

Desiring Liaisons in the Works of Isaac Bashevis Singer

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ABSTRAKT

Práce Příčiny touhy po milostných vztazích hlavních hrdinů v dílech Isaaca Bashevisa Singera popisuje vztahy, především milostné poměry a také je analyzuje. Oddíly práce jsou věnovány vztahu homosexuálnímu, vztahům, jevícím se jako založeným na soucitu a v neposlední řadě vztah vyplývající z obdivu. První kapitola se zabývá židovským autorem v kontextu Americké-etnické literatury, jeho inspirací a kritiky. V druhé části je popis a analýza. Závěrečná, třetí část, uvedené vztahy hodnotí. Závěr, vyplývající z této práce je, že Singer používal mnoho způsobů, kterými vztahy ve svých dílech učinil odlišné od ostatních autorů.

Klíčová slova: Isaac Bashevis Singer, inspirace, vztah, milostný poměr, láska

ABSTRACT

Work entitled *Desiring Liaisons* in the works of Isaac Bashevis Singer describes relationships, primarily liaisons and analyzes them. The work is divided into parts dealing with a homosexual relationship, relationships based on an emotion similar to compassion and the last but not least relationship originating in admiration. First chapter is focused on the Jewish author in the context of American-ethnic literature, his inspiration and criticism of his work. The second chapter contains descriptions and analyses. The final chapter comprises evaluation of relationships mentioned. Conclusion states Singer used many different ways in order to make his relationships different from the rest of authors.

Keywords: Isaac Bashevis Singer, inspiration, relationship, liaison, love

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INTRODUCTION

“No doubt the world is entirely an imaginary world, but it is only once removed from the true story”¹ this sentence was used by Jewish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer in the last paragraph of “Gimpel the fool” story, which is one of his most successful novels. Many other authors appreciated him for being realistic in description of his characters, although he used some of mystical Jewish characters too. He often wrote about abnormalities however he was strictly realistic in description of his characters. Mixing these two qualities let him create his stories and characters very true, moving and human. His stories became very popular and have been translated into many languages. Nevertheless there was sometimes trouble with translating from the Yiddish original so some of the translators omitted parts of his writing.²

In my Bachelor thesis I am going to focus on the most interesting liaisons of the following Singer’s stories: the story “Two”, generally considered one of his best works, the novel *Shosha* and its free sequel *Meshugah*, a part of the story “Two Weddings and One Divorce” and already mentioned “Gimpel the Fool” story. I chose these stories because they contain controversial and extraordinary liaisons between two or more people.

I am going to divide my work into three parts. In the first part I am going to deal with the life, inspirations and criticism of the work of Isaac Bashevis Singer. In the second part, various types of relationships are mentioned; particular stories and liaisons are described and analyzed. The third chapter is focused on evaluating liaisons which I am going to explore.

The Jewish writer was renowned for his writing about romantic relationship, especially about liaisons. That was the reason why I have decided to explore those works of Singer, that from my point of view, represent the most interesting literary output of this Jewish author.

The aim of this work is to analyze selected human relationships from the works of I. B. Singer that are specific in their controversy. From my point of view, I chose the most interesting liaisons depicted in Singer’s books the author used in his stories to counterpoint

¹ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Gimpel the Fool: And Other Stories*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 2006.

² See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství), 2006.

the topic of romantic relationships. I am going to describe them, analyze and find reasons why they are so controversial.

1 ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER AS A PERSONALITY OF AMERICAN ETHNICAL LITERATURE

Isaac Bashevis Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize on 5th of October 1978, Singer and his wife were shocked because they were not expecting it. He and his wife Alma did not allege it, because it was not used to receive this prize is returned back to country in so short time of 2 years. Isaac by s himself about this prize said, “I appreciate the Nobel Prize, but any prize doesn’t change a person and if it does, the person doesn’t deserve it.”³

1.1 Childhood and period of maturity

On 14th of July 1904, his mother, Basheva gave birth to Isaac Bashevis Singer, one of the best Jewish writers. Singer strongly believed in paranormal phenomena as well as astrology, which can appear in what Singer did as he grew older. He changed his date of birth to 21th of November, although he was born as a Cancer towards the end of his life he considered himself a Scorpio. That made him the right sign of the zodiac. Isaac was born in Leoncin, a town near Warsaw, Poland. His original Jewish name was Izaak Zynger, but he changed it because of moving to the United States of America. He had several pen names: Warszawski was the name used in newspaper articles, another one The Segal and the best known one Bashevis was created from his mother’s first name Basheva.⁴

When Isaac was a child he was growing up in a strictly orthodox family; his father was a rabbi, who strongly believed in both education and religion so he encouraged his son in Jewish education and hoped for Isaac to become a rabbi too. Although many of his characters were orthodox Jews, he himself was not which was probably due to his family background. Isaac opposed the wish of his father for him to follow in his steps. Singer was mean, self-confident and egocentric person, but on his surface he appeared depressed.⁵ He had a sister and two brothers too, one of them, Israel Joshua Singer, who was called Joshua, emigrated to the USA, when Isaac was still a child. Joshua, being a writer too, was considered the proper person to obtain a Nobel Prize.

³ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 168.

⁴ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 177.

⁵ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 280.

1.2 Emigration to the USA

Later Joshua, older brother of Isaac, invited him to live with him in the USA, because anti-Semitism was increasing in Poland. Isaac did not want to leave Poland, but there was no other way. He moved to the USA in 1935, but he felt very miserable and wanted to commit suicide at the beginning. On the other hand that was a really prolific period of his life when he wrote over 300 stories. It seemed that misery and his desperate situation helped him create a great amount of stories. His brother helped him to assimilate and find a job in *Forward*. *Forward* was the Jewish daily press, where he worked until his death. His stories were printed episodically, twice a week there. Singer was not so popular there, in the daily press. “When *Mademoiselle*, *Harper's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Vogue*, and *Playboy* published his work in the 1960s and 70s, Singer's subtly erotic stories made his name familiar to a more general readership.”⁶

After two years in the United States of America, Isaac met Alma, a married Jewish woman from Germany. As an outcome of this encounter, Alma got divorced and married Isaac Bashevis Singer in 1940. Bashevis always repeated that a man ought to get divorced after 15 years, if they want to know something about love and sex.⁷ Nevertheless they were a couple for more than 50 years. Alma did not understand his works, because she did not speak Yiddish, but she always supported him.

