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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

This article interprets the career of the Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978, in English translation. Involved is an understanding of the emotional and linguistic impact of the Haskala or “Jewish Enlightenment” on Polish Jewish life as well as of the other ideologies confronting Jewry—Socialism, Zionism and Hassidic Return, for example. Involved also is a just evaluation of the linguistic achievements of Singer’s translators, especially Jacob Sloan, Cecil Hemley, Elaine Gottlieb, Saul Bellow and Isaac Rosenfeld, all of whom have a creative identity with a thematic and stylistic influence on translation quality. An attempt is likewise made to demonstrate Singer’s transcendence of his rabbinical past and of his refuge in the United States.

# Ashen Hearts and Astral Zones: Bashevis Singer in Yiddish and English<sup>1</sup> Preparations

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## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article interprète la carrière d'Isaac Bashevis Singer, l'écrivain yiddish et lauréat du prix Nobel en 1978, à travers des traductions de son œuvre en anglais. Il s'agit surtout de l'influence de la Haskala ou de l'Âge de lumières juives et des autres idéologies dans le monde juif — socialisme, sionisme, et retour aux racines hassidiques, par exemple. Il s'agit aussi d'une compréhension juste des accomplissements des traducteurs de Singer, surtout de Jacob Sloan, Cecil Hemley, Elaine Gottlieb, Saul Bellow et Isaac Rosenfeld. Ceux-ci exprimaient des identités « originales » dans leurs œuvres créatrices et leurs expressions thématiques et stylistiques influençaient sur la qualité de leurs traductions. On essaie également de démontrer la transcendance hassidique et cabalistique sur la base rabbinique de Singer aussi bien que sur son refuge aux États-Unis.

## ABSTRACT

This article interprets the career of the Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978, in English translation. Involved is an understanding of the emotional and linguistic impact of the Haskala or “Jewish Enlightenment” on Polish Jewish life as well as of the other ideologies confronting Jewry—Socialism, Zionism and Hassidic Return, for example. Involved also is a just evaluation of the linguistic achievements of Singer's translators, especially Jacob Sloan, Cecil Hemley, Elaine Gottlieb, Saul Bellow and Isaac Rosenfeld, all of whom have a creative identity with a thematic and stylistic influence on translation quality. An attempt is likewise made to demonstrate Singer's transcendence of his rabbinical past and of his refuge in the United States.

## MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

Haskala, telepathy, Hassidism, demonism, cabalistic

In pointing to the movable mesh of character and plot in good fiction, the narrator of Grace Paley's “A Conversation with my Father” indignantly stresses that “everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life” (Charters 1991: 1135). Isaac Bashevis Singer apportioned such open-endedness to his creations, even when the perfection of the Bible and Judaism, the circle around many of his characters, constricted them. Irving Buchen, the first major commentator of his work, put it this way: “God gave man two books: the Book of Nature and the Book of the Bible. Wanda-Sarah [the heroine of Singer's *The Slave*] aligns both, and in the process Jacob the man [hero of the above novel] comes closer to becoming Jacob the Patriarch” (1968: 166). The dimensions reach the consoling Jewish prayer, “Fear not, Slaves of Jacob” (*al tiru avdey Yakov*), in which Jacob signifies Israel, his new name in the Bible<sup>2</sup> and now encompassing all of Jewish tradition. “Slaves” are devout advocates of this past and their “slavery” means freedom.

This viewpoint, simultaneously moral and imaginative, helped Bashevis Singer obtain the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978 in harmony with the predictions of Cecil Hemley, Singer's first major translator into English. In 1966, Hemley had told assembled publishers that Yiddish literature contained as much greatness as a "Giant" edition of Tolstoy or Mann (217-218). *The Slave*, in fact, was in the same class: as Hemley's son Robin remarked, his father might well have received a "shadow Nobel Prize" for rendering the book (1998: 85).

However, Cecil Hemley, though an important poet and short-story writer on the American scene—his son calls him a "Greenwich Village Intellectual"—knew no Yiddish. As a result, Bashevis Singer had to be his informant, supplying literal senses and cultural resonances and perhaps reading aloud to his translators (Hemley 1998: 84), although he knew that a large percentage of the original would be lost (Breger 1969: 34). At the same time, he was well aware that the reputation and popularity of his work depended on the quality of its translation and consequently chose translators who were themselves literary names: in addition to Cecil Hemley, Elaine Gottlieb, Hemley's wife and a respected fiction writer, Joseph Singer, the son of Bashevis Singer's brother, I.J. Singer, and a creative personality in his own right, Elizabeth Shub, editor and daughter of a Yiddish writer, Ruth Whitman, an accomplished poetess, Jacob Sloan, a poet and expert on Judaica, Elizabeth Pollet, a scholar of Delmore Schwartz, Herbert Lottman, a historian of the Jews in Vichy France, Dorothea Straus, a critic and wife of Roger Straus, Singer's publisher, Saul Bellow, Isaac Rosenfeld, Leonard Wolf, Lester Goran and Curt Leviant, all of them prominent novelists. Only Jacob Sloan, Joseph Singer, Whitman and the novelists knew Yiddish well enough to translate it unassisted and Bashevis may well have changed his translators so often because of disappointment (personal communication, Feb. 15, 2001, from Jacob Sloan).

Translation was, in fact, a main part of Bashevis Singer's apprenticeship, though his task at the time was only to render sensationalistic fiction from German into Yiddish and there was seemingly little skill needed to pour a rigged plot into an "interesting" mold (Miller 1983: 16)—after all, Yiddish had already developed its own formulas for popular fiction. Moreover, it was a "Germanic language" and Singer had opened himself up to enough literature from the "outside world" to be able to handle translation from German without difficulty. However, he looked down on the literary hackwork—without recognizing that its meanings could carry into his own work (see Garrin 1986: 56-57). Knut Hamsun (1858-1952), for one thing, was not at all a cheap sensationalist; he was as unpredictable and open-ended as the erotic mood-swings and the unforgettable fjords he described, and Singer wanted the Yiddish reader to savor this landscape along with the rest of 1920's Europe. In fact, the German translation called *Pan: aus Leutnant Tomas Glahns Papieren* (1920), the work of Maria von Borch from Norwegian in 1890 and later used by Singer for his own rendering, was identical to the one read by the father of the author of this article in post WWI Vienna.

Of course, a Nordic god of nature was very far from a Jewish belief in divine immanence, the closest Singer's Orthodox parents could get to "*Blut und Boden*" (an Aryan ideology to which Hamsun may have subscribed). So Bashevis (whose pen name honored his mother, Bat-Sheva) attempted to adapt the Scandinavian landscape to Jewish indwelling and Polish "meadows"—*lonke* from Pol. *laka* for Ger.

