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Isaac Bashevis Singer:

Speak English, Think Yiddish—

Adaptation Versus Assimilation

A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

East Tennessee State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

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by

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May 2001

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Keywords: Isaac Bashevis Singer, Holocaust, Polish Jewry,
adaptation, assimilation

ABSTRACT

Isaac Bashevis Singer: Speak English, Think Yiddish—
Adaptation Versus Assimilation

by

Susan L. Gardberg

Critics use the words "vanished culture" to describe Isaac Bashevis Singer's work for Polish Jewry had been destroyed. However, Singer's characters survive the travails of anti-Semitism and resettle in America. This study explores Singer's Polish Jews to determine whether they assimilate into their new culture; or maintain their strong Jewish traditions and adapt to the freedoms of America.

Singer's life is analyzed, including the people and places that have influenced his work. Two of Singer's works are examined in this thesis. Chapters Three and Four explicate an allegorical short story, "The Little Shoemakers." Singer writes a fairytale view of a magnificent rejuvenation in the new world. Chapters Five and Six explore the realistic portrait of Jewish transplants in the novel, Enemies, A Love Story. Chapter Seven concludes that belief in the Jewish faith, along with the love of freedom, allow Singer's characters to adapt, not assimilate, to foreign soil.

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CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT 2

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 3

CHAPTER

1. SINGER'S FAIRYTALE VERSUS REALISM 5

2. SINGER'S BIOGRAPHY 9

3. "THE LITTLE SHOEMAKERS" IN POLAND 18

4. "THE LITTLE SHOEMAKERS" IN AMERICA 26

5. ENEMIES, A LOVE STORY: SINGER'S REALISTIC CHARACTERS 34

6. ENEMIES: UNTANGLING THE WEB 51

7. CONCLUSION: ADAPTATION 61

WORKS CITED 66

WORKS CONSULTED 68

VITA 69

CHAPTER 1

SINGER'S FAIRYTALE VERSUS REALISM

Many critics use the words "vanished culture" in describing Isaac Bashevis Singer's work. For example, Lawrence S. Friedman writes in his book Understanding Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Isaac Bashevis Singer was born in 1904 in Leoncin, Poland, into the long-vanished world of East European Jewry that his writing reinvokes" (1). This analysis is true to the extent that Eastern European Jewry, as Singer knew it, had been destroyed. However, many Polish Jews survived the pogroms and Holocaust, and resettled into widespread cultural pockets around the world, taking their traditions, Talmud and Torah with them, indicating that Jewishness is not determined by place: it comes from within. Singer's works typically center on three or four individuals united in an existence of love and survival — whether in Poland or in the United States. The one constant is the Jewish cultural background. Singer's characters change their places of residence; however, the question is this: do they actually assimilate into their new environments or do they rather, merely adapt to their new surroundings?

To understand Singer's characters and their ability to settle in a new place, one must understand the life they fled, and more important, Singer's biography. Singer, forced to flee Poland, emigrated to America in 1935, a move that spared him the horrors of Hitler. Nevertheless, he was tormented by loneliness and depression in a new country; Singer's experience mirrors the life of many Jewish immigrants who had been driven from the security of the *shtetl*s where the Ashkenazim communities had resided

before World War II (Rosten 369). Like an incubator, the *shtetl* on the one hand nurtured traditional Jewish life, but on the other hand confined the Jews to a certain place. People left the *shtetl* to find economic relief, to seek secular wisdom and, finally, to escape Hitler's tyranny. What were these people like before they left the *shtetl?* Did they bring their personalities and ideologies with them? How did they manage the transition? If we examine a few of Singer's characters, we may learn to what degree the traditions and Jewish laws remain with them, and how their heritage ultimately affected their lives.

Does an individual ever recover from the traumatic events of the Holocaust? Friedman writes, "Given the facts of Singer's origin and upbringing, it is inevitable that the Holocaust looms large in his fiction. Unlike his American Jewish counterparts he is condemned by his subject matter to confront the Holocaust endlessly" (148). The implication is that in building new lives, many were able to leave the past behind, but Singer was unable to. The two works discussed in this study show diverse aspects of Singer's view: one, an example of wishful thinking and the other, a realistic treatment of those doomed to relive the Holocaust forever. Singer gives an allegorical view of a magnificent rejuvenation in the new world with his poignant short story "The Little Shoemakers." The protagonist is the patriarch Abba Shuster, whose unfailing belief in God tells a wonderful story of Jewish survival. In contrast, many of Singer's novels and short stories present a realistic depiction of Jewish transplants. These novels and short stories have similar themes of enlightenment, complex relationships, immigrant survival, and the search for truth. To avoid repetition, I have chosen one novel with these familiar Singer themes: Enemies, A Love Story. In this novel, Herman Broder is

driven by haunting memories, memories that encourage rejection of his Jewish heritage. Friedman describes Singer's fiction as a moral struggle for his characters: "Singer's works pose the eternal moral question: How is one to live? To answer this question Singer's characters are forced to choose between two worlds" (8-9), the secular and the spiritual. However, many of Singer's characters also have to exist in a new location — sometimes by choice and sometimes by dire necessity. As mentioned before, most of these individuals are steeped in the traditions of Jewish life and law. These laws are endowed with moral values that can be a way of life and a map for a spiritual journey, as in the life of Abba Shuster, or they can be a road to anger and an avenue toward depression, as in the life of Herman Broder. Because rigid and restrictive orthodoxy has a tenacious hold on behavior, and an orthodox religion can also be devoid of choice, the Polish Jews portrayed in Singer's works are escaping not only the atrocities of Hitler but also the confines of their religious life. Guilt accompanies many of Singer's characters — guilt for living while others were murdered, and guilt for no longer adhering to the Talmud and Torah. Singer tells his audience that individuals have to make choices, a necessary consequence of freedom. Sometimes the choice is hard: to either move on in life and incorporate the past, or to remain encumbered and haunted by the past.

Post-Holocaust emigration was not the first time Jews were forced to leave their country. Many Jewish prisoners of war were sent to Rome after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70; from Italy, Jews migrated to eastern Europe (Sarason n. pag.). Therefore, originally, the ancestors of Singer's Polish Jews had settled in Poland from other parts of the world. Their previous culture had not vanished, although the

individuals involved had modified their lives, conforming to the environment in which they now resided. However, many Jewish traditions survived. History repeats itself, and the Polish Jews have continued to change after leaving Poland, just as Singer's works demonstrate. Abba Shuster's life tells the fairytale of the immigrant experience — perhaps the dream of Singer. The verisimilitude of Singer's immigrant experience prevails in the tangled lives of Herman Broder and his three wives.

Many immigrants choose to assimilate into a new culture so they can have the sense of belonging, as well as the opportunities of gaining financial success. Singer's protagonists, for the most part, remain loyal to their heritage. I will demonstrate that the major characters in Singer's work do not assimilate — they adapt — whether in the fairytale short story "The Little Shoemakers," or in his novels of realism such as Enemies, A Love Story. Outwardly — in their clothes, careers, technology — they blend into American culture. Inwardly — in their emotions, interpersonal relationships and ideologies — they are Polish Jews. In other words, they speak English but they think Yiddish.

CHAPTER 2

SINGER'S BIOGRAPHY

Singer, born in 1904 in Poland, was a person torn between the traditions of his Hasidic forebears and the moral dilemma of the modern secular man. He also had a deep love for his language, Yiddish. Although he believed in God, he rebelled against organized religion. His father was a Hasidic rabbi, Pinkhos Mendel Singer, from Tomoszov. His mother, Bathsheba Zylberman, was the daughter of a rabbi of an opposing sect. Singer's novels are characterized by solipsism: they all revolve around his life, his experiences, his relationships. Therefore, a knowledge of Singer's biography is necessary to understand the conflicts of his work — between the spiritual and the secular, and between assimilation and adaptation (or, perhaps, segregation).

Pinkhos Singer, pious Jew and Hasidic Rabbi, strongly believed in the mysticism of the Kabala. Bathsheba was a learned, very logical, woman. Janet Hadda writes about Bathsheba in Singer's biography, Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Life, "She was a powerful intellect. She knew much more about scholarly matters than other women of similar background and standing" (19). Most important to note are the dynamics between the mother and father: endless conflict between mystic father and rationalist mother. Pinkhos was optimistic and Bathsheba was morose and melancholy. She was an avid reader, albeit not for pleasure; while he found joy in the study of his religious books. Isaac clearly demonstrated his mixed heritage. He was a believer in his faith, but a rationalist in his concept of God; he loved to read, perhaps for pleasure, but mostly for

knowledge; and he easily gave in to depression. An emotional oxymoron, Singer was both a loner and a womanizer. Many of his male protagonists have this same personality mix. An interesting observation is that location, whether Poland, America or Israel, doesn't appear to change this aspect of their personality.

Singer tells an insightful story about his parents in his memoir In My Father's Court. Pinkhos Singer, as a Rabbi, held a *Beth din* (a rabbinical court). Many observing Jews preferred to bring their troubles to their Rabbi instead of to the public courts. *Beth dins* had no legal authority; however, they would deal with religious and Jewish community problems as well as with domestic and commercial disputes that needed arbitration or advice. In "Why the Geese Shrieked," a woman, visibly disturbed, appears in Pinkhos Singer's court carrying a basket with two dead geese. Normally Pinkhos would not look at the woman, for it is forbidden by Jewish law; however, the woman is very distressed. Apparently even though the geese had been killed properly she tells Rabbi Singer ". . . the geese keep shrieking in such a sorrowful voice . . ." (Singer Father's Court 12). Therefore, Pinkhos believes the geese are possessed. This incident was of special interest to Rabbi Singer because he believed that spirits of the dead can possess the living, and souls can be reincarnated in animals. Singer's father spoke of these things often to his children. Pinkhos knew his children were involved in the secular world; nonetheless he wanted them to have a healthy respect for the mysterious forces in the world (Singer Father's Court 11).

However, Bathsheba's reaction is different — a mixture of skepticism, sadness and anger . "'Did you remove the windpipes?' my mother asked" (Singer Father's Court

14). The windpipes had not been removed, and once they are, the puzzle of the shrieking geese is solved. Singer writes about his father's reaction, "He [Pinkhos] knew what had happened here: logic, cold logic, was again tearing down faith, mocking it, holding it up to ridicule and scorn" (Father's Court 15). Bathsheba, on the other hand, was the product of her environment, the granddaughter of a great scholar, Rabbi of Bilgoray, who was also a "cold-blooded rationalist" (Singer Father's Court 16). This mixture of blind faith and cold-blooded logic, personality traits that are hard to assimilate in the new world, infuses Isaac Bashevis Singer and his characters.

