Dance as a Tool of Pleasure and Humiliation in I. J. Singer's *The Brothers Ashkenazi*[1]

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Soon after her unwelcome arranged marriage, fictional Polish Hasidic bride Dinele Alter reflects miserably on the paradoxical emotional qualities of Jewish wedding dancing. As narrated in Israel Joshua Singer's 1936 Yiddish-language family epic *The Brothers Ashkenazi* (*Di brider Ashkenazi*), she feels doubly alone because—despite cultural expectations that wedding dancing be joyous—she never shared in the gladess of her wedding guests: "All the hundreds of people who had danced and rejoiced over her happiness had no thought whatever about her feelings."[2] Dancing can express many moods in literary texts: joy, community, and freedom, but also the impossibility of escaping social restrictions. When writers depict Jewish figures, as in Singer's novel, dance scenes often take on a more specific character: the ritualized joy of dancing at a wedding, the sense of community in ecstatic Hasidic spirituality, the freedom of leaving behind traditional religious observance to waltz at a ball, or the impossibility of escaping social restrictions when a Jew is forced to dance for the entertainment of an antisemite. Ironically, it is precisely *because* dancing is so often associated with celebratory ocassions that forced or miserable dancing becomes a particularly profound expression of thwarted hopes in works of literature.

Jews in Polish lands confronted many different social possibilities over the course of the long nineteenth century.[3] It is not surprising that Singer, a writer who was interested in conveying the sheer variety of Polish Jewish experiences in his novel, also deployed dance scenes to reveal the shifting aspirations of Polish Jews and the changing realities for Polish Jewish bodies.[4] This article examines dance in *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, a novel which chronicles

Jewish life in Łódź (Lodzh in Yiddish) from the nineteenth century through the early twentieth century. To the extent that scholars have noted dance scenes in this novel, it is typically in connection with antisemitism. In his renowned article, "*Mayufes*: A Window on Polish-Jewish Relations," Chone Shmeruk recounts how, in Singer's novel, a Polish officer orders the brothers Max and Yakub Ashkenazi to dance a humiliating *mayufes*—when Yakub resists, the officer shoots and kills him. The term *mayufes* (Polish: *majufes*) refers to Jews entertaining non-Jewish Poles with craven dancing and singing, a practice that musicologist Bret Werb compares to blackface.[5] Originally derived from the beloved Sabbath song "mah yofis" ("Mah yafit" in modern Hebrew), by the early nineteenth century, the term was associated with comically servile, toadying, stereotypical singing and dancing performed variously by Polish Jews and non-Jews for the entertainment of Polish non-Jews:

> Polish landowners, as part of an evening's entertainment, would summon "their Jews"—those living on their lands—to the manor house for a command performance of *majufes*. And the Jews, coerced and humiliated, complied, playing out for their aristocratic landlords a travesty of a devout song accompanied by extemporaneous choreography and extravagant hand gestures: the "*majufes* dance". In time, this upper-class diversion made its way into society's less advantaged strata, where Żydek, the ubiquitous "little Jew" of Polish folk theatrics (always played by a non-Jew in costume), soon embellished his routines with song-and-dance descendents of "Mah yafit".[6]

Shmeruk claims the scene in *The Brothers Ashkenazi* is "perhaps the most poignant *mayufes* of all."[7] This tragic climax is a key scene for interrogating depictions of antisemitism in Yiddish literature, yet, by focusing exclusively on this humiliating form of dance, scholars risk missing the corporeal dimensions of Jewish cultural aspirations in Polish society. Indeed, the *mayufes*

scene is merely the most famous example of how Singer elaborately integrates diverse dance scenes into his narrative about Jewish life in Łódź.

Fig. 1: *Mayufes* scene from the stage production of *The Brothers Ashkenazi* (1938). Courtesy of the Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library, New York Public Library Digital Collections.

While the forced dance is arguably the best-known scene in the novel, I approach it in connection with an earlier wedding scene, in which transgressive mixed-sex dancing takes place. Yet a focus on these two scenes, in conversation with other instances of dance, does not simply reiterate familiar emotional associations with particular dances. Instead, I demonstrate that the

use of dances with such clear resonance is a hitherto unexamined through line in the novel that foregrounds the relationship between the Ashkenazi brothers (even though the novel focuses more attention on the antihero Max), situates the brothers' interactions in a particular historical context, and underscores the significance of bodies for Polish Jewish cultural ambitions. This kind of examination is particularly significant in the case of a novel that has often been examined in conversation with other works, rather than assessing its considerable merits on their own.[8] Indeed, a focused exploration of the dance scenes becomes a way of understanding the historical significance and literary excellence of the novel as a whole. Dance scenes in the novel juxtapose nineteenth-century dreams of embourgeoisement with the reality of twentieth-century antisemitism. As such, the dance floor both challenges and reifies power structures in the novel. Moreover, dance scenes occur at crucial moments, emphasizing the rupture and reconciliation of the Ashkenazi brothers and highlighting the physical contrast between cerebral striver Max (who relies on his wits to gain power) and lusty, good-natured Yakub (who attains prominence through his body and charisma). By examining these seemingly-disparate dance scenes, one gains a deeper perspective into the ways acculturation and antisemitism affect the Polish-Jewish body. This literary dance studies approach to the novel sets the parallel fortunes and divergent corporealities of the two brothers in sharp relief, at the same time revealing the complex intertwining of dreams of acculturation and the reality of antisemitism.

Literary Dance Studies and Jewish Dance Scenes

Dinele's sense of alienation from the jubilant dancing of her wedding guests underscores the deep connection between dancing and emotion. In East European Jewish culture, dancing is an obligatory part of wedding celebrations—as such, it is meant to be joyous.[9] According to the

commandment of "mesameyekh khosn v'kale" (bringing joy to the bride and groom), guests are required to delight the bridal couple, such as by dancing before the bride. Yet in Yiddish literary texts, such as *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, reluctant brides and grooms experience celebratory wedding dancing as an additional twist of the knife that accentuates their own unhappiness.[10] Throughout his intricate novel, Singer contrasts the expected emotions of the dance floor with the actual ambivalence many of his characters feel. Riotous Hasidic dancing honors a joyous occasion, even as the dancers may horrify the hostess by laying waste to a bourgeois household. Elite balls can be a site of triumph, or a place of great insecurity. Black-marketers can blithely celebrate their success by dancing on the Sabbath, much to the dismay of a politically radical parent (*BA*, 328; 492).[11] Most poignantly, under the cynical cover of authentic Jewish culture, *mayufes* performance humiliates Jewish dancers, even as it entertains non-Jewish audiences. Singer's dance scenes resist a tidy sense of joy, much in the same way his family epic pushes back against notions of redemption.[12]

My analysis of *The Brothers Ashkenazi* builds upon literary dance studies methodologies. Literary dance studies considers how dance scenes contribute to literary plots, character development, and social commentary about topics such as interethnic relations and changing gender norms. This research direction is particularly prevalent in the field of British literature, and includes discussions of dances in Jane Austen's novels.[13] Even though dance plays an important role in traditional Jewish culture—especially in connection with weddings and Hasidic spirituality (which was frequently expressed through ecstatic dancing)—Jewish dance practice has, until recently, received little notice in literary dance studies scholarship.[14] Yiddish literature in general, and *The Brothers Ashkenazi* in particular, can help expand this field. Dance scenes are a new way of making sense of the novel's rather panoramic plot and sweeping temporal scope,

and of demonstrating how a motif that some may have regarded as unserious or effeminate due to its various associations with bodies, Hasidic spirituality, pleasing women, and bourgeois leisure culture was actually employed to great virtuosic effect by a much acclaimed (male) writer.

Where studies of dance scenes in nineteenth-century European novels often draw upon well-known social dance choreography and elaborate etiquette conventions, Yiddish literature is often less specific about the precise dances in which characters participate. Often authors simply note which characters dance together on what occasion and how they feel about it, and writers may choose to put a particularly momentous dance scene at a key point in a narrative.[15] Even when a dance is referenced by name, it may be difficult to know the precise contours of its choreography due to various historical factors that have disrupted the transmission of Jewish folk dance from one generation to the next. While Yiddish texts can bolster our often-sparse knowledge of East European Jewish dance practice,[16] dance scenes in Yiddish literature offer particularly valuable insights when it comes to demonstrating relations between different social groups (Jews and Christians or Jews from different class backgrounds or levels of acculturation), revealing the stakes of participation in social dancing for Jewish acculturation, and, above all, expressing the emotional expectations of dancers and spectators with regard to all kinds of dancing.