*Acker* (Singer 1928: 26; Hamsun 1920: 29). This “*Pan*” no longer *flüstert* in Romantic accents; instead, he *sheptshet* on the model of Pol. *szepać*, “to whisper.” Moreover, nature did not grant *Gnade* or “grace” by stepping down from the heights of heaven like a lady in a castle tower “gracing” her courtly lover with a “divine” appearance (Hamsun 1920: 118). Rather, it exercised all of its *khessed*, its immanent and seemingly pantheistic “lovingkindness” (Singer 1928: 107).

Likewise, the stately teutonic Yselin (a sister both of Ysolde and Daphne) does not step forth accompanied by a “thunderclap” (*läütet Sturm*); she merely *kumt tsu geyn (kommt)* or “shows up” (Hamsun 1920: 30; Singer 1928: 27). What is a courtly address in the German—*Schönjungfrau Edwarda* (“Comely Virgin Edvarda”)—is nothing more exalted than *sheyn meydl* (“Pretty Girl”) in Yiddish, and what Ger. expresses as an emotion of terror—*es packt mir Ingrim* (“I was seized by Dread”)—is only a routine Yiddish tug—*se khapt mir on a kas* (Hamsun 1920: 105; Singer 1928: 96).

Singer was, in sum, learning how to be plain-spoken and anti-rhetorical, a skill he turned to great account as an explorer rather than an elaborator of fictional events. In addition, it took him a lifetime to see how the “volume had to be turned down” for languages like English, given that the latter was a language of understatement in contrast to the “screaming” of Yiddish (Prager 1986: 68). Inflated German was also loud but in a Romantic way, and it needed the “reality check” of down-to-earth Yiddish style. Using it was a part of maturity.

Plain speech (“*poshet mame-loshen*” or “simple mother tongue”) was, accordingly, a pillar of the Yiddish wing of the Jewish Enlightenment or *Haskala*, that historical movement which exposed Jews to all kinds of “winds from the West,” carrying the stench of the kitchen potboiler as well as the aroma of Scandinavian islands in Hamsun. It was so important because the energized Jew, whether intellectual or not, had to address a variety of ideological voices giving him varied solutions to his problems. The editors of the *Khalyastre* (or “Gang”), a Yiddish literary magazine with roots in German Expressionism, spoke with three of these: Peretz Markish was a Socialist-Communist, Uri Zvi Greenberg was a Zionist and Melech Rawitch was a “*Do-ist*,” a “*Now-ist*” or secular Jewish existentialist who believed in “going with the flow” (see Howe 1987: 301, 345, 479; Rosenfarb 1992: 23; Shmeruk 1964: 752). The point of the contrast—and occasional clash—was to “reach for the stars,” as the Warsaw Yiddish gadfly and poet Moshe Broderson put it (Rosenfarb 1992: 22). It was, likewise, to knock dead the pomposity and unreal elitism of the Hebrew *Haskala*, which had prized inflated metaphor (*melitsa*) and had penetrated Yiddish to the point that poets like Broderson complained about it even in the “people’s republic” of the Soviet Union (Luden 2000: 29).

Singer was not affiliated with any of these movements—in fact, his disaffiliation may have been responsible for his lack of acceptance in the Yiddish community (see, for example, Yakov Glatshteyn’s statement that Bashevis was dangerously “unJewish,” 1986: 148). However, he was close to them all: his wife of the time was a Communist who went to the Soviet Union before ending up in Israel, where she raised her—and his—son in the spirit of Socialist Zionism (see Buchen 1968: 18; Zamir 1994: 80). Likewise, when in New York he wrote for the *Forward*, a Yiddish newspaper with a tradition of Socialist Trade-Unionism; for it he adopted the populist personae of David Segal and Yitskhok Warshawski (“Man of Warsaw”) in order to endear its readers to his

human interest stories, literary journalism and autobiography (including a review of an anthology of Yiddish prose, a book about Spinoza and his own memoirs, collected in *In mayn tatns bes-din shtub/ In My Father's Court* [see Miller 1983: 227, 190, and Gottlieb 1959: 10]).

There was “enlightenment” progression from Segal and Warshawski to Bashevis himself, from talking to the Jewish teamster and factory worker, the “thinking” reader, and the lover of Yiddish writing. For good reason, David Roskies (1995) wrote that the plot of *Satan in Goray*, Singer’s first original novel, could be restated in the headlines of the “yellow press”—“MARRIED TO TWO MEN,” “POSSESSED BY A DYBUK” (278).

In addition, he could well have read Greenberg’s “In the Kingdom of the Cross” when it came out in 1923. In it the poet declared that Europe was a “woe woods” (*vey-vald*) and that the only way out of the thicket was a place in the Middle East, where a Jew could wear both a “broad Arab *abaya*” (“Bedouin headdress”) and a *tales* (“prayer shawl”) and so live happily and heroically in the desert. Greenberg advises—“Take back the frock coat, the tie, and the patent leather shoes” (Howe 1987: 484-486). Singer, of course, could not take the advice; he was much too much the emancipated Warsaw blade whose outfit covered the heart of a seminarian and was modernized only by the seersucker suit of a prestigious writer-in-residence at the University of Miami. Still, in 1932, not long before fleeing to the United States, he translated Moshe Smilansky’s Hebrew *Bney Arav* or “Sons of Arabia,” originally written in the spirit of Zionist settlement but now cast in a homespun Yiddish in order to make the desert seem less threatening (see Miller 1983: 283).

Of course, translating archaic Hebrew with its bristling inflections and Semitic verb patterns was no problem for Singer, especially after long study of the Bible and the Talmud. Moreover, Hebrew was near to him emotionally (Landis 1986: 162). Aharon Zeitlin best compared this cultural bilingualism to a “conversative vav” or Hebrew “and” interpreting all Biblical and “Israelite” action in the future to a historic past related to the omnipresent today by the overarching fact of Jewishness (1980: 383, 195). But no such “conversion” was necessary for Yiddish in the Twenties and Thirties; the language was today and the most relevant stance was to become a Yiddish writer.

For this reason, though he was far from being a card-carrying Yiddishist, Singer had joined the Warsaw chapter of the Yiddish Writer’s League of which Melech Rawitch was sometime Secretary, an experience behind many subsequent stories (“A Friend of Kafka,” for example). This organization lived and breathed under the portrait of Yitskhok Leibush Peretz, the rejuvenator of modern Yiddish prose—and thus the “entitler” of the Yiddish writer (see Rawitch 1945: 273, 275, 279). However, Peretz’s stylistic renewal consisted in the forging of a lightly artificial literary language, a folk medium which nevertheless stood above the folk (Spivak 2000: 40). Singer, on the contrary, was simultaneously above ideology and with the folk.