Nevertheless, in certain circumstances Singer's parents were of one mind; they would never divorce, they never left Poland, and they were committed to the Jewish faith and orthodox lifestyle in which they were raised. Although Bathsheba did occasionally read secular books, Irving Howe quotes Singer as he describes his parents' reaction to his ambition to become a secular writer:

> It was a great shock to my parents. They considered all secular writers to be heretics, all unbelievers — they were too most of them. To become a *literat* was to them almost as bad as becoming a *meshumed*, one who forsakes the faith. My father used to say that secular writers . . .were leading the Jews to heresy . . . 'sweetened poison,' but poison nevertheless. (499)

Singer did not forsake his faith — not in his life or in his writing. He did, however, change the outward appearance of his faith. Gone were the earlocks, beard and clothes of the orthodox Jew of his father's tradition. Singer blended into American

culture by his outward appearance, but, though he realized the importance of speaking English, his emotional psyche remained Yiddish.

Another great influence on Singer's life was his older sister Hinde Esther. She was thirteen years Isaac's senior. Hinde Esther could have been, and was to a major degree, a mother to her younger brother, Isaac. Hadda describes Singer's feelings toward his sister, "having experienced a reserved and undemonstrative mother, it is no wonder that little Yitskhok [Isaac] vividly recalled his sister's uninhibited and passionate displays of feeling" (Hadda 42). Hinde Esther was extremely emotional, a result, Singer theorized, of inheriting only the gene make-up of his father's side of the family, magnified by her epilepsy. Later on in her life she was diagnosed as having partial complex seizures which presented themselves with humming, lip smacking, crude vocalization, laughing, crying, and walking. As a result, Hinde Esther was totally misunderstood as a child; however, her younger brother adored her. He adored her affection and her story-telling. When Hinde Esther later married and left home, Singer filled the void she left with writing. Hadda describes Singer's loss and Hinde Esther's influence on Singer's writing, " . . .and fill it [the void] he did, with all the vibrant, expansive, crazy and troubling characters who represented Hinde Esther's disturbing but enlivening presence" (42).

By far the most influential person in Singer's life was his older brother Israel Joshua (I.J.). Singer writes of his older brother, "He was to me not as a brother; I regarded him as my master, my teacher" (Hadda 31). Hadda characterizes Israel as Isaac's hero, mentor, literary role model — a hard act to follow — but an irresistible

magnet (Hadda 31). As a young man, I.J. had exciting new views and was a follower of the Enlightenment movement, *Haskala*. Hadda describes the importance of the Enlightenment movement to I.J., Isaac, and even their mother: "For Jews, the Enlightenment meant a thirst for intellectual and cultural commonality with the non-Jewish world. Although most . . .did not at first seek assimilation, they did want to expand beyond what they considered to be the narrow confines of a strictly orthodox intellectual life" (26). It was I.J. who introduced Isaac to secular classics. Singer recalls after he read Crime and Punishment, "Although I didn't really comprehend it, it fascinated me. . . I was in another world. . . .the merger of literature and reality had become full blown and explicit" (Hadda 53). I.J. also introduced Isaac to the Warsaw Yiddish literary scene. At the Warsaw Yiddish Writers' Club, young Isaac was given access to artists of many mediums — novelists, poets, journalists, painters and sculptors. He also became acquainted with the strong social-democratic movements — Zionism, Communism, Socialism — that captured the imagination of literary Jews.

I.J. ultimately saved Isaac's life by facilitating his immigration to America. It was through Israel that Isaac received his visa to come to the United States and gained a position at the Jewish Daily Forward. Nonetheless, the relationship with his older brother, I.J., was one of conflict. Isaac respected and was devoted to his brother, and yet at times felt ". . . infantilized and undermined next to his brother" (Hadda 81).

Irving Howe's reference to I.J.'s success as a novelist in America describes him as one of the "first Yiddish writers in America to write the kind of thick, leisurely social novel that had dominated European literature earlier in the century" (448). English

reading audiences delighted in I.J. Singer's The Brothers Ashkenazi. Another success for I.J., although a short novel, was Yoshe Kalb (in English, The Sinner). At the age of fifty, I.J. died unexpectedly. His death traumatized Isaac. Ironically, the contentions between Israel and Isaac had been based on Isaac's search for independence, which also included his success as a writer and as a man. Now through death this freedom was established, however, Isaac was tormented with guilt. Hadda theorizes:

> The need to erase or deny his dual loss of family and community led Bashevis to develop the literary technique that became a hallmark of his writing. Throughout the rest of his career, he merged autobiographical facts and fiction so seamlessly that it was often impossible to tease the two apart. While maddening to critics . . . Bashevis's technique served an important psychological function. His flight into fiction had initially cushioned him from too-painful reality; now, the infusion of reality into his fiction provided relief from his forsaken solitude. [Singer was Bashevis to his Yiddish readers, a derivative of his mother's name] (Hadda 110)

The four family members, Singer's parents, brother, and sister, were major influences in the development of Singer's character. Minor factors in his character formation, nonetheless still worth mentioning, were his work for the Jewish Daily Forward and his long marriage to his wife, Alma. The Jewish Daily Forward had considerable power and influence in New York during Singer's tenure as a contributing writer. IrvingHowe relates the importance of the daily Yiddish paper, "Everyone read a Yiddish paper. . . . There were seldom many books in the average immigrant's home, but the Yiddish paper came in every day. Not to take a paper was to confess you were a

barbarian"(518). In one of Singer's novels, Meshugah, the protagonist, novelist Aaron Greidinger, writes his novels in serial form for the American Yiddish newspaper. Most of Singer's own novels were written in serial form for the Jewish Daily Forward. As Aaron meets other refugees who escaped Poland, they praise his writing prowess, and look forward to the next chapter in the newspaper, which would unfold the ongoing saga of his characters. Greidinger's influence, as Singer's, is enormous to the East European Jews who now live in New York. This was their link to the "old world," and Singer's concepts and ideologies were instrumental in easing the struggle of the immigrants' daily lives. This exaltation inspires a writer and nurtures the soul of a man yearning for attention.

Singer married Alma Haimann Wasserman in 1940, and although he had very little in common with this woman, they continued to be married until his death in 1991. Alma was a German-born refugee. Many German Jews desired to assimilate into the American culture. East European Jews were not as cosmopolitan as their German cousins. Irving Howe writes, "The German Jews, by contrast, had worked out for themselves a reconciliation between their Judaism, which they saw strictly as a religion, and the styles of Western thought" (497). Alma did not know Yiddish, and she came from a completely

assimilated home in Munich. Her parents were wealthy merchants, and she was blind to the poverty that Singer knew so well. Alma's first husband was a wealthy doctor of chemistry, who earned his fortune in business. Alma escaped Hitler's tyranny and came to the United States in 1936. One commonality Alma and Isaac shared in their

biographical history: once they came to America, neither one ever saw their parents again. Alma gave up her husband and two children to marry Singer. Alma is quoted as saying, ". . . I had to spend the rest of my life with him [Singer] and therefore I had to give up my marriage and my children which was a very difficult and very terrible decision to make" (Hadda 98). This obsessive relationship, which started out as an adulterous affair, resembled some of the liaisons in Singer's novels. Shosha, Meshugah and Enemies, A Love Story, each encompass an obsessive affair. Hadda writes of her interview with Alma, ". . . she provided a benchmark for the contradictions and conflicts that epitomized Bashevis's life" (7).

A personal hypothesis is that Alma, although ignorant of the issues that stimulated Singer, provided him an appearance of stature and culture in America — the concept of adapting, not assimilating, into his new environment. They never had children together, and by all accounts Singer was very unfaithful to Alma. However, they never divorced. Hadda quotes Singer, "'Here I was writing articles against assimilation and I was living with a woman produced by generations of assimilation. . . '" (102). A strange chemistry, not unlike that between Singer's parents, kept them together.

Singer was not a typical Yiddish writer. Irving Howe describes the Yiddish literary community as troubled by Singer's " . . .exploitation of sexuality, his surrender to the irrational, his indifference to the humane ethic of *Yiddishkeit*. . ." (458). Irving Howe translates *Yiddishkeit* as something beyond opinion or ideology; rather it is a way of life, a shared experience (16). Howe continues, "The culture of Yiddishkeit is no longer strictly that of traditional Orthodoxy, yet it retains strong ties to the religious past" (16).

Singer also holds on to the past, never turning his back on the Jewish culture. His characters actively celebrate Jewish holidays, read the Yiddish newspapers, light the Sabbath candles, and maintain the mystical superstitions of the Kabala. Singer understood American culture; however, he maintained his allegiance to the world of his past. An analysis of the "The Little Shoemakers" and Enemies, A Love Story, will explain and underscore the strong influence of Singer's autobiographical history and the influence he had on keeping the spirit of Yiddishism alive in America.

CHAPTER 3

"THE LITTLE SHOEMAKERS" IN POLAND

"The Little Shoemakers" is Singer's fantasy of the immigrant's experience. It is a story of Abba Shuster (Father shoemaker) who has no desire ever to leave the city of Frampol. Assimilation is not in his vocabulary. He is the eighth generation of shoemakers living in this city in Poland. The original Abba came to Frampol after the Chmielnitzki's pogroms, in approximately 1648. Through all the generations, to the present protagonist, again named Abba, the honorable craft of shoemaking has been traditionally handed down to the eldest son of the family. The secret of strengthening leather and making it more durable has been divulged from one generation to the next. In character, all the Shuster men are "sound, honest workmen" and in appearance they are all short and sandy-haired (Singer "Shoemakers" 39). Singer describes the generosity of the founder of the Shuster line in the 17th century:

> The name of Abba Shuster is recorded, on parchment, in the annals of the Frampol Jewish community. It was his custom to make six pair of shoes every year for distribution among widows and orphans; in recognition of his philanthropy the synagogue called him to the reading of Torah under the honorific title, Murenu, meaning 'our teacher.'" ("Shoemakers" 38)

The Abba of Singer's "The Little Shoemakers" is no different. He looks like his ancestors, is as religious as his ancestors, and maintains the same generosity. Abba would never make a promise he couldn't keep. Although a man of some learning, he was

not a Talmudic sage. The title of Murenu, given to his ancestor, also depicts this Abba — a man who is content, honest, generous, trustworthy, and faithful; indeed he has all the attributes of a virtuous man, virtues he will continue to teach his children. He is married to Pesha, a woman who values his judgment in all her homemaking decisions. Abba has seven sons named after his forefathers — Gimpel, Getzel, Treitel, Godel, Feivel, Lippe, and Chananiah. They all live in the same house which Abba's ancestors built on the stubby hill.

