

Enemies, A Love Story (1966)

By Isaac Bashevis Singer (Poland, United States)

Translated from the Yiddish by Aliza Shevrin and Elizabeth Shrub

Notes

page numbers refer to the Farrar, Straus and Giroux trade paperback

AUTHOR'S NOTE

*The novel was first published in **The Jewish Daily Forward** in 1966 under the title "Sonim, di Geshichte fun a Liebe."*

The Forward was the leading Yiddish-language newspaper in the United States. Most of Singer's novels were originally serialized in Yiddish language newspapers. Singer wrote all of his novels and short stories in Yiddish, the historical language of the Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern and Central Europe. It is a Germanic language written in an alphabet based on the Hebrew script. Singer was also fully fluent in Hebrew, Polish, and English.

PART ONE

Chapter One

1

*Herman Broder turned over and opened one eye. In his dreamy state, he wondered whether he was in America, in **Tzivkev**, or in a German camp. He even imagined himself hiding in the hayloft in **Lipsk**. (3)*

Both are in Poland.

He had probably bumped against the edge of the closet door on the way to the bathroom during the night. (4)

Herman's dream and bruise recall the Biblical account of the patriarch Jacob wrestling with an angel in what may or may not have been a dream (Genesis 32:23-33). Jacob also bears a physical wound from the encounter:

²³ That same night he arose, and taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²⁴ After taking them across the stream, he sent across all his possessions. ²⁵ Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. ²⁶ When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. ²⁷ Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." ²⁸ Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." ²⁹ Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." [*Israel* literally means "He who struggles with God"] ³⁰ Jacob asked, "Pray tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!" And he took leave of him there. ³¹ So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved." ³² The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip. ³³ That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since Jacob's hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle.

All Biblical references and quotations in the notes use the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh translation.

She was a Polish woman with rosy cheeks, pug nose, light-colored eyes; her hair

was light as **flax** (4)

a widely cultivated plant having pale blue flowers, seeds that yield linseed oil, and slender stems from which the fine, light-colored textile fiber is obtained

*Herman talked to her in Polish or sometimes in Yiddish, which she did not understand; he would throw in a few Biblical quotations in the holy tongue or even phrases from the **Talmud**, as the mood struck him. (4)*

the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend (comprising the Mishnah and the Gemara); there are two versions of the Talmud: the Babylonian Talmud (which dates from the 5th century CE but includes earlier material) and the earlier Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud; it is a central body of literature for Rabbinic Judaism, second in importance only to the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) (Karesh and Hurvitz 510); that Herman can quote from the Talmud is a marker of his education

*"**Shikseh**, what time is it?" he said. (4)*

a Yiddish word for a woman or girl who is not Jewish; the term can sometimes have offensive overtones, though not here; its use, even affectionately, does signal that Herman perceives that there is a crucial difference between him and Yadwiga (even though Herman is no longer observant); other characters in the novel will refer to Yadwiga by this title with more derision

*Though she was his wife and the neighbors called her Mrs. Broder, she behaved toward Herman as if they were still in Tzivkev and she still a servant in the house of his father, **Reb** Shmuel Leib Broder. (5)*

Reb is a Yiddish honorific traditionally used for Orthodox Jewish men. It is not a rabbinic title; it is the equivalent of the English *mister*.

*She really did not need to go anywhere. **Mermaid Avenue** provided her with everything she needed (5)*

Mermaid Avenue is in Brooklyn, the largest borough in New York City. Before World War II, there was already a sizable Jewish population in Brooklyn; during and after the war, though, it became a destination point for Jewish refugees from Eastern and Central Europe (especially Hasidic Jews) to neighborhoods such as Williamsburg, Borough Park, and Crown Heights (Abramovitch 7). Although it is not stated here, later allusions to historical events in the novel establish that the novel is set in the early 1950s.

(Herman did not eat pork) (6)

Kosher refers to the foods that may be eaten according to the set of Jewish religious dietary laws (*kashrut*). The prohibition against eating pork is just one of many dietary laws.

*On the days Herman stayed home, he and Yadwiga would stroll together on the **Boardwalk**. (6)*

located along the southern shore of the Coney Island peninsula in Brooklyn, adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean

*Occasionally Herman took Yadwiga to a cafeteria in **Brighton Beach** (6)*

an oceanside neighborhood in southern Brooklyn

*but she could not accustom herself to the trains hurtling by on the **E1** with their deafening roar (6)*

elevated railway

And the radio! Herman would set the dial on a station that broadcast in

*Polish in the morning and evening, and Polish songs, mazurkas, polkas, on Sunday a sermon by a priest, and news from Poland, which had fallen to the **Bolsheviks**, filled the room. (8)*

Soviet communists

2

Herman shaved while the bathtub filled with water. His beard grew fast. (9)

Orthodox Jews do not shave their beard or forelocks (Leviticus 19:27: "You shall not round off the side-growth on your heads, or destroy the side-growth of your beard."-- interpreted in the Mishnah as a prohibition against using a razor on the beard)

*She prepared all kinds of delicacies for him and cooked his favorite dishes: dumplings, **matzo balls** with **borscht**, millet with milk, groats with gravy. (11)*

matzo balls: an Ashkenazi Jewish soup dumpling made from a mixture of matzo meal, eggs, water, and a fat

borscht: an Eastern and Central European beet soup

*"You mean **Coney Island**? Here they come to eat popcorn, not to read books." (12)*

the Brooklyn neighborhood is well known as the site of amusement parks and a seaside resort

*That's what you think! I'll be eating with the **Queen of Sheba**. (13)*

First Kings 9:1-10:

¹ The queen of Sheba heard of [King] Solomon's fame through the name of the Lord, and she came to test him with hard questions. ² She arrived in Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels bearing spices, a great quantity of gold, and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she asked him all that she had in mind. ³ Solomon had answers for all her questions; there was nothing that the king did not know, [nothing] to which he could not give her an answer. [...] ¹⁰ She presented the king with one hundred and twenty talents of gold, and a large quantity of spices, and precious stones. Never again did such a vast quantity of spices arrive as that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

The Kingdom of Sheba (*Saba*) was in the southern Arabian peninsula, and the Queen has come to connote a person who is fabulously wealthy, exotic, and attractive.

"Why do you want to understand? 'For in much wisdom is much grief,' Ecclesiastes said. (13)

Ecclesiastes 1:18

3

*On hot days they brought benches and folding chairs out on the Street and sat around chatting about the old country, their American children and grandchildren, about the Wall Street crash in 1929, about the cures worked by steam baths, vitamins, and mineral waters at **Saratoga Springs**. (16)*

in upstate New York

*From the restaurants and cafeterias came the smells of chicken soup, **kasha**, chopped liver. (17)*

buckwheat

Stalin had declared in an interview that Communism and capitalism could co-exist. (18)

Singer is probably thinking of Stalin's April 2, 1952 interview in *Pravda* ("Replies to Questions of American Editors") in which he said, "The peaceful coexistence of capitalism and communism is quite possible provided there is a mutual desire to co-operate, readiness to carry out undertaken commitments, and observance of the principle of equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states."

In China there were battles between the Red and Chiang Kai-shek's armies. (18)

The civil war between Mao Zedong's Communists and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists culminated in the 1949 defeat of Chiang Kai-shek and his retreat to Taiwan, where he ruled as president of the Republic of China until his death in 1975. Clashes between Mainland China and Taiwan continued through the early 1950s.

*On the inside pages of the paper, refugees described the terrors of **Majdanek, Treblinka, Auschwitz.** (18)*

These were all Nazi concentration camps. Estimates of the number of Jews killed by the Nazis in the Holocaust conservatively number over five million, or approximately 2/3 of the pre-war population of Jews who had lived in Eastern and Central Europe (Hilberg 338).

*An escaped witness gave an account of a slave-labor camp in north Russia, where rabbis, socialists, liberals, priests, **Zionists,** and **Trotskyites** were digging for gold, dying of hunger and beriberi. (18)*

Zionists: the Jewish nationalist movement that had as its goal the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jews; the state of Israel was created in 1948 out of western Palestine

Trotskyites: followers of the theory of Marxism as advocated by Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) who had been a rival and critic of Joseph Stalin until his exile (1929) and eventual assassination abroad

He, too, promised a "better world" in the Garden of Eden. (19)

in Genesis, a paradise on earth without sin, death, or suffering in which the first human couple lived (Adam and Eve) until they sinned against God and were expelled

*As Herman read, he grimaced. The rabbi was selling God as **Terah sold idols.** (19)*

According to the rabbinical tradition, Terah-- father of the patriarch Abram, later known as Abraham-- was wicked and idolatrous (Numbers Rabbah 19:1; 19:33 and Midrash HaGadol on Genesis 11:28), and he made his living through manufacturing idols (Eliyahu Rabbah 6 and Eliyahu Zuta 25), opposed in this by his son.

