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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Novels by Chaim Potok, Philip Roth, and I.B. Singer Responding to the State of Israel

Romány Chaima Potoka, Philipa Rotha a I.B. Singera reagující na stát Izrael

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Abstract

The topic of this bachelor thesis is the analysis of novels of three Jewish American authors Chaim Potok, Philip Roth and Isaac Bashevis Singer and their respective approach to the establishment and development of the State of Israel. The theoretical part of the thesis considers the historical events and summarizes basic terms necessary for further research. In the following part the novels are analyzed in terms of their devices and the various perspectives of Israel provided by the protagonists. The final part of the thesis attempts to compare the novels in terms of common and individual features and their respective impact on the reader. As each of the novels covers a different period, they are eventually used to demonstrate how the public approach to the State of Israel has changed over time.

Anotace

Tématem této bakalářské práce je literární analýza tří románů amerických židovských spisovatelů Chaima Potoka, Philipa Rotha a Isaaca Bashevisa Singera a pohled těchto autorů na vznik a vývoj židovského státu Izrael. Úvodní teoretická část definuje základní pojmy a historické události nezbytné pro další postup. V následující části je každému autorovi věnována jedna kapitola, přičemž po krátkém úvodu následuje analýza jednotlivých děl, jejich jazykových prostředků a přístupu jednotlivých postav k danému tématu. Závěrečná část se pokouší porovnat společné a rozdílné prvky románů a definovat jejich vliv na čtenáře. Každý román se odehrává v jiném období, poukazují tedy na proměnu veřejného mínění a pohledu na Izrael jako takový.

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Preface

The Jewish nation has a vast history, full of suppression and hatred but also hope. The last centuries have been particularly painful for many Jewish people were lost in the Holocaust. But then the hope rose from the ashes as the new State of Israel was established. It is understandable that both these events are reflected in Jewish American literature.

The United States were the only place for Jews to come to when the pogroms in Poland and Russia stroke in the end of 19th century. Then again, before WWII came, they established Jewish communities in a New World. According to statistics, there are approximately 5.7 million Jews living in the United States today, thus the only place with more Jewish inhabitants is Israel with 6.1 million (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org). There are generations of Jews in the States, including well-known personnel, who tend to recover the memories of the long lost families. It is understandable that in the USA the memory of the Holocaust is more vivid than in any other country. Even the candidate for American President this year, Bernie Sanders, revealed that members of his family died in the Holocaust, and the article informing about his visit in Slopnice, Poland, cites the date (5th November 1942) when Sander's uncle, aunt and their kids were killed at Limanow, Poland (The Guardian, 2016).

The truth is, Jews have always felt bound to the others of the same beliefs, presumably much more than Christians ever felt. Even though they were safe in USA, nevertheless they experienced huge grief for those lost in the pogroms and Holocaust. Thanks to the safe refuge they had the opportunity to develop Jewish culture. Jewish literature is greatly represented by American Jewish authors. The analysis of literary works of three of Jewish American writers

Chaim Potok, Philip Roth and Isaac Bashevis Singer will be undertaken. These writers made great contributions to literature and to lesser extent to the knowledge we have about Jewish suffering. The aim of this work is first to introduce some events of Jewish history that are essential for understanding the four novels. Then I shall proceed with the literary analysis.

The historic excursion is based on secondary literature, whereas the literary analysis uses both primary and secondary literature. Each author's novel has a brief introduction, followed by a summary of historical events and then the literary analysis, divided into three chapters, one for each author. The conclusion deals with comparing all the novels their impacts and perspective to the matter.

1. Introduction

Jewish contributions to American literature have been significant for about one and a half century. Nevertheless there is not just one American-Jewish literature. There were numbers of different Jewish communities which formed based on their locations and experience before coming to USA, thus there are numbers of Jewish-American literatures (Wirth-Nesher, 2003: 4). As each of the listed authors has his particular background, their literary contributions differ in many ways and each of them needs specific historical introduction.

2. Historical background

2.1. The Zionist movement

In the late 19th century, anti-Semitism in Europe was growing intensely. The Dreyfus affair in France showed many, including Theodor Herzl, that something has gone wrong again in Jewish lives. It seemed that there are three possible solutions, from which the last one, seeking life in an independent Jewish country with Jewish government seemed to many like the best way to go. This option especially appealed to Theodor Herzl, a Hungarian-born journalist who made an effort to support the idea of independent Jewish state, first by contacting Turkish sultan, then by trying to influence German emperor and proposing his thoughts to the most important Jewish authorities in Western Europe. Later, in 1896 he started a World Zionist organisation and published *Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State)*, which became a manifest of Zionists (Gilbert, 2002: 27-28). In the pamphlet, Herzl claims that Jewish question is not social

nor religious, but national issue, and as the Jews are considered aliens in all the countries they live in, they should establish their own. (Herzl, 2009: 47) Hannah Arendt deals with the causes of the movement and claims that Zionism is a direct consequence of antisemitism of 19th century, it represents a “contraideology”. (Arendt, 1996: 19) Yet she contradicts the theory of “victims”, stating that there were reasons for the Jews to become detested. As Herzl puts it, the hatred towards the Jews might seem undeserved, yet Arendt questions the veracity of the theory, which is widely accepted by Jews, claiming that antisemitism is neither common nor natural, as it has roots in the historical events of 19th century. (Arendt, 1996: 54)

Herzl believed that due to the lack of support in their countries the Jewish nation should immediately return to Zion (Jerusalem) as Palestine is “our never-to-be-forgotten historical home”, the statement not only listed in his pamphlet but also presented at Zionist Congress at Basel in 1897. The delegates present at the gathering enthusiastically adopted his idea. (New York Times, 1897).

What Herzl may not have been aware of at that time was that the immigration to Eretz Israel had begun years ago. Between 1882 and 1903 more than 25 000 Jews came to Palestine. These were mostly Russian Jews and they formed the so called first Aliyah or first of the five major waves of immigration (Gilbert, 2002: 23).

After the Basel Congress the Zionists called for the renaissance of Jewish nation. But some Jewish communities had other plans than moving to Israel. The largest centre of Judaism, located in Russian empire, was more supportive of the idea of overthrowing the Tsar and

establishing a socialist government. The Zionists had to face the Bundists, whose proposals were equally appealing to people. The second largest communities of Jews were establishing in the USA, but the Zionist influence was even lower than in Russia. (Gilbert, 2002: 33-34)

Many didn't understand why Jewish people should aim for settling in Palestine and not establish colonies in the Americas (which was heavily supported by baron de Hirsh). Herzl opposed that in order to have wide settlement, the flag and idea is needed, not just money, the movement needs an ideal and faith and devotion. Herzl was later offered a territory in Uganda, which he accepted, claiming that he leads the Jewish nation to its destination on a detour, the way Moses did. Unfortunately this project was over when Herzl suddenly died in 1904 (Gilbert, 2002: 36-37)

The immigration to Palestine continued despite the death of the father of Zionism. Five aliyah came and the Jewish were settling in their "promised land" despite of fact, that they were surrounded by Arabs, which led to several conflicts.

2.2. Israeli Independence

Probably the greatest role played in establishing the independent Jewish state belonged to David Ben Gurion. He was a Russian-born Jew who came to Palestine with the second immigration wave. He fully supported the idea of Herzl and after studying law in Constantinople and participating in WWI he became leader of Zionist movement. He explained that unlike the Arabs, whose population in Palestine is not widely spread and who have many other places to go

in Asian countries, the Jewish have only one place, that represents a link to their origin and offers a hope for their future (Gilbert, 2002: 76). Over time the situation in Palestine became unbearable, the conflicts were intensifying and number of victims was increasing. In 1947 the conflict was presented to the United Nations to solve. On 29th November 1947 it was decided that Palestine would be divided between Arabs and Jews, thus allowing for the establishment of the Jewish state. The power shift was supposed to happen under the supervision of Great Britain, as the area of Palestine was under British administration since 1920. Yet the decision started not only as celebrations amongst Jewish people but also a wave of hatred rose and Arabs started to attack Jewish individuals, families, stores and Jewish public transports. This terror continued for more than five months (Gilbert, 2002: 163).

Barbarian behaviour was present on both sides. The Arabs might have started it, but the Jewish people participated in many terrible deeds. An important part in these conflicts was played by Irgun and Stern Gang (Lehi). Probably the worst massacre these two Zionist military groups performed was the Deir Yassin massacre in April 1948, which cost lives of 245 Arabian men, women and children. The remaining captives were transported to Jerusalem and shown in its streets. The Haganah leaders expressed their disapproval with the massacre immediately, but it remains a controversial topic until present days (Gilbert, 2002: 177).

