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An Analysis of the American Short Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer

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Anotace

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat vybrané povídky ze čtyř sbírek Issaca Bashevisa Singera, nositele Nobelovy ceny za literaturu, který popisuje zkušenosti židovského přistěhovalce ve Spojených státech amerických, velmi často mezi lidmi, kteří přežili holokaust a usídlili se v New Yorku a v Miami Beach. Práce ukazuje, jak imigranti prožívají proces přechodu od původní kultury k americké (*process of whiteness*) a tzv. *americký sen* jako novodobý mýtus, dále podmínky pro adaptaci a asimilaci židovských hrdinů a hrdinek v jazykové a náboženské oblasti, v manželství, ve zvycích i v jiných projevech starého židoevropského světa ve srovnání s americkou kulturou.

Abstract

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to analyze the selected short stories in four collections of the Nobel Prize winner Issac Bashevis Singer describing the Jewish immigrant experience in the United States of America, very often among Holocaust survivors in New York and Miami Beach. The work shows how immigrant characters in these works experienced the *process of whiteness* and so-called *American dream* as modern myth, as well as the issues surrounding adaptation and assimilation of Jewish heroes and heroines in the area of language, religion, customs, marriage and other manifestations of old Jewish European world versus American culture.

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1 Introduction

My intention in this bachelor thesis is to analyze selected collections of short stories of the Nobel Prize winner Isaac Bashevis Singer. His uniquely Jewish writing describes the Jewish immigrant experience in the United States of America, very often in bad conditions among Holocaust survivors. His works contain a lot of autobiographical features and the qualities of Singer's relatives, friends, ex-partners, colleagues and acquaintances who were models for his protagonists. He was a very good observer, a hearer, and a story-teller, he liked to sit in a café eating Jewish food and feeling a real Jewish culture in New York and in Miami Beach.

The work will show how immigrant characters experienced the so-called *American dream* as myth, as well as the issues surrounding assimilation (family, language, job, religion, customs, marriage, cultural center - *landsleit* and other manifestations of old Jewish world versus American culture). Every short story contains a view back from a modern American life into the Old Jewish World of Central and Eastern Europe in which Singer describes the childhood of his heroes, the personal memory, sources of carefree joy and dreams, the celebration of ethnicity, and also terrible war memories. In the first part, I would like to sketch the situation of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe in America in the twentieth century, Singer's personal life and condition for his literary work. Singer's works dealt only with Jews, Judaism, Jewish God and community, we cannot catch the differences between immigrants who practice Judaism, Christianity or Islam.

Then I would like to analyze some important elements: heroes, *shtetl*, intermarriage, process of *Whiteness*, so called *American dream*, supernatural (*dybbuks*) in selected American short stories – in four collections in English version: *Old Love*, *The Séance*, *A Crown of Feathers*, and *The Death of Methuselah and Other Short Stories*. I used primary and secondary literature for my analysis.

2 Singer's Short Stories

Short stories of I. B. Singer are combination of modern realism with Jewish folklore, legends, fairy-tales and fantasy and autobiographical facts. They described the possibility of a lonely writer, a sexual philanthropist, a millionaire, a mystic, a speaker, a sewer, demonic or angelic women, how to become an American citizen, and how

maternal words, language and original names lose their importance in new environment, and how strong is their Jewish faith and tradition.

His greatest literary influences were Russian masters Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gogol and French masters Maupassant and Flaubert, Czech author Kafka, from them, Singer developed a virtual sense of allegory, drama and tragic joke. In the space of a few pages of Singer's stories the hero can do an enormous break of his life. The famous Czech author - Jan Neruda used a similar method as Singer in his fiction - he also precisely describes details as a static photograph or as a sequence of the film, and created for example a marvelous short story *Figurky*. The plot is not so quick, in daily routine for example from the doorstep, street corner, cafeteria, pub, subway strap (by Singer), both of writers find the magic of human life. By using complex of small details (short characterization and brief description of hero's physiognomy, description of nature, sounds and smells, emphasize of yellow color), Singer build the whole story.

His short story collections contain stories which take place in Poland - his native country, Central and Eastern Europe, where Jewish lived and of course - in the United States - his second home. Only a few of them describe life in the Holy Land – the State of Israel. His heroes do not dream about migration to Israel. Maybe they are waiting for coming of the Messiah in their new home in America. The heroes lost their home in Europe in a horror way, so they wanted to stay in America, where they found a new free life.

In the Holy Land one hero was only for a few days as a guest at universities, a lecturer, a holidaymaker, from health reasons. On the other hand, Singer took special interest in events in Israel. He knew a lot of details from Holy Land because his son and first wife reside there and when they met together with his son after twenty years they spoke about events in this country and about life in a *kibutz*.

2.1 The Differences between Singer's Short Stories with European and American Topic

In his short stories, I. B. Singer described three huge topics. The first topic is human memories: old Jewish life in the village (*dorf*), small town (*shtetl*) or slums (ghettos) of Warsaw, old literal Jewish life in Warsaw and life stories of Jewish immigrants and refugees in American ghettos. The second one is represented by unconscious events, dreams, old legends, mythos, fairy-tales, and jokes. The third one is his own

religion - Judaism. Jewish world stands on three important pillars: on Torah and Talmud, on the service to God and celebration of fests, and on acts of human kindness.

Singer presented the pillars secretly, half-openly or openly. There is a great difference between his heroes and heroines in Poland and in America. American characters are changed, they did not attend synagogues, institutions of Jewish learning *yeshivas*, ritual baths *mikvahs*, did not follow the fests, strictly dietary laws

These three topics are contained in every Singer's short story.

According to the place of the plot, we can divide the short stories into two separate groups. The first group contains the short stories whose plot takes place in a small Polish town or village (e. g. Goray, Kolomir, Shidlovtse, Pinchev, Machlev, Krasnostaw, Kozlow) or in Warsaw in Poland, the homeland of I. B. Singer. He described Polish Jewry in its variability - orthodox, conservative, reform groups, the Hasidism etc., sometimes with a light irony. "The Stalinists would hang the Trockyites, the Trockyites would hang the Stalinists, and both would hang the general Zionists, the right Poale Zionists, the left Poale Zionists, and, of course, all pious Jews."¹

The second part of the stories is set in the USA, where he emigrated in thirtieth years of the twentieth century. In America he had a feeling of Jewish catastrophe – Holocaust and his own catastrophe – he lost appetite for writing, he was in a deep depression. This autobiographical feature is present in many of his American short stories.

He described Jewish immigrants with the strong Jewish tradition who had been becoming in America in various waves, mostly before and after the World War II. In America, they tried to assimilate into their new culture and adapt to the freedom of America, they tried to change their thinking, some of them had a feeling that they do not belong to the world, where words altered their meaning.

American stories are set in a modern society – a banal poor Jewish person escaped from ghettos in New York, he or she became a part of Jewish middle class, who lived there without pogroms and massacres of Cossacks, Poles and Nazis. Nobody savagely attacked them in the new home.

3. Manifestations of European Jewry in America in the 20th Century

In his novels and shorts stories, I. B. Singer described a Jewish generation from Eastern Europe, that was able to speak English but thought in Yiddish language. Any

Jewish person dealt with his or her new country in various way, not only they lived in different places of the USA, but also of their different European origin. In the America, there were gradual stratum of Jews, some of them disappeared, others adapted or actually assimilated into new environments of a free society.

3.1. Stratum of the American Jewry

According Yaffe, in 1654 landed twenty-three Jewish people, they founded a congregation which still exists in New York. Some of the other early settlers were Sephardic mostly from Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. They had a special ancient form of worship and they did not assimilate in America, they almost disappeared due to their refusing to intermarry.

In late 1840s (after the reactionism in the 1848) the second wave of Jews began. They were called the *German immigrants* but they were also from Hungary, Austria, Bohemia and North Italy. These middle-class German-Jewish peddlers felt themselves to be a German with Jewish origin in a good position in American society. They were afraid from the following wave because of the possible lost of their American standard.

A huge mass came from East Europe in 1870s (from Hungary, Rumania, and Austrian Galicia), in 1881 (from Russia, Poland), from 1903 to 1924 came a lot of Jews to Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, and mostly to New York to its part the Lower East side, an area of twelve square miles, and South Manhattan, East Village, Chinatown. They took with themselves a specific kind of live. They were used to live in city ghettos and village *shtetls* in very bad conditions. From 1933 to 1940 became a small wave but important - clever, professional people from Europe (the scientist Albert Einstein, the musician Bruno Walter, the author Franz Werfel, the political scientist Fred Sondermann).

After war a new group of Jews came, people who survived Holocaust, arresting, torturing, staying in concentration camps, being hidden by Gentile neighbors. About one hundred fifty thousand Jews reached the shore of the USA between the years 1945 - 1954.² Most of them were Hasidic Jews with long *paes* and black hats, some of them settled in Brooklyn. The last group was immigrants who came from Cuba, and Negro Jews originally from Ethiopia. Black Jews lived in Harlem and Cuban Jews mixed with other people from Cuba.

The Singer's manifestation of Jewry is the mix of all these immigrants. His literal characters are interested in Jewish and Gentile women. They are mystics, camp survivors, the people who lost of the religion or they converted to Christianity. They were beauty and also ugly, mentally ill, fidelity, also cheating. They tried to avoid the contact with the strict Jewish community, they never kept in touch with a young generation of their family, and with a young generation of writers. Some of them lived a double life because of socio-cultural, religious and ideological pressure.

3.2. Jewish Literature in the USA

Jewish literature has its specific place in the American literary world. The literature written by Jewish immigrants since 1885 is considered as Jewish American literature.³ Other authors defined it in more general terms as the works which are written by Jews about Jewish subjects, themes, Jewish identity and Jewishness.

The fiction and the poetry of Jewish authors is an important part of the American culture. Abraham Cahan is considered as the father of American Jewish literature, other authors such as the winners of the Nobel price Saul Bellow (in 1976) and Isaac Bashevis Singer (in 1978), create the world literal heritage. Other names such as Henry Roth, Philip Roth, John David Salinger, Bernard Malamud, Charles Reznikoff, David Ignatow, Allen Ginsberg, Jacqueline Osherow represent a high-quality standard in American literature but Jewry is not always present in their novels, short stories, poems, etc.

According Procházka, we can distinguish four alternate ways in American Jewish fiction. The first group exploited the Jewish background and concentrate on the depiction of the broken accents of Jewish immigrants in the USA. (e.g. Jerome Weidman). The second group of writers ignored the Jewish background, created an individual or abstract framework (e.g. Nathaniel West, J. D. Salinger, Arthur Miller). The third part of authors used the Jewish-American background as a fiction frame (e.g. Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, I. B. Singer). Procházka said that I. B. Singer cannot be classified fully as an American Jewish writer because of the language of his literal production – Yiddish.⁴ He represented the fourth group of Jewish writers in America.

