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**Eros and the Jews**

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**Chapter 7—**

**Eros and Enlightenment**

In the winter of 1810, only a few months after his fourteenth birthday, Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg departed from his parents' house in the Lithuanian town of Salant and began his wedding journey to Shavel, to the house of his new in-laws. Engaged two years earlier, at the age of twelve, Guenzburg was following in the footsteps of generations of young Jewish boys from Eastern Europe. But unlike his silent forebears, Guenzburg rebelled publicly against his early marriage, penning an autobiographical confession that was a devastating condemnation of Jewish marital practices. With Guenzburg, the nascent Jewish Enlightenment, or Haskalah, of Eastern Europe turned its sights on the Jewish family as part and parcel of its attack on the medieval practices of the Jews.

The Eastern European Haskalah followed the Jewish Enlightenment movement in Germany, which preceded it by about half a century. In Germany, the emancipation of the Jews, which had begun in the first decade of the nineteenth century, produced a growing mass movement of modernization, as the teachings of the German maskilim (disciples of the Haskalah) were taken up by the new German Jewish middle class. In Eastern Europe, where the much larger Jewish population was not emancipated until the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Jewish Enlightenment remained for a much longer time a small, embattled movement of alienated intellectuals. By the last third of the nineteenth century, however, revolutionary changes began to transform the Eastern European Jews into a more modern society, albeit under far less favorable conditions than in the West. Gradually, the maskilim found a wider and wider audience for their writings, which appeared primarily in Hebrew and Yiddish (and later in Russian). Their voices became increasingly influential as the Jews struggled with anti-Semitism, industrialization, urbanization, and the mass emigration from Russia that began in 1881.

The Haskalah was a movement intent on reordering power within Jewish society. The maskilim attacked the rabbis and the traditional communal leaders and advocated a new kind of community in which power would be shared between the enlightened state and enlightened, acculturated intellectuals like themselves.<sup>[1]</sup> This reordering of power went hand in hand with a new form of knowledge: secular learning would take the place of rabbinic learning, just as modern leaders would take the place of the rabbis. A new educational system emphasizing European languages and sciences, changes in Jewish dress, moderate religious reform, and a wholesale critique of the unproductive Jewish economy were all the stock-in-trade of the maskilim.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Haskalah's attack on the traditional Jewish family was part of this new discourse. Power within the family needed to be taken away from parents and placed in the hands of the children; the emotions would now play the role previously played by pragmatic interests. At the same time, sexuality would no longer be an uncontrollable experience inflicted on inexperienced children, but would instead come under the control of the children themselves when they matured. The maskilim were therefore operating in the familiar language of medieval Ashkenazic culture by asking the question that was the central issue of Chapter 3: who would control and define desire? Their revolt against communal and parental authority functioned as a literary version of the alternative discourses of medieval popular culture.

This chapter tells the story of these intellectuals, tracing the interaction between their new marital ideology and their own lives, as it was reflected in their memoirs, letters, fiction, and poetry.<sup>[3]</sup> The maskilim borrowed most of their ideas from European literature, but their ideology stemmed as well from their personal lives and experiences, especially from the struggles for identity that marked their adolescent years. For it was typically during those years that they, like their counterparts in the Hasidic and yeshiva movements, became converts to the cause. We have already seen how the new religious movements in Eastern Europe were products of such adolescent struggles, catalyzed by the crisis of Polish Jewry in the second half of the eighteenth century. But the followers of these movements saw themselves as the genuine heirs of the long Jewish tradition, even if they actually created new norms and ideals. Their rebellion was not entirely self-conscious, as it was for the maskilim. With the Haskalah, rejection of traditional Jewish life became an explicit ideology centered in a critique of traditional adolescence and an attempt to define new forms of family life.

The maskilim believed first that traditional Jewish adolescence, and particularly premature marriage, created sexual dysfunction and second that only a restructuring of Jewish marriage and family life could produce a normal or healthy sexuality. The "bourgeois" family that they ad-

vocated was based on notions of sexual modesty and restraint that, curiously enough, they thought were lacking in traditional society. The body of ascetic thought—from the Talmud through medieval philosophy, mysticism, and *musar* that culminated in Hasidism—seemed to them to be a smokescreen for social practices that distorted sexuality. If anything, the traditional discourse on sexuality appeared to reflect an unhealthy obsession that needed to be tamed by the new bourgeois sobriety. For all their renewed emphasis on modesty, however, the maskilim were no less anxious about sexuality than were the Hasidim. But their solution was different: it did not lie in the displacement of Eros by theology, but instead in the *neutralization* of sexuality within a new family framework.

These ideas resonated with broader developments in Eastern European Jewish society as well. The way the maskilim represented the nature of sexuality and marriage in traditional society gradually came to be accepted as the position of the tradition as a whole. They confused their own sexual complexes with

the experience of all Jewish men: in this way, a direct line can be drawn between the literature of the nineteenth century and Roth's *Portnoy*. The importance of this admittedly small movement of writers lies, therefore, in its success in defining the tradition and in creating a set of images that dominate the discourse of Jewish sexuality to this day.

### Eros and Autobiography

In order to effect a power shift within Jewish society, the maskilim felt it necessary to develop a new form of knowledge about the life of the individual in Jewish society, a critical discipline that might be called "self-knowledge." A new sense of the self or the individual was central to this enterprise, and it was therefore essential to construct a personal history of that self. The nature of the literature discussed in this chapter is thus completely different from that of earlier periods, whether the Bible, the Talmud, or the various texts from the Middle Ages. For the first time, Eros was not a cultic, theological, or moral issue, as in earlier periods; instead it became a matter of individual self-definition.

This sense of a self with its own unique history had no real precedent in earlier Ashkenazic Jewish culture, a culture in which neither biography nor autobiography played important roles.<sup>[4]</sup> One interesting precursor to the autobiographies of the Haskalah is Jacob Emden's *Megillat Sefer*.<sup>[5]</sup> Emden lived in Germany from 1698 to 1776 and was one of the foremost rabbis of his time. Although a fanatical defender of Orthodoxy

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in his battles against the eighteenth-century vestiges of the Sabbatian heresy, Emden was a part of a nascent Orthodox Haskalah that prepared the ground for the more secular German Jewish Enlightenment movement of Moses Mendelssohn.<sup>[6]</sup> In Emden's autobiography, we find for the first time in the Ashkenazic world traditional formulas mingled with hints of genuine introspection and a conscious sense of an erotic self. Emden relates a variety of intimate details of his life, including his sexual problems with his first wife, with whom he could barely get along, and the powerful erotic attraction he felt for his cousin, who apparently tried to seduce him. In the latter incident, he boasts in traditional fashion of his ability to overcome his powerful "evil impulse," but he also speaks of his own sexuality in less externalized terms: "I was very hungry for a woman. . . . I was a man with all of my powers and impulses."<sup>[7]</sup> Perhaps Emden's openness to his own sexuality explains the very positive position he took on conjugal relations. Quoting the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* at length, he goes into great detail about erotic foreplay and concludes, against the philosophers: "To us the sexual act is worthy, good and beneficial even to the soul. No other human activity compares with it."<sup>[8]</sup>

The need for a new knowledge of the self prompted the profusion of autobiographies that constituted one of the main literary genres of the Haskalah. Virtually every maskil felt compelled to record his personal *Bildungsroman*, a reconstruction of his own life, typically recounting the hero's progress from a traditional childhood to the awakening of enlightenment. The first of these was the

famous autobiography of Solomon Maimon, published in Germany in 1792–93 and modeled explicitly on the *Confessions* of Rousseau. Several decades later, similar memoirs began to appear in Eastern Europe, typically in Hebrew, the preferred language of the Eastern European Haskalah, but occasionally in Yiddish. These memoirs follow certain conventions, in part influenced by European literary traditions, and they must be treated more as works of literature than as objective accounts.<sup>[9]</sup> The maskilim also composed their memoirs long after the events described and under the influence of an already crystallized ideology, thus fulfilling Erik Erikson's dictum that autobiography is an attempt at "recreating oneself in the image of one's own method in order to make that image convincing."<sup>[10]</sup>

In their autobiographies, the maskilim typically present childhood as a period of innocence and of unproblematic relationship to one's biological parents. Some speak of it metaphorically as being like the Garden of Eden or as the "springtime of life." In most of the memoirs, the writers portray their parents in thoroughly positive and unambivalent terms. They describe their fathers as maskilim, although this is really a play on the traditional meaning of the word, namely, "learned in Torah," since most of the fathers were not maskilim in the sons' sense of the word. This rosy picture of the family was contrasted with the family of the in-

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laws, since there is a persistent "splitting" in these works between the "good parents" and the cruel outsiders.<sup>[11]</sup>

With their marriages, the maskilim felt themselves torn out of the arms of their parents and sent into a heartless world. These marriages typically took place during early adolescence. I have examined the biographies of several dozen writers, and the overwhelming majority were married by age sixteen or seventeen, most by age thirteen or fourteen.<sup>[12]</sup> Abraham Ber Gottlober, whose memoir includes a kind of anthropology of Jewish marriage, asserts that everyone he knew was engaged by the age of eleven.<sup>[13]</sup> This is probably not reliable evidence for the Jewish community as a whole, since the maskilim typically came from the elite class of merchants and scholars. But, as we have already seen in the last chapter, there is evidence to suggest that even the lower classes were marrying early: if not at thirteen and fourteen, then perhaps at fifteen and sixteen. This traditional pattern persisted in Russia during the first half of the nineteenth century. For instance, a law passed in Russia in 1835, but never enforced, sought to compel the Jews to marry in late adolescence, from which one infers that many Jews were marrying earlier.<sup>[14]</sup>

The vast majority of Jewish marriages were arranged. For the maskilim, arranged marriage and the particular role of the *shadkhan* (marriage broker) constituted the most offensive symbols of the mindless tyranny and seamy commercialism of traditional Jewish society. They used their fiction and their memoirs to attack this system with bitter sarcasm.<sup>[15]</sup> In addition to literary denunciations, some rebelled personally against arranged marriages. Reuven Braudes, who was to become an important Hebrew novelist in the second half of the nineteenth century, ran away from home when his mother

arranged a match for him in 1868; he did eventually marry—at age forty-six.<sup>[16]</sup> In the eighteenth century Moses Mendelssohn, the founder of the Berlin Haskalah, wrote to his fiancée, Fromet Guggenheim:

Your amorousness requires me in these letters to transcend all conventional ceremonies. For, just as we needed no marriage brokers for our [engagement], so we need no ceremonies for our correspondence. . . . The heart will answer these instead.<sup>[17]</sup>

Mendelssohn not only broke with the convention of using a marriage broker, but he also dispensed with the custom of writing formulaic letters based on literary models known as *egronim*. Just as writing autobiographies was a way of establishing a unique sense of one's individuality, so writing genuine love letters seemed to be a way of breaking out of the uniformity imposed by tradition. Paradoxically, some of the maskilim were to compose their own letter formularies as ways of educating young Jews to greater romantic spontaneity.