Isaac and Alma did not have children together. Alma had a daughter and a son from her first marriage, but they lived with their father. Isaac had an illegitimate child, a son, his name was Israel Zamir. Surprisingly his mother was a communist mistress of Isaac Singer. That was quite an irony, because Singer did not like the communist ideology. However, he often chose female communist characters as the main characters in many of his pieces. Although he despised communist ideas in general, he appreciated human qualities of his lover, who supported communist ideology. She may have been an inspiration for Dora, a communist lover of Arele in Singer's masterpiece *Shosha*. Isaac met his son, Israel, in America in 1955. They knew each other from letters. Even though Singer did not have a good relationship with him and he never spoke about him, Isaac Singer inspired his son Israel to write a book about their relationship. Later he translated his father's works too.

⁶ Singer 100. “Biography 1950-1991.” <http://singer100.loa.org/life/3/> (accessed January 2, 2012).

⁷ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 157.

1.3 American Life

In 1943 Isaac became an American citizen and in 1944 his beloved brother Israel Joshua died. Isaac asserted that all he knew, he learnt from his older brother. Israel Joshua was “the acknowledged hero: his mentor, literary role model, the one whose example he imitated, from choice of career to rejection of orthodoxy.”⁸ Furthermore, many of the reviewers think that Joshua was better writer than Isaac. Reviewers and critics thought that Joshua should have been awarded the Nobel Prize. Not only was Bashevis awarded the Nobel Prize, he also got The National Book prize; he won it twice - in 1970 and 1974. It was The Nobel Prize in literature in 1978 that brought him fame and focus of the media. The press wanted to interview Singer and write articles about him.

In spite of the fact that Singer spent most of his life in the USA, he never wrote in English, he always used Yiddish. Only some of his interviews were in English and his books were translated into English too. In the 1950's, he became involved in translation of his works. He always insisted he knew the translator as well as how good English of the translator was. Sometimes he even changed his Yiddish manuscript after he read the English version. When Isaac was younger, he translated too; he translated from German and Hebrew into Yiddish. Among his translations belongs for example works of Erich Maria Remarque and Thomas Mann.⁹

At the end of his life he suffered from Alzheimer's disease. His wife Alma arranged a hospital attendant for him, woman named Amparo. Amparo soon became a part of his family, almost his second wife. She helped him with everything, and Isaac needed her constant presence and care. Amparo was with Isaac when he died July 24, 1991. A similar triangle can be seen in his *Meshugah*, but there was a slight difference. There were two men and one woman only. Singer felt well in presence of Amparo and loved her to that extend that he refused to eat when she was not with him. He would refuse to go for a walk without her. It means his relationship to Amparo was strong and it was possible he may have considered her his mental lover. Possibly, because Singer loved everything what was mystical and connected with supernatural, on his gravestone was written Noble instead of Nobel Laureate. Many of his friends believed that was an intervention of dark forces.¹⁰

⁸ Hadda, Janet. *Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Life*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 31.

⁹ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 102.

¹⁰ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 333.

1.4 Inspirations of Singer

As many other authors, there were writers who influenced Singer in a way too. Among these were primarily Russian authors like Chekhov, whose short stories were Singer's favourite ones, although he did not like his dramas. Singer admired Tolstoy's works of prose, while Gogol often used themes similar to those of Singer. That may have been the reason why the Jewish author absolutely adored Gogol's short stories, often wondering about the plots Gogol used. Singer was surprised by a writer who depicted topics and plots similar to his own ones hundred years earlier.

Although Singer did not quite understand Dostoyevsky, he was strongly impressed by his novels. He admired the way the Russian author was capable to keep the balance between reality and fantasy, as well as the equilibrium between good and evil or life and death. Free will of a man was crucial in Dostoyevsky's stories, on the other hand Singer's heroes were often bound by outer circumstances. Many heroes of Singer had to oppose opinion of other people if they wanted to pursue their happiness which was the case of Aaron and Fradl. What these two authors had in common were fascinating tales narrated in a gripping way, always engaging imagination of a reader.

Furthermore, there also were other writers, not only Russian, but for example Flaubert, whom Singer admired for his proficiency to inform and concurrently to entertain, or Mann, whose works were translated by Singer into Yiddish, despite the fact he did not consider them true stories of life.¹¹ Both Flaubert and Singer used religion in their works. They often wrote about breaking rules or about people not able to comply with the Ten Commandments. Those were key points of Singer – depicting true life, real people and hardship they had to face, religious prejudice and rules.

Singer always declared that a writer should only write about what he knew best. That can be seen in setting of his stories. They were usually situated in Poland because he was born there, he knew the country and remembered it very well. When Isaac was 4, he and his family moved to Krochmalna Street, Warsaw, which became his biggest inspiration. Most of his stories are situated there. "Singer later called the street his literary gold mine."¹²

¹¹ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 245-249.

¹² Singer 100. "Biography 1904-1935." <http://singer100.loa.org/life/1/> (accessed January 2, 2012).

There were other places he used, especially, but not only in his mystical stories, it was the town Frampol. After more than 25 years he started to write stories placed in the USA, he assumed that was the moment when he really knew America and Jewish American life.

This author undoubtedly considered Poland his native country, however, he never returned there in his life. Apart from Israel, he felt that the United States of America was his home. Isaac used many of his memories to create his stories in a way that he situated his heroes in the places where he had lived himself. The main characters were not men exclusively. There were very often heroines too, and definitely those girls or women were the ones who had inspired him most. He usually described his characters in a realistic way and never romanticized any of them. Singer strictly separated the realistic description of people from the mystical one he used when describing mythological creatures of Jewish folklore.

During World War I, the Singer family moved to Bilgoray, the birth village of Isaac Singer's mother. That was a period of life with crucial importance to Singer because in Bilgoray people led their lives in the way they have always known, in accordance with their tradition. When Singer got there people were not influenced by surrounding world at all. Half of the population of the town was Jewish and they followed the Bible and strictly observed all rules given by their religion. It seemed as a Divine act for Isaac to be sent to Bilgoray in his adolescent years. It was due to the very specific atmosphere and way of life there that Singer felt isolated because his sister, brother and father did not live with him, and his mother had no time for him. That was the place where the author met with Jewish folklore in such intensity like never before. In Bilgoray Singer grasped Jewish history and tradition, which had immense impact on his later life and work. Bilgoray "amply provided him with folkloric material for both his fiction and nonfiction."¹³ Singer created fiction via using of Jewish folklore. Singer said about supernatural elements and folklore in his books, "I believe in the supernatural, not that I know exactly the difference between a demon and an imp," but we are "surrounded, surrounded by them and their power on our life. And I believe the greatest of all these powers is God, Almighty. I once said whenever I am in trouble I pray. Since I am always in trouble, I pray all the time."¹⁴ The Jewish author was

¹³ Wolitz, Seth L. *The Hidden Isaac Bashevis Singer*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 167.

