1. City & Shtetl

My essay is informed by a question: why have the Jews and modern Jewish writers persisted in their love affair with city life? The folk proverb, die Stadtluft macht frei--the city air liberates--suggests one kind of explanation. Episodes ranging from the Book of Esther--"The city of Shushan was perplexed"--to scenes and works from the contemporary Brazilian writer Moacyr Scliar, the Israeli A. B. Yehoshua, the North Americans Saul Bellow, Grace Paley, Philip Roth, and Rebecca Goldstein reinforce the claim. But our fascination has not been limited to cities and especially in recent years has extended to its geographical and cultural opposite, the shtetl. Several recent works including Eva Hoffman's The Shtetl and Allen Hoffman's Small Worlds have focused on that smaller world, perhaps in response to its utter destruction by the Nazis, perhaps also in the effort to find a way to respond to the suburbanization of modern life, in particular American Jewish life and the simultaneous increasing secularism and piety of its Jewish urban villagers.

The contrast between city and suburb could be analyzed historically, relegating the city-centered fictions to an older generation, and seeing in the new suburban-centered novels the wave of the Jewish future. While such a typology is at present speculative, it is clear that we are at a moment of change in the literary and social history of Jewish writing. At such a point, Rebecca Goldstein's work is of particular importance, for in encompassing both suburban and urban worlds (as well as that of the shtetl) and seeking to explore their meanings, it points us to a fuller understanding not only of the sociological but the literary, political, and (even) spiritual dimensions of our contemporary situation.

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1 The comment of Wittgenstein is worth attending to as well: "Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, entry 18, 8e.
What is striking about her most recent novel, Mazel, published in 1995--which recapitulates many of the themes of her earlier work, especially The Mind-Body Problem, (1983) her first novel, and her collection of stories, Strange Attractors, (1993) in which the central characters of Mazel first appear--is the powerful dialogue between and among shtetl, suburb, and city around which it is constructed. In this novel suburb, shtetl, and city-spaces illuminate an abiding concern of Jewish life, that of the relation of exile and diaspora. Mazel is in part a response to the suburban appropriation of some of the central values of the shtetl. However, the shtetl is a world obsessed by the dislocation of exile, while the city provides the chance to construct an empowering diasporic homeland within the larger condition of differing ranges of Jewish powerlessness--and the suburb, though similar to the shtetl, partakes of both conditions. In this interplay Rebecca Goldstein's novel articulates and elaborates central dimensions of exile and diaspora. For her central characters are caught in dancing at two weddings, unable to abandon either world. Living in shtetl, suburb, and city they are marked by the political, sociological, metaphysical, and cultural values of each, and thus enact the experience of modern Jewish life.

People change their names as they change their places in this novel, but instead of fitting in because of their new identities, they become outsiders in a different way. Personalities, situations, and events are doubled. Sharply differentiated figures take on the life-histories of dead siblings, and elaborate their narratives as their own. These doubled lives echo the worlds of gothic fiction and an interspersed realist narrative; and these mixed genres of modernist fiction are reinforced by classical Jewish forms. They include the chasidic parable, instances of Talmudic dialectic, and fables approaching the brevity and continuing resonance of Biblical narrative appropriate to characters who seem at times to partake of a second soul--as if the Shekhinah had awarded them its Sabbath gift on a permanent basis and thus taken them out of the condition of exile. Though they are worldless lufmenschen, they are also seekers of the way. Time plays tricks on us in Mazel. Scenes years apart merge into each other, events that changed the lives of grandparents are re-lived by grandchildren, the future becomes past and the past

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2See David Biale's important book on power and powerlessness.
present. The reader joins the characters in this process of de-centering. Neither is anchored to a central scene or figure or place; instead, experiences flow into each other.

Rather than the individualist character of the realistic novel, we encounter a different literary mode. *Mazel* lacks the narrative challenge thrown at the reader by a Bellow novel, or the strategy of entrapment of the reader in the seemingly autobiographical narrative characteristic of Philip Roth’s fictions. Rebecca Goldstein’s novel invites us into the conversation in an action that combines the almost lost art of Jewish conversation and the womans' world of sharing (feminist) discourse. In this fictional universe rather than engaging in the linear uni-directionality of events in collision, we are part of a matrix of experience, elicited in the dominant metaphor and image of the novel of "like circles in water." Instead of being forced with Bellow’s Herzog to resolve contradictions at the heart of western culture, or struggling with Roth’s Portnoy in the middle of a Jewish joke to avoid becoming a scapegoat for an immigrant family’s and community’s habits, Goldstein’s characters move through a landscape of possibility. Sharing their difficulties rather than competing for resources, they dwell in a potentially revolutionary time-space of their own construction.

In *Mazel* many characters travel great distances, and their personalities change in response to their new circumstances. Wandering into the fields adjacent to Shluftchev, Fraydel thinks of going off with the gypsies; Sore travels with the Bilbulnik Art Theatre to Lemberg, Brest-Litovsk, Grodno, Lodz, Pinsk, Krakow, Bialystock, Lublin, and Vilna; their younger brother, Tzali, travels from Shluftchev to Vilna to study in the "prestigious Ramalyes Yeshiva" (*Mazel* 180); Leiba wanders far and wide in her commercial pursuits, and she and her husband, Nachum, like their children move from Shluftchev to Warsaw. Family relationships change as they move from the shtetl to the city, where the Sonnenbergs encounter distant relatives who reshape their lives in urban terms. The Saunders boys begin their travels for career purposes: Jascha and Maurice move to Warsaw, and then keep going. Maurice moves from Poland to Palestine to America, and never settles down. Wandering becomes a way of life for him.

He never could sit out a New York summer. Once, in desperation, he had joined a freighter headed for Iceland, offering himself as a cook's assistant. He had figured that all he'd have to do was stir the pots and peel the potatoes. But then the cook had gotten seasick, and he had been ordered to take over. Discovered as an impostor, he had been relegated to swabbing the decks.
until they reached Reykjavik, where they had put him ashore. He had eventually made his way back to New York by way of Labrador, bringing home a bunch of good stories, filled with his wonder at the endless variety of human lives to be found on this planet. (327-328)  

Sore leaves Shluftchev for Warsaw, where she becomes Sasha, moves to Vilna, conceives Chloe there, and gives birth to her in Palestine, travels to America, and, though happily settled in New York, continues to travel. Her daughter, Chloe, who has grown up and made an academic career in Manhattan also has a vagabond spirit. Their constant movement marks them as diasporan figures, who, in James Clifford’s witty phrasing, exchange roots for routes. Theirs is the "wandering meaning" articulated by Shirley Kaufman; to borrow the title of her essay, which draws on that of her selected poems, their roots are in the air.  

These characters are at home in cities. Having abandoned their shtetlach, they respond to the dynamism of modern city life with energy and enthusiasm. While some characters like Phoebe and Nachum retreat into themselves in part perhaps as a result of the urban overload analyzed by Georg Simmel in his classic work, The Metropolis & Modern Life, most of the central persons in this novel, among them Sore, Hershel, Rosalie, Feliks, and Maurice respond to the incessant urban stimulation by seizing city opportunities. Embracing Emancipation, they abandon religious practice and study, and, instead, frequent coffee-houses, create a theatre company, compose music, write learned articles, fall in and out of love, study at the university, devour and devise the cultural treasures of urban life. What they discover when they get to Warsaw they carry with them and use to reshape all the cities they inhabit: "Jewish Warsaw, which was roughly a third of Warsaw proper was a city of rabbis and swindlers, capitalists and poets, but, most of all, it was a city of talkers. There were so many ideas in the air you could get an education simply by breathing deeply" (Mazel 206). In the city, they make ideas into realities, and in the process turn themselves from luftmenschen into cosmopolitan citizens.  

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3He came back once, after an absence that had seemed particularly long, and told Chloe of the months he had spent driving a cleche, a horse-drawn carriage, in old Quebec. His horse, a temperamental nag, he had named Miessa, the Yiddish for "ugly."


5"Between the crowds and the streetcars and the invention of Mr. Edison, it was difficult for a man to think. And this overwhelming confusion -- a maze of so many streets you could live your whole life in Warsaw and never see them all -- this, according to his sister-in-law was no more than an overgrown Shluftchev! How much more noise and tumult could there be squeezed in between the heaven and the Earth!" (Mazel, p. 169)
While their experience in Warsaw crystallizes their characters, nevertheless, the deep structure of their personalities has been shaped by the experience of the shtetl. Mazel explores the range of experience offered by that world, revealing its determining power at the critical moments of their life-histories: birth, the onset of puberty, marriage, career decisions, child-bearing, old age, and death. Shluftchev-on-the Puddle, to cite its full name, a central site in the novel, occupies more than a third of Mazel. It does not relinquish its hold on its characters, even when they are elsewhere, belying its name, which roughly translates into Sleepy Hollow. Furthermore, this shtetl world is doubled in the novel in suburban Lipton, New Jersey--where the opening and closing sequences take place. Recall how Sasha characterizes Lipton, as the Sabbath before the preparations for Phoebe’s wedding comes to an end, with a sarcastic remark: "Lipton is Shluftchev with a designer label" (Mazel 333). The sarcasm of her comment recalls the satire of Mendele Moycher Seforim, and is echoed in Shluftchev, the name of his generic shtetl. Despite her polemic views--the result of her own experience in escaping from Shluftchev and her sister Fraydel's suicidal experience--Sore/Sasha's view of the deadening power of the shtetl is only one of several central to Mazel.

Whether positive or negative, Shluftchev forms the structure of their memory as well as providing the content of its images; it is the material their urban street-smarts will have to contend with, sort out, and make sense of. Shluftchev is a bounded world, governed by Jewish law and tradition, Jewish habits and ways of life. In it, the logic of Halakha holds. Dominated by that patriarchal system, Shluftchev shapes the personalities, choices, and life-histories of its inhabitants.

When they leave Shluftchev for the city, mazel--the principle of chance--comes into play. In an interview coinciding with the novel's publication in 1995, Rebecca Goldstein calls mazel "the imp of metaphysics," and goes on to provide her shorthand definition: it is "the sly saboteur of cosmic coziness," carrying the force of "Jewish chaos." Her phrasing alerts us to the serious issues she explores in the novel. As a philosopher she is led to questions which she explores in her fiction, including chaos theory, in terms of Jewish tradition--she notes in her interview that her "knowledge of Jewish texts informs her writing 'in almost unconscious ways'"6--in order to sort out potentially universal

reconceptualizations. As Chloe thinks about it at the end of the first chapter of the novel, mazel parallels David Hume's analysis of causation: "All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another, but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem conjoined, but never connected" (Mazel 26). The principle of mazel thus calls into question the power of saychel to determine human life. Given this context, patriarchal reason in the form of the Halakha cannot control these characters: as Chloe thinks about the problem, she realizes that "David Hume sounded just like Sash". She wonders if "Hume's scathingly rigorous analysis of causality" was "nothing more than Sasha and her insistence that there's such a thing as mazel?" (Mazel 26) Even if Shluftchev is governed by iron rules of causation, Hume's analysis and Sasha's joie de vivre provide a way out of the shtetl. Urban life offers them change, transformation, new possibility, in short, a place of mazel.

The opening chapter of the novel thereby concludes on the note struck by the very beginning parable, a dialogue of Mazel and Saychel, which precedes the narrative of this fiction. This dialogue will reappear throughout the novel, constructing a meta-narrative on the level of parable to the events and experiences of the characters.

_Mazel, which is luck in Yiddish, encountered Saychel, or brains, on the road one day, and the two fell into a conversation. Before too long, they began to bicker about which of them was the more important._

_Saychel claimed that with brains anything is possible, but Mazel argued that without luck all the intelligence in the world will come to nothing._

_Soon Saychel and Mazel had reached the point in an argument when there's no going forward without going backward, and at this moment a baby boy was born. Both Saychel and Mazel agreed that one of them should enter the boy, and they would see what would come of it. It was Saychel who slipped himself in, while Mazel settled back and watched._

_To be continued_

With this parable, the novel marks several of its distinguishing themes. Mazel and Saychel meet "on the road," thereby striking the travel note so important in the book. Their argument involves opposing claims about the structure of experience and, by implication, how to make one's way in the world. Philosophical discourse about causality is inflected dynamically: time enters the algorithm in the form of the birth of a baby boy, who is informed by Saychel, the masculinist principle of reason, while
Mazel, who is female, watches, bemused and amused, both guardian angel and inquisitor. The parable also sets the key signature of the novel. A Yiddish folk-situation, this dialogue of the different gender principles, puts into play a Yiddish cultural world which the characters of the novel, whatever their situation, will have to come to grips with—or at least the reader will.

