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LOVE, MARRIAGE AND THE MODERNIZATION OF THE JEWS

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In the early 1760s, Moses Mendelssohn 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." And in another place: "Even the kisses that I stole from your lips were mixed with some bitterness, for the approaching separation made me heavy of heart and incapable of enjoying a pure pleasure."¹ In his classic article from 1945, Jacob Katz argued that with these letters, Mendelssohn marked the end of traditional Jewish norms of betrothal and marriage and the beginnings of romantic love and free choice.² Katz thus anticipated by nearly three decades the arguments of what is sometimes called the "sentiments school" of family history.³ Historians like Edward Shorter and Lawrence Stone have asserted that traditional marriage was an instrumental relationship characterized by a low level of affection.⁴ In the eighteenth century, a revolution of romantic sentiment turned marriage into a relationship of companionship and affection and thus contributed to the development of the modern nuclear family. Shorter attributed this change to the impact of industrialization on the working class while Stone, coming closer to Katz's argument about the Jews, saw it as a result of the rise of individualism among the upper and middle classes.

The sentiments school has been attacked on a variety of grounds which need not detain us here.⁵ The relationship of family history to the other indices of modernization remains very much an open question. What may the particular history of the Jews contribute to this discussion? A common argument holds that the Jews, as a relatively urbanized people, were more prepared for modern society than were the peasant populations of Western and Eastern Europe. A study of Latvian Jews suggests that the family structure of eighteenth century Jews more closely resembled the modern nuclear family than did the extended family perhaps more common to medieval peasant society.⁶ But Katz's work argues that even if Jewish family

structure was closer to a modern model, Jewish attitudes and norms were anything but modern until the new values of the European enlightenment infiltrated the Jewish community from the outside. For Katz, "modernization" of Jewish marital attitudes resulted from a backward people's imitation of the European revolution.

Against Katz, Azriel Shochat argued that, at least in Central Europe, a shift in values occurred within the Jewish community as early as the late seventeenth century, thus predating Mendelssohn by one or two generations.⁷ Shochat focused on deviations from rabbinic norms and concluded that the Jewish enlightenment was the later product of an earlier social transformation. As the power of the rabbis and the traditional community declined following the Thirty Years War, new values, including new marital values, became widely accepted. Shochat did not identify the origins of these values but implied that they were influenced by non-Jewish ideas to which the Jews were now more receptive. Katz's reply to Shochat was that all societies include exceptions and deviations from the norms, but that the exceptions did not indicate the triumph of new norms: they still believed in traditional values even if they rebelled against them. Only Mendelssohn and his generation fully adopted a new system of values.⁸

In contrast to both Katz and Shochat, I should like to propose a new framework in which to evaluate exceptions. Exceptional behavior was neither meaningless, as Katz implies, nor the harbinger of new values, as Shocat does. Instead, the exceptions indicate that early modern Jewish society offered a wider range of possibilities than the official literature (rabbinic codes, etc) admits. In addition, some exceptional behavior reflected values shared by the society as a whole, but which found expression in socially unconventional ways. For instance, rather than assuming that arranged marriages were devoid of sentiment and built on cold calculation, we should imagine a society that expected the arranged marriage to be accompanied by love. Those who rebelled against parental authority did not espouse different values from their parents, but rejected the specific choices offered to them. Such rebels were not representative, but they do testify that the possibilities for romantic sentiment were much greater than we imagine today. Their example also suggests that the "modernization" of marital values among the Ashkenazic Jews did not follow the model of linear "progress" proposed by Shorter and Stone for France and England or Katz for the Jews.

We shall have to consult materials from the responsa and sermonic literature in order to develop our case. Jewish historians have long recognized the problems of dealing with these kind of texts. The responsa literature, like any court cases, is bound to be anecdotal and not always representative, while sermons often exaggerate certain tendencies and present them as more widespread than they actually are. These materials can often be most productively used if one can find social comments en passant, that is, as incidental to the main issue, which is more likely to be distorted for polemical or legal purposes. In any event, my purpose in using these texts is not to make generalizations about what everyone experienced but to discover what was possible within the norms of traditional Jewish society.