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If some maskilim rebelled at the time their engagements were arranged, many of the younger boys who would later become maskilim responded quite differently to their engagements. Some reported experiencing feelings similar to romantic love toward their prospective brides, usually before they actually met them. For instance, Isaac Ber Levinsohn (1788–1860), one of the first Russian maskilim, wrote a love poem to his fiancée, as it turned out, soon after they married some three years later, their relationship turned sour and ended in divorce.<sup>[18]</sup> Similarly, Abraham Ber Gottlober relates in his autobiography that he began to develop feelings of love for his bride-to-be during their exchange of formulaic letters and before they had even met.<sup>[19]</sup> Pauline Wengeroff, one of the few women to write an autobiography, recounts the fantasies and dreams she had about her husband during their engagement.<sup>[20]</sup> These examples reinforce what we have already suggested regarding the status of love in Ashkenazic Jewish society of earlier times. Clearly, some like Levinsohn and Gottlober came to reject the system of arranged marriage only later, either when they became maskilim or when their marriages faltered.

The maskilim also fiercely attacked the practice of not allowing the bride and groom to meet until the day of the wedding. The only contact allowed was usually in the form of formulaic letters. This poses a historical dilemma: in the late Middle Ages, meetings between a couple during the engagement period were not uncommon and might even lead to sexual relations, a Jewish form of "bundling." Yet the memoirs of the maskilim are quite emphatic about the lack of contact until the wedding.<sup>[21]</sup> It may well be that the custom of keeping bride and groom apart was particularly strong among the elite, the social group from which most of the maskilim themselves came, and that matters were looser among the lower classes. Or this may be a case where a particular social practice was not universal, but those who rebelled against it, either because of their own experience or for ideological reasons, chose to make it appear as such.

Whether the engagement appeared to be a kind of puerile romance from a safe distance or the tyranny of a heartless society, the marriage itself seemed to many of our memoirists like the death of childhood. Adam Hacoheh Lebensohn, one of the outstanding poets of the first generation of the Russian Haskalah, was born in 1794 and married in 1807 at age thirteen. He wrote: "I had not yet had a chance to become a young man when they already made me a husband and father while I was still a child."<sup>[22]</sup> Gottlober speaks of the child snatched out of the paradise of childhood and forced to eat prematurely of the apple of love, which he calls "honey mixed with poison."<sup>[23]</sup> In this version of Adam's fall, early marriage was the kiss of death. Indeed, the maskilim often portrayed their adolescence as premature old age. Moses Leib Lilienblum, writing at age twenty-nine, characterizes himself as an old man, a tragedy he at-

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tributes to his premature marriage. This feeling that one has already failed at the outset of life was characteristic of eighteenth-century German intellectuals as well,<sup>[24]</sup> but for the maskilim it was a direct product of early marriage.

Some of the maskilim associated premature marriage with sexual trauma, and, as the graphic case of the eighteenth-century minors showed in the last chapter, they did not invent the problem. Guenzburg was the most explicit on this subject. He tells us that he married before he was sexually mature, when he still had no interest in members of the opposite sex. To make matters worse, he describes his wife, who was older than he, as a "masculine female," whereas he was a "feminine male." The wedding night, needless to say, was a sexual catastrophe, and the second night no better. What followed tells us a great deal about sexuality in traditional Jewish culture. Although public displays of sexuality were thoroughly forbidden, a sexual dysfunction such as Guenzburg's impotence became the subject of intense scrutiny by his in-laws. It was obviously discussed by one and all, and the boy's mother-in-law concocted some home-brew medicine that almost did him in. In the end, Guenzburg was sent to a doctor who temporarily cured him with techniques that resemble today's behavior modification; the doctor, a maskil, also prescribed treatment for his intellectual dysfunction in the form of Haskalah ideas. This dual treatment suggests that for Guenzburg, as perhaps for others, the cure for problems of Eros could only come through enlightenment, just as the failure of sexuality could be laid at the doorstep of traditional Jewish life as a whole.

While no other memoir quite matches Guenzburg's for sexual explicitness, a number of the others allude in more circumspect language to sexual problems. These problems also played a role in fiction.<sup>[25]</sup> For these writers, the trauma of premature sexuality seems to have made a mature relationship with the new wife extraordinarily difficult and, in some cases, contributed to a later divorce. When the maskilim came to adopt European ideals of romantic love, their own premature encounter with Eros created a bitter tension between ideology and reality.

These memoirists were plagued by other problems as well: separation from parents and

adaptation to new in-laws. Virtually all wedding contracts stipulated that the in-laws would support the young husband as a student for a number of years, while he and his wife lived in their house. The length of the period of *kest* varied according to the wealth of the parties, but it typically covered a substantial portion of adolescence. Thus, during this critical stage of life the boy lived with his in-laws and not with his biological parents. From the literature on the English public school, we know what it meant to spend one's teenage years away from home, or—closer to our subject—we know of the experiences of apprentices and house servants separated from parents at an early age. While

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young Jewish boys experienced many of the same problems, their situation as sons-in-law was at once better and worse. They could be pampered as prize possessions, or, as Solomon Maimon, Guenzburg, and Lilienblum attest, their in-laws could become persecutors.

Solomon Maimon's autobiography, written in Germany after he had fled Poland, provides one of the most striking accounts of relations with in-laws—in his case, as in many others, with the mother-in-law. Maimon describes the brutal beatings she inflicted on him, for which he amply repaid her with a variety of cruel practical jokes.<sup>[26]</sup> Lilienblum states: "It was my mother-in-law who in a real sense was the creator of this autobiography, that is, of the tragic part of it."<sup>[27]</sup> These youths experienced a distinct tension between their new status as married men and the infantilizing and sometimes violent treatment visited on them by their in-laws.

As the memoirs we have been discussing were all written by men, we might wonder about the experience of the young wives caught between their parents and their new husbands. In an earlier chapter, we tried to glean some evidence of women's experience of marriage from the few texts available to us, but we are at an equal disadvantage when it comes to the wives of the maskilim or of other "modernizing" husbands. Most of the evidence comes through the filter of these male autobiographies. The natural difficulties of marriage in early adolescence must have been exacerbated when the young husband began to espouse the strange ideas of the Haskalah. Many of the maskilim recount the conflicts that their wives experienced between affection for their husbands and loyalty to their parents in whose houses they remained.

The autobiography of Pauline Wengeroff is our only direct evidence from a woman. Wengeroff's husband, although not an intellectual, or maskil, became a highly Russified merchant, and her children all converted to Russian Orthodoxy. Her autobiography is a lament, entitled "The Memoirs of a Grandmother," intended to preserve the memory of an utterly alien world for her grandchildren. She perceives herself in the memoir as the upholder of tradition against the modernizing drive of her husband and children; in this, Wengeroff followed the nineteenth-century German Jewish preachers who extolled women as the defenders of tradition.<sup>[28]</sup> Wengeroff lived in the house of her in-laws, with all its attendant difficulties, for four years, a reversal of the usual pattern; her situation was therefore comparable to that of most of our male memoirists.

Whether these experiences were also characteristic of those of women in traditional Jewish society as a whole is harder to determine, since the Wengeroff family was so wealthy and so far along the road to assimilation. A fascinating case from the mid-nineteenth century offers us some insight into the experience of a young town girl who goes to live with her husband's family in the countryside—again, the reverse of the usual arrangement. Not only is she disconsolate at leaving her family and

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lonely in the unfamiliar rural setting, but she is seduced by her father-in-law while her young husband is off at school. The way the scandal developed tells us a great deal about the complex family dynamics in these marital arrangements:

Her mother-in-law spoke to her husband [that is, the girl's father-in-law] and urged him to befriend her so that she would forget her concerns. He began to befriend her and walked with her a number of times in the forest there. The young wife related this to her husband and said that his father had fondled her and kissed her. Her husband told her not to go walking with him, but she did not listen to him and continued to walk with her father-in-law as before.<sup>[29]</sup>

Whether this was a case of sexual molestation or of consent cannot be determined, but it is clear that the extraordinary pressures of spending one's adolescence in the house of in-laws could have as dislocating an effect on girls as on boys.

For most males in traditional Jewish society, and some of the females, the battles of adolescence were not waged with their biological parents but with their in-laws. When the maskilim turned this situation into an ideological struggle, they bifurcated the family into the "good" biological family of childhood and the "bad" family of their marriages. Their entrance into the family of the in-laws spelled the end of paradise and the beginning of hopelessness, despair, and senescence. And it was during this period that they typically discovered the ideas of the Haskalah, a discovery that brought them into severe conflict with their in-laws. Gottlober for instance, was forced to divorce his wife, whom he loved deeply, when his father-in-law learned that he had fallen into the heretical clutches of the Enlightenment. As late as the 1880s the Hebrew writer Micha Yosef Berdichevsky (1865–1921) was forced to divorce his first wife for the same reasons.

Even when not coerced by in-laws, divorce was frequently the result of the trauma of adolescent marriage mixed with Haskalah ideology.<sup>[30]</sup> The breakup of their marriages rarely led to more successful second marriages. Lilienblum could not imagine turning his extramarital intellectual relationship with an enlightened young woman named Feyge Novakhovitch into a sexual one: he could feel safe only at an epistolary distance, in a relationship based on the word rather than on the flesh.<sup>[31]</sup> Many of these intellectuals, for whom mature eroticism seemed unattainable, blamed the tradition for their failure.

Since the maskilim often could not realize their ideal family, some despaired of the institution



altogether. Abraham Mapu wrote to his brother: "Only one in a thousand will derive joy from family life, and even that will only be a facade."<sup>[32]</sup> Eliezer Zweifel expressed similar senti-

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ments in a poem entitled "The Woman." Married off at age twelve or thirteen, he fled his wife, who refused for many years to accept a writ of divorce from him. In his poem, which is patterned on the Book of Lamentations, he resolves that rather than marry, it would be better to follow the example of Ben Azzai, the second-century rabbi who preferred marriage to the Torah over marriage to a wife.<sup>[33]</sup> The Torah here is, of course Haskalah, rather than the rabbinic tradition. Striking indeed is how some maskilim adopted the model of celibacy, which had been rejected by the talmudic rabbis, as a theme in their revolt against the rabbinic tradition. In this, they came unintentionally close to their Hasidic opponents.