Some of the Jewish writers gave themselves questions about their own identity, tradition and history. They used ancient sources of Jewish culture - biblical authority,

strength of old myths and legends to express their cultural diversity. Their works influenced the modern human thinking. "Due to works of Sholom Aleichem and I. B. Singer, a lot of people considered rather chic to have a grandfather who come from a poor European shtetl."⁵ Other authors described the stress of total assimilation, materialism, and secularism in American society.

The Jewish literature was connected with the Jewish publishing house Daily Forwards. I. B. Singer became a successful writer when he started to cooperate with the most prestigious American publishers Liveright and Knopf, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

4. Some Important Elements from Isaac Bashevis Singer's Biography

Isaac Bashevis Singer was a famous Yiddish writer who won The Nobel Prize in 1978 due to high-quality translation of his literal work to English. He was a master storyteller who wrote a lot of novels, short stories, books for children, memoirs, plays, essays, and articles, but his short stories are the most excellent part of his production.

His works were inspired by situation of Eastern European Jewry in Europe before World War II and after that - in a new situation in America and Israel. Singer always wrote and published in Yiddish language which was called a language of dead, vanished, disappeared culture from Eastern Europe. His stories appeared it in Jewish newspapers – and then he edited his novels and stories for their American versions, with help of his nephew Josef Singer, and a range of other translators. A Yiddish original became the basis for all other translations, but he changed details and parts of the plot and construction, his English version are mostly simplex, more direct, without controversial opinions. He could also speak Polish and German, however, he considered English as his *second original language*. Many of Singer's short stories and novels have not been translated in English yet.

4.1. Polish Period

Isaac Bashevis Singer was born in Leoncin, near Warsaw, a part of the Russian Empire, on 14th July in 1902 (or in 1904) in orthodox Jewish family. His father Pinchos Mendel Singer was a rabbinical master, "a visionary, a very pious man prone to mysticism, chant, dance, and talk about miracles".⁶ He liked reading and studying

cabalistic books and the new interpretation of the Old Testament in exalted states of his mind, but his mother Bathsheva Zylberman Singer earned money for their family.

She was a daughter and granddaughter of rabbis. She was occupied by her books, she was a brilliant story-teller. "His orthodox parents had also given him the cabalistic gift of demonology as a future way of resolving [the sexual fears and prohibitions]".⁷ [He] " describes his mother as intellectual, critical, and rational /... / He even identifies himself with her by deriving his own literally name from hers."⁸

Singer had two brothers and one sister. The oldest brother Israel Joshua took him to literal profession. He was an excellent journalist, a very good writer. He taught him that the writer should not be only an interpreter of human life.

The youngest brother Mijelthe followed their father way – he wanted to be a Rabbi. His sister Hindele Esther Kreytman was *a Hasid in skirts*, she read father's books secretly. She had symptoms of a disabled person, who was mentally and physically ill but she needs access to the education, to the freedom and to the autonomy. Esther became a Polish-Yiddish writer in Great Britain.

Singer grew up in the Jewish *shtetl* – Radzymin or in mother's native town Bilgoray and in Warsaw ghetto (Krochmalna street), he was raised in Hassidism. He learnt Jewish prayers, studied Hebrew, Torah and Talmud. He described his childhood in the book *In My Father's Court*. He attended the Jewish schools and also a rabbinical seminary. In 1920's he went to Warsaw and joined his older brother Israel Joshua. Although his parents wanted young Isaac to become a rabbi, he got a job as a proofreader, he did translations of T. Mann, S. Zweig, K. Hamsun and published his successful novel about a false Messiah - *Satan in Goray*. After his Warsaw period, he left Poland.

4.2. American Period

In 1935 - without his wife Runia and his five-year-old son Israel Zamir - he became by the ship Champlain to New York City where he joined his older brother. He changed his name from Icek Hersz Zynger to Isaac Bashevis (from mother's name Bathsheba's) Singer and became an independent writer, journalist and columnist for the Yiddish-language newspaper *Jewish Daily Forward (Der Forverts)* edited by Abraham Cahan.

Before he met Alma Heimann, a Jewish refugee from Germany, he suffered from writer's amnesia, depression, loneliness in crowd, skepticism about his own religion.

He described these feelings of a *half-meshuga* person in his books: fluent change from normal situation into abnormal, from natural event into unnatural, from believable into incredible, from familiar into unfamiliar, terrifying. According A. Pridal, Singer used common words as a mask or picklock to open other invisible reality and to deny visible world.⁹

When Alma divorced her husband and left her two children, they married. He started a new quality of life – he had a stable place for living with a beloved working wife. They lived in New York, in Manhattan. In the 1944 he was shocked by the death of his older brother but he started to write again. In the 1953 he became successful due to Saul Bellow's translation of the short story Gimpel the Fool. His production is connected with publishing house Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

He became a vegetarian, who could not treat animals badly. I. B. Singer and his wife had two budgerigars in their flat, they liked to feed pigeons in the park. Singer's relation to others fellows was weak, he was the most isolated Jewish writer of all. He was very formal, he preferred to be called Mr. Singer. He had not sufficient income, but he was a proud person. He was affected by old traditions and habits, he usually wore a dark, funeral, overused suit.

On the other hand, he became a rational mystic, full of contradictions. The deeply intelligent man tried to chronicle a Jewish family. His Hasidic saga has name The Family Moskat. When he and his wife became senior citizens, they moved to Miami Beach, because of better condition for living. Singer died on July 24 in 1991, after suffering a series of strokes.

5. Contrasts between Polish *Shtetl* and American *Shtetl*

I. B. Singer described two different Jewish communities – Eastern-European *shtetl* and American *shtetl*. Eastern-European (primarily Polish) *shtetl* represented typical Jewish space for life - streets, shops, taverns, markets (meeting place with Gentile persons), wooden buildings, ritual bathhouse, cemeteries, yeshivas with at least one synagogue.

Important *shtetls* date from the sixteenth century. "He [Singer] had reported on three hundred years of Jewish history on inhospitable Polish soil, going sparingly on the blood, concentrating on the magic and mystery of the élan vital in the heart and the ether, and the fleeting feet of the time."¹⁰

From the mid-nineteenth century, the *shtetl* also became a literary construct – an imagined shtetl. It was a symbol of pure *Yidishkeyt* (Jewishness), that sometimes in a parodic way (town Chelm) described dilemmas and traumas of modernity, revolution, and catastrophe. After the Holocaust, it changed into a symbol of the lost world of East European Jewry.

Singer's Polish-born Jews primarily lived in compact Jewish small towns, villages, or in Warsaw ghetto. His characters consumed a very specific separate traditional life as a minority within the culture of the majority. The both side preferred the strategy of noninterference. Polish Jews spoke mostly only their own language, Yiddish, which is combination of German, Slavic and Hebrew elements.

At Warsaw, the situation was similar, for example, Polish writers did not know about situation in the Warsaw Yiddish Writers' Club, the religion and language was the insurmountable barrier which disappeared in America. There was a mix of various religions, whose members have to respect themselves, and only one language – English.

Singer's Jews in America had very different origin. They felt a difference between Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern and Western Europe. Jews from Switzerland, Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands tended to adopt the non-Jewish culture of the old continent before coming to America (e.g. Singer's second wife Alma). They left their language, traditional clothes and religious practices early. Yiddish culture lost its importance in their lives. They tended to have secular education and to live in bigger European towns or cities. They were better prepared to assimilation in the USA.

5.1 Yiddish-Polish *Shtot*, *Shtetl*, *Dorf*, and *Yishev*

I.B. Singer reported about a typical small Jewish community that lived in a small town *shtetl* in Central and Eastern Europe (mostly in Russian Empire, Galicia, Romania, the Congress Kingdom of Poland, and Halitsch) before the World War II. Later a *shtetl* became a common term for any town in this part of Europe with a large Jewish population. The name comes from the South German diminutive *Städtel* or *Städtle* with meaning "little town". A larger city was called *shtot* (from German appellation *Stadt*, and a smaller a smaller village was called a *dorf* (from German word *Dorf*). A *yishev* was name for a tiny rural settlement.¹¹

Judaism was for this Jewish community alpha and omega of their life. His characters often have Hasidic character. They do not read Yiddish books, do not want to be writers and do not attend Yiddish theater and movies, they like only religious ceremonial and writing, they attended religious school - yeshiva. They preferred traditional clothes, side locks, tall hats or caps, and the old women had no hair, they put wigs or kerchiefs on their heads. "Inside the shtetl, people live in totally closed space without inner European influence."¹²

Before World War II, secularization accelerated. The information from daily press, radio, theater, literature and film penetrated into Jewish thinking. After the World War II the situation of *shtetl* was radically changed. *Shtetls* were disappearing.

5.2 Ethnic Film *Yentl*

A very beautiful description of a Polish *shtetl* is in the film *Yentl* starring by Barbra Streisand. The film is based on the Singer's short story *Yentl the Boy of Yeshiva*. A small village in Poland – Pechev (which is named Yanev in the short story) is the native town of the heroine Yentl.

The story belongs to the Polish production of I. B. Singer, in which he described a traditional Jewish community in a small town - *shtetl*. He did not avoid working with old Yiddish legends (the wandering Jew, woman-demon, meeting with demons or *dybbuks* with the feet of geese, etc.).

Some details are added in the film version: attending the synagogue, teaching children, feeding rabbits, shopping on the market, (not) looking for the husband, preparing traditional Jewish food, burial of her father and moaning for seven days for him.

The director added a very beautiful description of the harmony and the love between Yentl and her dying father who did not divide society into segregated male and female parts. Gender roles in a *shtetl* were very strict. Men held the positions of power and education, but women played key roles in the communal and economic life of the *shtetl*. Yentl tried to break these boundaries. She was looking after her father, they played together chess game, studied the Torah and other holy books, and also spoke about Anshel, her dead older brother.

It is a Jewish-American film situated to an unknown distant place (from American view) in Eastern Europe in 1904. The short story takes place in Poland (the village Yanev, the town Beshev and the city Lublin), but the director decided to shoot the

film in Czechoslovakia, because of the beauty of old buildings in Český Krumlov and Prague. The end of the film was changed - Yentl was leaving to America, the country of freedom. The director wanted to emphasize American possibilities for all intelligent and creative people.

5.3 Jewish *Shtetl* in American Suburb

I.B. Singer had the ability to show that it was a very simple view on Jewish immigrants. They had the same problems as others European immigrants in “melting pot” (e. g. village people changed into urban population, problems with a behavior in the free society without restriction to Jews and without bad connotation of their name), but Jews wanted to save their religion and culture for younger generations, that sons would follow in fathers’ footsteps.

