

26. Lacan, "Discours de Rome" p.62.

27. Many of Singer's protagonists have this Janus-like characteristic of the gaze. The central character of "A Party in Miami Beach" presents us with a typical example of the scopic split: "Max Flederbusch tried to smile. One eye laughed, the other cried" (OL88), while another man, described in "A Friend of Kafka" exhibits the scopic intensity of a cyclops: "One eye was larger than the other - red, bulging, frightened by its own vision" (FK17). And the title character of "The Letter Writer" compensates with the ferocity of his glance for the decrepitude of his flesh: "The remaining strength in Herman Combiner's body - a body worn out by illnesses and undernourishment - seemed to be concentrated in his gaze" (S209).

28. Steiner, Extra-territorial p.81.

29. Martin Stanton, Outside the Dream (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) p.30.

The full quotation reads as follows:

"Words represented the repressed. They stood in place of, they indicated something else, they displaced, condensed, split or denied." Moreover, according to Freud in his paper "The Unconscious," On Metapsychology, words are the token, the mark of mental disease, as in this statement on the aetiology of schizophrenia:

If we ask ourselves what it is that gives the character of strangeness to the substitutive formation and the symptom in schizophrenia, we eventually come to realise that it is the predominance of what has to do with words over what has to do with things.
(On Metapsychology p. 206).

30. Forrester, Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis p.162.

The concept of the speaking symptom alluded to here must be aligned with the notion of meaning which circulates and which may be constrained only through the limitations of the speaker. In other words, the idea already discussed that whoever is able to limit meaning most stringently is most powerful.

31. Harold Bloom, Deconstruction and Criticism (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979) p.1.

Bloom explains the process whereby form is shattered, thus:

The word form goes back to a root meaning 'to gleam' or 'to sparkle', but in a poem it is not form itself

that gleams or sparkles. I will try to show that the lustre of poetic meaning comes rather from the breaking apart of form, from the shattering of a vision or gleam.

32. Certainly the poet and his exploits initiate the spoken word, precipitating speech, as it were, for we are told that: "When the writers in the Yiddish Writers Club in Warsaw tired of discussing literature and reviling one another, it was enough to mention the name Getzele Tertziwer to revive the conversation" (p.179).
33. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (London: Citadel, 1956)
34. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.103.
35. Jan Kott, The Eating of the Gods (London: Methuen, 1974). "Omaphagia" is the tearing apart of the gods (as in the myth of Dionysus - Orpheus) and "sparagmos" is the ritual alimentary assimilation of these deities (as in the practice of the eucharist).

In his book Sade Fourier Lovola (London: Jonathon Cape, 1977), Barthes explicitly aligns language and dismemberment:

Being analytical, language can come to grips with the body only if it cuts it up; the total body is outside language, only pieces of the body succeed to writing; in order to make a body mean, it must either be displaced, refracted through the metonymy of clothing, or reduced to one of its parts.
(Barthes's emphasis, p. 127)

Although Barthes and Kott are working on entirely different subjects from entirely different perspectives, it is interesting to notice the predominance that each gives to fragmentation, whether in the context of Greek tragedy (Kott) or language (Barthes). As will be seen many of the protagonists of the tales which follow, succeed to language only to be irreparably divided in it.

36. Indeed, Taloveh is famed for her curses, and we are told that once when Bendit fell ill she went to the synagogue, approached the Holy Ark, and addressed the Almighty as follows:

'Couldn't you find anyone to strike but Bendit ?
He must feed a wife and six worms. Father in Heaven it's better you plague the rich.' She began to name all the community leaders of Malopol. She advised God whom to give a boil on his side, a swelling on his rear, a burning of his insides. Fulcha, the beadle had to drag her away from the scrolls. FK202

37. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.50.
38. Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization (London: Tavistock Publications, 1985) p.94.
39. The entire tale categorically proposes that divergence be retributively punished by disintegration, so that when a striker, wanting to depose the tsar throws a bomb into a barracks, the ensuing "explosion" constitutes a punitive act of retrogressive castigation, as, eliding the soldiers it fixes upon the rebel: "The bomb didn't explode, but the one who threw it was torn to shreds by the Cossacks' spears" (FK206).
40. Lacan, Ecrits p.11.
41. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.59.

For the true formula of atheism is not God is dead - even by basing the origin of the function of the father upon his murder, Freud protects the Father - the true formula of atheism is God is unconscious (Lacan's emphasis).
42. John Irwin, Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975) p.9.

Another example of a compulsive narrator is the example alluded to by Barthes in S/Z (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975) where Sheherazade, the raconteur of The One Thousand and One Nights tells tales to prolong her life. Her narrative therefore exists as sacrifice, the only means by which death may be averted.
43. Susan Sontag, Illness as Metaphor (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978) p.44.

SECTION FOUR

THE INSISTENCE OF THE LETTER IN THE UNCONSCIOUS.

Itself a Cabbalistic book, the night was crowded with sacred names and symbols - mystery upon mystery. In the distance where sky and earth merged, lightning flashed but no thunder followed. The stars looked like letters of the alphabet, vowel points, notes of music. Sparks flickered above the bare furrows. The world was parchment scrawled with words and song.

I.B. Singer

The Slave

The two stories analysed in this section represent an attempt to explain and textually elucidate Lacan's oft-quoted, much touted axiomatic belief that, "...what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language."¹ Shoshana Felman has explained this dictum as an attempt to situate the textual movement of the letter which is necessarily displaced yet insistent, within the simulacrum of the signifying chain:

[It is] an analysis of the unconscious (the repressed) not as hidden but on the contrary as exposed - in language - through a significant (rhetorical) displacement (Felman's emphasis).²

Lacan's pivotal assertion that the unconscious is structured as a language deserves further discussion. Whilst Freud assumed that the unconscious existed prior to language, Lacan propounds the simultaneity of their existence. Because language is constituted at the moment of primal consciousness, when the subject first pronounces the "I" of the mirror stage, the word

both as it is spoken and as it is written must ever after fall under the dominion of the unconscious. Not only may the unconscious be said to be structured like a language, but it composes both process and product of discourse.

At the most basic level this assumes that the grammatical structures of a language must similarly rule the syntax of the unconscious, and it is this analogy that enables Lacan to apply the terms metaphor and metonymy to the unconscious. Of course language transcends man insofar as it obeys rules and conditions which are not in the control of the individual user. Similarly, for Lacan, the unconscious forges its hold on the subject's consciousness to partake of an existence autonomous and anarchic.

The result of this tortuous intercession of language and the unconscious is described by Lacan as the possession of the subject by the convoluted structures of language and its counterparts in the realm of the unconscious. It is the letter that insists, the word that is agency, and man is merely constituted by their effects, structured as in these two tales by the imperatives of language and the unconscious. Both the narratives that follow concern pious men, men who remain stalwart to the last and who follow the intricacies of their Law to the letter. And nowhere is language more insistent, nowhere does the unconscious speak more lucidly than here, in the lineaments and letters of the Law.

"The Last Demon," harnesses the Kabbalistic concept of *tzimtzum*,³ the deliberate location of evil in the world,

to creation, the invocation of the Word. This allows us to glimpse the exposure of the letter at that erotic moment in language when text becomes flesh. The transformation is in this case literal, as the angry black demon contracts to an incision, a stark point on a blank page.

"The Little Shoemakers" on the other hand, is an allegorical tapestry of hidden letters and secret acronyms which exposed, bespeak a chronicle of the New World, and the resurgence of kinship bonds after abrupt severance and long separation. Through both these tales, the letter insists, urgent and vigorous, inserting itself with phallic persistence in the apertures of the narrative.

4.1. "The Last Demon" (SF)

It is known that the evil one has no body, and works mainly through the power of speech. Do not lend him a mouth - that is the way to conquer him. Take, for example, Balaam, the son of Beor. He wanted to curse the children of Israel but forced himself to bless them instead, and because of this his name is mentioned in the Bible. When one doesn't lend the evil one a tongue, he must remain mute.

"A Piece of Advice" (SMS)

Of course, as it is said, the letter killeth while the spirit giveth life.