The major issue of contention here will be whether love was part of the norms associated with marriage. As in any society, some people experience love while others do not. It would be exceedingly difficult to determine (as some sentiments historians have tried) whether the percentage of people who experienced such emotions was fewer or greater in one period than in another. My goal instead is to discover whether love was part of the normative system that would be inculcated in young people as they approached the age of marriage, not whether they actually felt it or not.

Love in Premodern Marriages

The word "love" will present us with serious problems of definition. What love meant to the Romantics of the early nineteenth century was quite different from what it means today and, similarly, what it might have meant in Ashkenazic society (the relatively unitary Jewish culture of Central and Eastern Europe up until the eighteenth century and continuing into the nineteenth century in the East). What love might mean to a pubescent boy in one culture might be quite different from what it would mean to a twenty-five year-old independent man in the same culture. I would immediately want to distinguish between the companionship or affection referred to in the law codes as an important reason for marriage and love. The kind of affection which may develop between man and wife may or may not be preceded by romantic attraction, but it is a result of day-to-day living together. What we are dealing with here are the emotions experienced by people before marriage or in the first flush of married life. These feelings may or may not have

had an erotic component, although some of the evidence we shall see suggests that for engaged couples, love and erotic attraction were believed to be connected.

Neither the law codes nor the marriage manuals in our possession refer explicitly to love and we must search elsewhere for it. Certainly, the norms of society are not to be found only in law codes and, in fact, many norms may never be written down in prescriptive texts. One unusual text which repeatedly discusses love both prior to and outside of marriage is the twelfth century Sefer Hasidim.⁹ The author clearly has in mind something quite different from affection that develops within a marriage, for, in one case, he specifically refers to a man's love for a woman he does not even know.

The Sefer Hasidim comes from a period much earlier than that which is our focus here: the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But in this later period, we also find evidence that once a marriage was arranged according to the standard criteria of lineage, learning and wealth, romantic feelings not only sometimes developed of their own accord (as Katz was willing to admit) but they were expected to develop. For instance, Abraham Ber Gottlober, the early nineteenth century maskil, who was certainly no admirer of traditional marriage, relates that he began to develop feelings of love for his bride-to-be even before he met her.¹⁰ Now, we have no way of knowing just what Gottlober meant by love and since his memoir was composed many years after the event, memory may have distorted original feelings. But since he was only twelve at the time, it seems safe to say that whatever Gottlober actually felt was strongly influenced by parental and social expectations. In the eighteenth century, Solomon Maimon, also no apologist for traditional practices, similarly relates developing an affection for a girl of his age (around eleven at the time) when a marriage between them seemed in the offing.¹¹ Finally, Jacob Emden, one of the chief spokesmen for orthodoxy in eighteenth century Germany, seems to have fallen in love with the daughter of a wealthy Emden Jew at the age of about fifteen, although his father refused to allow the match.¹² In all of these cases, private experience seems to have been molded by social expectations: young boys expected to fall in love (whatever that might have meant) in the context of the system of arranged marriages.

The Yiddish chapbook literature of Eastern Europe confirms this assumed connection between love and marriage.¹³ A

remarkable tale, which is probably from the early nineteenth century at the latest, tells of a daughter of a rabbi from Constantinople who is betrothed to a rabbi's son from Brisk.¹⁴ Foreshadowing I. B. Singer's story of Yentl the yeshivah student, the girl disguises herself as a boy and goes to study in the yeshivah of her fiancé where she naturally falls in love with him. Another theme which is common in this literature is that of the boy and girl who fall in love only to discover at the end of the story that they were destined for each other by a vow (tekiyas kaf) between their parents. The theme of predestination was, of course, common to early modern European literature but it was easily assimilated into a Jewish context. According to a number of well-known midrashim, God is said to have engaged in matchmaking since He finished creating the world.¹⁵ Predestined matches gave divine legitimacy to parental arrangements which might otherwise have seemed crudely commercial and also seemed to guarantee love even though boy and girl did not choose the marriage of their own free will. An interesting example of this notion can be found in the memoir of the eighteenth century Polish Jew, Ber of Bolochow. Ber's first marriage ended in divorce and he comments that his wife was evidently not his predestined one.¹⁶ Such a formula allowed Ber to express what we today might describe with a more "romantic" vocabulary.

