Chapter - 2

THE FAMILY MOSKAT

Recognition came to Singer with the publication of The Family Moskat. When at the beginning of 1950, the book came out in both Yiddish and English, and after some time in Hebrew, it provided him with a break. In The Family Moskat Singer presents a panoramic view of Polish-Jewish society against the backdrop of the impending holocaust. The characters, ranging from millionaire to yeshiva student, aristocrat to revolutionary, rabbi to profligate, or professor to peddler, are seen in constant interaction with one another, underlining the conflict between the traditional Jewish values on the one hand, and the influence of science and modern European culture on the other. Contemporary Polish society is presented by the narrator as an observer as well as an occasional participant.

The Family Moskat, a family chronicle, records the fortune of the Moskat family over three generations. Max F. Schultz points out that like Isaac Joshua Singer's novel, The Brothers Ashkenazi, the F.M. ties the fortunes of a family to the history of a city: the Warsaw Ghetto... starting with the 80
year old patriarch Meshulam Moskat's senseless third marriage and stopping with Asa Heshel Bannet's perverse welcome of the Nazis.

Speaking of The Family Moskat, Singer himself says: "Willingly or unwillingly we have enacted here the struggle between two generations—the old and the new—religious Judaism and the secular." The juxtaposition of the old and the new marks the death of a culture, the transition of the East European Jew from the chassidic way of life to an imitation of modern secularism and scientific skepticism. Irving Malin points out:

In The Family Moskat old values and rituals—incarnated in Hasidic joy—give way to secular movements of Zionism, socialism or Enlightenment. The conflicts between traditional and modern Jews are viewed largely as generational disputes....Singer begins with marriage, unity, 'togetherness ...and then gradually alerts us to separation and fragmentation.

The women in the novel, too, reflect to a great extent, the growing intrusion of modernity into the traditional Jewish ways. They rarely follow the code of conduct laid down for them in the holy books and become increasingly careless or defiant. Unable to give up their old values altogether, they suffer as they find it difficult to embrace
the new order totally. Characters like Masha even give up their religion. Neither outright defiance nor non-conformity brings them peace. Thus they not only suffer themselves, but cause suffering to those around them.

Hadassah is first introduced into the novel when her uncle Abram Shapiro talks of her as a great beauty.

And his daughter, Hadassah—she's a beauty. One look at her and you're finished. Believe me, if I wasn't her uncle, I'd go after her myself. Besides, may be she'll be able to give you some tutoring.

Shortly after Asa Heshel's arrival in Warsaw, he is accidentally picked up by Abram. Attracted by the mixture of bashfulness and enthusiasm in Asa, Abram starts patronizing him. He brings him into the Moskat household by inviting him to the house of Nyunie Moskat, where some sort of celebration is going on to welcome Meshulam's third wife. Asa Heshel is confused as he finds himself the centre of attraction of a crowd of strangers. Hadassah is discussed by her family with a mixture of indulgence and criticism, suggesting a streak of waywardness in her. When Hadassah appears on the scene, Rosa Frumetl openly admires her beauty. Asa too is struck by her appearance, yet cannot help noticing the air of suffering about her. The use of
winter clothes out of season suggests that she is not as healthy as she appears to be:

...although the day was not too cold, she had heavy socks over her stockings. She reminded Asa Heshel of the aristocratic young ladies in the romantic novels he had read. Her light blue eyes had an embarrassed expression as though she were not in her own home but entering some strange house (P.54).

Hadassah and Asa Heshel are immediately attracted towards each other. Hadassah's secular education emboldens her to some extent. This is reflected in her preference for Polish over Yiddish and her friendship with a Christian girl named Klonya in spite of her mother's disapproval. She is pampered by her parents partly because she is an only child and partly because of her delicate health. So she is permitted to invite Asa Heshel into her room and to give him Polish lessons even when they have hardly known each other. She, on her part, is not so deferential to her parents' wishes. She goes her own way with scant regard for their opinion. Speaking of Klonya, she says: "Well, what difference does it make? I like her" (P.55).

At the same time she is polite and shy in the presence of strangers. She is courteous to Adele in spite of the latter's indifference. Quite unreasonably, she admires her uncle Abram, who is generally disliked for his profligate
conduct. He literally throws Asa Heshel into Hadassah's company and encourages her to cultivate the friendship that subsequently leads to a series of complications. Like Hadassah, Asa is a romantic, forever looking for new adventures. Ben Siegel comments on Asa's impossible dreams, his disbelief in God or man, and his flair for failure and running away:

A descendant of Hasidic rabbis, he rejects Orthodoxy for Spinoza while striving for a University degree, divine truth, and earthly happiness. He attains only an obsessive cynicism and a determination to shield his individuality—by running from problems, family, and self. His talent for failure is matched only by his knack for survival. Asa survives war, prison, hunger, typhoid, and pogroms. But in a final act compounded equally of inertia, courage, and surrender, he rejects escape from Warsaw and rejoins family and friends to await the Nazis. In thus accepting death he again overcomes it. 5

Hadassah lives in a dream world of her own where her diary is her only true friend. Apart from Klonya, nobody seems to know her plans or even her whereabouts. She prefers to remain in the halflight, between day and night, rather than light a lamp. Unlike her cousin Stepha, she lacks seriousness of purpose so far as her studies are concerned.
To Asa's unsophisticated mind, her rambling conversation appears like poetry. Hadassah develops an easy familiarity with him even though it is unseemly for a decent Jewish daughter to be so free with a strange young man.

In spite of her apparent timidity, Hadassah holds out quite strongly on the question of marriage. Like many enlightened young women of her time, she is not prepared to accept the choice of her family in the matter of a bridegroom. Her grandfather Meshulam Moskat chooses Fishel Kutner for his distinguished background and his sound financial standing. Dacha and Nyunie are prepared to yield in spite of initial reservations. Yet Hadassah refuses to marry him, although there seems to be no alternative choice in sight. She remains obstinate in the face of all persuasion by her family and also by the professional matchmaker:

Hadassah herself had flatly refused to marry him. Zeinvele Strotsker was known for being able to talk to young people in their own language....He had argued with Hadassah until his throat was dry, but had accomplished nothing. All the girl would do was flush and murmur some half-intelligible arguments. She was more of a 'shikse' than any of the gentile girls he had ever had anything to do with, Zeinvele complained.... Stubborn as a goat', he announced (P.95).
Abram, for purposes of his own, supports her, repeatedly calling Fishel 'snotnose' and 'worm', and talks of him as if he were not even fit to lick Hadassah's boots, thus further boosting her ego.

Hadassah behaves in an impulsive and irresponsible manner, speaking of working for a living, or even of choosing death rather than marry Fishel. She encourages Asa Heshel by visiting him at his lodgings, something no decent young lady would think of doing on her own. Later, she even consents to go up alone with Asa into Abram's apartment in spite of the scandal it might cause. Such recklessness on her part speaks of immaturity. She is an incurable romantic, predominantly occupied with dreams and visions. She dreams of a 'knight on a white horse' who would rescue her out of her monotonous existence. Like a true idealist, she imagines that in spite of its drawbacks life with Asa Heshel would be happy and that they would even be able to recover their ideals together in Switzerland. On Asa's part, his association with Hadassah marks a further step on the road to sophistication: "Her had thrown off his provincial garments: he had been with Hadassah. His life was beginning" (P.172).

Hadassah is confused in her mind regarding even common things. She imagines mountains with golden tops and for her
Asa Heshel and Abram Sahpiro appear merging into each other. Even while she is drawn strongly towards Asa, she minds his being so young. She had always hoped that her 'knight on a white horse' would be at least ten years older than her. She has her premonitions too. In spite of her quest for adventure and the spirit of defiance she displays, the feeling of doom pervades her actions:

For myself I have no fear at all, though sometimes I am sure that I am making a mistake and that everything will end in disaster. Something inside me - a spirit or another self - wants to lead me to perdition. I remember that other self from my childhood (P.137).

Once she sets out on the path of deceit, there is no chance of retreat or escape, whatever misgivings she may have. Hadassah lives more in her dreams than in reality. To present a semblance of normalcy, she consents to go through her engagement to Fishel, even while putting the finishing touches to her plan of escape. Thus she plays a double role constantly. So does Abram, trying to dissuade Hadassah and Asa from their course of action on the one hand and helping them in their preparations on the other. Occasional flashes of realization come to Hadassah when she thinks of the consequences of escape, but the faint voice of her conscience is promptly silenced. Being a spoilt child, Hadassah hopes for reprieve and recognition even while she
is betraying her parents.

