Today we get revenge on the British; they have taken our Holy Scriptures and treated them as one treats one’s own property: they have translated them, scattered them to all corners of the earth as if they were their own, and so today we repay them for their deed, for we are taking the books which are as precious to them as the Holy Scriptures, the plays of Shakespeare, and we are bringing them into the treasure-house of our holy tongue; is this revenge not sweet?!

The plays of Shakespeare in the holy tongue! If the entire Jewish people understood the language of their forefathers and loved it, and if all of those who understood the language and loved it understood the great spoil that the translator of these plays is bringing into the treasure-house of our language, then the day on which the first Shakespeare play appeared in the Hebrew language would be like a victory holiday, because it is indeed a great victory for our holy tongue if such gems perfect its beauty. Such gems adorn it with grace and youth at this time, despite the desire of those who reject it, who do not understand it, who say that it is worn out, bound for the grave; who bury it, cover its face in obscurity and do not mention its name again.

*) For those who have not yet read the play, I recommend that they read this preface after they have read the play to the end, because much of what I say will be like a sealed book to them.
The plays of Shakespeare, the greatest playwright without compare in all the languages and tongues, except for the Holy Scriptures and Homer, to whom have been revealed all the human heart’s secret schemes, machinations, and wiles, who has displayed before mankind all the secrets and machinations of the human heart, and who has revealed to the world all the secrets of the human heart, and who has written all the secrets of the human heart, and who has written all the secrets of the human heart.

Figure 2 (Hebrew title page of *Ithiel*)
us the naked human heart, so that we may read, as from an open book, everything that is inscribed upon it, the desire and the lust which, for good or for ill, have a share in every thought, deed, and action, and who can show us as well as he how man behaves and

Figure 3 (English title page of Ithiel)
the impulses that drive him so that we might recognize and understand the deceit of the cunning and the duplicity of scoundrels, the righteousness of the righteous and the honesty of the honest, so that we might know and be wise, rather than walking like a beast into the valley\(^1\) on this confounded earth, where the apparent is so altered and twisted by men that we do not know which way to go. For at times what appears to be the righteous path turns out to be death, while the wicked or the foolish path is nevertheless paved with righteousness. But this faithful guide leads us, a lamp in his hand lighting the way to banish the darkness so that we would not stumble but see and consider and judge for ourselves. Shakespeare is unique; none but him has had the power and the courage to lift the veil from the faces of actors who play their roles on this great stage of ours, the earth. He exposes the deeds of nation and man alike, which take place in the dark, when no human eye would see them as they are.

\(^1\) The phrase 'like a beast into the valley' is a citation of Isa. 63:14, but Smolenskin seems to be using it to denote ignorance, whereas in Isaiah it refers to effortlessness.
will not stay wallowing in mud for eternity, and clouds will not cover the face of the sun forever, the mud will be removed and the sapphire will appear in all its glory, the clouds will dissipate and the sun will make the eye rejoice, and so it was also for Shakespeare, for his redeemers arose after two hundred years and showed everyone the worth of the precious stone which they had tried to strip of its purity by besmirching it, and although admittedly until this day not all readers appreciate this brilliant playwright, and from time to time senseless and witless men still arise to malign him, nevertheless the wise men have made themselves counted and have all determined that one who reviles Shakespeare reviles himself.

But it is no wonder if many have not understood, and to this day do not understand, the works of this great man, the most exalted of writers, for the masses do not understand and do not realize what truth is, for they have long since grown accustomed to calling lies truth. And if they were to see the truth, they would not recognize it, and they would say that it was a lie! And all of this is the fault of the authors who mislead their readers with pleasant lies in order to capture their heart. Most authors and playwrights see everyone from their own perspective, and what is fitting to them they present to us as good and honest, while everything which they dislike, they besmirch. The characters they create in their plays, whom they present to us as good and upright, speak and converse only of the exalted spirit of their creators, and
any of them who does not speak or do as their creators’ heart desires is evil and a villain. Such authors mask men’s actions and thoughts, misleading their readers so that they cannot see what is really being done, since they do not show us men’s actions and desires but rather their own hearts’ desires, and if they succeed in following their hearts, then they raise up that which is low and lower that which is high, acquit the wicked and condemn the innocent. Authors who are honest also do so, only since they cannot be trusted to judge the matter as it is, but rather see everything from their own perspective, they corrupt justice and lead their readers astray by showing them perversions, not maliciously but rather in error. But there are authors even more evil than these (and they are the majority), playwrights who do not prevail on earth for the sake of truth and knowledge, but rather only in order to make a name and money for themselves, and they maliciously destroy all sense of morality and love of truth, for they attempt to present to their community of readers only that which is pleasant to them; they sing in their ears songs that are pleasing to the ear and extol with their tongue indecency and desire, speaking lustfully of everyone who prevails on earth by means of their wanton schemes and the impulses that drive them; they present to us as heroes men who violate law and morality, who mock truth and hate innocence, and every innocent man is like a powerless creature in their eyes, and as such the plays are of little dignity, and the places in which they
present to us the protagonists of these plays, the playhouses, whose purpose is to instruct the people in morality and wisdom, have become like thieves’ dens, like schools for youth to instruct them in how to chase after indecency and disgrace.

Not so is the lot of Shakespeare (and like him, so too all honest authors who have eyes to see what is in front of them, even if their spirit is not as great as his); he sits at the seat of judgement like a god judging the exalted; before his seat of judgement stand both king and slave, both nation and individual, and he considers everything, investigates everything, does not show partiality to anyone and does not favour his protagonists; no one is loved by him and no one is hateful in his eyes; he weighs everyone’s deeds on the scales and tells each man of the righteousness within him, even if he is a rogue and a villain, and he does not show partiality to the honest by ignoring their flaws, for no one is blameless in the land of the living. He does not refrain from pronouncing judgement for fear that hypocrites would rage at him, he does not pay heed to his audience for fear that the scene may displease them when they choose an opulently dressed lie over the naked truth. It is not in accordance with his own heart’s desire or others’ inclinations that he sets out a path for his characters and determines their end, but rather in accordance with the course, the rules, the accidents, and the circumstances of life, and therefore his plays contain a righteous man who perishes by his righteousness as he falls.
On the paths of life we see each morning that the earth belongs to the mighty man, and the man who plots evil rules over everything, over the spirits of the innocent and their bodies, and in his cunning he makes even them into a weapon of destruction. On the paths of life we see that not only honesty triumphs over injustice, and the pure-hearted man does not always eat the fruits of his deeds. On the paths of life we observe that not all wrongdoers are brought to justice, as they know how to put a shield and buckler around themselves in their cunning, and justice is not powerful enough to punish many wicked men who have caused much suffering and ruin, even if their treachery is known in the community. Indeed, what is the punishment that should be borne by one who slanders his fellow with lies and deposes him from his position with the breath of his mouth, or brings him to the gates of death? The guileless man is led astray and falls, while the one who led him astray rises up and rejoices because he has accomplished his desire, or if a villain entices the innocent with a flattering tongue to do evil and spill blood, and the innocent man who commits the evil is judged and punished for his sin, whereas the villain who led him astray