In the following months the conflict was growing stronger. The fights over the route from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem were culminating. Ben Gurion was facing a decision, whether to declare the independence or not. United States were calling for a ceasefire. Jewish settlements were still in great danger. The Kfar Etzion' massacre, where the Arabian legions killed fifteen surrendering

Jews and then massacred over 120 local defenders, remained one of the most painful incidents of the war of independence.

One day later, on 14th of May 1948 the State of Israel was declared. Before the ceremony the United Nations General Assembly discussed the issue of Jerusalem, which was the last part that depended neither on Arabs nor Jews. All the suggestions were refused, as the Arabian nations demanded Jerusalem to be a strictly Arabian city (even though its population was mostly Jewish at that time). This assembly ended the British mandate and left Palestine to its own destiny. The Arabian and Jews were supposed to solve their problem on their own. David Ben Gurion was the first to sign the Declaration of Independence as both Prime minister and Defence minister (Gilbert, 2002: 192-193). Sadly, the war of independence lasted for another half a year and the aggression and the hatred between nations of Arabs and Jews go on until the present days. Jewish had their own state, their own refuge, but its position is neither safe nor solid.

2.3. Jewish communities in America

The importance of American Jewry during the post war period is undeniable. The Zionist movement was politically supported by the United States of America and later by the Soviet Union, who played significant part in the establishment of Jewish state (Krupp, 2013: 13). The American Jewish communities had their share of financial support of the matter and finances have flowed from US until the present day.

According to statistics, there are more than six million Jews in the United States (counting people that identify themselves as Jews based on the religion and culture), which is about 2.2% of the inhabitants. The largest movement in the States is the Reform Judaism at 35%, followed by Conservative Jews (17%) and Orthodox (10%), while thirty percent of Jews do not identify themselves with any of those. The polls also show that Jews tend to shift from one movement to another, usually towards the less orthodox one. (NY Times, 2013)

2.4. Hasidism

Hasidism is possibly the most significant eastern European movement founded by Baal Shem Tov in the 17th century. It followed the tradition of Jewish mysticism and kabala and was bound by a set of rules that intervened in every aspect of life (Schubert, 2003: 80). It is an orthodox movement and has many active followers all around the world, even in Israel. However it can be considered fanatic and their attitude towards the goyim and more importantly “Jewish goyim” is rather strict. Israel Shahak dares to call it a depreciation of Jewish mysticism. In Hasidic eyes, all life is inferior to Jewish life and the whole existence of a non-believer is useless, as the world itself was created for Jews (Shahak, 2005: 45). As it shows in the novels, Hasidism is indeed a fanatic movement and the tendency to move from them to a less orthodox group is rather anticipative.

2.5. Trial of John Demjanjuk

The set of trials with the Ukrainian-born U.S. citizen John Demjanjuk, presumed to be the notorious mass murderer Ivan the Terrible eventually led Israel to lose its good name. He was deported to Israel in 1986, stripped of his American citizenship and charged with the murders and torture of thousands of Jews in the Treblinka concentration camp. He was found guilty in 1988 and sentenced to be hanged but the judgement was overturned after five years, when new evidence was found. He regained his citizenship only to lose it again due to another accusation followed by a trial in Munich. Yet eventually Demjanjuk died unconvinced in 2012.

(NY times, 2012)

3. Chaim Potok

When analyzing Chaim Potok, it must be taken into account that he grew up in a Orthodox Jewish family in New York, both his parents were Polish immigrants and Hasidic Jews and they disapproved with his literary talent. He later left Hasidic fraction to become a Conservative Jew and later a Conservative rabbi. Both assessed novels reflect his religious family background, yet they are confronted with the modern life in America. According to Walden (2013: XI), Potok considers Judaism as a tradition integrating into the American culture, not opposing it.

3.1. *The Chosen*

One of Chaim Potok's most famous novels was first published in 1967 and its success was surprising for the author himself (Chavkin, 1999: 154). The reason why Potok's debut novel became so popular was, that Chaim Potok was the first author who introduced Jewish tradition to wider public in a comprehensible way (Walden, 2013: XI). Yet the first reviews of the novel were rather negative and Chaim Potok was never considered one of the giants of Jewish literature, unlike Philip Roth or Saul Bellow. That is the reason why he is not usually found in anthologies or collections of classic Jewish American literature (Walden, 2013: 4) The plot starts with a baseball game between two Yeshivas which eventually results in creating a strong bond between two boys from completely different families. Many serious issues are approached and several conflicts addressed in this novel and I shall proceed from the individual conflicts to greater ones, considering not only their role in the novel but also their transcendence. *The*

Chosen reflects the events of Second World War and the establishment of independent Jewish state. The author makes contrast between two different attitudes of Zionists and Hasids, thus forming a central religious conflict of the novel. However, as the story is narrated by an adolescent and the whole story is perceived through the eyes of two growing-up teenage boys, so it puts the novel into a whole different perspective.

It is interesting how Chaim Potok omits the usual difficulties of youth, such as romantic relationships, formation and membership of peer groups or the search for own identity, only to concentrate on more complicated issues. All the problems of youth mentioned above are present in the plot, though they are usually performed by a single utterance – Reuven shows interest in Danny's sister, they are each a member of a different group of students at school, etc.

3.1.1. Inner struggles

Starting with the conflict that involves the least amount of individuals thus only one, Danny's position is the most crucial in the plot. Danny Saunders, being a Hasid and Rabbi's son, is aware of the fact, that he is expected to be his father's successor. This part of reality is confronted with Danny's interest in psychology and hoping for a different future than the one that was chosen for him. In the beginning he keeps this secret until he reveals himself to Reuven, the narrator of the story, which helps him to ease the struggle. The fact still remains that on one hand Danny does not want to disappoint his father, who is a man of great respect and yet he feels he cannot give up on his own dreams, which necessarily leads to an unpleasant decision. The internal conflict Danny has to live with is typical for people whose religious background is this strong and strict, which makes it harder to let go. The conflict of beliefs and

passion, the secular and religious world to be precise, is the motif very often used in Potok's novels and is based on his own experiences of the disapproval of his parents and the whole orthodox Jewish community.

3.1.2. Interpersonal conflicts

In the novel, this particular level of disagreements between two individuals is represented by silence. Most of the relationships that the characters have are peaceful and lack major misunderstandings, even though it starts off with a baseball contest. The only one that shows some kind of a conflict is a father – son relationship, more precisely Danny's and his father's. Danny's feelings towards the fact he was raised in silence are quite ambivalent. The fact that his father does not speak to him unless they are having a debate over Torah and Talmud texts makes his own struggle even more difficult, as he sees no option of confronting his father and discussing his future. Reuven does not comprehend this kind of relationship as the own relationship with his reformed Jewish father is very open. What he does not realise is that even though Danny can't talk to his father, he can now reveal to Reuven all the issues that worry him, which makes the situation much simpler.

Reuven Malter also plays significant role in the reconciliation of the two Saunders men. As they can't speak to each other and resolve their problem themselves, Reuven served as a mediator. He is the link that Reb Saunders uses to finally speak up to his son. To express his feelings, his worries about the path his son had chosen and his reasons for raising his son and not speaking to him. This confrontation eventually solves both Danny's intrapersonal and

interpersonal conflicts. In the very end Danny admits that he might even raise his children the same way he was raised as “It is, perhaps, the only way to raise a tzaddik.” (Potok, 1968: 269)

The position of Reuven is not only to be an intermediary between Danny and Reb Saunders, but he also goes between Danny and his own father (as he presents Danny's thought to his father and vice versa); and finally he represents a link between the Saunders' and the Malter's clans, as the fathers never speak in person.