Jacques Lacan

Ecrits

⁵
Sanford Pinsker, writing within the context of the rigid hierarchy of a patriarchal culture conceives of the devil as a manifestation of a people's collective guilt randomly organised

about the fulcrum of the law. This is a justifiably apt viewpoint, particularly when considered with regard to the present tale of demonic possession, triumphantly vanquished by the letter of the law. More than this however, the fiction bespeaks a literal existential reliance on the letter by the only remaining demon ("I am the last, a refugee" SF111), who vows to destroy a pious rabbi through speech of which he is the master. Destroyed by religious texts and imprisoned within the pages of an alphabet book, his predicament is no less urgent because it is temporary and finite:

When the last letter is gone,
The last of the demons is done. SF112

It is a time when great evil prevails, the generation we are told is already guilty "seven times over" (SF111) and still the Messiah prevaricates. In the words of the final despairing song of the Hebrew alphabet, ignorance, death and destruction reign on earth while the third letter, 'Geemel, God pretending he know'(SF111), represents what Lacan has called the cipher, the subject who is supposed to know, and who refuses knowledge, to rule only over the abyss and the shadow. Into this milieu the narrator enters, the chronicle begins: "I, a demon, bear witness that there are no more demons left" (SF103). And the subject, with these opening words, is instantly elided, lost within the rococo scallops of a baroque discourse. What can this elliptical statement mean but that the "I" in the text does not exist beyond the text. "The Last of the Demons" is thus the only receptacle for this the last demon, bound and fettered to the auguries of the

letter. With metaphysical éclat the demon forces a reckoning that is comparable in daring and ingenuity to Shakespeare's startling couplet in Sonnet 18:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

Lemaire relates this phenomenon to the inevitable condition of a language which in seeking to name the unrepresentable finds itself representing the un-nameable:

Just as it has been said that the word brings about the murder of the thing, and that the thing must be lost if it is to be represented, so the subject loses himself in his truth or his reality by naming himself in his discourse and by being named by the speech of the other. ⁶

"I am the last of the persuaders" (SF103) says the demon ⁷ saugly, and yet, soon after this he speaks of the many Yiddish and Hebrew writers who have taken over the "trade":

We grow hoarse talking to every adolescent, but they print their kitsch by the thousands and distribute it to Jews everywhere. They know all our tricks - mockery, piety. SF105

It would seem then, that language, the raucous utterance of unconscious thought, is the sole agent of persuasion, dissociating what Orlando ⁸ has called the letter and the spirit, and placing the former above the latter in a conjunction that emphasises the effects of the signifier far beyond the meaning of the signified. ⁹ Hence, the demon's first person narrative couched as it is in the immediacy of the moment ("I speak in the present tense as for me time stands still" SF103), constitutes a metaphorical enactment of the effects of language or more particularly of the letter, cauterised by the moral dictates of a religious conscience.

If the subject of the tale is language then the narrative chronicles to a large extent the transmutation of imp into ink. Martin Thom¹⁰ speaks of "the insistence of the letter" as that which emphasises the unconscious causing it to be foregrounded like a brand upon the subject's flesh. The demon who at the beginning of the tale draws sustenance from a Yiddish book: "The stories in the book are pabulum and duck milk, but the Hebrew letters have a weight of their own" (SF103), lives out his old age, sole semitic survivor of the Polish scourge within the pages of another storybook: "But nevertheless the letters are Jewish. The alphabet they could not squander. I suck on the letters and feed myself" (SF111). The demon suckles upon the writing but the alphabet is indestructible: the letter insists. In Tishevitz, a town where "even iron weathercocks die" (SF103), the letter insists, urges and impels, so that the demon exclaims in wonder: "Don't ask me how I managed to get to this smallest letter in the smallest of all prayer books" (SF103).¹¹

The demon speaks of removing Tishevitz from the devilish files as if the annihilation of the letter would as a matter of inevitability mean the dissolution of the town. This view finds resonance in the final pages where the scourge of Tishevitz centres about the burning of the holy books: "The Book of Creation has been returned to the Creator" (SF111). The town that has lived out its time as ideogram, as currency, becomes in its dying days nothing less than a hieroglyphic inscription, an ancient rune inaccessible and untranslated.

In The Greater Holy Assembly of the Kabbalah, the letter and the law are described as a single, symbiotic unit, as "the law - that is, the letters of the alphabet, from whose transposition the law was formed".¹² The righteous and holy rabbi of Tishevit, as supreme arbiter of the law must consequently be well versed in the letter. Surrounded as he is by the multiple and various letters of the law, what the demon calls "the usual paraphernalia" (SF106), holy books, the ancient scrolls of the ark, and a mezuzah, and saturated with learning ("he's absolutely stuffed with knowledge, knows the thirty-six tractates of the Talmud by heart" SF105), the good rabbi responds to demonic speech as can be expected with a determined and consuming application of the self to the written word:

"He takes his ear lobes and closes his ears. I keep on talking but he doesn't listen; he becomes absorbed in a difficult passage and there's no longer anyone to speak to." SF107

Against the seductive temptations of the demon is raised the monolithic bulwark of the law, in its minute attention to the letter as in the pious gestures of Talmudic exegesis, a process that Steiner in his fascinating essay "Language and Psychoanalysis" has called, "the Judaic assumption of the spirit hidden and instrumental in the letter."¹³

The demon who calls himself "the master of speech" (SF110) understands the attributes of the word as talisman, the letter as charm, and consequently seeks diligently to profane and pollute the very language that forms the substratum of the holy man's faith. He addresses the rabbi thus:

I come from Lublin where the streets are paved with
exegeses of the Talmud. We use manuscripts to heat our
ovens. The floors of our attics sag under the weight
of Cabala. SF108

When the rabbi asks for a sign of his good faith the demon calls
up a blasphemous wind that billows the curtain of the Holy
Scroll, turns the pages of the Gemara and blows the parchment
of the erudite commentary off the table. And the good rabbi, poor
man, he whose "soul yearns for Torah" (SF110) has only to close
the cover of the book, to lose all eternity. Fortunately
however, the rabbi of Tishevitz, man of the law that he is, and
well schooled in the ancient, anecdotal lore of his forefathers,
asks instead to see the demon's feet, to view that part of his
body that must ever remain as a visible sign of his abject and
cloven condition:

The moment the rabbi of Tishevitz speaks these words, I
know everything is lost...For the first time in a thousand
years, I, the master of speech, lost my tongue. SF110

Thus, the demonic corruptor of speech is quartered by the purity
of the word and the weight of the book: "What devil can withstand
the Book of Creation ? I run from the rabbi's study with my
spirit in pieces" (SF110).

Banished piece-meal from the holy community, fragmented and
dispersed by a language turned betrayer which stands to bear
witness against him, the last of the demons imprisoned in the
letter, comes to understand the totemism of a religion centred
about the gift of the word. It is a most precious and welcome
gift, but like all offerings it involves responsibility and
all the accoutrements of obligation and reciprocity outlined

in this passage from "Three Encounters" (P):

No word goes astray. Evil words lead to iniquitous deeds, utterings of slander, mockery and profanity turn into demons, hobgoblins, isps. They stand as accusers before God, and when the transgressor dies they run after his hearse and accompany him to the grave. P242

4.2. "The Little Shoemakers" (GP)

You know better than I do that the cabala is based on combinations of letters. When you combine two things that never existed together before, they begin a new existence and perhaps the spheres become enriched from this.

"Her Son" (CF)

I am not a poet, but a poem. A poem that is being written, even if it looks like a subject.

Jacques Lacan

The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis

Whereas the last of the demons is, in the final analysis, constrained within the harsh contour of a racked and plundered language, the seven little shoemakers who feature in the present tale are eventually consecrated by the munificence of the letter. The little shoemakers of Frampol, sons to Abba Shuster, leave their village one by one to reach the haven of America, where after a generation of wealth and assimilation they once again congregate to ply their trade and honour their father. The narrative is constructed about the tripartite repetition of a kinship ritual, what I have called the song of the hidden letters, a liturgy that bespeaks the structural triad of generation, dispersal and final reintegration, and which is

enacted at the level of the unconscious.