That Jewish society encouraged romantic affection prior to marriage is supported by the common practice of allowing the engaged couple to spend time together before the wedding. While some of these meetings may have been thoroughly Platonic, there is good evidence to suggest similarities to the "bundling" practices common in early modern France and North America.¹⁷ Bundling was a part of courtship in which some sexual contact short of intercourse took place between the couple. The seventeenth century moralist Isaiah Horowitz denounced the custom but revealed that other authorities may well have countenanced it:

Avoid very carefully allowing the bride and groom to sit together before the wedding as is the custom in this wicked generation. For not only do they sit together, but he even hugs and kisses her . . . and I am appalled at the authorities of this generation who tolerate this great iniquity . . . For, even if she is still a minor, the groom's lust will overcome him as a result of his love and he might have an ejaculation . . . and even if he does not ejaculate, in any case, it would be impossible for him to avoid having an erection.¹⁸

Horowitz is primarily concerned with the sexual transgressions which might result from the "hugging and kissing" before the wedding (he probably means during the period of engagement rather than immediately before the wedding). He appears to distinguish between the sexual lust that could lead to these transgressions and the love which he assumes develops between the engaged couple. Love may lead to lust and therefore the couple should not be allowed such physical intimacy. But Horowitz doesn't seem to denounce the love itself: he assumes it en passant as a natural (if, perhaps, not universal) product of engagement.

Horowitz was from Prague and he may well be reporting practices common in that area and probably also in areas to the east. In the eighteenth century, Ezekiel Landau, also of Prague, reports a case in which this "Jewish bundling" practice led to full-fledged intercourse: "[He] was accustomed to spending time with her [his fiancée] since he traveled from place to place on business and would stop in the apartment of the bride's father for several days in the middle of his journeys . . . [S]he had intercourse with him several times and became pregnant by him. [The groom told the rabbi] that the bride had had no intimate contact with any other man, but only with him [as a result] of the love which was between them . . ." ¹⁹ The circumstances of the case suggest a reasonably well-off family, thus refuting the presumption that such practices were limited to the less educated, poorer classes. Unless the parents exercised little control in their household, they would certainly have known that the engaged couple was together. From this and a good many other cases of premarital sex between engaged couples, it appears that such intimacy was not entirely deviant. For our purposes, what is important is the admission in this case by the groom that his relations with his fiancée were a result of the love which had developed between them before the marriage.

It would be difficult to develop a history of this bundling practice. In the sixteenth century, Moses Isserles (d. 1572) discusses a case from Cracow in which a girl comes to live either with or in the house of her fiancé. ²⁰ The legal question is unrelated to this arrangement and Isserles makes no comment about the relations between the couple. This is an argument from silence and we cannot know for sure what Isserles thought about such premarital contact. We do have evidence from the nineteenth century memoirs, which were typically written by

those who came from rabbinic or householder families, that grooms and brides met only on the day of their wedding. Perhaps Horowitz's critique of "Jewish bundling" and similar rabbinic strictures had an effect on at least the upper classes. But if such behavior persisted among members of other classes, we may have an example of how deviant behavior can reveal a wider range of possibilities than the practices of the literate class, that is, the class which left a direct record of its own values.