3.1.3. Religious disagreements

The first two conflicts described were universal, meaning that they were not necessarily bound to these particular individuals or to Jewish believers. Instead, conflict within the Jewish religion is more specific. The two fractions of Jewish people, Hasids and Reformists to be more precise, reflect two different approaches to faith and beliefs but also to the future of Jewish people, thus to the establishment of the State of Israel. Each side is represented by one of the fathers. Reuven Malter's father David, Reformist and Zionist, is trying his best to support the Zionist efforts in Palestine by writing articles and then giving speeches. Reb Saunders on the other hand is a true representative of Orthodox Hasidic community. He claims that until a messiah appears the Jews should not go to Israel, for it is not God's will. This is such an important dogma for Chasidic Jews that when David Malter presents his speech supporting the establishment of Israel, Reb Saunders forbids his son to ever talk with or of Reuven Malter again. From Reb Saunders point of view he was given no other option, as he was able to allow his son befriend a Reformist, as long as he did not oppose him publicly. As soon as the articles about the manifestation came out, he could no longer defend the Malter's without losing the trust of his

people. Likewise, Danny was not given any choice, as his respect for his father, no matter how confused, is the most crucial pillar of their relationship. The conflict is performed by a disagreement of two families, though they represent a disunity within Jewish communities in USA, therefore within Jewry in general. One would say that after centuries of suppression Jewish nation would be united when it comes to having their own country, their Jewish sanctuary. Both fathers express their feelings about the issue, Malter stating that they have waited long enough for the Messiah (Potok, 1968: 186), Reb Saunders opposing, that if the foundation of Eretz Yisroel is not accompanied by the arrival of Messiah, it becomes a land of Jewish goyim and it is better to live in a country of true goyim than Jewish ones (Potok, 1968: 188).

Reb Saunders tends to take the issue more personally. He did lead his people from Russia to the United States, only to witness the horrors that happen to those left behind. The religious beliefs of his circle are somehow rigid and even if he himself wanted to think otherwise, he could not admit it, as Zionism in the eyes of Hasidim is the same as heresy. He had no other option than to forbid his son to speak to Reuven, Danny had no other option than to obey him, leaving Reuven isolated and full of contempt. It is apparent that the boys both suffer from the forced separation. However, it is the attitude of the fathers that is worth taking into account. Reuven's father understands Reb's decision, even though it does not appeal to him and he tries to explain it to his son. Reb Saunders official opinion is clear, yet he does suffer from his own decision, as by banishing Reuven he lost an entrepreneur to talk to his son and he is left aware of everything Danny does or plans to do and is not able to discuss it with him.

3.1.4. United Perception of Holocaust and Violence

The two fractions, the Reformists and Hasids are unable to agree on the establishment of Israel. However, they do agree on the preceding events - the Holocaust or Shoah. None of them doubts the horrors happening in the work camps and gas chambers, therefore both fractions feel the compassion for those they lost and those that remain. In a way both fractions realize that something should happen, though Reformists decide to take actions and Hasids remain passive, waiting for the Messiah to come: "How the world drinks our blood." Reb Saunders said. "How the world makes us suffer. It is the will of God. We must accept the will of God." (Potok, 1968: 181)

Both fractions do believe in God, in the frequently hateful violent God of Judaism. The Hasids accept the situation in silent agony, whereas the Reformist decide to help themselves. David Malter covers the attitude in a response to his son's story: "*We cannot wait for God. There is only one Jewry left now in the world. It is here, in America. We have a terrible responsibility. We must replace the treasures we have lost.*" (Potok, 1968; p. 182) This is a crucial idea of Zionism. "We cannot wait for God". They do believe in God and his will, but they cannot accept the idea of God wanting them suffer so badly, which eventually leads to the idea of establishing an independent Israel on their own, as that must be God's will. The return to Zion is what should "compensate" Jews for their loss.

As in every other religion, the interpretation of what God wants from us is closely connected with the one who interprets God's will, meaning it varies from one to another. The study of the Torah is associated with the commentaries and it cannot be studied without those,

meaning that the whole Judaism is based on different interpretations of a text.

It is the approach to the violence that eventually unites the fractions, or at least helps make peace within the two communities. As the establishment of the State of Israel is followed by a bloodshed, as the Arabs attack Jewish communities and the numbers of dead Jews increase, those who openly opposed the idea of Jewish state grew silent. The League for religious Eretz Yisroel, led by Reb Saunders started as a somewhat radical organization, threatening with excommunication to anyone who would dare support the Zionism, but as the fight continues, they stop giving out the leaflets. Later, when the United Nation's truce comes unto effect, the League ceases to exist, at least within the college grounds. (Potok, 1968: 241) Soon after, Danny is allowed to speak to Reuven again, which has a certain symbolism of reconciliation. Two completely different communities which have unique attitudes towards a crucial issue regarding their nation eventually decide not to fight each other, as there are enough dead Jews already. Not that they would kill each other, but in terms of Judaism, an excommunicated Jew is almost the same as a dead Jew, as the Kaddish is said for such a person.

3.1.5. Role change

Danny and Reuven work as a link between two families and also two communities. Their religious background determines them to certain actions and goals. The fascinating thing is, that their decisions do not correspond with the community they grew up in. Reuven decides to be a rabbi, a Reformist one, yet a rabbi, even though his father would prefer him to be a mathematician. Danny finds himself in the same yet more complicated position, as he desires to be a psychologist, but he is expected to inherit the special position of rabbi after his father

(Potok, 1968: 70-71). He even reveals to Reuven that his concerns about his brother's health are motivated by hope. Danny hopes that his brother Levi becomes strong enough to become a rabbi instead of him, so he could pursue his dream. The reader does not learn whether Levi gets better or not. However Danny and Reb Saunders eventually speak about the subject, through Reuven of course. Reb appears omniscient regarding the situation, as it is him who initiates the discussion, which surprises both Danny and Reuven.

The ultimate debate between Danny, Reb Saunders and Reuven brings a final reconciliation. The Reformists and Hasids made peace, Reb Saunders approves of his son's choice, Danny accepts his father's method of upbringing in silence and finally, Reuven manages to understand the whole relationship of the two Saunders. He is explained the role of silence, the importance of soul and mind and even though he does not agree with such method, he comprehends it.

3.1.6. Conclusion

Chaim Potok tends to romanticize his characters and his depiction of Jewish life in America is rather sentimental. None of his characters is evil, only misunderstood or confused, which is one of the reasons why Potok is often criticized and considered merely a “popular” writer (Walden, 2013: 5). Yet Potok managed to narrate a complicated message through two Jewish young men, making it easier to process issues within the larger community. He also shows a certain weakness for happy endings, which transforms the story into a fairytale. Such tales are often surrounded by misunderstandings and violence, as it was in this case, but eventually the

reader feels content with the outcome. That is certainly the reason why *The Chosen* was so popular. The novel adopts a certain perspective regarding the identity of a man, the identity of a Jew and the principle of coincidence, which shall be further assessed in the final chapters of this thesis.

3.2. *My name is Asher Lev*

The novel published in 1972, five years after *The Chosen*, is not directly linked to the subject of Israel, however it is considered biographical and allows the reader to further comprehend the motives of the characters and the author himself. Also it provides further understanding of hierarchy within Hasidic communities.¹

The author himself is a writer and a painter, while growing up in an Orthodox Jewish family and community, he experienced disapproval and discouragement. The novel reflects the philosophical conflict between the orthodox religion and the secular life of an artist. (Sternlicht, 2000: 81)

The main protagonist, Asher Lev may be compared somewhat to Danny from *The Chosen*, as they were both brought up in a Hasidic family and both of them eventually chose to abandon it to pursue their dreams of secular character. However, Asher Lev is a narrator of his story while Danny is only a secondary character. Both novels are narrated by a young boy and later a young man, which gives the books a specific perspective.

¹ Though the English translation was used for analysis, due to the lack of page numbers the sources are marked in the Czech translation.

3.2.1. Jewish World of Asher Lev

The novel is set in 1950s and 1960s, somewhat later than *The Chosen*. The characters witness historical events and comment on the mistreatment of Jews, mostly focusing on Stalinist Russia. Asher's father Aryeh travels for The Rebbe and helps people from Europe to join their communities in USA. Such events as Night of the Murdered Poets or the Doctor's plot play significant role in the story (Potok, 1996: 45). In *My Name is Asher Lev*, Europe and especially the eastern part of it is described as a place which hates Jews. The horrors happening under the rule of Stalin are compared to the pogroms of late 19 century, illustrating the continuation of suffering of Jewish people living there (Potok, 1996: 53).

When the characters are confronted with an unpleasant situation, they usually turn to God or Ribono shel Olam, asking him about his intentions, which can be interpreted as an absence of the free will of the people, which is a common feature of strict religious groups. Even Asher turns to God, questioning his talent. If it is presumed that everything is God's will, even his uncontrollable urge to paint must be God's will, yet everyone denounces painting as not suitable for a proper Jewish boy. (Potok, 1996: 91)

Unlike Danny, Asher is not brought up in silence, though his father is constantly absent. The growing-up child's necessity of fatherly figure results in Asher's search for a substitute father, which he eventually finds in Jacob Kahn. Little is known about Danny's mother although the position of Rivkeh, mother of Asher is crucial for the story. She starts as a housewife who eventually works for The Rebbe together with her husband and in Asher's eyes, she is always in

the centre of attention, as he draws her since he was a little boy and eventually depicts her in his ultimate painting, the Brooklyn Crucifixion.

