References to a book in other publications can usually be interpreted as a sign of its success and as a proof of the book's assured quality or at least intrinsic importance. The book has made an impact on the reading public, copies of the book may have sold well and new editions may have continuously been prepared and printed. The book penetrated the general readership's memory, as it were, and turned into an integral or even essential segment of the literary corpus. In the course of time, it may have also earned a canonical status. The printing of Yiddish books from the sixteenth century on and the ever increasing distribution of books helped to turn the Ashkenazi vernacular into a powerful cultural agent among lower and eventually also upper strata of Ashkenazi society, from Amsterdam on the shores of the North Sea to towns and villages of Eastern Europe. Yiddish was responsible for the creation and mapping of new cultural boundaries within the Ashkenazi universe and the employment of a unified literary style for all printed books (the Western Yiddish literary style) slowed down the inevitable division of this Ashkenazi universe into regional entities, each of which developed its own dialect of Yiddish and subsequently also developed a new literary style. Already by the middle of the seventeenth century one book was recognized as a bestseller of the Yiddish language, and its stature only grew as time passed by. It is the *Tsene Rene*. Jacob ben Isaac's classic text was and still is identified with Yiddish culture itself.

Purchasing Yiddish books also enhanced the formation of household libraries, and by the 1730s Shlomo Zalman London, a publisher of

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Yiddish books, already complained that Yiddish books were purchased not only for the purpose of reading but also in order to adorn a household’s living room. Possessing a library has apparently become a status symbol. And the existence of libraries also presented producers with further opportunities. Possessing a collection of books meant that books could be examined through comparison with other books. The act of comparison was not only a privilege given to readers but also to producers. They could include evaluations and criticism of available books in new books they were producing and subsequently support and praise their own book. Although, at times, such references were general and did not mention titles of particular books, on other occasions specific books were positively or negatively mentioned.

The inclusion of references to books could be justified on several grounds. A comment about a book could engage a matter of content. It might object to the criticized book, describe it as a faulty product, and assure the reader that the present book corrected the matter. It might also discuss matters like a book being too long or too short. Books were also criticized or praised for their form: being published in a specific format, including illustrations, having a good or bad proofreading, being published on good or bad paper or using vague ink. There were usually no attacks directed at authors. Of course, all such references were justified on the ground that Yiddish books were published as a service to the Ashkenazi reading public. This service supposedly reflected the producer’s sense of duty towards his fellow community members and the Ashkenazi world as a whole on the one hand and his

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5 Orhot šadikim (Amsterdam, 1735): דִּרְו מֶעֲנֵי לַיְלָה לָא מְדִא מָסְפִּירָה קְרֵם אוֹתָא אוֹת אוֹת שֶׁנֶּאֱבַטּ אוֹת אוֹת שֶׁנֶּאֱבַטּ בְּכָלָא אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹת אוֹtol


7 See the Sefer Emanut Isra’el (1764) discussed below; the preface relates that the book sets out to present guidelines without including their reasonings which would demand another one hundred quires.

8 Such arguments are given in a large number of books. See below the discussion of the 1711 edition of the Tšene Rene, or the 1722 edition printed in octavo format, Sefer Lev tov (1706) or, for instance, Kokhva deshavit-Shtern Shus (1675) and Ḥovot ha-levavot (1768).