He showed this identification by recommending a reprint of the 1929 “Anthology of Yiddish Prose between both WW’s” (Zeitlin and Trunk’s *Antologiyе fun der yidisher proze tsvishen beyde velt-milkhomes*) to 1946 Yiddish teachers and all those interested in the uncluttered beauty of the language (Miller 1983: 190). This bare expressiveness began with examples of naturalistic style, with what Singer was later to see as only “the bones without the meat of human subjectivity” (see his statements

about the blurring of the real and the dream world in Gottlieb 1959: 9), and the *Antologiyе* excerpted portions of Ozer Warshawski's "Smugglers" (*Shmuglers*), a novel about contraband and poverty in Warsaw (229-247). On the surface, this was spade-work for Singer's own description of a band of thieves in *The Magician of Lublin/ Der kuntuksmakher fun Lublin*. However, Singer's concern for authenticity goes beyond the presentation of a real "slice of life," though his translators, Elaine Gottlieb and Joseph Singer, render the card-playing and wagering bluntness of it exactly in the phrase "Put your money where your mouth is" (Singer 1960: 56). But in the original the challenge reads—"Riba=fish/ Gelt oyfn tish"—"Riba means fish [in Rus. and Pol] / Money on the table" (Singer 1979: 60). In other words, a very gruff and crude exchange is a major sign of ethnic conflict in the hearts of the thieves and there is "multicultural" irony in the gloss which transcends naturalistic accuracy.

But naturalism didn't have to signify only dead-pan low life. It could mean a full-scale novel of middle-class manners and the coloring of real life by subjectivity—though, admittedly, the author's imagination was strictly controlled by fact. Singer's brother, Israel Joshua (I.J.), was a master of this 19th century genre, the novel of Tolstoy and other "Russian realists," and since the Jews had in fact only begun to emerge into the Western world in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was entirely appropriate that the young Bashevis first experience the *Haskala* in his brother's "atelier" (1966: 237), that this brother be revered as a formative influence (Gottlieb 1959: 8), and that the *Antologiyе* feature a full 55 pages of I.J. Singer's work (271-326).

The hero of the latter's "Old City" (*Alt shtot*) is thus an assimilated Jew who carries on a "friendship" with a priest and patron of his antique store, where he employs a Gentile assistant. He also arranges a very respectable party for all of these "friends," during which the assistant's wife is pictured, even photographed as strict, gaunt and frighteningly proper. But absurd and satiric images "criticize" the stuffy idyll (this is, after all, "critical realism"): the priest's bald pate sweats and he becomes red in the face for staring too hard at the corsage of one of the guests and the roasted hare prepared by the host tips over when an attempt is made to right it and simulate its "aliveness" (294, 292). Then the story ends with a similar "respect for life": the hero drowns his house cat, the pride of his domesticity, in the Vistula (314). The images are juxtaposed, strategically placed and thematically directive, true to what both Gottlieb and Bashevis Singer felt as "the symbolic striving of literature" (see Gottlieb Hemley 1972: 158)

Zionist rhetoric was also a part of the *Antologiyе*. For example, Aharon Zeitlin, poet, editor of the collection and "along with Swedenborg a soulmate in psychic research" (as Singer told the Swedish Academy: 6) contributed a story about the hanging of an early Zionist settler by the British rulers of Palestine. Rays of symbolic sunshine penetrate his "death row" cell (461). However, no such light shines on the anti-Romantic hero of "Earth" (*Erd*, a grubby backlash against "Pan"), the contribution of Rohel Korn, likewise a poet: Mordecai is a benighted, backward, cruel and incorrigibly Slavic peasant from Galizia, Southern Poland (where, ironically, the Hassidic homeland of Singer, Bilgoray, was also located). Nothing could signal the end of Sholem Aleichem-style humanitarianism more than his unTevye-like mistreatment of his horse (558).

### Correspondences

Such cruelty forms the end of Korn's story: Beyltshe, Mordecai's wife, is forced to miscarry and her blood falls onto the snow outside their rural hut (588). Generative life, in other words, is nipped in the bud. This is also the gloomy message of Bashevis Singer's contribution, a selection from *Sotn in Goray / Satan in Goray* (21-43), first published as a whole by the Warsaw Yiddish P.E.N. Club in 1935 (just when Bashevis left), later reprinted by the New York firm of Matones in 1943, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1972, and I.L. Peretz of Tel Aviv in 1992. In addition, the book had been translated into Hebrew and Israel Zamir, Singer's son, "was at last able to read something my father had written." However, he was repelled by the descriptions of sex:

I opened it at random to a chapter entitled "A Wedding on a Dung Hill" and was immediately embarrassed... We believed that literature was integral to the construction of the regime (my emphasis). I read my father's book in secret..., wasn't emotionally prepared to respond to the work... I buried the book under the mattress so other boys wouldn't read it and tease me (1994: 39-40).

True enough, *Satan in Goray* was not ideologically committed; in addition, it was pessimistic. On the other hand, the decimation of Jewish life by Chmelnitsky's Ukrainian cossacks in the 17th century, the event and the era it describes, was felt to be a pathos-ridden prelude to the Holocaust, even though it was not a state-planned extermination but a series of individual pogroms (according to Jacob Sloan's personal communication of Feb. 1, 2001). Because of this relevance, Sloan translated it into English in 1955.

Singer first wrote his novel as a reaction to Sholem Asch's *Kiddush Hashem* ("Sanctification of the Name," 1919), a fictional description of the massacres intended as a comment on the "independence" war then being fought in the modern Ukraine—because of which the Jews had to suffer pogroms throughout Poland and the Ukraine, leading to Uri Zvi Greenberg's bitter poetry (Roskies 1995: 292; Arnon 1980: 40). He wanted to show that the disaster was more than "wicked arrogance" versus "simple holiness," Asch's message (Lipzin 1963: 184). In reality, it meant the stirring of very impure embers: sexual perversion and barren desire resulted from it as did the hysteric adhesion to Sabbetai Zevi, a false messiah and apostate from Ottoman Turkey to whom the village of Goray clung in search for "the dark well-springs of archaic life" (Alter 1971: 61 and Sloan 1979: viii).