3.2.2. Interpersonal conflicts

The resemblance of Asher and Danny are not only on the outside, but both characters in search for their identity deal with mental difficulties. In Asher's case this is depicted in his nightmares where he is confronted with his ancestor, who disapproves of his non-Jewish intentions. Asher is torn apart, as his talent is stronger than his consciousness yet he tries not to hurt his family and community. The two aspects of his personality intensify his suffering, but eventually the talent wins, causing the ultimate separation from his relatives.

3.2.3. Hasidism

The novel provides a thorough insight of life in an orthodox Ladover community. The Hasids do not approve of artists, and painting is considered nonsense (Potok, 1996: 97) It demonstrates that there is no secular culture amongst the Hasidim, as they tend to believe that a painter cannot be a pious Jew. All actions within the community are coordinated by The Rebbe who eventually allows Asher to paint and arranges a meeting with Jacob Kahn. Even though Jacob Kahn is not a Hasid, he refers to The Rebbe as "our rebbe" and he somehow feels like a part of the community, no matter how distant his lifestyle is compared to the Ladovers. (Potok, 1996: 143) This shows how strongly bonded Jews are to the religion they grew up in.

3.2.4. Conclusion

Technically speaking, the novel *My Name is Asher Lev* plays a minor part in the matter of subject of this thesis. However it provides additional information to *The Chosen*, as it is narrated from within the Hasidic community not from the outside. Such aspect is useful for the analysis of *The Chosen* itself and for further comparison with the remaining novels, as the Orthodox perception of life and culture is also present in *The Penitent*.

4. Isaac Bashevis Singer – *The Penitent*

Isaac Bashevis Singer was born in Poland and raised in an orthodox and pious family. According to Noiville, the Singers had at least seven generations of rabbis belonging to the longstanding Hasidic tradition, one of Singer's ancestors had even been a disciple of the founder of Hasidism (Noiville, 2006: 7). Isaac Bashevis was introduced to the world of literature by his brother Joshua, who remained his mentor until his death in 1944 (Noiville 2006: 27). Both brother detached from the world they grew up in and became writers.

Main difference between the works of Singer and other two assessed writers is that his novels and stories are written in Yiddish and later translated into English, usually by his nephew. Even though the translation is performed by someone close, there are aspects that get lost during the process. If a reader encounters with other translations, the features of the original work might be completely absent, as the English version is used as the base for other versions.

Singer's novel, *The Penitent* ("Der bal-tshuve") was published in 1973 as a series in the newspaper *Jewish Daily Forward*, a year or so later published in Israel and translated into English ten years after. In the meantime, in 1978 he became a Nobel Prize laureate in literature. As Irving Saposnik remarks, the English versions of Singer's novels are rather shortened, losing some of the religious aspects and descriptions, thus the Yiddish version should be the primary source of literary study of his fiction (Wolitz, 2013). However, as the knowledge of Yiddish is not in my competence, the analysis uses the English and Czech translations, yet confronts them with secondary literature which works with the original novel.

4.1. Introduction

The Penitent uses two narrators, one of them being the author himself and the other one is Joseph Shapiro. The author provides an introduction and a conclusion, though the final note is only present as an author's commentary and is no longer part of the story. Most of the time, the reader encounters Joseph Shapiro, who is in fact "the penitent" or as he puts it, "the one, who comes back home" (Singer, 1983: 5). As explained in the English version of the novel, "Der baal-tshuvah" means "the one, who returns", which makes "the penitent" a not so proper translation, as it usually refers to "a sinner who regrets and desires an atonement". As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Joseph Shapiro is indeed "the penitent", as the reason why he returns to Israel is the urge to move away from sin, yet it confirms a previous statement, that the translation loses a significant part of the contents.

Shapiro states that "baal tshuvah" means one who returns, yet he came back home, putting a contrast between the two definitions. He claims that if a Jew remains a proper Jew, only his body was in exile, not his soul. As the body is of less importance, the soul of a good Jew remained home. Only when a Jew loses his spiritual way of life to embrace the perks of modern society, that is when his soul finds itself in exile too, which is a much worse situation. According to that definition, Joseph Shapiro's body and soul were both in exile and they both returned home.

4.2. Day one

The narrator shortly informs about the situation in Europe during a Second World War, how he got from Poland to Russia, then back to Lublin and from Lublin to USA, and briefly sums

up how he reunited with his girlfriend Celia and married her. He later finds himself in a romantic triangle, having a secret lover called Liza. After an argument with Liza he comes home only to find out Celia has an affair with one of her professors. He subsequently packs his things, and leaves. For a short period of time he lives in a hotel and one day joins a minyan, to participate in a prayer and it is this event that makes him reconsider his life and leads him to the decision that he should leave for Israel.

Shapiro describes modern lifestyle as a horrible thing for Jewry. He claims that today's Jew is nothing but a Goy (Singer, 1983: 31). He further develops this thought by stating that if it were not for the diaspora, the Jews would be gone. He implies that it would not be the Shoah or wars that would destroy the Jewry but the desire of Jews to resemble the goyim. Eventually the Jews would blend in with other nations and disappear. (Singer, 1983: 91). To mention such a thing right after speaking of war is rather controversial. The way Shapiro puts it, it would be wrong for a Jew to fuse with other nations, which demands that if a Jew wants to remain a Jew, he must not get romantically involved with a goyim. The idea of keeping the Jewry pure, of procreating with only those of the same religion, referring to the religion in a way that suggests that Jews are a different species, resembles a fundamental ideology. Even though one would suppose that Judaism and Nazism stand on opposite sides of a barricade, they share common elements, which is typical for radical ideologies, as those tend to resemble each other. Israel Shahak claims that there is no difference between antisemitism, its religious causes and what is happening in Israel, as long as there is prevailing discrimination. However, the second matter is generally perceived as nonexistent. (Shahak, 2005: 17)

The main protagonist experiences an identity crisis which resolves in an inner struggle between himself and what he calls "The Evil Spirit". The disunity of his thoughts is natural when one tries to coordinate a traditional Jewish way of life with modern society. Despite the fact that Shapiro hears two distinct voices, the "good Jew" and "The Evil Spirit", his approach to the problem is rather black and white, meaning that he only sees the good about Judaism and only the bad about the rest of society. He does not consider all the aspects of the issue and he draws a single conclusion: "Modern lifestyle is wrong for a Jew, in order to escape the sinful life, one has to atone for them, return to one's homeland and become a true Jew."

4.3. Day two

After he arrives to Israel, Shapiro learns that his homeland - he considers Israel to be his homeland, though he had never lived there - is far from what he imagined. Even on the flight to Israel he is taunted by an Evil Spirit, when a Jewish woman sits next to him on the plane. She represents everything he is trying to escape from and he expresses his disappointment when he learns she is traveling to Israel. He thinks that God exiled the sinful only to gather back the filth that descended from the sin. (Singer, 1983: 82), though his actions at that moment do not correspond with his thoughts, he is constantly full of disgust towards the disloyalty and corruption of the people, of his own people to be precise. He expresses contempt for the petty problems of the goyim world, which has infiltrated into Israel. He observes how women follow a ridiculous urge to look younger and more desirable, reading magazines that describe details of Hollywood stars' sex lives. He sees how Jewishness in Israel is not based on faith but a habit, a routine and is reluctantly accepted, but not truly embraced. He finds it upsetting that six million

Jews died in the Holocaust, the Jews growing up in the Diaspora had become fully or partially atheistic, and what is left within the state of Israel is surrounded by tens of millions of enemies ready to erase the remaining Jewry. (Singer, 1983: 104)

Eventually Joseph Shapiro becomes a Jew he wishes to be, a Jew of the Torah, of faith, marrying a proper Jewish woman, Sarah. However he presents the turnout of events as the ultimate solution of Jewish situation, as the only possible means of salvation. He idealizes the community he finds himself in as a company of equals, where no one competes or compares, believing he found a place where he belongs.

