



Project
MUSE[®]

Scholarly journals online

The Death and Life of a Jewish Judith Shakespeare: Rebecca Goldstein's *Mazel*

Helene Meyers
Southwestern University

This essay argues that Rebecca Goldstein's *Mazel* calls upon Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* not only to provide feminist critical memory of the shtetl experience but also to challenge feminist narratives that essentialize Orthodox Judaism. In *Mazel*, Goldstein presents us with a Jewish Judith Shakespeare figure who could find no outlet for her genius in the oppressively traditional shtetl. However, *Mazel* is a narrative of three generations, and in the third generation, Goldstein makes good on the promise that ends *A Room of One's Own* and re-embodies her Judith Shakespeare in the form of Phoebe, a *baalat teshuva* who resides in a Modern Orthodox community and who professes mathematics at Princeton. By imagining Phoebe as Fraydel's transhistorical double, Goldstein allies Woolf's vision of the future with Jewish conceptions of a soul's transmigration. Moreover, Phoebe's life challenges feminist assumptions that Orthodoxy is the practice of ethnic and gender chauvinism. By adopting and adapting Woolf's narrative of a woman of genius, Goldstein creates a Jewish feminist classic all her own, one in which feminist desire serves as a bridge rather than a battleground for intra-Jewish difference.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf imagines that William Shakespeare had a gifted sister, Judith. With a "poet's heart . . . caught and tangled in a woman's body," Judith's life ended in suicide.¹ Like Woolf, Rebecca Goldstein "finds the light of women of genius worthy of imagination."² In *Mazel*, Goldstein

¹Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929), p. 50. Hereafter cited parenthetically as ROO.

²Rebecca Goldstein, "Against Logic," *Tikkun*, Vol. 12, No. 6 (1997): 43.

created Fraydel, a gifted storyteller who was deemed “a meshuggena maydel”³ by many in Shluftchev, her Eastern European shtetl. Like Judith’s and Virginia’s, Fraydel’s life ends in suicide; if we remember that Woolf filled her pockets with rocks as she walked into the river Ouse, then Woolfian echoes resound in Fraydel’s death: the “terrible sight” of a drowned body with “heavy rocks sewn into the bottom of the skirt” (p. 153). Thus Goldstein presents us with a portrait of a madwoman of the shtetl—a Jewish Judith Shakespeare figure who could find no outlet for her genius in the oppressively traditional shtetl where the light of Haskalah had yet to reach. However, *Mazel* is a narrative of three generations, and by the third generation, a Modern Orthodox suburb in New Jersey has enabled the rebirth of this Jewish Judith Shakespeare in the form of Phoebe, a *baalat teshuva* (returnee to traditional Judaism) and a mathematics professor at Princeton. *Mazel* invokes Woolf’s classic narrative of the woman of genius not only to provide us with feminist critical memory of the shtetl experience but also to create a gilgul (re-embodied soul) who challenges feminist narratives that can only imagine Orthodoxy as antagonistic to female bodies.

Throughout Goldstein’s oeuvre, intellectual women are beset by “the mind/body problem,” the title Goldstein gave to her first novel and a theme that she adumbrates in diverse forms. In her Brontësque tale “From Dreams of the Dangerous Duke,” a prodigy girl-child succumbs to “brain fever.”⁴ In *A Late Summer Passion of Woman of Mind* (1989), the young Eva Mueller, daughter of a Nazi academic, strives to become all body as the lover of Martin, a violently disturbed second-generation Holocaust survivor; later, as a mature professor of philosophy, she strives to become all mind. *Properties of Light* (2000) features the brilliantly beautiful Dana, who only seems capable of fulfilling her intellectual and romantic ambitions in a posthumous world. In *The Mind-Body Problem*, the protagonist Renee Feuer attempts to assuage her own intellectual insecurities by marrying a man of genius. Recalling *Middlemarch*’s Dorothea Brooke, Renee initially plays handmaiden to her pragmatically challenged Princeton mathematician husband; once she learns that his mathematical prowess has been spent, she assumes the role of comforter and protector of his secret. At one point in the novel, Renee fantasizes that her female progeny might be her contribution to solving the mind-body problem:

³Rebecca Goldstein, *Mazel* (New York: Penguin, 1995), p. 148. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁴Rebecca Goldstein, “From Dreams of the Dangerous Duke,” in *Strange Attractors* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