Max and Yakub Ashkenazi are identified throughout the novel with different kinds of dancing, which are closely related to their own physicality. Yakub is able to effortlessly take on the physical components of acculturation, and he is most often associated with dancing at elite balls, an important token of Jewish participation in non-Jewish culture and changes in Jewish courtship norms. Yakub's participation in ballroom dancing, where he can flirt gallantly with

women, is part and parcel of the way he uses his body to give and receive pleasure. As I discuss in my book, *It Could Lead to Dancing: Mixed-Sex Dancing and Jewish Modernity,* dancing was viewed by Jewish religious authorities as a particularly dangerous social interaction, due to the traditional prohibition on mixed-sex dancing, and because of the physical intimacy of partner dances such as waltzes.[17] While rabbis repeatedly forbade men and women from dancing together in the medieval and Early Modern periods, such prohibitions were generally concerned with preventing sexual misbehavior *within* the Jewish community. In contrast, Jewish communal leaders since the Enlightenment identified transgressive dancing with forces and influences from outside the community and writers in both Europe and the United States used mixed-sex dancing as a favorite metaphor for modern phenomena such as acculturation, urbanization, changes in gender roles, and secularization.[18] Balls, in particular, carried specific class expectations. Whether Jews received invitations to non-Jewish balls or hosted events of their own, attendance at a ball was a claim of belonging to an exclusive milieu. Ballroom guests were expected to have mastered proper physical deportment and etiquette, they were assumed to have an acceptable social rank, and (if unmarried) were generally regarded as appropriate candidates for marriage.[19]

Max, in contrast to his ballroom-dancing brother, eschews any pleasure that is not part of his efforts to gain economic preeminence, and he participates in dance only when it will help him serve other objectives: maintaining the good opinion of his father by participating in Hasidic dancing or putting on a servile performance to satisfy antisemitic Polish soldiers so that they do not act violently toward him. These two forms of dancing have specific, yet starkly different, resonances in Jewish literature. While Hasidic dances might be viewed as some of the most ethnographically useful depictions of Jewish dance (and are often a form of local color), Yiddish writers use *mayufes* dances as a dramatic way of depicting, decrying, and foreshadowing the

evils of antisemitism. The contrast between the personalities, values, and physicality of the two brothers is a key narrative device in *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, which underscores Singer's literary virtuosity and the overall significance of dance for this novel.

I. J. Singer and *The Brothers Ashkenazi*

During his lifetime, I. J. Singer (1893-1944) was the best known of the Singer siblings, three of whom—including older sister Esther and younger brother Isaac Bashevis—were Yiddish writers.[20] Born to a rabbinic family in Biłgoraj (Yiddish: Bilgoray, Congress Poland), Singer left his religious upbringing behind and eventually immigrated to the United States in 1933, although he depicted Polish Hasidim in his novels, newspaper writing, and memoirs.[21] In a 1946 biographical essay, Aaron Zeitlin writes: "he is also renowned by gentiles, not only among Jews. His novel *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, which he already started in Poland, carried his name over the entirety of America, and excites celebrated English critics."[22] Zeitlin adds that a famous Scandinavian critic compared Singer's work to Tolstoy and predicted that the elder Singer brother would win a Nobel Prize.[23] Since his premature death from a heart attack, I. J. Singer's star status has been eclipsed by his much-translated Nobel laureate brother, yet a literary dance studies analysis of his work offers a way of shining new light on one of his major achievements.

Singer's oeuvre includes numerous dance descriptions. His novels incorporate shtetl wedding dancing[24] and waltzing in a bourgeois Berlin salon.[25] Singer also wrote several feuilleton pieces for the New York daily *Forverts* (Forward) with topics such as "Officers dance with Jewish girls at a Jewish ball, and all hell breaks lose in town" and "Hasidim celebrate, sing and dance in a car of a Polish train."[26] In his memoirs, dance is typically a threat to the social order. He describes how his grandfather, a prominent *misnagdic* (traditionally religious but non-

Hasidic) rabbi, puts a halt to mixed-sex dancing [*shatnez-tents*] at a lower class wedding, referring to such forbidden behavior using a term for a combination of linen and wool that is prohibited by Jewish law—suggesting that, although not directly prohibited in scripture, it is equally transgressive for men and women to mix on the dance floor.[27] Later on in the memoir, young Israel Joshua witnesses the "sophisticated merrymaking" of wedding guests from Leszno, which has a wealthy and more acculturated community: after "the proper and simple people of Leoncin had dispersed, they doused the lights and paired off for dancing polkas and waltzes. […] we watched couples kiss, embrace, mock the other guests, and offer all kinds of obscene observations about the bride and groom."[28] Yet even joyous dancing can take a more tragic turn, as Singer acknowledges in his memoirs when he recounts how his childhood teacher drunkenly imagines he can fly like an angel during a rowdy Purim dance, and ends up falling through a window.[29] As a result of this incident, the unfortunate man permanently loses sight in one of his eyes.

Singer was not the only modern Yiddish writer to depict dance as a source of community, chaos, passion, or dangerous physicality.[30] Nor was he even the only modern Yiddish writer born to the Singer family to do so.[31] Yet I. J. Singer's virtuosic use of dance imagery in *The Brothers Ashkenazi* deserves particular attention because of the way this motif is deftly interwoven into his narration of the fortunes of the Ashkenazi brothers and the overall panorama of Jewish Łódź––a use of the dance motif that has not been analyzed in depth for any Yiddish novel of this stature or epic complexity. Dancing—especially in forms (whether mixed-sex or antisemtic) that display influences external to the Jewish community—is a microcosm of seismic social shifts that come to destabilize and transform Jewish society in the modern period. Singer's use of dance in the novel is not merely incidental or idiosyncratic but at the heart of Jewish modernity.

The Brothers Ashkenazi was an international success, prompting multiple editions, translations into numerous languages, and a 1938 play by the celebrated Yiddish Art Theatre.[32] It was first serialized in the *Forverts* in 1934/5.[33] *The Brothers Ashkenazi* was translated into Polish in 1935 and published in installments in the Warsaw Jewish daily *Nasz Przegląd* (Our Review), which often republished material from the Yiddish press.[34] The novel was first published in book form in Warsaw in 1936.[35] Polish censors redacted the scene with the *mayufes* from both the 1935 Polish serial and the 1936 Yiddish book.[36] *The Brothers Ashkenazi* was also published in book form in Yiddish in New York in 1937 and 1951.[37] The first post-war Polish edition, from 1992, also omitted the *mayufes* scene. Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska speculates that "the publisher was probably unaware of the intervention" and used the original newspaper text.[38] A complete Polish translation was published in book form in 1998.[39] This article generally uses quotations and spellings from the 2010 edition of Joseph Singer's 1985 English-language translation of his father's work, with the exception of quotations from a ball scene that was not included in Singer's translation. References to these passages use the 1936 translation by Maurice Samuel or my own translation.

The Brothers Ashkenazi is both a family epic and a sweeping narrative about the city of Łódź. According to a 1936 review in *Literarishe bleter* (Literary Pages), it fills an important gap in Yiddish literature: "For the first time we get, in an artistic rendering, the story [geshikhte] of Jews in Poland over the last fifty years (until 1920)—a story that covers one city yet is typical and characteristic of the entire nation."[40] The novel contains many diverse characters from all strata of society, and an intricate plot.[41] In Singer's novel, the twin sons of pious Hasid Abraham Hersh Ashkenazi bear little resemblance to each other: Max (born Simha Meir) is slightly-built, a brilliant scholar of Talmud, and ruthless, whereas Yakub (born Jacob Bunem) is large, handsome,

and good-natured. Yakub falls in love with Dinele, the daughter of a wealthy textile manufacturer, yet her otherwise indulgent father Haim Alter arranges a match for her with Max. The wedding represents a culture clash between Abraham Hersh's riotous Hasidim and Haim's refined guests from the Łódź elite, who dispute over mixed-sex dancing. The marriage itself is also disastrous: Dinele retreats into the fantasy world of her romance novels, and Max abandons his religious studies for the business world. He starts by taking over his father-in-law's factory, continues by replacing his father as general agent for the Huntze factory, and ultimately obtains control of the Huntze factory. To accomplish this last feat, he divorces Dinele to marry a wealthy older widow, an act that epitomizes his willingness to deprive himself physically for financial gain since he still desires Dinele. Yiddish literary critic Shmuel Charney (who published under the name Shmuel Niger) compares Max's obsession with money to having "danced around the golden calf," a reference to biblical idol worship that seems especially apt for our purposes here, in an article about dance.[42] Max refuses to allow moral scruples, pride in craftsmanship, sympathy for workers, political upheaval, or physical desire get in the way of his quest for wealth and influence.