into the snare of evildoers, and a villain who lives long by his wickedness, because he is destined for great things, and there are those upon whom the hand of fate lands, when the righteous and the wicked together come to an end and meet their demise, for such are the paths of life.
with a lie stands and watches as the one who was lured kneels for slaughter, and if the one who led astray is a mighty or wealthy man, then he will be greatly honoured by the sages and will be counted among the wise counsellors, as a knowable man; what will be the judgement of godless ones who toil in the vineyard of faith and earn their living from it, even if they exploit others in its name, or if they commit every indecency and abomination in private and mock their faith and their God? These men sit sheltered in their castles, and no hand can touch them, and if a knowable man arises to make a judgement against the faith then he will be punished for his iniquity. – What is the punishment of those who rob lands and nations dishonestly and unjustly, who trample many men under their feet? Their sentence is that they become mighty men of the land, feared by gods, and exalted upon all lips, but if a hungry man helps himself to his fellow’s piece of bread, he is a thief and a criminal, and the whole nation sees the judgement which is brought against him and they consider it just, as if they were pure and blameless, and everything they do is achieved only through skill and justice and honesty. – How would the judges chastise a cruel father for ruling over his offspring like a cruel lord, reining in their spirit with a bit and bridle as if they were livestock bought with his money rather than his own flesh and blood, and for dealing with them in whichever way he fancies, forcing his son to take a wife not after his own...
heart but rather in accordance with the wishes of the father, who is thinking of family pedigree or great wealth; who binds the hands of his daughter who yearns for a man after her heart, giving her to someone who repulses her, robbing her of her joy and her life, and leading her to deceive the husband he has forced on her, for she gives him only her hand and not her heart. He thus brings evil upon her, upon her beloved, and also upon the one whom she despises, who has become her husband, for glory or money blinded his eyes, and he does not notice that he is violating lives, blameless lives, the lives of his offspring, which he is ruining, yet is there a judgement which will appropriately rebuke such cruel men whom we see at every moment? – Or is there an eye watching over the deeds of a hard-hearted man who cruelly humiliates his wife, deceives her with words and embitters her life without any compassion, such things as he would not do even to his servant, out of fear that he might run away from him, nor to his dog lest he grow angry and bite him with his teeth, as he knows that she is weak and will endure her pains? Power is right, this is what all powerful men say, and this is how they behave, and the sword of justice does not hang over them. Indeed, these are the paths of life, and is it a wonder that the number of honest men is extremely small, while the wicked prevail and grow powerful on earth, for anyone who turns away from evil is regarded as a madman by those who know him, and it is said of a successful man that he has great
strength of heart, so should we still be astonished if we see a righteous man perish in his righteousness, since his helpers are only few, and those who love evil, or who are in awe of it, comprise almost all men. Thus, if we desire to depict men’s character with a true pen, then we must acknowledge such painful sights, as otherwise we deceive ourselves, for only the vision of our hearts and not that which is seen in life will be visible to our readers. Now admittedly we see not infrequently that wicked men are also caught in the bonds of their sin, for cunning men can be trapped in their cunning and their leg can be caught in the snare that they themselves set, but here too we know that it is not justice, nor the righteousness of men who seek only justice, that do this, but rather circumstance, which does not show partiality to anyone whether righteous or wicked, and how does it benefit the innocent who have been destroyed by the throng of evildoers if in the end the wicked get their just desserts, and they perish; will their dead live as they go down to the grave? Will the oppressed lift up their head when those who humble them are humiliated? Why, no! It is very easy to do evil, to annihilate and destroy, to reduce a multitude of men to dust with only a single breath, but not to do good, to support those who are falling, to exalt those who have surrendered their own honour. If you spread libel against a man, everyone who hears will immediately believe you without asking for much evidence, and will go on his way adding to it here and there. But
if you speak well of your fellows, you will not easily find attentive ears and a believing heart, and therefore you will do more evil than good, for in order to do evil power and might and wisdom are not required, only an evil heart, whereas in order to do good not only is a good heart required, but a willing spirit and courage and knowledge and much toil.

On account of which, every man of sense will understand that those who describe for us how only pious and righteous men become great, whereas wrongdoers are scattered, are lying; they are flattering their readers and leading them astray with lies, and everything that they do is only wickedness or grievous harm, for it does not cause men to do good or consider their conduct or understand the paths of life.

Many may ask: what is the lesson of a play that presents us with wicked men who succeed in their deeds, and what is the moral that we should take from the sight of righteous men perishing in their righteousness? Indeed, if we see that the wicked prosper, then we shall envy all traitors and refrain from seeking to learn to do well. Not so if we are shown the chastisement and punishment of the wicked; in that case we shall learn to fear doing evil – so say many who preach morality without knowing what it is. Truth endures forever; it stands above all, higher than any feeling, even honesty and justice and morality, for without truth these are all meaningless. Such feelings change their appearance from generation to generation and from era to era, and

 Vader, that you may hear the voice of the heathen: I write to you all the words of the heathen and of the heathen, that you may hear them and be astonished.

Many may ask: what is the lesson of a play that presents us with wicked men who succeed in their deeds, and what is the moral that we should take from the sight of righteous men perishing in their righteousness? Indeed, if we see that the wicked prosper, then we shall envy all traitors and refrain from seeking to learn to do well. Not so if we are shown the chastisement and punishment of the wicked; in that case we shall learn to fear doing evil – so say many who preach morality without knowing what it is. Truth endures forever; it stands above all, higher than any feeling, even honesty and justice and morality, for without truth these are all meaningless. Such feelings change their appearance from generation to generation and from era to era, and
there are things that previously were called justice, honesty, and morality, but now are considered acts of delusion or foolish wickedness, and there are such things which we now admire and honour as high morality, but if we enquire as to the earliest days and resolve to investigate previous generations, we see that previously lovers of morality found them distasteful, but truth endures forever; it does not change its appearance and men are powerful enough only to put a veil over its face, to cast dust on it until it cannot be seen by the eye, or to besmirch it over its face, to cast dust on it until it cannot be seen by the eye, or to besmirch it.

Why, such plays delude their viewers, so that they do not examine their conduct and do not investigate and turn away from it, for they say to themselves: surely punishment follows on the heels of iniquity, and if we have not been punished, it is a sign that we have not sinned. What is the benefit of the fear generated by such plays, which depict only the punishment of the wicked; after all, it is pointless.

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and it vanishes in an instant. This fear is like the fear put into children that they must recite the Shema\(^2\) or else a demon or corpse will come and strangle them, and the child believes and fears, but after he has tried to sleep without reciting the Shema and has slept well enough – the demons did not leave the fire of Sheol\(^3\) and the corpses did not shake themselves out of the dust – then he stops believing in anything, and he abandons everything that he has been instructed to do out of awe and fear. And so it is with any instruction that is accepted only after it has been forced like a burden upon those accepting it; as long as bearing the burden scares them, they will hold onto it, but when the fear has passed they will throw it away like an unwanted vessel; and it is such fear that is generated by this type of play, which depicts the punishment of the wicked; innocent men believe in it until their eyes are opened and they see that they believed in misguided falsehood, for this is not the lot of the wicked on earth, not every woe affects only him, and not every injury lands directly upon him, but every woe affects only him, and so what is the moral which he should take from what he sees? Then he says: ‘Every man lies, and even the playwrights whom I said were gods, even they, as men, covet falsehood and lie often.’ Not so for the works of playwrights with open eyes, who read all of man’s deeds and thoughts and impulses as from an open book, and present them before our eyes naked as the day they were born; they do not turn evil

\(^2\) A central Jewish prayer consisting of the biblical passages Deut. 6:4–9, 11:13–21, and Num. 15:37–41. The Shema is recited at the morning and evening daily prayers and at bedtime.