¹⁴ Singer 100. "An Interview with Isaac Bashevis Singer: Phyllis Malamud and Isaac Bashevis Singer." <http://singer100.loa.org/life/commentary/interview/> (accessed October 5, 2012).

able to put supernatural in everyday life of his characters – a vision of Elka came to Gimpel in a dream.

1.5 Criticism of I.B. Singer

Singer was repeatedly criticized for his non-jewish behaviour, or wrong description of the Jewish people. His opponents claimed the Jews were not so perverted and they did not stand against their faith and religion as Singer often depicted them. Singer characterized them as thieves, prostitutes and frauds. Orthodox Jews felt damaged and weakened by this reputation. Criticism of professor Heszal Klepfisz was focused on the way Singer depicted real life. He said the author was writing about folklore not real life. According to professor Klepfisz that was fantasizing and lying.¹⁵

Another criticism was for his Yiddish writing. Using the Yiddish language was an object of criticism all the time. If he had written in English or some other well known language, he would have had more readers. Singer defended Yiddish for being the only language he knew best, and as he said he wanted to protect it from vanishing. Singer knew Hebrew, his first poem was in Hebrew, but that was the language of religious works and books. As he wanted to describe day-to-day life, Hebrew was not suitable for that, moreover, the less educated did not speak it. He decided to write in Yiddish, because it was language which was used by common Jewish people.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 208.

¹⁶ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 70.

2 SPECIFICATION OF EXPLORING WORKS AND ANALYSIS OF CHOSEN LIASONS IN PARTICULAR STORIES OF ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

When readers want to get to what a liaison is they have to go through what a relationship is and what types of them there are. In this world people are part of various types of relationships. Relationship can be considered as something very subjective and original; everyone can see it in a different way. According to what can be found in Singer's books it is evident that a relationship means two or more people who are connected by some kind of emotion, not necessarily love.

2.1 Close relationships

The first significant relationship of a human life is the one they have to a woman who gave birth to them. It is a mother and father who become man's first relatives together with other family members. I.B. Singer included his family in his works, namely *In my father's court* or *More stories of my fathers' court*. He used names of his family members in his stories too.

A friendship can be considered a close relationship. "Friendship is universal: at all ages, in all classes and cultures, men and women, boys and girls, form bonds of friendship."¹⁷ If avid readers read Singer's books, they will find out the hero does not usually have many friends. He often has a few close ones only. Thus, Singer was more focused on liaisons than on friendship in his stories. Singer himself appreciated friendship highly and that was reflected in his characters. A friendship can be seen in the novel *Meshugah* – after Aaron and Max met, they were able to continue their friendship despite the fact it had been interrupted for twenty years.

Another type of relationship might be love of God and religious form.¹⁸ Regarding this type of relationship Singer was with certainly influenced by his family background. As a son of a rabbi he had very near to religion and God. In his works he used this love very often as it was usually when his heroes or characters got into difficulty, for example in the story *Gimpel the fool* when Gimpel did not know if children were his, he argued in himself

¹⁷ Dwyer, Diana. *Interpersonal Relationship*. (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 10.

¹⁸ See Erich, Fromm. *The Art of Loving*. (London: Thorsons, 1995), 49.

“However, I resolved that I would always believe what I was told. What’s the good of not believing? Today it’s your wife you don’t believe; tomorrow it’s God Himself you won’t take stock in.”¹⁹

2.2 Desiring romantic relationships

Finally, the last type of a relationship is a romantic relationship - liaison. In the beginning, development of this kind of relationship is very similar - people fall in love.²⁰ People in this relationship should not feel only psychically attracted to each other, as in foregoing reference, but also physical attraction. An example of that could be seen when Singer wrote about the relationship of a writer and his fan in the novel *Meshugah*. Miriam had already been in love with Aaron even before they met in person. In such case, without physical attraction it should be called platonic love and only later it comes to physical contact. Heroes of Singer desired the whole women’s generation, just as Isaac himself. They often got entangled in polygon of lovers.²¹ That could be the case of most of his stories’ heroes. Singer had deeply elaborated liaisons of his characters because sometimes it did not seem the hero achieved his goal in the course of the plot, but in the end the hero usually achieved it.

In the novel *Meshugah* the main character Aaron said, “I identified love with freedom. When a man loved a woman it was an act of freedom. Love of God could not take place by commandment; it could only be an act of free will. The fact that almost all creatures are born of a union between a male and a female was proof for me that life is an experiment in God’s laboratory of freedom. Freedom could not remain passive, it wanted to create. It wanted countless variations, possibilities, combinations. It wanted love.”²²

There is no typical relationship in the stories and novels of Isaac Bashevis Singer. It does not exist. Nevertheless it is very hard to define a typical relationship nowadays. The most common kind of relationship of Isaac Bashevis Singer might be a desiring liaison in

¹⁹ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Gimpel the Fool: And Other Stories*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 14.

²⁰ See Diana, Dwyer. *Interpersonal Relationship*. (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 1-13.

²¹ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 181.

²² Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Meshugah*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 226.

which he should be considered an expert. A dictionary definition of a liaison is “an illicit sexual relationship.”²³

How can a relationship be characterized? A dictionary definition of relationship is “the state or character of being related or interrelated.”²⁴ A relationship describes a connection each of us has to other since the moment we are born. A relationship is a part of a human being and it determines how two persons understand each other – either in a positive or a negative way.

2.2.1 Multi-gender

Story called “Two” is about a man who was supposed by his parents to be born as a woman. They expected a girl but baby boy was born. They called him Zissel and brought him up as a girl. He was wearing girl’s clothes. At school Zissel met Ezriel but after they had had an argument Zissel got married to a girl. Unfortunately, Ezriel got unhappily married to a girl too. After some time they met each other and arranged that Zissel stole the dowry of his wife and ran away. Zissel and Ezriel lived together as a married couple. After some period of time they had to earn money; Zissel, with a new name Zissa, dressed as a woman and started to work as a barber at a ritual bath. Here Zissa served to local women and he was very popular with them. One day a very nice woman came to this bath and Zissel tried to have physical contact with her. They fought and both of them drowned in the bath tub. During manipulating with his dead body people found that Zissa was a man. Crowd of angry people killed Ezriel. The woman, who drowned too, had a beautiful funeral. Ezriel and Zissa were buried nearby a cemetery wall, which was place traditionally used for those who did not fit among the righteous people.

There were many young women who wanted to marry Zissel because he was a handsome man, but he preferred boys to girls. The boy, whom he liked most, was Ezriel, a very nice boy from Lublin. Their first conversation was when Ezriel chose Zissel for a study partner. They became good friends soon and when Ezriel spoke with another student, Zissel was jealous of him. Later Ezriel chose some other study partner and Zissel, in defiance of that, was getting ready to marry a nice girl. Ezriel was preparing for his wedding too. Parents of Zissel’s fiancée forced him to marry her but their marriage did not

²³ Allen, Robert et al. *The Penguin English Dictionary*. (Praha: Universum, 2005), 803.

