

PART I

1800

Romantic Love and the Beginnings of Jewish Emancipation

Romantic love took on a special significance in Western societies during the second half of the eighteenth century. Around this time, the increase in social mobility and individual freedom gave rise to a new ideal of love-based marriage that gradually replaced earlier practices of arranged marriage. Love came to be seen as the foundation of a person's most important relationship in life, and the selection of the right partner as paramount for one's happiness. As people began to conceive of themselves as individuals rather than as representatives of a class, they regarded love relationships as an opportunity to experience and articulate their own uniqueness. The literature of the time both reflects and promotes this process of individuation. Whereas medieval and early modern romances usually depict the encounter of two fairly stereotypical lovers, the adventures they experience and the obstacles they overcome, the modern novel is much more focused on the inner life of the literary characters. Their thoughts and feelings are at the center of the text. As Anthony Giddens argues, romantic love sets into motion a process of self-reflection and self-narration: "Romantic love introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual's life—a formula which radically extended the reflexivity of sublime love. The telling of a story is one of the meanings of 'romance', but this story now

became individualised, inserting self and other into a personal narrative which had no particular reference to wider social processes.”¹

If romantic love is conceived as a deeply personal experience without immediate social meaning, it nevertheless has a social function. Giddens observes that romantic love does not take the individual out of society in the way that *amour passion* did. Rather, romantic love is a “generic social force,”² because it induces the individual to engage in long-term planning and reflection, which inevitably have a social dimension. The conflation of love, sex, and marriage in the Romantic love ideal is crucial in this regard.³ Marriage domesticates erotic desire and imbues volatile emotions with the promise of permanence. The Romantic love ideal furthermore places a whole new emphasis on the marital relationship at the expense of other forms of kinship. Conceived as a personal bond based on individual choice and attraction, marriage takes primacy over all other personal bonds, especially those to one’s birth family.⁴ In *Love as Passion*—a work I will discuss at greater length in chapter 2—the sociologist Niklas Luhmann offers further observations about the social function of romantic love. He argues that modernity is characterized by two opposing tendencies, an increase of impersonal relations on the one hand and an intensified search for intimate relationships on the other. In this view, romantic love is a compensatory mechanism in a world of social fragmentation and social anonymity. In love and marriage, one relates to the other as an individual with a unique worldview and life story, as opposed to reducing the other to her transitory social role in places such as the factory, the department store, or the doctor’s office.⁵

Mixed Feelings builds on these insights about the social function of romantic love and pushes them in new directions. I show how the idea of love as a medium of individuation helped recast the relations between different religious, ethnic, and cultural groups. The first part of this book analyzes the *discursive intersection*

1. Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 39–40.

2. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, 45.

3. I capitalize the term “Romantic love ideal” to tie it more clearly to the intellectual movement of Romanticism, although some of its central elements were developed during the Enlightenment. The idea of romantic love, that is, of an intense emotional and physical attraction between two people, has of course existed for very a long time. However, the late eighteenth century gave birth to the Romantic love ideal, which conflates love, sex, and marriage and places the romantic relationship at the center of an individual’s life.

4. Many scholars agree that the conjugal family had become more important than the consanguineal family by the end of the eighteenth century—which is not to say that consanguineal family ties no longer played any role. On the shifting functions of conjugal and consanguineal bonds, see, for instance, Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage: A History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 2006); Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Günter Sasse, *Die aufgeklärte Familie: Untersuchungen zur Genese, Funktion und Realitätsbezogenheit des familialen Wertsystems im Drama der Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1988).

5. See Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

between representations of romantic love and the debates about Jewish emancipation, which also began in the second half of the eighteenth century. This intersection is no coincidence. The notion of civic equality and the valorization of romantic love are both part and parcel of the social transformations of modernity. Both are expressions of individualism and egalitarianism bound up with biopolitical and sociopolitical concerns. Ever since the publication of the first volume of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* it has been recognized that the Romantic love ideal developed in the context of biopolitics—that is, the state's attempt to control the population by disciplining the physical and social bodies of its inhabitants.⁶ Similarly, public calls for Jewish emancipation were often tied to the expectation that the extension of rights to Jews would promote social homogeneity and boost the state's economy. With these contexts in mind, *Mixed Feelings* focuses on the sociopolitical *visions* that become possible when Jewish emancipation is discussed in terms of love.

The chapters in part I are structured around three literary-philosophical movements that helped redefine the place of Jews in German politics and society. Within little more than a generation, the discussion of Jewish rights shifted rapidly: from the first Enlightenment calls for civic equality (which would take a long time to materialize) to the Christian-Jewish interaction in the early Romantic salons (which for a brief period seemed to anticipate full equality) to the anti-Jewish turn of the younger generation of German Romantics (which is often regarded a precursor of modern antisemitism). My analysis of these three intellectual movements shows how love around 1800 becomes a generative force for thinking through broad social interactions, if not an outright model for social and political relations.

I begin with the Enlightenment, when the debates about Jewish emancipation began and the Romantic love ideal first arose, several decades before the literary movement called Romanticism took hold.⁷ The authors discussed in chapter 1, Moses Mendelssohn and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, contributed to the debates about Jewish emancipation as well as to the rise of the Romantic love ideal. Lessing's bourgeois tragedies promote the ideal of love-based marriage, and Mendelssohn's letters to his fiancée and eventual wife express his romantic feelings and rejection of conventional arranged marriage. In their writings about religious toleration and Jewish emancipation, Lessing and Mendelssohn also allude to inter-faith romance, but they ultimately call for brotherly love as the appropriate affect

6. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978). On the history of sexuality in Germany, see especially Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996). Hull argues that during the eighteenth century the locus of social control shifted from the absolutist state to civil society. She shows how the representatives of civil society sought to harness the sexual drive for the public good by tethering the drive to love and marriage.

7. On some convergences between Enlightenment and Romantic conceptions of love, see also Edgar Landgraf, "Romantic Love and the Enlightenment: From Gallantry and Seduction to Authenticity and Self-Validation," *The German Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 29–46.

between members of different religions. However, as I will show, the idea of inter-faith romance retains some of its power and gives their writings a greater political urgency. Chapter 2 shows how the early Romantic author Friedrich Schlegel and Mendelssohn's daughter Dorothea Veit, who became lovers and eventually married, derive new models of society from romantic love while foregoing explicit references to religious difference. The writings of the following generation of German Romantic authors call into question the idea of love as a force of sociopolitical innovation, however. Chapter 3 shows how Achim von Arnim depicts failing Christian-Jewish love affairs to argue for the continued exclusion of Jews from German politics and society. His use of love to foreclose rather than negotiate cross-religious identification throws into even clearer relief the progressive claims of Enlightenment and early Romantic writers.

INTERFAITH LOVE AND THE PURSUIT OF EMANCIPATION

Moses Mendelssohn and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

And you, dear brothers and fellow men, who follow the teachings of Jesus, should you find fault with us for doing what the founder of your religion did himself, and confirmed by his authority? Should you believe that you cannot *love us in return as brothers* and *unite with us as citizens* as long as we are outwardly distinguished from you by the ceremonial law, do not eat with you, *do not marry you*, which, as far as we can see, the founder of your religion would neither have done himself nor permitted us to do?