\(^3\) The biblical abode of the dead.
into good and bitter into sweet, so high morals emerge for us from their words, for we see the truth and observe that honest men are but very few, and they are the choicest of the human race, and if our soul longs to be one of the choicest, then we must not pay heed to the delusions of the masses, for our own ideas should strengthen us, and the knowledge that we are doing good is the greatest reward that a human can receive; our eyes will open to see the impulses of our heart, which are like a gateway to sin, and if we deviate even a little bit from the good path, then we will go from bad to worse, for the beginning of every sin is but a scarlet thread, while its end is like the heavy cords of a cart; we see this, and we understand and know to be careful if we want to, and as for those who do not want to, no instruction or preacher will benefit them. And the benefit that emerges from plays faithful to the paths of life is very great and weighty, for they transform us into men of sense. Not every man is able to recognize the ways of men in the thousands with their changing desires and with the shifting circumstances of time, for our lives are short, and for the most part our eye does not penetrate the imaginings of the human heart; therefore

4 There are several biblical references to a scarlet thread, i.e., Gen. 38:28, 30, in which a scarlet thread is tied to the wrist of one of Tamar’s twin sons as he is born to identify him as the older one; Josh. 2:18, 21, in which Rahab, a resident of Jericho who shelters Joshua’s men from danger when they come to scout out the city, ties a scarlet thread to her window as an identifying sign so that they will know to avoid harming anyone in her house during their subsequent invasion; Song of Songs 4:3, in which it is used romantically as a simile for lips; and various locations in Exodus, in which it is one of the materials used to make the priestly garments. Smolenskin seems to be referring to the warning function of the scarlet thread as it appears in Josh. 2:18, 21, but is focusing on it being only a thin thread, as the mere possibility of sin first emerges.

5 This is a reference to Isa. 5:18, woe to those that draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, and sin as with the ropes of a cart.'
reliable authors become our eyes; they see with the eyes of the spirit and what they see, they tell us so that we might know, and their books become the best and most reliable teachers for us, for they guide us on the paths of life with open eyes so that we do not stumble. And the greatest of all teachers was Shakespeare; in his plays he shows us the chain of actions that sometimes unfolds from a trifling event, from a small desire of a small man’s heart, which expands and grows from day to day accompanied by various events until it becomes an instrument of destruction annihilating many men. He instructs us in the ways of desire, how it leads those trapped in its corrupt snares to the depths of the pit, and how the trapped ones also pull innocent men after them into the destruction that has opened up before them; there is none like him who knows how to weigh on a scale every trifling event, every object that at first was as nothing but in the end became a disaster that lays waste at midday. Let us look at this play before us, which is one of the best that he brought into existence with his great spirit, and let us try to make a judgement about each of the characters created by his imagination that appear in it.

‘Shakespeare sought to depict jealousy for us in this play, just as he depicted for us in Hamlet a man at his wits’ end, in Romeo and Juliet love, and in The Merchant of Venice revenge.’ Many of those who speak about him and his books have expressed their opinion in this manner, but in truth Shakespeare’s power is not one thing, he does not show us one desire, but rather his power is in...
This is a direct citation of Lam. 4:3. Ostriches were associated with cruelty in the Hebrew Bible as they were known for neglecting their eggs and young (Job 29:13–8; Berlin and Brettler 2004b: 1599).
(Desdemona’s) father condemned her on the day she left him, when he said to her husband, ‘Keep your eye on her, Cushite, lest she betray you too as she betrayed her father!’ This trifling thing was the starting point for the whole terrible event that followed. But let us first turn our attention to the characters, and afterwards to the events they triggered. The subject of the play is Ithiel the Cushite, after whom it is also named, and in this the author has shown us that this man is the protagonist of his story, even though Doeg (Diego*) is the prime mover throughout the play, and he is the driving force for all the deeds that take place in it, for his primary desire was to show in this play how an innocent man can stumble by listening to the flattering tongue of a traitor, and the power of blind jealousy, which can turn an innocent lamb into a cruel leopard, annihilating and destroying even those who love it on the day of reckoning. Ithiel is a mighty man of valour in war, he has courage and a great spirit without equal, but only in order to position himself against his foes in an offensive war where he can see them with his eyes and observe their weapons; not so against a scheming man who goes about his business in the dark and whom he cannot see. Men like him who stand on the most elevated heights, and who have not tried to fight against everyday obstacles (which do not surround him

7 Sic.

*) Although admittedly it has not escaped me that Shakespeare took this play from an Italian-language story in which almost all the characters in the play appear in identical form, nevertheless we can see in them the hand of Shakespeare who arranged them authoritatively and breathed new life into them with his greatness.
like warriors but instead like deadly flies seeking to wound rather than kill), such men, who have spent all their days in the din and thundering of war and have not seen the war of life, have not been admitted to the confidence of those who pursue perverse pleasures and are not familiar with their deceitful ways, such men who are used to the enemy calling them to battle, are like gullible children and believe everything they hear; they believe it because they are used to seeing before them only servants, servants who bow their heads like reeds when they speak to them, servants who wish for their mercy, servants who fear and are in awe of them. Therefore, they think that no man would take pleasure in leading them into the void, them, the mighty warriors who instil their terror in the land of the living. And because they have been accustomed to open war their entire lives, they do not understand the cunning of the man who shoots his arrows in the dark, and since they have never deceived anyone (because circumstance has not imposed this on them), and because they would consider it a disgrace to do so while in power, they do not understand the deceit of the cunning. Ithiel too was such a man. Indeed here too we see how great is the power of this