²⁴ Allen, Robert et al. *The Penguin English Dictionary*. (Praha: Universum, 2005), 1179.

fulfil their expectations. After some time Ezriel wrote to Zissel how much he missed him, and they started to write each other letters; Ezriel called his beloved man by a girl's name Zissa. They planned a rendezvous. On the day of their rendezvous Zissa got dressed as a woman and stole the dowry of his wife. They were glad to see each other and they promised never to leave each other again. They started to live together and devoted their time to their liaison. After a lapse of time they often argued because Zissa was more than Ezriel who lost his job and only stayed at home doing nothing. Soon he became jealous of Zissa.

2.2.1.1 *An analysis of relationship between Zissel and Ezriel*

When mother of Zissel was pregnant, both of his future parents wanted to have a girl. The sign of a girl in the mother's body was the shape of her belly. Zissel felt as a woman from his childhood. The initial impulse for his feeling that way could have been wearing girl's clothes. His parents dressed him in that manner because they were not prepared for a boy. That could be considered the determination of his sexual orientation.

Relationship between Zissel and Ezriel was very controversial for their neighbourhood. It was forbidden to have any other relationship than that between a man and a woman and that was only expectable after a wedding. For Jewish people it concerned twice as much because the first biblical story was about a man and a woman, Adam and Eve. Nevertheless, Zissel and Ezriel stayed devoted to God, they compared their relationship to biblical characters. "They compared their love to that between Jacob and Joseph or David and Jonathan."²⁵ However, the relationship between father Jacob and the most adored son of his, Joseph, was a family relationship; relationship between David and Jonathan was a strong friendship, and none of these was a romantic relationship – a liaison between two men. Apparently, they tried to compensate their offence against the Lord.

Many of the Ten Commandments were broken by these two young men. The first of them was: "You shall not steal"²⁶. This rule was violated when Zissel stole the dowry of his wife and he broke another commandment likewise – "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving

²⁵ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Gimpel the Fool: And Other Stories*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 40.

²⁶ Nelson, Thomas. *The New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition*. (Nashville: Catholic Bible Press a division of Thomas Nelson, 1993), 66.

you”²⁷, because that was action that led to disappointment of his parents. All parents are usually crushed when their child makes problems. “You shall not commit adultery.”²⁸ “You shall not murder”²⁹ The Law of Moses did not allow men to wear women’s clothes and if they broke that law they would burn in the fire of hell.³⁰

Relation of Ezriel to Zissel was not adequate from the beginning. Ezriel behaved impassively to Zissel, Ezriel made an effort to raise jealousy, it even seemed as a source of delight for him. Zissel wanted to take revenge on him by getting married to a nice girl. “But sometimes Ezriel acted friendly towards the other boys and then Zissel felt a pang of resentment – he wanted Ezriel to think better of him than of anyone else.”³¹ Other jealousy and revenge sighs can be found throughout the whole story. Those jealousies and revenges were damaging their liaison.

In today’s world, homosexuality is no longer a forbidden topic as it used to be in the past. Zissel never officially confessed to homosexuality or transsexuality. It is difficult to decide which one he was. Defined according to contemporary notions a homosexual is “a person who has sexual preference for members of their own sex,”³² while a transsexual is a term for “somebody physically of one sex with an urge to belong to or resemble the opposite sex.”³³ Regardless to his feeling he must have known people were prejudiced to any orientation different from heterosexual. It is the same at present. People often fear or dismiss those who differ in any way. Zissel only mentioned his concern once in a conversation with his mother. “‘Why can’t I be a girl?’ ‘You were supposed to be a girl,’ his mother replied.”³⁴ For Jewish people being a homosexual has not been forbidden, however their prejudices and orthodox belief have not allowed them to even think about this topic deeply. Still, it was forbidden to have homosexual physical contact, as Rabbi Michael Gold wrote to this controversial topic, “An important point to make from the outset is that Jewish law does *not* teach that it is forbidden to be a homosexual. On the contrary, Jewish law is concerned not with the source of a person’s erotic urges nor with

²⁷ Ibid, 66.

²⁸ Ibid, 66.

²⁹ Ibid, 66.

³⁰ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 253.

³¹ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Old Love*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), 38.

³² Allen, Robert et al. *The Penguin English Dictionary*. (Praha: Universum, 2005), 668.

³³ Allen, Robert et al. *The Penguin English Dictionary*. (Praha: Universum, 2005), 1497.

³⁴ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Old Love*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), 36.

inner feelings, but with acts. The Torah forbids the homosexual *act*, known as *mishkav zakhar*, but has nothing to say about homosexuality as a state of being or a personal inclination.”³⁵ For Zissel and Ezriel and their relationship it would have been simpler to live in present days because they would have been allowed to confess their homosexual orientation, so in their relationship there would not be any space for jealousies and revenges rising from their culture tied with laws, rules and duties.

2.2.2 Relationships based on an emotion similar to compassion

2.2.2.1 *Shosha*

The novel *Shosha* ranks among the best works of Isaac Bashevis Singer. Plot of this story was set to Krochmalna Street, Warszawa. It described life of a young man Arele Greidinger, called Aaron, a son of a rabbi, who was best friend with Shosha, an ordinary and uneducated girl. Arele went to school and was quite educated not only from the school, but in religious matters too. During the World War, when they both were children, they lost touch. Arele grew up and had to make his own living; he translated and wrote short stories and articles for a newspaper. He met many people in a writer’s club. Arele had many mistresses, for example a communist girl Dora, from the writer’s club, Celia, or Betty an actress. After 20 years, Arele, who was called Tsutsik especially by his friend from the club, met Shosha. They still felt for each other and some time later he decided to marry her. He did not care the girl was without any education and a simpler. To surprise of people, Shosha changed her behaviour as the time went. Last part of the story was situated in Tel Aviv. Shosha and Arele fled from Poland because the War started in Europe, but Shosha was not able to cope with the new situation and died there. Her weak body and mental strain finished everything.

Relation between Arele and Shosha started as an innocent children’s friendship. Arele visited Shosha because she would listen to Arele’s ideas and thoughts and she had toys at home too, which, for a son of a rabbi, was something unusual. Whereas Shosha found a reliable friend and a guardian in him. Later on, these two friends were separated by the war.

³⁵ Rabbi Gold, Michael. “Homosexuality and Halakhah.” *My Jewish Learning*, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Sex_and_Sexuality/Homosexuality/Homosexuality_and_Halakhah.shtml (accessed March 28, 2013).