While Hadassah's preparations for running away from home are presented in an elaborate manner, her actual escape is mentioned only in retrospect, as a piece of secondhand information. Old Meshulam's taking to his bed is at least partly due to his granddaughter's elopement. Meshulam's illness concerns not only family and friends, but rouses the interest of the entire Jewish community. Hadassah's running away from home is viewed as an act of poetic justice. Resentful of Meshulam Moskat's rise to riches, the crowd can gain some satisfaction by watching the disgrace of his family. The flight evokes different reactions in different people. The pious Jews see it as a consequence of the craze for worldly books and worldly education provided by the 'reformed' schools. They also find it alarming as they apprehend the same kind of trouble in the case of their own children. For Zeinvele Strotker, it is a personal tragedy. The money he would have received, had the wedding come off, would have greatly helped him in arranging the marriage of his own daughter.

Hadassah's disappearance also destroys whatever understanding there was between her parents. It sets off an 'unceasing squabble' (P.193) between her father and mother, each blaming the other for their daughter's waywardness.
Whereas Dacha becomes more abusive and complaining, Nyunxe withdraws into himself, trying to make a fresh evaluation of his life. The elopement evokes a mixed reaction in him. Although unhappy over losing his only child, he admires her courage in breaking away from the rut and defying society. Sympathetic to her, he decides to send her money to help the couple tide over their difficulties.

In a way Meshulam Moskat's funeral is more significant than being just an ordinary incident in the Moskat family. Irving Malin comments.

Reb Meshulam's funeral becomes an important symbolic event. We recognize the death of the old order and the birth of modern confusion. Every Jew is a spectator and participant. "The spectators from the balconies and windows were afraid that the crowd pressing forward in the cemetery would overrun the hearse or that some of the rabble would be pushed into the open grave." Rabbis mourn at length; the modern Moskat granddaughters worry about their clothing, and the sons go their special ways.

Hadassah's reappearance creates a feeling of anticlimax. While her departure was an act of courage and careful planning, her return in disgrace spells defeat. After their failure to leave the country, Hadassah, who
loses sight of Asa Heshel, is arrested and thrown into jail. Later on she is returned under armed escort to her parents' address, sick, dishevelled, and thoroughly miserable. So great is her sense of loss that Hadassah can escape it temporarily only by pretending to be dead: "Over and over she kept telling herself that she was dead, nothing could harm her any more; she need no longer feel any shame" (P.201). What had started out as a beautiful dream of emancipation proves to be a nightmare:

Her dreams had a nightmare quality. She imagined herself flying like a bat, and then falling precipitately like a stone. Shadowy forms whispered to her, speaking in a coarse mixture of Russian, Polish, and Yiddish. Abram and Asa Heshel seemed to be merged in a single dual-faced image. Her father and Dr. Mintz fused and separated. She seemed to be traveling abroad, but the borders kept receding ever further away, then coming closer and changing form, appearing first like a mountain, then like a river (P.202).

Asa Heshel's marriage to Adele comes as a rude shock to Hadassah, jolting her out of her apathetic state. More than sorrow or disappointment, it evokes in her a strong feeling of anger at betrayal. If, on the one hand, Asa has betrayed her by falling into the hands of her rival, on the other, her mother's act of betrayal consists in her withholding
Asa's letters from her. The wedding announcement in the newspaper aggravates her mental unrest: "I suppose Adele had it printed specifically to send here to Warsaw. So that she could gloat over all of us. It's so childish and so disgusting" (P.226). Added to it is the sadistic conviction that Asa, too, must be unhappy. In her distracted state of mind it appears to her that everybody rejoices over her misfortune. Her reaction to the preparations for her wedding reflects her highly confused state of mind:

They have taken my measurements for a matron's wig. I tried it on and in the mirror I hardly recognized myself. With all of this tragedy, I really wanted to burst out laughing. Well, I'll wear it as though it were my cross ... It's my own fault. I've willingly bent my shoulders to receive the yoke. And I know there is more suffering waiting for me (P.226).

Quite naturally, Hadassah's unusual behaviour makes her the centre of attention as well as gossip. People stare at her in the street when she bursts into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. Hadassah's marriage becomes a personal calamity for Abram as it signifies Koppel's victory over him. In spite of Hadassah's repeated avowal of love for Asa Heshel, it is seen more as physical attraction. Hadassah speaks of the 'electrical affinity' they have for each other. Asa's marriage to Adele makes her feel jealous as well as
insecure. She experiences fits of childish terror and feels the necessity of repeatedly cleaning herself. It is as if she feels compelled to wash off her sense of guilt and indecision. She even thinks of renouncing the world as well as her religion, and becoming a nun. But true to her indecisive nature, she takes no such step, but just continues to drift along. Her lack of consistency is reflected in her thoughts regarding her wedding. Even while she thinks of her marriage as an impending doom, her vanity is boosted by others' appreciation and envy:

For a moment I felt better, and I thought to myself that things weren't so terrible after all. I am young, and good-looking, and I'm not poor. I could see how the others envied me, and that made me more cheerful for a while (P.228).

To her, the reaction of other people appears more important than her own personal feelings.

The contradiction in Hadassah's character is evident in her topsy-turvy notions. She sees nothing wrong in elopement, or even carrying on a clandestine affair with a married man. Yet, to her, her own lawful marriage is the cause of disgrace:

I have gone through all of it; the ritual bath, the
wedding ceremony, and all the rest. I will confide no more of my thoughts to you, my diary. You are pure; I am unclean. You are honourable; I am false (P.229).

The ritual bath that is commonly seen as a symbol of purification, appears to her as nothing but a polluting agent. Max F. Schultz observes:

Hadassah describes in her diary the preparations of her Orthodox wedding to the pious Fishel Kutner: "They've taken my measurements .... it were my cross." Notice Hadassah's confusion of the two sets of religious views as well as ultimately two cultures in her association of matron's wig with cross! Three weeks later, now married to a man she loathes, she writes to her girlhood diary, "I am sitting at a writing desk.... I am unclean." For Hadassah the road back to orthodoxy by way of the ritual bath has ironically led her only to a new uncleanness. 7

The solemn institution of marriage is meaningless for her. Such an attitude already hints at the case with which Hadassah is going to dishonour her marriage vows. The actual impropriety, when it occurs later, hardly surprises the reader.

Rosa Frumetl's account of Hadassah's wedding describes in some detail the girl's apathetic, even hostile attitude
to her marriage:

....she looked like a corpse. She wouldn't be so bad-looking, but she was as white as chalk. The women who led her to the canopy practically had to drag her. And the girls who were there wept bitterly. The whole thing was more like a funeral (P.231).

Added to the vulgar display of wealth, it becomes a mockery of marriage. It lacks soul in spite of all the glamour. In Rosa Frumetl's words: "The wedding was noisy and vulgar, probably to drown out the truth that the bride had brought scandal on the family" (P.231).

Marriage fails to deter Hadassah from pursuing Asa Heshel. In spite of her respectable status as the wife of a rich and pious man, she deliberately seeks out Asa and professes her love for him, although to do so is immoral and suggests lack of balance. She feels no compunction in hurting either Adele or Fishele. In her quest for happiness she ignores the proddings of her conscience, as well as the norms of social behaviour. Neither advice nor criticism can put an end to her love for Asa Heshel. Her restlessness is echoed by Asa who, in spite of his marriage to Adele, is unable to settle down. He drifts about without any sense of purpose in life. Like Hadassah, he shies away from all responsibility, hiding from his own family, and even denying
his marriage. He, too, looks for personal pleasure only, oblivious of others' opinion of him, thus suggesting a streak of abnormality in his character. As Adele observes: "...his father died of melancholy in some dreary village in Galicia. There must be a streak of insanity in him, too" (P.241).

Hadassah displays in her character a strange mixture of defiance and cowardice. It is she who seeks out Asa Heshel and renews their relationship. Yet when she is directly confronted by Rosa Frumetl over this, she is unable to defend herself or to retaliate. Instead, she takes the coward's way out: flight. Later on she realizes that her running away from Usefov would only confirm her guilt in the eyes of the others. Still, she cannot make herself go back and face reality. So she goes home, to the same Fishel whom she has betrayed, hoping that news about her would not reach him soon.