*) Although even in this republic deceit and roguery rule without end, and the hands of most of the ministers are defiled by violence, nevertheless it did have a benefit, for there was not one man ruling over the land, and the rulers had some slight knowledge of how to appreciate the worth of a warrior who could save the land with his strength, which did not happen – not even rarely – in governments ruled by a king, and we can see this here as well, for even Phichol, one of the councillors of the realm, did not succeed in his desire to bring evil upon Ithiel unlawfully.
most exalted of playwrights, for he chose for himself) a military man from among the rulers of Venice, which had a republic rather than a monarchy. Whether he did this intentionally or unintentionally we cannot know, but we see clearly that his greatness elevated him above all error. He chose an army commander from a land which had a republic and not a monarchy, because in a land that is governed by a king, especially at that time, dukes and great army commanders were like lowly slaves before their lord the king; men advanced by means of deceit, speaking obsequiously to the king’s friends, with a flattering tongue to the women of rank who have audiences with the king; they carved a path for themselves with gossip, informing on others, and paved their way with deceit until they became exalted, while the innocent were forgotten, with no one turning to them and no one remembering their talent or wisdom. Therefore, if Ithiel had been a great army commander in a land ruled by a king, he would already have been familiar with deceitful conduct and he would not have been innocent, and if he were familiar with cunning and schemes, he would not have been so quick to believe the words of a schemer like Doeg, for he would have stopped and said to himself, surely he wants an eminent position, and to this end he is devising schemes; why, he is digging a pit for Chesed (Cassio) because he envies him, for that is what those who pursue position and office do. Not so in a land which bases its government on lawmakers, appointing and dismissing ministers not according to the counsel of hypocrites, but rather by law and accounts, because there is not just one
man sitting on the throne who could easily be drawn into a web of schemes; there are many. Therefore it is very difficult to treat them all obsequiously, and as such a man who has talent will be more successful; in such a land he has not seen the crooked paths of schemes, for he has advanced without flattery, only with his greatness, his honesty, and his innocence, and we can justly say of him what Doeg said of himself: ‘If I were Ithiel, I would not be Doeg.’ For indeed it is so; if Doeg were the elevated man that he wanted to be, he would not have hastened to act deceitfully, and if Ithiel were Doeg, he would not be Ithiel, for he would be a schemer and not an innocent man; but he was Ithiel, an innocent man, and therefore he believed in everyone, and it did not occur to him that a loathsome desire might drive one of his servants to put hooks in the nose of a leviathan such as himself and toy with him like a bird. It did not occur to him because such a thing cannot occur to a man such as he; especially since the man who was deposing him was destined for great things. Doeg knew well that an innocent soul like Ithiel would hate all deception, and when he heard the words treachery and deception, he would blaze with fury and he would not really take stock, and therefore he knew how to put doubt gradually into Ithiel’s soul regarding his wife’s innocence, and afterwards he showed him reliably that she was unfaithful, for she had deceived her father as well. This was enough to lead a man like Ithiel to believe that she had indeed been unfaithful and wayward from her youth. Why, she had deceived even her father with great cunning by
loving him, Ithiel, so who could guarantee him that she would not also trap him in the snare of deception by loving another man? – here the terrible things that Asenath’s father had cruelly said sprouted and formed a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood. Her father had warned him on the day his daughter left him, ‘Keep your eye on her, Cushite, lest she betray you as well, as she betrayed her father’, and the villain Doeg knew how to make these words into an instrument of destruction in his hand by reminding Ithiel that his wife had betrayed her father. Her father’s words thus became a net spread out on the path of his daughter and her husband, in which they were ensnared and trapped and together were doomed to die. Ithiel is the very image of every gullible person who believes everything, who becomes a game for every rogue and villain, and so are all of those who are not familiar with the ways of the earth and the schemes of the deceitful, for they become an instrument of destruction, annihilating themselves and honest men with their folly; such folly corrupts the path of the innocent like wickedness and lust, except that the wicked man condemns others in his wickedness, while they are found guilty by the wickedness of others.

The second character in the play, who is the first in every deed and the one who makes the whole play revolve, is Doeg. Through him, the very image of a man’s envy of his companion and the symbol of treachery is displayed before our eyes. There are very many men among the living with hearts like Doeg’s, half of them and perhaps even
more; men who try to improve their situation out of envy of their companions, and who would not hold back from any wicked deed, informing, bearing false witness, sowing discord between brothers and between a man and his wife, acting with ever greater deceit, only in order to achieve their desire, or at least to bring down their companion who is too great for them to endure, for every man who is greater than them is hateful to them, and they regard him as an enemy, and therefore they wage war against him, but since he is greater than them, and hence more powerful, they hide like ambushers on his way to set snares at his foot. Such men are extremely numerous, most of the traders and merchants of the earth, most of the ministers and dukes of the land, nor is their number few among the sages and teachers of law and judgement, but not many are as clever as Doeg at making every trifling event into an instrument of destruction, and not many have the fortune to be given an instrument of destruction such as they desire, and therefore they do not gain a reputation. By contrast, those who have been trapped by circumstances gain the reputation of the most deceitful men on earth. Conversely, if circumstances are favourable to them from when they first set out on their corrupted path until they achieve their goal and attain all their desires, they do not acquire the reputation of evildoers, for if a man is successful and becomes wealthy and holds a position, then has he not gained his desire by his righteous and honesty? So say all who
This expression is a slightly modified citation of Job 30:14. The Hebrew in the biblical verse is somewhat enigmatic and has been translated in various ways, including ‘in the desolation they rolled themselves’ (King James Bible), ‘amid the ruins they come rolling in’ (New International Version), ‘amid the crash they roll on’ (New Revised Standard Version).
happy with his lot, even if he has a great deal of work, for nothing gives rest to the soul and peace to the heart like toil in the hands of the industrious. These men do not envy their fellows’ happiness, and they do not plot to depose them from their high position and take their place, for their heart is full of love for their work. However, there are not many such men, and in contrast to them there are many slothful men who seek the good of the land without any toil or labour. Since they shy away from labour, have no desire to work, and are unsuccessful in forging a good path through life by means of their own toil, they look with envy upon their fellows’ happiness, and all day they contemplate schemes regarding them, as if they were the ones robbing them of their prosperity. Such men have a passionate hatred for every rich and respected man; such men are not grateful to those who are good to them, because they consider the good things that they receive to be only a small fraction of the payment for everything of which they have been robbed. We cannot trust such men, for they love us because we have often helped them (the very image of such men in all their conduct, behaviour, and wicked inclinations has been described for us with incomparable diligence by the wonderful author Dickens in his book Our Mutual Friend when he presented us with the destructive Silas Wegg), for at every occasion they seek and find excuses to say that we have not fulfilled our obligation to be good to them. We see such men by the hundreds in this

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for slothful men who have been humiliated in their sloth gather together and unite to engulf and destroy every prosperous man; who can count the number of men that secretly hate all those happier than them, and hatch plots to bring sudden disaster upon them. Yet such slothful men who shy away from work have tongues that know no sloth; they do their work all day, stirring up quarrels and provoking one man against his fellow and striking honest men with the breath of their mouth, like the case of the serpent who had no hands for fighting and no horns for goring, so instead he inflicted irreparable wounds with his tongue. And Doeg was one of this type of men or serpents who crawl on their belly to wound the feet of the trusting passer-by; he was not mighty in battle, and therefore he did not become exalted; he despised work and manual labour, and therefore he rushed to achieve through deceit that which he had not succeeded in achieving through talent. He plotted evil against Chesed, who had never done him ill; his only iniquity was that nature had graced him with a handsome face and a courageous heart and talent, inasmuch as he had succeeded in achieving a respected position based on his actions. He hated Ithiel passionately even though he treated him very well, because he had not promoted him, and therefore he concocted schemes to destroy these men that he hated. But even in this we see how great Shakespeare’s power is and how pure his eyes are in searching out the innermost depths, for he has not presented
this villain to us – although he was a villain – as one who commits evil deeds with open eyes, no! Even this evil and corrupted man took stock, justifying himself in doing the terrible wrong; he told himself that he was justified in his deeds as he dug a pit for Ithiel, for according to what many people said, Ithiel had desecrated his bed, and therefore he had the right to exact revenge upon him. Even though he did not believe this libel – and who knows if he did not conceive and plot it on his own in order to delude himself – nevertheless, it was sufficient to silence the warnings of his conscience, which sometimes stirs even in a corrupted heart. And all those who plot evil do as he did: first they deceive themselves and lead themselves astray with false visions, and afterwards they come to rely on the deceit which they themselves had invented, so that they might lead others astray with lies. ‘Be faithful to yourself and be faithful to every man’ – Polonius says to his son Laertes in the play Hamlet. And indeed this is man’s teaching; he who does not deceive himself, and does not delude himself with false visions, will likewise not lie to his fellow; indeed, this is the gateway to sin for all those who delude men with their speech, for first they deceive themselves; one boasts to himself that he is truly more exalted than all his fellows, and afterwards he desires to mould them to his will; a second one says to himself that he is not being paid as he deserves and in accordance with his talent, and therefore he thinks that he has the right to exploit
others as well; and a third one wants to believe that he has been selected as a judge of elevated men to lead the multitudes with his authority and trample many men under his feet, and if a man breaks away from him and attempts to remove his yoke from his neck, he regards him as a rebel against the judge of elevated men who has dominion and majesty because of his power, and so numerous are the crooked paths upon which those who deceive themselves in order to lead others astray with their lies are caught. That is how this villain initially silenced the warnings of his conscience, and afterwards, when he had already concocted many violent schemes, he ceased taking stock of himself and he thought only about the practicalities of his schemes, until he finished what he had started and brought evil upon all the objects of his wrath. However, he too was trapped in his cunning and in the end his betrayal was revealed, and therefore he became a symbol for every traitor and criminal. Doeg is the very image of sloth, which begets envy of one man against his fellow, as well as deceit and betrayal.