The cases of clandestine marriage which we find in the legal literature hint at the role of love in marriages, in these cases marriages against social convention. In the legislation of the communal and supra-communal councils of Poland and Lithuania, we find repeated and vociferous attempts to curb clandestine marriages.²¹ A particular problem in at least the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries occurred when sons or daughters of wealthy families fell in love with servants or apprentices. In one such case from the seventeenth century, Yair Chaim Bachrach of Germany specifically allows the marriage, although he could have easily found grounds to annul it. The story is recounted with great literary flair and it could nicely find its place in the literature of romantic love. Here one has the sense that the rabbi may have sympathized with the romantic feelings of the case.²²

If love was indeed part of the expectations inculcated in young people, it could, of course, come into conflict with parental control of marriage. The legislative attempts to control clandestine marriage reflect the desire to leave the politics of marriage in the hands of parents. Perhaps the practice most strikingly singular to the Jews to control marriage and prevent free choice was very early marriage. If love was allowed any existence in this society, it could not be connected with freedom of choice which might be a problem with children as they grew older. Although peasants in Eastern Europe tended to marry quite young, the evidence suggests that the Jewish age of marriage was considerably younger.²³ Among the elite, it was frequently thirteen or fourteen for boys and a year younger for girls.²⁴ But even among the lower classes, it may have also been quite young, if not as young as this. Thus, a communal regulation from Lithuania in the seventeenth century stipulates that dowry money will be provided for poor girls if they first do a stint as servants from the ages of twelve to fifteen.²⁵ In addition, child marriages (below thirteen for boys) were not uncommon in Eastern Europe, at least

among the rabbinic classes.²⁶ The social consequence of this practice was to preclude the possibility of free choice; love might be permitted within the context of the arranged marriage, even in the very early ones, but not outside it.

We might very well ask how such very early marriages could be associated with love. Certainly the enormous social pressures attendant upon such marriages must have produced both sexual and emotional traumas in these barely pubescent children. Ezekiel Landau relates a particularly heartbreaking case of a twelve-year-old boy forced to have intercourse with his similarly young wife. Following the aborted act, the two refused to touch each other and the boy disappeared at age fourteen.²⁷ Yet, much of the evidence points to surprisingly successful early marriages. The best known case is that of Glückel of Hameln whose seventeenth century memoir is replete with expressions of love toward her husband and children that seem quite at variance to the lack of sentiment that some historians of the family ascribe to the same period.²⁸ From the end of the eighteenth century in Galicia, we hear of a minor who sleeps with his wife on a number of occasions even though the two continue to live with their respective parents.²⁹ There is no evidence of coercion and one has the sense that the relations between the two followed an entirely accepted pattern. In the hagiographical collection of Hasidic stories, Shivhei ha-Besht, the widowed son of the Maggid of Mezeritch marries a twelve-year-old girl and is reported to have become "very fond" of his young bride.³⁰ Although these stories are legendary, they provided models for the normative values of the Hasidim. Interestingly enough, in this tale, the mother of the bride is initially reluctant to betroth her daughter at such a young age, suggesting that early marriage was not automatically accepted but was rather the consequence of social pressure. But the lesson of the story, for our purposes, is that love was a recognized part of marriage and even of very early marriage.

The expectation that love would develop in arranged marriages probably acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy in at least some cases. Just as novels of romantic love in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries caused people to experience what they had read about in books, so the values of traditional society no doubt influenced behavior and experience. Today we tend to be shocked at the idea of marrying "mere" children and skeptical that such marriages could work. In part, our attitudes have been shaped by the writings of those Eastern

European maskilim, to whom we shall return, who turned their own bitter experiences of early marriage into a denunciation of the whole institution. Although some marriages failed (and we have no way of estimating what percentage), it was not necessarily because the system suppressed or denied the importance of the emotional component in marriage. While biology dictates puberty, culture shapes the emotional readiness to marry and it appears that most Jewish children, upon reaching puberty, had developed romantic desires which they expected would be fulfilled through an early marriage.