*Modern Judaism had one aim: to ape the **Gentile.** (19)*

non-Jew; it is a term that is used by English translators for the Hebrew goy

*He would put on a pair of **rubbers** and lose them in a matter of hours. (20)*

rubber boots; galoshes

4

*He owned half a dozen convalescent homes, had built apartment houses in **Borough Park** and **Williamsburg** (20)*

4

both neighborhoods in Brooklyn with large Hasidic populations

*He could recall obscure commentaries from the **Prepared Table** (21)*

the Shulchan Arukh, often called “the Code of Jewish Law;” it was penned by Joseph Caro (1488-1575) to synthesize the various law codes in a single reference volume (Karesh and Hurvitz 477)

*but make errors in quoting a verse from the **Pentateuch**. (21)*

also known as the Torah; the first five books of the twenty-four books of the Tanakh and the heart of the Jewish religious tradition

*He played the role of a **Don Juan** (21)*

a legendary medieval Spanish womanizer and libertine

*A conference of rabbis isn't a meeting of the elders of Tzivkev! This is America, not Poland. Well, and how about the essay on **Bal Shem**? (24)*

Hebrew: a title meaning the “Master of the Name;” a mystical rabbinical tradition that used various names of God to heal and work miracles; the most famous Baal Shem is the Baal Shem Tov (Israel ben Eliezer, 1698-1760), the founder of the mystical Hasidic movement (Karesh and Hurvitz 40-41)

*Where do you live-- in hell? In **Asmodeus' castle**? (24)*

the King of the Demons in the non-canonical (at least in Judaism) Book of Tobit and various Talmudic legends (Pintel-Ginsberg 51)

*No one is going to drag you to the **wedding canopy** by force. (24)*

the *chuppah*, the canopy under which a Jewish couple stand during their Jewish wedding ceremony, consisting of a cloth stretched over four pole (or sometimes manually held up by attendants to the ceremony) (Karesh and Hurvitz 311)

*What secrets are you hiding behind **those proverbial seven locks**? (25)*

Samson was a legendary hero and judge of the Israelites whose supernatural strength was given to him by God, but this gift was dependent on the length of his hair (which must not be cut). Samson falls in love with treacherous Delilah, who induces him to tell her his secret, and she shears off the seven locks of his hair, rendering him powerless and delivering him into the hands of his enemies (Judges 13-16).

CHAPTER TWO

1

*Whenever Herman pretended to be on the road selling books, he spent the nights with Masha in **the Bronx**. (27)*

the northernmost of the five boroughs of New York City; the Bronx was the second most Jewish borough in New York City; for instance, in 1940 857,000 Jews lived in Brooklyn, while 538,000 resided in the Bronx (Abramovitch 248)

*He escaped from Warsaw before the Nazis occupied the country, only to die later of malnutrition and dysentery in **Kazakhstan**. (27)*

at the time, a Soviet Socialist Republic

*Masha had attended the **Beth Yaakov schools** (27)*

an early 20th century Polish school movement dedicated to providing schooling to young Orthodox women (who were traditionally denied education); it instructed girls in prayers, the Tannakh, Jewish laws and customs, but not the Talmud (reserved for men); instruction was in Yiddish (Gurock 187)

*During the war, her mother, Shifrah Puah, was sent to one **ghetto**, Masha to another. (27)*

One of the first acts the Nazis enacted upon seizing control of Poland in 1939 was to resurrect the medieval concept of the ghetto, in which Jews were concentrated in walled-off sections of major cities (after the Jewish population had been forcibly removed from the countryside). Approximately 10% of Poland's pre-war population was Jewish. At first the goal was to forcibly expel the Jews from Poland, though ultimately the ghettos became a way station for Nazi extermination camps (Hilberg 64-65).

In his thoughts, Herman had often likened himself to the Talmudic sage, Choni Hamagol, who according to legend slept for seventy years and when he awoke found the world so strange that he prayed for death. (28)

After having fallen asleep for those seventy years, Choni Hamagol awoke to find his son dead and a grandson who did not recognize him. He went to a rabbinic school, where he heard his name spoken with respect, but no one believed him when he cried out that he was Choni Hamagol. It was at this point that he prayed for death (Taubenhaus 15-16).

*Herman's mother, who had attended a German **gymnasium** in Lemberg, wanted her son to become a doctor. (29)*

in the German education system, the secondary school intended to prepare one for university (as opposed to the more vocational path of the other two types of German secondary schools)

*A disciple of **Schopenhauer**, Herman had determined never to marry, and bring new generations into the world. (30)*

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860): German pessimist philosopher who taught that the world is driven by a continually dissatisfied will, continually seeking satisfaction

*Later she dropped Communism and became a member of the **Poalay Zion Party**. (30)*

"Workers of Zion;" an Eastern European Marxist political movement dedicated to founding a Jewish state in Palestine

*Three years after their marriage, Tamara gave birth to a girl-- according to **Otto Weininger** (at the time considered by Herman to be the most consistent philosopher), a creature with "no sense of logic, no memory, amoral, nothing but a vessel of sex." (30)*

Otto Weininger (1880-1903): Austrian philosopher who believed in defining, essential characteristics for the two sexes-- with the weaker, more negative characteristics being assigned to women; interestingly, Weininger was an anti-Semite as well as a misogynist and identified feminine characteristics with Jewish characteristics, illustrating again Herman's complex ambivalence about his Jewish identity

*If time is just a form of perception, or a category of reason, the past is as present as today: **Cain continues to murder Abel**. Nebuchadnezzar is still slaughtering the sons of Zedekiah and **putting out Zedekiah's eyes**. The **pogrom in Kesheniev** never ceases. (30)*

In Genesis 4, Cain kills his brother Abel, committing the first murder in the world.

Zedekiah, last king of Judah, was overthrown by the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE. It was after the siege and fall of Jerusalem that he was blinded and his sons assassinated. This was the fall of the last independent Israelite kingdom. (2 Kings 25).

A pogrom is an organized massacre of an ethnic group, a word used to describe the various bouts of ethnic cleansing that periodically plagued Jews in Eastern Europe and Russia. In 1903 in Kishinev, Moldova (and again in 1905), a large anti-Jewish riot led the rape, injury, torture, and death of dozens of Jews. Property was destroyed, and thousands were left homeless. Jewish businesses were also looted and destroyed. The over 5000 Czarist soldiers stationed in the city were ordered not to intervene, and government complicity was assumed by nearly everyone (Pasachoff and Littman 236).

2

If Nietzsche's theory about the eternal return was true, perhaps this had already occurred a quadrillion years ago. (32)

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900): German philosopher; the concept was postulated so as to justify living one's life in a manner you would not mind spend eternity repeating

God does everything that he is capable of doing, Spinoza wrote somewhere. (32)

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677): Dutch philosopher and Sephardic Jew; in his *Ethics*, Spinoza held the universe arose from God's infinite nature (which is probably what Herman is straining to remember); God, for Spinoza, was a philosophical abstraction indistinguishable from Nature (an idea that was considered heretical)

If you had seen what I have seen, you would know that God approves of slaughter. (33)

Singer was himself a vegetarian in later life and flirted with vegetarianism for many years before he stopped eating meat altogether. Singer said in interview:

I always like meat and I think it is perfectly healthy. But I feel animals are not made to be killed. I have two birds, they are such lovely creatures-- the thought of someone eating them makes me sick. I realize that in this world things are made so animals and people have to kill each other. It can't be helped. But it is not my duty to help in this destruction.... No human being has what animals have. They should be our teachers and masters, not our food. They are humble, they have humility, they are sincere. They are not something to eat, they are God's beautiful creation (*Isaac Bashevis Singer: Conversations* 29)

*My father-- may he rest in peace-- your grandfather, once said, 'Their Talmudic arguments are brilliant, but somehow they end up proving that one is allowed to eat bread on **Passover**.'* (35)

Passover is a Jewish holiday celebrating the liberation of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. Jews are not allowed to eat leavened bread during Passover because, in the original story, the Israelites left Egypt in such a hurry they could not wait for the bread to rise (see Exodus 12-13).