Thus begins the peroration of Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism* (*Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*, 1783), which laid the philosophical foundations for the political emancipation of Jews in the German states.¹ Mendelssohn, the spiritual leader of the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment, outlines there the principles of a state that would grant rights to citizens irrespective of their religious affiliation. The first part of *Jerusalem* promotes a strict separation between church and state, and the second part shows that traditional Judaism is fully compatible with the precepts of the secular state. The questions in the passage just quoted are, of course, rhetorical, and their answers would spell out Mendelssohn's vision of the position of Jews in the modern state: they would enjoy equal rights and be able to observe the Judaic law in its entirety. Jews would

1. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1983), 135 (my emphasis). All further citations of *Jerusalem* refer to this translation and will be included parenthetically in the text.

form new affective ties with their Christian neighbors while remaining identifiable, and in some ways segregated, as a group. Of particular interest in this passage is Mendelssohn's distinction between two kinds of personal bonds between Jews and Christians. Mendelssohn cites the Judaic injunction against interfaith marriage as an example of a religious law that must be respected if the idea of religious tolerance is to have any meaning. He pits such marriage against another kind of personal bond between Jews and Christians, which he places squarely within the project of civic integration: brotherly love.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Mendelssohn's Christian friend and ally in the struggle for Jewish emancipation, dramatizes interfaith romance much more extensively than Mendelssohn before deflecting attention from it. Both *The Jews* (*Die Juden*, 1749) and *Nathan the Wise* (*Nathan der Weise*, 1779) feature an impossible Christian-Jewish love affair in which at least one of the partners contemplates the possibility of marriage but abandons the thought after a revelation of true identities. In *The Jews*, the traveler who has finally identified himself as Jewish explains that "fate" prevents him from marrying the daughter of the Christian baron. In *Nathan the Wise*, the Christian Templar learns that the Jewish girl with whom he fell in love was born a Christian and is, in fact, his sister. Since he cannot marry her, he has to overcome his erotic passion in favor of sibling affection—a brotherly love of sorts. The transformation of interfaith romance into brotherly love in Lessing and Mendelssohn calls to mind the larger set of oppositions often used to characterize the Enlightenment approach to Jewish emancipation: between public and private, friendship and love, males and females. The debate about Jewish civil rights took place in the semipublic sphere of journals, theaters, and learned societies, at some distance from the domesticity of marital life. Friendships between male intellectuals were a key element in the new sociability between Jews and Christians, but interfaith marriage remained anathema to the Haskalah and of limited interest to the Enlightenment at large.²

In this chapter, I read Lessing's and Mendelssohn's reflections on interfaith love and marriage in the light of their interventions in the debates about Jewish emancipation. The early 1780s mark a turning point in these debates, a shift from the idea of religious toleration to that of political-juridical equality for religious minorities. Under the rule of Frederick II, Prussia had practiced religious tolerance yet placed a host of administrative restrictions on Jews. The New Revised General Privilege and Regulation for the Jews in Prussia (1750) strictly limited the number of Jewish residents in the state and tightly regulated their access to professional and social

2. This is not to deny that the theme of marriage was important to the German Enlightenment. In fact, an article on civil marriage in the journal *Berlinische Monatsschrift* raised important questions about the relationship between state and religion and sparked the debate about the question "What is Enlightenment?" See Michael Thomas Taylor, "Was heißt Aufklärung?" Eine Fußnote zur Ehekrise," in *Vor der Familie: Grenzbedingungen einer modernen Institution*, by Albrecht Koschorke et al. (Munich: Konstanz University Press/Wilhelm Fink, 2010), 51–95.

opportunities. Mendelssohn himself was painfully aware of the limitations imposed by Prussian laws. When he came to Berlin as a poor Talmud student in 1743, all he could obtain, with the help of a rich benefactor, was a temporary resident permit. Even later, after Frederick II had granted the famous philosopher a lifelong resident permit, Mendelssohn only held the status of an “unprivileged protected Jew,” which among other things meant that he could not transmit his right of residence to his descendants. These conditions became the subject of fresh debate in the early 1780s, when key representatives of the Enlightenment took first steps toward the political emancipation of the Jews. The scholar Christian Wilhelm von Dohm made a plea for admitting Jews to citizenship in *On the Civil Improvement of the Jews* (*Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 1781). The Habsburg ruler Joseph II promulgated the Edict of Tolerance (1782), which lifted a number of restrictions on the economic and cultural life of Jews.

Compared to these progressive thinkers of their time, Mendelssohn and Lessing were more radical in that they demanded an *unconditional* emancipation of the Jews. Whereas the Habsburg edict was inspired by statist rationales and ultimately reaffirmed the dominance of the Catholic Church, and whereas Dohm accepted stereotypical notions about Jewish moral inferiority (although he ultimately argued for unconditional emancipation), Lessing and Mendelssohn saw no need for Jews to change before or after they became citizens. In their view, citizenship should be independent of religious affiliation; residency should be a right of the citizen rather than a privilege granted by the ruler. The argument of this chapter is that tropes of love were crucial in articulating this political demand. While neither Mendelssohn nor Lessing promotes intermarriage as a model of integration—in fact, Mendelssohn explicitly rejects it—love more broadly understood plays a central role in their political vision. Both authors conjure affectionate ties between Jews and Christians to stake new claims to civic equality. Translating a religious into a political concept, Mendelssohn appeals to the brotherly love of his Christian readers to solicit support for Jewish emancipation. In Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise*, interfaith romance leads to the discovery of a multireligious family network and, more importantly, to a notion of affective kinship as the foundation of an interfaith community (which, however, is never fully realized). I will argue that the precariousness of love in Lessing and Mendelssohn—the fact that love is often one-sided, forgotten, or conflicted—underscores the urgency of their political demand.

Brotherly Love versus Interfaith Marriage: Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*

It is not surprising that eighteenth-century playwrights stopped short of representing Christian-Jewish intermarriage. Such marriages were not legally possible at the time, except when one of the partners (usually the Jewish one) converted. For Mendelssohn, there would have been additional theological reasons to single

out marriage as an area in which the preservation of boundaries between Jews and Christians was imperative. Mendelssohn wanted to promote the cultural and political integration of Jews into German society while maintaining their religious distinctiveness, and endogamous marriage was crucial in this regard. As Benjamin Kaplan has shown, while interfaith marriages (between members of different Christian confessions) existed in the early modern period, and in fact were a major factor in the quest for religious toleration, such marriages also posed a threat to religious minorities intent on preserving their group identity.³ One might argue that this is especially true of Judaism. In theological terms, the idea of a covenant between God and the Jewish people requires a certain degree of endogamous behavior to safeguard the coherence of the group. In practical terms, it may be more difficult to observe the Judaic law, with its manifold regulations of everyday activities from eating to praying, in a household in which one partner is not Jewish. As I will show, Mendelssohn rejects interfaith marriage as a model of integration and suggests brotherly love as an alternative.

In the one instance in which Mendelssohn mentions a (potential) Christian-Jewish intermarriage in *Jerusalem*, he argues for the right to religious difference in terms of natural rights. In a footnote spanning several pages, Mendelssohn cites a recent divorce case in Vienna. A Jew who had converted to Christianity wanted to stay married to his Jewish wife and raise their children as Christians, but his wife refused to comply (50–52). The case is mentioned in the pamphlet *The Search for Light and Justice* (*Das Forschen nach Licht und Recht*, 1782), which called upon Mendelssohn to explain his relationship to Judaism, and which in fact induced him to write *Jerusalem*. The pamphlet's anonymous author, later revealed to be August Friedrich Cranz, expresses the hope that the court would decide the divorce case "according to the principles of the wise Joseph"—in other words, reject religious difference as a ground for divorce.⁴ Mendelssohn disagrees. A marriage, he argues, is primarily an agreement about the education of the future children in which both partners have an equal say—in this case, they entered into an (unspoken) agreement to raise the children as Jewish. If one of the partners later changes his or her religious views and a conflict arises, the case should be resolved in favor of the spouse who complies with the original agreement—in this case, the Jewish wife. As Susan Shapiro has shown, Mendelssohn advances here a new conception of religious tolerance while also engaging a blind spot of classical contract theory. Such theory emphasizes the voluntary character of the *social* contract, in which the individual cedes certain rights to the government, and at the same time naturalizes the *sexual* contract, by which all women are subordinated to all men.

3. Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 293.

4. See Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften: Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Alexander Altmann et al. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1972–), 8:85.

For thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau, the power differential between men and women in marriage derives from the natural properties of each sex. Mendelssohn undoes this naturalization of gender positions. He conceives of marriage as a social contract into which men and women enter on equal terms, and of women as autonomous individuals capable of making their own decisions. A member of a religious minority, he simultaneously defends a woman's right to follow her conscience and a Jew's right to resist assimilatory pressures.⁵

The long footnote in *Jerusalem* can be read as a sign of Mendelssohn's ambivalence about interfaith marriage, and the difficulty of integrating it into his vision of Christian-Jewish relations. In his personal life Mendelssohn spearheaded new Jewish attitudes toward love and marriage as he embraced a historically new ideal of love-based marriage. He always emphasized that he and his Jewish fiancée, Fromet Gugenheim, had met spontaneously and without the help of a marriage broker. Against all conventions, he exchanged romantic letters with Gugenheim while refusing to perform traditional engagement rituals such as the sending of gifts. He emphatically saw his engagement and marriage as a personal affair of the heart.⁶ Yet what if such a purely personal connection were to cross the boundaries between the religions (as would happen to Mendelssohn's daughter Dorothea, who will be discussed in the next chapter)? To be sure, the footnote in *Jerusalem* treats marriage as a contract between rational partners rather than a romantic bond between two fully individuated people. Yet Mendelssohn hints at a deep personal connection between the spouses, and at least for the converted husband—who "is said to have expressed his *desire* to retain his wife who has remained Jewish" (51; my emphasis)—this connection transcends religious difference. The very length of the footnote indicates that Mendelssohn struggles with the possibility of romantic attachments between people from different religions.

Mendelssohn's ambivalence reflects his concern about the totalizing effect of marriage as a model of interreligious rapprochement. In *The Search for Light and Justice*, Cranz expresses his hope that interfaith marriage will help tear down religious barriers. Mendelssohn senses that Cranz's pamphlet is just another public request for Mendelssohn's conversion and reads Cranz's advocacy of interfaith marriage in that light. Commenting on the same Viennese divorce case, Mendelssohn suggests that Cranz's advocacy rests on a faulty conception of tolerance: "Many

5. See Susan E. Shapiro, "The Status of Women and Jews in Moses Mendelssohn's Social Contract Theory: An Exceptional Case," *The German Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 373–94. Shapiro uses the concept of the sexual contract developed by Carole Pateman in *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988).

6. On the romantic character of the relationship between Mendelssohn and Gugenheim, see Moses Mendelssohn, *Brautbriefe* (Berlin: Schocken, 1936); Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. Bernard Dov Cooperman (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 231–32; David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 153, 165–66; Shmuel Feiner, *Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity*, trans. Anthony Berris (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), 62–63.

thanks for all tolerance if its avowed purpose is still religious union! Because the emperor is tolerant, a wife is to be forced to live, contrary to the agreement entered into, in matrimony with a husband who wishes to bring up the children according to his changed [religious] principles!"⁷ Mendelssohn adopts the perspective of the divorce-seeking Jewish wife when he views interfaith marriage as a forced assimilation to Christianity. Interfaith marriage comes to epitomize the complete union of faiths Mendelssohn rejects. Against the religious union (*Glaubensvereinigung*) that suppresses religious difference Mendelssohn pits the civic union (*bürgerliche Vereinigung*) that allows religious differences to be expressed in daily life. It is in this context that the idea of brotherly love takes center stage, as an alternative way of creating affective bonds between Jews and Christians. In the last pages of *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn repeatedly invokes brotherly love while pleading that Jews should be accepted into the state as Jews.⁸

Mendelssohn performs here what Jürgen Habermas calls a "saving translation" of a religious idea into the sphere of politics.⁹ The ideas of brotherhood and brotherly love hark back to the early Christians, who—similarly to the Jews of their time—conceived of their coreligionists as "brothers" with whom they shared an affective bond. Since the Middle Ages, and especially during the eighteenth century, the term "brotherly love" had become intermittently secularized and politicized, notably among the Freemasons (who called each other *Bruder* and promised to love

7. Quoted in Shapiro, "The Status of Women," 379–80.

8. It should be pointed out that the political ideal of fraternity, which is based on the idea of brotherly love, enacts a whole new set of exclusions, notably of women. As Stefani Engelstein has argued, the concept of fraternity points to a problem at the core of liberalism—namely, how to reconcile the citizen's identification with the state with more particularistic attachments of love and kinship. Eighteenth-century political philosophers responded to this problem by identifying women with purely personal feelings and excluding them from the sphere of politics. See Stefani Engelstein, "Civic Attachments & Sibling Attractions: The Shadows of Fraternity," *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011): 205–21. The logic identified by Engelstein is not readily apparent in Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*. As Mendelssohn's footnote on the Viennese divorce case shows, his argument for civic equality for Jews goes hand and hand with the recognition of women's capacity to make rational decisions and act as autonomous individuals, a capacity that in the liberal model should enable women to engage in politics. However, at times Mendelssohn subsumes female conscience under paternal will, as when he describes the marital contract from the perspective of the Jewish wife: "She knew and expected nothing other than to take her place in a household governed by ancestral rules of life and to bear children whom she would be able to educate according to the *principles of her fathers*" (*Jerusalem*, 51; my emphasis). A few years after Mendelssohn, German Jewish playwrights associated with the Haskalah were to describe what happens when the daughter's desires diverge from the father's principles. In plays such as Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn's *Leichtsinn und Frömmerei: Ein Familiengemälde in drei Aufzügen* (1792) and Isaak Euchel's *Reb Henoch, oder: Woß tut me damit* (1793), the representation of Christian-Jewish love affairs serves to guard against the dangers of a superficial enlightenment coded as female. Jewish women who lust after Christian men and light entertainment embody a female model of assimilation that contrasts with the male model of *Bildung*. For a detailed interpretation of these plays, see Lezzi, "Liebe is meine Religion!," 78–91.

9. On this concept of translation, see Jürgen Habermas et al., in *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2010), 15–23; and Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

each other in a brotherly way) and in the egalitarian ideal of the French Revolution, *fraternité*.¹⁰ However, the 1793 German *Adelung* dictionary does not mention any political usage but rather emphasizes the biblical, and specifically Christian, meaning of “brotherly love”: “the love which biological brothers have for each other, or should have for each other. In a broader sense in the biblical style, the love which Christians, and in fact all humans, owe to each other: the former because of their common faith, the latter because of their common ancestor.”¹¹ So when Mendelssohn establishes a connection between brotherly love and civil union, the work of translation is very much his own. He transfers the idea of an affective bond between coreligionists to a modern, secular, broadly inclusive state. In the passage from *Jerusalem* quoted at the beginning of this chapter, this translation is underscored through the paronomasia between *brüderlich* (brotherly) and *bürgerlich* (civil): “Should you believe that you cannot love us in return *as brothers* and unite with us *as citizens* [uns nicht *brüderlich* wieder lieben, euch mit uns nicht *bürgerlich* vereinigen zu können] as long as we are outwardly distinguished from you by the ceremonial law, do not eat with you, do not marry you, which, as far as we can see, the founder of your religion would neither have done himself nor permitted us to do?” (135; my emphasis).

Mendelssohn’s invocations of brotherly love allow for subtle shifts from religion to politics, or from questions of religious tolerance to demands for civic equality, and vice versa. He first uses brotherly love to frame an argument for the political emancipation of the Jews in his 1772 preface to Manasseh Ben Israel’s *Vindication of the Jews*; the preface was Mendelssohn’s contribution to the debate about Dohm’s *On the Civic Improvement of the Jews*. At the beginning of the preface, Mendelssohn expresses his hope for an expansion of “the rights of man” to new groups: “If it is the goal of providence that brother should love brother, then it is obviously the duty of the stronger to put forward the first proposal, to stretch out his arms, and like Augustus to cry out, ‘Let us be friends!’”¹² Mendelssohn refers here to the final act of Pierre Corneille’s play *Cinna*, in which the Roman emperor Augustus generously forgives his friends for their machinations and restores their friendship. The implication is that a similarly unilateral act on the part of a ruler—for example, the granting of civil rights to religious minorities—is necessary to reconcile the religions in his time. Mendelssohn voices this political demand by transposing the religious idea of “goal of providence” to the secular domain of politics and friendship. At the end of the preface, Mendelssohn writes that brotherly love should also reign *within* a religious community. Here he makes an argument that will become

10. Wolfgang Schieder, “Brüderlichkeit,” *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972–97), 1:552–81.

11. Johann Christoph Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der hochdeutschen Mundart* (Leipzig: Johann Gottlob Immanuel Breitkopf und Compagnie, 1793), 1:1217.

