

In Pursuit of the “Moses Complex” in Isaac Singer: The Author’s Psychological Trauma in *Shadows on the Hudson*

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アイザック・シンガーにおける「モーセ・コンプレックス」の分析
—— 『ハドソン川の影に見られる作家のトラウマ』 ——

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『ハドソン川の影』のイディッシュ語原文は1957年に出版されたが、諸事情により英訳が出版されたのは作者アイザック・バシェヴィス・シンガーの没後1998年である。『ハドソン川の影』はそれまで、ユダヤ系文学の専門家の間でもほとんど論じられることがなかった。この作品の舞台は1947年から1948年のニューヨークである。すなわち、ホロコーストが終焉を迎えて2年後、そして、ユダヤ人の国家が成立した時代である。このような大きな時代のうねりの中でアメリカに暮らすユダヤ移民を扱っているのだ。その意味で、一文学作品としてだけでなく、時代精神を映し出している貴重な文献でもある。この作品中で言及される「モーセ・コンプレックス」というキーワードを軸に、シンガー文学の特長を明らかにした。

キーワード：イディッシュ語、ホロコースト、「モーセ・コンプレックス」

Chapter 1 The Kaleidoscopic World of *Shadows on the Hudson*

All heresy was based on the assumption that man was wise and God was a fool: that man was good and God evil; that man was a living thing but the Creator dead. As soon as one left these wicked thoughts the gates of truth swung open.¹

Shadows on the Hudson (original Yiddish title: *Shotns baym Hodson*) is a novel through which Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902-91) minutely records the Jewish immigrants' lives in New York during a special period for Jews from 1947, just after the Holocaust, till 1948 when the State of Israel was established. Until English translations appeared,

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his Yiddish work was for non-Yiddish speakers and also for famous Jewish critics like Leslie Fiedler. First serialized in *The Forward (Forevertz)*, a Yiddish newspaper, *Shadows on the Hudson* was published in book form in 1957. Because of the delay of the English translation, even famous Jewish literary critic Leslie Fiedler did not know the fact that this voluminous work is set in New York before *Enemies, A Love Story* (original Yiddish title: *Sonim, di Geshichte fun a Liebe* 1966)². *Shadows on the Hudson* was translated into English by Joseph Sherman in 1998. Through this book we encounter a variety of Jewish Holocaust survivors living in New York City just after World War II and one-year prior to the founding of the State of Israel. In one way or another, they are all overshadowed by the nightmare of the Holocaust. Singer marvelously delineates several distinctive characters as well as the Zeitgeist of America in the late 1940's and 50's in the form of Communism. Most survivors lost their belief in God after the Holocaust, but they still could not help clinging to some replacement for God in order to survive. There are four different types of characters illustrated in *Shadows on the Hudson*.

1. Pious believers of Orthodox Judaism: Boris Makaver and Hertz Dovid Grein (a penitent).
2. Believers in Communism: Herman Makaver (Boris's nephew), and his wife Sylvia.
3. Believers in Mysticism: Stanislaw Luria (Boris's daughter Anna Makaver's second husband).
4. Hedonists: Anna Makaver, Esther Hatelback (Grein's mistress), Dr. Solomon Margolin (Boris's old friend and his family doctor) and his wife Lise. Yasha Kotik (Anna's first husband), a comedian.

Unlike most of Singer's other novels, he deals here with a multiplicity of characters. Through this essay, I would like to analyze such unique characters as Grein, Esther, and Boris, focusing upon their "Moses Complex."

One meaning of the "Moses complex" focuses primarily on the psychology of a leader who, convinced that he (or she) is in possession of eternal truth, must nonetheless face the failure of his own abilities as a leader to inspire others to follow him. This is clearly the problem Borukh Makaver deeply feels, yet he is admirable in this defeat by nonetheless inspiring his friends and those in his circle to a deeper commitment to the Jewish faith through his ability to forgive the weakness and sin of those whom he loves and interacts with.