The first episode of the narrative, "The Shoemakers and Their Family Tree" establishes a genealogy of the name that begins with the totemic¹⁴ appellation of the venerable "founder of the line" (GF80), Abba Shuster: "The name of Abba Shuster is recorded, on parchment, in the annals of the Frampol Jewish community" (GF80). Inscribed upon parchment, consecrated in memory and marked by a graveside tree ("According to the old wives, the tree sprang from Reb Abba's beard" GF81), the family name becomes a crux of significance, a structural knot that intercedes at the very moment of their dispersal.¹⁵

The shoemaker's art, handed down secretly through the generations not only forges enduring links between fathers and sons, but arches across the centuries to connect kinship lines, so that the present Abba Shuster may console himself with the thought that from him to the Patriarchs there stretched "an unbroken chain of generations - as if he too were part of the Bible" (GF83).¹⁶

We are told that all the shoemakers resembled one another so that when the old man, bewildered and disoriented arrives on the shores of the new country, he finds to his dismay that "no matter how often his sons spoke to him, he still could not tell them apart" (GF102). It is important to emphasise the interchangeable nature of the little shoemakers, for their significance lies directly in a sense of cumulative generation and diffused identity, summed up by Lacan's pivotal avowal in the "Discours de Rome": "I identify myself in Language, but only by losing myself

in it like an object." ¹⁷

The house in which they live, warped and shingled, bow-legged, sloping and crumbed with mushrooms and swallow's nests, rises above the action to constitute a polysemous, architectural index to their collective fortunes. Firstly, it provides a lateral diachronic cross-section of past generations, embalmed as it were in the peeling sections of wall paint:

When one layer of paint peeled off the wall, another of a different colour, was exposed; and behind this layer, still another. The walls were like an album in which the fortunes of the family had been recorded. GP87

Secondly, the house survives all misfortune, whether of fire, decay or desertion, and in so doing becomes a fungal memorial, a petrified family tree crystallising and preserving mortality within its living tissue.

The seven sons of Abba (in the name of the Father), his seven apprentice shoemakers, all of whom are named after an ancient forefather, and thus, in Freudian terminology, are consecrated as revenants, ¹⁸ become in their melodic entirety nothing more nor less than "objects lost in language," as when in familial harmony, they sing an old Frampol tune, the Kabbalistic song of the hidden letters:

'A mother had
Ten little boys,
Oh, Lord, ten little boys!

The first one was Avrenele,
The second one was Berela,
The third one was called Gimpele,
The fourth one was called David'l,
The fifth one was called Hershele ...' GP86

The story goes that once on Kol Mide night a pious, if unlearned

man, prayed in the synagogue simply by reciting the alphabet over and over again. When asked what the content of his prayer signified, the man replied that since his heart was full and his soul overflowing he knew not the words to praise God nor ask his forgiveness, therefore he offered up to his Lord the entirety of the alphabet, by means of which God Himself could construct the most supreme prayer. Each son constitutes a letter in a K-abba-istic text, the first one is "aleph," the second "beth," the third "gimmel," the fourth "dalei" and the fifth "hay." And the whole is a prayer offered up to a communal spirit of kinship and fraternity.

In the third episode, Gimpel emigrates to America, followed in close succession by his five brothers. The family tree once green and pleasant now hacked and wrenched, lies prone, metaphorically blasted by the family's dispersal. This iconic image finds a literal echo in the scene of destitution with which the next episode opens almost forty years later:

The house on the hill was nearly in ruins. The beams had rotted away, and the roof had to be supported by stone posts ... The pear tree in the garden had withered; the trunk and branches were covered with scales. GF93

And the song of course has similarly altered. Now, the father alone at his work bench sings in a hoarse voice the old shoemaker's ballad, a phantasy of the fragmented body:

'A mother bought a billygoat,
The schochet killed the billygoat,
Oh, Lord, the billygoat!

Avramela took its ears,
Berele took its lung,
Gimpele took the gullet,
And David'l took the tongue,
Hershele took the neck ...' GF94

In an orgy of palliative and displaced vengeance, Abba Shuster the patriarch conjures up a scene of ritual omaphagia followed by the demonic rites of sparagmos, as enacted upon Billy-the-scapegoat. Once again the letters insist in a Lacanian dimension of the unconscious in which, to quote the maestro's pivotal dictum: "the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language,"¹⁹

In part compensation for this bloody and vengeful vision, Abba Shuster subsequently imagines the coming of the Messiah, the opening of the graves and the reunion of the living with the dead. It is assuredly a phantasy of consuming reintegration, where not only do his seven lost sons return, but all the dead branches of the pliant family tree quicken into resurrected life and the whole town of Frampol with all the Jewish homes intact is lifted into a cloud and transported precipitately to the Holy Land: "'As long as we're all together!'" (GF95), he joyfully tells his once dead wife. Even the torn and tumbling house, supple index to a past of bounty and an arid present, once again expands to accommodate his phantasy: "Even though the house is as small as ever, it has miraculously grown roomy enough, like the hide of a deer, as it is written in the Book" (GF96). This vision of plenty, of the little shoemakers dressed in flowing silks and satins, rejoicing in Jerusalem and drinking the wine of paradise is particularly vivid when we consider that this is the hour of the sack of Frampol, of the gutting of the family house and the burning of the community books, and the stumbling

reiteration of midnight prayers on Kol Nidre, "recited in fragments." (GF97)

And still the letter insists, burning most brightly, most vigorously at the moment of its erasure:

Abba turned about and saw the shelf of sacred books go up in flames. The blackened pages turned in the air, glowing with fiery letters like the Torah given to the Jews on Mount Sinai. GF97

At this point, Abba crosses the ocean to America and, like Gimpel the fool before him, the tumult and clamour of his wanderings become transmuted in the sanctified realms of literary artifice:

From that day on, Abba's life was transformed beyond recognition - it was like a story he had read in the Bible, a fantastic tale heard from the lips of a visiting preacher. GF97

Abba, the Patriarch, "unequalled in Frampol as a man of his word" (GF82) becomes within the course of the tale, all the men of the Holy Book, seeing himself in the image of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of the characters of Joseph, Noah and the prophet Jonah. This motif of biblical displacement reaches its climax in the phrase "forgive us, Father!" GF99

Harold Bloom has described the Kabbalistic topos as that in which catastrophe is transformed into true creation, and this provides a valid judgment of the present fiction, where the violent trauma of war and separation yield in the last lines to a new song, a new and healing harmony of the letter, begun long ago in childhood Poland, and now completed in the New World:

'A mother had
Ten little boys,
Oh, Lord, ten little boys!

The sixth one was called Velvel,
The seventh one was Zeinvel,

reiteration of midnight prayers on Kol Nidre, "recited in fragments." (GF97)

And still the letter insists, burning most brightly, most vigorously at the moment of its erasure:

Abba turned about and saw the shelf of sacred books go up in flames. The blackened pages turned in the air, glowing with fiery letters like the Torah given to the Jews on Mount Sinai. GF97

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'A mother had
Ten little boys,
Oh, Lord, ten little boys!

The sixth one was called Velvele,
The seventh one was Zeinvele,

The eighth one was called Chenele,
The ninth one was called Tevele,
The tenth one was Judele 21

And, as the seven sons hasten to join in with the chorus, "Oh, Lord, Judele!" there is that sense of textuality, of the word turned suddenly flesh that Barthes has rather supremely called *jouissance*:

...the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language ... it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss. 22

4.3. Full Circle

From the child called fool, who reconstructs his future as lived legend, to the seven sons of Abba, who weave their collective mythologies into an undivided past, we have come full circle. All are children of the word and of the law, and all:

Still dream of that ceremony of the Torah, of arranging there all the bits of their lives, (and) dream of an all-encompassing Scripture, a Writing that weaves together the fragments of reality and simultaneously disseminates endless new meanings through its interpreter sons. 23

This displacement of the text, from the sacrosanct enclosure of the Ark to the infinite arches of autobiography is a specific characteristic of Hebraic lore. The children of a God, at once unknown and unappeased, seek through the intermediary of the word a knowledge of the Father as truth behind the veil, that which is always other and hidden and which by its very masked nature constitutes the subject as self-revealed. It is undeniable that the act of writing distances and displaces the subject from his

deity, yet how else may we approach a God who has invoked through
the spoken word, the world, all writing and all flesh.

