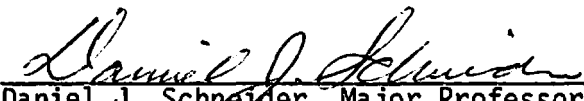
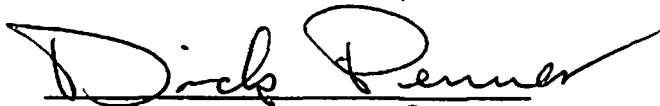
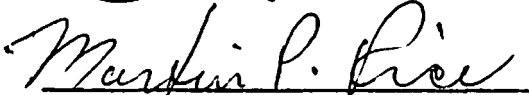
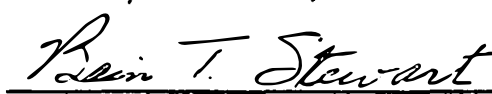


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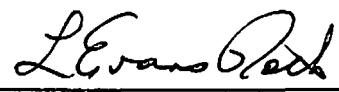
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Norbert Louis Elliot III entitled "Allegory in the Novels of Isaac Bashevis Singer." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


Daniel J. Schneider, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

ALLEGORY IN THE NOVELS OF ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Norbert Louis Elliot III

August 1981

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Thanks is also given to my family and friends, all of whom have given their unconditional love.

This work is for Mildred Seruntine, Dorman Edward Francisco, and Christian Elliot.

ABSTRACT

When Isaac Bashevis Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1978, he was still largely an unknown artist, and his work certainly had not been given the critical attention it deserved. At best, books on Singer are appreciative criticism that lack a systematic frame of reference through which the artistry of the novels may be approached.

My approach in the present study is essentially that of a formalist critic. I have sought to define the shaping artistic principle of each of Singer's novels, and in doing this I have been able to isolate Singer's allegorical tendencies. Thus Singer emerges as an artist studying the allegorical struggle between Good and Evil, between God and Satan, yet his profound insight into the subtle, "realistic" complexities of life lends a sense of immediacy to the timeless comprehensiveness of his themes.

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INTRODUCTION

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Isaac Bashevis Singer justified the vision in his novels by saying:

the pessimism of the creative person is not decadence, but a mighty passion for redemption of man. While the poet entertains he continues to search for eternal truths, for the essence of being. In his own fashion he tries to solve the riddle of time and change, to find an answer to suffering, to reveal love in the very abyss of cruelty and injustice. Strange as these words may sound, I often play with the idea that when all the social theories collapse and wars and revolutions leave humanity in utter gloom, the poet--whom Plato banned from his Republic--may rise up to save us all.¹

If Singer's work may be described essentially by one statement, his own phrase regarding the "essence of being" would certainly guide the critic. In the comprehensiveness of his vision of man in relationship both to himself and to God, Singer takes his place as a major world figure.

Yet surprisingly little in the way of rigorous scholarship has been done to date. Articles edited by Irving Malin² and Marcia Allentuck³ attempt to accomplish an overview of Singer's entire vision in a few pages. The only study that approaches the vastness of vision is that of Irving H. Buchen, yet this book is appreciative criticism

¹Isaac Bashevis Singer, Nobel Lecture (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1978), p. 16.

²Irving Malin, ed., Critical Views of Isaac Bashevis Singer (New York: New York University Press, 1968).

³Marcia Allentuck, ed., The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970).

and does not offer a systematic frame of reference for an analysis of Singer's art.⁴ In fact, the same may be said for Ben Siegel's pamphlet.⁵ A later study by Malin⁶ is insensitive, often hostile, and Edward Alexander's recent Twayne study offers little more than plot summary.⁷ Singer's biography has only recently been attempted by Paul Kresh, but it lacks critical emphasis on the novels.⁸ Since there are very few good formalist readings of Singer's early novels, I have assigned most critical evaluations to the notes in the first three chapters. Regarding the later novels which have been more adequately studied, I have cited only views that, for better or worse, attempt to present Singer in terms of the artistry of the novels. Since there is no work which deals with allegory in Singer's novels, the following study will, I hope, indicate that Singer is best defined as a novelist with allegorical tendencies.

As an artist, Singer is attracted to times of tension, most specifically that of the holocaust. His first novel, Satan in Goray, is set in the seventeenth century, as is a later novel, The Slave.

⁴Irving H. Buchen, Isaac Bashevis Singer and the Eternal Past (New York: New York University Press, 1968).

⁵Ben Siegel, Isaac Bashevis Singer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969).

⁶Irving Malin, Isaac Bashevis Singer (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972).

⁷Edward Alexander, Isaac Bashevis Singer (G. K. Hall and Co., Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980).

⁸Paul Kresh, Isaac Bashevis Singer: The Magician of West 86th Street (New York: The Dial Press, 1979).

Both works have as their background the holocaust caused by the revolt of the Ukrainian Cossak hetman (a Cossak leader) Chmielnicki against the Polish gentry. Singer's more modern "family" novels, The Family Moskat, The Estate, and The Manor, are also studies of Jews under tumultuous circumstances, both political and intellectual. Singer's novels of twentieth-century Jews who escaped the holocaust, Enemies, A Love Story and Shosha, concentrate on how chaos broke into a people's life. For Singer, the holocaust, both in the seventeenth century and in the twentieth, suggests a metaphor for God's inconsistency with his chosen people.

Speculations on God's injustices were common in Singer's own childhood. When the center no longer seemed to be holding for the world, his father speculated that the world was experiencing the disorder that presaged the coming of the Messiah. It was only later that Singer realized that the disorder that would accompany the Messiah's coming would mean that Death was the Messiah. It is the difficulty and tension inherent in such concepts that is felt throughout the novels, and this tension is also found by Singer in his early years, especially in the marriage of his mother and father. As Singer told Joel Blocker and Richard Elman in an interview, ". . . my maternal grandfather was an anti-Hasid, a misnaged. There was always a conflict between my father and my mother about Hasidism because my mother was a little bit of a skeptic. . . ."9

⁹Joel Blocker and Richard Elman, "An Interview with Isaac Bashevis Singer," in Critical Views of Isaac Bashevis Singer, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 12.

This tension between an emphasis on mysticism and faith and the contrary belief in learning and the law was also reinforced by Singer's first encounters with Baruch Spinoza's concept of a God of infinite intellect. The idea that God's intellect is not balanced by compassion seems to be a lifetime preoccupation of both Singer and his characters. "After nearly a lifetime of pondering the matter," Kresh writes, "he is sure that his God is not Spinoza's God."¹⁰ Yet many of Singer's major characters have not quite come to their author's certainty. In fact, all of Singer's young intellectuals speculate that if we are all, according to the Ethics, part of God, then Hitler too is part of God. Such dualism of God's nature assumes much of the background of Singer's novels, both implicitly and explicitly. It is a concept linked to the holocaust by the very ambiguity about God's nature that it suggests.

Yet as Singer states in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, there is hope for the redemption of man, and for Singer this redemption must be experienced on a personal level through the use of free will. As he told Marshall Berger and Bob Barnhart in an interview, "Everyone of us has free will. The only thing is that free will is a rare gift and we get very little of it. In the stories where I describe human misery, I describe cases where a man did not make use of his free will. . . . I always believe that there is no power which can curb a

¹⁰Kresh, p. 63.

man from using this rare gift if he really wants to."¹¹ We must make the most of this "rare gift" and activate it; for Singer, such activation is the first step towards freedom.

Thus man can overcome the snares and evils of this world, but the exertion of free will is the most difficult of all tasks for Singer's characters. Such an exertion is seen as a battle, and in the above interview Singer describes the stimulus of free will in allegorical terms: "This war between God and Satan means actually the war between free will and compulsion. From the moment man is born, he is compelled, yet at the same time he is given free will to fight compulsion."¹² This allegorical vision of the source of tension in man's life is also the source of Singer's allegory.

Since the tendency to allegorize is the consistent frame of reference for the present study, it is best to define here exactly what I mean by the allegorical impulse.¹³ The allegorical impulse

¹¹Marshall Berger and Bob Barnhardt, "A Conversation with Isaac Bashevis Singer" in Critical Views of Isaac Bashevis Singer, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 40.

¹²Berger and Barnhardt, p. 40.

¹³To give a history of the various uses of allegory would far exceed the aims of my study. Suffice it to say that anyone interested in the artistry and the formal implications of allegory should consult Edwin Honig's Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1959) and Angus Fletcher's Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964). These two studies, as well as suggestions made by Dr. Daniel Schneider, have greatly informed my understanding of the allegorical process.

belongs, as C. S. Lewis proposes, "to man, or even to mind, in general. It is the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms."¹⁴ In short, anytime an author wishes to give maximum comprehensiveness to his themes he is, on one level, employing allegory. The problem that one finds in such a definition of the creative process generally is that the tendency to allegorize is seen, at least since the nineteenth century, as the effect of a naive and feeble imagination. We tend to feel, with Coleridge, that the form of allegory is "mechanic" in that the author impresses a "pre-determined form" on the materials at hand rather than letting the form organically arise from the work.¹⁵ We should realize, however, that Coleridge's distinction between the mechanic and the organic is a product of an age in which subjectivity triumphed in heroes who chose Byronic daring over the indefatigable progress of Christian. Generally, we should not use allegory as a perjorative term; rather, we should realize that allegory is used whenever an author wishes to give reference to an event that has meaning on another level. Thus, allegory is a broader term than symbolism in that, to a writer with allegorical tendencies, all manifestations of the imagination are symbolic. Frequently, as the symbol and the allegorical counter merge, the symbols assume a pattern, and allegory arises.

¹⁴C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 44.

¹⁵Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Poetry, the Drama, and Shakespeare" in Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902), p. 229.

Yet I do not wish to imply that the tendency to allegorize is equal in all authors' imaginations. For example, we have pure allegory, as Norman Friedman reminds us, when "the events of a narrative obviously and continuously refer to another simultaneous structure of events or ideas, whether historical events, moral or philosophical ideas, or natural phenomena."¹⁶ Herein arises what might be called simplistic allegory in which the narrative is wholly subordinate to the allegory. For example, Bunyan's Christian, as well as the other "characters" in Pilgrim's Progress, are allegorical agents for moral virtues only. On the other hand, a more complex allegory exists when the allegory finds its counterpart on more than one level as, for example, in the Red Cross Knight of Spenser's The Faerie Queene, an agent for moral, historical, and mythical themes. As we begin to examine complex allegory, we realize that the list of works that one could cite would be endless, extending from Spenser's Mother Hubbard's Tale to George Orwell's 1984, from Jonathan Swift's Battle of the Books and Gulliver's Travels to Saul Bellow's Humboldt's Gift and Robert Penn Warren's A Place To Come To.

Is, then, all literature allegorical? This is precisely the type of limiting question that we should try to avoid because in answering yes we would assume that in defining Singer, for example, as an allegorist we are defining him as another artist; in short we are

¹⁶Norman Friedman, "Allegory," in Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 12.

defining nothing. Instead, let us say that the impulse to allegorize is at the heart of the creative imagination. We recognize this impulse most immediately when the allegory lacks mimetic richness, when there is a one-to-one correspondence between agent and idea. Yet along with allegory there is an impulse for mimesis in the imagination. When this impulse is very strong, very realistic, we tend to feel, rightly so, that the work is more a depiction of life as it is than life as a representation of ideas. Yet the impulse for allegorization, as well as the impulse for realism, both exist in the creative imagination, and it is senseless to deny either.

Perhaps the impulse of allegory and realism are best evinced in fiction because there a narrative movement must occur, a movement most often suggesting a journey that gives itself to allegorical suggestiveness. In turning to fictionalists, whose impulse is to render life as it is, we find that the impulse to allegorize is accepted by the twentieth century audience as long as the allegory includes a vision of life that we call "realistic," a vision of life that attends to the intricate subtleties of existence. Hence, when a fictionist such as Hawthorne moves the narrative of "Young Goodman Brown" on a horizontal axis while simultaneously suggesting a vertical allegorical association, we feel that Hawthorne reduces characterization to a psychological abstraction. In seeking to convert Christian allegory into psychological allegory, Hawthorne sacrifices a sense of mimetic richness. In fact, none of the characters emerge as realistic, and we tend to resent the intrusion of the narrator at the conclusion of the tale as he speculates that the entire narration might have been a

dream. Could this descent into hell have actually happened if the characters had been more realistically drawn? Singer would answer yes.

A later fictionalist, Kafka, takes allegory into the realm of realistic, psychological subtlety in The Metamorphosis. If we sympathize with Gregor Samsa, it is because he is carefully drawn as a human being, not as an archetype. The association of man and roach is an allegorical device that lends Martin Greenberg to state that "The Metamorphosis does not unfold as action or metaphor; it is the spilling out of a metaphor . . . it is a vision."¹⁷ It is, in fact, such a metaphorical vision that informs Singer's first novel, Satan in Goray. In this vision, Singer casts his agents in the roles of psychological and religious "types," but in doing so he creates an allegory that is simple in that the impulse for mimetic richness is minimalized in the work. In Singer's fictions after this first novel, we find allegory combined with realism, thus lending a sense of patterns of how people live their lives and what time does to people in such patterns. For Singer, the positive nature of existence is maintained by keeping man realistically in view as he was created, neither God nor insect. In essence, Singer's vision is always based on the psychological and dramatic interest that is always part of the realistic novelist's art. Like Melville, Lawrence, and Faulkner, Singer blends a sense of mimetic richness and allegory. Thus, as

¹⁷Martin Greenberg, The Terror of Art: Kafka and Modern Literature (New York: Basic Books, 1965), pp. 66-67.

Susan Sontag points out, Singer involves the reader in his story by use of detail, both physical and emotional:

It is I think altogether to the credit of Isaac Bashevis Singer that his fiction provides modern taste with a generous ration of nightmare, in the form of demons, dreams, deformity, and disease--without sacrificing the centrality of plot or the substantiality of a world. In the age of post-classical fiction, Singer continues to practice the classical virtues. His rare gift of constructing inventive and compelling plots has been much remarked on by critics. What has not been sufficiently commended, however, is his extraordinary power of sensuous evocation.¹⁸

As Sontag implies, as a result of our being able to "see" into the image of life we are moved. In fact, in a very recent interview by Richard Burgin, Singer vindicates the appropriateness of Sontag's observation:

There are a number of writers now who think that when they distort reality they create fantasy, which is completely false. Because a real daydream does not distort reality, it may magnify reality, it may create miracles, but it will not distort. Distortion is not really the ideal of literature because deep in his heart every writer wants to tell the truth. He is, in a way, a carrier of truth, but he carries the truth in his own way, a truth according to his emotion. A writer who will sit down and distort reality just arbitrarily, willfully, will never succeed from a literary point of view.¹⁹

In summary, it is clear that Singer wants to present a "truth" in life that consists of concrete detail. However, the image of Jewry also concerns Singer, and the major allegorical struggles of individuals to fathom the meaning of that image constitute the

¹⁸Susan Sontag, "Demons and Dreams," Partisan Review, 29 (Summer, 1962), 460.

¹⁹Richard Burgin, "A Conversation with I. B. Singer," Michigan Quarterly Review 17 (1978), 122-123.

metaphorical background of Singer's novels. As a result of Singer's combination of the "truth" of mimetic detail and his tendency to allegorize his characters as they struggle to discern the hand of God in their lives, Singer's young intellectual heroes become knights of faith striving in a battle to progress towards the meaning of their faith and the tradition that such meaning includes. In essence, Singer depicts his characters in realistic quests that seek to vindicate God's presence in a world in which evil exists.

My approach in the present study is essentially that of a formalist critic interested both in Singer's art and his conception of theodicy as it manifests itself in his work. I have sought to define the shaping artistic principle of each of his novels, and in doing so I have concentrated on Singer's allegorical tendencies and the variations of these tendencies. Thus, Singer emerges as an artist studying the allegorical struggle between Good and Evil, between God and Satan, yet his profound insight into the subtle, "realistic" complexities of life lends a sense of immediacy to the timeless comprehensiveness of his themes.

In Chapter I, I will concentrate on Satan in Goray as a simple allegory, one in which the narrative of the sufferings of Goray corresponds to an allegorical journey that leads the village, as well as the reader, to an awareness of the difficulties involved in a commitment to faith.

In Chapter II, I will analyze the artistry with which Singer combines allegory with realism as evinced in The Family Moskat. As a result of such attention to both the allegory and the mimetic richness

of the novel, I will be able to define the nature of Asa Hershel's journey towards his roots.

In Chapter III, I will again take the approach of identifying both Singer's allegorical tendencies and his sense of realistic detail to show how he successfully intensifies our sympathetic emotions for the complexities of his characters as they are presented in The Manor.

In Chapter IV, I will analyze the central metaphor of magic, suggesting a search for the essence of all things, that enables Yasha of The Magician of Lublin to overcome the obstacles of life and make his awesome leap of faith into commitment.

In Chapter V, I will analyze how Singer takes every opportunity to amplify the story of the biblical Jacob's struggles in order to create an allegorically realistic portrait of the Jewish people in The Slave.

In Chapter VI, I will delineate still another allegorical "type" of man, the fleeing Jew, who fails to execute his free will in the tragi-comedy of Enemies, A Love Story.

In Chapter VII, I will define the nature of Aaron Greidinger's allegorical journey towards beauty in Shosha, a journey that clearly indicates Singer's ability to transform life into art.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I will delineate the progression of Singer's novels.

CHAPTER I

SATAN IN GORAY: WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH

Although Singer's first novel is an allegory about the coming of the Messiah, criticism has ignored the allegorical structure of the work as a whole. Even Edwin Gittleman, one of Singer's more sensitive critics, ignores the universal symbolic nature of *Goray* by suggesting that the town is unique. He writes, "*Goray* is the town on the verge of falling into the void, the town whose existence is measured by its proximity to the cosmic cataclysm ending the world. It is the apocalyptic town."¹ Yet we must also realize that *Goray* is every town. The elements of deformation that affect *Goray* are not exclusive but inclusive of all societies. Once we realize that Singer views the events of *Goray* universally, an allegorical reading of the novel is suggested. As we witness *Goray* attempting to "force the Lord," a theme that has its roots in Singer's personal life and his conception

¹Edwin Gittleman, "Singer's Apocalyptic Town: Satan in Goray," in The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer, ed. Marcia Allentuck (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 69. All critics have not been as sensitive as Gittleman and Buchen towards Singer's novel, and there is no criticism that deals with the allegorical nature of the work. For example, Siegel has written that the novel is one of Singer's rare aesthetic failures in its use of the supernatural, although he does not explicitly define why this offends him (see pp. 14-16). Malin accuses Singer of ambivalence in his conclusion to the novel, wrongly believing that Singer wants to give us a hopeful moral (see pp. 43-51). Although Alexander understands the catastrophic character of the Messiah, he too does not deal with the actual artistry of the novel.

of Messianism, we realize that Singer is also suggesting that man can compress time by his own means. Ultimately, the novel's message is that there is no remedy, no hastening system of belief that can bring the Messiah, symbolizing the end of our trials, toward us. As Singer defines the false turnings that men take as they fail to recognize that it is the fate of man to adhere to his faith or die, we begin to see an allegorical pattern in the town's growing awareness through pain. Since the pattern of an awareness through suffering has its basis in Singer's personal life and his concept of Messianism (aspects of the novel overlooked by critics), I will first define the theme of hastening the Messiah as it is informed by Singer's own experience. After defining the implications of Messianism as they are delineated in the novel itself through characterization, I will then trace the clarity of Singer's presentation of Goray's awareness through pain as the town battles good and evil in its periods of prosperity, physical destruction, rebirth, and spiritual destruction. Only by tracing the archetypal process of Goray's coming to awareness through pain may the connection then be made between the suffering of Goray and Rechele, a young woman who symbolizes the corrupted community. We come to realize, even in this first novel, how Singer tends to view the general in the particular as we realize that Singer narrates the history of Goray as well as the spiritual biography of Rechele. Hence, when the demon, the child of a corrupted world and a corrupted woman, takes the stage in the conclusion of the novel, his presence exhibits Singer's interest not only in the individual and

the concrete, but also in the universal, the allegorical. By analyzing the novel for its autobiographical, thematic, and structural effectiveness, we ultimately come to realize that the strength of the novel lies in both the clarity of its definition of Messianism (forcing the Lord) and the precision with which Singer defines the nature of the false paths that men take if they refuse to accept the burden of their faith.

Although Singer did some research on the seventeenth-century historical period for this novel, the theme of hastening the Messiah is primarily informed by Singer's own experience, and it is best to lay the autobiographical foundation of the novel first so that we may understand Singer's early tendency to transform experience into art. As a child Singer grew up amidst speculation that the Messiah was at hand. In a chapter entitled "Jews don't bother to fix their roofs, anticipating the coming of the Messiah," Jushua Singer, Isaac's older brother, writes that he remembered a time in Leoncin when news came of the unspeakable atrocities of the war pogrom and revolutions in Russia. As a result, Pinchas Mendal, their Rabbi father (whose holiness is reflected in the character of the holy Rabbi Benish Ashkenazi in Satan in Goray) set about searching his holy books for signs of the Messiah's coming. Pinchas Mendal proposed that the Messiah would come in the year 1906. Accordingly, the Jews of Leoncin, like the fictional Jews of Goray, "stopped studying and doing business and spent their time talking about the deliverance."²

²I. J. Singer, Of A World That Is No More, trans. Joseph Singer (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1979), p. 228.

One even announced "that he would not repair his roof for the coming of winter, since it would be a waste of time and money. 'Why bother, when we'll all soon be on the way to Israel anyway?' he argued."³ Of his father, Joshua writes, "flushed, beaming, exultant, father painted the coming world in vivid, glowing pictures to hushed crowds in the house of worship."⁴ When the Messiah does not come on Rosh Hashanah as predicted, "the autumn rains gushed down from leaden skies that hung so low they caught against the trees."⁵

These scenes of expectation and disappointment in Singer's own experience find their way into Satan in Goray almost identically as Joshua describes them, thus revealing Singer's early tendency to transform life into art. For example, houses are neglected in Goray. When the Messiah does not come on the High Holy Day, Singer writes, "At the last moment runners had been sent to the surrounding villages to buy the most necessary articles. But they had not as yet returned. The unpainted houses huddled together, their roofs torn and their interiors visible; dusty attics full of cobwebs and rubbish."⁶ In such description the houses are almost personified as ruined people. The fantastic descriptions of Pinchas Mendal are also carried into the

³I. J. Singer, p. 228.

⁴I. J. Singer, p. 229.

⁵I. J. Singer, p. 237.

⁶Isaac Bashevis Singer, Satan in Goray, trans. Jacob Sloan (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1955), p. 179. All further references cited parenthetically in the text.

novel. Reb Gedalya, the licentious prophet, brings the news to Goray that Zevi had departed for Stamboul riding on "a wild lion, wearing garments of purple and spun gold and numerous precious stones that shone in the darkness" (p. 138). In fact, one device to build tension in the novel is the increasingly fantastic nature of these descriptions as it becomes obvious that the Messiah will not come. When famine comes to Goray, Gedalya prophesizes that "every godfearing man would have ten thousand heathen slaves to wash his feet and care for him. . . . Everyone would eat from golden dishes and drink only wine. The daughters of Israel would bathe in streams of balsam, and the fragrance of their bodies would suffuse the world" (p. 174). The rains that came for the Jews of Leoncin also come for the Jews of Goray: "On the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles a deluge descended on Goray, and the rain poured down incessantly for three days and three nights. The river overflowed, smashing the locks of the water mill and crumbling the dam" (p. 187). It seems that images of disappointment in Singer's own childhood figure in his novel as symbols for the spiritual destruction of Goray that begins when the townspeople believe that deliverance is at hand.

Since the personal tumultuousness of the years during which Singer wrote Satan in Goray also has been critically ignored in relation to the composition of the novel, it is important to note that during this period Singer's only son, Israel, was taken off to the Soviet Union by his Communist wife, Runya. For Singer, this event, symbolizing the corruption of innocence by optimistic systems assumes prophetic proportion, just as speculation about the Messiah assumes

symbolic proportions in Singer's childhood. Singer felt that much of Europe was beginning to believe in -isms and that, consequently, much innocence and good was being drawn into a false system of belief. Thus, Singer's personal belief in the catastrophic false turnings that come when the individual or his society believes in a saving system becomes an impassioned cry against blatant optimism. On one level, Singer transforms his experiences with Runya into a novelistic prophecy of the fate of western Europe.

In fact, this contempt for blind optimism is still vivid in the older artist. When Richard Burgin interviewed Singer, the novelist was asked about his impressions of America when he arrived in 1935, shortly after his wife left him and Satan in Goray was completed. Singer answered,

When I came here I had a feeling of catastrophe. I ran away from one catastrophe in Poland and I found another one when I came here. I had been working in Warsaw as a Yiddish journalist, but the situation of the Jews in Poland became worse from day to day. Hitler was already in power in 1935. Nazis used to come to Poland to visit, to go hunting and to talk to some of the Polish political leaders. My only hope was to come to America. I found there could be no rest in Poland. Many were too optimistic--or blind enough that they did not see anything.⁷

Thus we see that Singer's belief that blind optimism will not save man has its roots in his personal experiences. When Singer cries out against Messianism in Satan in Goray, he is also conveying a message that blind optimism will not save the people of Poland, just as an

⁷Richard Burgin, "Isaac Bashevis Singer Talks . . . About Everything," The New York Times Magazine, 26 November 1978, p. 26.

adherence to communism did not save Runya, who later had to flee the Soviet Union.

Since critics have also overlooked the thematic implications of Messianism for Singer, it is important to establish that the very nature of Messianism itself has an inherent allegorical nature, outside of the specific references of Poland or Goray. As Gershom Scholem has written on the subject, "Any discussion of the problems relating to Messianism is a delicate matter, for it is here the essential conflict [between Christians and Jews] has developed and continues to exist."⁸ For Judaism, Messianic salvation comes in a physical world on an historic stage, unlike salvation for Catholics, which comes spiritually and privately. Essentially, the Messianic idea defines the Jew, yet it can also alienate him and jeopardize his position of faith.