Another meaning of the "Moses Complex," a different kind of psychology, is seen in Grein. It is the fundamental problem that I.B. Singer faced in his own personal inability to follow faithfully the guidance of Moses (or Jewish tradition) as manifested in the example of his Hasidic father. It is about the follower's psychology, not the leader's psychology. What troubles the follower and informs this psychological dilemma is an

inability to follow the truth, the tradition, God, and this is the same problem. But Grein, like Singer himself, must struggle with the psychology of the follower who is incapable of living up to the example of the leader who embodies the truth from on high.

Like Borukh, Hertz Dovid also faces his failure with resolve and with action and self-sacrifice, but by the end of the novel, he has only just begun his journey of return to higher values, and it is unclear whether he can, or will, succeed in this noble endeavor as a result of his resettlement in the new nation of Israel.

Chapter 2 Two Types of “Moses Complex”

As Richard Bernstein writes, “*Shadows on the Hudson* is a startling, piercing work of fiction, a book with a strong claim to being Singer’s masterpiece³,” despite his writing many novels and short stories after this work. This masterpiece represents almost every element of the writer’s philosophy and awareness of “the Dark Age” suggested by its title.

The protagonist Hertz Dovid Grein, a typical Singer character, is weak-willed against woman’s temptation similar to such other protagonists in his major works as Yasha in *The Magician of Lublin* (1960), Herman in *Enemies, A Love Story* (1969), Aaron Greidinger in *Shosha* (1978), Joseph Shapiro in *The Penitent* (1983), Aron Greidinger in *Meshugah* (1994), and many more in other works. Despite many passages of caustic, untimely and inappropriate humor from such characters as Yasha Kotik, a comedian and Doctor Margolin, Singer intentionally strips the kindly and gentle tone evident in many short stories such as “The Fools of Chelm” (1973), “A Crown of Feathers” (1973) and other stories. *Shadows on the Hudson* is as dark as his first novel *Shoten in Goray* (1935), which is set in the years following 1648, when the Chmelnicki⁴ massacres occurred. *Shoten in Goray* illuminates the Jewish messianic cult that arose in the village of Goray and the effects of the 17th century faraway false messiah Shabbatai Zvi on the local population. *Shadows on the Hudson* similarly deals with the disillusioned Holocaust survivors in a kind of vastly expanded version. Richard Bernstein writes,

But the new book’s claim on the status of masterpiece stems from its largeness, the depth and complexity of its exorbitantly vivid, intelligent characters and from Singer’s Dostoyevskian skill at weaving into a seamless tapestry various disorderly responses to the savagery of life.⁵

Various Jewish intellectuals argue about the meaning of God, the Holocaust, and even the other world at the party held at the apartment of Boris Makaver, one of the protagonists. Boris represents a binding force that attracts almost every major character-- rabbis and scholars from the old country who have made homes in New York in the years just after World War II. Those characters are skillfully synthesized

as if they were woven into “a seamless tapestry.” He is a Moses figure who leads and helps many Jewish immigrants with his ample means.

Despite the fact that this book is Singer’s masterpiece, it only appeared long after its first publication in Yiddish in translated book form was late due to its length (548 pages, in the English version), the publisher’s difficulties in having it translated, and Singer’s own failure to get around to the revisions he usually made on his original Yiddish manuscripts.

Unlike other Singer characters, most of the figures in *Shadows on the Hudson* are well off, but each of them lives in deep grief, spiritual turmoil, and with nightmares brought about by the Holocaust. One of the characters who lost his family members during WWII is Stanislaw Luria. Even after immigration to the U.S., he never forgets his wife, who was a victim of the Nazis, and he is eventually taken by her to the world of the dead.

The main figures gather at a dinner party at Boris Makaver’s Upper West Side apartment. A recent émigré from Warsaw, Boris is a religious and successful real estate investor who has grown wealthy. Among the guests are Boris’ attractive, self-centered and passionate young daughter, Anna, her *nudnik* (boring) husband Stanislaw Luria, and a man named Hertz Dovid Grein, who looks like “a yeshiva boy from Scandinavia” (14). Grein was once a mathematics and chess prodigy in the old country, where he used to be Anna’s tutor. Later, he eventually becomes Anna’s lover. Grein, the protagonist of *Shadows on the Hudson*, resembles Herman Broder in *The Enemies, a Love Story*, and Aaron Greidinger in *Shosha* and *Meshugah*, all of whom are overshadowed by the Holocaust.