REFERENCES TO SECTION FOUR

1. Lacan, Scritta p.147.
2. "On Reading Poetry: Reflections on the Limits and Possibilities of Psychoanalytic Approaches," ed. J.H. Smith The Literary Fraud (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) p.140.
3. Tzimtzum is an act of creation which combines both the elements of good and the constructs of evil:

Creation, like a painting by an artist, must have both lights and shadows. These shadows are the source of all evil and the powers that hold creation together. When God created the world He had to create evil.

Cited in Clive Sinclair, The Brothers Singer (London: Allison and Busby, 1983) p.45.

4. In Writing and Difference, Jacques Derrida distinguishes between two dimensions of the letter, that of allegory and of literality. "The Last Demon" is constructed as a literal obedience to the insistence of the letter, whilst "The Little Shoemakers" exists unquestionably as an allegory of the letter.
5. Pinsker, The Shlemiel as Metaphor p.62. However, the rigidity of the Law creates its own dybbuks and, for Singer, the devil is a very operative literary figure who represents the collective consciousness of a people bound on all sides by a homogeneous value structure of their own creation.

Whilst in this tale the demon is recognised and exorcised it is interesting to notice in this context the numerous examples in Singer's tales of individuals who do not recognise Satan in his many disguises. Tales like "The Witch" (P), "Taibale and Her Demon" (SF), "The Sorcerer" (P) and "A Cage for Satan" (OL) all deal with instances of misrecognition regarding the identity of the evil one. The most interesting case of this kind occurs in "The Gentleman from Cracow" (GF) where an entire village including their pious rabbi is duped by a stranger who at first appears to be philanthropic then proves to be the supreme misanthropist, Satan the evil one. The question that must be asked here is why these people are so adamantly myopic? One answer of course is obviously suggested by Pinsker, for surely guilt by its very nature conceals its origins by repressing its source. Another answer is offered by Barthes in Mythologies

(London: Granada Publishing, 1985) when he speaks of the nature of Otherness:

The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself. In the petit-bourgeois universe, all the experiences of confrontation are reverberating, any otherness is reduced to sameness. p. 151

At the least, in recognising the imp for what he is in the end, the rabbi of Tishevitze proves that he is a man worthy to do battle with the evil forces if only that he, unlike so many others, is able to recognise them.

6. Lemaire, Jacques Lacan p.77.

7. The demon utilises the dual mediums of language and iconography, using both words and images to persuade and subtly leading the pious rabbi of Tishevitze through an associative chain of erotic motifs where each link is made more seductive than the last:

'In Hebrew Rachel is both a sheep and a girl's name,' I

say

'So ?'

'A sheep has wool and a girl has hair.'

'Therefore ?'

'If she's not androgenous, a girl has pubic hair.'

SF106

8. Francesco Orlando, Towards a Freudian Theory of Literature (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978) p.96.

9. Barbara Johnson makes this same point in her essay "The Frame of Reference": "the letter does not function as a unit of meaning (a signified) but as that which produces certain effects (a signifier)".

Cited in R.Young, ed. Unruly the Text (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) p.230.

10. "The Unconscious Structured as a Language," The Talking Cure, ed. C. MacCabe (London: Macmillan Press, 1981) p.2.

11. Singer characteristically describes villages in the iconography of calligraphy. In "The Destruction of Kreshev" the size of the town is calculated as being "about as large as one of the smallest letters in the smallest prayer books" (SMS143). While in "The Little Shoemakers" the shtetl of Frampol is conceived of as even smaller than Kreshev, indeed

it is described as "no bigger than a dot in a small prayerbook" (GF84).

12. Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled* p.116.
13. George Steiner, *On Difficulty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) p.52.
14. The concept of the "name" takes on a peculiar quality of actuality in this tale. At one point the narrator exclaims in superstitious dread: "Hitler may his name vanish!" (GF95). Later, at the sack of Frampol, Abba Shuster, whose name means "Father-Shoemaker" in Hebrew, believes himself to be connected by virtue of the name, with his ancient forefathers:

Abba felt he had become his own great-great-grandfather, who had fled Chmielnitski's pogroms, and whose name is recorded in the annals of Frampol. He was ready to offer himself in sanctification of the Name." GF98

The justification for the totemic structure of nomenclature in the Jewish faith is to be found in a consideration of the Hebraic God, Jahveh, He whose name may not be uttered, and whose face may not be seen: He, the divine subject of the celestial Name. The following verse from *Numbers* xv 37-41 is repeated many times in the New Year synagogue service:

Blessed, praised and gloried, exalted, extolled and honoured, adored and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond, yea, beyond all blessings and hymns, praises and songs, which are uttered in the world; and say
ye, Amen.

15. This sense of the mechanics of impediment seems to be what Barbara Johnson refers to in her paper "The Frame of Reference":

The letter as a signifier is thus not a thing or the absence of a thing, nor a word or the absence of a word, nor an organ or the absence of an organ, but a knot in a structure where words, things, and organs can neither be definably separated nor compatibly combined. p. 240.

16. Indeed, the biblical parallels in this tale are many and varied, "Abba had little learning but Biblical references ran through his mind ..." (GF99).
17. Lacan, "Discourse de Rome" p.53.

18. In The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud in describing his own practice of naming offspring, remarks:

I had insisted on their names being chosen, not according to the fashion of the moment, but in memory of people I have been fond of. Their names made the children into revenants. And after all, I reflected, was not having children our only path to immortality?

19. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.149.

20. cited in "Freud's concept of Defence and Poetic Will", The Literary Freud, ed. J.H. Smith, p.20.
Bloom is at pains to differentiate between the traditional Jewish and the mystical Kabbalistic perspectives:

From a normative Jewish or Christian point of view, catastrophe is allied to the abyss, and creation is associated with an order imposed upon the abyss. But from a Gnostic [or Kabbalistic] perspective, catastrophe is true creation because it restores the abyss, while any order that steals its materials from the abyss is only a sickening to a false creation.

21. Once again the sense of alphabetical progression is paramount in the song; the sixth is "vav", the seventh "Zayin", the eighth "chet", the ninth "tet", the tenth "jud".
22. Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) p.67.
23. Susan Handelman, "Jacques Derrida and the Heretic Hermeneutic", Displacement (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) p.102.

SECTION FIVE

SOUL-CATCHERS, TALE-TELLERS AND TALISMANS

The conclusions that have been drawn during the course of this work: that the child accedes to the symbolic register through language, that the word is potent and autonomous, that the letter insists within the unconscious; are all generalised statements about a particular culture. Indeed it is possible that such assertions could not be made except in the context of a patriarchal and pious community, whose world was invoked through the Word and whose God may only be regained through obedience to the Law.

Singer's Jews are nothing except the writing that has preserved their history and the speech by which their past is recalled. For this reason the question of narrative becomes particularly significant to my thesis and story-telling, structured here both as sacrament and as compulsion, provides us with a telling metaphor by which to draw all the elements of our conceit together - writing, Jew, tale and God. In this concluding chapter I wish to examine two characteristic story-tellers and the tales they relate in order to delineate the imperatives of narrative. For tale-telling requires no less an effort of the imagination than does the fiction itself. Indeed it composes the supreme gesture of creativity, committed as it is to finding and revealing the figure of the Creator within the creation.

5.1. Human Fictions

There will now be no need of many words to show that nature has set no end before herself, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions.

Benedict de Spinoza
Ethics

According to the Kabbalistic principle bereishit rabbah, God looked into the Torah and then created the world. The Creator, we are told, created His world by following the dictates of His Word. If the Word is the beginning of all things and the Creator the primal author-ity, what must we make then of His subsequent estrangement from this sacred artifact, our world ?

