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יהאזכרם ברוך

*'Get wisdom, get understanding;
Forsake her not and she shall preserve thee'*

PROV. 4:5

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE HASKALAH

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Edited by

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and

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Note on Transliteration

THE transliteration of Hebrew in this book reflects a consideration of the type of book it is, in terms of its content, purpose, and readership. The system adopted therefore reflects a broad approach to transcription rather than the narrower approaches found in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* or other systems developed for text-based or linguistic studies. The aim has been to reflect the pronunciation prescribed for modern Hebrew rather than the spelling or Hebrew word structure, and to do so using conventions that are generally familiar to the English-speaking reader.

In accordance with this approach, no attempt is made to indicate the distinctions between *alef* and *ayin*, *tet* and *taf*, *kaf* and *kuf*, *sin* and *samekh*, since these are not relevant to pronunciation; likewise, the *dagesh* is not indicated except where it affects pronunciation. Following the principle of using conventions familiar to the majority of readers, however, transcriptions that are well established have been retained even when they are not fully consistent with the transliteration system adopted. Likewise, the distinction between *het* and *khaf* has been retained, using *h* for the former and *kh* for the latter: the associated forms are generally familiar, even if the distinction is not actually borne out in pronunciation; for the same reason, the final *heh* is also indicated. The *shewa na* is indicated by an *e*—*loamedim*—except, again, when established convention dictates otherwise. The *yod* is represented by an *i* when it occurs as a vowel (*bereshit*), by a *y* when it occurs as a consonant (*yesodot*), and by *yi* when it occurs as both (*yisra el*).

Since no distinction is made between *alef* and *ayin* they are indicated by an apostrophe only in intervocalic positions where a failure to do so could lead an English-speaking reader to pronounce the vowel-cluster as a diphthong—as, for example, in *hu ir*—or otherwise mispronounce the word.

As in Hebrew, no capital letters are used except in the titles of published works (for example, *Shulhan arukh*).

Thanks are due to Jonathan Webber of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies for his help in elucidating the principles to be adopted.

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Reality and its Refraction in Descriptions of Women in Haskalah Fiction

TOVA COHEN

'O Hebrew woman, who can fathom your life?'

JUDAH LEIB GORDON

Katso shel yod

THIS chapter will examine the relationship between the extra-literary reality of women's lives and the attitude towards them in European Jewish society of the nineteenth century, and the portrayal of female characters in the fiction of the Haskalah.¹

Literature never directly reflects reality but at most refracts the given historical moment. The transition from the actual 'environment' of history to its literary counterpart involves fundamental changes resulting partly from the author's personality and partly from the inherent assumptions and requirements of the literary medium.² For the literary critic the social environment serves as a frame of reference for gauging the changes that have taken place in the 'literary environment' — the work itself. Once the historical reality has been defined, it is possible to identify the literary features of the fictional characters. As far as the prose works of the Haskalah are concerned, the refraction of reality can be examined from two points of view. One is the extent to which the maskil's socio-historical reality affected his fictional descriptions; the other is the manner in which literary models, genres, and traditions contributed to the portrait of his fictional characters.

¹ The scope of this chapter is limited to descriptions found in three genres of fiction: satire, romance, and the novel. Poetry is excluded on the assumption that it does not reflect extra-literary social reality to the same extent as the prose genres. This is in accordance with Simon Halkin's well-known definition: 'The prose of the Haskalah period tends to see the "real" Jew, while the poetry of the Haskalah tends to see the desirable Jew, the Jew envisioned as the ideal': *Trends and Forms in Modern Hebrew Literature* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1984), 56.

² According to Robert Alter, 'Literary Reflections of the Jewish Family', in D. Kraemer (ed.), *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory* (New York and Oxford, 1989), 225-6.

In considering the portrayal of female protagonists in the prose works of the Haskalah, the fact that this is male literature *par excellence* is highly significant. Not only was this literature male-authored, but it was addressed to a predominantly male readership (at least until the 1870s, as will be clarified below). Socially the maskil can be defined as a male member of the social class known as the *lomeditim* (studying) circles. This definition, which has gender-related social and cultural overtones, largely accounts for the male bias permeating the descriptions of women in Haskalah literature.

The maskil had to be a *lamdan* (a scholar) because of the inherent connection between Haskalah and the Hebrew language. A good understanding of Hebrew was a precondition for becoming even a reader of Haskalah literature. Those who had learned basic Hebrew, but did not go far beyond the education of the *heder*, were unable to understand the rich and sophisticated Hebrew texts of the Haskalah; this privilege was reserved to those who continued their studies in the yeshiva. As a result, the readership was limited to the narrow elitist social stratum of the *lomeditim* circles, the 'young men who devote their youth to the study of Torah, and mature professional scholars'.³

The biographies of Haskalah writers provide evidence of the scholarly elitism that distinguished the society from which they were drawn. They all attended a *heder* and studied for many years in a yeshiva before turning away from traditional Orthodoxy to embrace the notions and ideals of the Haskalah.⁴ Most maskilim came from families which had been rooted in *lomeditim* circles for several generations.⁵ Beyond its other cultural and literary ramifications,⁶ this elitism is significant for the present discussion because *lomeditim* circles excluded women. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, just as in previous generations, the majority of Jewish women were not familiar with Hebrew. Traditional middle-class women did learn the Hebrew alphabet (usually at home⁷), but only for the purpose of reciting the

³ The concept and its definition derive from Immanuel Etkes, 'Marriage and Torah Study among the *Lomdim* in Lithuania in the Nineteenth Century', in Kraemer (ed.), *The Jewish Family*, 153-78. My description of the typical division of roles in the family in the *lomeditim* circles is based on the conclusion of this chapter.

⁴ This pattern is true of the majority of Haskalah writers, as emerges, for instance, from Klausner's biographical introductions: see Klausner (ed.), *History of Modern Hebrew Literature* (Heb.), 6 vols. (Jerusalem, 1952-4), for example Joseph Perl (ii. 285-6), Adam Hakohen (iii. 174-5), Abraham Mapu (iii. 272-4), Moses Leib Lilienblum (iv. 193), and Judah Leib Gordon (iv. 305-7).

⁵ This applies, for instance, to Shneur Sachs, Isaac Baer Levinsohn, Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg, Adam Hakohen (the pen-name of Abraham Dov Lebensohn), and Abraham Mapu.

⁶ On this point see Tova Cohen, 'The Scholarly Technique: A Code of Haskalah Literature' (Heb.), *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature*, 13 (1992), 137-69.

⁷ See Z. Scharfstein, 'The *Heder* in the Life of Our People', in *Shilo* (Heb.) (n.p., 1943), 120. However, there were also special *heders* for girls (where they were taught to read Yiddish), especially towards

prayers or reading Yiddish texts. Beyond this limited knowledge, Hebrew remained an unknown language. They were never introduced to any Hebrew canonical texts (the Bible, the Mishnah, the Talmud, the later halakhic literature) since it was accepted that women should not study Torah.⁸ This gave rise to a division among the recipients of traditional Jewish culture: Hebrew texts (halakhic and scholarly) were addressed to men, while Yiddish texts (like *tehnit* or *Tse'enuh ure'enuh*) were addressed to women (and uneducated men).

The ability to read and understand a Hebrew text made the male member of the scholarly class a potential maskil; conversely, the inability to do so automatically excluded women from Haskalah circles. Thus the Jewish Enlightenment was governed by the same language-based and male-oriented elitism⁹ that characterized the *lomdim* circles. This holds true even for women who underwent European acculturation and acquired a general education, a trend that began at the end of the eighteenth century among the German Jewish bourgeoisie and which, by the middle of the nineteenth century, had become popular in eastern Europe as well. These well-educated women, just like their uneducated predecessors, had no knowledge of Hebrew; in most cases, Hebrew and Torah study remained strictly male preserves.¹⁰ Consequently the traditional division along gender-language lines carried over to the Haskalah: writing in Hebrew meant the renunciation of a female readership. The few maskilim who wanted to address women did so in Yiddish.¹¹

the end of the 19th cent.: see Shaul Stampfer, 'Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe', *Polin*, 7 (1992), 63-87. Stampfer underlines the fact that although many women acquired formal education, they were barred from Hebrew education.