I had always pictured myself with a daughter—a golden child, loving the world and herself. And now there was the possibility that she would inherit her father's genius. . . . I could be the mother of a Marie Curie. How's that for compensation for not being a genius oneself? Wife *and* mother of. And if she were brilliant—not that she need be; my love would be unconditional—but if she were, I'd make sure the flames of her creativity were never smothered by self-doubt. It was an exciting thought: Daddy's mind, Mommy's body.⁵

Renee's fantasy in *The Mind-Body Problem* is realized in Mazel's Phoebe. Indeed, Phoebe, Goldstein's emblem of the woman of genius who not only lives but also thrives, is a mathematician, with tenure at Princeton. While the question "what is it like being married to a genius" becomes the catalyst for Goldstein's first novel, *Mazel* seeks to show what it's like to *be* the genius—in both the Old World and the New.

Michael Galchinsky has noted that for many Jewish American writers, "the Old World is the American Jewish homeland. To be sure, it is an imaginary homeland, not remembered in its particularities, a homeland sentimentalized as a quaint and timeless place of Jewish wholeness, a seamless Yiddishkeit."⁶ Goldstein's text counters such sentimentality and nostalgia as it makes clear that the gendered double standards of the shtetl play a significant part in Fraydel's demise: "if she had been a boy, they would have called her an *illui*, a prodigy. There was no denying this. . . . Even Nachum [Fraydel's father] used to say . . . that it was a pity that, with such a head, the child had not been born a boy, destined for a life of study" (pp. 127–28). Indeed, Nachum compares Fraydel to an ostrich, "a bird that's been given wings but will never fly" (p. 128). In Shluftchev, a woman's body grounds a being of genius, and the history of Fraydel's family suggests that becoming of marriageable age is an especially perilous time for one's intellectual and creative life. Like her daughter Fraydel, Leiba used to lose herself in the books she surreptitiously read in the outhouse:

—a door with a latch, a most precious strip of thin metal, bolt it quickly across the jamb—and freedom—sinking herself deep down into reading that would close her above her head like quiet water, breathing in the thick element of another world, gulping it in, so deep and so sweet, time itself blotted out, the world she knew reduced to a few faint noises from a faraway distance, having nothing

⁵Rebecca Goldstein, *The Mind-Body Problem* (New York: Penguin, 1983), p. 178.

⁶Michael Galchinsky, "Scattered Seeds: A Dialogue of Diasporas," in David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel, eds., *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 201.

to do with her, no claim to make on her, until a knock on the outhouse door would rudely jolt her to her senses— (pp. 67–68)

In order to free herself from the demands of the quotidian, Leiba drowned herself in books. However, once she turns her attention to the student who is to become her husband, she stops reading. When Fraydel is betrothed, she follows in her mother's footsteps and discontinues her voracious reading habits; moreover, she now tells tame stories to her sisters rather than the lurid, fantastic fictions that were a hallmark of her style. Indeed, the end of her submersion in books and stories becomes the prelude to Fraydel's death by drowning. Significantly, Fraydel's imagination could always only conceive the Jewish woman's lifecycle as ending in tragedy: in *The Bridegroom*, the feminist Gothic tale that Fraydel composes, a marriage ceremony turns into a macabre dance of death, one that prefigures Fraydel's suicide as the end result of her betrothal story.

Like Woolf, Goldstein employs her feminist imagination to fill in the gaps of history and to re-member the past. *Mazel* reflects Goldstein's assumption that shtetl life must have produced "some incredibly brilliant, energetic and totally neurotic women."⁷ Indeed, she reports that since writing *Mazel*, "I have heard from various people who have confirmed my imagination. One professor of Jewish studies, who originally came from Poland, startled me by coming up to me after a talk and saying 'I knew your Fraydel. She lived in my village. She died as you said.' So here is an aspect of the real past that has found its way into my dreams only because of my contemporary sensibility, which finds the plight of women of genius worthy of imagination."⁸ Leo Spitzer has used the term "critical memory" to describe "nostalgia's complicating other side."⁹ In *Mazel*, Goldstein fictionally provides us with feminist critical memory of the shtetl experience.

At Phoebe's wedding, Sasha is overwhelmed by "the enormity of the irony" that, in a traditional Jewish world reminiscent of the Shluftchev that oppressed her sister to death, her daughter and granddaughter "danced out their joy in the midst of the clapping, celebrating women" (p. 355). However, the

⁷Sandee Brawarsky, "Rebecca Goldstein: Mining Intellectual Dilemmas," *Publishers Weekly* (23 October 1995): 48.

