

CURIOUS DAUGHTERS:
LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND JEWISH FEMALE DESIRE IN GERMAN AND YIDDISH
LITERATURE FROM 1793 TO 1916

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ABSTRACT

Lea H. Greenberg:
Curious Daughters: Language, Literacy, and Jewish Female Desire in German and Yiddish
Literature from 1793 to 1916
(Under the direction of Ruth von Bernuth)

This dissertation examines the interplay of language politics and romantic politics in German and Yiddish literature confronting the challenges faced by Judaism in the long nineteenth century. The project brings into dialogue both German and Yiddish texts, from West Yiddish farces to the literature of a new German Jewish elite to the popular stories of Tevye the Dairyman. This diverse body of literature uses a concern with the sexual purity and loyalty of the Jewish daughter to encode anxieties toward Jewish assimilation into the non-Jewish world. Yet these works also share another layer of the daughter's subversion: an act of rebellion in the form of a linguistic or cultural departure from tradition. Each of these texts depicts how the Jewish daughter's adoption of European language and literacy operates in conjunction with her romantic transgressions. I read these works in conversation with the gendered discourse on Jewish language and the history of Jewish women in Europe; these dynamics create a framework for understanding an ambivalence toward new modes of Jewish life. By bearing the onus as cultural gatekeeper, the daughter figure blurs the lines between religious and social categories or explodes these dichotomies altogether.

Dedicated to the memory of Jonathan M. Hess

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. On Relationships: German and Yiddish, German and Jewish, Christians and Jews.....	5
II. On Daughters.....	10
III. On Gender and Jewish Language.....	15
IV. Reading as Rebellion.....	21
V. Defining Modernity.....	24
VI. The Daughters Ahead.....	27
VII. A Note on Transliteration and Translation.....	31
CHAPTER 1: STAGING THEATRICAL AND LINGUISTIC ADAPTATION IN YIDDISH THEATER OF THE BERLIN HASKALAH.....	33
I. Introduction.....	33
II. The Haskalah and the Politics of Language.....	39
III. Halle-Wolfssohn's <i>Laykhtzin un fremelay</i>	44
IV. Euchel's <i>Reb Henoch</i>	66
CHAPTER 2: <i>BILDUNG</i> AND FAILED CONVERSION IN FANNY LEWALD'S <i>JENNY</i> (1843).....	81
I. Introduction.....	81
II. Fanny Lewald's <i>Jenny</i>	84
III. <i>Verbürgerlichung</i> in the Meier Family and the Role of <i>Bildung</i>	89
IV. Literature as a Space of Subversive Desire.....	101

V. An Attempted Conversion Narrative.....	106
VI. Literature as a Space of Denial.....	121
CHAPTER 3: LEOPOLD KOMPERT’S LOST DAUGHTERS.....	129
I. Introduction.....	129
II. “Eine Verlorene”.....	138
III. “Die Jahrzeit”.....	158
IV. Conclusion.....	172
CHAPTER 4: <i>LESESUCHT</i> AND <i>HALBE BILDUNG</i> IN KARL EMIL FRANZOS’S GHETTO FICTION.....	175
I. Introduction.....	175
II. The Daughter in the Precarious In-Between.....	182
III. “Der Shylock von Barnow”.....	184
IV. The Problem of <i>Lesesucht</i>	188
V. “Die halbe Bildung” and Reading Shakespeare.....	196
VI. The Stakes and Containment of Female Appetite.....	206
VII. The Stakes of Male Learning and the Problem of the Uncle.....	211
VIII. Conclusion.....	216
CHAPTER 5: FINDING TEVYE’S DAUGHTERS.....	219
I. Introduction.....	219
II. The Tasks of Writing in Yiddish and of Writing Tevye	223
III. Khave: The “First” Rebellious Daughter.....	233
IV. Tevye’s Confession.....	246
V. “Tevye’s daughters know how to talk”.....	252
VI. Conclusion.....	259

CONCLUSION.....262
WORKS CITED.....268

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2020, a large portion of the Netflix-viewing audience—held captive at home due to a pandemic—was captivated by the story of a curious daughter who leaves the Hasidic community and her new marriage in Brooklyn to begin a secular life in Berlin.¹ During a time when housebound viewers were all the more susceptible to new forms of escapism, the online streaming platform released the miniseries adaptation of Deborah Feldman’s 2012 autobiography *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots*.² Both the memoir and its adaptation follow a rebellious Jewish daughter whose parents, like her, did not adhere to the norms of the ultra-orthodox community. Her parents are both outsiders to a degree (a mother from England who later leaves the fold and a father dealing with mental health issues), but she is kept anchored in Jewish tradition by the generation before, raised primarily by her grandmother. This daughter makes the break with orthodoxy that was eschewed or delayed for her father and mother, respectively, and attempts to rebuild a secular life of her own shortly after she acquiesces to an arranged marriage.

The series *Unorthodox* gained global popularity as well as a hefty amount of criticism. Among its shortcomings was a trafficking in simple hero and villain tropes, in which the traditional, Hasidic world was bad, grey, and heartless, and the secular world of Berlin was good and welcoming, all drenched in bright golden hues. The series portrays the protagonist Esty’s

¹ Maria Schrader, *Unorthodox*, Miniseries (Netflix, 2020).

² Deborah Feldman, *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

abrupt entry into the secular world—and into the culture of partying and sexuality in Berlin no less—as relatively uncomplicated for a young woman who had spent her life in an insulated religious community. A more nuanced approach to this narrative might have accounted for the difficulties Esty would face deciphering the mores of young Berlin or reflected on the strength of ritual and familial ties in Brooklyn. Many of these critiques were articulated by members or former members of the Orthodox community such as Naomi Seidman and Frieda Vizel, who have both told their own OTD (off the *derekh*—that is, off the Orthodox path) stories publicly.³ The miniseries also departs from Feldman’s memoir in many ways, including the notable omission of Feldman’s intellectual rebellion as she secretly read secular literature—such as Pearl Abraham’s OTD novel *The Romance Reader*—and later enrolled in a writing program at Sarah Lawrence College.

The contemporary works of *Unorthodox* and its fictional adaptation in fact belong to a much longer tradition of literature that places the curious young woman at the threshold between tradition and modernity, between religion and the secular. The daughter, by subverting the status quo both intellectually and romantically, articulates both the potential and the limitations of cultural transformation. In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski identifies how key symbols of the modern are gendered as masculine: concepts and figures such as the public sphere, the man of the crowd, the dandy, and the *flâneur*. While the modern literary imagination allowed the dandy or the *flâneur* to roam through a new and rapidly changing world, the woman was to be

³ See Seidman and Vizel’s responses to the miniseries in: Naomi Seidman, “My Scandalous Rejection of *Unorthodox*,” *Jewish Review of Books*, May 4, 2020, <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/7564/telling-the-otd-tale-or-my-scandalous-rejection-of-unorthodox/>; Frieda Vizel, “‘Unorthodox’ is a dangerous, misleading fairy tale of transitioning from the secular world,” *Forward*, April 28, 2020, <https://forward.com/culture/445034/unorthodox-is-a-dangerous-misleading-fairy-tale-of-transitioning-from-the/> and Emelie Svensson, “Frieda Vizel: ‘Unorthodox’ Is Nothing Like the Hasidic Community I Know,” *The Spectator*, May 4, 2020, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/frieda-vizel-unorthodox-is-nothing-like-the-hasidic-community-i-know>. Seidman also points to Salomon Maimon’s 1793 *Lebensgeschichte* as a sort of early OTD narrative.

“located within the household and an intimated web of familial relations, more closely linked to nature through her reproductive capacity.”⁴ Felski writes that the woman “embodied a sphere of atemporal authenticity seemingly untouched by the alienation and fragmentation of modern life.”⁵ In the face of new social mores and economic structures, the female body acts as a vessel for the preservation of norms and a mythology of purity and “as a redemptive refuge from the constraints of modern civilization identified with growing materialism, the worship of scientific reason, and an alienating urban environment.”⁶ According to Felski, both the woman as a representative of an authentic, non-fragmented identity and her *deviation from* this ideal are central motifs in cultural representations of the nineteenth century that grapple with the immense social and cultural shifts of modernity.⁷

Felski’s framework is central in considering why the female literary figure perennially emerges to embody questions of a reorganization of the social order. The bourgeois tragedy (*bürgerliches Trauerspiel*), an influential German literary form emerging from the Enlightenment and modeled on the English domestic drama, is a foundational example of the female figure at the perilous site of social rupture: The typical paradigm of the bourgeois tragedy centers on tensions between father and daughter to explore broader anxieties toward the new social and moral frontiers of modern life.⁸ In this genre that grapples with a perceived threat to

⁴ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸ On the father-daughter paradigm, see Ch. 4 of: Jonathan M. Hess, *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

the patriarchal order, the mother is often all but absent and the daughter meets a tragic end.⁹ The centrality of the daughter, though, is not limited to this dramatic form. A concern with the errant daughter, in particular because of her aforementioned reproductive capacity, populates European literature throughout its confrontation with modernity. A policing of the daughter's desire operates as a literary language for articulating these uncomfortable encounters. This motif of control, whether corporeal or intellectual, indeed speaks to a larger anxiety toward the endurance of the self and the community. Rebellious daughters show points of ruptures; they are women poised to be the next generation of mothers who attempt to marry against the wishes of the father and who experiment with new forms of socialization and education. These ruptures occur when the potential bearers of the next generation rebuff their status as guardians of the domestic status quo.

This dissertation, *Curious Daughters: Language, Literacy, and Jewish Female Desire in German and Yiddish Literature from 1793 to 1916*, considers how this paradigm emerges in the forerunners of *Unorthodox*, a story of a Jewish daughter who refuses the strictures of tradition. I consider this model in European Jewish literature, specifically in German Jewish and Yiddish texts, and identify a dual, interrelated fixation with both the romantic and intellectual desire of the daughter. This dissertation considers a diverse corpus of literature—from eighteenth-century Western Yiddish comedies to the fiction of a new German Jewish elite to Sholem Aleichem's stories that inspired *Fiddler on the Roof*—that uses a concern with the sexual purity and loyalty of the Jewish daughter to articulate anxieties toward Christian-Jewish relations and Jewish

⁹ On the centrality of the “father-daughter dyad,” see Susan E. Gustafson, *Absent Mothers and Orphaned Fathers: Narcissism and Abjection in Lessing's Aesthetic and Dramatic Production* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995). On the genre of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* and the role of the daughter as enacting a threat to authority: Gail Kathleen Hart, *Tragedy in Paradise: Family and Gender Politics in German Bourgeois Tragedy, 1750–1850* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996).

assimilation into the non-Jewish world. Yet these texts also share another layer of the daughter's subversion: an act of rebellion in the form of a linguistic or cultural departure from tradition. Against the backdrop of Jewish tradition, the stakes of the daughter's behavior become all the more fraught. According to Jewish law, known as *halakha*, Jewishness is passed down through the matrilineal descent.¹⁰ The daughter figure therefore operates as both a symbolic and corporeal gatekeeper for the continuation of the Judaism and the Jewish family, a concern that features throughout the study of Jewish history and culture.¹¹ Notions of the feminine also color an understanding of Jewish language, as Yiddish, the Ashkenazi Jewish vernacular that developed out of Middle High German, is characterized as a feminine realm in contrast to the masculine Hebrew, the holy language.

I. On Relationships: German and Yiddish, German and Jewish, Christians and Jews

Curious Daughters brings together both German Jewish and Yiddish literature, groups of texts that are often considered separately by separate scholars. The close linguistic relationship between German and Yiddish is but a starting point for thinking about how these literary traditions are intimately connected in their attention to the European Ashkenazi Jewish

¹⁰ On the origins of the matrilineal principle, see Ch. 9 of Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

¹¹ The issue of "continuity" recurs throughout Jewish history and its writing. In the context of rabbinic culture, anxieties regarding reproduction and genealogy are central; see Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (University of California Press, 1993). In the 19th century Germany, advocates of the idea of Jewish continuity can be found among the leaders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* such as Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) and Heinrich Graetz (1817–91). Graetz, for example, is best known for his comprehensive history of Judaism, a project that was driven by a belief in its continuity. For more on these figures, Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2003). The notion of Jewish continuity reaches into the present day in America with the idea known as the "continuity crisis," a fear that American Jewish communities were, via interfaith marriage, in decline. For an explication of the "crisis mentality" toward intermarriage in the Jewish community that was bolstered by sociological studies, see Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009). Many thanks to Andrea Cooper to pointing me to this discourse.

experience. While the status of Yiddish as a Jewish language is self-evident, the place of German in Jewish literature opens up a different set of complexities. In his study *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity*, Jonathan Hess makes clear that works need not be written in the languages traditionally understood as Jewish—Hebrew, Yiddish, or Ladino, for example—to be Jewish literature.¹² As Jews in central Europe increasingly abandoned their use of Yiddish by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, German functionally became the primary language of Jewish life and culture in the German lands and Austrian Empire. I build on this landmark study of the socio-culturally transformative capacity of belle-lettres to suggest that German—central in the development of Jewish spiritual, philosophical, historical, national, and literary thought—is a Jewish language in its own right. In his recent study on the centrality of German in Jewish nationalism, Marc Volovici explicitly does *not* categorize German as a “Jewish language,” but his work questions the prevailing distinctions between Jewish and non-Jewish languages.¹³ German was central not only to articulating Jewish nationalism, but also to the Jewish Reform movement and to the everyday and scholarly experience of Jews across Europe. Volovici offers a corrective to the term “German-speaking Jews” by referring to “German-reading Jews,” since German-language literature and thought were a key part of cultural and intellectual life well beyond the borders of the German-speaking lands.¹⁴

This dissertation takes seriously the appeal to challenge the divisions between Jewish and non-Jewish languages by considering a spectrum of literary works—from texts written in a hybrid of Western Yiddish and High German, to German, to Yiddish from the Russian Empire—

¹² Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*.

¹³ Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

and conceives of them as part of a network of related literary models in which linguistic and educational boundaries are fluid rather than fixed. These models span across established linguistic and geographic boundaries, divisions born of political and ideological hegemony that cannot fully reflect Jewish cultural history. The idea of discrete national literatures and the notion of monolingualism are themselves innovations of the eighteenth century and paradigms that do not align with the lived experiences of European Jewry (whose bi- and multilingualism I will explore further later in this text).¹⁵ At the same time, the emergence of these paradigms in the late eighteenth century—in which language was seen as central to a people’s identity—necessarily informs the conceptions of linguistic and cultural transformation in these literary works. These works at times re-articulate a language ideology that aligns language with nation and a particular way of thought, and they also often demonstrate the quandaries and limitations therein.

Each case study is therefore both informed by its regional context and understood as part of a larger Jewish and/or European conversation. This analysis both challenges the assumptions of national literatures and takes into consideration the national and language ideological movements contemporaneous with the literary works at hand. My argument is not that linguistic divisions do not matter—in fact, they matter a great deal, and in particular during the centuries in which these texts emerged as various European nationalisms (including Jewish nationalism) developed. My aim is to think about these works in how they are informed by language and cultural ideologies while at the same time not reinforcing the notion that their literary home

¹⁵ Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 2. Philosophers such as Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte were central figures in the emergent study of linguistics and in theorizing the relationship between nation and language. On the formation of the fields of philology and comparative linguistics, see Tuska Benes, *In Babel’s Shadow: Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008). Benes traces how the German study of language contributed to the rise of modern nationalism.

(“German literature” versus “Yiddish literature”) affords them some sort of inherent features or self-contained intellectual space. European Jews, and Europe more generally, have long participated in a multilingual conversation. This dissertation focuses on a paradigm emerging from this conversation in literature that confronts Jewish-Christian relations and the secularization of Jewish life: the fixation with the Jewish daughter’s love life and interfaith romance.

Love has served as a prominent trope in talking about the relationship (already a love-laden term) between the “German” and the “Jewish.” In “Wider den Mythos vom deutsch-jüdischen Dialog” (1964), Scholem declares no genuine dialogue between Germans and Jews has existed; expanding further on a metaphor of interpersonal relationship, Scholem later states that the “[d]ie Liebesaffäre der Juden mit den Deutschen blieb, aufs Große gesehen, einseitig, unerwidert und weckte im besten Fall etwas wie Rührung [...]”¹⁶ Scholarship on German Jewish literature and culture since Scholem, whether directly or indirectly, have responded to this assertion. Literary scholars such as Jonathan Hess, Leslie Morris, Jonathan Skolnik, and Scott Spector, to name a few, have investigated the transformations of Jewish culture in the German-speaking world and the meaning (and limits) of the designation “German Jewish.”¹⁷

Scholem’s invocation of unrequited love points to a prominent model for exploring the

¹⁶ Gershom Scholem, “Juden und Deutsche,” *Judaica* 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970): 20–46, here 39.

¹⁷ Morris’s work questions the very nomenclature used to examine Jewish German-language literature, see Leslie Morris, “Epistemology of the Hyphen: German-Jewish/-Holocaust Studies,” in *Crossing the Disciplinary Divide: Conjunctions in German and Holocaust Studies*, ed. Jennifer Kapczynski and Erin McGlothlin (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2016), 107–19. Hess interrogates the political and social discourse on Jews during the Enlightenment and the role of popular literature in the shaping of a new German Jewish middle class. See, respectively: Jonathan M. Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002) and *Middlebrow Literature*. For a study of how historical fiction helped shape modern secular German Jewish culture, see Jonathan Skolnik, *Jewish Pasts, German Fictions: History, Memory, and Minority Culture in Germany, 1824–1955* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014). Spector examines the role of Jewishness in the literary and philosophical contributions of prominent modernist German Jewish intellectuals, see Scott Spector, *Modernism without Jews?: German-Jewish Subjects and Histories* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017).

relationship between Jews and European society more generally. The trope of love in confronting the negotiation and discontents of Jewishness in the non-Jewish world, according to Katja Garloff, functions to draw “attention to unfulfilled promises and the creative acts their fulfillment would require.”¹⁸ In recent publications, Garloff and Eva Lezzi use love and romantic relations as a model to consider Christian-Jewish relations in the context of German literature. Garloff’s *Mixed Feelings* and Lezzi’s “*Liebe ist meine Religion!*” both trace the role of love in German literature as a way of examining the social and political integration of Jews in the German-speaking world.¹⁹ Garloff considers how romantic love, defined as “a powerful attraction between two individuals and the basis of a potentially lifelong relationship,” serves as a model for (re)thinking about the relations between social groups.²⁰

Romantic love is a productive way to conceptualize the interactions between two historically opposed groups, but—if one takes seriously Scholem’s contention that the German-Jewish love affair was ultimately unrequited—love might also be the best place to consider how a group must negotiate with itself. When love is unrequited or is destabilized, a relationship of some sort—whether or not it is based on mutual feelings or even acknowledgement—takes place. Even when love is not reciprocated, it is still a fertile ground for exploring desires and the assertion or limitations of autonomy. The modern idea of the romantic self emerged, according to Eva Illouz, along with eighteenth-century sentimental literature and novels, spaces in which a new ideal of love was promoted and managed “in theory and in practice, to unsettle the power

¹⁸ Katja Garloff, “Unrequited Love: On the Rhetoric of a Trope from Moritz Goldstein to Hannah Arendt,” *Nexus: Essays in German Jewish Studies* 1 (2011): 47–66.

¹⁹ Katja Garloff, *Mixed Feelings: Tropes of Love in German-Jewish Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Eva Lezzi, “*Liebe ist meine Religion!*”: *Eros und Ehe zwischen Juden und Christen in der Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013).

²⁰ Garloff, *Mixed Feelings*, 3.

which parents—especially fathers—exerted in their daughters’ marriages.”²¹ The ideal of romantic love, both in the post-Reformation European literary imagination and society, thus served as “an agent of individualization and autonomy, however circumvolved such emancipation might have been.”²² The nuclearization of the family, centered around the married couple, and the rise of the love marriage have profound social and poetic implications that constitute a central premise of this work.²³ As a historical phenomenon, these paradigm shifts were highly visible among European Jews, who confronted changing pressures to adapt to surrounding Christian-dominated practices and institutions, whether through more secularized, bourgeois ways of life or through conversion. As a literary development, the emergence of the romantic self and the errant daughter create models for thinking about the potential for remaking and reconciling the traditional ways of Jewish life with the bourgeois ideal of family, offering new conceptions of domestic life and devotion (spiritual and familial). Love and its pursuit as an individualizing process create a friction against the idea of the Jewish family as a network of inter-reliant members.

II. On Daughters

At the center of this fraught process of individualization is the daughter. The term “daughter” appears straightforward but also requires explication, and in particular, how this label carries implications beyond its primary denotation as someone’s offspring. The daughter figure is understood in her potential to marry and bear children to create the next generation.

²¹ Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 12.

²² *Ibid.*, 12.

²³ Garloff, *Mixed Feelings*, 20.

Daughterhood is a useful category because it accentuates vertical relationships—those between parents and children, or even grandchildren and more distant ancestors—and serves as a model to consider the conflicts that transpire between generations.

Daughterhood is often invoked when identifying the female inheritors of a particular generation or significant period in history, or to mark the continuation of a certain religious or cultural heritage. By the eighteenth century, the emerging field of comparative philology cast the relationships between languages and their differentiation in terms of feminine roles of kinship, using a vocabulary of *mother language*, *sister language*, and *daughter language*.²⁴ Within and beyond religious understandings of kinship, daughter language surfaces to invoke a sense of cultural inheritance or to mark the guardians of a community, from the biblical designation for Jerusalem “Daughter [of] Zion” to the Daughters of the American Revolution or the United Daughters of the Confederacy.²⁵ As another example of the communal significance of daughter language, calls to Jewish women of all ages in twenty-first century Hasidic communities are formulated in terms of daughters (part of a longer tradition of addressing Jewish women as “tekhter”), as evident in public signs found in New York that implore “tayere yidishe tekhter” to observe modesty rules.²⁶ Such communal appeals, reflecting the central and at times

²⁴ Stefani Engelstein, *Sibling Action: The Genealogical Structure of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 19.

²⁵ The designation “daughter [of] Zion” is part of a larger tradition in the Hebrew Bible that personifies Zion, Jerusalem, or Israel as a “woman subordinate to YHWH” and is thematized both in terms of her beauty and her promiscuity (2–3). In the singular, the designation is understood to be a genitive of apposition, where Zion is a daughter, and not the parent of a daughter (2). The plural “daughters of Zion” likely refers to the inhabitants of Jerusalem or the its surrounding villages. See Annette Volfing, *The Daughter Zion Allegory in Medieval German Religious Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2017). Regarding the female personification of Zion, both in singular and plural, Christl M. Maier argues that the city as woman is understood both as a collective and as a precious place that was destroyed. See Christl M. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, 2008), 181.

²⁶ Signs found in Williamsburg, Brooklyn state, “Tayere yidishe tekhter: Bite rikt aykh on a zayt ven a man kumt antkegn” (“Dear Jewish daughters: Please move to the side when a man passes by”). These were taken down, as they were nailed to trees in violation of city law. John Del Signore, “Yiddish Signs Ordering Women to Make Way for

controversial Jewish modesty principles *tzniut* (or *tsniyes* in Yiddish; usually referring to rules of dress for women), employs language that conceives of daughters both concretely and in the abstract: Women, young and old, are recognized as individuals, each someone's daughter, and implored to mind their behavior, and at the same time they are called as part of a collective of daughters of the Jewish community tasked with upholding Jewish values. "Daughter" thus exceeds its primary meaning as the offspring of parents and instead emphasizes women's role as carriers of traditional institutions and socially sanctioned behavior.

Both in her fictional and (auto)biographical representation, the figure of the Jewish daughter who rejects traditional institutions is a persistently captivating subject. This is borne out in recent historical scholarship: In 2020, Rachel Manekin published *The Rebellion of the Daughters*, an investigation of young Jewish women who fled their Orthodox Galician homes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some sheltering in a convent and converting to Catholicism.²⁷ Manekin also traces how this phenomenon of runaway daughters entered into the cultural imagination and was taken up in Jakob Wasserman's (1873–1934) novel *Der Moloch* (1902), the film *Der Shylock von Krakau* (1913), Aniela Kallas's (1868–1942) novel *Córki marnotrawne* ("Prodigal Daughters," 1913), and S.Y. Agnon's (1888–1970) novella "Tehilla"

Men in Williamsburg Taken Down," *Gothamist*, October 7, 2011, <https://gothamist.com/news/yiddish-signs-ordering-women-to-make-way-for-men-in-williamsburg-taken-down>. Cited in Jonathan Boyarin, *Jewish Families* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 105–6. For another example of modesty-promoting signage, see also Aaron Short, "Rabbis to Williamsburg Women: Don't Wear That Tank Top!," *Brooklyn Paper*, June 8, 2011.

A prominent early example of this Yiddish call to Jewish daughters can be seen in Rabbi Benjamin Slonik's *Seder mitzvot ha-nashim* ("The Order of Women's Commandments," 1577), a handbook of Jewish law and ritual that addresses "mayn libe tokhter" ("my dear daughter"). See Edward Fram, *My Dear Daughter: Rabbi Benjamin Slonik and the Education of Jewish Women in Sixteenth-Century Poland* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2007).

²⁷ Rachel Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters: Jewish Women Runaways in Habsburg Galicia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

(1950).²⁸ The crisis of young women leaving the fold, in part spurred by the inadequacies of women's schooling, led to the Bais Yaakov movement, which provided a robust education for Orthodox Jewish girls in the years after World War I and continues as a network of day schools today. This is the subject of Naomi Seidman's latest monograph, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement: A Revolution in the Name of Tradition*, which looks at Schenirer's historical and symbolic role as leader of the movement as well as the tensions between her role as a pathbreaker and a protector of religious tradition.²⁹

As Manekin briefly addresses in her study, the phenomenon of lost daughters animated several works of literature, continuing in a longer tradition of European literature that imagines the strife between generations and the allure of modernity in terms of the daughter's rebellion. This dissertation considers how narratives of rebellious Jewish daughters both participate in the father-daughter paradigm of modern European fiction and at times complicate this constellation with the brother-sister and uncle-niece relationship. The central father-daughter dyad was already a troublesome recurring motif in the Hebrew Bible.³⁰ Robert Polhemus takes up the question of the biblical father-daughter paradigm in a bold and wide-reaching argument. In his study *Lot's Daughters: Sex, Redemption, and Women's Quest for Authority*, Polhemus explores how the incestual story of Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19) has shaped modern culture and history, producing what he terms the "Lot complex" as a "mutual attraction between young females and

²⁸ Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters*, 165–81.

²⁹ Naomi Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement: A Revolution in the Name of Tradition* (Liverpool: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2019).

³⁰ For a general study of father-daughter relationships in the Hebrew Bible, see Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

older males.”³¹ In nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture, Polhemus reads the Lot complex as a “drive or compulsion to preserve, adapt, and/or expropriate the traditional paternal power to sustain, regenerate, define, represent, and transmit life and civilization,” an impulse that is “[f]uture-oriented” in a way that “expresses the agonizing demand to sacrifice the past.”³²

It is not my aim to investigate the resonance of incestuous impulses, nor is it Polhemus’s claim that the Lot complex is a universal one. But the Lot story presents an foundational model of patriarchal power and the placement of burden to reproduce on the daughter, a story centered on the father-daughter relationship that contains, according to Polhemus, “desires that shake the world” including the desire for immortality by way of progeny and the “desire of men to preserve themselves, conquer time, remain potent, and keep on wooing the future.”³³ Reading literature partly in the shadow of the Lot story implies understanding texts both in their reproduction of these drives and in their attempt to shake them off. As suggested by its title, Polhemus’s study also celebrates the enactment of female agency in the context of patriarchal structures. *Curious Daughters* investigates how the daughter confronts her father’s desire to “keep on wooing the future”—that is, the daughter’s confrontations with the father’s interest in preserving his legacy and her attempts to challenge his defense of the status quo. This dissertation explores how the daughter subverts the father’s wishes and seeks liberation, but it is also interested in how these attempts fall flat and infelicitously reinforce existing systems of power. At times, the daughter succeeds in claiming her own voice and disrupting the father’s

³¹ In Genesis, Lot flees from Sodom and Gomorrah with his two daughters. Believing there are no men left, the daughters make their father drunk so that they may become pregnant by him. Robert M. Polhemus, *Lot’s Daughters: Sex, Redemption, and Women’s Quest for Authority* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), ix. This diverges from the Jungian Electra complex, which focuses on mother-daughter competition in this configuration.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

efforts to maintain the traditional practices of Judaism. At other times she returns to the patriarch, but more often, the result finds her somewhere in between—both treading new paths and suffering social alienation as a result of her innovation.

III. On Gender and Jewish Language

Although the characterization of Yiddish as a corrupted German is inaccurate (and more overtly, a description charged with stigma), the linguistic history of Yiddish and German cannot be disentangled.³⁴ A consideration of their entanglements first requires a clarification of the former term: “Yiddish”—the name currently used for the Ashkenazi Jewish vernacular—is a designation that is “much younger than the language itself.”³⁵ Preceding efforts in the twentieth century to standardize Yiddish, the Jewish vernacular was known by a number of other appellations including, but not limited to: *taytsh*, *Judendeutsch*, *Jüdisch-deutsch*, *Jargon*, and *die jüdisch-deutsche Sprache*. As these names for the Jewish vernacular suggest, the linguistic origins of Yiddish are intimately connected to the German language. The most commonly accepted genealogy of Yiddish identifies the Rhineland, circa 1000 C.E., as the language’s point of origin.³⁶ For this reason, Old Yiddish texts most greatly resemble Middle High German, and

³⁴ The idea that Yiddish as a corrupted version of German has a long legacy, and it was even promoted by figures of the Berlin Haskalah and Jewish nationalism. The linguistic theories of Herder and Humboldt only exacerbated the perception that Yiddish—with its mixture of German, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Slavic features—reflected a degraded condition of its speakers. See Jeffrey A. Grossman, *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany from the Enlightenment to the Second Empire* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000) and Ch. 6 in Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem*. This is part of a general discourse that there is a particularly “Jewish” way of speaking, evident in the German verb *mauscheln* (derived from the common Jewish name Moishe/Moses) and the related term *jüdeln*. Sander Gilman locates the first printed evidence of *mauscheln* in a 1622 broadside, where the term means “to extort usurious interest in the manner of the Jew” (139). The term began as a pejorative descriptor of Jewish behavior and came to characterize a Jewish manner of speech, one that was distorted and untrustworthy. See Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

³⁵ Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 315.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

the variant commonly referred to as Western Yiddish—the language spoken in central and western Europe before the end of the nineteenth century—has a high degree of mutual intelligibility with German, although it is written in Hebrew letters.

Among the many designations for this Jewish vernacular, we also find the colloquial term *mame-loshn*—literally “mother tongue”—which stands in contrast to the alternate name for Hebrew, *loshen-koydesh* or “holy tongue.” The term *mame-loshn*, like the English term “mother tongue” for one’s first language, refers to Yiddish as the everyday language of the home. The maternal designation for the language of the home is part of a legacy of gendered divisions in learning. Judaism is notable in its codification of gender roles as they relate to ritual obligations and scriptural study; classical Talmudic Judaism largely excludes women from the study of Torah, the central and most sacred practice of the culture.³⁷ Androcentric rabbinic culture conceived of the learner as male, drawing on erotic metaphors for learning in which the Torah is imagined as a female object of devotion.³⁸ Women were both structurally excluded from engaging in Torah-study, organized as a “male homosocial community,” and poetically woven into the cultural imaginary as merely the symbolic objects of male learning.³⁹

In the early modern and modern age, Hebrew literacy and religious scholarship continued to be a predominantly male domain and Hebrew literature into the nineteenth century was

³⁷ Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 168. Boyarin also identifies examples of female Torah study in the early rabbinic culture, but these operate as resistance to the male-centered practices of Torah study.

³⁸ Ibid., 148; Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “Gender Identity in Halakhic Discourse,” in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia* (Jewish Women’s Archive, February 27, 2009), <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/gender-identity-in-halakhic-discourse>; Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “Education as Filiation, BT ‘Eruvin 72b–73a,” *NASHIM: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues* 28 (2015): 9–29.

³⁹ Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 196.

produced “by and for males.”⁴⁰ Yiddish literature from the sixteenth and into the nineteenth centuries has been historically associated with a female readership—an association that was charged with stigma—although in practice, men and women alike read Yiddish religious texts and secular works; Yiddish was a way to disseminate information widely since Hebrew literacy was far from universal among Jewish men.⁴¹ Perhaps the most prominent example of the feminization of Yiddish literature is the *Tsene-rene*, an adaptation of text from the Tanakh and commentaries that are misleadingly referred to as the “women’s Bible,” since the work was neither only for women nor a translation of Jewish scripture. The perception of the *Tsene-rene* as feminine has also been reinforced by its title, meaning “go forth and gaze,” which derives from *Song of Songs* 3:11 passage, “Oh maidens/daughters of Zion, go forth and gaze.”⁴²

This distorted characterization of Yiddish readership notwithstanding, there were practical consequences to women’s general exclusion from scholarly study of the Jewish scriptural tradition. The tendency for Jewish women in German-speaking lands to abandon religious teachings over time resulted from an imbalance of secular and traditional education. Knowledge of Hebrew and the study of sacred texts were the masculine ideal, whereas young women did not have this scholarly expectation; most women relied on the re-worked and curated

⁴⁰ Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Marginalization in Nineteenth-century Eastern European Jewish Society* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 2.

⁴¹ David Roskies, *Ayzik-Meyer Dik and the Rise of Popular Yiddish Literature*. (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1975), 8–9. Roskies attempts to correct the misconception that Yiddish literature was targeted specifically toward women and notes that some ethical works were even designed exclusively for men (*ibid.*). Morris Faienstein also challenges this “conventional wisdom” about early modern Yiddish literature as being primarily targeted toward, and read by, women. Faienstein cites Yiddish literary historian Israel Zinberg (1873–1939), who locates the stereotype that Yiddish literature was “only fitting for women, girls and some ignorant men” in the efforts of the nineteenth century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to undermine Yiddish literature and culture (16). See Morris M. Faienstein, *Ze’edah U-Re’edah: A Critical Translation into English* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14.

material of the Yiddish *Tsene-rene*, although they could follow along with Hebrew passages.⁴³ Moshe Rosman adds nuance to the prevailing image of early modern Jewish gender roles among historians and argues that women were increasingly active and informed participants in religious life. While, indeed, men were to study Torah, women gained cultural capital as they facilitated their learning and physical and spiritual welfare.⁴⁴ A figure like Leah Horowitz, an 18th-century author of *tkhines* (Yiddish prayers primarily for women) who was learned in Talmud and Kabbalah, challenges the stereotype that women did not contribute to Jewish scholarship. The genre of devotional literature for which she is best known points both to the centrality of women in Jewish spiritual life and to the considerations of gender in addressing religious practice.⁴⁵ A gendered division in education was later exacerbated by the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment that emerged beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, whose male leaders promoted Hebrew scholarship and ensured that this work remained within a sphere of male elite.

The Haskalah was an intellectual battleground that put on the display the gendered politics of Jewish language. The early *maskilim* (promoters of the Haskalah; singular *maskil*) cast Yiddish as coarse and ill-suited for the aesthetic and ideological aims of the Haskalah, and Yiddish was cast as a mere “handmaiden” to Hebrew. This term to describe the relationship between Yiddish and Hebrew is laden with connotations of gender and power—evident in contemporary references to *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a shorthand for dystopian patriarchy and female subservience— but it has served as a common metaphor to describe these linguistic

⁴³ Deborah Hertz, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 187. Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 2.

⁴⁴ Moshe Rosman, “The Early Modern European ‘Jewish Woman,’” *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 33/34 (2008): 407–XIX, here 413–15.

⁴⁵ Chava Weissler, “The Mystical Spirituality of Eastern European Jewish Women,” in *Women and Judaism: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 116–28.

power relations and the politics of status and respectability between the two languages during the Haskalah.⁴⁶ Naomi Seidman points to the Russian-born Hebrew writer and Zionist Peretz Smolenskin's use of the term in an important reversal of the formulation: in 1887–8, he charged Moses Mendelssohn, who translated the Pentateuch into German but written in Hebrew letters, with lowering Hebrew to the status of “despised maidservant” for German.⁴⁷ As Seidman elucidates, this formulation operates in a linguistic hierarchy in which the masculine Hebrew occupies a dominant position.⁴⁸ By using Hebrew letters in the service of learning German, Hebrew was, according to this hierarchy, essentially lowering itself to the status of Yiddish and emasculating itself and its male guardians. This critique of Mendelssohn's Bible translation casts in gendered terms an anxiety toward the disruption of the elite, masculine, and sacred space of Hebrew language, while secular languages—such as Yiddish and German—are pejoratively constructed as weak and feminine.

These gendered relations characterizing Ashkenazi “internal bilingualism” form what Naomi Seidman refers to as the sexual-linguistic system of Hebrew and Yiddish, which conceives of the masculine-feminine gendered coding of Hebrew-Yiddish relations as a way to

⁴⁶ David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture: 1918–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32; Jeffrey Grossman, “Sholem Aleichem and the Politics of German Jewish Identity: Translations and Transformations,” in *Between Two Worlds: Yiddish-German Encounters*, ed. Jerold C. Frakes and Jeremy Dauber, vol. 41, *Studia Rosenthaliana* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 81–110, 85; David Roskies, “Call It JewSpeak: On the Evolution of Speech in Modern Yiddish Writing,” *Poetics Today* 35, no. 3 (2014): 225–301, 237 are a few examples of Yiddish scholarship that refer to the metaphor of Yiddish as handmaiden. Many thanks to Andrea Cooper for drawing my attention to the ubiquity of this term, both within and outside of Yiddish Studies.

⁴⁷ Smolenskin quoted in Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 176. The original Hebrew term Smolenskin uses is *shifkhah nevazah*/שפחה נבזה, *shifkhah* being one of the two terms used to designate female slaves in the Hebrew Bible (Edward J. Bridge, “Female Slave vs Female Slave: אָמָה and שִׁפְחָה in the HB,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 12, no. 2 (2012): 1–21). Seidman also refers to criticism from Ezekiel Landau, chief rabbi of Prague, who in 1786 disapproved of Mendelssohn's translation as reducing the Torah to the role of the German language's maidservant (175).

⁴⁸ Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 176.

investigate “important oppositions as sacred/profane, educated/uneducated” as well as “writing/speech.”⁴⁹ In this dissertation, I propose to think along with this system as it confronts the non-Jewish languages of surrounding Europe. I consider how this sexual-linguistic system continues to emerge in German Jewish and Yiddish literature in a variety of linguistic configurations, and how the incorporation of non-Jewish languages continues to open up critical oppositions, such as sanctioned/forbidden, tradition/innovation, loyalty/abandonment, purity/corruption.

As I open up this system of sexual-linguistic politics, I take into account how the gendered divisions in traditional Jewish learning informed the politics of Jewish literacy and education into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Traditional Jewish society prioritized the spiritual over the material in a gendered hierarchy in which the ideal man was bent over the sacred texts while women attended to the economic and practical matters of day-to-day life. In her study of Jewish female literacy, Iris Parush argues that the restrictive norms of literacy in Jewish society were the very conditions that allowed women to innovate:

In the encounter with modernity, it was precisely women’s marginal status within traditional society that served them to advantage. The very marginality of women is what allowed, paradoxically, the creation of communities of literate women who themselves underwent, and then brought about, transformation.⁵⁰

Parush’s work is concerned in particular with the Jewish communities of eastern Europe, but I argue that this paradigm holds true across European Jewry negotiating tradition and modernity.

Parush’s claim connects the marginal female status within the context of traditional Jewish

⁴⁹ Max Weinreich is credited with coining this term to describe the Hebrew-Yiddish bilingualism among Ashkenazi Jewry, as opposed to external bilingualism, which refers to the two languages of different but co-territorial groups. See Ch. 4 of Weinreich, *History of the Jewish Language*. Quote from Seidman, *Marriage Made in Heaven*, 6.

⁵⁰ Parush, *Reading Jewish Women*, 4.

scholarship with the potential for a subversive power—a power that is developed through the formation of new communities of literacy, primarily those in Yiddish or in the state language, such as Russian or Polish in the context of Parush’s work, or German in the context of this dissertation.

IV. Reading as Rebellion

Amid these gendered politics of learning, one finds the Jewish daughter in a secularizing Europe, a daughter who increasingly engages with non-Jewish literature and receives a secular education. The role of women—and women as readers—in the formation of Jewish middle class is particularly pronounced in German-speaking lands during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵¹ An elite group of Jewish women (who typically converted to Christianity) created a literary high society in Berlin at the end of the eighteenth century; Jewish-born women such as Rahel Varnhagen (1771–1833), Henriette Herz (1764–1847), and Dorothea Mendelssohn (1764–1839) became celebrities for running literary salons.⁵² Their experiences deviated from that of the average German Jewish woman in the period, but the image of the *salonnière* achieved outsized influence on the cultural imaginary.⁵³ As Paula Hyman and Benjamin Maria Baader have demonstrated, Jewish women were central in the Jewish religious culture that developed in

⁵¹ On the role of gender in the making of the German Jewish middle class, see Benjamin Maria Baader, *Gender, Judaism, and Bourgeois Culture in Germany, 1800–1870* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle: Washington University Press, 1995); Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Shulamit Volkov, *Die Juden in Deutschland 1780–1918* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010).

⁵² While these women rose to prominence, they also faced marginalization and occupied ambivalent positions. The most notable study of the *salonnière*’s negotiation of love, marriage, and participation in aristocratic circles is Hannah Arendt’s *Rahel Varnhagen: Lebensgeschichte einer Deutschen Jüdin aus der Romantik* (Munich: Piper, 1959).

⁵³ Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, 36.

nineteenth-century Germany. The notion that German Jewish women strayed from Judaism more readily than their male counterparts does not bear out in the data.⁵⁴ Far from straying from their religion, many Jewish women of the growing middle class played a prominent role in both preserving Jewish rituals in a new bourgeois framework and embracing the German ideals of *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit*.⁵⁵

My reading of the Jewish daughter therefore departs from both this historical landscape of Jewish embourgeoisement and the aestheticization of the Jewish women as readers and seekers of intellectual education. I argue that adoption of new language, literature, and forms of knowledge collides with anxieties toward a wholesale departure from the Jewish religion; Jewish women, both symbolic and historical liaisons between ritual and modernity, emerge as a literary figure of ambivalence toward the reconciliation of Judaism and bourgeois life.

Central to Felski's study on modernity is the motif of women as readers and the dangerous consequences thereof. In the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, excessive reading—and doing so privately or for pleasure—was the subject of moralizing debates. In this dissertation, I consider more closely how the space of reading is imagined as a realm of unsanctioned desire or excess; I also read the Jewish daughter alongside the discourse on the phenomenon known as *Lesesucht* or *Lesewut*. But the idea of reading as a space of forbidden love and partnership is a recurring literary trope, one that long precedes the debates on the dangers of bourgeois reading for pleasure in the late eighteenth century: Dante's Francesca and Paolo are moved to adultery as they read the story of Guinevere and Lancelot. The dangers of

⁵⁴ For statistics on rates of male and female conversions among Berlin Jews, see Deborah Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). See also Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, 36.

⁵⁵ Baader, *Gender, Judaism, and Bourgeois Culture*, 27.

reading in the relations between teacher and student are found in the medieval love story of Héloïse and Abélard or in Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz's *Der Hofmeister* (1774).

The conceptualization of the subversive capacity of reading for pleasure complements Parush's narrative of Jewish women readers as challenging the traditional social order through their reading communities. The consumption of fiction—a space that creates new worlds—is precisely where Jewish daughters could begin imagining for themselves new possibilities and often, in rebellion against their Jewish ancestors, conforming to surrounding social norms. The act of reading is embedded within a concern with modes of learning and the transfer of knowledge. Rabbinic culture conceives of knowledge transmission as a form of filiation, a vertical relationship between father-son/teacher-student.⁵⁶ The very act of reading in the Bible and the Talmud was public and shared, taking place in the forum, synagogue, or House of Study, which Boyarin explicates.⁵⁷ This inheritance contrasts with the dominant ideal of education in modern Europe, most notable in the form of *Bildung*. The *Bildungsideal* centers around the idea of self-formation and the growth of the individual, in contrast to the Jewish paradigm that emphasizes the vertical chain of knowledge transmission.⁵⁸ *Curious Daughters* considers what occurs when the daughter participates in or entirely flouts these models. The emergence of the father-daughter relationship highlights a diagonal and thus unsettling move—away from the

⁵⁶ Fonrobert argues that the father-son and teacher-student relationships are rendered homologous in rabbinic literature. See: Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “Education as Filiation.”

⁵⁷ Daniel Boyarin, “Placing Reading: Ancient Israel and Medieval Europe,” in *The Ethnography of Reading*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 18–19.

⁵⁸ The chain is a recurring symbol of the “continuity” of Jewish culture. For example, I.L. Peretz's play *Di goldene keyt* (“The Golden Chain”), which also became the name of Sutzkever's literary journal.

androcentric chain of learners—as the daughter concurrently encounters the worlds of learning that are chosen in place of the Jewish textual tradition.⁵⁹

V. Defining Modernity

This project that explores the poetics of Jewish learning and the daughter’s rebellion operates on the premise that modernity fundamentally changed Ashkenazi Jewish culture and incited a range of literary responses to the reconciliation of modern life and tradition. It is difficult to assign the concept of modernity clear chronological or ideological boundaries. For literary critic Frederic Jameson, modernity is more a narrative category than it is a historical period, while for sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, the slippery nature of the term is evident in his model of “liquid modernity,” which conceives of the contemporary age, characterized by constant mobility, as but another phase of modernity.⁶⁰

In the field of European history, the start of modernity is often placed at the Age of Enlightenment or the French Revolution. For this dissertation, more important than the precise chronological markers are the transformations that mark society as “modern.” Modernization might be best understood as what Jürgen Habermas calls a “ein Bündel kumulativer und sich wechselseitig verstärkender Prozesse” including the increased productivity of labor, urbanization, the centralization of political power, the shaping of national identities, the rise of formal schooling, and secularization.⁶¹ These characteristics in turn help give some

⁵⁹ I would like to thank Naomi Seidman for her formulation that emphasis on the father-daughter relationship represents a “lateral move” from the androcentric concern with father-son/male teacher-student.

⁶⁰ Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 31–32. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013) [originally published 1999].

⁶¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: zwölf Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 10.

chronological edges to what might be called “modernity,” a period generally defined by an increased interest in reason, subjectivity, empiricism, and the notion of progress. And while this assists in forming an operational definition for modernity, I, at the same, time acknowledge the limitations of attempting to dichotomize the “modern” versus “tradition”—categories that are not discrete but serve as a means to contrast the arrival of new norms with the ways of life governed by religion and longstanding customs. This understanding, echoing Jonathan Hess, conceives of modernity not as an object of study but rather as a tool of literary, historical, and cultural inquiry.⁶²

Defining modernity in the context of European Jewish history involves an additional layer of contention: modern Jewish history is also in part demarcated based on Jewish legal emancipation and the degree to which Jews participated in non-Jewish society. The political and social circumstances of Jews across Europe is varied between territories over the past four centuries and scholars of Jewish history maintain no consensus on what conditions constitute the onset of Jewish modernity.⁶³ The Haskalah is popularly understood as marking modern European Jewish history, but David Ruderman argues against the notion that this movement was a radical break from earlier traditions of Jewish thought. He considers the “Haskalah proper,” which is generally understood to begin in the last three decades of the eighteenth century, to be primarily a “political, pedagogic, and programmatic movement committed to transforming Ashkenazi

⁶² Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*, 20.

⁶³ For a discussion of the debates on where modern Jewish history begins and what constitutes modernization, see the first two essays in: Michael A. Meyer, *Judaism within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 21–43.

Jewish culture.” This period, according to Ruderman, is defined not by the onset of new ideas, but rather by their institutionalization.⁶⁴

Ruderman places the start of Jewish modernity at 1782 and argues that the modern Jewish culture is defined by “the changing political landscape of western and eastern Europe as it affected the Jews, the impact of enlightened absolutism on Jewry policy, the political debates and limited success of civil emancipation, and the subsequent use and misuse of Jewish minorities as tools of nineteenth century nationalism.”⁶⁵ 1782 was when Habsburg Emperor Joseph II issued the Edict of Tolerance, but also when Haskalah thinker Naphtali Wesseley published the ideological manifesto *Divrei Shalom ve-Emet* (“Words of Peace and Truth”), events that mark both the gradual political emancipation and the intense struggle for intellectual and political equality among Jews in central Europe. These developments occurred within the transformations shaping Europe as a whole, and the pressures of industrialization, the rise of the public sphere, and the consolidation of national economies affected Jews and non-Jews alike.

Jewish modernity thus comprises a complex set of religious, intellectual, political, and social dynamics in which Jews and Jewish communities sought both to change and to preserve longstanding ways of life. In his study of German Jews in modernity, Hess proposes thinking of the relationship between Jews and modernity more abstractly—not as a period or process, but rather as a discourse:

[Modernity] is not merely something the Jews were subjected to nor can it be grasped as a process of social, economic or political transformation whose conformity to an abstract standard might be quantified. It is, rather, a *discourse*, a mode of envisioning a new and secular world that claimed its legitimacy not with reference to the various traditions and

⁶⁴ David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 201.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

legacies of the past it sought to overcome but solely in relation to itself, to the break it performed with tradition to insist on its right to institute and follow its own norms.⁶⁶

This approach makes the important distinction that Jews were not simply passive recipients of a modernization; they were also active participants in shaping the discourse that we call “modernity” which conceives of a new world order and calls into question traditional practices. Indeed, Jews were not the only Europeans who, during and after the Enlightenment, sought to reconcile the sacred with the secular and to re-envision religious life. This positioning of Jews as creative agents in modernity also aligns with the work of scholars such as Jeffrey Grossman, Simone Lässig, David Sorkin, and Shulamit Volkov, to name a few, who have articulated the various ways in which German Jews may have departed from Jewish ritual but continue to create new forms of uniquely Jewish culture and institutions.⁶⁷ This dissertation considers a body of literature that is part and parcel of this creative process; each chapter considers how literature operates as a space for confronting and navigating Jewish tradition, while also participating in the cultural realms dominated by the legacy of Goethe and Schiller. In the final chapter, I move my attention Jewish literature written in the Russian Empire and examine how the paradigm of the Jewish daughter at the nexus of Jewish and non-Jewish legacies of learning maps onto this context.

VI. The Daughters Ahead

⁶⁶ Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*, 20–21.

⁶⁷ See Grossman, *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany*; Simone Lässig, *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum: kulturelles Kapital und sozialer Aufstieg im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); David J. Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Shulamit Volkov, *Die Juden in Deutschland*.

Curious Daughters navigates the trope of the Jewish daughter by means of literary criticism but is at the same time guided by cultural and religious history, linguistics, and critical gender approaches. Each chapter presents one or two case studies in order to illuminate how the fixation with the daughter's love and learning triggers a confrontation with the reformulation of Jewishness and the limitations of emancipation in the long nineteenth century. Central to each analysis is an understanding of the history of Jewish language and education as acutely gendered realms; this gendered legacy is then brought into conversation with the discourses of Bildung, language, and gender contemporaneous with each text. As such, this project is also constrained by its historical focus and selection of literary texts that are, in all but one case, written by men. This exploration of the "Jewish daughter" in the context of Jewish language and learning therefore can encompass representations of neither all Jewish daughters nor all Jewish culture. These terms, rather, will serve as shorthand for the literary figure of the Ashkenazi Jewish daughter as she appears chiefly in the male literary imagination and will refer to the traditions of language and education of Ashkenazi Jewry in central and eastern Europe.

In the first chapter, on two Yiddish plays of the Berlin Haskalah, I explore how the daughter's linguistic and romantic transgressions stage the growing pains of making German a "Jewish language" beyond the Hebrew-Yiddish diglossia. In these texts, the daughters speak High German while pursuing the attention of Christian men. In contrast to the daughter who keenly adapts non-Jewish forms, the father speaks a highly Hebrew-inflected Yiddish. I examine the linguistic spectrum along which the characters are positioned—from High German to a Western Yiddish intelligible to the German reader to a large Hebrew lexicon—and how these positions align with the gendered discourse on Jewish language. This linguistic configuration,

characterized by simultaneous comprehensibility and miscommunication, articulates the anxieties toward a departure from traditional Jewish life.

The second chapter, on Fanny Lewald's novel *Jenny* (1843), analyzes the intersection of literature and Christian-Jewish love where *Bildung* is both a medium to transcend the constraints of Jewish identity and a force reinscribing these constraints. Literature is the space in which the novel's protagonist, Jenny, falls for her Christian tutor and pursues conversion. In order to reconcile her secular worldview with the spiritual demands of conversion, Jenny attempts to encode Christian doctrine into a system of understanding shaped by her literary imagination and engagement with *Bildung*. This strategy fails, ending her romance and reinforcing an identification with her father. *Bildung*, which in part propelled German Jews into the middle class, ultimately prevents Jenny from escaping her status as a Jewish woman. The daughter's secular education in conjunction with her romantic rebellion away from the Jewish family stages the limitations of—and anxieties toward—refashioning Jewish identity.

Chapter 3 considers the positioning of the Jewish daughter in the ghetto tales of Leopold Kompert, interrogating the gendered arenas of learning in his short stories "Eine Verlorene" (1851) and "Die Jahrzeit" (1865). In each work, the daughter acts as both a mediator and harbinger of familial and community disruption—disruption that is ultimately reconciled, but through a reconciliation that calls into question a commitment to traditional ways. In Kompert's works, the critical linguistic and educational difference of the Jewish daughter is defined not by her consumption of belles-lettres, but rather by her exclusion from traditional Jewish education. The daughter's role as catalyst for familial disruption and innovation crystallizes in her prohibition from certain Jewish practices—whether in the study of sacred texts or in the recitation of certain prayers. While Lewald's text demonstrates the horizons of possibility

introduced by Bildung, these works offer an anti-Bildung approach to questions of Jewish life in the modern world.

In the fourth chapter, I turn to Galician author Karl Emil Franzos, one of Kompert's successors in the genre of ghetto fiction and staunch promoter of Bildung. Franzos's story "Der Shylock von Barnow" returns to the contested space of female learning. Like in Lewald's *Jenny*, secular literature is both a gateway toward the daughter's emancipation and a means of undermining her pursuits. The notion of partial Bildung and unrestrained reading mark an anxiety toward the attainment of bourgeois respectability and a German cultural ideal. Uncontrolled reading, the phenomenon known as *Lesesucht*, emerges in the language of consumption, desire, and compulsion.

In the final chapter, I return to Yiddish literature but turn to the Russian Empire. I consider the wildly popular stories of Tevye the Dairyman by Sholem Aleichem, the basis of the 1971 film *Fiddler on the Roof*. Sholem Aleichem's series brought the father-daughter relationship as a model for talking about the tensions of tradition and modernity into the wider public consciousness. Historian Yuri Slezkine reads the paths of Tevye's daughters as an allegory for the various paths taken by Russian Jews in the twentieth century. I focus on how the stories of two daughters open up new intellectual worlds and, in particular, how the third daughter, Khava, treads the most scandalous path outside of the Jewish family through her conversion for a love marriage. I argue that this romance is embedded within the world of secular letters and a new regime of worship—that of the author—and that Khava's love for her fiancé is indistinguishable from her love for Russian literature. This chapter considers how Khava's story grapples with questions of wisdom and intellectual status, challenging notions of who possesses, and thus transmits, knowledge.

VII. A Note on Transliteration, Translation, and Publication

This dissertation is written with the reader of German in mind, and therefore Yiddish source material is presented in a way that might bring the German reader as close to the original Yiddish as possible. I thus utilize the existing German transliterations and translations of a pair of Western Yiddish plays in Chapter 1, in part to demonstrate the proximity of Western Yiddish to German: The first text, Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn's *Laykhtzin un fremelay* (1796), already appeared in a German version in 1870. This work is closer to a transliteration of the original text in Hebrew letters than a robust translation, and the indistinct boundaries between translation and transliteration are significant to my analysis. In examples of Yiddish dialogue, I provide in square brackets the German glosses given in this edition and add my own additional glosses as needed in the footnotes. I quote the second play, Isaac Euchel's *Reb Henoch, oder: Woß tut me damit* (1793), from Marion Aptroot and Roland Gruschka's 2004 edition. This version includes the Yiddish text in Hebrew letters side-by-side with its transliteration into Latin letters (for the German-speaking reader) and footnoted German translation.

The language of Sholem Aleichem's Tevye stories, however, is less intelligible in transliteration to the reader of German. Therefore, I present a transliterated version of the original Yiddish using the YIVO system (for those who might not read Hebrew characters but wish to follow along) followed by its English translation. For longer passages, I utilize Hillel Halkin's translation. Shorter quotations, and particularly those in which I work closely with the original diction of the text, are my own translation. Unless noted as Halkin's, translations are my own.

Jewish terms and names that are not quoted from the literary source material—such as the Haskalah, Isaac Euchel, Sholem Aleichem—are written according to their most common spelling in an English-speaking context and scholarship, as opposed to their Yiddish pronunciation and corresponding YIVO transliteration.

Portions of this dissertation have been published or are forthcoming in a publication. An abridged version of Chapter 2 has appeared as an article in *The German Quarterly* (2020). Part of Chapter 1 is forthcoming in a special issue of the *Jahrbuch Selma Stern Zentrum für Jüdische Studien Berlin-Brandenburg* (expected in 2021); this issue is a product of workshops conducted at the Leo Baeck Summer University at the Selma Stern Zentrum in July 2019.

CHAPTER 1: Staging Theatrical and Linguistic Adaptation in Yiddish Theater of the Berlin Haskalah

I. Introduction

In the satirical drama *Laykhtzin un fremelay* (“Leichtsinn und Frömmelei,” 1796), written by the Jewish scholar Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn (1756–1835), the German Jew Markus agonizes over his niece’s proclivity for chasing charming Christian men. He warns his sister Telze about her daughter’s reverse skirt-chasing, a dangerous affinity for members of Prussian high society:

אַך שווייג ליבע שוועסטער! דוא זיהסט ווארליך ניכט דיא גפאָהר איין, דיא איבר דיינער טאכטר שוועבט.
גלויבע מיר מיין הערייך בלוטעט איממר, ווען איך אויף דיא פראָמענאָדע בין אונד צו זעהן מוס, פֿאן וועלכע
שווארם באראָנען, גראַפֿען אונד אַפֿיצירס דיינע טאכטר אומגעבן איסט. יעדער זעצט איהר דאָ איינע אנדרע
טאהרהייט אין דען קאפּף, איברהייפֿט זיא מיט שמייכעלייען, דיא זיא פֿיר ריינע וואָהרהייט אננימט.⁶⁸

Ach schweig, liebe Schwester! Du siehst wahrlich nicht die Gefahr ein, die über Deiner Tochter schwebt, glaube mir, mein Herz blutet immer, wenn ich auf der Promenade bin, und zuseh’n muß, von welchem Schwarm Baronen, Grafen und Officiers deine Tochter umgeben ist. Jeder setzt ihr da eine andere Thorheit in den Kopf, überhäuft sie mit Schmeicheleien, die sie für reine Wahrheit annimmt.⁶⁹

This admonition fits within larger contemporaneous debates about the extent to which the Jewish community should participate in secular society. Markus expresses heartache when he observes his niece, representative of the next generation, throwing herself at wealthy or powerful German men. This imprudent engagement with dominant members of German society, he fears, puts Jettchen in danger. Although Markus points to the cultural and moral implications of her involvement with Christian men, Jettchen’s implicit sexual exploits are the central issue at stake

⁶⁸ Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn, *Laykhtzin un fremelay: eyn familien gmelde in drey oyftsigh* (Amsterdam, 1798), 15–16.