An old friend of Boris is a medical doctor named Solomon Margolin, who plays a very important role in protecting Boris, while confidentially living with his former wife Lise, who had abandoned Solomon in order to ally herself with a Nazi during WWII.

The main character Grein, a stockbroker, sways between three women, his wife Leah, who has two non-religious children with him; his lover Esther, and Luria’s wife Anna. He is fully controlled by ungovernable passion.

Boris Makaver’s role in *Shadows on the Hudson* reminds us of an image of Moses, a powerful biblical figure, who led Jews out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Dean Waggenspack clearly defines “The Moses Complex” as follows:

The Moses Complex begins with the leader telling the subjects the path to follow. Since the leader (Moses) has been given the wisdom from “on-high” (God), everyone else should know to follow. It’s simple. Moses has the knowledge. Moses leads the group to the Promised Land. The loyal subjects all follow along. There may be some hard times along the way. . . . But because Moses has the knowledge, experience, insight and leadership role it should be apparent to all others that they should follow him. . . . They might agree they want to get to

the Promised Land. But they don't want to blindly follow him. . . . And perhaps his Promised Land is not their Promised Land. Moses keeps scratching his head. "They all know I have the information from 'on-high'. . ." They trust me. "Why aren't they following with enthusiasm?" That is the Moses Complex—because of what we know and the great places we will take others, we ought to be followed.⁶

This is the psychology of Boris, a pious Jew, when he tries to impose his sense of values about faith in God and practicing orthodoxy upon other Jewish survivors invited to his party. He is a symbolic and overpowering presence for those who attend him in his sumptuous apartment. Many intellectual friends are supported by his wealth and generosity. Even the people who do not share a sense of Judaism with him cannot help compromising their views in this atmosphere. Take Boris's nephew, Herman Makaver, for example, who later perishes in Stalin's Communistic Russia despite his deep belief in communism and love for his wife Sylvia. We can see a different version of Messianism, for he is a communist frustrated by other Jews showing no passion for the achievement of communism in America. Paradoxically speaking, Boris and his nephew Herman have much in common by nature. They believe in different Messiahs, but they both believe in a Savior.

Among all those irreligious are Boris's old friend Margolin and his former wife Lise. The doctor is afraid of revealing the secret about his wife and daughter to Boris. As mentioned earlier, Dr. Margolin's wife left with their daughters to live with a Nazi during WWII, but this was to save their lives. To Boris it is unthinkable and corrupt to have such close contact with active Nazi members.

Like Moses in the Bible, Boris is a fortress of Judaism in America after WWII, who will not allow old world survivors to have a mind and a will of their own:

Though as a young man he had changed his name from Borukh to Boris, out of business expediency, he had never abandoned his Jewishness. After the Hitler slaughter Boris resumed strict religious observance. Wrapped in a prayer shawl and phylacteries, he recited the morning service every weekday and no longer neglected the afternoon and evening prayers. In Williamsburg he had sought out a Hasidic rebbe to whose father Reb Menachem Makaver—his own father—had once traveled. And he still recalled a page or two of the Gemara. (4-5)

Unlike many other Holocaust survivors, Boris returns to strict religious observance as the result of the tragedy and literally practices traditional Jewish ceremony. Boris is a pivotal character by whom all others are attracted or repelled.

His only daughter Anna is a good example to show the distance that many New World Jews keep from her father. While engaging in an adulterous relationship with

Grein, she separates herself from her father Boris in her violation of one of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Hertz Dovid Grein has a family, but he is not the old world type of man who takes his wife with him when he goes visiting.