*Everything is **written on a person's forehead**, they say, if you know how to read. (36)*

Phrenology was a popular pseudo-science in the 19th century and early 20th century in which various measurements of the human skull were thought to reveal moral and physical traits.

3

Jews must be slaughtered-- that's what God wants. (37)

Compare Masha's words to the following exchange between professor of English Richard Burgin and Isaac Bashevis Singer:

BURGIN: Can there be a God who isn't merciful and doesn't care about man?

SINGER: I believe that this power is not blind. Even if you don't believe in God, you still believe that there is Nature. The wolf and the sheep are still there and the electrons and magnetic waves are still there, and the atoms and everything else. Whether I say Nature or God, it doesn't make any difference, because I believe that Nature sees. A Nature which sees and thinks is God.

BURGIN: But if Nature sees things without mercy, without pity for man, why should you as a man not revolt against this, why should you support this God?

SINGER: I don't support it... I feel the opposite. I say that I'm protesting against this. My relation with God is a relation of protest. I cannot revolt, because to revolt you have to have some power, but to protest you don't need any power. Spinoza said that we have to make peace with Nature, to love God or the Substance intellectually, but I don't say so. I say he's great, He's full of wisdom.

BURGIN: What wisdom, if He causes all this suffering?

SINGER: To create a flower you have to have wisdom. Even though this flower is two hours later eaten by an ox, we still must admire the wisdom in creating it.

(Singer and Burgin 176-177)

*Mama baked a **kuchen**. (38)*

a generic German and Yiddish word for a baked good

*"Daughter, first he has to eat the **compote**." (38)*

a dessert made of whole or pieces of fruit in sugar syrup

4

*He even wrote in his dreams-- on yellowish paper in **Rashi script**, a combination of a story book, **cabalistic revelations**, and scientific discoveries. (41)*

Rashi script: a semi-cursive script for the Hebrew alphabet; it is named for Rashi, an author of rabbinic commentary on the Tanakh and the Talmud, who used the script to distinguish his commentary from the text on which he was commenting (Karesh and Hurvitz 416)

cabalistic revelations: The Kabbalah is an esoteric school of Jewish mysticism, originating in the Middle Ages (Karesh and Hurvitz 180).

*She even **wore a wig** on the High Holy Days when she went to pray. (42)*

a *sheitel*, a wig worn by orthodox women who are taught to always cover their heads as an act of modesty (Karesh and Hurvitz 470)

*On the Sabbath, she insisted that Meyer Bloch perform the sanctification ceremony and sing the **Sabbath** hymns (42)*

the seventh day of the Hebrew calendar week; according to Exodus 20:8 it is commanded by God to be kept as a holy day of rest, as God rested from creation; Meyer Bloch was breaking the injunction against work by writing

*When she talked of German atrocities, she would run to the **mezuzah** on the door and*

spit on it. (43)

Literally “doorpost” in Hebrew, it is the miniature parchment scroll and scroll holder affixed to Jewish homes or businesses (Karesh and Hurvitz 325-326).

*Masha compared herself to **Scheherazade**. (44)*

a legendary Arabic queen and the storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*

*Once Masha had gone into a bakery to buy a cake and the baker had turned out to be a former **Kapo**. (45)*

A Kapo in a Nazi concentration camp was a fellow prisoner assigned to supervise the other prisoners. It was a system designed to encourage the kapos to be as cruel as possible in order to maintain their own position (since otherwise they would be returned to status of ordinary prisoner-- to be either worked to death or killed outright).

He belonged at one and the same time to the Zionist Revisionist Party and to the Communist Party. (46)

The Zionist Revisionist Party was a rightist party dedicated to a founding a Jewish state in Palestine through military strength, while the Communist Party was left wing and officially atheist.

In some mystical way she could temporarily stop the bleeding during her period. (47)

Jewish purity laws prohibit intercourse during menstruation (Karesh and Hurvitz 509).

5

*Now that Masha wasn't at home, **she gave him his hat to wear** when he recited the prayer over the hand- washing and later for the benediction. (48)*

The Talmud states, “Cover your head in order that the fear of heaven may be upon you” (Shabbat 156b). Orthodox men will wear some sort of head covering during prayers, but there is disagreement among rabbis as to whether men must keep their head covered at all times.

They stopped at the Botanical Gardens to look at the flowers, palms, cactuses, the innumerable plants grown in the synthetic climate of hothouses. The thought occurred to Herman that Jewry was a hothouse growth-- it was kept thriving in an alien environment nourished by the belief in a Messiah, the hope of justice to come, the promises of the Bible-- the Book that had hypnotized them forever. (52)

from Edward Alexander's *Isaac Bashevis Singer*.

[Herman] has cut himself off from every conceivable Jewish community because he knows that Jewish existence in the Diaspora has itself been a defiance of history, a willed indifference to empirical actuality and the convergence of probabilities (according to which the Jews should long ago have disappeared) made possible by an unreasoning faith in divine justice and messianic hope. [...] Hothouse growth, Herman recognizes, can be beautiful. Yet he believes that although the refusal to accept empirical reality as ultimate truth had sustained the Jews' life-giving belief in Messianic redemption, it had also been a contributing factor to their destruction at the hands of the Nazis. In any case, Herman lacks not only the hothouse atmosphere required to keep Jewry alive in the Diaspora, but also that belief in a divinely imposed destiny which would give meaning to the struggle and suffering (111).

Chapter Three

1

*After a lunch of **knishes**, stuffed **derma**, and coffee (55)*

knishes: an Eastern European snack food consisting of a filling covered with dough that is either baked, grilled, or deep fried

derma: a type of sausage or stuffed intestine with a filling made from a combination of meat and grain

He prods the angel Metatron; Metatron pushes the angel Sandalphon, the seraphim, cherubim, Ophanim, Erelim. (58)

In Jewish medieval apocrypha, Metatron is an archangel who was formerly Enoch, ancestor of Noah, who according to Genesis 5:24, did not die, but ascended bodily to be with God (Webster 132). Sandalphon, likewise, an archangel, assists Metatron in weaving Jewish prayers into garlands for God to wear. He was formerly the prophet Elijah, who, like Enoch, did not die and bodily ascended to be with God (2 Kings 2:11) (Webster 172). Seraphim are the highest ranking of the nine choirs of angels (Webster 184), and cherubim are the second-highest ranking (Webster 42). Ophanim are a lesser choir of angels (Webster 145), and Erelim are lower still, being in charge of plant life on earth (Webster 58). The picture here is of a hierarchical system of cause and effect.

*He knew who Reb Abraham Nissen Yaroslaver was-- an uncle of his dead wife, Tamara, a learned man, an Alexandrover **Hasid**. (58)*

Hassidism is an orthodox movement dating to the 18th century that teaches a more emotional connection to God than is common in other strains of Judaism. There is also a pronounced mystical dimension to the sect. Hasidic Jews dress in a distinctive manner, adopting clothes similar to those worn by their Eastern European forefathers (Karesh and Hurvitz 198-199).