⁸Goldstein, "Against Logic," p. 43.

⁹Leo Spitzer, "Persistent Memory: Central European Refugees in an Andean Land," in Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 384.

irony that so pains Sasha does not begin at Phoebe's wedding; rather, it begins in Warsaw at Sasha's audition for the Bilbul Art Theatre. Prepared to perform another classic text of female self-extinction, Ophelia's suicide monologue, Sasha experiences stage fright; just as the audition is about to end in silence and failure, "a voice like no other" (p. 243) takes hold of Sasha and she begins to narrate Fraydel's *The Bridegroom*. This performance of the uncanny not only begins Sasha's career as a star of the Yiddish theatre but also provides the Bilbul Theatre group with the play that will make it a cultural institution, "the spiritual heir to the legendary Vilna Troupe" (p. 308). *The Bridegroom* is critically acclaimed as "the first genuinely authentic contribution the Yiddish theatre has yet made to world drama" (p. 276), and Jewish audiences, "no matter how enlightened and assimilated" (p. 278), found in the drama an expression of Jewish pasts and presents. Indeed, as the imminence of World War II lurks offstage, "the story of the young bride meeting her doom on the very night of her wedding" (p. 278) seems to function as political allegory. Thus while *The Bridegroom* prefigured rather than prevented Fraydel's demise, it also came to bear witness to her creativity, to the aesthetics of communal rituals that could not sustain her, and to the overdetermined destructive forces of history. Although Fraydel's body was destroyed, traces of her soul are preserved via Sasha and *The Bridegroom*. This thematic of preservation and continuity despite unimaginable and irrecoverable losses is most fully realized in the third generation. Indeed, in Phoebe's story, we find a convergence of feminist and Jewish narratives of "a second chance at life" (p. 17).¹⁰

Despite the dramatic and biographically overdetermined nature of Judith Shakespeare's suicide, it is worth noting that in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf does not leave Judith to rest in her grave "where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle" (p. 50). Indeed, at the end of her classic essay, Woolf returns to the figure of Judith Shakespeare as an emblem of the future; as Woolf writes, "she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. This opportunity . . . is now coming within your power to give her" (p. 117). This Woolfian notion of Judith Shakespeare waiting to "put on the body which she has so often laid down" (p. 118) has much in common with the Jewish conception of *gilgul*, defined by Breslauer as "a soul's physical re-embodi-

¹⁰In her interview with Brawarsky, Goldstein indicates that Phoebe "live[s] out the sociological dictum that the third generation seeks to return to its roots" ("Mining Intellectual Dilemmas," p. 49).

ment after having already passed through a previous existence.”¹¹ Although this Jewish conception of transmigration had little or no place in more rationalist strains of Jewish philosophy, it did develop in kabbalistic and Hasidic thought. Although *gilgul* was originally associated with retribution, especially for sexual offenses, Gershom Scholem explains that it was reconceptualized as “a chance of fulfilling the commandments which it was not given to the soul to fulfil before, and of thereby continuing the work of self-emancipation”¹² Thus Scholem continues, “the *Gilgul* is part of the process of restoration, of *Tikkun*.”¹³ Breslauer argues that the conception of *gilgul* as self-emancipation is most fully realized in modern fiction; his brief analysis of short stories by I. L. Peretz and Judah Steinberg leads him to assert that “*gilgul* represents a chance to give the body its due.”¹⁴ In *Mazel*, Goldstein gives Fraydel, a Jewish Judith Shakespeare, her due by re-embodiment in Phoebe, Fraydel’s grandniece and the granddaughter of Sasha.