Boris admonishes his guests to be united as a nation instead of individuals:

" 'Since the Gentiles kill us all the same, / Let us keep our Jewish name.' Even though they murder us as individuals, why should we choose to die as a nation? Let us at least remain Jews and not assimilate."(5)

Just after WWII, Jews in Palestine were preparing to become an independent country and to establish the state of Israel in 1947. Boris suggests the Jewish nation be acknowledged by the United Nations without referring to its possibility. He maintains that it is quite inevitable for Jews to cling to Judaism instead of assimilating to American culture.

Next, I would like to move on to another type of the "Moses Complex." It is about the follower's psychology, not the leader's psychology. Against Boris's old-fashioned idea of holding Jewish tradition, Dr. Margolin criticizes his outdated opinion about Jewish assimilation:

"Your father's and your grandfather's Jewishness no longer exists and it'll never exist again. It was a brief episode in Jewish history."(5)

However, Margolin is deeply concerned about Boris's response towards his wife and daughter who live in New York, just as followers of Moses were afraid of the leader's hostility. Because of his fear, the doctor conceals till the end of the story the fact that he has forgiven and remains a partner to his wife who betrayed him. In the end, Margolin meets Grein, the protagonist of the novel, and confesses the shameful concealed fact that he accepts his wife, a former Nazi-sympathizer, and daughter. Knowing the doctor's agony, Grein explicates his idea of modern Judaism and Christianity:

"To me, modern culture is the exact opposite of the Jewishness I've known since childhood. Christianity is even complicit with this modern culture, because Christianity is a compromise between God and the world--it's given God all the beautiful words and human beings all the ugly deeds." (443)

Both Margolin and Grein are highly educated about Judaism; Margolin was an earnest student at a yeshiva. Grein knows that there is no such Jewishness in modern America because he is well aware of his "Moses Complex" existing in himself:

"I always wanted to be something. They say every Jew has a Moses complex.

Since I was a child, I've been preparing myself. You'll laugh, but I was thinking about these issues when I was only five years old. I saw other children torturing a cat and it made me ill---it took months to get over it. . . . Although in my youth I gave every sign of having unusual gifts, I suddenly saw them all wasted on triviality. I expended all my energy chasing after the sort of women one didn't even need to chase. I became indifferent to others---to their tears, their sufferings, even to their lives." (444)

Having enough knowledge and understanding of Judaism, Margolin is capable of sharing Grein's theory of the "Moses Complex." In order to decipher the protagonist's psychological complex, it is necessary to understand the complex which every Jew shares. The "Moses Complex" is considered one of the strongest driving-forces of Singer's literature. Singer's idea of "this psychological birthright" slightly differs from Waggenspack's definition. "I always wanted to be something. They say every Jew has a Moses complex." Moses is definitely a perfect leader showing the strict commandments to be observed by Jews. Isaac Singer himself learned as a young boy what a Jew should observe from his father, a Hassidic rabbi, but he cannot keep the commandments throughout his life. It makes him feel a strong sense of regret for what he cannot achieve according to the Jewish laws. This personal failure implants in Singer a complex psychology out of which he creates penitent protagonists, such as Hertz Grein in *Shadows on the Hudson* or Yasha Mazur in *The Magician of Lublin* (1960).

Chapter 3 The Author's "Moses Complex"

Most of Singer's protagonists struggle with the "Moses Complex" throughout their lives. Why is that, and where does it come from? Reflecting upon his boyhood, Singer recalls his saint-like father:

All I can say is that he [Singer's father] lived like a saint and he died like one, blessed with a faith in God, His mercy, His Providence. My lack of this faith is actually the story which I am about to tell. (*Love and Exile*)⁷