Yakub, meanwhile, catches the eye of Perele, the sickly granddaughter of a wealthy Jewish magnate, and she prevails upon her family to allow her to marry this relative nonentity. With little effort, Yakub gains the kind of financial success Max sacrificed everything to achieve. Yakub becomes a popular man about town, and manages the business affairs of the Flederbaums, the chief competitors of the Huntzes. Perele loses patience with his behavior and the couple divorces. Yakub ultimately marries his niece Gertrud, Dinele and Max's daughter. During World War I, Max moves his business operations to St. Petersburg, but he is imprisoned during the Russian Revolution. Yakub makes the perilous journey to rescue his brother. As usual, Yakub's

charisma helps him achieve a seemingly impossible feat. On their way back to Łódź, the brothers are stopped by Polish border guards, who humiliate them and demand that they dance. Max debases himself, but Yakub refuses, strikes back, and is fatally shot.[43] Max returns to Łódź to mourn his brother and attempt to rebuild his fortune, but dies unsatisfied. Singer uses the physically awkward, avaricious brother Max and the gallant, profligate brother Yakub to help illustrate the diversity of Jewish Łódź. Indeed, the balls Yakub attends and the *mayufes* Max performs symbolize the shifts in Polish Jewish fortunes in the long nineteenth century.

The Brothers Ashkenazi has achieved canonical status in Yiddish belles lettres, yet English-language scholarship of Jewish Łódź often focuses on the most prominent Jewish industrialist (Izrael Kalmanowicz Poznański) or on the Holocaust, rather than social history from the ground up.[44] An analysis of the novel's dance scenes does not simply offer a new angle on Singer's artistry, it also gives a perspective on the Łódź bourgeoisie that has tended to escape notice. This assessment is particularly valuable since literary scholar Anita Norich has argued that the novel's primary focus is not the Ashkenazi family, but rather Łódź itself.[45] Singer's diverse dance scenes and references to dance underscore the sheer variety of Jewish life in Łódź.

Dance, Historical Narrative, and Social Aspirations in *The Brothers Ashkenazi*

Singer depicts dance as a marker of influence and prestige that at times functions almost like a currency. Whether performed in a Hasidic court, an aristocratic ballroom, or a fashionable cabaret, it is impossible to disentangle dance from social expectations. Dance is therefore a fitting counterpart to the historical forces that spur the novel's action. Yet dance spaces operate in different contexts. Hasidic men dance together to celebrate festive occasions, while excluding women and non-Hasidic men. At the party for his grandson's circumcision, Abraham Hersh

encourages his friends to dance livelier and faster, even though he knows the furious dancing is scaring the new mother (*BA*, 135; 180). While Hasidim like Abraham Hersh join in all-male communal dancing, his bourgeois yet still religious daughter-in-law Dinele attended a non-Jewish school as a girl, where she took dancing lessons (*BA*, 52; 70). She regards Hasidim as uncivilized: "They danced like savages, howled like wolves, scampered through the room with unkempt beards and earlocks flying (*BA*, 80; 107)." Dance thus charts the process of Polish-Jewish acculturation, and women have more freedom to venture in this direction even in a traditional Jewish context.[46]

Singer invokes dance as he describes the growth and development of Łódź, and the changing fortunes of his various characters. Members of the elite use balls in an effort to persuade dignitaries to make rulings in their favor[47] (*BA*, 17; 28) and to demonstrate their social status (*BA*, 165; 229). While the German textile manufacturer Heinz Huntze resents how his children push him to learn social graces, like dancing, his Jewish rival Maximilian Flederbaum delights in upstaging Huntze with his dancing skills and distinguished ball guests: he "twirled his mustache and danced the mazurkas and polonaises with the aplomb of a genuine blueblood. Unlike Huntze, he slipped into his role without any traces of his humble beginnings (*BA*, 194; 272)." While the Saxon-born Huntze and Polish Jew Flederbaum might both be perceived as having a questionable claim to these Polish national dances, Flederbaum has clearly mastered such dance forms.[48] Similarly, when Yakub dances with the Flederbaum daughters, they "insisted that he was much too dashing and attractive to be Jewish (*BA*, 197; 279)." While an upwardly mobile man can prove himself by dancing well, mastery of dance figures is not the only way that a man can use dance to make a name for himself. Huntze's sons go to great lengths to procure the affections of a popular Hungarian cabaret dancer, and thus win what has essentially become a

competition between the men of Łódź to secure her as a mistress, although they ultimately succeed only in acquiring more gambling debts (*BA*, 156-59; 210-14). Dancing can help enhance social status, but it also has the potential to lead to humiliation.

By the novel's end, Singer draws connections between dance and (German and Polish) antisemitism. When Yakub marries a much-younger woman with great social ambitions, the balls she hosts reveal how Yakub is no longer a young ladies' man and, moreover, that there are limits to Jewish social acceptance: "She held magnificent balls at their palace, high-spirited affairs attended by men and women her own age. Even haughty German lieutenants with dueling scars were invited. They behaved as if they were bestowing a favor upon their hosts by condescending to mingle with Polish and Jewish riffraff (*BA*, 353; 531-32)." Having spent much of his youth entertaining bored young wives, Yakub sees only too clearly "how much passion and allure they could put into a seemingly innocent dance (*BA*, 353; 532)." And while at one time Flederbaum's invitations were the most coveted in Łódź (*BA*, 192; 268),[49] by the end of the novel the new Polish magistrate Puncz Panczewski resents how he is obligated to socialize with Jews: "he had to mingle with all kinds of herring snappers, to treat them as equals, and even invite some of them to his balls and receptions (*BA*, 410-11; 637)." Dancing reveals the social limitations and possibilities for Singer's characters, especially Jews. It is therefore not surprising that Singer repeatedly references dance throughout his novel and, moreover, uses dance scenes to chart Jewish aspirations in Łódź society.

The City of Łódź and the Polish-Jewish Bourgeoisie

In his seven-volume autobiographical writings about Jewish intellectual life in Poland, Yiddish writer Yehiel Yeshaia Trunk (1887-1961) describes Łódź Jews as having an almost

mythological character: "Łódź has ever been a city for catching falling stars and playing for big stakes. The Jews of Łódź resembled the legendary Red Jews of Sholem Aleichem and insisted on choosing the most slippery paths."[50] Although Trunk focuses on the interwar period, his description conveys the financial intricacy, moral ambiguity, and social precarity of the Jewish community of Łódź between the 1820s and 1930s. Such a context likely fostered Trunk's own creativity, and provided the rich variety of character types and scenarios for Singer's epic novel. *The Brothers Ashkenazi* reflects the complexity of this social milieu.

Singer's novel is set during a period when Łódź grew dramatically, becoming the second largest city in Congress Poland, with a Jewish population exceeded only by Warsaw. Nicknamed the Polish Manchester,[51] Łódź was an industrial powerhouse known for its textile manufacturing.[52] Between 1850 and 1900, the city's population soared twenty-fold, from 16,000 to 321,000.[53] Even in a period when industrial centers around the world grew rapidly, this expansion was extraordinary. By the end of the nineteenth century, Piotrków, the province in which Łódź was located, became the third largest producer of cotton textiles in the Russian Empire.[54] By 1913, a quarter of all factory workers in Congress Poland were employed in Łódź, and more than half of the largest textile factories in the country were located there.[55]

Łódź was a multiethnic city, with significant Polish, German, and Polish-Jewish populations.[56] In fact, the derogatory term "Lodzermensch" (Łódź citizen or Man of Łódź) coined by Nobel laureate Władysław Stanisław Reymont to represent the stereotype of a reckless, immoral (Jewish or German) capitalist, is derived from Yiddish and German.[57] Germans and Jews dominated the bourgeoisie; the two largest cotton factories were owned by a German, Karol Scheibler, and a Jew, Izrael Kalmanowicz Poznański, who may have inspired the characters of fictional industrialists Heinz Huntze and Maximilian Flederbaum respectively.[58]