Significantly, *Mazel* alludes to the concept of *gilgul* and explicitly connects it to the work of identity reconstruction associated with the theater. At one point, a young Maurice, the man who will eventually become Sasha’s beloved husband, thinks, “One life is definitely not enough, which is why the Cabalistic idea of reincarnation had always appealed to him. Or, if reincarnation wasn’t in the metaphysical cards, there was always the theater, where at least a person could *pretend* to try on one life after another” (p. 252). Although Fraydel is textually re-membered first through Sasha’s theatrical work, the language of the text suggests—and performs—the reincarnation that is part of the novelistic hand Goldstein deals. At one point, Leiba, Fraydel’s and Sasha’s mother, thinks about Fraydel, “She was a soul without a skin. . . . The world was flaying her raw” (p. 125). As Phoebe grows up marked by “hidden lights” and “disquieting shadows” (p. 16), Sasha worries about her in the terms set by Leiba’s thoughts: “More than once, she had found herself wishing that she could put her granddaughter under glass—to keep the world away. *A soul without a skin, without a skin. How can I keep the world from flaying her raw*” (p. 17, my emphasis). Thus the earliest descriptions of Phoebe establish that her being is interwoven with Fraydel’s, and the *gilgul* might be usefully understood

¹¹S. Daniel Breslauer, “The Ethics of *Gilgul*,” *Judaism*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1983): 230.

¹²Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), p. 282.

¹³Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 283.

¹⁴Breslauer, “The Ethics of *Gilgul*,” pp. 233–234.

in literary terms as a form of transhistorical doubling. Indeed, as both a child and an expectant mother, Phoebe possesses such a “haunting resemblance” to Fraydel that Sasha “fleetingly think[s] that the child really *was* Fraydel” (p. 17). Recognizing that Fraydel and Phoebe are connected across generations, Sasha commands Phoebe to use the name Fraydel for her *ketuba*. Paradoxically, a wedding contract comes to symbolize a line of Jewish female continuity that gender oppression, suicide, and the world-destroying effects of the Shoah have disrupted but not severed.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf fictionally theorized the destruction of a woman of genius and gave hope but not substance to such a woman's eventually being able to “to put on the body which she has so often laid down.” In *Mazel's* Phoebe, Goldstein embodies Woolf's hope and novelistically suggests one set of conditions that enable a contemporary Jewish Judith Shakespeare to take her place amongst the living. In a Purim-like reversal, Modern Orthodox life in Lipton, New Jersey, provides Fraydel with her second chance at life; indeed, “Shluftchev with a designer label” (Sasha's epithet for Lipton) becomes Phoebe's home, “a quite brilliant solution to the problem of being Phoebe” (p. 336).

To be sure, Phoebe's decision to seek “the comfort of [her] own kind” (p. 338) and to embrace Lipton's shtetl life is a refutation of the composer Jascha's belief that “[i]f they didn't hate us, there would no longer be anything like this anachronism you call Jewishness” (p. 268). For Jascha, Jewish difference is the product of antisemitism, and he predicts that “in a few generations, three or four at the most, nobody will even remember who was a sandal-wearer and who wasn't” (p. 269). Phoebe's—and, by extension, Goldstein's—desire to plant her feet not in an anachronism but rather in a vibrant, living tradition revalues the particularism of Jewish identity, as Andrew Furman has compellingly argued.¹⁵

However, Phoebe's life not only affirms the relevance of Jewishness and Judaic practice, but it also functions to counter feminist narratives that can only imagine Orthodoxy as the practice of patriarchy. As Sara Horowitz has noted, “Judaism and Jewishness are made to stand for (and be accountable for) patriarchy.”¹⁶ Critics such as Susannah Heschel and Judith Plaskow have shown that an early trend in feminist religious studies was to blame Judaism

¹⁵Andrew Furman, “Rebecca Goldstein's Feminist/Jewish Problem,” in *Contemporary Jewish American Writers and the Multicultural Dilemma: Return of the Exiled*, pp. 98–99.

¹⁶Sara R. Horowitz, “The Paradox of Jewish Studies in the New Academy,” in *Insider/Outsider*.

and monotheism for the death of the Goddess; thus even as the dissemination of Vatican II rendered charges of deicide moot, this timeworn version of anti-semitism was getting a feminist makeover. Moreover, feminist Christian scholars often used ahistorical readings of rabbinical texts as patriarchal foils to the supposedly more “feminine” teachings of Christ.¹⁷ Liberal Jewish feminists have tended to save Jewishness and Judaism from this critique by constructing feminism and Orthodoxy as the oxymoronic couple. As Sylvia Barack Fishman notes, early in the second wave, feminists who were Jewish tended to mention Jewishness only when “derid[ing] *traditional Judaism* as one more example of egregious patriarchal power” (my emphasis).¹⁸ Moreover, feminist debates and change within the Orthodox world are often dismissed as inconsequential and inadequate. For example, feminist response to the rise of the Orthodox bat mitzvah “has tended to concentrate on the disparity between limited Orthodox forms of bat mitzvah, on one hand, and egalitarian Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist modes of bat mitzvah on the other. This, however, misses the point that Orthodoxy has in fact traveled a farther road than other wings of Judaism in breaking away from previously prevailing norms.”¹⁹ For the liberal Jewish feminist, Orthodoxy too often enters the realm of the abject: traditionalism and fundamentalism become conflated, and Orthodox Jews are assumed to be ethnic and gender chauvinists.²⁰