⁶⁹ Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn, *Reb Chanoch, der betrogene Bigott, oder: Der entlarvte Scheinheilige* (Pest: M.E. Löwy’s Sohn Buchhandlung, 1870), 8. The High German version of Halle-Wolfssohn’s “*Laykhtzin un fremelay*”—published in Hebrew letters—appears under this title.

in this outburst. The above juxtaposition of these two versions of *Laykhtzin un fremelay*—one accessible to a Jewish audience and the other to any reader of German—also demonstrates the entanglement of German, Western Yiddish, and Hebrew for Jewish intellectuals such as Halle-Wolfssohn and his contemporaries. The latter version, printed in Fraktur, is less a translation into High German than a transliteration of the original Hebrew letters.⁷⁰ The Fraktur version closely reflects the text of the original version printed in Yiddish letters, with the words of Hebrew-Aramaic origin glossed in footnotes.⁷¹

An overlaying of questions of cultural identity with those of sexuality was not new. In their introduction to the anthology *Landmark Yiddish Plays*, Joel Berkowitz and Jeremy Dauber comment that, in the play *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, Halle-Wolfssohn’s “sexualization of religious issues was hardly innovative: since biblical times, Israel’s turning astray to worship other gods had been rhetorically framed in terms of wantonness and prostitution.”⁷² But Jettchen’s departure from Jewish tradition is not only cast in terms of her sexuality. Her eagerness to leap into the arms of Gentile men is also coupled with an adoption of new language and culture. Unlike her pious father, Jettchen speaks German instead of Yiddish, the Jewish vernacular. The association of dangerous language and dangerous women also reaches back to the Bible, where the motif of the “foreign woman” represents an adulteress female figure—arguably an allegory for a foreign religion—whose lips “drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil” (Prov 5:3). Despite the pleasant initial sensations of the “loose woman,” “her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-

⁷⁰ Unless otherwise specified, the designation “Yiddish” in this chapter refers to “Western Yiddish.”

⁷¹ For the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to Halle-Wolfssohn’s text by a transliteration of its Yiddish title, *Laykhtzin un fremelay*. However, for the German reader’s ease of comprehension, I will primarily utilize the Germanized transliteration of the 1870 version for quotations. In examples of Yiddish dialogue, I provide in square brackets the German glosses given in this edition. I add my own additional glosses as needed in the footnotes.

⁷² Joel Berkowitz and Jeremy Dauber, *Landmark Yiddish Plays: A Critical Anthology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010), 17.

edged sword” (Prov 5:4). This motif refers to the power of female sexuality—cast partly in terms of a woman’s seductive words—in portraying an anxiety toward social shift and rupture.⁷³

This chapter investigates how the female figure in *Laykhtzin un fremelay* functions to lay bare the tensions of religious tradition and secular life. In particular, I consider femininity in the context of the text’s language politics by looking at the relationship between the young woman’s desire and her adoption of a new language. Of interest is the configuration of German, Yiddish, and Hebrew in the play, and how this corresponds to gender. While the daughter, Jettchen, primarily speaks High German, both her father and her betrothed speak in Yiddish with a larger lexicon of Hebrew words. This investigation examines what values and anxieties are encoded in their language usage and how corresponding discourses on Jewish language and gender can inform a reading of this linguistic configuration.

Halle-Wolfssohn’s *Laykhtzin un fremelay* and its predecessor *Reb Henoch, oder: Woß tut me damit* (“Reb Henoch, or: What Can Be Done with It?”) (1793) by Isaac Euchel (1756–1804) are two examples of Western Yiddish plays of the early Haskalah that stage—both in form and content—the linguistic, literary, and social geography of the Jews in the German-speaking world. These plays emerge during a time of political and cultural transition in central Europe, including Prussia, the setting of these works. Both portray a range of encounters between Jewish tradition and the secular European sensibilities of the non-Jewish world, and they exist in many ways at the intersection of conventional linguistic and literary divisions: While scholars such as Dauber and Berkowitz consider *Laykhtzin un fremelay* a rehabilitation of the traditional Jewish *purimshpil*, the scaffolding of Euchel’s and Halle-Wolfssohn’s plays also participates in

⁷³ Nancy Tan offers a study on the meaning of the Biblical motif of the “foreign woman.” This study concludes that the motif points to an “intermarriage crisis” during the post-exilic period and a concern with the spread of apostasy (165). See Nancy Tan, *The “Foreignness” of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008). Many thanks to Christine Hayes for bringing this motif to my attention.

contemporary European modes of theater.⁷⁴ Within its dialogue, each play displays a high degree of code-switching, with characters speaking a range of dialects: from a Yiddish using a large lexicon of Biblical Hebrew to Western Yiddish to High German. These works thus operate on a spectrum of intelligibility to the German-speaking viewer or display what Dauber refers to as a “multivocal production.”⁷⁵ Even the publication history of Halle Wolfssohn’s play illustrates the multiple linguistic and cultural codes at work in its emergence, as well as the rapid changes taking place among German Jewry within a matter of decades: *Laykhtzin un fremelay* first appeared in a Hebrew version in the early 1790s.⁷⁶ Only later did Halle-Wolfssohn write his better-known version in Western Yiddish and German in Hebrew letters. By 1870, this version was also published in Fraktur for the German reader—reflecting the fact that, by the second half of the nineteenth century, most German Jews did not use Yiddish. Although Halle-Wolfssohn first published *Laykhtzin un fremelay* in Hebrew, the play’s texture could not emerge until its Yiddish-German form. The tensions between the characters and their positioning in relation to the traditions of Jewish life derive from the varied linguistic landscape offered by a combination of German and Yiddish with its varied lexicon of Hebrew-Aramaic-origin words. The daughter’s cultural departure from the family is chiefly evident in her use of High German, while the

⁷⁴ Joel Berkowitz and Jeremy Dauber, “Translating Yiddish Dramas of the Jewish Enlightenment,” *Metamorphoses* 9, no. 1 (2001): 90–112, here 92.

⁷⁵ Berkowitz and Dauber also utilize the term “spectrum” to describe the range of Jewish languages spoken in many maskilic plays. See Berkowitz and Dauber, “Translating Yiddish Dramas of the Jewish Enlightenment,” 93. For Dauber’s description of *Laykhtzin un fremelay* as a “multivocal production, see Jeremy Dauber, “What’s So Funny About Yiddish? Comedy and the Origins of Yiddish Drama,” in *Arguing the Modern Jewish Canon: Essays on Literature and Culture in Honor of Ruth R. Wisse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 535–50, here 540.

⁷⁶ Bernard Weinryb identified a Hebrew manuscript of Halle-Wolfssohn’s play *Reb Henoch ve-Reb Yosefke* in 1955. Jeremy Dauber describes this Hebrew version as “more schematic, less developed” than the Yiddish version of the text. Jeremy Dauber, “The City, Sacred and Profane: Between Hebrew and Yiddish in the Fiction of the Early Jewish Enlightenment,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (2005): 43–60, here 46.

sanctimony of the father is foregrounded by the contrast between his Hebrew quotations and the Yiddish of his wife.

In this chapter on Euchel's and Halle-Wolfssohn's contributions to Yiddish theater, I examine the significance of the figure of the Jewish daughter as an agent of change, occupying a liminal space that reflects anxieties toward Jewish civic emancipation and its accompanying cultural shifts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁷⁷ I argue for a more layered approach in examining this figure's disruptive capacity: not only in terms of subversive sexuality, but also in terms of the subversive potential of language and literacy. Through this investigation of the daughter, I consider more broadly the role of gender in its relationship to Jewish language and modes of Bildung, arguing that these texts stage the trials involved in making German a "Jewish language." Against the backdrop of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse on Yiddish and issues of Jewish language and women's literacy, these plays offer a rich display of language politics. Naomi Seidman refers to this gendered division of Jewish languages as the "sexual-linguistic system" of Jewish diglossia: Hebrew, the "holy tongue" and language of male Torah study, is a traditionally masculine realm, while Yiddish, the vernacular and language of the home, is associated with femininity.⁷⁸

In each play, this model is expanded to incorporate German as a new Jewish language, a feminine and concurrently subversive code in its association with non-religious education, which Jewish women often sought since they were typically excluded from religious study. Language usage in these texts signals a range of attitudes toward Jewish assimilation into western European

⁷⁷ The term "fulcrum" is used by Jeremy Dauber to describe the play's father figure—rather than the daughter—as an "ideological fulcrum." See Jeremy Dauber, *Antonio's Devils: Writers of the Jewish Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 199.

⁷⁸ Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven*, 1.

modernity, where language and educational differences are also gender-coded. With German usage and literacy representing participation in modernity and non-Jewish society, we find a gradient of participation among the Jewish characters in the play—from those who speak Yiddish with a substantial Hebrew-Aramaic component, to those employing a more typical Western Yiddish; and then on to those who have abandoned Yiddish for High German. The Jewish daughters, as speakers of German, act as partial agents of a new German-Hebrew diglossia promoted by Haskalah thinkers. As a new Jewish language, German dispenses with the Jewish religious lexicon and is suited for engaging with the surrounding world of letters. In this chapter, I consider two theatrical works of the Berlin Haskalah to demonstrate how the Jewish daughter's linguistic and educational differentiation signals tensions between tradition and modernity and ambivalence toward German *as a Jewish language*.⁷⁹ In Halle-Wolfssohn's *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, I argue that each linguistic register represents a certain level of conservatism and anxiety—or lack thereof—toward Jewish assimilation. In Euchel's *Reb Henoch*, I consider how the Jewish daughter, as a speaker of High German and advocate of the concept of *Bildung*, is the primary conduit toward non-Jewish life and thus the site onto which fears of secularization are projected.

⁷⁹ Of immediate relevance to this study is the political-ideological discourse on “Jewish languages” in relation to the Haskalah. The maskilim promoted Jewish bilingualism in Hebrew and German beginning in the eighteenth century and explicit political debates on the role of German for European Jews continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For more on the assertion and promotion of German as a distinctively “Jewish language” for Jewish nationalism (Zionism), see Marc Volovici, “Leon Pinsker’s *Autoemancipation!* and the Emergence of German as a Language of Jewish Nationalism,” *Central European History* 50 (2017): 34–58. There is also a large body of sociolinguistic scholarship on the concept of Jewish languages and what constitutes one. See, for example, Chaim Rabin, “What Constitutes a Jewish Language?,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 30 (1981): 19–28. For a review of literature on this subject and its continued application, see Sarah Bunin Benor, “Towards a New Understanding of Jewish Language in the Twenty-First Century,” *Religion Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008): 1062–80. See also Anita Norich and Joshua L. Miller, *Languages of Modern Jewish Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

In addition to rethinking how the crystallization of language politics relates to the ideological debates of the Haskalah, this chapter also brings Euchel's and Halle-Wolfssohn's plays into conversation with popular literary models of the non-Jewish European world. Maskilim such as Euchel and Halle-Wolfssohn each received a traditional Jewish education and pursued secular studies in the German-speaking world. *Laykhtzin un fremelay* and *Reb Henoch* emerged through contact between both Jewish and cosmopolitan European modes of education and therefore should be considered in the context of contemporary non-Jewish literary production.⁸⁰ This chapter considers how these Jewish works are also in dialogue with popular dramatic forms.

II. The Haskalah and the Politics of Language

In the eighteenth century, European Jewry faced the external pressures of modernization and the social changes that came with Enlightenment. While French Jews had gained equal civic rights in 1791, the Jews of Austro-Hungary and Germany only received full equal rights as late as 1867 and 1871, respectively.⁸¹ Despite this lag of almost a century, the late eighteenth century saw the development of the Berlin Haskalah, often referred to as the Jewish Enlightenment.⁸² The designation of the Haskalah as a "Jewish Enlightenment" can mislead, however, as it suggests that the movement directly paralleled the mainstream European Enlightenment.⁸³ Furthermore,

⁸⁰ Berkowitz and Dauber note that maskilim took on "external literary and dramatic conventions" in creating a secular Jewish literature. See Berkowitz and Dauber, "Translating Yiddish Dramas of the Jewish Enlightenment," 90.

⁸¹ Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*, 12.

⁸² Jutta Strauss, "'Together with the Shell, They Have Thrown Away the Kernel': Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn's Critique of Contemporary Judaism," in *Religious Perspectives in Modern Muslim and Jewish Literatures*, ed. Glenda Abramson and Hilary Kilpatrick (London: Routledge, 2006), 102.

⁸³ Dauber, *Antonio's Devils*, 27.

the term “implies a group cohesiveness that certainly did not exist”; the Haskalah had no clear epicenter or consolidated manifesto, and even the geographic and chronological bounds of the movement are ill-defined.⁸⁴ Rather, the term refers broadly to the Jewish intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from Prussia and into the Russian Empire who sought to show the compatibility of Jewish and Enlightenment thought. The leaders of the Haskalah criticized the religious orthodoxy and Hasidism in particular for undermining the pursuit of Jewish civic equality.

Halle-Wolfssohn, who adopted the German form of his Hebrew patronymic “ben Wolf,” was born in 1756 into a family straddling Jewish tradition and the new rationalism of Enlightenment society. His father studied both Talmud and medicine, and the family spoke German, rather than Yiddish, at home.⁸⁵ A great admirer of the German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), Halle-Wolfssohn moved to Berlin in 1785 to join the intellectual circles of the Berlin Haskalah. He was remarkable in his ability to write and publish in the three languages relevant to German Jews: German, Hebrew, and Yiddish. As Jutta Strauss notes, Halle-Wolfssohn’s work offers valuable subject matter for interrogating the multilingual dynamics of this period.⁸⁶ In 1788, he began writing for the Hebrew periodical *HaMe’asef* (“The Gatherer”), the key publication of the Haskalah, which he co-founded with Isaac Euchel. Halle-Wolfssohn’s work was not only literary: he wrote on many subjects for the journal, ranging from

⁸⁴ Dauber, *Antonio’s Devils*, 27.

⁸⁵ Strauss, “Together with the Shell,” 112. The precise year of Halle-Wolfssohn’s birth is disputed, but Strauss’s estimation is most frequently cited by scholars such as Jeremy Dauber as a source on the author’s biographical information. Dauber, *Antonio’s Devils*, 165.

⁸⁶ Jutta Strauss, “Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn: Ein Leben in drei Sprachen,” in *Musik und Ästhetik im Berlin Moses Mendelssohns* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1999), 58.

popular science to Biblical exegesis.⁸⁷ He received attention for his tract *Sikha be'eretzhayim* (translated as “A Conversation in the Land of the Living” or “A Conversation in the Afterlife”) which was published in *HaMe'asef* between 1794 and 1797. This work imagines a philosophical dialogue held between the spirits of Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and a Polish Jew. It addresses similar themes to those featured in *Laykhtzin un fremelay*.⁸⁸ Halle-Wolfssohn also worked as an educator, and among his efforts to bring together Jewish and non-Jewish traditions of pedagogy was the production of a children’s primary reader in Hebrew that included material from the Bible and from Aesop’s fables.⁸⁹

Much like the “German Socrates” Moses Mendelssohn and his admirer Aaron-Halle-Wolfssohn, who both worked as the tutor for wealthy families, the Copenhagen-born scholar and a key architect of the Haskalah Isaac Euchel began his intellectual career as a private tutor. In 1778, he moved to Königsberg to work as a tutor for the grandchildren of banker Meir Michael David.⁹⁰ He later worked in the home of Meir Friedländer, after which he began his studies at the university. The connection between the maskilim and prominent figures of the German Enlightenment were more than intellectual; while studying philosophy and oriental languages in Königsberg, Euchel drew the personal attention of Immanuel Kant.⁹¹ He came close to attaining a faculty position at the university, but received a letter of rejection from then-rector Kant, as he

⁸⁷ Strauss, “Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn: Ein Leben in drei Sprachen,” 112.

⁸⁸ Dauber, “The City, Sacred and Profane,” 44–45.
Elisheva Carlebach and Deborah Dash Moore, *The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization: Confronting Modernity, 1750–1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 75.

⁸⁹ Strauss, “Together with the Shell,” 112.

⁹⁰ Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 225.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

would have been required to swear a Christian oath to take such a position.⁹² While Euchel was singular in his contributions to the Haskalah, he was not an outlier in his participation in German education and achievement of social advancement during the late eighteenth century. Euchel was part of a growing group of Jews moving to Königsberg, a center of the European Enlightenment, during this period in order to pursue higher education. Königsberg was not only a home of prosperous middle- and upper-class Jewish families, but also the home of numerous associations and maskilic educational projects—endeavors that were funded with the support and patronage of wealthy Jewish families.⁹³

In their maskilic writings, Halle-Wolfssohn and Euchel wrote primarily in Hebrew or German; usage of Yiddish, the Jewish vernacular, ran counter to the emancipatory project of the Haskalah. The maskilim sought to proclaim and establish the unique contributions offered by Jewish culture, while also demonstrating the Jewish community's capacity to excel in the modern world. Eager to foster this balance of Jewish particularity with the secular world, they were strong proponents of bilingual proficiency—of fluency in Hebrew and in German; they viewed Hebrew, the language of a text holy both to Jews and Christians, as a “potential vehicle for rapprochement between proponents of the two religions.”⁹⁴ Operating within the discourse on linguistic divisions of the eighteenth century—one that emphasized the distinctive nature of each language and its character—the maskilim had little interest in showcasing the Jewish vernacular, a language that many perceived as a “corrupt version of German.”⁹⁵ This classification of Yiddish was shared both by its maskilic opponents and German philologists of the time. Yiddish

⁹² Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 226.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁹⁴ Berkowitz and Dauber, *Landmark Yiddish Plays*, 9.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

was regarded as on a par with *Rotwelsch* or *Gaunersprache* (thieves' cant), which Wilhelm von Humboldt deemed "utterly corrupt."⁹⁶

This chapter intervenes in existing scholarship on Yiddish theater of the Haskalah by recalibrating an interrogation of the movement's language politics. Scholarly studies of the Haskalah and its literature are typically organized around the narrative that while the leaders of the Haskalah promoted Hebrew's development as a refined, modern literary language, German was also a necessary medium of an educated, enlightened Jewry living in the secular European world; the maskilim had few aspirations for the future of Yiddish and its formative role in a Jewish enlightenment. Rather, Yiddish was primarily a means to an end: a widely understood vehicle by which to communicate the values of the Haskalah to Ashkenazi Jews at large, but not a valued poetic form receiving the treatment of Hebrew in its revival. As Dan Miron observes in his landmark study of modern Yiddish fiction, Hebrew followed the opposite course of Latin in the opposition between liturgical language and vernacular: Secularization in fact saw the increase of non-religious Hebrew literature. Into the nineteenth century, Yiddish was "almost never the first choice" of Jewish writers.⁹⁷

Because the subordination of Yiddish indeed played a key role in the Haskalah, the organization of research around this linguistic hierarchy inevitably constrains the analysis of Yiddish texts written by the early maskilim. I build upon previous scholarship interrogating the language politics internal to these Yiddish texts and how changes in language and linguistic register signal the tensions of Jewish life in the modern world. The high *Komponentenbewusstsein* of Yiddish—awareness of its composite nature and languages of

⁹⁶ Grossman, *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany*, 72.

⁹⁷ Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 8, 11.

origin—makes it a rich vehicle for communicating the multifarious influences upon Jewish life in the modern world.⁹⁸ I intervene by considering how shifts within and away from Yiddish are not only politically significant, but also reflect a highly gendered arena: The destabilization of both gender and language function to illustrate the destabilization of traditional life. Existing scholarship on literature of the Haskalah, informed by this historical period and its almost exclusively male cohort of reformers, understandably focuses on the pivotal roles of male characters and principally assigns them agency. Dauber and Berkowitz have written substantially on *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, for example, but focus on the father figure, Reb Henoach. Though the male figure serves as the site of traditional and institutional power, I hold that the female figure occupies a site of change, disruption, and ambivalence—the transitional space that characterizes the Haskalah itself. Rather than conceiving of the female figure as the passive victim of male decision-making, I consider how the behavior and decisions of a Jewish daughter actively propel the plot of these works.

III. Halle-Wolfsohn's *Laykhtzin un fremelay*

Writing Jewish Theater in a European Mode

Laykhtzin un fremelay first appeared among Purim plays, or *purimshpile*. The text was originally published in the book *Lustsphile tsur untrhaltung baym Purim-feste*, published in Hebrew letters in Breslau in 1796, alongside Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter's *Di shtoltse Vashti*.⁹⁹ Existing

⁹⁸ Yiddish is remarkable as a language whose speakers have an elevated awareness of the various languages that make up its lexicon—in particular, Hebrew-Aramaic, Slavic, and German words. This awareness is intensified because Hebrew-Aramaic words are largely associated with the religious realm, although many of these words have also taken on secular meanings as well. For more on *Komponentenbewusstsein*, see Marion Aptroot and Roland Gruschka, *Jiddisch: Geschichte und Kultur einer Weltsprache* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010), 25–26.

⁹⁹ Jutta Strauss, “Aaron Halle-Wolfsohn: A Trilingual Life. An Exemplary Life for the Interplay of Hebrew, German and Yiddish Among 18th Century German Jewry” (Dissertation, Oxford, University of Oxford, 1994), p.

scholarship on *Laykhtzin un fremelay* considers Halle-Wolfssohn's work a form of the traditional purimshpil and thus argues for its continuity in the development of Yiddish theater out of this genre. The purimshpil—the theatrical dramatization of the Book of Esther performed around the time of the holiday Purim—is regarded as a key dramatic form in the emergence of Yiddish theater.¹⁰⁰ This holiday, with its characteristic theatrical performances, was the time of year in which such unruly behavior was condoned, part of larger tradition of the carnivalesque shared by Christians (with the pre-Lenten Carnival) and Jews alike in which norms and hierarchies are overturned.¹⁰¹ Early Yiddish theater is indebted to this genre, and while *Laykhtzin un fremelay* goes beyond the typical purimshpil paradigm, Dauber makes the important claim that this model was critical for the maskilic project of both reinforcing foundational features of Judaism and critiquing existing hierarchies.¹⁰² Dauber argues that the maskilim, who both recognized the popularity of drama among their non-Jewish eighteenth-century contemporaries and its circumscription in the context of Judaism, were able to repurpose the purimshpil as a vehicle of their message of reform:

At least part of the solution must have been to maintain some analogous version of the original plays' spirit of comic reversals, to suggest that the Purim theme, that of topsy-turviness [...], is not limited to creating safety valves within traditional culture—the role played by the *purim-shpil* in generations past—but can extend to transvaluing that same culture. Comedy, then—a mode of subversion and disruption, but that [...] also stands for

136. Gotter was a German author, but I have transliterated the titles directly from the original publication in Hebrew letters.

¹⁰⁰ Jerold Frakes traces the history of the purimshpil and the influence of other European theatrical traditions in Jerold C. Frakes, *The Emergence of Early Yiddish Literature: Cultural Translation in Ashkenaz* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 83–114.

¹⁰¹ Ruth von Bernuth, *How the Wise Men Got to Chelm: The Life and Times of a Yiddish Folk Tradition* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 43–46. The “carnavalesque” is Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895–1975) coinage that refers more broadly to a mode of subverting hierarchies and norms that derive from the practices associated with Carnival (43). See: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

¹⁰² Dauber, “What's So Funny About Yiddish?,” 538.

cultural continuity—was precisely the dramatic medium needed by the maskilim in their balancing act between cultural conservatism and progressiveness.¹⁰³

Dauber considers *Laykhtzin un fremelay* a paradigmatic example of this maskilic restoration and re-instrumentalization of the classic purimshpil. Much like the maskilic aim to balance tradition and Enlightenment, the purimshpil, according to Dauber, was the ideal vehicle to preserve traditional forms and encourage intellectual revival. But, as Dauber himself notes, the maskilim operated not only in the context of Jewish theater; their intellectual and literary development was undoubtedly influenced by contemporary trends in non-Jewish theater. Halle-Wolfssohn's play is indeed modeled on its Jewish theatrical antecedents, but the constellation of characters, middle-class setting, and injection of social critique also call to mind the comedy inaugurated by Molière and the German *Lustspiel*. The title of the 1796 collection in which the German and Yiddish version first appeared attests to the convergence of both traditions.¹⁰⁴ *Lahykhtzin un fremelay* is therefore also notable as a work breaking the mold of Yiddish theater as Halle-Wolfssohn directly borrows from influential non-Jewish drama.¹⁰⁵

To say that Halle-Wolfssohn's *Laykhtzin un fremelay* was merely influenced by secular European dramatic forms, however, would be an understatement. Halle-Wolfssohn draws directly from a classic of French theater and presents a German Jewish remaking of Molière's 1664 comedy *Tartuffe ou L'Imposteur* ("Tartuffe, or the Imposter" or "Tartuffe, or the Hypocrite"). The later German version of the play, published in 1870, reflects the relationship to *Tartuffe* more clearly in its title, appearing under the name *Reb Chanoch, der betrogene Bigott*,

¹⁰³ Dauber, "What's So Funny About Yiddish?," 538.

¹⁰⁴ Strauss, "Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn: Ein Leben in drei Sprachen," 62.

¹⁰⁵ In his study on the history of Yiddish theater, Joel Berkowitz points out that Wolfssohn—with no formal training as a playwright—borrowed from both German and French models. See Joel Berkowitz, "Writing the History of the Yiddish Theatre," in *The Yiddish Theatre: New Approaches* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), 1–25.

oder: Der entlarvte Scheinheilige. Lustspiel in 3 Aufzügen. In this adaptation, a wealthy Jewish father, Reb Chanoch, invites Reb Josefche, supposedly a learned Jewish scholar from Poland, to tutor his son in Torah. Reb Chanoch is convinced of Reb Josefche's wisdom and attempts to betroth his daughter, Jettchen, to him. Jettchen, however, wants to adopt German culture and attract the attention of Prussian men. She runs away in protest, but later ends up in a brothel. Only her Uncle Markus, who presents himself as secular, is later able to find and rescue her. Ultimately, the family discovers that "pious" Reb Josefche is a regular customer at the brothel and is a lecher and a charlatan. In contrast to Molière's Mariane—who ultimately marries her beloved—Jettchen does not fare too well: in gratitude for his brother-in-law's rescue of Jettchen and his exposure of false piety, Reb Chanoch puts his daughter into the hands of her uncle. Although Jettchen's fate might strike the twenty-first-century reader as undesirable, the play concludes happily in both the comic formal sense and in terms of contemporary norms. In the eighteenth century, it was not uncommon for a young Jewish woman to be married off to a relative.

While the plot of Halle-Wolfssohn's comedy reflects Molière's critique of false piety, the constellation of characters in the play also signals an indebtedness to the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, a genre central to a new movement of German theater in the eighteenth century. One of the pioneers of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* was Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, dramaturg of the Hamburg National Theater and foundational figure in articulating the relationship between theater and bourgeois life. Lessing was highly involved in the repertoire of theatrical productions of the short-lived Hamburg National Theater (1767–69).¹⁰⁶ In tandem with Lessing's writing in *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, these theater productions were part of a larger cultural and

¹⁰⁶ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002), 151–52.

intellectual project: The theater was to be a moral institution and, to this purpose, it foregrounded the growing middle class.¹⁰⁷ Most of the repertoire from German playwrights borrowed from foreign models; French plays, such as comedies from Molière, dominated the plays performed, although Lessing was a proponent of borrowing from English models. Alongside these plays arose the new genre of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, a form modeled on the English domestic tragedy.¹⁰⁸ In her landmark study on the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, Gail K. Hart argues that in this genre, “threats to stability are imagined as ‘feminine,’ and represented as female figures who are then purged from the drama.”¹⁰⁹ The German dramas of 1750 to 1850, she argues, are: “*mainly* an enactment of a threat to stability, to bourgeois or domestic order, that is organized so as to defeat the threat and relieve the anxieties of a middle-class audience, which is, like most literary audiences, gendered male.”¹¹⁰

While the later-published German version emphasizes the role of deceit in its title, the original Yiddish version—*Laykhtzin un fremelay. Eyn familien g'melde in drey oyftsign* (“Silliness and Sanctimony, a Family Portrait in Three Acts”)—points more directly to the domestic portraits found in bourgeois tragedies such as Lessing’s *Miss Sara Sampson. Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel in fünf Akten* (1755) and *Emilia Galotti. Ein Trauerspiel in fünf Akten* (1772). Like Lessing’s landmark dramas, *Laykhtzin un fremelay* focuses on the tensions between the father and daughter that arise from unsanctioned desire. In each, the sexual purity of the daughter is at stake as the father seeks to determine her marital fate. In domestic tragedy, the daughter’s failed romance and the preservation of her *Tugend* ultimately lead to her death.

¹⁰⁷ Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre*, 152.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Hart, *Tragedy in Paradise*, x.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Though Halle-Wolfssohn's play indeed reflects features of a *Lustspiel*, the tensions between father and daughter echo those of the domestic drama. In this case, the daughter remains alive but in a distinctly lower position than she began: Jettchen is found in a brothel. When his daughter is released from this fate, the father, Reb Chanoch, puts her in the hands of her Uncle Markus. In the eighteenth century, such an intrafamilial ending was a far cry from the tragic endings of Lessing's dramas. In Halle-Wolfssohn's play the daughter is the perceived source of social disruption, but she is not purged from either the family or the social group. The solution to the daughter's subversion of her father's wishes—a conflict in which the modern, secular world meets Jewish tradition—is a future in the company of an enlightened Jewish man like Markus who, from a maskil's perspective, balances secular thought with Judaism. However, this outcome of Jettchen's transgression also suggests an entrance into modernity in a liminal state: the end of the play leaves her relationship with her immediate family ambiguous and does not reveal whether she will return to a pious life or pursue one that is more secular. This ambiguity thus takes the work a step further in reflecting the anxieties and ambivalence that accompanied the transformations of Jewish life in the German-speaking world at the end of the eighteenth century.

German Coded Feminine

An exploration of the role of the daughter in the Jewish literature taps into a broader discourse on the role of gender—the subversive nature of the feminine and the slippages that can take place between established norms of femininity and masculinity—as a vehicle for articulating larger social anxieties. Halle Wolfssohn's and Euchel's plays bring into relief the convergence of discourses on Jewishness, gender, and performance. A large body of literature exists on the intersections between Jewishness and constructions of gender or queerness, in particular

scholarship that responds to the long-standing “popular notion that Jews embodied non-normative sexual and gender categories.”¹¹¹ Gender and the perceived transgression of its categories often serve as the space in which anxieties toward the adherence to another group or identity are enacted. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* articulates the performativity of gender and reads the body as a site of cultural inscription, understanding its boundaries “as the limits of the socially hegemonic.”¹¹² Daniel Boyarin builds on Butler’s conception of gender as performance most notably in the study *Unheroic Conduct* on Jewish masculinity and how Jewish norms have interacted with non-Jewish ideologies of gender.¹¹³ Boyarin also draws on Marjorie Garber’s *Vested Interests*, which explores the phenomenon of cross-dressing as a mode of cultural anxiety and how shifting presentations of gender destabilize fixed notions of identity.¹¹⁴

Garber writes more precisely on the intersections of Jewishness and cross-dressing, tracing a pejorative discourse on the perceived feminization of the Jewish man: “The idea of the Jewish man as “effeminate” as well as “degenerate” has a long and unlovely history in European culture.”¹¹⁵ Garber points to the traditional long gown, sidelocks, and pale, slight figure—that of an individual locked away in devoted Torah study—as stereotypes that were cast as the effeminacy of the Jewish man. Both Garber and Sander Gilman make reference to a discourse on

¹¹¹ Some examples of studies that overlay theoretical and historical approaches to constructions of gender and Jewishness include the edited volumes *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* and *Jewish Masculinities: German Jews Gender, and History*. See: Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini, *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Benjamin Maria Baader, Sharon Gillerman, and Paul Lerner, *Jewish Masculinities: German Jews, Gender, and History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), here 1.

¹¹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 131.

¹¹³ Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

¹¹⁴ Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

the supposed particularity of the Jewish voice—a “sing-song manner” and break that suggests a lack of sexual maturity.¹¹⁶

In Halle-Wolfssohn’s *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, the traditional gendered divisions between Hebrew (the holy language of male religious study), Yiddish (the language of the home, known as *mame-loshn* or “mother tongue”), and German (the secular language of the non-Jewish world) is staged. These divisions are coded through the characters’ usage of subversive “feminine” versus conservative “masculine” language: The play’s main female protagonist, Jettchen, throws herself eagerly into the cultural and intellectual sphere of the non-Jewish world. This inclination appears, on the surface, naïve, but the shift also represents an act of transgression of linguistic and cultural tradition. Jettchen’s infatuation with German culture, language, and—most dangerously—its men provokes fear in her family, and their discomfort signals an anxiety about the possible abandonment of tradition in favor of the secular world. The tension between traditional Jewish life and the surrounding German culture during the debates on Jewish Emancipation forms the backdrop of *Laykhtzin un fremelay*. Halle-Wolfssohn sets his play in “einer großen Stadt [...] in der nördlichen Gegend von Deutschland” at the end of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁷ This reading of Jettchen’s social positioning is therefore informed by the intellectual life of Jewish high society during the late eighteenth century, a period of salon culture in which women played a distinctive and transformative role.

In her study of Jewish high society in Berlin, Deborah Hertz calls the period from 1780 to 1806 the *Rahelzeit*, referring to Rahel Varnhagen, the daughter of a wealthy Jewish merchant-banker and salonière who achieved remarkable success as an intellectual and political figure in

¹¹⁶ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 226 and Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

¹¹⁷ Halle-Wolfssohn, *Reb Chanoch*, 2.

Berlin (ultimately converting to Christianity for marriage).¹¹⁸ Although Jettchen is far from achieving the highly regarded intellectual status of Rahel Varnhagen, her character certainly makes reference to the “Rahels” of eighteenth-century German cities who became highly literate in secular languages and learned in Enlightenment culture. During this period, upper-class Jewish women assimilated more rapidly than men; although the cause of this divergence cannot be isolated, the management of female education likely contributed.¹¹⁹ Much as, according to Parush’s study, eastern European women used their marginalized status to create new communities of literacy, so too did women of wealthy German Jewish families undermine Jewish tradition in response to a neglect of female education. Since rigorous religious studies remained a masculine domain in Jewish culture, the daughters of these families often received a basic secular education in German and French. Women in Rahel’s cohort, excluded from either the professional or spiritual ambitions of their surrounding male figures, were thus given the tools to participate more fully in other European languages, reading authors such as Voltaire, Kant, Rousseau, Fichte, and Goethe.¹²⁰

Jettchen herself is the daughter of a wealthy Jewish *Hausvater*, Reb Chanoch, whose relatively high socio-economic status affords him the ability to hire a Polish Jew, Reb Josefche, as a tutor for his son Schmuel. However, the viewer never even meets Schmuel; rather, the child of real concern is Jettchen, and Reb Josefche’s arrival gives Reb Chanoch the opportunity to obstruct his daughter’s rejection of Jewish life in favor of Enlightenment culture. In his introduction to *Laykhtzin un fremelay* published in Hebrew letters, Halle-Wolfssohn sets out to

¹¹⁸ Hertz, *Jewish High Society*, 1–2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

criticize both the fanaticism hidden “untr dem dekmantel der religiyon” as well as the “falshe odr unekhte oyfklerung unzr yetziken modishn yugend.”¹²¹ Jettchen, for the writer, is the embodiment of youth’s false understanding of the Enlightenment, a type that indulges in the frivolity of modernity while abandoning Jewish spirituality. Halle-Wolfssohn depicts Jettchen in the image of a satirized Rahel, a woman who is attempting to take on the trappings of high society by speaking High German and consuming—if only with minimal intellectual rigor—the canonical texts of German culture. Our first encounters with Jettchen find her engaging with the literary, musical, and sartorial culture of the secular world: When not deliberating on her current romantic exploits with this or that baron or count, Jettchen is surrounded by German books, sheet music, and current European fashion. In her first on-stage appearance, Jettchen sits with her hairdresser, a scenario that is particularly charged when considered within the context of Jewish tradition, as Jewish law requires that married women cover their hair in public out of modesty. Jettchen is not yet married but, as the hairdresser (a man, no less) coifs her curls, her father is—fittingly—scheming to marry her off to a man in order to ensure her locks will forever be hidden.

Jettchen’s performance of the enlightened, European woman is marked not only by donning the latest hairstyle and a *Pudermantel*; rather, she also wears European identity intangibly through her language and markers of German “high culture.” Unlike her mother Telze, who speaks Yiddish, Jettchen uses a High German free of Hebraisms—never breaking this character, even when speaking to her own family. Although Jettchen hardly speaks in any depth of her affinity for German authors or composers, she surrounds herself with their trappings in order to cultivate the image of the well-rounded *salonière*. In Halle-Wolfssohn’s drama, we find differing linguistic codes represented not only in the characters’ speech, but also through

¹²¹ Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn, *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, 2. Transliteration of the Yiddish my own.

cultural objects, such as literature and musical notes and instruments. Seated at her piano, Jettchen complains of her unsuccessful affairs with an unnamed count. But as soon as she catches sight of another object of interest—Herr von Schnaps—she gives up on her attempts to practice and sets out to read: “‘Amalia, oder die gute Hausmutter; ein Buch für Frauenzimmer.’ – Was das wieder für Bücher sind? Immer bekomme ich solch’ dummes Zeug! Ich muß mir aus einer andern Lesebibliothek Bücher holen lassen.”¹²² Jettchen casts aside the unopened book, dismissing it as nonsense. Although the literary text to which this title refers is unclear, Jettchen’s reaction is indicative of the sort of false enlightenment Halle-Wolfssohn critiques in his introduction. Her announced affinity for German bourgeois culture quickly betrays a shallow form of refinement.¹²³ Jettchen maintains only a superficial relationship to the high culture to which she aspires; she engages not with secular literature as knowledge, but with books as accessories—mere decorations signaling a participation in German culture. Jettchen announces cavalierly that she will simply have to find herself another reading library, part of her performance as a petulant yet well-read Enlightenment woman.

In the following scene, Jettchen continues to display her turn away from Jewish tradition and flaunt her credentials as a bourgeois woman. Schendl, a maid in Reb Chanoch’s home, delivers Jettchen a letter from Herr von Schnaps, the Prussian officer whom she admires.

Jettchen reads with excitement:

“Ich nehme mir die Freiheit, Ihnen hiermit einigen Arien aus der Operette ‘Oberon’ zu übersenden, die ich eben von der Musikhandlung erhalten habe. Für meinen Dank

¹²² Halle-Wolfssohn, *Reb Chanoch*, 17. The book most likely refers to Amalia Friderika von Mellingsdorf’s 1712 publication on housekeeping: *Die Kluge und Wohl-erfahrene Hausmutter, Oder: Die in der Haus-Wirtschaft Höchst-nutzbare Frauen-Beschäftigungen*.

¹²³ Berkowitz and Dauber, *Landmark Yiddish Plays*, 93. Mordechai Breuer and Michael Graetz, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times: Tradition and Enlightenment, 1600–1780* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 321.

verlange ich von Ihnen, meine Theure! die Erlaubniß, solche von Ihnen singen und spielen hören zu dürfen.”¹²⁴

Herr von Schnaps’s letter explicitly requests that Jettchen should perform for him. This request appears even more charged when considered in the context of halakhic law, which forbids a woman from singing to a man who is not her husband. By forsaking Yiddish, Jettchen has already made clear her turn away from Jewish tradition. In this passage, however, Halle-Wolfssohn makes even more visible this verbal performance by breaking several norms—both code-switching and singing at the pleasure of the dominant Prussian figure. Embedded in the musical repertoire itself is a sexually charged plotline: The arias sent by Herr von Schnaps are likely from the 1789 romantic *Singspiel* entitled *Oberon: König der Elfen*, based on Christoph Martin Wieland’s *Oberon* (1780), an epic poem that thematizes fidelity and the dangers of seduction.

Jettchen is thus dually disobedient by both performing secular music and doing so in order to satisfy the desires of her Christian suitor. The power differential between them corresponds to the broader relationship between the marginalized Jewish culture and that of German society, but, implicit in this relationship, there is also a sexualization of the Jewish “performance” of European identity done before figures of power. In changing her linguistic register and consumption of literary and musical material, Jettchen thus transgresses the boundaries of courtship and sexuality that once separated the Jewish community from the surrounding culture. In Herr von Schnaps’s letter, Jettchen’s opportunity to “offer” herself to the Prussian officer is presented in thinly veiled terms.

While Jettchen’s hedonism may ostensibly account for the play’s titular “Silliness,” Halle-Wolfssohn’s harshest critique may be reserved for the religious male characters of the

¹²⁴ Halle-Wolfssohn, *Reb Chanoch*, 18.

play. Although Jettchen is cast in an unfavorable light, the play's starkest satire is directed toward Reb Chanoch, Jettchen's father, and Reb Josefche, the Hasidic tutor from Poland to whom he wishes to betroth Jettchen and who is later revealed to be a fraud. The one is shown up in his absurd intransigence; the other for his false piety. Dauber argues that Reb Chanoch, the wealthy man of the house, is the "focal point around which the play revolves"—an argument he supports by pointing out that "from a dramatic perspective [...] all of the play's action is conditioned by his decisions."¹²⁵ I contend, however, that the play is propelled by the daughter. Although Reb Chanoch may ostensibly wield the greatest agency among the play's characters, his decisions and actions are contingent upon Jettchen's more subtle female agency. Although he may act as the focal point of the play in terms of dialogue, Jettchen's action or inaction is what drives the story forward.

Dauber asserts that because "[i]t is he who decides to betroth Yetkhen to Reb Yoysefkhe; it is he who threatens Yetkhen when she refuses the betrothal, causing her to flee the house into the clutches of von Schnapps."¹²⁶ However, one can also invert this assessment: It is Jettchen's social and sexual transgression that causes Reb Chanoch to betroth her. It is Jettchen's refusal of Reb Josefche that causes her to flee into the arms of Herr von Schnaps. And it is this escape from the tyranny of her father that leads Jettchen into a brothel. In line with the majority of scholarship on the Haskalah, Dauber's analysis foregrounds the role of the male figure as the "ideological fulcrum" of the drama and elides the role of female figures in revealing the socio-cultural issues at stake in the text.¹²⁷ Halle-Wolfssohn's *Laykhtzin un fremelay* is not unique in its positioning of

¹²⁵ Dauber, *Antonio's Devils*, 199.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

the female daughter at the “fulcrum” of dramatic action. Considered within the context of contemporary German plays dramatizing Jewish family relations in the context of contemporary debates on Jewish emancipation, Halle-Wolfssohn’s play follows a similar pattern by depicting a Jewish father (often reactionary) and a Jewish daughter confronted with the potential of inter-religious marriage. In this vein are Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* (1779), Voss’s *Der travestierte Nathan* (1804), and Gutzkow’s *Uriel Acosta* (1846). In all of these plays, the Jewish daughter acts as a point of contact between Jewish tradition and the non-Jewish world, and the tension between the two is staged in terms of the daughter’s romantic desire that transgresses the boundaries of the Jewish community.

The subversive role of femininity, however, is not limited to the daughter figure in Halle-Wolfssohn’s play. Femininely coded subversive behavior also includes a destabilization of the norms of masculinity, both Christian European and Jewish. If German acts as the feminine code of change and rejection of Jewish tradition, then this also places Uncle Markus in a space of subversion as he, in parallel to Jettchen, diverges from the norms of traditional Jewish life. Markus also speaks High German and dresses in the current mainstream fashion; he adopts the sartorial and cultural markers of an educated European man, perhaps even wearing a wig like his Christian contemporaries; the wearing of a wig exemplifies a direct gender reversal of Jewish norms, as the wig is reserved as a hair covering for married Jewish women. His adopted “Markus” is also a stereotypic name for a young model maskil, an example of the common exchange of a traditional Jewish name for a German one. Throughout Haskalah literature into the nineteenth century, Markus frequently replaced the Hebrew name Mordecai (or in Yiddish, Mordkhe), reflecting a wider phenomenon of Jews seeking to adopt German social practices and

education.¹²⁸ Markus's presentation as the average educated Protestant, German man eschews the traditionally valued traits of the Jewish man, participating in what Naomi Seidman refers to as "a more general Enlightenment program of reorganizing Jewish masculinity."¹²⁹ Markus thus occupies an interstitial space by conforming to neither Christian European nor traditional Jewish norms of masculinity, a performance of gender that might be considered nonmale within either system. Markus appears in the work as an isolated entity, echoing the literary trope of the "noble Jew" and the celibate uncle (to be considered further in Chapters 2 and 4, respectively), where the eliding of their reproductive role parallels the existential fears embedded within the daughter figure.

But ultimately, it is Jettchen's and not Markus's behavior that becomes the source of harsh critique and leads to peril. While Markus also traffics in modes that eschew the norms of a Jewish conception of masculinity, his behavior remains unpunished. A juxtaposition of the fates of Jettchen and Markus—two Jewish figures who attempt to refashion themselves in the non-Jewish world—points to the availability of contemporary paradigms for Jewish participation in wider society. In the case of Jettchen, there exist few paradigms for the enlightened, educated Jewess active in wider society who also maintains a commitment to Judaism—no "Nathan der Weise," no Mendelssohn, no Euchel or Halle-Wolfssohn. The examples of prominent Jewish women of the eighteenth century include Rahel Varnhagen or Henriette Herz, who did away with Jewish languages and eventually also converted (although their conversion took place only after

¹²⁸ Israel Bartal, "The Image of Germany and German Jewry in East European Jewish Society During the 19th Century," in *Danzig, Between East and West: Aspects of Modern Jewish History*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 3–17, here 6. The use of the name "Mordecai" for an enlightened, Germanized character is particularly significant in the context of Euchel's play which also recalls the *purimspiel*, in which Esther and Mordecai prevent Haman's massacre of the Jews. Both the biblical Mordecai and Euchel's Markus play heroic roles and, in both stories, there is ambiguity in their familial relationship (cousin, uncle, spouse, etc.).

¹²⁹ Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 175.

the play's publication, in the early nineteenth century).¹³⁰ While the skirting of Jewish male norms might position Markus in a space of uncertainty, the text nonetheless casts him in a cautiously favorable light as an interlocutor between tradition and modernity, as opposed to Jettchen's unexamined engagement with secular culture in which her forays are met with captivity rather than emancipation.

Hebrew as the Masculine Register

In the opening scene of *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, Reb Chanoch complains to Telze of the assimilatory tendencies of Markus, her brother. Reb Chanoch bemoans that the foolishly enlightened Markus has also managed to influence their daughter. Responding to his wife Telze's defense of Jettchen, Reb Chanoch censures their daughter's rebellion:

[D]er Row [Rabbiner] wart sich nit mit ihr meßamech¹³¹ sein! Vos thüt sie den ganzen Tog? bensch [Dankgebet nach dem Essen] sie? dawent [betet] sie? seht sie e teitsch Chumesch [Bücher Moses] on, oder a Sidür [Betbuch]? Doi hert me 'n ganzen Tog nischt anderscht, as singen ün schpielen, ün schpielen ün singen."¹³²

Here Reb Chanoch displays his principal concern with the behavior and piety of his daughter. This exchange occurs after Reb Chanoch announces that he must improve the religious education of their son, Schmuel, but his attention turns quickly to Jettchen's endeavors. Reb Chanoch is alarmed that the rabbi would not approve of his daughter's behavior. He doubts whether she ever prays and complains of her constant singing—a worldly practice she undoubtedly carries out in

¹³⁰ I do not wish to argue that Halle-Wolfssohn was directly responding to the phenomenon of these prominent figures' conversion, since Varnhagen and Herz only converted after the play's composition. However, Jews' conversion to Christianity as a means of social mobility was not uncommon by the eighteenth century. Deborah Hertz offers an in-depth study of this phenomenon, highlighting figures such as Rahel Varnhagen, in *How Jews Became Germans*.

¹³¹ meßamech sein: to be happy

¹³² Halle-Wolfssohn, *Reb Chanoch*, 5.

German or other secular languages. In this, as always when Reb Chanoch speaks, the masculine realm is coded in words of Hebrew-Aramaic origin, referred to in Yiddish as *loshn-koydesh* (“holy tongue”).¹³³ This stands in contrast to the absence of *loshn-koydesh* in the Yiddish of female characters and to the femininely-coded High German.

The dominant presence of Hebrew highlights the linguistic divisions within the text, where Hebrew—the language that is closely associated with the male-dominated tradition of Jewish religious scholarship—represents the conservative, patriarchal sphere and operates as a masculine register to signal the preservation of tradition. As the language of holy texts, Hebrew achieves a status of sanctity, something that is fixed and untouchable. The male figures in the text therefore represent the aspiration toward premodern Jewish life and the corresponding privileged role of men in scholarship and ritual. Although this version of the play does not include characters who speak exclusively in Hebrew, two of the central male characters, Reb Chanoch and Reb Josefche, speak in a Yiddish rendered almost unintelligible to the German-speaker’s ear with its usage of Hebrew terms and phrases. In the opening scene, we find Reb Chanoch fumbling with a collection of Hebrew books in an attempt to improve his own knowledge of Talmud:

Nü waiter, frägt der Makschen, bemaï ko miflegi [Commentar des Talmuds fragt, woran bin ich?] wüdrön kriegen se sech? Reb Elieser sower, – (nachdenkend) – dos varschteh ech nit, doi müß bilti ßofek e grais [ohne Zweifel ein Fehler] sein, efscher [vielleicht] macht der Meharscho [Commentar des Talmuds] eppes darauf?¹³⁴

¹³³ For the purposes of this study, when used to describe language usage within Halle-Wolfssohn and Euchel’s plays, the term “Hebrew” will be used as a short form to refer to words of Hebrew-Aramaic origin or quotations of religious texts as they are rendered by eighteenth-century Yiddish speakers. In many cases, these words’ pronunciation and even spelling diverge from their counterparts in today’s Modern Hebrew.

¹³⁴ Halle-Wolfssohn, *Reb Chanoch*, 3.

Here Reb Chanoch educates himself in Jewish law and rabbinic commentary, but his approach to these texts betrays his superficial understanding of the tradition he seeks to defend. As Dauber notes, “Wolfssohn clearly takes pains to present Reb Henokh as an Everyman, textually speaking.”¹³⁵ The humor of Reb Chanoch’s opening appearance lies in his excitement at securing the tutor and the education he in fact intends for his son. The audience never meets this son, Schmuel, but instead sees Reb Chanoch aspire to appear “learned” in Jewish thought. His haphazard engagement with text is indicative of a shallow commitment to tradition: He is no Talmud scholar but, rather, flails about in confused reading. When he cannot understand a portion of the text, he reacts defensively and announces that it must be incorrect. Dauber calls this grumbling character a “man adrift, a traditionalist in search of a firm tradition,” but Reb Chanoch’s endeavors may even lack this *gravitas*.¹³⁶ Reb Chanoch is perhaps a man holding onto tradition, but his superficial study of Talmud is that of an effete traditional elite.

This opening scene deals overtly with religious texts, but the abundant use of Hebrew quotation occurs throughout Reb Chanoch’s and Reb Josefche’s dialogue. Although Reb Chanoch’s speech is framed in Yiddish, his language is interspersed liberally with religious terms and quotations that render it opaque. Without knowledge of Hebrew or the author’s heavy glosses, the text of this speech would be meaningless to the reader (or, in performance, the audience member). For the theater patron, the meaning of the text in *loshn-koydesh* is less important than what this language choice signals; indiscriminate insertion of Hebrew quotations both alienates the German- or Yiddish-speaking audience and marks these characters as part of a distinctly male sphere of power.

¹³⁵ Dauber, *Antonio’s Devils*, 200.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

In addition to its supply of biblical passages, Hebrew identifies social roles. Although much of the *loshn-koydesh* usage appears in religious phrases, words of Hebrew-Aramaic origin most saliently constitute terms of identification. These words referring to people and their specific roles appear consistently in Yiddish speech—even from characters such as Telze and the maid Schendl, who speak a less Hebrew-influenced version: *kalle*¹³⁷ (bride), *choson*¹³⁸ (bridegroom), *lamden*¹³⁹ (learned man), *balbos*¹⁴⁰ (householder, here the male form), *chachomim* (wise men, those versed in Jewish law), *goi*¹⁴¹ (a gentile), and *schkozim*¹⁴² (non-Jewish men) are but a few examples. This appearance of *loshn-koydesh* words serves as a concrete example in which linguistic terms serve as cultural anchoring points; the individuals and the roles they play in the community (whether a bride, Talmud scholar, or a non-Jewish man) are expressed through static Hebrew terms that transcend the differences between the language of tradition and what would be considered a *datshmerish*¹⁴³ form of Yiddish. These Hebrew words serve as the fixed points of reference around which Jews structure their understanding of community. Derived, as they are, from the Hebrew, they allude to male-dominated tradition: a realm of patriarchal conservatism that resists any recasting of these points of reference in new language. On the one hand, Hebrew serves the role of preserving a community, while on the other it creates a world indecipherable to the perceived Other. This indecipherability is evident when Reb Chanoch and

¹³⁷ Halle-Wolfssohn, *Reb Chanoch*, 6.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *daytshmerish*: adj. used to denote a Germanized Yiddish.

Reb Josefche quote prodigiously from Talmud, but the Hebrew words that still surface in Telze's speech and Schendl's are indicative of their continued function as anchoring points in Jewish culture, and these speakers still speak a language that is not entirely opaque to the secular German world.

Hebrew's representation of conservatism and tradition in the play is however not innocuous. Hebrew is the language of holy texts, and the use and *mis*-use of it also points to the hypocrisy of the patriarchal sphere. Reb Josefche, the phony rabbi from Poland and caricature of the eastern European Jew, speaks to Reb Chanoch in a mixture of Hebrew quotations and Yiddish that is largely unintelligible to a non-Hebrew-speaking audience.¹⁴⁴ However, he changes his register when he speaks to Jewish women and to non-Jewish characters in the play. A man hiding behind a veil of superficial Hebrew scholarship, Josefche flirts blatantly with the maid, Schendl. As the climax of his hypocrisy, we find that he is a regular customer at the local brothel. Here, when the business owner Lemgin reminds him of his accumulated debts, he insists that he is good for his dues and assures her: "ün wenn Dü Forcht host, will ech Der e Fand geben (nimmt seine Tefilin¹⁴⁵ heraus). Doi host Dü mein Zehngebot derweil."¹⁴⁶ Halle-Wolfssohn redoubles the irony of this "religious man" visiting a brothel: in addition to availing himself of the brothel's services (on credit), Reb Josefche uses his tefillin ("mein Zehngebot") as collateral. Unceremoniously he offers his sacred paraphernalia—traditionally reserved for men—to the

¹⁴⁴ The eastern European Jewish character Reb Josefche stands in as a representative of the more religious, traditional ways of life further east (i.e. in Poland). This example is an antecedent of the *Ostjude* figure (and stereotype) that began to populate German literature in the 19th century and into the 20th century. On the construction of Ostjuden and the construction of divisions between eastern and western European Jewry, see: Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

¹⁴⁵ tefillin: boxes containing Torah inscriptions attached to leather straps; these are traditionally used by Jewish men in a specific ritual of prayer.

¹⁴⁶ Halle-Wolfssohn, *Reb Chanoch*, 39.

female head of the house. This scene corrupts the holy status of Hebrew, depicting its male keepers as both hypocritical and lecherous. It is therefore not only the language of femininity—Jettchen’s German—that is cast in terms of superficiality and deception; Hebrew also operates as a vehicle for duplicity.

The Ambivalent Position of Yiddish

Western Yiddish then serves a bridge between the holy language of Hebrew and the language of secular modernity, German. If the influence of Hebrew characterizes the masculine sphere of conservatism and religious tradition at one extreme, and High German represents the erotically-charged, femininely-coded sphere of modernity, then Yiddish functions as a space of transition and ambivalence between these polarities. This space created by *mame-loshn*, like German, is also coded femininely: Among the characters in *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, only female characters speak in a register of Western Yiddish that is mutually intelligible with German using minimal glossing. The female Jewish characters, Telze (Jettchen’s mother) and Schendl (the maid) speak in a simpler form of Yiddish largely free of religious terms—a form closer to High German.

Telze and Schendl are also the characters who, other than the German-speaking Markus, come to the defense of Jettchen. In response to Reb Chanoch’s disapproval of Jettchen, Telze insists that both “Gojiem ün Jiden” are pleased with her, while he relentlessly critiques her: “ün Dü host immer eppes zü brümmen mit ihr.”¹⁴⁷ Telze therefore plays an ambivalent role by both perpetuating an adherence to Jewish tradition and showing sympathy toward modernity and the adoption of secular culture. Her assertion that Jettchen is pleasing both to Jews and to non-Jews demonstrates an intermediate space of pragmatism—one that recognizes the necessity of change

¹⁴⁷ Halle-Wolfssohn, *Reb Chanoch*, 4.

that might perhaps even be compatible with tradition. By articulating this intermediate attitude, Telze also reflects the debates among maskilim in the late eighteenth century on the nature of modern Jewish life and the potential for compatibility between the religious and the secular. Telze, having married a Jewish man, certainly has not overtly subverted the institutions of traditional Jewish life; she remains faithful to her husband despite his absurd machinations, yet her contradictory utterances suggest a more nuanced understanding of cultural belonging. The Yiddish-speaking Telze therefore embodies the more subtly subversive nature of Yiddish in the play.

Telze's subtle subversion thus fits within the broader discourse on Yiddish and its symbolic potential in the narrative of German Jewish assimilation. As the language of the home and the primary vehicle of Jewish female literacy, Yiddish is inextricably linked to the feminine. A language of cultural and geographic interplay—a relatively young Germanic language with a large Hebrew-Aramaic lexicon—Yiddish defies discrete linguistic categories. Both the proponents of German nation-building in the early nineteenth century and the maskilim of the Haskalah were much concerned with notions of linguistic purity, but Yiddish defies such constraints. Despite its basis in an Indo-European branch of the language tree, Yiddish is a hybrid language that has challenged contemporary understandings of linguistic genealogy. Thus, Yiddish can serve as an emblematic vehicle to explore the cultural shifts taking place within the Ashkenazic Jewish world: the language itself has long partaken in the destabilization of constructed boundaries.

The ambivalent status of Yiddish is further evident in its form: Written in Hebrew letters but containing a basis in the German lexicon, Western Yiddish is both intelligible and indecipherable to the average German-speaker. Despite its tarnished status as a non-literary

language—a language often conflated with a thieves’ cant in German philology—Yiddish was nonetheless the language of the everyday until the mid-eighteenth century in German-speaking lands, both for the male and female members of the Jewish community. Yiddish, while marginalized in literary or political discourse, has therefore also been historically indispensable in Ashkenaz as the vehicle of everyday communication. This ambivalent attitude toward Yiddish—a language that has served as both a shared means of communication and a popular ideological target of denigration—thus operates analogously to the issue of female sexuality as it is thematized in Halle-Wolfssohn’s play. While female sexuality is treated with scorn and the need for control, it is also policed so tightly because of its significance to notions of communal preservation. Women are the bearers of children and, in the historical context of *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, the primary caretakers of the next generation.