Kabbalists and Orthodox men reply that all things in this mortal universe are impelled toward a centrifugal Godhead and that the withdrawal of the Almighty from His world composes the supreme benediction, bestowing upon the souls of men the gift of free will. In disappearing from the mortal world, He makes possible a new kind of appearance, He (whom Serres calls the Weaver) vacates this cosmic locus and leaves us bereft to search for the logos that once marked His presence:

And thus one must find first, find conditionally, a word, a logos, that has already worked to connect the crevices which run across the spatial chaos of disconnected varieties. One must find the Weaver, the proto-worker of space... 1

Is all literature then only the search for our lost God ? 2

But men have searched for Him before, and penance has been exacted with swiftness and with fury. The chaos of Babel, the

downfall of Dedalus caution us against such presumptions, and the story-teller who seeks through his tale an icon of his god must be protected by the devices of narrative. For, says Derrida, the way of all writing is only self-exposure:

There is no writing which does not devise some means of protection, to ~~protect~~ against himself, against the writing by which the "subject" is himself threatened as he lets himself be written: as he exposes himself. (Derrida's emphasis) 3

There follows the institution of the tale-teller, a figure that Barthes has called the shaman, whose function is to deflect responsibility in the name of the tale:

In ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose "performance" - the mastery of the narrative code - may possibly be admired but never his "genius". 4

Through the device of the shaman, through the contrivance of the mediator, the tale-teller is protected.

These are the myths of his neutrality. 5

5.2. The Weaver

A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game.

Jacques Derrida
Dissemination

Among the many narrative persona that Singer utilises in his tales, is Satan, soul-catcher and bawd, and Aunt Ventl who weaves as she speaks. These two compose the boundaries of textual author-ity in the tales that they narrate and each

embarks upon the fiction as a quest, searching tirelessly amongst old tales, he for lost souls, she for lost children. What we will come to realise is that all pursuit in these narratives comprise the search for the weaver of the text. And all misdirection, all the detours of deflected desire are only the leaps of faith necessary to prolong desire.

5.3. The Evil One

I am not hidden within the text, I am simply
irrecoverable from it...

Roland Barthes
S/Z

In the short stories "Zeidius the Pope" and "The Unseen" Satan, the evil one becomes literally a teller of tales, a miserly counter of doomed souls as he hunches vengefully over his abacus and reckons up the numbers of his host. And like all misers, Satan becomes in the end no more than one of his coveted possessions, a piece of gold, a fallen soul, a tale. "Zeidius the Pope" is a fable of temptation and fall: "In ancient times there always lived a few men in every generation whom I, the Evil One, could not corrupt in the usual manner" (SF 150). With these words, Satan determines to capture Zeidius through his one great passion, his vanity. Zeidel Cohen, prodigy and scholar appears impervious to evil, for he is immersed in the psalm of sacred texts and devours their pages eagerly:

Zeidel loved only one thing: books. The moment he entered the study house, or his own home for that

matter, he ran straight to the shelves and began to leaf through volumes, sucking into his lungs the dust from ancient pages. SF 150

Haughty in his erudition, he is persuaded by Satan to convert to Christianity and then to write a definitive Apologia Contra Talmudum, which is to be a polemic against the Talmud. For years the proud apostate immerses himself in the Talmud in order to produce this sacred and profane manuscript by means of which he hopes to become Pope Zeidius the first. But he slowly loses sight of this purpose and becomes engrossed in a biblical exegesis of the very text that he seeks to discredit until all faiths become one to him, and he sickens, growing blind with age. Thus Zeidel blind and bent, takes his place amongst the beggars upon the steps of the great church of Cracow, lips moving silently in recitation of the Psalms. Beggared as he is and bereft of his mortal sin, pride, he is allowed the final insight into man's fallen condition on earth, and as the Tempter materialises for the last time to clutch his soul to hell, Zeidel understands:

'If there is a Gehenna, there is also a God ... If hell exists, everything exists. If you are real, He is real. Now take me to where I belong. I am ready' (Singer's ellipsis) SF 159

The devil tells this tale of a lost soul and counts the fallen wraith of Zeidel amongst the damned host of hell, but Zeidel, we are given to understand, rejoices at the epiphany offered him in his final moments and goes to his retribution gladly. ⁶

Zeidel blinded, sees at last, but Satan who is all-seeing remains oblivious of this final searing vision. At the last moment the

fallen soul strung upon the devil's counting board clicks back into place, unregenerate.

"The Unseen" too is a tale narrated by "I, the evil spirit" (GF 146), "I, the Seducer" (GF 149), who tempts a long married man and then punishes him by turning him into "one who sees without being seen" (GF 160). A condition, we are told, which comprises the penalty for lechery.

Nathan Jozefowicz a corpulent merchant is the contented husband of Roise Temerl, and both live for fifty years in comfort and plenty. Then Satan the tempter sends them a servant from Lublin, Shifra Zirel, a whore who seduces her master in the bathhouse and tries to persuade him to divorce his wife and marry her. The devil, hungry for souls counsels use, taunting him with naked images and sensual vision succumbs, fleeing with his lascivious temptress that very night. A year later, Roise Temerl who has since remarried is visited by a destitute beggar whom she recognises as her absconded husband. Nathan tells her of Shifra Zirel's treachery and she, taking pity on him hides him in a ruined outbuilding where he remains, fed and clothed by his devoted wife, through the long winter. In this ruin he is hidden from all eyes, he is buried as in a grave and he becomes as one who sees without being seen.

One day Roise Temerl dies, and Nathan ill and starving soon follows suit. Then the Evil One, narrator of the tale intervenes and grasping the sinner's soul in his claws, flies shrieking down to the nether world, where Nathan we must assume, wanders to this

day, unable to enter heaven or hell, for he remains unseen, unburied, unredeemed.

The similarities between the two protagonists, Zeidel Cohen and Nathan Jozefover are striking: both men are beggared in the course of the tale, and both achieve insight only at the moment when like Lear they stand blinded, crippled, mutilated upon a bleak landscape of the soul. Both tales end with the death of the sinner and with the appropriation of a fallen soul by Satan and yet both men continue to exist in a limbo, inhabitants neither of heaven nor hell, neither saved nor spent, they wander disconsolate and unaccounted for. Which can only mean that they have not been counted by Satan amongst the doomed host of hell.

Zeidel upon the steps of the Cathedral, Nathan buried in the ruin, are both men who "see without being seen" and in this they invert the predicament of Satan whose position as narrator dictates that he, whilst being heard, remain unhearing. For it is his tale that we listen to even as we hear the authorial voice contradict the teller: Zeidel finds truth and is saved, Nathan finds love and is saved, he who knows of neither truth nor love remains ignorant.

The stories which Satan narrates and in which liars and lecherers as well as holy men and women are duped and gulled, their immortal souls snatched from them in the narrative's momentum, constitute fables of the unseen, and not, as is commonly supposed, perverse morality tales. And it is the persona of Satan, unseeing of his own graceless condition who becomes in the

end the sum of all tales, the unseen teller stringing souls like beads upon the chains of his tales. And if we are to believe Peter Brooks, this is precisely the measure of all narrative:

Narrative is hence condemned to saying other than what it would mean, spinning out its movement toward a meaning that would be the end of its movement. {Brooks' emphasis} 8

5.4. Aunt Ventel

Now there is nothing in this world I abominate worse, than to be interrupted in a story ...

Lawrence Sterne

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy

'One can get used to everything', my Aunt Ventel said. And as she uttered those words I knew she was ready to tell a story.

"The Grave-digger" (P)

In his collection of memoirs entitled In My Father's Court⁹, Singer includes the sketch of "Aunt Ventel" and it is from this tale of the life of the tale-teller that much can be extrapolated of her peculiarly idiosyncratic reminiscences. The short story comprises a chronicle of Aunt Ventel's three marriages and infinite childlessness, and her many visits to wonder rabbis in order to elicit their help and blessing. Berated by her mother-in-law for a "tree without fruit" (264), she offers to divorce her much loved first husband, believing as she does in her own culpability with regard to child bearing, "it's all my fault" (264). Her insistence that she is being

punished for a sinful life leads her to attempt to allay the curse of childlessness, the withholding of fruition, through a life of generosity. She runs an open house, handing out food, money and tales to visitors, eliciting blessings from strangers with which to grow children. But she dies without a child to mourn her garrulous life, and we are left with the tales, scattered talismans by which to conjure a baby. The tales of this unpurported woman¹⁰ compose a metaphor for the children she cannot summon and the maternal desires that remain unconsummated. And, as we have unquestionably learned, feminine desire that can find no sanctioned outlet, traverses other pathways, the subterranean vaults of hysteria wherein the symptom is prolonged. There are three main figures of displacement in these tales.

In the first figure of the displaced symptom, the desires of the frustrated woman, bounded and static, unable to turn outward, return along the self-same circuit to attack and destroy the host.