⁸ R. Eleazar's saying as cited in the Mishnah (*Sotah* 3: 4)—'Whoever teaches his daughter Torah, it is as though he teaches her lewdness'—became the basis for extensive halakhic rulings that restricted or even banned the teaching of Torah to women. For details see E. G. Eilinson, *Between Woman and her Maker* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1984), 143-65.

⁹ This is similar to European male-oriented cultural elitism, which was based on knowledge of Latin, a language that was learned almost exclusively by men. Since Latin was considered a necessary basis for literary writing, culture became inaccessible to women. See J. Donovan, 'The Silence is Broken', in A. McConnell, R. Borker, and N. Forman (eds.), *Women and Language in Literature and Society* (New York, 1986), 205-18.

¹⁰ Thus, for instance, Isaac Euchel translated the prayer-book into German for his student Rivka Friedlaender, who was unable to understand the Hebrew prayers. In his preface he quotes her complaint that in spite of her sound educational background she knows no Hebrew: 'How unfortunate, my dear friend, that nearly all women and most of the men are unable to experience this happiness [the Hebrew prayers]! The translation was published in Königsberg in 1786. See Shmuel Feiner, 'The Modern Jewish Woman: A Test-Case in the Relationship between the Haskalah and Modernity' (Heb.; Eng. abstract), *Zion*, 58 (1993), 455.

¹¹ An early example of a maskil addressing women in Yiddish is Naphthali Herz Homburg's 1817 commentary on Jacob b. Isaac Ashkenazi of Janow's *Tse'enuh ure'enuh* [Go Out and See, c.1590] which is written in a Hebrew transcription of German and aims 'to reach out to those women who want to draw from the fountain of Torah'. On this book, and excerpts from it, see Chava Turniansky, 'A Haskalah Interpretation of the *Tse'enuh ure'enuh*' (Heb.; Eng. abstract), *Hasifrut*, 2/4 (1971), 835-41. By the middle of the 19th cent. there were many more examples. For instance, women were the main audience for the Yiddish translations of Mapu's works: see Shmuel Werses, *The Yiddish Translations*

While it is true that after the 1860s a few women formed part of the Haskalah readership, the rarity of this phenomenon, along with the astonishment which it generated among male maskilim, prove that these women were an exception. Men still constituted the vast majority of readers of Hebrew.¹² Even Miriam Markel-Mossohn (formerly Wirszbowski; 1841-1920), whose education and fluency in Hebrew and German¹³ gained the esteem of Mapu, Judah Leib Gordon, and Lilienblum, was treated as an exceptional phenomenon that might not repeat itself in the future.¹⁴

Hebrew women writers were even rarer. The Italian Jewish poet Rachel Morpurgo (1790-1871) stands out as a unique phenomenon of female Hebrew literary writing in the midst of the male-oriented Hebrew Enlightenment. Indeed, her contemporaries viewed her as an exception, and even as 'unfeminine'.¹⁵ Other women did write letters and essays in Hebrew at the end of the Haskalah period. But although this pursuit had social significance, it cannot be viewed as a literary phenomenon.¹⁶ The maskilim's amazement at any woman writing in Hebrew, even at that late stage, shows how strongly they were convinced of the male character of the Haskalah.

of 'Altsat Zion' by Abraham Mapu (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1986). The first Russian weekly in Yiddish, *Kol mevaser* (1st pub. 1862), included women among its staff, and its journalists regarded it as a primary vehicle for expressing women's views: R. Adler, *Women of the Shtetl through the Eyes of I. L. Peretz* (Cranbury, NJ, 1980), 120 n. 5. In this period too, Yiddish maskil fiction was written for the first time, by Israel Axenfeld (1787-1866), Isaac Meir Dick (1814-93), and Hayyim Lenski (1839-1915), on the assumption that these narratives were addressed to women as well. (In his introduction to *Malytzech mul malytzech* (1861) Dick explicitly states that the desire to reach Jewish female readers is what motivated him to write in Yiddish.) However, these were marginal phenomena before the emergence of the three Yiddish classics: Mendele Mokher Seforim, Shalom Aleichem, and I. L. Peretz.

¹² Thus, for instance, *Hamaqid*, the Haskalah journal, published Devorah Ha'eprati's Hebrew letter to Mapu on *Altsat tsyon*, introducing it as follows: 'Behold, this is new, what our eyes have seen—in the Hebrew language, handwritten by a Hebrew woman' (*Hamaqid*, 3/12 (1858), 46). Judah Leib Gordon too, who in the 1870s received a number of Hebrew letters from young girls, observed in every one of his responses how rare the phenomenon was and how much it pleased him. For instance, see his letters to Sheina Wolf in Gordon, *Letters* (Heb.), comp. and ed. Y. Y. Weisberg, vol. ii (Warsaw, 1894), 5, and his letter to Nehamah Feinstein (ibid. 158).

¹³ Women's knowledge of these languages is proved by the Hebrew edition of Isaac Aschey Francolm's *The Jews in England; or the Jews and the Crusaders in the Reign of Richard the Lionheart*, translated from the German by Miriam Markel (Warsaw, 1866).

¹⁴ Smolenskin wrote to her: 'You are the first Hebrew woman to write a book . . . perhaps the last one too.' This letter, dated 1869, was published in *Keturah*, 3 (Nov. 1927), 5.

¹⁵ On the responses of contemporary maskilim to the poems of Rachel Morpurgo see Y. Berlowitz, 'Rachel Morpurgo: Passion for Death, Passion for Poetry: On the First Modern Hebrew Woman Poet', in *Sadun: Studies in Hebrew Literature* (Heb.), vol. ii (Tel Aviv, 1996), 11-40.

¹⁶ See Shifra Alechin, 'A Letter to My Father's Friends' (Heb.), *Hamelus*, 3 (1863), 119, which demands that the teaching of Hebrew to girls should not be neglected; Berta Kreidman's letter in *Hamaqid*, supplement to no. 7 (1870), who makes the claim that she is an enthusiastic reader of Hebrew journals; Toybe Segal, 'The Question of Women' (Heb.), *Ha'ir* (1879), 69, 78-9, 85, 94, 101-2, a feminist paper which impressed the editorial board as it was written in Hebrew. On these writings see Feiner, 'The Modern Jewish Woman'.

This maleness can also be attributed to social factors. According to David Biale,¹⁷ the maskilim, just like contemporary hasidic Jews, formed closed societies, preferring to spend their leisure time in exclusively male company as a reaction to the enforced early marriage customary among the scholarly elite. Biale speculates that the traumatic experience of being married at the age of 13 or 14 made young husbands hostile to women. This explains the desire of hasidim, *lamadanim*, and maskilim alike to spend their time in a strictly male environment. Other reasons for this preference were the segregation between the sexes characteristic of traditional Jewish society and the male-oriented framework within which all Jewish intellectual activity—beginning in the *heder*—was conducted. The all-male character of maskilic circles was therefore the continuation of the accepted situation in traditional Jewish society. The male character of Haskalah literature is as much a social phenomenon as a cultural-linguistic one.

The maskilim were aware of the 'masculinity' of the circle; they recognized that they did not have to make allowances for the sensibilities of female readers. In a letter to Miriam Markel-Mosessohn, who had reprimanded him for using obscene language in his writings, Lilienblum dwells on this point: 'You should bear in mind that you are the only woman who reads my book. Do I have to guard my mouth and tongue that speak our holy language (which is not alien to such expressions, forged in this spirit of the ancient land) in a book read by no gentle woman but you?'¹⁸ This male orientation exerted a decisive influence on the portrayal of women, and gave rise to an exaggerated and biased characterization of them; in many cases descriptions are blatantly hostile to an extent possible only in a single-sex circle. The conventional trends of European androcentric literature, which typically creates an exaggerated distinction between women who are idealized ('angels') and those who are demonized ('monsters'), are reinforced in Haskalah literature.¹⁹ Such depictions in non-Jewish European literature were somewhat moderated during the nineteenth century, when female readership increased. But Haskalah literature did not experience the same process. Aware of the male composition of their audience, Haskalah authors took the licence either to denigrate women through satirical criticism or to place them on a pedestal through idealized descriptions. These two stereotypes—the ridiculed women and the worshipped heroine—are so recurrent

¹⁷ *Eros and the Jews* (New York, 1992), 158.