Jewish emigrants abroad were organized in *landsmanshaftn*. They helped themselves inside orthodox micro-society. Singer’s hero taught English to foreigners at the Educational Alliance¹³. American shtetl was famous for its social-democratic movements — Zionism, Communism, Socialism.

Every European *shtetl* had at least one synagogue, yeshiva and market and typical streets as places for the learning Talmudic tradition. It was a source of folk culture, independent way of living and thinking, dealing with humor and self-irony. American shtetl was not so large as a community in Europe, it was a ghetto of poverty where only some synagogues, yeshivas, and Hasidic study house rested. Members of the first immigrant generation tried to escape from this place. East Broadway was typical place for Jewish habitants in New York. Singer wrote: “Here and there one could still see a Jewish old people’s home, a shop selling Hebrew books, a meeting place for *landsleit* from some village in Rumania or Hungary.”¹⁴

There was a huge difference between the first and the second generation of Jewish immigrants. The young tried to escape from the ghetto, they changed neighborhood. “The synagogues became churches, the yeshivas restaurants or garages.”¹⁵ “In the cafeteria on the corner, in former times one could meet Yiddish writers, journalists, teachers, fund raisers for Israel, and the like. Blintzes, borscht, kreplech, chopped liver, rice pudding, and egg cookies were the standard dishes. Now the place catered mainly to Negroes and Puerto Ricans. The voices were different, the smells were different.”¹⁶

On the contrary to the first generation, they did not change English words according to Yiddish language (e.g. – paycheck was called *paydy* in Americanized Yiddish)¹⁷, they respected it, they tried to throw away a strong Yiddish accent.

6 Heroes and Heroines of the American Short Stories

Young Singer's characters strive for living in typical Judaic context according to Old Testament in a new surrounding, the later Singer's character were Holocaust survivors, strange person who were passive but they had interesting or crazy stories to tell or to write – about an American experience, the American dream, the process of whiteness, press in their mind and healthy problems (impotence, senility, abdominal ulcers, cancer, neurosis, complexes, and at least a dozen imaginary illnesses).

Only sometimes they described war experiences (Nazis, Communists, evolutionists, betrayers, *szmalcowniks*) and old Jewish legends, old wives' tales, and fairy-tales, in which *dybbuk* (ghost, phantom, demon, hobgoblin) is the main protagonist.

Singer's characters were descended from biblical heroes. But they had shlepped their kitchen problems and heartaches with them, in displacements from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Canaan, and Judea, and had lost much of their heritage along the way. Though half the planet has read the Hebrew Bible, and there are even thirty-six sages who truly understand the long view of four thousand years of displacement?¹⁸

Singer's characters are associated with two colors - a yellow sign (color of the sky, skin, eyes, and a red color. Some heroes have red hair and beards and untypical yellow eyes. In the middle ages, yellow color has only negative collocations. On the pictures, it was a symbol of non-Gentile religion: Judaism, Islam and other non-Christian religions, and also sign of debtors, false witnesses, criminals, prostitutes, loan sharks etc. Their houses and clothes were colored by yellow or they have other yellow signs. It was also color of a traitorous act (typical color of Judas's clothes), libels, jealousy, laziness.¹⁹ In Singer's stories yellow color takes its second meaning - a symbol of sin, loneliness and illness (physical and above all, mental). "I tried to come to a decisions as to the color of his eyes. They weren't blue or brown or gray, but yellow and set wide apart."²⁰

Singer described the situations in which loneliness changed character of Jewish persons, their fear of any contact - they avoided looking each other in the eye, touching each other the hand. He wrote what Jews can do to themselves in bad

mental conditions, how they sabotage their internal interests, how they felt trapped physically and spiritually in a dark corner, busy city or in a hot desert but inside themselves, they are still dreaming about love.

6.1 *Ostjude* and German Jews

In some short stories, Singer show how important was the origin of the protagonists. At the beginning of the 20th century Jews were living in every European country. They were divided into two different branches: Ashkenazy (Jews of the German rite) and Sephardic Jews who had lived in the Iberian Peninsula, now the term is sometimes used for all non-Ashkenazy Jews with Sephardic style of liturgy. Ashkenazy Jews mean Yiddish world that was concentrated in Middle and Eastern Europe (contemporary Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Ukraine, Belorussia, Russia, Lithuania, Hungary, and Romania).

"The German Jews did not forgive him for having being raised in Poland, the son of some Galician rabbi, and speaking German with an accent Lotte herself, who was German, called him *Ostjude* when she quarreled with him. To the Russian and Polish Jews he was a German, since, besides being married to a German, for many years he had lived in Germany."²¹

According to Yaffe, German Jude invented the word *kike* for poor *Ostjude*, deriving it from the "-ki" ending of many Russian names. East European people reacted by invention names such as *Yahuda*, *alrightnik* for rich German Jude, but East European Jews made first money and moved from Jewish ghetto uptown.²² "The only difference between Germans and Russians is that one fellow's father was peddling twenty-five years before the other fellow's father."²³

In the short story *The Trap* a Jewish marriage couple had various origin. Boris Kozlov came from Russia, his father was a devout Christian and his mother was a Jewish Hungarian. His young wife Regina Kozlov came from a millionaire's family from Germany, but before World War II the family got poorer and only Regina escaped from Hitler.²⁴ Their marriage was a total failure.

6.2 *Schlemiel* and *Szmalcownik*

The traditional Jewish figure is a schlemiel, an innocent fool. In modern literal works, he is still a loser, but he has more sophisticated and complicated character.

In Singer's works we can distinguish two totally different sorts of persons. Schlemiel is a positive hero "with this comic character as an ethical relationship."²⁵ The word schlemiel comes probably from German, it has four main meanings: a foolish man; a scapegoat, an awkward and unlucky person for whom things never turn out right; a cipher, nobody; a credulous customer who is betrayed by everybody. His twin is *nebuch* (from Polish or Czech word with meaning *nebohý*), a poor, powerless, petty man.²⁶

Schlemiel has to deal with obscured reality (e. g. Jewish situation during World War II), from which only one way lead – taking the reality easily, using comic elements of life, doing his own caricature, suppressing dark elements of life.

That is why the schlemiel did opposite movements: he loves but loses his love because of his silence, impossibility to act. "They could neither stay together nor remain apart. Eventually they were able to get along only in the dark."²⁷ Only hissing radiator or buzzing fly is overcoming a morbid silence in the flat of this silent, absent lover. He wants to win but he acts as an unlucky burglar, a separated person, he becomes a homeless, helpless, impotent, naked person, a stranger in our real world. "The schlemiel puts reality, not his own action into question, ...'into parentheses'".²⁸

He tries to emphasize cultural conflicts of modern history, lost value of a human life, old traditions, lack of warm contact with beloved woman, and also lack of communication between an old and a young generation. A new world becomes a joke, an unsolved chess game, a human riddle without solution. In his new world tobacco tastes bitter, belly is bloated, dreams are baffling.

There is also a woman-schlemiel. The young girl Regina Kozlov is not able to get divorced with her cold, old husband. The happiest moments in her life was when she was dead for a few minutes and the nurse without ceremony covered her face with a sheet.²⁹

A fool's behavior is in contrast with a hero - *szmalcownik*. The name comes from the pejorative Polish word *szmalec* which means *fat*.³⁰ This word was used during World War II. It is negative hero with the tragic character he can abuse everybody who is in a bad situation, he has any ethical relationship. He was not only blackmailing Jews who were hiding, he was also blackmailing Poles who protected Jews and bribed German officials and policemen. In American society, there are szmalcowniks, too.

A rich Jewish millionaire in the short story A Party in Miami Beach could precisely distinguish this kind of people. Due to his clever typology of human character he

become successful and rich person. He understood that *szmalcowniks*, Family and Mafia are the same kind of persons on the entire world. "You don't know who is the Family is? Oh! The Mafia. Half Miami Beach belongs to them. Don't laugh, they keep order here. Uncle Sam has saddled himself with a million laws that, instead of protecting people, protect the criminal."³¹

7. Motifs of Adaptation and Assimilation of Jewish Heroes and Heroines

I. B. Singer showed how immigrant characters experienced the *process of whiteness* and so-called *American dream*, as well as the issues surrounding adaptation and assimilation of Jewish heroes and heroines in the area of language (a trouble with strong Yiddish accent, Americanized Yiddish), job (a great change from a working woman and a meditate husband into a working man and a housewife), religion (religious struggles inside a person, eternally questioning and hesitating, a new vision of God: Anti-Semite God, a swindler, a bankrupt, a murderer), customs (clothes, preparing traditional kosher food, mourning practice, *kaddish*, etc.), marriage (the end of unhealthy patriarchal atmosphere, but also sexual corruption), intermarriage (unsuppressed sexuality), any implement of family (no child), cultural center (a weaker power of *landsleit*), and also supernatural phenomenon (*dybbuks*, inexplicable lost of wife, levitation of objects, improbable séances).

Although Singer's short stories are relatively short, open-ending, he can wake an interesting, exciting and bizarre story in a few lines. He did not describe the whole live of his heroes but only a small sector of their stay in America which had been combined with the European reminiscences. In the range of a few days, his heroes find the depths of life in day-to-day routine.

The narrator or hero (mostly disappointed Jewish intellectual) does not hide mistakes and deficiencies, but openly speaks about his health problems associated with being a stranger in a new country, a middle-aged or older person, often difficulties associated with deprivation during the World War II or lost of Jewish collective memory represented by disappeared European *shtetl* which symbols were a Hebrew teacher, the house of ancestors, the marriage broker, typical men's clothes - prayer shawl and phylacteries. Without them, the hero felt his hollowness, helplessness, nakedness in America.

7.1 Process of *Whiteness* in Singer's Short Stories

According Goldblatt, process of *whiteness* means "reaping full benefits of being an American"³², escaping from ghetto poverty, speak nonimmigrant, nonaccented English, find white work (no *Nigger*, *Hunkie* work in the factories and sweatshops), accommodation in the city, good education, high-paid job and family, own successors. The ownership of a house or flat represented the property – it granted whiteness, stability, status, respect, and good name in the middleclass in American society.

Only a few Singer's characters believed in miracle of America, they tried to become white, but to left ethnic-community based lifestyle was very difficult, they did not want to box with God.

Rich Jewish businessmen (mostly from Germany) tried to exploit ghettoites who were in bad situation – pious workers had a lower wage, because they observed the Sabbath, they had not an equal chance. Others fell into superficial participation in the Jewish community – children did not attend Hebrew school, bat mitzvah, they did not celebrate all Jewish feasts, only Sabbath.

In Singer's literal works old customs played important role. American Jews in his short stories were not synagogue-goers, but when a hero saw a woman lighting her Sabbath candles, he felt continuity between an old European life and new possibilities in America.