*He was frightened of this man who was involved with the Tzivkev **Landsleit**. (59)*

Yiddish: a person from the same town or village as oneself

*"They want to drag me into the **Landsmanscaft**, but I neither have the time for it nor the patience." (59)*

Yiddish: a society of people formally from the same place

2

*When she was a Communist, she wore a leather jacket à la **Cheka**; (64)*

the first of a succession of Soviet state security organizations

*when she became a Zionist, she wore a **Star of David** around her neck. (64)*

two overlapping triangles that form a six-pointed star; although the symbol is an old one (dating as far back as the third century CE), it did not become a more widespread symbol of Judaism until it was adopted by Zionist organizations in the 19th century (Karesh and Hurvitz 495)

3

*Nevertheless, one still occasionally saw a sign in Yiddish and, here and there, a synagogue, a **yeshiva**, a home for the aged. (66)*

a Jewish institution that focuses on the study of traditional religious texts

*The bus passed kosher restaurants, a Yiddish film-theater, a **ritual bath**, a hail that could be rented for weddings or bar mitzvahs, and a Jewish funeral parlor. (66)*

a *mikvah*, used to regain ritual purity (such as women after childbirth or menstruation) (Karesh and Hurvitz 327)

*In 1939 he had come to New York to enlist **prenumerants** for printing this manuscript (67)*

lists of signatories at the ends of books; these lists functioned as honorifics to publicize the role that the individuals had had in promulgating Torah scholarship (Parush 253)

*On that day, they fasted, sat in their stocking feet on low stools, and observed all the rules of **shiva**. (67)*

the week-long mourning period in Judaism for first-degree relatives: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, and spouse (Karesh and Hurvitz 474)

*A **broad, fringed garment** could be seen beneath his unbuttoned robe. (68)*

tzitzit, specially knotted ritual fringes, or tassels, worn in antiquity by Israelites and today by observant Jews; they are attached to the four corners of the *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tallit katan* (everyday undergarment) (Karesh and Hurvitz 531)

He wanted to reply, but the words wouldn't come. He pulled a chair from the table and sat down on the edge of it. He knew that he should ask her about the children, but he was unable to do so. Even when he heard people talking about children who were alive and healthy, he felt something akin to panic. Every time Yadwiga or Masha expressed the wish to have a child by him, he would change the subject. Somewhere among his papers there were photographs of little Yocheved and David, but he never dared to look at them. Herman had not behaved toward them as a father should. At one time he had even denied their existence and played the role of a bachelor. And here was Tamara-- the witness of his crime. He was afraid that she would begin to cry, but she retained her composure. (71)

Like Herman, Singer was not an ideal family man, and some of Herman's selfishness (and self-reproach) are almost certainly autobiographical. Singer's only child, Israel Zamir, for example, was conceived out of wedlock before Singer emigrated to the U.S. in 1935 from Poland. Singer took no active part in his son's upbringing and let some twenty years elapse before Zamir himself made the effort to meet his father for the first time as an adult. Israel Zamir's mother, Rokhl (Ronye) Shapia also provided a template for Tamara in the novel, sharing some personality features and political beliefs (Hadda 149-150).

As the Holy Book says, 'And thou shalt not hide thyself from thine own flesh.' (77)

Isaiah 58:7

*But in this case, **Rabbi Gershom's interdiction** does not apply to you. (78)*

Gershom ben Judah (ca. 960-ca.1040): an important rabbi most famous for calling a synod in which he synthesized many laws and prohibitions, including a ban on polygamy (Karesh and Hurvitz 172)

*"The **GPU** in Russia were no better than the Nazis." (79)*

the "State Political Directorate under the NKVD of the RSFSR," the successor Soviet intelligence agency and

secret police to the Cheka

Well, the prophet Isaiah said, 'And man is bowed down and man is humbled.' (79)

Isaiah 2:9

The Torah says, 'For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.' (79)

Genesis 8:21

"No, don't ask. I knew that there were great people among adults, but that children-- small children-- can become great, I would never have believed. They grew up overnight. I tried to give them some of my rations, but they refused to eat any of my share. They went to their deaths like saints. Souls exist; it's God who doesn't. Don't try to contradict me. That's my conviction. I want you to know that our little David and Yocheved come to me. Not in my dreams, but when I am awake. Naturally, you think me crazy, but that doesn't bother me in the least."

"What do they say to you?"

"Oh, different things. Where they are they are children again. What do you want to do? Divorce me?" (83)

These sort of supernatural elements (included without authorial comment) are intended to be taken at face value. Singer was himself interested in the Jewish mystical folk tradition, and his work is full of characters with access to the paranormal world. As Singer himself explained in interview:

I was interested in the supernatural all my life. I knew even as a child that the world which we see is not the whole world. Whether you call them demons or angels or some other name, I knew then, and I know today, that there are entities of whom we have no idea and they do exist. You can call them spirits, ghosts, or imps. Of course, I also use them as symbols in my writing. I can express with them many things which would be difficult to express if I only wrote about people. But it is not only a literary method, it is connected with a belief that the world is full of powers that we don't know. After all, let's not fool ourselves, a few hundred years ago we didn't know about microbes, we didn't know about electrons and all those powers connected with radiation. So who says that we have already come to the summit of knowledge? (Singer and Burgin 107).

Chapter Four

1

*The **scroll of life** would roll back and all that had been would be once again.* (85)

the Sefer HaChaim, the scroll in which God records the names of everyone destined for the world to come

*"**Yadzia** darling, it's me."* (86)

a diminutive form of Yadviga

*Herman shut his eyes. What should he do now? Where should he begin? Tamara almost certainly had come without money. She would receive some support from the **Joint Distribution Committee** if she concealed the fact that she had a husband.* (89)

a Jewish relief organization (based in New York City), originally founded in 1914 to provide assistance for Jews living in (what was then) Turkish Palestine (Bauer 21-22); after WWII, it was involved in resettling and providing assistance for Jews displaced by the Holocaust

"I want to have all three, that's the shameful truth," he admitted to himself. Tamara's become prettier, calmer, more interesting. She's suffered an

even worse hell than Masha. Divorcing her would mean driving her to other men. As for love, these professionals used the word as if it were capable of clear definition-- when no one had yet discovered its true meaning. (90)

Like Herman, Singer-- though married to Alma Wassermann from 1940 until his death in 1991-- was seldom faithful to his wife, claiming at one point that he was "a bachelor in [his] soul." If his relationship with Ronye Shapia provided the model for Tamara, Dobe Gerber-- a European Holocaust survivor-- became the model for the outspoken and emotional Masha. Singer was conducting an extra-marital affair with Gerber at the same time that he was also seeing American-born Dvora Menache who was fifty years his junior. When these affairs became too serious, however, the long-suffering Alma would inevitably put a stop to them. What his wife Alma, Gerber, and Menache all had in common was a willingness to take care of Singer and minister to his needs and insecurities (much like the women do for Herman in the book). Unlike Herman, however, whom Singer portrays as too weak to resist the passions that overtake him, Singer could be much more calculating and manipulative in the way that he conducted himself with women, though Singer did share much of Herman's pessimism and self-doubt (Hadda 159)-- Singer claiming at one point, "I'm Herman, for good and for bad" (Noiviller 108).

2

*On the Sabbath, Shifrah Puah and Masha prepared **cholent** and **kugl**. (90)*

cholent: a traditional Jewish stew, usually simmered overnight and eaten for lunch on the Sabbath

kugl: a baked casserole, most commonly made from egg noodles or potato, also usually served on the Sabbath; because work is forbidden on the Sabbath, these dishes would be prepared and cooked the day before

Shifrah Puah would often consult Herman on questions of dietary law: she had accidentally washed a dairy spoon together with a meat fork; tallow from a candle had dripped onto a tray; (90)

Meat and dairy may not be mixed according to Jewish dietary laws, and even implements used to handle each will be kept strictly separated in a kosher kitchen. Similarly, the tallow from the candles (made from animal fat) may not be kosher and so may not be acceptable to touch a serving tray.

the chicken had no gall. To this last question Herman remembered replying, "Taste the liver and see if it's bitter."

"Yes, it's bitter."

"If it's bitter, it's kosher." (90)

Here Singer has Herman provide the punchline to a well-known folk tale about a woman worried about whether a chicken she has prepared was kosher (since she could not find the gall bladder). Her rabbi suggests that if the gall bladder had broken while preparing the chicken, the meat would be bitter. Tasting the meat, however, he can find no bitterness, so he refers her to the Rabbinical Court. Before the judgment can be rendered there, however, the woman complains how bitter her life is-- how her children go hungry during the week and looked forward to a Sabbath meal that they now cannot enjoy. This is more than enough bitterness for the kindly rabbi who tells the woman, "If it is bitter, all is well ... Go home, woman. The chicken is kosher and you may eat it!" (Ben-Zvi 299-300).