The material that I have presented here suggests that the model of "erotic modernization" proposed by historians such as Stone and Shorter does not coincide well with the experience of the Jews. Although the official value system of Ashkenazic Judaism, as expressed in legal codes, moralistic treatises and marriage manuals, seems to have placed little explicit emphasis on love prior to and in marriage, other sources, such as responsa literature and memoirs demonstrate that romantic feelings were inculcated in young people and formed part of marital expectations. To be sure, no ideology of romantic love existed in this world, for such an ideology would have necessarily challenged parental hegemony over marriage. Instead, love was integrated into the notion of predestination in marriage and made a part of the arranged early marriage. It is possible that the Jews differed significantly from the societies studied by the sentiments historians, but it is more likely that the case of the Jews contributes additional questions to the validity of their conclusions. It may well be that lack of sentiment in premodern marriages is more in the eye of the historian than a reflection of historical reality.

The Haskalah and Social Reality in the Nineteenth Century

Katz was correct in arguing that the first ideology of romantic love originated with the Haskalah. The maskilim borrowed their ideas from Western literature and attacked what they took to be traditional Jewish marriage. In their desire to wrest control of marriage out of the hands of parents and traditional institutions, they contributed greatly to the image of premodern Jewish marriage as devoid of affection and based solely on economic calculations. Thus, the historians' hypothesis of loveless traditional marriages owed much to the polemics of the maskilim. Like all myths, this one had certain roots in reality, although a more limited reality than the maskilim believed.

Much of the Haskalah attack on premodern marriage seems to have come out of generalizations from Hasidism. Indeed, to no small extent, the Haskalah succeeded in turning Hasidism, or at least its image of Hasidism, into the equivalent of all medieval Judaism. In addition to its broadsides against the hypocrisy of the Hasidic rebbes and other similar criticisms, the Haskalah attacked the Hasidim for marrying their children very early. Although the ideal and practice of early marriage seem to have been widespread among all segments of the Eastern European Jewish community and to have predated Hasidism by many centuries, the evidence indicates that the Hasidim probably continued the custom longer than other Jews. Thus, most of the cases of child marriage (i.e. under thirteen for boys) which I have uncovered from the nineteenth century and which may serve as an index for early marriage in general, appear in the responsa of Hasidic rabbis.³¹

Hasidism may also have provided the maskilim with the model for a sexually repressive Judaism. Hasidism did not break with the normative Jewish insistence on marriage, but it seems to have urged a much more ascetic attitude in marriage than was earlier the norm. In the Shivhei ha-Besht, one finds a number of different stories of saints who abstain from sex with their wives for long periods, a practice which has virtually no precedent in the earlier traditions.³² In extreme statements such as one finds in Elimelech of Lizensk and Nachman of Bratslav there is a sense of negation not only of erotic feelings but of any marital affection at all.³³ No doubt such positions must have found little resonance among the average Hasidim, but they do suggest the ideal toward which at least the zaddikim strove. Since there are also indications of affection in marriage in the Baal Shem Tov stories, we must be cautious in generalizing about Hasidism, but as a preliminary hypothesis, it seems plausible that at least some tendencies in Hasidism were much more repressive than Ashkenazic Judaism in general.

A possible confirmation of this suggestion can be found in the anti-Hasidic polemics of Joseph Perl. In his Megalleh Temirin, Perl accused the Hasidim of licentiousness and promiscuity. He also attacked Hasidic theology, which was based on the Kabbalah, as pornographic.³⁴ Yet, these claims, which find no support in the actual history of Hasidism, may actually prove the opposite: since Perl's intent was to demonstrate the hypocrisy of the Hasidim, it made sense for him to accuse them of doing the opposite of their official ideology. For Perl, the

repressive nature of Hasidism was so obvious that the best way to satirize it was to portray the Hasidim as promiscuous. Elsewhere, Perl claims that Hasidism broke up the traditional Jewish family since the Hasidim were always off at the courts of the zaddikim, leaving wives and children behind.³⁵ This argument may have some truth in it and it would be worthwhile to investigate the impact of Hasidism on the Jewish family. If Perl was right about Hasidism's subversion of the family then it may be possible to conclude that the male fellowship provided by the Hasidic court provided an escape from family life.