Actually, there is room for error in interpretation in that there are two beliefs regarding the coming of the Messiah. One belief, as Scholem points out, is that the light of the Messiah "may become visible by gradations and stages. . . . Such a belief was very common among apocalyptic calculators in all ages whenever they sought schemata according to which the different stages of the redemption would occur within the frame of the last days."⁹ On the other hand there is the belief expressed in Sanhedrin 97a that "three things

⁸Gershom Scholem, The Messianic Idea in Judaism (New York: Schocker Books, 1971), p. 1.

⁹Scholem, p. 11.

come unawares: the Messiah, a found article, and a scorpion."¹⁰ The Jews of Goray are clearly of the first belief in that they seek signs. Yet in doing this they jeopardize their position as Jews. For example, the Catholics of Goray watch the Jews at a distance early in the novel, but as the prophecy of the End of Days is not fulfilled, Singer writes, "In the villages the [Catholic] peasants already complained that the Jews had betrayed their faith and were behaving exactly like gypsies and outlaws. The priests were inciting the masses to a holy war. They foresaw all devout Christians gathering together, sword and spear in hand, to exterminate the Jews, man, woman, and child, so that not a trace should be left of the people of Israel (God save us!)" (p. 202). Thus the Jews proceed wrongly in trying to find the light of the Messiah's coming, and they risk their destruction.

For Singer, Messianism suggests the eternal, allegorical struggle for the Jews in Goray or Leoncin or Warsaw to maintain their faith that the Messiah will come in His own good time. Judging from Satan in Goray, I would say that Singer himself believes in the apocalypse that the Sanhedrin prophet expresses. Man's intellectual exercises to find the presence of God that will lead to the end of life's torments, exercises suggested by the apocalyptic calculations of Mates and Gedalya in the novel, clearly jeopardize the Jewish position of faith. For Singer, the suddenness of the Messiah's

¹⁰Quoted in Scholem, p. 12.

coming is important to man's realization that he cannot, in his terms, intellectually discern the presence and plans of God.

As we turn to a structural study of the novel itself, we find that it is through the characterization of Mates and Gedalya that the implications of Messianism are delineated. First, it is important to recognize that these two false prophets are men who claim to be able to calculate the apocalypse. Regarding the secretive nature of the prophet of the apocalypse, an important aspect of such a prophet that Singer emphasizes in the novel, Scholem points out,

Apocalypses are revelations or disclosures of God's hidden knowledge of the End. That is to say, what reached the prophets as knowledge which could hardly be proclaimed with sufficient loudness and publicity, in the apocalypses becomes secret. It is one of those enigmas of Jewish religious history that have not been satisfactorily solved by any of the many attempts at explanation of just what the reason is for this metamorphosis which makes knowledge of the Messianic End, where it oversteps the prophetic framework of the biblical texts, into an esoteric form of knowing. Why does the apocalyptist conceal himself instead of shouting his vision into the face of the enemy power as did the prophets?¹¹

It also must be remembered that the Jewish people, in the present case the people of Goray, are so plagued by injustice that they are willing to believe that a secretive, religious nature may suggest an apocalyptic prophet. With such a willingness for salvation, the people are all the more tempted to believe in the promise of a coming Messiah.

Thus we see that the inclination to believe in a false Messiah arises from the very nature of Jewish religious practices. In fact, Judaism, by the nature of its organization, is ritualistic, and it

¹¹Scholem, pp. 6-7.

follows that a prophet would be seen as one who performs the ritual of faith diligently. His systemic and extrinsic actions are heightened. Singer relies on our associations of the prophet with secretiveness and ritualism as he presents Itche Mates in the novel. Allegorically, he is a false prophet, a sort of evil spirit. He comes into the village as a packman with holy scripts and amulets who, when asked if there is help for the Jews, is silent, "as though he hadn't heard, and they [the townspeople] understood at once that these were matters that one did not discuss openly" (p. 70). In his ritualism, he is described as compulsively neurotic.

For Angus Fletcher in his study of the psychology behind allegory, such compulsive neurosis is a distinct "type" of behavior that recurs eternally. Hence, the description of such behavior may be seen as an allegorical characterization because such behavior limits the character's actions according to a definable pattern of behavior. For example, Fletcher writes of the compulsively neurotic that "he is suddenly disturbed by the impulses that have no apparent rational meaning, and thence are seen as arbitrary and external 'commands.'"¹² Hence we see a psychological pattern, that of a man appearing to receive commands from God, which may be defined as a precise "type" of behavior.

In Satan in Goray Singer depicts the allegorically definable behavior of Itche Mates as compulsively neurotic. As an example of

¹²Fletcher, p. 187.

such neurotic behavior, Singer shows Mates' character through his compulsive desire for ritual immersion:

Reb Itche Mates took off his clothes. His body was covered with a heavy growth of yellow hair. It was scarred by the thorns and thistles on which he had mortified himself. Silently he went down to the pool by way of the crooked stone steps, noiselessly slipped into the water, submerged himself without a splash, and disappeared for a few minutes. . . . Two and seventy times did he immerse himself, according to the numerical significance of the letters Anin and Beth (p. 80).

Later, when the holy Rabbi Benish prepares for war with the Sabbitian sect and closes the bathhouse, Itche Mates goes to the pond beyond the town to chop a hole in the ice:

Silently, without a sigh, he took off his clothes, and immersed himself in the water. So as not to lose the small break in the ice, he held on to a rope. After immersion he did not cover his frozen body immediately; instead he rolled in the snow, recounting his transgressions. He went so far as to beg forgiveness for the pain he had given his mother when he lay in her womb (p. 96).

It is easy to see how a people involved in ritual would be led into believing that a man who showed all the external signs of religious extremism would be judged as an apocalyptic prophet. The townspeople, in turn, believe that the actions of Itche Mates are inspired by God. Indeed, we are never quite sure whether Itche Mates himself does not believe that this is true. He is depicted as more a victim than a seducer when he returns with Mordecai Joseph to tell the people of Goray that Zevi is a false Messiah. Yet Itche Mates is clearly harmful to the people of Goray. He suggests extreme asceticism which is, for Singer, the first step away from the recognizing of one's own humanity. Hence, in Itche Mates the distortion away from the holiness of Rabbi Benish is begun.

A second type of allegorical characterization of extremism is depicted in the sensual ritual slaughterer, Reb Gedalya, a false prophet whose sensualism the people would likely follow after the asceticism of Itche Mates. Clearly, Gedalya is an hysteric, a personality "type" allegorically defined by its extroverted character. As Fletcher points out, "the hysteric . . . is a markedly outgoing person, who seeks intimate contact--one might say erotic contact--with others."¹³ Such a desire for contact, another recurrent "type" of behavior, defines Gedalya, who is described sensually at the onset of the novel: "His coat was of beaver and covered with silk, and the hat he wore was sable. His black, broad, fanshaped beard hung down to his waist, his curly hair fell over his shoulders" (p. 139). Gedalya's sexual nature is suggested in his ritual slaughtering before Passover when "from early morning until late night he stood before the blood filled pit and, with his long butcher's knife, tirelessly cut into warm, distended necks, slaughtering innumerable calves and sheep, hens, geese, and ducks" (p. 148). In his hysteric and sexual nature, Gedalya suggests a movement toward destruction from the asceticism of Itche Mates. It is under Gedalya that Goray will experience its greatest evil. Hence, the personality types of Mates and Gedalya assume allegorical proportions in the novel. In *Asceticism and Secularism* Singer presents allegorical and psychological extremes that suggest imbalance.

¹³Fletcher, p. 238.

With Singer's tendency to characterize behavior into allegorical "types" firmly established, we may now trace Singer's clarity and structural skill in his presentation of Goray's progressive awareness through pain as the town battles between good and evil in its periods of prosperity, physical destruction, rebirth, and spiritual destruction. As I said earlier in this study, evil and good are in a constant dialectic in Satan in Goray. This dialectic may be seen in terms of what Fletcher calls a battle, one of the fundamental forms of allegory that constitutes the very basis of plot.¹⁴ Yet as we trace the battle, we must also remember that it is inseparable from the progress: as good and evil fluctuate in the foreground, there is also a forward movement in the novel as the dialectic progresses. Hence, the battle of good and evil is enacted in the process of Goray's periods of prosperity, physical destruction, rebirth, and spiritual destruction. The battle for Goray may be seen historically, metaphorically, and narratively.

The allegorical battle between good and evil had begun historically for Goray many years before the Chelminicki massacre. In those times, Goray had been a thriving community with a great many needs, and the implication by Singer is that the needs were too many. For example, in those days Rabbi Benish would often mistakenly declare an animal to be kosher when it was not. Consequently, "half of the housewives of the town had to smash their earthen vessels, scald the iron ones, and pour the soup and meat into the swill heap"

¹⁴Fletcher, p. 153.

(p. 34). Singer realizes that strict Jewishness can often lead to waste when the letter instead of the spirit of the law is followed and that strict Jewishness is easy when there is plenty. But these days of ease are destroyed by the holocaust of the Chmielnicki massacre in 1648. Hence, prosperity and physical destruction are depicted by Singer before the historical present in 1666. The rebirth indicated in the gradual return of the people to Goray, the third step in the battle's progress, eventually leads to the town's spiritual destruction under Reb Gedalya.

Singer quite clearly links the physical destruction of 1648 with the spiritual destruction of 1666 three times in the novel, thus indicating that spiritual chaos can equal and surpass the destructive force of physical chaos. The first conscious parallel is in the song of the wedding fool when Rechele is married to Itche Mates, suggesting the initial corruption of the town as symbolized in Rechele: "The hadimaks slaughtered and matyred us,/ They murdered young children, they ravished women,/ Chmielnicki slit open their bellies, he sewed cats inside, (because of our sins!)/ This is why we wail so loudly and implore/ Revenge, O Lord, the blood of thy slaughtered saints!" (p. 127). This striking image of the slaughtered women is recalled at a wedding, and the recollection suggests that chaos is come again to Goray. The second parallel is explicit in the description of the landscape during the Casting in which the boys commit sacriligious actions: "The air turned blue, like the pages of an old book, the houses were drab, half in ruins, and it seemed like the year 1648"

(p. 184). The third parallel is drawn by Singer when Mordecai Joseph and Itche Mates return to Goray with the news that Zevi had become a Moslem: "All of the congregation bowed their shoulders, as under a heavy burden. They looked exactly as they had in the year 1648 when messengers brought the evil news that Cossaks and Tartars encircled Goray" (p. 193). Yet, implicitly, 1666 is a time of even greater evil than 1648 because the spiritual destruction brought by the belief in the false Messiah is something invited. Unlike the onslaught of the hetmen, Goray's spiritual chaos is something that the people allow to happen.

If the battle between good and evil in Goray is seen historically, then it must also be seen as a striking metaphor of how evil comes in times of prosperity. For example, when Reb Gedalya comes to Goray in Part Two of the novel, Singer writes that "his arrival was a sign that the town would rise again" (p. 143). Yet it is under Gedalya that the town is led into evil. Moreover, Singer also makes it quite clear that synthesis always carries the seeds of antithesis: in Goray's rebirth is its own destruction. Reb Eleazer returns to Goray with his only daughter, Rechele, who is the symbolic vehicle for Satan's impregnation of Goray with evil. Essentially, Singer implies, rebirth always carries the potential for destruction.

Ultimately, the battle for Goray is conveyed by Singer narratively, and nowhere is his early genius for narration more evident than in the final chapters of Part One, in which Rabbi Benish prepares for war with the Sabbatian sect. Up to this point, we feel at one with the villagers because we are not sure if Itche Mates is an

apocalyptic prophet or a compulsive neurotic. In fact, the novel is effectively ambiguous in its presentation of Itche Mates in that Singer does not condemn him from the beginning. Rather, the reader watches in wonder as Itche Mates goes about his ritual immersions. Yet in Chapter Eleven we are shifted to the point of view of Rabbi Benish as he receives a letter from a Rabbi in Lublin that gives both Benish and the reader a perspective on the events of Goray. The letter denounces Zevi as a false Messiah and Itche Mates as a "forger and seducer . . . [who] mortifies his body with all manner of mortifications--all this he says and does to lead proper people into error and to seduce them from the path of righteousness, and to cast them into the lowest pit of heresy" (p. 89). The letter also foreshadows Mates' inability to "act the man's part" in his impotence toward Rechele after the marriage (p. 91). There is a good sense of narrative art in Singer's insertion of the letter in that Singer now allows the reader to judge Itche Mates' true purpose. When we are informed that he is evil, we become one with the good Rabbi Benish as he prepares for war with the Sabbatian sect.

Singer then shifts to the betrothal scene of Itche Mates and Rechele that suggests the abandon that has come to Goray. Itche Mates sits in a silk kaftan, and the atmosphere of the scene in the room suggests evil sensuality rather than the sacred union of marriage: "The oven was stoked, so that the wassl sweated, and the tall candles in the earthen candlesticks melted so fast that the wicks needed frequent trimming. Reb Itche Mates was in high spirits, his face flushed, eyes bright. Alluding often to the mystery of sexual union,

he expounded new cabalistic combinations and permutations of holy letters, while doling out portions of brandy and spiced wine" (p. 99). When Rabbi Benish hears of this licentious gathering, he goes to stop it, but it is already too late. The Rabbi, already yellowed and wrinkled with age, steps out of his house and realizes that evil is about him. As he steps from the house, ". . . his eyes were filled as with sand. The skull cap fell from his head, the tails of his coat billowed, and began to draw him backward. His head spun and he choked. Suddenly the storm seized him, bore him aloft for a short distance, as on wings, and then cast him down with such violence that in the turmoil he could hear his bones shatter" (p. 107). As the Rabbi dies we realize that evil has overtaken the forces of good. With the triumph of evil over the touchstone with moderation, symbolized in Benish, we realize that now Goray must face its destruction alone.

Clearly, Singer has set up a dialectical battle between good (life with God) and evil (life without God) in the novel, and the progress of Goray from prosperity to spiritual destruction is conveyed in the battle itself. The village undergoes a downward spiral through misfortune until its consciousness is heightened as it realizes that by believing in Messianism it has brought about its ruin. The allegorical progress of an awareness through pain is personified in Rechele, and this personification is the most convincing allegorical technique in the novel.

Certainly, Rechele's spiritual autobiography in the novel exhibits an undeviating movement towards destruction, like the movement of Goray itself. The "undeviating movement in a given

direction," as Fletcher defines the allegorical aspects of progress, is certainly evinced in Rechele's life."¹⁵ Moreover, the association of her name with that of Jacob's wife, Rechele, in Genesis points out that Singer is here depicting the allegory of the entire Jewish nation. Consequently, she represents not only the entire town of Goray but also Israel corrupted.

Like Oedipus, Rechele suffers a distortion at birth and must travel through destructive experiences to meet her fate with God. She is a child with a history of blood, having been born in Goray in 1648 a few weeks after the massacre and raised by her uncle, Reb Zydel Ber, a ritual slaughterer. She is psychologically tormented by her grandmother, who told tales of graves outside of the house where ghosts flew about ceaselessly looking to enter bodies. The grandmother would also lift the child's dress and "run her dead hands over the girl's hot body, crackling with impure delight: 'Fire! Fire! The girl's burning up!'" (p. 59). After the grandmother dies Rechele envisions her in a kerchief soaked with blood, at once the symbol for death and sensuality, wound around her head. Terrified on Yom Kippur she envisions her house coming alive, a projection of her own terror. As a result of this night, Rechele's left leg is paralyzed, suggesting that a distortion through terror had taken place. "Thenceforth," Singer writes, "Rechele was one apart" (p. 68).

Such is the first stage in Rechele's destruction. She has been isolated by her experiences and, because of this isolation, is

¹⁵Fletcher, p. 154.

more intuitively alert to her environment. When, for example, Itche Mates sends her a proposal of marriage, "she who was reputed to be half witted . . . wept as one who has all her wits about her" (p. 79). Her response to Mates is intuitively astute as she confesses, "He has dead eyes" (p. 83). In essence, she fears the sexual aspect in her past that is connected with marriage. For Rechele, the daughter of a ritual slaughterer, sexuality is equated with death. During her marriage to Mates, the second stage of her progress toward destruction, she is thrown from her isolation into a marriage that is not consummated.

When she envisions in her broth seven maidens with golden crowns on their heads, Rechele goes to Gedalya. After he greets her, Singer writes that "he shut the door behind her," implying that consummation has taken place (p. 152). Now, living with Gedalya, she turns to religiosity and prophecy. She dresses in her Sabbath garments and throws herself down on the study house floor, proclaiming a vision. Yet when the people ask her to prophesy again, she is helpless. Through Gedalya, Rechele realizes the union of sexuality and death that the vision of her grandmother foreshadowed.

Rechele now passes to the final stage of her destruction. When she hears that Zevi has become a Moslem, she falls into a trance, and the allegorical battle of good and evil takes place within her:

The sacred and the profane were engaged in a disputation. The sacred had a face, but no body. The Face was flushed, as after the bath, had a white beard and long, blown earlocks. A velvet skull cap sat on its high

forehead. The Face swayed in prayer; it spoke with zeal, like Rabbi Benish in the old days, chanted the whole writ; it raised questions of Torah and resolved them; it told pious tales to strengthen the faith and vanquish disbelief. With sacred pride, the Face recited the blessing before meals, and prayers that come at the beginning and the end of the Sabbath, as well as whole sections from the liturgy and the Zohar. Sometimes shutting her eyes, Rechele could see the Face surging up from the darkness. Tiny old-man's wrinkles quivered in the corners of its eyes. Delicate blue veins shown in its red cheeks, its eyes smiled with grandfatherly grace.

The Profane was situated in some distant place, in darkness, deep down, like a cellar. Sometimes he spoke very low, voicelessly. Hidden and veiled, he lay inside some web of cocoon. Often, he changed shape--at times he looked human, at other times like a bat or a spider. At moments all that Rechele could see was an open mouth, askew like a frog's. The Profane was audacious, making lewd remarks. Then his voice boomed from the pit, or the cave, where he lay concealed. Taunting and blaspheming, he bandied about the names of holy men and angels. A stream of vulgarities escaped his lips. He jested and mocked profusely, bringing Rechele to the verge of laughter, though she knew that to be sinful (p. 207).

The straightforward and simplistic character of the sacred is in dramatic contrast to the devious and complex character of the profane. The dialectical battle rages inside Rechele, just as it had raged in the town itself.

Goray is now seized by despair as famine grips the town. Most importantly, "there was no longer even sinning" (p. 212). It is in this despair that Rechele confesses that she has been impregnated by Satan (p. 214). Thus, the stage is set for the appearance of sin itself in the last two chapters of Part Two.

In Satan in Goray sin appears both symbolically and realistically. Symbolically, Rechele's dybbuk is the image for her descent into chaos, a suggestion of Singer's allegorical tendency to depict the universal in the particular. Realistically, the dybbuk is a

condemned sinner from Lublin who, during his life, engaged in evil with a vengeance. As a result, he was driven from the grave first into the leaf of a tree, then into a frog, then into a millstone, and finally into Rechele. The progress of the dybbuk suggests that evil has continued until it finally reached Rechele through "that same place," suggesting in lurid detail that evil has been consummated through lust.

Critically responding to the supernatural elements in the novel, Siegel has condemned Singer for his use of the dybbuk. "The insertion of demons into Goray's harshly realistic setting," he writes, "is so sudden and late that it jars. . . ."¹⁶ Yet the setting of the novel is anything but realistic. The landscape itself, sweeping Rabbi Benish away to his death, is allegorical. Moreover, Rechele's vision of Yom Kippur suggests that evil is externally and nominally present. In writing about the presence of evil in Hawthorne and Singer, Elaine Gottlieb says, "Satan is an active participant in Singer's stories. Hawthorne's Satan dwells in the forest of man's imagination, but Satan in Singer's work is an actual character or persona, usually invisible, sometimes in disguise."¹⁷ In Singer's first novel evil finally visibly takes the stage, suggesting that in the allegorical battle between good and evil, good has not triumphed. It is important to note that for Singer evil

¹⁶Siegel, p. 16.

¹⁷Elaine Gottlieb, "Singer and Hawthorne: A Prevalence of Satan," The Southern Review, (8) 1972, 360.

actually does exist in physical manifestation. In such a writer's vision, all life is depicted as having possible allegorical interpretation, and it is this belief that informs all of Singer's novels.

An allegorical view of the events in *Goray* is also suggested by the change in style and tone of the closing chapters of the novel. They are said to be rendered into Yiddish from a fictitious book called The Works of the Earth so that "women and girls and common folk might perfectly comprehend the wonder of it all and that they might set their hearts in returning to God's ways" (p. 219). This shift in tone and style, along with a distancing from the drama of Rechele's death, results in a point of view that has risen above the action. The novel is then "CONCLUDED AND DONE" with the moral that "Let none attempt to force the Lord. To end out Pain within the world: The Messiah will come in God's own time: And free men of despair and crime: Then death will put away his sword: And Satan die abjured, abhorred: Lilith will vanish with the night: The exile end and all be light" (p. 239). This device of distancing the reader from the action is a technique that Singer will use in all of his novels to give the effect that what we have just read about is a life lived, a battle and progress in history.

Satan in Goray is a fascinating and powerful allegory of the danger of compressing eternal time into man's conception of it. Yet this rather straightforward form of allegory, complete with moral, would not have served Singer throughout his career. The characters in *Goray* lack mimetic richness. We see them only in extreme actions, never in everyday realities. As a result, we are less likely to

believe in Singer's ultimate vision that all life has tendencies that are allegorical. In his next two novels Singer explores the craft of mimetic fiction, of the everydayness of life, that will enable him to convey his powerful allegorical tendencies realistically in his later novels.

CHAPTER II

THE FAMILY MOSKAT: SINGER'S FIRST SECULAR NOVEL

Satan in Goray must ultimately be seen as a novel very close to "pure" allegory, a narrative in which the results of seeking to hasten the Messiah correspond to an allegorical journey towards awareness through suffering. Yet as fictionalist, Singer did not employ a straightforwardly allegorical structure in novel after novel; Singer was pressing toward authenticity, a sense of realism that intensifies our range of emotions. In The Family Moskat he explored far more subtle characterizations than in his first novel, and, consequently, the novel is rendered with a sense of mimetic richness. Yet even here he retains a vision that enables him to allegorize, to depict the universal in the particular. Such a tendency leads us to realize that characters in Singer represent "types" of people that recur eternally. In his second novel Singer again sets his allegorical characters on a journey towards awareness. Through the novelist's realistic depiction of both his characters and their journeys, we come to appreciate Singer's sympathetic treatment of man's predicament as he seeks to substitute secular knowledge for knowledge of God. The novel effectively blends moral criticism with a sympathetic concern for its characters. But critics have failed to deal with the delicate combination of didactic and the mimetic in The Family Moskat, and if we are to appreciate this blend which

distinguishes Singer's best art, it will be necessary to examine, first, Singer's break from the tradition of Yiddish writers, a break that allows him to convey a greater sense of realism in his work and, second, Singer's characterization, which is a blend of "authenticity" and allegorical "types." We can then see how characterization is related to the choral statements of theme--how the characters are related to two types of knowledge in the novel, Jewish and secular. We may then determine the allegorical significance of the journey of one man, Asa Hershel, as he travels toward a higher consciousness, a journey that will eventually lead him back to the roots of his faith. Thus, by analyzing Singer's innovation, characterization, and theme in The Family Moskat, we are able to appreciate the unique blend of the mimetic and the allegorical that characterizes his art.

In analyzing the tendency to write historical novels such as The Family Moskat, Buchen points to Singer's continuity with the Jewish tradition. As Buchen proposes, the Jewish God "is an unfinished God--a God not of finality but of duration. He has thus burdened the Jew with history--with the arena for fulfilling the original impulses of creation. . . . Accepting these burdens, Singer has sought in The Family Moskat to present a Jewish saga which is simultaneously modern and ancient. His story is essentially a creation story fleshed with modern events."¹ Yet in emphasizing Singer's continuity with the

¹Buchen, p. 34. Again, all critics are not as sensitive as Buchen, and there is no criticism that deals with the allegorical nature of the novel. Siegel offers little more than a brief summary

Jewish tradition, Buchen ignores Singer's break with other Jewish writers of his generation, a break that allows him to depict in his characters what Heidegger calls "authenticity," a term defined by Robert Coles as "a person fighting a hard battle against odds which we tend to call 'life.'"² It is important to realize that in his second novel Singer depicts authentic characters because it is the effectiveness of the blend of the mimetic with the allegorical that convinces us of the truth of his vision.

This realistic immediacy of Singer's artistry was obtained only by his break with tradition. As he writes in his autobiographical A Young Man in Search of God, "The themes employed by Yiddish writers and the writing itself struck me as sentimental, primitive, petty. . . . Although Yiddish literature flirted with socialism and more recently with communism, it had remained provincial and backward."³ Singer saw himself as a Jew living in a world that seemed to be moving from a traditional faith to a faith in social forms. The enlightened, modern Jew turned to socialism, communism, and Zionism as his Messiah,

(see pp. 11-14). Malin prefers italics to analysis ("It [the novel] suggests, ironically enough that art--even high art such as this very novel!--cannot fully capture existence on earth. It profoundly questions itself" (see pp. 12-21). Alexander gives a splendid historical background to the novel, yet he nevertheless does not deal with Singer's artistry.

²Robert Coles, Walker Percy: An American Search (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1978), p. 163.

³Isaac Bashevis Singer, A Young Man in Search of Love (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), p. 7.

and Singer, as the conclusion to Satan in Goray implies, despised the shift.

Singer also saw himself as differing from his optimistically "provincial" contemporaries in his treatment of sexuality. Since criticism has ignored Singer's years in Warsaw in relation to his novels, it may be necessary to note that he had experienced a tempestuous relationship with a woman he calls Gina, a relationship that, at least partially, led him to write in A Young Man in Search of Love that "the sexual organs express more of the human soul than all the other bodily parts, even the eyes. To write about love and exclude sex was a useless labor."⁴ Thus the frank sexual escapades of Abram Shapiro with Ida and Ninotchka in The Family Moskat are central to an understanding of his character as Singer presents him. Although he is a kindly man, foreshadowing Dr. Feitelzohn in Shosha, he still has something of the sexual element of Reb Gedalya of Satan in Goray about him.