7.2 Myth of So-called *American Dream* in Singer's Short Stories

Every Singer's short story is a message how to become a real American. It is full of symbols that represented value of human character, immigrant's intense of new patriotism, love, friendliness, but also reservation of the faith of ancestors. Singer's protagonists were introspective, rootless, lonely, isolated, passive, and self-absorbed persons, they presented an image of schizophrenic persons. They tried to be faithful Jews and on the other hand successful American citizens.

Singer did not portrayed Jews as heroes or martyrs after the Holocaust, any version of the Wandering Jews, his main heroes did not liked any typical American behavior, food, and sports.

The young Jew - Sam Opal wanted to go to America. It was his dream. He spoke that this country is "the land of the streets paved with gold".³³ He was open to all changes in the new world. The first, he changed his name from Shmuel Opalovsly to Sam

Opal and the second, he stop to be a teacher of the Talmud Torah school, he became a dental technician, a job which was well paid.

He did not reap full benefits of the American society because of his Russian wife. She was not able to speak English, to accepted American society, she was a lost person in a new surroundings. She lost herself and family stayed without their mother. In other stories, a millionaire lost his family in a car accident, a young or old couple have no children, or children lived in a very distant place. The dream of a typical Jewish family is not fulfilled.

8 The Collection of Short Stories *Old Love*

The book *Old Love* contains eighteen short stories, fourteen of them were published in *The New Yorker*, others in *New York Arts Journal*, *Playboy*, and in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Only five of them occupy with American topic: One Night in Brazil, The Psychic Journey, A Party in Miami Beach, There Are No Coincidences and The Safe Deposit. Others dealt with Polish Jews before World War II, with the situation in Israel or they describe return of an American citizen with European roots to Europe as a tourist.

The name of this book comes from the name of the short story Old Love that was not joined to this collection. It appeared in the collection *Passions*. "I have decided to use this title for the present book. The love of the old and middle-aged is a theme that is recurring more and more in my works of fiction. Literature has neglected the old and their emotions."³⁴

8.1 One Night in Brazil

This short story belongs to the Singer's letter stories. The writing relationship was formed among two intelligent men, however, there was a nice woman in the back. The eternal triangle in the tropical Brazilian suburb started. The woman who took inside her body a dybbuk of a Polish dead lover, need help of the exorcist - a Yiddish writer. Maybe, she was looking for a new lover and she created the *dybbuk* only inside her mind but he grown up to a cancer.

A hero - a Yiddish writer in New York has a Yiddish pen friend from Brazil. Paltiel Gerstendrescher had been a lawyer in Canada, but when he got divorced his first wife he also wanted to be a successful Yiddish writer, somebody of the sort of Yiddish Joyce. He wrote his own book *The Confession of an Agnostic*. It was a mixture of

autobiography, essays about Heaven, God, the world, man and the aimlessness of creation in an atrocious style. Nobody understands him, nobody reads his book and he needs a positive reader and critic and he found it in the hero.

He attaches himself to the hero very strongly. "Than began a correspondence consisting of three or four incredible long letters from him, and a brief note from me apologizing for not writing sooner and in greater detail."³⁵ When they met one hot day in Brazil, the aureola of the writer was put down, Paltiel was disappointed by his appearance. His wife Lena, who the hero knew from the literally club in pre-war Warsaw, was convinced that the writer has also his dybbuk inside him and she tried to seduce him or his dybbuk. The reaction of arriving Paltiel was calm: "We both gained from your visit: I gained a true reader and Lena gained a true dybbuk."³⁶

Singer's mastery is based on the blending of the impressions from human senses. The bad smell of Lena had warned the writer not to entrance to the Gerstendrescher's half ruined house. "Her breath smelled of tobacco, alcohol, and something putrid,"³⁷ but he was mesmerized by ripe beauty of Brazilian nature: "I could hear juices flowing to the roots and being transformed into mangoes, bananas, papayas, pineapples."³⁸ Lena was almost successful in her seducing of him. On the other way, the nature was full of prickly weeds, nettles, rotten roots, slime, thorns and swarm of locusts that threatened them. The punishment of their bodies was sent from God before the sin. The yellow Paltiel's eyes were shining into Brazilian night.

8.2 The Psychic Journey

This story shows behavior of people in the war situation. They behaved similar as in the situation on the sinking ship. How they forgot to emit waves of brotherliness, reciprocal help, and peace, they stopped their astrally travelling, broke good constellation of solar of the solar cycle and telepathic communications, when they wanted to save their own skin. The war time is the time when people easy forget to give food and water for pigeons - also God's creatures.

The narrator Morris Potiphar worried about his friend Dora who is in Israel in the kibbutz near Syrian border. He is also in Israel but no alone. Melodrama of eternal triangle consisting of the narrator Morris Potiphar, Dora - his mistress - who left for Israel to meet her daughter who was giving a birth - and Margaret - his new friend - ended in this tense situation.

Margaret Fugazy, a Jewish woman from mother's side, half a Gentile tried to survive in American society. This Hungarian woman gives courses of Yoga, cabala, subliminal prayers, Yahweh power, UFO mysteries, concentration, mind stimulation, biorhythm, awareness and I Am. Under her intellectual activities and sending theta rays of trance, it was hidden, she was a solitary person seeking for a drop of love and security. She needs help in her financial, physical and spiritual crises. When she met a solitary Yiddish writer, she wanted to catch him. She wanted to create a fantastic pair and earn money as a tourist guides in the State of Israel.

They have similar interested in telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis and the mortality of the soul and in the feeding pigeons outdoors. The magazine The Unknown for occultism was their tell-tale signs. When she knew about Dora, she considered as war affaires as a punishment for Morris and she left him. She was one from mysterious women or witch who inspired him in his writing, in his psychic journey.

8.3 A Party in Miami Beach

What can a Jewish writer living in Miami Beach do for a famous old multimillionaire who had condominiums and rental houses in Florida, New York and Tel Aviv? He can perform a mitzvah for him - do an appointment in which the millionaire can tell his life story.

The whole story is based on the contrast between two words: *mitzvah* and *szmalcownik*. The Hebrew word mitzvah has two main meanings:

The first it is 613 God's commandments, relating to every area of Jewish life. The second meaning is a meritorious human act that shows a will of God and it must be done with kind, honourable and unblemished intention. Observance of *mitzvah* gives the promise of living an enlightened and meaningful existence.³⁹

What about performing a mitzvah in America? The narrator Menashe pretended that this word lost its meaning. American Jews threw away an important part of their Jewishness and they tried to become white and successful American citizens. "What kind of word is that - Hebrew? Aramic? Chinese? You know I don't do mitzvahs, particularly here in Florida."⁴⁰

The second word has Polish origin. Szmalcownik is a pejorative Polish slang word for man who pretended to help Jews during the World War II but he was blackmailing

hidden Jews and sold them food for an incredible high price. These two words are connected with memory of multimillionaire Max Flederbusch.

He comes from the same Polish area - Lublin as the narrator of the story. Max wants to meet him not only he is a compatriot but because he had understood Menashe's character from his writing. He wants to get to know somebody who lives in inner Talmudic concordance and who believes in Special Providence.

Max was a very successful American businessman. This man with womanly eyes had some kind of softness inside him. When he lost his family in car accident, he stayed alone with his money surrounded by new category of Miami szmalcowniks and mafia (The Family). He wanted to be fooled, he bought pictures but did not understand the art, he attended overpriced restaurants and séances with fake medium, he made huge parties for alien rich people. "It was a fashion show of jewelry, dresses, pants, caftans, hairdos, shoes, bags, makeup, as well as men's jacket, shirts and ties."⁴¹

The real heroes are not people who survived stay hidden in a Polish hole for long time or in DP camp in Germany but the financially secure bachelors or widowers who live out their years alone, who can appreciate beauty of living and who do not forgotten their young love and old Jewish tradition in new country - in America.

8.4 There Are No Coincidences

The narrator of this story is a Jewish writer who is living alone in his flat in New York. All God's gifts such as a flat, his own nice library, cosy kitchen with enough milk, tea or coffee do not satisfy him. He misses something. He is being pursued by disturbing dreams, Biblical imaginations and events of World War II which he did not experience but his European family did.

His only contact with outer world are telephone and letters, he is depend on mail as a bearer of good news. Every day he is waiting for a postman with a great excitement. "Without my robe or slippers I rushed to the door, and to my disappointment, I found a single printed advertisement put out by some rug-cleaning firm. I angrily tossed the ad into trash can thinking that a year or two ago a tree was felled in Canada to create paper for this."⁴²

He is a loner for long time. He lost Ester, he did not understand a young generation of modern writers, he had no personal contact with Europe, he is seeking his little pleasure elsewhere, because he need a human warmth and laugh, he need to meet new people who have similar decision at the same time or who can create a human

symphony. He does not need to speak to friends in maternal English but in some unknown human language.

His isolation is manifested in an unsuccessful contact with taxi driver. He tried to break his solitary attending a literal party. When he was going there he tried to speak to taxi driver. When the taxi driver knew that the party took place in the unfamiliar suburb he lost interest to speak with narrator. He was not noble or white enough for him. The hostility even arose between them owing to very bad autumn weather. On the other hand, the terrible weather brought him a friend. In the destructive hurricane when he was wet and unhappy leaving the displeasing party he found his new friend - a writer for children. The preparation and travelling to the party cost him half a week's salary. It was a good price for finding a related soul.

This woman was extraordinary, not pretending interest in any silly speech and non-soft-loaping to the hosts. She was not a type of women who were attractive to him but he found under her facade "that this was a woman who could be keenly witty, love intensely, perhaps hate intensely. When such a person become enrages, she is capable of hurling dishes or throwing herself out the window. She probably made love with great passion."⁴³

The most important questions for the narrator were at first - her profession and ambitions, if she could understand the life of a writer and only the second was her religion. He asked her about her profession but he did not touch question of her Jewishness. He knew there were no coincidences, that meeting this woman was a part of the universe that could not be ruled by blind forces. He was happy for this new God's gift.

They met other related soul - an Italian night watchman who was able to help people in emergency without hesitation. He did not look down on them, when they were wet and numb with cold outside in a hurricane, he knew that we all were "no more than flesh and blood."⁴⁴

8.5 The Safe Deposit

Professor Uri Zalkind - a hero of this story - was returning for a few days from Miami to New York to visit the rest of his wife's family, his doctor, the safe deposit in his bank and the editor of the university where he had worked for thirty years. He was over eighty and he promised himself not to return in New York after his wife Lotte's

death. He knew that his arrival to New York would be the death of him because he was seriously ill.

He is somebody who moves in the opposite direction, who did not accept advices of his neighbors from the senior-citizen apartment complex, he did not take the easiest life way. He was a typical schlemiel. "The schlemiel creates this interval/borderland and exposes us to the interstices and cultural conflicts of modern history."⁴⁵ In the exposing Zalkind's ill body, his confusion and stay in embarrassing situation to the readers, Singer evocated bareness and helplessness of the world of the old people.