12. Moses Mendelssohn, *Writings on Judaism, Christianity, and the Bible*, ed. Michah Gottlieb (Lebanon, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 40.

pivotal in *Jerusalem*: religious congregations should use love and persuasion rather than coercion and punishment. In particular, they should extend brotherly love to dissenting members and relinquish the right to excommunicate them. Mendelssohn effectively equates the toleration of dissidents within a religious congregation and the integration of religious minorities into the state.

Mendelssohn's emphasis on brotherly love should not be dismissed as an apologetic appeal to Christian sensibilities. Rather, it is part and parcel of his effort to reclaim love as a core value of Judaism. Throughout *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn presents the God of Israel as a God of love, and neighbor-love as Judaism's central commandment.¹³ He reads the scene at Mount Sinai in which Moses seeks to see God's glory after God punished the Israelites for idolatry in terms of divine love and benevolence. He depicts the revelation of the Judaic law as an act of divine love, and divine punishment as an opportunity for self-improvement.¹⁴ Mendelssohn valorizes the everyday practice of the law on similar grounds. Whereas both traditional Christians and modern Deists dismissed the law as a petrified ancient ritual, Mendelssohn hails it as a "living script, rousing the mind and heart" (102). Based on a complex semiotic theory according to which written language tends to fixate meaning and facilitate idolatry, he praises the law as a set of orally transmitted practices that propel people into communal interaction.¹⁵ While writing tends to isolate its reader, the performer of a ritual law seeks out others, especially more experienced coreligionists, for help and advice. Oral instruction proceeds "from man to man, from mouth to *heart*" (119; my emphasis), creating affective ties between the members of the community that prove God to be "the God of love" (121). Mendelssohn's notion of the law as revealed and transmitted through love refutes long-standing stereotypes that pit Christian love against Jewish law.

As Jonathan Hess pointed out vis-à-vis Mendelssohn's portrayal of Jesus as a Jewish reformer, *Jerusalem* has a distinct polemical thrust. Mendelssohn's appreciation of Jesus is not a step toward Christianity, as Cranz and others would have

13. Mendelssohn quotes the famous Talmudic story in which the Jewish sage Hillel responds to a heathen's inquiry about the essence of the Jewish law: "Son, *love thy neighbor as thyself*. This is the text of the law; all the rest is commentary. Now go and study!" (*Jerusalem*, 102; Mendelssohn's emphasis). Mendelssohn conflates several different sources here. In the Talmud anecdote, Hillel states his so-called Golden Rule in the negative: "Do not do to your fellow what you hate to have done to you." Mendelssohn inserts the biblical injunction to neighbor-love (Lev. 19:18) into the Talmudic anecdote. See Alexander Altmann's commentary in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8:348.

14. To that end, Mendelssohn even amends his own translation of the Bible, writing that God said to Moses, "Ich habe Dich namentlich *zu meinem Liebling* ausersehen," rather than just "namentlich ausersehen"; see Altmann's commentary in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8:355 (my emphasis here). The English translation does not render the "love" as clearly: "I have singled thee out by name as the one favored by Me" (*Jerusalem*, 122).

15. Willi Goetschel has argued that Mendelssohn's emphasis on the oral tradition, which allows the law to be adapted to new circumstances, entails a new conception of tradition as intrinsically open and dynamic. See Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), esp. 160–65.

it, but a way of securing for Judaism a central place in the modern world.¹⁶ Mendelssohn's conception of brotherly love is similarly subversive in that he traces the Judaic origins of this idea and deplores its absence in contemporary Christianity. In the passage quoted above, the expression "love us in return" implies something later stated explicitly, that Jews already love their Christian neighbors in a brotherly way. It is not entirely clear what exactly the "in return" means here, either that Jews already abide by the laws of the land or that Judaism, which Mendelssohn throughout *Jerusalem* and against Christian stereotypes depicts as a religion of love and tolerance, provides what Habermas calls the "pre-political moral foundations" of the liberal state.¹⁷ In any case, Mendelssohn highlights the discrepancy between the Jews' suitability for citizenship and their actual lack of civil rights.

Brotherly love furnishes not only a protopolitical value but also a rhetorical force, in the form of emotional appeals. In the last pages of *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn repeatedly and emphatically addresses his Christian readers as "dear brothers" ("liebe Brüder"), although he is aware that Christians may harbor no brotherly feelings for the Jews. There are several such phatic moments in *Jerusalem*, in which he seeks to create and instill feelings he presumes to be missing in his Christian addressees.¹⁸ Witness, for instance, his earlier comments on the revelation at Sinai. After quoting the biblical passage about God's benevolence, which is manifest even in punishment—"The Lord . . . who preserveth His lovingkindness even to the thousandth generation; who forgiveth transgression, sin and rebellion, yet alloweth nothing to go unpunished"—Mendelssohn interjects: "What man's feelings are so hardened that he can read this with dry eyes? Whose heart is so inhuman that he can still hate his brother and remain unforgiving toward him?" (122–23; Mendelssohn's emphasis). This is of course a rhetorical question, an appeal to readers to assume a conciliatory attitude toward their "brothers." Mendelssohn does not so much describe the effect of the biblical passage on its readers as he seeks to produce such an effect. The reader should be moved to tears in view of the benevolence of a God who gives his people the opportunity to better themselves. By alerting his readers

16. See Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity*, 91–136.

17. Jürgen Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?," in *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 19–52. It should be noted that Habermas's notion of a "saving translation" can only approximate the complex process of appropriation, contestation, and invocation that occurs when Mendelssohn speaks of brotherly love. Mendelssohn reclaims brotherly love as a core value of Judaism, indicts its absence among his Christian contemporaries, and calls it forward by directly addressing his Christian readers as brothers.

18. Mendelssohn's preface to Manasseh Ben Israel's *Vindication of the Jews* ends on a similarly emphatic appeal to "brothers," in this case, to his fellow Jews who are to extend tolerance to dissenters in their communities: "Nations are tolerating one another, and they are also showing you the love and forbearance that, with the assistance of the One who directs the hearts of men, can grow into true brotherly love. O my brothers, follow the example of love, just as you have until now followed the example of hate!" Mendelssohn, *Writings on Judaism*, 52. Here, too, the emphatic address "brothers" is meant to call forth the brotherly love that is missing in reality.

to the power of the biblical narrative, Mendelssohn hopes to inspire brotherly love in them. His emotional appeals help conjure a state in which Jews and Christians could share a sociopolitical structure while observing the boundaries set by their different religious practices.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*

As Willi Goetschel has argued, Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* pursues, by different means, the same political goal as *Jerusalem*. The play proposes the establishment of a new political order, "a model of full legal equality whereby the state (Saladin) recognizes the necessity of granting its citizens the same rights regardless of their religious affiliation."¹⁹ It is important to note, however, that such an order is never fully realized in *Nathan the Wise*. The famous ring parable in the middle of the play relates the conflict between three brothers, each of whom believes he possesses the true ring—an analogy, Nathan explains, to the three monotheistic religions, each of which proclaims to be the true one. The brotherhood of the ring remains riven by conflict and competition; in the end, the judge can only advise the brothers to prove themselves worthy of the ring in the future. Nor is the extended family network in the play's final scene, which includes Recha, the Templar, and the Muslim rulers of Jerusalem, a persuasive model of an open and inclusive community. As several scholars have noted, Nathan's status in particular remains tenuous. Ritchie Robertson suggests that by establishing the family as a model of an interfaith community and by presenting Nathan as the only character who is not related to the others by blood, Lessing puts him into a position analogous to that of the German Jews, whose admittance to German society was not based on the idea of natural rights but contingent upon proof of their suitability for citizenship.²⁰

In what follows, I will argue that the play locates the possibility of interreligious community elsewhere—namely, in the creation of new genealogical lineages through affective kinship. Set in the period of the Crusades, *Nathan the Wise* relates the budding love between Recha, the adoptive daughter of the Jewish Nathan, and a Christian Templar, who later turns out to be her brother, which makes their union impossible, because it would be incestuous. Their romance drives the plot, as it triggers Nathan's genealogical inquiry and eventually leads to the discovery of family ties between people of different religious backgrounds. I suggest that the

19. Willi Goetschel, "Lessing and the Jews," in *A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, ed. Barbara Fischer and Thomas C. Fox (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2005), 201.