In this parallel between the discourse on Yiddish and feminine sexuality, form meets content: Yiddish and its surrounding discourse serve as the expressive vehicle to reveal the underlying anxieties of the play. In purely linguistic terms, Yiddish is inextricably intertwined with the German language, yet it is also literally marked by difference through its written form. This dynamic of simultaneous similarity and difference is illustrative of a broader narrative of the German Jewish experience and the uncertainties of reshaping Jewish life to conform to the demands of the modern world. In its proximity to German, Yiddish acts as a tenuous bridge toward German modernity—one that contributes both to an alienation from secular culture and to a means of transition into wider European society.

IV. Euchel’s *Reb Henoch*

Halle-Wolfssohn was not alone in both insisting on Hebrew-German bilingualism as the linguistic path into modernity and telling this story of transition in Yiddish, and the use of Yiddish to relay maskilic ideas persisted into the nineteenth century. Isaac Euchel, an iconic leader of the Haskalah, was best known for his Hebrew intellectual contributions, but he, too, employed Yiddish to address a wider audience and to speak to the multivocal nature of Jewish cultural transformations in the late eighteenth century. *Laykhtzin un fremelay* is a paradigmatic instance of Jewish theater remaking a Western European form, and Euchel trafficked in similar dynamics—as well as a similar plot and set of characters—in his 1793 play *Reb Henoch, oder, Woß tut me damit*. This work also presents of a spectrum of Jewish integration into European culture. In this text, the Jewish daughters once again stand at the precipice between traditional Jewish life and the wider secular world. The daughter figure encodes a concern with Jewish continuity—rendered in terms of her sexuality as the “gatekeeper” of the Jewish family—and with the boundaries between Jewish and non-Jewish culture. In presenting the encounters of Jewish piety with a range of attempts to engage with European culture, Euchel blurs the distinctions between traditional and enlightened culture while also discrediting contemporaneous notions of authenticity.

In *Reb Henoch*, a range of linguistic registers once again corresponds to a spectrum of engagement with western European culture: from the Western Yiddish rich with a large lexicon of Hebrew-Aramaic terms to a Western Yiddish intelligible to German speakers to High German and other European languages such as French and English. Even more than Halle-Wolfssohn, Euchel plays with a constant shift in language and linguistic register. Language shifts occur not only between characters, as individual characters also modify their linguistic register according to their environment. As in Halle-Wolfssohn’s play, each of these linguistic registers signals a

different level of anxiety toward, or acceptance of, European modernity: from the conservatism of patriarch Reb Henoch's Hebrew-inflected Yiddish to the High German of "aufgeklärte Juden" who embrace European literature, music, and dress and forgo Jewish ritual law. Each of these linguistic registers also corresponds to the gender politics undergirding the languages of Ashkenazic Jewry. Like Halle-Wolfsohn's Jettchen, the Jewish daughters in *Reb Henoch* demonstrate the most visible departure from Jewish tradition. I consider how Euchel presents the daughters' commitment to new modes of speech and education and how this imagines the tensions between Jewish and secular life. Furthermore, I consider how the Jewish daughters—through their mastery of previously non-Jewish languages and engagement with *Bildung*—act as transmitters of threats to the status quo, imbuing their actions with the highest social consequence.

Euchel's three-act play—which he refers to as a "Familiengemälde," again revealing its indebtedness to the European dramatic form of the domestic drama—revolves around the family of Reb Henoch, the father of two daughters and two sons, each of whom force their father, at different moments, to proclaim "Woß tut me damit" in response to their machinations.¹⁴⁸

Euchel's play lacks a single coherent plot, but instead offers a series of rather disjointed *Gemälde* as Reb Henoch and his wife Jittel attempt to manage the rebellion of their children. In contrast to Halle-Wolfsohn's *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, which consists of a fairly tight plot focused on Jettchen and her immediate family, Euchel's play also contains a series of peripheral characters

¹⁴⁸ "Woß tut me damit" translates to "Was soll das?"

The text quoted in this chapter is from Marion Aptroot and Roland Gruschka's 2004 edition Euchel's play. This edition includes the Yiddish version of the text side-by-side with its transliteration into Latin letters (for the German-speaking reader) and footnoted German translation. The Yiddish version is based primarily on a reference manuscript (MS 99:24) found in Copenhagen's Royal Library, with scene variations based on a manuscript (MS Hebr. 8° 383) located in the National Library of Israel at the Hebrew University. All subsequent German translations provided for Yiddish quotations refer to the corresponding German translation in Aptroot and Gruschka's edition. See Isaac Euchel, *Reb Henoch, oder: Woß tut me damit*, ed. Marion Aptroot and Roland Gruschka (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 2004), 93.

in Reb Henoch's orbit. This chapter will concern itself with the central storyline of the text, that of Reb Henoch and his children. The play takes place in "das aufgeklärte Jahrhundert" and primarily follows the children Elisabeth, Hedwig, and Hartwig in their attempts to subvert the constraints of traditional Jewish life.¹⁴⁹ Of central concern are the romantic pursuits of the two daughters, who both seek the attention of Prussian men. Elisabeth, who is already married to the hapless pious Jew Moddel, runs off on the Sabbath to enjoy the company of the Prussian Leutnant Horn, while Hedwig, too, flirts with Prussian men. In contrast to Halle-Wolfssohn's comedy, in which only the daughter's behavior is illustrated, the sons of Euchel's Reb Henoch simultaneously play an active role. While the son Schmuël stays by his parents' side, their son Hartwig (whose Yiddish name is Herzche) is a perennial source of mischief. Although Hartwig, like his sisters, stimulates his parents' indignation by refusing to lead a pious life, the consequences of his behavior diverge from those met by Elisabeth and Hedwig. The juxtaposition of both daughters' and sons' behavior serves as a productive space in which to consider the stakes of a departure from Jewish tradition. In what follows, the gendered divisions of these stakes inflect an understanding of the horizon of possibilities in refashioning a Jewish existence in a world not governed by Jewish law and rituals.

Daughters as Agents of Subversive Language and Education

Both Delphine Bechtel and Natalie Naimark-Goldberg comment on Euchel's positioning of the Jewish woman in his critique of Jewish society. Bechtel argues that Euchel offers no positive example of Jewish womanhood, in contrast to the play's male characters who present an ideal of

¹⁴⁹ Euchel, *Reb Henoch*, 100.

enlightened masculinity.¹⁵⁰ Bechtel, too, asserts that Euchel likely had in mind the salonières who were his contemporaries—women such as Rahel Varnhagen, Henriette Herz, and Dorothea Veit—when he conceived of the text’s female characters who receive secular education.¹⁵¹ While Bechtel writes that Euchel’s presentation of the “moderne Frau” reinforces a stereotypical attribution of sentimentality to women, Naimark-Goldberg moves a step further and argues that Euchel even constructs a “modern gender hierarchy.”¹⁵² That the Haskalah was an androcentric movement is clear, and the subordinate status of women in Euchel’s text corresponds to this. Euchel himself likely did little to raise the status of women, and his play offers a rich example of the intersection of anxieties toward the loss of Jewish tradition and the control of female desire.

Both Elisabeth (whose name returns to the Yiddish “Elke” in the home) and Hedwig (in Yiddish, “Hodeß”) eagerly fashion themselves as mainstream European women, abandoning Yiddish for High German and other European languages such as French and English. Unlike some of their male counterparts in the Jewish community—such as Elisabeth’s husband Moddel, who occasionally moves between Western Yiddish and High German—the sisters do not return to their original language of the home. Their movement into new social circles is evident when a visiting Englishman, Sir John, praises the sisters’ linguistic abilities: “Lady Moddel [Elisabeth], spricht reecht gut English, ooch her sister, Miss ‘Enoch [Hedwig], underschteht.”¹⁵³ John’s observation not only speaks to the sisters’ more comprehensible departure from Yiddish, but also

¹⁵⁰ Delphine Bechtel, “Reb Henoch, oder: Woß tut me damit? – Hybride Sprache, Zwittergestalten: Kulturen im Kontakt in einer jüdischen Komödie der Aufklärungszeit,” in *Reb Henoch, oder: Woß tut me damit* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 2004), 19–44, here 35.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 35; Natalie Naimark-Goldberg, “The (Questionable) Appraisal of Women in Isaac Euchel’s Haskalah,” in *Isaac Euchel: Der Kulturrevolutionär der jüdischen Aufklärung* (Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag, 2010), 261–76, here 274.

¹⁵³ Euchel, *Reb Henoch*, 128.

to the distinction between Elisabeth and Hedwig in their linguistic competence. Euchel juxtaposes two models of women adopting the secular intellectual, musical, and sartorial culture around them: one daughter a paragon of Bildung and the other only adopting the superficial features of secular European culture. While Elisabeth is depicted as successful in her social and intellectual transformation into a well-read, cosmopolitan woman, Hedwig's attempts to play the Enlightenment-era salonière come off as a clumsy performance. Hedwig not only shifts her language to High German; she also peppers her language with snippets of "French" ("mon cher mama") when she addresses her mother, an act that alienates and infuriates her conservative father as he exclaims in frustration, "Woß tu ich mit dain 'mon scher mama'! Di meme hot recht, nit mer iber di mesuse."¹⁵⁴ The limits of Hedwig's linguistic adaptation are also evident in her slippage from High German into Yiddish, or from German into Berlinerisch, a manner of speech signaling less cultural cachet and deviating from normative grammar: "Verzeihen Sie, lieber Tate, verjeben Sie mich, ich bin unschuldig!"¹⁵⁵ Hedwig's occasional failure to distinguish between the High German of the aristocracy and the dialect that she encounters from the non-Jewish domestic help points to a shallow understanding of surrounding non-Jewish culture and limited literacy.

Much like the satirized Rahel figure of *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, Euchel's Hedwig can be read as a critique of superficial and unexamined participation in contemporary intellectual life. Hedwig's interactions with non-Jewish high society do more than reflect a lack of engagement with literature and philosophy; they also lampoon the pseudo-intellectual status of the overly confident men with whom she associates. Hedwig becomes particularly taken with Herr

¹⁵⁴ "Was soll ich mit dein 'ma chère maman'! Mutter hat recht, nicht mehr über die Türschwelle." Euchel, *Reb Henoach*, 104.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

Breitenbauch, a self-proclaimed Kantian whose name (meaning “wide stomach”) conjures the image of a well-fed member of the upper class and points toward the carnivalesque engagement with the exaggerated and the corporeal, a kind of “grotesque realism.”¹⁵⁶ Breitenbauch condescends to Hedwig by addressing her “in einem didaktischen Ton” and attempts to give her a crash course in epistemology as he explains Kant’s concept of the thing-in-itself.¹⁵⁷

Hedwig, who has changed registers to High German but has yet to adopt the specialized language of philosophical German, understands little of the content of Breitenbauch’s abridged lecture, but she recognizes that he is performing the role of the intellectual elite: “Was Sie da sagen! Das klingt mich sehr gelehrt; und weil es mich so ein großer Philosoph sagt, will ich ooch gerne glooben, daß es sehr prächtig und sehr vernünftig ist.”¹⁵⁸ Her response then progresses to a humorous misunderstanding, as she adds: “Aber ich nehme es Sie sehr übel, daß Sie mich ein Ding nennen.”¹⁵⁹ Apart from a philosophical naivety, Hedwig’s speech itself undercuts her entrance into a refined world of German letters and high culture, as her lack of distinction between accusative and dative (using “Sie” rather than the dative form “Ihnen”) again reflects an adoption of Berlin dialect.¹⁶⁰ Rather than understanding Breitenbauch’s monologue as an explanation of epistemology, she takes his usage of the term “Ding” in its literal, colloquial sense. Hedwig’s ignorance positions her as an aspiring Rahel-type and member of high society, although there is little content or intellectual engagement beneath her adoption of High German

¹⁵⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 163 and Ch. 3–4.

¹⁵⁷ Euchel, *Reb Henoch*, 140.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ On the reversal or collapse of accusative and dative forms in the Berlin dialect, see: Agathe Lasch, *Berlinisch. Eine berlinische Sprachgeschichte*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1928).

and the latest fashions. Hedwig's response—the indiscriminate acceptance of the genteel man's words as a source of wisdom and calling someone who philosophizes a "großer Philosoph"—signals a superficial grasp of contemporary intellectual movements. At the same time, this satirical portrayal of a Jewish character in her failure to master non-Jewish forms resembles what later became the offensive *Judenpossen* that became popular in the early nineteenth century. These plays "derided the—generally futile—attempts of Jews to assimilate and pass as (Christian) Germans by deriding their racial mimicry and denying them the capability of proper mimeses."¹⁶¹ This concern with passing and belonging was pervasive before this genre became popular, and Euchel's play conducts a similar operation—in a Jewish satirical rather than an antisemitic form—by denying the Jewish figure acceptance into the European elite, demonstrating slippages that the viewer can easily detect.

But more is also at work here: Hedwig's reaction also suggests a keen recognition of the various linguistics registers implemented among social groups. While she does not understand the content of Breitenbauch's analysis, she is able to identify his mode of speech and its intended effect. In hearing his monologue, Hedwig affirms that, indeed, Herr Breitenbauch is speaking the language of an intellectual elite, even if this speech is overwrought jargon. Hedwig therefore is not the only character in this scene who is posturing; Breitenbauch, too, speaks to her in order to signal his participation in an intellectual movement and assert his dominance—while also perhaps seducing her—rather than to conduct a philosophy lesson. Hedwig's speech amplifies Breitenbauch's performance of intellectual superiority. "Das ist mich wieder viel zu gelehrt, und davon verstehe ich leider ganz und gar nichts," Hedwig states before she indulges Breitenbauch

¹⁶¹ Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 40.

in a monologue.¹⁶² Although Hedwig does not possess the education to retort with her own philosophical jargon, she reaffirms Breitenbauch's own performance of the educated elite. As Hedwig denigrates her own intellect and misunderstands the function of the term "Ding," at play is not only a satirized salonière and the folly of the under-educated. This interaction also signals the range of registers that function in moving between social groups. Hedwig's adoption of the salonière persona—notwithstanding its comic potential—is therefore not simply critique of a superficial adoption of Enlightenment culture; rather, the figure of the Jewish daughter also renders visible the role of linguistic codes in signaling and shaping social belonging.

Hedwig's ability to signal social belonging, as well as the limits thereof, continues in her interaction with Herr Breitenbauch's colleagues. Her lack of familiarity with key figures of German culture become evident when she insists that Herr Breitenbauch originates from "Kant:"

Hedwig: Breitenbauch aus Polen? Aus *Kant* ist er, wenn Sie's wissen wollen.
Plump: Aus Kant? Wo liegt dieser Ort?
Hedwig: Ja, das weiß ich selbst nicht. Er hat mir's aber oft genug gesagt, daß er ein Kantianer ist.¹⁶³

It is no coincidence that Hedwig makes reference to the name "Kant," irrespective of this proper noun's function in the sentence. Immanuel Kant played a key role in defining the Enlightenment for Euchel. Kant represents the double-edged nature of the Enlightenment: He was central in both shaping Euchel's education in Königsberg and cutting it short, as the rector who ultimately denied Euchel an academic degree or position.¹⁶⁴ "Kant" was undoubtedly a name in circulation during this period—what Euchel terms "das aufgeklärte Jahrhundert"—and would make its way

¹⁶² Euchel, *Reb Henoch*, 140.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁶⁴ Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 226.

even to the ears of less educated circles. Hedwig here once again betrays her identity as the daughter of the pious Reb Hensch rather than a well-established woman of Christian high society. Her naïve command of German language, culture, and intellectual figures makes her a source of curiosity for non-Jewish men, while these same failures to “pass” fully allow male figures to take advantage of her.¹⁶⁵

This contested performance of the high society woman also becomes evident when Hedwig is faced with the task of reading German. When asked by her Yiddish-speaking mother Jittel to read a receipt written in German, Hedwig is barely able to make out the letters. Jittel replies in frustration: “Was murmelst du? Du hast uns doch genug gekostet, du wirst doch die lateinische Schrift lesen können.”¹⁶⁶ Hedwig’s use of German causes a twofold resentment in her family: Her European education and adoption of German culture provoke unease in her father, since her ability to interface with the non-Jewish world ultimately also leads her to stray from tradition. However, her basic, if inadequate, cultural literacy of the non-Jewish world is also critical to the survival of the family. Despite Hensch and Jittel’s disparagement of *Aufklärung*, they also recognize the necessity of the intermediary role of a German-speaking daughter.

In contrast to the satirized image of the salonière in Hedwig, her sister Elisabeth performs the role of the enlightened woman of letters more seamlessly. Elisabeth rarely demonstrates a slippage into Yiddish or another dialect of German, and her European education serves both as a

¹⁶⁵ The introduction to Katrin Sieg’s monograph on ethnic drag in West Germany offers a helpful summary of the discourse on Jewishness and performance. According to Sieg, “The enterprise of Jewish assimilation became wedded to the racial thematics of passing. The exhortation to self-improvement turned into the anxiety about dissimulation, that is, disavowing one’s very own essence, feigning what one is not, and usurping privileges to which one is not entitled by birth” (39–40). The narrator’s evaluation of Steinheim’s appearance reveals this ambivalence toward his ability to inhabit such modes of “self-improvement.” For more on the construction of racial difference and its relationship to portrayals of Jewish figures, in particular Jewish language, see Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 33–40.

¹⁶⁶ Euchel, *Reb Hensch*, 180.

potential source of power and as her greatest transgression. Unlike Hedwig, whose piecemeal understanding of German culture alienates her from both her Jewish family and her public European persona, Elisabeth is able to harness her education to influence cultural shifts around her. In another example of the male family member initiating the Jewish daughter into the world of secular letters (like Markus does for Jettchen), Elisabeth receives a secular *Bildung* from her cousin Nathan—a not-so-subtle reference to the titular character of Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*. With this education, Elisabeth acts as a conduit between the secular world and the men in her community. Her greatest role is as transmitter of secular learning to her brother Hartwig. Reb Henoeh attempts to give both of his sons a traditional Jewish education, but Hartwig manages to evade this fate through tutoring from his sister Elisabeth. He begins a traditional Jewish education at the wishes of his father under the tutelage of a Reb Josefche-type: “Ein polnischer Rebbe lehrte mich Dinge, wovon er, Gott weiß es, selbst keinen Begriff hatte.”¹⁶⁷ Hartwig considers these studies a practice in which the reading of texts and individual thought are divorced from one another. He resolves to escape what he deems a “Zeitverderb” and follow the example of Elisabeth: “Sie hatte mich besonders lieb, zog mich an sich, lehrte mich lesen, unterrichtete mich in der deutschen und französischen Sprache, sorgte für mich, daß ich gute Bücher zu lesen bekam.”¹⁶⁸ Elisabeth’s relationship to Hartwig illustrates the subversive role that the Jewish woman, in interfacing with the secular world, plays in influencing the family’s gradual move away from tradition. This influence, however, is not cast in terms of progress; Elisabeth’s initiation of her brother into secular letters is imagined as an act of corruption and desertion. In avoiding Reb Henoeh’s attempts to find a suitable vocation for his son, Hartwig

¹⁶⁷ Euchel, *Reb Henoeh*, 188.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 188, 190.

ends up with enormous gambling debts and ultimately pursues a *Bildungsreise*, the quintessential event of a German bourgeois education.

Gender and the Stakes of Secular Learning

While the secular lives of Elisabeth and Hedwig are on display in Euchel's play, women are not the only Jewish characters who adopt High German and non-Jewish culture. Their forays into secular culture, though, are met with suspicion and the demand that the daughters return to pious lives and Jewish husbands. Furthermore, the act of entering this world of *Bildung* is depicted as a feminine arena: Not only does Elisabeth provide her brother Hartwig with secular literature and an opening into Enlightenment culture, she also influences her pious husband. Moddel claims that, in order to satisfy Elisabeth, he, too, has adopted the latest fashions:

Aj-ja-ja, ich hob si doch sou lihb gehat, hob ihr all ihr schmad-willen gelosen. Ihr zu gefallen, hob ich mir a gepuderte peruk ufgesetzt, ihr zu gefallen, hob ich mir nit amol a schnirche schein gelost, ihr zu lihb hob ich kaan smireß gesungen, kaan schaleschudeß gemacht—bin ich mamesch a filosof geworren.¹⁶⁹

Elisabeth is not alone in her embrace of contemporary dress and abandonment of Jewish rituals. To appease his wife, he claims, he too began wearing a powdered wig, rids himself of his traditional beard, and changed his rituals on the Sabbath. In a similar way that Hedwig calls Herr Breitenbauch a great philosopher, Moddel concludes that, by adopting these sartorial and ritual changes, he too has become a "filosof." This model acknowledges both the performative elements that define a reshaping of identity and the assignment of agency in this process. In Moddel's frustrated formulation, he is not an active adopter of these changes but rather a

¹⁶⁹ "Ei-ja-ja, ich habe sie doch so lieb gehabt, habe all ihren gojischen Launen nachgegeben. Um ihr zu gefallen, habe ich mir eine gepuderte Perücke aufgesetzt, um ihr zu gefallen, habe ich mir nicht die Spur von einem Bart stehen lassen, ihr zuliebe habe ich am Schabbes keine Tischlieder gesungen, die Mahlzeit zum Abschluß des Schabbes aufgegeben—bin ich ein richtiger Philosoph geworden." Euchel, *Reb Henoch*, 186.

recipient of change forced to accommodate Elisabeth's wishes; he positions his wife as the agent of these cultural changes and himself as the victim of her modern whims. Without her introduction of new ideas and behaviors, Moddel would have remained committed to the traditions of the Jewish community. Elisabeth thus operates as a site of social change, the transmitter of non-Jewish practices that threaten the status quo. The Jewish woman as site of change—and fear thereof—is also evident in the consequences of these changes. While Moddel, too, gives up some Jewish norms, he remains in the conservative Reb Henoeh's good graces and is not maligned for these transgressions against tradition. Instead, Moddel is depicted at the mercy of his swiftly modernizing wife—pejoratively referred to by a member of the community as his "schöne Rachel"—who acts as a linchpin for reforms that are seeping into the Jewish community.¹⁷⁰

Among Reb Henoeh's "enlightened" children, Hartwig's transgressions are perhaps the greatest in scope: from shunning his Talmud studies, to bribery, to acquiring gambling debts, to embarking on a journey of bourgeois self-improvement. This is not to say that Hartwig's transgressions go unnoticed or that they are immediately forgiven; his misbehavior also stirs the anger of his father. However, in contrast to his sisters, the preservation of Hartwig's symbolic purity is not at stake. Reb Henoeh's grumblings over Hartwig characterize his son not as an agent, but rather as a pathetic and unsalvageable figure. After abandoning his Talmud studies and beginning an apprenticeship in a new trade, Reb Henoeh displays apathy toward what may become of his son: "Er werd aanß wi'ß andre, ma soll sogen, aan kind forß andere (mit froher Miene auf Schmuel zeigend), nischt mer, woß tut me damit!"¹⁷¹ Reb Henoeh relies on the

¹⁷⁰ Euchel, *Reb Henoeh*, 176.

¹⁷¹ "Egal, was aus ihm wird, dafür hat man ja zum Glück (...) noch andere Kinder, aber was soll's!" *Ibid.*, 102.

potential of his other son, Schmuel, to carry on with traditional Jewish teachings. While Hartwig's rejection of a pious life is distasteful, the departure of his son is not an existential question in the manner of his straying daughters. Despite his father's frustration, Hartwig's behavior ultimately goes unpunished, whereas Elisabeth—who finds company with a German lieutenant one Sabbath—is forced to beg her father for forgiveness. By contrast, the audience rarely sees the sons, Hartwig and Schmuel, take any action, and neither is forced into an act of supplication to their father. Hartwig, in fact, tasks the local doctor with relaying his apologies to Reb Henschel before he flees the city. Hartwig's mischief is typically described in retrospect, while Schmuel is only present in an inert state, studying Torah. In a final twist of irony, however, the audience discovers that the unassuming and ostensibly pious brother Schmuel has committed the greatest transgression: He has impregnated the cook, a non-Jewish woman.

The stakes are highest, though, when considering the behavior of the daughters. As in *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, Elisabeth and Hedwig are agents of change between traditional Jewish and non-Jewish life, what Reb Henschel terms “*di naie welt*.”¹⁷² Reb Henschel, who represents the institutions of Jewish tradition, seeks to punish the romantic and intellectual transgressions of his daughters while his mischievous sons are left unscathed. Gilman locates the origin of the “schlemiel” in the Enlightenment and considers Euchel's Reb Henschel to be a paradigmatic example of schlemiels, “fools who believe themselves to be in control of the world but are shown to the reader/audience to be in control of nothing, not even themselves.”¹⁷³ Gilman argues that Euchel utilizes Yiddish, in its capacity as a “damaged language,” as a vehicle to expose the

¹⁷² Euchel, *Reb Henschel*, 212.

¹⁷³ Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 112.

hypocrisy of tradition and to “cajole the reader into not being a fool.”¹⁷⁴ While indeed, Reb Henoch and his counterpart in Halle-Wolfssohn’s play have little control over the cultural or sexual transgressions of their family members, Yiddish hardly acts as a “damaged medium” to communicate the hypocrisy of piety and conservatism. In both Euchel’s and Halle-Wolfssohn’s plays, the range of linguistic registers does not offer a moral spectrum, but rather a space in which anxieties toward changes in cultural norms are played out. Gilman presents a dichotomy in which Yiddish-speakers represent folly, while German is a vehicle of authenticity or operates as an “undamaged” medium. However, neither the Yiddish- nor the German-speaking figures emerge in a favorable light. Both the conservative Reb Henoch and the enlightened children are depicted as superficially engaged in their cultural and ideological projects: Reb Henoch’s persona is one of false piety, while the newly-Europeanized generation of Jewish daughters and sons likewise have only an insubstantial grasp of “reason” and the cultural milieu in which they participate. Both works therefore offers an ambivalent response to the conditions of modernity, presenting neither model examples of tradition nor an embrace of reason. Rather, Euchel and Halle-Wolfssohn depict the double bind of committing to either and, visible in the figure of the daughters, the risks of attempting to live in between.

¹⁷⁴ Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, 112.

CHAPTER 2: *Bildung* and Failed Conversion in Fanny Lewald's *Jenny* (1843)

I. Introduction

In the 1843 novel *Jenny* by Fanny Lewald (1811–89), a constellation of Jewish characters attempts through various means to thrive in the non-Jewish world. Lewald's work grapples with the possibilities available to—and limitations facing—a new German Jewish elite and demonstrates how Jewish figures might maneuver through the social and political structures of the period. Each character uses different tools at their disposal as a survival mechanism or to divorce themselves entirely from their Judaism. The protagonist Jenny's father, for example, ensures his survival pragmatically through his economic enterprise. His success in banking enables him to attain high social standing and compels him to run a household devoid of traditional Jewish practice. His worldview is in line with Enlightenment attitudes; as a deist, he has also imbued his children with similar views.

Jenny's brother Eduard, as another case, continues in the vein of his father by gaining economic and social capital: He is well-educated and a successful doctor. Despite an acknowledgement of his religious difference, the community respects him for his service and skill in medicine. In addition to these mechanisms of survival, he also articulates an explicit political confrontation with his Jewishness. Eduard's activism therefore is not only an attempt to ameliorate his own struggles and station within a constraining and threatening social structure; he is also attempting to transform the external conditions themselves. Although he may not succeed in moving the needle of Jewish emancipation, he remains committed to this activism and

unwaveringly devoted to his principles of justice when faced with an opportunity to make concessions.

While Eduard and his father engage with the structural and material conditions that affect their family, the Jewish daughter, Jenny, provides an opportunity to consider the tensions and contradictions that constitute a negotiation of Jewishness within a predominantly non-Jewish milieu. By examining the rebellion of the Jewish daughter, questions of women's emancipation map onto questions Jewish emancipation. Jenny's defiance of the emotional, intellectual, and social paradigm expected of a Jewish daughter brings into relief a new understanding of the desire for Jewish participation in non-Jewish society. Much like contemporary domestic fiction, Lewald's *Jenny* uses the relationship between fathers and daughters to explore broader anxieties toward the new social and moral frontiers of modern bourgeois life, in which the father, through his perception of threat, stands in for the status quo. In the case of *Jenny*, the text explores the new social and moral frontiers of bourgeois Jewish life in the non-Jewish world. In *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation*, Todd Kontje considers how the female figure and domestic fiction provide a window into the national discourse that has been articulated by patriarchal voices. Kontje argues that "[p]rotest abounds in women's fiction, both covert and open."¹⁷⁵ Jenny's protest, through her engagement with literature and Bildung while pursuing a Christian man, is at once covert and open. Lewald's work corresponds to Nancy Armstrong's paradigm of the novel, in which the protagonist attempts to "resolve a discrepancy between the individual's sense of, say, love or justice and the material conditions that he or she encounters."¹⁷⁶ More

¹⁷⁵ Todd Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation 1771–1871: Domestic Fiction in the Fatherland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10.

¹⁷⁶ Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719–1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 4–5.

precisely, as Armstrong elucidates in the case of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), "literacy alone" transforms the female protagonist "from an object he can possess into a self-possessed subject."¹⁷⁷ In *Jenny*, literacy is key in carving out the space in which the protagonist can attempt to re-fashion her romantic and social relations. And while literacy creates this opportunity for transformation, it also presents the Jewish figure's limitations in resolving the discrepancy between external social conditions and internal desires. This chapter is concerned with the method through which this novel's protagonist, Jenny, grapples with her Jewishness and its corresponding social limitations by means of literacy and *Bildung*. In Jenny's navigation of her social milieu, she is able to read social relations and expectations keenly. However, her ability to perceive the world and establish a spiritual outlook is mediated by the attitudes of her father as well as her brother. While the act of reading and Jenny's abilities *as a reader* are the means through which Jenny works to fashion herself as a subject apart from her Jewishness, this capacity also prevents her from successfully transcending her social station and restores her to the constraints of her family.

In the following, I consider the intersection of literature and Christian-Jewish love in Lewald's novel. In this text, literature serves as both the gateway and the medium of Jenny's attempt to extricate herself from the constraints of a Jewish identity. Jenny's initial romantic rebellion is catalyzed by her pursuit of secular *Bildung* and enlightened worldview, both highly inflected by her father. In continuing her education, she meets and falls in love with the Christian tutor Reinhard, and their romance grows through a shared immersion in German literature. I then consider Jenny's engagement with literature in the form of the conversion narrative—or rather, the failure to fashion her own conversion narrative—as part of an attempt to realize her romantic

¹⁷⁷ Armstrong, *How Novels Think*, 5.

attachment to Reinhard. Through the process of conversion, Jenny attempts to map one system of understanding onto another, but ultimately fails to employ her verbal acumen in transforming her father's deist worldview into Christian faith. Moreover, the shortcoming that undermines her ability to realize a love for Reinhard reinforces an identification with her father and brother, the primary sources of her religious and intellectual attitudes. The development and limitations of Jenny's *Bildung* ultimately prevent her from escaping the limitations imposed by her status as a Jewish woman and, in effect, push her closer to her immediate family. The secular education of the Jewish daughter in conjunction with her romantic rebellion away from the Jewish family functions in staging the limitations of—and anxieties toward—refashioning Jewish identity in the non-Jewish world. This chapter considers how a relationship with *Bildung* and literature both offers the possibility of transforming the Jewish figure's marginalized status and acts as the medium that undermines this endeavor.

II. Fanny Lewald's *Jenny*

Set in 1832 in "einer großen deutschen Handelsstadt," Lewald's 1843 novel follows the titular character Jenny Meier and her upper-class Jewish family. Jenny's father has earned his family's economic security and social status as a banker, while her older brother Eduard is a well-respected physician. The whip-smart and restless Jenny requires education beyond that of domestic occupations, so Eduard arranges for her to receive lessons from his friend Reinhard, a student of theology and soon-to-be pastor. During her lessons, Jenny falls in love with her tutor. As their mutual attraction crystallizes, Jenny begins the process of conversion in order to enable their marriage. As her conversion lessons progress, Jenny struggles to convince herself of the tenets of Christianity. Her pastor intuits this as well, and Jenny ends her union with Reinhard

through a letter expressing her inability to convert with sincerity. Reinhard continues to pursue his post as a pastor and ultimately marries Therese, a Christian friend of Jenny.

Concurrently, Eduard has fallen in love with the Christian *Kommerzienrat's* daughter Clara Horn, a patient with whom he becomes acquainted. While Clara's parents are grateful for his medical care, their prejudice against the Meier family is clear. Eduard seeks a way to make possible an interfaith marriage with Clara, but he finds his aspiration thwarted. Unlike Jenny, who pursues conversion to Christianity, Eduard refuses to renounce the Jewish religion for their love, although he is not observant. Their relationship ends with Eduard's commitment to this principle, and Clara marries her English cousin William Hughes, a partner deemed suitable by the Horn family. Jenny, too, later finds another Christian fiancé—this time the nobleman Graf Walter. However, their partnership is cut short when Walter is killed in a duel while avenging an antisemitic offense targeted at Jenny. Upon learning of his death, Jenny passes away from grief.

Previous studies of Fanny Lewald focuses on issues of female authorship and her role as a writer of the Vormärz. Complementing these studies, scholars have favored a historical reading of Lewald's *Jenny*, focusing on the depiction of political and social questions in the text—namely, the contemporary debates on Jewish and female civic emancipation. Among this scholarship is work emphasizing the semi-autobiographical features of *Jenny*, as the novel echoes many of the themes and events described in Lewald's later-published *Meine Lebensgeschichte* (1861–62). Lewald was born in Königsberg, the daughter of a secular Jewish businessman, David Marcus. In 1828, Lewald, like the protagonist Jenny, converted to Christianity with the permission of her parents. Lewald, too, experienced feelings of doubt and regret during and following her conversion experience.¹⁷⁸ Lewald's autobiography serves not

¹⁷⁸ Fanny Lewald, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Otto Janke, 1861–62).

only as point of comparison with *Jenny*, but also a source of insight into the author's personal and political inspiration. In her monograph *Fanny Lewald: Between Rebellion and Renunciation*, Margaret Ward traces Lewald's biography and literary production, noting that both personal experience and the resurgence of debate on Jewish emancipation informed the plot of *Jenny*.¹⁷⁹

While most scholarship primarily features the protagonist's "double-bind" as both a woman and a Jew in the nineteenth century, scholars such as Todd Kontje and Ritchie Robertson also feature the political advocacy of Jenny's brother Eduard in their analysis of the work. In his study of the novel and the German nation, Kontje emphasizes Eduard's role as an advocate of a liberal vision of ethnic diversity. This analysis reads Jenny's attempts to move across social and religious boundaries as an allegory to contemporary relations between Jews and German Christians. According to Kontje, Jenny's ultimate demise—in both her abortive relationship with Reinhard and her death following the Graf's assassination—indicates that neither the "political utopia" where "German Christians and Jews could participate equally in an enlightened, constitutional state" nor equality in the private sphere between men and women could be realized.¹⁸⁰

Both Kontje and Robertson also consider representation of Jewish characters and their relationships to one another. While the narrator describes the Meier family as devoid of any distinctive features separating them from their non-Jewish social milieu, Kontje and Robertson argue that the minor characters Doktor Steinheim and his mother present "puzzling anti-Semitic caricatures."¹⁸¹ Doktor Steinheim is depicted with dark hair, a clumsy appearance, and an even

¹⁷⁹ Margaret E. Ward, *Fanny Lewald: Between Rebellion and Renunciation*, *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 99.

¹⁸⁰ Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation*, 159.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

clumsier command of German literature, while his mother speaks an exaggerated form of “Jargon.” Robertson contrasts this characterization with Jenny and Eduard’s so-called “unaffected language” which he argues represents their “moral integrity.”¹⁸² Kontje notes the danger of presenting an opposition between the secular German Jewish family and the stereotype of the unassimilated eastern European Jew; while Eduard may envision a world in which Jews possess equal rights, he also internalizes anti-Jewish prejudice and speaks disdainfully of Steinheim’s “national” characteristics.¹⁸³

Among scholarship on *Jenny*, Eva Lezzi’s “*Liebe ist meine Religion!*” offers the most thorough interrogation of the politics of conversion. Lezzi recognizes the act of conversion as an important rite of passage in nineteenth-century texts portraying Jewish women at the interface between Judaism and Christianity.¹⁸⁴ The act of conversion, Lezzi argues, not only represents contemporary religious and legal questions in the text, but also operates as its own “ästhetische Figur” in enacting the ambivalent space between Jewish and Christian identification in the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁵ Lezzi considers the term “*Jüdin*” a designation that is perpetually tied to the converted subject. Conversion therefore is not only an instrumental act—an event that displaces one religious identifier with another—but rather one that characterizes the experience of a certain type of Jewish existence. Lezzi gives attention to Barbara Hahn’s assertion that Jewish women who did convert also did not commit their experiences to text—or rather, implicitly, that they would not reach the social echelons in which their writing could achieve

¹⁸² Ritchie Robertson, *The Jewish Question in German Literature, 1749–1939: Emancipation and Its Discontents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 92.

¹⁸³ Kontje, *Women, the Novel, and the German Nation*, 158.

¹⁸⁴ Eva Lezzi, “*Liebe ist meine Religion!*”: *Eros und Ehe zwischen Juden und Christen in der Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013), 223.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 224

visibility.¹⁸⁶ Conversion, then, whether or not it is successful in transforming the spiritual outlook of the convert, serves as the vehicle through which the *Jüdin* may make her voice heard. Lezzi then considers how gender functions in determining Jenny's navigation of romantic Jewish-Christian love versus that of her brother Eduard. Eduard's *Eheverständnis* is coded as male, Lezzi argues, and he rejects a renunciation of Judaism, while Jenny's experience is one of attempted transformation and accommodation.¹⁸⁷ According to Lezzi, Lewald confines traits such as national loyalty and identity to the masculine sphere, while female "Anspruchslosigkeit" governs the social and religious accommodations expected of women in the novel.¹⁸⁸

The politics and poetics of conversion is one of the central themes of this chapter. While issues of gender, Jewish civic emancipation, and the representation of Jewish identity all play a significant role in my analysis, this chapter will explore more precisely how Jenny's relationship to literature and the poetics of her conversion function in articulating the tensions of German Jewish subjectivity within the Christian world. Most previous scholarship has treated *Jenny* as more of a historical document than a literary text. An understanding of the social milieu, education, and political status of German Jews in Königsberg and the wider German-speaking world during the nineteenth century provides the contextual framework of this analysis. While this is not a historical study, it concerns itself with how Lewald's work grapples with contemporaneous political and social conditions. In moving beyond existing scholarship, this chapter considers the poetics of this representation and traces how the female negotiation of Jewishness in relation to the non-Jewish world is staged through a twofold desire: both romantic

¹⁸⁶ Lezzi, "*Liebe ist meine Religion!*", 228.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

love and a devotion to language and literature. These themes consistently intersect, and this chapter builds on Lezzis's work in considering how gender and love operate in exploring the possibilities of Jewish emancipation in the nineteenth century. This analysis will go further to consider the unique role that literature and notions of *Bildung* play in shaping the attempted transformation of the Jewish female subject. I argue for the significance of *Bildung* and the act of reading literature in carving out the space in which the Jewish daughter transgresses against the limitations of her religious status. This work explores how instantiations of female agency and its truncation are at once also a vehicle for telling the story of Jewish emancipation—and how both of these endeavors are defined by a nuanced negotiation between participation and exclusion.

III. *Verbürgerlichung* in the Meier Family and the Role of *Bildung*

Jenny Meier is the educated and enlightened Jewish middle-class woman par excellence. In his study on the emergence of German Jewish literature, Jonathan Hess outlines the social and economic shifts prevalent among German-speaking Jews in the nineteenth century, a period in which Jews rapidly entered the middle class and adopted bourgeois values.¹⁸⁹ The experience of Jews in central Europe in the medieval and early modern periods was characterized by an oscillation between integration into and separation from the non-Jewish world. This oscillation persisted into the nineteenth century; while the Jews of France received equal rights in 1791, the Jews of the German lands “saw their political status improve gradually, in fits and starts” throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁰ Hess's study looks at how the political and educational

¹⁸⁹ Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

conditions of this period heralded new forms of German Jewish identity and how German became a primary language of central European Jews.¹⁹¹

Key to these new forms of German Jewish identity—as part of a rapid ascension into the middle class—is the adoption of *Bildung* and the embracing of German literature. According to Hess, the classics of German literature were focal points of German Jewish domestic life, and prominent Jewish figures such as salonière Rahel Varnhagen and historian Ludwig Geiger (1848–1919) fervently cultivated a culture devoted to Goethe and the German canon.¹⁹² An understanding of the Jewish negotiation of German cultural forms in the nineteenth century therefore necessitates a definition of *Bildung* in its corresponding ideology. The German Jewish entry into the world of German letters entails more than the expansion of German-language literacy. Rather, it refers to an active engagement with the concept of *Bildung* and its role in nation-building. *Bildung* as a broad educational concept emerged in its nationally inflected German form in the second half of the eighteenth century and was dominant through the nineteenth century. The philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder developed some of the key concepts of *Bildung* in the context of German thought. Foundational to this conception of *Bildung* was his interest in the primacy of language in constituting human thought and articulating differences between groups of people. Herder’s historiography of humanity is critical

¹⁹¹ The development of a distinct “German-Jewish subculture” is explored in depth in David Sorkin’s *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840*. In line with Hess’s study, Sorkin argues that German Jewish families shaped their own subculture through contact with German social and educational models in their efforts to achieve prosperity and social equality. Rather than an assimilation to the surrounding non-Jewish culture, Sorkin argues that the emulation and re-fashioning of attributes of German culture synthesized a uniquely German Jewish middle-class community, in particular a modification of the “German bourgeoisie of ‘education and property’ (*Bildung und Besitz*)” (112). Sorkin’s thesis can be helpful in understanding German Jewish society of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century in its relation to non-Jewish society—that the trajectory of German Jewish society in this period is not defined by a subsumption of Jewish ways of life into dominant European modes but rather a creation of distinct cultural forms and associations. However, his work assumes a sharp distinction between this new middle class of German Jews and those before the late eighteenth century.

¹⁹² Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*, 13.

in considering “culture” in its multiplicity, for this serves as the premise for understanding people within distinct national categories. Herder further develops his conception of human difference and its articulation in various cultural forms in the essays *Shakespeare* (1773) and *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774).¹⁹³ In these works, he argues against a universal conception of beauty and validates a geographically and historically contingent understanding of communities. Turning away from a strict devotion to reason and empiricism, Herder emphasizes the primacy of self-reflection and “organic concepts of nature” in humans’ education.¹⁹⁴

This movement away from the universal and emphasis on “inwardness” shaped a notion of *Bildung* distinct from that of English and French forms. This “inwardness” did not begin as a secular practice of self-improvement and reflection; rather, German *Bildung* was originally heavily indebted to Protestant, and in particular Pietist, values.¹⁹⁵ This conception of *Bildung* goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and the institutional forms of education; rather, it describes the perpetual process of self-improvement and cultural enrichment. While the pursuit of perfectibility derives from Pietism, *Bildung* took on a secular life of its own into the nineteenth century, most notably in the form of the *Bildungsroman*.¹⁹⁶ *Bildung* was therefore an integral feature in defining “German culture” in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and was inextricably linked to the German Enlightenment. In his response to the question “Was heißt

¹⁹³ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Shakespeare,” in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (Hamburg: Bey Bode, 1773), and Johann Gottfried Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1774).

¹⁹⁴ Rebekka Horlacher, *The Educated Subject and the German Concept of Bildung: A Comparative Cultural History* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 12.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

aufklären?“—most famously answered by Immanuel Kant in 1784—German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn offers an explanation in terms of *Bildung*, culture, and language. In Mendelssohn’s essay, *Bildung* is composed of both *Cultur* and *Aufklärung*, the former encompassing practical occupations and the latter the theoretical.¹⁹⁷ Language, the primary organizing principle of nations put forward by Herder, is also a key feature in the development of *Bildung* according to Mendelssohn:

Eine Sprache erlanget Aufklärung durch die Wissenschaften und erlanget Cultur durch gesellschaftlichen Umgang, Poesie und Beredtsamkeit. Durch jene wird sie geschickter zu theoretischem, durch diese zu praktischem Gebrauche. Beides zusammen gibt einer Sprache die Bildung.¹⁹⁸

Mendelssohn articulates the centrality of language as the vehicle of enlightened development. In responding to the question of what defines enlightenment, Mendelssohn replies in terms of language to the extent that it has been imbued with *Bildung* as a symbiosis of theoretical and practical knowledge. Mendelssohn relies on the premise of shared language as the defining feature of a *Volk*. The primary objective of this cultural entity, bound by language and thus a shared tradition of education, is to achieve *Bildung* formed upon the building blocks of enlightenment and culture. While Mendelssohn’s essay certainly differs from Kant’s response to the same question, his explanation demonstrates the inextricable links between notions of *Bildung*, a nationally defined language, and enlightenment ideals.

Central to the development of the German Enlightenment, and home of Immanuel Kant, is the city of Königsberg. This city also played a significant role in the social and cultural transformation of Prussian Jews during the period. While Lewald does not name the precise

¹⁹⁷ Moses Mendelssohn, “Ueber die Frage: Was heißt aufklären?,” in *Moses Mendelssohns gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: G.B. Mendelssohn, 1843), 399–403.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 401.

Handelsstadt in which her novel takes place, the environment of her own upbringing in Königsberg is evident in the narrative. Cities such as Königsberg and Berlin had relatively young Jewish communities, but they became the residence of many wealthy Jewish families and centers of the unique German Jewish subculture to which Sorkin and Volkov refer.¹⁹⁹ The formation of societies and associations in Königsberg and Berlin, Sorkin argues, served as a way in which German Jews could “create parallel institutions” to those of surrounding Christian society and gain “membership in the larger society in the sense that theirs closely resembled it.”²⁰⁰ The “Beneficent Society” was one such example that sought to make children “useful citizens.”²⁰¹ Dohmsian in its pragmatic approach, the Society considered Bildung, vocational training, and welfare to the poor the primary vehicles of social improvement and emancipation.²⁰² Engagement with the German, Protestant-inflected Enlightenment was critical in shaping the Haskalah. By the late eighteenth century, Königsberg was central in the growth of this movement.

The Meier family exemplifies the social elite like that of Königsberg, but they do not reflect an active engagement with the Haskalah or Judaism beyond its influence on their social and legal status. While members of the Haskalah actively attempted to synthesize a movement between European Enlightenment and Judaism, the Meier family does not belong in this category

¹⁹⁹ Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry* and Volkov, *Die Juden in Deutschland*.

²⁰⁰ Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry*, 116.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁰² In 1781, Christian Wilhelm von Dohm published *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, a key text in the politics of Jewish political emancipation. His work argued that the detrimental economic and political circumstances of the Jews were responsible for their social standing. He promoted their integration into economic and military activity as a means of generating a more productive society. While operating on the premise of a “degenerate” Jewish society, Dohm’s work was groundbreaking in its call for the unconditional emancipation of Jews. Moses Mendelssohn famously wrote an introduction to this publication. For more, see Sorkin (117) and Christian Wilhelm Dohm, *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, (Berlin & Stettin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1781).

of self-conscious proponents of a uniquely Jewish subculture. It would be difficult to imagine the deistic Herr Meier inviting an advocate of Hebrew revival, such as Isaac Euchel, into his home as Jenny's tutor. The arrival of a tutor in the upper-class Jewish home is central to the plot of *Jenny*, but of a radically different sort. Eduard invites the theology student Reinhard into the Meier home, inducing Jenny's decision to leave Judaism. While Eduard vehemently rejects the possibility of conversion for himself, he nonetheless displays great admiration for Reinhard by placing his sister's education in his hands. This decision points to the tension between German Jews' active engagement with Protestant-Enlightenment culture and their incompatibilities. Eduard in part reflects the paradigm of an enlightened reformer who attempts to reconcile these tensions, a figure both steeped in the German Enlightenment and fiercely committed to the political and social advancement of Jews, but his Jewishness is emptied of any religious content. Rather, he maintains a fierce commitment to what he refers to as "mein Volk," echoing contemporary discourses of national difference and anticipating the rise of Jewish nationalism and the response to antisemitism in the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁰³ In a letter to Clara addressing the legal barriers to their marriage and his loyalty to Judaism, Eduard writes:

Es ist nicht der Glaube, der mich an das Judentum bindet: ich bin weder Jude noch Christ in dem Sinne der Menge [...] Aber meine Ehre fesselt mich an mein Volk, das gleich mir in Unterdrückung seufzt.²⁰⁴

Eduard's self-identification as a Jew does not reflect the intellectual and cultural project of the leaders of the Haskalah, but he does articulate some of the innovations re-defining German Jewry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to Eduard, it is no longer religious

²⁰³ The first prominent engagement with the Jewish "national question" was Moses Hess's (1812–1875) *Rom und Jerusalem*, in which the author validates national particularities, critiques assimilation, and calls for a Jewish restoration. See: Moses Hess, *Rom und Jerusalem, die letzte Nationalitätsfrage* (Leipzig: Eduard Wengler, 1862).

²⁰⁴ Fanny Lewald, *Jenny* (Frankfurt am Main: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 1988), 152

laws and rituals that bind him to his Jewishness; rather, he is bound by a responsibility to his “Volk.” Jewishness is no longer constrained to a set of religious practices attributable to a socially and geographically distinct community. With the growth of the German Jewish middle class, the broader discourses on the nature of human division, language, and nation also inflected the discourse on Jewishness among Jews themselves, not least in the form of proto-Zionist movements. An invocation of the *völkisch* organizing principle demonstrates Eduard’s internalization of these national divisions that is contingent not upon belief, but rather on belonging to a particular national spirit.²⁰⁵

In his critique of the legal barriers placed against Jews, Eduard frequently makes reference to national characteristics. Eduard justifies his refusal of conversion to Christianity by invoking the historical narrative of his “Volk,” one that stretches back centuries. When confronted with the prospect of conversion in order to marry Clara, Eduard asks himself, “War es nicht auch das Volk, in dem er geboren war, von dem er sich losreißen mußte? Das uralte Volk, das in tausendjährigen Kämpfen seine Selbständigkeit zu wahren und damit seine innere Mächtigkeit zu bekunden gewußt hat?”²⁰⁶ By converting to Christianity, Eduard does not see himself abandoning a set of religious laws but instead envisions a desertion of his nation and its narrative in the arc of history.

²⁰⁵ Eduard’s attitudes predate the more explicit Jewish engagement with conceptions of *Volk* and the particular character or spirit of peoples. In the 1850s, German Jewish scholar Moritz Lazarus (1824–1903) developed the field of *Völkerpsychologie*, which considered individuals to possess an objective spirit corresponding to their culture. Decades later, Lazarus later became known for his involvement in the *Berliner Antisemitismusstreit*, and in particular for his response to the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke’s (1834–1896) antisemitic publication “Unsere Aussichten” (1879). Lazarus responded with the lecture “Was heisst national?” (1879, printed 1880) that argues for the compatibility of Judaism with belonging to the German nation, for which the primary organizing category was language. See: Heinrich von Treitschke, “Unsere Aussichten,” in *Der “Berliner Antisemitismusstreit” 1879–1881: Eine Kontroverse um die Zugehörigkeit der deutschen Juden zur Nation. Kommentierte Quellenedition.* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 127–30, and Moritz Lazarus, *Was heisst national? Ein Vortrag* (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1880).

²⁰⁶ Lewald, *Jenny*, 76.

In contrast to the innovations of German Jewry explored in Benjamin Maria Baader's study, which describes a movement that transformed religious practices to accommodate new bourgeois values and lifestyles, the Meier household is devoid of Jewish ritual or tradition.²⁰⁷ The Meier family reflects the phenomenon of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which greater legal and economic opportunities for Jewish families also accompanied an increased participation in the institutions of German high culture.²⁰⁸ The Meier family is never found attending synagogue, observing Jewish holidays, or speaking a Jewish language such as Yiddish. Like many German Jews of this period, the Meier family "hatte sich von den jüdischen Ritualgesetzen losgesagt," and Jenny "hatte daher von frühester Kindheit an sich gewöhnt, ebenso die Dogmen des Judentums als die des Christentums bezweifeln und verwerfen zu hören."²⁰⁹ A generational shift away from these institutions of Jewish learning give way to the ideals and habits of German bourgeois life. A new paradigm of the Jewish family is evident in the Meier household, a family imbued with a commitment to Enlightenment ideals rather than to religious ritual; one that frequents the theater rather than the temple; and one that trades scripture for Shakespeare or Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*.²¹⁰ In one example of the Meier family's participation in western European high culture, Jenny takes part in a series of *tableaux vivants*.

²⁰⁷ Baader, *Gender, Judaism, and Bourgeois Culture in Germany*.

²⁰⁸ Stephen M. Lowenstein, "The Beginning of Integration: 1780–1870," in *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618–1945*, ed. Marion A. Kaplan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 128.

²⁰⁹ Lewald, *Jenny*, 50.

²¹⁰ The Meier family's prominent presence at the theater reflects the popularity of this social space for upper class Jewish families. In his study of the transformations of German Jewish households from 1780–1870, Lowenstein describes travelers in Berlin, starting in the 1770s, noting that Jewish families "occupied the best theater seats" (129). Sigrid Nieberle examines both the social and the aesthetic function of the opera in *Jenny*. According to Nieberle, the characters' superficial engagement with a staging of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* signals the bourgeois ubiquity of opera-going and a corresponding lay-understanding of musical performance. For more on the aesthetic function of the opera and the intimate space of the loggia, see: Sigrid Nieberle, *FrauenMusikLiteratur: Deutschsprachige Schriftstellerinnen im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 1999), 102–14.

Jenny portrays Rebecca from Scott's *Ivanhoe* and Bendemann's *Die trauernden Juden im Exil*. These scenes foreground the recreational activities of this social milieu, but they also cleverly enact the containment of Jewishness in the text. Lezzi observes that "[j]üdische Identität wird als immer bereits performative hergestellt und somit zitierbar, im Grunde aber vergangen gezeigt."²¹¹ Explicitly Jewish characters are exoticized (costumed in turbans, for example) and placed in a highly staged context, drawing a sharp contrast between a distinctly Jewish identity—one that is relegated to a distant past—and secularized, bourgeois families like the Meiers.

Jenny's family has embraced the culture of *Bildung* and displays the trappings of a successful bourgeois household. Her father's economic success is known throughout the community and Jenny is "eins der reichsten Mädchen der Stadt" as the daughter of one of its most successful banking families.²¹² The Meiers socialize with the other wealthy, often non-Jewish, families. Jenny's level of education is evident in her familiarity with the canonical literature, knowledge which she displays, in one instance, in the presence of the family friend Doktor Steinheim, who has a penchant for quoting great works gratuitously. In response to Steinheim's quotation of Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell," Jenny retorts,

"Mein Gott! Herr Doktor! Geht es so bergab mit Ihnen, daß Sie von dem göttlichen Shakespeare, dem erhabenen Calderon und dem heiligen Schmerzenssohne unserer Zeit, dem unvergleichlichen Byron, schon zu unserm armen Schiller zurückkehren müssen? Sie haben also in den letzten Tagen wohl gar zu viele Zitate verbraucht?"²¹³

Jenny's response is indicative of her attitude vis-à-vis Steinheim and his mother, whose descriptions scholars have labelled as explicitly anti-Jewish stereotypes.²¹⁴ Jenny seeks to reveal

²¹¹ Lezzi, "*Liebe ist meine Religion!*", 231.

²¹² Lewald, *Jenny*, 110.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

²¹⁴ For more on this analysis of Steinheim and the discourse on "national" features, see Kontje and Robertson.

Steinheim's quotations as a hollow understanding of the texts; she teases him by implying that his arsenal of quotes are part of an already-exhausted rotation. Not only does Jenny draw attention to Steinheim's ignorance, the fifteen-year-old also demonstrates her own precocious knowledge of literature and biting wit.

Steinheim's differentiation from the ostensive sophistication of the Meier family is not only verbal. Upon entering the Meier household, the narrator describes his attire as "nach der modernsten Weise gewählt" but somehow not quite right, as "all das stand ihm, als ob er es eben wie eine Verkleidung angelegt hätte. Es war für den feinen Beobachter etwas Unharmonisches in der ganzen Erscheinung, das störend auffiel."²¹⁵ The depiction of Steinheim's physical presentation underscores an exaggerated performativity of his attempt to conform to upper class European society. The element of "etwas Unharmonisches" operates on a notion of authenticity that Steinheim, an outsider, is unable to achieve, echoing the problems of performance and passing that emerge in Halle-Wolfssohn's and Euchel's satirical representations. Steinheim falls short of passing as a member of the elite, and the level of verisimilitude coupled with the suggestion of imitation ("wie eine Verkleidung") engender this dissonance.²¹⁶ The physical discomfort engendered by Steinheim's presence aligns with Jenny's intellectual frustrations. Much as his recitation of Shakespeare and Schiller strikes Jenny as unconvincing—no indicator of a deeper understanding of the texts—so too does his outward appearance belie an attempt to accommodate the latest fashions.

There is, therefore, credence to Kontje and Robertson's critiques of Steinheim's characterization as trafficking in antisemitic stereotypes. In taking up these literary types—the

²¹⁵ Lewald, *Jenny*, 38.

²¹⁶ See Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 33–40.

assimilated German Jew and the darker figure anticipating the stereotype of the *Ostjude*—the text also presents this polarity of Jewish types with a level of ironic distance. While the Meier family and Steinheim are portrayed as achieving disparate levels of successful *Verbürgerlichung*, both families endure the same discrimination on the basis of their “national” characteristics. By invoking these stereotypes, the text subverts and thus dismantles the false dichotomy of the assimilated-versus-eastern paradigm of European Jews. Beyond this, the apparent intellectual distance created between Jenny and Steinheim highlights the social standing of the Meier family. Steinheim’s Jewishness is foregrounded in the text and his mother continues to speak in Yiddish-inflected language. While operating on the premise of harmful stereotypes, these features stand in contrast to the characterization of the Meier family, a household that is deeply embedded in the upper-class milieu of Königsberg and non-Jewish social circles.

While Jenny’s father Herr Meier is the patriarch of the family, he also shares his decision making—particularly in regard to Jenny’s upbringing—with his son Eduard. Like in the domestic drama, Jenny’s mother occupies a passive role while the father is highly invested in the romantic pursuits of the daughter. The task of raising Jenny is, in practice, shared between Herr Meier and Eduard. Jenny is constructed in relation to these masculine figures; her mother refers to Jenny as possessing the “Charakter deines Vaters, der feste, starke Sinn, und Eduards Einfluß hat diese Charakter-Richtung in dir noch mehr ausgebildet.”²¹⁷ While Jenny derives many of her characteristics and worldview from her father, Eduard plays a key role in shaping her education and social trajectory.