Whether or not Hasidism was in reality as hostile to love in marriage as the maskilim believed, it provided the Haskalah with useful ammunition. But the romantic ideology of the maskilim was even more the product of the biographies of the maskilim themselves. The memoir literature of the nineteenth century Haskalah revolves around the unhappy early marriages of the heroes who frequently either divorce or leave their wives when they discover the Haskalah. As I have argued elsewhere,³⁶ there is a strong connection in these works between unsuccessful marriages and adoption of Haskalah ideology. It is just possible that one factor that predisposed young intellectuals to drift toward Western ideas of Enlightenment was unhappiness with their adolescence, spent with a strange young wife in the often tyrannical household of their in-laws. Enlightenment, including the ideal of romantic love, formed an attractive escape from this oppressive reality.

No ideological avenues of escape existed for earlier youths whose marriages had failed. Like the fourteen-year old we encountered in the eighteenth century who disappeared from the house of his in-laws, flight or perhaps divorce were purely personal solutions. Hasidism may have fulfilled a similar role for young men caught in unhappy marriages, although this was but one factor among many in the rise of the movement. The Haskalah offered an ideology with which to counter traditional marriage. This ideology sought to redefine adolescence as a period when marriage could not succeed and when time should be devoted to other pursuits such as education or acquisition of a career. In this, the maskilim only borrowed from the new definition of adolescence which began to emerge in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,³⁷ but they applied it to the Jewish situation.

The memoirs of the maskilim suggest that most early marriages were unhappy. This testimony is suspect in the light

of the evidence we have already examined from early modern times. We have seen that the traditional understanding of adolescence prepared many, although certainly not all, boys and girls for marriage and sexuality at the time of puberty. Like all ideologies, the Haskalah tended to generalize the conditions out of which it emerged and the maskilim created a myth of the unhappy early marriage based on their own experience. Undoubtedly, those who accepted the new values of romantic love and a free adolescence were much more likely to experience their own early marriages as oppressive: in this way, an ideology can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. But it would be a mistake to read back into history the perceptions of the nineteenth century maskilim.

The tragic youths of the maskilim, whether products of ideology or reality, foreclosed the possibility of love. Although captivated by Western Romantic literature, the young Jewish intellectuals were rarely able to realize the ideals they read about in their own lives. They suffered from a high divorce rate and many would no doubt have agreed with Abraham Mapu that "only one in a thousand will derive joy from family life and even that will be a facade."³⁸

In this respect, art followed life. Up through the 1860s or so, Haskalah literature in both Hebrew and Yiddish was heavily didactic. The maskilim advocated a new capitalist mentality to replace the medieval commercial ethic of the Jews. In fiction such as Israel Aksenfeld's Dos Shterntikhl (1840s) and Mendele's Ha-Avot ve-ha-Banim (1868), the old system of marriage symbolizes medieval commercial values.³⁹ Capitalism required the "decommercialization" of marriage, which meant that instead of a business deal between parents, marriage would be contracted freely between the young people themselves. These authors wedded romantic love to capitalism in order to remove marriage from the marketplace. However, in such didactic novels, romance is really not the main theme, but rather exists as an artificial prop for the main Haskalah ideology of economic productivity. Novels treating love more centrally, such as Mapu's Ahavat Zion, are typically set in an imaginary biblical past and thus have a quality of escapism about them.

By the 1870s and 1880s, Hebrew and Yiddish literature had become less didactic and more realistic. But love remained elusive and, as Baruch Kurzweil shrewdly observed, the heroes of many of these stories seem caught in perpetual adolescence, unable to realize mature erotic relationships.⁴⁰ Sholem

Aleichem spoke for a whole generation when he said that the peculiar problem of the Jewish writer was to "write a novel without romance."⁴¹ For these intellectuals, the social reality of the Jews did not include love.