Small wonder that the maskilim should turn to male friendships for comfort in their shattered personal lives. Mapu writes to his brother: "Yes, the love of women is strong, but as its price, it takes the souls of the husbands. . . . Not so is brotherhood whose candle will never be extinguished."<sup>[34]</sup> Time and again, Mapu, like other Haskalah writers, uses frankly erotic language to describe male friendships. To his brother, for instance, he wrote: "My right hand embraces you and my lips kiss your lips."<sup>[35]</sup> Would it be too bold to suggest that the erotic energies that some of the maskilim failed to direct toward women found their targets in men? While we must not impute too much to these conventions of epistolary style, it is significant that such language seemed appropriate between men but not between men and women, leading to an almost sectarian comradeship and ideology of friendship in the Haskalah. Whatever the affective valences of these friendships, they provided emotional outlets inconceivable within marriage.

In its cult of male friendship, the Haskalah unwittingly reproduced the feelings of male camaraderie that characterized its hated foe, Hasidism. While the maskilim did not congregate around charismatic leaders as did the Hasidim, they, too, sought solace in relationships with other men. Beyond Hasidism, such male fellowships had an even longer legacy in the mystical brotherhoods in Safed and in the rabbinic academies, both those contemporary with the Haskalah and those throughout Jewish history going back to talmudic times. Unable to create a truly egalitarian community between the sexes, the maskilim ironically returned to the male-oriented pattern of the tradition.

The maskilim also replicated in the Jewish setting a general tendency in Europe since the Enlightenment to create a community of male friendship (*Männerbund*), which often found its highest expression in the experience of warfare.<sup>[36]</sup> While the Haskalah did not share in this aggressive form of male camaraderie, it did make a similar connection between friendship and the creation of an incipient form of modern nationalism.

### Eros, Marriage, and the Discourse of Capitalism

For the maskilim, the Enlightenment provided an avenue of escape from the pressure cooker of the adoptive family. It allowed them to attack the very social system that had torn them out of their parents' arms, only to bury them in the graveyard of an early marriage. If Hasidism and the yeshivot also offered means of escape from the life of the traditional family, they did not provide the weapons of direct criticism. Those young men who discovered the Haskalah found or, better, invented an ideology that matched their experience. What had been denied to the flesh might be liberated by the word.

As a result of this interplay of ideology and identity in their adolescent years, the maskilim combined their attack on the system of arranged early marriage with their critique of traditional society and their program for reform. This critique was closely tied to an economic vision based on a capitalist ethic. In the 1840s, for example, Adam Hacoen Lebensohn wrote an important memorandum to Moses Montefiore, the English Jewish philanthropist who undertook a mission to investigate the condition of the Russian Jews.<sup>[37]</sup> Lebensohn listed four reasons for the impoverished and degenerate state of the Jews, the second of which was early marriage. Lebensohn blamed early marriage for the failure of fathers to find productive professions and also for the birth of Jewish children with physical weaknesses, an argument borrowed from eighteenth-century medicine.<sup>[38]</sup>

As Lebensohn's memorandum to Montefiore demonstrates, the maskilim believed that early marriage contributed to the unproductive nature of the traditional Jewish economy. Instead of learning a worthwhile profession, the young married man was expected to study, a parasite supported first by his in-laws and later by his wife. In Peretz Smolenskin's novel *Ha-Toeh be-Darkhei ha-Hayyim* (Wanderer in the Paths of Life), for instance, a young Hasid tells a maskil who wants to know how he supports himself: "Is my mother-in-law paralyzed that I should have to earn a living? Until the day the worms take up residence in her corpse, she will go on working and supply our needs."<sup>[39]</sup> The maskilim advocated destroying this system and urged that adolescence be devoted to learning a productive occupation. Marriage should come later, when the boy himself could support a wife. Adolescence should be a period of some autonomy, and the burdens of family life should be delayed.

There was yet a further dimension to the connection between productivization and marriage in Haskalah ideology. For the maskilim, traditional marriage was a commercial transaction unsuited to the modern world. Instead of money being earned by productive labor or capitalist initiative, Jewish financial transactions were epitomized by the *shiddukh*,

or engagement. In fact, this portrait of marriage as a financial transaction was largely correct, as we can learn from the autobiographies of Glückel of Hameln and Jacob Emden.<sup>[40]</sup> For many Jews, these

transactions must have been economically among the most significant of their lives. The maskilim were particularly hostile to the institution of the *shadkhan*, or matchmaker, because they considered him an unproductive parasite, living off marriage commissions, and they suspected him of playing a major role in keeping the age of marriage inordinately young.

Israel Aksenfeld's Yiddish novel *Dos Shterntikhl* (The Headband),<sup>[41]</sup> written in the 1840s, makes this point in an allegory about the conflict between the old commercial values, represented by the marital headband with its valuable stones, and the new ethos of capitalism.<sup>[42]</sup> The former is based on fixed wealth, and the latter on liquid. Women represent medieval values and are portrayed with an utter lack of sympathy. The novel's hero, Mikhl, symbolically defeats the old world by marrying the heroine but presenting her with a *shterntikhl* made of false pearls. Once the *shterntikhl* and the values it represents are shown up as bogus, the new capitalist spirit that Mikhl has acquired in Germany can prevail.

Influenced by the nascent Russian feminist movement, later Jewish writers such as Y. L. Gordon and Lilienblum sought to liberate the Jewish woman from the yoke of traditional marriage, a modern version of the medieval Spanish and Italian literature "in defense of women." Gordon's poem "Al Kotzo shel Yod" (The Dot on the I) probably remains the most eloquent literary denunciation of the oppression of women by Jewish law and is certainly the first attempt by a man to write from a woman's point of view.<sup>[43]</sup> Lilienblum, too, wrote several manifestos against the traditional view of women, denouncing in particular what he rather crudely labeled the wife as "chamber pot" (*avit shel shofkhn*).<sup>[44]</sup> Lilienblum argued that the tasks assigned to the wife by traditional Judaism could as well be discharged by a servant, and he advocated a companionate marriage to replace traditional marriage.

Because of the commercial nature of traditional marriage, women were subject to dangerous sexual temptation. The maskilim believed that women in the marketplace—a role quite common for Jewish women in Eastern Europe—were in moral peril. This was the ostensible reason that the maskilim preached taking women out of commerce, just as they advocated removing marriage from the marketplace. In one of his didactic letter formularies, Guenzburg praises the customs of countries where men work and women stay at home; in his own country, he complains, the women engage in business and their morals have deteriorated.<sup>[45]</sup> Ayzik Meyer Dik, the best-selling author of Yiddish pulp novels, also considered the marketplace a disaster for feminine morality. With his characteristic lack of subtlety, he writes in one of his novels: "The women of

Israel and their daughters sit selling all kinds of silk and linen and everyone who comes to buy wants to try out the taste of a virgin."<sup>[46]</sup> For the maskilim, both marriage and women had to be decommercialized since both were morally degenerate: their goal was a kind of bourgeois respectability that might be attained only by restricting women to hearth and home.

The maskilim envisioned a family in which the position of women was at once better and worse

than in the traditional family or, at least, in their image of the traditional family. While they experienced their mothers-in-law and, to a lesser extent, their wives as powerful and domineering, they imagined an ideal family in which power implicitly lay in the hands of the husband. Their revolt against the traditional family was a revolt against a perceived matriarchal family. If the wife was to be liberated from the yoke of traditional marriage, she must also be divorced from the power that women were thought to wield in the old system. While the maskilim directed their polemics against a specifically Jewish system of marriage and family, their goal was the same as that of other nineteenth-century advocates of domesticity—upholding such values as privacy and chastity.<sup>[47]</sup> Their solution to what they saw as the promiscuity and sexual dysfunction of traditional Jewish society was the imposition of bourgeois constraints upon desire.

Not all Haskalah writers preached erotic conservatism, however. One extraordinary exception—perhaps unique—was Judah Leib Ben-Ze'ev (1764-1811). Ben-Ze'ev was born in Cracow but spent most of his adult life in Berlin, where he was active in the Berlin Haskalah. There he wrote a number of scholarly works on Hebrew linguistics. In addition, however, he penned a pornographic poem in Haskalah Hebrew that, although not published until this century, circulated in manuscript in Eastern Europe and was reputed to be an underground favorite among young Hasidim.<sup>[48]</sup> Cleverly adapting phrases from the Song of Songs, the poet describes in great detail an act of sexual intercourse between his male narrator and a woman whom he "picks up" at a ball. A typical author of pornography, Ben-Ze'ev was interested only in the physical interaction and ignored any emotional or other transcendent dimension. He therefore strips the language of the Song of Songs of centuries of theological allegorization and replaces it with pornographic allegory. For example, he turns the biblical phrase "my beloved" (*dodi*) into a euphemism for the penis. The verse "So my beloved has gone down into his garden" (6:2) becomes a metaphor for the actual act of intercourse. When the Shulamit says of her lover, "I held him fast, I would not let him go / Till I brought him to my mother's house" (3:4), Ben-Ze'ev gives the verse what we would anachronistically call a "Freudian" interpretation: the "mother's house" becomes the vagina. Ben-Ze'ev's rendering of the

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Song of Songs is surely among the most physically erotic to which the biblical poem has ever been subjected, far exceeding even its original meaning.

Ben-Ze'ev does not limit himself to describing the man's pleasure; he gives full attention to the woman's as well, an extraordinary shift in point of view, given when the poem was written:

She closed her hand around me and squeezed  
 So that my beloved could not spring free  
 She thrust her thighs, down and up,  
 Racing, racing the horse of her war  
 For her heart was stormy with the flame of her love.

Ben-Ze'ev obviously had no doubts that women have orgasms: the poem ends with both partners reaching a graphically described climax.

Ben-Ze'ev's erotic poem was a unique exception in Haskalah literature, occasioned, no doubt, by the desire to explore the full capacities of the Hebrew language. It was certainly not emblematic of the Haskalah's general approach to sexuality, an approach characterized more by frustration and failure. Perhaps as a result of their own traumatic histories, they had difficulty envisioning true erotic liberation. They desired marriages based on companionship in which bourgeois respectability would substitute for traditional chastity and in which women would be placed firmly within the confines of the home. Intent on freeing both men and women from the erotic repression of traditional marriage, the disciples of the Enlightenment constructed modern versions of the ills they believed to be endemic to medieval Judaism.

### **New Marital Customs in the Traditional World**

The maskilim saw themselves as an isolated and embattled group of rebels in a world still mired in traditional practices, a world in which romantic love and free choice in marriage were alien ideals. But was this an accurate portrait of the Jewish culture of Eastern Europe? We have already seen that the range of possibilities in Jewish society was much broader than rabbinic norms might suggest: not all marriages were arranged in disregard of the emotions, and not all Jews followed the strict sexual ethic proclaimed by the legal codes. During the nineteenth century a variety of modern ideas infiltrated into this world and added new dimensions to the complexities of traditional culture. Moreover, important social changes undermined the stability of traditional norms.