Professor Zalkind could not resist in warmth of Florida, he visited New York during terrible blizzard. "The blizzard was getting worse. The afternoon was as dark as dusk... snow hit his face like hail."⁴⁶ At the apocalyptical weather, when he forgot the name of his bank, he tried to call to his relatives, but nobody answered, when he lost his suitcase with documents, and his problems with prostate culminated, he met a woman.

The accumulation of his anxiety, perplexity and fumbling was so great, that he was thankful for any help. Esther Sephardi brought him his suitcase and took him at her flat to take rest. She comes from Poland from city Lodz, she survived her stay in Kazakhstan, Russia, and German DP camp. After death of her husband and her illness she became very poor, however, she was able to do mitzvah to her compatriot.

On the one hand, Professor Zalkind was very happy that he met the goodhearted woman in his humilitating situation when he had problems with his prostate gland. He wanted to give her for her great help some of his wife's jewelry that he protects from thieves in a safe deposit for five years. "I have no more need for wordly possessions. If some part of Lotte's mind still exist, she will forgive me."⁴⁷

9 The Collection of Short Stories *The Death of Methuselah and Other Stories*

The book *The Death of Methuselah and Other Stories* contains twenty marvelous short stories but only five of them deals with American topics – running to America or smuggling of hero's body there, marrying an American businessman, cheating him, ageing in Miami Beach and bidding farewell to a dead lover.

The names of these stories are *The Trap*, *The Smuggler*, *Runners to Nowhere*, *The Hotel*, and *The Last Gaze*. They build a beautiful complex with Biblical and Polish stories. The collection is named after the last short story *The Death of Methuselah*

that is inspired by the Book of Genesis. This dark story represents the other pole of a short, nevertheless full and satisfied human life – the Methuselah's long dying in the arms of the she-demon Naahma. The oldest man on the Earth knew that Yahweh regretted creating man and he was thinking about leaving the vicious, jealous and vengeful God to a perverted and sadistic world of demons.

9.1 The Trap

This short story belongs to the Singer's conversation stories. A former chambermaid tells her loss of an American dream to the narrator of the story. She was a Jewish girl who came from a rich German family. Regina Wertheim-Kozlov had to live in the United States because of the Nazis. There she was alone - without family, friends and means, with one valise, and reparation money from the Germans. She did not know that the too-painful reality would come.

She was a woman *schlemiel*, in her thirties she had white hair, face without wrinkles, she was not able to drive a car, to type or write her story, to change a fuse, or to live a normal happy life. She was caught in a trap by her Russian husband - Boris Kozlov. The bright book - the novel *Buddenbrooks* was a decoy that attracted her. She longed for a nice, intelligent and literate husband, however, she instead lost everything.

Her *American dream* - to have a rich husband, children and a house - did not come true, she did not blend into American culture and she spoiled contacts with Jewish community because of her obsessed husband.

She became an inert object in the marriage which cheated her husband and then she hoped only for the death to stop her mental isolation and unhealthy body. Singer worked very hard to describe her sense of devotion, tranquility, unhappiness and impossibility to put up with the man who suffered from stubbornness, severity, and real fanaticism.

She was not a writer but a cruel reality influenced her to tell her life story. In the year 1938 she met a half Jew and a half Christian from Russia in a hotel where she worked in the United States. She spent with Boris Kozlov six long years. She knew about a demonic aspect in his character but she did not divorce, she wanted to be a devoted wife. Therefore, it was not religion or ancestor's heritage, she was leaving her own personality. The history of her predecessors was repeated. The colors of her

husband's eyes warned her, they were demonic: blue, green, and even violet but she wanted to get married and to have a nice wedding celebration.

Boris was twenty years older and extremely attractive to women "I'm a serious man and to me marriage is a serious institution. I demanded from a woman physical and spiritual beauty and strong moral values."⁴⁸

What he wanted to give to the young girl? He demanded classic and aesthetic ideals of bodily and mental perfection, but he was not able to give love, human warmth, children, speaking and laughing with her devoted wife. "I often had the impression I was having an affair with a corpse."⁴⁹

Inside the silent man, there was a dark, demonic aspect, he was a wife-killer, a building robot with a pathological behavior – obsessed with books. He planned to have family and buy a house, to live a consume life. He hid his feelings and thoughts, everything was a cunning calculation – he got married the healthy young girl to reach a good position in American society. When he was not able to have children, he could not consume his wife and change her to a person without different feeling and sense of humor, so he decided to destroy his useless wife. She could not adopt any child but a young lover - a boy of fourteen. Regina Wertheim-Kozlov was squeezed into cheating her husband and then committed suicide because of her good character.

She survived to flat and bizarre life, half dead, irrational and terribly lonesome existence in a topsy-turvy world inside New York. She was an individual standing outside the Jewish community and ideology.

9.2 The Smuggler

Singer often used this short story form - a kind of the frame story. His stories are describing vivid dialogues between a narrator - a Jewish writer or reporter and other interesting Jewish persons. Their conversations took place in a cafeteria, in a narrator's flat, in his office, on the street.

The smuggler is a former Yiddish poet from Poland who smuggled himself to America. His family in Poland was dependant on smuggling food by women but he did a triumph of smuggling - to take his own body to the USA in 1949. "...what I smuggled was myself. My body is my contraband."⁵⁰ This little man in a shabby coat was revealing the mystery and tragic cruelty of life at an appointment with the narrator of the story. On the one hand, he called himself a graphomaniac because he wrote Yiddish poems but he did not publish his works, he was out of luck with editors.

On the other hand, he was a real Yiddish poet who saved his language - idiomatic Yiddish. He used to speak his maternal language without American-English elements. The narrator thought that the poet had emigrated to the United States long after the war because of his purity of language. The small poor and ill man who looked like a beggar or a bum understood paradox of the human life. He spoke about cruelty, wickedness, madness inside everyman, who could be "today a victim, tomorrow a tyrant."⁵¹ His parents and sister died because of the Nazis, his brother fell from an Arab bullet in Israel, and two younger brothers died in Stalin's prisons.

The Polish poet did not have to be only a savior of a language, and also a bearer of a human value. Among the Nazis, there were poets. "In the day they dragged out children from their cribs and burned them, and at night they wrote poems."⁵² He did not want to be a poet anymore, he only liked to dabble in poetry.

In December, when a heavy snow had fallen in New York and there was a reddish sky without stars above Broadway. Two men from Poland were blending their European memories. The warm from a hissing radiator reminded them of a stove on Krochmalna street, kerosene lamp or their father's proverb, old traditional world which disappeared without any compensation.

In the new country, there is an element of losing - losing things and memories. Although the poet had reparation money from the Germans, his house was wrecked and thieves stole everything except his books, he become a bum with a cart full of books in the carnival, full world.

9.3 Runners to Nowhere

The story *Runners to Nowhere* belongs to the Singer's cafeteria stories. Two Polish Jewish writers were sitting in a cafeteria in Broadway drinking coffee, eating rice pudding and chatting. It looks like an idyllic time but their topic of speaking was war events of the period from 1938 to 1945. The narrator had lived in the United States in this period but his friend from Warsaw Zeinvel Markus had changed totally his behavior because of the war sufferings. He survived all war terrors and he escaped to Shanghai and then to the USA to save his bare life.

Process of *whitening* of this hero was not successful. He was puzzled by life in America. Everything was an American trick or vice versa – hot coffee was cold but the cup for it was warm. "The American does not believe in such a thing as an objective truth. The judge in an American court is not interested in whether the

accused is guilty or not guilty. All he cares about is whether his defense is flawless or not. This is also true of the female sex. A woman doesn't want to be beautiful, she only wants to *look* beautiful. If she wears the right makeup, then she is a beauty."⁵³ The small man with yellowish skin and slanted eyes suffered from imaginary illnesses and mental impotence. He was an excellent story-teller but could not write anything. He was a columnist (feuilletonist) in Warsaw but now his hand was not able to write, he had a writer's cramp in his right hand. His job was travelling, he knew all so-called professional Jews in the whole world.

He belonged to the runners to nowhere – Jews in Poland in the year 1939 who had no opportunity to save their lives because they could not find no-man's-land. They were afraid of Hitler, Stalinists, Trockytites, and Zionists. White running in the pandemonium he noticed the huge treachery of the two runners. A wife left her slow husband, a Jewish poet changed his political opinion according his situation. *Homo politico* won in every collective insanity.

9.4 The Hotel

Process of *whitening* of the hero Israel Danzinger reached its top. He escaped from Polish ghetto poverty to paradise of New York and Miami Beach. He became a successful businessman with a large family, he reaped the full benefits from American society. "He wondered what he would have thought if someone in Parciowe, his hometown in Poland, had told him that one day he would own a house in America, with citrus and coconut trees on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in a land of eternal summer."⁵⁴

In this short story, Singer describes other problem of Jews in the USA - ageing in a strange culture, in huge complexes consisted only of old people, without their families, only with memories which they can not transmit to their descendants.

The hero went through the rough process of Americanization but he was satisfied. Now he felt to be in the other world, everything was too serious, too artificial, too flawless. His sons and daughters with their families would come to visit him and his wife, but the doctor had prescribed him complete rest - without any excitement and life struggle.

Israel had everything but he was not happy, his feelings were very dark, he knew about emptiness of the world. When he liquidated his business to retire, he felt like a dead man, like a corpse. It could not satisfy him - living in a beautiful house with a

green garden and a swimming pool on the banks of Indian Creek. Gazebo, palms, flower beds, special chairs for his ill heart, squeaking seagulls, half-naked women on the beach, everything was meaningless, boring, vacuous, idiotic, flat. He could not read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch television, read books, eat a piece of fat meat, smoke. Everything that he liked was bulky, boring or forbidden. He envied Joe, their black gardener who was doing something useful, who tasted a real life.

At the age of fifty-six Israel was at the edge of his life, "only one step away from death, from madness".⁵⁵ The atmosphere of sunny seaside took him to gloom, to hysteria. The creek stank, seagulls screamed shrilly, crickets were noisy, women only gabbled to no effect, food was full of cholesterol. He was thinking about his life, what he did during years that he spent in New York. He sat in the desk chair and gazed up at the sky and he gained a fortune for nothing.

He was a businessman, he needed ringing phones, his stocks and bonds, adrenalin, speculations, using his potential and energy. The life is perfect only when man has to do something or he will perish. In one second, he decided to risk all his money to invest in a fantastic bargain - a fourteen-story hotel in Miami Beach. "A man is like a Hanukkah dreidel. It gets a turn, and then it spins on by itself until it drops."⁵⁶

9.5 The Last Gaze

The Singer's interest in death topics was revealed in this short story. *The Last Gaze* dealt with the lost of the beloved woman Bessie. The author described cruelty of love, a relationship that was full of the altercations and the friction, a suffering from an unfilled attachment between two ripe Jewish persons, a mutual silence and a kind of enmity between man and woman.