¹⁸ Moses Leib Lilienblum's letter to Anshel Markel Mosessohn and his wife Miriam Markel, Odessa, 1870, in *Ketucim* (1926), 3–4. It is noteworthy that five years later Smolenskin noticed the slight infiltration of women into the readership and realized that Hebrew writing was no more 'an exclusive club': in a letter to Judah Leib Levin dated 1875, he warns him to avoid writing obscenities, out of consideration for the readers of *Haskalah*, some of whom were women. See the catalogue edited by Rivkah Maoz entitled *Peretz Smolenskin Exhibition: On the 150th Anniversary of his Birth* (Jerusalem, 1992), 24.

¹⁹ This dichotomy was described in detail in Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris, 1949); trans. H. M. Parshley as *The Second Sex* (New York, 1972). The impact of this phenomenon on depictions of women in European literature is described in S. M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven, 1979).

in Haskalah literature that they can be categorized as the governing models for the portrayal of its female protagonists. Evidently, these models form part of the literary conventions that run through European and earlier Hebrew literature (such as the *makama*). Nonetheless, their persistence in Haskalah literature derives directly from the fact that it was written by and for men. As in all androcentric literature, but in a particularly marked way, the male-oriented descriptions are far removed from real women, being mere projections of their authors' fears and fantasies.

To this must be added the way in which the attitude towards women—whether critical or worshipful—united the writers and readers of male literature: both perceived the woman as the 'other'. While this tendency is characteristic of European patriarchal culture in general,²⁰ its prevalence in Haskalah literature is of particular importance. By characterizing women as 'other', the maskil author, whether consciously or unconsciously, created a bond of understanding with his male readers which was especially valuable in view of the fact that some of them were not yet fully convinced of the movement's principles.²¹ In the satirical descriptions the female protagonist becomes a scapegoat for the evils of traditional society; personifying a whole range of social ills, she exonerates the male reader from responsibility and makes him receptive to the author's criticisms. A similar function of bonding between writer and reader is fulfilled by the image of the woman on a pedestal, representing as she does a shared yearning for the ideal.

Through its male orientation, Haskalah literature reinforced the tendency to produce male-biased descriptions of women. A well-balanced and thorough examination of how women were portrayed in Haskalah literature must therefore take into account its male orientation.

THE EXTRA-LITERARY BASIS FOR THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN

The real-life woman whose character infuses the portrait of female characters in Haskalah fiction is the traditional wife, as found among the *lomeditim* circles of

²⁰ Cf. de Beauvoir's definition: 'She [the woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other' (*The Second Sex*, 16).

²¹ In view of its didactic, extra-literary objectives as the organ of a revolutionary social movement, Haskalah literature addressed whoever was willing to open a Haskalah book. The writer had to do his best to make the reader sympathize with the ideas he expressed in order to effect the desired change in the reader's thinking and way of life. For this reason, it was advisable to create the broadest common denominator that could bring together reader and writer despite their differences of ideological opinion. This must be one of the reasons why the maskil maintained a considerable number of traditional Jewish techniques: he addressed the reader in a familiar language, he made references to texts that were known to the reader, and he suggested that the reader should apply the reading strategies customary in traditional scholarly pursuits. On this point see Tova Cohen, 'Simultaneous Reading: A Key Technique in Understanding the Confrontation with the Bible in the Poetry of Adam Hakoheh' (Heb.), *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature*, 7 (1985), 71–89; Cohen, 'The Scholarly Technique'.

eastern and central Europe.²² Her model is first and foremost the women with whom the maskil was familiar during his formative years. Since the basis for one's emotional perception of the world is formed at a very young age, early experiences and acquaintances with members of the opposite sex affect the way one subsequently treats them: long after the maskil had severed ties with his society of origin, he continued to relate to women in conformity with the attitude prevalent in that society.²³ Such was the case even with regard to the women he met as an adult and who turned out to be completely different from the traditional women he had known as a boy, either because, just like him, they had experienced European acculturation, or because they had learned to demand equality in the spirit of the Russian revolutionary ideologies. They too were cast into the bipolar female moulds that were imprinted on his consciousness.

The women portrayed in the literature of the Haskalah mostly belonged to the Jewish community of central and eastern Europe. In the earlier works of the Haskalah, which originated in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century, female characterization is negligible. Satires such as *Ketav yosher* (The Book of Righteousness) by Saul Levin-Berlin, *Sihah be'erev haḥayyim* (A Dialogue in the Land of the Living) by Aaron Wolfson, and *Herev nokemet nekam berit* (A Sword Avenging the Covenant) by Meir Israel Breslau contain hardly any descriptions of women.²⁴ These and other works dealt with the essence of Judaism and criticized Jewish society in an abstract way, with virtually no reference to actual figures or to the writer's emotional attitude. When the maskilim of Germany wanted to treat the

²² No full account is available of the status and characteristics of women in traditional European Jewish society in the 18th and 19th cents. It is particularly difficult to discover sources on the history of the Jewish woman, since most of the texts that serve as historical materials are not concerned with the world of women, which in Jewish society was relegated to the margins of social, and totally excluded from intellectual activity. Those few and partial descriptions of Jewish women in the 19th cent. that do exist are placed in the framework of a general discussion on the Jewish family in the period, and are mainly drawn from subjective and biased sources. Some studies rely on childhood memories of people who left the shtetl and emigrated to another country: see M. Zborowski and E. Herzog, *Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York, 1952); S. Stahl-Wemberg, *The World of Our Mothers* (Chapel Hill, NC and London, 1988). Other studies rely on autobiographical descriptions of the maskilim, or on literary descriptions of autobiographical nature: see David Knaani, *Studies in the History of the Jewish Family* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1986); Biale, *Eros and the Jews*. These descriptions tend not to reflect reality, both because of the critical attitude of the maskilim and the nostalgic approach of the memoirs. Of special note is Etkes, 'Marriage and Torah Study', which describes the *lomedim* family with the help of internal sources.

²³ See e.g. the confession of the hero of *Urva parah* by Bercydzewski: 'I am not the one who is to blame for not being able to find the love I seek. It is my ancestors, along with their way of thinking and their books, who depressed our spirit': 'Mihuts latehum', in *The Works of M. Y. Bin-Gorion* [Bercydzewski], *Stories* (Heb.), vol. II (Tel Aviv, 1936), pt. 1, p. 132.

²⁴ Incidentally, *Nezed hadema* by Israel of Zamosc, the only early satire that fully portrays a female character, reflects the Jewish community of eastern Europe. Israel b. Moses Halevi of Zamosc (1700-72) was born in eastern Galicia, and was raised in Zamosc, Poland, where he later served as a rabbi in the local yeshiva.

realities of everyday life they did so in their Yiddish-German rather than in their Hebrew works (as was the case, for instance, in the comedies of Wolfsson and Euchel). Hebrew was reserved either for scholarly discussions or for sublime epic poetry, where the contemporary Jewish woman was marginalized.²⁵

In Haskalah fiction, real concern with female characters began only in the second decade of the nineteenth century (in Perl's social satire) and gathered momentum from the 1850s. By that time, the centres of the Hebrew Enlightenment were located in east-central and eastern Europe, and it is from the Jewish communities of those regions that the characters of Haskalah literature are drawn. The role of the wife in the *lomedim* circles of these regions differed markedly from that of women in other social strata. These women served as the breadwinners of the family to enable their husbands to devote all their time to studying Torah. This unusual economic structure developed primarily in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,²⁶ and became most pronounced in Lithuania. In other sections of Jewish society the division of roles was similar to that found among non-Jews: in the families of the rich Jewish merchants, for example, as in those of the contemporary European bourgeoisie, the husband was the sole provider while the wife was the homemaker while in the families of craftsmen and labourers, just as in the non-Jewish lower classes, husband and wife alike worked for the family livelihood.²⁷

The economic power wielded by wives in the *lomedim* families did not grant them official authority over family matters, or even equality within the family.²⁸

²⁵ The difference between the way women were described in Hebrew and in German texts can be demonstrated by comparing the Hebrew and German works of Isaac Euchel. In 'The Letters of Meshulam Ha'eshetemoi' (Heb.), a series of pseudographic letters published in *Hamelusef* (1789-90) he discusses the place of women in society (the very concern with the subject is unusual for his generation). He does not describe specific characters, but provides a general utopian account of women's status which conveys his criticism of the segregation of the sexes. In contrast, in his Yiddish-German play *Rabbi Henoch, or: What To Do With It* (1792), he describes in detail female characters drawn from the reality of contemporary German Jewry.