Singer's "Moses Complex" originates from Singer's Hasidic upbringing. This saint-like image of his father emerged from his life as a Hassidic rabbi (rebbe) and modeled the role of Moses, for Isaac Bashevis and his brother Israel Joshua Singer, a symbolic image of Judaism. Singer's father, Pinchos Menachem Singer was a man of belief and modesty, and living primarily in a world of Jewish liturgy made him seem impossibly naïve. In *More Stories from My Father's Court* (2000), Singer delineates his modest and compassionate father, in comparison to another successful rabbi, was never better dressed. One day the rich rabbi visited Pinchos Mendel and he bragged

only about himself and his greatness. To show Pinchos his knowledge about Talmud, he insolently translated Biblical Hebrew passages from the Talmud into Yiddish (a mundane language) for such a Talmud scholar as his father. Even as a little boy Isaac could understand the quotation; therefore, it goes without saying that his father did not need the conceited rabbi's Yiddish translation. Pinchos, however, did not interrupt his talk and carefully listened to his translation. Singer's father kept silence, as if he were a Peretz's "Bontshe Shvayg⁸." Even when his wife declared that she would not let the rabbi cross the threshold, Pinchos implored her not to do such a rude thing. Pinchos said, "He has his flaws, but he's a great scholar."⁹ After growing up, Singer had a chance to talk with a scholar and learned from him about his own father's generosity and humility:

Once, a scholar praised my father's book, telling me that Father "interprets what he sees." For him, the plain meaning of the text was more important than overly subtle hair-splitting. He compared Father to the early commentators. I then asked the scholar if he knew that rabbi who would come to visit us, and if he indeed was such a genius.

The scholar replied, "Disjoined blather . . . lots of hot air In his quibbling analyses he tries to bring East and West together. Can you bring two walls together? Futile attempts . . . ; he doesn't even come up to your father's ankles."¹⁰

Through this illustration, we see how deeply Isaac came to respect his father and pays homage towards him. On the other hand, his first son Joshua Singer despised him as "impractical" and "gullible," a Yiddish "schlemiel."¹¹ Isaac Singer recollects his boyhood and writes about the hostile relationship between his father and older brother in his memoir *In My Father's Court* (1966):

My brother Israel Joshua, because of his emancipated views, found it difficult to speak to my father, whose only response was, "Unbeliever! Enemy of Judaism!"¹²

In contrast to Joshua, Isaac B. Singer seems to respect his father for Pinchos's as deep religiosity and humility, as we see in the successful story "Gimpel the Fool" (1953). A well-known Singer schlemiel-figure, Gimpel reaches belief in God through his honest life, often compared with Bontshe in I. L. Peretz's "Bontshe Shavayg" (1894). Bontshe is a typical shlimazel (an unlucky person) in this world, but after his death, while ascending to heaven he is highly praised by the angels for having kept his "silence" in the face of God regardless of his hardships. In *The Magician of Lublin*, the protagonist Yasha Mazur, a skirt-chasing magician, finally comes to realize how seriously he has wronged many people because of his egocentric passion, and chooses a penitent life by containing himself in a small brick structure.

In spite of Joshua Singer's influence upon his younger brother, Isaac Singer never left his religiosity or belief in mysticism. Joshua endeavors to delve into the depth of human psychology and instructs readers how stupid it is to cling to mystic phenomena through his work. On the other hand, Isaac sees a mystical world surrounding us and believes it is impossible for us to elucidate what God intends to do.

Boris's nephew Herman seems to be modeled upon Joshua Singer, who was also a believer in Stalin's communism, unlike his younger brother Isaac. Due to his blind belief in Stalin's Russia, Herman leaves his wife Sylvia behind in New York for Russia, ignoring Uncle Boris's warning of the possibility of his being murdered there. As a communist or socialist, Herman's belief in Stalin never sways, even if his uncle tries to wake him up from his delusion. Though Joshua Singer flees Russia to America, Herman nonetheless has a strong affinity with him. The relationship between Boris and Herman mirrors that of Pinchos and Joshua.