The third character in the play is Phichol (Brabantio), Asenath’s father, who was the starting point for all the evil that befell his daughter and her husband. Through him we are given a description of the love of false honour, which hardens the heart and blinds the one who possesses it until he cannot distinguish between good and evil or between truth and lies, and he does much evil, even if he has an honest heart, like all evildoers.

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Phichol, Asenath’s father, was a great and wealthy minister, respected in his city and his country, and a counsellor in the government; as such, it goes without saying that since he had a daughter he intended to give her to a man as exalted as himself, and for such men, an exalted man is not one who has made a name for himself by his wisdom, courage, or talent; they honour and respect such men when they find them pleasing, but what nobleman would give his daughter to such a man? For the daughters of noblemen, a man from among the noblemen is required, whoever he may be: an unsuccessful man, a villain, someone who chases intoxication and lewdness, or is empty-headed; it does not matter, if only he has hereditary privilege from the womb. So how great is the pain of Phichol, the minister and the counsellor, when he finds out that his daughter has given her heart to a man who acquired all his honour only by means of his toil and courage; consuming rage burned within him, and he forgot that he was his daughter’s father, pushing her away with both hands and

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to her in front of everyone, ‘You are not my daughter.’ Indeed, such is most fathers’ love for their children; only as long as they do their bidding like faithful servants, only as long as they rule over their bodies as well as their souls, do they exalt them, elevate them, toil for them, and glory in their love, but if for a moment the idea enters the children’s mind that they too are people and that they too have a heart and feelings and want to live in accordance with their desires, then these merciful fathers do not recognize them and are not their fathers. Most fathers act in this manner, and their conscience does not rebuke them for this iniquity, because they inherited it from their fathers and their fathers’ fathers. Indeed, if Phichol had said to himself, ‘What right do I have over my daughter to sell her like a contemptible maidservant to a man whom she reviles? Who gave me the authority to rob her of her heart’s desire and to embitter her life forever? After all, her soul and her heart are hers, and she can give them to whomever she pleases;’ if he had taken stock in this way he would have said to himself that indeed a daughter only spends a quarter of her life in her parents’ house, but must spend three-quarters of her life in her husband’s house, and if she is given to a man who is alien to her, why then all her days will be pain and anger, and she will prefer death to such a bitter life; if he had said such a thing to himself, perhaps he would have repented, regretted his thoughts, and had mercy on his daughter, and would not have pushed her away in anger. But like most
fathers, he did not consider such things, and his selfishness made him harden his heart against his daughter as if she were a stranger to him, and he did not remember all his mercy and love for her on that day of wrath; ‘I no longer have a daughter’ – he called out in his wrath – and did not repent. Indeed, if he had only done this, if he had only acted like a stranger to her, then his evil would not have been so great, but no! He wrought much more profound destruction without considering what he was doing. Indeed, if Asenath had been a stranger to him, would he have dared to tell her in public that she would become a whore, a strumpet in the future? Would he have had the nerve to tell a man that he had an adulterous wife? – ‘Keep your eye on her, for she will surely betray you!’ – he would not have done such a thing, and if he had done such a thing he would have been punished, and his disgrace would have returned to him twofold; but this merciful father who a moment previously had said, ‘I no longer have a daughter!’ and as such regarded Asenath as a stranger to him, nevertheless did not contain his fury, continuing to scold her and curse her in front of everyone, because of what? Because he was her father and he felt that he still had right and authority over her, since he had been her father for some years. With this judgement he brought the evil upon her that drove her to the grave, for the words that he spoke in his anger spawned a poisonous fruit in the furrows of Ithiel’s heart, who, like any man, did not think much either, and did not tell himself that
Phichol might have been lying when he said that his daughter had betrayed him, for she had not betrayed him; on the contrary, he had betrayed her and alienated himself from her. Choosing a husband for herself did not constitute a betrayal; rather, she was acting in accordance with the law of nature. Was it her fault that on the day she was created fate gave her a heart which had an open chamber for love to settle in? She did not betray her father, in that she did not say to him: ‘You are not my father’; rather he betrayed her, saying: ‘You are not my daughter!’ but nevertheless, Ithiel did not oppose him when he heard him insulting his wife, because of what? Because he too had been misled like every man to think that indeed the father has the authority and the right to do as he pleases with his daughter, and since he had been misled to think thus, he saw her as a traitor to her father, and since he saw her as a traitor, he paid heed to the informer who destroyed her with his speech, saying that Asenath had betrayed her husband as she had betrayed her father. This is the outcome of the perverted ruling that has become rooted in men’s hearts, from which they have refused to distance themselves. This perverted ruling – that fathers have the right to do as they please with their children – corrupted her father so that he did not have mercy upon her and brought evil upon his beloved daughter, as well as upon himself (for he too died from affliction, evil, and sorrow over his daughter, whom he had considered a traitor), and her husband, so that he did not have mercy upon her
on the day of his fury, and did not tell himself: ‘Indeed she did not betray her father, and even if she had betrayed him, there is no other reliable indication that she has betrayed me, for a husband is not like a father; she did not choose her father of her own free will, whereas she chose her husband, and she would not betray him.’ Instead, since he too had been blinded by the perverted ruling, he listened to someone who slandered in secret and brought about the death of this blameless girl, innocent of any iniquity. Phichol is the very image of the love of false honour, which lives on perverted rulings and kills those who possess it.

The rest of the men who appear in the story are not honourable in their actions; Chesed is a naive man who fell into the net of cunning unwittingly; Raddai is an empty-headed man chasing after desire who is trapped by his desire and goes to the grave because of his desire and folly.

But Asenath is the very image of pure and faithful love, which knows no limits and sees no obstacles on its path; her love leads her to follow a man who has won over her conscience and heart; her love also sustains her to endure pain inflicted by her beloved, and her love does not abandon her even in death, and she blesses the name of her lover who destroyed her in his anger.

This is the power of Shakespeare, for all the women who appear in his plays do not speak much and do not perform great deeds, but in few words we see them as if they were living before our eyes. Ophelia (in Hamlet),...
Julia in *Romeo and Julia,* and Asenath (Desdemona) in *Ithiel* speak only little, but nevertheless we see the power of their limitless love. Even in death she did not abandon her love, and before her soul departed, she even tried to clear her beloved of any blame, saying, ‘My hands did this’, and these few words were potent enough to depict the power of love for us much better than entire books intensely praising its greatness and worth.