Yet while wealthy magnates like Poznański could build lavish palaces, most (working-class) Jews lived in the historically Jewish districts of Stare Miasto Łódź and the village of Bałuty, which was eventually incorporated into Łódź.[59]

The Brothers Ashkenazi reflects the social complexity of its urban setting. There is perhaps no starker crystallization of Łódź's ethnic and class diversity in the novel than Singer's description of a lavish ball to celebrate nouveau riche Saxon industrialist Heinz Huntze's elevation to the rank of baron, a description that comprises the entirety of a chapter that was excluded from Joseph Singer's English translation.[60] This chapter expounds upon certain details in a way that a translator might consider tedious (even Samuel omits entire passages), yet such details importantly underscore the tensions between different groups in Łódź—tensions which might seem at odds with the ostensible gaiety of a celebratory ball.[61] The guests who carouse inside the Huntze palace include

> wealthy German industrialists, former weavers, who just like their colleague Huntze had come here with a horse and handloom, and now had chimneys and fame. […] Jewish bankers, putting on airs [es zol tsugebn zey pritsishkayt] with their potbellies and large mustasches, feeling uneasy about their Jewishness in the company of these great noblemen [pritsim]. From their country estates, languishing Polish gentry came in old coaches, noble and bitter at the boorish krauts who were taking their land and their money and their heritage [yikhes]; and military coaches harnessed with three horses brought Russian officers and functionaries from the provincial capital.[62]

Anyone who is anybody comes to this ball, and the guests represent the different groups jockeying for power in Łódź: insecure German and Jewish bourgeoisie who have only recently entered the local elite, Polish gentry who resent their declining fortunes, and Tsarist dignitaries (including the provincial governor). They mingle together mistrustingly—all the while enjoying the lavish hospitality of their host. The ambiguity of this social environment is typified by the Jewish bankers, who aspire to aristocratic trappings [pritsishkayt] yet feel uncomfortable when actually socializing with the aristocracy [pritsim]. Singer thus utilizes this grand ball to reveal

ethnic divisions in late nineteenth-century Łódź society, which lurk beneath a polite veneer and erupt into violence by the twentieth century.[63]

Yet these future conflicts concern class as much as ethnicity, and appropriately the Huntze ball does not simply illustrate the leisure pursuits of the rich. As the artistocrats and industrialists hobnob with each other inside the opulent palace, "four deep around the iron railings stood the poor of Lodz and stared [through the windows] and wondered, and envied the people inside."[64] In subsequent chapters, Singer goes on to brutally juxtapose the lavish, emotionally-fraught ball with the way Huntze decides to cut worker pay in his factory to finance his newly-aristocratic lifestyle, leading female workers to sell sexual services to the factory attendant who—ironically—serves them wine left over from the Huntze balls (*BA,* 168; 233-34). While the ball itself emphasizes ethnic tensions among the elite, its position in the novel highlights the harsh economic ramifications of this kind of extravagance on factory workers.[65] It mirrors the similarly significant aftershocks of Dinele and Max's Jewish wedding earlier in the novel, events which are crucial for Max's transformation from a Talmud scholar to a ruthless entrepreneur. As these instances demonstrate, Singer deploys dance scenes throughout the novel to showcase the complex social dynamics of industrial Łódź.

The Wedding Dance Scene

Max and Dinele's wedding is a pivotal moment in the novel's plot arc, which is underscored by a transgressive mixed-sex dance scene. This arranged marriage between a promising scholar and a girl from the wealthy family marks one of the last triumphs of the old Jewish order, since almost immediately thereafter the younger generation begins to abandon religiosity and insist on choosing their own marital partners.[66] In fact, the wedding itself is a site

where this change starts to happen: after Perele flirts with Yakub at the wedding, she convinces her family to arrange a match with him, even though he would not normally be regarded as a suitable candidate for a millionaire's granddaughter. While Haim Alter selected Max for Dinele on account of the young man's brilliance, Perele's interest in Yakub is entirely motivated by physical desire (*BA,* 107; 143). Her unorthodox choice of a groom reveals how the novel's younger generation has shifted its values from piety to worldly concerns: pleasure, capitalism, and political radicalism. Soon Yakub will be able to embody such changes on the dance floor, and Max will attempt—in vain—to abandon his father's Hasidic habitus as he seeks to become the industrial "King of Łódź." The wedding thus enables both brothers to pursue upward mobility in Polish society, and attempt to make a place for themselves as acculturated Jews.

The wedding follows Jewish tradition, yet reveals several important rifts between the guests. Most obviously, the wedding cements a rivalry between the Ashkenazi brothers. Although Dinele marries Max, she actually loves Yakub, and he adores her in return. Max, for his part, is jealous of how easily Yakub acquires a fortune through Perele (*BA,* 112; 149). As a result of the fateful wedding, each brother acquires with little trouble what the other one desires above all else. Their crisscrossed fortunes push them further apart emotionally, even though the two brothers face certain parallels in their experiences: unsatisfying home lives and eventual divorce.

The wedding also represents a clash between devout Hasidim and bourgeois Łódź Jews, a conflict which is embodied through different forms of dance. Even though both families are Hasidic and financially well off, Max's parents are much stricter in their observance, whereas Dinele's parents enjoy luxuries such as spa visits, diamond earrings, and a jaunty blond wig for Dinele's mother Priveh. Abraham Hersh invites the Alexander Rebbe, who is accompanied by a hundred ragged, uncouth Hasidim—the kind of men who think nothing of removing fancy

settings in order to dance on the table (*BA*, 60; 80). Haim invites the Łódź elite, including Germans and acculturated Jews, whom he seeks to impress with a lavish party.[67] Abraham Hersh dismisses Haim's guests as non-Jews and views them as an insult to his rabbi. Haim frets that the raucous behavior of the Hasidim will offend his distinguished bankers and industrialists. The conflict finally ends with complete humiliation for Dinele's family, which is particularly insulting because they are the ones paying for the wedding.

Guests on both sides of the wedding are inclined to behave as they wish, yet only the groom's side has the physical force and spiritual conviction to make sure their preferences for the dance floor are followed. The mixed-sex dancing takes place in the women's section, a space that male religious authorities would have been less likely to supervise than the dance floor used by men, since they likely viewed it as off-limits and less important. Singer does not describe the dances that are performed by the mixed-sex couples (perhaps ballroom dances such as the waltzes or quadrilles that were often danced by female couples in traditional Jewish contexts, or Polish folk dances like the mazurkas mentioned elsewhere in the novel), but he clearly delineates what follows.[68] Unlike a similar scene from Joseph Opatoshu's 1912 novella *A roman fun a ferd-ganef* (*Romance of a Horse Thief*), where a man and woman dance scandalously in the women's section at a Hasidic wedding, Singer does not mention the movements of the dancers themselves, instead focusing on the response their behavior incites.[69] Afterall, Opatoshu was a Naturalist whose titillating dance scenes help showcase his *femme fatales* and *fleyshik* (meaty) Jewish men, whereas Singer uses his dance scenes to interrogate power relations in a complex, constantly shifting urban landscape.

When Abraham Hersh hears that mixed-sex dancing is taking place in the women's section, he marches in and stops the dancing in a way that horrifies the bride's family. Although Singer

does not provice dance choreography, his dramatic description would make for helpful stage directions for a play, pantomime, or even a modern dance:

> "Out, gentiles and reprobates!" [Abraham Hersh] shouted. "This isn't a German wedding!"
>
> The bride's female relatives fainted; the bride suffered a fit; women shrieked; girls laughed. Priveh raised bejeweled arms to protect her guests, but Abraham Hersh was not to be denied. Towering, furious, beard ruffled, eyes shooting fire, he whipped the dancers with his [fur] cap. "Respect for the Alexander Rabbi!" he roared. "Reverence for an assembly of Jews!" (*BA,* 78; 104)

Abraham Hersh and his Hasidim try to restore order, and even their efforts to stop the dance exemplify the overall importance of physicality in the novel:

> The aroused Hasidim extinguished the lamps and doused the waxed floors with pitchers of water to render them unfit for mixed dancing. The crones in bonnets clapped in approval. "That's the way! Serves them right!" Brimming over with righteous joy, the Hasidim slid over the floor, making a shambles of the posh hall (*BA,* 78; 104).