Asa Heshel's reappearance in Warsaw wipes away the last vestiges of inhibition in Hadassah. She responds to his telephone call by rushing out to meet him, throwing all caution to the winds. Even as she hurries on, she is conscious of life around her, observing the details in a detached manner: a coin falling, a baker's boy carrying a tray, or a policeman scattering apples. She becomes almost wild at the sight of Asa heshel: "People stopped to stare.
They were not far from Fishel's store, but that did not matter to her now" (P.265). It is she who takes the initiative, Asa merely falling into step with her. Asa has been as much of a coward as Hadassah. When confronted with the truth, he too takes to his heels: "He had taken to his heels and had not stopped running until he reached Falenitz. There he caught a train to Warsaw" (P.247). Neither Hadassah nor Asa Heshel has any sense of responsibility or obligation. They merely want to grab what the moment offers them. Such conduct appears unusual even to a profligate like Abram:

That Asa Heshel and Hadassah would be meeting each other Abram knew. But that she would come to him in this dark hole in a house where they were known, that was more than he could have imagined. If Dacha heard about it ! he thought. It would finish her off ! (P.289).

Hadassah's ambivalent attitude is seen in her love for her mother and her lack of consideration for her feelings. Even while she repeatedly prays to God to spare her mother. Whom she loves dearly, she does nothing to make her happy. Dacha knows very well that Hadassah is travelling a false road. She also realizes that it is no use making her promise to mend her ways, as it would only add the sin of perjury to her existing lapses. Hadassah would never keep
her promise. The idea of reforming herself never occurs to Hadassah. Thus Dacha, on her deathbed, cannot get out of her mind the idea that her only child is behaving like a whore. In her anguish she calls Hadassah unclean. Exploited by her parents, ignored by her husband, Dacha's misery is further heightened by her daughter's betrayal.

Hadassah does not hesitate to tell blatant lies to her husband. She claims that it was a girl friend on the telephone, even though Fishel has clearly heard a male voice coming through. Shamelessly she plans for and arranges her secret meetings with Asa heshel. Fishel, far from condemning her, can only think of her with concern and pity: "Dear God in Heaven! What can be done now? How can I save her? Help me, dear Father!" (P.300). It is strange that Fishel remains faithful to Hadassah in spite of her unseemly conduct. Nor does he like other people criticizing his wife and offering him pity:

Hadassah had cheated him, had heaped shame and disgrace on him. But his love for her could not so easily be rooted out. 'The poor creature, lost to this world, lost to the next. Yet it might be that she is more precious in the eyes of God than all the pious pretenders. In her own way she is a pure soul. Who knows whose sins she is called to atone for? Maybe she is the vessel for the spirit of some holy man whose
purification it is her lot to accomplish'....He would support her in honour (P.369).

But such noble acceptance and forgiveness go in vain. Hadassah is unable to understand or appreciate Fishel's undemanding, selfless love for her. In her sickness it is he who consoles her and promises to take care of her. Hadassah only wonders how, in spite of her waywardness, Fishel can be so magnanimous. She goes her own way, not caring how she hurts her husband, and the prayers she offers to God are only for her dead mother and for Asa Heshel.

When Asa returns to Warsaw after a long absence, the first contact he tries to establish is with Hadassah. From Abram's conversation with Asa, we gather that she is still beautiful and whimsical. Moreover, she has become much richer in the meantime. It is typical of the contradiction in her character that while she is not averse to taking advantage of Fishel's wealth, she cannot bear the sight of him, and prefers to stay alone rather than go back to her husband. Even in his relationship with Hadassah, for which Asa Heshel has turned his back on family and friends, he is indecisive and escapist in his attitude. "It was a queer thing, but he had no desire to see his mother, or his child, or to return to Abram's house. He was frightened of the idea of meeting Hadassah" (P. 420). Yet when he finds
someone enquiring about a train to Otwotsk where Hadassah lives, he is automatically drawn in that direction. As in their previous encounters, Fate seems to take a hand. Although it is very late when he reaches Otwotsk, he manages to find her house quite by accident, and is eagerly welcomed by Hadassah.

Hadassah's selfishness makes her totally insensitive to her husband's feelings. She comes home on the Sabbath as if there were nothing strange in that and forces Fishel to discuss the matter of divorce, although she knows that as a pious Jew, Fishel would have liked to spend the evening in studying holy texts. She openly admits that she and Asa Heshel have been living together for some time. Fishel is shocked by her brazenness: "Fishele looked at Hadassah's face. The softness that had formerly dwelt in her eyes was no longer there. A gentile toughness emanated from her." (P.433). He finds her, 'completely depraved, worse than converted . (P.433).

She succeeds in getting a divorce in spite of initial misgivings regarding Adele's intentions. Yet it makes her unhappy and tearful: "I certainly wasn't sorry that it was all over, but I cried, any way.... I kept on thinking of death and of mother " (P. 445). Without waiting for marriage, Hadassah openly lives and moves about with Asa Heshel, even going to Switzerland with him. Yet the lack of
stability in Asa's character hurts her. She is sad to note that Asa has little thought of marriage as he is content to have her as his mistress rather than as his wife. This naturally worries Hadassah as they are constantly put into embarrassing situations. Her long-cherished dream of a happy life with Asa Heshel is soon replaced by disillusionment. Far from being a loving companion, Asa Heshel is often angry and tense, and unsociable. He does not wish to share Hadassah's fortune either. Thus he isolates himself by his own behaviour.

It is significant that the diary Hadassah had discarded after marriage is again taken up after her divorce. If marriage had made her unclean, the filth is washed away with the end of the marriage. Hadassah's view of her affair with Asa as something pure is indeed ironical. Life in a village provides them some measure of privacy, but Asa Heshel continues to be morose and irritable, displaying only occasional flashes of carefree gaiety. In spite of the years that have passed since his first coming to Warsaw, and his varied experiences, Asa Heshel is still as unsettled as a green youth and as full of dreams. He remains confused in his dealings: "He's sincere but his love is uncertain. Every minute he has another plan" (P.446). So complains Hadassah. As she observes, he is a pessimist. He speaks of undying love for Hadassah, yet shies away from the idea of
becoming a father. He becomes furious when Hadassah talks of having a baby, and is particularly afraid of having a daughter. As in the case of his other responsibilities, fatherhood is something Asa Heshel would like to avoid. Such conduct naturally makes Hadassah doubt his love.

Hadassah is often conscious of her own sinful existence. While thinking of Masha, she cannot condemn her for turning apostate as others do, because Masha has at least been bold enough to sacrifice her religion and family ties for the sake of love. On the occasion of Rosh Hashonah Hadassah does not want to go to the synagogue as she feels that her sinful life has deprived her of the right to be there. She finds her dreams equally disturbing, as she dreams of her dead mother crying. Time and again she questions the propriety of her actions:

One thought plagues me—have I acted properly? Did I have the right to take him from his child? They all think that I've committed a crime. Even those who consider themselves progressive. They talk and read so much about love, but when it comes down to it, they are a bunch of fanatics.... Sometimes I feel as though my neck were in a noose (P.451).

Added to this self-examination is the uncertainty about Asa's intentions: "Other women are so sure of themselves
and of their husbands. But I, who have sacrificed so much, am always in doubt" (P.452). Asa is always unpredictable and restless, faithful neither to his ideals nor to his family. This restlessness makes him look ill and prematurely old. Hadassah worries about him constantly, unable to find any explanation for Asa's troubled look.

If Hadassah had given up her family and riches for the sake of being with Asa Heshel and had imagined that becoming his wife would mean the ultimate happiness in her life, reality turns out to be totally different. Even her daughter provides her very little pleasure. Added to the troubles of a difficult pregnancy and an even more difficult childbirth, the girl is delicate and constantly ailing. Most of their money goes into paying the doctor. Even Hadassah's beauty, of which she had always been proud, begins to fade:

Hadassah was still beautiful, although the events of the passing years had left their mark on her.... Her gold-blond hair showed signs of fading; the first fine creases were beginning to appear at the corners of her eyes. Her figure, however, still remained girlish (P.492).

Asa Heshel's love has become so elusive that Hadassah tries to seize every moment of it. Thus when her gentile maid...
servant bursts into the room while she is sitting on her husband's lap, Hadassah has mixed reactions: "Hadassah felt some embarrassment, but at the same time she enjoyed having the maid witness her triumph" (P. 493).