Many have regarded Asenath’s love as exaggerated, and now too many regard it as impossible, that this wretched girl who was murdered by the bridegroom of blood not long after her wedding, that this wretched girl should still continue to love him and should take such great blame upon herself as her soul departed, saying, ‘My hands did this to me!’ But they do not understand women’s hearts. Almost all women and children – as well as many men – who are not used to waging war with the vicissitudes of circumstance, feel desire only as long as it is far from their reach, whereas if it is given to them without toil they do not rejoice in it. So too with their love: if they obtain it without obstacles or misfortunes, then they do not value it. Only with a multitude of obstacles in their way does their love grow, does its intensity increase without them searching out schemes to achieve their desire. Instead, they sit and quarrel with their circumstances, feeling angry

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9 Sic.

10 This is a reference to Exod. 4:25. See Fifth Act, note 73.
with their misfortunes and mourning over them, and since they are not accustomed to act, the idea grows more and more powerful, becoming master over their whole heart, until they cannot find the strength to stop thinking about their love even for a moment; not so are those who have experience waging war against the vicissitudes of life; misfortunes spur them to action, to do away with every stumbling block and remove every obstacle from their way. And if they are successful they rejoice, but if they see that they have been ineffectual, and all their toil has been in vain, they say to themselves: there's nothing for it, and toiling to no end is utter futility, and in this way they find some comfort and relief. But women, who for the most part are not accustomed to physical battle, are always intoxicated in their love. And each stumbling block and misfortune stirs them not to obtain their desire by practical means, but rather to desire more intensely. Because of this, if a man shows his beloved frequent signs of love, he does not cause her love to intensify; conversely, if he treats her like a stranger and appears not to seek her love, then the love is ignited in her heart like an infernal blaze, and a woman will bear everything calmly, even condemnations and abuse, even blows from her lover's hand, especially if she sees that he did it out of jealousy, for jealousy in her lover's heart – even if it treats her very badly and embitters her life and forces her to sit at home like a bird in a cage and not to speak a word to anyone – even brings joy to her heart, as she thinks: indeed he is only
jealous because of his love, and this idea is enough for her to silence herself, and so too Asenath’s love did not weaken when her husband struck her down; on the contrary, it grew even more intense, especially as she was convinced that he had acted out of jealousy, so she forgave him for all of his wrongs, and she was even prepared to kiss the hands that had brought an end to her life. It is no wonder that she tried to clear her husband of all blame, her beloved, as she thought that he had acted only out of his love for her, and the lie that she told seemed to her like truth and justice, because through it she sought to save her husband from disgrace or punishment.

But she did not tell a lie, for indeed her hands had done this to her: she had failed because of her great love and innocence; she trusted in her love too much, and because of that she pressured Ithiel to restore Chessed to his position, and it never even occurred to her that what she was saying might be a burden to him, that she might be asking something of him which should not be done even for love – namely, issuing a corrupt ruling and desecrating his honour. Only senseless youths follow love with closed eyes wherever it leads them and do everything that it commands them, performing strange deeds and uttering perversities. Not so for men who have made their mark on the world by their might and uprightness, and whose honour, which they have obtained with great toil, is more precious to them than all of life’s pleasures, even more than love, even more than life. A sense of honour is extremely precious to those who understand its value, and they will forcibly remove everything from their hands to save their honour.
path that has the power to tarnish their honour even slightly – even if the deed that they must do sickens them greatly. A faithful judge who has gained a reputation for his righteousness will not become biased, desecrating his honourable name, even if love commands him to do so; a warrior who has gained the reputation of a hero through his strength of spirit will not stop a war while his enemy is before him, even if love asks it of him; a man who has followed his conscience and stood up to speak the truth in public, rebuking misguided men for their folly and sinners for their sins, will not act deceitfully again, not even for love. Thus, no man who is sustained by a sense of honour and who found his path in life before he knew love will abandon his path for it, for the sense that had inspired him for a long time and had been like a light illuminating his path does not dim quickly; even if its voice is hidden for a day or two by the roar of love’s voice, it will grow stronger in the end and will make itself heard with greater force. Only those who lack any noble yearnings in life wander after love like a beast into the valley,\(^{11}\) going so far as to commit strange and perverse acts, for they would commit strange and perverse acts even without love, since they have not chosen a sound path for themselves. Many women fail to understand this and place too much trust in the power of love, asking of their lovers things that it is inappropriate for them to do; in this way they do themselves ill, for if once or twice the lover disregards and overrides his honour, the power of love is indeed thereby weakened, and woe to love if its

\(^{11}\) See note 1.
power is weakened even slightly, for then it continues to diminish until it disappears and not infrequently turns into enmity, being a burden. However, many women are ignorant of this and dig a grave – an eternal grave – for their love with their own hands. This was the case for Asenath too; she did not act wisely in pressuring her husband to do what he had refused to do. Even if the rot of jealousy had not set into his bones (which she did not know), it still would not have been wise of her to ask this of him; she should have known that a wife must not interfere with state governance and military judgements. She would have known this if she had been familiar with the ways of the world and men’s hearts, but in her innocence she did not understand this. Thus her innocence and love became a trap and a snare, and the villain Doeg made even them into an instrument of destruction to obliterate those with whom he was angry by advising Chesed to plead repeatedly to her, convincing her to speak repeatedly to her husband, and showing Ithiel that she was only doing this because she loved Chesed. His evil words easily made inroads into Ithiel’s heart, since what she was saying would have caused him grief even without the jealousy, and even if he had listened to her the first time, he would have undoubtedly grown angry at her if she had tried to do such a thing a second time. And through Asenath’s few words, Shakespeare managed like none other to show women how to follow love without stumbling, without trusting too much in the power of love and without digging a grave for it with their own hands, over which they would cry all the days of their lives without a future or hope.
In Milcah he has presented us with a woman on a lower level than Asenath, a woman who says decisively that she would not shy away from sin if she were to receive a great payment, and that it would not be her own fault, but rather the fault of her husband, the villain who had mistreated her (as indeed, according to her, all men do). The number of such women on earth, who are corrupted by their husbands and forget the honest way, is not small; indeed, it is much bigger than the number of women like Asenath.

Anah is a woman on the lowest level among women, equivalent to Raddai’s level among men, about whom there is not much to say, and in these three we have been given a reliable portrait of almost all women, with the diversity of their characters and inclinations.

From all these, we see that this exalted play becomes like an illuminating light, like a faithful guide for the multitudes, instructing them in the ways of the world and the desires, schemes, and inclinations of men’s hearts. For this playwright is not a playwright for one people or one land, he is a playwright for all peoples and all lands, for he does not show us the conduct of a member of a single people or individual men, but rather the conduct of men in general. Therefore he is like a teacher for all men, and should not be considered a stranger even to us in our language, for if we observe just a little, we see that among us too there are men like Ithiel and Phichol and Doeg and their ilk.