Singer dealt with two layers of alienation: alienation to himself or herself and impossibility to get in touch with other people, friends, a lover, or with a young generation. The hero was a typical schlemiel who had suffered many failures and had no courage to make a proposal to Bessie and to put her in existential troubles. Twelve years ago, he felt in love with her but their love was not realized as a marriage. She was ready to marry and to have a family. She was his bride but he could unveil her face only when she was lifeless.

After Bessie's death, the hero was shocked. He had been waiting for her ringing more than fifteen months but he was not able to call her himself. His passivity caused

Bessie's death, she was tricked by other man and she lost her self-respect. She needs help from her lover.

The hero did not adapt to American society. In his dreams, he felt alone among the race of dwarfs, in a strange bed, far from home. He did not trust anybody. Only animals can give him a message from the Creator. He prayed to God to make a transfer between the living and the dead, to display the deceased lover herself. "Let her face become visible in the mirror, let her voice to be heard, let some sign of her presence manifest itself."⁵⁷

In a gloomy winter day under a yellow sky, between wilds of Brooklyn, shortcuts, tunnels, and bridges, there was a small fly. It could change snowflakes into blossoms of the spring twenty years ago. It was buzzing against human barriers, pondering over possibilities, entangling, and it was looking on the life as if into a deep abyss. It represented Bessie's life

A *schlemiel* in New York City had only one place to meet his lover - a funeral parlor where lifeless Bessie had her office and her office hours to live. He felt the strong connection between the dead and the living. Now she was something sacred and forbidden, she looked like a queen, independent of everyone. She gained and he failed in their life called a chess game. It was his funeral, he lost devoted woman and she won their quarrels about human life.

10 The collection of Short Stories *The Séance*

The collection of short stories *The Séance* consists of sixteen short stories but only three are set in an American locale or with an American topic - cross-cultural identity of a hero: *The Séance*, *The Lecture*, and *Letter Writer*. The book contains a mix of short stories written in Yiddish language between 1943 and 1981. Singer was very glad that he put inside this three stories that deal with events in the United States or in Canada.⁵⁸ The plot of the other short stories takes place in Poland, in small towns such as Kolomir, Shidlovtse, Pinchev, Machlev, Krasnostaw, Kozlow and also in Warsaw. These Old world stories look like a magic in extraordinary places full of the charm of Jewish Hassidism, ritual laws, traditional celebrations of Jewish feasts, religious hesitating, strange dreams and *dybbuks*.

On the contrary, the American stories provide rich terrain for human contemplation, the exploration of borders in human behavior, where Jews overcome various crisis and deal with the hard reality, a different cultural environment and the possibility to

reach the *American dream*. A new immigrant's life in the USA is tightly connected to their European past. This painful connection brings them to the edge of madness.

10.1 The Lecture

Why does a Yiddish immigrant stand in a strange cold room with a dead body of an old woman? Why does his old boyhood fears return? He only has his paper. He feels the necessity to prove that he is still alive, and a real human being. He had to travel to another country to recognize that his staying in the United States was successful.

One winter day Mr. N., the narrator of the story, was traveling from New York to Montreal to deliver a lecture. He wrote an optimistic report on the future of the Yiddish language and knew that it was not true. The journey was complicated because of this lie. There in Canada he could open his unbeliever eyes. "Here is my photograph. And my signature. Here is the government stamp. True, these were also inanimate, without life, but they symbolized order, a sense of belonging, law. I stood in the doorway and for the first time really read the paper that made me citizen of the United States."⁵⁹

Before his coming to Canada he regretted, that he was alone in his own exodus, a shy victim of his own isolation. He loved people, but he felt lost in the happy American crowd. He was very ashamed therefore he spoke to other people in inner speech. He imagined that they wanted to know what of sort of person he was: "But does anyone guess that I am Yiddish writer late for his lecture?"⁶⁰

A dead crippled woman, and a rabbi's daughter, symbolized hope for him. She died when her dream to see him - a brilliant Jewish writer had come true. Why did he feel fear? When he was with her dead corpse, he imagined his worst days in Poland and his bitterest crisis in his life - making the effort to immigrate to the USA, to be a successful Jewish author, to catch the *American dream*. The dead woman had achieve nothing from this but she died happy.

She died that night when he became to Canada. The dead woman had only one child, Binele, who survived the stay of their whole family in the camp Auschwitz in Poland. She was waiting for him to come to put Binele - a victim of Hitler - in the trust of a lost Yiddish writer. "/.../ life had returned. The long nightmare was over."⁶¹

Before it his conscious was divided into two parts: into his real life in America and his memory about old Europe and native Poland. There he spent his childhood and teenage years within his large family. There he wrote his first short story, found his

job and had lots of friends, nice co-workers and first love. He remembered places in his village. Some memories were locked. Only smells have the power unlock forgotten unkind memories. A smell in the Binele's kitchen remains to him an old whiff of poverty. "They opened the door and I was suddenly enveloped in odor I had long forgotten: moldy potatoes, rotting onions, chicory, and something else I could not even name. In some mysterious way the mother and daughter had managed to bring with them the whole atmosphere of wretched poverty from their old home in Poland."⁶²

10.2 The Letter Writer

Herman Gombiner, a main hero of this short story, lost his job in Zion Publishing Company. During his stay in America he had lived in fear that one day he would be without his job. Now he was feeling only regret and resignation because he had sensed that event would come. He was a kind of clairvoyants, he had a privilege to see beyond the facade. The new Hebrew-English dictionary which he was completing had no chance to be finished. "He never turned his head to look back at the place in which he had wasted almost thirty years."⁶³

The work had provided a system to his live. He had to go out every day and with a taxi had to travel to the publishing house. There he used to meet his old co-workers and his Jewish boss. He was a very good worker, he had made a name of this Hebrew publishing house but his salary was low. He enjoyed his job and his apathic co-workers, who almost did not speak each others.

His boss, an old Jew from Poland, loved his employees. He ate with some of them at lunch, gave them extra money at Hanukkah, sent them Purim gifts, and in general he acted as an old-style boss from Europe. He wanted to preserve the impression of his old home country. He employed a few people who were useless for publishing house but they came from the same city in Poland, that he came from. When he became senile, his half Gentile sons sold the publishing house so that a garage could be build there.

Herman Gombiner lived in New York alone, with no family and real friends because of Nazis, every day he saw only his Puerto Rican neighbors and tired co-workers. He had tried as a foreigner to understand American culture and society. He was opened to changes, he was able to learn new skills, for example he studied English but he remained an outsider not because of his religion and his writing in dying Yiddish, but

for his alienation to people. He missed everything important, so he thought that he could find it in reading and writing letters to unknown women from faraway parts of the United States. He chose them from occult magazines.

He knew when people were living very long in isolation, they could achieve a specific view of the world. He believed in ghosts and telepathy, instead of the Jewish religion. His friends were only clever statements and thoughts of the famous writers and philosophers, ordinary things and one small animal - a mouse. The smart animal and things were behaving as a life clever creatures. What is stranger – the friendly animal and animate things can behave better than people without souls – such as Hitler and Stalin. He gave his mouse a Hebrew name - Huldah. She was his real friend.

He did not weep from the time when he received the news that his family had perished in Kalomin. When he saw Huldah after her long starvation, he wept, he was happy that Huldah is alive, that God exists.

Because he was without a job and felt through his illness to be near death, and above all that his alarm clock had stopped. Herman lost his ritual behavior - every day morning he had open an eye and gradually open the second. The day started, but he could not distinguish that it was a day, or a night, wakefulness, or dream, or letter which he was reading. The clever editor, proofreader and translator was dreaming about the world without Kant's categories. He dreamt about revenge, the war between dead Jews and Nazis - "The spirit cannot be burned, gassed, hanged, shot. Six million souls must exist somewhere."⁶⁴ then he saw "whales and sharks, fish with golden fins, red horns, with skin similar to that on the wings of bats"⁶⁵ in Kalomin and a beautiful non-Jewish woman, who saved him.

The Gentile woman Rose Beechman, his correspondent, visited him because of her Grandmother's message. Her dead Grandmother said her in her vision about Herman's illness and she started to care of him. "Herman was filled with love both for the mouse, and for the woman, Rose Beechman, who was understood his feelings..."⁶⁶ His *American dream* started.

10.3 The Séance

Why does a very clever Jewish writer and philosopher attend the occult séances? Why is a failed rationalist, a sceptic in contact with a bogus mystic? What does he

look for? He knows that the séances are only a comedy played for him. Only there he can hide his hopelessness that the world is a big joke. Occultism gives him some hope, feelings of brotherhood, possibility to survive his stay in America and chance to catch a vision of love and sexual satisfaction.

Dr. Zorach Kalisher went in the United States in 1939, and he was a successful man. He had been offered a very good position in Palestine - in the Hebrew University, his works had been printed in Zurich and Paris. During the outbreak of the Second World War his world changed, and an undying evil met him. "Well, I'm finished, kaput."... He made a swift summation of his existence. "Philosophy? what philosophy? Eroticism? whose eroticism?"⁶⁷

The narrator - an intellectual from Poland, who lost his roots, is in a large American city surrounded by honking of cars, the screams of boys, the thundering echo of the subway. He has no family, there is not family tomb in the cemetery, any coffee bars or restaurants, where he could meet his childhood or boyhood friends. There is no evidence of his presence in the world. He had only a thin connection with his lost lover Nela. He attends the séance of Mrs. Kopitzky, a rich widow. There he does not find not occultism but also her kind friendship.

He wanted to stop visiting the séances, and it was his last night. The man who looked like a primitive African statue with a typical Jewish nose wanted to stop the comedy played for him. His face was whole wrinkled, badly shaved, and grimy. His black jacket and white shirt were covered with ash and coffee stains. He had no chance to meet good people as Mrs. Kopitzky and her friend but he wanted to stop everything.

When he was forced to wear the clean but bad smelling clothes of dead Mr. Kopitzky he remembered his father's traditional Hassid clothes. He felt the relief and conciliation, he stuck out his tongue like a child to his fate. Treblinka, Maidanek, Stuthoff - places of horrors were forgotten at this moment. He stopped to think at tragic fate of six million Jewish people and started a new part of his life.

