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DEPICTION OF PATHETIC CONDITION OF HERMAN BRODER AND MASHA IN ENEMIES, A LOVE STORY

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the main character of *Enemies, A Love Story*, named Herman Broder which represents the universal agony and aftermath of the Nazism faced by Jewish community. Singer's *Enemies, a Love story* is not a love story in a traditional sense. It is a love story which develops in the shadow of Nazi's torture during Second World War and communal hatred.

KEYWORDS: Nazism, Second World War, Victimization, Agony, Jewish Fiction.



INTRODUCTION

I B Singer is one of the most influential novelists of Jewish American Literature. His novel *Enemies, A Love Story* (1970), adopted for film, portrays the protagonist, Herman Broder as a survivor of the marginalization and massacre by Nazis. He lost his wife Tamara in the war and left his homeland. He remarries a Gentile woman Yadwiga who helped him to escape from the Nazis. Later on he immigrated to America and started to work as a ghost writer for a rabbi. Herman committed bigamy by marrying Masha, who was also the victim of Nazi's torture during second World War. More complications emerged when Herman had discovered that his first wife, Tamara, was survived from the war. Herman is driven by lust that helped him to maintain relations with all three wives. Finally, Herman flees away from New York. Herman spent three years hiding in a hayloft in Yadwiga's village. Yadwiga helped him to survive during Hitler's attack. It was a gap in his life, which could never be filled:

Weeks had passed without his seeing the light of day. His eyes had grown accustomed to darkness, his hands and feet had been numb with disuse. Insects, field mice, had bitten him. He had developed a high fever and Yadwiga had cured him. Herman depended on her utterly" (ELS 6-7).

After his escape when he left the place, he settled in America. However, that event of past agony haunted him in America too. "even if Herman never had a large appetite, the hunger of the Nazi years had left Herman with a sense of excitement at the sight of food" (ELS 17). Thus it becomes clear that the people who have survived from the execution camps were never recovered and couldn't return to normal life.

The novel *Enemies, A Love Story* is also structured in such a way that each of the central characters has his or her own tale that represents an aspect of Jewish existence soon after the catastrophe. All including the protagonist, Herman Broder, his first wife, Tamara, his beloved Masha and her mother Shifra Puah are the survivors of the marginalization and massacre. Herman himself could survive because Yadwiga had hidden him in a hayloft in her native village Lipsk.

Having survived from the execution camps Tamara first lived in Russia for many years and then she immigrated to New York. She was a prisoner in both Nazi and Soviet slave labour camps. When Tamara and Herman met in America he wanted to know about her past life. However, from his own experience with Masha and other survivors of the German camps, he realized that the whole truth would never be learned from those who had survived from the concentration camps or wandering through Russia : "not because they lied but because it was impossible for them to tell it all" (ELS 72). *Enemies A Love Story* distances the horrors of the camps by means of flashbacks depict the traumatic events in Poland and Russia.

As mentioned earlier, we find that the principal characters are haunted by the past sufferings and tortures. In their daily routine, all the time in normal life the survivors of the camps react as if they were in execution camps. The survivors feel that there was no guarantee that anti-Semitism and the persecution which endangered their life will not flare up again, even in America. Masha tells Herman: "How do we know what tomorrow will bring? It can happen again. Slaughtering Jews is part of nature. Jews must be slaughtered that what God wants" (ELS 37).

The marginalized Jews and survivors are ravaged by nightmares of Nazi pursuit. Singer delineates the pathetic condition of the Jews who are horrified by execution camps and tortures by the Gentiles. The extreme traumatizations of the camps inflicted deep wounds. All the time they live under fear. Masha tells that her mother was unable to live alone: My mother is afraid of people. If someone knocks at the door, she thinks it's a Nazi" (ELS/09).

The protagonist Herman Broder fears that Nazi can attack and torture him any time. His fear of deportation is exceeded by his quest for hiding places against the inevitable invasion. He tries to find out some safe places to avoid Nazis and Hitler: "Herman walked along, his eye sought hiding places in case the Nazis were to come to New York Could a bunker be dug somewhere nearby? Could he hide himself in the steeple of the Catholic Church?" (ELS 17).

If such situation arises Herman thinks in advance the critical situation which he will have to face if the Nazis approach towards him. He starts to calculate how much food Yadwiga! would need to bring him each day:

"For him to survive two or three potatoes, a slice of bread, a piece of cheese a spoonful of vegetable oil. From time to time a vitamin pill. It would cost her no! more than one dollar a week at the most, one dollar and a half. Herman would have some books here, and writing papers. Compared to the hayloft in Lipsk, this would be luxurious. He would keep a loaded revolver at hand, or perhaps a machine gun when the Nazis discovered his hiding place and came to arrest him, he would welcome them with a volley of bullets and leave one bullet for himself" (ELS 10).

At other time, to hide his identity Herman listed his telephone under the name of Yadwiga Prac, instead of his own name. The following paragraph reveals his dreamy state and nightmare. When he stood before the mirror he began spinning a fantasy. In the fantasy he saw that:

"The Nazis had come back into power and occupied New York. Herman was hiding out in his bathroom. He tries to find out the several places to hide". Where would I sit? Here on the toilet seat I could sleep in the bathtub. No, too short". Herman examined the tile floor to see if there was enough room, for him to stretch out. But even if he were to lie down diagonally, he would have to draw his knees up. Well at least he would have light and air here. The bathroom had a window opening on a small courtyard.