20. See Ritchie Robertson, *The "Jewish Question" in German Literature, 1749–1939: Emancipation and Its Discontents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 45. The famous 1933 staging of *Nathan the Wise* by the Kulturbund Deutscher Juden highlighted Nathan's position as an outsider. The staging ended with a scene in which Nathan is left completely alone on the stage, abandoned by the others. See Barbara Fischer, *Nathan's Ende? Von Lessing bis Tabori: Zur deutsch-jüdischen Rezeption von "Nathan der Weise"* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000), 117–42.

nonfulfillment of this romance is crucial to the play's political vision. *Nathan the Wise* performs a process of sublimation in the Freudian sense, a redeployment of erotic energies in intellectual, artistic, or other creative activities. In particular, the many miraculous rescues are life-creating acts that come to supplant romantic love and marriage as a means of establishing affective bonds between the religions.

In *Nathan the Wise*, Lessing anticipates and radicalizes Mendelssohn's theory about the historical truth of religion. One of the central arguments of *Jerusalem* is that Judaism is grounded in a historical event—namely, the revelation at Sinai and the tradition of commentary it produced. Mendelssohn holds that the revelation and the subsequent teaching of the law inspire in Jews a passionate attachment to their religious tradition. He intimates that the revelation can also affect non-Jews, such as the readers of *Jerusalem*, in whom he seeks to arouse brotherly love by citing the biblical passage. Lessing goes even further than Mendelssohn in suggesting that people can fall in love with a different religious tradition. This is first hinted at in the ring parable, in which Nathan says: “Are [the religions] not grounded all in history, / Written or handed down?—And history / Must be accepted wholly upon faith— / Is that not so?”²¹ Nathan goes on to explain that we will adopt the religious tradition of those we trust most, “our own people” (233/278). However, he defines “our own people” in two different ways, first as those whose blood we share and then as those who have loved us since childhood: “Well then, whose faith are we least likely / To doubt? Our own people's, surely? Those whose blood / We share? The ones who, from childhood on, gave / Us proof of their love?” (233/278). In what follows, I will argue that *Nathan the Wise* unfolds this duality by showing that the family that loves us is not necessarily the family into which we were born. The play invites the conclusion that just as we may love an adoptive father, we may become emotionally attached to a different religious tradition.

The Christian-Jewish Romance

In this drama of shifting identities, it is first necessary to establish that the relationship that develops between the Templar and a woman who is revealed to be of Christian-Muslim origin should be considered interreligious, and specifically,

21. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, trans. Bayard Quincy Morgan, in Lessing, *Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barnhelm, and Other Plays and Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Continuum, 1991), 233. For the original German, see Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan der Weise*, in *Werke*, ed. Herbert G. Göpfert (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1971), 2:278. Further citations from these editions will be included parenthetically in the text, with the page number in the English translation followed by the page number in the German edition in italics, as here (233/278). I have frequently (and silently) modified the translations, often inspired by the following translation: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, trans. Ronald Schechter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2004). Like Schechter, I use the name Recha instead of Rachel throughout my reading.

whether this attachment can be said to involve a Jew and a Christian.²² The attraction between Recha and the Templar provides Lessing with an opportunity to rehearse and dismantle some of the arguments against the political emancipation of the Jews. The disjunctive sequence of revelations opens up a dramatic space in which the difficult education toward tolerance can be displayed, with the Templar figuring as an example of Christian prejudice and stubbornness, but also of the ability to learn. The Templar, who at first refuses even to enter the house of a Jew, changes his mind when he and Nathan establish a friendship grounded in the new sociability that, at the end of the eighteenth century, enabled the kind of encounters between Jews and Christians for which the friendship between Lessing and Mendelssohn has become emblematic. Yet when the Templar confesses his love for Recha and receives a rather tepid response from Nathan, he resents what he presumes to be Jewish exclusiveness, and falls back into his earlier prejudices against the Jews. Nor does the theme of interreligious love disappear after Recha's Christian origins have been revealed. Rather, as long as the Templar wants to marry her, still ignorant of the fact that she is his sister, she remains in the social position of a Jew. This becomes evident when the Templar contemplates the reasons for his attraction to Recha and finds that her Jewish upbringing and the character she owes to Nathan are more important than her Christian origins: "If I envision her as but / A Christian girl, bereft of all the traits / That only such a Jew could give to her: — / Speak, heart—what would she have to win your praise? / Nothing! Little!" (260/325). To be sure, the Judaism of Nathan and Recha is a rather disembodied religion, abstracted from concrete practice and reality.²³ Nevertheless, Recha's perceived Jewish identity serves to introduce the idea of a Christian-Jewish intermarriage.

The Templar's bitter comments regarding Nathan's supposed unwillingness to marry his daughter to a Christian echo the arguments against Jewish separateness that loomed so large in the Enlightenment debates about Jewish emancipation. Among non-Jews, both advocates and opponents of emancipation tended to accept the notion that contemporary Jewry was degenerate, though they disagreed about the reasons, and both regarded Jewish religious rituals and dietary laws as expressions of an unwholesome "clannishness" that hampered the integration of Jews into Christian society. While the opponents, most importantly Johann David Michaelis, regarded Jewish "clannishness" as an insurmountable obstacle to integration, even

22. Recha's mother was Christian, and Recha never converted to Judaism. It remains unclear whether her father, Saladin's brother Assad, converted to Christianity or remained a Muslim.

23. On Lessing's tendency to depict Jews in an abstract and disembodied manner, see, for instance, Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews*, 74. More recently, Jonathan Hess has suggested that Lessing might have been deliberately vague about the nature of Nathan's Judaism, and that this vagueness allowed nineteenth-century German Jewish writers and thinkers to assert their own views about the relationship between Jewish particularism and secular universalism. See Jonathan M. Hess, "Lessing and German-Jewish Culture: A Reappraisal," in *Lessing and the German Enlightenment*, ed. Ritchie Robertson (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013), 179–204.

the advocates, such as Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, devised a program of "civic improvement" intended to reduce the distinctiveness of Jews and Judaism.²⁴ The Templar's suspicion that Nathan resents the proposed marriage because he wants to preserve his genealogical line cannot but evoke this context. He ironically comments on the exclusiveness of the Jewish family tree: "Not that I have / The slightest doubt about your family tree. God / Forbid! You can trace it, shoot by shoot, clear back / To Abraham. And backward from there on / I know it too; will take my oath on it" (240/286).²⁵ However, the Templar's suspicions about the motives for Nathan's hesitation turn out to be unfounded; Recha and the Templar cannot marry because they are siblings and their union would be incestuous. In disproving the Templar's suspicions in this peculiar way, Lessing repudiates an important argument against Jewish emancipation, but at the same time tacitly accepts the assumption that Jewish "clannishness" has to be overcome.