It is clear that the tasks of *Erziehung* and *Bildung* in part fall into Eduard hands, for—in Eduard’s absence during university—their approach toward Jenny was characterized by

²¹⁷ Lewald, *Jenny*, 36.

adoration rather than discipline: “Die Eltern hatten die Kleine niemals aus den Augen verloren und jeden Wunsch des nachgeborenen Lieblings mit zärtlicher Zuvorkommenheit erfüllt.”²¹⁸ The result of this gentle acquiescence to Jenny’s wishes, however, does not impair her social and intellectual growth. Upon returning from university, Eduard remarks that he was “überrascht durch den Verstand und den schlagenden Witz des Kindes.”²¹⁹ In her permissive environment, Jenny has flourished and developed an impeccable mind. Eduard elects to serve as her “Lehrer und Erzieher,” and he finds that “[s]ie lernte fast spielend, ja es schien oft, als läge das Verständnis aller Dinger in ihr, und man dürfe sie nur daran erinnern, um klar und deutlich in ihr Kenntnisse hervorzurufen.”²²⁰ With little formal education, Jenny possesses both native intelligence and the ability to read her own environment to compensate for what she might lack in formal education. Her own independent reading and curiosity, unconstrained by institutional education or parental control, have allowed her to develop intellectually with few limitations. Eduard raises the concern that Jenny possesses “zu viel Selbstgefühl und eine fast unweibliche Energie.”²²¹ Eduard’s assumption of responsibility for Jenny’s education stems from a twofold anxiety: that she might continue to assert an excess of independence and that she transgresses the boundaries of her gender. Jenny’s consumption of literature and corresponding verbal aptitude are not lacking; rather, her further education is a matter of containment. Eduard’s task, in lieu of his father, is to exercise control over Jenny’s intellectual development and to prune the mind that has flourished.

²¹⁸ Lewald, *Jenny*, 45.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

IV. Literature as a Space of Subversive Desire

In Eduard's attempt to constrain Jenny's intellectual development, indicative of an anxiety toward women's education and autonomy, reading emerges as a space of subversion and forbidden love. Eduard first attempts to guide his sister's education by enrolling her in a private school. This arrangement fails when Jenny encounters the antisemitism of her classmates' families; few peers are allowed to consort with Jenny outside of school, including Eduard's love interest, Clara Horn. Eduard hires his friend Reinhard to serve as a private tutor for Jenny and Therese Walter, the mild-mannered Christian daughter of a *Beamtenwitwe*. During these lessons, Jenny initiates her greatest transgression against the norms and perceived *Tugend* of the family by falling in love with a Christian man. Reinhard is therefore both a romantic object as well as the embodiment of Christian dogma that compels a departure from Judaism. Her lessons with Reinhard and their engagement with literature serve as the romantic space in which Jenny first falls in love, as well as the medium through which she is able to articulate her infatuation. Jenny's engagement with the products of high culture—music, art, and poetry—serve as the means through which she attempts to realize her devotion to Reinhard. Through their shared engagement with literature, Jenny repurposes these intellectual tools to fashion her own conversion narrative in order to enable their marriage.

Jenny's first encounter with Reinhard is already articulated in terms of a literary fascination. In her initial appraisal of Reinhard, she conjures up the fantastic imagery of a medieval tale:

Weit über die gewöhnliche Größe, schlank und doch sehr kräftig gebaut, hatte er eine jener Gestalten, unter denen man sich die Ritter der deutschen Vorzeit zu denken pflegte. Hellbraunes, weiches Haar und große blaue Augen bei graden regelmäßigen Zügen machten das Bild des Deutschen vollkommen[...]²²²

²²² Lewald, *Jenny*, 48.

Even before beginning her lessons, Jenny locates her image of Reinhard within an archetypal fairytale framework. Her assessment of the tutor reflects an awareness of the mythology of German knights and epic tales. She is drawn toward his lightly-colored “weiches Haar und große blaue Augen” in an image of idealized Germanic masculinity—“das Bild des Deutschen vollkommen.” The figure of Reinhard as a gallant, fair-haired knight exists as part of Jenny’s own literary imagination, an instrument that the reader discovers drives her romantic impulses. Jenny’s appraisal of Reinhard is significant not only in its invocation of a nationally-classified masculine ideal (“das Bild des Deutschen vollkommen”) but also in that it indicates Jenny’s tendency to tap into this literary imagination in assessing the world. Jenny not only perceives Reinhard through this lens, but she also equates the figure of the tall, fair-haired knight with incomparable beauty.

This engagement with a national mythology (Germanic knights of long ago) is in line with the cultural upbringing of the Meier family. Jenny is both aware of and embraces the products of a German national narrative. While Christian families in Jenny’s community perceive the Meier family in terms of their religious background, Jenny herself sees herself as a participant in German culture. But this participation does not necessitate Jenny’s wholesale acceptance of German myth. By invoking these images of the fair-haired *Ritter*, Jenny is also playing with these literary types. In their encounter, Jenny reads Reinhard as a stock romantic figure rather than an individualized and dynamic character. In doing so, she also subverts the typical constellation of figures in which the Jewish woman is reduced to the type of the “beautiful Jewess.” This dynamic and its power relations are reversed, albeit momentarily, when the Jewish daughter exoticizes the older Christian man, and Jenny again covertly subverts the constraints of her gender.

Jenny's growing infatuation with Reinhard remains entangled with her love for literature and the texts they share together. Jenny's intense engagement with German literature, a practice that is linked with Reinhard, serves both to heighten her own attraction to him and to act as a space of romantic affection in which she can defer her forbidden desire. The entanglement of literary and romantic infatuation continues as Reinhard reads to Jenny Goethe's *Faust*: "Mit erhöhter Begeisterung las er die deutschen Klassiker mit dem Mädchen, wenn er Jenny, hingerissen durch die Schönheit der Dichtung, rot werden und ihr Auge in Tränen schwimmen sah."²²³ The act of reading, in the company of her object of desire, elicits in Jenny an overwhelming, visible display of emotionality. Reading therefore becomes the space into which she can transfer and enact the love that she must, beneath the gaze of her family and social network, manage and conceal. Notable in such passages of shared reading is the absence of Therese; while the reader is aware that she is present during their lessons, one could not tell based on the portrait of intimacy in this scene. Therese's physical presence also serves as a foil to Jenny's subversive position: Mild, obedient, and of modest means, Therese is precisely the opposite of the clever, assertive, and doted-upon Jenny. Most crucially, Therese is Christian and would—and later does—make a more suitable partner for Reinhard. During these lessons, though, Therese remains silent and effectively erased as Jenny carves out this space of intimacy with her tutor. While this is no longer the same subversive act of solitary "private reading," the space in which Jenny's love of literature originally flourished, their shared reading creates its own form of secret experience. Reading therefore enables Jenny and Reinhard to conceive of their own private space in which to initiate an otherwise forbidden romance.

²²³ Lewald, *Jenny*, 49.

Reinhard's interest in giving lessons is also cast in terms of attraction. He finds the opportunity to teach Jenny and Therese "doppelt anziehend;" he is pleased simply for an opportunity to interact socially with women, since "[e]r hatte wenig Gesellschaften erlebt, wenig mit Frauen."²²⁴ Jenny's passionate reaction to text soon also drives a reciprocal response of emotionality. As Reinhard completes Faust's line, Jenny bursts out "weinend vor Wonne" as she puts her hands in Reinhard's.²²⁵ In Jenny's cries of pleasure, her romantic and intellectual desire become indistinguishable. With the knowledge of the religious barriers between her and Reinhard, Jenny uses the intimate act of reading as an opportunity to subvert the possibilities of their social reality. The poetics of storytelling become Jenny's primary vehicle of self-deception.

Literature and *Bildung* not only serve as the sites in which female rebellion occurs; literature also serves as the vehicle through which Reinhard consciously makes palatable the explicit content of Christian dogma. Christianity and Reinhard are, in Jenny's language of pursuit, interchangeable. Jenny's desire to believe Christian dogma corresponds directly to her desire for Reinhard. Although Reinhard does not actively seek a convert in his student, the narrator casts Jenny's initial infatuation with him in terms of proselytism and conversion. In the early days of their lessons, Jenny sees in Reinhard "ein Apostel des Wahren und des Schönen" and becomes his "Proselytin."²²⁶ And while Reinhard himself does not consider Jenny his *Proselytin*, the narrator makes explicit the extent to which Reinhard recognizes the malleability the literary space creates in their lessons. The lessons are ultimately more than "doppelt anziehend" for Reinhard, for their attraction is threefold: In Jenny he also finds a lack of faith

²²⁴ Lewald, *Jenny*, 49.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

that he feels obligated to address. Reinhard immediately identifies Jenny's rejection of religion and considers it impossible for a "weibliches Gemüt ohne festes Halten an Religion" to achieve happiness.²²⁷ To address this spiritual shortcoming, Reinhard ensures that Jenny's affinity for literature might also lead to religious commitment:

Absichtlich führte er deshalb die Unterhaltung mit seinen Schülerinnen häufig auf christlich-religiöse Gegenstände, so daß in seinem Unterricht Religion und Poesie Hand in Hand gingen, wodurch den Lehren des Christentumes ein leichter und gewinnender Einzug in Jennys Seel bereitet wurde.²²⁸

For Reinhard, religion serves as a central feature of *Bildung*; eternal truths are the content of his lessons, rather than the framework alone. Christianity is not simply a collection of stories from which "eine den wahren Kern verhüllende Allegorie zu betrachten gelernt hatte," but rather the *Kern* of literature itself.²²⁹ Until this point, religious stories are for Jenny simply a vehicle for addressing greater universal truths. To interpret the Christian narrative as revealed truth is, for Jenny, akin to reading allegory literally. Reinhard therefore confronts Jenny's conception of revealed religion by attempting to collapse the literary into the religious.

While Reinhard believes that his integration of literature into Christian teachings enable him to achieve an "Einzug in Jennys Seele," he misidentifies the mechanism at work in Jenny's transformation. Jenny knows she must convert in order to marry Reinhard and is therefore already convinced of the need to open herself to religious change; Reinhard's entry point into her soul is already primed so that Jenny may accept his teachings. Jenny, however, must calculate her ability to adopt Christian beliefs based on her existing intellectual capacity—one that rejects revealed religion but that embraces secular *Bildung*. For this reason, Jenny is not simply

²²⁷ Lewald, *Jenny*, 50.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

passively vulnerable to Reinhard's pedagogical strategy; rather, she herself identifies the potential of this approach in inducing a religious transformation. Jenny utilizes the poetic tools available to her in order to extract meaning from Christian dogma—meaning that she can grasp earnestly. Jenny must actively repress an instinctive reaction to reject revealed religion. The narrative of Christianity is for Jenny “wie ein leeres Märchen” that she can only approach accordingly.²³⁰ She must interpret religion as she would a fairy tale: not as a historical work, but rather a fiction that offers moral instruction. Jenny does not fear the consequences of lacking Christian faith for its spiritual consequences; rather, a lack of faith implies the disintegration of her union with Reinhard.

V. An Attempted Conversion Narrative

This act of self-deception carries forward when Jenny attempts to convert to Christianity. Only conversion will enable Jenny to marry Reinhard—both legally and to accommodate his spiritual convictions. Storytelling is central both in activating Jenny's initial romantic connection to Reinhard and in the structuring Jenny's experience, as the protagonist also attempts her own form of storytelling through conversion. I will consider this attempt in terms of the conversion narrative, a genre that encompasses a wide range of accounts portraying the process of embracing a new religion. These narratives “served to consolidate the convert's inner transformation by adopting the language and metaphors of the new and previously forbidden religious tradition.”²³¹ Paul and Augustine serve as prototypes of Christian conversion; scholarly

²³⁰ Lewald, *Jenny*, 50.

²³¹ Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 88.

studies on the conversion narrative broadly categorize the conversion narrative in the Pauline or Augustinian tradition.²³² The former model of conversion entails a sudden, life-changing event of conversion, while the latter describes a life-long process that engenders the religious transformation.²³³

In her study of Paul and Augustine's conversion narratives, Paula Fredriksen argues against classifying Paul's experience as a conversion on the premise that his change involves a "lateral movement within Judaism."²³⁴ Fredriksen defines the process of conversion as a "movement between two religions, from one articulated symbol system to another."²³⁵ In Jenny's attempt to come closer to Reinhard, she is not only seeking the legal status—as a Christian—to marry Reinhard; she also attempts to acquire the "articulated symbol system" that shapes Reinhard's worldview in order to engage with him. Jenny's attempt to deceive herself into Christian faith is not only an instrumental move, but rather an earnest attempt to re-code her understanding of the world to correspond to that of Reinhard. In literary scholarship on *Jenny*, Lezzi offers the most detailed account of Jenny's conversion process and asserts that Jenny's inability to accept the Christian dogma acts as an enlightened critique of Christianity and an example of "ein öffentliches, theologisch begründetes Bekenntnis zum Monotheismus des Judentums."²³⁶ Lezzi asserts that the "Apostrophierung Gottes als 'der Eine, einzig wahre'" can

²³² Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37, no. 1 (1986): 3–34, here 3.

²³³ Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany*, 90.

²³⁴ Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine," 15.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ Lezzi, "*Liebe ist meine Religion!*", 236.

be connected directly to an explicit conception of Jewish monotheism.²³⁷ While the origins of the Jenny and Herr Meier's spiritual views may be inflected by this form of monotheism, I disagree with Lezzi's claim that *Jenny* offers evidence pointing to a uniquely Jewish conception of God's unity. I instead consider how, during her pursuit of conversion, Jenny articulates a diffuse conception of a higher power and pluralistic view that considers religious confessions fundamentally compatible. Evident in Jenny's attempted conversion is precisely her refusal—or perhaps inability—to distinguish between distinct religious confessions in their conceptions of one God. Therefore, Jenny's conversion is ultimately not a movement from “one articulated system” to another in the sense that Jenny converts from Judaism to Christianity. Rather, Jenny begins from the absence of a single articulated religious system. Jenny departs from a nearly pantheistic conception of the world that she struggles to narrativize—a narrative rooted in a combination of her own literary imagination and the worldview imparted by male figures of influence.

Jenny reflects the attitudes of her father and brother, for whom Judaism and Christianity are to an extent interchangeable. Unlike prominent Jewish Enlightenment reformers such as Moses Mendelssohn, the Meier family does not defend the validity of Judaism in response to the pressure to convert. Rather, Eduard argues that both religions function as a departure from reason. When confronted with the prospect of conversion, Eduard asks:

Warum sollte er nicht, wie tausend Andere, einem Glauben entsagen, dessen Form allein ihn von der übrigen Menschheit trennte? Was band ihn an Moses und seine Gesetze? Es sträubte sich bei diesen ebenso viel gegen seine Vernunft als bei den Lehren Jesu. Warum nicht einen Aberglauben gegen den andern vertauschen [...]?²³⁸

²³⁷ Lezzi, “*Liebe ist meine Religion!*”, 236.

²³⁸ Lewald, *Jenny*, 76.

In this passage, Eduard weighs whether his love for Clara warrants the conversion necessary for their marriage in Prussia. Such a move would not be considered a radical break from his family or tradition; rather, Eduard would fall in line with thousands of other Jews who chose to convert in order to open up new paths. Eduard's status as "Jew" is an arbitrary marker—a difference in only in form—that ensures his social and economic limitations. However, a conversion to Christianity is not an abandonment of Judaism for Eduard, since his identification with the laws of Judaism is as strong—or rather, as weak—as his ability to adopt the teachings of Jesus. Conversion is here not a religious movement from one set of beliefs to another, but rather a political statement. Conversion is, for Eduard, a capitulation—one that threatens the integrity and endurance of what he refers to as "das uralte Volk."²³⁹

Eduard's acknowledgement that Mosaic Law is equally in conflict with reason as the teachings of Jesus can be seen as analogous to Jenny's commentary that revealed religion is to her "wie ein leeres Märchen" were it not for its allegorical function. Eduard's attitude toward conversion and religious dogma more broadly, whether Jewish or Christian, is noteworthy in its re-articulation through Jenny. In describing her understanding of God and his role in the world, Jenny consistently refers to her father, brother, and cousin Joseph as the source of her religious knowledge. While Jenny does not have the same political commitments of her brother, she also acknowledges the arbitrary nature of religious divisions. Jenny articulates her spiritual worldview most clearly when she begins her lessons with a local pastor, "ein aufgeklärter Geistlicher."²⁴⁰ Even in her entry into Christianity, Jenny's father guides the source of her spiritual education. Herr Meier selects a pastor who had abandoned a strict approach toward

²³⁹ Lewald, *Jenny*, 76.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

Christian dogma and in the latter part of career “sich dadurch in der Überzeugung befestigt, daß Liebe und Duldung bei fortschreitender geistiger Entwicklung die Grundzüge des Christentums und besonders des Protestantismus ausmachten.”²⁴¹ This character is drawn directly from Lewald’s autobiography, in which she attends conversion lessons with the consistorial councilor and theologian Ludwig August Kähler.²⁴² Kähler wrote prolifically—both theological and literary texts—and participated in contemporary debates on Jewish civic emancipation and issues of conversion.²⁴³ While the pastor is no radical, his stance toward the necessity of Christian dogma is more liberal than the inflexible Reinhard, who requires the persuasion of his mother to accept him as Jenny’s teacher. Even though Reinhard is the impetus for Jenny’s conversion, ultimately only her father may decide who is tasked with shaping her spiritual education.

In their first encounter, Jenny grasps at a way to articulate her diffuse, almost pantheistic attitudes to the pastor:

Er [mein Vater] sagte mir, alles was du siehst, empfindest, bist, ist Gott! Ein Unendliches belebt durch sich selbst, durch sein Dasein, die Welt. Die Sonne und das Sonnenstäubchen sind er selbst. In mir, in Dir, in jenem Moose ist er, belebend wirkend, immer derselbe eine Gott, gleichviel in welcher Gestalt er sich offenbart.²⁴⁴

Jenny’s understanding of God’s relationship to the physical world is directly quoted from her father. As a point of entry into a Christian worldview, Jenny attempts to construct a narrative of her own relationship to God, despite the recognition that God plays little explicit role in her life

²⁴¹ Lewald, *Jenny*, 129.

²⁴² Lewald, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, 66.

²⁴³ Ulrich Wyrwa characterizes Kähler’s approach toward a Jewish-Christian dialogue as “weniger intransigent, weniger gefühllos” than that of his contemporary Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, also a theologian (289). While open to participating in this dialogue, Kähler was nonetheless critical of Judaism and hence a strong proponent of conversion to Christianity. In 1841, Kähler critiqued what he considered a lack of distinction between nation and religion (*ibid.*). For more on Kähler’s contribution to this debate, see: Ulrich Wyrwa, *Juden in der Toskana und in Preussen im Vergleich* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

²⁴⁴ Lewald, *Jenny*, 130.

before. By offering a narrative of her upbringing and the integral role of her father's explanation of God, Jenny attempts to frame her arrival to Christianity as one rooted in earlier religious development. In this passage, part of a longer soliloquy, she effusively describes her belief that God is in all things. By expressing a belief in God's omnipresence, Jenny hopes in the same move to capture the fundamental beliefs of Christianity and as a result articulate a code that is analogous to Christian doctrine, one that can be easily translated.

The incompatibility of Jenny's "pantheistische Weltanschauung" and the aims of their conversion lessons is immediately clear to the pastor.²⁴⁵ Ultimately, the worldview Jenny offers cannot satisfy the constraints of Christian dogma, and the pastor must dismiss her: "aber das will Christus nicht."²⁴⁶ Beyond Jenny's quotation of her male role models, the pastor recognizes in her account an intense literary imagination:

Es freute sie, Gott zu sehen in allem, was sie umgab, und obgleich sie sich zu der reinen Anschauung Gottes im Geiste zu erheben vermochte, hatte sie oft die heitere Zeit des griechischen Altertums zurückgewünscht, in der es den Menschen möglich war, sich die Gottheit als unter ihnen wandelnd zu denken.²⁴⁷

Jenny's pantheistic conception of the world not only indicates her distance from revealed religion, but also demonstrates how she engages with her father's spiritual education. She embeds her understanding of the divine composition of the world into her own mythological imagination, inspired in part by ancient Greek myth. The connection to Greek myth is not arbitrary: Jenny's fascination with Ancient Greece points directly to her immersion in a culture of *Bildung*. Herder, Mendelssohn, and their contemporaries took Greece as a model of aesthetics, politics, and education when shaping their conception of German *Bildung*. During the

²⁴⁵ Lewald, *Jenny*, 132.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

Enlightenment and through the long nineteenth century, the classical world functioned as a central model of intellectual life.²⁴⁸ When the pastor recognizes Jenny's attitude as a longing for the world of Greek antiquity, he identifies her engagement with a longer tradition of German philhellenism.

The interaction of classical and biblical cultures was not a wholesale adoption of Greek culture, but rather as part of the organizing framework of European civilization and universalism. The opposition between Hellenism and Hebraism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shaped debates on the compatibility of faith and reason.²⁴⁹ But in Jenny's paean for the presence of God in all things, her appreciation for Greek antiquity goes beyond contemporary philhellenic attitudes. Jenny is uninterested in contemplating, "how could the secular knowledge of Greco-Roman antiquity be reconciled with the new certainties of Christian revelation?"²⁵⁰ Her fascination with the ancient world is not only a literary-aesthetic appreciation; rather, she embraces a vision of pantheism to occupy the space where a belief in Christianity would ideally form. Instead of adopting the German literary reception of ancient myth as a way to affirm the universality of Christianity, Jenny's commitment to the tenets of Christianity becomes increasingly oblique and she stirs unease in the pastor.

Shortly before her scheduled baptism, Jenny once again articulates the literary basis of her spirituality. Grasping for a palatable articulation of Christianity, Jenny conceives of Christ's

²⁴⁸ The proliferation of philhellenism was also part of a constellation of debates between Hellenism and Hebraism. While a focus on the classical world was key in German letters of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, this period also saw intense debate over the reconciliation of ancient and Biblical models. This discourse also changed the debate on Jewishness and the figure of the Jew in modernity. For more on this debate, see: Miriam Leonard, *Socrates and the Jews: Hellenism and Hebraism from Moses Mendelssohn to Sigmund Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

story in terms of German literature and its reception of Greek myth: “Christus [...] wurde für sie zu einer so festen Gestalt in seinen Wundern, wie es ihr früher irgendein Gott des Olymps gewesen, wie es ihr noch jetzt Goethes göttlicher Mahadö war.”²⁵¹ In her conversion narrative, Jenny trades the story of Christ for stories of Greek deities as conceived of by Goethe. Next to the gods of Olympus, Jenny invokes the Indian god “Mahadö,” an appellation of Shiva, from Goethe’s ballad “Der Gott und die Bajadere” (1798). her allusion to ancient religion renders visible a palimpsest of cultural orientations in German philosophy and literature: While the eighteenth century was the apotheosis of German philhellenism, the end of the eighteenth century also heralded a reverence for India in the development of Romantic aesthetics and the conceptualization of the nation. More than a source of fascination, India was also seen as a point of origin for the so-called German nation and was part of a larger discourse on the relationship between distinct national cultures. Jenny’s invocation of these literary texts and their uptake of Greek and Indian themes embed within the novel an illustration of the development of German literature and conceptions of Bildung. Jenny uses her education in this literary tradition in attempting to construct a system to render Christianity coherent and convince herself, Reinhard, and the pastor of her conviction. However, in utilizing the works of Goethe and others of the German canon as anchoring points in this system, she equates the story of Christ with her other encounters with fiction and further distances herself from religious belief.

Jenny’s engagement with Bildung continues to interfere with key stages of her conversion lessons. In addition to her literary descriptions of God’s omnipresence—a narrative revealing a fascination with Greek and Indian antiquity—Jenny also grasps at her love of high culture as means of translating for herself the Trinity, the Christian doctrine that conceives of one

²⁵¹ Lewald, *Jenny*, 174.

God in three simultaneous divine forms: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Upon her initial apprehension of the doctrine, she is eager for the opportunity to transpose the Trinity into her pre-existing understanding of God's place in the world: "“Oh! Sie geben mir das Leben wieder, indem Sie mir sagen, ich dürfe Gott denken ohne Christus und den heiligen Geist! Das ist der Gott, den man mich von Kindheit an gelehrt hat, der uns alle beschützt.””²⁵² For Jenny, the co-existence of God in three entities appears congruent with her understanding of God in all entities. In this passage, she expresses relief while believing that an adoption of Christianity does not necessitate faith in Christ or the Holy Ghost. In her reading of the Trinity, Jenny reinterprets this to mean that God takes on many forms. Jenny has not yet abandoned the premise that Biblical scripture is a merely an allegory for wider truths, and for this reason she continues to strive for and insist upon a universal code for understanding the world. For Jenny, if God is in all things, then the Christian view that conceives of God simultaneously in three forms fits within this framework.

When Jenny attempts to incorporate the concept of the Trinity into the received spiritual attitudes from her father, she is unable to abandon a notion of God's singularity in his omnipresence; she conceives either of "die Gottheit unverändert und ungeteilt stark" in which Christ and the Holy Spirit are "Eigenschaften Gottes" or of these as "Ausströmungen, Strahlen Gottes."²⁵³ In the eyes of both the pastor and Reinhard, these interpretations once again bring Jenny dangerously close to a "gewisser Art dem Pantheismus," a doctrine they warn encourages "Hochmut und Selbstanbetung."²⁵⁴ Implicit in this critique of Jenny's purported affinity for

²⁵² Lewald, *Jenny*, 134.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 135.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

pantheistic spirituality is an indictment of her engagement with *Bildung*. Vital to her family's inclusion in Prussian upper-class society and movement away from Jewish tradition is a participation in the tradition of *Bildung*, a process of cultural education and self-improvement. The pastor and Reinhard caution against Jenny's proclivity toward a form of pantheism not simply on the basis of its divergence from Christian doctrine; rather, they articulate their concern for her interpretation of the Trinity in terms of the potential damage of character these ideas might stimulate. Their indictment of Jenny's attitudes as leading her to "Hochmut und Selbstanbetung" map onto her participation in this form of self-cultivation: What might be positively deemed "self-improvement" and progress are in this context evaluated as pride, arrogance, or egoism. The cultural capital required of the Meier family to enter into higher echelons of Protestant society is also the same tradition of thought that undermines Jenny's attempt to adopt Christian doctrine. Lewald's portrayal of Jenny's immersion in *Bildung* as a barrier toward her ability to adopt Christian doctrine convincingly speaks to the overarching problematic of the tensions in Jews' attempts to enter into non-Jewish society.

These limitations become increasingly clear when Reinhard asks Jenny whether the Trinity had become clear to her yet and in response, she expresses a familiarity with *a* trinity, rather than *the* Trinity, in concepts legible to her:

"Nun, eine Dreieinigkeit habe ich immer gekannt [...]. Es ist die Dreieinigkeit der Kunst! Diese ist mir von jeher einleuchtend gewesen, so sehr, daß ich Poesie, Musik und bildende Kunst gar nicht voneinander im Innersten der Seele zu trennen vermag; daß ich sie wie Eines immer zusammen empfinden und die Anschauung oder der Genuß einer dieser Künste mir gleich, wie zur Ergänzung, das Bedürfnis nach der andern hervorruft. Mir wird jede Musik Gedicht und jedes Gedicht zum Bilde. Hier ist mir, obgleich ich jede Kunst als selbständig in sich erkenne, doch eine unauflösliche Einheit denkbar: und so kann man nicht sagen, daß ich bis jetzt den Begriff der Dreieinigkeit nicht hatte."²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Lewald, *Jenny*, 138–39.

Throughout her conversion lessons and leading up to this encounter with Reinhard, Jenny agonizes over her inability to embrace the Christian doctrine. In shaping her conversion narrative, she awaits a Pauline moment of revelation, in which a new religious conviction will overcome her. In Jenny's narrative, however, this experience of sudden clarity is replaced by a different manner of revelation in her interaction with Reinhard. Instead of sudden spiritual clarity, Jenny realizes both the need for self-preservation and the impossibility of her spiritual transformation. If Jenny betrays her alienation from the concept, she jeopardizes her ability to marry Reinhard. This sudden existential pressure forces Jenny to transpose the concept of the Trinity into the closest to a spiritual framework she possesses—the material of *Bildung*. Like her previous conversations with the pastor, Jenny's interpretation of the Trinity by means of analogy to the fine arts is highly literary. However, Jenny's passionate response inevitably falls flat, since Reinhard demands not only intellectual understanding, but also belief in the truth of this religious doctrine. Jenny's shortcoming lies in her conviction that she can grasp Christian belief intellectually—"die Symbole des Christentums mit dem Verstande zu erfassen."²⁵⁶ Instead of declaring faith, Jenny communicates to Reinhard a heuristic that allows her to understand the Trinity in secular terms.

Jenny soon learns that adopting the structure of belief—a code that conveys the content of Christian dogma—is not sufficient for a successful conversion in order to marry Reinhard. For Reinhard, conversion is not simply a ceremonial obstacle to their marriage, evident in his repeated evaluation of Jenny's spiritual commitment to her lessons. He continues to test her by asking that they take part in the sacrament of communion together: "Ich wünsche noch vor unserer Hochzeit mit Dir das Abendmahl zu nehmen und auf diese Weise in die heiligste,

²⁵⁶ Lewald, *Jenny*, 174.

innigste Gemeinschaft mit Dir zu treten.”²⁵⁷ Reinhard’s emphasis on the Eucharist carries symbolic weight for his conception of marriage and, correspondingly, its effect of Jenny’s autonomy. According to the Lutheran understanding of the Eucharist, Christ’s blood and body are present with the bread and wine in taking the Eucharist, rather than serving as symbols.²⁵⁸ For Reinhard, their joint consumption of sacramental bread and wine demands a shared belief in, and acknowledgement of, Christ’s presence. Jenny, who has been able to engage with Christianity only through its allegorical functions, would need to unite with Reinhard in a material understanding of Christ. In Reinhard’s image of marriage, Jenny’s spiritual identity—and by extension her social identity as a *Pfarrfrau*—must collapse into his.

Herr Meier explains, “Reinhard ist duldsam gegen den Andersgläubigen, aber seine Frau will er nicht nur dulden, er will sie lieben, sie soll ein Teil seines Ich’s werden.”²⁵⁹ In order to be Reinhard’s wife, Jenny must do more than learn and incorporate his worldview in a manner that conforms to her own sensibilities. She must also assume and then become subsumed by her husband’s being. Jenny later explicitly rejects this model of marriage when she sketches two trees standing side-by-side: “Zwei kräftige, üppige Bäume standen dicht nebeneinander, frisch und fröhlich emporstrebend, mit eng verschlungenen Ästen. Darunter laß man die Worte: ›Aus gleicher Tiefe, frei und vereint zum Äther empor!‹”²⁶⁰ In this image of partnership, Jenny

²⁵⁷ Lewald, *Jenny*, 211.

²⁵⁸ In Königsberg during this time, the church was administered as the *Kirchenprovinz Ostpreußen*. The Protestant churches of the region were part of a union of both the Reformed and Lutheran Church. These denominations had differing interpretations of the Eucharist: The Reformed Church held the more radical view that the bread and wine are merely symbols, whereas the Lutheran Church continued to believe in the simultaneous presence of Christ. See: Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁵⁹ Lewald, *Jenny*, 214.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

conceives of a husband and wife who grow closely alongside one another. These entities are both separate and entangled, both free and unified—while not a single unit. Reinhard’s desire to take part in the Eucharist together—in both the expectation of their unity with Christ and of her complete unity with her future husband—propels Jenny to recognize the untenability of attempting to forge her own commitment to Christianity.

In the days following her baptism, Jenny’s unease with regard to her act of deception—falsely declaring faith in Christ—compels her to end the engagement to Reinhard. In an explanatory letter to him, Jenny writes:

Ich glaube nicht, daß Christus der Sohn Gottes ist; daß er auferstanden ist, nachdem er gestorben. [...] Die Dreieinigkeit, in der er lebte, ist mir ein ewig unverständlicher Gedanke, der keinen Boden in meiner Seele findet. Ich glaube nicht, daß es ein Wunder gibt, daß eines geschehen kann, außer den Wundern, die Gott, der Eine, einzig wahre, täglich vor unsern Augen tut. [...] Lügen kann ich nicht länger, aber auch glauben kann ich nicht.²⁶¹

In this passage, Jenny offers her final admission that she cannot believe in the presence of Christ, nor the Trinity. Outside of a space of reading Christ’s story as literature, she is incapable of accepting him as anything other than a historical figure. Jenny refers to the spiritual concept of the Trinity as one in which he lived, as if this describes a condition in which a historical Jesus lived. Shortly after her baptism, Jenny discovers the tenuous nature of her attempt to translate the Christian faith into a system intelligible to her. Despite the poetic and intellectual gymnastics she performs, Jenny is unable to shift her worldview permanently. Her beliefs remain tied to the attitudes articulated by her father, a spiritual outlook that reaffirms the ultimate unity and omnipresence of God.

Early in their lessons, the pastor observes Jenny’s tendency to transform the poetics of an unfamiliar concept in order to make it palatable: “Eben deshalb liebte Jenny es, Gedanken, die

²⁶¹ Lewald, *Jenny*, 212.

sie sich nicht ganz deutlich zu machen wußte, in einen poetischen Schleier zu hüllen, als ob sie sie dadurch vor der entweihenden Berührung des Zweifels behüten könne.”²⁶² By rearticulating the doctrine of Christianity under a veil of poetic beauty, Jenny is able to mask its revealed truths and stave off temporarily the incongruities with her own reason. As poetic material for this reconciliation, Jenny returns to Goethe’s *Faust*, a text which she reads aloud and “weinend vor Wonne” with Reinhard.²⁶³ In finally accepting Christ before her planned baptism, Jenny relates her image of Christ to her understanding of the historical and literary Faust. Just as her perception of the historical Faust is subsumed into Goethe’s Faust “weil der letztere allein ihr durch die poetische Schönheit des Gedankens als wirklich erschien,” so too do Christ and “die christliche Moral” become for her “vollkommene[...] Wahrheit” in its literary form.²⁶⁴ It is significant that—of all the literary figures with some historical source material—Jenny chooses Faust as her point of reference. Goethe’s Faust is more similar to Jenny than to the Bible’s Jesus. Like Jenny, Faust is a character grappling with questions of knowledge and his relationship to religion. Although one might not equate Jenny’s conversion with a “deal with the devil,” her confrontation with the adoption of Christianity arouses comparable internal tensions. Conversion to Christianity has both internal and social consequences for Jenny (in abandoning both her own beliefs and community), but she recognizes the utility of persuasively giving herself to the Christian religion.

However, the figures of Faust and Jesus only become temporary truths for Jenny insofar as they are true to their literary function—in their role as literature. Jenny recognizes the

²⁶² Lewald, *Jenny*, 131.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

existence of a medieval historical figure Faust, but Goethe's act of writing him into literature constructs and elevates his narrative into one that palatably transcends historical reality. In Jenny's eyes, the apostles mirror Goethe by placing the historic Jesus into a literary framework. This comparison to Goethe thus speaks to authorial power: Through the act of writing about Faust, Goethe immortalizes, glorifies, and canonizes. By evaluating the Christian canon in its relationship to Goethe's act of storytelling, Jenny considers literature and its consumption her closest point of reference to a religious act; creating and reading literature are therefore, for Jenny, the most sacred acts.

Only when she is able to render the "poetischen Schleier" of Jesus's story visible is she able to achieve a semblance of faith. However, this veil only serves as a vehicle for Jenny to accept, temporarily, the presence of Christ in an experience analogous to the act of reading literature. This veil can obscure Jenny's view of Christianity only provisionally; ultimately, the veil must be pushed away to reveal that Jenny possesses no enduring belief in Christ. In constructing her conversion experience, the narrator describes the faulty foundation on which she builds a poetic system of understanding Christ's miracles: "Wie bei allen Trugschlüssen stimmte plötzlich alles zu ihren Ideen, nachdem sie willkürlich einen Anfangspunkt für ihr System gefunden hatte."²⁶⁵ The strategy of creating an arbitrary reference point for organizing and reading the world falls short when confronted with the ritual demands of her new religion, such as receiving the Eucharist. Jenny then realizes that her poetic approach to Christianity is no longer sufficient; during the process of conversion, she approaches the material of Christian doctrine as she would literature in her school lessons. Ultimately, the instruments of *Bildung* undermine Jenny's full admission into the life she envisions outside the Jewish world.

²⁶⁵ Lewald, *Jenny*, 174.

VI. Literature as a Space of Denial

The combined barriers of religion, gender, and class are illustrative of the continual triple-bind faced by Jewish women seeking civic equality in the nineteenth century and beyond. Ultimately, Jenny's romantic subversion is most present in its potential and most crucial in its lack of fulfillment. Jenny's failed romance (which repeats itself with the death of her second fiancé, Graf Walter) and conversion in name only are particularly instructive when considered in contrast to her brother's path. Eduard falls in love with the affluent Christian woman Clara but asserts his own agency by rejecting the opportunity for conversion in order to realize their union. He makes this decision on the premise of loyalty toward his "nation," whereas the enactment of such a political statement is not available to Jenny. Eduard resembles the archetypal enlightened Jewish reformer, a type continuously remade in the tradition of characters such as Lessing's Nathan or the traveling Jew; an additional feature of this archetype is also the sterility of the "noble Jew."²⁶⁶ Much as Nathan is excluded from the genealogical family at the end of *Nathan der Weise* and the traveler of *Die Juden* (1749) exists untethered to any geographical or familial reference point, Eduard insists upon a life without Clara and structures his identity around a higher ideal. Following the dissolution of both Eduard and Jenny's interfaith romances, Eduard remains celibate, becoming even more committed to "sein Volk," thus adhering to the image of

²⁶⁶ The figure "noble Jew"—an idealized Jewish male character, in contrast to the negative Shylock stereotype, who displays exceptional moral and intellectual qualities but who often lacks individual character development (in some cases even a name) and is external to the romantic relations of the plot. Lessing offers perhaps the most famous examples of this paradigm, but the genealogy of the "noble Jew" stereotype begins even earlier, see: Franka Marquadt. "Blut und Brevier: Familiengeschichte und Frömmigkeit in Lessings *Nathan der Weise*." *Monatshefte* 103, no. 4 (2011): 483–503.

In a review of Lewald's *Jenny* published in 1850, the author also refers to Lessing's legacy in both the writing and reading of literature about Jews. He describes Jenny's father, Herr Meier, as "einer von jenen ruhig-klaren, tiefsittlichen, milden Charakteren, denen wir nicht selten unter ältern Juden begegnen." The author continues: "Lessing hat wohl gewußt was er that als er seinen Nathan den Weisen zum Juden machte." "Fanny Lewald." *Blätter für literarische Unterhaltung*. December 26, 1850, 309 edition, 1233.

the idealized, but personally unfulfilled, “noble Jew” who remains the virtuous representative of abstract principle.

This sterilization in the wake of unfulfilled love is visible throughout the Meier family: Jenny’s romance with Reinhard is defined by a lack of consummation. While she proceeds with her baptism, she is unable to fulfill Reinhard’s deepest wish to share in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Correspondingly, the sexual nature of their relationship is also left unfulfilled. Instead, Jenny’s desire for Reinhard is sublimated into devotion for her father. In the months following her loss of Reinhard, Jenny begins to lose connections with external social networks and, with the sudden death of her mother, the relations of the Meier family turn further inward. True to the “father-daughter dyad” and the passive or absent mother of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, Jenny continues to collapse her own identity further into that of her father.²⁶⁷ Following her mother’s death, Jenny becomes increasingly devoted to the Meier household and dotes upon her father, where she wants nothing more than “für ihren Vater zu leben und sein Alter zu verschönen.”²⁶⁸ In the years since her lessons with Reinhard and the pastor, Jenny realizes a new confidence in her father as model of her religious views. The uncertainties that plagued her during her youth are extinguished and, much as she returns to the stability of her father’s orbit, so too does she become hardened in the spiritual views she assumed from Herr Meier: “Jene religiösen Zweifel, welche einst das Glück ihrer ersten Jugend untergraben hatten, waren längst und glücklich besiegt.”²⁶⁹ In the wake of her failure to escape the constraints of her Jewishness, Jenny reverts further into the insularity of her family. Jenny’s greatest affection—for her father—is redoubled

²⁶⁷ Gustafson, *Absent Mothers and Orphaned Fathers*, 14.

²⁶⁸ Lewald, *Jenny*, 224.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

following her loss of Reinhard, as is her assumption of Herr Meier's and Eduard's religious and political views. Despite the social capital of the Meier household, neither Jenny nor Eduard are able to fulfill their romantic desires and defy the limitations of their status as Jews in their engagement with the non-Jewish world.

Eduard's disengagement from domestic life is depicted in terms of honor and noble sacrifice, while his sister's renewed commitment to the life of the mind is cast in gendered terms of anxiety. Both Eduard and Jenny's romantic fate are indicative of a cynical vision for the potential reconciliation of Jewishness within the non-Jewish world, but the disparity between siblings—the brother's noble celibacy versus the daughter's tragic or even suspicious spinsterhood—reinforces the model of domestic fiction in which the daughter and her pursuit of love serve as the site on which anxieties toward cultural shift are projected. The extinguishing of Jenny's own romantic potential and fulfillment of the expected roles of womanhood are further established by rendering her in terms of androgyny. This once again takes up Eduard's concerns regarding Jenny's intellectual development and its discipline, a spirit he refers to as “eine fast unweibliche Energie.”²⁷⁰

Graf Walter, Jenny's second suitor, even describes her as skirting the boundaries of femininity. In a letter to his uncle, Walter writes that “eine gewisse Jugendlichkeit, das weiblich Weiche fehlt ihr [...] Es liegt etwas Männliches darin, das interessant ist,” and that “[i]n ihr vereinen sich der Geist und der Mut eines Mannes mit einem Frauenherzen.”²⁷¹ In this passage, Walter expresses his ambivalence toward Jenny and the potential of pursuing a partnership with her; her lack of socially demanded feminine softness and the presence of “der Geist und der Mut

²⁷⁰ Lewald, *Jenny*, 45.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 234–35.

eines Mannes” are simultaneously the source of his initial fascination and dismissal of Jenny. The ultimate source of this unease toward Jenny’s “masculine spirit” is in her education and intellectual independence. Her Bildung and verbal acuity once again become both the source of Jenny’s attraction and repulsion. The simultaneous presence of what Walter considers masculine and feminine features are cast in terms neither of admiration nor repulsion as Walter verbally contemplates his relation to Jenny. In addition to perceiving Jenny’s subversion of gender categories, Walter also considers her somehow not yet fully formed—possessing “eine gewisse Jugendlichkeit.” These terms evoke a common paternalistic discourse used to discuss the immaturity of the Jewish people and the necessity of their education (in the vein of Lessing’s *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* [1780] or Dohm’s *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*). In the context of Walter’s contemplation, this immaturity is also cast in terms of desexualization—an immaturity that prevents her from embodying an ideal of womanhood, implying her lack of sexual maturation. Although Walter later seeks Jenny’s hand in marriage, Jenny’s agency—in realizing her romantic desire and marrying beyond her social group—is cut short by Walter’s death and, as a result, her own passing.

Toward the end of the novel, Jenny therefore lives in a form of tragic limbo: She is able neither to satisfy the social expectations of womanhood nor to transcend women’s social constraints in order to achieve autonomy. Concurrently, her conversion wins her little acceptance as a Christian, but it also legally separates her from her Jewish affiliation. Despite her new legal status, though, the conclusion returns Jenny to her starting point before a tragic end. Jenny’s connection to her father—in the most literal, familial sense—serves as the origin point of her social station as a Jewish woman. This stands in contrast to the traditional conception of Jewish identity: a matrilineal model of descent. Lewald’s novel thus demonstrates the new features and

challenges of German Jews in the nineteenth century; Jenny is firmly rooted in the constraints of bourgeois life, both in its participation in the poetics of the father-daughter dyad of the domestic drama and its anchoring of social fate in the occupation of the father. The familial framework constraining her social and political emancipation is also her source of education and potential for freedom. The intellectual and philosophical tools she acquires from her father shape her approach to the pursuit of Christianity. These abilities enable Jenny, to an extent, to pursue her own romantic desires while also ultimately undermining this endeavor. And while she returns to her father intellectually and emotionally, she is concurrently alienated from both Christianity and her Jewish home. After her conversion, she returns to her family but ultimately (and for eternity) is separated from them when she dies, buried in “einem fremden christlichen Kirchhof” far from any ancestors.²⁷²

Jenny’s return to the father followed by her untimely death demands a comparison to Hess’s analysis of the modern orthodox novella *Aus der Gegenwart II* (1863–64) by Sara Hirsch Guggenheim (1834–1909) in its borrowing from the genre of bourgeois tragedy. In Guggenheim’s melodramatic work, a young Jewish woman Aurelie turns away from Judaism and converts in order to elope with a count. After her marriage fails, she returns home seeking redemption from her father, who accepts her and asserts that Aurelie never ceased being Jewish. Despite the disgrace enacted by Aurelie’s conversion and love for an unfaithful nobleman, she ultimately gets to live happily ever after as a Jewish woman with the support of her father. Guggenheim’s novella borrows from the familial constellation of the bourgeois tragedy but elides the daughter’s tragic ending in favor of demonstrating the redemptive potential of a return to the father and Judaism. Jenny, by contrast, offers no such optimism or celebration of the

²⁷² Lewald, *Jenny*, 273.

strength of Jewish tradition. Lewald's final portrait is far from Guggenheim's, in which the "bourgeois Jewish family ends up being all-inclusive, all-powerful, and all-healing" and "romantic love, filial piety, orthodoxy, and bourgeois family values all exist in perfect harmony."²⁷³ The Meier family has removed orthodoxy from this equation as Jenny seeks entrance into the non-Jewish world in the hopes that ideas of universalism and the status of Bildung might bring her closer to emancipation. Instead, Lewald presents the bourgeois Jewish family and the relationship to the father as sites of ambivalence and paradox: Jenny identifies with her father throughout the text, both in her interpretation of Christian doctrine and the return from her failed engagement, but her efforts to convert and return home thwart a complete restoration of the family.

Despite the central place of Bildung in the development of nineteenth-century middle-class culture, Lewald's novel demonstrates the limits that this engagement with non-Jewish culture offers Jenny in transcending her social status. In the secularized Meier household, the bourgeois veneration of Bildung fails to serve as a placeholder for religious identification, either Christian or Jewish. This outcome is not to say that religious identification is incompatible with Bildung—particularly in light of Bildung's Pietist roots. Rather, it demonstrates the limits of Bildung's promises of self-improvement and self-cultivation. The concept of "formation" is contained in the very term Bildung; in attempting a religious transformation, Jenny also seeks a new formation of her social horizons. But the result of Jenny's attempt to reshape her status not only demonstrates the paradoxes of refashioning Jewish life and the pursuit of equality in the nineteenth century. Jenny's failure to launch also lays bare the gendered limitations of Bildung, a

²⁷³ Jonathan Hess, "Beyond Subversion: German Jewry and the Poetics of Middlebrow Culture," *The German Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2009): 316–35, here 328.

realm, Lynne Tatlock points out, that is coded masculine.²⁷⁴ The conception of Bildung as a holistic process of experience and individual formation are pursuits made inaccessible to Jenny. Her life experience is confined to reading within the domestic sphere and—in the entire arc of the novel—her world remains just as small by returning to her childhood home.

While Bildung refers to individual formation, it was also an integral component of contemporaneous processes of German nation-building. By depicting Jenny's pursuit of emancipation by means of high literature, art, and music, Lewald's novel also reveals the constraints of the national model in shaping communities. In his discussion of the development of German Jewish middlebrow literature, Hess argues that Bildung "opened the door to the creation of a middlebrow culture that mediated so seamlessly between the universal and the particular."²⁷⁵ Lewald was arguably a participant in middlebrow literature and Bildung serves as the initial door to allow Jenny into non-Jewish society. But Bildung also closes this door to Jenny. The implementation of literature in the pursuit of love stages an unsanctioned allocation of emotions and devotion. In an attempt to assert herself as an emancipated subject, both as a Jew and as a woman, Jenny's active engagement with the products of German literature and art draw her further away from her goal. The novel ends with Jenny alienated from the Christian world and Eduard more hard-bitten in his commitment to "mein Volk."²⁷⁶ This ending makes salient how the mechanism of exclusion embedded in Bildung is twofold: in its gendered constraints and its inextricable link to nation building. Bildung as the means of Jenny's undoing reveals that the pursuit of equality for Jews was hardly seamless. The Meier family's

²⁷⁴ Lynne Tatlock, "Zwischen Bildungsroman und Liebesroman: Fanny Lewalds *Die Erlöserin* im literarischen Feld," in *Der Bildungsroman im literarischen Feld: Neue Perspektiven auf eine Gattung*, ed. Elisabeth Böhm and Katrin Dennerlein (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 221–38, here 238.

²⁷⁵ Hess, "Beyond Subversion," 332.

²⁷⁶ Lewald, *Jenny*, 152.

predicament thus demonstrates that enlightenment ideals of universalism largely went unfulfilled.

CHAPTER 3: Leopold Kompert's Lost Daughters

I. Introduction

In the opening pages of his 1865 two-volume collection of short stories *Geschichten einer Gasse*, the Bohemian Jewish writer Leopold Kompert (1822–86) dedicates his work to Carl Alexander, Grossherzog von Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, “[e]iner der trefflichsten Fürsten Deutschlands [...] ein Fürst von wahrhaft volkstümlicher Gesinnung” who ensured the publication the book “unter die Aegide seines Names.”²⁷⁷ Kompert is regarded as the founder of ghetto fiction, a genre depicting traditional Jewish life outside the urban centers, and by 1865, he already had a well-established reputation for his nostalgic stories, inaugurated by the success of his 1848 collection *Aus dem Ghetto*. The opening of his 1865 publication self-consciously reflects on his central role for the genre of ghetto literature and his continued commitment to the form: “‘Geschichten einer Gasse’ habe ich dieses Buch genannt—denn wieder sind es Geschichten, Naturen und Gestalten aus jener Gasse, aus der auch meine früheren Bücher [...] hervorgegangen sind.”²⁷⁸ Kompert returns to the provincial space that propelled his literary career and insists that his work there was not finished. For those who might question his return to the Jewish *Gasse*, Kompert insists on claiming the world of rural Jewish quarter “für die deutsche Literatur” and proclaims:

Ja! ich wiederhole es, dem deutschen Volke sollen diese Geschichte erzählen, was diese ‘Gasse’ einst an Leid und Freud’, an Drangsal und Aufrichtung umschloß; ihre Gestalten und Naturen, so treu wiedergegeben, als ich es vermochte, sollen darthun, unter welchen Kämpfen und Wehen das Licht des Morgens nach so langer Nacht für sie angebrochen ist; mit welchen Gefühlen, Anschauungen, Widersprüchen und Dissonanzen sie hart an der Schwelle stehen, die in das Thor der Gegenwart führt [...] Sie sollen es erklären,

²⁷⁷ Leopold Kompert, *Geschichten einer Gasse: Novellen* (Verlag von Louis Gerschel, 1865), III.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, I.

warum der Born des Familiensinnes und der Zusammengehörigkeit noch immer so voll und unerschöpft fließt, und wie es gerade dieser geheimnißvolle Zug war, der das deutsche Volk, diesen treuesten Hüter und Pfleger der Familie, aus der sein Schönstes und Größtes entsprang, bestimmen konnte, offen, herzlich und brüderlich die Arme für diejenigen zu öffnen, die gleich ihm am lohenden Feuer des heimatlichen Heerdes ihres liebsten Sitz haben.²⁷⁹

Kompert's foreword stakes a claim for a distinctly Jewish genre as one that is also firmly located within German literature. The particular world of Bohemian Jewry found in these works, according to Kompert, were not mere folktales or vessels for nostalgia; through the microcosm of the Bohemian village, the stories address universal questions and offer a window into the fundamental aspects of human experience. In his attempt to depict as accurately as possible both the sorrow and joy of life in the *Gasse*, Kompert works to unfold the struggles of modern Jewish life and, in the same move, position his fiction squarely within a body of German literature that was geared toward Jewish and non-Jewish readers alike.

This dedication to the German nation and culture, however, diverges considerably from Kompert's public disillusionment toward the place of Jews in central Europe at the beginning of his career. Shortly after anti-Jewish pogroms took place in Preßburg (today Bratislava) in April of 1848, Kompert articulated bitter disappointment in the project of Jewish emancipation in his article "Auf, nach Amerika" for the Vienna-based periodical *Oesterreichisches Central-Organ für Glaubensfreiheit, Cultur, Geschichte und Literatur der Juden*, where he called upon Jews to emigrate from the "Vaterland" to America in light of the failed promises of political and social progress for European Jewry.²⁸⁰ A far cry from the strength and familial bonds that Kompert

²⁷⁹ Kompert, *Geschichten einer Gasse*, II.

²⁸⁰ Louise Hecht, "Between Toleration and Emancipation: The Self-Empowerment of Jewish Intellectuals in the Habsburg Monarchy," *Religions* 8, no. 6 (2017), 10.
Leopold Kompert, "Auf, nach Amerika," *Oesterreichisches Central-Organ für Glaubensfreiheit, Cultur, Geschichte und Literatur der Juden*, May 6, 1848, 6th edition, and "Auf, nach Amerika. II.," *Oesterreichisches Central-Organ für Glaubensfreiheit, Cultur, Geschichte und Literatur der Juden*, May 13, 1848, 7th edition.

locates by returning to the *Gasse*, this essay instead celebrates the possibility found in the American frontier and imagines a Jewish future that is defined not by continuity, but by rupture and re-making. In America, the author contends, “gilt der Mensch was er ist, und er ist, was er vorstellt;” the individual is no longer burdened by the legacy of hatred and prejudice that afflicts Europe.²⁸¹ Kompert is uninterested in what his coreligionists choose to pursue when they make the transatlantic journey—“Werdet Ackerbauer, Handelsleute oder Handwerker, Hausierer oder Mitglieder des Waschingtoner Kongresses”—so long as their new homeland affords them a freedom that was long withheld in Europe, a condition that had caused the “Organismus des Judenthums” to “vegetir[en]” rather than to live fully, a passage that echoes Christian Wilhelm Dohm’s stance on the Jewish condition and which—as we will later see—finds a new form in his fictional writing.²⁸²

This appeal was influential, although the Kompert’s convictions did not manifest in his own departure from the Habsburg Empire.²⁸³ Born in Münchengrätz (present-day Mnichovo Hradiště, Bohemia), Kompert studied first in Prague and then in Vienna before moving to Hungary to serve as a tutor for a wealthy Jewish family. He was associated with the literary circle *Junges Böhmen*, modeled on *Junges Deutschland*, and advocated for liberal reforms and Jewish emancipation.²⁸⁴ In the wake of the revolutions of 1848, Kompert’s political and cultural affiliation, though, remained Austrian-German in the face of increased Czech nationalism and

²⁸¹ Kompert, “Auf, nach Amerika,” 78.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 78 and 90.

²⁸³ Dieter J. Hecht, “Self-Assertion in the Public Sphere: The Jewish Press on the Eve of Legal Emancipation,” *Religions* 7, no. 109 (2016).

²⁸⁴ Hecht, “Between Toleration and Emancipation,” 10.

antagonism.²⁸⁵ Contrary to his fervent cry for relocation in “Auf, nach Amerika,” Kompert remained primarily in Vienna during the subsequent decades and became a prominent figure in the German Jewish press. The legal status of Jews in the Empire improved somewhat after 1848, as marriage and residence restrictions were eliminated, although full legal emancipation came in 1867 when the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary was formed.²⁸⁶ Louise Hecht further credits this loyalty to and identification with the monarchy to both the gradual loosening of legal restrictions and individual success in the public sphere: Along with his literary popularity, Kompert also reached administrative roles when he was nominated *Regierungsrat* in 1868, appointed as *Bezirksschulrat* in 1870, and elected to the Vienna’s city council in 1873.²⁸⁷

Kompert’s article calling for an exodus from Europe is of note here both as an inflection point and for containing features consistent with the author’s literary production, fictional works embedded within the socio-political debates on Jewish emancipation in central Europe. Kompert may have abandoned his transatlantic aspirations, but the article shares in common with his ghetto fiction an appeal for Jewish self-sufficiency and the necessity of accommodating changing social circumstances. “Auf, nach Amerika,” written in the heat of 1848 violence, looks forward and outward in responding to the political and social dislocation of central European Jewry, while his oeuvre of fiction—according to Hess, key in the formation of a new secular literature that allowed German Jews to negotiate multiple identities—takes a decidedly different tack by

²⁸⁵ Hillel J. Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 31–32.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁸⁷ Hecht, “Between Toleration and Emancipation,” 16.

looking backward, toward the past and toward abandoned ways of life, and inward within the Jewish family.²⁸⁸

Kompert's literary engagement with the Jewish family in relation to its Christian neighbors is highly localized, embedded within the particular Catholic and labor history of Bohemia, and thus creates for his contemporary audience a window into a Jewish past that, for many German Jewish readers, never was, and in some cases was not even past (set in the mid-nineteenth century). For contemporary Jewish readers, these nostalgic works nonetheless "recuperated the lost world of premodern Jewish life as a distinctly modern form of aesthetic experience" and their rose-tinted portrayal of rural Jewish life helped create, according to Hess, a "usable past" in order to move forward as integrated members of German society.²⁸⁹ Of interest, then, is just how the nostalgic mode of this ghetto fiction functions to generate possibilities of Jewish belonging in modern Europe.

Nostalgia, first coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer to describe soldiers' pathological fixation on the desire to return home, is a longing for a temporal or spatial belonging that no longer exists or perhaps never existed in the first place.²⁹⁰ As Svetlana Boym and Peter Fritzsche have illustrated, the phenomenon took new hold as a result of the French Revolution and processes of industrialization, since nostalgia "is predicated on a deep rupture in remembered experience. Nostalgia takes the past as its mournful subject, but holds it at arm's length."²⁹¹ For Fritzsche, nostalgia in response to discontinuity is not a entirely reactionary

²⁸⁸ Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*, 81.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁹⁰ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), xiii.

²⁹¹ Peter Fritzsche, "How Nostalgia Narrates Modernity," in *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*, ed. Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 62–85, here 65.

operation, since it acknowledges what is already lost and thus must break with that which “is regarded as *past*”, as opposed to the “ordinary reactionary, who inhabits wholly, without the nostalgic’s dread, a verifiable universe in which today corresponds with yesterday.”²⁹² By mobilizing the nostalgic, Kompert participates both in a regressive and generative process in a post-revolutionary age where the future no longer makes sense. While this disjointedness between the present and conceptions of the future broadly characterizes nineteenth-century Europe, the nostalgic lens gains particular significance in the context of German Jewish society as German Jews, on the one hand, received only piecemeal liberties in the German-speaking lands over the course of the century and, on the other, rapidly ascended into the middle class, all while abandoning Yiddish and ritual Judaism. Kompert writes a past to be held at “arm’s length” in a mode that curates material for a synthetic cultural anchoring point, a shared and contained heritage, that generates a kind of kinship to sustain a move forward. Where “Auf, nach Amerika” is a call for literal escape in order to overcome the oppression of faced by European Jewry, Kompert’s ghetto fiction is a transitory escape into a Jewish past that offers a space of reimagining Christian-Jewish relations and the liberated place of Jews in the future.

Kompert’s work typically centers on any or all of three motifs in his nostalgic reimagining of a bygone, rural Jewish life in Bohemia for his German readers: love between Jews and non-Jews, a threat to the practice of Judaism that strains the family (often a result of inter-religious love), and a Dohmsian return to the soil.²⁹³ In his introduction to *Geschichten einer Gasse*, Kompert invokes the family, a bulwark of stability through the struggles rendered

²⁹² Fritzsche, “How Nostalgia Narrates Modernity,” 65.