Shluftchev, however, does not offer the only Yiddish dimension to the novel. The Bilbul Art Theater and its triumphant presentation of The Bridegroom throughout the cities and shtetls of Eastern Europe—echoing the embrace of the Yiddish world of its own theatrical traditions from The Dybbuk to Second Avenue—speaks to another aspect of this realm. The Bilbul Art Theater was the spiritual heir to the legendary Vilna Troupe. Their fame grew from their connection to The Dybbuk, "a dark and brooding drama about a dead lover who possesses the soul of his intended bride, after she has been betrothed by her father to another man. Its author had been a Yiddish folklorist named Shlomo Rapaport, who had written under the name S. An-ski. Rapaport had based his play on an old Chasidic legend that he had recorded during one of his ethnographic expeditions, but he had never been able to convince any of the Yiddish actors that he’d known to perform it" (Mazel 308). We learn this as the Bilbulniks are about to conclude their triumphant tour in Vilna, where after An-ski’s death, "the still obscure Vilna Troupe had decided to produce their friend’s play as a memorial to him. They had put everything together in great haste, wanting to open on the night that marked the end of the thirty-day period of mourning. When they opened, they had found themselves with a smash hit. For a few brief years, they had lived at the feverish pace of fame, there within the nimbus of the limelight. They had toured Western Europe and then gone on to America. And there, in America, they had somehow or other fallen apart, a mishpocheh no more, each of them going his or her own separate way and claiming to represent, in his or her very own person, the former Vilna" (Mazel 309). Success in this world does not appear to last; it is tinged with melancholy, death, and it is moment pointed to at the end of the novel, at the wedding of Phoebe: "And then Jason stamped on the glass that symbolizes the destruction of Jerusalem, always remembered in even the happiest of moments" (Mazel 353). While the city makes possible the flight of inspiration and of art, it cannot sustain the transient moment or transform it into a lasting monument.
Shlufcheyv is thus inflected as the pre-modern world of traditional pious Jewish culture, governed by the daled amot of the Law, while the Bilbulniks--whose name appropriately enough means confusion--speak for modern Yiddish urban culture. That vibrant city world, with its dazzling array of Jewish identities both religious and secular, was also destroyed by the Nazis; the utter churbn of the Eastern-European Jewish world has, through nostalgia's inappropriate claim, at times conflated the city and the shtetl, leading to a blurring of distinctions and depriving us of our necessary history, an error Rebecca Goldstein's novel does not fall into. In Shlufcheyv people exist in a dream-like world, which has the completeness of meaning of a classical work of art. In Warsaw, by contrast, the novel's personages must function in the clangorous realm of chaos, whose meanings are subtle, complicated, and depend on chance--on mazel--rather than on saychel’s inexorable logic. And this contrast between shtetl and city central to Mazel calls to mind many of the novels of I. B. Singer, notably The Magician of Lublin. In her interview, Goldstein notes that "Singer even makes a brief appearance in the novel as a red-haired 'newly modernized yeshiva boy (Mazel 207). His is the voice I've been able to internalize," she adds, noting that his autobiographical writings about Warsaw, proved particularly important in her work on Mazel.7

In the city, these shtetl Jews turn their status as luftmenschen into the creative possibilities of modern life. Their very marginality becomes a resource. They continue to learn the lesson of the exodus from Egypt: having been marginal themselves, they are fascinated by marginality everywhere, and do not seek to escape from it so much as to understand its ramifications. Here again Maurice is representative. "No person was too quirky or marginal for Maurice not to want to know how the world looked through his eyes. In fact, the more quirky and marginal, the better. Maurice himself had a great weakness for life in the margins" (328). Maurice, the wanderer, understands the ambiguities of experience.

Like the classic texts of modern Jewish writing, the characters in Rebecca Goldstein's novel cluster around an informing myth,8 the marginal person emerges from the shtetl and seeks a place in the

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7 Brawarsky, Interview, ibid., p. 49.
8 For further discussion see my City Scriptures: Modern Jewish Writing.
freer, more complex, and cosmopolitan life of the city. Rooted in the urban experience of the modern Jewish writer, this myth articulates the strategies by which the fictional protagonists might escape from the traditional tribal realm, as it simultaneously explores the possibilities of citizenship in the newly found civic arena. Paralleling the historical process, the literary work gives it a conscious shape and purpose, defining an ideal city, at the very least a city of imagination, in which protagonist and people might participate in the general enterprise of western culture. This act reflects the modern Jewish status and situation, for the emancipated Jew is "the first cosmopolite and citizen of the world," he is such by virtue of being both stranger and city person.9

Mazel puts this myth of liberation into play, explores it, and complicates it. In this novel the city world of its characters is balanced by the shtetl world of Shluftchev and of suburban Lipton in which some feel more at home. The dialogue between them--between city, shtetl, and suburb--changes the trajectory of its characters. Instead of giving the free-thinker center stage, and legitimating the supposedly inevitable move from tradition to modernity, from communal status to ethnic and personal identity, Mazel helps us to envision the possibility that the city--the bridge between tradition and modernity--may also lead to re-traditionalization. That is, the free-thinker--Sasha in all her glory--must share the stage in this novel with other characters, including her granddaughter, Phoebe. Together, they function in the words of Hannah Arendt as a "conscious pariah"--as someone committed to the difficult problem of critical thinking and living. Phoebe, by contrast with her grandmother, attempts to invent ways to bring the values of tradition into the modern world, as part of the effort to devise a coherent history for herself and her people.

A comic version of this process occurs when Aunt Fruma/Frieda returns from Hamburg and takes Sorela to the Yiddish theater.

She couldn’t anticipate too much. After all, she had seen the dramas of such Germanic geniuses as Wedekind and Hauptmann, performed by the greatest tragedians of the German stage. On the other hand, sitting and watching a good Yiddish play, she couldn’t keep her heart from kicking up like a Chasid at a wedding. Somehow--and completely in spite of her own better judgment, you should understand--she ended up having such a wonderful time. It was like when you go back to

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the old neighborhood after you’ve, thank God, made good. You get all *ferputzt*, change your
dress a million times before deciding, wear your fur even if it’s ninety degrees in the shade, just
so there shouldn’t be the slightest bit of doubt in anybody’s mind. And then what happens but
that the sight of the old places and the old faces makes you go limp with memories, and before
your better judgment can step in and slap some sense into you, you’re actually overcome with
the bittersweetness of nostalgia. (p. 184)

The comedy of manners elicits the problem in a different register with a similar psychological and
intellectual process.

Phoebe, unlike Sasha or Maurice, is not willing to remain an outsider; exactly what kind of an
insider she becomes is an issue the novel will raise and leave open for the reader to decide while
emphasizing the direction of Phoebe's action. From the beginning of the novel Phoebe appears under her
apple-tree in her village, the suburban shtetl Lipton, a figure of rootedness evoking a reiterated Biblical
image of the focalizing power of home, in contrast to her wandering cosmopolitan grandmother.

Much of the energy of the novel is invested in the exploration of the impact of wandering on
Sasha and her colleagues in the Bilbulnik Art Theater. They exemplify Thorstein Veblen's
characterization of the modern Jewish free-thinker: "It appears to be only when the gifted Jew escapes
from the cultural environment created and fed by the particular genius of his own people, only when he
falls into the alien lines of gentile inquiry and becomes a naturalised, though hyphenate, citizen in the
gentile republic of learning, that he comes into his own as a creative leader in the world's intellectual
enterprise." Furthermore, "it is by loss of allegiance, or at the best by force of a divided allegiance to the
people of his origin, that he finds himself in the vanguard of modern inquiry." 10 The social meanings of
the historical process are brought into even sharper focus by Robert Park's phrasing "When . . . the
walls of the medieval ghetto were torn down and the Jew was permitted to participate in the cultural life
of the peoples among whom he lived, there appeared" a person "living and sharing intimately in the
cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break . . . with his past and his
traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now
sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies." 11


Sasha leads the characters of Mazel in dancing at two weddings--that paradox enshrined in the Yiddish proverb whose very existence reveals the difficulties of this enterprise and the power central to its pursuit. In calling attention to the ways in which these characters come to a common realization of their situation as social outcasts, Arendt notes that they reflect the political status of all Jews. Though they are intellectuals and perhaps more thoroughly attuned to the demands of the host culture, these individuals are still deeply linked to their native Jewish people and tradition. "It is therefore not surprising," Arendt goes on, "that out of their personal experience Jewish poets, writers, and artists should have been able to evolve the concept of the pariah as a human type."12 Given the conditions of their social and cultural experience, these Jewish artists enact the same structural role of conscious pariah.

Mazel organizes a gallery of characters deployed along the spectrum from true-believer to freethinker to conscious pariah. They are shlemiehls and shlimazels, as Jascha calls himself at one point in the novel, luftmenschen and artistes, yet the comedy of their interaction also captures the difficulties of their identity-politics. Thus, for example, Jascha, the assimilationist, despite the isolation he suffers as a result of increasing antisemitism, thinks of Hershel Blau as a conscious pariah: He was a "disciple, a veritable Chasid, of secular Yiddishism," devoted "to the disentanglement of the condition of Jewishness from its unfortunate and embarassing theological underpinnings, thereby to weave it into a high and noble culture: radically and uncompromisingly secular, but still, somehow or other, Jewish."

Jascha realizes how they are all caught between past and future: "Hershel Blau and all the other Yiddishists, who hung out at the Writers’ Club on Leszno Street and here at the [Cafe] Pripetshok, were all stuck in some untenable middle-ground, stalled halfway between the past and the future, trying to think of some means or other of being good Jewish sons and daughters, even though they no longer believed anything their fathers and mothers had taught them. The Bundists and the Zionists were the same at heart, none of them able to follow the path to the simple, unavoidable conclusion" (Mazel 221-222).

Veblen's characterization of the skeptical Jew describes the trajectory of the conscious pariah. "Intellectually he is likely to become an alien; spiritually he is more than likely to remain a Jew." Veblen emphasizes the fact that there is no easy or apparent way to return home to tradition once the modern enterprise has been broached. "The most amiable share in the gentile community's life that is likely to fall to his lot is that of being interned. One who goes away from home will come to see many unfamiliar things, and to take note of them: but it does not follow that he will swear by all the strange gods whom he meets along the road." The marginality of this conscious pariah, coupled with her dual allegiance, makes this skeptical Jew a formidable thinker, for she "is in a peculiar degree exposed to the unmediated facts of the current situation; and in a peculiar degree, therefore, he takes his orientation from the run of the facts as he finds them, rather than from the traditional interpretation of analogous facts in the past."\(^1\)\(^3\) The conscious pariah, therefore, "is a skeptic by force of circumstances over which he has no control. He becomes an artist in the largest sense, an intellectual, because he seeks to respond to the course of modern Jewish history not only in order to comprehend it as a scholar but in order to come to terms with the experience--the passion, pain, sorrow, and joy--inscribed on body and spirit by the course of these two intertwined histories. She becomes a conscious pariah and critical thinker not by virtue of some historical process (which she undergoes and only later reflects upon) but, as Arendt puts it, she liberates herself by "sheer force of . . . imagination."\(^1\)\(^4\) Freethinker and conscious pariah are as closely related in this novel as Sasha and Phoebe. For both, meanings are not rigid, but rather wanders, wavers, moves about as their lives have. In their chaotic city world, meaning-making, the construction of the self, and social formation is a function of mazel, urban experience indeed, and as Shluftchev or Lipton would have it, the rigors of saychel. Similarly, though Sasha often appears to win the confrontations with her mother-in-law, Beatrice--note the meaning of her name as Brucha, blessed one--by the end of the novel the two are paired as strong Jewish women in opposing yet complementary modes. Even though Sasha can out-perform Beatrice, and parody her habits in a delicious skit at the

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\(^1\)\(^4\)Arendt, Jew as Pariah, p. 134.
beginning of the novel, at its end the wedding of their children takes place in Lipton not Manhattan. And, Sasha ruefully acknowledges, it is Lipton where Jason and Phoebe have decided to settle.

In its rendition of these characters and their situations, Rebecca Goldstein’s novel recapitulates the history of Yiddish literature. We have not only the Haskalah critique of the shtetl of Mendele in Sasha’s sarcasm but the spiritual confusion of the characters of Lamed Shapiro's "Eating Days" or "White Chalah" in Jascha. The urban spirit of I.J. Singer’s strong-willed, world-creating figures reappears in Hershel’s heroic creation of the Bilbul Art Theater, tempered by Anski’s and I. B. Singer’s evocation of the world of spirits roosting in the folk imagination central to Fraydel’s and in one sense Sore/Sasha’s experience. But the novel is not simply a rehearsal of Yiddish literary history; it also poses the question of agency in putting these characters and situations into play, making us wonder if mazel can indeed lead us to new possibilities. Are we still in the world of the Enlightenment and of Emancipation, with the illusory promises of citizenship to the Jews, wandering in nothingness once we have abandoned the inexorable grip of the Law? Or can we, like some of these characters, take advantage of the urban moment and turn its evanescent transience into the occasion for action in a revolutionary mode that changes the conditions of living? Can the theatre--can art--make such a difference?