Although admittedly we do not have great army commanders like Ithiel, who display their prowess and courage on the battlefield, instead we have in our midst members of the elite who are innocent in
their conduct, innocent rabbis, teachers, community leaders, and rich men who turn an attentive ear to the words of those who slander in secret, to crooked-hearted men who would guide their leaders into oblivion in order to acquire money or a position, corrupting justice, pursuing blameless men who have done no wrong, and spreading quarrels and strife in each and every community. And the Jewish people are not at all lacking in men like Doeg; in almost each and every town, in each and every community, there are men like him by the dozens, who with their lying and deception set cities afame, sow discord, and cause destruction. One calls on the name of faith and puts a God-fearing veil over his face in order to destroy many followers of the Haskalah by making judgements against those who have forgotten God, while another carries the banner of the Haskalah on his shoulders in order to oppress those whom he considers to be fools and simpletons, as they draw water from the well of faith in order to sustain themselves; and together they all surround the great ones with their deceit and the lesser ones with their fear or their intellect, and they cause a great deal of failure wherever they go. Indeed, all such men are Doeg’s friends, and they camp under his banner.

But men like Phichol, who are blinded by the desire for power, are perhaps even more numerous among the Jewish people than among all other peoples. There is almost no people on earth which regards its sons and daughters as livestock bought with its money, doing what it pleases with them, like the Jewish people do. Among all peoples we see that only their great men and leaders are
indifferent to their offspring’s feelings, marrying them off to whomever they deem suitable in order to gain honour and increase their family’s honour, whereas among the Jewish people almost everyone, from the most insignificant to the greatest among them, from the wisest to the most foolish among them, are all the sons of kings, and family honour and pedigree are the things that make matches for them. But they falsely boast that no one is as merciful towards their children as they are, and that they toil their whole lives only in order to grant their children success, but in truth it is not for their children but rather for themselves, in order to increase their honour that they do so. If they were really thinking of their children’s success, they would take care to make a path for them in life, to teach them a trade if they are not suited for study, and they would not constantly think about how this would ruin their pedigree. If they really wanted to grant their daughters success, they would not choose husbands for them by means of messengers and match-makers, they would not consider familial honour, or a foolish rabbi who bestows his glory upon the whole family, or a rich man who has robbed strangers of their wealth and has become successful and bestowed the radiance of his gold upon all the members of his family.

Indeed, what is the pedigree of most Jewish families? One has become rich through deception, and has managed to buy the sixth Torah portion and maftir 12.

12 This refers to the practice of dividing the Sabbath Torah reading in synagogues into seven portions and giving different members of the community the honour of being called up to recite the blessings over each portion. The sixth portion is particularly esteemed and is often assigned to learned members of the community. The maftir portion follows the seventh portion; it consists of the last few lines of the seventh portion followed by the haftarah, a selection from the Prophets with links to the Torah reading.
for many years, to occupy a leading position in the synagogue, and to buy Torah scrolls and so forth, and he becomes a precious cornerstone for his entire family and all of his descendants derive their honour from him and mention his name with great pride. Another has borrowed money without repaying it on multiple occasions, yet nevertheless he is considered generous, for he is a friend of the burial societies and gives of his stolen money to charity; a third one acted corruptly and committed every indecency in his trading with partners from other lands in the days of his youth, and yet in his old age he sits in a prayer-shawl and phylacteries for two hours a day in the study-house and is called a righteous man, and all his sons and daughters boast of his honour; a fourth one made his wealth through deceit overnight on the stock market and became respected by all, and this man has a rabbi or dayyan or ritual slaughterer in his family, whose honour is as naught in his eyes, and when he speaks to them he lords it over them because he is rich and they are poor, but on the day when it comes to discussing a marriage match for his son or daughter, he puffs himself up like a frog and mentions the name of the exalted man, because he too is illuminated by the light of his honour. And they all (except a small number of people, and they are very few, who with their hearts as well as their mouths seek only their children’s happiness) see their sons and daughters only as a way of increasing the family honour, and even if the girl cries out bitterly: ‘I have no desire

13 Sponsoring a scribe to produce a Torah scroll for the community is an extremely costly endeavour that is considered a great honour in Jewish society.
14 Judge in a rabbinical court.
for a man whom I despise; I would prefer to die rather than to give my life to a man who is alien to me,’ and even if the son begs, ‘I am repulsed by the daughter of this rich or pedigreed man who has a corrupted character and a hollow heart, so how can I endanger my life and spend my days groaning?’ These afflicted souls cry out and howl how they feel, but there is no one to listen to them among their merciful fathers, who live only for them and are closed, because he is doing this for her happiness. In another case a man befriends Maskilim and appears to be an enthusiast of the Haskalah in order to gain honour, and his daughter has learned since her youth to honour Maskilim and the Haskalah, seeking not wealth,
dancing chariots, or palaces of pleasure, but rather a man who has won her mind and heart. But on the day when her match is arranged, her father chooses a wealthy man, even though he is devoid of knowledge, intellect, and manly qualities, and he throws his daughter at the foot of this ass in order for him to trample on her with a prideful foot, for he desires a rich man, and his daughter’s distress does not soften his heart, for he is giving her money for her happiness and success. If the tears welling up from the eyes of these afflicted souls were gathered into one place, they would become a flowing stream; if all the groans emanating from such broken hearts were united, they would become a very fearsome storm wind, but no one counts them, no one gathers them, no one pays attention to them; they sell their sons and their daughters like slaves in order to satisfy their own desire for honour, and therefore wretched people proliferate, and true peace in a Jew’s home (especially at this time, when the hearts of the Jewish people have been divided into the camps of the God-fearing and the Maskilim) is a very precious thing. In countries where the Jews have not yet adopted Gentile ways, we hear of strife and quarrels between a man and his wife; on a daily basis we see men going to the courthouses to grant bills of divorce to their wives whom their fathers had given them; we see miserable divorcées and desolate abandoned wives at every step. Meanwhile, in the countries where men are ashamed to get rid of their wives, because it is a disgrace, each man does as he pleases, following his eyes and heart, and their wives also learn their ways, and this is the success upon whose altars
the merciful fathers who toil only for the benefit of their offspring place their sons and daughters. These Jewish students of Phichol who choose to follow in his footsteps will see their conduct and their actions in this play as if in a polished mirror, and perhaps they will understand what lies in store for them; innocent men like Ithiel will see how traitorous scoundrels behave and will know to be wary of them; the entire people will see the behaviour of traitors like Doeg and will not go chasing after it. It is all the same; therefore I say that this play is also for us just as it is for all peoples, and therefore we must be grateful to this translator for bringing such a precious object into the treasure-house of our language, a precious object that will be a beauty and a delight for our language. And it gladdens my heart very much when I recall that I spurred the translator on to perform this labour, and that he relied upon my judgement to bring his work to light, because for a long time I had yearned to see the work of the greatest of playwrights dressed in the mantle of our language; for a long time, when I saw that our authors – those deserving of the title of author as well as those who take this title for themselves without any justification – were all turning to foreign books and dressing them in the garment of our language, books foreign to our people, our spirit, and our language, books that bring no benefit or knowledge, books not even worth printing in the language in which they were written, let alone translating into another language, our authors were choosing such books with which to enrich the treasure-house of our literature; when I saw such things, I always said: ‘Have they all been stricken
with madness, choosing only what is evil and corrupt, with no one stirring to give us good and beneficial words? If only a man could be found to translate the plays of Shakespeare into our language, he would receive the blessing of all lovers of our language who understood his work’ – I always said this to my friends, and look, today someone to redeem our language has been found, someone who has begun to try his hand at this work; he has tried it and has succeeded most greatly, as readers will see. If only he should desire to continue with this labour of his, to glorify the prestige of our language, and to draw in many of its readers, who do not yet know how to judge what is good and what is bad, paying attention only to good and exalted books like these! May his good deed be his wages, for he does not wish or hope for any other wages, other than to increase and magnify the honour of our language, and I know with certainty that he will not be put to shame in his hope, because all readers will praise him for his work just as I praise him and bless him for the good that he has done.