Nonoccurrence of the marriage between Recha and the Templar allows Lessing imaginatively to refrain from violating the prohibition against intermarriage that at the time was upheld by both church and state, and by both Jews and Christians. In depicting incest as the obstacle to marriage, however, *Nathan the Wise* retroactively changes the nature of the transgression: the problem was not that the Templar loved a Jewess but that he loved his sister. By presenting the incest taboo as the decisive factor that separates Recha from the Templar, Lessing moves the obstacles to interfaith marriage to a more fundamental level. Lessing had resorted to a similar technique in his earlier plea for religious tolerance, the drama *The Jews* (1749). In this play a Jew traveling incognito saves a baron from a robbery at the hand of his own servants, who are disguised as Jews. The incident leads the baron to indulge in clichés of the deceitful, thieving Jew, not knowing that he is speaking with a Jew. The traveler discloses his Jewish identity only when the baron, as a sign of his gratitude, offers him his daughter's hand in marriage. The disclosure inspires in the baron shame about his earlier behavior. When he deplores his inability to thank the traveler adequately—now that marriage is ruled out—the traveler asks him to instead abandon his anti-Jewish prejudice and look more favorably upon Jews in the future. The play intimates that the learning process of the baron is an exemplary step toward a better understanding between Jews and Christians while stopping far short of staging an

24. See, for instance, Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, "Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews," in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 27–34 (see 28 and 29 for the use of "clannish"); Johann David Michaelis, "Arguments against Dohm," *ibid.*, 36–38.

25. Later on, when he asks the Patriarch for advice, the Templar revives the age-old myth of Jews stealing Christian children to fill in the gaps in Daya's account: "And then we would be informed that the girl was not / The Jew's own daughter: he had picked her up / In childhood, bought or stolen" (*Nathan*, 248/297). The scene, which shows how easily the Templar falls back into the Christian war ideology of his times, was probably intended as a warning against the anti-Judaic sentiments in Enlightenment philosophy. See W. Daniel Wilson, *Humanität und Kreuzzugsideologie um 1780: Die 'Türkenopfer' im 18. Jahrhundert und das Rettungsmotiv in Wielands 'Oberon,' Lessings 'Nathan' und Goethes 'Iphigenie'* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 74, 86.

intermarriage. However, the impossibility of interfaith marriage is also naturalized, or given a biological rather than a social foundation, through repeated allusions to the age of the Christian girl.²⁶ Because the spectator is aware throughout the play that the baron's daughter is simply too young to marry, marriage appears unrealizable from the beginning, for reasons that have nothing to do with religion. Lessing thus manages to allude to interfaith marriage while escaping from the dichotomous imperative of either carrying it out or condemning it.

The sudden disappearance of interfaith romance in *Nathan the Wise* still begs for an explanation, especially since love and marriage are explicitly referenced as ways of mitigating religious conflicts. We learn that Saladin at one point pursued a politics of intermarriage to ensure the truce between Christians and Muslims during the Crusades, hoping that his brother Melek would marry Richard the Lionheart's sister. His plans foundered over Christian demands for conversion, which is, of course, precisely what would have been demanded from a Jew who wanted to marry a Christian in Lessing's times.²⁷ Moreover, the social and religious injunctions against interfaith marriage did not prevent Lessing from playing with the theme in various ways. An earlier draft shows that he originally planned to end the play with two such marriages, between Sittah and the Templar and between Saladin and Recha. The couples were evidently not meant to be blood relatives, though the Templar is said to stem from Antioch in Syria, which sets his origins in greater proximity to those of his bride Sittah.²⁸ In the final version, Recha and the Templar are themselves the offspring of a marriage between a Christian woman and a Muslim man—at least no mention is ever made of their father's conversion to Christianity. Why did Lessing shun the possibility of ending the play with yet another interfaith marriage? And what happens to the tensions—erotic and otherwise—that have been built up in the dramatization of the impossible love story?

Like *The Jews*, *Nathan the Wise* prepares the audience for the failure of romance by suggesting that the obstacles to marriage are of an internal rather than external nature. Something seems never quite right about the love between Recha and the Templar. Their feelings for each other are noncontemporaneous—the Templar falls in love with Recha at the very moment her own feelings cool down—and prove altogether chimerical. Nathan, who figures here as the voice of the Enlightenment, early on suggests that Recha's passion for the Templar is mere *Schwärmerei* (reverie), an expression of inner torment. Rejected by the man who saved her,

26. The representation of yet-to-be-married women as immature and childlike is quite conventional in eighteenth-century literature, so one may argue that the barriers to interfaith marriage in *The Jews* are not truly given a biological foundation. However, the allusions to the girl's age in this play are not simply conventional but rather serve to prepare the audience for the (especially for a comedy) disappointing end.

27. See *Nathan*, 201/237–38. See also Wilson, *Humanität und Kreuzzugsideologie*, 64. On the historical background, see the annotations to *Nathan the Wise*, in Lessing, *Werke*, 2:755.

28. See Lessing, *Werke*, 2:743. Antioch was an old Christian community in Syria. Its invocation in the draft underscores the Christian—if Eastern—origins of the Templar.

Recha is torn between her head and her heart (179/211). Indeed, Recha's feelings are shown to be the product of a schism between imagination and reality that she gradually learns to overcome. When she first tells Nathan about how she was rescued by what she deems was an angel, she emphasizes that it was a *visible* angel, in contrast to the invisible angel that saved her father during his perilous journey to Babylon (180/213). Nathan's side comments then inform us that her vision is based on a misinterpretation of visual details: her taking of the sleeve of the Templar's white coat to be a wing. Recha's confused passion turns into a more tender affection once she meets the Templar again and recognizes in him a human being rather than an angel. The encounter helps her integrate visual with other sense impressions, including that of the Templar's speech, and puts an end to her *Schwärmerei*: "The sight of him, his speech, his actions have . . . / DAYA: sated you already? RECHA: Sated is not the word; / No—far from it.—DAYA: Assuaged the pangs of hunger. / RECHA: Well, yes; you could put it that way" (226/269). Scenes such as this one suggest that Recha had an intuitive knowledge of the true relations between herself and the Templar, which explains why the revelations of the final scene do not come as such a disappointment to her.²⁹

Like *The Jews*, *Nathan the Wise* creates hope for a better society by first invoking and then disrupting the possibility of interfaith romance. If the dramatization of the budding love between Recha and the Templar teaches the reader about the difficulties faced by a Christian-Jewish couple, the transformation of erotic passion into sibling affection demonstrates how a socially unacceptable attraction turns into a socially acceptable one. In *The Jews*, the impossibility of interreligious love similarly opens up the possibility of better relations between the different religious groups in the future. The difference is that *Nathan the Wise* replaces the marital bond with an even more primal bond and presents the harmonious union of the religions as already achieved. Above I suggested that both plays naturalize contingent social norms, a strategy that brings the game of love to a halt. Yet this strategy is never entirely conclusive. In both plays the barriers to interfaith marriage are not insurmountable but rather retain a possibility on the horizon, opening up a temporal gap between desire and fulfillment. In *The Jews*, the Christian girl who is too young to marry can theoretically still do so in the future. And the incest taboo invoked in *Nathan the Wise* is a social convention rather than natural law, or more precisely, it is the law that marks the transition between nature and culture. As Claude Lévi-Strauss famously argued, the incest taboo founds the possibility of social exchange through exogamic marriage, thus making human societies

29. The integration of visual, aural, and tactile impressions that mitigates Recha's visual infatuation also marks other instances of cognitive intuition in *Nathan the Wise*. 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), 244–45.

possible.³⁰ The substitution of the incest taboo for the injunction against intermarriage in *Nathan the Wise*, then, situates the possibility of interfaith romance in a prehistoric past. This impression of a past withdrawn from memory is compounded by the fact that one interfaith romance—between Assad and his Christian wife—has already happened in the play and that we know next to nothing about the circumstances of that relationship. By projecting the fulfillment of interfaith romance into a remote past or an unknowable future, Lessing retains and redirects the affective energies behind such romance.