Like the greatest theatre, Mazel’s magical art inserts the audience/reader into the tale as one of its actors. "It happens sometimes like this, although very rarely: a collaboration between spirits that steps over the footlights, drawing the spectators up out of their seats and into the art, so that they are as inspired as the players, and an entirely new work emerges between them" (Mazel 309). The experience does not derive from the replacement of one mode by another but by the reinforcement of a tendency within everyday life by another.

Out there in the dark were sensibilities refined by the untold generations of scholars from whom they had issued. They were worldly men and women, dressed like any other citizens of Europe, and informed by Europe’s culture, and yet they were unworldly, too. What they took from the world was meshed with that sensibility which was their birthright, which they could no sooner have put off than their own faces. There was a sort of subtlety sitting out there in the darkness this night that had been centuries in the making, and it was from it that these spirits had soared over the footlights, to join themselves with those on the stage, creating an entirely new work. And even Hershel, with all the torments of his ambitions, knew a moment of complete and perfect satisfaction. (Mazel 309)
This is accomplished in part by the interplay of genres, to all of which the reader lends credence, though most of the characters remain wedded only to one. Change in this novel is signalled when a character leaves one genre--the bounded, almost pastoral world of Shluftchev, for example, for the open arena of Warsaw with its novelistic possibilities as does Sasha, or, reversing this trajectory as Phoebe does when she leaves Manhattan to settle in the suburb of Lipton. In other works of fiction, Goldstein works similarly with fictional genres, creating a generic resource guide and literary compendium of these forms in Strange Attractors, the collection of stories in which Sasha, Chloe, and Phoebe first make their appearance. Unlike the characters of Mazel, who are fixed at least to begin with in one genre or another, be that the gothic, the parable, or realist narrative, the reader gets situated in the in-between-ness of the conflicting genres, caught between saychel and mazel, participating in the unfolding of the tale which depends on their interaction. Living in all the genres at once, audience becomes actor here in a moment worthy of Dickens’s art.

Throughout the novel, urban life offers hope and breathing space, opportunity and possibility. Enlightenment has brought the heady possibilities of modern life, including the goyim-naches of romance. The desire of these "young people" has a messianic force: they are "so hungry for the world at large, that, no matter how much they took in, they still felt themselves famished. It was a hunger that would be felt unto the seventh generation" (Mazel 201). Taking possession of urban possibility, they insist, "This is mine! I am here and this is mine!" (Mazel 201) The hunger to participate in the enterprise of modern life translates into a dominant image: "How could there be time enough to touch it all, absorb it all, and then--yes--contribute something of one’s own? A piece of melody, an equation, a theory, a canvas--something of one’s own that will make a difference. It doesn’t have to be big, though all the better if it is. But something to show that one is there, there, inhabiting the text itself, no longer stranded in the despair of those despicably narrow margins" (Mazel 202). Yet this city is also a place that does not by itself redeem. These urban secular Jews who "will no longer be confined to the narrow, grimy margins," repudiating the places where "father and mother were born and will die, having never

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15Joyce uses the phrase; also see Daniel Boyarin, "Goyim Naches; Or, the Mentsh and the Jewish Critique of Romance," Unheroic Conduct: the Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man. Berkeley: University of California, 1997
even learned the language of the text" unlike their modernizing children,--"They, but not I!"--have not emerged into a normal existence. Rather, "so many we passed on the street had the feverish look of consumptives. Desire for the world at large was consuming us alive" (Mazel 202). And though they believe they can make a home and world for themselves in the modern European city, they are threatened by the prowling antisemites of rightwing Polish nationalism and forced to hide in entranceways on what is no longer the public street. Such ever-present and increasing danger is but another indication that their chosen city of Warsaw is but another stop in the long Jewish journey of homelessness.

Having left Shluftchev behind, the characters return to it in thought and lived experience; it becomes the conundrum which their lives must somehow decode and resolve. Sasha, the spirit of mazel and of the city, cannot and does not want to leave Fraydel behind; she continues to haunt this novel, as the meanings of her story-telling continue to inform and shape it. Fraydel, for example, brings Maurice and Sasha together in a moment of recognition that ignites their love.

"I’ve wished so many times that we really had run off with the Gypsies," she suddenly said, so softly that for a moment Maurice wondered whether he had only imagined it . . . "She took her own life. She drowned herself in the river."

She was staring at him, and he stared back into her long gray eyes, overlaid with their shimmering sea-blueness, and it was hard to shake off the sense that this moment wasn’t happening at all.

"She could have been anything, my sister Fraydel. She could pull knowledge from out of the air, even there in the shtetl. You don’t know what it was lie there"--her voice suddenly became fierce--"especially for a girl like Fraydel, Fraydel, Fraydel, da meshuggena . . . "

Sasha’s sobs cut short her sentence.

When Maurice, who was also crying, just a little, reached out his arms to her, she collapsed into them and clung, clutching him, so that for the first time in his life, Maurice Saunders forgot to think. (Mazel 291)

It is loss that has brought them to love, in a moment of mourning not exhilaration, which exemplifies the mysteriousness of the characters in Mazel, their contradictions, and the conundrum of their personalities. They will be possessed by love and attempt to sort out its meanings, and yet they will not be able to evade Fraydel’s story. Presented on stage by the Bilbulniks, this gothic experience doubled as a Yiddish folk-tale, which brings the world of this novel forward as a liminal moment
between classical Western and Jewish modes and invents a third way,\(^\text{16}\) haunts Gentile and Jew alike. "No matter how enlightened or assimilated, the story of the young bride meeting her doom on the very night of her wedding cast a long shadow of meaning" (Mazel 278). For The Bridegroom rivets by its oppositions, as Misha, the critic acknowledges: "The play had at once exhilarated and depressed him, and it continued to do so all through that unusually warm Warsaw summer. The artistry was superb, and yet the net result of all this artistry had been to induce in Misha an overwhelming sense of life’s futility. The drunken lift their cups to Life/To strange powers of unseeing and forgetting. Misha wasn’t able to get these lyrics out from his head" (Mazel 276). Despite themselves, they must remember and retell its meanings, as a way perhaps of recovering and reclaiming the sources of their being. Their experience thus turns upon them; city life in all its gaiety yet evokes the deep guilt of exile. What is it they remember? What experience do they retell?

2. Remembering & Retelling

In Jewish tradition, remembering and retelling have an honored place, from the tales of grandparents to the Biblical commandment to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. In this mode, recollection shapes the future not only in anticipation but as its informing structure. Memory matters not as literal repetition but as that generic process which reshapes and defamiliarizes; in so doing it opens the world of the everyday to the demands of the uncanny. The differences between the Deuteronomic version of the fourth commandment and that of Exodus, reinforces and elaborates the relationship between remembering and retelling. As a recent critic has noted, what Goldstein recognizes "is the complex narrational interconnection between teller and interpreter. Further, she recognizes the hopelessness of the desire for some omniscient interpreter or impersonal narrator--some third-person interpretive perspective that can simply bracket the intentions of the agent as that agent understands them. Goldstein helps us to see part of what is at stake in all discussions of storied lives, as well as what is at stake in the idea that the self or subject of action is produced through the stories that we and

\(^{16}\)Not only the mixture of genres but the range of references includes the classic works of Western culture, from Bleak House with its dialectic of connection/disconnection and Moby Dick which focuses the theme of wandering and suicide. These could be multiplied to include Goethe's Faust as well as other works, which I have not pursued. My interest has been to elicit and elucidate the Jewish sources which are the greater motor force of this fiction, and, in any event, are much less well known.
others tell.” Note how the intertwined tale of Mazel and Saychel which punctuates the openings of the different sections of the novel, involves the telling of a story. That is how the tailor’s apprentice who is born before the action of the narrative of this fiction, seduces the princess into speaking. Saychel brings him to resolving the conundrum, but only mazel can bring us to a happy ending. The performative magic of *mysahs* depends on the participation of speaker and hearer; it is like the greatest theatre-magic, and like that experience it is one that calls out for repetition and reexperiencing.

In Exodus the commandment enjoins us to "Remember the Sabbath Day, "zachor et yom hashabbat (20:8); in Deuteronomy, we are commanded to observe the sabbath day, shamor et yom hashabbat. In Deuteronomy the imperative mood leads to a narrative sketching a historical context: "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm." Here the action of remembering brings the epic sweep of the exodus from Egypt into the summary retelling. Moses' personal account of Deuteronomy brackets the people's story of Exodus, his first-person testimonial recalling the national events whose lessons his account elicits. Concluding the brief citation, the statement ends as a commandment bridging past and future: "Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:15). In this way the commandment to observe and to remember the Sabbath is linked to the Passover commemoration, both historical recreation and contemporary retelling, of the Jews' exodus from Egypt. In this discourse they are inseparable: to remember is to retell the history of communal beginnings and reiterate its defining structures--and thereby to build a bridge between narrator and reader/listener. And it is in the great Kabbalistic hymn of Shlomo Alkabetz, the *Lecho Dodi* of the Friday evening prayer service welcoming the Sabbath, the *Kabbalat Shabbat*, that this bridge between narrator and reader/listener is articulated as Zachor and Shamor are brought together: Shamor veZachor BeDibur Echad. As the later Spanish commentary of Don Isaac Abrabanel makes clear in responding to Alkabetz's formulation, the two commandments are separated in the two versions but were uttered as one: BeDibur Echad.18

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18 Abrabanel's commentary is found at the two recitations of the fourth commandment. Get bibliographic citation from Gildas.
This informing power of remembering and retelling situates Rebecca Goldstein's work in a Jewish fictional poetics\(^{19}\) rather than just a (post-)modernist, more-or-less secular, Western, or Christian tradition. By contrast with other efforts to reconstruct cultural memory resulting from responses to modernization--that great rupture in the fabric of traditional life--which first took shape in the historical novel beginning in England with Sir Walter Scott and the rhapsodic/analytic prose of Thomas Carlyle, the Jewish force of the imperative to remember and retell is anchored in its scriptural text and its continuous two-thousand year-old interpretive practice, in constant reference to the mitzvah central both to the book of Deuteronomy and the Shma, where we are enjoined to recall "these words which I command you this day," and to remember that they "shall be in your heart, teaching them diligently to your children," calling us to speak "of them when you sit in your house, when you lie down and when you rise up."\(^{20}\)

Remember and Retell: Goldstein's fundamental exploration leads us into the problematics of the uncanny. That is, in this universe of discourse "alternately nothing seems to be connected and everything seems to be connected" and "everything is constantly in movement between the poles." Mazel puts this question to the reader and its characters in chapter 22, when "Maurice, in the course of arguing a point of philosophy with Aleksander Meisel, had declared that everything in the world connects, a fundamental axiom of Spinoza’s. All of a sudden, Sasha, who Maurice had thought wasn’t even listening, had whirled around and almost hissed at him, the contempt in her voice hitting him like a

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\(^{19}\) "When Nachum Sonnenberg began to pay very close attention to the people around him, he saw, with great astonishment, how different a world it was, depending on who was looking at it, and when. The Master of the Universe had created heaven and earth, and all that stood and moved thereon. But when, on the sixth day, He saw fit to create a creature in His own image, on that day He had brought into existence a great vast number of separate worlds. Here, too, stood firmaments dividing one world from another. "Now, at last, Nachum felt that he had come to understand a passage in the Talmud that before had always baffled him. "The puzzling passage occurs in the book of Sanhedrin. Each person, says the text, has been created absolutely unique as regards his appearance, his voice, and his mind. Therefore, each person should believe that the world was created precisely for him. "A baffling passage, no? Nachum was to believe that the world was created for him? But now he saw: the Master of the Universe has created for each person a world that he alone inhabits." \((\text{Mazel, p. 166})\)

\(^{20}\) Together, remembering and retelling shape the Jewish way of life, as the tefillin (phylacteries) in which the Shma is inscribed are bound upon the arm as a sign and a reminder between the eyes, and its phrases written in the mezuzah affixed upon the "doorposts of thy house and upon thy gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). In capturing a further nuance of the original Hebrew, the 1962 translation of the \text{Torah} (A New Translation, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962), underscores their force not only as a constitutive ritual but as the how-to manual of Jewish life and thus suggests their relevance for contemporary fictional practice: "Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day: Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Markers of self-definition, these words articulate the space of meaning, delineating not only the domicile of this discourse but the signified body in which it is inscribed.
knock in the head, ‘Nothing connects!’” (Mazel 288) The subsequent course of the novel leads Sasha to experience what Maurice

For the moment she assumes the roles of the women's world of the shtetl, and Maurice answers: "Everything connects," Maurice had mouthed to her silently through the swaying forms of the davening men. "There's always a reason" (Mazel 340). While she is in Lipton, Sasha is also in Shluftchev, existing in two time-space continua simultaneously. Her conversation with Maurice, dead now these many years, which has continued for so long and articulated her self-consciousness as has the whispered voice of Fraydel, leads in the narration not to a resolution of the question of connection, but to a moment of meditation on some of the experiences of his wandering: "She had slowly shaken her head in answer. For Maurice she had no more of the vehemence with which she had too often tromented him. But even so, with all of her tormenting, he had always made his way back to them, back to New York, a city he had hated. There was something in the life here that had oppressed him. Sooner or later he'd begin to feel the sheer colossal waste of it all. He liked cold places, sparsely populated. Even human life is worth something more in places where there's little of it" (Mazel 340). The uncanniness of the moment is emphasized by the naturalness with which their conversation takes place, a mark of their being "sealed together," and yet "worlds apart" (Mazel 335).