That others perceived radical departures from tradition in Singer's work is expressed in the response of a Warsaw editor to one of his early stories: "He [the editor] said that the piece was too pessimistic; that it lacked problems, and that the story was negative and almost anti-Semitic. Why write about thieves and whores when there were so many decent Jewish men and devoted Jewish wives? A Yiddish writer, my editor argued, was honorbound to stress the good in our people, the lofty and sacred. He had to be an eloquent

⁴Singer, p. 37.

defender of the Jews, not their defamer."⁵ Many readers have agreed with Singer's Warsaw editor, as Siegel points out: "Many have misread The Family Moskat as a bitter indictment of Poland's prewar Jews. Singer omits none of their flaws, tragic or pathetic; on the other hand he unfailingly endows his embattled spirits with compensatory flashes of generosity and courage."⁶ In short, Singer chose, in his second novel and throughout his career, to be a Jewish writer rather than a Jewish propagandist.

With his break from tradition firmly established, we may now turn to the unique realism of Singer's characterization in The Family Moskat. While creating a sense of authenticity in the novel, Singer simultaneously distances us from the characters through allegory. While intensifying our responses to the characters through realism, he never permits us to forget the characters' allegorical significance. For an example of such a blend, let us first turn to the opening of the novel to analyze Singer's depiction of Meshulam Moskat. The patriarch of the family lives allegorically the pattern of the Worldly Man, a successful merchant in the novel, a Jew burdened with debts and children. This wealthy version of Sholom Aleichem's Teyve is also recently married to his third wife, Rosa Frumetl. Realistically, the peasants envy him, and their contempt is nowhere more evident than in the shout of a woman as Moskat pulls up to his house: "As I live, the old goat's got himself married

⁵Singer, p. 38.

⁶Siegel, p. 12.

again."⁷ Here is the blend of allegory and realism, a realistic fairytale of a king being mocked by his people. Ironically, Moskat is isolated by his wealth from both the community and his children, all of whom--Joel, Nathan, Pinnie, Nyunie, Pearl, Hama, and Leah--are dependent on him for support.

Through the relationship between Moskat and his children Singer most intensely depicts Moskat's state of alienation. In a key scene of the novel, overlooked by critical attention, Singer shows his skill in depicting the mimetic richness of an allegorical type of character as he gives us Moskat's thoughts just before his death. With his children before him, he begins to reflect as visitors come to celebrate Purim:

"A pack of fools! Idiots!" he thought.

He regretted everything now: that he had twice married daughters of undistinguished families and spawned children of no accomplishments; that he had not been more discriminating in the choice of sons-in-law; that he had made such a fool of himself as to marry for a third time; and especially that he had not made out a detailed will, with an executor and a seal, leaving a substantial part of his wealth to charity. Now it was too late. They would dissipate his fortune, every grosz of it. . . .

"Your health, Father! May it soon be restored to you!" It was Joel speaking, raising a glass of wine to his lips.

Meshulam made no movement. What was he sopping it up for, the glutton? Wasn't his belly big enough?

Meshulam grimaced and made motions with his head, Naomi and Pinnie wheeled him back into the bedroom. They lifted him onto the bed and pulled the blanket over him. He lay awake for a long time, watching the twilight deepening. The clouds had scattered; only small puffs remained in the sky. Stars began to appear. From behind the spires of the church on the other side of the street, which still reflected the glow of the setting sun, a yellow moon swam into the heavens. Meshulam, as when he was a boy, still saw the moon's pale face the features of Joshua. What did the affairs of the world mean to him now? He had only one desire, to see the splendors of the higher worlds that, iridescent with secret illumination, hovered over the roofs of Gzhybov (pp. 193-94).

⁷Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Family Moskat*, trans. A. H. Gross (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), p. 7. All further references cited parenthetically in the text.

Here we have a life presented in an overview, and a clear pattern is discerned in Moskat's life of poor choices. As the living world appears as a passage of the dead before Moskat's eyes, we doubt if evil is always overcome, as the holiday of Purim symbolically suggests. Thus Singer's complex allegory departs from, but continually reminds us of, the simple structure of life as an allegorical progress.

Often in The Family Moskat Singer depicts situations that seem to elude the didactic aspect of allegory which presumes that evil is punished and good is rewarded. For example, as Moskat muses on his misspent life, his children thrive. When the Moskat fortune continues to flourish, it is because his son-in-law, Fishel, does business with the Germans. One cannot help wondering if the Moskat assets, won at the expense of Meshulam, will not eventually serve to help the Nazis build the ovens at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Singer most explicitly depicts the cruelties of life's transitions in the death of Dacha, Nyunie's wife. When she is asked on her deathbed about her health, she answers:

"May my enemies--" Dacha started. She was quiet for a moment. "There are lucky people in this world. Live easy and die easy. My life is cursed. My mother was a pious woman, but a bitter one. All she did was punish me and drive me to work. Ah, God, never a minute's peace. I was the oldest. All the burdens were on my shoulders. Ever since I was five years old. My father was a holy man, but not of this world. What could he understand? 'Dacha, tea! Dacha, bring me my pipe! Dacha, go and borrow some money; not a copper in the house for the Sabbath!' I had to go and borrow from strangers; I stood at the door like a beggar. They sucked my blood. Woe to me, I was not yet eight years old" (p. 345).

Like the depiction of Moskat's deathbed scene, here again is a life in overview, a clear pattern of needless suffering that arouses our pity.

Ironically, Dacha's husband develops a ravenous appetite during her illness and even plans to see a widow he knows regarding marriage after an appropriate period of mourning for his dying wife.

At first, such situations might seem antithetical to Singer's message in the novel that a life of faith and commitment is the "best" of all possible lives. Do such situations as those of Moskat, Dacha, and Nyunie serve as Kafkaesque metaphors that negate the existence of God? Just as Milton tempts us in Paradise Lost to believe that Satan is more attractive than God, so Singer tests the reader's own sense of faith by depicting such lives as those of Moskat and his family. Realistically, the world is often hostile to faith, and we are tempted to see the presence of cruelty as proof of the absence of God. However, Singer is far from another Kafka in his total vision of the patterns of life. In Singer's novels, we cannot always rationalize the events of this world. Yet, as in Milton, Singer does give meaning to the overall experience of life, and this is best seen in The Family Moskat through the characterizations of those who live lives of commitment to faith and those who strive for such commitment.

Thus far we have seen realistically drawn characters whose existence seems meaningless. On an allegorical level, we have seen Secularism and its fruits. In contrast to this, Singer presents the opposite pole of the Faithful. Clearly, the search for faith is a distinct type of belief, and secular knowledge is its opposite. Between these two poles Singer sets his main character, Asa Hershel, on a quest for meaning. Yet before we define the nature of Asa

Hershel's journey, it is necessary to examine how Singer characterizes the allegorical patterns of those who adhere to each type of knowledge so that we may see both the attraction of the young knight to secular knowledge and the call for his commitment to faith.

Knowledge that is strictly religious is represented by the Chassidim in such characters as Rabbi Dan Katzenellenbogen, Moishe Gabriel, and his son Aaron. Religious faith is suggested to such men by study of the Torah and the Bible, and the faith that comes from such knowledge is exemplified in both patience and tolerance. Yet, Singer does not lead us to believe that such faith comes easily, and it is not synonymous with a release from religious doubt. As he writes of Reb Dan,

It might have seemed as though Reb Dan was hiding away from the world behind the yellow window hangings that separated his study from the Shulgass. All matters of arbitration or ritual decision he left to his sons; the only community problems to which he would give any consideration were those of great complexity and importance. Rabbis from other communities wrote epistles to him, but he never answered. He was invited to grace weddings and circumcisions with his presence, but he rarely accepted any of these honors. All his life he had hoped that in his old age all worldly temptations would depart from him so that he might be able to serve the Eternal in full faith. But even now, at the very threshold of the grave, he still found himself carrying on the interminable wrangles with Satan, confusing his mind with alien thoughts, troubling himself with questions into which a man of piety should not inquire. The old riddle remained: the pure in heart suffered and the wicked flourished; the people chosen of God were still ground into the dust; Israel's people, instead of living a life of penance, were turning to heresy. What would the end be? What had Reb Dan accomplished during his span on earth? What meritorious deeds would he be able to offer on the scales of judgment in the world to come? (p. 299).

In Singer's novels, the adoption of the religious life is never easy, and the doubts and trials of Reb Dan are representative of the religious men of the later novels.

Yet these doubts should not lead us to believe that the religious frame of reference is not superior in The Family Moskat. For Singer, the patterns of those striving for faith suggest what Kierkegaard would call the religious stage. The use of Kierkegaard is, in fact, appropriate in defining Singer's sense of religiosity. Although Singer has read Kierkegaard, the appropriateness of the comparison is more a matter of similar concerns than influences. Both the philosopher and the novelist are humble writers interested in spiritual values, both illustrate an allegorical progress in man's spiritual state from one level of consciousness to another, and both are interested in what might be called a practical theology, a means by which life must be lived.⁸

Kierkegaard writes of three stages: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. The first stage of consciousness is a primary stage that implies that commitment is intellectual and, therefore, incomplete. The second stage, the ethical, implies commitment to an idea, a proposition of either/or. As David F. Swenson writes in the introduction to Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments, ". . . the aestheticist appears to be unquestionably the more brilliant mind. . . . Hence it becomes clearer precisely in what the ethicist differs from the aestheticist, namely in the quality of his pathos and in his more calm and secure assurance with respect to the

⁸George C. Bedell in Kierkegaard and Faulkner: Modalities of Existence (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972) also faces the same problem of "Why Kierkegaard." The rationale of his comparison on pp. 3-14 has been very helpful to me.

problems of life, a moral and existential superiority is not confused with a merely intellectual giftedness; the choice becomes a choice of character, not of brains."⁹ In the religious stage, the third level of consciousness, the nature of struggle itself plays an important part. As Kierkegaard writes in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, "In connection with the aesthetic or ethical existence suffering plays an accidental role. . . . Not so here [in the religious stage] where suffering is posited as something decisive for a religious existence, and precisely as a characteristic of the religious inwardness: the more suffering, the more the religious existence--and suffering persists."¹⁰

The suffering and turmoil of Reb Dan clearly places him in the religious stage. By living a life committed to faith, he must re-make that difficult, often painful, commitment daily. Hence, for Singer, Reb Dan becomes a type of figure, religious and suffering in nature, who assumes allegorical proportions.

Just as Reb Dan represents religious knowledge, Jekuthiel the watchmaker, whose profession symbolizes the intricate "tinkering" with the things of the temporal world, represents an intellectual interest in secular knowledge. In fact, one of the most important and little regarded scenes in the novel is the confrontation of Reb Dan by

⁹Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments or A Fragment of Philosophy, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. xvi-xvii.

¹⁰Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 424.

Jekuthiel. An order has come from the Czar's Uncle that Tereshpol Minor must be evacuated by all Jews. Accordingly, Reb Dan crams all his manuscripts into the mouth of the stove and watches them burn, a gesture indicating his separation from the things of this world. (His grandson, Asa Hershel, will make the same gesture later in the novel when the Germans invade Warsaw.) The rabbi then joins his family in the wagon, and they draw up alongside the cart of Jekuthiel:

"Nu, rabbi?" he said.

It was clear that what he meant was: "Where is your Lord of the Universe now? Where are his miracles? Where is your faith in Torah and prayer?"

"Nu, Jekuthiel," the rabbi answered. What he was saying was: "Where are your worldly remedies? Where is your trust in the gentiles? What have you accomplished by aping Esau?" (p. 260).

In the reference to Esau, symbolizing a concern with the things of the world, we see Singer's allegorical tendency. These are the representatives of the tribes of Jacob and Esau confronting each other. Clearly, here we have the allegorical meeting between religious and secular knowledge. Yet, for Singer, Jekuthiel is, like his protégé Asa Hershel, clearly in the aesthetic stage, because for them both life is merely a matter of intellectualization without faith.

With the difficulties involved in the struggle for higher consciousness firmly established, we may now turn to Asa Hershel's spiritual dilemma and his journey towards faith, the main concern of the novel. A young intellectual from Tereshpol Minor, he wants to become part of the modern world. However, unlike his worldly tutor, Abram Shapiro, Asa Hershel's past is interfused with traditional Jewishness. The geneological chart on his grandfather, Reb Dan, is a

linden tree: "The root was king David, and the branches bore the names of other illustrious forebears. Reb Dan himself had on his forehead a scar that, it was said, was the mark only of those descended from kingly stock and privileged to wear the crown when the Messiah came" (p. 25). Yet, even with this distinguished background of men of faith, Asa Hershel's preoccupation with the intellectual holds him in the aesthetic stage. His is a useless battle against the faith of his fathers.

Early in the novel Asa Hershel tells Dr. Jacobi, "I want to study for my own sake" (p. 32). By the end of the novel, we see that Asa Hershel has largely kept his word. His knowledge of the secular philosophers offers little sustenance. As a result, his statement to Jacobi, which seems so noble at the opening of the novel, is ironic in its egoism. In fact, Shapiro's assessment of Asa Hershel offers a grim prediction of the life that such an egoist lives: "You're a coward, brother. That's the whole thing. You want to run away from everything. You'll hang around with this new discovery of yours and in a little while you'll be high and dry again. Unless you want to commit suicide" (p. 525). Shapiro's observation is accurate: Asa Hershel is a coward who has allowed himself to sink into unwitting despair.

It is this sense of despair more than anything else that characterizes Asa Hershel, just as despair will later characterize Herman Broder in Enemies, A Love Story. Again, Kierkegaard is helpful in describing unwitting despair in that "the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being

despair."¹¹ This describes well the despondent life that Asa Hershel lives as a result of remaining suspended in the intellectual, aesthetic stage.

When Shapiro accuses Asa Hershel of wanting to run away from everything, he recognizes Asa Hershel's lack of faithful commitment either to people or to knowledge. Asa leaves Warsaw with Hadassa, ruins her, marries Adele and has a child by her, deserts them both to return to Hadassah, and finally takes up with Barbara. Obviously, his lack of commitment is exemplified in his frenzied response to women. But Asa Hershel has neither been able to respond entirely to the secular knowledge of Jethukiel, nor has he been able to follow the faith of his grandfather. He is the ultimate allegorical aesthetician, fighting an ultimately useless battle, wearily drifting from moment to moment while asking questions of the uses of this world.

Yet Asa Hershel decides to stay in Warsaw when the Germans come. In a key scene that is ignored by most critics, he meets Menassa David, a devout Chassidim, who, after the first bombings, urges him to get up and dance. Singer comments, "For what, after all, was the great trick in showing ecstasy only in time of plenty? The true greatness was in giving oneself up to the joy when the waters were arising around one" (p. 541). Here we see a man of faith like Reb Dan who can say with Kierkegaard,

I am able by my own strength to renounce everything, and then to find peace and repose in pain. I can stand everything--even though that horrible demon, more dreadful

¹¹Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 71.

than death, the king of terrors, even though madness were to hold up before my eyes the motley of the fool, and I understood by its look that it was I who must put it on, I am still able to save my soul, if only it is more to me than my earthly happiness that my love for God should triumph in me.¹²

In worldly terms, Menassah David is a madman and a fool, yet in allegorical terms, here suggesting the man of complete faith, he is a hero. Ultimately, it is with this type of faith that Asa Hershel chooses to stay. In the conclusion to the novel he leaves the aesthetic stage and chooses to make pain and death his friend. In the closing lines of the novel Herz Yanovar tells Asa Hershel that "Death is the Messiah. That's the real truth," indicating the apocalyptic nature of the coming of the Messiah that was the basis for Goray's belief that the End of Days was near in Singer's first novel (p. 611). Asa Hershel remains to face Death in the blitzkrieg, and this suggests that he has made the leap of faith in commitment to the beliefs of his fathers in the conclusion of the novel.

Edward Alexander has written of The Family Moskat that "a novel which takes as its subject the life of Polish Jewry from the early part of the twentieth century until the moment of Hitler's entry into Warsaw cannot, if its author is a man of moral sensitivity, end its story with a picture of emancipated individuals pursuing their separate destinies. For the Jewish people of Europe, and the Moskat family of Singer's novel, found themselves, at the very moment of their greatest internal disintegration and disunity, integrated and

¹²Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 60.

united by a common destiny: the violent death that was to be dealt by the Germans to every Jew of Europe."¹³ In living the fate of the Jews through the novel, the reader feels great sympathy for these doomed people. We see the patterns of their lives and, knowing they will soon be dead, view their lives as allegorical representations of the history of a people.

Yet if Singer magnifies our inherent emotions of sympathy and dread for these doomed people by combining an allegorical sense of lives lived according to developments of consciousness with realistic details of pre-war Warsaw, he fails in his depiction of Asa Hershel. One moment he is the allegorical fleeing Jew, running from woman to woman and idea to idea like Herman Broder of Enemies, A Love Story, the next he is making a leap of faith like Yasha in The Magician of Lublin. Although Asa Hershel remains in Warsaw, thus fulfilling the prophecy that a member of the Katzenellenbogen family will witness the birthpangs of the Messiah, we have no sense of the motivation for his decision. In fact, earlier in the novel we have no sense of Asa Hershel's thoughts when he returns from the army after five years. Although he has witnessed the horrors of being a Jewish soldier and has been in Russia during the revolution, he can only reflect on his appearance when he comes home to Hadassah: "If I at least had a clean handkerchief! If I had at least shaved! They hate kissing a bristly jaw" (p. 403).

¹³Alexander, p. 39.

Ultimately, the depiction of Asa Hershel must be seen as a serious flaw of the novel. Although I am speculating, I think that the novel fails in its depiction of the motivation behind its main character because Singer tries to describe things that he has never experienced. He has never been to war, nor has he faced the Germans. In later novels, Singer would not again write about things that he did not have a sense of. As a result, his second family novel, The Manor, is a successful depiction of the history of a people that also gives a more complete sense of the inwardness of its characters.

CHAPTER III

THE MANOR: THE FAMILY NOVEL AS ALLEGORY

The Manor is a more successful novel than The Family Moskat in that its main character, Ezriel Babdad, is convincingly portrayed and sufficiently motivated in his allegorical journey towards faith. Although neglected by critics, the successful depiction of Ezriel is an indicator of Singer's growing attention to realistic motivation.¹ Such realistic motivation suggests a pattern in Singer's novels from the "pure" allegory of Satan in Goray continuing through the attempt at realistic allegory that only partially succeeds in depicting Asa Hershel's motivation in The Family Moskat. In The Manor Singer constructs an effective, realistic allegory, and it is the artistic nature of this construction that I want to examine here. In the demands of characterization of his "family novel," Singer was confronted by a difficult problem: how to give a sense of the allegorical pattern of lives while simultaneously depicting such lives realistically. Singer solved these problems by sensitively combining the distance of allegory with the immediacy of realism to give us a portrait--often panoramic, often detailed--of the lives

¹There is no criticism that deals with either the successful depiction of Ezriel or the artistry of the novel. See, for example, the plot summaries offered by Siegel (pp. 35-39), Malin (pp. 21-39) and Alexander (pp. 83-98).

of a family of Jews living during a period of great historical tension. To assess the effectiveness of Singer's combination of allegory and realism in The Manor, one must examine first the appropriateness of the choice of the historical period itself (a demand of setting that is well met by Singer) and then the devices by which Singer combines allegory and realism in order to intensify our sympathy for the characters involved. Singer's allegory, as we shall see, continues to focus on the journey that characters must always make, a journey toward or away from their God. As in The Family Moskat, two types of knowledge are contrasted, and the historical setting and the characterization are employed to define the allegorical dialectic. But Singer's blend of the allegorical and the realistic in The Manor allows us to sympathetically view the actualities of the character's lives even as we recognize that there are patterns at work here that recur eternally.

Singer uses the historical period of tension between 1863, the year of the unsuccessful Polish insurrection against Russian oppression, and the end of the nineteenth century to explore the pattern on the breaking of tradition and the consequent loss of identity for the individual. As Singer writes,

It was the era of gas lamps, the time when the Poles had finally become resigned to their loss of independence and turned to a kind of national positivism. Poland now began to emerge as an industrial country; railroads were built, factories were opened, and the cities grew rapidly. The Jews, who until 1863 for the most part still lived in a ghetto atmosphere, now began to play an important role in Polish industry, commerce, the arts and sciences. All the spiritual and intellectual ideas that triumphed in the modern era had their roots in the world of that time--socialism and nationalism, Zionism and assimilationism,

nihilism and anarchism, suffragettism, atheism, the weakening of the family bond, free love, and even the beginnings of Fascism.²

Such periods put man in an "existential" dilemma in which choices must be made and consequences must be suffered. Indeed, we may say that such a period allegorically suggests the dilemma that man must continually face. Yet, as Alexander points out, Jewish culture had even more at stake than most cultures. As he writes, "A Frenchman who rejected his father's religion and dress and manners would still remain, however transformed or diminished, a Frenchman. . . . For the Jews of Europe, however, the loss of unity in religion meant the loss of Jewish identity itself."³ However, after this splendid observation, neither Alexander nor any other critic emphasizes the artistry with which Singer depicts traditional Jewish culture and its breakdown.

In describing the breakdown on this culture, Singer seeks to intensify our sympathy for characters that are caught in transition, while simultaneously showing patterns that recur in people regardless of the period in which they live. The required action in such a

²Isaac Bashevis Singer, The Manor, trans. Joseph Singer and Elaine Gottlieb (New York: Avon Books, 1979), author's note. All further references cited parenthetically in the text. All references to The Manor and The Estate are prefixed with an M and an E, respectively. Singer's third novel was published in two separate volumes by Farrar, Straus, Giroux in 1967 (The Manor) and 1969 (The Estate), yet they were published between 1953 and 1955 in the Jewish Daily Forward; hence they are placed in this study so that emphasis is given to Singer's actual development, a method that is used neither by Siegel or Alexander.

³Alexander, p. 84.

situation as that depicted in The Manor is that the characters must be involved in the transition of the time as well as the individual patterns of their own lives. In other words, they must make choices that constitute moral or immoral responses to the times in which they live. Singer solves this requirement of the novel in Calman Jacoby and Ezriel Babdad, two men involved in the transition away from traditional Jewish culture who, nevertheless, remain individuals struggling against their own particular weaknesses.

In analyzing the technique of unifying allegory and realism through characterization, let us first turn to Calman Jacoby and his family because the allegorical quality of The Manor is most strongly evinced in their depiction. Although Calman represents the pious "type" of God-fearing Jew, he is involved in the transition of his time through his increasing wealth, a result of his lease of Count Jampolski's estate. When the Polish rebellion fails, the lands are turned over to Calman for management. Thus Singer depicts a pious Jew tempted by the transitions of his time. When we first meet Calman in the novel, he is a much younger man than Meshulam Moskat, Singer's earlier representation of a Jewishness that is too concerned with the material. Thus, when we meet Calman our sympathies are aroused for the God-fearing man who, like Lear, is overburdened with daughters that he must marry off. In the opening pages of the novel Calman is going into the city, and Singer has each daughter ask for a present. It is the combination of the fairytale rendering of this first scene with Singer's depiction of these women's lives later in the novel that intensifies the reader's concern for their struggles.

The reader feels as though he is at once the witness of an allegorical abstraction from life and an involved participant in life itself. On one level, the daughters represent a paradigm of Jewish daughters embodying loyalty, beauty, romance, and piousness. Yet, as the novel unfolds, we begin to see these portraits painted realistically. Consequently, we feel great involvement in the lives of these women over a forty year period. For example, when we first meet Jochebed, the eldest, she is blond like her mother, with the same narrow face, pointed chin, prominent nose, and freckles down her neck" (M, p. 10). She does not ask for a present but, instead, wishes her father "Godspeed." Later in the novel she becomes a steadfast Jewish matron, allegorically one of the Faithful. A survivor, she will live to bury both her mother and father. Shaindel, a year younger, is described as "The Gypsy" who "loved costume jewelry, earrings, bracelets, and flowers twined in her hair" (M, p. 11). As Calman departs for Warsaw, she asks for a "handsome bridegroom" (p. 11). We feel a great sense of loss when this lovely creature becomes insane and dies. "She was the most beautiful in the family!" Jochebed mourns decades later. "She shone like the sun. Why did it happen?" (E, p. 242). In a Kafkaesque inversion, she gives her life to Ezriel and her children and is rewarded by suffering.

At fifteen, the third daughter, Miriam Lieba, asks her father for a Polish romance from Warsaw. It is this romantic child who later becomes an apostate by marrying the mad Polish count Lucian Jampolski. She dies an alcoholic, an allegorical martyr to the romantic ideal. The youngest daughter, Tsipele, is still in pigtails when the novel

opens. She asks for a miniature prayerbook, symbolic of a later life that will be rooted in faith. Through her, Singer takes subtle issue with modern psychology in that in her child marriage to the saintly Jochannan she is the happiest of all the daughters. For Singer, each action has ultimate significance and the little gifts that each of the daughters requests suggest the future of their lives. The opening scene of the novel is dependent on our association with the fairytale, allegorical quality of life which gives meaning to the seemingly insignificant.

Another device of giving an allegorical quality to the realistic lives of the characters in The Manor is through Singer's use of biblical allusion, a technique that Singer employs throughout his later work. Like the combination of fairytale and realism used in depicting Moskat's daughters, biblical allusion suggests an allegorical pattern to the realistic lives of these nineteenth-century Jews. For example, when Lucian Jampolski, the son of the exiled count, first meets Miriam Lieba he sarcastically comments that her last name, Jacoby, "means Jacob--Jacob's grandchildren. The Jacob who cheated Esau out of his birthright" (p. 104). This is significant not only because Calman takes over the Count's estate after the Polish insurrection but, more importantly, because Lucian is very much a type of Esau. He is depicted by Singer as a rapacious sinner who undergoes a Dostoevskian pattern of destruction that finally results in suicide.