Ultimately responsible, then, is a Dybbuk or evil spirit, itself a folk implementation of the "inclination" (*yetser hara*) dragging all men down. Singer exorcises this evil through a tale told in the style of the *Tsene-urene*, the encyclopedic compendium of Bible and folklore written in a mixture of Yiddishized Middle High German and Hebrew called *Khumesh-taytsh* or "the Language of Glossing the Five Books of Moses" (see Waldinger 2000: 164). So when the Dybbuk speaks, he confesses to having been "seized by three evil spirits" (*bahofen*) who "began" (*bagunen*) to "torment me cruelly" (*payniken-peinigen*) and "sorely afflicted me" (*mir ongeton yesurim koshim*). In the case of the "torment," Sloan adds a modifier, but he summarizes and telescopes the afflictions with a strong scriptural phrase in the spirit of the "sore trials" of the Hebrew (see Noble 1943: 18, 49); Singer 1955/1979: 225; Singer 1972: 178).

The Dybbuk then narrates his own—definitely unrepentant—death (*Ikh hob far mayn petire gelestert / "before I expired I blasphemed"*) and thousands of "imps"

march at the funeral (actually, these are *klipes* or Kabbalistic “husks” of evil and Sloan focuses only on their supernatural and superstitious side while neglecting the ironized Kabbalah). These are his heirs, the progeny of “defilement and fornication” or “*tumas kerī*” (“abomination-pollution” in a grammatical compound) and “*baules asures*” (“acts of fornication” in the ritual pat phrase of prohibition). In short, Sloan succeeds in making the Dybbuk talk the tongue of King James in order to summarize the sins in an English formulation and make this “Jewish Puritanism” available to non-Jewish readers (Singer 1972: 178; Singer 1955/1979: 225).

But there was no saintly stoicism in the “Bible Commonwealth” of Goray. The people really died. For this reason, their survivors “scream into [the graves] and beyond” (*shayen arayn ahin*) with “doleful voices” (*yomerlekhe koyles*), and Sloan renders the piled-up particles, “screaming and wailing.” Moreover, he gives the grief a flow (that’s what Jewish tears need) by integrating the “screaming” with the “begging of forgiveness,” marked off dramatically in the original (Zeitlin and Trunk 1946: 21 and Singer 1955/1979: 177)

Zeitlin pointed out this rhythm of lamentation as prose heightened into poetry (Singer 1972: 7) and Sloan reproduces the very social nature of the dirge both in translated and original work written after the Holocaust. His poem of 1947, “I Was This Screaming Boy,” points up the participial nowness of frenzy:

I was this screaming boy, screaming (this was  
no dream) against the barber’s crawling  
clip, the shorn-hair-plastered hands  
waving a two-bladed, crisscross  
knife at my childhood, that fell  
on my eyes, neck, lips and screaming mouth.

I am this still man, (this  
is my pain) before the mirror, star-  
ing at another still man  
sitting in another. I, sprawling  
underneath the straight-edge of His will,  
cough at the hot, damp final cloth (My emphases, 1972: 18).

Zeitlin also wrote a poem in which a “squashed insect,” symbol for a Holocaust survivor, is given an “astral body,” a place among the dancing stars (“The Empty Apartment,” translated by Whitman 1995: 202/203). This is no facile supernaturalism but a full-scale principle of imagination with Singer, one that “explains for” the ashes of a community and then “provides for” its restoration. As he said to Elaine Gottlieb:

without a belief in invisible powers,  
it is difficult to explain anything. There are  
powers which we cannot fathom, and which  
play a big part in our lives. We visualize them  
in the forms of devils and goblins, but these are  
merely names. For example, love cannot be  
explained without telepathy. (My emphases, 1959: 9).

*Satan in Goray* applied this telepathy to a complete society.

The same year that Gottlieb conducted the interview, Singer was serializing *Der kuntsnmakher fun Lublin* in the *Forward* and the next year, 1960, it appeared as *The*



*Magician of Lublin* in her translation for her husband's publishing company, Noonday Press, which merged with Farrar, Straus and Giroux shortly afterwards. Singer was 51 at the time and had just passed through a long period of acculturation and adjustment to New York (Buchen 1968: 24-25).

But middle age didn't stunt his growth: *The Magician of Lublin* was his first novel to center on the charisma of an individual in contrast to *Satan in Goray*, about the personality of a community. Dorothea Straus even invited its hero to her wedding—"Yasha Mazur stood alone at the altar" (evidently waiting for her):

What was he doing there? What tricks was he about to perform? Perhaps this was a village fair, but there was no village. What country were we in? (1982:164).

The important point is that Yasha Mazur here introduced her to the "wandering and countryless" identity of Jewishness, so different from the fixed dichotomies she was used to, that of a well-heeled neighborhood celebration on the Upper East Side as distinguished from a "Downtown" Yiddish festivity; that of assimilated German Jewry versus the warm ethnic certainty of the newcomers from Russia and Poland:

We had never wanted to be Jews, and we had hoped to merge with those less endangered than ourselves [whether in Germany or the United States]. In my early experience enlightenment was the heritage; progress, the ideal; money had provided the flimsy camouflage; atheism, the shaky excuse; and romantic love, the anodyne. Recognition of our predicament at a time of great peril [like the Holocaust] would have been capitulation: we did not dare. Established in the United States (in safety?), we had sought to blot out our origins, but in our guts and nerve ends we harbored the atavistic memory of our persecution (1986: 161).

In other words, she was made and nurtured to be fascinated by Yasha Mazur's professional and unprofessional daring: four women at the same time—Esther, his home-base of comfort and identity, Magda, a Polish peasant who is his assistant and privy to his "tricks" (Houdini-like escapes and tightrope artistry), Zeffel, his erotic conquest and the wife of a Jewish thief, and Emilia, the widow of a Polish professor with a "Western" library; she is his "true love," super-refined, seemingly unattainable, and his future mate for life (or so he thinks). These relationships make up the plot of *The Magician from Lublin*; they are its underlying "telepathy" and attraction toward or away from them determines its action.

It goes without saying that a sensitive translator must understand their influences. He must see, for example, that Yasha's outcry—"You God are the true magician, not I"—is a result both of Magda's place beside him in his wagon, that of an itinerant showman, and the wonders of nature around them, the work of a divine force more stable and ancient than "upward mobility" (see Singer 1979: 64-65). He must also understand that Emilia's confession that "the more you tell me about yourself, the less do I gain from it" is penetrated by Yiddish prefixation—*der/geyn* (lit. "go throughout," "exhaust the going," "reach") in echo of *der/tseylen* (lit. "count completely" and "recount" or "tell," in which the prefix is inconceivable without its stem and inseparable from it) (Singer 1979: 87). Moreover, there is a basic—and "inseparable"—difference in Yasha and Emilia's "goings" throughout life, and love, as a *Haskala* illusion (an "anodyne" in the words of Straus), cannot level the primrose path. "She reached under [undermined ] his life" (*zi hot im dergangen di yorn*) in many unreal ways and not in vain does Zeffel warn, in prefixal expressiveness: "The

heathen woman will drag you down to the earth”—*di goyte vet dikh far/shlepn in der erd arayn* (Singer 1979: 53; Singer 1960: 56).