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The Jewish population in the Russian empire increased dramatically during the nineteenth century. Under Nicholas I, communal institutions were weakened by a governmental policy of Russification of the Jews. Later in the century, especially following the pogroms of 1881, large portions of the Jewish population were uprooted, some moving into the cities of Russia and others emigrating to the West. All these changes weakened traditional patterns of life. The rise of Jewish prostitution in Russian cities and of a white slave trade abroad were both examples of the breakdown of sexual controls. In the Russian census of 1897, for example, there were forty-four Jewish prostitutes for every hundred thousand women, the highest proportion of any ethnic group.<sup>[49]</sup>

Even before industrialization and emigration began to have a major effect on the Jewish family at the end of the nineteenth century, a quiet transformation was taking place within the traditional world. Despite the Haskalah portrait of continuing adolescent marriages, the age of marriage began to rise rapidly in the last third of the nineteenth century.<sup>[50]</sup> Whereas in 1867, some 43 percent of bridegrooms and 61 percent of brides were under the age of twenty, by 1897, the figures were only 5.8 percent and 27.7 percent. The responsa literature of the nineteenth century records a sharp decline in cases of child

marriage, a problem that had preoccupied eighteenth-century authorities. Those few cases of boys marrying before the age of thirteen were generally in the Hasidic communities, which tended to preserve old traditions longer than other factions of the Orthodox world; and most of these cases appear to date from the first half of the century.<sup>[51]</sup>

Independent of Haskalah polemics, Orthodox Jews were also beginning to change their attitudes toward the age of marriage and, perhaps as an unwitting consequence, toward the very nature of marriage itself. Moses Feivish (1817–1887), for instance, authored a popular treatise on the laws of marriage published in 1858. He opposed the marriage of boys at age thirteen and recommended that they marry at eighteen, since "the main period of study is in these years and therefore it is permitted to wait until this age."<sup>[52]</sup> The maskilim also wanted to reserve the years of adolescence for study, but Feivish's source was the old Palestinian tradition from talmudic times that had not been followed by most Ashkenazic Jews. Feivish also quoted the eighteenth-century Sephardic authority Hayyim Yosef Azulai, who argued against marriage at age thirteen because "the generations have grown weak." This physiological argument against early marriage was to be used repeatedly by rabbis later in the nineteenth century. Feivish, like his Haskalah contemporaries, may have arrived at his position out of his own experience. Married at age fourteen, he ran away with his wife to a yeshiva in Vilna when his in-laws refused to let him study.<sup>[53]</sup>

The yeshiva world as a whole came to accept the notion of study be-

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fore marriage. Naphtali Zvi Berlin (1817–1893), the head of the great Volozhin yeshiva, stated in 1879 that early marriage was medically unsound, even though young people in earlier generations may have been able to cope with it. In his commentary on Exodus 1:7, which recounts the population explosion of the Israelites in Egypt, Berlin wrote: "Girls who begin to give birth when they are young become weak and sickly. And the same is true of males who use their sexual organs for procreation in the days of their youth. They become weak in health."<sup>[54]</sup> This medical argument had already been advanced in the eighteenth century by Jacob Emden in a responsum against child marriage; it reflected a widespread opinion of the European Enlightenment that was used in support of raising the legal age of marriage.

Berlin, as the head of the Volozhin yeshiva, gave this view an institutional dimension. The Lithuanian yeshivot did not accept married men, and it was only in 1879 that the *kolel* was established as a parallel institution for married students. The age of marriage among the yeshiva students rose dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century, until it stood at around twenty-five.<sup>[55]</sup> By putting study before marriage, the yeshiva movement may have been a factor in the rising marriage age. With the claim that young boys were not sexually ready for marriage, these Orthodox authorities unconsciously placed themselves in the same camp as their archenemies, the maskilim.

One of the major summaries of Jewish law from the early twentieth century, the *Arukh ha-*

*Shulhan* of Yehiel Michael Epstein (1829–1908), confirms this shift in priorities. Epstein echoes Feivish that "the instincts have weakened in these generations," making marriage to avoid masturbation and temptation less necessary. One should first study and then wed at age eighteen. Rejecting the earlier Ashkenazic tradition of child marriage, Epstein concludes: "And there is no reason to discuss this matter at length since it is virtually nonexistent in our time."<sup>[56]</sup>

As the age of marriage rose, children of traditional families were able to exercise greater choice in mates, even if parents continued to arrange the match. Thus, Solomon Schwadron (d. 1911) reported the following case from Galicia:

The groom objects in front of a number of people and he also says to his mother that he has not yet seen the face of the bride. [But] since it is the father's custom to intimidate the household, they were afraid to tell him [of the son's objections], and they wrote the contract of engagement. And now, the groom has seen the bride and he does not like her, since she is very short and not pretty and is a bit repulsive.<sup>[57]</sup>

According to this responsum, a meeting between bride and groom before the engagement would have been possible had the father not been so for-

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bidding. Schwadron rules that the engagement may be broken without penalty since the son's wishes should have been taken into account.<sup>[58]</sup> The rabbi sympathizes with the boy's reasons for rejecting the girl, and he quotes from the Song of Songs to the effect that height is a desirable trait in a bride. The plaintiff makes special mention of the father's domineering behavior—might this mean that the typical Jewish household was less patriarchal than this one?

Schwadron's ruling in favor of the son had precedents in the Middle Ages, especially in the *Sefer Hasidim*, but it appears as well to reflect the growing influence of ideas of romantic love. Pauline Wengeroff reports that her older sister did not meet her fiancé until the day of the wedding, but a few years later, in 1849, she and her husband-to-be met unchaperoned and exchanged love letters.<sup>[59]</sup> In another case from 1879, two young people tried to arrange their own marriage based on the new notions of romantic love:

The boy Chaim said that for a long time, perhaps four or five years, the soul of the virgin [Nehama] had adhered to him in love . . . and, once, the two of them found themselves by chance together in the community of Likewe [?] and they talked together day and night. She said to him that it seemed to her that their love was eternal. During this whole time, she wrote him many letters containing statements of love and affection. In one of the letters she wrote that he should find a way of avoiding an engagement with another since she would certainly find some trick to become his wife, even though she was already engaged to someone else.<sup>[60]</sup>

Although there was nothing particularly new about clandestine love, this account does contain some singularly modern elements. The boy and girl meet in a community to which each has traveled independently, suggesting a certain autonomy that may have been a result of a more advanced age. In fact, there are a number of indications of new possibilities for boys and girls to meet unchaperoned. In particular, walks in the fields or forests, beyond the boundaries of the shtetl, became increasingly popular and provided an unsupervised opportunity for intercourse (of all kinds) between the sexes. As the Hebrew writer M. Y. Berdichevsky noted in a story from the end of the nineteenth century: "A generation went and a generation came and a new generation rose in Israel, a generation that began to walk on the Sabbaths at the borders of the city."<sup>[61]</sup> A new interest in nature can be found in this custom, an interest that went hand in hand with romantic values.

Like Moses Mendelssohn's letters to his fiancée, the letters mentioned in this responsum were not copied from the traditional letter formularies. They were instead spontaneous expressions of affection that would never have been put into writing earlier. But what of the use of the word

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"love" in this responsum and in the letters that it quotes? Was this a continuation of the subterranean career of love in the traditional Jewish world, or was it the result of modern influence? Although there may be no definitive way of answering this question, the world of nineteenth-century Eastern European Jews was filled with popular literature and folk songs that inculcated romantic ideas in the general population. Much of this literature expanded the medieval folk traditions we have already examined in new directions.

Yiddish chapbooks were one source for romantic ideas, especially for female readers.<sup>[62]</sup> Many of these anonymous texts turned traditional practices into vehicles for romance. For example, a girl and boy might fall in love, only to discover at the end of the story that they were destined for each other by a vow (*tekiyas kaf*) sworn between their parents at their birth. One remarkable anonymous tale tells of the daughter of a rabbi from Constantinople who is engaged to a rabbi's son from Brisk in Lithuania, a geographical flight of fancy typical of such literature.<sup>[63]</sup> She is the best student in her father's yeshiva in Constantinople, also an improbable detail, since girls were not allowed to study in yeshivot.<sup>[64]</sup> The engagement with the boy in Brisk takes place when she is twelve and she and the groom accept it with enthusiasm, exchanging the traditional formulaic letters with each other. But her curiosity gets the better of her, so, disguised as a boy, she travels with another yeshiva student to Brisk, where she enters the yeshiva of her intended. There, she makes a great impression and encounters the boy, but they do not "know" each other, implying that the audience would have wondered about such a possibility. At one point, he becomes ill and she cures him by exposing her breasts!

This story of a transvestite talmudic prodigy, with its erotic innuendo, resembles Isaac Bashevis Singer's famous "Yentl the Yeshivah Boy." What is so striking here is the mix of traditional elements, such as the details of the engagement, with the subversive, such as the girl's talmudic knowledge, her



bold initiatives, and, finally, the sexual suggestions. In this fashion, the story may have appealed to a traditional audience, but it allowed that audience, particularly if it was female, a fictional reversal of gender relations.

Signs of the infiltration of modern ideas of romantic love into Jewish popular culture can also be found in nineteenth-century Jewish folklore and folk songs.<sup>[65]</sup> One folk song relates how a girl who falls in love with a boy commits suicide as a result of opposition from her parents, while another recounts the suicide of a boy for the same reasons. Yet another song, which may have been based on an actual incident that occurred in Moldavia in the early 1870s, is the story of a groom who, enraged by the opposition of his girlfriend's parents, kills her and then attempts, unsuccessfully, to kill himself.<sup>[66]</sup> Some versions of the song do not mention the

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attempted suicide and treat him as a murderer rather than a romantic figure. The parents regret their opposition and call on other parents not to interfere in their children's romantic affairs. This explicit message is, indeed, the implicit message of all these folk songs. In the conflict between parents and children over marital choices, nineteenth-century popular culture increasingly sided with the children.