The allegorical pattern of the Jacob and Esau story is of great importance for Singer in that the ways of Esau will take the

individual away from God. For example, as Calman becomes wealthy and feels the loss of his pious Jewishness, he compares himself to Esau, who sold his birthright for "a mess of porridge" (M, p. 241). Moreover, Singer also compares Calman's son, Sasha (the Savage) to Esau, who "would have done everything at once: ride, swim in the pond, eat" (M, p. 439). Sasha's rapacity is like his mother's, and his own decadent life is clearly a reflection of Clara's unbridled licentiousness.

However, Singer does not strictly rely on either fairytale associations or biblical allusion for characterization in The Manor. Unhesitatingly, he also depicts an allegorical "type" of modern woman in Calman's wife, Clara. Critically, Singer's handling of her character has been misunderstood. For example, Irving Malin has pointed to what he believes to be Singer's mishandling of her. He writes, "She is truly a warped creature. Singer does not know what to do with her. He condemns her quest for sexual freedom, but he also admires her independence and shrewdness."⁴ Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. As Singer told Paul Rosenblatt and Gene Koppel in an interview, Clara is depicted as a modern woman, that rare combination of sexual freedom and independence.⁵ Moreover, Clara is a very carefully drawn character, and Malin's simple classification of her is not possible. If she is the modern woman, then there are also characteristics about her that make her an individual.

⁴Malin, p. 28.

⁵Paul Rosenblatt and Gene Koppel, A Certain Bridge: Isaac Bashevis Singer (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1971), pp. 34-35.

For example, after Clara marries Calman, she begins to take over his business. Calman urges her to let him build her a ritual bath, thus suggesting the tension in their marriage between pious and worldly Jewishness. As Calman falls asleep, Singer writes, "The clock seems to her to be ticking at a feverish pace. Her pulse was beating just as quickly. She couldn't stop planning, waiting, and hoping. It was as if her blood were boiling within her. 'What's happening to me? Why am I so driven? And what am I so afraid of?' she asked herself. She knew the answer; obstacles always littered the path to her happiness" (M, p. 266). Indeed, throughout the novel Clara is conscious of her actions to the point of being cunning. Yet it is her relationship to time, symbolized by the clock ticking, that is the key to her ruling passion. In reaction to the transitory nature of life, she becomes a sensual creature, enjoying the pleasures of this world. When she leaves Warsaw to visit her old lover Zipkin in America, Calman thinks, "This was not a woman but a devil. In The Righteous Measure Calman had once read of demons who disguised themselves as human females, lived with men, and even married them. Could Clara be one of these creatures of the netherworld?" (E, p. 94). In depicting Clara as a demon or type of Lillith, Singer reinforces the allegorical associations of the eternal temptress, yet in her death Singer softens our memory of Calman's reaction to her by giving her a sense of realistic nobility. Having failed in her plan to recapture Zipkin's heart, she returns to Warsaw. When she returns to her apartment she finds it is dust laden. "Before going away," Singer writes, "Clara had left everything in order, but in her last minute

hurry she had dropped some orange peel in a basket in the kitchen. She now recognized the peelings, which had become blackened and shriveled as if petrified. Clara began to laugh and cry at the same time. She had crossed oceans, been happy and had suffered, and here lay the orange peelings from a piece of fruit she had eaten just before leaving" (E, p. 276). The orange peelings suggest that there is a dimension to time that one cannot overcome, and that even as Clara has tried to deny the inevitability of time by seizing the day, age has finally caught up with her. As Clara lies dying of a heart attack, she spies half an orange on the chair. Singer writes that it "glistened in the afternoon sun, red as wine, and the seeds and veins could be seen exactly as in her vision"--the vision of her death that she had received many years before (E, p. 279). Singer suggests here the eternal quality of life in that after death one is reborn into another dimension. The dried peelings have been replaced by the sensuous orange, and through this gesture Singer foreshadows Clara's vision at the moment of her death: "Next to the stove, figures materialized. She recognized them all: her father, mother, aunt, grandparents. Their faces glowed, casting a light that dimmed the lamp on the table. A joy such as she had never seen before exuded from them. . . . They looked as if they wanted to approach her, but could not. Clara wanted to speak to them, but her lips would not open. She shut her eyes, but they were still there. Her mother smiled. 'How is it possible that I can be her child?' Clara asked herself. 'She is still so young. I could be her mother . . .'" (E, p. 288). Thus the association of Clara with the orange

illustrates Singer's concept of rebirth in the novel. Clara goes to join those in another dimension that excludes time as we understand it.

Singer is, in fact, quite interested in time as it relates to the eternal in The Manor. When we see Clara dying, we realize what time does to people, and, consequently, we see a pattern in their lives. This device of intensifying emotions through realistic description while simultaneously defining the allegorical pattern of a character's life is achieved by a technique that might be labeled interrupted narration.⁶ For example, Calman figures very largely in the first part of the novel, but, as an old man, he appears almost as a shadow in the second part. We first see him in detail as he raises his family, marries off his daughters, becomes involved in the machinery of business, and finally renounces the world. He is not presented in detail again until late in the second half of the novel, and when he is, his deathbed scene is a remembrance of an age that has passed, both for Calman and for the reader:

Calman looked back on his life. Wealth had come and gone. He had buried two of his four daughters. His son-in-law, the Marshinov rabbi, was at death's door. Ezriel was living with some converted woman. Calman had been charitable, but not sufficiently so. He could have provided for many men with his possessions, but instead he had yearned for new tracts of land, new leases. He could have married a respectable woman, but he had become enamored of Clara. Well, soon he would have to give an accounting of himself! Behind him he left the Gentiles, irreligious Jews, generations of base individuals (E, p. 324).

⁶Alexander has also noticed this technique in Singer (see pp. 87-88).

Through the use of such compressed narration a pattern is presented of a man who sampled the material world and tried to return to a spiritual life of Jewishness. As with Clara's death, Singer intensifies our emotions of sympathy for Calman by depicting the moment of his death as the overlap of man's temporal time with God's eternal time.

With Singer's ability to meet the demands of setting and characterization in The Manor firmly established, we may now turn to the thematic concern of Ezriel's allegorical journey from secular to religious knowledge. Essentially, Ezriel is the allegorical Doubter, and his questions on the nature of religious evidence summarize the major apprehensions that one might have about the authority of religious knowledge:

The author of the Pentateuch obviously had not the remotest conception of natural science. That being the case, how could he presume to know the truth about other matters? One must assume, therefore, that the Bible was nothing but a collection of legends and old wives tales. That being so, why study the Holy Writ? On the other hand, how had the universe come into being? Could it have created itself? (M, p. 26).

Clearly, these are a young man's questions in their arrogance, and, accordingly, Ezriel feels that he must help his people out of such darkness. Is this not the situation, one might ask, of anyone extrinsically finding knowledge while misunderstanding intrinsically the nature of a culture? Singer, the ever-wise narrator, tacitly comments on Ezriel's mission: "Ezriel scooped up a handful of snow, molded it into a hard ball, and hurled it at the twilight sky" (M, p. 35). Certainly, Singer here comments on the futility of purely secular knowledge.

Yet Singer does fully present the secular view in The Manor, and the implications of Darwin are central to the novel. Wallenberg, reminding us of the worldly Abram Shapiro of The Family Moskat, initiates Ezriel into Darwinism just as Shapiro led Asa Hershel into the world of Warsaw society. In one of Singer's favorite types of allegorical situations, that of the young innocent from the provinces listening to the experienced older man from the city, Wallenberg tells Ezriel that "there's a recently published English book that is causing a furor in the world of science. Its theory seems to be that all life is a struggle for survival and that the strongest species win out . . ." (M, p. 39). In The Manor Darwinism, and its representative Wallenberg, presents a central problem for the Jews in that it is concerned with survival of the physically fittest, ignoring spiritual attributes. Darwinism, survival of the species, is an antithesis to spiritual knowledge that teaches survival of the spirit through faith. For Singer, Darwinism fails because it does not take into consideration the infinite possibility of the individual. As Alexander points out, "One way in which modern novelists at odds with the Darwinist legacy have expressed their disagreement is by asserting the freedom of individual character from the determinism of heredity and environment. . . ." ⁷ Quite simply, children do not follow the paths of their parents. Ezriel, for example, is certainly not following the pious life of his rabbi father in the novel, and Miriam Lieba, Calman's daughter, is an apostate.

⁷Alexander, p. 89.

Yet even more explicit a denunciation of secular systems is established in the novel by the allegorical personification of spiritual survival through faith in the elder Marshinov Rabbi and his son, Jochannan. In fact, it is through the elder Rabbi that the sense of an ongoing journey is first introduced into the novel as the anthesis of the static systems of secular knowledge:

"Why should this be considered a virtue?" the rabbi continued. "Isn't it more commendable to listen and consider before plunging ahead blindly? Doesn't the Talamud say elsewhere that the evil servant acts first and asks questions later? There seems to be some contradiction here. According to common sense, is not inaction preferable to deeds whose consequences are unknown? The truth of the matter is that in certain cases action does come before thought. The need for a pilgrimage cannot be explained, for it will not be understood until it has been experienced. Philosophy inevitably begins with doubt, with chaos and emptiness. Thus it is unable to create anything for what was void to begin with will remain void to the end. Therefore it is written: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. The earth was without form, and void.' In the beginning God created--only then did he perceive the void. If he had beheld it first, there might have been no creation. When the Almighty gave the Torah to the Jews, He feared that they might first wish to know what it was--for if you argue and think about anything long enough, doubt is sure to arise. This was exactly what happened in the case of Esau and Ishmael, who according to the sages were offered the Torah first, and refused it. . . . But the Jews followed the Lord's way when He created heaven and earth. With them, action preceded deliberation. In the deed, all misgivings were resolved.

"Yet how and when is this principle to be applied? Only in the fulfillment of holy duties. In secular matters and those pertaining to the flesh, it is the opposite course one must follow; one must consider and deliberate first, and only then perform one's duty. It is the evil-doer who inflicts harm and then asks questions. For wickedness awakens endless questions in man. All doubts vanish in the performance of virtuous deeds. Yet how can one recognize the true spirit of virtue? The answer is: through Joy. The man who injures someone is disturbed and full of conflicts. But a good deed is succeeded by inner happiness. For a man who is uplifted, all questions are resolved" (M, pp. 62-63).

The specific placement of this passage so early in the novel attests to Singer's technical skill. The sermon is delivered to Calman, yet it sets the stage for the spiritual journey of the characters throughout the novel. Indeed, it is even an invitation to the reader to pursue a "pilgrimage" with Singer, for in reading The Manor the characters of nineteenth-century Polish Jewry are delineated. Specifically, we are invited to witness Ezriel's journey from the secular void of Wallenberg to the spiritual life of Jochannan.

As we view Ezriel's battle between secular knowledge and the faith of his fathers, we have a sense of authenticity that is not evident in Asa Hershel's journey as he makes a commitment to Judaism in the conclusion of The Family Moskat. Part of the reason for Singer's more convincing depiction of Ezriel is that the older novelist gives a clearer sense of Ezriel's dilemma by dramatically depicting his journey towards an understanding of tradition. For example, when Zadok, a younger version of Ezriel, argues with his older uncle, telling him that "the struggle for existence is a biological. According to Malthus, wars are necessary," the older, more experienced Ezriel no longer thinks that it is his destiny to save his people; they are already saved (E, p. 214). Instead, he argues for "eternal truth" such as the ten commandments. Moreover, significant changes in his personal life also show him as growing in awareness away from naive social solutions, what Singer called isms in his first novel:

Ezriel explained that he neither believed in revelation nor had faith in religious traditions or dogma. Man must

continuously seek God. The entire history of man was one great search for God. But in addition man must also serve God. When he ceased to serve God, he served tyrants. Undoubtedly Judaism had come closest in the search for God. Christianity and Islam were both products of Judaism. Jewish suffering had produced a spiritually superior type. For two thousand years the Jew had not been in power and had not carried a sword. Even the current endeavor of the Jews to return to the land of Israel was unique. In the passage of two thousand years, hundreds of nations had become assimilated into other cultures. But the Jews still struggled to return to the land of their ancestors. This fact alone proved that the Old Testament contained divine truths (E, pp. 246-247).

The idea of a struggle is here emphasized by Ezriel, and his speech echoes the message of the Rabbi earlier in the novel because faith in Jewishness and in tradition must be evinced in endurance and measured by joy. Only in faith may misgivings be resolved.

Singer devotes the second to last chapter of The Manor to a letter from Ezriel to Zadok. The letter is sent after Ezriel has left for Warsaw, and it articulates the central battle and its tension that has driven Ezriel throughout the novel: "I have seen what I have known for a long time: that the person who estranges himself from God seeks only an opportunity to hate" (E, p. 363). To establish a sense of connection and meaning in his life, Ezriel goes to Palestine, finally realizing that Jewish history cannot be obliterated. We realize the significance of these facts for the sake of the narrative of the novel itself, but on another level we realize that we are being shown another type of life, the allegorical depiction of a Faustian man, a predecessor of Yasha in The Magician of Lublin, who has digested the best that secular knowledge of Western Europe could offer but still needs the sustenance that only life in a spiritual family

can give. Even though Ezriel still doubts everything, he has finally come to realize that "the power, whatever it is, that has kept us alive for four thousand years, is still with us. I can deny God, but I cannot stop being a Jew--contradictory and strange as these words may sound" (E, p. 365). Here we see the archetypal situation: the need for roots. Unlike Zadok, who appears unnoticed at his saintly father's deathbed, or unlike Asa Hershel of The Family Moskat, who never comes to terms with his own past, Ezriel realizes that tradition, his Jewishness, must be the controlling focus in his life.

In the closing pages of The Estate Ezriel and Jochannan meet, and this allegorically suggests that there is a connecting point between secular and religious knowledge in which religious knowledge can fulfill the progression for higher consciousness. The Rabbi takes Ezriel's son, Moishale, into his care, the action itself suggesting the symbolic offering by Ezriel of his son to Judaism. The Rabbi then asks Ezriel, "Did you see the truth?" and he replies, "Not completely. But I saw their lie" (E, p. 334). Ezriel has finally come to realize that the very existence of the Jewish people is a testament to the rightness of their spiritual belief. "They placed their faith in God," Ezriel reflects, "not in man, evolution, or revolution" (E, p. 336). Thus the estate, originally referring to the material purchase of some hundred acres by Ezriel and Olga, becomes an estate of spirituality as Ezriel leaves his son a sense of tradition and Jewishness.

As The Manor ends, Singer presents the death of Jochannan, a scene so powerfully rendered that it is worthwhile to cite it here:

The rabbi remained in a dreamlike state, praying inwardly for the truth. Someone had entered and left. The candle went out, or was extinguished. The rabbi thought about darkness. It is nothing but the lack of light, the concealment of His face. Then what was there to fear? He was still there. Evil spirits? Let them be--they were necessary! Incarnation! So be it. Rabbi Jochannan saw his father, his face emerging from the ritual bath. Everything dripped, his beard, his sidelocks. Were there ablutions on high, too? His father spoke, but without a sound. The rabbi listened. So that's the way it was. Suddenly something fluttered. Opening his eyes, the rabbi saw a great light. What was it? Sunrise? Lightening? He lay there, his limbs numb. It was neither of these. It illuminated every beam of the ceiling, every corner of the room, the windowpanes, the bed cover. "And God said, 'Let there be light.' And God saw that it was good." The rabbi was witnessing creation. Within one moment everything had become clear, all questions had been answered. The rabbi closed his eyes, but the light was still there: a radiance that shone neither outside him nor within him, but filled all space, penetrated all being. It was everything together: revelation, surcease from all earthly turmoil, the profoundest joy. "All is right, God is perfect!" something in the rabbi cried out. It was all so simple that he could not grasp why he had not known it before. How long had it all lasted? A minute? Seconds? Time itself had vanished. He had merged with eternity. He had only one wish left: to let those who had sunk into doubt and suffering know what he had seen. He stretched out his hand to knock on the wall, but his hand made no sound (E, pp. 372-373).

Here is Singer at his best, intensifying the reader's emotions of sympathy and his need for resolution while sharply defining the message that spiritual knowledge is supreme. Jochannan, the allegorical personification of a life of faith, is rewarded with a vision of the transcendence of God as he falls out of temporal time, like Calman and Clara, into the eternal time of God. Yet, unlike Clara, Jochannan is rewarded by becoming one with his faith.

Regarding the overall effect of The Manor, Mary Ellman has written that "characters come forward and recede in short, simple,

even perfunctory turns."⁸ Yet, she does not point to the basic problem that accompanies a family novel: supporting characters are often one dimensional, while we long to know more of the major character's lives. Although Singer breathes new life into the convention of the family novel by realistically depicting characters while simultaneously viewing the allegorical patterns of their lives through such methods as biblical allusion and interrupted narration, there is still a sacrifice of the subtleties of characterization that we tend to seek in novels.

In The Manor Singer has sought to present the entire history of a people, and in this he is successful. However, from his first novel Singer has shown a greater interest in portraying the anguish of an individual than in establishing that individual's place in history. Since, for Singer, the themes recur eternally, and may thus be set at any period, the variations on the theme are of greater interest. Having written a successful family novel, Singer then moves on to intimately depict the individual as he vacillates between existing in this world and living in hope of a world to come. In short, Singer continues to examine the difficulties of finding meaning through the exertion of free will.

⁸Mary Ellman, "The Piety of Things in The Manor," in The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer, ed. Marcia Allentuck (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 124.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAGICIAN OF LUBLIN: THE CASE OF THE RELIGIOUS MAN

With The Magician of Lublin Singer clearly moves into another stage of development, evincing a sense of continually renewed creativeness that characterizes his work. As Kresh has written, "Isaac [Singer] is in no sense a one book writer. Each of his novels represents a tremendous leap forward from the last, a daredevil's attempt to accomplish what he has never accomplished before, to explore new territory. . . ." ¹ To recognize this "leap forward" we must remember that Satan in Goray is a novel very close to "pure" allegory, while The Family Moskat and The Manor are novels combining allegory and realism. Certainly, Singer could have continued to write family novels such as these, studies resplendent with characters representing broad spectrums of "types." Yet Singer, by this time well over sixty years old, chose instead to give more attention to the particular, realizing that in a careful study of the specific may be found the best of the general. Hence, The Magician of Lublin, The Slave, Enemies, A Love Story, and Shosha are united in depicting the allegorical journeys of one individual as he seeks to find meaning in a discordant, often hostile world. In the present chapter the difficulties that Yasha Mazur must surmount become the main focus.

¹Kresh, p. 210.

In overcoming the obstacles of his journey, Yasha elicits intense sympathy--and a concern heightened by the allegorical significance of his journeying. Clearly, Yasha's profession as magician, which will be examined first, suggests a search for knowledge, but it is a search that leads Yasha away from his Jewishness. It leads him away from the pastoral world of Lublin into a state of unwitting despair and an attempt to escape such despair through women. Thus, Yasha's travels must be seen as a journey through an internal labyrinth in order for us to realize that he must escape his own rationalism and egoism to make his leap of faith away from the world. It is the implications of his choices that intensify our emotions of both dread and awe as we behold his allegorical journey.

The reason such a detailed analysis of Yasha's difficulties must be made is that critics have failed to note either the implications of Yasha's journey or the conscious artistry with which Singer presents his character. For example, Siegel emphasizes that the conclusion to the novel, in which Yasha the Magician becomes Yasha the Penitent, illustrates that Yasha has been defeated by his "inner demons."² Cyrena N. Pondrom also muddles the question of Yasha's journey by proposing that he is fundamentally dishonest. Consequently, Yasha becomes "guilty of hubris, that first and last he aspires to power beyond the condition of man."³ Yet, Pondrom proposes, even if

²Siegel, p. 22.

³Cyrena N. Pondrom, "Conjuring Reality: I. B. Singer's The Magician of Lublin," in The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer, ed. Marcia Allentuck (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 109.

Yasha is dishonest and there is a possibility that God does not exist, Yasha's actions do have meaning because "they represent the patterns of generations of human experience, even if they refer to a conception of reality which is untrue."⁴ Yasha thus becomes "an Icarus who flies too near the sun, but who, nevertheless, prepares the way for men who will fly."⁵ Yet Pondrom overcomplicates the remarkable simplicity with which Singer presents Yasha, and consequently the central issue of the novel is confused. Malin, insensitive to Singer's purpose, writes that "although I am not surprised by Yasha's decision--he is, after all, as obsessive here as he was about his magic talent--I am disturbed by the ease of his new performance."⁶ Likewise, Alexander misunderstands the difficulties involved in a leap of faith, and he feels that Yasha's "escape" is imperfect: "We have a depiction of two unsatisfactory extremes, and from these we may, if we wish, infer a mean."⁷ Although the quality of criticism improves somewhat regarding Singer's later novels, I have included a survey of the existing criticism early on in this chapter to emphasize again that critical observations of Singer remain vague (and often straightforwardly wrong) even as we approach Singer at his best. Although The Magician of Lublin is probably Singer's most well known novel, criticism has not viewed it with sufficient attention to its formal structure.

⁴Pondrom, p. 104.

⁵Pondrom, p. 110.

⁶Malin, p. 57.

⁷Alexander, pp. 69-70.

The first error of criticism has been to misinterpret the significance of the central symbol: magic. First of all, Yasha's position as magician does not illustrate his paradoxical dishonesty, as Pondrom suggests. Rather, his position as a magician is a symbol for secular knowledge itself. In The Magician of Lublin, there are no lengthy discourses on Spinoza's amor Dei intellectualis. Instead, Yasha's speculations, when they appear, are of a general quality rather than a discussion on a specific philosophical issue. For Yasha, "the whole world acts out a farce because everyone is ashamed to say: I do not know."⁸ The result of presenting archetypal questions of existence is that such interior monologue gives an intimate sense of realism to Yasha's allegorical journey. Instead of presenting characters debating specific philosophical issues, the suggestion on magic itself symbolizes, for Singer, the trickery that metaphorically follows from abstract and uncommitted reason. For example, a belief in Darwinism illustrates a mental adroitness that presents a system for defining reality, yet it ignores the all-important existence of the individual. But rather than denouncing Darwinism by having characters break a hereditary pattern, as Singer does in The Estate, he here deals with the entire issue of secular

⁸Isaac Bashevis Singer, The Magician of Lublin, trans. Elaine Gottlieb and Joseph Singer (New York: Noonday Press, 1960; rpt. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979), p. 334. I have used the novel reprinted in An Isaac Bashevis Singer Reader because, since there is no standard edition of the novels, the novel as it is presented in the Reader is readily accessible. Moreover, in his selection of this novel for the Reader, Singer points to its significance.

knowledge symbolically through magic. Yasha's magic in the novel becomes the dominant metaphor for the limited, although attractive, knowledge of the things of this world.

Each time magic is discussed in the novel, Singer points to the allegorical implications that are evident in the metaphor. For example, early in the novel Yasha is seated at Bella's tavern talking to Schmul, Lublin's most accomplished violinist. The discussion becomes an allegorical debate on the nature of art as it is perceived by two accomplished artists. Instead of depicting Wallenberg and Ezriel discussing a precise theory, the mature Singer presents the essential questions of secular knowledge as Schmul praises Yasha on his abilities of deception. In other words, Singer presents one secular artist complementing another on his ability to fulfill his conception of art. Yet, significantly, when Schmul remarks that Yasha is clever to have appeared to swallow a sword, Yasha becomes irritated:

"You big simpleton, how can anyone deceive the eye? You happen to hear the word 'deception' and you keep repeating it like a parrot. Do you have any idea what the word means? Look, the sword does go down the throat and not into the vest pocket."

"The blade goes into your throat?"

"First the throat, and then the stomach."

"And you stay alive?"

"I have so far."

"Oh, Yasha, please don't expect me to believe that!"

"Who gives a damn what you believe?" Yasha said, suddenly becoming weary. Schmul was nothing but a loud-mouthed fool who could not think for himself. They see with their own eyes but they don't believe, Yasha thought (p. 328).

Yasha does not like to discuss his magic because it is sacred to him, not, as Pondrom implies, a lie by which he tricks himself and others.

Rather, his magic is refined secular knowledge, a kind of poetry. Consequently he feels, rightly, that no one will understand the process by which he creates. Like all poets and artists, he feels that people will not be able to distinguish the simple from the difficult in his work. How much more difficult it is to actually swallow the sword, and how exasperating it is to have the difficulty misunderstood!

Indeed, Yasha is a master magician in that, although most magicians present illusion in the disguise of reality, he presents reality in the disguise of illusion. For example, in the marvelous card dueling scene with Herman, the white slaver, Yasha performs the standard arpeggios with the easy tricks, but he then begins to do tricks that "Herman did not seem to know. . . . [He] grew overheated. He began to mop the sweat from his brow" (pp. 444-445). Again, we here see Yasha at the summit of his profession, the consummate magician so skilled that he baffles another master. Although Pondrom believes that "Yasha is not what he claims and conceives himself to be; he deceives, but by a means that enables him to conceal the fact from himself,"⁹ Yasha is quite honest with himself and knows exactly both the greatness and limits of his artistry. Like Singer, Yasha is a magician whose art has been largely misunderstood.

We must keep in mind that Yasha has abandoned his ancestry of pious Jewishness and that he seeks to manipulate the realities of his

⁹Pondrom, p. 100.

life by the illusion of magic. Implicitly, there is a parallel stressed between the artistry of magic and secular knowledge. Swallowing a sword and discussing the subtleties of Spinoza are, doubtless, related in Singer's mind: both are types of activities that are essentially abstractions, and abstractions do not give comfort in time of need. Hence, Yasha, like Asa Hershel and Ezriel before him, is a knight of the secular when we first meet him. Like the philosophy of Asa Hershel and the psychiatry of Ezriel, magic is a type of knowledge that the world gives. Yet, as I suggested earlier, magic is perhaps the ultimate symbol for secular knowledge. Because Yasha is so good at his art, he allegorically becomes the superior aesthete of secular ability. He must be seen, therefore, not merely an artist but the artist. He is the allegorical, secular poet in a world of prose.