Her warning resounds throughout the story, even though it occurs at the very beginning—“Just stay a Jew” and “Don’t convert even if you’re ready to give in to Emilia’s demands” (Singer 1979: 53; Singer 1960: 56). In addition, though Zefel is, in the opinion of Magda, “the little whore of Piask,” she inadvertently sends him back to Esther, his communally accepted wife. Moreover, the band of thieves to which she belongs, as the wife of one of them (like a gangster moll traveling with the pack), are judgmentally traditional: they blame Yasha for “traveling with a Gentile girl and bringing shame and disgrace (*bushes vekherpes*, a pluralized Heb. doublet of respectable outrage) on his legitimate wife—while they are anything but legitimate themselves (Singer 1979: 51; Singer 1960: 56). The pat outrage is much less learned and prescribed than Sloan’s “defilement and fornication” and is completely natural in English, though without the prayerful and formulaic resonance of the original. Likewise, the names of Yasha’s two horses, “*Kore and Shiva*” or “*Afar and Eyfer*,” are accurately given as “Dust and Ashes” from the Yid/Heb. glossing of the Polish *kora*, (“bark”) and *siwka* (“gray mare”), in which the latter term may be an allusion to Jewish mourning, but the translation in no way approximates the chiming and riming of theologically yoked phraseology (see Singer 1979: 75; Singer 1960: 69).

These thieves live with trouble, not only for fear of the law but also out of ongoing “Jewish self-defense.” Thus, what is translated as no more than an offhand, macho betting challenge—“Put your money where your mouth is!” (Singer 1960: 56)—is originally an ironic rimed gloss—*Riba* [Pol./Rus.] = *fish/ gelt oyfn tish* (“*Riba* means fish,/ Money on the table!” Singer 1979: 60). Their authenticity is always tested, always split into two by a non-Jewish presence, sometimes seen as a real threat and sometimes as an opportunity. In this upsetting context, one can understand (without sanctioning) the white-slaver Herman who will exploit Zefel for his brothel in Buenos Aires: later in his story, Yasha sees them sleeping together in a curiously “lifeless”—and homeless—position (Singer 1960: 220). What’s more, even the mild-mannered Sholem Aleichem had drawn a satiric portrait of such an exploiter in “The Man from Buenos Aires,” a main character who is simultaneously vitiated and vicious like his own Menachem Mendl (see Roskies 1995: 176, 178).

In other words, a scene and character can be far-reaching and recurrent, both in the future of the story and in the periodicity of Yiddish fiction as a whole, and a good translator should be able to give them the emphasis their creator thinks they deserve (through emphatic paragraphing, for example, as in Singer 1960: 195, where Yasha “happens on” the synagogue which is to change his life). It doesn’t really matter whether this translator has read the whole story before in the original, has heard it summarized by the author, has gone over it in a publisher’s synopsis (for Noonday Press, for example), or has merely worked from partial “rough drafts” of *The Magician of Lublin* such as those Joseph Singer prepared for Elaine Gottlieb (according to a personal communication from Gottlieb, Dec. 6, 2000). Even in the latter case, the translator as creative writer—and translation is by nature creative—can sense the whole plot from the embryo of a part and make the appropriate inferences. So when Joseph Singer belittled Gottlieb’s participation—“All she does is change the words of my rough draft”—Cecil Hemley laughed, perhaps because the reduction of imaginative scope was so absurd (see personal communication from Gottlieb, Dec. 6, 2000).

Certain of these connections have huge importance. For example, there are clear and close relationships between Yasha's triumphant lock picking before the thieves, his bungling of the lock during the attempted burglary of Emilia's neighbor, undertaken in order to finance his escape with her to Italy and putting him on the same low level as the thieves, and his helplessness at putting on phylacteries and prayer-shawl (Singer 1960: 192-198; Singer 1979: 158). As the original emphasizes—"He wasn't Yasha the Magician anymore, only a helpless boy" (*Er iz itst nisht geven Yasha der kunstmaker, nor an umbaholfen yingl*). He is seized by *bushe*, internalized shame and a reflex of the "shame and disgrace" (*bushes vekherpes*) with which the thieves had branded him, and it is now a deepened humility at the realization that the formerly despised community of prayer was granting him pardon (*moykhl*) despite his unworthiness (Singer 1979: 159; Singer 1960: 150).

As a result, he becomes a "Synagogue Jew" (Singer 1960: 195) but not as a mainstream observer, someone for whom the *beysamidresh* or "House of Study" has always been the center. Instead, he is now "Yasha the Penitent" or "*Baltshuve*" (the title of Singer's late, little-known and "favorite" work, as he confessed to students of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem, Shmeruk 1986: 114). Naturally, he returns to Esther, the faithful though barren wife, but much to her dismay walls himself in a "self-imposed prison" of breast-beating, in a cell next to Esther's bedroom—"A beast must be kept in a cage" and a "murderer" must be punished (Singer 1960: 238). His end is joyless, completely against the celebratory spirit of Judaism, even ascetic Hasidism; there is an echo of the extremist self-abnegation of Itche-Manes in *Satan in Goray* who bathes himself in a frozen stream in search of purity. Even the pious Emilia, in an admiring letter, admits that "it does seem to me that you have inflicted too severe a punishment upon yourself" (Singer 1960: 245).

Gottlieb translates this hesitancy very well; after all, Emilia had once been extremely sure of herself and rather hard on Yasha's inconsistency (Singer 1960: 180). Now, however, she admits her own discomfort and disorderly humanity:

For some mysterious reason I sleep badly and the human brain is such a capricious organ (my emphasis). In my fantasies I always pictured you in America in a huge theater or circus, surrounded by luxury and beautiful women. But reality is full of surprises (my emphasis, Singer 1960: 245).

In other words, this is no morality tale with an uncomplicated ending in the "bosom of Judaism." Rather, it is the story of ongoing wandering without surcease of solution.