This turn in narrative strategy has an additional function, however, for it helps to overcome the apparent division between the discussion of modernity and that of Jewish tradition, as Goldstein's narrators discover that remembering and retelling can only be partial functions, and each other's oblique

21I owe this observation to Erich Gruen.
and opaque obverse: in the act of remembering they cannot retell, and in retelling they momentarily block out the process of remembering. Such an act of forgetting, Freud notes, "creates a division within us and allows an uncanny experience to occur." Shuttling between remembering and forgetting, this discourse is characterized by "the tension between the two competing frames of reference or double perspective that characterizes uncanny experience. Without such a 'forgetting' the familiar never can become strange or romantic to us."  

Unlike other contemporary works part of the power of Goldstein's fiction derives from the recognition of the informing power of the uncanny. It leads to the acknowledgment that cultural mapping cannot be separated from the context of what it is to have a memory, to forget as well as to remember, and to chart the effort of retelling. Thereby, they locate the power of memory in this uncanny and doubled process. Furthermore, by suggesting that Jewish women have tended to function as the primary producers of those values through their story-telling, values ritually recalled by Jewish men in their traditional liturgical practice, Goldstein's tales focus on the process of the engendering of Jewish life, echoing the phrase in Genesis, when God creates humanity, that emphasizes difference while proclaiming equality, for "male and female created He them." As she noted in her interview, she is "always intrigued by 'women of tremendous vitality in settings in which they're not allowed to express themselves.'" Furthermore, she comments, that in looking around at the Jewish women she knew, she would think that "there must have been some incredibly brilliant and energetic and totally neurotic women" in the shtetl (Interview, p. 48).

The implications of the meanings of remembering and retelling are translated in her first novel, *The Mind-Body Problem*, into questions about what her narrator calls our mattering map. As she

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24 Deploying "mattering map" in her first novel as a phrase that is at once metaphor and metonymy, Goldstein also reminds us that the functions of memory are deeply embedded in language. The *Mind-Body Problem* is dedicated "In memory of my father Bezalel Newberger" and one of its strongest strands is the narrator's account of remembering the sweetness of her father's life as the devoted *chazzan* of an American congregation (by contrast with her mother's ever-present worrying). Goldstein's mattering map is not only a defining feature but a figure that stands for the novel as a whole, serving to define the project of this modern fiction as the charting of our cultural situation. As befits the workings of the uncanny, the mattering map is not prior to the narrative; rather, the narrator's central project, like that of the novel as a whole, is to articulate it. Defined as a dynamic process constantly undergoing revision, dependent equally upon character and reader response as much as the narrator's imagination, the effort to draw it produces the energy with which the novel proceeds.
embarks upon the explorations that will in the course of this witty narrative shape its boundaries the engaging narrator assures the reader that our mattering map orients each of us. Mattering map: the unfamiliar, perhaps onomatopoetic phrase carries the overtones of many language-games and academic disciplines, ranging from topology to psychoanalysis. and we hear in it the effort to bring together the reasoned, powerful methods of mathematical logic and the intimate, associative tactics of the analyst's couch. Together, they signal the polar extremes of this novel.

Goldstein's work is distinguished not only by its wide range of American Jewish literary and cultural reference--there are important allusions to Bernard Malamud, Henry Roth, Anne Frank, Alix Kates Shulman, Erica Jong, Tillie Olsen, Kate Simon, and Grace Paley, and its acknowledgment of the determining presence, importance, and central achievement of Cynthia Ozick for modern Jewish writing--but by the effort to bring Saul Bellow and Philip Roth together and sort out the meanings involved in being the heir of both: in her narrator's voice we hear the mediating and synthesizing project of the contemporary American Jewish woman, unwilling to relinquish any of her modern possibilities, sorting out their benefits and consequences— and a rethinking of the relationship of exile and diaspora, center and periphery.

Like Saul Bellow's work The Mind-Body Problem grapples with the intellectual effort to chart the realities of modern life; and thus the academic world, that institutional collection of creativity and intelligence, serves not as its sole yet certainly as its central arena of character and action. Like Philip Roth, who also writes fictions of university and intellectual life, in her novel Goldstein represents the knotted strands of family life, the discovery of sexuality, and the desperate struggle to make sense of the difficulties of developing a personal identity. Not only polar extremes, Bellow and Roth are also overlapping though in some ways irreconcilable conceptualizations. Each emphasizes a different aspect of American Jewish memory and recounts a different tale. Implicitly, Goldstein thus acknowledges that the mattering map must encompass both even though they are in opposition. In this way the questions of contemporary Jewish cultural and literary history are displaced into the process of narration in her fiction. Told in the first person, The Mind-Body Problem enacts the process of remembering and retelling as it performs the ways in which the doubled frames of the uncanny define her life-experience.
We skip from mind to body and back again in this fiction till they begin, like intertwined computer programs constantly to call each other up. In effect, this novel articulates how and why both remembering and retelling depend on each other.

The narrator's first comments about the mattering map are the result of an invitation to "a party in honor of the famous Noam Himmel,"a certified genius, mathematical"Wunderkind" and "an important figure in philosophy" because of "the work in logic he had done some years before" (Mind-Body 30). At this point in her life, Renee Feuer, a graduate student in philosophy, admits to being particularly susceptible to genius--perhaps because she herself has aspired to the same status, even having implicitly received such a designation upon graduation from her Alma Mater, Barnard, when she garnered the award of a graduate fellowship to Princeton. Now the chance to meet Himmel--discoverer appropriately enough as his name suggests of the supernatural numbers and, as the result of a challenge put to him by another mathematician, author of "a spare and elegant solution to an outstanding problem in modern logic that yielded a cornucopia of consequences" (Mind-Body 30)--is doubly welcome. Having just recently crossed the Hudson river to New Jersey (and thereby let it be noted reversing the mythological pattern of Washington crossing the Delaware in the name of democracy triumphant), Renee's sense of herself has been crumbling in the face of the nasty competitive world of linguistic philosophy ruling Princeton. By contrast with Himmel, the reigning star in the firmament,

my own position in the world of Princeton was incomparably inferior. I was a graduate student in philosophy, and not a highly successful one at that. My first year there had been disastrous, and my second, just beginning, gave every indication of being worse. In short, I was floundering, and thus quite prepared to follow the venerably old feminine tradition of being saved by marriage. And, given the nature of my distress, no one could better play the part of my rescuing hero than the great Noam Himmel. For the man had an extravagance of what I was so agonizingly feeling the lack of: objective proof of one's own intellectual merit. (Mind-Body 20)

Note how the contrast between Renee, floundering under the pressure of this difficult environment and half-neurotic as a result, and Noam, the rescuing hero, is also the distinction she has drawn between her father, the all-competent Chazan (cantor) and her fretful, distressed mother. But what she faces in Princeton is on a different scale than that experienced by her parents. Somewhat ruefully she has
discovered that all the views which she has taken with her from her New York city education are, once across the state-line, nothing more than excess baggage. "Not in the habit of dismissing any criticisms of myself" and "in general always willing seriously to consider any denunciation," Renee thus finds herself at the beginning of the second year in the Princeton Philosophy program "thinking that all the questions that interested me were really pseudo-questions" (Mind-Body 22). To make matters worse,

my eyes were used to the gloom of Columbia's Broadway campus and were having trouble focusing amidst Princeton's brilliance. And not just my eyes were in need of readjustment. My views on The Life of the Mind had been modeled on the people I had known at Columbia, urban intellectuals, unkempt, graceless, morose creatures who walked around with eyes downcast, muttering to themselves. Those were the sorts of bodies--neglected, misshapen, decaying--that serious minds belonged in. But here were these first-rate thinkers who worried about their backyards and backhands, who discussed Buber and black holes over barbecues. The genteel goyishness of the place overwhelmed me. There were Jews at Princeton, of course, but nobody seemed Jewish. At Columbia even the non-Jews had seemed Jewish. (Mind-Body 21)

How is she to reconcile the suburban world of this affluent town and the gritty texture of the upper west-side of Manhattan that has been woven into the fabric of her thinking? How is she, a city girl wandering in the trackless wilds of the Princeton suburban woods, to find her way back to philosophy? Is it possible, she wonders, for a Jewish woman to be a serious western philosopher? Part of the wit that charms readers of The Mind-Body Problem lies in the ways in which Goldstein, a professional philosopher and faculty member at Columbia University who, at the time of the printing of this novel the back cover of the paperback assures us, had "recently won a grant from the American Council for Learned Societies to write a philosophical study entitled The Concept of Body," can take the abstract, general, and at times exalted language of philosophy and turn it into the stuff of everyday life. Thus when Renee mentions "The Life of the Mind" pursued so intensely at Columbia, Goldstein also expects that her professional audience will chuckle over the citation of the title of an important book by Hannah Arendt.

Not only does Noam Himmel --"shaggy and Semitic," with an "incipient paunch" that testifies to his never having "chased a tennis ball, his black hair long and scraggly, his beard rabbinically full" (Mind-Body 34)--in fact, rescue her, marriage to a genius giving her an incontestable status--his
presence and power make it possible for Renee to construct the mattering map and reconstruct her shattered identity. Having brought down a bit of heaven to his fellow-creatures in the form of the supernatural numbers, Noam bears the aura of an epic hero, his the powers of a Prometheus or, even better for Renee's immediate purposes, a conquering Ulysses returning home from his voyage. Married to this brilliant logician, Renee can confront the public world of linguistic philosophy, that reduces what she calls Reality with a capital R to matters of language and words. "The field had made 'the linguistic turn' and I . . . had not. The questions were now all of language." Instead of wrestling with the large, messy questions that occupied earlier thinkers, philosophers now claimed that "one should examine the rules that govern words like 'good' and 'ought.'" My very first seminar, given by a prominent visitor from England whose field, they told me, was metaphysics, was on adverbs. The metaphysics of adverbs? From Reality to . . . adverbs? (Mind-Body 22) Princeton has become a bounded world, what in Mazel will become the shtetl - of Shluftchev and the suburb of Lipton. Banishing difficulty and mystery (along with the past history of philosophy), its school of thought does lead to certainty. "No more inexhaustible Reality to contend with and make us feel our human limitations. No more dark, inaccessible regions lying beyond the reach of reason's phallic thrusts. Reality was but a creature formed from one of the intellect's own ribs, from language. We could take care of her, fill her up and leave her spent" (Mind-Body 22). As a woman, Renee understands the chauvinist premises of this "limited universe," growing from the "pre-Socratic Pythagoreans who, "in their table of opposites, listed 'limited' on the side occupied by 'order,' 'light,' 'good,' and 'male.'" Conceiving reality as "extending no farther than our powers of expression," this school has made mystery as "impermissible as the logical contradiction," analogue to the reductio ad absurdum which some "have employed . . . to argue away consciousness. For its existence," Renee notes, "would present us with the notoriously impenetrable mind-body problem." To make room for this problem in their universe of discourse would, the narrative goes on to reveal, undermine its tidy order and allow women their voices as subjects in their own right rather than keeping them as objects of the male gaze. Soon after her arrival at Princeton Renee protests that "'Reality doesn't accomodate itself to the size and shape of the human mind.'" To step outside the magic circle of language is heresy for this school of thought. "Everyone stopped talking and
stared at me. Finally, mercifully, someone spoke. "That's a metaphysical statement," came the deadpan reply. There could not, in that context, have been a worse insult" (Mind-Body 24).25 Renee's marriage to Noam is part of the process of her liberation, for though he believes utterly in logic, Noam is not a linguistic philosopher and in fact acts as if he lived in a metaphysical universe. Once married to him, Renee's satire of Princetonian suburban behavior and linguistic philosophy gives way to analysis of more classical philosophical issues, paralleled by her exploration of the bodily force of the Mind-Body problem in the intimate world of bed and board.