After twenty years they met again. They did not stop to think about each other. Arele was captivated by Shosha again and Shosha was scared to lose him again. He started to visit her daily. Shosha never forgot of him, she would remember each moment she spent in his company. The relationship between Shosha and Arele was open. He told her about his former lovers. There were many lovers Arele had had so far but when he met Shosha all of his liaisons were slowly beginning to fade. Shosha very often made sure or asked Arele if he would ever leave her. His answer was always the same “No, Shoshele, I will stay with you as long as I live.”³⁶ Arele mentioned he wanted to marry Shosha once and she did not hesitate to tell it to her mother. Although nobody tried to persuade him not to marry her, some of his kin and neighbours were asking him or themselves what he liked about her. People who knew Arele tried to dissuade him from getting married to Shosha, because she was too weak and without sense, they added she was immature and had a weak body so she would not be able to become a good wife and support for him, and to be a good mother too. Shosha had difficulty meeting new people and could not communicate with them; she was very introverted, while Arele loved people. Shosha and Arele went on honeymoon but Shosha was scared of something all the time and constantly kept on asking him questions. The way Shosha behaved and thought changed after their wedding. She started to ask about things more common for other people and Arele no more felt ashamed of her. Arele was living with Shosha but kept his flat as a place to work. After the War started, Shosha and Arele tried to escape from the country but Shosha died in Israel on the second day of their journey.

2.2.2.1.1 An analysis of relationship between Shosha and Arele

Arele, in the novel *Shosha*, was very similar character to Isaac Bashevis Singer himself. Both of them were writers, they had the same external appearance, and they were lovers of women. Some judges, as for example his biographer Agáta Tuszyńska, said that “some parts of that book seem to be his autobiography.”³⁷ Perhaps this novel was a compensation for his liaisons which he did not actually realize because of his happy marriage. Many of his friends and reviewers said he was not such a philanderer he wanted to be, while others asserted Singer would have many lovers and would give his phone number or address

³⁶ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Shosha*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 114.

³⁷ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 312.

freely. This is quite an intriguing and tricky issue to which there is not an easy answer to be found. Not only was he an excellent fiction writer, he was very good at using fiction as a way to say as few facts about his actual life as possible too.

Arele had many liaisons, he lived unbridled. There were women from various backgrounds among his lovers: a communist Dora – there could be seen the connection with personal life of Singer, an actress Betty or a female servant Tekla. However, but none of his relationships was stable. It might have been caused by the passionate nature of the hero. That changed when Arele met Shosha again, and his liaisons slowly stopped. He had not any significant reason to marry her and it was merely a sudden proposal but he never regretted. Qualities of Shosha - devotion or simplicity were probably the reasons why Arele had the idea of asking her to marry him; it is also possible he only wanted her to stop asking him whether he would ever leave her. Arele was aware marriage to Shosha was a serious matter similar to adopting a child, mainly because of her immature personality. However, Arele no longer spoke or thought about Shosha as a child, because after their wedding his opinion changed in a way he saw a new light in her, he saw a mature woman.

Still, Shosha was a naive girl without education, who was afraid of everything and everyone. Meeting Arele could have evoked her memories from childhood when she had felt safe too. The fact that Shosha lost Arele in the period when she had last felt safe may have been an impulse for her to get stuck psychologically. Her psyche would protect her in the way Shosha remained in that period both psychologically and physically. It seemed Shosha herself was shocked by their relationship too because when they were together she would often ask Arele if he would ever leave her again. Wedding with Arele was probably a stimulus for her to feel safe again, after the wedding she began to grow again. In the presence of Arele, Shosha often met new people and furthermore, she was prepared to communicate with them. Arele was astonished by the changing behaviour of Shosha. He noticed her rising interest in practical matters of their household and also her newly awakened sexual desires.

Wedding of Arele and Shosha caused an impression full of contradictions. Some people may have seen his marriage as an act of compassion but those who knew Arele saw he adored that simple girl. Mother of Arele was very glad to live and to see his wedding though she was rather shocked when she saw his bride-to-be. "Now you come and marry

Shosha. True, she's a gentle child, unfortunately sick, perhaps a victim of her father, but couldn't you find something better in the whole of Warsaw?"³⁸ Similarly, the family of Shosha were flabbergasted by that news, they were never expecting Shosha to marry at all. One day mother of Arele went to visit mother of Shosha and also some other curious people came to their home, particularly girls. When they saw careless Shosha "the girls looked at one another and smiled. They exchanged side glances that asked 'What does he see in her?'"³⁹ On the other hand a friend of Arele, Morris Feitelzohn, had different opinion "He had praised her childish beauty to me... He added, 'Tsutsik, in my eyes she has a million times more charm than that American actress – what is her name?'"⁴⁰

Relationship between Shosha and Arele finished by her unexpected death during their escape from Warsaw. "The others walked fast and Shosha couldn't keep up. She began to stop every few minutes. Suddenly she sat down, and a minute later she was dead."⁴¹ "I think she simply didn't want to live anymore."⁴² In spite of her love to Arele, Shosha and her weak body did not have strength to live. From the biblical point of view there can be an analogy found in the story of the Hebrew people wandering in the desert for forty years before they were allowed to enter the Holy Land. None of the old generation survived. Similarly, Shosha, being short and weak was not meant to live in Israel with Arele too.

2.2.2.2 *Two Weddings and One Divorce*

The author dealt with one unusual wedding of two young people - Aaron and Fradl in this part of the story. Aaron was a rich young man who felt in love with a handicapped girl. According to a Jewish custom a teacher would come to potential groom-to-be and check his knowledge of the Torah. But Aaron David, the groom-to-be, was making mistakes on purpose. Aaron had to confess that he loved Fradl - a girl without hands and legs. Father of Aaron was very angry but he felt he did not have much time left before him to be alive and finally he agreed. Aaron and Fradl got married and his father died soon. Surprisingly, Fradl got pregnant and during their marriage she gave birth to five healthy and beautiful children. She also turned out to be a good housewife and women from neighbourhood started to be

³⁸ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Shosha*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 179.

³⁹ Ibid, 183.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 172.

⁴¹ Ibid, 247.

⁴² Ibid, 247.

friends with her. Of course, Fradl was not able to look after the household; she had two servants and Fradl managed them. Fradl proved very good at business and she succeeded in earning money too. Aaron loved his wife very much and he did not get married after her death.

Relationship between Aaron and Fradl began when Fradl sent a present to Aaron and he, in return, brought her a present too. He felt in love immediately, some people said Fradl told Aaron something in order to bewitch him; it was said she gave him some potion to drink. Aaron's father, neighbours and also the local rabbi tried to dissuade him from marrying her, but nothing helped. The young couple in love had a great time together and late during their marriage they had five daughters, and they were very successful in everything until Fradl started to be seriously ill. She died and Aaron never got married again.