In "Zeitl and Rickel" (S), two female lovers, fearing the torments of illicit love which will be visited upon them in the after-life, kill themselves the sooner to reach it. Admittedly this is a rather harsh fate for what is at most a perverse love, but Aunt Yentl seems undaunted by the injustices she has related even naively pleased by the fitness of all things in a determined universe:

'I often hear people say, "This cannot happen, that cannot be, nobody every heard of such a thing, impossible." Nonsense! If something is destined to happen, it does.' S 101

In "The Image" (I) a young girl remains virginal through two betrothals and a marriage. Deserted by one man and damned by another she marries but is prevented from mating by the image of her absconded lover who insinuates himself between husband and wife as they lie in bed at night. Zylka converts to Catholicism and enters a cloister, there to offer an intact hymen upon the altar of the sacrament.

It is in the tale "The Mistake" (I) however, that we may most accurately trace the compulsive symptom. Gneshe, the well loved daughter of a privileged home is of marriageable age and the matchmakers send many suitors. But she is fastidious by nature and rebuffs them all until she becomes smitten by handsome Mully. It is only after the wedding that she realizes that her husband is a fool, but it is too late to easily rectify her mistake, for as Aunt Yentl remarks:

'It's easy to say "I made a mistake". But a mistake is not always a trifle. God protect us, one little mistake can ruin a life, especially of those who are proud and conceited.' I 258

Gneshe is both proud and conceited, and she sets out to prove her rectitude: a devoted wife and mother, she praises her husband and children in public, and berates them in private for their foolishness.

Thus the female divided by the claims of public esteem and private error compounds her obliquity, for when Mully dies, she travels to Kielce there to find another husband as foolish and boastful as the first.¹¹

In the second figure of the displaced symptom, we are brought

to the imperative of what Barthes has called the "dilatatory space"¹² of narrative, where desires are released along a self-perpetuating, closed circuit. Through the structures of metonymy the female subject receives her scattered desires remade in her own image.

In the following three fictions, three females are mutilated by the figures of their own desire, and each in dying replicates the object of her passion. Henne Fire ("Henne Fire" S) is a fire from gehenna, a woman consumed with such retributive anger that everything she touches, inhabits or loves, bursts into spontaneous flame. One day she herself is found consumed by fire, a blackened skeleton on an unsinged chair. Itte Lubliner ("The Needle" S) is a remnant, the discarded woman not chosen by the matriarch, the bearer of the needle, for her son's bride. To the end of her days she feels the insoluble needle slashing at her insides, cauterising her womb and sewing up the access there. Adele Zuckerberg ("The Primer" FK) is a vaniteax, a woman so obsessed with fashion that she scorns all suitors. She converts to Christianity in order to go to her grave finely bedecked

Such are the forms of deflected desire narrated by Aunt Ventl.

In the third figure of the displaced symptom, feminine desire disallowed comes under the bar of the Law. And who but the male, what but the phallus is seen fit to wield such power.

In "Not for the Sabbath" (OL) Aunt Ventl tells of a woman publicly whipped by a brutal teacher who falls in love with her

discipliner, marries him and is eventually cut down by his sedulous organ. In "Big and Little" (SF) a man tries to fulfil his wife's gargantuan appetites by proxy, for when he dies he bequeaths to her a phallus of prodigious measure; the biggest man in all of Lublin. "The Lentuch" (CF) is a tale told of a demon sprite who settles in the house of three unmanned women, a widow, a divorcee and a spinster, there to sweep their hearths and fill their hearts. One day however he tires of providing for their clamorous needs and sets fire to the home he has nurtured. Grandmother, mother and daughter are all three burnt alive. In "The Wife-Killer" (GF), the matron from Turbin relates the definitive tale of male hegemony in the story of Pelte, four times married, four times widowed and known as the wife-killer of Turbin. When the mothers of pregnant women speak of him they protect their orifices, covering both front and back entrances with aprons. The cheder boys finger their fringed garments before pronouncing his name, and predictably even the gregarious narrator demurs at the threshold of the fiction:

'To tell you the truth, I'd rather not go on with the story. It might give you nightmares, and I myself don't feel up to it. What? You do want to hear more. Very well. You will have to take me home. Tonight I won't walk home alone.' GF 47

These then are the wayward paths of feminine desire turned hysteria narrated by Aunt Yentl, childless matriarch of countless villages.¹³ But who is Aunt Yentl, this beribboned matron with arabesques on her Sabbath dress and rhinestones in her bonnet? All great story tellers, says

Benjamin, have this in common, "the freedom with which they move up and down the rungs of their experience as on a ladder." ¹⁴ But what are Aunt Yentl's experiences, she who has lived and died in the same shtetl, thrice married never mothered ?

It is precisely the experience of childlessness that constitutes the rungs of her ladder for how else may the barren woman gather children to her but by the suckling of the tale ? And Aunt Yentl who spends her life collecting talismans by which to bear children and tales by which to bear the burden of her lack, may surely be regarded in the light of a shaman. She who conjures in the Sabbath dusk for a community of yearning women, tales to grow children by.

In ending it would be appropriate to re-read the tale "Hanka" (P) in the light of a talisman. In this story the narrator goes on a lecture tour of Argentina where he meets a distant relative. Hanka is long thought to have perished in the holocaust but would seem to have survived, insisting that she is the great granddaughter of Aunt Yentl. She too tells stories, but they are of the dead and the inanimate, of life in death and necrophilia. She herself proves to have been an illusion at the end, a lost spirit of the dead remembered.

Hanka is reputed to be Aunt Yentl's great granddaughter and this would seem to dispute the fact of her childlessness. However, Hanka it proves is not a real person, but a spectral fugitive, a figment dispossessed and adrift, an exiled soul who like her ancestor "spewed forth stories" (P 14). Hanka, the dying

remnant of a slaughtered race composes in this frame of reference the spiritual child of her Aunt Yentl, for both are barren women who situate in the place of the symptom, the story:

I looked up and there she was, standing in the dusk - an image surrounded by shadows. I ordered dinner and Hanka would begin her soliloquy in the quiet monotone that reminded me of my Aunt Yentl. P 17

Satan, the evil one and Aunt Yentl the benevolent are both story tellers whose fictions are structured by loss. Although Satan tells triumphant tales of the souls he has acquired, he searches always for the one soul he lacks, as Yentl yearns for the lost child that will prove her fiction fecund. Within the context of these tales, within the context that is of the sacred icons of the shtetl, all loss, all desire is directed toward the Godhead. So that it is once again the figure of the Weaver that we must trace within the narrative.

5.5. The Festival

"What follows the festival?", asks Derrida¹⁵, and Foucault replies for all of us; why, language of course:

At the secret heart of madness, at the core of so many errors, so many absurdities, so many words and gestures without consequence, we discover, finally, the hidden perfection of a language. 16

After the tale has been told and re-told, after the festival of the fictions, there remains only the obliteration of all stories, all narrative, what Felman here defines as erasure:

If the tale is thus introduced through its own reproduction, if the story is preceded and anticipated by a repetition of the story, then the frame, far from situating, as it first appeared, the story's origin, actually situates its loss

the story's origin is therefore situated, it would seem, in a forgetting of its origin: to tell the story's origin is to tell the story of that origin's obliteration. (Felman's emphasis) 17

The tale obliterated, we are left destitute in the wake of all narrative; in the silence that alone predicates the presence of the Weaver. He to whom all speech, all story, all silence, defers as in the short story "Shiddah and Kuziba" (SMS^{to}) which ends in the convoluted of silence and divinity:

Silence is like fruits which have pits within pits, seeds within seeds. There is a final silence, a point so small that it is nothing, yet so mighty that worlds can be created from it. This last point is the essence of all essences. Everything else is external, nothing but skin, peel, surface. He who has reached the final point, the last degree of silence, knows nothing of time and space, of death and lust. There males and females are forever united; will and deed are the same. This last silence is God. But God himself keeps on penetrating deeper into Himself. He descends into his depths. His nature is like a cave without a bottom. He keeps on investigating his own abyss.