Hadassah is a failure as a housewife too. She is unable to run her household on Asa's meagre income. She herself spends too much, unnecessarily frittering away housekeeping money on some useless present for her husband. This gives rise to frequent domestic quarrels, husband and wife blaming each other for the troubles in the family, including the child's sickness. When Abram Shapiro unexpectedly turns up with tickets for a ball, Hadassah is delighted, but feels frustrated as she thinks it unbecoming of her to leave a sick child at home and attend such affairs. But with a bit of encouragement from Abram she overcomes her hesitation and starts eagerly looking forward to the occasion:

Hadassah was eager to go to the ball. It had been years since she had been to any sort of function. As long as she had lived with Asa Heshel without benefit of clergy, the pair had been invited nowhere. Then came the long period of her pregancy, the bearing of the child, the illnesses of infancy. Besides, Asa Heshel invited few to his home and had accepted almost no invitations. But how long could a person isolate herself? She was still good-looking; it was criminal to sit like an old crone warming herself at the oven (P. 506).
The ball creates a great stir in Jewish circles. People throng it, packing the place to capacity, some even flinging away their last zlotys to acquire a new dress or hat. Hadassah and Masha both present beautiful pictures while starting for the ball. But the long wait for the droshky and the cold weather combine to dampen Hadassah's spirit very soon:

Her eagerness to go to the ball and show her good looks subsided. She felt weak and listless and was aware of only one desire: to get through the ordeal as quickly as possible and take to her bed (P.507).

Instead of being an exciting adventure, the ball appears to be an ordeal. Very soon it assumes even nightmarish proportions with people thronging the hall and the space around it, women shrieking, men quarrelling and pushing their way in. Hadassah feels terrified as her dress gets ripped in the terrible crush. In the utter confusion that follows, she is separated from her escort, and hemmed in on all sides. She even starts crying in desperation. The noise and the vulgar display prove too overwhelming for her. In the midst of this cheap, jostling crowd Hadassah looks lost, completely out of place. Even Asa Heshel notices it:

He had never seen her so beautiful .... A wave of pity rushed over him. Here she stood, his beloved wife, the
mother of his child, a woman who had thrown away a fortune to be with him. What a disappointment he must be for her! How bankrupt was his life, his career, his love.... Hadassah trembled. She looked at him, frightened, and then her face lit up (P.520).

She realizes that it had been nothing but foolishness to come to such a place, and is only too glad to escape.

Hadassah's moments of peace and understanding with Asa Heshel are rare indeed, and their domestic life is disrupted by frequent quarrels:

His arguments with Hadassah had turned into a kind of madness. The screamed, cursed, even struck each other.

Yadwiga, the servant, would cook their meals, but the food would become stale while they quarreled. The little girl would cry, but her mother would pay no heed. Hadassah took sedation; she still could not sleep (P.541).

Hadassah starts suspecting everybody around her, particularly their female relations and friends. She is resentful towards Adele and her son, and also Asa's mother and sister because she feels that they take up too much of his time and money. Her jealousy extends to Masha, Stepha, Klonya, and even to Hertz Yanovar. In her troubled state of
mind, she remains constantly worried about Dacha, and frequently takes her to doctors. Not a day passes without some fresh trouble. Gradually Asa Heshel begins to feel that Hadassah is going mad.

With Hadassah's suspicions and Asa Heshel's indifference, the marriage seems to be heading towards failure. Asa Heshel's involvement with Barbara further complicates the matter. The lack of mutual trust prevents Asa from explaining his situation to Hadassah, when he has to go out suddenly in the middle of the night to meet Barbara at the station. He would rather risk facing her displeasure later.

Asa Heshel's treatment of Hadassah is more a result of cowardice than of lack of love. Any sort of responsibility soon becomes a burden for Asa, and he becomes impatient to shake it off. When Abram accuses him of cruelly neglecting Hadassah, he has little to say in self-defence except that he is not a family man. He acknowledges that Hadassah is his dearest friend, since she has thrown away a secure, respectable family life to follow his uncertain fortune. Yet he cannot remain tied to her for long. His character is correctly summed up by Abram who calls him a coward, forever trying to run away from things. Thus it is but natural for Hadassah to expect very little support from such a husband.
The only way to survive is by breaking away from the daily grind.

Hadassah surprises her friends and relations by going to live in Otwotsk, removing herself completely from city life. They regard this move as masochistic, almost suicidal; yet Hadassah survives, and leads a more settled life in spite of the misgivings of others:

When Hadassah gave up her Warsaw flat and moved out to Shrudborov, the family's comment was that she had voluntarily exiled herself to Siberia. They prophesied that she would die of loneliness, and Dacha would grow up wild, without any discipline....But the years passed by and Hadassah did not die and Dacha recovered her health completely (P.578).

She finds the country air more conducive for herself as well as for her daughter. She can always manage her household more economically as things are cheaper there than in the city. She is visited by her husband, and also by Masha, Stepha, Dosha, and Klonya. They bring a touch of colour to her normally uneventful life.

The women were all over forty, but they looked young and childish. Klonya and Stepha, true, were a bit on the fat side but Hadassah, Masha, and Dosha still kept
their slender figures. When they played ball in the
garden, one might have thought that a group of young
things was running around. It was only when one looked
at them more closely that the gray strands in their
short-cut hair and the tiny creases at the corners of
their eyes could be noticed (P.580).

In their gaity and vivacity they present a healthy
contrast to the brooding, restless Asa Heshel. He, on his
part, does not approve of Hadassah's way of life. He finds
it unusual that she should bury herself in the country, away
from the bright lights of Warsaw, to which she had been
accustomed since childhood. He also thinks of Dacha's
upbringing as defective:

Hadassah had moved herself into the wilderness. Death
was all she talked about whenever he went to visit
her. Dacha was growing up wild and undisciplined among
the gentile girls of the neighbourhood. There was
probably nothing she did not know now...he worried
(P.582).

In spite of his critical attitude towards Hadassah's
behaviour, the few occasions when they meet remind him of
his own meanness, of the injustice he has done her. Even
though Hadassah waits eagerly for her husband's arrival,
they find little to tell each other when they are together:

All the shame of their married life emerged during these moments of silence. This was the wife whom he had deceived...This was the same Hadassah who had come running to him in his room in Shviento Yereska street in her velvet beret and with a book under her arm, the same one who had given him his first kiss. And now he was coming to her from the arms of another (P. 587).

Yet, it is not exactly the same Hadassah. She has changed, too, with the passage of time:

In the years she had lived in the woods, Hadassah had herself become as silent as the trees that looked in through her window. She had never studied any philosophy, but she had learned to appraise things in her own way. She had seen how the ones nearest to her had gone; she had lived through the decline of the family....She had long since found a justification for the things Asa Heshel had done (P. 588).

She is not only more tolerant of his lapses, but is also a staunch defender of his actions. When her step mother starts criticizing Asa, Hadassah silences her with angry protestations of love for him. Angry, Bronya never visits her again.
After all their years together, Hadassah still finds Asa Heshel something of an enigma. She is unable to understand how he manages to attract people while paying scant attention to them. Hadassah's brief moments of happiness with her husband soon come to an end, and she is left with a sense of foreboding:

Whenever Hadassah accompanied him to the Otwotsk station, she had the foreboding that she was seeing him for the last time....Men still looked at her, but she resented their glances. Love had been cruel enough to her....He would never know how much she loved him. He would never understand how much she had suffered on his account from the very day her uncle Abram had brought him to her father's house for dinner (P.589).

Although Asa Heshel readily promises to visit her very soon, she knows that she could hardly rely on his promises. Later, her foreboding proves to be true. While Asa Heshel is busy spending a vacation in Barbara's company, Hadassah is killed in Otwotsk by a bomb. The news reaches Asa much later, and the details are provided by his own daughter Dacha. Thus Hadassah, once the centre of so much attention and admiration, meets her end prematurely far away from family and friends. Her death leaves Asa Heshel with a feeling of emptiness:
If he could at least weep! But not a single tear came out of his eyes. Why was he still alive? He had not realized that the death of Hadassah could so shatter him. There was a great emptiness about him; his feet seemed to be giving way; he was filled with the horror of death (P.632).

Even Dinah, who had earlier considered Hadassah a schemer, is moved to pity on hearing of her death: "Oh God, that beautiful child! So young! So lovely! What a terrible thing!" (P.633). Death has smoothed out the bitter feelings Hadassah had once aroused in others. It brings her release from the tensions and troubles of life, from her desires and frustrations. Thus, in a way, her end justifies Hertz Yanovar's closing comment that the Messiah is Death.