Unlike that of her philosophical colleagues Renee's search we come to recognize is for an understanding of ordinary life, the same subject bedeviling another philosophical student of western culture, Moses Herzog. The Mind-Body Problem carries forward the project Saul Bellow initiated for modern fiction, with Herzog exploring what a philosophy of ordinary life might be. To focus on the question of ordinary life is to address fundamental Jewish issues, and both Moses Herzog and Renee Feuer find themselves rethinking their familial experience. Nevertheless, neither are allowed to remain within its familiar confines; while modern history and culture are recapitulated in their personal odyssey out of the urban shtetl of New York's upper westside, leading both to confront the central questions of classical western thought, neither can abandon past Jewish habits: "The process of thinking about philosophy always reminds me of fireworks," Renee comments. "One question is shot up and bursts into a splendorous many. Answers? Forget answers. The spectacle is all in the questions." Her comment echoes Herzog's similar inability to conclude his insistent, continuous questioning, and reveals the Jewish sources and modes of their thinking. It is a realization that brings Renee up short, for the moment "I stepped out of the isolation into which I always retreat when I'm really working, and began to talk with other members of my department, all the doubts returned." Unlike her New York experience, the social context of thought in Princeton brings "doubts not about the objects of thought, but about the thinking subject, me. I was overwhelmed again with the sense that I didn't know what philosophy was all about." The intensity of her questions, as well as their focus in ethics, have no

25 As woman and philosopher, Renee confronts the male premises of this world. A parallel moment in a somewhat different mode occurs in Mazel in the narration, through Sasha's eyes, of The Yiddish King Lear. Toibela, the Cordelia figure, refuses her father's offer of a diamond brooch. Her angered father responds, "'A woman must do as she is told!' Dovid Maysheles fulminates. 'She mustn't indulge in philosophy like a man! A woman must have beautiful things!'"
place in this cozy suburban world. "One of my fellow graduate students suggested that my problem lay in my religious background; I had transplanted the attitude of Awe Before the Unknown to philosophy, where it definitely didn't belong. This analysis was provoked by my commenting that a certain question seemed very deep to me. 'Nothing is deep,' he had drawled back reprovingly" (Mind-Body 35). We recognize that Renee's Jewishness is part of her ordinary health and sanity, and an essential aspect of the magnetic force she exerts on most of the characters of the novel; unlike most of them, however, she will not and even cannot abandon her past and ingrained Jewish experience but rather will end up making it a home-base from which to launch her analysis, and grapple with the difficulties--among them the deep Christian roots--of classic as well as contemporary western thought. Granting validity both to her Jewish and her western cultural inheritance, Renee cannot avoid the problem of the uncanny: in fact, her career as woman and philosopher, wife and lover, Jew and modern intellectual forces her to confront the meanings of the overlapping frames which define her life.

Like Herzog, The Mind-Body Problem deploys a dialectic of remembering and forgetting, and Renee discovers that at the moment when she is most modern and needs to recall her past, when memory is indispensable to make sense of the present, the very condition of being modern has tended to deny it to her. Married to the genius, and awarded his status, she loses her ability to remember who she is, enacting once more her mother's role. As her husband eclipses the memory of her father, and mathematical logic sweeps away the melodies and rituals of synagogue and the Jewish home, she begins to lose her way.

The genius theme echoes Philip Roth's studies of Nathan Zuckerman, and the emphasis on the philosophy of the body recalls Roth's exploration of sexuality and identity, as Goldstein evokes the experiences, unique as they are, that make up ordinary sexual life. The intimate, confessional aspect of the novel further reinforces the link to Roth, as both create a rhetoric of self-expression that is also an act of disguise, in which nimble city talk and agile urban joking serve the most serious purposes. When Renee's friend, Ava, a physics graduate student fond of taking strong lower-class unacademic and non-intellectual young men as her lovers, whom she designates "the elementary particles," accuses Renee of believing that "the male sexual organ is the human brain" (Mind-Body 92) in a direct quote from
Portnoy's Complaint, Renee must confront the problem of the relationship of sexuality and thought. Responding to Roth's and Bellow's objectification of women Renee, the woman, acknowledges their power and defines their very clear limitations as novelists in recounting how in the course of a love-affair, her partner has revealed the shape of his mattering map: "He was worshipful, offering me again and again the highest praise of which the Jewish male is capable: You don't look at all Jewish" (Mind-Body 232).

A parallel moment occurs in Mazel in chapter 11, "A Little Yiddish Theater," when Aunt Frieda dresses Sorela and imagines she is not Jewish but a Russian aristocrat fleeing from the revolutionary hordes; together they make a dramatic entrance into the theater and Sorela’s regal bearing gives her the air of "the beautiful shiksa" (Mazel 185). It is not, however, a role Sorela accepts, refusing the meaning of this image in which she looks "so very un-Jewish. People were always telling her this. She was, to be perfectly frank, perfectly sick of it. People always said it as if it constituted a compliment of the highest order. Well, Sorela didn’t consider it such. It rankled in her, this dismissal of Jewish beauty" (Mazel 183 ). And the comic punch-line follows through on this image: "There could be no doubt: everyone assumed she was a young Polish aristocrat, a beautiful shiksa. By following the general flow, they soon made their way to one of the two buffets. There was a crush of people before it. Again heads turned. And then one of the greatest tributes that can be paid to someone, especially when performed by Jewish people waiting in line to get food: the crowd parted for Sorela" (Mazel 193).

Goldstein dramatizes what Bellow and especially Roth express about American Jewish men, and then opposes it: her narrator defends what Portnoy and Herzog, classic examples of Jewish American Princes, have done their best to escape from--the beauty and power of the Jewish woman:

Our brothers always expect us to thrill at the words, because of course in their scheme of things there's nothing so desirable as a shiksa. I've never understood it. Jewish women seem to me so much juicier and more betampte (tasty). It's like the difference between a Saltine cracker and a piece of Sacher cake. The latter may be a bit much at times; but it's moist, it's rich, and it's layered. My symbolic logic professor in college who regarded himself as a great connoisseur of women, once told me that I was his first Jewish lover and that, judging from me, he had made a great mistake in never sampling from his own kind before. I recognized the compliment, although I was pricked by its suggestion that my qualities could be duplicated in any other daughter of Jacob. And I certainly didn't respect my professor any the more for it. It was as if someone...
who professed a great love and knowledge of wines told me he had just sampled a Bordeaux for the first time and thought these wines merited further investigation. (Mind-Body 232)

In the analogy with Bordeaux wine to the complexity of the sexuality of the Jewish woman, we discover what Portnoy's implacable reductive logic has led him to miss. And unlike Portnoy who journeys to Israel only to discover the extent of his inner confusion and personal malady, Renee encounters the sweetness of the Sabbath even amid the devastating memories of post-Holocaust Vienna.

Roth's obsessions are further echoed and parodied in this novel, for Renee expounds the philosophy of the body when, spurned by her linguistically minded colleagues, she evokes the affirmation of her worth denied her in the realm of mind by seducing "various graduate students who lived, like me, at the Graduate College. The Mind-Body Problem also echoes the episode of The Counterlife when Jimmy Lustig demands that Nathan Zuckerman help him force the State of Israel to close Yad Vashem and thus turn the Jews away from the task of remembering. "Forget Remembering" is Jimmy's motto; for him the Jews must give up the function of superego and become nations like all others. Embracing the mindless functions of the id, they will cease to elicit the moral guilt of the other nations.

Renee discovers that the mind she cannot still, the questions she cannot repress, provide the dialectic opposite to Jimmy Lustig's demands: what she needs is to "Remember Forgetting." Neither, however, are ultimately possible for her, as she discovers the meaning of the Jewish idea, which in Edward Alexander's clear and direct phrasing is the view

that the Jews were called into existence as a people by a covenant with God that is as real and living today as it was at its inception. "I will establish My covenant," says God to Abraham, "between Me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant" (Genesis17:7). According to this simple and traditional idea, the Jews were chosen by God in order to achieve the universal salvation of mankind: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast hearkened to my voice" (Genesis 22:18). Israel has been chosen, but chosen by a God who keeps admonishing Israel to love the stranger "as thyself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34). The chosenness of Israel, therefore, is directed toward the ultimate unity of mankind.26

Discovering the central purposes of Jewish tradition through the process of remembering and retelling, Renee's narrative parallels the work of her husband, Noam Himmel, in discovering the supernatural numbers. Now, about to marry Noam, she is ready to begin to draw a fuller mattering map, translating a particular private vision into an intersubjective experience. Her comments also suggest that what has happened to Moses Herzog is the shattering of his mattering map.

When we first meet Herzog, it is his questions phrased as letters to the thinkers who shaped modern culture, that make us pause. What answers are possible, we wonder, what meanings can result from such inquiries? As if to preempt our assessment, the novel begins with Herzog embracing his condition: "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me, thought Moses Herzog." It is not that he is certifiably insane, we discover, but rather that like Hamlet's his madness is uncannily more rational than the putative sanity of his friends. Bellow's canny deployment of Hamlet as character and cultural theme leads us to understand that Herzog like the Prince of Denmark is trying to reconstruct not only his identity but the social, cultural, and familial basis of his existence. For not only has his personal life failed Herzog, so too has western culture. In the murder of the Jews by the Nazis, and the attempted obliteration of their right to tell their own story, Herzog discovers the modern totalitarian project of the destruction of cultural memory. A further dimension of the mattering map comes into focus in the middle of Bellow's novel. The meanings of remembering and retelling as forms of resistance to the pressures of contemporary life emerge when Herzog thinks of his father. The passage echoes Hamlet's...
discovery of his father's signet ring which saves him, just as Moses is saved by his discovery of his father's gun and the power of recollection: "What happened during the War abolished Father Herzog's claim to exceptional suffering. We are on a more brutal standard now, a new terminal standard, indifferent to persons. Part of the program of destruction into which the human spirit has poured itself with energy, even with joy. These personal histories, old tales from old times that may not be worth remembering. I remember. I must. But who else-- to whom can this matter? So many millions--multitudes--go down in terrible pain. And, at that, moral suffering is denied, these days. Personalities are good only for comic relief. But I am still a slave to Papa's pain. The way Father Herzog spoke of himself! That could make one laugh. His I had such dignity (Herzog 184). Remembering and retelling, he will remake his mattering map.

One way of discerning the redemptive force of remembering and retelling is offered in the episode in Primo Levi's. *Survival in Auschwitz* when language leads him to discover the sources of his being and personal existence. Levi's narrative reminds us of the deformation of language brought about by the totalitarianism of the Lager. He makes it possible for us to distinguish among words like survivor, rebellion, and resistance, as part of the acknowledgment that even in the world of Ivan Karamazov, where in the absence of God anything is possible including turning human beings into numbers and dust and ashes, language yet has world-creating power. The effort to remember a passage of Dante and teach its Italian to his friend, Jean, the Alsatian student (who held the role of assistant to the Supervisor which was designated the Pikolo), provided the energy that made it possible to continue to confront the challenge of everyday life in Auschwitz. The episode recalls Camus' Myth of Sisyphus, emphasizing the moment of hope amid the terror of unending grinding repetition; for in Camus' formulation, in the moment when the rock he has arduously pushed up the mountain is falling down, Sisyphus is for the moment free to contemplate his fate and thus assert mastery over his life. Analyzing the canto of Ulysses, Primo and Pikolo go to collect the soup for the others. The startling realization of the power of language, of poetry, comes with their discussion of the conclusion of Dante's strophe.
"It is late, it is late, we have reached the kitchen, I must finish:
'And three times round she went in roaring smother
With all the waters; at the fourth the poop [-deck]
Rose, and the prow went down, as pleased Another.'

I keep Pikolo back, it is vitally necessary and urgent that he listen, that he understand this 'as pleased Another' before it is too late; tomorrow he or I might be dead, or we might never see each other again, I must tell him, I must explain to him about the Middle Ages, about the so human and so necessary and yet unexpected anachronism, but still more, something gigantic that I myself have only just seen, in a flash of intuition, perhaps the reason for our fate, for our being here today. " Analyzing Dante, Pikolo and Primo reenact the fundamental human relation of reciprocal speaker and listener, teacher and student. The roles are there for both to play; and as they become the explorers of the strophe's meaning, they create the fundamental encounter on which communal experience depends. Theirs is the communion of the discovery of shared language--of the metalogue29 that articulates the meaning of shared food, bed, work, and fate, and delivers them out of the hands of the Nazis into that of "Another." They have recovered the fuller meanings of the Shma--of hearing--by accepting the injunction to remember and retell, and thus enacted its uncanny commandment. In so doing, they make a cosmos out of chaos, they articulate a mattering map.30

In the terms of Goldstein's novel, the problem is how Renee can make herself heard. This, as Lewis Coser argues, is a question of power, for "to make oneself understood and to get others to listen is contingent upon the possession of power to give force to one's argument."31 And here power is patently not something available to the individual but a matter of group dynamics.

Renee as spokesperson, as representative of the community of the Jews and the sisterhood of women, has that power she cannot reach as an individual; that is, Renee, the fictive character, remakes the reader into someone who agrees to participate in playing the communal, woman's role, thereby bringing the desire for redemption into the virtual state of realization. She also thus recovers a

29The term and idea are Gregory Bateson's. See
traditional Jewish intellectual force for her account, for her life is grounded in and informed by the classic texts of Jewish life. Renee's interweaving of liturgy and personal reflection that recaptures the sources of philosophy in religion, reminds us how fundamentally we experience the mind/body problem even before thought calls us to recognize and inquire into its problematic qualities. Language here takes us back to images, most notably the bodily image in which the mattering map first begins.

