towards Temerl's money is not self-evident, and does not apply to other patrons. This being the case, the intensity of his aversion is even more puzzling, and the manner of its expression points to an entire world of association that is bound up with aversion to Temerl's money. Other stories describe this fierce aversion on the part of the Kotsker Rebbe later on in his life, too. A tradition cited by Meir Orian goes so far as to transform the question of whether to accept her gift into a test of faith, and the final straw leading to the Kotsker Rebbe's ultimate despairing of his disciples (who wanted her support despite his opposition) and his self-imposed seclusion.[40]

[36] See Dynner, "Merchant Princes," 70–71, concerning various male patrons.

[37] See *Siah sarfei kodesh he-hadash* (1989), part III, 151:12.

[38] Ibid., 146–147:3.

[39] *Siah sarfei kodesh* (1972), part IV, 73:39.

[40] See Meir Orian, *Sneh bo'er be-Kotsk*, chap. 13, "The Test," 110–118. It is interesting that in this description, too, for which I have found no earlier source (Orian claims that he heard some of the stories directly from "extremely old men"), the agreement to be supported by Temerl's money is homiletically compared to acceding to temptation in the Garden of Eden: once again we find the woman who seduces, the primal sin, and so forth.

Perl's Temerl

Before summing up let us turn to another storyteller. Yosef Perl, a great *maskil*, parodies Hasidic stories. In his satire, *Megaleh temirin* [Revealer of Secrets], he offers a brilliant condensed image of Temerl.

According to Perl, at the behest of R. Yaakov Yitshak Horowitz, the Seer of Lublin, Hasidim called Temerl "Reb," a Yiddish appellation akin to "Mr." The reason, Perl states, is that according to the Zohar, Tamar—both the biblical figure and the palm tree—is considered both male and female. Temerl had a spark of the zoharic Tamar within her, and may even have been a reincarnation of the biblical Tamar. Therefore, the Seer told them to call her "Reb," in deference to her masculine aspect.[41]

Leaving aside the historical question of whether the Seer of Lublin actually requested this of his followers,[42] my focus here is on the Zohar's interpretation and symbolism.

The biblical Tamar[43] is a strong woman who displays enterprise and initiative. After being twice widowed (her late husbands had been brothers) and then abandoned by Judah, her father-in-law, she seduces him in an anonymous tryst in order to bear his children. Tamar represents a woman who steps out of her humble place. The Zohar (III.71b) emphasizes her dualistic nature by stating, "From that single [act of] effrontery of that righteous woman, numerous benefits came into the world"; that is, from her sin with Judah, she brought into the world both offspring (the Davidic line) and supernal blessing, inasmuch as Tamar is both a real woman and a representation of the *Shekhinah* (Divine Presence).[44] Tamar embodies conflicting energies: sin, temptation and danger, as well as purity, piousness, and grace. Appropriately, the name Tamar is linked etymologically to *temurah*, which means 'change' or 'transformation.' She is at one and the same time male and female, good and bad, justice (*din*) and grace (*hesed*), *Shekhinah* and Lilith.

[41] Joseph Perl, *Megaleh temirin* (Vienna, 1819). Translated as *Joseph Perl's Revealer of Secrets: The First Hebrew Novel*, trans. Dov Taylor (Boulder, 1997), 179–180.

[42] According to Avraham Rubinstein, this rumor is part of Perl's satire. See Avraham Rubinstein, "Hasidut ve-hasidim be-Varsha," *Sinai* 65 (1974), 81–82. Dynner takes this masculine honorific to be a fact, see Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 108. See also Perl, *Megaleh temirin*, critically edited and introduced by Jonatan Meir (Jerusalem, 2013), 259.

[43] Gen. 38.

[44] See Zohar 2:126a; 3:71b–72a; 1:188a–b. For a detailed discussion on Tamar's character and symbolism in the zoharic literature, see Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, *Kedeshot u-kedoshot: imahot ha-mashiah be-mitus ha-Yehudi* (Tel Aviv, 2014), 206–230, 240–245.

Perl's satire might echo or even preserve real voices and perceptions of real Hasidim,[45] who viewed the world through kabbalistic, and especially zoharic, lenses. On the other hand, it might reflect his own creative imagination. Either way, Perl's sophisticated literary description of Temerl reflects her image in Hasidic circles. Though he sets forth these connections as a parody of the Hasidim, he is closer to their perspective than he may have realized. Both he and they share the same "other." Temerl embodies the same "righteous effrontery" that the Zohar attributes to Tamar. She is a woman of grace without a place; an object of both admiration and denigration.

The literary figure of Temerl reveals the gender perceptions of the society that tells her tales, embodying both their own perception of her and the image of her that they sought to transmit to future generations. She is indeed a somewhat masculine figure: a woman who wears a *talit katan* and has a Torah scroll written for her; a woman who immortalizes the object of her admiration as a painted portrait; a woman of power, influence, control, initiative, and action, who impacts on those who benefit from her beneficence. At the same time, she is also a feminine figure: even when she fulfills a (masculine) commandment, she is identified with the material side of the act and with the femininity that is concentrated in this world; she represents, through her presence, the desire for money and, by extension, all desires. She arouses physical revulsion, recalling an impure fowl, while at the same time representing physical attraction, recalling the seductive foreign woman, such that the appropriate reaction to her is one of spontaneous, involuntary physical rejection.

Conclusion

The various Hasidic stories relating to Temerl are mentioned in research on Hasidism as historical sources of information as to the connection between *tsadikim* and the wealthy patrons in Poland who supported them. A literary reading of these tales allows us to pay attention to a range of literary motifs, the manner in which the characters are constructed, the use of symbols and allusions, biblical echoes, internal structures, and more. These reflect the cultural perceptions of the storytellers and their audience.

[45] See Jonatan Meir, *Hasidut medumah: iyunim bi-ketavav ha-satiriim shel Yosef Perl* (Jerusalem, 2013), 19, 43, 102, 111–112.

Although the tales discussed were related over the course of a century—from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth—they share a similar perception. It seems that within Hasidic discourse, Temerl has come to represent a kind of hermaphrodite, a masculine woman, whose presence complicates traditional attitudes towards the body and corporeality, matter and earthliness. Her wealth augments her material, feminine aspect, giving it more emphasis than that attached to an ordinary woman, and thereby intensifying the sexual threat that she represents. At the same time, that same power and influence make her more masculine than the ordinary Hasid, thus placing the *tsadik* himself in a feminine role.

Temerl is a woman without a place; she exists "outside the natural order." She is *temurah*, transformation, with both her male and female sides intensified, like the zoharic Tamar. She embraces gender conflict within herself and threatens the gender boundaries of society by not fully identifying with either side. The discomfort she causes among men is defused through narratives that either disparage her or ridicule her. Each narrative has its own way of dealing with her threat. Reading gender in Hasidic tales and hagiography as a cultural product alerts us to the nuances within the text, and allows us to understand how a liminal figure with considerable social status and influence functions within Hasidic discourse; a discourse that reflects and constructs perceptions, attitudes and behavior.

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