A number of Yiddish writers who were influenced by the Haskalah exploited this taste for romantic popular literature in order to propagandize explicitly for modern values. Such figures included Shomer and A. M. Dik, both of whom fed their readers an endless diet of the Jewish equivalent of Harlequin romances.<sup>[67]</sup> While the chapbooks tended to build their romances around the traditional predestined matches, these writers, following the Haskalah, put the young couple more fully in control of their fate, as in the title of one of Dik's romances, "The Match without Matchmakers."<sup>[68]</sup> Romantic love was now tied to the new bourgeois values. Dik, in particular, emphasized the distinction between his Enlightenment point of view and the older Yiddish romances that, in his opinion, inculcated immorality. He reflected, in 1860, on his phenomenal literary success:

I wrote . . . for the benefit of our women whose eyes look only into a *Taytsh-khumesh* [a Yiddish Bible; Dik is referring to the *Tsene-rene*] written in a language of stammerers which includes unseemly passages that should never be read by pious women and maidens. Not so my own stories written as they are in a fine style, full of ethical teaching, free of any words of eroticism and blemish and they instruct the women to walk in the paths of righteousness and to turn away from all evil.<sup>[69]</sup>

As we have seen, the maskilim regarded traditional Jewish culture as hypocritical: it preached upright behavior but, in fact, practiced promiscuity. Dik offered his romances as a new form of ethical exempla in which the traditional virtue of modesty might be wedded to bourgeois respectability. But these romances, for all their putative Haskalah values, pandered to the same thirst for romance that informed the chapbook literature he criticized. The line between old and new was often not as clear as

the Haskalah writers themselves believed, especially in the works of those who, like Dik and Shomer, wrote in Yiddish for the masses.

The popular culture of nineteenth-century Jews marked a transition from "traditional" to "modern" values, but that transition was not straightforward. Since notions of love, though not necessarily defined in purely modern terms, circulated in Jewish culture throughout the Middle Ages, they formed a kind of foundation for new romantic and erotic attitudes during the nineteenth century. Although the maskilim painted a bleak portrait of traditional society as devoid of any romance, that soci-

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ety was already undergoing changes under the surface that made it increasingly receptive to Haskalah values.

### **The Literary Revolution of the Turn of the Century**

By the end of the nineteenth century, a new Jewish nationalism had spread through Eastern Europe, transforming the Haskalah in the process. This nationalism was itself the product of broad developments in the Russian empire, including the pogroms and political persecutions of the 1880s and early 1900s and economic impoverishment, especially in the 1890s. The Jewish communities of Eastern Europe spawned a variety of political movements in response to these worsening conditions, from Zionism to the socialist workers' Bund. This new politics was accompanied by a Hebrew and Yiddish literary revival that featured a new stylistic realism.

Influenced by political developments, the writers of this period rejected the Haskalah's optimistic belief that a rational program of reform might change Jewish society. They nevertheless remained indebted to the Haskalah's critique of tradition. They concurred with the Haskalah belief that love and erotic fulfillment were, by definition, foreign to traditional Jewish culture.<sup>[70]</sup> In the words of a character from an early novel by Berdichevsky: "I am not to blame that I cannot find the love that I seek, but rather my ancestors with all their way of thinking and their books . . . which suppressed our spirit and crippled our stature."<sup>[71]</sup>

One of the sharpest critiques along these lines is the story "The Tale of the Scribe" by the great twentieth-century Hebrew writer S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970). Agnon satirically portrays a Torah scribe who is so consumed with exaggerated sanctity that he lives a virtually celibate life with his wife; her barrenness, Agnon intimates, is really the result of his abstinence. Given the perceived lack of romance in Jewish society, these writers could not envision a Jewish novel in the conventional European sense of the word: the Yiddish writer Shalom Aleichem subtitled one of his early novels, *Sender Blank* (1887), as a *roman on a roman* (a novel without romance).<sup>[72]</sup>

Some writers did, however, believe that if love and sexuality were foreign to the establishment, they might be found among the lower classes of Jewish society. Shalom Aleichem's early novel *Stempenyu* (1888) describes the licentiousness of Jewish musicians (*klezmerim*). One such musician,

Stempenyu, tries to seduce an honorable Jewish girl, Rochelle, into having an extramarital affair with him. After meeting him on *Monastery Road* (sexual license is thus figured as gentile!), she manages

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to overcome temptation and return to her husband. Although *Stempenyu* appears on the surface to be a celebration of such "good Jewish daughters," Shalom Aleichem, in his typical fashion, satirizes the fate of these Jewish women: they have no hope of real love and any attempt to find it must end in tragedy. The Jewish middle class is doubly cursed by the repressive Jewish tradition and by nascent bourgeois respectability.

Some writers of the period turned to folklore in hopes of recovering there the ostensible erotic traditions of the lower class. Berdichevsky collected vast anthologies of folktales for the purpose of demonstrating that the repressive and passive rabbinic tradition was not monolithic.<sup>[73]</sup> Under the influence of Nietzsche, Berdichevsky found vitality and eroticism in these popular countertraditions and believed that they might form the basis for a "new Hebrew man." Zionism would resurrect these same ideas in its revolt against the alleged passivity of the Diaspora.

In his fiction, Berdichevsky harnessed elements of traditional folklore to his ideological wagon. The story "In Their Mothers' Wombs,"<sup>[74]</sup> for example, relates how two Hasidic fathers make an oath to marry their as yet unborn children, a typical theme in popular tales. One father becomes wealthy and the other poor, and the wealthy one wants to renege on his oath. He gets his chance when the boy and the girl are caught walking secretly in the woods: the engagement contract is ripped up and the boy and girl, who had been "joined since they were in their mothers' wombs," are separated. Modern romantic love, symbolized by the walk in the woods, is linked to the traditional *tekiyas kaf*, but the two are destroyed by materialistic parents. The folk has the right instincts, but the oppressive culture of the establishment thwarts it.

Another folklorist motivated by the same ideology was S. An-ski (1863–1920). In 1912, An-ski led an ethnographic expedition to collect Jewish folklore from the vanishing world of the Russian Jewish shtetl. Although An-ski's still-popular play "The Dybbuk," first produced in 1920, is usually considered to be a straightforward retelling of a folktale, it is, in fact, another example of how a writer of this period shaped folklore to advance his own agenda. "The Dybbuk" takes the typical Haskalah form of a conflict between romantic love and the traditional *shiddukh*, but An-ski creates an alliance between popular Jewish culture and modern values against a repressive establishment. At the very outset, he suggests, through the voice of one of the "idlers" who act as a kind of Greek chorus, that in earlier, "purer" times, people made matches based on the virtues of the couple themselves, while, more recently, admiration of wealth and paternity have corrupted Jewish marriage.<sup>[75]</sup> Following the standard theme from popular culture, Chanon, the brilliant young Kabbalist, is promised to Leah in an oath sworn by their parents before their birth. This *tekiyas kaf* signifies predestination: the love that ultimately develops between them is sanctioned by heaven. But following Chanon's

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sudden death, Leah is betrothed to another based on purely pragmatic considerations by the parents.

In revenge, Chanon possesses her in the form of a *dybbuk* (the spirit of a deceased person) and refuses to let her marry the boy her father has chosen for her. Like the Maid of Ludmir, Leah becomes both male and female when the *dybbuk* enters her, and this gender confusion subverts the arranged marriage. Possession by the *dybbuk*, with its sexual overtones, symbolizes a kind of erotic revolt against the reactionary establishment of rabbis and parents, but because of the prior pledge between the parents, it is a revolt that has divine backing.

Chanon is a Kabbalist, but his Kabbalah is really a camouflaged form of erotic modernism. Like the talmudic apostate Aher to whom he is compared, he says of himself: "I am one of those who searches for new ways."<sup>[76]</sup> He propounds a doctrine of the "holiness of sin" and asserts that the greatest sin, lust for a woman, can be purified into the greatest holiness, the Song of Songs. Like Ben-Ze'ev's reworking of the Song of Songs, Chanon therefore restores the erotic biblical poem to its original, nonallegorical meaning: his "Kabbalah" is at once traditional and radically modern.

Yet the tragic end of the story, in which Leah, too, dies and is united with Chanon in the other world, suggests that romantic love cannot yet find a home in this world. While romantic tragedy of this sort could be found in such Yiddish romances of the late Middle Ages as the *Maase Beriah ve-Zimrah*, An-ski's play was a pessimistic reminder that the power of the establishment was still stronger than either the counterculture of the folk or the revolutionary doctrines of modernity. The original title of the play, "Between Two Worlds," may suggest not only the obvious "world of the living" and "world of the dead" but also the dilemma of Jews caught between the vanishing world of popular culture and the still-unborn world of modern values.

Although the power of conservative forces was in fact collapsing throughout the Eastern European Jewish world by the time An-ski wrote his play, his pessimism and that of many other Hebrew and Yiddish writers became the hallmark of the literary renaissance of the age. For the writers of the turn of the century, the Haskalah had failed to provide an alternative to the repressive establishment: on the political plane, its promise of integration was thwarted by the rise of a new anti-Semitism; and on the social plane, it could not deliver healthier institutions of Jewish life. Its rational version of the bourgeois family turned out to be a failure, both for the maskilim themselves and for society at large. Love and sexuality, it now transpired, were beyond rational solutions. Enlightenment now became the enemy of Eros: under the influence of fin de siècle *Lebensphilosophie*, intellectuals came to believe that the study of books, whether modern or traditional, stood in the way of erotic fulfill-

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ment. This new literature testified to the failure of Haskalah and therefore, self-referentially, to the failure of literature itself.

While the earlier maskilim had believed in the power of the word to transform the tradition and to liberate the writer, Hebrew writers such as Berdichevsky, Y. H. Brenner, M. Z. Feierberg, and U. N. Gneissin, to name only a few, were far less sanguine. They created new literary genres by turning the themes of the Haskalah autobiographies into fiction and poetry.<sup>[77]</sup> In this fictional mode of autobiography writers stood at a critical distance from both their fictional narrators and their protagonists. These writers turned their criticism against themselves, portraying their struggles (which the Haskalah memoirists took with the utmost seriousness) as the stuff of contempt and satire. While their antiheroes wallowed in self-pity, trapped in a hopeless internal monologue, they, their creators, stood off at a sardonic distance.

These antiheroes were paralyzed in all aspects of life, emotional and intellectual. But the core symbol of their paralysis was the problem of Eros, which all the writers of the period addressed much more explicitly and insistently than their Haskalah predecessors had done. The new emphasis on sexuality, which characterized European literature of the turn of the century, could only highlight the inadequacies these Jewish writers felt. In turning to *Lebensphilosophie* as an alternative to rationalism, they found themselves in a cruel dilemma: how difficult it must have been for these erotically frustrated intellectuals to try to imagine the liberation of the senses promised by the new irrationalist philosophy! Their predecessors had at least adopted a bourgeois version of modesty.