²⁹³ Gabriele von Glasenapp, “Deutsch-jüdische Ghettoliteratur,” in *Handbuch der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur*, ed. Hans Otto Horch (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2016), 407–21, here 413, and Maria Theresia Wittemann, *Draußen vor dem Ghetto: Leopold Kompert und die “Schilderung jüdischen Volkslebens” in Böhmen und Mähren*, *Conditio Judaica* 22 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1998), 218–19 and 261.

visible in the literary *Gasse*, as the centerpiece of his literary project. Kompert turns inward by conceiving of the pressures of social, political, and economic change during the nineteenth century through the microcosm of the family, all within the microcosm of the Bohemian village. In the same move that Kompert claims the *Gasse* for German literature and dedicates it to “das deutsche Volk,” his work also articulates the limitations of Christian-Jewish relations and the burden of Jewish actors in conceiving of and creating a positive Jewish future.

In this chapter, I consider two exemplary texts from Leopold Kompert, “Eine Verlorene” (1851) and “Die Jahrzeit” (1865), that conceive of the scope and durability of the Jewish family, in which the threat to tradition is articulated through the daughter’s unsanctioned love. The daughter, who stands at the threshold of maternity, brings into relief the stakes of filial duties and triggers both a re-examination of the Jewish textual and ritual tradition and reinforces it. In each work, the daughter acts as both a harbinger and mediator of familial and communal disruption—disruption that is ultimately reconciled, but through a reconciliation generated by a fraught engagement with tradition. As we see in Lewald’s *Jenny*, romantic love acts as a catalyst for testing the boundaries between Jews and the non-Jewish world and revealing the price of entrance into the latter. The relatively recent innovation of the love-based marriage, which privileges individual desire over the communal, serves as an important site in which the “preservation of boundaries between Jews and Christians” are questioned and in which the norms of modernity must be negotiated with the demands of tradition.²⁹⁴ At the center of these texts is a renewed engagement with Jewish tradition through a reckoning with the pressures of both conversion and secularization. In declaring Jewish literature as part and parcel of German literature, Kompert also works to disentangle, and at times re-write, narratives of division:

²⁹⁴ Garloff, *Mixed Feelings*, 26.

divisions between Germans and Jews, Christianity and Judaism, Orthodox and Reform. But while both stories imagine the compatibility—and its limits—between Jewish tradition and the non-Jewish world, the solutions to these tensions are consistently answered within a closed system (the Jewish family), offering a view of Jewish life in the modern world that is predicated not on interreligious dialogue, but on the one-sided task of promoting Jewish belonging in wider society.

In the example of “Eine Verlorene,” I read the spiritual and social tensions sparked by the Jewish daughter’s love-marriage and conversion to Christianity, and demonstrate how Kompert, in a program that makes “Jewish literature” part and parcel of “German literature,” blurs the distinctions between Jewish and Christian narratives. Unlike in the preceding chapters, the daughter’s difference is not cast in terms of her pursuit of *Bildung*. Instead, her transgression of boundaries based on romantic love brings into relief the Jewish family’s re-examination of the textual tradition and questions of transmission. The daughter’s break with the family spurs a new engagement with scripture and an invocation of the generations of Jewish fathers—traditional guardians of Jewish learning—in order to facilitate a form of reconciliation. Through a re-examination of Hebrew scholarship and a questioning of the status quo, I read how the traditional divisions of religion, gender, and language serve as sites to articulate the challenges of recalibrating Jewish life in modernity and the role that the daughter plays in igniting these shifts.

In this recalibration, Christian narratives are re-imagined as Jewish narratives. As Jonathan Hess notes in his study *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of Modern German-Jewish Identity*, many contemporary, non-Jewish reviewers of Kompert’s ghetto fiction saw his thematization of Christianity as “part of a program of Christian compassion” that “called out to

be subsumed into the master-narratives of Christianity's supersession of Judaism."²⁹⁵ Hess challenges such fantasies of Christian triumph, instead underscoring a specifically Jewish narrative that is able to sustain itself through the pressures of the modern world. I build on this work and scholarship from Petra Ernst and Gabriele von Glasenapp that identify Kompert a key figure in shaping a genre that built off the legacy of Berthold Auerbach's (1812–82) *Dorfgeschichte* to construct a past of rural, traditional Jewish life in order to contend with a rapidly changing Jewish present.²⁹⁶ In doing so, I consider how the poetics of gender and learning create a space in which Kompert can utilize elements of the Christian Bible as a means of re-imagining the Jewish family in a space of Christian hegemony.

While following the perspective of the male figure Jossef, "Eine Verlorene" cleverly appropriates Christian themes within the framework of a Jewish family in order to tell a tale of Jewish existence in the modern world. The re-negotiation of Jewish life in modernity takes place through a re-negotiation of linguistic and canonical differences; as Kompert takes ostensibly Christian texts and imagery and places them in the hands of Jewish figures, he works to render intelligible a world outside the ghetto that once seemed unreadable to this isolated Jewish community. By using the New Testament and Christian allusions as vehicles of Jewish storytelling, Kompert offers an ambivalent view of Christian-Jewish reconciliation: at once suggesting a fundamental compatibility and celebrating to the durability of the Jewish family, while also creating a one-sided dialogue that places the burden of inter-faith understanding on Jewish actors alone.

²⁹⁵ Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*, 97–98.

²⁹⁶ See Petra Ernst, *Schtetl, Stadt, Staat: Raum und Identität in deutschsprachig-jüdischer Erzählliteratur des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2017) and Gabriele von Glasenapp, *Aus der Judengasse: Zur Entstehung und Ausprägung deutschsprachiger Ghettoliteratur im 19. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1996).

Unlike “Eine Verlorene,” “Die Jahrzeit” does less to disrupt the divisions between Jewish and Christian narratives or to demonstrate the reciprocity between ostensibly separate traditions. Rather, this text lays bare the tension between the male-dominated world of Jewish learning and the female-dependent structure of Jewish tradition. The exclusion of the daughter from certain Jewish rituals serves as the premise for “Die Jahrzeit.” From this exclusion, the significance of the daughter crystallizes in preserving this gendered division of religious practice and, ultimately, maintaining the Jewish family. This story, too, celebrates the durability of the Jewish family but does not open up its definition in the way that “Eine Verlorene” does. Instead, “Die Jahrzeit” maintains a constrained conception of the family and reinforces Jewish ritual as a mechanism for its survival.

Both of these texts shape a world in which the daughter’s absence, and thus her silence, helps create a cascade of familial anxiety. The central problem of “Die Jahrzeit”—that a daughter may not say the mourning prayer for her father—functions in the service of preserving her silence in order to preserve a Jewish ritual. In this story, the daughter is structurally prohibited from performing this rite for her parents, but her agency is simultaneously critical to carrying it by way of producing male offspring. The concurrent fixation on the daughter’s reproductive capacity, in the service of generating a male bearer of ritual, is built around the father’s anxiety toward the loss of traditional ways in the face of urbanization and secularization.

II. “Eine Verlorene”

Kompert’s “Eine Verlorene,” published in 1851 in his collection of ghetto tales *Böhmische Juden*, follows the Jewish family of Jossef in their mourning of—and eventual reconciliation with—the titular “lost one,” Jossef’s sister Dinah. Their mourning, however, is not for a mortal

loss. Rather, Dinah leaves the family in order to marry a Czech peasant, for whom she converts to Catholicism, changes her name to Madlena (as she will henceforth be designated), and eventually bears three children.²⁹⁷ After her departure from the Jewish community, her father dies “vor Gram,” leaving a household of the mother Marjim, brother Jossef, and Jossef’s young son Fischele.²⁹⁸

The story traces the tensions and rapprochement not only between Madlena and her family, but also between the Jewish and surrounding Christian community as a whole. Since Madlena’s marriage, the family ceases communication with her although they observe Madlena and her growing brood in the village. Marjim openly displays a longing to reconnect with her daughter; she sends her grandson Fischele as liaison to deliver Madlena a package of coffee and sugar. Jossef acts as the patriarch of the family and runs a business as a peddler. In his sister’s absence, he takes in the ten-year-old Anezka, daughter of the Christian farmer Stepan Parzik, as both domestic help (their *Magd*) and an ersatz daughter, deemed by the family to have “einen zu ‘jüdischen Kopf.’”²⁹⁹ Jossef later encounters some of the anti-Jewish hostility in the community when he finds written above his doorway “Ahasverus, du verfluchtete Jude.”³⁰⁰ The source of the text, we later discover, is the local priest who was assisted by Anezka.

The young woman’s betrayal is revealed after a climactic encounter between her father, a critic of the Catholic Church, and Jossef following the feast of the Bohemian Saint John of Nepomuk. While grappling with his own fury toward his converted sister, Jossef unexpectedly

²⁹⁷ Specific place names are rare in the text, but the narrator mentions the nearby city of Bunzlau. This refers to the city of Jungbunzlau/Mladá Boleslav in Bohemia where Kompert attended *Gymnasium*.

²⁹⁸ Leopold Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” in *Böhmische Juden: Geschichten von Leopold Kompert* (Wien: Jasper, Hügel & Manz, 1851), 112.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

defends the religious practices against which Stepan rails and prevents him from desecrating the saint's statue. Jossef's reconciliation with Madlena is anticipated when he learns of Anezka's collaboration with the priest and, rather than ostracizing the young woman for her treachery, reflects on his own cruelty toward his sister on the basis of her religious affiliation.

In the final portion of the story, the mother Marjim goes to her deathbed and insists upon a final visit from her daughter before she may go peacefully. Before this occurs, she reveals to Jossef the location of salvaged texts—most of which were burned—from the great-grandfather, referred to as their *Urdede*.³⁰¹ Jossef discovers that these papers contain Hebrew translations of the Sermon on the Mount. Following this revelation, Madlena returns to her family and reconciles with her brother Jossef, explaining the decisions she made out of love for her husband and to provide a harmonious life for her children. Madlena visits her mother's bedside and Marjim blesses her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren. She dies peacefully and, in the years following, Jossef gives up his business to become a farmer, working his field alongside that of Madlena.

Kompert's story imagines the potential and failures of Christian-Jewish relations by means of scripture, both shared and divergent. The title alone of Kompert's story points to a Biblical allusion: the Parable of the Prodigal Son. "Eine Verlorene" is the feminine counterpart of the original "verlorener Sohn," who is mourned as if he had died and then celebrated upon return to his father. After leaving the family to marry a Christian man—and, in doing so, convert to Catholicism—Madlena's family considers her a dead relative. The father passes away shortly

³⁰¹ The name Marjim uses for her grandfather reflects the regional specificity of the story. "Ur" is a prefix, like in German, applied to progeny to refer to another generation of removal—like the "great" in English "great grandfather." "Dede," however, does not match the most common Yiddish for grandfather, *zeyde* (זיידע). "Dede" instead reflects the Czech word for grandfather, *děda*. *Zeyde* comes from the same Slavic root, but involves a consonant shift of d' > dz'.

as a result, spurring Jossef to assume the role of patriarch and multiplying her perceived destruction of the family. This is not the first time that Kompert makes this allusion. “Eine Verlorene,” in fact, comes on the heels of a story that depicts a prodigal son figure. The first story in the collection *Böhmische Juden* (of which “Eine Verlorene” is the second) is “Der Dorfgeher,” which follows a Jewish son, Elije (or his new name, Emanuel), as he returns to the ghetto after leaving for university and finding a Christian fiancé. His family, too, mourns his departure like a death, and Elije observes this grief by visiting them undercover as a Jewish beggar. Ultimately, Elije returns to his family and to the practices of Jewish ritual law. This return, as Hess and Krobb note, is triggered by a realization of his emotional ties and the “worldly sophistication of his peddler-father, whom he comes to recognize as a productive middleman and benefactor to the Czech peasants whom he serves.”³⁰² “Der Dorfgeher” primarily traces the development of the child who left, rather than the emotional and spiritual transformations of the family through the loss and return of the child. “Eine Verlorene,” by contrast, traces the emotional and spiritual reckoning of the family left behind by the daughter. While the story also ends with reconciliation, it does not end with a wholesale return to Judaism after the daughter’s reconsideration of her new life as a Christian. Rather, Madlena’s absence allows for the family’s re-examination of its relationship to sacred texts and for a re-imagining of Christian-Jewish relations.

The allusion to the New Testament parable of the Prodigal Son is also significant in its engagement not only with issues of return and acceptance, but also those of inheritance: In the parable, the son is considered “dead” because he has asks for his inheritance while the father is

³⁰² Florian Krobb, “Reclaiming the Location: Leopold Kompert’s Ghetto Fiction in Post-Colonial Perspective,” in *Ghetto Writing: Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999), 49–50.
Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*, 89.

still alive. By demanding his father's inheritance prematurely, he implicitly desires the effect of his father's death. Through her conversion, Madlena causes the actual premature death of her father and squanders her spiritual inheritance from the Jewish family. In a reversal of the Prodigal Son, she tacitly renounces also her monetary inheritance by leaving the family. However, as Jossef begins to oscillate between a desire for reconciliation and renewed fury toward his sister, he chooses to send Madlena her share of the father's inheritance, plus interest, so that he may "mit ihr einmal fertig werden."³⁰³ In another gender reversal of the parable, the mother calls upon the reconciliation of the family and anticipates the daughter's return. In the final union between parent and siblings, Kompert re-writes the conclusion so that the brother is no longer occupied by jealousy and instead, the siblings live peacefully alongside one another as they tend their fields.³⁰⁴

Before an explicit engagement with the Bible, the names of the central Jewish characters in "Eine Verlorene" allude to its key figures, anticipating the text's demonstration of the proximity between the Jewish and Christian spheres. The daughter's original name, Dinah, alludes to Genesis 34 and the Rape of Dinah, in which Dinah the daughter of Jacob has intercourse with Shechem and her brothers avenge this by killing all the men of Shechem. From this story arises the theme of intermarriage and the family's stakes in the daughter's "defilement." It is therefore telling that, in seeking a peaceful life with a Christian husband, she adopts a new name. Her new name, a form of Magdalene, though also points to an ambivalent Biblical figure, one who is known both as a (reformed) prostitute and a companion of Jesus; in Jossef's eyes, Madlena is the definitive wayward woman. Perhaps most salient are Jossef and

³⁰³ Kompert, "Eine Verlorene," 231.

³⁰⁴ Many thanks to Lukas Hoffman for his ideas on the parable connection at the Carolina-Duke Graduate Program Works in Progress, March 2, 2020.

Marjim, a form of Maria. Marjim herself acknowledges the Christian iteration of her name as she defends her daughter's decision to take on "Madlena:" "'Ich heiß' ja aber doch selbst auf teutsch Maria', meinte die Mutter, 'wenn ich auch auf jüdisch Marjim heiß'.'"³⁰⁵ Jossef, the father figure, and Marjim, the mother, therefore allude to the Biblical Joseph and Mary—appellations that accrue greater significance as Jossef confronts the New Testament through the eyes of his great-grandfather. These names then come to symbolize a Jewish re-writing of a Christian story, in which Madlena is cast out "wie einen wurmigen Apfel," an allusion to the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden that came to be understood as an apple largely through Christian interpretation.³⁰⁶

Although Madlena is the titular character of Kompert's story, her presence in the text is mediated primarily through her family members, Jossef and Marjim, until the final scenes. The physical and dialogic absence of Madlena, the lost daughter, throughout the story is precisely what intensifies her presence in its development. Madlena, in her absence, is the central figure influencing the emotional configuration of "Eine Verlorene" and the actions of the protagonist, her brother Jossef. Her departure is a central force not only in the context of Jossef's family but also in the community at large, which is aware of their tragedy: "Das kleinste Kind im Dorfe wußte es, daß die Bäuerin Madlena die 'Tochter der alten Jüdin' und die Schwester des 'Juden'

³⁰⁵ Kompert, "Eine Verlorene," 114.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 140.

The Hebrew text of Genesis does not specify the fruit, which has also been interpreted as figs, grape, or wheat (70). See: Kristen E. Kvam et al., *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

But the apple is also present in Yiddish texts on Genesis, such as Slonik's handbook *Seder mitzvot ha-nashim* (see footnote 26) and Rivkah bat Meir Tiktiner's advice manual *Meneket Rivkah* ("Rivkah's Nurse," originally published 1609). See: Fram, *My Dear Daughter*, 161–63, and Rivkah bat Meir, *Meneket Rivkah: A Manual of Wisdom and Piety for Jewish Women*, trans. Samuel Spinner (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2009), 153.

sei.”³⁰⁷ While she is physically present in only a handful of passages, her memory and the ultimate betrayal of her conversion to Catholicism are constant in Jossef’s internal monologue and in his home, where “da gab es einen ungeheuern Schmerz in dem einzigen Judenhouse des Dorfes.”³⁰⁸ Coming from the only Jewish family in the community, Madlena places the family in a position of stark visibility through her conversion. The Jewish daughter’s departure, therefore, both governs the dynamics of the individual family and sets the terms for the perception of Jews within the surrounding non-Jewish community.

The early death of the father in “Eine Verlorene” doubles as another salient absence in the text: In a reversal of the paradigm found in the previous chapters, which features a central father figure and largely absent mother, Kompert’s story buries the father and foregrounds the mother. The brother Jossef—much like Eduard in Lewald’s *Jenny*—instead takes on a father-like role in the family and considers himself responsible for his sister’s circumstances. The father’s physical absence, however, does not have the effect of his erasure. This very absence haunts the text in acknowledging the stakes of Madlena’s departure: Jossef and Dinah/Madlena’s father passes away shortly after she leaves the family to convert, triggering a double mourning for both family members. The family grieves Madlena as if she had passed away by sitting *shiva*, and the consequences of her departure—including the death of the patriarch—loom over the family ten years later. Jossef, taking on the role of both father and son in the household, exhibits a traditional response by disinheriting the convert but, coupled with his ire, he is also provoked by encounters with the Christian community that create openings for a rapprochement.

³⁰⁷ Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” 108.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

The mother Marjim takes on a significant role in the narrative as the primary conveyor of family history and the mediator between the patriarchs—living and deceased—and the younger generations of the family. In the transmission of tradition and religious knowledge, the patriarchal figures serve as anchoring points structuring an understanding of the family. In the opening pages of the tale, Marjim chides her grandson Fischele, Jossef’s young son, and encourages his good behavior by reminding him of his lineage: “Hast Du vergessen, wer Dein Vater, wer Dein Dede (Großvater) ist gewesen? Und erst Dein Urdede, den Du gar nicht hast gekannt?”³⁰⁹ This passage and the text throughout make little mention of the maternal lineage of the family, although halakhic law dictates the matrilineal transmission of Judaism. Even when describing Madlena’s conversion to Christianity, the narrator writes that she leaves the “Religion ihrer Väter.”³¹⁰ The emphasis of the father figures is not only a feature of a general patriarchal order; it is also part of a larger social-historical context in which the holy language of Judaism and the study of its texts was marked as a masculine realm. While tracing the preservation of tradition and family norms through generations of fathers, Kompert casts these figures in terms of their engagement with religious texts. Marjim goes further to tell of their “Urdede,” whose image hangs over her bed. She explains to him of the great-grandfather’s immense religious knowledge:

Wie du ihn ansiehst, hat der schon in seinem dreißigsten Jahre über zehn Bücher gehabt geschrieben, [...] er war ein gewaltig großer Mann, und hat Tag und Nacht gelernt; getragen hat er ein dreieckig Hütel und darunter sind die schwarzen Haar in Locken hervorgegangen, Du kannst Dir nicht denken, was das für ein Frommer und Gelehrter ist gewesen.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” 92.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 112.

³¹¹ Ibid., 93–94.

In order to impress upon Fischele the moral weight of his predecessors, Marjim recounts the diligence and intellectual rigor of her grandfather. The idealized image of the Jewish man, bent over his desk in the study of religious texts, emerges from her reflections. Marjim's recollections long for an age before the adoption of bourgeois norms of masculinity, to a time in which the learned rabbis and students of Talmud made up the cultural elite.³¹² The role of text and storytelling in the patriarchal order of Kompert's text is therefore twofold: Here, Marjim first introduces the central role that Jewish learning plays in defining the legacy of the great-grandfather and, by extension, the religious tradition that defines familial expectations of behavior. The great-grandfather's significance in the family is told in terms of his piety and the many Hebrew books he wrote. Secondly, the writing of the family story locates tradition in the father figure, positioning him as the main character while the female figure serves as mediator. Neither Marjim nor her maternal ancestors make an appearance in her recollection of the family legacy, but she is the primary transmitter of its narrative. The woman, thus, writes herself out of the story as she relays it, while the central actors in these tales are the generations of fathers.

A concern with the preservation of Jewish texts and ritual is also told from the perspective of Jossef in his role as patriarch. The traditionally male-dominated sphere of Jewish education is evident in the relationship between Fischele and Jossef, who looks after his son's religious education. Fischele dutifully recites his prayers and memorizes the Book of Psalms, and the boy is tutored by the local teacher named Julius Arnsteiner, "der den Knaben im 'Deutschen' sowohl, als im 'Jüdischen' unterrichten sollte."³¹³ Julius is met with measured hostility by both

³¹² For a short summary on the shifts in Jewish gender ideals and stereotypes, see: Paula Hyman, "Gender and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identities," *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 2/3 (2002): 153–61. See also: Baader et al., *Jewish Masculinities*.

³¹³ Kompert, "Eine Verlorene," 196.

Jossef and his mother, who complains of his use of High German and insists that, under his tutelage, Fischele will no longer speak Yiddish: “‘Das Kind, klagte sie öfters, werde sie ja bald gar nicht verstehen.’”³¹⁴ Julius’s use of High German provokes an anxiety in the family as a threat to traditional ways. His arrival is both a harbinger of transformations to Jewish life in Europe and an influence on Jossef’s gradual reconciliation with his converted sister.

Jossef initially is suspicious of his Julius’s enlightened attitudes: “er war ihm zu ‘aufgeklärt’, ihm schien es, als ob Julius Arnsteiner es ‘mit Gott zu leicht nehme;’ in gewissen Dingen erschien er ihm geradezu als ein Narr.”³¹⁵ The teacher is learned in both Hebrew and German, reflecting a bilingual model of education first most prominently promoted by maskilim such as Isaac Euchel or Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn. Despite Julius’s knowledge of Torah, Jossef receives him with skepticism, critical of his reading of Hebrew texts in light of his participation in the secularizing, modernizing efforts of enlightened intellectuals. Julius’s engagement with non-Jewish literature and everyday usage of German over Yiddish signal to Jossef a foolish modern irreverence toward tradition. Jossef identifies Julius as an adherent of Reform Judaism—a movement in Germany that de-emphasized Jewish law and aimed to make Judaism more compatible with modern life—and is critical of his association with a group that “spottete über die ‘Orthodoxen;’” he balks at Julius’s invocation of terms such as “Emancipation” and “Glaubensfreiheit.”³¹⁶ From Jossef’s perspective, these words do not inspire a desirable form of freedom; rather, they represent religious and political changes that might threaten his way of life.

³¹⁴ Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” 196.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 196–97.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 197. Reform Judaism emerged in the German-speaking world in the mid-nineteenth century and was an alternative to the strict ways of orthodox Judaism. This movement was largely influenced by the legacy of Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment. On the development of Reform Judaism in Germany, see: Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1995).

What for Julius and his cohort of reformers was part of an entrée into social and political equality is for Jossef a harbinger of the end of tradition.

When Jossef becomes involved in Fischele's lessons reading the Bible, his opposition to Julius's modernizing proclivities becomes more pronounced. Jossef listens in as Julius studies the Torah with Fischele, this time reading the end of the fifth book or Deuteronomy. Jossef is displeased to find that Julius does not take greater time and care in analyzing the content of the Torah, and his hostility is aroused when the teacher and student arrive at the following passage and Fischele seeks an explanation:

“Wer zu seinem Vater und zu seiner Mutter spricht: Ich sehe dich nicht, und zu seinem Bruder: Ich kenne ihn nicht, und zu seinem Sohne: Ich weiß nichts von ihm, die halten deine Rede und bewahren deinen Bund.” [...] “Lehrer”, begann der Knabe, “das versteh ich nicht. Welches Kind wird den zu seinem Vater oder seiner Mutter oder zu seiner Schwester sagen: Ich kenne dich nicht, ich weiß nichts von dir; geh’ fort. Und doch soll ein solcher Mensch fromm sein und Gott soll dem sich wohlgewogen erweisen?”³¹⁷

In this reading, Deuteronomy 33:9, Moses tells of the Levites who rejected the opportunity to worship a false idol, the golden calf, and remained firmly committed to God at the expense of even their family members.³¹⁸ Jossef is particularly moved and overwhelmed by this portion of his son's lesson: He listens to this passage with Madlena's departure and her conversion to Christianity ringing loudly in his ears. He awaits with heightened interest—while contemplating both Madlena's act and consequent estrangement—as to what interpretation Julius will offer his son.

In response to Fischele's query, Julius answers, “Das ist auch nicht so zu verstehen’, began der Lehrer, ‘und wenn ich dir's auch erkläre, so bekommst du doch nicht den rechten Sinn

³¹⁷ Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” 202–3.

³¹⁸ Many thanks to Joshua Shelly for his help in discussing this passage.

heraus. Wart' bis du älter bist.”³¹⁹ Josséf demands that Julius explain the passage in terms the young boy might understand. The tutor proceeds to offer a Catholic perspective as he explains that the requirement for clerical celibacy is based in this text and contends that the passage is a key element in the structure of the Catholic Church: “Dieser Satz, habe ich erklären wollen, ist gleichsam der Schlußstein in dem Gewölbe der katholischen Kirche.”³²⁰ Josséf has no interest in employing a comparative approach to the study of Biblical texts. He lashes out in anger, mortified that Julius would use a Christian interpretation of “Chumesch (Bibel)” to teach his son.³²¹ Josséf’s initial concern with this passage is heightened by his current preoccupation with his sister’s departure and the hostility between his family and the Catholic community at large. Moses tells of Levites whose commitment to God was so steadfast that they would abandon their own family in order to remain true to their creator. Josséf considers himself pious and firmly committed to Judaism, yet in this moment he also wrestles with hostility toward Madlena. Hearing this passage intensifies Josséf’s fear that loyalty to Judaism indeed demands his sister’s continued estrangement.

Julius’s response shocks Josséf both by eliding the question of an individual’s commitment to God and by utilizing a Christian framework of interpretation. Josséf anxiously awaits Julius’s interpretation as a result of his ambivalence and yet unarticulated desire to reconcile with his sister, but his explanation ultimately serves to redouble Josséf’s understanding of the passage as a mandate to put God before all else. In this scene, Josséf’s conservatism is located in his refusal to accept the multiple paths traveled by Hebrew source material; he

³¹⁹ Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” 204.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

understands the Bible (which he refers to as *Chumasch*, a Hebrew term for the five books of Moses) as the foundation for Judaism and resists the notion that these texts have been incorporated into Christianity and a different framework of belief. Julius, whose “Bildung” Jossef dismisses and from whom he wants to hear no more about “Euern Geistlichen und mit Euerer Philosophie,” represents the modernizing forces of contemporary Judaism that threatened tradition. Jossef confronts Julius for bringing Judaism into conversation with Christianity and acknowledging the necessity of placing Jewish tradition into a larger interreligious framework. Part of this context—both in Europe more broadly and in the immediate setting of the story— involves regular interaction between Christians and Jews. Jossef asks that Julius explain this passage of Deuteronomy in terms that he can understand: “Macht es ihm wenigstens mit Hilfe des Verstandes begreiflich, Herr Lehrer.” Julius obliges by drawing on material for which Fischele has concrete reference points: the Catholic priests he observes in the community. His intention is not to convince Fischele of the supremacy of Christian interpretation, but rather to demonstrate the various functions a text, through its various interpretations, may have for a multiplicity of religions.

Jossef disparagingly refers to Bildung and philosophy as the source of Julius’s universalizing approach. Bildung and an engagement with literature transform into a dangerous space in which the pillars of Jewish belief are challenged and exposed to the non-Jewish world. In contrast with Lewald’s *Jenny*, in which the female figure engages with secular literature as an entrée into Christianity, “Eine Verlorene” presents a threat to the male-coded realm of Jewish textual tradition. Madlena’s departure is the crisis that destabilizes the family and Jossef’s unintended re-examination of the Torah: His agony over Madlena and the negotiation of familial loyalty versus religious commitment compel him to examine—with varying levels of

resistance—the community now chosen by his sister. While observing Fischele’s lessons with his enlightened tutor, the reading of texts is revealed at once to be a site of stability and of fluid meaning. Scripture is a site of continuity, while at the same time it is also a space of perpetual questioning, discussion, and interpretation—perhaps most evident in the act of midrash, the commentary of Hebrew scripture. Jossef’s encounter with Julius crystallizes as such a space of instability, as his lesson reveals religious texts to be like any literary work: transported, translated, re-adopted, and re-interpreted. Their conflict opens, for Jossef, a Jewish text into a larger network of interpretation in which the material of the Hebrew Bible has been incorporated into a Christian worldview.

Leading up to a reunion with his sister, Jossef continues to assume new interpretative perspectives and acceptance of religious diversity among his Christian neighbors. In a violent encounter with Anezka’s father Stepan Parzik, who attempts to desecrate the statue of the local Saint Nepomuk, Jossef finds himself defending the saint on the basis that millions deem him sacred. Their verbal altercation becomes physical and is ultimately interrupted by the arrival of Anezka, whose sudden abandonment of Jossef’s household acts as a sinister echo of Madlena’s departure. Anezka is both a familiar and estranged double, a Catholic-born daughter taken to be a new Jewish daughter (Marjim insists she could have been born to the *Landesrabbiner*) who replaces the Jewish-born daughter lost to Catholicism. When Jossef here learns of Anezka’s betrayal—reporting on Jossef’s hostility toward his Catholic sister and aiding in the local priest’s anti-Jewish persecution—his show of compassion and forgiveness toward the young woman anticipates the understanding he will show toward Madlena. What is striking, though, is that his response is not grounded solely in forgiveness for Anezka’s transgression, but rather in Jossef’s recognition of his own intolerance toward Madlena as a Catholic. Although Jews in Bohemia and

throughout the German-speaking lands were still subject to persecution and extensive legal restrictions, the Jewish figure assumes the role of oppressor and is compelled to re-examine his own intolerance—a reversal that assigns him agency but also shifts the culpability for the conflicts between Christians and Jews. As we will see again as Jossef and Madlena make amends, the burden of understanding and mercy is placed in the hands of Jewish figures.

Jossef operates as the central agent of rapprochement, yet the centrality of the male figure both in the narrative and in Marjim’s retelling of family history does not, result in the erasure of female figure nor her agency in the main narrative of the text. While the Jewish daughter is pivotal in her positioning toward the future and reproductive capacity, the maternal figure acts as the transmitter of family history to the younger generations and creating opportunities for Christian-Jewish understanding. Marjim plays a crucial role in relaying both the idealized narrative of the family—in which the great-grandfather is an admired scholar and protector of tradition—and the underlying truths that disrupt this image of flawless piety. Marjim discloses to her grandson Fischele that—through her mother—she learned that her great-grandfather “ist nicht fromm gewesen,” although he dutifully followed Jewish ritual law.³²² She briefly alludes to moment where she first detected this lack of reverence:

Einmal, das weiß ich aber, wie wenn’s heut’ geschehen wär’, da hat mein klein Brüderl aus einem Topf, in dem man Fleisch gekocht hat, Milch getrunken. [...] Dein Urdede aber, der dabei gestanden ist, hat gelacht und gesagt: Narrele, was schreist du da und jammerst? Ist Dir ein Haus eingefallen? Nicht sollt’st Du wissen, was man Alles thun darf...³²³

According to *kashrut*, Jewish dietary laws, milk and meat cannot share the same cooking vessels. Marjim’s brother’s mistake represents a basic breach of Jewish rituals, but the Urdede’s reaction

³²² Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” 96.

³²³ Ibid.

suggests the realm of possibility far beyond these daily obligations. With this recollection, Marjim reveals her first window into the non-Jewish world, one that is structured by other norms and beliefs.

The phrase “Nicht sollt’st Du wissen, was man Alles thun darf,” remains ambiguous in the context of Marjim’s Yiddishized German speech. Throughout the text, Marjim employs both German and Yiddish syntax, and intermittently uses Yiddish words, including false cognates such as “schmecken” (in Yiddish “to smell” rather than “to taste”) and “Schul” (in Yiddish “synagogue” and not “school”). The formulation “nicht sollst du” in the German might be read as “you should not,” while in Yiddish it conveys “you ought not” or “it is not for you to.” The Yiddish verb “darfn” is preserved from Middle High German, meaning “must” instead of the High German “dürfen” meaning “may.” Marjim intimation of her great-grandfather’s curiosity into Christian scholarship and practices, scandalous actions, are correspondingly relayed in this peculiar formulation which she also uses as a mantra. A combination of the Yiddish-like “nicht sollst du” and the German “dürfen” render the cautionary statement, “It is not for you to know everything that you may do [can get away with].”³²⁴ With a twinkle in his eye, Marjim’s grandfather gestures toward the possibilities that exist beyond the strictures of Jewish ritual law. But read in oscillation between the German and Yiddish meaning of “darf,” his statement at once warns of what one is allowed to do in the wider world and also what one is obligated to do. Only toward the end of the tale, on her deathbed, does Marjim reveal precisely what transgressive acts marked the great-grandfather as impious and would force this engagement with questions of spiritual and familial duties.

³²⁴ Many thanks to Jeffrey Grossman for his help with this passage.

The centrality of Madlena resurfaces as Marjim retires to her deathbed with the desire to see her daughter in her final days. This compels her to invoke, once again, the legacy of the *Urdede* and ignite another opportunity for a Jewish engagement with Christian thought. Marjim quotes her grandfather again on her deathbed, but this time, several times, to her son:

“Verbrannt haben sie ihm seine Bücher, weil er ihnen die Wahrheit gesagt hat; die können die Leut’ nicht hören, und daß er immer gesagt hat: Nicht wissen sollt’s ihr, was man Alles thun darf! Die Leut’ wollen auch nicht wissen, was man Alles thun darf.”³²⁵ She repeats this formulation of her grandfather’s suggestion that an existence outside of Jewish tradition is possible and that a transgression of these laws is not only conceivable, but also permissible. Marjim claims that she has heard from her grandfather in her final days and is reminded of his writings that remain in her possession—all that is left after ten of his books were burnt in front of the synagogue on the night of Yom Kippur. Marjim instructs Jossef to retrieve the salvaged pages of the great-grandfather’s texts. Upon reading them, Jossef begins to understand the source of controversy that caused the burning of his works. Unfamiliar with the New Testament, Jossef does not realize that he is reading a Hebrew translation (conveyed in Kompert’s work in German) of the Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew.

Bewildered by the writings of his great-grandfather, Jossef calls upon Julius, the individual he knows commands both Hebrew texts and religious matter alien to him. Julius recognizes the irony that Jossef, who had only recently scorned the teacher for his interpretation of texts, now pleads for Julius’s (a “Posche Jisroel,” or apostate of Israel) help in interpreting his great-grandfather’s writing.³²⁶ Julius reveals to Jossef that his great-grandfather was not the

³²⁵ Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” 291–92.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 297.

author of these texts, but rather that he had translated from the Gospel of Matthew. Upon discovering the scope of the great-grandfather's religious curiosity, Julius comments that "Ihr Urdede [...] muß ein merkwürdiger Mensch gewesen sein. Ich begreife erst jetzt, woher die Spinoza's und Uriel Akosta's gekommen sind."³²⁷ Julius's observation brings "Eine Verlorene" into conversation both with contemporary German Jewish literature in its writing of a Jewish narrative and with European Jewish history more broadly. Julius likens the *Urdede* to the historical figures of Uriel Acosta and Baruch Spinoza, two philosophers of Sephardic Jewish origin whose stories have been taken up and fictionalized in German literature such as Berthold Auerbach's *Spinoza: ein historischer Roman* (1837)—which begins with an opening scene at the funeral of Acosta—and Karl Gutzkow's novella and popular play on Acosta, *Der Sadduzäer von Amsterdam* (1834) and *Uriel Acosta: Ein Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen* (1847). Acosta, from a family forced to convert to Catholicism who later returned to Judaism, and Spinoza, who was excommunicated from the Jewish community in Amsterdam, engaged with both Christian and Jewish thought and were critical of each religion.

Spinoza and Acosta might also belong in the same group as Jesus, another prominent Jew whose teachings disrupted the status quo and who, in the nineteenth century, received increasing attention as an object of historical inquiry.³²⁸ By invoking such figures, Julius positions the controversial translations of Jossef's great-grandfather into the context of this larger Jewish history, one that can be characterized, on the one hand, by transgression and, on the other, by an

³²⁷ Kompert, "Eine Verlorene," 299.

³²⁸ Interest in the historical Jesus was not new to the nineteenth century; a consideration of Jesus as a Jew is found, for example, in Martin Luther's *Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei* (1523). Perhaps the most prominent example of German Jewish engagement with the historical Jesus is Abraham Geiger's account of Jesus as a Pharisee in *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte* (1865), fourteen years after the publication of *Böhmische Juden*. For an in-depth study of Geiger's controversial proposition and its stakes for the positioning of Judaism in relation to Christianity, see Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

aspiration for inter-religious dialogue and universal humanism. As guardian of the status quo, Jossef once considered himself part of a lineage of piety, familial loyalty, and stability. The discovery of his great-grandfather's texts, however, forces him to reconfigure his understanding of Judaism and his place therein. Julius encourages him to position his great-grandfather among the many critics and revolutionaries among Jews, while also acknowledging the dynamic nature of Judaism in the context of a shifting social terrain.

The patriarchs of the family function as a site of traditional Judaism and of Jewish learning, but Jossef's encounter with the content of his great-grandfather's scholarship and re-examination of Biblical texts—spurred by his feelings of guilt and sorrow for his converted sister—disrupt this image of stability. Jossef's insistence on the division of Judaism and Christianity, which he maintains in the years following Madlena's conversion, begins to crumble once he realizes the Christian-Jewish permeability that existed all along within the framework of his own family. However, he is only able to arrive at this realization through the mediation of Marjim, who transmits the stories of previous generations, and Madlena, whose conversion triggers this spiritual engagement.

In relating the actions of his beloved *Urdede* to those of Spinoza and Acosta, Jossef is also forced to re-examine the meaning of transgression. His great-grandfather transgressed in the eyes of the Jewish community and suffered the consequences of disrupting traditional practices. While shaken by the realization of his great-grandfather's translations, Jossef's instinct is not, however, to renounce their relation. Instead, he begins to reconceive of the scope and durability of the Jewish family—familial ties that do not simply end when an individual engages with texts in the Christian tradition or marries outside of Judaism. These revelations spur Jossef to return to and reconcile with his sister after a decade of estrangement. Madlena relays to Jossef the pain of

conversion with the knowledge that she would lose ties with her immediate family. However, she converted to Christianity out of love for her husband, Pawel, and the desire to provide stability for their children. When Jossef asks why she could not raise her children as Jews, Madlena replies:

Wenn ihr dir Kinder möchtet gebären, ihr müßtet da anders reden. Da denkst du nicht daran, was du gewesen bist; du willst nur, die Kinder sollen gut und rechtschaffen werden, ob als Christen oder als Juden, das ist dann gleichgiltig. Eine Mutter sieht nur immer auf den Vater von ihren Kindern. Wie der ist, so werden auch die Kinder. Ist der Vater ein schlechter Jud oder Christ, so werden's die Kinder auch. [...] Ich bin, was mein Mann ist [...] das Weib soll auch gar keine andere Religion haben als der Vater. Es kommen nur Streitigkeiten zwischen Beiden heraus, das nicht gut ist, und was soll erst mit den Kindern geschehen? Nimm an, Jossef, ich hätt' meinen Pawel genommen und wär' eine Jüdin geblieben. Meinst du, es hätt' nicht geschmerzt, wenn ich seine Kinder auf jüdische Art, wie ich's im Haus bei Euch hab' gesehen und gelernt, aufgezogen hätt'? Mein Mann ist gewohnt von seiner Kindheit auf an die Mutter Gottes zu denken, sie anzurufen in allen Nöthen, meinst du, ich hätt' den Kinder sagen sollen: "Stoßt Euch nicht daran, wenn der Vater den Namen der heiligen Mutter Gottes ausspricht; er kann ja nichts dafür, daß er als Christ ist geboren worden?"³²⁹

Madlena's conversion thus is not a result of spiritual revelation nor of deep conviction; rather, her motivations to convert—like Jenny's—are both practical and patriarchal. In order to display harmony and unity to her children, Madlena chooses to take on Pawel's religion. She does not necessarily adopt new religious convictions in her conversion but rather prizes a continuity of practice between father and mother as a foundation of stability, one that is contingent upon the wishes of the father. "Eine Verlorene," the Jewish principle of matrilineal descent notwithstanding, refers to Madlena as having left the "Religion ihrer Väter," and Madlena's children, too, will reflect this conception of religious transmission.³³⁰

This lack of spiritual transformation also makes room for the story's final reconciliation, in which the prodigal daughter Madlena returns and joins her mother Marjim at her death bed.

³²⁹ Kompert, "Eine Verlorene, 313–14.

³³⁰ Ibid., 112 and 118.

In the final scenes, both Jewish and Christian prayer take place in one space: First Marjim recites blessings over all of her grandchildren, both Christian and Jewish, followed by the recitation of the *Sh'ma Yisrael* (rendered in German) during her last moments. After Marjim passes away, Madlena's husband Pawel and their children recite the Lord's Prayer three times. Madlena's perceived transgression, thus, acts as a catalyst in reuniting the family by drawing attention to the shared traditions of Judaism and Christianity and allowing for the reimagining of Christian texts in a Jewish context. And while Madlena's subversion of norms creates this space for a re-examination of scripture and the relationship between religions, enactment of this reconciliation ultimately reinforces the patriarchal lineage of Jewish scholarship: Madlena's act of marrying a Christian man are only deemed acceptable when the patriarchal figure, Jossef, is able to find a masculine precedent for engaging with Christianity in his *Urdede*. Underlying the text, then, is a conservative impulse. Even though the lost daughter offers the occasion for a reconciliation between Jewish family and its Christian convert, the justification for this exchange can only be found through male precedent. Ultimately, the sanctioning of an engagement with Christian texts and the re-writing of the Jewish narrative in the modern world is controlled by a male gatekeeper—an engagement and re-writing that rely on the resolution, risk-taking, and innovation of the daughter.

III. “Die Jahrzeit”

Kompert's short story “Die Jahrzeit” follows the father Jacob Löw and his wife Esther who tragically lose all five of their sons before they reach the age of bar mitzvah. Of central concern to Jacob is that he will have no one to say Kaddish for him when he dies. In this context, Kaddish refers specifically to the mourning prayer said in memory of the dead on their *yortsayt*, the

anniversary of a relative's death. In traditional Judaism, men are required to recite the Mourner's Kaddish while women are not, but reponsa literature since the seventeenth century has demonstrated the halakhic legitimacy of women saying Kaddish. However, in the context of the traditional practices displayed "Die Jahrzeit," women were excluded from this commandment and the recitation of Kaddish was seen as an obligation between father and male offspring.³³¹

The only hope in solving this dilemma for Jacob and Esther is their daughter, Blümele, who might soon marry and bear them a son to say Kaddish. Jacob already has plans for her marriage, selecting her clumsy cousin Maier as her betrothed. In the meantime, Blümele falls for the local bookkeeper Jaques, a non-observant Hungarian who is described as the "Abgott der gesammten Mädchenwelt in der Gasse."³³² After a solemn wedding, Blümele and Jaques move away to his homeland and Esther dies shortly after her daughter's departure. Several years after the mother's death, Blümele—along with her son—returns home after an unfulfilling marriage to Jaques, who left for America. Before Blümele reunites with her father, her cousin Maier takes her in and teaches her son—who previously had no religious education—to say Kaddish for Esther's *yortsayt*. The dramatic reconciliation occurs when Blümele's son says Kaddish at the synagogue service and Jacob meets his grandson for the first time. Maier and Blümele later marry and provide Jacob with eight grandsons who are able to say Kaddish on his own *yortsayt*.

"Die Jahrzeit" reintroduces the central relationship between father and daughter, part of a narrative in which tensions between the two articulate larger social and cultural questions: the

³³¹ One of the problems of Hebrew sources is that "the male is considered paradigmatic," where *ben* is both the neuter and masculine; as a result, the father and son are the paradigmatic relationship, while mothers, spouses, daughters, etc. are not enumerated as reciters of but also not explicitly excluded (116–17). Gender equality in saying the Mourner's Kaddish has become the norm in Reform and Conservative Judaism, but it is not yet entirely accepted in Orthodox Judaism. See Rochelle L. Millen, *Women, Birth, and Death in Jewish Law and Practice* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2004).

³³² Leopold Kompert, "Die Jahrzeit," in *Geschichten einer Gasse: Novellen*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Verlag von Louis Gerschel, 1865), 22.

father acts as the guardian of the status quo, projecting these norms and expectations of obedience on the daughter, while the daughter attempts to subvert these obligations by shunning tradition. This quest to preserve tradition, though, is discordantly cast in secular, economic terms. After the early death of his five sons, Jacob Löw dotes over his only remaining child, Blümele, and frequently brings her gifts—an overt method of buying her affection and loyalty. At the doctor, Jacob presses him to ensure that his daughter will continue to thrive into adulthood:

“Ich bin nicht krank, Herr Doctor!” rief Blümele endlich lachend.

“Nein! So wahr es einen Gott giebt, Sie sind nicht krank!” rief der Arzt. [...]

“Schwören Sie, Herr Doctor!” rief dazwischen Jacob Löw in einem Tone, aus dem der Arzt ebensogut wie die tiefste Erschütterung, auch einen gewissen Hohn zu vernehmen glaubte.

“Ein Arzt kann nicht schwören!” sagte der Doctor ernst; “aber er versichert, daß, soweit seine Kunst voraussetzen darf, Ihre Tochter... dem Geschicke Ihrer andern Kinder nicht anheimfallen wird.”

“Die armen, armen Knaben!” seufzte Jacob Löw, indem er sein Gesicht mit beiden Händen bedeckte.

“Rechnest Du schon wieder, Jacob Löw?...” rief Esther leise.

Da ließ er die Hände fallen, schwere Thränen rollten ihm über die Wangen. Dennoch lag’s auf seinem Antlitz wie ein Sonnenstrahl. Er trat auf Blümele zu und schaute ihr lange in die Augen, dann fuhr er ihr mit der Hand über das glänzende, schwarze Haar und sagte mit einer Stimme, die dem Mädchen durch die Seele ging:

“Blümele! Du mußt ganz rechtschaffen, gut und fromm werden, denn Du bist jetzt die Einzige, auf die ich rechne. Versprich mir das.”³³³

Kompert makes stark the basic existential threat for which Blümele is the stopgap: She is the only remaining offspring who might guarantee Jacob a male descendant to say Kaddish for him. If Blümele were to die early like her brothers, the lineage of the family ends. This exchange with the doctor takes on the language of calculation and probability: First, the doctor rejects the father’s religiously and ethically charged request to swear (“schwören”) to him that his daughter is in good health. Rather, he insists that his scientific occupation gives him the evidence to suggest that Blümele will not reach the same fate as her brothers; this is clear not only from his

³³³ Kompert, “Die Jahrzeit,” 12–13.

observations, but also from the fact that she has already reached age seventeen while her brothers died before their bar mitzvahs. Blümele's well-being is understood only in relation to that of the brothers, and the mother Esther intuits the calculations that Jacob makes when he looks at their daughter. Jacob approaches Blümele as a venture on which he is speculating. He announces that he counts on her—using the formulation *auf jemanden rechnen*, which mirrors Esther's accusation that he is calculating (“rechne[t]”)—to guarantee the family's continued religious observance. Blümele's health, in and of itself, is not meaningful to Jacob. Rather, it is valuable insofar as it increases the probability that she will provide him with a grandson.

This interaction lays bare a clash between the economic and the sacred, a friction that governs the broader world of the text. Like Jossef and Madlena's family of “Eine Verlorene,” Blümele and her parents live in rural Bohemia during the nineteenth century. Threats to traditional Judaism existed in the context of increased secularization and the emergence of Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century were part of a larger confluence of changes that included rapid social and economic transformations. From the beginning of the eighteenth century until 1848, Jews in the Bohemian Lands were barred from changing their place of residence.³³⁴ With the removal of this ban in the mid-nineteenth century, Bohemian Jews suddenly attained greater geographic, and therefore economic, mobility. Many Jews from small villages, such as those of “Die Jahrzeit” or “Eine Verlorene,” were compelled to move to industrializing urban centers. In the backdrop of Jacob's negotiation with the doctor is Jewish migration away from predominantly agrarian Czech villages into largely German-speaking borderlands and larger cities, where Jews “became involved in industry and business, and thus

³³⁴ Kateřina Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews?: National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 61.

naturally became part of the local German middle and upper classes.”³³⁵ In contrast, those who remained in rural Czech-speaking areas continued to participate in local commerce and crafts connected to farming.³³⁶

The looming presence of the city—and the economic activity it entails—stands in contrast to the quiet, agrarian life of the Bohemian village and echoes the tensions of “Eine Verlorene.” In Kompert’s earlier work, Jossef spurns the cosmopolitan sensibilities of his son’s tutor, Julius Arnsteiner. Concurrently, he works to maintain his business as a merchant but ultimately becomes a farmer, working the local soil, as he reconciles with this sister and her Czech family. The conclusion of this text offers an anti-Bildung narrative, in which a cosmopolitan pursuit of self-exploration and self-formation is evaded in favor of one that celebrates a return to the land, one that is engaged with long-standing agrarian practices. “Die Jahrzeit” reintroduces a tension between the pressures of urbanization and the preservation of traditional ways. Jacob’s aspirations for his daughter articulate an ambivalence between these competing impulses: He makes explicit a desire to keep Blümele tied to their home in a rural village in the name of religious practice, but his machinations are cast in terms of calculation and production. The market-driven world surrounding their small village emerges in the father’s language as he attempts to salvage their customs; the death of his sons points to a fear that the death knells of traditional Judaism have arrived. In order to confront this threat, Jacob at one level operates with the tools of the market. Blümele is but a commodity for Jacob, one whose yield will enrich his future—with grandsons, he hopes. When his daughter marries a non-observant man and plans to leave, Jacob likens the loss of his daughter to the loss of a material

³³⁵ Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews?*, 63.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

possession: “Die Räuber müssen mir aus dem Hause, die Diebe, die mir meinen einzigen Kadisch gestohlen haben.”³³⁷ In this declaration, Blümele herself is no longer the commodity at stake. Rather, she and her betrothed are both cast as thieves who have stolen Jacob’s final opportunity for a male offspring to say Kaddish, which he formulates as an object that he can possess: “meinen einzigen Kadisch,” the German equivalent of the Yiddish formulation for the son who can say Kaddish for his parents.³³⁸ Blümele was, for Jacob, once a potentially profitable venture in his pursuit of “a Kaddish,” but her unsanctioned marriage pulls this investment from under Jacob’s feet.

For Jacob, Blümele exists in his world chiefly as a means of reproduction, since she may not herself say Kaddish for him. In the years after his sons’ deaths, Jacob tends to his daughter in the hopes that he might preserve her beauty and purity. He adorns her with finery and monitors whether she has behaved piously, inquiring: “‘Blümele, bist Du in dieser Woche auch recht fromm gewesen?’ worauf er, ohne die Antwort abzuwarten, ihr mit einer unerklärlichen Hast das glitzernde oder flatternde Angebinde zuschob.”³³⁹ This act becomes its own form of ritual between Jacob and his child: He recites weekly this question about his Blümele’s spiritual well-being, although he does not expect an response. Embedded in this ritual, though, is the exchange of material goods for the false promise of piety; Jacob attempts to use the material to achieve the spiritual.

³³⁷ Kompert, “Die Jahrzeit,” 42.

³³⁸ Hanoah Avenary and Rochelle L. Millen, “Kaddish,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 695–998, here 697. As is reflected in “Die Jahrzeit,” a man without a son is said to have died “without leaving a Kaddish.” Millen separately notes that in eastern European culture, a son was often referred to as “my little Kaddish.” See Millen, *Women, Birth, and Death in Jewish Law and Practice*, 117.

³³⁹ Kompert, “Die Jahrzeit,” 14–15

The futility of this act is evident when Blümele undermines her parents' wishes by falling for and marrying the non-observant Hungarian bookkeeper Jaques.³⁴⁰ Jacob already has plans to marry Blümele off to her cousin, Maier, a man so clumsy that the village tells of how "Maier war vierhändig geboren." While Jaques is tall, handsome, and skilled in dance, Jacob's selection for a bridegroom is the opposite in physical form: "An ihm war Alles klein [...] dafür hatten jedoch seine Arme eine Länge erlangt, die über alle Vorstellung ging. Sie waren so unförmlich lang, daß sie fast auf den Boden reichten."³⁴¹ Maier, the father's safe and sanctioned choice for Blümele, is presented as distorted and effete, much like the set of expectations he expects his daughter to fulfill. Blümele, instead, desires a partner who represents an inversion of her father's expectations: an evasion of Jewish ritual laws, a longing to move away from rural Bohemia, and a history of socializing with various women. After their wedding, Jaques moves with his new bride Blümele on the "die Straße, die gegen Prag führt," in order return to together his native Hungary.³⁴²

Jaques's name itself is the foreign counterpart to Blümele's father: the French form of "Jacob." The two male figures to whom Blümele orients herself stand in opposition to one another and concurrently operate along an internal set of tensions. While Jacob attempts to protect the spiritual in the language of the economic, Jaques presents a tension between the regional and the cosmopolitan, the particular and the universal. Jaques simultaneously expresses a desire for his "Heimat" in Hungary and a yearning for an unbounded community outside of their village.³⁴³ Jaques is at once a guardian of the national conception of homeland and the

³⁴⁰ Kompert, "Die Jahrzeit," 22.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

³⁴² Ibid., 46.

³⁴³ Ibid., 31.

figure who draws Blümele into the wider world and a desire for urban spaces. Blümele is enchanted by Jaques's descriptions of his home: "In Blümele's Gemüth fielen aber seine Worte wie glühende Funken [...] Das Wilde, Grenzenlose und Phantastische hob die Welt Blümele's aus den Angeln... die Verhältnisse, unter denen sie aufgewachsen war, schrumpften vor ihren Augen zusammen."³⁴⁴ Kompert at first offers little reference to Jaques's precise origins; he enters the narrative as an undefined, exotic figure who is able to activate Blümele's imagination for a life outside of the village. With no concrete point of reference, Blümele's conceives of an emancipated existence without limitations. Concurrently, the reader, too, has no concrete reference for what new life Jaques intends to introduce to his future bride. Jaques's storytelling allow Blümele a space in which to abandon the narrow set of possibilities for her life in Bohemia, where her sole *raison d'être* is to produce a son for her father's Kaddish. In her new vision, the power relations dictated by Jewish ritual and the restrictions governing her current world collapse so that she might be able to reconstruct them out of the grandiose material Jaques offers. Jaques articulates a desire for the particular—his homeland in Hungary—but at the same time ignites a curiosity about the universal for a Blümele, who has known nothing aside from her village and the rituals of Judaism. Jaques is to her a marker of a diverse and unfamiliar world.

Kompert often explores the lure of urban spaces in his works, as Wittemann writes: "Vielmehr ist sich der böhmische Autor der Faszination und Sogkraft der Großstadt, die wegen ihrer Tendenz zur Nivellierung religiöser und kultureller Unterschiede in der Fiktion das Synonym für 'Welt' darstellt, sehr bewußt."³⁴⁵ In this process of flattening religious and cultural differences, the city also disrupts the divisions internal to Judaism. Blümele imagines this

³⁴⁴ Kompert, "Die Jahrzeit," 31.

³⁴⁵ Wittemann, *Draußen vor dem Ghetto*, 261.

flattening of difference and a shifting of power differentials when she prepares to leave Bohemia. When Blümele abandons her rural home, the Jewish ritual and its gendered divisions risk erasure.

Cathy Gelbin and Sander Gilman together note that “virtually all commentators on Jews and cosmopolitanism stress this tension” between particularism and universalism.³⁴⁶ Questions of Jewish civic emancipation beginning in the Enlightenment are concerned with a reconciliation between universal ideals of freedom and the particular features of Judaism. The rise of the nation-state, the city, and of nationalism has positioned Jews in various conflicting categories—both as a nation and nation-less, both part of secular urbanization and distinctly religious. Gelbin and Gilman consider the ambivalent status of Jews after the rise of the nation-state. Here, “the Jews were tagged as representing the limits of autonomy and thus the national, and they began to understand themselves in these terms. [...] The Jews became cosmopolitan in all of its varieties as the world came to codify what the cosmopolitan could and could not be.”³⁴⁷ Drawing from Peter van der Veer, the authors note that the post-Enlightenment age demands that the cosmopolitan person trade religious tradition for secularism.³⁴⁸ Thus, the persistent association between Jews and cosmopolitanism, intensified in the late nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, is tied also to a movement toward secularization. This, in turn, is at a tension with the exclusion of Jews from social and political equality on the basis of religious difference. The Jewish experience, thus, “reflects the question of the space of alterity in the modern world,”

³⁴⁶ Cathy Gelbin and Sander Gilman, *Cosmopolitanisms and the Jews* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 6.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

where they exist along many “fragile and partial dichotomies [...] defined as religion, ethnicity, culture, or ‘race.’”³⁴⁹

Together, Jaques and Jacob reflect these fragile dichotomies. Jaques is not simply the universalist counterpart to Jacob’s particularity. Both characters exist at the intersecting commitments faced by Jews in nineteenth century. Jaques is a figure of multivalent anxieties, indicative of the various paths of European Jewry during this period—a move toward secularization and the alignment with various national movements. Jaques is problematic for Jacob not because he is a non-Jew. Rather, Jacob disapproves of Jaques as a non-observant Jew who flouts Jewish laws and practices. In contrast to Jenny or Madlena, Blümele does not transgress by falling in love with a Christian. Instead, she rebels by building a secular life with a Jew who “hat nichts auf die Religion gehalten.”³⁵⁰

Jaques represents both a nomadic impulse and a national loyalty; he both seeks out a world without borders and reinforces a conception of nation in line with the nineteenth-century proliferation of European nationalist movements. Jaques alludes to a future unconstrained by boundaries, a possibility that propels Blümele away from the certain restriction of life in her village, yet he at the same time professes his devotion to the nation of Hungary, an entity that is inherently characterized by constraints and exclusion. The foregrounding of Jaques’s Hungarian identity points to the variety of processes of Jewish emancipation and cultural change in nineteenth-century Europe. The modernization of Jewish cultural institutions was centered not only in Germany through the Reform Movement; the Jewish community in the Kingdom of Hungary, too, experienced intense internal conflict. By the 1860s, tensions between the reform-

³⁴⁹ Gelbin and Gilman, *Cosmopolitanisms and the Jews*, 8.

³⁵⁰ Kompert, “Die Jahrzeit,” 69.

minded Neologs—a faction in support of secular education and integration into wider Hungarian society—and the Orthodox became particularly acute, culminating in a schism in 1869.³⁵¹

Integration into non-Jewish society had different meanings across Europe. In the Hungarian case, as Mari Réthelyi explains, Jews seeking acceptance into the surrounding culture and its corresponding national movement also took up some of the language and premises of this nationalist discourse.³⁵² Neolog Hungarian Jews took their cues from German positive historical Judaism and *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in order to argue for their position in Hungarian society. According to Réthelyi, the Neolog movement ultimately “incorporated Magyar mythmaking” into their theories of ethnic origins and capitalized on the “Oriental orientation of Hungarian nationalist discourse” by drawing historical connections between Jews and Hungarians.³⁵³ Jaques’s invocation of his Hungarian origins gestures toward a growing movement that attempted to embed Jewish narrative within the Hungarian national mythos. Kompert depicts the shortcomings of this mode of Jewish belonging in Jaques, part of the author’s own writing that saw Jewish literature as part and parcel of a more expansive German

³⁵¹ Ferenc Laczó, “Jewish Questions and the Contested Nation: On the Major Hungarian Debates of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 13, no. 3 (2014): 422–41, here 431.