Gimpel, the oldest, is taught not only the trade of his father; but also, surprisingly, is educated in Russian, Polish, and arithmetic. Gimpel, as the eldest son, is foremost in his father's attention and appears to get most of the Hebrew and secular training. Nonetheless, Abba is so comfortable with his lifestyle that he wants to be surrounded by all his children. He pledges to train not only Gimpel but all his sons in the shoemaker trade. Therefore, as each son joins the father as a shoemaker, the family makes more shoes and more income. However, Abba will never rebuild this dilapidated house of his ancestors, or live ostentatiously. Friedman writes, ". . . Abba embodies the persistence of a Jewish tradition outwardly symbolized by the ruined house in which generations of his family had lived and died" (197). There is no talk of assimilation, for Abba never wants to move. Singer wants his reader to understand Abba's contentment:

> He knew that the wide world was full of strange cities and distant lands, that Frampol was actually no bigger than a dot in a small prayer book; but it seemed to him that his little town was the navel of the universe and that his own house stoodat the very center. He often thought that when the Messiah came to lead the

> Jews to the Land of Israel, he, Abba, would stay behind in Frampol, in his own house, on his own hill. Only on the Sabbath and on holy days would he step into a cloud and let himself be flown to Jerusalem. ("Shoemakers" 41)

Singer devotes many pages to the description of Abba Shuster's upstanding character and tranquillity. In a way, Abba and his family represent the childhood Singer would have desired. Part of the fairytale mentality of this story is Abba's self-satisfaction with his lot in life. Singer works very hard to describe Abba's sense of fulfillment, a sense of fulfillment bordering on stubbornness. Therefore, the first turning point of the story occurs when Gimpel, the eldest son, tells his father he wants to leave the *shtetl*. This desire is beyond Abba's understanding. Singer lets Gimpel's vehement response to his father's question of why he wants to leave Frampol give a truthful glance of what *shtetl* life was like in reality:

> . . . the Hebrew teachers beat the children; the women empty their slop pails right outside the door; the shopkeepers loiter in the streets; there are no toilets anywhere, and the public relieves itself as it pleases, behind the bathhouse or out in the open, encouraging epidemics and plagues. He [Gimpel] made fun of Ezreal the healer and of Mecheles the marriage broker, nor did he spare the rabbinical court and the bath attendant, the washerwoman and the overseer of the poorhouse, the professions and the benevolent societies. ("Shoemakers" 45)

However, Abba's last words to his son are "'Good luck! Don't forsake your religion'" (Singer "Shoemakers" 46).

Ironically, when Gimpel does leave to go to America, the few things he takes include his prayer shawl and phylacteries, small leather boxes containing Hebrew biblical texts, worn by Jewish men to remind them of the obligation to keep the law (Brown OED 2196). Therefore, it is not religion or heritage Gimpel is leaving; rather it is new opportunities he is seeking. Gimpel is a character based on Singer's older brother, I.J., both of these visionaries searching to explore the modern, secular aspects of life. The question is not whether Gimpel forsakes his religion; but whether he forgets his roots and assimilates into American culture. At first he adheres to his orthodox training. In fact, on his voyage over, he eats only potatoes and herring because he does not want to touch improper food. In America, however, he does not maintain this strict concept of his religion. Although Singer never tells his reader outright of Gimpel's religious transition from orthodox to liberal Judaism, he does drop hints about the clothes Gimpel wears, the language he begins to speak, and certain traditions he no longer follows. Gimpel begins to adapt to this new society. Singer does not depict a head on confrontation with the new energetic culture of America but a gradual shift. As Sol Gittlemen describes "The Little Shoemakers" in his book From Shtetl to Suburbia, ". . . it emphasizes the pleasant and minimizes the unpleasant" (112) aspects of American life.

Abba believes he will never see his son again. Many months pass, and finally to Abba's delighted surprise, he receives a very friendly letter from Gimpel. Gimpel is in America, and he tells his parents "No one walks with his eyes on the ground, everybody holds his head high"(Singer "Shoemakers"46). He describes a place where there is no persecution, no pogroms — Jews are welcome in America. Abba continues to process

Gimpel's letter, "He met a lot of his countrymen in New York; they all wear short coats" (Singer "Shoemakers" 46). Singer is describing a new Gimpel — adapting to his new environment. And most important, Gimpel tells his family that, "The trade he learned at home has come in very handy. He is *all right*; he is earning a living" (Singer "Shoemakers" 46). Gimpel's ability to take care of himself correlates directly to the training, love and devotion he received from his parents, most notably his father. What is impressive at this juncture is Singer's ability to describe the positive bridge between Gimpel and his family, between the old and new world. Gimpel has not forgotten his roots and very much wants to continue a strong relationship with his family. He has not assimilated; he has adapted.

Gimpel's second letter tells his parents he is engaged to be married to Bessie, a Jewish girl from Rumania. Bessie, Gimpel tells his family, "works at *dresses*" (Singer "Shoemakers" 46). *Dresses* is written in English, while the rest of the letter is in Yiddish. The fact that English is beginning to permeate his letters reveals the transition taking place in Gimpel's life. A picture is enclosed of Gimpel and Bessie. Singer's ironic fairytale prose describes the reaction from family and friends to Gimpel's photograph:

Abba could not believe it. His son was wearing a gentlemen's coat and a high hat.The bride was dressed like a countess in a white dress, with train and veil; she held a bouquet of flowers in her hand. Pesha took one look at the snapshot and began to cry. Gimpel's brothers gaped. Neighbors came running, and friends from all over town: they could have sworn that Gimpel had been spirited away by magic toa land of gold, where

he had take a princess to wife — just as in the storybooks the pack merchants brought to town. (Singer "Shoemakers" 46-7)

Ironically, Gimpel is a struggling immigrant whose new wife probably "works at *dresses*" paid by piecemeal. Nonetheless, to the simple folk of the *shtetl,* she is a princess and Gimpel is in the "land of gold." Eventually Gimpel brings all his brothers to America. Singer, as mentioned before, has spent many pages describing Abba's devotion to his religion, but he has not analyzed the religious commitment of Abba's seven sons. One can assume they are not as pious as their father, because of certain references to the ways their lives evolve. Instead of reference to their religious dedication, Singer describes their adjustment to a free society. The first and obvious change is in the way the sons earn a living. For just as the horse and buggy became obsolete and the automobile became the transportation of choice, the shoemaker became the shoe manufacturer. Gimpel has changed: no longer a struggling immigrant, he is the wealthy owner of a shoe factory, and his brothers are the wealthy managers of the shoe factory. At the same time, however, the reader is very aware that the brothers still maintain the community of their past by living close together. Singer writes, "Their seven homes, surrounded by gardens, stood on the shore of a lake" ("Shoemakers" 53) in a New Jersey suburb, a far cry from the epidemic-ridden, plague-infested, poverty-stricken *shtetl* that Gimpel had described to his father forty years before. Although the synagogue in Frampol had been walking distance from anywhere in the village, Singer describes the synagogue in this New Jersey suburb as ten miles away from their homes — definitely not walking distance. The Shuster brothers speak English in America,

travel to their synagogue, and live in an upscale Yiddish *shtetl*. They strictly maintain a sense of family and send money home regularly pleading with their parents to join them in America.

The question that Singer's stories pose, "How is one to live?" comes to the forefront in "The Little Shoemakers." Piety, although important, is not the backbone of Jewishness nor is living in Poland. If one forsakes Yiddish to communicate in the language of the country in which he resides, does that determine assimilation? Or is assimilation a rejection of one's name and religion and denial of ancestral background? Abba's sons maintain the name Shuster, continue to be Jewish and consistently reach out to their father. But at the same time, Abba's sons ultimately want a better life — a secular life of freedom and comfort. Singer communicates this to his reader. Gittleman believes that Singer created a world in "The Little Shoemakers" to appeal to his Jewish reader now living in New York (108). That audience sought a sentimental story that elaborated their ". . . hopes and dreams of the Jew who has created a new *shtetl* for himself on the lower end of Manhattan Island" (108).

Nevertheless, a new *shtetl* is not what Abba wants for himself. Forty years pass and even though his faithful wife, Pesha, dies and Abba is all alone, he refuses to go to America. His sons, Singer writes, "wrote every week, begging him to come and join them, but he remained in Frampol, in the same old house on the stubby hill" ("Shoemakers" 47). Is Singer being ironic? For the reader wonders whether his refusal is piety or stubbornness. Why wouldn't a father, whose wife has died, want to be with

his sons and grandchildren? Evidence of Singer's complex background — his personal conflict between Jewish tradition and worldliness — provides the tension in this story.

Everyone in the village of Frampol urges the elderly Abba to go to America. Abba refuses, preferring to be alone with his thoughts and the history of his ancestors. Singer's major theme is voiced by Abba's contemplations, "All his thoughts ran on one theme: What is life and what is death, what is time that goes on without stopping, and how far away is America" ("Shoemakers" 49). Only when Hitler bombs Frampol and destroys Abba's house along with the lifestyle Abba cherishes does he begin his exile from Poland. Through the influence of his wealthy sons, Abba escapes on the last ship leaving for America.

CHAPTER 4

"THE LITTLE SHOEMAKERS" IN AMERICA

The second part of "The Little Shoemakers" projects Singer's point of view that "Eastern European Jewry could be replanted on American soil" (Hadda 123). Abba's journey from Poland to Rumania and finally to America is an arduous one. Abba, as his son Gimpel on his voyage forty years ago, refuses to eat on the difficult passage to America for fear the food is ritually unclean. Aboard ship, Abba loses his prayer shawl and phylacteries, a major source of comfort to him, and becomes confused. A disoriented person fantasizes and exaggerates what is familiar to him, as Singer demonstrates with Abba's dreams concerning the Bible. Singer writes, "Abba had little learning, but Biblical references ran through his mind and he saw himself as the prophet Jonah, who fled before God. He too lay in the belly of a whale and, like Jonah, prayed to God for deliverance" (Singer "Shoemakers" 52). Singer brilliantly incorporates stories from the Bible throughout "The Little Shoemakers" as a parallel to Abba's lifestyle and his relationship to God. The Biblical parallels continue in America.

The shoemaker is greatly shocked when he sees his children and grandchildren. Of course he has not seen his children for over forty years and has never met his daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Outwardly they look like "Polish landowners, counts and countesses" (Singer "Shoemakers" 52), not the simple villagers he is accustomed to. They speak to him in Yiddish and in English. His sons, now "short men with white hair" shout their names to Abba so he can recognize each

individual. Abba is quickly maneuvered into one of the automobiles, and a caravan speeds through a huge city with skyscrapers. To the stunned old man, the city calls to mind "a heathen festival" and "Pithom and Rameses" from the Bible (Singer "Shoemakers" 53). Singer's marvelous description of the confusion and excessive sensory stimulation, which the old man Abba experiences, is important for the reader. If Singer wants to convey his vision of how traditional values can survive on foreign soil, it is imperative for his audience — immigrants yearning for a hopeful conclusion — to comprehend Abba's initial reaction to his family and environment.