²⁶ Though in earlier periods too some women were involved in commercial dealings or even supported their husbands, this was a rare phenomenon, and regarded as an ideal. See Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. Bernard Dov Cooperman (New York 1993), 164 n. 2. See also Gershon David Hundert, 'Approaches to the History of the Jewish Family in Early Modern Poland-Lithuania', in S. M. Cohen and P. E. Hyman (eds.), *The Jewish Family: Myth and Reality* (New York and London, 1986), 22.

²⁷ See Knaani, *Studies in the History of the Jewish Family*, 80-6. On the division of roles in European bourgeois family see nn. 42-4 below. On the division of roles in non-Jewish lower-class families as continuing the medieval autarkic structure see J. W. Scott and L. A. Tilly, 'Women's Work and the Family in Nineteenth-Century Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17/1 (Jan. 1975), 36-62.

²⁸ Samuel Horodezky argues that hasidism displayed an egalitarian attitude towards women: 'The Woman in Hasidism', in his *The Hasidim and the Hasidic Jews* (Heb.), vol. IV (Tel Aviv, 1943), 68-71. However, Ada Rapoport-Albert has demonstrated that Horodezky's descriptions are anachronistic since they are influenced by the pioneering Zionist insistence on the equality of women. In her opinion there was no egalitarian ideology in hasidism; see 'On Women in Hasidism: S. A. Horodezky and the Maid of Ludmir Tradition', in A. Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Jewish History* (London, 1988), 495-525.

For both spouses, studying the Torah reigned supreme. Hence the husband was accorded the highest status, while the wife's role as the family breadwinner was secondary.²⁹ However, there may have been a marked discrepancy between theory and practice. Contemporary personal memoirs suggest that in many cases 'the woman's informal status [was] more demanding and more rewarding than that formally assigned to her'.³⁰ The concentration of economic power in the hands of the wife enabled her to make and implement decisions; moreover, there could have been an easy transition from running financial affairs to making decisions on other family matters: 'Although children were encouraged to view their father as the head of the family, the mothers often made the important decisions.'³¹

The wife's position in *lomedem* circles had other consequences: she was seen as materialistic and possessed of a 'merchant's mentality'; she also tended to be out of the home for hours at a time in order to make a living. This double burden as breadwinner and homemaker, coupled with her decision-making responsibility, took their toll. To her children and husband she could appear impatient and hard-hearted.³²

For the husband, the contrast between his wife's formal, inferior, status and the power she in practice wielded constituted a potential source of frustration. In the traditional system of values, Torah and its study reigned supreme, overshadowing nearly all aspects of mundane life,³³ so that the husband could feel secure in his role as a scholar. The pursuit of 'enlightenment' called into question the fundamental assumptions of Judaism and the resultant norms that shaped the structure of Jewish society. Thus, while the traditional scholar acknowledged his wife's economic power to be subservient to his own (superior) role, the scholar turned maskil, who no longer believed Torah learning to be a supreme value, resented the actual power exercised by the woman in her role as a breadwinner, and his hostility to her increased. The misogyny thus engendered was supplemented by the influences simultaneously exerted on the maskil's attitude towards women in general by the way of life in which he had been reared.

²⁹ On the secondary status of women in the Jewish family see M. Zimbalist Rosaldo, 'Women, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview', in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford, Calif., 1974), 20. See also Stahl-Weinberg, *The World of our Mothers*, 6; Zborowsky and Herzog, *Life is with People*, 132; and Knaani, *Studies in the History of the Jewish Family*, 81.

³⁰ Zborowsky and Herzog, *Life is with People*, 131. See also 'Matriarchy in Patriarchy', in Knaani, *Studies in the History of the Jewish Family*, 85-91.

³¹ Stahl-Weinberg, *The World of our Mothers*, 24.

³² 'In many families the father was viewed as having a softer character than the mother. Many women who were burdened by the necessity of making a living did not leave themselves time to express feelings' (ibid. 25; see also Knaani, *Studies in the History of the Jewish Family*, 87).

³³ For example, according to the sons of Rabbi Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna, their father showed no interest in the affairs of the world and the concerns of his family. He applauded 'those who leave the ways of this world and its business to occupy themselves with the Torah and its Commandments'. Etkes, 'Marriage and Torah Study', 105.

Foremost among these influences was the segregation of the sexes. Indeed, in the traditional Jewish community, men and women led almost separate lives, within clearly defined boundaries of their respective spheres of activity.³⁴ This social segregation limited the range of women that the maskil (just like any other male member of the community) was exposed to during his formative years, restricting it to members of the immediate family: mother, wife, and mother-in-law; young girls were strictly out of bounds and continued to be remote and alien 'others' even in his adult years. Consequently the satirized wives, who are modelled on the familiar married women within the family, are vivid and convincing characters.³⁵ In contrast, the idealized heroines (as a rule unmarried young girls) are portrayed with such fidelity to the literary conventions that they frequently seem to be cardboard figures.³⁶ The maskil's failure to depict these characters convincingly stems from his lack of intimate acquaintance with girls in his formative years, for which he compensated by resorting to literary models and conventions.

Another salient influence on the portrayal of women was the typical phenomenon of a young boy's separation from his family and his early marriage. The Jewish boy spent most of the day apart from his family as soon as he turned 3 and began to attend the *heder*. Then, in his early teens, he left home to attend yeshiva in some distant town. Yet the most extreme separation from his family took the form of early marriage, which was customary in *lomedem* circles until the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁷

³⁴ The strict segregation between the sexes that was implemented in Jewish society originates in the halakic concept of modesty which functioned as a 'fence' against transgression. For this purpose, the halakah established rules of separation between men and women in all spheres of life. In prayer: 'A first woman were inside and men were outside but they were led to frivolity . . . Therefore it was ruled that women should sit above and men below (BT *Sukkah* 51b). At public gatherings: 'It is the duty of the court . . . to make sure that men and women do not congregate there [in public places] to eat and drink together and thus be led to immorality'. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, trans. S. Gandz and I. Klein as *The Code of Maimonides: The Book of Seasons*, vi. 21 (New Haven, 1961), 304; for a parallel see *Shulhan arukh: Orah hayyim*, 589: 4). During meals at religious ceremonies: 'One should make sure the men and women do not eat in the same room' (*Kitsur shulhan arukh*, 149: 1). Educating children: 'E chronological listing of all the relevant sources divided into topics, with emphasis on present-day rulings, see E. G. Eilinson, *Walking Modestly: Woman and the Commandments* (Heb.), vol. ii (Jerusalem 1981), chs. 1 and 2.

³⁵ This is how they are described in literary criticism. See for instance Joseph Klausner's evaluation of the satirical figure of Sarah the Widow in Smolenskin's *Hato'eh bedarkhei haluyim* 'demonstrating the descriptive talent of Smolenskin the realist': Klausner, *History of Modern Hebrew Literature*, v. 22.

³⁶ This point too was raised by the literary critics. See for instance L. Lilienblum's criticism of the figure of Elisheva, the heroine of Mapu's *Ayot barzava*, in his article 'The World of Chaos' (Heb.), *Hushiah* (1873), and Yosef Hayim Brenner's criticism, in his essay 'In Memory of J. L. Gordon' (Heb.), in *Critical Works*, vol. iii (Tel Aviv, 1967), 11-34, on the figure of Bat-Shu'a in Kato's *she'el yod* [The Point of a Yod] by J. L. Gordon.