³⁵² Mari Réthelyi, “The Racial Option in Modern Jewish Thought: The Case of the Hungarian Jews,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12, no. 1 (2013): 17–34.

³⁵³ Réthelyi, “The Racial Option in Modern Jewish Thought,” 18. Neolog Judaism began with the arrival of reform-minded Jews from German-speaking lands, such as Prussia and Moravia, who sought economic mobility and religious freedom. The term “Neolog” first appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century, including in the writings of German Orthodox rabbi Samuel R. Hirsch. In the years following the publication of “Die Jahrzeit,” intellectuals of the Neolog movement wrote increasingly on the ethnic affinities between Jews and Hungarians. Réthelyi writes more on their attempt to argue that “Hungarian history showed that Neolog Jews had much closer ties to non-Jewish Hungarians than to German Reform movements, and they claimed a previous parallel relationship between Magyars and Jews that stemmed from their origins in the same long-lost tribe” (72) in Mari Réthelyi, “Hungarian Nationalism and the Origins of Neolog Judaism,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 18, no. 2 (2014): 67–82.

culture: Jaques abandons traditional Judaism for Hungarian nationalism but ultimately only oscillates between this commitment and an itinerant, and fruitless, opportunism.

This tension comes to a head when the two begin their lives together in Hungary: The “Vaterstadt” that Jaques idealizes is no urban center, but rather a settlement that could be called “ein großes Dorf” situated in the middle of the outstretched Pannonian steppe.³⁵⁴ The promise of a borderless utopia falls flat as Blümele discovers that she has moved from one set of limitations to another, not only for the smallness of her new home, but also for the exacerbation of notions of difference. In their new Hungarian home, Jaques continues to belittle his wife and maintain their national differences:

Er schalt sie eine “Böhmin,” der die kleinlichen Begriffe und Vorstellungen als Erbtheil ihrer Landsleute mitgefolgt seien. Sie möge aber nicht vergessen, daß sie nicht mehr in Böhmen lebe; die Welt wäre ein unausstehlicher Aufenthalt, wenn lauter Böhmen darin wohnten. Darum sei Ungarn geschaffen worden. [...] Jaques nannte “böhmisch” was seinem hochfahrenden Sinne und seiner alles Kleinliche verachtenden Sorglosigkeit in den Weg lief. [...] Statt seiner “Geschäfte” sich anzunehmen, brachte er die meiste Zeit außer dem Hause zu, meist in Gesellschaft ungarischer Edelleute, mit denen er spielte, ritt und auf die Jagd fuhr. Jetzt erst schien seine innerste, nur durch Geburt und Verhältnisse anders bestimmte Natur den eigentlichen Boden gefunden zu haben, worin sie gedeihen konnte. Jaques war kein Kaufmann—er war ein geborener Edelmann!³⁵⁵

By following her new husband to his home, Blümele trades one set of restrictions for another. Divisions of gender determine her life in Bohemia, but her new life with Jaques introduces a new system of constraints. Here, she is prisoner to nationally charged judgments from her husband when Jaques positions Hungary, a national entity, as superior to the region of Bohemia, equating this space with provinciality and small-mindedness. These claims, in turn, imagine a world built on biological notions of essential difference, ones that liken Jaques to a plant who is able to flourish when rooted in his proper soil. His proclivity for associating with the nobility, though,

³⁵⁴ Kompert, “Die Jahrzeit,” 62.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 63–64.

stands in contrast to the land- and soil-oriented conclusion of “Eine Verlorene.” Rather than trading work as a merchant for a modest life working the land, Jaques instead reveals himself to be a fortune-seeking *Glücksritter* figure who chases a life of opulence and recreational hunting.

The formulation that Jaques possesses a certain “Natur” and that he is a “geborener Edelmann” becomes ironic in the context of his trajectory through the narrative: He is decidedly changeable and unreliable, a contradiction between his national commitment and his recurring desire for a new home. His assertion of national or regional difference and claim that Hungary is a gift to the world are also coupled with a peripatetic impulse. While he defends the singularity of his homeland, he also continuously seeks new spaces. A longing to leave Bohemia for his Hungarian home gives way to a desire to leave their home for life among the aristocracy. After he tires of this, Jaques abandons Blümele to journey to California via Liverpool, where he ultimately dies, a reversal of Kompert’s previous vision of American prosperity. Jaques’s deception toward Blümele, his cruel treatment of her, and his own tragic end illustrate the precariousness of both a nationalist discourse and a secular, cosmopolitan turn.

The latter affinity—for the wider, secular world—are the greatest threat to Jacob, who demands the maintenance of Jewish ritual at all costs. Blümele’s return offers a conservative response to a secular project and reinforces the durability of both the Jewish family and Jewish learning. This durability, though, is contingent upon the completion of a ritual that demands a restoration of traditional gender roles. Upon learning of her mother’s death, Blümele returns with her son to her family’s village and re-encounters the clumsy cousin Maier. Blümele admits that her son does not read Hebrew nor is he familiar with Jewish prayers. In order to initiate the family’s reunion, Maier insists on beginning the son’s religious education:

“Ich will der Lehrer Deines Kindes sein!” sagte er.
Blümele sah zu ihm auf und verstand ihn nicht.

“Was willst Du mit dem Kinde?” fragte sie.
“Ich will ihn das ‘Kadischgebet’ lehren!...”

Wie Maier dies begonnen, welche Lehr- und Lernkünste er anwandte, um dem Knaben die unverständlichen, nie gehörten fremdartigen Laute der heiligen Sprache in’s Gedächtnis zu prägen, wie er vor Allem das Kind dazu brachte, daß es ruhig auf seinem Schooße aushielt und stundenlang dasjenige nachsprach, was er ihm vorsagte, ja nicht müde ward, zu begehren, daß er fortfahre... [...]

Maiers Lehrtalent war wie eine jener Wunderblumen, die über Nacht ihre ganze Herrlichkeit entfaltet. [...]

Als Blümele am Abende ihren Knaben zu Bette brachte, sprach er unaufgefordert das ganze Kadischgebet von Anfang bis zum Ende, ohne den geringsten Anstoß zu begehren.³⁵⁶

Although Blümele’s son has no religious upbringing, it is nonetheless incumbent upon him to fulfill the ritual duties of his family. This passage celebrates the endurance of Jewish ritual and holy texts, which are able to transcend rupture and span generations. In this passage, Maier swiftly transforms into both a *melamed* (religious teacher) and a father figure while Blümele’s son miraculously assimilates his teachings by memory in a day. His learning takes place through rote memorization, yet the scene between the son and his soon-to-be stepfather is portrayed as a tender scene of paternal bonding as he sits on Maier’s lap. Words that, to a child only exposed to the secular world, begin as alienating and incomprehensible quickly become intuitive, akin to the many rituals structuring the rest of Jewish daily life. This scene of Jewish learning invokes a vision of Judaism as a religion defined by a “living script,” passed down over generations by oral rabbinic teaching. In his 1783 *Jerusalem*, Moses Mendelssohn rejected Protestant critiques that his religion was of “the dead letter” by articulating how Judaism’s tradition of oral transmission “infused the practice of the law with spirit and vitality.”³⁵⁷ Through their access to holy texts,

³⁵⁶ Kompert, “Die Jarhzeit,” 69–70.

³⁵⁷ Micah Gottlieb, “Oral Letter and Written Trace: Samson Raphael Hirsch’s Defense of the Bible and Talmud,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 106, no. 3 (2016): 316–351, here 321. For Mendelssohn’s treatise and discussion of “eine lebendige [...] Art von Schrift” (169), see: Moses Mendelssohn, “Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judenthum,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, vol. 8 (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1983), 99–204.

only male figures are given the opportunity to perpetuate this “spirit and vitality” and pass down the laws governing Jewish life.

The conclusion of “Die Jahrzeit,” like “Eine Verlorene,” looks inward within the Jewish family to resolve its central tension. Blümele attempts to escape her family yet ultimately returns not only to her parents, but also to the cousin Maier, whose fate as her spouse was ordained by the father years before. Maier solves Jacob’s loss of a male descendant who can say Kaddish first by teaching Blümele’s young son and later by fathering another eight grandchildren with her. Unlike much of Kompert’s other work, though, “Die Jahrzeit” does not entertain the possibilities of intermarriage or validate the resilience of the Jewish family through cultural change. Madlena of “Eine Verlorene” reconciles with her family but does not forfeit her new life among Christians; she remains firmly part of a new community while also convening—and finding peace—with her Jewish heritage. Blümele, by contrast, is completely disillusioned by a secular life and the capricious, unmoored attitudes of her first husband. She abandons this choice and re-embraces her former home wholesale, where the solution to her tragic life abroad exists in a resumption of her father’s wishes. Blümele’s marriage to her own cousin also echoes *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, in which the daughter marries her uncle. This was not anomalous at the time, but the literary pairing of the daughter with her cousin also offers a vision of a Jewish future that becomes more insular rather than reaching outward to expand and redefine Jewish life in modernity.

IV. Conclusion

Kompert’s stories together share a common dedication to the particularity of the rural Bohemian village in conceiving of the future of the Jewish family. In “Eine Verlorene,” Madlena converts

to Christianity, yet she remains in the same village and compels her brother to join her in working the land. Blümele never leaves her religion, yet her greatest transgression occurs when she leaves Bohemia; the family is once again made whole and grows when she returns to her original home. The Bohemian village and an orientation to its land operate as the idealized space in which to imagine both the remaking and continuity of Jewish life. The conclusion of “Eine Verlorene” envisions a world in which Christians and Jews, both in the same village and within the same family, are able to cooperate, while the Bohemian home of “Die Jahrzeit” functions as an anchoring point in which Jewish ritual can be sustained despite the interruptions of modernity.

The conclusion of “Eine Verlorene” marks not only a move toward religious tolerance but also a reversal in attitudes toward agricultural labor and a tie to the land.³⁵⁸ Jossef’s choice to work the land instead of working as a peddler is a stark shift from his initial assessment of his sister’s double transgression, both as a convert and a peasant, someone who had “in bäuerliche Rohheit versunken, erniedrigt, weit unter ihrem Stande” and “ihre Sitten verläugnet.”³⁵⁹ Jossef’s new vocation is, at first glance, illustrative of kind of Jewish unification with their Christian neighbors as they work their adjacent fields. But his move to the land and manual labor—a theme that recurs in Kompert’s work, such as “Am Pflug” (1855)—also evokes the attitudes espoused by Dohm, who in *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* encourages Jews to take-up farming, craftsmanship, and military service as avenues of civic improvement and also

³⁵⁸ It should also be noted that in the 1780s, Joseph II introduced several reforms that both expanded and restricted Jewish rights in the Habsburg Empire. In the edict of October 18, 1781, introduced more education for Jews in Bohemia and also encouraged poor Jews to become farmers. See David J. Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History Across Five Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 67.

³⁵⁹ Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” 118.

anticipates some of the ideals of *Muskeljudentum* and Zionist labor principles that sought to regenerate the individual Jewish body as part of strengthening the Jewish body politic.³⁶⁰

This discourse of self-sufficiency and regeneration is part of why Kompert's work falls short of offering a utopic vision of Christian-Jewish relations. In both stories, the conflict is resolved within the Jewish family. The productive interaction between Christianity and Judaism in "Eine Verlorene" is not a dialogue but rather a one-sided conversation, wholly conducted by Jossef and Madlena's family, and the resolution of intolerance—including the defense of Catholic practices—remain the burden of Jewish actors. The result, then, is a more expansive conception of the Jewish family. "Die Jahrzeit" also finds answers within the Jewish family in responding to its threat but instead constrains its vision of the future by relying on an intrafamilial solution. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, these questions of self-improvement, regeneration, and self-determination would take on greater meaning in various strains of Jewish nationalism, but they also persisted in the genre of ghetto fiction that Kompert inaugurated.³⁶¹ The Galician-born writer Karl Emil Franzos (1847–1904) would also adopt the peripheral Jewish community as the centerpiece of his storytelling and promote, above all, *Bildung* as a means of Jewish self-improvement. The next chapter will explore how Franzos's gaze toward rural Jewish life marks a shift from the nostalgic to the cautionary.

³⁶⁰ On the origins and development of *Muskeljudentum*, a term originally coined by the Zionist Max Nordau (1849–1923), see: Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (London: Routledge, 2007). In the introduction, Presner cites Dohm and Moses Hess (1812–1875) as antecedents of this discourse on "Jewish regeneration" (1). On the turn to agricultural work and craftsmanship in Kompert's fiction, see Wittemann, *Draußen vor dem Ghetto*, 218–229.

³⁶¹ See Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem*, and in particular his consideration of Leon Pinsker's 1882 pamphlet *Autoemancipation!* in Ch. 2.

CHAPTER 4: *Lesesucht* and *halbe Bildung* in Karl Emil Franzos's Ghetto Fiction

I. Introduction

As Kompert's career came to a close, Karl Emil Franzos took on the mantle as the German writer of the central and eastern European Jewish ghetto. Born in 1847 in the city of Czortków in Galician Podolia (present-day Ukraine), Franzos, like Kompert, strongly identified with German nationalism but took on a decidedly different tack in his fictional works.³⁶² The author distanced himself—a self-proclaimed promoter of German *Bildung*—from the world of eastern European Jewry and often used the eastern European setting as a foil to a German Jewry steeped in enlightened culture. In contrast to Kompert, who presented a nostalgic image of the rural Jewish village, Franzos did not idealize the traditional Jewish world nor share his nostalgic warmth. Hess notes that in Franzos's obituary for Kompert, he even “managed to smuggle in a complaint about his [Kompert's] precursor's predilection for seeing premodern Jewish life through rose-colored glasses.”³⁶³

³⁶² Anna-Dorothea Ludewig, *Zwischen Czernowitz und Berlin: Deutsch-jüdische Identitätskonstruktionen im Leben und Werk von Karl Emil Franzos (1847–1904)* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2008), 159.

The date of Franzos's birth is disputed. In his own writing, he states that his birthday is October 28, 1848, but his personal documents (such as passports) list July 25, 1847. It is unclear whether Franzos revised his birthdate or several bureaucratic mistakes were made. Ludewig notes, though, that the revolutionary year of 1848 was a key feature of Franzos's “Selbstverortung” (32). Franzos also offers differing descriptions of his birthplace: In one letter, he reports that he was born in a forester's lodge “dicht an der russischen Grenze,” but in the forward to *Der Pojaz* he writes that he was born in such a house “dicht an der österreichischen Grenze” (31–33). At the time of his birth, Czortków was part of the Austrian Empire, but the latter description implies that he was born outside of the Austrian realm. Both of Franzos's narratives, though, help construct the mythos of his origins as a Jew born to a German father in the eastern provinces, part of a “zielgerichtete Biographie” (33).

³⁶³ Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*, 108.

Franzos also publicly engaged with the work of Aaron Bernstein, another prominent author of ghetto fiction (known for the novellas *Vögele der Maggid* [1857] and *Mendel Gibbor* [1859]) and contemporary of Kompert. Franzos's serialized essay “Ueber A. Bernstein” (1895) for the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* brings into relief the stark contrast between their orientations toward fictionalizing traditional Jewish life, a world that Franzos considered

Franzos's literary oeuvre is characterized by a simultaneous fascination with and aversion to religious Jewish life on the peripheries of the Habsburg lands. He is best known for his anthropological gaze toward eastern Europe and the world of traditional Judaism, although he himself hailed from the farthest eastern reaches of the Austrian Empire. Franzos was the son of a physician of Sephardic origin who rejected traditional Judaism and embraced German education and the ideals of the Enlightenment. After his father's death, Franzos moved with his family to Czernowitz, the capital of the historic region of Bukovina (in present-day Ukraine and Romania), where he was educated at a German *Gymnasium*.³⁶⁴ He went on to study law in Vienna and Graz, but he ultimately turned to writing and made a career first in Vienna and then in Berlin.

Franzos hardly holds a position in the German canon and is best known today for his publication of the first edition of Georg Büchner's unfinished play *Woyzeck* in 1875 for *Die Neue Freie Presse*.³⁶⁵ This contribution, though, is often overshadowed by Franzos's misspelling of the titular character as "Wozzeck." But Franzos was also a well-regarded fiction writer in his day, publishing popular works such as *Aus Halb-Asien* (1876), *Die Juden von Barnow* (1877), and *Der Pojaz* (completed in 1893 but published posthumously in 1905) about Jewish life in the rural regions in which he grew up. Franzos in part adopts Kompert's mode of storytelling while also taking a pseudo-ethnographic approach. In his writing, he "identifies eastern Europe as a culture only half-civilized, and by establishing himself as a mediator between his eastern origins and European civilization, Franzos situates himself as an authority on both worlds but at home in

backward and that Leopold and Bernstein treated sympathetically. On Franzos's critique, see also: Jeffrey Grossman, "From Shtetl to Ghetto: Recognizing Yiddish in the 'Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judentums,'" *Naharaim* 10, no. 2 (2016): 215–44.

³⁶⁴ Leo W. Riegert, "Subjects and Agents of Empire: German Jews in the Post-Colonial Perspective," *The German Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2009): 336–55, here 343.

³⁶⁵ David G. Richards, *Georg Büchner's Woyzeck: A History of Its Criticism* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), 2.

neither.”³⁶⁶ Despite his steadfast identification with German language and *Bildung*, Franzos nonetheless occupied an ambivalent political and social space that belonged neither to the Prussian Empire nor to the communities on the peripheries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that he describes in his stories.

A wealth of historical and literary scholarship explores Franzos’s role in shaping questions of German Jewish culture in the nineteenth century and in constructing the archetype of the Ostjude in opposition to the western, assimilated Jew.³⁶⁷ Franzos is considered one of the key figures in the genre of ghetto fiction, among authors such as Kompert, Aron Bernstein (1812–84), and Salomon Kohn (1825–1904).³⁶⁸ Franzos is set apart from these writers by his almost militant approach to the promotion of German language and culture. Central to a consideration of Franzos, then, is a definition of German belonging and an assessment of his usage of the term *deutsch**. Anne-Dorothea Ludewig offers one of the most comprehensive analyses of Franzos’s life and writing and utilizes M. Rainer Lepsius’s differentiation between *Volksnation*, *Kulturnation*, and *Staatsnation* to distinguish what form of *Deutschtum* governed Franzos’s literary-ideological project. Ludewig argues that the author was not focused on the political features of Germanness contained in the concept of *Staatsnation*; the notion of a *Volksnation* was also of less interest to Franzos, not least because this framework became

³⁶⁶ Marc Caplan, “Woyzeck or Wozzeck? Karl Emil Franzos and the Border Lines between Eastern Europe and German Culture,” *Jewish Social Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019): 128–54, here 131.

³⁶⁷ Steven Aschheim’s foundational work on the construction of the Ostjude also offers an in-depth look at Franzos’s role in this process in Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*. For more on the construction of Galicia in the German cultural imagination, see: Larry Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

³⁶⁸ A wealth of literary scholarship looks at the construction of an East-West divide in Franzos’s works. See Caplan and Riegert as well as: Mark Gelber, “Ethnic Pluralism and Germanization in the Works of Karl Emil Franzos (1848–1904),” *The German Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (1983): 376–85; Paula Giersch, *Für die Juden, gegen den Osten?: Umcodierungen im Werk Karl Emil Franzos’ (1848–1904)* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2014); Grossman, “From Shtetl to Ghetto.”

increasingly problematic for German Jews by the end of the nineteenth century.³⁶⁹ Rather, Franzos was deeply invested in the world of German literature, art, and customs making up a

Kulturnation:

Vielmehr wird Franzos von dem Glauben an eine deutsche “KulturNation” geleitet, deren transnationaler Einfluss sich segensreich auf Europa auswirken könnte. Diese “Überhöhung der deutschen KulturNation” als identitätskonstituierender Moment ist ebenfalls eine Besonderheit des deutsch-jüdischen Emanzipationsprozesses und resultiert nicht zuletzt aus der Kleinstaaterei, durch die auf diese Weise, ein “moderner dezidiert bürgerlicher Orientierungsrahmen” entstehen konnte. [...] [D]iese “Überhöhung der deutschen KulturNation” [ist] eines der Leitmotive des Franzos’schen Lebens und Werkes.³⁷⁰

Ludewig here highlights what Franzos scholarship more broadly identifies as the dual function of the author’s exaltation of the German *KulturNation*: first, to promote German cultural forms across geographic and political boundaries as part of Austrian intra-European imperialism; and second, to constitute an approach of bourgeois respectability to questions of Jewish emancipation. Franzos lived in Vienna and Berlin during his professional life and acted—as Leo Riegert puts it—as both subject and agent of empire, both Austrian and Prussian.³⁷¹ In his article on this tension, Riegert examines how Franzos participates in a hegemonic discourse of German cultural superiority while contending with his own position of marginalization as a Jew from Galicia. Franzos spent most of his life in cities and was a member of elite literary circles, yet he still occupied an “in-between status” that made him a “marginal figure” in German history and literary criticism.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Ludewig, *Zwischen Czernowitz und Berlin*, 18–19. Ludewig also notes that Franzos made a brief attempt to attain German *Staatsbürgerschaft* in 1893. Based on his correspondence with the privy councilor and lawyer August von Simson, it is unclear whether he was denied citizenship.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁷¹ Riegert, “Subjects and Agents of Empire,” 342.

³⁷² *Ibid.*

The fragmentary nature of the German and Austrian geopolitical entities paved the way for Franzos's commitment to an expansive German *Kulturnation* as opposed to a geographically constrained interest in the nation-state. The borderless nature of the *Kulturnation*, which Ludewig refers to as its "transnationaler Einfluss," was a central feature of Franzos's participation in a civilizing, culturally homogenizing project, but the inherent flexibility of his political loyalty constituted an experience of limbo between political and cultural entities. As a student, Franzos was involved in German nationalist *Burschenschaften* and promoted a *großdeutsch* answer to questions of German unity. As it became clear that this solution was not viable, Franzos abandoned this ideal but did not waver in his affinity for German culture.³⁷³ Riegert draws from Franzos's correspondence between Vienna and Berlin and contends that Franzos "saw himself as both Austrian and German, and could almost spontaneously switch affinities."³⁷⁴

The theme of liminality and the "in-between" in Franzos's own life carries through into his fictional work. His literary career was largely built on a notion of eastern Europe as only half-civilized and on his promotion of German-language literature and cultural ideals. The author is perhaps best known for his collection of stories *Aus Halb-Asien: Kulturbilder aus Galizien, der Bukowina, Südrußland und Rumänien* (1876) in which he articulates this perception of partial civility.³⁷⁵ His signature coinage "Halb-Asien" refers to—what Franzos contends are—the regions located between the enlightened, cultured western world and the exotic, uncivilized lands of Asia. The concept of eastern Europe was, according to Larry Wolff, largely an invention of

³⁷³ Riegert, "Subjects and Agents of Empire," 340.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 341.

³⁷⁵ This text became part of a *Halb-Asien* trilogy, accompanied by *Vom Donau zur Donau* (1878) and *Aus der großen Ebene* (1888).

the Enlightenment: a space that was both adjacent to Enlightenment culture and an object of Orientalism.³⁷⁶ By naming this swath of Europe “half Asia,” Franzos characterized the area as halfway between his beloved “gebildete Europa” and the “öde Steppe [...] durch welche der asiatische Nomade zieht.”³⁷⁷ In the introduction to *Aus Halb-Asien*, Franzos articulates how “Halb-Asien” refers not only to the geographic position of the regions between western Europe and Asia:

[A]uch in den politischen und socialen Verhältnissen dieser Länder begegnen sich seltsam europäische Bildung und asiatische Barbarei, europäisches Vorwärtsstreben und asiatische Indolenz, europäische Humanität [...] Die Schale, die Form sind in jenen Ländern vielfach dem Westen entlehnt; der Kern, der Geist sind vielfach autochthon und barbarisch.³⁷⁸

Franzos finds in his homeland of Bukovina and its neighbors features of both the *Leitkultur* with which he aligns himself as well as a purportedly unfamiliar culture that is, by virtue of diverging from Enlightenment values, primitive.³⁷⁹ Eastern Europe is “half Asia,” but its complementary half is the Europe with which Franzos identifies; an alternate title to this collection may as well have been *Halb-Europa*. Just as Franzos is concerned with eastern Europe’s partial positioning in Asia, so too is he concerned with the foothold it maintains in his conception of an ideal Europe. This tension is precisely what both repels and attracts the writer.

The geographic and socio-cultural concept of eastern Europe and its distinction from the remainder of the continent are notions embedded in Franzos’s work. As a writer of ghetto fiction,

³⁷⁶ Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia*, 242–43.

³⁷⁷ Karl Emil Franzos, *Aus Halb-Asien: Culturbilder aus Galizen, der Bukowina, Südrußland und Rumänien* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1876), III.

³⁷⁸ Franzos, *Aus Halb-Asien*, III–IV.

³⁷⁹ I refer to the culture of Bukovina as purportedly unfamiliar because, by virtue of growing up in this region, Franzos was likely quite familiar with it. Franzos worked diligently to construct distance between himself and his region of origin.

Franzos is invested in the continual negotiation of borders between the shtetl, associated with eastern Europe, and the outside world. Petra Ernst writes:

Insofern repräsentiert das erzählte Ghetto, Shtetl oder Dorf selbst vor dem Hintergrund der dargestellten Konflikte einen Raum der Herkunft, der Familie, der Religiosität, der Gemeinschaft und der Tradition und avanciert mithin zu einer Sinn stiftenden Institution kollektiven Zusammenlebens. Nichtsdestoweniger wird als seine zentrale immanente topographische Kategorie die Grenze aufgefasst [...]. Die Grenze kann sich verschieben, sie kann sich öffnen und wieder geschlossen werden; niemals aber kann sie zur Gänze verschwinden. Denn mit dem Verschwinden der Grenze würde das Ghetto, das Shtetl, das Dorf al erzählter Raum aufhören zu existieren.³⁸⁰

The shtetl thus serves as a productive space onto which Franzos is able to project an ambivalent understanding of Jewish difference and its relationship to German culture. Much as the boundaries between shtetl and the outside world shift, so too is the role of Jewish family and tradition fluid in the modern world. Most notably, though, the borders between the Jewish community and the outside world are constructs of fiction, configurations that Franzos exploits in order to intensify the contrast between Jewish life and the secular world in his campaign for educational and cultural reform.

Franzos's answer to the woes of eastern European society was cultural, not political, much as his conception of *Deutschtum* was about culture rather than the state.³⁸¹ He perceived *Bildung* as the antidote to eastern backwardness—for Jews and non-Jews alike—and considered the German nation “selbstlose Vorkämpfer der Bildung und der Menschlichkeit.”³⁸² Franzos positions himself as one of these pioneers, one who can rescue these regions from their social and cultural condition in another example of a program of self-improvement. Franzos's fixation with the in-between status of eastern Europe governs his conception of Galician Jewry and, in

³⁸⁰ Ernst, *Shtetl, Stadt, Staat*, 96.

³⁸¹ Grossman, *The Discourse on Yiddish*, 200.

³⁸² Franzos, *Aus Halb-Asien*, IX.

particular, the potential limitations of Jews to align with his vision for an adoption of higher culture. In “Der Shylock von Barnow”—the opening tale of his subsequently published collection of short stories, *Die Juden von Barnow* (1877)—Franzos returns to a fictional town featured in *Aus Halb-Asien* and warns against the dangers of a denial of secular education by staging the ill-fated space of liminality between illiteracy and a complete embrace of *Bildung*. In this text, the pursuit of reading takes shape in the form of *Lesesucht*, a pathological desire to read for pleasure that, beginning in the eighteenth century, was critiqued as a behavior counter to the Enlightenment project. In showing a pathological mode of reading, Franzos traces a treacherous path toward and leading from “halbe Bildung,” a condition cast as more dangerous than ignorance. This in-between state of education is analogous to the geographic, cultural, and social in-between status of eastern Europe that characterizes his larger project.

II. The Daughter in the Precarious In-Between

Franzos’s story “Der Shylock von Barnow” once again takes up the Jewish daughter as a central figure in negotiating the conflicts between traditional Jewish life and the secular world. Like in Lewald’s *Jenny*, reading is the gateway through which the Jewish daughter attempts to separate herself from the strictures of tradition; this pursuit also propels her ultimate rebellion from the family when she falls in love with a Christian man to disastrous ends. “Shylock,” however, depicts another form of literary undoing. Unlike in *Jenny*, reading is not a space of deepened engagement with the tools of *Bildung* and its entrenchment. Instead, a certain mode of reading and reading material characterize a compulsive act, one that leads not to a greater apprehension of the surrounding world, but rather to a turn inward. The daughter’s indiscriminate reading in “Shylock” ultimately shares in common with *Jenny* the mechanism of undoing; in both works,

the unrestrained embrace of literature treads a path toward social exclusion and suffering. The fatality of unsanctioned reading in both works is determined along lines of gender: It is the daughter whose unrestrained reading expels her from both the traditional home and a new social realm.

Franzos approaches the world of Galician Jewry as a doctor who can offer the cure to the ails of eastern European society; his primary therapeutic tools are *Bildung* and the world of German letters. When his recommendation of secular culture is not heeded (in this text, by the titular figure), the adverse reaction—the punishment found in a cautionary tale—is *Lesesucht* and the comorbid *halbe Bildung*, a condition that, according to “Shylock,” is worse than the primary illness. Previous scholarship on this work explore the tensions between the traditional, patriarchal world and the opening into “Aufklärung und Bildung.”³⁸³ Paula Giersch, too, identifies that *Lesesucht* leads the daughter toward the secular, enlightened world but ultimately offers her false images of love and causes her undoing.³⁸⁴ This chapter builds on this research by examining the significance of pathological reading—*Lesesucht* or *Lesewut*—in relation to the perennial Franzosian concern with liminality and hybridity. In the case of “Shylock,” unconstrained reading is a feature of *halbe Bildung*, a dangerous space between the two poles of the Franzosian cultural imagination. I argue that the portrayal of this form of partial education acts as an indictment of the eastern European cultural condition that Franzos critiques while at the same time invoking an anxiety toward the attainment of a certain mode of modern bourgeois respectability and of a perceived German cultural ideal. A liaison between the traditional and secular world—Franzos’s so-called “Orient” and the modern world—the Jewish daughter

³⁸³ Ludewig, *Zwischen Czernowitz und Berlin*, 141.

³⁸⁴ Giersch, *Für die Juden, gegen den Osten?*, 340.

operates in a liminal space and thus disrupts the social constraints of either category. The condemnation of the daughter's romantic and intellectual life foregrounds a nineteenth-century Realist impulse toward containment, a literary operation that involves processes of both "enclosure (that which preserves, collects, or limits)" and "control (in the sense of discipline or mastery)."³⁸⁵ This operation often "appears as a symptom of crisis in a period of historical change and aesthetic innovation."³⁸⁶ In what follows, I consider how the overlaying of the daughter's intellectual and erotic desire—in the form of reading—triggers a drive toward containing the social disruption she represents.

III. "Der Shylock von Barnow"

"Shylock" was originally written in 1873 before it was published in *Die Juden von Barnow*. The collection enjoyed widespread success, generating several new editions already in the decade following its initial publication. Like Kompert, Franzos enjoyed a readership far beyond a German Jewish audience. *Die Juden von Barnow* also quickly received attention outside the German-speaking world and by 1905—the year of the publication of the seventh German edition—was translated into a variety of languages such as Dutch, Danish, English, French, Hebrew, Hungarian, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Swedish, Spanish, and Yiddish.³⁸⁷ Franzos's indebtedness to Kompert is not only implicit in his work; the opening pages of *Die Juden von Barnow* feature an explicit dedication to the father of ghetto literature.

³⁸⁵ Dania Hückmann, "Containment in Realism," *The Germanic Review* 90 (2015): 153–55.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁸⁷ Karl Emil Franzos, *Die Juden von Barnow*, 7th ed. (Stuttgart and Berlin: Cotta, 1905).

Each story in the collection is set in the fictional Barnow, a town in eastern Galicia between Skala and Lemberg that likely draws upon Franzos's own birthplace.³⁸⁸ The first text in *Die Juden von Barnow* is the tragic tale of "Der Shylock von Barnow," in which the eponymous figure loses his daughter both to a secular education and to a Christian love interest. The story's "Shylock" is Moses Freudenthal, a prominent religious and economic figure in the town of Barnow. Moses is considered "einer der frömmsten und ehrlichsten Männer der Judenschaft" and is also very wealthy, serving a variety of roles such as lottery collector, merchant, and landlord.³⁸⁹ In telling the fate of Moses and his daughter, the narrative shifts temporal perspectives and focalization, describing the wider town of Barnow, Moses's past, and the local Frau Bezirksrichter's account of Moses and his daughter.

At age seventeen, Moses marries "Chaim Grünstein's Rösele," a young woman chosen by his father.³⁹⁰ Rösele dies in childbirth and Moses must raise their daughter Esther alone. The father dotes upon her and arranges for an education "in der althergebrachten Weise" so that Esther learns to cook, pray, and do basic arithmetic.³⁹¹ In this way, Moses asserts, "so wußte sie genug für das Haus, für den Himmel und für das Leben."³⁹² Esther's uncle Schlome, Rösele's brother whom Moses pejoratively refers to as a "Meschumed" (a Jew who has been baptized), also dotes upon Esther and wants to have a hand in her education. Schlome has not actually been baptized, but the pious Moses considers Schlome's interest in both secular and Christian texts

³⁸⁸ Ludewig, *Zwischen Czernowitz und Berlin*, 132.

³⁸⁹ Karl Emil Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," in *Die Juden von Barnow*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Eduard Hallberger, 1878), 4.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

comparable to conversion. During his youth, the uncle convinced the local Christian schoolmaster to teach him “heimlich, in späten Nachtstunden, das verbotene, verhaßte Hochdeutsch [...] und die ‘Christenweisheit.’”³⁹³ Despite their conflicting views on education, Schlome convinces his brother-in-law to serve as Esther’s teacher. Esther absorbs her uncle’s “verzehrende Sehnsucht nach Wissen und Erkenntnis,” reading and learning voraciously until her father confiscates her books.³⁹⁴

Frau Bezirksrichter continues Moses and Esther’s story to an audience of guests in her home, insisting that she took pity on Esther, who begged for access to books, and even arranged for her access to a lending library in Tarnopol. Later, Moses betroths his daughter to Moschko Fränkel of Czortków, and Esther falls ill. In reaction to the unwelcome betrothal, her attentions turn to the Hungarian Rittermeister Graf Géza Szapany of the Württemberg-Husaren. Soon, the beautiful Esther disappears with her new suitor. Moses sits shiva and mourns his daughter as if she had passed away—even lowering an empty casket into the ground. After a week of grief, though, Moses proceeds with his usual business. Frau Bezirksrichter’s audience balks at Moses seeming heartlessness, and one guest announces that “wir nennen den Freudenthal von heute ab nicht mehr bei seinem Namen, sondern [...] ‘den Shylock von Barnow.’”³⁹⁵

The story returns to the omniscient narrator and tells of Esther’s fate. One night on the Sabbath, Esther’s body is found on Moses’s doorstep, “ein ärmlich gekleidetes, abgezehrt, junges Weib.”³⁹⁶ Moses buries her actual body the next day, “wo man die Selbstmörder begräbt,”

³⁹³ Franzos, “Der Shylock von Barnow,” 24.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 48–49.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 53.

unaware of whether she had converted.³⁹⁷ The only evidence of her life in the preceding years is found in a packet of letters from her lover Géza, who ultimately rejected her and passed her off to another man. Moses lives on for many years and his death is mourned by no one but the professional *Klagefrauen*. He donates his great wealth to the Wunderrabbi von Sadagóra, “dem heftigsten Feinde des Lichts, dem eifrigsten Verfechter des alten, finstern Glaubens.”³⁹⁸ The story thus closes with an explicit critique of religiosity, drawing a sharp contrast between enlightenment and what Franzos describes as the darkness of religious belief.

The narration of “Der Shylock von Barnow” also shares important similarities with “Eine Verlorene:” Although the behavior and fate of the Jewish daughter are at the center of the text, the daughter’s voice rarely comes forward in the text itself. In “Eine Verlorene,” Madlena’s voice only appears briefly in dialogue with the family. Esther’s own speech is also only briefly reproduced by Frau Bezirksrichter who recounts her story. Franzos’s story presents a more complex layering of narration, moving between the “present” in the town of Barnow, flashbacks of Moses’s life, and the retelling of Moses and Esther’s story among members of the community.

The narration offers a small window into the interior life of Moses and presents some of the voices of Barnow’s residents. Absent, however, are the thoughts and words of Esther, whose interior life is completely unknown to the reader. Esther’s prominent absence from the narration and dialogue of the text most blatantly points to a removal of her power. If she does not speak, and if her inner workings and motivations remain hidden, then there is little room to assign agency to Esther. Since the primary conflict of the text centers around the daughter, and the reader is given access to the thoughts of a range of other characters, then the reliability of the

³⁹⁷ Franzos, “Der Shylock von Barnow,” 53.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

narration comes into question. Esther's story is primarily mediated through two channels of antagonism: the bitterness of her father, whose home and religious practices she has left, and the antisemitism of the gossiping Frau Bezirksrichter. The very telling of Esther's story illustrates her double-bind as she attempts to straddle both the Jewish home and the secular world: Her visibility in the text is contingent upon their transmission of her fate, yet each of these realms cast her with scorn. Already at the level of storytelling—who tells Esther's story and how—the Jewish daughter's experience is marked by hostility she faces both from within and outside of her religious community. The reader's understanding of Esther is the product of an interweaving of scrutinous gazes, policing her both as a disobedient woman and as a Jew.

IV. The Problem of *Lesesucht*

While the title may take the name of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (1594–96) character, the plot centers—as also Marc Caplan notes—on his daughter; Franzos references the classic play “less for its avaricious Jewish patriarch than for his daughter's apostasy.”³⁹⁹ Like the family in “Eine Verlorene,” Moses Freundenthal sits shiva for his daughter when she leaves the community with her Christian lover. When he finally receives Esther's dead body, he buries her among those who have committed suicide, echoing the form of anger experienced by Madlena's family as they contemplate her conversion: “sie haßten sie, wie man einen Selbstmörder haßt, der mit eigener Hand in die Lebensadern schneidet um daran zu verbluten.”⁴⁰⁰ In this formulation, the fury toward Esther and Madlena is rendered not only as an anger toward the acts of conversion and the abandonment of the Jewish family; it is also the deliberate nature of these

³⁹⁹ Caplan, “Woyzeck or Wozzeck?,” 138.

⁴⁰⁰ Kompert, “Eine Verlorene,” 111.

actions, the fact that the daughter demonstrates agency, that makes her departure unforgivable. The act that she chooses is seen as a deliberate injury toward the familial body—as Jossef also articulates when referring to the Jewish family as a living organism, in which the acts of one member damage the whole.⁴⁰¹ The enactment of female agency, thus, is conceived of as the disruption or defilement of a larger network rather than as solely an individual's transgression.

Once again, the father-daughter paradigm comes forward in articulating the conflicts between Judaism, Christianity, and the regulating demands of bourgeois life. While Kompert's "Eine Verlorene" and "Die Jahrzeit" confront and disrupt the male-dominated realm of traditional Jewish learning, Franzos's "Shylock" is a complementary example of the feminized space of non-Jewish education. The tragic ending of "Shylock" stands in complementary contrast to the selection of Kompert's tales and stages the fears and uncertainties embedded within the feminine engagement with secular letters. Esther's gateway to unsanctioned love—a desire for Christian men—is a secular education, echoing Euchel, Halle-Wolfssohn, and Lewald's texts. Mediating the strict conservatism of the father and the curiosity of the daughter is the enlightened Uncle Schlome, akin to the role of Uncle Markus in *Laykhtzin un fremelay*. Schlome manages to convince his conservative, pious brother-in-law to show Esther "das Licht und das Leben."⁴⁰²

By initiating young Esther into the world of belle-lettres, Schlome positions himself as an enlightening figure who will extricate her from the darkness of religious conservatism and the intellectual restrictions therein. As Schlome shines a light in the form of German literacy, Esther becomes consumed by a desire to read. She "saß den ganzen langen Tag und oft bis in die Nacht

⁴⁰¹ Kompert, "Eine Verlorene," 174.

⁴⁰² Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," 33.

hinein über den Büchern [...] vernarrt war sie in's Lernen."⁴⁰³ After her father takes away her books, Frau Bezirksrichter helps to feed Esther's appetite for literature and observes her act of reading to be "wie ein hungriger Wolf ein Lamm verschlingt."⁴⁰⁴ The process of secular education—designated as the introduction of light or "enlightenment"—is subsequently portrayed as a new form of darkness: one of hunger, loneliness, and turning inward. In a paradox that imitates her uncle Schlome, who studied German and Christian texts at night, Esther also seeks enlightenment through reading in the cover of darkness. Esther increasingly isolates herself in order to satiate her desire for texts. Frau Bezirksrichter observes Esther's development and comments that, while beautiful, she becomes "überspannt und verdorben, eine Romannärrin."⁴⁰⁵

Frau Bezirksrichter's description of Esther echoes a larger discourse on the dangers, both physiological and moral, of reading. Her observation that she is "überspannt" encompasses a range of meanings—from hysterical and overexcited to fanciful and quixotic—and each depicts a young woman who has lost control or challenged a set of constraints. To the present-day observer, the silent reader is the embodiment of coyness and good behavior. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, silent reading was understood for what the practice hid beneath. The act of reading alone and a concern with *Lesesucht* were illustrative of a network of fears surrounding the regulation of both the mind and body. Silent reading and reading for pleasure were largely innovations of the seventeenth century and practices that took root in the eighteenth century.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," 37.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁰⁶ Stefan Bollmann, *Reading Women* (London: Merrell, 2006).

The general fear of the reading fervor concerned both girls and boys alike. The eighteenth century saw the proliferation of pedagogical literature, from such authors as Jean-Jacques Rousseau or the educator Johann Heinrich Campe, that was concerned with the moral and psycho-sexual effects of reading on adolescents.⁴⁰⁷ At the same time, this period also saw the general increase in literary production. By the second half of the eighteenth century, there was simply more reading material available to the public. The book market was no longer just dominated by theological, medical, legal, and pedagogical works; it also included a range of fictional literature that could be read for leisure.⁴⁰⁸ The reading debates that gained momentum in the late eighteenth century thus centered around fiction, an unregulated space in which young readers could engage with new emotional worlds. According to Susanne Barth, these debates articulated the “Furcht vor der Emotionalisierung der Leserinnen und Leser durch die subjektiven Schreibwesen einer neuen fiktionalen Literatur in der Nachfolge des *Werther* [...] und die Sorge, daß die Vielfalt der literarischen Angebote Sucht nach immer neuen Lesestoffen weckt.”⁴⁰⁹ This concern with the heightened emotionality of readers was part of an Enlightenment approach to child-rearing. Young readers lost in fantasy worlds, writes Barth, could not develop into rational individuals who would perpetuate the “Aufklärung ideologisch abgesicherte Projekt ‘bürgerliche Gesellschaft.’”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁷ Susanne Barth, *Mädchenlektüren: Lesediskurse im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2002), 81. The most prominent example of pedagogical literature from Rousseau is his 1762 treatise *Émile, ou De l'éducation*. Campe was active in writing children's literature and on pedagogy. His popular and widely translated *Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter* (1789) outlines educational ideals for middle-class daughters.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

Reading fiction was critiqued not only on moral and psychological grounds; medical literature also argued for its deleterious effects. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contemporaries insisted that reading for pleasure in solitude was linked to masturbation, an independent act that, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick threatens “the orders of propriety and property” by escaping the societal “narrative of reproduction.”⁴¹¹ The anxiety toward self-pleasuring was articulated in terms of a general concern for both physical and mental health, irrespective of gender. Even the Enlightenment philosopher Johann Adam Bergk saw reading for pleasure as a luxury dangerous to intellectual development, while pedagogue Karl G. Bauer remarked on the physical slackness caused by reading.⁴¹² Later, even German Jewish newspapers of the nineteenth century explicitly took up this concern with reading for pleasure: Ludwig Philippson, reform rabbi and founder of the influential *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* that frequently featured the work of both Kompert and Franzos, writes in 1855 on the dangers of reading novels and warns parents to protect their children’s purity in the face of this epidemic.⁴¹³

Although medical and pedagogical literature discussed young readers of both genders, special attention was given to young women who read. In his 2005 study, Stefan Bollmann examines the erotically charged image of the reading woman in visual art and the surrounding moral debates. Anxieties toward the act of women reading in privacy dovetail with the conception of reading as a space of unsanctioned love (a topic discussed in Chapter 2). Barth examines how the young female reader became a recurring trope from the eighteenth into the

⁴¹¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 818–37, here 820–821.

See Barth on the *Onaniediskussion* and its connection to the discourse on reading in the eighteenth century.

⁴¹² Bollmann, *Reading Women*, 25.

⁴¹³ Jonathan Hess, “Reading and the Writing of German-Jewish History,” in *Literary Studies and the Pursuits of Reading*, ed. Richard Benson V., Eric Downing, and Jonathan M. Hess, *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics and Culture* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012), 105–29, here 105.

nineteenth century. In pedagogical texts around 1800, for example, the model female reader would be the rational “Bildungsleserin” who fulfills a “rousseauische[s] Weiblichkeitsmodell” in contrast to the unrestrained “süchtige Romanleserin.”⁴¹⁴ A masculine equivalent of the latter archetype is hard to come by, but the German literary canon has given enormous attention to the educated young man who reads as part of his own personal growth, most notably in the form of the *Bildungsroman* (i.e. Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 1795–96, or Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich*, 1855).⁴¹⁵

Whereas young men are figures of measured growth and self-improvement, the young female figure has operated as a model of what might go wrong in this process. Reading might serve as a tool of edification, but reading in excess can lead to a detachment from reality and thus the ability to self-regulate. Barth describes how the young reading woman became a feature of moralizing literature around 1800:

Beispielfiguren der Erzählungen lesen einsam, ungezügelt, ergehen sich in ihren Phantasien, neigen zu hysterischen Anwandlungen. Die Lektüren sind immer verantwortlich oder wenigstens mitverantwortlich für das Unglück der Mädchen in deren späterem Leben. Die Mädchen lassen sich ver- und entführen; ihre Ehe wird, wenn sie überhaupt geheiratet werden, unglücklich, oder sie finden erst nach einem vergeblichen Anlauf den richtigen Mann. Manchmal müssen die Leserinnen den Rest ihres Lebens als ‘alte Jungfern’ verbringen oder sie sterben einen frühen grausamen Tod. [...] Das Handlungsschema solcher Romanleserinnen-Geschichten gründet immer auf dem Kausalzusammenhang zwischen unkontrolliertem Lesen von fiktionaler Literatur und dem Scheitern oder dem möglichen Scheitern an der ‘weiblichen Bestimmung’.⁴¹⁶

In “Shylock,” Franzos writes his own form of *Warngeschichte* in which Esther precisely fills the trope of *Romanleserin* delineated by Barth. Much of the anxiety surrounding the reading young woman lies in the “Flucht in die Fiktion,” a flight that triggers other forms of escape: first, the

⁴¹⁴ Barth, *Mädchenlektüren*, 146.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

escape inward for self-discovery and the recognition of sexual impulses, and second, an escape from social mores.⁴¹⁷ These two types of escape represent yet another tension in Franzos's exploration of the liminality of Galician Jews: As Esther turns away from the outside world, she becomes more deeply entrenched in fiction. This solitary reading creates opportunities to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, a recurrent critique made by Enlightenment pedagogues of the dangers of recreational reading. In this way, Esther the *Romannärrin* subverts the Enlightenment ideal of a middle-class woman who behaves with restraint and reason. The second escape, though, is not just an escape from Franzos's image of the *gebildete Frau*. Esther simultaneously escapes from the existing social structure in Barnow that confines her. By reading secular literature, she rejects the limited life Jewish tradition affords her and embraces new frontiers—in the world of fiction—of emotional and social configurations. While, on the one hand, the *Romanleserin* trope is a perennial figure of failed Bildung, it also marks a general refusal to conform to existing social expectations—in this case, the piety and arranged marriage demanded by Esther's father.

In teaching her to read, Esther's uncle aims to illuminate a world governed by reason. In following her uncle, Esther ironically embodies a mode of reading thought to undermine the ideals of the Enlightenment and middle-class propriety. But by reading widely and thus rejecting the strictures of Jewish tradition, Esther also begins to develop a more enlightened worldview. Frau Bezirksrichter observes Esther's newfound understanding of nature when she encounters a thunderstorm:

Meine Kleine, welche Gottlob eine christkatholischen Erziehung genossen hat, fängt laut zu beten an, aber die Jüdin bleibt ganz ruhig. "Esther," frag' ich, "fürchtest Du Dich nicht vor dem Strafgerichte Gottes?" – "Das ist ja das Gewitter gar nicht," erwidert der

⁴¹⁷ Barth, *Mädchenlektüren*, 146.

Naseweis. – “Nun – und was ist denn der Blitz Anderes?” – “Die Entladung der Elektrizität,” ist die Antwort.⁴¹⁸

The problem of Esther’s reading is not only her fondness for trivial literature; in the process of reading, she is also exposed to a world of empiricism that drives her further from the religious framework of either her own family or their Christian neighbors. Despite her articulation of enlightened, reason-driven attitudes, Esther is nonetheless cast as an impulsive *Romannärrin* who both subverts the duties of a Jewish daughter and cannot fulfill an ideal of *Bildung*.

Esther’s dilemma, therefore, is not that she fails to engage in secular learning or that she chooses to read only low- or middlebrow literature. In the provincial community of Barnow, surrounded by superficially educated residents such as the gossiping Frau Bezirksrichter, she is thwarted from extricating herself from her station and fully employing her knowledge and reason. Frau Bezirksrichter not only undermines Esther’s scientifically informed attempt to explain the events of a thunderstorm. As Esther’s main conduit to reading material, she also provides Esther with a body of literature deemed trivial. The contents of Frau Bezirksrichter’s own bookshelf are sparse: “Und so leihe ich ihr denn, was wir so an deutschen Büchern zufällig im Hause haben: Heines Reisebilder, Klopstocks Messiad, Kaiser Joseph von Louise Mühlbach, den neuen Pitaval, Eichendorffs Gedichte und die Romane von Paul de Kock.”⁴¹⁹ At first sight, this assortment of texts represents a full range of cultural registers, from the elite literary heights of Friedrich Gottfried Klopstock’s (1724–1803) epic poem *Der Messias* (1745–73)—explicitly presenting Christian themes—or the poetry of Joseph von Eichendorff (1788–1857) and the convert from Judaism Heinrich Heine (1792–1856), to the popular fiction of Luise Mühlbach (1814–73) and the publication of criminal cases (*pitaval*, an eighteenth-century equivalent of a

⁴¹⁸ Franzos, “Der Shylock von Barnow,” 38.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

true crime series). Frau Bezirksrichter's shelves might not reflect Franzos's ideal of a household steeped in *Bildung*, but rather another example of partial education that stands at the center of the story's critique. The patchwork of literary works does not include a single work of Schiller, the benchmark of German literary production for Franzos, most evident in his short story "Schiller in Barnow" from *Aus Halb-Asien*. Esther's reading is disparaged, but its origin in Frau Bezirksrichter's bookshelves indicates that her literary pursuits are not a reflection of her own aesthetic choices. Rather, the material she consumes is a direct reflection of the cultural conditions surrounding her and—by virtue of reading rapidly and against the wishes of the patriarch—her reading is demonized.

V. "Die halbe Bildung" and Reading Shakespeare

"Shylock" also echoes Haskalah writers such as Halle-Wolfssohn and Euchel in its concern with partial *Bildung*. Halle-Wolfssohn's Jettchen and Euchel's Hedwig serve as examples of this type of education—what Halle-Wolfssohn refers to as "falshe oder unekhte oyfklerung"—and such false enlightenment is positioned as more dangerous than ignorance. These authors all comment on the perils of engaging with non-Jewish culture and the innovations of modernity—among them the proliferation of literacy and secular texts—and mark Jewish daughters as the carriers of an irresponsible adoption of secular learning. The problem, in these works, is not *Bildung* itself but rather a concern with its correct development and an indictment of those who thwart it.

As Frau Bezirksrichter entertains her guests with Esther's story, the doctor bemoans the reading of middlebrow literature and the wayward development of one's moral code from this material: "Deshalb behaupte ich doch: es ist in den ungebildeten Jüdinnen sehr wenig moralisches Gefühl!" 'Ja!' ist die trockene Antwort, 'besonders wenn man sie durch Paul de

Kock bildet; — durch die Gesamtausgabe [sic].”⁴²⁰ The lady of the house questions Esther’s morality, and the doctor asserts that Esther and her cohort cannot possibly achieve lessons in morality through their diet of reading. Paul de Kock (1793–1871), the doctor’s example, was a French author who wrote novels about middle class life quickly and prolifically. His works appealed to a growing reading public and were cheaply translated and sold, making him the “bourgeois writer par excellence.”⁴²¹ De Kock’s name was synonymous with market success and, by the 1830s, his name was also equated with lowbrow or middlebrow literature among critics.⁴²²

Esther’s reading is therefore not only a rejection of her pious father’s expectations of propriety. Her reading habits also scandalize the non-Jewish community members as they hear about her loose literary exploits. Her rebellion triggers fear at the intersection between two social changes: an abandonment of traditional Jewish learning and the transformation of aesthetic forms with the rise of capitalism and the middle class. Disapproval of Esther’s reading in the age of mass-produced secular literature acts as a code for anxieties toward the control of her desire. She reads rapidly and indiscriminately, consuming texts that are quickly translated and distributed to wide audiences. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries opened new frontiers in the production and circulation of literary forms, and Esther eagerly throws herself into this unknown—and therefore morally dubious—terrain. The perceived moral deficiency of the work is found in its status as commodity, devalued by its mass production and in its conferring of cultural capital, more than in the content of the works themselves. This tarnished literary engagement thus takes

⁴²⁰ Franzos, “Der Shylock von Barnow,” 41.

⁴²¹ Anne O’Neil-Henry, *Mastering the Marketplace: Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 58.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 58–71.

place at night in Esther's bedroom, hiding from her father, and she continues to develop "wie eine Königin, schlank, stolz, und noch üppig [...] sie war ein hübsches, wunderliches Mädchen."⁴²³

This conception of reading—as an obscure space where moral deficiency can hide—shapes a cautionary image of partial Bildung. Frau Bezirksrichter's guests listen to Esther's story with pity and the doctor remarks that Esther was not an agent of immoral behavior, but rather a victim of an incomplete education:

Die Sache liegt tiefer, viel tiefer. Wie das Zwielight unheimlicher ist als die Nacht, so ist die halbe Bildung verderblicher als die Unwissenheit. Die Unwissenheit und die Nacht, sie halten das Auge umfassen und fesseln den Fuß an die Scholle; das Wissen und der Tag, sie öffnen das Auge und lassen uns fröhlich vorwärts schreiten; das halbe Wissen aber und das Zwielight, sie nehmen uns nur halb die Binde vom Auge und lassen uns in's Ungewisse schreiten und —straucheln! Armes Kind!⁴²⁴

The doctor's warning against the dangers of "die halbe Bildung" echoes the scenes at night as Esther reads her books in hiding. This half Bildung is not dangerous because of its darkness, which the doctor argues allows for a measure of security in its stillness. Danger crystallizes only as darkness approaches the clarity of light. Half Bildung is treacherous by inhabiting an ambiguous space—one that is neither held stable in ignorance nor propelled forward by knowledge. In the doctor's articulation, Esther has emerged from the darkness enough to compel her to move through the world with a pretense of clarity, when in reality, she fumbles through space with limited vision. The source of this partial education is, according to the doctor, the rapid proliferation and consumption of popular literature. These works exist in a liminal space by serving the reading demands somewhere between the most educated elite and the illiterate.

⁴²³ Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," 42.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 46.

In their discussion of Esther's half Bildung, the doctor positions himself and his guests outside of this condition of ignorance. The guests of the party accordingly express sympathy toward a victimized Esther. As their discussion progresses, though, Franzos reveals the irony of the doctor's diagnosis. At the end of Esther's tale, a Frau Emilie exclaims that the story reminds her of a famous work:

“[W]issen Sie, an was mich diese Geschichte erinnert hat?! An ein sehr lustiges Theaterstück, welches ich einmal in Lemberg gesehen habe. Es ist aus dem Englischen, von einem gewissen ... o, — diese englischen Namen...”
“Vielleicht Shakespeare?” hilft der Arzt.
“Shakespeare,” wiederholt der Bezirksrichter, “das ist ein ziemlich bekannter Dichter.”
“Ja! ein recht hübsches Talent!” meint der Doktor, ernst wie ein Grab.⁴²⁵

The party here goes on to recall Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, a play that also features prominently in Franzos's later novel *Der Pojaz*.⁴²⁶ The work was a popular part of German theater repertoire since its first German performance in Hamburg in 1777.⁴²⁷ This interest in Shakespeare followed a broader uptake of Shakespeare in the German-speaking world that took place among cultural elites such as Johann Elias Schlegel, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and manifested in the widespread performance of his plays in translation. *The Merchant of Venice* was, after *Hamlet*, one of the most popular plays translated into German.⁴²⁸ Frau Emilie and her peers, though, are barely able to recall the playwright's name and the doctor

⁴²⁵ Franzos, “Der Shylock von Barnow,” 48.

⁴²⁶ See: Karl Emil Franzos, *Der Pojaz. Eine Geschichte aus dem Osten* (Stuttgart and Berlin: J.G. Cotta, 1905). Franzos's posthumously published novel follows the hapless Sender Glatteis in his pursuit of becoming an actor after he is inspired by seeing a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*. Before the protagonist's death, his last wish is fulfilled: to see the real-life Bogumil Dawison perform as Shylock.

⁴²⁷ Jeanette Malkin, “Fritz Kortner and Other German- Jewish Shylocks before and after the Holocaust,” in *Wrestling with Shylock: Jewish Responses to The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Edna Nahshon and Michael Shapiro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 198–223, here 198.

⁴²⁸ Andrew G. Bonnell, *Shylock in Germany: Antisemitism and the German Theatre from The Enlightenment to the Nazis* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 5.

remarks ironically that Shakespeare was merely quite a nice talent. The doctor himself thus appears to be in on the joke that his fellow party guests are unversed in canonical European literature.

Franzos presents side-by-side the party's denunciation of Esther's reckless cultural consumption with their own philistinism. The party's patronizing exchange about "das arme Mädchen" who was "nur ein Opfer" in her unrestrained pursuit of literature is an attempt to distance themselves from Esther, who ultimately suffers a tragic fate.⁴²⁹ Their concern with her alleged half Bildung, though, only underscores their own partial Bildung through superficial engagement with literary forms, again presenting gender-coded models of education in which the doctor offers an incisive critique while Frau Emilie makes a naïve observation. Esther thus acts not as a victim of a partial education, but as the instigator of the partygoers' confrontation with their own ignorance, prejudices, and anxieties toward social change. Esther's tale in Frau Bezirksrichter's adaptation also lays bare the inherent liminality of pursuing Bildung—that one can be neither entirely ignorant nor fully *gebildet*. The notion of a pious abstention from secular letters is not possible in an increasingly interconnected world, nor does a completed state of knowing ("Wissen," which the doctor likens to the "enlightening" light of day) exist.