David Hirsch describes "The Little Shoemakers" as a "bittersweet parable," one that describes the transformation from "East European Jewish piety to American Jewish secularism"; he argues that the moral of the story is more ambiguous than most critics believe (168-9). In his essay "Secularism and Yiddishkeit in Abraham Cahan's 'The Imported Bridegroom' and Isaac Bashevis Singer's 'The Little Shoemakers,'" Hirsch comments, "To avail themselves fully of the opportunities America offered, Jews often had to sacrifice at least some part of their old-world identity" (169). He goes on to explain that sometimes in America it was necessary for a Jew to work on the Sabbath, and in an American motorized culture, drive to synagogue (169), acts that would never have occurred in Frampol. These facts, of course, are true; however, a deeply pious Jew would still maintain tradition. Yet many Polish Jews yearned to escape the *shtetl* life for a more liberated secular life in Warsaw or America. Singer, as a youth, was drawn to secular books to understand the world around him. His brother, Israel, as a follower of the Enlightenment movement, was instrumental in Singer's education into secular

literature. For both of the brothers the search began in Poland, not in America. Consequently, Abba's sons and family may have the outward appearance of immigrants who have assimilated into their new culture, but within their psyche, they have not strayed far from their heritage. One example is the respect and devotion the sons give to their father. For over forty years the sons have written religiously to their parents, and after the mother dies, they continue to write to their father, sending money and pleading with him to come to America. After Hitler invades Poland, and Abba barely escapes into Rumania, it is the sons who go to Washington and somehow manage his escape.

The last chapter, "The American Heritage," best describes the blending of the old and new world. To celebrate their father's arrival in America, the family prepares a feast in Gimpel's house with all the traditional Jewish rituals and their finest dishes, silver and crystal. Singer writes about Gimpel's wife, ". . . Bessie, whose father had been a Hebrew teacher in the old country, remembers all the rituals and observes them carefully . . ." ("Shoemakers" 53). The food preparation is in full compliance with dietary laws, the sons wear skullcaps during the meal, and the grandchildren and great grandchildren have learned Yiddish phrases. What may be most significant about the feast is what is not mentioned. David Hirsch argues that a part of Singer's "comic genius" is to leave things unsaid. Hirsch notes, "The fact that Bessie must dig the rituals out of her deep European past is a clear indication that she does not practice them in America"(171). Ironically, as mentioned before, Gittleman believes not mentioning the unpleasant only emphasizes the pleasant. In other words, the "pleasant" provides a fairytale quality to the story. An example of the pleasant is Singer's use of the word "remembered," not "dig" as Hirsch

implies. The Shuster family in America, while remembering their heritage, complies with their religious traditions in accordance to their new environment. While Hirsch negatively describes the feast as "ostentatious display of excess" and compares it to the extravagance of Philip Roth's nouveau riche family in the novella Goodbye Columbus, to this reader it is not a farce, but a joyful celebration. Hirsch implies that the sons wear their skullcaps only during the Jewish holidays, rather than daily as does their father, Abba (171). Furthermore, Hirsch believes the sons attend synagogue only during high holy days, while their father prays twice a day. This, of course, is Hirsch's reading of the story. However, secularization is still not assimilation. Singer's ambiguity allows for diverse, innovative reactions to his story. This reader believes that the American Shuster merely practices a less orthodox form of Judaism than does the father.

After the soup course, Abba falls asleep. Hirsch interprets the act as a negative reaction from the old man. A close reading of Singer's description of Abba's reaction to the feast is necessary in order to disagree with Hirsch's explication:

> All sorts of fruit juices and salads were set before the old man, sweet brandies, cognac, caviar. But Pharaoh, Joseph, Potiphar's wife, the Land of Goshen, the chief baker, and the chief butler spun round and round in his head. His hands trembled so that he was unable to feed himself, and Gimpel had to help him. No matter how often his sons spoke to him, he still could not tell them apart. Whenever the phone rang he jumped — the Nazis were bombing Frampol. The entire house was whirling round and round like a carousel; the tables were standing

> on the ceiling and everyone sat upside down. His face was sickly pale in the light of the candles and the electric bulbs. He fell asleep soon after the soup course, while the chicken was being served. Quickly they led him to the bedroom, undressed him, and called a doctor. ("Shoemakers" 54)

First, the journey to America had been so difficult that by the time Abba arrived in America, Singer writes, "they helped him dress and led him out on deck . . ." ("Shoemakers" 52). Secondly, Abba, by now an old man, had lived in the house in which he had been born (and where his great-grandfather had been born) all the days of his life. Now he is metaphorically catapulted into a strange environment, with people he does not recognize and a language he does not understand. A third point is that although he was not poor in Frampol, he was, and still is, a humble, hardworking, simple person. His Sabbath table in Frampol had been set with the finest linens and dishes that Abba and his wife could afford, and that were available to buy. However, his sons are wealthy, in an affluent country, where there is no limit to the accessibility of beautiful silver and crystal. Fourth, the village of Frampol did not have the latest technology. It is possible there were no telephones, radios, automobiles, and definitely no skyscrapers. Indeed, Abba's ancestral home may not have had electricity. In short, his transplantation has caused a monumental disruption of Abba's entire lifestyle. Elderly, surrounded by virtual strangers, probably by an outpouring of emotion, and confused by unfamiliar sights and sounds, he simply could not complete his meal.

Another dimension in the American Shuster's way of life is their place of work. How easy it would be for Gimpel and his brothers to change their name, or not call

attention to their heritage in their personally owned shoe manufacturing plant. Nonetheless, Singer writes that even the gentiles knew of the Shuster history. To advertise his business to the community, Gimpel publishes ads in the paper that celebrate the family "shoemaking aristocracy":

> Our experience dates back three hundred years to the Polish city of Brod, where our ancestor, Abba, learned the craft from a local master. The community of Frampol, in which our family worked at its trade for fifteen generations, bestowed on him the title of Master in recognition of his charitable services. This sense of public responsibility has always gone hand in hand with our devotion to the highest principles of the craft and our strict policy of honest dealing with our customers. Singer "Shoemakers" 54)

Gimpel is proud of his heritage and Singer emphasizes this message. Gimpel wants to follow in his father's footsteps as a man respected and admired for his responsibility and kindness to his others. Abba has been successful in teaching the virtues of contentment, honesty, generosity, and trustworthiness. Although Gimpel and his brothers have been in America for over forty years, they are virtuous men as theirforefathers before them had been. Singer, Gittleman writes, has a specific audience in mind: "that aging generation of Yiddish speakers and readers who want this time not problems, but solutions for their problems, as they see their children beginning to benefit from what is both the blessing and the curse of *shtetl* life in America: freedom" (112). What is the curse? Perhaps a different kind of faithfulness. In a strange paradox, freedom is seen as a curse because it leads to a falling away from traditions. However,

there is no immediate danger of assimilation in how the Shuster family work or where they live.

Abba spends many months depressed, part of the time in bed. Even a trip to the synagogue does not comfort him. The synagogue, as Singer dry's humor describes it, reminds Abba of a gentile church — the sexton has no beard, the candelabra are electric, there is no courtyard and the cantor "babbled and croaked" ("Shoemakers" 55). Finally, a fortuitous discovery leads to Abba's rebirth and the renewal of his relationship with his sons. Abba finds in the closet the tools he had brought from Frampol. He begins to work fixing and making shoes. Abba's shoes become the talk of the neighborhood. His daughter-in-law Bessie said the shoes Abba made for her "were the most comfortable shoes she had ever worn" (56). Gittleman suggests, "Continuing in the best and most direct traditions of Yiddish literature, Singer comes on with a direct message for the Jew growing old in America: keep your hands busy and your mind alert" (114). Does this message have the same meaning in Poland and America? Certainly.

As in Poland where three generations of family live together, so it is with the Shusters in America. The sons are happy to see their father interacting with the family and neighbors. They realize the source of this good fortune — work. The sons build a shed on their property for their father, with all the shoemaker's tools needed to produce good shoes. Abba is not only content with his life, he reaches out to his loved ones by teaching his grandchildren Hebrew. Singer notes that communication is difficult and Abba must use gestures; however the process of teaching faithfulness has begun.

When Abba's sons were young, he would sing to them an old Frampol song, "A mother had/Ten little boys,/Oh, Lord, ten little boys!" (Singer "Shoemakers" 42); and they would sing the chorus, "Oh, Lord, Hershele!" (Singer "Shoemakers" 43). Hirsch suggests that this tune is a song of lamentations. Hirsch writes, "It is sung three times in the story and its lyrics . . . are both melancholy and pointless"(170). Ironically, Hirsch while negating the story's positive immigrant experience, mentions several times that Abba was a good wholesome, simple man; although not a learned man. Hirsch believes one would not be wrong calling Abba ignorant. In fact, Abba is just recalling the songs of his youth. Therefore, Hirsch's deconstruction of the song, to prove that it is gloomy, is futile. For Abba, the point is not the nature or the lyrics of the song, rather the sense of family and community in which it is performed.

To Abba, and the reader, the song is a sign of renewal, albeit in a different country, in different circumstances, and perhaps in a different language. One by one, every Sunday, the Shuster sons join their father in the shoemaker shed they have built, working together in the craft of their ancestors— making shoes. Abba looks at his sons and prays, "No, praise God, they had not become idolaters in Egypt. They had not forgotten their heritage, nor had they lost themselves among the unworthy" (Singer "Shoemakers" 56). Although they live in America, the Shusters re-embrace the Yiddish culture. Gittleman describes the ending of "The Little Shoemakers" optimistically, "The threat of total Americanization and loss of Jewish identity has been triumphantly beaten back; . . ." (115). A united family once more, the Shuster family has adapted to life in a new land.

CHAPTER 5

ENEMIES, A LOVE STORY: SINGER'S REALISTIC CHARACTERS

The Torah we received at Sinai,

And in Lublin we gave it back,

Corpses do not praise God

Jacob Glatstein

Irving Howe, quoting several of Jacob Glatstein's Holocaust poems, states, "The God that figures in these poems is hardly the omnipotent one of traditional belief, yet neither is he a mere construct of modern religiosity; he is an indestructible presence in Jewish life, beyond acceptance or denial" (456). The Eastern European Jews were bound together by a strong religious commitment. Their existence in the communities of Poland was solidly entrenched in their religious laws. These firm spiritual ties changed after World War II. How can one believe in a God that allows such destruction of His people? And yet, even with this change, discussing God had been constant in the immigrant's life— albeit to some, it was a discussion of doubt. The presence of God, denial or acceptance, as well as certain familiar Jewish traditions, facilitated the adaptation or assimilation process for the immigrant arriving in America. Howe continues, "'The God of my disbelief is magnificent' — this was as far as Glatstein could go in reconciliation. What remained was anger and incomprehension . . ."(457). Anger and incomprehension filter through Singer's post-Holocaust novel, Enemies, A Love Story, as his characters

try to adjust to life in America. These emotions can stymie a person's ability to make a transition into a new environment.