Chapter 4 Hertz Dovid Grein's "Moses Complex"

Singer often explores a unique love-quadrangle (involving one man and three women) in the post-Holocaust existence of Jewish New York. Singer's themes of passion, loyalty, betrayal, and disorientation make for a compelling and kaleidoscopic read. Around Grein, the protagonist, are three women, namely his obedient and undemanding wife Leah, Boris's married daughter Anna, and Esther, Grein's mistress. Leah is an ideal wife, who loves Grein deeply:

"Leah retained the meekness of generations of wives made wise by the suffering of generations of great-grandmothers who knew that a man was but a man, and that if a woman wanted to live with him, she had to be capable of patience, devotion, and humility." (74)

His wife Leah reminds us of "Leah" in the Bible, who is the modest and old-fashioned wife of Jacob. In contrast to his religious and observant wife, Grein is illustrated as follows:

He was one of those men who, out of house, throw off every restraint, but at home long for chasteness. He was even jealous if Leah kissed a male relative at family celebration. This double standard had been pointed out to him countless times, he cited support for his conduct from the highest authority---the Bible. Had not Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, and Solomon all kept concubines? (75)

Grein used to be Anna's teacher, and she has special feelings towards him: "He brought back Warsaw for her, the time when she still had a mother. Being with him

made her young again, vivacious, the only child of long ago" (19).

Esther is an older woman who attracts Grein like a witch:

"I made a wax model of you and stuck seven needles into it. As long as the needles remain there, your heart'll be drawn to me like a magnet, and it'll blaze and melt like wax. *Hocus-pocus, abracadabra, barabas-satanas, kokodover, malkei tzedk.*" (218)

Then she jokes about herself, "I'm an old witch" (218). It is highly possible that Esther has indeed put a spell on Grein and can draw his heart like a magnet at any moment. Even at midnight, it appears that she has power over Grein and calls him to her presence just before her marriage to a rich old man. She tells him,

"It's the truth, my murderer. I'm dead and buried. I'm a corpse with a telephone!" Esther suddenly started to laugh hysterically and stopped just as abruptly. "Wherever you are, come to me immediately." (213)

Regardless of his decision not to pursue a further relationship with Esther, her order is irresistible for the protagonist. Esther is the only woman who can control Grein like a "witch," as if she has put him under a curse.

After Esther marries Morris Plotkin, a rich furrier, they visit the depressed and gloomy Europe in 1947 just after the war. Returning from this honeymoon, she decides to leave Plotkin and calls Grein again by camouflaging with quotes the sad story of Jephthah's daughter¹³ from the Hebrew Bible.

"I'm here. I'm yours, yours! You can do as you wish with me. I'm like Jephthah's daughter---you can offer me up as a sacrifice. Tell me what I must do, my master, and I'll fulfill it to the letter, because you're my priest and I'm your burnt offering." (473)

In the Jewish context, a "witch" is understood as a "hedonist" who denies Moses' Ten Commandments without hesitation. Esther's uncontrollable passion for Grein is expressed here as if she were ready to become a sacrifice for his sake alone. Easily taken in by her sweet and magical words, he decides to give up his relationship with other people. Grein then recollects a phrase of Gemara:

"When a man is overcome by an evil inclination, he should clothe himself in black and go to a place where he is not known, and do what his heart desires." (475)

At this time Grein still does not remember what the book of Proverbs warns Jews,

“But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul” (Proverbs 6:32)

Esther is successful in cajoling him until they move to a little town in Maine and plan to live like penitents. They scarcely see a car on the narrow road nearby. To Grein, it is a cozy if run-down farmhouse. “A cricket chirped, not a field cricket but the familiar domestic variety they often heard behind the stove in the old country” (511). This is the very place for him to be nobody, and he can do what he likes without having to consider other people’s opinions. In addition to that, he can cherish reminiscences of his childhood in Poland:

To Grein it seemed as if the cricket was saying, Don’t be so troubled, there is a role for you. You are a part of the plan, a part of the history of the cosmos. An Eye exists that looks down on you and sees all your misfortune, all your sorrow, all your confusion. Grein remembered the evening prayers and the recitation of the Shema , and he had an urge to pray. (511)

In Singer’s works, a cricket is used as a symbol of the Jewish prayer tradition in the old country as it appears in his memoir *A Day of Pleasure* (1963):

We were both silent again, and suddenly I heard the familiar chirping of a cricket. Could it be the cricket of my childhood? Certainly not. Perhaps her great-great-great-granddaughter. But she was telling the same story, as ancient as time, as puzzling as the world, and as long as the dark winter nights of Warsaw.¹⁵

The sound of a cricket resounds like the recitation of *Shema*.