2.2.2.2.1 An analysis of relationship between Fradl and Aaron

Reading through the story the reader cannot avoid asking one question: why did Aaron, who was such a clever boy, choose that miserable girl? Was it his compassion, reassurance of any kind or an enchantment? It could not have been compassion because it was Fradl who had made the first step by sending Aaron a present. Handicapped people are very sensitive to the way other people behave towards them; they desire to be treated as equal⁴³ and do not wish to feel any compassion. It could have been the courage of Fradl, she showed by sending a present to a strange man, which might have appealed to Aaron. At that time, it was not usual for a woman to send presents to a man.

Everybody, except for father of Fradl, was against their relationship. Furthermore, people came with a theory Aaron was bewitched by a spell. "It seemed that the sly creature spoke to him ticklish words and worked a charm on him. There is a proverb: The Evil One is not choosy. Who knows? Perhaps she treated him with a potion that makes the blood hot."⁴⁴ People did whatever they could to try to discourage Aaron from the marriage with Fradl, the outcome was hardly ever. The more disagreement the couple met, the stronger was their love. "He must have loved his wife truly, because after her death he did not

⁴³ See Chodicilide.cz. "Lidé s tělesným postižením." http://chodicilide.cz/jak-se-zachovat/lide-s-telesnym-postizenim#.UWqz8co_S1m (accessed February 19, 2012).

⁴⁴ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Old Love*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), 98.

remarry.”⁴⁵ Aaron not only protected her from other people, in addition to that, he tried to make her life easier and he employed two female servants who were helping Fradl with everything she needed. He simply must have loved her because he neither left her nor had he a mistress. He chose to share her difficult life.

Undoubtedly their relationship was an extraordinary one due to very many obstacles those two people had to face. Looking back at those times it was least probable for a handicapped woman to be able to have a child. In present days, it is not very common either. A woman must be able to take care of her children too. “People predicted that a cripple like Fradl would not get pregnant. But she was soon with child. In the years that followed she gave birth to five daughters, one more beautiful than the others.”⁴⁶ Having children probably made their marriage and relationship stronger.

2.2.2.3 *Gimpel the Fool*

“Gimpel the Fool” is a story about the life of an ordinary and an uninteresting man whose name was Gimpel. He was considered foolish and inferior man ever since his childhood. All his life was full of humiliation, ridicule and injustice, and Gimpel had no self-confidence. In the course of time people forced him to marry Elka, a curious woman with an illegitimate child. Even though they did not have any intercourse, the number of their children was growing. Gimpel was working in a bakery and brought bread home every day. As the time passed, Gimpel earned enough money to establish his own bakery. Elka became seriously ill and apologized for her infidelities she had committed. Elka died. Gimpel divided his money among her children and set out on a journey around the world.

Gimpel did not search for a mate, but people used to find him one because of the fun. Elka was the best target for them because she had bad reputation of a prostitute. Gimpel did not want to marry her but people were forcing him and told him that Elka was still a virgin. When the wedding started Elka confessed to a rabbi that she was a widow and divorced too, and Gimpel had no chance to escape. Gimpel wanted to go to bed with Elka but she did not want to and to great surprise of Gimpel, only four months later, she gave birth to a baby. Nevertheless, Gimpel loved her and stole things for Elka in the bakery where he

⁴⁵ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Old Love*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), 100.

⁴⁶ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Old Love*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), 99.

worked. From Monday to Friday he had to work in the bakery and when he came home Elka would scream at him. One night, he came home unexpectedly and found out Elka was with some man in the bed. Gimpel was very angry with her. He sought help of a rabbi the next day but the fact was Elka denied everything and insisted she was innocent and called Gimpel the fool. What followed was Gimpel no longer trusted himself and started to believe all he saw that night was a hallucination. Gimpel told it to a rabbi who tried to solve it, but instead of any solution, another baby was born. Time was passing and finally the rabbi said Gimpel could go back to his wife and children. Another surprise was yet to come: no sooner than he arrived home, he found Elka lying with an apprentice in one bed. Elka sent her husband to have a look at their goat and when he returned to her the apprentice was gone. Gimpel tried to find and look for him but Elka started screaming and after a while he went to sleep. From this time Gimpel did not hear and see anything. During her life, Elka gave birth to six children. Twenty years later Elka was dying and asked Gimpel to forgive her because none of their children was his own. He wanted to do something horrible but Elka appeared in his dream, stopped him, and said, "You fool! Because I was false is everything false too? I never deceived anyone but myself. I'm paying for it all, Gimpel. They spare you nothing here."⁴⁷

2.2.2.3.1 An analysis of relationship between Gimpel and Elka

Gimpel was not a real fool, whom he was considered, but his big mistake was he trusted people; he had faith and he also believed that everything was possible. That could have been reason for his foolish behaviour. People turned away from him; they considered him a fool because they did not really understand him. They usually made fun of him by jokes as for example "Gimpel, the Czar is coming to Frampol; Gimpel, the moon fell down in Turbeen; Gimpel, little Hodel Furpiece found a treasure behind the bathhouse."⁴⁸ Some people often enjoy when there is someone weak or different from them so they can make fun of such an outstanding person. It used to be like that and nowadays it is not different. Gimpel was not a weakling, however, he was too kind to beat anybody. Moreover he almost always got scolded when he was trying to say it was a lie. Wedding with the

⁴⁷ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Gimpel the Fool: And Other Stories*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 19.

⁴⁸ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Gimpel the Fool: And Other Stories*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 4.

unsophisticated Elka seemed to be as one of people's jokes. In order to prevent people from making innuendos he probably did what people wanted. So they stopped bothering him with talking about wedding. Thus he found himself in a marriage he did not wish and on top of all oddities it was people who gave Elka a dowry.

In general, Elka's relation to Gimpel was in no way loving, caring and sensitive. The weird side of their relationship could be seen from their first meeting which was actually the moment when they first spoke about getting married too. One of Elka's conditions to marry him was people would give her a dowry. Gimpel's expectations were not met at all.

In a way, that he did not become the master of the house as he had hoped before their wedding. Elka was selfish, bossy and mean, she often shouted at him, was angry with him, made fun of him, she would never understand Gimpel, while he kept on tolerating all her behaviour. The reason for him to bear her rude manners were most probably their children, although he was not their father indeed "“I saw the newborn child's face and loved it as soon as I saw it – immediately – each tiny bone.””⁴⁹

The fulfilment of their love was missing. Their relationship lacked the satisfaction from mental side and also from physical side. As well as it influenced their amorous and sexual life. Elka hardly ever slept with Gimpel in one bed, because Gimpel was in his bakery and when he was at home she did not want to. The cause of this rejection could be the fact that Elka liked money Gimpel was earning and she did not have to care about anything, only about her children and lovers, although she kept denying having any affairs till the day of her death. Gimpel lived with her and gave her money although he knew Elka was cheating on him. He also knew their children were not his but he remained true to his principles, because Elka insisted he was the father of their children. Gimpel trusted Elka when she told him must have been dreaming when he saw her with another man. It was easier to tell the rabbi it was a hallucination so that he would avoid listening to screaming Elka.