4.4. Fanaticism and Morality

In *The Penitent* reader observes orthodox Jewry from quite a new perspective. Joseph Shapiro represents a religious radical and a fanatic, yet he is depicted as a man who achieved peace and became humble and pious. Though he does not mean any harm to non-believers, he criticizes them a lot, making no boundaries between a Goy and a Jewish Goy. Interesting is that it is acceptable to be a goy whereas being a Jewish goy, a Jew that turned away from God and Jewry, is considered an abomination. It is an attitude rather typical for orthodox Jewish communities, such as Hasidic groups, and as the author grew up in such environment, it can be anticipated that it reflects his novels. To the bound version of his novel, Singer attached an author's note, in which he writes that unlike the protagonist he does not believe in the ultimate escape. There is no final rescue. Also, the fundamentalist and pious Jews tend to make peace with God, as everything is God's will, even the horrors of a war, yet the author is not accustomed

to such. (Singer, 1983: 168)

In the final chapter of the novel, Shapiro defends his choices to the woman he met on the airplane, Priscilla, and at one point he denounces the idea of humanism, declaring that it is the biggest lie in the world. In his eyes, there is no such thing as morals without faith (Singer, 1983: 157). In this light everyone who does not consider oneself as a believer, is an immoral being. If taken literally, every non-Jewish person is a non-believer, a Jewish Goy is worse than a regular Goy, hence also non-believer, which implies that only a Talmudic Jew possesses some sort of morality. Thinking of pious Jews as of the only moral persons is one step further toward the common belief of Jewish superiority. The Jews consider themselves as the chosen people, Israel is their Promised Land as stated in the Old Testament, yet the condemnation of everyone else represents a fundamental element of all radical religious groups, including the islamic ones, which is somewhat paradoxical.

4.5. Depiction of Israel

Joseph Shapiro speaks of Israel before the Six-Day War, yet the year is not specified. Before his arrival he considers the country as the only hope for his salvation, he perceives Israel as a sanctuary for Jewish souls. He expresses a wish to go to the Promised land at the very beginning, when he leaves Europe for the United States, wishing he got a visa to Israel (Singer, 1983: 12). As he arrives, he is displeased with the conditions within the country. He does not bear in mind the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but depicts the corruption amongst the Israeli Jews. In his imagination, Israel was supposed to be The Promised Land, the biblical place, where all the

pious Jews are to be gathered. Shapiro himself returns to Israel, even though he could have stayed with the Hasidic group he met right before his departure. Nevertheless he considers Israel to be better choice, as if he were to return to his ancestral roots. Later he describes his disappointment with the atrocities extended to the Holy Land. However, he often speaks of women committing sins or of people in general. It might have not been intended, still it seems he makes direct link between corruption and women. It is women who take part in adulteries, who read the magazines about Hollywood affairs, whose greatest wish is to look much younger and more desirable. From the very beginning, women are depicted as corrupted creatures, starting with Celia (a socialist, having an affair with her professor), his own lover Liza and her daughter (both sucking money from their sponsor Shapiro), Priscilla (the woman on the plane who tries to seduce him) and later with women in Israel, who talked loshon hora about other women, spoke about intimate subjects, colored their lips and such. In contrast to those nasty women, Shapiro depicts Sarah as the true Jewish wife. The description of her associates with her name, which unlike all the other female names appeared in a Bible. However, Shapiro speaks of no man the way he portrays Sarah, meaning he can observe both corruption and holiness in females. The novel focuses on the evil that is in women, even though it describes strong, independent and competitive females trying to work their way up in a masculine world, when it comes to Sarah, she is the decent, traditional wife, which also means her position is inferior within the family, thus as soon as Shapiro marries her, she vanishes from the spotlight.

4.6. Conclusion

The novel deals with search for one's identity, the position within Jewry, repentance and corruption. The main protagonist eventually reaches peace and spiritual insight, yet he condemns everything that he has left behind, not admitting the function and purpose of elements of modern lifestyle. However, he addresses several important topics, such as the breakdown of the traditional family, loyalty, position of women and the information overload. He discovered peaceful life in faith and devotion to God, embracing his own spirituality. Even though he complains that the state of Israel was a failure in the eyes of Moses, as it is full of idolatries (Singer, 1983: 93), he eventually finds the sanctuary he seeks which seems like the purpose of the Holy land, despite the evil that reached its borders.

The author's note disagrees with some of the ideals represented by the protagonist of the novel, claiming not only that there is no ultimate rescue, but also that a human being fights the moral war all its life and contradictory emotions can coexist within one's soul simultaneously. The author also points out the importance of free will, which would vanish if there was a permanent solution to the human dilemma. (Singer, 1983: 169)

5. Philip Roth – Operation Shylock

Philip Roth is considered one of the three giants of Jewish literature, together with Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud and Safer (1994: 157) claims, that the reviewers often describe his writing style as that of a stand-up comedian. He often uses Jews and Jewish traditions as the inspiration for his humour. However, Roth seems to be writing about Jews from the outside, like a person closely familiar with the particular lifestyle that never lived it (or lived it a long time ago). Compared to Philip Roth's novel, those of Potok and Singer come out as fairytales. Roth criticizes and mocks everything there is to mock about Jewishness and he is sometimes not very popular amongst his own folk for that. Conservative members of the Jewish community felt that the mocking of one's own people was inappropriate to which Roth responded with the statement that he does not mock an entire nation but only individuals. One does not condemn all French after reading *Madame Bovary*. (Kirsch, 2014) While that statement might be true, no French felt so bound to other of the same nation as the Jewish do to their kin, thus it is understandable that some of the Jews take his mockery of Jewish individuals very personally.

Unlike Potok or Singer, Philip Roth is a controversial and satirical writer. Even though he grew up in an almost exclusively Jewish neighbourhood, and was born to Jewish parents, he considers himself a rational atheist. This has obviously a great impact on his works and the point of view he writes from. (Roth Pierpont 2014: 299) Roth believes that an author is defined by the language he writes in, thus he prefers to be called an American author rather than a Jewish author. (Thurman, 2014)

Roth 's most famous works include *Portnoy's Complaint (1969)* and *American Pastoral*

(1997), the second mentioned winning him a Pulitzer Prize in 1998. The novel *Operation Shylock* was published in 1992 and together with *Patrimony* (1991) and *The Facts* (1988) forms a “nonfictional trilogy”. (Rabbino 1998: p. 70) It is observable how his writing style and approach change, for the novels of the 80s and 90s are less traditional than the previous. Roth employs postmodern features such as multiple narratives, deconstruction and the relationship between the narrative and the message. (Safer 1994: 157)

5.1. Introduction

Operation Shylock, as a novel of the 90’s, does not contain as much enthusiasm about Zionism and Israel as the works of his fellow writers. The Diaspora support becomes more apparent, thus creating a principal conflict regarding Israel. The struggle is real even in the 21st century, when Europe experienced several terrorist attacks, some aimed at Jewish inhabitants. After such attacks Israel usually issues a statement about the need of another aliyah of European Jewry instead of taking diplomatic actions. Jewish communities inform about having lived in Europe for thousand years, surviving Holocaust and thus not moving anywhere. (Brownfield, 2015)

Philip Roth uses the tension between the Zionists who reject the Diaspora and those claiming that Jews should return to Europe, thus he includes it in some of his works, including *Operation Shylock*. Roth plays with the Diasporic incompleteness of characters which is undergirded by the idea of A.B. Yehoshua who believes that exile Jews are only partial Jews. However, Roth suggests that the lack of wholeness is something essential for a Jew. (Grumberg,

2009: 39)

In *Operation Shylock* Roth also transcends the boundaries of fiction and history, as he uses details from his own life and makes two of the characters carry his own name. Simultaneously he ridicules his own persona by giving one of the characters a rather humiliating nickname. While addressing his own identity, he also questions the Israeli law and its legitimacy through the trial of John Demjanjuk, presumed to be the notorious Ivan the Terrible, who tortured Jews in concentration camp. The early title of the book was *Duality*, which is a central topic of the novel, as there are not only two characters named Philip Roth but John Demjanjuk is presumably not the Nazi war criminal he is thought to be. (Roth Pierpont 2014: 175) Duality is also present in the perspective of the narrator, who at some point could not separate fiction and facts within the novel due to his medication.