Once Hadassah had cried impassionedly:

Warsaw, dear city of mine, how sad I am! Already before I have left you, I long for you. I look at your crooked roofs, your factory chimneys, your thickly clouded skies, and I realize how deeply rooted you are in my heart. I know it will be good to live in a strange country, but when my time comes to die I want to be in the cometry on the Gensha, near my beloved grandmother (P.175).
But in her later years she lives and dies far away from her beloved Warsaw, and is buried among strangers.

Adele's story runs almost parallel to that of Hadassah. The only daughter of Rosa Frumetl, Reb Meshulam Moskat's third wife, she is introduced in the very first paragraph of the novel. She is presented as a modern young woman, educated abroad, and familiar with the European way of thinking. Even her name is a modern version of 'Eidele', her original one. She is portrayed as no great beauty, but from the very beginning, she appears showy and arrogant, critical of the way of life of Warsaw Jews. Adele is a girl in her early twenties, tall and slender, with an irregularly shaped nose, prominent-boned features, a sharp chin and thin lips. There were dark rings under the girl's eyes; she looked as though she had gone sleepless for nights. Her faded blond hair was combed tightly back into a Greek knot and was thickly peppered with hairpins....The girl gave off a scent of caraway-seed perfume, and something arrogantly foreign (P.12).

Leibel, the coachman, immediately labels her as a show-off. Adele makes no particular effort to endear herself to his stepfather or his large family. On the contrary, she
is quick to show her resentment and impatience. She dislikes the Jewish section of Warsaw for its shabbiness and poverty. Her mother tries to reason with her, pointing out that she has married Meshulam only with a view to providing her daughter with a decent dowry. Adele is rebellious and constantly talks of going away from this Asiatic set-up.

At her first encounter with Asa Heshel, she is frankly sceptical of his achievements. Unlike the others, she is not prepared to accept him as a mathematician or a genius - as Abram claims. She prefers to talk in Polish rather than in Yiddish, thus showing her modern bent of mind. In contrast to her precise and elegant tone, Asa is diffident and can only stammer his replies. Her questions reveal her familiarity with the different subjects, and a logical mind.

She is surprised to find Asa Heshel described as a scholar whereas she, with her higher education, cannot think of making such claims. In spite of her mother's attempts to silence her, she maintains her own point of view that in order to be a scholar one has to follow a systematic method of learning under the guidance of able teachers: "That's the style these days. Every Yeshivah student is a Newton....I've been to Switzerland and I've seen all these geniuses of yours. They lack elementary education" (P.52).

Adele is careful about her personal appearance and dress. She is well-mannered though not very friendly.
Initially she sees in Hadassah a potential friend as both have been educated under the modern system and do not appreciate all the age-old Jewish customs. But Asa Heshel's interest in Hadassah and the latter's willingness to teach him Polish suddenly ignites a spark of jealousy in Adele as it makes her conscious of her own lonely existence. Whereas Hadassah is in the midst of family and friends, much adored for her beauty and intelligence, Adele is alone but for the company of her mother. Uprooted from her familiar surroundings, she finds herself a stranger among the noisy Moskats, and often misses her dead father, a quiet and scholarly type of person. She feels completely out of place, and repeatedly expresses her desire to go back to her studies in Switzerland.

Something in Asa Heshel reminds Adele of her own father. Particularly his air of vulnerability and bashfulness rouses her sympathy. She resents his getting so easily attracted towards Hadassah whom she considers shallow and showy like a doll. Adele is no beauty like Hadassah, but she is clearly far more intelligent. She forms her own opinion of people, and often does not hesitate to speak her mind: "I have the same temperament as my father. I speak frankly - and I make enemies. I am afraid that I'll come to a bad end" (P.84).
Very early in her relationship with Asa Heshel, she is able to recognize that his troubles stem from his lack of confidence. She offers him friendship and guidance: "'You're a queer combination', she said. 'The small-town' Yeshivah student and the cosmopolitan ... What you need is someone to be a real friend to you - and you need a lot of discipline' (P.88). She offers to help him with his studies, and feels she can do it better than Hadassah, as the latter lacks sincerity and depth in learning. Adele recognizes Asa's potential and finds excuses for him: "He's from a fine rabbinical family - and he's cultured and is intelligent. If he fell into the right hands, he could become..." (P. 102). She also requests Meshulam not to scold him as it would hurt his ego. Not content with a merely mechanical existence, she feels that life is not easy without some understanding of things.

Adele holds modern views on the question of marriage too. She does not like the idea of getting married through the services of a match-maker, but believes in marrying for love. She even discusses her views openly with Meshulam Moskat when he talks to her about marriage. She speaks with confidence about Hadassah and Asa Heshel: "It's not his fault. She has got some sort of notion in her mind. He's
not for her and she's not for him" (P.103). In spite of his initial resentment towards his stepdaughter, old Meshulam appreciates her logical approach to problems. So he leaves with words of advice and not of anger.

Hadassah's flight with Asa Heshel and Meshulam's illness provoke mixed responses among the family members. Adele feels terribly upset not over her stepfather's condition but because of Asa's desertion:

But that the provincial Asa Heshel should pick himself up and run off with Hadassah - that was something she could not accept....it was like a slap in the face. She regretted bitterly that she had agreed to have him work on her father's commentary. She was ashamed that she had spoken to him the way she had, and had volunteered to tutor him. She had degraded herself, and all he had done was jeer at her. That's the way it had always been with her - in Brody, in Vienna, and now here in Warsaw. When it came to men she was simply an unfortunate. Was she really so ugly, or did she have faults she was not aware of? (P.182).

Adele's self-examination is soon followed by acceptance of her lot: "She would make peace with her destiny. She would reconcile herself to never having a husband, children, a home of her own. She would live alone" (P.183). Adele
blames herself for responding so warmly to Asa's simplicity. She feels that the latter has betrayed her senselessly by running away with Hadassah.

Adele's decision to live alone is soon forgotten. When a letter from Asa Heshel arrives unexpectedly, she is overjoyed in spite of the circumstances under which it is written. Asa Heshel makes it quite clear that he is forced to write to her because hers is virtually the only address he remembers. His real purpose is to contact Abram through her, and thus to gather information about Hadassah. Yet in her eagerness Adele ignores this fact and sends him a long, emotional reply complete with her photograph and flowers. Thus it is she who takes the initiative in the matter. Her marriage to Asa is a hurried affair. While Adele claims that it was Asa heshel who pressed her into marrying him, Asa takes just the opposite view.

Marriage marks for Adele a definite step towards success in life. It is not only her victory over Hadassah, but also over her own bad luck. Whereas earlier she had considered herself unlucky in love, now she is full of enthusiasm. Her decision to go to Switzerland is her first step in this direction, although ostensibly she has gone there to further her studies. She deliberately seeks Asa out and offers him her friendship as well as financial help.
She even casually mentions Hadassah's engagement to Fishel. Asa's certainty of losing Hadassah, coupled with Adele's persuasion, draws him into marriage, although Adele persuades herself into believing that it is due to Asa's undying love for her:

It turns out that he has been in love with me all the time. When he saw me he practically threw himself at me. It was quite plain that Hadassah has completely gone out of his mind. The whole thing was never anything more than an adventure for him; he hasn't even bothered to write to her (P.221).

She is oblivious of the fact that he has written to her not one but many letters. She further adds:

... the very first evening we were together he told me he loved me and asked me to marry him....I could tell that he was being sincere; you know, Mother, that I'm not fooled by empty compliments.... All the time he was talking to me, I felt such sympathy for him (P.222).

Yet it seems that the usually careful and intelligent Adele has been deceived by the show of sincerity on Asa's part. Sympathy rather than love for Asa becomes the basis for the marriage. With some engineering on Adele's part, and lack of resistance on Asa Heshel's the marriage comes to
materialize. There is also the fact that Asa Heshel acts for Adele as a substitute for her dead father:

...here in Switzerland I saw him in an entirely different light. He is so romantic, and so deeply in love. Sometimes he talks such playful nonsense... And he has so much of Papa in him! Sometimes, when he begins to talk, I really have the illusion that it is Papa speaking (P.222).