Love was the goal, but it could never be achieved and the male antiheroes of this literature were trapped in a kind of perpetual adolescence.<sup>[78]</sup> Presented with the possibility of an actual sexual relationship, the protagonists flee back to their books or, in some other way, abort the erotic encounter. In the words of Berdichevsky's anti-hero Elimelech, in "The Raven Flies":

There were times I simply wanted her. When we used to sit reading together, our souls enmeshed, I knew that all I had to do would be to take her in my arms and kiss her and then perhaps everything would be different. . . . But my hands would not perform the commission of my heart, so I would sit there reading, reading and wanting, wanting and reading.<sup>[79]</sup>

Such passivity and fruitless erotic entanglements became the hallmark of virtually all the male protagonists of the literary renaissance of the turn of the century, as well as in later literature. One extreme expression of this theme was the portrayal of sadomasochistic relationships, in which an aristocratic gentile woman often dominates an ineffectual Jewish man. These bizarre relationships are found at the turn of the century

in stories by Berdichevsky and later in works by S. Y. Agnon and David Vogel.<sup>[80]</sup> In our last chapter, we will see how the comic figure of the male Jew as sexual shlemiel in American Jewish culture recapitulated aspects of these passive antiheroes.

How is one to understand these passive, masochistic literary creations? One need not take such a prevalent theme in a body of literature as a reflection of the actual psychology of its writers; rather, one can see it as a representation of how those writers understood themselves and their contemporaries. The literary renaissance, it should be remembered, took place in the wake of the Russian pogroms of the 1880s and early 1900s and in tandem with the emergence of Jewish nationalism. Passivity became so important a theme in the writing of this period because it represented on a psychological and sexual plane the perceived passivity of the Jewish people that so preoccupied these writers. Berdichevsky, for example, proclaimed a Nietzschean revolt against rabbinical ethics, which had sapped the Jews of their vitality; he called for a nationalist return to nature and to elemental strength in place of bookish learning. In this context, the contrast between erotic desire and reading in "A Raven Flies" actually stands for the opposing values of power and intellection, the latter represented by both Jewish tradition and the Haskalah. To free oneself erotically becomes the individual mode of liberating the Jews as a nation from the passivity of exile. Conversely, the fictional sadomasochistic enslavement of a Jewish man by an aristocratic gentile woman serves as a symbol for the degradation of the Jewish people as a whole in Christian Europe.<sup>[81]</sup>

The literature of the Jewish national renaissance was caught between erotic passivity and the drive for political power. At a time when Jews were taking up arms and organizing politically in their own defense, the predominant fiction that they produced—a fiction intimately associated with this movement of national awakening—expressed impotence and pessimism. Thus, side by side with the ideology of national liberation, the persistence of passivity in this fiction illustrates that instead of freeing both Jewish sexuality and the Jewish people, this generation's self-image remained constrained by erotic passivity. Each writer need not have himself been passive in his relationships with women: it is enough that writers and readers believed that these difficulties characterized their generation and that they provided the psychological key to the powerlessness of the Jews.

Most of the literature of this renaissance was written by men, using the symbolism of male passivity and erotic confusion. Rebels in their own day against the rabbinic tradition, they later came to be canonized by Zionist culture as the spokesmen of a new national movement. As always, however, there were other discourses that accompanied and challenged the canon as well. By the beginning of the twentieth century,

women began to express themselves as writers and poets.<sup>[82]</sup> The vision of some of these women both corroborated and challenged that of the male writers.

One of the earliest writers of Hebrew fiction from that period was Dvorah Baron (1888–1956),

who composed most of her stories about Eastern Europe after emigrating to Palestine in 1911.<sup>[83]</sup> Baron wrote with outrage at the ill-treatment of women in Jewish family life,<sup>[84]</sup> but she also explored the theme of female sexuality. In one especially striking story,<sup>[85]</sup> she describes an Eastern European shtetl consisting only of women; the men have all left for America. As the gentile postman, Fedka, brings the women letters from their husbands, his relationship to them grows increasingly erotic. As opposed to the distant and therefore ineffectual Jewish men, Fedka is strong and attractive; when a fire sweeps through the town, he comes to protect the women. The women seek to seduce him; one of them transparently asks him to pull out a cork stuck in a bottle. Only when some of the husbands return to visit is Fedka shunted aside. Although she does not say so explicitly, Baron implies that the eroticism of Jewish women can only become "uncorked" in the absence of Jewish men and, perhaps, when the object of their desire is a Gentile.

Baron explored a similar dilemma in a bizarre fable about a female "Jewish" dog named Liska.<sup>[86]</sup> Dogs have a particularly negative valence in Ashkenazic Jewish folklore, generally in association with the gentile world; Liska is a symbol for the vexed relations between Jews and Gentiles in the Eastern European setting. She bears puppies sired by a dog belonging to a local nobleman, but her offspring are stolen from her. At another point, she is kidnapped by Gentiles and gang raped by their dogs. But Liska is driven by her sexual impulses: she falls in love with a "gentile" dog and betrays the Jews she had once belonged to; once she has crossed over to the other side of town, she becomes as vicious as the Gentiles. The Jews take vengeance on her by strangling her to death. Erotic Jewish women, Baron intimates, are doubly cursed, as Jews and as women. Those who challenge erotic norms become victims caught between two worlds, the Jewish and the Gentile.

The problem of erotic relations between Jews and Gentiles also plagued the male authors of the dominant literature of "national renaissance," against whom Baron rebelled, just as it preoccupied Jewish writers in Central Europe and, as we will see, those in twentieth-century America.<sup>[87]</sup> Hayyim Nachman Bialik (1873–1934), whose name is associated above all others with the generation of national renaissance, devoted a whole story to the issue.<sup>[88]</sup> "Behind the Fence" tells of the love between a Christian girl, Marinka, and a Jewish boy, Noah; their love stands in opposition to the brutality and xenophobia of his parents and of her witchlike stepmother. At the end of the story, he is forced to marry a Jewish girl, having left Marinka pregnant. The story is an indictment of

both traditional Jewish society and of the "fence" between Jews and Gentiles. In what must have been shocking to those of his readers imbued with Jewish nationalism, Bialik seemed to celebrate true love between Jew and Gentile as a protest against convention.

The tension between nationalism and erotic relations with non-Jews was but one of the many personal ambivalences in Bialik's work, ambivalences that were taken as emblematic by a whole generation of writers and readers.<sup>[89]</sup> With Bialik, all of the themes examined in this chapter found their

most eloquent expression: themes of loss of youth, the frustrations of love, and anger at Jewish passivity.<sup>[90]</sup> A product of the yeshiva world, like so many of his contemporaries and predecessors, Bialik vacillated between the traditional God of his childhood and the secular nationalist revolt of his adolescence, as well as between sexual renunciation and erotic desire.

In his prose poem "Scroll of Fire,"<sup>[91]</sup> Bialik gave mythic expression to this tension between erotic fulfillment and theological-national redemption. The poem tells the story of two hundred young men and two hundred young women who were exiled from Jerusalem after the destruction of the Second Temple. The hero of the poem rescues the divine torch that was carried from Jerusalem, but he must then choose between ascending with it to heaven or descending to save the one surviving girl—his intended—from the abyss. He falls into her outstretched arms, the torch is extinguished, and he is spewed forth into the distant exile. He wanders through the world, carrying the torch of "unconsummated love and the groan of the world from the night of the destruction."

Trapped between the "fire of love" and the "fire of God," Bialik's narrator captured the dilemmas of the generation. How could the desire for erotic fulfillment be reconciled with the demands of the religious tradition and national goals? If, as appears to be the case, the love of which the poet speaks is pagan and the beloved woman a non-Jew,<sup>[92]</sup> how can Eros be reconciled with Jewish allegiance? The end of the poem makes it clear that unconsummated love cannot be separated from the experience of exile: both represented dilemmas of powerlessness.

In his love poetry, Bialik was similarly torn between the rebellious desire for Eros and the sense that his desire is polluted and illegitimate. In "It Was a Summer Evening,"<sup>[93]</sup> he evokes the Lilith myth we recall from the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* :

And the pure daughters of Lilith are twining-spinning  
shiny silver threads by moonlight,  
weaving one and the same garment for high priests and  
for swineherds.

The "daughters of Lilith" represent erotic women, but their weaving is at once sacred and profane; the very weaving of garments conjures up the

biblical account of women in the Temple weaving garments for Asherah, the Canaanite goddess (2 Kings 23:7). The poem oscillates between chastity and lust: "O you chaste stars, come out quickly above, and you, harlots, below." The term for "harlots" is *kedeshot*, the prophetic name for the putative cultic prostitutes of Canaanite religion. The erotic tension in the poem thus evokes the old biblical struggle between sexual norms and subversions and between Jewish tradition and pagan liberation.

In "The Hungry Eyes," Bialik blames a lover for having seduced him with the temptations of the flesh away from the "law".<sup>[94]</sup>



For a small happy moment I was without a law, and I blessed  
 The hand that grants me the pain of sweet pleasure  
 And at the small moment of pleasure, of happiness and joy,  
 A whole world was destroyed for me—how great is the price that I paid  
 to your flesh.

Women are the force of antinomian pleasure; they compete with the purity of the law for the heart of the Jewish male.

Given this profound ambivalence toward women and sexuality, Bialik is drawn back to love of the mother as a substitute for problematic Eros. In one of his most popular poems, written in 1905, Bialik mourns the loss of youth and the impossibility of love.<sup>[95]</sup> The poem is addressed ambiguously to a woman in terms reminiscent of the Jewish mystic's prayer to the Shekhinah, the female aspect of God. Bialik appeals to this woman/goddess to care for him as a substitute for an erotic relationship:

Take me in under your wing  
 And be a mother and sister to me.  
 Let your lap be a shelter for my head,  
 A nest for my rejected prayers.

If the legacy of the tradition had frustrated the search for love, it remained the sole, if ambivalent, source of comfort for its wayward sons. With poems such as these, Bialik's generation and its successors found an expression of their own dilemmas, dilemmas that were as much created by literature as they were by reality.

The reordering of power promised by the Haskalah had substantially failed in the minds of its children, and the exploration of the self in the autobiographies and novels had come to a solipsistic and pessimistic dead end. Love and erotic fulfillment seemed doomed. With Bialik, many turned their hopes to the new movement of Jewish nationalism. But could Zionism, which adopted Bialik as its poet laureate, redeem the Jews not only from their historic wanderings but also from their erotic exile?