The boundary between fiction and reality is even more vague thanks to Roth's statement that everything in the book is true. As he comments in an interview:

The only thing I've told them is that when I wrote 'Portnoy's Complaint,' everybody was sure it was me, but I told them it wasn't. When I wrote the 'Ghost Writer' everybody was sure it was me, but I said none of these things ever happened to me. (...) And now when I tell the truth, they all insist that I made it up. I tell them, 'Well, how can I make it up since you've always said I am incapable of making anything up?' I can't win! (Fein, Esther 1993)

Even though it can't be sufficiently distinguished, it provides a guide to the way the author constructs the reality and perceives his own life, as both of these reflect in the fiction he writes.

Most of Roth's novels depict the crisis of identity as a major theme and that is also the case of *Operation Shylock*. The main protagonist suffered from a breakdown after taking Halcion and experiences problems with distinguishing the reality. He states at the very beginning, if

someone had told him few months before (while still on pills) that Philip Roth is in Israel, he would have believed it and would probably commit suicide right after. (Roth 1993: 22)

5.2. Analysis

Philip Roth, the author, operates with several characters in order to provide different approaches to Judaism and the role of Israel. According to Koy (2015: 2), a typical feature of his characters is that they each come from different cultural background and in some cases are of different races, therefore they provide different response to the topic. These should illustrate the reality of living in Israel and being a Jew or at least the author's vision of it. Roth also lacks the idealistic approach typical for earlier statements and works regarding the Jewish state and provides the reader with a critical and satirical depiction of confusion and disunity of the Israeli population and of the Jewish nation in general.

There are several characters, each taking a different side of the problem, that are worth analyzing. Probably the most eloquent is Moishe Pipik, Philip Roth's impostor. If we presume that the novel is at least partially autobiographical and the characters each represent some thoughts of their creator, Moishe Pipik represents the dark side, whereby Philip Roth speaks fairly rationally and George Ziad is the representative of the non-Jewish way of thinking. It is apparent that a healthy and intelligent human interested in the matter should take into account all these attitudes and somehow manage to apply them to specific situations. It is not typical for such a Jewish matter, as there is some sort of a stigma that prevents most people from observing the issue in its complexity, the more interesting it is to analyze the thoughts that should be present one by one.

5.3. Moishe Pipik

The character's motivations are quite clear, though some of his life's aspects remain unknown. The reader does not know what his real name is, nor is he informed about his end (though Philip Roth imagines he died). As a most radical and fanatic character, Moishe Pipik is possibly the easiest to analyze. He is a bit of an idealist and lacks the ability to view the issue from a different perspective. That is apparent from the beginning, as in the first chapter, when he is on the phone with Pierre Roget (unaware it's Roth pretending to be a French journalist) and gives him a passionate speech about a hearty welcome the Jews would get when returning to Europe. (Roth, 1993: 45) Pipik also acquaints Philip with the agenda of the movement that opposes Zionism, the so called Diasporism, whose main aim is to establish Jewish settlements within the European countries where there had been sizeable Jewish populations before the World War II. (Roth, 1993: 44) As he states, Diasporism is a necessary movement, as the second Holocaust would not happen in Europe but in Israel because the conflict between the Jews and the Arabs are escalating. (Roth, 1993: 43)

The question is not whether Pipik's presumptions about the danger lurking at every corner of Israel are eligible. Israel has been a dangerous place from the very beginning of its existence as an independent state. The anger growing amongst the Jews, Muslims and Arabs is a cluster of time bombs, and every once in awhile one of these explodes. The question is, is there place for Jewry in Europe? Even if the circumstances were better and the Jews did come back, would that help the situation? Even though it is highly improbable that a second holocaust would take place in Europe, the Jews had never attracted much sympathy for themselves, thus the best they could expect is to be reluctantly accepted.

At some point, the reader would sympathize with Pipik. Though applying the idea of Diasporism is rather eccentric, it is a dream and dreams do come true from time to time. The reader is to contemplate the idea and eventually might grow fond of it, but before that can happen, Pipik goes through a transformation. Pipik seemed to be a peculiar man with a dream but turns out to be completely irrational, bending all the facts in order to fit them into his own theory and before the climax of the book (or after a climax, if meant literally) he enters a new dimension of craziness. In the audiotope he leaves for Philip, not only does he question the veracity of Holocaust, declaring that “there were no gas chambers” (Roth, 1993: 253) but that the “six millions didn’t die. There weren’t six million Jews in Europe.” (Roth, 1993: 255). These statements contrast with his previous beliefs. Though he does not specifically mention gas chambers of six million dead Jews, he does however speak of the tragedy of a Holocaust during the phone call (Roth, 1993: 43)

It is necessary to mention Pipik's attitude to Zionism. He does acknowledge the role of Zionism in the postwar era, when Europe was inhabitable for Jews for obvious reasons. Zionism was sort of a cure for the disease Ashkenazi European Jewry suffered from, so it was necessary. Additionally, the Zionism managed not only to heal the Jewish people but it restored the Jewish life and Hebrew language in a somehow unexpected place (Roth, 1993: 44) The Jewish people suffered a lot in the Holocaust and even those who managed to escape the horror itself have lost families in the gas chambers and work camps. The term “family” however might have a broader meaning than we are used to, as members of Jewish communities tend to feel closer to each other.

Pipik's state of mind is accompanied with his physical appearance. The fact that he is missing his reproductive organs automatically puts him in the position of a lesser man. It also represents the humiliation, an element so essential for the novel and for Jewry itself. Pipik is constantly put down by Philip (who uses that strategy as a self-defence). Moreover, Philip even gives him the humiliating nickname, partially to distinguish himself from the impostor, who does look a lot like him. However there is a certain level of humiliation hidden within the term Diaspora. The Jews from Diaspora are often referred to using forms of Hebrew expressions *galut* and *gorah*. While *gorah* is a neutral word simply stating that someone is living in exile, *galut* contains and undertones humiliation and degradation. (Grumberg, 2009: 47) Diaspora can be perceived both as humiliating and neutral. The same rule applies to Israel, at least according to Pipik's statements – Israel can be seen both as a natural development of events as well as a necessary evil that is no longer desirable and affects the Jewish inhabitants in a not very pleasant way.

Overall, Moishe Pipik is an unfortunate figure, consumed by his beliefs and opinions. The development of the character's perception is also regrettable. At the beginning of the novel, he is the type of an idealist one can sympathize with, but later he becomes a fool to be pitied and eventually he is stripped of the last bits of dignity and all that is left is travesty.

5.4. Philip Roth

One would say Philip Roth, the protagonist, is the one voice of reason in the book. The complicating element is the Halcion affair which caused problems with recognizing the reality

and despite what he said might sound clear and rational, the emotions and thoughts that accompany such statements are definitely not. Most often he laughs (Roth, 1993: 83) or questions the reality, which usually ends with his persuasion that everything was just a dream or a hallucination and that he had never left for Israel (Roth, 1993: 176). The absurdity of the situations he is experiencing makes such behaviour understandable, nevertheless it makes the reader question one's own perception of the real world and the literary reality.

Roth does not reason with Pipik, he rather derides his ideas. His thoughts of Jewry in Europe can be summarized by a single utterance in the novel: "No, fewer Jews is my sense of how Europe prefers things, as few of them as possible. Diasporism, my dear, seriously misses the point about the depths of the antipathy." (Roth, 1993: 221) However, he does not present this statement to Pipik himself but to his mistress Jinx. He makes a point, it is improbable that Europe would welcome the Jews back with a bottle of champagne and it would be certainly reasonable to present such argument during a serious conversation. Nevertheless Roth never gets an opportunity to have an adult dispute with Pipik and he presumably does not even want to. The absurdity of the situation lies in the following actions, as Roth eventually has sex with Jinx, emphasizing the degradation of a man with no genitals. He then runs away, never hearing from either of the two again.

In the final chapter, he imagines receiving a letter from Jinx, in which his contempt is reflected, the ultimate degradation being depicted by the image of Wanda Jane (Jinx) having intercourse with the deceased body of Moishe Pipik, or more precisely his artificial penis. (Roth, 1993: 366) The fact he needs to invent a letter though shows his need for a closure of some sort.

The surprising turn of events is when Philip Roth eventually meets Smilesburger, the man who donated a great amount of money to the cause Pipik was fighting for. He not only agrees to participate in a non-specified mission, he even cuts the last chapter of the book, which is when the author and the character Philip Roth merge, leaving the reader even more confused and uncertain about reality and fiction.

Though “Duality” had been the early title of the novel, in this case one can even talk about Triality, as there are, technically speaking, three Philip Roths, the author, the narrator and the impostor. It is difficult to distinguish between the three at some points in the novel, and there are situations in which it seems there is only one – the author using the voice of the character, who is only imagining his opponent. There is a certain Christian symbolism in that, one could even compare it to the trinity of God himself, as a writer can certainly be perceived as the God of an imaginary world he creates.