Vienna, the ninth of the month of Shevat, 5634.\(^\text{15}\) 

*Peretz ben Moses Smolenskin.*

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\(^{15}\) This date on the Hebrew calendar corresponds to 27 January 1874.
Letter from the translator to the publisher

I have fulfilled your desire, my friend, and translated Othello from English into Hebrew. I have also obeyed you and called it Ithiel in Hebrew, which resembles Othello only in pronunciation, and not Athlaf as I had called it in the beginning, and which is its correct translation. But after I finished the work, I was disheartened, for while reading the original, each and every utterance chimed in my ears with a voice full of power and glory, like the voice of a living man emerging from Shakespeare’s throat, but my translation was not like this, for its voice issued like a ghost from the ground, and my words spoke from the dust. And even though I knew well that I had translated the author’s ideas faithfully and had not strayed from his thoughts to the right or the left, nevertheless the road is long between the living language emerging from the mouth of the greatest man among the Anakim and the Hebrew language twittered by a man such as myself. It is in no way lost on me that the man contemplating the work of his own hands resembles a woman looking at her face in a polished mirror; she cannot know whether she is beautiful or not if she has not heard so from someone else’s mouth; and thus is man; he should not be judge of the work of his hands or testify about it either for good or for ill, because the judgement is for others. Therefore

Malachi, you can tell my heart, what I accomplished and sent from my mouth, I have painted the picture of the greater man among the Anakim, the Cushite of Venice, Ithiel the Cushite of Venice, and even though I knew well that I had translated the author’s ideas faithfully and had not strayed from his thoughts to the right or the left, nevertheless the road is long between the living language emerging from the mouth of the greatest man among the Anakim and the Hebrew language twittered by a man such as myself. It is in no way lost on me that the man contemplating the work of his own hands resembles a woman looking at her face in a polished mirror; she cannot know whether she is beautiful or not if she has not heard so from someone else’s mouth; and thus is man; he should not be judge of the work of his hands or testify about it either for good or for ill, because the judgement is for others. Therefore

16 This minor biblical character, mentioned in Ezra 10:28, was a Judean who had intermarried but was influenced by the scribe Ezra to send away his foreign wife. See First Part, note 94. Apart from this brief statement and one editorial comment at the end of the play (see Publisher’s Note, note 1), there does not seem to be any documented indication as to the extent of Smolenskin’s changes to Salkinson’s translation, nor as to how Salkinson might have regarded such alterations to his work.

17 ‘The greatest man among the Anakim’ is a citation of Josh. 14:15; the Anakim or Anakites were a race of primordial giants mentioned on various occasions in the Hebrew Bible.
If readers scorn the offering that he has brought to the Jewish community, but if you find that Shakespeare’s flavour has not remained intact in my jar, and the scent of our holy tongue has been altered in my translation, tell me so decisively, and I shall be prepared to destroy the work of my hand and to hand over my toil as fuel for the fire, for why should I bring frogs into Egypt and a bad translation into the camp of the Hebrews? Do they have too few bad and corrupted translations, with which Jewish authors have been swarming like the Nile for generation after generation? Or do I have no other work to keep me occupied, other than mistreating a beautiful woman and defiling her beauty, to the point where the viewer would be repulsed by her and Shakespeare’s name would be desecrated at my hand? Indeed, it is true that I translated Paradise Lost and printed it and took it upon myself to ensure that it would see the light of day, without taking advice from knowledgeable people, but there were two reasons for that; the first reason is that this great and important book is constructed from beginning to end on the foundation of the Holy Scriptures, and because of my great love for the books of the Lord I determined to present this voluntary offering upon the altar of our language for the good of the Jewish people; and if they scorn my offering, I shall not take it to heart because the Lord, who sees into the heart, knows that I did this for His honour. And the

J.E.S.
second reason is that *Paradise Lost* is not so well known among the Jewish people; while there are many among its foremost sages and authors who have heard of it, and that it is the work of a great artist, nevertheless they have not read it, have not seen its glory and do not know what it is, and therefore I responded though no one had asked me, and translated the book for the Hebrews, in order that they might know and recognize the worth of Milton, the greatest of the righteous among the nations, and what he achieved with his book, which I have called by the title *So He Drove Out the Man*, because wondrous things can be seen in it which have not been devised in any nation until this day. It is not so with Shakespeare; his books are read in the four corners of the world in seventy languages, and viewers can see his plays on the stage in every big city; therefore I have no desire to bring his books into the Jewish community before I hear from the mouth of a great and powerful man like yourself that my translation is correct and that it is permitted to enter the community. And if afterwards the critics come and find any indecency in it, you, my friend, will bear it on your own, and I shall have rescued myself.

"Your friend who respects and honours you"

J.E.S.

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in translating, but the subject of the book is not pleasing to a Jew, and therefore, if he does not highly value the translator’s work, we cannot place the blame on the translator. However, with this translation that is not the case, because its subject matter is desirable and acceptable to all readers, and moreover the translator has succeeded greatly in his work. He can trust that this translation will be a desirable offering for all those who love the language of their forefathers – The Publisher.

18 The title of Salkinson’s translation of *Paradise Lost* is a citation of the beginning of Gen. 3:24, in which God drives Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden after they eat from the tree of knowledge.
The names of the speakers

Duke. ............................................. The Prince of the Land in Venice

Brabantio. ................................. Phichol counsellor at the gate of the state

Senators .................................................. Two other counsellors

Gratiano .............................................. Gether Phichol’s brother

Lodovico ........................................... Lud Phichol’s friend

Othello the Moor ................................. Ithiel the Cushite

Cassio ..................................................... Chesed his officer

Jago ........................................................ Doeg his standard-bearer

Roderig .............................................. Raddai one of the noblemen of Venice

Montano .......................... Kenaz the governor on the island of Caphtor before Ithiel’s arrival

Chlown .................................................. Clown attendant to Ithiel

Herald .......................................................... Herold

Desdemona .............................. Asenath Phichol’s daughter; Ithiel’s wife

Emilie ........................................................ Milcah Doeg’s wife

Bianco ................................................. Anah Chesed’s concubine

Officers, noblemen, couriers, musicians, sailors, attendants, and others.

The scene in the first part is in Venice, and the rest of the scenes are on the seashore on the island of Caphtor [Cyprus].

19 Salkinson provided this English cast list alongside the Hebrew one.

20 In biblical times a city’s gate served as the gathering place for its judges and other authority figures.

21 Sic; this appears in Salkinson’s English cast list instead of the expected ‘Iago’.

22 Sic; this appears in Salkinson’s English cast list instead of the expected ‘Roderigo’.

23 Sic; this appears in Salkinson’s English cast list instead of the expected ‘Clown’.

24 Sic; this appears in Salkinson’s English cast list instead of the expected ‘Herald’.

25 Sic; this appears in Salkinson’s English cast list instead of the expected ‘Emilia’.

26 Sic; this appears in Salkinson’s English cast list instead of the expected ‘Bianca’.
Ithiel the Cashite of Venice