To Adele's one-sided thinking, her marriage appears predestined. Moreover, the familiar pattern of marriage and love appeals to her. She thinks that as in the case of her parents, she too has fallen in love with her husband after marriage. They have a quiet wedding with only a few friends present. Adele treasures every moment of it and remembers every small detail of the ceremony. In her relationship with Asa Heshel, she regards herself as the stronger partner and wishes to protect him from others:

He is as bashful as a child and wants to conceal everything from other people. And at the same time he says things that are simply unbelievable. I have to watch him all the time, to make sure that people don't get the wrong impression.... He has absolutely no sense of discipline, but you may be sure that I'll be watching out for him from now on. He is really very capable, and I'm sure that he'll go far. He doesn't realize how lucky he is that he has me as his wife. Without me he would literally have died here (P.224).
In a way, rescuing Asa becomes a mission for Adele. It gives her a sense of purpose and moral superiority.

Even the euphoric tone of her letter describing her marriage cannot conceal the fact that she is aware of the shortcomings in Asa Heshel's character. She can see that he is childish and impulsive, but she hopes to correct him through her love and devotion. In spite of the romantic haze of her marriage, Adele retains something of her practical nature. This is seen in her reminding her mother of her dowry and also in her requests for the continuation of her weekly allowance.

Whereas Hadassah's marriage to Asa Heshel fails because both are equally emotional and unstable, Adele's marriage fails due to the basic incompatibility between her and Asa. Asa Heshel's irresponsible behaviour and immaturity make him a very poor husband. Even then Adele does not give up. It is Asa Heshel who runs away, throwing off all his responsibilities. He chooses to remain a fugitive, an outsider.

Asa's inconstancy very soon brings disillusionment to Adele. Her letter to her mother two years after her marriage reveals her almost desperate state. In spite of all her efforts to help Asa Heshel and to keep him away from Hadassah, Asa becomes restless and eager to break away. As
a result, Adele's marriage turns into something of a nightmare:

...your daughter has fallen into a living grave. In the two years that I've been married, I can honestly say that I haven't had one happy month. The first few days I was really happy. I thought that at last I could see the end of all my years of loneliness. But soon it was plain that my miserable fortune was still following me (P.239).

She is shocked by his irresponsibility and duplicity. While he can be very polite to strangers and preach ideals, in private he can be quite cold-hearted and cruel, and behave crazily. He rejects all Adele's efforts to help him and goes on drifting as before. This, coupled with his abnormal behaviour worries Adele to distraction. Unlike other normal people, Asa does not want a secure home complete with children. He moves from lodging to lodging, dragging Adele after him. The very thought of parenthood is terrifying for him. He even denies that he is married. Asa wants to be free from all responsibilities so that whenever he finds the going rough, he may quit and run away. Such behaviour causes embarrassment for Adele. She can only hope that her mother-in-law would be able to make Asa see reason. Her desperate state makes her seek Divine help and intervention.
Asa Heshel's version of their wedding is the exact opposite of Adele's. Adele's repeated talk of love and all her accusations against him leave Asa unmoved:

What was the use of all this babbling? They had an agreement, hadn't they? Before they left for Poland he had promised to introduce her to his family and spend at least a few days with her at her mother's. That promise he was going to keep. All her talk about love for him and his treachery was hopeless repetition. She had known, the very day she had dragged him to the canopy, that he loved Hadassah, not her. She herself had called that marriage an experiment - two people living together without love. He could show her these words in her own handwriting (P.248).

Adele feels comforted when she finds that, in spite of her husband's inconstancy, she is warmly welcomed by his family. Her polite manners and willingness to obey endear her to the ladies in the family:

His mother drew Asa Heshel into a corner and whispered to him that the daughter-in-law he had brought her was treasure, intelligent and good. She wanted him to promise her that he would honour Adele loyally and guard her against all harm. His sister Dinah winked knowingly at him, a clear sign that her sister-in-law
was to her liking. His aunts and cousins hung on her every word and gazed at her with adoration (P.255).

Her success makes Adele feel momentarily elated: "Adele kept throwing triumphant glances towards him, as though she were saying: 'Your family, and they're all on my side! To them, I'm your wife, not Hadassah" (P.255). She repeatedly addresses Finkel as 'mother-in-law' and gives long accounts of her distinguished family background. In spite of her education abroad, she readily shares the domestic chores with the ladies. Yet this feeling of superiority does not last long. Her elation dies when she discovers that, despite all her careful planning, she cannot make Asa Heshel remain faithful to her. The formalities of his visit over, Asa seizes the first opportunity to escape to Hadassah, thus spelling defeat for Adele. Asa goes on meeting Hadassah in spite of the scandal it causes in his family circles. Selfish and impractical as he is, he thinks nothing of drawing Hadassah away from the life of comfort she is accustomed to. Asa turns a deaf ear to the persuasion and upbraiding of Adele's mother and stepfather. Adele, with her correct reading of Asa's character, predicts that he is not going to remain constant to Hadassah.

Adele's strength of purpose is seen in her determination to hold Asa Heshel true to their marriage vows. She follows him from Shvider to Usefov and back, and,
face to face with him, openly accuses him of infidelity. Suddenly, she breaks down, and true to his character, Asa Heshel runs away from the place, in order to escape her.

More than Asa heshel or Hadassah, Adele has a strong sense of duty. Even though there is no hope of getting back her husband's love, she loves and respects her mother-in-law and ungrudgingly discharges her duties towards her. Asa's mother reciprocates the sentiment. Arriving alone and tired in Warsaw, she is avoided by her son, but warmly welcomed by her daughter-in-law. Asa displays his cowardice by unceremoniously leaving his mother on Adele's doorstep and running away. The Hendlers' servant, not knowing her, takes her to be a beggar and offers her a coin. This hurts Adele even more than Asa's desertion of her. She does not hesitate to criticize his lack of courage:

You ought to have at least the courage to face things. Please don't imagine for a moment that I want to get you to come back. When you ran away from Shvider you showed the things you're capable of. You can imagine what my mother and stepfather thought. I tried to look for you, but you hid somewhere like a thief... But anyway, nothing surprises me now. If a son can abandon a woman like your mother... If you've got an ounce of honour in you, you'll come to see her (P.296).
She reminds him that hiding cannot solve his problems. Sooner or later, he would have to meet her, even if it is only to discuss the question of divorce.

In spite of Asa Heshel's initial denial of his involvement with Hadassah, she makes him admit it and recount all the details of their meetings. Yet she fails to be angry with him:

How could she feel any anger at this awkward youth, with his chasidic gestures - the strange mixture of embarrassment and shameless confession? She could see now that he would never change. That quick brain, behind that high forehead, would find a justification for any transgression (P. 297).

Still she is not prepared to give up her rights without putting up a fight. In spite of the fact that she is unable to hold the love of her husband, she is not going to hand him over to Hadassah so easily: "'The poor fool!' Adele thought. 'I'll not divorce him. Why make her respectable? Let her stay the whore'" (P. 297). At the same time she is courageous and is prepared to accept her responsibilities. While the news that she is expecting a child startles Asa Heshel, she remains calm. She even jocularly comments that since it is she who would be bearing the child, he should not get flustered about it.
Adele's attitude towards her husband remains a mixture of hatred and love. Even as she hates his duplicity and his escapist attitude, her anger is more strongly directed towards Hadassah for stealing her husband. At the same time Adele feels sympathy for the childish, immature personality of Asa Heshel and loves him in spite of his lapses. She repeatedly offers him a chance to come back and resume a normal life where he can pursue his scholarly ambitions. That is why, on the eve of his leaving to join the army, she visits Asa in his rooms although she is aware of his resentment. She offers him a practical solution to the problem. Better than anybody else, she knows that Asa Heshel is not cut out to be a soldier. So she suggests that they should escape to Switzerland with the money she has been able to raise, and there live in peace. She reminds Asa Heshel of his duties: to his mother, to her, to their unborn child, and even to himself:

If you go away, I'm left absolutely at sea. You know the Jewish law better than I do....What are you doing with your life? You're killing your mother—all for the sake of that idiot....I'm your wife and you're my husband. I'm carrying your child under my heart. (P.335).

Quite predictably, Asa wants to own none of these responsibilities. On the contrary, he alleges that Adele's
pregnancy is due to her carelessness alone. Adele perceives Asa's attachment to Hadassah as nothing but madness. She can foresee that it is not going to bring him real happiness. So in return for her offer of freedom she wants Asa Heshel to give up Hadassah.