³⁷ See Shmuel Stampfer, 'The Social Meaning of Premature Marriage in Eastern Europe in the Nineteenth Century', in A. Mendelson and Chone Shmeruk (eds.), *P. Glickson Memorial Volume*:

Early marriage characterizes the biographies of most maskilim who were originally affiliated with the *lomeditim* circles. This must have influenced their attitude towards women, matchmaking, and traditional married life. On the one hand, this early separation produced the nostalgic yearning for childhood and the mother figure seen in some Haskalah literary descriptions. On the other hand, it inspired feelings of resentment towards the *heder* and early marriage, the two institutions responsible for the separation.³⁸ Being uprooted from his family and going to live with his in-laws made the young husband resent them too, a feeling which only intensified as he experienced adolescent rebelliousness.³⁹

Contemporary literature supplies several testimonies to the traumatic effect of premature marriage on young men who had grown up in a segregated society.⁴⁰ The experience often generated strong antagonisms not only to the institution of marriage and the matchmaking process which made it possible, but also to the women involved—the wife and her mother. For the maskil the traditional wife represented forced marriage, economic dependence on in-laws, and the burden of married life. Once he was drawn to the Enlightenment in rebellion against the traditional norms and in pursuit of a new way of life, his family and wife felt like millstones around his neck. In view of these circumstances, it is no wonder that the maskil writer used bitter satire to describe the wife as a representative of the restrictions of traditional society.⁴¹

What sharpened these descriptions of women and their place in society was the maskil's contrasting vision of the ideal family. That vision was motivated not merely by his rejection of the existing situation, but also by his adoption of contemporary European ideals, primarily the west European bourgeois ethos. Only towards the end of the nineteenth century is it possible to discern another influence—that of radical Russian ideologies.

Collection of Studies on the Jews of Poland (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1987), 71. By this time, the practice of premature marriage was no longer widespread in European society (see J. Hajnal, 'European Marriage: Patterns in Perspective', in D. V. Glass and E. D. Eversley (eds.), *Population in History* (London, 1965), 101–43), but it persisted in the *lomeditim* circles of eastern Europe. According to Stampfer, 'Gender Differentiation', 74, this practice was such a defining characteristic of the elite *lomeditim* circles that people adopted it in order to affiliate themselves with them.

³⁸ Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 151–8.

³⁹ For examples see Knaani, *Studies in the History of the Jewish Family*, 19–29.

⁴¹ The hostility towards the wife, to whom the boy was married at a young age, and towards the family which was formed as a result of this marriage, is clearly described by Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg in his autobiography, *At'ezzer* (Vilna, 1864), and it found trenchant expression at the end of the Haskalah period in autobiographical works (e.g. Lilienblum, *Hadot ne'urim* [Sins of My Youth] and treatises (e.g. Isaac Kovner, *Hamatsref* [The Crucible]). On *Hamatsref* and its author see Shmuel Feiner, 'Jewish Society, Literature, and Haskalah in Russia as Represented in the Radical Criticism of I. E. Kovner' (Heb., Eng. abstract), *Zion*, 55 (1990), 283–316. The descriptions of women in Kovner and Lilienblum demonstrate how resentment of premature marriage provoked such strong hostility towards traditional married women that it found its way even into the writings of radical maskilim who called for egalitarian relationships between the sexes.

The European bourgeois ethos posited the division of society into two spheres of action. One was the male-dominated public sphere: work and business, war and politics, and learning. The other was the domestic sphere of female activities: housework, child care, and homemaking, providing men with a peaceful haven into which they could retreat from the troubles of the outside world.⁴² From this ethos emerged the literary stereotype of 'the angel in the house', an amalgamation of the Holy Virgin and the romantic heroine. Since the woman was removed from worldly affairs, she was perceived as weaker, but also purer, than the man. Undisturbed by the pressures of the coarse masculine world, she was free to adhere to her ideals without compromise, and was therefore attentive to the voice of conscience and responsive to the language of feelings. Her physical weakness required the man's protection while her emotional and moral strength served as his conscience and guided his conduct.⁴³ The woman's activity, according to this ethos, was confined to the fine arts of homemaking and elegant entertaining. She thus needed to become accomplished in piano-playing, needlework, and fluent conversation in French.⁴⁴

The maskilim welcomed the west European ideal of femininity as an antidote to the uncouth and domineering working women of their traditional background. Filtering this ideal through their own notion of femininity, they portrayed a heroine who was passive and refined, a domestic creature content with trivial pastimes of no productive value. As a symbol of love and loyalty she was a nurturing figure, the source of warmth and comfort. Her carriage and personality made her the perfect match for her mate, the hero of Haskalah literature. This exponent of Haskalah values was, in the eyes of the maskilim, the exact opposite of the Jewish scholar. He was active assertive, and in control of his own destiny. Moreover—and unlike the traditional scholar—he supported his family by undertaking productive work. This divisor of roles, according to which the wife is a full-time homemaker while the husband is a productive member of society, conforms to the dual targets incorporated into the ideology of the Jewish Enlightenment: confining women to the domestic sphere and insisting on the need to make Jewish society economically productive.⁴⁵ An excerpt from *Imrei shefer* (1802) by Naphthali Herz Homberg (1749–1841) illustrates this attitude well. In the context of discussing the advantages of education segregated along gender lines, Homberg makes the following observations about the family:

It is the husband's duty to love his wife . . . to honour her, to provide her with all the house-keeping necessities . . . And even though the husband is the master of the house, he should

⁴² This division of spheres is characteristic of western Europe from the late 18th cent. onwards, as industry moved away from the home to the factory, and the economic role of the urban middle-class woman, who until the Industrial Revolution had played an active part in supporting the family financially, became increasingly restricted.

⁴³ J. N. Burstin, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London, 1986), 31.

⁴⁴ V. L. Bullough, *The Subordinate Sex* (Urbana, Ill., 1973), 3.

⁴⁵ See Shmuel Ertinger, *The History of the Jewish People in Modern Times* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1966) 73–4. See also Israel Bartal, *The Metamorphosis of the Idea of the Productivization of the Jews in the Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries: Sources for M.A. Seminar* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1985).

not treat her as if she were a servant . . . and from time to time he ought to consult with her about his business affairs even when he does not need her advice, if only to show his affection and loyalty. It is the wife's duty to her husband to love and honour him, and to cater to all his needs . . . without keeping him away from his business . . . She has the duty to manage the household prudently, to look after her children lovingly . . . and to converse with her husband in a pleasant manner and in good taste, so that day by day his love for her shall grow . . . She ought to be chaste in words and deeds . . . and her eyes should always be fixed upon him, for he is her lot in life.⁴⁶

Several decades later, Mordecai Aaron Guenzburg endorsed the same view. One of the letters compiled in *Kiryat sefer* postulates this ideal as antithetical to contemporary practice, which Guenzburg regarded as a striking deviation from the natural order of things.⁴⁷ The writer describes his beloved woman in terms of 'the angel in the house': 'While she was engaged in her needlework, I read to her fine discourses from her brother's books . . . All her gestures are levelled by the balance of morality and aligned according to the strict rules of etiquette. She does not fill her mouth with laughter as do the common girls . . . for morality is her measuring line.' For the Haskalah, the liberation of the woman thus involved her removal from the public domain and her reinstatement in the domestic sphere under the man's protection. The education of this woman was intended to make her a suitable mate by providing her with conversational skills and perfecting her 'feminine' virtues.

In the 1860s, towards the end of the Haskalah period, the influence of the bourgeois ethic on the maskilim's descriptions of women was supplemented by models taken from the social ideology of Russian radical movements. In keeping with its insistence on equality, Russian social ideology generated a new model of the ideal woman, epitomized in Russian literature by the figure of Vera Pavlona, the heroine of Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is To Be Done?* (1863). This model, known as the 'new woman', is anchored in the socio-economic notion of equality between the sexes, which holds that women should possess the same rights and privileges as men. Any form of subordination or exploitation is precluded, and women are afforded a chance to earn a living and gain economic independence and equal status. Hence the 'new woman', who has acquired the same kind of education as her male

⁴⁶ *Imrei shefer kolelim inyenet torah unasar leyaldet benet yisra'el, elem ve'almah* [Words of Wisdom, Including Matters of Torah and Morals for the Jewish Boy and Girl] (1862, repr. Vienna, 1816), 156-8. This book served as a textbook for teaching religion to Jewish children. It was printed as an educational project of the Haskalah under the aegis of the Austrian government.