The uncontainability of desire transpires in the figurative excess of the word “fire,” which throughout the play indexes the precarious nature of the love between Recha and the Templar. The fire metaphor in *Nathan the Wise* has generally been interpreted as an expression of excessive, even violent, irrationality. Indeed, the metaphor links the Templar’s vehement passion for Recha to the religious fanaticism of the patriarch and to the brutal pogrom in which Nathan’s wife and sons perished. However, the opposition between calm reason and violent passion never quite works in the play.³¹ There is simply no way of extinguishing the fire. Recha’s miraculous rescue from fire continues to incite new fires, first in her own imagination—“Her imagination still paints fire / In every scene it paints” (177/209)—and then in the Templar, whose unfulfilled passion for Recha is described throughout the play in metaphors of fire. It is in fact the same enlightened rhetoric that is meant to dampen Recha’s exalted imagination that sets the Templar on fire. Nathan seeks to purge both of them of unwanted affects by showing them the truth behind appearances. He teaches Recha to see the real human behind the imaginary angel, and the Templar to see the universally human behind the particular group: “What is a people? / Are Jew and Christian sooner Jew and Christian / Than human being?” (214/253). However, this rhetorical strategy arouses new desires in the Templar, who upon establishing a friendly bond with Nathan expresses his wish to meet the wise man’s daughter in the words “I’m burning with desire [*Verlangen*]” (214/254). The ambiguities around the word “fire” point to the limits of the

30. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), esp. 29–68, 485–97. I cannot fully explore here the significance of the incest motif in *Nathan the Wise* and other eighteenth-century literature, which is currently the focus of important research in the field. In *Sibling Action: The Genealogical Structure of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming), Stefani Engelstein argues that the literary motif of sibling incest is linked to the imagination of more democratic political principles. Michael Thomas Taylor offers an intriguing reading of *Nathan the Wise* that focuses on the interconnectedness of different forms of love and the centrality of the prohibition of incest in the play. According to Taylor, this prohibition guards against all attractions based on sameness and ultimately dismisses love as the basis of the social bond altogether. See Taylor, “Same/Sex: Incest and Friendship in Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*,” *Seminar* 48, no. 3 (2012): 333–47.

31. For an incisive reading of the fire metaphor, see Daniel Müller Nielaba, “‘Die arme Recha, die indes verbrannt!’ Zur Kombustibilität der Bedeutung in Lessings *Nathan der Weise*,” in *Neues zur Lessing-Forschung: Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs zu Ehren am 26. August 1997*, ed. Eva J. Engel and Claus Ritterhoff (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1998), 105–25.

play's pedagogic project. In dramatizing the interreligious romance and transforming it into something else, *Nathan the Wise* creates an affective space in which the audience can be educated about the proper direction and application of feelings. Yet the proliferation and dissemination of the word "fire" in the play also reveal the impossibility of ever fully domesticating erotic desire.

Affective Kinship

Both *Nathan the Wise* and *The Jews* end somewhat unconvincingly, as the promise of a society free of prejudice cannot fully compensate for the disappointments caused by the prevented marriage. The German Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig once deplored the lack of children at the end of the *Nathan the Wise*, which he read as a sign of the "bloodlessness" of the idea of emancipation.³² Indeed, by depriving the audience of the generic happy ending of comedy, *The Jews* turns into a farce. *Nathan the Wise* brings the interfaith romance to a similarly abrupt end; the transformation of the Templar's passion into sibling affection is not staged in the same tangible detail as the moderation of Recha's feelings. When faced with the fact that Recha is his sister, he exclaims: "You take from, and give to me, Nathan! / And both in full!—But no, you give me more / Than you are taking! Infinitely more!" (273/345). Helmut Schneider has read these lines against the backdrop of the Enlightenment myth of male self-creation and the attendant repression of the sexual, and in particular the birth-giving, body. According to Schneider, the ingenuity of *Nathan the Wise* is that the play does not simply suppress the contingency associated with birth and corporeality but transposes it to the spontaneity of the rescue actions and the playfulness of the dramatic structure. In the Templar's acceptance of a gift that inevitably hinges upon a loss, the concept of self-creation gives way to the acknowledgment of the irreducible exteriority of our own origin.³³

I would suggest pushing Schneider's ideas about the displacement of sexual energies further and reading *Nathan the Wise* as a form of sublimation, a mobilization of erotic desire for a vision of coexistence of the religions. I am using the concept of sublimation here in a broad Freudian sense to designate creative acts that redirect and redeploy energies otherwise used to perform sexual acts. In Freud's dynamic model of the psyche, Eros figures as the creative force that drives the agglomeration of elements into more complex units, a process that binds energy. Whereas

32. Franz Rosenzweig, "Lessings Nathan," in *Zweistromland: Kleine Schriften zu Glauben und Denken*, vol. 3 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Reinhold Mayer and Annemarie Mayer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 449–53.

33. Helmut J. Schneider, "Der Zufall der Geburt: Lessings *Nathan der Weise* und der imaginäre Körper der Geschichtsphilosophie," in *Körper/Kultur: Kalifornische Studien zur deutschen Moderne*, ed. Thomas W. Kniesche (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1995), 100–124.

the archetype of such erotic activity is human procreation, intellectual and artistic works are seen as valuable substitutes for procreation, in fact as activities that give birth to humanity at large. In *Nathan the Wise*, sublimation in this sense does not so much take place on the level of the psyches of individual characters; Recha's feelings are never of an unambiguously erotic nature, and the Templar's passion is never convincingly transformed into something else. Structurally, however, the plot and perhaps also the reaction elicited in the audience enact a societal sublimation. *Nathan the Wise* displaces creative energies from romantic love and marriage to miraculous rescues by which people are given their life anew. The play mobilizes these energies for a political project, the creation of a sociopolitical order capable of accommodating religious difference—although it is crucial that this project never takes on concrete contours.

In *Nathan the Wise*, the miraculous rescues are a form of filiation that depends on luck, chance, affect—anything but a conscious choice. The metaphor of the gift (*Geschenk*) that comes to describe the saved lives underscores the idea of the unexpected and the unpredictable (215/255). Nathan's adoption of the Christian Recha just after his own family has been murdered in a pogrom and Saladin's sparing of the Templar's life just after the Templar Order has broken the truce between Muslims and crusaders are equally spontaneous and inexplicable acts. As second-order births in which people are given their lives once again, they are also creative acts. These rescues might be understood as expressions of virtue, following the Enlightenment idea that reason and morality ultimately converge: as people help those whom they are naturally least inclined to help, they overcome their social and religious parochialisms and realize their true humanity. But the rescue actions in *Nathan the Wise* follow affective impulses to a degree that undermines the idea of reason's victory over emotions. These actions are motivated by previous losses, the memory of which returns and gives rise to a process of substitution: Saladin is overcome and moved to tears by memories of his brother when he looks at the Templar's face. The Templar, who finds little worth in his life after Saladin has effectively made him a prisoner, gives in to suicidal impulses when he rescues Recha from fire. Even Nathan, who adopts a Christian child after suffering terrible losses at the hands of the Christians, does not exclusively listen to the voice of reason, as he initially puts it. Rather, he performs a mourning ritual in the course of which he transfers the love for his murdered children to a substitute object: "All I know is this: I took the child, I bore it to my couch, / I kissed it, threw myself upon my knees, / And sobbed: O God! For seven *one* at least is back!" (257/317).³⁴

Equally important is the fact that the miraculous rescues are not isolated events. Recha's rescue by the Templar is throughout the play presented as the result of the

34. For a reading of this scene of loss and grief, see Astrid Oesmann, "Nathan der Weise: Suffering Lessing's 'Erziehung,'" *Germanic Review* 74, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 131–45.

Templar's own miraculous survival. This emphasis on how one person's survival depends on another's effectively establishes new genealogical lines. There are in fact two different genealogical lines: Saladin rescued the Templar who rescued Recha, and Wolf rescued Nathan who rescued Recha. This parallelism rests on a small detail hardly ever mentioned by scholars—namely, the fact that Wolf von Filneck, Saladin's brother and the biological father of Recha and the Templar, repeatedly rescued Nathan, whom he had befriended before his death (255/314). The fact that Wolf was unable to rescue Nathan's family from fire compounds the impression that his rescue act was aimed at Nathan the individual and independent of family bonds. Furthermore, its very repetition casts Wolf's deed as the structural condition rather than a one-time event of Nathan's life. This observation provides a new answer to the question of whether Nathan in the final scene stands apart because he does not fulfill the criteria of belonging or stands out because he makes the family reunion possible. Seen in the light of his own repeated rescue, Nathan becomes less of an outsider and more of a link in a longer historical chain. Nathan is not so much the founder of a spiritual family or the embodiment of the idea of male self-creation, but the middle element of one of the genealogical lines established in the play.