Grein’s semi-penitent life, however, is not accomplished until he immigrates to Israel. A hedonist, Esther always seeks another male partner and a thrilling time. She is never satisfied with a life of monotony without the social events of a New York City. After a short time living with Grein on the farm, she flees him and goes back to New York seeking pleasure.

As a result, Grein finally realizes his long-desired life of penitence when he severs his “connections with everyone, even with [his] children” to move to Israel, totally freeing himself from mundane reality:

One cannot keep the exs while one lives in a society that breaks them. A soldier must wear a uniform and live in a barracks. Whoever wants to serve God must wear God’s insignia, and must separate himself from those who serve only themselves. The beard, the sidelocks, the girdle worn during prayers, the fringed ritual undergarment---all these are the uniform of the Jew, the outward signs that he belongs to God’s world, not to the underworld. (545)

To become a penitent in a secular world is not possible unless one is guarded by the ritual uniform. This is what Grein realizes in the end after a long journey through American secular society. Yet, he does not deny the soft spot in his heart: "I am bound to my family and even to my good friends, but I must remain isolated. The whole point of Jewishness is isolation, after all" (548). The message "Jewishness is isolation" is very clear-cut, but very deep, and the theme is repeatedly used by Singer in his works.

Chapter 5 "Moses Complex" for the "Human Beast"

Modern Israel has its origins in the Zionist¹⁶ movement, established in the late 19th century by Jews in the Russian Empire who called for the establishment of a Jewish state after pogroms and riots aimed at Jews. In 1896, Jewish-Austrian journalist Theodor Herzl¹⁷ (1860-1904) published an influential political pamphlet called *The Jewish State* ("Der Judenstaat"), which argued that the establishment of a Jewish state was the only way of protecting Jews from anti-Semitism. Herzl became the leader of Zionism, convening the first Zionist Congress in Switzerland in 1897. After the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, growing numbers of Eastern European and Russian Jews began to immigrate to Palestine, joining the few thousand Jews who had arrived earlier. The Jewish settlers finally, after long argument, chose Modern Hebrew, instead of their mother-tongue Yiddish, as their national language. In 1917, Britain issued the "Balfour Declaration¹⁸," which announced its intent to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Although protested by the Arab states, the Balfour Declaration was included in the British mandate over Palestine. Because of Arab opposition to the establishment of any Jewish state in Palestine, British rule continued throughout the 1920s and '30s. Then as a result of the Holocaust in Europe, many Jews entered Palestine illegally during the Second World War, the most radical of whom employed terrorism against British forces in Palestine. At the end of the war, in 1945, when the United States took up the Zionist cause, the State of Israel was born in 1948.

As indicated above, Grein immigrates to the State of Israel, shortly after its establishment. On May 14, 1948, in Tel Aviv, Jewish Agency Chairman David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the founding of the State of Israel, the first Jewish state since the Second Temple had been destroyed by Romans in 70 AD, almost 2,000 years previously. Ben-Gurion became Israel's first premier, and despite the expected Arab invasion, Jews joyously celebrated the birth of their own new country. At midnight, when the State of Israel officially came into being, the British mandate in Palestine finally came to an end, a key event in Jewish cultural history, to which *Shadows on the Hudson* slightly refers.

Grein feels that Israel is a secular country, even though they speak Hebrew on the street, and he fears secularization after his disastrous experiences in America:

I am now in Israel, and for some time I have been able to observe the enlightened Jews here. They give the appearance of having fled from assimilation, but in reality they have brought it with them. They speak Hebrew, but they imitate the Gentiles at every turn. The country is infested with their Gentile books, their Gentile plays are performed to popular acclaim. (546)

The period from 1947 till 1948 is a dramatic and historic period for Jews. It is noteworthy that Singer picked this particular turning point in *Shadows on the Hudson*. Grein is the only character who immigrates to the new State of Israel, and thus, he reports how Jews live in Israel. Through him, Singer conveys his view of the revived country adopting the secular Modern Hebrew.