Without regard for the other guests, or the mother of the bride, the Hasidim pour water onto the waxed floor to ensure improper dancing will be impossible. Instead of performing an appropriately-joyous wedding dance, women clap to celebrate how the Hasidim disrupt dancing they consider disrespectful.[70] Their behavior is in keeping with the way that religious authorities (especially Abraham Hersh) refuse to compromise in the novel. Yet even such fervent religious faith is unable to compete with the forces of history. Abraham Hersh and his Hasidim are able to

stop the mixed-sex dancing at the wedding, but their power does not last long. In fact, one can argue that this wedding (and the refusal to allow mixed-sex dancing) marks the end of Abraham Hersh's influence, since his sons acquire through their marriages the kind of wealth that allows them to secularize. Ironically, by imposing this traditional marriage, both sets of parents actually encourage the forces of change, since they make their children unhappy and give them the means and freedom to alter their circumstances. Max is able to pursue his economic potential in a rapidly industrializing metropolis, and Yakub acquires a fortune that allows him to indulge in a high life. Yet as Singer demonstrates by the end of his novel, Jewish social mobility is undermined by the historical reality of antisemitism.

The *Mayufes* Scene

Yakub's rescue of Max from a Russian prison at the novel's end offers the promise of redemption. Although the two brothers have long been estranged, Yakub's heroic action proves the enduring importance of family. Max learns to appreciate his brother in a way that he never did before, and Singer offers the elusive hope that perhaps their lives might now be happier and more complete. Ultimately, however, this reconciliation simply serves to make the historical reality even more painful. While dancing can be a way for Hasidim to express joy and for acculturated Jews to exhibit their social prestige, antisemites weaponize dance to humiliate Jews.[71]

On their return from Russia, the two brothers are stopped at the Polish border. Although they explain that they are manufacturers and residents of Łódź, the border guards accuse them of being Bolsheviks. The brothers are forced to strip, and Max is ordered to shout "Death to [Leibush] Trotsky" and "Death to all the Jewish Leibushes (*BA,* 401; 624)." As these

exclamations make clear, the brothers are not really suspected of being Bolsheviks, but are instead sadistically targeted as Jews. In a perverse twist on Max's betrothal and wedding festivities, which Yakub experienced as a form of torture, the two brothers are again confronted with an opportunity to dance that once more demonstrates their different attitudes and fates—yet this time, for once, the brothers demonstrate feelings of solidarity with one another. Max complies with these humiliating commands, but as the demands escalate, Yakub refuses to obey:

> "Good," the officer said. "And now give us a dance, manufacturer and resident of Lodz. A nice little dance [*mayufes-tentsl*] for our lads. Step lively now!"
>
> Yakub strained to tear free. "No, Max!" he cried.
>
> Max ignored him. He gazed at his tormentors as one might face a pack of mad dogs and began to whirl awkwardly in a circle.
>
> "Faster! Livelier!" the gentiles cried, clapping their hands in accompaniment.
>
> Max spun until his legs gave out and he collapsed.
>
> "Leave him there, and bring the other one," the lieutenant ordered.
>
> The gendarmes led Yakub to the table. He stood there pale but unflinching.
>
> "Now it's your turn. Dance!" the officer ordered.
>
> Yakub didn't move.
>
> The lieutenant flushed. He was aware of his men watching the contest of wills. After a while he rose from place and seized Yakub by the beard. "Dance!" he shrieked. "Dance, you damn Jew (*BA*, 401; 625)!"

Yakub, who relies on his body for pleasure and social advancement, is unwilling to degrade himself by dancing. Much like at Max and Dinele's betrothal celebration, where Yakub sat out the raucous Hasidic dancing because he was mournful rather than joyous, Yakub is unwilling to

participate in dancing that makes mockery of his feelings (*BA*, 60; 80-81). He has previously accepted certain inevitable physical and psychological humiliations—Dinele's marriage to another man, Gertrud's flirtations with younger admirers—but he considers buffoonish dancing unthinkable. Yakub strikes the lieutenant, who empties his pistol into Yakub's body, killing him. While scholars have offered differing interpretations of whether Yakub's refusal to dance should be read as heroic, it is perhaps most interesting to consider this scene in the context of how the novel treats physicality in general and the bodies of the Ashkenazi brothers in particular.[72]

The two brothers respond differently to this antisemitic incident, underscoring the different ways in which they relate to their bodies. Max relies on his wits to further his ambitions, and he views craven conduct and physical indignities as mere inconveniences to be endured in service of a grand plan. He considers the *mayufes* to be part of a Jewish survival strategy.[73] As he later reflects: "For hundreds of years Jews had danced to the gentiles' tune because they were too few to resist. In times of danger the Jew was obliged not to sacrifice his life, but to appease the wild beast in order to survive and persevere (*BA*, 407; 633)." While Max once dismissed both Jews (including his brother) and gentiles for lacking his business acumen, and moreover aspired to the social trappings of the non-Jewish elite, he now professes allegiance to the Jewish people and questions the humanity of those who would persecute them. Max downplays the significance of physical humiliation, and expresses a cynical view of relations between Jews and non-Jews in Poland.

Max invokes Jewish history to justify his participation in the *mayufes*. He laments his brother's death, which he identifies with impractical non-Jewish values: " [Yakub] had chosen the gentile way. For 'honor' he had sacrificed his life. What nonsense (*BA*, 407; 632)!" Max prefers the mindset of previous generations of Jews, who, in his view, had looked down upon

gentiles as less than human, and thus did not think that antisemitic insults were humiliating. Yet in addition to demeaning both his brother and non-Jews, Max misunderstands a crucial aspect of his brother's experience. Yakub may be a more sympathetic character than Max, but it is not precisely because he is focused on honor. Yakub has always relied upon his charm and good looks. Physicality is Yakub's forte, and he cannot endure letting the soldiers deprive him of his bodily autonomy. While it may have been more pragmatic for him to submit to humiliation like his brother, such behavior would be completely contrary to Yakub's character.

Max returns to Łódź to mourn Yakub, and remains haunted by his brother's death. He can not escape the memory of his brother's bleeding body: "The images of those he had known and wronged passed before his eyes—his parents, his in-laws, but especially Jacob Bunem [Yakub]. He could see the trickle of blood run down into the beard and congeal there, and his own blood chilled (*BA*, 425; 665)." Even in death, Yakub's physicality is striking. What is more, just as Max returns to the Jewish texts of his childhood by reading the Book of Job (the same book his father Abraham Hersh used to console himself after Max left traditional religiosity), he also resumes using his brother's birth name, Jacob Bunem. While Łódź has changed greatly over the course of the novel, at the end of his life, Max seeks comfort in his religious upbringing. Yet these seemingly separate phenomena are in fact closely related: Max returns to Jewish texts precisely because independent Poland has become a more hostile place for Jews. In several ways, the *mayufes* incident marks the end of Yakub's ballroom aspirations.

Conclusion

The Brothers Ashkenazi demonstrates the ways in which dance can be both aspirational and humiliating. Dance scenes chart the hopes and failures of acculturation in *The Brothers*

Ashkenazi, and the way these thwarted ambitions played out in the context of industrializing Łódź. Jewish characters dream of wealth, romance, redemption, revolution, and social prominence. They attend cabarets, and dance in various venues: Hasidic courts, parties with black-marketers, prestigious schools, and balls. Yet by the novel's end, Singer questions whether any of these strategies can truly lead to happiness or a good life—in keeping with the overall pessimism of a novel in which Łódź Jews face economic depression, misery, death, and the impossibility of any hope of religious or political redemption. As Clive Sinclair notes: "By the end of *The Brothers Ashkenazi* the Jews were torn between a religion that had lost its humanity and a country that had no place for them."[74] Singer describes how his characters fight against this inevitable disappointment using both their bodies and their minds, as typified by the differences between the Ashkenazi brothers. Ironically Max, for all his ambitions, only dances to adhere to sources of greater authority: he dances with other Hasidim at his father's behest, and he submits to the humiliation of the *mayufes*. Yakub, on the other hand, dances for his own enjoyment and the pleasure of his dancing partners. While Yakub's mistreatment at the border shows the failure of Jewish dreams of social inclusion in independent Poland, his refusal to perform a *mayufes* represents a continued hope in the aspirational—even utopian—potential of the dance floor.

NOTES

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[2] I. J. Singer, *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, trans. Joseph Singer (New York: Other Press, 2010), 85. [Y. Y. Zinger, *Di brider Ashkenazi* (New York: Farlag Matones, 1951), 114.] The Yiddish version indicates that they dance on her behalf, not because she is necessarily happy herself. These texts will henceforth be referred to parenthetically as *BA*, with English page numbers followed by Yiddish.