It is important to recognize, however, that Renee (and we) have reached this point because of the process of remembering and retelling, and it is worth recalling that it is not Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah alone that in Jewish practice call us to this doubled act of performance. Rather, it is Pesach, particularly in the recent history of American Jewry in which it is the central event of the liturgical and communal year, and the recitation of the Passover Haggadah, that enjoin upon us this uncanny act. Remembering and Retelling: we become the community that draws its mattering map by recalling and retelling the story of our liberation from Egypt. Bechol dor vador chayav kol adam leerot et atzmo k'ihu hu yatza mimitzrayim: the imperative mood of the Hebrew takes us into the act of remembering and retelling and endows us with the understanding to comprehend its essential self-referential aspect: in each and every generation, every person must regard herself as if s/he went out of Egypt.

This process of remembering and retelling while not constrained by any language, yet has a fuller resonance — has its home, we might say — in Jewish languages. Not only Hebrew and Ladino but especially Yiddish convey the memory of this process of remembering, which alone makes exile (and, I will also argue later, diaspora) meaningful. Mazel evokes both the bitterness of exile, the hopefulness of diaspora, and the difficulties implicit in the strenuous dialectic of memory which recalls the arabesques of much contemporary theorizing. Written in late 20th century American English, the texture of Mazel yet bears the continuing imprint of the semantic values of Yiddish. In the process, the world of the novel edges into a query similar to that elicited by Maeera Y. Shreiber in "The End of Exile: Jewish Identity and its Diasporic Poetics." Have its characters, especially Phoebe & Jason whose marriage frames the novel, reached "the imagined peace of a daily life in which none is afraid"—the terms in

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which Arnold Eisen reminds us classical Jewish thought defined home?33 or are we still amid the bitterness of exile, veiled though it may be. In what way are these Jews no longer exiles from their own country, exiles from themselves?34

Goldstein's novel, like Shreiber's essay and the diasporizing writers she draws on, come at a moment when American Jews no longer live in a transitory or transient urban homeland. Having become suburbanized as a result of political, economic, and socio-cultural trends and choices, they seek to account in various modes for their current north American acculturation. Perhaps in this situation, the word diaspora can be replaced by suburb. Mazel offers a critique of this conflation of diaspora/suburb/home when Sasha calls Lipton "Shluftchev with a designer label." And yet despite her tart witticism, the conclusion of the novel takes place in Lipton with a traditional Jewish wedding that re-enacts the life-cycle as "circles drawn in water," and evokes profound emotion and a surprising depth of feeling. It is a scene that functions as wish-fulfillment: yes, exile has ended, for it is a glimpse into the unmitigated joy of the return to Eden pointed to by one of the traditional seven marriage blessings. And yet the wedding ceremony concludes with the traditional breaking of the glass which is a powerful reminder of the condition of exile. Perhaps what occurs here in this simultaneous reference to the worlds of shtetl, suburb, and city, is a moment of joy defined as what Clive Sinclair has aptly called the "diaspora blues."35

3. Story-Telling & Self-Consciousness

In Mazel, people live in two separate space-time continuums simultaneously. Who more present in the moment than Sasha, yet who more engaged in the past through her dialogue with the dead--with Fraydel, Leiba, Maurice--than Sasha. And Hershel the artistic entrepreneur, centered like a whirling dervish in the frantic activity of building the Bilbulniks into a theatrical company is at the same time immersed in the Chasidic world where he had his first taste of ecstasy (Mazel 262). Living in two

worlds simultaneously, neither of which can be denied or resolved into the other, these characters encounter the world of the uncanny,

They live in a storied world, a world explored and articulated by stories. As such they follow the rules of story-telling with their own logic of surprise and meaning-making. They are mysahs, tales, accounts, fables. In them realistic experiences are evoked and then suspended; remembered first in order to be retold and re-remembered. These stories make time move fluidly forward and backward in response to the present-tense action --or is it timeless like meditation?--of consciousness and meaning-making. The first chapter of the novel begins with the preparations for Phoebe’s wedding yet quickly segues into Chloe’s experiences with her mother, and leads into Sasha’s remembering of Warsaw. I say remembering for the narration in effect functions in present tense, creating a virtual reality more like what we expect from lyric poetry, in which consciousness is put into action, than novelistic description of a physical world and its events; in Mazel past, present, and future are all available simultaneously. And the second chapter repeats the experience of the first, only this time Phoebe is pregnant and about to give birth within twenty-four hours in a reprise of the time sequence of the first chapter.

The exploration of time in Mazel thus parallels the scrutiny of causality. Instead of time’s arrow having only one direction, like a plotted vector or algorithm, it goes in both directions simultaneously; time, too, bears the sign here of the uncanny--of mazel, the imp of metaphysics. It is also worth noting that in this novel of four generations of women in the Sonnenberg family--of Leiba, Sasha, Chloe, and Phoebe--memory is a two-way bridge. In this novel which enforces reciprocal interpretations by leaving nothing singular and doubling if not tripling characters and situations Sasha’s memories of Shlufchet are paralleled by Phoebe’s memories of New York, which will be her node of recollection and reinterpretation.

Like the time trickery of this novel, the mysahs punctuating the narrative are not singular but multiple; other stories nest inside them. This pattern is most clearly discernible in the way the great theatrical triumph of the Bilbulniks--the play of Death and the bride which echoes Anski’s
pathbreaking The Dybbuk\textsuperscript{36}--is the story of Fraydel, which Sore/Sasha has carried with her from Shluftchev.

In this world, story-telling is authoritative. One exchange between Jascha and Maurice focuses the difference:

"A good story, huh, Yossela?" Maurice said to his brother, trying to provoke him. He alone could get away with calling his brother by his discarded Yiddish name.

"Not so bad, Mayer," the elder brother responded in kind. "But a story is only a story. It proves nothing."

"Says who? If a story rings true, you think that doesn’t count for anything?" (\textit{Mazel} 267)

The Yiddish world of the Bilbulniks functions under this sign--here, in the world of efshar, of shoulder-shrugging possibility--Sasha is noted for her "extravagant shrugs, her eyebrows eloquently skeptical" (\textit{Mazel} 342)--stories like Fraydel's sketch a Jewish and a human destiny. As Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi notes of Singer in a phrase that applies also to Goldstein, "in the figure of Gimpel and others of his species, Singer offers not sentimental recycling of a no-longer viable Jewish character, but a competing figure of authority: the authority of the wanderer-shlemiel-storyteller."\textsuperscript{37}

Sasha becomes a story-teller, taking on Fraydel's role; she remembers the story of Fraydel's life and retells it. The story comes upon her unawares, rescuing her at her audition when she has forgotten her prepared lines. Her spellbinding performance--she enters a trance as Fraydel and her story speak through her--sweeps her into the theatrical world of the Bilbulniks--they call themselves the mishpocheh, the family, and they become her new kin group--and Fraydel's story becomes their great play. The experience of that play--death coming for the bride--is riveting, as attested by their triumphant tour. \textit{Mazel}, however, does not leave the story singular, but doubles it as the wedding of the Fraydel-play is doubled too in the concluding marriage-scene of Jason and Phoebe. Unlike the

\textsuperscript{36} The best modern version is by Golda Werman, in S. Anski, edited by David Roskies; also see J. Hoberman, "Repossessing the Dybbuk," \textit{Pakn Treger}, Spring 1998/5758, Number 28, pp. 20 - 35, for a discussion of the history of its staging, including film versions.

\textsuperscript{37} Our Homeland, the Text . . . Our Text the Homeland: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination, \textit{Michigan Quarterly Review}, p. 489.
Bilbulnik's version, the young couple's wedding loops around to the birth of their child at the beginning of the novel--which is connected by Sasha to Fraydel, whose name she asks be given to Phoebe and written on the ketuba, the marriage contract. That is, remembering leads to retelling, and such doubling articulates the relationship of speaker and listener in an act constitutive of community.

Both the Bilbulnik's play and the marriage of Phoebe and Jason reflect back on the shtetl. The motivation for Fraydel's suicide is reinforced by her inability to leave Shluftchev and go wandering with the gypsies. While she succumbs to their allure, she is unable to put her feelings into action--unable to repudiate the rigors of the Law of the Father. She is torn apart by these conflicting impulses, and like Ophelia drowns herself. The stories she tells have a gothic edge, while the life she lives is bounded by the seemingly realistic world of the shtetl. Together they plot the dimensions of her identity and elaborate in a kind of cost-benefit analysis the social formation--the deformation a Haskalah generation called it--of personality and Jewish identity by the shtetl and its governing religious ideology.

Henya Saunders parallels Fraydel’s experience of oppression, though Henya has a musical outlet denied to Fraydel. "Under the tyranny of their father, the only inclinations Henya was free to develop with abandon were her scores of nervous ailments, the twitchings and grimaces that came and went, and which, at their worst, made almost a freak of this infinitely kind and infinitely intelligent sister." Only "when she played the piano was Henya free from her afflictions. Within the music, she existed whole and harmonious. Her face—with its great high forehead and sunken cheeks and long, thin nose—rested in repose; her fingers flew with perfect control over the keyboard. She stopped playing, and her organism was once again the scene of grotesque, almost mocking, mannerisms" (Mazel 214).

Both Henya and Fraydel live in a world dominated by a deep sense of exile--of dislocation. This world has been constructed by rabbinic Judaism in response to the power of political, social, economic, and ideological institutions that invent them as the scapegoat, the Other. It is a world desperately trying to articulate and safeguard, in a polluted, corrupt environment, a space of sacredness, even at the cost of obsessive behavior (Eisen, pp. 42, 50, 52). Inside this world, the guilt and shame of exile--the powerlessness of the Jews the Zionists insisted--informs their lives. When confronted with this idea by
Zev Ben-Zion, Jascha explodes: "Homeland?" He had turned the word contemptuously back on the odious little firebrand. 'I suppose by this you mean some wilderness on the other side of the globe, on which I have never laid eyes, and which I don’t even know how to picture, but which, from its description, even by those who profess themselves its eternal lovers, can promise me nothing." The vehemence of his response reveals the power of the theme in the shaping of his identity like that of the other intellectuals who frequent the Cafe. "Somehow he had let this little fanatic pull a hidden cord in his psyche" (Mazel 224). Their identities circle around the ever-present question of exile and homeland made daily relevant by the increasing antisemitism of their Eastern-European environment and the powerful attraction of modern Zionism. Most of Mazel is played out in the lands of the Jewish dispersion. Of its central characters, only Sasha, Chloe, and Maurice get to Palestine, and all leave before the proclamation of the independence and existence of the State of Israel. Yet Zionism is present throughout the novel as a call from the Center.

The stories that fill Mazel interweave different voices and dictions "into what Bakhtin might recognize as a 'composite text'--a term central to polyphonic narrative."38 In these tales the effort to come to terms with the meanings of exile and diaspora results not in exclusion but inclusion. When the Bilbulniks perform, their audiences respond with tears; though the play dramatizes the difficult experience of their shtetl lives, which they have left behind for the city, they do not evade that but accept it as their own. The Bilbulniks thus offer catharsis in the Aristotelian sense, echoing the therapeutic powers of the novel which proposes a theory of character and culture as palimpsest.

The actors embrace the role-playing of this theater-world. They are marked as performers by the new names they choose; stage-names, they also proclaim their right to act out their desires on the urban stage. The metropolis, be it Warsaw or Vilna or New York, is their partner, and is the enabling condition for their new identities as it participates in their transforming characters. "The glowing windows of the great fine residential buildings they passed provoked something sharp with the ache of longing in Sorel, as she imagined to herself the cultivated existence that go on in such places: book-lined walls, artful talk, refined tastes and pleasures. So many lives going on simultaneously! It was wonderful

somehow just to know this was so, even though you couldn’t hope to partake in all their lives" (Mazel 186). This sense of city possibility is part of the magic of theater: "Jews and theater may have come together belatedly, but once they were together, it was a match of real love. How could it have been otherwise? You step onto a stage . . . and become somebody else! How could Jews not have loved it? " (Mazel 179) Maurice has a similar experience: "He would have liked, at one and the same time, to be both a talmid chachem, a disciple of the wise, and also to be one of those bright lights who danced away every night at the Astoria Hotel, buying drinks for the prettiest and fastest girls in all of Warsaw." These don't slake his thirst: "He would have liked to be a thorough-going rationalist, a professor of physics or philosophy at some famous German university, and at the same time to be a Cabalistic mystic, seeing divine emanations in every puddle." And "he would have liked to be an American millionaire, but also a kibbutznik living in collective penury in Palestine." since "one life is definitely not enough," Maurice decides, "there was always the theater, where at least a person could pretend to try on one life after another" (Mazel 252). In this novel, everything is overdetermined, condensed, performed.