Yet, it is crucial for the historian not to be misled by either the fiction or the ideology of the nineteenth century intellectuals. Their personal reality was not the reality of all the Jews. We may, in fact, be able to learn much more about the values of late nineteenth century Jews not by reading the literary giants but by examining the voluminous writings of pulp novelists like A. M. Dik and Shomer.⁴² These best-selling authors, who were denounced for writing trash by the "better" writers such as Sholem Aleichem, undoubtedly had more influence on popular culture than did their critics. Dik and Shomer fed their readers an unending stream of the Jewish equivalent of Harlequin romances. As David Roskies has shown, many of Dik's stories differed little from the earlier Yiddish chapbook literature, but where the earlier stories were usually built around predestined matches, Dik infiltrated Haskalah values by putting the young couple more fully in control of their fate.⁴³ It was in this literature that Jews could find modern values of romantic love, but the form of the literature was so close to more traditional models that it represents less of a revolution than an evolution in values.

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. Probably independent of Haskalah polemics, orthodox Jews were beginning to change their attitudes toward age of marriage. Moses Feivish (1817-1887), the author of a popular treatise on the laws of marriage, condemned marriage of boys at age thirteen. He held that sexual development was not as precocious in his time as it was earlier so that early marriage was not necessary to protect against sin. Feivish recommended marriage at age eighteen, since "the main part of one's studying should be during these years. [Therefore, the rabbis] allowed one to wait until this age."⁴⁴ Feivish's prescriptions are particularly striking because they may have been related to his own biography. He was married at age fourteen and ran off to a Vilna yeshivah with his young wife because his in-laws refused to let him study.⁴⁵

Feivish represents the shift towards study as the correct activity during adolescence. A similar position was taken by

Naphtali Zvi Berlin, the head of the great Volozhin yeshiva for much of the nineteenth century. In his commentary on Exodus 1:7, Berlin wrote: ". . . girls who begin to give birth when they are young (be'neur'ei'hen) 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 . . ." ⁴⁶ The health argument for later marriage can already be found in eighteenth century writings, such as Jacob Emden's response, but Berlin's position took on institutional meaning. The Lithuanian yeshivot did not accept married men with their wives and it was only in 1879 that the kolel was established as an institution for married students. A special category of students were perushim, those who had separated from their wives in order to study. As Shaul Stampfer has shown, the age of marriage among the yeshivah students rose dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century until it stood at around twenty-five. ⁴⁷ Thus, by putting study before marriage, the yeshivah movement, which was a nineteenth century phenomenon, may have contributed to the rise in age of marriage. With the claim that young boys were not sexually ready for marriage, the very definition of adolescence changed and, with it, the expectations placed on children reaching puberty.

One of the major summaries of Jewish law from the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth confirms this shift in priorities. In 1905, Yehiel Michael Epstein (1829-1908) published his Arukh Ha-Shulhan on the Even Ha-Ezer (laws of marriage) section of the Shulhan Arukh. He states explicitly that one should wed at eighteen and study before. Echoing the argument we found in Feivish, he claims that "the instincts have weakened in these generations" so that marriage to avoid masturbation and temptation is less necessary. Epstein thoroughly rejects the earlier Ashkenazic tradition which allowed child marriage and concludes: "And there is not reason to discuss this matter at length since it is virtually non-existent in our time." ⁴⁸

Within the orthodox world, then, changes in values similar to those advocated by the Haskalah were taking place which may have affected secular demographic trends. An older average age of marriage did not in and of itself herald a breakdown in parental authority, but it did create a period after puberty, which we today call adolescence, that was not constrained by marriage. Since parental control was exercised by supervising

the match of children and then boarding them in one of the parental houses for a set period, delay in marriage would create the possibility of children leaving home following puberty, especially if they went off to study.