Humanity was very typical characteristic for Gimpel, it helped him to solve his relationships with people; he tried to find the best in everyone. He was an orphan, so who else he should trust than his own wife Elka. However, he suffered disillusionment when

⁴⁹ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Gimpel the Fool: And Other Stories*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 15.

dying Elka told him word of abandonment on her deathbed. The only person, he had ever trusted, disappointed him.

At the beginning of the relationship of Elka and Gimpel, it seemed the compassion could have been the reason of her agreement to marriage with Gimpel, it was indicated in the part where they met for the first time “‘Don’t be deceitful with me, for I’m an orphan.’ ‘I am an orphan myself,’ she answered, ‘and whoever tries to twist you up, may the end of his nose take a twist.’”⁵⁰ In the course of marriage of these main characters, Elka had no mercy on Gimpel. Elka cheated on him whenever she could, Elka was lying about it to him and sometimes it seemed as if she lied to herself too; Elka did not depend on him. What were her reasons for such strange behaviour? Why would she live with Gimpel, while she lied to him and kept on having affairs constantly? Considering Elka, and orphan, did not have finance for her and her children then money was the most logical reason. She knew that Gimpel, even though a simpler, was very hardworking.

Gimpel’s nickname the fool was a peculiar appellation of him. Gimpel was not the fool in the meaning of silly, but he was the⁵¹ fool because Gimpel did everything what Elka wanted, he did not argue, just did it. Furthermore there is a mistake in translation from Yiddish to English. Due to this fact the translation should not be *the fool* but *simple*.⁵²

2.2.3 Love and admiration

The novel *Meshugah* was situated in the USA of the 50’s of twentieth century and later the setting changed to Israel. It was a free sequel to the novel *Shosha*. The novel *Meshugah* described life of several people who lived in pre-war Poland. Some of them had fled in good time, however, some others had survived in Poland and moved to the USA later. In the begging of the book, forty-seven years old Aaron Greidinger, a well known Jewish author living in New York, met there his old friend from Poland Max Aberdam. Max was a rich stock broker, bohemian and philanderer. One day they took a walk and visited Miriam, a twenty-seven years old mistress of Max. Miriam was an admirer of Aaron’s pieces of

⁵⁰ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Gimpel the Fool: And Other Stories*. (New Yourk: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 6.

⁵¹ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Gimpel the Fool: And Other Stories*. (New Yourk: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 4.

⁵² Seidman, Naomi. “Who’s the Fool?: Isaac Bashevis Singer in America.” *Yiddish Book Center*, http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/files/pt-articles/PT45__fool.pdf (accessed February 16, 2013).

work, she read all his articles in newspapers, novels, and listened to interviews with him on the radio; she even wrote a paper about him in college. Eternal triangle developed among Aaron, Max and Miriam; both men shared their intimate details with Miriam, so members of this triad knew almost everything about each other. One night, when Aaron was sleeping with Miriam in her flat, her husband Stanley came. Stanley got angry and told Aaron everything about the past life of Miriam. Aaron was surprised but he did not attach great importance to it and continued in their liaison. Max was involved in financial machinations, which led to loss of his Jewish friend's money. He went to Poland but he had to return because he became sick. Eternal triangle started again. Max left for Israel to undergo a surgery. Miriam left for Israel to see Max and sometime later Aaron with friends went there too. Aaron was awarded a literature prize when he was at a party in Tel Aviv. There was a woman, at the party, who could remember Miriam from the time of war. The woman told Aaron that Miriam was a warder in a concentration camp, who beat and tortured girls and perhaps pulled children in to a gas chamber. Aaron returned back to New York. Max stayed in Israel and died there. Finally Miriam returned to the USA and, unexpectedly, the story finished with the wedding of Miriam and Aaron.

The relationship between Miriam and Aaron started with the cliché “I want you to know that I’m your greatest fan in the whole world. I read every word you write”⁵³ Isaac Bashevis Singer often started his stories with this phrase: Readers often call me they want to talk to me about a true story of their life. It was one of his literary tricks. Another starting phrase was: I read all you wrote.⁵⁴ Isaac loved his fame, and it was one way how he self-congratulated himself. There were many female readers who felt for him. After this acquaintance, Miriam and Aaron started seeing each other more often, while at the very same time Miriam was still dating her old lover Max who perceived Aaron as his son. The liaison between Miriam and Aaron slowly changed to love over time. The amorousness of this couple was stalled by an illness of Max; Miriam did not have much time for Aaron. Max went to Israel and Miriam wanted to visit him, but Aaron could not. On the eve of her departure she swore an oath “I swear by God in heaven and by the souls of those dear to me, the martyrs who perished at the hand of Hitler, may his name and memory be obliterated, that I shall have no other man in my life besides Max and you. If I should break

⁵³ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Meshugah*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 30.

this sacred vow, may all the courses of *Toykhekhe* descend on my head. Amen.”⁵⁵ Miriam considered this the marriage oath. She started to consider Max more as her father than her lover. Miriam left the USA and after some time Aaron with his friends followed her. Miriam and Aaron met again. Miriam forced Aaron to go on a literary awarding party where he would be awarded. There he found out the truth about the past of Miriam. Aaron left Israel with disenchanted feelings but still he was in letter contact with her. Relationship between Miriam and Max became platonic. For the time being Max died in his sleep. Miriam came back and married Aaron in a civil ceremony, not a Jewish one.

2.2.3.1 *An analysis of an eternal triangle*

The relationship of Miriam evolved during the twists and turns of the story. First, she loved her married lover, seventy years old Max Aberdam, Aaron’s old friend from Warszawa. When Max met Aaron in New York and Miriam became acquainted with him, whom she platonically loved before their introduction, she slowly started to fall in love with him really. Miriam loved Aaron platonically, because she adored how he wrote and what types of stories he wrote. Furthermore, it was the first thing Miriam told him, “Max I never kept it from you,” Miriam said. “I love you for what you are, and I love him for what he writes.”⁵⁶ This statement supports theory that her relationship to Aaron was based on admiration firstly. After some time Miriam wanted to have a baby and because Max was quite old and ill for this, Aaron could be a better partner to start a family. Max was three times older than Miriam and he often tried to mentor or teach her. It may have been the reason why Miriam changed her attitude towards him and started to perceive Max more as her father than her lover.