Singer's first English-translated novel with an American setting, Enemies is a journey into realism. Enemies is also a story of remembrance. Memories of family, friends, and life in Poland bring about ambiguous feelings of joy, guilt, happiness and sadness. These and other emotions abound throughout the novel, which is a psychological story of Herman Broder; his doubts about God, his dependent relationships with his three wives, and his difficulties adapting to a new environment. The main characters, Herman, Yadwiga, Masha, and Tamara, do not escape Poland prior to the Holocaust, but directly experience the terrorism of the Nazi occupation. Three of the four, Herman, Masha, and Tamara, are Jewish. Yadwiga is a gentile Polish servant who worked for Herman's family. Masha and Tamara are survivors of German concentration camps. Herman hid in a hayloft during the war, on Yadwiga's farm. Yadwiga had risked her life and the lives of her family hiding Herman. In their own way, they were all traumatized by the Nazi occupation of their homeland. The question posed in my introduction "Does an individual ever overcome the traumatic events of the Holocaust?" comes to the forefront in analyzing Enemies. Herman and Masha never evolve to a normal lifestyle. However, Yadwiga and Tamara adapt and resurrect their lives in America — but only by creating a nontraditional family.

Irony abounds in this novel. First, the title is ironic, even paradoxical, Enemies, A Love Story. Second, Herman Broder is a ghost of a man, who becomes a ghostwriter

for an American rabbi. Herman describes his phantom-like existence to his first wife Tamara, "When a man hides in an attic for years, he ceases to be a part of society. The truth is that I'm still hiding in an attic right here in America" (Singer Enemies 101). Thirdly, Herman, raised as a traditional, religious Jew, develops into a nihilist haunted constantly by his traditional heritage. In fact, as a ghostwriter for an ostentatious, entrepreneurial rabbi, Herman composes sermons and writes books about the concepts and laws of the Jewish faith, which ironically he has rejected. Herman is a complex, hedonistic individual whose personality and ideologies don't change because he is in a different country. The Holocaust did not create Herman's anti-social and self-destructive behavior — the Holocaust intensified it.

Irving Howe describes the importance of scholarship in *shtetl* life, "Scholarship was, above all else, honored among the Jews — . . . A man's prestige, authority, and position depended to a considerable extent on his learning" (8). Whereas Herman, a Talmudic scholar and writer, would be admired and respected in his Polish community, in America, ironically, he believes himself to be "a fraud, a transgressor — a hypocrite, too. The sermons he wrote for Rabbi Lampert were a disgrace and a mockery" (Singer Enemies 15). Marilyn Chandler in her essay "Death by the Word: Victims of Language in Enemies, A Love Story" describes Herman's employer, "Lampert, a modern man of the world, and the one character in the novel who seems to have emerged from the war unscathed and to have adapted admirably to secularized postwar American life, had departed radically from his traditional role"(140). Although Lampert has little time for

words, he realizes there is a desire for traditional expectations of a rabbi as a teacher. This need for tradition ultimately is the reason Herman has a job. Chandler continues, "Though he dignifies Herman's work with the term 'research' in public, privately the rabbi refers to it as 'scribbling''(140). As a worldly man, Rabbi Lambert ". . . loved doing favors — finding jobs for the needy. . ." but it also gave him pleasure "to drive his Cadillac down the streets of a poor neighborhood" (Singer Enemies 22). Chandler states, "Herman sees the words he authors as mimicry, pretense, and deception" (141). Chandler believes, "Herman's writing therefore is both a betrayal of Jewish tradition and a betrayal of himself— . . ." (141).

Does Herman betray himself? Who is this confused person that critics describe as a hedonistic nihilist? Herman is the only child of a religious, wealthy man in Tzivkev. Singer describes how Herman's father educated his son: "He hired a rabbi to instruct his son in Jewishness and a Polish tutor to teach him secular subjects. Reb Shmuel Leib hoped his only son would become a modern rabbi" (Enemies 29). Herman's mother wanted him to be a doctor. Herman leaned toward philosophy. At nineteen he went to the university in Warsaw and entered the school of philosophy. Against his parents' wishes, he married Tamara, his first wife, whom he met at the university — she a student of biology and active in the leftist movements. Herman, who had resolved never to marry or "bring new generations into the world," had to marry the pregnant Tamara. Tamara refused to have an abortion and enlisted her parents to force Herman to marry her. From the beginning they never got along. He was a neglectful, absentee father, and wanted to divorce Tamara; however, the war interrupted his plans. Singer describes their

marriage, from Herman's viewpoint, "Tamara talked incessantly of redemption of humanity, the plight of Jews, the role of woman in society" (Enemies 63). Herman has no involvement in any of these issues — his background in philosophy gave him a negative outlook on all the subjects Tamara was interested in. Singer continues, "She praised books which Herman considered little better than pulp, was enthusiastic about plays that revolted him, sang the current song hits with gusto. . ."(Enemies 64). Herman, an intellectual snob and loner, who prides himself as an independent thinker, also resents Tamara's leftist leanings. Singer explains why, "She seemed to Herman to be the incarnation of the masses, always following some leader, hypnotized by slogans, never really having an opinion of her own" (Enemies 64). Herman's selfish personality does not allow him to compromise — a necessary skill in any relationship.

Dorothy Bilik, in her essay "Singer's Diasporan Novel: Enemies, A Love Story," compares Singer to his complex fictional characters. Bilik writes that Singer was part of "two opposing strains within traditional Judaism" (90). Singer's father had been active in the Hasidic movement, and his mother's family had been Orthodox. Bilik points out that Singer is also the "product of urban, secular, antitraditional Jewish life" (90). Bilix continues, "Herman Broder is typically Singerian in that he is craven, lecherous, inconsistent; at times he retreats toward orthodoxy, only to be drawn again to his customary hedonism" (90). It is the inconsistencies and paradoxes of Herman's life that ultimately segregate Herman from everyone, and do not allow him to adapt to a new life. Herman's outward appearance gives the illusion of adjustment to his current environment — clothes, language, mobility; he dresses like an American, speaks English

when necessary, travels by train, bus and taxi. However, inwardly he believes he is one of "those without courage to make an end to their existence" (Enemies 30). Singer gives the reader a glimpse of the haunted personality of Herman Broder:

> During the war and in the years after, Herman had time enough to regret his behavior to his family. But basically he remained the same: without belief in himself or in the human race; a fatalistic hedonist who lived in pre-suicidal gloom. Religions lied. Philosophy was bankrupt from the beginning. The idle promises of progress were no more than a spit in the face of the martyrs of all generations. If time is just a form of perception, or a category of reason, the past is as present as today: Cain continues to murder Abel. Nebuchadnezzar is still slaughtering the sons of Zedekiah and putting out Zedekiah's eyes. The pogrom in Kesheniev never ceases. Jews are forever being burned in Auschwitz. Those without courage to make an end to their existence have only one other way out: to deaden their consciousness, choke their memory, extinguish the last vestige of hope. (Enemies 30)

Herman is involved with three women — his second wife, a gentile, Yadwiga; his Jewish mistress, Masha; his first wife, Tamara, a Jewish woman whom he thought was killed by the Nazis. All three women fill a vital need in Herman's reclusive life. Chandler believes, "The three main women in this novel represent three modes of existence: action, speech, and simple being. Each function as a catalyst in Herman's tragic odyssey" (147).

Yadwiga is a simple being. She saved Herman's life and continues to care for him in America. The novel begins in New York, with Herman in the midst of a bad dream. The scene provides a flashback to explain Herman's current circumstances. Herman's nightmare is based on his experience during the Nazi occupation in Poland. Yadwiga, a Polish, peasant girl and Herman's family's servant, protected Herman during the war by hiding him in a hayloft on her family farm in Lipsk, Poland. Singer describes Herman's reliance on Yadwiga during this time, "For three years Herman had depended on her utterly. She had brought food and water to him in the loft and carried out his waste" (Enemies 6). Yadwiga's commitment to Herman is very evident to the reader, "She put her mother and sister in constant jeopardy; if the Nazis discovered that a Jew was hiding out in the barn they would have shot all three women and perhaps burned down the village as well" (Singer Enemies 6).

Herman's first wife, Tamara, and their children are rumored to be dead — murdered by the Nazis. Herman marries Yadwiga out of a sense of obligation for saving his life. Herman and Yadwiga marry in a civil ceremony, unheard of for a Talmudic scholar. Singer tells us the alteration of Herman's belief in his religion, "Yadwiga had been ready to adopt the Jewish faith, but it seemed senseless to burden her with a religion that he himself no longer observed" (Enemies 5). To marry out of his faith is Herman's initial break with tradition.

Herman and Yadwiga are living in Coney Island, near the seashore in Brooklyn, a *shtetl* existence for immigrant Jews. Singer is very familiar with this area of New York. As a young man, an immigrant who had just arrived in America, Singer lived in Sea

Gate, near Coney Island. Singer, a loner (very much like Herman), who loved to take long walks from Sea Gate to Coney Island, describes the details of Yadwiga and Herman's surroundings from first hand experience: "On Stillwell Avenue, Herman turned right, and the hot wind struck him with the sweet smell of popcorn. Barkers urged people into amusement parks and side shows. There were carousels, shooting galleries, mediums who would conjure the spirits of the dead for fifty cents" (Enemies 17). Singer continues his description of Coney Island, U.S.A., including the presence of Jewish life, "Jews were allowed to live freely here! On the main avenue and on the side streets, Hebrew schools displayed their signs. There was even a Yiddish school" (Enemies 17). As previously mentioned, Gimpel Shuster, Abba's eldest son in "The Little Shoemakers," also writes his father about the freedom Jews experience in America. Although Singer left Poland before the Nazi invasion, he was constantly astounded by the wonder of limitless freedom the Jewish immigrant experienced in America. Consequently, whether it is Gimpel's fairytale existence or Herman's journey into realism, they found the joy of freedom to be a delightful surprise.

Herman's marriage to Yadwiga is doomed from the very beginning— he is a sensual man, she is chaste; he is a man of intellect, she is illiterate; he is a Jewish man, she is gentile. However, he is unwilling to leave Yadwiga, partly out of guilt — she now is very dependent on him, and partly because Yadwiga worships and cares for him.