[3] Discussions of Jews who lived in the territories formerly part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth are complicated by shifts in borders over the course of modern European history. When I refer to "Polish Jews" or "Jews in Poland," I am referring to these territories, even though Poland did not exist as an entity in the way it does today (the novel's setting of Łódź was part of the Russian Empire for most of the period discussed in *The Brothers*

Ashkenazi) and many Jews in Polish lands would not have considered themselves to be Polish Jews.

[4] Although Singer wrote about the long nineteenth century, his own historical context (and choice of genre) may have also informed his style of narration. Malka Magentsa-Shaked notes that he wrote in a period in which, in part due to the Holocaust, sweeping family sagas were in vogue in Hebrew and Yiddish literature as a way of coming to grips with the monumental changes and catastrophes taking place, since the decline of the family in 1930s family epics is caused by destructive outside forces. See Malka Magentsa-Shaked, "Singer and the Family Novel in Jewish Literature," trans. Jeffrey M. Green, *Prooftexts* 9, no. 1 (January 1989): 28-30.

[5] Bret Werb, "Majufes: A Vestige of Jewish Traditional Song in Polish Popular Entertainments," *Polish Music Journal* 6, No. 1: Polish Jewish Music – Sources and Studies. Accessed March 16, 2020. https://polishmusic.usc.edu/research/publications/polish-music-journal/vol6no1/majufes/.

[6] Bret Werb, "Musical Afterthoughts on Shmeruk's 'Mayufes'," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, ed. François Guesnet, Benjamin Matis, and Antony Polonsky, vol. 32: *Jews and Music-Making in the Polish Lands* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2020), 64. Werb's musicological discussion complicates Shmeruk's definition of *mayufes*, but the use of the term in *The Brothers Ashkenazi* adheres to Shmeruk's usage. See Werb, "Musical Afterthoughts on Shmeruk's 'Mayufes'," 79.

[7] Chone Shmeruk, "*Mayufes*: A Window on Polish-Jewish Relations," trans. Anna Barber, Appendix trans. Esther Frnak, in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, ed. Gershon David Hundert, vol. 10: *Jews in Early Modern Poland* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1997), 279. For more about the *mayufes*, see Halina Goldberg's forthcoming chapter, "The Jewish Inn

in the Polish National Ballet," in Bożena Shallcross, ed., *The Jewish Tavern: From Architecture to Phantasm*.

[8] Such studies include: Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, "'I know who you are, but who I am–you do not know….': Reading Yiddish Writers in a Polish Literary Context," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 29, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 83-104; Max F. Schulz, "The Family Chronicle as Paradigm of History: *The Brothers Ashkenazi* and *The Family Moskat*," in *The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, ed. Marcia Allentuck (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 77-92.

[9] For more about Ashkenazi dance in general, and wedding dance in particular, see sources such as Walter Zev Feldman, *Klezmer: Music, History, & Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 163-202; LeeEllen Friedland, "'Tantsn Is Lebn': Dancing in Eastern European Jewish Culture," *Dance Research Journal* 17 (1985): 76-80. For a study that investigates Ashkenazic wedding dancing from a literary perspective, see Sonia Gollance, "A Dance: Fradel Shtok Reconsidered," *In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies* (December 2017), accessed January 22, 2020. https://ingeveb.org/articles/a-dance-fradel-shtok-reconsidered.

[10] Esther Singer Kreitman depicts a similarly miserable bride at a Jewish wedding in Berlin, see Esther Singer Kreitman, *The Dance of Demons*, trans. Maurice Carr (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2009) 210-11. [Esther Kreitman, *Der sheydim-tants* (Warsaw: Farlag Ch. Brzoza, 1936), 242-43.]

[11] For more about the Bund in Łódź, see François Guesnet, "*Khevres* and *Akhdes*: the Change in Jewish Self-organization in the Kingdom of Poland before 1900 and the Bund," in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 3-12.

[12] Anita Norich claims that Singer perceives an inherent conflict between linear world history and cyclical Jewish history. A cyclical Jewish history is one which resists messianic redemption. Indeed, *The Brothers Ashkenazi* draws explicit connections between the way both Jewish religious fanatics and revolutionaries are obsessed with their sacred texts. Anita Norich, *The Homeless Imagination in the Fiction of Israel Joshua Singer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 40-41.

[13] See, for instance, Molly Engelhardt, *Dancing Out Of Line: Ballrooms, Ballets, and Mobility in Victorian Fiction and Culture* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009); Cheryl A. Wilson, *Literature and Dance in Nineteenth-Century Britain: From Jane Austen to the New Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[14] For more about Hasidic dance, see David Biale, et al., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 218-20; Jill Gellerman, "Rehearsing for Ultimate Joy Among Lubavitch Hasidim: Simchas Bais Hasho'eva in Crown Heights," in *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, ed. Judith Brin Ingber (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 285-311; Fred Berk, ed., *The Chasidic Dance* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1975).

[15] For instance, a consequential dance scene takes place near the end of part one of Isaac Bashevis Singer's 1933 historical novel *Der sotn in Goray* (*Satan in Goray*). This transgressive dance at an engagement party, by the groom and another woman in full view of the bride, serves to underscore the influence of Sabbatean heresy in the town of Goray. See Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Satan in Goray*, trans. Jacob Sloan (New York: Avon Books, 1955), 72-74. [Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Der sotn in Goray: a mayse fun farsaytns un andere dertseylungen* (New York: Farlag matones, 1943), 84-6.]

[16] Andreas Schmitges, "Yiddish Dance Songs: The Repertoire and Its Meaning for Yiddish Dance Research," in *Einbahnstraße oder „die heilige Brücke"?: Jüdische Musik und die europäische Musikkultur*, eds. Antonia Klokova and Jascha Nemtsov (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 147-86; Sonia Beth Gollance, "Gesture, Repertoire, and Emotion: Yiddish Dance Practice in German and Yiddish Literature," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 25, no. 1 (Fall 2019): 102-27.

[17] For more about the prohibition on mixed-sex dancing and how communities dealt with this taboo in practice, see Sonia Gollance, *It Could Lead to Dancing: Mixed-Sex Dancing and Jewish Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), esp. 21-28; Zvi Friedhaber, "The Bride and Her Guests: The Dance with the Separating Kerchief," trans. Judith Brin Ingber with Rabbi Moshe Silberschien, in *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, ed. Judith Brin Ingber (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 225-33.

[18] Gollance, *It Could Lead to Dancing*, 17.

[19] In his 1876 German-language dance manual, dance descriptions from which were republished in Moscow that same year in a Russian volume called *Plody dosuga* (The Fruits of Leisure), Bernhard Klemm details the kind of posture that was expected for ballroom dance, noting: "Since the equilibrium of the upright body resides primarily in the spine and over the hips, a sense of stability must first be felt there. Next the shoulders back—armpits down—chest pressed forward with lungs full of air, the head held lightly back and the chin withdrawn." Bernhard Klemm, *Katechismus der Tanzkunst: Ein Leitfaden für Lehrer und Lernende*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1876), 6-7. This kind of disciplined body, a requirement of proper social dancing that Yakub has presumably mastered, was far removed from the stereotype (very much identified with Max) of the traditional Jewish man perpetually hunched over his Talmud volume. For more

about associations of Jewish men with poor posture see Sander L. Gilman, "*You, Too, Could Walk Like a Gentile*. Jews and Posture," in *Wegweiser und Grenzgänger: Studien zur deutsch-jüdischen Kultur-und Literaturgeschichte,* ed. Stefan Vogt, Hans Otto Horch, Vivian Liska, and Malgorzata A. Maksymiak (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2018), 17-30.

[20] For a biographical sketch, see: Robert Danberg, "Israel Joshua Singer (Yisroel-Yehoyshue Zinger) (30 November 1893 – 10 February 1944)," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 333: Writers in Yiddish, ed. Joseph Sherman (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 290-94. Esther Singer Kreitman (1891-1954) published two novels and a collection of short stories that criticized the role of women in Hasidic society; she also translated works by Charles Dickens and George Bernard Shaw into Yiddish. Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-1991) is best known for his short stories and novels about Jewish life in Poland and the United States; he is probably the most widely-read Yiddish writer in translation and the recipient of the 1978 Nobel Prize for literature.

[21] Congress Poland (short form of Congress Kingdom of Poland) refers to the Polish state created by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, which was under the control of the Russian tsars until World War I. Biłgoraj is a town in south-eastern Poland, in the Lublin administrative district.