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### Notes

1. For an extended discussion of this argument, see David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York, 1986), chap. 4.
2. For Germany, see David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York, 1987). For Eastern Europe, see Mordecai Levin, *Arkhei Hevrah ve-Kalkalah be-Ideologiyah shel Tekufat ha-Haskalah* (Jerusalem, 1975); J. S. Raisin, *The Haskalah Movement in Russia* (Philadelphia, 1913); and Raphael Mahler, *Ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Haskalah* (Merhaviya, 1961).
3. A recent study of the Scottish Enlightenment takes an approach similar to the one taken here to correlate youthful experience and ideology. See Charles Camic, *Experience and Enlightenment* (Chicago, 1984).
4. There were, however, several important precursors for the Haskalah autobiographies. Starting in the sixteenth century, there emerged a new genre of mystical hagiography, which was later adopted by the Hasidim. Because the life of the zaddik was taken to be exemplary, his personal struggles assumed didactic importance, just as the maskilim were to turn their own lives into counter-*exempla*. Another genre of literature that could provide a source for autobiography was that of the "ethical will" (or *tzavaah*). These documents, typically written by a father for his children, might merge details of autobiography with moralistic pronouncements. A particularly interesting example of this kind of literature, which pays

particular attention to marital relations, is the memoir of Glückel of Hameln (1646-1724), often considered a unique testimony of a woman's life in traditional Jewish society: *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*, trans. Marvin Lowenthal (New York, 1977). Glückel wrote her memoirs in the second decade of the eighteenth century. Although she proclaims that her memoir will be "no book of morals," it is in fact filled with conventional advice to her children and copious quotations from the moralistic literature available to a woman of her class.

5. Jacob Emden, *Megillat Sefer*, ed. David Kahana (Warsaw, 1897). Emden wrote his autobiography about 1752. [\[BACK\]](#)

6. For this argument, see Azriel Shochat, *Im Hilufei ha-Tekufot* (Jerusalem, 1960). [\[BACK\]](#)

7. Emden, *Megillat Sefer*, p. 82. [\[BACK\]](#)

8. Jacob Emden, *Siddur Beit Yaakov* (Lemberg, 1884), pp. 158b-159b. See also David Feldman, *Marital Relations, Birth Control and Abortion in Jewish Law* (New York, 1968), pp. 101-2. [\[BACK\]](#)

9. Solomon Maimon, *An Autobiography*, ed. Moses Hadas (New York, 1947). On these memoirs, see Alan Mintz, "Banished from Their Father's Table": *Loss of Faith and Hebrew Autobiography* (Bloomington, Ind., 1989), pp. 1-54; and Samuel Werses, "The Patterns of Autobiography in the Period of the Haskalah" (in Hebrew), *Gilyonot* 17 (1945):175-83. Other important memoirs include Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg, *Aviezer* (Vilna, 1863); Avraham Ber Gottlob, *Zikhronot u-Masaot*, 2 vols., ed. R. Goldberg (Jerusalem, 1976); and M. L. Lilienblum, *Ketavim Autobiografim*, 3 vols., ed. S. Breiman (Jerusalem, 1970).

Guenzburg (1795-1846) began his memoir in 1828 but did not complete it. Gottlob (1810-99) published the first part of his autobiography in 1881 and the second in 1886, but the section on his youth seems to have been written in 1854. Lilienblum (1843-1910) lived a generation later and published his *Hatteot Neurim*, the relevant part of his autobiography, in 1876 (it was written in 1872-73). Thus, Lilienblum was the only one of the three to have written the memoir close to the time described.

10. Erik Erikson, *Life History and the Historical Moment* (New York, 1975), p. 125. [\[BACK\]](#)

11. The literature of ego psychology argues that such "splitting" results from a very early inability to separate properly from the mother. Those who split the world in this fashion typically idealize certain people while exhibiting aggression toward others. In addition, such personality types often have considerable difficulty in realizing mature love relationships. See Otto Kernberg, "Barriers to Falling and Remaining in Love," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 22 (1974):486-511. On the concept of splitting generally, see Gertrude and Rubin Blanck, *Ego Psychology*, vol. 2 (New York, 1979). If this theory is helpful in understanding the maskilim, it must be put into the specific social setting of Eastern Europe in which boys were taken from their homes at a very early age, first to be sent to the heder or school and then to the houses of their in-laws after their marriages in early adolescence. [\[BACK\]](#)

12. For sources of the biographies of maskilim, see Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, trans. Bernard Martin (Cleveland, 1972-78), esp. vol. 11; and Joseph Klausner, *Historiya shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah* (Jerusalem, 1953).

13. Gottlob, *Zikhronot u-Masaot*, 1:85. The typical goal was to celebrate the bar mitzvah and the marriage at the same party. Since a two-year engagement was frequently considered necessary, the *shiddukh* (engagement) was often concluded when the boy was eleven. [\[BACK\]](#)

14. See Israel Halpern, "Panic Marriages in Eastern Europe" (in Hebrew), in Halpern, *Yehudim ve-Yahadut be-Mizrah Europa* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 289-309. [\[BACK\]](#)

15. A particularly acute analysis is in Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, 1:85-89, 92. For other evidence, see David Knaani, *Ha-Batim she-Hayu* (Tel Aviv, 1986), pp. 29-33. [\[BACK\]](#)

16. For Braudes's memoirs, see "Memoirs from The Days of My Youth" (in Hebrew), in *Zekanim im Na'arim* (Vienna, 1886), p.

65. See further Klausner, *Historiya shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit*, 5:402. [\[BACK\]](#)

17. Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe* (Berlin, 1929-38), vol. 16, May 15, 1761, letter 103, p. 205 (and April 27, 1762, letter 200, p. 324). [\[BACK\]](#)

18. The poem is quoted in Klausner, *Historiya shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit*, 3:36. [\[BACK\]](#)

19. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, 1:90-92, 94-95. See also Guenzburg, *Aviezer*, p. 54. [\[BACK\]](#)

20. Pauline Wengeroff, *Memoiren einer Grossmutter* (Berlin, 1913), p. 40. [\[BACK\]](#)

21. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, 1:89. [\[BACK\]](#)

22. See Klausner, *Historiya shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit*, 3:175. [\[BACK\]](#)

23. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, 1:93. [\[BACK\]](#)

24. See Henri Brunschwig, *Enlightenment and Romanticism in Eighteenth Century Prussia*, trans. Frank Jellinek (Chicago, 1974), pp. 147-55. [\[BACK\]](#)

25. See for example, A. M. Dik, *Yankele Goldshlager* (1895); Isaac Linetski, *Dos Polische Yingel*; and Y. L. Gordon, *Olom ki-Minhago Noheg* (Odessa, 1868). [\[BACK\]](#)

26. Maimon, *Autobiography*, pp. 31-33. [\[BACK\]](#)

27. Lilienblum, *Ketavim* , 1:108. [BACK]
28. Wengeroff, *Memoiren* , pp. 100-102, 138-40. For some examples of this sermonic literature in nineteenth-century Germany, see Sulamith 7, no. 2 (1833):390; Gotthold Salomon, *Das Familienleben: Drei Predigten gehalten im neuen Israelitischen Tempel zu Hamburg* (Hamburg, 1821); and J. Maier, J. N. Mannheimer, and G. Salomon, ed., *Israelitische Festpredigten und Casualreden* (Stuttgart, 1840). See further David Sorkin, *Transformation of German Jewry* , p. 89, and Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1991).
29. Hayyim Halbershtam, *Divrei Hayyim* (Lemberg, 1875), no. 29, pp. 96-97. [BACK]
30. Guenzburg claims that early marriage produced a very high rate of divorce: of every two women, one had had two husbands. See Guenzburg, *Aviezer* , p. 104. His testimony is suspect because of his own unhappy marriage, but when compared with a survey of the biographies of other maskilim, if not the population as a whole, his observation is not far off the mark. [BACK]
31. See the excellent analysis of this affair in Mintz, " *Banished from Their Father's Table* ," pp. 44-45. [BACK]
32. Ben-Zion Dinur, ed., *Mikhtavei Avraham Mapu* (Jerusalem, 1970), October 29, 1860, p. 133. [BACK]
33. For Zweifel's biography, see Klausner, *Historiya she ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit* , 6:14. The poem appeared in *Makhbarot le-Sifrut* 1 (September 1941):96-102. [BACK]
34. Dinur, *Mikhtavei Avraham Mapu* , January 12/26, 1861, p. 138. [BACK]
35. *Ibid.*, November 7, 1857, p. 23. See further his letters to Shneur Sachs from 1843 (pp. 3-7), which include a "love" poem on friendship. [BACK]
36. See Brunschwig, *Enlightenment and Romanticism* , pp. 208-213; and George Mosse, "Friendship and Nationhood: About the Promise and Failure of German Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, no. 2 (April 1982):351-67. [BACK]
37. The memorandum can be found in Adam Hacoheh Lebensohn, *Kol Shirei Adam* (Vilna, 1895), 3:68-70. [BACK]
38. See above, Chapter 6, n. 22. [BACK]
39. (Warsaw, 1905), pt. 3, pp. 22ff. Translated in David Patterson, "Hasidism in the Nineteenth-Century Novel," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 5 (1960):367-68. [BACK]
40. See above, this chapter, ns. 4 and 5. [BACK]
41. Joachim Neugroschel, ed. and trans., *The Shtetl* (New York, 1979), pp. 49-172. The novel was probably written in the 1840s, but pressure from Hasidim prevented its publication. It appeared in Leipzig in 1862. Another novel, this time in Hebrew, that makes a similar point is Mendele Mokher Sforim's *Ha-Avot ve-ha-Banim* ("Fathers and Sons"), published in 1868. See *Kol Kitvei Mendele* , vol. 6 (Tel Aviv, 1935). [BACK]
42. For this analysis, see Dan Miron, *Ben Hazon le-Emet* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 177-216. [BACK]
43. Y. L. Gordon, *Kol Shirei Yehudah Leib Gordon* (Tel Aviv, 1930), 4:4-34. On this poem and Gordon in general, see Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York, 1988), pp. 125-28. [BACK]
44. Lilienblum, *Ketavim* 2:89-93. [BACK]
45. M. A. Guenzburg, *Kiryat Sefer* (Vilna, 1847), p. 59. [BACK]
46. A. M. Dik, *Masekhet Aniyut* (n.p., n.d.), p. 26. For a fuller treatment of this theme in Dik and other Yiddish authors, see David Roskies, "Yiddish Popular Literature and the Female Reader," *Journal of Popular Culture* 10, no. 4 (1977):852-58. Roskies quotes a similar passage from Dik's *Royze Finkl* (1874): "Our Jews only consider it shameful for (a Jewish woman) to flirt with a young Jewish fellow, but not with a Christian, because in the latter case, it is a matter of business." [BACK]
47. Peter Gay has shown how despite the cultivation of these values in nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, the erotic lives of middle-class Europeans were far more sensual within marriage than the so-called Victorian ideal suggests. See Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* , 2 vols. (New York, 1984 and 1986). [BACK]
48. The poem was published in a limited edition by G. Kressel under the title *Shir Agavim* (Love Poem) (Tel Aviv, 1977). In his introduction, Kressel brings references to the poem from Shimon Bernfeld, Ephraim Deinard, and Ahad Ha-Am. For the evidence on the Hasidic readership of the poem, see Deinard, *Zikhronot Bat Ami* (St. Louis, 1920), pt. 2, p. 31. [BACK]
49. *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden* 8-9 (1906):141. See further Abraham Shtal, "Prostitution among Jews as a Phenomenon Accompanying the Transition from Culture to Culture" (in Hebrew), *Megamot* 24 (1978):202-25. For a contemporary view of prostitution and the breakdown of morals, particularly in the cities of the Pale such as Vilna, see the anonymous article in *Ha-Dor* 1, no. 24 (June 13, 1901):4-6. [BACK]
50. For the census data of the late nineteenth century, see *Die sozialen Verhältnisse der Juden in Russland* (Veröffentlichungen des Bureau für Statistik der Juden, Berlin 1906), vol. 2. See further Andrejs Plakans and Joel M. Halpern, "An Historical Perspective on Eighteenth-Century Jewish Family Households in Eastern Europe," in Paul Ritterband ed.,