Singer's description of Yadwiga takes the reader back to Poland. Yadwiga had been in America for three years; however Singer writes, "she had retained the freshness and shyness of a Polish village girl. She used no cosmetics. She had learned only a few

English words. It even seemed to Herman that she carried with her the odors of Lipsk" (Enemies 4). Yadwiga speaks only in Polish, although Herman talks occasionally in Yiddish — especially when he is sarcastic and wants to keep something secret. Herman and Yadwiga still have a relationship of master and servant. Yadwiga continues to cook in the old traditional style, "She prepared all kinds of delicacies for him and cooked his favorite dishes: dumplings, matzo balls with borscht, millet with milk, groats with gravy" (Singer Enemies 11). She keeps her house immaculate as in the old style of Poland. She is a devoted and faithful wife in the Polish style, "She had a freshly ironed shirt, underwear, and socks ready for him every day" However, Yadwiga is insecure about living in America, and never ventures beyond a few blocks from their house, unless she is with Herman. She very much wants to embrace the Jewish faith and desperately wants children. Herman refuses to bring more children into this world. It will be difficult for Yadwiga to assimilate into American culture; nonetheless, she eventually will adapt to her new environment. The process of adaptation begins with Yadwiga and Herman's American apartment:

> It was like an enchanted palace in the stories that old village wives used to tell while spinning flax or stripping feathers for down. You pushed a button on the wall and lights went on. Hot and cold water flowed from faucets. You turned a knob and a flame appeared on which you could cook. There was a tub for daily baths that kept you clean and free of lice and fleas. And the radio! Herman would set the dial on a station that broadcast in Polish in the morning and evening, and Polish songs, mazurkas, polkas, on Sunday a sermon by a priest, and

news from Poland, which had fallen to the Bolsheviks, filled the room. (Singer Enemies 8-9)

Although Yadwiga does not socialize very much with her neighbors, they try to pry into her life. Coney Island is a *shtetl*-like small community of Eastern European Jews. The neighbors have embraced the freedom of America; therefore, they are intrigued by this Polish peasant woman, who wants to become Jewish and is so subservient to her husband. The women in the neighborhood enjoy their emancipation and adopt characteristics of the modern Jewish women in America — speak your mind, become independent, and confront your husband. Suspicious of Herman's hermit-like lifestyle, they encourage this young Polish women to the nuances of the American way. Singer writes, "Herman warned her to tell them as little as possible. He taught her to say in English, 'Excuse me I have no time'" (Enemies 9). Herman speaks Yiddish to Yadwiga in an attempt to maintain his former patriarchal culture, but he teaches her English when he wants her to adapt according to his wishes. Both situations give Herman the control he covets.

The foundation of Herman's life is built on lies, which ultimately affect Yadwiga. First Herman lies to Yadwiga about his vocation. Yadwiga believes he is a traveling book salesman; she has no idea that he works for a rabbi in Manhattan. Herman needs a cover story to legitimize his "vanishing." He tells Yadwiga he is required to travel to sell books, however, Herman only travels to the Bronx where he has a mistress, Masha. Second, Herman lies to Rabbi Lampert about where and with whom he lives, embarrassed to tell the Rabbi Lampert he lives with a gentile woman. Nonetheless, in

the first part of the novel Yadwiga appears quite content—she loves her apartment, her parakeets, and Herman. If only Herman wouldn't travel; Yadwiga doesn't like being left alone in a strange country with a different language.

Masha, the second woman in his life, represents speech. Unlike Yadwiga, Masha, Herman's mistress, will never be content. Masha is the consummate storyteller — the ultimate actress. Sarah Blacher Cohen has a vital point when she writes, ". . . Singer's protagonist is very different from his Jewish-American counterpart. Many of them lust after the *shikse*, the gentile woman, considering her more seductive, more lubricious, whereas Herman Broder finds the Jewish woman sexually more enticing, more venturesome" (78). Masha is Herman's Lilith, his object of chaos. Chandler believes Herman is drawn into Masha's "world of unreality, succumbing to the seductions of ungrounded intellect and imagination and passion detached from life-giving love, which in the end destroys them both" (147).

If Yadwiga's apartment is an oasis for her and a respite into the old world for Herman, Masha's apartment is the reality of the new world for the victim of the Holocaust — decay. Singer writes about Masha's neighborhood: "It only had a few houses separated by empty lots overgrown with weeds. There was an old warehouse, with bricked-up windows and a gate that was always shut. In one dilapidated house, a carpenter was making furniture that he sold 'unfinished'" (Singer Enemies 32). Masha lives with her mother, Shifrah Puah, "on the third floor of a house with a broken porch and a vacant ground floor, the windows of which were covered with boards and tin" (Singer Enemies 32). Masha is a beautiful and sensual woman. Singer describes her:

> She wasn't tall, but her slenderness and the way she held her head gave the impression that she was. Her hair was dark with a reddish cast. Herman liked to say that it was fire and pitch. Her complexion was dazzling, her eyes light blue with flecks of green, her nose thin, her chin pointed. She had high cheekbones and hollow cheeks. A cigarette dangled between her full lips. Her face reflected the strength of those who have survived peril. Masha now weighed one hundred and ten pounds, but at the time of the liberation she had weighed seventy-two. (Enemies 33)

Masha is a tortured personality. She hates God, but talks about Him incessantly. She loves her mother but argues with her constantly. Although separated from her husband, Leon Tortshiner, at present she is not seeking a divorce. On the other hand, she constantly nags Herman to leave his gentile "peasant" wife. Her sexual foreplay consists of telling Herman wild stories from the ghettos, the concentration camps, and her wandering through the destruction of Poland after the war. Singer describes Masha's devastating philosophy: "The moral of all her tales was that if it had been God's purpose to improve His chosen people by Hitler's persecution, He had failed. The religious Jew had been practically wiped out. The worldly Jews who had managed to escape had, with few exceptions, learned nothing from all the terror" (Enemies 45).

Masha's mind is so tormented that the process of adaptation in a new environment is impossible. Even the simplest task, like preparing a meal for Herman, evokes an angry and agonizing reply. Herman asks Masha not to cook meat for him any more (another biographical detail of Singer's lifestyle; he was a vegetarian). Masha

replies, "God himself eats meat — human flesh. There are no vegetarians — none. If you had seen what I have seen, you would know that God approves of slaughter" (Enemies 33). Masha is intense about everything — she smokes constantly, munches chocolate, drinks Coca-Cola, never completes a normal meal. Even their lovemaking is obsessive. Singer describes their lovemaking as ritualistic, lasting throughout the night.

Yadwiga constantly cleans her house, while Masha has no interest in keeping Herman's room clean. She tells Herman, "The Nazis forced me to do things for so long that I can't do anything of my own free will any more. If I want to do something, I have to imagine that a German is standing over me with a gun" (Singer Enemies 35). Masha cynically continues, always trying to compare Poland to America, "Here in America I've come to realize that slavery isn't such a tragedy after all — for getting things done, there's nothing better than a whip" (Singer Enemies 35).

Shifrah Puah, Masha's mother, is a devoutly religious woman. In America, her piety has intensified. She always wears black, mourning for the family she lost during the war, although she resents living while others are dead. Shifrah Puah constantly reads the Yiddish newspaper looking for stories of Holocaust survivors. Neither Masha nor Shifrah Puah is capable of adapting to new surroundings. This inability is directly related to the traumatic events they experienced at the hands of the Nazi regime. Singer explains:

> Other refugees used to say that with time one forgets, but neither Shifrah Puah nor Masha would ever forget. On the contrary, the further removed they were from the holocaust, the closer it seemed to become. Masha would attack her

> mother for grieving so much for the dead victims, but when her mother was silent, Masha would take over. When she [Masha] talked of German atrocities, she would run to the mezuzah on the door and spit on it. (Enemies 43)

In a previous chapter, Singer's sister Hinde Esther was described as "vibrant, expansive, crazy, disturbing." This description fits Masha. The only difference is Masha's vibrancy is generally during the act of sexual intimacy. Most of the time she is disturbing and crazy. Cohen describes Masha, "Yet so volatile is her nature, so beguiling is she to others, that Broder is uncertain that she and her aesthetic sense will remain with him"(79). This statement needs to be clarified. Masha is beguiling to men. Men, like Herman, Leon, and even Rabbi Lampert, find her enticing. Masha, in general, is distrustful of people. She exudes discord. Working as a cashier in a cafeteria, Masha does not mingle with other refugees she once knew, or who want to befriend her. She fears meeting old friends who knew her husband, and people who live in Coney Island who know Herman and Yadwiga. Even Masha's humor is caustic and negative. On a holiday with Herman, looking at the beautiful Adirondack mountains, the lake, the motorboats, Masha muses playfully, "Where are the Nazis? What kind of a world is this without Nazis? A backward country, this America" (Singer Enemies 110). Herman doesn't control Masha as he does Yadwiga — seething anger and painful memories control Masha.

One of the most important links between the past and the present for the immigrant in America was the Yiddish newspaper. Consequently, it is very believable when Shifrah Puah notices an ad in the "Personals" of the daily Yiddish paper,

requesting Herman Broder to call Reb Abraham Nissen Yaroslaver. Tamara's uncle, Reb Abraham, a learned and pious man, is searching for Herman. Tamara is miraculously alive and is now in America. Upon Herman's arrival in the United States, Reb Abraham had offered his niece's husband assistance; however, Herman has avoided Reb Abraham because he had been embarrassed about his gentile wife, Yadwiga, as well as his adulterous affair with Masha. In her initial appearance, Tamara is dressed like an American. Perhaps Tamara believes she will be more attractive to her hedonistic husband if she does not dress like a "greenhorn." Singer writes, "She was wearing American clothes and had obviously visited a beauty parlor. Her hair was jet black and had the artificial sheen of fresh dye, her cheeks were rouged, her eyebrows plucked, her fingernails red. She made Herman think of a stale loaf of bread put into a hot oven to freshen up" (Enemies 69).

Eventually Tamara takes the red polish off and becomes herself. She moves into her own apartment in Manhattan, works in her uncle's bookstore, and makes no demands on Herman. The only person Herman is totally truthful with, and confides in, is Tamara — she becomes his best friend. The irony is that Herman would certainly have divorced Tamara in Poland. He had never rejected the rumor that Tamara and his children were murdered, nor had he ever researched the missing person lists that were published in the Yiddish newspapers. Herman doesn't deserve Tamara's unselfish friendship; for nowhere in the novel does it state that Herman ever mourned for his wife and children.