With the metaphorical association of magic firmly established, we may now turn to Yasha's quest, the action of the novel that carries out the idea of the bankruptcy of secular knowledge. Singer sets his knight off on an allegorical journey from the province of Lublin to the sophisticated city of Warsaw, and the Lublin-Warsaw opposition functions in the novel as a key to the meaning of the sacred. For Singer, God's presence is more keenly felt in the simplicity of nature. Clearly, Lublin is associated with peace. In the mythopoetic landscape of The Magician of Lublin, Lublin is described as the pastoral garden of innocence: "Butterflies fluttered this way and that, and bees buzzed from flower to flower. Every leaf and stalk had its inhabitant: a worm, a bug, a gnat, creatures

barely discernible to the naked eye. As always, Yasha marvelled at them" (p. 320). In such scenes we feel the interconnection between all life that gives intimations of immortality. On the other hand, Warsaw, associated with magic, is a bustling metropolis in which the hand of God is unlikely to be felt: "The women already wore wide-brimmed straw hats decorated with artificial fruits and flowers. Carefree young men in straw hats and light-colored suits strolled about, twirling their canes. Through the tumult the locomotives whistled and hissed; the railroad couplings clanged" (p. 384). The tacitly drawn image of the artificial fruits and flowers serves as an indicator of how far we are from God's work in Warsaw. In Lublin Yasha keeps his animals, symbolic of the unity between man and beast that will be explicitly drawn in The Slave; in Warsaw Yasha keeps his library, antiques, collection of billboards, newspaper clippings, and reviews, all of which suggest the aesthetic interests of the secular world. Singer specifically sets up polar opposites between these two places, a dialectic of location between which Yasha lives.

Yasha's allegorical journey is from his innocent home in Lublin to the urban world of Warsaw. As Fletcher emphasizes in his theory of allegory, the questing journey is of primary importance in the allegorical scheme. As Fletcher writes, "There is usually a paradoxical suggestion that by leaving home the hero can return to another better 'home,'" and Fletcher proceeds to exemplify this point with regard to Pilgrim's Progress, Gulliver's Travels, and Rasselas.¹⁰

¹⁰Fletcher, pp. 151 ff.

Significantly, Yasha, like Rasselas, returns home in his quest, yet he suffers the same disillusionment as Gulliver. Singer presents a realistic Pilgrim in his novel who comes to understand both the difficulty in coming to faith and the anguish of maintaining it.

Practically, Yasha leaves Lublin to make his living, yet the intention behind his travels is to escape boredom, "this eternity void of content, this bliss without enjoyment, this superficial profundity, this hungry satiety," as Kierkegaard, an expert on boredom with whom Singer would agree, describes it.¹¹ Indeed, this boredom leads to the unwitting despair that we have witnessed in both Asa Hershel and Ezriel, a result of being so expert at mastering secular knowledge that the challenge is gone. Unlike the eternal and painfully fulfilling work that involves a maintaining of faith in God, competency in secular matters leads to boredom, which in turn leads to despair. In Singer's novels, such despair results in the hero's attempts to escape intellectual boredom through women.

As with Asa Hershel and Ezriel, the case is no different for Yasha. Early in the novel he says to himself that "it's all because I'm so bored" (p. 351). As Singer writes, "Yasha was well aware that his worst enemy was ennui. To escape it, he had committed all his follies. It had lashed out at him like so many whips. Because of it he had loaded himself down with all sorts of burdens" (p. 443). As a result of such boredom and despair, he is led away from his home and

¹¹Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony, trans. Lee M. Capel (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 302.

his faithful wife, Esther. Once on the road, he seeks to escape boredom through involvements with women, involvements that will, at least in part, lead him to the end of his secular journey and inspire his leap of faith.

The women in The Magician of Lublin represent every aspect of womanhood that Yasha could desire: fidelity (in Esther),¹² assistance (in Magda), companionship (in Zefitel), respectability (in Emilia). Yet, like Asa Hershel and Ezriel before him, Yasha is not fated to find salvation in women. He is unable to commit himself to any one woman because he is seeking salvation outside of himself. Although these women are attractive, perhaps representing an allegorical paradigm of womanhood itself, Yasha must look to himself.

In turning to women for salvation, Yasha suggests Faust, another intellectual who reached the summit of secular knowledge and, realizing that he was overcome with boredom and despair, sought a higher consciousness. In his success with magic, Yasha again suggests the Faust who, seeking the essence of all things, turned to hermetic lore, the ultimate symbol for secular knowledge in that such lore is an intellectual attempt to find unity among dissimilar things. Moreover, as Faust sought the essential nature of life by turning to alchemy, a secular knowledge that borders on the impossible for him, so Yasha the magician, who has had success in presenting reality in the disguise of illusion, seeks to present something bordering on the impossible.

¹²Pondrom points to the allegorical significance of the name Esther, the Hebrew queen who saved her people from a Gentile plot to exterminate them, p. 95.

For Yasha, his stunt on the tightrope, never before attempted, is symbolic of such intellectual daring. Yet even this feat is conceivable, so Yasha must next speculate on presenting the impossible in terms of reality, and this is suggested by the metaphor of flight. Thus, he becomes Icarus in his desire to both escape and triumph.

Most of the flight sequences in the novel are presented in dreams, and, as Edwin Honig suggests in his work on allegory, such dreams are essential to the allegorical process. "It [the dream] is no casual device," he writes, "but a function to the allegorical procedure as a whole. In fixing the symbolic character of the quest, it discloses the hero's relationship to his goal. It keeps a realistic purpose alive by dramatizing the dominant sanctions and forces with which the hero must keep in touch. It also conveys the serious tone of the make-believe, designating the transcendent import of the matter experienced by the dreamer."¹³ Certainly, this is the case for Yasha's dreams and daydreams. His goal is escape from his over-complicated life, and he must constantly, even if unconsciously, keep in touch with the image of flight. Such dreams are evident throughout the novel. Early in the novel Singer writes that:

Yasha dozed off and dreamt that he was flying. He rose above the ground and soared, soared. He wondered why he had not tried it before--it was so easy, so easy. He dreamt this almost every night, and each time awoke with the sensation that a distorted kind of reality had been a dream or simply a train of thought. For years now he had been fascinated by the idea of putting on a pair of wings and flying. If a bird could do it, why not man? The wings would have to be large enough and made of strong silk like the kind used in

¹³Honig, p. 78.

balloons. They should be sewn onto ribs and should be able to fold and unfold like an umbrella. And if wings were not enough, a sort of web, like a bat's, could be attached between the legs to assist buoyancy. Man was heavier than a bird, but eagles and hawks were not exactly light either, and they could even lift a lamb and fly away with it. Whatever time Yasha could spare from thoughts of Emilia, he dedicated to this problem (p. 352).

Here again Singer emphasizes Yasha's attempt to free himself from a boredom which involves his skill with magic (secular knowledge) and women (sexual distortion). The two are so closely intertwined that when Yasha is not thinking about flight, he thinks of Emilia. Later, when Yasha is riding, he imagines himself with a pair of artificial wings (p. 373). He fancifully imagines that he would fit Magda with a set of wings and that "they would soar together like a goose and gander" (p. 388). Thus, throughout the novel Singer presents the flight metaphor as a symbol for Yasha's conception of the impossible. Yet it is important to remember that the metaphor is drawn in terms of a secular conception of the essence of all things, not a religious conception. Ironically, Yasha is led not to Satan in his dabblings in magic but to God, and this is because the nature of his journey keeps him in contact with the Jewish world of his fathers that he has sought to escape.

Since we have analyzed Yasha's profession as a magician as well as his unwitting despair, we may now turn to Yasha's journey, a battle in which he must triumph over his own rationalism and egoism to make his leap of faith. In the final stages of his quest, Yasha is depicted in three separate episodes in the synagogue; each time he feels the pull of his faith, his principal foe is himself. It is

worthwhile to spend some time on the actual explication of these scenes, for all critical attention has neglected the significance of the synagogue episodes as a key to Yasha's ultimate leap of faith.

In the first episode, Yasha is on the road to Warsaw, a place farthest from the sacred nature of his home, and he is driven by inclement weather into a prayer house in the village of Makov. Although day is breaking, it is still night in the prayerhouse, suggesting that the synagogue is a place out of chronological time, a place frozen forever in faith. One old man is still reciting the midnight service, an adherent to the timelessness of the place. Singer writes that "it was all strangely foreign to him [Yasha], yet familiar. Magda had gone back to the wagon as if fearful of all this intense Jewishness. He, Yasha, chose to remain a moment longer. He was part of this community. Its roots were his roots. He bore its mark upon his flesh" (p. 381). Yasha then sees a young boy enter and realizes that "once I looked exactly like that boy" (p. 383). He is drawn to the boy's grandmother who "noddled her head as if aware of a truth known only to those not deceived by the vanity of worldly things" (p. 383).

It is precisely this "vanity of worldly things" that Singer exposes in Warsaw. Although Yasha is there to perform, the only feat that he attempts is the robbery of Zaruski. Pressured by his financial needs so that he might escape with Emilia, he decides to use his magician's talents. Yet such talents, when used for the wrong purpose, fail. Everything seems to go wrong. Yasha cannot find his skeleton key, symbolizing that his escape from boredom will not come

from overt sin. Altogether, the event is "failure! A Fiasco! . . . That enemy which for years had lurked in ambush within him, whom Yasha had had, each time, to repel with force and cunning, with charms and such incantations as each individual must learn for himself, had now gained the upper hand. Yasha felt its presence--a dybbuk, a satan, an implacable adversary who would disconcert him while he was juggling, push him from the tightrope, make him impotent" (p. 456).

As Singer suggests that each individual must learn to repel his own demons, we realize the allegorical significance of this passage. Yasha becomes a contemporary Everyman, fighting a nameless fear that is personified in a dybbuk. As Yasha realizes that his fear of failure has "gained the upper hand," he cannot work the skeleton key even when he finds it because "his will, strength, and ambition had been spent" (p. 458). The all important confidence in his magic, his sense of conviction in his skill, so subtle and intrinsic to him that he has refused to discuss its nature with Schmul, is lost. The misuse of his skill has led him into evil; as punishment, he has lost his sense of artistry. It is important to note in this set of events that Singer has not been so overtly didactic since his message concerning the hastening of the Messiah in Satan in Goray. Yet we may judge the advance of Singer's skill as a novelist in that in his first novel the moral was clearly added at the end of the novel. In The Magician of Lublin Singer presents his moral about the misuse of talents subtly through a straightforward narrative structure.

As the narrative continues, we find that Yasha's misfortunes are not yet over. In jumping from the apartment, he injures his left

foot "near his heel," suggesting, of course, the vulnerability of the invincible Achilles. Now Yasha will not be able to perform the somersault, that nearly impossible trick that was his reason for coming to Warsaw in the first place. His punishment, the inability to use his talents, suits the crime, the misuse of talents.

Yasha runs from a watchman into a synagogue, and Singer here presents the second episode of Yasha among the faithful. Singer's rendering of this scene is far more intense than the first. An old red-bearded beadle approaches Yasha and asks him if he would like to pray. After fighting an instinctual urge to run, "deliberately, Yasha took out the prayer shawl. He fingered the phylacteries within. It seemed to him that everyone was looking at him and waiting to see what he would do. In his stupor it appeared to him that everything depended on what he would do now with the prayer shawl and phylacteries" (p. 463). Again Singer suggests the importance of this one action in that, for Singer, the particular always suggests the general: ultimately, Yasha's fate will depend on what he "does" with his faith.

At first the Jews in the synagogue watch him "with a sort of adult derision," but presently they begin to look on him with "curiosity, respect, and affection" suggesting that acceptance is there if Yasha wants it (p. 464). In this place of prayer Yasha, like Ezriel before him, quite articulately and movingly feels his need for tradition:

Yasha distinctly sensed the love which flowed from their persons to him. They are Jews, my brethren, he said to himself. They know what I am a sinner, yet they forgive me. Again he felt shame, not because he had been clumsy, but because he had betrayed this fraternity, befouled it,

stood ready to cast it aside. What's the matter with me? After all, I'm descended from generations of God-fearing Jews. My great-grandfather was a martyr for the holy name. He remembered his father who, on his deathbed, had summoned Yasha to his side and said, "Promise me that you will remain a Jew."

And he had taken his, Yasha's, hand and held it until he entered his death throes.

How could I have forgotten this? How? (p. 465).

"I must be a Jew," Yasha says to himself (p. 467).

However, it would be simplistic of Singer to allow the spiritual development of his character to stop here. Yasha has spent many years in the world; he will not leave it so easily. Like Calman Jacoby and Ezriel in The Manor, Yasha is a man who has consciously chosen to live in the world and, indeed, will never be free of it. Just as Calman and Ezriel find it impossible to return to Jewishness without feeling the attraction of the world, so Yasha's fervent desire for his birthright diminishes. Almost immediately after leaving the synagogue, "the piety, which had consumed him as he stood in the prayer shawl and phylacteries in the prayer house, began to cool now and evaporate" (p. 469). Later, in a soup kitchen Yasha realizes that "earlier he had felt happy being in the company of devout Jews but now he was ill at ease among them. . . . He felt hostile and ashamed" (p. 471). Clearly, Yasha is now caught between the secular world of his magic and the traditional world of Jewishness.

After telling Emilia the truth about the attempted robbery, Yasha returns to the prayer house for the third time. In his first visit he felt alienation, in his second he felt acceptance, but now he views his religion skeptically. Again, it should be stressed that these visits suggest not only the specific pattern of Yasha's faith

but an allegorical vision of the difficulty of accepting religiosity. "Now he was again a prey to doubts," Singer writes. "Why did God need these capotes, these sidelocks, these skullcaps, these sashes? How many more generations would wrangle over the Talamud? How many more restrictions would the Jew put on himself. . . . A religion was like an army--to operate it required discipline. An abstract faith inevitably led to sin. The prayer house was like a barracks; there God's soldiers were mustered" (p. 512). Of course, this passage could be read as a foreshadowing of Yasha's own measures at the end of the novel. Yet such a reading, it seems, ignores Yasha's development. If Yasha is truly a knight on a journey towards spiritual consciousness, then precisely at what stage is he on his third visit to the synagogue? Does he misunderstand the nature of faith and consequently seal his doom in an extreme, disciplinary measure? Or is Singer suggesting something else here?

In Chapter II, I used Kierkegaard's three stages of spiritual development--aesthetic, ethical, and religious--as a frame of reference by which to explain the spiritual development of Asa Hershel. The same development may be seen in Yasha as he views the people in his visits to the synagogue. On his third visit, for example, he views the people there aesthetically. Yasha wrongly assumes that the religious people there are passive and that an unreasonable God has placed unreasonable demands on His chosen people. Yasha does not realize that these people have free will; consequently, in underestimating them, he cannot become one with them by exerting his own free will.

Yet earlier, in his second visit, Yasha views the Jews as ethical beings who can choose and, therefore, have authenticity. He is as attracted to them as he is repulsed by them in the soup kitchen. He feels that they have an answer in faith just as he later feels that they are merely well-disciplined soldiers. In short, Yasha changes his point of view almost as a sleight of hand. He is the aesthetic man throughout much of the novel, the allegorical secular man incapable of commitment to any one idea. For example, as his plight gets worse and he loses Emilia, it is then that he becomes skeptical. His life is governed by his situation, and, as an intellectual, he can at least attempt to rationalize the situation. His frame of reference, like his magic, depends on his adroitness.

But for Singer, such intellectual adaptability can carry a character only so far. Eventually, whether it is Asa Hershel or Ezriel or Yasha, the essentially spiritual man must face reality. He is finally no longer allowed to present reality in terms of illusion: secular reality versus spiritual reality must be dealt with in Singer's novels. In fact, this is the tension that underlies the narrative action in the novels. For the town of Goray, the moment of crisis arrives when it is found that Zevi has betrayed his people; for Asa Hershel, the holocaust must be faced; and for Ezriel, the crisis of his confused life is relieved by his journey to his Jewish roots in Palestine. Yasha's moment of crisis in his journey is Magda's suicide.

Technically, Singer foreshadows Magda's death and Yasha's spiritual crisis in a dream, a device, as I have suggested above, of some importance:

There were times when he was tormented nightly by dreams. He dreamed of funerals, monsters, witches, lepers. He would awaken drenched with sweat. But these weeks he had dreamed little. He would fall asleep, exhausted. More than once he had awakened in the same position in which he had fallen asleep. Yet he had known that the night had not been dreamless. Asleep, he led another life, a separate existence. From time to time he would recollect some dream of flying or some such stunt contrary to nature, something childishly preposterous, based on a child's misunderstanding or perhaps even on some verbal or grammatical error. So fantastically absurd would the dream have been that the brain, when not asleep, simply could not sustain it. He would remember and forget it the very same instant (p. 515).

Yasha's earlier dreams of terror are specific, thus giving a touchstone to his own conscious terror. But the "fantastically absurd" dreams of exhaustion suggest that Yasha has been through such an ordeal, both spiritually and physically, that he can no longer even depend on the specificities of concrete terror. Like Christian or the Red Cross Knight, sleep seems to have overtaken Yasha when he is weakest. In fact, as Honig points out, sleep is also an allegorical device of some importance when a knight is incapable of going on: "to Spenser's goal-directed knights, Guyon and Red Cross, sleep comes when they are least capable of proceeding directly to their quest. . . . Even Christian, Bunyan's indefatigable imitator of Christ and Paul, is caught napping soon after losing his burden."¹⁴

Singer depicts death as the final reality for Yasha on his journey. In the paragraph following the terrifying dream, Yasha finds

¹⁴Honig, p. 77.

Magda "hanging from the ceiling, an overturned chair beneath her" (p. 515). The only other suicide that we have seen thus far in Singer is that of Lucian in The Manor, whose death is the necessary conclusion for the course of depravity that was his life. On the other hand, Magda, whose sensitivity to the cruelties of life is symbolically suggested by her constantly blemished skin, seems more the victim. "Swollen and cracked, the mouth shouted [to Yasha], Look what you have done to me! Look! Look!" (p. 518). As the guilt-ridden Yasha leaves the apartment, he comes to a street symbolically named Bolesco, meaning "pain" in Polish. He goes to ZefTel, but finds her sleeping with Herman. Again Yasha feels "sorrow, emptiness, a sense of powerlessness":

It was not unlike the feeling he had experienced a few hours earlier when he had discovered Magda dead. Twice in one day there had been unveiled to him things which are best concealed. He had looked on the faces of death and lechery and had seen that they were the same. And even as he stood there staring, he knew that he was undergoing some sort of transformation, that he would never again be the Yasha he had been. The last twenty-four hours were unlike any previous day he had experienced. They summed up all his previous existence, and in summing it up had put a seal upon it. He had seen the hand of God. He had reached the end of the road (p. 534).

Technically, the passage is like those analyzed in Chapter III. Singer compresses a picture of a life into a few brief lines. It is this device of compression, combined with the finely described detail found throughout the novel, that gives a sense of both realism and allegory. It is the combination of these two qualities that lends much of the believability to the Epilogue of the novel. Unlike Asa Hershel of The Family Moskat, we have seen Yasha as both an individual and a type. His "leap of faith" is thus all the more convincing.

In the Epilogue narration progresses three years--the same type of device used in Satan in Goray. But although the message is didactically stated in the earlier novel, Singer now narrates the fate of Yasha the Penitent.

In three years Yasha had returned home, studied the Torah, and walled himself into a "living grave" (p. 537). Just as magic is the symbol for secular knowledge, this grave, appropriately, is the symbol for religious acceptance. Yasha had allowed himself a space of only four cubits long and four cubits wide. "He had grown a beard and sidelocks and had put on a wide fringed garment, a long gaberdine, and a velvet skull cap. As the masons worked, he had sat, book in hand, mumbling prayers. There had not even been sufficient room inside for a bed. His possessions consisted of a straw pallet, a chair, a tiny table, a pelisse with which to cover himself, the copper candlestick which the Rabbi had given him, a water jug, a few holy books, and a shovel with which to bury his excrement" (p. 538).

Quite clearly, Yasha has abandoned the systemic and extrinsic things of this world, but Singer does not allow us to think that this was done for repentance. In the point of view of Yasha he writes that "even if he remained in his cell for a hundred years he could not atone for all his iniquity" (p. 542). Moreover, Yasha's doubts are also with him: "As he read the sacred books, nagging thoughts came to him: How can I be sure that these speak the truth? Perhaps there is no God? The Torah may be the invention of man? Possibly I torture myself in vain? Vividly, he heard the Evil Spirit debate with him, remind him of past delights, advise him to begin again his

debauchery" (p. 543). He is, moreover, still plagued with temptation in that he fantasizes that Emilia "had a tunnel dug from her bedroom directly to his cell" (p. 553).

As the novel closes, Singer again returns to the epistolary form, a device that gives distance from the immediate narrative action. Emilia is surprised at his fate, she feels that he has inflicted too severe a punishment upon himself, and she has married a friend of her dead husband. Thus, Singer tells us, life has gone on. What, then, has been the purpose of Yasha's sacrifice?

Pondrom points to the irony in the Epilogue that "makes the absolute ethical value of Yasha's acts ambivalent."¹⁵ Certainly, there is irony in the end of the novel, but it is quite consciously and explicitly drawn by Singer:

It became clear to Yasha why the ancient saints had chosen exile and had never slept twice in the same place; had feigned blindness and deafness and muteness. One could not serve God amongst other men, even though separated by brick walls. . . . No, peace of mind was not to be found in this world (p. 546).

The irony here is not a fault of the novel, as Pondrom implies. Rather, the irony is consistent with the character of Yasha that Singer has depicted. Singer is much too wise a writer to propose that by leaving the world one can also leave oneself. Yasha has rid himself of the world's distractions, the vanity of worldly things: in turn, he has received knowledge of himself.

Yasha has made a leap of faith at the end of his journey, a commitment to the religious state suggested by Kierkegaard. It is,

¹⁵Pondrom, p. 96.

however, of central importance to realize that peace and contentment should not be expected in this state. As I emphasized in Chapter II of this study, suffering is essential to, and for Singer inherent in, the religious existence. Regis Jolivet further explains this relationship of suffering to the religious state: "The religious, then, inevitably involves suffering for it means the defeat of the reason and its natural clearness, passionate hope in the total absence of reasons for hope, conflict . . . with the world. The consequence is that suffering belongs essentially, not simply by accident, to the paradoxically, that is, authentically, religious."¹⁶ And Yasha, in his isolation and pain, is authentic. Paradoxically, his quest into the world has led him back into the world of faith which, ultimately, must always be found in oneself. The irony found in the end of the novel illustrates Singer's understanding of the subtleties found in being totally religious. For example, even Jochannan, possibly the most saintly man in all of Singer's novels, is plagued by doubt, but that does not mean that he is not religious because of such doubt. Rather, Jochannan, like Yasha, is religious because of doubt.

In Singer's vision Yasha is a "superior" man in the conclusion to The Magician of Lublin because he is more committed and, consequently, more religious. "You're killing yourself," Esther tells him. "Better myself than others," Yasha answers, expressing an informed restraint that is always positive in Singer's vision (p. 552).

¹⁶Regis Jolivet, Introduction to Kierkegaard, trans. W. H. Barber (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., n.d.), p. 151.

Because Yasha is informed about himself, he is finally able to escape the boredom that plagued him throughout his life.

In a scene resplendent with irony and tenderness, Schmul, now bored with his life, comes to ask Yasha the Penitent's advice. "What should we do?" he asks. "Harm no one. Slander no one. Not even think evil," Yasha replies (p. 551). His advice, like that of Jochannan to Ezriel in the conclusion of The Manor, is both simplistic and unimaginably difficult, as Yasha's journey has shown. The advice is wise and, like Yasha himself, humble in its religiosity. In the difficulty, though, is the success.

Singer's Yasha is certainly a spiritual hero, one who has mastered secular knowledge and sought the higher consciousness of religiosity. Unlike Faust, Yasha comes to an awareness of the futility of an existence without God before damnation. He has ventured much, triumphed greatly, and, like Judaism itself, been rewarded with pain.

The Magician of Lublin is a tale that is deceptively simple. Hence, most critics have read it as an example of extremism. Yet Singer has presented in the novel the case of a religious man, a type of life that is, for Singer, representative of the difficulty of maintaining a religious frame of reference. In its narrative of the quest, a central allegorical device, and the mimetic richness achieved by the dramatic scenes and interior monologues of Yasha, The Magician of Lublin becomes Singer's best novel examined thus far in this study. It is a combination of the allegorical and the realistic, a tale that intensifies our emotions for Yasha. As he overcomes the

difficulties that constitute his life--his magic, his boredom, his women, his rationalism--we feel a sense of awe, just as we feel sympathy for the death of Magda. Ultimately, however, our admiration and sympathy are mixed with dread at the severity of Yasha's leap of faith. Indeed, the involvement of our range of emotions suggests the power of The Magician of Lublin.

CHAPTER V

THE SLAVE: THE ARTISTRY OF A MIMETIC ALLEGORY

For the historical setting of The Slave Singer returns to the aftermath of the Chmielnicki massacre, the background for Satan in Goray. Singer's development as a novelist is clearly indicated in a comparison of these two novels, for his methods of allegorization as well as his didacticism are more subtle in the later novel. Although Singer again uses an allegorical method of correspondence between the incidents of the novel and a pattern of meaning on another level, he seizes every opportunity to amplify the meaning of the biblical story of Jacob found in Genesis. Since critics have overlooked such complexities in the novel, we shall have to examine them carefully. By analyzing Singer's realistic amplification of Genesis, we realize that we have sympathy for Jacob's plight because we have come to know him not only as a symbol for the Jewish people but also as an individual. In order to establish Singer's delicate balance of allegory and realism in The Slave, my method in the present chapter will be first to analyze Singer's mature sense of allegorical theme and realistic characterization through a comparison of Satan in Goray with The Slave. Thereafter, I wish to show how Singer seizes every opportunity to expand the meaning of the biblical story by thematically depicting the "meaning" of Jacob's plight, both realistically amplifying specific events from Genesis and symbolically

presenting a biblical landscape that suggests a mythopoetic tension between nature and the city. Finally, I will analyze the conclusion of the novel in order to show how Singer heightens our sympathetic response to Jacob while avoiding blatant sentimentality. Such a method of analysis as I have outlined will allow us to understand how our responses to the novel are generated through Singer's blending of allegory and realism.