¹⁷See especially Judith Plaskow, “Blaming Jews for Inventing Patriarchy,” *Lilith*, Vol. 7 (1980): 11–12, and Susannah Heschel, “Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in Michael Shermis and Arthur E. Zannoni, eds., *Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), pp. 227–246. For a more recent discussion of this problem, see Sarah J. Melcher, “The Problem of Anti-Judaism in Christian Feminist Biblical Interpretation: Some Pragmatic Suggestions,” in *Cross Currents* (2003): 22–31.

¹⁸Sylvia Barack Fishman, *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* (New York: Free Press, 1993), p. 2.

¹⁹Barack Fishman, *A Breath of Life*, p. 131.

²⁰Significantly, the view that Orthodoxy is feminism’s other often parochially overestimates the feminist values of the non-Orthodox world. As Goldstein smartly points out, “this problem of female intelligence might be connected with the problem of Jewishness—at least in my personal history it was. But it’s certainly not a problem that’s restricted to Jewishness. Would that it were. Would that—as the heroine of my first novel *The Mind-Body Problem* innocently thought—and as I, too once innocently thought—you could leave traditional Judaism behind and thereby leave behind all forms of diminishing female intelligence, female potentiality” (“Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered Am I: Reflections on Being Asked to Speak on the Topic of the Jewish Writer,” keynote address delivered at the

Indeed, when Sasha learns that Phoebe has decided to keep kosher, her first response is to “harangue” her by telephone and then to visit her at her Princeton office: “I can’t *understand* you. You’re an educated woman. A *professor*. Why would you want to start up all over again with those *old ways*” (p. 338). Similarly, Sasha fumes about what she terms the “reshtelization of America” (p. 354). However, the specifics of Phoebe’s Modern Orthodox life merit feminist attention rather than wholesale dismissal, and Sasha’s prejudices as well as her grudging reappraisals help to stage a rereading of Orthodoxy.

Although Sasha assumes—and fears—that Lipton is simply a designer version of the shtetl that stifled her beloved sister, she as well as her daughter Chloe (Phoebe’s mother) discover that Lipton and traditional Judaism are marked by diversity: “Phoebe described herself as Orthodox—to Chloe’s ears, an unfortunate term—but there seemed to be a rather large range of value-systems lumped under the rubric of that one word. No wonder that ‘the Jerusalem of New Jersey,’ as small as it was, had five different Orthodox synagogues” (p. 332). Thus Goldstein de-essentializes Orthodoxy for both characters and readers.²¹ Moreover, for Phoebe, Lipton is hardly a self-enclosed world. Although “Lipton, New Jersey, seems to be the very first place in which Phoebe feels quite entirely at home” (p. 8), she does not stay at home; rather, Lipton is also the site from which she commutes to and successfully functions in “the altogether different world, the genteel, the posh, the WASPY world, of Princeton” (p. 5). Likewise, she commutes to Sasha’s Riverside Drive apartment in Manhattan, where Sasha stir-fries “some vegetables and tofu in the separate wok she now kept solely for Phoebe” (p. 351). In a study of *ba’alot teshuvah*, Deborah Kaufman asserts that “every aspect of orthodoxy serves to separate Jews from the larger society—keeping kosher, the Sabbath, rituals, dress, and even the lunar calendar”; such practices also tend to create distance between the *ba’alot teshuvah* and their birth families.²² However, in Goldstein’s vision, those “old ways” that Phoebe has adopted anew, the laws of kashrut, need not

2003 American Literature Symposium on Jewish American and Holocaust Literature—I am indebted to Rebecca Goldstein for providing me with a copy of this address).

²¹Goldstein also does such cultural work in her short story “Rabbinical Eyes”; as the narrator of that work explains, “I’ve read some of the angry literature that’s been put out by Jewish feminists. And truly there seems to be a lot there to be angry about. All I can say is that the kind of mindless dismissal of girls that seems to typify certain parts of the Orthodox Jewish world simply wasn’t my experience at all” (*Strange Attractors*, p. 206).