Tamara is the noblest character in the novel. In contrast to Masha, her words become action. Tamara's suffering has strengthened her resolve. Though she classifies

herself as "dead" inside, outwardly she acclimates to America. If Masha is Herman's Lilith, a model for chaos then ". . .Tamara is his version of the Shekhina-Matronit, the goddess of the Kabbalah [sic] who preserves her chastity 'where the general atmosphere is one of intensive sexual activity or even promiscuity'" (Cohen 80). Herman felt the "miracle of resurrection" whenever he was with Tamara (Singer Enemies 131). Tamara has always conformed to groups— socialism, communism — and in America she is determined to forge a new group identity. In the end she succeeds.

Before the first part of the novel ends, Herman and Masha take a vacation to the Adirondacks. It is there that she confides in Herman that she is pregnant. History repeats itself — like Tamara, Masha refuses to have an abortion. She claims she will divorce her husband. Herman, rather than lose Masha, promises to marry her in a Jewish ceremony, which would not be legal or binding in a court of law. It is also during this holiday that Herman confronts German Jewish immigrants who have adapted or assimilated into American culture. His disgust in what he views as modern American Jewry is obvious as Singer describes Herman's reaction to his "brothers and sisters" of the faith, "'What does their Jewishness consist of? What is my Jewishness?' They all had the same wish to assimilate as quickly as possible and get rid of their accents. Herman belonged neither to them nor to the American, Polish or Russian Jews" (Enemies 114). Herman has difficulty belonging to anyone or any place, and so does Masha. The dysfunctional behavior of Herman and Masha does not allow them to be a part of the community. Herman is still in a hayloft hiding, even though he is in America.

Singer uses symbols to foreshadow the characters who will have the determination to evolve, adapt, and go on living. One example is the bullet lodged in Tamara's body. Tamara debates whether to remove the bullet or to keep it as a reminder of the past. The bullet acts as a symbol, and its removal will be a sign of survival for Tamara — physically and emotionally. Another sign is Masha's false pregnancy which leads to a mock marriage with Herman. How can a person exist on constant disillusionment? Meanwhile the simple, illiterate Yadwiga's pregnancy and ultimate conversion to Judaism predict a regeneration and prospects for a Jewish future in America. Herman at one point recognizes the futility and waste of his hedonistic life and tries to repent (Friedman 171). He fails. Ultimately Herman's tangled web of women produces a strangulation of mind and soul.

CHAPTER 6

ENEMIES: UNTANGLING THE WEB

The second part of Enemies, A Love Story is complicated and unpredictable. The characters involved are struggling with more than just being strangers in a strange land. Herman marries Masha in a Jewish ceremony; Yadwiga converts to Judaism and also becomes pregnant; and, although Tamara does have one sexual encounter with Herman, she basically maintains a platonic "managerial" relationship with her husband and his second wife. What are the turning points in the novel that will untangle the web of Herman's life— one way or another? Can Herman continue to evade his problems? Obviously Herman cannot. Nothing in life remains static.

Part two of the novel begins the spiral downward for Herman. A major turning point in Herman's life is Yadwiga's pregnancy and conversion. Yadwiga is in the process of transition from a sheltered Polish servant in a foreign country to a Jewish American wife in an Americanized *shtetl*. Whereas before she kept to herself; she now socializes with her neighbors. Although she still keeps her apartment immaculate, her neighbors encourage her to have more gadgets. Singer describes some of the changes in Yadwiga:

> Yadwiga no longer kept her neighbors at a distance. They visited, shared secrets, and gossiped with her. These women, with little else to do, instructed Yadwiga in Judaism, showed her how to buy bargains, warned her about being exploited her husband. An American housewife must have a vacuum cleaner, an electric mixer, an electric steam iron, and if possible, a dishwasher. The apartment must be

insured against fire and theft; Herman must take out a life-insurance policy; she must dress better and not go around in peasant's rags. (Enemies 178)

As a Jewish convert, Yadwiga now obeys the laws of purification and Kashruth (kosher). She constantly asks Herman questions about the proper way to keep Jewish law. Instead of listening to the Polish programs on the radio, she now listens only to the Yiddish stations. Yadwiga asks Herman to speak Yiddish to her so she can learn the language. Although she barely understands what he is saying most of the time, she is trying to acclimate to the Jewish way of life in Coney Island, New York. Ironically, Yadwiga, the gentile, has become more committed to the Jewish faith than Herman, the Jew. Singer writes, "She reprimanded him more and more for not conducting himself like other Jews. He didn't go to synagogue, nor did he own a prayer shawl and phylacteries" (Enemies 178). Although the characters and their situations are not comical, Singer's novel nonetheless is a dark comedy. A perfect example is Herman's comment after Yadwiga nags him for his lack of piety; Herman tells Yadwiga to mind her own business, and adds, "Do me a favor, and leave the Jews alone. We have enough trouble without you" (Enemies 178). There is a sardonic tone to Herman's conversations, especially with Yadwiga. Herman is basically a bully, belittling a weaker person. Yadwiga is fighting back as she assimilates to the culture around her — strong Jewish women.

The most interesting transformation in Yadwiga is her confidence. She no longer placates Herman. One example is after Herman receives a frantic phone call from Shifrah Puah that Masha is sick. Singer sets the tone for Yadwiga's fervent,

confrontational demeanor: "Yadwiga came into the bathroom. Usually she would open the door slowly and ask permission to come in, but this time she came without courtesy. 'Who just phoned? Your mistress?'" (Enemies 181). Frantic that Masha is desperately ill, Herman screams at Yadwiga that he is going to his mistress. Her response is, "'You made me pregnant and you go running to whores. You're not selling books. Liar!'" (Enemies 181). Herman is shocked by her anger. The Polish gentile servant has evolved into a combative American woman defending her home, her unborn child, and herself.

Only once is there a change in Yadwiga's new personality; she reverts to her humble servant status when she first confronts Tamara. There are two possible reasons for Yadwiga's acquiescent behavior. First, she has more respect for the modern American woman, such as her female neighbors, and Tamara's appearance is of that genre. Secondly, Yadwiga is haunted by old Polish superstitions of ghosts and spirits, and at first she believes Tamara has returned from the dead. For although she is trying to affiliate with the modern Jewish American woman, she is still an illiterate, simple being. Even after that first meeting, she remains the homemaker subservient to Tamara. Ultimately, when Herman disappears, Yadwiga lives with Tamara, and raises her child in the Jewish faith. Friedman writes, "Besides the obvious promise of Jewish continuity the birth reaffirms the covenant with God that Herman had broken" (174).

Another major turning point in the novel is Singer's introduction of the minor character, Nathan Pesheles. Mr. Pesheles is the catalyst who begins the tidal wave of events that finally destroy Herman and Masha. As in Eastern Europe, Jewish people in America, especially rich, influential men, admire scholarship. Mr. Pesheles is such a

man. He collects rare books, loves to read and appreciates a scholar. He is prideful of his philanthropic assistance to the less fortunate immigrant Jew. Mr. Pesheles must believe his magnanimous efforts give him the privilege to meddle. For although he doesn't directly assist Herman financially, Mr. Pesheles has the personality of one who believes he can pry into everyone's business, especially an intriguing "family" such as Herman and his three wives.

An ironic twist of fate brings Herman and Mr. Pesheles together. Tamara decides to visit Herman and Yadwiga in Coney Island. Yadwiga, not aware that Tamara is still alive, answers the door and upon seeing Tamara screams in total fright. Herman and Tamara can barely control the poor pregnant women. Within minutes of these events, a knock on the door brings a neighbor accompanied with Mr. Pesheles. The neighbor introduces the influential businessman to Herman. Mr. Pesheles is interested in books and is curious to meet the scholar who married a Jewish convert. Of course, Tamara is also in the apartment. Mr. Pesheles is attracted to Tamara, a contemporary-looking American. He tells Tamara she does not look like a "greenhorn": "In my time you could spot an immigrant from a mile away. You look like an American" (Singer Enemies 196). Mr. Pesheles is also fascinated with Yadwiga, "Nowadays a Gentile converting to Judaism is no small matter" (Singer Enemies 197). However, when Mr. Pesheles learns during Rabbi Lampert's American cocktail party that there is yet another wife ". . . the prettiest woman in America" (Singer Enemies 215), he is astounded. Mr. Pesheles uncovers Herman's secret lives, "I tell you, these greenhorns know how to live. With us, Americans, when you get married you stay that way, whether you like it or not. Or you

get divorced and pay alimony, and if you don't pay, you go to prison" (Singer Enemies 222).

It is at Rabbi Lampert's disastrous cocktail party that Mr. Pesheles informs Masha of Tamara's existence. Masha cannot believe that Tamara is alive, well, and living in New York. She screams at Herman in anger, "I believed that when I came to America I'd get out of all the filth, but I seem to have landed in the thickest muck of all" (Singer Enemies 233). The paradox is that Masha created her own muck; she sleeps with her former husband to get a divorce, lies to Herman when he confronts her about her divorce, obsesses about Herman's relationship with Yadwiga, and in disbelief leaves Herman when she finds out about Tamara. Although Masha tries to exist in America working for Rabbi Lampert, she is miserable without Herman. After her mother, Shifrah Puah, dies, Masha spirals downward into a world that is intolerable. Masha, an intelligent and educated woman, who speaks English, Yiddish, Polish, and Russian, nonetheless is unable to adapt, assimilate or even segregate herself in a new culture. Masha, an hysterical survivor of the Holocaust, commits suicide.

Singer does give a glimpse of how difficult living in America would be for Herman. At the infamous cocktail party Herman shows his distaste for the well-informed American women at the party, and demonstrates his inability to conform to a different culture. Singer skillfully describes Herman's confusion, "Herman had never been to an American party. He had anticipated that the guests would be seated and that dinner would be served. But there was neither room to sit down nor was a meal served. Someone spoke to him in English, but in all the din he couldn't make out the words"

(Enemies 216). Herman is obviously thinking in Yiddish, yearning for the familiar traditions of Poland. Singer continues Herman's uncomfortable scene:

> He walked into a room with several armchairs and couches. The walls were lined with books from floor to ceiling. Some men and women were sitting around, holding drinks in their hands. A vacant chair stood in a corner and Herman sank into it. The group was discussing a professor who had received a five-thousand dollar grant to write a book. They were ridiculing him and his writing. Herman heard the names of universities, foundations, scholarships, grants, publications on Judaica, socialism, history, psychology. 'What kind of women are these? How is it they are so well informed?' Herman thought. He was self-conscious about his shabby clothing, apprehensive that they might try to draw him into their conversation. 'I don't belong here. I should have remained a Talmudist'. (Enemies 216)

Herman forgets that he was mired in disorder in his previous life; discontented as a Talmudist, disappointed in his first marriage, unhappy in *shtetl* life, miserable in .Warsaw. Where is the hayloft in America? Herman has a need to hide; the scene foreshadows his disappearance as a result of his inability to cope in New York.