- Modern Jewish Fertility* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 18-32; and Jacques Silber, "Some Demographic Characteristics of the Jewish Population in Russia at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *Jewish Social Studies* 42 (Summer-Fall 1980):277-78. [BACK]
51. See, for example, Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (1789-1866), *Sefer Tzemach Tzedek* (1870-74; New York, 1945), *Even ha-Ezer*, no. 34, pp. 89-91, and no. 114, pp. 106-10. The latter case is from 1828. See also Isaac Judah Shmelkes (1828-1906), *Sheelot u-Teshuvot Beit Yitshak* (Przemysl, 1901), pt. 1, no. 1; and Isaac Meir Alter of Gur (d. 1866), *Sheelot u-Teshuvot ha-Rim* (Biozefotz, 1867), *Even ha-Ezer* no. 21 and no. 26. The latter case is from Warsaw in 1850. [BACK]
52. Moses Feivish, *Netivot Shalom* (Königsberg, 1858), sec. 1, par. 1. [BACK]
53. For Feivish's biography, see Jacob Galis, *Encyclopedia Toldot Hakhmei Eretz Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1977), 2:317-20. [BACK]
54. Naphtali Zvi Berlin, *He'amek Davar* (Vilna, 1879-80), commentary on Exodus 1:7. [BACK]
55. See Shaul Stampfer, *Shelosh Yeshivot Litaiot be-Meah ha-19* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1981), appendix. [BACK]
56. Yehiel Michael Epstein, *Arukh ha-Shulhan*, *Even ha-Ezer* (1905-6), sec. 1, p. 11:3. [BACK]
57. Solomon Mordecai Schwadron, *Sheelot u-Teshuvot Marasham* (Warsaw, 1902), pt. 1, no. 195. [BACK]
58. For a similar opinion from early-twentieth-century Hungary, see Isaac Zvi Leibovitch, *Sefer Shulhan Ezer al Dinei Nisuin* (Bergsas, 1932), secs. 1-2. [BACK]
59. Wengeroff, *Memoiren*, pp. 100ff. [BACK]
60. Abraham Landau Bornstein, *Avnei Nezer* (Pieterkov, 1916), pt. 1, no. 119. [BACK]
61. M. Y. Berdichevsky, "In Their Mothers' Wombs" (in Hebrew), *Kitvei M. Y. Bin-Gurion (Berdichevsky)* (Tel Aviv, 1965), 1:102.
62. See David Roskies, "Ayzik-Meyer Dik and the Rise of Yiddish Popular Literature" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1975), pp. 48-101. [BACK]
63. Anonymous, *Ayn Sheyne Historye fun aynem Ekhtikn Rovs Tokhter fun Konstantinopl un fun ayn Rov Zayn Zun fun Brisk* (n.p, n.d.); see further Roskies, "Ayzik-Meyer Dik," pp. 67-68. [BACK]
64. A similar anonymous story, also featuring a girl who studies in a yeshiva, is *Mordecai un Ester—Eyn Shayne Vunderlikhe Historiye fun ayn Hosen mit ayn Kala* (Warsaw, 1860). [BACK]
65. For a collection of this Yiddish material, including quotations and extensive bibliography of sources, see Meir Noy, "The Theme of the Canceled Wedding in Yiddish Folksongs: A Bibliography Survey" (in Hebrew), in *Studies in Marriage Customs* (Jerusalem, 1974), especially pp. 61-65. [BACK]
66. A song based on an incident like this, entitled "Di Geshterte Liebe" (The Interrupted Love), was published in *Makel Noam* in 1873. Other versions of the folk song can be found in Noy, "The Theme of the Canceled Wedding," pp. 63-64. [BACK]
67. See Roskies, "Yiddish Popular Literature"; idem, "Azik-Meir Dik"; and Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised* (New York, 1973), chaps. 1, 2. [BACK]
68. A. M. Dik, *Der Shidekh on Shadkhonim* (Vilna, 1871). [BACK]
69. H. D. S. (Ayzik-Meyer Dik), *Mahaze mul Mahaze* (Warsaw, 1861), p. 4. Quoted in Roskies, "Yiddish Popular Literature," p. 853. For another Haskalah attack on popular literature and theater for encouraging promiscuity, see the anonymous article in *Ha-Dor* 1, no. 24 (June 13, 1901):4-6. [BACK]
70. For the examples of such literary sources, see Knaani, *Ha-Batim She-Hayu*, pp. 43, 62-64. [BACK]
71. "The Raven Flies" (in Hebrew), in Micha Yosef Bin-Gurion (Berdichevsky), *Romanim Ketzarim* (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 87.
72. See also Mendele's letter to Shalom Aleichem, quoted in the introduction to the latter's *Stempenyu* (New York, 1900; English translation, New York, 1913): "I doubt if there is anything that is romantic in the life of our people." [BACK]
73. Berdichevsky's *Mi-Mekor Yisrael* remains one of the best collections of Jewish folktales, and it served as one of our main sources for medieval popular culture in Chapter 3. [BACK]
74. *Kitvei M. Y. Bin-Gurion (Berdichevsky)* 1:101-2. [BACK]
75. S. An-ski, *Der Dybbuk*, in *Di Yidishe Drame fun 20sten Yorhundert* (New York, 1977), p. 14. [BACK]
76. *Ibid.*, p. 44. [BACK]
77. See Mintz, "Banished from Their Fathers' Tables," pts. 2, 3; and Gershon Shaked, *Ha-Siporet ha-Ivrit: 1880-1970*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 1977). [BACK]
78. Baruch Kurzweil, *Sifrutenu ha-Hadashah: Hemshekh o-Mahapekchah?* (Tel Aviv, 1971), pp. 234ff. [BACK]
79. *Romanim Ketzarim*, p. 82. The translation is from Mintz, "Banished from Their Fathers' Tables," p. 103. [BACK]
80. See, for example, Berdichevsky's "Two Camps," Agnon's story "The Lady and the Peddler" (1943), and David Vogel's *Married Life* (Tel Aviv, 1920-30; English translation, New York, 1988). Other such sadomasochistic themes in which the woman is Jewish can be found in Berdichevsky's "The Master of the Story" and Agnon's posthumous novel, *Shira*. It is fascinating that the literary namesake of masochism, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, was himself a philo-Semite who advocated

a Haskalah program for the Jews. See David Biale, "Masochism and Philosemitism: The Strange Case of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17 (Spring 1982): 305-24. [\[BACK\]](#)

81. See Robert Stoller, *Perversion* (New York, 1975), for one theory of sadomasochism and bibliography. [\[BACK\]](#)

82. For a recent treatment of female Hebrew poets, see Dan Miron, *Imahot Miyasdot, Ahayot Horgot* (Tel Aviv, 1991); and Michael Gluzman, "The Exclusion of Women from Hebrew Literary History," *Prooftexts* 11 (1991):259-78. [\[BACK\]](#)

83. For biographical information and analysis of the stories, see Nurit Govrin, *Ha-Mahatzit ha-Rishonah: Dvora Baron—Hayyeiha u-Yetzirotah* (Jerusalem, 1988). [\[BACK\]](#)

84. See, for example, Dvora Baron, "A Quarreling Couple" (in Hebrew) in Govrin, *Ha-Mahatzit ha-Rishonah*, pp. 374-76, first published 1905. [\[BACK\]](#)

85. Dvora Baron "Fedka" (in Hebrew), in Govrin, *Ha-Mahatzit ha-Rishonah*, pp. 442-49, first published in 1909. [\[BACK\]](#)

86. Dvora Baron, "Liska" (in Hebrew), in Govrin, *Ha-Mahatzit ha-Rishonah*, pp. 543-50, first published in 1911. Use of a dog as a symbol of projection can also be found in S. Y. Agnon's *Just Yesterday*. [\[BACK\]](#)

87. One of the most popular novels among German Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century was Georg Hermann's *Jettchen Gebert* (1906), in which a virtuous Jewish daughter falls in love with a déclassé Christian. [\[BACK\]](#)

88. Hayyim Nachman Bialik, "Behind the Fence" (in Hebrew), *Kol Kitvei H. N. Bialik*, 6th ed. (Tel Aviv, 1945), pp. 112-29. On Bialik as a prose writer, see Shaked, *Ha-Siporet ha-Ivrit*, pp. 278-86. [\[BACK\]](#)

89. For a discussion of the concept of "Bialik's generation," see Dan Miron, *Bodedim be-Moadam* (Tel Aviv, 1987), especially pt. 2. [\[BACK\]](#)

90. Bialik's clearest attack against Jewish passivity is in his bitter poem written in the wake of the Kishinev pogroms, "In the City of Slaughter." [\[BACK\]](#)

91. Bialik, "Scroll of Fire" (in Hebrew), *Kol Kitvei Bialik* (Tel Aviv, 1945), pp. 88-94. The poem was written in the summer of 1905. [\[BACK\]](#)

92. Yonatan Ratosh suggested this possibility in his reading of the line that describes the two hundred girls with Christian imagery as "wearing crowns of thorns and on their faces were frozen the sufferings of the Messiah." Moreover, the goddess that protects the girls is Venus (the morning star), suggesting pagan associations in contrast to the Israelite "God of vengeance," who is implicated in the destruction of the Temple. See Ratosh, "Bialik's Poem of Foreign Love" (in Hebrew), in Gershon Shaked, ed., *Bialik* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 261-65. [\[BACK\]](#)

93. Original and translation in T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York, 1981), pp. 513-14. [\[BACK\]](#)

94. Bialik, "The Hungry Eyes" (in Hebrew), *Kol Kitvei Bialik*, p. 30. [\[BACK\]](#)

95. Bialik, "Place Me under Your Wing" (in Hebrew), in *Kol Kitvei Bialik*, p. 41. [\[BACK\]](#)