[22] Aaron Zeitlin, "Y. Y. Zinger, der mentsh un der kinstler," ([New York]: [1946]), 5. Box 1, Folder 1, Papers of Israel Joshua Singer, RG 1103, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Norich lists this essay as the introduction to Singer's memoirs, see Norich, *The Homeless Imagination in the Fiction of Israel Joshua Singer,* 139. Critic Borekh Rivkin also refers to *The Brothers Ashkenazi* as Singer's best novel, see Borekh Rivkin, "Y. Y. Zingers letzt verk," in *Undzere prozaiker* (New York: YKUF, 1951), 270. This piece was first published in *Epokhe* in May 1944.

[23] Many Yiddish critics considered I. J. Singer to be more worthy of acclaim than Isaac Bashevis, see Adamczyk-Garbowska, "'I know who you are, but who I am–you do not know….'," 84-85.

[24] Israel Joshua Singer, *Yoshe Kalb*, trans. Maurice Samuel (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 180-4. [Y. Y. Zinger, *Yoshe Kalb* (Warsaw: H. Bzshoza, 1937), 245-248.]

[25] I. J. Singer, *The Family Carnovsky*, trans. Joseph Singer (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1969), 189-90 [Y. Y. Zinger, *Di mishpokhe Karnovski* (New York: Farlag Matones, 1943), 225-26].

[26] Norich, *The Homeless Imagination in the Fiction of Israel Joshua Singer*, 124, 125. These articles were published under the pseudonym G. Kuper. For more about Singer's newspaper writing, see Eddy Portnoy, "The Strange Case of Gimel Kuper, Mystery Journalist," in *Bad Rabbi: And Other Strange but True Stories from the Yiddish Press,* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 118-26. For a discussion of the first of these two feuilletons, see Gollance, *It Could Lead to Dancing*, 16-17.

[27] I. J. Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, trans. Joseph Singer (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 133. [Y. Y. Zinger, *Fun a velt vos iz nishto mer* (New York: Farlag Matones, 1946), 138.]

[28] Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, 169. [Zinger, *Fun a velt vos iz nishto mer*, 177.]

[29] Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, 66–7. [Zinger, *Fun a velt vos iz nishto mer*, 71-72.]

[30] Gollance, "A Dance."

[31] See n10; n15; Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Black Wedding," in *Collected Stories: Gimpel the Fool to The Letter Writer* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2004), 180-82 [Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Di shvarts-khasene," in *Gimpl tam: un andere dertseylungen* (New York: Tsiko, 1963), 309].

[32] Other translations include French, German, Hebrew, and Russian. For more about Yiddish literature in Poland, see Chone Shmeruk, "Jews and Poles in Yiddish Literature in Poland Between the Two World Wars," in *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies,* ed. Antony Polonsky, vol. 1: *Poles and Jews Renewing the Dialogue*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004): 176-95. For more about the play, see Norich, *The Homeless Imagination*, 11.

[33] See Adamczyk-Garbowska, "I know who you are," 85; Shmeruk, "*Mayufes*," 279-80.

[34] Adamczyk-Garbowska, "I know who you are," 85; Shmeruk, "*Mayufes*," 280.

[35] Adamczyk-Garbowska, "I know who you are," 85.

[36] "A blank square appears at the end of the 209th issue of the paper (10 November 1935) in place of the offending portion of the chapter. The passage is also deleted from the third volume of the 1936 Warsaw edition of the novel in Yiddish, and the omission is marked by an ellipsis on page 213." See Shmeruk, "*Mayufes*," 280.

[37] Adamczyk-Garbowska, "I know who you are," 85.

[38] Adamczyk-Garbowska, "I know who you are," 85.

[39] Adamczyk-Garbowska, "I know who you are," 85. See Izrael Joszua Singer, *Bracia Aszkenazy*, trans. Maria Krych (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1998).

[40] M. Taykhman, "Di epopee fun yidishn Lodzh," *Literarishe bleter*, no. 20 (May 15, 1936): 313.

[41] For the purposes of this article, I focus on the plot arc of the Ashkenazi brothers, and refer to characters by a single name throughout, even though some characters switch between Jewish names and more acculturated monikers. I have chosen the names that seem to be used most frequently by literary critics, who tend to use the acculturated names Max and Yakub, but retain the traditional Dinele (rather than Diana). For instance, see Sh. Niger [Shmuel Charney], "Y. Y.

Zinger," in *Yidishe shrayber fun tsvantsikstn yorhundert* (New York: Altveltlekhn yidishn kultur-kongres, 1973), 2:278-98.

[42] Niger, "Y. Y. Zinger," 292. For a discussion of the pseudonym, see Eli Bromberg, "We Need to Talk about Shmuel Charney." *In geveb* (October 2019). Accessed Jun 04, 2020.

[43] Rivkin (who seeks to understand Singer's psychology and premature death through his written work) describes Yakub, like the author himself, as a "stoltser yid-kinstler" (proud Jew-artist), see Rivkin, "Y. Y. Zinger," 272-73.

[44] One notable exception is Anthony Polonsky, ed., *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 6: *Jews in Łódź, 1820—1939*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004). Robert Moses Shapiro has also written on Łódź Jewry both before and during the Holocaust, including Robert Moses Shapiro, "Jewish Communal Autonomy in Poland: Lodz 1914–1939" *Shofar* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 25–35. Yiddish writer Chava Rosenfarb's (1923–2011) novels and essays depict Łódź during the Holocaust, yet also emphasize how Jews had long been an established and vibrant presence in the city. For a discussion of the role of Łódź in her *Der boym fun lebn* (*The Tree of Life: A Trilogy of Life in the Lodz Ghetto*), see Goldie Morgentaler, "'I am still there: The Recreation of Jewish Poland in the Canadian Novels of Chava Rosenfarb," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 35, no. 2 (2016): 187-99.

[45] Norich, *The Homeless Imagination*, 41.

[46] Since women were not permitted to engage in the religious scholarship that was expected of men, they had more opportunity to learn secular subjects and cultivate cultural refinements. For more about Jewish women's acculturation patterns, see Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society*, trans. Saadya Sternberg (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004). For a discussion of the role

of novel-reading women in modern Yiddish literature, see Allison Schachter, "Men Reading Women: Gender, Secularism, and Literary Modernity in the Writings of Abraham Cahan and Sholem Aleichem," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 111, no. 4 (2021): 622-49.

[47] When wealthy Jewish leaseholder Solomon David Peiss decides to purchase Bałuty as a suburb where Jews can live, he uses the power of his money to persuade local functionaries to support him instead of entertaining them in the manner of the Polish nobility. The Yiddish version makes clear that balls are the entertainment that is not being offered. For more about Jewish leaseholding in Polish territories, see M. J. Rosman, *The Lords' Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 106-42.

[48] For more about Polish national dances (and their role in nineteenth-century Polish nationalism), see Tomasz Nowak, "The Myth of Polishness in Polish Dances. How Ideologies Interpret Phenomena Related to Music and Movement," *Musicology Today* 15 (2018): 63-76. For a nineteenth-century Polish dance manual that discusses Polish and other national dances, see Karol Czerniawski, *Charakterystyka Tańców* (Warsaw: W Drukarni Stanisława Strąbskiego, 1847).

[49] The new governor von Müller's first social function in Łódź is a reception at the Flederbaum mansion, rather than the Huntze mansion.

[50] Yehiel Yeshaia Trunk, "Łódź Memories," trans. Anna Clark, in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 6: *Jews in Łódź, 1820—1939*, ed. Antony Polonsky, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 263. [Yehiel Yeshaia Trunk, *Poyln: zikhroynes un bilder* (New York: Medem-klub, 1944), 6:97.] For more about the Red Jews and folklore about the Ten Lost Tribes

of Israel, see Rebekka Voß, "Entangled Stories: The Red Jews in Premodern Yiddish and German Apocalyptic Lore," *AJS Review* 36, no. 1 (April 2012): 1-41.

[51] Yedida Kanfer, "'Each for his Own', Economic Nationalism in Łódź, 1864–1914," in *Polin: Studies in Polish* Jewry, ed. Glenn Dynner, Antony Polonsky, and Marcin Wodziński, vol. 27: *Jews in the Kingdom of Poland, 1815–1918* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civiliation, 2015), 154. For a comparison of the two cities, see Andreas Kossert, "'Promised Land?' Urban Myth and the Shaping of Modernity in Manchester and Lodz," in *Imagining the City*, vol. 2: *The Politics of Urban Space*, ed. Christian Eden, Catherine Keen, and David Midgeley (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), 169-92.