After his accident with his blander, he fell asleep and when he was awake his first words were about a new woman whom he had met in a bathroom. "There is no death, there isn't any. We live forever, and we love forever. This is the pure truth."⁶⁸

The key shift of his thinking brought him to a new horizon, from the humiliating state to a titudes hidden inside his brain. When Dr. Kalisher woke up, his first idea was love - true love - not to a transparent phantom of a dead mistress but love to a real middle-aged woman in a corset. When he asked for Nela, he was amazed at his own

words. Mrs. Kopitzky gave him a simple solution. At first she wanted to married him but after that she changed her mind. She helped two solitary persons to find themselves, to fall in love. She wanted Dr. Kalisher to complete his wide philosophical works.

And which role did Nela play? Why did a middle-aged woman play this tragical comedy as a spirit? Why did she pretend that she was the medium of the dead mistress of Mr. Kalisher? Perhaps she wanted to give him a new sense of his life, perhaps she is also alone soul in America who was looking for friendship and love.

11 The Collection of Short Stories *A Crown of Feathers and Other Stories*

The book *A Crown of Feathers and Other Stories* contains twenty-four short stories. I. B. Singer distributed the short stories with Polish topic and with American topic evenly. Some of them were published in *The New Yorker*, others were edited by Rachel Mackenzie. The title name of this book comes from the name of the first short story *A Crown of the Feathers*. This story is about a woman – a renegade who returned back to Judaism.

11.1 A Day in Coney Island

This short story includes autobiographical features. In a hot nice sunny day in Coney Island, the narrator of this story lost everything – a safe refuge in America and a beautiful ripe woman whom he really loved. He was a Yiddish writer from pre-war Poland, with only a notebook and a fountain pen in his pocket. He did not want to end his young life in Hitler's paws in which human time and space were nothing. He was illegally in the USA, without money and papers. As a tourist, he could not get a permanent visa, so he had to either go to Cuba or Canada or else get married an American woman.

For a year and a half, he craved for his adaptation to American culture and society. However, among the American giants he became a small person, sickly white despite a hot sun, with sparse red hair, watery blue eyes, inflamed eyelids, sunken cheeks, a protruding Adam's apple, and speaking English with a terrible accent.

The writer about old Jewish demons, *dybbuks*, imps, werewolves, sprites was baffled by the world that looked like a great carrousel. "At thirty, a refugee from Poland, I had become an anachronism."⁶⁹ His sleep was full of otherworldly nightmares, and only sometimes he remembered a marvelous dream.

He wanted to work and study hard. His second Bible became *The Education of the Will* in Polish. His will was so weak as a hungry person with an idea of Hitler on his back, that he could not study, work, think, sleep, and love. He only observed this crazy world, the sideshow displaying a creature that was a half woman and a half fish, dancing Pygmies, a turbanned astrologer, a medium calling back spirits from the dead, a group of old men discussing Communism. He was baffled. Because he was hungry, he was thinking about the importance of food and brooding about vegetarianism. He did not want to kill any animals for his pleasure.

Due to the God's intricate calculation, he was surprised by sudden shift in his luck. He found a little money in the telephone booth but he lost his lover because of the impossibility of speaking.

He thought that he was only one step from the God's truth but he was mistaken.

In the hot summer with red sun, he admired the fastest and newest ships in the world from his bathroom window, he heard the sound of the ocean, breeze, but there was also an underwater decay under the nature beauty. "The powers that rule the universe were preparing the catastrophe."⁷⁰ He did not keep the Ten Commandments, he did not pay his bills, and he had a secret mistress. He was satisfied with his bat's life with her. He was aware that she was ready to marry him, to give him a good opportunity so that he would not to be punished by Nazis in Europe.

11.2 Property

This short story belongs to the Singer's cafeteria stories with the framed narrative story. Two Jewish friends are spending their free time by chatting, drinking coffee in glasses and eating onion rolls with sour cream in Café Royal in New York. The older one, Max Peshkin, was speaking about anarchism in the nineteen thirties in America. A former anarchist, whose memoires were published in three volumes, retold tenderly the story about his first girl-friend Libby and about the old Jewish community in New York that was disappearing. Yiddish centre in the nineteen thirties was in the Lower East Side that was like a small village full of gossip, in the market on Orchard Street, near Grand Street.

"If you had time and nothing better to do, I would be glad to tell it to you."⁷¹ The hearer - the baby-writer in his thirty-third year heard how American freedom was controlled

by its European roots, how Jews could be threatened by deportation by their wicked neighbors.

The noble name of the cafeteria is in contrast with the story that deals with the primitive persons - Maurice and Libby - two hero-worshippers in the anarchist movement. This pair changed friends quickly. They could be great leaders, speakers, friends yesterday and traitors or enemies tomorrow. Max looked for a room and he stayed with this perverted pair.

Maurice liked a quotation "Property is theft".⁷² He quarreled with Max that property was evil, or the essence of humanism. Maurice did not like words as mine, thine, so instead he would use only our and he had an urge to share his wife. "I was a lucky devil; I had everything all in one – a room, food, a mistress..."⁷³ and an overwhelming friend. In one day, Max had everything and next he lost everything, so he had to pack his bags and go.

Libby was a provider, she worked hard, sewed ladies' blouses for a shop while her husband allowed her entertainment. He gave her permission to do it, for he did not wish to own any property, any wife himself. He wanted that institution of marriage would disappear, it was a kind of a slavery, and jealousy was a product of feudalism and capitalism. The perverted couple did not want to have children because of question of paternity.

Max's first love, Libby, looked like "she-demon – one of the Lilith spirits who tempt yeshiva boys to sin".⁷⁴ There was a strange brotherhood between the three of them. Other Jews saw it and were dissatisfied with their behavior.

Libby had *landsleit*, they wrote to her relatives in the old country and told about their abominations. Because of the threat of deportation, they decided to move to Oregon, where free communes were founded by Socialists and utopians.

One day they found a new idol – a Russian revolutionist. Immediately, Max was forgotten. After some years, Maurice became a landlord in Miami Beach. He had forgotten that "Property is theft". He was dressed in the Miami Beach fashion, in shorts and pink flowered shirt and his third wife boasted with her Jewish traditional food - kreplech.

11.3 The Briefcase

This short story deals with feelings of a foreign-born hero in America. Kohn thought that he was a naturalized person who had completed a process of *whitening* and who

had accepted the constant rushing as a main feature of this society. He worked hard on a newspaper, wrote a pile of books, went on the lecture routes, taught creative literature on a university, visited Jewish centers, and also made crazy relationships with women. He had no time to pick up the phone, to read students' papers, to give interesting interviews, to go to lunch or dinner with his colleagues, to visit his mistresses. "Over years of a long bachelorhood, I had assembled an invisible harem of has-beens and might-have-beens... Their daughters treated me like a stepfather."⁷⁵

He had no time to build a real relationship or found his own family. He used telepathy, clairvoyance, and premonitions to substitute a vivid contact with other people. He had a great problem when he travelled to a distant town. Because of his lost of papers and proof of his identity, he returned to his Jewish origin. He did not know whether it was a self-sabotage of his American life, or it was his Jewish mistress's curse, a demon's play with his painful existence, imp's trick, or God's pitfall that he was in no contact with a Jewish *shtetl*.

He felt to be caught in the trap, he was in a wrong hotel with no telephone in his shabby room, he lost his notebook with telephone contacts and he did not have his briefcase, while the cold weather paralyzed him. He was so helpless, that he believed that Satan ruled in our world.

He was going blind in a strange, chilly town covered with foggy haze. He had forgotten to taste holiness of European poverty and semi-darkness, because he had been earning enough money throw his writing and lecturing during his stay in America. He had a behavior of a yeshiva student who lost his head. He was so desperate that he considered suicide. Without his documents, he was nothing. "If a man's life and peace of mind depended of a briefcase full of paper, living wasn't worth a pinch of tobacco."⁷⁶

His old Jewish thinking returned, his faith was reawakened. He promised to do mitzvoth, to give eighteen dollars to charity. He understood that he had belonged to a tribe that was destroying itself because of its passivity. He looked for a Jewish *shtetl* in an unknown town. Although he was not successful, he was able to call his mistress Reizl and his old girl-friend Rosalie. Both of them did not refuse to help him although he wounded their feelings. They built with him a strange triangle. Reizel, who had a habit of drinking and smoking three packs a day loved him very much but "she

brought with her the tension of ghetto life, of secret frontier crossing, of the D. P. camp.”⁷⁷

Rosalie was a dissolute woman who smoked marijuana but she was prepared to help him, divine spark was still inside her. When they visited him, he believed that God did not leave him alone. At a night of miracles he can say Jewish words with a joy - *Mazel tov*.

11.4 The Cabalist of the East Broadway

This short story compares living and the society in America and in the State Israel. Where is Paradise for Jews? Was the hero out of Paradise, back in Hell – in a lost Jewish community in the East Broadway?

An I-narrator describes life story of Joel Yabloner, a Yiddish writer in his early seventies who specialized in the cabala and who lived on East Broadway. The huge Jewish community disappeared there but it was still Yabloner’s home. At the end of his life, he returned from Israel, where he was a rich and respected author and speaker. Maybe there was his Paradise full of sins of his youth, the place of free behavior and thinking, maybe he wanted to lie near his beloved teacher Deborah.

He lived there in a room without bath, telephone, or central heating. A silent, lonely, and forgotten man who had a nephew, a professor at the university in Jerusalem looked satisfied. He did not want to use his contacts in Israel. He was without a beard, emaciated, sallow, wrinkled, disheveled, with empty mouth, and eyes with color of amber, dressed in a shabby suit, and an unbuttoned shirt. He used nothing false - “There is only one step from false teeth to a false brain.”⁷⁸

In a sanatorium in Colorado, he was forced to eat pork then he fell into melancholy and became a vegetarian. His relationship with an intelligent Hebrew teacher – Deborah was unfilled. Their most intimate contact was when the two lovers exchanged their glasses.

When the narrator met him in a hotel lobby in Tel Aviv, he was surprised. Yabloner was having a speech, he was dressed an alpaca suit, a white shirt, a silk skullcap. His face was shining with freshness and youth. He spoke the old holy language with Ashkenazi pronunciation. This sad, melancholy man changed into talkative person with sense of humor, his triumph was symbol of the Eternal Jew.

A few years later, he returned home, to America, in his favorite cafeteria full of different voices and smells. He was alone, without his Israel wife. He was not

talkative, he did not like to meet Jews, he was hostile to the Sabbath itself. The narrator remembered his words: "Man doesn't live according to reason."⁷⁹

11.5 The Beard

Who can grow a beard? Whose symbol is it? Perhaps an old Hassid or a wise rabbi, in any way we can imagine a beautiful girl. Only Zelda Pupko – a *woman-schlemiel*. When she was young, she was a very pretty girl. She got married in Europe, and then in America she and her husband became very rich because of the stock. They were one of the people who became rich from day to day with a help of a mysterious advisor.