*Herman was eating potatoes and **schav** (90)*

a cold soup of sorrel to which chopped egg, sour cream, lemon juice, and chopped scallions are sometimes added

The day seemed longer to Herman than any summer day he could recall. He remembered David Hume's words that there was no logical proof the sun would rise the following morning. In that case, neither was there a guarantee that the sun would set this day. (94)

David Hume (1711-1776): Scottish philosopher who taught that all knowledge was empirical and that we could be sure of nothing

3

"How? When a man hides in an attic for years, he ceases to be a part of society. The truth is that I'm still hiding in an attic right here in America You said so yourself the other day." (101)

from Kyeong Hwangbo's *Trauma, Narrative, and the Marginal Self in Selected Contemporary American Novels*:

At its fundamental level, the novel is about Holocaust survivors' experiences of radical deracination. For Herman, the Holocaust is a life-altering ordeal that marks his irreparable alienation from the world: "He had spent almost three years hiding in a hayloft. It was a gap in his life which could never be filled. . . .In his thoughts, Herman had often likened himself to the Talmudic sage, Choni Hamagol, who according to legend slept for seventy years and when he awoke found the world so strange that he prayed for death" (28).

For Herman, his experiences of disconnection and disempowerment are like a hard kernel or knot of trauma around which subsequent layers of wounds and pains cluster and gradually develop into a protective thick skin of detachment, deceit, and callousness. The tragic consequence is that it is very hard for him to break through the defensive wall he himself has set up around him, thus trapping him inside his own world of misery, loss, and exile, despite his longing for human contact and companionship. In this respect, he is different from other characters in Singer's novels such as Yasha Mazur in *The Magician of Lublin*, whose exile and detachment from society ultimately leads to transcendence and redemption. Herman's exile from human society is detrimental, for it leads to his alienation not only from other human beings but also from himself.

The nightmarish three years Herman spent hiding in a confined space in utter isolation from other human beings have brought a dramatic change in his perception of himself and the world, pushing him into an extreme pessimism. Although he survives the horror of confinement and alienation, the Holocaust puts Herman permanently off kilter. He thinks of himself as not deserving to live or his life as not worth living. Chastising himself in an extremely masochistic self-denigration and nihilism for "lacking the courage to commit suicide," Herman lives "like a worm" by managing to "shut his eyes, stop up his ears, close his mind" (19). Herman admits, "When a man hides in an attic for years, he ceases to be a part of society. The truth is that I'm still hiding in an attic right here in America" (101).

In other words, Herman's self-narrative is so broken by his traumatic withdrawal from society that the life he resumes after the Holocaust becomes only a variation and reenactment of his previous retreat from life. Thus, even after the war, the survival strategies of secrecy, disguise, and exile, which Herman originally employed under the Nazi rule, continue to determine his mode of living in a free world and prevent him from reestablishing himself securely by formulating trusting and loving bonds with others. As a result, his misanthropic detachment and pathological lies trap him in his own lonely world, which becomes an American version of his former hayloft. In an interesting way, Herman's disconnection from others is closely related to, and reinforces, the stasis in his life. His carefully crafted re-enactment of the past in his present life as an underground con man shows how traumatic events in life always leave their indelible marks by arresting the progression of their victims' self-narrative (102-104).

What shall I say if she does ring up? That I'm your sister? That's what Sarah said to Abimelech about Abraham. (103)

Genesis 20:1-7:

¹ Abraham journeyed from there to the region of the Negeb and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While he was sojourning in Gerar, ² Abraham said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.' So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, 'You are to die because of the woman that you have taken, for she is a married woman.' ⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. He said, 'O Lord, will You slay people even though innocent?' ⁵

He himself said to me, "She is my sister!" And she also said, "He is my brother." When I did this, my heart was blameless and my hands were clean.'⁶ And God said to him in the dream, 'I knew that you did this with a blameless heart, and so I kept you from sinning against Me. That was why I did not let you touch her.'⁷ Therefore, restore the man's wife-- since he is a prophet, he will intercede for you-- to save your life. If you fail to restore her, know that you shall die, you and all that are yours.

*Tamara had heard that the wife of the son of the **rebbitzin** of Old Dzikow was alive and was about to remarry. (104)*

the title used for the wife of a rabbi, more likely to be used with Orthodox or Hasidic Jewish groups

*But as a religious woman, she would need to be released from the obligation of **levirate marriage**. (104)*

a type of marriage in which the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow, and the widow is obliged to marry her deceased husband's brother (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10)

4

*She bought a **challah** and baked the special little Sabbath cakes. (105)*

a special Jewish braided bread eaten on Sabbath and holidays

Here in America she didn't have the right oven for making cholent, but a neighbor taught her to cover the gas burners with asbestos pads, so that the food would not burn and would stay hot through Saturday. (105)

The injunction against work on the Sabbath means that the stove cannot be lit on Saturday. Asbestos hot pads over the gas burner disperses and distributes the heat more evenly, allowing the fire to be turned down low to mimic the effects of a wood-burning stove, to allow it to heat the food for several hours without burning it.

But Herman the Jew ignored the Sabbath. He turned on the lights and shut them off, even though it was forbidden. (105)

The prohibition has to do with the injunction against kindling a fire (creating the electrical spark).

The latter was in praise of the virtuous wife, rarer than a pearl. (105)

cf. Proverbs 31:10-12

¹⁰ What a rare find is a capable wife!

Her worth is far beyond that of rubies.

¹¹ Her husband puts his confidence in her,
And lacks no good thing.

¹² She is good to him, never bad,
All the days of her life.

Once, he had translated for her a hymn about an apple orchard, a loving bridegroom, and a bride bedecked with jewelry. It described caresses that, according to Yadwiga, did not belong in a holy chant. Herman explained that the hymn was written by a cabalist known as the Holy Lion, a miracle worker to whom the prophet Elijah had revealed himself. The wedding of the song took place in the heavenly mansions. (106)

Herman refers to a Sabbath hymn by Isaac Luria (1534-1572), a Sephardic Jew who was the foremost rabbi and mystic in the Safed community in Ottoman Syria. The hymn reads in part:

I sing in hymns
to enter the gates,
of the field of apples
of holy ones.

A new table
we lay for her,
a beautiful candelabrum
sheds its light upon us.

Between right and left
the Bride approaches
in holy jewels
and festive garments.

Her husband embraces her
in her foundations,
gives her fulfillment,
squeezes out his strength.

Torment and cries
are past.
Now there are new faces
and souls and spirits.

(A Shabbat Reader 41)

5

*Herman and Masha took a bus to the **Adirondacks**. (110)*

mountain range and resort area in northeastern New York state

*He mused on how fantastic it was to be in America, in a free country,
without fear of Nazis, the **NKVD**, border guards, informers. (111)*

the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, a law enforcement agency of the Soviet Union that directly executed the rule of power of the All Union Communist Party; it was closely associated with the Soviet secret police

*Somewhere on this lovely summer morning, fowl were being slaughtered; **Treblinka** was everywhere. (112)*

a Nazi concentration camp in Poland

*She handed him a hard-boiled egg and he was suddenly reminded of the evening before **Tisha Ba'av**, the last meal before fasting, when one partakes of a hard-boiled egg sprinkled with ashes, a sign of mourning, a symbol that one's luck can roll like an egg and turn bad. (114)*

an annual day of fasting commemorating the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews from their homeland (Karesh and Hurvitz 154)

6

*He could swallow neither the chopped liver and onions, the **kreplach**, (116)*

small dumplings filled with ground meat, mashed potatoes or another filling, usually boiled and served in chicken soup

*Since his stay in Yadwiga's hayloft, in the **DP camp** in Germany and in the years of struggle in America, Herman had lost contact with this kind of modern Jewry. (116)*

Displaced Persons Camp. After the conclusion of the war, most Jewish refugees-- unlike more ordinary displaced persons (prisoners of war, forced laborers, etc.)-- did not have homes or communities to which they could return. Even if there was something left, however, the prospect of returning to live among those who were (to varying degrees) complicit in the extermination of former Jewish populations did not appeal to many. These camps, then, were set up to house the refugees until they could re-settle permanently or, more commonly, emigrate out of Europe altogether. By 1947, there were approximately 250,000 Jewish refugees living in DP camps in Germany, Italy, and Austria (Patt and Berkowiz 1-3).

7

Afterward they all gathered in the casino, a remodeled barn. The Yiddish poet gave a speech, lauding Stalin, and recited proletarian poetry. (120)

According to Marxist theory, the proletariat are the class of wage-earners (especially industrial workers) in a capitalist society whose only possession of significant value is their ability to work.