The miraculous rescues stand for two different models of kinship. Saladin's and the Templar's rescue actions are grounded in intuitive cognition of existing kinship relations. Saladin's affective response to the Templar's face turns out to be well founded—the Templar is indeed related to Saladin's late brother—and the Templar's attraction to Recha seems a misinterpretation of a similar intuitive knowledge of blood relations. Both moments of recognition are focused on memories of the past rather than projections of the future.³⁵ Whereas the connection between Saladin, the Templar, and Recha is underwritten by biological kinship and suggests that the emotion at work might be unconscious love for one's relatives, the affective lineage between Wolf, Nathan, and Recha is not. Furthermore, whereas Saladin's and the Templar's deeds are referenced and narrated throughout the play, those of Wolf and Nathan receive next to no narrative elaboration or explanation. The knowledge of Nathan's adoption of Recha is withheld from most characters in the play. Nathan reveals the details of the adoption only to the friar, whom he admonishes to keep the story secret. Even less is known about the circumstance of Wolf's rescues of Nathan. We do not know why Nathan was in danger or how Wolf came to help him. Their actions form a chain of interventions that makes the final family reunion possible and at the same time points beyond the family as a model of kinship. These miraculous rescues do not reflect existing kinship relations but instead create tenuous new relations, a form of kinship-in-becoming.

35. The earlier draft of *Nathan* contains allusions to the Templar's memory of his mother. When he first sees Recha, who in the draft is called Rahel, the Templar believes he has seen her before, perhaps in a dream, and Nathan suggests she might remind him of his mother. See Lessing, *Werke*, 2:738.

The Politics of Love

The connections built through affective kinship, however, never translate into a sociopolitical order in which Nathan the Jew would enjoy a truly equal status. Such an order remains a possibility that is never fully realized, or, to the extent that it realized, is constantly endangered. The precarious status of Nathan's "rights" is a case in point. Nathan himself discusses adoptive fatherhood in terms of rights, and the word was likely to evoke the contemporary debate about Jewish civil rights. He bases his paternal claims to Recha on the Enlightenment view that we have a greater right to the things we acquire through virtue than to those nature bestows on us (176/208). In the end, however, Saladin threatens to limit Nathan's rights once again through the claims of biological kinship. After Nathan's revelation that he is Recha's and the Templar's uncle, Saladin alludes to the potential rivalry between him and Nathan: "Me, not recognize my brother's children? / My niece and nephew—not my children? / Not recognize them? Me? And let you have them?" (274/346).³⁶ The sense of rivalry stems from the different forms of fatherhood embodied by Nathan and Saladin. Whereas Nathan's claims to fatherhood depend on mutual agreement—"For should not / My daughter's brother be my child as well— / As soon as he wishes?" (273–74/345)—Saladin's claims do not need such consent: "(to the Templar): And now, you stubborn boy, now you'll have to love me! / (to Recha) And now I am what I proposed to be! / Whether you like it or not!" (275/346–47). The principle of adoptive fatherhood seems theoretically valid but practically threatened by Saladin's despotism. Nathan's position in the extended family remains tenuous because this family cannot truly accommodate the new relations built on affective kinship. The final scene underscores that Nathan's rights—Jewish rights—are to be demanded rather than assumed.

As we have seen, both Lessing and Mendelssohn register the possibility of inter-faith romance while focusing their attention on other affectionate bonds between members of different religions. In that process, love becomes a future-oriented emotion, the source of actions that have yet to occur. In his calls for civic equality, Moses Mendelssohn appeals to a brotherly love he assumes to be lacking in his Christian readers. His emphatic address "dear brothers" implicitly calls on Christians to extend brotherly love to the Jews. In *Nathan the Wise*, love is similarly future oriented. We may recall here the open-endedness of the ring parable. The original ring was a token of love, a sign of a father's election of a favorite son, with the capacity to render its owner agreeable to others. Beyond that, it was an insignia

36. On this exchange, see Sasse, *Die aufgeklärte Familie*, 258–60. For an analysis of Saladin's despotism, see also Christiane Bohnert, "Enlightenment and Despotism: Two Worlds in Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*," in *Impure Reason: Dialectic of Enlightenment in Germany*, ed. W. Daniel Wilson and Robert C. Holub (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 344–61.

of power and authority: whoever inherited it became master of the house irrespective of birth order. This rite of investiture no longer functions when one father loves his three sons equally and passes a ring to each of them. In a situation in which neither of the rings can prove love past or present, the judge defers to the brothers' own potential to generate love. Rather than pass a verdict, he advises them to make every effort to demonstrate benevolence and prove themselves worthy of the ring. There is a sense of urgency in the judge's final address to the brothers, a protopolitical command to free the world from prejudice: "Let each aspire / To emulate his father's uncorrupted love, / Free from prejudice!" (235/280).

The nonfulfillment of romantic love in *Nathan the Wise* is crucial for the political effect of the play. I have suggested that the logic of play is one of sublimation broadly understood, a redirection of erotic energies to dramatic acts of rescue and, ultimately, to the idea of politico-juridical equality between the religions. Yet sublimation also remains peculiarly open-ended. While incest prohibition restores a certain order after the possibility of interfaith romance has created much confusion and imbalance, this order becomes neither concretized nor truly stabilized. As the development of the fire metaphor shows, emotions are never fully domesticated, and erotic energies never fully inactivated in the play. Nor can the final scene of familial harmony expunge all traces of conflict between competing genealogical claims. This sense of ongoing conflict makes the play politically more provocative than any vision of interfaith harmony could be.

A comparison with subsequent plays throws the import of Lessing's representation of the potential Christian-Jewish love relationship into even clearer relief. In the years following the first performances of *Nathan the Wise*, a number of Christian supporters of Jewish emancipation wrote plays that pick up on the same motif but offer very different solutions. Two of these plays dramatize the budding love between a Christian man and a Jewish woman who conveniently turns out to have been born a Christian but was adopted by a Jew, which enables the couple to marry. Another play juxtaposes two weddings, a Jewish wedding and a Christian one, and yet another play ends tragically with the death of the Jewish girl.³⁷ These plays perform what Zygmunt Bauman, following Niklas Luhmann, identifies as one major function of the modern discourse of love: they resolve the conflicts arising from shifting social relations in an idealized private sphere.³⁸ The plays cast domestic life as a domain that is exempt from the inequalities caused by social

37. See Johann Karl Lotich, *Wer war wohl mehr Jude?* (Leipzig: Friedrich Gotthold Jacobäer, 1783); Karl Steinberg, "Menschen und Menschensituationen, oder die Familie Grunau," *Deutsche Schaubühne* 4 (1792): 1–180; Gottfried Julius Ziegelhauser, *Die Juden: Eine bürgerliche Scene in einem Aufzuge* (Vienna: Johann Baptist Wallishauser, 1807); Jakob Bischof, *Dina, das Judenmädchen aus Franken: Ein tragisches Familiengemälde* (Fürth: Im Büro für Literatur, 1802). On the motif of interreligious love in these plays, see also Peter R. Erspamer, *The Elusiveness of Tolerance: The "Jewish Question" from Lessing to the Napoleonic Wars* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 106–9.

38. See Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 197–230.

power (and achieve this effect only by erasing Judaism as a divisive factor) or, in the case of the last play, as a domain that *should* be exempt from such inequalities. Compared to these later plays, Lessing's transformation of erotic love into sibling affection is more provocative and open-ended. Lessing's move toward the naturalization of the social obstacles to interfaith marriage remains suspended; instead he turns love into a metaphor of social integration that cannot be confined to the private sphere of domestic life—or to any other partial domain for that matter. He contributes to the debates about Jewish emancipation by dramatizing desire rather than fulfillment, a political desideratum rather than a political program.