The group's sense of moral and intellectual superiority is also undercut by the antisemitic views that surface in their discussion. The hostess of the evening, Frau Bezirksrichter, not only relays the tale of Esther's downfall but also facilitates it. She provides Esther with the decried works of Paul de Kock and watches as she unravels into a *Romannärrin*. Instead of helping her, she uses Esther's circumstances as conversational fodder for social gatherings, lamenting Esther with false pity while also explicitly revealing her own antisemitism. Frau Bezirksrichter

⁴²⁹ Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," 45.

dismisses the gravity of the story and her own complicity in Esther's struggles with the assertion that Jewish women generally lack morality: "[E]s handelt sich ja nur um eine Jüdin! [...] es ist in den ungebildeten Jüdinnen sehr wenig moralisches Gefühl!"⁴³⁰ Her only positive evaluation of Esther comes in the form of objectification when she describes her physical appearance, "Sie hatte die schönsten, klarsten Augen, groß, blau—blaue wie der Himmel. Und der wuchs—wie eine Königin, schlank, stolz und doch üppig."⁴³¹

Frau Bezirksrichter is, however, not alone in her demonization of Esther, both as an insatiable reader and as a Jew. The party's ill-informed mention of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* reveals the attendees' own partial education by invoking one of the most well-known Jewish figures in theater and a longstanding vehicle for antisemitic stereotypes. Frau Bezirksrichter's depiction of a beautiful, but ultimately untrustworthy and immoral, daughter reaches its crescendo when the group equates her father with Shakespeare's Shylock and, by extension, Esther with Jessica. Shylock and Jessica are perhaps the most famous Jewish father-daughter pairs in European literature. Like Shylock, Moses plays a central role in the financial life of the community, acting as "Kollekteur, Agent, Kaufmann und Wirth."⁴³² His daughter, like Jessica, also betrays his trust, falls for a Christian, and leaves her family.

Shakespeare's oeuvre held an important place in the history of German theater through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the figure of Shylock has been a focal point of debates on Jewish representation up to the present day. A wealth of scholarship on *The Merchant of Venice* reads Shylock as a cipher for Elizabethan antisemitic stereotypes or even as a figure to

⁴³⁰ Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," 40–41.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 42.

⁴³² Ibid., 4.

discuss more general forms of intolerance, such as contemporary fears of immigrants.⁴³³ Shylock is the ambivalent character par excellence: He has been staged as both a villainous, greedy, anti-Jewish stereotype and as a sympathetic victim of prejudice and of his “cruel and faithless child.”⁴³⁴ Among German Jewish intellectuals and actors alike, Shylock has served as a site of both discrimination and redemption.

Abigail Gillman demonstrates the stark contrasts in Jewish intellectual responses to Shylock by comparing historian Heinrich Graetz’s and theater critic Hermann Sinsheimer’s analyses of Shakespeare’s iconic Jewish figure.⁴³⁵ Graetz (1817–91) rails against Shylock in his essay “Shylock in der Sage, im Drama und in der Geschichte” (1880) as a damaging caricature with no historical basis. As a central figure in shaping the field of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Graetz was deeply invested in delineating and promoting an understanding of Jewish history and therefore reads Shylock through a historical lens. And Graetz was not alone; Shakespeare scholarship over the subsequent centuries has continued to assess Shylock in terms of his validity (or lack thereof) within the play’s historical context. Sinsheimer (1883–1950), in contrast, is not concerned with issues of historical accuracy. Fifty years after Graetz, Sinsheimer insists that Shylock was not meant to represent a “Real Jew,” but rather a figure embodying a “spectrum of anti-Jewish images” who ultimately inspires empathy.⁴³⁶

⁴³³ Sara Coodin, *Is Shylock Jewish?: Citing Scripture and the Moral Agency of Shakespeare’s Jews* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 8–9.

⁴³⁴ Michael Shapiro, “Literary Sources and Theatrical Interpretations of Shylock,” in *Wrestling with Shylock: Jewish Responses to The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Michael Shapiro and Edna Nahshon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3–32, here 24.

⁴³⁵ Abigail Gillman, “Shylock in German-Jewish Historiography,” in *Wrestling with Shylock: Jewish Responses to The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Michael Shapiro and Edna Nahshon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 51–73.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

Sinsheimer represents a body of critical scholarship that reads Shylock from a Jewish perspective and sees Shakespeare's character not as a blatant perpetuation of antisemitism, but rather "a victim-rebel, a comic figure unveiled as tragic before our eyes [and] ultimately a tribute to the power of art to unmask stereotypical figures and reveal them to be human beings."⁴³⁷ Scholars such as Sara Coodin and Jeremy Dauber operate in this tradition by reading the Jewish content in Shylock—and also considering the power of Jewish adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice*.⁴³⁸ Franzos then does more than invoke a well-known stereotype; rather, he calls upon a multilayered Jewish figure and his disobedient daughter in order both to bring attention to the struggles of the Jew in the non-Jewish world.

An important difference between Shylock and Moses, though, is in their downfall. Moses lives out his final days lonely and embittered, but still firmly committed to Judaism; he bequeaths his wealth to the Hasidic rabbi of Sadagóra. By contrast, Shylock is forced to convert to Christianity after the play's famous trial scene, a conclusion that many critics consider an illustration of the triumph of New Testament grace over Old Testament legalism.⁴³⁹ Jeremy Dauber, though, argues against such a clear dichotomy between Old and New Law by pointing to the manner in which Portia employs the very tools Shylock uses in order to pull his argument from under his own feet. Dauber argues that this scene highlights an important feature in the construction of Shylock's Jewishness in Shakespeare's play:

⁴³⁷ Gillman, "Shylock in German-Jewish Historiography," 72.

⁴³⁸ Coodin's *Is Shylock Jewish?* looks at Yiddish-language adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice*. Coodin writes that the "rationale for adapting *The Merchant of Venice* builds on a commonly held supposition among contemporary Jewish people and worked instead from a series of inherited medieval stereotypes. This led some Yiddish-language writers to understand their own historical position as uniquely auspicious—a knowing, privileged vantage point for revising and adapting Shakespeare's writing" (200). For more on Jewish responses to *The Merchant of Venice*, see also Nahshon and Shapiro's edited volume *Wrestling with Shylock*.

⁴³⁹ Dauber, *Antonio's Devils*, 22.

Shylock, a Jew and a creature of Jewish interpretation, has become so inextricably connected with the literal meanings of texts, *regardless and sometimes even in spite of their “plain meanings,”* that when presented with a situation that does violence to a text’s plain meaning, he is powerless to object to it. His silence is not personal, nor contextual, but, for lack of a better phrase, hermeneutical: the Jew, always insistent on a literal reading in which words mean not their “plain meaning,” but some narrow, twisted analogue, must accept that such a reading allows him to be bound by Portia’s literal construction of the bond’s terms.⁴⁴⁰

In Dauber’s interpretation, Shylock’s strict understanding of Jewish texts causes his own economic and religious undoing. Moses suffers neither financially nor spiritually, but his strict interpretation of what it means to be a Jew also leads to his demise. Moses loses his daughter and lives out his last years embittered and alone. He undermines himself not in a legal dispute, but through his relationship to Esther and his traditional understanding of propriety, family, and the role of the Jewish daughter. He dies alone because of his intransigence, even wishing the death of his own flesh (echoing the central concern with flesh in Shylock’s conundrum) so that he must no longer “[ver]fluchen” his own child.⁴⁴¹ Moses is bound by a conservative interpretation of Jewish life, one that punishes Esther for seeking knowledge outside his world and that marks her as effectively dead when she falls for a Christian, much as Shylock is bound by a literal reading of his deal’s terms. Shylock unintentionally writes the deal that leads to his downfall. In a way, Moses also writes his own misery by pronouncing Esther dead to him upon her departure—a pronouncement that is fulfilled when she is found deceased on his doorstep. At the same time, though, Moses’s self-destruction is determined and structured by the social conditions in which he operates. He does not act out of individual malice; rather, his actions are borne out of an internalization of religious and ethnic animosity, in which a father is more inclined to trust the antisemitic Frau Bezirksrichter than his own daughter, much as Shylock does not trust Jessica.

⁴⁴⁰ Dauber, *Antonio’s Devils*, 24–25.

⁴⁴¹ Franzos, “Die Juden von Barnow,” 11. Moses refers to his “Fleisch und Blut” when he wishes for Esther’s death.

When Franzos introduces Shylock into his story of a small Galician town, he goes beyond invoking a widely recognized antisemitic stereotype. In a tale centered around notions of *Bildung* and reading, Franzos embeds this example of canonical literature in two ways: At the more superficial level, the comparison with Shylock highlights the intolerance of the community. Within the story itself, Franzos also creates parallels between Shylock and Jessica's tensions and those between Moses and Esther. The Shylock figure, to be sure, has received wider recognition than either Jessica or Esther in their respective works, but the daughter forms the complementary end of the fraught dynamic in question. Shylock serves as a shorthand to refer to the intrafamilial and interreligious conflict sparked by Jessica. She, like Esther, is given little voice in the dialogue of *The Merchant of Venice*, but both daughters are central in their respective stories' "negotiation of tribal conflict."⁴⁴² Coodin articulates the under-acknowledged significance of Jessica in the play:

Jessica's character is particularly compelling within that conflict because of her liminal position. She is poised between ethnological and theological worlds for much of the play, neither willing to remain affiliated with the Jewish 'blood' of her father nor able to convincingly be defined by the Christian 'manners' that she seeks to adopt through conversion. [...] to what extent is Jessica, who yearns for an exit from her father's household, also able to effect an exit from the moral universe that constitutes her father's and, presumably, her own Jewishness?⁴⁴³

Coodin reads Jessica as a figure of transgression by bringing her plot into conversation with the Biblical stories of Dinah and Rachel.⁴⁴⁴ Jessica of *The Merchant of Venice* thus also participates in the broader paradigm that is the central concern of this chapter: the Jewish daughter as the liminal figure between religious worlds. In the early modern context of Shakespeare's work,

⁴⁴² Coodin, *Is Shylock Jewish?*, 142.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁴ Of relevance to a comparison with Jessica's story: Rachel's stealing of her father's idols (Genesis 31) and Dinah's abduction by Shechem (Genesis 34, also mentioned in the previous chapter on "Eine Verlorene").

romance and conversion are the primary tools with which the daughter is able to disrupt the social constraints in which she finds herself. Esther's literacy, though, affords her another arena through which she may break from her family. Like Jessica, Esther is also given the status of "a stolen commodity who leaves behind bereaved, humiliated, and ultimately vengeful male kin."⁴⁴⁵

Esther's betrayal offers another layer of complexity to issues of familial wealth and tribal divisions. Nineteenth-century Galicia was a space governed by religious, linguistic, and intellectual divisions, in which the normative authority of German-language education and culture held great sway in determining who did and did not hold power. Esther struggles to reclaim her own intellectual agency away from her father by learning to read and consuming non-Jewish texts. The "stolen commodity," in Esther's case, is a wresting of the ability to think, love, and move through the world from her father's hands. Her move toward secular literature is a pursuit of cultural capital, a set of tools that might grant one social mobility and open a world beyond the arranged marriage and women's prayer books that Moses deems appropriate for his daughter. Esther's tale ends more tragically than her Shakespearean counterpart, wherein she maintains neither her lover nor her own life while her father holds onto his riches. Her pursuit of cultural capital founders because, according to the members of Frau Bezirksrichter's party, she hangs in a vulnerable limbo between ignorance and robust Bildung. This Jewish daughter traverses a new frontier of rebellion via literature, yet she is unable to meet the conditions of entry.

VI. The Stakes and Containment of Female Appetite

⁴⁴⁵ Coodin, *Is Shylock Jewish?*, 153.

With Esther's indiscriminate consumption of low-brow literature as the focal point, "Der Shylock von Barnow" reveals a skepticism toward a superficial engagement with literature in society at large and the impartial attainment of Bildung. This skepticism is part and parcel of an anxiety toward the new social and economic structures of modernity. The telling of Esther's story is ultimately framed as one of helplessness that takes place within the liminal space of partial Bildung—not only in terms of her tragic fate, but in terms of the exclusion of Esther's voice from the narrative itself. And while the narrative of "Shylock" precludes Esther's agency, its characters assign her with culpability as a corrupted consumer and lustful pursuer of the forbidden. The account of her transgressions is an arena in which the community of Barnow—both its Jewish and non-Jewish members—articulate their fears of powerlessness toward a shifting social landscape. In these stories of wayward daughters, representations of life beyond tradition are feminized.

As in Lewald's *Jenny*, consuming literature for pleasure acts as a metaphor for, and precursor to, unsanctioned romantic desire. In Franzos's "Shylock," though, the stakes of reading for pleasure are augmented by an anxiety toward the nature of reading in a rapidly expanding market of so-called low- or middlebrow literature. Rather than reading a selection from Jewish sacred texts—ones that have persisted over countless generations—Esther independently pursues new, unvetted literature that is both abundant and unknown. What is known however is that these texts are, both in terms of circulation and content, embedded in bourgeois life and a departure from traditional Judaism.

Esther's pleasure-seeking, both in reading and in love, compels her father and the larger community to contain her desire. The desire for reading—and its depiction as compulsive or lustful reading—stands in stark contrast to the ideal of female education advocated by Moses, an

ideal primarily characterized by constraint. In the world of traditional Judaism, Jewish women were structurally prevented from receiving the full religious education that might have been available to their male counterparts. Women most often read Yiddish prayer books or the *Tsenen-rene*, commonly referred to as the “women’s Bible.” The very nature of this popular Yiddish adaptation of biblical texts and commentaries—one that was read by women and men alike but that is linked to the conception of a feminized Yiddish literature—entails a process of curation and restriction. Moses wants Esther to know just enough to maintain the household and her spiritual well-being: “Und was hätte ihr auch der Vater noch außerdem lehren lassen sollen? Polnisch und Deutsch etwa? Sprechen konnte sie die beiden Sprachen; das Lesen und Schreiben schien ihm, wie allen Juden in Barnow, für ein Mädchen Ueberfluß.”⁴⁴⁶ In prescribing his daughter’s education, Moses reveals a fear of excess; anything that exceeds the bounds of tradition is jeopardizing. Esther’s disobedient reading practices are thus cast in an opposing language of unconstrained desire. Her curiosity is portrayed as an addiction to text—a pathological desire to consume that simultaneously consumes her. The forbidden nature of her reading is heightened by casting it as carnal, as she reads like a hungry wolf, and also intimate, taking place under the covers at night.

Here, the erotics of reading are part of the erotics of consumption; representations of both reading and shopping are, for Rita Felski, central motifs of the modern. In *The Gender of Modernity*, she looks at the portrayal of women in urban spaces as consumers in the growing capitalist market, women who chase changing fashions and products and who are “portrayed as buying machines, driven by impulses beyond their control to squander money.”⁴⁴⁷ Franzos

⁴⁴⁶ Franzos, “Der Shylock von Barnow,” 21.

⁴⁴⁷ Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 62.

performs this same operation in his depiction of Esther: Moses's daughter is the voracious female consumer, but instead of indiscriminately buying up the latest fashions, she consumes a rapidly-produced new body of literature, also a result of the growing international market. Esther is outside of an urban center, but Esther's access to a new world of reading and consumption demonstrates the new reach of the city. The products and quotidian experiences of urban spaces are no longer contained to the cities themselves; their products are infinitely reproducible and transferrable throughout the continent and across oceans.

Felski also points to the proliferation of alimentary language to describe women reading in the nineteenth century. Esther "verschlingt" the novels she receives; literary critics writing on *Madame Bovary's* Emma, the archetypal reader of popular fiction, describe how she "devours" magazines and "gorges herself" on romances.⁴⁴⁸ These verbs of ingestion help to distinguish Esther's reading practice from one that is either intellectual or spiritual. Rather, her reading is portrayed as responding to a crude biological need. She reads because she must—as one must eat to survive—and not because she has made a choice to pursue careful self-cultivation, a process that remains a male-gendered realm. This distinction creates a corresponding moral and intellectual divide between feminine and masculine motifs of reading. The act of reading as consumption—not only economic consumption but also dietary—implies an anxiety toward the physical containment of the female body. The language of uncontrolled food consumption speaks to a fundamental concern with and policing of the most basic desire in the woman—a desire that, when fulfilled to its extreme, also leads to the physical expansion of the woman's body. As Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace notes, women with appetites have had a central place in both western literature and popular culture, beginning with Eve and the apple and continuing

⁴⁴⁸ Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 81.

until the present day.⁴⁴⁹ The control of her appetite is the control of her ability to occupy space in the world. The regulation of Esther's desire for reading is thus part of a larger operation of containing the various hungers that cause her to occupy the world in new and unsanctioned ways.

While Esther's silence within the narrative of "Shylock" in one manner extinguishes her agency, she also surfaces as more than a passive victim of her circumstances. Her unsanctioned desire for reading is a canary in the coal mine for her ultimate transgression; her inability to control her desire for a non-Jewish man is anticipated by her unrestrained consumption of literature. Her initial encounter with the Hungarian Graf Géza appears at first innocuous but soon escalates: "Nun und die Geschichte entwickelte sich. Zuerst einzelne Begegnungen, dann viele, zuerst wenige Worte, dann viele, zuerst ein Kuß, dann unzählige..."⁴⁵⁰ Small, innocent actions quickly compound into flagrant misconduct. Soon, Esther follows her new lover and abandons her father on the Sabbath evening. Just as the introduction of literacy is, at first glance, innocent, so too is her interaction with Barnow's handsome visitor. Their small exchanges cannot be contained to mere flirtation; rather, they expand to the desertion of her home and, the eyes of the community, the wholesale betrayal of her father. In reading, Esther is both the consumer of text and the one consumed; in her love of Géza, she is both the pursuer and the pursued. The Hungarian count is ostensibly Esther's seducer, an intriguing outsider and womanizer who "hatte freilich auch schon genug Erfahrung [...] die schöne Esterka wußte er bald zu fangen."⁴⁵¹ But

⁴⁴⁹ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 4.

⁴⁵⁰ Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," 45.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

Esther is not just prey to his chase; she is also cast as an agent of indiscretion who is already “innerlich verderbt und überspannt.”⁴⁵²

VII. The Stakes of Male Learning and the Problem of the Uncle

Like *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, “Der Shylock von Barnow” features an ambivalent uncle figure who is complicit and even instructive in the daughter’s disobedience, acting as mediator between the daughter and the secular world. Esther’s uncle Schlome, the brother of her late mother, also resembles the figure of Julius Arnsteiner in “Eine Verlorene.” J Josef disparages Julius as “Posche Jisroel,” or apostate of Israel, while Moses and the narrator refer to his brother-in-law with the epithet “Meschumed,” which also denotes apostasy and comes from the Hebrew for “a person who is destroyed.”⁴⁵³ Schlome does not convert to Christianity, but his desire to learn “das verbotene, verhaßte Hochdeutsch” and “die Christenweisheit” initially marks him, like Julius, as having forsaken his religion. Schlome acts as a masculine counterpart to Esther: He, too, pursues a non-Jewish education and even actively engages in the teachings of Christianity, yet he does not meet the tragic fate of his niece. Instead, he is able to return to the Jewish community while also mediating between worlds, albeit with limited success. Both of their respective fates and the capacity for the Jewish community to reabsorb them demonstrate the divergent stakes of male and female learning.

Schlome’s intellectual and spiritual departure from traditional Judaism is demonstrably more extreme than that of Esther. As a pupil always lost in books, he begs the local Christian school master to teach him secretly at night, much as Esther, years later, must hide her reading

⁴⁵² Franzos, “Der Shylock von Barnow,” 45.

⁴⁵³ Jennifer Speake and Mark LaFlaur, *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

from her father.⁴⁵⁴ Unlike his niece, Schlome was not reading popular novels with his new aptitude. His lessons with the schoolmaster lead him to a rigorous engagement with Christian scripture and a re-consideration of his own religious commitments. In the same way that his niece rapidly reads through the contents of the local *Leihbibliothek*, the young Schlome exhausts the contents of the *Klosterbibliothek*, where he first encounters the New Testament:

Da kam ihm auch eines Tages ein Buch in die Hände, das ihn dem Wahnsinn nahe brachte. Die Form und der Ton dieses Buches waren ihm wohlbekannt und vertraut, mahnten sie doch an die heilige Thora, aber der Geist, der durch diese Blätter zog, war ein anderer und—dem Jüngling erstarrte das Blut—ein milderer und sanfterer. Denn dieses Buch war das Neue Testament. Wie Frühlingsluft wehte es ihn daraus an, und doch sträubte sich sein Haar vor Entsetzen. Das also war die Götzenlehre der Christen, und so hatte jener Mann gelebt und gewirkt, den seine Väter gekreuzigt und von dessen Bilde man ihn noch jetzt in Haß und Verachtung das Antlitz abzuwenden gelehrt! Der Schlag war zu heftig, Schlome verfiel in gefährliche Krankheit und lag lange Wochen in schwerem Fieber. Oft und viel weinte und sprach der Bewußtlose von dem bleichen Nazarener und dem Kreuz und jenem Buche. Entsetzt hörten es die Eltern und die Nachbarn; sie forschten nach dem Zusammenhang und entdeckten endlich die heimlichen Studien.⁴⁵⁵

This encounter recalls Jossef's experience as he reads the translations of the *Urdede*, in which Christian teachings are rendered legible to the Jewish reader, causing the lines between Christianity and Judaism to blur. In this passage, Schlome is initially most struck by the mutual intelligibility of the Christian texts he confronts. He finds the form of this scripture familiar but meets a new spirit and message, much as Jossef is perplexed by the simultaneous familiarity and novelty of his great-grandfather's translations of the Sermon on the Mount. A religion from which Schlome had long been taught to distance himself begins to crystallize in an accessible form. He identifies with the text and, within this same work, is shaken by the story of Christ's sacrifice—an idolatrous set of teachings that subvert his fundamental understanding of the world.

⁴⁵⁴ Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," 24.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24–25.

The coupling of this identification with complete aversion triggers a physical illness. After his attempted re-education and recovering from illness, Schlome is able to re-enter the Jewish community, swearing to remain a Jew but with his father's promise that he may read all the books he desires and remain unmarried. This account of Schlome's youthful foray into Christianity demonstrates the extent to which he deliberately seeks a spiritual departure from Judaism. Schlome the "Meschumed" remains the subject of gossip in town, yet he still obtains a favorable plea bargain after once straying from Judaism.

Schlome does not suffer the same fatal consequences as his niece, but he remains a problematic figure even upon his return and is differentiated from the rest of the Jewish community both socially and physically. After turning away from Christianity, Schlome is still set apart as weak and sickly: "doch war der bleiche, kränkliche Mann mit den weichen, träumerischen Zügen immer Jude geblieben."⁴⁵⁶ His voice sounds "wehmüthig und weich" and he remains a "ein kranker, greiser, gebrochener Mann."⁴⁵⁷ These descriptions of a soft, weak Schlome obliquely recall the model of Ashkenazi Jewish masculinity articulated by Daniel Boyarin, a subject briefly explored in Chapter 1 through the example of the mediating uncle Markus. According to Boyarin, Ashkenazi Jewish culture "produced a model of masculinity that was openly resistant to and critical of the prevailing ideology of 'manliness' dominant in Europe. [...] the soft man was the central and dominant cultural ideal."⁴⁵⁸ This softer form of masculinity stands in opposition to the "'knight in shining armor' heartthrob of our romantic culture" and derives from the veneration of focused Talmud study.⁴⁵⁹ This ideal of masculinity thus presents

⁴⁵⁶ Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," 23.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 30 and 34.

⁴⁵⁸ Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 23.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

what would be considered a “feminization” of the Jewish man in the context of dominant western European conceptions of masculinity.⁴⁶⁰

Schlome’s depiction, though, is far from an idealized version of this softer masculinity; rather, Franzos renders the image of the timid man of study in its most unflattering extreme. Timidity and modesty register as weakness; gentleness becomes illness. Schlome is further emasculated, in the western European sense, through the conditions of his return to the Jewish community: He swears to his father that he will live as a Jew as long as he may remain unmarried and read any books he wishes. This vow of celibacy, in which marriage is effectively exchanged for a lifelong devotion to thought, renders Schlome sterile, in the same vein that *Jenny*’s brother Eduard and other noble Jew figures are constructed as isolated, unmarried representatives of principle. Schlome’s effective sterilization, like the masturbatory implications of Esther’s private reading articulated by Kosofsky Sedgwick, thus also skirts the demands of the societal narrative of reproduction and presents another anxious orientation toward the future.

Even though Schlome briefly strays from Judaism, he represents a commitment to texts that is woven into the Jewish reverence for Talmud study. Franzos, the champion of *Bildung*, fittingly does not position Schlome’s reading as more noble than Esther’s even though he escapes great punishment. By casting Schlome as a sickly figure, Franzos establishes an investment in the dominant European form of masculinity that prizes physical strength and dominance over quiet study. Franzos’s almost militant concern with *Bildung* and the world of letters associated with Schiller is part and parcel of a set of European bourgeois ideals. Schlome is villainized by deviating from these bourgeois divisions of gender.

⁴⁶⁰ As Boyarin also notes, this idea of “feminizing” is not based on the premise that there exists an essential or inherent femininity to certain traits. Rather, I am referring to traits and behaviors traditionally associated with womanhood versus manhood in modern western European literature and thought.

Schlome's status in the text thus has implications for Esther as well. Complementary to the Ashkenazi Jewish ideal of gentle masculinity that Boyarin outlines is a model of Jewish female assertiveness and leadership—often in the form of economic power. While men were devoted to textual study and spiritual concerns, women often took care of the business and other worldly concerns in the traditional Jewish household.⁴⁶¹ The bourgeois conception of acceptable masculinity positions the man as the doer or creator, while the woman is prized for her gentle passivity as she recedes into the private sphere. Schlome—Esther's teacher and initial conduit into a forbidden world of learning—subverts the bourgeois standards of masculinity and at the same time ironically inhabits the Ashkenazi mode of masculinity through his attention to Christian texts. In his promotion of reading, Schlome triggers Esther's own form of subversion. This takes place through her lack of containment: she rejects passivity in favor of action and consumption.

But Esther's actions do not take place in a vacuum; she is aided and abetted by her enlightened uncle and further provoked by the antisemitic Frau Bezirksrichter. It is notable, then, that Schlome may live out his days in the Jewish community while Esther is ejected from her home before a tragic end. The rules of containment do not apply to Schlome, who may continue to read Christian and secular texts uninhibited. Schlome is a reminder of Halle-Wolfssohn's Markus or Kompert's Julius Arnsteiner, both enlightened male characters who are met with skepticism by male protectors of Judaism but who manage to live between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. In the case of the daughter, though, a position of liminality between worlds cannot be sustained since she is burdened by the fundamental assumption that she must reproduce, rather than the uncle-teacher figures who may choose not to do so.

⁴⁶¹ Boyarin gives as one of the most prominent examples Glikl of Hameln (1645–1724), whose memoirs relate this division of roles. Glikl ran the family business and lovingly refers to her husband as “meek” (55).

VIII. Conclusion

“Der Shylock von Barnow” places the Jewish daughter at the intersection of various forms of mistrust and betrayal: Literature and learning are not trusted in the hands of the daughter, while a son’s rebellious curiosity can be forgiven. In seeking an outlet for her intellectual hunger, the daughter trusts Frau Bezirksrichter, who betrays her by feeding her literature that will mark her as unrestrained and ultimately ensure she will be cast out of her community. Esther also cannot trust the various sources of love in her life, both familial and romantic. Her father rejects her entirely and her potential lover leaves her with little more than a letter. And at the very level of storytelling, the reader cannot even trust whether Esther’s behavior is so flagrantly rebellious, as it is told primarily through the eyes of the antisemitic Frau Bezirksrichter.

At the core of this mistrust is Franzos’s anxiety toward the ways in which eastern European Jews might thwart the process of attaining ostensibly complete *Bildung*, the ideal central to Franzos’s cultural project and vision of modern Jewish life. Franzos harnesses the discourses of wider debates on education and the ideals of self-improvement to articulate a more particular critique of his imagined shtetl—and how the shtetl, as synecdoche for eastern Europe, might undermine the ongoing project of achieving Jewish equality. Esther is thus the embodiment of Franzos’s *Halb-Asien*, located between what Franzos considers the unrefined eastern character and a western European ideal. Esther thus emerges both as corrupted agent and victim, but her condition is ultimately a result of the circumstances created by her father, the one who denies her secular education in the first place. Franzos warns of this before we learn of Esther’s unraveling:

O wie du frevelst, Moses Freudenthal! Wie viel dich das Ünglück auch geläutert und dich dein eigen Herz erkennen gemacht, noch immer kannst du es nicht erfassen, daß es eine

Sünde gewesen, als du deinem Kinde das Licht und die Welt verschließen gewollt, und daß du recht getan, als du in jener Stunde gestattet, daß ein Anderer sie ihm erschließe.⁴⁶²

The original sin, then, was Moses's refusal to bring "enlightenment" to his daughter, but the alternative path he chose was a transferal of responsibility. While Franzos was an unabashed champion of the *Kulturnation*, "Shylock" hardly paves a clear path toward secular education and the rewards therein because it does not imagine a positive form of *Bildung*, one that is ostensibly complete. "Shylock" thus paints a portrait of the redemptive potential of *Bildung* for traditional Jews precisely because it presents what *Bildung* is *not*.

The father-daughter pairs in "Die Jahrzeit" and "Der Shylock von Barnow" present inverse conclusions: one in which a welcome return to the father and a fulfillment of his wishes generate a content, unified Jewish family, and another in which a return to the father without an opportunity for amends yields misfortune for all involved. The preservation of the family in "Die Jahrzeit," though, is reliant on a closed conception of a Jewish future: the daughter must marry her cousin in order to satisfy her father's wishes and create this joyful conclusion. Esther fails to return to a closed system of intra-Jewish relations after being exposed to a world of secular learning and inter-faith love, but the provincial village provides no safe haven.

Throughout his career, Franzos deliberately positioned himself in the tradition of Kompert's ghetto fiction and associated himself with his successful predecessor. And while the two authors occupied shared literary terrain, the conclusions of Franzos's works diverge greatly from the visions of universality and religious cooperation often portrayed by Kompert. The latter continuously turns to a relationship with the land and the rural community as spaces of resolution. The Jewish family is made whole within their small, Bohemian village and fortifies a connection to the soil. This idyllic image is absent in "Der Shylock," in which the Jewish

⁴⁶² Franzos, "Der Shylock von Barnow," 22.

characters are increasingly alienated from their community. For Kompert, the rural space has utopic potential and, by harnessing a connection to that very land, Jews might advance a program of self-improvement. Franzos, too, engages in a Dohmsian program of self-improvement, evident in his indictment of Moses and the character's crucial failure to embrace a secular worldview, but the village is for Franzos a space of darkness awaiting the external guide of enlightenment.

CHAPTER 5: Finding Tevye's Daughters

I. Introduction

Perhaps the most prominent example of father-daughter tensions in European Jewish literature is Sholem Aleichem's (1859–1916) series of *Tevye the Dairyman* stories, first published between 1895 and 1916.⁴⁶³ The original Tevye stories and their many afterlives not only brought the father-daughter trope to the forefront of Yiddish literature, but they did so five-fold (although the narrator purports that there were seven daughters). These Jewish tales of a scripture-quoting—and misquoting—Jewish father and the marital pairings of his daughters have also been adapted into several musicals, plays, and films, the most iconic of which, at least to an American audience, was the *Fiddler on the Roof* musical that debuted in 1964 and was adapted into a film in 1971. But the wider influence of Sholem Aleichem's work is not limited to the screen and stage: *Tevye the Dairyman* has also become a literary shorthand for talking about Jews and modernity. In historian Yuri Slezkine's influential and provocative work *The Jewish Century*, Tevye's daughters—namely, their departures from the home—serve as the motif for the different paths taken by Jews of the Russian Empire, tracing those who went to Palestine, those who went to America, and those who remained in what became the Soviet Union.

According to Slezkine, the twentieth century was the “Jewish Century” and modernization—with the primacy of mobility, occupational flexibility, and “book-reading

⁴⁶³ I utilize the most common English-language spelling of this pen name, “Sholem Aleichem,” although it does not correspond to the YIVO transliteration standards.

tribes”—was about everyone becoming Jewish.⁴⁶⁴ The twentieth century, then, was also the century of Tevye and his daughters, because everyone (and I use this term in Slezkine’s provocative mode of generalization) saw themselves in the Tevye stories. Jews and non-Jews alike have identified and continue to identify with the intergenerational ruptures laid bare in Sholem Aleichem’s stories and its subsequent adaptations. And the path of the stories themselves is emblematic of a modern experience: born in fits and starts, fragmented, published in pieces throughout different stages of suffering in Jewish history; emerging in a variety of translations for a multilingual, globalized audience; moving overseas for its American success story; undergoing a name change and becoming commercialized and commodified in its world-famous *Fiddler* format.⁴⁶⁵

Each of Tevye’s daughters wound Tevye in different ways, but all by means of marriage (or lack thereof). Most of the named daughters fall in love with a Jew, although not all couples unite happily: Tsaytl marries for love to a poor tailor, against her parent’s wishes. Hodl also follows her heart to marry a revolutionary (from a Jewish family) who takes her far away to Siberia. Next, Khave commits the greatest transgression when she converts to Christianity in order to marry for love. Shprintse attempts to marry outside of her class but the engagement is broken off due to these barriers (as well as an out-of-wedlock pregnancy), and she drowns herself as a result. The final pairing is between the daughter Beylke and the nouveau riche Pedotsur, whom Tevye can hardly tolerate.

⁴⁶⁴ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 11.

⁴⁶⁵ Anita Norich refers to this as the “most transportable, international, and peripatetic Yiddish text in the modern world” in *Writing in Tongues: Translating Yiddish in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 22.

I read how the Tevye stories participate in the literary preoccupation with the control of female desire, romantic and intellectual, and how the conflicts between father and daughter operate as a site in which to grapple with questions of Jewish life under the pressures of the Enlightenment, modernization, and antisemitic violence. In Chapter 1, I argued that the Berlin Haskalah comedies *Reb Henoch* (1793) and *Laykhtzin un fremelay* (1796) articulated the vicissitudes of asserting German as a “Jewish language” of its own. A century later, arising from the Russian Empire and informed by a different sphere of the polycentric Jewish Enlightenment, Sholem Aleichem’s task was less to establish a language—in this case, Yiddish, although he also wrote in Hebrew and Russian—as Jewish; rather, his enterprise was to establish *how* Yiddish would serve as a language of Jewish literary expression. The persona Sholem Aleichem, the pen name of Solomon (Sholem) Naumovich Rabinovich, allowed the author the freedom to “cast a critical eye on traditional Jewish life, to expose its inherent absurdities as well as its deterioration, and to make it, in general, the subject of comedy” while at the same time poking fun at the contradictions of the Russified Jew.⁴⁶⁶

The Tevye stories, a series that has enjoyed many afterlives, have made the language of father-daughter tensions widely accessible and, at times, even synonymous with

⁴⁶⁶ Dan Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl and Other Studies of Modern Jewish Literary Imagination* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 140.

The pen name “Sholem Aleichem” means something like “how do you do” (literally: “peace unto you”). Because “Sholem aleichem” is a set phrase, one therefore does not refer to the author by “Aleichem” as one would with a surname.

In the following analysis of the Tevye stories, I refer to the author by the pen name “Sholem Aleichem” for the sake of continuity. At the same time, I acknowledge the distinction between the literary persona of Sholem Aleichem and his historical creator. Dan Miron’s *The Image of the Shtetl* provides a thorough explication of the relationship between Solomon Rabinovich and his creation of a particular Yiddish literary voice through “Sholem Aleichem.” Miron contends that critical scholarship on Rabinovich/Sholem Aleichem has not been sensitive to the distinctions between the two and the role that the latter played in the public sphere. Beyond making this division clear, Miron also works to unpack Sholem Aleichem’s authorial role and its various iterations through the author’s lifetime.

intergenerational conflict.⁴⁶⁷ While the *Fiddler on the Roof* musical adaptation diverges from the source material in many ways, its famous refrain of “Tradition!” distills the central issue at stake in the disruptions between generations: an investment in continuation, the transmission of practices and forms of knowledge from one generation to the next. According to Mikhail Krutikov, each of the daughters in the Tevye stories “inhabit a very concrete, historical time and space, being fully aware of the rapid cultural, social, and political changes around them, while their father remains aloof to the ongoing transformations of reality.”⁴⁶⁸ I suggest instead to read Tevye not as oblivious, but instead as articulating a fraught response to the threats to Russian Jewish life and to the traditional role of the Jewish patriarch. This chapter considers how the relationships between Tevye and his many daughters—and importantly, no sons—contend with the uncertainties of the Jewish future and pervasive concerns with how Jewish life can be re-made after historical traumas, including pogroms, revolution, and mass emigration. I focus on the stories of two daughters—Khava and Hodl—and consider how they are embedded within an account caught up in questions of genealogical, spiritual, and intellectual transmission. I undertake this by first considering how the very narrative form of Tevye locates Jewish tradition and its regulation in the patriarch. Then, I consider more closely how these two daughters attempt to redirect the path of the Jewish family and re-make the conception of the learned Jew, a central feature in the Jewish cultural imaginary and its preservation of the textual tradition. In doing so, each daughter’s rebellion against the norms of communal Jewish life opens up new forms of learning and structures of devotion. Both daughters introduce new ideological and

⁴⁶⁷ Norich darkly notes that “Tevye and his daughters have had an afterlife that the twentieth century denied their nonfictional compatriots” (23). See: *Writing in Tongues*.

⁴⁶⁸ Mikhail Krutikov, *Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity, 1905–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 166.

intellectual worlds, yet the key difference between the two is the issue of conversion. This singularity of the Khave story—also in its persistence throughout later adaptations—poses questions of the plasticity of the Jewish family and the conditions of forgiveness.

II. The Tasks of Writing in Yiddish and of Writing Tevye

It is important to recognize that Sholem Aleichem’s work diverges significantly from that of German writers such as Lewald, Kompert, and Franzos discussed in the preceding chapters, most notably in terms of its socio-cultural milieu and intended audiences. Whereas the use of Yiddish had largely fallen away in the German-speaking lands by the nineteenth century, Yiddish remained the dominant vernacular of Russian Jewry into the twentieth century.⁴⁶⁹ The marked rise of a Jewish middle class in the German-speaking lands was not mirrored in the Russian Empire, where a proportionally much smaller Jewish bourgeoisie developed.⁴⁷⁰ Jews were largely restricted to living within the territories of the Pale of Settlement and subject to imperial policies causing large-scale poverty. The Jews of the Russian Empire lived under drastically different conditions, but Jonathan Frankel also draws similarities between the German and Russian processes of Jewish emancipation. Frankel writes that “the experience of German (and Austrian) Jewry anticipated that of Russian Jews” in terms of progress toward civic equality, since the German-speaking lands also experienced reversals after steps toward emancipation and

⁴⁶⁹ According to Aschheim, 96.7% of Russian Jews declared Yiddish as their first language. See: Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 11.

⁴⁷⁰ Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 45. Bartal points out that this socio-economic phenomenon—which included the abandonment of traditional Jewish customs—was in part influenced by German culture, “then considered the ideal European culture by a certain segment of Eastern European Jewry” (45).

the increase of violence and antisemitism following revolution.⁴⁷¹ The late years of the Haskalah dovetailed with the rise of modern Jewish nationalism toward the end of the nineteenth century in eastern Europe, and Sholem Aleichem wrote during periods of political and ideological flux regarding the status of Jews in eastern Europe.⁴⁷²

Sholem Aleichem inherited the legacy of generations of maskilim who were compelled to justify their use of Yiddish. As Dan Miron writes in his landmark study on the rise of modern Yiddish fiction, maskilic writers of Yiddish were aware of the language's stigmatization and, at the same time, participated in stigmatizing it.⁴⁷³ The early maskilim typically deplored Yiddish as coarse and ill-suited for the aesthetic and ideological aims of the Haskalah, and Yiddish functioned in the service of Hebrew or as a vehicle for parody.⁴⁷⁴ By the 1880s, though, the status of Yiddish literature had improved, in part due to the increased interest of both Hebraists and Russian Jewish intelligentsia alike who sought to elevate the positive features of Yiddish in order to promote Jewish culture more widely in the years after the 1881–82 pogroms.⁴⁷⁵ Sholem Aleichem's arrival to Yiddish authorship was not self-evident though, and early in his career, his critique of the vernacular and its limitations was, according to Miron, still "deeply rooted in the aesthetics of ugliness."⁴⁷⁶ This self-consciousness among writers of Yiddish generally and of

⁴⁷¹ Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2.

⁴⁷² Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, 97. Bartal writes that "Jewish nationalism did not rebel against the Haskalah. Rather, it carried on the Haskalah's concepts and gave them a nationalist slant" (ibid.).

⁴⁷³ Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 42.

⁴⁷⁴ David Roskies, "Call It Jewspeak: On the Evolution of Speech in Modern Yiddish Writing," *Poetics Today* 35, no. 3 (2014): 225–301, 237.

⁴⁷⁵ Miron, *The Image of the Shtetl*, 130.

⁴⁷⁶ Miron, *A Traveler Disguised*, 68.

Sholem Aleichem specifically—perennially explaining and defending the very form of their writing—also operated in the service of shaping modern Yiddish literature. While Sholem Aleichem may have articulated disdain toward the language of his most popular works at points in his career, he also went on to innovate and disseminate Yiddish literature at a rapid pace.

In his prolific literary career, Sholem Aleichem is perhaps best known for his innovative implementation of the monologue. Central to scholarship on Tevye is the protagonist’s orality in this format. Key scholars of Yiddish literature such as David Roskies and Hana Wirth-Nesher agree that his mode of narration is a form of *skaz*, from the Russian *skazat* “to say” or “to tell.”⁴⁷⁷ First identified by Russian formalists, *skaz* is characterized by a narrator of simple means and limited education whose language is identifiably oral and who speaks personally and directly to a group of listeners.⁴⁷⁸ Tevye’s voice carries the entirety of the narrative, whether he is speaking to himself or carrying on a “monologue-in-intimate-dialogue” with his horse, his family, the daughters’ suitors, God, or his author Sholem Aleichem, who is included throughout the tales as a silent sounding board for Tevye’s rambling.⁴⁷⁹ In the opening installment of the Tevye stories, the dairyman sends a letter to his ghostwriter, who patiently recorded the long-winded tales that follow. In this exchange (which is, for the reader’s view, one-sided), Tevye establishes himself as socially and intellectually subordinate to his loyal listener, Pani Sholem Aleichem, by

⁴⁷⁷ David Roskies, “Call It Jewspeak: On the Evolution of Speech in Modern Yiddish Writing,” *Poetics Today* 35, no. 3 (2014): 225–301, here 245; Hana Wirth-Nesher, “Voices of Ambivalence in Sholem Aleichem’s Monologues,” *Prooftexts* 1, no. 2 (1981): 158–71.

In an earlier article, Roskies argues that Sholem Aleichem reaches back a generation to “discarded elements of Haskalah literature” when he writes Tevye’s monologues (35). The Tevye stories, according to Roskies, revives “a particular type of monologue—the pseudo-maggidic sermon, complete with scriptural epigraphs, a homiletic structure, and a dazzling array of proverbial sayings” (ibid.). See David Roskies, “Sholem Aleichem: Mythologist of the Mundane,” *AJS Review* 13, no. 1/2 (1988): 27–46.

⁴⁷⁸ Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 128.

⁴⁷⁹ Roskies, “Call It Jewspeak,” 245.

declaring that he is unworthy and begging forgiveness for his shortcomings: “Ir zolt oyf mir keyn faraybel nisht hoben, ikh bin a proster khay-vekayem” (“I ask that you not hold it against me; I am just an ordinary man”).⁴⁸⁰ The opening letter is both an entrée into the *skaz* form of narrative, an unrefined and highly colloquial mode, and an ironic introduction into the Tevye series. Tevye profusely thanks his author and insists that his story is uninteresting—that he finds it hard to believe that the story of a simple man would be worth immortalizing in text. What follows though is blatant evidence to the contrary: Tevye is, simply put, a ham. He is the ideal candidate for longform storytelling and offering Sholem Aleichem’s readers a rich source of familial melodrama.

Each element of the text, whether the recollection of events, the dramatization of dialogues, or the supermonologue in which each account is embedded, is relayed by Tevye’s voice.⁴⁸¹ Thus, while the central concern of the fourth through eighth Tevye stories is the marital fate of each daughter, every event and dialogue is mediated by the father. As Hana Wirth-Nesher has identified, Tevye’s particular style of narration offers a solipsistic worldview in a form of verbal isolation.⁴⁸² Tevye’s interpretation and expression of the surrounding world is often disconnected from anyone but himself; even the very syntax of his speech is characterized by truncation and disconnection. His sentences are fragmented and interrupted by scriptural quotations, much like the patriarchs featured in Chapter 1, and various phrases such as “I beg your pardon” or “no evil eye” (a saying for warding off bad luck). The narration is made more disjointed by Tevye’s constant reiteration of the speaker’s pronoun in the middle of sentences,

⁴⁸⁰ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye der milkhiker*, in *Ale Verk* (New York: Sholem-aleykhem folksfond, 1917), 9.

⁴⁸¹ Roskies, “Call It Jewspeak,” 245.

⁴⁸² Wirth-Nesher, “Voices of Ambivalence,” 159.

clumsily interrupting the dialogue and frequently adding “Hodl/Khave hayst es” (“Hodl/Khave, that is” or “Hodl/Khave is her name”).

Tevye’s fragmented speech patterns and use of quotations create an experience of repetition, a feature that is evident in his frequent declaration that “Tevye iz dokh nisht keyn yidene” (“Tevye is not a woman”). Dauber suggests that this refrain reveals Tevye’s concern that “some divisions aren’t as immutable as he’d like to claim” while Miron comments that the insecure Tevye must repeat the mantra to convince himself of it.⁴⁸³ Alisa Solomon and Ruth Wisse both suggest that Tevye’s designation as dairyman—*Tevye der milkhiker* literally means “Tevye the milky one”—implies a milder temperament that undermines claims to a harsher patriarchal authority; his status as the “milky one” is a “feminizing descriptor, signaling Tevye’s warmth and nurturing nature and, later, the challenge to his paternal authority that will come from his daughters.”⁴⁸⁴ As Miron has demonstrated, Tevye also grapples with an insecure masculinity by flaunting his “intellectual virility,” although he often reveals himself to be paralyzed by his own uncertainties—unable to take action in response to his circumstances (although he often actively invites the suitors who cause him such woe).⁴⁸⁵ Symptomatic of an anxiety toward the traditional divisions of gender, Tevye uses quotation and repetition in a clumsy attempt to speak into existence a world he wishes to preserve, although the world he envisions may not have existed in the first place. His various refrains thus function as forms of

⁴⁸³ Jeremy Dauber, *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem: The Remarkable Life and Afterlife of the Man Who Created Tevye* (New York: Schocken, 2013), 175.

Dan Miron, “The Dark Side of Sholem Aleichem’s Laughter,” *Derekh Judaica Urbinatensia*, no. 1 (2003): 16–54, here 47.

⁴⁸⁴ Alisa Solomon, *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 13. See also: Ruth R. Wisse, *The Modern Jewish Canon: A Journey Through Language and Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 43.

⁴⁸⁵ Miron, “The Dark Side of Sholem Aleichem’s Laughter,” 46.

chant, devotionals that might reinforce the gender roles and models of family that come under threat throughout his stories, alongside his recitation of both scripture and folk sayings.

Tevye makes abundantly clear his commitment to religious texts and his knowledge thereof, although he frequently makes mistakes and dismisses his ignorance as the shortcomings of a humble dairyman. He is most proud of an ability to bring scripture into his daily parlance, “to quote, to gloss, to interpret the textual tradition.”⁴⁸⁶ Tevye’s engagement with scripture makes evident the muddled lines between the sacred and the profane. His quotations from the Jewish textual tradition are intimately entwined with the secular: Hebrew-Aramaic quotations are interspersed in his Yiddish (language also influenced by Slavic vocabulary and syntax), and his practice of textual quotation is filled with errors. Tevye is not the ideal learned Jewish man; he picks up the Bible or some Rashi if he has the time, in between his back-breaking work in the village, or he chats up a well-read interlocutor to discuss Jewish texts. This transformation of scriptural quotation alongside Yiddish folk sayings creates, according to Roskies, a new vernacular in which “Yiddish-speaking Jews turned scripture and the store of rabbinic wisdom into a living (and therefore irreverent) vernacular. To speak is to misquote.”⁴⁸⁷

The act of misquotation, in the case of Tevye, operates within the narrative’s general mode of unreliability. Just as the reader must approach Tevye’s knowledge of scripture with skepticism, so too must they consider his account of events, recollection of dialogue, or assignment of motivations with a level of doubt. In outlining the basic features of the fictional homodiegetic unreliable narrators (those who are part of the story world, as opposed to omniscient authorial narrators), Vera Nünning precisely describes the stylistic and formal

⁴⁸⁶ Roskies, “Call It JewSpeak,” 245.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 246.

qualities of Tevye's mode of storytelling: The homodiegetic unreliable narrator is "often deeply emotionally involved, obsessed or disturbed monologists" and can be "recognised by features like exclamations, ellipses, rhetorical questions, any number of repetitions and the tempo of their narration. In trying to convince readers of the truth of their story, they often appeal to the reader by direct address and explanation."⁴⁸⁸ By virtue of his intense investment in the narrated events, Tevye's perspective is narrowed and distorted in order to relay his desired recollection. This untrustworthiness participates in a larger tradition of unreliable narration in European literature, particularly evident in the rise of first-person narrative in the eighteenth century and, more immediate to Sholem Aleichem, in Nikolai Gogol's works such as "Diary of a Madman" (1835) and "The Nose" (1836). Gogol, a fellow native of Ukraine whose portrait adorned Sholem Aleichem's study, was also a master of *skaz*, and his style exerted a strong influence on the Yiddish author's work.⁴⁸⁹ Like Gogol's best-known characters, Tevye is a relatively powerless individual struggling with the "moral imbalance of the universe" and confronting the innovations and devastating changes brought on by urban life.⁴⁹⁰

Central to a reading of Tevye is also an acknowledgement of the highly constructed nature of this speech. As Anita Norich points out, the vast majority of Tevye scholarship interprets him within two paradigms: as the "old-fashioned *folksmentsch*" or as a "Job-like

⁴⁸⁸ Vera Nünning, *Unreliable Narration and Trustworthiness: Intermedial and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 10.

The term "unreliable narrator" is considered to have been first coined in 1961 by Wayne C. Booth, where he defines the narrator reliable "when he speaks or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983 [1961]), 158–59. Nünning's edited volume attempts a multidisciplinary approach at defining unreliable narration and, in the realm of literary studies, responds to and expands on Booth's rhetorical narratological work with cognitive and structural narratological perspectives.

⁴⁸⁹ Dauber, *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem*, 28.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

figure, a long-suffering Jew who argues with God but will not give up, a patriarch whose children—in Tevye’s case seven daughters and in Job’s case seven sons—are a series of trials he must bear.”⁴⁹¹ Both paradigms are at play, but his folksy, malapropic speech should not be read straight as an illustration of an uneducated, ordinary Russian Jew from the countryside. Sholem Aleichem does not write a simple dairyman who makes haphazard errors; rather, Tevye’s interweaving of folk wisdom, scriptural quotation, and general proclivity for repetition is meticulously staged and often contains within it clever word play: He assimilates Yiddish words into Hebrew-Aramaic passages and inserts himself into Rashi’s wisdom.⁴⁹² At other times he displays an intimate knowledge of scripture, often relayed with strategic mistakes, or even invents non-existent sources, quoting “unreal Talmudic sayings cast in bogus Aramaic.”⁴⁹³ Sholem Aleichem’s deployment of Tevye goes beyond the maskilic use of idiomatic language to launch social critique or to render the more realistic speech of shtetl life; the persistent intertextuality of Tevye’s speech and the insecurity therein are the ideal vehicle for an engagement with the social and historical tensions of the tales.

According to Roskies, the kind of folk or proverbial speech found in *Tevye* serves as a “fount of wit, wisdom, and righteous indignation” and “was a vehicle for giving everyone a voice and giving that voice free rein.”⁴⁹⁴ This mode of Yiddish in a way operates as a

⁴⁹¹ Norich, *Writing in Tongues*, 23.

⁴⁹² In just one example of his wordplay, Tevye invites his daughter Shprintse’s future ill-fated suitor to share blintzes (filled pancakes) over the holiday Shavuot (*Shvues* in Yiddish), he creatively plays on a Biblical verse (Numbers, 11:5) and makes a Hebrew verb out of the Yiddish word *blintse*. Tevye announces that his wife will serve “milkhige blintes avelkhe, *asher lo blintsu avoysenyinu bemitsrayim*” (“such creamy blintzes that *our forefathers never blintzed in Egypt*”). In Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 147. For an explication of the biblical source, see Halkin’s notes on p. 297 in: Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Tales*, trans. Hillel Halkin (New York: Schocken Books, 1987).

⁴⁹³ Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 379.

⁴⁹⁴ Roskies, “Call It JewSpeak,” 244.

democratizing force, allowing the average individual, rather than a member of the religious or urban elite, to take center stage and launch social and ideological critique through Yiddish literature. The paradox of Tevye and Sholem Aleichem's use of monologue is that by bringing the narrative into the mouth of the salt-of-the-earth, proverb-quoting Tevye, the narrative necessarily marginalizes any other voices.⁴⁹⁵ Reading the Tevye stories—and in doing so, listening to the isolated orality of its self-proclaimed humble protagonist as he battles the vicissitudes of modern life—therefore requires an act of excavation in order to unearth the voices of the central figures of concern, the daughters. Like the unreliable narration in Franzos's "Der Shylock von Barnow," the reader has an indirect path toward the daughters' thoughts and attitudes, once again preventing them from developing fully as moral agents while also placing them at the center of the protagonist's moral dilemmas.

The father's monopoly on the narrative is particularly notable since the most dynamic characters are the daughters, while Tevye, the protagonist, is predictable by design. He says a great deal but also often manages to say very little through his repetition, misquotation, and reliance on generalization. The daughters propel Tevye, a father whose agony and long-winded oration constitute the majority of the text; less visible, though, is what propels the daughters. The pursuits of the daughters operate as a subterranean mode of telling more layers of the story than directly evident in Tevye's accounts. Identifying Tevye's solipsism and reading *around* this maximally Tevye-centric presentation of events is necessary in order to bring into relief the arrival of a variety of new worldviews. Tevye's attempts to accommodate a shifting social and ideological landscape into his own understanding of the world ultimately allows the reader to

⁴⁹⁵ While Sholem Aleichem's oeuvre is certainly dominated by male protagonists, and as a result also male narrators, he did also write some stories centering on the woman's voice. See, for example, "Dos tepl" ("The Little Pot," 1901) and "Gendz" ("Goose," 1902).

find what no longer fits. Miron refers to a similar operation of “glimpsing through the cracks in his various masks” in order to read the account of a “highly accomplished raconteur” who provokes suspicion.⁴⁹⁶

Tevye’s strategy of storytelling is intensely concerned with what it means to be a learned Jew. When Tevye quotes from the Talmud or wishes to indulge in some scholarly debate with his future son-in-law, he draws on a culture that makes Torah study the most esteemed practice. But not every Jew is learned scholar (*a talmid-khokhem*) or has the time to spend hours daily bent over sacred texts. Many men and women alike are also occupied with the demands of the material world, doing physical labor in order to earn a living. Tevye’s (mis)quotation, coupled with both boasting and apology for his intellectual shortcomings, is colored by an awareness of the traditional Jewish masculine ideal of scholarship and is driven by an anxiety toward its attainment. The stories of both Hodl and Khave grapple with questions of wisdom and who bears, and thus transmits, knowledge. Through their marriages, these daughters encounter new models of the learned individual and, consequently, disrupt corresponding traditional dichotomies of gender roles. Ashkenazi Jewish culture traditionally divided study of its sacred texts and earthly concerns between men and women, respectively, and has placed these in a hierarchy in which the spiritual is valued over the material.⁴⁹⁷ The redefinition of the learned Jew as well as who gets to be learned, then, distorts this gendered opposition and its distribution of status.

⁴⁹⁶ Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 368–69.

Miron also writes that in the case of the first person, unreliable narrator like Tevye, “What is left unsaid or half-said is as (and even more) important as what gets said.” See: Miron, “The Dark Side of Sholem Aleichem’s Laughter,” 37.

⁴⁹⁷ Parush, *Reading Jewish Women*, 39.

These texts grapple with the elevation of the intellectual and the author, as Tevye self-consciously tells these stories driven by a fixation with what it means to be a pious and educated Jew. To be knowledgeable is a source of pride and pain for Tevye, who both boasts of his daughters' "oyfgeklerte kep" ("enlightened heads/minds") and struggles to come to terms with the new intellectual worlds that they enter.⁴⁹⁸ *Tevye* is an exploration in how existing dichotomies of sacred/profane, educated/uneducated, masculine/feminine cannot hold true. Men as carriers of knowledge and women as physical carriers of the next generation are accordingly both disrupted and reinforced. Tevye himself defies these oppositions while at the same time yearning to keep a foothold in an old ideal of social order. He encounters an expanded realm of possibility in defining what it might mean to be a learned Jew and, more generally, a Jew who lives among Christians.

III. Khave: The "First" Rebellious Daughter

Khave's name, the Yiddish equivalent of "Eve," points to her disobedient Biblical predecessor. The dominant understanding of Genesis locates the origins of sin in Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit, but this negative image of Eve and her bringing of sin were not always seen as features of the Hebrew Bible; rather, they were later innovations in Jewish and Christian interpretations.⁴⁹⁹ Khave's actions may fit tidily in Eve's most well-known characterization as a

⁴⁹⁸ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 126.

⁴⁹⁹ Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 61. Meyers traces the interpretive traditions of Eve and the over-emphasis of her as a "sinner." According to Meyers, Eve is not mentioned again in the Hebrew Bible after the first part of Genesis, and her next mention occurs in Tobit, a book in the Apocrypha which is part of the Catholic and Orthodox bibles but not in the Jewish or Protestant canon. More negative views of Eve appear later in Ecclesiasticus (also in the Apocrypha) and in early Christian sources, such as the New Testament. Meyers writes, "The association of the first woman with sin, sexuality, and lust continues and grows in postbiblical texts." (62). The idea that Eve tempted Adam or that she has "fallen" are ideas that have become the authoritative interpretations in the context of Christianity (61–62).

transgressor: She eats the ultimate “forbidden fruit”—a Christian lover—and is punished by expulsion. But Khave’s story might also be considered in dialogue with a wider realm of Eve interpretation. Scholarship over the past few decades complicates the narrative of Eve as the initial transmitter of sin: Phyllis Trible’s landmark re-reading of Genesis 2–3 inaugurated an approach to biblical criticism that works to “depatriarchalize” the Bible, identifying Eve’s agency in the text.⁵⁰⁰ In her study of the emergence of the female character, Mieke Bal reads Eve’s partaking of the tree of knowledge—her disobedience—as the “first independent act” through which she has the power to “make the man eat, hence to make him know (her), and disobey in his turn.”⁵⁰¹ Many more recent feminist readings that build on Trible and Bal’s work reject the notion that sin is the central theme of Adam and Eve’s story in Genesis.⁵⁰² John C. Hampsey, for example, notes that humanity is “indebted to Eve, since she was the one who willingly ate of the fruit of the Tree of the *Knowledge* of Good and Evil” and argues that this is higher than the “good” itself.⁵⁰³ Eve is the original innovator: She takes initiative in her role as the first woman, much as Khave is the first: to marry outside of Judaism, to imperil her belonging in the family, and eventually, to begin a form of reconciliation with her father after her perceived betrayal.