⁴⁷ 'And in this respect, the way boys are raised in this country seems to me better than our own customs, for they follow nature . . . the young men develop their strength on the streets, while the young women prepare their strength at home, and the glory of a king's daughter is within . . . In our customs, on the other hand, nature is distorted, the wheel is turned upside-down. The young men are hidden in the schools as if they were gaoled . . . while the maidens, having been taught the art of bargaining, remove the veil of shame that Nature wrapped around them': *Kiryat sefer: Mikhacum melukatim al tohorat lesyon hakodesh* [The City of the Book: Selected Letters on the Purity of the Holy Tongue] (Warsaw, 1873), 72.

counterpart, is active, independent, and self-supporting. Her characteristics and qualifications are not gender-specific, and she is valued as an equal human being.⁴⁸

Even in the 1860s, however, the model of the 'new woman' did not gain popularity, though it left its imprint on some of the works and programmatic essays written by Lilienblum, Judah Leib Levin, and Braudes. The strikingly small number of heroines modelled upon the 'new woman' in Haskalah literature, including the works that were clearly influenced by Russian radical ideology, is in itself proof of the pervasiveness of the earlier female stereotypes. In Judah Leib Gordon's later works, just as in Mendele Mokher Seforim's *Ha'avot vehabanim* and the stories of Braudes, the ideal of womanhood advocated by the west European bourgeois ethos overshadows the 'new woman' inspired by the Russian revolutionary literature.

THE INFLUENCE OF CONVENTIONAL LITERARY MODELS

In their effort to shape modern Hebrew fiction the maskilim emulated the formal structures of European literature. In its earliest period, Haskalah fiction was marked by two pervasive prose genres directly influenced by European literature: satire (as early as the end of the eighteenth century) and romance (from the middle of the nineteenth century). Much as these genres were 'Judaized', their major conventional contours were preserved in the Hebrew works.⁴⁹

The characters populating the early fictional works of the Haskalah were fashioned in accordance with the conventions typical of satire and romance. However, the distinctive socio-cultural context of Hebrew literature caused the European models to be Judaized in content as well as in language. As I will clarify below, these changes involved both the extra-literary content that is refracted in the fictional description, and the literary medium, which was adapted to the particular mentality of the Haskalah readership.

In their Haskalah incarnations, these European models established themselves as fixed conventions governing the portrayal of women. At first, they appeared in the framework of the original genres. Over time they came to operate autonomously: female characters typical of west European satire or romance were also introduced into social novels, short stories, and poetry. The pervasiveness of these stock characters in Haskalah fiction created its own literary tradition of the depiction of women, and female protagonists were accordingly cast into two basic moulds: the satirized

⁴⁸ On the women's liberation movement in Russia in the 19th cent. and the 'new woman' in the teachings of radical thinkers such as Michaelov, Chernyshevsky, and Pisarev see R. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia* (Princeton, NJ, 1978).

⁴⁹ On the influence of European satire see e.g. Shmuel Werses, 'The Satirical Methods of Joseph Perl', in id., *Story and Source: Studies in the Development of Hebrew Prose* (Heb.) (Ramat Gan, 1971). On the influence of European romance see e.g. Dan Miron, *From Romance to the Novel: Studies in the Emergence of the Hebrew and Yiddish Novel in the Nineteenth Century* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1979), 112-18.

woman and the romantic heroine. As noted above, a third type, the 'new woman', was marginally adopted towards the end of the Haskalah period.

The Satirized Woman

Portraits of the satirized woman conform to the general (i.e. European) rules of satirical characterization. This character is a type—a representative of a social group which the author criticizes by means of irony.⁵⁰ For this purpose, it is presented as a flat character and viewed from a perspective that discourages sympathy. Since the satirical type represents an entire group of people, he or she becomes recognizable by use of a small cluster of fixed, stereotypical, and mostly negative traits, which are established on the basis of exaggeration, distortion, and vulgar reduction.

In addition to incorporating the satirical content of general social criticism, the convention of the satirized woman also betrays misogynistic attitudes typical of patriarchal societies. In European satires the woman is characterized by physical weakness (which she exploits to her advantage by controlling men), treachery and guile, and tattling. Cultivated by women as protective measures against their subordinate status in patriarchal society, these perceived traits posed a threat to male dominance and hence became the focus of satirical criticism directed at women.⁵¹ Any other female trait that threatened to undermine male dominance could be added to round out the description. By exaggerating them, the satirist expressed his fear of, and hostility towards, women and his desire to destroy them with the weapon of his satire. By the eighteenth century this stock character had become a well-established literary model which was carried over into Hebrew literature.

In Haskalah satire the European model of the satirized woman was supplemented by other characteristics, derived from the social reality of the maskil's background, which added a distinctly Jewish dimension to the model of the satirized woman. Thus, the satirized Jewish woman is:

1. A businesswoman who turns away from domestic affairs to trade with the outside world. She is greedy, materialistic, and shrewd in her business dealings.
2. Domineering: she controls her environment and overshadows her husband.
3. A middle-aged wife who is described in terms of her relationship with her husband, rather than her interaction with her children (the maskil's satirical criticism derives from his hostility towards the woman in her role as a wife, not as a mother).

Once these traits had been assimilated, they became an inextricable part of the model and served as common denominators that invariably characterized all the satirized woman portrayed in Haskalah literature.

⁵⁰ My presentation of the characteristics of the satirical figure is based on the following sources: L. Feinberg, *Introduction to Satire* (Ames, Ia., 1967); D. C. Meuck, *The Compass of Irony* (London, 1969); O. M. Hodgart, 'Satire', in R. Paulson (ed.), *Satire: Modern Essays in Criticism* (London, 1971), 79–107.

⁵¹ Hodgart, 'Satire'.

The integration of a European model into Hebrew Haskalah satire also brought about changes in descriptive techniques, since the satire was addressed to a different 'interpretative community'.⁵² Haskalah fiction uses irony, a key tool of satire, is produced by juxtaposing two fundamentally incompatible frames of reference: in this case the traditional scholarly method of learning—the simultaneous reading of several texts⁵³—is applied to the satirical depiction of the Jewish woman. This technique, known as 'bisociation',⁵⁴ works on the traditional biblical notion of the ideal woman the figure of *eshet hayil* (a woman of valour), the paragon of female virtue (Proverbs 31), or famous women such as Deborah the prophetess or Queen Esther. Placed in this context, the satirized woman is reduced to a vulgar imitation of the ideal. Thus the stylistic parody becomes an integral component of her portrait and a major feature of its Jewish essence.

Haskalah fiction provides numerous examples of female characters modelled upon its own version of the satirized woman. The recurrence of this ridiculed figure established a sort of convention or tradition manifest not only in social satires (such as the rabbi's virtuous wife in Perl's *Megaleh temirin*) but also in later works. This tradition yielded such characters as Sarah, Ephrayim's wife, and Hannah, the ritual bath attendant and servant, in Mendele Mokher Seforim's *Ha'avot zehabaim*; Deborah, wife of Zevulun the Melamed, in Smolenskin's *Kevurat hamor* (1874); the ridiculed landlady in *Simhat hanef* (The Joy of the Godless), also by Smolenskin; the rabbi's wife in *Kafregel egel* (The Calf's Foot) by Judah Leib Gordon, and Reichel in *Bank lemistar uleharoshet hama'aseh* (A Bank for Commerce and Industry) by Brandstaedter.

The first solid character of this type is the satirized wife described in *Nezed hadema* (A Pottage of Tears) (1773) by Israel of Zamosc:

She is noisy and un governable. She too is a woman of valour. Watchwoman, what of the night? She lies in wait from morning till evening. She rises while it is yet night so that she shall have no lack of gain. As a bride she adorns herself with her jewels. Her feet do not remain in her house; like a restive young camel, she runs and returns. On the street she raises her voice to pursue her own business and speak with everyone who passes by. And she profusely greets those who are far and near.⁵⁵

This passage is a parody of Proverbs 31. The negative qualifiers 'noisy and un governable' deflate the exalted portrait of the 'woman of valour', the ideal mistress of the house. The description then proceeds along the same lines by copying

⁵² This is the term coined by Stanley Fish, who defines interpretative strategies as 'the shape or reading' shared by members of specific interpretative communities: 'These strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read': *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 171.