When her husband was hard ill she visited his friend - a Yiddish writer and did a dramatic confession of her long hermit's life. Her husband - Bendit Pupko was her contrast - a dark man with physical handicaps. He was "a little man, sick, pockmarked, with one blind eye and game leg" and "his teeth, crooked and black like rusted nails".⁸⁰ He liked go out to the Jewish cafeteria to discuss his works with other writers. He did not finish his plays, nobody wanted to read his poetry and publish his novels but he was a successful and rich old man. He could buy everything. He bought his fame as a excellent author for five thousand dollars. He quoted from the Talmud: "Money can purify a bastard."⁸¹

Why did he get married to a nice girl only to make from her a bizarre creature? When young Zelda grew a beard, neither shaving nor burning out could help her. She was unhappy because she had a beard, first black and then gray. Pupko felt in love with her beard and married her. Perhaps it was a symbol of temptation for him such as women's hair for old Jews.

Zelda could not shave her beard, so she shut herself up at home. Bendit Pupko was out with his friends while Zelda was home alone. Zelda's loneliness had changed her, she discovered a man's part in herself, her voice became gruff, she put on a men's shoes and smoked cigars.

She tried to save her husband who had cancer. She pleased his friend - a Yiddish writer - to write an article about her husband's works because Pupko was dying. His friend did not like corruption and promised not to write about him in any way. He has since changed his mind and wrote an article about Pupko's mostly unsuccessful works. He had been describing the change in behavior and thinking of European people when they came to America. "He describes half-crazed people, chronic

misers, old country quarrels which had gone on for so many years that no one know how they began or what they were about, and complicated love affairs which started in the Polish villages and were carried over East Side houses of New York and later to the hotels for old people in Miami Beach."⁸² Zelda read all husband's writings. When he had a problem with his books, she gave him a solution. They had no children, but his works were their children. Zelda was fighting for them. After her husband death she became very rich but she did not shave her beard or change her image. It was a symbol of her difficult love.

11.6 Lost

In this short story the young girl became a part of a mystery. She did not want to go to the USA, she did not want to be a Jewess. She did not want to be assimilated or study new languages. The United States was for her a demon's country full of inexplicable events and accidents. At the end of the nineteenth century it was a shame to go to America. "... to have son in America was considered a blight on the family - like having a convert or a suicide".⁸³

She was an orphan and her grandfather sent her to America to married Vladimir Machtei. She was an obedient granddaughter and went by ship to America, where she was very unhappy. She was a reticent barishnia (a name for miss in Russia before revolution) whose heart stayed in Russia, in the town of Kovno. "She was on her way a Russian patriot"⁸⁴, she did not give her daughter an American name but a typical Russian name - Natasha.

The beautiful, rich, intelligent woman - Anna Davidovna Barzel was on the way to America. On the board she had an accident, she lost all her money and the address of her fiancé. It was a sign not to travel to America, to return home. Her fate was different, for she was "a person born to lose and to be lost".⁸⁵

She did what her grandfather wanted. She promised to eat kosher food but she did not believe in the dietary laws. She was modern and clever girl that could have a good fate, but not in the USA. The devil was waiting for her there. She spoke only German and Russian, she refused to speak Yiddish, she did not learn English. She got married to a Jewish man who she became acquainted with on the boat. She started to be "a person not of this world ... she was the most silent creature ... she became talkative only when she lost something..."⁸⁶

On the other hand, her husband Sam Opal was an optimist and active person in the Jewish community - *landsleit*, he was a reader of Yiddish newspapers. He has no problem with immigration officers. He helped Anna to find her fiancé, but after seeking him without success he married her. He lived six years with Anna but staying with her was very difficult. At the beginning he had not believed her, he was crying at her then. He knew that hidden powers exist everywhere: demons, imps, devils, angels. He asked himself: "What would a demon do in New York?"⁸⁷ In the modern large city, where nobody has time for old stories and legends.

Singer describes in detail what Anna did before she disappeared in broad daylight in Manhattan. She was buying new shoes before their trip to the mountains. She had never returned home.

And where is Anna? Maybe she had found her lost fiancé, or returned to Russia to throw a bomb at the tsar, she is dead in the Hudson, in the sea or met with the devil. Maybe she had disappeared not to damage her family, because she had never returned home not to lose her daughter and husband like diamond rings, money, a teddy bear and so on. She went away to give her daughter and husband the opportunity to live a normal life.

When she vanished, her husband never got married, he wanted to solve this riddle, but he had never found an answer. Who knows how many people traveled to America only to see or to meet *Vladimir Machtei* (a demon) so as not to start a new life connected with enormous efforts and hard work?

11.7 Neighbors

In this short story Singer describes problems of old immigrants in New York. Well-educated people from Central Europe - Margit Levy and her friend Morris Terkeltoyb suffer from a persecution mania, a distrust of other people, from isolation and health problems. Although they had been living in the same house on Central Park West for years, they had never met, they had no friends or acquaintances there, but only a Yiddish writer connected them to the real-life world. At the end of their lives they found the most important value - a taste for life and a great love between a converted woman and a Jewish man.

Morris Terkeltoyb was a writer of *true stories* for the Yiddish newspaper. He liked speaking to elderly people and used them as models for his writing. He descended from Polish rabbis and merchants. He must have studied Talmud in his youth. Now

he was a lonesome old bachelor with a sick heart. He had much in common with Margit Levy. They mixed up names, dates, and episodes in their narrations. They made up whole stories and presented them as a true story.

Margit, who had a telepathic ability, felt it. She was afraid from the same unhappy fate, she detested this Polish *schlemiel*. When she lost her flat, behind his dull boasting she found a great friend. Only he was the man who helped her.

The whole short story is a celebration of human friendship, selfless help and love. Margit lived thirteen months longer than Morris. She did not know that Morris was a weak writer without knowledge of English syntax. He gave her new meaning of life, since she did not live in state of confusion never more. When she died, her last friend accompanied her to the chapel. He was alone when the rabbi said about Jewish woman with cross beneath her blouse: "The privilege of leaving a good name is for villagers only. In a city like New York, a person's name often dies before him."⁸⁸

She was dead for New York, but for Klimontów Society she was unforgettable, for she got a new Hebrew name Malkah Levy.

12 Conclusion

My intention in this bachelor thesis was to analyze selected short stories of a Polish-born Jewish-American author - Isaac Bashevis Singer. Because he wrote in Yiddish language, some literal scholars gave the question if he was an American author. According Sundel he was "a multicultural hybrid", "both a *shtetl* Hasid and a New York-Miami condo-loving Jew".⁸⁹ I used English versions of his short stories which he translated with help of his nephew Joseph Singer and other translators.

His uniquely Jewish writing deals with the Jewish-speaking immigrants in the United States of America, very often in bad conditions (in ghetto) among Holocaust survivors. His works contain a lot of autobiographical features (problems with language, accommodation, job, relations to animals, situation in Jewish press).

Singer is famous for his fascination with old people. Seldom, the heroes and heroines are young people or children. He admires a relic of old America - "a tall man with a white beard and long white hair".⁹⁰ Singer speaks about his religion, about Jews in the Diaspora, Zionism, orthodox Judaism, and the Hasidism of his ancestors, conversion to Judaism and renegades.

Jews who were displaced from rural Poland and metamorphosed due to a new immigration experience tried to conserve vestigial Jewishness in various way: by use

of Yiddish language in English-speaking milieu, by preparing traditional food, by writing at Yiddish newspapers, by helping the Jewish community, by visiting the séances, by looking for a new Messiah (e.g. Communists and their leader Stalin), by strange sex relation, by changing judges into victims and old victims into judges. Singer's poetics is full of motifs of melancholy, mysticism, depression, and supernatural events. By using them, he masterly emphasized problems of modern society. The readers can catch a hidden idea for the survival of the Jewish nation, for helping themselves under bad condition, for seeking the brotherhood. A Jew has a moral responsibility to save his own identity, culture, philosophy and history in every country. We can discard the latent message of biblical authority at the end of the short stories.

13 Czech Summary

Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo analyzovat vybrané povídky ze čtyř souborů povídek (*Old Love, The Séance, A Crown of Feathers a The Death of Methuselah and Other Short Stories*) známého fejetonisty, povídkáře a romanopisce Issaca Bashevisa Singera. Jedná se o židovsko-amerického spisovatele, který pocházel z tradiční rabínské rodiny v Polsku. V povídkách s americkými motivy se zabýval pobytem židovských hrdinů ve Spojených státech amerických, velmi často mezi lidmi, kteří přežili holokaust a usídlili se v New Yorku a v Miami Beach.

Práce ukazuje, jak postavy židovských imigrantů prožívají bolestný proces přechodu od původní kultury k americké (*process of whiteness*). Jejich náboženstvím je judaismus, který zdůrazňuje výlučnost židovského národa, jenž byl (podle jejich víry) jako jediný vybrán bohem ke spáse. Tato víra pomáhala židům přežít rozmanité útrapy: otroctví, vyhnanství, pogromy, masakry a antisemitismus. Ve svobodné americké společnosti, kde jim nehrozí žádné nebezpečí od kozáků, *szmalcowniků*, komunistů, ani nacistů, se paradoxně necítí být volní. Vedou vnitřní boj sami se sebou: nakolik mají ustoupit své výlučnosti a prastarých tradic a nakolik mají přijmout všechny výhody života v USA.

Jejich tzv. *americký sen* se hroutí, chápou jej jako novodobý mýtus, kterého nelze nikdy zcela plně dosáhnout. Ti, kdož si plně osvojili anglický jazyk, zajistili dobrou práci, vzdělání i vlastní domov, ztrácejí své kořeny, otevřený vztah k židovské komunitě, kontakt se starou vlastí i s rodinou. Muži tragicky zmizí žena za bílého dne na newyorských ulicích, milionář ztratí při autonehodě celou rodinu, jeden z

manželského páru je neplodný a manželství fyzicky zaniká, nebo dokonce si hrdinové nepřejí mít vlastní potomky. Buď o ně přišli za války a nechtějí znovu podobnou tragédii prožít, nebo prostě netouží po pokračovateli židovské tradice, ve které je *kadiš* (motlitba za mrtvé pronesená synem) vysoce ceněna. Některé ženy si dokonce stvoří *dybbuka* (démona), kterého nosí pod srdcem namísto dítěte.

Singer popisuje neradostné podmínky adaptace a asimilace židovských hrdinů a hrdinek, velmi často oduševnělých, ale osamělých lidí, žijících v naprosté chudobě newyorského ghetta, které se stává dokonalou nápodobou života v evropském *shtetlu*. Zachycuje problémy, se kterými se musel osobně potýkat po svém příjezdu do Ameriky, kdy přestal rozumět, stal se němým a hluchým. Jeho hrdinové se snaží (či nesnaží) překonat jazykovou bariéru, ale silný židovský přízvuk je vždy prozrazuje.

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