5.5. Mr. Smilesburger

The reader's first encounter with the character is rather short, but of a great significance for the further development of the story. He approaches Philip Roth during a lunch with his friend Aharon and gives him a check for a million dollars. He adds another piece of the puzzle of Jewish identity, claiming that the Jewish God is crazy and constantly irritated and as the Jews keep appealing to this violent entity that brought them nothing but suffering, Jews must be crazy as well. It is only logical that this angry God would eventually send another horror upon the Jews, this time it would be the masses of enraged Arabs from whom Jews stole the land. (Roth, 1993: 110)

Later in the novel he organizes an abduction of Philip Roth and persuades him to get involved in a mission which is not specified. At that point he discusses *loshon hora*, the evil speech, which he believes is much worse in Israel than in any other place. As there are no *goyim* to worry about, there are no boundaries, and the Jews in Israel would say anything without being ashamed for it. The Jewish people won their own country within which they managed to become experts on *loshon hora*, on speaking poorly about the others. (Roth, 1993: 337) Smilesburged acknowledges that *loshon hora* is essential for a Jew, as one would be merely a nice *goyim* without it. It seems that it is better to be an atrocious Jew than a well-behaved nonbeliever. The reality in Israel is such that the Jews are superior to the others, meaning that every Jew, whether Israeli or not, has more rights than a non-Jewish inhabitant of Israel! Knowing the behavior of the Jewish God, one would paraphrase the saying "Like father, like son." - Like God, like Jew." The Jewish God is vengeful, so therefore are the Jews: what the God did to them, they do unto others. The behavior towards the Palestinians might seem justifiable in this light. (Roth, 1993: 350)

5.6. George Ziad

George Ziad provides another perspective of Israel as the aggressive power, being an Arab that returned to his father's homeland. He denounces Jews as the occupants, aggressive and hateful. His father was bereaved of his possessions as many others were. The Palestinians not only lost their belongings, they were deprived of their dignity and security. The whole country was founded on aggression, force and domination. (Roth, 1993: 122) George addresses the fact, that the Israeli Jews belittle the Diasporic Jews, despite a lack of their own culture – when

compared to the contributions of American Jewish communities. Israelis are depicted as arrogant about everyone else but themselves. The Jews have always looked down on people of different beliefs but the Israeli Jew despises other Jews as well.

5.7. Conclusion

Philip Roth (the author) provides a devastating depiction of a country full of hatred, arrogance and corruption. The way he puts it, the Israeli Jews mistreat the Palestinians the same way the European Americans treated the native tribes of the Americas. The only difference is that there are so few Jews and so many Palestinians and the level of development is somewhat same on both sides. Most people still see Jews as victims of the Shoah, believing they are victims of Palestinians as well, but no one realizes that it was they who “invaded” the land, stole their property and killed their people. When it comes to the State of Israel, Roth takes a side not many are on – he speaks about all that is wrong in the State of Israel. Though his accusations are true, he does not take into account several things, yet it is certain that he is aware of them. There is no other state with the majority of a Jewish population (as there are many almost exclusively Christian, Islamic or Hindu countries). There is no place in the world the Jews would be allowed to create their own country and would not face difficulties afterwards. Establishing a state in Palestine was not a wise move due to the presence of the Palestinians, but it is understandable that Zion meant more to the Jews than any other place. Finally, to base a state on religion might not be the best thing to do, but if there is supposed to be a religion-based state, it should be a Jewish state, as they have none and after all they have been through they would deserve a sanctuary.

Roth does not provide a complex insight, which is not the purpose of the novel, nor the literature of fiction in general, but he does give voices to rather controversial perspectives about an issue that tends to be seen from one viewpoint only. Most topics are usually examined to details, all their aspects scrutinized and all the angles are considered. When it comes to Israel, most Jews would not admit any mistakes (other than the establishment of the state was supposed to be accompanied by the arrival of Messiah) and as for others, people are generally very careful when it comes to criticizing anything about the Jews, as there is the prevailing feeling of guilt for what had been done to them. In order to study an issue, one must be able to discover the other viewpoints, and that is exactly what Philip Roth does – he shows different perspectives.

6. Comparison

The novels analyzed in this thesis are written in different times, refer to different historical events and their structure varies a lot, yet they necessarily share common elements of Jewish literature. The authors all grew up in an orthodox neighbourhood, however each of them took a separate path and faced different response from wider public and more importantly from Jewish public.

6.1. The Principle of Fate

The coincidence plays great part in all three novels and in Jewish literature in general. Singer approaches it in his novel directly, using the word “Et...” (Singer, 1983: 120). The Jewish thinking does not believe in coincidence, which means that what seemed to be a mere luck was actually predetermined. It goes hand in hand with the rather small free will. In *The Chosen*, David Malter claims that Reuven was predestined to befriend Danny (Potok, 1967: 105) and in *Operation Shylock*, the coincidence and fate are hard to distinguish, as what might seem as a coincidence was in fact well prepared and vice versa. It is necessary to consider the predetermination in Jewish literature as the birth of Israel is assessed as the fate of Jewish nation.

6.2. Orthodox Jewry

As the orthodox Jewish communities played significant part in the authors' upbringing, aspects of their culture are reflected in the novels. In *The Penitent*, the main protagonist leaves

his somewhat ordinary life and eventually becomes a pious Jew, claiming he is on the righteous path. Shapiro also defines the orthodox Jewry as the one true Jewry, the ultimate salvation of Jews and Judaism. Even though Singer questions the finality of the Shapiro's statement in the author's note, it is apparent that his connection to his orthodox Jewish roots is significant for the expression of Shapiro's beliefs. Chaim Potok bases both his novels on the conflict between orthodox Jews and the non-orthodox. The approach of the orthodox Jews to secular science and art is the main focus of the novels and it shows how the author himself copes with turning away from his orthodox roots. This contrasts with Singer's novel, whose main protagonist turns away from secular life to "return" to Israel and to real Judaism. The orthodox influence is least apparent in Philip Roth's novel, as it does not address the issue directly. However, Roth satirizes and therefore belittles some aspects typical for fundamental Jews, such as the absolute truth, the question of the Jewish soul or the tendency to look down on other Jews. He uses humour as the main device to point out the absurdity of orthodox thinking, so the characters presenting such thoughts are also the objects of mockery. Moishe Pipik represents a figure that does not let anyone question his beliefs and at the same time he is ridiculed as a man. Mr. Smilesburger believes that the Jews in a Jewish land have no soul, while being a spy with a peculiar name (Roth, 1993: 101). George Ziad speaks of Israeli Jews' spite towards other Jews, yet he is an Arab being suppressed by the Israelis (Roth, 1993: 125).

6.3. The Perception of Israel

The three novels can be arranged chronologically, each one dealing with a different epoch

of the development of the country, starting with *The Chosen*, in which the birth of the country is described, *The Penitent* then takes place approximately fifteen years later and finally the *Operation Shylock*, which considers the Demjanjuk trial in late 1980s. Each of the novels then presents a conflict that was associated with that particular time.

Chaim Potok shows the enthusiasm and anticipation that accompanied the creation of the state. As the Jewry was devastated by the Holocaust during the of Second World War and learning of the terrible losses during the Holocaust, there was an urge internationally to make a change and to give the Jews hope for a better tomorrow. Thus the ideas of Theodor Herzl were reconsidered by the United Nations and Zionism experienced a great boom. The excitement about the establishment of the State of Israel was confronted with several obstructions. The establishment is immediately followed by military confrontations resulting in more dead Jews, which is certainly not what they hoped for. However the novel revolves around the more intellectual conflict, which takes place in the Jewish communities outside of Israel. It is the interpretation of God's will that brings disunity of opinions: the orthodox Jews claim that a Messiah must come before they could return to Zion, and the reformists disagree, stating that they cannot wait for God anymore. This makes a central conflict of *The Chosen* a religious discord.

The main protagonist of Singer's novel, Joseph Shapiro, turns to Israel, hoping for salvation. He visualizes the Holy Land as the place all the pious Jews should go, as the right place for Jewry. Again his image of Israel is confronted with the reality that shows him, that there is no place on Earth that would be 100% holy. Shapiro copes with the situation with difficulties,

questioning the morality and denouncing humanism but eventually he finds a place to belong to in a smaller orthodox community within Israel. The question of morals and whether morals are necessarily connected with faith constitutes the key issue of the novel.