So too the theme of exile. Note how Rabbi Nachum watches his daughter go to the Warsaw Theater, and, when she is out of sight, turns back to the tract of Baba Bathra, where he reads of the bitterness of exile, and the problem of setting limits to mourning the destruction of the Second Temple.

Our rabbis taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the second time, large numbers in Israel became ascetics, binding themselves neither to eat meat nor drink wine. Rav Joshua got into conversation with them and said to them: My sons, why do you not eat meat nor drink wine? They replied: Shall we eat flesh which used to be brought as an offering on the altar, now that this altar is in abeyance? Shall we drink wine which used to be poured as a libation on the altar, but now no longer? He said to them: If that is so, we should not eat bread either, because the meal offerings have ceased. They said: That is so, and we can manage with fruit. We should not eat fruit either, he said, because there is no longer an offering of first fruits. Then we can manage with other fruits, they said. But, he said, we should not drink water, because there is no longer any ceremony of the pouring of water. To this they could find no answer, so he said to them: My sons, not to mourn at all is impossible, because the blow has fallen. To mourn overmuch is also impossible, because we do not impose on the community a hardship which the majority cannot endure. (Mazel 181-182)
Though he is concerned to reconstruct the bounds of that world within which exile is palliated through the power of Halakha, Nachum acknowledges that "there was no denying that many Jewish people took enjoyment from these productions, so who was Nachum to say? Jewish Warsaw was filled with talk of theater" (Mazel 180). Perhaps his tolerance for the modern world is due to his understanding that both theater and Halakha are performative realms.

Like the shtetl the Bilbul Art Theater takes the confusions of everyday life and, by dramatizing them selectively in powerful ways, creates a place of enchantment. So doing the Bilbulniks turn the city of refuge into a place of hope, even in exile, even in the capitalist world of alienated labor, helping to realize the force of the folk proverb of the free air of the city. Furthermore, their ability to move their audiences to catharsis, produces a moment of communal solidarity which, evanescent though it is, also functions as a taste of redemption. For the moment of the performance their audiences enter the Eden of art. And within themselves, the Bilbulniks know their power--theirs is the force of theater to re-make reality--to create a momentary homeland within the diasporic city which removes the stigma of homelessness and dislocation. Their theater dramatizes the world of exile and the hope of redemption; enacting the process, it engages the reader in realizing an imaginary community.

This fragile, evanescent moment comes into being in the city; its repetitions amid different venues, and its reiterated evocations of redemption by means of theatrical catharsis mark it as an urban modern ritual. As such it provides a glimpse of wholeness, and allows participants a fleeting moment to overcome the destruction of community and the dislocation of personality which, as Eisen articulates in Galut, are the conditions setting the stage for the lives of the characters of Mazel. The Bilbul Art Theatre frees each of these figures for the moment from the condition of being "an exile from his own country, an exile from himself" (Eisen, 131). They have arrived at a home, temporary though it may be.

This urban moment of liberation, however, differs from the claim of contemporary diasporic apologists like Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin who speak for the tent as against the house. (Shreiber, 277, 275). The triumph of the Bilbulniks is bittersweet. Even amid their urban theatrical success they cannot abandon the shtetl; they are in exile and in diaspora, homeless and at-home simultaneously. They live at the periphery and in the center at the same time. No politics can extricate them from their metaphysical
irony, which Clive Sinclair discovers on a visit to Israel. Visiting Masada in the company of a beautiful Israeli, he realizes that "She was not mine to possess, any more than was Israel, and I left both, because my language was English and I had ambitions to be a writer. I didn't know then what my subject would be, nor that I would eventually attempt to possess with the written word what I couldn't otherwise, that I was destined to haunt Masada . . . forever spying upon the history of the Jews, stuck at the base camp with the diaspora blues" (Mazel 77).

The diasporic issue is also raised by Jacob Neusner in a slightly different context, when he argues that "the experience of exile and then restoration marked the group as special, different, and select." His "Field Theory of the History of Judaism" elaborates this premise. "The history of Judaism began with the destruction of the Temple," he notes, and "the exile of part of the population to Babylonia in 586 B.C., and the return of some of the exiles in 450 B.C. These events can be seen as the beginning of the history of Judaism because the experience of those few formed the pattern which Israel chose as its history. This is the lesson they claimed to learn from it: nothing is set and given and all things are a gift, land and life itself" (Neusner 5).

Neusner insists that there have been many Judaisms, and goes on to argue that the pattern of exile and return, of leaving home and coming home, has been definitive in each formulation. For each Judaism, furthermore, the experience of exile led to a pervasive self-consciousness.

To be an Israel--the social component of a Judaism--has meant to ask what it means to be Israel. The original pattern meant that an Israel would be a social group whose existence had been called into question and affirmed, and therefore would always be called into question and remained perpetually to be affirmed. . . . What for everyone else was a given, for Israel was a gift. What all the nations knew as how things must be, Israel understood as how things might not be: exile and loss, alienation and resentment; but instead of annihilation, there was renewal, restoration, reconciliation, and redemption. So the experience beginning in 586 B.C. and ending about 450 B.C., written down in the Torah of Moses made its mark. (pp. 8 - 9)\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{39}The principles of the Pentateuchal Torah and the historical and prophetic writings of the century after 586, namely Israel's heightened sense of its own social reality, its status as an elected people standing in a covenantal relationship with God, in fact spoke out of the inner structure of the system. They expressed its logic, not a logic intrinsic in events, even in events selected and reworked. They applied its premises, not the data of Israel's common life in either Babylonia or the land of Israel. For the system not only selected the events it deemed consequential, but also spoke of events that had simply never happened. Consider the Jews who remained in the land after 586, or those who remained in Babylonia after Cyrus's decree permitting the return to Zion. For both groups, for different reasons, there was no alienation, also, consequently, no reconciliation, and their lives corresponded to the merely normal, as in any other nation. Treating exile and return as normative imparted to the exile a critical and definitive position. It marked Israel as special, elect, and subject to the rules of the covenant and its stipulations. But to those who stayed put, the urgent question of exile and return, and the response of election and covenant, bore slight relevance. (Neusner, 33)
He elicits the problematics of this pervasive Jewish self-consciousness through historical analysis. "Once more we have to locate ourselves in the time of the completion of the Mosaic Scriptures, that is, in the late sixth and fifth centuries B.C., to identify the critical tensions of that period. The same tensions persisted and confronted the thinkers whose reflection led to the conclusion--in resolution of those ongoing points of dissonance--that the Temple's holiness enveloped and surrounded Israel's land and demarcated its people too. What marked ancient Israel as distinctive was a preoccupation with defining itself." Here Neusner and Edward Said's insights converge as both argue that "to dwell in exile means to know the fundamental fragility of place and to cultivate a radical skepticism toward the condition called home. (Shreiber, 275 - 276)\textsuperscript{40}

In other writings as well as the epilogue to Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, Neusner also notes that the American Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption follows the same pattern of exile and return, inflecting it for the moment as the (near) death and resurrection of the Jewish people. His trenchant phrasing raises a difficult question in comparative religion: did not Rabbinic Judaism develop at the same time, roughly, as Pauline Christianity? and is not the structural role played in the latter by the myth of original sin taken by the theology of exile? That is, in exile, human action is inevitably skewed, intrinsically misses the mark, because of the condition of dislocation--in Neusner's terms because of the inescapable and defining fact of self-consciousness. Within exile, there can be no individual action; to take action outside the fold of the community, is to engage in a form of suicide. To stray from the four cubits of the Law which guarantee the possibility of right action, and guard against the misprision of exile, is to move into unmarked territory, and to lose your way. As one of Singer's characters in Meshugah notes, "What is important? I could understand if you were a pious Jew, as your father was, or a Zionist who wanted to rebuild the Jewish land. What you are doing, your entire conduct, is sheer

\textsuperscript{40}This experience sets the keynote of subsequent Jewish life.

The reason for the persistence of the exegesis of the everyday as a sequence of acts of sanctification -- was the Torah's encapsulation, as normative and recurrent, of the experience of the loss and recovery of the land and of political sovereignty. Israel because of its (in its mind) amazing experience had attained a self-consciousness that continuous existence in a single place under a long-term government had denied others (and had denied Israel before 586, as the Yahwist and the Deuteronomist testify). There was nothing given, nothing to be merely celebrated (as the Yahwist thought) or taken for granted (as the Deuteronomist testify) in the life of a nation that had ceased to be a nation on its own land and had then once more regained that (once normal, now abnormal) condition. Judaism took shape as the system that accounted for the death and resurrection of Israel, the Jewish people, and pointed for the source of renewed life toward sanctification now and salvation at the end of time. (p. 41)
suicide." (Singer, 104) That is, like Fraydel, to wander out of the homeland of the Halakha is to invite confusion, terror, and death.

Given this condition, how can the city redeem? Do we believe that Goldstein's characters escape the condition of exile and the four cubits of the Law by making a Homeland in the city, in Warsaw or Vilna or New York? While we admire their courage in leaving the bounded world, we must also ask if right action is possible in the city--the arena in which such action can be articulated through the art of the theater, amidst the theatricality of urban life. These questions circle back into Sasha's presence, and are explored at the end of the novel when she participates in the student takeover of Columbia University in 1968. Is the idealism of the students--her idealism as a revolutionary woman--viable? or does an acknowledgment of the power of exile and self-consciousness lead us inexorably to the shtetl of Shluftchev/Lipton and a return to the four cubits of the Law? Yet the action of this novel reveals how each of the central women characters in the Sonnenberg family--Leiba, Sasha, Chloe, and Phoebe--struggles to a choice that shows different mitigations of, if not ways out, of the condition of exile. Like the narrator of Isaac Babel's story, "Gedalia," each asks for "a little bit of that pensioned-off God" in the glass of Sabbath tea, and has the courage and will to make her own way in the chaotic, revolutionary world.

The home they make in and of the city for the moment suspends the bitterness of exile. Undermining what Hannah Arendt calls worldlessness--the deeper condition of all Jews between the destruction of the Second Commonwealth by the Romants in 70 CE and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 Arendt implies--these Jews make a diasporic world by force of imagination. Like Kafka they put into play a representation of their worldlessness; like rabbinic Judaism, this exilic image gathers, bounds, and thus restrains the metaphysical and political dimensions of exile, cathecting them as does Nahum's quoted Talmudic passage about how one manages to live in the straitened world and means of exile. As a result of this process of catharsis and boundary-making, these Jews are then freed to conduct their lives with a measure of freedom--though still governed by the ever-present possibility, enforced and reinforced by the example of Hitler's destruction of European Jewry, that they are not finally secure.
Diaspora, thus, no matter how comfortable, is not redemption. The messiah, despite the arrogant\(^{41}\) claims of the political left and the metaphysical right has not yet arrived. As Eisen notes, "Zionism "has significantly altered the facts but not the nature of Jewish existence. It has dealt the Jewish people a far better political hand. But the deck remains the same. The metaphysical condition of the Jews are mains as it always has been" (Eisen, 185). The dimensions of the world these Jews construct in Shlufchev, Warsaw, Vilna, Palestine, and New York in Mazel simultaneously reveal their diasporic triumph and exilic failure.

In constructing a city that, in the classic Jewish phrasing is an Eer VaEym BeYisrael--a city that nurtures learning, we might say, echoing one of the glories of Jerusalem--they articulate what Andre Aciman calls a shadow city. It is a place like his New York, which resembles Sasha's and Isaac Bashevis Singer's, for it exists simultaneously in multiple addresses. It thus has its being in Einsteinian rather than Aristotelian space-time.

What I was looking for, and had indeed found quite by accident, was something that reminded me of an oasis--in the metaphorical sense, since this was . . . an oasis of the soul, a place where, for no apparent reason, people stop on their various journeys elsewhere. Straus Park, it seemed, was created precisely for this, for contemplation, for restoration --in both its meanings--for retrospection, for finding oneself, for finding the center of things.

And indeed there was something physically central about Straus Park. This, after all, was where Broadway and West End Avenue intersected, and the park seemed almost like a raised hub on West 106th Street, leading to Riverside Park on one side and to Central Park on the other. Straus Park was not on one street but at the intersection of four. Suddenly, before I knew why, I felt quite at home. I was in one place that had at least four addresses.

Depending on where I sat, or on which corner I moved to within the park, I could be in any of four to five countries and never for a second be in the one I couldn't avoid hearing, seeing, and smelling. This, I think, is when I started to love, if love is the word for New York. I would return to Straus Park every day, because returning was itself now part of the ritual of remembering the shadow cities."\(^{42}\)

Aciman's essay is a meditation on exile, which articulates this language of worldlessness. "I had come here, an exile from Alexandria, doing what all exiles do on impulse, which is to look for their homeland abroad, to bridge the things here to things there, to rewrite the present so as not to write off the past. I


wanted to rescue things everywhere, as though by restoring them here I might restore them elsewhere as well." As it evokes the multiple, overlapping worlds of shadow cities, his essay simultaneously elicits the meanings of exile. "I wanted everything to remain the same. Because this too is typical of people who have lost everything, including their roots or their ability to grow new ones. They may be mobile, scattered, nomadic, dislodged, but in their jittery state of transience they are thoroughly stationary. It is precisely because you have no roots that you don't budge, that you fear change, that you'll build on anything, rather than look for land. An exile is not just someone who has lost his home; it is someone who can't find another, who can't think of another. Some no longer even know what home means." Aciman helps us to see that exile is not only a state of being but a linguistic condition. Exiles "reinvent the concept [of home] with what they've got, the way we reinvent love with what's left of it each time. Some people bring exile with them the way they bring it upon themselves where they go" (35).