⁵⁴ 'The effect produced by perceiving an idea or event simultaneously in two habitually incompatible frames of reference': Hodgart, 'Satire'. See also Yehuda Friedlander's use of the term in *Studies in Hebrew Satire*, i: *Hebrew Satire in Germany* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1979).

⁵⁵ Y. Friedlander, *Hebrew Satire in Europe*, ii: *The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Heb.) (Ramat Gan, 1989), 75–6.

the biblical text almost verbatim ('She rises while it is yet night'; 'so that she shall have no lack of gain'). But the biblical allusions produce a 'bisociation': the original meaning—praising the housewife's industry—is transformed into a strong denunciation of the working wife, who deserts her domestic territory for commercial dealings. In using the text of *eshet hayil* as a frame of reference for this parody, the denunciation of her modern counterpart is reinforced, as the satirized woman is contrasted with the very ideal she is supposed to epitomize.

The thrust of the satire in this description is the tradeswoman's conduct: her greed drives her from home in pursuit of commercial activities that involve frivolous and immodest intercourse with strangers. The extra-literary reality of the female breadwinner becomes an integral part of the literary figure. Nonetheless, this description does not accurately reflect extra-literary reality; the satirical intent gives rise to a deliberately distorted and exaggerated description. For example, the reiteration of the woman's bustling activity conveys purposeless movement, typical of satirical descriptions and in particular those addressing female conduct, conventionally recognized as 'much ado about nothing'. This hyperactivity perfectly fits the character of the tradeswoman and marks her out as a ridiculous and contemptible figure, driven by eccentricity rather than by a desperate struggle to survive. This description underlines the maskil's resentment of female dominance and role-reversal.

The Romance Heroine

It was in the mid-nineteenth century that the model of the romance heroine began to strike root alongside the satirical genre and influence the development of Haskalah literature. Specifically, the appearance of the prose romance can be dated to the publication of Mapu's *Ahavat isiyon* in 1853, later followed by his other works: *Ayit tsavua* (1857–64) and *Ashmat shomron* (1865). The romance does not describe reality in the same way as the novel: 'The romance is an heroic fable which treats fabulous persons and things . . . The romance in lofty and elevated language describes what never happened nor is likely to happen.'⁵⁶ Romance heroes are deliberately presented as exalted and heroic figures, and the reality they reflect is universal and supra-temporal.

The romance heroine represents the author's vision of the ideal woman. This vision incorporates his criticism of female reality and the ideals he strives to attain. Accordingly, through the romance heroine, reality is refracted in two ways: whereas it stands out as the exact opposite of those aspects of female reality that the author finds unacceptable, it also conveys his inner reality, his fantasies and ideals. The heroine of the romance literature⁵⁷ is generally portrayed in accordance with a

⁵⁶ The definition follows Clara Reeve's well-known book *The Progress of Romance* (London, 1785). This genre originated in medieval courtly romance, but found its way into fiction.

⁵⁷ For a detailed account of the characteristics of the romance heroine and how they were formed see R. M. Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine* (New York, 1982); Bullough, *The Subordinate Sex*; J. M. Ferrante, *Women as Image in Medieval Literature* (New York, 1973).

conventional model that is anchored in the medieval concept of courtly love. She is well born (usually either a noblewoman or a member of the upper class), perfect, chaste, and beautiful. As the object of the hero's devoted love and passionate yearnings, she motivates him to seek bold adventures in order to win her heart. Fixed in her remote position on a pedestal of perfection, she leads no significant life of her own. Her essential role lies in her passive existence as the personification of pure love that can be attained only through the hero's sustained efforts and persistent devotion.

The model of the romance heroine was a major source of inspiration to Mapu and the maskilim who followed him. The ideal heroines populating the literature of the Haskalah are beautiful, noble (the nobility of class is replaced in the Haskalah narratives by the nobility of wealth), perfect, and passive, serving as the exalted object of the hero's love. Certain departures from utter passivity are discernible in some of Mapu's heroines (such as Tamar, the heroine of *Ahavat isiyon*), but they do not amount to a consistent trait: by the end of the story, even these heroines resume their passive role.

The romance heroines of the Haskalah are diametrically opposed to the satirized 'real' women that dominate the maskil's background. They are never married,⁵⁸ most are young unmarried girls, but even the older ones (for example Na'amah in *Ahavat isiyon*, or Yehosheba in *Ashmat shomron*) are unattached, being widows or deserted wives; they are usually sheltered from the pressures of the outside world; on the whole, they come from wealthy and respectable families and are not constrained to earn a living.⁵⁹ The removal of the idealized heroine from the world of action testifies to the influence of the European bourgeois ethos, as well as to the author's intention to portray her as the countertype of the 'real' wife in her role as the family provider. She is also distinguished by the excessive passivity which permeates her interactions with the members of her family. In this respect too, she is the opposite of the 'real' woman, who is both assertive and domineering. In fact, the heroine's passivity is frequently juxtaposed with her own mother's assertiveness.⁶⁰ Significantly, the unfolding of the plot clearly suggests that passivity is a

⁵⁸ In early European romances the hero's beloved, whom he worships and idealizes, might be a married woman. This is not the case in Haskalah literature as it goes against the strict conventions of morality, from which the maskil never deviates.

⁵⁹ Mapu's heroines, for instance, conspicuously belong to this category. When an idealized romantic heroine earns a living, as does Bat-Shu'a, the heroine of J. L. Gordon's *Katso shel yoad*, this is a matter of necessity. She regards her work as a temporary stage in her life and is looking forward to the day when she will retire and assume the delicate passivity of 'the angel in the house'.

⁶⁰ For instance, in *Ahavat isiyon* Tamar plays a much more passive role than her mother Tirza during the confrontations with Tamar's father. To give another example, the passive figure of Rachel in Mendele Mokher Seforim's *Ha'avot vehatanim* (Odessa, 1868) is in sharp contrast to the active, gregarious, and excessively fussy figure of her mother Sarah. It is precisely her passivity that leads Rachel to the idyllic conclusion of the love story: her beloved Ben-David, who is portrayed as an active and successful person, redeems her and the entire family.

virtue. In Haskalah literature assertiveness and dominance are relegated to portraits of satirized women.

Like the model of the satirized woman, that of the romance heroine is also appropriated by Haskalah literature and endowed with specifically maskilic characteristics. At the most basic level, this is achieved by the Judaization of her name, background, etc. More interesting, however, are two other devices. The first is the ambivalent formulation of the heroine as an educated woman; the second is the use of a distinctive biblical linguistic code to describe her. Each of these two devices warrants more detailed analysis.

The maskilim were ambivalent about women's education. Although pleased when female readers of Hebrew joined their ranks, they nevertheless remained committed to the traditional notion that learning was the exclusive domain of men. This ambivalence had a dual impact on their portrayal of the romance heroine. First, they created heroines who were uneducated but nonetheless successful in life. This is true not only of the heroines of Mapu's biblical romances, but also of those placed in a nineteenth-century setting, such as Shifra and Ruhama in *Ayit tsavua*. Second, the kind of education acquired by the heroine is described in terms that make it seem merely decorative, with no actual bearing on her life. Rachel in *Ha'avot vehabanim*, Elisheva in *Ayit tsavua*, and Sarah in *Aharit simhah tugah* by Judah Leib Gordon carry the banner of women's education. Yet the way their story unfolds suggests that their education has no real influence on their lives; they still depend on the hero to redeem them. The opposite holds true of the romance hero, who takes advantage of his education to change the course of his life.

To elaborate this point, I will discuss the case of Elisheva in some detail. Her presentation as the idealized heroine, as well as the emphasis on her talents, her education (she is versed in Hebrew and European culture), and her ability to discourse with men⁶¹ undoubtedly express the author's approval of women's education. In effect, her struggle to exercise her right to acquire an education is reminiscent of the struggle of the maskilim to transcend the constraints of their society. Addressing this issue in a letter to her grandfather, Elisheva writes:

You condemn learning as folly because of many people who tell me that my wisdom and my knowledge have led me astray. Why do they consider me wayward? My graceful speech is my crime, and my wisdom—the sin of my soul. I was schooled in learning, I studied books and languages, but you, my father, pronounced judgement upon them, saying that they corrupt the soul and will bring shame upon me.⁶²

However, Elisheva's education has no impact on her choices in life. *Ayit tsavua* ends with her predictable marriage to Na'aman, with whom she made an alliance in her childhood. At the same time, however, Na'aman does benefit from his education: he travels to study agronomy and chooses a new way of life.