REFERENCES TO SECTION FIVE

1. Michel Serres, Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982) p.52.
2. Marc Eli Blanchard in Description: Sign, Self, Desire (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1980) speaks of all narrative as being constructed about the incidence of loss:

The model narrative usually entails (the Bible; folktales) the recognition of an original loss and a subsequent attempt to recover the lost object (whether it be an entity distinctly separate from the subject or, more simply, a part of the subject himself). p. 215

3. Derrida, Writing and Difference (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) p.224.
4. Barthes, Image Music Text p.142.

In the same article "The Death of the Author", Barthes further emphasises that individual authority is tantamount to the closure of all writing:

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. p. 147

Of course, this viewpoint follows Bakhtin's thesis in The dialogic imagination (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) where it is argued that the institution of the mediator serves to protect language from the foreclosure of individual creativity:

All forms involving a narrator or a posited author signify to one degree or another by their presence the author's freedom from a unitary and singular language, a 'freedom connected with the relativity of literary and language systems ... of saying "I am me" in someone else's language, and in my own language, "I am other". p. 314 - 315

On the other hand, Julia Kristeva in Desire in Language (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) describes this very freedom connected with the narrator as one which divides the mediator who now becomes both subject of and object in language:

In order to describe the dialogism inherent in the

denotative or historical word, we would have to turn to the psychic aspect of writing as trace of a dialogue with oneself (with another), as a writer's distance from himself, as a splitting of the writer into subject of enunciation and subject of utterance. p. 74

5. I use the term "myth" here insofar as it designates the existence of a linguistic form, a narrative structure that exists prior to the act of telling. Myth-making, tale-telling, comprises thus what Descombes in Modern French Philosophy has called "recitation" (105), and what I have elsewhere named narrative-performance. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)
6. Of course what this text seeks to entrench is that a Jew remains a Jew even after he has broken his covenant, even after conversion, in much the same way that Oliver Twist remains a gentleman even as he sleeps amongst the thieves in Fagin's den. For who else but a Jew, we are asked, would return to his God through the very channel by means of which all Gods are rejected - the auspices of the letter. It is in fact the very divisiveness of language that will not allow the Jew to escape his God, and it is the letter that gathers him in. This is the answer to Handelman's ironic query in her essay on Derrida:

What collusion with Satan does the Jew have, the Christian wonders, to exist so well within the realm of difference, in the infinite regression of signs, in the cacophony of words and interpretations, in the endless referentiality of the letter, without the redeeming, ultimate presence of the Word? p. 108

7. In "A Tale of Two Liars" (SMS) we are presented with a spectacle of symmetrical deceit where Satan inveigles two manipulators into an obscene tryst. Similarly in "From the Diary of One not Born" (DP) we watch as the devil tempts a pious scholar.
8. Brooks, Reading for the Plot p. 56.
9. I.B. Singer, In My Father's Court (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1979)
10. Not all of the tales discussed are explicitly related by Aunt Yentl, some of them are narrated by anonymous village women. But, as all unmistakably belong to the same genre, I feel justified in including them as "Yentl" fables.
11. In another tale, and one which I have examined in detail "The Man Who Came Back" (SMS), Singer repeats the

predicament of the mistaken female subject. Shifra Leah loves her husband so powerfully that when he dies she is able to call his soul back from the abyss. Alter returns to torment her, defiling the town with his excesses. At last, debauched and dying, he lies again at death's door. This time she allows him to cross the threshold.

In this variation of the theme, the woman leans from her error and is consequently set free, that is, she is not compelled to continue committing the same mistake ad infinitum.

12. In Reading for the Plot, Peter Brooks explains Barthes's phrase as composing "the space of retard, postponement, error and partial revelation - is the space of transformation" (92).

Of course Brooks follows the post-structuralists in claiming this dilatory space as the scene of desire, but for him desire is inalienably linked to the mechanisms of closure:

The desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the moment of the death of the reader in the text.
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p.108.

13. In "The Lantuch" we come across an interesting passage which purports to describe the history of Aunt Ventl and which, if carefully examined, might provide a clue to the keynote of her personality, that being her barrenness:

Aunt Ventl was not a blood relative. She came from generations of villagers - innkeepers, bailiffs, dairymen Before Uncle Joseph married her, some gossip told him that she was once a milkmaid. My uncle was supposed to have answered, 'So it will be an unkosher mixture of meat and milk.' CF85

The taboos of separation and pollution are too stringent it would seem, to easily admit of fruition in this unhallowed coupling.

Perhaps this loss, this incapacity is what J. Hillis Miller refers to when he observes, "Storytelling is always after the fact, and it is always constructed over a loss." Fiction and Repetition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982) p.61.

14. Benjamin, Illuminations (Glasgow: Collins Publishers, 1970) p.102.

David Neal Miller in Fear of Fiction reiterates this point particularly as it pertains to the means by which

a fiction is ordered through individual reminiscences:

The narrative voice not only draws attention to itself but, as the story's central focus and sole unifying strand, feels at liberty to provide transitions solely by personal association - thus satisfying a residual need for an ordering principle while establishing itself as character. p. 9

Allied to these instances of "personal association" by which the narrative is structured, is the function of autobiographical narrative by means of which the personality of the storyteller itself becomes the pivot upon which the tale turns. Paul Eakin makes this point in his study on "the art of self-invention" entitled Fictions in Autobiography (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985):

The writing of autobiography emerges as a symbolic analogue of the initial coming together of the individual and language that marks the origin of self-awareness; both are attempts, as it were, to pronounce the name of the self. p. 213

15. Of course for Derrida, the Law follows the festival, the multitudinous laws of prohibition in general, and the law of incest in particular, as in this extract from Of Grammatology:

What follows the festival? The age of the supplement, of articulation, of signs, of representatives. That is the age of the prohibition of incest. Before the festival, there was no incest because there was no prohibition of incest and no society. After the festival there is no more incest because it is forbidden. p.263

16. Foucault, Madness and Civilization p.96.

Alan Sheridan reiterates this point in his study of Foucault entitled, Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth (London: Tavistock, 1980):

The world did not enter the unconscious directly, or in images, but through language, through signifiers, which usually had no more than an arbitrary relation to their referents, to the real objects. p. 200

17. "Turning the Screw of Interpretation", ed. S. Felman Language and Psychoanalysis (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982) p.122.

CONCLUSION

Singer's artistry expresses a vision of a world no longer extant, of a people extinguished, of a language extinct. In the most profound sense, his tales exist as cultural traces, as remnants of a gutted past, as historical narratives (or history-as-narrative). The shtetls of Eastern Europe, the Jews who populated them, their language exist now only as fiction and may be accessed solely through fictional devices. For this reason thematic or historical critiques of Singer's work appear to be inadequate. For no analysis however exhaustive can ever redeem an exterminated past: that is the prerogative of fiction.

Post-structuralists like Barthes and Kristeva, Psychoanalysts like Lacan, emphasise the fictiveness of chronicle and case-history. Fiction here is not set in opposition to fact, but viewed in conjunction with narrative: the textual structurations of the tale, the verbal configurations of the patient's discourse. For this reason a post-structural analysis itself composes a re-enactment of the very fictionality of the given text, whether it be story or psyche. And when the object under scrutiny exists, as in this case, only within the lineaments of memory and ungratified desire, perhaps the only true tribute lies in fiction.

If the shtetl communities of Europe are reclaimed however briefly within the configurations of Singer's narrative, the problem for the critic lies in retaining this aura of a lost

past even as one examines the restored object in the guise of the tale. It is only through the insights afforded by psychoanalysis in general and of Lacan in particular that such a Janus-like vision may be sustained. For this discipline unlike any other insists on the achronology of time. And it is only when we accept the equality of past, present and future that we are able to examine history as narrative through a critique structured as chronicle.

C.1. NEW DIRECTIONS

What I have tried to accomplish in this dissertation is to demonstrate the usefulness of psychoanalysis as a means of penetrating those elements of Singer's short stories not easily accessible to more traditional approaches. The elements in question have centred upon the premises and predicaments of a culture based entirely upon the Word of God and the Law of the Fathers.

I should like to conclude by suggesting potential areas of research in this field taking the boundaries of this same community as my object and undertaking a similar reading as the implement of enquiry.