The motives for Yasha's seclusion could be stated in the question of Elaine Gottlieb's heroine in her early novel *Darkling* (1946): "Wasn't there some way to preserve integrity from the hungry air?" (97). However, whereas Yasha is a Jew and seasoned performer and artist in 1890's Poland, Cristabel is a young and modern American art student, a solitary individualist riddled by the "love-dreams" of an untamed unconscious (1946: 110). To show these, Gottlieb carries her through an archetypal "dark wood" away from the girl's summer camp, prompting the same bursts of self-doubt that plagued the magician during his burglary (Singer 1960: 129-133)—"Am I lost?" "Ah, I know I am not lucky" (1946: 130, 132). Just like Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush," Cristabel "flings her soul upon the growing gloom," and this ability to evoke crisis would be invaluable to Gottlieb as a translator.

These actions are full of felt verbal invention—"My heart paraded madly," Cristabel says (89): not only "hungry air" but also "vast voluptuousness" (70) and "green insistencies" (183) and the direction of striving in such expressions as "the dimensionality of spirit" (90) plus the consciousness of obstacles in "A strange weakness diluted her intent" (192). Some of these are unquestionably overripe, too rhapsodic and even solipsistic in the style of Thomas Wolfe ("a leaf...a door...death and dust will die"), but she is well aware of the "aimless passion" (67) in her desire to "define her space" in a world hostile to art; in the same way, Emilia, a Polish Catholic, extreme version of the American girl, can criticize Yasha for being too "extempore," as you theater people [in New York?] phrase it" (Singer 1960: 180). But Yiddish needs this arsenal of English intensity, whether in self-absorption in the problems of maturity or a realization that life is a "Sick Rose," the title of Blake's poem heading Gottlieb's novel and speaking of a "dark secret love" underlying maturation. Cristabel is, after all, able to see her lover as "a blacker shadow overpowering others" (68) and at the death of her husband Gottlieb could make a character, based on her small son Robin, say—"Everyone has to die. Don't cry" (quoted from a story called "The Habit of Loving," Hemley 1998: 99). She was compensated for the loss by a "phosphorescent vision" (in the words of another story, "The Woman Who Was Absent," Hemley 1998: 259) filled with the "lively luminosity" of a Yiddish-English translator (to use Cristabel's favorite words, 1946: 109).

Hemley's own "Song of Experience" was a novel called *The Experience* (1960) dedicated to his wife and countering the somewhat callow—and effusive—probing of Cristabel. The novel's focus is the "revelation and divine study" of a wealthy exurbanite (out of a John Cheever story and "Bartleby the Scrivener") who ends up finding, in the words of an "I" narrator and friend, that "now that God is unavailable...there is nothing" (Hemley 1958/60: 190). In other words, the experience means disconnection, obsession and very real despair (42, 109). At the same time, there is a dimension of combined comedy and demonism in the presentation of the exurbanite's "psychic friend" as a "Lillith in night attire" (166) plus the sober—and somber—thought that perhaps the revelation was not a fraud after all—in a realization worthy of Singer that everything, including psychic life reaching to the astral zones, is possible. Hemley sums it up beautifully for a reader that has lost his God-centeredness, to be compared with the divine focus of Singer's world: all reality—the narrator's unfocused girl friends included—"is the visible ikon of the disoriented heart" (114).

This adjective-noun bonding is typical of Hemley's translation of *The Slave*. The mist rising from the woods surrounding Jacob's indentured hut is seen as "tenuous curls," not merely "hazy" or *nepeldik*, because these remind him of the majesty of Samson the Hero before Delilah cut off his hair, and the sun is "ascending" (rather than merely "going up" or *oyfgegangen*) in Latinate rather than commonplace Anglo-Saxon garb (Singer 1962: 4; Singer 1967: 10). Consequently, nature is significantly "adorned"—Singer could be lyrical and expansive as well as plain—and full of cabalistic and pantheistic speech (*gezog*, 190/197).

In tune with this divine movement is the prose itself. Hemley supplies rhythmic adverbs for prefixes—"smoke drifted upward" (*oyfgegangen*)—and prepositional phrases—"as if the mountains were burning within" (*in zayne tifenishen*). Moreover, the euphonic training of the eye and ear on a "creature" like a hawk "floating beyond care" (*bashefenish...badrengenish*) is followed by his recreation of its "gliding

tranquilly with a strange slowness beyond all earthly anxiety” (Singer 1962: 4-5; Singer 1967: 10). Jacob’s world is poetic, even when circumscribed by Godhead, and Hemley reproduces its stately beauty with great skill and sensitivity.

In other words, such divine circumscription is based on sober and inevitable reality, the basis for the “flowering of fact” envisioned both by Singer and his translator. Consequently, Hemley had to project this inevitability through short and simple sentences and clauses as well as restrictively used words. *That*, for example, does more than give rise to expansive apposition but is a bound and “embedded expansion” itself, with all the contextual boundaries of embedding (Halliday 1985:219-220); in this function, it is only the reflex of a verb—“doubt that” or “means that”—and can even be reworded out of existence: instead of “she recognizes that the experience is a threat,” Hemley can produce direct recognition—“recognizes as a threat” (1960: 42; see also Halliday 1985: 244). This is precisely in the spirit of Jacob’s indenture “as a slave” to Wanda’s father (*farkoyft far a knekht*, Singer 1967: 11; Singer 1962: 6).

The objectively clausal *that* is *az* in Yiddish (sometimes preceded by a comma completely foreign to English)—“It appeared to Jacob that,” Singer 1967: 10; Singer 1962: 5). This is distinguished from the fully apposite *vos* or *which* as in “the locks/curls which reminded Jacob of the deeds of Samson,” Singer 1967: 10. Hemley in *Young Crankshaw* (1963), a novel in fact dedicated to Singer, can eliminate *that* entirely—“How jubilant she had been the day [omission] she realized that Hannah Meyer had fallen from grace” (11)—and completely squeezes the *vos* out of the picture through the strength of an analogy in *The Slave*—“Mists...like tenuous curls made him think of Samson” (Singer 1962: 4). With an even stronger thematic thrust, he drops *which* from Jacob’s statement of acceptance of “the privations [*vos*] Providence had sent him” (Singer 1962: 6; Singer 1967: 11).

A comparison of the Yiddish original with Hemley’s version shows that the latter has suppressed signs of sensationalism, especially suspension marks (1962: 47). But these are motivated for the Yiddish reader, who would not feel that the heat of Wanda’s Polish-peasant breasts against the body of a Jewish religious scholar is unworthy of the emphasis that Singer gives it (1967: 46). Moreover, he would also see as significant—even “perilous”—Jacob’s fear that Wanda’s attraction could “sink him even deeper into the [Cabalistic] net” of demonic reality (1967: 46), although Hemley, in the interests of sobriety, eliminates the statement completely. Translation is, after all, the adaptation of a network of resonances to an entirely different—in this case, English—reader, and Hemley makes this adjustment admirably.