⁶¹ See the chapter 'Hisei lashon' [Arrows of the Tongue], in *Ayit tsavua*, in *The Works of A. Mapu* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1964), 333–7.

⁶² *Ibid.* 247.

Before getting married, Na'aman writes a letter to Elisheva in which he describes their future married life:

Now I'll tell you how I imagine my own house. For it is not good that man should live alone. And she who is to be the mistress of the house, the one I shall choose, will love what is precious to my soul and together with me shall lie down in green pastures and among the plants of Eden, planted with my own hands. And my desire will be to delight the soul of my beautiful wife. She too will make an effort to be a woman of valour, the crown of her husband, who looks well to the ways of her household and loves my beloved ones just as I do . . . I will also prepare a selection of books in my study, which we shall read in the autumn and winter nights, when no work is done in the fields. Not so during the working days. Then I shall ride my horse to awaken my brethren who cultivate the land. And my wife will rejoice over her good life . . . for under my shadow she will enjoy the pleasures of love and the treasures of life.⁶³

This vision of married life accords with the bourgeois notion of separate spheres. For Elisheva, education is merely decorative: it enables her to help brighten the long autumn and winter nights she spends with her husband in the intimacy of shared reading. Otherwise it has nothing to do with her life and her role as a wife: she is confined to the domestic sphere, where she takes her proper place in the shadow of her loving and generous husband. The idyllic ending of the romance suggests that the author approves of this marriage and shares Na'aman's vision of married life.

It is important to note, however, that some of the late Haskalah works express a significant change of attitude towards women's education. This was inspired by the Russian radical movement, which advocated women's education as a means of granting them independence and equality.⁶⁴ In the 1870s it gave rise to a new type of heroine, who stands half-way between the romance heroine and the 'new woman'. This heroine's education actually influences her life and grants her more equality with men.⁶⁵

Thus extra-literary social ideals exert some influence on the formulation of the

⁶³ *Ibid.* 253.

⁶⁴ This new ideology was articulated, for example, in Moses Leib Lilienblum, *Mishnat elisha ben aronah* [The Doctrine of Elisha b. Avuyah], 1st pub. as a series in *Asfat hakhanim* (1878) and *Hamasef* (1879). See Yehuda Friedlander, *Hebrew Satire in Europe*, iii: *The Nineteenth Century* (Heb.) (Ramat Gan, 1994), 206.

⁶⁵ Thus, for instance, in Reuven Asher Braudes, *Hadat vehayyim* [Religion and Life] (1876–9), Rachel's education influences her relationship with Samuel and to some extent affects her decisions and the course of her life. Another example of the heroine's education as shaping her destiny is found in the description of Loira, the heroine of *Ke'far mezagegim* [The Glaziers' Village] (1894) by Mordecai David Brandstaedter. These heroines are still modelled upon the conventional romantic heroine, but their education serves as a guiding factor in their life. A more extreme example of how education affects the destiny and personality of the idealized heroine is to be found in 'Elhanan', the unfinished poem by Judah Leib Levin, pub. in *Hatsahar*, 9 (1878–9) and 10 (1880–1). For Miriam, the protagonist of this work, education becomes such a dominant factor that it transforms her into an active and independent person—a 'new woman'.

literary character. Nevertheless, the ideal heroine is much less convincing than the satirized woman. Haskalah ideal heroines are described in accordance with the contours and formulas of the romance convention; indeed, they frequently seem to be carbon copies of previous romance heroines. Such fidelity to the convention of the romance heroine becomes particularly ridiculous in the realistic social novels that emerged at the end of the period. The hero of *Ha'ivot veltabanim* even makes fun of this practice.⁶⁶ However, it transpires that in this work too, the character of Rachel the heroine and the unfolding of the plot conform to the same model that is ridiculed by the hero. The maskil's inability to provide a convincing description of the young beloved heroine may be explained by his upbringing: the social segregation of the sexes in traditional Jewish society meant he had no close acquaintance with young unmarried women. Any description of such a woman is thus more likely to be a figment of his literary imagination than a realistic portrait, and it comes as no surprise to find that the unmarried girls described in Haskalah literature carry no conviction.

The singularity of the Haskalah romance heroine also finds expression in the linguistic formulation of her depiction. Adopting a neoclassical approach to canonical texts, the Haskalah writers embedded biblical allusions in their descriptions, expanding the meaning of their text by alluding to a multiplicity of voices. Their preferred topos in depicting the romance heroine is that of the beloved woman in the Songs of Songs. It was initially employed by Mapu and later adopted by Smolenskin, Judah Leib Gordon, and Brandstaedter. It was used with such consistency that any female character described in terms of the beloved of Song of Songs was duly recognized as a romance heroine; even a single detail derived from this topos ('her stature was like a palm tree') sufficed to evoke the entire picture in the mind of the reader.

The model of the romance heroine governed the portrait of the ideal heroine in Haskalah fiction to the very end of this period and permeated genres other than the romance. This is apparent, for instance, in *Aharit simhah tugah* by Judah Leib Gordon. Though far removed from Mapu's romance style, this story still revolves around a typical romance heroine. Young Sarah comes from a wealthy family and is blessed with a host of feminine virtues. She is good-looking, noble-hearted, and pure. Her identity as a romance heroine is established as soon as she makes her first appearance (in the chapter 'A Lily among the Thorns'). The very title of this chapter, as well as other typical details from the Song of Songs, provide the reader with sufficient clues:

⁶⁶ 'If you manage to betroth Rachel, then a fine writer can use your story to produce a wonderful love story. He will find in it all the materials he needs: a good-looking maiden, shining like the sun; her lips are like a thread of scarlet and her eyes and her hair are as black as a raven; her neck is polished ivory, her head is wrapped in curls, her hands are filled-up silver rolls. She is an only daughter to her father, a wealthy man who conserves vanities' (Mendele Mokher Seforim, *Complete Works* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1952)), 28.

A good-looking woman, young in age and youthful in spirit . . . she walks with an upright carriage and her fine and delicate head is raised majestically above her ivory neck ['Thy neck is like a tower of ivory', S. of S. 7: 5]. . . For a few moments the gentle woman planted herself [*ra'utah*] in the garden like a lily ['my beloved is mine and I am his, he feeds [*ru'eh*] among the lilies', S. of S. 2: 16].⁶⁷

Indeed, as the scene progresses, other features of the model of the ideal woman round out the description of the heroine. Sarah is not only beautiful, young, and of a wealthy family; she is also well educated and courted by Albert, a respectable member of the medical profession—the perfect maskil. Thus, even in a story of a satirical-realistic character, the heroine is cast in the romance mould, demonstrating the strength of persistence of this convention.

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The case of Haskalah descriptions of the nineteenth-century east European Jewish woman illustrates the manner whereby reality is reflected in literature. In this chapter I have attempted to analyse the dual roots of such descriptions. On the one hand, I have shown the formulation of the literary character to be influenced by extra-literary social realities. These influences on descriptions of women were complex. The portraits integrate realistic elements of the dominant female character known in Haskalah literature to the maskil from his own family with the author's male bias and his European/Enlightenment ideology. At the same time it has been possible to discern the degree to which the depiction of women also constitutes part of a literary and linguistic tradition. Literary conventions played a crucial role in the formulation of female characters in Haskalah literature; indeed, the use of literary models and of specific linguistic techniques was typical of the Jewish Enlightenment fashioning the two dominant female types to be found in this corpus: the satirized wife and the romanticized maiden.

The blending of these two streams of influence created the female figures which are characteristic of Hebrew Haskalah literature. Indeed, the central models are so powerful and dominant that they hardly altered throughout the period—even when the maskil consciously attempted to liberate himself from them. Admittedly, alternative models (such as that of the 'new woman' or the 'suffering woman') do begin to appear towards the end of the Haskalah, and even become more evident in the period categorized as *hateiyah* (the Hebrew revival). Nevertheless, during the Haskalah era itself, the two models analysed here are those which typify the formulation of literary portraits of women.

⁶⁷ *Collected Works: Prose* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1960), 29.