⁵⁰⁰ See Phyllis Trible, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2–3 Reread,” *Andover Newton Quarterly* 13 (1972): 251–58. The general effort to “translate biblical faith without sexism” (31) is found in “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, no. 1 (1973): 30–48.

⁵⁰¹ Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 125.

⁵⁰² Bal, Meyers, Lyn Bechtel, and Ellen van Wolde among others challenge the assumption that Genesis 3 centers on sin. Alice Ogden Bellis offers a helpful overview of contemporary feminist readings of Eve in Ch. 2 of *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women’s Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

⁵⁰³ John C. Hampsey, “The Idea of the ‘Good,’” *Philosophy and Literature* 40, no. 1 (2016): 285–96, here 287.

For Khave's story, it is of particular relevance that Eve's insubordination involves partaking from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, an act that denies a state of ignorance and opens her to the expanse of knowledge that exists in the world. Khave disobediently falls in love with a man whom she considers adjacent to Gorky, a prominent figure of Russian literature and thought, in an act that points toward an engagement with a larger world of learning and letters. Her rebellion functions analogously to Eve's by opening up a world of knowledge previously inaccessible. Eve takes from the tree as a source of wisdom, and thereafter, Adam and Eve are aware not only of their nakedness, but also the varieties of suffering in the human experience.⁵⁰⁴ But Khave is not alone in opening up new worlds of knowledge—her sister Hodl does this, too. The key difference, though, is the dual transgression of boundaries: both cultural-intellectual and religious. Khave's love of Russian literature would not have been received the same way had she fallen in love with a secularized Jew who inspired her to read Gorky. Although Tevye learns to assent to the demands of romantic love for his other daughters, the case of Khave demonstrates that "romantic love can stretch the belief system of Tevye so far", an act that would have been unacceptable either to the author or his contemporary readers.⁵⁰⁵

Khave's transgressive curiosity causes her to push further questions similar to the ones Hodl and her husband introduce. When asking why humanity contains its existing divisions, she is confronted by her father's conservatism, who attempts to stymie her penchant for inquiry: "E! AZ mir velen onhoyben fregen kashes—lemay azoy un lemay azoy, iz in ledaber sof—a mayse on ayn ek!' Zogt zi mir: 'Deroyf hot dokh unz got gegeben a farshtand, az mir zolen fregen

⁵⁰⁴ Peter Thacher Lanfer, *Remembering Eden: The Reception History of Genesis 3: 22–24* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). See p. 70 on whether expulsion after taking from the Tree of Knowledge is about attaining wisdom or about covenant.

⁵⁰⁵ Seth L. Wolitz, "The Americanization of Tevye or Boarding the Jewish 'Mayflower,'" *American Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1988): 514–36, here 518.

kashes.” (“If you’re going to ask why, why, why all the time, we’ll just keep going around in circles.” “But what did God give us brains for if we’re not supposed to use them?” she asks.)⁵⁰⁶ Khave articulates a desire to avail herself of her full capacity for thought. More precisely, she calls for the use of “farshtand,” the Germanic word for reason, which gestures toward an interest in Enlightenment principles, while at the same time using the Aramaic term for a difficult question “kashe,” as opposed to the Germanic “frage,” to refer to the method of inquiry.⁵⁰⁷ This formulation signals Khave’s position at the intersection between traditional Jewish frameworks of learning and the universalizing demands of Enlightenment thought. Tevye predictably responds to Khave with another folk-saying and in doing so, truncates an attempt to reconcile methods of Jewish inquiry—one characterized by the Talmudic asking of questions—with the dominant modes emerging from the European Enlightenment.

From the perspective of Jewish cultural history, the rapid succession of love marriages that take place in the Tevye stories aligns with a general shift away from the traditional configuration of Jewish family and toward an adoption of bourgeois models of marriage and the nuclear household. By the end of the nineteenth century, wider European practices of love and marriage based on mutually chosen partners had already become a central concern in both Yiddish and Hebrew Haskalah literature.⁵⁰⁸ The incorporation of new domestic models was

⁵⁰⁶ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 126. Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 73.

Typically, I provide longer passages in Halkin’s translation. Shorter quotations, and particularly those in which I work closely with the original diction of the text, are my own translation. Translations not cited as Halkin’s are my own.

⁵⁰⁷ Max Weinreich notes that “language reflects life” regarding the centrality of modes of inquiry in Jewish culture. Yiddish has a range of substantives for the verb *ask*: *di frage/der freg* (the Germanic form), *kashe* (a perplexing issue requiring a “solution on an intellectual basis”), and *shayle* (a juridical matter determined an authority). Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, 4.

⁵⁰⁸ Naomi Seidman, *The Marriage Plot: Or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 10.

particularly fraught for eastern European Jewish families, in which traditional marriage was defined by an emphasis on in-law relationships.

In her study of new models of love and marriage in Hebrew and Yiddish literature, Naomi Seidman contrasts traditional Jewish terms of kinship with those of its surrounding communities. While some kinship terms are translatable between Yiddish and German or Slavic languages, the Hebrew-derived designation *mekhutanim* in Yiddish, referring to the parents of a child's spouse, does not exist in the surrounding languages. According to Seidman, *mekhutanim* “describes a structural rather than affective relationship, signaling that families connected through the marriage of their children take part in a set of conventions, obligations, and transfer of status” and that marriages in this context thus create “family both backward (to a previous generation) as well as forward (to grandchildren) and thus radiates ‘outward,’ as well.”⁵⁰⁹ While a concern with a larger familial network—and its economic and status implications—is not unique to Jews, the existence of the term *mekhutanim* and its persistence point to the institutions at stake in narratives that suddenly reduce the negotiation of marriage to a decision between the spouses in question. Khave's marriage is the first to make the familial origins of the husband entirely unknown. Her union represents an erasure of a traditional model of marriage that emphasizes the resulting relationships between larger familial entities. By virtue of converting and marrying a Christian—alone a nonstarter—the identity of the spouse's parents is elided, indicative of an obliterated potential for linkages between families.

Creating Her First Man

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 222.

When Tevye first learns that his daughter Khava is associating with the local scribe Khvedke, Tevye is primarily concerned with the pedigree (or *yikhes*, the eastern European Jewish concept of status based on lineage and also acquired through marriage) of his daughter’s new friend. Khava has no interest in questions of lineage: “Bay mir zeynen ale mentshen glaykh; nor az er aleyn iz a mentsh nit keyn geveyntlikher—dos veys ikh far gevis” (For me all people are equal. And Khvedke is no ordinary person—that I know for sure).⁵¹⁰ Khava insists on a vision of human equality, but nonetheless maintains that her love interest is exceptional, albeit unrelated to his religious affiliation. She hesitates to tell Tevye what makes her friend so special, contending that he would not understand, but then asserts that Khvedke is “der tsveyter Gorki” (the second Gorky).⁵¹¹ Tevye responds, bewildered:

“Der tsveyter Gorki? – zog ikh. – Ver-zhe iz geven, zog ikh, der ershter Gorki?”...
 “Gorki, zogt zi, dos iz haynt kimat der ershter mentsh oyf der velt”... “Vo zitst er, zog ikh, der tane dayner, vos iz zayn gesheft un vos far a droshe hot er ge’droshn’t?”...
 Makht zi tsu mir: “Der Gorki – dos iz a barimter shrayber, a shriftsteler, a mentsh, hayst dos, vos makht bikher, un a tayerer, a zeltener, ayn erlikher mentsh, shtamt oykh fun prosten shtand, nisht gelerent in ergets, nor fun zikh aleyn... ot dos iz zayn bild”... Azoy makht zi tsu mir, Khava hayst es, un nemt aroys fun keshene a portretl un vayzt dos mir.
 “Ot dos iz er, zog ikh, der tsaddik dayner, Reb Gorki? Ikh volt gemegt shveren, az ikh hob im ergets gezeyen, zog ikh, oder bay der ban trogen zek, oder in vald shlepen kletser”... “Iz dos bay dir, zogt zi, a khesorn, zogt zi, az a mentsh horevet mit zayne eygene hent? Du aleyn horevest den nit? Un mir horeven nit?”⁵¹²

“A second Gorky?” I say. “And who, pray tell, was the first?”
 “Gorky,” she says, “is only just about the most important man alive.”
 “Is he?” I say. “And just where does he live, this Mr. Important of yours? What’s his act and what makes him such a big deal?”⁵¹³

⁵¹⁰ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 124.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid., 124–25.

⁵¹³ “Mr. Important,” in Halkin’s translation, corresponds to “tane” in the original. “Tane” (or “tanna”) refers to one of the rabbis of the first two centuries CE, whose teachings are in the Mishnah. In this context, it indeed refers to someone wise and important, but the English rendering inevitably loses this religious context. In the following sentence Tevye asks what Gorky is so good at; in Yiddish, he asks what kind of “droshe” (Jewish sermon) Gorky had “ge’droshn’t” (preached—the verbal form of “droshe”).

“Gorky,” she says, “is a literary figure, a famous author. That means he writes books. He’s a rare, dear soul, even if he comes from a simple home and never had a day’s schooling in his life. Whatever he knows, he taught himself. Here, this is his picture...”

And she takes out a little photograph from her pocket and shows it to me.

“This tsaddik is your Rabbi Gorky?” I say, “I could swear I’ve seen him somewhere before. You can search me, though, if I remember whether he was toting sacks at the train station or hauling logs in the forest...”

“And is it so shameful,” says my Chava, “for a man to work with his own two hands? Whose hands do you work with? Whose hands do we all?”⁵¹⁴

When interrogated on the origins of her new Christian friend, Khave seamlessly begins orating on the brilliance of her literary idol, making it unclear where Khvedke ends and Gorky begins. In this exchange, it becomes evident that Khave has perhaps not fallen in love with Khvedke after all, but rather with ideas: She is enamored with idea of fundamental human equality and with a socialist valorization of the worker. She is also in love with the idea of Maxim Gorky. The historical Gorky, the penname of Aleksey Maksimovich Peskov (1868–1936), was a Marxist writer of socialist realism who critiqued the tsarist regime in his work. Khave exalts him as a writer—designated both as a “shrayber” and the more evocative “shriftshhteler” (like in the German, *Schriftsteller*: one who lays down script)—but he is also a self-made man and a salt of the earth individual who knows how to do an honest day’s work. Khave sings a paean to Bildung both in terms of Gorky’s engagement with literature and his process of self-cultivation. Through her love of the intellectual and his autodidacticism, Khave also articulates a Romantic notion of the individual creator as genius—alongside a belief in universal kinship.

It is unsurprising that the traditional, scripture-quoting Tevye is unimpressed by Gorky or Khave’s nascent political attitudes, particularly after he has recently lost his second daughter to the revolution. Even before it is revealed that Khave will convert to Christianity, she presents to her father a reorientation of values. Most importantly in this reorientation, though, is a re-

⁵¹⁴ Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 72.

sourcing of values: A regard for human equality, learning, honesty and hard work—all of which Khave celebrates in her praise of Gorky—are certainly not alien to Tevye, but their divergent cultural anchoring points for these values come into stark relief. When he suspiciously and sarcastically probes about Khave’s new spiritual leader, Tevye meets her Russian literary superstar with his “tane,” a rabbinic sage whose views are found in the Mishnah, and “tsaddik,” a Jewish spiritual leader meaning “righteous one.” Even in this mode of derision, Tevye nonetheless attempts to assimilate Gorky into his own worldview. He then moves from the sacred to the more profane, imagining the literary giant as just another figure of daily life in Boiberik. But in attempting to lower Gorky’s status, Tevye succeeds in describing himself, a laborer whom one might find on the train or carrying logs from the forest. When confronted with the new center of Khave’s moral universe, Tevye responds by turning him into his own mirror.

Khave and Tevye’s exchange presents a rhetorical rift that is greater than their actual differences of belief. Khave goes on to scold her father for having a biblical passage prepared for any scenario. In her attempt to convince Tevye of Jews’ and Christians’ common humanity, Khave finds that her father comes up short: “Efsheer gefint zikh, zogt zi, bay dir a pasek vegen dem, vos mentshen, zogt zi, hoben genumen un hoben zikh aleyn, zogt zi, ayngelayt oyf yiden un goyim, oyf balebatim un knekht, oyf printsim un betlers?” (“Maybe you’ll find, she says, a passage about how human beings separated themselves into Jews and Christians, masters and slaves, princes and beggars?”)⁵¹⁵ Tevye maintains that these divisions have constituted the world since its creation, and refers to the morning prayer to substantiate these binaries—which includes the distinctions between day and night, men and women—and insists on the immutability of

⁵¹⁵ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 125.

these categories. As Dauber observes, Khave’s queries are powerful not because they question whether these divisions exist, but because they question “whether they *matter*.”⁵¹⁶

Olga Litvak has also paid special attention to the appearance of oppositions and the role of doubling in Khave’s story. Litvak argues that the doubling of lovers—Khvedke and Gorky—corresponds to a doubling of the fathers (Tevye and the local priest) and “signifies the confusion between good and evil, true and false, Jew and non-Jew, ambiguities critical in the story’s poetics of transvaluation.”⁵¹⁷ In practice, Khvedke is no equal to Gorky; he is silent while Khave falls in love with her fantasy, the famous author, and not the local scribe himself. The real Gorky, though, is cast as the center of the—or at least Khave’s—universe, and the Yiddish formulation that Gorky is “*der ershter mentsh oyf der velt*” also literally means “the first person [or man] in the world.” The famous author therefore acts as a secular Adam, as Litvak also notes, who remains silent as Khave courageously speaks, just as Eve is the only speaker in their encounter with the serpent.⁵¹⁸

If Gorky is indeed the “first man,” then Khave, the Eve of Boiberik, initiates another inversion: She creates her own Adam, a reversal of the narrative in Genesis 2:21 in which Eve is created from Adam’s side.⁵¹⁹ Khave is an initiator and rule breaker in the tradition of Eve, but in this telling, she is also a creator and in doing so, she elevates the status of the artistic creator. Through her exaltation of the writer Gorky, Khave initiates for herself a new regime of devotion.

⁵¹⁶ Dauber, *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem*, 175.

⁵¹⁷ Olga Litvak, “Khavel and Her Sisters: Sholem-aleichem and the Lost Girls of 1905,” *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 3 (2009): 1–38, here 11.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵¹⁹ God removes the *tzela* (צֵלָע), commonly translated as “rib,” from Adam, but this is more precisely translated as “side.” See Wilda Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 21.

Her glorification of the famous author and political figure, which I read as metonymy for Russian literature and European culture more broadly, also involves a measure of identification. In her desire to have access to the wider world of non-Jewish learning, Khave sees in Gorky a model of entry into the world of so-called high culture coupled with a commitment to social and political transformation in an unequal society. While Gorky was not considered a peer of other members of the Russian canon such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, or Anton Chekhov, he was steeped in this tradition of fiction and then synthesized his own literary voice to be later considered “the founder of socialist realism.”⁵²⁰

Maxim Gorky’s appearance in Khave’s story was more than a convenient reference to a popular author and political activist of his day. In his own life, Sholem Aleichem was enamored with Gorky and corresponded with him professionally, eventually meeting him in St. Petersburg.⁵²¹ His respect for Gorky was apparently mutual: their professional relationship, and later friendship, began when Gorky wrote to Sholem Aleichem in 1901 requesting his participation in an upcoming collection of contributions from Russian Jewish authors.⁵²² The volume never came to fruition, but their correspondence continued toward the end of the Yiddish author’s life while Gorky lived in Capri. In a letter to his children in 1904, Sholem Aleichem recalls their first encounter with delight:

I am writing to you shortly after my first visit with the idol of our age, the master of thought, Maxim Gorky. He treated me as a comrade. [...] I acquainted myself with the most positive examples from the press—in a word, he was friendly, and not at all like some others [are]! His appearance is not at all like we would imagine. A fascinating, larger-than-life-figure, Russian in every sense of the term, with a kind, open, bright face

⁵²⁰ Victor Terras, *Handbook of Russian Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 180.

⁵²¹ Amelia Glaser, “Maxim Gorky’s ‘Pogrom’: Jewish Victimhood and Russian Revolutionary Thought,” *Shofar* 37, no. 2 (2019): 166–90.

⁵²² Maxim Gorky, *Iz literaturnogo nasledii: Gorkii i evreiskii vopros*. (Jerusalem: Centre for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry, 1986), 93.

and a wide nose. Tall, strong (not at all sickly), soft, although perhaps somewhat angular, and of course, in tall boots.⁵²³

For Sholem Aleichem, Gorky is the embodiment of what it means to be Russian, and his letter idealizes him with a fervor that anticipates the mythical status Gorky would achieve throughout the twentieth century. In his own work, Sholem Aleichem occupied several literary worlds by writing in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian, and Gorky acted as a devoted liaison between Jewish writers and the rest of the Russian intelligentsia.⁵²⁴

Gorky's contribution to Russian Jewish reading culture was perhaps most evident in his work as the editor of *Znanie* ("Knowledge"), a Russian literary collection that featured contemporary realist writers. Here, Russian and Russian Jewish writers alike worked to capture the struggles against the oppressive tsarist regime.⁵²⁵ Russian Jews eagerly read the publication's neorealist offerings, particularly because it featured many Jewish authors.⁵²⁶ In combatting the oppression of Imperial Russia, Gorky was also particularly concerned with the suffering of Russian Jews and, according to Amelia Glaser, he helped to support the development of Russian Jewish literature at the turn of the century.⁵²⁷ Gorky actively engaged with the plight of Russian Jews and in 1901 published the short story "Pogrom" in the literary and artistic anthology entitled *Aid to the Jews Suffering from Famine*, a publication that sought to assist impoverished Jews who were concurrently suffering antisemitic violence.⁵²⁸ And Gorky himself enjoyed

⁵²³ Gorky, *Iz literaturnogo naslediiia*, 102. Translation my own.

⁵²⁴ Among their affinities, the authors both shared witty pen names to convey their message of social critique: Gorky means "bitter."

⁵²⁵ Krutikov, *Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity*, 72.

⁵²⁶ Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 95.

⁵²⁷ Glaser, "Maxim Gorky's 'Pogrom.'"

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

reading Jewish authors; he even writes to Sholem Aleichem of his appreciation for Chaim Nachman Bialik's Hebrew poetry in translation. These activities heighten the Yiddish author's assessment of the revolutionary figure. The Yiddish author's report to his family, written two years before "Khavé" was published in 1906, shares striking parallels with Khavé's description of Gorky. Sholem Aleichem portrays the author as a towering figure, the intellectual equivalent of a spiritual leader, who is at the same time humble and treats others as his equal. In the same way, Khavé introduces Gorky to her father like a form of secular "Good News," carrying his likeness with her in a photo like a form of religious (Orthodox Christian) iconography.

The nearly religious veneration of Gorky—an elevation of his persona beyond that of a humble individual—that appears in Sholem Aleichem's prose fits within a long trajectory of mythmaking and devotion that have surrounded Gorky, both during his life and in the years after his death. Gorky achieved notoriety within the Russian Empire as well as further west, through Europe and across the Atlantic. He stood out as an author who showed western Europeans and Americans "a different Russia from that of L. Tolstoy or A. Chekhov" and as revolutionary who at times deviated from the mainstream of Bolshevism and lived several years abroad.⁵²⁹ Once the Soviet Union was established, his cultural role re-entered a process of mythologization. According to Tovah Yedlin, a "Gorky myth" was created that would comport with Stalin's regime. Gorky was upheld as a kind of secular icon, the "first proletarian writer" and Lenin's friend.⁵³⁰ His history of disagreements with Lenin and the party were elided as brief errors that were later recanted.

⁵²⁹ Tovah Yedlin, *Maxim Gorky: A Political Biography* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1990), 242.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 241.

This process of mythmaking and veneration of the individual also emerges as a central feature of Gorky's literary and ideological innovations. In the early twentieth century, Gorky and some of his contemporaries promoted an idea of "god-building." Gorky, along with revolutionaries such as Anatoly Lunacharsky and Alexander Bogdanov, attempted to reconcile Marxism with religion and harness the human desire for faith that locates God in humanity—a form of "religious atheism."⁵³¹ Gorky is credited with coining the term god-building, *bogostroitel'stvo*, but Lunacharsky is known for his systemization of the concept.⁵³² The most thorough presentation of Gorky's conception of god-building is found in his 1908 novel *A Confession (Ispoved')*, which first appeared in the twenty-third collection of *Znanie. A Confession*, like "Khavé," emerged in the tumultuous years after the failed 1905 revolution. Much like Sholem Aleichem, Gorky spent the years after 1905 in exile.⁵³³ Gorky's novel fittingly follows a wandering hero, Matvei, often identified as containing autobiographical features.⁵³⁴ Matvei recounts his life as an orphan in provincial Russia, scenes of class struggle, and his questions of faith through a search for a spiritual identity. Through an encounter with a former priest, Matvei learns that the people are the creators of God and the source of miracles. In finding this "theanthropic creed," Matvei abandons the search for a personal God and instead recognizes the people as the ultimate source of spiritual values.⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ Ross Wolfe, "Religion in Russian Marxism," *Rethinking Marxism* 32, no. 1 (2020): 6–40, here 20.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵³³ Barry P. Scherr, "God-Building or God-Seeking? Gorky's *Confession* as Confession," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 44, no. 3 (2000): 448–69, here 450.

⁵³⁴ Wolfe, "Religion in Russian Marxism," 18.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 and Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 132.

A Confession made a splash when it was first published, although the novel largely faded into obscurity. Its ideas of god-building were condemned by many Marxists, including Lenin, as antithetical to scientific socialism and an “attempt to graft a religious superstructure upon Marxist ideology.”⁵³⁶ Gorky was interested in the revolutionary potential of religion. According to Roland Boer, the god-builders “sought to promote the affinities between Marxism and religion, fostering the ‘warm stream’ of Marxism in terms of enthusiasm, feeling, the new human being, the radical dimensions of religion, all of which were to be embodied in revolution.”⁵³⁷ According to Ross Wolfe, Gorky’s god-building did not draw directly from either Feuerbach or Nietzsche (he even publicly disavowed the latter), and he was certainly not the first to suggest that theology arises from human experience. Gorky was a humanist who asserted that there was “nothing greater, more interesting or complex, than man,” who created everything including God.⁵³⁸ Gorky and his god-building colleagues were not promoting a new system of deity worship. Instead, they acknowledged the significance of emotion and devotion in religion and that an elimination of these qualities from society created a vacuum. God-building above all stressed the creative power of humans—and that humans were at the center of any great change in the world.

IV. Tevye’s Confession

Sholem Aleichem’s professional correspondence and evident personal admiration of Gorky resonate in the image of the Russian revolutionary in “Khave,” and this installment, like the rest

⁵³⁶ Yedlin, *Maxim Gorky*, 83.

⁵³⁷ Roland Boer, *Lenin, Religion, and Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 59.

⁵³⁸ Wolfe, “Religion in Russian Marxism,” 13.

of the Tevye stories, is correspondingly embedded in the political and aesthetic concerns of the day. Gorky's attempt to reconcile religion with Marxism is a similar operation to the one that Jewish writers confronted through the Haskalah and beyond: how might Judaism and its ritual demands be reconciled with the secular world? I do not suggest that Sholem Aleichem was attempting to remake Judaism akin to Gorky's "religious atheism." But I propose that both operations represent a larger demand to reconcile an increasingly empirical and rational worldview with religious spirituality. God-building was a radical notion for both Marxist atheists and believers alike: For most of Gorky's revolutionary colleagues, the addition of religion to their socialist vision was an impossibility. On the other hand, Gorky presented a radical idea in opposition to organized religion and explicitly critiqued the Abrahamic religions.⁵³⁹

Khavé's Gorkys—both in his iconic form and through his Khvedke surrogate—arrive on the scene just as Tevye's world is about to be overturned. While he has always lived among Christians, Tevye must for the first time consider what is at stake when Jews and Christians come together—not simply for the purpose of economic transactions, but as people who remain in each other's lives, join families, and produce new generations. But ultimately, a union between Christians and Jews can only take place insofar as one party is willing to adopt the religion of the other, cutting short any notion that these marriages are interfaith—and in the Russian Empire, there was no such thing as intermarriage.⁵⁴⁰ The process is instead one of religious homogenization. "Khavé" repeats the tale of Jewish-to-Christian conversion found in

⁵³⁹ Yedlin, *Maxim Gorky*, 86.

⁵⁴⁰ Dauber, *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem*, 174.

Civil marriage, and thus the possibility of interfaith marriage, was impossible under the czars, but even in Germany and the Habsburg lands, civil marriage was only introduced at the end of the nineteenth century. See Ch. 5 of: Todd Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Jenny or “Eine Verlorene,” stories that, on the one hand, affirm the fundamental humanity and compatibility of individuals independent of religious confession, but at the same time offer a pessimistic vision of Christian-Jewish relations that relies on a Christian absorption of Judaism.

Khavé’s conversion, like that of Madlena in “Eine Verlorene,” spurs a cascade of questions challenging Christian-Jewish divisions—or, as Tevye puts it, the differences between “Jews and not Jews” (“yiden un nit yiden”). When he rebukes Khavé’s attempt to make amends, Tevye rides away and contemplates what, ultimately, so irreconcilably divides them:

Vos iz dos azelkhs yid un vos iz nit yid?... Und far vos hot got bashafen yiden un nit yiden?... Un az got hot shoyt yo bashafen yiden un nit yiden, far vos-zhe zolen zey zayn azoy opgetaylt ayns fun dos andere, nisht konen onkumen ayns dos andere, glaykh vi der iz fun got un yener iz nit fun got?... Un es fardrist mikh, lemay ikh bin nisht azoy klor, vi andere, in sformim un in bikher, ikh zol konen gefinen deroyf epes a rekhten terets.⁵⁴¹

What did being a Jew or not a Jew matter? Why did God have to create both? And if He did, why put such walls between them, so that neither would look at the other even though both were His creatures? It grieved me that I wasn’t a more learned man, because surely there were answers to be found in the holy books...⁵⁴²

In the conclusion of this installment, the very questions that Khavé posed to her father, inquiries that he summarily dismissed by citing Hebrew prayers, return to haunt him. Tevye had long used scripture as the justification of the basic categories, and particularly the binaries, that structure his world. Khavé’s concurrent creation of a new regime of worship—of Gorky and his power as a literary creator—and of her own second Gorky jeopardize the distinctions that Tevye finds immutable in their textual basis. Tevye’s scriptural argumentation is perhaps useful when engaging on theological terms in the realm of Abrahamic religions—something that he does with the local priest—but his “scriptural logic” is rendered ineffective when brought into conversation with a new system of devotion and understanding the world. Khavé’s act of creation makes

⁵⁴¹ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 138.

⁵⁴² Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 81.

visible the constructed nature of texts deemed sacred and the elevation of singular figures as superior carriers of knowledge. This confrontation exposes Tevye's logic, one ensconced in the Jewish textual tradition, to the possibility of other forms of comprehending human relations. At the same time that Tevye begins to question the limits of distinguishing between Jews and non-Jews, he does not suddenly embrace new ways of knowing or acknowledge the relative approaches of grasping the world. Instead, he doubles down on a closed system of understanding and maintains that, were he only to mine the corpus of Jewish text long enough or were he only learned enough, he might find an answer.

Tevye's reliance on quotation and proverbs provides him with limited formulations in which he can articulate, and by extension perceive, the world. When confronted with new questions and new circumstances, he responds with the same corpus of answers. As Tevye wrestles with his dismissal of Khava from the family, he is left, in opposition to his entire persona, without a confidently spoken answer. The disconnect between the daughter and the Jewish family is thus articulated partly in terms of an interruption of a legacy of Jewish learning. If one considers the androcentric rabbinic culture of learning that conceives of education as a process of filiation, establishing a homology between father-son and teacher-student, the daughter stands outside of this model of transmission. If Jewish wisdom is imagined between father figures and sons, then Tevye is only able to speak his knowledge into the ether. Excluded from this model, the daughter moves onto new systems of learning and truncates this perpetuation of a legacy transferred between male inheritors.

Taking into account Dan Miron's assessment of Tevye's oration as part of a confessional process, the "Khava" story shares another affinity with Gorky's work. According to Miron, Tevye's loquacity is a function of an increasing burden of guilt; his obsessive verbalizing to his

father-confessor Sholem-Aleichem assists in purging him of the shame for his shortcomings as a father and breadwinner, a man who demonstrated a pattern of bringing trouble home or taking the easy way out.⁵⁴³ As the highly unreliable narrator, Tevye unloads this weight, justifies his mistakes, selectively reports events, and pads his accounts with scriptural quotation in an attempt at absolution. In Khave's story, questions of "confession" are at stake in both senses of the term: Tevye must admit and come to terms with his failings while also confronting his daughter's confession of a new faith.⁵⁴⁴ After Tevye spurns Khave's first effort to reconcile with her father, he articulates his own gesture at confession as he begins to comprehend the gravity of turning away from his daughter: "[Ikh] shlog zikh oshamnu un vays nit, far vos" ("Beating my breast in the confessional without knowing for what sins").⁵⁴⁵ Khave, like her namesake, commits the first truly transgressive act within the structure of the Jewish family, yet Tevye ultimately finds himself in need of atonement even though the recognition of his own wrongdoing is never fully realized.

According to Litvak's Nietzschean reading of the story's inversions, Khave's intellectual and religious departure from her other sisters "represents an imaginative record of Sholem-Aleichem's attempt to assimilate the violence that followed Russia's first revolution into his literary politics."⁵⁴⁶ It is no coincidence that the most traumatic rupture between Tevye and one of his daughters takes place in the wake of the greatest unrest in both Russian and Jewish politics during the author's lifetime. In the years between the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 and the 1917

⁵⁴³ Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 386 and 376.

⁵⁴⁴ The terms for confession (admission of wrongdoing) and religious confession also have a related correspondence in Russian: исповедь (*ispoved*) and вероисповедание (*veroispovedanie*), respectively.

⁵⁴⁵ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 139; Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 81.

⁵⁴⁶ Litvak, "Khavé and Her Sisters," 11.

Revolution, Russian Jewish life radically departed from the ways of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴⁷ The fifth installment of the Tevye stories came on the heels of widespread pogrom, a failed Russian revolution, and the author's first emigration from the Russian Empire. When "Khave" was published in late May of 1906, Sholem Aleichem is writing as an author in exile; moving from city to city, later even back and forth across the Atlantic twice, Sholem Aleichem could not anchor himself to any given cultural or literary center. Processes of disruption, disorientation, and inversion characterize Khave's story, but through this confrontation with disorder also emerges a reorientation.

Jews in the Russian Empire had long suffered oppression and the threat of violence—whether through the restrictions of domicile in the Pale of Settlement, conscription, pogroms, or the myriad other manifestations of anti-Jewish hatred—but Khave's story in 1906 arrives at particular apex of disillusionment. Dauber refers to this installment as being written in the "teeth of revolution and anti-Semitic backlash" to present a story that "did nothing less than weigh the attractions of utopian idealism against the limits of what it means to be Jewish."⁵⁴⁸ Khave's conversion and departure with her new husband distort a once-familiar geography for Tevye. At the conclusion of her story, Tevye secretly sets out to visit the young couple in Yehupets, Sholem Aleichem's fictional version of Kiev, where they live.⁵⁴⁹ He arrives at the train station only to discover from the ticket seller that "Aza shtot iz bay mir nisht faran" ("I know of no such city"), almost as if, by asserting that Khave's home never even existed, he concurrently erased

⁵⁴⁷ Barry Trachtenberg, *The Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish, 1903–1917* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 5.

⁵⁴⁸ Dauber, *The Worlds of Sholem Aleichem*, 174.

⁵⁴⁹ Mikhail Krutikov notes that the name "Yehupets" has no obvious meaning, although it resembles the Ukrainian term or Egypt, "Yehypet." See: "Yehupets as Fantasy and Reality: Sholem Aleichem's Kiev," *East European Jewish Affairs* 50, no. 1–2 (2020): 24–41, here 27.

the life she was building with her Christian husband. Without hesitation, Tevye simply responds, “bin ikh nit shuldig” (“that’s not my fault”).⁵⁵⁰ The world order Tevye once thought to be true no longer exists. Khave’s choice was not the cause but rather the symptom of social, political, and religious shifts that changed Jewish life in both the shtetl and the city. But Tevye attempts, if for a moment, to refuse this encounter with a strange and painful reality by denying any complicity. Sholem Aleichem allows him to return to Boiberik, ensconced again in his own fortress of scriptural (mis)quotation.

V. “Tevye’s daughters know how to talk”

Khave’s rebellion opens up a network of political, religious, and literary spheres that shake the foundation of Tevye’s world. I suggest that her elevation of Gorky as a pseudo-religious figure belongs within a larger preoccupation with the status of the intellectual in creating cultural and moral anchoring points. Khave is the first daughter who makes the choice to convert, but she is neither the first ideologically radical daughter nor the first to establish the centrality of the scholar for the family’s value system. Before Khave marries Khvedke, Hodl is the first daughter who combines the rebellion of romantic love with a new set of political ideals. Hodl’s installment, written in 1904 shortly before the failed revolution of 1905 and subsequent widespread pogroms, and her resurfacing in later installments reflect, respectively, a more hopeful and nostalgic orientation toward the fate of Russian Jewry. Hodl falls in love with the socialist revolutionary Pertchik (nicknamed Feferel meaning “Peppercorn”), of a Jewish family,

⁵⁵⁰ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 139.

and leaves their village to follow him in Siberia.⁵⁵¹ Although he is heartbroken by her absence, Tevye neither begrudges nor punishes Hodl for her departure—and he did, after all, introduce her to Feferel, a young man with whom Tevye feels he can have a “vort; a mol a pasek, a mol a midrash, a mol a shtikel khkire in himel-zakhen” (“[Jewish] word with; here a verse from the Bible, there a line from the Talmud, even a bit of philosophy”).⁵⁵² Tevye in fact celebrates Hodl, her husband, and their revolutionary dreams. What he admires most of all about his second daughter is her abilities as a reader, writer, and lover of ideas and that she loves someone in love with ideas. Tevye extols the intellect of his daughters as frequently as he sings of their beauty. The loquacious father also takes credit for the well-spoken nature of his children and proclaims, “Tevye’s tekhter konen reden” (“Tevye’s daughters know how to talk”).⁵⁵³

Hodl marries a Jew and never converts, but the political alignment and revolutionary pursuits of the young couple suggest that they do not fit the model of Jewish piety that a traditional man like Tevye would expect. What makes her rebellious desire not only palatable, but at times even admirable to her father? Hodl and Khave’s marriages, apart from the religious affiliations of their new husbands, are ideologically parallel: spurred by their newfound loves, both daughters insist on fundamental human equality. In the case of the former, Hodl repeats the socialist universalism of Feferel, an outlook that crystallizes in his first encounter with Tevye. When Tevye happens upon the young student, Feferel attempts at every turn to deny the particular for the universal: When Tevye asks what he is studying, Feferel responds that he has not yet decided. When Tevye asks who the young man is, he responds that he is human being.

⁵⁵¹ I transliterate each letter of the name פֿעפֿערעל to “Feferel” according to the YIVO transliteration standards. A more expected spelling of this diminutive word for pepper would not include the third *ayen* and render “Feferl,” the spelling used by scholars such as Dan Miron and Ruth Wisse.

⁵⁵² Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 100; Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 56.

⁵⁵³ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 114.

When he probes about his family, the young man answers that he is a child of God's and a member of the human race (literally that he is descended from the first man: "shtam ikh fun odem horishn'en").⁵⁵⁴ Tevye comes to appreciate Feferel not because of his ideals of human equality and revolutionary dreams, but despite them; he is able to tolerate the young student's notions only insofar as he is reminded that the boy is a familiar entity, the local cigarette maker's son. Despite Feferel's radical ideals, he remains in Tevye's eyes just another local Jew; their philosophical debates are like a make-believe pilpul for Tevye, always anxiously reflecting on his limitations as a learned Jewish man and attempting to demonstrate what scriptural knowledge he possesses.

Although Tevye is infuriated by Hodl and Feferel's swift marriage and subsequent departure, their union does not prompt the intense mourning of Khave's conversion—although Hodl's move to Siberia and to the revolution would, in practice, likely necessitate her permanent absence. Hodl remains favorable in Tevye's eyes because their marriage in part reinforces the notions to which Tevye holds fast. Via Feferel and then onto Hodl, Tevye projects his aspirations of what it means to be a learned Jew and the implications this has for the transmission of Jewish knowledge. At the same time, his attitude toward Feferel and Hodl's union further positions the story at a decisive juncture: His assessment of Feferel is one of ambivalence and skepticism, as opposed to outright dismissal. He initially draws in, and is drawn in by, Feferel's knowledge of both spiritual and worldly subjects, but soon views his subsequently incarcerated son-in-law with suspicion tempered by acceptance as he allows Hodl to follow her own path. But in the years before the failed revolution and violence of 1905, the story of Hodl still occupies a world imbued with a shred of optimism against the forces of Russian imperialism, one in which many Russian

⁵⁵⁴ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 98.

Jews were increasingly imagining themselves both as Jews and political agents shaping a new socialist future.⁵⁵⁵

When Hodl enters the narrative, her combination of beauty and hunger for reading recalls that of the daughter in “Der Shylock von Barnow,” down to a reference to the biblical Esther:

Iz zi shen, zog ikh aykh, di andere tokhter mayne, Hodel mayn ikh, vos zol ikh aykh zogen? Take vi in der heyliger megile shteht geshriben: *ki tovyas mar'eh hi*—sheynt vi a shtik gold! Un tsu di tsores badarf zi nokh hoben a kop oykh, shraybt un leyent yidish un rusish, un bikhlekh—bikhlekh shlingt zi, vi haleshkes.⁵⁵⁶

I can't begin to tell you how gorgeous she is—I mean Hodl, my second daughter; she's like the Bible says of Queen Esther, *ki toyvas mar'eh hi*—prettier than a picture! And if looks aren't bad enough, she has the brains to go with them; she reads and writes both Yiddish and Russian and swallows books like hot cakes.⁵⁵⁷

Hodl's reading tendencies are rendered in alimentary language, paralleling the image of the voraciously reading Esther. Just as Esther “verschlingt” whatever books come her way, so too does Hodl “shlingt” them ravenously. The reading practices of both characters are mediated through the storytelling of others, refracting their behavior through a prism of moral judgment. Esther's reading casts her as excessive, uncontrollable, and depraved, while Hodl's image is less an assessment of corruption and more a paean to his daughter, albeit one ridden with woe. Both daughters' rapid consumption of literature is a display of excess, but Hodl's intellect and creative production only amplify Tevye's affection and admiration rather than inspiring a condemnation. In a world in which the ultimate marker of status is the knowledge of sacred texts, Hodl's textual consumption is notably outside of the traditionally male realm of scriptural study as she reads “bikhlekh,” secular chapbooks, as opposed to “sforim,” religious works. Unlike the narrators of

⁵⁵⁵ See Ch. 1 of Trachtenberg, *The Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish*.

⁵⁵⁶ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 96.

⁵⁵⁷ Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 53–54. Halkin uses the idiomatic “hotcakes” to refer to Hodl's rapid consumption of books, but the original uses the term for a stuffed cabbage dish “haleshkes” (also commonly transliterated as *holishkes* or *halishkes*).

Esther's story, though, Tevye does not identify secular literature as a signal of the daughter's demise, suggesting that she might in this way be able to carve out a third space between the sacred and the secular through a new commitment to texts. If one considers Rabbi Eliezer's dictum, "He who teaches his daughter Torah is teaching her promiscuity [*tiflut*]," then the world of secular letters might be her only remaining intellectual playground.⁵⁵⁸ In a culture in which the study of (sacred) texts constitutes high social status, the positive formulation of Hodl's assiduous reading functions as a secular extension of scriptural devotion.⁵⁵⁹

Tevye's constant anxiety toward his own status and propriety repeatedly links back to a knowledge of texts and a need to affirm that one is connected to more than the material world. Hodl's introduction comes on the heels of Tevye and Golde's displeasure with their first daughter's love-matched marriage to a poor tailor named Motl. Their concern is spurred less by his lack of resources than the dismay that a small tradesman would enter their family lineage of, according to Golde, teachers, cantors, beadles, or even undertakers.⁵⁶⁰ Tevye is, of course, neither a teacher nor a cantor nor any sort of great scholar, and thus his ramblings document a compulsion to affirm his place in the world as more than a humble dairyman. As a father only to daughters, Tevye's world must be recalibrated from a system that relies on the transmission of Jewish wisdom from father to son to one that accommodates both a new familial and social order on the eve of the failed revolution.

⁵⁵⁸ Parush, *Reading Jewish Women*, 71.

Eliezer ben Hyrancus was a Tanna, a rabbinic sage recorded in the Mishnah, from the first and second centuries. This prohibition on women's Torah study appears in the Babylonian Talmud *Sotah* 21b.

⁵⁵⁹ It should be noted that "biklekh" does not imply that Hodl did not read any religious texts. The average Jewish woman would likely read prayer books and other religious texts in Yiddish. But as a reader and writer of Russian, and as an ideological ally of Feferel, Hodl would also be reading a number of non-religious texts.

⁵⁶⁰ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 89; Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 51.

Tevye praises Hodl's mastery of words by repeatedly boasting of her exceptional letter-writing abilities: "Ir zolt zeyen di brivelekh, voz zi shraybt...s'iz a Hodl fun got!" ("You should see the letters she writes...she God's own, Hodl!").⁵⁶¹ Tevye reads Hodl's letters as his own personal genre of sentimental literature, texts arriving in installments akin to the serialized domestic fiction so popular among middle class European readers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As he begins Khave's story, he continues to lament Hodl's absence and once again boasts of her beautiful letters, texts so beautiful that "kon men tsegeyn" ("one could melt").⁵⁶² From Siberia, Hodl reports on her arrangement with Feferel:

Es geht zey, shraybt zi mir, dorten zeyer gut. Er zitst, un zi fardint. Zi vasht gret un leyent bikher un zeyt zikh mit im ale vokh, un hot, zogt zi, a hofenung, az es vet zikh do, bay undz, iberkokhen, es vet oyfgehn di zun un es vet veren likhtig, vet men im umkeren tsurik mit nokh a sakh azelkhe, vi er, un demolt velen zey zikh ersht, zogt zi, nemen tsu der rechter arbeyt un iberkeren di velt mit'n kp arop, mit di fis aroyf.⁵⁶³

They're doing very well there, she writes; that is, he's doing time and she's doing wash. She takes in laundry, reads books, sees him once a week, and hopes, so she says, that one glorious day her Peppercorn and his friends will be pardoned and sent home; then, she promises, they'll really get down to business and turn the world upside down with its feet in the hair and its head six feet in the ground.⁵⁶⁴

Hodl's assurance that they are getting along well is undercut by the circumstances of their lives in Siberia. Feferel's incarceration and Hodl's long days of labor and waiting are hardly an image of domestic bliss, but distilled through Tevye, their arrangement might even appear somewhat serene. Taken from Tevye's account, the couple's arrangement aligns with the traditional roles of a Jewish husband and wife: Hodl deals with the worldly tasks—washing and earning money—and reading her secular chapbooks intended for women. Feferel, whom Tevye admires as

⁵⁶¹ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 117.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 122. Halkin translates this as "it's enough to melt a heart of ice" (70).

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁴ Sholem Aleichem, *Tevye the Dairyman*, 70.

someone with whom he can discuss big ideas, is essentially left with nothing but time and space for his intellectual musings. In this darkly humorous turn, the fulfillment of a prison sentence rhymes with the ideal of the Jewish scholar, seated for long periods of time in the house of study. Tevye uses a short expression for serving time in jail: “zitsn,” like the German or Russian idioms that use the verb “to sit” to refer to jailtime. In a traditional Jewish household, the man ideally sits concentrated on the study of holy texts. Feferel is versed in Jewish learning, but his secular studies and participation in the revolutionary movement have brought him to a new space of seclusion—one not of study but of punishment.

The warmth and teary-eyed nostalgia of Tevye’s report on Hodl and Feferel introduces Khave’s story and thus draws a stark contrast with the bitterness and loss that develop in the subsequent pages. Khave’s unsanctioned love arrives in the form of a devotion to literature not unlike her older sister, but the act of conversion obliterates their similarities and configures Khave’s departure as absolute (when, in fact, Hodl’s departure to Siberia separates them indefinitely). Through their abandonment of Jewish ritual as dedicated communists, Hodl and Feferel are in practice divorced from Judaism, yet they maintain a celebrated status in the family as opposed to one of betrayal. The divergence between Hodl’s and Khave’s treatment, stories separated in their composition by the trauma of the 1905 revolution and subsequent rise in antisemitic violence, articulates the contemporaneous social rupture in the form of potentially irreparable familial rupture. In Hodl’s story, one finds hope in the negotiation and redefinition of Jewish practices, but one that conceives of a new generation that developed out of a community of pious Jews. Khave’s story, then, articulates the limitations of this conception of the Jewish family, one that precludes an explicit compromise of religious identification.

VI. Conclusion

The Tevye stories were already an object of continual adaptation for Sholem Aleichem well before they became the internationally adapted material of screen and stage. Each episode emerged from its specific historical moment, and there is little evidence that the author had sketched out the fates of each daughter and the arc of the Tevye stories in advance. But by 1911, Sholem Aleichem presented the stories as a cohesive work in a move of closure when he published the existing Tevye cycle in a single volume, *Tevye der milkhiker*.⁵⁶⁵ In the subsequent years, though, Sholem Aleichem returned to the Tevye stories in a sustained literary engagement with the plight of Russian Jewry and, in particular, the Beilis affair, a blood libel case in Kyiv that received international attention.⁵⁶⁶

The final installment of the 1911 Tevye compilation ends sorrowfully enough in the story “Tevye fort keyn Erets-Yisroel” (“Tevye Leaves for the Land of Israel”): With his daughter Shprintse and wife Golde dead, Tevye prepares to abandon everything he knows when his fifth daughter Beylke’s new husband, the unsavory nouveau riche businessman Podhotsur, insists that Tevye give up his vocation as a dairyman (since he considers this job socially unseemly) and altogether leave his sight by moving to Palestine: “Ale alte yiden foren keyn Erets-Yisroel” (“All old Jews go to the Land of Israel”), Podhotsur claims.⁵⁶⁷ But much like the paths of Jewish emancipation in Europe and Sholem Aleichem’s own biography, Tevye’s story is full of false starts and disappointments. Sholem Aleichem revived Tevye in 1914 with the story “Lekh-Lekho” (“Get Thee Gone” or “Leave”), where the protagonist must admit that his plans for

⁵⁶⁵ Solomon, *Wonder of Wonders*, 32.

⁵⁶⁶ Sholem Aleichem most notably took up the subject of the Beilis trial in his novel *Der blutiger shpas* (“The Bloody Hoax,” 1913).

⁵⁶⁷ Sholem Aleichem, *Gants Tevye*, 185.

Palestine have been thwarted.⁵⁶⁸ At the same time, his existing home falls apart around him while he and his fellow Jews are expelled from their villages by an edict from the tsar.

In his resumption of the Tevye stories, Sholem Aleichem also returns to Khave's plight. The daughter whom Tevye stubbornly declared dead reappears, sparking a quiet reconciliation between the father and scorned daughter. Khave simply utters "tate" ("papa") when she approaches her father, condensing the grounds for their reunion in a single word: Khave remains his daughter, religious affiliation notwithstanding. Moreover, Khave's homecoming at this moment acknowledges that the virulence of antisemitism runs so deeply that it cannot easily be neutralized by a renunciation of Judaism, whether through religious conversion or a participation in dominant Russian cultural modes. Much as Jenny's life and sorrow remain tied to her status as Jew, so too does Khave recognize a continued bond with her Jewish family and the larger plight in Russia. Such distillation already took place in the years before "Lekh-Lekho" was published, as Sholem Aleichem labored over a theatrical reworking of Tevye. In this version, he stripped down the story to center on Khave and wrote the bittersweet ending of her return.⁵⁶⁹

This conclusion seems to deflate the optimistic notions of human equality that Hodl and Khave champion in previous chapters: A joyful union between a Jewish-born daughter and a Christian cannot be sustained, and ultimately the daughter returns to Judaism and assumes the burden of her heritage. However, there is no evidence that Khave was harmed by her spouse, nor

⁵⁶⁸ The very title of the new penultimate chapter elevates the presently tragic state of affairs by linking Tevye's experience, and that of his fellow Russian Jews, with the titular Torah portion, Parashat Lech-Lecha (Genesis 12:1–17:27), in which God tells Abram to go forth (*lech-lecha*) from their homeland and make a great nation. There was another, final chapter after this one, written 1914–16 and entitled "Vachalaklokos" (literally "And Smoothness" but also presented as "Tevye Reads the Psalms" in translation) in which Tevye attempts to thwart the local council, which has decided they must damage Tevye's property to an extent in accordance with the "authorities." Tevye proposes a challenge with the villagers by "randomly" choosing a Hebrew word from the Psalms to repeat. The villagers naturally are tripped up in their pronunciation and Tevye declares Jewish superiority, but this arbitrary verbal test does not succeed in changing his lot.

⁵⁶⁹ Solomon, *Wonder of Wonders*, 34.

that she was ejected from her community; she returns in solidarity with her family as they suffer at the hands of state-sanctioned antisemitic violence. Cruelty seems not to emerge from individuals, but rather from systems and the coercion of those in power. Even the villagers, who drive Tevye out of his home, are hardly malicious masterminds; rather, they are following the masses and breaking Tevye's windows simply to appease the authorities. This is not to make light of the brutality wrought against Jews; it instead demonstrates that hatred and hostility are not essential qualities, but rather dispositions that are acquired as distinct groups seek to protect what they perceive as their own.

CONCLUSION

The rebellious daughter stories that opened this dissertation—*Unorthodox*, its fictional adaptation, and the genre of OTD narratives—are but one set of examples of the curious Jewish daughter trope’s sustained appeal. The popularity of a series like Netflix’s *Unorthodox* is in part due to the viewers’ perception that they are being let in on a dirty secret. There is a certain voyeuristic element to it: It allows one to watch what goes on “behind the closed doors of my [Hasidic] neighbors,” as Rachel Syme of *The New Yorker* writes of the series, and serves up an “ethnography of horror” in its depiction of sexuality, as Seidman critiques.⁵⁷⁰ The average secular viewer cheers on the delicate, doe-eyed female protagonist, who quietly but doggedly extricates herself from what appears to be a loveless world in order to join one that allows her to remake a life on her own terms. *Unorthodox* delighted many viewers because it presents, as a *Guardian* review writes, a story of “rebellion and freedom” where the modestly dressed Esty suddenly removes her wig in order to dip into lake Wannsee in a “scene reminiscent of a Christian baptism.”⁵⁷¹ This is the remaking of a curious Jewish daughter narrative by a group of secular filmmakers in 2020: where the traditional, insular world—one that shuns things like secular music, books, television, and movies—is the darkness to the light of a sexually open, multicultural Berlin.

⁵⁷⁰ Rachel Syme, “‘Unorthodox,’ Reviewed: A Young Woman’s Remarkable Flight from Hasidic Williamsburg,” *The New Yorker*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/on-television/unorthodox-reviewed-a-young-womans-remarkable-flight-from-hasidic-williamsburg> and Seidman, “My Scandalous Rejection.”

⁵⁷¹ Brigid Delaney, “Unorthodox: A Thrilling Story of Rebellion and Freedom from New York to Berlin,” *The Guardian*, April 19, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/apr/20/unorthodox-a-thrilling-story-of-rebellion-and-freedom-from-new-york-to-berlin>.

Esty's story is by no means without its trials, but the dichotomization of two worlds and where they stand in the series' moral hierarchy is clear. Strict adherence to Jewish law, here shown in its contemporary expression in Hasidic communities, stands at odds with the secular world, epitomized by the microcosm of Berlin. But what one lauds as freedom and glorious rebellion might also be read as chaos, hedonism, and a betrayal of community. The *Guardian's* observation that Esty seems to undergo a sort of baptism in the Wannsee—where “instead of joining a flock she is leaving one”—brings to light the underlying assumptions regarding that which is deemed “secular” and “universal.”⁵⁷² A rejection of the particular is often a submission to Christianity's claims to universalism; Christian supremacy allows its particularity to present as neutral—current and correct. The “flock” is so pervasive that it is rendered invisible. Esty's dip in the Wannsee is thus at once a baptism and an acknowledgment that she is now indeed a participant in globalized social norms. These are the contradictions and conventions that emerge in such curious daughter narratives, whether in the nineteenth or the twenty-first century.

Baptism is one of the central sites of rupture in *Jenny*, “Eine Verlorene,” and “Khave,” stories in which the spiritual departure from Judaism also coincides with unsanctioned love and literature. The world of secular learning and non-Jewish European culture in German Jewish and Yiddish literature function as both a central feature of entry into the “modern” world and as its own form of peril. By no means is an ambivalence toward the promises of *Bildung* told only through the feminine figure. A sibling study of the literary Jewish son and his encounter with secular education might center on texts such as Kompert's “Der Dorfgeher” (1851), Yitskhok Yoyel Linetski's *Dos poylishe yingl* (1867), and Ludwig Jacobwoski's *Werther, der Jude* (1892). And

⁵⁷² Delaney, “Unorthodox: A Thrilling Story of Rebellion.”

as Hess demonstrates in his exploration of German orthodox middlebrow fiction of the nineteenth century, the allures of secular lifestyles and literature were imagined as a dangerous force for Jewish sons and daughters alike.⁵⁷³

This dissertation thus does not argue that the trope of forbidden learning and love are the sole domain of the daughter. It centers on the daughter figure—the gatekeeper of the future—because she renders several key discourses and impulses visible: the “modern” as a masculine domain alongside the untouched domestic sphere of the feminine; the dangers of reading as a space of desire and excess; the drive toward reproduction; the implications of the gendered discourse on Jewish language; adaptation of European genres of storytelling; and negotiation of new regimes of devotion between the sacred and the secular. The anxieties of transmission, transformation, and control intersect with one another through the daughter and offer a literary language for articulating the many textures of Jewish self-definition and its re-definition in a non-Jewish environment.

These texts demonstrate on the levels of both form and subject matter issues of accommodation to the demands of non-Jewish European culture: Whether the *Tartuffe* adaptation found in *Laykhtzin un fremelay* or the middlebrow literature—read by Jews and non-Jews alike—of Lewald, Kompert, and Franzos, or Sholem Aleichem's use of *skaz* and influence of Gogol and Gorky, these works self-consciously participate in a process of writing Jewish literature into mainstream European cultures, largely inflected by German-speaking or German-reading thinkers. Within these stories, a self-consciousness toward the place of Jews in a modern culture of letters emerges—at times bringing a Jewish pursuit of *Bildung* and secular reading culture into conversation with a specifically Jewish engagement with text and language—one

⁵⁷³ See Chapter 4 of Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*.

that codes the ultimate language of continuity, Hebrew, as male. *Laykhtzin un fremelay*, *Reb Henoch*, *Jenny*, and “Der Shylock von Barnow” all present the aspirational nature of the *Bildungsideal* while also bringing to bear both its unfulfillable promises and its failed acquisition.

Notably, aside from Lewald’s work, the daughter’s voice is largely absent from the fictional narratives examined in this dissertation, her speech minimal and her experience often mediated by an unreliable narrator. The absence of women as creators and agents—whether as author or literary figure—is a reflection of historical conditions and an aesthetic feature of the phenomenon in question, respectively: These German Jewish and Yiddish authors join a long line of European writers who articulate anxieties toward social and religious change through the protection of female purity. The daughter is at once the catalyst of change and the passive recipient of external conditions. The constraints placed on the daughter, though, allow for innovative models of covert subversion. Her simultaneous silence and centrality are the paradox that brings to the fore the tensions between the universal and the particular; the sacred and the profane; power and weakness.

While the female figure is, in her historical and literary iterations, not conceived of as the wielder of power, the threat of change and the influence thereof is perennially imagined as feminine. The daughter emerges as the central liaison between the traditional and secular: her straying from the former, as well as her occasional return thereto, triggers a crystallization of what is at stake: Within the homogenizing demands of bourgeois life and a cultural milieu that “stressed the universality of aesthetic experience, conceiving of the aesthetic domain as a disinterested realm that allowed human beings to experience their pure humanity and rise above the contingencies of the empirical world,” the female figure—who in Enlightenment discourse

was never imagined as the abstract universal individual—operates at the center of negotiating alternative paths, courses that both envision new realms of opportunity and those that convey cautionary tales.⁵⁷⁴

The texts presented in this dissertation are illustrative, but by no means exhaustive representations, of the trope of the intellectually and romantically curious Jewish daughter. In the works of secular, Reform, and traditional Jewish writers, daughters trigger a negotiation between the traditional home and the temptations of modernity—often to return to a pious father figure. In envisioning new paths, then, the Jewish daughter paradigm need not only rely on the model of the bourgeois tragedy, in which the rupture between patriarch and his offspring lead to the daughter’s tragic demise; a preservation of Judaism and the Jewish family is also imagined as a reconciliation between the two. In such conservation instantiations, the father, who embodies the masculine realm of Jewish textual tradition and ritual, collides and then reunites with the corporeal and symbolic guardian of future generations.

Understanding the daughter figure in her reproductive capacity—and in the realm of male-authored texts and a male-dominated discourse of Jewish life in modernity—runs the risk of reducing her to vessel for anxieties toward continuity. *Curious Daughters* acknowledges the significance of this positioning—the daughter as a symbolic center of cultural threat—and considers how literature is also invested in her capacity to reproduce knowledge. If secular literature was to supplant or supplement the Jewish textual tradition, then these forms had to engage with how the two might coexist. The works considered in this dissertation thus engage

⁵⁷⁴ Hess, *Middlebrow Literature*, 20.

As Anne Phillips notes, even “gender-neutral abstraction ends up as suspiciously male.” See Anne Phillips, “Universal Pretensions in Political Thought,” in *Feminism and the Enlightenment*, ed. Mary Evans, vol. 1, *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2001), 181–98, here 182. Carole Pateman explicates how modern civil order and the bonds of humankind are cast interchangeably as universal and fraternal *instead* of patriarchal, although the modern idea of fraternity assumes a community of men. See *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988/2018), 78.

with the relationship between text and its reproduction—a highly gendered arena in the Jewish tradition—and broader cultural and genealogical questions of reproduction as they are imagined through the female figure. Curious daughter narratives like *Unorthodox* will continue to flourish, both within and outside Jewish texts, because the concerns are universal and perennial: Tensions emerge as new forms of life and art begin to supersede longstanding practices. The daughter is the agent who negotiates this divide and ultimately challenges the extent to which tradition and the novel are even opposed.

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