Likewise, Hemley tries to tighten the screws of Singer’s narrative by titling its sections—“Wanda, Sarah [her Jewish name], and The Return” (to the Land of Israel, where her son becomes the head of a seminary, see Singer 1962: 2, 146, 282). The original, on the other hand, needs no separate heading to signify the transition from her Polish to her converted identity (1967: 142) because this conversion entails clear obligations for Singer’s Yiddish readers, but it does need emphasis in English, the kind that Hemley was used to defining in his own fiction. In *Young Crankshaw*, for example, the evolution of the hero is traced in sections referring to “The Lover, The Son and The Man” in climactic succession (1963: 99, 183, 235).

Singer, in fact, saw his mission as a Cabalistic clarifier in a world where God had “withdrawn His Presence” (a world of *Tsimtsum* or “Divine Contraction”). His job

was to pick up the pieces of the “broken vessels,” the chaotic meanings and “black husks” (*shvartse klipes*) of human fate, thereby gathering and reconstituting “the holy sparks” (*nitsotses*) that had fallen from the sacred into the impure, from the world of emanations [and celestial creativity] into the unclean [and temporary] host” (Landis 1986: 165). Hemley ministered to this end.

### Epitomes

In other words, Singer’s short stories are “Chaos Redeem’d” in small. As Hemley wrote in a poem, “Ascent from the Dead” (“For Elaine Gottlieb”), “Joy can survive/ The advent of wisdom” (1966: 61-62). Consequently, he translated (with Martha Glicklich) *Der Spinotsist* as “The Spinoza of Market Street” about a scholar and devotee of Spinoza (Dr. Nahum Fischelson) who despite intellectual, social and physical inhibitions is still able to be a “lusty bridegroom” on the night of his wedding to a denizen of the Warsaw Jewish slums (Singer 1963: 62-82; Singer 1982: 79-93).

Singer revered Spinoza for his deification of *Sub specie aeternitatis*, the divine Substance dear to his Jewish heart. At the same time, however, he was unmoved by the idea of “serving a God who is silent,” who could offer no more than geometrical maxims about rational conduct. What he needed was a dynamic, creative and compassionate Father much like the Creator of Jewish tradition, a God who was “Himself the Universal Sufferer” and could stand behind fictional but painfully real creations (see Singer 1980: 2-3, 6). “*Amor dei intellectualis*” and a Spinozan “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” were not enough and Dr. Fischelson, even after the miraculous gift of his manhood, can only excuse himself to his “Deity” for “having behaved so foolishly” (Singer 1982: 81, 93).

The irony becomes even more devastating in American Exile or “*Goles*,” where an “old lover” Harry Bendiner meets a “younger woman” in his Miami apartment complex. But the woman is not so young that she cannot forget their shared Polish-Jewish past, and she offers him hope. Unfortunately, though, she commits suicide—in spite of talk about the need to sing the praises of youthful American “goodies” (Singer 1982: 427)—and Harry decides that as a survivor “he must comfort [the woman’s daughter], be a father to her, and perhaps try to meditate together why a man is born and why he must die” (my emphases, Singer 1982: 433). The pathos is rhythmically patterned by Singer’s nephew, Joseph Singer, a man who deeply understood it.

Even more rhetorically patterned was “Gimpel the Fool,” the first story in *Gimpel Tam un andere dertseylungen*, Singer’s first collection (to which *Der Spinotsist* also belongs, as does *Men darf lebn basimkha* or “Joy,” a neo-Hasidic tale about the dol-drums of disbelief, 1963: 113). After hearing it read aloud in Saul Bellow’s fine translation, first published in *The Partisan Review* of 1953, Cecil Hemley was so moved that he decided to publish the “complete Gimpel” for Noonday Press (Hemley 1998: 86). And Gimpel is moving. In the first place, the story introduces the stimulating ambiguity of the “Fool,” which in Yiddish and Hebrew can either signify wholeness, purity and innocence (Job 1: I is *tam* or “perfect and upright” in the wording of King James) or “one easily duped,” a *nar* with attendant nicknames (“imbecile, donkey, dope, ninny,” Bellow translates in full command of the English registry of stupidity, 1963: 232). In fact, though, Gimpel is no such thing. Despite heavy humiliation by

his community and family, including a temptation by the Devil who states that “the whole world deceives you, you ought to deceive the world in your turn,” he understands well that in the end, “the grave will be real, without complication, without ridicule [*leytsanes* or “clownishness”], without deception. God be praised: there even Gimpel cannot be deceived” (My emphases, Bellow 1963: 245, 247). The thematic and moral echo of the whole thus resounds, having rung English changes on *nar* with the variety of an original prefixal expressiveness—*op/narn* or “delude” (Singer 1963: 17).

In the second place, Gimpel is a cross between Sholem Aleichem’s Tevye the Dairyman and Peretz’s “holy beggar” Bontshe Shvayg—Singer could create archetypes in the Yiddish literary tradition, his detractors notwithstanding. Gimpel lives according to such pious and ironic maxims as “Shoulders are from God, and burdens too” (Bellow 1963: 239 from *Az Got git pleytses muz men shlepn dem pak*—literally, “If God gives shoulders, you must tote the pack,” Singer 1963: 10). Involved is no mere fictional figure but a complete folk morality in all its binding terseness.

Although Bellow adamantly rejected identification as a “Jewish writer,” preferring to see his work as universal and American, he nevertheless confessed to the “great power” of his ethnic background and stressed that “at a most susceptible time of my life I was wholly Jewish” (including immersion in Yiddish and Judaic morality and learning, see Miller 1991: 42-43). This is particularly true of early works like *Seize the Day*, which first appeared in *Partisan Review* in 1956, only a few years after his translation of “Gimpel the Fool,” significantly Singer’s first work in an English version (Miller 1991: 93, 54).<sup>3</sup>

The title of the book is no joyous call to *carpe diem* life and love; it is the tip of a huckster (Dr. Tamkin) to buy the right stock at the right time—ironically, lard or “pigmeat.” But this is, after all, a modern American story, not a Jewish village tale. Still, Tommy Wilhelm, its hero, is like Gimpel in being a consummate loser with “ashes in his mouth, not freedom” (113). For him *tam* means a “fool” in the sense of an “idiot,” someone without “reserves” (inner as well as outer resources), and he reviles himself in the terms of Gimpel’s community—“Wild boar! Dumb Mule! Slave!” (38, 55). But the “burden is personal and individual now:”...this Wilky [as his father called him], or Tommy Wilhelm [his Hollywood agent’s “stage name”], was assigned to be the carrier of a load which was his own self, his characteristic self” (39). Unfortunately, his father (Dr. Adler) doesn’t want to be “burdened” by him any longer (109). Neither does his wife nor his so-called friend nor his community.