Max was an old philanderer and married Miriam was one of his lovers. He appealed to her affection towards him, much older man than her. By the end of the story Max was very ill and he considered Miriam as his daughter; he treated her nicely and she repaid it by taking care of him. Max very often manipulated people; he forced them to find funds for him, however, those funds were lost in the course of time. Max was a very rich man, he

⁵⁴ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 184.

⁵⁵ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Meshugah*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 158.

⁵⁶ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Meshugah*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 31.

was a big spender too but a positive feature of his character was his generosity. He was also a kind a person who wanted the best for Miriam and Aaron.

When Aaron first entered the flat of Miriam, she gave an impression of being rather a chaotic child. At the beginning her answers were rather childish but later they became more philosophical. Aaron felt in love almost immediately. He thought he had known all about Miriam but he found the terrible truth about her. The most enigmatic question of this liaison was Aaron's return to Miriam. Each reader must have been asking that question after finishing the book. Maybe it was his nature other people appreciated, he forgave mistakes, helped others and kept his word. He knew a critical situation would influence actions of everybody, and he never judged behaviour of other people. Such an attitude may have been an outcome of what he has been through during both wars. However he was not engaged in any of them on a battle field. Besides that, a crucial moment for his decision not to leave Miriam could have been his conversation with a rabbi on his flight back to the USA, "'You have a family, a wife and children?' 'No.' 'A widower?' 'I never married.' Rav Zechariah Kleingewirtz scratched his beard. 'How come? Since Hitler – may his name be blotted out – murdered so many of our Jews, it behoves Jews to rise new generations.' 'True, but...' 'I know, the enlightened argue as follows: Why bring up new generations when Jews are always in trouble?'"⁵⁷ That conversation may have brought to him an idea of his future life. He probably realized he was old enough to share his life with somebody or have a family instead of living on his own.

⁵⁷ Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Meshugah*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 213.

3 EVALUATING OF DESIRING LIAISON IN WORKS OF I. B. SINGER

The relationships between two lovers in works of Singer are too far from a traditional picture of a couple. Each couple almost always met many obstacles and had to fight with adversities of fate; they often had to reconcile to a difficult issue. There were not couples only in the works of Singer; he often complicated his lovers' relationship by creating eternal triangles. That might be a strategy of the writer. He used passion, lust or desire and employed these emotions as modifiers of the unusual liaisons of his characters. Those emotions had consequence as, for example, jealousy. For some heroes jealousy became a source of pleasure. The hero's confession of being unfaithful to their partner made their passion towards each other stronger, and it became a part of an erotic ritual as well as description of degeneracy.⁵⁸

Emotions in books of Singer did not only lead to bad behaviour. Other people were often source of bad behaviour too because their opinion was full of prejudice, envy, hatred and ill thoughts. The story "Two", as mentioned above, showed how jealousy in the relationship of two married men, later living together, changed the dynamics of their liaison. Differently love between Aaron and Fradl in the story "Two weddings and one divorce" led to extraordinary bravery of Aaron in the fight for his adored girl.

Another important component of the literary output of Isaac Bashevis Singer was contrast between internal and external world of a couple. The internal world meant relationship between lovers and the external one described other people or a barrier that the couple had to surmount. That was the case of almost each story of Singer. There were external barriers that made the couple strive and made desire the force of their liaison.

Some critics never forgave Singer he employed controversial topics. Singer's detailed description of characters in his works was very realistic but on the other hand his main characters often found themselves in strange or difficult situations. Those situations were not common for past generations neither are they for the current ones. Opponents of Singer criticized his characters who acted against Jewish laws and often broke the moral ones too. Professor Heszal Klepfisz for example, in his criticism, disagreed with the way Singer pictured Jewish people; he said orthodox Jews simply were not like those in the books of

⁵⁸ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 255.

Singer. The Jewish author did not seem to think so because he tried to describe all his characters as truly as he remembered or viewed them. He never judged his characters or their relationships in his stories; he never looked for a moral neither did he state his opinion. The writer kept his position of a narrator.

Many characters of Isaac Bashevis Singer were considered to be foolish or simple; it was one of their common features. Simplicity of the hero was very often overshadowed by other positive personal qualities. Maybe they were simple in a way they lead their lives but they never lost their love, compassion, empathy and their kind heart. Whether it is called humanity or a soft-hearted feature, there is a good example of this statement in behaviour of “Gimpel the Fool”, when he did not leave Elka, although he found out that their children were not his own.

The author’s background could have predetermined him to use religious annotations in his Jewish stories. Statement that literature should avoid love and sex he considered a sheer nonsense. Bible and Talmud are also full of sex and love stories. There was no need to be ashamed of it as it was accepted as a necessary part of life. Just through love and sex the truth about a man can be manifested. Singer wanted to uncover the truth.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ See Agáta, Tuszyńska. *Singer, krajiny paměti*. (Praha: H+H nakladatelství, 2006), 252.

CONCLUSION

In my work, I explored relationships described in selected stories of a Jewish author, Isaac Bashevis Singer. This Bachelor thesis dealt with three most frequently used relationship type, which I considered, were the most significant in his literary works, their common feature was love and sex. The three types were namely: a multi-gender relationship, relationships based on an emotion similar to compassion and love and admiration.

In the present days we can meet with various types of relationships all around, some of them are common for us, but some of them may be surprising. The exploration proved that the books of Singer may cause shock by the nature of relationships the author is describing. Even in the present readers can be surprised by raw description of his characters. He included controversial topics unusual for his era and he was not afraid the true nature of man as well as their prejudice.

In almost each relationship described by Singer I found elements that were common for his works. Singer never commented on the plot or characters in his work; he stayed objective. He never judged his characters or their action. First of all, controversial topics appeared in his stories and they were usually against typical orthodox Jewish behaviour, public opinion too. That led to tempestuous reaction of Jews and critics of Singer. Secondly, it was the bad nature of man that became evident in critical situations. Jealousy was widely used in the books of Singer. Thirdly, simplicity of the hero was immediately obvious to other people and laughed at by them. Unfortunately, it was the superficial judgement that very often hid the hero's great human qualities; however, they were not evident at first sight. Prejudice must not be omitted, for it occurred very often in specific Jewish community. Another characteristic feature of Singer's description was his use of religion or religious elements. Finally, there was a contrast between an internal and external world that added dynamics into both plot and relationships of the heroes.

Singer presented to us that love was an eternal power and an indivisible part of people's lives. Taking advantage of that knowledge he added his thoughts as a part of himself, and the very unique Jewish background and culture in order to create his outstanding literary output. The author showed us that relationships were in past, they are now, and they will always be all around us in the future; it is a constant element we encounter not only in the literary world but in our real lives as well.

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