[52] For more about the development of Łódź, including the way its growth as a textile center was influenced by historical events such as the Congress of Vienna and November 1830 Uprising, see Wiesław Puś, "The Development of the City of Łódź (1820–1939)," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 6: *Jews in Łódź, 1820—1939*, ed. Antony Polonsky, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 3-19. Puś divides the city's history between 1820 and 1939 into four periods, which loosely correspond with the events of the novel and the economic fortunes of the Ashkenazi brothers: the birth of industrial Łódź (1821-1865); rapid industrial growth and rather chaotic urbanization (1866-1914); widespread devastation, population loss, and destruction of industry during World War I; rapid reconstruction of industry, doubling of population, and loss of Russian market in the Second Polish Republic. See Puś, "The Development of the City of Łódź," 3.

[53] Puś, "The Development of the City of Łódź," 12.

[54] Kanfer, "'Each for his Own,'" 159-60.

[55] Puś, "The Development of the City of Łódź," 8-9. Other names for Congress Poland are the Kingdom of Poland (as used in this article) or Russian Poland.

[56] For a comparison with another celebrated novel about Łódź that relies on stereotypical portrayals of different ethnic groups, Władysław Stanisław Reymont's Polish-language *The Promised Land* (*Ziemia obiecana*, 1899), see Adamczyk-Garbowska, "I know who you are," 84-93. Reymont's novel was adapted into a film by renowned Polish director Andrzej Wajda in 1975. For a general discussion of different ethnic groups in Łódź, see Paweł Samuś, "Lodz: Heimatstadt von Polen, Deutschen und Juden," trans. Wolfgang Jöhling and Jürgen Hensel, in Jürgen Hensel, ed., *Polen, Deutsche und Juden in Lodz 1820–1939: Eine schwierige Nachbarschaft* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 1999), 13-32, esp. pp. 14–5 for analysis of Reymont's ironic designation "promised land" to refer to Łódź. For a discussion of Jewish and German organizational life (including Jewish religious reform), see François Guesnet, "'Die beiden Bekenntisse leben weit entfernt voneinander, sie kennen und schätzen sich gegenseitig nicht.' Das Verhältnis von Juden und Deutschen im Lodz des 19. Jahrhunderts," in Jürgen Hensel, ed., *Polen, Deutsche und Juden in Lodz 1820–1939: Eine schwierige Nachbarschaft* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 1999), 139–70, esp. 146-9 for a discussion of antisemitism.

[57] Kossert, "'Promised Land?'," 177-8. Winson Chu defines the term more sympathetically as connotating "an urban entrepreneur whose individualistic and profit-maximizing spirit supercedes his allegiance to any single nationality, and who thus crosses and blurs ethnic lines in both his professional and personal life." Chu argues that, while the "lodzermensch" was perceived as negative in the first half of the twentieth century, it can also be reclaimed as a positive symbol of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. Winson W. Chu, "The 'Lodzermensch': From Cultural Contamination to Marketable Multiculturalism," in *Germany,*

Poland, and Postmemorial Relations: In Search of a Livable Past, ed. Kristin Kopp and Joanna Niżyńska (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 240.

[58] For more about the demographics of various industries, see Puś, "The Development of the City of Łódź," 7-12. For more about Poznański, see Kazimierz Badziak, "Great Capitalist Fortunes in the Polish Lands Before 1939 (The Case of the Poznański Family)," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 6: *Jews in Łódź, 1820—1939*, ed. Antony Polonsky, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 57-87. Poznański's company dominated the production of inexpensive, poor-quality textiles. See Badziak, "Great Capitalist Fortunes in the Polish Lands Before 1939," 65.

[59] Stanisław Liszewski, "The Role of the Jewish Community in the Organization of Urban Space in Łódź," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 6: *Jews in Łódź, 1820—1939*, ed. Antony Polonsky, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 27-36. See also Samuś, "Lodz: Heimatstadt von Polen, Deutschen und Juden," 25-6 for a discussion of the Jewish areas of Łódź. Samuś claims that lower-class Jews (unlike Germans) desired to live as separately as possible from other ethnic groups and maintain the traditional values of the shtetl, although Singer's novel depicts Germans as similarly ethnocentric and scholars might question Samuś's characterization of the shtetl as an "almost hermetically sealed world" where Jews only came into contact with Christians in the form of shabes goyim, see Samuś, "Lodz: Heimatstadt von Polen, Deutschen und Juden," 27.

[60] For Book I, chapter 24, see Zinger, *Di brider Ashkenazi*, 219-26.

[61] According to one Yiddish-language etiquette guide, published in Warsaw around 1920, attendees at a dance "need to forget their daily concerns for several hours" and "have to be cheerful, joyful, laugh, tell stories, dance; to sum it up in one word, they must be carefree."

Although this passage was published several decades after Singer's fictional ball took place, it reflects widespread ideas going back centuries that dances and balls should be pastimes, even if, in reality, they were often just as much about displaying wealth and jockeying for power. See G. Vhaytman, *Gute zitn un shehne manyern* (Warsaw: Farlag Unzer lebn (n.d.) [ca. 1920]), 124.

[62] Translation is my own. For Yiddish, see Zinger, *Di brider Ashkenazi*, 221. For a published translation that is less literal (although it beautifully evokes the tensions between these groups), see I. J. Singer, *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, trans. Maurice Samuel (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1936), 225.

[63] Singer depicts an 1892 pogrom, one of the key moments for Jewish-Christian relations in the novel.

[64] Singer, *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, trans. Samuel, 226. [Zinger, *Di bider Ashkenazi*, 226.]

[65] Such moments are particularly significant because dance scenes in the novel are more commonly identified more with bourgeois ambitions than with the activities of political radicals

[66] Dinele's father Haim goes into debt to pay for the dowry and lavish wedding expenses, and he is only able to avoid bankruptcy by taking on Max as a business partner in order to make use of the dowry he himself provided. The expectation had been that Max continue his Talmud studies.

[67] For more about the term "daytsh," which Singer usually uses to refer to non-Jewish Germans but could also be used for westernized or German Jews, see Marie Schumacher-Brunhes, "The Figure of the Daytsh in Yiddish Literature," in *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe: Shared and Comparative Histories*, ed. Tobias Grill (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), 72-87.

[68] In a 1937 essay, Soviet ethnomusicologist Moshe Beregovski notes that couple dances tended to be performed by women. See Moshe Beregovski, "Jewish Instrumental Folk Music," in *Old Jewish Folk Music: The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski*, ed. and trans. Mark

Slobin (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 200), 533. For more about the dance repertoire of traditional East European Jewish women, see Gollance, "Gesture, Repertoire, and Emotion," 108-12.

[69] For analysis of this scene, see Gollance, *It Could Lead to Dancing*, 138-45.

[70] For clapping in wedding dances performed by women, see Gollance, "Gesture, Repertoire, and Emotion," 111-12, 125n50.

[71] Nazis also forced Łódź Jews to perform humiliating dances during the Holocaust. Jews were forced to dance in public in their underwear, see Gordon J. Horwitz, *Ghettostadt: Łódź and the Making of a Nazi City* (Cambridge: Bellknap Press, 2008), 11. Ghetto inhabitants were also forced to dance, see Yehiel Yeshaia Trunk, *Łódź Ghetto: A History*, trans. and ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 343.

[72] See Norich, *The Homeless Imagination*, 44.

[73] In a contemporaneous Yiddish literary example, Leyb Rashkin's 1936 novel about a shtetl in interwar Poland, *The People of Godlbozhits* (*Di mentshn fun Goldbozshits*), a Jewish character's prosperity is explained because an ancestor was willing to entertain a local nobleman with a *mayufes*, performed on a table in his under-tallis. In exchange for this performance, the Jewish man is given ownership of the inn he leases and the land on which it stands—although he also receives a beating because the dance frightened a noblewoman so much she fainted. See Leyb Rashkin, *The People of* Godlbozhits, trans. Jordan Finkin (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2017), 3. [Leib Raskin, *Di mentshn fun Goldbozshits: roman* (Warsaw: Yidishe universal-bibliotek, 1936), 6-7.]

[74] Clive Sinclair, *The Brothers Singer* (London: Allison & Busby, 1983), 95.