Criticism has noted some of the biblical parallels in The Slave, but the parallels have not been fully analyzed in relation to the actual complexities of the novel. Essentially, criticism has failed to discern how the parallels from Genesis are qualified by the realism of Singer's art. For example, in examining how the novel follows the calendar of Jewish holy days, Buchen compares Jacob's enslavement in Poland with the Jews' slavery in Egypt, and he notes that Jacob is ransomed from slavery just before Passover, a time which commemorates the release of the Jews from Egyptian slavery. He concludes that the novel is "distinguished from most reworkings of biblical or mythical material in that the focus is not so much on a hero as a people," yet he neglects the realism with which Singer presents Jacob.¹ In a later study Siegel merely mentions that a parallel exists,² and Malin only states that Jacob recognizes the timelessness of his name.³ Alexander, although he notes that the peasants are a collective Esau in

¹Buchen, pp. 150-154.

²Siegel, pp. 28-30.

³Malin, p. 66.

opposition to Jacob, does not delineate the other biblical parallels, nor does he discuss the artistry with which such parallels are drawn.⁴

It will be necessary, if we are to grasp Singer's full message and his development as an artist, first to compare his sense of characterization and theme in his earliest novel with his subtle treatment of allegorical realism in The Slave. In looking back at the younger Singer, we would find that the characterization of the townspeople of Goray is one-dimensional. For example, it will be remembered that there are two false prophets of the End of Days, Reb Itche Mates and Reb Gedalya. Itche Mates, the packman, is described as "a most holy man, truly one of the elect" (p. 73). The narrator here has "sided" with the townspeople's naive point of view, a device that Singer retains throughout his career. Itche Mates is not exposed until a didactic letter written in biblical diction arrives from Lublin saying that in his fanaticism he seeks "to lead proper people into error and to seduce them from the path of righteousness, and to cast them into the lowest part of heresy" (p. 89). Reb Gedalya, the sensual ritual slaughterer, is not exposed until Rechele is impregnated by Satan himself, an act suggesting that evil also has its hierarchy. Gedalya finally became an apostate, as we find in the closing two didactic chapters, and "rose to a high position among the idolators and a troubler of Jews" (p. 238). In both men Singer relies on a delayed exposition of character that narrates the "truth" about a character in judgmental language. In fact, Singer is concerned with

⁴Alexander, pp. 73-74.

depicting the symbolic extremism of both men. Itche Mates is shown immersing himself "two and seventy times" (p. 80) while Reb Gedalya advocates open, licentious sexuality and suggests that the Messiah's wife had "once been an inmate of a brothel in Rome" (p. 150). In both cases, Singer does not concentrate on the characteristics that make these men partially like all other men, but instead he depicts those characteristics that make them obsessive or hysterical. The two allegorical false prophets, in short, are not drawn in descriptive mimetic detail as are the characters in Singer's later novels.

In comparison, the characterization in The Slave is far more subtle. Jacob, for example, is introduced to a false prophet, but the characterization of this emissary from Israel is not as one-dimensional as the depiction of Itche Mates and Gedalya. The "little man" in The Slave is dressed in a white prayer shawl and phylacteries unlike those found in Poland. This detail is all the reader needs to deduce the character's origin. The employment of excessive detail that was used in Satan in Goray is abandoned for a more selective, descriptive technique in The Slave. Moreover, the envoy's falseness is implicitly shown in his brief conversation with Jacob. Although this man from Israel esoterically knows that "the book of Daniel makes it clear to those who understand that Redemption will come in the year 5426" and that the sacred names in the Zohar govern everything, he does not know the basic laws concerning the conversion of Jacob's baby.⁵ Although

⁵Isaac Bashevis Singer, The Slave, trans. the author and Cecil Hemly (New York: Fawcette Crest, 1980), p. 246. All further references cited parenthetically in the text.

Singer's belief that esoteric study is absurd if not united with basic knowledge is reflected in both novels, the technique of revealing a character through dialogue is an advance over Singer's earlier method of overt didactic judgment. Moreover, while Singer has retained his device of distancing the reader from the immediate action by moving the reader ahead great time spans in the conclusion of a novel, the technique is more subtly and skillfully handled by the older Singer. When Jacob of The Slave returns to Pilitz twenty years after meeting the envoy, we find that this man had been one of Sabbatai Zevi's legates and eventually had become a Turk, but this information is given in only a few lines of the conclusion. Singer, getting maximum "work" out of a few choice details, is so confident of his technique of revealing a character by his conversation that only a tacit note is needed to confirm the reader's worst suspicions. In comparison to the two chapters of didactic narration that conclude Satan in Goray, the technique of well developed dialogue to reveal character is far more sophisticated.

It is also important to note that Singer's didacticism is more subtly articulated in The Slave. The thematic concerns with false prophets and the error in hastening the Messiah that Singer employed in Satan in Goray are relatively minor themes in The Slave. In fact, when we find that Jacob in his old age had been present when Sabbatai Zevi was driven out of Jerusalem, we feel that Singer only gives this detail to attest to Jacob's vast travels and experiences. The theme of Messianism is perhaps too exclusive, perhaps more of "an ax to grind," as Singer would say, in his first novel. The older Singer

understands more of the subtleties of human nature than he did when writing Satan in Goray. In The Slave Singer, employing a broader theme, describes the implications of how evil broke into ordinary people's lives. Jacob, for example, only years after the massacre realizes "how deep were the wounds" (p. 106). Deserted wives, Cossack brides, forced conversions--all are part of the horror that the survivors must re-live daily. Moreover, the religious implications of the massacre, not fully explored in Singer's first novel, are strongly conveyed in The Slave: "Did the creator require the assistance of Cossacks to reveal His nature? Was this a sufficient cause to bury infants alive? . . . Jacob wondered how it had been possible for him to forget them [his own dead wife and children] for an instant. Through forgetfulness, he had also been guilty of murder" (p. 100). The questions asked after a Chmielnicki or a Hitler are the eternal questions of doubt in the presence of such horror. In such cases, power of memory is aptly viewed as both a blessing and a curse: through it one is compelled to recognize God's mercy as well as His cruelty. Although memory allows Jacob to scratch forty-three commandments and sixty-nine interdictions into a rock, the same memory also reminds him of his children. In The Slave such agonizing implications of the massacre are given more immediate and striking impact upon individual lives than in Satan in Goray. It is not only the presence of death but also the memory of death that adds believability to The Slave.

Singer's total "meaning" in The Slave, then, is subtler than critics have taken it to be. Having established some of the

technical aspects of the mature novelist's vision by comparing Satan in Goray to The Slave, let us now examine the allegorical theme of Jacob's story in Genesis so that we may fully understand the theme that Singer realistically amplifies. In searching for a "meaning" of the biblical Jacob's story, the interpreter is left with slender, often contradictory, evidence. The presence of God in Jacob's life certainly exists, but proof of the exact nature of the presence is impossible to give meaning to. Even the narrator of Genesis is tacit. As Gerhard Von Rad, a commentator of the Genesis story, writes,

The story reckons with an act of God that sovereignty takes the most ambiguous human act [Jacob's cheating of Esau] and incorporates it into its plans. The guilty one becomes the bearer of the promise. To be sure, the narrator draws a powerful picture of the most extraordinarily entangled guilt, but his view of what God has decreed and accomplished keeps him from being ruffled before the question of the personal guilt and subjective motives of the individual persons. If one wants to ask the narrator what his thoughts are concerning these men who act in the story, his concern, in our opinion, will be this: he intends to awaken in the reader a feeling of sympathetic suffering for those who are caught up mysteriously in such a monstrous act of God and are almost destroyed in it. For whether their subjective motives were worldly or spiritual, they go to pieces on the frightful incomprehensibility of the God who has made them the object of his saving will. And ultimately where did Jacob's great advantage over Esau become tangible? Jacob's life, as our narrator further describes it, reveals little enough of his prominence. And in our story he shows only how God, in pursuit of his plans which had to remain concealed from all relevant persons, broke into a family and how he seems to pass beyond its ruins.⁶

Von Rad's interpretation of the nature of the presence of God in Jacob's life may aptly be applied to the life of Singer's Jacob. His life is broken into in the massacre at Josefov. His love for Wanda

⁶Gerhard Von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, trans. John E. Steely (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), pp. 280-281.

is, at least partially, motivated by lust, yet through the ambiguousness of passion he is able to save her soul by rescuing her from the village and converting her to Judaism. Jacob is taken from Josefov, lives on the mountain, is ransomed back to Josefov, goes to Lublin and Cracow, returns to the mountain, flees to Pilitz, travels to Palestine, and finally returns to Pilitz. Yet the "meaning" of all this wandering, along with God's motive for causing it, is not definable. For the narrator of Genesis, as for Singer's Jacob, life finally comes to a question of faith. Thus The Slave is an allegorical study of how one man continues to be troubled and to doubt but still keeps an ultimate faith in the existence of God. As the old Jacob realizes, "The leaves drop from the tree, but the branch remains; the trunk still has its roots" (p. 268). The traditional faith in Judaism remains.

What is perhaps most striking in Singer's development of this "meaning" is the imagination with which he seizes upon and amplifies specific incidents in the Genesis story. In establishing the allegorical associations with the biblical Jacob, Singer works with Genesis 25:19-31:29 and 49:1-49:28. Specifically, Singer concentrates on five episodes from Genesis: the character of Rechele, Jacob's departure from Laban, the birth of Benjamin, the dream at Bethel, and the wrestling at Penvel.

The parallel of the biblical love of Jacob for Rachel is made by Singer's Jacob himself: "The analogy between him and his biblical namesake had already occurred to him. Jacob had left Berrsheba and journeyed to Haran for love of Rachel and had toiled seven years to win her" (p. 127). Here the similarity is drawn not only between

Jacob and his namesake but also between Wanda and Rachel (Genesis 29:15-30). We know that Singer's Wanda had an unattractive, gap-toothed sister named Basha, Singer's whimsically drawn portrait of the biblical Leah, whom the narrator of Genesis describes as having "eyes [that] were weak" (29:18). From the Genesis narrator's brief suggestion of the physical inferiority of Leah, Singer creates an older sister contemptuous of the younger, who is both "beautiful and lovely," as the Genesis narrator states (29:18). Since Leah probably means "cow" and Rachel "ewe," the connotative suggestiveness of the names is also picked up in the characterizations of the sisters. Basha is much the inferior, homely animal, while Wanda, in fleeing the village with Jacob, "climbed like a bear, or a doe" (p. 134). In fact, descriptions of Wanda's beauty abound. At twenty she was "taller than most of the other women. She had blond hair, blue eyes, a fair skin, and well-modeled features. She braided her hair and twisted it around her head like a wreath of wheat. When she smiled, her cheeks dimpled and her teeth were so strong she could crush the toughest of pits. Her nose was straight and she had a narrow chin" (p. 16). Although Singer took the archetypal situation of the beautiful and ugly sister from Genesis, he has realistically described Wanda as a child of nature, a technique that lends dimensionality to the allegorical parallel with Rachel.

In the second biblical parallel Singer draws on Genesis 30: 25-43. Here, Jacob wishes to depart from Laban with his wives and children back to his "own home and country." Likewise, Singer's Jacob also wishes to take Wanda away from Jan Bzik's house back to his

own home with the Jews. Yet Jacob is suddenly ransomed and taken back to Josefov, his home. He is not content there and decides to rescue Wanda from the peasant hamlet and the children of Caliban. There is, however, a basic question that plagues Jacob about rescuing Wanda: the conversion from Christianity to Judaism was a severe offense punishable by law under the Polish state. As Von Rad illustrates in his commentary on Genesis, there were also similar complications for the biblical Jacob: "According to Hebrew law in the Book of the Covenant, the slave whose employer had given him a wife had to leave his wife and children with his master when he himself was released. If he does not wish to leave them, then he must remain a servant."⁷ Singer, a scholar of the Bible in his own right, takes the biblical Jacob's predicament and makes it his own. Moreover, just as the biblical Jacob cunningly takes not only his wives and children but also great wealth from Laban, Singer's Jacob steals Wanda away from Bizak's hut and, after standing under the wedding canopy with Wanda, passes her off as the mute Sarah (the name given to all Jewish converts) so that her past will not be discovered because she "spoke like a gentile" (p. 148). Again, Singer takes the legal complications suggested in Genesis and makes them realistic by showing the cunning of a "modern" Jacob.

As Sarah, as she is called in Part Two of The Slave, becomes pregnant in Pilitz with Jacob's son, who will later be named Benjamin, we begin to realize that Singer is realistically depicting a third biblical parallel. When Sarah dies in childbirth, we recall that

⁷Von Rad, p. 299.

Rachel is also described as having "hard labor" for her child Benjamin. As Rachel dies, she calls her child Ben-oni, but his father re-names him Benjamin (35:19). As Von Rad comments, "Rachel, already in the throes of death, gives the newborn a name that records the early death of his mother and that would have placed the child for the rest of his life under the shadow of this grief. Jacob, however, snatches the child from that darkness which is about to determine its beginning life. He grants no existence to this evil name by changing its meaning. The word jāmīn in Benjamin's name indicates "quarter of heaven," which is on one's right as one faces east, i.e., the south side. Furthermore, the right side was widely thought of as the fortunate side."⁸ In The Slave Dumb Sarah begins to scream in pain during her labor, thus completely giving away her role as a mute. But more than this, in the pains of labor Sarah calls herself Wanda and upbraids the cruelty of the women in the village for mocking her. She shouts in her native, Catholic-accented Polish to the women, "What do you want from me? Get out of here. You play at being good, but you're all rotten. You want to bury me and marry off Jacob to one of your own, but I'm still living. I'm alive and my baby's alive too. You're rejoicing too quickly, neighbors. If God had wanted me to die, He wouldn't have made me go through what I have" (p. 209). As Sarah dies giving birth, she implicitly places a "curse" on her child by revealing her past. Consequently, the child will be alienated in the village and, according to the rabbi, will not be circumcised (p. 220). In her death throes, Sarah is like the biblical Rachel.

⁸Von Rad, p. 341.

Singer's Jacob returns for the child and eventually takes him to Israel, thus, like the biblical Jacob, saving the child from alienation. As Singer's Jacob ruminates while fleeing the village, "No, not everything was lost, he still had his son" (p. 257). It is this child who will later become an instructor in a Jerusalem yeshiva at twenty and the son-in-law of a rabbi. When we find out that the child has done so well, we realize that in saving the child Jacob has also saved himself. The sense of pathos that we feel for the fleeing Jacob and the dying Sarah is a realistic amplification from the Genesis narrator, a mimetic variation on a theme that intensifies our sympathy for Singer's character. And, of course, Singer himself again draws the parallel between the biblical story and his creation:

Jacob remembered the words his namesake had spoken on his deathbed: "And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was a little way to come into Ephrath; and I buried her there. . . ."

His name was Jacob also; he too had lost a beloved wife, the daughter of an idolater, among strangers; Sarah too was buried by the way and had left him a son. Like the biblical Jacob, he was crossing the river, bearing only a staff, pursued by another Esau. Everything remained the same: the ancient love, the ancient grief. Perhaps four thousand years would again pass; somewhere, at another river, another Jacob would walk mourning Rachel. Or who knew, perhaps it was always the same Jacob and the same Rachel (p. 258).

In the suggestion of eternal recurrence, a theme made explicit in Enemies, A Love Story, we realize that we are reading a realistic version of the Genesis story.

The fourth biblical parallel drawn by Singer regards Jacob's dream in Bethel (28:10-22). It will be remembered that Jacob receives a dream in which God promises him that his descendants will

be a nation blessed by God. When Jacob rises, he sets a stone up as a pillar and anoints it as God's abode. Similarly, Singer's Jacob decides that he will "enumerate the two hundred and forty-eight commandments and the three hundred and sixty-five prohibitions to be found in the Torah" (p. 41). He takes a hook and begins to scratch out the laws on a large rock that "had been waiting ever since creation" (p. 43). The simplicity and piety of this act is reminiscent of the biblical Jacob's statement that "surely the Lord is in this place [Bethel]; and I did not know it" (28:27). On the mountain Singer's Jacob feels the presence of God in nature, and even Balaam, the dog, sanctions Jacob's act of inscription by wagging his tail and jumping "as if his canine soul comprehended what his master was preparing to do" (p. 43).

Yet Singer is not content merely to establish the parallel with the biblical Joseph's act; rather, he realistically amplifies Jacob's plan to write down God's laws and thus "anoint" the place. There are three reasons for Jacob's plan: to take up time, to remind himself of God's laws, and to distract himself from his lust. For Singer, these reasons are the basic motivations for work of any sort. Thus it is not a dream sent by God that prompts Jacob's act but rather a realistic need to be busy in meaningful work. When Jacob begins by trying to find the bent hook, it seems to have disappeared: "Jacob took down the earthen pots, one by one, and put them back on the shelf. He rummaged on the ground, searching among the straw. He remained hopeful. The important thing was not to give up. Good things never come easily" (p. 43). This search is Singer's comic

rendering of the biblical Joseph's rummaging about for the anointing oil, suggesting that we are always pursued by the laughter of God. Even in this search, however, is seen the hand of God, for finding the hook is seen by Jacob as "ordained" (p. 43). Thus God's presence is found both in Singer's realistic description and in the biblical tale.

The fifth, and perhaps the most effective, biblical parallel concerns the wrestling at Penue! (32:22-33). The biblical Jacob, it will be remembered, wrestles until the breaking of day, at which time his adversary pleads to be released. Jacob demands a blessing in return and is re-named Israel because he strove with both God and men and prevailed. This wrestling certainly defines the essential nature of Singer's Jacob. Throughout the novel he is depicted as a man both striving with and alienated from other men. As Singer writes, "he had been driven, he knew, by powers stronger than himself" (p. 229). "Even as a child he had been a misfit . . . he had always remained aloof . . . he had always been the same Jacob, in Zamosz, in Josefov, in the hamlet on the mountain, in Pilitz, in Jerusalem. His thoughts seemed clear to him, but others found them confused" (pp. 273-274). He is neither at home on the mountain nor in Lublin (p. 123). His condition is certainly "existential" in that he is a man cut off, like the biblical Jacob, from systemic and extrinsic definitions of self. He is a Jew who marries a gentile woman, a blue-eyed hero in a world of dark-eyed peasants. He is a man who wrestles with his conscience throughout the novel.

In the struggle at Penue! the biblical Jacob asks his adversary his name, but the adversary replies, "Why is it that you ask my name?"

(32:30). In naming the being, Jacob would be able to identify its qualities and give it definition. But, as Von Rad points out, "the being does not answer the question, for he does not permit his mystery and his freedom to be troubled."⁹ On one level, the mystery and freedom of the adversary suggest divinity extrinsic of Jacob, but, on another level, divinity is also intrinsic to Jacob. It is partially his own divine nature that Jacob wrestles with in the dark. In asking his adversary's name, he is also asking the nature of divinity as a force in his own being and life. This is essentially the situation with Singer's Jacob, who throughout The Slave asks for a vision of the presence of God in the massacre and in his own tumultuous life. Quite early in the novel Singer writes that "one never knows where events are leading. Wanda asked questions and Jacob answered them to the best of his ability. He lay close to her in the granary, the same blanket covering them both, a sinner who ignored the restrictions of the Talamud, seeking to explain in a strange tongue those things he studied in holy books" (p. 81). In other words, although Jacob can explain God's presence to others, he cannot explain this presence in his own life. He seeks a part of him that is divine, looking for "ordained" events and for "signs" that would give meaning to his wanderings, but such attempts give only temporary definition. When Jacob's grief is at its height as he looks out of the prayer house window in Josefov toward the hill where his wife and children are buried, he cries out to God, "I have no doubt that you are the Almighty

⁹Von Rad, p. 323.

and that whatever you do is for the best, but it is impossible for me to obey the commandment, Thou Shalt Love Thy God. No, I cannot Father, not in this life" (p. 105). Although he can explain God's laws to the young school children in Josefov, just as he explained such laws to Wanda on the mountain, he cannot apply them with any consistency to his own life. Like the biblical Jacob, he wrestles with the presence of divinity both in the world and in himself. Although Jacob does come to love God again, as an old man he realizes that "heaven writes the story and only there is the truth known. In the end each man is responsible only for himself" (p. 268). This is Jacob's final knowledge, presented in the closing pages of the novel. Yet his realization does not give any sense of a final "meaning," either to the presence of God in the world or in his life; the presence is felt, but it never reveals itself.

Just as Singer realistically amplifies events from Genesis in order to give symbolic "meaning" to The Slave, the symbolism extends also to Singer's treatment of nature. Even if God's presence is not to be tangibly realized, His presence is intimated more in nature than in the city. The thematic concern for the tension between the country and the city was first developed in the Lublin-Warsaw tension felt in The Magician of Lublin. In that novel Yasha finds more peace in his native village and returns to it to carry out his leap of faith. Although Jacob's story is about how one man tries to make this leap daily, he, like Yasha, feels intimations of God most strongly when away from the city. Thus, although they have not been examined by

critics, the mythopoetic associations of country and city have great significance in The Slave.

In the first chapter of The Slave Singer describes a primitive, almost biblical landscape with which Jacob is at one. In contrast to the din of the city, the mountain suggests serenity. A single bird call begins the day as Jacob warms his hands on the animal's bodies. "Every sunrise in the mountains," Singer writes, "was like a miracle; one clearly discovered God's hand among the flaming clouds. God had punished His people and had hidden His face from them, but He continued to superintend the world. As a sign of the covenant which He had made after the Flood, He had hung the rainbow in the sky to show that day and night, summer and winter, sowing and reaping would not cease" (p. 14). In such a description one cannot help but be reminded of the biblical Jacob's pious exclamation at Bethel that "surely the Lord is in this place . . ." (25:16). Even when reaping the fields, Singer's Jacob echoes the biblical Jacob: "Surely some Hand had created all this. Some eye was watching over it" (p. 46). On the mountain Jacob's soul throbs with music (p. 47), he reminds the Lord that even the cattle must have salvation at the End of Days (p. 62), and he mourns the death of a white butterfly (p. 63).

We eventually began to understand that Jacob is quite like an artist who hates to leave his solitude because he fears that divine intimations will not be perceived among men. In fact, Singer describes Jacob's task of scratching the laws into the rock as artistry in which the battle is only won by force and persuasion: "Patience was also required, but concentration was most important of

all. . . . He mined within himself as men dig for treasure in the earth. It was slow work; he scratched sentences, fragments of sentences, single words into the stone" (p. 44). This is the archetypal situation of all artistic work, and Jacob becomes so involved that he hates to leave his solitude and his work to participate in the harvest with the peasants.

Most importantly, Wanda is also associated with the landscape, and she embodies the most sublime aspects of nature. As a child of nature, her love for Jacob first flourishes away from the city. On the mountain, away from the functional time-keeping of the city Jacob fashions a sundial and counts the hours until Wanda ascends the mountain to see him. Before Jacob sexually consummates his love for Wanda, they both immerse themselves in the stream, thus ritually undergoing a symbolic union of souls. Even though Jacob is torn with guilt about his act, nature seems to sanction it the next morning: "Dew covered the grass, and each droplet gleamed. Birds were singing, and in the distance a cow lowed . . ." (p. 70). Even though the cow's lowing reminds Jacob of a blast from a ram's horn and he reflects that he has forfeited the world beyond, the landscape suggests the natural beauty of his love for Wanda.

After Jacob is rescued and returned to Josefov, he longs for nature and its association with Wanda: "He sat in the study house longing for the open air, dreaming of gathering grass again, scalding crags, chopping wood. The Jews had ransomed him but he remained a slave" (p. 109). Just as Jacob had before been a slave to Bzik, he is now bound to both the intimations of the unifying presence of God

found in nature and to Wanda's association with this unity. In fact, even after Wanda is rescued and becomes Sarah, Jacob still finds comfort and communion in the solitude of nature. For example, fearing that he will be punished for rebuking the advances of Lady Pilitzky, he walks through the fields and looks to the heavens "where a half moon shone, attended by a brilliant blue-green star. . . . Here on earth he was as good as destroyed by the dangers hemming him in on every side. But it was a comfort to realize that God and his angels and seraphin dwelt in these heavenly mansions" (pp. 183-184). Again, it is nature that gives comfort to Jacob and affords him a sense of sustaining equilibrium.

In opposition to nature, Singer clearly extends his symbolism to the city, a place in which contact with intimations of divinity is nearly impossible for Jacob. After Jacob deserts the widow of Hrvbyeshov, associated with the city and drawn as a foil to Wanda, Jacob feels that:

Doubt, dissension, discord dwelt within him, but the fields exuded harmony, tranquility, fruitfulness. The sky was blue, the weather warm with the mercy of summer, the air fragrant as honey, each flower exhaling its own perfume. A hidden hand had shaped and molded each stalk, blade of grass, leaf, worm, fly. Each hovering butterfly's wings exhibited a unique design; every bird sang with its own call. Breathing deeply, Jacob realized how much he had missed the country. Grainfields, trees, every single growing thing refreshed his eyes. If only I could live in perpetual summer and do harm to no one, he murmured. . . . The trees were as tall and straight as pillars and the sky leaned on their green tops. Brooches, rings, gold coins were embossed on the bark of their trunks. The earth, carpeted with moss and other vegetation, gave off an intoxicating odor. A shallow stream coursed through the woodland, and perched on rocks in the water were birds Jacob had never seen in the mountains. All of these creatures knew what was expected of them. None sought to rebel

against its Creator. Man alone acted viciously. . . . Jacob closed his eyes as though begrudging himself the sight of so much splendor. A roseate light seeped through his lids. God mingled with blue, green with purple, and, out of this whirlpool of color, Wanda's image formed (pp. 119-120).

Certainly, Singer's description of nature here is conventional and stylized. Yet the intention behind this vision is to convey a harmony shaped by a "hidden hand," a harmony depicted as enclosed, almost as if within a structure of pillars and roof and carpet. Nature is depicted not as expansive but rather as contained, its own limits evincing the harmonious presence of God. In contrast, the city does not prompt such thoughts, and the description of Lublin is a description of misery: "People were starving before his [Jacob's] eyes. A groschen here could save a life. He was continually changing silver to smaller coins and distributing money. . . . Where was God? How could He look on such want and keep silent? Unless, heaven forbid, there was no God" (p. 125). For Singer, the city itself prompts doubt, a doubt which Jacob never felt in the presence of nature on the mountain.