Following the events of the party, Herman has dissipated into a dysfunctional mode. At this point, Tamara rises to "angel of mercy" status, and the reader has a short glimmer of hope for Herman's resurrection. Tamara tells Herman, "Here in America, some people have what is called a manager. Let me be your manager" (Singer Enemies 240). He tries, under Tamara's jurisdiction, to evolve and adapt to a new life in America.

Herman returns to traditional Jewish customs — celebrating Passover with Yadwiga and Tamara. He is faithful to the pregnant Yadwiga — divorcing himself from Masha. He no longer pretends to "travel," and no longer writes for Rabbi Lampert. Instead, Herman attempts to work with Tamara in her uncle's bookstore. However, all efforts to revitalize Herman fail. Eventually, Herman, the hedonistic nihilist, vanishes. After a brief but fatal rendevous with Masha before she dies, Herman disappears. Leslie Fiedler writes in his essay "Isaac Bashevis Singer; or The American-ness of the American Jewish Writer," "What ensues for Broder is not quite clear, . . ., he simply disappears from the final pages of the book; which is to say Singer will not or cannot discern his ultimate fate" (119). Fiedler speculates that Broder chose total loneliness over death — hiding out in what Singer calls the "American version of his Polish hayloft" (119).

Herman is basically an indecisive, inadequate person. This inadequacy is creatively enacted in one scene in the Paul Mazursky's movie, Enemies, A Love Story, based on Singer's novel. Herman snakes around the city going from Yadwiga in Brooklyn, to Masha in the Bronx, to Tamara in lower Manhattan and to the rabbi's home in upper Manhattan. When the tension of all his lives is pulling him apart, Herman, confused, stands in the train station looking at three signs with arrows pointing in different directions. He hesitates, walks one way and then another. This is Herman's life — too many arrows pointing different ways. Ultimately, he does make a decision — no decision — and like a ghost fades away.

In the epilogue, Tamara and Yadwiga are depicted as the true survivors — not only of the horrors of the Holocaust atrocity but of the immigrant experience. Tamara has decided to remove the bullet from her body; a sign of closure. She will, of course, never forget her life in Poland, the death of her children, or Herman. Nonetheless, Tamara has adjusted — she is an American businesswoman, with responsibilities at home. Tamara manages her uncle's Judaica bookstore, while she resides with Yadwiga and the new baby, Masha. Tamara financially and emotionally supports Yadwiga. In return, Yadwiga manages the household. They are an American family. Singer's paradoxical novel concludes with Herman's two wives as the heroines nurturing his child, who is named after his mistress; and whom Friedman declares is "the symbolic hope of Jewish survival" (173).

The way Singer resolves conflicts, religion versus secularism; past versus present; outwardly contemporary behavior versus inwardly traditional behavior, is intriguing. Singer's resolution is steeped in the strong belief of maintaining the Jewish faith. Friedman believes that naming the baby Masha "is the symbolic linchpin binding the Jewish past to the Jewish future" (174). Friedman continues ". . . Yadwiga is inspired by the faith that was burned out of the Jewish Holocaust survivors. . . .Her faith is the antithesis of Herman's faithlessness, her affirmation the antidote to this denial" (174).

On the other hand, Tamara's faith has been stained with the blood of her children. She is, as Chandler writes, the "heroic victor" (147). Tamara is in the business of selling Jewish "stuff" — books, menorahs and other articles of the Jewish faith. The fact that, as Chandler comments, ". . . she [Tamara] caters to beliefs she no longer shares bespeaks

not only a willingness to compromise for the sake of living, but, perhaps more significantly, a certain tolerance" (147). Tamara, Chandler continues, "is a woman with vision, but not a visionary. She simply sees clearsightedly what is and makes the most of it" (147).

There is room for disagreement with Chandler. It is true Tamara is not pious, as is Abba Shuster in "The Little Shoemakers." However, one can argue that Tamara remains loyal to the Jewish faith, albeit full of doubt. Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin write in The Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism, "Crises of faith are to be expected, and acknowledging such crises is not an irreligious act for a Jew" (18). In fact, Prager and Telushkin have a whole chapter on the most common contemporary sentiment about God: doubt. Tamara has survived a horrendous crisis, and. therefore, one could assume she would be plagued with tremendous doubts. Doubt without fear is Tamara's residual consequence. Prager and Telushkin state, "The purpose of Jewish existence is not to eat Jewish foods, or tell Jewish jokes, or use Yiddish words. It is to fight evil and to reduce suffering in the world" (16). Although Tamara eats Jewish food and thinks in Yiddish terms, she is also a kind, empathetic individual who cares for her fellow person. Her loyalty to Herman, her concern for Yadwiga, and her love for the new baby, Masha, all exemplify the depth of her character and an essential "Jewishness."

Tamara has been given a gift — a reason to live. Like Abba Shuster, she has meaning and purpose in her life— work and family. Unlike Abba Shuster, Tamara has doubts and questions about her faith. Singer's philosophy —people have free choice to believe or doubt — is exercised in Enemies. Yadwiga's childlike faith and Tamara's

strong determination, are a fairytale ending to a novel of realism. Tamara and Yadwiga adapt to American culture, enjoying the freedom of America while maintaining Jewish and Polish customs.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: ADAPTATION

"Remembering"

You remember, O Lord our God

The past which lives in our minds;

The heritage, rooted in the ages, which was nurtured

By psalmist and sage, by poet and prophet.

This is a stanza from one of the prayer selections read on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year (Silverman 316). A major reason that Singer's Polish Jews could never assimilate into another culture was their heritage "rooted in the ages." Irving Howe echoes this philosophy when he writes about historian Simon Dubnow's ideology, developed in the 1890's, which describes *Yiddishkeit:* "He [Dubnow] saw the Jewish people as a spiritual community held together by historical, cultural and religious ties, despite the absence of a common homeland or territory, and he urged the Jews to struggle for cultural and religious autonomy in whichever country they happened to find themselves" (19). Struggle the Jews do, especially in Singer's post-Holocaust work, but they remain true to their heritage.

Singer's major thrust is to recreate the experiences of the Polish Jews, even on foreign soil, but his own experiences made it impossible for him to allow his characters to assimilate. Hadda believes that Singer's ". . . longings for greatness expressed themselves in terms that were intimately tied to the Jewish fate, past and present.

However secular his behavior had become, he had brought with him to America the religious sensibility of his home . . ." (91). Hadda argues, "However reluctant his attachment, . . .nonetheless [Singer] accepted the centrality of the Jewish people and the Jewish God"(91). Ironically, assimilation and religion have an uneasy if undeniable relationship. If one assimilates, it usually causes a denial of one's faith and culture. This does not happen in Singer's life or his works.

The evidence of Hadda's theory is apparent in "The Little Shoemakers." At the end of the story Abba and his sons are once more together. Even though they are on alien soil, the Shuster family are proclaiming their Jewishness. No matter what the reader believes the atmosphere of the dinner to be, farce or celebration, it was done within Jewish customs. Singer's point is that whatever tragedies prevail upon the Jews — their tradition and their resilience endure. Abba Shuster, as his ancestors before him, has transmitted his values, love of family and God, to his sons. They in return are teaching these important concepts to their children. Are the Shuster sons different from their ancestors? Definitely. Do they dress as their forefathers, speak the language of their forefathers, or follow their religion in the orthodox manner as their forefathers? No, they do not. However, none of the seven sons has shunned his heritage, rather they have combined both cultures, the old and the new, taking advantage of all the freedom America has to offer.

Gittleman points out, "Singer has written the perfect Jewish fairy tale for the Jew growing old in America. . . . Assimilation has taken place only insofar as to provide a new kind of *yichus* [prestige] (the elegant suburban home in New Jersey and the

successful business enterprise in this case); in reality, no different from what the Jew had hope for in Russia" (115). Would this statement be true in today's world? That is a question for another thesis. However, in 1953 when the "The Little Shoemakers" was first published, Jewish survival was of the utmost importance.

In Enemies, A Love Story, first published in the Jewish Daily Forward in 1966 and later published as a book in 1972, Singer offers a more complex view of Jewish survival. Singer writes in the Author's Note in the book form of Enemies, "The characters are not only Nazi victims but victims of their own personalities and fates"(n. pag.). Herman and Masha are two such characters. To adjust to changes in their lives is out of the question; they find it difficult even to exist. Nonetheless, Herman is unwilling to assimilate to the new culture. He not only scorns the assimilation of the German Jews he meets in the Adirondacks but he scorns the Jews who attend synagogue only on Jewish holidays as well. Singer writes, "Herman fasted but did not go to the synagogue. He couldn't bring himself to be like one of those assimilated Jews who only prayed on the High Holy Days" (Enemies 147). Singer may single out the Jews who frequent their house of worship only on occasions; however, these immigrants have not turned their back on their religion or the customs of their religion.

Singer's characters maintain their cultural background in Enemies: for example, Herman and Yadwiga live in a Jewish neighborhood; Herman works for a rabbi; Masha and Herman marry in a Jewish ceremony; Yadwiga, a new convert, has a Jewish child; Tamara manages a store selling Jewish books and artifacts; Jewish holidays are celebrated; Jewish food is prepared. These are not signs and symbols of assimilation.

Yad Vashem is the memorial park in Jerusalem dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust victims. In the Hall of Remembrance, artist Naftali Bezem designed the Wall of Holocaust and Heroism, a monumental bas-relief. The first section is entitled "Holocaust," with all the symbols of destruction and extermination, such as overturned Shabbat candlesticks burning the mother's breasts— "her living source, the root of being for her children" ("Memorial" n. pag.). The second and third section "Revolt" and "Going up to the Land" depicts uprising, ascending and finally Zionism. It is the fourth, "Re-birth" section that is universal for Jews everywhere and apropos for the conclusion of this paper. The pamphlet says:

> The remnant [the Jew] that remained had reached the longed-for heaven— the land. He grows in size and strength, and his countenance therefore is now the countenance of a lion. The lion's eyes shed tears. For all his greatness and strength, he cannot forget. He weeps for the past.
>
> The candlesticks that were overturned are overturned no longer. They no longer symbolize desecration, but instead the Jewish home, the Jewish family rooted in tradition. ("Memorial" n.pag.)

To conclude, it is the Jewish heritage and enjoyment of freedom that are the essential elements in Singer and his characters, elements which allow them to adapt, not assimilate, to their new country. The strength of their heritage is bound by tradition, Torah, and love of the Yiddish language. It is the emotions of the Yiddish language that are the heart and soul of Singer's characters. His work is replete with Eastern European

Jews whose behavior is driven by their passions. Singer's Polish Jews, living in America, speak English but think Yiddish.

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