As the age of marriage rose, children of orthodox 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 . . .⁴⁹

In addition to a fleeting portrait of a strict patriarchal household, we learn from this responsum that a meeting between bride and groom before the engagement would not have been out of the question if the father were not so forbidding. It is also interesting to observe from Schwadron's ruling, in which he allows the engagement to be broken without penalty, that the wishes of the son should have been taken into account. Schwadron sympathizes with the boy's rejection of the girl based on her appearance and quotes from the Song of Songs to the effect that height is one of the traits desirable in the bride.

In other cases, children tried to arrange their own marriages. Here is a case from 1879 reported by Abraham Landau Bornstein of Sochaczew (1839-1910):

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 were by coincidence in the community of Likewé (?) 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 (ahavah ve'hibba) and 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.⁵⁰

There was nothing new about such clandestine love, but there are some peculiarly modern elements to this case. The boy and girl meet in a community to which each has traveled, which suggests greater mobility than would have been the case for early adolescents. Like Mendelssohn's letters to his fiancée, these letters are not copies from letter formularies but are

spontaneous expressions of affection, something that would have been extremely unusual in an earlier period when most letter writing of this sort followed strict conventions. The use of words like ahavah also suggests modern influence, perhaps from the Yiddish pulp literature.

Similarly, Pauline Wengeroff, the daughter of a wealthy Lithuanian family, exchanged intimate letters with her fiancé in 1849.⁵¹ Wengeroff's engagement was arranged by the parents, but it had certain clearly modern elements such as the exchange of real rather than formulaic letters. In addition, Wengeroff was allowed to meet privately with her husband-to-be, which, as we have seen, was part of traditional engagement customs in an earlier time. But in Wengeroff's circles, the practice had thoroughly disappeared, even if it possibly persisted among less educated and less wealthy people. Wengeroff attributes the increased freedom to the influence of non-Jewish ideas and she points out that her sister, married just a few years earlier, only met her husband the day of the wedding. Here is a case of the reintroduction of traditional practices, which had been suppressed, as a result of Western notions of romantic love.

These cases, taken from orthodox settings, suggest the complicated way in which old customs were giving way to new. Even among those who had seemingly moved away from traditional attitudes, many of the old practices persisted. Thus, Y.L. Peretz's father, who was a maskil, arranged his son's marriage in the traditional fashion.⁵² In a letter formulary from the beginning of the twentieth century, a young man writes to a matchmaker for help in securing the parent's approval for his prospective marriage.⁵³ Here the young people have taken the initiative by falling in love in the "modern style" but they turn to a traditional institution to put the marriage on the right basis.

Was there, then, a Jewish revolution of romantic sentiment? The answer is ambiguous at best. Love was not absent from marriage in early modern Jewish society, despite the effects of early marriage. Nor was love necessarily a deviation from a system of instrumental marital norms: it was, rather, an expected part of this system. Parents generally controlled marriage but their control was by no means absolute and the degree of freedom within the system allowed for the possibility of love, whether sanctioned or illicit.

The Eastern European enlighteners tried to introduce Western values of romantic love and free choice in marriage, but, on a

personal level, their attempted revolution must be judged a failure. Their inability to realize love in their own lives led to a bitter critique of traditional Jewish society and the creation of an extreme image of the nature of Jewish marriage. It was on the more popular level, in pulp literature that wedded Western ideas with indigenous Jewish traditions, that new values began to take root. Yet, more than a revolution in values, the modernization of Jewish marriage was a result of the victory of love once parental control of marriage dissipated. If love had always played a role in marriage, it could only become the main element when urbanization and emigration at the end of the nineteenth century weakened the power of the traditional family. As Jews increasingly left their families before marriage, whether to study or work, they removed love from its traditional matrix and made it the centerpiece of their emotional lives, thus replacing the "family of origin" with the "family of procreation."⁵⁴ Only once this shift in power from one generation to the next had been completed could love acquire a new and autonomous meaning.