A particularly interesting facet to Singer's work is the occurrence and development of desire especially as it relates to the circumscriptions of the Law. The religious law that is the supreme arbiter of this Jewish culture, commands rigid obedience to all its numerous statutes. Many of Singer's tales

are concerned with the opposition conceived between desire and circumscription, between the wanton wilfulness of the individual and the prohibitions exercised by the community. Tales like "Short Friday" (SF) and "Yochna and Shmelke" (OL) demonstrate the rewards to be gained by strict allegiance to the Hebraic Law. Whilst stories like "The Riddle" (FK), "The Boy Knows the Truth" (OL) and "The Destruction of Kreshev" (SMS) deal with the transgressions of the individual as they are visited upon the community through the structures of pollution and taboo. A particularly interesting tale from this point of view is "Blood" (SF) where the plot focuses upon the multitude of prohibitions and restrictions centering upon a fluid both sacred and profane, the woman who transgresses these laws, the community who suffers for her sins, and the ritual orgy of blood-letting by which her demonic power is exorcised.

Moreover desire is conceived of as metonymic in these tales where passion is often presented within the geometry of the triangle. Tales like "The Third One" (CF), "The Prodigy" (CF), "Loshikl" (I), "A Tale of Two Sisters" (P), "The Adventure" (P) and "The Image" (I) are all triadic love stories where a third subject is inserted between man and woman thereby altering the symmetry of the dyad and breaking the circuit so that desire is released along a metonymic channel.

Another interesting area of research may be discerned in those tales which focus upon the figure of the double. "Sam Palka and David Vishkover" (P), "Getsel the Monkey" (S), "The Captive" (CF),

"Caricature" (SMS) and "The Mirror" (GF) all conceive of a reflexive life lived beyond the impotency of the fading subject. Whilst the theme of the double has always been of literary interest it is of especial relevance to Freud's theory of narcissism and Lacan's concept of the mirror stage. Allied to this concern with the imaginary realm of spectres is the Lacanian notion of Otherness, a discourse that is given great emphasis in Singer, in tales like "The Witch" (P), "Taibele and her Demon" (SF) and "The Dead Fiddler" (S) where demons in human shape haunt hysterical virgins, husbands and lovers. In yet other fictions, the subject attempts to gain mastery over the Other to a greater or lesser extent, a conflict that comprises the plot of tales like "The Sorcerer" (P), "A Cage for Satan" (OL), and "The Gentleman from Cracow" (GF). Finally, tales like "The Cafeteria" (FK), "The Shadow of the Crib" (SMS), "The Pocket Remembered" (I) and "The Slaughterer" (S) may be elucidated only through an understanding of Freud's repetition-compulsion taken to its logical extension in Lacan's notion of the eternal return of the repressed. Likewise, "Altele" (FK), "Under the Knife" (SF), "The Yearning Heifer" (P) and "Strong as Death is Love" (I) may be understood most profoundly in the light of Lacan's concept of the lost object of desire, or what is better known as "Objet petit a".

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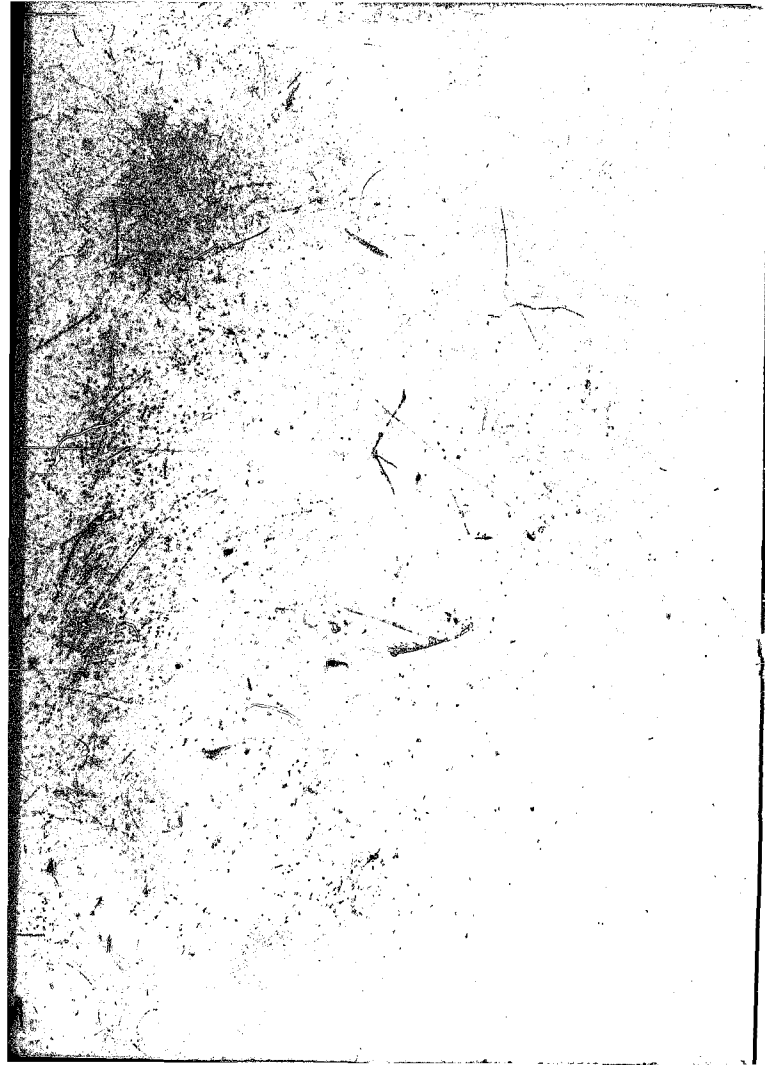
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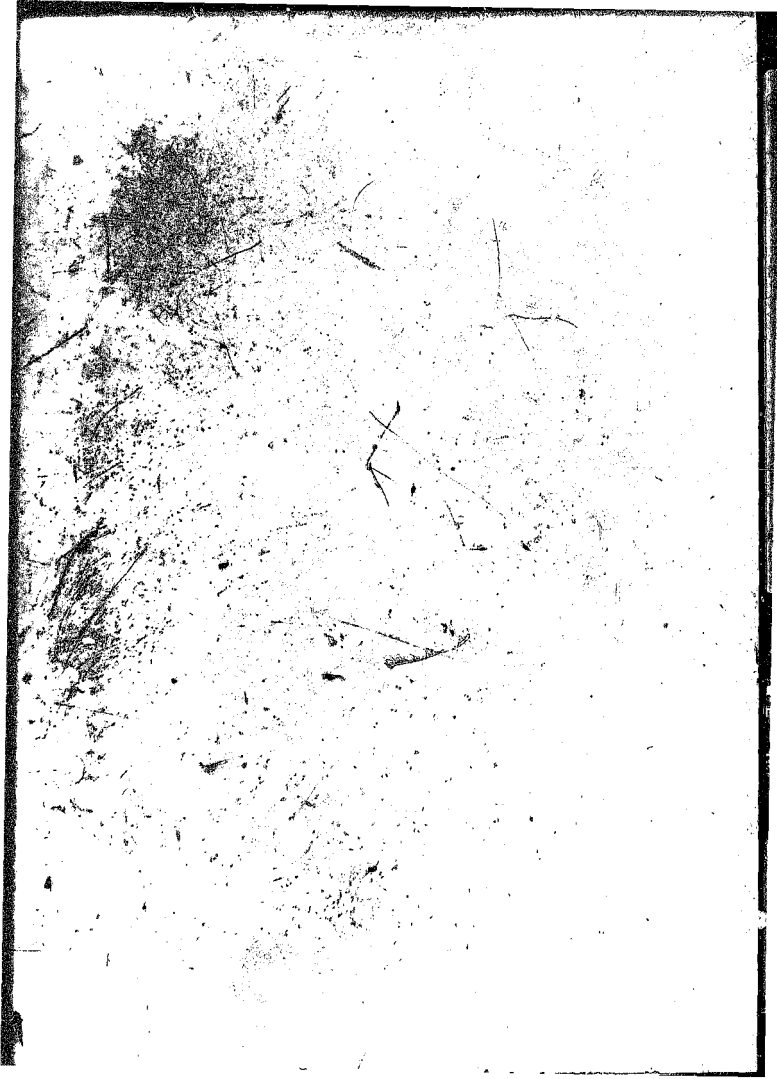
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