If our sympathies are aroused for Jacob as he struggles, like his biblical counterpart, with his alienation from God, the conclusion of The Slave gives us a sense of vindication for the "rightness" of Jacob's struggles. In the conclusion Singer again employs his favorite technique of ending a novel by distancing the reader from the immediate action. As a result, when Singer writes that "One day in the month of Ob, a tall, white bearded man, in a white gaberdine and white hat, sandals on his bare feet, a bag on his shoulder, appeared at the cemetery" and began looking among the headstones in the

cemetery, we are the first to recognize Jacob (p. 265). The result of Singer's technique is that we have a sense of Jacob's life, and a sense of how time passes, leaving people to pain, to wisdom, and to death. Consequently, we see his life as an allegorical journey, turning full cycle back to Pilitz. As Jacob dies in Pilitz, he is granted a vision not unlike that of Jochannan in The Manor:

From nowhere, images came to him: his father, peace be with him, his mother, peace be with her, his sisters, Zelda Leah [his first wife, killed by the Cossacks], the children, Sarah. Even Jan Bzik visited him, no longer a peasant, but a saint from paradise. . . . Jacob's body died, but he was already so busy greeting those who had come to meet him that he did not look back. His dark cabin with its rags and refuse was left behind on the ship. The voyagers would clean it out, those who still must continue to journey on the stormy seas. He, Jacob, had arrived (p. 285).

Hence, Jacob's battle to find the hand of God in his life, to try to reconcile the massacre with God's goodness, is ended. He has been faithful, and his faith has been vindicated in a vision of unity.

As Jacob is buried, the gravedigger's spade strikes the bones of Sarah, who had been buried unshrouded in her own dress. Singer writes, "The community had buried Sarah outside but the dead had gathered to take her in. The cemetery itself had ordained it; Sarah was a Jewish daughter and a sanctified corpse" (p. 286). Sontag has written that the novel dares to tell a "passionate, exalted love story" ending in a "reunion-in-death" that is "tearfully satisfying."¹⁰ Indeed, The Slave is a true love story. But the epitaph with which the community encircles their names ironically emphasizes the struggles in the lives of Jacob and Sarah: "Lovely and

¹⁰Sontag, p. 462.

pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided" (p. 286). If Jacob and Sarah were lovely, it was because they had to battle relentlessly against the evil snares of this world. Although the town may romanticize their deaths, we have a very real understanding of the difficulties of their lives in that Jacob's story is, clearly, that of the allegorical struggle of the Jews.

CHAPTER VI

ENEMIES, A LOVE STORY: ETERNAL RECURRENCE AND ALLEGORY

Enemies, A Love Story is a novel that realistically depicts a theme of eternal recurrence, a concept used by Nietzsche to suggest that all existence is repeated in cycles. As Singer defines "types" of events and characters that recur, we realize that Singer believes, like Nietzsche, that there are discernible patterns in life that exist eternally. Thus, Singer's Herman Broder, a holocaust survivor who desperately tries to execute his free will over the demands of others, is best seen as the recurrent allegorical "type" of fleeing Jew, a man who misunderstands the commitment demanded by faith.

Unfortunately, however, the novel has not received careful analysis regarding theme and characterization. For example, Alexander is hostile to the novel in writing that it "treats the survivors of the Holocaust as if they were now the central bearers of Jewish fate, and as if the definition and resolution of the ultimate questions of philosophy, politics, and religion can never again be made without reference to their experience."¹ Clearly, this reading says more about Alexander than about Singer. Enemies is a novel about a select group of people in certain circumstances that, for Singer, define the essence of the Jewish experience because great suffering, as well as

¹Alexander, p. 99.

great joy, is involved in the holocaust and its aftermath. Alexander's study does not grant Singer the right even to construct his novel according to the terms of his vision. On the other hand, Ben Siegel, writing one of the first full-length scholarly articles on Singer, calls Herman Broder "Harry" and completely ignores the subjects of eternal recurrence and free will in the novel.² Since critics have failed to deal with the formal nature of Enemies, I will analyze Singer's use of the theme of eternal recurrence and the demands of this theme regarding characterization. By this method we may see how the novel achieves unity as it realistically defines the eternal recurrence of man's attempts to find meaning.

In turning to the theme of the novel, we immediately recognize the significance of the setting. By depicting survivors of Hitler's camps living in New York, the setting for the novel, Singer again returns to his concern with the displacement of lost persons following a holocaust. For Singer, the recurrence of a holocaust, used in Satan in Goray, The Slave, and Enemies, suggests that events in history recur eternally. Whether the victims return to Goray or Josefov or New York after the horrors created by a Chmielnicki or a Hitler, the "types" of people involved appear eternally. Hence, in wryly suggesting in the Author's Note to the novel that "in literature the exception is the rule," Singer points to the allegorical patterns that we find in the novel because in defining patterns we are also, implicitly,

²Ben Siegel, "The Jew as Underground/Confidence Man: I. B. Singer's Enemies, A Love Story," *Studies in the Novel* 10 (1978), 397-410.

suggesting their repetition.³ For Singer, in both art and actuality patterns are repeated eternally.

This theme of recurrence is central to an understanding of the novel, so we had better look at it with some care. Significantly, for Herman Broder "the past is as present as today: Cain continues to murder Able. Nebuchdnezzar is still slaughtering the sons of Zedekian and putting out Zedekiah's eyes. The pogrom in Kesheniev never ceases. Jews are forever being burned at Auschwitz" (p. 29). If a Chemielnicki existed and then a Hitler, Singer asks, then why not believe that such patterns exist eternally? Moreover, Herman also speculates on Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence itself: "If Nietzsche's theory about the eternal was true, perhaps this [the events of his life] had already occurred a quadrillion years ago" (p. 31). Since this significant passage in the novel has been ignored by criticism, it is important to point out that Singer's character actually attributes a pattern of his life to Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence, and thus we realize the explicit connection in the novel between Nietzsche's philosophy and Singer's art. Like Nietzsche, Singer believes that there are recognizable patterns that must be repeated throughout time. This theme of eternal recurrence is central to an understanding of Singer's allegorical vision in that the idea of recognizable patterns underlies the basis of all allegory. As "types" of events return, "types" of behaviors are evinced. Just as

³Isaac Bashevis Singer, Enemies, A Love Story, trans. Aliza Shervin and Elisabeth Shub (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), Author's Note. All further references cited parenthetically in the text.

Chmielnicki's holocaust produced a man of faith in Jacob, Hitler's holocaust produced a fleeing Jew in Herman. Although the kinds of patterns are different, there are still patterns in evidence regardless of time or circumstance.

On one level, Singer's concept of eternal recurrence is quite like the musings of the poet-hero of Thus Spake Zarathustra. "I will come back," Nietzsche writes, "with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent--not for a new or better life, but to the same life I am now leading. I will come back into this same old life, in the greatest things and in the smallest, in order to teach once more the eternal recurrence of things."⁴ In glossing this passage H. L. Mencken writes that the philosopher, like his Zarathustra, felt that "all which is now happening on earth, and in all the stars, to the uttermost, will be repeated, again and again, throughout eternity."⁵ Certainly, this idea of recurrence informs Herman's vision in the passage quoted above. However, Nietzsche applies eternal recurrence to the superman, a prophet who will be heroically undaunted by eternal recurrence. As Mencken writes, "He will defy the universe and say 'yes' to life. Putting aside all thought of conscious existence beyond the grave, he will seek to live as nearly as possible in exact accordance with those laws laid down for the evolution of sentient beings on earth when the

⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, trans. Alexander Tittle (New York: Macmillan Co., n.d.), p. 321.

⁵H. L. Mencken, The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (Boston: Luce and Co., 1913), p. 117.

cosmos was first set spinning."⁶ Unlike Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Singer's characters are not supermen because Singer realistically realizes that if horrors are destined to recur eternally, then so are human, often comic, errors. Herman, for example, thinks about Nietzsche as he climbs the stairs to visit his mistress, Masha. The allegorical situation of a man having too many women is comic, and if Nietzsche does not allow for the soul's improvement, then at least Singer allows us to laugh at the soul's poor state.

Since such realistic treatment of the theme of eternal recurrence is essential to an understanding of Enemies, let us now turn to the rich allegorical characterizations in the novel. It is important to analyze the characterizations because through allegorical "types" that are realistically portrayed Singer suggests that characters, as well as events, recur eternally. Since criticism has overlooked the allegorical depiction of Herman, let us first look at the pattern of his life. Herman comes to America from the German camp for displaced persons with Yadviga, whom he marries out of gratitude because she saved his life during the German occupation. In America he takes a mistress, and he learns that his first wife in Poland, Tamara, who he believed had been shot by the Nazis, is alive in New York. While Herman is deciding whom he will divorce, Masha is believed to be with child, so he marries her. Herman is now married to three women. Eventually, Yadviga is the one who is pregnant, and Masha has had only a false pregnancy. The despondent Masha leaves for New Jersey with her

⁶Mencken, p. 121.

mother, returns, and upon realizing that Herman cannot leave the pregnant Yadviga, commits suicide. Herman then leaves all three women and disappears. Yadviga, the baby (named Masha), and Tamara live together.

Certainly, the outline that such a pattern suggests is a reductio ad absurdum of the situation of Asa Hershel in The Family Moskat, Ezriel in The Manor, and Yasha in The Magician of Lublin. Like these characters of the earlier novels, Herman is obviously a man whose distortion is in terms of women, but, unlike his predecessors, he continues to flee from commitment. He appears to be what Aristophanes would call a pharmakos or scoundrel, as Frye defines the term.⁷ However, in the ironic comedy of Enemies, essentially based on Herman's being driven out of society, we also see the "lower limit" that Frye suggests exists in "actual life": "the world in which comedy consists of inflicting pain on a helpless victim, and the tragedy of enduring it."⁸ Thus, Herman is a sympathetically rendered scoundrel, and, on one level, the novel becomes the age-old allegorical story of a scapegoat being driven from his women. Thus, Herman is seen as a distorted man, descending not from the mountain like Nietzsche's Zarathustra but from a hayloft.

Yet, in realizing that Herman has failed to understand the central message of his faith, we find that there is another level of meaning in the novel. Unlike Yasha of The Magician of Lublin, who

⁷Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 45.

⁸Frye, p. 45.

makes the painful and difficult leap into faith, and unlike Jacob of The Slave, who makes his pact with God daily, Herman has taken the central message of Judaism not as faith through perseverance but as a constant flight. In what is the central passage of the novel Singer presents Herman's vision:

Animals had accepted the precariousness of existence and the necessity for flight and stealth; only man sought certainty and instead succeeded in accomplishing his own downfall. The Jew had always managed to smuggle his way in through crime and madness. He had stolen into Canaan and into Egypt. Abraham had pretended that Sarah was his sister. The whole two-thousand years of exile, beginning with Alexandria, Babylon, and Rome and ending on the ghettos of Warsaw, Loda, and Vilna had been one great act of smuggling. The Bible, the Talamud, and the Commentaries instruct the Jew in one strategy: Flee from evil, hide from danger, avoid showdowns, give the angry powers of the universe as wide a berth as possible. The Jew never looked askance at the deserter who crept into a cellar or attic while armies clashed in the streets outside (p. 195).

In citing this passage Siegel refers to Herman as a "fabricating picaro."⁹ Yet certainly there is more to Herman's character than this. For Singer, Herman's view is the wrong one, a failure to execute free will against the trials of this world. In Singer's concern with presenting Herman's thoughts on divine recurrence, we must see Herman not as merely a scoundrel or scapegoat or picaro but as an intelligent man who misunderstands the commitment demanded by faith. Unlike Asa Hershel, Ezriel, Yasha, and Jacob, Herman refuses to take the central message of faith--perseverance through faith--and apply it to his life. Hence, Enemies becomes central for an understanding of Singer's vision, for it deals with a man who stays in the aesthetic level of

⁹Siegel, p. 404.

consciousness, denying the commitment of the ethical and the faith of the religious. With this lack of commitment in mind, we realize why Herman interchanges both women and ideas constantly. Ultimately, it is impossible for Herman to believe in Judaism. He is cut off from both the sustenance that his religion gives and its roots.

Singer, in fact, depicts Herman as a trapped man. "In Herman," Singer writes, "there resided a sorrow that could not be assuaged. He was no victim of Hitler. He had been a victim long before Hitler's day" (p. 98). Thus, Herman is not, like the other characters of the novel, totally a victim of Hitler. Even though his two children have been killed by the Nazis and although he was hidden in a hayloft by Yadviga, Herman remains a figure cast in the allegorical role of the fleeing Jew, a recurring "type" of character realistically rendered by Singer.

Yet, although Herman fails as a Jew, we do have sympathy for his fate. As Frye proposes of such situations, we see Herman as "inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity."¹⁰ He is a man in a constant rage, reading newspapers about Nazi crimes being forgiven and fantasizing vengeance. Even the little consolation that philosophy offers is no help because philosophers "all preached some sort of morality but it did not have the power to withstand temptation. One could be a Spinozist and a Nazi . . ." (p. 135). Like his predecessors in previous novels, Herman recognizes that

¹⁰Frye, p. 34.

secular knowledge offers no answer, but unlike them he cannot embrace his faith.

With Herman's characterization established, let us now turn to the four women with whom he is involved. Yadviga, Masha, Shifrah Puah, and Tamara all represent allegorical "types" of women, recurring eternally, who were caught in Hitler's fury and are now lost in America. In realistically depicting these women, Singer intensifies our emotions of sympathy for them.

In Yadviga, a character reminiscent of Wanda in The Slave, there is the allegorical "type" of woman defined by her simplicity and innocence. Although she has risked her own safety, as well as that of her family and village, in hiding Herman, in America she is frightened by the vastness of New York and never ventures from the "enchanted palace" of her modern apartment" (p. 12). There are comic tones conveyed through Yadviga as she converts to Judaism because the form that this faith takes in America is quite different from that found in Poland. For example, she carries a prayerbook to synagogue printed in Hebrew and English on facing pages, although she can read neither language. "In Yadviga's mind," Singer writes, "the insurance policy and the dishwasher were both necessary aspects of Jewish observances" (p. 142). Yet, for these survivors of the holocaust every possibility of joy is linked to sadness. As Herman believes, Yadviga should not become pregnant "in a world in which one's children could be dragged away from their mother and shot . . ." (p. 12). Nevertheless, Herman's lack of faith is not to be totally relied on, and, appropriately, it is Yadviga who carries forth the next generation. Unfortunately, it is

from this thirty-three-year-old woman that Herman flees, and in his flight we are reminded of Yasha's allegorical journey. However, unlike Yasha, Herman is unable to make the leap of faith back to his home and to Yadviga.

Masha, reminiscent in her flirtatiousness and rapaciousness of Clara in The Manor, is the allegorical "type" of temptress, a voyeur drawing upon the sexual frame of reference in the novel. As Singer writes, lovemaking between Herman and Yasha "was not merely a matter of a man and woman having intercourse, but a ritual that often lasted until daybreak" (p. 41). In Masha, love and the possibility of a distortion of love combine. As a survivor of the camps, she is no longer able to experience love without the possibility of violence and perversion. "Even though neither Masha nor Herman were perverse," Singer writes, "they talked endlessly to each other of unusual sexual behavior and perversions. Would she enjoy torturing a Nazi murderer? Would she make love to women if there were no men left on earth? Could Herman turn homosexual? Would he copulate with an animal if all humans perished?" (p. 42). That such behavior is a definable type is suggested by Erwin W. Straus, a phenomenologist, who describes a pattern of life similar to Masha's. He writes, "The voyeur does not become a voyeur out of an exogenous or endogenous heightening of his 'urge to look.' Anyone who draws his sexual gratification from looking at another lives continuously at a distance. . . . To keep his distance when it is essential to draw near is one of the paradoxes of his perversion. . . . Thus, the voyeur does not participate in reality in any direct sense but only by way of the objectifications,

i.e., reflected knowledge. He makes the Other into an object in and for itself."¹¹ Such is the case for Masha. As a survivor of the horrors of the Nazis, she can no longer experience natural lovemaking; consequently, she turns her lovemaking away from herself. Moreover, in her projection of her love into a separate realm from herself, we have the first indication of the possibility of her suicide. She is the archetypal survivor of a horror who can no longer have a relationship with the world. In her dissociation from life is found the motivation of her suicide.

To constantly remind Masha of the past that separated her from the world is her mother, Shifrah Puah, who finds her counterparts in Stachowa in The Manor and Elizabietha in The Magician of Lublin. These mothers are perhaps not widely recognized character "types," but they do hold a significance in Singer's novels. The situation of a mother allowing her daughter to be illicitly loved is of interest to Singer because it symbolizes the tension between a world that should be, evinced in a mother's lawful approval, and a world that is, suggested in a daughter being sexually loved under a mother's eyes. Moreover, Shifrah Puah also reminds Masha of the holocaust. As Singer writes, "She continued to live in spirit with those who had been gassed and tortured. She was always lighting paraffin-filled glasses-- memorial candles for friends and relatives. In the Yiddish newspapers she read nothing but the accounts of those who had survived ghettos

¹¹Erwin W. Straus, Phenomenological Psychology, trans. Erling Eng (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1955), p. 219.

and the concentration camps. She saved money from her food budget to buy books about Majdanek, Treblinka, Auschwitz" (p. 39). In her association with her past she also suffers survivor's guilt, feeling that "the greatest sin she had committed was to have remained alive when so many innocent men and women had been martyred" (p. 400). Indeed, the vigil that Shifrah Puah keeps dissociates Masha from the world around her, and the implication is that, for some, the memory of the holocaust cannot exist simultaneously with the present. Yet, terribly, even though Masha is dissociated by her past, she cannot live without it. When Shifrah Puah dies, Masha flees to Herman, trying to define herself in terms of his love. When he refuses to leave with her, Masha's suicide is inevitable. This Kafkaesque relationship between mother and daughter illustrates that certain "types" of people are destroyed by the eternal recurrence of holocaust.

Just as Shifrah Puah represents the past for Masha, Tamara represents the past as it exists for Herman. Moreover, as Shifrah Puah is a "type" of mother, Tamara is a "type" of wife. Although, realistically, Herman argued with her while they were married because of her belief in communism, she is still young and Herman is in love with her. Moreover, she is a mystic who tells Herman of dreams in which their dead children visit with her until morning (p. 111). Hence, Herman is drawn to her because she is a link with his past as a husband and father. Yet he cannot reunite with her any more than he can recapture the past. When she tries to control his life, he rebels and flees.

All of these women have allegorical associations in that they represent goodness (Yadwiga), sensuality (Masha), motherhood (Shifrah Puah) and fidelity (Tamara). Yet they are realistically depicted, suffering from survivor's guilt and lighting paraffin-filled glasses for the dead. They are testaments to the eternal recurrence of characters as well as events. Ultimately, all of the characters in Enemies retain their willingness to love, a part of life that recurs along with hate, yet they are all victims of both their own mistakes and an implosion of time. As Tamara tells Herman, "Only God can cram so much into such a short time" (p. 110). Those who might have gone on, such as Masha, who retained the "normal instincts" of husband, children, and household, are separated from such conventional values by the holocaust. In a very significant passage Singer writes that "like the lean cows of Pharo's dream the present had swallowed the past" (p. 124). In alluding to Genesis:40, Singer makes it explicit that suffering is eternal and that the suffering inflicted on people when time implodes creates situations of trial. Just as the plagues destroyed Egypt, all that was capable of good has nearly been destroyed by the horrors of Hitler.

Singer does, however, offer hope in the Epilogue to the novel. As usual, he distances us a bit from the immediate action, thus giving us a sense of the characters' lives as patterns. We find that a child is born to Yadwiga on Shevout, the anniversary of the covenant between God and Israel that is symbolized by the first fruits of the harvest. In linking birth and season, Singer again emphasizes the allegorical theme of rebirth as it follows destruction and death.

The child symbolically incorporates the innocence of Yadviga, the life force of Masha, the spirituality of Tamara, and the intellectual searching of Herman. As always, the spirit endures in Singer. In the last lines of the novel a rabbi informs Tamara that she could be married a second time. She replies, "Perhaps, in the next world--to Herman" (p. 249). The combination of a spiritual union of the newborn child in this world and the hint of another life in a world to come concludes the novel. Rebirth, as well as death, must recur. For Singer, the love that is implicit in the conclusion of the novel serves as a momentary stay against impending tragedy.

CHAPTER VII

SHOSHA: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS FICTION

Shosha is Singer's most autobiographical novel, a tribute to a world that is no more. Allegorically, it is the story of a search for beauty and innocence that leads Aaron Greidinger, like Asa Hershel before him, to face the holocaust. In writing the novel Singer was confronted by a great difficulty: how to realistically depict the love of beauty over the desire for survival. Since critical attention has failed to recognize how the demands of such a problem are met through Singer's artistic depiction of his own life, I will analyze the novel by defining its autobiographical elements and then by illustrating how Singer converts life into art. Thus we may see in Shosha a mature work of great beauty, an affirmation of the power of both art and life.

The way in which life is converted into art has been overlooked by critics. For example, Alexander writes that Shosha "makes explicit references to widely known facts of his life, from his home address to his early difficulties as a Yiddish writer to his conversion to vegetarianism. Those aspects of his own experience and ideas which in previous novels were widely distributed among his characters are here in a sense gathered back to their source. Whether this turning in upon himself is a cause or an effect of a diminished creative energy which this novel exhibits is a question which only his future work can

answer."¹ It is difficult to believe that a mature critic could so strikingly misread a novel by looking for simplistic similarities between Singer's life and the lives of his characters. Rather, it is the allegorizing into types of people that Singer knew, together with the details that he preserved from his experience, that lends a sense of realism to the novel.

With this sense of allegorical realism in mind, let us now turn to the events of Singer's life from 1931-1935, the period of Singer's life depicted in Shosha. Although overlooked by critics, the people and situations that Singer preserves from this period of his life suggest "types" of situations in which allegorical journeys are undertaken that end in death at Hitler's hands. Of course, we have seen autobiographical impulse before. Even in his first novel, *Goray* is suggested by *Bilgoray*. In fact, the suspense and tension in all of Singer's later novels owes something to Singer's depiction of himself as, at least in part, a thief for love. Yet it is in Shosha that Singer's own association with his past is artistically brought to the foreground.

In an interview with Richard Burgin, Singer defined the importance of his years in Warsaw: "I keep going back to 10 Krochmalna Street in my writing. I remember every little corner and every person there. I say to myself that just as other people are digging gold which God has created billions of years ago my literary goldmine is this street. I keep going back to it with the feeling that there are

¹Alexander, p. 113.

still treasurer which I haven't used up. Many writers have done the same before me. It is true I also write about later years, that I even write about things that happened in the United States. But somehow it is easier for me to go back to these years in Warsaw than to any other years. Just because they have vanished so totally that there is no sign left of them they are more alive to me than all the other years."² It is the vividness with which Singer captures this world that was wiped off the face of this earth by the Nazis that makes Shosha a remarkable novel.

Biographically, in 1921 Singer returned to Warsaw after a four year stay in Bilgoray with his mother, Bathsheba. In Warsaw he briefly attended the Tachkemoni Rabbinical Seminary, but he fled, became ill, and eventually went to live with his family in the "half bog, half village" of Dzikow. During this time he gave lessons in Hebrew, and he was all too glad to return to Warsaw when his brother Joshua offered him a job as proofreader. Back in Warsaw Singer began to shake off the influences of the provinces and to work on his own writing. He also became involved with a number of young women, as he recounts in his autobiographical volumes A Little Boy in Search of God³ and A Young Man in Search of Love.⁴

²Burgin, p. 126.

³Isaac Bashevis Singer, A Little Boy in Search of God (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976).

⁴Isaac Bashevis Singer, A Young Man in Search of Love (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1978).

The first of these affairs was with Gina Halbstark. As Singer writes, "The woman (I'm not giving her right name here) stopped, and we confronted each other. She appeared both girlish and prematurely aged, like someone who has just gotten up from an illness. Her cheeks were sunken, her chin was narrow, her nose thin, her neck long, her red hair faded. Earrings were dangling from her lobes. For all her fancy dress, there was a kind of genteel seediness about her. Her eyes reflected curiosity as well as a familial intimacy as if by some mysterious instinct she would have known who I was and why I had come [to rent an apartment]."⁵ For Singer, this woman's appearance suggested her character's essence. A theosophist, she believed she had known Singer in an earlier life. She practiced automatic writing, had visions of the dead, wept in the night, and walked in cemeteries. Although Singer rented her room for a period, he began to tire of her gloom and her sexual insatiability: "I had begun to grow weary of her pathos, her endless assurances that she was in constant touch with the dead, her hunger for love that I could never manage to satisfy."⁶

Eventually, Singer took a room with an elderly couple, the Alpertes, and their maid, Marila. When Gina heard that Singer was moving out she became hysterical: "A bitterness hovered about her lips and something akin to mockery over her own ill fortune. For the first time I grasped the fact that love was no game. Love killed people."⁷

⁵Singer, A Little Boy in Search of God, pp. 171-172.

⁶Singer, A Young Man in Search of Love, p. 19.

⁷Singer, p. 59.

During this period Singer was also scheduled to be examined for conscription into the army, but his older brother again came to his rescue, this time with a certificate of immigration to Palestine. The one stipulation was that the certificate was only good for a family; hence Singer had to marry, "whether actually or in name only."⁸ Stefa Janovsky, a young woman whose fiance was already in Palestine, was suggested by the Palestine Bureau in Warsaw as a potential "wife." As Singer instructed her in Hebrew in preparation for the trip, she once told her tutor, "I've turned into a half anti-Semite. I can't stand Jews. They're always running, bustling, mouthing endless complaints against everyone and only striving to create a better world."⁹ This "enlightened" young intellectual finally decided to marry not Singer but the wealthy Leon Treitler. "Fate played with me and I played along," Singer writes. "I could see clearly that it was leading me to disaster but I told myself that I was ready for this. Everyone lost to it anyhow. . . . The Palestine Bureau had withdrawn my certificate and it appeared that I was fated to either serve in the army or commit suicide. I lived in a state of suspension."¹⁰ Eventually, however, Singer was rejected from military service because of weak lungs.