However, Wilhelm is a sincere seeker; maybe the “business of life” (as distinguished from the “trading of commodities”) meant

to carry his peculiar burden, to feel shame and impotence, to taste these quelled tears (my emphases)...Maybe the making of mistakes expressed the very purpose of his life...Maybe he was supposed to make them and suffer from them on the earth (56).

Maybe, furthermore, his name was neither Tommy Wilhelm nor Wilky but Velvel “by which his old grandfather called him.” Maybe his “True” versus “Pretender Soul” (in Dr. Tamkin’s scheme) was the same as Gimpel’s (see 1956: 72). For both, after all, *Yizkor* (prayer for the dead), *Yom Kippur*, and the release of tears (not “quelled” anymore) during a Jewish funeral are climactic events of purgation (1956: 117-118).

The setting for *Seize the Day* is that of Singer’s *Shadows on the Hudson* (origi-

nally serialized in the *Forward* of 1957-1958), “The Cafeteria” (Singer 1982: 297-301), and his own residence—”Along Broadway in the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties, [where] a great part of New York’s vast population of old men and women live” (1956: 4). In other words, it was so close to home that Singer may have resented the proximity—”Saul Bellow was a writer who made no sense,” he said to Lester Goran (1994: 20). Bellow, it must be remembered, had won the Nobel Prize only two years before Singer.

The *karma* of Gimpel was also passed on to the second story of *Gimpel Tam un andere dertseylungen*, in which Gimpel, the son of Abba, the father of a vast family of “Little Shoemakers,” goes to America armed with both *Haskala* knowledge and traditional religion—so that in America he would not turn into an “idolater in Egypt” (Singer 1963: 43; Singer 1966: 95). The story was translated by Isaac Rosenfeld, like Bellow a *Partisan Review* writer and the author of a nostalgic novel about the remnants of Jewish folk feeling in America entitled *Passage from Home*. In this book, the hero’s stepmother vituperates against the “cold and inaccessible world of the *goyim*” (“Gentiles”) to which Gimpel (and Tommy Wilhelm/ Velvel) must oppose Jewish humanism:

I translate literally, ‘[they live] like dogs and pigs, low, false, besmirched, without heart and soul, without love, without self-respect, without a care for anything human, and as hard and selfish as a stone’ (Rosenfeld 1946: 41).

“*Hart un egoistish vi a shteyn*,” the stepmother’s “excitable” Yiddish could have resounded in what was undoubtedly a personal reminiscence. For Rosenfeld knew Yiddish so well that he even wrote creatively in the language, translated “Prufrock” into Yiddish together with Saul Bellow (Schechner 1988: 15), and, according to educated opinion, almost equaled Bashevis Singer in the quality of his style (Schechner 1988:413). He was therefore the ideal reconstituter of Bashevis’ “lexical cohesion,” in which the “referential chains” are dragged along the corridors of the whole story (see Halliday 1985: 385)—or as Abba meditates with pleasure, throughout “the unbroken chain of generations” (Singer 1966: 71, in which Rosenfeld adds “unbroken” for English emphasis to *eyn keyt fun doyyes*, Singer 1963: 20).

This dragging is made up of sounds beginning with the Polish village “whispering, murmuring and soft scratching, as of some unseen creature engaged in endless activity, conversing in an unearthly [astral?] tongue” (Singer 1966: 76, rendering the nominal *shorkhenish*, *shorshen* and *kratsen* as well as the verbal-nominal “pairing” of *geporet an eyvik porenish*, Singer 1963: 25). This rhythmic labor then receives the blessing of God and America: outside Gimpel’s workshop, “The birds sang, flies buzzed, butterflies fluttered about” (Singer 1966: 94, adding assonance to *getsvitshert*, *gezhumt* and *geflatert*, Singer 1963: 43). Rosenfeld, in other words, enhances what turns out to be a harmony, not the usual discord of the Jewish “generation gap.”

Accordingly, fate is mild rather than in the traditional formulation of “Man plans and God laughs” (*A mentsh trakht un Got lakht*, Singer 1963: 26). Instead, “Man proposes, God disposes” (Singer 1966: 77), so that God and man work together and their identity of sound and purpose are maintained. Likewise, Gimpel is graced with a tender diminutive and Gimpele leads to the generation of Velvele in a counting song of “The Little Shoemakers” on their benches reminiscent of the reclining praise of Passover(83, 95).



Elaine Gottlieb's "Singer and Hawthorne: a Prevalence of Satan" (1972) interprets the constancy of evil in his fiction, though its demonic presence tends to lose its sting in the stories, especially in "The Mirror" (*Der shpigl*), in which Satan is not only Master Imp (*Der shretl*) but also Head Peeping Tom through a boudoir mirror. He speaks pretentious Yiddish, "Germanically" cast and flavored with learned Aramaic, and is really no more threatening than a comic devil of medieval Mystery (see 1975: 3). Of course, the bad advice of the "Master of Deceit" proves disastrous to Gimpel, but this damage doesn't keep him from enduring this world (*Haoylom haze*) and envisioning another (*Haoylom haba*) "beyond deception."

More serious yet is their embodiment of such Passover values as adherence to tradition and redemption through suffering in addition to the nagging question of man's cruelty to Creation (Landis 1986: 15). These starlike sparks are undimmed by bloodless allegory, by the moral system behind Puritan "Romance"—even though Hyman (1966: 83) calls Singer "The Yiddish Hawthorne." They are sealed with troubled Adamic flesh and steeped in exiled Yiddish expressiveness.

#### NOTES

1. This article is an elaboration of Elaine Gottlieb's dream, recounted by her son Robin: "A strange, garbled voice spoke somewhere below me in the dark—'Your heart is ashes'; then, "'Yes, I'm Jewish and proud of it,' my mother was saying in her sleep" (Hemley 1998: 273).
2. The Bibles here used are the bilingual *Holy Scriptures (Tora, Neviim, Ktuvim)*, Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 1992, and *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and the New Testaments and the Apocrypha*, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1977.
3. This was an extremely moving story, so much so that a faithful film, starring Robin Williams and Jerry Stiller, was made of it (Learning and Focus, Monterey Home Video, Monterey, CA, 1986).

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