Adele realizes clearly that in spite of all his talk about love, Asa Heshel's love for Hadassah does not really exist. He has only talked himself into believing that he is madly in love with Hadassah, but actually he is incapable of any kind of enduring attachment. Even Asa Heshel recognizes Adele's logical mind:

There was something mannish, and rationalistic about her forehead, her lifted eyebrows. Asa heshel had a strange feeling; it was as though, behind the feminine façade, the spirit of her father, the scholar, had broken through (P.336).

Even as Adele criticizes her husband for his shortcomings, any show of concern or affection his part makes her happy. When Asa Heshel cautions her against leaning too far out of the window, she feels elated because he is still concerned about her safety. She believes that behind that mask of indifference he has developed some affection for his unborn child. This makes her re solve not to give him up as there is some hope of his coming back to her: "She suddenly realized that she would not listen either to her stepfathr
or to her mother. She would not divorce him. Never! Legally he would forever remain her husband, she his wife" (P.337). She longs to with him in spite of all the distance that has developed between them.

Five years spent in the army and in Russia fail to bring about any change in Asa Heshel. He remains as unsettled as before. On his return to Warsaw, he tries to avoid meeting his family for as long as possible. When he finally visits his mother, she tries to remind him of his duties:

What you are doing is wrong. You have a wife and a child. It is to them you should have gone first. Woe is me, you don't yet know your own son... She's still your wife... What have you got against her? She's a dear, devoted woman. And, God help me, she's suffered so much on your account. If you only knew what she has done for us in these hard years, you would realize how you wrong her .... And the child - Is it the child's fault? (P.430).

All these admonitions leave no impression on Asa.

As the time for Adele's delivery approaches, her mother and mother-in-law take precautions against evil spirits by placing holy texts around her. Speaking of the birth of Adele's child, Edward Alexander comments:
Even the fabric of daily life is interwoven with the Messianic expectation, so that Adele's delivery pains provoke the remark 'Everything is attended by suffering, ... birth ... Messiah ...' With the approach of Hitler, even many of the pious go off to Palestine, complaining about their elders and their god: 'The old generation knows only one thing. Messiah will come. God knows, he is taking his time'.

In spite of the difficult times and lack of support from Asa Heshel, Adele does not despair. Instead, she takes her duties as a parent seriously, and tries her best to bring up her son. She refuses to seek an easy way out of her problems by marrying Wolf Hendler's son, who is a doctor. Adele nurtures a vague hope that some day Asa Heshel would return to her. On his arrival she speaks to you. Why did you come back? "To whom? I should think five years was time enough for a man to make up his mind" (P.436). Having little hope of regaining Asa's love, Adele reminds him of his obligations towards his son. In a cool and business like manner she places her demand for financial support in exchange for which she is prepared to give him a divorce. She has to appear hard in spite of her love for him: "I loved you once—even more than you know. But now everything is dead" (P.437). It appears that her previous talk of their marriage as an experiment was nothing but bluster. Adele was prepared to adopt any means to draw
Asa Heshel into marriage, hoping that with her love and devotion she would be able to win his love in time.

With her knowledge of Asa's nature, she can predict his movements: "I know your dodges. The first thing you did was to run off to her, even before you went to your mother... What have you got there on your left side? A heart or a stone?" (P.438). As she listens to Asa's account of his life in these five years, she realizes that he has not become maturer in any way in spite of all his experience: "His talk seemed to Adele to be a jumble of unrelated things....He still had neither profession nor plans; neither real love for anybody, nor responsibility" (P.438).

She also derives some comfort from the fact that if Asa Heshel has betrayed her for the sake of Hadassah, he has not remained faithful to the latter either. This makes her even with Hadassah. Soon it is replaced by pity as she realizes that Hadassah's lot is going to be no better than her own so far as Asa Heshel is concerned. Asa Heshel's irresponsible behaviour suggests that he is far from being normal:

You're crazy, Asa Heshel, crazy to death. You don't run wild in the streets, but you're insane just the same. I have only one hope left—that your son won't take after you... If you have a spark of decency left, see to it that he doesn't have to suffer want in addition (P.439).
Asa agrees with Adele's evaluation of his character. His lack of interest in his surroundings, even in his own son, makes him think that there must be something seriously wrong with himself.

Long after Asa Heshel's marriage to Hadassah, his mother and sister still do not recognize her status as his wife. To them, she remains an outsider as before:

Neither his mother nor Dinah ever visited him at his flat on Bagatella Street. They still sided with Adele. Every fortnight Adele was in the habit of bringing David to pay a visit to his grandmother for a Sabbath meal. She still addressed the old woman as mother-in-law. And Finkel still referred to Hadassah as 'that one' (P.560).

Fleeing from a possible arrest, when Asa Heshel goes to visit Adele in her apartment, they are ill at ease with each other, finding it difficult to communicate. They can only make desultory conversation on small matters. Adele's desappointment in Asa makes her sarcastic. At the same time she feels satisfied with her own role as mother:

'...What brings you here? she asked. 'You probably wanted to find out whether we had starved to death.'...'As long as David has a mother, he won't go hungry', Adele said firmly. 'I gave him money to travel
with, and a few zlotys pocket money. Most of the delegates are boys from well-to-do families, and I don't want my child to feel ashamed' (P.566).

Asa Heshel's affair with Barbara gives her momentary satisfaction, as she thinks of Hadassah's unhappiness. At the same time it makes her feel sorry for Asa as it marks a further degradation in his character. Sweet as her revenge on Hadassah is, it is not unexpected since it is logical enough to expect that a man who is false to one woman would be false to others too. As for Asa, she can not bring herself to condemn him.

As far as she was concerned, she had long since written him off as lost. There was only one thing that was wrong: she could not hate him as he deserved. Her anger with him was always tempered with pity....Why should a person want to bring about his own downfall, she wondered. That was puzzling (P.566).

His behaviour continues to puzzle her in spite of their long-standing familiarity. Even though their marriage has been short-lived and full of bitter feelings, somehow Adele has never felt free to marry again, to make another bid for security and happiness:

Strange that his irregular goings on had somehow prevented her from marrying again. It had often
occurred to her that as long as this riddle remained unsolved she could not free herself from him. She still had the nebulous conviction that he would find nothing but disappointment with everyone else and would come back to her (P.567).

She tries to find excuses for him, and offers him consolation. In spite of her previous demand for money, she does not blame him when he fails to pay her allowance. Instead, she offers him help. She forgives him his lapses and can even feel magnanimous towards Hadassah: "You've committed a great evil against me; but don't do the same to Hadassah. I've got strong shoulders; she's sick. She'll never survive it" (P.568). It is as if she has grown wiser, like her mother. For a moment her mother's spirit seems to be finding expression through her.

As she grows older, Adele's interests become more concentrated in her son who is intelligent and hard-working. Eventually she sells her house and some of her belongings, gives away the rest, and starts for Palestine to join her son. While making arrangements for her journey her methodical mind dislikes the glib answers of the manager, but she is neither willing nor able to do anything about it as her only interest is to be near her son anyhow. Asa Heshel accompanies Adele on her trip from Warsaw to the place from where the boat to Palestine is scheduled to leave.
On the verge of leaving him forever, Adele is comforted by his presence, and even starts daydreaming:

Adele leaned her forehead against Asa Heshel's shoulder and dozed. She was tired out with worry and anxiety. As she napped, with the night lamp glimmering in her eyes, she imagined that she was still young and still Asa Heshel's wife; they were on their honeymoon in Switzerland (P.604).

Deprived of love in real life, she can derive some comfort only from her fantasies. Before leaving Asa Heshel, she makes one last attempt to find the real cause behind his irregular conduct, but fails to draw any answer from him. Then suddenly, in a flash the real explanation bursts in upon her:

It occurred to Adele that she had never been able to understand what it was that tormented him. Was it the failure to have had a career? Did his heart long for someone? She was on the point of asking, but suddenly she knew: he was not a worldly man by his very essence. He was one of those who must serve God or die. He had forsaken God, and because of this he was dead - a living body with a dead soul. She was astonished that this simple truth had eluded her until now (P.606).
Just as her bus is leaving, she cries out his name as if she wanted to tell him something very important but the bus speeds away, and the moment is lost. Later on, in the midst of the war between Poland and Germany, she returns to Warsaw, as the ship carrying them to Palestine is turned back. Like many other Jews, she remains in wartorn Warsaw, waiting for something to happen.