*An actor who had played in a Yiddish vaudeville theater in New York told bawdy jokes about a betrayed husband, whose wife had hidden a **Cossack** under her bed, (120)*

a Slavic people who lived on the steppes of Ukraine, known for their horsemanship

8

*Masha took a sleeping pill and fell asleep, but Herman remained awake. First he waged his usual war with the Nazis, bombed them with atomic bombs, blasted their armies with mysterious missiles, lifted their fleet out of the ocean and placed it on land near Hitler's villa in Berchtesgaden. Try as he might, he could not stop his thoughts. His mind worked like a machine out of control. He was again drinking that potion which enabled him to fathom time, space, "**the thing in itself.**" (123)*

called the noumenon, by German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), this is a posited object or event that is known (if at all) without the use of the senses, i.e., without experiencing it empirically

As long as one does not have the courage to leave this world, one can only hide and try to get by, with the help of alcohol, opium, a hayloft in Lipsk, or a small room at Shifrah Puh's. (123)

Compare this to Singer's words in interview:

I grew up in a house which was full of faith, and over the years my faith diminished. Today, I still believe in God. I still don't believe that the world was a physical or a chemical accident and that some cosmic *bomb* exploded and created the universe. I still believe that there was a plan and that there was more to it than some silly accident that happened twenty billion years ago [...] I cling in a way to this belief that there are higher powers, that there is a God. I can believe in God's wisdom but I cannot see His mercy. His mercy or His providence is more hidden in our times than ever (Singer and Burgin 161).

*"As long as there is no marriage certificate, no one can prove that we're man and wife. You can burn the **ketuba** right after the wedding ceremony." (125)*

the Jewish wedding contract, outlining the responsibilities of the groom in relation to the bride (Karesh and Hurvitz 270)

PART TWO

Chapter Five

1

*He was away the first day of **Rosh Hashanah** and half of the second. (129)*

the Jewish New Year and the first of the High Holy Days; usually occur in the early autumn of the Northern Hemisphere; it is a day of rest celebrating the creation of the Biblical Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, and is celebrated by eating symbolic foods (Karesh and Hurvitz 431)

*Now after only a few days with her, Herman was leaving again, to join not Masha but Tamara, who had rented a bungalow in the **Catskill Mountains**. (130)*

in southeastern New York state; as a resort area, it has long been a destination for vacationing urban Jews

*It was a lame excuse. Even **Reformed rabbis** did not hold conferences during the **Days of Awe**. (130)*

Reform Judaism holds that Jewish traditions should be modernized and made compatible with the broader culture; Jewish law, then, is interpreted much more liberally (or, in some cases, ignored altogether).

Yamim Nora'im (Days of Awe) is another name for the High Holy Days.

*He both planned his actions and improvised. The "Unconscious," as **von Hartmann** called it, never made a mistake. (131)*

Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906): German philosopher who taught that the Unconscious is both Will and Reason, but is defined primarily by the Will (and the latency of Reason)

*Herman had been interested in occultism even before the war. Here in New York, when he could spare the time, he would go to the public library on Forty-second Street and look up books on mind-reading, clairvoyance, **dybbuks**, poltergeists-- anything pertaining to parapsychology. (131)*

According to Ashkenazi Jewish folklore, a "dybbuk" is a dead soul that has returned to possess a living person (Pintel-Ginsberg 133). Quite a few of Singer's short stories are about dybbuks.

*Herman noticed that he had a **blue number tattooed on his arm**. (134)*

The waiter is a survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp (in Poland), as it was the only Nazi camp that tattooed numbers on the prisoners as a form of identification (Rees 65).

2

*Where was I on **Yom Kippur** in 1940? (136)*

the Day of Atonement and the holiest day in the Jewish calendar; it is marked by fasting and prayer; according to tradition, God seals the Book of Life on this day and thus confirms each person's fate for the upcoming year (Karesh and Hurvitz 566)

*But when evening came and I realized that somewhere Jews were reciting **Kol Nidre**, the food wouldn't go down. (136)*

the Aramaic declaration recited in the synagogue before the beginning of the evening service at the start of Yom Kippur (Karesh and Hurvitz 277)

4

*After reluctantly agreeing and twirling the hen above her head, uttering the prescribed prayers, Masha refused to take the fowl to the **ritual slaughterer**. (145)*

Kosher laws involve not only what is “fit” (the literal meaning of the Hebrew word), but also how it is prepared. Animals who are killed for food, must be slaughtered in accordance with Jewish law. In broad outlines, a ritual slaughterer (*shochet*) is one who prays over the animal, slices the animal quickly across the trachea (so as to avoid pain) with an unblemished knife (a *chalef*), drain all blood, and butcher the animal so that forbidden portions are discarded (Karesh and Hurvitz 267-268).

Chapter Six

1

*Herman had spent the first two days of **Succoth** with Masha and had returned for **Chol Hamoed**, the intermediary days, to his apartment in Brooklyn. (151)*

Succoth: more commonly transliterated as *Sukkot*, this is a harvest and pilgrimage festival that commemorates the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land; it occurs in late September to late October, five days after Yom Kippur (Karesh and Hurvitz 502)

Chol Hamoed: the intermediate period of the festivals of Sukkot and Passover

*He had eaten breakfast and was sitting at a table in the living room, working on a chapter of a book entitled **Jewish Life as Reflected in the Shulean Aruch and the Responsa**. (151)*

By the title, this will be a book about how Jewish law illuminates the way that Jews live.

He had talked to Masha just a half hour before and she had told him that she was going down to Tremont Avenue to shop for the remaining days of the holiday-- Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. (152)

Sukkot is celebrated for seven days; Shemini Atzeret (“eighth assembly”) occurs on the eighth day. It has become conflated with Simchai Torah (“Joy in the Torah”), and they are often celebrated on the same day (Karesh and Hurvitz 472, 481).

*“I’m in Flatbush. I know you live somewhere in Coney Island, and if it’s inconvenient for you to come to my place, then I’ll come to yours. What is the saying? **If Mohammed won’t come to the mountain, then the mountain must come to Mohammed.**” (154)*

i.e., if something cannot or will not happen the easy way, then sometimes it must be done the hard way. This expression is based on a tale that Muhammad once sought proof of his teachings by ordering a mountain to come to him. When it did not move, he maintained that God had been merciful, for if it had indeed moved they all would have been crushed by it.

"Everything has already happened," Herman thought. "The creation, the flood, Sodom, the giving of the Torah, the Hitler holocaust." (156)

Sodom: Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities destroyed by God for the sinfulness of their inhabitants (Genesis 18-19). Its association with homosexuality is extra-textual (and is particular to the Christian tradition). Jewish commentaries stress the sins that are actually described in Genesis: inhospitality, greed, unrestrained sexual appetite, and bloodshed.

the giving of the Torah: to Moses

Like the lean cows of Pharaoh's dream, the present had swallowed eternity, leaving no trace. (156)

Genesis 41:1-31:

¹ Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, ² when out of the Nile there came up seven cows, handsome and sturdy, and they grazed in the reed grass. ³ But presently, seven other cows came up from the Nile close behind them, ugly and gaunt, and stood beside the cows on the bank of the Nile; ⁴ and the ugly gaunt cows ate up the seven handsome sturdy cows. And Pharaoh awoke. [...] ¹⁴ Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was rushed from the dungeon. He had his hair cut and changed his clothes, and he appeared before Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream is to tell its meaning." [...] ²⁵ And Joseph said to Pharaoh, " [...] God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁶ The seven healthy cows are seven years [...] ²⁷ The seven lean and ugly cows that followed are seven years [...] of famine. [...] ²⁹ Immediately ahead are seven years of great abundance in all the land of Egypt. ³⁰ After them will come seven years of famine, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. As the land is ravaged by famine, ³¹ no trace of the abundance will be left in the land because of the famine thereafter, for it will be very severe.

2

*He had thick eyebrows and his brown eyes were slanted like a **Tartar's**. (156)*

a Turkic people living in Asia and Europe

"Sholom aleichem." (157)

Hebrew: "peace be upon you"

*As primitive as she is, she has the perceptiveness of a **Freud, Adler, and Jung** put together, (160)*

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Alfred Adler (1870-1937), and Carl Jung (1875-1961) were all pioneers in the field of psychology.