Singer, repeatedly trying to find a systematic basis for ethics, decided that he would serve only two idols, those of love and literature. Yet many of his colleagues chose to serve the idol of

⁸Singer, p. 65.

⁹Singer, p. 83.

¹⁰Singer, p. 129.

World Betterment. Among these was Isaac Deutscher, a Trotskyite, who "pounded his fist on the podium and his audience of Trotskyites encouraged him with thunderous applause."¹¹ Among those who attended a lecture of Deutscher's was Sabina, a leftist who did not speak of romantic love and who "hadn't yet decided whether she was a Stalinist, a Trotskyite, or an anarchist."¹² Of her Singer writes:

Sabina talked a lot and told me stories that seemed to be lies, but I subsequently became convinced that for all their strangeness they were true. The impotent old writer [who had recently died] had a whole harem of mistresses. He spent every penny he earned on them. He had indulged in all kinds of quirks and perversions. He slept days (after swallowing enormous quantities of sleeping pills) and stayed up nights. He had stopped writing fiction in his last years and lived from the one feuilleton he published every Friday. He would write the piece at the last minute, at the same time consuming so many cigarettes that once a dense smoke began issuing from his window and the policeman outside called the fire department. L. M. Preshburger, as I call him here, had lost the talent or the urge to write, but he had concentrated all his art in his tongue. He would repose on the couch, smoke, drink, and utter words that evoked amazement, shock, and awe from his female admirers. The doctors had long since given him up--he lived in defiance of all the laws of medicine.¹³

Since Singer was not earning much and could no longer afford the room with the Alperets and Marlia (with whom he had started an affair), and since Gina had moved to the country because of poor health, Sabina suggested that Singer move in with her family. "I knew," Singer writes, "that once I moved into her house she would

¹¹Singer, p. 162.

¹²Singer, p. 163.

¹³Singer, pp. 105-106.

become my mistress."¹⁴ Yet he was unable to leave the Alpersts and Marlia, so Singer decided upon the "pure nonsense" of taking two rooms."¹⁵ Oddly enough, God did not desert the young Singer, and he received a job translating a German novel in which he relocates the action in Warsaw.

Singer does not mention Runia, the mother of his son in either A Little Boy in Search of God or A Young Man in Search of Love, but he has told Irving Buchen that "she was a communist and the only place for her was the new 'holy land'--Russia. . . . And so Runia took my son and went off to that new haven which turned out to be a butcher shop. Two years later, she was exiled. She went to Turkey and then to Palestine where her mother was living. There she and my son stayed. I did not see my son again until twenty years later."¹⁶ "Were Sabina and Rynia really the same person?" Kresh asks. "It's possible. Again, Isaac isn't saying."¹⁷ Eventually, Singer would leave Warsaw for reasons that Buchen summarizes: "In short, by 1935, with his older brother in America, his wife and son in Russia, his parents in Galicia, the lack of financial success of Satan in Goray, the prospect of the Nazis--Singer had no reason to stay when his brother urged him to come to the United States."¹⁸ In 1935 Singer came to New York, and in 1939

¹⁴Singer, p. 164.

¹⁵Singer, p. 166.

¹⁶Buchen, p. 18.

¹⁷Kresh, p. 108.

¹⁸Buchen, p. 18.

learned that with the Hitler-Stalin Pact and Hitler's invasion of Poland, his mother and brother were deported from Dzikow in a cattle wagon. "After the war," Kresh tells us, "he [Isaac] was to discover that the Russians had taken Bathsheba and Moishe to Kazakhstan in a cattle train and that they had frozen to death in a forest with a group of prisoners who were ordered to build themselves log cabins in the depths of winter."¹⁹ It was even rumored that the saintly Moishe starved to death--"was given a piece of bread on the Sabbath but refused to carry it home because one is not allowed to carry things on the Sabbath, or to eat it on the spot, since it wasn't kosher."²⁰ Such are the events of Singer's young life.

With the autobiographical elements of the novel firmly established, we may now turn to the artistry by which Singer converts life into art. The importance of the events of Singer's life is essential to an understanding of Aaron Gredinger, a young writer who, like Singer himself, complicates his life and the lives of others on the eve of the holocaust by becoming a thief of love. Aaron is involved simultaneously with Celia Chetshiner, Betty Slonim, Tekla, and Dora Stohnitz.

Autobiographically, Celia, the young, passionate wife of Hamil, does not have a direct parallel with any one woman in Singer's life; rather, in her intellectualism, she suggests Sabina (Runia) and in her passionate nature she is somewhat like Gina. Betty, the

¹⁹Kresh, p. 162.

²⁰Kresh, p. 162.

actress-mistress of Sam Drieman, is also like Gina in her passionate nature, as well as Sabina (Runia) in her talk of death. Hence, with these characters Singer is free to totally fictionalize. Yet there are direct parallels in Shosha between Tekla and the Alpert's maid, Marlia, Dora and Singer's wife, Runia, Wolf Fenhendler and Isaac Deutscher, and Dr. Feitelzohn and Sabina's former lover. Finally, Shosha and Singer, as the artist Aaron Gredinger, take the stage. Just as I analyzed how Singer took every opportunity to amplify Genesis in The Slave, I will now show how Singer artistically depicts the characters and situations in his own life.

Let us first turn to Marlia, who is described in A Young Man in Search of Love as having "a high bosom and round hips. Her calves were broad and muscular, her pale blue eyes exuded a peasant strength." After such graphic description, Singer writes that "Mrs. Alpert introduced us and said that if I ever needed anything, a glass of tea, breakfast, or whatever, Marila was always at my service. She would make up my bed, sweep up, and keep the room in order. The girl nodded and smiled showing a mouthful of wide teeth, and dimples."²¹ In Shosha Aaron returns late after an evening with Feitelzohn and oversleeps. Tekla wakes him with a tray of eggs, rolls, cheese, and coffee. Again, Singer fills his pages with concrete details that lend mimetic richness to his characters. Aaron thanks her for the breakfast and "she smiled, showing a mouthful of teeth without a blemish. She had muscular legs and firm breasts. . . . A dimple showed in her left

²¹Singer, p. 56.

cheek."²² But Singer is not concerned merely with the one-to-one correspondence that such a comparison of autobiography and novel suggests. He further writes:

These are the real people, the ones who keep the world going, I thought. They serve as proof that the cabalists are right--not Feitelzohn. An indifferent God, a mad God couldn't have created Tekla. I felt temporarily enamored of this girl. Her cheeks were the color of ripe apples. She gave forth a vigor rooted in the earth, in the sun, in the whole universe. She didn't want to better the world as did Dora; she didn't require roles and reviews as did Betty; she didn't seek thrills as did Celia. She wanted to give, not to take. If the Polish people had produced even one Tekla, they had surely accomplished their mission (p. 61).

For Singer, Tekla suggests the allegorical good woman, less handsome than Wanda of The Slave and Yadviga of Enemies, and less intuitive than Shosha herself. Yet she will endure and prevail because she represents the life force itself. Hers is a life that is proof of a plan to the things of this world. Symbolically, she becomes a maid of the Chestshiners on the eve of the holocaust, and in this Singer suggests a unity of forces, a memorial candle that will flicker after the blitzkrieg is over.

Such universal allegorical suggestiveness exists for all of the characters in Shosha. Dora and Felhendler are not communists, for example, but the communist, the archetypal character whose belief lies in -isms, and whose journey ultimately ends in disillusionment and destruction in the onslaught of Singer's concept of reality. Of course, it is interesting to note that a man named Isaac Deutscher once

²²Isaac Bashevis Singer, Shosha, trans. by the author and Joseph Singer (New York: Fawcette Crest, 1979), p. 60. All further references cited parenthetically in the text.

pounded his fist on a podium in Warsaw, but it is essential to recognize Singer's sense of artistry as he presents Felhendler as a ruined man, missing his front teeth, and holding out a clammy hand to Aaron. Yet even though his arrogant figure is destroyed, Felhendler still believes in his social systems. Having undergone torture under Stalin, he is now a supporter of Trotsky. When Aaron tells him that "Trotsky's permanent revolution, or whatever permanent revolution it may be, will duplicate precisely what the Stalinists are doing now, Felhendler answers, "No. If I were to think in your terms, I'd have to hang myself this very night" (p. 191). Through Singer's realistic presentation of a character's conversation we realize that those like Dora and Felhendler are fated to tragic consistency and doom in Singer's paradigm. They are fictional creations, based on people that Singer once knew, that effectively convey the author's own disbelief in social systems that was first indicated in Satan in Goray. However, as I suggested in my chapter on The Slave, such concerns for the mature Singer are part of the whole; they do not constitute the entire vision of the later, more theologically complex novels.

The rendering of Dr. Feitelzohn in Shosha takes its basis from a few lines in A Young Man in Search of Love about an old writer, Preshburger, who had a harem of mistresses. Yet from the suggestion that this man "evoked amazement" Singer depicts one of the most effective characters in the novel. More like Abram Shapiro of The Family Moskat than Reb Gedalya of Satan in Goray, Feitelzohn is an articulate intellectual in the tradition of Saul Bellow's Humboldt. For Singer, Feitelzohn is the ultimate, good natured intellectual at

the end of his road. For example, when Feitelzohn meets Moishe at Aaron's wedding, he displays his knowledge of the Gemara and the Midrash. Moishe tells him that "eardition demands practice" and Feitelzohn replies, "for that you need what I lack--faith" (p. 221). When Hamil later proposes that Feitelzohn publish a magazine espousing "the world deliverance of play," he quips, "Before I become the Messiah, maybe you could lend me five zlotys?" (p. 251).

Although Singer achieves dimensionality by depicting Feitelzohn comically and sympathetically, the doctor is also a hedonist whose blend of eroticism and Hassidism concludes that "since we are sure of nothing and there is no evidence that the sun will rise tomorrow, play is the very essence of the human endeavor, perhaps even the thing-in-itself" (p. 142). Taken to its natural conclusion, this hedonistic philosophy denies meaning in life. As Feitelzohn proposes, "God is a player, the cosmos a playground. For years I have searched for a basis of ethics and gave up hope. Suddenly it became clear to me. The basis of ethics is man's right to play the game of his choice. I will not trample on your toys and you will not trample on mine" (p. 142). This philosophy of meaninglessness, suggesting the meaninglessness of the suffering to come under Hitler, is Singer's last temptation for Aaron, and as the vehicle for this philosophy Feitelzohn takes on the allegorical role as tempter. Just as Aaron had been tempted from his instinctual love for Shosha by Betty's offer to flee the country, Aaron's final temptation is the intellectualism of Feitelzohn, an allegorical situation reminding us of the last temptation, the knowledge of the Greek philosophers, for Milton's Christ in Paradise

Regained. Such secular knowledge is both intellectually stimulating and attractive, but it cannot lead to God.

With the minor characters established, let us now turn to the artistic depiction of Shosha and Singer himself. In order to recognize the affirmation of life that Singer presents in Shosha, a child that he knew on Krochmalna Street, we must first recognize that the novel itself is a work of self-conscious artistry, a creation seizing immortality for itself through its telling. Like Keats in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Shakespeare in Sonnet 18, Singer's Aaron proposes: "I believed that the aim of literature was to prevent time from vanishing . . ." (p. 21). This sense of self-conscious artistry as both a stay against confusion and a timeless monument to things past is recurrent through the atmosphere of the novel. Hence, both Shosha and the novel itself become objects of art, and the effort to preserve them is the allegorical task of the artist to search for beauty and innocence.

In the opening pages of the novel, both Aaron and Shosha are children. Aaron, representing the artist as a child, tells stories that he hears from his mother and father, reinforcing the oral traditions that lie behind all literature, "embellishing them freely":

. . . I told her of the wild forests of Siberia, of Mexican bandits, and of cannibals who ate their own children. Sometimes Bashela would sit with us and listen to my chatter. I boasted to them that I was familiar with the cabala and knew expressions so sacred they could draw wine from the wall, create live pigeons, and let me fly to Madagascar. One such name I knew contained seventy-two letters, and when it was uttered the sky would turn red, the moon topple, and the world be destroyed.

Shosha's eyes filled with alarm. "Arele, don't ever say the word!"

"No, Shoshele, don't be afraid. I will make it so that you'll live forever" (p. 12).

As with many of the other scenes in Shosha, the roots are autobiographical. The scene itself first appeared in a sketch entitled "Shosha" in A Day of Pleasure: Stories of a Boy Growing Up in Warsaw. Singer writes, "I myself liked to invent things. I told the girls that my father had a treasure that was hidden in a cave in the forest. I boasted that my grandfather was the King of Bilgoray. I assured Shosha that I knew a magic word that could destroy the world if spoken. 'Please, Itchele, please don't say it, she would beg me.'"²³ What prompted Singer to add the promise that Shosha would live forever in the novel, a promise that is fulfilled through the creation of the novel itself, is also suggested in the autobiographical reminiscence. Singer writes that "in time Shosha became for me an image of the past."²⁴ He writes of returning to Krochmalna Street years afterward to find, in the same apartment, a little girl about eight or nine who is the image of her mother: "The same fair face, the same blond hair braided with red ribbons, the same longish neck."²⁵ Finding that this is Basha, Shosha's daughter, he explains that he once lived here and played with her mother. What follows is best told in Singer's own words:

²³Isaac Bashevis Singer, A Day of Pleasure: Stories of a Boy Growing Up in Warsaw (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1969), p. 223.

²⁴Singer, p. 223.

²⁵Singer, p. 225.

Basha looked at me with large eyes and inquired, "Are you Itchele?"

"How do you know about Itchele?" I said. A lump stuck in my throat. I could barely speak.

"My mother told me about him."

"Yes, I am Itchele."

"My mother told me everything. Your father had a cave in the forest full of gold and diamonds. You knew a word that could set the whole world on fire. Do you still know it?"

"No, not any more."

"What happened to the gold in the cave?"

"Somebody stole it," I said.

"And is your grandfather still a king?"

"No, Basha, he is not a king any more."

For a while we were both silent. Then I asked, "Did your mother tell you about the house imp?"

"Yes, we used to have a house imp, but he's gone."

"What happened to him?"

"I don't know."

"And the cricket?"

"The cricket is still here, but it chirps mostly at night."

I went down to the candy store--the one where Shosha and I used to buy candy--and brought cookies, chocolate, and halvah. Then I went back upstairs and gave them to Basha.

"Would you like to hear a story?" I asked her.

"Yes, very much."

I told Basha about a beautiful blond girl whom a demon had carried away to the desert, to Mount Seir, and had forced her to marry him, and about the children that were born of the marriage, who were half human, half demon.

Basha's eyes grew pensive. "And she stayed there?"

"No, Basha, a saintly man called Rabbi Leib learned about her misfortune. He traveled to the desert and rescued her."

"How?"

"An angel helped him."

"And what happened to her children?"

"The children became completely human and went with their mother. The angel carried them to safety on his wings."

"And the demon?"

"He remained in the desert."

"And he never married again?"

"Yes, Basha, he did. He married a she-demon, one of his own kind."

We were both silent again, and suddenly I heard the familiar chirping of a cricket. Could it be the cricket of my childhood? Certainly not. Perhaps her great-great-great granddaughter. But she was telling the same story, as ancient as time, as puzzling as the world, and as long as the dark winter nights of Warsaw.²⁶

²⁶Singer, pp. 226-227.

For Singer, the situation suggests eternal recurrence. Stories have been passed from mother to daughter, stories still serve to delight and fascinate. But the uniqueness of Singer's autobiographical situation is that for the preserver of these stories, time has frozen. She remains the beautiful blond girl who, although touched briefly by the demons of ordinary men like Singer, remains unchanged and is rescued by a creature of her own spiritual kind, the angel. Ordinary men, Singer and the reader included, remain in the desert.

It is easy to see how this allegorical situation was transformed into the novel. The artist, Aaron, tells tales of both fantasy and destruction, the particulars of which are to be found in Wonderland or Warsaw. Yet the artist can only depict. Ironically, he himself is exiled because of the demon quality that allows him to render. In the conclusion of the novel Shosha tells Aaron, "I would like to be with you a thousand years," and we must realize that the life that was Shosha's will endure as long as art and memory interchange the essence of life (p. 232).

More than any other of his main characters in previous novels, Aaron Greidinger represents a version of Singer himself. Both have associations with pre-war Warsaw, both have a brother named Moishe and a mother named Bathsheba, and both are young intellectuals who have taken paths away from their rabbi fathers. Like Singer himself, Aaron's life must be seen as that of the "existential" artist. For example, he cannot believe in the traditional Judaism of his brother Moishe who tells him that:

"it all comes from heaven, it's all from heaven. In everything man does there are obstacles so that he can discern the hand of Providence. If everything were to go smoothly, man would say, 'My power and the might of mine hands hath gotten me this wealth.' When evildoers achieve success, they believe it to be due to their own ability, but not always is the path of evil successful. That Hitler--may his name be blotted out--will be dealt his punishment, nor will Stalin, that wicked monster, have his way either" (p. 219).

Aaron is far too secular a man to make the ultimate leap of faith to the belief that "he who knows the truth relies completely on God."

Nor can Aaron find meaning in the complete secularism of Sam Dreiman, a satirical portrait of the American millionaire, and his mistress Betty. Clearly, they both destroy Aaron's play about the Maiden from Ludmir. The initial idea of a play about a woman who became a rabbi and held court for Hasidim has great possibility. As Aaron muses, "This was a magical theme--like the Torah, it seemed to possess seventy different faces" (p. 64). But as Sam and Betty seek to make the play acceptable to the Warsaw stage, Aaron comes to realize that the "grotesqueries grew faster than I could repair them" (p. 119). Allegorically, this is the path that art must take when it is taken from the artist and commercialized.

However, Aaron comes to meaning neither through complete spirituality, secular art, or Fietelzohn's hedonism. Singer does not depict Aaron as making the ultimate leap of faith like Yasha of The Magician of Lublin, nor does he strive to do God's work daily like Jacob of The Slave. Aaron stays to face the holocaust, but not because he must find his roots like Asa Hershel of The Family Moskat or Ezriel of The Manor. Unlike Herman Broder of Enemies, Aaron is not

the allegorical fleeing Jew in his love for Shosha. Essentially Aaron is part of all his fictional predecessors, who are, in turn, parts of Singer himself, yet Aaron is quite different in that he is the artist as Singer perceives it. An essentially naive and instinctual man, Aaron seeks neither rationalization nor survival but beauty, the beauty found in Shosha. As Aaron lives with her, he is also listening to her as a muse. In bed he tells her stories because "she listened to everything with the same sense of curiosity" (p. 240). For the artist, Shosha embodies the ultimate sense of meaning that accompanies innocence: she is the eternal child, inspiring as only a child can. Allegorically, he pursues her as the world ends.

Clearly, Shosha is a spiritual creature, existing out of time. She simply is not involved in the "normal" cause and effect temporal relationships; she does not make do like the rest of us, nor does she care to. For Shosha, all things are of consequence. As she tells Aaron, "Leizer reads the paper to us, and awful things happen every day. A man crossed the street and was run over by a droshky. A girl from No. 9 tried to get into the trolly car before it stopped, and she lost her leg. Only last week, a tinsmith fixing a roof fell down and the gutter was red from blood. With such things in my head, I could not pay attention to my lessons" (p. 118). For her, events are important and are of lasting meaning and effect; they are not diminished by time. As Aaron reflects, "In her own fashion she denied death. Although they had all died, in Shosha's mind Eli and Zeldele still ran the grocery store, David and Mirale still sold butter. . . . Whenever I was with her, I asked myself, How can this be? How can it

be explained? Had Shosha found a magical way to stop the advance of time?" (pp. 98-99). Finally, he asks, "Was this the secret of love or the power of retrogression?" Tacitly, we must admit that Shosha is evidence of the power of love. She is a delicate creature, a visionary who sees the dead, the phenomenon itself suggesting, as Aaron's mother tells him, that "the comfort is that there is no death" (p. 203). For Shosha there is no death. Our vision of her is as vivid as the passage of the dead is to her. Allegorically, she is beauty and spirituality, preserved both in the novel and in time, by Singer's artistry.

In the epilogue to Shosha, set thirteen years later in Israel, we learn what happened to the people we have lived with through Singer's eyes, and in their passing we see them for the allegorical figures they were, bravely facing death at Hitler's hands. Of course, Shosha, a fragile creature, cannot survive the exodus from Warsaw and dies on the side of the road. Thus her living simplicity and beauty are destroyed by the sword.

As the novel ends, Aaron tells Hamil:

"There can't be any answer for suffering--not for the sufferer."

"In that case, what am I waiting for?"

Genia opened the door. "Why are you two sitting in the dark, eh?"

Hamil laughed. "We're waiting for an answer."

Yet the novel does not end in darkness because through its creation the memory of the dead is preserved. Thus Shosha is a testament to Singer's faith in the power of art to transform and make eternal those things dear to us.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Writing of the Grand Inquisitor scene in Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov, D. H. Lawrence proposed that "the inadequacy of Jesus lies in the fact that Christianity is too difficult for men, the vast mass of men. It could only be realized by the few 'saints' or heroes. For the rest, man is like a horse harnessed to a load he cannot possibly pull. 'Hadst Thou respected him less, Thou wouldst have demanded less of him, and that would be nearer to love, for his burden would have been lighter.'"¹ Although Lawrence misreads the ending of the Grand Inquisitor scene by believing that Jesus gives the kiss of acquiescence to the Inquisitor instead of His silent answer of forgiveness, Lawrence's question of Christianity is the same question that we may ask of Judaism as Singer presents it. Does man rely always on miracle, mystery, and authority, and are these indeed his weaknesses?

Man certainly demands the miracle, mystery, and authority of his faith, but for Singer these are not man's weaknesses but his strengths. Singer refuses in his novels to convey the utter failure of God to His creation; rather, the novels concentrate on the message that God loves

¹D. H. Lawrence, "Preface to The Grand Inquisitor," Selected Literary Criticism, ed. Anthony Beal (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1961), pp. 233-241; rpt. in Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Rene Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 91.

His people because of the harshness of His laws. Faith demands much, but it also gives sustenance. Judaism is more than the great reality of life on earth that Lawrence writes about, filling us with "vivid life, 'the heavenly bread.'"² For Singer, there is more than the vivid life that this earth suggests: there is also life in God.

It is this awareness of a life in God as Singer artistically depicts it that I have tried to convey in the present study. Singer perceives life as an allegorical struggle, and he renders this struggle authentically in his novels. In Satan in Goray the village succumbs to a simplistic solution to the trials of this world by believing that the Messiah will come. This belief leads townspeople, as well as the reader, on an allegorical journey that emphasizes the difficulty of maintaining faith. In The Family Moskat Asa Hershel, like Ezriel in The Manor, strives for a consciousness in his faith and is led to abandon secular speculation for religious conviction. Both Asa Hershel and Ezriel journey away from their roots, only to find that they must return "home" to find sustenance and faith. Likewise, Yasha in The Magician of Lublin becomes a knight of faith, seeking the essence of existence through his magic, only to find that the essence of life involves the painful commitment of a leap of faith. In The Slave Singer depicts Jacob, an allegorical representation of the Jewish people, as a man who makes his pact with God daily, a man who willingly chooses to be committed to faith even after the awesome presence of God breaks into his life. In Enemies, A Love Story Herman Broder, the

²Lawrence, p. 92.

opposite of Jacob, is rendered as the allegorical fleeing Jew, a "type" of man who fails to execute his free will. Finally, Aaron Greidinger of Shosha assumes the allegorical role of a seeker of beauty, a role that demands that he must commit himself to the possibility of frustration and death. In all of these novels Singer intensifies the range of our emotions by depicting his characters as individuals caught in eternally recurring themes that suggest the difficulties of exerting free will. Because his characters are rendered realistically, there are no saints in Singer's novels. No one escapes the complexities that accompany life.

In Singer's novels, the complexity of Judaism is the central metaphor for existence, a belief of incredible difficulty to maintain in the modern world. Yet Singer's knights of faith--Asa Hershel, Ezriel, Yasha, and Jacob--continue to hope for miracle, seek mystery, and submit themselves to authority because they realize that religiosity without difficulty is impossible. Through such difficulty God shows His respect for His people, yet He continues to make demands. He allows Chmielnici and Hitler to slaughter innocent people, yet He still demands faith. If God did indeed interfere in man's struggles, then the struggles would be rendered eternally useless. For Singer, man must ultimately come to the fact that in His silence God shows His respect for man's faith: this world is man's, and he must seek the presence of God in it. For Singer, life is a struggle to make meaning, and Judaism is the vehicle that conveys this struggle.

As an artist, Singer was required to convey such didacticism with subtlety. As a result, he depicts his characters realistically,

suggesting that their lives are variations on a theme. In the present study I have tried to show a progression of Singer's art away from the blatant didacticism of Satan in Goray. In moving away from the straightforward allegory of this early novel, Singer chose to depict life as it is in The Family Moskat and The Manor. Yet, finding that the individual always suggests the general, Singer abandoned the conventions of the family novel for the subtleties of characterization evinced in The Magician of Lublin, The Slave, Enemies, A Love Story, and Shosha. As Singer intensifies our sympathetic responses for his characters, we finally come to realize that, like all great writers, Singer depicts the old verities. As Buchen has written, "to Singer nothing is old and nothing is new. The Torah is not dead because it is dated, any more than the twentieth century is alive because it is current."³ In Singer's vision, things recur eternally.

In the final analysis we must recognize that Singer's life is limned by his own experiences. He is a holocaust survivor writing about what he knows best--people in intellectual and physical turmoil. As he directs his cast of the dead we realize that Singer's novels are his memories, monuments to things past that intimate recurrence. Thus we recognize parts of ourselves in any century that Singer takes us to, and this recognition is itself a testament to the truth of the novelist's vision.

³Buchen, p. 200.

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