²²Debra Renee Kaufman, *Rachel’s Daughters: Newly Orthodox Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 118.

be social barriers nor divide families. Indeed, the names of Phoebe's mathematician bridesmaids, Cindy Chan and Shanti Chervu, suggest that Phoebe's turn to Modern Orthodoxy and Lipton is NOT a self-imposed form of Jewish ghettoization. Rather, Phoebe shares with other female ethnic subjects a sense that permeable boundaries define the diasporic homes that we make.

In "Professions for Women," an essay that linguistically and thematically functions as a follow-up to *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf writes that a room of one's own and five hundred pounds a year constitute a start rather than an end: "But this freedom is only a beginning; the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared. How are you going to furnish it, how are you going to decorate it? With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms?"²³ Significantly, the trauma of betrothal that precedes Fraydel's suicide is compounded by the trauma of a returned marriage contract. Fraydel had picked flowers on the Sabbath, a violation of Jewish law, and she responded to taunts by playing the role of madwoman of the shtetl. When the family of her betrothed calls off the wedding, Leiba tries to comfort Fraydel by saying, "He wasn't your intended"; Fraydel's response is a simple "I know that" (p. 149). Indeed, Fraydel also seems to know that, in Shluftchev, there can be no intended for her, that there will be no one with whom she can share a room or her stories.

However, Phoebe, Fraydel's gilgul and Goldstein's Jewish Judith Shakespeare, does find her *bashert*; her chosen life partner, Jason, is a computer "wunderkind" (p. 37), and one with whom Phoebe can share the ethereal world of higher mathematics. In sharp contrast to the bridegroom of death that Fraydel imagined, Jason is Phoebe's spiritual, intellectual, and romantic partner. Even Sasha approves of him: "how could one help it? He's *adorable*—with big, brown, long-lashed puppy-dog eyes, just begging for some affectionate gesture—and altogether lacking those sexist traits that Sasha had initially presumed he *must* have. Without making any big deal about it, Jason and Phoebe manage to live on the most perfectly egalitarian terms . . ." (p. 36). In *Unheroic Conduct*, Daniel Boyarin argues for the feminist potential of rabbinic models of masculinity²⁴; Jason seems to embody this potential. Thus the new man and the contemporary woman of genius find themselves and one another in a re-

²³Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women" (1931), in Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*, ed. Michele Barrett (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), p. 63.

²⁴Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

markably revised shtetl. Indeed, as *mazel* would have it, the “reshtetlization of America” of which Sasha is so contemptuous is posited as containing the seeds of not only Jewish renewal but also gender renewal. Lest we underestimate the feminist marriage plot in *Mazel*, we might remember that a Yiddish folk tale about the daughter of a king who was “so brilliant that the conversation of all the young men who sought her hand bored her to tears” (p. 157) frames each section of this novel. Although the ostensible moral of this tale is that *mazel* supersedes *saychel* (brains), this frame narrative also teaches that a woman’s *bashert* is the one who stimulates her voice: “of course she belongs to the man who made her talk. He made her into a person” (p. 296). Both the framing tale and Phoebe’s Modern Orthodox life narrative constitute a revision of Fraydel’s *The Bridegroom*; thus the marriage plot is disentangled from the Gothic.

Sasha memorializes her sister Fraydel by lighting a *Yahrzeit* candle for her each year, the only Judaic practice Sasha retains. Moreover, she keeps Fraydel’s presence alive by transmitting *The Bridegroom* and making it into a hit of the Yiddish theater. As a secular Yiddishist, Sasha re-members the female creative power that was born of, nurtured by, and drowned in Shluftchev. In the form of Phoebe, Fraydel’s soul finally finds both work and love. Indeed, the Modern Orthodox community of Lipton, “Schluftchev with a designer label,” enables a Jewish Judith Shakespeare to take up and live fully within both body and mind. According to the conception of *gilgul*, souls are reembodied because they still have work to do. Sometimes that work consists of individual fulfillment; however, some souls return because their gifts are needed in the world. In *Mazel*, Fraydel’s soul seems to serve a narrative of not only self but also communal emancipation. By adopting and adapting Woolf’s narrative of a woman of genius, Goldstein creates a Jewish feminist classic all her own, one in which feminist desire serves as a bridge rather than a battleground for intra-Jewish difference.