*I told her straight out that if she stopped wasting her talents on foolishness, she could be a second **Sarah Bernhardt**. (160)*

Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923): French stage and early film actress, extremely well-known across Europe and in the Americas

*You undoubtedly come from a religious home. Where else did you learn **Gemara**? (160)*

the component of the Talmud comprising rabbinical analysis of and commentary on the Mishnah (the first major written redaction of the Jewish oral traditions) (Karesh and Hurvitz 169)

*But I didn't want to take advantage of such privileges and went through the whole **Gehenna**. (161)*

after one's death, a place of spiritual torment or purification (Karesh and Hurvitz 168); Leon Tortshiner is using the term as one might describe going through Hell

*The atomic bomb would also have been ready years before it was if **Rockefeller** hadn't butted in. (164)*

John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937): founder of Standard Oil and billionaire. Leon Tortshiner's conspiracy theories and self-aggrandizing stories are not meant to be taken at face value.

3

*He had once again arrived at the same conclusion: if a Jew departed in so much as one step from the **Shulcan Aruch**, he found himself spiritually in the sphere of everything base-- Fascism, Bolshevism, murder, adultery, drunkenness. (170)*

The 16th century Shulchan Arakh, prepared by Joseph Caro, was a legal code redacted out of the complex debates contained within the Talmud. It has become the authoritative of the various Jewish codes of law (Karesh and Hurvitz 477).

*Behind this **Weltanschauung** festered deception and the principle of "might is right." (170)*

Worldview

*"Say **Hakaffoth**, not Kuffoth. Yes, I'll go with you. You'll have to go to the ritual bath too, if you want to become a Jewish woman." (171)*

hakafot, Hebrew for "to circle around;" in this context, on Simchat Torah, the custom is to take the Torah scrolls out of the Ark and to encircle the reader's platform and throughout the synagogue with singing and dancing (Karesh and Hurvitz 481)

The sinners in the Gemara stole and cheated solely so that Jews would have a lesson to learn-- so that Rashi could make a commentary, so that Tosafoth could write the great super-commentaries on Rashi; so that the learned teachers such as Reb Samuel Idlish, Reb Meir of Lublin, and Reb Shlomo Luria could seek even clearer answers and ferret out new subtleties and new insights. (173)

Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) (1040-1105): medieval French rabbi and Talmudic scholar; he produced a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud that are still included in most editions

Tosafoth: medieval commentaries on the Talmud, taking the form of critical and explanatory glosses that are printed on the outer margin and opposite Rashi's notes in almost all Talmud editions

Samuel Eliezer Halevi Edeles (1555–1631), Meir Lublin or Meir ben Gedalia (1558–1616), and Solomon Luria (1510–1573) were all famous rabbis and Talmudic scholars

Chapter Seven

1

*Herman thought about his boyhood: **Hanukkah**, the rendering of chicken fat for the coming Passover, playing games with a **dreidl** (175)*

Although a relatively minor Jewish holiday (that has grown in importance in the West due to its proximity to Christmas), it is thematically significant at this point in the novel. *Chanukah* means “dedication” in Hebrew, and it celebrates the re-dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem after it been taken by the Seleucid Greeks who had profaned it with idolatry (Karesh and Hurvitz 84). The *dreidl*, mentioned soon after, is a spinning top used to play a game associated with the holiday.

reading the weekly portion of the Torah which begins with “And Jacob dwelt in the land of his fathers.” (175)

Genesis 37:1

*She observed the laws of purification and **Kashruth**. (177)*

the Jewish dietary laws

Her neighbors confused her with their conflicting suggestions, often based on shtetl superstitions. (177)

Shtetls were small towns with large Jewish population which existed in Central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust.

*He didn’t go to synagogue, nor did he own a **prayer shawl** and **phylacteries**. (178)*

prayer shawl: a *tallit*, worn over clothes during the morning prayers and worn during all prayers on Yom Kippur (Karesh and Hurvitz 510)

phylacteries: *tefillin*, small boxes containing biblical verses on tiny pieces of parchment attached to leather straps that can be bound to ones arms or forehead; like the tallit it is worn during morning prayers by observant Jews (Karesh and Hurvitz 513)

*Must she die and have no **Kaddish**? (179)*

Kaddish are Aramaic prayers that feature in every Jewish worship service. Yadwiga is thinking of the Mourner’s Kaddish, recited at the end of service by those in mourning or remembering the anniversary of a loved one’s death (Karesh and Hurvitz 262-263).

“Szczerwa, cholera, lajdak, parch.” (181)

Yadwiga is swearing at him Polish, calling him a liar, excrement, a bastard, and a scab.

3

*“**Pani** Tamara, sit down. You frightened me and that’s the reason I screamed so. I’ll bring coffee. God is my witness that if I had known that you were alive I would have kept away from him.” (189)*

Yadwiga uses Polish honorific similar to “Mrs.” It is a marker of respect.

Chapter Eight

1

As long as the train ran aboveground, Herman looked out through a bit of window he had wiped clear of mist. Newspapers fluttered in the wind. A grocer was throwing salt on the sidewalks near his store. An automobile was trying to get out of a ditch, but its wheels spun helplessly in one spot. Herman was suddenly

reminded of his resolution to become a good Jew, to return to the Shulchan Aruch, the Gemara. How many times had he made such resolutions! How many times had he tried to spit in the face of worldliness, and each time been tricked away. Yet here he was on his way to a party. (213)

from Edward Alexander's *Isaac Bashevis Singer*.

Why is it that Herman's conversion, his penitent return to Judaism, is impermanent? Both the antecedents and the process of his conversion may be found in Singer's Eastern European Jews as well. But when Yasha Mazur returns to Judaism, or Eziel Babad to the Jewish people, there is no question of backsliding. The difference is that Yasha and Eziel lived in a world where Jews still had a culture and a language and an inner world of their own, one which could sustain waverers. American Jewry lacks such a world and culture, and therefore the medium which might support so unsteady a character as Herman Broder. His spiritual aspirations die for want of a nourishing atmosphere. Although he passes most of his time among Jews and makes his living ghostwriting sermons and essays for a rabbi, Herman does not live in a Jewish world (109).

2

*For the sake of something to do, he took a copy of **Plato's Dialogues** from the bookcase. (216)*

Plato (ca. 428 - ca. 348 BCE): Athenian philosopher and student of Socrates; he is a foundational figure in Western culture

Here it's Shevuot and people are swimming in Coney Island and there it's Shevuot and you shudder in an apartment without heat. (219)

Shavuot is an important Spring festival, one of the three pilgrimage festivals to Jerusalem in biblical times. It celebrates the anniversary of the day when God gave the law to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai (Karesh and Hurvitz 469).

*"He's as **drunk as Lot**," Masha muttered. (220)*

Genesis 19:30-38:

³⁰ Lot went up from Zoar and settled in the hill country with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; and he and his two daughters lived in a cave. ³¹ And the older one said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world. ³² Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father." ³³ That night they made their father drink wine, and the older one went in and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. ³⁴ The next day the older one said to the younger, "See, I lay with Father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go and lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father." ³⁵ That night also they made their father drink wine, and the younger one went and lay with him; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.

³⁶ Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father. ³⁷ The older one bore a son and named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. ³⁸ And the younger also bore a son, and she called him Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

3

*They asked me to play **Cuny Leml** while the union experts played cards as they watched. (222)*

the title character of *The Flying Matchmaker*, an 1880 Yiddish play by Abraham Goldfaden

Jewish ex-truck drivers go there with their **shiksehs**. (222)

non-Jewish girls; the Yiddish term is usually used as a slur

Masha waited. Then she said, "You wanted all this to happen. You planned it this way. I'll lock myself up with the old and sick people. Since there is no nunnery for Jewish women, that will be my nunnery-- until my mother dies. After that, I'll make an end to the whole comedy. Can I get you something? It's not your fault you were born a charlatan." (228)

from J. A. Eisenberg's "Passionate Primitive or Pious Puritan?":

One of the most striking aspects of Singer's writing [...] is his deep involvement with the sensual and passionate. On these subjects his writing reaches a pitch and force not equaled in other sections. In doing so Singer causes the reader to feel a certain sympathy with the corrupt and fallen. [...] Such evocative writing which often arouses our sympathies for the physical goals of man, does not necessarily mean that Singer is advocating lust, ambition or greed. One may passionately believe in certain ideals, yet not write passionately about them. Or may produce involved writing about activities and deeds for which one has no sympathy. Singer's emphasis on sensual excitement is simply meant to draw attention to certain aspects. It is not an attempt to convert the reader to some form of ethical hedonism. [...] The moral element in all of Singer's works is crucial. Evil, corruption, deception, truth and uprightness are the central themes. As singer uses them, they must be stated dramatically and vividly, or else their powerful emotional charge is not felt. Without this, the stories would lose an essential tension and probably fall flat (61-62).