Wittgenstein's comment — "The limits of my language are the limits of my world"—serves as a gloss on Aciman's articulation.

In a shadow city, the lucky or plucky exile can construct a diasporic space by bridging his worlds and bringing his past into the present. It is no accident that Straus Park, Aciman discovers, is presided over by the statue of Memory—of "Mnemosyne, Zeus' mistress, mother of the Muses." This mother endows her daughters, the Muses, with the ability to inspire the art of exile, the creative inventive imagination that can make a (temporary) home in a homeless world. This world of the creative art of the homeless, Aciman comes to realize, is what leads him again and again to Straus Park. "My repeated returns to Straus Park make of New York not only the shadow city of so many other cities I've known, but a shadow city of itself" (37). In this shadowy world, the condition of exile can be transformed into the diasporic world of hope, through the creation of the rich and layered city language of which Wittgenstein speaks. "Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses."

Though in Mazel these Jews come to be apparently rooted in their American home they do not cease their wanderings, as all the characters attest. Nevertheless, they have found a still point and
temporary center from which to leave and to which they return. They have given the book that is their portable homeland--the Torah--a local habitation and a name. Of the transience and evanescence of urban experience, they have articulated a permanent virtue, the power and presence of memory. This home is where the theatre of their imagination functions; it is the place where they perform the experience of homelessness and, thereby delimiting it, create a home for themselves.

What Aciman articulates as a personal journey, Mazel expresses in familial terms. At the end of the novel the relationship of Chloe and Phoebe, mother and daughter, Sasha's child and grandchild, engages the issue of agency. Phoebe tells her mother she has "begun to keep kosher" and the puzzled Chloe acknowledges that "being Jewish had seemed to Chloe to be nothing more than an incidental feature in both her own and her daughter's biographies" (Mazel 335). The narrative pauses in the recounting of events to inquire into the difference between accidental and substantive features of personality, we enter the intersubjective world of these three women and their entangled family history.43 "These family stories had been what had constituted Chloe's elusive sense of herself as Jewish. Her mother and her father had lived through extraordinary events, largely because they had been born into a Europe in which being Jewish was no incidental feature in a person's biography. the world from which these stories had derived had always seemed so remote to Chloe, existing almost at the level of mythology. And this was true even though Chloe, of course, had been conceived right in the middle of all that inconceivable history, just as the old world had come crashing down around her father and mother" (Mazel 335). Chloe had thought that "being Jewish had figured" in the "back pages of the family history," aware of how the utter destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis had deprived her of grandparents and cousins and an extended family.

Sasha had escaped from the shtetl world of family only to reconstitute itself for the moment in the mishpocheh of the Bilbulnik Art Theatre in Warsaw. Now, however, Phoebe has decided to "start taking being Jewish so very seriously, insisting on removing it from the level of mythology" (Mazel 336). Chloe--the in-between figure--"had no idea whether this was, in itself, a good thing. But she did find herself believing, increasingly, that it was a good thing for Phoebe" (Mazel 336). The chapter

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43I owe this observation to Howard Wettstein.
articulates Phoebe's choice, against Sasha, her grandmother—and Chloe's acknowledgment that in so doing "Phoebe—who had always been an extraordinarily gifted problem-solver, first as a little chess prodigy, and then as a mathematician—had hit upon a quite brilliant solution to the problem of being Phoebe." (Mazel 336) The phrasing simultaneously enforces the sense of the mysteriousness of personality which informs the novel, and leads to the notion of agency: Phoebe chooses to make Judaism central to her life. What had seemed the suffocating condition of being for Sasha, and outside the realm of adult experience for Chloe, has now become the focus of Phoebe's life. This chapter ends with Sasha being outmaneuvered by Phoebe, who explains her choice by interpreting a story Sasha had told about her great-great-grandfather, who had re-buried a suicide inside the cemetery. As she tells Sasha, "I always loved what the dead man said to Rav Dovid. That even the dead need the comfort of their own kind" (Mazel 338). With this phrase, Phoebe solves the conundrum and the contradictions of her life, asserting her right not to Fraydel's death-dealing Gothic story-telling and Sasha's heroic world-creating self-consciousness central to their personalities, but to what Chloe understands is "an almost unbearably poignant innocence, the air-sweetening breath of the very wise child" (Mazel 331). This choice to return and thus become literally a ba`alat teshuvah takes her to the old ways. Chloe recognizes that "Phoebe had found something here that she loved, and Chloe was trying her damnedest to see what it might be, if only for the sake of understanding her daughter. She was trying to peer past the limits of irony . . ." (Mazel 332). The phrase--the limits of irony--takes us out of the modernist world of Sasha with its dominant self-consciousness into the world of classic Jewish tradition. We are left with a conundrum, which we as readers will have to resolve: is Phoebe in re-enacting that return to tradition simply re-entering the stagnant world of the shtetl, of Shluftchev with its puddle where, as Fraydel said "that all of the memories of Shluftchev had sunk to the bottom of that puddle, and these memories were of such a nature as to give off just such a stink?" (Mazel 334) Or has a different, and new possibility come into play that might reconcile modernist city and traditional shtetl life?

Mazel articulates central themes of Rebecca Goldstein's work. Chaos theory, gender concerns, theatrical mise-en-scene, and the shifting narrative point of view join in this fiction. We move from the first-person narration of The Mind-Body Problem to the shifting narrative of Mazel, like mazel itself
constantly changing course, even in mid-sentence. This is a novel relying on free indirect discourse, which thereby flows from character to character, and thus offers us a shifty, shifting narrator whose point of view keeps switching not only from character to character but from inside to outside--entirely appropriate to a tale of four women's overlapping generations. Its many story-tellers and stories invite us in their multiplicity into the world of chaos, chance, and the capriciousness of life. With Sasha, Chloe, and Phoebe we experience the uncontained, uncontainable, and surging power of life. Leiba acknowledges the world left outside by the Halakha, just as Phoebe discovers the Law as a Jewish religious experience, Chloe as generic Greek paganism, and Sasha as the fullness of the world of Emancipation. In Warsaw Sasha transforms Fraydel from the ugly duckling of Shluftchev into the Sasha-theatrical-swan of Hans Christian Andersen's tale. Together, these women articulate not the chain of tradition but the circles of life in water; as women their experience is flowing, fluid, and dynamic, by contrast with the masculinist closed systems of ideological institution building; as women, they live in experience. That is, they are part of the world of mazel, in the world of chance and change. They are, as the novel concludes, "all dancing together, their arms linked around one another's waists and their feet barely touching the billowing floor, as they swirled in the circles drawn within circles within circles" (Mazel 356-357).

Their is the pleasure of wit from the skewering phrase--"Lipton is Shluftchev with a designer label" (333)--to the surprising turn of syntax that changes the meaning of the sentence--Yes, Sorela will be the Jewish Sarah Bernhardt." "The Jewish Sarah Bernhardt, Fruma? But wasn’t the woman herself Jewish?" "Oh, for heaven’s sake, Leiba. You know what I mean" (175). Here the barb turns upon the speaker, though the exchange begins with an assertion intended to define the object, only to double back upon the person making the assertion. Then there is one of my favorites which is worth hearing once more: "Jewish Warsaw, which was roughly a third of Warsaw proper was a city of rabbis and swindlers, capitalists and poets; but, most of all, it was a city of talkers. There were so many ideas in the air you could get an education simply by breathing deeply." (206) And any mention of linguistic fun in the novel cannot ignore the delicious wit in the name of the theater: the Bilbul Art Theater, since bilbul is the Hebrew (and Yiddish cognate) for confusion. And Shluftchev, which echoes the sound of
the word for sleepy in Yiddish. Nor is the following exchange to be ignored: "Sherlock Holmes is Jewish. He changed his name. Watson’s a goy. The thing I’ve always wondered about is whether or not Watson ever suspected. My dear friend Holmes: filthy Yid" (248).

This cornucopia of linguistic pleasure does not proceed from an omniscient narrator. Rather, it is the result of the experience of different characters, who apparently can’t help making such remarks, which emerge from the contradictions of their lived experience, and as a result often surprise by returning to pierce them with a boomerang effect. Some of them sound like direct translations from Yiddish--"When the penis stands up, then the brains fall down" (256)--and all of them color the novel, providing a kind of Yiddish inflection to the experience it chronicles. Like Yiddish proverbs, these comments have a bite, and, often, a reverse turn, which parallels the dominant narrative habit of the novel. Such wit sticks stories into the memory and encourages us not only to remember but to retell them.44

Mazel concludes by returning us, via Lipton, to the shtetl. The urban moment of Sasha's participation in the student take-over of Columbia, when she leads them in dancing parallels the joyous dancing of the wedding of Jason and Phoebe. The revolution seems to Sasha to be a version of Purim, while the wedding with its theme of fasting and subsequent joy--by contrast with the Bilbulnik's staged version of The Bridegroom--we recognize as Yom Kippur and Sukkot--the festival of our rejoicing--rolled into one. The novel balances them against each other: there is the evanescent creation of a diasporic homeland in a theatrical moment in the city by Sasha, and the structured space of the ritual of the wedding which extricates Phoebe and Jason from the wanderings of exile and creates a space under the Chuppa, the marriage canopy, where the logic of joy can function and the itch of self-consciousness for a moment be laid to rest. The novel balances Phoebe against Sasha--touring performer against the wunderkind mathematician whose academic specialty is the geometry of soap-bubbles. In this way Mazel and Saychel for the moment are reconciled, chance and reason, the bride who understands from her fascination with soap-bubbles the evanescent, fragile beauty of floating and wandering, and her grandmother who recovers a lesson in the meanings of home.

44 Freud reminds us that part of the power of jokes, whose category these witticisms fit, is to make the listener want to retell them. See "On Jokes and the Unconscious?"
Can it be an accident in this brilliantly organized novel that Chloe always remembers Maurice's arrival, her first glimpse of her father, and focuses on "the funny sandals her father had been wearing" (Mazel 327). These sandals echo Maurice's encouragement of Sasha to go to Israel with Zev Ben-Zion; they are the mark of the kibbutznik. They also echo Hershel's wonderful tale of the sandal wearer who, thanks to the leaf blown by a windstorm from the Tree of Knowledge out of the Garden of Eden that had become stuck on the bottom of one of his sandals is able to cure the King's daughter of her ailments. Ironically, the King exchanges half the kingdom for the sandals "But it stands to reason that a king can't wear dirty sandals. So he gave them to his servants to be cleaned, and the servants, of course, scraped away the leaf from the Tree of Knowledge along with the other shmutz, and when the King put then on he was no wiser or more sensible than before." With its reference to the Tree of Knowledge, this mysah returns us to the Edenic world prior to the first exile. It also recapitulates the uncanny division of this world and in the culminating exchange between Jascha and Hershel punctuates the effort to accept all the experiences of Israel. "'You say there's wisdom buried somewhere in all the shmutz we've picked up along the way. I say shmutz is shmutz.'" "'Oh,''Maurice says to his brother, 'I know how you think it will ends. There won't be anyone left who still wears sandals.' 'Precisely. In a few generations, three or four at the most, nobody will even remember who was a sandal-wearer and who wasn't.' So, said Hershel, finally pushing back his chair and reaching for his hat, 'we will have to see whose is the more improbable fairy tale'"

(Mazel 266-268). The phrase echoes the Zionist enterprise, and the effort to construct a new home for the Jewish people, a most improbable dream and tale-come-true.

The novel concludes in the second person address of an invitation, welcoming us to "The bris of little Mayer will be--'God willing,' his parents have requested that I add--next Thursday morning, at seven o'clock a.m., in Congregation Z'chor Et Ha-emeth in Lipton, New Jersey. You are all, each and every one of you, invited. Beatrice has taken over all the arrangements, so it's sure to be an event that will be well worth the trip--even to such a place as Lipton.

And may we all only meet at happy occasions, the face pressed up outside the window kindly disposed toward the fragile life that lies within" (Mazel 357).
Remembering Fraydel, retelling her story, Sasha despite her conscious choice in leaving, participates in the reconstruction of Shluftchev in modern Lipton. In recovering the past so brutally destroyed by the Nazis in the virtual reality of this brilliant fiction, Sasha's and Phoebe's actions and force of character merge into an emblem of our work of recovery, reclaiming, and reconstruction.