Even while cutting off relationships with others, Grein struggles with his own passion. He often thinks, "I should shave off my beard, abandon everything, and flee back to the jungle. Every day is full of temptations" (548). The newly-born Israel is assimilationist, but Grein maintains, "We created an entire nation that served God. We were once a holy nation. Thank God, a remnant of that nation has remained" (548). If it were not for "the Moses Complex," Grein might be easily misled to the jungle, again. Grein categorically denies the Yiddish wordplay, "a Jew without a beard is better than a beard without a Jew" (Yiddish: "a yid on a bord iz besser fun a bord on a yid.") (546-47). He argues, "The Torah is the only effective teaching we have about how to bridle the human beast" (548). In this new Israel, Grein begins to find the strength to enact in his own life those "outward signs that he belongs to God's world, not to the underworld" (545).

The protagonist Grein surely reflects Singer's "Moses Complex," namely, what Singer could not achieve regardless of his father as a role model deeply imprinted in his mind. Singer's inescapably deep-seated complex human feelings might be projected into the title *Shadows on the Hudson*, and what's more, into his powerfully creative writing activity. The Hudson never stops flowing, but it also never escapes from the shadows of Singer's psychological trauma.

Ending the novel in this open-ended and unresolved way is a central part of Singer's realism and his ability to capture the open-ended *Zeitgeist* of post-WWII American culture, cut loose from traditional values by the war experience.

Notes

¹ Isaac Bashevis Singer. *The Magician of Lublin*, 198.

² Leslie Fiedler. "Isaac Bashevis Singer; or, The American-ness of the American Jewish Writer." *Critical Essays on Isaac Bashevis Singer*, 118.

³ "Shadows on the Hudson: Dark Side of Isaac Bashevis Singer" *New York Times*. December 31, 1997.

⁴ Bogdan Chmielnicki (1595-1657) is the leader of the Cossack and peasant uprising

against Polish rule in the Ukraine in 1648 which resulted in the destruction of hundreds of Jewish communities. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 480.

⁵ Richard Bernstein. "Shadows on the Hudson: Dark Side of Isaac Bashevis Singer" *New York Times*. December 31, 1997.

⁶ Waggenpack, D. (December 12, 2012). Teaching- The Moses Complex [Blog Post]. Retrieved from <https://deanwaggenpack.wordpress.com/2012/12/02/teaching-the-moses-complex/>

⁷ Isaac Bashevis Singer. *Love and Exile*, 183

⁸ I.L. Peretz. "Bontshe Shvayg," 146-152.

⁹ Isaac Bashevis Singer *More Stories from My Father's Court*, 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 43.

¹¹ Schlemiel=an incapable person.

¹² Isaac Bashevis Singer. *In My Father's Court*, 175.

¹³ The brief account of his decisive defeat of the enemy highlights Joseph's vow, if he wins, to sacrifice to YHWH whoever would come out of his house to meet him on his victorious return. To Jephthah's immense grief, it was his only daughter who came out first to meet him, and he felt obliged to fulfill his solemn vow. The daughter resigned herself to her fate and begged only that it be postponed for two months so that she might mourn with her companions on the mountains. At the end of this period she met her tragic fate. (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*.)

¹⁴ The twice daily recitation of the declaration of God's unity, called the *Shema* ("Hear") after the first word in Deuteronomy 6:4; also called *Keri'at Shema*("the reading of the Shema").*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1370.

¹⁵ Isaac Bashevis Singer. *A Day of Pleasure*, 227.

¹⁶ Chaim Grade admits the importance of the Zionist movement in Lithuania as much as Judaism in his *The Yeshiva*.

¹⁷ Theodor Herzl is the "father of political Zionism and founder of the World Zionist Organization." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 407.

¹⁸ "British declaration of sympathy with Zionist aspirations. The declaration was communicated to Lord Rothschild by Arthur James Balfour . . . in 1917." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 131.

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