*"But she told me that from Europe she sent an announcement to the 'Joint' or **Hias** to be printed in the newspapers here. You probably don't read the papers?"* (230)

refugee resettlement agency in the U.S. (originally founded in 1881 to resettle Jews from Europe fleeing pogroms)

4

Herman, left alone, sat with his head bowed. He had noticed a copy of the Bible on the shelf near his chair and he leaned over and took it out. He leafed through the pages and found Psalms: "Be gracious unto me, O Lord, for I am in distress. Mine eye wasteth away with vexation, yea, my soul and my body. For my life is spent in sorrow, and my years in sighing. My strength faileth because of mine iniquity and my bones are wasted away. Because of mine adversaries, I am become a reproach, yea, unto my neighbors exceedingly, and a dread to mine acquaintances." (231)

Psalm 31

6

*The entire people should squat on low stools and read from the **Book of Job**.* (239)

In this poetic book, Job is a righteous man who is tested by God to see if his piety is a result of his blessings. He loses his wealth, and health, and family. When Job confronts him about his misery, God refuses to justify himself, and Job can only confess his ignorance of divine justice and beg for mercy. In the end, God restores the blessings he had taken away from Job.

Chapter Nine

1

*Before Passover, Tamara had stocked up on **Haggadahs**, seder trays, matzo covers, skullcaps of all styles and colors, even candles and matzo plates. (246)*

a Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder

Abraham had pretended that Sarah was his sister. (247)

Genesis 12:10-13; Abraham tells the lie to King Abimelech while traveling in a strange land, fearful to reveal his true identity

*He was deceiving not only Abimelech but **Sarah** and **Hagar** as well. (248)*

in Genesis, Abraham's wife and consort respectively

*He raised his wineglass and poured off ten drops to indicate the **ten plagues** visited on Pharaoh. (248)*

in the biblical story, the impetus for Pharaoh to let Moses and the Israelite slaves depart from Egypt to the Promised Land (Exodus 7-11)

2

*If Abraham could sacrifice **Isaac**, you can sacrifice **Esau**. (252)*

Isaac: God command Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac as a test of faith. Abraham is willing to make the sacrifice, but God provides a lamb for the sacrifice instead (Genesis 22)

Esau: Esau is the first born of Isaac. His younger brother Jacob tricks Isaac on his deathbed into giving Jacob the birthright blessing that was due the first born, becoming the spiritual heir to his father in place of Esau (Genesis 27).

4

*"Stop it! You make yourself sound worse than you are. A woman can drive a man insane. While we were fleeing from the Nazis, a man prominent in the Poalay Zion stole his best friend's wife. Later we were all forced to sleep in one room, about thirty people, and she had the **chutzpa** to lie with her lover two steps away from her husband. All three are dead now. Where are you planning to go? God has granted you a child after all this destruction-- isn't that enough?" (260)*

Yiddish for "shameless audacity"

In the Bible it says, 'Naked I came out of my mother's womb and naked will I return there.' (261)

Job 1:21

Chapter Ten

1

Back to Zeno's paradoxes! (269)

Zeno of Elea (ca. 490 - ca. 430 BCE): pre-Socratic Greek philosopher most famous for his paradoxes that illuminated questions about the natural world

2

"We're not Jews any more and I can't stay here any longer." (274)

from Alan Berger's *Crisis and Covenant: The Holocaust in American Jewish Fiction*:

Herman cannot dismiss completely either the God idea or Jewish rites. Masha, for her part, when speaking of German cruelty to the Jews, 'would run to the mezuzah on the door and spit on it.' The attempt to live as *apikorsim* (unbelievers) proves finally unbearable for Herman and Masha. Those who do manage to achieve a qualified form of transcendence do so by clinging to *ahavat Yisrael*, love and dedication to the Jewish people, thereby adhering to Hillel's ancient admonition, 'separate yourself not from the community.' Herman Broder violated this precept. Certain characters in *Enemies* who otherwise possess little or no moral stature, such as Rabbi Lampert and Leon Tortshiner (Masha's first husband), share Tamara's commitment to *ahavat Yisrael*. Quarrelling with, or even denying, God does not grant license for hedonism or for ignoring one's communal obligations. The classical triad of God, Torah, and community may have been, as Rubenstein argues, irrevocably truncated by the Holocaust. But an absent God leaves Jews who wish to remain Jewish with the compelling necessity of embracing their tradition of study and community.

Epilogue

The night before Shevuot, Yadviga gave birth to a daughter. (279)

from Edward Alexander's *Isaac Bashevis Singer*:

Only Yadviga the non-Jew is capable of recognizing that the preservation of the Jewish people after Auschwitz has not merely a Jewish but a universal human significance as an affirmation that no member of the family of nations shall be removed from the world to satisfy the blood-lust of another member. The simple yet profound recognition makes her unique among the characters of the novel and makes the birth of her daughter on 'the night before Shevout' the single sign of hope that the plague of death will not spread from Europe to America.

And Tamara had replied, "Perhaps, in the next world to Herman." (280)

from Kyeong Hwangbo's *Trauma, Narrative, and the Marginal Self in Selected Contemporary American Novels*:

The novel concludes with Tamar's final wish to marry Herman in the next world. Actually, although Tamara's final remark is hard to understand and leaves lots of room for different interpretations, in many ways it puts the entire novel in perspective. Her remark might be easily interpreted as a sign of a grief-stricken wife's unshaken devotion and loyalty. However, in light of Herman's repeated deceptive and unfaithful behaviors that have clearly proved his incompetence as father and husband, her wish seems to take on a rather obsessive character. Frances Vargas Gibbon interprets Tamara's last hope as a "threat" and asserts that she is "the worst enemy an escapist like Herman can have." Even after his disappearance and in the hypothetical world of imagination, Herman is not free from Tamara's tenacious grip. Additionally, her wish to marry Herman again in the next world darkens, to a considerable extent, the prospect of hope and regeneration that comes with the birth of Yadviga's daughter.

Yet, in a sense, it is both ironic and understandable that Tamara, the personification of the

never-healing traumatic wound, has such an obsessive loyalty and attachment to the one person with whom she shares her unforgettably painful past. To symbolically interpret Tamara's final remark from the standpoint of those who want a respite from the harrowing pain of their trauma, her tenacity may illustrate how difficult it is to escape from the persistent and steadfast grip of their past memories and pains. To approach it from a different angle, however, her remark also poignantly sheds light on a sad psychic truth of those who cannot let go of their traumatic past. For survivors of the Holocaust, who have lost everything they had, their past, tragic as it is, might be the only thing left, and they might want to cling to it desperately. For Tamara, Herman is the only person who connects her to the past that has been totally annihilated without a trace. As she does not want to part with the Nazi bullet stuck in her body because it reminds her of the fact that she once had a family, for the same reason, she *has* to stay connected to Herman even in the next world. Her seemingly perplexing wish to be married again to Herman betrays the poignant, desperately earnest wishes of survivors to reverse the time and recapture the essence of their destroyed lives.

Obviously, the birth of little Masha suggests a possibility that the past wound may heal and there will be a regenerated hope for the future. The birth of this baby in the midst of betrayal, separation, and death brings a sense of wonder and disbelief. Like a fresh wind entering a suffocating, enclosed place, it offsets and dispels the aura of the uncanny that weighs down on all the survivors of the Holocaust in Singer's work. The ending of the novel indicates the possibility of imagining a horizon beyond the survivors' grief-stricken and guilt-ridden lives. In this connection, Lawrence S. Friedman astutely notes that little Masha is born on the night before Shevuot, a traditional Jewish holiday commemorating God's giving the Torah to Israel on Mount Sinai and celebrating the first offering of the harvest to God. Thus, arguing that little Marsha's birth is the "promise of Jewish continuity" and "reaffirms the covenant with God that Herman had broken," Friedman claims, "Named after Masha, the baby is the symbolic linchpin binding the Jewish past to the Jewish future" (128-130).

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