Barbara Fishelson presents a different aspect of womanhood. Daughter of a converted Jew who is a pastor, she is radical in her ideas. She dreams of a socialistic solution to everyday problems. Her views on love are unconventional too. In spite of her brief acquaintance with Asa Heshel, she is ready to start an affair with him. She does not hesitate to telephone him in the middle of the night and drag him out of his home with talk of a possible arrest. This is in fact the immediate cause of the break-up of Asa's marriage to Hadassah. In spite of her intimacy with Asa, Barbara insists on paying her share of the expenses all the time. She professes to be a socialist but we seldom find her actively engaged in such work. Later, when war breaks out, she wants to escape abroad, rather than stay in Warsaw and wait for certain death. As Asa and Barbara plod on through the rubble-littered streets of the city on their way to Pinnie's house, for a moment the
uncharitable thought flashes through Barbara's mind that with Hadassah's death Asa Heshel is free to marry her. But her desire for self preservation wins, so that she is ready to give up Asa Heshel:

'This is fascism', thought Barbara; 'I fought it and did not know what it was. Now I see it. But what am I doing here? Why am I wandering about the city? I must flee to day!' An ugly idea occurred to her. Now that Hadassah was gone, Asa Heshel would marry her (P.633).

This shows that in spite of all her talk in support of free love, the idea of marriage appeals to her. She starts urging Asa to run away from Warsaw while the bridge is still standing. This, coming at a time when Asa has just learnt of his wife's death, and is going to visit his daughter, speaks of selfishness on Barbara's part.

Singer portrays a variety of women characters in the novel on various levels. Some, like Finkel and Dinah, follow the line of Pious Jewish wives and mothers. They remain faithful to their husbands in prosperity and adversity, accepting their lot calmly. Finkel, deserted by her husband early in life, pins all her hopes on her son. Yet when Asa belies her hopes, she is neither angry with him nor resentful. As a dutiful mother, she tries to make
him see reason, yet does not criticize him severely when he behaves in a wayward manner. In spite of the respect she had enjoyed as the Rabbi's daughter in Tereshpol Minor, she adjusts quickly to life in the big city among strangers. Dinah, too, offers a cheerful front to the world, in spite of the fact that her husband is hardly able to support her and the children. She is hard-working and hospitable. In spite of Asa's irregular behaviour, she is never harsh to him, and even offers him food when her family is living in a terribly poor condition.

Rosa Frumetl is portrayed as a woman with a more practical outlook. After the death of her first husband all her efforts are directed towards protecting her daughter's interests. Although faithful to the memory of her dead husband, she agrees to marry Meshulam Moskat mainly for the sake of providing her daughter with a suitable dowry. She thinks highly of her first husband's scholastic achievements, and wants to have his manuscripts published with financial help from Meshulam. Later on, after Meshulam's death, she contracts yet another marriage in order to lead a respectable life away from the bickering Moskats. She prefers a quiet life, and attaches much importance to the virtues of traditional Jewish values. This is seen in her advice to her daughter after the latter's marriage. Even in the early days of her acquaintance with Asa Heshel, she does not hesitate to
criticize him for cutting off his sidelocks. Rosa Fruemetl can easily take up a fight when her daughter's happiness is threatened. Thus she seeks out Hadassah in Usefov, and accuses her openly of trying to entice Asa away from his wife. She extends her steady support to Adele all through her separation from Asa Heshel.

The older generation of Moskat women range from the disciplined Pearl to the immature, showy Leah. Meshulam Moskat's eldest daughter-in-law, Esther, or Queen Esther as she is called, is huge in size, overbearing in manner, and a voracious eater. In spite of her age and respectable position, she indulges in gossip with Saltsha, her sister-in-law. Pearl, Meshulam's eldest daughter, is a hard-hearted business woman, but at the same time is a strict follower of Jewish laws and customs. As she does not like her noisy family members, she keeps the minimum contact with them. Hannah is of a nagging type, forever watching Pinnie for any sign of indiscretion.

Abram's wife Hama presents a complete contrast to him. Whereas Abram is boisterous and is always in search of fresh adventures, Hama is melancholic, and given to frequent fits of weeping. Although not much poorer than her brothers, she is always ill-dressed and presents a diffident manner: "She looked like a nondescript pauper who by some miracle had
found herself the daughter of a wealthy house" (P. 77). Her husband's indifference to her has made her bitter and resentful towards others.

Leah, Meshulam's youngest daughter, sees herself as belonging to the younger generation. Although fat and nearly forty, she prefers the company of her nieces. She entertains them with scandalous gossip unbecoming of her age and position as the wife of a holyman. While Moshe Gabriel is respected in the community for his depth of learning and pious chassidic ways, Leah criticizes him and often talks of divorce. In order to satisfy her girlhood dream of marrying Koppel, she divorces Moshe Gabriel in the face of criticism from family and friends. Yet neither her second marriage nor a life of affluence in America makes her happy. She remains dissatisfied and irritable.

The younger women are largely influenced by their modern European education. They have scant respect for traditional values and customs. Masha, the daughter of Moshe Gabriel, gives up her religion for the sake of marrying a Christian boy. Caught in the constant conflict of different religious backgrounds, she becomes neurotic and embittered. Lacking support from either religion, she is left suspended in uncertainty. Stepha, too, plays with the idea of love for some time, first going out with one young
From time to time different characters in the novel offer their observations on women. A man like Koppel regards them as easy conquests. Abram Shapiro spends his whole life in chasing one woman after another, and nearly dies in Manya's room. Reb Moshe Gabriel avoids them scrupulously. Pinnie sees them as the source of all trouble:

What did they want, these women? They were the ones who caused all the trouble, and it was the men who got the blame. It was the men who had to chase about and slave, while they sit around in the house like princesses, making all sorts of complaints....Men died before their time, and they lived unto a ripe old age (P.577).

Speaking of the characters in The Family Moskat, Ben Siegel observes:

Many have misread The Family Moskat as a bitter indictment of Poland's prewar Jews. Singer omits none of their flaws, tragic or pathetic, on the other hand, he unfailingly endows his embattled spirits with compensating flashes of generosity and courage. Failing to win our admiration, they evoke our compassion and understanding.10

Thus while Adele invites the reader's criticism and ridicule
man and then with another. Yet when she ultimately marries, it ends in failure, and she is divorced from her husband. Dosha chooses to remain unmarried in spite of her father's disapproval.

Speaking of Singer's treatment of marriage in his fiction, Golden comments:

The wedding presents for Singer the supreme device of testing alternatives.... Between Meshulam's third marriage, a sign of dotage, which opens The Family Moskat, and Hadassah's death to release Asa Heshel at the end, the coupling of pair after pair is chronicled and duly tested for intensity of fusion.

Not many marriages survive the test. Thus the general atmosphere is one of dissension and discord. Repeatedly, in The Family Moskat, Singer depicts the failure of marriage owing to some cause or other. Ida Prager, Gina Genendel, Bashele and Leah soon find themselves released from the marriage bonds. Bashele is a good wife; simple, hard-working, and prepared to trust Koppel's judgment in everything. Yet, in spite of her unquestioning devotion, she is divorced. Only in very few cases the marriage is seen to be a success, as in the case of Shosha and Simon Bendel.
for her machinations in marrying Asa Heshel, her suffering later on evokes sympathy. Her courage and strong sense of duty also give her character greater strength. In spite of adverse circumstances, she continues to fight, and tries to bring up her son as a better individual than his father. In a way, Hadassah too deserves our sympathy for her unfailing loyalty to Asa Heshel in spite of his erratic behaviour. For this she has to give up everything she had once loved, and choose a life of isolation. Rather than give in to familial and social pressure, Gina Genendel goes on struggling to keep her independence till she achieves her one goal of marrying Hertz Yanovar.

Of the Christian women in the novel, only Klonya is described in some detail. She is introduced very early in the novel as a very close friend of Hadassah. She stands by Hadassah in times of difficulty. Even in Hadassah's later years, while she is living at Otwotsk, Klonya visits her regularly. Klonya's mother is pictured as a simple, affectionate woman who loves Hadassah as her own child and offers her refuge when she needs it. Manek's mother appears only briefly, to echo her husband's sentiments in the matter of Manek's marriage. Singer once observed:

With The Family Moskat I said to myself, "Warsaw has just been destroyed. No one will ever see the Warsaw I
knew. Let me write about it. Let this Warsaw not disappear forever"....But I said to myself, "I can only write about the Jewish Warsaw, not the Catholic Warsaw." I didn't know the Catholics as well as the Jews."
NOTES


2. Quoted by Schultz, P. 84.


7. Schultz, P. 87.