Philip Roth works differently with the perception of reality and he does not share the optimistic approach to Israel or to Jewry as his fellow writers. *Operation Shylock* takes place later than the other novels and is revolved around the trial of John Demjanjuk, which eventually ruins the good name of the country. Roth questions the basic values of Israel and Zionism and confronts it with an idea of Diasporism, of returning Jewry to Europe. He uses humour as the main instrument to demonstrate the absurdity of the situation and he mocks the trial with Demjanjuk that resembles a witch-hunt. Humour is often associated with Jews, yet it is denounced amongst the orthodox communities, which would explain why Philip Roth is considered a controversial writer. Main conflict of *Operation Shylock* is the contrast between reality and imagination, yet when speaking of Israel, he discusses the two conflicting theories dealing with the future of Jewry.

Diasporism itself is a central topic, as all the writers are technically speaking diasporic Jews and so are most of their characters. In *The Chosen*, David Malter is a Zionist supporter, though right after the results of the War are known, he proclaims that there is a need to rebuild Jewry in United States (Potok, 1967: 182). Reb Saunders addresses the subject a few pages later, when he refers to Zionism as an Apikorsim, and points out that he brought his people to USA and not to Israel for a reason (Potok, 1967: 188). *My Name is Asher Lev* does not deal with the problems of Israel, but it considers the diaspora. It takes place in a fully orthodox community, which is why it

makes sense, if the previous statements are taken into account. In the novel, Asher's parents both work for Rebbe in order to support the communities in the States, help the Jews to come from Europe and later they help establish and organize those in Europe. It is also stated that Russia still hates Jews thus it is not yet suitable for development of Jewish groups, so those in Russia must be aided and passageways must be built for them. (Potok, 1996: p. 84) In *The Penitent*, Joseph Shapiro is an exiled Jew who escaped from Europe to United States, but when he questions his identity and decides he has to come back to his ancestral roots, he does not return to Poland where he came from, but he travels to Israel, where he has never been. Nevertheless he admits that the Israel he came to is not the Israel he imagined and claims that the highest level of spirituality was achieved during the Diaspora. He remembers meeting the yeshiva students he met in Rome, considering them the greatest triumph of Jewry (Singer, 1983: 93) In *Operation Shylock*, the impostor Moishe Pipik develops the idea of diaspora based on the fact, that the country is surrounded by Palestinians ready to erase the remaining Jewry. Later in the audiotope he left for Philip he contemplates about the corruption of Jewish state, he puts down all Jews for being arrogant and having talent to cause antipathy towards themselves in every other group (Roth, 1993: 256) Another character however supports the idea of Diaspora, stating that the State of Israel has no culture whatsoever, no moral identity and that the whole state is based on the "Shoah business", that helped raise money for Israel amongst Diaspora Jews (Roth, 1993: 133).

6.4. Conclusion

The novels assessed in this thesis belong to major Jewish works and two of their authors

were awarded a significant literary prize (Roth received Pulitzer prize in 1997 for *American Pastoral*, Singer is a Nobel prize laureate of 1978). Nevertheless, it is Chaim Potok who is easiest to read, his novels provide historical insight of certain events allowing the reader to comprehend his novels without previous knowledge of Jewish history. Therefore Chaim Potok is the most suitable author for the first encounter with Jewish literature.

The works of Potok and Singer depict Jewry as generally good, even though they present some remarks regarding the legitimacy of the State of Israel. After reading Philip Roth, who is a somewhat untypical Jewish author, one achieves a more complex perspective of the issue. Though Roth uses humour in order to poke the flaws of Jewishness and the Jewish country, he makes some valid points and shows the imperfections of a country that might seem to have none to wider public. In order to understand a problem, one has to assess as many aspects as possible and Philip Roth is one of the few who provides other than a positive approach to the matter.

The aim of this thesis was to address Israel from different literary perspective. One cannot assume that an understanding of such a complex problem would be achieved after reading a few novels and some supporting secondary literature, yet it is a step towards the truth and that is the goal of any performed research.

7. Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá porovnáním čtyř významných děl americké židovské literatury a jejich přístupem k problematice vzniku a vývoje samostatného židovského státu. Cílem je pak shrnutí a zhodnocení dopadu, jaký měl vznik Izraele na literární svět ve Spojených státech.

Úvodní kapitola vymezuje několik historických událostí a pojmů. Zabývá se samotným vznikem Izraele, uvádí sionismus jako ideologii, která měla zásadní vliv na poválečné události. Dále hodnotí význam židovských komunit ve Spojených státech a definuje chasidismus jako významné židovské ortodoxní hnutí. Závěrem zmiňuje proces s Johnem Demjanukem v Izraeli, který poskvřnil dobré jméno země a byl také zároveň chronologicky vzato poslední událostí, která je reflektována v rozebíraných dílech.

Druhá kapitola je věnována Chaimu Potokovi a jeho dvěma románům *Vyvolení* a *Jmenuji se Ašer Lev*. Po stručném uvedení autora následuje rozbor jednotlivých děl. Román *Vyvolení* je hodnocen jako ústřední dílo autora, je mu proto věnována větší část kapitoly. Na intrapersonální a interpersonální úrovni se rozbor zabývá konflikty v rámci rodiny, komunity a víry. Vzhledem k tomu, že se děj odehrává v období konce druhé světové války a bezprostředně po ní, kapitola také zahrnuje zhodnocení vztahu jednotlivých postav k holokaustu a vzniku státu Izrael.

Podkapitola věnována druhému románu Chaima Potoka je zkrácená, a to především vzhledem k tomu, že neobsahuje přímé odkazy na Izrael. Nicméně prohlubuje pochopení problematiky chasidismu, který s existencí židovského státu za daných okolností nesouhlasí. Zabývá se také židovskými komunitami v exilu a rozvojem v rámci diaspory.

Třetí kapitola náleží románu *Kajícník*, který napsal Isaac Bashevis Singer. Ten se zabývá hledáním identity v moderním světě. Centrálním problémem je vykořenění z vlastní kultury a následný návrat domů, přičemž oním domovem je myšlen právě Izrael. Jak hlavní postava Josepha Shapira ale zjišťuje, Izrael v jeho představách se liší od reality, jelikož vliv moderního světa se dostal i na východ, a tedy Židé v Izraeli nejsou nijak odlišní od těch v Americe. Nakonec

Shapiro nachází, co hledal v kruhu ortodoxních Židů, které považuje za jediné správné představitele židovstva. Autor sám toto tvrzení následně zpochybňuje v poznámce autora na konci románu, kde tvrdí, že neexistuje definitivní řešení a trvalý únik. I tato skutečnost je brána v úvahu a názory Josepha Shapira a jeho autora jsou rozebrány zvlášť.

Čtvrtá kapitola patří Philipu Rothovi a jeho *Operaci Shylock*. Roth se liší od předchozích autorů zejména tím, že ve svém románu používá humor jako hlavní jazykový prostředek. Děj se odehrává v Izraeli v době Demjanjukova procesu, přestože ten je spíše okrajovým tématem. Autor konfrontuje sionismus, nejvýznamnější židovskou ideologii, která zapříčinila vznik židovského státu, s jejím opačným pólem, „diasporismem“. Všechny postavy v románu jsou určitým způsobem zesměšněny, a tak i vážně se tvářící prohlášení může být vykládáno jako absurdní. Vypravěč příběhu byl obětí Halcionové aféry, a tedy důsledkem nesprávné medikace neustále zpochybňuje realitu, vydává ji za výplod své vlastní fantazie, což je v kapitole také zohledněno. Samotný autor pak v jednom z rozhovorů prohlásil, že všechno, co napsal v *Operaci Shylock*, se doopravdy stalo, což je v přímém rozporu s poznámkou na konci románu, kde tvrdí, že všechno je fikce. Tato skutečnost ale analýzu díla jen komplikuje. Rozbor se tedy zabývá nejen otázkou reality nebo ponižení, ale pochopitelně také zachycuje obraz Izraele a Židovstva v Rothově podání.

Závěrečná kapitola má za úkol porovnat vybrané romány. Zabývá se jak umístěním dějové linky na časové ose, tak jejich společnými prvky, jako je právě otázka identity, ortodoxní judaismus, sionismus, problematika diaspory a samozřejmě i samotný pohled na Izrael. Závěr ukazuje způsob, jakým se proměnilo vnímání židovského státu.

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