Whenever, Herman stood in front of a mirror in his apartment living with Yadwiga in New York, he began spinning a fantasy. Once when he found a black-and blue-mark on his high forehead, he imagined that it could have been caused by the bayonet in his dream. The very opening paragraph of the novel delineates the dreamy state of Herman Broder. When he wakes up in the mid morning, he is not sure about his residence or the place where he lives. Awakening from nightmares was sometimes even more painful than captivity:

"Herman Broder turned over and opened one eye in his dreamy state, he wondered whether he was in America, in Tzivkev, or in a German camp. He even imagined himself

hiding in the hayloft in Lipsk. Occasionally all these places fused in his mind. He knows he was in Brooklyn, but he heard Nazis shouting. They were stabbing with their bayonets, trying to flash him out, while he pressed deeper and deeper into the hay. The blade of the bayonet touched his head." (ELS 3).

In fact, Herman always lived in the fantasies; moreover his life becomes abnormal out of the fear of Nazis tortures and feelings of insecurity. His mind was out of control. It worked like a machine: "He waged his usual war with the Nazis, bombed them with the atomic bombs blasted their armies with mysterious missiles lifted their fleet out of the ocean and placed it on hard near Hitler's villa. He couldn't stop his thoughts. His mind worked like a machine out of control..." (ELS 723)

Similarly the next lines reveal his fear and anxiety: Herman bought a Yiddish newspaper but read only the headlines. The sum total of the news was always the same. Germany was being rebuilt. The Nazis' were being forgiven by both the Allies and the Soviets each time Herman read such news it awakened in him fantasies of vengeance in which he discovered methods for destroying whole armies, for ruining industries. He managed to bring to trial all those who had been involved in the annihilation of the Jews. (ELS 132). Herman often compared the zoo to a concentration camp. In his opinion the situation of Jews is like imprisoned birds:

"The air here was full of longing -for deserts, hills, valleys, dens, families, like animals, the Jews had been dragged here from all parts of the world. Condemned to isolation and boredom. Some of them cried out their woes. Other remained mute. Parrots demanded their rights with screeching. A bird with bananas shaped beak turned its head from right to left as if looking for the culprit who had played this trick on him..." (ELS 53).

One of the other characters, Masha, too was haunted by the past trauma. Her dreams plagued her: "She would shoul in her sleep talk German, Russian Polish. The dead revealed themselves to her. She would use a flashlight and show Herman the scars the dead had left on her arms, her breasts, and her thighs. Her father appeared to her in a dream and read her verses he had written on the other world. A stanza had remained in her mind and had recited it to Herman" (ELS 46).

This shows that Singer is the chronicler of the butchered past and the keeper of the memories of the survivors who survived in destruction. From the above description it is revealed that the survivors are removed by time and distance. They recall disconnected fragments, the terrible events of their European past. The survivors relate their bitter experiences to each other. One of such conversations between Mrs. Schrier and Tamara about their journey and torture in the camp reveals the fact. When the Jews were transported to the concentration camps, they lived in horrible conditions such as filth and lack of hygiene, diseases and extreme harassment and physical ill treatment. Masha says:

"Three weeks we rode, packed in like herring in a barrel. If we had to eliminate you should excuse me we had to do it through a small window. Picture if men and women together. How we survived. I'll never be able to understand. And some didn't survive. They died standing up. They simply threw the dead bodies out of the train. We came to forest in a terrible frost and first we had to chop down the trees with which to build the barracks. We dug ditches in the frozen earth and that's where we slept" (ELS 200).

In the concentration camp, people risked their lives for a piece of bread or a potato. One of the characters says: "Don't imagine these were small matters. A crust of bread was a dream. A few potatoes were a fortune" (ELS 81). The survivors narrate their bitter experiences about deportation to each other. Tamara states: "There were mass deportations to the camps. They took men, starved them, and made them do work that would destroy even the strongest within a year. I witnessed it myself. If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't believe it either (ELS 73) While narrating her experience of the execution camp, Masha says that being a Jew they had to suffer a lot. Here she narrates how Gentiles tortured her father: "I had to stand by and watch those monsters rip out my father's beard and a piece of his cheek as well. Anyone who did not see my father at that moment doesn't know what it means to be a Jew..." (ELS 74).

Masha had survived several years in the ghetto and concentration camps. During deportation her mother, Shifra Puag, was sent to one ghetto and Masha to another. They did not see each other

other for many years. To enhance their agonies, they were separated from each other deliberately. Jews are marginalized in such an extent that they express doubt the justice of God. Masha expresses her anxiety on God's role. She blames Him for His silence: " But if God dallow the Jews of Europe to be killed, what reason is there to think. He would prevent the termination of Jews of America? God doesn't care, that's how God is". "If God is almightyand omnipotent. He ought to be able to stand up for his beloved people. If He sits in heaven and stays silent, that means it must bother him as much as last years frost" (ELS 37).

Once Herman visits Masha's house, when she asks him to take food. He tells her that he had promised not to eat meat any more. Masha replies: "God himself eats meat-human flesh there are no vegetarians - none. If you had seen what I have seen, you would know that God approves of slaughter" (ELS 33). In Singer's complex portraits, Herman is at once an innocent victim and victimizer. His sense of victimization is so strong that he not only refuses to eat flesh but gets up restlessly in the middle of the night to free mice from Masha's traps. By the time the story ends Masha is dead and Herman has disappeared. In this connection, Alan Berger remarks that suicide in the form of physically ending one's existence plays a prominent role in *Enemies A Love Story*.²

WORK CITED:

- 1) Alan Berger, *Crisis and Convena*. Albany:State University of New York Press, 1985.P. 81
- 2) *Ibid*. P. 85

Note: All Textual quotations are taken from the novel, *Enemies A Love Story*, Trans. Aliza Shevrin and Elizabeth Shub New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.